Tamás Reinicke

"WITH UNLEARNED TONGUES IN THE WILDERNESS OF THE WORLD": EUROPEAN OTHERNESS IN THE ICELANDIC *RIDDARASQGUR*

MA Thesis in Comparative History, with a specialization
in Late Antique, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies.

Central European University

Budapest

June 2020

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by

Tamás Reinicke

(Hungary)

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Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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Chair, Examination Committee

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Thesis Supervisor

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Examiner

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I, the undersigned, **Tamás Reinicke**, candidate for the MA degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in Late Antique, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Budapest, 1 June 2020

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Signature

Abstract

The fourteenth century saw the emergence of a new literary genre in Iceland. The indigenous *riddarasǫgur* (chivalric sagas) adapted their setting, themes, and topoi from European romance literature, seemingly completely superseding those appearing in earlier Icelandic works. The *riddarasǫgur* introduced chivalric literature to an environment where it had no precursor and no social basis, yet it quickly spread and acquired immense popularity that persisted for centuries. The sudden shift in the interest of saga authors and compilers is usually explained with the necessity to adjust and reformulate Icelandic identity after the widescale political and social changes that began in the late thirteenth century.

This thesis uses four of the *riddarasǫgur*, all belonging to the subgroup known as *meykongr* (maiden-king) sagas, to examine the ways European identities were perceived, received, and adapted in late medieval Iceland. I investigate the textual presence of Otherness in order to explore this interaction of identities and the subsequent results. Alterity being a key element to the identity-building process, I analyze the forms it takes and the groups that represent it in these sagas, from the repulsive and monstrous to the familiar but foreign to the close but marginal.

Acknowledgements

This paper has been written amid unusual circumstances. I was certainly not the only one affected by them, nor have I been among those that bore their brunt. Nonetheless, I have faced difficulties and challenges the likes of which I had not encountered before. It is these difficulties and challenges that I could not possibly have overcome without the ever-present help of my supervisor, Zsuzsanna Reed. She was always available to provide guidance, inspiration, and encouragement, for which I wish to express my immense gratitude. While it may sound cliché that without her support this thesis would not have been completed, in this case it could not be more true. I would also like to thank Alaric Hall for taking the role of external reader for this paper. Last but not least, I thank my family and friends for their love and patience expressed towards me in this difficult period.

Table of contents

A Note on Orthography, Language, and Names

There is no single, universally accepted orthographic tradition when it comes to normalizing Old Norse texts. The use of *ö*, *ǫ*, and occasionally *ø* compete even in modern editions, to mention only the most salient divergence; older publications adhered to different transliteration and normalization practices as those today. To complicate matters further, my sources span a stretch of time when Icelandic language and orthography began its shift from the phase familiar from earlier manuscripts towards its modern state. Not pretending to be in a position to settle age-old differences, I simply follow the forms each text presented when quoting directly. In this, however, I take several liberties. First, when quoting the texts, I omit the parentheses and other indications of abbreviations and editorial handiwork present in the quoted editions for the sake of easier reading.[1] All translations from Old Norse are mine unless indicated otherwise, including those cases where the Old Norse text was published together with a translation. Also, I keep the saga characters' names in the forms which appear in the texts, unless I refer to those normalized for the uniform titles of their sagas.[2] When I mention other names, I follow the orthographic tradition presented in the *Íslenzk fornrit* series. This includes using the names of historical and literary figures in their Old Norse forms throughout the text, the anglicized forms appearing only in an explanatory role for the sake of clarity. Speaking of names: I follow the practice customary in Iceland to refer to Icelandic scholars with either their full or only their given name rather than their patronymic or matronymic.[3]

[1] For the editions used, see the section "On the Source Material" in the Introduction.
[2] E.g. "Viktor" instead of the commonly occurring "Wictor" form.
[3] See Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, *Wasteland with Words: A Social History of Iceland* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), 15.

Introduction

Marga merkiliga hlute heyrdum wer sagda af heidarligum herra Hakoni Magnus syni Norigs kongi. einkannliga ad hann hiellt mikit gaman at fogrum fra sogum. ok hann liet venda morgum riddara sogum jnorœnu ur girzsku ok franzeisku mali.[4]

(Viktors saga ok Blávus)

The Beginning in the End – The Birth of the *Riddarasǫgur*

The history of the *riddarasǫgur,* most often referred to in English as the chivalric sagas, began in Norway during the reign of Hákon Hákonarson (Haakon IV, r. 1217-1263).[5] In an attempt to infuse his court and realm with what he perceived as European values (described by Glauser as his "civilizing and feudalizing efforts"), Hákon commissioned the translation of several pieces of continental romance literature.[6] The commonly accepted *terminus post quem* for these works is 1226, the date given by a manuscript of *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, allegedly translated by a certain Brother Robert.[7] In the following decades, the literary activity of Hákon's court produced at least three more separate saga translations (*Elis saga*, *Ívens saga*, *Möttuls saga*) and the compilation of twenty-one tales known as *Strengleikar* based on the *lais* of Marie de France.[8] The flow of European chivalric literature into Norway did not cease with the death of King Hákon, although extant evidence is scarce. Three romances were produced in the early fourteenth century from continental poetic material for Queen Eufemia, wife of

[4] "We heard many remarkable things being said of Hákon Magnússon, king of Norway, particularly that he found great joy in fair stories, and that he had many chivalric tales turned into Norse from Greek or French." Jónas Kristjánsson, ed., *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, Riddarasögur 2 (Reykjavík: Handritastofnun Íslands, 1964), 3.
[5] *Riddarasǫgur,* pl. (sg. *riddarasaga,* from *riddari* + *saga*), lit. "knightly stories".
[6] Jürg Glauser, "Romance (Translated *riddarasögur*)," in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture,* ed. Rory McTurk (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 375.
[7] Marianne Kalinke, "Norse Romance (*Riddarasögur*)," in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide,* ed. Carol J. Clover and John Lindow, Islandica 45 (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 332.
[8] Kalinke, 332.

Hákon Hákonarson's grandson, Hákon Magnússon (Haakon V, r. 1299-1319).[9] Of the translations attributed to the same Hákon Magnússon by the above quote from *Viktors saga ok Blávus* we know exactly nothing.[10] The translations also acquired immense popularity in Iceland, resulting both in local derivations and adaptations and in the fact that most of the translated works survive today in Icelandic manuscripts.

The feudalizing efforts of Hákon Hákonarson remarked upon by Glauser included his attempts to extend his influence over the Iceland. In this he followed the example of earlier Norwegian monarchs, the most prominent of them being Óláfr Tryggvason, whose thinly veiled—and ultimately unsuccessful—efforts in the last five years of the tenth century included a strong push for the Christianization of Iceland.[11] By the early thirteenth century the Icelandic *þjóðveldi* (lit. "power/realm of the people", commonly rendered to English as Commonwealth) has already shifted from its original pseudo-democratic state into a quasi-oligarchy, ushering in the Age of the Sturlungs.[12] In the increasingly tense and unbalanced inner political climate, Hákon Hákonarson slowly but steadily gained control over the powerful chieftains of the island. This culminated in the signing of the *Gamli sáttmáli*, the Old Covenant of 1262, and the chieftains swearing their allegiance to the Norwegian king over the next two years.[13] As Hákon Hákonarson died in 1263, it was his son, Magnús Hákonarson (Magnus VI), who received the last of these oaths and in effect concluded the Icelandic submission to the Norwegian crown in 1264. This was followed by an extensive legal reform in the realms of the Norwegian crown that earned Magnús the by-name *lagabœtir* (Law-mender) and saw the substantial transformation of the earlier constitutional structure of Iceland and a considerable

[9] Stefka G. Eriksen, "Courtly Literature," in *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 60.
[10] Kalinke, "Norse Romance (*Riddarasögur*)," 332.
[11] Ari Þorgilsson, "Íslendingabók," in *Íslendingabók. Landnámabók,* ed. Jakob Benediktsson, Íslenzk fornrit, I (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1986), chap. 7; Gunnar Karlsson, *The History of Iceland* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 33. Iceland indeed became Christian in 999/1000, but managed to avoid being pulled further into Norway's (and Óláfr's) sphere of influence.
[12] Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, *Wasteland with Words: A Social History of Iceland*, 151.
[13] Gunnar Karlsson, *The History of Iceland*, 83.

shift in Icelandic economy which, together with the changes in the legal environment, promoted the emergence of a new social elite.[14]

It was in this climate that the translated romances found their way to Iceland. The beginnings of this process coincided with the later part of what is known as the Golden Age of Icelandic literary history, that frantic surge of manuscript production which resulted in the more than four hundred manuscripts from before 1400 that still exist today.[15] The imported narratives found an audience keen not only on reception but on adaptation, too. Having just finished putting to parchment their sagas of Norse kings and prominent Icelanders, the literary people of Iceland redirected their energies into the creation of a new saga genre. Using the European stories as models, Icelanders produced narratives of their own making; the results of these new efforts, however, in many respects fall short of the earlier ones. Many of these works, the so-called "indigenous *riddarasǫgur*" are considered heavily derivative and often lack originality, which in modern times resulted in an unfavorable reputation.[16] It is only in the recent decades that they began to receive more sympathetic scholarly attention.

Before going further, some terminological housekeeping is in order. Works of Old Norse romance literature have been referred to throughout literary and scholarly history, among others, as *lygisǫgur* ("lying sagas"), *fornsǫgur Suðrlanda* ("legendary" or "ancient sagas of the Southern lands"), and *riddarasǫgur*.[17] In some cases, *riddarasǫgur* signifies only the translated sagas, while *lygisǫgur* means those of Icelandic origin; in others, *lygisǫgur* refers to both

[14] Gunnar Karlsson, 89–91; Geraldine Barnes, "Romance in Iceland," in *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 42 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 269.

[15] Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, *Wasteland with Words: A Social History of Iceland*, 149; Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson, "Manuscripts and Palaeography," in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 249. This does not include documents, either in Latin or in the vernacular; on the distinction, see Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson, 245.

[16] Matthew Driscoll, "Late Prose Fiction (*lygisögur*)," in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 197.

[17] Further on this matter see Terje Spurkland, "Lygisǫgur, Skrǫksǫgur and Stjúpmæðrasǫgur," in *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, ed. Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson (Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2012), 174–75; Driscoll, "Late Prose Fiction (*lygisögur*)," 190–92.

categories.[18] Further combinations and subdivisions also exist, some even encompassing elements of other saga genres. Without the intention or the means to settle the matter conclusively, merely for the sake of simplicity, in the following I use the terms *riddarasǫgur* and *chivalric saga(s)* as shorthand to refer to the *frumsamdar riddarasǫgur*, the indigenous subgroup of the chivalric sagas. The distinction from the translated sagas will be made whenever necessary.

The Icelandic Other – Found Not in Iceland

It is evident based on the above that the *riddarasǫgur* are the result of the relatively young Icelandic literary culture interacting with and being influenced by various forms of European intellectual traditions. Previous research mostly explored how these traditions are reflected and incorporated in the sagas and how they blended together with pre-existing Northern concepts. What I am interested in is in some sense the opposite: I am looking for the places where blending is imperfect, where oddities stand out, where traditions clash rather than agree. My idea is that so many and so intensely foreign concepts could not have been integrated into the Icelandic mindset without bumps and hitches. In many regards, fourteenth-century Iceland was—to borrow the expression of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen—a "difficult middle," a hybrid cultural landscape.[19] Geraldine Barnes argued that the *riddarasǫgur* "address political reality through the medium of fiction," either to convey the feudalist ideology that prompted their genesis or as ironic reflections upon the relationship between Iceland and Norway.[20] Produced at a time of immense social and cultural changes, perhaps indeed to *be* the vehicle of those changes, I theorize that the sagas have gazed at Europe through European-tinted glasses

[18] Driscoll, "Late Prose Fiction (*lygisögur*)," 190; Margaret Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1934); Richard Beck, "review of *Romance in Iceland*, by Margaret Schlauch," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 34, no. 4 (1935): 579–82.
[19] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middles* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 2, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-08670-9.
[20] Barnes, "Romance in Iceland," 282.

– but the eyes behind those glasses were Icelandic, and there should be traces of this to be found.

With this in mind, I have decided to examine the presence of the foreign, the uncanny, the Other in the *riddarasǫgur*. Otherness, of course, is both a broad and a fluid concept. "'Othering' or marginalization is an active process," but it is not a clear-cut or simple one.[21] It manifests through various layers of culture, and several different approaches have proved to be productive in analyzing it. Albrecht Classen emphasizes the role of the "binary opposition of self and other" in the process through which identity is formed.[22] He asserts that "the study of literary and historical texts allows for a critical examination of selfhood in contrast to 'otherness.'"[23] Juri Lotman and Boris Uspensky consider "culture as a mechanism creating an aggregate of texts and texts as the realization of culture."[24] Likewise, İrvin Cemil Schick writes: "[i]dentity is its own construction, then, and narrative is the medium through which that construction is realized."[25] He continues: "[b]ut the construction of identity is inseparable from that of alterity—indeed, identity itself only makes sense in juxtaposition with alterity."[26] Examinations of Otherness across diverse disciplines and methodologies often arrive to complicated or controversial results.[27] These results have been evaluated and categorized in numerous ways in the different discourses, usually focusing on the marginalization and oppression—either their degree or forms— the various Othered groups suffered.[28] Such initial

[21] Paul Freedman, "The Medieval Other: The Middle Ages as Other," in *Marvels, Monsters, and Miracles: Studies in the Medieval and Early Modern Imaginations*, ed. Timothy S. Jones and David A. Sprunger, Studies in Medieval Culture 42 (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Western Michigan University, 2002), 8.
[22] Albrecht Classen, "Introduction: The Self, the Other, and Everything in Between: Xenological Phenomenology of the Middle Ages," in *Meeting the Foreign in the Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), xi.
[23] Classen, xi.
[24] Yu. M. Lotman and B. A. Uspensky, "On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture," trans. George Mihaychuk, *New Literary History* 9, no. 2 (1978): 218, https://doi.org/10.2307/468571.
[25] İrvin Cemil Schick, *The Erotic Margin: Sexuality and Spatiality in Alteritist Discourse* (London and New York: Verso, 1999), 21.
[26] Schick, 21.
[27] Freedman, "The Medieval Other: The Middle Ages as Other," 10.
[28] See for instance Boswell's trichotomy of "distinguishable insider," "inferior insider," and "outsider," or Guglielmi's distinction between "alógenos" (aliens, foreigners) and "marginales" (marginals). John Eastburn Boswell, "Jews, Bicycle Riders, and Gay People: The Determination of Social Consensus and Its Impact on

criteria are not entirely suitable for my purposes; instead, my primary classification of the Others appearing in my texts is based on their degree of perceived remoteness.[29] I discuss *close* (or in Dollimore's phrasing *proximate*), *familiar*, and *monstrous* Others.[30] The dimension in which the proximity or remoteness of the Other is discerned is not restricted to the spatial: I examine temporally and culturally displaced Others as well. *Monstrous* Others are represented by one group innately Scandinavian and another acutely foreign: *berserkir*, the uncanny warriors of legends and *blámenn*, the inhabitants of the Southern fringes. In the role of the *familiar* Other, Europe and European chivalry appear: seeping in from the Norwegian royal court, these concepts remained ambiguous to fourteenth-century Icelanders. The clash of various traditions perhaps comes out most sharply here. As c*lose* Others, I look at two groups whose representations in the *riddarasǫgur* shifted dramatically from those known from earlier literary works: Vikings and women. Being in several senses the most proximate, they offer the largest amount of material of the three categories. By investigating the forms of alterity presented in the *riddarasǫgur* texts, I intend to trace the changes in how Icelanders perceived the world—most prominently Europe—and their relation to it, and the ways they expressed this "með ófróðri tungu í útlegðum veraldarinnar."[31]

Minorities," *Yale Journal of Law & the Humanitie* 1, no. 2 (1989): 209; Nilda Guglielmi, "Reflexiones sobre marginalidad," *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 20 (1990): 317–48, https://doi.org/10.3989/aem.1990.v20.1152.

[29] The idea originates from the categorization put forth by Juliana Dresvina in her syllabus for a program at St Peter's College Summer School. Juliana Dresvina, "Medieval Margins: Identity & Otherness," Oxford Summer Programmes: Medieval Studies, accessed April 20, 2020, https://www.oxsummerschools.co.uk/3-medieval-margins/.

[30] "Within metaphysical constructions of the Other what is typically occluded is the significance of the proximate—i.e., that which is (1) adjacent and there-by related temporally or spatially, or (2) that which is approaching (again either temporally or spatially), hence the verb 'to approach or draw neere' (1623, OED), and thus (3) the opposite of remote or ultimate. As we shall see, the proximate is often constructed as the other, and in a process which facilitates displacement." Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 33.

[31] "with unlearned tongues in the wilderness of the world" Sheryl McDonald Werronen, "*Nítíða Saga*: Text and Translation," in *Popular Romance in Iceland: The Women, Worldviews, and Manuscript Witnesses of Nítíða Saga*, Crossing Boundaries: Turku Medieval and Early Modern Studies 5 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 233. *Útlegðum* (dat. pl.) is a fascinating choice of word here: *útlegð* is a legal term meaning "banishment, exile". In this context, it was clearly supposed to indicate remoteness and lack of civilization. I chose to translate it as "wilderness" for this reason, and also for the allusion to the other legal term for outlawry, *skóggangr*, lit. "woods-going".

On the Source Material

To produce such a survey as outlined before across the entire genre of the *riddarasǫgur*—or even the bridal-quest sagas—is far beyond the scope of an MA thesis. Therefore, I have chosen four from the subgroup known as the *meykongr* (maiden-king) sagas: *Klári saga keisarasonar*, *Nítíða saga*, *Sigrgarðs saga frækna*, and *Viktors saga ok Blávus*.[32] *Klári saga* is a controversial example of the *riddarasǫgur* genre. For a long time, it was considered a translated chivalric saga, a rendition by bishop Jón Halldórsson from a Latin original, as the introduction of the saga also professes.[33] More recently, however, evidence was offered to the contrary, i.e. that it is an original Icelandic composition, possibly written by the good bishop.[34] I find the argument offered by Shaun Hughes convincing and treat *Klári saga* as one of the indigenous *riddarasǫgur*.[35] Regardless of its origins, it was the earliest saga to introduce the *meykongr* figure with its characteristic traits and this saga illustrates her emblematic narrative arc most extensively of all *riddarasǫgur*.[36] *Nítíða saga* is in many regards the polar opposite of *Klári saga*, indeed, of most maiden-king sagas; Paul Bibire even considered it a direct response to *Klári saga*.[37] It has the *meykongr* as point-of-view character and presents the moral mirror image of the archetypal bridal-quest storyline. Furthermore, it is an almost inexhaustible repository of evidence for the Icelandic reception of encyclopaedic

[32] The *meykongr* is a character exclusive to the *riddarasǫgur*: a woman who is "always a ruling queen and unwilling to share her power with a man." Lise Præstgaard Andersen, "Maiden Warriors," in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2016), 403.
[33] Marianne E. Kalinke and P. M. Mitchell, eds., *Bibliography of Old Norse–Icelandic Romances*, Islandica 44 (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 72.
[34] Shaun F. D. Hughes, "*Klári saga* as an Indigenous Romance," in *Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland: Essays in Honor of Marianne Kalinke*, ed. Kirsten Wolf and Johanna Denzin, Islandica 54 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 2008), 135–64.
[35] That the question is not decisively settled is shown by Kalinke not including *Klári saga* among the maiden-king romances in her 2017 book: Marianne E. Kalinke, *Stories Set Forth with Fair Words: The Evolution of Medieval Romance in Iceland* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2017), 179, n. 3.
[36] Marianne E. Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland*, Islandica 46 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 98, 102.
[37] Paul Bibire, "From Riddarasaga to Lygisaga: The Norse Response to Romance," in *Les Sagas de Chevaliers (Riddarasögur): Actes de La Ve Conférence Internationale Sur Les Sagas Présentés Par Régis Boyer (Toulon. Juillet 1982)*, ed. Régis Boyer, Civilisations 10 (Toulon: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 1985), 67, 70.

tradition. *Viktors saga ok Blávus* is a typical example of the *riddarasǫgur*, heavily loaded with the fantastic elements that are staple motifs of the genre. It presents the widest typological variety of Otherness, featuring Vikings, *berserkir*, and *blámenn*. It has also strongly influenced *Sigrgarðs saga frækna*, although the latter also shows impressions from other (mainly Irish and Welsh) sources.[38] This results in *Sigrgarðs saga frækna* showing heavy use of folktale elements not commonly featuring in Icelandic sagas.[39] I surmised that these four sagas should offer just enough material for my investigation to be feasible without stretching the boundaries of this paper.[40] Two of these sagas has been published in recent years in normalized, high-quality editions: *Nítíða saga* and *Sigrgarðr saga frækna*.[41] References will be made to the Old Norse text appearing in these editions, but not to the English translations accompanying them. *Klári saga* has a somewhat old but still reliable scholarly version, edited and published by Gustaf Cederschiöld in 1907.[42] In the case of *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, it was first published by Agnete Loth in 1962; two years later, an edition by Jónas Kristjánsson followed, to which I will refer in the following.[43]

It is important to establish at the outset that the four sagas discussed here can be used merely as a sample, and not a comprehensive inventory, of the *riddarasǫgur* as a genre. My

[38] Alaric Hall, Steven D. P. Richardson, and Haukur Þorgeirsson, "Sigrgarðs saga frækna: A Normalised Text, Translation, and Introduction," *Scandinavian-Canadian Studies / Études Scandinaves au Canada* 21 (2013 2012): 84–87.

[39] E.g. the *fjöregg* (life-egg, lit. "vitality egg") protecting the life or soul of a character. Hall, Richardson, and Haukur Þorgeirsson, 85.

[40] At one point I considered including the remaining two sagas of the subgroup (*Dínus saga drambláta* and *Sigurðar saga þǫgla*) but before I could come to a decision, the unfortunate epidemiological situation and its logistical consequences rendered the question moot.

[41] McDonald Werronen, "*Nítíða Saga*: Text and Translation"; Hall, Richardson, and Haukur Þorgeirsson, "Sigrgarðs saga frækna: A Normalised Text, Translation, and Introduction."

[42] Gustaf Cederschiöld, ed., *Clári saga*, Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek 12 (Halle: Niemeyer, 1907).

[43] Agnete Loth, ed., "Viktors saga ok Blávus," in *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances*, vol. 1, 5 vols., Editiones Arnamagnæanæ, ser. B 20–24 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1962), 1–50; Jónas Kristjánsson, *Viktors saga ok Blávus*. More recent editions, such as Allen H. Chappel's *Saga af Viktor ok Blavus* and Dennis Ferrell Kearney's *Clárús Saga* have been consulted but due to the problems they presented I have decided against using them. Allen H. Chappel, *Saga af Viktor ok Blavus: A Fifteenth Century Icelandic* lygisaga*: An English Edition and Translation* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972); Dennis Ferrell Kearney, "Clárús Saga: An Edition and Translation" (Ph. D., Oxford, Mississippi, University of Mississippi, 1990). See also Marianne E. Kalinke, "review of *Saga af Viktor ok Blavus. A Fifteenth Century Icelandic Lygisaga. (Janua Linguarum, Series Practica 88)* by Allen H. Chappel," *Scandinavian Studies* 46, no. 2 (1974): 182–85.

analysis is restricted to these four works, and I do not attempt to make sweeping general statements that cover all chivalric sagas. Other examples, either complementary or contradictory to my findings, may be uncovered from the remaining corpus in future research.

Chapter 1:
The *Riddarasǫgur* Among the Icelandic Sagas

Saga Typology – Story Brethren[44]

In order to present the subject matter clearly, a short systemic overview of the entire saga corpus is necessary. The chivalric sagas are but one of the numerous genres and subgenres the Icelandic sagas are sorted into. Ever since the saga corpus first came under scholarly scrutiny, it has been divided and subdivided according to various criteria. These categorization attempts have invited objections from the start and are still considered problematic, albeit necessary. Even though a consensus exists that some kind of system is required in order to compare and contrast the various features of medieval Icelandic prose, there is no general agreement in place on how such a classification should be constructed. The following taxonomy, presented here based on the works of Massimiliano Bampi and Margaret Clunies Ross, is the result of "[d]ecades of discussing the adequacy of the classification system," taking into account the subject matter of the sagas and their chronology; it is not, however, without criticism on account of its rigidity.[45] Several sagas are known to defy allocation into these categories; these "generic hybrids" still offer unique insight and particular problems at the same time.[46]

- *fornaldasǫgur* ("legendary sagas")[47]

[44] The following section is based on part of my BA dissertation written in 2018: Tamás Reinicke, "Orð fljúga, rit standa: The Transition of the *Íslendingasǫgur* from Orality to Literacy" (BA, London, University College London, 2018).
[45] Massimiliano Bampi, "Genre," in *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 4; Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Cambridge Introduction to The Old Norse-Icelandic Saga* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 29.
[46] Bampi, "Genre," 9.
[47] This diverse group includes texts of various types and styles. Their common element is that they all deal with events, often fantastic events, taking place before the time of the settlement of Iceland. Their subject material and the fact that they exist only in manuscripts from after 1300 makes their dating complicated. E.g. *Yngvars saga víðfǫrla*, *Hrólfs saga kraka*.

- *konungasǫgur* ("kings' sagas")[48]
- *Íslendingasǫgur* ("Sagas of the Icelanders" or "family sagas")[49]
- *samtíðarsǫgur* ("contemporary sagas")[50]
- *heilagra manna sǫgur* ("hagiographic sagas")[51]
- *riddarasǫgur* ("chivalric sagas")
    - *þýddar riddarasǫgur* ("translated chivalric sagas"): as their name suggests, these are the translations mentioned earlier, adapted from Old French and Anglo-Norman sources. Most of the extant manuscripts are Icelandic copies of earlier Norwegian translations.
    - *frumsamdar riddarasǫgur* ("indigenous chivalric sagas"): derivative literary works written in Iceland, inspired by the translated chivalric sagas. They were highly popular in the fourteenth and fifteenth century, and this popularity continued well into their modern era.

The latest and most peculiar members of the Icelandic saga corpus, the *riddarasǫgur* tell the stories of knights and aristocrats in European or Eastern contexts. Two further subgroups can be distinguished within this genre, *þýddar riddarasǫgur* and *frumsamdar riddarasǫgur*, of which the latter offers the material for this paper. As it was previously noted, they occupy a special place in the saga corpus. Touching upon unprecedented themes, developed using patterns of imported narratives, by their many aspects they represent a foreign body among their saga brethren. Critics often cite their outlandish origins, derivative nature, and formulaic structure, dismissing their literary value.[52] Yet the fact remains that they were

[48] These contain semi-historical narratives on the lives of Scandinavian kings. They were first written down between the mid-twelfth to thirteenth century; e.g. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, *Óláfs saga helga*. Many of them survived as parts of compilations such as *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla*: for instance, *Saga Magnús góða og Haralds harðráða* or *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* are found in these volumes, respectively.

[49] These sagas tell the stories of prominent Icelanders that lived in the period between the settlement (traditionally 870-930) and the Christianization of Iceland (traditionally 1000); e.g. *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, *Laxdæla saga, Njáls saga*. Their dating is highly debated, but in their written form they were probably composed not earlier than the thirteenth century; the *terminus post quem* varies between 1200 and 1220. Vésteinn Ólason, "Family Sagas," in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 114–16; Theodore M. Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas (1180-1280)* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 66, 109–10, 119.

[50] These sagas deal with the lives of Icelandic power figures between 1117-1291. The origin of the term is in the fact that these sagas were written shortly after the events they discuss, mostly during the thirteenth century.[50] *Samtíðarsǫgur* can be divided into two major subgroups: *Sturlunga sǫgur*, "Sagas of the Sturlungs," which detail the exploits of the eponymous Sturlung family, and *biskupa sǫgur*, "bishops' sagas," that describe the lives of Icelandic bishops.

[51] Perhaps the oldest type to appear in written form, starting around the middle of the twelfth century, these sagas are translated and original hagiographies of mostly foreign saints and religious figures (including the Virgin Mary). Bampi, "Genre," 5.

[52] For a few examples, see Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*, Anden udgave, vol. 3 (København: G.E.C. Gads, 1924), 98; Jón Helgason, *Norrøn litteraturhistorie* (København: Levin & Munksgaard, 1934), 218; Sigurður Nordal, "Sagalitteraturen," in *Litteraturhistorie B: Norge og Island*, ed. Sigurður Nordal, Nordisk kultur 8B (Stockholm: A. Bonnier, 1953), 268.

written *by* Icelanders *to* Icelanders in an age that brought cataclysmic changes to Icelandic society. The self-sufficiency and autonomy of the Commonwealth were gone, Iceland had submitted to the Norwegian crown; whether the *riddarasǫgur* were escapist fantasies conjured up to deal with the shock and fatigue of the related economic and political decline, or instructive and educational works to help the forming aristocracy find its bearings, they were created with the intention of introducing and representing a wider world that Iceland could not help but become a part of.[53] It follows that many characteristic attributes of the earlier, "traditional" sagas have been removed, reformed, or replaced by the authors of the chivalric sagas. These are the points where traditions meet and clash and where the "imperfect blending" I aim to investigate occurs.

Origin and Authorship

The most obvious characteristic that sets aside the *riddarasǫgur* from their earlier counterparts is their apparent lack of oral provenance. The word *saga* is related to the Old Norse verb *segja*, its basic meaning being "to say, tell"; thus, *saga* is "what is said". This simple piece of linguistic data had been the starting point of a debate on saga orality which has been raging with fluctuating intensity for the past two hundred years.[54] The finer points, e.g. the form of the actual oral background, the transition to literacy, etc. are still heavily discussed to this day, but there *is* a general scholarly consensus in place that "as a literary genre, the saga is likely to have first taken shape as an orally generated and transmitted form which sometimes, but not always, acquired a written existence in later centuries."[55] Attempting to trace the oral

[53] Driscoll, "Late Prose Fiction (*lygisögur*)," 196–97; Barnes, "Romance in Iceland," 270.
[54] The idea of the sagas existing in a set oral form before being written down originates from Danish scholar Peter Erasmus Müller, who wrote the first comprehensive study on the then-available saga material in the early nineteenth century. See Peter Erasmus Müller, *Sagabibliothek med Anmærkninger og indledende Afhandlinger*, 3 vols. (Kiøbenhavn: J. F. Schultz, 1817–1820).
[55] Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Cambridge Introduction to The Old Norse-Icelandic Saga* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 15.

background of a specific saga is an arduous and unrewarding process with little hope of yielding decisive result; most of the sagas where such analysis has been pursued belong to the *Íslendingasǫgur*.[56] In the case of the indigenous *riddarasǫgur*, no case has ever been made for a pre-existing oral tradition: they appear to have been straight-to-parchment literary works, although their reception and dissemination did not lack an oral component.[57]

When it comes to their authorship, the *riddarasǫgur* present us with the same lack of information as the bulk of the other sagas. The overwhelming majority of the saga material (or of medieval Icelandic manuscripts in general) is anonymous. The most probable places of origins are ecclesiastical centers (the bishoprics in Skálholt and Hólar and certain monasteries) and the wealthier farms and manors, but the textual and paratextual assertions towards the origins of the *riddarasǫgur* are doubtful at best.[58] For instance, no evidence has ever been found supporting the statement of *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs* that its author was Homer himself and that the saga was found written on the walls of Babylon.[59] The most plausible allegation of authorship is found at the beginning of *Klári saga*: "Þar byrjum vér upp þessa frásǫgn, sem sagði virðuligr herra Jón byskup Halldórsson, ágætrar áminningar, — en hann fann hana skrifaða með látínu í Frannz í þat form, er þeir kalla 'rithmos', en vér kǫllum 'hendingum'."[60] Jón Halldórsson was the thirteenth bishop of Skálholt in northern Iceland between 1322-39; while it is certain that he was schooled in Bergen (and later in Bologna and Paris), his parentage was most likely at least in part Icelandic, as demonstrated by the highly idiomatic language of

[56] See for instance the extensive overview in Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas (1180-1280)*.
[57] Driscoll, "Late Prose Fiction (*lygisögur*)," 202–3.
[58] Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson, "Manuscripts and Palaeography," 252; Pernille Hermann, "Literacy," in *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 39–40.
[59] Agnete Loth, ed., "Vilhjálms saga sjóðs," in *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances*, vol. 4, Editiones Arnamagnæanæ, ser. B, XX–XXIV (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1964), 3. The motif of a saga being written on stone walls is observable in several other sagas; Barnes labelled these "graffiti sagas." Barnes, "Romance in Iceland," 271.
[60] "Thus we begin this account that the venerable bishop of renowned memory, Jón Halldórsson told, and he found it in France written in Latin in the form which they call 'rithmos' but we call 'verses'." Cederschiöld, *Clári saga*, 1.

Klári saga.[61] The word *sagði*, "said" or "told", clearly indicates an oral transmission preceding the narrative being put to writing. For a long time, this sentence was taken at face value, and *Klári saga* has been classified as one of the translated chivalric sagas. Recently, however, a strong case has been made for the saga being an original Icelandic composition, quite possibly by the venerable bishop himself.[62] This would mean that the single most credible authorial testament is about as trustworthy as those of the "graffiti sagas".[63] The crux of the matter is that despite the information available regarding the authorship of the currently known texts of the traditional sagas and the *riddarasǫgur* is similar both in quality and quantity, the *riddarasǫgur* do not seem to have an preexisting oral tradition and formation period.

Historiography – Emergence from Obscurity

While other saga types, especially the *Íslendingasǫgur*, attracted intense scholarly attention since the early nineteenth century, the first comprehensive survey on the chivalric sagas was done as late as 1934 by Margaret Schlauch.[64] In her *Romance in Iceland*, Schlauch analyzed what then were known in the literature as *lygisǫgur*, "lying sagas," with a wide focus and no particular emphasis.[65] The remainder of the twentieth century saw sporadic interest in the field; perhaps the most important contribution of this time was the 1985 bibliography by Marianne E. Kalinke and P. M. Mitchell.[66] In this, the authors listed all *riddarasǫgur*, both translated and indigenous, with detailed information on their then-known manuscripts, scholarly and translated editions, and published secondary literature. While our understanding has considerably deepened since its publication, due in large part to the continued work of

[61] Hughes, "*Klári saga* as an Indigenous Romance," 137–38.
[62] Hughes, 158.
[63] See note 59 above.
[64] Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland*.
[65] Cf. the contemporary reviews, e.g. F. P. Magoun, "review of *Romance in Iceland*, by Margaret Schlauch," *Speculum* 11, no. 1 (January 1936): 151–53, https://doi.org/10.2307/2846892; C. L. W., "review of *Romance in Iceland*, by Margaret Schlauch," *The Review of English Studies* 14, no. 54 (April 1938): 238.
[66] Kalinke and Mitchell, *Bibliography of Old Norse–Icelandic Romances*.

Kalinke herself, this bibliography is still an extremely valuable summary of information regarding the *riddarasǫgur*. In the same year, Kalinke summarized and presented the current scholarly understanding regarding the chivalric sagas in a chapter dedicated to them in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*.[67]

In the first two decades of the twenty-first century the previously lukewarm scholarly attitude towards the chivalric sagas seemed to shift towards a more favorable one. Independent journal and study volumes (e.g. *Arthuriana* 22 (1), *Scandinavian Studies* 87, *The Arthur of the North*) have been dedicated especially to the translated sagas, examining their origins, connections, and peculiarities. Beside this, several indigenous *riddarasǫgur* have been normalized, published, and even translated. In the second half of the twentieth century it has become a peculiar but accepted way of earning one's doctoral degree to process and present a previously disregarded chivalric saga.

Despite their slowly rising popularity within the academic community, the study of *riddarasǫgur* remains a niche subject, with few scholars dedicating their undivided attention to it. The two most prominent works of the last ten years that had the chivalric sagas as a genre in their focus are Geraldine Barnes' *The Bookish Riddarasögur* (2014) and Kalinke's *Stories Set Forth with Fair Words* (2017).[68] Barnes explored how continental encyclopaedic tradition, ranging from geography to history to cosmography to mythography, had permeated the indigenous chivalric sagas, showing how knowledge from and of Europe and further lands (Byzantium, the Middle East, etc.) has been incorporated in the distinctly Icelandic fabric of the *riddarasǫgur*. Kalinke, on the other hand, followed the process that resulted in these sagas from the earliest impact made by European romance literature in Norway through the dissemination of the translated material to the emergence of original, creative works in Iceland.

[67] Kalinke, "Norse Romance (*Riddarasögur*)."
[68] Geraldine Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur: Writing Romance in Late Mediaeval Iceland*, The Viking Collection. Studies in Northern Civilization 21 (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2014); Kalinke, *Stories Set Forth with Fair Words: The Evolution of Medieval Romance in Iceland*.

Other authors explored specific aspects of the *riddarasǫgur*, or their relation to wider research areas. They are often used by scholars examining Old Norse literature from a gender perspective due to their distinctive female characters and gender-related topoi. In both of these the chivalric sagas show considerable deviation from earlier Old Norse literary works. Particular attention has been dedicated to *Nítíða saga*, which stands apart from other *riddarasǫgur* due to its female protagonist and its "proto-feminist" motifs.[69] Barnes discussed how the geographic depictions of *Nítíða saga* were used to counter growing Icelandic marginality in the fourteenth century. The saga author employed traditional European cartographic patterns with variations that resulted in a "fantasy of geopolitical desire [where] the power is with the periphery," as opposed to the commonly accepted centers in the West (France) or the East (Miklagarðr/Constantinople).[70] Barnes described *Nítíða saga* as a conscious effort to maintain an Icelandic sense of identity and importance in a period of increasing isolation. Sheryl McDonald Werronen also took into consideration the manuscript corpus of the saga, its reception and audience, and the conflicting worldviews it conveyed with the aim to analyze the ideas coeval Icelanders held regarding themselves and their place in the world.[71]

Open Avenues of Research

Despite the increasing attention the *riddarasǫgur* have recently received, numerous approaches are still open to investigation. Among the various scholarly works discussing the

[69] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words, and Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 108.
[70] Geraldine Barnes, "Margin vs. Centre: Geopolitics in *Nitida Saga* (a Cosmographical Comedy?)," in *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature, Sagas and the British Isles: Preprints of the Thirteenth International Saga Conference, Durham and York, 6th - 12th August, 2006*, ed. John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick, vol. 1 (Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Durham University, 2006), 110.
[71] Sheryl McDonald Werronen, *Popular romance in Iceland: the women, worldviews, and manuscript witnesses of Nítíða saga*, Crossing boundaries: Turku medieval and early modern studies 5 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016).

social, cultural, material, ideological etc. aspects of the chivalric sagas, the representation of Otherness is just beginning to appear. When investigated, the subject is usually approached using other saga genres as source material, with the *riddarasǫgur* providing only occasional examples; in other cases, Otherness is examined with a tight focus of a singular group. Among the former works, the study conducted by Sirpa Aalto regarding the *konungasǫgur* must be mentioned.[72] Other examples are the research of John Stanley Martin and Sverrir Jakobsson on Muslim representation and John Lindow's work on the connection of supernatural and ethnic Otherness is the sagas.[73] The most significant publication that focuses on Otherness in the *riddarasǫgur* is *Von monströsen Helden und heldenhaften Monstern* by Handrik Lambertus from 2013, whose main field of interest is the relation between *riddarasǫgur* heroes and monsters and the ambiguities of such categories.[74] Despite it being a comprehensive work, *Von monströsen Helden und heldenhaften Monstern* is yet to receive substantial scholarly response. While some of the themes I discuss necessarily overlap with those examined by Lambertus, my questions lead the inquiry in a different direction.

[72] Sirpa Aalto, *Categorizing Otherness in the Kings Sagas*, Dissertations in Social Sciences and Business Studies 10 (Joensuu: University of Eastern Finland, 2010).
[73] John Stanley Martin, "Attitudes to Islam from the *Chansons de Geste* to the *Riddarasögur*," *Parergon* 8, no. 2 (1990): 81–95, https://doi.org/10.1353/pgn.1990.0001; Sverrir Jakobsson, "Saracen Sensibilities: Muslims and Otherness in Medieval Saga Literature," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 115, no. 2 (April 1, 2016): 213, https://doi.org/10.5406/jenglgermphil.115.2.0213; John Lindow, "Supernatural Others and Ethnic Others: A Millenium of World View," *Scandinavian Studies* 67, no. 1 (1995): 8–31.
[74] Which, unfortunately, I was unable to consult in detail. Hendrik Lambertus, *Von monströsen Helden und heldenhaften Monstern: Zur Darstellung und Funktion des Fremden in den originalen Riddarasögur* (Tübingen: A. Francke Verlag, 2013).

Chapter 2:
Monstrous Others – *Berserkir* and *Blámenn*

Monsters are present in some form in all cultures—and at the same time belong innately to the culture they arise from.[75] Their roles are manifold, as are their appearance, but ultimately, they are the epitomized Other: anything that We are not, were not, and should never be can take the monstrous form to demarcate known from unknown, safety from danger, Us from Them. Various types of differences can "slide together like the imbricated circles of a Venn diagram, abjecting from the center that which becomes the monster."[76] Medieval Iceland certainly had its fair share of monstrous, supernatural Others: spirits, giants, and undead roamed the cultural landscape.[77] Yet even at their most dreadful and foreign, these beings were still inherently Icelandic. They were Others, but they were their own Others. The margins of knowledge were populated by different creatures, but true to their monstrous nature, they were subject to transformation and change. Even familiar figures could be pushed outward if perception on their more centered Otherness shifted. This can be seen on the example of the *berserkr* (sg.; pl. *berserkir*), the fearsome warrior figure which in the *riddarasǫgur* has been moved to the fringes of the world from its previous Scandinavian position.[78] There, they joined those Others who were always known to dwell there, who were different to start with. Their Otherness, best described as *ethnic*, was made larger than life by supernatural connotations.[79]

[75] Or, as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen put it, "[t]he monstrous body is pure culture." Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 4.
[76] Cohen, 12.
[77] For a comprehensive survey on the presence of paranormal in Iceland, see Ármann Jakobsson, *The Troll inside You: Paranormal Activity in the Medieval North* (Earth, Milky Way: Punctum Books, 2017).
[78] Two competing etymologies have been proposed for the origin of the name. The first is *berr* + *serkr*, meaning one who is fighting without a shirt, i.e. armor; the second, **berr*/**beri* + *serkr*, to signify one wearing bear's skin. Recently, the latter explanation has become more accepted. Benjamin Blaney, "Berserkr," in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2016), 38.
[79] Lindow, "Supernatural Others and Ethnic Others: A Millenium of World View."

In Old Norse literature, the most prominent specimen of the latter type is the *blámaðr* (pl. *blámenn*), the dark-skinned Others of the distant South.

Berserkir – The Monsterized Northmen

Of the Warriors of the North

Certain figures and social roles admired or at least respected in the Saga Age (between the ninth and the eleventh centuries) would have been out of place in the newly-forming identity of fourteenth-century Iceland. The authors of the *riddarasǫgur* came up with the solution of recasting these characters in new roles within their stories, preserving their defining characteristics but presenting these as undesirable or even revolting. Two specific examples of this practice are the figures of the Viking and the *berserkr*. Despite their similarity at first glance, both the origin and the *riddarasaga* presence of these characters show significant differences. To go on Viking journeys was a prestigious activity in the eponymous Viking Age (between the late eight and the eleventh centuries), and Vikings are depicted according to this in earlier sagas. On the other hand, the *berserkr* has been a well-known but uncanny character in these works (an example of Boswell's *inferior insider*, tinged with anxiety and dread).[80] Vikings and *berserkir* both became adversaries of the *riddarasǫgur* heroes and the ideology they represented, but not in equal measure. The former, whom I discuss in detail in Chapter 4, retained some of their positive characteristics and the prestige they were endowed with; the latter were transformed into a monstrous Other, throwing it together with the other wondrous, terrifying, and—most importantly—alien adversaries.

Despite being recurring, although secondary, characters in numerous Old Norse texts, we have very little definite knowledge of *berserkir*. The sources themselves are among the difficulties: we learn of the *berserkir* mostly from sagas and poems, i.e. literary works. A

[80] See note 28 above.

reference is made to them in the late thirteenth-century law compendium *Grágás*, which penalizes "if a man falls into a berserk's frenzy" with three years of exile.[81] Beside this frenzy called *berserksgangr*—and their willingness and extraordinary ability to do battle—, the further trademark characteristics of *berserkir* are their supposed invulnerability to fire or iron, their association with the god Óðinn—most apparent from archaeological sources—and their intermittent but well-established connection to shapeshifting.[82] *Berserkir* are "figure[s] of overstated masculinity" unfit for "socially modulated role[s];" thus, they usually appear in an adversary or a neutral role at best.[83] It is common to see the *berserkr* making unwelcome marriage advances bolstered with threats of violence, only to be overcome by the saga protagonist (e.g. *Egils saga*, *Grettis saga*).

From Enemy to Monster

We encounter relatively few *berserkir* in the *riddarasǫgur*. In the four under scrutiny here, only *Viktors saga ok Blávus* features them. The brothers Falr and Sóti unite various forms of strangeness and uncanny qualities in their persons: they are "blaer berserker" and "miklar hamhleypur," who can also spew forth venom and are impervious to weapons.[84] *Berserkir* and their shapeshifting abilities are traditionally associated with wolves;[85] it is unattested elsewhere

[81] Andrew Dennis, Peter Foote, and Richard Perkins, eds., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás I*, trans. Andrew Dennis, Peter Foote, and Richard Perkins (Winnipeg, Canada: The University of Manitoba Press, 1980), 39.
[82] Blaney, "Berserkr," 37–38. For some examples of the archaeological sources, see Neil Price and Paul Mortimer, "An Eye for Odin? Divine Role-Playing in the Age of Sutton Hoo," *European Journal of Archaeology* 17, no. 3 (2014): 524, https://doi.org/10.1179/1461957113Y.0000000050.
[83] Judy Quinn, "Women in Old Norse Poetry and Sagas," in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 521.
[84] "black berserkers"; "great shape-leapers." Jónas Kristjánsson, *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, 28–29. This multitude of Otherness is in line with the common depiction of *blámenn*; see Arngrímur Vídalín, "Demons, Muslims, Wrestling Champions: The Semantic History of *Blámenn* from the Twelfth to the Twentieth Century," in *Paranormal Encounters in Iceland 1150–1400*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Miriam Mayburd, The Northern Medieval World (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 204, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501513862-013. *Blámenn* in the *riddarasǫgur* are discussed in the following section.
[85] See for instance Kveld-Úlfr and his son Skalla-Grímr in *Egils saga*. For an analysis of the concept of Old Norse shapeshifting, see Catharina Raudvere, "*Trolldómr* in Early Medieval Scandinavia," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Middle Ages*, ed. Karen Jolly, Catharina Raudvere, and Edward Peters, The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: 3 (London: The Athlone Press, 2002), 101–6; Ármann Jakobsson, *The Troll inside You*, 64, 130, 140.

that one of them should take the shape of a dragon or a lion as we see it from Falr and Soti.[86] They also lack the innate grace, nobility and empathy that Randuer and Aunundur—warriors faced by Viktor and Blávus earlier—showed, treating their challengers discourteously from the start.[87] In their figures, the uncanniness—and with it, the Otherness—of the *berserkir* is enhanced to the extreme, deprived at the same time of any positive connotations whatsoever. The *berserkir* of *Viktors saga ok Blávus* certainly do not represent a well-defined social group that is considered undesirable; rather it is an element of an alienized past that has been blended with the monstrous enemies lurking around the edges of the civilized world.

Blámenn – The Ethnic Monsters

The question of ethnicity and the criteria that defined it in the Middle Ages are a complex issue.[88] Despite the lack of coeval "reflections on the characteristics by which peoples were distinguished," these distinctions have been made and were used as tools of the Othering processes.[89] In Old Norse literature, non-Norse ethnic groups were often attributed supernatural, uncanny qualities. Examples of these are the *Finnar*, i.e. the Sámis and/or Finns, whose connection to magic was so fixed in the Norse mindset that *finn* became a prefix synonymous with magical, uncanny, supernatural;[90] the *skrælingar*, indigenous people encountered by the explorers of Vinland, who appear only in few sagas but in those cases are heavily associated with magical practices;[91] and the *blámenn*, whose presence in the *riddarasǫgur* is the most significant of the three. They certainly suffered the coeval equivalent

[86] Jónas Kristjánsson, *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, 31–32.
[87] Védís Ragnheiðardóttir, "'Meir af viel en karlmennsku': Monstrous Masculinity in *Viktors saga ok Blávus*," in *Paranormal Encounters in Iceland 1150–1400*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Miriam Mayburd, The Northern Medieval World (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 427, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501513862-024. I discuss the encounter with Randuer and Aunundr in Chapter 4.
[88] Patrick J Geary, "Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct in the Early Middle Ages," *Mitteilungen Der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien* 113 (1983): 24.
[89] Geary, 19.
[90] Lindow, "Supernatural Others and Ethnic Others: A Millenium of World View," 17, 19.
[91] Lindow, 12–13.

of being typecast: very few *blámenn* appear in Old Norse literature in a positive or at least neutral role. In his exhaustive study on the literary *blámenn*, Arngrímur Vídalín was able to locate only four depictions where the *blámaðr* in question was not some kind of monster, either supernatural or not.[92] Two of these depictions are found in *riddarasǫgur*, one of them in *Klári saga*.[93] Most frequently, however, *blámenn* are presented as enemies to defeat; in this role, they can take on different appearances depending on what sort of threat they represent at the moment.[94] Due to practical reasons, they are frequently encountered in the Mediterranean, such as in the narratives of Sigurðr jórsalafari Magnússon (Sigurd the Crusader) and Rǫgnvaldr kali Kolsson (Rognvald, Earl of Orkney), who both meet such foes during their respective travels to Jerusalem.[95] The aforementioned Falr and Sóti fit this pattern, as they "raada fyrer ey þeirri er Kypur heiter."[96] *Blámenn* are also often either associated or outright identified with the *Serkir* (Saracens) of *Serkland*, and in such cases their heathenness is also emphasized.[97] Rulers from Serkland do appear in the *meykongr* sagas, with the recurring name Soldán (a distorted form of "sultan").[98] They are not described as being *blámenn* themselves, although the one in *Nítíða saga* has them in his army, among other unpleasant members: he "safnar að sér blámönnum og bannsettum hetjum og alls kyns óþjóð og illþýði."[99] It is conceivable that knowing that one is the king of *Serkland* has been enough for the audience to identify him as *blámaðr*. Another possible explanation is that since they arrive as suitors for female characters

[92] Arngrímur Vídalín, "Demons, Muslims, Wrestling Champions," 206–8.
[93] The other is found in *Mágus saga jarls*.
[94] Arngrímur Vídalín, "Demons, Muslims, Wrestling Champions," 203–4.
[95] See *Morkinskinna*, chapter "Vtferþar saga Sigurþar konvngs" and *Orkneyinga saga*, chapter "Rognvalldr vann dromundinn". Finnur Jónsson, ed., *Morkinskinna*, Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur 53 (København: S. L. Møllers Bogtrykkeri, 1932), 338–48; Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Orkneyinga saga*, Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur 40 (København: S. L. Møllers Bogtrykkeri, 1913–1916), 247–58.
[96] "rule over the island which is called Cyprus" Jónas Kristjánsson, *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, 28.
[97] "A dromundinum voru Saraceni; þat kaullum ver Maumetz villumen. Þar var mart blamanna […]" (On the dromond there were Saracens, whom we call heathens of Muhammad. There were many black men […]) Sigurður Nordal, *Orkneyinga saga*, 249.
[98] McDonald Werronen, "*Nítíða Saga*: Text and Translation," 223; Jónas Kristjánsson, *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, 45; Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, eds., *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1874), 578.
[99] "gathers to himself black men and outlawed villains and all kinds of wretches and rabble." McDonald Werronen, "*Nítíða Saga*: Text and Translation," 229.

of the sagas, the ethnic—monstrous—Otherness needed to be softened so that they could plausibly move in the same social framework as their intended brides.

Beast of a Different Color

The color terms appearing in Old Norse have only recently received deeper scholarly attention; however, the problems *blár* pose have long been known and discussed.[100] What appears certain is that it primarily refers to a dark color, but its exact relation to *svartr*—which unambiguously denotes black—is unclear. *Blár* is most commonly rendered as "blue" in translations, but such practice diminishes the significant overlap between the two terms. At points, they seem almost interchangeable, while at others they are meticulously distinguished.[101] This latter is the case with *blámenn*: *blár*, when used to describe complexion, always denotes ethnic difference. Nordic people of dark hair or darkish skin tone are referred to as *svartr*, whereas *blár* is reserved for those of notably darker pigmentation.[102] *Svartr* was also applied to *skrælingar*: "[þ]eir váru svartir menn ok illiligir ok hǫfðu ill hár á hǫfði."[103] That the distinction between *blár* and *svartr* was based on ethnicity when it came to skin color is further supported by instances where the coloration is only partial. The Viking Jógrímr in *Sigrgards saga frækna* was dubbed with his derogatory nickname *skít í andliti*[104] because "nef hans var *kolsvart* ok kinnr báðar en hvítt hörundit annars staðar."[105] The use of *kolsvart* here

[100] Kirsten Wolf, "Non-Basic Color Terms in Old Norse-Icelandic," in *New Norse Studies: Essays on the Literature and Culture of Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Jeffrey Turco, Islandica 58 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 2015), 389; Kirsten Wolf, "The Color Blue in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature," *Scripta Islandica* 57 (2006): 55–78.

[101] Wolf suggested that the development of dye production resulted in a shift in the Old Norse vocabulary of dark colors, causing the ambiguity between sources of different age. Wolf, "The Color Blue in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature," 74.

[102] Lindow, "Supernatural Others and Ethnic Others: A Millenium of World View," 13.

[103] "They were black men and hideous and had evil hair on their head." Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., "Eiríks saga rauða," in *Eyrbyggja saga. Brands þáttr örva. Eiríks saga rauða. Grænlendinga saga. Grænlendinga þáttr*, Íslenzk fornrit, IV (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1935), 227.

[104] Shit in the face.

[105] "his nose and both cheeks were black as coal, but in other places his skin was white." Emphasis by me. Hall, Richardson, and Haukur Þorgeirsson, "Sigrgarðs saga frækna: A Normalised Text, Translation, and Introduction," 124.

instead of *kolblár*—which is also attested elsewhere—might have served as differentiation between different levels of Otherness.

At certain points, however, *blámenn* are described using other color terms. In *Klári saga*, this happens when Eskelvarð appears, in the episode pointed out by Arngrímur Vídalín as featuring a positive *blámaðr*. The twist here is that the *herrann blálenzki* (lord from Bláland) is in fact Prince Clárús, disguised by the arts of Master Pérús. After being smeared with an ash-like substance, Clárús sees that "hans litr er orðinn nǫkkut *bleikr*, sem þeim mǫnnum er nattúruligt, er langt eru útan ór heiminum undan sólarhita."[106] *Bleikr*, as Wolf succinctly puts it, "is problematic."[107] In its most general meaning, it refers to light or pale coloration. In practice, this is most often an earthen color such as yellow, brown, or red, but the emphasis is on the light, bleached, or faded characteristic of whatever is described as *bleikr*. Considering the possibility raised by Wolf that *bleikr* "should be considered a macrocolor or composite color," it is conceivable that for fourteenth-century Old Norse speakers it covered the color concept associated with the skin color of inhabitants of the Southern peripheries.[108] The seeming contradiction between *blámenn* and *bleikr* may be resolved in several ways. It is possible that *blámaðr* was merely a fixed semantic form by this time in Old Norse and did not necessarily invoke whatever color *blár* denoted in other contexts. On the other hand, *bleikr* may be used here as a descriptor for skin color so as to avoid directly associating Clárús with the Othering ethnic connotations that would accompany *blár*. The saga characters encountering Eskelvarð/Clárús certainly disregard his seeming ethnic Otherness. Both Séréna and her maidservant Tecla are captivated by his wealth and pride, and although they certainly recognize him as an "úkunnan hǫfðingja ok útlendan," his pigmentation does not influence their opinion

[106] "his color has become somewhat *bleikr*, like it naturally is for those people who live a long way out from the world (*i.e.* "on the edges," "in the outer regions") under the heat of the Sun." Cederschiöld, *Clári saga*, 34. Emphasis by me in both the original and the translation.
[107] Wolf, "Non-Basic Color Terms in Old Norse-Icelandic," 394.
[108] Wolf, 395. On the term macrocolor, see C.P. Biggam, *Blue in Old English: An Interdisciplinary Semantic Study*, Costerus New Series 110 (Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1997), 18.

on him.[109] It is possible that this has reasons lying outside the narrative itself: since the reader is aware of the true nature of Eskelvarð, he cannot fulfill the customary narrative roles assigned to *blámenn*.

[109] "unknown and foreign chieftain" Cederschiöld, *Clári saga*, 37.

Chapter 3:
Familiar Others – Europe and Chivalry

An Island No More

From the beginning of the Settlement Period up until the signing of the Old Covenant, Iceland mostly remained apart from Europe. In this almost four hundred years, the island in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean was independent politically and isolated culturally from the rest of the continent.[110] The early settlers were mostly Norwegians of high status who left Norway after coming into conflict with the centralizing efforts of Haraldr hárfagri (Harald I Fairhair).[111] Their descendants construed from this a narrative of fleeing from tyranny and made a point of protecting their autonomy fiercely from outside—especially Norwegian—influence.[112] This, of course, could not be carried out perfectly: cultural, social, and economical ties binding Iceland to Norway facilitated the creation of a "transnational space," where distinguishing and maintaining separate identities became increasingly difficult.[113] Despite all attempts to the contrary, Iceland remained closest to Norway of all Scandinavian countries, the legal system of both countries acknowledging the special status of the inhabitants of the other.[114] These pre-existing connections helped the legal and political integration of Iceland into the Norwegian realm after 1262/64.

Thus, Iceland has finally became part of Europe – after a fashion. At this point, Norwegian kings have made efforts to move their country closer to—or into—the European power sphere for some centuries now. The conversion efforts of Hákon góði Haraldsson

[110] The settlement began around 870; the Commonwealth, as I wrote above, effectively ended in 1264. See note 13.
[111] Ann-Marie Long, *Iceland's Relationship with Norway c.870 – c.1100: Memory, History and Identity*, The Northern World: North Europe and the Baltic c. 400-1700 AD: Peoples, Economies and Cultures 81 (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2017), 111–12, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004336513.
[112] Long, 87.
[113] Long, 204.
[114] Long, 206–7.

(Haakon I) and the two Óláfrs (Tryggvason and Haraldsson, Olaf I and Olaf II or the Saint) in the tenth and eleventh centuries, the Norwegian Crusade by Sigurðr jórsalafari Magnússon (Sigurd I) between 1107 and 1111, and the aforementioned literary endeavor of Hákon Hákonarson in the late thirteenth century that eventually resulted in the *riddarasǫgur:* these all had the element of the royal wish to be considered players of equal rank to other kings in the political arena that was Europe at these times.[115] It seemed, however, that Norway—and by extension, Iceland—has not only arrived somewhat late to the party, but also met difficulties when it came to the dress code. Since the narratives of the *riddarasǫgur* always take place in a courtly context, it is worth investigating to what degree did the courtly furnishings were integrated into Norwegian culture.

The Scandinavian Lord

Feudalistic arrangement was not unfamiliar to Norwegians: *lendir menn* were already named to hold lands in the name and representing the authority of the king early in the history of unified Norway.[116] Yet the staples of "feudal chivalry," as Barnes summarized it, never truly spread.[117] As part of his reforms, Magnús lagabœtir Hákonarson abolished the title of *lendir menn* in 1277, superseding it with *barrun* (baron), just as *riddari* (knight) replaced the earlier *skutilsveinn* (lit. "plate-boy," page).[118] In the courtly hierarchy, these dignities slotted in below *jarl* (earl), a rank of ancient Germanic provenance originally just below the king; this latter fact changed in 1237, when the newly founded title *hertogi* (duke) was given to Skúli Bárðarson. None of the ranks above ever became widespread in Norway: beside Skúli, only Hákon

[115] Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 132; Gary B. Doxey, "Norwegian Crusaders and the Balearic Islands," *Scandinavian Studies* 68, no. 2 (1996): 139–60.
[116] Claus Krag, "The Creation of Norway," in *The Viking World*, ed. Stefan Brink in collaboration with Neil Price (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 648. The later forms were *lendmenn*, pl.; sg. *lendr maðr*/*lendmann*.
[117] Barnes, "Romance in Iceland," 268.
[118] Barnes, 268.

Magnússon was ever appointed *hertogi* (up until his ascendance to the throne), *barrun* was not used after 1308, and we know of only sixty-five *riddarar* from between 1277 and 1310.[119] In 1349, the Black Death devastated Norway, with fifty to sixty per cent of the population falling victim; the following social and economic decline, together with the political turmoil that later resulted in the Kalmar Union, left little room for expanding a chivalric culture and elite.[120]

In Iceland, the courtly ranks have never taken root. This was partly due to the characteristic social structure of the country: the land had not been the property of a king as sovereign ruler, but of the farmers living on it. Social hierarchy distinguished between landowners based on their power and responsibility: *bændr* (farmer, householder, pl.; sg. *bóndi*) were organized under the less numerous *goðar* (chieftain, pl.; sg. *goði*).[121] The sole *jarl* of Iceland was appointed in the late stage of the Norwegian annexation: Gizurr Þorvaldsson held the title from 1258 until his death in 1268, but his authority in Iceland stemmed ultimately not from his courtly rank but his chieftainly power base.[122] Later, the royal will was conveyed through an administration around whose members coalesced the new Icelandic service aristocracy. The gap between the social strata quickly widened, setting the new ruling class apart, e.g. through sumptuary laws, to the point where the new aristocrats had more ties to and more in common with the Norwegian king than with their own community.[123]

Feudalistic arrangement and institutions have started to arrive at Iceland more than three hundred years after they started to take form in Europe. The translated *riddarasǫgur* came almost as a side effect to the political maneuvers of Hákon Hákonarson, although it is unlikely that he foresaw the popularity his attempt at cultural reform would enjoy in Iceland. The feudal

[119] Karl-Erik Löfqvist, *Om riddarväsen och frälse i nordisk medeltid* (Lund: Ohlsson, 1935), 112–52. Cited by Barnes, "Romance in Iceland," 268.
[120] Per Oeding, "Svartedauden i Norge," *Tidsskrift for den Norske Lægeforening* 110, no. 17 (June 30, 1990): 2204–8.
[121] Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, "The Icelandic Aristocracy after the Fall of the Free State," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 20, no. 3 (January 1995): 154, https://doi.org/10.1080/03468759508579302. For a complete list of honorifics used for chieftains, see Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 161.
[122] Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, "The Icelandic Aristocracy after the Fall of the Free State," 156.
[123] Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 159–60.

hierarchy and chivalric ritual represented in them, however, was not adapted by Icelanders in the slightest. The administration of the king wore official titles; other members of the aristocracy maintained their mantles of chieftaincy.[124] The ranks abound int the world of the *riddarasǫgur* remained foreign but recognizable for the people of Iceland: they belonged to the court of the king on the other side of the sea.

The Icelandic Knight

The translated *riddarasǫgur* introduced a new type of protagonist to Icelandic literature, which was not necessarily easy to begin with. Just as there is no typical saga beyond the broadest generalizations, there is no typical saga hero to be discerned across the entire board. Obviously, sagas categorized into thematically defined genres will present protagonists of shared characteristics: the central figure of any *konungasaga* is expected to be a Scandinavian king, the eponymously titled *Íslendingasǫgur* feature distinguished Icelanders, etc. If it were absolutely necessary to find a common denominator, a shared configuration of traits for the main characters of the highest possible number of sagas, it would take the shape of a male figure of northern origin. Within this category, the extremes range from kings and bishops to poor Icelandic farmers to mythical heroes, but they are all of Scandinavian birth in the wider sense (explicitly or implicitly, i.e. it is either stated or understood of them), and always men.[125]

The latter property remains mostly unchanged in the case of the *riddarasǫgur*, with one important exception, *Nítíða saga*; the former attribute, however, is almost completely discarded.[126] The geographical origin of the protagonists is diverse and fantastic: *Saxland*

[124] For a list of chieftain honorifics after the 1264, see Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 161.
[125] There are numerous prominent female figures to be found with strong agency and considerable influence on the narrative, e.g. Hallgerðr Hǫskuldsdóttir of *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Guðrún Ósvífsdóttir of *Laxdæla saga*, or Auðr Ketilsdóttir (nicknamed *djúpúðga*, the Deep-minded) of both of the above sagas and several others, but none cast as the principal character of the story they appear in.
[126] On this, see Chapter 4.

(Germany),[127] *Frakkland* (Frankia/France), *Grikkland* (Greece), and England are recurring elements, but Ector of *Ectors saga* is the descendant of King Priam of Troy, Dínus in *Dínus saga drambláta* hails from Egypt, and obscure place-names such as *Fricilia* and *Ertinborg* also appear. Two sagas feature heroes with approximate Scandinavian connections: Sigrgarðr of *Sigrgarðs saga frækna* is a prince of Garðar (or Garðaríki), which "can be understood to correspond to Scandinavian-speaking Russia of the Viking Age;" whereas Vilmundr in *Vilmundar saga viðutan* is from Hólmgarðaríki (Novgorod).[128] *Riddarasǫgur* heroes are predominantly members of the highest elite: sons of kings and emperors, or at least courtly knights, occasionally rulers already come to their own.[129] Despite their exotic homelands, they most often have Nordic or "Norsified" names: Sigurðr, Rémundr, Vilhjálmr, Ríkarðr, Hringr, Jón, Konráðr, but names of Latin and Greek origins can also be found: Adonias, Klárus, Mágus, Samson.

Considering all this, the protagonists of the chivalric sagas appear a form of amalgamation of familiar and foreign traits. The imported sagas featured princes, kings, and emperors, so it stood to reason that their adaptations should also do so. In some cases, they were familiarized—probably for the convenience of the reader—by presenting them with recognizable names; they do not, however, originate from areas fourteenth-century Icelanders would be closely acquainted with. Even the homelands of the two heroes hailing from the *Austvegr*—the Kievan Rus having been considered part of this loosely defined geographic unit,

[127] The common translation of *Saxland* as Saxony alludes not to the modern state but to Old Saxony in what today is northwest Germany. In translating *Saxland* as Germany I followed both the Cleasby-Vígfusson and the Zoëga dictionaries and the fact that by the fourteenth century Old Saxony was part of the German-ruled Holy Roman Empire. Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 516; Geir T. Zoëga, *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 351.

[128] Hall, Richardson, and Haukur Þorgeirsson, "Sigrgarðs saga frækna: A Normalised Text, Translation, and Introduction," 101; Marika Mägi, *In* Austrvegr*: The Role of the Eastern Baltic in Viking Age Communication across the Baltic Sea*, The Northern World: North Europe and the Baltic c. 400-1700 AD: Peoples, Economies and Cultures 84 (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2018), 158–59.

[129] Only two sagas of the thirty-odd known *riddarasǫgur* break with this pattern: *Drauma-Jóns saga* and *Vilmundar saga viðutan*. The protagonists of these two are lowly farmers, who nonetheless rise to high rank through their merit.

roughly corresponding to the eastern Baltic—had only vestigial cultural connections to Scandinavia at the time the *riddarasǫgur* were written. Thus, the protagonists of the chivalric sagas were themselves a display in Otherness for the Icelandic reader, but these Others were mostly endowed with characteristics intended as positive and appealing rather than frightening or repulsive.

Riders Without God or Horses

If I said above that the knights of the *riddarasǫgur* constituted a form of Other for the Icelandic audience, I must immediately follow it up by noting that they would have also looked out of place among their continental counterparts. While they did share certain characteristics, especially in the area of physical attributes and martial prowess, the mores and conduct of the *riddarasǫgur* knights often adhered to remarkably different principles to those of the European chivalry. The protagonists of the *riddarasǫgur* are mostly knights in the sense that the concept acquired at the end of the twelfth century: whereas up until then knighthood implied and consisted of service—military service, primarily—, now it was "transferred to the lower and upper nobility and [became] a proud distinction of emperors and kings."[130] Only four *riddarasǫgur* have as their heroes someone who does not belong to the highest stratum of society: *Drauma-Jóns saga* and *Vilmundar saga viðutan*, where the protagonists start as mere commoners—but do not remain so for long—, and *Dámusta saga* and *Jóns saga leikara*, where Dámusti and Jón are knights of noble birth, but eventually through marriage rise to their respective thrones. The typical *riddarasǫgur* protagonist, however, is of royal birth, and their chivalric nature and behavior is only a consequence of their social position.

[130] Joachim Bumke, *The Concept of Knighthood in the Middle Ages*, trans. W. T. H. Jackson and Erika Jackson (New York, N.Y.: AMS Press, 1982), 72.

The history of European chivalry is one mired in controversy regarding the social role of knighthood.[131] The discourse mostly consisted of recurring realizations that knights no longer served the ideals they should, and of reform movements that attempted to remedy the situation in response. At the high point of the debate, Geoffroi de Charny—d. 1356, the "chivalric embodiment of his colorful and violent age"[132]—outlined two basic tenets upon which chivalry, in his view, hinged. "First: prowess is the essential chivalric trait and leads to honor, the highest human good. Second: this prowess is the gift of God, requiring ceaseless thankfulness."[133] The first is immediately observable in the mentality of the *riddarasǫgur* knights; the second, however, is curiously missing. Looking at the details beyond the two fundamental elements also brings other discrepancies to light.

While it is clear that the chivalric sagas were written in and for members of a Christian society, the religious aspect of chivalry is not present to the degree observable in continental literature.[134] This is particularly true to the *meykongr* sagas: the protagonists here are in search of fame, wealth, and—most importantly—a bride, and their road to these does not lead through the tenets of chivalric culture related to Christianity. The piety so clearly discernible as the foundation for Charny's idea of chivalry does not hold the key to the honor of the Icelandic knights.[135] Practically no reference to God, Christ, or any form of Christian belief is found in *Nítíða saga*, *Sigrgarðs saga frækna*, and *Viktors saga ok Blávus*. In *Klári saga*, God is invoked merely in exclamations ("Guð fyrirláti mér […]!"; "Ek sampínumz þér, guðs skepna!")[136] and

[131] Richard W. Kaeuper, "Historical Introduction to the Text," in *A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry*, by Geoffroi de Charny, ed. Richard W. Kaeuper, trans. Elspeth Kennedy, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 16–18.
[132] Kaeuper, 1.
[133] Kaeuper, 22.
[134] Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur*, 13.
[135] "one should indeed live at ease and fear nothing if one dwells in such good hope as one should have in the glorious Lord and His gentle and glorious Virgin Mother. […] For you should be certain of and hold firmly to the belief that you have no other course of action to take except to remember that if you love God, God will love you." Geoffroi de Charny, *A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry*, ed. Richard W. Kaeuper, trans. Elspeth Kennedy, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 106.
[136] "God forgive me!"; "I feel for you, God's creature!" Cederschiöld, *Clári saga*, 7, 68.

in greetings ("Guð gefi yðr góðan dag").[137] No prayer is ever uttered to a higher power for help: the characters of these sagas appear to be—and believe themselves to be—perfectly self-sufficient, trusting in their own capabilities to overcome any possible hurdle. When assistance is required, it usually arrives from a wise and trusty companion, be it the widely renowned Master Pérús of *Klári saga* or the wily sailor Kódér of *Viktors saga ok Blávus*. In place of divine aid, these knights turn to the more material support of learning and knowledge. Clárús is lengthily described to have been the most promising man in the world at the time and to have learned "at svara ok spyrja af sjaufaldri list" from the best possible teachers in the land, until his father was obliged to invite the most knowledgeable master from Árábía.[138] Throughout *Klári saga*, the importance of knowledge and learning is heavily impressed upon the reader. High social status of a character is often illustrated by the level of education they have received or by staples of exotic knowledge they surround themselves with.[139] In other sagas, pragmatic knowledge takes the lead from encyclopaedic tradition. Viktor and Blávus inherit the services of Kódér, whose position and profession remains obscure, but "honum er kunnig sigling til allra landa, ok veit hafner allar."[140] His knowledge is proved to encompass much more than navigational data, as the protagonists receive useful advice from him at every turn.[141]

To turn now to more worldly matters: the role of horses is also curiously diminished in the *riddarasǫgur*. They indeed appear, but there is a wide divergence on the emphasis each saga places on their presence. They are definitely not the omnipresent chivalric staple as they

[137] "God give you a good day" Cederschiöld, 69.
[138] "to ask and answer about the sevenfold crafts," here denoting the Seven Liberal Arts of medieval education. Cederschiöld, 3.
[139] See the meeting of Séréna and Clárús, where the entire hall was "pentuð ok purtréuð innan með stjǫrnugang ok alls kyns margfrœði" (painted and decorated with pictures of the course of the stars and varied learning of every kind). Cederschiöld, 18.
[140] "the sailing to all lands is known to him and he knows all havens." Jónas Kristjánsson, *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, 12.
[141] This is built up to a comical degree throughout the saga, with a repeating pattern of Viktor and Blávus demanding information from Kódér on the most dangerous exploit possible, from which Kódér tries to dissuade them unsuccessfully, with the sworn brother returning with further demands of help when they fall short of the task.

are found in continental history and literature, there is no trace of the "dependence of chivalric identity upon equine mastery."[142] The word *riddari* shares an etymology with German *Ritter*, but apparently it arrived first to Norway and later to Iceland as a hollowed-out title without semantic connection to its original meaning.[143] No member of the new Icelandic aristocracy was referred to as *riddari*.[144] In European chivalry, horsemanship was the bread and butter of knights since the early stages of training, and chivalric mindset and methodology have developed with horses and the complex network of relationships they brought along as one of its focal points.[145] The knights depicted in the *meykongr* sagas under discussion completely neglect this aspect of chivalry, putting the emphasis on different skills. Also waned in significance one of the main "pursuit[s] at which many men-at-arms aim to make their reputation: that is at deeds of arms at tournaments."[146] In the four sagas discussed here, only *Viktors saga ok Blávus* feature a classic knightly contest, early in the narrative: Viktor is poised against the mystery knight who has just descended from the sky on a flying *tialld* (carpet).[147] Their fight demonstrates all the topoi of knightly combat, although in condensed form: the description of arms, jousting, swordfight, and the eventual reconciliation over a stalemate. *Viktors saga ok Blávus* contains two further fight scenes; these are, however, not knightly tournaments but duels.[148] Dueling, i.e. single combat to settle a dispute was common and accepted in pre-Christian Scandinavia, with well-established rules embedded in the legal

[142] Jeffrey J. Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, Medieval Cultures 35 (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 51.
[143] Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 497; Bumke, *The Concept of Knighthood in the Middle Ages*, 6.
[144] Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, "The Icelandic Aristocracy after the Fall of the Free State," 161.
[145] Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, 51–53.
[146] Charny, *A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry*, 48.
[147] The translation of *tialld* is problematic: *tjald* primarily means "tent", or "wall-hanging, tapestry." Later the *tialld* is consequently referred to as *klæði*, "cloth"; this supports the commonly accepted pragmatic translation of *tialld* here as "carpet", "rug".
[148] Based on Charny's system, jousting is distinguished from tourney by the number of participants and the modes of combat involved: in a joust, two knights face each other with lances, whereas in a tourney many knights take part and *mêlée* is also included. Kaeuper, "Historical Introduction to the Text," 22.

framework.[149] Unsurprisingly, the description of the two duel scenes, both referred to as *hólmganga*, are decidedly more elaborate than that of the fight between Viktor and Blávus.[150] The saga author alluded to a discontinued practice whose memory still lingered, as shown by side remarks made to the code of the duel, e.g. that the duelers are not allowed to leave the area marked by their cloak.[151] Apparently, the martial prowess of a knight—or a saga hero—was just as important to the Icelandic as to the continental audience, but the authors preferred familiar contexts.

Shedding the Knightly Garment

It must not be omitted from this discussion that the most excellent chivalry embodied by the knights of the *riddarasǫgur* can show a dark underbelly. Despite their valiant deeds and martial feats, these knight at least occasionally disregard the virtues that, again, were considered an integral part of the chivalric code elsewhere. The contradiction was present in the European ethos, too: after all, "chivalry aimed to create a body at once deadly in its sanctioned violence and docile in its comportment at home."[152] What the saga knights seem to lack is the moral framework to keep this contradictory tension in place and in balance, resulting in intermittent extreme behavioral patterns on their part.

Their most obvious transgression is at the same time a staple of the *meykongr* saga subgenre, i.e. the systemic and socially sanctioned violent behavior against women. I discuss this in detail in the following chapter, so I touch upon it here only briefly. Essentially, the

[149] At least two forms of dueling were practiced up until their abolition in 1020 in Iceland and Norway. Due to the early prohibition of the custom, our main sources regarding it are sagas and not later legal compilations. The basic distinction is that *hólmganga* was governed by a set of rules, while *einvígi* was not. Olav Bø, "Hólmganga and Einvígi," *Medieval Scandinavia* 2 (1969): 142–43; Jesse L. Byock, "Hólmganga," in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano (New York, London: Garland, 1993), 289–90.
[150] Jónas Kristjánsson, *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, 21, 30.
[151] "hafdi Randuer hartt til lagit at hann hafdi borit þa baada Victor ok Skeggkarl allt wt a felldar skautit" (Randver has thrust so hard that he would have pushed both Viktor and Skeggkarl completely off the cloak) Jónas Kristjánsson, 25.
[152] Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, 47.

maiden-king refuses the marital or sexual advances of the knight—often in a vicious and humiliating manner—, to which the knight responds with violence. This happens in two phases: in the first, the aim is to overcome the resistance of the *meykongr* and make her submit to the will of the knight, in the form of sexual intercourse and/or marriage. In the second phase, the previously resistant woman is punished for her reluctance through physical or mental abuse and subjugation. To put it simply, we do not see "the knight serving the lady whom he adores with 'chivalric love'," [153] but an expression of overbearing masculinity.

Other than this universal chink in their chivalric armor, the knights show great variety in their adherence to the knightly code. Clárús is shown as the most courteous person imaginable, with command over all expected knowledge and every aspect of courtly etiquette. Even the extreme abuse Séréna eventually suffers at his hand is presented by the saga author as fitting discipline and valuable lesson from a wise and just master, through which the true merits of Séréna is revealed. At the other end of the spectrum we find Sigrgarðr and Viktor. The former is a well-known womanizer, who "fekk aldrei svá væna konu eðr velættaða at hann sinnti lengr enn þrjár nætr," [154] markedly different from the idea of chastity present in courtly love literature.[155] Viktor, on the one hand, is described as being "bædi mikill ok sterkur wænn ok wegligur ok pryddr morgum menntum sem til heyrdi slikum kongs syni;" [156] on the other hand, the saga begins with his heedless extravagance throwing the kingdom into a financial crisis, for which he is delicately but firmly deposed and exiled. This is reflected in how Viktor and Blávus choose the targets of their missions: although they cite their desire for honor and

[153] Robert P. Miller, "The Wounded Heart: Courtly Love and the Medieval Antifeminist Tradition," *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 2, no. 3 (January 1974): 336, https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.1974.9978363.
[154] "never took a woman so beautiful or well-born that he would care for her for more than three nights." Hall, Richardson, and Haukur Þorgeirsson, "Sigrgarðs saga frækna: A Normalised Text, Translation, and Introduction," 105.
[155] R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 155–56.
[156] "both big and strong, handsome and grand, and adorned with many skills that belong to such a king's son" Jónas Kristjánsson, *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, 3.

renown, eventually they are always motivated by greed and lust for treasure, a "mercenary ethos adapted by the saga's principals."[157] Such materialistic motivation was incompatible with the spirit of the chivalric code, as Charny asserted:

> You should not care about amassing great wealth, for the more worldly goods a man acquires, the more reluctant he is to die and the greater his fear of death; and the more honor a man gains, the less he fears to die, for his worth and honor will always remain, and the worldly goods will disappear, and soon no one will know where they have gone.[158]

The conclusion of the saga puts the case of less than chivalrous knight into a fascinating context. The sons of Viktor and Blávus—named, according to their promise, Randuer and Aunundr—themselves become sworn brothers, search for the magical weapons of their namesakes and proceed to follow in the footsteps of their fathers, until they meet the Danish king Geirminer and fall before him. In this, Barnes observed the motif of a repeated *translatio imperii*: first, by the marriage of Viktor and Fulgida, the rule of India passes to France, then both that of France and of Serkland transfer to the North after the death of the sons of Viktor and Blávus.[159]

[157] Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur*, 44.
[158] Charny, *A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry*, 64.
[159] Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur*, 45–46.

Chapter 4:
Close Others – On Vikings and Women

Looking at medieval Iceland, the Otherness of either Vikings or women may appear counterintuitive first. The idea of Vikings is innately Scandinavian, to the degree that *Viking* has become the—rather imprecise but nonetheless accepted—umbrella term for all medieval Nordic people even in academic language. Considering this, what sort of Otherness could this concept and its representatives carry for Icelanders? The case is similar with women: accounting for roughly half the population at any given time and endowed with the often-cited wide range of rights—wide perhaps in their medieval context—, one would be hard pressed to imagine Icelandic women in the role of Other within Icelandic society.[160] The answer is found once more in the social changes that facilitated the birth of the *riddarasǫgur*. The chivalric sagas can be understood as an attempt to begin a new chapter in social memory in order to instill Icelandic society with new values and ideas. This included a transformation which extended to the images of prominent figures, both male and female: Vikings, the epitome of masculine values, were relegated to socially unacceptable roles, and the capable, substantial women of earlier sagas were reconstructed as strong but antagonizing characters whom the male protagonist most overcome.

Sagas act as vehicles for social or cultural memory in "the process by which a society uses its past in giving its present form and meaning […] social memory allows history to be shaped in the image and interest of a community's needs."[161] Viking activity abated after Christianity and the institutions of the Church, along with the administrative changes they

[160] See for instance Judith Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1991); Jenny Jochens, "Gender Symmetry in Law?: The Case of Medieval Iceland," *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 108 (1993): 46–67; Jenny Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996); Auður G. Magnúsdóttir, "Women and Sexual Politics," in *The Viking World*, ed. Stefan Brink in collaboration with Neil Price (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 40–48.
[161] Jesse Lewis Byock, "Social Memory and the Sagas: The Case of Egils Saga," *Scandinavian Studies* 76, no. 3 (2004): 300.

ushered in, have arrived to Scandinavia.[162] By the time the earliest sagas were written down, Vikings have disappeared from the Atlantic. The sagas in which their practices are immortalized and praised thus can be seen as a proto-Romantic attempt to evoke and capture a bygone past.[163]

Vikings – Re-contextualizing Former Customs

In the traditional sagas, *at fara* (or *liggja*) *í víking* was a highly respectable activity to devote one's time to.[164] It was by no means a primary occupation, but a strictly seasonal one, the weather permitting such escapades only between spring and autumn. Furthermore, to lead such an expedition was the privilege of the prosperous elite: to set up a ship and hire a suitable crew was not cheap, even if the payment for the latter could be arranged from the loot itself. Numerous principal saga characters are mentioned to have gone abroad during the summers for such journeys, especially in their youth.[165] Even when these are not described in detail, it is often remarked upon how the adventurers garnered much honor from them, such as Þórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*:

[162] Attempts have been made to find a final act of Viking activity that can be established as a conclusion of the Viking Age. Traditionally, the Battle of Stamford Bridge is cited, where the Norwegian king Haraldr Harðráði suffered defeat from Harold Godwinson, king of England. While raiding indeed decreased around this time, this was not necessarily due to the lost battle; also, Scandinavian-European confrontations did not cease, they were merely conducted on a different level. Stefan Brink, "Who Were the Vikings?," in *The Viking World*, ed. Stefan Brink in collaboration with Neil Price (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 5.

[163] This role of the sagas, focusing primarily on the *Íslendingasǫgur*, has been the subject of extensive research; e.g. Jürg Glauser, "Sagas of Icelanders (*Íslendinga sögur*) and *þættir* as the Literary Representation of a New Social Space," in *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 42 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 203–20; Byock, "Social Memory and the Sagas: The Case of Egils Saga."

[164] The closest English equivalent of this expression is the rather cumbersome "to go on a Viking journey," which many modern translations use despite its literality. This becomes understandable if one considers the alternatives: "to go raiding" is imprecise, while Cleasby's "to go a-freebooting" is quaint at best. Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 142.

[165] See for example: Úlfr and Kári of *Egils saga* (and later Úlfr's son Þórólfr and, of course, his grandsons Þórólfr and Egill), Ingjaldr and Þorsteinn and later their sons Ingimundr and Grímr of *Vatnsdœla saga*, or Þorleikr Hǫskuldsson of *Laxdœla saga*.

> Þat var nǫkkur sumur er þeir lágu í víking, en váru heima um vetrum með feðrum sínum. Hafði Þórólfr heim marga dýrgripi ok fœrði fǫður sínum ok móður; var þá bæði gott til fjár ok mannvirðingar.[166]

It is important to point out that these journeys involved, beside the violence and plundering commonly associated with them, more peaceful enterprises, too. The complicated honor-shame system of medieval Icelandic society rewarded bravery and martial prowess, but also other forms of wealth acquisition, if done abroad.[167] Nonetheless, the literary emphasis has always been placed on the former: if someone is described as a *víkingr mikill* (great Viking) in the sagas, it is usually not due to their financial finesse and negotiation skills.

Distancing in the Baltic

Even though the written sagas are the product of a time when Christianity was already well-established in Iceland, their—most likely—ecclesiastical scribes apparently had little problem describing the violent exploits of their ancestors or the appreciation shown by society in response. This changed drastically in the context of the *riddarasǫgur*: here, Vikings become enemies or at least obstacles in the hero's path.[168] Their basic, most distinctive features are retained: they are formidable warriors on board of mighty ships who raid and pillage freely. This characterization would have been immediately and intimately familiar for the fourteenth-century Icelandic reader. More ambiguous is the idea that Vikings are to be found in distant corners of the world. We have no real information regarding the locations associated with place-names such as Lóar or Kalldialand except that they both lie "í Eystrasalti"/"j Eystra sallti" i.e. in the Baltic Sea.[169] The Baltic region was a favored target for Viking journeys in earlier

[166] "They were on Viking journeys for some summers and were home for the winters with their fathers. Þórólfr brought home much treasure and gave them to his father and mother; at that time there was plenty of wealth and renown to be had." Bjarni Einarsson, ed., *Egils saga* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2003), 2.
[167] William Ian Miller, *Humiliation* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 116–17.
[168] Vikings, of course, appeared as antagonists in earlier sagas, too; the difference is in the exclusivity of the adversary role the *riddarasǫgur* show.
[169] Hall, Richardson, and Haukur Þorgeirsson, "Sigrgarðs saga frækna: A Normalised Text, Translation, and Introduction," 123; Jónas Kristjánsson, *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, 13.

times; on the other hand, it was considered remote and not part of the Scandinavian heartlands.[170] Placing the Vikings of the chivalric sagas here would not have sounded out of place, the area being traditionally associated with Viking activity, but made them distant enough to underline their Otherness and dissociate Iceland and its people from them.[171] In this we can see a subtle but clear example of cartographic marginalization.[172]

Gamekeepers Turned Poachers

Beside their now-remoteness, Vikings are imbued with additional characteristics to move them further into a relinquished past. They are referred to in *Nítíða saga* as the chief threat against which Nítíða is on the lookout for: "Nú er að segja af meykóngi að daglega litur hún í sína náttúrusteina að sjá um veröldina ef víkingar kæmi og vildi stríða á hennar ríki."[173] They also serve to underline the honor and righteousness of a certain Ingi, who "drap ránsmenn og víkinga, en lét friðmenn fara í náðum."[174] Sigrgarðr, the hero of *Sigrgarðs saga frækna*, at one point specifically looks for "víking þann at mestr frami væri at berjast við."[175] This proves to be Knútr and his warband, among whom we find the aforementioned Jógrímr whose otherwise white skin is black in his nose and cheeks, and Gráboli with cloven hoofs and horns protruding from his face. The physical deformities are consistent with the wonder-tale nature of the saga and serve as a counterweight for the remarkable capabilities for Sigrgarðr's companions, but at the same time they infuse the image of the Vikings with an uncanny hue.

[170] At least remote enough not to be listed among the chief areas of the northern part of the world in *Nítíða saga*. McDonald Werronen, "*Nítíða Saga*: Text and Translation," 231.
[171] In *Nítíða saga*, we see a *jarl* treated similarly; see note 203 below.
[172] Described by, among others, Friedman. John B. Friedman, "Cultural Conflicts in Medieval World Maps," in *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters Between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Stuart B. Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 65–66.
[173] "Now it is to be said of the maiden-king that she gazed into her supernatural stones daily to look around the world whether Vikings came and wanted to harm her realm." McDonald Werronen, "*Nítíða Saga*: Text and Translation," 225.
[174] "killed robbers and Vikings but let peaceful people go in peace." McDonald Werronen, 223.
[175] "the Viking that it would yield the most fame to fight with." Hall, Richardson, and Haukur Þorgeirsson, "Sigrgarðs saga frækna: A Normalised Text, Translation, and Introduction," 123.

Thus, the Vikings so far have been marginalized threefold: (1) physical distancing, (2) being depicted as a threat to civilized order, (3) endowed with unnatural disfigurement.[176]

The most extensive presence and the most complex depiction of Vikings, however, is found in *Viktors saga ok Blávus*. Again, the sworn brothers Viktor and Blávus look for the most famous Viking to best; again, their trusty advisor points them towards the Baltic, where Randuer sterke (the Strong) and Aunundur grickr (the Greek)—also sworn brothers—are to be found every summer.[177] To be precise, Viktor and Blávus ask "huar þeir siokongar sie edur uikingar edr hermenn at frægazter eru;" it is unclear into which category Randuer and Aunundur belong, or even if these are distinct categories at all.[178] The two apparently has cleared the Baltic Sea of (other) Vikings, hoarding an enormous amount of treasure in the process. Although they are described using positive terms— "væner menn at aaliti. sterker ok storer;"[179] "þeirra lika veit ek aungua allri verulldu at daadum ok dreingskap hreysti ok hardfeingi"[180]—, their lifestyle and conduct certainly puts them at a common platform with the Vikings they are supposed to keep away.[181] It also turns out that their invincibility stems from each possessing a magical weapon forged by a dwarf. Viktor and Blávus are able to defeat their enemies only after they recruit the same dwarf to exchange these weapons with powerless replicas and to give the originals to them instead. These Others are tinged with a degree of nostalgia: honorable adversaries whose behavior and methods are not—or no longer—

[176] As I pointed out earlier, the dark coloration of Jógrímr is probably not an allusion to the ethnic Otherness of *blámenn*, but in the hooved-and-horned appearance of Gráboli it is not difficult to discover the popular image of the devil.

[177] The two names (although not the epithets) also belong to legendary Scandinavian kings: Randvér of Denmark and Ǫnundr of Sweden. See G. Turville-Petre, ed., *Hervarar Saga ok Heiðreks*, Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series 2 (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1956), 68; Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed., *Heimskringla I*, Íslenzk fornrit, XXVI (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1941), 62–63. While this may be coincidental, it could possibly be seen as further distancing from a less-than-agreeable past. On this, see also Védís Ragnheiðardóttir, "'Meir af viel en karlmennsku,'" 427.

[178] "where those sea-kings may be or Vikings or warriors may be that are the most famous." Jónas Kristjánsson, *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, 12.

[179] "fine men to look at, strong men and large" Jónas Kristjánsson, 13.

[180] "I know not their equal in the world in valor and courage, prowess and hardihood" Jónas Kristjánsson, 15.

[181] The saga's opinion regarding Vikings is well illustrated at an earlier point where the Sea-king Samarion is said to fight against "uikinga hetiur ok blamenn ok illþydi en lætur fara kaupmenn j fridi" (Vikings and champions, black men and rabble, but lets merchants go in peace). Cf. note 174 above. Jónas Kristjánsson, 10–11.

acceptable, but they are of familiar origins and worthy of respect even in rivalry. A more direct reading could also offer the interpretation of Randuer and Aunundur, the representatives of an undesirable ethos of a bygone era, being vanquished by a new, feudal order and ideology portrayed by the knights Viktor and Blávus.

Women – The Closest of All Others

Female Otherness in the North[182]

The social situation and representation of women in Old Norse literature has invited much research and debate in the past decades.[183] Scholars mainly relied on the *Íslendingasǫgur* for their studies, on account of both the quantity and the intricacy of the source material. The common pattern we see is that a few remarkable female figures "assume the social powers of a man, and be praised for her vigour and assertiveness;" the threat of this, in turn, fuels "the frantic machismo of Norse males."[184] Carol J. Clover outlined "a one-sex, one-gender model with a vengeance," referring to the sexual difference model Laqueur observed in European sources.[185] This Norse one-gender model recognized only "manly" and "unmanly" behavior, the latter appearing as either "effeminate, or emasculate, or impotent."[186] Clover boils this down to the binary of *magi*/*úmagi,* an originally legal dichotomy between maintainers and

[182] The following section requires a prior note. As I mentioned before, we have little to no conclusive information on the authors of the *riddarasǫgur*. This fits well into the trend of medieval Icelandic manuscripts being anonymous, with only a "small number of Icelandic scribes […] identified by name." However, the few names we have are all male names, signifying for the most part members of the clergy with some laymen among them. To further this point, Barnes notes how "the wealth of Latin learning in the *riddarasögur* is strongly suggestive of clerical composition." In turn, it follows that the chivalric sagas are most probably the works of male authors, and that female representation must always be considered with this taken into account. Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson, "Manuscripts and Palaeography," 252; Barnes, "Romance in Iceland," 270.

[183] Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age*; Jenny Jochens, *Old Norse Images of Women*, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words, and Power*.

[184] Quinn, "Women in Old Norse Poetry and Sagas," 519; Carol J. Clover, "Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe," *Speculum* 68, no. 2 (1993): 380, https://doi.org/10.2307/2864557.

[185] Clover, "Regardless of Sex," 386; Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990).

[186] Clover, "Regardless of Sex," 387.

dependents. The deeper implications of the distinction here is "between strong and weak, powerful and powerless or disempowered, swordworthy and unswordworthy, honored and unhonored or dishonored."[187] However, in Clover's view, "sexual difference used to be less a wall than a permeable membrane […] in a world in which a physical woman could become a social man, a physical man could […] become a social woman."[188] The important caveat was, of course, that while the former shift, especially if kept temporary, was often lauded, the latter involved a significant loss of honor and social status.[189]

It is easy to construe the above as the marginalization or "Othering" of women in the world of the *Íslendingasǫgur*. To a certain extent this is certainly true: by default, they belong to the lower end of the power spectrum, and while female representation often focuses on the exceptions, those obtaining power ordinarily attributed to men, the majority of the women can easily be seen as "inferior insiders."[190] In the *riddarasǫgur*, especially the *meykongr* sagas, this appears to change at first glance. The *meykongr* figure itself seems to be the antithesis of the *úmegð* women of the family sagas: a powerful, unmarried woman, ruling over her realm on her own right.[191] However, the bridal-quest of the male saga protagonist is all about radically changing this arrangement, definitely for the worst from the perspective of the *meykongr*. On the whole, the *meykongr* sagas—with the notable exception of *Nítíða saga*—follow a recognizable and highly violent pattern in their handling of female characters. While supposedly stories of romance and adventure, in depicting their women these *riddarasǫgur* do more to reflect on male anxieties and efforts to impart an ideal of social order. Female

[187] Clover, 380.
[188] Clover, 387.
[189] Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society*, trans. Joan Turville-Petre (Odense: Odense University Press, 1983), 22–23.
[190] See note 28.
[191] The presence of other female characters in the *meykongr* sagas is sporadic and their role is usually restricted to that of plot devices; e.g. the mother of Victor who initiates his quest or the bondwoman of Nítíða who is abducted in her place. The significant exception is the stepmother of Ingigerðr, whose adversary role and magical powers would place her among the monstrous, rather than the close, Others.

independence is portrayed as destructive, female power as uncontrolled, female voice as vicious; all told, women must be contained and constrained, forcefully, if necessary.

The narratives of the *meykongr* sagas are moved by love, but this love is a far cry from the courtly love depicted in the European literature that the sagas ultimately originate from. It shows difference in origin, operation, and objective: it is (1) not based on a visual perception of beauty or other virtue, (2) not a secretive or immoral love affair, and (3) culminates in marriage rather than tragedy.

Love Is Blind – This One More than Most

Male love in the *riddarasǫgur* is often aroused before the meeting of the parties; this is the case with all four sagas discussed here. It is commonly initiated by the fame and—perhaps even more importantly—inaccessibility of the *meykongr*.[192] This shows a striking contrast with European tradition, where love and desire "enters through the eyes, and love is always love at first sight."[193] Female characters are definitely ordered in the narrative according to the "male gaze" of Laura Mulvey; here, however, the "gaze" is aural, or more precisely verbal.[194] In three of the four sagas, the first impressions of the male protagonist come through the metadiegetic level.[195] *Klári saga* and *Viktors saga ok Blávus* both have a trusted source of knowledge disseminating information regarding the *meykongr*, through active speech, directly to the male protagonists. *Nítíða saga* and *Sigrgarðs saga frækna*, on the other hand, depict their *meykongr*

[192] Cederschiöld, *Clári saga*, 5–7; McDonald Werronen, "*Nítíða Saga*: Text and Translation," 224, 229; Hall, Richardson, and Haukur Þorgeirsson, "Sigrgarðs saga frækna: A Normalised Text, Translation, and Introduction," 109; Jónas Kristjánsson, *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, 34–35.
[193] Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*, 113.
[194] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 11–12, https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6. On the application of the "male gaze" theory in literature, see for instance Małgorzata Łuczyńska-Hołdys, *Soft-Shed Kisses: Re-Visioning the Femme Fatale in English Poetry of the 19th Century* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 15–16.
[195] I use here the framework and definitions set by Gérard Genette: according to him, "any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed." The *metadiegetic* level refers to a "narrative in the second degree," i.e. an embedded narrative. Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), 228.

by narratorial voice and later give an account of the aspiring suitors learning about the females through hearsay. The conveyance of information and the fact that the males are ready to form lasting opinion based on it hearken back to earlier Icelandic tradition. Up until the twelfth century, Icelandic society was exclusively an oral one.[196] Every aspect of culture were conceived, disseminated, and received orally.[197] One's *heiðr* (personal honor) depended on how their dealings were discussed in the wider community. Whenever travelers stopped at a dwelling, it was customary to exchange news with the locals.[198] To evaluate someone based on their reputation, i.e. the prevailing impression of the wider community, is perfectly in line with the Icelandic convention and mindset.

Besides the manner in which the males are informed on the females, the focal points of the actual discourse also diverge from those appearing in continental romance literature. Rather than emphasizing the beauty or bodily appearance of the *meykongr*, the focus is on her mental capabilities, social status, and accomplishment. Séréna, the daughter of the French king in *Klári saga* is presented as follows:

> Hann á eina dóttur, geysi væna ok vel mannaða. Sú heitir Séréna. Þótt leiti um alla veröld, finnz engi henni vitrari né kurteisari; því at sakir hennar vizku lýtr náliga at henni öll stjórn ríkisins jafnfram sjálfum konungi. […] Þat er til marks um makt ok manér þessarar konungsdóttur, at fyrir hennar fótum, þar sem hon sitr, liggr ein lééna svá mjúk sem eitt lamb — ok jafnfram fyrir henni rennandi, hvert er hon gengr. Svá mjök er hon prýdd vizku ok klerkdómi, at eigi sinnaði hon meira þínu næmi en eins akrkarls.[199]

[196] The oldest known Icelandic manuscripts both in Latin and in the vernacular date from the first half and the middle of the twelfth century, respectively. Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson, "Manuscripts and Palaeography," 249. See also the attestation of Ari Þorgilsson in *Íslendingabók* that "fyrsta sumar, es Bergþórr sagði lǫg upp, vas nýmæli þat gǫrt, lǫg ór skyldi skrifa á bók" (the first summer that Bergþórr spoke the law, that new law was made that our laws should be written in a book), said summer being that of 1117. Ari Þorgilsson, "Íslendingabók," 23; for the dating, see Siân Grønlie, trans., *Íslendingabók - Kristni Saga* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2006), 29, n. 98.

[197] Risking self-repetition and redundancy, I wish to remind the reader of the origin of the word *saga*; see p. 12.

[198] This rather mundane act is mentioned and described in numerous sagas, often as a device to further the narrative. "Þar kómu fátœkar konur ok kváðusk komnar at langt. Þeir brœðr spurðu þær tíðinda. Þær kváðusk engi tíðindi segja — 'en segja kunnu vér nýlundu nǫkkura.'" (Then beggar-women came and said that they come from far away. The brothers asked them for the news. They said they had no tidings to tell—"but we could tell something strange.") Finnur Jónsson, ed., *Brennu-Njálssaga (Njála)*, Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek 13 (Halle: Niemeyer, 1908), 295.

[199] "He [Alexandr, the French king] has a daughter, exceedingly beautiful and well brought up. She is named Séréna. Although one might search all over the world, there is no wiser or more courteous to be found; because

The *meykongr* ruling over *Jndialand hin mikla* (India the Great) in *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, Fulgida, receives a similar description. The well-travelled helmsman of the sworn brothers, Kódér, discloses that he knows about

> eina jungfru at suo ber af aullum konga dætrum ok aullum audrum meyium sem gull af blyi. edur þat gras er lilia heiter ber birte af þeim elldibrandi er steinkol heita. þo hefer hun meiri fordeilld wm vizsku ok velkunnendi med heidr ok huerskyns hannyrder ok er þat skiotazt af at segia at hennar liki hefer æigi fæzt j allri heims kringlunni at vænnleik ok aullum kuennligum listum.[200]

Sigrgarðr is also mainly fascinated by the "margar hannyrðir þær sem meykonungrinn hafði gjört," compared to which all other works of womanly skill are like *fölski* (ashes).[201] *Nítíða saga* is, as it is often the case, an exception to the above pattern. Here, Nítíða is introduced by the narrator and not another character from within the saga. The tone and the content of the introduction, however, is similar to what we saw in the other three sagas, but more emphasis is placed on both the appearance *and* the intelligence of Nítíða:

> Hún var bæði vitur og væn, ljós og rjóð í andliti þvílíkast sem hin rauða rósa væri samtemprað við snjóhvíta lileam, augun svo skær sem karbunkulus, hörundið svo hvítt sem fíls bein, hár þvílíkt sem gull, og féll niður á jörð um hana. […] Hún var svo búin að viti sem hinn fróðasti klerkur, og hinn sterkasta borgarvegg mátti hún gjöra með sínu viti yfir annara manna vit og byrgja svo úti annara ráð, og þar kunni hún tíu ráð er aðrir kunnu eitt. Hún hafði svo fagra raust að hún svæfði fugla og fiska, dýr og öll jarðlig kvikindi, svo að unað þótti á að heyra.[202]

of her wisdom she has nearly equal rule over the kingdom to the king himself. […] It is a token of the power and manners of this princess that before her feet where she sits lies a lioness as meek as a lamb – and just as well it runs before her wherever she goes. So great is her magnificent wisdom and learning that she would not think more of your knowledge than that of a ploughman." Cederschiöld, *Clári saga*, 5–6.

[200] "a certain lady who surpasses all princesses and all other maidens like gold does lead, or like the plant that is called lily surpasses the firebrand called coal in radiance. She has more splendor regarding wisdom and knowledge, regarding honor and all kinds of fine crafts. In short, the like of her in beauty and all womanly skills has not been born in all the circle of the world." Jónas Kristjánsson, *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, 34.

[201] "many handiworks that the maiden king has made." Hall, Richardson, and Haukur Þorgeirsson, "Sigrgarðs saga frækna: A Normalised Text, Translation, and Introduction," 109.

[202] "She was both wise and beautiful, bright and red in the face, as if the red rose were melded with snow-white lily, eyes bright as carbuncle, skin white as ivory, hair like gold that fell down to the ground around her. [...] She was as rich in knowledge as the most learned clerk, and she could make the strongest castle-wall with her wits surpassing that of other men and thus prevent the designs of others, and she could give ten answers when others could give one. She had so sweet a voice that she lulled to sleep birds and fish, animals and all earthly living creatures, such a delight it was to hear." McDonald Werronen, "*Nítíða Saga*: Text and Translation," 221.

A short detour is in order here. It is also in *Nítíða saga* that vision and sight come into play and obtain particular importance. Nítíða herself undertakes a quest to the supernatural island of Visio "út undan Svíþjóð hinni köldu, út undir heimsskautið, þeirra landa er menn hafa spurn af."[203] She goes not in search of a groom: she acquires from the eponymous island four *náttúrusteinar* that grant her influence over the capacity of vision: that of both herself and of others.[204] For the rest of the narrative, these stones are used extensively as plot devices to provide Nítíða with knowledge by her perceiving distant places through them and to conceal the *meykongr* from the unwelcome—male—gaze.[205] The power over visual perception increases female agency against male attempts to tear it down.

As soon as they have heard about her, the males react with sudden but persistent desire to obtain the *meykongr*; this ranges in intensity from the initially mild interest of Sigrgarðr ("fannst honum mikit um")[206] to the determined resolution of Clárús ("mér hyggz svá at þessari jungfrú, sem þér hafið frá sagt, at ek man þar meira við skylda en einum fimm versum")[207] to the dramatic (over)reaction of Viktor ("þar kemur wm sider at Wictor tekr þetta so fast at hann legzt j reckiu af ok neytti huorki azs nie dryckiu").[208] The suitors of Nítíða do not describe their motivations to marry the *meykongr* in detail, but their marital intention quickly turn to vengeful determination upon refusal ("kóngur verður nú reiður við orð hennar, og hugsar það að þau skulu ei skiljast við svo búið").[209]

[203] "out beyond Sweden the cold, out by the corner of the earth of those lands which people have heard of." McDonald Werronen, 222.
[204] *Náttúra* is a word of Latin provenance (*natura*), with its original meaning ("nature, character") extended in Old Norse to cover "(supernatural) power, potency, virtue". Hence the common translation of *náttúrusteinn* as "supernatural stone".
[205] Also, to disguise another woman as Nítíða, essentially throwing her to a kidnapping suitor instead of the maiden-king, in this case redirecting rather than avoiding violence.
[206] "found it greatly fascinating" Hall, Richardson, and Haukur Þorgeirsson, "Sigrgarðs saga frækna: A Normalised Text, Translation, and Introduction," 109.
[207] "I think so much of this maiden, of whom you have spoken, that I shall have more to do with it than some five verses" Cederschiöld, *Clári saga*, 7.
[208] "it comes to pass that Viktor takes this so ill that he goes to bed and enjoys neither food nor drink" Jónas Kristjánsson, *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, 35.
[209] "the king now becomes offended at her words and thinks that they shall not part in this fashion" McDonald Werronen, "*Nítíða Saga*: Text and Translation," 224.

To summarize, the romantic intentions of the males—heroes or otherwise—in the *meykongr* sagas are initiated by them being verbally informed on the exceptional qualities of the maiden king. While they do not always manifest an emotional response, the common element is an overwhelming, almost guttural urge to possess the *meykongr* through marriage, which only intensifies in response to rejection.

Towers and *Tartaría*

I have mentioned before the inaccessibility of the *meykongr* which in itself may act as an incentive for the adventurous male heroes. This characteristic of the maiden king consists of several elements. The most overt of these is her attitude described as haughty, if not outright misandristic, towards any suitor approaching her.[210] Another is her remoteness, the presence of significant distance or other physical obstacles that disconnect and isolate her from the world the male protagonist inhabit. In this, we can see marginalization through cartographic means again: the threatening female figure is moved outside from the center represented by the male, to alien or otherwise dangerous territory, thereby immediately becoming its embodiment and representative. Séréna of *Klári saga* is the princess of Frakkland and her homeland is thus situated relatively close to Saxland (Germany) from where Clárús hails. However, Séréna lives in a tower together with sixty other highborn maidens, where they are protected by a thousand knights so that "[e]ngi karlmaðr skal inn koma í hennar herbergi fyrir útan sjálfan konunginn ok hennar þjónustusveina."[211] Ingigerð of *Sigrgarðs saga frækna* rules in the unspecified East in Tartaría; although the idea of "the moral hierarchy of directions in which east, location of the Earthly Paradise, had primacy" is apparent in other *riddarasǫgur*, here it merely distances the *meykongr* and her realm—also scene for malignant magic and bordering lands of wonderful

[210] These accounts again come either on the diegetic or the metadiegetic level, i.e. from the narrator or other characters.
[211] "no man shall come to her chamber except for the king himself and her male servants." Cederschiöld, *Clári saga*, 6.

and monstrous creatures—from the civilized center.[212] *Jndialand hin mikla* (India the Great) where Fulgida in *Viktors saga ok Blávus* is found, is the ultimate *terra incognita* of medieval literature where anything is imaginable and everything is possible.

It is in *Nítíða saga* that we see—again, quite characteristically—the pattern turned on its head: the *meykongr* is the queen of France, and the various suitors vying for her hand arrive from *Miklagarðr* (Constantinople), *Serkland* (the land of the Saracens), and *Indialand hin mikla* (India the Great). Maleness, rather than femaleness, is associated with the periphery and imbued with Otherness: the male suitors arriving from the margins of the map are threatening figures, intending to rob Nítíða from her agency through marriage, and their reaction to refusal is to turn to violence in order to achieve their goal. A further element identifies maleness with both the periphery and the uncanny in the case of the *jarl* Virgilius ruling the island of Visio mentioned earlier: despite its both marginal and Northern—i.e. cold—nature, the island hides a lake with an islet called *Skóga-blómi* (Forest of Flowers), a repository of natural magic in the forms of "náttúrusteinar, epli, og læknis-grös."[213]

Not-So-Taming the Not-So-Shrew

Another significant difference to traditional courtly love is that *riddarasǫgur* love lacks the adulterous element that the former so often hinges upon, as the desired lady of the chivalric sagas is always a maiden, unwed, ready to be claimed and conquered. Also, the difficulties the heroes face are not the consequence of illicit ("hidden, secret, adulterous") love, but rather trials before achieving a coveted goal.[214] The trials and the goal are unified in the *meykongr* figure: females are presented as both the object of the protagonist's desire and the source of the difficulties and hindrances in his way. The reasons behind the reluctant behavior of the women

[212] Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur*, 33. It must be pointed out that Sigrgarðr himself is the prince Garðar, i.e. the Kievan Rus, slightly less from the center than other *riddarasaga* heroes.
[213] "supernatural stones, apples, and healing herbs" McDonald Werronen, "*Nítíða Saga*: Text and Translation," 222.
[214] Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*, 130.

are varied, ranging from pride to supernatural curse, but their resistance is eventually broken, often forcibly, and then punishment follows on behalf of the knight they frustrated. I did not write "claim and conquer" as a mere figure of speech earlier: the success of the male protagonist is measured in defeating the female, completely and on all fronts. The threat of the distant, defiant, Othered female is vanquished by forcing upon her the innately patriarchal institution of marriage. Accepting both the consequences of her earlier defiance and the place in society intended for her by the male suitor, the *meykongr* is un-Othered and moved back from the margin to the center signified by the side of her husband—literally just as well as figuratively.

Typically, the courting process introducing the bridal-quest already manifests in the male protagonist trying to assert his dominance over the *meykongr* through various (physical, magical, etc.), but innately violent means. The *meykongr* avoiding these attempts through deceit and/or violence is depicted as devious and dishonorable, whereas the attempts themselves are worthy and appropriate, or cunning at worst. This pattern is subverted in *Nítíða saga*, in line with its mirror narrative status. Nítíða employs no excessive violence against her unwelcome suitors, and her reluctance to marry them is explained and justified by their shortcomings.[215] Here, the forcible wooing of the kings and princes is seen as unchivalrous and Nítíða's repeated escapes from them is lauded. The eventual marriage of the *meykongr* in this saga is a delicate affair: Nítíða makes her decision to marry Livorius under social and emotional pressure from the nobles of her land and her foster-brother Hléskjöldur, but this gentle violence is a far cry from what the other maiden kings suffer, and the power and agency remains ultimately with Nítíða in the matter.

After agreeing to marriage, the *meykongr* is not punished merely for the violence directed against the knight but for her challenging the social order of male dominance. The

[215] I specify "excessive" because Nítíða—or rather her armies—do respond with force against the armed threat of King Soldán and his sons, but this is depicted to be within the lines of acceptable and proportionate response.

supposed aim of the punishment is to demonstrate this dominance and make the maiden king accept her place under male supremacy. The motif of bringing the subdued *meykongr* back into the fold is most evident in *Klári saga*, where the punishment episode occupies the final quarter of the narrative, and the psychological and physical torture of Séréna is both devised and described in elaborate detail. Cederschiöld compared this treatment of the defeated *meykongr* to Shakespeare's "The Taming of the Shrew" story. However, Hughes called attention to the fact that "at this point in the saga Serena is no longer a 'shrew.' She is totally obedient and humble […] and there is no indication at all of her having to be 'tamed' as in the other variants of the story."[216] Other maiden kings react similarly: their resistance ends when they agree to marry the male protagonist, everything after that is only punishment meted out to a submissive receiver. Sigrgarðr in *Sigrgarðs saga frækna* is initially disposed to take extreme physical revenge on Ingigerðr, but eventually resorts to mere humiliation and depriving her of power – which Ingigerðr accepts gladly in exchange for her life and marrying Sigrgarðr.[217] Fulgida is abducted by her half-brother Blávus who, besides heavily scolding her, forces her to wear his shape for a while in the French court of Viktor, whom she marries as soon as Blávus himself also returns. *Nítíða saga*, as it becomes customary, is an exception inasmuch as it forgoes the punishment episode, or any parallel of it.

[216] Cederschiöld, *Clári saga*, xvi; Hughes, "*Klári saga* as an Indigenous Romance," 155–56.
[217] Hall, Richardson, and Haukur Þorgeirsson, "Sigrgarðs saga frækna: A Normalised Text, Translation, and Introduction," 143–48.

Conclusion

To ascribe thoughts and emotions to people of earlier times based on fictious narratives is treading on treacherous ground at best. Using such literary adaptations as the indigenous *riddarasǫgur* may be even riskier. These sagas have received severe criticism for their unoriginality and derivative nature, and not unjustly; nonetheless, they still appear indicative of the Icelandic mindset at the time of their writing and offer us insight accordingly. The first thing that has become clear through the study of these four *riddarasǫgur* is that Otherness is present in Icelandic chivalric literature in a multitude of facets and aspects. Some of these were inherited from earlier periods of Norse culture and remained mostly intact; others mirror the sweeping social changes that the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries brought to Iceland. This variety of Otherness proves that the shaping of Icelandic identity was at least partially a conscious process: the authors of the sagas seem to have had clear ideas about what should be looked upon differently than before and what should be preserved.

Certain Others—the most distant and the most different—show only a slight shift compared to their earlier forms. *Blámenn* remained mostly unchanged: they still populate the nigh-uninhabitable margins of the map, only now their supernatural characteristics—already often associated with ethnic Otherness in Old Norse sources—have been enhanced and emphasized. When we see this Otherness moderated or downplayed it happens so that a character could take their narrative place more plausibly. The *blámenn* are joined by the *berserkir*: already considered untasteful in the Saga Age, they are now irrevocably relegated among the monsters and consequently, to the fringes of the world to dwell among their equals.

I have shown that whatever concepts of chivalry are presented in these sagas must have been imported from mainland Europe. This has happened through two main channels: first, the translated *riddarasǫgur*, and second, the Latin education of the ecclesiastic circle among whom

we suspect their authors.[218] The former established the popularity of the subject matter, while the latter infused the Icelandic *riddarasǫgur* with state-of-the-art knowledge regarding the world and Iceland's place in it. The result is perhaps the most evident example of the "imperfect blending" I have set out to locate. The underlying nature of chivalry has not been grasped by these authors in its entirety. The knights and noble figures presented by the sagas and attributed to European chivalry show considerable discrepancies with both the literary and the historical knights of the continent. They display all the externals of chivalry, while in many instances they are merely vehicles for certain behavioral patterns that have been shifted from their earlier representatives to the new martial class, e.g. sanctioned and approved violence and hoarding of wealth. We have seen that in extreme cases, there is no other substance under the surface of the supposed exemplars of chivalric conduct but these transposed behaviors. Here, the Other straddles the gap between *Them* and *Us*: *They* keep doing what *We* used to, but no longer, do. Such a literary sleight of hand may have served for putting distance between practices and former practitioners, while maintaining the option to laud and savor said practices. Further research conducted on a larger sample of the *riddarasaga* material may reveal other explanations, too.

Where the Otherness in chivalry is the most glaring, the Othering of those proximate can be the most controversial. Viking practices and ethos are an example of the transference described above: they are partially preserved in the behavior and representation of the *riddarasǫgur* knights, while the characters themselves are moved outward as enemies to be conquered. The women of the *meykongr* sagas present more complex issues. They are purposefully marginalized by placing them to peripheral or otherwise inaccessible locations. Their voices and opinions are made to be those of unwarranted, spiteful resistance to good

[218] The attempts of Norwegian kings to introduce feudalistic hierarchy to their courts had only negligible effects, if any, in Iceland.

social order. Regardless of the background and motives of their actions, their agency is depicted as malicious and cruel, their power deceitful and egotistical. The exaggerated one-gender model has been dissolved, the demarcating lines redrawn: to have will and instrumentality is now the exclusive domain of males, and trespassing females are chastised and disciplined. Women are marginalized in the very center they are moved to through their marriages by removing their agency and pushing them to a powerless social periphery. That this viewpoint on the supposed order of things was not absolute in late medieval Iceland is shown by the example of *Nítíða saga*, which carefully and deliberately upturns all these topoi to reclaim the possibility of female power.

There is a further point to mention: that the tradition embodied by the earlier sagas has remained part of the Icelandic cultural body during and after the social and cultural reforms. Although the popularity of the *riddarasǫgur* has eclipsed, at least for a time, the significance of other saga genres, these other sagas were still being copied again and again, often examples of different genres in the same manuscripts, for hundreds of years. This offers another possible avenue for further research into the problems I examined here. Investigating textual movements and manuscript correlations may reveal more about the Icelander's attitudes to these traditions living together.[219] After all, they were all conceived, shaped, and sustained by their unlearned tongues in the wilderness of the world.

[219] Examples of such research have already been conducted, e.g. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, "Ideology and Identity in Late Medieval Northwest Iceland: A Study of AM 152 fol.," *Gripla* 25 (2014): 87–128.

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