Dating and Origins

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Origins

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> In my opinion, the discussion must be kept alive as long as we do not know anything for certain—i.e., probably forever.[1]

Introduction

As seen in the above quotation, by one of its most recent, significant contributors, some scholars are very attached to the 'saga origins debate'. In few fields would scholars set out their self-justification in quite such stark terms, especially while hinting at the hopelessness of achieving a definitive answer to their question. In this instance, the major question actually comprises several fascinating, interrelated ones, which anyone who has read one or more of the *Íslendingasögur* (sagas of Icelanders) may have pondered.[2] How did *Íslendingasögur* come into being? Who wrote them, or at least wrote them *down*? When were they committed to writing? Was there an oral storytelling tradition in Iceland which existed alongside the written one and, if so, what was that tradition like? Moreover, those familiar with multiple sagas and/or *Landnámabók* (known as *The Book of Land-takings* or *The Book of Settlements*) may be intrigued by similarities and overlaps between the first and any subsequent texts they read. Are the shared characters and plots the result of skilled authorial borrowings, the product of lost oral traditions, or both? The fact that manuscripts containing sagas seldom mention authors or scribes adds to the mystery of the whole process of saga genesis. Nor are there obvious precursors to the sagas, experiments in literary form, or even rough drafts. We can also throw into the mix the fact that Scandinavian courts and scribes interacted with their peers in other parts of Europe, that other kinds of 'sagas' and compilations of sagas were being produced in Iceland at the same time, and that the issue of genre was complicated in medieval Scandinavia.

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[1] Tommy Danielsson, 'On the Possibility of an Oral Background for Gísla saga Súrssonar.' *Oral Art Forms and their Passage into Writing*, eds. Else Mundal and Jonas Wellendorf, Copenhagen, Museum Tusculanum Press, 2008, 27–41, 40.

[2] For a definition of the *Íslendingasögur* and other saga genres see the chapter 'Genre' in the present volume.

Given all this, it is perhaps easier to see not only why definitive answers in the saga origins debate are hard to come by, but also why all scholars have an opinion on the matter—whether or not they make their views explicit. The balance of views expressed on these matters has probably shifted in the last fifty years against a background of changing scholarly fashions beyond the study of medieval Iceland and its literary culture. Views on other literary genres produced in medieval Iceland have shifted as well; the literary qualities of the drier *samtíðarsögur* (contemporary sagas) and *konungasögur* (kings' sagas) have been explored and, for all the continued interest in *Íslendingasögur*, narratives assigned to other genres such as the *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* (chivalric and legendary sagas) have started to receive greater attention.[3] Even though less has been published on these issues recently than was the case between the 1960s and 1980s, trying to survey all of it is no easy task. Furthermore, presenting the research in detail is difficult: The kinds of close analysis of textual relationships which can characterise this scholarship are sometimes 'unusually taxing for both writer and reader'.[4] Hopefully this survey will aid the reader's understanding rather than lessen it and include most, if not all, relevant publications.[5]

A masterful survey and analysis of the scholarship on *Íslendingasögur* carried out by Carol Clover in the mid-1980s inevitably forms the backdrop to what follows. Clover began her survey by noting that the best-known phase of the debate about saga origins, was characterised by (extreme) positions in the nineteenth and early twentieth century which were known as bookprose and freeprose.[6] Bookprose (*Buchprosa*)

[3] For contemporary sagas, mostly the *Sturlunga saga* compilation, Úlfar Bragason has made the largest contribution. See Úlfar Bragason, *Ætt og saga*. Reykjavik, Háskólaútgáfan, 2010 and, in English, his overview of the scholarship, 'Sagas of Contemporary History (*Sturlunga saga*): Texts and Research.' *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk, Oxford, Blackwell, 2005, 427–46. For the rise of *fornaldarsögur* scholarship see Rory McTurk, 'Introduction.' *Making History: Essays on the Fornaldarsögur*, eds. Martin Arnold and Alison Finlay, London, Viking Society for Northern Research, 2010, v–vii.

[4] Theodore M. Andersson, 'Five Saga Books for a New Century.' *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 103 (2004), 505–27, 515.

[5] It is pertinent to remind ourselves that *Íslendingasögur* have arguably occupied modern scholars far more than their medieval forebears; they exist in just 59 of the 750 pre-Reformation manuscripts from Iceland, see Emily Lethbridge, '"Hvorki glansar gull á mér / né glæstir stafir í línum"', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 129 (2014), 55–89, 57 n. 4, 65.

[6] Carol J. Clover, 'Icelandic Family Sagas (*Íslendingasögur*).' *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, eds. Carol J. Clover and John Lindow, Islandica 45, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985, 239–315, 239–40. Some would argue these positions were always more nuanced than their caricatures; Paul Bibire, 'On Reading the Icelandic Sagas: Approaches to Old Icelandic Texts.' *West Over Sea: Studies in Scandinavian Sea-Borne Expansion and Settlement Before 1300, A Festschrift in*

signified a view that sagas were created by male, antiquarian authors akin to modern novelists who used their own imaginations with recourse, first, to existing texts and, second, if at all, to oral traditions.[7] This approach was a reaction to proponents of freeprose (*Freiprosa*) whose belief in oral sagas equated with an empiricist view of the sagas' ability to tell 'the truth' about what happened in the ninth to eleventh centuries.[8] These terms have since become redundant because few scholars subscribe to such extreme positions and because history as a discipline has moved on, but they nevertheless serve as useful markers.

There has been a continuing tendency for modern Icelandic scholars to situate themselves closer to a bookprose position since the mid-twentieth century, although this has lessened in recent years. Sigurður Nordal's landmark 1940 study, *Hrafnkatla*, on *Hrafnkels saga freysgoða*, depends on the bookprosist notion of direct literary borrowing from one text to another (Ice. *rittengsl*) and has come to define what has been labelled the Icelandic School. Theodore M. Andersson's *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins* (1964) has been an equally influential analysis of the issues but was also a statement of the author's own position in favour of oral origins, contrary to the bookprose Icelandic School view. In a second significant monograph, Andersson champions a structural approach to *Íslendingasögur*, proposing a model of a six-part structure for each saga—an approach which has generated much scholarship albeit little approval.[9] Andersson has continued to publish on the debate for half a century and has inspired a growing body of work emphasising the significance of comparative work on 'oral literature' in contexts beyond medieval Iceland. Whereas Clover could lament that a disproportionate number of Icelandic scholars had spent time examining manuscript and textual relations, the balance of scholarly effort has

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Honour of Barbara E. Crawford, eds. Beverley Ballin Smith, Simon Taylor, and Gareth Williams, Leiden, Brill, 2007, 3–18, 11.

[7] For the first such study see Konrad Maurer, 'Ueber die Hænsa-Þóris saga.' *Abhandlungen der philosophisch-philololologischen Klasse der königlichen bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 12, 2 (1871), 157–216.

[8] The classic example is Bogi Th. Melsteð, *Íslendinga saga* 2. Copenhagen, Hið íslenzka bókmenntafélag, 1910, which includes over two hundred pages uncritically recounting events recorded in Íslendingasögur.

[9] Theodore M. Andersson, *The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytical Reading*. Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 28, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1967. Andersson's six parts are: Introduction, Conflict, Climax, Revenge, Reconciliation, and Aftermath. Another advocate of the primacy of oral saga origins advocates a far more complicated schema which, no doubt, has caused it to be ignored, Tommy Danielsson, 'Om den isländska släktsagans uppbyggnad,' PhD diss., Uppsala, Uppsala Universitet, 1986. See Lars Lönnroth, 'Structural Approaches to Saga Literature.' *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Studies in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, eds. Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop, and Tarrin Wills, Turnhout, Brepols, 2007, 63–73.

changed in recent decades, even if diverse views remain.[10] Additionally, where scholars were once keen to try to identify 'great men' from the thirteenth century as authors of individual sagas, they are now less likely to do so. The likes of Snorri Sturluson (d. 1241, author of the poetic treatise the *Prose Edda* as well as one of the *konungasögur* compilations, *Heimskringla*) and his nephew Sturla Þórðarson (d. 1284) continue to be discussed, but less often, and with greater caution.

Landnámabók

A useful starting point for a more detailed examination or origins is *Landnámabók*, which, owing to the text's great size and volume of 'data', has the potential for connections with multiple sagas. *Landnámabók*'s demise as a central text for understanding saga origins, however, is symptomatic of the shift in the debate as a whole.

Landnámabók contains about 400 short chapters, many of which recount the supposed first settlers of particular habitable (and sometimes less habitable) areas of Iceland. It names about 360 primary colonists, most of whom are associated with some kind of land-claim. Sometimes the chapters contain nothing more than a brief sentence about a colonist and the land they acquired in Iceland, but often chapters include short narratives that relate something about their origins outside Iceland; their reasons for travel; events that take place in Iceland; and then perhaps fairly extensive genealogy, which often stops at about six generations after the time of colonisation. The material in the text is occasionally repeats verbatim what is said in one of the *Íslendingasögur* or else provides a sketch of a story laid out more fully in a saga.

A series of studies by Björn M. Ólsen in the first decade of the twentieth century deal extensively with the textual relationships between *Landnáma* and particular sagas, and many scholars (including Sigurður Nordal in *Hrafnkatla*) have revisited the issue in many saga studies since then. *Landnámabók* is still assumed to have been a source to which saga authors had access and from which they often drew material directly. Quite why a unique text like this was compiled in the first place is also an issue which has continued to be addressed in recent decades. One version of the text is explicit in stating that it was written to defend Iceland against foreigners' claims that Icelanders were descended from slaves but scholars have sought other purposes.

[10] Clover, 'Icelandic Family Sagas,' 240–242.

It has been suggested that *Landnámabók* aimed to record the land rights of thirteenth-century families,[11] while the most distinctive recent theory proposes that it was designed to create a history for all of Iceland's settled regions, even to the extent that some parts of it were effectively invented to fill gaps in contemporary knowledge of sparsely-inhabited districts.[12]

Before considering the development of debates on saga origins and the connections between *Landnámabók* and the sagas, *Landnámabók*'s origins themselves require discussion. The text(s) have attracted their own specialist studies over the twentieth century and continue to do so.[13] Debates have most often concerned the textual relationships of the five basic surviving versions of the text, as well as speculations about the role of one lost version of the text (*Styrmisbók*) in shaping those that survive. Most scholars still assume that these versions share a common, lost original which dates back to the first half of the twelfth century on the basis of the epilogue of one version (*Hauksbók*).

The five surviving versions, in order of supposed composition, are: *Sturlubók*, thought to have been written by the historian, poet, and politician Sturla Þórðarson (d. 1284); *Hauksbók* by Haukr Erlendsson (d. 1334); *Melabók*, of which only a small part survives, also from the early fourteenth century; *Skarðsárbók* by Björn Jónsson (d. 1655); and *Þórðarbók* by Þórður Jónsson (d. 1670). Of these, *Melabók* is the most distinctive. Not only do we only have a handful of chapters of this text, but each of its chapters is entirely genealogical rather than containing narratives about colonists. While Melabók follows the same clockwise tour of Iceland's colonists, it starts in a different place than do the other redactions. The survival of *Melabók* brings into question the form of the supposed lost versions of *Landnámabók*. Haukr Erlendsson's text says that he compiled the text using those written by Sturla Þórðarson, *Sturlubók*, and one by Styrmir Kárason (d. 1245), *Styrmisbók*, which is lost. Jón Jóhannesson holds that *Styrmisbók* was a source for both *Sturlubók* and *Melabók*.[14] In general,

[11] Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, *Studier i Landnámabók: Kritiska bidrag till den isländska fristatstidens historia*. Lund, Bibliotheca Historica Lundensis, 1974; Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, *Sögugerð Landnámabókar: Um íslenska sagnaritun á 12. og 13. öld*. Reykjavik, Sagnfræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, 2001; Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, 'Hvað er Landnámabók?' *Saga* 46 (2008), 179–93.

[12] Adolf Friðriksson and Orri Vésteinsson, 'Creating a Past: A Historiography of the Settlement of Iceland.' *Contact, Continuity, and Collapse: The Norse Colonization of the North Atlantic*, ed. James Barrett, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 5, Turnhout, Brepols, 2003, 139–61.

[13] Jón Jóhannesson, *Gerðir Landnámabókar*. Reykjavik, Félagsprentsmiðjan, 1941; Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, *Studier*; Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, *Sögugerð*.

[14] Jón Jóhannesson, *Gerðir*.

scholars have supposed that where contents of sagas have been at odds with surviving versions of *Landnámabók*, they contain material taken from *Styrmisbók*.

Working on the same principles as most Icelandic scholarship of the mid-twentieth century—i.e. assuming that scribes or authors writing new texts drew on pre-existing sources wherever they could—Sveinbjörn Rafnsson has in recent years had much to say about *Landnámabók*. Sveinbjörn's most famous contribution to debates about literary production in Iceland is his published PhD thesis, *Studier i Landnámabók*.[15] There he proposes that *Melabók* sat outside the tradition of historical writing demonstrated by *Sturlubók*, *Hauksbók*, and *Styrmisbók*. Sveinbjörn's view that the lost, original version of *Landnámabók* most likely contained unadorned genealogy similar to *Melabók* has been challenged, but the issue remains open.[16]

Sveinbjörn's more recent compilation of *Landnámabók* studies develops some aspects of his arguments about the dating of and relationships between texts.[17] He is keen, for example, to make assertions about the contents of *Styrmisbók* and proposes the existence of a version of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* which pre-dates the surviving late twelfth-century versions (see below). He argues, too, that *Kristni saga*, the narrative concerned with Iceland's conversion, existed in *Styrmisbók* and, as we shall see, that *Laxdœla saga* pre-dates *Styrmisbók* because of similarities in its contents with surviving versions of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*.[18] What is striking about all of this argumentation is the absence of any recognition of much of the more recent scholarship which will be surveyed below: The bibliography and index of *Sögugerð Landnámabókar* contain no mention of oral tradition, nor any modern secondary scholarship which discusses it. Differences between surviving texts are explained exclusively via the speculative contents of lost texts rather than as the less predictable product of writers' conversations about the past.

Oral Tradition

[15] Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, *Studier*.
[16] Auður Ingvarsdóttir, 'The Relation of *Landnáma* to Icelandic Family Sagas.' *Sagas and Societies Borgarnes: International Conference at Borgarnes, Iceland, September 5–9, 2002*, eds. Stefanie Würth, Tõnno Jonuks, and Axel Kristinsson [https://publikationen.uni-tuebingen.de/xmlui/handle/10900/46197]; Auður Ingvarsdóttir, 'Sagnarit eða skrá? Staða Melabókar sem upprunulegustu gerðar *Landnámu*.' *Saga* 42 (2004), 91–119; Auður Ingvarsdóttir, 'Ný tíðindi í fræðunum: Svarpóstur til Sveinbjarnar Rafnssonar.' *Saga* 44 (2006), 175–78.
[17] Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, *Sögugerð*.
[18] See also Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, *Ólafs sögur Tryggvasonar: Um gerðir þeirra, heimildir og höfunda*. Reykjavik, Háskólaútgáfan, 2005.

The approach adopted by Sveinbjörn is remarkable for its novelty rather than its ubiquity. In 1985, Clover looked forward to 'the fruits of [an] idealogical adjustment' signalled by the published view of Jónas Kristjánsson (1924–2014)—then director of The Árni Magnússon Institute in Iceland—that the roots of the *Íslendingasögur* were both traditional and literary.[19] One major development in saga studies in recent decades has been the publication of books which are dedicated to discussing the nature of oral tradition.

The work of Gísli Sigurðsson is arguably most emblematic of this change. His early work engages with the question of the Gaelic influence on Icelandic literature. He studied in Ireland because in 1980s Iceland 'it was still considered taboo in Icelandic studies to take up the old issue of the Gaelic influence on Icelandic tradition'.[20] As to his conclusions, Gísli thinks that the form of the extended prose narrative, and some limited motifs, made their way from Irish tradition into the *Íslendingasögur*,[21] but that greater influences were felt elsewhere; in skaldic metrical forms and in the *fornaldarsögur*. Although doubt might be thrown on whether there are real linkages between some of the motifs in Irish texts and *Íslendingasögur*, there remains a curious geographical pattern whereby sagas mostly set in the west contain the Irish connection.[22] This fits fairly well with an archaeological phenomenon: In the west of Iceland there is an almost complete absence of tenth-century Scandinavian-style furnished burials. Taking these two patterns together, it might still be argued that this region was first settled by people who buried their dead without grave goods, i.e. were from the British Isles.[23]

Gísli has since published numerous studies which have explicitly aimed to question the notion of *rittengsl*.[24] Whereas many older studies would have focused on a single saga, Gísli's starting points have been, for example, to study the

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[19] Clover, 'Icelandic Family Sagas,' 245.
[20] Gísli Sigurðsson, *Gaelic Influence in Iceland: Historical and Literary Contacts, A Survey of Research*, 2nd ed. Reykjavik, University of Iceland Press, 2000, i.
[21] On *Landnámabók*'s comparatively numerous mentions of Irish colonists, see also William Sayers, 'Management of the Celtic Fact in *Landnámabók*.' *Scandinavian Studies* 66 (1994), 129–53. Rory McTurk has suggested literary borrowings from Irish into Old Norse-Icelandic, see *Chaucer and the Norse and Celtic Worlds*. Aldershot, Ashgate, 2005.
[22] Slavica Ranković, 'The Temporality of the (Immanent) Saga: Tinkering with Formulas.' *Dating the Sagas: Reviews and Revisions*, ed. Else Mundal, Copenhagen, Museum Tusculanum Press, 2013, 149–94, 184.
[23] See generally Kristján Eldjárn, *Kuml og Haugfé*, 2nd ed., rev. Adolf Friðriksson. Reykjavik, Mál og menning, 2000.
[24] See e.g. Gísli Sigurðsson, *Túlkun Íslendingasagna í ljósi munnlegrar hefðar: Tilgáta um aðferð*. Reykjavik, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 2002, 129–134.

representations of particular characters which appear across texts or to consider all the sagas recording events in particular geographical areas, such as Vínland and the Eastfjords.[25] His approach has largely been to assume that textual differences represent variants in oral versions of stories. His choice of Icelandic sagas set in the east of the country (*Droplaugarsona saga*, *Fljótsdœla saga*, *Vápnfirðinga saga*, and *Gunnars saga Þiðrandabana*) usefully raises a flag in that these narratives rarely draw on *Landnámabók*; it serves as a useful reminder that so much of the debate about saga origins has been shaped by texts set in western Iceland which have lengthy sections on colonisation. Many of this latter group are the ones which have formed part of the translated canon as well—and with which English-speakers have become most familiar (notably *Laxdœla saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga*).

Undoubtedly, a large contributor to this change in the balance of scholarship has been the growing influence of scholars who have worked comparatively or drawn inspiration from work on oral traditions elsewhere. Gísli himself takes inspiration from a nexus of scholars whose approaches have been informed by the work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord, who studied performers of oral epic poetry in the Balkans in the first half of the twentieth century. Carol Clover's article 'The Long Prose Form' has a broad geographical scope and has significantly impacted saga scholars, arguably achieving what Clover had hoped Jónas Kristjánsson would.[26] In her article, Clover sought to answer one of the fundamental questions for scholars wishing to argue for a vibrant oral tradition in Iceland; namely, by trying to find evidence in multiple other cultures for the kind of lengthy prose narrative traditions which might anticipate the written sagas. She came to the conclusion that no such lengthy, unified narratives were actually performed in a single sitting in any culture.

Instead, Clover found that, whether in prose or poetry, short narratives, that are performed as individual pieces, much like the sub-units of sagas which scholars have referred to as *þættir* (sg. *þáttr*), or 'strands', can exist. Essentially arguing for a nuanced version of what was once known as *þáttr*-theory, the notion that sagas

[25] For characters, see Gísli Sigurðsson, *Túlkun Íslendingasagna*, 129–191 and 'The Immanent Saga of Guðmundr ríki.' *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Studies in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, eds. Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop, and Tarrin Wills, Turnhout, 2007, 201–18; for Vínland, see *Túlkun Íslendingasagna*, 251–300 and 'The Quest for Vinland in Saga Scholarship.' *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga*, eds. William W. Fitzhugh and Elisabeth I. Ward, Washington, National Museum of Natural History and Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000, 96–115; for the Eastfjords, see 'Aðrir áheyrendur—önnur saga? Um ólíkar frásagnir Vatnsdælu og Finnboga sögu af sömu atburðum.' *Skáldskaparmál* 3 (1994), 30–41 and *Túlkun Íslendingasagna*, 129–247.

[26] Carol J. Clover, 'The Long Prose Form.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 101 (1986), 10–39.

comprise separate parts which were combined by a literate author, Clover proposes that 'a whole saga existed at the preliterary stage not as a performed but as an immanent or potential entity, a collectively envisaged "whole" to which performed parts of *þættir* of various sizes and shapes were understood to belong, no matter what the sequence or the frequency of their presentation'.[27] Andersson and Gísli Sigurðsson, among others, have been influenced by Clover's study, even if we might now be more sceptical about the idea that *þættir* existed as independent narratives in exactly the form in which they now survive in writing.[28] Andersson sees Clover's idea as a significant rapprochement between opposing views, even if this flexible model might not answer the perennial question of how the longest of the *Íslendingasögur* could emerge so seemingly well-formed as soon as they appear on vellum.[29] Whatever form the oral traditions took, Andersson supposes that they likewise included the copious dialogue which characterize the written *Íslendingasögur*.[30]

At this point it is worth adding that no significant attempts have been made to develop particular theories about the performers of oral stories.[31] However, Slavica Ranković has suggested a new model of 'authorship' for the Íslendingasögur in the form of the 'distributed author'. In her words, 'the purposefully oxymoronic expression "distributed author" is chosen to account for both the process of distributed representation that is taking place in traditional art, and the simultaneous narrative coherence, the absence of the collage or patchwork forms'.[32] Usefully, she has also drawn attention to the rather romantic views of Serbian storytellers which have influenced scholars studying the literature of Iceland and elsewhere. It appears that Parry and Lord, the recorders and interviewers of early twentieth-century

[27] Clover, 'Icelandic Family Sagas,' 34.
[28] The *þáttr*-theory per se has had far less discussion in recent decades, although the *þættir* still sometimes get special treatment as if there were a separate literary genre; see Joseph Harris and Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, 'Short Prose Narrative (*þáttr*).' *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk, Oxford, Blackwell, 2005, 462–78. The rise (and fall) of the *þáttr* as a genre, particularly in Icelandic scholarship, has been traced by Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Life and Death of the Medieval Icelandic Short Story.' *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 112 (2013), 257–91.
[29] See also Theodore M. Andersson, *The Partisan Muse in the Early Icelandic Sagas (1200–1250)*. Islandica 55, Ithaca, Cornell University Library, 2012, 1–34, esp. 5–8, 32–34.
[30] Theodore M. Andersson, 'From Tradition to Literature in the Sagas.' *Oral Art Forms and their Passage into Writing*, eds. Else Mundal and Jonas Wellendorf, Copenhagen, Museum Tusculanum Press, 2008, 7–17, 11.
[31] See, however, a strong, recent case made for the ubiquity of skaldic verse composition, at least among men: Jonathan Grove, 'Skaldic Verse-Making in Thirteenth-Century Iceland: The Case of the Sauðafellsferðarvísur.' *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, 4 (2008), 85–131.
[32] Slavica Ranković, 'Who Is Speaking in Traditional Texts? On the *Distributed Author* of the Sagas of Icelanders and Serbian Epic Poetry.' *New Literary History* 38 (2007), 293–307, 300.

performers in the Balkans, did what so many anthropologists have done; they phrased their questions so as to get the answers they wanted. In doing so, they imagined the performers of ancient Greek heroic poetry in the mold of twentieth-century Serbian performers.[33] Nevertheless, as Clover has demonstrated, the broader idea of oral composition remains valid.[34]

The Growth of Íslendingasögur

Theodore M. Andersson's work has continued to range broadly over issues relating to the development of *Íslendingasögur*—not just in relation to the genre as a whole, but also in the more general context of prose-narrative writing in medieval Iceland, especially the *Íslendingasögur*'s most likely forebears, the *konungasögur* and the *Sturlunga saga* texts.[35] This has also led him to consider the relative and absolute composition dates and locations of particular *Íslendingasögur*. Andersson's 2006 book, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas (1180–1280)*, provides a clear exposition of his theory on the development of the genre and, thus, on composition dates of individual sagas and the nature of generic developments. This is one of a few recent studies to deal with this subject extensively.[36] This will therefore be used as a loose framework for a discussion of recent views of *Íslendingasögur* origins.

Andersson organises his chapter-by-chapter discussion of sagas by assumed dates of composition and, for *Íslendingasögur*, by their sharing of certain thematic properties. We know from Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók* that elite Icelanders were

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[33] Slavica Ranković, 'Managing the "Boss": Epistemic Violence, Resistance, and Negotiations in Milman Parry's and Nikola Vujnović's *Pričanja* with Salih Ugljanin.' *Oral Tradition* 27, 1 (2012), 5–66 [http://journal.oraltradition.org/issues/27i/rankovic].

[34] A novel process of composition has been proposed for *Þiðreks saga*, a mid-thirteenth century *riddarasaga*/*fornaldasaga*. Susanne Kramarz-Bein, *Die Þiðreks saga im Kontext der altnorwegischen Literatur*. Beiträge zur Nordischen Philologie 33, Tübingen and Basel, A. Francke Verlag, 2002, speculates that German and Norwegian scholars at the court of King Hákon Hákonarson collaboratively composed this new text in Old Norse-Icelandic on the basis of German-language oral stories, i.e. not a written text about Dietrich von Bern. Cf. Theodore M. Andersson, 'Five Saga Books for a New Century: A Review Essay.' *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 103 (2004), 505–27, 510–14.

[35] Perhaps of most note is Andersson arguement that the closer similarity of style between *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*, the commonly-agreed earliest saga in the *Sturlunga saga* compilation, and most 'classical' *Íslendingasögur* is the result of the former's gestation in oral tradition, Andersson, *The Partisan Muse*, 1–34, esp. 19–27. The shorter *Sturlunga saga* texts on late twelfth-century events similarly predate, and perhaps served as models for, the 'chronicle style' *Íslendingsögur*, *Vatnsdœla saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga*, as texts which centre on the conflicts of particular *goðar*, Theodore M. Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas (1180–1280*). Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2006, 153–54.

[36] See however Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland's Medieval Literature*. Reykjavik, Hið íslenzka bókmenntafélag, 1988, for a thorough survey and Vésteinn Ólason, *Dialogues with the Viking Age*. Reykjavik, Heimskringla, 1998, on *Íslendingasögur*.

familiar with the history of Norwegian kings and their relations with Iceland, but it is from 1180–1200 that we have extensive textual evidence. Within this timeframe, the Benedictine monk Oddr Snorrason at Þingeyrar wrote a Latin saga of Óláfr Tryggvason, of which we have surviving Old Norse-Icelandic translations. Andersson emphasises the importance of Oddr's named informants.[37] Notwithstanding isolated arguments for lost versions of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, this much now seems uncontroversial. Recent focus on *Morkinskinna*—in itself notable—also shows a shift in views.[38] Ármann Jakobsson's 2002 monograph on this synoptic history of Norwegian kings argues for the whole text being the creative work of a single author rather than a composite work which, in particular, drew on independent *þættir* about Icelanders. Ármann argues that its inspiration and the interlacing of *þættir* both derive from western European models rather than a native tradition of telling/writing short tales. This also has the significant implication that 'foreign influence' reached the Norwegian court, and Iceland, earlier than has often been supposed.[39]

Andersson's first chapter on *Íslendingasögur* (ch. 3, 'Creating Personalities') discusses early sagas which exhibit the development of an interest in character that he does not see in earlier *konungasögur*.[40] He sees all of these texts (*Víga-Glúms saga*, *Reykdæla saga*, *Fóstbræðra saga*, *Heiðarvíga saga*, and *Gísla saga Súrssonar*) as being first written in the period 1200–1220—i.e. after the writing of the earliest versions of sagas about Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson but before the writing of other royal biographical sagas. In the cases of most of the *Íslendingasögur*, Andersson supports or further develops pre-existing arguments for what, in the last few decades, have come to be seen as the *earliest* conceivable dates for these sagas. Before discussing the finer points of debates where it is still supposed that *Íslendingasögur* were the product of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, it is salutary to remember that some of them only survive as fragments before 1500, while

[37] Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, 21–28.
[38] A first complete translation into English has been published, *Morkinskinna. The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030–1157),* trans. Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade. Islandica 51, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2000. The major manuscript is late thirteenth-century but probably based on an earlier one from the early decades of the century; see pages 5–6. For a similar view and overview of older scholarship, see 11–14.
[39] Ármann Jakobsson, *Staður í nýjum heimi: Konungasagan* Morkinskinna. Reykjavik, Háskólaútgáfan, 2002. See also Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging:* Morkinskinna *and Icelandic Identity, c. 1220*, trans. Fredrik Heinemann. Odense, University Press of Southern Denmark, 2014.
[40] Theodore M. Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*.

others only exist at all in post-Reformation manuscripts.[41] However, a cautious argument has been made for twelfth-century origins using *Laxdæla saga* as an example. Based on the study of oral traditions elsewhere, the contents of supposedly thirteenth-century *Íslendingasögur* do not reflect the thirteenth-century socio-political circumstances in the way that they 'should', and this might mean that they reflect earlier, otherwise unrecorded power relations.[42]

Andersson, then, has long argued for 'early' dates for *Víga-Glúms saga*, *Reykdæla saga* (both pre-1220), and *Ljósvetninga saga* (1220s), each of which have small overlaps in content and are generally considered to have been written in or around Eyjafjörður in northern Iceland, most likely at the monastery at Munkaþverá.[43] Andersson imagines 'a burst of literary activity in Eyjafjörður', which included the writing of *Morkinskinna*.[44] There is consensus on the geographical origins of these narratives, but for *Víga-Glúms saga* Richard North has proposed that Sighvatr Sturluson, apparently the pre-eminent political figure in Eyjafjörður from c. 1217 until his death in 1238, might have written a version of *Víga-Glúms saga*. North suggests this lost version was 'finished perhaps in the early to mid 1220s'. This was then expanded by a member of Sighvatr's household, even within Sighvatr's lifetime. North argues that Sighvatr would have wished to make a claim to an Eyjafjörður ancestry through Víga-Glúmr, the early owner of Munkaþverá, and where Sighvatr was buried; Sighvatr would also have seen the writing of the saga as a political tool to bolster his authority in response to his more powerful brother, Snorri.[45]

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[41] See, for example, Vésteinn Ólason, 'Family Sagas.' *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk, Oxford, Blackwell, 2005, 101–18, 114–16; Lethbridge, '"Hvorki glansar gull á mér / né glæstir stafir í línum"', 68–69. Lethbridge points out that *Fljótsdæla saga*, *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, and *Valla-Ljóts saga* are three sagas accepted as part of the canon of 35–40 texts which are not extant pre-1550; the iconic *Hrafnkels saga* exists in just one single pre-1500 leaf.

[42] Chris Callow, 'Reconstructing the Past in Medieval Iceland.' *Early Medieval Europe* 14, 3 (2006), 297–324.

[43] Andersson discusses *Ljósvetninga saga* in chapter 6 of *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas* separately from the other Eyjafjörður texts, preferring to discuss *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* immediately after considering later *konungasögur* in chapter 4. He sees *Egils saga* and *Ljósvetninga saga* as roughly contemporary texts written in the 1220s, Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, 109–10, 119; see also, for example, *Law and Literature in Medieval Iceland:* Ljósvetninga saga *and* Valla-Ljóts saga, trans. Theodore M. Andersson and William I. Miller. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1989, 78–84; Theodore M. Andersson, 'The Literary Prehistory of Eyjafjǫrðr.' *Samtíðarsögur II, Forprent: Níunda alþjóðlega fornsagnaþingið*, Reykjavik, 1994, 16–30; Andersson, *The Partisan Muse*, 167–70.

[44] Theodore M. Andersson, 'Redating *Fóstbræðra saga*.' *Dating the Sagas: Reviews and Revisions*, ed. Else Mundal, Copenhagen, Museum Tusculanum Press, 2013, 55–76, 57.

[45] Richard North, 'Sighvatr Sturluson and the authorship of *Víga-Glúms saga*.' *Analecta Septentrionalia: Beiträge Zur Nordgermanischen Kultur- Und Literaturgeschichte*, eds. Wilhelm

Others have proposed later dates for all of Andersson's remaining early sagas. The text known as *Heiðarvíga saga* is in fact one whose early chapters were destroyed by the great fire of Copenhagen in 1728 and then (re)written from memory by Jón Ólafsson of Grunnavík, Árni Magnússon's assistant. This has not lessened anyone's willingness to speculate about its origins. Whereas Sigurður Nordal contends that the saga was early because of its awkward style, Andersson thinks it is likely to be early because its content 'marks the onset of the full-fledged feud saga and could very well be understood to represent the full blossoming of the native saga'.[46] Bjarni Guðnason adduces novel arguments for the saga being an extended religious metaphor, something which he claimed would better suit a later thirteenth-century date.[47] Some feel that while there are now no winning arguments for an *early* date, there is no particular reason to believe that Christian writers' attitudes changed so significantly across the thirteenth century that a *later* date can be proved.[48]

Fóstbræðra saga has largely been dated on the grounds of its style, most often seen as relatively early but then famously argued to be late thirteenth-century by Jónas Kristjánsson.[49] It is fair to say that Jónas Kristjánsson's view 'is still neither universally accepted nor dismissed'.[50] Andersson considers it early because of affinities with the sub-group of *Íslendingasögur* commonly referred to as the *skáldasögur* (skald sagas). This group of biographical sagas about particular poets (*Kormáks saga*, *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds*, *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa*, and *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*), featuring skaldic verse attributed to them—consciously omitted by Andersson in this book—are also thought to be relatively early in origin (not least by him).[51]

Fóstbræðra saga presents particular conundra which are typical of many sagas when it comes to its date and origins. It survives both as an independent text and as recognisable episodes woven into the saga of St. Óláfr. It also features 'rather baroque

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Heizmann, Klaus Böldl, and Heinrich Beck, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2009, 256–80, at 271–78, quotation at 272.

[46] Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, 74.

[47] Bjarni Guðnason, *Túlkun Heiðarvígasögu.* Reykjavik, Bókmenntafræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, 1993.

[48] David A. H. Evans, 'Review of Bjarni Guðnason, *Túlkun Heiðarvígasögu*.' *Saga-Book* 24 (1997), 361–65; Alison Finlay, 'Two Borgfirðinga sögur: The Oldest or the Youngest *Íslendingasögur*.' *Sagas and Societies: International Conference at Borgarnes, Iceland, September 5–9*, eds. Stephanie Würth, Tõnno Jonuks, and Axel Kristinsson, [https://publikationen.uni-tuebingen.de/xmlui/handle/10900/46222].

[49] Jónas Kristjánsson, *Um Fóstbræðrasögu*. Reykjavik, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1972.

[50] Finlay, 'Two Borgfirðinga sögur,' 2.

[51] Andersson, 'Redating *Fóstbræðra saga*'.

physiological descriptions that clash with the standard saga style and the saga as a whole', which may be interpolations and may show the author's knowledge of medical scholarship.[52] It also mentions just one externally dateable event later than the eleventh century, referring to panelling in a hall which existed in the time of Bishop Magnús Gizurarson of Skálholt, i.e. 1216–37.[53] The saga contains many verses attributed to, and about, one of the two foster-brothers of the saga's name, Þormóðr Bersason. Typically these verses are quoted after the action has been recounted in prose. For Andersson, the separateness of each episode in the saga—its 'block structure'—marks it as being akin to *Víga-Glúms saga* and *Reykdœla saga*, and thus early. This saga and the others discussed so far lack the quality of 'psychology, characterization, and thematic thrust' which later sagas achieve.[54]

The 'terse and spare'[55] *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, the saga of the eponymous outlaw from the West Fjords, is notable for still attracting several author attributions in recent years, all of whom would have written the saga post-1220. As Emily Lethbridge, who wrote a PhD dissertation on the redactions of *Gísla saga*, notes, this is another saga for which it is difficult to identify an author as we have two different versions of it, neither of them original.[56] She further notes that several authors and sponsors have been suggested for *Gísla saga* in recent decades: Sturla Bárðarson, a deacon from the West Fjords alive in the first half of the thirteenth century,[57] and Snorri Sturluson as either the first person to commit the saga to write it or else rewrite it.[58]

A potentially more flexible idea for *Gísla saga*, that of sponsorship by one of two Sturlungar leaders based in the west of Iceland (Sturla Sighvatsson, d. 1238 or Þórðr kakali Sighvatsson, d. 1256), has been proposed by Axel Kristinsson. Ultimately he too suggests 1242–45 as a precise timeframe because of *Sturlunga saga*'s presentation of politics in the West Fjords. He suggests that 'Gísla saga would have served his [Þórðr kakali's] political purpose to unite the people of the area behind him. After 1245 his power-base was much wider and attempts to strengthen the resolve of his

[52] Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, 69.
[53] Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, 69.
[54] Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, 73.
[55] Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, 78.
[56] Emily Lethbridge, 'Dating the Sagas and *Gísla saga Súrssonar*.' *Dating the Sagas: Reviews and Revisions*, ed. Else Mundal, Copenhagen, Museum Tusculanum Press, 2013, 77–113.
[57] Aðalgeir Kristjánsson, 'Var Sturla Bárðarson höfundur *Gíslasögu*?' *Skáldskaparmál* 2 (1992), 107–23.
[58] Lethbridge, 'Dating the Sagas', 102.

followers would probably not focus on such a small part of the country'.[59] Axel has made similar arguments about the intention of Iceland's literate elite to use various *Íslendingasögur* to give a sense of regional identity to particular polities, often associated with the Sturlungar (*Egils saga*, *Hænsa-Þóris saga*, *Gunnlaugs saga Ormstungu*, *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa* (as anti-Sturlungar), *Gísla saga*, and *Ljósvetninga saga*).[60] The impact of what amounts to being a new holistic theory of saga origins still remains to be seen.[61] It should also be noted that Tommy Danielsson sees *Gísla saga* as a text which was 'an ongoing oral saga […] continuously told (at least in the West Fjords)', but which was capable of resisting most influence from stories about the local outlaw Aron Hjörleifsson (d. 1255), the subject of *Arons saga*.[62]

Egils saga Skallagrímssonar is the next text Andersson deals with, and one which he thinks was written 'not too long after 1220'.[63] *Egils saga* is notable as the saga for which we have the oldest manuscript, the so-called theta fragment, dated to c. 1250 (AM 162 A θ fol). There continues to be far less debate about the date of *Egils saga* than almost any other saga. This has been the case for a long time, not least because many scholars have accepted that Snorri Sturluson (d. 1241) wrote it; debates about *Egils saga* have been as much about whether Snorri wrote *Heimskringla* or *Egils saga* first, rather than whether he wrote at all.[64]

Others, Andersson among them, are unwilling to associate Snorri with *Egils saga* 'no matter how likely' that may be.[65] At the same time, new and not so new reasons have been found to connect Snorri and Egill. Axel Kristinsson sees the greater extent

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[59] Axel Kristinsson, 'The Revered Outlaw: Gísli Súrsson and the Sturlungs.' *CAHD Papers* 4 (2009), [http://axelkrist.com/CAHD/issue_4.pdf].

[60] Axel Kristinsson, 'Sagas and Politics in 13th-Century Borgarfjörður. *Sagas and Societies: International Conference at Borgarnes, Iceland, September 5–9, 2002*, eds. Stefanie Würth, Tõnno Jonuks, and Axel Kristinsson, [https://publikationen.uni-tuebingen.de/xmlui/handle/10900/46198]; Axel Kristinsson, 'Lord and Literature: The Icelandic sagas as Political and Social Instruments.' *Scandinavian Journal of History* 28 (2003), 1–17.

[61] Axel's ideas have been neglected in recent syntheses, e.g. Kristel Zilmer, 'From Dilemma to Diversity: Traditional and Modern Approaches to Medieval Icelandic Sagas.' *Interlitteraria* 14 (2009), 68–83. Lethbridge is the only author to cite it in *Dating the Sagas*.

[62] Tommy Danielsson, 'On the Possibility of an Oral Background,' 38.

[63] Andersson, *The Partisan Muse*, 171. Andersson is less explicit in dating the saga in *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, 109–10.

[64] Jonna Louis-Jensen, 'Dating the Archetype: *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*.' *Dating the Sagas: Reviews and Revisions*, ed. Else Mundal, Copenhagen, Museum Tusculanum Press, 2013, 133–47, 139–40; Clover, 'Icelandic Family Sagas,' 245–46. See Vésteinn Ólason, *Dialogues with the Viking Age*, 252, n. 38 for further references.

[65] Quote from Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, 110; Lethbridge, 'Dating the Sagas'.

of Egill's father's land-claim in *Egils saga* as a sign of Snorri's political self-aggrandisement as the owner of their farm at Borg in Borgarfjörður.[66] Torfi H. Tulinius has suggested that Snorri, novelist-like, wrote *Egils saga* as a Christian allegory (with Egill at times a Cain- and David-like figure) and, at the same time, as a kind of autobiography with a particular interest in the nature of the conflict between brothers (such as Snorri had with his brother Sighvatr and Sighvatr's son Sturla).[67] Torfi also posits continental influences, expanding on others' arguments for Snorri having borrowed ideas directly from Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain*.[68] At least two reviewers have been as sceptical about these readings of the text as others have been about some of Bjarni Guðnason's views on *Heiðarvíga saga* mentioned above.[69]

It is refreshing to see that the explicit or implicit acceptance of Snorri as the author of *Egils saga* has been challenged using the very linguistic tools which have seemingly cemented this view. In the 1960s, Peter Hallberg applied statistical methods to investigate affinities between particular sagas. One of his most vaunted conclusions is that the same person must have written *Egils saga* and *Heimskringla*; they featured similar percentages of the verb 'hitta'/'hittask' (over 75%) as opposed to its synonym 'finna'/'finnask'. A closer look at the linguistic data and the constituents of manuscripts supports exactly the opposite conclusion, according to Jonna Louis-Jensen. Only the version of *Óláfs saga helga* incorporated into *Heimskringla* shares the same percentage of 'hitta'/'finna' with *Egils saga*; the rest of *Heimskringla* is very different.[70] If faith can be placed in such analyses—an issue which has been a major concern since Hallberg's publications—then Louis-Jensen's work should do much to weaken the still nineteenth-century view of Snorri as the author of these two texts.[71] He, or someone else, was at most the author or editor of either *Egils saga* and a version of *Óláfs saga*, or else parts of *Heimskringla*.

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[66] Axel Kristinsson, 'Sagas and Politics', 5–6.
[67] Torfi H. Tulinius, *Skáldið í skriftinni*. Reykjavik, Hið íslenzka bókmenntafélag, 2004; Torfi H. Tulinius, *The Enigma of Egill: The Saga, the Viking Poet, and Snorri Sturluson*, trans. Victoria Cribb. Ithaca, Cornell University Library, 2015.
[68] Torfi H. Tulinius, *Skáldið í skriftinni*, 99–101; Bjarni Einarsson, *Litterære forudsætninger for Egils saga*. Reykjavik, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1975, made the most extensive efforts to trace Snorri's possible sources.
[69] Ármann Jakobsson, 'Review of Torfi Tulinius, *Skáldið í skriftinni: Snorri Sturluson og* Egils saga.' *Speculum* 81 (2006), 1266–67; Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Review of Torfi Tulinius, *Skáldið í skriftinni: Snorri Sturluson og* Egils saga.' *Saga-Book* 30 (2006), 122–24.
[70] Jonna Louis-Jensen, 'Dating the Archetype.' The arguments are much more detailed than there is space to discuss here.
[71] Louis-Jensen cites, for example, the inclusion of *Egils saga* in the 2002 edition of Snorri's writing sponsored by Iceland's parliament; 'Dating the Archetype,' 139.

The latter half of Andersson's book covers *Laxdœla saga* (ch. 7, 'Gilding an Age'), *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Vatnsdœla saga* (ch. 8, 'Two Views of Icelandic History'), *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*, *Bandamanna saga* and *Hrafnkels saga* (ch. 9, 'Pondering Justice'), and finishes with *Njáls saga* (ch. 10, 'Demythlogizing the Tradition'). There is nothing particularly striking about Andersson's organisation here or the implications for these sagas' dates. Indeed, as regards dating, most of these texts have not been the subjects of significant or controversial studies of their provenances. Most remain safely bracketed as mid- to late-thirteenth century in origin and written close to where their action takes place. Andersson sees *Laxdœla saga* as establishing 'something akin to a school of saga writing, best represented by *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Vatnsdœla saga*'—three texts which give detailed accounts of colonisation and were possibly written to revive the writing of regional history.[72] Andersson also believes that *Vatnsdœla saga* shows 'some of the same taste for style and grandeur' as *Laxdœla saga* but does not elaborate.[73]

In fact, *Laxdœla saga* provides an excellent case study for the purposes of this discussion because it is a long text, at 78 chapters the second longest *Íslendingasaga* after *Njáls saga*. It was the subject of arguably one of the most bookprosist studies of a saga in Rolf Heller's *Die Laxdœla saga* (1976)[74] with any number of proposed examples of *rittengsl* still occasionally being suggested, most of them seen as borrowings from *Laxdœla saga*.[75] The close correspondence between *Laxdœla saga*'s colonisation narrative with a part of *Landnámabók*, and with its possible loans to *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, are also of interest. The western Icelandic setting has suggested a potential connection with members of the Sturlungar and with the monastery at Helgafell.[76] Snorri Sturluson and the brothers Sturla Þórðarson and Óláfr hvítaskáld used also to be proposed as authors of this saga.[77] Ármann Jakobsson has argued for the saga being an attempt to give the elite of Dalir royal attributes in terms

[72] Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, 207.
[73] Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, 154–55.
[74] Rolf Heller, *Die Laxdœla saga: Die literarische Schöpfung eines Isländers des 13. Jahrhunderts.* Abhandlungen der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, Philologisch-Historishe Klasse 65, 1, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1976.
[75] Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, *Sögugerð*, 130, 134–35, 163, 164, contends that *Laxdœla saga* borrows from an 'old' version of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* for its account of Iceland's conversion but that both Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* and the anonymous *Kristni saga* are younger and dependent on *Laxdœla saga*. Cf. Gísli Sigurðsson for a more sceptical picture on links between *Laxdœla saga* and sagas set in the east, *Túlkun Íslendingasagna*, esp. 191, 245.
[76] Callow, 'Reconstructing the Past,' 308–11 for a role in the saga's transmission for the descendants of the Helgafell abbot Ketill Hermundarson (d. 1197).
[77] Clover, 'Icelandic Family Sagas (*Íslendingasögur*).', 245–46.

of their ancestry, physique, and behaviour.[78] In a similar vein, Daniel Sävborg points out how the saga's language and interest in courtly love is evidence its uniqueness, sitting at the intersection between *Íslendingasögur* and *riddarasögur*.[79]

Last, but not least, *Laxdæla saga*'s focus on at least two key female characters, Unnr in djúpúðga Ketilsdóttir and Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir, has led to it being described as a saga about 'strong' women and about Guðrún in particular; an anonymous female author has been suggested many times.[80] Elizabeth Ashman Rowe has highlighted *Laxdæla saga*'s interest in female characters by noting the way the author of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* reshapes its borrowings from *Laxdæla saga* to concentrate on male characters.[81] Sometimes the argument for female authorship seems almost essentialist, not far removed from Robert Kellogg's 1973 comment that the saga 'draws upon a peculiarly feminine wisdom'. Yet there is something unique among the *Íslendingasögur* that *Laxdæla* draws so extensively on the motifs and vocabulary of courtly literature.[82] The most significant suggestion, however, has been a new author attribution. Guðrún Nordal proposes that the saga's patron or author might be 'Helga Þórðardóttir, Ingibjörg Sturludóttir or other women in their company'—the first two of which are the wife and daughter, respectively, of Sturla Þórðarson. These women had experience visiting the Norwegian court, lived at Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir's farm Sælingsdalstunga, and would have had no less knowledge or means to write or commission the saga than their male relatives.[83]

The relative dates of *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Laxdæla saga* have continued to attract comment, but most schoolars accept that *Eyrbyggja saga* is later because it mentions *Laxdæla saga*—or, perhaps, *a* version of *Laxdæla saga*. Andersson also believes the *Eyrbyggja saga* author knew a written version of *Gísla saga*, although a shared oral

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[78] Ármann Jakobsson, 'Konungasagan *Laxdæla*.' *Skírnir* 172 (1998), 357–83.
[79] Daniel Sävborg, 'Kärleken i *Laxdæla saga*—höviskt och sagatypiskt.' *Alvíssmál* 11 (2004), 75–104.
[80] This an idea with a long history. See e.g. Njörður P. Njarðvík, 'Laxdœla saga—en tidskritik?' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 86 (1971), 72–81, 81. Helga Kress wrote the most famous case, "Mjǫk mun þér samstaft þykkja": Um sagnahefð og kvenlega reynslu í *Laxdæla sögu*.' *Konur skrifa til heiðurs Önnu Sigurðardóttur*, eds. Valborg Bentsdóttir et al., Reykjavik, Sögufélag, 1980, 97–109. See also Judith Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age*. Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 1991, 199, 200; Robert Cook, 'Women and Men in *Laxdæla saga*.' *Skáldskaparmál* 2 (1992), 34–59; Loren Auerbach, 'Female Experience and Authorial Intention in *Laxdæla saga*.' *Saga-Book* 25 (1998), 30–52, 45–46.
[81] Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, 'The Adaptation of Laxdæla Saga in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*.' *Leeds Studies in English* 36 (2005), 157–74, 167–68.
[82] Auerbach, 'Female Experience', cites Kellogg, 45. See also Sävborg, 'Kärleken'.
[83] Guðrún Nordal, 'Skaldic Citation and Settlement Stories as Parameters for Saga Dating.' *Dating the Sagas: Reviews and Revisions*, ed. Else Mundal, Copenhagen, Museum Tusculanum Press, 2013, 195–212, 208–10.

tradition is still thought possible.[84] However, the editor of a recent edition of *Eyrbyggja saga* sees *Eyrbyggja* as later, the supposed courtly themes in *Laxdæla* not being seen as a 'late' feature.[85] Torfi H. Tulinius has made arguments for *Eyrbyggja saga* being from either the 1230s or c. 1253 because of its concern for issues surrounding ecclesiastical independence, as manifested in the episodes about the hauntings at the farm of Fróðá. This, he suggests, reflects either the wider power struggle between Bishop Guðmundr Arason of Hólar (d. 1237) and the Sturlungar or else the sudden adoption of canon law at the Alþing in 1253 that enabled the powerful Gizurr Þorvaldsson to remarry and make his sons legitimate.[86] As Torfi admits, there is nothing new in these dates, although it is worth remarking that no one besides Einar Ól. Sveinsson has claimed as early a date as the 1220s, nor that Sturla Þórðarson might be the author and hence date the saga to beyond 1265.[87]

Vatnsdæla saga, like many of the shorter *Íslendingasögur*, gets only sporadic scholarly attention.[88] It is, however, distinctive. It has a fairly tight geographical focus on the small valley of Vatnsdalr in Húnavatnssýsla, following the fortunes of a local *goði*, Ingimundr. Ingimundr is on good terms with the Norwegian king and is reluctant to go to Iceland, thus giving an unusually positive spin on Iceland's relations with the Norwegian king. Ingimundr and his family keep order in Vatnsdalr, driving

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[84] Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, 150. Lethbridge, 'Dating the Sagas,' argues against *rittengsl*, esp. 96–97.

[85] Forrest S. Scott, *Eyrbyggja saga: The Vellum Tradition*. Editiones Arnamagnæanæ A18, Copenhagen, C.A. Reitzel, 2003, 19*–27*.

[86] Torfi H. Tulinius, 'Dating *Eyrbyggja saga*: The Value of "Circumstantial" Evidence for Determining the Time of Composition of Sagas about Early Icelanders.' *Dating the Sagas: Reviews and Revisions*, ed. Else Mundal, Copenhagen, Museum Tusculanum Press, 2013, 115–32, 127–28. See also his 'Guðs lög í ævi og verkum Snorra Sturlusonar.' *Ný Saga* 8 (1996), 31–40 and 'Political Echoes: Reading *Eyrbyggja saga* in Light of Contemporary Conflicts.' *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Studies in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, eds. Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop, and Tarrin Wills, Turnhout, Brepols, 2007, 49–62. Klaus Böldl, *Eigi einhamr: Beiträge zum Weitbild der* Eyrbyggja *und anderer Isländersagas*. Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde 48, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2005, 24–26, suggests 1255–65 as possible dates of composition but not on particularly incisive grounds, essentially arguing that it had to be before Iceland's fuller incorporation into the Norwegian state in the mid-1260s.

[87] *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslenzk fornrit IV, eds. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, Reykjavik, Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1935, lv. Peter Hallberg suggests Sturla Þórðarson as the author on the basis of other works alleged to have been his, '*Íslendinga saga* och *Egla*, *Laxdœla*, *Eyrbyggja*, *Njála*, *Grettla*: Ett språktest.' *Maal og Minne* 3, 4 (1965), 89–105. For the theory that the Sturlungar wrote the saga and based their portrayal of its most significant character, Snorri goði, on Snorri Sturluson, see Helgi Þorláksson, 'Snorri goði og Snorri Sturluson.' *Skírnir* 166 (1992), 295–320.

[88] Clover, 'Icelandic Family Sagas,' barely mentions it, 267–8. Vésteinn Ólason, '*Vatnsdœla saga*.' *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, eds. Phillip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf, New York, Garland, 1993, 689 has probably the shortest bibliography for any saga in this encyclopedia. Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, cites no modern secondary scholarship on it. Bernadine McCreesh recalls earlier *Íslendingasögur* scholarship, suggesting that things in the saga are 'arranged in fives', 'The Structure of *Vatnsdœla saga*.' *Saga-Book* 34 (2010), 75–86, 76.

out or defeating various malefactors. Andersson characterizes this as 'a facile opposition of generalized virtue and generalized villainy'.[89] Moreover, *Landnámabók* contains a précis of the saga's entire plot, which seems to suggest that it predates the *Sturlubók* version of *Landnámabók*.

Since it was published in the *Íslenzk fornrit* series in 1939, *Vatnsdœla*'s date has rarely been discussed; it is considered pre-1280, but not by much.[90] Gísli Sigurðsson has used its similarity of content with *Finnboga saga ramma* to argue for the flexibility of oral tradition.[91] Þór Hjaltalín, a historian and archaeologist by training, has suggested that the (local) author of *Vatnsdœla saga* drew inspiration from what, even in the thirteenth century, would have been ruined farms. Excavation has proved that there were abandoned structures at some farms mentioned in the saga well before the thirteenth century. Þór also sees the saga as authored by someone from the Vatnsdalur farm of Hvammr, the locally-dominant farm by the 1240s, who imposed their views of the present onto the past. This theorized author gives a positive or powerful role to people associated with Hof (which Þór equates with Hvammr) in opposition to 'bad' places which could be linked to the Haukdœlir family, the mid-thirteenth century enemies of Hvammr.[92] This is one of the most interesting ideas to have emerged about any *Íslendingasaga* in recent decades, but it is built on particular readings of the saga's own action and the idiosyncratic account of the thirteenth century in *Sturlunga saga*.

Andersson groups together *Hænsa-Þóris saga*, *Bandamanna saga*, and *Hrafnkels saga* as texts which question the abilities or virtues of Iceland's ruling elite. *Hænsa-Þóris saga* centres on the dispute between the local leader Blund-Ketill, who wants to buy hay on behalf of his tenants, and the trader Hænsa-Þórir, who not only refuses to sell to Blund-Ketill, but also kills him and his household by burning down their home. The dispute continues between Blund-Ketill's son and his ally Þórðr gellir against Hænsa-Þórir's side, abetted by the *goði* Tungu-Oddr. The upshot of the saga, Þórðr gellir's legal struggle against Tungu-Oddr, is recounted in *Íslendingabók* as being the

[89] Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, 161.
[90] Vésteinn Ólason, '*Vatnsdœla saga*'; Þór Hjaltalín, 'The Historic Landscape of the Saga of the People of Vatnsdalur: Exploring the Saga Writer's Use of the Landscape and Archaeological Remains to Serve Political Interests.' *Medieval Archaeology* 53 (2009), 243–70, 247.
[91] Gísli Sigurðsson, 'Aðrir áheyrendur—önnur saga?' 30–41. Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, *Sögugerð*, 98, places *Vatnsdœla saga* within a chain of literary connections, making it later than a lost Icelandic version of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*.
[92] Þór Hjaltalín, 'The Historic Landscape of the Saga'.

reason for the development of Iceland's system of regional courts. This fact, which used to invoke discussions of *rittengsl* and a preference for *Íslendingabók's* earlier, 'correct' version, has barely been explored in recent decades. Perhaps predictably, *Hænsa-Þóris saga* is another text for which Gísli Sigurðsson has suggested oral origins, but in particular, he has suggested that elements of the saga show resemblances to mythological stories, including Hænsa-Þórir's role as a Loki-like mischief-maker, something attributable to the living oral tradition which underpinned the saga.[93] Otherwise, the scholarship on *Hænsa-Þóris saga*, notable for being part of move towards the anthropological analysis of sagas in the 1980s and 1990s, has concerned itself with the mechanisms and morality of exchange.[94]

Bandamanna saga also tends to slip below the scholarly radar.[95] As a satire, it is odd, sending up the greed and envy of the eight well-to-do men (*höfðingjar*) who oppose the corruption of Ófeigr, the saga's hero. Ófeigr acts to protect and aid his son Oddr, who has risen to become a *goði*, and is so successful that he facilitates the marriage of Oddr to the daughter of Gellir Þorkelsson (presumed owner of the major farm of Helgafell in the west). Andersson's later thirteenth-century dating of this saga is conventional, although in passing, Guðrún Nordal has placed it within a group of early fourteenth-century *Íslendingasögur*.[96] Most critics probably date the fuller *Möðruvallabók* version as opposed to the shorter, fifteenth-century *Konungsbók* version, but this is often left unsaid. The *Konungsbók* version, according to one of the few recent commentators on the manuscripts, 'contains certain details that seem to be more original than […] in Möðruvallabók'.[97] As is still true for so many *Íslendingasögur*, Stephanie Würth has advised that more attention be paid to the reception of *Bandamanna saga*, in this case because of the potentially changing resonances of its legal content.[98]

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[93] Gísli Sigurðsson, *Túlkun Íslendingasagna*, 318–26.
[94] Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, 165.
[95] See, however, Paul E. Durrenberger and Jonathan Wilcox, 'Humor as a Guide to Social Change.' *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*, ed. Gísli Pálsson, Enfield Lock, Hisarlik Press, 1992, 111–23.
[96] Guðrún Nordal, 'Skaldic Citations and Settlement Stories as Parameters for Saga Dating.' *Dating the Sagas: Reviews and Revisions*, ed. Else Mundal, Copenhagen, Museum Tusculanum Press, 2013, 195–212, 200.
[97] Hallvard Magerøy, '*Bandamanna saga*.' *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, eds. Phillip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf, New York, Garland, 1993, 34–35, 35.
[98] Stephanie Würth, 'Dialogizität in der Bandamanna saga.' *Studien zur Isländersagas: Festschrift für Rolf Heller*, eds. Heinrich Beck and Else Ebel, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2000, 301–22. The wider issue of the degree of variation between manuscripts has been addressed by the 'Breytileiki Njálu' project

Hrafnkels saga is the third of Andersson's shorter sagas which show authors playing with and questioning convention. This saga was the famous exemplum of Sigurður Nordal's theories on authorship and saga origins, then the subject of a significant rejoinder by Óskar Halldórsson in 1976, and has continued to attract attention.[99] Tommy Danielsson has argued for the text's oral origins in a book-length study with a similar outlook to that of Gísli Sigurðsson, arguing for oral traditions but not for an oral saga.[100] While agnosticism over a scribe or author often accompanies scholars' predilections for oral tradition, Danielsson, sceptical about the saga containing hidden messages about Christian conduct, nevertheless mentions Hermann Pálsson's theory that Brandr Jónsson (Bishop of Hólar, d. 1264) was the saga's author. Hermann argues in various places that Brandr, as known translator of texts from Latin (the story of Alexander the Great, *Alexanders saga*, the history of the Jews, *Gyðinga saga*, and *Stjórn III*), wrote *Hrafnkels saga* in the last year of his life. This idea was thoroughly debunked on a variety of grounds by Kirsten Wolf in 1991.[101]

The debate about the moral or political message of *Hrafnkels saga* continues, with points being voiced that are similar to those of thirty or more years ago. Robert D. Fulk, Theodore M. Andersson, Jan Geir Johansen, Richard Harris, Russell Poole, and, no doubt, others, have all published views on the return to local pre-eminence of the overbearing and murderous Hrafnkell and his ultimate defeat of Sámr, who has taken the unusual step of torturing Hrafnkell rather than killing him when he had the chance.[102] The mystery here is not so much that modern scholars find this text fascinating, but rather whether or not medieval audiences did: *Hrafnkels saga* survives in just one pre-Reformation manuscript.

Njáls saga is still seen as the crowning glory of the *Íslendingasögur*, a long, complex, and tragic story which seems to have been written after many admirable but

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(2012–2014), led by Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir at The Stofnun Árna Magnússonar for Icelandic Studies in Reykjavík. See the project website, [http://www.arnastofnun.is/page/breytileiki_njalu].

[99] Óskar Halldórsson, *Uppruni og þema Hrafnkels sögu*. Reykjavik, Hið íslenzka bókmenntafélag, 1976.

[100] Andersson, 'Five Saga Books', 519–24.

[101] Kirsten Wolf, 'On the Authorship of *Hrafnkels saga*.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 106 (1991), 104–24.

[102] Robert D. Fulk, 'The Moral System of *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*.' *Saga-Book* 22 (1986), 1–32; Theodore M. Andersson, 'Ethics and Politics in *Hrafnkels saga*.' *Scandinavian Studies* 60 (1988), 293–309; Jan Geir Johansen, 'The Hero of *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*.' *Scandinavian Studies* 67 (1995), 265–84; Russell Poole, 'Counsel in Action in *Hrafnkels saga*.' *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic literature. Sagas and the British Isles: Preprint Papers of the Thirteenth International Saga Conference, Durham and York, 6th–12th August, 2006*, 2, eds. John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick, Durham, Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006, 779–88.

not excellent sagas. Like *Egils saga*, there seems to be no appetite for questioning the long-supposed date of its composition, c. 1280. *Njáls saga* has been said to postdate the 1271 introduction of the legal text *Járnsíða* into Iceland because of its author's familiarity with some of *Járnsíða*'s contents.[103] Late thirteenth-century authors for *Njála* have continued to be suggested alongside some continued argument for *rittengsl*.[104] At 159 chapters, the saga is long, meaning that it was almost always copied on its own—the only such *Íslendingasaga*.[105] *Njáls saga*'s length might also be seen as a 'problem', whatever one's views about oral or written antecedents. As it is, it sits almost alone as a saga set mostly in the southern quarter of Iceland, and has its most obvious connections to *Laxdœla saga* (with whom it famously shares Hallgerðr langbrók Höskuldsdóttir).

Commentators still talk of shorter, component precursors to the written form of *Njáls saga*, of a **Gunnars saga* which centres on Gunnar of Hlíðarendi followed by a **Njáls saga*, the latter half of which focuses so much on Kári Sǫlmundarson that it might be thought of as **Kára saga*.[106] Not much recent attention has been paid to the structure of *Njáls saga*, but Guðrún Nordal highlights the variegated nature of the saga's manuscript tradition. In particular, she underscores the diverse origins of verses in the saga; some precede the saga's writing, while others in later manuscripts even seem to derive from the prose itself. The varied approaches to verse taken by different medieval redactors has meant that the verse of the 'X group', deriving from the early fourteenth century, has largely been absent from standard editions and translations.[107]

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[103] See, for example, Vésteinn Ólason, *Dialogues with the Viking Age*, 192.

[104] Gísli Sigurðsson, 'Njáls saga og hefðin sem áheyrendur þekktu.' *Rannsóknir í félagsvísindum XI. Erindi flutt á ráðstefnu í október 2010*, Reykjavik, 2010, http://skemman.is/stream/get/1946/6776/18432/3/59-66_GisliSigurdar_FELMANbok.pdf. An impressive list of possible authors appeared in a magazine article recently on the back of popular discussion, Páll Ásgeir Ásgeirsson, 'Hver er höfundur Njálu?' *Ský* 5 (2012), 16–20. For the idea of a lost *Landnámabók* lying behind part of the saga, see Baldur Hafstað, '*Egils saga*, *Njáls saga*, and the Shadow of *Landnáma*: The Work Methods of the Saga Writers.' *Sagnaheimur: Studies in Honour of Hermann Pálsson on his 80th Birthday, 26th May 2001*, eds. Ásdís Egilsdóttir and Rudolf Simek, Vienna, Fassbaender, 2001, 21–37.

[105] Lethbridge, '"Hvorki glansar gull á mér / né glæstir stafir í línum"', 57–63.

[106] William Ian Miller, *Why is Your Axe Bloody? A Reading of* Njáls saga. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, 15–23. Miller, like his sometime collaborator Andersson, is still willing to accept arguments for *rittengsl*, specifically on the saga's dependence on *Íslendingabók* for its account of the conversion, see page 179. As Miller argues, some of the saga's keenest students still react with bafflement to the saga's opening scene where mention is made of Hallgerðr's 'thief's eyes', an allusion to her eventual role in the downfall of her husband Gunnar (*Why is Your Axe Bloody?*, 22).

[107] Guðrún Nordal, 'The Dialogue between Audience and Text: The Variants in Verse Citations in *Njáls saga*'s Manuscripts.' *Oral Art Forms and their Passage into Writing*, eds. Else Mundal and Jonas Wellendorf, Copenhagen, Museum Tusculanum Press, 2008, 185–202, see 187–88 for the typology of verse origins.

Andersson names his chapter on *Njáls saga* 'Demythologizing the Tradition', a title underpinned by giving a strong role to the author as someone who is a 'satirist and caricaturist' with the theme of failure: '[F]ailed characters, failed institutions, the failed values of valor and wisdom, and, not least, the failed literary conventions of the saga, which are shown to be hollow or perverse'.[108] There are echoes here of the traditional historians' take on the collapse of the Icelandic commonwealth, and Andersson's take on the writing of *Íslendingasögur* by this stage is that authors have greater craft and the ability and willingness to shape the traditional material they work with.

If *Njáls saga* is still usually seen as the apogee of saga writing, then we still at least need to consider texts which are considered to be *Íslendingasögur* and were possibly composed in the fourteenth century. While the diversification of 'saga studies' has led to an expansion of research into other genres, arguably scholars have unfinished business with the texts often demeaned as 'post-classical'. There is, sadly, almost nothing to be discussed about these texts but at least there is a recognition that these texts signify not 'an impoverishment of taste, the dregs of tradition […] [but] a redirection of taste aimed at expressing a reordering of Icelandic cultural sensibilities'.[109] Many texts dated to the fourteenth century can be seen as having, as Vésteinn Ólason puts it, 'folkloristic motifs' and 'material reminiscent of amusing medieval exempla with their clear Christian message'.[110] *Grettis saga* is the best known of these sagas, but others include *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, *Finnboga saga ramma*, *Fljótsdæla saga*, *Flóamanna saga*, *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, *Kjalnesinga saga*, *Króka-Refs saga*, *Svarfdæla saga*, *Víglundar saga*, *Þórðar saga hreðu*, and *Þorskfirðinga saga*. In recent estimates, *Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfífls*, dated to the fifteenth century, is the last composed *Íslendingasaga*.[111] Many of these texts are

[108] Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, 203. The idea of failure is taken a step further by Ármann Jakobsson in 'Masculinity and Politics in *Njáls saga*.' *Viator* 38 (2007), 191–215.
[109] Martin Arnold, *The Post-Classical Icelandic Family Saga*, Scandinavian Studies vol. 9, Lewiston, Edwin Mellen Press, 2003, 243.
[110] Vésteinn Ólason, *Dialogues with the Viking Age*, 189–90. See also his 'The Fantastic Element in Fourteenth-Century Íslendingasögur.' *Gripla* 18 (2007), 7–22.
[111] Margrét Eggertsdóttir, 'Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfífl.' *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, eds. Phillip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf, New York, Garland, 1993, 250–51. *Fljótsdæla saga* had been supposed to be sixteenth-century, but a fourteenth-century date is proposed in Stefán Karlsson, 'Aldur *Fljótsdæla sögu*.' *Sagnaþing helgað Jónasi Kristjánssyni sjötugum 10. apríl 1994*, 2, eds. Gísli Sigurðsson, Guðrún Kvaran, and Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Reykjavik, Hið íslenzka bókmenntafélag, 1994, 743–59. There are yet unhappier texts such as *Valla-Ljóts saga*, which, although granted some discussion in recent decades, remains undateable, see Andersson and Miller, *Law and Literature*, generally, and 85 on the impossibility of dating.

short, some have lacuunae, and some have only relatively recently made it into a standard normalised version in the *Íslenzk fornrit* series.[112]

Some recent work on *Króka-Refs saga* and *Bárðar saga Snæfellsnesáss* are perhaps symptomatic of the diversity of texts and analyses they inspire. Króka-Refr is a typical 'kolbítr' (coal-biter)—a young man who is idle in his youth in Iceland—but once he travels abroad transforms into a warrior-hero. He moves to Greenland and then Norway before going on pilgrimage to Rome. Much of the saga strikes the modern reader familiar with other sagas as designed to amuse. Whereas Martin Arnold sees the whole saga as a parody of the genre via parodies of particular sagas (*Hrafnkels saga*, *Víga-Glúms saga*, and *Gísla saga*), Kendra Willson reads it as making fun of well-known motifs rather than particular sagas.[113] *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, another text set in the west of Iceland, has most recently been regarded as a mixture of material drawn from *Landnámabók* and of local oral tradition which often attempts to record what its author regarded as history. Its interest in what we would define as the supernatural would not have struck its author as incompatible with the folk etymologies of place-names being compiled. The lengthy *Grettis saga* is widely recognised as filled with antiquarian detail but features famous supernatural elements. Its origins have rarely been discussed in recent years, but a positive appraisal of the quality of its verse has been published.[114] Grettir's childhood and psychology have been of interest as part of a wider move by medievalists to investigate childhood.[115]

Overall, the research on the origins debate has been less voluminous since 1985 than it was in the preceding thirty years. There have been no major shifts in the framing of the debate. Opinions within it, however, remain diverse. One possible way

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[112] *Harðar saga*, Íslenzk fornrit XIII, eds. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, Reykjavík, Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1991 contains *Harðar saga*, *Þorskfirðinga saga*, and *Flóamanna saga*, for example.

[113] Arnold, *The Post-Classical Icelandic Family Saga*, 181-208; Kendra Willson, 'Króka-Refs saga as science fiction: technology, magic and the materialist hero.' *The fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic literature. Sagas and the British Isles. Preprint papers of the 13th international saga conference, Durham and York, 6-12 August 2006*, eds. John McKinnell, David Ashurst and Donata Kick, The Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Durham University, Durham, vol. 2, 2006, 1064-1070.

[114] Russell Poole, 'Lof en eigi háð? The Riddle of *Grettis saga* Verse 14.' *Saga-Book* 27 (2003), 23–47.

[115] Russell Poole, 'Myth, Psychology and Society in *Grettis saga*.' *Alvíssmál* 11 (2004), 3–16; Janice Hawes, 'The Monstrosity of Heroism: Grettir Ásmundarson as an Outsider.' *Scandinavian Studies* 80 (2008), 19–50; Chris Callow, 'Transitions to Adulthood in Early Icelandic Society.' *Children, Childhood and Society*, IAA Interdisciplinary Series 1, eds. Sally Crawford and Gillian Shepherd, Oxford, Archaeopress, 2007, 45–55; Carolyne Larrington, 'Awkward Adolescents: Male Maturation in Norse Literature.' *Youth and Age in the Medieval North*, ed. Shannon Lewis-Simpson, Leiden, Brill, 2008, 151–66.

to develop our understanding of the sagas in the next few years will be to continue the 'return to the manuscripts', signalled by projects such as *The Variance of Njáls saga*.[116]

[116] See note 98 above.