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SVÁ VAR LANGT SAGT Á ÍSLANDI:
HISTORICAL AND FICTITIOUS NARRATIVE BOUNDARIES
IN TWELFTH AND THIRTEENTH-CENTURY ICELAND

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Universidade Estadual de Londrina, como
requisito parcial à obtenção do título de Mestre
em História.

Orientador: Prof. Dr. Lukas Gabriel Grzybowski.

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„Wer fremde Sprachen nicht kennt, weiß nichts von seiner eigenen“
(Goethe, *Maximen und Reflexionen*)

„En þó er þetta sagt eftir sögnum gamalla fróðra manna“
(Anonymous)

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RESUMO

Este estudo investiga os mecanismos através dos quais narrativas medievais Islandesas construíam e legitimavam o conhecimento sobre o passado, com atenção particular à relação entre veracidade, autoridade narrativa e classificações modernas das sagas. Este examina como textos medievais Islandeses estabelecem reivindicações de credibilidade através de suas próprias práticas narrativas, sem pressupor uma separação estrita entre escrita histórica e ficcional. As fontes analisadas consistem em três textos tradicionalmente designados a diferentes categorias dentro do corpus das sagas: *Ynglinga saga*, comumente colocada entre as sagas de reis (*konungasögur*), e *Yngvars saga víðförla* e *Eiríks saga víðförla* geralmente associados às sagas lendárias (*fornaldarsögur*). Essas narrativas compartilham preocupações com configurações temporais e espaciais distantes, encontros com a alteridade e o uso de testemunho autoritativo, o que torna sua comparação analiticamente produtiva. Essa investigação combina abordagens historiográficas e conceituais. A *Vorstellungsgeschichte* fornece uma estrutura para examinar como representações de povos distantes, espaços e seres sobrenaturais expressam horizontes de plausibilidade historicamente situados e concepções compartilhadas de realidade. As reflexões de Tzvetan Todorov acerca da verossimilhança sustentam a análise de elementos narrativos extraordinários como parte de um sistema interpretativo mais amplo, que organiza experiência e significado. Também foi dada atenção às estratégias narrativas, como apelos a autoridades orais e escritas, construções genealógicas, discurso direto, referência a informantes e a incorporação de motivos literários maravilhosos. A noção de verdade sincrética, de Mikhail S. Kamenskij, juntamente com a Sociologia do conhecimento, de Berger e Luckmann, ampara um entendimento da cultura narrativa medieval Islandesa como um campo em que o conhecimento é produzido através de mecanismos de validação socialmente compartilhados. A distinção entre história e ficção é tratada como uma noção epistemológica moderna, com aplicação limitada ao contexto medieval sob examinação. Nos textos analisados, a credibilidade emerge através da mobilização das estratégias de legitimação mencionadas acima. A análise demonstra que os limites entre as categorias de sagas permanecem fluidas na prática, ao menos para o contexto contemporâneo às sagas. Através do corpus, a autoridade narrativa é construída através de repertórios de verificação cultural compartilhados, ao invés de divisões genéricas estáveis ou de autoria identificável. Este estudo conclui que a literatura de sagas pode ser entendida como uma prática narrativa flexível, envolvendo-se na produção e transmissão de conhecimento sobre o passado. O foco na veracidade e legitimidade revela como a cultura narrativa medieval Islandesa organizava a relação entre memória, testemunho e interpretação, e como a mesma articula mundos passados através de meios culturais fundamentados de plausibilidade e autoridade.

Palavras-chave: *Fornaldarsögur*; *Konungasögur*; *Vorstellungsgeschichte*; Historiografia Medieval; Islândia Medieval.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the mechanisms through which medieval Icelandic narratives constructed and legitimized knowledge about the past, with particular attention to the relationship between truthfulness, narrative authority, and modern saga classifications. It examines how medieval Icelandic texts establish claims to credibility through their own narrative practices, without presupposing a strict separation between historical and fictional writing. The analyzed sources consists of three texts traditionally assigned to different categories within the saga corpus: *Ynglinga saga*, commonly placed among the kings' sagas (*konungasögur*), and *Yngvars saga víðförla* and *Eiríks saga víðförla* usually associated with the legendary sagas (*foraldarsögur*). These narratives share concerns with distant temporal and spatial settings, encounters with alterity, and the use of authoritative testimony, which makes their comparison analytically productive. This investigation combines historiographical and conceptual approaches. *Vorstellungsgeschichte* provides a framework for examining how representations of distant peoples, spaces, and supernatural beings express historically situated horizons of plausibility and shared conceptions of reality. Tzvetan Todorov's reflections on verisimilitude supports the analysis of extraordinary narrative elements as part of a broader interpretative system that organizes experience and meaning. Attention was also given to narrative strategies such as appeals to oral and written authorities, genealogical constructions, direct speech, reference to informants, and the incorporation of marvellous *motifs*. Mikhail S. Kamenskij's notion of syncretic truth, alongside Berger & Luckmann's Sociology of Knowledge, supports an understanding of medieval Icelandic narrative culture as a field in which knowledge is produced through socially shared mechanisms of validation. The distinction between history and fiction is treated as a modern epistemological notion with limited applicability to the medieval context under examination. Within the texts analyzed, credibility emerges through the mobilisation of the above mentioned narrative strategies of legitimation. The analysis shows that boundaries between saga categories remain fluid in practice, at least to the contemporary context of the sagas. Across the corpus, narrative authority is constructed through shared cultural repertoires of verification rather than through stable generic divisions or identifiable authorship. This study concludes that saga literature can be understood as a flexible narrative practice engaging in the production and transmission of knowledge about the past. The focus on truthfulness and legitimacy reveals how medieval Icelandic narrative culture organized the relationship between memory, testimony and interpretation, and how it articulated past worlds through culturally grounded forms of plausibility and authority.

Keywords: *Foraldarsögur*; *Konungasögur*; *Vorstellungsgeschichte*; Medieval Historiography; Medieval Iceland.

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1. FRAMING THE STUDY: QUESTIONS AND APPROACHES

What is the most impacting invention of human history? Some might argue that learning how to control fire gave man the opportunity to assert itself as the most preponderant species on the planet, after all, the fire illuminated our darkest nights, at the same time opening paths until then unknown, such as cooking food. During the trajectory of mankind, however, the invention of both ground and chipped stone tools was distinguishing, for it gave space for the development of agriculture, hunting and fishing, for example. Later, the stone gave in for the metal tools, consequently lasting more time, some even to today, then adorning archaeological museums around the world. In fact, these inventions were crucial during the course of mankind's history. Yet, one may argue that writing could be the most impacting invention of them all. It was through writing that it was made possible to register events and thoughts that otherwise would have been lost to the sands of time. Through writing, it was possible to organize thoughts, create literature to several ends, write poetry or even exchange messages without relying on messengers's memories.

Still, the possibility of registering events would be useless without History to ordain these in a coherent way. History is not fact, it is indeed narrative. Not any narrative, but a type that is usually meticulously built, matured and shaped. After all, every History serves a purpose, frequently attributed by those that project and write it. Every History, being narrative, also has an expected audience, for the one who writes expects that somebody reads what is being written. Thus, this narrative has to make sense for its readers, be it reinforcing ideas from the dominant groups which need to be concretized on the minds of the dominated, be it shaping identities which unite and divide peoples.

If History is, however, not a fact, but narrative, contrary to, for example, what Hank proposed years ago, then we might suggest it is not the *Ding an sich*, as Schopenhauer says, for the *Ding an sich* would be the fact itself. And that fact is not, but was; it happened in the past, be it distant or closer. The *Ding an sich* is, thus, inaccessible to us, beings of the present, at least directly. History, as it is narrative, provides only indirect means to access the *Ding an sich*. That is to say, we cannot – even when we consider archaeological sources – access the past directly.

The saying that “material evidence does not lie” could not be more wrong, for the archaeologist who finds himself analysing material evidence, may only build his argument and produce results through writing, that is, through narrative. And that is in itself a major interpretative process, in which the archaeologist's perspectives, experiences, social *milieu*

and so on, make all the difference. If we take on Hans R. Jauss's Reception theory – in this case the archaeologist "reads" its material source, in that regard similar to the text, and interprets it; from this contact, emerges meaning – we may notice that the interpretation and meaning giving are the first phase, already influenced by the individual's previous experiences. After that, the archaeologist must yet write the results of this encounter, give it meaning. There is the reception of his material source, at least on a first level. His results, on the other hand, might be interpreted differently by different people from different times or places, giving them another set of possible meanings, after all, be it materially or textually, archaeology is still somehow narrative.

In any case, as we turn our focus back to History, as narrative, it is thus embedded by literature. In that regard, we may remember that Schopenhauer has put History closer to poetry than to science, and for that same matter, the debate goes on the literary nature of History. Across the time, early historians would excuse themselves, for instance enlarging numbers when narrating battles. This practice, in accordance with the convention of organizing the events in a coherent way, would corroborate for a more interesting narrative for its public, be it because of the dramatic element, or because it could seem more real.

At some point in time – likely set in the modern period – our society started to distinguish the practice of narrating the past with verissimilitude from what came to be called fiction. Although fiction itself can be a problematic concept, one tends to know – at least upon previously established social constructs – when they are reading a History book and when they are reading fiction. Albeit the line becomes more tenuous when we look at people's ideas on historical romances.

These broader reflections on the nature of historical knowledge become particularly relevant when considering medieval narrative traditions, in which the boundaries between historical account and literary construction are far less clearly defined than in modern epistemological terms. Moreover, this reflection is exactly what sparked the present study.

In Icelandic saga literature, narratives concerning kings, settlers, travellers and legendary figures were often transmitted in forms that combine elements which modern readers tend to distinguish as historiographical, literary and testimonial. Yet, these categories are not necessarily self-evident within the medieval context itself. Rather, saga narratives appear to participate in a system of knowledge production in which credibility is not primarily derived from a strict separation between fact and fiction, but from the successful mobilisation of authoritative sources of information, inherited traditions, and recognizable narrative forms. Oral reports, skaldic verses, genealogical knowledge, and references to named and unnamed

informants frequently function as mechanisms through which the truthfulness of a narrative is asserted and reinforced. In this sense, medieval Icelandic historiographical *praxis* may be understood as operating within a framework in which the legitimacy of a narrative depends less on its conformity to an external notion of factual accuracy than on its integration into socially and culturally validated structures of knowledge.

Within such a framework, the modern distinction between historical account and literary work becomes difficult, or rather anachronist if applied to the reading of medieval Icelandic texts. The sagas, be them kings sagas or legendary sagas, all engage, in different ways, with the representation of the past and the establishment of credibility, yet they do so through overlapping narrative strategies rather than through clearly demarcated categories such as ‘history’ and ‘fiction’. It is precisely this overlap that makes medieval Icelandic narrative culture a particularly fruitful field for examining how societies construct, negotiate, and transmit authoritative knowledge about the past.

This complexity becomes especially visible in texts situated at the intersection of the different modern saga classifications. While modern scholarship frequently organizes the saga corpus into relatively stable categories, individual narratives often resist such categorization, simultaneously participating in multiple historiographical, literary and epistemological traditions. Consequently, rather than taking generic divisions as self-evident starting points, it becomes necessary to examine how individual texts themselves construct and justify their claims to truthfulness.

The present study therefore focuses on three narratives that occupy particularly revealing positions within this scenery: *Ynglinga saga*, traditionally classified among the kings’s sagas, and *Yngvars saga víðförla* and *Eiríks saga víðförla*, commonly associated with the *fornaldarsögur*. Although these texts are usually assigned to different genres, they share several features that make their comparison especially fruitful. All three are concerned with either distant times or distant lands; all three combine historical, genealogical, and marvellous elements; and all three deploy explicit strategies to establish the credibility and authority of their narratives.

Their selection is therefore not intended to challenge existing classifications for their own sake, but to investigate the extent to which such categorizations adequately account for the ways in which these texts themselves articulate and legitimize knowledge about the past. By examining the mechanisms through which these narratives establish their truthfulness, this study seeks to contribute to the broader discussions concerning the production and transmission of historical knowledge in medieval Iceland.

Before addressing these questions, however, it is necessary to introduce the sources themselves, as well as their manuscript transmission, their place within the saga corpus, and the historiographical debates that have traditionally shaped their interpretations.

1.2 On the sources and their investigation

In this section of the text, I will present the sources that I have chosen to analyze, as well as discuss the reasons behind the selection. Alongside my justification, I will explain the research problem, that is the question that guides my investigation throughout the course of this inquiry. Each source will be presented individually, and I will discuss their selection criteria.

1.2.1 *Heimskringla* and *Ynglinga Saga*

The text called *Ynglinga saga* is the one that opens the *könungasögur* compilation, *Heimskringla*, likely redacted around 1230. The kings' sagas, or *könungasögur* (a subgenre in which *Heimskringla* is traditionally placed), are closely to other medieval chronicles, that is, they can be considered *historia*¹. Yet, *Ynglinga saga* deals with a legendary past, presenting several characteristics that bring it closer to the literary genre of the *fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*. More specifically, this text opens *Heimskringla* because it covers the mythical origin of the lineage of the Ynglingar, a legendary family largely present in the Old Norse corpus². Thus, the saga begins with a chapter describing the cosmological geography of the world by its Narrator. The text follows with a presentation of Óðinn, his brothers, and the gods – Æsir and Vanir – and the war between them. As the narrative moves forward, we are shown how Óðinn flees from the Romans, traveling through *Turkland*. The lineage still mentions King Yngvi from Sweden and ends with Rognvaldr, in chapter fifty.

In this way, *Heimskringla* depicts a *historia* of the kings of Norway, from the legendary times until approximately 1177. Its most common authorship attribution is to Snorri Sturluson, a very influential man in Iceland during his time. During his life, he became a powerful *goði*, acquiring several properties and even going as far as to fill the position of *lōgsögumaðr*, or lawspeaker (FAULKES & FINLAY, 2011). *Heimskringla*, however, is not the only work attributed to Snorri. There are other texts, such as the *Edda* and *Óláfs saga helga* (which is the work most confidently attributed to Snorri), which were probably written before the redaction of *Heimskringla*. Curiously, Faulkes argues:

There is no trace in Snorri's writings of any knowledge of Latin; he almost never uses Latin words and never quotes Latin works. Where he shows

¹ I borrow this term from the German Historian Hans-Werner Goetz, as will be demonstrated below. Yet, the term here is used to distinguish the conceptions of medieval historiography and modern History.

² Cf. the genealogy at the end of Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók*.

knowledge of Latin concepts or theological ideas that were not already available in Icelandic translations, it is mostly of a fairly general nature and could easily have been derived from listening to vernacular preaching in churches or from conversation with clerical friends such as the priest and historian Styrmir Kárason (d. 1245). But there would undoubtedly have been books at Oddi, and they may have included secular writings in the vernacular such as Eddic poems and historical records about Icelandic and Norwegian history. Snorri was a learned writer, but his learning was mostly in native lore rather than Continental European writings in Latin (2008, p. 311).

I will also return to this topic later, but it seems that the picture of Snorri as a clearly identifiable author for the works mentioned above includes something of a “(almost) pure” Icelandic transmission of knowledge. Regarding the production context, historiography usually relates Snorri’s travels to Norway to it. There, the author came closer to the Norwegian crown, especially the regent *Jarl* Skúli (BAGGE, 1991, p. 8). In this way, Snorri becomes a *lendr maðr* in the Norwegian court, with the promise to convince his fellow countrymen to accept Norwegian rule. In this time interval, before 1230, the work was compiled (FAULKES & FINLAY, 2011). *Heimskringla* was likely addressed to an Icelandic audience, yet considering this Norwegian *milieu*, its contents might be seen as a systematic attempt to build a history that concerns that royal power. Something that is directed in the prologue of the text³:

Í bók þessi lét ek rita fornar frásagnir um höfðingja þá, er ríki hafa haft á Norðrlöndum ok á danska tungu hafa mælt, svá sem ek hefí heyrt fróða menn segja, svá ok nokkurar kynkvíslir þeira, eptir því, sem mér hefí kent verit, sumt þat er finnsk í lang- feðgatali, því er konungar hafa rakit kyn sitt eða aðrir stórættaðir menn, en sumt er ritit eptir fornum kvæðum eða sǫguljóðum, er menn hafa haft til skemtunar sér, en þó at vér vitim eigi sannynði á því, þá vitum vér doemi til þess, at gamlir frœðimenn hafa slíkt fyrir satt haft (1911, p. 1, my emphasis).

This book, I let be written, according to ancient stories of the chieftains who had held power in the northern lands and had spoken the Danish tongue, as I had listened wise men tell, and also according with some of their genealogies, as was taught to me, some of that is found in the tales of the agnates, there the kings or other men of noble origin have their lineage tracked, and some is written according to old reports or sung stories, which the people have held for their entertainment. Even if we do not know the truth about that, we still know of cases in which old wise men had, similarly, held this as true.

When we look at *Heimskringla*'s codicology, we will notice that the oldest surviving manuscript, *Kringla*, is dated to 1270; however, only one page survives intact. Still, its content was preserved in a 17th-century copy made by the Icelander Ásgeir Jónsson, on which most of the modern editions are based (JØRGENSEN, 2007 *apud* FAULKES & FINLAY,

³ All translations from Old Norse and other languages presented in this work are done by myself, unless stated otherwise. In that way, the original text always follows in footnote.

2011). Moreover, there are other medieval manuscripts, dating from the 14th century, which are also incomplete – namely, AM 39 fol. and *Fríssbók*.

1.2.2 *Yngvars saga víðförla*

Yngvars saga víðförla, or the Saga of Yngvarr the far-traveled is a text whose authorship is – as I will discuss below – subject of debate. Other than its anonymous author, the major name to be attached to it by scholarship is Oddr Snorrason, a Benedictine monk. If that stands true, then the text would have been written in 12th-century Iceland, likely in a monastery in Þingeryar. Haki Antonsson (2012) divides the work into three sections, as follows:

The first begins with a Swedish chieftain, Áki, abducting a Swedish princess, followed by his marriage to her. Their son, Eymundr, later becomes the father of Yngvarr. His opening section concludes with Yngvarr's departure from Sweden in search of a kingdom. Two themes dominate the opening part of the saga. First, the focus is on the power relation between Yngvarr's ambitious family and the established Swedish royal dynasty [...] The second distinctive feature of the first section is the complete absence of religious matters. Even for a legendary saga there is an almost obsessive focus on earthly riches such as jewellery, gold, and other treasures [...] The absence of Christian or pagan elements in the first section stands in sharp contrast to the second and central part of the saga and even more so with the concluding section [...] In the third and final part of the saga Yngvarr's son, Sveinn, retraces his father's journey at the helm of another Viking crew. Sveinn completes his father's work by first killing Jaculus, the dragon, and then converting Silkisif's kingdom to Christianity, and lastly he marries the queen. Sveinn then returns to Sweden and the saga ends with him setting out on the river, apparently to rule over his newly acquired kingdom (pp. 77-78).

In that regard, the saga – which begins with the story of a Swedish chief who becomes Yngvarr's father – initially without references to religion, with the focus set mainly on material wealth, becomes progressively more engaged with salvation and Christian morality. Likewise, Lars Lönnroth (2012, p. 8) recognizes the similarities of the text to Latin *exempla*, which the author connects to the edifying purpose of the saga itself. The *exempla*, however, are only the tip of the iceberg, as Lönnroth notes:

The literary and folkloristic patterns in the saga also seem to be of several different kinds and have different origins. First of all the saga appears to be influenced by various Old Norse myths and folktales about travels in the North or East to Giantland, Bjarmaland or Kvænland by Þórr, Þorsteinn bæjarmagn, Örvar-Oddr and various other heroes – a narrative pattern that goes back to the mythological poems of the Edda but was further developed in the fornaldarsögur and also in the learned literature of the Scandinavian Middle Ages. The closest parallel to *Yngvars saga* among these texts is probably the story of Thorkill the Far-Travelled in Book 8 of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* (2012, p. 8).

Thus, *Yngvars saga víðförla* seems to draw both from the Old Norse literary *corpus*, which supports a later dating of the text⁴, as well as from Latin works, such as the *Gesta Hammaburgensis*, by Adam of Bremen. In one of the two main manuscripts, AM 343a 4to, a certain “*gesta saxonum*” is mentioned. However, one could argue that this mention is not about Saxo’s *Gesta Danorum*, quoted above by Lönnroth. As Annett Krakow (2022, p. 148) points out, the mention could actually be a paraphrase of Adam’s text, more specifically from Book III, c. 16⁵, referring to some Anund, son of a Swedish king, who would have gone to the isle of the amazons. That reference to the isle, as Lönnroth concludes, could be traced to Isidore of Seville:

This is true for example of the cyclopes and the birdmen and one of the dragons that attack Yngvar’s men, since that dragon is called Jaculus, just like a similar monster in Lucan’s *Pharsalia*. The dangerous women are reminiscent of *amazones* and they live where amazones were said to live, that is in Scythia, according to Classical sources. The cities Heliopolis and Scythopolis have Greek names, meaning “the city of Scyths” and “the city of the Sun”, and are inhabited by people who speak the Greek language, as both Queen Silkisif and King Júlfr turn out to do (2012, p. 9).

In this regard, there is a vast range of influences, all being worked inside the narrative and molding a certain vision of the past, made in Iceland, somewhere between 1200 and 1400. The same range of influences makes the saga hard to classify under one label, even if we consider the subdivision made by Kurt Schier (1970)⁶. After all, the text has elements which mix *Abenteuersagas* and *Wikingersagas*, besides kings’ sagas and even *Þættir* to some degree. Thus, researchers such as Hermann Pálsson defend still another division, which contains the *víðförla sögur* – besides the *Yngvars saga víðförla*, *Eiríks saga víðförla*, and *Þorvalds þátr víðförla*.

1.2.3 *Eiríks saga víðförla*

Eiríks saga víðförla is a travel narrative, in this respect similar to *Yngvars saga víðförla*, yet in regards to its historicity, it has received less attention than the latter. That is because the saga itself has left little space for such a discussion, as its few ‘historical’ marks are more vague than those in *Yngvars saga*, as well as because there is no material evidence of Eiríkr’s journey. The travel in the narrative, in a way, serves as a background for the discussion of theological matters, especially regarding the conversion to Christianity. In a

⁴ Lönnroth, on this topic, exempts himself of dating more precisely, differently from Dietrich Hofmann, who says: “written at some time between 1200 and 1400” (*apud* Lönnroth, 2012, p. 5). Although a two hundred year time span is not exactly precise as well.

⁵ In the manuscript it reads: *Eymundur, son Olafs, atti son, er Onundur hiet. Sa uar hinn likazti Ynguari i margri natturu ok allra hellzt j uýðforli sinni, suo sem til uisar j bók þeiri, er heiter gesta saxonum ok er suo ritat* (*Yngvars saga*, XXIII *apud* Krakow, 2022, p. 147)

⁶ Schier splits the subgenre of the legendary sagas into three subdivisions: a) *Heldensagas* (Heroic sagas); b) *Wikingersagas* (Viking sagas); c) *Abenteuersagas* (Adventure sagas) (1970, pp. 73-78).

way, one could say that the main point of its author was to tell a history of Eiríkr's spiritual journey, both in search of the earthly paradise, as well as his salvation.

Moreover, the question of who wrote the saga of Eiríkr is left up for debate. Simek (1981) and Hofmann (1981, 1984a) suggested the learned *milieu* of Þingeyrar in northwest Iceland as a possible location where the text might have been composed. Scheel (2016) pointed to a dating around the 1300s. If that is the case, the *milieu* of composition of *Eiríks saga* could be the same as *Yngvars saga*.

Regarding its preservation, the work survives in four different textual versions, represented across around sixty manuscripts, according to Kolbrún Haraldsdóttir (2019)⁷. Of the sixty, five are medieval manuscripts, of which three preserve the version A of the text. Those are:

- I. GKS 1005 fol. (*Flateyjarbók*) from *c.* 1387, in which the text is complete.
- II. AM 720 a VIII 4to from the first half of the 15th century, where approximately one-third of the text is preserved
- III. AM 556 4to (*Skáholtsbók*) from *c.* 1420. In this manuscript about half of the text survives.

The medieval manuscripts that preserve the B version of the text are:

- I. AM 657 C 4to, *c.* 1340-1390
- II. GKS 2845 4to, *c.* 1420-1450

The C and D redactions of the text are preserved exclusively in post-medieval witnesses (2019), and because of that are out of the scope of the present study.

Finally, the text demonstrates – as pointed out by Simek and Hofmann – a learned hand in Latin culture and literature. This may be seen in regard to the possible Latin sources utilized by its author during the composition, namely the *Elucidarius*⁸ and Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*.

1.2.4 Source Selection and research problem

Having presented the sources to be analyzed in the present study, I shall now comment on their selection. As the reader may have already noted, all of the sagas selected for this study share one apparent characteristic: all of them deal with elements we – 21st century people – would consider fiction. *Ynglinga saga* presents an account of Óðinn and other Old Norse figures typically viewed in a “Norse Pantheon”. *Yngvars saga* describes encounters

⁷ Helle Jensen's critical edition from 1983 appointed fifty manuscripts, however Kolbrún Haraldsdóttir's more recent study expanded the picture.

⁸ The *Elucidarius* has been translated into Old Norse, which could have found its way into the author's hands. Cf. Firschow; Grimstad. (1989).

with a dragon, giants and other marvels and *Eiríks saga* tells of a journey to paradise, in which the protagonist dives into a dragon's mouth to enter, and where he talks to an angel.

This shared characteristic already partly motivates the selection of these sources, yet, to better understand it, one must first state the research problem of this scientific investigation. In that regard, we have the fantastic elements above, which we deem clearly fictitious. In spite of that, to assume that the people behind the documents that will be analyzed thought of them in the same way we did would naturally be anachronistic. Still, the current categorization accepted by modern scholarship sustains itself on categories that are partly shaped by such anachronistic assumptions. That is because it divides the groups of sagas into subgroups, based on modern perspectives on their content, such as the assumption that medieval Icelanders saw their reality in a similar manner as we do. Namely, that they separated texts about the past into true histories and fairy tales.

In the light of this, it is necessary to question those assumptions, which is my intent within this investigation's length. This is why I have chosen these three primary sources. *Ynglinga saga* has a particular position within saga division, for its characteristics align with the group of the legendary sagas, albeit it is still classified as a king's saga, for reasons I will discuss below. The two *viðförla sögur*, *Yngvars saga* and *Eiríks saga*, on the other hand are properly grouped in the *fornaldarsögur* category. *Yngvars saga* occupies a position comparable to *Ynglinga saga*, as it has sparked some debate on its historicity, as there is material evidence that supports a journey by a certain *Yngvarr*. Contrary to both, *Eiríks saga* is seen by modern scholarship as a theological and fictitious narrative. Thus, there are no claims – different from the case with *Yngvars saga* – that the journey described there actually took place.

In other words, the *Ynglinga saga* and *Yngvars saga* may be seen as 'hybrids', considering the actual state of saga subgenre classification. *Eiríks saga*, on the other hand may not be considered as such, yet its less empirically grounded narrative is what makes it so interesting for the study, as it enlarges the range of what could be considered historical by medieval Icelanders. These factors led to the formulation of questions about how medieval Icelanders wrote History.

This theme became the central research problem of this study: was there a distinction between historical and fictitious narratives for the Icelanders of the 12th and 13th centuries? To answer the question posed above, the three selected sources will be analyzed regarding this very aspect: their perceived – by their contemporaneity – historicity.

As has been shown in the presentation of the sources, while *Heimskringla* and *Yngvars saga* have little manuscript variation, *Eiríks saga* has a substantial one. For this reason, I will now explain the edition choice regarding each source.

- A. *Heimskringla* (*Ynglinga saga*): I chose the 1941 edition by Bjarni A., a part of the *Íslensk Fornrit* collection, for it is the most authoritative modern version of the text, containing a vast introduction as well as substantial information in footnotes. Since the manuscript variation is limited, a standardized edition is appropriate for the purposes of the present study. It must be added, however, that the 1911 edition by Finnur Jónsson was also consulted, albeit less frequently.
- B. *Yngvars saga víðförla*: As we shall see below, this particular saga is found primarily in two manuscripts from the 15th century, although it was likely composed between the 1200s and 1300's. Moreover, because of the limited variation in the manuscripts, the choice of edition was to utilize Guðni Jónsson's 1954 edition, which is found in his book series *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*. This is a standardized edition and limited critical commentary, thus this gap was supplemented by relevant scholarly studies.
- C. *Eiríks saga víðförla*: Unlike from the other two selected sources, this saga is preserved in about sixty manuscripts in total, divided into four versions (A-D) (KÓLBRUN HARALDSDÓTTIR, 2019). For this reason, the chosen edition of the text was Helle Jensen's 1983 critical edition. This is a *variorum* edition, which presents the four different versions of the text, alongside an extensive introduction and footnotes. The study of manuscript variation proved fruitful for this study, justifying the edition choice. Guðni Jónsson's 1954 edition was also consulted when needed.

1.3 Regarding the genre classification

medieval Iceland was the stage for various political conflicts, from the religious change – traditionally placed around the year 1000 of the Common Era – until the emerging tension with the Norwegian crown, which, by 1262, resulted in the end of the Icelandic “independence”. Still, one could say that the great product of medieval Iceland was the literary *corpus* produced there, which brought to posterity the Icelandic Sagas and other texts, such as the Eddas.

Despite being an island geographically remote and often described as inhospitable, it was there that most of the sagas were composed, at least in their written form as we now know. However, one must ask, what are Sagas? The renowned translator of several Old Norse texts (such as *Njáls Saga* and *Völsunga Saga*) to Portuguese, Théo de Borba Moosburger, explains:

[...] they are a literary genre apart from others; they are not romances or novels: they are texts in prose in which one can indeed recognize similarities with these other genres and which also possess a lot in common with the epics, however, with their own elements (2024, p.11)⁹.

The word *saga* comes from the Old Icelandic verb *segja*, which means to say or tell something. *Saga*, *per se*, could mean either story or history¹⁰. Whether the narrative is an anecdote or a “*de facto*” narrative of the past, it is referred to by *saga*. The Russian researcher Mikhail S. Kamenskij writes:

This word could also designate the narrated events themselves: for example, "He was already very old at the time when these events (*sjá saga*) took place." And since the events told of in the saga were most often feuds, *saga* could also mean "feud". For example, "Thus originated the feud between Þorbjörn and Hávarðr the Lamé (*saga þeira Þorbjarnar ok Hávarðar ins halta*)". But while in Modern Icelandic this word has two clearly distinct meanings - a *saga* as a literary work and history as a scholarly discipline - in Old Icelandic there is not the slightest trace of such a distinction. Whether a narrative was considered fact or fiction, it was designated by this word (1973, p. 26).

As the semantic range of the term *saga* suggests the corpus encompasses a wide variety of themes. It includes texts ranging from *könungasögur* narrating the lives of kings, Scandinavian or not, in a somewhat similar style to that of the continental chronicles and the *fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, or *sagas* from the old times of the northern lands, which Torfi Tulinius (2005) calls a “legendary pre-history” of Scandinavia. In other words, they range subjects perceived as historical to subjects perceived as legendary, thereby including elements that would be considered fictitious nowadays¹¹. Because of this diversity, modern scholarship has divided the literary genre of sagas into several subgroups.

With that in mind, the subgenre of *Fornaldarsögur* is, perhaps, the most heterogeneous among all, however, as Bampi notes:

[...] what binds them together as a genre is that these sagas recount events which took place before the colonization of Iceland and its later conversion to Christianity. The actions are thus set in the North (excluding Iceland) and in territories known to Scandinavians (2017, p. 19).

But if what binds the *fornaldarsögur* together is, on one hand, the time when they are set, what do we make of the *viðförla sögur*? If we take the *Yngvars saga viðförla*, for instance, we will notice that narrative is generally situated in the 1030s and 1040s. Still, this

⁹ [...] são um gênero literário à parte; não são romances, não são novelas: são textos em prosa nos quais se podem, sim, reconhecer semelhanças com esses outros gêneros, e que também possuem muito em comum com as epopeias, mas com elementos próprios (2024, p. 11).

¹⁰ In Portuguese, however, there used to be a similar distinction, done by the use of two different words: *História* and *Estória*. The latter eventually fell into oblivion, giving space to *História*, which now englobes both meanings, making it somewhat similar to the Old Norse *saga*.

¹¹ Perhaps when they were conceived there was some kind of distinction or doubt, at least when thinking about the educated public that could read them. The same cannot necessarily be extended to the illiterate people that heard them.

text is generally classified as legendary. At the same time it is not completely alien to the genre, after all, the saga presents fantastical elements, such as the *Jakulus*, and it fulfills the “space requirement” of being set outside of Iceland, for it is set on:

[...] the undefined landscape of Germanic heroic literature or in the exotic, far-off venues of adventure tales; in any event, the locales (and resulting atmospheres) are far from the realistic, workaday world of medieval Iceland so characteristic of the *Íslendingasögur* and other more realistic saga genres (MITCHELL, 2008, p. 320).

Because of this heterogeneity, the group of *fornaldarsögur* may be further subdivided into three subgroups, as Kurt Schier proposed in *Sagaliteratur* (1970). The author divides the group in the following categories: a) *Heldensagas* (Heroic sagas); b) *Wikingersagas* (Viking sagas); c) *Abenteuersagas* (Adventure sagas) (pp. 73-78). Schier argues that *Heldensagas* deal mainly with themes tied to heroic legends and Germanic poetry, highlighting the *Völsunga saga* and the *Hrólfs saga kraka* as examples. The central feature emphasized by Schier is the tragic element, which usually usually appears at the end of the story¹² (p. 74).

In the *Wikingersagas*, however, the main literary motifs are the expeditions, plunder, and combat. From a narrative perspective, Schier points out that the events are presented in a more episodic and vivid manner, which results in a “loose” structure, *i.e.*, without a proper climax; something that does not occur in *Abenteuersagas* and which Schier considers to represent a later development in the tradition (p. 76). As examples of the *Wikingersagas*, the scholar mentions *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Orvar-Odds saga*. The *Abenteuersagas*, although they do not share the same structural weakness regarding narrative climax, are likewise not particularly elaborate in their construction. Usually, these sagas' literary motifs come from other popular narratives, either Scandinavian or foreign, and they also incorporate those narratives more extensively, as is the case with *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* (pp. 77-78).

Another classificatory model was suggested by Sigurður Nordal in *Litteraturhistorie B* from 1953. Rather than adopting the traditional saga divisions, Nordal proposed a classification based on the temporal distance separating the events narrated from the period of composition (*apud* BAMPI, 2017 and KAMENSKIJ, 1973). The main criterion employed by Nordal was to think of the relationship between the time of composition of the texts and the time when the events were believed to have occurred. Nordal then divided the corpus into three main groups: a) *Oldtidssagaer*, or sagas about the remote past (up until around 850); b) *Fortidssagaer*, “sagas about the past” covering the period up to roughly 1100; and

¹² Cf. QUINTANA, Thiago. “*Nunca é tão sábio quanto imaginas*”: *metábasis e o paradoxo do trágico na saga de Hrólfr Kraki*. Thesis (Phd program in Classical Literature) - Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2022.

c) *Samtidssagaer*, the contemporary sagas (*apud* BAMPI, 2017, p. 21 and KAMENSKIJ, 1973, pp. 34-35).

This division, albeit with limited impact on the debate surrounding saga classification, offers an alternative perspective on the Icelandic narrative corpus. Rather than emphasizing literary motifs or narrative structures, Nordal privileges the temporal distance separating the events narrated from the period of composition. By doing so, the scholar highlights a criterion that may be particularly relevant when considering medieval conceptions of the past. Although his model never achieved the prominence of the traditional saga divisions, it nevertheless encourages a reconsideration of the assumptions that underlie modern classifications of the categories through which medieval Icelandic narratives have come to be understood.

1.4 Analytical Approach and chapter presentation

Due to the character of the sources I have presented here and proposed to investigate, I have chosen a multidisciplinary approach to this study. That is, rather than relying exclusively on historical scholarship, I intend to expand the analytical framework, combining theories from literature and sociology, in order to enrich my analysis.

To that end, I sought to draw on Berger & Luckmann's *Sociology of Knowledge* (1966) alongside insights from literary theory, such as the studies of Goldschmidt (1943) and Todorov (1977). The *Sociology of Knowledge* emphasizes that reality is not simply given, rather socially constructed through processes of institutionalization, habitualization and legitimation, and that it is only perceived as stable insofar as it is continuously maintained through the transmission of knowledge. In this sense, what is considered "true" or "historical" in a given society is not an external absolute, but a socially stabilized epistemic framework. This approach will be developed more fully in chapter three, where it will be applied to the analysis of how the sagas construct claims of historicity, authority and plausibility.

Besides that, much of my historiographical analysis is based on the German school of thought called *Vorstellungsgeschichte*, as developed by Goetz (1979; 2008) and Grzybowski (2012, 2021). As the name indicates, the focus of this approach is on the intellectual aspects of history, particularly on conceptualizations and worldviews, treating sources as reflections of their authors' mental frameworks. It treats historical texts not as transparent records of events, but as expressions of historically situated mental frameworks (*Vorstellungswelten*) that shape what can be perceived, represented or believed as "history".

From the perspective of a *Vorstellungsgeschichte*, the narrative constructions that will be analyzed can be understood as expressions of culturally conditioned frameworks of

historical imagination, in which events, spaces, and figures are organized according to inherited conceptual patterns rather than empirical verification. At the same time, the Sociology of Knowledge provides a complementary explanatory layer by emphasizing the social processes through which such frameworks are maintained, transmitted, and legitimized across time. In this sense, saga narratives engage in the stabilization of meaningful historical worlds by reproducing and reworking collectively recognizable forms of knowledge. Another author is relevant here, albeit not a part of this school: Skinner (2002), whose contextualist approach similarly emphasizes the embeddedness of meaning within linguistic and intellectual contexts.

These analytical orientations will be further developed in chapter three, where they will be applied to the narrative strategies of the selected texts, particularly in relation to claims of authority, and the construction of narrative credibility. This discussion will be complemented by Goldschmidt's approach to medieval authorship and Todorov's concept of verisimilitude, both of which contribute to understanding how textual authority and narrative plausibility are created within medieval literary systems.

In the second chapter of this work, "Nafnleysis sǫgur: constructing Authorship without an Author", I will address the question of medieval authorship, examining the individual problems of authorship present in each of the sources elected for this inquiry. There, I will explain my choice of treating all of the sources as anonymous works, rather than attaching them to particular names and, consequently, the contexts given by these figures *milieux*. I will also address the question of how from the perspective of *Vorstellungsgeschichte* to deal with this anonymity.

In chapter three, "Narrative Strategies and Historiographical Practices", I will focus on an in-depth analysis of the sources. At first, I will conduct a separate investigation for each of them, inquiring about their claims of historicity and truthfulness by their Narrators. After that, a brief comparative analysis will take place, constructing the basis of the discussion that will be developed in the last chapter of my work.

Finally, in chapter four, "Fornaldarsǫgur or Konungasǫgur? How was the Past made Credible in medieval Iceland", I will discuss the conclusions reached in chapter three. There, my aim is to argue that medieval Icelanders did not in fact differentiate between "history" and "story", in relation to Old Norse saga narratives, that is their narratives about the past. Moreover, it is my intent to question saga classification and ultimately to challenge the notion of sagas as a distinct literary genre.

2. *NAFNLEYSIS SÖGUR*: CONSTRUCTING AUTHORSHIP WITHOUT AN AUTHOR¹³

2.1 On the question of authorship

We, modern readers, are accustomed to knowing works by their author's names. When someone mentions J. R. R. Tolkien, the fantasy reader will understand that it is probably a reference to *The Hobbit*, or *The Lord of the Rings*, the same goes for instance, for Andrzej Sapkowski's *Wiedźmin*, more popularly known as *The Witcher*. This logic extends equally to canonical authors, such as Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Shakespeare, Machado de Assis and so on. We tie the author's name to its work, in such a way that the two cannot be dissociated, indeed it would make no sense to speak of any of these works and not mention their authors. When a book is published, after this same author has gone through the editorial process, the title will follow his name on the book cover, thus being marketed on the internet and in physical bookstores. That is how we know books, sometimes even choosing to read them solely on the basis of the author's name displayed on the cover. However, this is one point in which medieval readers are somewhat different from us. Because of this difference, rather than departing from questions of individual authorship, this study adopts anonymity as a methodological starting point, treating named attribution not as something given, but as a historical and interpretative construction. That will now be concisely addressed.

If we think of the medieval *Scriptoria*, we might picture libraries filled with books (that is if it was an important, and consequently rich one) and more books being copied little by little, every day. In this context, naturally there were no ISBNs, publishers, and so on. That is to say that even titles, chapter divisions and especially authors' names were conceived differently. If we are not thinking about great names of the church, such as St. Thomas Aquinas or Isidore, for instance, there was a great chance that there were no mentions of authorship at all. Other than that, there were cases in which the person behind the quill would not mention their name purposefully, be it by humility or because they did not think of themselves as worthy of recognition. As Ralph O'Connor puts:

[...] saga-authors claimed no personal ownership of (or finality for) their particular reworking of the received story [...] In mediaeval Iceland, it seems, distinctions between the 'copying' and 'composition' of a text were rather blurred: the Norse terms *skrifa* ('write') and *setja saman/samsetja* ('put together', 'compose') overlapped considerably and were sometimes interchangeable (2005, p. 115).

¹³ This chapter was originally published before the completion of the work. See BOTELHO, Pedro de A. B. C. Nafnleysis sögur: constructing Authorship without an Author. In: GRZYBOWSKI, Lukas Gabriel. (Org.). *The Vikings go South: Scandinavian Studies in Londrina*. Ananindeua: Itacaiúnas, 2025, pp. 58-81. The version that follows here contains a few modifications.

That is the case with all of the medieval manuscripts of the texts I am dealing with in the present work, as we shall see. This however, does not mean that the texts were not significant, or that their meaning was somehow lost without a name attached to their opening pages. On the contrary, to the contemporaries of theirs, this knowledge was part of a greater body of cumulative knowledge, and giving a bunch of leaves a name was not a particularly significant detail. These material conditions are not merely codicological details, but directly shape how authorship could be conceived, transmitted and retrospectively assigned. I will now attempt to explain this through a brief hypothetical scenario.

A paleographer, observing certain medieval manuscript, that it is likely to be the result of a collective work of several hands, will notice this latter detail, just as any kindergarten teacher, teaching children how to read will observe in their assignments that their writing differs from each other, significantly, that is if this teacher can even read some of the indistinct bunch of letters of the preschoolers. But back to our hypothetical manuscript and paleographer. As the manuscript under scrutiny has passed through several hands, the evidence for that will emerge: different writing styles or linguistic features – which could also indicate different moments of redaction – mistakes made while copying, marginal annotations or drawings, etc. The point is, while we may associate a single name to a medieval work, that might not be the case with the medieval manuscripts upon which our modern editions were based, as those manuscripts might also be – and frequently are – the product of more than one copyist's work. Authorship, in this context, emerges not as a singular creative act, but as a layered process distributed across multiple agents and moments of transmission. To differentiate between these layers and what was written by whom is the work of the paleographer, but as a historian, one should at least ask how to deal with this situation when analyzing such texts.

In this section, I will discuss the authorship problems and attributions of the three texts I am working with, starting with the *Ynglinga saga*, and following with *Yngvars saga víðförla* and *Eiríks saga víðförla*. After presenting these sources and their authorship attributions, I will discuss the concept of medieval authorship – through E. Goldschmidt's work – alongside *Vorstellungsgeschichte* and Todorov's narrative theory, in order to demonstrate my approach to the problem of (not) assigning a name to these texts. With that, the present study proceeds from the premise that these texts are best approached, in the first instance, as anonymous products of a manuscript culture, leaving questions of individual authorship as secondary and historically contingent.

2.2 Who speaks in Heimskringla?

As I stated above, the first text whose authorship is to be discussed is *Ynglinga saga*. However, this saga was not preserved alone, at least not in this format¹⁴. On the contrary, the *Ynglinga saga* is compiled within what is probably the most famous *Konungasögur* work, *Heimskringla*. Because of that, it may not be thought of as completely independent from the remaining kings' sagas in the compilation. It is therefore natural to begin this discussion by addressing the state of the art when it comes to *Heimskringla*'s authorship attributions. After that, I shall move on more specifically to the *Ynglinga saga* itself.

Diana Whaley, in *Heimskringla: an Introduction*, states the following, at the very outset of her study: “Yet so strong is the impression of integrity and artistry which Heimskringla gives that it is reasonable to speak of an author, and, for reasons explained in Chapter One, that author must be Snorri Sturluson (1178/9-1241)” (1991, p. 9, my emphasis). Whaley nevertheless qualifies this assertion, noting that:

The author is not named in any surviving vellum manuscript of these works, but it is known that Snorri compiled books and was an authority on the Norwegian kings, and most scholars would agree that it was Heimskringla that he wrote (1991, p. 13).

I draw attention to two different versions of the work's prologue, both preserved in medieval manuscripts: the one in *Jöfraskina 2* (J2) and the one in *Fríssbók* (F). Where in J2 there are no attributions, F assigns the work to Ari Þorgilsson. As Bjarni Alðabjarnarson (1941) already discussed, that is unlikely; however, this attribution is still a part of the manuscript. Even if the author is not named in any of the medieval *vellum*, Whaley's whole book revolves around the idea that Snorri is in fact to be considered the author of *Heimskringla*. Although Whaley herself does not directly imply that Snorri is to be taken as the sole author, her enthusiasm throughout the book points in that direction, as he is frequently referred to. Yet, that is not a consensus within scholarship – albeit, the idea that Snorri at least had some relation to the production and compilation of *Heimskringla* seems to be¹⁵. If we take, for example, Patrícia Pires Boulhosa, in *Icelanders and the Kings of Norway: Mediaeval Sagas and Legal Texts*, we will notice a rather contrary argument to that of Whaley.

¹⁴ There is another version of this narrative, the *Ynglingatal*, which is “detached” from *Heimskringla* and written in verse. Nevertheless, that is out of the scope of this work.

¹⁵ I must add, however, that the seemingly “dominating” opinion is that Snorri is to be considered the author of *Heimskringla*, which may be exemplified by looking at one of the main encyclopedias of the field: “Ynglinga saga (“The Saga of the Ynglingar”) is the first section of Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla [...] (YNGLINGA SAGA. In: PULSIANO, Phillip (ed.). *Medieval Scandinavia: an Encyclopedia*. New York & London: Garland Publishing Inc., 739, 1993, my emphasis).

Boulhosa challenges the claim that Snorri must be the author of *Heimskringla*, as stated:

Their major premise is that Snorri wrote all the kings' sagas known to us as Heimskringla: the assumption, though a common one, is in fact far from uncontroversial. There is little clear proof that Snorri was the author of Heimskringla, especially in the sense in which authorship is understood within Old Norse scholarship: there are no manuscripts which explicitly claim Snorri wrote the work, and the circumstances surrounding this attribution are particularly obscure. The most important piece of evidence which scholars bring forward in order to support Snorri's authorship is a Danish translation of a number of kings' sagas from about 1551, by the Norwegian Laurents Hanssøn, which was commissioned by Hans Svaning, a tutor of the Danish prince, later King Frederik II (King of Denmark and Norway from 1559 to 1588) (2005, pp. 8-9, my emphasis).

In Hanssøn's translation, Snorri is briefly mentioned in the prologue, as it follows: "That which follows in the preface is nothing other than the chronology which one finds in the chronicle itself about each king after Saint Óláfr and before etc. Here ends the prologue of Snorri Sturluson from the Book of Kings" (*apud* Boulhosa, p. 10¹⁶, my emphasis). Boulhosa goes on:

In the case of Heimskringla, there is no mediaeval attribution; it is therefore necessary to concentrate on the mentions of Snorri Sturluson and Ari inn fróði in the headings of the prologue of the sixteenth century translation. These headings are not unambiguous; as seen above, the first heading does not mention authors; the second heading, which Hanssøn apparently wrote in order to mark a change of subject in the body of the prologue, ascribes a saga or sagas to Ari inn fróði and a prologue to Snorri Sturluson. It is noteworthy that Hanssøn connects Ari and Snorri to the sagas only implicitly, and does not attribute the work to either of them in the prologue, or in the frontispiece of the book [...] (2005, p. 12).

Hanssøn states in his preface that he had two manuscripts to rely on for his translations, one of them probably being the above mentioned *Fríssbók*. Scholars have suggested that, since Hanssøn affirms he had these two manuscripts at hand, the other one could have been *Kringla*, which would contain a prologue where Snorri was mentioned as the author of the work. However, *Kringla* was burned in a fire in 1728, in Copenhagen. Today only one leaf remains – *Lbs* Fragm. 82, in the National Library of Iceland. In any case, Ásgeir Jónsson did transcribe *Kringla* before the fire, separating it in three volumes, none of which contains the prologue in question. As Boulhosa discusses, Hanssøn could have based his

¹⁶ The translation was done by the above mentioned author, thus here follows the original, also provided by the same author: "*Thet som efter fylgir in prohemio er intthet annet æn Aara tall huilket man fynnir i sellffue kronicke om huer kong ifra Sanct Oluff oc tillforenn etc. / Her Enndis fortalenn / Snorris Sturlesenn / vdi konninge Boghen*".

affirmation on other sources, such as the *Óláfs saga ins helga*¹⁷, which could have been thought by him as Snorri's work, and that would not have been a mere coincidence:

I suggest that Hanssøn consciously manipulated the information he had before him in such a way that he could present the names of both Ari inn fróði and Snorri Sturluson. Far from an unintended ambiguity, these headings give the book an 'authoritative authorship' (2005, p. 13).

This is not entirely surprising, as both Ari and Snorri's names would certainly carry some weight with regard to making the work more "authentic" in the eyes of a modern audience. Even during the Middle Ages in Iceland, both names were well known. F's prologue, we must remember, attributed the work to Ari. Sverrir Tómasson, in *Formálar Íslenskra Sagnaritarara á Miðöldum* notices: "It is evident that Ari was an auctoritas at the end of the twelfth century and in the early 13th century" (1988, p. 279)¹⁸.

There is still another work from roughly the same time period as Hanssøn's, namely a translation of *Heimskringla*, made by Peder Claussøn at about 1599. However, in his version there was no attribution to Snorri, which was only made when Claussøn's work was published in 1633 by Ole Worm (Boulhosa, 2005, p. 17). In this regard, Jon Gunnar Jørgensen ads:

If Peder Claussøn did not derive information about the authorship of Heimskringla from a lost manuscript of that work, it is not necessary to believe that he knew the Prologue at all. This could explain why the publisher of his translation, Ole Worm, derived the text of the Prologue from Laurents Hanssøn's translation rather than from a manuscript (1995, 62).

Finally, if we inquire about Snorri on other sources from about the same period, we will find that no other mention is made, as Whaley points out:

Not all the authorities of this period agreed, however. Christiern Pedersen (d. 1554), when gathering materials bearing on early Danish history, used a '*norsk krønike*' compiled from a manuscript of Heimskringla, Bergsbók, and a manuscript of *Fagrskinna*. He thought that this 'chronicle' was by Bishop Ísleifr or Ari the Priest. No author was named by Mattis Størssøn (d. 1569) in his translation of Heimskringla, nor by Arngrímur Jónsson 'the Learned' when he cited Heimskringla's Prologue in his geographical and historical treatise about Iceland, the *Crymogaea* of 1609 (1991, p. 14).

In this case, it seems, if we take into account the written sources, both from the Middle Ages and early modernity attempting to attribute *Heimskringla* solely to Snorri, this will lead us to a methodological problem. Since there is not sufficient evidence – at least not based on the written accounts – to say with confidence that Snorri is to be the author here¹⁹. In fact, as

¹⁷ Jon Gunnar Jørgensen (1995, p. 62), argument goes on about the same direction: "[...] the two translators were probably not working from the same manuscript, and that the manuscript sources supporting the attribution need be no other than texts of *Orkneyinga saga* and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*. Information about Snorri and his work might also have been in circulation in the literary and cultural life of Bergen during Laurents Hanssøn's lifetime; and Peder Claussøn could have learnt of the thoughts and theories of literary scholars in Bergen from the lawyer Jon Simonssøn".

¹⁸ *Það er augljóst að Ari hefur verið auctoritas í lok 12. aldar og á öndverðri 13. öld.*

¹⁹ In this regard, even Whaley, who is of the opinion that Snorri is the author, agrees: "All these factors are far too vague actually to prove the theory of Snorri's authorship, but they are all compatible with" (1991, p. 15).

Boulhosa and Jørgensen argue, the early modern attributions made to Snorri seem to revolve around a “historiographical debate, permeated by national rivalries” (2005, p. 14). And in this context, the author of a compilation of *Heimskringla*’s magnitude – be it Snorri, Ari, or whoever carried more weight – should be stamped on the first pages of said book, especially if this author was, in this context, Icelandic or Norwegian²⁰. Because authorship claims were shaped by prestige and political concerns, they cannot serve as definitive evidence of Snorri’s role; thus, the text’s composition might be considered independently of these later constructions.

This is not, naturally, the only argument used to strengthen Snorri’s authorship theory. As Whaley points out, through Peter Hallberg’s study, vocabulary could favor some “unity” when dealing with *Heimskringla* (1991, p. 16). Although that does not provide us with any direct evidence regarding Snorri’s role, rather, it could, however, suggest the possibility of a single author. As I mentioned, this role is not undisputed within academia, though many scholars do not entirely abandon the tradition of associating Snorri with *Heimskringla*. One example of this was Konrad Mauer, who disputed Snorri’s authorship over the last section of *Heimskringla*: “Like others at that time and since, he felt the impress of Snorri’s authorship to be weakest in the final sagas of the cycle, maintaining that the four sagas following the death of Sigurðr Jórsalafari in 1130 were not the work of Snorri at all” (Whaley, 1991, p. 15). In that regard, Mauer still thought of *Heimskringla* as somewhat related to Snorri, even if not entirely conceived by him. However, in light of the above discussion regarding the prologues, one may ask why we, as academics, continue to regard Snorri as the author of *Heimskringla* despite the lack of conclusive evidence. But the fact is we also cannot affirm that he was not the author. Neither hypothesis can be fully proven. What to do then? I shall come back to this question in a moment.

For now, what I wanted to highlight was exactly this need to tie Snorri to *Heimskringla*, which, in my view, is not productive for the advancement of the field. In fact, Snorri being one of the “major figures” when it comes to Old Norse studies has shown other concerning developments in the same regard, as Kólbrun Haraldsdóttir demonstrates:

One sees in Snorri the reviver of Old Norse poetry and the great pioneer of classical saga literature. Almost everyone assumes that he composed the *Heimskringla*, the *Snorra-Edda*, and a separate version of the *Óláfs saga helga*, the so-called *Óláfs saga in sérstaka*. Arguments have been put forward that he wrote *Egils saga*, and even the *Prymskviða* and the extant version of

²⁰ As Boulhosa (2005, p. 14) explains, this was a period when Denmark sought to maintain sovereignty over the other Scandinavian kingdoms under its rule. In contrast, Norway was weakened, which explains why it would be interesting to look once again upon its “glorious past”, through its royal dynasties.

the *Hávamál* are said to originate with him. The latest idea is that Snorri, with *Egils saga*, created a new literary genre, the *Íslendingasögur*; *Egils saga* would be the first *Íslendingasaga* and at the same time a kind of link between the *Konungasögur* and the *Íslendingasögur* (1998, p. 97)²¹.

The tendency to associate Snorri with multiple works, as Kólblun notes, reflects the historiographical weight his name carries, which may bias attributions rather than reflect actual authorship. Since Gustav Storm in the 19th century, Snorri has been attached to almost any work deemed significant, something that can be seen by the attempts to attribute *Egils saga* to him²², as well as in designating him the “founder” of the *Íslendingasögur*. In a way, these attempts are not so distant from the early modern attributions of *Heimskringla* to Snorri, made by Hanssøn or Christiern Pedersen (d. 1554)²³, as then, Snorri’s name still lends authority to any work associated with him²⁴. Taken together, these scholarly perspectives illustrate that even modern consensus is provisional and shaped by interpretive frameworks, supporting a reading of *Heimskringla* as potentially anonymous or multi-authored.

With this section, I hope the reader can see my argument regarding Snorri and *Heimskringla*, and why I avoid treating the work as solely his. There is simply not enough evidence to conclude that Snorri is the author or the sole author. Rather, it might be more fruitful to try and read the compilation as an anonymous work from the 13th century, or perhaps earlier, as suggested by Alan J. Berger in *Heimskringla is an abbreviation of Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* (2001). This is at least, the path I chose to address the double-edged sword problem with authorship: depart from the point that the work is anonymous in the first place.

The *Ynglinga saga* is, however, not amongst the final sagas of *Heimskringla*, but rather the very first in the compilation. Still, with the evidence I presented here pointing towards an anonymous work, I do not believe it is productive to isolate this saga from the collection. On the contrary, if we say *Heimskringla* is to be considered anonymous, we may

²¹ *Man sieht in Snorri den Wiedererwecker der altnordischen Dichtkunst und den großen Wegbereiter der klassischen Sagaliteratur. Fast alle gehen davon aus, daß er die Heimskringla, die Snorra-Edda und eine gesonderte Fassung der Óláfs saga helga, die sogenannte Óláfs saga in sérstaka, verfaßt hat. Man hat Argumente dafür angeführt, daß er die Egils saga geschrieben habe, und sogar die Prymskvíða und die heute erhaltene Fassung der Hávamál sollen von ihm stammen. Und die neueste Idee ist die, daß Snorri mit der Egils saga eine neue literarische Gattung, die islendingasögur, geschaffen habe; die Egils saga sei die erste islendingasaga und gleichzeitig eine Art Bindeglied zwischen den Konungasögur und den Islendingasögur.*

²² On attributions of *Egills saga* to Snorri, see Hermann Pálsson’s introduction to Paul Edwards translation (1976), Bjarni Einarsson’s (2005) translation of the text as well as Torfi Tulinius, *The Enigma of Egill: The Saga, the Viking Poet, and Snorri Sturluson* (2014); on Snorri’s role as a “founder” of the *islendinga sögur* subgenre, see Jónas Kristjánsson, *Var Snorri Sturluson upphafsmaður Íslendingasagna?* (1990).

²³ Pedersen attributes the work he called *Norsk Krønike* to either the bishop Ísleifr or Ari Þorgilsson.

²⁴ Still on *Egils saga*, it is worthy mentioning a recent indirect translation made to Brazilian Portuguese by Artur Avelar, published in 2023. On the apparently IA made cover, it is stamped the name “Snorri Sturluson”. It is also interesting to disclose that Avelar is not a specialist in Old Norse studies, rather an independent translator focused on “medieval classics” in general.

read Mauer's idea as follows: the final section may not be the work of the same author as the earlier sections. In that way, we might conclude that there is a case of multiple authors, which is not unheard of in the Middle Ages.

2.3 The Authorial Question in *Yngvars saga víðförla*

Yngvars saga víðförla's authorship bears some similarities to *Heimskringla*'s, as we shall see. The tale of the adventurer sea-king Yngvarr and his son Sveinn, is usually classified as a legendary saga²⁵, though only partially, since the víðförla sagas can be seen as a distinct subgenre, following Rudolf Simek²⁶.

When it comes to authorship *Yngvars saga víðförla* may be a product of the 12th-century, as Dietrich Hofmann (1981, 1984a, and 1984b) points out. Hofmann argues that the author of the text is Oddr Snorrason, a Benedictine monk at the monastery of Þingeryar, in the northwest of Iceland. This is indeed mentioned in the epilogues of both the main manuscripts that preserve the saga *i.e.*, GKS 2845 4to²⁷ and AM 343A 4to (*c.* 1450-1475). While the manuscripts mention Oddr, this alone cannot confirm authorship, as we have seen with the case of *Heimskringla*. The manuscripts present incomplete versions of the text, compiled among other *Fornaldarsögur* and *Riddarasögur*. In one epilogue, it is written:

This story is told by the monk Oddr, who had heard it from that priest who was called Ísleifr, and also another Glúm, son of Þorgeirr, and a third, who was called Þórir (1954, p. 459)²⁸.

If we take the word of the copist at face value – as Quentin Skinner, in *Visions of Politics volume 1: Regarding Method*, suggests when dealing with ideas from other times (2002, pp. 40-41) – at first glance, one might conclude that the author is a certain monk, who is called Oddr, at least for those involved in the production of the manuscript and potential readership. Besides this excerpt, however, Hofmann relies on the consensus about Oddr Snorrason's authorship of the *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, originally composed *c.* 1190, in Latin, which survives in translations to Old Norse, made around the 13th-century. Therefore, Hofmann's theory is that *Yngvars saga víðförla* complementary work by Oddr to his *Óláfs saga*, based on the on the parallels of both works. Antonsson, however, disagrees on these parallels, as he says that: "Most notably, the two texts are not conjoined around political and

²⁵ This borderline classification is relevant because subgenre conventions may influence narrative structure and thematic choices, which in turn can provide clues about possible authorship or compositional context. The classification as a legendary saga, mentioned in the main text, can be seen in Clunies Ross (2010) and Mitchell (2023).

However, discussing the saga subgenre classifications is out of the scope of this section.

²⁶ 1984. *Die Quellen der Eiríks saga víðförla*. Skandinavisk, vol 14, n. 2, 114.

²⁷ This manuscript contains both *Yngvars saga víðförla* and *Eiríks saga víðförla*, as well as other *fornaldarsögur*.

²⁸ Þessa sögu segist Oddr munk heyrð hafa segja þann prest, er Ísleifr hét, ok annan Glúm Þorgeirsson, ok inn þriði hefir Þórir heitit.

ecclesiastical issues. Rather they share a concern with salvation and, more specifically, with the fate of secular leaders in the afterlife” (2012, p. 76). Despite researchers such as Lars Lönnroth agreeing, partially, with Hofmann on the attribution of authorship to Oddr, the larger consensus is that this is a later invention. Antonsson goes beyond:

Indeed since the publication of Olsson’s edition there seems to have been a consensus that the attribution to Oddr was a fourteenth-century invention which enhanced the authenticity of the saga and gave it an illustrious ancestry. Underpinning Hofmann’s ascription of the saga to Oddr was his discovery that the earliest text of Yngvars saga had almost certainly been written in Latin rather than Old Norse (2012, p. 75, my emphasis).

Rudolf Simek, similarly to Hofmann, does not agree with the idea that the attribution to Oddr is an invention (*apud* Hofmann, 1984b, p. 106). However, he suggests that a later author — unlike Hofmann’s dating to the 12th century — likely composed the saga in the 14th century: “knew only Oddr’s letter and made use of it in order to lend greater authority to his *Yngvars saga víðförla*” (*apud* Hofmann, 1984b, p. 106)²⁹.

Regarding the first topic, the evidence does not suffice, as Hofmann assumes, to say with confidence that Oddr Snorason is our author here. Not only that, but the fact that we only have manuscripts from the 1400s containing this saga means that, even if we take Hofmann’s hypothesis that the text is dated to the 12th century, we still do not have any manuscripts to confirm that this attribution is from that period rather than from later copying. That does not mean, of course, that the text itself could not be dated earlier than GKS 2845 4to and AM 343A 4to. On that regard, Hofmann produces two solid arguments to date it to the 12th century:

I would like to point out only two indications which, among others, speak particularly clearly in favor of an early dating of *Yngvars saga*. The expression at *alþjóðaliði* (“according to the common reckoning”) in connection with the specification of the year of Yngvarr’s death was meaningful only for as long as another system of chronology – namely that of Gerlandus – was also in use in Iceland. The uncertainty resulting from this situation did not persist very long beyond the year 1200 and had long since been forgotten by the fourteenth century (SpN, pp. 197ff.). A saga author of the fourteenth century would scarcely have addressed the problem of Yngvarr’s sanctity – demonstrated through miracle-working – at all, and certainly not in the daring manner found in *Yngvars saga* (SpN, pp. 215ff.).

²⁹ “Simek hält es aber auch für möglich, daß dieser späte Verfasser nur Odds Brief gekannt und sich seiner bedient habe, „um seiner *Yngvars saga víðförla* größeres Gewicht zu geben”.

This does not fit the fourteenth century, but fits very well the late twelfth century and Oddr in particular (1984b, p. 107)³⁰.

On the one hand, Hofmann points to the linguistic argument: many aspects of the Old Norse prose present in the text point not only to an earlier date, but possibly to an earlier composition in Latin. In chapter XI, the term *Jaculus*³¹ is used to refer to a winged creature that one could call “dragon”. On this same topic, Roland Scheel, in his book *Skandinavien und Byzanz*, wrote:

Since the Old Norse version also explicitly states that it dates Ingvarr’s death to 1041 (as do the Icelandic annals) at *alþýðu tali* (*secundam aeram vulgarem*), one must – also in view of the early linguistic forms – assume that the passage in question originated no later than the course of the binding introduction of the Dionysian computus around 1218, if not already earlier in conjunction with the process of vernacularization. Until that point, the Gerland computus had been in use at Þingeyrar, and it is plausible that the reference signals an innovation, or a deviation from the Latin exemplar (2016, p. 703)³².

As Hofmann, Scheel generally supports authorship attribution to Oddr and circumstantial dating to the 12th century. Returning to Hofmann, the other argument made for dating the text to the 12th century concerns the theme of sanctity and salvation. And again, it seems Hofmann is right, as in this century, the concept of sanctity was not yet fully systematized, whereas by c. 1300 canonization was already more centralized and organized under papal authority (Brown, p. 1981). Because of that, for a holy man to be properly canonized, there would need to be a proper list of miracles, either in life or posthumous, which required proper church investigation. This left little room for a 14th-century scribe to address canonization as it is done in *Yngvars saga víðförla*; by contrast, the 12th century

³⁰ Im übrigen verweise ich nur auf zwei Indizien, die, neben anderen, besonders deutlich für die Frühdatering der *Yngvars saga* sprechen. Die Wendung *at alþjóðaliði* ‚nach allgemeiner Zeitrechnung‘ war im Zusammenhang mit der Angabe von Yngvars Todesjahr nur so lange sinnvoll, wie man in Island auch eine nach einer anderen Zeitrechnung, nämlich der von Gerlands, datieren konnte. Die dadurch gegebene Unsicherheit bestand kaum sehr lange über 1200 hinaus und war im 14. Jahrhundert längst vergessen (SpN, 197ff.). Ein Sagaverfasser des 14. Jahrhunderts hätte das Problem von Yngvars nicht durch Wundertaten ausgewiesener Heiligkeit schwerlich überhaupt und sicher nicht in so gewagter Weise behandelt, wie es in der *Yngvars saga* geschieht (SpN, 215ff.). Das paßt nicht ins 14., sehr gut aber ins ausgehende 12. Jahrhundert und zu Oddr ganz persönlich.

³¹ Which comes from Isidor of Seville, as Scheel and Hofmann already pointed out. This means that whoever has written the manuscript versions we have access to, likely had a latin education.

³² Da die norröne Version zudem hervorhebt, sie datiere Ingvars Tod 1041 (wie auch die isländischen Annalen) *at alþýðu tali* (*secundam aeram vulgarem*), muss man auch angesichts der frühen Sprachformen davon ausgehen, dass der fragliche Passus spätestens im Zuge der verbindlichen Einführung des Computus nach Dionysius Exiguus um 1218 entstand, wenn nicht schon früher zusammen mit der Vernakularisierung. Bis dato verwendete man in Þingeyrar den Gerlands-Computus, und es liegt nahe, dass der Hinweis auf eine Neuerung beziehungsweise eine Abweichung von der lateinischen Vorlage hindeutet. Da die norröne Version zudem hervorhebt, sie datiere Ingvars Tod 1041 (wie auch die isländischen Annalen) *at alþýðu tali* (*secundam aeram vulgarem*), muss man auch angesichts der frühen Sprachformen davon ausgehen, dass der fragliche Passus spätestens im Zuge der verbindlichen Einführung des Computus nach Dionysius Exiguus um 1218 entstand, wenn nicht schon früher zusammen mit der Vernakularisierung. Bis dato verwendete man in Þingeyrar den Gerlands-Computus, und es liegt nahe, dass der Hinweis auf eine Neuerung beziehungsweise eine Abweichung von der lateinischen Vorlage hindeutet.

provided much more fertile ground for such discussion. Thus, if the text was composed in the 12th century when the discussion of sanctity was more fluid, it would make Oddr's potential authorship plausible – albeit still circumstantial; conversely, a 14th century scribe would likely have treated the theme differently, weakening a late dating attribution.

If we consider then that the text was composed around the 12th century, then the argument of attributing the same to Oddr gets stronger. The several similarities to Oddr's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, pointed out by both Hofmann and Scheel as well as by Phelpstead, become even more evident. Nevertheless, in my opinion, it is still a leap to go from “the text belongs to the 12th century” to “Oddr is the author”, that is because Oddr was just one in a possible *milieu* of textual production, even if we consider that *milieu* as Þingeyrar. The matter of medieval authorship only adds to this question. The similarities between both texts are indeed very much real, and yet this does not rule out the possibility that another scribe used Oddr's *Óláfs saga Tryggvason* to compose a first draft of *Yngvars saga víðförla*, possibly in Latin. Given the widespread practice of textual borrowing in the Middle Ages, it is entirely plausible that the author of *Yngvars saga* relied on Oddr's Latin work, especially if we consider the Latin textual marks present in text – as discussed in Krakow (2022).

The same is valid for the dating, as the canonization question does not forbid one from writing about this theme, even in the early 13th century, especially if we consider the time it would take for information from the continent to reach a periphery such as Iceland and there become properly established.

For these reasons, here is how I am addressing both problems: a) Authorship: since there is insufficient evidence to confirm Oddr as the author, I will consider the text anonymous – a point I will clarify below; b) Dating: it is reasonable to suggest that the text could have been composed in Latin in the 12th or early 13th century. However, we do not have access to this hypothetical Latin draft, which means we may only infer upon linguistic evidence to point in that direction. That ultimately is to say that the Old Norse version we have of the text is our one and only material to work – besides of course, the Yngvarr runestones³³ – and there is no way to say with confidence what is residual from this Latin version and what is the scribe's creation in Old Norse. Still, there is enough evidence to say that at least the text was heavily influenced by Latin sources such as Isidor and Adam of Bremen. This underscores that while the text draws heavily on Latin sources, such influence does not necessarily indicate Oddr's authorship, as any educated scribe could have incorporated these materials.

³³ Cf. Krakow, 2022 and 2023.

2.4 On the authorship of *Eiríks saga víðförla*

Quite differently from our previous two cases, *Eiríks saga víðförla* seems to be widely accepted as an anonymous work. The last, and most up to date, critical edition of the text was made by Helle Jensen, as a part of the Danish series *Editiones Arnaimagnæanæ*, and published in 1983. In it, Jensen wrote an extensive introduction – which was well received despite Rudolf Simek’s critique (1984) – to the text, in which the scholar approaches authorship concisely.

Albeit not necessarily Jensen’s main concern, the authorship question emerges in her introduction. However, not a single attempt is made to tie a name to the text. Jensen simply states that the author of the saga was a learned man who relied very much on the current literature of his time (1983, p. XXV). In this regard, the scholar goes on to explore the relations between the sources that the saga makes use of, such as the *Elucidarius* and *De imagine mundi*, which she defends were in Old Norse translation, rather than in Latin³⁴, agreement with Margaret Schlauch’s earlier observation in *Romance in Iceland* (1934). According to the uses of both the Latin texts – be it in translation or not – the implicit dating may be placed between the 12th and 13th centuries, a timeframe further supported by the saga’s use of the revelation *motif* (Jensen, 1983). This is reflected in other scholar’s texts, such as the above mentioned by Scheel, who wrote that “In the *Eiríks saga víðförla*, composed around 1300 in Iceland, a heathen in ancient times sets out in search of the *Óðáins akr*, that is, Paradise” (2016, p. 710, my emphasis)³⁵.

In fact, when it comes to the saga of *Eiríkr*, there is no explicit attempt to link the text to a “famous” name, as it occurs with our other two sagas. This contrast highlights that the practice of attaching renowned names as in *Heimskringla* or *Yngvars saga*, was not universal and may reflect differences in audience expectations or textual purpose. Be it for the complete lack of modern claims – at least to my knowledge – or because it did not occur to anyone that it would be interesting to do so in this case, the fact is that anonymity suffices here. Even Hofmann does not do so, at least explicitly; for him, the syntax and conceptual structure of *Eiríks saga víðförla* is a sign of a Latin trained author that could be compared to Oddr – although he does not claim that Oddr is in fact the author of this saga (1981, 1984a), he merely suggests that it could be located in the same monastic horizon, namely Þingeyrar.

³⁴ In this point, R. Simek disagrees, as he thinks that the versions of these works utilized by whoever wrote the saga were actually in Latin, rather than in Old Norse. See Simek, Rudolf. 1984. *Die Quellen der Eiríks saga víðförla*. Skandinavisk, vol 14, n. 2, 114.

³⁵ *In der um 1300 in Island entstandenen Eiríks saga víðförla begibt sich gar ein Heide in grauer Vorzeit auf die Suche nach dem Óðáins akr; also nach dem Paradies.*

With that, I do not think it wise to attach a name to a text that does not appear to require one. Not because the text was not important during the Middle Ages and beyond, after all, as Alessia Bauer in *Fremd und Eigen in der Eiríks saga víðförla: die Umkehrung der Erzählperspektive* (2018, pp. 3-4), Kolbrún Haraldsdóttir (2019) remind us, there are more than sixty known manuscripts that preserve the saga, ranging from the end of the 14th century to the 19th century, with the oldest surviving copy likely being the *Flateyjarbók* (GKS 1005 fol.). The text made its way into our posteriority without the need of a name to bear, demonstrating the high regard of its audience and the diligence of those who preserved it over the centuries. In any case, as I will argue in the next subsection, there might be no need to name authors for any of the texts I discussed above, as the medieval audience appears to have been unconcerned with naming authors. As we shall see, textual authority often derived from content and tradition, rather than individual authorship in the Middle Ages.

2.5 About Medieval Authorship

In *Medieval texts and their First Appearance in Print* (1943), Ernst Goldschmidt said: “I think this would be a simpler world if people left anonymous texts anonymous instead of thinking up odd proposals for fathering them on a varied assortment of incongruous authors” (1943, p. 30). With that tone, I open this subsection to discuss how I address the three works hereby discussed as anonymous texts. To say a text is anonymous does not mean it did not have an author, or possibly several. After all, there would be no extensive scholarship, including this study if something had not been written centuries ago.

As I mentioned in the beginning of this section, medieval authorship is rather different from authorship in our contemporary sense. We are accustomed to assume that if the work is published, it is typically the product of a single known author. This is especially intertwined with the advent of the book press, during early modernity. That is not, however, exactly the case for medieval texts. On the one hand, during the Middle Ages, the notion of authorship was much closer to a collective than a single name (of course, there are exceptions, that is not a rule after all; we may quote so-called “great names” as St. Augustine or Isidore of Seville). On the other hand, with the advent of the press, a need emerges as well – evidently modern – to assign authors to circulating books and texts (Goldschmidt, 1943).

In this context – especially the first hundred years after the invention of printing, that is between 1450 and 1550 – Goldschmidt brought up three categories to understand the medieval books then printed. The first one are books that were always in demand, such as the Bible, and the church fathers' works. Following the commerce rules of demand and offer, it is clear why these books were popular printing choices, selling quickly due to constant

readership. The second group comprises those books by contemporary readers: “[...] wrote with a view to their immediate appearance in print” (1943, p. 41). But it is the third group that is of primary interest here, for it contains what Goldschmidt calls “resuscitated books”:

The demand of the booksellers for a greater range of titles, the spirit of the age of the revival of learning with its eager curiosity for every kind of literary relic of the past, the spiritual and philosophic tendencies of the Pre-Reformation period seeking for a purer religion and deeper knowledge in the days of the wiser forefathers, all contributed to make the printers search the libraries for books worth printing (1943, p. 41).

After the initial “boom”, when the “newly found” Greek and Roman classics were exhaustively printed and reprinted, the interest was turned to medieval books. But, as we already have seen, those manuscripts often did not contain any authorship attribution. Goldschmidt says the following, regarding how it was dealt with: “the copyists or printers got hold of a manuscript that did not give the author’s name and either left it at that or took the name of the author of the following or preceding tract in the volume to apply [...]” (1943, p. 47). That may remind us of the earlier discussion on Laurents Hanssøn and Peder Claussøn. Moreover, in the third chapter of his book, Goldschmidt states that:

I believe that the real cause of all these ‘pseudonyms’, all these false attributions, as well as the existence of a large body of hopelessly anonymous work, is twofold. It lies firstly in the physical circumstances under which books were studied, written, and multiplied before the invention of printing; and secondly in the psychological attitude towards conditions and differing widely from our modern views and judgements on the various forms of literary activity (1943, p. 89).

With that, the author points out to our modern distinction of “Manuscripts” and “Books”, which is not at all applicable to the pre-press era, when manuscripts and books were effectively “equivalent”. Moreover, as it is also demonstrated by the author, few of the surviving medieval manuscripts were worked on by “one hand”. That does not only mean that more than one scribe would have worked on said manuscript, but also that several of the pages could have been reorganized and recompiled by librarians or bookbinders, who created new volumes without concern for critical compilation. That meant that:

They would assemble loose peciae of similar size to preserve in one volume, and they would be guided primarily by the format and secondarily as far as possible by the nature r subject-matter of the texts, but practically never by considerations of authorship. They might endeavour to form volumes of homilies and sermons and other volumes of grammar, logic, and astronomy, because these two categories would be placed in different sections of the library. But within these two categories they would not mind in the least binding a ninth-century author next to a 13th-century one (1943, p. 95).

Then if we are dealing with several scribes working on a manuscript, or even reorganization of the leaves, the question of what was an author in this context becomes relevant. Goldschmidt provides an interesting reflexion:

It cannot be doubted that for many medieval writers the exact point at which they ceased to be 'scribes' and became 'authors' was not at all clear. What amount of 'comportation' of acquired information entitled a man to claim the standing of an 'author' of a new unit in the chain of transmitted knowledge? We are guilty of an anachronism if we imagine that the medieval student regarded the contents of the books he read as the expression of another man's personality and opinion. He looked upon them as part of that great and total body of knowledge, the *scientia de omni scibili*, which had once been the property of the ancient sages. Whatever he read in a venerable old book he would take to be not somebody's assertion but a small piece of knowledge acquired by someone long ago from someone else still more ancient (1943, p. 113, my emphasis).

I think that is an interesting way of synthesizing the concept of medieval authorship, as it explains why assigning a name to a work was not a priority for medieval scribes, unlike the emphasis placed on authorship in early modernity. As Goldschmidt suggests, that seems to be strongly linked with the press and commerce logics, including large-scale book production and the distribution of copies to a growing readership, for which naming authors could provide market recognition. And if we turn back to our sources for a moment, more specifically to *Heimskringla*, as Diana Whaley reminds us:

Few nowadays, then, would question that Snorri, more than anyone else, is the author of *Heimskringla*. What needs further thought, though, is the nature of authorship in the Middle Ages, which was altogether less individual, more corporate than post-medieval and especially post-Romantic authorship. Two crucial ways in which this is so will be examined here. The first concerns the medieval author and those immediately around him. The opening sentence of Snorri's Prologue to *Heimskringla* contains the idiom *lét ek skrifa*, literally 'I caused to be written', and in *ÓlTrygg* 80 he uses *rita* and *rita láta* apparently interchangeably within a few lines. (He also applies the phrase *lét rita* to King Sverrir in *Hsona* 32.) These phrases suggest that Snorri's method of composing sagaworks was to make use of at least one scribe, sometimes dictating to him, and sometimes instructing him to incorporate a passage from a preexisting source, possibly with some prescribed alteration. Such a scribe would presumably be a man in holy orders, for there were several in Snorri's entourage (1991, p. 17, my emphasis).

Indeed that could suggest – or at least be meant to – the collaboration of several scribes on making the manuscript, as *lét ek skrifa* implies someone is dictating to the writer. As with Snorri, this part of the prologue should not automatically be regarded as more authoritative. However, the practice of dictating was attested in medieval *Scriptoria*, and one should bear that in mind in this case. What is left, thus, if we chose here not to assign any work to a known name? In the first two cases, we could say that *Heimskringla* is Snorri's work as much as *Yngvars saga víðförla* is Oddr's. We might then rely on biographical context, but as shown above, I adopt a different approach, which now is further justified.

As Goldschmidt and Whaley make clear on the excerpts above, it would be somewhat anachronistic to talk about authorship – at least in the way we are concerned with today –

when working with medieval texts, broadly speaking. In the first two examples, *Heimskringla* and *Yngvars saga víðförla* we might see how early modern editors addressed this problem by assigning names they considered authoritative. Their concern was not with anachronism, naturally, but as a 21st century Historian, that would be considered a sin to do. On the third case, *Eiríks saga víðförla*, we are left with several manuscripts of all ages but the medieval, which demonstrates that anonymity was not a hindrance to a text's transmission or influence, reinforcing the medieval conception of collective authorship. As it is obvious from the scholarship, that should be then treated as anonymous *a priori*. My question is then, in the light of the evidence, both circumstantial and direct, why should the first two not be taken as anonymous works as well? And then as we hereby consider them so, how to deal with those works? If we are not to assign a name, what can we do? I will discuss the solution I found best below.

2.6 Dealing with anonymity

Before what we now call a “History of Ideas”, and especially if we look into 18th and 19th century historians, one would often say that the document “speaks for itself”. That is, there was no room for historical criticism, as the narrative presented by official documents was often taken for granted and therefore history itself was considered the science that narrated the past “as it was”. After the *École des Annales* and the “linguistic turn” popularized this “History of Ideas and Mentalities” approach however, historians started to look beyond the official documents, to those sources, both written and in other formats, in order to reconstruct this “unofficial” history, or even history “seen from below,” rather than focusing solely on dominant perspectives. This shift in historiography highlights the importance of examining the perspective of the Narrators in sources, including those who remain anonymous.

The most important thing though, is that these narratives were no longer accepted uncritically as accurate mirrors of past events. That also meant that what History was, essentially changed, since the implication was that we cannot know the past directly. We may only look into the past through indirect evidence, building a version of the past that we can understand and internalize. In 1979, the German Historian Hans-Werner Goetz was one to give voice to what he called a *Vorstellungsgeschichte*, in an article entitled „*Vorstellungsgeschichte*”: *Menschliche Vorstellungen und Meinungen als Dimension der Vergangenheit*. He wrote:

A “*Vorstellungsgeschichte*” does not reconstruct the past in its factuality, but the past as the “processed reality of the contemporary.” Since “history” today

is increasingly defined as the image of the past held by the respective present, a “*Vorstellungsgeschichte*” in this sense indeed treats “the history of past times.” It does not reveal facts or structures, but the contemporary understanding of history, and thus, as I argue, it stands alongside event history and structural history, representing a third domain of past reality and a new (third) type of historical study with its own methods and results (1979, pp. 256-257)³⁶.

Moreover, he writes:

In short, it is applicable to all questions that do not aim to capture historical facts in their objectively occurring context, but rather focus on their filtering “in the mirror of the sources” – that is, on examining the ideas, views, and conceptions of people of past times. Here, the task is no longer merely to provide preliminary work for a source interpretation, but – beyond the source-critical approach – to see the real aim of knowledge in the conceptions of the authors of the sources themselves. Such an approach goes far beyond the remit of traditional intellectual history, because it does not aim at reconstructing “epoch-making ideas,” but investigates the thought-world and mental framework of individual contemporaries in their entirety. When applied consistently, this opens up a significant dimension of the past – the mental world of people of earlier epochs – that has hitherto received insufficient attention within historical scholarship, even though recent impulses concerning “ideas and mentalities” point in this direction (1979, pp. 255-256)³⁷.

That I believe is very relevant here, as it allows us to interpret the Narrators of the texts discussed in question as constructions reflecting contemporary perspectives rather than focusing on the question of personal authorship. Besides merely preparing and analysing a historical document regarding the event sequence presented in it, this perspective proposes to go beyond, and think about the conceptions and perceptions of the document’s Narrator. One must then understand that which the source itself provides directly: the individual conceptions of the Narrator. I am referring specifically to a Narrator, because I believe calling for an author in this case, where we are dealing with medieval texts, could be considered anachronistic – as demonstrated priorly. In that regard, the primary source becomes not a

³⁶ Eine „*Vorstellungsgeschichte*“ rekonstruiert nicht die Vergangenheit in ihrer Faktizität, sondern die Vergangenheit als die „verarbeitete Wirklichkeit des Zeitgenossen“. Da man „Geschichte“ heute zunehmend als das Vergangenheitsbild der jeweiligen Gegenwart definiert, behandelt eine *Vorstellungsgeschichte* in diesem Sinn tatsächlich „die Geschichte vergangener Zeiten“. Sie erschließt weder Fakten noch Strukturen, sondern das zeitgenössische Verständnis von Geschichte, und tritt damit, wie ich meine, in eine Reihe neben die Ereignis- und Strukturgeschichte und repräsentiert gleichsam einen dritten Bereich der vergangenen Wirklichkeit und eine neue (dritte) Art geschichtswissenschaftlicher Betrachtung mit eigenen Methoden und Ergebnissen.

³⁷ Kurz, er ist anwendbar auf alle Fragen, die die historischen Tatbestände nicht in ihrem objektiv abgelaufenen Geschehniszusammenhang zu erfassen trachten, sondern ihre Filterung „im Spiegel der Quellen“ zum Gegenstand haben, also die Ideen, Ansichten, Vorstellungen der Menschen vergangener Zeiten untersuchen und hier nicht länger lediglich Vorarbeiten für eine Quelleninterpretation leisten, sondern - über den quellenkritischen Ansatz hinaus - in den Vorstellungen der Quellenverfasser ihr eigentliches Erkenntnisziel sehen. Ein solcher Ansatz geht weit über die Aufgabe einer traditionellen Geistesgeschichte hinaus, weil er nicht auf die Erarbeitung „epochemachender Ideen“ abzielt, sondern die Gedanken- und Vorstellungswelt einzelner Zeitgenossen in ihrer Gesamtheit untersucht. Konsequenter angewendet, eröffnet sich hier mit der Vorstellungswelt der Menschen vergangener Epochen eine bedeutende Dimension der Vergangenheit, der bisher noch eine angemessene Beachtung innerhalb der Geschichtswissenschaft fehlt, wenngleich die neueren Anregungen über Ideen und Mentalitäten in diese Richtung zielen.

direct mirror of the past, but an indirect one. It is only direct when we think that it is the *reservoir* for this Narrator's conceptions. This Narrator may represent a composite of multiple hands or voices, potentially spanning different periods or locations; however, for analytical purposes, we treat it as a single "constructed Narrator" for the purposes of this study.

If then the source arms us with the possibility to grasp what the Narrator's thought, this once anonymous figure becomes somewhat more intelligible. For instance, if we look at both *viðförla* sagas, we will notice the already stressed religious theme very explicitly. If we then compare it with the heavy presence of Latin vocabulary present in both texts and the use, for example, of sources such as the *Elucidarius* and maybe *Stjórn* or *Hómiljubók*, we might reach the same conclusion as some of the authors cited above have argued: we are dealing with men who were well versed in Christian literature, which is not a surprise. We may even go further and say that the Narrators were perhaps priests. In the case of the *Ynglinga saga*, we will notice that, even if the Narrator is concerned with recounting the past, he is not very fond of pagan kings and paganism – although they present what they consider to be paganism of some sort – on the contrary, most of the pagan kings presented there die either foolishly or because they were simply terrible kings. The fact is, we are always dealing with narrative, which is how these Narrators talked to their audience. In *Poetics of Prose*, Tzvetan Todorov wrote about Benveniste's studies on the verb tenses:

He has shown the existence, within language, of two distinct levels of the speech-act: that of discourse and that of the story. These levels refer to the integration of the subject of the speech-act within what is spoken. In the case of the story, Benveniste tells us, "we are dealing with the presentation of phenomena which occurred at a certain moment of time without any intervention on the part of the speaker in the story." Discourse, on the other hand, is defined as "any speech-act supposing a speaker and a listener, and in the speaker an intention to influence the listener in some way" (1977, p. 25, my emphasis).

And moreover:

Literary narrative, which is a mediatized, not an immediate language and which moreover is subject to the constraints of fiction, knows only one "personal" category, the third person: that is, impersonality. The one who says I in the novel is not the I of discourse, that is, the subject of the speech-act. He is only a character, and the status of his words (direct style) gives them a maximum objectivity, instead of bringing them closer to the subject of the actual speech-act. But there exists another I, an I generally invisible, which refers to the Narrator, that "poetic personality" we apprehend through the discourse. Hence there is a dialectic of personality and impersonality, between the I of the Narrator (implicit) and the he of the character (which can be an explicit I), between discourse and story. Here is the whole problem of "point of view": in the degree of transparency of the impersonal he of the story in relation to the I of discourse (1977, p. 27).

Todorov's distinction between discourse and story allows us to interpret the Narrator's intentions and world view without needing to rely on a specific name. That also aligns with *Vorstellungsgeschichte*, as we always must think about what is behind the text, that is, why was it written in the first place? This concerns of course the relation of what might be gained, legitimized, validated or invalidated. Who benefits from the text and who does not? To answer these questions is one way to gain access to the core of how the Narrator thinks, what is their worldview and so on. However, that is of course not the only point to be addressed. The Narrators are always showing themselves and what they think, be it by producing a third person discourse, which includes "simply narrating facts" – although, as Goetz has already wrote: "A medieval chronicler has not just written down „facts“ (although he himself may have believed that he has), but has handed down a personal „construction“ of his own perception of the historical process" (2012, p. 111) – or by reproducing its thoughts through the mouths of the characters. That means, directly or indirectly – in between the lines lies the face of our anonymous Narrators. Henceforth, in this work the term "Narrator" refers to the narrative voice constructed by the text rather than to a historically identifiable author.

Although, for Todorov, the narrative interpretation does not aim at reconstructing the narrative intention, for a Historian that is in fact very informative. Nevertheless, for the author, interpretation is related to describing the internal laws of the narrative by which a text finally produces meaning. In any case, to address the anonymity and the construct of the Narrator, Todorov's narrative theory seems very promising, especially paired with *Vorstellungsgeschichte*; after all, giving a name to an author is as of as much importance in this case as being concerned with the factuality of the narrative, that is, neither issue is critical for our purposes here; the focus is on the constructed Narrator and the text's internal narrative logic. In this way, the Narrator is different from the author, as it is a function created by the text and governed by its internal rules (1977). Through that function, a Historian can deduce much about the context and people behind the text, encompassing its narrative objectives and aspirations, but also keeping track of this narrative world which is inseparable from the text itself, for as Todorov said: "The absence of narrative signifies death [...] The man is merely a narrative; once the narrative is no longer necessary, he can die. It is the Narrator who kills him, for he no longer has a function" (1977, pp. 74-75).

3. NARRATIVE STRATEGIES AND HISTORIOGRAPHICAL PRACTICES

In this section I analyse the three primary sources selected for this study. The analysis is structured as follows: initially, I will analyse them separately³⁸. This will be followed by a comparative analysis, where I will deal with the limits of their subgenre's characteristics with the aim of providing evidence for the problem addressed in the following chapter. That is the contemporary boundaries between "fiction" and "history" in the context of textual composition and transmission.

The analysis I propose here is not primarily concerned with the factual evidence the texts could provide – which, of the three texts, particularly the ones to raise such questions would be *Yngvars saga víðförla* and parts of *Ynglinga saga* – that is, regarding the factuality of the texts themselves. As I already provided some theoretical background, I am instead concerned with narrative structure and how it is shaped by the Narrators' conceptions, experiences, and interpretative choices. The Narrators' perspectives should emerge from the textual analysis, as was mentioned by Goetz, above.

To undertake the analysis, I choose to first build a particular understanding of each text on its own terms, as Quentin Skinner has stated:

I am only pleading for the historical task to be conceived as that of trying so far as possible to think as our ancestors thought and to see things their way. What this requires is that we should recover the concepts they possessed, the distinctions they drew and the chains of reasoning they followed in their attempts to make sense of their world (2002, p. 47).

This entails reconstructing the conceptual framework available to medieval narrators and readers. For instance, *Ynglinga saga* is of particular importance to a greater narrative in *Heimskringla*, which is made evident by its position on the compilation. It makes a foundation upon which the Narrator builds other narratives, thus it functions as a foundational narrative within *Heimskringla*, providing a framework for subsequent accounts. Throughout these shorter narratives, the aspect of the king's model emerges in such a way that it is only natural to compare the kings shown in *Ynglinga saga* with other kings the Narrator deemed as potential rightful rulers. Moreover, the contents of *Ynglinga saga* are explicitly problematised within the prologue – I will discuss this with more depth below – which may raise the question of "authenticity" for both Narrator and public. This notion of authenticity is not necessarily tied to correspondence with "real-world events", absence of what modern readers would classify as "supernatural" phenomena, on the contrary, it may be intertwined with the sources used to build the narrative. One point worth noting is the purpose of the texts, for

³⁸ For the purpose of this analysis, I included the prologue of *Heimskringla*, as it concerns topics aligned directly with *Ynglinga saga*.

example both the *viðförla* sagas explore religious topics in depth, something that – particularly in light of a *Vorstellungsgeschichte* – is not unheard of: discussing several topics, here maybe theology, in texts that, to a modern audience, would not necessarily relate to those. Overall, the main focus of the individual analysis is to understand what makes these narratives about the past legitimate to a contemporary audience.

On the comparison side, this section examines the narrative structures that are shared between the texts, one of those being the repetition – sometimes *ipsis litteris* – of narrative models. In the *Ynglinga saga*, it happens most constantly, as we are presented in nearly every chapter, particularly in the second half, with a new ruler, in which the ruler is succeeded by his son. In *Yngvars saga viðförla*, two instances are especially relevant where a structure is repeated. Those are the encounters with queen Silksif and king Jólfr. Yngvarr's behaviour is consistent in both episodes: the king separates his man from the unholy peoples by confining them to a hall and only allowing for the queen/king to come in, due to the presence of idolatry outside those walls. *Eiríks saga viðförla* shares certain geographic *motifs* with *Yngvars saga viðförla*, possibly suggesting the use of a shared or related source, such as a version or adaption of *Etymologiae*; that is besides both narratives presenting journeys to the east – although the answer to the question of what is this east for each Narrator may differ.

Through the comparison of these narrative repetitions and structural parallels, the analysis seeks to highlight a potential lack of distinction between “history” and “literature”, after all, a distinction that is itself historically contingent. The direction I am taking in this section is then to think about how these seemingly different texts – at least to modern standards – behave as both operate through comparable strategies of legitimising claims about the past. It seems easy to think about *Heimskringla* as a “historiographical source”, whereas the same classification is not always applied to the two *viðförla sögur*. That is largely due to modern scholarly classification traditions, but what if such a separation was not operative when those narratives were being conceived?

3.1 Genealogy and Dynastic Legitimacy: *Ynglinga Saga*

The saga of the Ynglingar may be divided into two parts. The first comprises the narrative from chapter one to approximately chapter eleven. This section establishes two fundamental dimensions of the narrative: space and time. In the opening sentences of chapter one, the Narrator describes the structure of the world, its division into three parts by rivers, and the names of both distant and nearby lands. The prologue further introduces a sequence of ages, including the age of fire, during which cremation was practiced. Subsequent chapters

recount Óðinn's flight from the Romans, his passage through *Turkland*³⁹, and his eventual arrival in the North, where Gefjun's sons are said to have displaced a piece of land from Sweden, later identified as Jutland. Another important episode is the war between the Æsir and the Vanir, which culminates in the reconciliation of the two groups and establishes the foundations of the Ynglingar lineage.

The second part of the saga extends from chapter eleven to the end of the text. Here, the lineage develops from Yngvifreyr to Rognvaldr in chapter 50. Each ruler is positioned in direct succession to the previous one, producing a strong sense of temporal continuity. This structure is reinforced by chapters six to eight, which describe how Óðinn establishes ritual practices concerning sacrifice, funerary customs, and tribute. Sacrifice and tribute emerge as recurring thematic concerns throughout this section, as several rulers encounter difficulties related to both. For instance, in chapter fifteen, King Dómaldr is sacrificed following a severe famine, as the Swedes attribute the crisis to his rule.

Whereas the first section contains two quotations from skaldic poetry – a stanza by Bragi *inn gamli* in chapter five and another by Eyvindr *skáldaspillir* in chapter eight – the second includes approximately twenty-five stanzas attributed to Þjóðólfr *inn hvinverski*, as well as one further stanza by Eyvindr. In most cases⁴⁰, the structure is identical: “*Svá segir ...*”, followed by the name of the poet. This pattern is not incidental, after all, if we look into the prologue of *Heimskringla*, the Narrator tells us that Þjóðólfr composed the *Ynglingatal*, as well as that Eyvindr composed *Háleygjatal*, both poems telling about the lineages of the kings. Along with those, the Narrator mentions other possible sources for the text as tellings from wise men and their genealogies. As Diana Whaley has observed:

Verse quotations figure sporadically in Ari's *Íslendingabók*, the Oldest saga of *Óláfr helgi* and *Ágrip*, but it is in the encyclopaedic histories, *Fagrskinna*, *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla* itself, that their use reaches its peak and their function is fully established. In the earliest works the quotations are mainly of lausavisur, occasional verses which form an integral and dramatic part of the narrative. Uttered, supposedly, by the protagonists at high points in the action, they are introduced by tags such as *þá kvaéd Sigvatr*. The later quotations are more commonly extracts from long encomia which serve an authenticating function, confirming and embellishing the facts of the narrative. These are typically introduced *svá segir Sigvatr*, or *þess getr Óttarr* (1991, pp. 75-76, my emphasis)

³⁹ Which, as Faulkes suggested, is not related to Turkey, but to Troy (*apud* GRØNLIE, 2006, p. 31). In fact, *Íslendingabók* mentions a certain Yngvi, king of the Turks, in a genealogy similar to the one in *Ynglinga saga*. This could be related to a continental tradition of linking the origin of the peoples to the fall of Troy, as well as inserting the narrative into the greater narrative of biblical history, linking those to the creation of the human race, with Adam and Eve, as is seen in *Trójumanna saga*.

⁴⁰ The exceptions being the quotation from Eyvindr in chapter eight, where it reads: “*Um hann orti Eyvindr skáldaspillir þetta*”; “About him, Eyvindr skáldaspillir composed this” (1941, p. 21); and the last quotation in the text, in chapter fifty: “*Par segir hann svá*”; “There, he tells so” (*ibid*, p. 83).

Skaldic citations may be compared, with due caution, to citation practices in modern academic writing. Modern academic writing frequently relies on citation practices to validate claims and establish credibility. In the same manner, these quotations appear to function as mechanisms through which the narrator establishes narrative legitimacy by signalling the sources upon which the account is said to depend. We cannot tell exactly what is being taken from oral sources we do not have direct access to, and even other written sources are a problem, as we have seen in the previous chapter. By repeatedly invoking skaldic poetry, the narrator establishes a consistent pattern which coincides with the information we are given in the prologue. In other words, uncertain material is nevertheless transmitted because it is grounded in traditions accepted by learned authorities. At the same time, gaps in transmission inevitably remained and had to be resolved through narrative organisation and, where necessary, narratorial elaboration.

Whaley also argues that:

The verse quotations in *Heimskringla*, and Snorri's comments on verse in the Prologue, always suggest that his priorities in choosing and using the verse are historical rather than aesthetic [...] (pp. 76-77).

This interpretation also seems applicable here. Especially as we compare the use of skaldic poetry in *Ynglinga saga* with that found in an *Íslendingasaga* such as *Njáls saga*, an important distinction emerges. In the latter, verse is abundant, yet it does not merely complement the prose narrative; rather, it often fulfills an aesthetic function and is frequently integrated into the narrative through the declamation of individual characters. In *Ynglinga saga*, however, the issue raised in the prologue concerns the reliability of the knowledge being transmitted. Within this context, the skaldic quotations appear to support the prose narrative by providing an additional layer of authority and validation⁴¹.

The same may be said of the section of the prologue devoted to Ari Þorgilsson. It is well known that Ari had become a prominent authority on matters concerning the past, both during his lifetime and in later centuries, as several medieval and modern texts mention him and attribute works to him⁴². The fact that a section is dedicated to Ari's life and scholarly activity in the prologue itself suggests, at least narratively, that the Narrator wishes to associate the text with his authority and perhaps even to present him as one of its sources:

Því var eigi undarligt, at Ari væri sannfróðr at fornum tíðendum bæði hér ok útan lands, at hann hafði numit at gömlum mǫnnum ok vitrum, en var sjálfr

⁴¹ According to scholarship on saga prose and skaldic verse, the stanzas in question would fall into the category of 'corroborative stanzas', serving this exact purpose of confirming the truth of the prose. Cf. O'DONOGHUE, Heather, *Prosimetrum in the Íslendingasögur*, 2024.

⁴² Cf. BOULHOSA (2005), as we already discussed, some early modern manuscripts attribute *Heimskringla* to Ari; GRØNLIE (2006).

ok minnigr. En kvæðin þykkja mér sízt ór stað færð ef þau eru rétt kveðin ok skynsamliga upp tekin

So it was not extraordinary that Ari would be well informed about ancient events both here and in foreign lands, that he had learned from old and erudite people, after all he himself was eager for learning and attentive. And the poems seem to me solidly grounded in truth, if they were correctly declaimed and sagaciously interpreted (1941, p. 7).

In this excerpt, where the Narrator discusses both Ari and the poems, the statement that Ari was “well informed about ancient events both here and in foreign lands” points toward a deliberate construction of authority. By presenting Ari as a source, the narrative acquires additional credibility, since Ari is portrayed as an exceptionally learned individual, as the preceding account of his life emphasizes.

The Narrator does not specify what Ari’s precise contribution to the text would have been. This may be because such information was already familiar to the intended audience, or because the prologue itself was added at a later stage by an editor who no longer had access to these materials. Regardless, the invocation of Ari appears to draw upon an already established tradition surrounding his name in order to evoke a sense of authority. It is this authority that ultimately reinforces the credibility of the narrative: if the information derives from Ari’s work, then it acquires the legitimacy associated with his reputation as an expert on the past⁴³.

Moreover, the poems that had already been addressed in the first section of the prologue – “*Tökum vér þat allt fyrir satt, er í þeim kvæðum finnsk um ferðir þeira eða orrostur*” (1941, p. 5); “We take everything as truth, which is found in their poems about their journeys or battles” – are brought up once again at the end of the prologue, even though Ari does not seem to be directly associated with these poems.

Thus, the prologue closes by returning once more to the poems as authoritative sources, reminding the reader of the materials upon which the work is built and of the reasons they should be regarded as trustworthy. As the excerpt indicates, these poems are considered particularly reliable when they concern “*ferðir þeira eða orrostur*” – journeys and battles. Most of the cited verses indeed deal with such subjects, with the exception of certain more overtly legendary episodes, such as Bragi *inn gamli*’s stanza in chapter five or Eyvindr’s in chapter eight. Nevertheless, these examples are also incorporated into the text and fulfill the

⁴³ For a longer discussion – in Portuguese – on Ari’s influence over Icelandic historiography both during the Middle Ages and in modern times, see: BOTELHO, PEDRO de A. B. C.; CORREA, João Ricardo M. T. O passado pagão da Islândia, segundo o Íslendingabók De Ari Þorgilsson. In: Taís Nathanny Pereira; João Victor Bernardes; Wemerson Romualdo. (Org.). *Sacralidades Medievais: relíquias, devoções e sensibilidades*. 1ed. Goiânia: Tempestiva, 2025, pp. 609-623 and BOTELHO, Pedro de A. B. C. A construção do passado da Islândia Medieval por Ari Þorgilsson e as repercussões de sua confiabilidade. In: Pietro de Chiara; Pablo Gatt. (Org.). *Crenças e Culturas em Circularidade no contexto Tardo Antigo e Medieval*. Ituiutaba: Barlavento, 2025, v.2, pp. 187-209.

same function identified throughout this discussion: they are usually positioned at the end of an episode in order to reinforce and validate the preceding prose account.

One example may be found in chapter eighteen, which narrates the story of Dagr inn spaki, son of Dyggvi. After learning that his talking crow had been killed by a local farmer in a place called Vǫrvi, Dagr launches a retaliatory expedition. Following the raid and subsequent bloodshed, Dagr and his army attempt to cross a river called Skjótansvað (or Vápnavað), where a slave throws a pitchfork that strikes and kills the king. After recounting these events, the Narrator introduces a skaldic quotation through the formula already discussed: “*Í þann tíma var sá hqfðingi gramr kallaðr, er herjaði, en hermenninir gramir. Svá segir Þjóðólfr:*” (1941, p. 36); “At that time, the chief who plundered was called Gramr, and the warriors, Gramir. So tells Þjóðólfr:”. A stanza then follows, condensing the episode into the characteristic allusive language of skaldic poetry. Once again, the verse does not simply embellish the narrative, but functions as an additional mechanism of validation by linking the prose account to an authoritative poetic tradition.

Another aspect worth considering concerns the formal dimensions of historical writing itself. Diana Whaley, in *Heimskringla: an Introduction*, more specifically in the chapter *Style and Structure*, points out that:

At the syntactic level too the general impression is of relative simplicity. An analysis of *Ynglinga saga* and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* in the Íslensk fornrit text yields the following provisional information. Some 64% of the sentences in *Ynglinga saga* contain no subordinate clauses. Nearly 43% consist of a single main clause. No more than 9% of all the sentences have more than one subordinate clause (1991, p. 87, my emphasis).

She adds:

Insofar as subordination is a gauge of syntactic complexity, therefore, straightforwardness is the norm. The extreme of this can be illustrated by *Yng 22*. The first sentence of the chapter contains two subordinate clauses, but the remaining nineteen sentences have none at all. The middle of the chapter has a succession of seven sentences consisting of a single main clause each, including the staccato: *Þeir hittusk á Fyrisvillum. Varð þar mikil orrosta. Fell brátt lið Hugleiks*, ‘They met on Fyrisvellir. There was a great battle there. Hugleikr’s forces quickly fell.’ (p. 87)

Indeed, the first sentence of chapter twenty two is as follows: “*Hugleikr hét sonr Álfs, er konungdóm tók yfir Svíum eptir þá bræðr; því at synir Ygnva váru þá börn at aldri*” (1941, p. 42). “Hugleikr was named the son of Álf, who took the kingdom over Sweden after the brothers, because the sons of Yngvi were, then, children at that time”. This particular instance of syntactic complexity is, as Whaley notes, not representative of *Ynglinga saga* as a whole. On the contrary, the narrative is generally characterized by a simple and straightforward style, leaving relatively little room for the dramatic elaboration frequently encountered in some of

the *Íslendingasögur*. Such stylistic choices may point to a form of writing concerned with the efficient transmission and organization of information about the past. In this sense, simplicity itself may be understood as part of a broader strategy of authority construction, one that aligns with the claims made in the prologue concerning the reliability of the poems and other sources mobilized throughout the narrative.

Another explicit reference to a source occurs in chapter 29, when the Narrator recounts Hrólfr kraki's upbringing and the battle fought on the frozen river *Vænir*: "*Þar fell Áli konungr, en Aðils hafði sigr. Frá þessi orrostu er langt sagt í Skjöldunga sögu ok svá frá því, er Hrólfr kraki kom til Uppsala til Aðils*" (1941, p. 57). "There fell king Áli and Aðils had victory. About this battle, it is largely told in the saga of the Skjöldungar, and about why Hrólfr kraki came til Uppsala, til Aðils". Although it is possible that the Narrator had access to *Skjöldunga saga*, as Whaley (1991) and Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (1941) suggest, the text itself has not survived⁴⁴. Nevertheless, its mention once again functions as a mechanism of validation. At the same time, the reference creates a narrative bridge between this chapter and the following one, where Hrólfr kraki dies during the reign of Eysteinn Aðilsson. In this respect, the invocation of *Skjöldunga saga* resembles the earlier reference to Ari Þorgilsson, insofar as both mobilize already established authorities that the audience was likely familiar with.

The examples discussed thus far suggest that the Narrator approaches all narrated events according to similar principles, regardless of whether they involve supernatural or everyday occurrences. Episodes involving magic, monsters, or extraordinary journeys are treated in much the same manner as more ordinary events. In this respect, chapters 13 and 32 are particularly illustrative.

Chapter thirteen narrates the story of Vanlandi, son of Sveigðir, who becomes ruler of Uppsala after his father. During his travels abroad, he marries Drífa, daughter of Snjár *inn gamli*. When Vanlandi later abandons her and fails to return after three years, Drífa seeks the assistance of Hulð *seiðkona*, who employs magic to bring about his death. As Vanlandi sleeps, he feels a mare stepping upon him; despite his cries for help, his men see nothing, and the creature eventually crushes his head, killing him.

Here, the choice of words regarding magic is the same as seen in chapter seven, when the Narrator presents Óðinn's abilities, amongst which is *seiðr*. In the case of Hulð we find two instances of this term. The first occurs in Hulð's epithet "*seiðkona*", which can be

⁴⁴ Although we do have access to a very fragmentary text, under the title of *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*, which is believed to be linked to a lost version of *Skjöldunga saga*.

translated as “sorceress or witch”, following the two main English-Old Norse dictionaries (CLEASBY & VIGFUSSON, 1874, and ZOËGA 1910). The word is a compound of *seiðr* itself, meaning a woman who practices *seiðr*. *Seiðr* itself remains a complex and contested concept within Old Norse studies. One reason for this is that our primary sources describing these practices were written after the Christianization of Scandinavia. Consequently, the individuals responsible for recording them were unlikely to have had direct contact with practitioners of *seiðr*. Their accounts therefore constitute indirect representations of pre-Christian practices and are necessarily filtered through Christian perspectives. Nevertheless, both Cleasby & Vigfusson (1874) and Zoëga (1910) define *seiðr* broadly as a form of magical practice associated with spells, divination, and the manipulation of future events. In the aforementioned dictionaries, we will find the following entries for *seiðr*:

[...] *a spell, charm, enchantment, incantation*, which in the heathen times was solemnly performed at night; the wizards were seated with certain solemnly rites on a scaffold (*seiðhjallr*), from which they chanted their spells and songs; the ‘*seiðr*’ was performed either to work any kind of good or evil to another person, or to be a kind of oracle or fortune-telling, to foreshow future events, such as the life and fate of those present, the weather, or the like [...] (1874, p. 519)

And: “[...] *m. spell, charm, enchantment, incantation* [...]” (1910, p. 353). These definitions should be approached with caution, as neither dictionary reflects recent scholarship on Old Norse magic. Nevertheless, they are useful insofar as they indicate the semantic field of the term in the sources: a form of spell or incantation, the precise ritual performance of which remains beyond the scope of the present study. Chapter seven presents the following description of *seiðr*:

Óðinn kunni þá iþrótt, svá at mestr máttur fylgði, ok framði sjálf; er seiðr heitir, en af því mátti hann vita orlog manna ok órorða hluti, svá ok at gera monnum bana eða óhamingju eða vanheilendi, svá ok at taka frá monnum vit eða afl ok gefa qðrum. En þessi fjölkynngi, er framið er, fylgir svá mikil ergi, at eigi þótti karlmonnum skammlaust við at fara, ok var gyðjunum kennd sú iþrótt.

Óðinn knew that skill, which followed the greatest power, and himself performed it, which was called *seiðr*, and from this, he could foresee the fate of man and things that did not yet happen, and still cause the death of men of bad luck or cause sickness and take from man their intellect or force and give to others. And this sorcery, if practiced, accompanies then great perversion, so the man of character did not think of practising it shamelessly, and that skill was taught to the priestess (1941, p. 19).

This passage suggests that, from the perspective of the narrative voice, *seiðr* is not presented as a neutral form of knowledge. On the contrary, it is associated with moral and social disapproval, particularly through its gendered framing, since it is explicitly linked to female practitioners despite Óðinn himself being portrayed as its master.

As we return to chapter 13 *seiðr* is notwithstanding practiced by a woman, Hulð the witch. This episode establishes continuity between the most remote mythological layer of the narrative and its subsequent dynastic sections. Although divine figures recede from the foreground, the explanatory framework associated with them remains operative. The narrative thus maintains a coherent system of causation across different temporal strata, without signalling any conceptual break between what modern readers might classify as “mythological” and “historical” material. Which suggests that they were understood as equally valid components of a coherent account of the past. This uniform treatment of narrative content becomes particularly visible in the closing formula of the chapter:

Þá tóku þeir til fótanna, þá kafði hon hqfuðit, svá at þar dó hann. Svíar tóku lík hans, ok var hann brenndr við á þá, er Skúta heitir. Þar váru settir bautasteinar hans. Svá segir Þjóðólfr:

So they took the feet and it trampled the head, so that he died there. The Swedes took his body and he was cremated by the river that is called Skúta. There were set his memorial stones. So tells Þjóðólfr (1941, p. 29).

Here, a particularly significant element emerges: the appeal to material traces. The implication of this passage is that the account is anchored not only in poetic authority but also in physical traces embedded in a recognisable landscape. The reference to *bautasteinar* and to the river Skúta functions as a mechanism of validation that extends beyond textual transmission. It suggests that the narrative world is accessible through geography, and that memory is materially inscribed within it.

The reference to a known geographical space connects to the broader spatial framework established at the beginning of the saga. The world described is not entirely external to its audience but is structured through a network of recognizable place names and transmitted geographical knowledge. Even Icelandic audiences who had never travelled to Scandinavia could situate these locations within a shared mental map shaped by oral tradition, trade routes, and narrative circulation. Spatial familiarity thus becomes another mechanism through which credibility and authority are constructed. We will return to that soon.

For now, let us go on to the second example, following the prologue’s guideline, to chapter 32, which tells of the history of king Yngvarr, son of Eysteinn, who after making peace with the Danes, goes on to travel east to plunder. Yngvarr plunders in *Eistland* – likely generalized designation possibly referring to the eastern shores of the Baltic sea – until a much greater force subjugates his army and kills him:

Fell þá Yngvarr konungr, en lið hans flýði. Hann er heygðr þar við sjá sjálfan. Þat er a Aðalsýslu. Fóru Svíar heim eptir ósigr þenna. Svá segir Þjóðólfr:

Fell then king Yngvarr, but his troop fled. He is buried there, by himself. That is in *Aðalsýsla*. The Swedes travelled home after this defeat. So tells Þjóðólfr:

The structure we observe here follows the already established pattern: it is composed predominantly of simple, non subordinated clauses. The narrative style is concise and highly direct. And Þjóðólfr appears once again as an authority invoked to validate the narrative content. Like in chapter 13, there is a geographical mark: *Aðalsýsla*. This term likely refers to the continental part of Estonia, as opposed to the islands. As *Aðal* gives the notion of main, *sýsla* might mean something like “region”. Although still generic, the Narrator is playing with a concept which was probably somewhat known to their public, in a manner comparable to references to Swedish territory itself. Similarly, it is possible that many only knew *Eistland* or *Aðalsýsla* by name, not ever having set foot there; that is, however, enough to activate recognition and associative meaning, as one is presented with this narrative.

Another very similar case, seen in both chapters are the relationships with foreign peoples. In chapter 13, Hulð, as well as Vanlandi’s wife, Drífa, are Finnish. The Finns have been associated with magic practices and other customs considered marginal throughout the Old Norse corpus, a pattern well attested in the corpus, as Arngrímur Vídalín reminds us:

Blámenn (‘blue men’), *Serkir* (‘Saracens’), *Skrælingjar* (‘Skin-People’), *Finnar* (‘Finns’, ‘Sámi’), *Bjarmar* (‘Bjarmians’) / these are all examples of people that are considered monstrous, ethnicities that are marginalized and dehumanized in Old Norse literature on the basis of pre-racial thought, though the precise manner varies from text to text, based, among other things, on how far removed they were from Nordic reality (2020b, p. 224, my emphasis).

That would explain how the Finns are brought up by the Narrator in chapter 13, especially when we consider this excerpt: “*Þá gerði hann fúsan at fara til Finnlands, en vinir hans ok ráðamenn þönnuðu honum ok sögðu, at vera myndi fjölkynngi Finna í fýsi hans*” (1941, p. 29); “So he showed enthusiasm to travel to Finland, but his friends and advisors dissuaded him and said it likely was finnish sorcery the cause of his enthusiasm”. Both *Finnar* and *Eistr* are two peoples removed from the everyday reality of the Narrator and of their audience. While the *Finnar* are associated with sorcery, the *Eistr* represent a people who is frequently the target of *viking*, or sea raiding. After all, that was a gateway to eastern routes leading toward Rus’ territory. That is to say that, even if the peoples are removed from this reality, they are still integrated into it as intelligible categories within a shared conceptual geography.

To better understand this relationship with chronological time and space, I shall delve into Berger & Luckman’s theory, as discussed in *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. To them, the reality of everyday life is the reality *par*

excellence, that is, it is the reality that one always returns to – except when there are problems endangering this reality or deviations, such as mental disorders. They state that “Everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted by men and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world” (1966, p. 29).

While every individual has a singular experience regarding their everyday life – where the two sociologists use the term *realissimum* of an individual consciousness (p. 32) – this is still a case of a shared reality, as they also remind us that one “experience everyday life in terms of differing degrees of closeness and remoteness, both spatially and temporally” (p. 32). In the case we are dealing with – the so-called legendary Scandinavian past – the facts being narrated might seem as another reality, but in fact they are a distantly located segment of the author(s) and audience’s reality. Those are not necessarily present in their “here and now”, that is, they might not be part of their daily occupation, rather they are a far zone of their reality.

This reality, as I said, is necessarily intersubjective, for “I cannot exist in everyday life without continually interacting and communicating with others” (p. 33). Communication is not the only factor, however, for a shared reality to remain stable, there needs to be correspondence between the meanings of the individuals, which produces a “common sense about reality”. For that to happen, there must be face-to-face interactions between individuals, on a daily basis, which make an interchange of “heres and nows”. The way the individuals deal with and apprehend others is by creating typificatory schemes in their own minds (p. 42). For instance one may be typified as “a man”, “an Icelander”, “a farmer” and so on. By putting others into categories, we tend to generalize and anonymize, as an Icelander has certain characteristics implied by the category, which will be brought up when we think of another individual of the same group. Berger and Luckmann go on:

The social reality of everyday life is thus apprehended in a continuum of typifications, which are progressively anonymous as they are removed from the ‘here and now’ of the face-to-face situation. At one pole of the continuum are those others with whom I frequently and intensively interact in face-to-face situations – my ‘inner circle’, as it were. At the other pole are highly anonymous abstractions, which by their very nature can never be available in face-to-face interaction. Social structure is the sum total of these typifications and of the recurrent patterns of interaction established by means of them (1966, p. 45).

Yet, the relations that build the basis of a reality are not limited to the present, to the “here and now”. One can easily relate to the past, to their predecessors – or even to the future for the same matter (p. 45). That is because those times are encompassed by the reality of the individual, only they are located in far distant zones of this reality. As is the case, the more

one distances from the “here and now”, the more anonymous the typifications are. For instance, who are the *Finnar*? Or the *Eistr*? Or even the *Svíar* that are frequently brought up in the excerpts analyzed above. On one hand we are presented with the names of several kings, and even some of their traits, on the other, the remaining characters of the narrative are highly anonymous, with few exceptions. Berger and Luckmann also add that:

The anonymity of both these sets of typifications, however, does not prevent their entering as elements into the reality of everyday life, sometimes in a very decisive way. After all, I may sacrifice my life in loyalty to the Founding Fathers – or, for that matter, on behalf of future generations (p. 45).

In our case, even if the *Finnar* are not named, they are still the bearers of sorcery and “dark practices” who are to be despised by “us, here and now”. That, however, regards the reality *per excellence* of the Narrator, outside the text. The reality we are dealing with here is another one: the reality of the narrative itself. As the sociologists point out, we frequently interact with different realities, for instance when we dream we are brought up to another world, and as we wake up, we are in the everyday reality once again:

Compared to the reality of everyday life, other realities appear as finite provinces of meaning, enclaves within the paramount reality marked by circumscribed meanings and modes of experience. The paramount reality envelops them on all sides, as it were, and consciousness always returns to the paramount reality as from an excursion (p. 35).

Another instance is when one goes to the movies, the theater or even a religious ceremony, as soon as the spectacle is over, the individuals return to the “main” reality. These other worlds may present similar traits to that “main” reality, and in fact, as they are also built up worlds, these similarities may become very interesting. That is because making references to the reality *per excellence* may make them “feel more real”. As we are dealing here with a narrative reality, it seems appropriate to bring Todorov’s text up once again. In the sixth chapter of his book, *Introduction to Verisimilitude*, the author discusses this very concept which the title takes on. He points out that:

[...] we speak of a work’s verisimilitude insofar as the work tries to convince us it conforms to reality and not to its own laws. In other words, verisimilitude is the mask which is assumed by the laws of the text and which we are meant to take for a relation with reality (1977, p. 83).

Verisimilitude is an interesting concept for the present discussion, however, as the excerpt suggests, some distinctions must be made in order to proceed. First of all, we have the reality of everyday life, in which both the author(s) and audience reside. This reality is perceived by them, individually, meaning each one has its own world inside that reality. That is of most importance as we think of the relation already established between the narrative reality – which resides inside the text and in which the Narrator is located.

What we have seen so far is that inside this narrative reality, the Narrator appears to make references to everyday life reality, in an attempt to give the narrative layers of truthfulness, “making it feel a lot more real” to their audience. However, the key here is in “making it feel more real”, as the “real” is intimately linked to the world perceptions of whoever wrote the text. Those perceptions – as seen in the case of the *Finnar* – may trigger the audience into making the same relation, as they also abide in that world and may share many of the conceptions. Still, Todorov says that:

Studying verisimilitude is equivalent to showing that discourses are not governed by a correspondence with their referent but by their own laws, and to denouncing the phraseology which, within these discourses, would make us believe the contrary. We must disengage language from its illusory transparency, learn to perceive it, and at the same time study its techniques of disappearing—like Wells’s invisible man swallowing his chemical formula—before our eyes (p. 81, my emphasis).

If we take a look once again at the excerpts analyzed here, we will notice that from the very beginning of the text, the Narrator utilizes several mechanisms to build up the verisimilitude of this narrative. They give names to places in this world – and those names can, and very likely were – associated by the audience with places in their everyday life reality: *Svíþjóð*, *Ásía*, *Európá*, *Bláland*, *Serkland*, *Turkland*, *et cetera*.

They also rely on known figures, such as Ari and Þjóðólfr to reinforce the idea that the narrative is plausible as real, as those figures are a means of attesting the facts being narrated. The skaldic poetry itself, being brought up in the form of small quotations at the end of several chapters act like a layer of verisimilitude: the texts are obscure, while written in the same language, they present archaic forms, the order of subject, predicate and verb are not the same as the prose and there also the *kenningar*⁴⁵. Those factors made skaldic poetry obscure for most of the people, even those who could read, by the time the text was likely composed. This means that those potentially “felt” old at least, which contributes to this air of an ancient source of wisdom that confirms what is being told.

Notwithstanding, the Narrator also mentions peoples that were known by the audience, frequently having encounters with the characters in places that were also known. All this contributes to a narrative that “feels” real, because it has a strongly built verisimilitude, even if presents things that for us are clearly “fantasy”, that was likely not the case for the audience. Rather, verisimilitude emerges independently of a strict separation between the fantastic and the factual: it is produced through the cumulative effect of authoritative references, recognizable geographies, and culturally shared forms of knowledge

⁴⁵ *Kenningar* are language figures, similar to metaphors. Something similar may be found in Luís de Camões’ *Os Lusíadas*, when the poet instead of simply saying “sea” says “Neptune’s kingdom”.

that allow even extraordinary elements to remain narratively credible within the same discursive system.

3.2 Authority through Testimony: *Yngvars saga Viðfǫrla*

Although not as extensive as *Ynglinga saga*, in terms of size, chronological scope, and range of characters, *Yngvars saga Viðfǫrla* may be divided into three main sections, as Haki Antonsson (2012, pp. 77-78) suggests. In the first two chapters, the protagonist Yngvarr is absent. That is because the Narrator first introduces his lineage, which starts with his grandfather, Áki, followed by his father Eymund⁴⁶. In chapter three, Yngvarr is born into the narrative, which then tells his story up until his death in chapter eight. From chapter nine to the end at chapter fourteen, the narrative goes on to tell Sveinn's – Yngvarr's son – story. While section one is very introductory, sections two and three complement themselves, as Yngvarr dies without having achieved his objective of securing a kingdom abroad, Sveinn follows in his father's footsteps, eventually becoming a king.

This text is, as already discussed, classified traditionally as a legendary saga. However, as we search for evidence of "historical writing", the very beginnings of the saga may be relevant, reinforcing that *Yngvars saga viðfǫrla* shares stylistic similarities with *konungasögur* (kings' sagas) (Wolf, 2016, p. 740; Lönnroth, 2014, p. 103 *apud* Gritton, 2020, p. 56). The first few lines of the text read as follows:

EIRÍKR hét konungr, er réð fyrir Svíþjóðu. Hann var kallaðr Eiríkr inn sigrsæli. Hann átti Sigríði ina stórráðu ok skildi við hana sakir óhægendera skapsmuna hennar, því at hún var kvenna stríðlyndust um allt þat, er við bar. Hann gaf henni Gautland. Þeira sonr var Óláfr svenski (1954, p. 425)

Eiríkr was called a king, who ruled over Sweden. He was called Eiríkr the victorious. He had⁴⁷ Sigríð, the ambitious, and would separate from her on her inadequate temper, because she was a sullen woman in all that happened. He gave her Gautland. Their son was Óláfr the swede.

This excerpt may present one of those similarities, as it begins the narrative by demonstrating that the protagonist is of royal blood, since his lineage is traced back to Eiríkr *inn sigrsæli*, a historical figure who is usually considered as the first 'historical' king of Sweden. The presence of epithets is also something to consider. Besides Eiríkr, his wife and his son are also presented with epithets: Sigríði *ina stórráða* and Óláfr *soenski*, which is

⁴⁶ It is interesting to note that neither Yngvarr's grandmother or mother are mentioned by name. About his grandmother, it is said that: *Eiríkr konungr átti ok dóttur, er eigi er nefnd* (1954, p. 425); "King Eiríkr had also a daughter, who is not named". And about his mother: *Nú fór Eymundr ór Garðaríki með mikilli sæmd ok virðingu af allri alþjóðu ok kemr nú til Svíþjóðar ok sezt at ríki sínu ok eignum, ok brátt aflar hann sér kvánfangs ok fær ríks manns dóttur, ok gat hann við henni einn son, er Yngvarr hét* (*ibid*, p. 429); "Now travelled Eymundr from Garðaríki, with great honour and esteemed by all the people and arrives now at Sweden and established at his kingdom and properties, and he swiftly acquires for him a match, and takes the daughter of a powerful man, and he had, with her, a son called Yngvarr."

⁴⁷ As his wife.

interesting because, differently from his daughter and from Yngvarr's mother, who are not named, Sigríð and Óláfr are given certain attention. This could of course be an indicative of another source used in the composition of the text, but the presence of epithets could indicate that these figures were somewhat known by the audience, being – to some degree – historical figures within their horizon of historical knowledge. The same is valid for Jarl Hákon from Norway, who is an important character for the first section of the narrative.

Hákon, alongside Eiríkr plot against Áki – for he had allied with some eight chieftains, after killing the man who would be Eiríkr daughter's husband – inviting him for a banquet in Uppsala and killing him and his allies. About which the Narrator interestingly tells us: "*Þessi ráð kenna sumir menn Hákon jarli, en sumir segja, at hann væri sjálf at drápi þeira*" (pp. 426-427); "This plot, some men attribute to Jarl Hákon, and some say that he himself would be amongst those killers". The way the last part is phrased indicates that the Narrator was not very fond of Hákon, or perhaps even of the Norwegian nobility, nevertheless, that seems out of our scope. In any case, the main point here is that during chapters one, two and until some part of three, we are bombarded with several characters that could certainly be taken as real persons. They differ from the characters presented in Yngvarr's and Sveinn's journeys, who come from far eastern lands, since this part of the narrative is set in Sweden, around the 10th and 11th centuries.

One could say that the Narrator is mixing known *personas* with his own fictional characters, as in modern historical romance narratives. However, there is no way of telling if this is the case. What we may also think of is that for that audience all those people were real, even if their names were the only thing that stood out, in the case of Áki, Eymundr and Yngvarr, for instance.

After the killing of Áki, Eiríkr takes his son, Eymundr, as his own, and raises him. And after Eiríkr passes, his son Óláfr *held inni sömu virðingu við Eymund sem faðir hans hafði gert* (p. 427); "held the same honour with Eymundr, as his father had done". As Eymundr grows up, he becomes fond of Óláfr's daughter, Ingigerðr, but is denied her hand in marriage, which makes him travel to Garðaríki and meet with king Jarizleifr – who actually married Ingigerðr. Eymundr assists him in a feud against his brother Burizleifr⁴⁸. Once again, we are faced with well known historical figures, more specifically the nobility. Jarizleifr and Burizleifr are the nordic versions of who were likely "Jaroslav and Burislav". At the end of

⁴⁸ There is also another version of this narrative, present in *Flateyjarbók* (GKS 1005 fol.), under the title of *Eymundar páttur hrings*. There, Eymundr is, however, Norwegian and not Swedish. Besides that, there are some other narrative variations between the two sources, especially regarding Eymundr's fate after he leaves Jarizleifr's court.

this ordeal, Eymundr returns to Sweden with fame and money, and gets established there. It is here where we are finally met with Yngvarr.

Similar to *Ynglinga saga* itself, the first section of *Yngvars saga Viðforla* serves to establish how the protagonist, Yngvarr, came to be. Moreover, it demonstrates that his forefathers were not only of noble origin⁴⁹, but that they had also acquired fame and renown. In turn, Yngvarr grows up to become a man of great reputation, as the king “*setti hann yfir aðra höfðingja í Svíþjóð*” (p. 433); set him over other chieftains in Sweden. In other words, Yngvarr’s authority is already firmly established before his journey begins.

However, when he eventually asks for a kingdom of his own, the king replies: “*Hverja hluti aðra, sem þú beiðir, tígn eða fjárhlutum, mun ek gera. En þetta má ek eigi, því at ek er eigi vitrari várum frændum, ok eigi kann ek betr en várir fyrri frændr*” (p. 434); “Anything else, as thou demands, honour or wealth, I shall concede. But that I cannot, for I am not wiser than our forefathers, and I do not know more than our old kind”.

The use of *várum frændum* and *várir fyrri frændr* further confirms the noble state of Yngvarr, as it demonstrates that the king recognizes his kinship with Yngvarr, their relationship had begun with the conflict surrounding his grandfather Áki. What matters here is that, before the journey section even begins, is already concerned with establishing both spatial and temporal coordinates for the narrative. The space is clear: Sweden, and, at one specific moment, the Baltic⁵⁰. Both places are certainly familiar to the audience, and consequently, could easily contribute to the narrative's legitimacy in the eyes of a contemporary audience.

The chronology which begins with Áki and Eiríkr, during the days of Jarl Hákon, is constructed as a continuous sequence, as their offspring keep the narrative alive as they grow up. Before Yngvarr has a disagreement with the king and chooses to leave him in order to find his own kingdom, the Narrator states that “*Með þessi virðingu var Yngvarr með Óláfi konungi, þar til at hann var tvítugr*” (p. 433); “With that honour, Yngvarr stayed with king Óláfr there, until he was twenty”.

The explicit passage of time is particularly noteworthy. Although not exact, it allows the audience to approximately locate when these events would have taken place. Something

⁴⁹ At the beginning of the narrative, it is said that “*Hennar bað sá höfðingi af Svíþjóð, er Áki hét*” (p. 425).; Her, that chieftain from Sweden, that was called Áki, asked (in marriage).

⁵⁰ Before Yngvarr embarks on a fare to the Baltic, because *var su þjóð í missætti við Ólafkonung, er Seimgalir heita ok höfðu ekki skatt goldit um hríð* (p. 433); “those people which were called Semigallians were in disagreement with king Óláfr, and had not paid the tribute for a while”.

similar happens in chapter eight, when Yngvarr dies. The Narrator deliberately marks Yngvarr's death through a series of chronological references⁵¹, as they state:

En þá er Yngvarr andaðist, var liðit frá burð Jesú Kristi MXL ok einn vetr. Þá var hann hálfþrítugr, er hann dó. Þá var ellefu vetrum eftir fall Óláfs konungs ins helga Haraldssonar (pp. 447-448).

When Yngvarr passed, it had passed from the birth of Jesus Christ, 1040 and one winter. Then, he was half way to thirty⁵² when he died. This was eleven winters after the fall of king Óláfr Haraldsson, the holy.

As a means of reinforcing the credibility of the account, the Narrator not only numbers the year in which Yngvarr dies – *MXL ok einn vetr* – but they also bring up his age – *hálfþrítugr* – and locate it accordingly with another taken for granted historical fact: the death of St. Óláfr. This strategy is particularly common in *konungasögur*, and within the Old Norse tradition, it may be tracked even earlier as *Íslendingabók* demonstrates:

ÍSLAND byggðisk fyrst ýr Norvegi á dögum Haralds ens hárfagra, Halfdanarsonar ens svarta, íþann tíð [...] es Ívarr Ragnarssonr loðbrókar let drepa Eadmund enn helga Englakonung; en þat vas sjau tegum (vetra) ens níunda hundraðs eptir burð Krists, at því es ritit es í sögu hans (JAKOB BENEDIKTSSON, 1986, p. 4).

Iceland was inhabited itself first from Norway, in the days of Harald fine hair, son of Halfdan the black, in that time [...] Ívarr, son of Ragnarr loðbrók, made kill Eadmund, the holy, king of Angles; that was eight hundred and sixty winters after the birth of Christ, as is written in his saga.

In other words, chronological anchoring appears here as another mechanism of legitimation. By connecting Yngvarr's life to widely recognized historical markers, the Narrator situates his protagonist within a broader historical continuum instead of presenting him as an isolated legendary figure.

After his dispute with king Óláfr, Yngvarr decides then to set sail *at leita sér útlends ríkis* (p. 434); 'in search of a kingdom abroad for himself'. Before proceeding to the following textual evidence, I believe it is worth to discuss the so-called "Yngvarr runestones", they may further illuminate the relationship between memory, testimony, and historical authority that is being explored here⁵³.

There is a *corpus* of runestones that mentions or can plausibly be related to Yngvarr and his expedition. Gritton states that:

⁵¹ Interestingly enough, Yngvarr's death is listed in the *Konungsannáll*, one of the Icelandic annals, in the same year: "1041. ... Dáinn Yngvarr in víðförli" (1948, p. 7). Since the *Konungsannáll* is believed to have been written c. 1300-1328, it is possible that *Yngvars saga* was used as a source of information to date – although one should not discard the possibility that the source used in the annals was the same as the one used in the saga itself, namely Adam of Bremen.

⁵² In this context, it likely means twenty five years old.

⁵³ A disclaimer must, nonetheless, be done: I do not intend to analyze the runestones or connect them to the text in ways that suggest that Yngvarr's fate indeed happened. As stated before, my concern is with narrative, and the mention of the runestones may be relevant for this narrative and the contemporaries of it.

There is little agreement among scholars as to the exact number of runestones that purportedly commemorate Ingvar's journey east, with estimates ranging from twenty-one (Fuglesang 1998: 2010) to more than thirty (Sundqvist 2015: 530) (2020, p. 58)

Annett Krakow points out that there “are between 21 to 26 runic inscriptions on stones which are assumed to be contemporary, or near contemporary, to the expedition” (2023, p. 316). Nevertheless, there is a parcel of about twelve stones (KRAKOW, 2023, p. 319) that mentions either *austr* or *austarla*, that is they agree with the narrative of an expedition towards the east. Now, there are no clear links between the written narrative we know as *Yngvars saga Viðfǫrla* and any of the runestones recognized as “Yngvarr runestones”. Yet, the stones themselves may indicate that the memory of Yngvarr's expedition, if not the narrative itself, circulated orally during that period. may indicate that the memory of Yngvarr's expedition, if not the narrative itself, circulated orally during that period.

It is also possible, as Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards indicate “that in the author's time, early in the 13th century, there were still oral stories about Yngvar and his expedition circulating in Iceland, although the saga writer preferred the authority of a Latin text from the pen of the learned monk Odd Snorrason” (1990, p. 2, my emphasis). As they also indicate, it is unlikely that has come down to us is a direct heir to this oral tradition, for, as I pointed out in section two of this work, there are several literary influences that can be traced in the saga:

Notwithstanding the claim in *YS* that the story had been told by several people, it is difficult to single out specific details in *YS* which must have come from oral narratives. Though the reference to Odd's informants shows that in the late twelfth century there were people who knew something about Yngvar and his expedition to the east, to this information he added materials he had gathered elsewhere (PÁLSSON; EDWARDS, 1990, p. 4).

Even so, as we turn over to the runestones, their presence and the possible presence of oral accounts concerning Yngvarr's journey may have anchored the narrative within the social reality in which it was composed. If the individuals that composed and read this work were familiar with the oral narratives or any of the stones, they would have possessed concrete points of reference through which the narrative could be interpreted. In this regard, Víðain suggests that: “Given the existence of rune carvings that affirm the travels of Yngvarr víðfǫrli, a Nordic audience of the fourteenth century would already have been familiar with the legend” (2020a, p. 95).

This is especially relevant when considering the authorities invoked by the Narrator, as the epilogue of the narrative – similarly to the prologue in *Ynglinga saga* – mentions that the sources for it are *at forsögn fróðra manna*” (p. 459); in accordance with the report of wise men. This statement adds another layer of legitimacy to the narrative, one that is potentially grounded in elements already present within the audience's social world.

One of these elements appears to be the geography. That has become a central point of interest for scholars who comparatively analyzed both the textual narrative and the runestones, with the objective of pinpointing where this journey could have taken place: somewhere east. Besides the textual descriptions being vague, and also taken from Latin sources – “several place names in the east derive from medieval authorities, such as Isidore of Seville (d.636). Scitopolis/Citopolis (ch. 8) has been identified with Scythopolis in Palestine” (PÁLSSON; EDWARDS, 1990, p. 7) – Pálsson and Edwards also note that: “though the geography is hazy beyond recognition, individual features of the landscape seem real enough, and it is quite possible that unidentifiable places like the whirlpool Gapi and the waterfall Belgsoti contain vague memories of actual locations” (1990, p. 3).

As I have discussed in the previous subsection, the geography familiar to both the author and the audience may function as a grounding element that the text deliberately mirrors in order to create a sense of realism for its readers. In this case, much of that realism is derived from Isidore of Seville. Two of the places mentioned in the narrative – *Heliopolis* and *Siggeum* – are highlighted by Gallna Glazyrina:

It is still not clear whether Icelandic clerics had access to the manuscripts of Isidore's works which were produced on the continent, or whether parts of his voluminous opus were retold to their fellows by monks and la}men who learned about Isidore at continental universities. The limited number of verbal connections (three) is insufficient to prove that the author of YS took them directly from a *written* text of the *Etymologiae* and in fact it is more likely that his source was a retelling or adaptation of Isidore. But in either case we have to assume that the cleric who compiled YS was a learned man with a wide background, and that he - and this is particularly important - used his source consistently. He picked out the names (both place-names as well as the name for the dragon) from different parts (books) of Isidore's work: as as well as the name for the dragon) from different parts (books) of Isidore's work: *Heliopolis* in Egypt (Book XV), *Siggeum* - a promontory at the Asian part of the Dardanelles (Book XIV), and the dragon *Jaculus*, borrowed from the description of Arabia (Book XII). His choice seems to have been deliberate because all the names fit into a contextually narrow area at the Southern coast of the Mediterranean, be it Asia Minor or North Africa. The author of YS seems to have been convinced that all the geographical names that he mentioned belonged to the same geographical region, i.e. to the southern of *priðjungr* the known world (2003, p. 176, my emphasis)

In fact, the Narrator's own geography seems to be deeply rooted in Isidore, whether directly or indirectly, and this influence may have extended to the intended audience as well. Since both Narrator and audience inhabited a Christian intellectual world, Isidore's *Etymologiae* would be a part of their world view. Consequently, when the narrative draws upon this framework to construct its geographical setting, it becomes more believable for the audience: real people are exploring the edges of a world already familiar to them

conceptually. The notion of the “ends of the world” would not have appeared strange within this context; rather, it was an established component of medieval Christian cosmography. This also contributes to fit the narrative within the notion of biblical history, which permeated medieval Christian society. On this matter, Glazyrina adds:

It might be the case that from this vast area the author chose the name of the city which was both familiar to him and easily recognizable by the audience which listened to (or read) his saga. One cannot be sure that general acquaintance with the place-name *Heliopolis* stemmed from a thorough study of Isidore. We can, however, be nearly certain that Christian Icelanders might have heard about *Heliopolis* in a life-story of Saint Barbara, who was a popular saint both in the West (including Scandinavia and Iceland) and in the East (Russia in particular); her cult reached Iceland from the Continent and spread throughout the country in the twelfth century. The churches at Haukadalr and Reykjaholt in the South and in the East of the country had St. Barbara as their patron, together with other saints who were popular in Iceland (p. 176).

Glazyrina’s argument that Heliopolis would not have been unfamiliar in twelfth-century Iceland is further supported by other texts, such as *Barbare saga*, which mentions a certain *Sólarstaðr*, where St. Barbara was martyred in 306 of the common era (p. 176).

Returning to Yngvarr’s journey as depicted in *Yngvars saga víðförla*, before sailing away from Sweden, the Narrator mentions: “Þá bjóst Yngvarr ór landi at leita sér útlends ríkis ok valdi sér lið ór landi ok þrjá tigi skipa, öll alskipuð”; “Then, Yngvarr prepared himself to leave the land in his search for kingdoms faraway, and chose his company from the land and thirty ships, all full decked”.

This, along with other two mentions – “*Litlu síðar sigldi Yngvarr ór Svíþjóð með þrjá tigi skipa*” (p. 434); “A little after, Yngvarr sailed away from Sweden with thirty ships”; and “*Eftir þat heldu þeir í ána með þrjátigi skipa*” (p. 435); “After that, they continued in the river, with thirty ships” – shows that the Narrator repeatedly emphasizes the quantity of ships Yngvarr travelled with⁵⁴. This repetition is unlikely to be coincidental; rather, it appears to be a deliberate narrative strategy.

From what has been discussed thus far, it is clear that the text shows signs of its engagement with Latin written culture, and one of those aspects is the symbolism of the numbers. The number three, in particular, alongside its multiples, is particularly significant in Christian symbolism, as demonstrated by the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Adding to that, Li Tang – while analyzing an episode in *Kýntlinga saga* – pointed out that: “The number 3 is

⁵⁴ There is also another mention of *þrjátigi skipa* in the text, when Sveinn sets sail: “*Síðan bjó hann þrjá tigi skipa ok kveðst halda vilja því liði á fund drottningar*” (p. 449); “After, he prepared thirty ships and declared he intended to lead that force in search of the Lady”.

chosen both for Knútr and Haraldr, because three is not only a great number, but also a sacred number linked with power. This number can be a sign that they will reverse the situation to their benefit and defeat their enemies” (2015, p. 40, my emphasis).

If we read the text in light of this observation, it becomes possible to suggest that the Narrator could be in fact emphasizing the power of Yngvarr, since the narrative contains other instances in which the symbolism of the number three appears to be mobilized⁵⁵. Yet, these repeated references may serve more than a symbolic function. The amplification of numerical figures, particularly regarding armies and expeditions, is not uncommon in Latin historiography and may further indicate the influence of a learned literary tradition upon the text. More than that, when considered alongside the other mechanisms discussed throughout this section, this numerical emphasis may be understood as part of a broader historiographical strategy, if we consider the centrality of biblical history and the extent to which medieval narratives were embedded within a Christian conception of universal history.

Moving further, the protagonist then arrives at *Garðaríki*, where he stays with king Jarisleifr for some time, learning distinct languages. While there, Yngvarr learns of three rivers that flow east, and eventually sets out in search of their source. Just before he departs, however, the Narrator adds:

Hann lét biskup vígja sér boljárn ok tinnu. Fjórir menn eru nefndir með Yngvari til ferðar: Hjálmvígi ok Sóti, Ketill, er kallaðr var Garða-Ketill, hann var íslenzkr, ok Valdimarr (p. 435, my emphasis).

He let a bishop consecrate his poleaxe and flint. Four men are named with Yngvarr in the journey: Hjálmvígi e Sóti, Ketill, who was called Garða-Ketill, he was an icelander, and Valdimarr (my emphasis).

I wish to draw attention to the mention of Ketill. While the four companions play important roles in the narrative, Ketill is particularly relevant for the present discussion. He will later assume a crucial role in the narrative: in chapter eight, Yngvarr, on his deathbed, passes on to him the responsibility to inform his son, Sveinn, of his death. Moreover, Ketill is mentioned in the epilogue as a source for the narrative.

First of all, in the excerpt above, he is the only companion whose origins are explicitly mentioned, as the Narrator states *hann var íslenzkr*. This detail forms the basis of an implicit argument that permeates the narrative and culminates in its final lines: the authority of Icelanders as reliable transmitters of the past.

⁵⁵ For instance, before Sveinn set sail it is said that: “*Hann hafði með sér marga kennimenn. Var þeira æðstr biskup sá, er Róðgeirr hét. Biskup vígði þrysvar hluti ok hlutapi þrysvar, ok hlutaðist svá til í hvert sinn, at guð vildi, at hann færi*” (p. 449); “He had many clerics with him. The foremost among them was the bishop called Róðgeirr. The bishop consecrated the lots three times and cast lots three times, and each time it fell out that God willed that he should go”.

When Yngvarr is dying, in chapter eight, he calls his companions – among whom only Garða-Ketill is mentioned by name – and declares his last wishes:

[...] En þess vil ek biðja yðr ok allra helzt þik. Ketill, at þér færið líkama minn til Svíþjóðar ok látið jarða at kirkju. En fjárhlut mínum, þeim er ek hefi hér í gulli ok silfri ok dýrligum klæðum, því vil ek skipta láta í þrjá staði: Einn þriðjung gef ek kirkjum ok kennimönnum, annan gef ek fátækum mönnum, inn þriðja skal hafa faðir minn ok sonr minn. Berið Silkisif drottningu kveðju mína! En fyrir allra hluta sakir vil ek biðja, at þér séið samþykkir. En ef yðr skilr á hverja stefnu hafa skal. þá látið Garða-Ketil ráða, því at hann er yðvar minnigastr” (p. 447, my emphasis).

[...] But this I ask of you – and most of all of you, Ketill – that you carry my body to Sweden and have it buried at a church. As for my share of wealth, which I have here in gold and silver and precious garments, I wish it to be divided into three parts: one third I give to churches and to the clergy, another I give to poor men, and the third shall be for my father and my son. Bear Queen Silkisif my greeting! And above all things I ask that you remain in agreement. But if you cannot agree on what course should be taken, then let Garða-Ketill decide, for he is the most mindful among you” (my emphasis)

In this excerpt, the Narrator, through Yngvarr’s speech, places particular emphasis on the expression *því at hann er yðvar minnigastr*, which is rather interesting, considering that it was previously established that Ketill is an Icelander. *Minnigastr*, the superlative form of *minnigr*, refers to someone endowed with an exceptional memory⁵⁶. This association is also not uncommon in medieval Scandinavian literature, as both Saxo Grammaticus in his *Gesta Danorum*⁵⁷ and Theodoricus Monachus on his *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium*⁵⁸ point out. Here it is reinforced, as Ketill is the man chosen by Yngvarr to report on his death to both Silkisif and his son, Sveinn. Moreover, Yngvarr’s final instructions further reinforce Ketill’s authority, as he is entrusted with remembering and interpreting his last wishes should any disagreement arise among the men.

This point is highlighted once again at the end of the narrative, when, after returning from Sveinn’s fare, Ketill stays in Sweden for some time, where “*lézt hann svá heyra sagt, at Sveinn væri í Görðum um vetrinn ok bjóst um várit þaðan ok sigldi at sumarmagni ór Garðaríki, ok vissu menn þat síðast til hans, at hann sigldi í ána*” (p. 458); “later, he then was said to hear that Sveinn had been in Garðar in the winter, and in the spring he prepared to

⁵⁶ Cleasby & Vigfusson state: *minnigr*, adj., **mingastir**, a ἄπ. λεγ., Fms. vi. 199 (Hulda), but elsewhere uncontracted: —*mindful, having a good memory* [...] (1874, p. 429). And the word seems to come from *minning*: [...] f. memory, recollection, remembrance; (*Ibidem*).

⁵⁷ “The diligence of the men of Iceland must not be shrouded in silence; since the barrenness of their native soil offers no means of self-indulgence, they pursue a steady routine of temperance and devote all their time to improving our knowledge of others’ deeds, compensating for poverty by their intelligence. They regard it a real pleasure to discover and commemorate the achievements of every nation; in their judgment it is as elevating to discourse on the prowess of others as to display their own [...]” (1979-1980, p. 5).

⁵⁸ “[...] those whom we call Icelanders,³ who preserve them as much celebrated themes in their ancient poems” (1998, p. 1).

leave there and sailed at the beginning of summer out of Garðaríki, and the last that people knew of him was that he sailed into the river”.

Once more, Ketill’s credibility is demonstrated, as he is the one to reveal Sveinn’s fate of going back to his kingdom in the east. However, the Narrator simultaneously introduces a degree of uncertainty through the use of *heyra sagt* and the subjunctive form *væri*. This means that the Narrator does not intend to present these events as absolute certainties, encouraging the audience’s own imagination. This uncertainty is conveyed both by the verb *heyra* – to hear – which already indicates it could be a rumour and by *væri*, which is the subjunctive form of the verb *vera*, indicating the possibility, but not the certainty of the fact.

This, however, does not undermine Ketill’s credibility, as it is demonstrated ahead: “*En Ketill fór til Íslands á fund frænda sinna ok staðfestist þar ok sagði fyrstr frá þessu [...]*” (p. 458). “Then Ketill travelled to Iceland in search of his relatives and established himself there and told first about this”. Ketill is listed as a witness of these events, and the fact he is an Icelander himself reinforces that he has even more authority to speak about these past events. This alone would give the text enough legitimacy. However, Ketill is not listed as a direct source by the Narrator; rather his role as a witness functions as a mechanism through which the narrative acquires authority and credibility.

Another interesting occurrence takes place right after the last excerpt:

[...] en þat vitum vér, at nokkurir sagnamenn segja, at Yngvarr hafi verit sonr Eymundar Ólafssonar, því at þeim þykkir honum þat meiri sæmd at segja hann konungsson. En gjara vildi Önundr gefa til allt sitt ríki, ef hann mætti Yngvars líf aftr kaupa, því at allir hofðingjar í Svíþjóðu vildu hann gjarna konung hafa yfir sér. En þess verður enn nú af sumum mönnum spurt, fyrir því at Yngvarr væri eigi sonr Eymundar Ólafssonar, en því viljum vér þá leið svara: Eymundr, sonr Óláfs, átti son, er Önundr hét. Sá var inn líkasti Yngvari í margri náttúru ok allra helzt í víðförli sinni, svá sem til vísar í bók þeiri, er heitir Gesta Saxonum ok er svá ritat: „Fertur, quod Emundus, rex Sveonum, misit filium suum, Onundum, per Mare balzonum, qui, postremo ad amazones veniens, ab eis interfectus est.” Svá segja sumir menn, at þeir Yngvarr færi tvær vikur, at þeir sáu ekki, nema þeir tendruðu kerti, því at saman luktust björgin yfir ánni, ok var sem þeir reri í helli þann hálfan mánuð. En vitrum mönnum þykkir þat ekki sannligt vera mega, nema áin félli svá þröngt, at gnúpar tæki saman eða væri skógar svá þröngir, at saman tæki þess á meðal, er gnípur stæðist á. En þó at þetta megi vera, þá er þó eigi sannligt (pp. 458-459).

“But we know that some saga-men say that Yngvarr was the son of Eymundr Ólafsson, because they think it brings him greater honor to call him the son of a king. Yet King Önundr would gladly have given his entire kingdom if he could have bought back Yngvarr’s life, for all the chieftains in Sweden would willingly have had him as their king. Even now some people ask why Yngvarr was not the son of Eymundr Ólafsson. To that we wish to give this answer: Eymundr, the son of Óláfr, had a son named Önundr. He was most like Yngvarr in many qualities, and above all in his far-traveling, as is

indicated in the book called *Gesta Saxonum*, where it is written thus: ‘It is said that Emundus, king of the Swedes, sent his son Önundr across the Baltic Sea, and that in the end, when he came to the Amazons, he was killed by them.’ Some people also say that Yngvarr and his men traveled for two weeks without seeing anything unless they lit candles, because the mountains closed together above the river, and it was as though they were rowing in a cave for half a month. But wise men think that this cannot be true, unless the river flowed so narrowly that cliffs met together, or the forests were so dense that they closed together where cliffs stood opposite each other. And even if this could be possible, it is nevertheless not likely.”

This excerpt is interesting because in it, the Narrator acknowledges the existence of other competing narratives – *en þat vitum vér; at nokkurir sagnamenn*⁵⁹ *segja* – in regards to Yngvarr's noble origin. Yet, the Narrator reaffirms their position as the most credible narrative as they state that Eymundr Ólafsson had in fact a son named Önundr. Which is then confirmed by quoting a Latin text “*Gesta Saxonum*” as their source of information. This *Gesta*, as stated before, could be Adam of Bremen’s *Gesta Hammaburgensis* (KRAKOW, 2022). Notwithstanding, another strategy used to question the information that Yngvarr would have sailed into some sort of cave is that the Narrator brings up a quite common unnamed formula in Old Norse literature: *vitrum mönnum*. This was seen in *Ynglinga saga*, before, and can also be seen in other works such as the *Íslendingabók*, where Ari Þorgilsson highlights that his sources were *spakastan, margspök ok óljöugfróð* and that they *lang munði fram* (JAKOB BENEDIKTSSON, 1986, p. 4), which are similar ways of bringing up the credibility of wise people.

Finally, this brings us to the moment when the Narrator properly names their sources for this narrative:

En þessa sögu höfum vér heyrt ok ritat eftir forsögn þeirar bækr, at Oddr munkr inn fróði hafði gera látit at forsögn fróðra manna, þeira er hann segir sjálfir í brefi sinu, því er hann sendi Jóni Loftssyni ok Gizuri Hallssyni. En þeir, er vita þykkjast innvirðuligar, auki við, þar sem nú þykkir á skorta. Þessa sögu segist Oddr munkr heyrt hafa segja þann prest, er Ísleifr hét, ok annan Glúm Þorgeirsson, ok inn þriðri hefir Þórir heitit. Af þeira frasögn hafði hann þat, er honum þótti merkiligast. En Ísleifr sagðist heyrt hafa Yngvars sögu af einum kaupmanni, en sá kveðst hafa numit hana í hirð Svíakonungs. Glúmr hafði numit at föðr sínum, en Þórir hafði numit af Klökku Sámssyni, en Klakka hafði heyrt segja ina fyrri frændr sína (p. 459).

“But this saga we have heard and written according to the account of the book that the learned monk Oddr had caused to be made, following the testimony of wise men, whom he himself names in the letter that he sent to Jón Loftsson and Gizurr Hallsson. But those who think themselves more knowledgeable add to it where it now seems to be lacking. This story is told by the monk Oddr, who had heard it from that priest who was called Ísleifr,

⁵⁹ The particular use of the term *sagnamenn* could indicate that those narratives were in written form, however, in that same form, we do not have any other texts that suggest that Yngvarr's father was Eymundr Ólafsson – Not to be confused with the Eymundr, son of Áki, which following the present narrative is his actual father.

and also another Glúm, son of Þorgeirr, and a third, who was called Þórir. From their accounts he took what seemed to him most noteworthy. Ísleifr said that he had heard the saga of Yngvarr from a certain merchant, and that man said that he had learned it in the court of the king of the Swedes. Glúm had learned it from his father, and Þórir had learned it from Klakka Sámsson; and Klakka had heard it told earlier by his kinsmen”

The same formula is also applied here, the people who told of this story are *fróðra manna*. As discussed before, the monk Oddr is brought up as the one who actually serves as a primary source for the text. This indicates that it could be a later addition, however, it also suggests that the original saga was written by Oddr. “*En þeir, er vita þykkjast innvirðuligar, auki við, þar sem nú þykkir á skorta*” also highlights the idea of medieval authorship, previously explained, as “anyone who sees it fit and has more knowledge, should add where needed”. Furthermore, the Narrator goes on to name Oddr’s sources for his text: Ísleifr, Glúm Þorgeirsson and Þórir. Of the three, perhaps Ísleifr is the only one we could pinpoint to an actual historical figure. Since the Narrator says that “*þann prest, er Ísleifr hét*”, they could be referring to Ísleifr Gizurarson, the first bishop of Skálholt. Even if the time line does not make any sense, this Ísleifr was a known figure and would have borne credibility if listed as a source for the text. Regarding the other two, Glúm Þorgeirsson and Þórir, one can only assume that they would have also played the same role, for they were potentially known to the audience as authorities of some sort. As Ari also does in his *Íslendingabók*, the Narrator tracks down how these characters came in contact with this information, be it from a Swedish merchant or from their own families, being listed by name – as Klakka Sámsson – reinforces that this did not come from thin air – neither from their imagination – rather, it was passed down from generation to generation.

This accumulation of named witnesses and mediated transmission suggests that authority in *Yngvars saga víðförla* is not located in the figure of the Narrator alone, but in the structured presentation of testimony itself. By consistently displacing authorial certainty onto a sequence of intermediaries – learned men, oral informants, and named transmitters – the saga produces credibility as an effect of transmission rather than origin. What emerges is a model of historical truth in which legitimacy is cumulative and relational, built through the layering of attestations rather than grounded in a constant access to the past. In this sense, authority is less a property of any one voice than a narrative strategy designed to simulate the conditions under which knowledge of the past is believed to be reliably preserved.

3.3 Travel and otherness: *Eiríks saga víðförla*

The Narrator of *Eiríks saga*, unlike the other Narrators, is not really concerned with aligning with an established time line. Regarding that, we have little implicit information to

rely on, when talking about the time at which the narrative could be set. One piece of evidence is right at the beginning of the text: “*PRANDR er nefndr konungr sa er fystr Red fyrir Prandhæime hann atte son þann er Eirekr het*” (JENSEN, 1983, p. 2); “Brandr is named the king who first ruled over Þrándheimr, he had a son who was called Eirekr”. Similar to what happens in *Heimskringla* – where a certain Danr is named as the king responsible for giving the name of Danmörk – Brandr is usually seen as a legendary king, whose name is the origin of the region’s own name, in this case Þrándheimr. That, however, does not discredit the Narrator’s attempt to establish a historical baseline for the narrative to build upon. Simple, as it is, it still fulfills the objective of giving the reader a known starting point, for they would certainly know Þrándheimr, in Norway, and perhaps some story about a ruler by the name of Brandr. Moreover, this establishes that Eiríkr is the king’s heir.

Another factor that contributes to the construction of a time frame is the fact that Eiríkr himself is not yet a Christian, his conversion happens later in the narrative. The Narrator also makes clear that the northern lands have not yet accepted Christianity, which would set the narrative at least in a period prior to the ninth century. Sverrir Jakobsson observed that, for this *motif* of evangelisation, the saga would be set before 850 AC (*apud* MUSIKAS, 2001, p. 100). Even if the Christianization of Norway – and the remainder of Scandinavia, for the same matter – is a subject of debate⁶⁰, especially considering the plurality of narratives around it, it is safe to say that the Narrator is projecting a pagan North – whose population already knew a little of Christianity, albeit they were not yet Christian.

Similar to *Yngvars saga víðförla*, symbolic numerology also appears here. After the excerpt above, the narrative progresses steadily, as we are told of Eiríkr’s vow to find *Ódainsakr*⁶¹, or the earthly paradise, the Narrator declares: “*A næsta sumre eftir byrr Æirekr skip eitt skrautligt af Noregi ok hellt til Danmerkr. þeir uoru xij a skipe*” (1983, pp. 4-6); “Next summer, Eiríkr prepared a splendid ship in Norway and sailed to Denmark. There were twelve of them on the ship”.

When Eiríkr gets to Denmark, he meets Eiríkr, the Dane, who decides to join his expedition. About that, the Narrator points out: “*Þeir nafnnar lógdu lag sitt saman ok var med*

⁶⁰ Cf. GRZYBOWSKI, Lukas G. *The Christianization of Scandinavia in the Viking Era: Religious Change in Adam of Bremen’s Historical Work*. Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2021; and WINROTH, Anders. *The Conversion of Scandinavia: Vikings, Merchants, and Missionaries in the Remaking of Northern Europe*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.

⁶¹ In the *saga*, the Narrator constantly differentiates between *Ódainsakr* and Paradise. While the first is how the heathens call it, the second one is how Christians do. This appears both at the start when Eiríkr makes his vow to find this place, as well as when the protagonist is dialoguing with the Byzantine Emperor – through whom the difference is once again highlighted. In the first instance, the text is as follows: “[...] *heidnir menn kalla V dains akr. en kristnir menn jord lifande manna edr Paradisum*” (1983, p. 4); “[...] heathen men call it field of the immortals, but christian men, land of the living people or Paradise”.

þeim vel ok at morgu uoru þeir líkir: ok vm varit eftir redzst Æirekr danski j ferd med nafnna sinum. yoru þeir ok xij sama(n)” (1983, pp. 6-7); “The namesakes joined forces, and things went well between them, and in many ways they were alike. And the following spring, Eiríkr the Dane set out on a journey with his namesake. They were twelve together” (my emphasis). In that regard, I once again quote Li Tang:

In Christian tradition, twelve is often regarded as a perfect number. Abraham’s son Ishmael is promised by God to have 12 sons who become 12 tribal rulers (Genesis 17). Jacob has 12 sons who form the 12 tribes of Israel (Genesis 35). Moses sets up later 12 stone pillars to represent them (Exodus 24). The most famous example should be Jesus’s 12 disciples. Twelve seems to be destined by a divine power which requires its existence as a whole (2015, pp. 26-27).

If we take into account the narrative as a whole, this number becomes more fascinating. Eiríkr departs on a journey, searching for the paradise, which he eventually does find. As Eiríkr and his companion enter this paradise, they see a tower of some kind, which they enter and find a marvelous banquet. Then, an angel appears and starts a dialogue with Eiríkr. This angel explains that he is Eiríkr’s guardian angel, and that God himself sent him to aid the protagonist in his journey. Moreover, the guardian angel highlights that the paradise they were in was nothing compared to the heavens, where he lives. Then, this angel gives Eiríkr the choice of either staying or returning home, and he chooses the latter: *þuiat ek vil segia kunningium minum fra slikum dyrdar verkum drottinsligs mattar* (p. 98). “For I wish to tell my acquaintances about such glorious deeds of the Lord’s power”. Eiríkr’s decision to return transforms him from a seeker into a messenger.

With this, Eiríkr receives a mission from his guardian angel: to tell of Christianity back at his home in the north. That is comparable with the figure of Jesus, as he also comes to earth in order to spread the seeds of the new faith, and to save mankind by doing it. With that in mind, this excerpt becomes more significant, as Eiríkr and his company are twelve, the same number of Jesus’ apostles. Symbolically, this marks a divine depiction of Eiríkr’s company, and to some degree, of their journey. Again, this is not a historiographical structure *per se*, yet it indicates the Latin knowledge of the hand that wrote it. As Vídalín states about this text: “It also owes much to the *Elucidarius*, an eleventh-century theological summa, and *De imagine mundi*, both by Honorius Augustodunensis; as well as to the *Visio Tnugdali*, a twelfth-century Latin reworking of a Middle Irish visionary text” (2020a, p. 90). Consequently, the same can be interpreted as a sign that the text is being located in biblical history.

This is only reinforced by the angel’s dialogue with Eiríkr:

Æingillinn mællti. Þó at nú se goda blot a norðr/londum þá mun þó koma sú tíð at þat folk mun leysazst fra villu ok man gud kalla þat til sinnar truar. Nu gef ek þér leyfui til aftr at fara til þinna ættiarda ok at segia þínum vinum fra guds miskunn þeire sem þú sætt ok heyrdir. Þú skiotara munu þeir trúa guds eyrende ok ollum hans bodordum er þeir heyra þuilikar sogr (pp. 98-102).

“The angel said: Although there are now great pagan sacrifices in the northern lands, the time will nevertheless come when that people will be freed from error, and God will call them to his faith. Now I give you permission to return to your home land and to tell your friends about God’s mercy, the things that you have seen and heard. The more quickly they will believe God’s message and all his commandments when they hear such stories.”

Not only does the angel foresee the future when Christianity will arrive in Norway, but he also tells Eiríkr about his role in this process. His role is therefore explicitly defined as one of preaching and transmitting divine knowledge, that is why Eiríkr is not to stay in the earthly paradise, because his mission is to *segia þínum vinum fra guds miskunn*, as his acquaintances back home are yet to know Christianity, consequently not yet being saved from eternal damnation. In this case, the revelation is central to the logic of salvation and preaching. Eiríkr must do as the king of *Miklagarðr* did to him: teach others about God. The possibility of staying in this earthly paradise could even be seen as a test, after all, the true paradise – as the angel remembers – is the heavenly one. And the heavens await the believers of God, and those believers must expand the domains of Christianity to achieve this salvation, as Eiríkr does when he returns home. This aligns with the biblical notion that the Apocalypse is to take place after Christianity is spread throughout the whole world, highlighting the need to bring it to the north.

Same as in *Yngvars saga*, in this narrative, geography plays an important role, as Eiríkr’s journey is towards the east. However, in this case, the “gate” to the east is *Miklagarðr*, or Constantinople, rather than *Garðaríki*. Once Eiríkr leaves Denmark, he goes to *Miklagarðr*, where he finds the *Grikkja konungr*, or king of the Greeks, who is in fact the Emperor of Constantinople. Although this king is not named, to travel to *Miklagarðr* and serve the emperor’s guard is a common *motif* in several *sagas*, for instance *Njáls saga*, where Kolskeggr goes on to make his name and fame in *Miklagarðr*⁶². Notwithstanding, the very term *Miklagarðr* is a compound of *mikill* and *garðr*, which could be literally translated as “Great stronghold”, indicating that not only it was a well recognized place, but in a way an admired one – something that is also pointed out by the many Icelanders described to have served in the Varangian guard⁶³.

⁶² Another example is Gríss Sæmingsson, a character from *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds*, who is also said to have travelled to *Miklagarðr*, receiving great honours there.

⁶³ Cf. SVERRIR JAKOBSSON. *The Varangians: In God’s Holy Fire*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

During Eiríkr's dialogue with this emperor, it is revealed where *Óðainsakr* is located:

Æirekr mællti. huert er yzst land j sudr halfu hœimsins. konungr suarar. India land segium uær enda alóndum j þa halfu heims. Æirekr mællti. huar er sa stadr er O dains akr hœitir. konungr s(egir). Paradisum kollum uær sua edr iord lifande. Æirekr mællti. huar er sa stadr. konungr s(egir). j austr er land fra Jnndia lande hinu yzsta. Æirekr mællti. ma komazst þangat. Vist æigi. segir konungr. þuiat elldligr ueggr stendr firir sa tekr allt til himins upp (pp. 44-46).

Eiríkr said, "What is the outermost land in the southern half of the world?" The king answered, "India we say is the end of all lands in that half of the world". Eiríkr said, "Where is the place called *Óðainsakr*?" The king said, "We call it Paradise, or the Land of the Living". Eiríkr said, "Where is that place?". The king said, "It lies to the east, beyond India, the outermost land". Eiríkr said, "Can one get there?". "Certainly not," said the king, "for a wall of fire stands before it, and it rises all the way up to heaven".

Perhaps not as frequently mentioned as *Miklagarðr*, India was still known by these Icelanders, however, this place was much more subject to the appearance of monsters and marvels, as Vídalín noted:

As Eiríkr and the audience of his saga knew, this was a land of monsters. In 1302–1310, when the Icelandic lawspeaker Haukr Erlendsson produced his impressive summary of world history and knowledge— one of the key texts introduced in my first paragraph— many of this world's inhabitants were of Plinian stock. The most detailed of related geographical treatises, found in the Icelandic biblical compilation *Stjórn* (ca. 1350), represents Asia and Africa as almost exclusively inhabited by monstrous peoples such as *blemmyae*, *panotii*, *sciopodes*, *trogodytes*, *cyclopes*, and the like. The manuscript containing the *Leiðarvísir* (described above, and containing excerpts from the *Hauksbók*) also has a description of the monstrous peoples of India, including *blemmyae* (headless men) or *lamnies*, as they are called in this particular manuscript. So when Eiríkr asks the emperor about the "yfirbragði þjóða ok grein landa" (physical features of peoples and the demarcation of lands) and "frá mönnum undarligum ok búningi þeira ok siðum margra þjóða, frá höggormum ok flugdrekum ok alls kyns dýrum ok fuglum, frá gnótt gulls ok gimsteina" (of strange men and their clothing and the customs of many peoples, of serpents and flying dragons and all kinds of animals and birds, of abundances of gold and gemstones), these questions and their answers were already familiar. As Sverrir Jakobsson has noted, the "insertion of a geographical description of this sort into a víðförla saga is a reminder that the world- view of these narratives was not distinct from what can be found in more learned works (2020a, pp. 90-91, my emphasis).

Based on that, we may say that the Narrator is transmitting this world-knowledge through the emperor's lines. If we take in consideration the previous knowledge of the audience on these far lands, as Vídalín suggests, we are faced once again with a type of "mirror relationship", where the text builds on existing wisdom about a topic. In this case, the lands which are only imagined by the audience are brought up again by the Narrator, after all, one may assume that those were thought to be the real end of the world. The very notion that Paradise is close to India "corresponds perfectly to the model transmitted by Isidore of

Seville's *Etymologiae*, 'Paradise is located in the East [...] close to India' (Book XIV, iii 5: 286)" (MUSIKAS, 2011, p. 97).

Once Eiríkr reaches this paradise, the Narrator also gives us a brief description of it:

[...] *þa sa peir fagrt land grausin huit sem purpuri vid sætum ilm ok myklum bloma ok flutv hunangs lækir um alla uegu landzins. Þetta land uar langt ok slett. Sol skin var þar sua at alldri var þar myrkt ok alldri bar skugga a. lognn uar þar i lofte en litill vindr a iordu til þess at þa kende hinn sæta ilm helldr en adr* (pp. 74-76).

Then they saw a fair land, its grass white as purple, with a sweet fragrance and abundant blossoms, and streams of honey flowed throughout all the ways of the land. This land was vast and level. There was such sunshine there that it was never dark, and no shadow was ever cast. There was calm in the air, but a slight breeze on the ground, so that they perceived the sweet scent more than before.

The description is of a marvelous land, which reminds even *Vinland*, and consequently the paradise description in *Genesis*, especially when we think of the *flutv hunangs*, or the streams of honey. To that end, Claire Musikas adds:

India seems more to be represented as unreachable, far away, exotic. According to Kristel Zilmer the limited description which often characterize the medieval Scandinavian texts do not indicate a lack of the writer's interest in their topics, but are more of a way to enlighten the dramatic elements composing the narration. India is then represented as the last land before Paradise, and not as an independent territory. It gains a liminal status without any independence. And because of this dependence, the literary perception of India seems pretty close to the description of Paradise. The abundance of honey, the sweet smell that corresponds to the Canaan description in *Genesis* (7,17, 8.), linked India to the usual exotism used to define the Far East countries. India is indeed just like a virgin earth. Moreover, the literary perception of India here is similar to the one contained in the late medieval Icelandic saga *Jarsonar saga bjarta*. Thus, India was the place of exotism, glory, and sweetness. In Isidore de Séville's *Etymologiae*, India is related to the existence of fantastic creatures, as the Dragon for instance, whereas in *Eireks saga víðförla* they do not appear before Paradise. India is not even defined by a magical creature. India is seen as the last land of the world. This saga does not show any lack of interest towards India, but more a lack of knowledge. This might be the reason of the exotic part of the image of India (2011, p. 98).

It is clear that, in order to build up a grounded geography for the narrative, the Narrator frequently brings up Latin sources to fill the gaps. One reason for this is that those Latin texts allow them to connect their narrative with what the audience expects, especially if we assume that they had built a picture of India based on Latin texts, which the Narrator also had access to. As Hans Robert Jauss points out: "The coherence of literature as an event is primarily mediated in the horizon of expectations of the literary experience of contemporary and later readers, critics, and authors" (1982, p. 22). Jauss employs the term *Erwartungshorizont* ("horizon of expectations") to describe how readers interpret and

evaluate literary works based on their prior experiences – whether cultural, historical, or aesthetic. The meaning of a text thus emerges from the interaction between the reader's – or audience's – background and the work itself. That is, the horizon of expectations, in this case is fulfilled by the narrative: India, as described by Isidore, is a land of monsters, and the way Eiríkr enters this place is precisely by jumping into a dragon's mouth, "*hófdu hlaupit j munn drekanum*" (1983, pp. 72-74). This confirms that this is indeed paradise, which is then reinforced by the already familiar description of rivers of honey and other marvels of that land.

Up until this point, one could argue that this is merely an analogy, after all, especially with all the above noted biblical references, the main point of the Narrator seems to be to merely use the narrative space to discuss theological topics in the form of *exempla*, transmitting this knowledge to the audience without giving attention to many details – such as dating or naming of the characters – that could give their narrative more credibility. That is to say, it would seem as if the question of whether the text narrates a real journey or a purely unreal one is not really relevant. However, at the very end of the narrative, we will find this:

[...] *þesse Æirekr uar kalladr Æirekr hinn uidforlle. þessa sogu hafa margir sannfrodliga eftir ordum hans sealfs. Nu lukum uer þar sogu þesse. En þui setti sa þetta euintyr fyst j þessa bok er hana skrifade at hann uill at huerr madr vite þat at ekki er traust trutt nema af gude þuiat þo at heidnir menn fai frægd mykla af sinum af reks verkum þa er þat mikill munr þa er þeir enda þetta hit stundliga lijf at þeir hafa þa tekit sitt uerdkaup af ordlofui manna firir sinn frama en æigu þa von hegningar firir sin broth ok tru leyse er þeir kunnu æigi skapara sinn. en hinir sem gude hafa vnnat ok þar allt traust haft ok barizst firir frelse heilagrar kristne hafa þo af hinum vitrazstum monnum fæingit meira lof en þat at auk at mest er at þa er þeir hafa fram geingit vm almenniligar dyr daudans sem ekki holld ma fordazst hafa þeir tekit sitt verdkaup þat er at skilia eilijft Riki med allzualldanda gude vtan enda sem þesse Æirekr sem nu var fra sagt (pp. 112-114, my emphasis).*

[...] *this Eiríkr was called Eiríkr the far-travelled. Many have faithfully recounted this story according to his own words. Now we bring this story to an end here. And for this reason, the one who wrote it placed this tale first in this book, because he wishes that every man should know that no faith is trustworthy except that which comes from God.* For although heathen men may gain great fame from their deeds of valor, there is a great difference when they come to the end of this brief life: they have then received their reward in the praise of men for their glory, but must expect punishment for their sins and unbelief, since they did not know their Creator. But those who have loved God and placed all their trust in Him, and have fought for the salvation of holy Christianity, have indeed received greater praise from the wisest of men; and moreover—which is greatest of all—when they have passed through the common and noble death, which no flesh may escape, they have received their reward, that is, to inherit the eternal kingdom with Almighty God without end, like this Eiríkr of whom has now been told (my emphasis).

Similarly to the other two *sagas*, here we have this brief epilogue, which, among other clarifications, tells about the source of the narrative. This epilogue, however, seems to be exclusive to GKS 1005 fol., or *Flateyjarbók*. Yet, there is a claim to be considered: that of Eiríkr's existence and, moreover, that he did return from paradise to tell his acquaintances in Norway about his journey. That is what the Narrator suggests by writing that *þessa sögu hafa margir sannfrodliga eftir ordum hans sealfs*. Even if, in other manuscripts of the text, we do not find this excerpt, the fact that this is present in *Flateyjarbók* indicates that its Narrator was indeed concerned with the credibility and historicity of their narrative. Whilst their main objective was not strict factual accuracy, this is indeed one of their concerns, be it because it could make it easier for the audience to accept the actual message of the narrative or because of other implicit motives. If the audience was then to believe that the *saga* is told *eftir ordum hans sealfs*, the Narrator would have succeeded in this objective, for Eiríkr is an example of a good Christian – after all, he went to paradise and came back to tell the word of God in the north – whose word would definitely be trustworthy.

Ultimately, the *Flateyjarbók* epilogue functions as a final reinforcement of the narrative's authority. By combining claims of eyewitness transmission, learned compilation, and moral-theological framing, the *saga* situates Eiríkr within a network of credibility that is both historiographical and devotional. The text thus constructs a believable Christian past through recognized modes of authority, in which narrative reliability is established through testimony, learned tradition, and theological coherence.

3.4 A Comparative Reading of the sources

In this final subsection I compare selected excerpts, as well as broader structural features from each of the three sources. In particular, I focus on patterns within individual texts – a feature evident in both *Ynglinga saga* and *Yngvars saga*; as well as on geographical conceptualizations across the two *viðförla sögur*, significant affinities between their narrative strategies. This comparison lays the groundwork for the following chapter, where I further develop the argument that these texts exhibit comparable approaches to the construction of the past.

As I have previously noted, *Ynglinga saga* may be divided into two main parts, the second of which is of relevance in this section, due to its consistent structural repetition. Narrative structures such as “*X, sonr Y réð þá fyrir*”, or “*X tók ríki eptir föður sinn*” recur frequently as chapter openings. This regularity reflects the chronologically ordered nature of the narrative, structured around the succession of kings. The question, however, is whether

such repetition may also reflect broader conventions of medieval historical writing. I return to this issue below.

Chapters 14 and 15 provide us with a good example of this repetition. In chapter 14 it reads: “*Vísburr tók arf eptir Vanlanda, föður sinn*” (1941, p. 30) – “Vísburr took the patrimony after Vanlandi, his father”; and in the 15th: “*Dómaldi tók arf eptir föður sinn, Vísbur*” (p. 31) – “Dómaldi took the patrimony after his father, Vísburr”. Inserting this excerpt into the context of a historical narrative, as *Heimskringla* was composed to be, this may not be a mere stylistic variation alone. One must also keep in mind that this is not an isolated case⁶⁴, on the contrary, is a narrative pattern that permeates the whole *Ynglinga saga*. It seems to be a common approach to begin the history of a king’s life. If that is the case, what other factors could we deem to be “history-like” within *Ynglinga saga*?

One of these factors is arguably the near absence of direct discourse⁶⁵. In the whole narrative, the Narrator mediates all events, at least if we do not take into consideration the skaldic stanzas. While in certain historiographical traditions, the presence of direct speech is not aligned with the idea of history writing, others such as the Greek historiography (in Thucydides, for instance), do not seem to have a problem with it. As we have observed before, skaldic poetry plays an important role in confirming the events told by the Narrator of the text. Moreover, one should keep in mind the structure used many times to introduce the stanzas: “*Svá segir*”, which also signals the presence of direct discourse, as the stanzas are told by the poet mid-narrative.

Let us, however, look closer at *Yngvars saga* for now. Regarding the first aspect, that of structural repetition, as I mentioned above, there is one instance of particular interest in the narrative. That refers to two encounters between Yngvarr and two rulers: queen Silksif and king Jólfr, respectively. In both encounters, the narrative follows a similar pattern: Yngvarr meets the other ruler and subsequently arranges a single hall for himself and his company, from where they are not supposed to leave, because of the idolatry outside.

Moreover, the only local allowed inside is the ruler, with whom Yngvarr keeps dialogue during his stay. In the case of Silksif, the narrative develops into a romantic relationship, whereas with Jólfr, it results in a military alliance. The similarities become clearer when one notes the textual structure used to describe the start of this interaction: “*Yngvarr bjó eina höll öllu liði sínu ok lukti hana vandliga, því at fullt var af blótskap allt umhverfis*” (1954, p. 437) and “*Þau sáu þeir um öll stræti mikinn blótskap. Yngvarr bað sína*

⁶⁴ Cf. chapters 24 and 25, 33 and 34, and 45 and 45.

⁶⁵ There is one clear occurrence of direct speech in chapter 37, where Hildiguðr speaks.

menn vera bænraekna ok trúfasta. Eina höll gaf Jólfr þeim [...]” (p. 439). That is to say, while the outcomes of the interactions are distinct, the means follow a recurring formulaic structure, which is exploited by the Narrator.

Another instance where this pattern appears is in the beginnings of the journeys, both Yngvarr’s and Sveinn’s. Both narratives follow a similar sequence: leave Sweden with men and ships, eastwards, to *Garðaríki*, where they stay for some time and learn many of the languages spoken in the east. While in Yngvarr’s case the narrative mentions king Jarizleifr and his feud, Sveinn’s stay does not bring up the name of the ruler. Yet, similar to *Ynglinga saga*, there is a repetition of narrative cycles. Whereas in the first case, the repetition is much more evident and constant, in *Yngvars saga* the Narrator is more careful, perhaps because their knowledge gaps were narrower than those of the Narrator in *Ynglinga saga*.

Finally, when we think about direct discourse, *Yngvars saga*, as well as *Eiríks saga* are full of examples where that occurs. The first one brings several dialogues, not only between Yngvarr and the rulers mentioned above, but also in the opening section of the narrative. Compared with *Ynglinga saga*, where there are no dialogues, yet a strong presence of direct speech in the form of skaldic stanzas, both the *viðförla sögur* Narrators make use of dialogue with much more frequency. In *Eiríks saga*, especially, the narrative is developed primarily through Eirík’s dialogues with the Emperor and the Angel. In *Yngvars saga*, the dialogues seem more dramatic, similar to what is seen in the *Íslendingasögur*, where the Narrator takes on the characters as puppets, mid sequence of events. Still, in both cases, the presence of dialogue does not seem to be a problem in relation to the idea of verisimilitude, especially if we consider the claims written on the epilogues.

Another aspect to be considered is the shared geographic notions, especially between the *viðförla sögur*. While both narratives present journeys eastwards, the very notion of what is east may differ in each case. In *Yngvars saga*, east seems to be linked to ‘Rus, as Yngvarr and Sveinn stay in *Garðaríki* before departing east from there. After that, there are numerous suggestions on exactly where east would be. Lönnroth proposed that their journey would eventually lead to the Red Sea (2012, p. 6), as well as Vidalín who implied “Most certainly Scythopolis, or Beit She’an in the North District of Israel” (2020a, p. 93).

On the other hand, *Eiríks saga* presents a different notion of east. Eiríkr first goes on to *Miklagarðr*, or Byzantium, and from there also “east”. This east, however, as Musikas (2011) and Vidalín (2020a) point out, may be understood as India, the earthly paradise, so central to Eiríkr’s quest. *Ynglinga saga* is also one that shares certain geographical concepts likely inherited from Isidore and *Elucidarius*, in this case on the tripartite division of the

world, shared by the Narrator in the very first lines of the text. On the matter of east, as we have seen, in *Ynglinga saga* the entrance to the east is neither *Miklagarðr* nor *Garðaríki*, but *Eistland*, as it served as a place for “raiding” in the eastern route – *austanverðr*.

More significant than the precise location of these eastern regions is the fact that all three texts engage in a shared learned geography. Rather than purely representing empirical cartography, the spatial notions reflect a historiographical framework inherited from Latin encyclopaedic traditions. East is, therefore, constructed as an ideologically charged space, associated with Christian universal history. By building this association, the narrators situate Scandinavian actors within a broader Christian *orbis terrarum*, demonstrating their familiarity of trans-European intellectual traditions.

In this case, if we consider these associations alongside the narrative formulas shared by the analysed texts, we should return to the question of historical writing. As we take their epilogues seriously and accept that the three texts present themselves as *historia*, then the answer appears to be in the affirmative: these features should indeed be understood as components of a broader historiographical tradition. Such a tradition sought to integrate the Scandinavian past into a wider Christian understanding of history, combining indigenous modes of remembering and narrating the past with learned models circulating throughout medieval Europe.

Rather than simply imitating continental historiography, these texts selectively appropriated and adapted its conventions, creating a distinctly Scandinavian form of historical writing. Shared geographical frameworks, references to universal history, and appeals to textual authority demonstrate an effort to situate local memories within the broader *orbis terrarum*. In this sense, these sagas do not merely recount journeys to the east or a Scandinavian pre-history. Instead, they participate in a historiographical project that inserted the Scandinavian North into a universal Christian past while simultaneously asserting the legitimacy of its own historical traditions.

Taken together, the three narratives analysed in this chapter demonstrate that seemingly disparate saga traditions – *Ynglinga saga*, *Yngvars saga víðförla*, and *Eiríks saga víðförla* – share a set of narrative and epistemological strategies that extend beyond simple storytelling conventions. Structural repetition, controlled use of direct discourse, appeals to named or implied authorities, and the deployment of a learned geography derived from Latin encyclopaedic traditions all contribute to the construction of narratives that present themselves as grounded in historical reality. While the degree of explicit historicisation varies

between the texts, each engages in a comparable process of legitimising the past through recognisable historiographical forms.

These sagas operate within a continuum in which verisimilitude is produced through the integration of familiar spatial frameworks, Christian temporal structures, and authoritative discourse. The repeated invocation of eastern geographies – whether *Garðaríki*, *Miklagarður*, or the distant India of paradisiacal imagination — reveals not only shared conceptual maps, but also a common intellectual horizon shaped by Latin learning and Christian universal history.

In this sense, the texts do not merely preserve traditions about the Scandinavian past or imagined voyages to the east; they actively construct that past within a broader Christian historiographical worldview. What emerges is a coherent pattern of historical thinking in which saga writing participates in the production of universal history while simultaneously anchoring it in local narrative traditions.

4. FORNALDARSÖGUR OR KONUNGASÖGUR? HOW WAS THE PAST MADE CREDIBLE IN MEDIEVAL ICELAND?

In this final chapter, I return to the question of the saga as a literary category and to the classificatory systems established by modern scholarship. More specifically, I examine the limits of the category *fornaldarsögur* in light of the analyses developed in the preceding chapters. This discussion explores the extent to which the separation of *fornaldarsögur* from other saga categories relies upon modern assumptions concerning their supposedly fictional character and their association with entertainment, an interpretation frequently linked to a well-known episode in *Sturlunga saga*. The main argument rests upon the apparent absence of a rigid distinction between fact and fiction, as well as upon the observation that marvellous or fictionalized elements did not undermine the possibility of producing serious accounts of the past for the medieval Icelanders who composed, transmitted, and received these narratives. Narrative credibility appears to be linked to the Narrator's ability to articulate a recognizable reality through the narrative itself, and, as this chapter will argue, that reality included elements that contemporary readers may classify as fictional.

4.1 Was there a difference between the historical past and the legendary past?

As we have seen in the introductory chapter of this work, sagas are usually considered a distinct literary genre, with its own subdivisions, *i.e.* king's sagas, legendary sagas and so on. Some of these subgenres, particularly the *fornaldarsögur*, are more controversial than others due to the diversity of their characteristics. The category originally brought together texts that appeared to share a common fictitious dimension. Yet, as we have seen, it may also

be the most heterogeneous of all saga categories. Consequently, additional subdivisions have been proposed in an attempt to account for the diversity of texts grouped under the label of legendary sagas.

This classification largely stems from assumptions concerning their supposed fictionality, an interpretation inherited from the creator of the term *fornaldarsögur*, Carl C. Rafn. This interpretation ultimately reflects a nineteenth-century perspective. Rafn likely understood these texts as closer to fairy tales or folklore, yet as the previous analysis of some of those “fictional” sagas pointed out, that may not be the case for those who composed them. This is, however, not undisputed. Some scholars argue that in medieval Iceland, there was already a distinction between historical narratives and fictitious ones⁶⁶.

One of the main arguments for the contemporary existence of this division is the presence of *apologiae* – which refer to declarations similar to those in *Heimskringla*’s prologue and the *viðförsla sögur*’s epilogue – defined by Ralph O’Connor as “passages in which a self-conscious narrator protests against his saga being dismissed as untrue” (2005, p. 125). This definition aligns perfectly with the excerpts mentioned above, as in each case, the Narrator attests to the truthfulness of their narrative, be it based on named oral reports or other written texts. The very presence of these *apologiae* however, has also been interpreted as evidence of a self-conscious narrator and, in some cases, as an instance of irony (VÉSTEINN ÓLASON, 1994), which has been used to support the argument that such a distinction already existed in medieval Iceland.

Another counterargument is the famous excerpt from *Borgils saga ok Haflíða*, where the term *Lygisaga* makes its one and only appearance regarding a “genre” division⁶⁷. The term may be translated as “lying saga”, and in this case it was used to designate a saga suitable for king Sverrir’s entertainment. This, however, is problematic, as the only other occurrence of the term in the Old Norse corpus – in *Jomsvíkinga saga* – designates not a group of sagas, but a false report. As Spurkland concludes: “*Lygisaga* as a literary notion belongs to the modern academic world and has very weak, if any, support in the medieval literary sources” (2012, p. 175). Spurkland suggests that *skröksaga* offers a more productive avenue for thinking about “false stories”, since the term is more widely attested in the literature (2012, p. 176). This term has been identified as a synonym of the Latin *fabula*, precisely referring to Ovid’s poetry, in a non-pejorative manner (O’CONNOR, 2005, p. 137). O’Connor nevertheless

⁶⁶ Cf. Orning, 2015 and Spurkland, 2012.

⁶⁷ It is not a proper genre division, as there is little evidence of such in medieval Iceland.

reminds us: “No author of an extant mediaeval Icelandic text ever admits to telling a *Skrðksaga*” (2005, p. 137).

This is, I argue, because the matter of textual truthfulness was not related to our conceptions of fiction and history, those categories operated differently in medieval Iceland. In that regard, I would like to discuss the concept of syncretic truth, explored by the scholar Mikhail S. Kamenskij. According to the scholar, modern societies operate with two distinct forms of truth, historical, intended to encompass “the truth presented in the study of history” (1973, p. 20) and artistic truth, which is the equivalent of fiction. Following his argument, those truths are opposites, even in cases such as historical romances, for they are still fiction, although they present real people in some instances. We are expected to distinguish one form of truth from the other.

However, as the same scholar points out:

All ideas about the development of Old Icelandic literature, all classifications of the sagas, and all evaluations of the essence of each of them are the result of assigning them to one of the two rubrics to which modern man is accustomed, corresponding to the two forms of truth described above (1973, p. 24).

This explains Rafn’s classification of the *fornaldarsögur*, as it departs from his – and in extension, ours – dual conception of truth. For us, the elements presented in the legendary sagas are clearly fiction, very different from what we consider history. Yet, a similar observation could be made about many medieval accounts, whether written in Latin or Old Norse. Even texts we would classify as *historia* do not fully align with modern notions of historical truth.

Kamenskij then proposes a third type of truth, the syncretic truth, based on the lack of vocabulary in Old Icelandic to designate the two truths familiar to modern thought. As the academic notes, there were no words in Old Norse that designated only one of the truths, rather, the terms I mentioned above – *Lygisaga* and *Skrðksaga* – may designate falsehood, but that does not mean that the term *saga*, according to Kamenskij, would be precisely the same as *historia*⁶⁸. That is, if *historia* is understood as a separate genre exclusively devoted to narrating past events as they occurred (*narratio rerum gestarum*), one that could be distinguished from other literary forms by its subject matter and function.

In the case of the sagas, such a distinction does not appear to have been native to medieval Iceland, at least not during the period covered by the present study. This syncretic truth is a mode of truth in which the distinction between historical and artistic truth does not

⁶⁸ In Latin at least, the use of the term *fabula* was explored by Isidore of Seville, in contrast with *argumentum* and *historia*. Yet, the question of truthfulness remains the same as in the Old Norse world.

yet exist. To Kamenskij, medieval Icelanders operated within this unified conception of truth, which is not situated in between the other two types, but something “greater” (pp. 24-25). This epistemological unity is also captured by Goetz, as he writes that:

Insofar as the historian was at the same time a theologian, his activity fitted into this framework: scholarship and theology, rational curiosity and faith, directed their gaze toward the past; the historiographers called for the one who was to preserve and assemble the facts, and for the theologian who was to interpret them as a revelation of God and to explore their meaning (2008, p. 163)⁶⁹.

Historiography in the Middle Ages, in this sense, cannot be reduced to the collection and arrangement of factual data. Instead, it manifests itself as a hybrid intellectual activity in which historical inquiry, theological interpretation, and rational explanation are not yet fully differentiated. The medieval historian is simultaneously concerned with preserving facts and discerning their divine or moral significance, a complementary function that aligns with Kamenskij’s notion of syncretic truth.

Furthermore, Kamenskij also points out to the fact that authors would consider their accounts as true, even if authors considered their accounts truthful even when they themselves filled narrative lacunae with dialogue, background information, or everyday events. That would be done within the limits of what was considered plausible for these authors. Which, in particular, is very interesting regarding our previous discussion on direct speech. If we take the sagas analyzed here, we may observe that the very presence of these elements is still within the limits of what our Narrators would have regarded as truth. Namely, if we are talking about the presence of monsters and other supernatural beings, those are within the horizon of the believable to the medieval Icelandic; as demonstrated by Víðalín (2020a and 2020b), such elements may even be interpreted through the lens of dehumanization of distant peoples. Moreover, in *Eiríks saga* especially, we find an angel, a figure which is rather common in a biblical context and hitherto, plausibly acceptable to a Christian public and Narrator. As Annette Lassen puts: “[...] giants existed in ancient times. In the Middle Ages Christians believed as much on the evidence of The Old Testament (Genesis 6:4)” (2012, p. 44).

Within this same framework, the dialogues present in both *víðförla sögur* might be perfectly plausible for their Narrator, because they likely understood that the reconstruction of this speech act did not affect the truthfulness of the narrative itself, rather it filled an important

⁶⁹ “Soweit der Geschichtsschreiber zugleich Theologe war, fügte sich sein Tun darin ein: Wissenschaft und Theologie, rationale Neugier und Glaube richteten den Blick in die Vergangenheit; die Historiographen riefen nach dem, der die Fakten bewahren und zusammenstellen sollte, und nach dem Theologen, der sie als Offenbarung Gottes deuten und ihren Sinn erkunden sollte”.

lacune in the text. The same may be said about the repetition patterns we have observed across *Ynglinga saga*, as the Narrator likely understood some of them as inventions to fill the necessary gaps, this creative intervention did not undermine the truthfulness claims articulated in the prologue.

This discussion nevertheless raises an important question: why justify something one already believes to be true? Skinner offers a useful point of departure:

Rational agents want their reasons for holding their beliefs to bear upon their truth. But to espouse a given belief as well as its contradictory is to hold at least one belief that must be false. A rational agent will thus be concerned, at least in seriously troubling cases, to identify and eliminate any such obvious inconsistencies. Above all, rational agents must be interested in the justification of their beliefs. They must be concerned with the kinds of coherence, and where appropriate the kinds of evidence, that give them grounds for concluding that their affirmations of belief can in fact be justified (2002, p. 32, my emphasis).

Skinner emphasizes the beginning point to any historian as to assess the information on the sources at face value, but to do so, one needs to consider the author as a rational agent. Beliefs must therefore be understood within the contexts that render them coherent; that is, if the fantastic elements may sound absurd to us, that does not make the people in medieval Iceland irrational as those elements are within their horizon of possibilities. Accepting them was entirely compatible with rationality.

Moreover, in sociological terms, Berger and Luckmann (1991) argue that what individuals regard as coherent and justified knowledge is not determined solely by evidence or logic, rather it is socially constructed through the processes of externalization, objectivation and internalization. Rationality itself is historically contingent: people inherit socially established stocks of knowledge that define what counts as valid justifications. It is to these stocks of knowledge that the rational agents in question would resort when trying to justify their beliefs, in this case regarding the verisimilitude or truthfulness of their narratives. The epilogue and the two prologues analysed here illustrate this mechanism particularly well. Each invokes an authoritative figure of the past, be it a *Skáld*, such as Þjóðolf in *Ynglinga saga*, a certain *munk* Oddr in *Yngvars saga* or even the protagonist himself, as is the case in *Eiríks saga*. Such appeals function as mechanisms of legitimation because they mobilize forms of authority that were already socially recognized and therefore constituted rational strategies for establishing narrative credibility.

The presence of poetry alongside prose in *Ynglinga saga* raises an additional question concerning historiographical form, namely whether verse itself could be regarded as a legitimate vehicle for historical knowledge. An answer may be found in Goetz's work:

Particularly in the twelfth century, considerable efforts were made to fulfill these aspirations. In an age often characterized as a “Renaissance,” as much attention was devoted to language — often reminiscent of classical models — as to form itself. Rhetoric and rhymed prose spread from the prologues, where they had always claimed a place, into the historical works themselves. Historiography, understood as a narrative of deeds and events (*narratio rerum gestarum*), came to be perceived as literature, as an art form (2008, p. 124, my emphasis)⁷⁰.

Goetz's observation ultimately extends beyond the question of form, demonstrating that this understanding of historiography as a unified field in which factual reporting, rhetorical argumentation, and interpretative meaning coexist was not limited to the Old Norse world.

Returning to the question posed at the title of this subsection, and in light of the theoretical framework hereby reviewed, alongside the analysis of the sources, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that, for the Narrators of these texts at least, the boundary between fact and fiction was not itself a meaningful problem. The legitimacy, in each source, is established through appeals to recognized authorities, as mentioned above. Simultaneously, the presence of fantastic elements, invented dialogues and narrative repetitions does not appear to undermine these claims to truthfulness. Instead, these devices coexist within the narratives without any apparent friction.

The observation also has implications for the study of the *fornaldarsögur* as a whole. If categories such as ‘legendary sagas’ derive largely from modern scholarship’s attempts to distinguish between historical and fictional narratives, then caution is required when employing these classifications as analytic tools. The present study does not seek to abolish such categories, which remain useful for practical purposes; it seeks to emphasize their heuristic nature and to avoid projecting contemporary epistemological assumptions onto medieval texts.

Ultimately, the question is not whether medieval Icelanders believed in giants, monsters of miraculous journeys, nor whether these accounts correspond to modern standards of historical truth. Instead, the question is how these narratives were rendered believable and authoritative within medieval Icelandic society itself. Seen from this perspective, truthfulness in the *viðförla sögur* and *Ynglinga saga* emerges as a socially negotiated and culturally

⁷⁰ “Gerade im 12. Jahrhundert wurden oft große Anstrengungen unternommen, um diesen Anspruch einzulösen: In einer Zeit, die als „Renaissance“ charakterisiert wird, widmete man der oft klassisch anmutenden Sprache ebensolche Aufmerksamkeit wie der Form. Rhetorik und Reimprosa drangen von den Prologen, wo sie schon immer ihren Platz beansprucht hatten, in das Geschichtswerk selbst vor: Geschichtsschreibung als Ereigniserzählung (*narratio rerum gestarum*) wurde als Literatur, als Kunst, empfunden”.

contingent process through which historical memory, narrative creativity, and the marvelous could coexist within a single epistemological framework.

4.2 A case of transitional circumstances

As noted above, *Ynglinga saga* has occasionally been treated in this study as if it belonged to the group of legendary sagas. It is true that this particular text, as was already demonstrated, shares several features with the two other *viðförla sögur* – which are deemed *fornaldar sögur* by scholarship⁷¹ – analyzed in the present work. As I mentioned in the introductory chapter of this thesis, *Ynglinga saga* is traditionally classified as a part of the group of the king's sagas, both on stylistic grounds and due to its preservation within *Heimskringla*.

Ynglinga saga thus occupies a position between these two categories. While it largely conforms to the conventions of a *konungasaga* – narrating a genealogical sequence of rulers and their reigns – its remote temporal setting and its incorporation of marvellous elements bring it closer to the *fornaldarsögur* tradition. Nonetheless, one aspect I have not yet addressed, and which differentiates *Ynglinga saga* from the other two sources examined should now be discussed: its function as a *origo gentis* narrative.

The Narrator of *Heimskringla* deliberately begins their compilation with *Ynglinga saga* because of this aspect. Due to its genealogical sequence, the *Ynglinga saga* serves the purpose of establishing the genealogical foundation of the Norwegian royal line. Annette Lassen (2012) has shown that such narratives should be understood within the broader framework of learned *origines gentium* traditions, in which mythological and legendary material is reorganized according to genealogical principles derived from Latin historiography. Rather than constituting an anomaly between “historical” and “fictional” genres, *Ynglinga saga* participates in a historiographical logic in which the construction of origins requires the integration of mythic, legendary, and historical registers into a single genealogical continuum. Seen from this perspective, the so-called “hybridity” of *Ynglinga saga* ceases to be a classificatory problem and should be understood as a structural effect of its own function as an *origo gentis* narrative.

In her study, Lassen explores Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum* in its connections with the legendary sagas. Particularly relevant for the present study is the fact that Saxo used sources such as *Skjöldunga saga* – a now lost source of legendary character, likely used in the composition of *Heimskringla* as well (BJARNI ADALBJARNARSON, 1941) – in the making of his own narrative. Saxo wrote around 1200, which situates his work as roughly

⁷¹ Cf. Clunies Ross (2010, p. 31).

contemporary to the sources we are dealing with in this work. As his narrative itself suggests, which includes legendary heroes and marvellous elements, Saxo's use of such material indicates that its historicity was not necessarily questioned.

Lassen states that:

One may therefore assume that Icelanders and Saxo had similar views on such important matters at the time as the historicity of *fornaldarsögur*. Around fifty years after Páll's consecration in Lund, and a few decades after Saxo had finished his *Gesta Danorum*, it was used as a source in *Knýtlinga* saga, which is believed to have been written around the middle of the thirteenth century, perhaps by Óláfr Þorðarson hvítaskáld, an Icelandic scholar who had close ties with the Danish court. The historical writings of Saxo indicate that around 1200 the legendary sagas were considered *historia*, not *fabulae* or fiction, and therefore suitable matter for historiography. Their context is thus historical writings, specifically *origines gentium*, of which the *Gesta Danorum* with its long pre-Christian and legendary history of Denmark is an example per se. Saxo was – on his side – in dire need of Icelandic stories of the pagan past to fill his nine books of Danish prehistory. But it is not unlikely that Saxo's work may have inspired Icelanders – on their side – to write *fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* or *origines gentium borealium* in the vernacular and, not least, to have increased the value of such stories within the ecclesiastical and learned environments of contemporary Iceland. To give an example, it is not unlikely that the impressive history of Norwegian kings, *Heimskringla*, itself an *origo gentis* in the vernacular, written around the middle of the 13th century, was intended to emulate Saxo's boastful history of Danish kings (2012, p. 46)

The understanding of *Ynglinga saga* as an *origo gentis* narrative gains further support when placed within the broader Scandinavian historiographical context of the 12th and 13th centuries. As shown above, Icelanders and Saxo appear to have operated with broadly comparable assumptions regarding the status of this 'legendary' material within historical writing⁷². In this respect, Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, provides an example of how this material could be integrated into historiography under the model of the *origines gentium*. The same applies to *Ynglinga saga*, as was observed. Moreover, the same assumption made by Lassen, that this text was not *fabula*, but *historia*, might be extended to *Ynglinga saga*.

The perspectives shared in Lassen, as well as O'Connor's (2005, 2017) studies also have significant implications regarding the *viðförla sögur* examined in this work. If both Icelandic and Danish historiographical traditions engaged in a shared learned framework of *origines gentium*, as suggested by the parallel explored above, then the boundary between *fornaldarsögur* and *konungasögur* becomes even more noticeable as the product of a modern scholarly taxonomy.

⁷² This point of view is also shared by Sverrir Tómasson (2006) and Gottskálk Jensson (2009).

In this regard, the *viðförla sögur* in question occupy a position analogous to that of *Ynglinga saga*, albeit lacking its explicit dynastic function⁷³. While *Ynglinga saga* anchors the Norwegian and Swedish royal lines within as mythic-historical genealogy, the *viðförla sögur* instead construct authority through mobility across space, contact with distant peoples, and the accumulation of experiential knowledge in faraway regions. In both cases, however, narrative legitimacy is produced through the mobilisation of different forms of recognised authority – whether genealogical, geographical or experiential – rather than through adherence to a strict distinction between historical fact and literary invention.

Thus, the presence of fantastic *motifs*, ethnographic amplification or supernatural elements in the *viðförla sögur* does not function as a marker of fictionality in a modern sense. Instead, these elements contribute to the expansion of the narrative field within which origin and authority can be established. Just as *Ynglinga saga* incorporates mythic material into a dynastic framework, the *viðförla sögur* incorporate marvels and otherness into a narrative of exploration and legitimized testimony. Both types of text thus participate in a broader historiographical logic in which the construction of the past – and of authoritative knowledge about it – is inseparable from the mechanisms through which legitimacy is produced.

4.3 Exploring the limits of saga as a literary genre

During the extension of the present study, it has been possible to identify the factors that were central for Icelanders of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in constructing narratives about the past. Through the analysis of the selected excerpts in section three, many of the mechanisms used by the Narrators to produce what they understood as *historia* became visible. As demonstrated, the presence of such mechanisms across all three narratives suggests that, for the three Narrators analyzed, truthfulness is closely linked to the authority attributed to their sources.

This conclusion challenges the initial division of the saga corpus, presented at the beginning of the study, in chapter one. This division, while being modern and in fact very useful for didactic purposes, may not be as relevant to a historical analysis of these texts, insofar as it does not necessarily reflect medieval perspectives on these texts. There is limited evidence that Icelanders systematically divided their sagas into groups, regarding any of its characteristics, let alone that they considered some texts to be of lesser value or authority because of deemed fantastical elements, such as monsters. Even less so on the basis of

⁷³ Yet, both sagas do have some narrative space – although minimal in comparison with *Ynglinga saga* – dedicated to this very aspect of genealogical presentation. In *Yngvars saga*, the first chapters tell the history of the protagonist's family, their feuds and then insert him into the narrative. At the same time, Eiríkr is presented as the son of Þrandr, right at the beginning of the text.

entertainment, as the excerpt from *Porgils saga ok Hafliða* is often interpreted. On the same matter, Lassen summarized the question: “[...] we should bear in mind that nothing prevents medieval history, e.g. *Historia regum Britanniae* and *Gesta Danorum*, from being both didactic and entertaining” (2012, p. 49).

As Kamenskij notes, the term *saga* was not used solely to designate literary texts, but could also refer to past events themselves, such as a feud between two farmers. In light of these considerations, it is therefore necessary to question to what extent ‘saga’ itself constituted a medieval literary genre; could this classification be a modern scholarly category grouping together texts that medieval Icelanders themselves may have understood according to different principles?

Ultimately, the observations developed throughout this study invite us to reconsider not only the (non) distinction between the categories of history and fiction, but also the status of *saga* itself as a separate literary genre. While the term undoubtedly remains useful as a practical category, its apparent coherence may derive more from modern scholarly codification than from medieval Icelandic conceptions of textual production. The fluidity observed between *konungasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* suggests that these texts were not necessarily organized according to stable generic boundaries, but rather according to their functions, their claims to authority, and the kinds of knowledge they sought to convey. If medieval Icelanders operated within a framework of syncretic truth, as Kamenskij suggests, then the modern separation between history, fiction, and literary genre becomes increasingly difficult to maintain when analysing texts produced in that *milieu*. Rather than constituting a homogeneous literary genre, the sagas may therefore be better understood as a constellation of narrative practices through which medieval Icelanders organized, legitimized, and transmitted knowledge about the past, both recent and distant.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The present study began from a seemingly simple observation: three texts traditionally assigned to different categories of the Old Norse corpus share narrative characteristics that complicate the generic divisions upon which modern scholarship frequently relies. *Ynglinga saga*, conventionally classified as a *konungasaga*, and *Yngvars saga víðförla* and *Eiríks saga víðförla*, commonly associated with the *fornaldarsögur*, reveal, upon closer examination, a much greater degree of continuity than such classifications initially suggest. Their shared concern with distant times, distant spaces, authoritative testimony, and the legitimation of knowledge demonstrates that the boundaries separating these genres are considerably more permeable than is often assumed.

This observation, however, ultimately points towards a broader issue. Throughout this investigation, the central question gradually shifted towards understanding the mechanisms through which these narratives establish and communicate truthfulness. Such a shift requires the temporary suspension of modern epistemological assumptions and, in particular, the abandonment of a rigid opposition between historiography and literary invention. The relevant question concerns how these narratives constructed socially acceptable and culturally authoritative representations of the past, given that this past remains inaccessible both to modern scholars and to the medieval authors themselves.

If medieval Iceland did not in fact operate within the same conceptual distinction between historical and artistic truth that characterizes modern thought, then the presence of marvellous *motifs*, direct speech, or narrative elaboration cannot, in itself, serve as evidence of fictionality. On the contrary, such elements may be understood as integral components of a broader system of knowledge production, one in which narrative creativity and truthfulness were not mutually exclusive categories. Their function was not to oppose historical credibility, rather to render the past intelligible, coherent, and meaningful to their intended audiences.

This also invites a reconsideration of how medieval authors and audiences established plausibility and truthfulness. The issue does not concern whether medieval Icelanders believed in giants or angels, but how such elements came to be accepted as legitimate within their own social and cultural horizons. What appears extraordinary from a contemporary perspective could constitute an entirely coherent component of truthful narration, precisely because it belonged to a shared stock of knowledge that defined the boundaries of the believable. Skinner's reminder that historical actors should be understood within their own contexts therefore functions as a methodological precaution against imposing modern standards of rationality upon medieval ways of knowing.

The legitimacy of a narrative depends on socially shared stocks of knowledge that determine what may be considered coherent and plausible. It is precisely these mechanisms that emerge throughout the texts examined here. Whether invoking skaldic poetry, genealogical succession or written authorities, the Narrators repeatedly mobilize socially recognized forms of validation. These appeals are fundamental mechanisms through which historical knowledge was produced and transmitted rather than secondary narrative embellishments.

The case of *Ynglinga saga* is revealing in this respect. Although traditionally situated among the king's sagas, its proximity to the *viðförla sögur* demonstrates the limitations of

rigid generic boundaries. Its function as an *origo gentis*, moreover, places it within a broader northern historiographical tradition concerned with the articulation of collective origins and the legitimation of political communities. In a similar manner, *Yngvars saga víðförla* and *Eiríks saga víðförla* transform geographical movement and encounters with distant peoples into mechanisms for producing and communicating authoritative knowledge about the world. Despite their different classifications, all three texts engage in comparable historiographical practices.

Consequently, this study also invites a reconsideration of the status of the sagas as a distinct literary genre. If texts conventionally separated into king's sagas and legendary sagas employ similar strategies of legitimation, mobilize analogous forms of authority, and effectively participate in related processes of knowledge production, then the category 'saga' may perhaps be more productively understood as a flexible narrative practice rather than as a stable literary genre in the modern sense. This does not imply that existing classifications should be abandoned. They remain valuable heuristic tools, while their provisional character cautions against transforming modern taxonomies into medieval realities.

This reconsideration inevitably extends to the question of authorship. Throughout the saga corpus, authorial identities often remain uncertain, disputed, or entirely absent. Yet this anonymity should not be interpreted as a deficiency to be corrected, nor should authority be reduced to the figure of an individual author. The relative absence of identifiable authors suggests that narrative authority resided elsewhere: in traditions, communities, accepted forms of knowledge, and socially recognized mechanisms of validation. These texts derive their legitimacy not from their attribution to a single authorial consciousness — at least not within their original context of production — but from their position within broader networks of cultural authority.

This study does not propose new answers to the longstanding question of whether sagas are historical or fictional texts. Instead, it suggests that such a question may itself be the product of modern epistemological categories whose applicability to medieval Iceland is limited. To impose such a distinction on this context is to risk obscuring the very mechanisms that made these narratives meaningful to their contemporaries. The challenge is therefore to understand how these narratives participated in the production, organization, and transmission of authoritative knowledge about the past.

Perhaps this is where the enduring significance of the sagas resides. They remind us that historical knowledge has never been a simple matter of reproducing past events, but has always involved processes of selection, interpretation and legitimation. medieval Icelandic

narratives did not merely preserve memories of a distant past; they actively shaped ways of understanding it. In doing so, they reveal that the relationship between narrative and truth is neither oppositional nor accidental, but constitutive. To study the sagas, therefore, is not simply to study medieval literature or historiography; it is to study a society in the very act of producing knowledge about itself, its origins, and its place in the world.

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