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# Saga-Accounts of Norse Far-Travellers

by

John Douglas Shafer

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

University of Durham

Department of English Studies

2009

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## Abbreviations used

<i>Alexanders saga</i> (Brandr Jónsson)	<i>Alex.</i>	<i>Íslenzk fornrit</i>	ÍF
<i>Auðunar þáttir vestfirska</i>	<i>Auð.</i>	<i>Jarteinabók Þorláks önnur</i>	<i>Þorl.</i>
<i>Ágrip af Nóregskonungastígum</i>	<i>Ágrip</i>	<i>Jþkuls þáttir Búasonar</i>	<i>Jþk.</i>
<i>Bandamanna saga</i>	<i>Band.</i>	<i>Ketils saga hængs</i>	<i>Ket.</i>
<i>Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss</i>	<i>Bárð.</i>	<i>Kjalnesinga saga</i>	<i>Kjal.</i>
<i>Bjarnar saga Híttdælakappa</i>	<i>Bjar.</i>	<i>Konungs skuggsjá</i>	<i>Konung.</i>
<i>Bósa saga ok Herrauðs</i>	<i>Bósa</i>	<i>Kormáks saga</i>	<i>Kor.</i>
<i>The Complete Sagas of Icelanders</i>	<i>CSI</i>	<i>Knyttlinga saga</i>	<i>Knyt.</i>
<i>Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana</i>	<i>Egil.</i>	<i>Kristni saga</i>	<i>Krist.</i>
<i>Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar</i>	<i>Egla</i>	<i>Króka-Refs saga</i>	<i>Kró.</i>
<i>Eireks saga víðftrla</i>	<i>Eirek.</i>	<i>Landnámabók</i>	<i>Land.</i>
<i>Eiríks saga rauða</i>	<i>Eir.</i>	<i>Laxdæla saga</i>	<i>Lax.</i>
<i>Eymundar þáttir Hringssonar</i>	<i>Eym.</i>	<i>Legendary Saga of St Óláfr</i>	<i>Leg.</i>
<i>Eyrbyggja saga</i>	<i>Eyr.</i>	<i>Ljósvetninga saga</i>	<i>Ljós.</i>
<i>Finnboga saga ramma</i>	<i>Finn.</i>	<i>Magnússona saga (Hkr)</i>	<i>Mag.</i>
<i>Flateyjarbók</i>	<i>Flat.</i>	<i>Morkinskinna</i>	<i>Mork.</i>
<i>Flóamanna saga</i>	<i>Fl.</i>	<i>Njáls saga</i>	<i>Njála</i>
<i>Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda (ed. Guðni Jónsson)</i>	<i>FSN</i>	<i>Orkneyinga saga</i>	<i>Ork.</i>
<i>Fóstbræðra saga</i>	<i>Fóst.</i>	<i>Óláfs saga helga (Hkr)</i>	<i>Helga</i>
<i>Gautreks saga</i>	<i>Gaut.</i>	<i>Óláfs saga helga hinni sérsttku (Snorri Sturluson)</i>	<i>Sér.</i>
<i>Gesta Danorum</i> (Saxo Grammaticus)	<i>Saxo</i>	<i>Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar (Hkr)</i>	<i>Ólaf.</i>
<i>Gísla saga Súrssonar</i>	<i>Gís.</i>	<i>Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta</i>	<i>Mesta</i>
<i>Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar</i>	<i>Gret.</i>	<i>Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar (Oddr Snorrason)</i>	<i>Oddr</i>
<i>Gríms saga loðinkinna</i>	<i>Grím.</i>	<i>Saga-Book of the Viking Society for Northern Research</i>	<i>Saga-Book</i>
<i>Grænlandinga saga</i>	<i>Gr.</i>	<i>Sverris saga</i>	<i>Sver.</i>
<i>Grænlandinga þáttir</i>	<i>Gr. þ.</i>	<i>Yngvars saga víðftrla</i>	<i>Yng.</i>
<i>Gull-Þóris saga (Þorsfirðinga saga)</i>	<i>Gull</i>	<i>Þorsteins þáttir bæjarmagns</i>	<i>Þors.</i>
<i>Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu</i>	<i>Gunn.</i>	<i>Þorsteins þáttir stangarhtggs</i>	<i>Stang.</i>
<i>Guta saga</i>	<i>Guta</i>	<i>Þorvalds þáttir víðftrla</i>	<i>Þorv.</i>
<i>Hallfreðar saga</i>	<i>Hall.</i>	<i>Þórðar saga hreðu</i>	<i>Þórð.</i>
<i>Haralds saga hárfagra (Hkr)</i>	<i>Hár.</i>	<i>Þrvar-Odds saga</i>	<i>Þrv.</i>
<i>Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar (Hkr)</i>	<i>Har.</i>		
<i>Hálfðanar saga Brtnufóstra</i>	<i>Brtn.</i>		
<i>Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar</i>	<i>Hálf.</i>		
<i>Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka</i>	<i>Hálfsrek.</i>		
<i>Heiðarvíga saga</i>	<i>Heið.</i>		
<i>Heimskringla (Snorri Sturluson)</i>	<i>Hkr</i>		
<i>Helga þáttir Þórissonar</i>	<i>Helg.</i>		
<i>Historia compendiosa regum Daniae (Sven Aggesen)</i>	<i>Sven</i>		
<i>Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium (Theodoricus)</i>	<i>Theo.</i>		
<i>Historia Norwegiae</i>	<i>HN</i>		
<i>Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða</i>	<i>Hrafn.</i>		
<i>Íslendingabók (Ari Þorgilsson)</i>	<i>Ísl.</i>		

For my father, who has travelled far  
and my mother, who has travelled farther.

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John Shafer

Durham, December 2009



## Chapter 1 – Introduction

*Misjafnar verða farir til manna* – “Travels affect people in different ways.”

*Svarfdæla saga* (Íslensk fornrit IX, p. 162)

This thesis originated in a question: what did medieval saga-writers think about the Viking travellers who sailed west across the ocean without knowing the way to the lands they sought, or even whether or not these lands existed? Those who set out across the open sea discovered and settled new lands while other travellers went only short distances, hugging coast-lines all the way. This contrast leads to more specific questions. Did saga-writers consider the Norse travellers who sailed far across the open sea braver than others? More foolish? Did they respect the fortitude of men seeking new lands to settle, or did they think the discoverers just got lucky? Or of these maritime feats did the medieval story-tellers think anything at all?

The medieval saga-writers tell many stories of westward far-travel, but they do not write “These voyages were amazing feats of seamanship, and far-travellers were braver than near-travellers.” To find the answers to these questions the travel-narratives must be placed in the contexts in which they appear, and thus my questions about travel westward quickly led me to the broader study of saga-accounts of far-travel in all directions. Skalla-Grímr’s wisdom regarding travel would seem to be relevant to the study of travel: *Er ýmsar verðr, ef margar ferr* (*Egla* 38: 96) – “Many journeys lead to many directions.”<sup>1</sup> Within this broader context, stories of far-travel westward across the ocean are just one type of saga-narrative dealing with the journey from the familiar to the “other”, a theme manifested in many different ways in the various sagas in which

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<sup>1</sup> As Bernard Scudder translates it: “The more journeys you make, the more directions they take” (CSI I 65). *Egla*, CSI, and the other abbreviations I use are listed after the table of contents to this thesis. In citations from individual sagas, the number before the colon denotes chapter and the number after denotes page number. In citations from CSI, ÍF, Fritzner’s dictionary, and other multi-volume works, the Roman numeral indicates volume.

it appears. The sagas' Vikings encounter in the distant west a race of savages speaking an unintelligible language; if the same characters had gone north, they might have encountered trolls reciting verses in Norse or giants feasting in a kingly hall. In the distant south they might find wealthy, noble, Christian men willing to employ them in battles against dark-skinned Saracens, while in the distant east they might meet similarly civilised Christian rulers, but beyond them dragons. Far-travel is clearly a narrative device valued by the medieval saga-writers, and there is therefore no shortage of material to explore for enlightenment. Interest in the courage of the Vikings who travelled the physical world has led me to the inventiveness of their descendents, who in their literary works travel through the geography of an imagined world.

## **1. Purpose and parameters**

To state my purpose succinctly and clearly: in this thesis I examine saga-accounts of travel by Scandinavian saga-characters from their home countries to distant lands, noting narrative patterns and themes associated with far-travel in each of the cardinal directions. Special attention is given to the characterisation of far-travellers, and to the motivations for far-travel ascribed to them by saga-writers. It is therefore essential to define from the outset what precisely is meant by "far-travel" as I use it in this thesis, as well as which lands are "distant" and which are not.

### **1.i. Far-travel to distant lands**

**1.i.a.** "Distance" in this context does not refer to geographical distance: it is rather an imagined, literary concept of distance. Sagas are literary creations, and the lands featured in them likewise serve literary purposes, a concept readily illustrated by saga-writers' treatment of the regions north of Scandinavia, Finnmark in particular. It is commonplace for saga-writers to populate this region with marvellous inhabitants such as trolls, sorcerers and shape-changers, both in the

fantastic fornaldrsögur as well as the more realistic Íslendingasögur and konungasögur.<sup>2</sup> Yet the geographical region corresponding to the literary Finnmörk was closer to the habitations of medieval Scandinavians and much simpler to travel to than, say, Byzantium in the distant south, a place the saga-writers populate with recognisably human characters. It is therefore clear that the “Finnmörk” of these fantastic episodes is not the one to which the saga-writer and his neighbours could travel, and its monstrous and magical inhabitants are not the people they would interact with once there. The literary north is instead a “distant” place filled with “others”, a place in which fantastic tales take place, where valiant Vikings engage in magical adventures. Distant lands in different directions, naturally, correspond to different literary purposes and themes. The key factor in all directions is the idea of an imaginary border being crossed in the saga-writers’ mental, imagined map of the world, from “inside” to “outside.” Far-travellers are not those who sail for two months rather than two days, but those who travel from inside this area of Norse familiarity, which I call “northern” or “Scandinavian” Europe, to outside (see §1.i.b. below).

This distinction between near- and far-travel is not an artificial, academic construct: some medieval saga-writers clearly sense or create the distinction themselves. There are, for example, some saga-characters given the byname *víðfrli* – “widely travelled” or “far-travelling.” “Widely travelled” seems the better interpretation when the byname is applied to Þrvar-Oddr (“Arrow-Oddr”, “Oddr the archer”), who visits many lands during his 300-year life-span, while the “far-travelling” interpretation fits Yngvarr víðfrli, who leads a single expedition, but further east into Asia than any Norseman has gone before. A notion of Scandinavian nations occupying a single “neighbourhood” – despite long sea-journeys separating some of them – is evident in *Laxdæla saga*, when the Icelander Bolli Bollason decides to leave his homeland and see the world. In

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<sup>2</sup> Among English-speaking scholars of Old Norse “Íslendingasögur” and other terms of Icelandic origin have fully entered into academic speech and writing, so I rarely use English equivalents such as “sagas of Icelanders.”

Norway Bolli replies to a query about whether he intends to stay there or return to Iceland: „*Ek ætla mér hvárki, ok er þat satt at segja, at ek hafða þat ætlat, þá er ek fór af Íslandi, at eigi skyldi at spyrja til mín í þðru húsi*“ (*Lax. 73: 213*) – “I mean to do neither, and it is fair to say that when I set out from Iceland I did not intend that any should hear of me being just next-door.” Bolli then travels south to Constantinople and distinguishes himself in the service of the Byzantine emperor. Norway is thus “next-door” to Iceland, while Constantinople is not: to the writer of *Laxdæla saga*, the difference between near- and far-travel is clear.

It is important to note that “far-travel” as I use the term does not correspond exclusively to the cognomen *víðfrli*. Though the saga-characters given this epithet are also far-travellers by my definition, they form too small a group to properly represent the many travellers who spread out in all directions to distant lands. Leifr Eiríksson, for example, is never called “Leifr víðfrli”, despite his undeniable status as a far-traveller westward. Indeed, as Sverrir Jakobsson points out, “A common characteristic of the persons called by the byname *víðfrli* is that their journeys took them partly or exclusively to the East” (2006: 936). The collection of far-travellers named by the saga-writers therefore forms only a subset of mine.

**1.i.b.** The area characterised in the sagas by Norse familiarity is not exclusive to Scandinavia. Though the saga-episodes I examine concern only travel by Scandinavian characters – that is, Norwegians, Swedes, Danes, Icelanders, Faroese people, Shetlanders and Orcadians – across a near-far border, the border itself is not merely the outer edge of Scandinavia. The British Isles and much of northern and central Europe are also “inside.” As indicated above, the goal of defining this area of inclusion – which I call “northern” or “Scandinavian” Europe – is to separate lands and peoples medieval Scandinavian saga-writers considered “ordinary” from those they

considered “other”, and, ultimately, to determine how they characterise travel and travellers who move from these familiar lands to those distant ones. “Northern Europe” encompasses not physical landmasses and their historical inhabitants but imagined, literary locations in which recognisably Scandinavian characters move with freedom and familiarity.

Though saga-writers do not often verbalise explicitly this inclusion/exclusion of lands and peoples, it is nevertheless possible to detect such a separation within some saga-texts, and sufficient evidence exists for a reasonably stable definition of this area of Norse familiarity. Judith Jesch observes that Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld’s description of the travels and military exploits of King Óláfr Tryggvason in *Óláfsdrápa* “usefully outlines the various arenas for Viking activity in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries” (2007: 124). Hallfreðr relates that after returning from Russia in the east, Óláfr defeats in various battles the inhabitants of Jamtaland, Gautland and Skáney (Jämtland, Götaland, Skåne); Denmark; Saxony and Frisia; Walcheren and Flanders; and finally England, Northumbria, Bretland (Wales, Cornwall and possibly Brittany) and Cumbria (Kock 81). The writer of *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* outlines a similar area when describing the diaspora of Norwegians following the violent consolidation of Norwegian states by Haraldr hárfagri (“fair-hair”, “fine-hair”):

En af þessi áþján flýðu margir menn af landi á brott, ok byggðusk þá margar auðnir víða, bæði austr í Jamtaland ok Helsingjaland ok Vestrltnd, Suðreyjar, Dyflinnar skíði, Írland, Norðmandí á Vallandi, Katanes á Skotlandi, Orkneyjar ok Hjaltland, Færeyjar. Ok í þann tíma fannsk Ísland. (*Egla* 4: 12)

But because of this oppression, many people fled the land and settled widely in many uninhabited places, both to the east in Jamtaland and Helsingjaland, and to the west in the British Isles, the Hebrides, the pale of Dublin, Ireland, Normandy in France, Caithness in Scotland, Orkney and Shetland, and the Faroes. And at that time Iceland was discovered.

The disparity between the lists of peoples or countries in these two sources results from their different narrative purposes. *Óláfsdrápa* celebrates Óláfr's military achievements across Europe, while this portion of *Egils saga* introduces a theme of flight before royal tyranny, in anticipation of Egill's father Skalla-Grímr later abandoning oppressive Norway for independent Iceland. The peoples and countries in the first list are therefore places familiar as adversaries, while those in the second are those in which a Norse population can settle and live in comparative freedom and peace. Combined, the two lists demarcate a collection of peoples and countries familiar to the medieval saga-writers, those to which Scandinavian characters may be expected to travel and with which they may be expected to interact, either in conflict or in peace.<sup>3</sup>

There are many other indications throughout saga-literature that these lands, the British Isles in particular, sit inside the same broad cultural area as Scandinavia. Thus when Gunnlaugr ormsunga ("serpent-tongue") travels around honouring Norse rulers with skaldic verses, he includes the monarchs of England and Ireland in his circuit (*Gunn.* 7-8).<sup>4</sup> The Icelander Egill Skalla-Grímsson also finds an appreciative recipient of his skaldic verse in an English king, Athelstan (Aðalsteinn), and he and his brother Þórólfr serve that king as soldiers (*Egla* 50-55). Other parts of Europe are treated as similarly unremarkable destinations for Scandinavian travel. Previous to serving Athelstan in England, Egill and Þórólfr raid in the Baltic country of Kúrland (Courland, the Kurzeme region in modern Latvia), where they offer the local inhabitants a fortnight's truce and trade with them during that time (*Egla* 46). The Norsemen thus interact with the Courlanders on familiar if antagonistic terms, and Courland is certainly not remote from the Scandinavian world. A passage in *Knyttlinga saga* indicates the short distance and ease of

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<sup>3</sup> The geographical knowledge and beliefs represented by the list of countries in 10th-century *Óláfsdrápa* are utterly familiar to 13th-century saga-writers like that of *Egils saga*. This is evident from the various sagas and synoptic histories that, following the poem, trace through Europe a path for Óláfr essentially the same as that in *Óláfsdrápa*.

<sup>4</sup> When a parenthetical citation from a saga contains no colon, the numbers refer to the chapters in the edition used.

travel between Denmark and Flanders (Flæmingjaland), when two Danish brothers remark of an errand there: „*Ekki er ferð þessi svá lǫng, at hon megi eigi vel fram komask fyrir þat*“ (Knyt. 64: 201) – ““This journey is not so long that it may not nevertheless be easily achieved.””

Countries that sit outside the borders of northern Europe as I have defined it are those that I consider “distant” for the purposes of this thesis. Travel to these lands from Scandinavia is “far-travel.” The distant lands associated with a particular cardinal direction will be listed at the beginning of the chapter covering far-travel in that direction. My classification of some lands as distant may be considered dubious due to their geographical proximity to Scandinavia (Finnmtrk), cultural similarity to Norse societies (Russia), or both (Greenland). Conversely, Ireland may be considered a reasonably “distant” land, but I classify it as part of Scandinavian Europe. I defend these classifications as necessary in the introductions to the relevant chapters. The imagined geography or cosmography of the world evident in saga-literature that I have described here is illustrated in Figure 1, “Concentric circles of familiarity centred on Scandinavia.”<sup>5</sup> I do not suggest that medieval Icelanders had this precise diagram in their minds as they wrote their sagas – though a quite similar diagram does appear in a 13th-century geographical text (see Simek 1986: 267-69) – nor that every saga-reference to the lands included fits precisely and exactly into its arrangement. The diagram is merely intended to give a rough visualisation of a fairly consistent conceptual geography that was based not on maps or charts but on elements both of experiences, reports and stories and of native and continental literary traditions. The second ellipse of the three on the diagram marks the border between northern Europe and the distant lands which has been discussed here.

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<sup>5</sup> As this diagram and my usage throughout this chapter indicate, I include Iceland in the term “Scandinavia.”

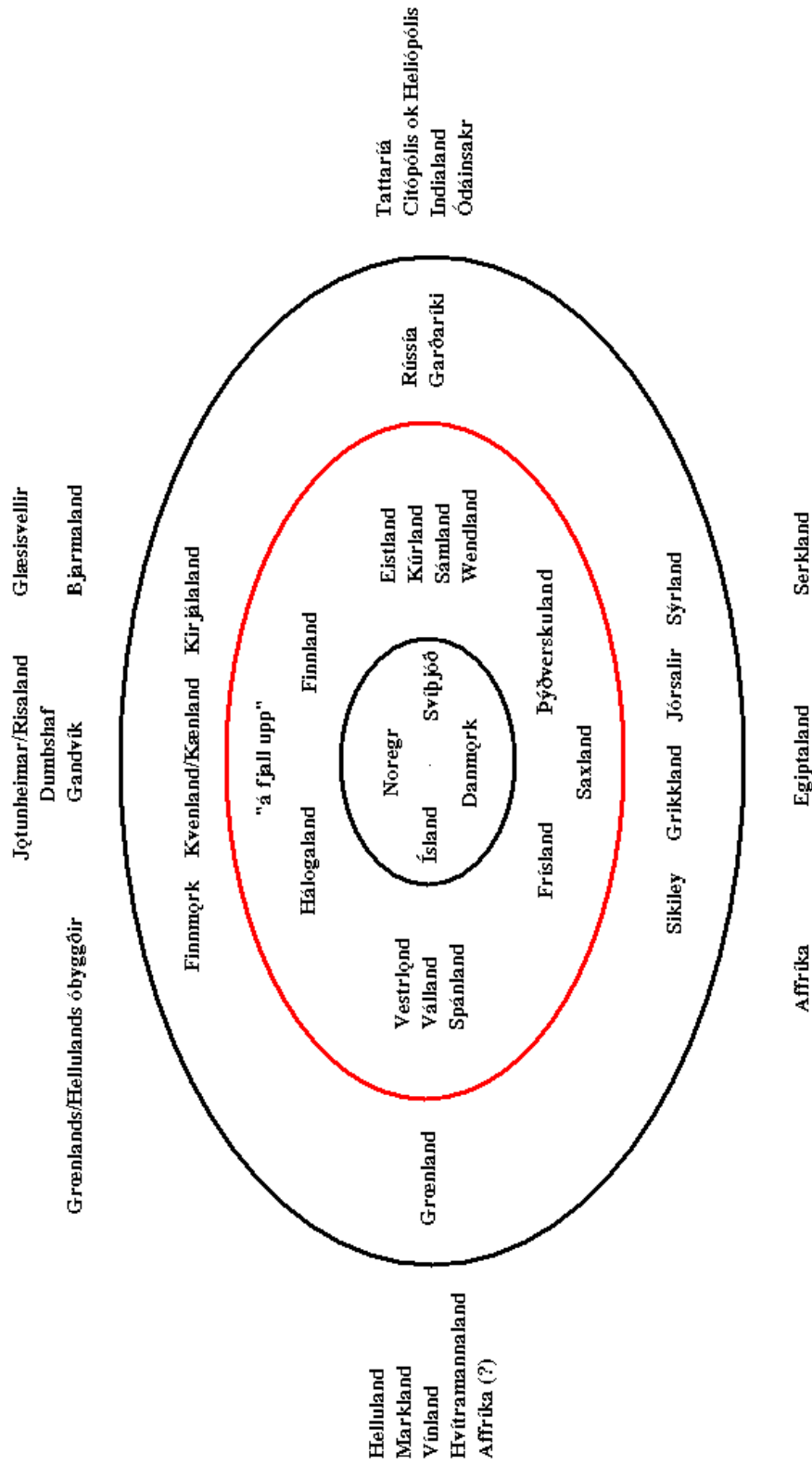


Figure 1. Concentric circles of familiarity centred on Scandinavia



## 1.ii. Saga-literature

The corpus of saga-literature is quite well-defined in Old Norse scholarship, but it would be as well to outline briefly a few points about the selection of the texts I use in this thesis. The primary texts are those sagas, þættir and other medieval, Norse-language prose texts which feature episodes of travel by Norsemen from their Scandinavian homelands to distant lands in all four cardinal directions. Nearly all of these texts are Íslendingasögur, konungasögur and fornaldarsögur, as well as þættir embedded in these types of saga or manuscripts containing them. Some byskupasögur that feature brief episodes in the distant south are also included. Many riddarasögur feature episodes taking place in distant lands, usually in the distant east or south, but none of these involves travel by Scandinavian characters, and thus I use no riddarasögur as primary texts in this thesis.<sup>6</sup> Each of these categories is distinctive in its own way, and in using these texts I attempt to remark appropriately on generic issues where relevant. One noticeable pattern is that different types of saga correlate with different directions of travel; most of the episodes in which saga-characters travel to the far north, for example, are in fornaldarsögur, while stories dealing at length with journeys to the distant south are most often found in konungasögur. While it is important to remember that strict genre distinctions are later, academic creations designed to aid discussion of the vast topic of Old Norse-Icelandic literature, the differences must be recognised if examples from diverse genres are to be examined together.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, a key

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<sup>6</sup> *Samsons saga fagra* shows the influence of native tradition and features travel to a distant northern realm of Norse legend, Glæsisvellir, but the saga's main character is either English or Welsh, not Scandinavian. A main character of *Sigurðar saga fóts* is the king of "Sjólþnd" ("Sea-land", Danish Sjælland?), but there is no far-travel in this saga. Though medieval Icelandic romance is excluded here due to the focus of my study, riddarasögur are certainly important to the study of saga travel-narrative in general. As Marianne Kalinke observes, "Travel, with attendant depiction of strange places, is *de rigueur* in Icelandic romance" (1983: 853).

<sup>7</sup> Some genre distinctions existed in medieval Scandinavia. "Þátr", for example, is one of the authentic, medieval designations for the genre of short fiction called by that name in modern scholarship (Rowe-Harris 462). Modern scholarship's use of the medieval term "lygisögur" for native riddarasögur is less widespread.

point to recognise is that I use accounts from different types of saga side by side and consider them as essentially equal in literary value. The literary characteristics, motifs and purposes of the sagas from the various sub-genres may be very different, but they all contribute to an overall understanding of the function of far-travellers and far-travel in saga-literature. All forms of saga and þátrr also occasionally quote verses, skaldic or otherwise, to punctuate or validate the narrative. In konunga- and Íslendingasögur, many of the verses are authentic, or at least demonstrably contemporary with the events they describe, literary relics from the 10th, 11th and 12th centuries recorded by saga-compilers centuries (or at the nearest, decades) later. Where I quote from such verses embedded in prose, I acknowledge this context.

**1.ii.a.** Of the three sub-genres of sagas, I use Íslendingasögur most frequently.<sup>8</sup> Among their defining characteristics are anonymous authorship, concern principally with Icelandic characters (many of them historical figures), a narrative time-frame falling between about 830 and about 1050, and composition roughly between 1200 and 1400. Íslendingasaga-plots often centre on inter-familial feuding, a tendency that has resulted in their also being called “family sagas.” Those Íslendingasögur whose main character is a skald quote that skald’s verses extensively, and other sagas are liable to include more sporadic skaldic verse as well.

Not all of these characteristics are applicable to every Íslendingasaga I refer to in this thesis. The Vínland sagas, for example, do not deal with feuds, while *Fljótsdæla saga* may have been composed as late as the early 16th century. Where these defining characteristics apply, however, they are factors to be considered in my analysis of their accounts of far-travel. One of these defining characteristics, for example, is in *Gísla saga* directly related to an account of far-travel: the central feud resulting in the title character’s death also provides the later impetus for

one of his allies to abandon Iceland for the distant west. It is thus essential to place this instance of far-travel motivated directly by feud-violence in its proper context: the journey far away from Iceland is not an unexpected or unique occurrence, but one of several reasonable courses of action open to a character embroiled in the common circumstance of a family feud.

**1.ii.b.** While *konungasögur* bear many similarities to *Íslendingasögur*, there are differences between the two sub-genres both superficial and fundamental.<sup>9</sup> The primary defining characteristic of *konungasögur* is, of course, their narrative focus on the kings of Norway or Denmark. Unlike the writers of *Íslendingasögur*, authors or compilers of *konungasögur* are often known by name. Where the origins of the *Íslendingasaga* genre are obscure and hotly debated, the development of *konungasögur* from hagiography can be traced with much more confidence. The range of projected composition dates of *konungasögur* falls somewhat earlier than those of *Íslendingasögur* (about 1180 to 1280); the events they describe cover a wider time-range (about 850 to 1280) and were, at their time of writing, more recent. Like *Íslendingasögur*, *konungasögur* quote many skaldic verses to authenticate or otherwise enhance episodes in the narrative, though in *konungasögur* the verses are more often composed by the royal title character's skalds than by the king himself. *Orkneyinga saga* does not focus on the monarchs of Norway or Denmark but relates the biographies of the line of Orcadian jarls; an alternative, medieval title for the text is *Jarla stgur* (Pulsiano 456-57). The saga's other characteristics, however, fit the *konungasaga* sub-genre fairly well (see Vésteinn 2007: 116, endnote).

As with *Íslendingasögur*, I discuss the defining characteristics of *konungasögur* where they directly factor in the accounts of far-travel I cite. The skaldic verses that Rǫgnvaldr jarl Kali

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<sup>8</sup> On *Íslendingasögur*, see Vésteinn 2007 and Jónas 1988: 203-24.

<sup>9</sup> On *konungasögur*, see Ármann 2007 and Jónas 1988: 147-66.

composes, for example, are a typical feature of *konungasögur*, yet in *Orkneyinga saga* they serve the unique needs of the narrative, some illustrating the courtly nature of southern Europe with their continual praise of the lady Ermengarde of Narbonne (Ermingerðr, Narbón) and one describing the awe-inspiring view on the pilgrim's arrival at Jerusalem. The stanzas also demonstrate Rǫgnvaldr's proficiency at versifying, one of his self-proclaimed "nine skills" (see Jesch 2006).

**1.ii.c.** Fornaldarsögur show a number of marked differences from the other two major saga sub-genres and have been of less interest to modern scholars.<sup>10</sup> There are two ways of defining the fornaldarsaga. The first is simply as a saga published in *Fornaldar Sögur Norðrlanda* (1829-30), C.C. Rafn's three-volume collection containing twenty-five sagas from various medieval manuscripts. The second fornaldarsaga-criteria are the specific, defining characteristics used by Rafn himself to select the texts. Sagas in this sub-genre are chronologically set in the time before Haraldr hárfagri ruled Norway (i.e. before the Icelandic *landnám*), and they are geographically set primarily in mainland Scandinavia or elsewhere in the Germanic world – but not in Iceland (Tulinius 2002: 17-19). Like sagas from other sub-genres, fornaldarsögur often contain significant amounts of verse, but this verse is often in eddic rather than skaldic metres. This generic trait suggests a literary purpose independent of *Íslendingasögur* and *konungasögur* and at the same time valuable in its own right. Sagas constructed around skaldic verse are often biographical in origin and focus, but sagas constructed around eddic verse may truly be called heroic literature, not only successors to the earlier heroic lays but often their preservers as well (see Tulinius 2007: 448). *Vǫlsunga saga*, for example, consolidates into a saga-narrative the stories of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani preserved from earlier times in the heroic poems of the poetic Edda,

providing our only Norse version of the events lost in the great lacuna in the Edda's Sigurðr-cycle. *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* preserves verses from several long poems in eddic metre known from no other source, as well as a scattering of quite old lausavísur (Pulsiano 711, 283, 286-87; Tulinius 2007: 452-55). Fornaldarsögur are thus characterised primarily by their basis in the heroic-mythical prehistory of Scandinavia. Fornaldarsögur were probably written roughly contemporary with Íslendingasögur, from the middle of the 13th century to the end of the 14th. Some scholars identify fornaldarsögur with lygisögur, a term used in the 13th century for an old saga about the northern hero Hrómundr Gripsson (O'Donoghue 99-100).<sup>11</sup> Others use the term lygisögur for later, indigenous Icelandic sagas written in imitation of continental romances, sagas which are based in "an exotic (non-Scandinavian), vaguely chivalric milieu" (Driscoll 190). Given the lack of clear consensus, I do not use the term "lygisögur."

As with the Íslendingasögur and konungasögur, I consider and comment on the implications of particular fornaldarsaga-characteristics where they are relevant to the accounts of far-travel I use. *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, for example, features heroic characters engaged in classic fornaldarsaga activities: abandoning royal households, going on Viking raids, and finding life-mates at the end of adventurous quests. Egill and Ásmundr's travels to the distant north and east are thus an inevitable consequence of their wide-ranging quests and raids. In addition to the native, heroic elements of the story, the saga also shows the influence of continental tales: Egill's captivity with and ultimate defeat of a goat-keeping giant, for example, is easily recognisable as a northern adaptation of the story of Odysseus and the Cyclops. Ultimately, fornaldarsögur are among the most useful texts to the study of saga far-travel. As Peter Hallberg observes, "The [fornaldarsögur] move in a wide geographical space and

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<sup>10</sup> On fornaldarsögur, see Tulinius 2007, Driscoll 2007 and Jónas 1988: 341-46.

cover many countries in the North, the South and the East, some of them well-known, others rather nebulous” (1982: 27).

**1.ii.d.** In addition to these three categories of sagas, I also use examples from the shorter Norse-language texts known as *þættir*, as well as some other vernacular prose texts. Some of the categories into which Elizabeth Ashman Rowe and Joseph Harris classify *þættir* indicate their fundamental similarity to the various saga subdivisions (462-64). The category designated “king-and-Icelander *þættir*”, for example, consists of *þættir* that deal with an Icelandic commoner’s relationship with the Norwegian king, associating them immediately with *konungasögur*. Indeed, many of these *þættir* are preserved as interpolations in *konungasögur* and may never have existed as independent works. “Feud *þættir*”, which relate Icelandic feuds, and “skald *þættir*”, which relate brief anecdotes to do with skaldic poetry, both resemble small-scale versions of common types of *Íslendingasögur*. *Þættir* of the “journey to the other world” and “mytho-heroic” or “fornaldar*þættir*” likewise resemble small-scale *fornaldarsögur* (Rowe-Harris 463-64). *Þættir* may therefore be considered essentially as short sagas, which unfortunately blurs the distinction between “saga” and “*þátr*.”<sup>12</sup> Also, a *þátr* transmitted as a part of a larger work is not always identified in the manuscript as an individual text, and thus it is not universally agreed which works are truly “*þættir*.” I simply regard the *þátr* as a genre in its own right and comment on sub-generic and identification issues only where relevant to my argument. The time-range of *þátr*-composition is a bit wider than that of sagas, perhaps reflecting their cross-generic nature;

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<sup>11</sup> A famous episode in *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða* relates that King Sverrir Sigurðarson says of this saga that such lying sagas are the most entertaining (*kallaði hann slíkar lygisögur skemmtiligastar*, 10: 27).

<sup>12</sup> Supporting this notion, the short saga now known as *Grænlandinga saga* (or *Þorfinns saga karlsefnis*) has also been known in the past as *Grænlandinga þátr*.

according to Rowe and Harris, “*Þættir* were composed before 1220 and apparently continued to be written in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries” (464).

I also use as primary sources some other Old Norse-Icelandic texts that do not fall easily into generic classifications but are generally included by scholars in the corpus of saga-literature. These include the Icelandic books of history and genealogy, Ari Þorgilsson’s *Libellus Islandorum* (or *Íslendingabók*) and *Landnámabók*, as well as *Ágrip af Nóregskonungastígum*, one of the so-called “synoptic histories” of Norwegian kings. The other two synoptics, *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium* of Theodoricus Monachus and the anonymous *Historia Norwegiae*, are in Latin. Other contemporary non Norse-language texts I also occasionally refer to include Adam of Bremen’s *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* and the Latin-language Danish histories of Sven Aggesen and Saxo Grammaticus, as well as the Anglo-Saxon translation of Orosius associated with King Alfred the Great. These works serve exclusively as secondary source material in this thesis, supporting or providing context for arguments whose foundations lie squarely in the Norse-language texts.

## 2. Scholarship survey

Before going on to describe my methodology and other technical aspects of this thesis, I first provide a review of the scholarship in areas related to my specific questions and aims.

### 2.i. Geography and travel

To my knowledge, no scholar has published any work focusing exclusively on far-travel within saga-literature, either as the saga-writers seem to define far-travel or as I have.<sup>13</sup> The general

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<sup>13</sup> The only exception is my own paper “Saga Accounts of Violence-motivated Far-travel” (2009), which presents a small portion of the material covered in this thesis.

subject of the role of travel in saga-literature, however, has been discussed by several scholars. Some study has also been devoted to the medieval Scandinavians' perceived geography of the world, a subject intimately connected with the study of accounts of travel from the Scandinavians' homelands to places perceived as distant from them.

The standard reference work that collates and analyses medieval Icelandic and Scandinavian visualisations and descriptions of their world's geography is Rudolf Simek's *Altnordische Kosmographie: Studien und Quellen zu Weltbild und Weltbeschreibung in Norwegen und Island vom 12. bis zum 14. Jahrhundert* (1990). Besides providing an exhaustive survey of the material and comprehensively summarising and interpreting it, Simek also includes texts and German translations of thirty passages from primary sources fundamental to understanding medieval Scandinavian cosmography. Gísli Sigurðsson has delivered papers and published studies on the medieval Icelandic "mental maps" of various specific locations, such as the British Isles (2006), Greenland (2009) and Vínland (2004). In his 2005 book *Við og veröldin: Heimsmynd Íslendinga 1100-1400*, Sverrir Jakobsson describes the medieval Icelandic world-view, illustrating how Icelanders placed themselves in relation to the Christian and Norse worlds. For the most part it is the Icelanders' conceptual position that is discussed, but their geographical position also enters the discussion, especially where it concerns marginality versus centrality.

Kristel Zilmer has written quite prolifically on the role of travel in saga-literature. Most thorough in method and at the same time most focused is her doctoral dissertation on Viking Age Baltic traffic and its representation in early Nordic sources, published in the *Nordistica Tartuensia* series (2005, reviewed in Jackson 2006). In various other papers<sup>14</sup> Zilmer discusses the narrative representation of travel in sagas of different sub-genres and connects that

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<sup>14</sup> "Learning About Places and People" (2004), "The Motive of Travelling in Saga Narrative" (2005), and "Icelandic Sagas and the Narrative Tradition of Travelogue" (2006).



representation to various other facets of saga-literature, such as its methods of introducing, characterising and imbuing with personal significance saga-characters; its literary relationship with cultural-historical realities; and its representation of the past. Though the intrinsic value of travel motifs to saga-literature is best demonstrated by the careful, extended attention Zilmer devotes to them, it is defended more succinctly in some of her concluding words:

The travels undertaken by the saga characters play a distinctive role in the saga narrative on different levels, contributing to the plot and the structure of the sagas, and at the same time opening up some characteristic concepts and perceptions that have shaped the story. [...] To travel is to experience and learn, but it is also to develop one's imagination and creativity – and the narrative representation of travel in the sagas of Icelanders works in the same manner, mixing imaginary, illustrative interpretations with realistically grounded elements, and building a bridge between the experiences of different times. (2005: 88-89)

The articles collected in *The World of Travellers: Exploration and Imagination* (2009) address various categories of the perceptions of travel in Latin and Germanic literature of the early Middle Ages. Articles in this collection by Judith Jesch and Lars van Wezel deal with aspects of travel in saga-literature. Travel in medieval literature in general and within Old Norse studies in particular continues to be a subject of great interest and ongoing discussion. The theme of the annual Leeds Medieval Congress for 2010 is "Travel and Exploration." The University of Nottingham hosted a postgraduate conference on movement in the Middle Ages in May 2009, in which several of the papers presented dealt specifically with travel-related topics. (The proceedings of this conference will be made available on Nottingham Eprints.)

## 2.ii. Directions

There have been many studies of both historical and literary focus pertaining either to Viking Age and medieval Scandinavian interaction with specific distant lands in each of the four cardinal directions or to medieval accounts of travel to those lands.

**2.ii.a.** The extensive archaeological excavations by Poul Nørlund in the early 20th century advanced knowledge of medieval Greenland more than any previous endeavour; Nørlund's conclusions were published in 1936 as *Viking Settlers in Greenland and their Descendants During Five Hundred Years* (reprinted 1971). Other treatments of Norse Greenland use literary as well as archaeological sources.<sup>15</sup> As an exhaustive survey of the medieval Scandinavian literary treatment of Norse Greenland, Ólafur Halldórsson's *Grænland í miðaldaritum* (1978) has not been surpassed. Ólafur provides, among other things, a complete edition of *Grænlands annál* and extracts from many other medieval Norse sources on Greenland, as well as an essay on the relationship between *Grænlandinga saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða*, their dating and their relationship to other medieval sources on Greenland. A recent contribution to the ongoing debate about the causes of the decline and ultimate disappearance of the Norse Greenland colonies is Jared Diamond's 2005 book *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*. Diamond's focus, however, is more popular than academic. Kirsten Seaver's study *The Frozen Echo* (1997) provides a more scholarly treatment of the subject.

The primary focuses of Vínland scholarship ever since C.C. Rafn's scholarly assertion that medieval Norsemen had reached continental North America (*Antiquitates Americanae*, 1837) have been the validity of archaeological evidence for Norse presence in North America and the veracity of the medieval literary accounts of Norse travel to Vínland. Fridtjof Nansen's extensive

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<sup>15</sup> See Knud J. Krogh, *Viking Greenland* (1967); Helge Ingstad, *Land Under the Pole Star* (1966); and Gwyn Jones, *The Norse Atlantic Saga* (1964 revised 1986).

study *In Northern Mists* (1911) argued that the saga-accounts of travel to Vínland were entirely derived from previously existing classical, continental and Irish motifs of travel literature and cosmography. Helge Ingstad's 1960 discovery of a Norse settlement site at L'Anse-aux-Meadows on the northern coast of Newfoundland was the subject's defining moment, and the archaeological excavations of his wife Anne Stine Ingstad and later Birgitta Wallace have solidified and enriched our understanding of Norse presence in North America at the turn of the first millennium.<sup>16</sup> The volume and pace of Vínland scholarship do not show signs of lessening. A collection of articles relevant to medieval Norse voyages to North America, medieval Norse activities there, medieval literature on Vínland, and other related topics was published in 1993 (*Viking Voyages to North America*, ed. Birthe L. Clausen). Large, interdisciplinary conferences were held in Reykjavík in August 1999 (*Approaches to Vínland*, ed. Andrew Wawn and Þórunn Sigurðardóttir) and Newfoundland and Labrador in September 2000 (*Vínland Revisited: The Norse World at the Turn of the First Millennium*, ed. Shannon Lewis-Simpson), the proceedings of which were published in 2001 and 2003 respectively. Richard Perkins's article "Medieval Norse Visits to America: Millennial Stocktaking" (2004) provides a useful, brief description of the current state of Vínland scholarship, and Perkins addresses some of the recurrent questions in that field and suggests possible avenues of investigation for the future.

**2.ii.b.** Scholarly treatment of Norse interaction with the distant south deals primarily with two subjects, the Varangian regiment in Byzantium and the many Scandinavian pilgrims to Rome and Jerusalem. Paul Riant (*Expéditions et pèlerinages des scandinaves en Terre Sainte au temps des*

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<sup>16</sup> See Helge Ingstad, *Westward to Vinland* (1969); Helge and Anne Stine Ingstad, *The Viking Discovery of America: The Excavation of a Norse Settlement in L'Anse Aux Meadows, Newfoundland* (2001); and Birgitta Wallace, "L'Anse aux Meadows: Gateway to Vinland" (1990), "The Vikings in North America: Myth and Reality" (1991) and "L'Anse aux Meadows, the western outpost" (1993).

*Croisades*, 1865, and *Skandinavernes Korstog og Andagtsrejser til Palæstina*, 1868) draws attention both to the long-range pilgrimages of medieval Scandinavians and to their mercenary service in the Byzantine empire. The most extensive and authoritative study of the southern mercenaries is Sigfús Blöndal's 1954 book *Væringjasaga*. Blöndal's treatment is primarily historical rather than literary, but the work as a whole is heavily dependent on literary sources, not only from medieval Scandinavia, but also from the Byzantine empire itself and elsewhere in the Near and Middle East. The work was revised, updated and translated into English by Benedikt S. Benedikz as *The Varangians of Byzantium* (1978). Hilda Ellis Davidson's book *The Viking Road to Byzantium* (1973) treats with Varangians but also deals to a large extent with early Russia, the eastern "road" of rivers and settlements by which Viking Age Scandinavians first reached the distant south.

The subject of saga-accounts of southern pilgrimage, especially as it relates to historical, royal pilgrims, is discussed by Joyce Hill in her 1993 article "Pilgrimage and Prestige in the Icelandic Sagas." Another recent treatment of medieval Scandinavian pilgrimage to the distant south may be found in Christian Krötzl's 1994 study *Pilger, Mirakel und Alltag: Formen des Verhaltens im skandinavischen Mittelalter (12.-15. Jahrhundert)*, which also examines the related subject of Scandinavian miracle-books (*jarteinabókar*). Most relevant to the study of far-travel to the distant south is Krötzl's third chapter, which enumerates and discusses the many textually-attested Scandinavian pilgrims of the Middle Ages. The earliest account of Scandinavian pilgrimage to Rome and Jerusalem, the 12th-century travel itinerary of an Icelandic abbot named Nikulás (now usually identified as Nikulás Bergsson of Munkaþverá), has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention. Translations of Nikulás's description of Jerusalem and the anonymous description of Jerusalem appended to it in AM 194 8vo are included in *Jerusalem Pilgrimage 1099-1185* (ed. John Wilkinson, 1988), and in a lengthy introduction the two works

are discussed in the context of medieval European pilgrimage to the Holy Land and the other contemporary accounts.<sup>17</sup> Benjamin Z. Kedar and Chr. Westergård-Nielsen analyse these two accounts of Jerusalem in their 1978 article, “Icelanders in the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem.”<sup>18</sup>

**2.ii.c.** For much of the 20th century, scholarship dealing with Scandinavia and early Russia was embroiled in the Normanist/Anti-Normanist controversy, adherents of the first view ascribing the primary role in early Russian state-creation to Swedish immigrants and the second ascribing that role to the Slavonic natives of the area. This debate has cooled somewhat since the break-up of the Soviet Union.<sup>19</sup> Two treatments of the subject in 1996 from both sides of the east-west cultural divide provide authoritative (and amicable) analysis of Scandinavian interaction with early Russia.<sup>20</sup> Much of the saga scholarship dealing with the east focuses on specific texts narrating eastern adventures. Robert Cook’s (“Russian History, Icelandic Story, and Byzantine Strategy in Eymundar þáttur Hringssonar”, 1986) offers a fascinating analysis of the various textual sources for Eymundr’s extended military service in Russia and the probable courses the oral narratives took in Russia and Scandinavia before being recorded (in various versions) in 13th-century Iceland. Jonathan Shepard (“Yngvarr’s Expedition to the East and a Russian Inscribed Stone Cross”, 1984-85) offers a similar analysis of *Yngvars saga víðftrla* but focuses on the possible historical origins of the saga-material rather than its narrative history. Literary analysis of various aspects of *Yngvars saga* is given by Dietrich Hofmann and Galina Glazyrina,

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<sup>17</sup> An extract from *Magnússona saga* describing Sigurðr Jórsalafari’s travels to Sicily, the Holy Land and Constantinople is discussed in the same introduction and its sources listed with those of the other extracts at the end of the volume, but, curiously, the translated passage is not included in the volume.

<sup>18</sup> More recently, Tommaso Marani has delivered papers on *Leiðarvisir* at the last two Saga Conferences (2006, expanded and re-published as 2009a; 2009b). Marani’s work focuses on Nikulás’s descriptions of Rome.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Nicholas Riasanovsky, “The Norman Theory of the Origin of the Russian State” (1947), and Thomas Noonan, “The Vikings in Russia: Some New Directions and Approaches to an Old Problem” (1991).

<sup>20</sup> Elena Melnikova, *The Eastern World of the Vikings: Eight Essays about Scandinavia and Eastern Europe in the Early Middle Ages* and Simon Franklin and Jonathan Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus 750-1200*.

who respectively elucidate the saga's origins and examine the saga's literary relationship with other texts.<sup>21</sup> The introduction and editorial material in Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards's translation of the two sagas, *Vikings in Russia* (1989), reviews and summarises the evidence for the two historical journeys and also provides a literary analysis of the texts. Sverrir Jakobsson ("On the Road to Paradise: 'Austrvegr' in the Icelandic Imagination", 2006) examines the role of the far east itself in the Icelandic imagination and usefully analyses the meanings and import of the term *víðfrtla*. The most recent International Saga Conference (Uppsala, 2009) followed the theme "Á Austrvega: Saga and East Scandinavia", and within this broad theme several papers focused on topics dealing with Eastern Europe and Russia.

**2.ii.d.** The unique status of the far north as the mythical habitation of giants and trolls results in literature in which travel there from Scandinavia is often a recognisable version of an older, mythic story-pattern adapted to the needs of the later, more realistic saga-narrative. For this reason much of the scholarship on journeys north is oriented to myth rather than literature. Rosemary Power ("Journeys to the north in the Icelandic Fornaldarsögur", 1984, and "Journeys to the Otherworld in the Icelandic *Fornaldarsögur*", 1986), Vésteinn Ólason ("The Marvellous North and Authorial Presence in the Icelandic Fornaldarsaga", 1994) and John McKinnell (*Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend*, 2005) all devote attention to particular story-patterns involving travel to the distant north. Jacqueline Simpson ("Otherworld Adventures in an Icelandic Saga", 1966) and Lars van Wezel ("Myths to Play with: *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*", 2006) each focus their attention on a particular saga that features northern travel and mythic story-patterns. Rudolf Simek's article in the 1986 festschrift for Hermann Pálsson, "Elusive

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<sup>21</sup> See Hofmann, "Die *Yngvars saga víðfrtla* und Oddr munkr inn fróði" (1981) and "Zu Oddr Snorrason's *Yngvars saga víðfrtla*" (1984), and Glazyrina, "On *Heliopolis* in *Yngvars saga víðfrtla*" (2003)."

Elysia, or: Which Way to Glæsisvellir?" prefigures his work in *Altnordische Kosmographie* by illustrating the medieval Scandinavians' mental map from saga-literature and other texts; where the book exhaustively describes the imagined geography of the entire world, the article deals primarily with distant northern lands and, to a limited extent, distant eastern ones.

### 3. Methodology

The most important point to stress regarding my methodology is that this thesis is above all else a literary examination of saga-texts. All observations about historical aspects of these works, as well as those aspects primarily socio-political, economic, archaeological or even geographical in nature are subordinate to my primary purpose: understanding the saga-writers' characterisation of far-travellers and far-travel. Whether or not Leifr Eiríksson was the first European to land on North American soil, where exactly Haraldr Sigurðarson waged battles against Africans while serving in the Byzantine military or what exactly the historical Yngvarr did on his travels east of Russia are of small concern to me. Rather, what medieval saga-writers say about these fantastic exploits in exotic lands is my focus, and studying the literary techniques used to create the saga-characters and episodes based on these historical persons is my business. This literary viewpoint, from which I address all textual themes and patterns I discuss, is manifested even in such technical choices as chapter organisation (see §4.ii. below). The methodology I have adopted for this literary study is based on identifying and analysing motivations and patterns.

#### 3.i. Motivations

Literary characters are created by what they do and say, and for the things they do and say there must be reasons. For a story of any kind to succeed, its characters' motivations must be logical or natural enough to forestall objection and disbelief in the story's audience. Sometimes reasons for

far-travel are stated explicitly by the characters themselves, as when one speaks of travelling north to gain wealth with valour rather than stay home and fish (*Gull.* 3). More often characters do not express why they decide to travel, but their reasons are readily perceptible in the circumstances, as when two half-brothers whose father has just been killed by a band of marauding trolls travel from Norway to the distant north and kill the trolls (*Bárð.* 2). On other occasions there is neither a reason given for far-travel nor a simple cause and effect, and textual clues, the broader literary and cultural context, and outright guesswork must be applied. Eirekr víðftrli's vow to travel the world seeking Paradise seems to come out of nowhere, completely unmotivated by any previous circumstances in his life (*Eirek.* 1). Yet audacious vows abruptly made by Norsemen in their drinking-halls are a familiar staple of heroic literature (cf. *Beowulf*), and later in *Eireks saga* it is revealed that a powerful, heavenly being has at least partially guided Eirek's steps from Norway to earthly Paradise in the distant east. It is reasonable to conclude that both heathen custom and the guiding power of the Christian god conspire here to motivate Eirekr's journeys to distant lands.

As established in the opening words of this chapter, character motivation is central to the purpose of this thesis. In seeking answers to the question of what medieval saga-writers thought about the Viking far-travellers of former days, elucidating the saga far-travellers' motivations is of primary importance. When towards the end of *Laxdæla saga* Bolli Bollason announces that he intends to travel south to gain honour and knowledge of the world, and when Bolli later returns to Iceland from the distant south laden with all the honour, knowledge and riches he can carry, we must conclude that the saga-writer thinks rather well of this sort of far-travel.

Along with character motivation, narrative motivation must also be considered; the motivations of the storyteller may drive a saga's plot and carry its characters from one place to another and from one action to another independently of the internal logic of the narrative. If, for



example, a saga-writer wishes to relate a fantastic story about a Scandinavian adventurer outwitting a pack of trolls, the adventurer must clearly be made to travel to the distant north rather than the distant south. Whatever logical or natural reason the character exhibits for their far-travel north, it is clearly secondary to the saga-writer's initial motivation for setting that episode in that fantastic, troll-infested place. Conversely, a saga-writer may not have the freedom to choose whether a particular character travels far or not: many sagas narrate the stories of historical or legendary figures around whom there were previously-existing, fixed narrative traditions. Skaldic verses relate that Haraldr Sigurðarson and Rǫgnvaldr Brúsason escaped the battle of Stiklarstaðir and fled east to Russia; their sagas must therefore narrate that eastern exile, whatever the saga-writer's own inclinations may be. In these cases the motivation may be said to belong neither to the character nor the narrator, but to the narrative itself.

### 3.ii. Patterns

Patterns are also an essential part of storytelling, especially in such an integrated and cross-referential body of stories as the sagas. Patterns forge connections between stories and characters, and they suggest modes of thought and authorship. One narrative formula, for example, that appears in sagas of many different types is the practice of describing a long journey between distant lands with words to the effect, "There is nothing to tell of their journey until they reached [Destination]" (see, for example, *Egla* 56: 152). This suggests a mode of saga-authorship in which sites of activity are more important than characters' progressions from one site to another. On brief and concentrated references to journeys abroad, Kristel Zilmer writes:

The incidental mode of corresponding references does not automatically mean that the act of travelling is in itself regarded as insignificant – otherwise it could simply be left unmentioned. Rather, this presentation strategy stands in connection with the general

style of saga writing, which concentrates on the most dramatic events and highlights, and normally does not devote much attention to situations that do not exercise straightforward influence on the conflict matter. (2005b: 73; see also Zilmer 2005b: 82-84)

The various narrative patterns related to travel evident both within single sagas and in the body of saga-literature as a whole are thus important tools for understanding the mindset of saga-writers who describe far-travellers and far-travel, and they serve to connect the modes of travel-narration in particular to the modes of saga-narration in general.

Ultimately, patterns create a framework in which an audience's narrative expectations can be fulfilled or transgressed. The many saga-descriptions of pilgrimages to the Holy Land, for example, become almost formulaic: the holy sites of Jerusalem are visited, money is donated to worthy causes, and the River Jordan is bathed in. Saga-readers with no personal knowledge of Jerusalem or pilgrimage can thus become familiar with the typical behaviour of southern far-travellers who visit the Holy Land. So the drunken misbehaviour of some of the men accompanying Rǫgnvaldr jarl Kali on his pilgrimage to Jerusalem comes as a surprise, not only as singularly profane behaviour on a pious journey but also as an unexpected episode in an otherwise familiar and typical narrative pattern. Some narrative patterns associated with far-travel apply more broadly; some, indeed, are evident in accounts of far-travel in all four cardinal directions. The concept of the "moral geography" of the world, for example, is quite clearly discernible in all directions. The common medieval world-view held that Jerusalem is both the geographical and spiritual centre of a world divided into European and African quadrants and an Asian half (see Figure 2), and this mental map was certainly completely familiar to the saga-writers.<sup>22</sup> Thus travels from Scandinavia, located in the northern portion of the European

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<sup>22</sup> See, for example, the opening paragraphs of Snorri Sturluson's *Ynglinga saga*, ÍF XXVI 9-10. See also Simek 1990: 37-46, 189-92, 197 and Cassidy 397-98.

quadrant, to the distant south and east take saga-characters towards the righteousness and holiness appropriate to the moral centre of the world, whereas travels to the distant north and west, by and large, take them towards evil or profane lands and peoples.

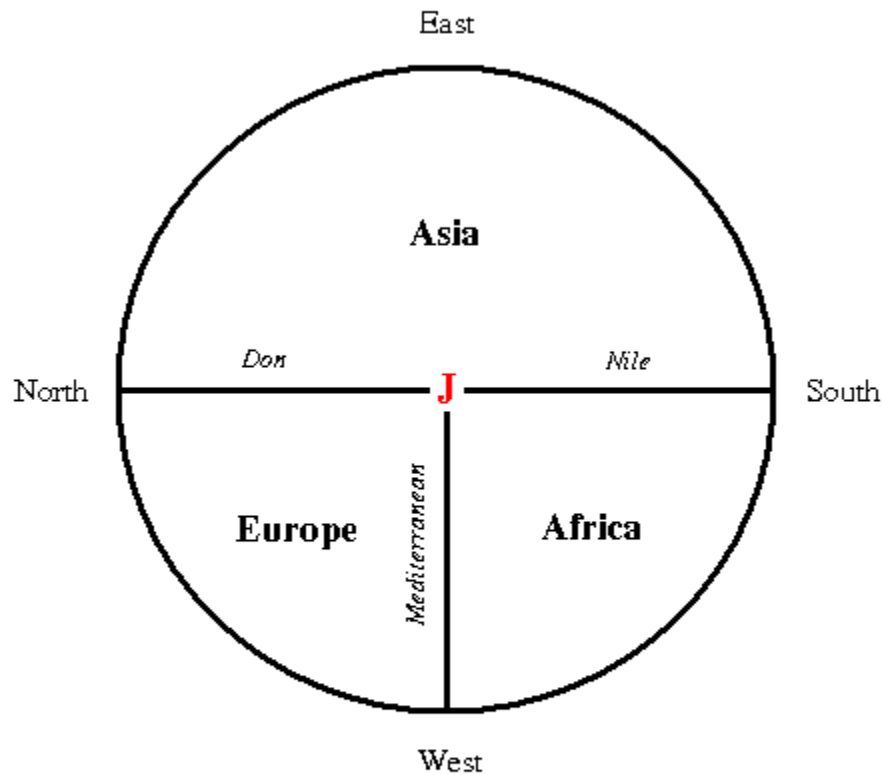


Figure 2. The medieval "TO-diagram" with Jerusalem at centre

Since motivations and patterns are the two principal focuses of my literary analysis, examples from different sagas illustrating particular motivations and patterns are gathered and examined together, and the major sections of each of the four directional chapters are organised according to these groupings. Some points of methodology pertinent only to specific texts or directions will be discussed in the introductory sections to the chapters in which they appear.

## 4. Miscellany

Having established the purpose, parameters and methodology of this thesis, it remains only to comment upon a few miscellaneous choices I have made, mostly fairly cosmetic matters pertaining to formatting. Some points will already be evident from this introductory chapter, such as my system of heading and numerating sections and subsections.

### 4.i. Translation and terminology

English translations of Norse quotations in this thesis are numbered and collected in an appendix and are, unless otherwise noted, my own. Some published translations have been consulted, and where their translating choices are illuminating, I have cited them as well. As noted above, I use some terms of Icelandic origin that have been fully naturalised within the vocabulary of English-language Norse scholarship (without italicisation). “Jarl” and “þátr”, for example, are used in preference to “earl” and “short story” respectively. Some other terms I use throughout this thesis in very specific contexts bear brief explanation.

Though the most accurate and diplomatic term for the language of medieval, vernacular Scandinavian texts is probably “Old Norse-Icelandic”<sup>23</sup>, the term lacks conciseness, and some of the vernacular texts I examine in this thesis must have originated outside Iceland (e.g. much of the verse quoted in sagas). Thus I tend to refer to the language (or “dialect continuum”) of the saga-writers and their contemporaries by the generic term “Old Norse”, or simply “Norse.”<sup>24</sup> I likewise apply these terms to the culture the saga-writers and their characters inhabit,

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. the title of Clover and Lindow’s authoritative book, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide* (1985).

<sup>24</sup> Jónas Kristjánsson’s objection to the application of the term “Norse” to Old Icelandic literature places him in an extreme minority among saga scholars (McTurk 6, footnote). The titles of the widely-used introductions to the Old Norse grammar and language by E.V. Gordon and Michael Barnes attest to the usefulness of the terms “Norse” and

acknowledging that, like the language, this common culture may be as multifarious as the experiences of the different saga-writers who invoke it. I also use the term “Norse” to refer to the language spoken by saga-characters, which, like the “Scandinavian Europe” I describe in §1.ii. above, is conceptual and defined by the saga-writers’ cultural perceptions. The terms the saga-writers use for the language of Scandinavian saga-characters – *dǫnsk tunga*, “the Danish language”, and *norrænna*, “Norse” or “Norwegian” – indicate the perceived centres of this cultural area they imagine themselves to inhabit (see also Fig. 1 above).

By deliberate choice I do not refer to the “author” of a saga, even when the name of the writer of a particular saga is known or well-attested. As Vésteinn Ólason succinctly puts it, “No saga text survives which can be said to be an author’s original copy” (2007: 102). The debates surrounding the nature of saga “authorship” are far from over (see, e.g., Clover-Lindow 13-15, 239-41), and sagas were probably constructed in several different ways: compiled from previously existing oral stories or written texts, shaped around a particular figure’s verses or a particular family’s heirlooms, expanded from a pre-existing text, translated from a foreign source-text, or invented entirely from a single person’s imagination. The medieval Scandinavians themselves might have had no concept of prose “authorship”: the names of skalds, after all, were remembered and revered, but the names of saga-writers, by and large, were not. It seems best to me to refer to the person who made the final creative choices regarding a text or part of a text, whether author, compiler or scribe, as the “writer” or “saga-writer.” As a particular manuscript’s version of a saga or þátr may, however, show the creative input of multiple persons, and indeed, as there are often many manuscripts of a given text, even these terms can be misleading. For this

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“Old Norse.” Barnes summarises the development of the language an article in Rory McTurk’s *Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (2007: 173-89).

reason I sometimes refer only to the “narrator” of a work. Saga prose affords us this one privilege at least: all sagas are narrated in the third-person.

When naming Scandinavian saga-characters I give the nominative form of the name in normalised Old Norse spelling. I leave characters’ nicknames in Norse, translating them parenthetically at the first appearance of the name in the thesis. When the meaning of a nickname is ambiguous, I provide information on its interpretation. For non-Scandinavian characters well-known from other sources – kings of England and emperors of Byzantium, for example – I give a widely-used English equivalent and parenthetically cite the name used in the Norse text at the character’s first appearance in this thesis. For saga-characters with multiple possible spellings of their names I have chosen a single spelling and applied it consistently, seeking above all else to maintain clarity. I thus write of “Eirekr víðfrli” rather than “Eiríkr” and refer to his saga as *Eireks saga víðfrla*, to avoid confusion with abbreviated references to *Eiríks saga rauða* and its title character.

I primarily refer to places, especially countries, by modern English equivalents of Norse place-names (cf. §1.i.b. above). National borders, however, have changed since these countries were referred to in Old Norse literature, sometimes quite significantly, and linguistic equivalence in many cases obscures the geographical differences between the lands named by medieval Scandinavians and those known by the corresponding names now. Modern Sweden, for example, includes areas once part of medieval Denmark, rendering use of “Sweden” and “Denmark” to translate *Svíþjóð* and *Danmtrk* problematic. Old Norse *Jórsalaheimr* and *Jórsalaland* certainly refer to the crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem, but in context the word often clearly includes the crusader-states Antioch, Edessa and Tripoli – lands partially under the authority of Jerusalem’s king and whose borders fluctuated throughout their brief periods of existence (Foss 325-26; Rose 392; Lock 412, 421-22). As in all issues of translation, solutions must be decided upon and

applied consistently. I therefore attempt to read and understand national, regional and municipal place-names as they were when the Old Norse text in which they appear was written. Where there may be some ambiguity regarding the true meaning of a name, it will be discussed, as, for example, when Snorri describes Haraldr harðráði battling Saracens in Africa (Affriká). Africa here is probably a mistake for Asia Minor, as at that time (winter of 1034-35) the Varangians were engaged in fighting in that region.<sup>25</sup>

#### 4.ii. Chapter organisation

As indicated in §1.i.a. above, far-travel in different directions corresponds to different narrative themes and purposes. A typical purpose for journeys west is settlement, while a typical purpose for eastern journeys is exile; pilgrims tend to journey southward, and reckless young adventurers northward. There are of course many other purposes and patterns associated with far-travel in different directions, and the correspondences are rarely exclusive. Exploration, for example, occurs in both the distant east and distant west. The directional correlations are strong enough, however, to merit organising this thesis's chapters on the basis of cardinal directions; Chapter 2 covers far-travel to the west, Chapter 3 far-travel to the south, Chapter 4 the east and Chapter 5 the north. Also, as noted in the introduction to §1.ii. above, different types of saga correspond with different directions of travel, though this correspondence is not quite as strong as that between direction and purpose of travel. Thus journeys to the distant west appear almost exclusively in *Íslendingasögur*, but journeys to the distant south occur in sagas of all sub-genres.

It must be noted at this juncture that the Norse words *vestr*, *suðr*, *austr* and *norðr* do not correspond exactly with English "west", "south", "east" and "north." This point has been very

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<sup>25</sup> See ÍF XXVIII 75, footnote; Blöndal-Benedikz 60-61, 66; and §2.i.a.4. of Chapter 3, "South."

well established with respect to Iceland and Norway<sup>26</sup>, and it seems a fairly universal principle that within a local or regional context cardinal directions often take very specific and non-intuitive meanings. The cardinal directions describing locations at great distances, however, and the spatial relationships of lands far from one another also display certain erratic qualities. One consistent principle has been observed by previous scholars, that the “Viking compass” is rotated 45° to 60° clockwise from the true, geographical compass: thus *norðr* refers to northeast, *austr* to southeast, etc. The generally diagonal slant of the Scandinavian peninsula, and especially the Norwegian coastline, is likely to have influenced this anomalous linguistic development<sup>27</sup> (see Figure 3). Other, less consistent principles also apply: that the location of the mythical land “Jttunheimar” gradually shifts from the far east to the far north over time<sup>28</sup>, that Jerusalem and Novgorod are sometimes portrayed as near to one another, and that Greenland can be variously reached by sailing westward from Iceland or by setting out northward from Norway and sailing past Finnmþrk.

In accordance with the primacy accorded to motivations for far-travel in my methodology (see §3.i. above), the largest section of each of my directional chapters concerns motivations, its subsections arranged by groupings of related motivations. Some motivations, naturally, are not exclusive to travel in a particular direction. There are, for example, far-travellers in all four cardinal directions who seek to acquire material goods. Despite cross-references between each of the chapters and sections relevant to such multi-directional motivations, the arrangement of chapters by direction inevitably fragments the data relevant to particular motivations. Summaries

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<sup>26</sup> On the meanings and contexts of the words denoting cardinal directions in Iceland, see Einar Haugen, “The Semantics of Icelandic Orientation” (1957); on those relating to Norway, see Tatjana Jackson, “On the Old Norse System of Spatial Orientation” (1998).

<sup>27</sup> See Lauritz Weibull, “De gamle nordbornas väderstrecksbegrepp” (1928), esp. pp. 303-08, and Richard Ekblom, “Alfred the Great as Geographer” (1941-42), esp. pp. 122-26.

<sup>28</sup> See the entries “Jttunheim” and “Utgarðr” in Rudolf Simek’s *Dictionary of Northern Mythology* (1993), but also Ármann Jakobsson, “Where Do the Giants Live?” (2006). On the ambiguous east/north, see also Simek 1986.



of the material in the conclusions to each of the chapters thus relate some of the general trends and patterns of that chapter to material in previous chapters, with the intention of liberating individual motivations from their unavoidable association with the particular direction with which they are initially associated. In the conclusion to the final chapter, possible reasons for and interpretations of the most prominent general trends are suggested.



Figure 3. The 45° to 60° clockwise shift of the Viking compass

## Chapter 2 – West

### 1. Introduction

I begin my investigation of saga-accounts of far-travel where my interest began, with journeys to distant western lands. The western lands I consider distant for the purpose of this study are Greenland and Vínland. It is worth reiterating here that whatever geographical places these names originally represented and wherever the historical journeys from which these saga-stories developed took the Viking Age far-travellers, I discuss the Greenland and Vínland that are literary landscapes imagined and constructed by the saga-writers.

#### 1.i. Grœnland

In some texts Greenland functions as an ambiguously-located land known only by report, to be first explored and later settled by Icelanders in the course of the narrative, while in others it appears as the furthest western outpost of the Norse world, harsh and remote but stubbornly populated by Scandinavians or their kin. Still other texts construct Greenland (with not a little geographical and historical accuracy) as a divided land: on the western coast, habitations of Norse farmers and merchants, on the eastern coast, a harsh wilderness inland of a treacherous, storm-swept sea. The remoteness and wildness of that eastern region of Greenland is well-represented in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Jtkuls þátrr Búasonar*, in which *Grænlands óbyggðir* (“the wastes of Greenland”) serve as a pseudo-Jttunheimr, wilderness-land populated by monstrous revenants, hags and giants.<sup>1</sup> Writing of the travel-motifs of exploration and settlement, Kristel Zilmer remarks that Greenland “simultaneously functions as a foreign target and a new settlement area” (2005b: 75, footnote). Eleanor

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<sup>1</sup> The course taken by Scandinavians to reach Grœnlands óbyggðir also suggests that the writers of these tales imagine it not in the distant west but, like Jttunheimar, in the distant north. These accounts are thus collected with others on far-travel to the north; see §§2.ii.a.4. and 2.iii.a.2. of Chapter 5.

Rosamund Barraclough observes that “the Greenland of the sagas was a unique and at times strange place, lying somewhere on the boundary between the known, familiar Norse world, and an unfamiliar, exotic sphere beyond” (99; see also 105). In relation to Greenland’s liminality, Shannon Lewis-Simpson has argued that Ari’s *Íslendingabók* was influential in establishing Greenland as a place predetermined by God to be pagan, in contrast to Iceland, which was preordained by God to be *christiana terrena*. Though both lands are at the outer edge of the expanse of Christendom, Greenland seems to be beyond that edge, while Iceland is just inside it (Lewis-Simpson 2006, esp. 578-79). Lewis-Simpson cites *Íslendingabók*’s archaeological, anthropological observation that when the first Norse explorers arrive in uninhabited Greenland, they find artefacts left there by Skrælings, people native to an even more distant and remote western country, Vinland. The first explorers of uninhabited Iceland, by contrast, find Christian artefacts there, left by the people of a nearer and more familiar land, Ireland<sup>2</sup> (*Ísl.* 6, 1). Greenland is by its nature part of the remote, pagan world of the distant west, while Iceland and Ireland are part of northern Europe, either part of Christendom or fated to become and remain Christian.

Another clear indication that Greenland is a land perceived as distant is the stretch of perilous water separating it from Scandinavia, a sea in which the weather is (supernaturally?) bad and fabulous events sometimes occur. The description in *Historia Norwegiae* of the sea separating Greenland from Norway and the rest of Scandinavia stresses the peril that awaits sailors who attempt to cross it; significantly, Greenland is also excluded from the list of lands tributary to Norway at the beginning of that text (*HN* 2). The fabulous and dangerous

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<sup>2</sup> Ireland’s imaginative inclusion in the neighbourhood of Scandinavian Europe is evident throughout saga-literature. In *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, for example, Dublin is included in the circuit of royal courts Gunnlaugr visits to honour monarchs with skaldic verses (Ch. 8). Irish laws and customs are portrayed as familiar to reasonably well-travelled Norsemen, even those of the Irish-speaking area outside of Dublin (see *Lax.* 20, 21). The rest of the British Isles is portrayed as comparably near and familiar. England and Scotland in particular are consistently portrayed as “close” to Scandinavia, as in episodes throughout *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* and *Orkneyinga saga*. The English are even thought to speak the same language as Norsemen, a

marvels of the Greenland Sea are also a key feature of *Hemings þáttr*, in which an experienced Greenlandic merchant sails through a wall of fire and a deluge of blood to reach St Óláfr in Norway (pp. 41-43). *Konungs skuggsjá* fills the waters around Greenland with mermen, mermaids and gigantic, terrifying waves it calls “sea hedges” (*hafgerðingar*, 16: 39), as well as more realistic but no less dangerous ice floes and icebergs. The difficulties of travel across the Greenland Sea suggest that it is beyond a kind of barrier separating Greenland from other, more easily reached Scandinavian islands, such as Iceland, the Faroes and Orkney (see also Barraclough 101-04, Falk 232).

Related to this, some of the sagas characterise parts of Greenland as wild, remote and dangerous. When an Icelander named Snæbjörn galti (“boar”) sails to the same skerries off the eastern coast of Greenland that Eiríkr rauði (“red”)<sup>3</sup> will later set out to seek, one of his travelling-companions prophesies that a completely detestable death awaits them in the frost and cold northwest across the sea. The prediction proves true: when the explorers do reach land in the distant west, the house they build is soon snowed under, and Snæbjörn and the others murder each other over the long winter (*Land. S* 152). Among the difficulties and uncanny occurrences Þorgils Örrabeinsstjúpr’s party experiences after first sailing to Greenland and then being stranded on a remote part of the coast are men falling sick, going mad, and walking around after death as revenants (*Fl.* 22). The stranded men even encounter a pair of trollwomen (*tröllkonur*, *Fl.* 24: 290), though this does not lead to any adventures among giants or interaction with their assembly or king, events typical when far-travellers meet trolls after sailing to the far north (cf. *Jfkuls þáttr Búasonar*; see §2.iii.a.2. of Chapter 5). In this saga, other parts of Greenland are in fact settled while the ill-fated far-travellers are stranded on the coast, and Þorgils’s journey to Greenland was instigated at the invitation

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point made explicit in *Gunnlaugs saga* (Ch. 7) and the mid 12th-century *First Grammatical Treatise* (p. 12). This has some historical validity (Moulton 1988; Townend 2002, esp. 181-83).

<sup>3</sup> Like many saga-characters’ bynames, Eiríkr’s is given both with the definite article (i.e. “inn rauði”) and without. I usually cite such bynames without the definite article.

of Eiríkr rauði (see §2.i.a.2. below). Greenland, though able to support Norse colonies in some parts, is still a harsh and remote wilderness in other parts, rugged, glacier-bound and prone to fantastic occurrences. Greenland thus ultimately functions in saga-literature as a “distant” western land.

### 1.ii. Vínland

That the Vínland of the sagas is conceptually “distant” from Norse-inhabited lands is beyond doubt. This Vínland has absorbed the attention of scholars and laymen alike ever since Carl Christian Rafn first stepped forward in the early 19th century to lend academic weight to the notion that Viking Age Scandinavians had crossed the Atlantic in their longships and reached America. Though questions of Vínland’s identification and the veracity of the saga-accounts of Norse travel there have divided scholars for the two centuries since, Norse presence in the eastern coastal regions of North America at the turn of the first millenium is now well-attested. Hard evidence exists in the form of the ruins of a Viking settlement at L’Anse-aux-Meadows in Newfoundland, an 11th-century Scandinavian coin found in Penobscot Bay, Maine, and artefacts from Norse Greenland made of wood from trees indigenous to North America.<sup>4</sup> How far south or inland the Greenlanders reached is still a matter of conjecture and argument.

The name “Vínland” is itself a debated issue.<sup>5</sup> The medieval manuscripts in which sagas appear mark vowel-length inconsistently or not at all and often spell quite haphazardly, and it has therefore been suggested that the original place-name was not “Vínland” but “Vinland.” The meaning in this case is not “wine-land” but “meadow-land.” The evidence

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<sup>4</sup> On L’Anse-aux-Meadows, see Anna Stine Ingstad’s report on the excavations at the site (1977), Helge Ingstad’s book *Westward to Vinland* (1969), and Birgitta Wallace’s article “L’Anse aux Meadows: Gateway to Vinland” (1990). The Penobscot Bay coin was first identified as a Norse artefact by Peter Seaby in his *Coin and Medal Bulletin* in 1978. On Greenlandic artefacts made of North American wood, see Seaver 28 and Fitzhugh-Ward 273; for a dissenting viewpoint, see Andersen-Malmros, especially p. 122.

of many place-names in continental Scandinavia ending with “-vin” or “-vinjar” (with the clear original meaning “meadow/s”) supports this proposition. However, the word “vin” was archaic by the time the Greenlanders reached North America, around the year 1000; there are, for example, no place-names with that element in either Iceland or Greenland, and the word appears with the meaning “meadow” only once in the extant corpus of Old Norse literature. Further, the association of vines and grapes with the name of the land goes back as far as we have written texts about it: native speakers of Old Norse would not have mistaken “vín-” for “vin-.” Other points have been made on either side of this debate, but for the purposes of this thesis it is sufficient to select a spelling and apply it consistently. Since this thesis is a literary study of saga-literature and my propositions are reasoned and supported directly from evidence drawn from this body of texts, what I mean by “Vínland” is the land I understand the saga-writers to most consistently represent it as. To the Icelandic saga-writers, as well as the German Adam of Bremen and probably his Danish informants as well (see §2.i. immediately below), the distant western land discovered by Greenlanders is “Wineland,” a land of wild-growing grapes suitable for wine-making. Thus I refer to the land as “Vínland.” The saga-writers also frequently apply the name “Vínland” to the entire collection of lands discovered by Bjarni Herjólfsson or Leifr Eiríksson, including Helluland, Markland and Vínland itself. I too adopt this short-hand for convenience and brevity.

As detailed in §3.i. of the introductory chapter, motivations for far-travel will be the primary focus of study in this thesis. This chapter will comprehensively describe those motivations for western far-travel in saga-literature. A section of this chapter will also be devoted to other narrative patterns of interest detectable in these texts.

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Erik Lönnroth’s article “The Vinland Problem” (1996) and Alan Crozier’s counter-argument “The \**Vinland* Hypothesis” (1998).

## 2. Motivations

### 2.i. Business ventures

The most prominent group of motivations for journeys westward to both Greenland and Vínland treats far-travel as a business venture. This group of commercial motivations for far-travel includes settlement of lands previously uninhabited by Europeans, collection of these lands' often unique or distinctive natural resources, trade, and gainful employment. All these purposes present far-travel as a matter of business venture rather than adventure. Most business-like of all is the Norse travellers' risk-assessment of battle in these distant lands: if the odds are bad, they deem the venture unprofitable and leave. Examples of these motivations occur in most of the saga-accounts of travel westward, *Íslendingabók*, *Landnámabók*, and the ecclesiastical history of Adam of Bremen.<sup>6</sup>

#### 2.i.a. (Settlement)

2.i.a. (1) The best-known example of settlement as a motivation for Viking Age travel is the story of Eiríkr rauði, who journeys to and settles Greenland. *Landnámabók*, from which the accounts in the extant versions of both *Eiríks saga rauða* and *Grænlandinga saga* derive, makes clear that the direct motivation for Eiríkr's original journey is feud violence, but it immediately goes on to describe him exploiting the vast, uninhabited land for its settlement

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<sup>6</sup> Ari Þorgilsson's vernacular *Libellus Islandorum*, commonly called *Íslendingabók*, was written in the early 12th century, though the earliest extant manuscripts are two 17th-century copies of a now lost 12th-century vellum manuscript (ÍF I<sub>1</sub> xliv-xlix, Grønlie ix-xxx, Gordon 33). Ari "the wise" or "the learned" (*inn fróði*) may also have compiled the earliest version of *Landnámabók*, the book tabulating the Scandinavian settlers of Iceland, along with Kolskeggr inn vitri ("the wise") in the early 12th century; so says Haukr Erlendsson in the epilogue to his version ("Hauksbók", 1306-08). The other major extant manuscript of *Landnámabók* is "Sturlubók", compiled around 1275-80 (Jón 1941, esp. 226; Hermann-Edwards 1972: 3-6; Jónas 1988: 125; Pulsiano 373-74). The German chronicler Adam was a canon of the cathedral chapter of Bremen from about 1066 until his death about 1085. His ecclesiastical history contains the oldest extant written account of Vínland, "Descriptio insularum Aquilonis" ("A Description of the islands of the North"). Adam obtained his information on North Atlantic islands on a personal visit to the Danish king Sveinn Ástríðsson (Sweyn II Estridsson), and his account thus gives a fair indication of the stories being told about Vínland before the time of the sagas' writing. Adam's work existed in some form at the end of the 11th century (Tschan xxvi-xlvi).

potential.<sup>7</sup> Eiríkr names the new country Grœnland – “Greenland” – calculating that people will want to go there if the place has an attractive name. *Íslendingabók* reports that Eiríkr states openly that this is his reason for calling Greenland green (Ch. 5). Ari cites his source for this information: his own uncle and foster-father Þorkell Gellisson, who spent time in Greenland and reportedly heard this story from one of the original settlers who had travelled out with Eiríkr. This story of crafty real-estate marketing is thus a very old one and may well be true. *Landnámabók* also states specifically that Eiríkr intends to settle or colonise the new land he has found (*at byggja land þat, er hann hafði fundit*, S 89: 132). The inclusion of this account unchanged in both the Vínland sagas suggests this was the accepted version of the story in 13th-century Iceland. Travel to Greenland is for Eiríkr rauði certainly a business venture of settlement.

It might be posited that Eiríkr’s desire to settle Greenland arises from an altruistic rather than a commercial desire: perhaps he seeks to settle the new land for the prospective colonists’ own good, rather than for financial gain or to make himself a chief there. Even if, however, it is not Eiríkr’s purpose to become a wealthy man, the chief in Greenland and the progenitor of its leading family, he certainly becomes these things. It may also be observed that Eiríkr spends his first year in Greenland naming landmarks after himself (*Gr. 1, Eir. 2*), a practice more in line with power- or wealth-seeking than altruism. The Vínland sagas go on to portray Eiríkr as a well-respected and powerful man in Greenland and relate the exploits of his promising sons, the royal favourite Leifr not least among them. *Fóstbræðra saga* indicates that two generations later Eiríkr rauði’s family is still the most powerful in

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<sup>7</sup> The datings of these so-called “Vínland sagas” are disputed. *Grœnlendinga saga* has been dated both to about 1300 and to before 1200 (see Vésteinn 2007: 115; ÍF IV: xci; Jón 1956 throughout; Jónas 1988: 271-73; Ólafur 398-400). *Eiríks saga* is variously dated to the early 13th century and to later than 1264; in either case, it may use the other Vínland saga as a source (Magnus-Hermann 1968: 34-35; Vésteinn 2007: 114; Jón 1962: 59). The two datings have even been combined: “Both manuscripts [of *Eiríks saga*] were based on an original written after 1263 – which in turn was based on an older text from the early thirteenth century” (Gísli 2001: 630).



Greenland.<sup>8</sup> Not only is Eiríkr's grandson Þorkell Leifsson portrayed throughout the saga as a powerful and well-liked chieftain, but once a character refers to another chieftain as the greatest but one in all Greenland – implying that Þorkell is the greatest (*Fóst.* 23). Eiríkr's desire to settle Greenland, his ruse to ensure settlement, and his elevated social position after that settlement leave little reason to doubt that the saga-writers consider his travel to Greenland a matter of good business.

Eiríkr's son Leifr also seeks to settle the new land to which he travels. Though Leifr and his men only winter in fine, bountiful Vínland and have no intention of settling permanently, they erect permanent houses there rather than temporary booths (*Gr.* 3).<sup>9</sup> The attitude Leifr displays towards these houses after returning to Greenland is one of a shrewd businessman who knows the value of good real estate. When planning expeditions to Vínland, both Þorfinnr Karlsefni ("material of a man") and Leifr's own half-sister Freydís ask Leifr to give them the houses he built there. Each time Leifr says he is willing to lend them the houses but not to give them away (*Gr.* 7, 8); clearly the houses are his property and the ground they stand on his real estate.<sup>10</sup> Though these ventures ultimately fail and Leifr's houses go untenanted after the Vínland explorers give up their settlements in the new land, the businesslike arrangements between Leifr and the travellers suggest that the nature of travel is business and the nature of business here is settlement.

**2.i.a. (2)** Travel for the purpose of settlement is not always an opportunistic venture, as seems to be the case for Eiríkr and Leifr. When Karlsefni sets off on his expedition to

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<sup>8</sup> The traditional view that *Fóstbræðra saga* is one of the older Íslendingasögur was challenged in the early 1970s by Jónas Kristjánsson, who re-dated the saga to the last decades of the 13th century (see Hollander 1949: 79; Jónas 1972, 1973 throughout). Opinion is still somewhat divided (see Pulsiano 216-19).

<sup>9</sup> Though *Eiríks saga* does not mention Leifsbúðir, the Hauksbók text of the saga says Vínland's trees are so large they are used for house-building (*Eir.* 5; see §2.i.b.2. below). The buildings at L'Anse-aux-Meadows, the likeliest site of Leifr's base-camp, were sod structures built around wooden frames; archaeology confirms the saga-account that the Vínland houses were permanent constructions suitable for year-round use rather than temporary *búðir* (Krogh 53-71, Fitzhugh-Ward 210-11, Wallace 1991: 213-14).

Vínland, he and the settlers bring various kinds of livestock, <sup>1</sup> því at þeir ætluðu at byggja landit, ef þeir mætti þat (*Gr. 7: 261*). Furthermore, once Karlsefni and his companions settle in Vínland and begin trading with the natives, they build a strong wooden palisade around their settlement, indicating that their resolution to make a success of the venture is if anything greater than Leifr's.

Other Íslendingasaga-accounts of travel to these distant western lands provide additional examples of the business of settlement. *Grænlandinga saga* lists the first settlers of Greenland and the locations of their farmsteads, generally named after the men who settle there (Ch. 1). Both Vínland sagas relate the stories of several characters who travel to Greenland to settle, some of whom move on to Vínland for the same purpose. Bjarni Herjólfsson's voyage from Norway to Greenland for a Yuletide visit to his father results in accidental sightings of various mysterious lands that do not fit Greenland's description. Bjarni does not set foot on any of these lands, but once he reaches Greenland his visit soon turns into permanent settlement (*Gr. 2*). Þorfinnr Karlsefni's reason for coming to Greenland is not stated directly, but *Eiríks saga* implies Karlsefni's original reason for sailing there is trade, introducing him as a sea-going merchant immediately before relating his voyage to Greenland (*Eir. 7*). In both sagas, however, Karlsefni arrives in Greenland prepared to marry and settle down with a kinswoman of the most powerful man in Greenland (*Gr. 7, Eir. 7*). Karlsefni is also, of course, the man to lead the first expedition to Vínland with the stated purpose of settlement. The Icelander Þorgils Þórðarson, nicknamed Örrabeinsstjúpr ("Scar-leg's stepson") after his stepfather Þorgrímr Örrabeinn ("Scar-leg"), is very deliberate in his plans to settle in Greenland. *Flóamanna saga* relates that after being invited by Eiríkr rauði himself to come settle in Greenland, Þorgils consults with his wife and takes prophetic dreams and visions into account before deciding to divide his property, sail to Greenland, and

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<sup>10</sup> Wallace suggests Leifr's right of control over Vínland's resources was in his mind when he lent rather than

settle there (Chs. 20-21).<sup>11</sup> Supernatural disasters, unfortunately, beset Þorgils's venture (*Fl.* 21-24). Notably, Þorbjörn Vífilsson explicitly cites financial reasons for relocating from Iceland to Greenland, connecting quite directly settlement and the notion of far-travel as a business venture (*Eir.* 3; but see also §2.iii. below).

Departures too can illustrate that settlement in the distant west is an ordinary matter of business rather than adventure. Towards the end of *Fóstbræðra saga*, three Greenlandic settlers sell their land-holdings and livestock to return to Iceland on account of some violence (Ch. 24).<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the title character of *Króka-Refs saga* butchers his livestock and sells his land in Greenland, agreeing to vacate the plot within six months and give the buyers notice (Ch. 7).<sup>13</sup> This familiar pattern of events, complete with precise contractual details, could have been told of Iceland or Norway. When Greenlandic saga-characters sell their property and move in the same manner and for the same reasons as Icelanders, one sees that settlement is much the same business it is back in Iceland: simply finding and securing – or selling and leaving – a residence.

### 2.i.b. (Goods, cargo)

2.i.b. (1) For settlement to be economically viable, the new land must of course have sufficient natural resources, and for travellers whose voyage is a commercial enterprise, an abundance of these natural resources is certainly a powerful draw. Greenland thus seems a poor choice for settlement. The soil in that country is unsuitable for cereals and plants larger than small shrubs, and there are no trees to use for buildings and farming implements. Greenland is a somewhat better choice for exploitation of natural resources for financial gain.

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gave Leifsbúðir to Þorvaldr and Freydís (1991: 219).

<sup>11</sup> *Flóamanna saga* dates from the late 13th or early 14th century (CSI III 271, Pulsiano 199).

<sup>12</sup> ÍF VI includes both the Möðruvallabók and Hauksbók texts of *Fóstbræðra saga*. I identify in citation the manuscript used with an M or an H. When the two texts agree I include no such identifier.

Though the island has few distinctive native goods, the ones it has are highly valued. The title character of *Auðunar þátr vestfirzka* travels to Greenland and gives every penny he has for a white bear, so that he can take it to Denmark and present it to the king.<sup>14</sup> The Norwegian *Speculum regale* or *Konungs skuggsjá* (“King’s mirror”) describes walrus-hide rope and its exceptional strength (Ch. 16)<sup>15</sup>, and in *Króka-Refs saga* the Norwegian king sends the trader Bárðr to Greenland rather than Iceland one summer to obtain walrus ivory and walrus-hide ship ropes (Ch. 10). Upon Bárðr’s departure from Greenland another character gives him three valuable gifts to take King Haraldr: a trained polar bear, a board game carved of walrus ivory, and a gold-inlaid walrus skull with all its teeth (*Kró.* 11). All these gifts are well received by the monarchs to whom they are given. *Króka-Refs saga* also names furs and prized white falcons as products of Greenland (*Kró.* 14, 18). Some of these same Greenlandic goods are presented to Norwegian monarchs in the first and last chapters of *Grænlandinga þátr*, along with the obligatory polar bear.<sup>16</sup> As noted above, however, more practical goods for farming and living are rare in Greenland, and historically this scarcity of basic natural resources, along with other factors, precipitated the colonies’ decline and ultimate extinction.<sup>17</sup>

**2.i.b. (2)** The scarce natural resources in Greenland are flagrantly contrasted by the abundant natural resources of bountiful Vínland, which figure prominently in saga-accounts of far-travel there. Wild-growing grapes for wine and wheat for bread, tall hardwood trees

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<sup>13</sup> The saga of “Clever-Refr” probably dates from the late 14th century; this late dating and the saga’s fantastical episodes distance it from the literary conventions of the Íslendingasögur (IF XIV xxxvii, Örnólfur-Scudder 596). On *Króka-Refs saga* as an imitation or parody, see Willson 2006.

<sup>14</sup> There are two extant versions of *Auðunar þátr*, one in *Morkinskinna* (c. 1220) and another, fuller text in *Flateyjarbók*. The story was probably composed between 1190 and 1220 (IF VI: cvii-cviii, Pulsiano 24-25).

<sup>15</sup> *Konungs skuggsjá* is a didactic work after continental models probably composed around 1250 at the behest of the Norwegian king (Jónas 1988: 335; Pulsiano 366-67).

<sup>16</sup> On furs as a native product characteristic of distant, wilderness lands, see §2.v.d.2. of Chapter 4 and §2.i.a.3. of Chapter 5. On the highly valued products native to Greenland, see Krogh 114 and Seaver 48-49, 82-84.

<sup>17</sup> See Krogh 117-26, Seaver 238-53, 306-11. Jared Diamond ascribes the Norse Greenlanders’ downfall to mismanagement rather than scarcity of natural resources (Chs. 7, 8).

for lumber, unusually large salmon in good supply and plenty of vegetation for winter fodder are all named in the Vínland sagas. There are correspondingly many implications in these texts that acquisition of Vínlandic goods is a motivation for journeys there.

Wild-growing grapevines, of course, give the land its saga-name, “Wineland.” When Leifr Eiríksson sails to explore the lands Bjarni sighted earlier, a member of Leifr’s party who goes missing discovers vines and grapes growing wild (*vínviðir*, *vínberjar*; *Gr.* 3-4). This man Tyrkir returns and tells the others, assuring them that, being from the south (i.e. from Germany, where grapevines grow), he knows what vines and grapes look like.<sup>18</sup> The next morning Leifr orders his men to collect grapes and fell trees to make cargo (*farmr*) for his ship (*Gr.* 4: 253). Leifr and his men have already decided to winter in the new land: there are bigger salmon in the nearby lakes and rivers than they have ever seen before, and plentiful vegetation and a mild climate make winter fodder for their livestock seem unnecessary (*Gr.* 3). When the spring comes, Leifr has a ship full of timber and a tow-boat full of grapes, and he sails home to Greenland to grow in wealth and reputation and gain his nickname *inn heppni*, “the lucky” (*Gr.* 4). While grapes are the most singular of the goods Leifr brings back to Greenland, the resource probably valued most was timber, a commodity difficult to obtain in Greenland and necessary to the building of both ships and large houses. Timber is also prevalent in the second land Leifr encounters on his voyage from Greenland: Markland (“Forestland”), named after its dense forests.<sup>19</sup> In *Eiríks saga* Leifr reaches lands southwest of Greenland by accident. The account of his stay in that country is short, but the land’s abundant natural resources are still recorded:

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<sup>18</sup> Adopting for a moment a historical rather than a literary perspective on this episode, we may note that Tyrkir, if he existed, may have been the only member of the party who knew what grapevines look like. If he was lying, mistaken or fictional, what the Viking explorers found in Vínland may have been some sort of berry unfamiliar to them. Several varieties of berry grow wild in Newfoundland, which is farther north than grapes grow. Botanist Merrit Fernald discusses this point and confidently identifies the sagas’ *vínberjar* with “rock cranberries” (20-25). However, the presence of butternut shells in a clearly Norse context at the L’Anse-aux-Meadows excavation indicates that the Norsemen there travelled further south than Newfoundland, as butternuts grow no further north than wild grapes (Wallace 1990: 193).

<sup>2</sup> Váru þar hveitiakrar sjálfsánir ok vínviðr vaxinn. Þar váru þau tré, er mǫtsurr<sup>20</sup> heita, ok hǫfðu þeir af þessu tǫllu nǫkkur merki, sum tré svá mikil, at í hús váru lǫgð. (*Eir.* 5: 211).

In both accounts, the natural resources (*landkostir*) are reported as valuable goods discovered in a land being explored for the first time, and thus they do not properly constitute a commercial motivation for travel.

In all the accounts of the later Vínland-voyages in *Grænlandinga saga*, however, the collection of goods for cargo (*farmr*) seems to provide a powerful financial incentive for travel there. The expeditions led by Þorfinnr Karlsefni and Freydís Eiríksdóttir are from the start described very clearly as financial enterprises. Both Karlsefni and Freydís engage men for their expeditions for equal shares of the profits gained on the venture (*Gr.* 7, 8). Once Karlsefni's convoy reaches Vínland, the collection of goods commences immediately:

<sup>3</sup> Karlsefni lét fella viðu ok telgja til skips síns ok lagði viðinn á bjarg eitt til þurrkunar. Þeir hǫfðu tǫll gæði af landkostum, þeim er þar váru, bæði af vínberjum ok alls konar veiðum ok gæðum. (*Gr.* 7: 261)

When after two years in Vínland Karlsefni decides return to Greenland, his ship is once again laden with much produce (*mǫtrg gæði*, *Gr.* 7: 264): grapes and another commodity, which Karlsefni and his people have obtained from the natives in trade, animal pelts.<sup>21</sup> Freydís also has trees felled for her cargo on her Vínland expedition, and when she too abandons the new world for home, her ship is laden with <sup>4</sup> *þeim tǫllum gæðum, er þau máttu til fá ok skipit bar* (*Gr.* 8: 267). Even in the account of the exploration-driven voyage of Leifr's brother Þorvaldr, Vínland's commercial goods make an appearance. After Þorvaldr has tragically

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<sup>19</sup> Icelandic annals report an excursion from Greenland to Markland for timber-collection as late as 1347 (*Íslandske annaler* 213, 403).

<sup>20</sup> This word, often translated "maple", may refer to various hardwood trees (ÍF IV 211, footnote). Botanist Merrit Fernald identifies the trees as white or canoe birch (Fernald 30-32, Morison 52).

taken his death-wound from a Skræling arrow, delivered suitably laconic dying words, and been buried in proper Christian piety beneath crosses at his head and feet – even then, the saga-writer cannot resist adding that before embarking for home, the men load the ship with a cargo of the obligatory vines and grapes (*Gr.* 5). The focus in these *Grænlandinga saga* accounts of voyages to Vínland is on material gain from the products this veritable paradise has to offer. The last word on Vínland-cargo the saga offers is that no ship ever sailed from Greenland more richly laden than the one Karlsefni steered back to Norway (*Gr.* 8). Similarly, Karlsefni's last trade before settling down to a farmer's life in Iceland is selling to a German man his ship's carved *húsasnotra*, a gable-head of genuine Vínlandic *mʃsurr*-wood (*Gr.* 9).

*Eiríks saga*, by contrast, does not devote as much attention to the natural resources of Vínland or their commercial value, focusing instead on exploration of the geography of the new land and the anthropology of its non-Christian inhabitants. This saga's account of Karlsefni's expedition, in fact, records not the loading of ships with cargo but rather the search for provender, both for men and livestock (*Eir.* 8). The resources are ultimately found – the usual wild wheat and grapes, rivers teeming with fish and woods with game – but here the goods seem to be viewed as provisions for settlement rather than cargo to be transported back to Greenland or Scandinavia. Also, the ensuing contact with the native population, violent and otherwise, somewhat overshadows the narrative attention to these natural resources (*Eir.* 10). In this regard *Grænlandinga saga* is consistent with the oldest literary source for information on Vínland, Adam of Bremen's "Descriptio insularum Aquilonis." Adam's brief description reports that Vínland (*Winland*) is so called *quod ibi vites sponte*

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<sup>21</sup> The cargo Karlsefni originally loaded onto his ship has apparently disappeared. One supposes the perishables were consumed by the settlers in the two intervening winters, while the wood is presumably either still on board or was used for the palisade Karlsefni built around their settlement.

*nascantur, vinum optimum ferentes* (IV.xxxix: 275<sup>22</sup>) – “because vines producing excellent wine grow wild there” (Tschan 219) – and that self-sown grain grows there abundantly. All this, Adam writes, is not from fabulous reports, *sed certa comperimus relatione Danorum* (IV.xxxix: 275) – “but from the trustworthy relation of the Danes” (Tschan 219). Adam uses quite commercial terms to describe Vínland’s goods: grapevines are immediately transformed in his account into a more desirable consumer product, good wine. It is implied that the reason Scandinavians travel to Vínland is for its saleable goods.

Two more indirect examples in *Eiríks saga* portray Vínland as a place to acquire natural resources. The delightful character Þórhallr veiðimaðr (“hunter”), upon taking a drink of water in Vínland, speaks this verse of complaint:

5 Hafa kvfðu mik meiðar  
 malmþings, es komk hingat,  
 mér samir láð fyr lýðum  
 lasta, drykk inn bazta;  
 Bílds hattar verðr byttu  
 beiði-Týr at reiða;  
 heldr 's svát krýpk at keldu;  
 komat vín á græn mína. (Eir. 9: 225)

Þórhallr’s complaint that he was lured with the promise of good drinks suggests that the story of Vínland’s namesake product was a powerful advertising tool for getting men to join expeditions to go there. It is, however, difficult to connect this far-traveller’s reference to Vínland’s wine with a business venture: it is the idea of putting the wine into his stomach that appeals to Þórhallr. Finally, the first mention of Vínland by name in *Eiríks saga rauða*

<sup>22</sup> In references to Adam’s *Gesta Hammaburgensis*, Saxo’s *Gesta Danorum* and other works divided into books, chapters and sections, the book number is given in capital Roman numerals, followed by the chapter in lower-case numerals, followed (if applicable) by section number in Arabic numerals. The number after the colon is the page number.



implies it is a land of abundant natural resources. It is introduced simply as *Vínland inn góðr* – “Wineland the good” or “Wineland the abundant.”<sup>23</sup> Whether or not the goodness of *Vínland* is understood to reside in its distinctive natural resources, this cognomen has certainly continued to capture the imagination of later generations the same way it did the medieval saga-writers.

### 2.i.c. (Trade/commerce)

2.i.c. (1) As mentioned above, one of the distinctive products of *Vínland* must be traded for: animal pelts. The trade-motivation for far-travel exists indirectly in the Greenlanders’ desire to obtain the valuable goods of *Vínland* and bring them back to Greenland and Scandinavia to trade with the people there. If Adam of Bremen’s account accurately reflects contemporary knowledge of that *Vínland* and its products, the goods so obtained would find a robust market. In both *Grænlandinga saga* and *Eiríks saga* trade with the native inhabitants for new-world furs takes place during the voyage of Þorfinnr Karlsefni. Having heard in Greenland of the existence of native inhabitants of *Vínland*, the successful sea-going merchant Karlsefni may be optimistic about the possibility of trading with them, despite the fact that the earlier *Vínland*-travels made only hostile contact with these natives (*Gr.* 5; see *Eir.* 7). Karlsefni’s bid for the hand in marriage of an exceptional woman in the care of the most powerful man in Greenland bespeaks a certain optimism of character (*Gr.* 7). Karlsefni may actually consider the natives worth trading with because they put up a fight with the earlier Greenlandic explorers: they might, after all, fight because they possess something valuable enough to protect.

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<sup>23</sup> It is so introduced only in *Hauksbók*; the *Skálholtsbók* text calls it merely “*Vínland*”; ÍF IV 221, ÍF IV (Viðauki) 422.

The details of the trade are interesting. In both sagas Karlsefni forbids his men to sell the natives any weapons.<sup>24</sup> In *Grænlandinga saga* the Greenlanders instead sell the natives milk for their packs and furs, and in *Eiríks saga* they sell them red cloth.<sup>25</sup> In both sagas the natives are said to be eager to trade for these commodities (*Gr.* 7, *Eir.* 11). Each saga-writer also presents the trading rather like a clever gyp on the part of Karlsefni and his men. The writer of *Grænlandinga saga* points out that the Greenlanders get the Skrælings' valuable furs, while the Skrælings walk away with their wares in their bellies. The writer of *Eiríks saga* describes the Greenlanders running low on red cloth and cutting it into thinner and thinner strips to offer the natives, *ok gáfu Skrælingar þó jafnmikit fyrir sem áðr eða meira* (*Eir.* 11: 228).<sup>26</sup> Of all the details in the two sagas regarding the natives of Vinland, this story of European travellers' unscrupulous dealings with natives is perhaps the most familiar and plausible.

**2.i.c. (2)** The accounts of travel to Greenland yield more and better examples of the trade-motivation for far-travel. In *Eiríks saga* it is clear that Karlsefni himself comes to Greenland to trade with the settlers there. Immediately after being introduced in the text as an Icelandic trader, he prepares a ship for a summer voyage to Greenland. Upon his arrival at Eiríksfjtrðr in autumn, *7 Eiríkr reið til skips ok aðrir landsmenn; tóksk með þeim greiðlig kaupstefna* (*Eir.* 7: 219). In *Fóstbræðra saga* another vessel captained by an experienced travelling merchant (*farmaðr mikill*, M 18: 214) makes landfall at Eiríksfjtrðr many years later, and

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Nrvor-Oddr's order to his men not to sell weapons to the natives of Bjarmaland in the distant north. See Ch. 5 of *Órvar-Odds saga* (Guðni Jónsson's edition).

<sup>25</sup> Both sagas may be correct. Early medieval Greenlanders certainly had plenty of milk-producing livestock (see *Konung.* 18, Krogh 53-71, Seaver 54-55). It is also possible Greenlanders had a surplus of red cloth. An article of polar bear fur excavated from the medieval graveyard in Herjólfnes had been dyed red; at the Sandnes farm, a piece of homespun cloth was found which had been dyed blue (Seaver 47; but see also Ewing 2006a: 223). On the provenance, trade and literary perception of fine, coloured cloth in medieval Scandinavia, see Ewing 2006a and 2006b.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Perkins comments on these portrayals: "Certainly the sagas seek to represent the natives as simpletons" (39). However, see also Sverrir 2001: 96-97.

Eiríkr rauði's grandson Þorkell Leifsson comes down and buys from the newly-arrived traders all he needs (Ch. 20). Lee Hollander explains that it "was the prerogative of the chief of a district to have first choice of the wares brought by ships from abroad; also, to fix values in the exchange for native goods" (212). Desire for these often quite valuable native goods proves elsewhere to be a powerful incentive for trading voyages to Greenland. The title character of *Auðunar þáttur* certainly considers a Greenlandic polar bear worth spending his entire fortune to obtain and a gift appropriate to present to the Danish king. As mentioned in §2.i.b.1. above, in *Króka-Refs saga* a merchant named Bárðr, said to make regular trading voyages to Iceland and Britain, is ordered by the Norwegian king Haraldr harðráði to cancel his summer trip to Iceland and instead sail out to Greenland for walrus ivory and ship ropes (Ch. 10; see also §3.i. below). When Bárðr returns to Norway, his distinctively Greenlandic products – carved walrus ivory, a gold-inlaid walrus skull and a trained polar bear, as well as many excellent Greenlandic wares (*margan grænlenzkan varning ágætan*, 12: 142) – are enthusiastically received by the king. When Króka-Refr himself later travels to Denmark, word quickly travels around about his Greenlandic goods so seldom seen in Denmark (*fásénir í Danmörk*): walrus-hide ropes, walrus ivory, furs, five polar bears and fifty falcons, fifteen of them prized white ones<sup>27</sup> (*Kró.* 18: 157). In *Konungs skuggsjá* the learned father informs the attentive son that many men brave the perils of the Greenland Sea because they have heard that great wealth may be had by trading much-coveted European products for such precious Greenlandic products as walrus-hide ropes, ivory and white falcons (Ch. 17). It is clearly understood that certain goods in Greenland are rare and valuable, and that desire to trade for them is a powerful motivation to travel there.

The scarcity of ships bringing from Norway to Greenland the provisions necessary to their lives, as well as links to the church and European culture, has often been considered one

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<sup>27</sup> Greenland's distinctive white gyrfalcons were an extremely valuable commodity (ÍF XIV 157, footnote;

of the key reasons for the colony's ultimate failure.<sup>28</sup> In the sagas, however, Scandinavian trade with Greenland is an ordinary and regular occurrence. When Króka-Refr first travels to Greenland from Iceland with a cargo-filled ship, the saga-writer specifically notes that Refr does not sell his goods but takes up his handicraft as a builder, as if trading one's goods upon arriving in Greenland is the standard, expected procedure (*Kró.* 6). In *Flóamanna saga*, the first ship Þorgils Örrabeinsstjúpr and his shipwrecked party encounter in settled Greenland is a merchant ship (Ch. 24). In *Grænlandinga þáttur*<sup>29</sup>, the Norwegian Arnbjörn sails to Greenland in what is later described as a merchant ship (*kaupskipit*; 2: 278), and after he is shipwrecked there his kinsman Þzurr makes the long journey to retrieve Arnbjörn's wealth. Þzurr and his companions later turn to trade in Greenland (*Gr. þ.* 5, 6). In *Fóstbræðra saga* two men, the Greenlander Þorgrímr trolli ("troll") and his companion Þórarinn ofsi ("arrogance"), harbour their ship on the north side of Iceland but remove none of their wares to land, intending to sail on to Greenland (M 16). If the prospect of finding a market for their goods in Greenland were at all uncertain, they would presumably have made their wares available for trade with Icelanders living nearby. Before leaving for Greenland however, the two kill the famous warrior Þorgeirr Hávarsson and dissolve their business partnership. Þorgrímr takes the ship and Þórarinn the movable property (*lausafé*), and Þorgrímr then sails to Greenland and has a successful journey (*fórsök honum vel*, *Fóst* M 18: 211). The nature of that journey's success is not specified, but it may reasonably be supposed to encompass both arriving safely in Greenland and finding a market for his cargo there. Þórarinn, interestingly, decides to remain in Iceland, *því at Þórarinn þóttisk mikinn sigr unnit hafa; vænti hann sér virðingar hér á landi fyrir sigrinn* (*Fóst.* M 18: 211).<sup>30</sup> Þorgrímr may choose to continue

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Krogh 114, Seaver 82-83).

<sup>28</sup> Kirsten Seaver argues that English fishermen and merchants in fact maintained trading contacts with Greenland well into the 15th century (throughout, esp. Chs. 8 and 9).

<sup>29</sup> Also known as *Einars þáttur Sokkasonar*, this þáttur exists only in *Flateyjarbók*, c. 1390 (ÍF IV: xci).

<sup>30</sup> These events are also related in the fragmentary *Þórarins þáttur ofsa*, attached to the end of *Ljósvefninga saga* in one of its manuscripts (ÍF X Iv-lvii).

with the business venture to Greenland because he himself is a Greenlander, but Þórarinn, careless of the financial (and fatal) consequences of killing a famous Icelander with kin living, chooses to stay where his action may be considered great and he may be honoured for it. This decision is interesting because it suggests an attitude in which honour or esteem in Iceland is better than material gain in Greenland. All things in Greenland bear a different, inferior value to that they enjoy in Scandinavia: honour and wealth in Greenland are remote, like the land itself. Glory is best earned and enjoyed in Scandinavia. Þórarinn's glory in Iceland is short-lived, however, and he is killed that same summer.

**2.i.d. (Employment)** A final motivation indicates the business-like nature of far-travel westward: travel to distant western lands is for some saga-characters simply a matter of employment. The Icelander Auðunn vestfirzki has little money, so he works for a farmer named Þorsteinn. After a ship-owner named Þórir winters with Þorsteinn, Auðunn embarks on his ship under Þorsteinn's management or supervision (*umbráð*, *Auð.* 1: 361), and they ultimately sail to Greenland. This circumstance is utterly familiar to modern readers: a person not independently wealthy must work for his or her living. When a good job on a farm becomes a good job on a ship, Auðunn simply follows the pay; he even sets aside part of his earnings for his mother. It may be employment that motivates the group of particularly valiant farmers' sons (*bóndasynir vaskir*) who join Króka-Refr's crew when he sails for Greenland. The terms certainly do not suggest equal partnership: Refr is a ship-owner and the others volunteer to sail with him (*Kró.* 6). Willing sailors find employment on voyages not only to Greenland but also on to Vínland. When Þorfinnr karlsefni engages a ship-crew (*skipverjar*) for his enterprise to Vínland, the terms of employment are given: *Þann máldaga gerðu þeir Karlsefni ok hásetar hans, at jǫfnum hǫndum skyldi þeir hafa allt þat, er þeir fengi til gæða* (*Gr.* 7: 261). Unlike the offer Freydís Eiríksdóttir later makes the ship-

owners Helgi and Finnbogi – also equal shares of profits on an expedition to Vínland (*Gr.* 8) – Karlsefni's terms seem to be those of employment. Where Freydís, Helgi and Finnbogi are business-partners, Karlsefni and his crew are employer and employees. The agreement he makes is not with fellow-merchants and ship-captains but with his own oarsmen (*hásetar*). Karlsefni's position, however, is not precisely that of an employer paying out regular wages. His men's stake in the venture may be likened to sales commission: they have a monetary incentive for the financial enterprise to succeed. The motivation for travel is simple and direct: sail the ship well to earn one's share of the profit.<sup>31</sup>

As postscript to this section on far-travel as commercial enterprise, it may once again be observed that the Norse far-travellers are none too willing to fight on their business ventures. In both Vínland sagas, the Greenlanders decide to return home after only one or two altercations with the natives, and they permanently abandon attempting to settle Vínland. In *Eiríks saga*, their motivation for leaving is plainly stated in what reads like a very business-like risk analysis: <sup>10</sup> *Þeir Karlsefni þóttusk nú sjá, þótt þar væri landskostir góðir, at þar myndi jafnan ótti ok ófriðr á liggja af þeim, er fyrir bjuggu* (11: 230). People might stay in an inhospitable place and fight for their lives for any number of reasons, but rarely for business. So Karlsefni and his people leave.

## 2.ii. Violence and vengeance

Another common group of motivations for far-travel to the west centres on violence; as elsewhere in Íslendingasögur, this most often involves feud or vengeance. Violence motivates travel in two ways. In some cases, an act of violence a man has committed forces

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<sup>31</sup> One additional saga-account of a kind of employment in the distant west is in *Hemings þáttur Áslákssonar*, in which a Greenlander named Líka-Loðinn transports the body of a kinsman of St Óláfr from Greenland to Norway through fantastic and frightening portents. This episode, however, involves only a journey east to Norway and not one west to Greenland.

him to leave a land because he fears retaliation from avenging forces. In others, a man travels far to wreak his own vengeance. Both these types of violence-motivated far-travel are, like financially-motivated far-travel, fundamentally pragmatic: here the far-travellers do not garner monetary profits or tracts of land, but gain instead their own safety or – what is often just as crucial to one’s peace-of-mind – the deaths of enemies.

**2.ii.a.** All four texts telling the story of Eiríkr rauði’s immigration to Iceland and subsequent emigration to Greenland give virtually the same account.<sup>32</sup> Eiríkr and his father Þorvaldr first leave Norway for Hornstrandir in Iceland on account of some killings (*fyrir víga sakir*, *Land. S 89*<sup>33</sup>: 130). Eiríkr is soon drawn again into feud-violence and kills two men, for which he is banished from the region. Eiríkr re-settles on two islands in Breiðafjörðr in western Iceland, again falls into disagreement with a neighbour, and ends up killing two of the man’s servants (*Gr. 1*; sons, according to *Land. S 89*, *Eir. 2* and *Eyr. 24*). Outlawed from Iceland, Eiríkr now decides to search for the land a certain Gunnbjörn Úlfsson had sighted when he drifted west beyond Iceland, Gunnbjarnarskerjar “Gunnbjörn’s Skerries.” What is interesting about Eiríkr’s decision is that he has neither any solid assurance that the land actually exists nor any better idea of where it is than “west.” None of the saga-writers, however, comments on the bold or foolish optimism of Eiríkr’s decision to put his family and possessions into a ship and sail into uncharted waters to seek a rumoured land. The account of the voyage west is similarly anticlimactic: <sup>11</sup> *Eiríkr sigldi undan Snæfellsnesi, en hann kom útan at Miðjtkli, þar sem Bláserkr heitir* (*Land. S 89*: 131-32). *Grænlandinga saga* alone adds the intermediate detail that in between setting out from Iceland and landing in Greenland, Eiríkr finds the land he is looking for.

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<sup>32</sup> These texts are *Landnámabók*, *Grænlandinga saga*, *Eiríks saga rauða* and *Eyrbyggja saga*. The wide-ranging and enigmatically-structured *Eyrbyggja saga* was probably composed in the middle of the 13th century, between about 1244 and 1262 (Pulsiano 174).

No specific reason is given why Eiríkr decides to sail west rather than any other direction. Presumably he does not go east to mainland Scandinavia because it is now closed to him after his original violence there. Perhaps the extreme, violent situation in which Eiríkr has been involved and the now imminent threat of vengeance motivates him to correspondingly extreme measures of escape. Or perhaps Eiríkr is naturally adventurous, curious or travel-hungry, and his outlawry in Iceland is merely the catalyst that sets in motion a plan he has always intended to try. Whatever the saga-writers intend for Eiríkr's motivation to be, if he is indeed thought to have one at all, Eiríkr's far-travel to Greenland is in these narratives a logical step in a chain of violence-motivated movements. Eiríkr is involved in three discrete violent situations, and three times as a result he moves westward to an island. It is also notable that the final time Eiríkr begins a journey westward to a supposed island, Vinland, there has been no intermediate act of violence, and Eiríkr fails to complete that journey. In *Grænlandinga saga* he quits the expedition just before embarking after experiencing a bad omen (Ch. 3), while in *Eiríks saga* he sets out with the others, but the convoy meanders around the Irish Sea and must return to Greenland without having reached its destination (Ch. 5). Eiríkr, it seems, is fundamentally unable to engage in far-travel outside the pattern of violence-motivated movement.

**2.ii.b.** This pattern of expanding concentric circles also sees expression in *Fóstbræðra saga*, in which a great deal of the intra-Scandinavian travel is motivated by acts of violence. Each of the two sworn-brothers' fathers is compelled to move from one region of Iceland to another due to their sons' disturbance and tumult (*óróí ok stormr*, Ch. 2: 125; Ch. 5). Twice one of the sworn-brothers, Þorgeirr, travels to Norway following violence precipitated by offences committed against his horse (*Fóst.* 8, 12), and Þorgeirr next travels back to Iceland

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<sup>33</sup> In citations from *Landnámabók* S refers to Sturlubók and H to Hauksbók. On *Landnámabók*'s textual



to carry out an act of vengeance on behalf of King Óláfr inn helgi (“the holy”, St Óláfr; *Fóst.* 13). Finally, Þorgeirr prevents a friend of his named Veglágr from being hanged, after which he takes Veglágr first to another part of Iceland, to the home of his sworn-brother Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld (“Coal-brow’s poet”), and afterwards as far as Orkney. Here the motivation is to escape execution or vengeance, but Veglágr is killed in Scotland anyway (*Fóst.* 13).

Though he does not die at the hands of Icelandic avengers, his death, along with Þorgeirr’s repeated acts of violence in Scandinavian lands and subsequent violent death, is indicative of a problem with violence-motivated near-travel: the claustrophobia of the Scandinavian world. Violence motivates men to travel to escape its consequences, yet men do not escape.

Þorgeirr’s father, his friend Veglágr, and ultimately Þorgeirr himself all die violent deaths.

Violence-motivated far-travel to the west is thus the result of a logical progression in which the narrative must gradually expand its boundaries to encompass the successive acts of violence and vengeance punctuating the story it tells. For Eiríkr rauði, the centre-point of the expanding concentric circles is in Norway (see §2.ii.a. above). In *Fóstbræðra saga* the centre-point is in Iceland, and movement is first regional. Next a journey is made to the British Isles, and violence again follows: travel must then be taken further. The direction it takes is west, to Greenland, where one of Þorgeirr’s killers travels. Þormóðr, now occupying his sworn-brother’s former place at King Óláfr’s side in Norway, decides to travel to Greenland himself. The king immediately identifies Þormóðr’s reason for travelling there, asking: <sup>12</sup> „Hvert ærendi áttu til Grænlands, hvárt ætlar þú at hefna Þorgeirs, svarabróður þíns?” (*Fóst.* M 20: 220). In this purpose Þormóðr is ultimately successful, indicating that the problem of escaping violence sometimes fails to be solved even by travelling a great distance.<sup>34</sup>

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transmission, see ÍF I<sub>1</sub> I-cxxiv and Pulsiano 373-74.

<sup>34</sup> The account in *Þórarins þátr ofsa* is just as explicit: *Í þenna tíma var Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld farinn at drepa Þorgrím trola til Grænlands* (ÍF X 146) – “At that time Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld had travelled to Greenland to kill Þorgrím troll.”

2.ii.c. Króka-Refr becomes a fugitive from Iceland to Greenland, and, like Eiríkr rauði, his escape is more effective than that of Þormóðr's victims. Early in his saga Refr confronts and kills a belligerent man named Þorbjörn, and when Refr informs his mother of the killing in verse, she sends him to live with her brother in another part of Iceland until a settlement can be reached (*Kró.* 1-3). Before that time, however, Refr has committed another killing. Having recently built a sea-worthy ship, he now decides to sail to Greenland. His uncle Gestr tells him, <sup>13</sup> „ *Nú kaus þú þat, sem ek vilda, því at þér mun ekki vel fritt í Nórøgi, þegar spyrst víg þetta*“ (*Kró.* 6: 131). According to the ordinary pattern of expanding concentric circles of travel following successive acts of violence, Refr's movement after this second act of violence should be from Iceland to elsewhere in Scandinavia. In this case, however, Norway is closed to Refr, probably because his victim Gellir has many friends and family there; Gellir has earlier been said to spend alternate years in Iceland and Norway. Refr must therefore skip that circle and progress to the next larger one, making far-travel – and Greenland – the logical option. Alternatively, Gestr, who is fond of Refr, may simply wish him as far away from his victim's avenging relatives as possible. Refr is tarring and preparing his ship for putting to sea before he attacks and kills Gellir, which may suggest that Refr's act of violence is not the fundamental motivation for his far-travel (*Kró.* 6). If, however, Refr intends to retaliate from the moment Gellir strikes him with a spear – the cause of the quarrel, committed before Refr begins tarring and rigging the ship (*Kró.* 5) – then Refr's knowledge that he will need to leave Iceland following the killing motivates his preparations, and the result is essentially the same. As is seen in two later episodes in Greenland, thorough advance preparation for escape from the repercussions of violence is Refr's speciality (see *Kró.* 7, 14).

A final example of violence-motivated far-travel in *Króka-Refs saga* is when the trader Bárðr sails to Greenland from Norway to help his friend Gunnarr take vengeance on Refr for killing Gunnarr's kinsmen. Bárðr's motivation in this case is not, however, purely violence-oriented, as when the king objects to Bárðr going due to his evil premonitions, Bárðr replies,<sup>14</sup> „*Ek hefi svá heitit Gunnari, at þat má ek eigi rjúfa*“ (*Kró.* 12: 144). Bárðr seems motivated as much by loyalty to his friend as desire for vengeance. Loyalty as a motivation for far-travel will be discussed in §2.iii. below.

**2.ii.d.** In the final chapter of *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Vésteinn Vésteinsson's son Helgi is smuggled out of Iceland on a ship bound for Greenland.<sup>35</sup> The impetus for him to leave Iceland is danger that threatens him following his brother Berg's killing by Gísli's brother Ari, a killing that was itself precipitated by Berg and Helgi's earlier killing of one implicated in their father's murder, Gísli's other brother Þorkell (*Gís.* 28). Thus Helgi's departure from Iceland and far-travel to Greenland is directly motivated by feud-violence. The saga briefly reports that men are later sent to Greenland to kill Helgi, but nothing comes of it; Helgi ultimately dies in Greenland not from feud-violence, but on a hunting expedition (*Gís.* 38).

**2.ii.e.** Violence-motivated far-travel to Greenland is not exclusive to Íslendingasögur. In an example from the konungasaga *Morkinskinna*<sup>36</sup>, a wealthy Norwegian named Þrándr gains the favour of King Magnús inn góði and the disfavour of King Haraldr harðráði by exchanging cloaks with Magnús. After assassins sent by Haraldr to murder Þrándr at his farm fail and are beaten away, Magnús invites Þrándr to abandon his farm and join his

<sup>35</sup> There is little consensus on the dating of *Gísla saga*. Proposed dates include c. 1250 (ÍF VI: xli-xliii), the first half of the 13th century (Faulkes xi-xii), and between 1270 and 1320 (Örnólfur-Scudder 496).

<sup>36</sup> The continuous narrative of the line of Norwegian kings preserved in the manuscript known as *Morkinskinna* ("mouldy/dark parchment"), GKS 1009 fol, has come to be known by that parchment's name. It is unknown whether this collection is largely the work of a single author or based on a series of now-lost royal biographies.

retinue, telling him <sup>15</sup> *at Haralldr konvngr hafði þvngan hvg ahonom. oc hann mondi þar eigi mega víþ halldaz* (*Mork.* 18: F 107, U 26). Þrándr accepts the offer, and Magnús makes arrangements to take care of Þrándr's farm in his absence. The next spring, however, Magnús says he doubts Þrándr will be safe in Norway, even in Magnús's retinue, and sends him to Greenland and safety. Magnús's warning is not an idle one: Haraldr attacks Þrándr's convoy as it leaves for the west, and it is only Magnús's timely intervention that allows them to escape (*Mork.* 18). This series of events illustrates clearly the pattern of expanding circles of violence-motivated travel culminating in far-travel, though here, as in the example of Króka-Refr, only two levels of travel, regional and extra-Scandinavian, are exercised. Perhaps Iceland is considered too sympathetic to Haraldr or too full of his henchmen to make an adequate safe-haven for Þrándr.

Another Norwegian is sent west to Greenland by a king due to violence, but in this instance the king and the one being sent are on opposing sides of the conflict. A Norwegian petty king named Hrærekr is sent by his opponent St Óláfr to Greenland after Hrærekr and his allies have been defeated. In Snorri's *Óláfs stgur* and the Flateyjarbók saga of Óláfr<sup>37</sup>, an exceedingly ugly Icelander named Þórarinn Nefjólsson loses a bet with King Óláfr and is compelled to do whatever the king asks.

<sup>16</sup> Þórarinn segir: „Dýrt er dróttins orð, eða hverja bæn viltu af mér þiggja?“ Hann segir: „Þá, at þú flytir Hrærek til Grænlands ok færir hann Leifi Eirikssyni.“ Þórarinn svarar: „Eigi hefi ek komit til Grænlands.“ Konungur segir: „Farmaðr slíkr sem þú ert, þá er þér nú mál at fara til Grænlands, ef þú hefir eigi fyrr komit.

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References to datable historical events and the dependence of *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla* on *Morkinskinna* allow scholars to date *Morkinskinna* to between 1217 and 1222 (Andersson-Gade 1-2, 57-58, 67-68).

<sup>37</sup> The version of the saga of St Óláfr included in Snorri's *Heimskringla* constitutes a third of that accomplished work, which can be dated only roughly, to the 1220s and 1230s; the separately-preserved version *Óláfs saga helga hinni sérstíku*, can be dated to before 1230. Snorri's saga is believed to have been based chiefly on the now-lost *Óláfs saga* of Styrmir Kárason, his own version based on the so-called *Oldest Saga of St Óláfr* (Jónas 1988: 160-61, 168-69; Pulsiano 276). On the question of Snorri's authorship of *Heimskringla*, see Whaley 1991, Chapter 1. The great codex Flateyjarbók, GKS 1005 fol, dates from the late 14th century (Rowe 11-12).

(*Helga* 85: 126; see also *Sér.* 70: 184-87)<sup>38</sup>

Unlike the other examples of violence-motivated travel from Scandinavia to Greenland, here there is no immediate threat of danger to the traveller. Rather, Óláfr ends his violent conflicts with Hrærekr in a non-violent fashion, sending him to a remote place where he can do no further damage to Óláfr's Norwegian regime. The journey to Greenland, however, is nevertheless precipitated by violence, and indeed, Óláfr does not banish his opponent in this peaceable fashion until after he has put out Hrærekr's eyes (*Helga* 75, *Sér.* 58, *Eym.* 1).

Þórarinn does not like the thought of sailing to Greenland but ultimately relents, taking care to first ask the king with whom he should deposit his charge in Iceland should he fail to reach Greenland. In point of fact, after sailing past Iceland into the Greenland Sea, Þórarinn does encounter foul weather and must return to Iceland. Þórarinn's failure to reach Greenland may relate to the typical saga-pattern of difficult far-travel out versus easy far-travel back described in §3.ii. below. Alternatively, Þórarinn may simply have been justifiably dubious about reaching Greenland in the first place, given his ignorance of the Greenland Sea and despite his experience as a *farmaðr*. On the value to western far-travellers of personal experience of the route to a given destination, see §3.i. below.

### 2.iii. Loyalty

All vengeance-motivated travel is to some extent loyalty-motivated. Vengeance is essentially retribution for an earlier act of violence or grievous insult inflicted upon someone to whom the avenger owes loyalty through bonds of kinship, friendship or an oath. Yet vengeance is not the only form loyalty takes, and Íslendingasögur contain several examples of loyalty- or friendship-motivated far-travel. Bárðr in *Króka-Refs saga* seems motivated in equal part by

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<sup>38</sup> Óláfr's saga in *Flateyjarbók* and *Eymundar þáttur Hringssonar*, also preserved in *Flateyjarbók*, change a few details (e.g. Dagr is Hrærekr's brother rather than his father) but also relate that Óláfr sends Hrærekr to Greenland with Þórarinn Nefjölfsson (*Flat.* II 168-69; *Eym.* 1: 199-200). Hrærekr's brother Eymundr chooses exile in the opposite direction, seeking his fortune in Russia; see §2.i.d. of Chapter 4.

loyalty and vengeance: though his stated reason for returning to Greenland is to honour a promise made to his friend Gunnarr, the energy and verve with which he assists Gunnarr in attempting vengeance is considerable. Also, Bárðr suffered insults from Refr when he and Gunnarr failed to burn down Refr's fortress on their previous attempt (*Kró.* 10), and his natural anger undoubtedly (partially) motivates his return for another try. Other examples of loyalty-motivated far-travel are less diluted.

The most explicit example may be found in *Eiríks saga rauða*, when Þorbjörn Vífilsson decides to uproot his home in Iceland rather than lose his honour (*en sæmðinni týna*, 3: 205; see also §2.i.a.2. above). He says, <sup>17</sup> „*Ætla ek fyrr af landi fara en ætt mína svívirða*“ (*Eir.* 3: 205). Þorbjörn thus explicitly identifies his motivation for leaving Iceland for Greenland as loyalty to his family.<sup>39</sup> An even better example of loyalty- or friendship-motivated far-travel immediately follows: <sup>18</sup> *Réðusk til ferðar með honum þrír tigir manna; var þar í ferð Ormr frá Arnarstapa ok kona hans ok aðrir vinir Þorbjarnar, þeir er eigi vildu við hann skilja* (*Eir.* 3: 205). The motivation is here clear and undiluted: Icelanders travel to Greenland out of simple friendship for Þorbjörn. Thus we have here examples of both family-oriented and friend-oriented loyalty motivating far-travel.

In *Grænlandinga saga* an element of family-loyalty colours Þorsteinn Eiríksson's decision to travel to Vínland. Following the new world expedition that results in his brother Þorvaldr's death from a Skræling arrow, Þorsteinn decides to travel to Vínland himself: <sup>19</sup> *Nú fýstisk Þorsteinn Eiríksson at fara til Vínlands eptir líki Þorvalds, bróður síns* (*Gr.* 6: 257). The implication seems to be that Þorsteinn, loyal to his brother and solicitous for his soul, is unwilling to let Þorvaldr's body lie in heathen ground, howsoever it lies under two crosses; Þorsteinn chooses instead to make the journey and bring Þorvaldr back for interment in the (nominally) Christian ground of Greenland. This implication is reinforced by Þorsteinn's

generally pious portrayal in both *Vínland sagas*. Especially notable is the episode that follows, in which Þorsteinn is blown off-course to another part of Greenland: after dying there Þorsteinn temporarily rises from the dead to deliver a short exposition on proper Christian burial (*Gr.* 6).<sup>40</sup>

Towards the end of *Fóstbræðra saga*, Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld leaves Greenland and establishes himself in the retinue of the Norwegian king, St Óláfr:

20 Þormóðr fór ór landi með Óláfi konungi ok þolði með honum alla útleigð. Hann fór ok apr með honum til Nóregs, því at honum þótti betra at deyja með honum en lifa eptir hann. (*Fóst.* H 24: 260)

Þormóðr's loyalty is without question his motivation for travel. However, his far-travel is not to the distant west but from it. The saga does not inform us where Óláfr's exile takes place, but in other texts it is spent in the far east, in Russia (see §2.i.b. of Chapter 4, "East"). The example is therefore a rather good one of loyalty-motivated far-travel, but a rather poor one of western far-travel.

## 2.iv. Minor motivations

Several other motivations for saga far-travel to the west are evident. These are the motivations with the fewest direct examples in the texts, and some are detectable only by implication or indirect clues.

**2.iv.a. (Exploration)** During the 19th and 20th centuries, public perception of "the Europeans who first discovered the Americas" gradually shifted from Christopher Columbus and his fellow southern European explorers to Leifr Eiríksson. As is clear from the foregoing, however, to see the westward-seafaring Norsemen of the sagas as curious

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<sup>39</sup> This may also be a negatively-expressed example of far-travel motivated by honour: that is, Þorbjörn travels

explorers rather than enterprising merchants or pragmatic colonisers is to ignore much of the plain exposition of the saga-accounts. Yet exploration for exploration's sake does appear as a motivation for western far-travel, though the evidence for this depends to some extent on implication and conjecture.

The first example occurs after Bjarni Herjólfsson, travelling to Greenland to visit his father for the winter, is blown off-course and sights three separate lands that roughly match the descriptions of lands later named Helluland, Markland and Vínland. Each time, however, Bjarni decides not to stop and either investigate the unknown lands or forage for supplies, as he is eager to get to his father's farmstead in Greenland. Finally a land is sighted that looks to Bjarni like Greenland, and the ships fortuitously make landfall at the very headland where Bjarni's father lives (*Gr.* 2). Bjarni later returns to Norway and relates the sightings of these lands to Norway's ruler, Eiríkr jarl:

<sup>21</sup> Sagði Bjarni frá ferðum sínum, er hann hafði l'tnd sét, ok þótti m'tnnum hann verit hafa óforvitinn, er hann hafði ekki at segja af þeim l'tndum, ok fekk hann af því n'tkkut ámæli. Bjarni gerðisk hirðmaðr jarls ok fór út til Grænlands um sumarit eptir. Var nú mikil umræða um landaleitan. (*Gr.* 3: 248)

The criticism Bjarni receives for not investigating unknown lands suggests that the Scandinavians consider proper a healthy curiosity about new and uncharted lands. One could argue that they are more interested in the economic prospects of the new lands' goods or settlement potential, but the fact that they reproach Bjarni not for having no goods to show but for having no stories to tell suggests otherwise. Immediately after this Leifr Eiríksson buys Bjarni's ship and sails in search of the land himself, which further suggests that Bjarni's accidental discovery sparks the Greenlanders' imagination and impels them to satisfy their own curiosity. Yet the possibility that mercantile motivations accompany exploratory ones

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from desire to avoid suffering dishonour. See §2.iv.b. below.

<sup>40</sup> See also §2.iv.c. below on far-travel motivated by Christian piety.



cannot be dismissed, and it may here be recalled that curiosity and desire for profit are two branches of man's threefold nature with which the wise father in *Konungs skuggsjá* explains Norse sailors' impulse to brave the perils of western seas (Ch. 17).

The second piece of evidence supporting the motivation of exploration is similar. After Leifr Eiríksson has succeeded in finding the lands Bjarni sighted, given them suitable names, landed on them, collected some of the more interesting and distinctive native goods for his ship, and returned victorious to Greenland, he too is criticised for lack of curiosity: <sup>22</sup> *Nú var umræða mikil um Vínlandsftr Leifs, ok þótti Þorvaldi, bróður hans, of óvída kannat hafa verit landit* (*Gr.* 4: 254). Once again, the far-traveller comes under criticism for the narrow scope of his curiosity. Here it is even more clear that desire for knowledge about new lands is implicit in the criticism rather than mere commercial interest; Leifr has actually built houses in Vínland and brought back some of its products, and still the curious are not satisfied.

Þorvaldr himself now travels to Vínland. His expedition seems more exploration-oriented than the other Vínland-voyages described in *Grænlandinga saga*. Not only does it immediately follow in the narrative Þorvaldr's criticism of Leifr's paltry exploration, but once in the new world Þorvaldr seems genuinely interested its geography. He gives names to various landmarks and is so affected by the land's natural beauty that he says he wants to spend the rest of his life there (*Gr.* 5). Tellingly, it is not until after Þorvaldr dies and is buried that his crew loads the ships with Vínlandic cargo and commercial interests begin to be served. In *Eiríks saga* it is Þorfinnr Karlsefni who names the lands and the landmarks of the new world, and in that account too the emphasis is not on Vínland's commercial goods (*Eir.* 8-10). As noted in §2.i.b.2. above, the *Eiríks saga* account of Karlsefni's voyage is the only one in which a dearth of supplies in Vínland is described. Also, the practice of naming lands and landmarks on these voyages after their natural qualities (*eftir landkostum*, as Leifr

does in *Grænlandinga saga*) suggests a focus on the geography of the land rather than its commercial possibilities. A name that describes what a place is is a geographical narrative; a name that tells who first found the place, as in Eiríkr rauði's naming-practice, is a mark of ownership.<sup>41</sup> Other, more primary motivations for these two voyages are certainly possible, some readily argued. Taken together with the two explicit criticisms of lack of exploration, however, these accounts of the Vínland voyages do support the idea that exploration as a motivation for far-travel was one the medieval saga-writers knew and expressed.

**2.iv.b. (Glory, fame and honour)** Evidence for the desire for glory, fame or honour as a motivation for far-travel is more direct but also more sparse. Most explicitly, *Grænlandinga saga* relates: <sup>23</sup> *Nú teksk umræða at nýju um Vínlandsferð, því at sú ferð þykkir bæði góð til fjár ok virðingar (Gr. 8: 264)*. This direct citation of Vínland-voyages as a source of fame and fortune comes immediately before Karlsefni's entrance into the narrative and subsequent expedition to that land, suggesting desire for good reputation and wealth at least partially motivates his far-travel. Other motivations for Karlsefni's expedition have been discussed above, and the motivation of wealth-acquisition is certainly compatible with those, but here the talk of enhancing one's reputation suggests that this too motivates Karlsefni's westward expedition.

Glory and honour are also implicitly suggested by the saga-writers' choice to write of these journeys and their general presentation of far-travellers in such a way as to glorify, honour and esteem them. Certainly Eiríkr rauði's treatment in *Íslendingabók*, *Landnámabók*, the Vínland sagas, and even *Flóamanna saga* (Ch. 15) shows respectful acknowledgement of his feat of discovery, and other characters who move to and from Greenland, such as

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<sup>41</sup> Judith Jesch observes that the name "Vínland" is about both exploration and imagination, writing: "Unlike Iceland, Greenland, *Markland* and *Helluland*, *Vínland* is not a name based on distant observation, not a name that can be bestowed just by sailing past it. The observation of wild vines is one that must have been made on the ground after landing, most likely by someone who had spent some time there" (2006b: 137).

Þorbjörn Vífilsson and his daughter Guðríðr (*Eir.* 3-4), are considered exceptional at least partly because of their capacity for that far-travel. Both *Vínland* sagas lavish praise in varying degrees on Leifr Eiríksson as a man of excellent qualities and luck (*Gr.* 2, *Eir.* 5) – the appropriate sort of man to lead an expedition to the new world or come across it by fortuitous mistake.<sup>42</sup> Karlsefni receives much the same treatment (*Gr.* 6, 8; *Eir.* 7).

Ultimately, the very fact that these stories are told demonstrates the voyages' capacity to win the voyagers lasting fame, and in some cases, honour.

The notion that desire for this lasting fame might motivate far-travel is supported in *Króka-Refs saga*, when Refr's uncle Gestr responds to Refr's announcement that he is leaving for Greenland:

<sup>24</sup> „Ef þér verðr eigi útkvámu auðit, þá vil ek, at þú látir skrifa frásögn um ferð þína, því at hún mun nokkurum merkileg þykkja, því að ek hygg, at þú sér annarr spekingr mestr í várri ætt. Mun og nokkut gott af þér verða.“ (*Kró.* 6: 131)

This self-referential flourish by the saga-writer states directly that accounts of far-travel are written because it is a noteworthy achievement, and it may also suggest that Gestr, if not Refr himself, considers gaining such esteem and having such an account written of his deed a reasonable motivation for that travel. Compelled to sail from Iceland to avoid feud-retribution and having Norway closed to him, Refr could conceivably have chosen to travel to Denmark, Sweden, or the British Isles; his choice of distant Greenland may suggest he seeks to gain honour even as he flies from violence. Admittedly, Gestr's statement also carries the possibility that Refr's far-travel will be a noteworthy achievement only because he was born into an otherwise un-noteworthy family. Even so, for a journey to Greenland to be considered remarkable above and beyond the expectations of Refr's birth, that journey must generally be considered at least somewhat exceptional. As such, desire for lasting fame must

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<sup>42</sup> This may also be the Christian author's admiration for a hero of the faith. See §2.iv.c. below.

be considered a possible motivation for those saga-characters who engage in such voyages. Though this motivation is represented here rather thinly, it will be seen to be more prominent in the accounts of travel to the distant south and north.

**2.iv.c. (Christian piety)** There are two good examples of westward far-travel undertaken primarily for pious reasons; in both cases the purpose is Greenland's spiritual edification. After Leifr Eiríksson sails from Greenland and joins Óláfr Tryggvason's court in Norway following an unplanned but ultimately salacious detour to the Hebrides, the king asks Leifr if he plans to sail home that summer. Leifr says if it is the king's will, he does.

25 Konungr svarar: „Ek get, at þat muni vel vera, ok skaltu þangat fara með ørendum mínum, at boða þar kristni.“ Leifr kvað hann ráða skyldu, en kvezk hyggja, at þat ørendi myndi torflutt á Grœnlandi. Konungr kvezk eigi þann mann sjá, er betr væri til fallinn en hann, – „ok muntu giptu til bera.“ „Þat mun því at eins,“ segir Leifr, „ef ek nýt yðvar við.“ (*Eir.* 5: 211)<sup>43</sup>

Leifr is as good as his word. Upon leaving Norway and arriving in Greenland after another unplanned detour that turns up a new land, Leifr converts Greenland to Christianity: <sup>26</sup> *Sýndi hann í því ina mestu stórmennsku ok drengskap, sem mǫrgu tǫru, er hann kom kristni á landit, ok var jafnan síðan kallaðr Leifr inn heppni* (*Eir.* 5: 212). Here the cause-and-effect relationship of motivation and far-travel is very simple and direct: the king tells Leifr to take Christianity to Greenland, and Leifr does so.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> On the transferable luck possessed by exceptional saga-characters, see Peter Hallberg's 1st International Saga Conference paper, "The concept of *giptu-gæfa-hamingja* in Old Norse literature" (1971, published 1973).

<sup>44</sup> The account in *Kristni saga* is brief but essentially the same: Óláfr sends Leifr to preach Christianity in Greenland, and Leifr discovers Vínland, rescues some stranded men and gains the nickname *inn heppni* (ÍF XV<sub>2</sub> 30). *Heimskringla* also relates this episode in abbreviated form (ÍF XXVI 347). The 14th-century geographical miscellany which preserves Abbot Nikulás's travel itinerary also contains a brief account of the lands west (MS south) of Greenland, including Leifr's discovery of Vínland, rescue of stranded sailors and Christianisation of Greenland (Kálund 12).

The second example of piety-motivated far-travel is found in *Grænlandínga þáttr*. This short story begins with a prominent Greenlander, Sokki Þórisson, announcing at an assembly that he wishes to establish an episcopal see in Greenland. He asks all the others to contribute to its founding, and when they agree he sends his son Einarr to Norway to bring back a bishop. Sokki's stated reason for choosing Einarr for this Christian-motivated journey is remarkably similar to King Óláfr's words to Leifr Eiríksson: <sup>27</sup> *kvað hann vera sendiligstan mann þess ørendis at fara* (*Gr. þ.* 1: 273). Like Leifr, Einarr says he will do as the other wishes. The rest of the þáttr relates what happens when Einarr brings this bishop back and unleashes him on the Greenlanders. As before, a pious reason directly motivates Einarr's far-travel – in this case, both his travel from and his travel back to Greenland. These are the only examples of this motivation in saga-accounts of far-travel westward, but as with the honour or reputation motivation it is quite prominent in accounts of far-travel southward.

**2.iv.d. (Compulsion by weather)** Though it is fairly common for saga-characters sailing to one destination to be blown off-course to another, there is only one example of a character with no intention of travelling whatsoever being blown by adverse winds to a distant land. This macabre episode is related in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, when the title character's daughters are playing games on the ice-field by the Icelandic shore with the sons of their father's neighbour (Ch. 5). The competitive rivalry between the children comes to a head when one of the boys pushes out into the foggy sea the ice floe on which Bárð's eldest daughter, Helga, is standing:

<sup>28</sup> Rak þá jakann út til hafíssins; fór Helga þá upp á hafíssin. Ina sömu nótt rak ísinn undan landi ok út í haf. Hon fylgdi þá ísinum, en hann rak svá ört, at innan sjau daga kom hon með ísinum til Grænlands. (*Bárð.* 5: 114)

Though *Bárðar saga* is concerned with particularly trollish human characters – and Helga is indeed supposed by the Greenlanders to be a troll – the Greenland Helga reaches is not the wild, northern pseudo-Jǫtunheimar reached much later in the saga by Bárðr's son Gestr (see §1.i. above). Helga reaches the civilised Norse colony presided over by Eiríkr rauði, and it is Eiríkr himself who offers Helga lodging for the winter due to her respectable lineage. It is true that trolls and evil spirits (*troll ok óvættir*, 5: 116) do attack the Greenlandic settlement that winter, but in this saga infestation by trolls is not exclusive to distant lands: Bárðr himself battles mischievous, ill-working monsters in Iceland throughout the saga. The Greenland Helga reaches is clearly the distant, western-most colony of Norse settlement.

Helga did not choose to travel to Greenland and shows no inclination to stay: the following summer she and her lover, an Icelandic trader named Skeggi Skinna-Bjarnarson, sail first to Norway and then to Iceland to settle at Skeggi's home farm. This is thus a clear example of a saga-character being made to travel to the distant west by the forces of nature, against her will. Among far-travellers westward Helga is also notable as the only woman who travels by herself: all the other women who travel to Greenland or Vínland do so as part of a convoy or expedition. This is consistent with Helga's general characterisation in *Bárðar saga* as a strong and self-sufficient woman, and one capable of masculine pursuits.

Elsewhere in the saga Helga composes skaldic verses, and she breaks an arm and a leg of a man who tries to date-rape her (*Bárð.* 5, 7). Also, of course, she survives seven nights on an ice-floe, a feat requiring no little strength of body and mind.

**2.iv.e. (Adventure)** There is a final motivation for far-travel detectable only by implication from a single account: the desire for adventure or excitement. When Króka-Refr decides to abandon Iceland for Greenland, a group of "manly farmers' sons" (*bóndasynir vaskir*) joins him, providing him with a crew (*Kró.* 6: 131). As argued above (§2.i.d.), their primary

reason for this is probably financial. Yet these sons of local farmers presumably have steady farm-work that keeps them well-clothed and well-fed, and thus their decision to simply quit their farms and families for a risky venture on dangerous seas to go to a place as distant as Greenland is quite singular. Only fourteen of twenty-five ships in the first convoy of settlers to Greenland had reached that land, some being driven back and others being lost at sea (*Land. S 90*). The saga-writer gives no reason why Króka-Refr's crewmembers join him, so I suggest that thirst for adventure is the likeliest root-impulse that motivates these strong young men to make this odd decision. Whether or not they desire adventure in far-off Greenland, adventure is exactly what they get, and the crafty Refr leads them from one exciting scene to another, from bold disappearances to fantastical inventions. A better motivation with more compelling evidence does not suggest itself. Though textual evidence overwhelmingly suggests that far-travel westward was to the saga-writers' Vikings a business venture rather than adventure and their movement motivated more often by feud-violence than by personal choice, it is easy to imagine that some characters choose to travel for excitement and adventure. The evidence of this single example – and possibly the regularity with which there is said to be "much talk" in Greenland about new Vínland-voyages after each expedition returns – supports the idea that at least some saga-characters set out for distant western lands for the sheer thrill of it.

### **3. Other narrative patterns**

#### **3.i. Good far-travel**

Among these various accounts of western far-travel several other narrative patterns emerge. One such pattern involves "good" far-travel, in which textual examples illustrate what saga-writers considered admirable or necessary in a far-traveller. These examples therefore illuminate why some expeditions across treacherous, uncharted seas to find barely-attested

lands in indistinct locations are reasonable and approved of, while other such expeditions are not. Whether this appraisal actually reflects the beliefs of the Viking Age Scandinavians cannot be told from these later texts; it is rather the beliefs (and fears?) of the medieval writers that are revealed.

All leaders of successful expeditions to the distant west illustrate some of the qualities necessary for the far-traveller. The saga-character who illustrates these qualities most completely, however, is Bjarni Herjólfsson. Bjarni spontaneously decides to set out from Iceland for Greenland to spend Christmas with his father and asks who will join him, cautioning: <sup>29</sup> „*Óvitrlig mun þykkja vár ferð, þar sem engi vár hefir komit í Grænlandshaf*“ (*Gr.* 2: 246). We see that experience is crucial for the far-traveller, and what is more it must be the right experience. Bjarni's words imply that those who have never before sailed particular, dangerous waters will be considered foolish for venturing into them without a guide who has been there. True to expectation Bjarni's convoy goes astray, yet Bjarni ultimately reaches Greenland successfully. In this saga-writer's estimation then, far-travellers who are bold may succeed. When Bjarni continually sights lands that do not match the description he has heard of Greenland, he does not land but continues searching for a land that does match. In this Bjarni is shown to be a man of sense or capability (though not, as pointed out earlier, a man of curiosity), evaluating circumstances carefully and not allowing either himself or his crew to make foolish mistakes. In the absence of an experienced man, the saga tells us, a thinking man is needed.

A second example of the necessity of experience to the far-traveller is a character named Skúfr, who is introduced in *Fóstbræðra saga* as <sup>30</sup> *grænlenzkr maðr at kyni, farmaðr mikill ok vitr maðr ok vinsæll* (*Fóst.* M 18: 214). Here three qualities necessary for the successful far-traveller are distilled in a single character. Skúfr is familiar with the Greenland Sea; later in the saga he sails to and from Greenland directly, not getting lost along the way as



Bjarni does. Skúfr is experienced at sea, and he is intelligent. He is also, of course, well-liked, but this quality undoubtedly enhances his social interactions rather than his maritime exploits. One notable negative example of the necessity of specific experience to a good far-traveller is Þórarinn Nefjólfsson. Though a widely-travelled man, Þórarinn has never sailed the Greenland Sea before; lacking this pertinent experience, he meanders about the sea beyond Iceland, is unable to reach Greenland and must instead return to Iceland (*Helga* 85, *Sér.* 70; see also §2.ii.e. above).

Another character who positively exemplifies the qualities of the far-traveller is Bárðr in *Króka-Refs saga*, a follower of the Norwegian king: <sup>31</sup> *Hann var á sumrum í kaupferðum til ýmissa landa, Íslands eðr Vesturlanda* (10: 138). His voyages to Greenland in the saga are as successful and direct as Skúfr's, indicating once again the relationship between successful far-travel and experience. Also, Bárðr's readiness for conflict throughout the saga – and indeed, boldness in fighting is his ultimate destruction – may suggest again that boldness is an integral quality of the far-traveller. Bárðr's voyages do not, however, seem to profit directly from his courage. In the same saga, the farmers' sons who join Refr to sail to Greenland provide a better example of this quality. It seems significant that the saga-writer chooses to describe these young men volunteering to embark on a dangerous voyage as "valiant" or "manly" (*vaskr*, *Kró.* 6: 131). This occurs immediately after travel to Greenland is described as a noteworthy achievement, and since the voyage is successful, it seems implicit that exceptional men are required to make a success of far-travel. These young men are exceptional in manliness and courage.

From these examples we see that above all else saga-writers value experience in a far-traveller, ideally experience sailing the specific waters they must cross to reach their destination. This, along with plain sense or capability, is the quality most necessary to the

success of a western voyage. Courage, it seems, is also a valued quality and may aid the success of a venture where relevant experience is lacking.

### 3.ii. Difficult western voyage, easy return voyage

Another narrative pattern in these sagas is the tendency of far-travel out to distant western lands to be difficult, compared to relatively easy travel back east to Scandinavia or Iceland. This is almost a generic convention: though not entirely consistent, the pattern is detectable in a majority of the texts used in this chapter. For any example of trouble-ridden travel west or smooth sailing east to be a true example of this pattern, it must naturally be paired in the same account with a mirroring example of a journey or group of journeys in the opposite direction. Together the two opposites form the pattern. For this reason the otherwise strong example of only fourteen of twenty-five ships in the first settlement-convoy safely reaching Greenland is rendered weak by the lack of corresponding examples in *Landnámabók* or the *Vínland* sagas of significantly smoother travel from Greenland back to Iceland. The success of Eiríkr rauði's original outward voyage further weakens the point. Other examples, however, illustrate this pattern quite clearly.

Bjarni Herjolfsson and Leifr Eiríksson are both blown off-course on their way from Scandinavia to Greenland, each traveller accidentally discovering *Vínland* in his saga-account. Their voyages back to Scandinavia from Greenland do not see them go nearly as wrong, though Leifr is blown off-course to the British Isles and must wait for favourable winds (*Eir.* 5). Bjarni's voyage to Norway after sighting *Vínland* and later reaching Greenland is so smooth it merits no authorial comment of any kind (*Gr.* 3). Both *Vínland* sagas later tell of Leifr's brother Þorsteinn setting out with high hopes and utterly failing to reach *Vínland*. His ships are so storm-tossed as to either be forced to land far north on the coast of Greenland (*Gr.* 6) or to meander past Iceland and Ireland before finally returning to

Greenland in the autumn, battered and travel-weary (*Eir.* 6). This failed voyage may be compared with that of Þórarinn Nefjólsson, who, as related in §2.ii.e. above, fails to deliver St Óláfr's enemy King Hrærekr from Norway to Greenland on account of the raging, foul weather they encounter after sailing beyond Iceland (*Helga* 85, *Sér.* 70). Þorsteinn Eiríksson's failure is counter-balanced by several accounts in the Vínland-sagas of other Vínland-explorers making good voyages back to Greenland and carrying their wares successfully on to Scandinavia. *Eiríks saga* does, however, contain an account of a disastrous return voyage from Vínland to Scandinavia. Bjarni Grímólfsson's ship becomes separated from Karlsefni's convoy while returning from Vínland to Greenland and is blown into the Ireland Sea, where their worm-chewed ship sinks underneath them; only half the men survive, drifting to Ireland in a boat coated with sea-tar (*Eir.* 13). *Grænlandinga saga* thus seems to adhere more consistently to a pattern of difficult travel out, easy travel back.

Paired examples of this difficulty-ease pattern from other sagas and þættir generally provide a more direct contrast. The merchant Skúfr arrives in Norway in *Fóstbræðra saga* after an easy voyage back from Greenland (Ch. 18). When he subsequently sails out to Greenland with Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld, they are tossed about by heavy storms, one so powerful it breaks their sail-yard. They do not reach Greenland until late in the autumn, indicating that the bad weather has caused some delay (*Fóst.* 20). When Skúfr and Þormóðr later sail back to Scandinavia together, the account of their time in Greenland is neatly book-ended with an easy voyage east: <sup>32</sup> *Skúfr ok Bjarni láta í haf. Þeir fá góða byri; fersk þeim vel, taka Nóreg (Fóst. H 24: 257).*<sup>45</sup> Króka-Refr's voyage west goes well until he and his men sail within sight of Greenland, when <sup>33</sup> *velkir þá lengi ok hefr þá norðr með landinu (Kró. 6: 131).* His one and only voyage back east to Norway is long and easy (*langa ok hæga*, 16: 150). In *Grænlandinga þáttir*, the Greenlander Einarr Sokkason's journey to

Scandinavia is so easy as to pass without authorial comment, the narrator merely reporting that he arrives in Norway. His journey back, with a newly-acquired bishop aboard his ship and a Norwegian named Arnbjǫrn sailing behind in another, is circuitous. Einarr's ship is blown off-course to Iceland, where he and his people are forced to spend the winter (*Gr. þ.* 1). Arnbjǫrn's ship is lost entirely; his beached ship and the bodies of his unlucky crew are later discovered far north in the desolate Greenland wilderness by a skilled fisherman who has only sailed up this far due to a bad summer catch (*Gr. þ.* 2).

Finally, in *Flóamanna saga* Þorgils Örrabeinsstjúpr sails from Iceland to settle in Greenland and suffers a journey fraught with difficulty. The grisly difficulties he and his men face once they have been blown off-course and shipwrecked on a desolate section of the coast of Greenland, including near-starvation and madness, are detailed at agonising length (*Fl.* 21-22). When they later sail away from Greenland, <sup>34</sup> *berr þá at Írlandi, koma vestan at landinu* (*Fl.* 26: 309). The text does not specify whether they mean to sail to Ireland or are carried there unintentionally. Compared to the miserable sufferings they endured during the voyage to Greenland, however, the inconvenience of being blown off-course to the British Isles seems decidedly less traumatic. Together these paired examples of difficult, storm-fraught far-travel westward and easy, smooth-sailing return-travel eastward illustrate a clear narrative pattern: in the saga-writers' minds, travelling out to Greenland or Vínland is a seriously dangerous proposition, but travel back can be quite easy. Some accounts of difficult travel east to Scandinavia complicate the pattern, but they may indicate nothing more than that a few saga-writers also consider far-travel home a dangerous proposition.

### 3.iii. Giving up violence

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<sup>45</sup> In a discussion of Greenland's negative portrayal in sagas, Eleanor Rosamund Barraclough cites this and other examples to compare the initial journeys to, landings on, and *landnám*-periods in Greenland and Iceland (102).

Some saga-characters who travel to the distant west motivated by violence give up violence once there. As described in §2.ii.a. above, Eiríkr rauði sails to Greenland and settles there following some feud-violence in Iceland. He returns to Iceland and resumes fighting, but upon losing again he sails back to Greenland to settle, this time with a large convoy in tow. Once permanently settled in Greenland Eiríkr is no longer involved in violence. In fact, as noted above, without any act of violence to motivate his movement, Eiríkr's planned participation in a voyage further west to Vínland fails, and he must stay non-violently behind in Greenland.

The second example of this pattern occurs in *Gísla saga*, when Helgi Vésteinsson, having avenged his father's murder by killing Þorkell Súrsson, is threatened by retaliation from Þorkell's surviving brother Ari (see §2.ii.d. above). After Ari succeeds in killing Helgi's brother Berg, Helgi takes passage on a ship to Greenland:

<sup>35</sup> Helgi kom þangat ok þroskaðisk þar ok þótti inn bezti drengur, ok váru menn sendir til htfuðs honum, en þess varð eigi auðit. Helgi týndisk í veiðiftr, ok þótti þat mikill skaði. (*Gís.* 38: 118)

Helgi is thus presented as one who, compelled by violence to move to Greenland, settles down to peaceful prosperity. Helgi may have defended himself against the assassins sent to kill him, but there is certainly no indication that he instigates any violence once he has relocated to Greenland.

There is a third possible example of this pattern in *Króka-Refs saga*. Refr sails west to Greenland to escape retribution for an act of violence he has committed in Iceland. Once there he returns to his trade, ship-building, and adopts a habit he had back in Iceland: he rises early each morning and goes down to the boat-house to work, returning home late each night. The saga relates: <sup>36</sup> *Hann læsti þar í hrófinu smíðaröxi sína um nætr, en gekk slyppr heim* (*Kró.* 6: 133). The reference to his going home weaponless each evening indicates that Refr

is truly uninterested in resuming violence in Greenland. The saga also relates that in Greenland Refr settles, marries, has children and lives in peace for eight years (*Kró.* 6). He does ultimately return to his crafty, violent ways, but only after some local troublemakers begin hounding him and spreading serious insults about him.

Other saga-characters who travel out to Greenland motivated by violence do not show this seemingly genuine desire of Eiríkr, Helgi and Refr to give up violent modes of behaviour. The pattern is thus not widespread, but it does provide a corollary to the violence-motivation: some saga-characters travel to the distant west to escape not only danger but also their own violent natures. Remarkably, Eiríkr and Helgi actually do.

#### 4. Conclusions

I conclude this chapter with one final aspect of saga-accounts of western far-travel that is less a narrative pattern than a general indication of the saga-writers' mindset. Essentially, a distant western land is considered real only after travellers have set foot in it, and even then it is only as real as the number of people who settle it. Ari Þorgilsson does not include any details about the Greenlanders' travel to Vínland in *Íslendingabók*, and *Landnámabók* does not even mention the land; by contrast, each work devotes narrative space to the discovery and settlement of Greenland. There may be several reasons for this, the first simply that they are books of and for Icelanders. Whereas Greenland was discovered and settled by Icelanders, Vínland was discovered and its settlement attempted from Greenland. Another reason may be that the existence of Vínland was not attested well enough for Ari and other historiographers. Further, they may have considered Vínland not important enough to write about at any length, because it had not been settled. Settlement of a land, after all, creates its history. Details of the discovery, the nature, and even the existence of uninhabited lands are automatically suspect. It is also notable that in the sagas Greenlandic products consistently

make it back to Scandinavia (see §2.i.b.1. above), but the signature Vínlandic products, grapes and grapevines, do not. Though the products themselves are described with gusto in the Vínland sagas and even in Adam of Bremen's account, the only Vínlandic product said to be traded in Scandinavia is the carved gable-head (*húsasnotra*) of Þorfinnr Karlsefni's ship (*Gr.* 9). Ari and other Icelanders may have heard of the grapes of Vínland but never seen them. Lacking the permanency of settlers who trade the land's produce back to Scandinavia, the existence of Vínland is, to hard-headed historiographers like Ari and the careful compilers of *Landnámabók*, dubious.

Another indication of this principle is the way Leifr Eiríksson gradually comes to be considered the discoverer of Vínland. In *Grænlandinga saga* Bjarni Herjólfsson is blown off-course and sights several unknown lands but lands on none of them and is later criticised for his lack of curiosity (*Gr.* 2). In the same saga Leifr seeks out these lands and not only sets foot on them but also names them, collects produce from them, and builds houses (*Gr.* 3-4). As Judith Jesch observes, "[*Grænlandinga saga*] implies that Leif earned the right to name the three lands by actually setting foot on them, unlike Bjarni who, the saga says, was criticized for his lack of curiosity" (2006b: 135). In *Eiríks saga* Leifr is the one described as being blown off-course and finding the unknown lands, but he actually lands on them and brings back to Greenland samples of the wild wheat, grape-vines and hardwood he finds there (*Eir.* 5). In this later saga Bjarni is not even mentioned. We see that a land merely sighted by a man may not exist. After the land has been landed on, after artefacts from that land have been brought back for the examination of others, after it has been settled, then it may be considered a real place. In this way, Leifr represents the person who was there at the inception of "Vínland", and he gradually comes to be considered its true discoverer. We in later centuries have continued the trend by erecting statues of Leifr, naming buildings after him, and declaring public holidays in his honour as the first European visitor to North

America (cf. Perkins 30, Wawn-Þórunn 217-18). Bjarni has received from us the same neglect he received from the writer of *Eiríks saga*.

Something similar happens to Eiríkr rauði. *Landnámabók* and the *Vínland sagas* relate that on his first journey to Greenland Eiríkr goes in search of a land he has heard was sighted many years before by another Icelander, Gunnbjörn Úlfsson (*Land. S* 89). Ari's *Íslendingabók*, however, does not mention Gunnbjörn at all, implying that Eiríkr not only settled Greenland but discovered it as well. The careful historiographer again refuses to accept the veracity of a mere sighting; Eiríkr, who not only sights but also lands in and settles the country, may be believed. In *Flóamanna saga* a younger Eiríkr rauði is actually introduced as the man who later discovers and settles Greenland (*er síðan fann og byggði Grænland*, 15: 258), making his transition from first settler to true discoverer complete.<sup>46</sup> All this illustrates what seems to be a consistent mindset of saga-writers and Icelandic historiographers, that a land is only real once someone has set foot in it, and only historical once settled. The first person to set foot in or settle a distant land is much more likely to be considered its discoverer than the first person to merely sight it.<sup>47</sup>

This is ultimately connected to a general observation that has already been made about westward far-travel and with which I shall conclude this chapter: saga far-travellers are motivated primarily by pragmatism. Financial enterprises and escapes from violence are foremost among these pragmatic motivations, desire to wreak vengeance and other loyalty-related motivations secondary. Setting foot in a distant land is thus a truly pragmatic first step in discovering a new land and effectively creating its identity for those back in the

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<sup>46</sup> Neither *Íslendingabók* nor any saga mentions Snæbjörn galti Hólmsteinsson, whose story of ill-fated settlement on Greenlandic skerries appears elsewhere in *Landnámabók* (S 151-52, H 122). This story may also have been included in a no longer extant \**Snæbjarnar saga galta* (Perkins 48).

<sup>47</sup> Related to this, a man named Þjelvarr becomes known as the discoverer of the Baltic island of Gotland, which in *Guta saga* is said to magically rise by day and sink by night, not because he sees it first but because he first brings fire onto the island and thus breaks the spell (*Guta* 1). E.V. Gordon believes Þjelvarr is identical to Þórr's follower Þjálfri and glosses the name as "one who seizes and holds" (199, 255). Fabulous sinking islands and hallowing with fire are, however, common motifs in European and Scandinavian folklore (Peel xviii-xx).



Scandinavian homeland: it leads to exploration and assessment of a physical landscape, exploitation of natural resources to be shipped home, and new settlement opportunities.

Merely sighting a new land, by contrast, is an action lacking practical substance, and such sightings are in saga-narratives aptly associated with the aimless, off-course journeys that result in them. The saga-writers and historiographers, whose narratives are so saturated in the practical, concrete matters of financial and personal security and societal stability and so sparse in such frivolities as exploration for curiosity's sake, inevitably show their values in their characterisations of the discoverers of and far-travellers to distant western lands.

## Chapter 3 – South

### 1. Introduction

There are more accounts of far-travel southward than westward, and this wealth of saga-material undoubtedly results from several historical causes. The sagas tell stories of an earlier age in which many Scandinavians were employed in the Varangian regiment in Byzantium, mercenaries who enjoyed great prestige when they returned to the north. Also, the late saga age coincides with the First Crusade to Jerusalem and the establishment of crusader states in Palestine, making that historical period an excellent time for Scandinavians to seek spiritual fulfillment in both military expeditions in the Holy Land and pilgrimages to newly-available holy sites. The later literature corresponds to the earlier history: saga far-travellers often visit Byzantium for military reasons, mercenary service and gaining glory in battle, while travel to the Holy Land is often made for pious reasons – pilgrimage, crusading, and sometimes absolution.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the usual meaning of the words *suðrferð* and *suðrfrtr* is “pilgrimage” rather than its literal meaning “journey south”, and *suðrganga* too suggests travelling south as a pilgrim, though more often to Rome than Jerusalem (Fritzner II 595, Cleasby-Vigfússon 603). Thus when the pure-hearted Icelander Auðunn tells the Danish king he wishes to travel south („*Suðr vil ek ganga*“ 2: 364), the king immediately and correctly interprets this as the desire to make a pilgrimage.<sup>2</sup> The nouns *vestrferð* and *vestrfrtr*, by contrast, presuppose not a particular motivation for travel but a particular destination, the British Isles (Fritzner III 924, Cleasby-Vigfússon 700). Despite this close association between southern far-travel and piety and the more narrow association between travel to Byzantium and mercenary service, there are nevertheless many indications in the sagas of other non-pious and non-mercenary

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<sup>1</sup> In this chapter the place-names “Byzantium” and “Constantinople” will be used interchangeably, as will “Palestine” and “the Holy Land.”

<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this thesis, Rome will not be considered a “distant” place. As a pilgrimage destination to the south, however, Rome is relevant to this study and will be referred to from time to time.

purposes for far-travel to the south. Discussion of all these motivations forms the central portion of this chapter; as in the previous chapter and throughout this thesis, the discussion is a literary one, and arguments are constructed exclusively from primary texts. The occasional historical observations made provide only context or indirect support.

Though the “distance” of Constantinople and Jerusalem from Scandinavia seems in many ways self-evident, the type of “distance” these lands exhibit is quite different from that of Greenland and Vínland in the west. In the saga-accounts those lands are discovered, explored and settled from Scandinavian lands; Greenland is uninhabited when the Icelanders arrive, and Vínland is inhabited by people possessing no greater a nobility or more complex a civilisation than the Greenlanders who encounter them, and with whom the Greenlanders cannot communicate. The southern lands, by contrast, are understood to have been inhabited and their great civilisations established longer than the northern ones. There is in saga-literature no “discovery narrative”, nor even a legendary or semi-mythical first contact narrative. No Norseman is said to be the first to reach the distant south, though various saga-characters are said to be the first to serve under the Greek emperor (e.g. Bolli Bollason, Eirekr víðftrli). The only “voyage of discovery” in Old Norse-Icelandic literature between those lands and the Scandinavian north moves in the opposite direction, Snorri’s Asians fleeing Troy in the distant south or east and establishing themselves in the north as Æsir.

The understanding of long contact with Constantinople and Jerusalem does not, however, dispel their imaginative distance from Scandinavia. As will be seen in examples throughout this chapter, splendid, almost unimaginable wealth and finery is characteristic of the Byzantine empire in the sagas. Norse far-travellers who return from that empire display this finery (Bolli Bollason’s scarlet silk and gold, *Lax.* 73, Haraldr Sigurðarson’s gold-ornamented, silken-sailed ship and chests of gold, *Mork.* 8, 14), and Norse visitors to Byzantium see it on display all around them (Kirjalax’s gifts to Sigurðr Jórsalafari, *Mork.* 62). There may be an additional suggestion of the exotic nature of the south in Haraldr’s

seemingly mystic knowledge of medicine and power of healing after returning from the distant south (*Mork.* 22, 39; Andersson-Gade 439, endnote 39.1). Jerusalem, besides being the exact centre of the world and thus nearly as far from the peripheral north as it can be, is also close to lands inhabited by Saracens and *blámenn*, constantly requiring defence from them, people very much “other” in appearance, character and, most importantly, religion. Constantinople and Jerusalem are thus easily recognisable as distant, exotic lands.

## 2. Motivations

### 2.i. Miklagarðr – Byzantium

**2.i.a. (Mercenary service)** The most common and explicitly-stated motivation for journeys south to Byzantium is the desire for employment in the military service of the emperors there. Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons of the 10th, 11th and 12th centuries found steady employment as soldiers in the Byzantine emperors’ Varangian regiment, a unit composed almost entirely of such northern European mercenaries, and, in a later literary reflection of this, *Íslendingasögur* and *konungasögur* contain many tales of Scandinavian characters who find such work there.<sup>3</sup> The saga-writers usually present this mercenary service as a fairly typical career-option for adventurous young men. With independent verification of the existence of these Norse fighting-men both in Byzantine texts and in some archaeological evidence, primarily runic inscriptions, this motivation is one grounded in historical fact rather than spun out of literary fancy.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore unsurprising that the majority of textual examples are found in the historiographical *konungasögur*.

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<sup>3</sup> The most comprehensive survey of the history of Scandinavian mercenaries in Constantinople is Sigfús Blöndal’s *Væringjasaga* (1954), a work translated from Icelandic into English, updated and re-written by Benedikt Benedikz and published as *The Varangians of Byzantium* (1978). An additional standard reference text on Norse involvement in the Byzantine Empire is Hilda Ellis Davidson’s *The Viking Road to Byzantium* (1976).

<sup>4</sup> Blöndal and Benedikz cover the Greek primary sources exhaustively in their study; publication details of editions of some of these texts may be found in their bibliography (pp. 234-35) and on pp. 40 and 151. The runic inscription on the marble Lion of Piraeus is the most famous of the Varangian inscriptions (Shetelig 201-24, Blöndal-Benedikz 230-33). I have personally inspected one of the runic inscriptions in Istanbul’s Hagia Sophia

2.i.a. (1) The most direct example of this motivation is found in two passages in Snorri's *Magnússona saga* (*Heimskringla*) which book-end the account of Sigurðr Jórsalafari's travels to Byzantium and the Holy Land. Shortly after Sigurðr and his brothers have been elected joint kings of Norway after their father Magnús berfœttr's death at a disastrous battle in Ireland, an expedition to the distant south led by a certain Skopti Þngmundarson returns to Scandinavia, and the men become very popular on account of the fantastic stories they tell:

37 Af þeim nýnæmum girntisk fjtlði manns í Nóregi þeirar ferðar. Var þat sagt, at í Miklagarði fengu Norðmenn fullsælu fjár, þeir er á mála vildu ganga. Þeir báðu konungana, at annarr hvárr þeira, Eysteinn eða Sigurðr, skyldi fara ok vera fyrir því liði, er til útferðar gerðisk. (*Mag.* 1: 238)

Sigurðr is chosen and ultimately leads an expedition of sixty fine ships to the Mediterranean.<sup>5</sup> After spending some time in the Holy Land (see §2.ii.a.1. below), the troop sails to Byzantium and is given a grand welcome by the emperor, Kirjalax (Alexius I Comnenus, *Mag.* 12).<sup>6</sup> After some time in Byzantium spent impressing the emperor, Sigurðr sets off for home: 38 *Fór þá Sigurðr konungr brot af Miklagarði, en eptir dvalðisk mikill fjtlði manna ok gekk á mála* (*Mag.* 13: 254).<sup>7</sup> The Norwegians were described as determining to sail to Byzantium with the express purpose of going into military service for pay; once there, a large part of them do just that. These Scandinavian saga-characters then consider such mercenary service a good

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(see also Svárdström 1970). There is an 11th-century ceiling fresco in Kiev that appears to represent a Scandinavian or Varangian dance (Gunnell 71-74, Ellis Davidson 210).

<sup>5</sup> *Morkinskinna* and Arab sources agree with Snorri on the number of ships in Sigurðr's convoy (Blöndal-Benedikz 136). In demanding that Magnús's son travel south for temporal and spiritual accomplishments the Norwegian people may wish to redeem their loss of honour from Magnús's defeat. Giovanna Salvucci observes that the portrayal of Magnús in his last battle is more negative in *Morkinskinna* and *Fagrskinna* than in Snorri's account, reinforcing the sense that the defeat is to some not only regrettable but also ignominious (108-11).

<sup>6</sup> Alexius Comnenus is the Byzantine emperor named most frequently in Icelandic sagas, whether the events narrated take place during Alexius's reign or not. "Kirjalax" derives from the emperor's common title, *Κύριος Ἀλέξιος* – Kyrios Alexios, "Lord Alexius" (Blöndal 197, 389; Blöndal-Benedikz 122).

<sup>7</sup> *Morkinskinna* (Ch. 62) also remarks that many of Sigurðr's men enter the emperor's service but lacks the earlier episode of Skopti in Norway and his stories of Byzantine fame and fortune.

source of income or even wealth and thus a good motivation for far-travel south. Other, named saga-characters make the same judgment.

**2.i.a. (2)** One such character is Eindriði ungi (“young,” perhaps “the younger”). He is introduced in *Orkneyinga saga*<sup>8</sup> when Rǫgnvaldr jarl Kali of Orkney is visiting the Norwegian king Ingi one summer:

<sup>39</sup> Þat sumar kom útan af Miklagarði Eindriði ungi; hann hafði þar verið lengi á mála. Kunni hann þeim þaðan at segja mǫrg tíðendi, ok þótti mǫnnum skemmtan at spyrja hann útan ór heimi. (*Ork.* 85: 194)

Eindriði’s one explicitly-stated motivation for travelling to and spending time in Byzantium is mercenary service. Though he finds great popularity as a far-traveller upon his return to Norway, it would be only conjecture to suggest that he fights in the distant south with the purpose of gaining fame at home in the north. The off-hand manner in which the saga-writer mentions Eindriði’s Byzantine employment indicates the Varangians’ status as a commonplace of saga-literature. Nevertheless, the description of Eindriði’s homecoming reception in Norway, like that of Skopti Þingmundarson, suggests that the Mediterranean empire is truly remote and exotic, to both the contemporary saga-audience and also the 11th- and 12th-century Scandinavians described in the narrative. The “imaginative distance” indicated by this exoticism – along with the geographical distance – ensures that few enough Vikings travel south for this mercenary service for their southern stories to be received with great interest back home in the north. Eindriði ungi figures in an earlier text as a source of information on Varangian activities in the Byzantine Empire. In his drápa *Geisli* (“Ray of light”), the skald Einarr Skúlason cites Eindriði as the source of a story concerning St Óláfr’s

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<sup>8</sup> *Orkneyinga saga* was probably written after 1192, when Rǫgnvaldr jarl Kali was made a saint, and not long after 1200, as the jarl ruling at the end of the original version, Haraldr Madaðarson, died in 1206. The final chapters were probably added about thirty years later (ÍF XXXIV civ-cviii; Taylor 23-25).

sword Hneitir in the possession of a member of the Varangian guard, and Snorri cites both Eindriði and Einarr in his version of the events.<sup>9</sup>

At Eindriði's urging, Rǫgnvaldr too travels south to the Mediterranean. Most of the account of his expedition there concerns events that occur before he reaches Byzantium – in Galicia and Narbonne<sup>10</sup>, on the Mediterranean Sea, and in the Holy Land. In Rǫgnvaldr's own verses describing his decision to steer to Byzantium, he speaks of earning *máli* – "soldier's pay" – from the Byzantine prince and "reddening the mouths of wolves" (*rjóðum gylðis góma*), indicating that he and his men intend to earn their pay in battle (*Ork.* 88: 235). Indeed, when they reach the great city the emperor there, Menelías (Menelaus, Manuel I Comnenus), gives the Orcadian jarl much money *ok bauð þeim málagjǫf, ef þeir vildu þar dveljask* (*Ork.* 89: 236). However, for Rǫgnvaldr the mercenary motivation is not strong enough to keep him in the southern empire for longer than a year; he sets off for home that same winter.

Rǫgnvaldr shows himself aware of the financial benefits of mercenary service, and he has been made an offer, but his reason for refusing or cutting short mercenary service in Byzantium is not stated. Perhaps Rǫgnvaldr is in this decision similar to Þorfinnr karlsefni on his Vínland expeditions: for some men, the threat of bloodshed or loss of life is too great a risk on a business venture. The popularity among Scandinavians of serving in the Varangian regiment demonstrates, naturally, that this is not true of all men.<sup>11</sup> Blöndal and Benedikz suggest that Rǫgnvaldr and his principal followers or companions lose interest in serving in the Varangian Guard once they realise they will be subordinate to Eindriði ungi, who has

<sup>9</sup> See *Geisli*, p. 95, and Ch. 20 of Snorri's *Hákonar saga herðibreiðs* (ÍF XXVIII 370-71). The historical Eindriði was probably a Norwegian nobleman related to Einarr þambarskelfir; Eindriði probably transmitted his southern stories to Einarr Skúlason in Bergen around 1148 (Blöndal 339-40, Icelandic; Blöndal-Benedikz 217, English; Chase 41).

<sup>10</sup> There is some confusion in the account of Rǫgnvaldr's journey south: his route should take him first to Galicia in northwestern Spain and then to Narbonne on the Mediterranean coast of France, but the saga-writer has the convoy reach these locations in reverse order.

“clearly reached high command among the life-guard section of the Varangians” and with whom the jarl is at this point on cool terms (Blöndal 235, Blöndal-Benedikz 156-57). In any case, Rǫgnvaldr has a jarldom back home to look after, so he can hardly stay away from the north indefinitely.<sup>12</sup>

**2.i.a. (3)** The widespread nature of this mercenary motivation is corroborated in *Spesar þátr*, when Grettir Ásmundarson’s killer Þorbjörn tngull (“angle”, “fishhook”) decides to leave Norway for the distant south to escape the vengeance of Grettir’s kinsmen.<sup>13</sup> Though military service is by no means his only motivation for the journey (see §2.i.c.1. below), Þngull’s decision is introduced in this context: <sup>41</sup> *Í þenna tíma fór mart Norðmanna út í Miklagarð ok gengu þar á mála* (*Gret.* 85: 271). Þngull himself determines that travelling south for this purpose is a good idea, expecting to gain there wealth, fame and asylum from Grettir’s vengeful kinsmen. One such kinsman, Þorsteinn drómundr (“galleon”<sup>14</sup>), follows Þngull out to Byzantium, and both men subsequently join the Varangian guard (*Gret.* 86). The relative importance of Þngull’s various motivations is debatable, though desire for material gain from mercenary service seems to be a central one; for Þorsteinn, that motivation is very much secondary to his desire for blood-vengeance on Þngull. Of their joining the Varangian guard, the saga-writer relates: <sup>42</sup> *Nú vildu þeir koma sér í sveit með Væringjum, ok var því vel tekit, þegar þeir vissu, at þeir vǫru Norðmenn* (*Gret.* 86: 271-72). Here, as elsewhere, it is implied that it is common for Scandinavians to travel south and become Varangians, and the very term

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<sup>11</sup> Though this statement refers primarily to saga-literature, it can also be read in historical terms. As Blöndal shows throughout *Væringjasaga*, Scandinavians between the 10th and 13th centuries who found service with the Byzantine emperors must have run to the thousands.

<sup>12</sup> For an additional interpretation of Rǫgnvaldr’s refusal, see §2.i.a.4. below.

<sup>13</sup> *Spesar þátr* forms a sort of epilogue to the main action of *Grettis saga*, and the stylistic contrast between the þátr’s pseudo-courtly romance and the saga’s rugged outlaw-survival story is striking. The þátr was probably written, along with the saga, between about 1310 and 1325 (ÍF VII lxxviii-lxxxv; Jónas 1988: 235; Pulsiano 242).

<sup>14</sup> *Drómundr* has an English cognate, “dromond”, a large medieval sailing vessel; both words derive from late Latin *dromon* and Byzantine Greek *δρόμων* (*dromon*, a swift ship propelled by rowers). See ÍF VII 34, Fritzner I 267, Cleasby-Vigfússon 107 and OED entry “dromond.” The saga-writer connects the nickname with



“Varangians” (Væringjar) supports this implication; its casual, unelaborated use by the saga-writer testifies to the contemporary readership’s familiarity with what “Varangians” were.

The widespread nature of the mercenary motivation is of course also attested by the sheer number of saga-characters who serve the Byzantine emperors. Bolli Bollason and Halldórr Snorrason are probably the most well-known Icelandic Varangians. Halldórr’s role in the sagas and þættir in which his far-travel is narrated, however, is as a retainer of the Norwegian king Haraldr, and his mercenary service in Byzantium is not an independent action of his own, but service to his lord. Bolli’s decision to travel south, by contrast, is independent of any Norse lord, and in fact he travels south against the wishes of the Norwegian king, whose guest Bolli is at the time of his departure; the king lets Bolli depart with a bemused comment about how self-willed Icelanders are (*Lax*. 73). In *Laxdæla saga*<sup>15</sup> Bolli expresses various desires motivating his far-travel (discussed in §2.i.d.4. below), but only a short time after arriving in Constantinople he joins the Varangian regiment and distinguishes himself with excellence and bravery. The narrator comments that no Norsemen entered the Varangian guard before Bolli, but this cannot be true and is probably a literary gesture to enhance Bolli’s excellence. It may, however, indicate that the saga-writer believes the “Varangians” who welcome Bolli into their company are Russians. In *Heiðarvíga saga* Víga-Barði Guðmundarson is also said to distinguish himself in all the Varangians’ military actions after travelling to join them (Ch. 43).<sup>16</sup> Barði, however, is said to travel to “Garðaríki”, so the saga-writer probably means Russia in the distant east rather than Byzantium in the distant south, whichever land the historical Barði served in (see §2.i.e. in the following chapter).

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Þorsteinn’s slow reactions, and Grettir himself refers to it elliptically in verse (*Gret.* 13, 24). The nickname may refer to the historical Þorsteinn’s service as a naval Varangian (Blöndal 320, Blöndal-Benedikz 202).

<sup>15</sup> The most chivalric of the Icelandic sagas, *Laxdæla saga* dates between 1230 and 1260, the likeliest time in that range being between 1240 and 1250 (ÍF V xxv-xxxv; Jónas 1988: 273-74).

<sup>16</sup> The first fifteen chapters of this saga and the saga’s only other copy were destroyed in the 1728 fire in Copenhagen. The copyist Jón Ólafsson subsequently reconstructed the missing portions from his notes and from memory, so much of the extant text is his 18th-century summary. The original *Heiðarvíga saga* probably dates from the late 12th century (Jónas 1988: 224-25; Pulsiano 275).

Gríss Sæmingsson is introduced in *Hallfreðar saga*<sup>17</sup>, in which he is a major character, with these words: <sup>43</sup> *hafði hann verit út í Miklagarð ok fengit þar miklar sæmðir* (3: 144). The version of the saga in *Mesta* adds the words *af stolkonunginum* – “from the emperor” – to the end of this sentence, suggesting Gríss’s time in the south was spent in imperial service (*Mesta* 153: 340). Supporting this conclusion are the gold-inlaid spear and fine sword Gríss possesses: the sword is said to have been given him by the Byzantine king (*Hall.* 4). The Icelander Þormóðr Eindriðason’s entrance into the Varangian guard after he flees to the south (due to violence, see §2.i.c.3. below) is unique in that the emperor initially refuses to employ him due to his diminutive size. Even Þorsteinn drómundr with his arms like a pair of tongs does not have any trouble joining the famous regiment (see *Gret.* 41, 86). When, however, the emperor sees Þormóðr behead a large bull with a single blow, he remarks that the man can probably use his sword on things other than livestock and admits him into the Varangian regiment (*Mork.* 42: F 243, U 92-93<sup>18</sup>; *Har.* 72: 165).

One final Varangian may be mentioned, an Icelander who like the others in this subsection travels south to Constantinople for military service independently of any Scandinavian far-traveller of greater authority. This is Þorkell Þjóstarson, nicknamed *leppr* (“lock of hair”) for a distinctive light streak in his chestnut-coloured hair. In Chapter 4 of *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*<sup>19</sup>, a legal dispute at the Alþingi is going badly for the central character Sámr when he encounters by the river *Øxará* a party of men led by a tall, colourfully-clothed man

<sup>17</sup> *Hallfreðar saga* probably predates *Heimskringla*, which was assembled c. 1230 (Jónas 1988: 226-28). Many of the skaldic verses quoted in *Hallfreðar saga* are probably genuine, or at least composed in the time-period they purport to be, the late 10th century (Gade 71-2; Whaley 2003: 252-54). The saga is included in condensed form in the mid 14th-century manuscript *Möðruvallabók* and in discontinuous segments in the early 14th-century *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* (ÍF VIII lxxiv-lxxv, Pulsiano 263). Some of the material in the episode-rich *Mesta* is thought to originate in Gunnlaugr Leifsson’s lost saga about Óláfr (Jónas 1988: 158; Pulsiano 449).

<sup>18</sup> In citations from *Morkinskinna* I give the chapter number as it appears in Andersson and Gade’s translation and page numbers from the editions of Carl Unger and Finnur Jónsson (identified by U and F respectively).

<sup>19</sup> This popular saga is the subject of one of the defining moments in saga-scholarship, when in 1939 and 1940 E.V. Gordon and Sigurður Nordal independently demonstrated that the saga is quite fictional and not founded on oral tradition, causing a great upheaval of established scholarship. Despite some sporadic disagreement, Sigurður’s conclusions have gained widespread acceptance as the explanation of the saga’s origins (Sigurður 56-67; Jónas 1988: 250-54). *Hrafnkels saga*, one of the later sagas, dates from around the year 1300 (ÍF XI lv-lvi).

carrying a fine, ornamented sword. The man identifies himself as Þorkell and says that for the last six years he has been in Byzantium, a sworn retainer of the Byzantine emperor (*handgenginn Garðskonunginum*). Þorkell leppr is thus a Varangian. Through the rest of the saga he proves his worth as a fighting-man and, to an extent, as a born mercenary, assisting Sámr first in his Alþingi case and later in his attack on and expulsion of Hrafnkell from his farm. Though Þorkell does not assist Sámr for monetary payment, his mercenary nature is revealed at the end of the saga, when loyalty to Sámr must be abandoned in favour of prudence, and he and his brother refuse to help Sámr after Hrafnkell has returned to power (*Hrafn*. 10). Incidentally, in this final episode Þorkell has just returned from another voyage, one of four years: he is not only a natural-born mercenary, but also a natural-born traveller.

**2.i.a. (4)** Paid military service as a motivation for sojourn in Byzantium is not reserved for fugitives, fame-seekers and natural-born mercenaries like Þingull, Eindriði ungi and Þorkell leppr, nor does every ruler pass it up, as Sigurðr Jórsalafari and Rǫgnvaldr jarl do. Such mercenary work is sought there by no less important a figure than Haraldr Sigurðarson, later king of Norway.<sup>20</sup> His cognomen *harðráði* (“tyrannical,” literally “hard-counsel”), descriptive of his harsh reign as king, also testifies to the violent focus of his earlier years in the Mediterranean and his belligerent behaviour there. The time Haraldr does not spend fighting foreign armies in the service of Byzantine emperors he spends in ruthless competition for precedence with his Greek commander. Though neither the first Varangian nor the last, Haraldr is unquestionably the most famous member of that regiment and the one who receives

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<sup>20</sup> It may in fact have been thought demeaning for independent rulers like Sigurðr and Rǫgnvaldr to accept service with another ruler, even the Byzantine emperor; thus their dealings with the emperors tend to be portrayed as alliances involving gift-giving. Haraldr, not yet a king when he serves in Byzantium and thus free of this constraint, nevertheless spends his time in the south in *Morkinskinna* disguised and known pseudonymously as “Norðbrikt.” The Greek commander Gyrgir, suspecting Haraldr’s royal identity, remarks that it is not customary for persons of royal blood to enter paid service (*Mork*. 11: F 65).

the most extensive treatment in Norse sources. Haraldr is also the only Norseman clearly identified by name in a Byzantine source.<sup>21</sup>

Having taken part in the battle of Stiklarstaðir for his half-brother Óláfr Haraldsson (at the age of fifteen, according to the skald Þjóðólfr Árnorsson), Haraldr flies east to exile in Russia following their defeat (*Mork.* 9, *Har.* 1-2). After spending several years in Russia and travelling widely throughout the east, Haraldr leads an expedition of many men and ships southwards to Greece (*Grikland*), where Zoe the Great is empress and Michael IV Catalactus emperor (*Mork.* 9: F 59, *Har.* 2-3). Though Haraldr is given no explicit motivation in the text for this decision to travel to the distant south, his first actions upon reaching Constantinople are as follows: <sup>44</sup> *En er Haraldr kom til Miklagarðs ok á fund dróttningar, þá gekk hann þar á mála ok fór þegar um haustit á galeiðr með hermönnum þeim, er fóru út í Griklandshaf* (*Har.* 3: 71). If mercenary service was not Haraldr's original motivation, it certainly swiftly eclipses any other possible ones he might be conjectured to have had in travelling to Greece. Indeed, Haraldr does little else than fight during his time in the Byzantine empire. According to Snorri's saga, he leads campaigns against corsairs in the Greek islands, among the Saracens in Africa<sup>22</sup>, and against four separate fortified towns in Sicily<sup>23</sup> – all in the service of the Greek monarchs. Haraldr's monetary gain in this employment is considerable: Snorri describes him garnering enormous wealth in booty on these campaigns, much of which he ships to his friend King Jarizleifr in Novgorod for safe-keeping (*Har.* 5). That the financial

<sup>21</sup> The activities of Araltes, son of the "king of Varangia" and brother of Julavos (Óláfr) are detailed at some length in Cecaumenos' *Logos Nouthetikos* (Blöndal 113-14, Blöndal-Benedikz 57-58).

<sup>22</sup> *Affríka/Serkland* is probably Snorri's mistake for Asia Minor (ÍF XXVIII 75, Icelandic; Magnus-Hermann 1976: 48-49, English). In this judgment Snorri is undoubtedly following verses from *Sexstefja*, a contemporary poem in praise of Haraldr composed by his skald Þjóðólfr Árnorsson. Þjóðólfr, however, reports only that Haraldr seized land from the king of Africa, so he may be referring to engagements in other lands in which African (Egyptian, Tunisian) emirs had influence, such as Sicily or Asia Minor. Blöndal and Benedikz are confident the Sicilian campaigns (in which Haraldr was certainly engaged) are meant and that the "King of Africa" referred to by Þjóðólfr is the Tunisian caliph or his son, the commander of his forces in Sicily (Blöndal 116-17, 123-24; Blöndal-Benedikz 60-61, 66).

<sup>23</sup> Though entertaining, the tales of Haraldr's clever ruses for capturing Sicilian cities are adapted versions of itinerant folktales, familiar from other military anecdotes concerning other leaders. For a brief discussion of the other uses to which these templates are put and the texts in which they feature, see Blöndal 131-33 and Blöndal-

aspect of mercenary service in the south is detailed here and not in the accounts of Eindriði ungi, Þorbjörn tngull and Þorsteinn drómundr may result both from the needs of the narratives and from the historical Haraldr's royalty, which may have entitled him to a more impressive hoard of battle-wealth than common Varangian foot-soldiers like the others.

At the same time, Haraldr seems to have something of a literary reputation for financial greed, especially in *Morkinskinna*. In *Brands þáttur trva*, for example, Haraldr asks for the title character's fine scarlet tunic and receives it with one sleeve ripped away. The king interprets Brandr's gesture: <sup>45</sup> *Honom þiccir sem ec eiga eina h- ndina oc þa þo at þigia avallt en veita alldrigi* (*Mork.* 38: F 195). Even Brandr's cognomen, *trvi* ("generous"), acts as an indirect indictment of his royal antagonist. Haraldr's excessive concern in comparing the generosity of his and the Danish king Sveinn's gifts in *Auðunar þáttur* (two chapters before *Brands þáttur* in *Morkinskinna*) may also relate to Haraldr's avaricious portrayal. In the context of medieval historiographers' characterisation of Haraldr, explicit references to his takings as a Byzantine mercenary and efforts to preserve that wealth are logical and familiar.

In both *Morkinskinna* and *Haralds saga* the popularity of mercenary service in Byzantium among Scandinavians is evident once again. *Morkinskinna* says so explicitly: <sup>46</sup> *En mikill fiolde var þar adr fyrir Nordmanna er þeir kalla Væringia* (*Mork.* 9: F 60). Snorri's account is not so direct, neither estimating the Varangians' numbers nor identifying them as Norsemen. Snorri does, however, remark that after Haraldr has been in Byzantium only a short time, the Varangians there become deeply attached to him and he becomes their leader; when battles come, they band together (*Har.* 3). It is clear Snorri is visualising a fairly large fighting-force: if, for example, their numbers were fewer than a dozen or so, he would

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Benedikz 71-74. Regarding the incendiary bird ruse in particular, see Cook 76-77, Boberg 186 and Thompson 493 ("Sparrows of Cirencester").

probably have named them all. The men's immediate attachment to the Norwegian Haraldr suggests they too are Scandinavians.<sup>24</sup>

This Norse solidarity is suggested again later in both *Morkinskinna* and *Haralds saga*. After several disputes for precedence with the commander of all the Greek forces, Gyrgir<sup>25</sup>, Haraldr employs the strategy of withholding his men from the front lines in battles in which the whole Greek army is engaged but driving them forward fiercely in encounters in which his company fights alone, <sup>47</sup> *at annat tveggja skyldi hann fá, sigr eða bana (Har. 5: 74)*. As a result, victories are often won when Haraldr is in command, but Gyrgir is less successful. The men start to grumble and suggest that Haraldr should command the whole Greek army, whereupon Gyrgir accuses the Varangians of failing to support him in battle and sends them away under Haraldr's command as a separate fighting force: <sup>48</sup> *Fór þá Haraldr frá herinum ok Væringjar með honum ok látinumenn. Gyrgir fór með Grikkja her (Har. 5: 74)*. *Morkinskinna* uses the same term, *látinumenn*. These "Latins" may be Latin- or Romance language-speaking men, perhaps French-speaking Normans and thus distant cousins of the Norse Varangians (ÍF XXVIII 74, footnote). "Latin", however, is quite as likely to refer to Roman Catholicism as opposed to Greek Orthodoxy, and these fighting *látinumenn* could include Catholics not only from France and Normandy but also from Armenia and other Christian principalities (Shepard 2008: 359-60, 381, 395; Chahin 270-72; Redgate 236).<sup>26</sup> The distinction between Haraldr's following and the Greeks may thus be a confessional, sectarian division rather than a linguistic, ethnic one.<sup>27</sup> Whichever division Snorri and the writer of *Morkinskinna* have in mind, the Norsemen and Latins, bound together by either a common region of origin or a common church, reject Greek command and follow a Roman

<sup>24</sup> Most of the Varangians in Byzantium during Haraldr's time there would indeed have been Scandinavian in origin. Later, an influx of Anglo-Saxons unable to bear Norman rule in Britain changed the international composition of the Varangian regiment considerably. See Fell 1974, Blöndal-Benedikz 141-47.

<sup>25</sup> Georgios Maniakes was one of the most important generals of Basil II and Alexius Comnenus. Though Georgios is said in Norse sources to be a kinsman of Empress Zoe, this is probably not true (ÍF XXVIII 71, footnote; Blöndal 122-23; Blöndal-Benedikz 65-66).

Catholic Scandinavian. This schism also re-emphasises the fact that the Northmen are there as mercenaries and not as loyal followers of the Byzantine empire: if they can earn a soldier's pay in Mediterranean battles and follow a Scandinavian, Catholic captain, all the better.

Varangian preference for authority figures who practise distinctly Scandinavian Christianity is also characteristic of the episode in a miracle-book of Bishop Þorlákr, in which a large group of Norse mercenaries calls upon Iceland's new patron saint in a time of distress in battle.<sup>28</sup> Shortly after the late Bishop Þorlákr's sanctity is declared, Philip of Flanders (Philippus af Flæmingjaland) is chosen king of Byzantium during the period of Latin rule there.<sup>29</sup> The narrative continues:

49 Þá drifu þangat af Nóregi Norðmenn til væringjasetu, ok kunnu þeir at segja þessi fagnaðar tíðendi þeim er þar váru fyrir, um heilagleik ok jarteinakraft ins heilagra Þorláks byskups. (*Þorl.* 147: 236)

The wording not only explicitly establishes that mercenary service motivates these Norwegians' far-travel, but also suggests a motivation for the timing of their journey: they seem to make their decision to join the Varangians because a nobleman from their part of Europe, Flanders, has been chosen as king of the southern Empire. Shortly afterwards, the Varangians fight for the emperor against heathens and are compelled to flee to a certain castle, knowing the enemy will attack in the morning. They make a vow to build a church in St Þorlákr's honour if he will come to their aid, and aid them he does: the next day in battle the heathen are struck with fear and confusion at the sound of Þorlákr's name shouted by the Varangians. Victorious, the Varangians keep their vow, and the king himself carries the first

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<sup>26</sup> On Armenians in 11th-century Byzantium in general, see Dédéyan 1975.

<sup>27</sup> But see also Sverrir 2008.

<sup>28</sup> ÍF XVI provides no fewer than four texts of *Þorláks saga helga* and two miracle-books. The text designated *Jarteinabók Þorláks önnur* is one of the younger Þorlákr-texts, dating from 1300 or later and appearing only in a 1645 manuscript that also preserves *Hungrvaka* and the C-version of *Þorláks saga* (ÍF XVI ci). Like many byskupasögur, the sagas of Þorlákr are true samtíðarsögur, "contemporary sagas", the earliest composed no more than about ten years after his death (ÍF XVI xxxii; Jónas 1988: 136).

<sup>29</sup> Philip of Namur was elected emperor but in fact refused the dignity, letting his brother Robert become emperor in his place. Blöndal and Benedikz discuss the hagiographer's knowledge of this election (168-70).

stone to the church (*Þorl.* 147). As with Haraldr's Norse followers and the *látinumenn*, the Varangians here show marked loyalty to and trust in authority figures of their own cultural and religious background: the Icelander Þorlákr is a genuine Norse saint, and even Philip, who is not Norse, is at least a Roman Catholic. The episode closes with words about St Þorlákr's church in the distant south that once again emphasise the familiarity of Varangians to the readers and writers of sagas: <sup>50</sup> *segja þeir er þaðan koma at þar verði fjöldi jarteina* (*Þorl.* 147: 237). Between the Scandinavian north and Varangian south, news travels both ways.

**2.i.a. (5)** After all this it may be noted that the mercenary motivation for travel in Norse texts is not exclusive to Byzantium. The *Jómsvíkingar*, for example, fight in the service of the monarch in Slavonic Wendland, part of modern-day Poland. In the fifteenth chapter of the fanciful *Jómsvíkinga saga*, Dane Pálna-Tóki and his Scandinavian and Welsh companions, fresh from successful raids in the British Isles, travel east to Wendland.<sup>30</sup> The Wendish king Búrizleifr, fearful of this harrying band, quickly proclaims himself Pálna-Tóki's friend and makes the Vikings an offer: he gives them an entire district of his country, called Jóm, provided they will settle there and assist Búrizleifr in the defence of his kingdom. Thus the *Jómsvíkingar*, as they are now called, become mercenaries. Whether their service for the Wendish monarch is "approved" by the saga-writer is difficult to tell: admiration of the archaic Heroic ideal and condemnation of the company's later foolhardy action against the Norwegian ruler are both present. The saga also fails to establish King Búrizleifr's faith. If he is intended to be Bolesław I of Poland (Boleslaus), he is Christian. He may, however, represent Mieszko I, the pre-Christian ruler of Poland whose reign, like his son Bolesław's, also overlaps with that of Sveinn tjúguskegg ("forkbeard") of Denmark, during whose reign the *Jómsvíkingar* are imagined to have existed (Maurer I 274, Bugge 7-8). Or this Búrizleifr

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<sup>30</sup> For recent discussions of the textual nature of *Jómsvíkinga saga* and the historicity of the *Jómsvíkingar*, see Finlay 2006 and Slupectki 2006.



may simply be a mythical king of the Wends, imagined in saga-literature independently of any historical Slavic prince. In this case, he is likely to be considered heathen, as the Wends are most often characterised in sagas. If either of the latter two cases is correct, the Jómsvíkingar's service to a heathen king contrasts with the later Varangians, all of whom serve Christian monarchs.<sup>31</sup>

There are other accounts of fighting for pay on a more individual basis scattered about the corpus of Íslendingasögur. The extent to which Þorkell leppr Þjóstarsson's assistance of Sámr in his legal dispute against Hrafnkell may be considered mercenary service has been discussed in §2.i.a.3. above. Some of the actions the mighty Grettir Ásmundarson takes on behalf of others may be called mercenary service. On Grettir's first trip to Norway he stays with a chieftain named Þorfinnr Kársson. The travelling Icelandic guest Grettir soon proves useful to Þorfinnr in belligerent (if not exactly military) ways and subsequently receives monetary rewards, first retrieving family treasures belonging to Þorfinnr from a gravemound by battling its restless resident and later defeating twelve raiders who attack Þorfinnr's homestead while he is away (*Gret.* 18-20). Also, Grettir's famous, Beowulf-like fight against the revenant Glámr is taken on behalf of the farmer whose farm Glámr has been terrorising, and the farmer rewards Grettir richly once the *draugr* is laid to rest (*Gret.* 35). The best examples of mercenary service on an individual basis, however, are Egill Skalla-Grímsson and his brother Þórólfr, who travel to England and fight in the army of King Athelstan when he needs good soldiers to drive off the attacks of the Scots, Irish and Welsh.<sup>32</sup> *Egils saga* describes the situation as follows:

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<sup>31</sup> The order of the Teutonic Knights conducted campaigns in this general area and the Baltic throughout the 12th, 13th and 14th centuries, the so-called "Northern Crusades." It is possible the writer of *Jómsvíkinga saga* and other Icelanders of the time considered mercenary service in Slavic lands pseudo-crusading. See Eric Christiansen's *Northern Crusades* (1997), especially Chapters 2 and 4 on Wendish and East Baltic campaigns.

<sup>32</sup> Due to its similarity in style and subject-matter to *Heimskringla*, *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* – familiarly known as *Egla* – has sometimes been attributed to Snorri Sturluson. If this attribution is true, the saga dates from before 1241; it is in any case a 13th-century composition (Jónas 1988: 269; Pulsiano 156-57).

51 En Aðalsteinn konungr safnaði herliði at sér ok gaf mála þeim mǫnnum þllum, er þat vildu hafa til féfangs sér, bæði útlenzkum ok innlenzkum. Þeir bræðr, Þórólfr ok Egill, heldu suðr fyrir Saxland ok Flæmingjaland; þá spurðu þeir, at Englandskonungr þóttisk liðs þurfa ok þar var ván féfangs mikils. (*Egla* 50: 128)

When the two show up in Athelstan's court offering their services, he welcomes them warmly, feeling their support will greatly strengthen his forces. The parties come to an agreement and the brothers fight for Athelstan in battle against the Scottish king Óláfr rauði ("red"). Though Þórólfr is killed in battle, Athelstan is victorious and Egill is given a fine gold ring from the king's own arm as payment for his service and two chests of silver in compensation for the loss of his brother (*Egla* 55).

These non-Byzantine accounts of paid fighting all share the common characteristic that they take place well within the range of near-travel, either in Scandinavia or practically next-door. They provide a broad context of Norse mercenary service in which the Varangians of Byzantium are a specific case involving far-travel (see also §2.i.e. of the following chapter, "East"). It is also apparent that this mercenary motivation is fundamentally akin to the most prominent motivation for far-travel westward, financial gain. Whereas the business ventures in previously uninhabited Greenland focus on real-estate and in naturally abundant Vínland on the acquisition of tradable goods, the business ventures in the well-populated, wealthy Byzantine empire necessarily focus on paid employment in a most lucrative service-industry, that of the professional soldier.

**2.i.b. (Military glory, fame and honour)** Closely related to the motivation of financial gain as mercenaries is the group of motivations centred on military glory or honour and the renown attendant on them. Of the far-travellers discussed above who serve the Byzantine emperor as fighting-men, three associate that service with gaining honour for their military exploits.

**2.i.b. (1)** As noted above, it requires some conjecture to suppose that Eindriði ungi travels to the exotic south for the glory and renown he later receives in Norway for his soldier stories. However, when encouraging Orkney's Rǫgnvaldr jarl to lead an expedition to the distant south, Eindriði does emphasise the acquisition of honour:

<sup>52</sup> „Þat þykki mér undarligt, jarl, er þú vill eigi fara út í Jórsalaheim ok hafa eigi sagnir einar til þeira tíðenda, er þaðan eru at segja. Er slíkum mǫnnum bezt hent þar sakar yðvarra lista; muntu þar bezt virðr, sem þú kemr með tignum mǫnnum.“

(*Ork.* 85: 194)

Somewhat complicating the matter is the fact that here Eindriði refers not to Byzantium but to *Jórsalaheimr*, the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Yet Eindriði is said to have spent his mercenary years in *Miklagarðr*, Byzantium, and no textual explanation of why he recommends one land rather than the other is forthcoming. A subtle psychological motivation might be postulated, in which Eindriði adduces that a ruling-man like Rǫgnvaldr would consider the Holy Land a more suitable location for winning military honour, winning it in the service of the Lord rather than the emperor of a secular empire. This might relate to the purpose of *Orkneyinga saga*, which is at least partially connected with Rǫgnvaldr's 1192 canonisation. Perhaps the simplest explanation, however, is that to Eindriði the two distant, southern lands are interchangeable. Mercenaries need not be concerned with whose money they accept.

When Rǫgnvaldr himself reaches Byzantium, a skaldic stanza he composes also associates military service there with honour. Sailing from the Holy Land to Constantinople, he recites this verse:

<sup>53</sup> Þiggjum þengils mála,  
þokum fram í gny stála,  
rjóðum gylðis góma,  
gerum ríks konungs soma.

(*Ork.* 88: 235)

It is interesting that here Rǫgnvaldr appears to consider honour won in battle to be due to the monarch under whose command the mercenaries, or even the leaders of the mercenaries, fight. (The lines cannot refer to Rǫgnvaldr himself, as the term used in the final line, *konungr* “king”, can denote the emperor of Byzantium but not the jarl of Orkney.) Rǫgnvaldr may thus be more concerned with hierarchy and responsibility than with financial opportunism, and thus his rejection of more mercenary pay in Byzantium to resume his leadership responsibilities in Orkney is both understandable and admirable. Also, Rǫgnvaldr’s clear-headed view of his own subordinate status may reflect the situation in which he rules his jarldom back in the north, where he is subordinate to the king of Norway.

**2.i.b. (2)** The character who travels to Byzantium most explicitly for glory or fame is Þorbjörn Þngull in *Spesar þátr*. As shown in §2.i.a.3. above, Þngull’s decision to make the voyage south is introduced in the context that many Scandinavians at that time make a good living as mercenaries for the Byzantine emperor. The narration continues:

<sup>54</sup> Af því þótti Þorbirni fýsiligt at fara þangat ok afla sér svá fjár ok frægðar, en hafa sik eigi í Norðrlǫndum fyrir frændum Grettis. Þjó hann nú ferð sína ór Nóregi ok fór út í lǫnd ok létti eigi, fyrr en hann kom út í Miklagarð ok gekk þar á mála.

(*Gret.* 85: 271)

Of the three characters with whom earning glory, fame or renown for military exploits in the distant south is associated, Þngull alone is explicitly stated to travel south at least partly with the express purpose of earning glory, fame or renown. The mixture of motivations here suggests rationalisation, the ostensible desire for wealth and renown foregrounded to play down Þngull’s desire to escape violent death at the hands of an avenging friend or kinsman of Grettir Ásmundarson, whom he murdered with guile and witchcraft earlier in the saga. Greed for wealth and lust for fame are undoubtedly less distasteful than cowardice.

### 2.i.c. (Vengeance violence)

2.i.c. (1) The reader can nevertheless see through Ñngull's rationalisation, and self-preservation in the face of impending danger must be considered his primary motivation for fleeing Scandinavia for the distant south. This motivation is also clearly of first importance to the saga-writer: if the tale of Þorsteinn drómundr's revenge and subsequent romantic escapade in the exotic south is to be told, Ñngull must flee the north, and Þorsteinn must follow.

Ñngull's flight and Þorsteinn's immediate chase to a land well outside the bounds of Scandinavia fall into the pattern of violence-motivated far-travel noted in §2.ii.b of the preceding chapter, "West." There a pattern was outlined in which Scandinavian saga-characters move outward from their point of origin – some to escape acts of vengeful violence, others to commit them – tracing expanding "concentric circles of violence" and ultimately reaching Greenland in the distant west. Here in *Spesar þáttir* the pattern is manifested in Ñngull's departure to Norway after his indefinite banishment from Iceland and his later departure from Scandinavia to seek his fortunes in the distant south (*Gret.* 84-85). Like some of the western examples of this pattern, Ñngull and Þorsteinn's southern travel also illustrates the claustrophobia of the Norse world. For some acts of violence, it is enough for an Icelander to seek refuge in Norway – but not for an act of violence so widely unpopular as Grettir's killing, in which despicable *seiðr*-magic was used and during which Grettir's innocent and well-liked brother Illugi was also killed. For this, the perpetrator must escape Scandinavia altogether.

Like the fugitives to Greenland in *Fóstbræðra saga*, however, Ñngull does not escape retribution even with far-travel: Þorsteinn drómundr succeeds in killing Ñngull as he is showing the other Varangians the sword he took from Grettir's dead body (*Gret.* 86). Yet Ñngull's decision to travel to Byzantium to escape vengeance is not necessarily a poor one:

the saga-writer twice emphasises how rare Scandinavian vengeance in the distant south is. Other Varangians witnessing Þorsteinn's revenge comment as much: <sup>55</sup> *Ok þá tóku margir undir, at sjá inn sterki maðr myndi mikill fyrir sér hafa verit, þar sem Þorsteinn hefði rekizk svá langt út í heim at hefna hans (Gret. 86: 273)*. The saga-writer later adds, <sup>56</sup> *Vitu menn varla dæmi til, at nþkkurs manns af Íslandi hafi hefnt verit í Miklagarði, annars en Grettis Ásmundarsonar (Gret. 90: 286)*. We may adduce that violence-motivated far-travel to the distant south pertains only to cases where the scale of violence propelling the travel and the high regard in which the avenger holds the memory of the original victim are proportional to the great distance covered and great effort required for the journey.

In contrast to these two observations on the rarity of acts of vengeance by one Scandinavian on another in the distant south, no such comments are made in the accounts of such vengeance-motivated travel to Greenland (Þormóðr in *Fóstbræðra saga*, Bárðr in *Króka-Refs saga*). This factor aptly distinguishes the distant south from the distant west: lands settled by Scandinavians are understood to be part of Scandinavia, and they adopt Norse customs (here, customs regarding vengeance). Not so the settled, civilised lands in the distant south: the saga-writer understands that there, it is Scandinavians and their customs that are foreign.<sup>33</sup> This act of vengeance is also noteworthy as an indicator of the “moral geography” of the medieval Scandinavian world: travels to the south and southeast take one towards the moral centre of the world, Jerusalem, and (as will be discussed in §2.ii.a.) piety is the most characteristic motivation for travelling there. While journeys away from this moral centre may be expected to be motivated by any kind of evil or violence, far-travel towards this holy locale for bloody vengeance must certainly be exceptional. Þorsteinn's successful vengeance is thus remarkable partly because he travels to a “holier” location to enact it, far from the

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<sup>33</sup> The historical Varangians probably had the right to exercise internal regimental discipline; though the Norse ethos of vengeance for personal injuries and disgraces was no doubt recognised, miscreants among their ranks were most likely judged with typically harsh Byzantine military discipline (Blöndal 62, 193-94; Blöndal-Benedikz 24, 118-19).

northern periphery of Christendom – Scandinavia – where vengeance is both more common and more appropriate.

**2.i.c. (2)** The holiness of the locale may be the reason another Norseman pursuing a fellow-Scandinavian south fails to achieve his vengeance. Following the violence in which Gestr (or Þorgestr) Þórhallason kills Víga-Styrr (“Killer-Styrr”) for having killed his father, Gestr leaves Iceland for Norway, where he hides out on a northern fjord with a widow (*Heið.* 10). Víga-Styrr’s son Þorsteinn pursues Gestr to Norway, and the widow sends Gestr away to safety in Raumeríki. Notwithstanding his rescue from a shipwreck by Gestr, Þorsteinn soon follows and makes a failed attempt on Gestr’s life with an axe. Jón Ólafsson writes:

57 Gestr sér, at hann má eigi við haldask í Nóregi fyrir umsátrum Þorsteins, ok ferr at vári komanda suðr í Miklagarð ok gengr þar á mála með Væringjum; ætlar sik þar heldr óhultara verða. Þorsteini kemr njósn af þessu, ok ferr sama sumar út til Miklagarðs. (*Heið.* 11: 243)

Like Þorbjörn Þngull and Þorsteinn drómundr, Gestr and Þorsteinn trace the pattern of growing concentric circles of violence-motivated far-travel originally traced in the western examples far-travel. Here the first two movements, regional and international travel, are reversed: Gestr first abandons Iceland for Norway before changing locations within Norway, finally moving outside Scandinavia altogether.

The accounts of vengeance in *Spesar þáttur* and *Heiðarvíga saga* diverge when the pair reaches Constantinople. Jón Ólafsson tells that during one of the games or wrestling matches with which the Varangians and Norsemen<sup>34</sup> customarily spend the day, Þorsteinn draws a short sword (*sax*) from under his cloak and strikes at Gestr’s head. As before he misses his mark and only wounds Gestr on the shoulder. Gestr intervenes on his attacker’s behalf when

the Varangians seize Þorsteinn and wish to execute him according to their law, and he finally convinces Þorsteinn to give up his quest for vengeance, saying it is clearly destined not to succeed (*Heið.* 11). Þorsteinn may indeed not be fated to kill Gestr. Since, however, Gestr's flight to Constantinople takes him not only far from Scandinavia but also close to the centre of holiness, the location itself may simply not allow the commission of a violent act without proper justification. Thus while Þorsteinn drómundr is justified in avenging his kinsman Grettir's shameful murder, Þorsteinn Víga-Styrsson, attempting to avenge a violent man who arguably brought about his own death, lacks justice on his side. The moral geography of the world thus mandates what sorts of actions may be performed where.

**2.i.c. (3)** In a third example of travel to Byzantium motivated by vengeance-violence, the Icelander Þormóðr Eindriðason commits his act of vengeance in the north and flees to the south afterwards to avoid the repercussions. *Morkinskinna* relates that during a campaign in Gautland led by Haraldr harðráði, Haraldr's crew, including Þormóðr and the killer of his kinsman Koðrán Guðmundarson, Hallr Ótryggsson, is working to free their ships from ice blocking their escape from Lake Vänern. When someone makes a comment about how well "Koðrán's killer" is working, Þormóðr loses control of himself and strikes Hallr dead:

<sup>58</sup> Oc er lípit þrǺngþis at oc villdi drepa hann Þormoþ þa brast niðr issinn vndir þeim oc varþ þa micid svarf oc var við svap vm at mart Manna mvndi drvcna. Magnvs s. Haraldz konungs veitti Þormodi oc bad honom griþa oc bǺð s¶ttir þui at Þormoðr var ahans scipi oc varþ setz amalið oc siþan for Þormodr svdr til Danmerkr oc þaþan vt iGrikland. (*Mork.* 42: F 233-34)

Once in Greece, he takes service with the emperor. Presumably, then, Þormóðr's departure from Haraldr's company and possibly from all of Scandinavia is part of the settlement by

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<sup>34</sup> Jón distinguishes *Væringjar* and *Norðmenn*, suggesting he is fully aware that in the 11th century there were non-Scandinavian Varangians in Byzantium, perhaps Russians or Englishmen. Jón, an experienced saga copyist,



which he is granted his life; in any case, his flight from the north to the south is motivated very directly by his violent act of vengeance.<sup>35</sup>

Though in these three examples the characters' initial flights to the distant south are unequivocally motivated by vengeance, mercenary employment in the service of the emperor is in each case a clear secondary motivation. This is only fitting: Norsemen characterised by adherence to the violent code of ethics advocating violent retribution are well suited to military service. Saga-characters motivated to far-travel by piety, like many of the Jerusalem-pilgrims listed below, tend to eschew military service once in the south.

#### 2.i.d. (Minor motivations)

2.i.d. (1) Five separate motivations for far-travel to the seat of the Byzantine empire are evident in only one or two saga-characters each. The first of these minor motivations exists almost exclusively in the character of Sigurðr Jórslafari and is best called self-aggrandisement. This motivation is similar to that described in §2.i.b. above, glory or honour, but the examples described there all relate the military exploits performed in the service of the empire. That is to say, in the previous examples renown is earned for deeds performed. The Sigurðr of *Morkinskinna*, however, and to a lesser extent Snorri's Sigurðr in *Magnússona saga*<sup>36</sup>, seeks renown only in the eyes of southern kings and emperors, and possibly important citizens of Byzantium. His goal is to be esteemed not necessarily as a good soldier, but as a great and rich king.<sup>37</sup>

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says the phrase is common in sagas. See ÍF III 243, footnote; Blöndal 318; Blöndal-Benedikz 200.

<sup>35</sup> An abbreviated version of these events is narrated in Ch. 30 of *Ljósvetninga saga* (ÍF X 103). Snorri relates the episode in *Heimskringla* but does not mention Pormóðr's flight south to Byzantium (*Har.* 72).

<sup>36</sup> The episodes from Ch. 61 of *Morkinskinna* included in this subsection are missing from the principal manuscript (GKS 1009 fol); the wording that immediately follows the manuscript lacuna, however, indicates that the episodes were originally present. They are inserted here from a manuscript of *Heimskringla*, Frissbók, having been interpolated into Snorri's saga from a version of *Morkinskinna*. See Andersson-Gade 5-11, 320-23.

<sup>37</sup> Joyce Hill notes that though the various saga-accounts of Sigurðr's southern voyage differ, "they all interpret the expedition as a prestige-enhancing journey" (439).

The saga-writers tell that while Sigurðr and his men are docked at Engilsnes (Gallipoli peninsula, Blöndal-Benedikz 137), waiting to sail on to Constantinople after their visits in Jerusalem and Cyprus, Sigurðr repeatedly refuses to set sail with good, following winds. Instead he waits for side winds, as their ships' fine, silk sails will look more impressive to the on-lookers as they sail into the great city (*Mork.* 61, *Mag.* 11; but see also Hill 441-42). Once in the city, according to *Morkinskinna*, Sigurðr's bids for admiration increase. He has his horse shod with golden shoes for the procession through the city to the emperor's palace, even contriving that one should fall off on the way and ordering his men not to stop and retrieve the precious object (*Mork.* 61: F 348, U 163). He further orders his men to regard the new and exotic things they see in the city with disinterest, including the precious cloth that has been laid across the road, presumably to test the Northmen's regard for wealth and finery.<sup>38</sup> When the emperor sends the Norwegian king purses and chests of gold and silver, Sigurðr does not even look at the gifts, but tells his men to divide them among themselves (*Mork.* 62: F 349, U 163). Like the earlier royal Scandinavian visitor to Byzantium, Eiríkr góði<sup>39</sup> of Denmark, Sigurðr is offered the choice between a massive payment of gold and games in his honour at the Hippodrome. Unlike Eiríkr, whose expenses on his journey south make the payment a welcome influx of cash, Sigurðr chooses the games. This seems to be the correct choice, as the narrator goes on to say that the games cost no less than the gift of gold would have.<sup>40</sup> Sigurðr is also of course explicitly honoured with the occasion (*Mork.* 62: F 349, U 164). Finally, when preparing a great feast for the emperor and empress, Sigurðr uses walnuts as

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<sup>38</sup> This test of the Norwegian king's indifference to wealth has already been tried on him by King Baldwin of Jerusalem (*Mork.* 61).

<sup>39</sup> The piety of Eiríkr's Mediterranean voyages earned him his cognomen *góði* ("good"). Eiríkr's Danish nickname "ejegod" developed from "egodh" and later "æygodh" – "ever good." See "eje-" in the *Ordbog over det danske sprog* (online at <http://ordnet.dk/ods/>).

<sup>40</sup> The corresponding passage in *Knyttlinga saga* compares Sigurðr's choice with Eiríkr's, remarking that people still debate which ruler's decision was more in the spirit of a true chieftain (Ch. 81). *Knyttlinga saga*, modelled on *Heimskringla* and other sagas of Norwegian kings, provides a similar continuous narrative of Danish kings. Though much of its material is drawn from earlier Danish histories, *Knyttlinga saga* dates from the latter half of the 13th century. Like other late *konungasögur* the saga is carefully planned and structured; it may have been written by Snorri Sturluson's nephew Óláfr hvítaskáld Þórðarson (ÍF XXXV clxxix-clxxx, Jónas 1988: 164).

fuel rather than firewood, further demonstrating his (enacted) flippant disregard for expense. For this last gesture, however, Sigurðr may perhaps be excused: firewood has been made unavailable by the empress in order to see what the northern king would do (*Mork.* 63: F 350-51, U 164-65).<sup>41</sup> Sigurðr's ruses partly succeed in impressing the Byzantine monarchs: after each one they conclude that he must be very wealthy or very simple-minded.<sup>42</sup>

In all his time in Constantinople, however, Sigurðr is not said to take part in any military action or otherwise seek glory connected to military exploits of any kind. Sigurðr thus appears to value renown in this Mediterranean empire more than in his own lands. For a northern king to be considered great, he must surely be a mighty man in battle; in the distant south, monarchs seem more impressed with a studied disregard for wealth and finery.<sup>43</sup>

As noted above, this self-aggrandising motivation for far-travel to Byzantium seems exclusive to Sigurðr Jórsalafari. The only suggestion of such a motivation in another saga-character is when the ships of Rǫgnvaldr jarl of Orkney approach Constantinople following their time in the Holy Land: *59 sigldu þá með þrís miklum, sem þeir vissu, at gǫrt hafði Sigurðr Jórsalafari* (*Ork.* 88: 235). When it comes to impressing the citizens of Byzantium, Sigurðr is the acknowledged standard by which other southern far-travellers are measured.<sup>44</sup>

**2.i.d. (2)** Sigurðr's daughter Kristín is party to a second minor motivation for far-travel to Byzantium, adultery. *Heimskringla* relates that though Kristín is married to Erlingr jarl skakki ("skewed"), himself a former far-traveller to the distant south, she runs away to

<sup>41</sup> A similar tale is related earlier of Sigurðr's grandfather and fellow Byzantium-farer Haraldr harðráði (*Mork.* 11: F 65-66). There, however, Haraldr is not passing a test of ingenuity but contravening the emperor's edict against dedicating a Varangian-built church to St Óláfr, and firewood has been withheld not as a test but to prevent the consecration from going forward.

<sup>42</sup> Blöndal cites antecedents and alternate versions of each of these ruses, "anecdotes that have been fathered on to him and are quite clearly about older personages" (Blöndal-Benedikz 136-40; Blöndal 212-17).

<sup>43</sup> Sigurðr has already demonstrated military prowess elsewhere in the Mediterranean. As argued in §2.ii.a.1. below, however, Sigurðr's battles in the Holy Land are connected with God's glory rather than Sigurðr's.

<sup>44</sup> The literary account of Rǫgnvaldr's journey to the distant south may be inspired by that of Sigurðr, as indeed the historical journey itself may have been. Like Sigurðr, Rǫgnvaldr spends his time travelling across the

Constantinople with another man: <sup>60</sup> *Kristín fór af landi með þeim manni, er Grímr rusli var kallaðr. Þau fóru út í Miklagarð ok váru þar um hríð, ok áttu þau saman btrn ntkkur* (ÍF XXVIII 407). There might be any number of reasons why the pair choose to go so far from Scandinavia to start their new family: fear of reprisal from Erlingr (eventually the most powerful man in Norway), for example, or avoidance of the shame of their misdeed among people they know. Paul Riant surmises that Kristín's particular motivation in leaving Erlingr is her anger for his killing of Haraldr, said to be her illegitimate son by King Sigurðr munnr, though this explains only her abandonment of Erlingr for Grímr, not their journey to Byzantium (Blöndal-Benedikz 218). The simplest explanation, however, might be that Snorri simply heard the story told that way and reported it faithfully. In any case, when there are characters whose time in a saga is over, a distant land is an excellent place to dispose of them.

**2.i.d. (3)** Trade is another motivation for far-travel to Byzantium known from only one saga-character, Eyvindr Bjarnason in *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, brother of the central character Sámr. The saga-writer introduces Eyvindr and describes his career-path:

<sup>61</sup> Eyvindr gerðisk farmaðr ok fór útan til Nóregs ok var þar um vetrinn. Þaðan fór hann ok út í lnd ok nam staðar í Miklagarði ok fekk þar góðar virðingar af Grikkjakonungi ok var þar um hríð. (*Hrafn.* 3: 100)

“Merchant” or “trader” is the usual meaning of *farmaðr*, though it can also simply mean a sailor or traveller. Trade seems the most natural purpose for Eyvindr's sea-faring: no violence is mentioned in connection with it, and he is not said to go on Viking raids. Therefore, though Eyvindr's specific motivation for travelling to the distant south is not stated explicitly, trade is in the context the most likely reason. The next most plausible alternative is that Eyvindr sails south to Byzantium for the honour he receives from the mighty monarch there (see §2.i.b.

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Mediterranean fighting heathen pirates and occasionally fighting for local inhabitants along the way. Also like Sigurðr, he travels first to the Holy Land before visiting Constantinople.

above, §2.ii.b.1. below). However, Eyvindr first stops in Byzantium and then stays there longer after being honoured by the emperor, suggesting that he did not at first count on receiving imperial esteem. Eyvindr is therefore probably understood to be a trader exceptional enough to make the long voyage south to the Mediterranean, where the emperor recognises his excellence and invites him to ply his trade in that wealthy land for a time.

After this interlude the narrative returns to Iceland and Hrafnkell, and Eyvindr does not enter the story again until he returns to Iceland and is killed the same day as he rides homeward across the heath, casualty to the feud that has sprung up in his absence between Hrafnkell and Sámur (*Hrafn.* 8). Though some details in this portion of the narrative are reminiscent of Bolli Bollason's return to Iceland after serving as a Varangian in Byzantium – particularly the company's colourful clothes and fine shields<sup>45</sup> – Eyvindr's identity as a merchant rather than a mercenary is still quite clear. Two of Eyvindr's companions are said to be his brother Sámur's servants, while three are said to be traders (again, *farmenn*), presumably shipmates of Eyvindr, and the group is driving ahead of them sixteen pack-horses laden with the goods they have brought (*Hrafn.* 8). This expedition seems less like the homecoming of a carefree mercenary and his comrades than the steady return progress of a successful merchant and his partners or employees after a long stint of business abroad. The distinction between merchants and Vikings, however, must have been less pronounced to saga-writers than to modern readers, and during the years described by the saga-writers Scandinavians in ships laden with goods will often have sailed to lands prepared for either trading or raiding as the situation warranted.<sup>46</sup> In any case, the fight Eyvindr and his men put

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<sup>45</sup> Joyce Hill writes that Eyvindr's colourful clothes and bright shield are symbols of his prestigious, successful travels that provoke status-conscious Hrafnkell to kill him (435).

<sup>46</sup> On Vikings mistaken for traders and ships capable of both mercantile and military functions, see Foote-Wilson 229 and 248-49 respectively.

up in the ensuing attack demonstrates they are certainly prepared to fight, even if that is not their primary business.<sup>47</sup>

**2.i.d. (4)** As noted in §2.i.a.2. above, Bolli Bollason does not travel to the distant south exclusively for mercenary service with the Byzantine emperor. Rather, he expresses his original desire for travel in terms of the knowledge or experience of the world he will gain: <sup>62</sup> „*Þat hefi ek lengi haft í hug mér, at ganga suðr um sinns sakar; þykkir maðr við þat fávíss verða, ef hann kannar ekki víðara en hér Ísland*“ (*Lax.* 72: 211). Bolli is perfectly clear on the direction he wishes to travel. The savage, largely unpopulated distant west and north are certainly not places to gain respectable, civilised education, and the Russian courts of the east, though populated and civilised, lack the southern capital's grandeur and proximity to the foci of the Christian world, Rome and Jerusalem. In his decision to seek knowledge in Byzantium Bolli is not unlike Eirekr víðfrli, whose more aimless wanderings eventually take him to a wise Byzantine king who gives Eirekr purpose and direction (see §2.i.e. below).<sup>48</sup>

After Bolli has spent a winter in Norway, he again expresses his desire to travel south, this time in terms of the dishonour of failing to gain experience or knowledge. Asked whether he intends to return to Iceland that spring or remain in Norway, Bolli responds: <sup>63</sup> „*Ek ætla mér hvárki, ok er þat satt at segja, at ek hafða þat ætlat, þá er ek fór af Íslandi, at eigi skyldi at spyrja til mín í tðru húsi*“ (*Lax.* 73: 213). Bolli then travels south first to Denmark and later on to Byzantium. For Bolli, the education necessary to avoid the ignorance of remaining

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<sup>47</sup> The synoptic history *Ágrip* portrays the southern far-traveller Haraldr harðráði in a similar fashion to Eyvindr. Military service is not referred to either of the two times Haraldr's sojourn in Constantinople is mentioned (though Haraldr does refer to his "great feats", *mikil stórvirki*), and he returns to the north in a ship well-laden with cargo (*Ágrip* 32; 38: 36).

<sup>48</sup> Desire to acquire knowledge of foreign peoples is apparent in other saga-characters whose journeys away from Iceland are crucial to their development as characters. Earlier in *Laxdæla saga* an Icelander expresses a desire to journey abroad which his uncle correctly interprets as a wish to learn of foreign ways (*at kanna annara manna sið*, *Lax.* 40: 114). The title character of *Gunnlaugs saga ormstunga* insists from a young age that his father fund his travels abroad so that he can see how other people live (*at sjá sið annara manna*, *Gunn.* 4: 59). Neither character specifies a predetermined direction or becomes a far-traveller. Kristel Zilmer observes that although

all one's life in Iceland is not available in Norway or Denmark or anywhere else in northern Europe; for the experience he desires he must travel all the way to the Byzantine empire and distinguish himself there. Whatever knowledge or experience Bolli seeks, it is military glory he soon gains, and Bolli becomes the quintessential southern mercenary (see §2.i.a.3. above). Yet it is clear that, at least initially, Bolli desires not a soldier's pay but experience of the wide world offered by the mercenary opportunities and grandeur of the distant south.

**2.i.d. (5)** A final unique motivation for travel to Byzantium is found in *Finnboga saga ramma*, after the title character has won his way into the retinue of the ruler of Norway, Óláfr Tryggvason's predecessor and antagonist Hákon jarl Sigurðarson.<sup>49</sup> Finnbogi has proved himself against two of the jarl's champions, a *blámaðr* and a bear, so Hákon entrusts his mighty new follower with a very particular task. Another of Hákon's followers, Bersi hvíti ("white"), was earlier lent twelve marks of silver by the jarl and subsequently disappeared. Hákon tells Finnbogi:

<sup>64</sup> „Nú er mér sagt, at hann sé kominn út í Grikkland, en þar ræðr fyrir konungr sá, er Jón heitir, ok ágætr höfðingi. Nú hefir Bersi gerzt hirðmaðr Jóns konungs ok vel virðr. Nú vil ek senda þik eptir fénu. Vil ek nú hafa hálfu meira eða höfuð hans ella.“  
(*Finn.* 18: 286)

Finnbogi travels south to Byzantium with men and equipment the jarl provides. Lodging near the imperial residence, Finnbogi and his men hold markets for the local populace but do not draw attention to themselves. When Finnbogi comes before the emperor and explains his

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the reasoning behind travelling usually has "a pragmatic orientation", the sagas occasionally show a character's "genuine eagerness to experience the world and learn about other people" (2005b: 78-79).

<sup>49</sup> *Finnboga saga* is one of the later *Íslendingasögur*, composed in the early 14th century or possibly the very late 13th century (ÍF XIV lxxviii-lxix, Pulsiano 194).

mission, the emperor first invites him to stay and trade all winter and later ensures his errand's success by ordering Bersi to pay the owed silver at once (*Finn.* 19, 20).<sup>50</sup>

Finnbogi's journey to the distant south shows some attributes of other saga-characters' journeys there: like Þorsteinn drómundr and Þorsteinn Víga-Styrsson, he chases another Norseman there with (partially) violent intentions, and even more explicitly than the trader Eyvindr Bjarnason, Finnbogi engages in trade in the south. Like the Norwegian prince Eirekr víðfrli, Finnbogi is introduced to Christianity by the Byzantine emperor (see §2.i.e. below). Curiously, Finnbogi does not join the Varangian regiment or in any way appear to engage in mercenary service for the emperor, despite being recognised by him as a mighty warrior and even given by him his nickname *rammi* ("mighty"). All these activities notwithstanding, Finnbogi unequivocally travels to the distant south at the behest of his liege lord, sent on a quest in which he is ultimately successful. Thus Finnbogi's direct motivation for journeying to Constantinople is unique among southern far-travels. As will be seen in §2.ii.a. of Chapter 5, however, several saga-characters are sent by their lords on quests to the distant north, due, like Finnbogi, to their physical excellence proven in previous trials.

**2.i.e. (Christian piety)** Three saga characters exhibit religious motives for travelling to Byzantium. For two of them, however, travel to the great city seems to be only an indirect result of their pious motivations. One such character is Þorvaldr Koðránsson, the first Christian missionary to Iceland, and appropriately nicknamed *víðfrli*, "widely-travelled." His story is told in a þáttur bearing his name and in *Kristni saga*.<sup>51</sup> Following his long and

<sup>50</sup> There was no emperor named John when the historical Finnbogi would have been in Constantinople, ca. 943-49, but there were several around the time of the saga's writing who acquired "a certain amount of Western European attention" (Blöndal-Benedikz 196).

<sup>51</sup> *Þorvalds þáttur víðfrla* exists in two distinct versions with markedly different endings, one in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* among the so-called *Kristni þættir*, and the other in *Flateyjarbók*. The *Kristni þættir* may derive from the monk Gunnlaugr Leifsson's lost saga of Óláfr Tryggvason (Grønlie xxxiv). *Mesta* also contains the þáttur of Stefnir Þorgilsson, another Icelandic missionary who travels out to Byzantium with Þorvaldr. *Kristni saga* is preserved in the early 14th-century Hauksbók, immediately following that manuscript's version of *Landnámabók*; the beginning and end of the saga are preserved in a 17th-century copy by Jón Erlendsson (ÍF



arduous Christian missionary effort in Iceland, Þorvaldr Koðráns­son travels to Norway, where he comes to a realisation:

65 En með því at hann var maðr mikill af sjálfum sér, sterkr ok hugaðr vel, en í alla staði geyminn Guðs boðorða með fullkominni ástarhygli, þá hugsaði hann þat, ef hann færi enn aptr til sinnar fóstrjarðar, at eigi væri víst hvárt hann þylði svá í alla staði sem vera ætti fyrir Guðs ást mótgang ok meingørðir sinna samlanda. Fyrir því tók hann þat ráð at vitja eigi optarr út til Íslands. (*Þorv. Ó* 10: 88)<sup>52</sup>

Neither the Flateyjarbók version of the þátrr nor *Kristni saga* mentions this pious (if curious) decision, though they do place Þorvaldr's abandonment of Iceland in the context of his hot-tempered reactions to the heathen Icelanders' attempts on his life (*Þorv. F* 3, *Krist. 4*).

Thereafter Þorvaldr's journey takes him first to the Holy Land and then to Byzantium, where he is received with great honour by the emperor himself, who seems most impressed by the traveller's good standing with God. From Byzantium Þorvaldr is sent to Russia to be the emperor's spiritual authority in that vast region. In a place called either Drǫfn or Drafn Þorvaldr builds beside the cathedral of John the Baptist a great monastery later named "Þorvaldsklaustr" in his honour (*Þorv. Ó* 9).<sup>53</sup> So, though neither the þátrr nor the saga explicitly states Þorvaldr's motivation for travelling to Constantinople, his travel there is (in the *Mesta þátrr*) an indirect result of his oddly-reasoned pious decision. Also, in both the þátrr and the saga, once in Constantinople Þorvaldr is honoured for his exceptional Christianity and devotes himself to pious pursuits.<sup>54</sup>

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XV<sub>1</sub> clvi-clix, Grønlie xxxii-xxxiii). *Kristni saga* may have been authored by the *Landnámabók*-reviser Sturla Þórðarsson (Jón 1941: 69-72, 224-25; Grønlie xxxiii).

<sup>52</sup> Citations from the *Mesta*-version of the þátrr are denoted by Ó, those from Flateyjarbók by F.

<sup>53</sup> In *Kristni saga* Þorvaldr is sent up the Dniepr to Kiev but is not said to be the emperor's emissary (Ch. 13). In the *Mesta* version of his þátrr he is sent to *Rússland* and *Garðaríki*; Kiev and Novgorod are probably meant. The Flateyjarbók version of the þátrr does not mention the Holy Land, the cathedral of John the Baptist, or the name of the cloister. *Kristni saga* also fails to name Þorvaldsklaustr.

<sup>54</sup> The historical Þorvaldr is likely to have been in the host of clerics accompanying the emperor's sister Anna when she travelled to Kiev to marry Prince Vladimir (Blöndal 316-17, Blöndal-Benedikz 198-99, Noonan 248).

The second saga-character whose visit to Byzantium is an indirect result of a religious motivation is another man nicknamed “far-” or “widely-travelled”, the title character of *Eireks saga víðftrla*.<sup>55</sup> Like the Christian Icelander Þorvaldr, the heathen Norwegian Eirekr Þrándarson travels as the result of a vow:

66 Þess er getit æitt iola kuelld þa streingde Æirekr þess heit at fara vm allan heim at leita ef hann fynde stad þann er heidnir menn kalla V dains akr. en kristnir menn jord lifande mannaedr Paradisum.<sup>56</sup> Þesse heit stræinging verdr fræg vm allan Noreg. (*Eirek. A 1: 4*)

Mead-hall boasts and vows of future acts of valour are a fine old heathen tradition, so Eirekr’s original motivation may not, strictly speaking, be called pious. The vow is vaguely religious, though, essentially compelling Eirekr to find either the heathen afterlife or Christian Heaven – each connected with the god or gods who created it. Eirekr sets out the following summer, picks up fellow-travellers in Denmark, and sails on to Byzantium. Eirekr and his men immediately assist the king with wise counsel and much gallantry (*med uitriligum radum ok myklum røskleika, Eirek. A 1: 12*) and help the king defend the realm from attackers.<sup>57</sup> Some time later, Eirekr strikes up a conversation with the king and quizzes him at length about

<sup>55</sup> This late, pious fiction, composed in the early 14th century, survives in many manuscripts, both in texts with primarily religious purposes and among riddarasögur and other fornaldarsögur (Jensen xiii, xiv; Pulsiano 160). Eirekr víðftrli is mentioned by name in *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar*, which, like *Eireks saga*, begins its opening genealogy with Eirekr’s father Þrándr (Ch. 1).

<sup>56</sup> Ódainsakr is known only from some fornaldarsögur and Saxo’s *Gesta Danorum*. Saxo names the land Undersake/Undensakre, which suggests that the name may originally have meant “land in the south-east” or “Underworld.” Saxo probably began his history of the Danes around 1180 and completed it between 1208 and 1218 (Fisher 1), showing that the term goes back to about 1200, but there is no documentary evidence of the concept for the heathen period (Simek 1993: 239). The term seems to echo Psalm 114:9 of the Vulgate, *placebo Domino in regione vivorum* – “I shall please the LORD in the land of the living” (Authorised Version, Psalm 116: 9: “I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living”). While this probably means “in this life,” in the context of the medieval Office of the Dead rite it was taken to mean “in heaven.” The commentary of the influential Christian scholar and early church father St John Chrysostom supports this interpretation (Chrysostom 87). Both strands of meaning may influence the *Eireks saga* author’s ultimate representation of Ódainsakr as a kind of paradisiacal “waiting room” for the true heaven in the far eastern environs of the physical world; see also §2.iv.c. of the following chapter. The concept may also be influenced by the Celtic/Irish *tír na mbéa*, “land of living ones”, though there is some debate whether this term refers to a genuinely pre-Christian Celtic Otherworld or is itself a translation of the biblical phrase (see MacCulloch 362; Dumville 81-82; Herren 52, footnote).

<sup>57</sup> In recensions A, B and C the narrator goes on to comment that this is the first time Norsemen fought for the Byzantine monarch. I do not include this with other examples of mercenary service in §2.i.a., as Eirekr’s service

Christianity and the supposed location of Paradise. The king informs him that this is the country furthest east of India (Indíaland). So Eirekr and his men are baptised and travel eastward from Byzantium to continue their search for Paradise; an angel with whom Eirekr later converses in the distant east reveals Eirekr's baptism takes place in the River Jordan, and also that it was at the angel's prompting that Eirekr originally travelled to Byzantium (*Eirek.* 2, 4). In all this it is evident that though Eirekr's original motivation for travelling to Byzantium is a religious one, his purpose is not to receive spiritual edification there, however much edification he ultimately receives. Byzantium is merely a stop on his spiritual quest. For this saga-writer, when one is searching for Paradise, Byzantium is the sort of place where one asks for – and receives – direction. (See also §2.iv.b. of the following chapter, "East.")

The third far-traveller to Constantinople with a pious motivation is Kolskeggr Hámundarson from *Njáls saga*.<sup>58</sup> Staying in Denmark following the violent events that have driven him from Iceland, Kolskeggr dreams that a man radiant with light says Kolskeggr will be given a wife and become the speaker's knight (*riddar*). Presumably the speaker is God: Kolskeggr's dream is interpreted for him by a wise man (*spekingr*), who tells Kolskeggr he must become God's knight in the south (*Njála* 81: 197). Accordingly, though he is baptised in Denmark Kolskeggr can no longer find peace there, and he travels first east to Russia and then south to Byzantium, where he does marry and also becomes a leader in the Varangian regiment. Kolskeggr's journey to the distant south is obedience to God and thus directly motivated by piety. It seems notable that despite the fact that he ends up in the secular Byzantine empire rather than the holy Kingdom of Jerusalem, and despite the fact that he is not described doing battle with heathens, Kolskeggr is nevertheless considered "God's knight" for travelling south and joining the Varangians. This may be yet another indication of

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with the Byzantine king is clearly an action of opportunity, not a premeditated motivation for travelling there. Blöndal and Benedikz also do not include Eirekr in their chapter devoted to miscellaneous Varangians (Ch. 9).

the medieval Scandinavian “moral geography” mentioned in §2.i.c.1. above and discussed more fully in §3.ii. below: travel towards the south, whether to Jerusalem or Constantinople, takes one closer to the spiritual presence of God. Though his travel to Constantinople is not exactly pilgrimage nor motivated simply by desire for mercenary pay, by fighting in the distant south Kolskeggr has become a soldier for God.

## 2.ii. Jórsalaheimr – the Holy Land

**2.ii.a. (Piety)** The curiosity of Eindriði ungi encouraging Rǫgnvaldr jarl Kali to travel to the Holy Land to achieve renown in mercenary service such as Eindriði has enjoyed for years in Byzantium has been noted and discussed in §2.i.b.1. above. Aside from this curious little episode, there is no other suggestion in saga-literature that Norsemen wish to travel to the Holy Land for mercenary service, either for money or secular glory. There is, however, another type of gain associated with travel to that land in the distant south. That gain is spiritual, and, like the temporal glory sought by far-travellers to Byzantium, this spiritual glory is also quite often associated with military service there. The overwhelming majority of journeys to the Holy Land in saga-literature are made with the motive of earning spiritual “kudos”, either with God or with one’s fellow-Scandinavians back home. In instances unconnected with violence, this far-travel to Jerusalem can most accurately be called “pilgrimage.” In instances in which there is military action, it is best called “crusade.”<sup>59</sup>

An Icelandic abbot named Nikulás (usually identified as Nikulás Bergsson of Munkaþverá in Eyjafjtröðr) made a pilgrimage to Rome and the Holy Land sometime in the mid-12th century. On his return Nikulás produced a travel itinerary known as *Leiðarvísir* (“Journey guide”), which draws from both his own experience and earlier written sources

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<sup>58</sup> Also known as *Brennu-Njáls saga* and, familiarly, *Njála*, the great, intricately-plotted saga of Njáll survives in several manuscripts, the earliest from around 1300. The saga dates from after 1271, as legal details in the saga refer to laws introduced to Iceland from Norway in that year (Einar 22, 34).

(Marani 2009a; Simek 1990: 264-67). The text features descriptions of many of the places he visited on his journey, providing details pertinent to travellers (e.g. distances, routes, travel times between destinations) as well as descriptions of churches and other sites of interest. Many historical Scandinavians followed or preceded Nikulás in piously-motivated travel to the south, and so, correspondingly, do many saga-characters. The earliest Scandinavian texts giving accounts of such piously-motivated journeys south, however, pre-date Nikulás's 12th-century itinerary and the 13th-century sagas by several hundred years. These are runic inscriptions. A rune stone in the vicinity of Stockholm memorialises the journey to the distant south of a man named Östen, who travelled to Jerusalem and died in Greece; this pilgrimage was probably made about the time when Danish king Knútr inn ríki went to Rome, in 1027 (Jansson 72). In a now-lost runic inscription recorded by the 17th-century antiquarian Mårten Aschaneus at Almarestäket, a woman named Ingirun is said to be planning a journey "east" to Jerusalem (Jansson 72). Finally, a rune stone found in Uppsala Cathedral refers to a man who died in the south; the phrase is ambiguous, but from the common meaning of *suðrferð*, *suðrfr*, and *ganga suðr* it seems likely this man died on a pilgrimage (Jansson 73). Whether that journey took him to Jerusalem or Rome cannot now be known.

**2.ii.a. (1)** King Sigurðr Magnússon of Norway earns his nickname *Jórsalafari* ("Jerusalem-traveller", perhaps "crusader") by not only making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land but also joining King Baldwin (Baldvini) of Jerusalem in fighting against the Muslim caliphates. *Morkinskinna* relates that three years after his father Magnús's death, Sigurðr prepares to leave Norway, intending to go south to Jerusalem: <sup>67</sup> *Hann hafði með sér fiolment oc gott manval. oc þo þa eina er sialfir villdo fara. oc veita honom fylgð oc foroneyti* (*Mork.* 61: F 338). The far-travellers who join Sigurðr are thus self-motivated, wishing through some

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<sup>59</sup> Though historical Scandinavians did not participate in military actions in Palestine during the years of the Crusades, they did fight the Muslims of the Middle East on behalf of the Christian monarchs of crusader states.

combination of piety and loyalty to travel with the Norwegian monarch to the Holy Land. As for Sigurðr himself, his words to his brother Eysteinn on departing suggest two motivations: he says it is important for them to conduct themselves in a princely fashion to enhance their fame and for the good of their souls. In accordance with the *Morkinskinna*-writer's ambivalent (or perhaps balanced) portrayal of Sigurðr, he here desires both spiritual gain and worldly glory. Sigurðr's desire for fame has been discussed with reference to Byzantium in §2.i.d.1. above.

Snorri quotes a skaldic verse by Einarr Skúlason<sup>68</sup> to describe Sigurðr's arrival in Palestine:

68 Getk þess, es gramr fór vitja,  
glyggs, Jórsala byggðar,  
meðr vitut tǫling æðra,  
ógnblíðr, und sal víðum,  
ok leyghati laugask,  
leyft ráð vas þat, náði  
hauka fróns í hreinu  
hvatr Jórðánar vatn.

(*Mag.* 10: 249-50)

Sigurðr spends the autumn and beginning of winter with King Baldwin in Jerusalem. It seems, then, that Sigurðr's primary intention in coming to the Holy Land is to wash in the River Jordan, a "praise-worthy plan" as the skald calls it, and he is thus motivated by piety. This sense increases when King Baldwin presents the Norwegian king with several holy relics – including a piece of the cross of Christ – but only after Sigurðr swears <sup>69</sup> *at hann skyldi fremja kristni með þllum mætti sínum ok koma í land erkibyskupsstóli, ef hann mætti, ok at krossinn skyldi þar vera, sem inn helgi Óláfr konungr hvíldi, ok hann skyldi tíund fremja ok sjálfr gera*

(*Mag.* 11: 250). Sigurðr's actions in Jerusalem again show a focus on doing what is right and good by God, collecting holy relics with the intention of advancing the cause of Christianity in Norway – whether the original intention is his own or his host's. It is worth noting that he does not ultimately achieve the things he promises: the archbishopric, for example, was established in Niðaróss in 1153 by Sigurðr's stay-at-home nephew Ingi (Foote-Wilson 49, Forte 382). The saga-writers are certainly aware of this, and they adopt a correspondingly ambivalent view of Sigurðr, whose later reign is in the sagas characterised by degeneration and madness, despite the promise of his magnificent and holy youth. Crusade and pilgrimage might only be spiritually beneficial if followed up by good deeds at home. The historical Baldwin can in any case hardly have cared about the establishment of a Norwegian archbishopric, so far from his land and concerns.

Sigurðr's activities in Palestine finally take a turn for the militaristic, as he and Baldwin lead their men in a siege of the heathen town Sæt in Sýrland (Sidon, Syria). The two Christian kings conquer the city and Sigurðr presents his share of it to Baldwin (*Mork.* 61, *Mag.* 11). With this Sigurðr moves from pilgrimage to crusade, his spiritual kudos in this case achieved by vanquishing heathens and giving their city to God – if not directly to Him then at least to one of His representative kings on earth. This militant Christianity is not a new development in Sigurðr, however, nor should we suppose that the pious intention is solely Baldwin's, Sigurðr simply joining him for the fun of it. Rather, Sigurðr's attack on the heathen city comes at the end of a series of similar military actions: in the preceding chapters on Sigurðr's long journey from Scandinavia, no less than eight (successful) battles with opponents specifically identified as heathens are described (*Mag.* 4-7). There is therefore no sense of spiritual spontaneity or haphazardness to his Sidonian siege, but rather one of completeness and fulfilment. Sigurðr, having defeated a succession of heathen hosts on the

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<sup>60</sup> Einarr, whose poem *Geisli* is mentioned in §2.i.a.2. above, was a priest and prominent skald descended from the family of Egill Skallagrímsson, serving 12th-century Norwegian monarchs: Sigurðr, his successor Haraldr

path to Palestine, finally engages infidels there and wins back a city in the Holy Land for God. Immediately after this victory, Sigurðr sails for Constantinople to seek temporal glory (as detailed in §2.i.d.1. above). Though the saga-writers' and skalds' words following this battle contain only the usual sort of praise for a monarch victorious in battle, one can imagine Sigurðr dusting off his hands in self-satisfaction, considering his spiritual errands in the Holy Land accomplished.

**2.ii.a. (2)** Sigurðr Jórsalafari is not the only man to wash in the Jordan, nor the only one to fit crusading into his Palestinian schedule. Two jarls of Orkney, Hákon Pálsson and Rǫgnvaldr Kali, make the long journey south to the Holy Land and wash in the River Jordan. Appropriately, the self-described athlete Rǫgnvaldr even swims across it (*Ork.* 88).<sup>61</sup> The saga-writer does not assign any particular pious motive to Hákon jarl's dip in the holy waters, though he does write that Hákon bathes in the Jordan as is customary for palmers (*svá sem siðr er til pálmara*, *Ork.* 52: 113). The saga-writer also relates that in Jerusalem Hákon seeks holy relics (*sótti þangat helga dóma*, *Ork.* 52: 113).<sup>62</sup> His purpose there seems entirely pious. Curiously, the saga-writer does not explicitly connect Hákon's pilgrimage with any desire to absolve himself of the guilt of having ordered the murder (indeed, martyrdom) of his kinsman and former joint-jarl of Orkney, St Magnús, as one might expect. Absolution for this guilt must then remain a conjectural motivation.<sup>63</sup> Hákon's life in Orkney after he returns from the Holy Land is certainly characterised by attention to good administration of that province and

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gilli, and Haraldr's sons (Jónas 1988: 109; Pulsiano 159).

<sup>61</sup> Though Judith Jesch's examination of the jarl's so-called "Nine Skills" stanza focuses mainly on Rǫgnvaldr's innovations as a poet, Jesch does devote some space to his other, physical accomplishments and skills, giving some interesting possible palaeopathological evidence of his athleticism (2006a: 8). When Sigurðr speaks of his pilgrimage to Jerusalem years later, he says that he too swam across the River Jordan (*Mork.* 71: F 383, U 187).

<sup>62</sup> If *helgir dómar* is considered equivalent to *helgidómar* ("halidoms", "sanctuaries"), Hákon does not seek holy relics but visit holy places, possibly shrines. The context and the word *þangat* ("thither," indicating movement towards) may support this interpretation. See Cleasby-Vigfússon 101, 255.

<sup>63</sup> Strengthening the notion that Hákon's pilgrimage may be motivated by a desire for absolution is the fact that he visits Rome before proceeding to Palestine. Pilgrimage to Rome is in sagas often connected to the desire for absolution from the guilt of specific sins (cf. *Njála* 158, *Gret.* 91).



no longer stained with acts of violence. He also dies in his bed, somewhat atypically for a jarl of Orkney (*Ork.* 53). If it is spiritual kudos Hákon sought in the Holy Land, he may have been granted it.

Rǫgnvaldr jarl bathes in the River Jordan with his men, and, as noted above, he and Sigmundur ǫngull swim across it. On the other side, they compose comic verses about the lazy folk who will not make the journey to the River Jordan themselves, and one of the jarl's verses, true to form, contains a reference to his beloved Ermingerðr (*Ork.* 88).<sup>64</sup> Upon approaching the holy city of Jerusalem, however, Rǫgnvaldr's adopts a more solemn, spiritual tone:

70 „Kross hangir þul þessum,  
þjóst skyli lægt, fyr brjósti,  
flykkisk fram á brekkur  
ferð, en pálmr meðal herða.“ (Ork. 88: 233)

Rǫgnvaldr and his men are also said to visit all the holiest places in Palestine (*Ork.* 88). Thus both Rǫgnvaldr's own verse, contemporary with his travels and representing his own stated motivations, and the prose of the later saga-writer interpreting his motives agree that Rǫgnvaldr's journey to the Holy Land is motivated by piety. Despite Eindriði ungi's original implication that the jarl can win honour in the Holy Land with mercenary service in the company of the most noble people, Rǫgnvaldr here shows he seeks spiritual rather than material gain in this particular southern land. Like Hákon jarl and unlike Sigurðr, Rǫgnvaldr does not follow up pilgrimage with crusade. For the jarls of Orkney at least, far-travel to the Holy Land for spiritual glory is unconnected to military accomplishment.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Rǫgnvaldr's poetic preoccupation with the viscountess of Narbonne is of course quite as likely to be the exercise of a proper gentlemanly pursuit as the expression of genuine, romantic feelings. On Rǫgnvaldr's use of the native form of skaldic verse to express continental, courtly sentiments, see Jesch 2006a: 10-12.

<sup>65</sup> Both historical jarls arrived in Palestine too late to participate in the First Crusade and too early to participate in the Second. The same is true of Sigurðr, however, who nevertheless managed to fight battles in the Holy Land by joining King Baldwin I in his military activities of the early 12th century. Similarly, the earlier Jerusalem-

**2.ii.a. (3)** For Haraldr harðráði, however, military accomplishment seems to be the principle purpose for visiting the Holy Land: his military actions in that land are much more numerous than Sigurðr Jórsalafari's, and his peaceful pilgrimage comes later, almost as a narrative afterthought. Following his successful military exploits in the service of the Byzantine monarchs, Haraldr travels to Palestine. The skald Stúfr blindi ("blind"), who is said to have had his account from Haraldr himself, says:

71 Fór ofrhugi enn øfri

eggjarfr und sik leggja

(fold vas víga valid

virk) Jórsala ór Girkjum.

(*Har.* 12: 83; also *Mork.* 13: F 78, U 11)

According to the verse, contemporaneous with the events it describes and probably drawn directly from the report of Haraldr himself, Haraldr travels to the Holy Land with the express intention of earning his spiritual kudos with the sword. Quoting this same verse by Stúfr, however, *Morkinskinna* gives an alternative purpose for Haraldr's travel to the Holy Land: seeking atonement for his transgressions against God (*Mork.* 13). The generally negative portrayal of Haraldr throughout *Morkinskinna* makes such a desire contextually logical: a chronic sinner like Haraldr clearly needs atonement. Both Snorri and the *Morkinskinna*-writer, however, continue by describing Haraldr's military actions in Palestine: 72 *En hvar sem hann fór um Jórsalaland, váru allar borgir ok kastalar gefnir í vald hans* (*Har.* 12: 83). Haraldr's intention to express militant piety is not an idle one: he sets out to conquer Palestine and does so.<sup>66</sup> Like other travellers to the Holy Land, Haraldr also bathes in the River Jordan, and as in

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faring Norwegian royal, Haraldr harðráði, fights battles in Palestine despite there being no crusade in his time. See §2.ii.a.3. immediately below.

<sup>66</sup> Stúfr and the saga-writers are mistaken in their impression that in Palestine Haraldr conquered a hostile territory. He and his Varangians were probably sent by Emperor Michael IV as an escort for masons and pilgrims sent to rebuild and worship at the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, following a peace treaty struck in 1036 between the Byzantine emperor and the peace-loving Egyptian Caliph Moustansir-Billah. It is

the case of Hákon jarl, it is said to be the custom of palmers. Haraldr also donates generously to the shrines of the sepulchre, the cross and other holy sites, a pious act none of the other saga-pilgrims are described as doing; *Morkinskinna* adds that the amount of money Haraldr donates cannot be counted (*Mork.* 13, *Har.* 12). Returning immediately to the military method of gaining spiritual favour, Haraldr then frees all the roads around the Jordan, killing robbers and other plunderers (*raufara ok annat hernaðarfólk*), corroborated by another verse from Stúfr (*Har.* 12: 84; *Mork.* 13: F 78, U 11). Finally, Haraldr returns to Byzantium.

Haraldr is thus the best all-around example of the pious Jerusalem-traveller: his seemingly single-minded desire for spiritual glory is manifested both in customary palmers' activities and in swinging his sword for the Lord. In contrast to his time in the Byzantine army spent fighting in Greek campaigns and sending his hard-earned booty back to Novgorod for safe-keeping, Haraldr's time in the Holy Land is engaged solely in temporally "non-profit" activities: battles to keep the land under Christian dominion, cleansing himself in holy waters, giving money to the church, and freeing the roads of dangers. The profit Haraldr garners in the Holy Land is spiritual. Incidentally, Snorri's rosy account is consistent with his apparent concern throughout *Haralds saga* with countering Haraldr's usual reputation for meanness and worldliness. *Morkinskinna*, by contrast, offers here only a brief respite from its usual negative portrayal of Haraldr.

**2.ii.a. (4)** Other saga-characters visit the Holy Land for pious purposes. Apocryphal stories are told relating to the great Christianiser Óláfr Tryggvason's travel to and life in the distant south following his defeat and presumed death at the battle of Svǫlðr. Oddr Snorrason and Snorri Sturluson mention the rumours of Óláfr's survival but do not include these southern

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only natural that, as Stúfr and the saga-writers relate, all fortified Palestinian towns open their gates to Haraldr's party and that he takes down robbers and brigands along the way. See Blöndal 121-22, Blöndal-Benedikz 64-65.

episodes in their narratives.<sup>67</sup> Three other southern far-travellers to Jerusalem are the pretender to the Norwegian throne Sigurðr slembidjárn and the title characters of *Ñrvar-Odds saga* and *Þorvalds þáttur víðftrla*.<sup>68</sup> All four men engage in entirely non-violent activities while in the distant south. Þorvaldr, whose somewhat curious pious reason for far-travel southwards to Constantinople is discussed in §2.i.e. above, is said only to first go to the Holy Land to visit holy sites (*at kanna helga staði*, *Þorv.* Ó 10).

After assisting the king of Scotland in several battles, Sigurðr slembir travels south, first to Rome and then to Jerusalem. The writer of *Morkinskinna* reports that Sigurðr visits the sepulchre of Christ and all the holy shrines in Jerusalem, noting that this is customary for pilgrims (*palmarom*). Interestingly, the saga-writer remarks that due to Sigurðr's visit to the holy sepulchre, he <sup>73</sup> *keypti sér sva gþps miscvN.oc mikin veralldar soma* (*Mork.* 84: F 408). As with his earlier royal namesake, Sigurðr's pious achievements in the south thus gain him some temporal glory as well (see also §2.i.d.1. and § 2.ii.a.1. above). The saga-writer goes on to quote the skald Ívarr Ingimundarson, who has his own þáttur in *Morkinskinna*:

<sup>74</sup> Sotti breiða  
borg lorsala  
oR oddviti  
vt ilondum:  
aþr ivatni  
þvi er vigþi gvð  
Sigvrþr af sér

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<sup>67</sup> Oddr's *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar* is the oldest of the surviving sagas of Óláfr, first composed in Latin around 1190 and subsequently translated into Icelandic (Jónas 1988: 157, Pulsiano 449). A fellow-monk at Þingeyrar named Gunnlaugr Leifsson wrote his own Latin life of Óláfr Tryggvason around the same time and translated it into Icelandic, but neither the Latin nor the Icelandic version of Gunnlaugr's work survives (Jónas 1988: 157-8, Pulsiano 449). ÍF XXV provides the texts of the two principal manuscripts, AM 310 4to (A) and Stockholm 18 4to (S), in parallel; where relevant I identify in citation the manuscript used. The synoptic histories also mention the rumour without narrating the episodes (*HN* 17, *Ágrip* 20, Theo. 14).

synþir þvegi.

(*Mork.* 84: F 408, U 203)

Like other travellers to the Holy Land, Sigurðr slëmbir is thus unequivocally a pilgrim in the Holy Land, seeking and achieving absolution from his sins in the waters of the Jordan.<sup>69</sup>

Though the narrative informs briefly that Sigurðr returns home via Greece, France and Saxony, no stories are told of his activities there.

There are two accounts of “Arrow”-Oddr’s journey to and activities in the Holy Land in his saga. In a verse narrative at the end of the saga, purporting to be Oddr’s own autobiographical musings at the end of his 300-year-long life<sup>70</sup>, Oddr describes his activities in the distant south of many years before, starting with his reaction to baptism in Aquitaine (Stanzas 56-57):

75 “Réð ek skunda

frá skatna liði,

unz hittak breiða

borg Jórsala;

réð ek allr

í á fara,

ok kunnak þá

Kristi at þjóna.

“Veit ek, at fossum

falla lét

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<sup>68</sup> Þorvaldr’s visit to the Holy Land is not related in the Flateyjarbók version. The meaning of Sigurðr’s nickname, often shortened to *slëmbir*, is ambiguous; “sham deacon”, “hack deacon” and “fortuitous deacon” are all possibilities (Andersson-Gade 455, endnote 69.3).

<sup>69</sup> The corresponding account in *Heimskringla* is more brief and quotes no verses (ÍF XXVIII 297-98).

<sup>70</sup> *Þrvar-Odds saga*’s editor R.C. Boer dates the saga to the last decades of the 13th century (1892: x). The saga must certainly have existed in some form by 1314, when it appears in a catalogue of books (Jónas 1988: 356). Among the sources of the saga are the very old poem “Hjálmar’s death-song” (of which the saga preserves some *lausavísur*) and possibly an 11th-century version of Oddr’s so-called *ævidrápa* or *ævikviða*, of which the version in the last chapter of Oddr’s saga is a later re-working (Boer 1891: 138-39).

Jórdán um mik  
 fyrir útan Grikki;  
 helt enn þó,  
 sem hverr vissi,  
 ítrger skyrta  
 öllum kostum.”

(*Ñrv.* 32: 357-58)

The verse here places the Jordan “beyond the Greeks” (perhaps “far beyond the Greeks”), indicating that in the verse-composer’s mind there is no confusion between the two lands.

Also, Jerusalem and the River Jordan are here directly connected with Christian piety.

Perhaps the saga-writer considers the two southern lands not only spatially separated but, like me, differentiates between them according to separate sets of motivations, pious service in Jerusalem and mercenary service in Byzantium.

The prose narrative that describes Ñrvar-Oddr’s travel to the Holy Land appears earlier in the saga and gives more detailed information than the verse stanzas. Oddly enough, Oddr’s most immediate reason for fleeing Aquitaine, where he has (grudgingly) become Christian, and travelling from there to Jórsalaheimr is to escape the stifling attention of the other Christians. Irked (*leiðr*) by the enthusiastic attention of the Christians there, Oddr gives his adorers the slip and wanders from land to land until he reaches Jerusalem. As in the verse, the protective virtue of Oddr’s magical silk shirt that repels all wounding agents is unchanged by Oddr’s immersion in the sanctified waters of Jordan. The prose, however, does not mention the piety of the bath, rendering somewhat cryptic the revelation that the heathen power of the shirt still works (*Ñrv.* 17). The River Jordan’s “seal of approval” on Oddr’s magical shirt is nevertheless in keeping with the saga’s easy and accommodating dovetailing of heathenism and Christianity. A heathen *völva* is, for example, able to prophesy correctly about Oddr’s abnormally long life and the circumstances of his death, but the abnormally long life seems to be not a whim of fate but an integral part of God’s plan to allow Oddr enough years to

become Christian before he dies. The magical shirt is thus not anti-Christian: God allows its power to continue after Oddr's pseudo-baptism in order to maintain the plan He has ordained and the völvu witnessed years before.

The artistry of the saga-writer may be at work in the contrast between the harum-scarum recklessness of Oddr's youth indicated in this prose account and the greater experience and many years as a Christian stretching behind him exhibited by the hero in his death-bed verses. The contrast is certainly strong enough to be deliberate. The ambivalent, agnostic and easily-bored traveller meandering about southern Europe and the Holy Land in the prose account is neatly balanced by the older, wiser and more Christian man of later years, described in a more pious tone in Oddr's autobiographical *ævidrápa*.

Oddr Snorrason and the writers of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* and the later compendium in *Flateyjarbók* all relate that King Óláfr survives the battle of Svílóðr after leaping from his ship and disappearing beneath the waves. The writer of *Mesta* tells that at the end of the battle a man in red clothing is seen swimming towards a swift boat manned by followers of the Wendish princess Ástríðr; he climbs aboard and is rowed away. The saga-writer then insists at some length that, despite the disbelieving verses of Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, Óláfr left the battle alive (*Mesta* 256: 292-96). Oddr does not include this episode in his account of the battle, but several chapters later in both sagas, Oddr and the *Mesta*-writer relate some of the stories that "prove" Óláfr left the battle alive. Recuperating from his wounds in Wendland with Princess Ástríðr, Óláfr rejects invitations to re-insert himself into northern European political life, commenting that he has displeased God and it is now God's will that he has been removed as king of Norway (Oddr A 80: 357, *Mesta* 267: 318-19). The *Mesta*-writer continues, saying that when Óláfr is asked what he wishes to do, he responds that he will travel south to Rome. From Rome Óláfr journeys to the Holy Land, where he meets the patriarch and the king of Jerusalem. Recognising Óláfr's royalty, the two

rulers offer him a large realm to rule, but in accordance with his pious desire to now follow God's will, Óláfr refuses the realm and accepts only two towns and three castles; he also puts on a monk's habit (*Mesta* 268: 319-20). Óláfr's final appearance in the saga occurs several chapters later, when about fifty years after the battle of Svǫlör a Norse pilgrim to Rome named Gautr travels on to Jerusalem and loses his way in the desert while travelling from there to Egypt. Gautr comes upon a stone house beside a monastery in the wilderness, where he meets an old man who questions Gautr in Norse (*dtnsk tunga*) about very specific pieces of news from Scandinavia (*Mesta* 283: 340-42). Finally suspecting the hermit's identity, Gautr asks him directly if he is King Óláfr. Though the old man brushes aside the question with a cryptic denial, he subsequently gives Gautr tokens to take back to Norway and give to Óláfr's old follower Einarr þambarskelfir ("gut shaker"<sup>71</sup>); Einarr recognises the tokens as the possessions of Óláfr Tryggvason (*Mesta* 283: 345-47).<sup>72</sup>

It is clear that Óláfr's motivations for travelling south to Jerusalem are pious. He does not seem to be even partially motivated by fear of violence from his Scandinavian enemies, as he has an abundance of royal supporters of his cause in Wendland and England. Furthermore, if his time in the Holy Land can in any sense be considered "exile", it is a pious sort of exile, ordained by God and endured obediently by his good servant Óláfr. His earlier time abroad in Russia, by contrast, was a period of very political exile (see §2.i.a. in the following chapter). His piety is further emphasised by a token he chooses to send back to King Æthelred with some Englishmen returning from a pilgrimage: a book containing his own saga and those of six other holy men (*Mesta* 269). Óláfr's pious motivation in travelling to the Holy Land is nevertheless different from those of the other pilgrims and crusaders there. Unlike the others,

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<sup>71</sup> Einarr's nickname is traditionally taken to refer to either the gut (*þtmb*) of which his bowstring is made or his belly. A recent analysis, however, suggests the meaning may originally have been "terror of the belly", "belly" a euphemism for "womb", and thus "fornicator" (Uspenskij 978-81).

<sup>72</sup> The narrative in *Flateyjarbók* (IV, pp. 558-62) follows that of *Mesta* very closely. Though Oddr Snorrason refers to the rumour that Óláfr ends his days in a monastery in the south, he does not relate the story of Gautr (see ÍF XXV 358, 372-74).



he is not said either to visit holy sites or to dip in the River Jordan, and he neither donates money to worthy causes nor lifts a sword in the service of God or his earthly ministers. His piety is rather monastic, even heremital: he truly wishes to seclude himself from all temporal things and devote his attention to God. His choice of Palestine for this seclusion is logical not only because it is a holy location, near to the centre of the Christian world, but also because its great distance from Scandinavia reflects Óláfr's great importance to and involvement in Scandinavian public life and consciousness. Where an ordinary man wishing to abjure the world may need only to join the nearest monastery or set up his hermitage on a nearby island, Óláfr must leave Scandinavia entirely and relocate to a wilderness as far to the south as he can to avoid becoming re-entangled in temporal matters.

### 2.ii.b. (Minor motivations)

**2.ii.b. (1)** In addition to the prominent motive of spiritual gain, there are three additional character motivations for travelling south to the Holy Land. The first is quite straightforward. Eiríkr, reputedly the son of King Sigurðr Haraldsson of Norway and thus called "konungsson", is introduced in Chapter 59 of *Sverris saga*<sup>73</sup> having just returned from Jerusalem. There he underwent an ordeal to prove the legitimacy of his claim to the Norwegian throne: he carried a candle across the River Jordan and the flame was not extinguished.<sup>74</sup> The other two motivations for far-travel to the Holy Land are more ambiguous and less easily-defined.

The first arises out of the episode in Chapter 85 of *Orkneyinga saga* in which Eindriði ungi invites Rǫgnvaldr jarl Kali of Orkney to lead an expedition to the Holy Land (see §§2.i.b. and 2.ii.a. above). The text gives no explanation why Eindriði, who had spent his time in

<sup>73</sup> Uniquely, much of *Sverris saga* was dictated by its own subject. The Icelandic abbot Karl Jónsson visited Norway between 1185 and 1188, where King Sverrir commissioned his saga from Karl and more or less told him what to write (Jónas 1988: 152-54, Pulsiano 628). The saga was probably completed soon after Sverrir's death in 1202 (ÍF XXX xxxvi-xxxvii).

<sup>74</sup> Eiríkr is also said to have spent time in the service of Mánúli konungr (Emperor Manuel I Comnenus) in Constantinople along with many important men. No further details are given.

Byzantium, encourages Rǫgnvaldr to travel to Palestine. It was suggested above that the simplest explanation is that Eindriði does not recognise a difference between the Byzantine empire and the Holy Land. If, however, either he or the saga-writer does recognise a difference, Eindriði's words present another motivation to travel to Palestine. Telling Rǫgnvaldr he is well-suited to go to the Holy Land on account of his abilities, Eindriði says, <sup>76</sup> *muntu þar bezt virðr, sem þú kemr með tignum mǫnnum* (*Ork.* 85: 194). The saga-writer then reports that many others present back up Eindriði's words, urging Rǫgnvaldr to lead such an expedition. The jarl eventually agrees, mainly because it is honourable people (*gǫfgr menn*) who urge him, many of whom join him on the expedition (*Ork.* 85). The motivation suggested by all this is the desire to gain honour by mixing with honourable men, or those of noble families. This motivation for travel to Jerusalem is evident only in this one example, yet it reminds one of Sigurðr Jórsalafari's self-aggrandising postures and efforts to appear a great monarch in the eyes of the Byzantine rulers described in §2.i.d.1. above. The motivation is also not unheard of in intra-Scandinavian travelling contexts. Oddr Ófeigsson, for example, is said in *Bandamanna saga* to travel about on trading voyages, not only becoming prosperous and famous but also gaining honour and respect by sojourning abroad with "men of rank and other leading people" (*hǫfðingjum og tignum mǫnnum*, 1: 297).<sup>75</sup>

The writer of *Orkneyinga saga* does not make clear whether Eindriði suggests Rǫgnvaldr will gain honour mixing with Mediterranean or Scandinavian nobility. The latter is suggested by the facts that Rǫgnvaldr agrees to go only at the urging of respected Northmen and that so many of them join his expedition (and are important enough to be listed by name). The former is suggested by the very fact that Eindriði intimates the jarl must go to the Holy Land to gain this honour. Indeed, Rǫgnvaldr is arguably already mixing with these "men of

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<sup>75</sup> *Bandamanna saga* probably dates from somewhat later than 1250 (ÍF VII xci-xciii). Oddr is himself shown to be a far-traveller in *Odds þáttir Ófeigssonar*, in which Oddr employs various ruses to hide from King Haraldr the Lappish tribute his men have kept back for themselves after a trading/tribute-collection voyage to Finnmark.

nobility” by spending time in the Norwegian royal court; there is no need for him to gather men from the best families for a convoy off to the distant south when he is already in the company of the Norwegian monarch and his retainers. In either case, this ambiguously-defined motivation sets itself apart from the common motivation for far-travel to Palestine by not being even remotely connected to earning spiritual “kudos” through service to the Lord, peaceful or otherwise. Here the honour to be earned seems to be the entirely temporal one of associating with those in earthly power, either the foreign nobles the jarl will meet in his travels or the many noble Northmen who will accompany him on that journey.

**2.ii.b. (2)** The third ambiguous motivation is one that may best be called “tourism.” While the actual concept of “tourism” did not, of course, exist when the sagas were written and would not for centuries to come, some details of the activities of the Scandinavians in the Holy Land are very much like the behaviour of modern-day tourists. The broadest indication of this is the uniformity of the activities of the Norse pilgrims in the Holy Land. Five of the six parties that reach Palestine are said to bathe in the River Jordan, and in three of the accounts (*Ork.* 52, *Mork.* 13, *Har.* 12) this activity is said to be customary (*siðr, hátt*) among other pilgrims. Four of the parties are said to visit holy places or relics (*helga dóma*) in the Holy Land, and Haraldr harðráði actually donates money to them (*Ork.* 52, 88 and *Har.* 12). This is recognisably the behaviour of modern tourists, engaging in the activities customary when visiting a certain land and visiting all the “must-see” sites. The Jerusalem-traveller who distinguishes himself most from the others, however, is the Gautr who gets lost in the wilderness on his way from the Holy Land to Egypt and encounters the aged Óláfr Tryggvason (see §2.ii.a.4. above). Once Gautr and his travelling-companion Gauti have reached Jerusalem, the writer of *Mesta* relates: <sup>77</sup> *Pvi nærst villdu þeir fara fyrir forvitnis sakir*

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There is, however, no suggestion that the nobles and rulers referred to in *Bandamanna saga* are either Lapps or Norsemen living in Finnmark. See §2.i.a.2. of Chapter 5, “North.”

*alt vt at sea hít rauða haf. ok hvar Moyses hafði Gyðinga lyð leið<t> utan af Egipta landi* (*Mesta* 283: 340-41). Curiosity to see a well-known site is tourism, pure and simple.

Weakening the examples of this motivation is the fact that all accounts, with the exception of the account of Gautr and Gauti, arguably describe the correct behaviour of devout pilgrims: the homogeneity of their experiences may indicate only correct fulfilment of their palmer intentions. The possibility remains, however, that these far-travellers visit the popular sites both as pilgrims and as tourists, and that (pragmatically speaking, at least) they value the stories they will tell upon returning to Scandinavia as much as the spiritual favour they are earning. Like Viking raiding and trading (see §2.i.d.3. above), the motivations of pilgrimage and tourism may be to the saga-writers much less separable than to modern readers. As mentioned in §2.ii.a. above, Rǫgnvaldr and one of his followers, Sigmundur ǫngull, not only dip in the River Jordan but swim across to the other side, as Sigurðr Jórsalafari says he did, indicating that to them the river is less a place of baptism than a swimming pool (*Ork.* 88, *Mork.* 71).<sup>76</sup> Other men seem to be there for nothing more than to drink. Two separate instances are described in which members of the jarl's party are completely drunk. In the first episode, Erlingr skakki returns from town to the ship along the pier and is too drunk to recognise the locals' cries for right-of-way – he ends up tumbling into the mud below.<sup>77</sup> In the second, more sinister episode, a group of Northmen are leaving the same town, all very drunk (*mjǫk druknir*), when they notice that one of their companions, Jón fótr ("foot") is missing. They discover him the next morning, dead of mysterious wounds by the city wall (*Ork.* 88). This drunken behaviour is not easily reconcilable with the official intents and purposes of either pilgrims or crusaders, but it fits neatly into the pattern of behaviour

<sup>76</sup> Joyce Hill notes the Jordan-swimming feats of Sigurðr and Rǫgnvaldr as examples of the secular prestige-seeking focus of their southern pilgrimages (440, 445; see also §2.i.d.1. above). Hill observes that the values of *Orkneyinga saga*, even during the account of pilgrimage, run counter to the ecclesiastical prestige system which the 1192 declaration of Rǫgnvaldr's sanctity suggests (446).

<sup>77</sup> The word Rǫgnvaldr's verse reports is shouted at Erlingr, *miðhæfi*, is probably a Norseman's mishearing of Greek *μή διάβε* (me diabe, "do not cross"; Blöndal 234, Blöndal-Benedikz 155-56).

associated with rowdy tourists.<sup>78</sup> Their behaviour also recalls the Vínlandic verse of Þórhallr veiðimaðr quoted in *Eiríks saga rauða*, in which he complains of sailing to Vínland expecting to find wine and having to drink water instead.

### 3. Other narrative patterns

#### 3.i. Dying in the distant south

There are two minor narrative patterns related to piously-motivated far-travel to the distant south. The first is the pattern of dying in the distant south, in which a saga-character travels south to Jerusalem on a pilgrimage or to Byzantium for pious reasons and does not return home to Scandinavia. In the accounts that tell of Óláfr Tryggvason's sojourn in the south as a monk, Óláfr is said to live out his days in seclusion and never return to the north (Oddr 78: 242-43, 259-61; *Ólaf.* 112: 368-70; *Mesta* 283). At the end of his reign as king of Denmark Eiríkr góði plans a great expedition to Jerusalem, though his journey takes him first to Constantinople, where he seems to be no more than a royal visitor with no particular purpose to his visit there (see §2.i.d.1. above). On the voyage from that great city to the Holy Land, Eiríkr reaches no further Cyprus (Kipr) in the Ægean Sea before he contracts a fatal illness and dies (*Knytt.* 81; Saxo XII.vii). Þorvaldr víðftrli travels to Byzantium and never returns to the north, but he dies not in that city but in Kiev, represented in his þátrr as tributary to the Byzantine emperor. Þorvaldr's time in these two distant cities and his death are also related to piety: when he dies he is buried in a large, fine monastery he himself built (*Krist.* 13; *Þorv.* Ó 10, F 4). His travelling-companion Stefmir, by contrast, returns to Denmark and meets a bad end after uttering a verse indicting a jarl for involvement in the death of Óláfr Tryggvason, Stefmir's earlier patron (*Krist.* 13; *Mesta* 263: 305).

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<sup>78</sup> Some Byzantine sources also tell anecdotes of the disastrous results of Norsemen's drunkenness in the distant south (Blöndal-Benedikz 115-16, 118-19). Perhaps in anticipation of just such fiascos, the southern far-travelling Danish king Eiríkr góði warns the Varangians against excessive drunkenness (Saxo XII.vii).

Applying an underlying meaning to these accounts may be somewhat artificial, as in each case the character's death in the far south may simply result from narrative convenience, or, even more simply, from the saga-writer's belief that this was what actually happened. There does, however, seem to be the common element of fulfilment in these characters' deaths: Scandinavians travelling to the distant south for absolution or another pious purpose have completed the final spiritual requirement in their lives and may then die in peace. Certainly Eiríkr góði and Þorvaldr víðftrli leave the north with the expressly-stated intention of not returning: King Eiríkr proclaims he will not return from Jerusalem and arranges the royal succession when he departs (*Knytt.* 79), and Þorvaldr's original impetus to travel widely stems from his decision to never return to his home country of Iceland (*Þorv.* Ó 10). These journeys south to Jerusalem with no intention of returning may reflect what some historical pilgrims actually did. The subject of the lost runic inscription of Almarstaket (referred to in §2.ii.a. above) erected it in her own memory, prior to her journey to the Holy Land. If she had thought she was going to return, she would presumably have waited until she got back to bear the expense and trouble of having the inscription carved.

Examples of characters dying on their journeys to or from distant lands in other directions include Bjarni Grímólfsson in *Eiríks saga rauða* (west) and the title character of *Yngvars saga víðftrla* (east). In both accounts, the reason for the death is given in great detail (and, in Bjarni's case, with admiration), which sets them apart somewhat from the examples of deaths during far-travels south. Bjarni's death does not carry a hint of spiritual fulfilment, as he dies a premature death when his worm-eaten ship sinks in the Irish Sea (*Eir.* 13). Yngvarr's death is more like the southern examples in that his quest eastward is motivated at least partly by piety (see §2.iii.b. of the following chapter), but like Bjarni Grímólfsson he dies due to misfortune and his death seems a bit premature to be a natural fulfilment of his spiritual life. Yngvarr even describes it as a plague God has sent in judgement for his sins,

which may imply that in dying he atones for those sins (*Yng.* 8). The examples of death in the distant south thus hang together rather well in contrast to the examples of deaths in distant lands in other directions, indicating once more that the common theme of spiritual fulfilment may underlie them.

### 3.ii. Giving up violence

There are also a couple of examples of saga-characters giving up violence and leading peaceful lives after journeying to the distant south; this pattern is also related to Christian piety. Two saga-characters discussed in §3.iii. of the preceding chapter, Eiríkr rauði of the *Vínland sagas* and Refr of *Króka-Refs saga*, give up violence after travelling to Greenland in the distant west, but they do so imperfectly. Eiríkr, though successfully avoiding violence for the rest of his life, dies an unconverted heathen (*Gr.* 4), while Refr, despite good intentions, is drawn back into violence following a campaign of insults by his neighbours (*Kró.* 7). Likewise, two violent or sinful saga-characters give up their lives of violence or sin following their absolution in or pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Hákon jarl Pálsson of Orkney makes a journey south to Rome and later travels beyond to Jerusalem and the Holy Land, where he bathes in the River Jordan (*Ork.* 52; see §2.ii.a.2. above). Though the text does not explicitly say Hákon either seeks or receives from any authority in Rome or Jerusalem absolution from his sins, that Hákon seeks (and finds?) absolution on his *suðrfr* may be surmised from the context of the account. Immediately before this episode, the saga describes Hákon ordering the death of St Magnús following several chapters' worth of highly appreciative praise of Magnús' saintly life and acts. To the saga-writer, if anyone is in need of absolution it is Hákon jarl. Following the account of Hákon at the River Jordan, the saga continues:

78 Eptir þat vendi hann aptr til óðala sinna ok tók undir sik ríki í Orkneyjum. Hann gerðisk þá stjórnsmátt ok friðaði vel ríki sitt. Setti hann þá í Orkneyjum ný lög, þau er bóndum hugnuðu miklu betr en þau, er áðr váru. Tóku við slíkt at vaxa vinsældir hans; kom þá svá, at Orkneyingar stunduðu á ekki annat en hafa Hákon at htfðingja ok hans afspringi. (*Ork.* 52: 113)

Following Hákon's pilgrimage, the people of Orkney at least seem to have forgiven the man who had had their beloved St Magnús murdered. Hákon's later years are peaceful and he dies in his bed (*Ork.* 53). This may without any great leap of imagination be construed as Hákon's earthly reward for his act of penitence in the Holy Land, and we may suppose that God too has now forgiven Hákon. The implication is clear and simple: travel to the holiest sites on Earth has the spiritually healing power to make a peacemaker of the most violent sort of man.

The title character of *Þorvalds þáttur víðftrla* is an additional, if somewhat weaker example of this pattern (see §2.i.e. above). Previous to his far-travel south to the Holy Land and Byzantium, Þorvaldr is twice criticised for being too violent a man. Afterwards, he is said only to build a monastery, die and be buried there, possibly indicating a change in his life for the more pious and less violent. This, however, is not explicitly stated. Þorvaldr does nevertheless die a peaceful death and lie buried on holy ground, which together with the example of Hákon suggests that in contrast to far-travel to the west, which may have a partially ameliorating effect on violent or sinful people, piously-motivated far-travel to the south can effect a complete turnaround in a life and change a wretched sinner into a sociable, peaceful or perhaps just a forgiven person.

This relates to the "moral geography" of the medieval Scandinavian mind mentioned in §2.i.c. above. To saga-writers movement south and southeast, the general direction of the two unequivocally holy cities Rome and Jerusalem, is "good" or "holy" movement,



pilgrimage to Jerusalem being perhaps “more holy” than travel to Rome.<sup>79</sup> Byzantium is naturally less holy still, lacking either the pope or the sites of Christ’s activities (River Jordan, Golgotha); it nevertheless exhibits some degree of sanctity by virtue of its position in the south and east. Movement north certainly takes one towards the land of evil beings – trolls, giants and magic-dealing Lapps – and movement west may also indicate movement towards evil, or at least away from Christendom. This moral geography is not by any means exclusive to Scandinavians. In the 9th-century Anglo-Saxon poem *Genesis B*, itself probably a translation of an Old Saxon original, Satan sets up his kingdom in opposition to God by fortifying lands in the north and west (ll. 274-76, *Junius* 11). In Alfred the Great’s *Metres of Boethius*, harsh, evil-doing winds come from the north or north-west and reviving ones from the south-east (metre iv, Alfred 59). Abbo of Fleury’s *Passio Sancti Eadmundi* contains an even more explicit example of this European moral geography of the world, where Abbo explains the fundamental reason the ferocious Danes attack England:

Denique constat iuxta prophetae uaticinium quod ab aquilone uenit omne malum, sicut plus aequo didicere, perperam passi aduersos iactus cadentis tesserae, qui aquilonalium gentium experti sunt seuitiam. (Abbo 5: 71-72)

Furthermore, it is known according to the prophecy of the prophet that all evil comes from the north, as those in particular have come to understand who, because they have suffered the unfavourable cast of lots/dice, have been tried by the ferocity of the Northern peoples.<sup>80</sup>

By God’s own ordaining then, unholiness and barbarism simply emanate from the north as holiness and cultured civilisation emanate from the south. At best, western and northern lands are peripheral: in both Alfred and Bede’s writings it is clear that the British Isles are viewed in

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<sup>79</sup> On the “hierarchy” of Rome and Jerusalem as pilgrimage sites in the medieval Icelandic world-view, see Sverrir 2005: 162-80 (Icelandic), 365 (English).

this manner, and Iceland's identity in medieval continental Europe is of course *Ultima Thule*.<sup>81</sup> Thus movement south in the physical world, especially towards Jerusalem, is travel towards the centre of the spiritual world, towards places truly imbued with God's presence.

#### 4. Conclusions

In summary, the most prominent motivations for travel to Constantinople are mercenary service, followed by the desire for glory or honour in that distant, southern empire.

Vengeance-related violence is also a motivating factor for travel there. Journeys to Jerusalem are motivated almost exclusively by different types of piety, pilgrimage and crusading being characteristic and absolution being occasionally detectable. We thus see with the southern far-travellers of the sagas what we have seen with far-travellers to the west, that journeys made to distant lands are most often motivated by pragmatic reasons. This is most obvious in the commercialism of the mercenary motivation for travel to Byzantium. What is more, saga-characters who become involved in commercial ventures in the distant south, like those who travel west, have often been initially motivated to go there by a separate impetus, such as feud-violence. As Eiríkr rauði turns to profitable settlement in Greenland after being outlawed from Iceland, so Þormóðr Eindriðason enlists in the Varangian regiment after killing one of Haraldr harðráði's retainers and being compelled to flee the north.

The pragmatism of piously-motivated pilgrimages to the Holy Land is not so immediately apparent as the clear financial draw of military service for the Greek emperor, but it is evident on closer inspection. The piety of the south-travelling pilgrims need not be mercenary for them to be pragmatic. For one who is truly Christian, nothing can be more practical than to ensure one's place in God's eternal kingdom and at the same time express

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<sup>80</sup> Translation provided by Dr Donata Kick. While Abbo here refers to a previously existing tradition, his own anti-Norse bias may result from his residence in the 10th-century Loire area, a region frequently ravaged in Viking raids. See Price 23/341 - 54/372.

allegiance or even devotion to one's acknowledged spiritual – and to a large extent, temporal – lord. Also, some of the south-faring pilgrims have an even more specific pragmatic reason for travel, making the journey to obtain absolution (from one of the only places one truly can) for often quite despicable sins committed. If one must obtain forgiveness for these acts to secure eternal life, the great expense and effort required to reach the purifying waters of the River Jordan is a reasonable expenditure on the spiritual balance-sheet. The Holy Land functions rather like the northern sites of pilgrimage associated with particular northern saints' cults; Jerusalem is simply the original, prototypical and most spiritually beneficial such site. If one can gain spiritual benefit from travelling from Iceland to Norway to worship at the shrine of St Óláfr in Niðaróss, how much more spiritual benefit can one gain by travelling the much greater distance to Jerusalem to pay homage to St Óláfr's spiritual master, Christ?

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<sup>81</sup> To those living in Christian Iceland, lands further north and west must occupy this more unholy or peripheral space. On Greenland in particular as a land non-Christian by nature, see Lewis-Simpson 2006 throughout.

## Chapter 4 – East

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.i. Distant east

While each of the four cardinal directions is in the sagas imagined differently from the others, some aspects of the distant east are similar to the distant west and others to the distant south. The east's similarity to the south lies in the splendid wealth and exotic grandeur of its civilised kingdoms, not only the courts of Novgorod and Kiev (Hólmgarðr, Kænugarðr), but also those of splendid cities further east (Citópolis and Heliópolis in *Yngvars saga*). In structure, however, the distant east is more like the west. Where in the south two specific locations, Byzantium and Jerusalem, sit at essentially the same imaginative "distance" from Scandinavia, in the west there are two locations at two discrete distances from Scandinavia, Vínland unambiguously further to the west than Greenland. This is evident not only in the simple mechanics of travel (i.e. west from Iceland is Greenland, west from Greenland is Vínland), but also in the literary representation of these lands. In the course of saga-chronology, Greenland comes to be populated by Norsemen and interacts with Scandinavia essentially as a distant colony, while Vínland is in all accounts of travel there wild and "other." Similarly, there are two essentially different destinations of eastern far-travel at two discrete imaginative distances from Scandinavia: Russia (Garðaríki), the distant and exotic but definitely civilised kingdom that interacts with the Norse world on fairly familiar terms, and the lands further east, wild, unknown, and populated by fantastic beasts and creatures. It is thus helpful to visualise Russia in the east balanced with Greenland in the west: both countries are at the outermost edge of the vast region of Scandinavian

familiarity and bear qualities both of Scandinavia itself and of the utterly “other” lands beyond.<sup>1</sup> Both eastern echelons are encompassed in the general term *Austrvegr*, which originally denoted the water-route to Eastern Europe, later meant the river-route south through Russia to Byzantium, and eventually came to stand for the entire, vast eastern section of the world (Melnikova 13-15; Sverrir 2006: 935; Simek 1986: 254).

### 1.ii. Garðaríki

A few brief examples will suffice to illustrate Garðaríki’s imaginative distance from Scandinavia. Among the indications that to saga-writers Russia is considered far in a straightforward, geographical sense are the various episodes in which Scandinavian sojourners in Russia return home by stages rather than all at once. The Norwegian princes Magnús góði and Haraldr harðráði are each said to take time travelling from Hólmgarðr to the Baltic coast before sailing to Sweden; in *Heimskringla* they stop at Staraya Ladoga before reaching the Baltic coast (*Mork.* 1, 13; *Har.* 17-18). A large contingent of welcoming Norwegians comes to meet Magnús in Sweden, while Haraldr is met in Sweden by a potential Danish ally, suggesting that Magnús and Haraldr are considered “back” not once they reach Norway, but earlier, as soon as they reach Sweden. The difficulty of travel between the eastern, Russian courts and Scandinavia is suggested by several episodes in which Norsemen in Russia cannot leave it until the ice blocking various ports along the water-route home thaws. Norse royalty trapped by Russian ice include the Danish prince Eiríkr góði (*Knytt.* 70) and St Óláfr of Norway (*Helga* 92), and the ice that

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Perkins’s geographical-historical observation about this east-west balance is equally applicable to saga-literature: “America stands as a ‘furthest West’ symmetrical to the ‘furthest East’ represented by medieval Norse visits to, for example, the region around the Caspian Sea” (29). This balance is neatly illustrated in the literature by the early chapters of *Historia Norwegiae*, in which the North Atlantic tributary states to Norway are listed, Greenland not among them, and the final chapter of *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, in which the boundaries of Ívarr víðfaðmi’s Scandinavian empire are said to extend as far as the border between Estonia and Russia but no further. See also Phelpstead 78, note 3/2.

blocks them in is a true barrier in time and space between Russia and Scandinavia that requires time or great effort to surmount, like the miles of ocean to Greenland in the west or the eastern way itself on the journey south to Constantinople. A final indication of the physical, geographical distance of Russia in the saga-writers' mindset is a "belt" of heathen lands separating Russia from Christian, Norse lands. In *Knyttlinga saga*, there is a marked contrast between Eiríkr góði's youthful Viking raids in the Baltic lands populated by heathens and his stately, educational trip to Christian Russia beyond to partake of the nobility and culture of the refined easterners (*Knytt.* 70: 212; see §2.v.a.2 below). The contrast between the heathen barbarity of the near eastern Baltic countries and the civilised refinement of Russia further east is also a key feature of the stories of Óláfr Tryggvason's life (see §2.i.a. below). Christian Russia beyond the heathen Baltic thus occupies a position not unlike Byzantium and the Holy Land beyond the heathen-infested waters of the Mediterranean, which must often be battled through to reach the Christian "oasis" on the other side. Another distant oasis of civilisation beyond wild, pagan-inhabited lands is the kingdom of the cultured giant-king of the north, Guðmundr of Glæsisvellir. Despite his ambivalent role in the texts in which he appears, Guðmundr's distant, northern kingdom is always located firmly beyond a belt of heathen, northern areas, such as Finnmǫrk and the White Sea (Gandvík, "Enchanted Bay"). Guðmundr and Glæsisvellir will be discussed further throughout the following chapter, "North." Russia's usual characterisation as a bastion of culture in the distant east matches those of Glæsisvellir in the north and the Byzantine empire and Holy Land in the south sufficiently well to suggest a saga topos of "mighty, cultured kingdom far beyond wild, heathen lands." Only the distant west lacks such a kingdom.

There are also indications of Russia's more "conceptual" distance from Scandinavia, especially in the words of various saga-characters who either travel out to Garðaríki or speak of travel there. When a delegation is sent from Norway to Russia to convince Magnús góði to return

and re-take his kingdom, Einarr þambarskelfir reacts grudgingly to the demand the Russian queen Ingigerðr places on him and his fellow far-travellers, suggesting that it is less than honourable of her to demand an oath of twelve from foreigners in Russia (*Mork.* 1: F 19). This suggests that the Norwegians are at a disadvantage in this distant land, with no recourse to such support from their allies as they would have in or near Scandinavia. In contrast, there is no hint of undue coercion in the oath of twelve of Magnús and the Danish king Sveinn in the following chapter, sworn on the neutral, Scandinavian ground at the Götaälv, the traditional meeting-place of Scandinavian kings (*Mork.* 2). Einarr further asserts that the great distance travelled from Norway to Russia is proof enough of the Norwegians' good intentions and obviates the need for a formal oath of loyalty. Other minor, textual clues suggest the conceptual distance between Norse lands and Garðaríki, as when Oddr Snorrason remarks in his saga of Óláfr Tryggvason that news of Óláfr's conversion of Russia and other excellent deeds spreads all the way to Norway (*allt norðr í Nóregsveldi*, Oddr A 13: 166). The Russia of the sagas also shows some signs of "otherness", adding to the sense of imaginative distance between it and Scandinavia. In the realistic Íslendingasaga- and konungasaga-accounts, Russia is a slightly exotic but certainly civilized and cultured land separated from Scandinavia not by otherness but by distance and the perilous "heathen belt" between the two. In fornaldarsaga-accounts, however, Russia is a place of more magic and mystery. In *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, for example, the magnificent, cursed sword Tyrfingr is made for the king of Garðaríki, and in *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* monstrous beasts abduct helpless Russian princesses in their own territory (see §§2.i.e., 2.v.c.3. and 2.ii.c. below). A more socio-political and less magical otherness is suggested in some Russians' objections to seeing a Norwegian prince – a "foreigner" – fostered by their king and queen (see §2.v.b.1. below).

Sverrir Jakobsson examines the role of *Austrvegr* in the medieval Icelandic imagination in his paper for the 13th International Saga Conference (2006), and in this respect the material of this chapter overlaps considerably with his study. Sverrir notes that “a common characteristic of the persons called by the byname *víðfrli* is that their journeys took them partly or exclusively to the East”, and his observation is borne out in the sagas titled after characters bearing this cognomen (936; see also Hermann-Edwards 24-26). This is one of the principal reasons I have found it expedient to create for this thesis my own definition of “far-travel” and to differentiate between my meaning and the medieval Norse meaning. In this chapter, however, the cognomen and its associated direction of travel are apposite. Sverrir’s purpose in his paper is to analyse the relationship between two strains of thought in their influence on scholarly attitudes towards *Austrvegr* – the east as a region of the fantastic and as a place of wealthy, civilised and cultured lands. My division, by contrast, is between the “far” Russia and the “further” lands east of it, though I find exotic, civilised courts in both echelons. Also, as in the other chapters of this thesis, my principle focus is on the act of travelling from Scandinavia to the distant east and on the motivations given to the literary far-travellers who go there, while Sverrir’s focus is the imaginative space the east itself occupies.

## 2. Motivations

### 2.i. Exiles in Russia

While there are many individual factors motivating the various travels from Scandinavia to the distant east, most appearing in only one or two sagas, there is one type of journey that occurs in many different episodes throughout several saga-genres. This is exile. It is almost common enough in *konungasögur* to be considered a motif that a ruler or member of a ruling family whose



life is threatened in his Scandinavian homeland travels east to Russia, and many such exiled rulers engage in military service for Russian kings while they are there. The details of their travel, however, differ. The Danish king Knútr Magnússon, for example, is said in *Knýtlinga saga* to travel out to Russia and back again during the intrigues and conflicts of the Danish throne in his time, after which he goes south to Saxony to escape the danger threatening him in Denmark (*Knýt.* 108). In the context, it seems clear that Knútr's far-travel and brief stay in Russia is a kind of exile, but the narrative space devoted to his travels is no longer than this. Other accounts of Scandinavian exiles in Russia are told at much greater length and in much more detail.

**2.i.a.** The most well-known of these exiled rulers is King Óláfr Tryggvason of Norway, one of the most written-about characters in all of saga-literature and concerning whose life and Christianising efforts a whole host of stories and episodes sprang up in the centuries following his death at the battle of Svǫlðr in the year 1000. Each of his sagas, which preserve contemporary and near-contemporary accounts of Óláfr in skaldic verses, narrates the story of his exile from Scandinavia when he is a small boy, forced to stay away from Norway on account of his enemies there. Some details of Óláfr's exile also take narrative form in the earlier, briefer synoptic histories.

Following Norwegian regional king Tryggvi's murder by one of the sons of the infamous Gunnhildr, Tryggvi's pregnant widow Ástríðr flees along with her foster-father Þórólfr lúsarskegg ("lousy beard") and his young son, intending to go into hiding at the home of her father, Eiríkr of Ofrustaðir (Oddr S 1, *Ólaf.* 1, *Mesta* 43).<sup>2</sup> During this flight Ástríðr is compelled to stop at a lake, which Oddr specifies as Rǫnd (the site of early Norwegian king Hálfðan inn

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<sup>2</sup> Oddr's saga of Óláfr and *Mesta* were introduced in §§2.ii.a.4. and 2.i.a.3. of Chapter 3, respectively. The other *Óláfs saga* cited here is that in Snorri's *Heimskringla*, from the 1220s or 1230s (Pulsiano 276).

svarti's drowning), and gives birth to Óláfr. In Oddr's saga this occurs in a boathouse and the baby is wrapped in swaddling clothes (*sveift kleðvm*), details suggestive of Christ's nativity (Oddr S 2). All three sagas record that the new-born child is sprinkled with water.<sup>3</sup> Ástríðr's company reaches her father's home, and they spend the winter there. On learning of the approach of Gunnhildr's emissary, Eiríkr sends Ástríðr and her party east to the home of his friend Hákon gamli in Sweden. Their pursuers failing to apprehend them, Ástríðr and her companions stay with Hákon two years (Oddr 4-5, *Ólaf.* 3-4, *Mesta* 44-45). Ástríðr decides to travel further east with her child to stay with her brother Sigurðr in Russia, but the convoy of merchants with whom she travels is attacked by pirates, and she and the child are separated and taken into slavery. Passing through the hands of a succession of Baltic Slavic masters, Óláfr is eventually spotted by Sigurðr, freed, and taken to Russia to be fostered (Oddr 7-8, *Ólaf.* 5-6, *Mesta* 46).

There are two distinct perspectives on the motivating factors that take Óláfr from Hákon gamli's protection in Sweden to exile in Russia. According to the first perspective, human agents decide to remove Ástríðr and Óláfr from Scandinavia and take them to distant Russia to protect them from the violence of their enemies. In Oddr's version Hákon gamli decides to send the pair east, while in the other two sagas the decision is Ástríðr's. *Mesta* includes a passage to the effect that due to the tyranny of Gunnhildr's sons, many sons of powerful men (*rikra manna synir*) have already fled Norway; Ástríðr's brother Sigurðr is then immediately introduced, implying that he himself is in Russia on a sort of self-imposed exile (*Mesta* 46). From this perspective Óláfr's exile is part choice, part chance: while it is Ástríðr's choice to take Óláfr to the distant east, her

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<sup>3</sup> The accounts of the flight in the synoptic histories differ. Theodoricus and the author of *Ágrip* suggest Óláfr has already been born when his father is killed; in *Historia Norvegiae* the pregnant Ástríðr flees to Orkney and gives birth to Óláfr there in static comfort (Theo. 4; *Ágrip* 9, 17; *HN* 16). The custom of naming a son born after his father's death after the dead father suggests Theodoricus and *Ágrip* are correct (Driscoll 1995: 93; Storm 1893: 214).

plans are frustrated by free-booting slave-traders, only to be realised in the end when Sigurðr finds the boy and takes him to Russia himself.

According to the second perspective, Óláfr could never have avoided being carried to Russia. Oddr and the writer of *Mesta* both include an episode prior to Ástriðr's departure from Sweden in which the Russian king Valdimarr's mother, a pagan prophetess (*spákona*), divines that a prince born that year in Norway will come to Russia and be fostered (Oddr A 6: 144, *Mesta* 46: 80-81). Further, she accurately predicts some of the details of the rest of Óláfr's life, such as his too-short reign in Norway. From this perspective it is clearly inevitable that Óláfr will be taken to Russia to be fostered, and the decisions of the far-travellers (i.e. Ástriðr and Þórólfr) are secondary consequences of that fate. In later passages in both Oddr's saga and *Mesta* Russia is said to be inhabited by many seers (*spámenn*) who perceive that the radiant, auspicious fetches or guardian spirits (*hamingjur* in Oddr, *fylgjur* in *Mesta*) of a young, distinguished foreign person have appeared in their land. The parallel with Christ is further pronounced when they say that the bright light of these portents stretches over all of Russia and the eastern part of the world (Oddr A 8: 150, *Mesta* 57: 104-05). Once again, the implication is that Óláfr's exile in Russia is not a matter of mere human motivation – that of his mother or his uncle Sigurðr or Hákon gamli – but something that is ordained by God or fate and is visible in the atmosphere to those with prophetic powers. In *Ágrip* God's agency is even more explicit. The narrator introduces the episode in which the young slave-boy Óláfr is redeemed by his uncle with these words: <sup>79</sup> *En guð, er þetta barn hafði kosit til stórra hluta, stillti honum til lausnar með þeim hætti* (*Ágrip* 18: 20). Óláfr's motivation for far-travel is not his own.

This view of Óláfr's exile in Russia relates to its failure to adhere to the pattern of expanding concentric circles of violence-motivated travel. A story in which a character directs

his own life according to his own purposes may expand spatially to accommodate the ever-growing consequences of the character's successive actions, and far-travel due to violence is often the culmination of many individual instances of violence followed by flight. A prince ordained before his birth by God to bring Christianity to multiple Scandinavian lands, however, is drawn from his turbulent homeland to a distant safe-haven with the inevitability of God's will, much as Christ was removed to Egypt to protect him from the violence of the malicious King Herod. Óláfr's exile in the distant east is not a culmination but an incubation, as God protects and prepares his servant for the tasks of his adult life. This second perspective does not erase violence as a factor motivating Óláfr's far-travel eastward: it is simply God, the supreme saga-writer, rather than any human agent who is motivated to move his young protégé such a great distance to protect him from violence.

**2.i.b.** Óláfr's later royal namesake Óláfr Haraldsson (Óláfr inn helgi, St Óláfr) is also forced to flee east from Scandinavia for his life. The main difference between his eastern exile and Óláfr Tryggvason's is that St Óláfr travels to Russia as an adult. Having struggled for ten years or so to keep his grip on Norway's throne, Óláfr is finally forced to flee on account of the overwhelming power of his enemy Hákon jarl. Snorri writes in his *Heimskringla* version of the saga:

<sup>80</sup> Gerði konungr þá bert fyrir vinum sínum, at sú var ætlan hans at fara þá ór landi í brot, fyrst austr í Svíaveldi, ok gera þá ráð sitt, hvert hann ætlar eða snøri þaðan af, en bað svá vini sína til ætla, at hann myndi enn ætla til landsins at leita ok aprt til ríkis sins, ef guð léði honum langlífis. (*Helga* 180: 327)

Óláfr's journey is thus envisioned beforehand as exile: present circumstances compel him to leave, but he intends to return. Óláfr first goes eastward from Norway through Eiðaskógr forest until he comes to the district of Næríki, where he stays all spring with a rich and powerful man,

Sigtryggr. In the summer Óláfr sets sail for the court of King Jarizleifr and Queen Ingigerðr in Russia, where he is welcomed and given land to cover the expenses of his retinue (*Helga* 181: 328).<sup>4</sup> Snorri then concludes the chapter by listing the reasons why the Norwegian people revolted against Óláfr, reiterating the exilic nature of his sojourn in Russia. Further reiteration comes later, when Óláfr's erstwhile opponent Björn stallari ("king's marshal") regrets his disloyalty, travels eastward to Russia, and tells Óláfr that Hákon jarl has gone missing and Norway is now leaderless (*Helga* 185-86, *Sér.* 181-82).<sup>5</sup> Snorri writes: <sup>81</sup> *Þeim tíðendum urðu menn fegnir, þeir er Óláfi konungi htfðu fylgt ór Nóregi ok þar htfðu átt eigur ok frændr ok vini ok léku miklir landmunir til heimferðar* (*Helga* 186: 338). Once again, the context in Russia is very much exilic: Óláfr's men do not wish to remain in Russia but choose to because they feel compelled to stay. The *Legendary Saga* also stresses the single-minded desire of Óláfr's men to return to their possessions and homeland (*Leg.* 71: 174).

*Fóstbræðra saga* mentions St Óláfr's exile briefly, though only the Flateyjarbók version specifies Russia as the location of that exile. After avenging the death of his foster-brother in Greenland, Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld goes to Norway and joins Óláfr's retinue:

<sup>82</sup> Nú var Þormóðr með Óláfi konungi í góðri virðingu ok þótti inn rískvasti maðr í þllum mannaunum. Þormóðr fór ór landi með Óláfi konungi ok þolði með honum alla útleð. Hann fór ok aprt með honum til Nóregs, því at honum þótti betra at deyja með honum en lifa eptir hann. (*Fóst.* 24: 260)

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<sup>4</sup> This Jarizleifr is Jaroslav the Wise, Grand Prince of Kiev and Novgorod until 1054; the years between the deaths of his father Vladimir (1015) and brother Mstislav (c. 1034-36) were filled with dynastic struggles, and Norsemen found much employment in the east during this time (Franklin-Shepard 183-207). In *Guta saga* Óláfr is said to put in at Gotland on his way east; he exchanges gifts with the local chieftains and converts one, Ormika, to Christianity before progressing to Russia (*Guta* 2: 8). No other saga mentions Gotland in connection with Óláfr's eastward flight.

<sup>5</sup> In the mid 13th-century legendary saga of St Óláfr, Björn resists a financial incentive to be disloyal to Óláfr offered by his enemy King Knútr and instead joins Óláfr in his Russian exile (*Leg.* 70: 170-72).

*Útlegð* can mean either “exile” or “banishment”; that Þormóðr must “endure” (*þola*) this exile or banishment indicates it is understood to be another trial, like the ones he has gallantly overcome before. Clearly Þormóðr’s loyalty to or love for the holy king is the primary motivating factor for his far-travel, and so his is a self-imposed exile.

Óláfr’s own exile is also, in a sense, self-imposed. Unlike his earlier royal namesake, no miraculous fetches or portents herald his sojourn in Russia; like many of the far-travellers to the west and south, he simply flees the danger when it threatens him. When Björn comes to Russia to offer Óláfr the throne of Norway, Óláfr has all but given up the idea of returning west and instead nearly resolved to travel south to Jerusalem, perhaps to enter an order of monks (*Helga* 187, *Sér.* 183). When divine purposes make themselves known, however, it is not to keep Óláfr in eastern exile but to send him back to Norway. King Óláfr Tryggvason comes to Óláfr in a dream and urges him to re-take his kingdom or die in the attempt, despite Óláfr’s own inclination to abdicate his royal rights (*Helga* 188, *Sér.* 184).<sup>6</sup> Obeying the ghostly king, Óláfr does return west, loses the battle at Stiklarstaðir, and achieves martyrdom. Russian exile, a necessary part of God’s plan for his Norwegian Christianiser Óláfr Tryggvason, who must be protected in his childhood, is not only non-essential but perhaps even an obstruction to his plan for Óláfr Haraldsson, destined to be the Norwegian patron saint.

**2.i.c.** St Óláfr’s defeat at Stiklarstaðir makes exiles of his half-brother Haraldr Sigurðarson and ally Rǫgnvaldr Brúsason (future jarl of Orkney), both of whom survive the battle and must seek refuge in the distant east. *Haralds saga* gives the first-hand account of the skald Þjóðólfr Arnórsson:

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<sup>6</sup> The legendary saga makes no mention of this dream. The synoptic histories handle Óláfr’s exile in Russia in much less detail. Only Theodoricus relates that Óláfr is impelled to return west to Norway by prophetic dreams (Theo. 18).

83 Hvasst frák Haugi et næsta

hlífél á gram drífa,

en Bolgara brennir

bræðr sínum vel tæði.

Skilðisk hann ok hulði

hjalmsetr, gamall vetra

tyggi tolf ok þriggja,

trauðr við Óleif dauðan.

(*Har.* 1: 68)

It is Rǫgnvaldr who carries young Haraldr away from the battlefield and smuggles him to a remote farmhouse, where Haraldr recovers from his battle-wounds and is secretly escorted east to Sweden (*Har.* 1, *Ork.* 21). The two Scandinavian rulers-to-be sail east to Russia that summer and join the court of Jarizleifr, who gives them good welcome on account of his earlier royal guest (*Har.* 2, *Ork.* 21); *Morkinskinna* and *Orkneyinga saga* add that this good welcome is given on account of Jarizleifr's earlier royal guest, the holy St Óláfr (*Mork.* 9: F 58).<sup>7</sup>

The party's exile in the east is not a time of idleness, and both rulers-to-be gain valuable military experience in the service of the Russian king. Snorri reports that Haraldr joins another exiled Norseman, Eilífr jarl Rǫgnvaldsson, in taking charge of King Jarizleifr's defences (*Har.* 2).

*Haralds saga* quotes Þjóðólfr concerning a Russian campaign against the Poles:

84 Eitt htfðusk at,

Eilífr þars sat,

htfðingjar tveir:

Hamalt fylkðu þeir.

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<sup>7</sup> *Ágrip* mentions Haraldr's flight east to Russia only briefly (Ch. 33). Theodoricus does not refer to it at all.

Austr-Vinðum ók

í tngvan krók.

Vasa Læsum léttr

liðsmanna rétr.<sup>8</sup>

(*Har. 2: 70*)

*Orkneyinga saga* suggests that Rǫgnvaldr Brúsason joins them in this military venture (*Ork. 21*). Haraldr stays in Russia for several years and travels widely throughout eastern lands (*víða um Austrveg, Har. 2: 70*) before setting off south for Byzantium, as was related and discussed in the preceding chapter. Quoting Arnórr jarlaskáld ("jarls' poet"), *Orkneyinga saga* relates that Rǫgnvaldr stays in Russia and fights many battles around Novgorod (Hólmgarðr) on the Russian king's behalf:

<sup>85</sup> Deildisk af svát aldri

él grafninga þelar

gunnar Njǫrðr í Gǫrðum

gunnbráðr tíu háði.

(*Ork. 21: 54*)

Rǫgnvaldr also engages in peace-making during his Russian exile. *Orkneyinga saga*, *Heimskringla* and *Morkinskinna* all relate that two of St Óláfr's former enemies travel east to make amends to the young prince, Óláfr's son Magnús, and petition King Jarizleifr to allow them to make Magnús king of Norway in defiance of the ruling Knýtlings (see §2.v.b.1. below). The pair enlists Rǫgnvaldr's assistance and that of the eleven greatest Norwegians in Russia to swear an oath of loyalty to Magnús, and King Jarizleifr grants their request (*Ork. 21; Helga 251; Mork. 1: F 18-19*).<sup>9</sup> What is interesting here is that the Scandinavians, however powerful they may be

<sup>8</sup> *Morkinskinna* includes the same verse (F 58). It is likely Haraldr and Eilífr joined Jarizleifr in his action against the Poles in 1031 (ÍF XXVIII 70, footnote). The verse dates from after 1050 (Gade 2009 I 103).

<sup>9</sup> Theodoricus and the author of *Ágrip* both relate that Rǫgnvaldr and the others must swear the oath of loyalty to Magnús on account of Queen Ingigerðr's love for the young prince (Theo. 21, *Ágrip* 33).



in their homelands, must apply to the Russian king for permission to make their own choice for king. This accords with the observation made in the sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason that it is law in Russia that no foreign person of royal birth is allowed to remain there without the king's consent (Oddr A 8, *Ólaf. 7*, *Mesta* 47). When northern rulers are exiled in the east, it is the eastern rulers who have final authority over them.

**2.i.d.** Unlike these other Scandinavian rulers, Eymundr Hringsson, son of a Norwegian petty king, is not forced into Russian exile by the threat of violence or death. Rather, he actually expects to be honoured by the new Norwegian ruler with the title of king. When this is denied it becomes apparent that this title is one Eymundr cannot do without. His exile thus comes about more like the “sons of powerful men” mentioned in *Mesta* who choose to flee to Russia to escape the tyranny of the current Norwegian regime (see §2.i.a. above).

In the first chapter of *Eymundar þáttur Hringssonar*<sup>10</sup> Eymundr and his good friend Ragnarr jarl Agnarsson are on a Viking raid when their sworn-brother Óláfr Haraldsson siezes control of all of Norway, deposing eleven regional kings. Eymundr's father and brother are forced to flee, while another king named Hrærekr is blinded and held at King Óláfr's court (*Eym.* 1: 200). Shortly after this Eymundr and Ragnarr return to Norway with a large fleet, and call a meeting of their fellow-countrymen (*Eym.* 2: 200-01). At that assembly Eymundr sums up the situation, saying that he himself expects to be treated with honour by Óláfr but not granted his rightful title of king. Wanting neither to bear arms against the king nor to abjure his claim to the royal title, Eymundr resolves to keep his distance from Óláfr (*koma ekki á hans fund*).

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<sup>10</sup> The single extant version of *Eymundar þáttur* is preserved in the saga of St Óláfr in Flateyjarbók; another copy from around 1700 is missing (Cook 65). Story-traditions of a possibly historical eastern traveller named Eymundr seem to have become mixed with stories connected to other eastern travellers, such as Yngvarr víðfrli and St Óláfr

Eymundr's men respond: <sup>86</sup> *"Hvat hyggur þú, ef eigi skal til sætta ganga, nema koma ekki á konungs fund ok fara útlægr af eignum sínum, enda koma ekki í andskotaflokk konungs?"* (*Eym.* 2: 201). Ragnarr comments that though he does not wish them to try their luck against King Óláfr's, if they are to abandon their estates in Norway, he would like people to think they made the better bargain. Eymundr then explains his plan: he tells the others that since the late king of Russia divided his kingdom unevenly between his three sons, they should visit these kings and stay with one who is satisfied with his father's division of the kingdom and intends to hold onto his realm. Eymundr concludes: <sup>87</sup> *"Mun oss þat verða gott bæði til fjár ok virðingar"* (*Eym* 2: 202). This plan is agreeable to everyone, so they sail east with a large company of hardy, hand-picked men. From the very start Eymundr's plan is two-fold: to escape the tyranny and harsh treatment in Norway and to win "wealth and esteem" in the service of a foreign monarch. It is evident that while other exiles in Russia engage in military service simply as something to do, for Eymundr exile and mercenary service are equal motivations for eastern far-travel.

This impression is reinforced by the actions of Eymundr and his men upon reaching the kingdom of Jarizleifr, Novgorod (Hólmgarðr). Eymundr immediately approaches Jarizleifr with an offer of service in the king's power struggles with his brother Búrizlafr (*Eym.* 4: 203). The Russian king accepts, and they talk over payment. In addition to a fine hall and provisions for his men, Eymundr also demands an ounce of silver (*eyri veginn silfrs*) for every man, an extra half-ounce for every ship's captain. When the king balks at this price, Eymundr says they will accept payment in kind, furs from beavers and sables and whatever else is available (*Eym.* 4: 203). On furs and silver as valued products especially associated with the distant east, see respectively §§2.iv.b. and 3.i. below. When the time comes to serve Jarizleifr in battle, Eymundr not only

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(Hermann-Edwards 8, Cook 67-68). There is no indication of how much older the þátrr is than Flateyjarbók, c. 1380; *Yngvars saga* was probably one of its sources (Hermann-Edwards 7-8).

fights valiantly and victoriously, but he also advises the king in military matters. When the king repeatedly puts off paying Eymundr and his men, they eventually join another of the king's brothers, Vartilaftr, and serve him in battle at the same pay-rate (*Eym.* 10: 213-15). All of this reinforces the idea that Eymundr's purpose in being there is (self-imposed) exile as well as to gain fame and fortune from mercenary service there.

2.i.e. As noted in §2.i.a.3. of the preceding chapter, a major character in *Heiðarvíga saga* named Víga-Barði Guðmundarson travels east to a location the saga identifies as Garðaríki, where he joins the Varangians and distinguishes himself in all their campaigns (*Heið.* 43). It is of course more usual in sagas for Varangians to be mercenaries of the Byzantine emperor, and the English translation of the saga in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders* alters the location without comment to Constantinople (CSI IV 128).<sup>11</sup> However, saga-writers do often show a distinction between "Scandinavians" (*Norðmenn*) and "Varangians" (*Væringjar*) in Byzantium, most notably earlier in *Heiðarvíga saga* itself (*Heið.* 11: 243), where the saga-compiler and copyist Jón Ólafsson remarks in an annotation that this distinction is common in sagas (see §2.i.c.2. of the previous chapter). This suggests that saga-writers recognise two distinct groups of mercenaries, one of Scandinavian origin and the other of Russian, the Russians being the true "Varangians." There is therefore no compelling reason to alter "Garðaríki" to "Miklagarðr" here.

In contrast to all the previous examples in this section, this mercenary service is not occasioned by royal exile. Rather, Víga-Barði seems to travel directly to the distant east from Iceland with the express intention of becoming a mercenary there. At the same time, it is conflict

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<sup>11</sup> Blöndal and Benedikz argue that the historical Barði served in Byzantium, drawing attention to the galleys these Varangians are said to be sailing and observing that there was much naval activity in the later days of Basil II (Blöndal-Benedikz 201). The Principate of Kiev, however, borders the Black Sea, and the city itself is connected to

at home that provides the initial impetus to send him on his way. A pillow-fight between Barði and his wife escalates and results in their divorce the very next day, and the following spring Barði leaves and does not stop on his way until he reaches Russia (*Heið.* 43). It almost seems as though Barði's far-travel eastward is visualised as a kind of self-imposed exile from the tyranny of his wife; he even uses the word tyranny – *ofríki* – to refer to her antics (*Heið.* 43: 327). Thus the distant east, in contrast to the distant south, is not a place to which Scandinavians willingly travel to seek fame and fortune as mercenaries, but rather a place in which they are willing to turn to mercenary service to earn their pay after they have been driven there or can no longer stomach the situation in their native Scandinavian lands.

Uncoloured by any hint of exile whatsoever is the eastern mercenary service of the Viking Arngrímr in the early chapters of the R-version of *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*.<sup>12</sup>

88 Hann sótti austr í Garðaríki ok dvalðisk um hríð með Sigrlama konungi ok gerðisk forstjóri fyrir liði hans, bæði lands at gæta ok þegna, því at konungr var nú gamall.  
(*Herv.* R 2: 3)

Arngrímr's initial motivation for travelling east is absent, and furthermore it is in the context clear that his motivation is unimportant. Arngrímr's journey to the east is simply utilitarian: the magnificent sword in Sigrlami's possession, *Tyrfingr*, as well as the king's daughter, *Eyfura*, must both travel to Scandinavia from the distant east in Arngrímr's possession, so the saga-writer's task is merely to get Arngrímr out there. Indeed, the writer of the U-version of the saga comes up with a different explanation for Arngrímr's travel to Russia and acquisition of *Tyrfingr*

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that body of water by river, so it is not inherently implausible that Barði and his fellow maritime mercenaries should serve the Kievan Grand Prince (nor that a saga-writer should have imagined him to do so).

<sup>12</sup> *Hervarar saga*, which probably dates from the mid-13th century, weaves together several ancient story-traditions loosely centred on the magnificent sword *Tyrfingr* and the family that possesses it for several generations. The saga preserves verses from at least three narrative poems much older than the saga-text, and independent literary sources such as Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* and the Anglo-Saxon poem *Widsith* attest to the great antiquity of the stories re-

and Eyfura (see §2.v.c.3. below). The saga we now have was constructed from different story materials at the saga-writers' disposal, and though there are many uncertainties concerning its development, one key unifying principle of the saga-material is the sword Tyrfingr, and in particular its progression from one member of the Angantýr-Hervtr-Heiðrekr family to the next through several generations (Tolkien viii-xiv, xxviii-xxix). It is not clear from what oral or written material the saga-writers acquired the notion that the sword had to begin its journey in the distant east, but the verses of *The Waking of Angantýr* make it clear that it must ultimately be buried in a grave-mound on the Danish island of Sámsey (Samsø), to be demanded of Angantýr by Hervtr in due course. Thus the saga-writers were motivated to provide a plausible avenue for its progression westward with the Viking father of the Sámsey berserkr-combatants, Arngrímr. He, naturally, required a purpose for being in the distant east, and the writer of the R-version found a plausible purpose for him in military service for the Russian king.

A later passage in the saga provides a parallel to this episode. After challenging the Swedish king's retainer Hjálmar to a fight, Arngrímr's twelve berserkr sons all inexplicably convene to a certain Bjarmarr jarl's realm, identified in the U-redaction as Aldeigjuborg; Bjarmarr welcomes the brothers with a feast and interprets a prophetic dream for him. No motivation for their travel is given, though the oldest son, Angantýr, soon marries the jarl's daughter Sváfa. Shortly afterwards the brothers return west to Scandinavia to challenge Hjálmar and Nívar-Oddr on Sámsey (*Herv. R 2: 4*). Given no other details to this episode, one can only suppose the brothers travel east to while away the time until the arranged battle in the relative safe-haven of an ally's realm. Here, though, there is neither mercenary service nor exile.

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worked and re-presented in the saga (Tolkien xi-xiv, xxi-xxviii; Jónas 1988: 73-76, 350-52; Pulsiano 283). The older of the saga's two recensions is designated R, and a later, much-altered version is designated HU.

## 2.ii. Love and marriage

Though Arngrímr is given a king's daughter in marriage while in an eastern kingdom and Angantýr is given a jarl's daughter in the east, there is no suggestion that either Viking leaves Scandinavia for the purpose of these marriages, much less that they travel for love's sake. Love and desire to marry do provide the impetus for some far-travels to and from the distant east, though the sagas do not always link the two motivations. Political expediency was of course a more common reason for marriage than love between members of medieval royal households, and some of the saga-accounts of travel between the distant court of Russia and those in Scandinavia certainly reflect this. Oddr's and Snorri's sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason, for example, mention an eastern king, Vissivaldr, who in competition with Haraldr grænske sues for the hand of Queen Sigríðr of Sweden; she earns her byname *in stórraða* – “the imperious” or “the haughty” – by burning the two in their lodgings (Oddr A 34, *Ólaf.* 43).<sup>13</sup> Vissivaldr is a native inhabitant of the distant east, so this is not a proper example of marriage-motivated eastern far-travel. In other accounts, however, travels to Russia and even further east for reasons related to marriage do occur.

**2.ii.a.** In the first of several examples of far-travel to and from the east for love or desire to marry in *Yngvars saga víðftrla*<sup>14</sup> a Swedish chieftain named Áki asks for the hand of the king's

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<sup>13</sup> Inasmuch as this story features a king travelling to another's realm to marry a royal woman and being murdered by her, it bears resemblance to the Summer King / Winter Princess myth illustrated by John McKinnell. The reigns of the first nine Yngling kings demonstrate this pattern; one king, Vísburr, is burned in his hall by his associated Winter Princess. See Ch. 5 of McKinnell 2005, esp. pp. 69-72; see also *HN* 9 and *ÍF* XXVI 30-31.

<sup>14</sup> This singular text is classified a *fornaldarsaga* due to its fantastic episodes and folk- and fairy-tale motifs, yet the historicity of Yngvarr's 11th-century expedition to the east is attested to by twenty to thirty contemporary Swedish runic inscriptions that commemorate those who fell with him on that voyage (Jansson 63-69; Sawyer 118-19; Shepard 231-34, 238-40). One of the two principal manuscripts of *Yngvars saga* identifies its author as the monk “Oddr inn fróði.” This and other evidence suggest that a Latin original of the saga was written by Oddr Snorrason near the end of the 12th century and translated into Norse early in the 13th century (Hofmann 1981: 188-89, 208-11; Pulsiano 740; Hermann-Edwards 1989: 2, 5).

daughter in marriage. The king, Eiríkr inn sigrsæli (“the victorious”), does not wish to give his daughter away to a commoner, and shortly afterwards he marries her to district king from Russia (*einn fylkiskongr austan ur Gardariki*, *Yng.* 1: 1<sup>15</sup>). Here far-travel to Russia is taken by Eiríkr’s un-named daughter due to his desire to see her married well. Broadly the same reason, desire for political alliance, probably motivates the Russian king’s travel, though love for the young lady is also possible; the text does not specify. In the following episode, Áki travels out to Russia, kills the king, and carries Eiríkr’s daughter back to Sweden, where he promptly marries her himself. In this case, while it is desire to marry that motivates Áki’s journey, it is surely love (or some similar passion) rather than politics that underlies that desire. Certainly Áki subsequently comes under the king’s displeasure, as he must surely have known beforehand would happen. Also, Áki later offers to make peace with the king for having acted too rashly (*bráðr*), a trait more typical of the high passion of love than pragmatic political motivations. This episode thus associates both love and political gain with the marriage-motivation for far-travel to the east.

The beginning of this scenario replays itself a generation later, when Áki’s son Eymundr is enamoured of Ingigerðr, the daughter of Eiríkr’s son King Óláfr svenski (“the Swede”).<sup>16</sup> Here the text explicitly names love: <sup>89</sup> *Þau Eymundr unnuzt micit fyrir frændsemi saker, þuiat hun uar uel at sier um alla hluti* (*Yng.* 2: 3). Eymundr incurs the wrath of the king, however, and is outlawed, leaving Ingigerðr open for a more suitable, royal marriage. Once again, an eastern king asks for the hand of the Swedish princess, and Ingigerðr goes east, the bride of King Jarizleifr of Russia (*Yng.* 3). As before, the Russian king’s motivation in far-travel for marriage may involve either love or political pragmatism, or both. This courtship and marriage is also related in the

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<sup>15</sup> In citations from *Yngvars saga*, the chapter divisions of Guðni Jónsson’s 1950 edition will be used (FSN II); the text quoted and the page numbers given will be from Emil Olson’s 1912 edition. Olson’s edition shows chapter headings from Chapter 11 onwards, and these agree with Guðni’s.

<sup>16</sup> Óláfr svenski or sænski is also nicknamed “Skötikonung”, the meaning of which is uncertain: “tribute-king” is likely. Óláfr is one of the Scandinavian rulers who conspires to defeat Óláfr Tryggvason at Svítlör (Helle 223).

sagas of St Óláfr, where Óláfr rather than Eymundr is the lady's original betrothed who incurs the anger of the Swedish king.<sup>17</sup> In these accounts political pragmatism seems a more likely motivation than love; Jarizleifr courts Ingigerðr first with letters and then with ambassadors, and the marriage is arranged without the two meeting at all. In Snorri's sagas Ingigerðr makes a deal with her father that also smacks of pragmatism: she expresses herself willing to marry the Russian king only if her bride-gift is agreed to (*Helga* 93, *Sér.* 77).<sup>18</sup> In *Yngvars saga*, upon hearing the news of this marriage, Eymundr, like his father Áki before him, goes east to Russia. Unlike his father, Eymundr does not kill the king and steal his beloved back; he instead serves the king in his battles and wins his friendship (*Yng.* 3). Love may compel Eymundr to travel far to see his beloved, but it does not compel him to rashness and violence, to force a marriage that may have results as disastrous as those that earlier saw King Eiríkr kill his father at a marriage feast. From these examples, we see that marriage between members of the courts of Sweden and Russia can motivate far-travel between the two locations, while love can motivate far-travel to either bring the beloved bride back or to be near her.

**2.ii.b.** In *Knýtlinga saga* there is another quite explicit example of far-travel east to Russia for the purpose of marriage or, more precisely, bride-acquisition. In this instance, the Scandinavian in question is not the bride but the groom, Knútr lávarðr ("Lord Knútr" or "Duke Knútr"). Like the Scandinavians of previous examples, he is a member of a royal household, the son of a king

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<sup>17</sup> Snorri's *Heimskringla* version of St Óláfr's saga gives the fullest account (Chs. 91, 93), *Ágrip* and Theodoricus' *Historia* the most brief (Ch. 25 and Ch. 16 respectively).

<sup>18</sup> In accordance with its much uglier portrait of Jarizleifr and Ingigerðr than the other texts in which they figure, *Eymundar þáttur Hringsson* suggests that this bride-price – amnesty and the district of Ladoga for her cousin Rǫgnvaldr jarl Úlfsson – allows Ingigerðr to carry on an extramarital affair with Rǫgnvaldr. The "Eymundr" of this þáttur is broadly the same character as that of *Yngvars saga*, though son of Norwegian Hringr rather than Swedish Áki. On the two traditions of Eymundr's sojourn in Russia and the historical and literary circumstances that gave rise to varying versions of his tale, see Cook 67-68.



and later the father of a king.<sup>19</sup> Having recently converted to Christianity a capable young Viking named Viðgautr, Knútr lávarðr proposes to send this experienced traveller out on a mission from his fortified harbour at Hedeby:

90 En er Viðgautr hafði verit um vetr með Knút lávarði í miklum kærleikum, þá beiddi hertoginn hann, at hann mundi fara sendiftr hans austr í Hólmgarð at biðja Engilborgar, dóttur Haralds konungs, til handa honum. (*Knytt.* 88: 246)

Viðgautr's subsequent journey to Russia introduces what will be seen to be common characteristics of travel to the distant east. Accepting his lord's charge, Viðgautr offers a somewhat formulaic protest that the material goods he will have to offer Knútr following his eastern voyage – forty *serkir* of expensive grey furs, at five *timbr* to a *serkr* and forty furs to a *timbr* – will fall short of Knútr's past hospitality to him (*Knytt.* 88: 246-47). Furs have been noted above in §2.i.d. as the typical medium of exchange and measure of movable wealth in the east, and will be discussed again in §2.iv.b. below. Like the other eastern far-travellers Yngvarr, Sveinn and Eiríkr góði, knowledge of foreign languages serves Viðgautr well on his eastern bridal quest: he is said by the saga-writer to express himself eloquently in the Russian court without the need of an interpreter (*Knytt.* 88: 247; see also §§2.iii.b.2. and 2.v.a.2. below). While it is clear from many of the sagas that capability and indeed excellence in all manly skills is prized in saga-heroes, especially those who wish to prove themselves in foreign travel and adventure, the necessity of wide knowledge of languages is associated especially with those Norse travels to the magnificent, civilised realms in the distant south and east.<sup>20</sup> True to his

<sup>19</sup> Son of the Danish king Eiríkr góði, Knútr lávarðr never became king himself, but he fathered King Valdemar I, "the Great" (Helle 180, 347, 353).

<sup>20</sup> In this these eastern far-travellers attain the ideal advocated by the father-advisor of *Konungs skuggsjá*, the mid 13th-century Norwegian King's Mirror in which the son is advised to learn as many languages as possible, most pragmatically Latin and French (*Konung.* 6: 13-15). The southern far-travelling monarchs Óláfr Tryggvason and (again) Eiríkr inn góði are both said to need no interpreter on their pilgrimages to Rome (*Mesta* 267, *Knytt.* 74).

capability and eloquence, Viðgautr is successful, and in due course the young princess travels west and marries Knútr lávarðr in grand style.

**2.ii.c.** In a variation on the pattern of marriage-motivated far-travel, the title characters of *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* travel great distances to collect family members to come to their weddings in Russia.<sup>21</sup> After Egill and Ásmundr have successfully found the abducted daughters of the Russian king Hertryggr, freed them from captivity in the distant north (see Chapter 5, §2.ii.a.3.), and brought them safely back to Russia, the pairs prepare to marry, Egill to the princess called Bekkhildr and Ásmundr to Brynhildr:

<sup>91</sup> Lét konungr nú búaz við brullaupi. En Egill kvez fyrst vilja finna fíður sinn, e[f] hann lifði, ok vita, til hvers hann mátti ætla um ríki þat, sem hann þóttiz eiga. En Ásmundr sagðiz vilja fara austr í Tattará at bjóða Herrauð, fóstbroður sínum, í sitt brullaup.  
(*Egil*. 17: 77)

Thus motivated, Ásmundr travels further east to Tartary and Egill returns to his homeland in Scandinavia, Götaland; each ultimately returns to Russia with his family and friends to celebrate the weddings at the appointed date. These are indirect examples of the marriage-motivation for far-travel eastward: Egill is already in the distant east when he makes the decision to travel first home to Scandinavia and later back to Russia, while Ásmundr does not travel from Scandinavia at all, only travelling further into the distant east to fetch his wedding guest. Their travel does, however, indicate that the literary topos of marriage connections between Scandinavia and the distant east is not exclusive to kings' sagas like *Knýtlinga saga* and associated texts like *Yngvars*

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Knowledge of foreign languages is also nearly ubiquitous among the far-travelling (but non-Scandinavian) heroes of the riddarasögur; see Kalinke 1983, especially pp. 853-56.

<sup>21</sup> *Egils saga ok Ásmundar* dates from about 1325; its oldest and principal manuscript is AM 343a 4to, a 14th- or 15th-century compendium containing several other fornaldarsögur (Lagerholm xlii-xlv, Pulsiano 155). With its

*saga*. This is the final, resolving episode of far-travel in a saga that has traced the paths of its heroes all over the north and east, finally securing them in a kind of domestic normality, albeit one that necessitates far-travel for family and friends to attend the wedding.

### 2.iii. Christian missions

Another widespread motivation for far-travel eastward is piety. Several saga far-travellers engage in Christian missions in Russia or more easterly lands. Eirekr víðfrli's eastern travels are certainly primarily pious in purpose, but the expression of his piety is markedly different from the eastern missionaries. Eirekr's pious motivation will be discussed in §2.iv.b. below.

**2.iii.a.** In both the general area of piously-motivated far-travel east and the particular area of Norse Christian missions there, the leader of the field is once again Óláfr Tryggvason. Oddr's *saga* and *Mesta* give very similar accounts of Óláfr's proselytising in Russia. Additionally, in the Flateyjarbók version of *Þorvalds þáttur víðfrla* the great Norwegian king and the hot-headed Icelandic missionary Þorvaldr meet in the east and discuss theology. Only Snorri's *saga* and the synoptic histories fail to mention Óláfr's eastern evangelism.

**2.iii.a. (1)** Having left Russia due to some slanders about him circulating in the royal court, Óláfr settles in Wendland and marries one of the daughters of King Þúrízleifr, Geira, serving the king in his military campaigns (Oddr A 10-11, *Mesta* 58-9).<sup>22</sup> After three years Geira dies, and the grief-stricken Óláfr decides to leave the country: *92 vænti hann at þá myndi hann skjótara af*

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strange beasts and fantastic creatures, the saga testifies primarily to the imaginative world of the saga-writers rather than to the geographical or historical knowledge of their contemporaries.

<sup>22</sup> On the identification of this Þúrízleifr with a historical Polish king, see §2.i.a.5. of the preceding chapter, "South."

*hyggja harmi þeim er hann hafði fengit; ætlaði hann at fara í Rúsíam* (Oddr A 12: 160). *Mesta* elaborates on Óláfr's decision to return to the land of his upbringing:

93 Reð hann ser þa til skipa. og sigldi fyrst til Danmerkr. ok ætlaði þaðan austr j Garða. Ma þat ok líkligt þickia. at við sinn harm mundi hann þangat fyrst venda sem hann hafði aðr lengzt verit. ok sino raði bezt unat. (*Mesta* 75: 150-51)

Here Óláfr's initial motivation in travelling to Russia is not a pious one, but a more personal desire to escape grief. His missionary motivation he will not attain until later. Far-travel as homecoming is found elsewhere, but since Óláfr considers Russia home because – as *Mesta*-writer is careful to point out – he spent the best days of his childhood and youth there, and that due to exile, this must be considered a motivation corollary to exile. Óláfr seeks to assuage his grief by “going home” to the distant east, but it is only his home because he was exiled there.<sup>23</sup>

In Denmark Óláfr twice miraculously escapes the consequences of stealing local livestock by lying down and holding over himself two sticks in the shape of a cross, having heard of a powerful god whose victory token is a cross (Oddr 12, *Mesta* 75). Effecting a more permanent escape, Óláfr travels eastward to Russia and is welcomed by King Valdimarr and Queen Allogia. There Óláfr has a magnificent and terrifying dream in which a voice high above him says that though Óláfr has the promise of a righteous man, he must learn about the Christian god and be baptised in the land of Greeks (Oddr 13, *Mesta* 76). He is also told that following his full conversion, Óláfr will then guide many others 94 *af dauckum villu u[e]gum heiðins<sup>a</sup> trunadar<sup>a</sup> biartar g<sup>1</sup>tur heilag[rar truar]* (*Mesta* 76: 153). After receiving this message of hope, Óláfr sees a vision of fiery, Christian Hell, full of torments and the cries of the suffering – some of whom are heathen friends and chieftains known to Óláfr. In both sagas it is made clear that the torments

of this fiery place await Valdimarr and Allogia if they remain in their unrepentant state. Waking with tears in his eyes, Óláfr sets off at once for Byzantium.

Once there, Óláfr immediately seeks out clerical teachers and receives instruction in Christianity, eventually becoming “prime-signed” (*prímsignaðr*) – marked with the sign of the Cross preliminary to christening (Oddr 13, *Mesta* 76). Oddr remarks that an unnamed bishop gives this prime-signing to Óláfr in response to his request to be baptised, while in *Mesta* Óláfr finds the bishop, here named Páll, after his *primo signatio* (Oddr 13, *Mesta* 76). In both accounts Óláfr entertains the bishop to travel to Russia and <sup>95</sup> *boðaði þar GUðs kristni heiðnum þjóðum* (*Mesta* 76: 154). Bishop Páll agrees on the condition that Óláfr himself first return to Russia and <sup>96</sup> *tulkaði hans erendi. sva at h'fþingiar stæði eigi imoti. at hann mætti þar grund valla GUðs kristni* (*Mesta* 76: 154). Óláfr then returns to Russia and preaches Christianity in private to the royal couple. Against initial opposition, Óláfr succeeds in converting the king and queen, and they in turn have all the people baptised. In *Mesta* this conversion follows a large assembly at which Óláfr delivers the gospel message and the royal couple publically endorse the new religion (Ch. 76).

Óláfr’s Christian missionary motivation is very clear. Though Óláfr initially travels to Russia out of grief and the desire to be once again in the country of his childhood, he is soon motivated by a divine vision to pursue a new course, and he gains a new, pious motivation for his stay in the eastern kingdom. Thereupon Óláfr acts on his newly-acquired motivation and succeeds in bringing Christianity to Russia. History assures us this is literary fantasy, a Scandinavian invention to add to the glory of their first great Christian king. Valdimarr’s conversion, for example, did not take place until 988, after Óláfr had already left Russia (Bugge

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<sup>23</sup> This may be contrasted with Hervtr’s homeward travel to Aldeiguborg (Staraya Ladoga) after she tires of travelling about on Viking raids (*Herv.* R 3: 10, R 4: 20). Though her father was a Scandinavian Viking, the distant

1910: 7).<sup>24</sup> Perhaps mindful of the doubtful veracity of this episode, the writer of *Mesta* says that these accounts of Óláfr's preaching of Christianity in Russia are not incredible, and further defends his story:

97 Eín bok <sup>a</sup> giæt ok sann froð er heitir Ymago mundi kveðr skyrt <sup>a</sup> at þessar þioðir er sva heíta. Rvsci. Polaii. Vngarij. kristnaðvz <sup>a</sup> d'gum Ottonis þess er hinn .iij<sup>di</sup>. var keisari með því nafni. Sumar bækr segia at Otto keisari hafi farit með her sinn j Austr ueg ok brotit þar folk viðá til kristni ok með honum Olafr Tryggva s(on). (*Mesta* 76: 158)

Irrespective of the historical truth of this Christian missionary episode, the saga-writer's careful citation of supporting material shows he feels this is an important point to validate. To the saga-writer, piety may not be the initial motivation for Óláfr's travel east, but it is the most important.

**2.iii.a. (2)** It is interesting that though the writer of *Mesta* shows knowledge of the story that the Saxon emperor Otto was the primary agent of Russia's conversion to Christianity, the writer does not make Otto the primary agent in his saga. Oddr Snorrason does not mention Otto at all in connection with Russia's conversion. Yet both sagas, as well as Snorri's version in *Heimskringla*, include a full account of Otto's campaign to Christianise Denmark, in which Óláfr takes enthusiastic part under an assumed name (Oddr A 15, *Ólaf.* 24-6, *Mesta* 66-70).

Another saga-source, however, does portray Óláfr engaging in missionary activity in Russia at Otto's behest. This is the Flateyjarbók version of *Þorvalds þátr víðftrla*, which has a differing closing chapter to the one in the *Mesta* version of the þátr. This alternate chapter adds a perhaps more human dimension to the great missionary Óláfr. In this anecdote, Þorvaldr and

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east is Hervtr's true home: she was raised in the eastern court of her maternal grandfather, Bjarmarr jarl.

<sup>24</sup> Theodore Andersson remarks that Óláfr's absence at the time of Valdimarr's conversion is not the only reason for doubt (2003: 140). The Orthodoxy of Russia against the Roman Catholicism of Scandinavia is presumably one of these additional reasons, as is the failure of native Russian sources to ascribe their original conversion to Óláfr.

Óláfr meet in eastern lands (*í Austrveg*), Óláfr on his Christian missionary assignment with Emperor Otto and Þorvaldr for no particular reason. In the course of their conversation, Óláfr asks Þorvaldr what his faith is, and Þorvaldr answers he is Christian. For a man accompanying a Christian monarch on a Christian mission, Óláfr's response is somewhat curious:

98 „Þat er líkligt at þú þjónir vel þínum herra ok kveikir marga menn til ástar við hann. Er mér mikil forvitni á mþrgum trúligum tíðendum þeim er þú munt segja kunna, fyrst af ágætum jartegnum Jesú Kristí, Guðs þíns, ok síðan af ýmissum lþndum ok ókunnum þjóðum, þar næst af þínum athþfnum ok frægiligum framgþngum.“ (*Þorv. F 4: 98-99*)<sup>25</sup>

Thus encouraged, Þorvaldr tells the king 99 *mþrg ok merkilig tíðendi, bæði af Guði ok góðum mþnnum* (*Þorv. F 4: 99*). King Óláfr and all with him are greatly entertained by Þorvaldr's words, especially the stories about Þorvaldr's earlier tribulations preaching Christianity in Iceland. Óláfr then speaks some semi-prophetic words to Þorvaldr regarding Iceland soon becoming tenaciously Christian, and Þorvaldr returns the favour with semi-prophetic words regarding Óláfr attaining the throne of Norway and being granted the good fortune to convert the Icelanders and other northern peoples to the right faith (*til réttar trúar, Þorv. F 4: 99-100*). This episode serves to drive home once again Óláfr's identity as the Norseman who travels to the distant east to convert the people there to Christianity. It also offers an alternative version of Óláfr's conversion and missionary work, in which his adherence to the faith is not so single-minded and immediate as portrayed in his sagas. It is understandable that this alternate version of Óláfr's conviction to bring Christianity to Russia is preserved in only one account; the image of the Norwegian missionary king taking instruction in his faith from a hot-headed Icelandic yokel casts shade on his halo.

What is foregrounded in this þáttur – Óláfr’s spiritual ambiguity at the time of his conversion of Russia – is also detectable in both Oddr’s saga and *Mesta*. In neither account is Óláfr actually baptised in the Christian faith when he achieves the baptism of the Russian royalty and populace. Both sagas follow this eastern episode with an account of Óláfr’s full conversion and baptism in the British Isles (Oddr 14, *Mesta* 77). In the more verbose *Mesta*, the saga-writer inserts between the two episodes the comment that in offering the first-fruits of his labour (*fyrsta<sup>a</sup> u<sup>1</sup>xt sins erfiðis*) to the Lord while yet unbaptised, Óláfr is following the examples of St Basil, who also preached the faith before he was baptised, Ambrose, who was appointed Archbishop while unbaptised, and the biblical centurion Cornelius (*Mesta* 76: 157-58). The writer of *Mesta* adds that in Óláfr’s case, *primo signatio* is sufficient.

**2.iii.b. (1)** A passage of glowing praise describing Yngvarr víðfrli at the end of the third chapter of his saga renders his ultimate involvement in Christian missions unsurprising. Though such praise-passages about title characters are common to many sagas and þættir, this one ends with what (in the context of what follows in the saga) is surely foreshadowing:

100 Uitrer menn hafa honum til jafnat um atgiorfi uid Styrbiorn, frænda sinn, edur Olaf kong Tryggvason, sem frægazstur madur hefer uerit ok mun vera a nordurlaundum um alldr ok æfi, bædi fyrir gudi ok monnum. (*Yng.* 3: 9-10)

Yngvarr’s favourable comparison with the great Christian missionary king of Norway prepares the reader for exploits which will mirror or emulate those of the well-known saga hero – and

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<sup>25</sup> AM 62 fol has *frægiligum*. Flateyjarbók, however, has *frækiligum*, making Þorvaldr’s successes “valiant” rather than “famous” or “creditable.” As in the preceding chapter, I indicate the text used with either an F for Flateyjarbók or an Ó for *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*.



when Yngvarr follows the great king in travelling east, the reader may reasonably expect him to follow Óláfr in missionary activity there.<sup>26</sup>

The reader is not disappointed. While Yngvarr's initial motivations in travelling first east to Russia (lack of proper honour at home, see §2.v.a.1. below) and then east from Russia to unknown lands beyond (curiosity about river-sources, see §2.iv.a. below) are secular, the piety of Yngvarr's great journey east soon reveals itself in several ways. As Yngvarr prepares to leave Russia to begin his eastern voyage, the saga-writer relates: <sup>101</sup> *Hann liet biskup uigja sier boliarn ok tinnu* (*Yng.* 5: 12). Both the bishop Yngvarr brings along and the bishop's blessing on his gear suggest something of Yngvarr's pious nature. By contrast, when sent west by Óláfr Tryggvason to convert Greenland to Christianity, Leifr Eiríksson does not take a bishop with him on any of his voyages. When later in the saga Yngvarr's convoy is attacked by the dragon Jakúlus, the frightful beast spews venom over <sup>102</sup> *skip þat, sem prestar ij styrdu* (*Yng.* 5: 14). Even in lesser clergy Yngvarr is uncommonly spiritually prepared for his voyage to the far east, well-prepared from the outset to fight spiritual battles in potentially pagan places.

The explicit accounts of Yngvarr's Christian missions in the east begin once he arrives in the grand city of Queen Silkisif, Citópolis (classical Scythopolis?). There, though marvelling at the beauty and splendour all around – not least the women of that place – Yngvarr fits out a hall for his men and locks it, <sup>103</sup> *þuiat fullt uar af blotskap allt umhuerfis* (*Yng.* 5: 15). He warns his men to have no dealings with heathens (*heidinna manna*), refusing entry to any women apart from the queen herself and proving his serious intention in this matter by executing the first few offenders among his men. Not one to rely on defence alone, Yngvarr speaks to the queen every day: <sup>104</sup> *Jafnan sagdi Ynguar henni af almætti guds, ok fiell henni uel j skap su trua* (*Yng.* 5: 16).

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<sup>26</sup> Sverrir Jakobsson observes that Oddr's *Saga Óláfs* can be viewed as a prototype for later sagas' treatment of the Christianisation of eastern lands (2006: 936); *Yngvars saga* is of course quite likely to have been written by Oddr.

This pattern is repeated after Yngvarr leaves Silkisif's city to travel further east and arrives at the city of Heliópólis, ruled by King Jólfr.<sup>27</sup> Yngvarr and his men are once again hospitably welcomed to the city, and Yngvarr once again keeps his men steadfast in a separate hall:

105 Par sau þeir um aull stræti micinn blotskap. Ynguar bad sína menn uera bæn-rækna ok trufasta. Eina haull gaf Julfur þeim, ok þann uetur geymdi Ynguar suo sína menn, at engi spilltitz af kuenna uidskiptum edur audrum heidnum domi. (*Yng.* 5: 17)

Again it is only the monarch of the town who is allowed entrance to Yngvarr's hall. Here, curiously, Yngvarr is not said to preach the gospel of Christ to the king. A possible explanation for this omission occurs later on, after Yngvarr has travelled further east and then returned to Heliópólis: King Jólfr betrays Yngvarr and turns on him in a battle in which they have been fighting on the same side (*Yng.* 7: 25-26). It would not do for a monarch who had been enlightened by knowledge of Christ to display such treacherous behaviour – to give such an account would surely dishonour both Christ and Yngvarr.

The rest of Yngvarr's travels in the east are typified by his piety in the face of pagan opponents and dangers, if not actual missionary effort. Confronted by a terrifying giant as ugly as the devil himself, Yngvarr enjoins one of his good clerics to sing hymns and promises a six-day fast to the Lord, with prayers (*Yng.* 6: 19). When pagan pirates attack their convoy with fire hurled from a furnace and a bronze tube<sup>28</sup>, Yngvarr fires an arrow lit with consecrated fire (*uigdum elldi*) into the tube and 106 *eyddi suo þui diofulsfolki med Guds fulltingi, at þat vard at aungu utan faulska* (*Yng.* 6: 21). Part of Christianising a heathen land, presumably, is cleansing the land of the unrepentant. One of Yngvarr's men, Sóti, spends the night in a haunted castle and

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<sup>27</sup> On the saga-writer's use of the place-name Heliopolis/Hieriopolis, see Glazyrina 2003. The saga-writer may have borrowed the name directly or indirectly from Isidore's *Etymologiae*, where it is an Egyptian city, or from one of the accounts of the life of St Barbara, where it is in Syria.

is told by the devil in human form that Yngvarr and many of his men will fall ill and die before returning west to Sweden. Sóti will die and stay behind with the rest of the unrighteous and faithless (*ranglâtur ok trvlaus*) spirits in that place, but Yngvarr will be saved by his faith in God (*Yng. 7: 24*). All these predictions come true, and shortly after Yngvarr and his men re-enter the realm of Queen Silkisif, Yngvarr and many of his men fall sick. On his deathbed, Yngvarr asserts his faith in God, and asks that his body be carried west to Sweden and buried in a church. He also orders that his wealth be divided in three, one third to be given to churches and preachers, and another to be given to poor folk (*Yng. 8: 27-28*). Finally, Yngvarr bids his men farewell until the day of resurrection and dies. After Silkisif, understandably grieved, has Yngvarr's body sumptuously interred in her own city, she sends men back to Sweden with words that are a testament to Yngvarr's piety and success as a missionary:

107 Þa bad drottning þa fara j Guds frid ok Y[n]guars. „Er sa minn Gud, sem yduar er. Bidit heila frændr Ynguars, er þeir komit til Suiþiodar, ok bidit nockurn þeira hinngat koma med kennimonnum ok kristna þenna lyd, ok þa skal hier kirkiu giora, þa er Ynguar skal huila at.“ (*Yng. 8: 30*)

In death as in life, Yngvarr is a formidable Christian missionary in the distant east.

**2.iii.b. (2)** Yngvarr's eastern journey is paralleled in a number of ways by that of his son Sveinn, not least in the general piety of the travellers and most especially their leader. Like his father, Sveinn travels out east to Russia and there learns many languages known to be used in the east. Unlike his father, however, Sveinn's express intention in travelling east of Russia is not to investigate a river-source but to see Queen Silkisif. Thus while the Christian missionary activity

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<sup>28</sup> This detail clearly preserves the memory of "Greek fire," which the Scandinavian Rus would have encountered during their 9th-century naval attacks on Byzantium; the historical Yngvarr is unlikely to have encountered it on his

on Yngvarr's voyage was somewhat opportunistic, Sveinn is fundamentally motivated by piety from the outset, desiring to fulfill Silkisif's request and bring Christianity to her land. For this purpose, Sveinn brings with him on his expedition several priests and a bishop. The bishop, Róðgeirr, casts blessed lots to determine God's will, and three times the lots indicate God wants them to go (*Yng. 9: 32*). Not only is it Sveinn's pious desire to go east, but it is also God's will.

Like his father, Sveinn fights battles with heathens and fantastical beasts of these pagan lands, continually calling on the Christian god for aid in these battles. Sveinn is, if possible, even more devout than Yngvarr. Before an uncertain battle with heathens, Sveinn not only again casts lots to determine God's will but also solemnly vows to give up plundering if God grants him victory (*Yng. 9: 32-33*). When victory is granted, Sveinn and his men praise God. When another army of heathens bears a blood-stained corpse (*mann blöðgan*) as their battle-standard, Sveinn is encouraged by Bishop Róðgeirr to bear as his battle-standard the cross of his Lord with the image of Christ on it (*Yng. 10: 40-41*). Finally, after defeating the dragon Jakúlus with the help of one of the men from Yngvarr's voyage, Sveinn and his men once again praise God for their victory (*Yng. 11: 41-42*). Sveinn's voyage is perhaps more blessed than Yngvarr's in proportion to the extent to which it is more directly motivated by piety.

When Sveinn reaches Silkisif's realm and city, his greeting is characteristic of his piety: when she moves to embrace him he refuses to kiss her, a heathen woman (*heidna konu*). When she indicates love for him by saying he has his father's eyes, Sveinn apparently makes no reply (*Yng. 12: 43*). The queen is instead first instructed in the Christian faith by the bishop<sup>29</sup>, gains an understanding of spiritual wisdom, and is baptised along with the whole city (*Yng. 12: 43-44*).

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11th-century expedition (Ellis Davidson 169, 276-79; Shepard 234, 278-80; Franklin-Shepard 114-15).

<sup>29</sup> This catechisation occurs through an interpreter, which suggests that Sveinn's resolution to keep himself pure of heathen women has led him to refuse her company even as interpreter until she has accepted the Christian faith.

Only then, once the queen has proved her earnest desire to accept Christianity, does Sveinn accept her hand in marriage and become the king of the realm. The narrative continues:

108 Eftir þessa veitslo för Sveinn kongur fi<sup>1</sup>lmennur vmm rijke sitt ok so drottning. Þar er ok biskup j ferd ok lærder menn, | þviat Sveinn kongur lætur christna landid ok oll þã rijke, sem drottning hafde ädur stiörnad. Enn er sumra tök ok so hafde megnaz kraftur gudlegrar mōskunar j þvi landi, ad það var allt alchristid ordit, þa villde Sveinn kongur ok hans f<sup>1</sup>runeōte bua ferd sijna heim til Svijþiödar ok läta vita frændur sijna sanninde vmm hans ferd. (*Yng.* 13: 44)

Where his father began the work of Christian missions in the east but died before his end was achieved, Sveinn completes the work and intends to travel home again, his purpose fulfilled. The queen, naturally, does not want him to go and appeals to his missionary spirit:

109 „Ok siä, hvad þier hlijder ad stirkia christnina ok läta kirkiur reýsa, þviat first skaltu kirkiu läta giora jnnan borgar micla ok virdulega, ok ef su verdure so, sem ad ec villda, þa skal ad þeire jarda lijkama f<sup>1</sup>dur þijns.“ (*Yng.* 13: 45)

Sveinn, pious Christian missionary that he is, cannot refuse, and in due course the church is built and – over the initial and somewhat legalistic protests of the bishop – consecrated in Yngvarr’s name (*Yng.* 13: 45-46). This is the culmination of Christian missions in the far east, and following a chapter citing the writer’s sources of information, the saga ends.

#### 2.iv. Exploration

As in some far-travels westward, exploration is a motivation for some of the eastern far-travellers of the sagas. The exploration of unknown lands in the west beyond the relatively settled yet imaginatively distant Norse colony of Greenland is balanced in these accounts by exploration of the mysterious lands in the east beyond the settled, distant realm of Russia.

**2.iv.a.** After being refused the title of king in Sweden, Yngvarr leaves Scandinavia for Russia, where he is welcomed and honoured by King Jarizleifr. *Yngvars saga* relates:

110 Þar uar Ynguar iij uetur ok nam þar margar tungur at tala. Hann heyrdi umræðu a þui, at iij âr fiellu austan vm Gardariki, ok uar su mest, sem j midit uar. Þa for Ynguar uida um austurriki ok fretti, ef nockur madur uissi, huadan su a fielli; enn engi kunni þat at segia. Þa bio Ynguar ferd sina vr Gardariki ok ættladi at reyna ok kanna, lengd ar þessarar. (*Yng.* 5: 12)

*Kanna* may mean either “search” or “explore” (Cleasby-Vigfússon 330); the context here suggests “explore” is the best sense. While Yngvarr’s initial motivation for travel to Russia seems to be to gain honour after being denied honour at home, his decision to travel further east is clearly an effect of his having heard of an exploration possibility that interests him. A large river flows through Russia, of which no one knows the source, so Yngvarr decides to go and find it.<sup>30</sup> Also of interest is the fact that Yngvarr spends his time in Russia learning several languages. This would seem to indicate that Yngvarr is preparing himself for the possibility of interaction with unknown peoples with whom it would behoove him to be able to communicate. It follows that Yngvarr is unsure what lands and countries he may pass through, but nevertheless intends to learn something of the people and culture while he is there, a further indication of an attitude of exploration (see also §2.v.a.2. below).

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<sup>30</sup> The great rivers of Russia are the original routes Scandinavians took to travel through that country to their southern and eastern goals (Blöndal-Benedikz 8). The names of some of the cataracts along the lower Dnieper, attested by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus in the 10th century, are clearly derived from Old Norse originals and indicate the Scandinavian eastern travellers’ early encounters with these river-obstacles. See Constantine 57-63, Blöndal-Benedikz 9-12 and Ellis Davidson 80-88. Constantine himself recognises the difference between the names “in Russian” and “in Slavonic” (*Ῥωσισί, Σκλαβηνισί*; Constantine 58). The historical Yngvarr travelled these rivers centuries later than the Scandinavian explorers who gave the cataracts the “Russian” names that Constantine knew.

As it turns out, knowledge of many languages serves Yngvarr well on his eastern journey: arriving in the magnificent city ruled by Queen Silkisif, he is able to test her knowledge of languages before revealing his own (*Yng.* 5: 15). Yngvarr's educational quest again reveals itself when Silkisif offers to marry him and make him king of all her realm: Yngvarr replies that he <sup>111</sup> *fyst uilia rannsaka leingd arinnar ok þiggja þann kost sidan* (*Yng.* 5: 16). Yngvarr's desire for knowledge and experience in the distant east must be considerable, because his wish to learn the source of the eastern river seems now to be greater than his desire for honour or power. It was, after all, because he was refused the title and position of king that Yngvarr left Sweden in the first place.

Finally, the exploratory nature of Yngvarr's voyage east is suggested by a sentence marking his convoy's passage from the familiarity of Russia to the unfamiliarity of the lands east of it. Following the expedition's first adventure, the saga-writer relates: <sup>112</sup> *Sidan sigldu þeir marga daga ok um morg hierut ok þar til, at þeir sau annann sid ok lit a dyrum; ok af þui skildu þeir, at þeir fiarlægduzt sin hierut edur laund* (*Yng.* 5: 13-14). This pseudo-scientific judgement recalls Ari Þorgilsson's words in *Íslendingabók* regarding the artefacts left behind by the indigenous peoples of Greenland (*Ísl.* 6: 13-14). Both statements express a similar interest in the cultural, botanical or zoological details of newly-explored lands. If nothing else, the statement suggests that Yngvarr and his men are paying close attention to the flora and fauna of the regions through which they are passing and using them to gauge their distance from home. Their curiosity about the unfamiliar lands through which they travel and the practical use to which they put their observations suggest that Yngvarr's journey is as much as anything else one of exploration.

**2.iv.b.** Eirekr víðfrli's motivations for travel eastward are more obscure than those of Yngvarr and his son Sveinn. His saga, however, also contains indications that his travels are explorations, with piety at least a secondary motivation. Though the exploration in *Eireks saga* is as explicitly connected with piety as in *Yngvars saga*, here the central character is not spreading the Christian faith but seeking it. In Eirekr's journey the exploratory and pious desires are thus much more intimately connected; the knowledge he seeks is as much spiritual as geographical.

The obscurity of Eirekr's original motivation lies in the fact that he solemnly vows to travel the wide world to find the land of paradise without explaining why he wants to find it:

113 Þess er getit æitt iola kuelld þa streingde Æirekr þess heit at fara vm allan heim at leita ef hann fynde stad þann er heidnir menn kalla V dains akr. en kristnir menn jord lifande manna edr Paradisum. (*Eirek. A 1: 4*)<sup>31</sup>

There is certainly curiosity here and perhaps a hint of piety, but it is impossible to say if there are not other motivations: desire for fame and glory, or a love of adventure, or even a simple Viking's search for the richest plunder. Also, whatever piety there is is not Christian: Eirekr is heathen. It nevertheless seems reasonable to suppose that the explorer's curiosity about uncharted lands is present, however many other corollary motivations there are. Later passages support this supposition and introduce the elements of Christian piety and spirituality.

After first travelling to Denmark and doubling his party's number with the addition of the Danish prince Eirekr and his men, Eirekr sails for Byzantium. There the Greek king receives the Norsemen with honour and asks which way they are bound, to which Eirekr replies that they

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<sup>31</sup> As in my citations from *Yngvars saga*, the first number in my citations from *Eireks saga* is the commonly used chapter-number; the letter denotes the manuscript quoted from. The second number denotes the page number in the Arnamagnæan edition, from which I quote the saga-text; this edition does not number the five chapters of *Eireks saga*. Ódäinsakr is equated in the beginning of the U-redaction of *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* with the realm of Guðmundr of Glæsisvellir, due to his race's longevity (Tolkien 66, 84-86). The land appears as "Undensakre" in Book IV of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, the place to which the governor of Scania Fiallerus retreats into exile. See also Simek 1993: 239 and §2.i.e. of the preceding chapter, "South."



intend to explore (*kanna*) the world far and wide (*Eirek. 1: 10*). Here Eirekr's stated intention is exploration, though admittedly he is not telling the king the whole story. The narrative soon foregrounds Eirekr's curiosity, however: after serving the Byzantine emperor in some of his campaigns, Eirekr begins to question him on theological matters (*Eirek. 2*). With relentless inquisitiveness, Eirekr bounds from each answer the Byzantine ruler gives him to the next question; the generally cosmological bent of Eirekr's questions illustrates the extent to which Eirekr is a spiritual explorer. Towards the end of this long question-answer session, the king even remarks: <sup>114</sup> *foruitinn ertu Æirekr ok margra hluta uilltu uiss verda þeira sem o naudsynligir eru ok fa heyrdir ok miog okunnir (Eirek. 2: 40)*. Eirekr eventually presents his most practical questions, asking the king first what the most distant part of the (southern) world is, then where the land he seeks, Paradise, is located, and finally whether or not he can get there (*Eirek. 2*). To this final question the king is at last compelled to answer he does not know, so it is up to Eirekr, the increasingly pious explorer, to find out. The king, however, enjoins Eirekr to first be baptised and remain in Byzantium for three years.<sup>32</sup> As befits a man pious enough to seek Christian Paradise yet worldly enough to intend to travel in life rather than after death, Eirekr spends these three years in both pious and practical study:

<sup>115</sup> *Æirekr spurde konung uandliga at <sup>1</sup>mbun rettlættis edr pijslum heluitis. hann spurde ok at yfirbragde þioda ok grein landa fra h<sup>1</sup>fum ok vtl<sup>1</sup>ndum ok fra allre australfu heimsins ok sudr halfu fra konungum storum ok fra ymissum eyium. fra audn landa ok fra þeim st<sup>1</sup>dum er þeir attu ferd yfir fra monnum undarligum ok buninge þeira ok sidum margra þioda. fra h<sup>1</sup>gg ormum ok flugdrekum ok allzkyns dyrum ok fuglum fra gnott gullz ok gimsteina. (Eirek. 2: 50-52)*

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<sup>32</sup> This is the same amount of time Silkisif asks Sveinn to stay to strengthen her kingdom's Christian faith (*Yng. 13*). In distant realms, three years seems to be the gestation period of a person or a people's conversion to Christianity.

The king answers all Eirekr's queries well and wisely (*uel ok frodliga, Eirek. 2: 54*). Thus fortified with knowledge, the newly-baptised Eirekr and his men set off east to cross Syria and India and find Paradise on the other side (*Eirek. 3: 54*). The narrator reports that though the travellers sometimes go by ship and horse, they usually walk – a detail of their exploration that recalls the piety of pilgrims on their way to Rome.<sup>33</sup> Piety is suggested more directly when an angel Eirekr encounters in the distant east who informs him that he, the angel, has directed Eirekr's actions and paths for the entire journey, from his initial vow to his ultimate arrival in earthly Paradise (*Eirek. 4*). Eirekr, like young Óláfr Tryggvason, has been transported east by God to fulfil pious purposes (see §2.i.a. above).

The far-travellers are helped on their way by a letter and seal the Greek king provided them with, <sup>116</sup> *Ritat a allar tungur þeira þioda sem uon uar at þeir munde koma til (Eirek. 3: 56)*. As in *Yngvars saga*, the narrative emphasises the multilingual nature of the far east. Also as in *Yngvars saga*, the far-travellers find what they are looking for. Yngvarr seeks the source of the great river, and he finds it; Eirekr seeks Paradise, and good information followed by one leap through a fiery dragon's mouth takes him there. If this indicates a trend among saga-accounts of exploration in which the explorers tend to find what they are looking for, it is hardly surprising. A saga-writer would probably consider a story about a person who fails to find what they seek not worth telling. As discussed in §4 of Chapter 2, "West", discoverers of new lands are often defined as those who first manage to successfully set foot on or settle them – not those who first sight them from a ship. In this eastern manifestation of that trend, the explorers of distant eastern lands must be successful in their quests for their stories to be told.

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<sup>33</sup> Pilgrims who walk to Rome include Icelanders Flosi and Kári (*Njála* 158), Danish king Knútr inn ríki (*Knytt.* 17), and Norwegian king Sigurðr slembidjárn (*Mork.* 84: F 408, U 203).

2.iv.c. Success and piety are not the only perspectives from which Yngvarr's and Eirekr's explorations may be compared. From another perspective, Yngvarr's and Eirekr's voyages are both searches for Paradise, *Yngvars saga* implicitly and *Eireks saga* explicitly. *Eireks saga*, more fantastical than *Yngvars saga* and concerned not with historical figures from the 11th century but with mythical characters in a prehistoric past, may allow its protagonist to actually reach that place. As David Ashurst has pointed out, however, the search for eastern river-sources in medieval Icelandic literature is to an extent the search for Paradise. The notion that Paradise is the source of the four great rivers of the eastern or southern world originates in the second chapter of Genesis (Ashurst 71). The medieval Icelanders knew and integrated this knowledge into their world-view, repeating the concept in other contemporary sources.<sup>34</sup> In *Alexanders saga*, a 13th-century Icelandic translation<sup>35</sup> of Walter of Châtillon's 12th-century epic *Alexandreis*, the narrator relates: <sup>117</sup> *Darius konungr feR nu með her sinn til ár þeirar er Evfrates heitir. hon er ein af þeim fiorom er or paradiso falla (Alex. 2: 20)*. Ashurst further notes that *Veraldar saga*, an Icelandic work from the late 12th century, corroborates this notion and also "locates Paradise in the uttermost east, far from the habitations of mankind but clearly conceived of as a real place in a real world" (71). This somewhat justifies Eirekr's finding and entering earthly Paradise – if the place is on earth and in a definite direction, why should he not reach it? In a later passage in *Alexanders saga* Alexander decides to search for the source of the Nile – and by implication, Paradise – and in another he says he will make war beyond the confines of the world (Ashurst 79, *Alex. 9*). In the latter passage, Paradise seems to be located outside the world, which is consistent with Yngvarr travelling to the source of a great eastern river and reaching nothing more

<sup>34</sup> Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards suggest Oddr may have added the detail of Yngvarr searching for a river-source in *Yngvars saga* as an appropriate detail borrowed from "the world of book-learning" (3-4).

<sup>35</sup> The saga was probably written by Brandr Jónsson, Bishop of Hólar 1263-64, in the early 1260s at the behest of the Norwegian king (Finnur 1925: i-ii; Pulsiano 7-8).

extraordinary than a dragon atop a pile of treasure (*Yng.* 6: 18-23). On the question of whether there was a widespread understanding of the earthly and heavenly Paradises in medieval Scandinavia, Ashurst concludes from his survey of Old Norse texts that they “contain a good deal of variation and disagreement over details, and even over some major issues”, but that while these “contradictions and uncertainties...would no doubt have been a source of frustration to anyone in search of exact doctrinal correctness,” they “would also have offered the benefits of freedom and ambiguity to those writing works of imaginative literature” (Ashurst 77-78). These late works of imaginative literature like *Eireks saga* are no doubt freer to exploit the possibilities of doctrinal ambiguities than the earlier, more conservative texts seeking to establish definite, consistent models of heaven and earth. Elena Melnikova writes with regard to this question of what lies in the distant east that Icelandic learned, geographical treatises largely adhere to Latin, Christian traditions regarding the east until, after the emergence of a learned prehistory of Scandinavian peoples, “entries on Asia start to be supplemented with the story of the migration of Odin’s clan from Asia to the North of Europe” (10). The most well-known example of this is, of course, Snorri’s tale of the emigration of the Æsir from Troy in the beginning of *Gylfaginning* and *Ynglinga saga*. The most remote, uncharted east is either God’s country or the gods’ country.

Perhaps in an attempt to reconcile the contradictory attributes of the earthly and heavenly Paradises, the writer of *Eireks saga* has an inhabitant of the land Eirekr reaches explain to him that this place is not Paradise but the Land of Living Folk (*iord lifande manna*). He says that this fine place they see <sup>118</sup> „er sem eyde mork til at iafnna vid Paradisum. en skamt hedan er sa stadr ok fellr þadan <sup>a</sup> su er þu sátt þangat skulu <sup>1</sup>ngir lifs koma” (*Eirek.* 4: 92). Eirekr himself refers to the land by the heathen name, “the field of undying” (*Vdains akr*, *Eirek.* 4: 82). By having

Eirekr reach an earthly Paradise in which the inhabitants know of and apparently have dealings with the heavenly one, the saga-writer manages to side-step certain details of Paradise a well-read reader might have found irreconcilable with this account – its infinite height above earth, for example (Ashurst 78).<sup>36</sup> Eirekr himself observes that the eastern river he crosses to enter this realm must flow out of Paradise (*Eirek.* 3: 62-64), and so it shares with *Yngvars saga* the motif of finding the source of a great, eastern river. Both sagas indicate that at that source of this river the far-traveller may expect to find a dragon. Whether this dragon guards the gates of Paradise or a hoard of wealth varies according to the reality the story relates: a spiritual one, in which Paradise is at the eastern end of the world, or a historical one, in which the Vikings who travel furthest east find precious metal. The latter notion will be discussed in §3 below.

## 2.v. Minor motivations

**2.v.a. (Honour or power)** Several motivations for eastern far-travel are identifiable in only a few examples or manifested only indirectly. The first is Yngvarr víðfrli's initial motivation for travelling to Russia: the desire for honour, power or glory in a distant land when it is denied at home.<sup>37</sup>

**2.v.a. (1)** Having served King Óláfr svenski with excellence in all things, and being of royal blood, Yngvarr has been set above all the chieftains of Sweden. Nevertheless, it is related that he is constantly requesting the title of king and not receiving it (*Yng.* 4: 11). Eventually weary of

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<sup>36</sup> Saxo's Hadingus also makes a journey to the other world and reaches a beautiful land neighbouring the world to which no living creature may travel, separated from it by a large river and a wall. A dead chicken heard to crow after being thrown over the wall demonstrates that there is truly resurrection in the land beyond (Saxo I:viii).

<sup>37</sup> This might also be considered Eymundr Hringsson's motivation in travelling east. However, his father and brothers suffer at the hands of King Óláfr, and most of Eymundr's followers face tyrannical oppression under Óláfr's regime, suggesting his travel east is more like exile.

waiting, Yngvarr prepares his ships to leave the country <sup>119</sup> *at leita sier vtlenzs rikis* (*Yng.* 5: 11). King Óláfr hears of Yngvarr's intended journey and begs Yngvarr to stay, promising him the title of king if he does. Yngvarr responds that if he had been given the chance earlier, he would have accepted; as it is, he sets sail (*Yng.* 5: 11-12). In Sweden, the easternmost of Scandinavian countries, sailing east across the Baltic and venturing through the Slavic wilds to the royal court of Novgorod is the natural direction and choice.

It is clear that here Yngvarr's perceived dishonour in his homeland and desire to attain greater or equal honour in a distant land motivates him. This is certainly his original impetus, howsoever other motivations (exploration, Christian missions) assume larger importance in the course of the narrative. King Óláfr's reaction to Yngvarr's decision to travel far to acquire honour or even a throne abroad – a hasty offer of the title of king – is notable: Óláfr, at least, seems to believe Yngvarr can achieve greater honour and renown in foreign parts than even the title of king in Sweden will afford him.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps the king also fears the power Yngvarr may gain in distant lands, hinting at a perception that military power and personal autonomy are more easily gained in the shifty, unknown worlds outside Scandinavian boundaries than those inside them. This is certainly consistent with accounts of various kings of Norway – both Óláfrs, Magnús góði, Haraldr harðráði – whose exiles in Russia ultimately result in triumphant reinstatement on their Scandinavian thrones (always with the Russian king's support). Also, Scandinavian kings are perpetually plagued with the problem of what to do with their promising young men when there is no enemy to send them out against. The three generations of far-travellers – Eymundr, Yngvarr and Sveinn – all gain valuable travelling and raiding experience on Viking voyages or state-sanctioned “tribute-collection” before striking out to the distant east

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. Ragnar's comment in *Eymundar þáttur Hringssonar* to the effect that in leaving Norway for the distant east he would like to be considered to have made a good trade. See §2.i.d. above.

to put that experience to work for them (*Yng.* 2: 4; 4: 10; 8: 31-32). In Sveinn's case, the connection is explicit: when Yngvarr's men return home with Silkisif's invitation for Sveinn to come and Christianise her eastern realm, <sup>120</sup> *hann reizt j hernat ok uilldi reyna sic fyst; og er nockurer uetur uoru lidner, kom hann med myclu lidi j Garda austur* (*Yng.* 8: 31-32). In Yngvarr's case, employment as a royal privateer is not enough, and when the glory and power of a king's title is refused, he is impelled to travel to the distant east to find comparable glory. In this he is successful, though, as noted in §2.iv.a. above, Yngvarr's interest in becoming king wanes when he is presented with an uncharted river to explore.

Sverrir Jakobsson demonstrates that the acquisition of glory or honour in the wealthy, noble courts of the east is one of two strains of thought that characterise eastern travel in the sagas, even more characteristic than its fantastic creatures and beasts. Sverrir describes the east as “a place of wealthy, civilized and cultured lands where a traveler might acquire a great honour by mingling with noble people” (2006: 935), and ultimately comes to the conclusion that progress eastward leads not only to geographical and spiritual goals, but also social advancement (2006: 942). The similarity and relationship between the great empires of the south and east is again called to mind; the acquisition of glory and honour in distant lands is a motivating factor for southern far-travellers from Sigurðr Jórslafari to Rǫgnvaldr jarl Kali (see §§2.i.b., 2.i.d.a. and 2.ii.b.2. of the preceding chapter).

**2.v.a. (2)** The remaining examples of saga-characters travelling east to Russia for the purpose of gaining honour or glory there are not as clear as that of Yngvarr. Like Sveinn Yngvarsson, however, one of these far-travellers describes his proposed far-travel east in terms of testing his

character. This is Björn Hítðælakappi (“champion of Hít river dale people”).<sup>39</sup> Björn seeks in addition to experience gained by testing his abilities abroad education in the ways of cultured peoples outside Scandinavia. Björn explains to a fellow-Icelander in Norway why he does not wish to return to Iceland and marry just yet:

121 „En ek þykkjumk enn of lítt reynt mik hafa í framgǫngu ok óvígða kannat hafa góðra manna siðu, en ef ek fer þegar til Íslands, þá mun ek eigi nenna at fara svá skjótt frá ráðahag mínum.“ (*Bjar.* 3: 118)

In this Björn is not unlike Bolli Bollason, who himself goes to Norway and then refuses to return to Iceland before gaining valuable experience and knowledge of the world by travelling further abroad (*Lax.* 73; see §2.i.d.4. of the preceding chapter). However, Björn had earlier expressed a desire to go raiding to win money and fame (*afla fjár ok sæmðar*, *Bjar.* 3: 117). It is thus uncertain why Björn wants to continue travelling, and indeed he may not be sure himself: what is certain is that he wants to keep going. The response of an erstwhile antagonist to Björn’s expressed wish to go raiding is telling: he tells Björn that he thinks further travel is unwise and risky, Björn having already gained much honour and glory (*góða sæmð ok virðing*, *Bjar.* 3: 118). It seems that whatever Björn’s stated motivations may be, his true reason is interpreted to be glory-seeking. Björn’s eventual far-travel is just as ambiguous as his motivations. He travels to the east (*í Austrveg*) with merchants rather than Vikings, and yet at the Russian court he serves the king as a fighting-man rather than a trader (*Bjar.* 4). It may be that raiding and trading, at least in the context of far-travel, are practically interchangeable as the sort of “enterprises” in which Björn wishes to test himself. In any case, after fighting a duel on the king’s behalf and

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<sup>39</sup> Though *Bjarnar saga Hítðælakappa* developed from various sources – continental romance, orally-preserved verses and other oral traditions – it shares a narrative pattern with other so-called “skáldasögur” (Pulsiano 47). The beginning portion of the saga, in which the Russian episodes take place, is missing from all extant manuscripts and



emerging victorious, what Björn ultimately gains from his time in Russia is glory, whether this was his original primary motivation for travelling east or not.<sup>40</sup>

Another far-traveller to the east whose reason for travelling is not explicitly stated in the text of his saga (nor in the skaldic verses it quotes) is the future king of Denmark Eiríkr góði, a jarl at the time of his visit to Russia. Though Eiríkr's journey there is introduced in *Knýtlinga saga* in the context of his Baltic Viking raids against heathens, the Russian voyage is clearly differentiated from those Viking expeditions by his activities among the Russians. The saga-writer describes his journey: <sup>122</sup> *Hann fór allt austr í Garðaríki ok sótti þar heim htfðingja ok ríkismenn, ok tóku þeir honum allir vel ok sæmiliga. Þá hann þar stórar gjafir af ríkismönnum* (*Knýt. 70: 212*). The saga-writer also quotes Markús Skeggjason's magnificent elegy

*Eiríksdrápa*<sup>41</sup>:

<sup>123</sup> Fæðir sótti fremðar ráða  
 foldar vtrðu austr í Garða.  
 Auði gæddu allvald prúðan  
 ítrir menn, þeirs hnøggvi slíta.  
 Stillir varð of Austrveg allan  
 einkar tíðr enn mæðar blíði.  
 Hinn varð engr, es hans nafn kunnit,  
 Heiðar manns, í lofi reiða.

(*Knýt. 70: 212*)

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must be supplied from an extended version of Snorri Sturluson's saga of St Óláfr (ÍF III 110-11, Jónas 1988: 258). *Bjarnar saga* was probably written before 1230 (ÍF III xc).

<sup>40</sup> Björn's magnificent achievements in Russia illustrate two literary patterns identified by Kristel Zilmer, one in which foreign place-names mark the significant deeds of saga heroes (Zilmer 2004: 4) and another in which a saga-hero's career advancement through accomplishments abroad is determined by travel (Zilmer 2005: 70).

<sup>41</sup> *Eiríksdrápa* follows the form of Arnórr jarlaskáld's metrically progressive poem for King Magnús góði, *Hrynhenda*. See Jónas 1988: 108-109, 122.

It seems clear that Eiríkr's sojourn in distant Russia is fundamentally a visit by an aspiring Scandinavian nobleman seeking to gain honour and wealth from the rich and powerful people of the great, civilised courts there.<sup>42</sup>

As noted in §1 above, the contrast between Eiríkr's Viking raids in the Baltic against heathens and his visits with the cultured, civilized Christian nobles of Russia illustrates the imaginative "distance" of Russia from Scandinavia in quite spatial terms. Between Scandinavian and Russian Christians is a heathen, Slavic "belt" of Wendland, Courland, Semigallia and other lands. These Slavic heathens are comparable to the Mediterranean heathens who must occasionally be battled through to get to Jerusalem and Byzantium (see §2.i.d.1. of the preceding chapter). As has also been noted (§2.ii.b. above), Eiríkr is said to be knowledgeable and skilled in foreign languages. After the account of Eiríkr's brief visit to Russia, it is said of him: <sup>124</sup> *Eiríkr konungr var vitr maðr ok klerkr góðr ok kunni margar tungur tala* (*Knytt.* 73: 216). Eiríkr is also said to be eloquent and possessed of a fine memory, and a verse by Markús Skeggjason is again quoted to reinforce these points. As has been seen with another Danish far-traveller to the east, Viðgautr, and the eastern far-travellers of *Yngvars saga* (see §§2.ii.b. and 2.iii.b.2 above), proficiency at foreign languages is a fairly common character-trait among eastern far-travellers. This presumably reflects an historic reality of the eastern road to Byzantium through Russia, in which Norse-speaking adventurers and traders encountered many different languages along the way: the individual dialects of Slavic tribes, for example, the language of the Arab peoples whose silver they sought, and the *lingua franca* of the Byzantine empire, Greek. Marianne Kalinke connects the prevalence of multilingual characters in riddarasögur, bishops' sagas, and kings' sagas with medieval Icelanders' preoccupation with fluency in foreign languages, referring

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<sup>42</sup> Sven Aggesen's history of Danish kings and *Ágrip af stfu Danakonunga* do not mention Eiríkr's trip to Russia. Saxo sends him to Sweden rather than to Russia (XII.i, XII.iii).

among many other multilingual characters, to the eastern far-travellers Eiríkr góði and Yngvarr víðftrli and the southern far-traveller Sigurðr Jórsalafari (1983: 856-58).

**2.v.a. (3)** Traces of the honour- or glory-seeking motivation may colour Eirekr víðftrli's desire to seek out and find the Deathless plain. The conclusion to *Eireks saga* begins:

<sup>125</sup> En þui setti sa þetta euintyr fyst j þessa bok er hana skrifade at hann uill at huerr madr vite þat at ekki er traust trutt nema af gude þuiat þo at heidnir menn fai frægd mykla af sinum af reks verkum þa er þat mikill munr þa er þeir enda þetta hit stundliga lijf at þeir hafa þa tekit sitt uerdkaup af ordlofui manna firir sinn frama en æigu þa von hegningar firir sin broth ok tru leyse er þeir kunnu æigi skapara sinn. (*Eirek.* 5: 112-14)

Eirekr was himself a heathen when he originally vowed to search the world for Paradise, leading one to wonder firstly if he too seeks reward from human praise and secondly if in converting to Christianity mid-way through his deed of valour he escapes the requisite punishment. This is especially problematic when one considers that Eirekr does receive the temporal reward: fame and renown during his lifetime that (presumably) result in the saga afterwards. The reader may recall the words written about the Danish prince Eirekr, who witnesses Eirekr víðftrli's courageous leap of faith through the dragon's mouth and subsequently returns home to Scandinavia to tell the story: <sup>126</sup> *nu uerdr þesse madr frflgr af ferd sinne ok þotte hinn meste rausnar madr ok lykr þar fra honum at segia* (*Eirek.* 3: 72). Whether the Norwegian Eirekr also desires this world-renown, or whether this desire for fame forms a part of Eirekr's initial motivation in making the solemn vow to reach the Deathless plain we can only guess. One can merely note that in literature boasts made in drinking halls are often successors or precursors to great deeds designed to increase heroes' fame. Within the corpus of Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse literature, the boasts of Beowulf and the Jómsvíkings immediately spring to mind.

**2.v.b. (Fostering)** A couple of *konungasögur* feature another motivation for travelling east to Russia, the fosterage of a royal Scandinavian child at the Russia court.<sup>43</sup> This purpose for eastern far-travel is closely related to the pattern of royal exile.

**2.v.b. (1)** In his sagas of St Óláfr Snorri suggests (as do Theodoricus and the author of *Ágrip*) that Óláfr entrusts his young son Magnús to King Jarizleifr and Queen Ingigerðr's care only after he himself is compelled to flee Norway for Russian exile, making the entirety of Magnús's time in the distant east exile as well (*Helga* 180-81, *Sér.* 176-77; Theo. 16, *Ágrip* 26). The first chapter of *Morkinskinna*, however, tells quite a different story.

*Morkinskinna* begins with a domestic quarrel between Jarizleifr and Ingigerðr, the queen having earlier been betrothed to Óláfr Haraldsson of Norway (see §2.ii.a. above). When Ingigerðr angrily threatens to leave Russia, friends intervene and arrange a reconciliation. Jarizleifr acquiesces and grants Ingigerðr anything she wishes, and she makes her request:

127 “Þv scalt nv s. hon senda scip iNoreg til Olafs konvngs. þvi at ec hefi spvrt at hann a einn son vngan lavngetenn. bioð honom hingat oc veit honom vppfözlo oc fostr. þvi at sannlict er þat meþ ycr er melt er at sa er ogÃfgari er oprom fostrar barnn.”

(*Mork.* 1: F 3)<sup>44</sup>

Messengers are dispatched, and Óláfr enthusiastically sends young Magnús to be fostered by the Russian royal couple. The king and queen receive him with honour, love and affection, but other

<sup>43</sup> The *fornaldarsaga* *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* reverses the usual pattern, having King Heiðrekr travel to Garðaríki to foster the Russian king's son (*Herv.* R 7: 28). This is not an example of far-travel, as in the saga Heiðrekr's realm, Reiðgotaland, seems to be imagined both quite close to Russia and well outside Scandinavia.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Hǫfdr's advice to his son Heiðrekr (*Herv.* 4: 22) and English king Athelstan's livid reaction to the suggestion that he foster Norwegian king Haraldr's son (ÍF XXVI 145).

Russians are less pleased: <sup>128</sup> *Svmir menn hotöpo hann oc þotti ovþqvemilict at fōða þar vpp konvngrs s. vtlendan (Mork. 1: F 3-4).*

Thus in contrast to other accounts of Magnús's eastern far-travel, *Morkinskinna* establishes the motivation for his travel as fosterage under the Russian king and queen. There is not even a suggestion that Magnús is sent to Russia to protect him from gathering clouds of rebellious unrest in Norway. On the contrary, Ingigerðr instigates her argument with Jarizleifr by suggesting that Óláfr's royal hall is finer than Jarizleifr's, Óláfr's solid hall an image of the apparent solidity of his reign at that time (*Mork. 1: F 1-2, U 1*). Naturally, after Óláfr has been first exiled to Russia and later killed at the battle of Stiklarstaðir, his vulnerable son Magnús's sojourn in the east becomes as much exile as anything else. The Russians' initial objection to Magnús being fostered there is interesting, as it makes explicit the "foreignness" of Scandinavians in Russia. Though the Russia of the sagas interacts with Scandinavian and other northern European courts (as indeed Magnús's fosterage there attests), it is nevertheless a place where Norsemen are foreign.

**2.v.b. (2)** Sons of Danish kings are also fostered east in Russia. Chapter 23 of *Knyttlinga saga* lists the children of the late King Sveinn Úlfsson (Ástríðsson), reporting briefly on the lives of those who do not go on to distinguished deeds and a lengthier treatment in the saga. Of one such son the saga-writer relates:

<sup>129</sup> Þorgísl, son Sveins konungs, fór austr í Garðaríki. Þar átti hann móðurætt gtfga.  
Fœddisk hann þar upp ok var þar til konungs tekinn ok kom ekki síðan til Danmerkr.  
(*Knyt.* 23: 136)

There is little about Þorgísl's fosterage in Russia that bears any similarity to that of Magnús góði. Magnús's fosterage in Russia is narrated at some length in *Morkinskinna*, and it is merely the

beginning of his long and elaborate life-story, while this is nearly all we hear of Þorgísl. It is perhaps worth noting that Þorgísl is apparently fostered in Russia because of family connections on his mother's side, while Magnús is invited to be fostered in the Russian court by one who would like to have been his mother. In any case, Þorgísl turns his initial journey to the distant east into a life-long sojourn. Þorgísl is mentioned again only once, when the saga-writer reiterates that he is made king in Russia and adds that he never makes a claim to his brother St Knútr's Danish throne (*Knytt.* 30).

A later member of the Danish royal family who is brought up in Russia may also be mentioned here, Valdimarr, the son of Knútr lávarðr. At the time the saintly Knútr is murdered by his ruling kinsmen in Denmark, his heavily-pregnant wife Engilborg is staying with her family in Russia. Seven days after Knútr's death, she gives birth to Valdimarr (*Knytt.* 93). Valdimarr thus does not travel to Russia to be fostered but is brought up at the Russian court after being born there, and, as with Magnús góði, his father's death in Scandinavia effectively makes his sojourn in the east exile. Valdimarr returns to Denmark by the time he is eight years old (*Knytt.* 104), and after a succession of intrigues and conflicts he becomes king of Denmark and is called Valdimarr inn ríki – Valdimarr the Great.

## 2.v.c. (Viking raiding)

2.v.c. (1) There are a few of instances of Viking raiding as a motivation for travel to Russia, all from fornaldarsögur. On Ásmundr berserkjabani's first appearance in his saga, sailing into the harbour of Russian king Hertryggr's capital in a gold-plated ship, he informs the king that he has come to the east on a Viking expedition (*ór hernaði, Egil.* 2: 10). Ásmundr later identifies himself as a Hálogalander, demonstrating that his travels have been not only conceptually far (i.e.

from familiar Scandinavia to exotic Russia) but also geographically far (i.e. from the remote, opposite side of Scandinavia to distant Russia). Egill einhendi's first appearance in the saga is somewhat more dramatic, casting him as a far-travelling Viking not only by report but also by action. Ásmundr, welcomed by the king, has been in the Russian court for about a month when a bloodied and battered remnant of the king's soldiers reports that a Viking raider has come to the kingdom with five well-equipped ships and is plundering in all directions, making short work of all organised opposition (*Egil*. 3). Ásmundr sails to meet Egill, challenges him, and after a stalemated duel convinces him to be reconciled to the Russian king and join his court (*Egil*. 4). Like Ásmundr, Egill is Scandinavian, a son of the king of Gautland, so his Viking expedition too has been one of far-travel to the distant east. From their new positions in the Russian king's court the two Norse Vikings are sent on a quest to battle monsters of the distant north and recover the kings' daughters (see §2.ii.a.3. of the following chapter). Like Eymundr Hringsson and many other Scandinavian royals, Egill and Ásmundr thus turn from their original purpose in travelling to the distant east to a kind of mercenary service.

**2.v.c. (2)** Another Viking raider's motivation to sail all the way from Scandinavia to Russia has another dimension to it. The first chapters of *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar* concern the title character's father Eysteinn, king of Þrándheimr in Norway and several other northern territories obtained as dowry when he married Ása, great-granddaughter of the legendary Viking Ragnarr loðbrók.<sup>45</sup> Fifteen years after the birth of their son Hálfðan, Ása falls sick and dies, and Eysteinn takes it badly: <sup>130</sup> *Konungr unði lítt í ríki sínu þaðan í frá, ok fór hann í hernað hvert sumar* (*Hálf*. 1: 92). He meanders far and wide, and the saga-writer observes that his journeys to the Baltic

take him all the way to Permia (*Eystrasalt ok um Bjarmaland*), indicating some confusion in the saga-writer's mind between distant east and distant north. Finally, Eysteinn raids the Russian town of Aldeigjuborg (Staraya Ladoga), where he lays waste the fortress and makes the slain King Hergeirr's wife Ísgerðr his new queen (*Hálf*. 3). King Eysteinn's far-travel eastward for Viking raids is thus somewhat different from Egill and Ásmundr's, both in its origins and in its results. Where the other two seem simply to be motivated by raiding on its own terms – possibly wishing for wealth, fame or experience as well – Eysteinn has a grim, psychologically plausible sub-layer to his desire to go raiding, the sorrow and emptiness of his wife's loss that he seeks to bury beneath Viking violence. The distance Eysteinn must travel, as far as Aldeigjuborg in the east, is a measure of how great is the sorrow he must escape, or possibly a sign of short-range expeditions gradually becoming ineffective as antidotes to that sorrow. If this is the case, Eysteinn's progressively larger concentric circles of violence-motivated travel culminating in far-travel provide a unique example of this pattern in the easterly direction. Eysteinn's ultimate antidote, presumably, is the new queen he obtains in the distant east: Eysteinn is later said to be very much in love with Ísgerðr (*Hálf*. 7).

**2.v.c. (3)** As illustrated in §2.i.e. above, in the R-redaction of *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* the Viking Arngrímr travels east to Garðaríki for unspecified motivations but once there immediately engages in military service for the Russian king. The U-redaction of the saga tells a very different story. In this version, Arngrímr's family history is first given, identifying him as a Hálogalander whose paternal grandfather's parents were giants from Jǫtunheimar and "Ymisland", a land visualised by this saga-writer as the habitation of giant females; Arngrímr's

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<sup>45</sup> *Hálfðanar saga* is found along with *Egils saga ok Ásmundar* in the fornaldarsaga compendium AM 343a 4to, having reached its complete form in the latter half of the 14th century (Schröder 42). The *Märchen* motifs of the two



mother is the daughter of the legendary hero Starkaðr áludrengr, himself a descendant of giants (*Herv. U 1: 66-67*). After narrating the story of dwarfs forging the sword Tyrfingr for the Russian king Svafrlami and subsequently placing a curse on it, the saga-writer tells that with a great company of Vikings Arngrímr berserkr harries Svafrlami's eastern kingdom, Garðaríki (in this saga the former kingdom of the "Asian" Óðinn, *Herv. U 1: 67-68*). Tyrfingr's curse undoes Svafrlami, and Arngrímr takes the sword from him and kills him with it. The saga-writer concludes the episode: <sup>131</sup> *Síðan tók Arngrímr herfang mikit ok Eyfuru dóttur Svafrlama ok hafði í burt með sér. Arngrímr fór þá heim í Bólm ok gerði brúðlaup til Eyfuru* (*Herv. U 1: 68*). As argued above, Arngrímr's motivation for travelling east to Russia is a secondary consequence of the saga-compiler's motivation of getting the sword Tyrfingr from its point of origin in the fantastic east to the Scandinavian island Sámsey. While the writer of the R-redaction decides that the Sámsey berserkr's father must himself possess enough military prowess to serve as an excellent mercenary commander of the Russian king's armies, the writer of the U-redaction extends the logic a step further and decides that this figure must be a rapacious Viking and berserkr himself. His motivation in travelling to the distant east and his actions once there accord with this interpretation of the Arngrímr-character.

**2.v.d. (Trade)** The remaining motivation to be discussed is trade. Though it enjoys little coverage in the sagas, it must certainly have been one of the most common motivating factors for eastern travel by Viking Age Scandinavians (see §4 below). Foote and Wilson identify "the great Scandinavian fur trade" as one of the major sources of income for Viking merchants, and they cite the works of Arabic authors who describe Scandinavian traders in Russia, such as Ibn Horradabeh and Ibn Rustah. Foote and Wilson even tentatively ascribe the breakdown of the

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sagas show interdependence with each other, though concrete links are difficult to establish (Pulsiano 155).

Greenland economy in the later Middle Ages to the opening of the Russian fur trade to the European market and the decline in demand of furs from the North (200-01). Elena Melnikova also stresses the importance of trade to the old Russian states, especially along the Baltic-Volga trade route; she, too, identifies furs as a principal commodity, and she too cites an assortment of Arab writers (50-53). Though Norse literary accounts of eastern far-travel for trade are few, they do provide a medieval perspective on the Viking Age reality.<sup>46</sup>

**2.v.d. (1)** A saga-character named Skinna-Björn Skeggjason who appears in several sagas is said in *Landnámabók* to have travelled to Hólmgarður (*Land. S 174, H 140*<sup>47</sup>). His nickname – “Skinna-Björn” or “Pelt-Björn” – is the primary testament to his fundamental identity as a trader in the distant east. In the complete version of *Þórðar saga hreðu* and the Melabók-version of *Landnámabók*, travel to the distant east is said to be customary for Björn, and while there he engages in trading all types of fur and other commodities (*Þórð. 2; ÍF I<sub>2</sub> 212, footnote*).<sup>48</sup> *Þórðar saga* specifies that these furs or pelts traded are those of squirrels, beavers and sables (*gráskinn, bjór ok safala, Þórð. 2: 169*). The financial incentive to engage in this sort of far-travel is made clear in Skinna-Björn’s ultimate position as a prominent, land-holding settler of Iceland in all accounts. In *Morkinskinna* Karl vesæli (“luckless”) and his brother Björn, said to be experienced and wealthy traders, break a trade embargo between Norway and Russia by travelling east to trade there (*Mork. 1*). Upon reaching Russia, however, Karl is first imprisoned due to the hostilities between the two countries and later enlisted into political intrigues by the young prince

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<sup>46</sup> The scarcity of saga-accounts of eastern trade may relate to the scarcity of saga-accounts of Swedes, historically the most common travellers to the distant east. These few Swedish stories usually focus only on the careers of royalty or noblemen, whose far-travels are typically more “royal” and less mercantile and common. Almost all sagas were, of course, written in Iceland and deal more often with the affairs of western Scandinavia than those of the east.

<sup>47</sup> As elsewhere in this thesis, S denotes Sturlubók and H Hauksbók.

Magnús góði. Throughout the rest of the saga, Karl acts no longer as a trader but as Magnús's agent in his plans to regain the Norwegian throne. The mercantile motivating factor for travel to Russia is also seen in *Bjarnar saga Hítðælakappa*, when, as noted in §2.v.a.2. above, Björn travels from Norway east to Russia with a company of merchants (*með kaupmáttinum*, *Bjar.* 4: 120). No more is said about those traders' activities in Russia.

**2.v.d. (2)** *Yngvars saga* provides a fuller and more interesting treatment of eastern trade and takes this activity to the wilder, less civilised lands even further east. On more than one occasion on his voyage, Sveinn Yngvarsson engages in trade with the natives of the lands east of Russia, in episodes reminiscent of the Vínland voyages of Þórfinnr Karlsefni and the sons of Eiríkr rauði. As noted in §2.iii.b. above, Sveinn's initial and primary motivation in his travel eastward to and beyond Russia is the pious desire to fulfil Queen Silkisif's wishes and God's by converting her kingdom to Christianity. Sveinn is nevertheless not averse to making profits before completing that mission.

After Sveinn has left Russia to the east, he and his man make hostile contact with first a group of galley-sailing heathens and then some giants, one of whom Yngvarr had encountered on his eastern journey years earlier.<sup>49</sup> The third group of natives the travellers encounter give them what they take to be a sign of peace, holding up first the stem and then the blade of a feather (*Yng.* 9: 35). Sveinn returns the sign of peace, and the locals crowd together under a cliff, bringing with them various wares for trading (*ymsum kaupskap*). The narrative continues:

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<sup>48</sup> The two extant versions of *Þórðar saga* are possibly independent works by two authors who obtained a "kernel of historical fact" from oral tradition (Jónas 1988: 239). The largely fictional saga was composed around 1350 on the model of older Íslendingasögur (ÍF XIV Iv).

<sup>49</sup> On this occasion the giants are identified as *Cyclópes* (Cyclopes), illustrating saga-writers' tendency to populate distant, unfamiliar places with classical monsters and creatures borrowed from continental tales and learned works concerning fantastic lands. Cf. the uniped of *Eiríks saga rauða*, ultimately derived, through intermediate Scandinavian works of learning, from Isidore of Seville (*Etymologiae* XI.iii.23; see also Nansen I 11).

<sup>132</sup> Sueinn bad sina [menn] a land ganga, ok keyptuzt þeir uid ok lanzmenn, ok skildu | þo huoriger, huat adrer mælltu. A audrum degi gengu menn Sueins en til kaupa uid lanzmenn, ok keyptuzt uid um hrid. Þa uilldi einn girdzskur madur skina kaup þat, er þeir hofdu nykeypt. (*Yng.* 9: 35-36)

The disagreement becomes bloody and a great battle ensues, in which Sveinn and his men defeat the natives and take all their wares (*Yng.* 9: 36). As noted above, this episode bears striking resemblance to accounts of trade with natives in the *Vínland sagas*. In *Eiríks saga rauða*, the Norse far-travellers are given by the natives what seems to be a sign of peace, poles waved in the air sun-wise (clock-wise, *Eir.* 10). In *Grænlandinga saga* it is noted that neither party understands the other's speech (*Gr.* 6). In both *Vínland sagas*, what the natives have to offer is pelts or furs, and in both accounts the trade ends in a battle between the natives and the Scandinavians, the Scandinavians proving the victors (*Eir.* 11, *Gr.* 6). Initial overtures of peace, misunderstanding and violence are the hallmarks of international commerce in distant lands peopled by heathens who do not speak any of the languages an educated Norseman knows.<sup>50</sup>

Another saga that bears comparison with these is *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*. In the first part of that saga, the title character's uncle Þórólfr is sent by King Haraldr hárfagri to collect tribute from the Lapps of the distant north, and Þórólfr also brings many goods with him to trade (*Egla* 10; see §2.i.a.3. of the following chapter). As in *Yngvars saga* and the *Vínland sagas*, the native goods Þórólfr acquires are specifically said to be furs or animal skins; the furs of Finnmǫrk are described as particularly fine ones (*Egla* 13). On another tribute-collection journey north, Þórólfr travels eastward and engages in some mercenary service on behalf of the Kven people (*Egla* 14). In this account the Kven king is said to be entitled to all the beaver skins, sables and

martens for himself, but now Þórólfr is entitled to share in equal profits with the king (*Egla* 14). The Norsemen and Kvens are successful and win a large amount of booty, and when Þórólfr returns to Norway, he uses precious, regal gifts of beaver skins and sables to prove his loyalty to King Haraldr (*Egla* 15, 16). As in the other accounts, trade with natives in the distant lands is associated with furs and violence.

Sveinn Yngvarsson engages in trade on his voyage once more, though in this case the similarities with trade in the Vínland sagas and tribute-collection in *Egils saga* are less pronounced. Following a battle with more eastern heathens and an elephant, Sveinn's party sails on and comes upon a multitude of heathens (*fiolda heidingia*, *Yng.* 10: 39) who once again signal Sveinn and his men with a sign of peace (*fridarmark*). The travellers come ashore:

133 Ok nu leggja þeir môt sin a millum, ok keypti Sveinn þar margar gersimar. Þa budu heidingjar sinum kaupnautum j eitt hús til veizlu, ok þat þau þeir. (*Yng.* 10: 39-40)

Despite this hospitable turn of events, a disagreement yet again erupts between the two parties, and Sveinn and his men again defeat the heathens in battle. As with trade in Vínland, in this account there is once again a sign of peace at the beginning and a battle at the end. The “precious things” Sveinn acquires, however, are not said to be furs, and there is no suggestion that the two parties do not understand each other's speech. Also, in this case violence ensues not over a point of trade, as in the earlier episode and the Vínland sagas, but over ritual: the heathens are enraged when Sveinn and his men cross themselves before eating (*Yng.* 10: 40).

### 3. Narrative pattern – eastern silver

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<sup>50</sup> Some recent scholarly attention has been given to likenesses between the accounts of Norse interaction with natives in the Vínland sagas and *Yngvars saga* and whether these similarities result from textual borrowing. See Sverrir 2001: 90-91; Perkins 39.

One episode in *Yngvars saga* and a couple of minor details elsewhere suggest a subtle connection between travel east of Russia and silver, indicating a possible medieval Scandinavian mental association between eastern far-travel and the quest for silver. This mental association would thus preserve the memory of the reason 8th- and 9th-century Scandinavians, mainly Swedes, originally travelled into the far east: to obtain Arab silver from the Islamic caliphates of that time. Hilda Ellis Davidson writes that the lure that attracted Scandinavians to the east was the silver of the Islamic world and describes the good prospects for traders at the market of Bulghar on the middle Volga, in which Norsemen first traded with eastern merchants:

The Scandinavians had no silver mines of their own and, once the influx of gold and silver from the Roman Empire came to an end and the trade-routes were blocked by barbarian peoples moving west, they could only obtain precious metals by trade or plunder, and for this the eastern world offered great possibilities. (Ellis Davidson 52)

Thomas Noonan also asserts that the newly-open silver trade centred in Khazaria and Volga Bulgaria attracted 9th-century Vikings to Russia (Noonan 250). There is no reason to suppose that this knowledge would have been obscure to saga-writing Scandinavians of the 13th century. Ellis Davidson writes that in light of the many hoards of Arabic and Kufic coins that have been uncovered in Sweden and the island of Gotland during the intervening centuries (“not to mention the wealth put to practical use by its owners”), the total number of coins and silver objects flowing into Scandinavia during the Viking Age reaches “staggering proportions” (53). In a chapter entitled “The Silver-Seekers from the North (c. 750-c. 900)”, Simon Franklin and Jonathan Shepard enumerate the many hoards of silver dirhams found throughout Russian archaeological sites and in central Sweden and Gotland (Franklin-Shepard 11). If the influx of silver into Scandinavia by eastern routes is anywhere near as great as Ellis Davidson, Franklin and Shepard suggest, it must have been common knowledge in 9th- and 10th-century Sweden

that the distant east was home to vast quantities of wealth in silver. It is surely logical for later medieval Scandinavians to have remembered the origins of their silver after the steady flow from the east had stopped, and it is not surprising at all that the late 12th-century author of *Yngvars saga* preserves some sense of this in several passages in his saga. Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards write that in such sagas dealing with the distant east “the two elements that went into the making of the sagas, historical fact and creative story-writing, are sometimes barely perceptibly, sometimes extravagantly, fused together” (Hermann-Edwards 1).<sup>51</sup> It is these fusions of the historical reality of Vikings seeking Arab silver in the distant east with obviously fictive or fantastic elements that I examine here.

**3.i.a.** The first such instance in *Yngvars saga* is an episode strongly reminiscent of the fairy-tale of Jack and the beanstalk. Shortly after Yngvarr’s thirty ships have set out to explore the length of the great river flowing out of the east through Russia, Yngvarr orders that no man shall go ashore without his permission, and each night a watch is set. Inevitably, one of these watchmen, an Icelander named Garða-Ketill, goes ashore one night to do some exploring on his own:

134 Pott honum langt, þa er alþydan suaf, ok foruittnadi hann a land at ganga at seazt vm, ok vard gengit lengra en hann ætladi. Hann nam stadar ok hlyddizt um. Hann sa fram fyrir sic hus eitt hatt ok geck þangat til ok inn j husit, ok þar sa hann silfurketil yfer elldi, ok þotti þat undarligt. (*Yng.* 5: 12-13)

Not one for obeying rules, Ketill takes the silver pot and begins running back towards the ship. Before long he sees a terrible giant (*ogurligan risa*) running after him, and no matter how fast Ketill runs the giant continues to gain on him. Finally Ketill pulls off the handle and drops the

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<sup>51</sup> Robert Cook makes similar observations about another later, literary adaptation of historical, eastern events, *Eymundar þátr Hringssonar*, noting how the requirements of literature bring a definite form and literary

pot, and the giant stops, picks up the pot and goes home. Ketill returns to the ship, breaks the handle into pieces and hides it, though the morning brings the truth to light (*Yng.* 5: 13). Whether the saga-character represents one of the historical Yngvarr's travelling-companions or not, and whatever germs of truth this fantastic episode contains, Garða-Ketill's name in the saga evidently relates to his role in the story. "Garða" identifies him as a visitor to or inhabitant of Garðaríki, and "Ketill" hangs the object of his crime around his neck. Besides its *Märchen* motifs, this episode may also be compared to the eddic poem *Hymiskviða*, in which Týr and Þórr are compelled to travel to the home of a giant, Hymir, to borrow his great cauldron for ale-brewing. The stories are no more similar than this, but it may be noted that in the poem the giant's home is imagined in the distant east (verses 5, 35).<sup>52</sup>

As an adventure story of the fantastic east, *Yngvars saga* is almost obliged to include episodes of encounters with monstrous "others", and into this category a giant certainly fits. The detail of the giant's silver cooking-pot is, however, one that may suggest the saga-writer's effort to make this episode plausibly "eastern." While a giant or dragon may be expected to hoard some sort of treasure, an eastern giant should have eastern wealth: in this case, a kettle made of silver. It is also worth observing that in foreign episodes in other fantastic fornaldarsögur, the wealth of the "others" inhabiting distant northern or eastern lands is also commonly represented as silver. Hilda Ellis Davidson notes, for example, that treasure in the form of silver is commonly associated with Bjarmians (35-39). In one of the examples she cites, Ñrvar-Oddr and his companions steal silver from a Bjarmian funerary mound, which is made of equal parts earth and silver (*Ñrv.* 4-5). In other accounts Norsemen take silver bowls from the knees of statues of the Bjarmians' god, Jómali (*Helga* 133, *Sér.* 122; *Bósa* 8). Ellis Davidson also observes that the

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characteristics to the historical account, giving it regularity, repetition and pattern (Cook 71; see also §1.iii.b. above).



exact position of Bjarmaland is difficult to determine, and its location shifts between distant north and distant east from saga to saga (32). *Ǫrvar-Oddr*, for example, reaches Bjarmaland by travelling north past Finnmǫrk, whereas in *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinssonar* Bjarmaland is not far from Novgorod (*Ǫrv.* 4, *Hálf.* 16, Ellis Davidson 41). Bjarmaland may also be located ambiguously within a single work. In Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, for example, Regnerus Lothbrog reaches "Biarmia" by crossing Courland and Semigallia (Baltic east), but this Biarmia borders Finmarchia (Finnmǫrk, distant north; IX.iv). As is observed sporadically throughout this thesis, ambiguity or indistinctness between adjacent cardinal directions is common in saga-literature, and this is especially true with regard to the distant east. This may result partially from the common medieval mental map in which the world is divided into northwestern and southwestern quadrants, Europe and Africa, and an eastern half, Asia (see Figure 3 in §3.ii. of Chapter 1). The east stretches from the most distant north and extends to the most distant south, and may therefore encompass aspects of both these other directions.

**3.i.b.** In its other accounts of eastern wealth *Yngvars saga* is less discriminating: there is silver, there is gold, there are fine clothes. The two times Yngvarr's company encounters dragons, the dragons are resting on beds of gold. There are, however, two details that once again subtly suggest that the east is understood to be a place of silver. When Yngvarr has returned from the furthest east to the realm of King Jólfr, he tells his men to avoid the heathen women of that town. Yngvarr stabs one high-ranking lady who is trying to tempt him inside his own tent, and when his men see this, they too begin to push the temptresses away (*Yng.* 7: 26). Some, however, give in to temptation and lie with the women: <sup>135</sup> *En er Yngvar heyrði þetta, þa snerizt fagnadur silfurs*

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<sup>52</sup> On the location of the giant-world in first the distant east and later the distant north, see "Jǫtunheim" and "Utgardr" in Rudolf Simek's *Dictionary of Northern Mythology* (1993: 180, 343).

*ok gleði uýns j micinn harm, þuiat um morguninn lagu áttian menn dauder, þa er þeir kaunnudu lid sitt* (*Yng. 7: 26-27*). Here the “joy of the silver and gladness of wine” is clearly meant to encompass the full range of earthly pleasure, much like “wine, women and song.” It may therefore be significant that the signifier for wealth used in this eastern context is silver.<sup>53</sup> The wine, too, may have significance: it is a drink more appropriate to a distant, exotic location than, say, beer or mead, though it is not otherwise associated with the east in particular.

A second detail that remotely suggests an association of silver with the east is found in the two accounts of the far-travellers approaching the treasure-trove of the dragon Jakúlus and his lesser serpent-companions. In the first episode, Yngvarr’s company sees one evening <sup>136</sup> *langt fra sier, sem halft tungl stædi a jordunni* (*Yng. 5: 14*). That night the watchman Valdimarr slips away and searches for the place where the moon-like light had appeared. He finds a hill gleaming like gold on account of the treasure and the sleeping serpents covering it. Valdimarr steals a gold ring with his spear-shaft, but this ultimately wakes Jakúlus and a dreadful battle between the dragon and Yngvarr’s men follows (*Yng. 5: 14*). The episode is repeated later in *Yngvars saga* when Sveinn Yngvarsson and his men think they see a half moon standing on the earth. As before, they follow the light to its source and discover a snake-covered hill with Jakúlus encircling all. Once again, an attempt is made to steal a gold ring by means of a spear-shaft, and once again, the dragon attacks Sveinn’s company (*Yng. 11: 41-42*). As before, despite the gold the serpents guard, the beacon followed there by the far-travellers is a silvery moon-like light.

The notion of a light shining in the distance or a fire burning over hidden treasure is a widespread belief in medieval Scandinavia, and many examples of this folk-belief exist in later,

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<sup>53</sup> Recall that Eymundr Hringsson demands payment for mercenary service to a Russian king in the form of an ounce of silver for every man (*Eym. 4: 203*; see §2.i.d. above).

fantastic sagas.<sup>54</sup> Oren Falk takes this folk-belief a step further, arguing that the flames that show the way to treasure in Icelandic accounts are veiled, literary references to Iceland's distinctive geographical feature, volcanoes. Falk writes that "buried treasure seems to give off a magma-like glow" (237), citing examples from several *Íslendingasögur* in which characters find or believe treasure to be at the location of a distant fire or light seen at night. In *Grettis saga*, for example, the Icelander Grettir witnesses in Norway a great fire erupting on a headland at night, saying, <sup>137</sup> „*Þat myndi mælt [...] ef slíkt sæisk á váru landi, at þat brynni af fé*“ (*Gret.* 18: 57). As in Falk's estimation buried treasure in Iceland is identified with a kind of light geographically appropriate to that land (the fiery glow of volcanic out-flow), here in *Yngvars saga* the light seen is appropriate to the veiled memory of the distant, silver-rich east, radiating the silvery shine of a crescent moon. On the other hand, up close the serpent-covered hill is the colour of gold, as are the rings the Norsemen steal. Nevertheless, where according to *Grettis saga* and other sagas Icelandic or Scandinavian buried treasure is marked by fiery light, in the distant east treasure is found where silver light is seen. As with the episodes of Garða-Ketill and Yngvarr's disenchantment with silver, this seems to indicate a subtle connection in the medieval saga-writer's mind between the distant east and silver.

#### 4. Conclusions

Like saga far-travellers to the distant west and south, eastern far-travellers are motivated primarily by pragmatism, though unlike the west and south the east is not characterised by financial motivations. Rather, the pragmatism of the east relates first and foremost to necessity, survival being sufficiently important to several Scandinavian rulers to necessitate exile. In this regard royal exile in the east may be related to the frequent violent-motivated far-travels to the

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<sup>54</sup> Examples of this folk-tradition are enumerated by Jón Árnason in *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri* (I 265-67).

distant west and occasional violence-motivated far-travels to the distant south. Where violence-motivated journeys in those directions are often the result of feuds between individuals or prominent families, these exiles to the distant east are connected to the grander feuds between Scandinavian nations, rulers and rulers-to-be. The national and often international scale of these feuds necessitates those fleeing to travel far immediately, with none of the intermediate instances of violence-motivated travel. This provides a plausible reason why travel to the distant east so rarely fits the pattern of expanding concentric circles of violence-motivated far-travels.

Pragmatism in eastern far-travel relates secondarily to the wisdom or expediency of forging political links between Scandinavian and Russian courts by means of royal marriages and occasionally by having children of Scandinavian royalty fostered in Russia. In these pragmatic interactions, too, there is rarely any suggestion of a primarily financial arrangement; even when Ingigerðr insists on a steep bride-price before marrying Jarizleifr, the price is in land rather than moveable wealth, and she may in any case be seeking to facilitate a sexual liaison rather than gain control of a valuable province (see §2.ii.a. above). Mercenary service does provide a financial incentive for some eastern far-travellers, but in general Norsemen turn to mercenary service only after they have reached Russia, motivated to leave Scandinavia by something else entirely, usually exile. The other major motivation relating to the south, piety, is also seen in eastern far-travel, but the east is characterised by its own unique brand of piety. While pilgrims travel to the Holy Land to bathe in the River Jordan or fight heathens, pious travellers to Russia and the lands beyond seek a missionary field. Óláfr Tryggvason and the far-travellers Yngvarr and Sveinn all go east to Christianise distant lands; Eirekr víðftrli is a notable exception to the rule, travelling east, ultimately, to be Christianised.

While some of the journeys to the distant west were seen to be exploration of a type, the exploratory motivation is much more explicit in eastern expeditions. Eirekr víðftrli's curiosity

about distant lands seems intrinsic to his character: his vow to travel the wide earth to find Ódáinsakr or Paradise springs unbidden from his lips. Yngvarr víðfrli's magnificent voyage along the rivers flowing in from the lands east of Russia is directly precipitated by his curiosity concerning their sources. There is also in this saga a unique example of a character comparing pragmatic and educational motivations for far-travel. Having just fought a hard battle in the far east, Sveinn Yngvarsson instructs his men not to explore too far into the customs of these strange, heathen easterners. He tells them they must avoid such cultural interchange, <sup>138</sup> „*þviat meir hefur [...] aflast j þessare ferd manntiöns enn aavaxtar*“ (Yng. 10: 41). Sveinn's concise statement aptly demonstrates the dominance of pragmatic motivations that has been seen in far-travels west, south and now east, and the relative scarcity of travel for educational or exploratory reasons. Kristel Zilmer observes: “Although usually we experience that the reasoning behind travelling has a pragmatic orientation, the sagas may occasionally make a point about the character's genuine eagerness to experience the world and learn about other people” (2005: 78-79). Yngvarr is one of these occasional explorers genuinely eager to acquire knowledge about the far east; his son Sveinn is the more usual pragmatist, focused on his goal of Christianising Silkisif's eastern kingdom and interested only in minimising loss of life and resources in the process.

Of the several minor motivations for far-travel eastward, one is notable for its lack of prominence in saga-literature: trade. Writing on the extent of the influence and involvement of Scandinavians in early Russian towns and states, Foote and Wilson stress the priority of trade:

Northern influence in Russia was primarily mercantile. The Scandinavians came to Russia in search of trade and any political power and control which they gained there was incidental to their main purpose. (220)

Noting that there exists both archaeological and literary evidence for this trade, Foote and Wilson go on to describe how the Swedish Vikings in Russia from the first half of the 9th century

onwards, coming first as traders and later as mercenary soldiers, played a part in the founding or consolidation of the city-states of early medieval Russia. The Vikings controlled a number of towns for the purposes of trade and military power, but the military power was not exerted for its own sake but for the development and control of the rich “north-south commercial routes through western Russia from the Baltic to the Black Sea” (Foote-Wilson 220). Given the importance of trade to early Norse involvement in the distant east, it is somewhat surprising that there are not more saga-accounts of traders there. On the other hand, scattered but frequent references throughout the sagas to fine Russian clothing and especially hats, no doubt associated with the fine furs of the eastern forests, testify indirectly to an awareness of the firm trading links between Iceland, mainland Scandinavia and the eastern empire. This may be the fundamental literary legacy of historical Scandinavian mercantile contact with Russia. Saga-literature, naturally, is not concerned with cataloging the ordinary activities of medieval Scandinavian life. It is to be expected that, as notable an achievement as far-travel is, the more ordinary, prosaic sorts of distant journeys will be represented less frequently than exciting stories of political intrigues, mercenary adventures, and explorations through exotic, distant lands. Trade thus serves as one of what Zilmer calls “background motives”, pragmatically-oriented purposes for travel that typically serve a narrative requirement other than driving the plot: introducing or illustrating a character’s capabilities, for example (2005: 78). Trade is, in fact, an example Zilmer cites.

Viking raiding provides a motivation for far-travel to the distant east in precisely the sort of narratives in which it may be expected, *fornaldarsögur*. Demonstrating the Viking prowess of the hero is almost a narrative imperative in this saga-genre, and adventures in distant, fantastic lands are standard *fornaldarsaga* fare. Combined, these *topoi* result in the examples cited above: *fornaldarsaga*-accounts of Vikings who in their wide-ranging raiding expeditions reach as far as the rich lands and courts of Russia.

## Chapter 5 – North

### 1. Introduction

Given Scandinavia's northern location, it may be thought surprising that there is any "distant north" to be travelled to by saga-characters. As with travels in the other three cardinal directions, however, the actual distance covered and time spent on journeys to "distant" lands are not of primary importance. Greenland is, after all, closer to Iceland than Iceland is to either mainland Scandinavia or the British Isles. The key factor in all directions, once again, is the imaginary border being crossed from "inside" to "outside", the border drawn in the conceptual rather than geographical world-map existing in the minds of the saga-writers and readers. Far-travellers are not those who sail for two months rather than two weeks, but those who travel from Scandinavian Europe to elsewhere.

#### 1.i. Distant north

In the north more than in any other direction, the saga-writers' characterisation of the native inhabitants of these exterior lands as "others" is crucial in determining the lands' locations in the mental map. The distant north is populated by monsters and magicians, as well as human beings with clear monstrous or magical qualities. It is fundamental to the nature of the giants of Norse mythology that they come from "Útgarðr" – outside the habitations of gods and men – and in the same way the giants, trolls and Lapps of saga-literature must come from non-Scandinavian lands to be what they are. The monstrosity of the northern natives fits readily into the "moral geography" of the medieval Scandinavian mindset evident throughout saga-literature, in which Norse lands occupy a position between the holiness of the distant south and the evil of the distant north. We have seen how the status of the Holy Land and even Constantinople as "holy ground" fits with their intrinsic distance from Scandinavia.

Conversely, the lands of the distant north can be as evil, as troll-ridden and permeated by sorcery as they are precisely because they are “far” from Scandinavia. This is not to suggest that saga-accounts of travel to the far north paint a uniform picture of that region. The north functions differently in different sagas and saga genres. As might be expected, it features more realistically in works of a primarily historiographical focus – *konungasögur* and many *Íslendingasögur* – and more fantastically in *fornaldarsögur* (cf. Vésteinn 1994: 103). Some liminal texts, such as the *fornaldarsaga*-like *Íslendingasaga Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, prove exceptional. Scholars have often noted the prevalence of journeys to the far north in *fornaldarsögur* and analysed their implications regarding myth, legend and written and oral narrative tradition. As Vésteinn Ólason writes:

Tales about journeys to the Far North, that is, to Finnmark and then eastwards to Russia, are prominent ingredients in many Icelandic sagas. Such tales appear in some of the sagas of the Kings of Norway, and in a few of the sagas of Icelanders or the family sagas, but above all the journey to the Far North is an important episode in a number of *fornaldarsagas*. (1994: 102)<sup>1</sup>

While Vésteinn here includes Russia in his “Far North”, I place Russia in the distant east.

The lands I do include in the distant north are Finnmörk; Kvenland, Kirjálaland and Bjarmaland; Jötunheimar and Risaland; and the lands around Gandvík and Dumbshaf.<sup>2</sup> Some sagas set episodes in the wastes of Helluland and Greenland, describing these lands in a manner that clearly places them not in the distant west, but in the distant north; these accounts are also included in this chapter. Throughout this chapter I often refer to these lands by English equivalent names. Thus Kirjálaland is occasionally referred to as Karelia and

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<sup>1</sup> For other analyses of the common *fornaldarsaga* narrative formula of the journey to the north, see Power 1984 and van Wezel 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Though the name “Gandvík” (“Bay of sorcery”) is probably a muddled adaptation of the native Sami/Suomi name for Kandalaks Bay on the White Sea, its Norse name suggests the magical, monstrous space it occupies in the saga imagination. See Ross 1951: 430-32. The name “Dumbshaf” (the Arctic Sea) is sometimes explained in relation to a giant-king named Dumbr; in *Bárðar saga*, this King Dumbr is made Bárðr’s father.



Bjarmaland as Permia. I provide here a brief defence of the most counterintuitive of the lands I have classed as distant and northern, Finnmǫrk and the wastes of Greenland and Helluland.

### 1.ii. Finnmǫrk and *óbyggðir*

“Finnmǫrk” is the sagas’ name for the geographical region that covers the most northerly part of Scandinavia and some of the Kola peninsula; “Sápmi” and “Lapland” are modern designations with roughly the same meaning.<sup>3</sup> Within saga-literature the inhabitants of Finnmǫrk are consistently named *Finnar*; only in the mythological account of Nórr settling Norway are they called *Lappir*.<sup>4</sup> Following 20th- and 21st-century editors and translators, I consider “Lapps” the best translation of the saga-writers’ term *Finnar*. It is important to stress that my use of the term “Lapp” throughout this chapter to refer to the sagas’ native inhabitants of Finnmǫrk and elsewhere in the north is consistent with my general approach to saga-literature. I write of literary characters rather than historical figures, and by “Lapps” I do not mean the historical Sami peoples of the Viking Age, but the literary figures later saga-writers created to inhabit the imagined northern lands they describe.<sup>5</sup> The inhabitants of Finland, by contrast, are in the sagas most often called *Finnlendingar*, “Finlanders”, though at times saga-writers appear to make no distinction between the two peoples (Aalto 1).

The Finnmǫrk of the sagas is a literary landscape characterised (like other lands in the far north) by fantastic creatures and otherworldly adventures. In the *fornaldarsögur* in particular, Finnmǫrk is a place in which fantastic things may happen and fantastic creatures may appear, and even in kings’ sagas and sagas of Icelanders the Lapps are frequently imbued with magical abilities. Thus a Lappish king is said in a *fornaldarsaga* to re-attach his

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<sup>3</sup> The region covered includes the Norwegian county of Finnmark (Sami Finnmarku), the Swedish county of Norbotten (itself composed of the provinces of Lappland and Norbotten), the Finnish province of Lappi, and some of the Russian oblast of Murmansk (Paine 3; Ratcliffe 1; Jones 1982: 5).

<sup>4</sup> The account is given in the first chapter of *Orkneyinga saga* and in the portion of *Flateyjarbók* known as *Fundinn Noregr* (*Flat.* I 241). There the *Lappir* live not in Finnmǫrk, but in a land adjacent to it. East Norwegian writings use the term *Lappir* more often (Aalto 1).

own severed hand in battle and continue to use it, while another turns into a whale and hurls himself on top of his opponents (*Hálf.* 20). Clairvoyant Lapps are common in Íslendingasögur (cf. *Vatn.* 10, 12), and Lapps may even cause storms at sea (cf. *Ket.* 3, *Ñrv.* 10). Ultimately, the saga-writers seem to use Lapps as a catch-all of monstrous and magical characteristics and remain unsure about who the people actually were. They may wish their readers to be unsure as well.<sup>6</sup> *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* introduces Finnmǫrk itself and the lands beyond with a lengthy, detailed passage (*Egla* 14: 36), suggesting that the 13th-century Icelander who wrote the saga – Snorri or not – feels that his or her Scandinavian audience is not familiar with its geography. It seems clear, therefore, that to the saga-writers Finnmǫrk is outside the bounds of “Scandinavian Europe.” Vésteinn Ólason is thus able to conclude of stories of travel to Finnmǫrk:

These tales must ultimately be traced back to the northern parts of Norway where people had real experience of, or knowledge about, journeys to the Far North and to whom *the borderline between cosmos and chaos* was situated somewhere between Halogaland and Finnmark. (1994: 114, italics mine).

Greenland and Helluland, naturally, are lands ordinarily located in the distant west, but the specific accounts in which they are called *óbyggðir Grænlands* and *óbyggðir Hellulands* identify them as distinctively northern locations. The land to which Jǫkull Búason and his men are driven by inclement weather is populated by trolls and giants and named both *óbyggðum í Grænlandi* – “the wastes in Greenland” – and Jǫttunheimr in the course of his þátrr (see §2.iii.a.2. below). In *Bárðar saga* a wild, monster-populated region reached by sailing from Norway north past Hálogaland and Finnmǫrk is called first *Grænlands óbyggðir* and later Helluland (see §2.ii.a.4. below). As in *Jǫkuls þátrr*, the wastes of Helluland and

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<sup>6</sup> See Pulsiano 379-80 on the origins of the exonyms “Lapland” and “Lapp”, and the confusion about the meanings of Old Norse and modern Norwegian *finn(r)*. See also Paine 3.

Greenland seem to be invoked simply as a suitably wild and barren landscape for the hero's fantastic adventures among monsters – in this case, 501 revenants – but here the location is even more evidently northern. In *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinsonar*, Helluland is a place on the northern sea Dumbshaf that the Viking Raknarr clears of giants (Ch. 26; cf. Simek 1986: 258). It should also be borne in mind that to medieval Icelanders, the far north was connected across to Greenland by a continuous land-mass, possibly called Svalbarði (see Simek 1986: 258-59).<sup>7</sup> In no saga-account, however, is this northern land-bridge used to reach the recognisably Norse, unambiguously human colonies of Greenland familiar from many *Íslendingasögur*. We see instead that saga-characters who reach *óbyggðir Grænlands* or *óbyggðir Hellulands* by travelling north encounter only giants, hags and *draugar*.

## 2. Motivations

### 2.i. Acquisition of local wares or resources

Like journeys to distant lands in other directions, journeys to the distant north most often have pragmatic motivations, and like journeys to the distant west and Byzantium in the distant south, pragmatism in far-travel northward manifests itself most often as ventures for financial gain. Northern lands are inhabited by plenty of men and creatures but not civilised or crowded enough to require mercenaries very often, so these business ventures tend to focus on the acquisition of moveable wares or natural resources, rather than settlement programmes or military service for foreign monarchs.

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<sup>6</sup> These and other aspects of the alterity of the Lapps are discussed in articles by John Lindow (1995) and Sirpa Aalto (2003). Aalto focuses her study on *Heimskringla*, Lindow on the connection between notions of ethnicity and social boundaries on the one hand, and the supernatural on the other.

<sup>7</sup> Where "Svalbarði" is identified by name in saga-literature, it is attached to or near *óbyggðir Grænlands*. Whatever "Svalbarði" is to saga-writers, it is closely related to the particular "Greenland" that they call *óbyggðir*. See Ch. 2 of *Landnámabók* (H) and Ch. 16 of *Samsons saga fagra*, pp. 31-32.

**2.i.a. (Trade and tribute-collection)** As we have seen throughout this thesis, most saga-characters dislike placing themselves in positions of peril, and the decisions they make regarding travel often reflect this preference. The far-travellers who reach Vínland, for example, are enticed by the abundance of natural goods in that fine land but are repelled by the constant threat of violence from its native inhabitants; the repulsion ultimately supersedes the attraction, and the Norsemen abandon Vínland. In the same way, far-travellers to the north seem to prefer acquiring native wares and resources in peaceful rather than belligerent ways. Examples from several þættir and sagas illustrate a pattern of travelling north to trade for native goods or collect them as tribute.

**2.i.a. (1)** In *Helga þáttir Þórissonar* the trade-motivation for far-travel to the north is stated explicitly.<sup>8</sup> Shortly after introducing the brothers Helgi and Þorsteinn, the narrator reports:

139 Þat var á einu sumri, at þeir bræðr höfðu kaupferð norðr til Finnmerkr ok höfðu smjör ok flesk til kaups við Finna. Fengu þeir góða kaupferð ok heldu aftr at áliðnu sumri. (*Helg.* 1: 347)

The products the Norwegian brothers bring with them, pig's meat and butter, suggest that the Lapps who inhabit Finnmerkr keep neither swine nor cattle (nor other milk-bearing farm animals). The lack of pigs decisively differentiates Lapps from the people of Norse-speaking Scandinavia, to whom swine had both dietary importance and mythical significance. In myth and myth-based literature, a boar served as the god Freyr's mode of transport, and the gods and heroes of Valhǫll feasted each day on the meat of the eternally regenerated boar Sæhrímnir.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The first part of this late 13th- or early 14th-century þáttir is probably derived from Marie de France's *Lai de Lanval*, though the story as a whole seems to originate in Celtic tales of the delightful Otherworld inhabited by beautiful women (Pulsiano 280; Rowe 36).

<sup>9</sup> In Úlfr Uggason's *Húsdrápa* a boar is Freyr's steed, while in Snorri's *Gylfaginning*, two boars draw his chariot (Kock 71; *Edda* 32, 46-47). The relative "status" of various farm animals plays a key role in Jared Diamond's

The butter mentioned here recalls the *Grænlandinga saga* account of the Greenlanders' trade with the Skrælings, in which a dairy product proves similarly popular: the native Vínlanders eagerly barter their furs for the milk the Greenlanders offer (*Gr.* 7; see §2.i.c.1. of Chapter 2). Eagerness for dairy is presumably a characteristic trait of peoples unacquainted with animal husbandry, and the Lapps too are sometimes portrayed as (excessively) attracted to butter. In Chapter 12 of *Vatnsdæla saga*, Norwegian Ingimundr Þorsteinsson pays three Lapps from the north for their clairvoyant services with butter and tin. Butter also seems to attract the Lapps of Finnmörk in *Ketils saga hængs*.<sup>10</sup> In that saga the narrator relates that Ketill, blown off course in the far north, is harboured at a nearby farm and hidden by the farmer, Brúni, because some Lappish friends of his are coming to visit. Brúni tells Ketill the Lapps will raid his butter-chest (*smjörlaupr*), and when the giant-like visitors arrive they indeed enthuse <sup>140</sup> „*Mannfögnuðr er oss at smjöri þessu*“ (*Ket.* 3: 159).

Trade in the distant north features several times in the sagas of St Óláfr. The most detailed account features travel not merely to Finnmörk but to Bjarmaland beyond.<sup>11</sup> During the days of King Óláfr's reign in Norway, he sends his retainer Karli inn háleyski ("the Hálogalander") on a trading voyage north to Bjarmaland, about which the two settle a very precise business arrangement: <sup>141</sup> *Var svá ætlat, at Karli skyldi hafa félag konungs ok eiga hálf t fé hvárr við annan* (*Helga* 133: 227). On his way north Karli is joined by his brother Gunnsteinn, already well-supplied with his own merchant goods (*kaupeyrir*, *Helga* 133: 228), and an overbearing, powerful man named Þórir hundr ("dog") Þórisson. Þórir demands business terms of his own and, true to his assertive nature, brings along eighty men on his ship

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analysis of the Norse colonisation of the North Atlantic islands, the environmental damage that resulted, and the ultimate collapse of the Greenland Norse colony (188).

<sup>10</sup> *Ketils saga* was written much later than *Nrvar-Odds saga*, which tells the story of Ketill's grandson; it probably dates from the late 13th century, with material drawn from older heroic sagas and folk motifs (Pulsiano 353; Jónas 1988: 361). These sagas, along with *Gríms saga loðinkinna* and *Áns saga bogsveigis*, belong to a group of four fornaldarsögur known as the Hrafnistumannasögur, as their protagonists' homestead is on the island of Hrafnista in Hálogaland. *Áns saga* alone among this group does not feature any far-travel to the north.

instead of the agreed twenty-five (*Helga* 133, *Sér.* 122). The two ships soon reach their destination:

<sup>142</sup> En er þeir kómu til Bjarmalands, þá lǫgðu þeir til kaupstaðar. Tóksk þar kaupstefna. Fengu þeir menn allir fullræði fjár, er fé hǫfðu til at verja. Þórir fekk óf grávtru ok bjór ok safala. Karli hafði ok allmikit fé, þat er hann keypti skinnavtru marga. En er þar var lokit kaupstefnu, þá heldu þeir út eptir ánni Vínu. Var þá sundr sagt friði við landsmenn. (*Helga* 133: 229)<sup>12</sup>

Once the trading-truce is over the three men immediately take to raiding, ultimately landing themselves in trouble with the native Permians when they rob a silver-rich burial mound and its treasure-laden shrine of the god Jómali.<sup>13</sup> For the brothers this is clearly an opportunistic venture taken after the expedition has already reached the distant north. Since the idea to raid is Þórir's, however, and since he originally pushed his way into the trading voyage and insisted on bringing a heavily-manned ship, it is certainly possible that he always intended to lead Viking raids in the distant north.

At two later points in the saga Þórir hundr is again connected with trade in the distant north. The first instance is a mere aside in the account of the Danish king Knútr inn ríki assuming the throne of Norway, where it is said that Knútr gives Þórir and another prominent Norwegian, Hárekr ór Þjóttu, exclusive rights to trade with the Lapps (*Helga* 170, *Sér.* 164). The second instance comes when Óláfr has been exiled east to Russia, and the saga-writer relates what is happening back in Norway:

<sup>143</sup> Þórir hundr hafði Finnferð haft þessa tvá vetr, ok hafði hann verit hvárn tveggja vetr lengi á fjalli ok fengit óf fjár. Hann átti margs konar kaup við Finna. Hann lét þar

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<sup>11</sup> Here the Bjarmian settlement-area at the mouth of the northern Dvina river (*Biarmia ulterior*) is meant. On the "two Bjarmalands" of saga-literature, see Ross 1940 (esp. p. 43) and Phelpstead 78.

<sup>12</sup> On furs as the currency of exchange in the distant east and north, see §2.i.a.3. below, as well as §2.v.d. of the preceding chapter. Alan Ross suggests that Viking traders in Bjarmaland traded weapons for furs, citing Ñrvar-Oddr's refusal to allow his men to trade arms to the Permians (Ross 1940: 38, 46).

<sup>13</sup> See §2.i.b.1. below for the account of Ñrvar-Oddr's similar mound-raiding adventure in Bjarmaland.

gera sér tólf hreinbjálba með svá mikili fjǫlkynngi, at ekki vápn fest á ok síðr miklu en á hringabrynju. (*Helga* 193: 344-45)

Perhaps Þórir is satisfied with trading rather than raiding on this voyage to the north because on this occasion he has the royal franchise on financial activity and does not need to supplement his takings with booty. Þórir's twelve reindeer-skin coats that cannot be pierced by metal weapons demonstrate the magical "otherness" of the Lapps that pervades their saga-characterisation, even in an account as plausibly historical as this one, written by as sceptical and careful a scholar as Snorri Sturluson. It also connects this short episode to what follows, when Þórir is involved in the great battle against St Óláfr at Stiklarstaðir; a man who expects to soon lead an armed host against a returning king might well be interested in a weapon-proof coat. That Þórir orders twelve is indicative of his taste for excess.

**2.i.a. (2)** Tribute-collection is a form of acquisition of native goods similar to trade in that it is a (generally) non-violent method of goods-acquisition from the inhabitants of the land. Tribute-collection might even be considered a form of trade, if nominal protection from enemies by the tribute-demanding ruler is a commodity to be bartered. The two practices are certainly very closely related in the sagas in which tribute (*skatt*) is mentioned. In the *Morkinskinna-páttir Odds páttir Ófeigssonar*, the Icelander Oddr travels first to Norway and then north up the coast to Finnmark, where he and his men spend the winter. When in the spring they depart south for Norway, Oddr speaks to his men:

<sup>144</sup> „Ferð þessi er með nǫkkurri ábyrgð,” segir hann, „því at hingat á engi maðr kaupferð at hafa nema með konungs leyfi eða sýslumanns; er sá nu ok maðrinn til fenginn at heimta finnskattinn ok hafa þar yfirsókn, er ekki þykkir væginn, sem er Einarr fluga.“ (ÍF VII 367; see also *Mork.* 48: F 254, U 105-06)

With no previous indication in the text that they have been sent north on a mission of tribute-collection, Oddr's words to his men suggest that any kind of commercial activity whatsoever in Lappish territory is a royal prerogative. Oddr immediately goes on to ask his men how much they have earned in their dealings with the Lapps, suggesting that even Oddr's voyage is not a centrally-organised expedition in which the leader directs all trade, but a loose confederation of participants who may all trade with the natives as they please. Yet the remainder of the þáttir involves the royal tribute-collection agent's attempts to confiscate as "tribute" the men's Lappish goods and Oddr's crafty ploys for keeping them hidden. Here trade and tribute are clearly closely related. This point is again dwelt on at length later in *Morkinskinna*, in the section often called *Pinga saga*, which relates the legal dispute between Norwegian king Sigurðr Jórsalafari and his kinsman by marriage Sigurðr Hranason. The king accuses Sigurðr of robbing the royal revenues of at least sixty marks per half-year by keeping back half the Lapp tribute every six months (*Mork.* 70: F 367-68, U 176). Sigurðr Hranason counters that the privilege of keeping all but sixty marks of the semiannual Lappish tribute for himself was granted to him by King Sigurðr's father Magnús berfœttr (*Mork.* 70: F 369, U 177). Through the complex legal wranglings that follow, it remains clear that tribute-collection in the far north is a royal prerogative, to be granted and regulated by the king at his pleasure.

**2.i.a. (3)** The most extensive account of *Finnskattr* is in the first quarter of *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, in which trade-tribute in the far north is central to the plot. In contrast to the previous examples, in *Egla* the voyage to the distant north is introduced from the start as an errand of tribute-collection rather than a private enterprise over which the king is later acknowledged to have authority. Þórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson, the main character of this part of the saga, inherits the right of Lappish tribute collection (sanctioned by King Haraldr hárfagri)



from his late friend Bárðr, whose claim to this privilege had been disputed by his half-brothers Hárekr and Hrærekr, the so-called “sons of Hildiríðr.” Bárðr himself had been granted the right to all his late father’s revenues (*veizlur allar*, *Egla* 8: 21) by King Haraldr.<sup>14</sup> When the dying Bárðr asks leave of the king to turn over all his possessions, his rights and even his wife to his friend Þórólfr, the text specifically notes that Haraldr grants Þórólfr <sup>145</sup> *finnferðina með þvílíkum skildaga, sem áðr hafði haft Bárðr* (*Egla* 9: 24). Þórólfr soon journeys to the far north:

<sup>146</sup> Þórólfr gerði um vetrinn ferð sína á fjall upp ok hafði með sér lið mikit, eigi minna en níu tigu manna; en áðr hafði vanði á verit, at sýslumenn hefðu haft þrjá tigu manna, en stundum færa; hann hafði með sér kaupskap mikinn. Hann gerði brátt stefnuleg við Finna ok tók af þeim skatt ok átti við þá kaupstefnu; fór með þeim allt í makendum ok í venskap, en sumt með hræzlugæði. (*Egla* 10: 27)

Here trade and tribute-collection are Þórólfr’s unambiguous reasons for travelling to Finnmǫrk. Þórólfr and his party travel further east and encounter a people identified by the narrator as “Kylfings”, who have been both trading with the Lapps and plundering.<sup>15</sup> So Þórólfr and some Lappish allies attack them in several skirmishes and kill over a hundred of them, taking in that action a great amount of booty (*ok tóku þar ógrynni fjár*, *Egla* 10: 28). As for Karli inn háleyski, then, the far north is for Þórólfr a land rich in opportunities for both trade and piracy. Like Karli and his brother, however, Þórólfr merely takes this opportunity once already in the north; subsequent journeys he makes to Finnmǫrk for the express purpose of plunder (and later mercenary service) are discussed below in §2.ii.a.1. After Þórólfr delivers the tribute to King Haraldr, his kinsman Ñilvir hnúfa comments on the products’ overwhelming value, saying that <sup>147</sup> *engi mun sét hafa jafngóða grávtru* (*Egla* 13: 34). As in

<sup>14</sup> Lappish tribute-collection was the right and practice of chiefs in Hálogaland from before Haraldr’s subjugation of the region to unified Norwegian rule (ÍF II 18, footnote).

<sup>15</sup> Gustav Storm believes Kylfings are tribute-collectors for the Swedish king; Sigurður Nordal argues they are to be associated with Russia. See ÍF II 27 (footnote).

the wilds of the distant east and the distant west, wealth in the far north is measured in furs and animal pelts.<sup>16</sup> The point is made again in Chapter 15, when Hárekr Hildiríðarson slanders Þórólfr to the king; he accuses Þórólfr of keeping thirty beaver skins (*bjórskinn*) for himself, having delivered to Haraldr only three.

Þórólfr makes a second trading voyage to Finnmǫrk in which he travels further east and profits from military action there, this time in the service of the Kven people against their plundering enemies, the Karelians (*Egla* 14). As before, this mercenary service is a venture taken once the Norsemen are already in the far north (again, see §2.ii.a.1. below). The saga-writer identifies Þórólfr's activity among the Lapps as "trade" (*kaupstefna*), but the trade-tribute connection is again made clear when Þórólfr himself delivers to the king the wealth he collected on his expedition, calling it <sup>148</sup> *þar skatt þann, er konungr átti, er kominn var af Finnmǫrk* (*Egla* 16: 39). Þórólfr also makes a special gift to the king of several beaver skins and sables (*safala*), indicating once again that the most valuable commodity from the far north is furs.

Despite this worthy gesture, a displeased Haraldr confiscates the lands and rights Þórólfr inherited from Bárðr, giving them instead to Hárekr and Hrærekr – including the right to make tribute-journeys to Finnmǫrk: <sup>149</sup> *Hildiríðarsynir tóku við sýslu á Hálogalandi* (*Egla* 17: 41). The pair then makes its own journey northward: <sup>150</sup> *Þótti Finnum miklu minni vegr at þessum sýslum tñnum en þá er Þórólfr fór; greiddisk allt miklu verr gjald þat, er Finnar skyldu reiða* (*Egla* 17: 41). It may be significant that while Þórólfr twice travels to Finnmǫrk laden with merchandise for trade, the activity of Hildiríðr's sons is described only as tribute-collection. They are not there to trade with the Lapps; they are there only to take from them. The difficulty Hildiríðr's sons experience may be due only to the smaller complement of men

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<sup>16</sup> See also §2.v.d. of the preceding chapter. Saxo mentions that the "Skrit-Finns" (*Skritfinni*) who inhabit the area near Gandvík (*Gandwicus*) use animal skins in place of money (*Prefatio*:ii:9). During the description of Finnmǫrk in *Historia Norwegiae*, the beaver is described at length and the annual Lapp tribute in fine furs sent to the Norwegian kings is mentioned (*HN* 4).

they bring, but it may also mean that the Lapps recognise in their new tribute-collectors a fundamental lack of the admirable character traits the former tribute-collector possessed. If so, Lapps are here represented by the saga-writer as shrewder judges of Norwegian men's characters than some Norwegians are.

**2.i.a. (4)** There is another, briefer Íslendingasaga-account of goods-acquisition in the far north identified from the start as royal tribute-collection. In *Finnboga saga ramma*, the Icelandic title character shipwrecks on the island of Grænmó off Hálogaland and is given lodging by a friendly farmer there, Bárðr. One day Finnbogi goes down to the rocky shore and sees a man rowing northward in a large boat; hailed by Finnbogi, the man pulls ashore and identifies himself as Álfr aprkemma ("combed back"<sup>17</sup>, Ch. 12). Upon being asked where he is going, Álfr informs Finnbogi he is going north to Finnmǫrk to collect tax (*hann skyldi norðr á Mörk ok heimta skatt, Finn. 12: 277*). Álfr says he expects to be returning back through Hálogaland in about two weeks, giving us an estimate of the expected length of tribute-collection expeditions. After Álfr returns south and fails to kill Finnbogi in a sneak attack (Ch. 13), Finnbogi reaches the court of the Norwegian ruler, Hákon jarl, and delivers the Lapp tribute to him: <sup>151</sup> *Hafði hann af höndum greitt fé þat, er Álfr hafði með farit ok norðan flutt. Var jarli sagt, at þat væri vel af höndum greitt ok meira en vandi var á* (*Finn. 16: 284*). Álfr had presumably been cheating the jarl, which is in accordance both with Álfr's villainous characterisation in this saga and the fairly typical saga-trope of partially or wholly withheld Lappish tribute (seen in each of the examples cited above). The exemplary saga-hero Finnbogi, naturally, cheerfully turns over the entire amount to the proper authority.

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<sup>17</sup> In his translation John Kennedy renders this nickname "with swept-back hair" (CSI III 234).

2.i.a. (5) A final example of trade in the far north may suggest that Bjarmaland, too, was occasionally seen as tributary to Norway. In the saga of Haraldr hárfagri in *Flateyjarbók* the king sends two of his men on an expedition to the north:

152 Eitt sumar segir Haraldr konungr, at hann vill senda Hauk norðr til Bjarmalands at heimta hárvöru, ok er Vígharðr veit þat, segir hann, at hann vill fara. Konungr svarar at ei vill hann fyrirmuna honum þeirrar sæmdar, lætr nú búa sitt skip hvárum þeirra.  
(*Flat.* II 66)

The verb *heimta* can mean simply “to collect”, but it can also have the sense “to claim as a debt or dues” (Cleasby-Vigfússon 251-52, Fritzner I 774-75). If the second meaning applies here, then King Haraldr is saying the Bjarmians owe him tax or tribute, and Haukr and Vígharðr’s subsequent voyage is one of tribute-collection. This subsequent voyage again illustrates the monstrous, magical “otherness” of native inhabitants of the north, as well as their love of pork and butter. When Haraldr instructs Haukr and Vígharðr to protect themselves on this journey from the Swedish king Eirekr by allying themselves with Haraldr’s foster-mother Heiðr, a powerful troll-woman who lives north of Gandvík, he tells them: 153 „*Ek sendi henni gullhring, er veigr tólf aura, ok tvau villigaltarflikki gömul ok tvær tunnur smjör*” (*Flat.* II 66). The latter two of these three gifts are the products Helgi Þórisson took with him to trade with the Lapps (see §2.i.a.1. above). Heiðr’s magical abilities ultimately serve the two far-travellers well, as when they reach Bjarmaland and are attacked by King Eirekr’s servants – one of whom is a god, Lýtir – Haukr is able to use a pair of balls (*mýla tvá*) Heiðr gave him to set his enemies’ ships aflame, and Heiðr herself fights and defeats Lýtir (*Flat.* II 68-69).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> This episode follows a common fornaldarsaga story-pattern of northern journeys; see Power 1984: 19-20.

**2.i.b. (Viking raiding)** Like far-travelling traders and tribute-collectors, far-travelling Viking raiders take goods from people rather than directly from the land itself. Unlike traders and tribute-collectors, they use violence to take these goods from those people.<sup>19</sup> Three *fornaldarsögur* contain examples of Vikings travelling to the far north to plunder there, *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*, *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* and *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinssonar*. Other texts feature this far-travel motivation in a more ambiguous or oblique way.

**2.i.b. (1)** Early in *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*, the title character returns to his father's homestead after spending his childhood being fostered elsewhere, and he immediately joins an expedition to Bjarmaland that his brother Guðmundr and cousin Sigurðr are preparing, despite his brother's reluctance (*Ǫrv.* 4-6).<sup>20</sup> The saga-writer describes their journey to the far north:

154 Þeim gaf þegar byr, ok sigldu þeir í einni norðr til Finnmerk; þeir lftgðuz þar um nóttina við akkeri. Þar var fjtlði gamma á land upp. Um morgininn ganga þeir Guðmundr á land af skipi sínu; þeir renna í gammana ok ræna Finnurnar, en Finnar váru ekki heima; þær þola illa ok æpa mjtk. (*Ǫrv.* 6: 14-15)

Ǫrvar-Oddr does not take part in this plundering raid, nor does he allow his men to.

Comparing the characterisations of Oddr and Guðmundr, this may indicate that the saga-writer disapproves somewhat of Viking raids: the heroic and proto-Christian central character Oddr refuses to participate where his antagonistic and thoroughly heathen brother rushes in. The saga-writer's very deliberate indication that only Lappish women are robbed perhaps signals his scorn of Vikings who strike only easy targets; it might also indicate that Guðmundr and his men rape their victims. When Guðmundr invites Oddr along on the next shore-raid,

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<sup>19</sup> The Vikings were so widely-known that piracy is one of two motivations for travel into polar regions ascribed to Scandinavian far-travellers by the 11th-century Muslim scholar al-Bīrūnī. The other northern activity he ascribes to these "Varangians" is fishing; see §2.i.c.3. below, al-Bīrūnī 107, Kennedy 1973: 81.

<sup>20</sup> References to the younger, longer *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* (as printed in Guðni Jónsson's edition) will identify the version in a footnote or by "G" in the parenthetical citation. Where the saga is cited without specifying which version, as here, the older one is meant, and it is R.C. Boer's edition being referred to and quoted from.

he says in one version of the saga that it has been great sport to him to make the Lappish women weep (*græta*).<sup>21</sup> Even through this euphemism the Christian saga-writer's distaste for such despicable behaviour may be detected.

When the expedition carries on to Permian, it is *Ńrvar-Oddr* who leads the shore party's raid, and though it is notably different from *Guðmundr's* affair – *Oddr* doing less hut-robbing and woman-irritating than treasure-mound raiding – it is still carried out with the clear intention of plundering the wealth of the land. *Oddr* and his foster-brother *Ásmundr* follow a group of natives to a great hall in which some kind of feast is being held (*Ńrv.* 7).<sup>22</sup> *Ńrvar-Oddr* kidnaps from the hall a Scandinavian serving-man or slave and asks him, interestingly, not the location of the Permians' stockpile of wealth but rather how best to annoy them. The man nevertheless volunteers that there is a mound nearby composed half of silver and half of earth. *Ńrvar-Oddr* sends for *Guðmundr*, *Sigurðr* and their men, and the two parties take turns alternately raiding the mound for all the silver they can carry and guarding the ships (*Ńrv.* 7-8). *Guðmundr* and *Sigurðr's* men accidentally let the Norse slave escape, and soon *Oddr's* party at the mound is attacked by a large force of livid Permians. The Norsemen escape and sail back to *Finmþrk* with their loot (*Ńrv.* 9-10).

Two circumstances clearly mark these far-travels as Viking expeditions: the narrative emphasis in both episodes on the material treasures obtained from Lapps and Permians, as well as the characters' desire to avoid full-scale battles unless absolutely necessary. Unlike the northern journeys of *Þórir hundr* in *Óláfs stgur helga* (see §2.i.a.1. above), which begin as trading expeditions and turn opportunistically to plunder, *Oddr* and *Guðmundr's* journey is clearly focused on raiding throughout.<sup>23</sup> Within the saga as a whole, this first journey by *Oddr* to a distant land, one of several to the distant north, can be seen to function as a

<sup>21</sup> See p. 15 in R.C. Boer's edition (Ch. 6), p. 214 in Guðni Jónsson's (Ch. 4).

<sup>22</sup> In one version of the saga, before this episode a fortnight's truce with the native Permians is arranged and a trading market held (Ross 1940: 37). Cf. *Þórir hundr's* trading and raiding in *Bjarmaland*, §2.i.a.1. above.

“qualifying test”, such as are common in fornaldarsögur (especially in “Abenteuersagas”).<sup>24</sup>

Throughout the rest of the saga, characters who meet *Ñrvar-Oddr* ask him the question, “Are you the *Oddr* who went to Bjarmaland?” Upon the affirmative reply, they immediately recognise what sort of accomplished hero they are dealing with.

**2.i.b. (2)** A northern far-traveller in *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, King *Hjtrleifr* of *Htrðaland*, raids in Bjarmaland in much the same manner as *Ñrvar-Oddr*, though the initial impetus for his plunder-motivated travel northward is quite novel.<sup>25</sup> The saga-writer first relates that *Hjtrleifr* accedes to his father’s throne and marries, and then continues: <sup>155</sup> *Hiorleífi brustu lausa fe fyrer aurleika. hann let gíora skip af uirktum ok for til Biarma landz (Hálfsrek. 2: 172)*. After *Hjtrleifr* stops off on an island in *Naumadalssinni* along the way to collect a second wife (hence his nickname *inn kvennsami*, “the lady-loving”), no more is said of the journey until he reaches the distant north:

<sup>156</sup> En er *Hiorleifr* kongr kom j *Vínu* miní skiptí hann lídí sínu j ííí þridíung<a>. A skípí hans uoru xc manna. þridíungur líds hellt upp bardaga med honum uid landz menn annar þridíungur líds uardueíttí skip med styre manni en ííí þridíungur braut haug med stafn bua ok fengu þeir mikit fe. (*Hálfsrek. 2: 172*)

On his plundering expedition, King *Hjtrleifr* thus follows what *Ñrvar-Odds saga* has established to be standard barrow-raiding procedure for Bjarmaland: some of the party ransack the mound while others guard the ship. There is also a battle with the irate locals, another feature typical in accounts of burial mound raiding in the far north (see also §2.i.b.4. below). On the return voyage from Bjarmaland, the party stops in *Finnmtrk* and, typically,

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<sup>23</sup> Rosemary Power connects these two accounts of Bjarmian silver-mound raiding, suggesting the account in *Ñrvar-Odds saga* may be “partly derived” from that in *Heimskringla* (1984: 18-19).

<sup>24</sup> See Vésteinn 1994: 102-04. Vésteinn places the saga hero’s “qualifying test” in the context of the structural model outlined by Algirdas-Julien Greimas (French pp. 196-98, English pp. 227-28).

encounters one of that region's monstrous inhabitants. The creature itself is, however, atypical: it is first called a *brunnmigi* ("water-fouler", a fox or perhaps a fox-spirit), then a *þurs* and finally a *trǫll*.<sup>26</sup> *Landnámabók* relates a brief sequel to Hjǫrleifr's northern adventures that his son's saga fails to provide. Tracing Hjǫrleifr Hǫrðakonungr's genealogy down to the settlers of Iceland, the compiler comments briefly on Hálf's son: <sup>157</sup> *Hjǫrri herjaði á Bjarmaland; hann tók þar at herfangi Ljúfvinu dóttur Bjarmakonungs* (*Land. S* 112, H 86: 150).<sup>27</sup> The urge to raid in the north and acquire a wife there may run in the family.

**2.i.b. (3)** *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinsonar* begins with accounts of Viking raids in the Baltic, with a grief-stricken King Eysteinn incessantly raiding and ultimately arriving in Staraya Ladoga in the east (*Hálf.* 2, 3; see §2.v.c.2. of the preceding chapter). The brother of one of his raiding partners, however, reaches the far north on his raiding voyages:

<sup>158</sup> Úlfr hét enn yngsti sonr Svips; hann var kallaðr Úlfr enn illi. Hann herjaði um Eystrasalt ok um Bjarmaland; hann hafði mikla ræningjasveit ok var allóvinsæll.  
(*Hálf.* 1: 92)

The writer of *Hálfðanar saga* seems to concur with the writer of *Ñrvar-Odds saga* that Vikings raiding in the far north are undesirable characters, even by Viking standards; Eysteinn, by contrast, is here characterised as neither evil nor unpopular. Perhaps Vikings' natures simply correspond to their raiding-ground of choice: those who regularly roam mysterious waters and make raids into lands inhabited by monsters and semi-humans are correspondingly evil or anti-social. Northern plunderers make a second appearance in *Hálfðanar saga*, when someone enumerates the difficulties of a particular journey across the

<sup>25</sup> Though the extant version of *Hálfs saga* probably dates from the 14th century, its core story of the burning and defeat of Hálf and his champions certainly preserves an ancient tradition, as *Hálfs bani* is a kenning for fire attested in the 9th century (Jónas 1988: 354-55; Pulsiano 262; Seelow 156-66).

<sup>26</sup> On the "*brunnmigi*", see footnote 9 on p. 78 of A. Le Roy Andrews' edition of the saga.

<sup>27</sup> *Geirmundar þátr*, which tells of Hjǫrri's son by this woman, fails to relate either the episode of Hjǫrri's Permian expedition or the lady's name. See also Chesnutt-Ross 64-65, Jón 1941: 167.



far north to Karelia, saying: <sup>159</sup> „*Á skipum má ekki fara skemr en fim vikur, ok er þat en mesta mannhætta fyrir sakir víkinga ok hermanna*“ (*Hálf*. 16: 118). This is a weaker example of the Viking-motivation for far-travel, as it is not specified whether these pirates and raiders are transplanted Scandinavians or the dregs of Permia’s own native population. It is nevertheless clear from these examples that the writers of *Ñrvar-Odds saga*, *Hálfs saga* and *Hálfðanar saga* believe the waters of the far north are populated by pirates, at least some of whom are Scandinavian ne’er-do-wells travelling far to seek plunder in Finnm̄rk and Permia.

**2.i.b. (4)** There are two more accounts of Viking raiding in the far north, one fairly straightforward and the other rather more ambiguous.<sup>28</sup> *Heimskringla* tells of one of the Viking exploits of the Norwegian king Haraldr gráfeldr (“grey-cloak” or “grey-hide”):

<sup>160</sup> Haraldr gráfeldr fór á einu sumri með her sinn norðr til Bjarmalands ok herjaði þar ok átti orrostu mikla við Bjarma á Vínubakka. Þar hafði Haraldr konungr sigr ok drap mart folk, herjaði þá víða um landit ok fekk ófa mikit fé. (ÍF XXVI 217)

A verse by the skald Glúmr Geirason quoted here adds the image of a burning settlement and tells that Haraldr obtained fame from this expedition.<sup>29</sup> This passage clearly describes Viking raiding, especially in its mention of the booty Haraldr wins; the account in *Fagrskinna* specifies that he gains both silver and gold. The clarity of the raiding motivation is dimmed only slightly by the description of Haraldr’s exploit in the north as a battle (*orrostá*) and the explicit information that he obtains victory – a foregone conclusion on a Viking raid but not in a pitched battle (see also §2.iv.b.2. below).

The final Viking raider to mention is Herv̄r Angantýsdóttir of *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, though her specific purpose for travelling to the far north is ambiguous. Herv̄r

<sup>28</sup> The Bjarmaland and Hundingjaland raids of Sturlaugr starfsami could also be mentioned here (*Stur.* 20), though this expedition seems to be no more than a follow-up to his earlier quest to obtain for King Haraldr gullmuðr a valuable aurochs horn from the north: on Sturlaugr’s second voyage he only attacks those lands in which he was ill-treated on the first voyage. See §2.ii.a.4. below.

spends her childhood and young adulthood learning the warrior's arts and making trouble within the realm of her grandfather Bjarmarr jarl (Aldeigjuborg, according to the U redaction; *Herv.* 3: 10). Learning that her father and his fabulous wealth are buried on the Scandinavian island of Sámsey, Hervtr leaves home and joins a band of Vikings, calling herself Hervarðr. As captain of the band she goes to Sámsey and succeeds in obtaining from her father's *draugr* the magnificent sword Týrfingr, despite her Viking companions deserting her (*Herv.* 3: 12-19). The saga-writer continues:

<sup>161</sup> Hervtr dvalðisk nú í Sámsey, þar til hon fekk sér far í burt; er nú eigi sagt frá ferðum hennar, fyrr en hon kom til Guðmundar konungs af Glæsisvǫllum; hon nefndisk þá enn Hervarðr ok lét sem væri ein kempa. Þessi Hervarðr var þar einkanliga vel tekinn. (*Herv.* 4: 20)

It is here completely ambiguous why Hervtr travels from Sámsey in Scandinavia to Glæsisvellir in the furthest north. Though she is a (very successful) Viking raider at this point in the narrative, she is as likely to have travelled to see Guðmundr on a kind of state visit as for plunder (see also §2.v. below). At Guðmundr's court she is not feared as an attacker but welcomed as a respected guest or perhaps a mercenary. Even when Hervtr beheads one of Guðmundr's courtiers while giving the king advice on his chess-play, he prevents his retinue from taking revenge on her (*Herv.* 4: 20). Hervtr's departure, though, again stresses her identity as a Viking. Without preamble, the saga-writer relates: <sup>162</sup> *Hervtr kom sér til víkinga ok var í hernaði um hríð* (*Herv.* 4: 20). Viking raiding is thus a natural reason for Hervtr to have travelled to the distant north, but the text simply does not make this explicit.

**2.i.c. (Hunting and fishing)** Two Hrafnistumannasögur feature journeys motivated by the desire to collect natural resources of the far north in a manner that does not involve the

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<sup>29</sup> *Fagrskinna* gives essentially the same account without citing Glúmr's verse (ÍF XXIX 103).

inhabitants of the land. In each of their respective sagas, Ketill hængr (“trout”) and his son Grímr loðinkinni (“hairy-cheek”) travel to the far north to fish or hunt, sometimes during periods of famine in their Hálogaland home.

**2.i.c. (1)** The three separate accounts in *Ketils saga hængs* in which the title character travels north to go fishing leave ambiguous the question of how far north Ketill sails; textual clues suggest that he is understood to reach some place distant from ordinary Norse, human habitations. In the first episode, Ketill has been fishing just offshore when a man named Björn passes by in his fishing-boat and mocks him on account of his paltry catch. Ketill subsequently goes out to sea to find better fishing waters, and he ultimately heads north:

<sup>163</sup> Eitt kveld eftir dagsetr tók Ketill öxi sína í hönd sér ok gekk norðr á eyra. En er hann var kominn eigi allskammt í burt frá bænum, sér hann dreka einn fljúga at sér norðan ór björgunum. (*Ket.* 1: 153)

Ketill defends himself with his axe against the fire-breathing beast and succeeds in cutting it in half, making sense of his father Hallbjörn’s earlier warning to him against travelling north to these uninhabited islands, especially after the sun has set. When asked later whether he has had trouble with any harmful or provoking spirits (*glettivætti*, *Ket.* 1: 153), Ketill says only that he has cut a fish in two, the understatement earning him his nickname and reinforcing the notion that he sees his journey north primarily as a fishing expedition.

The location of Ketill’s northern adventure is ambiguous, but its distance or alterity is suggested by two textual details. Firstly, the episode is said to take place “a not inconsiderable distance” (*eigi allskammt*) north of human habitations; one of the defining characteristics of distant lands is that they are not home to Norsemen, and the *óbyggðir* – “wastes” or “wilderness” – of the distant east and north in the sagas are commonly populated not by human beings but by different types of monsters or by nothing at all. So the second

clue, the dragon, is a being at home not in Scandinavia but in fantastic lands elsewhere. Together these two details suggest that Ketill's northern islands are outside the boundary of Scandinavian familiarity, a place populated not by humans but by harmful or mischievous spirits. The saga-writer is unconcerned with establishing the exact distance or location, as long as it is sufficiently "other" a locale for the fantastic events to take place.

The locations of Ketill's next two fishing trips are likewise ambiguous. During a time of great famine (*hallæri mikit*) in Hálogaland, <sup>164</sup> *Ketill kveðst þá vilja fara til fiskjar ok vera eigi allr ómagi* (*Ket. 2: 155*). His father tells him of three fjords – Næstifjtrör, Miðfjtrör and Vitaðsgjafi – the last of which is later revealed to be in the north; the progression of names – "Nearest fjord", "Middle fjord" and finally "Sure giver" – suggests that the three inlets progress north from Hálogaland. That summer Ketill travels to Miðfjtrör and discovers a large hut with a great pit filled with the carcasses of whales, polar bears, seals, walruses and at the bottom, salted man-flesh (*mannkjöt saltat*, *Ket. 2: 155-56*). Soon a large, evil-looking man named Surtr comes home and is quickly dispatched by Ketill's axe. Only giants or trolls are oversized hoarders of man-flesh, and their native habitat in saga-literature is the north. Ketill's return journey in the giant's boat in the autumn (*um haustið*) suggests Miðfjtrör is a place distant enough from Hrafnista to merit spending the entire summer rather than only a couple of nights. The next summer Ketill travels north to the furthest fjord, Vitaðsgjafi: <sup>165</sup> *Síðan fór hann norðr í Vitaðsgjafa ok fann þar skála ok bjóst um. Þar skorti ekki veiðiskap. Mátti þar taka fiska með höndum sér* (*Ket. 2: 157*). As before, Ketill has come to the far north to fish and encounters and kills with his axe a monstrous creature, this one unambiguously described first as a giant and later as a troll (*jötunn, troll*; *Ket. 2: 157*).

Chapter 5 begins with the final example of far-travel north for a fishing expedition in *Ketils saga*. The famine in Hálogaland is increasing, the fish growing scarce and crops failing, so Ketill declares: <sup>166</sup> „*Ek skal til veiða*“ (*Ket. 5: 168*). The saga-writer calls the place

Ketill reaches Skrofar, where he meets a pitch-black troll-woman rising from the sea. Ketill asks her identity in a verse, and she gives it in another:

<sup>167</sup> „Forað ek heiti.

Fædd var ek norðarla

hraust í Hrafnseyju.“

(*Ket.* 5: 169)

Ketill shoots the monster dead with an arrow as she turns into a whale and resumes fishing. A few nights later he encounters another troll-woman running past, who tells him:

<sup>168</sup> „Ek skal til trölla-þings. Þar kemr Skelkingr norðan ór Dumbshafi, konungr trölla, ok Ófóti ór Ófótansfirði ok Þorgerðr Hörgatröll ok aðrar stórvættir norðan ór landi.“

(*Ket.* 5: 173)

Again, the monstrous creature has specified a distant, northern location. Ketill atypically abstains from killing the troll-woman, but lies low during the witch ride (*gandreið*) on the island that night and returns home safely the next day.

**2.i.c. (2)** *Gríms saga loðinkinna* also contains an example of travel to the distant north to fish in a time of famine.<sup>30</sup> At the beginning of the saga Grímr lives on the Hrafnista farmstead he has inherited from his father Ketill hængur:

<sup>169</sup> Þat bar þá til sem oftar, at hallærrí mikít kom á Hálogaland. Grímr loðinkinni bjóst þá heiman ok fór á ferju sinni við þriðja mann. Hann helt norðr fyrir Finnmörk ok svá austr til Gandvíkr. Ok er hann kom í víkina, sá hann, at þar var nógr veiðifangi.

(*Grím.* 1: 186)

Grímr's reason for travelling north to Finnmörk and Gandvík is perfectly clear, but rather unexpected under the circumstances. Shortly before, Grímr had gone to a wedding feast to be married, only to find that the bride had been abducted. Vésteinn Ólason notes that though the

<sup>30</sup> *Gríms saga* is probably the latest of the Hrafnistumannasögur, dating from around the beginning of the 14th century (Pulsiano 243, Jónas 1988: 361). The saga is clearly influenced by romance.

motifeme “the hero leaves home” is structurally expected at this point in the narrative, his motivation to search for food rather than his lost bride is surprising. Vésteinn cites the recurrent motif of the search for food in the north and connects it, along with the motif of acquiring a sexual partner in the north, to the historical Hálogalanders’ struggle to maintain the welfare of their society (1994: 107-11; see also §2.ii.b.1. below). This struggle was naturally one with which medieval Icelandic saga-writers and -readers could identify.

**2.i.c. (3)** There is another medieval account describing Scandinavians travelling to the distant north to hunt or fish, though it is a non-Norse text that predates the sagas by several hundred years. This is the famous account of Ohthere (ON Óttarr) from the Anglo-Saxon Orosius.<sup>31</sup> The Norwegian chieftain initially reports that *he æt sumum cirre wolde fandian hu longe þæt land norþryhte læge, oppe hwæðer ænig mon be norðan þæm westenne bude* (Orosius 14) – “he once wished to find out how far the land extended due north, or whether anyone lived to the north of the unpopulated area” (Lund 18). Later, however, when Ohthere’s tale has carried him from his home in Hálogaland to Bjarmaland (or the land of the “Beormas”), the narrator reports:

Swiþpost he for ðider, toecan þæs landes sceawunge, for þæm horshwæum, for ðæm hie habbað swiþe æpele ban on hiora topum—þa teð hie brohton sume þæm cyninge—7 hiora hyd | bið swiðe god to sciprapum. (Orosius 14-15)

His main reason for going there, apart from exploring the land, was for the walruses, because they have very fine ivory in their tusks – they brought some of these tusks to the king – and their hide is very good for ship-ropes. (Lund 19-20)

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<sup>31</sup> The late 9th-century Old English translation and adaptation of Paulus Orosius’ *Historiae adversum paganos* (“History against the pagans”), associated with Alfred the Great, undoubtedly includes Ohthere’s report of his remarkable journey north around the Kola peninsula in order to fill in the areas of European habitation not known by the original author.

There follows a brief but detailed description of this creature and of Ohthere's success at hunting its kind; in England, where walrus do not live, such a description of a strange creature inhabiting a distant land would be most interesting. It will be recalled from §2.i.b.1. of Chapter 2 ("West") that walrus products are a valuable commodity characteristic of Greenland; in those accounts as in this one, walrus ivory is perceived as an appropriate gift for a monarch. Habitation by walrus is thus a characteristic shared by lands to the distant west and the distant north. Unlike the Hrafnistumenn, Ohthere hunts in the north not for necessary meat during a famine, but to increase his wealth. He is, after all, a chieftain with means and standing sufficient to make the trip to King Alfred's court and be entertained there.<sup>32</sup>

## 2.ii. Adventures and quests

In many episodes in saga-literature Scandinavian characters travel to the distant north to participate in some sort of adventure or quest, either of their own volition or on behalf of monarchs to whom they owe allegiance. Þórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson's and Gull-Þórir's adventures in the far north share with the previous sub-section's motivations the pursuit of profit, while all other examples of this adventuring motivation distinguish themselves by their questing heroes' lack of any desire for profit or personal material gain. Some of these literary adventures enact or echo story-patterns from Old Norse myth, either Óðinn's sexual exploits with giants' daughters or Þórr's violent rampages against various northern monsters.

### 2.ii.a. (General adventures and quests)

**2.ii.a. (1)** As detailed in §2.i.a.3. above, on the first of Þórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson's several voyages to Finnmǫrk he fights with the Lapps against some Kyllings who have been raiding them, acquiring from this venture a great deal of booty (*Egla* 10). Here it is clear Þórólfr goes

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<sup>32</sup> A. Zeki Validi suggests al-Bīrūnī's account of north-travelling Varangians refers to Ohthere's voyage (47-48).

to the far north for the purposes of trade and tribute-collection and turns to mercenary service (or provincial police-work) in an opportunistic fashion. The next time Þórólfr goes north, the Kven people approach Þórólfr after he has travelled widely throughout Finnm̄rk. They report that Karelians are harrying their land and request Þórólfr's military help, promising him as large a share of spoils as their king, each of his men receiving as much as three Kvens (*Egla* 14). When Þórólfr gives his men the option of joining the campaign, most take up the challenge, <sup>170</sup> *er féfang lá við svá mikit* (*Egla* 14: 36). Though it is the Kvens who approach Þórólfr, his earlier experience fighting the Kylfings for the Lapps has clearly opened the door for this new mercenary proposition; Þórólfr's approachability and willingness to take on this job may even indicate that he originally set out for the north prepared for and expecting such opportunistic adventures. This mercenary activity may nevertheless be another spontaneous decision.

On Þórólfr's third journey to the far north, however, he unambiguously seeks military service and booty rather than trading opportunities. Since King Haraldr has revoked Þórólfr's right and responsibility of Lapp tribute-collection, he now travels north for his own purposes:

<sup>171</sup> Þann sama vetr fór Þórólfr upp á fjall með hundrað manna; fór þá þegar austr á Kvenland ok hitti Faravið konung. Gerðu þeir þá ráð sitt ok réðu þat at fara á fjall enn sem inn fyrra vetr ok htfðu fjtgur hundruð manna ok kómu ofan í Kirjálaland, hljópu þar í byggðir, er þeim þótti sitt færi vera fyrir fjtlmennis sakar, herjuðu þar ok fengu of fjár; fóru þá aptr, er á leið vetrinn, upp á m̄rkina. (*Egla* 17: 41)

The word *þegar* ("immediately", "directly") emphasises Þórólfr's single-minded purpose in travelling north. On his previous journey to Finnm̄rk he wandered about for some time before being approached by Faravið's messengers; here he goes directly to the Kven king. His legitimate trade with the Lapps taken from him, the resourceful Þórólfr turns instead to

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This is unlikely: al- Bīrūnī's Varangians are fishermen and pirates, and Ohthere, a chieftain who boasts of owning 600 reindeer, probably had no need for either fishing or piracy (*Orosius* 15).



another profit-making business enterprise that is more legitimate than outright piracy – and still sanctioned by a monarch – but still bears more risk than the similar mercenary service of the Varangians in Byzantium. There Norsemen serve in the great army of a powerful, Christian emperor in military enterprises that will almost certainly succeed; here the risk of failure is greater, and the Norsemen must weigh the probabilities and make their judgments both before joining the expedition.

The Icelander Gull-Þórir's wealth-seeking journey to the far north is even more of an adventure than Þórólfr's. According to Þórir's saga, while staying with a kinsman's friend in Hálogaland Þórir encounters a dead berserkr or troll in a grave-mound after following its will-o'-the-wisp, planning to ransack the mound for its treasures.<sup>33</sup> The berserkr dissuades Þórir by giving him a few precious, magical gifts and, crucially, by telling him of an even greater hoard of treasure to be had in a cave up north on Dumbshaf. To possess the treasure, Þórir must only defeat a family of Vikings-turned-dragons who now rest on the great pile of treasures (*Gull* 3). Thus motivated, Þórir sets out with a small band of companion warriors:

172 Litlu síðar ráðast þeir félagar til ferðar ok fara norðr fyrir Finnmörk, þar til er þeir koma norðr fyrir Blesaverg; svá heitir fjallit, þat er hellir Vals var í, en þat er norðr við Dum<b>shaf. (*Gull* 4: 186)<sup>34</sup>

There the company invades the dragons' cave and manages to kill off the dragon-family; the payout of the large pile of golden treasures amongst Þórir and his men is detailed very carefully by the saga-writer (*Gull* 4).

A fight with a dragon is, naturally, a sort of adventure very different from mercenary service for a distressed king, both more fantastic and more risky, but the initial motivation (desire for gold) and the actions taken (far travel, fighting) are the same. Gull-Þórir himself

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<sup>33</sup> *Gull-Þóris saga*, sometimes called *Þorskfirðinga saga* after a probable reference to it by this name in *Landnámabók*, is a "post-classical" Íslendingasaga with several fantastic elements; the saga was probably composed in the early 14th century (ÍF XIII cx, cxxx-cxxxiii; Pulsiano 249).

notes the contrast between these adventures and the more prosaic ways of making a living with northern far-travel. Countering the objection that he should not chase after monster-guarded treasure, he says: <sup>173</sup> „*Þat er nú drengiligra at afla þar fjár en róa til fiska, ok þar skal til hætta*“ (*Gull* 3: 183). Here Þórir explicitly compares two different methods of acquiring goods or wealth in the far north and shows he values the valiant, dangerous method over the ordinary, safer one. Þórir even refuses his host’s offer of payment to stay home rather than go north to fight the dragons (*Gull* 4); Gull-Þórir, it seems, is a true northern adventurer. This dragon-slaying episode is also mentioned briefly towards the end of *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar* and in *Landnámabók* (S 114, H 86).

**2.ii.a. (2)** As indicated above, Þórólfr and Gull-Þórir are the only characters in this subsection whose adventures or quests are motivated primarily by profit. This underlying motivation of profit for a northern adventure is explicitly rejected in an episode in Saxo’s *Gesta Danorum*. Saxo first describes the Danish king Gormr (Gormo):

Hic enim novum audaciæ genus complexus, hereditarium fortitudinis spiritum scrutandis rerum naturæ vestigiis quam armis excolere maluit, utque alios regum ardor bellicus, ita ipsum cognoscendorum mirabilium, quæcumque vel experimento deprehensa vel rumore vulgata fuerant, præcordialis stimulabat aviditas.

(VIII.xiv.1: 238-39)

This man was enterprising in a novel way, for he preferred to exercise the spirit of adventure he had inherited not with weapons, but by investigating features of natural phenomena; as other princes were stimulated by a craze for war, he was excited by a deep-seated passion to discover marvels, either traced through his own experience or divulged by word of mouth. (Fisher 262)

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<sup>34</sup> In *Hálfðanar saga* the mountain is called *Blesanergir*; scholars have noted the similarity of the second element to Sami *njarg* and Finnish *nirkko* – “headland” or “ness.” See ÍF XIII 186, footnote, and §2.iv.b.1. below.

Having heard from some Icelanders of a certain giant Geruthus, Gormr decides to go to see him for himself.<sup>35</sup> Gormr is undaunted by reports that describe the northern waters he must sail through as a place of perennial darkness:

Sed in iuvenili animo circumstantis periculi metum non tam prædæ quam gloriæ  
cupido calcabat, multum sibi claritatis accessurum sperante, si rem admodum  
intentatum auderet. (Saxo VIII.xiv.1: 239)

Yet Gorm stamped out any fear of these besetting dangers in his youthful heart, which yearned not for gain so much as glory; he hoped that high distinction would accrue to him, if he could only venture on a quest never yet attempted. (Fisher 262)

In the first passage Saxo characterises Gormr’s motivation for making this journey north as an inherited “spirit of adventure” that manifests itself not in violence but in exploration, and in the second he explicitly states that Gormr seeks not material gain but the glory of going on a previously unattempted quest.

As noted in §2.i.c.5. above, Ohthere’s original stated reason for travelling to the distant north is that he wishes to find out how far north the land extends and whether anyone lives in those desolate, northern haunts. The careful, detailed nature of his narrative certainly bespeaks a keen interest in the geography of unfamiliar regions, and compared to many of the attempts at descriptive navigation in saga-literature, Ohthere’s estimated sailing distances are notably accurate (cf. Lund 30).<sup>36</sup> It is only later, after Ohthere has reached Bjarmaland, that his secondary motivation for far-travel north – walrus-hunting – is revealed. There, too, the narrator reiterates that the primary reason for Ohthere’s journey to the north is exploration.

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<sup>35</sup> The giant-king Geirrøðr appears in several Norse sagas and þættir. He is an opponent of Þórr’s in Norse myth, as in *Þórsdrápa* and Snorri’s *Skáldskaparmál*.

<sup>36</sup> The accuracy of Ohthere’s description is, indeed, the principal reason scholars from Alan Ross in 1940 to Vilmos Voigt in 2009 are willing to accept the historicity of his northern voyage.

**2.ii.a. (3)** Like Gormr and Ohthere, the title characters of *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* travel to the distant north of their own volition for an adventure or quest. The character of their quest, however, differs from previous examples: it is more focused in purpose and more aimless in direction. Where Gormr and Ohthere travel primarily because of curiosity, Egill and Ásmundr set off with the very specific goal of recovering the Russian king Hertryggr's daughters, who have been carried off to unknown places by a pair of monstrous creatures; Egill and Ásmundr, not knowing where to search, wander aimlessly and reach the distant north by chance as much as by anything else.

When at a Yule feast the Russian king proclaims that whoever finds his missing daughters may marry one of them and will be awarded a third of his kingdom, Egill comments that this is a good chance for brave men (*rǫfsum mǫnnum*) to earn wealth, and he and Ásmundr soon put to sea with a crew of twenty-four:

<sup>174</sup> En þeir stgðuz mundu leita konungsdœtranna ok eigi aptr koma, fyrr en þær fyndiz annathvært lífs eða dauðar. Sigldu þeir nú í haf, ok vissu aldri, hvert þeir skyldu fara; kǫnnuðu þeir eyjar ok útsker ok fjallbygðir, ok fóru svá allt sumarit. En at vetri váru þeir komnir norðr at Jǫtunheimum. (*Egil*. 5: 17-18)

This is very much a quest: the Viking pair goes to seek and find the fantastically kidnapped daughters of their royal host. Though the desire for wealth is clearly present (in Egill at least), the journey cannot be reduced to a simple business venture: there are difficulties to be surmounted, hardships to endure, and an uncertainty and risk at the heart of the money-earning project. It is no mere venture – it is an adventure. It is natural that Egill and Ásmundr's aimless travels ultimately take them to the distant, northern realm of Jǫtunheimar. The first of King Hertryggr's daughters, Brynhildr, is carried off by a monstrous creature called a *hjási*, which the narrator describes in ghoulish detail and compares to a *glatúnshundr*, a ravenous hound (*Egil*. 1: 5); the second daughter, Bekkhildr, is swept up by a gigantic

vulture that kills two of the princess's hand-maidens during the abduction (*Egil. 2*). The logical place to find princesses kidnapped by such monstrous, evil creatures is that particular part of the far north that is the natural habitat of all things magical and monstrous.

Jtunheimar fits the profile.

**2.ii.a. (4)** Though Egill and Ásmundr's decision to seek King Hertryggr's daughters is their own, the quest can certainly be said to have been undertaken on a monarch's behalf. There are several examples in which saga-characters travel north on a quest more directly in the service of a king. In *Egils saga ok Ásmundar* the king merely offers a large reward to any adventurers who can recover his daughters: in other examples kings send out on adventures men who owe them allegiance or are somehow in their debt.

The first such example is in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, when the two title characters are awaiting execution after leading an unsuccessful rebellion against the king of Eystra-Gautland (Östergötland), Herrauðr's father Hringr (Ä 5, J 8).<sup>37</sup> Bósi's foster-mother Busla magically transports herself into the king's bedroom the night before the executions are scheduled, and with a series of magic spells she bullies him into agreeing to spare the companions and instead send them on a dangerous mission (*forsending*, *Bósa* Ä 5: 20, J 9). The very next morning Hringr brings his son Herrauðr before him and tells him:

<sup>175</sup> "Bósi skal hafa lífs grið ok lima, ok skal hann fara úr landi ok koma eigi aptr, fyrr en hann færir mér þat gammsegg, at skrifat er alt með gullstöfum utan, ok eru vit þá sáttir, en elligar skal hann heita hvers mannz níðingr." (*Bósa* Ä 6: 20)

As in the previous examples of northern adventures, danger and risk are implied in this quest: if Bósi does not accept this mission, he will be branded *níðingr* – "scoundrel", "criminal", or

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<sup>37</sup> The riddarasaga-influenced fornaldarsaga *Bósa saga* is dated by some scholars to before 1350, by others to around the time of the oldest manuscript of one of its two independent recensions, about 1450 (Pulsiano 54; Jiriczek ix-xv; Vésteinn 2007: 115). Ä denotes the older recension, J the younger.

even “coward.” There must therefore be something on this mission scoundrels and cowards wish to avoid – danger. The saga-writer continues:

176 En er vóraði, þjuggu þeir ferð sína úr landi ok höfðu eitt skip ok á fjóra menn ok XX ok fóru þeir mjök at tilvísan Buslu, ok heldu þeir í Austrveg ok kvómu undir Bjarmaland ok lögðu undir einn eyðiskóg. (*Bósa* Ä 6: 21)

Bósi and Herrauðr set off on their quest with precisely the same number of men as Egill einhendi and Ásmundr berserkjabani: perhaps twenty-four is understood to be the appropriate number of companions on such a quest.<sup>38</sup>

Bósi and Herrauðr’s journey is focused in its outcome as well as its motivation. Making their way through the great, northern wood and coming across a cottage, the pair stays with a farmer, his wife and his daughter one night, and Bósi has sex with the daughter in order to gain information about the gold-inscribed vulture’s egg from her (*Bósa* Ä 7, J 10). In this *Bósa saga* resembles the story-pattern of the Odinic seduction-myth, especially the tale of Óðinn’s acquisition of the mead of poetry largely by the seduction of the giant-girl Gunnltǫð (see Ch. 10 of McKinnell 2005, esp. pp. 164-67). The farmer’s daughter’s response again emphasises the danger of the foster-brothers’ mission: 177 “*En hverr var þér svó reiðr, at þik vill feigan ok senda þik forsending?*” (*Bósa* Ä 7: 25). She nevertheless gives Bósi the information he needs, and with a combination of mighty deeds and derring-do Bósi and Herrauðr defeat the monsters guarding the vulture’s precious egg and rescue the kidnapped daughter of King Guðmundr of Glæsisvellir as well (*Bósa* Ä 8, J 10). Despite its narrative resemblance to a mythic story-pattern, *Bósa saga*’s northern adventure bears on the whole more affinity to later, romantic tales of the fantastic than to the earlier, more gritty and realistic – but nevertheless monster-populated – portrayals of the north (see Vésteinn 1994, esp. pp. 117-19).

<sup>38</sup> In the younger redaction, Bósi and Herrauðr collect 300 men and go raiding far and wide, ultimately finding themselves off the coast of Permia, at the edge of Mirkwood (*Myrkviskógur*, *Bósa* J 10: 104-05).

The title character of *Sturlaug's saga starfsama* is also sent on a quest to the far north by a king who is angry with him.<sup>39</sup> When Sturlaugr wins the fiancée of the Norwegian king Haraldr gullmuðr ("gold-mouth") by fighting a single-combat contest on his behalf, the king summons Sturlaugr before him and, after an exchange of angry words, gives him a task: <sup>178</sup> "Pat er þer at segja Styrlaugr at þu skalt aldri ohræddr uera her j landi nema þu ferir mer urarhorn þat er ek tynda fordum" (*Stur.* A 14: 17). In the B-version of the saga the king adds that Sturlaugr will be called *hrak* and *hrækvikvendi* ("wretch", "carrion creature"; *Stur.* B 8: 366) if he fails to complete the task, words with a similar "bite" to that with which the king in *Bósa saga* threatens its heroes, *níðingr*. Sturlaugr is refused any information about where he might find this treasure, so he consults various old women of magical abilities who ultimately direct him to Hundingjaland (*Stur.* 15). Sturlaugr and his band of foster-brothers immediately sail north past Hálogaland, Finnmǫrk and "Vatnsnes" until they reach Austrvík, where various watchmen and finally Sturlaugr himself have nocturnal encounters with troll-women (*Stur.* 16). Wherever "Hundingjaland" is, it is as far north as the habitation of monsters. Sturlaugr's further adventures in the north involve him travelling on to Bjarmaland and there defeating no less mighty a personage than Þórr, visualised in this saga as the giant-like possessor and protector of the aurochs horn and other fabulous treasures (*Stur.* 17-18). Sturlaugr finally travels back to Norway and delivers the horn to the king by smashing it into his face (*Stur.* 19). As in *Bósa saga*, the saga-hero's relationship with the king for whom he quests in the distant north is decidedly antagonistic.<sup>40</sup>

Another saga in which a character is sent out on a dangerous mission to the distant north by a monarch is *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, something of an anomaly among the

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<sup>39</sup> *Sturlaug's saga* exists in two distinct recensions, an older version from around 1300 (A) and a younger (B). See Zitzelsberger 3-6, Pulsiano 614. Chapter numbers in citations from the A-text refer to Guðni Jónsson's edition, page numbers to Zitzelsberger's edition. Citations without specification refer to the A-text. Both chapter numbers and page numbers of the B-text are from Zitzelsberger.

<sup>40</sup> Rosemary Power includes *Bósa saga* and *Sturlaug's saga* in her analysis of a folkloric story-pattern involving a quest to a northern temple to retrieve a valuable object; see Power 1984.

Íslendingasögur due to its inattention to Icelandic feuding and its prominently-featured fantastic elements (e.g. Bárðr transforming from a human into a land-spirit).<sup>41</sup> In contrast to the previous examples, this saga's monarch, Óláfr Tryggvason, is not displeased with the person he sends on the dangerous mission, the Icelandic title character's son Gestr (*Bárð.* 17). During a winter feast in Óláfr's great hall, a monstrous, foul-smelling character bursts in and challenges any of the daring guests there to follow him and take the treasure he guards (*Bárð.* 18). When the mighty challenger leaves and the king asks who the intruder was, Gestr replies that he believes the person to be King Raknarr of Helluland, who buried himself and five hundred followers in his ship Slóðinn in a large barrow in the northern wastelands (*norðarliga í Hellulands óbyggðum, Bárð.* 18: 161). The saga-writer continues:

179 „Er þat nú bæn mín, Gestr,“ segir konungr, „at þú sækir gripi þessa.“ „Forsending má þat heita, herra,“ segir Gestr, „en eigi mun ek undan skorast, ef þér búið ferð mína eptir því, sem þér vitið mér á liggja.“ Konungr segir: „Ek skal þar allan hug á leggja, at þín ferð takist vel.“ (*Bárð.* 18: 162)

It is clear that Óláfr sends Gestr on his quest not in anger or desire for vengeance but out of respect for Gestr's capacity to achieve the quest's end. Óláfr does not compel Gestr to go by threatening his life but asks him to because he is the most knowledgeable person there; Gestr was, after all, the only one present to identify the monstrous intruder. Like the other far-travelling adventurers to the north, Gestr is true to his word and travels north to Helluland, winning the great treasure after a harrowing battle with King Raknarr and his walking dead warriors (*Bárð.* 19-20).

A final example of the northern quest or adventure made at the behest of a king is found in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*. King Gormr, having returned to Denmark from Bjarmaland, is troubled by the prospect of his soul's destination after death:

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<sup>41</sup> The saga dates from the late 13th or early 14th century (ÍF XIII lxix-lxxii, xcvi-cvii; Pulsiano 35).



Hæc volventem subeunt quidam parum benigni in Thorkillum animi, docentes divino opus esse consultu tantæque rei certitudinem, humano altiore ingenio nec mortalibus cognitu facilem, cælestibus expetendam oraculis. Quamobrem propitiandum esse Utgarthilocum, neminemque id Thorkillo aptius exsecuturum. (Saxo VIII.xv.2: 244)

As he meditated on these problems, some who were ill-disposed towards Thorkil approached the king and informed him that to reach any certainty in matters which were too deep for human wisdom to penetrate he would have to gauge the opinion of heaven by consulting divine oracles. He should therefore seek the favour of Utgartha-Loki, none being more fitted to effect this than Thorkil. (Fisher 267).

Aware that there is no escaping his fate, Thorkillus suggests that those who wish to send him on this dangerous errand accompany him. Gormr agrees and sends them all (Saxo VIII.xv.2).

What is only implied in Gestr's quest to seek out a northern "other" is here made explicit:

Thorkillus is sent on this mission because he is the one best able to accomplish it. As in *Bósa saga*, native inhabitants of the land to which the far-travellers go express to them the dangers and difficulties of their journey. Two enormous, eagle-headed demons speak to Thorkillus:

Tum gigantum alter salutatum eum rem conatu præarduam orsum esse dicebat, inusitati numinis adeundi cupiditate flagrantem atque extramundani climatis cognitionem investigabili scrutatione complexum. (Saxo VIII.xv.5: 245)

Then one of the giant creatures greeted him and observed that he had embarked on an extremely difficult undertaking; in his keen desire to address an unfamiliar deity he had made acquaintance with this region beyond the world to pursue his search and enquiries. (Fisher 268)

The eagle-headed giants' identification of their land as a "region beyond the world" shows that this world is not the human one, but one to which monsters and demons are native.

**2.ii.b. (Imitations of Óðinn and Þórr’s mythic adventures)** With reference to the giant king Guðmundr tempting Gormr and his men by offering his daughter and her maidservants in marriage (Saxo VIII.xiv), Hilda Ellis Davidson remarks that a “temporary marriage with one of Guthmund’s daughters is one of the attractions offered to visitors to his kingdom” and that “the motif of a temporary union between a hero and the daughter of a giant is a frequent one in the Icelandic legendary sagas” (Ellis Davidson-Fisher 143). She cites Helgi Þórisson’s acceptance of Guðmundr’s offer and punishment by his wife with blindness when he deserts her to return to his own land.<sup>42</sup> In his book *Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend*, John McKinnell traces this motif back to Norse myth, elaborating on the pattern and identifying it with Óðinn’s sexual exploits with giantesses. McKinnell enumerates characteristic features of a common pattern in which a human being becomes the sexual partner of a giantess or “other” (172-76); we may also consider those saga-accounts which do not closely match the story-pattern but do feature a Scandinavian man who sleeps with or marries a northern giant or troll’s daughter. Some sagas and þættir also show in their accounts of journeys to the far north the influence of earlier myths about Þórr, whose interactions with the inhabitants of the giant-worlds are more often violent than sexual.

**2.ii.b. (1)** Human-other relationships from two of the Hrafnistumannasögur, *Ketils saga hængs* and *Ñrvar-Odds saga*, are both examined by McKinnell. Ketill and his northern lover Hrafnhildr Brúnadóttir are discussed in §2.v. below. Ñrvar-Oddr spends a winter with his giant-rescuer Hildir in his Risaland home (see §2.iii.b.2. below) and makes first an ally and then a lover of Hildir’s daughter Hildigunnr. As is typical in Odinic otherworldly sexual encounters, Oddr first arranges for the child to be sent to him if it is male and then abandons his lover (*Ñrv.* G 18). As the heroes are transported from the world of men to that of giants in

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<sup>42</sup> Ellis Davidson provides several additional examples of this motif in Chapter 2 of Part 4 of her book *The Viking Road to Byzantium* (1976).

accordance with an old story-pattern (Odinic sexual encounters with giants or others), the characters' motivations for far-travel are secondary consequences of the saga-writers'. The saga-writers' fulfilment of the story-pattern's various elements may also affect the way the saga-writer chooses to take his far-traveller to the north. Ketill hængr may be blown to Finnmark by a wild gale that strands him in a harsh environment and leaves him in need of Brúni's hospitality due to the need to fulfil the characteristic story-element "Hero is rescued by a hospitable giant"; elsewhere in the saga Ketill maintains complete control of his boat on northern fishing expeditions. So, too, is Njrvan-Oddr made to be kidnapped by a monstrous vulture and flown to the distant north to be stranded in an eyrie; any less harrowing a situation could probably be taken care of by the otherwise capable and resourceful Oddr, using his magic arrows and shirt.

Three additional sagas relate to this Odinic pattern more generally by featuring sexual relationships of saga-heroes with native inhabitants of the far north. The well-known sexual encounters in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* (and the rather Odinic use Bósi makes of them) were touched upon in §2.ii.a.4. above. The very late fornaldarsaga *Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra* alters the story-pattern significantly but still retains some of its elements.<sup>43</sup> Illugi is blown off-course to Gandvík by storm-winds, is entertained by the hideous hag Gríðr and her beautiful daughter Hildir, sleeps with Hildir at Gríðr's invitation, and fulfils the conditions that allow him to make Hildir his wife. McKinnell cites earlier, mythic accounts in which Gríðr is a sexual partner of Óðinn and acts as a kind of foster-mother/patroness to Þórr (*Þórsdrápa*, Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál*), explaining how the various myth-elements are transformed:

This author probably knew that this kind of story usually involves a sexual liaison with a giantess (who must be beautiful), but he also wanted to portray Gríðr as a hag, and consequently needed two females, a hideous mother and a lovely daughter.

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<sup>43</sup> The earliest manuscripts of *Illuga saga* are 17th-century; the saga may have developed from post-medieval ballad versions of the story rather than vice versa (Jesch 1982: 121-25; Davíð 38-42; Pulsiano 322-23).

(2005: 163)

Finally, *Þorsteins þáttur bæjarmagns* may be mentioned. After adventures among the giants and ogres of the far north, Þorsteinn follows his trollish opponent Agði jarl home and encounters his daughter Guðrún; she accepts Þorsteinn's invitation to return with him to Norway and embrace the Christian faith (*Þors.* 11). The two marry, and after Þorsteinn lays Agði's *draugr* to rest, the pair lives happily ever after (*Þors.* 12-13). This tale, naturally, does not have much to do with the old, Odinic sexual seduction story-pattern besides the hero's acquisition of a giant-like person's daughter from the far north. Incorporated into the orbit of tales surrounding Norway's great Christianising king Óláfr Tryggvason, *Þorsteins þáttur* keeps its hero firmly on Christian paths, howsoever his actions might re-trace heathen mythic story-patterns (see also §2.ii.b.2. immediately below). Þorsteinn's Christianity illustrates a key difference between the distant east and distant north in saga-literature. Throughout the þáttur Þorsteinn's Christianity is what distinguishes him from the giants amongst whom he interacts in the distant north, but though he can be Christian in the north, he cannot Christianise it. Even his allies there do not show any inclination to convert, but instead either ally themselves with Þorsteinn to exploit Óláfr Tryggvason's luck (Ch. 5) or promise not to interfere with Þorsteinn's faith (Ch. 12). Here we see again the moral geography of the world: the east, even when ruled by non-Christians like Valdimarr and his queen, is "holy" by virtue of its proximity to the Holy Land, so it is readily converted by God's grace and Óláfr Tryggvason's efforts. The north, however, is wild and unholy by virtue of its location, so the land will not be converted. Even a sympathetic character like Guðmundr of Glæsisvellir cannot become Christian if he chooses to remain in the unholy north; only a character who leaves the north for Christian lands south of it, like Þorsteinn's bride Guðrún, can become Christian.

**2.ii.b. (2)** *Þorsteins þátrr* is also, of course, very closely connected to myths of Þórr's journeys to Giant-world for antagonistic rather than amorous encounters, especially the contest of fabulous skills in Útgarða-Loki's hall described in Snorri's *Gylfaginning* and the hot rock throwing game in Eilífr Guðrúnarson's 10th-century *Þórdrápa*. The þátrr's debt to these myths has been examined at length by Jacqueline Simpson (1966), who also connects the story to journeys to the Otherworld in Celtic mythology (see esp. pp. 8-16). The correspondences between the þátrr and the earlier versions of the myth (including one in Saxo's *Gesta*) are indeed great enough to consider *Þorsteins þátrr* not merely influenced by the myth-story but a version of it. Thus the primary motivation for Þorsteinn's travel northward is not his character's but the saga-writer's: for the story to be told, the hero must travel from the world of men to the realm of giants. This writer does not even bother to provide Þorsteinn with a plausible motivation for travelling north – Þorsteinn simply collects a crew, packs up his ship and goes (*Þors.* 3). The mist through which the ship wanders may indicate that Þorsteinn blunders into Giant-world as a result of bad weather (see §2.iii.a. below), but even this detail may only preserve a myth-element: the passage through mist is a motif in Celtic myth and a key feature of journeys to the Otherworld in Irish, Welsh and even Norse tales (Simpson 11).

*Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra* shows the influence of the myth-pattern associated with the Þórr-Geirrøðr myth that McKinnell refers to as "the Helpful Giantess." McKinnell enumerates some of the elements in *Illuga saga* that appear in earlier versions of this myth, in which Þórr is helped along the way by a giantess mother-figure named Gríðr. The clearest trace is, of course, the "foster-mother" herself, called Gríðr both in the early versions (*Þórdrápa*, *Skáldskaparmál*) and in this later saga. The saga has seven troll-women attack its hero, where the original myth has two attack Þórr. Both in the saga and in Saxo's version of the Geirrøðr myth there are searches for fire and the demand that the hero should speak three

undeniable truths (McKinnell 2005: 187-88). Finally, there is a brief passage in *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinsonar* that associates it with the myths of Þórr continually journeying from the world of the gods to the world of giants simply to kill them, without reference to any specific story or text. A pair of Viking brothers named Raknarr and Valr, sons of the king of the Swedish province of Gestrekaland (Gästrikland), is said to sail about Dumbshaf in the far north fighting giants (Ch. 26). Raknarr spends his time clearing Helluland of giants, and Valr fights a giant named Svaði and takes a great deal of treasure from him. The saga identifies Svaði as the son of Þórr, but to the Christian saga-writer Þórr himself is probably an “other” – a demon and enemy of men rather than their ally. Svaði is also the name of a giant in the second chapter of *Orkneyinga saga*.

### 2.iii. Compulsion

Journeys to the distant north for an adventure or quest at the behest of a monarch could be classified as travel of compulsion, in which the far-traveller is carried to the far north by forces outside his control. In those examples, however, whether the monarch offers the protagonist a choice between the mission and death or requests his participation, the protagonist always verbally accepts the king’s instruction. In episodes of far-travel by true compulsion, the characters never choose to travel north at all.

**2.iii.a. (Weather)** While ships are tossed about by storms throughout saga-literature, in a few specific accounts bad weather carries Norse mariners from ordinary sea-paths to the distant north. Ketill hængr’s northern travel in Chapter 3 of his saga is not a proper example of this: Ketill is already sailing northward from Hálogaland on a fishing voyage when storm-winds carry him further north to Finnmǫrk.

**2.iii.a. (1)** After successful Viking raids in Orkney and Scotland, the title character of *Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra* and his companion Sigurðr make ready to sail home to Denmark:

<sup>180</sup> At hausti vill Sigurðr heim halda, ok þá rekr á storm mikinn. Tók þá skipit at ganga of mikit, rekr þá norðr í haf. Herti seglit, svá at helt við rif. Tekr nú hvert band at slitna. Þeir sjá hvergi landa til. Sjórinntekr nú at ókyrrast, ok gerði svá stóran storm, at inn rann á bæði borð, en svá váru þeir allir hraustir, sem á þessu skipi váru, at engi talaði æðruorð. Skipit tekr nú mjök at leka, ok standa allir í austri átta dægr. Skip rekr langt norðr í haf í vík þá, er Gandvík hét. (*III*. 3: 416-17)

The travellers do not wish to travel north; the narrator explicitly states that Sigurðr wishes to sail home to Denmark – east of Scotland and well within in the borders of Scandinavia – but are instead carried northward and eastward a considerable distance, to Gandvík (“Bay of Sorcery”). As its name suggests, Gandvík is in many sagas the native habitation of monstrous and magical “others.” In this one it is home to a family of trolls.

The saga-writer reinforces the sense of compulsion by continually stressing the unwillingness of Sigurðr and his party to be in this northern land at all. Having made landfall, the Danish prince decides the company should wait there for a fair wind (*III*. 3). All through Illugi’s adventures away from the ship amongst the trolls, the Vikings wait, and after he has returned the narrator again remarks: <sup>181</sup> *Mánuð lá konungsson þar, ok gaf honum aldri byr* (*III*. 6: 423). The resident troll-wife of the bay hangs a quarrelsome crew-member from the mast, and the narrator continues: <sup>182</sup> *Eptir þat siglir Sigurðr frá Finnmörk, ok gaf honum þá vel byr ok kom heim til Danmerkr* (*III*. 6: 423). Clearly Sigurðr is not interested in wasting time in the far north; as soon as he gets a following wind, he sails straight home.

**2.iii.a. (2)** A second example of weather-orchestrated far-travel is found in *Jtkuls þáttur Búasonar*<sup>44</sup>, when the title character, fleeing Iceland after having accidentally killed his father in a test of strength, encounters a storm and is driven north to be beached ashore in a mysterious wasteland populated by giants. Jtkull feels so terrible after his deed that he sets out immediately in a ship captained by a man named Úlfr. The narrator continues:

183 Gaf þeim lítt byri, og rak á fyrir þeim myrkr og hafvillur, svó þeir vóru úti allt sumarið; en er hausta tók, gerði storma með miklum hríðum og frustum, svó sýldi hvern dropa, er inn kom; urðu allir í austri að standa bæði nætr og daga, og gerðust allir mjög dasaðir og gáfust upp um síðir nema Jökull einn; hann gekk að ausa aleinn í fjóra daga. Um síðir rak skipið að skerjaklasa miklum með boðaföllum stórum.  
(*Jtk.* 1: 47)

The ship breaks up and the cargo is lost, and Jtkull, Úlfr and their surviving crew-mates are stranded on the skerries. Jtkull, however, uses his superhuman strength first to swim ashore and scout out the land and then to conduct all the men ashore and into a great hall, where there is a large fire to warm them. Jtkull soon encounters a pair of creatures gathering flotsam washing ashore from the shipwreck. The narrator calls them hags (*syrpur*), signalling that Jtkull and his companions have been driven outside the area inhabited by Scandinavians. When Jtkull kills one of the monstrous females and defeats the other in a wrestling match, the surviving ogress tells him it was not very manly of him to kill her twelve-year-old sister. In *Gríms saga loðinkinna* the title character kills two troll-women in Gandvík and is also told it is not much of an accomplishment – one was six years old and the other seven (Ch. 1).

The hag, Gnípa, promises loyalty to Jtkull in exchange for her life and tells him that he has come to the wilderness of Greenland (*að óbyggðum í Grænlandi*), into a fjord called

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<sup>44</sup> This *Íslendingaþáttur* is a sequel or continuation of *Kjalnesinga saga*, almost certainly written by a scribe or saga-compiler who read the saga and invented a story for its main character Búi's son, possibly in the 15th century (Pulsiano 348, 355).



Öllumlengri (“Longer-than-everything”).<sup>45</sup> Though ordinarily located in the distant west, “Greenland” here stands for any wilderness-land populated not by humans but by trolls and giants. Gnípa ultimately takes Jtkull to a Yule feast in the giant-king’s cave, and after Jtkull has killed most of the monsters there with the help of an invisibility ring, he offers the king’s son Grímnir the choice of death or marriage to Gnípa, saying: <sup>184</sup> „*Og skaltu vera konungr yfir Jötnaheimi sem faðir þinn var*” (*Jtk.* 3: 55). This “Greenland” clearly functions as the giant-world of the far north.

**2.iii.b. (Abduction)** In a second instance of characters in *Jtkuls þátr* being taken to the far north by forces outside their control, the forces are not the natural winds of a storm at sea but the magical powers employed by the giants or trolls native to abduct humans to their northern land for their own nefarious purposes. After Jtkull sets up Grímnir as the new king of Greenlandic Jttunheimr, he explores the cave-hall and discovers a pair of humans bound to a chair with iron chains. This man and woman are described as *mögr og þó fögr að álit* – “meagre and yet fair in appearance”, and when Jtkull speaks to them the man replies:

<sup>185</sup> „Eg heiti Hvítserkr, sonr Soldáns konungs af Serklandi, en systir mín Marsibilla. Skrámr jötunn heillaði okkr hingað, ætlaði hann Grímni, syni sínum, systur mína.”  
(*Jtk.* 3: 56)

Though this pair of abductees is native not to Scandinavia but to the distant south, they function in the story as “ordinary” humans, more like the Scandinavians who rescue them than their monstrous captors. “Hvítserkr” and “Marsibilla” are common enough names for Norse saga-characters (cf. Ragnarr loðbrók’s son and the Swedish princess in *Strola saga sterka*), and Marsibilla’s comment that the norns, distinctively Norse mythical creatures, have prophesied regarding her and her brother, indicates that to this þátr-writer the two Saracens

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<sup>45</sup> This was the name of an actual fjord in Greenland in the mid-14th century. See ÍF XIV 50, footnote.

are not fundamentally different from Scandinavian people. This sort of far-travel by compulsion is best called “abduction.” The fact that conscious creatures rather than natural forces are the agents compelling far-travel northward makes no difference to their motivation: as in the previous examples, the far-travellers are simply compelled to travel. In the remaining examples of abduction the captive travellers are unambiguously Scandinavian and thus true far-travellers by my original definition.

**2.iii.b. (1)** Helgi Þórisson’s abduction is central to the plot of his þátrr. After his uneventful summer trading-voyage north to Finnmǫrk, Helgi returns to his father’s home in Rauðaberg near Vík (Oslofjord) only to be carried away again to the far north. Although a great storm coincides with Helgi’s abduction, storm-winds are not the agents that abduct him. The narrator relates that at Yule a terrible gale begins to blow over Helgi’s father’s homestead, and Helgi and his brother Þorsteinn go out to investigate: <sup>186</sup> *Þá heyra þeir brest mikinn. Þar ríða at þeim tveir menn ok höfðu Helga í burt með sér. Veit Þorsteinn eigi, hvat af honum verðr* (*Helg. 2*: 349). This abduction seems a fairly prosaic affair, though the storm is later revealed to be the result of a magic spell (see below). Where the mysterious riders take their prisoner is also revealed later when, on the eighth day of a Christmas feast Óláfr Tryggvason is holding, three men come into the hall uninvited – two strangers and Helgi. The strangers immediately introduce themselves as emissaries of Guðmundr of Glæsisvellir, both named Grímr. They present a pair of gift drinking-horns to Óláfr (also named “Grímr”), but when they are unable to drink bishop-blessed mead, they angrily leave again, taking Helgi away with them (*Helg. 2*).<sup>46</sup> Though the two Grímrs’ advent and departure in both these cases are mysterious, the narrator actually specifies part of the route they take, saying the mountain pass

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<sup>46</sup> Jacqueline Simpson suggests that tales of Óláfr Tryggvason being offered a magical or poisonous drink by an Otherworld being may be “Christian distortions of an old heathen association between kingship and the acceptance of a drink offered by an Otherworld being, such as can be clearly seen in Irish tales” (117). Simpson

they travelled through on their way westward down to Alreksstaðir is now called Grímaskarð (“Grímrs’ pass”).

The following year, again on the eighth day of Christmas, Óláfr is in church with his retainers when two men approach and leave the third, a blinded Helgi, at the church door, saying Óláfr will not easily get rid of this grimacer (*grettir*). Helgi then tells his tale:

<sup>187</sup> Hann segir þá konungi fyrst frá því, er hann fann konurnar í skóginum, þá frá því, er þeir Grímar gerðu veðrit at þeim bræðrum, er þeir vildu bjarga skipinu, ok síðan höfðu þeir Grímar hann með sér til Guðmundar á Glæsisvöllum ok færðu hann Ingibjörgu, dóttur Guðmundar. (*Helg.* 3: 352)

One final point of interest about this abduction involves the clear signs of Helgi suffering “Stockholm syndrome” or “trauma bonding”, identified by 20th-century social scientists, in which victims of kidnapping display some sympathy with or affection for their captors after being released.<sup>47</sup> Asked by King Óláfr how he found King Guðmundr’s northern kingdom, Helgi responds that there is nowhere he has liked better: <sup>188</sup> *Hann lét yfir öllu vel ok sagði, at hans var miklu fleiri en hann fengi talit* (*Helg.* 3: 352). Helgi concludes by praising Guðmundr’s splendour and hospitality (*tign ok risnu*), as well as the large size of his retinue (*Helg.* 3: 353). Only after Óláfr presses him about his blindness does Helgi briefly describe the more painful side of his exile: his wife Ingibjörg blinded him in a fit of jealousy when he left for Norway.<sup>48</sup>

**2.iii.b. (2)** In the later, extended version of his saga, Nǫrvar-Oddr is abducted to the far north by a living creature, but it is debatable whether this creature has intelligence, and it certainly

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relates this account to other Norse stories about horns named “Grímr” (cf. *Þorsteins þátr bæjarmagns*), the Grail legend and the Welsh figure of King Bran the Blessed.

<sup>47</sup> The phenomenon was first identified by criminologist and psychologist Nils Bejerot in 1974. A brief description appears in the *International Handbook of Traumatic Stress Syndromes* (1993), p. 783.

distinguishes itself from the abductors of the Saracen couple and Helgi by using no magic in its kidnapping. Following travels throughout many European lands, *Ñrvar-Oddr* has been baptised and become a Christian of sorts, his sanctification culminating in a bath in the Jordan River (*Ñrv.* G 17). *Oddr* next wanders through the wilderness until he is forced to stop at a cliff-top overlooking a deep river-gorge:

189 Sem hann hafði eigi lengi þar verit, er hann gripinn upp váveifliga. Var þar kominn gammr atfljúgandi ok hremmdi Odd með klóm sínum svá hart, at hann gat engri vörn í móti komit. Þetta kvikvendi fló með Odd yfir mörg lönd ok höf. En um síðir flýgr gammrinn at flugabjörgum ok settist í eina tó, er var í björgunum. (*Ñrv.* G 18: 271)

The saga-writer stresses the fact that this is an abduction by carefully pointing out that *Oddr* is helpless to stop it. Trapped in the vulture's nest on the high cliff-face and surviving on the vulture-chicks' food for several days, *Oddr* eventually sees a large giant rowing by in a stone boat in the water far below the eyrie. The giant is lamenting loudly that the vulture has been stealing his cooked meat, and when *Oddr* promptly calls down that he has been hoarding the meat the two work together to kill the vulture and its young. The giant, *Hildir*, then takes *Oddr* in his boat to his home in *Risaland*, where *Oddr* ultimately assists his giant-companion in deposing his brothers and setting himself up as king of that country (*Ñrv.* G 18). Though the location to which the vulture abducts *Ñrvar-Oddr* is ambiguous, it is clearly visualised as a place near enough to distant, northern *Risaland* for a giant to be casually rowing by lamenting his problems aloud. *Oddr*'s journey is thus a case of abduction to the far north.

There is a second perspective by which *Ñrvar-Oddr*'s far-travel may be considered compulsion. At the beginning of the saga the seeress *Heiðr* tells *Oddr* that he is fated to wander all over the earth for three hundred years but will nevertheless die back home in *Berurjóðr* as a result of his horse *Faxi*. With this prophecy colouring the entire saga that

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<sup>48</sup> *Helga þátr* shows some influence of the myth of the seductive or seduced Odinic hero (see §2.ii.b. above), but as McKinnell points out, the affair with the giant's daughter is here "merely a perfunctory device" and the

follows, it is reasonable to argue that all of Oddr's wanderings – far-travel and otherwise – are directed not by Oddr's own motivations and desires but by the inexorable hand of fate.

Compulsion is also suggested by Oddr's behaviour: before the prophecy is spoken he objects to its being delivered, and after it is spoken he curses the witch and strikes her with a stick (*Ǻrv.* 2). When someone so unwilling to hear his own fate nevertheless fulfils it, he may be said to be compelled. When his fate is to travel the earth, his far-travels likewise result from compulsion.

#### 2.iv. Violence – public and private

In the previously-discussed episodes in which saga-characters engage in violence in the far north, the far-travel is clearly motivated by some purpose of which the violence is a mere corollary. Viking raids, for example, are fundamentally motivated by the desire for profit, as are mercenary adventures. The examples in this sub-section, by contrast, are centrally motivated by violence or force, either the public violence of battles for political reasons or the private violence of a feud.

**2.iv.a. (Private, personal)** There is one clear example of far-travel northward motivated directly by the personal desire to enact a violent purpose. The title character of *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* is born to King Dumbr in a kingdom in the far north – identified in some manuscripts as Risaland and in another as Helluland (ÍF XIII 101) – before being sent south to Norway and fostered in the home of the giant Dofri.<sup>49</sup> After Bárðr's father is killed by a group of marauding trolls led by one named Harðverkr, Bárðr's mother Mjǫll re-marries and bears a son called Porkell:

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traditional pattern is radically subverted to suit the later author's Christian purposes (177).

<sup>49</sup> Dofri is famous as the giant foster-father of Haraldr hárfagri (cf. *Kjal.* 12, *Flat.* II 50-52). Finnur Jónsson discusses Haraldr's byname "Dofrafóstri" in an article in *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* (1899).

<sup>190</sup> Fór Þorkell þá byggðum til Hálogalands ok var í nágrenni við Bárð, bróður sinn; bjuggu þeir í firðinum Skjálfta norðarlíga á Hálogalandi. Nökkura síðar fóru þeir bræðr norðr yfir Dumbshaf ok brenndu inni Harðverk inn sterka ok þrjátígi þursa með honum. (*Bárð. 2: 106*)

Their object in the north achieved, Bárðr and his half-brother immediately return south to Skjálfti again. Consistent with the moral geography of the world, the wastes of the far north are populated by ogres, and the rule of vengeance applies there with no checks or interfering Christianity (cf. the morally problematic acts of revenge in the distant south discussed in §2.i.c. of Chapter 3). The episode is simple, self-contained and utterly clear in its motivation: Bárðr's father is killed in the far north, he and Þorkell travel north and kill his killers in revenge, and the brothers return south.

#### **2.iv.b. (Public, political)**

**2.iv.b. (1)** Similarly unambiguous is Bósi's far-travel at the end of the older redaction of his saga. Bósi, having taken the Permian princess Edda from the far north to Scandinavia and married her, defeats her father Hárekr and his allies in a great sea-battle off of Götaland, Bósi and Herraúðr's native country (*Bósa Ä 14-15*). The saga-writer continues:

<sup>191</sup> Litlu síðar söfnuðu þeir liði ok fóru til Bjarmalandz, ok beiddi Bósi sér þar viðtöku ok taldi þat til, at Edda ætti land alt eptir föður sinn, er nú var orðin eiginkona hans, ok segizt hann svó helzt mega bæta landzmönnum þann mannskaða, sem þeir höfðu af honum fengit, at vera konungr yfir þeim ok styrkja þá með lögum ok réttarbótum, ok með því at þeir vóru höfðingjalausir, þá sá þeir öngvan sinn kost vænna, en taka hann sér til konungs. (*Bósa Ä 16: 61*)

Since Edda is known by the Permians to be a person of quality, Bósi is made king. Though there is no actual violence here, its threat is implicit in the large force Bósi and Herraúðr take

with them to assert the legitimacy of Bósi's claim to the throne. Also, Bósi has never previously shied away from violence anywhere in the saga; it may safely be assumed that if the Permians do not agree to Bósi's claim, he will put up as stern a battle as he did when Hárekr and his force came to his land and attacked him. It is true, however, that this is an example of far-travel motivated more by force than by violence – Bósi is willing to do battle in Bjarmaland, but in the end he does not need to. That the Permians bend to Bósi's coercion before outright violence ensues is simply a slightly unexpected twist.

No such problem of classification exists with similar examples in *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar*; the various battles for possession of Bjarmaland are central to the plot of this saga, and on two occasions characters travel there from Scandinavia with the express purpose of fighting to win it. Hálfðan's mortal enemy Úlfkell snillingr ("smooth-tongued"<sup>50</sup>), busily usurping rulership of Hálfðan's various territories, sails from Norway to a place called Klyfandanes not far from Bjarmaland (*Hálf.* 12: 108), and, encountering Hálfðan there, wages a great sea-battle against him. Úlfkell's purpose here is quite clear: he wishes to put whatever distant, northern lands he can under his own possession, at Hálfðan's expense. After Úlfkell is ultimately defeated in the far north and Hálfðan has returned to his expatriate home in Russia, Hálfðan reacquires Bjarmaland in a similar episode to that in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*. Hálfðan first marries his comrade Sigmundur Hlǫðvesson to Edny, daughter of the late Permian king Hárekr, presumably in order that the people there will accept Sigmundur's authority without a fight; when Hálfðan and Sigmundur eventually lead their expedition north, the people indeed offer no resistance (*Hálf.* 24). This is not a proper example of northern far-travel, however, as the pair travels to the distant north not from Scandinavia but from Russia in the distant east. Further, much of the language in the saga suggests that to this saga-writer, the far

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<sup>50</sup> *Snillingr* suggests a person abundant in eloquence, wit or skill at some art or practice (Cleasby-Vigfússon 575; Fritzner III 460-61, 488). Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (1985) translate this name "Ulfkel the Wizard."

east and north are close to one another or simply the same region; Bjarmaland, for example, is said to be in the Baltic.<sup>51</sup>

The final power-struggle for Bjarmaland does, however, motivate true far-travel. Having installed his friends in positions of power in the distant east and north, Hálfðan returns with Sigmundr to his native Norway to rule his kingdom there (*Hálf.* 24). Soon, however, messengers from Bjarmaland bring the news that Vikings have been raiding there and in Novgorod<sup>52</sup>, and these marauders have also taken over Karelia, so Hálfðan gathers an army and immediately travels to Bjarmaland (*Hálf.* 25). His antagonists turn out to be a pair of Viking brothers named Raknarr and Valr, both of whom, though Swedish, are now accustomed to the wilderness of the far north: Raknarr spends his time fighting giants in Helluland, and Valr has won gold from the giant Svaði on a mountain called Blesanergr, north of Dumbshaf (see §2.ii.a.1. above). The saga-writer continues:

192 Þeir Hálfðan ok Sigmundr koma nú austr til Bjarmalands ok halda fréttum til, hvar Valr er, ok fundu hann fyrir norðan Gandvík, ok sló þar þegar í bardaga.  
(*Hálf.* 26: 137)

Here the causal relationship is clear from the promptness with which Hálfðan and Sigmundr react to the news that their distant, northern kingdoms have been over-run. They do not hesitate to gather an army, travel north, and fight with the Vikings to win back Bjarmaland and Karelia. As with Úlfkell snillingr, their campaigns are both military and political, and violence is central to their far-travel.

One account of politically-motivated military campaigning in the distant north concerns the famous Viking Ragnarr loðbrók, but the story is told not in his saga or *Ragnarssona þáttr*, but in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*. Saxo tells that after Regnerus has installed

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<sup>51</sup> Rudolf Simek cites *Hálfðanar saga* in support of his statement that some saga-writers do not have even an approximate idea of Bjarmaland's location (1986: 251).



his sons on Scandinavian thrones and enjoyed a five-year raiding spree around Europe, he learns that the Permians (*Biarmi*) are openly critical of his rule and that he cannot rely on their passivity. Regnerus goes to regain control of the region, but the Permians magically create both bad weather and an outbreak of sickness for him and his men (associating them with both the *Finnar* and *Finnlendingar* of the sagas).<sup>53</sup> When Regnerus perseveres through the storms and sickness and ultimately reaches Permia, the Permian king flees and takes refuge with Matullus, prince of *Finmarchia*<sup>54</sup>; from Finmtrk, the Bjarmian king and bands of Lapps carry out guerrilla attacks against Regnerus' forces wintering in Permia (Saxo IX.iv.22-23). Saxo shows a great deal of anthropological interest in the Lapps and goes into some detail describing their speed and control while skiing, as well as their proficiency shooting arrows on skis and making quick escapes (IX.iv.24). Saxo, like the saga-writers, seems to regard the inhabitants of Finmtrk and Bjarmaland as culturally exotic, and his placement of the two lands in close, snow-covered proximity suggests they belong in his mental map side by side in the distant north.<sup>55</sup>

**2.iv.b. (2)** A couple of the royal saga-characters who wage war in the distant north do not make specific territorial claims on realms there; their military expeditions to the north are instead left largely unexplained. Several sagas tell of a battle in the far north waged by the Norwegian prince Eiríkr blóðøx ("blood-axe"). In *Haralds saga hárfagra* (*Heimskringla*),

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<sup>52</sup> The place-name given is the later "Nógarðar" rather than the earlier and more typical "Hólmgarðr." In some manuscripts of *Gtngu-Hrólf's saga*, the Russian royal residence "Hólmgarðaborg" is explained as the name for the town *er nú kallað Nógarðar* (Rafn III 362).

<sup>53</sup> Hilda Ellis Davidson contrasts the warlike nature of the Permians with the relatively peaceful, nomadic lifestyle of the Lapps; both reputedly possess magical skills, including power over the weather. The Frankish annals of 845 tell of a terrible plague striking Ragemar's Vikings after their raid on Paris. See Ellis Davidson-Fisher 157, notes 43, 44. Jonathan Shepard associates Saxo's account with *Yngvars saga víðftrla*, in which another expedition to a distant land is decimated by disease (1984-85: 244-45).

<sup>54</sup> Within saga-literature, the Lappish king Mttull appears in a genealogy in *Landnámabók* (ÍF I 82), and in *Fagrskinna* he is the foster-father of Eiríkr blóðøx's bride Gunnhildr (ÍF XXIX 79).

<sup>55</sup> At the end of *Þorsteins þátr bæjarmagns* the title character returns to the distant north to lay claim to a jarldom he is entitled to through his wife, but the territory is granted to him peacefully by the ruler of the north, Guðmundr of Glæsisvellir. Þorsteinn does not even use violence to lay to rest the mischievous *draugr* of his

twelve-year-old Eiríkr, given five ships by his father Haraldr hárfagri, raids throughout Denmark, Frisia, Saxony, the British Isles and Normandy for eight years, finally turning northward: <sup>193</sup> *Eptir þat fór hann norðr á Finnmǫrk ok allt til Bjarmalands, ok átti hann þar orrostu mikla ok hafði sigr* (*Hár.* 32: 134-35). Without elaborating further, Snorri then relates that Eiríkr sails back to Finnmǫrk and there encounters and wins as his bride Gunnhildr (*Hár.* 32).<sup>56</sup> No reason for Eiríkr's far-travel north to Bjarmaland for this battle is given, and the context of his Viking raids immediately preceding this episode may suggest that Eiríkr travels north for the purpose of raiding, partly for plunder and partly for the renown that any king's son newly come of age should wish to win. The word *orrosta* ("battle"), however, suggests a more military and less haphazard, piratical conflict. The word *sigr* ("victory") indicates that this battle is a fairly even contest in which the outcome is not predetermined, which would hardly be the case if Eiríkr were leading raids against carefully-selected (i.e. rich, poorly-defended) settlements. Also, unlike the otherwise similar northern expedition of Eiríkr's son Haraldr gráfeldr (see §2.i.b.4. above), in this account there is no mention of booty. *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* gives a couple of additional details about this expedition that further suggest this is a pitched battle rather than a Viking raid. In *Egla* this journey comes after Eiríkr has already assumed power in Norway:

<sup>194</sup> Ok eitt hvert vár bjó Eiríkr blóðøx ftr sína til Bjarmalands ok vandaði mjtk lið til þeirar ferðar. [...] Í ferð þeiri var mart til tíðenda; Eiríkr átti orrostu mikla á Bjarmalandi við Vínu; fekk Eiríkr þar sigr, svá sem segir í kvæðum hans.  
(*Egla* 37: 93-94)<sup>57</sup>

Eiríkr's careful choice of soldiers, the lack of any mention of spoils won, and the skaldic poems about this victory invoked are all indications of a pitched battle rather than one in a

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predecessor in the jarldom, but merely places a cross on his burial mound, sealing him inside permanently (*Pors.* 12-13). See §2.ii.b.1. above, McKinnell 2005: 194-95.

<sup>56</sup> The less detailed account in *Fagrskinna* is essentially the same (ÍF XXIX 79-80).

series of Viking raids. In light of these accumulated details, Eiríkr blóðøx's far-travel north is best considered to be motivated by desire for military action (possibly with a view to gaining renown as a battle-hardy prince) rather than for profit in Viking raids.<sup>58</sup>

One other Norwegian king travels north on an expedition of a military rather than specifically piratical kind. Haraldr harðráði's popular grandson Hákon Magnússon, king of Þrændalǫg while Magnús berfœttr is king of the rest of Norway, is said to travel to Permian and campaign there victoriously (*barizc þar oc fecc sigr, Mork. 55: F 297*; see also *Hkr, ÍF XXVIII 212*). The accounts of his Permian expedition are, however, no fuller than this.

**2.iv.b. (3)** The Norwegian royal pretender Sigurðr slembidjárn and the Danish prince Hálfðan Brǫnufóstri and his sister Ingibjǫrg engage in a different manner of "public" violence-motivated far-travel to the north. Like many royal far-travellers to the east, they flee dangers that threaten them in Norway and lie low in a distant land for a short period of time. It is their choice of the north as the location for their temporary exiles that is unique.

Once during the long period of conflict between Sigurðr slembir and the sons of Haraldr gilli, King Ingi and King Sigurðr, Ingi goes on the offensive and compels Sigurðr slembir and his allies to flee. Some stay in Hálogaland, but Sigurðr decides to make himself even more remote: <sup>195</sup> *Sigurþr var a Finnmorc þann vetr a lavn. oc meirr en .xx. menn með honom. en hann hio stafna af scipi sino. oc sæcpi niþr i Egisfirþi innanverþom* (*Mork. 90: U 214*). Presumably Sigurðr saves the stem and stern because of their value and sinks his ship in the fjord to escape detection (see Gade 2009: 837).<sup>59</sup> A couple of additional details from skaldic verses quoted in both *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla* give to Sigurðr's northern

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<sup>57</sup> Kristel Zilmer cites this passage as an illustration of the glamour and renown attached to voyages, and the importance of passing on information about them in verse-form. See Zilmer 2004: 5, 14 (endnote).

<sup>58</sup> *Kormáks saga* relates an episode aboard several of the ships in an expedition to Bjarmaland by Eiríkr's father Haraldr hárfagri. No reason for the journey is given, and none of the action takes place in Bjarmaland itself (*Kor. 25*). Haraldr's northern voyage is mentioned nowhere else in saga-literature; the writer of *Kormáks saga* may have been thinking of Eiríkr's expedition when selecting a setting for his ship-board anecdote.

sojourn a distinctly Lappish flavour.<sup>60</sup> Sigurðr is said to compose a verse that begins with this line: <sup>196</sup> *Gótt vas í gamma, / es vér glaðir drukkum* (ÍF XXVIII 312). *Gammi* is a word that refers very specifically to the turf or earth huts inhabited by the Lapps of Finnmark (Fritzner I 543; de Vries 155; Gade 2009: 500). Habitation by “others” is *gammi*’s defining characteristic; thus while it ordinarily refers to the residence of a Lapp, on one occasion it is used of the dwelling of a dwarf (Cleasby-Vigfússon 188). The following spring Sigurðr returns south in two ships constructed for him by the Lapps, remarkable for being made without nails or brackets: the planks are instead held together with sinews and bands (*sin, viðjar*; *Mork.* 90: F 426, U 214; ÍF XXVIII 311). Praising these boats’ swiftness, the saga-writers quote this poetic piece of folk-wisdom:

<sup>197</sup> Fátt eitt fylgir

furu háleyskri.

Svipar und segli

sinbundit skip.

(ÍF XXVIII 312)

The small, light boats of the Sami people – bound together rather than nailed – have impressed visitors to northern Scandinavia from the time of this verse until the present day. In his 1555 account of northern lands and peoples, Olaus Magnus describes Sami boat-building at length, noting that due to the scarcity of metals in the far north they use pliable tree-roots and animal tendons to bind together their distinctive craft (Book IV, ch. x). Alan Ross cites Carl Linnaeus’ 1732 observations on Sami-built sewn boats and compares the Viking Age and medieval boats of the Sami people in sea-worthiness and manoeuvrability to the modern rubber dinghy (1954: 343-45).

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<sup>59</sup> Alternatively, it is the ship-ends themselves of which Sigurðr disposes, because they are valuable and richly carved, and he does not wish the natives to get their hands on them; see Andersson-Gade 462, endnote 3.

<sup>60</sup> The *Heimskringla* account locates Sigurðr’s northern exile *í Tjaldasundum í Hinn* (Tjeldsund, Hinnøy), a location in the borderland between Hálogaland and Finnmark.

Towards the beginning of *Hálfðanar saga Brǫnufóstra*, the father of Hálfðan and his sister Ingibjǫrg, King Hringr of Denmark, is killed by the Viking Sóti, and the pair are subsequently hidden by their loyal foster-father Þorfiðr jarl (*Brǫn. 3*).<sup>61</sup> The usurper Sóti now swears to find the royal children, so Þorfiðr decides to make them more inaccessible. He takes the children from their hiding-place down to a ship and speaks with young Hálfðan:

<sup>198</sup> „Skaltu fara til Bjarmalands til Óttars jarls bróður míns, ok segja, at hann taki við þér fyrir mín orð, en ef hann er tregr til, þá fá honum gull þetta til jartegna, ok mun hann þá við þér taka.“ (*Brǫn. 3: 296*)

Hálfðan and Ingibjǫrg obey Þorfiðr, and before long they have been welcomed to Óttarr jarl's distant, northern court (*Brǫn. 3*). As in the accounts described in Chapter 4 of young royalty being compelled to leave Norway on account of the danger to their lives there, here the exilic nature of Hálfðan and Ingibjǫrg's forced departure from Denmark is perfectly clear. A twist occurs, however, when 12-year-old Hálfðan and his sister set sail in ships provided by their host, and, attempting to return to Bjarmaland after sailing far and wide all summer, suddenly encounter a great storm that tosses them off-course and beaches them in a wild land Hálfðan calls *Hellulands óbyggðir*, the wilderness of Helluland (*Brǫn. 4*). Like other lost travellers in the distant north, Hálfðan soon encounters and wrestles with troll-women, and his northern exile becomes a series of northern adventures. Whereas the distant east is a location for exile in which Norse royalty can engage in civilised pursuits, such as mercenary service for Russian monarchs or Christian missions, in the distant north Norse exiles are prone to meet the monstrous. Even Sigurðr slembir, who remains entirely in control throughout his northern exile, returns not in proper Scandinavian ships but in exotic, native-built sinew-bound boats with the uncanny (magical?) ability to outrun all ordinary sailing vessels.

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<sup>61</sup> *Hálfðanar saga*, which was composed around 1300, probably developed along with *Gríms saga loðinkinna* from a common written source, the now-lost saga of the outlaw Grímr skógarmaðr (Pulsiano 243, 260-61).

## 2.v. A visit

Ketill hængr travels to the far north for a reason unique to him. In the fourth chapter of his saga, Ketill journeys north to Finnmǫrk to visit his former lover.<sup>62</sup> When earlier in the saga Ketill is blown off course in the waters of the far north and subsequently sheltered at the farm of Brúni (see §2.i.a.1 above), Brúni not only takes Ketill inside and hides him from his troll-like Lappish friends, but he also invites Ketill to sleep with his daughter Hrafnhildr. She is described in giant-like terms (big and valiant, face an ell wide) and the narrator reports that Ketill amuses himself with her (*skemmti sér*, *Ket.* 3: 159). After Ketill has returned south to his homestead, Hrafnista, Hrafnhildr comes to him and gives him their son, Grímr loðinkinni – called “hairy cheek” simply because one of his cheeks is hairy, though this saga does not explain why this is so.<sup>63</sup> Once Hrafnhildr has left Ketill’s son with him and returned to the far north, Ketill is encouraged or coerced by his family into marriage with another (fully human) woman, Sigríðr. When Hrafnhildr returns and learns of this development, she refuses Ketill’s offer of living with him and blames his looseness of mind and unsteadfastness (*lauslyndi, óstaðfestu*, *Ket.* 4). First in Ketill’s lack of enthusiasm for marriage with anyone but Hrafnhildr, and later in Hrafnhildr’s sober refusal to live as Ketill’s concubine and her departure, the saga-writer powerfully implies the depth of feeling on both sides of the relationship.<sup>64</sup> What might otherwise seem like a weak motivation for far-travel to the distant north is thus strengthened, and when the saga-writer next relates that Ketill travels north to Finnmǫrk with his young son Grímr to visit Hrafnhildr and her father Brúni, the readers are less surprised than they might have otherwise been: <sup>199</sup> *Hann fór eitt sumar norðr á Finnörk at finna þau Brúna ok Hrafnhildi* (*Ket.* 4: 166). Ketill and Grímr do not, however, find the

<sup>62</sup> As was noted above in §2.i.b.4., Hervtr Angantýsdóttir may travel to Glæsisvellir in the distant north to visit King Guðmundr. If so, it is a very different sort of visit from Ketill’s intended amorous reunion.

<sup>63</sup> *Nrvar-Odds saga* explains Grímr’s distinctive cheek in terms of the widely-known medieval concept of “maternal impression” – Grímr’s mother is looking at a hairy, troll-like Lapp when he is conceived (Ch. 1).

father and daughter but merely encounter a troll who forbids them from trespassing further; Ketill and his son return home without having seen their friends and relations. This lack of further activity in Finnmǫrk suggests that the only reason for the father and son's journey northward is the visit: Ketill wishes to see his former lover, and Grímr his mother. That the two fail to find her illustrates only that far-travellers frequently fail in the object of their far-travel. Motivation does not presuppose success.

### 3. Narrative pattern – realities of far-travel northward

The difficulties of far-travel aboard a Viking vessel go largely unmentioned in saga accounts. A typical saga account of a journey to a distant land reads: "There is nothing to tell of their journey until they reached [Destination]." Yet a Viking Age or medieval journey from Scandinavia to Constantinople by either the sea-route around the Iberian peninsula or the river-route across Russia was a serious undertaking, requiring enormous amounts of preparation, financial outlay and time, as well as, in the case of Russia, difficult and time-consuming portages. Journeys westward and northward involved sailing through uncharted seas, past hazardous floating ice, towards unknown or ambiguously-located lands. Yet sagas for the most part simply ignore these harsh realities of far-travel, and some of the less dangerous but just as tangible realities of foreign travel receive little attention as well. It is therefore a remarkable feature of some of the accounts of northern far-travel that they explicitly mention of some of these realities.<sup>65</sup>

#### 3.i. Northern obstacles, homesickness

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<sup>64</sup> Classifying Ketill and Hrafnhildr's relationship in the mythic story pattern of the Odinic hero seduced by the Giantess, McKinnell notes that only in *Ketils saga* is there a suggestion that the protagonist might have been better off staying with his giant mistress rather than switching to a human bride (175). See also §2.ii.b.1. above.

<sup>65</sup> The realities or hardships of far-travel feature in some accounts of journeys westward (cf. *Fl.* 21-22). The difficulty of far-travel "out" was contrasted with the comparative ease of travel "back" in §3.ii. of Chapter 2.

There are two such examples in *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar*. The first occurs when Hálfðan, recovering from battle-wounds, learns from his host Hriflingr that the man to whom he owes his life is Grímr, who rules over Karelia in the distant north. Hálfðan asks the shortest and quickest route to Karelia, and Hriflingr replies:

200 „Torsóttir eru hér flestir vegir [...] en á skipum má ekki fara skemr en fim vikur, ok er þat en mesta mannhætta fyrir sakir víkinga ok hermanna. Annarr vegr liggir et eystra, ok er þar þó at fara fjtll ok eyðimerkr ok er þat langr vegr ok torsótt, ok óvíst at fram komiz. En þriðja leið er skemst, ef hon tekz vel, því hana má fara á þrim vikum, en margt er þar til tálmanar.“ (*Hálf.* 16: 118)

The obstacles of the third route – a string of ogres and their monstrous pets – provide the adventures of the following chapters. Though these “difficulties of far-travel” are clearly narrative devices to give the saga-hero worthy opponents to defeat, the narrator still goes out of his way to stress the difficulty of the routes to distant Karelia. The saga-writer does not, for example, make Hálfðan’s shortcut route the only one. The sea-route is implied to be a northern one, as the second, land route is identified as eastern. Two harsh realities identified with this journey are the great length of time it requires – five weeks at least – and the dangers of the route from marauding Vikings. Though the specific difficulties of the eastern, land route are not identified, it is nevertheless implied to be very difficult. Hálfðan’s harrowing adventures on the third route to the distant north – the least undesirable route – lead one to imagine the dangers and difficulties of the other two ways must be very great indeed.

Difficulty is again explicitly associated with far-travel towards the end of the saga, when Hálfðan has won great battles in the eastern and northern kingdoms of Russia, Karelia and Permia. Arranging marriages and appointing allies to positions of power in distant lands, Hálfðan proclaims his own intention of returning to his native Norway: 201 „Ok mun þat hverjum heppnast sem hann til borinn er“ (*Hálf.* 24: 133). Whether a shrewd observation of the difficulties of living as a foreigner in a distant land or a simple expression of Hálfðan’s



homesickness, these words show that the saga-writer understands that relocation to a distant, foreign land has consequences more personal and internal than the obvious political or military ramifications. Simply put, it can be hard on a person to be so far from home.

### 3.ii. Communication

Another reality of foreign travel in the distant north relates not specifically to travel itself but to human interaction once there. In *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*, Oddr and his men sail to Bjarmaland, where they encounter a large hall filled with feasting Permians. Peering in at the door, Oddr and his companion Ásmundr speak to each other:

<sup>202</sup> Oddr mælti þá: „Skilr þú nþkkut hér manna mál?“

Ásmundar segir: „Eigi heldr en fugal klið, eða hvat skilr þú af?“

Oddr mælti: „Sjá muntu, at einn maðr skenkir á báða bekki, en þat grunar mik,“ segir

Oddr, „at sá muni kunna at tala á norrœna tungu.“ (*Ǫrv.* 7: 15)

Oddr and Ásmundr show recognition of a separate language spoken by the Permians, one incomprehensible to them but as natural to the northerners as chirping is to birds. The Norse travellers must surmount this communication difficulty by seeking to use the translating skills of the Permians' Norse-speaking servant. Oddr's conclusion that because this man is compelled to serve the Permians he must be a foreign captive perhaps suggests another difficulty in distant lands: the difficulty of keeping one's liberty amongst hostile natives. In any case, this exchange between Oddr and Ásmundr certainly indicates both awareness of a foreign language in the distant north and communication difficulties associated with it.

The reality of foreign languages in the distant north is noted by two non-saga stories of travel there, Ohthere's account of his journey and Saxo's tale about the first voyage of Thorkillus and Gormr. Ohthere, who probably spoke some of a Sami language, remarks that the language of the Beormas sounds something like Lappish to him, but that he cannot

understand it (Orosius 14; Ross 1940: 48-49). When the giant Guthmundus wonders aloud why Thorkillus' companions are so quiet, Thorkillus replies that they are unused to the giant's language and their ignorance makes them ashamed (Saxo VIII.xiv.7). This passage not only recognises the reality of communication difficulties in foreign lands – notable in a text that deals so freely in the fantastic – but also seems to indict the Norse travellers for their ignorance in this matter (cf. the Greenlanders and Skrælings, *Gr.* 7). Thorkillus may, however, be merely trying to excuse his men's aloofness with flattery. Their communication difficulties are dealt with in the same fashion as is in *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*, and Thorkillus fills the role of the interpreter for the monolingual Danes.

### 3.iii. Northern waters

The linguistic difficulty is only the latest of the far-travelling difficulties Gormr and his men experience on their voyage to the far north. Saxo's descriptions of both the Danes' preparations for their journey north and the sea-voyage itself are notable for attention to the realities of sea-travel north of Scandinavian waters. Saxo introduces Gormr's inquisitive, adventurous nature and relates that he intends to test the Icelanders' reports of the land in which the giant-king Geruthus rules. Saxo describes these reports, saying the Icelanders would spin unbelievable statements about the immense riches there but also tell of the perils of the journey. Specifically, the Icelanders would claim that one must sail into the ocean with the sun and stars behind one's back in order to pass into the realm of night and finally into regions suffering perennial darkness, with no glimmer of daylight (VIII.xiv.1). Though Saxo casts this explicit description of a difficulty of far-travel as an "unbelievable" second-hand statement, he nevertheless calls the people who describe this phenomenon knowledgeable, and the perpetual darkness of wintertime certainly is of course a genuine meteorological feature of the far north. Adam of Bremen emphasises the same feature in accounts of two

voyages to the far north, but the idea that one must pass through a region of darkness to enter the Otherworld is a traditional feature of supernatural journeys, as, for example, one in Book III of Virgil's *Aeneid* (Ellis Davidson-Fisher 142, n. 137).

While this description of the passage to the northern kingdom of Geruthus may be a fantastic flourish with a classical flavour, the description of Thorkillus' preparations for the voyage are grounded in solid, realistic details:

Is, officio non recusato, adversum inusitatam navigandi maris sævitiam firmiore  
 structuræ genere nodisque crebrioribus ac consertioribus clavis præparanda iubet  
 navigia solidari, eademque magnis repleti com meatibus ac bovinis superne tergoribus  
 claudi, quæ intrinseca navium spatia ab incursantium undarum aspergine tuerentur.  
 (Saxo VIII.xiv.2: 239)

When he accepted the duty, he ordered them to build ships strong enough to withstand the unprecedented fury of the seas they must navigate; they must be constructed with more than usual solidity, fitted with many knotted ropes and closely-driven nails, filled up with abundant provisions and covered on top with oxhides to guard the inner quarters from the spray of the encroaching waves. (Fisher 262)

Later, before his second voyage to Permia, Thorkillus and his companions again prepare their ships for the rough, northern seas by lashing ox-hides over them (VIII.xv.2). The hard-headed realism of Thorkillus' preparations to sail the stormy, icy seas of the north is only to be expected: he is an experienced traveller and well-informed of the route to Geruthus' land. General knowledgeability and maritime experience are undoubtedly qualities of value to the person leading an expedition across treacherous waters, but Thorkillus' eligibility to guide the Danish convoy is somewhat at odds with the values expressed in saga-accounts of far-travel westward. As we saw in §3.i. of Chapter 2, "West", a premium is put on personal rather than second-hand knowledge of routes to particular distant lands, and the value saga-writers place in personal experience is evident in the outcomes of journeys to the west. Thus Bjarni

Herjólfsson, a capable sailor who nevertheless lacks personal experience with the route to Greenland, misses his way on a voyage to Greenland and accidentally reaches the previously undiscovered Vinland (*Gr.* 2), while an experienced Greenlandic travelling merchant named Skúfr sails there and back again without trouble (*Fóst.* M 18).

This pre-departure impression of the difficulty of Thorkillus' journey north is only strengthened when the party sets sail. Passing Hálogaland they lose their following breezes and are *varia pelagi iactatione dubiis navigationis casibus agebantur* (Saxo VIII.xiv.3: 239) – “tossed to and fro on the waters, encountering some tricky sailing hazards” (Fisher 262). Also, on the outward journey their food runs short. The Danes' return journey from Permia is fraught with similar difficulties, in contrast to the pattern outlined in §3.ii. of Chapter 2, in which far-travel westward is significantly more difficult than far-travel back to Scandinavia. Saxo writes of initial prosperity and later contrary winds and subsequent near-starvation on the return journey to Denmark (VIII.xiv.20). Some of the features of Thorkillus' first northern voyage are duplicated in the second. On the second voyage Thorkillus and his men sail to a sunless region without stars or the light of day. As before, they go hungry, this time due to lack of wood; without fuel to light the braziers and cook their meat, they must either eat raw food and die of disease or fast and starve (VIII.xv.3). The overwhelming impression of Saxo's account of northern far-travel, like those in *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinsonar* and *Ñrvar-Odds saga*, is that the writers have some understanding of the real difficulties a far-traveller faces when setting out to sail to the lands of the distant north.

#### 4. Conclusions

Rosemary Power observes that historical journeys to the area near the White Sea during the Viking Age were made “for the purposes of trade, the collection of taxes, and raiding” and also mentions the voyage of the historical Ohthere, on which, among other things, he hunted

walrus (1984: 16-17). Power thus concisely and neatly encapsulates the historical Norse travellers' primary reasons for sailing north, which match exactly the three categories of the goods-acquisition motivation for northern journeys in saga-accounts discussed in §2.i. above (trade/tribute, Viking raiding, hunting/fishing). These correspond to the "pragmatic motivations" that are primary in literary accounts of far-travel to the west, south and east, profit-oriented motivations primary in the west and in Byzantium in the south, spiritual welfare in Jerusalem, and self-preservation (i.e. danger-motivated exile) in the east.<sup>66</sup> Yet, as is obvious from the body of material in this chapter, this class of motivations by no means dominates saga-accounts of travel northward. There are certainly as many examples of less realistic, more fantastic adventures or quests to the far north, and if the travels as the result of compulsion are added to these, there are even more. We see that the focus of northern far-travel is not pragmatism but heroism, and the journeys saga-characters take from Scandinavia to the wilds of the north represent less often the historical journeys known to the saga-writers and more often the legendary journeys either passed down to them by oral/textual tradition or springing from their imaginations. For this reason, more than other directions the distant north represents wildness, chaotic evil and the fantastic – the exciting and exotic "other" – and northern locations often seem selected primarily or exclusively for their suitability as unexplored, fantastic or exotic lands in which adventurous, marvellous tales can be set.

This results in large measure, no doubt, from necessity. *Konungasaga*- and *Íslendingasaga*-accounts of journeys to the distant west, south and east must accord with previously recorded or well-known information about the historical travels whose stories they tell. The earliest sources agree that Óláfr Tryggvason travelled east to Russia, taken or sent there by his guardians when his Norwegian enemies proved powerful; later saga-accounts were thus obligated to make his sojourn in Russia exile. Similarly, the later Norwegian king Haraldr harðráði was known to have travelled south to Constantinople and serve the Greek

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<sup>66</sup> See the conclusions to the previous three chapters, §4 in Chapter 2, §4.i. in Chapter 3 and §4 in Chapter 5.

emperor in a military fashion, so the stories written about him, as rich and varied as they were, had to accommodate these facts. Though the Icelandic settlers who emigrated west to Greenland were less prominent, less politically important figures than these eastern and southern far-travellers, their sheer numbers over the years of migration and familiarity to Icelanders dictated that the writers of the *Íslendingasaga*-accounts had to present them for what they were: settlers. The writers of *fornaldarsögur*, by contrast, were telling tales of legendary heroes and kings who existed in the earliest mists of the imagined history of Scandinavia, either those around whom there were oral story-traditions in existence (such as *Hrómundr Gripsson* and *Hálfr Hjǫrleifsson*) or those who were less widely-known or even invented by the saga-writers (such as *Bósi* and *Herrauðr*). These saga-writers therefore have a much freer hand to make what they wish of the stories they tell, to set them where they wish (in accordance with “common knowledge” – there are, for example, no giants in Denmark), and to give their saga-travellers any reason they wish for travelling to distant, exotic lands in the first place. If the multitude of extant manuscripts filled with *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur* tell us anything, it is that what medieval saga-readers wanted was fantasy, either native tales of the fantastic grounded in Norse myth, legend and folk-belief or continental (or “imitation continental”) romances filled with chivalrous doings among exotic peoples and creatures. It is fundamental to both sorts of fantasy that the most exciting and harrowing adventures of their saga-heroes take place in distant lands, but the distinction between the two genres is that in *fornaldarsögur* the heroes come from Scandinavia itself rather than continental European or other foreign lands. Unlike *riddarasögur*, therefore, *fornaldarsögur* can tell tales of moving from “here” to “there”, from “inside” the boundaries of the familiar to “outside”, with a pre-Viking Age or at least pre-Icelandic *landnám* setting to facilitate the readers’ suspension of disbelief. Unlike the writers of most *konungasögur* and *Íslendingasögur*, *fornaldarsaga*-writers can for the most part ignore exiles and mercenaries, pilgrims and settlers, and give their heroes grand, heroic and chivalrous reasons for travelling

northward to monster-filled lands. Viking raids are only the most prosaically profitable journeys of this sort, quests resulting in the acquisition of valuable objects or marriage to exotic princesses the most marvellous.

Far-travel is thus primarily “functional” in accounts of far-travel to the north, as it is primarily “reflective” in accounts of far-travel to the west, south and east. Far-travel performs the useful function of carrying saga-heroes from Scandinavia to the distant north, where trolls and ogres dwell and valuable objects sit guarded in heathen temples or silver-earth barrows. Elsewhere far-travel reflects either certain historical realities, such as the eastern exiles of kings, or certain well-known story-patterns, such as that in which an Icelandic skald goes so far away from Iceland that he fails to return in time to marry his betrothed. There are of course exceptions on both sides: the brief northern journey of Sigurðr slembir is probably reflective, and the periodic northern journeys for Lapp tribute undertaken by Þórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson may be entirely functional. In no saga-account does far-travel appear to be an end unto itself, or at least, some other aspect connected to the travel – such as the setting – is always more important than the travel itself. Some sagas may introduce a long journey into the narrative to allow a shipboard episode to occur (e.g. Haraldr hárfagri’s journey north to Permia in *Kormáks saga*; see §2.iv.b.2. above), but more commonly they simply need to get their characters to a particular location for a specific episode to occur. Bolli Bollason shows a great desire to travel, but he wishes to travel to acquire knowledge and experience of the world rather than experience the joy of being a sailor. The closest far-travel comes to being an end unto itself is in pilgrimage; as was noted in §4 of Chapter 3 (“South”), pilgrimages are at least partially validated by the distance travelled and difficulties endured to achieve them. The intrinsic holiness of the site travelled to is also a validating factor, naturally, but a pilgrimage to Jerusalem from Edessa would simply not be regarded as paying such large positive, spiritual rewards as a pilgrimage there from Shetland.

Returning to the north, we may finally observe that the relationship between far-travel north in the sagas and older stories and texts, though not exactly “reflective”, is at least “transmissive.” Though accounts of far-travel to the north rarely reflect historical journeys there, they do often transmit older story-patterns, some undoubtedly from oral tradition and others from myth – albeit in an indirect, inverted or garbled way. Studies by Vésteinn Ólason, John McKinnell, Rosemary Power, Jacqueline Simpson and others have uncovered some of these transmitted story-patterns in saga-accounts of journeys to the far north and elucidated what some of their meanings may once have been. By and large, however, *fornaldarsögur* are late creations, and many of these motifs and story-patterns will not have had a specific, recognisable structure at the time that the saga-writers used them, whatever the elements’ origins. Jacqueline Simpson writes that *fornaldarsaga*-writers who used certain old, Celtic story-elements – travelling through a mist to reach the Otherworld and helping one warring faction there against another – probably did not think of them as “foreign”: by the time they were writing, the material had been fully naturalised into Norse literary culture (11-12). This notion can be extended: saga-writers who invented stories of travel to the north probably did not think of themselves as preserving old or mythic story-traditions concerning Otherworld encounters. Otherness was simply part of what the far north was.



## Chapter 6 – Conclusion

The main conclusions regarding far-travel and far-travellers in saga-literature have been made in the concluding sections to each of the four previous chapters. Those chapter conclusions are intended to be cumulative; that is, each chapter's conclusions build upon and connect to the conclusions of the previous chapters. The reader may wish to review those chapter conclusions before moving onto this short, concluding chapter, which makes a few additional conclusions about the principal arguments of this study.

What is most immediately obvious is that the motivations for journeys to distant lands in each of the four cardinal directions are primarily pragmatic, though the sorts of pragmatism exhibited in the individual accounts differ. Travels westward to Greenland and Vinland and southward to Byzantium are often commercially-motivated: real estate and tradable goods characterise the west, mercenary opportunities the south. Finnmörk in the north is frequently a site of tribute-collection and trade. Some journeys to the west, south and east are motivated by the pragmatic principle of self-preservation. Such violence-motivated far-travellers to the west and south are most often common people involved in family or personal feuds, while far-travellers who flee east to escape violence are typically kings or jarls. Christian missions and quests for absolution may be seen as "spiritually pragmatic." Many of the journeys to the west, south and east described in saga-accounts are literary representations of earlier, historical journeys to distant lands by Viking Age and medieval Scandinavians.

The focus of northern far-travel, by contrast, is not pragmatism but heroism, and the journeys saga-characters take from Scandinavia to the northern wilderness represent less often the historical journeys known to the saga-writers and more often legendary journeys passed down to them by oral or textual tradition or new tales springing from their imaginations. Thus northern settings more than locations in other directions often seem selected by saga-writers

primarily for their suitability as unexplored, fantastic or exotic lands in which marvellous adventures can take place.

These conclusions are not startling, and the point of this thesis has not been to make startling conclusions, but to lay out the whole picture of far-travel in saga-literature exhaustively and systematically. The number of accounts of far-travel in saga-literature is very great and its range of representations very wide, but the basic relationships between the far-travel motivations by direction can be represented in a simple diagram, shown in Figure 4 below. As indicated above and in the conclusions to the previous four chapters, pragmatism

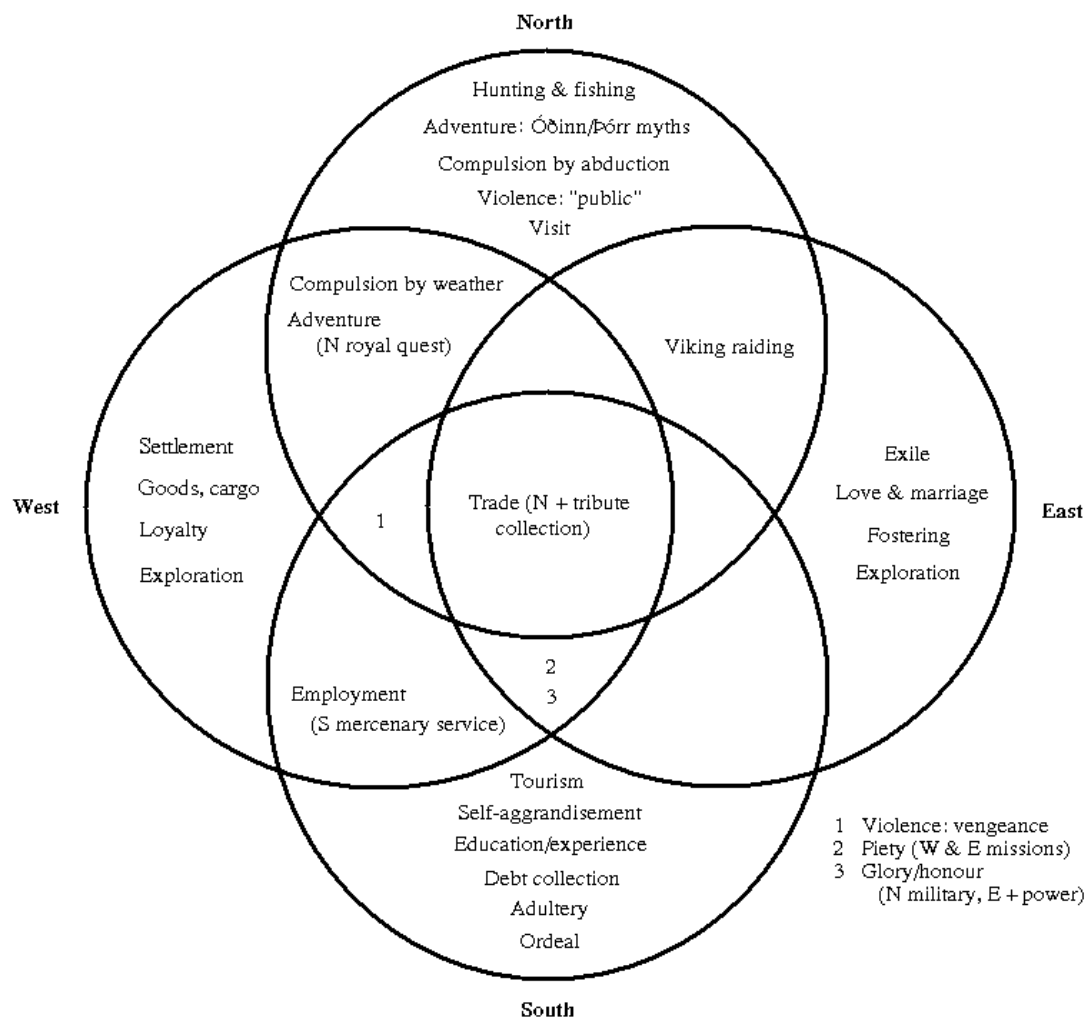


Figure 4. Diagram of motivations and directions

is the most common motivating factor for far-travel, and financial enterprises are the most common type of pragmatic far-travel. As shown in the diagram, the most practical of all financial motivations, trade, is the only kind common to all four cardinal directions, and another financial motivation, employment, is common to two. One of those directions, the south, sees this financial motivation combined with the other common motivating factor for far-travel, violence: most of the far-travellers to Byzantium, naturally, are employed to fight in the emperor's battles. This prevalence testifies to the power of the combination of violence and desire for wealth – two common themes in saga-literature in general – as does the fact that two directions feature travel for the most direct combination of violence and greed, Viking raiding. Violence is of course a powerful motivating factor in its own right. In a body of literature so concerned with private feuds between families and public power struggles between royal pretenders to Scandinavian thrones, it is only natural that vengeance violence motivates journeys in three directions, and a closely related journey-type, exile, motivates journeys in the fourth. Feuds and struggles over regnal succession are themselves concerned not only with the relative power of individuals or families, but also with their relative honour or glory. Correspondingly, we see that the desire for various types of glory motivates far-travel to the west, east and south. Finally, we may observe that in the same three directions we find journeys motivated by Christian piety. Christian missions characterise journeys to the west and east, and pilgrimage and crusade characterise journeys to the south. There are clear historical reasons for the east-west trend of Christian missionary effort in saga-literature. The inhabitants of both the distant south and distant north must have enjoyed long familiarity in the Scandinavians' cultural traditions. The southerners were the original Christians in their natural habitat, not far from where the Scandinavians' own Germanic ancestors must have migrated, and the northerners were the original, mythic enemies, first of mankind and their patron gods and later of Christ and his human followers. Neither population is a natural target for Christian proselytising. Greenland in the distant west and the eastern forests of Russia, by

contrast, were reached by Norsemen at a much later stage in their cultural history, and both the Norse settlers of Greenland and the Slavonic Russians they encountered were originally non-Christian. The inhabitants of the lands east of Russia, seen in *Yngvars saga víðftrla*, are also portrayed as fully human (unlike the monsters of the distant north) and fully heathen (unlike many of the humans of the distant south). West and east are thus the natural directions for Christian missions. The south's identity as the spiritual centre of the geographical world makes it the natural direction for pilgrimage, and its habitation by non-Christian Saracens who must be battled to preserve the Christian kingdoms of Palestine makes it the natural site for crusade.

A final motivation for far-travel evident in more than one direction is exploration. This overlap is not represented in the diagram, and though this is due only to the inevitable limitations of the diagram's design, there are differences between the portrayal of exploration in the two opposing directions. There are more individual pieces of evidence for the exploratory motivation in the west than in the east, but the evidence in the east is more direct. Chapter 5 of *Yngvars saga* relates that Yngvarr chooses to explore the length of an uncharted Russian river out of curiosity. In the *Vínland sagas*, by contrast, the exploratory impulse is only implied or referred to indirectly, as for example when Bjarni Herjólfsson and Leifr Eiríksson are criticised for lack of curiosity after their brief visits to new lands, or when Leifr names newly-discovered sites after their natural features rather than after himself. Another difference between exploration in the two directions, one that relates directly to the questions with which I began this thesis, is that western exploration progresses across seas, while eastern exploration progresses overland, along rivers. The Greenlanders who travel west to investigate Bjarni and Leifr's claims about new lands are unsure whether landfall or oblivion truly awaits them; the Swedes who explore the length of Russian rivers to find their sources know some land must be there. Nevertheless, like many far-travellers in all directions, the

explorers to both the west and the east are presented as excellent, noteworthy men, the curious ocean-going mariners no more valiant than the river sailors.

The answers to my original questions have thus been found: the saga-writers consider all far-travel praise-worthy, regardless of the specific hardships the historical far-travellers must have endured or the risks they must have taken. Luck goes hand in hand with excellence. Bolli Bollason is clearly a person of good fortune from the start of his life, and his journey to distant Byzantium and excellence in the service of the emperor there are undoubtedly manifestations of his luck, just as Leifr Eiríksson is recognised as a man of quality by Óláfr Tryggvason before he is later given the nickname “the Lucky.” An Icelandic man’s words to his kinsman about to travel to Greenland reiterate the innate excellence of far-travellers: „*Vil ek, at þú látir skrifa frásögn um ferð þína, því at hún mun nokkurum merkileg þykkja, því að ek hygg, at þú sér annarr spekingr mestr í várri ætt*” (Kró. 6: 131) – “I wish that you would have an account written about your journey, because it will seem remarkable to some people, for I believe you are the second wisest man to appear in our family.” According to these words, far-travel is a remarkable achievement worthy of a saga, and far-travellers are people of more than usual capability. These truths are borne out by the exciting tale of far-travel in the saga in which these words appear, as well as the far-traveller’s success in all his later ventures. More broadly, these truths are shown by the many tales told throughout saga-literature of travel to distant lands by exceptional Norsemen.

## Appendix – English translations

### 1. West

- 1) ... “for they intended to settle the land, if they could.”
- 2) “In that land were fields of self-sown wheat and grapevine growing. There were trees in that place, the ones called *mʃsurr*, and of all these things they took some samples; some trees were so large that they were used for house-building.”
- 3) “Karlsefni had trees felled and cut into sections to be loaded onto his ship, and he laid the wood on a rock to season. They collected goods from all the resources the land had, both grapes and all kinds of game and produce.”
- 4) ... “all the produce that they could get and the ship could bear.”
- 5)
 

“Trees of weapons’ meeting said  
 should I come here I’d have  
 (I could curse this country)  
 drinks of the finest.  
 A bidding-Týr in Bíldr’s hood  
 must raise a bucket;  
 no, he must kneel at a spring.  
 No wine has passed my moustache.”

Weapons’ meeting is a kenning for battle, trees of weapons’ meeting are men. A bidding-Týr is a god, Bíldr’s (Óðinn’s?) hood a helmet; together they form a kenning for warrior, here Þórhallr.
- 6) ... “and yet the Skrælings gave for them just as much as before, or more.”
- 7) “Eiríkr rode to the ships with some other settlers; good trading took place between them.”

- 8) ... "because Þórarinn thought he had won a great victory; he imagined he would have honour in this country on account of this victory."
- 9) "Then Karlsefni and his oarsmen made a contract that they should be entitled to receive equal shares of all profit garnered."
- 10) "Now Karlsefni and his people perceived that though the produce of the land was good, there would always be hostilities and cause for fear in that place on account of those who already lived there."
- 11) "Eiríkr sailed from Snæfellsnes, and he made landfall at Miðjökull ("Mid-glacier"), which is called Bláserkr ("Blue-shirt")."
- 12) "'What errand do you have to Greenland, unless you intend to avenge Þorgeirr, your sworn brother?'"
- 13) "'Now you chose what I wanted you to, because there will be no peace for you in Norway after this killing becomes known.'"
- 14) "'So have I promised Gunnarr, and I cannot break my word.'"
- 15) ... "that King Haraldr was in an adverse frame of mind with him and that he was not likely to be able to remain."
- 16) "Þórarinn says: 'The king's word is worth a great deal. But what request do you wish to make of me?' He says: 'Only that you escort Hrærekr to Greenland and deliver him into the care of Leifr Eiríksson.' Þórarinn replies: 'I have never been to Greenland.' The king says: 'If you have never sailed to Greenland before, as widely-travelled a man as you are, then it is high time you went.'"
- 17) "'I intend to go abroad rather than disgrace my family.'"
- 18) "Thirty men resolved to travel with him; on that journey were Ormr from Arnarstapi and his wife, as well as other friends of Þorbjǫrn's who did not want to part from him."

- 19) "Now Þorsteinn Eiríksson wished to travel to Vínland for the body of Þorvaldr, his brother."
- 20) "Þormóðr travelled abroad with King Óláfr and endured his entire exile with him. He also journeyed back to Norway with him, for he thought it better to die with him than live after him."
- 21) "Bjarni told of his journeys on which he had sighted land, and people thought he had been uncurious, since he had nothing to say about these lands, and on account of this he received some reproach. Bjarni became a retainer of the jarl and travelled out to Greenland the next summer. There was now much discussion about the investigation of these lands."

*Landaleit*, which I have translated "investigation of lands", may more literally be rendered "land-search" or "searching out of lands." Cleasby-Vigfússon gives "a journey to discover land, search for land" (371).

- 22) "Now there was much discussion about Leifr's Vínland voyage, and Þorvaldr, his brother, thought the land had been explored rather inextensively."
- 23) "Now there was talk once more about travel to Vínland, because such travel was thought a profit in both wealth and reputation."
- Virðing* ("reputation") could also be rendered "honour", "good opinion" or "esteem."
- 24) "'If it happens you are not fated to return, I wish that you would have an account written about your journey, because it will seem remarkable to some people, for I believe you are the second wisest man to appear in our family. And rather good things shall happen to you.'"
- 25) "The king responds: 'I think that will be good, and you must travel there on an errand of mine: to preach Christianity in that place.' Leifr said it was for the king to command but that he thought the errand would be difficult to achieve in Greenland.



- The king said he knew of no other man who was better suited than he – ‘and you shall have good luck.’ ‘That will only be,’ says Leifr, ‘if I enjoy the benefit of yours.’”
- 26) “In this he showed the most greatness and courage, as in many other things, when he brought Christianity to the land (i.e. Greenland). Afterwards he was always called Leifr the lucky.”
- 27) “He said he was the man most suitable to be sent on this errand.”
- 28) The ice-floe then drifted out to the ice field, and Helga went up onto the drift ice. That same night the ice drifted away from land and out to sea. So she stayed on the ice, and it drifted so fast that inside of seven days she came with the ice to Greenland.
- 29) “‘Our voyage will be thought unwise, since none of us has sailed the Greenland Sea.’”
- 30) ... “a Greenlandic man by kin, a great travelling merchant and a wise and well-liked man.”
- Farmaðr* (“travelling merchant”) may also be translated “sea-going man” or simply “traveller.”
- 31) “In the summers he took trading-voyages to various lands, Iceland or the British Isles.”
- 32) “Skúfr and Bjarni put to sea. They get good, fair winds; they have a good voyage, reaching Norway.”
- 33) ... “they are then tossed about for a long time and are carried north along the coast.”
- 34) ... “they are borne to Ireland, approaching the shore from the west.”
- 35) “Helgi arrived in that land and matured to manhood, and he came to be regarded as the most stout-hearted fellow. Men were sent for his head, but this did not succeed. Helgi died on a hunting expedition, and that was considered a great loss.”
- 36) “He locked up his carpenter’s adze there in the boat-shed at night, and went home unarmed.”

## 2. South

37) “Because of these novelties many men in Norway wished to make the same voyage themselves. It was said that in Byzantium Northmen were getting great wealth, those who would go into military service. They (i.e. the Norwegian people) asked that one or other of the kings, Eysteinn or Sigurðr, should go and lead the expedition they were organising.”

*Máli* (“military service”) may refer to any contract or agreement; the phrase *á mála* literally means “in service.” Cleasby-Vigfússon defines *ganga á mála* as “to take service as a soldier with a foreign prince” (417). See also Fritzner II 630-31.

38) “Then King Sigurðr’s party left Byzantium, but a great many of his men stayed behind and went into military service there.”

39) “That summer Eindriði ungi returned from Byzantium; he had been in military service there for a long time. He had many tidings about that to share with them all, and people found it entertaining to question him about places abroad, outside their land.”

40) ... “and offered them mercenary wages if they would stay there.”

41) “At that time many Northmen travelled out to Byzantium and took military service there.”

42) “Now they wanted to join the company of Varangians, and therefore were received gladly, as soon as they knew the two were Northmen.”

43) “He had been out in Constantinople and received there great marks of esteem.”

44) “And when Haraldr came to Byzantium and visited the queen, he immediately went into military service there and embarked that very autumn on a galley with those warriors who patrolled the Greek sea.”

45) “He thinks that I have only one arm, one that always takes and never gives.”

46) “And a great multitude of Norsemen were already there and were called Varangians.”

47) ... “so that he would gain one of the two, either victory or death.”

- 48) "Then Haraldr left the main army with the Varangians and Latins under his command. Gyrgir commanded the Greek force."
- 49) "Thereupon Norsemen from Norway thronged there to join the company of Varangians, and with those who were already there they shared these good tidings about the holiness and the power of the miracles of the sainted Bishop Þorlákr."
- 50) "Those who come from there say that a great number of miracles take place in it."
- 51) "So King Athelstan mustered for himself an army and gave pay to all those who wanted to join this enterprise, both (English) natives and foreigners. Þórólfr and Egill streered southward past Saxony and Flanders. Then they heard that the king of England found himself in need of soldiers and that there was the prospect of much booty to be had."
- 52) "'I think it strange, jarl, that you do not wish to travel out to the Holy Land and have not a single thing to say to those tidings that are told about it. Such a man as yourself is most suited to be there on account of your skills; you would earn much honour there, when you come among men of nobility.'"
- 53) "We will accept the prince's pay,  
moving forward into the steely roar  
to redden the mouths of wolves,  
doing the mighty monarch honour."
- 54) "So Þorbjörn thought it desirable to travel to that place and thus gain for himself wealth and renown, as well as to be no longer in Scandinavia amongst Grettir's friends. He now prepared for his voyage from Norway and set sail from that land, and he did not halt before he came to Byzantium and went into mercenary service there."
- 55) "And then many repeated that the strong man must thus have been very important to him, since Þorsteinn had pursued so far from his land for his vengeance."

- 56) "People know of scarcely an example of any Icelander having been avenged in Byzantium, apart from Grettir Ásmundarson."
- 57) "Gestr saw that he would not be able to remain in Norway for fear of ambush from Þorsteinn, and when spring came he travelled south to Constantinople and took service there with the Varangians, imagining himself to be safer there. News of this reached Þorsteinn, and that same summer he travelled out to Constantinople."
- 58) "And when the men thronged close and wanted to kill Þormóðr, the ice beneath them broke apart, and then there was a great tumult because many men were about to drown. King Haraldr's son Magnús came to Þormóðr's aid, asking that he be spared and offering a settlement, because Þormóðr was one of his ship's crew. A reconciliation was reached, and Þormóðr subsequently travelled south to Denmark and from there abroad to Greece."
- 59) "They sailed with great pomp, as they knew Sigurðr Jórsalafari had done."
- 60) "Kristín went abroad with a man called Grímr rusli ("rubbish"); they travelled out to Constantinople and stayed there a while, and together they had some children."
- 61) "Eyvind became a sea-faring merchant and travelled abroad to Norway, and he spent the winter there. From there he also went to other countries, and stopped in Constantinople, where he received excellent marks of esteem from the Greek king. He remained there for a while."
- 62) "'I have long had it in mind to one day travel to the south; a man is thought to grow foolish if he never explores more widely than just here in Iceland.'"
- 63) "'I mean to do neither, and it is fair to say that when I set out from Iceland I did not intend that any should hear of me being just next-door.'"
- 64) "'Now I am told that he has gone out to Greece, and the land is ruled by a king named John, an exceptional leader. Bersi has since become a retainer of King John and is

valued highly. I now wish to send you to collect the money: I want far more in return or his head.'"

- 65) "And because he was a naturally gifted man, strong and courageous, and in all situations heedful of God's ordinances with perfect devotion, he then thought that if he now returned to his native land, it was uncertain whether he would endure in all situations, as one who loves God is obliged to do, against the opposition and offences of his fellow country-men. So he made a decision to never again visit Iceland."
- 66) "It is told that one particular Yule Eve Eirekr made a solemn vow to travel throughout the whole world to try if he could find that place which heathen men call Ódáinsakr ("the Deathless Plain") and Christian men the Land of Living Folk or Paradise. This solemn vow became famous throughout all Norway."
- 67) "He had with him a fine and numerous body of select men, though only those who themselves wished to make the journey and offer him support in his retinue."
- 68)            "This I tell: the king, blithe in danger,  
                   went to visit the settlements of Jerusalem,  
                   (men know of no nobler prince  
                   under the wide storm-hall)  
                   and the vigorous one  
                   who hates the flame of hawk's land  
                   bathed himself – it was a praise-worthy plan –  
                   in the pure water of Jordan.
- "Hawk's land" is a kenning for a hand or arm, and its "flame" is gold. Thus, one who disdains the flame of hawk's land is generous, liberal or open-handed – a proper king.
- 69) ... "that he would champion Christianity with all his power and establish an archbishop's seat in the land, if he might, and that the cross would be put in the place where the holy king Óláfr rested, and he would promote tithing and practise it too."

- 70)           “‘A cross hangs before this sage’s breast,  
a palm branch between the shoulders;  
the tumult shall abate,  
travellers crowding about on the hillside.’”
- 71)           The superior, dauntless man,  
bold as a blade, fared from  
Greece to conquer Jerusalem  
(the land was dear to the wielder of battles).
- 72)           “And wherever he went throughout Palestine, all the fortresses and castles were  
surrendered to him.”
- 73)           ... “gained for himself God’s forgiveness with this, as well as much worldly honour.”
- 74)           “The active leader  
sought the wide  
city of Jerusalem  
in foreign lands  
before in water  
consecrated by God  
Sigurðr washed  
his sins away.”
- 75)           “‘Speedily I left  
the mass of men,  
until I hit upon  
broad Jerusalem-town;  
I surely undertook to  
go into the river,  
and then I knew

how to serve Christ.

'I know that Jordan  
made waters to flow  
around me,  
beyond the Greeks;  
yet the well-made shirt,  
as expected,  
kept all its  
good qualities.'"

*Fossar* ("waters" above) are literally "waterfalls."

- 76) "You would earn much honour there, whenever you come among high-born people."
- 77) "Thereafter they wished for curiosity's sake to travel all the way out to see the Red Sea, where Moses led the host of Jews out of the land of Egypt."
- 78) "After that he returned to his realm and took upon him the ruling of Orkney. Thereafter he became a very able ruler and restored peace to his dominion. At that time he established new laws in Orkney which pleased the farmers much better than those they had had before. With this his popularity grew; it thus came about that the people of Orkney would have none besides Hákon or his offspring as their leader."

### 3. East

- 79) "But God, who had chosen this child for great things, arranged for him to be set free in this way."
- 80) "Then the king made known to his friends that it was his intention to travel away from that country, first east to the Swedish realm, there to form a plan where he should go

next. But he told his friends he intended to return to the country and try to win back his kingdom, if God granted him a long enough life."

81) "At these tidings the men were glad, those who had followed King Óláfr from Norway and had had there possessions and kin and friends, and with great homesickness their minds were bent on the homeward journey."

82) "Now Þormóðr was in fine favour with King Óláfr and was thought the most gallant man in all trials. Þormóðr travelled abroad with King Óláfr and endured with him all of his exile. He also travelled back to Norway with him, for he thought it better to die with him than live after him."

83) "I heard that the sharp shield-storm  
showered upon the king near Haugr,  
and the burner of Bulgars  
aided his brother well.  
He parted from the dead  
Óláfr reluctantly, hiding his  
helmet's seat, a chieftain at  
twelve and three years old."

The "sharp shield-storm" is a shower of arrows, battle. Haraldr is "the burner of Bulgars", in reference to his later campaigns for the Russian king. His helmet's seat is his head; hiding it, he goes into exile.

84) "The two chieftains  
acted as one  
where Eilífr tarried:  
shield to shield they lined up.  
The East-Wends were driven  
into a tight corner.



The quarter the warriors granted  
the Poles was not light."

- 85) "Well-dealt in age and  
eager for the fight,  
the Njǫrðr of battle fought in Russia  
ten storms of shield's files."

The "Njǫrðr of battle" is a warrior; "shield's files" are swords and their storms battles.  
Thus the warrior, Rǫgnvaldr, fought ten battles in Russia.

- 86) "'What do you have in mind, if you will not go to make a settlement, instead avoiding  
the king's presence and travelling away from your possessions in banishment, and yet  
not join the company of the king's adversaries?'"
- 87) "'That will surely be to our good both in wealth and esteem.'"
- 88) "He sought Russia in the east and dwelt for a while with King Sigrlami and became  
the commander over his army, charged with the protection of both the land and the  
subjects, for the king was now old."
- 89) "She and Eymund love one another greatly because of their kinship, for she was fine  
to look at in every way."
- 90) "After Viðgautr had spent the winter with Knútr lávarðr on very friendly terms, then  
the duke asked him to go on an errand for him to Novgorod in the east and request on  
his behalf for the hand of Engilborg, the daughter of King Haraldr."
- 91) "Now the king made preparations for the wedding, but Egill said he first wished to go  
and find out if his father still lived, and also learn what he could expect regarding the  
realm that he considered he had the right to rule. Ásmundr, however, said he wished  
to travel east to Tartary to invite his foster-brother Herrauðr to his wedding."
- 92) "He hoped in this way that he might push away this heart's sorrow with which he had  
been inflicted, intending to travel to Russia."

- 93) "So he hurried to his ship, and sailed first to Denmark, intending to go from there east to Russia. And that may be thought natural, for in his sorrow he would turn first to that place where he had dwelt before the longest and his lot pleased him best."
- 94) ... "from the dark error of their heathen paths to faithfulness in the bright roads of the holy faith."
- 95) ... "proclaim there God's Christian faith to the heathen nation."
- 96) ... "plead his case, so that the leaders would not oppose him, that he might plant there God's Christian faith."
- 97) "A renowned and truly learned book called *Imago Mundi* states clearly that those peoples who are called Russian, Polish, and Hungarian became Christian in the days of Otto, who was the third emperor of that name. Some books relate that Emperor Otto travelled with his army into the eastern lands and compelled the people there far and wide to accept Christianity, and with him was Óláfr Tryggvason."
- 98) "'It is likely that you serve your lord well and kindle many men to his love. I am greatly curious about many true tidings that you should be able to tell me: first about the excellent miracles of your god Jesus Christ, and secondly about various lands and unknown peoples, and next about your own doings and famous successes.'"
- 99) ... "many remarkable tidings of both God and good men."
- 100) "Wise men have likened him in accomplishments to Styrbjörn, his kinsman, or to King Óláfr Tryggvason, who is the most renowned man there has been or will be in the north countries, for ever and ever, both before God and men."
- 101) "He had a bishop consecrate his wood-axe and flint."
- 102) ... "a ship that two priests captained."
- 103) ... "for all the surrounding area was full of idolatry."  
*Blótskapr* may alternatively mean simply "sacrifice." Clearly pagan worship is meant.
- 104) "Yngvarr spoke to her constantly about almighty God, and this faith pleased her well."

- 105) "There they saw great idolatry in all the streets. Yngvarr told his men to be diligent in prayer and steadfast in their faith. Jólfr gave them a hall, and that winter Yngvarr watched his men so closely that none was harmed from intercourse with women or other heathendom."
- Viðskipti* may denote any kind of dealings or intercourse, though sexual intercourse is here a natural interpretation.
- 106) ... "destroyed in this way the devil's-folk with God's help, so that they became nothing but white ashes."
- 107) "Then the queen bade them travel with the peace of God and Yngvarr. 'Let He who is your God be mine. Greet Yngvarr's kin for me when you arrive in Sweden, and ask some of them to come here with clerics and make this people Christian, and then a church shall be built here, where Yngvarr shall rest.'"
- 108) "After this banquet, King Sveinn travelled throughout his realm with a great following and also the queen. The bishop is there also on the journey as well as clerics, for King Sveinn is causing the land to be converted to Christianity, and all those realms that the queen had ruled before. And when summer came and the power of God's grace in that land had so manifested itself that it had become entirely Christian, then King Sveinn and his retinue wanted to make ready for their journey home to Sweden and let his kinfolk know the truth about his journey."
- 109) "'And see how fitting it is that you should strengthen Christianity and have churches built, for you must first have a great and worthy church built in the city, and if it goes just as I wish, then the body of your father shall be buried there.'"
- 110) "Yngvarr was there for three winters and there learned to speak a great number of languages. He heard talk that three rivers flowed from the east through Russia, and the one in the middle was the biggest. Then Yngvarr travelled widely throughout the eastern realms and enquired if any man knew where that river flowed from, but no one

knew to say. Then Yngvarr prepared for a journey out of Russia, intending to try and explore the length of this river.”

- 111) ... “first wanted to search the length of the river and would accept that match afterwards.”

The Norse word used here for “search” or “explore” is not the usual *kanna* but *rannsaka*, which bears the meanings “search,” “enquire into”, and “ransack”, its English analogue.

- 112) “After this they sailed for many days and through many regions until they saw animals of different habits and colours, and from this they concluded that they were getting very distant from their own district or land.”

- 113) “It is told that one particular Yule Eve Eirekr made a solemn vow to travel throughout the whole world to try if he could find that place which heathen men call Ódáinsakr (‘the field of undying’) and Christian men the Land of Living Folk or Paradise.”

- 114) “You are curious, Eirekr, and you want to learn many things, those which are unnecessary and unusual and very strange.”

- 115) “Eirekr asked the king fully about the rewards of righteousness and the tortures of hell. He also asked about the appearance of peoples and the division of lands, about seas and foreign countries and all about the eastern and southern regions of the world, about great kings and various islands, about desert-lands and about those places they must travel across, about marvellous races and their apparel and the customs of many nations, about vipers and flying dragons and beasts and birds of every kind, about hoards of gold and gem-stones.”

Other manuscripts, including Flateyjarbók, have for “great kings” *frá skógum stórum* – “about great forests.”

- 116) ... “written in all the tongues of those peoples who they might expect to meet on the way.”

- 117) "King Darius travels now with his army to that river that is called Euphrates, which is one of those four that flows out of Paradise."
- 118) ... "is like a desert to compare with Paradise, though that place is a short distance from here, and from there flows that river that you saw; no one may enter there while yet alive."
- 119) ... "to seek for himself a kingdom abroad."
- 120) ... "he went raiding, wanting to test himself first, and after a few years were past he went east to Russia with a large force."
- 121) "'But it seems to me that I have tried myself very little in enterprises and have not explored very widely the customs of good men, and if I travel to Iceland at once I will not be inclined to go away again very soon after my marriage.'"
- 122) "He travelled east all the way to Russia and visited the homes of chieftains and noble people, all of whom received him well and honourably. There he received large gifts from ruling people."
- 123) "The excellent counsel-breeder visited  
land-wardens east in Russia.  
Glorious ones, destroying meanness,  
lavished wealth onto the stately sovereign.  
The king praised for peacefulness  
became greatly beloved throughout the east.  
There was none who did not raise his name  
in praise, this honourable man."
- 124) "King Eiríkr was a wise man and a good scholar, and he knew how to speak many languages."
- 125) "But he who first put this adventure into this book that he wrote wishes for everyone to know that there is no reliable help apart from God. For though heathen men acquire

- great renown for themselves by their marvellous deeds, there will be a great difference when they reach the end of this temporal life; for they will have received their reward in the human praise of their excellence, but will have the prospect only of punishments for their transgressions and lack of faith, having failed to recognise their own maker.”
- 126) “This man now becomes famous because of his travels, and he was regarded as the most splendid of men, and that is all there is to say about him.”
- 127) “‘You shall now send a ship to King Óláfr in Norway, for I have been informed that he has a young, illegitimate son. Invite the child here and provide for his upbringing and fostering, because it may truly be said of you two that it is the baser man who fosters the other’s child.’”
- 128) “Some people threatened him and thought it was unbecoming to raise a foreign prince there.”
- 129) “Þorgísl, son of King Sveinn, travelled east to Russia. He had in that country distinguished relatives on his mother’s side. There he was brought up and eventually made king, and he did not return to Denmark afterwards.”
- 130) “The king had little desire to remain in his kingdom after this, and so he started going on Viking expeditions every summer.”
- 131) “Next Arngrímr collected much plunder and also made off with Svafrlami’s daughter Eyfura. Arngrímr then travelled home to Bólm and married Eyfura.”
- 132) “Sveinn ordered his men to go ashore, and they traded with the natives, and yet neither party understood what the others spoke. Another day Sveinn’s men went to trade with the natives again, and they traded together for a while. Then a Russian man wanted to cancel a fur-trade he had just transacted.”

*Girdzskur madur (girskr maðr)* may refer to either a Greek or Russian man; while the context implies the latter, the proper adjective for a Russian would be *gerzkr*. There is occasionally ambiguity between distant east and south.

133) “And now they have a meeting between themselves, and there Sveinn bought many costly things. Then the heathens invited their trading-partners into a house for a feast, and that they accepted.”

The phrase I translate “have a meeting” might also be translated “hold a market.”

134) “He found it wearisome when everyone had gone to sleep, and in curiosity he went ashore to look around, and it happened that he went further than he intended. He stopped and listened. He saw up ahead of him a tall house, and he approached the house and went into it; there he saw a silver kettle over the fire, and he found it marvellous.”

135) “But when Yngvarr heard this, then his joy of the silver and gladness of wine was turned into great sorrow, for in the morning when they called the roll, eighteen men lay dead.”

136) ... “far away from them something like a half moon standing on the earth.”

137) “‘If such a thing were seen in our country, it would be said that treasure caused the flame.’”

138) ... “because that has bred on this journey more loss of life than profits.”

#### 4. North

139) “It was one summer that these brothers made a trading voyage north to Finnmǫrk, taking butter and pork to sell to the Lapps. The trading went well for them, and they sailed back again when the summer was nearly spent.”

140) “‘This butter is great fare for us.’”

141) “It was arranged that Karli would be in equal partnership with the king, and each would receive half of the profits.”

142) “And when they arrived in Bjarmaland they went to the merchant town, and a market began. All of those who had money to spend got plenty of goods. Þórir obtained

many squirrel, beaver and sable skins. Karli also had a great amount of money, with which he purchased many fur-wares. And when the market concluded, they steered out of the Dvina river. Then the truce with the native people was declared ended."

143) "Þórir hundr had been on an expedition to Finnmark over these two winters, and each of the two winters he had been a long time in the mountains and gotten a great deal of wealth. He traded with the Lapps in many kinds of wares. There he had tailored for himself twelve reindeer-hides with such great sorcery that no weapon could cut it, much less even than a coat of ring-mail."

144) "'This expedition carries with it some risk,' he said, 'because no one may make a trading-voyage here without having the king's leave, or that of the king's steward. Now a man has also been appointed to collect the Lapp tribute; he has the royal grants there. This man, Einarr fluga, is not thought lenient.'"

145) ... "the right to voyages to Finnmark, with such privileges as Bárðr had formerly possessed."

Or "the right to trade with the Lapps." Cleasby-Vigfússon and Fritzner both mention trade in their definitions of *finnferð*.

146) "That winter Þórólfr made his journey up into the mountains and had with him a great company, no less than ninety men; formerly the custom had been that the king's stewards had had thirty men, or sometimes fewer; he had with him a great deal of trade-goods. He soon arranged a meeting with the Lapps and collected tribute from them and held a trade-market with them; all between them passed in good feeling and in friendship, though with some timidity."

Bernard Scudder translates the end of this passage: "All their dealings were cordial and friendly, partly because the Lapps feared them" (CSI I 43). Sigurður Nordal is even harsher in his judgment: *tillátssemi fyrir hræðslu sakir, þrælsótti* (ÍF II 27, footnote) – "compliance due to fear, slavery."



- 147) ... "none has seen grey furs so fine."  
Or possibly "squirrel-pelts." See ÍF XIV 169, footnote.
- 148) ... "that tribute from Finnm̄trk, which is the king's."
- 149) "Hildiríðr's sons took over the stewardship of Hálogaland."
- 150) "The Lapps did not think nearly so well of these royal agents as they had of Þórólfr; the tribute that the Lapps were supposed to pay was collected with much more difficulty."
- 151) "He handed over the goods that Álfr had conveyed from the north. The jarl was told that it was freely paid, and there was more of it than usual."
- 152) "One summer King Haraldr said that he would send Haukr north to Bjarmaland to claim furs, and when Vígharðr knew this, he said that he wished to go along. The king said that he would not grudge him this honour and to let each of them make their ships ready."
- 153) "'I send her a golden ring weighting twelve ounces, two sides of cured wild-boar bacon, and two barrels of butter.'"
- 154) "As soon as they got a favourable wind they sailed north together to Finnm̄trk; they lay at anchor there overnight. There was a multitude of earth-huts further up on land. In the morning Guðmundr and his crew went ashore from their ship, invaded all the huts and robbed the Lappish women, though the Lappish men were not at home. The women bore this badly and screamed a great deal."
- 155) "Hj̄trleifr ran out of wealth because of his generosity; he had a ship constructed with special care and sailed to Bjarmaland."
- 156) "And when King Hj̄trleifr came to the mouth of the Dvina, he divided his crew into three divisions. There were ninety men on his ship. He led a third of his crew in battle against the native inhabitants, the second division kept watch on the ship with

- the steersman, but the third division broke into a burial mound led by the forecattleman, and they got a large amount of treasure."
- 157) "Hjtrr harried in Permia; he captured as his prize Ljúfvina, daughter of the Permian king."
- 158) "Svipr's youngest son was named Úlfr. He was called Úlfr inn illi ("the evil", "the hostile"). He harried in the Baltic and throughout Permia. He had a large band of robbers and was extremely unpopular."
- 159) "'By ship the journey takes no shorter than five weeks, and this way is the most harrowing due to the pirates and raiders.'"
- 160) "One summer Haraldr Gráfeldr went with his army north to Bjarmaland, and he raided there and had a great battle with the Bjarmians on the bank of the Dvina. King Haraldr won a victory there and killed many people; then he harried widely throughout the land and obtained a great amount of wealth."
- 161) "Hervtr now stayed on Sámsey until she obtained passage away; there is then nothing to tell of her travels until she came to King Guðmundr of Glæsisvellir; at this time she still called herself Herverðr and behaved as if she were a champion. This Herverðr was received particularly well there."
- 162) "Hervtr left to join some Vikings and went raiding for a while."
- 163) "One evening after sunset Ketill took his axe in his hand and went north to the islands. But when he had gone a not inconsiderable distance away from habitations he saw a dragon fly alone out of a hill to the north."
- 164) "Ketill says that he wishes to go fishing and no longer be completely helpless."
- 165) "Then he travelled north to Vitaðsgjafi, finding a hut there and staying in it. The hunting there was not scarce. He could catch fish with his bare hands."
- 166) "'I shall go fishing.'"

Or "I shall go hunting." The context of Ketill's earlier travels suggests he again seeks fish, but he may just as well be hunting seals, reindeer or any other game.

- 167) "I am called Forað.  
I was reared in the north,  
hearty in Hrafnsey."
- 168) "'I am going to the council of trolls. Skelkingr, king of trolls, is coming there from the north, from Dumbshaf, and Ófóti from Ófótansfirth and Þorgerðr Htrga-troll and other great creatures from the lands of the north.'"
- 169) "Then it happened, as so often before, that a great famine came to Hálogaland. Then Grímr loðinkinni prepared to leave and set out in his boat with two other men. He steered north for Finnmǫrk and so east to Gandvík. And when he entered the bay, he saw that there were plenty of fish to catch there."
- 170) ... "because so great an amount of booty lay at stake."
- 171) "That same winter Þórólfr travelled up into the mountains with a hundred men; they went immediately to Kvenland in the east and met with King Faravið. Then they formed their plans and resolved to journey into the mountains as they had the previous winter, and, with four hundred men, they came down into Karelia and there attacked settlements where they thought their numbers guaranteed their success, harrying there and gaining much wealth. Then they travelled back to Finnmǫrk as winter progressed."
- 172) "A short time afterwards the company decided to set out on their voyage, and they travelled north to Finnmǫrk until they arrived at Blesavergr. This was the name of the mountain in which Valr's cave was, and it is bordered by Dumbshaf on the north."
- 173) "Now it is more valiant to gain wealth there by force than by going fishing, and it will be ventured."

- 174) "They said they would seek the king's daughters and not come back before the two were found, whether alive or dead. Then they sailed out to sea not knowing where they should go. They travelled about all summer and explored islands and out-skerries and mountain-districts, until that winter they arrived in Jttunheimar in the north."
- 175) "'Bósi's life and limb shall be spared, and he shall leave the country and not return until he brings me that vulture's egg which is inscribed all over the outside with letters of gold. Then we will be reconciled; otherwise he will be called a scoundrel by every man.'"
- 176) "In the spring they prepared for their voyage abroad and had one ship with four-and-twenty men, and they travelled mostly according to the guidance of Busla. They set out across the Baltic and came to Permia, lying off the coast of a wild wood."
- 177) "'But who was so angry with you that he wishes you dead and sends you on this dangerous mission?'"
- 178) "'It can be said of you, Sturlaugr, that you will never be without fear in this land until you fetch for me the aurochs horn that I lost some time ago.'"
- 179) "'Now this is my request, Gestr,' says the king, 'that you seek out this valuable treasure.'  
'That may be called a dangerous mission, my lord,' replies Gestr, 'but I will not refuse, if you prepare my voyage in that manner that you know is best for me.'  
The king responds, 'I shall do all in my power to make your journey turn out well.'"
- 180) "In the autumn Sigurðr wanted to sail home, but then a great storm rose. They boarded the ship to sail quickly but then were driven north into the ocean. The sailing was hard, so reefed sails were used. Every cord now began to break. Nowhere did they see land. The sea now became turbulent, and the gale grew so great that water came in on both sides of the ship, but everyone aboard was so valiant that none spoke a single

word of fear. The ship began to leak badly and drifted eastward for eight days. The ship was driven north a long way across the sea, into the bay called Gandvík."

- 181) "The prince was harboured there for a month, and he never got a fair wind."
- 182) "After that Sigurðr sailed to Finnmark, and there he got a fair breeze and returned home to Denmark."
- 183) "They got little wind, and darkness settled on them; they lost their course, so that they were out at sea all summer. But when autumn began, storms of heavy sleet and frost grew, so that every drop of water that came in turned to ice. They all bailed water both night and day, and everyone became terribly weary and at last gave up, save Jǫkull alone. He continued bailing alone for four days. In the end the ship was driven onto a large cluster of skerries with a great crash of breakers."  
One manuscript reports Jǫkull bails for forty days. Four seems more reasonable.
- 184) "'And then you would be king over Jǫtunheimr, as your father was.'"
- 185) "'I am called Hvítserkr, the son of King Soldánr of Serkland, and my sister is Marsibilla. The giant Skrámr abducted us here with witchcraft, intending my sister for his son Grímnir.'"
- 186) "Then they heard a loud crash. Two men suddenly rode towards the pair and carried Helgi away with them. Þorsteinn did not know what had become of him."
- 187) "Then he told the king first about how he had met the women in the wood, then about how the Grímr had created the gale around the brothers as they tried to save the ship, and then the Grímr took him with them to Guðmundr of Glæsisvellir and gave to him Ingibjörg, Guðmundr's daughter."
- 188) "He spoke well of everything and said that there was much more to say about him (i.e. Guðmundr) than he was able to report."
- 189) "He had not been sitting there long when he was suddenly caught hold of. A vulture had flown up and clutched Oddr with his talons so hard that he could do nothing to

- defend himself. This creature flew with Oddr over many lands and seas. In the end the vulture flies to a precipice and lands on a certain grassy ledge on the side of the cliff."
- 190) "Þorkell then went to live in his brother Bárðr's neighbourhood in Hálogaland; they lived in the firth called Skjálfti in the north of Hálogaland. A little while later the brothers travelled north across Dumbshaf and burned Harðverkr the strong in his house, and thirty ogres with him."
- 191) "A little while after this they gathered an army and travelled to Bjarmaland, and Bósi demanded to be received there, making this claim on the grounds that his wife Edda owned all the land left by her father, and she had now become Bósi's wife. He further said that this would be the best way of compensating the people of that land for the lives he had taken, and that as their king he would strengthen them with laws and the bettering of their condition. And because they were now without a leader, they saw no better choice than to accept him as their king."
- 192) "Hálfðan and Sigmundr now arrived in Bjarmaland in the east and made inquiries about where Valr was, and they found him north of Gandvík, and immediately a battle commenced there."
- 193) "After that he travelled north to Finnmǫrk and all the way to Bjarmaland, and there he fought a great battle and won victory."
- 194) "And one particular spring Eiríkr blóðøx prepared for a journey to Bjarmaland and was very particular in his choice of troops for this expedition. [...] About this journey there are many tidings to tell. Eiríkr fought a great battle in Bjarmaland on the Dvina; there Eiríkr won a victory, as it says in the poems about him."
- 195) "Sigurðr stayed in Finnmǫrk that winter in secret, along with more than twenty men, and he chopped the stem and stern off his ship and sank it in the inmost part of Ægisfjǫrðr."

- 196) "It was good in the *gammi l* when we gladly drank."
- 197) "Few can follow  
a ship from Hálogaland.  
Beneath the sail the  
sinew-bound ship races."
- 198) "'You will sail to Bjarmaland, to my brother Ótarr jarl, and tell him that he must accept you on account of my words. But if he is reluctant, give him this gold as a token, and then he will take you both in.'"
- 199) "[Ketill] travelled one summer north to Finnmǫrk to see Brúni and Hrafnhildr."
- 200) "'Most ways from here are difficult [...] and by ship none may make the journey in less than five weeks, and that is the most dangerous due to Vikings and raiders. Another way lies to the east, though that one passes through mountains and wild forests, and that is a long way and difficult, and it is doubtful if you would find the way through. The third road is shortest if all goes well, for it may be travelled in three weeks, but there are a great many obstacles.'"
- 201) "'What is best for a each man is what he is born to.'"
- 202) "Oddr then spoke: 'Can you understand anything of the speech of the people here?' Ásmundr said: 'No more than birds' twittering; what do you make of it?' Oddr replied: 'Look at that man who is serving drinks to both benches. I suspect,' said Oddr, 'that he must be able to speak the Norse language.'"

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This bibliography is alphabetised according to the Icelandic standard; thus ð follows d and þ, æ, œ, ö, ø, and † follow z at the end of the alphabet. All accented vowels are alphabetised as their unaccented form, and á is alphabetised as a. Names of Icelanders are alphabetised by first name rather than patronymic or surname.

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