

the main part of the inscription has been written in the so-called "Lønruner" (secret runes). Only a small part is written in ordinary runes, and these runes — according to Moltke's preliminary interpretation — give the following sentence: "Bibra is the name of that maid who is sitting in the blue" (the last words with some uncertainty). Moltke points out that it is interesting that the inscription shows the use of a pre-Greenlandic runic alphabet, corresponding to the Norwegian which indicates a direct import from Norway, and there can be no doubt, Moltke says, that the inscription is very old, perhaps dating back to the time of the immigration. Another interesting find is a fragment of a sword — made of wood, most probably a boy's toy. Strangely enough swords have never before been found or even fragments of such weapons in the Norse settlements in Greenland. Now one shall of course be careful not to overrate this find — remembering it being most reasonably just a boy's toy — but in my opinion the type of this sword indicates a dating to the 11th century, perhaps its first half part. Another proof — and even a more safe one — that the Narssaq farm goes back to the early days of the settlement is arrived at by studying the numerous arrowheads. They are of clearly definite types, common in Norwegian finds from the later part of the Viking age, but — as something quite extraordinary — they have all been made of reindeer-antler. No doubt the Norse settlers in Greenland very soon learned to use this excellent material for arrowheads and other artefacts, not only because iron soon became scarce, but also because reindeer antler was actually just as fit for arrowheads as iron.

King Ólaf Goðröðarson

By Jón Jóhannesson.

In the Ynglingatal, which was composed in honour of a certain King Rögnvald, probably in the first quarter of the 10th century, the principal events of the life of this King Rögnvald's father, King Ólaf Goðröðarson of Vestfold in Norway, are outlined. Irish and Scottish annals and other authorities, on the other hand, mention a King Ólaf Goðröðarson (Amhlaeibh mac Godfraidh) of Dublin, who raided Ireland and Scotland in the years 853—871 and assumed chieftainship over an extensive state there. Historians were bound to notice the resemblance of the two names, but few of them have been able to conclude that they referred to the same man, because the chronology of the Kings of Vestfold as it is represented by Old Icelandic historians does not quite agree with the date of King Ólaf of Dublin according to British sources, but particularly, however, because the genealogies of the kings in question are traced in different ways. However, at least two scholars have been inclined to believe that the two names in question referred to the same king, i. e. Jan de Vries in [*Norsk*] *Historisk Tidsskrift*, V. Series, Vol. V, (1924), pp. 520—522, and Professor Jón Steffensen in *Samtíð og Saga*, Vol. V (1951), pp. 40—45, though no apparent connection seems to have been between their work. Their view has not attracted much attention for the reasons I have already mentioned, but it is, however, worth a closer consideration because if it proves to be right it sheds a new light on the cultural and political relationship between Ireland and Norway in the 9th century and on the chronology of the Kings of Vestfold. I believe the view expressed by Jan de Vries and Professor Jón Steffensen may be supported by stronger arguments than they themselves have advanced, and I shall now attempt to produce some of them.

Let us first look at what the Ynglingatal has to say about King Ólaf Goðröðarson:

Ok niðkvísl
í Nóregi
þróttar Þrós
of þróazk hafði.
Réð Áleifr
ofsa forðum
viðri grund
of Vestmari,
unz fótverkr
við Foldar þrom
vígmiðlung
of viðá skyldi.
Nú liggr gunndjarfr
á Geirstöðum
herkonungr
haugi ausinn.

i. e. "And the descendants of Óðin had flourished in Norway. In former times Ólaf governed a very large area of *Vestmari* (I shall leave the translation of these words until later) until a foot-disease took the life of the warrior on the coast of Vestfold. Now the warlike warrior-king lies at Geirstaðir buried in a gravemound."

I should mention that there is another version of the text:

Réð Áleifr
Ofsa (or Ufsa) forðum
viðri grund
ok Vestmari.

i. e. "In former times Ólaf governed Ofsi (or Ufsi), a large area, and Vestmarr."

This reading of the text requires us to look upon *Ofsi* (or *Ufsi*) and *Vestmarr* as counties in Norway, for which there is no evidence in old sources. This version is in any case younger than the other.

Parts of the verse are hard to interpret, but what matters for the question before us is the meaning of the words "of Vestmari." The name itself has been explained in many ways. In *Sögubrot af Fornkonungum*, i. e. "A Fragmentary Saga of Ancient Kings" a certain King Eystein of *Vestmörum* is referred to, the name *Vestmarar* thereupon being explained as an old name for Vestfold.¹⁾ But the form *Vestmarar* looks suspicious. It is true that the *Vestmari* of the verse can be accusative plural, but only if nominative plural

was *Vestmarir*. It is questionable, therefore, whether the explanation given in the Fragmentary Saga can be well founded. But however that may be, Snorri Sturluson and other old writers seem to have believed that *Vestmarar* or *Vestmarir* was an old name for Vestfold¹⁾.

P. A. Munch rejected the explanation given in the Fragmentary Saga. He thought *Vestmarr* was the country to the west of the *Marr*, i. e. *Grenmarr*, which is an old name for the Langesundsfjord to the South-West of Vestfold.²⁾ This interpretation is far-fetched and seems to be based on the younger text of the verse.

Professor Jón Steffensen seems to have known only the older interpretation, not the one given by P. A. Munch. But he pointed out that Vestfold could not be referred to as "ofsa við grund" i. e. a very large area, and I may add that the same may be said of the region which P. A. Munch thought to have been called *Vestmarr*. Steffensen believes that *Vestmarr* is either a name for Westmorland in the North-West corner of England, or that it refers to all the countries to the West of the (North) Sea, i. e. the British Isles. The first assumption can hardly be right, because the Old English name for Westmorland was "Westmoringaland," and it could hardly have become *Vestmarr* or *Vestmarir* in the Old Norse of the 9th or 10th century, even though Westmorland is called *Vestmar* in the Old Icelandic translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* of the 12th or 13th century. The alternative assumption that *Vestmarr* refers to countries to the west of the (North) Sea is equally as far-fetched as Munch's interpretation.

But we may offer one more interpretation, which has not been advanced elsewhere as far as I know. *Marr* means "sea," the genitive being *marar*. *Vestmarr* would then refer to the sea in the West, which, from the point of view of the people of Vestfold and other parts of the South of Norway must mean the North Sea. Similarly, the Danish call the North Sea *Vesterhavet*. In this connection it should also be noted that the Baltic Sea is called *Austmarr* (i. e. the East Sea) in the *Ynglingatal*, in an earlier place. That name does not occur in Norse sources any more often than does *Vestmarr*, but it is the same name as *Estmere* in King Alfred's translation of Orosius' *World History*. According to this interpretation *Vestmari* is dative singular and the prepositional phrase "of Vestmari" accor-

1) *Heimskringla* I (1941), p. 78, *Hauksbók* (1892—96), p. 457.

2) P. A. Munch: *Samlede Afhandlinger* II (1874), p. 362—363.

1) *Sögur Danakonunga* (1919—1925), p. 25.

dingly seems to mean "at the other side of the sea in the West," i. e. in the British Isles. Parallel examples of "of" with dative conveying this meaning seems to be found in Egill Skallagrímsson's *Höfuðlausn* (or Head-Ransom). In Verses 12 and 15 we have:

Bauð ulfum hræ
Eiríkr of sæ.

i. e. "Eiríkr offered carrion to the wolves beyond the sea." And in Verse 4 of the same poem we have:

Sú vas mest of lǫ

i. e. "that was the greatest (battle) beyond the sea." This is the most natural interpretation of the two examples, and that is how they are explained by Sigurður Nordal in his edition of the *Egils Saga*. It is true that scholars have passed *sæ* and *lǫ* in these contexts as accusatives singular, but there does not seem to be anything against the assumption that they are in fact datives. Further I may mention that in *Höfuðlausn*, Verse 18, we have:

frétt es austr of mar,

i. e. "the news has come east over the sea" (i. e. the North Sea). It shows how commonly the designation *marr* was used of the North Sea.

Now we have obtained a natural interpretation of the lines:

Réð Áleifr
ofsa forðum,
víðri grund
of Vestmari,

i. e. "In former times Ólaf governed a very large area to the west of the North Sea."

But the only King Ólaf Goðröðarson mentioned in British sources of the 9th century is King Ólaf Goðröðarson of Dublin. There is, therefore, hardly any doubt that King Ólaf Goðröðarson of Vestfold and King Ólaf Goðröðarson of Dublin were the same man. If we look more closely at the verse about Ólaf in the *Ynglingatal* we can detect a few pieces of supporting evidence. Ólaf is referred to as "gunndjarfr herkonungr," i. e. a brave warrior-king. As Prof. Jón Steffensen pointed out these words could be appropriately used of King Ólaf of Dublin, but much less so if used of a king who merely

ruled over a county in Norway. We must presume, therefore, that King Ólaf of Vestfold raided some foreign countries, but he might for instance have been the chieftain of the "Westfaldingi," i. e. men from Westfold who raided Nantes in France in 843. This argument is therefore not conclusive. The first part of the verse may shed more light on the problem:

Ok niðkvísl
í Nóregi
þróttar Þrós
of þróazk hafði.

i. e. "And the descendants of Óðin had flourished in Norway."

Why did the poet go out of his way to state this? No one could answer that question while Ólaf was thought to have been a ruler over only a county in Norway. But if we assume that he also ruled over a large state in the British Isles and even had there some descendants, the first part of the verse becomes intelligible. The poet wants to say that up to now the descendants of Óðin flourished in Norway, but Ólaf enhanced their reputation in another land.

Archaeologists are of the opinion that King Ólaf of Vestfold was buried in the Gokstad ship, but all that is known about that grave-mound might also apply to King Ólaf of Dublin. The "Three Fragments," moreover, state that he went to Norway in 871 to reinforce his father's army, and he is not mentioned in the British Isles after that. It is admittedly a bit odd that no Irish remains were found in the mound, but that fact could hardly be said to disprove the theory advanced in this paper, whatever is the reason for it. However, in the ship there was found a peacock, which shows that the king in question had relations with the countries in western Europe, as peacocks were at that time extremely rare in Norway, but common amongst the Franks.¹⁾ I do not know whether peacocks were common in Ireland, but they could easily have found their way there through trade.

A fairly large number of objects dating from the Viking Age has been found in Vestfold, however, and consequently Professor Haakon Shetelig thinks it very likely that people from there took part in raids on Ireland.²⁾ Among other things several Irish objects

1) A. W. Brøgger og Haakon Shetelig: *Vikingskipene* (1950), p. 189.

2) *Viking Antiquities I* (1940), p. 57.

were found in the Queen's Mound associated with Oseberg in Vestfold. They demonstrate that some one closely connected with the Queen raided Ireland in the first half, or about the middle, of the 9th century, because it is unthinkable that all these objects found their way there through trade. Again it is King Ólaf Goðröðarson or his kinsmen who would seem to be responsible for their presence in Norway.

* The historical fact that the "Westfaldingi," i.e. men from Vestfold, sailed up the Loire on 67 ships and raided Nantes in 843¹⁾ may possibly also indicate that they raided Ireland at the same time. In his excellent work about the Normans and the Franks (*Die Normannen und das Fränkische Reich bis zur Gründung der Normandie*) Walter Vogel has produced arguments for the view that the vikings who raided the west coast of France around, and to the south of, the Loire estuary sometimes came from Ireland. Vogel believes that in so doing the Vikings followed the ancient route from Ireland to the Loire, which was well known from the beginning of the 7th century or from an earlier time. Professor Shetelig was of the same opinion and believed that the "Westfaldingi" followed this route.²⁾ This theory is attractive in many ways, although it cannot be proved. But it is by no means certain that all the raiders came from Vestfold even though they were referred to by this name. It may just as well be that they were only under the leadership of chieftains who originated in Vestfold.

By the time when the "Westfaldingi" raided Nantes Turges had established himself as Viking King in Ireland and had fortified Dublin. He was defeated by the Irish and was drowned in a lake in 845. Eight years later King Ólaf Goðröðarson came to Dublin. Apparently the Vikings in Ireland submitted to his rule without resistance and he took tribute from the Irish. The "Three Fragments" which, to be sure, may be an unreliable authority, as I will mention later, relate that he brought orders from his father, King Goðröð of Lochlann "for many rents and tributes." This suggests that King Goðröð made a claim to, or had been entrusted with authority over, the state which Turges had founded in Ireland. It might indicate that Turges originally came from Vestfold and was closely related to King Goðröð, although he could, of

1) J. Steenstrup, *Normannerne I*, p. 52; G. Storm, *Kritiske Bidrag I*, p. 62.

2) *Viking Antiquities I* (1940), pp. 13, 18—19, 57, 105.

course, have become the head of state through marital, no less than through blood, relationship. But however that may be it would not seem unnatural to relate these three facts to one another: first, the Queen's Mound in Vestfold dating from the middle of the 9th century and containing several Irish objects; second, the "Westfaldingi" with a fleet in the Loire estuary at the end of a well-known sea-route from Ireland in 843, and third, a king in Ireland being the namesake of a king in Vestfold a few years later.

The Vikings in Ireland came from various quarters. Both the Norwegians and the Danes raided Ireland, but the Norwegians were much more numerous. This may be gathered both from Irish literary sources and the finding-places of Irish objects overseas. A large number of Irish Viking Age objects have been found in Norway, but very few elsewhere in Scandinavia. Many Irish objects have been found in Vestfold, as I have mentioned before, but still more in Rogaland and in the Fjords. Professor Shetelig draws the conclusion that men from Vestfold took part in raids on Ireland but that chieftains from Rogaland and the Fjords predominated.¹⁾ This conclusion may be correct as far as it goes, but nevertheless it is not certain that the Dublin state was founded by West-Norwegian chieftains. It is true that Turges may have originated in the West of Norway, although later his state passed under the rule of King Goðröð of Vestfold, but such an assumption is by no means imperative. Gradually Norwegian Vikings in Ireland had to unite under the rule of one man to strengthen their position in an enemy country, especially after they began to stay there all the year round, even though they were disunited at home. It was natural, therefore, that they should rally round a member of the largest and noblest royal family in Norway, because noble extraction was highly respected, and it was not even thought fit that anyone, who could not trace his family to kings, should assume the royal title. But the *Ynglingatal* shows, that the royal family in Vestfold was considered one of the noblest there was, and the grave-mounds in Vestfold, the largest and richest in Norway from the 9th century, demonstrate that the royal family there was also one of the most powerful royal families in Norway. It was natural, therefore, that Norwegian Vikings in Ireland should be readiest to rally round a member of that family, even though the majority of them came from other parts of Norway.

1) *Viking Antiquities I* (1940), pp. 55—57.

It is probable that the unification of the Norwegians at home under a king of this same family may be traced to the same or similar causes. Harald Fairhair was considered a member of the Ynglingar family. That tradition may be traced back to the 10th century (cf. the poems *Hákonarmál*, *Arinbjarnarkviða*)¹⁾, and there does not seem to be any reason to doubt that he was King Ólaf Goðröðarson's nephew, as there has been unanimity on this point from the days of Ari the Wise.

Let us now turn to the arguments which seem to point against the theory that King Ólaf of Vestfold and King Ólaf of Dublin were one and the same man, arguments which are based on chronology and old genealogies.

Icelandic authorities of the 13th century assume that Hálfðan the Black the father of Harald Fairhair was one year old when his father, King Goðröð, was slain, but thirty when Harald Fairhair was born around 850. Accordingly King Goðröð should have been slain around 820, which altogether conflicts with the "Three Fragments." According to that source King Ólaf leaves Ireland for Norway in 871 "to wage war on the Lochlanns, and to aid his father Goffridh, for the Lochlanns had made war against him, his father having come for him." According to this account King Goðröð was slain in 871 or later. It is true that the "Three Fragments" on occasion seem to be an unreliable authority, but there does not seem to be any reason to dispute what they say on this point. But it does not occur to any modern historian to rely on Icelandic works of the 12th or 13th century for the chronology of Norwegian events in the 9th century. Consequently there do not seem to be any valid arguments based on chronology against the possibility that King Ólaf of Vestfold and King Ólaf of Dublin were one and the same man.

The conflicting genealogies of King Ólaf of Vestfold and King Ólaf of Dublin do at first sight appear more difficult to account for. According to the *Ynglingatal* the last members of his line seem to have been the following:

Hálfðan
Eysteinn
Hálfðan
Guðröðr
Óláfr
(Rögnvaldr)

1) Cf. also *Háleygjatal*.

It is true that we are not explicitly told that father and son are always enumerated one after the other in the poem, but it has always been so interpreted, the poem not making sense otherwise. The line could not represent just the succession of kings, because the names mentioned refer to kings in different countries. We cannot be sure, however, that no names have been lost in transmission, or whether their order is the original one, as the poem was most likely dependent on oral tradition for a long time before it was reduced to writing. Professor Jón Steffensen believes, for instance, that the verse about Goðröð, referred to another and an older Goðröð than Rögnvald's grandfather, in whose honour the poem was composed, because Goðröð is referred to as "sás fyrir löngu vas" (i. e. he who lived long ago). This argument is not conclusive, however, because Ólaf himself is, according to the verse, said to have ruled long ago: "réð Áleifr forðum (i. e. Ólaf governed in former times). At present there does not seem to be any alternative but to take the poem as it stands.

In the "Three Fragments," the only source which mentions the father of King Ólaf of Dublin, his male lineage is traced as follows:

Godfraidh
Godfraidh
Ragnall
Godfraidh (Goffridh)
Amhlaeibh

This is, it is true, the male genealogy of Imar (Ívarr), who became the Viking King in Ireland and Brittany when King Ólaf left for Norway, but as Imar is said to have been Ólaf's younger brother, and as Ólaf's father was still alive in 871, their male genealogy must have been the same. It is difficult to judge the value of this genealogy, but it seems that scholars have put too much faith in the "Three Fragments." Jan de Vries has pointed out that they are carelessly compiled from several sources, some old and reliable, but others comparatively young. I cannot go into details, that would be far too complicated, but this genealogy is among the sections which Jan de Vries considers unreliable. He believes it may be relatively young. Let us have a look at the passage in which it occurs:

"In this year (i. e. 873) Imhar, son of Godfraidh, son of Ragnall, son of Godfraidh Conung, son of Gadfraidh, and the son

of the man who went from Erin, i. e. Amhlaeibh, plundered all Erin from west to east, and from south to north."

Jan de Vries has pointed out that these extensive raids are nowhere referred to in other sources, which is suspicious, as they often mention smaller raids. Then the question arises whether all the passage, including the genealogy, is not taken from a comparatively young and unreliable source. The genealogy, at least, cannot be trusted under these circumstances, and it cannot refute the theory that King Ólaf of Vestfold and King Ólaf of Dublin are one and the same person.

At this juncture it is appropriate to mention a name which suggests that King Ólaf of Dublin was of a Vestfold extraction. His son was called Oistin, i. e. Eysteinn, and was treacherously slain by Hálfðan, a Danish Viking chieftain in the year 875. But the great-grandfather of King Ólaf of Vestfold was called Eysteinn according to his genealogy, which I have already described. This is worth noting, because the name Eysteinn was not very common in royal families.

In the *Landnámabók* an Ólaf is mentioned who conquered Dublin and Dublinshire and made himself king there. But here we have one more variation of his genealogy:

Hálfðan hvítbeinn
Goðröðr
Óláfr
Helgi
Ingjaldr
Óláfr hvíti.

The genealogy appears also in Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók*, but he does not mention that Ólaf conquered Dublin and the surrounding area. It is of no importance here, however. This genealogy is, of course, a worthless concoction, but yet it is noticeable that Ari should trace it back to the Ynglingar. It seems conceivable that Ari knew a tradition to the effect that King Ólaf of Dublin was descended from the Ynglingar, even though he did not know how to trace his genealogy correctly. Then he probably just tried to fill the gap by means of guesswork. But in the days of Ari the Icelanders had forgotten that King Ólaf of Dublin was the same Ólaf as the one who was mentioned in the Ynglingatal.

I have now tried to produce arguments for the theory that King Ólaf of Vestfold is to be identified with King Ólaf of Dublin. It will probably never be possible to prove it conclusively, but it seems to me that the supporting arguments are weighty enough to warrant a special attention.

Theodoricus Monachus and the Icelanders

By E. F. Halvorsen.

I.

One of the most difficult questions in the history of the development of the *konungasögur* is the nature and extent of the Icelandic sources of the earliest Norwegian historians. One of these, Theodoricus Monachus, who wrote his *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium* about 1180¹⁾ states emphatically:

.... prout sagaciter perquirere potuimus ab eis, penes quos horum (i. e. regum Norwagiensium) memoria praecipue vigere creditur, quos nos Islendinga vocamus, qui haec in suis antiquis carminibus percelebrata recolunt.²⁾

Icelandic sources are not mentioned in the two other accounts of Norwegian history written in Norway, the *Historia Norwegiae* and the *Ágrip*, but they have been widely supposed to be based on Icelandic traditions. On the other hand, it is also generally recognized that parts of the three books derive from other sources. The difficulty has been to decide what is of Icelandic origin and what is derived from other, *in casu* probably Norwegian, sources. The question has been much debated from the time of P. A. Munch and Keyser. One extreme point of view is represented by Finnur Jónsson, who is inclined to believe that everything which cannot be proved to derive from Norwegian local traditions is of Icelandic origin. This view is mainly based on two theories, both widely held at the beginning of this century,

(a) that separate sagas of practically all the Norwegian kings had been written before 1200, and

(b) that, owing to the civil wars in Norway in the twelfth century, practically all native traditions had disappeared.³⁾

1) Vide G. Storm, in the Introduction to the ed. of Theodoricus in *Monumenta Historica Norwegiae*, p. VII—VIII.

2) Ibidem, p. 3.

3) *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*, second ed. vol. II p. 3—4.

The former view has now been generally abandoned.¹⁾ But the second contention is equally doubtful, since the argument usually begins by regarding as a fact the very theory it is meant to prove: Theodoricus used Icelandic traditions, which proves that there were no Norwegian *frásagnir*, and: The fact that there were no Norwegian traditions leads to the conclusion that Theodoricus had to rely on Icelandic sources.

But the theory that the Norwegian traditions disappeared because of the civil wars is untenable for other reasons as well. The civil war is only one aspect of Norwegian history in the twelfth century, and we are inclined to overrate the consequences and extent of these struggles because our sources are mainly concerned with wars. And, after all, some of the greatest of the Icelandic family sagas were written during and after the Sturlung feuds. The fact that family sagas were never written in Norway neither proves nor disproves the existence of traditions, the fact that needs explanation from the point of view of the history of literature is that sagas were written in Iceland. Norway in this respect is in the same position as other European countries, where family traditions did not develop into a saga literature.

The opposite point of view is held by the authors of some more recent works on the sagas of the kings, notably by Beyschlag,²⁾ who is far more sceptical about the Icelandic sources of Theodoricus; to him, Theodoricus is the first historian to use Icelandic traditions *in addition* to the Norwegian ones. In this paper, I am not concerned with these problems, I am only going to discuss the *meaning* and *background* of the statement quoted above.

II.

Theodoricus says that he did consult Icelanders, so much is clear. The discussion has been mainly concerned with the extent of his Icelandic sources, and whether they were written or oral. Beyschlag is undoubtedly right in pointing out that Icelanders were referred to, not because they were the only source of information, but because

1) Sigurður Nordal, in *Nordisk Kultur*, vol. VIIIb, *Norges og Islands Litteratur* pp. 195, 204; G. Turville-Petre, *Origin of Icelandic Literature*, Epilogue, pp. 213&c.

2) Siegfried Beyschlag, *Konungasögur* (Bibliotheca Arnarnagæana VIII, Hafniæ 1950).

their traditions were particularly *trustworthy*, being based on their ancient *carmina*.¹⁾ What Theodoricus does, both in the already quoted words of his preface, and still more in his first chapter, where he discusses the year in which Harald Fairhair came to the throne,²⁾ is to substantiate his facts by referring to the authority of the Icelanders, but that does not exclude other sources. It is obvious that he did not need Icelanders to describe to him the main facts of the reign e. g. of Sigurðr the Jerusalem-Farer (1103—1130), since the sons of men who had known King Sigurðr and even his father Magnús Bareleg were alive when Theodoricus wrote his book.³⁾ But the interesting fact seems to me to be, not that the author consulted Icelanders, but that he emphatically states that he has done it, and that he refers to their *carmina*.

Meissner⁴⁾ sees in Theodoricus' words an expression of sincere admiration for the learning of the Icelanders. That may be so, but mediaeval chroniclers are not always lavish with acknowledgements of their debt to other writers. We know that Snorri has borrowed extensively from Oddr and a number of sagas of St. Olaf, but there is no word about this in his preface to the *Heimskringla*. The only authorities mentioned in his masterly prologue to that work, and the earlier *Óláfs saga hins helga*, are Ari and the ancient poems. In the prologue to the *Óláfs saga*, he also discusses oral traditions; apologizing to foreign readers for including so much material dealing with Icelanders, he argues that these traditions were brought to Iceland by men who had seen or heard about the events, "oc hava menn síðan af þeim numit."⁵⁾ But if Snorri does not mention Oddr, or Orkneyingasaga, or Morkinskinna, or Ágrip, in his prefaces, it does not mean that he is dishonest. His preface is not meant to give a list of his immediate sources, but to give an outline of the principles upon which he based his work, and when he mentions Ari and the skalds, it is because they are his authorities. What Oddr, Gunnlaugr, Styrmir, and all the others had done was to write down *frá-*

1) Ibidem, p. 122—23.

2) Mon. Hist. Norv. p. 6: — — ab illis, quos nos vulgato nomine Islendinga vocamus, — —, quos constat sine ulla dubitatione prae omnibus aquilonaribus populis in huiusmodi semper et peritiores et curiosiores extitisse.

3) e. g. Nikólás, son of Sigurðr Ranason, mentioned in chapter XXXI.

4) R. Meissner, *Die Strengleikar*, Halle 1902, p. 25.

5) *Den store saga om Olav den Hellige*, ed. O. A. Johnsen og Jón Helgason, p. 5.

sagnir, and since most of these authors were his contemporaries, or a little older, Snorri might, with some justification, claim that they had only written down what was generally known, things which he, having been brought up in a place like Oddi, knew even better than they did. Since they had already taken the trouble to write down these traditions, he used their books, incorporating in his work what he considered well enough told in the older sagas, reshaping what was not satisfactory, and changing and omitting what was wrong. His methods might not always meet with the approval of modern historians, and may not always have resulted in historically correct versions of the events, but they are both rational and critical, and from the point of view of a mediaeval audience, there was no need for him to acknowledge his debt to contemporary sources. It was different with Eiríkr Oddsson, he was a primary source, and he is therefore mentioned in the text, just as the individual skalds: what is said of the skalds in the prologue, applies to Eiríkr as well, and there was no need to discuss his book in the preface.¹⁾

Authorities and sources are different concepts. Ari is the authority on chronology, and without chronology, mediaeval history could not exist. Even a pseudo-historian like Geoffrey of Monmouth is very careful to state the length of the reigns of his imaginary early kings of Britain. Ari was also an authority because he had written a summary of the history of the Norwegian kings 100 years before Snorri, and because of his strict method in collecting traditions, stating his source, and checking the stories told by different men against each other. The poems of the skalds are authorities because the authors were often eyewitnesses of the events. But Snorri could not have written his books if he had only had these sources, the bulk of his works is based on *frásagnir*, often written down by others, but checked, amplified and sometimes changed with the aid of the poems, and, in some cases, Ari.

There is nothing specifically Icelandic in a prologue written on these lines. The European chroniclers of the same period write their prefaces in the same way, stressing the fact that they have consulted the recognized authorities, and borrowing freely from other authors, who happen not to be "authorities," without acknowledging it. And if we turn to Theodoricus, we find that his prologue follows the

1) Vide on the prologue of Hkr. Sigurður Nordal, *Snorri Sturluson*, Rvík 1920, pp. 162—67.

same lines, as was to be expected; he is a serious and conscientious historian, and very anxious to be accepted as such by his audience. This is evident from the way in which he refrains from writing about events in Norway before the time of Harald Fairhair, and from his insistence on the fact that he had no written sources for certain events, and therefore only sets down what he has heard, well aware that books are more to be trusted than oral traditions.¹⁾ He complains of his own unworthiness, a convention typical of the Middle Ages,²⁾ but since nobody else would undertake the task, he has done it, although reluctantly. He then proceeds to quote Hugh of St. Victor and Sigebert of Gembloux on the Viking raids, incidentally showing his readers that he had studied the recognized authorities on European history. In the text of his work, he also shows that he is familiar with the more important writers on chronology, Bede, Isidore, Jerome, Eusebius.³⁾ Such knowledge was of course of little use to Theodoricus in his immediate task, but it does not follow that he wrote this chapter merely to show his learning. He is so evidently a rather timid man, who would have liked to rely on the accepted authorities, and, in mediaeval history, the great masters were Jerome (who had used Eusebius), Bede, whose works on chronology were fundamental,⁴⁾ and their twelfth century successors Hugh and Sigebert. Theodoricus shows us that he knows these authors, and, since they could not help him, he had to look for other authorities. He is not a gifted historian, like Snorri and Ari, therefore, it was not for him to admit that he had to be content with oral traditions, and proceed to discuss the merits and deficiencies of such *frásagnir*. Nor does he give us the names of his informants, and the reasons why he regarded them as particularly trustworthy, as Ari had done,⁵⁾ he simply refers to the Icelanders "*pena quos horum memoria praecipue vigere creditur*," and the reason why the Icelanders are thought to know more about these matters than

1) *Vide*, on the expression "non visa sed audita conscripsimus" Jens S. Th. Hanssen: *Theodoricus Monachus and European Literature*, Symbola Osloenses XXVII, pp. 75—76.

2) *Ibidem*, p. 72.

3) *Mon. Hist. Norv.* pp. 42—43.

4) *Vide* the edition of Bede's chronological works by Charles W. Jones: *Beda's Opera de Temporibus*, Cambridge, Mass. 1943 (Mediaeval Academy of America).

5) Ari is probably influenced by Bede in this respect, *vide* *Baetae Opera Historica*, ed. J. E. King, London 1930 (Loeb Classical Library), vol. I, pp. 2—10, the Introduction to the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*.

others is that they have recorded their deeds in their ancient "*carmina*." Now, we know that skaldic poems were still understood, and composed, in Norway in the second half of the twelfth century, but Theodoricus does not claim the credit for having read, or heard, and interpreted these poems himself, as he might have done, so that it is evident that the mention of the "*carmina*" is just a somewhat vague justification of the Icelandic traditions. It is, indeed, the same reliance on the old poems as we find in Snorri's preface, but Snorri explains why they are trustworthy, and how they can be used. When Theodoricus mentions the "*carmina*," it looks as if he is just repeating something which was an accepted maxim in his day: "The Icelanders know more about history than other people, because of their ancient poems." Nobody, and least of all Theodoricus, would be bothered by the fact that the Icelanders are also referred to on matters of chronology, in spite of the fact that that is precisely the one aspect of history on which the poems were of practically no use.

It is clear that when our author refers to the poems, he repeats what others have said before him. Theodoricus cannot have been the first Norwegian to recognize the superiority of the Icelanders in the field of history. He is a far too conventional and timid person to have been able to "discover" the Icelanders. His preface is so obviously written to convince his audience that he had studied the best authorities, and when he throws the responsibility for what might be controversial on the Icelanders, it must mean that an allusion to the Icelanders really carried weight with his contemporaries. Consequently, the Icelanders were accepted as *the* authority on Norwegian history in Norway itself about 1180. Theodoricus would not have given them so much credit if he had not known that this was the best recommendation of his work. He does not say *what* he got from the Icelanders, nor does his statement mean that he got all or most of his information from them, any more than Snorri got all his information from Ari and the skalds. The question of the sources can only be decided on internal evidence, as in the case of Snorri; the Icelanders were the authority, which he used, or at least said he used, to check his *frásagnir*.

III.

Theodoricus is not the only author who testifies to the reputation of the Icelanders as historians. The Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus, who began his *Gesta Danorum* about 1185 and finished his preface about 1216,¹⁾ also praises their knowledge of historical traditions. His preface is much longer than that of Theodoricus, but he quotes few sources, and complains that nothing has been written in Latin of the great deeds of the Danes.²⁾ He does not even mention the few books that did contain some information on these matters, Adam of Bremen's *History* and two short Danish chronicles, nor does he refer to his contemporary, Sven Aggeson. Naturally, the latter was not an authority, but Adam, at least, had written more than a hundred years before Saxo's days, and might be regarded as a contemporary source for certain of the events he describes.

Saxo begins his preface by describing how Archbishop Absalon had encouraged him to undertake the task, and, after a dedication to Absalon's successor, he gives a survey of the material he has used: The Danes used to compose poems to celebrate their great deeds, he says, and they also wrote on stone, in runes. These poems, Saxo has recovered and used, and they must be regarded as true records of ancient times. "Nec Tylensium (i. e. the Icelanders') industria silencio obliteranda," they possess rich treasures of ancient traditions and Saxo has frequently consulted them, a not inconsiderable portion of his work is based on their tales (haut paruum presentis operis partem ex eorum relacionis imitatione contexui.³⁾ He would in no way disregard their evidence, knowing that they were well versed in such matters. Even more he got from Absalon himself (Nec minus Absalonis asserta sectando, etc.), information about events in which the archbishop had taken part as well as about the deeds of others.

These are the sources mentioned by Saxo in his preface. Would it be correct to assume that these really were his *only* sources for the greater part of his *Gesta Danorum*?

J. Olrik, in his introduction to *Saksnes Danesaga*, regards Absalon

1) Vide J. Olrik, Introduction to his translation of Saxo, *Saksnes Danesaga* (Copenhagen 1925), vol. I, pp. 12—22.

2) Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, ed. Holder, Strasb. 1886, p. 1.

3) Ibidem, p. 3.

as the source for most of the information contained in the later part of the *Gesta*.¹⁾ But this is not in itself very likely. Saxo and the archbishop did not live in some lonely monastery, Absalon was the trusted friend and councillor of the king, and lead or took part in a number of warlike expeditions. Saxo, his private secretary, had ample opportunity for meeting all the great men belonging to the same circle as his master, and besides, he came of a family of some importance, and his father and grandfather had served in the king's household. Most of the things related in his 14th to his 16th books must have been common knowledge in these circles, and if Saxo had had to go to Absalon for his information about these matters, we should have to assume that nobody else was sufficiently interested ever to discuss them. Absalon is the *authority*, not the source, Saxo could discuss things with him, and when he corroborated the evidence of others, his verdict would naturally be regarded as conclusive, but it would be rash to infer, from the words of the preface, that Absalon, as it were, "sat yfir" while Saxo wrote, as King Sverrir did.²⁾

The main source for the ancient history is, if we are to believe the author, the old lays. Now we know that these poems account for a very small portion of the first nine books, and consequently Saxo is exaggerating if we are to regard his words as a full description of his sources. If, on the other hand, we look at them in the light of the two prefaces we have already discussed, Snorri's and that of Theodoricus, we have here a new example of the traditional view of the old poems as the best and most trustworthy sources of ancient history.

Lastly, there is the vexed question of Saxo's Icelandic sources. Axel Olrik, in his book *Kilderne til Saksnes Oldhistorie I—II*,³⁾ has divided the traditions related in books I—IX into Danish and Norwegian—Icelandic tales, and this division has been accepted by almost all scholars. Olrik combines the fact that there are West-Norse traditions in Saxo's work with the author's praise of the Icelanders, and concludes that these tales were brought to Denmark by an Ice-lander. He even identifies him with the "Arnoldus Tylensis" who was present in Absalon's army in 1168, and who was renowned for

1) *Saksnes Danesaga*, vol. I, pp. 17—18, cp. p. 20.

2) *Sverris saga*, ed. Indrebø (Kria 1920), p. 1.

3) Vol. I in *Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie* 1892, vol. II, publ. separately, Copenhagen 1894.

his great knowledge of history.¹⁾ Olrik thinks that Saxo has not known Arnoldus personally — he was probably much too young in 1168 —, and that he has had to rely on what others had written down.²⁾ On the other hand, Olrik has found that most of the tales are of Norwegian, not Icelandic origin, typical sailors' stories known to those who sailed along the Western coast of Norway. But there is also such a great similarity between them that they must, according to Olrik, have been given their ultimate form by one person, Arnoldus, who has collected the traditions while sailing down the Norwegian coast in a Norwegian ship on his way to Denmark.³⁾

There are several weak points in Axel Olrik's theory. The fact that Saxo probably never met Arnoldus has already been pointed out. More important, as it seems to me, is the objection that it is very peculiar that Arnoldus, an Iclander and a skald (Olrik identifies him, probably correctly, with the Arnaldr Þorvaldsson who, according to Skáldatal, composed a poem in honour of Valdemar the Great) should have known so little about the Skjöldung traditions which we know were still very much alive among the Icelanders in the twelfth century. No skald could possibly have been so impressed by these pretty commonplace stories told by ordinary Norwegian sailors that he preferred them to the genuine traditions he undoubtedly knew.

Another serious objection is that there does not seem to be any need for an Icelandic interpreter between the Norwegian sailors and the Danes. In the years between 1180 and 1202, Norwegian chiefs were to be found in Denmark, and at the Danish court, practically all the time, and Danes took part in the periodical raids against King Sverrir. In the 1190ies, the Norwegian bishops were in Denmark, the archbishop mostly in Lund, Absalon's see. Quite apart from these people, every Dane would probably meet hundreds of Norwegians for every Iclander he saw. If most of Saxo's West-Norse tales are Norwegian sailors' stories, they are far more likely to have been told to a Dane sailing along the Norwegian coast than to have been brought to Denmark by an Icelandic *sagnamaðr*. It is highly unlikely that an Iclander in Denmark should have been so careful to mention the names of places along the Norwegian coast

1) Saxo, ed. Holder, p. 594, and Olrik, *Kilderne* II, pp. 286—87.

2) Olrik *Kilderne* II, pp. 289—90.

3) *Ibidem*, p. 279—86.

(most of them would be unknown to his audience) where Danish kings had fought.

On the whole, I think that the question of Saxo's sources is more complicated than Olrik would have us believe. His main argument for thinking that Saxo had only one source is that so many names and motifs occur again and again,¹⁾ and this is certainly a strong argument. But if the Danes had more to do with the final form of the tales than Olrik is ready to concede, then there is always the possibility that many of the repetitions are due to the Dane or Danes who told Saxo these stories. It is also likely that the West-Norse as well as the Danish material has come from different sources, and even that some of the "Danish" traditions may be of Icelandic origin.

But the main point here is that we do not need to regard Saxo's words about the Icelanders as a proof that all his West-Norse traditions were brought to Denmark by Arnoldus or some other Iclander, any more than we need to regard Ari and the skaldic poems as Snorri's only source, or Absalon as the source of all the later books of Saxo's *Gesta*. The *Tylnenses* were to him, as to Theodoricus, the acknowledged authorities on ancient Scandinavian history. They were recognized as such, not only by him, but by educated Danes, because if such had not been the case, we can be fairly certain that Saxo would not have mentioned them. Saxo is not, like Theodoricus, anxious to find somebody else to share the responsibility for the traditions he has recorded, he is proud of his work, and even speaks about the old poems as if he had been the first to discover and interpret them, although it is far more likely that he has got many of his poems from the Icelanders. Absalon and the Icelanders are his *authorities*, and he would have failed in his duty as an historian if he had not consulted them, but when it comes to deciding exactly what they have contributed to the *Gesta Danorum*, we have to consider internal evidence.

IV.

The Ágrip is now generally considered to be of Norwegian origin. The first leaf of the only existing MS is lost, so we do not know if the work originally had a preface, but in most respects, the work

1) *Kilderne* II, pp. 275—78.

is a typical mediaeval *Historia* or *Compendium*, it is certainly neither an *ágrip* nor a collection of *konunga sögur*. The peculiar flavour of its style is due to the author's rhetorical training, not to a Latin source. But there is one feature of this otherwise entirely "European" work which is Icelandic rather than Norwegian: the quoting of skaldic poems. There is nothing strange in the fact that poems are used as sources, on the contrary, "ancient poems," genuine or spurious, are referred to by classical authors from the time of Livy, and French chroniclers of the twelfth century often enriched their accounts of Charlemagne and his times with tales taken from the *chansons de geste*. In Iceland, the first sagas of the kings, *Óláfs saga hins helga* and the *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* of Oddr are partly based on skaldic poems. But the custom of quoting the *drápur* of the court skalds as evidence (a different procedure from quoting *lausavísur* for their own sake¹), and of discussing them in the text, is an Icelandic practice. When the author of *Ágrip* quotes poems in this way, he may, of course, have hit upon the idea by himself, but in view of his European background, this seems hardly likely. But if we compare him with Saxo and Theodoricus, his contemporaries, the explanation suggests itself: To him as to the other two, the Icelanders were the great authorities on history, because of their "*carmina*." Theodoricus says so, and refers to the Icelanders, Saxo refers to ancient poems and to the Icelanders without saying that the poems were the reason why Icelandic historical traditions were more trustworthy than those of continental Scandinavia. The author of *Ágrip* has gone one step further, he quotes poems *without* referring to the Icelanders, and writing as he does in the vernacular, he did not have to translate them. He thus imitates an Icelandic practice, but his interpretation of the kenning *skeiðar-brandr* as a name shows that he was not a skald himself and did not know very much about the poetic language of the skalds. His mistake is probably typical of the attitude of educated Norwegians to the art of the skalds at the end of the twelfth century: They still listened to the recitals of professional poets with respect, and they could follow the poems when they knew what they were supposed to describe, but they were no longer experts, and therefore, when an obvious kenning like *skeiðar-brandr* appears in a context where it was not immediately clear what the word referred to, they might easily misunderstand it.

1) Vide Sigurður Nordal: Snorri Sturluson, p. 169.

V.

Modern scholars have known, since the sixteenth century, that the Icelanders of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were superior to the continental Scandinavians as historians, and in this paper I have tried to show that this fact was fully recognized by the Scandinavians themselves by about 1180. When did they come to realize the superiority of the Icelanders in this field?

We know that from the time when Sæmundr and Ari laid the foundations of Icelandic literature, the Icelanders were, in fact, head and shoulders above the other Scandinavians in this respect. But that does not mean that the Norwegians and the Danes of the twelfth century *recognized* it. Iceland was a remote outpost of European culture, and it is notoriously difficult for the great men of small and remote countries to gain recognition outside their own country. Ari is never mentioned by the Norwegian historians, and as his main concern was with Icelandic history, it is probable that he remained unknown, just as the Icelandic family sagas were practically unknown outside Iceland in the next century. The work of Eiríkr Oddsson dealt with contemporary history, and the *Hryggjarstykki* was evidently written for his countrymen, not for some anonymous Norwegian. It was only King Sverrir who hit upon the idea of asking an Icelandic writer to write his history, or at least part of it, and we do not know whether this was because the king was favourably impressed by the personality of Karl Jónsson or because he was an Icelandicman. In any case, Karl ábóti worked at a time when, as we have already seen, the prestige of Icelandic historians was already great.

But there is another field where the Icelanders were well established and had been able to maintain a monopoly for a very long period before 1180. From the close of the tenth century, all the court skalds known to us are Icelanders. We cannot infer from this that, from the time of Glúmr Geirason, no Norwegian court skalds had existed. Our sources for the period before 1100 are practically all Icelandic, and the traditions on which the sagas dealing with the period are based are so often concerned with just these court skalds that it would be a dangerous argumentum ex silentio to claim that there were only Icelandic court skalds in the time of the two Ólafs. The fact is that we know next to nothing about conditions in Norway in this period.

In the time of Haraldr harðráði, things are different. His predilection for Icelanders is so marked and so well attested that we have no reason for doubting it, even if the Icelandic tradition may have exaggerated it a little. The part played by his constable and brother-in-law, Úlfr Óspaksson, an Icelandic who settled in Norway, is significant. And when we begin to feel on more secure ground in Norwegian history, i. e. when the sagas give us a more direct view of the Norwegian scene, somewhere about the time of Magnús Bareleg, the Icelanders have already established their monopoly as court skalds, we know of Norwegian poets in the twelfth century, but they are not *court* skalds. It was necessary for these court poets to know, not only the general theory of their art, but also the *drápur* of the older court skalds, the accepted authorities. With these *drápur* there must have gone some sort of prose commentary, to explain what the allusions meant. The *drápur*, as is well known, do not give epic descriptions of the lives of the princes, they were composed to be recited before the people who had taken part in the events, who did not need to be told exactly what had happened. But when the poems were repeated to an audience of people who only knew of these events by hearsay, a commentary became necessary. It is probably thanks to these commentaries that the Icelandic traditions concerning the early kings of Norway is so relatively rich and also fairly realistic. This does not mean that blunders and misunderstandings have not crept in, here and there, in the course of time, after all, they were oral traditions; but the poems themselves must always have acted as a corrective.

Thus the knowledge of the old *drápur* has made the court skalds bearers of an historical tradition, and, at the Norwegian court, where there were always one or more Icelandic court skalds in the twelfth century, it must have been a natural thing for the king and his men to turn to these skalds whenever they wanted to know about the ancient kings. This does not mean that there were no such traditions in the families of the Norwegian chieftains, but they were *amateurs*, the skalds were professionals, not only as skalds, but, to a greater or lesser degree, as historians. The most important of the twelfth century court skalds was Einarr Skúlason, who spent a long time in Norway. In 1153—54, when Trondheim became a metropolitan see, he recited his *Geisli* in the cathedral there, with the kings and the archbishop present. The poem is in honour of St. Olaf and deals with his miracles, which, of course,

were just as much part of his history as his other exploits, to the mediaeval mind. I would suggest that Einarr was asked to compose and recite this poem, not only because he was a poet and influential at court, — after all, we do not expect a skaldic poem on an occasion of this kind, and it is the only record we have of such a recital in the cathedral —, but because, as a skald, he was thought to know more about the saint than other people.

However this may be, I regard it as very likely that, when we find the Icelanders established as the historians par excellence all over Scandinavia by the end of the twelfth century, it is due to the court skalds: they, and they alone among Icelanders outside their own country had the position and prestige necessary to ensure the acceptance of the historical *‘rǫlitions* of the *fróðir menn* among the Norwegians and the Danes.