

## 4 *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*

In the final two sagas of 589a–f, legendary Scandinavia is reimagined to fit within the world of the manuscript's first half. In the first, *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, the north is positioned as part of a Europe-wide Trojan heritage, and the move away from legendary-heroic traditions which had begun in *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* is taken a step further. The plot of this saga is relatively straightforward and falls into three main parts. The first describes Sturlaugr's bridal quest and the consequences it has in Norway: Sturlaugr's duels with Kolr and Franmarr and his falling out of favour with King Haraldr. The second part describes his journey to Bjarmaland where he is sent by the king to find an aurochs's horn. The final part details the swearing and completion of a series of Yule oaths by Sturlaugr and his sworn-brothers after they have relocated to Svíþjóð (Sweden).

In my analysis of both this saga and the one after it, I have continued to use Lachmann's intertextual framework with a particular focus on the interaction between *riddarasaga* and legendary material, in addition to considering more specific instances of intertextuality. To do so, I have found it helpful to adopt some of Lachmann's more precise terminology, specifically the distinction she makes between three types of intertextual relationship, which she terms "participation", "troping", and "transformation". She describes the first type, "participation", as "the dialogical sharing in the texts of a culture that occurs in writing" (Lachmann 1997, 17). This is intertextuality as remembering, or reaffirming representations of the past presented in other texts. The second type of intertextuality, "troping", is characterised by the rejection of received narratives; it is a "turning away from the precursor text" (Lachmann 1997, 17). I understand texts which 'trope' to be ones which set themselves up in opposition to their precursors – texts on which they must necessarily draw but which construct a version of history that the new text wishes to supplant. The final type, "transformation", sits somewhere between the two: it "conceals the other texts, veils them, plays with them, renders them unrecognizable, irreverently overturns their oppositions" (Lachmann 1997, 17). This kind of intertextuality is often the result of excerpting parts of texts so that, although being remembered, they are detached from their original contexts and thus fundamentally changed. Transformation is similar to troping in that there is a degree of alteration involved. The key difference between the two lies in the attitude towards the referent: whereas the text that tropes is antagonistic and sets itself up in opposition to its referent text, the text which transforms absorbs the referent into itself in order to reconfigure it and thus also participates in it to some degree.

As Lachmann notes (1997, 17–18), the different kinds of intertextual relationships are not mutually exclusive. The process of transformation necessitates some degree of both participation and troping – of both accepting parts of a narrative and (whether explicitly or not) rejecting the whole from which they came. In much the same way, acts of participation and troping must also involve a degree of transformation; there is always some recontextualization required which creates new meaning, and the act of rejecting a text also (somewhat paradoxically) serves to remember it in a new (transformed) form. The fluidity of Lachmann's different types is further borne out by the following two chapters, in which I will avoid designating intertextual relationships to wholly one type or another but rather discuss how they tend towards them.

Despite being somewhat vague, I have found these terms useful for identifying the internal conflicts that are at play within the 'memory of literature', and each of them is the focus of one of this chapter's three sections. I first look at how *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*'s very first line participates in the narrative of Norse origins outlined in the Prologue to *Snorra Edda*. I then explore how it 'tropes' the traditional heroic ethics of *Völsunga saga* and *Jómsvíkinga saga* in its first and third parts. Finally, I demonstrate how several intertextual references are brought together in a transformative manner in the central journey to Bjarmaland, which affects a move towards the creation of a 'new' kind of legendary hero who can supplant those that the saga elsewhere rejects. This lays the foundations for the fuller delineation of that hero in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, the subject of Chapter 5.

## 4.1 The Myth of Trojan Origins

*Sturlaugs saga starfsama* begins with an intertextual reference that anchors the events which follow within a pre-existing historical framework:

<A>ll[ir] menn þeir [er] sannf[ro]d[ir] eru at um tidendi uita þat at Grickir ok Asiamenn bygdu N[or]drland. h[ofz] þa tung[a] su er sida[n] dreifdiz um oll lond. Formadr þess folks hiet Odin[n] er [menn] telia ætt til (*Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, p. 8).<sup>87</sup>

(All people who are truly informed about events know that the Greeks and men of Asia settled the Northlands. The language which originated there later scattered around all countries. The chief of this people was called Óðinn, from whom people trace their lineage.)

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<sup>87</sup> For quotes that occur during 589a–f's ninth lacuna, I have reproduced Zitzelsberger's transcriptions of AM 335 4to. The [] indicate a 'conjectural editorial addition' in places where the manuscript is unclear and the < > indicate additions where there is deliberately unwritten space. See further Zitzelsberger 1969a, 3–7.

This is a reference to the myth of Trojan origins, which appears in several extant medieval Icelandic texts.<sup>88</sup> Through a play on the similar sounding words *Æsir* and Asia, the Norse pre-Christian gods were, in this myth, euhemerised and their otherworldly abode Ásgarðr given an earthly location in Tyrkland (Turkey). The myth had already been alluded to by Ari Þorgilsson in his genealogy at the end of *Íslendingabók* (written between 1122 and 1113) (Ari Þorgilsson, *Íslendingabók*, 1968, p. 27),<sup>89</sup> and according to Arngrímur Jónsson's sixteenth-century Latin translation, the Óðinn-Asia connection was also made by the compiler of the no-longer-extant *Skjöldunga saga* later in the twelfth century (*Danasaga Arngríms lærða*, 1982, ch. 1, p. 3; Faulkes 1987–1989, 26).<sup>90</sup> But it was in the Prologue to the early thirteenth-century *Snorra Edda* that the narrative took on its fullest form: Óðinn is said to be descended from Þórr, the grandson of Priam, high king of Trója (Troy) and the prophetess Sif.<sup>91</sup> He travels north from Tyrkland to conquer large amounts of territory and establishes three of his sons as kings of Austr Saxaland (East Saxony), Vest-

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88 These are the Prologue to *Snorra Edda*, *Heimskringla's Ynglinga saga*, some versions of Óláfr Þórðarson's *Third Grammatical Treatise*, *Sörla þáttr*, *Völsungs rímur*, *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar*, and *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*. The *Snorra Edda* Prologue manuscripts are discussed below in n. 91. The earliest known manuscript of *Heimskringla* only survives as a fragment (Lbs fragm 82, 1258–1264), but it is known from several seventeenth-century copies made by Ásgeir Jónsson (AM 35 fol, AM 36 fol, and AM 37 fol) before the rest of the manuscript was lost. There are also several other incomplete manuscripts from the fourteenth century which include some variant readings. Of the *Third Grammatical Treatise's* three medieval witnesses, the myth is evoked in the oldest witness, AM 748 I b 4to (1300–1325), and the Codex Wormianus version, but is omitted in AM 757b 4to (1400–1500). *Sörla þáttr* appears only in GKS 1005 fol (Flateyjarbók, 1387–1394). *Völsungs rímur* are preserved only in AM 604g 4to (1540–1560). *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* and *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar* are preserved in manuscripts from the fifteenth century, including 586.

89 *Íslendingabók* is only preserved in two seventeenth-century paper manuscripts (AM 113a fol, 1651; AM 113b fol, 1625–1672) copied from a now-lost medieval exemplar.

90 *Skjöldunga saga* is believed to have been originally written in the late twelfth century. The rough contents of the saga are known from Arngrímur Jónsson's sixteenth-century Latin paraphrase, although this has a substantial lacuna. Scholars have estimated some of the rest of the saga's contents based on extant texts that probably used it as a source: Bjarni Guðnason 1982, xix–li.

91 The Prologue is extant in the same four manuscripts as *Gylfaginning* (see p. 32, n. 52) but in more varied versions. The version in Codex Upsaliensis is the shortest, those in the Codex Regius and the Codex Trajectinus are slightly longer, and that in the Codex Wormianus is considerably expanded: Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, 2005, pp. 3–6; *Edda*, 1924, pp. 1–9; *The Uppsala Edda*, 2012, pp. 6–10. For a full discussion, see Faulkes 2005, xxviii–xxxi. Whether or not Snorri wrote the Prologue himself is disputed. An argument against his authorship is made by Klaus von See 1990.

fal (Westphalia), and Frakland (France), and then travels even further north to give two more of his sons the titles of king in Nóregr (Norway) and Svíþjóð (Sweden).<sup>92</sup>

By tracing Scandinavian origins back to Troy, the myth participates in a popular medieval historiographical trend of claiming descent from the survivors of the Trojan war, which ultimately derived from Virgil's *Aeneid* (Faulkes 1987–1989, 27–30; Malm 2018, 98). The most relevant examples can be found in the twelfth-century history of Britain by Geoffrey of Monmouth (*History of the Kings of Britain*, 2007, pp. 7–29) and the late-tenth or early-eleventh century Norman history by Dudo of Saint-Quentin in his *Historia Normannorum* (*History of the Normans*, 1998, p. 16). Dudo's take on the myth seems to have been known in early thirteenth-century Denmark, since at the beginning of his *Gesta Danorum* Saxo Grammaticus 'corrects' Dudo's mistaken attribution of Danish origins to the Trojan Antenor, citing the key figure as Dan instead (Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*. The History of the Danes, 2015, pp. 19–21; Lassen 2012, 47). But it was the British myth, transmitted in *Trójumanna saga* and *Breta sögur*, which seems to have been known best in Iceland (Faulkes 1987–1989, 30–31). The Icelandic version was produced by merging a classical prehistory that was inspired by these texts with existing genealogies that traced the ancestry of prominent Icelandic families through Scandinavian royal lines back to Óðinn, the progenitor of not only the Scandinavian dynasties but also those of Wessex, Kent, and Deira (Faulkes 1977, 177; 1987–1989, 30–31). By bringing together the continental fixation on Troy with these native genealogies, the myth capitalised on an existing perceived ancestral connection between Scandinavia and England and went one step further, giving that shared heritage an ultimately classical origin and thus situating it within a larger continent-wide aristocratic family tree.

Scandinavia's belonging to a wider European community is emphasised by the Prologue's concluding comments (which also appear in the *Third Grammatical Treatise* and are echoed at the beginning of *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*) that, as a result of Óðinn's northwards travels and the resettlement of the *Æsir*, the peoples of northern Europe speak related languages which developed from the original tongue spoken in Troy: “umb Saxland ok allt þaðan um norðrhálfur dreifðisk svá at þeira tunga, Asiamanna, var eigintunga um öll þessi lönd” (Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, 2005, p. 6) (“throughout Saxony and from there all over the northern regions it spread so that their language, that of the men of Asia, became the mother

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92 The principal elements of the myth are present in all versions of the Prologue, although the religious framing is very different in Codex Wormianus.

tongue over all these lands”) (Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, 1995, p. 5).<sup>93</sup> Rather than dramatically contrasting the classical world, pre-Christian Scandinavian language and culture are presented here as “an offshoot of the pre-Christian culture of the Mediterranean” (Faulkes 1983, 26). This has more specific implications in this manuscript, since (as discussed in Chapter 3.1.5) the “pre-Christian culture” of Troy is colourfully depicted in *Ektors saga*. Thus, the myth of Trojan origins is here rerouted to situate Scandinavia within not only a general European community, but to position it specifically as an inheritor of the international courtly culture that is constructed in 589a–f’s first half.

The other implication of evoking the myth is to make space for Norse paganism within Christian history. Before turning to Asia, the Prologue to *Snorra Edda* situates itself in the context of universal history: it begins with the creation of the world, gives an abridged account of Noah and the Great Flood, and then explains how early humans forgot God and developed a kind of natural religion through observation of the world around them (Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, 2005, pp. 4–5). According to *Gylfaginning* and a passage in some versions of *Skáldskaparmál*, because humanity had forgotten the true God, when the powerful *Æsir* travelled north from Troy people believed that they were gods and the historical events that had happened in Troy were turned into their myths.<sup>94</sup> The Prologue is the only extant Icelandic text where such an in-depth interpretation of Norse paganism is attempted, but it has precedents in medieval humanist thought on classical philosophy (Faulkes 1983, 5; Lönnroth 1969, 7–8). It has been described as the ‘noble heathen’ approach or the view of paganism as an ‘imperfect Christianity’ and is one of three main ways that medieval writers interpreted pre-Christian religions (the *interpretatio Christiana*); the other two being euhemerism and demonology.<sup>95</sup> As Lars Lönnroth (1969, 5) notes, they are not mutually exclusive, and the Prologue intermixes both the ‘noble heathen’ and ‘euhemeristic’ approaches with only the demonic interpretation lacking – although the layers of illusion in *Gylfaginning* certainly hint at that interpretation too (Clunies Ross 2018, 125; Faulkes 1983, 30; Malm 2018, 100; Viðar Pálsson 2008, 143–145). By adopting this framework for Norse paganism, the Prologue author was able to present the religion of his ancestors as (in Faulkes’ words again) “a groping towards truth by pagan thinkers” (Faulkes 1983, 31), rather than a devilish delusion.

The Prologue makes explicit the relationship between the paganism of northern and southern Europe by connecting religion to language. It states that the pa-

<sup>93</sup> For the equivalent text in the *Third Grammatical Treatise*, see Ólafur Þórðarson, *Málhljóða og málskrúðsrit*, 1927, ch. 5, p. 39.

<sup>94</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, 2005, pp. 54–55; *Edda*, 1998, pp. 5–6; *The Uppsala Edda*, 2012, p. 86.

<sup>95</sup> Summarised in Viðar Pálsson 2008, 142–146.

gans “gáfu þeir nafn með sjálfum sér öllum hlutum ok hefir þessi átrúnaðr á marga lund breyzk svá sem þjóðirnar skiptusk ok tungurnar greindusk” (Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, 2005, p. 4) (“gave a name among themselves to everything, and this religion has changed in many ways as nations became distinct and languages branched”) (Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, 1995, p. 2). This resonates with the Genesis 10 account of the Table of Nations in which the development of different languages was the natural consequence of the scattering of Noah’s sons following the Great Flood (Dronke and Dronke 1977, 157; Holtsmark 1964, 57; Wellendorf 2018, 96).<sup>96</sup> Recourse to this biblical narrative, which is echoed in *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*’s paraphrase, bolsters the theological explanation of Norse paganism described above and, by positioning it as a variation on the same continent-wide misunderstanding of the true faith, solidifies the cultural connection between north and south that it goes on to establish by tracing descent to Troy.

## 4.2 Rejecting Heroic Tradition

Much of the intertextuality in the saga’s main narrative is, by contrast, characterised more by ‘troping’ than ‘participation’. As Christopher Sanders (2006, 876) has noted, it borrows motifs from other sagas in a way that makes light of both traditional heroic ethics and the conventions of courtly literature; he writes that “the saga adopts a satirical attitude to, or at least pokes fun at, some classically ‘heroic’ and, to a lesser extent, ‘romance’ poses”, which results in the audience being “invited into a game world”. For Sanders, the saga’s intertextuality is principally a mechanism of its humour, but, since intertextuality is how texts dialogue with each other, their implications can be drawn out further than just humour.

### 4.2.1 *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* and *Völsunga saga*

The events of *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* begin with two parallel bridal quests for the same woman: both the young Sturlaugr and old King of Brándheimr Haraldr set out to woo Ása, the daughter of Jarl Hringr. Sturlaugr is prompted by his father, Ingólfr, who complains that his son has spent long enough playing like a child and should either do something to distinguish himself or acquire a wife. Sturlaugr is a *kolbítr* (coal-biter), a lazy youth who lounges around by the fire – a

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<sup>96</sup> The Codex Wormianus version is more polemical and evokes the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11) to explain the diversification of language and paganism (Lassen 2018, 111–114).

common figure in Icelandic sagas (Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2005, 95–96). Ingólfr suggests his son woo Ása and when Sturlaugr asks her father Hringr, he refers the decision to his daughter. She declines the proposal because of Sturlaugr's lack of heroic achievements, decrying “fyrir hui mun[d]a ek eiga þann mann er jafnan uinnr heima buuerk með modur sinni en gerir ecki til frama” (*Sturlaug's saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, p. 9) (‘Why should I marry this man who always does dairy work at home with his mother and does nothing to further himself?’). Ása's father is then approached by King Haraldr, who has recently found himself a widower, and he also asks for her hand.

The basic pattern of two competing suitors, one old and one young, has parallels in *Völsunga saga* and *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*. In the latter, the widowed King Gautrekr wishes to marry the young Ingibjörg, daughter of Þórir, but has a younger competitor – a prince named Óláfr. Like Hringr, Þórir refers the decision to his daughter, and she decides there is more security in marrying an older, already successful king than the promising, but as of yet unaccomplished, young prince. Gautrekr and Ingibjörg marry and Gautrekr defends his kingdom from the rejected suitor's attack without difficulty, proving that “þessi inn gamli er óragr” (*Saga af Hrólfi konungi Gautrekssyni*, 1830, ch. 2, p. 62) (this old man is uncowardly).<sup>97</sup> The equivalent scene in *Völsunga saga* sees Sigmundr pursue Hjördis, daughter of King Eylimi, in competition with a younger man named Lyngvi (*Völsunga saga*, 1965, chs. 11–12, pp. 19–20). As in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, the older suitor wins out, but in this case he does not live long: Óðinn intervenes to put an abrupt (but nevertheless heroic) end to his life. In both texts, the woman's deliberation and active consent is important for demonstrating the superior qualities of the old kings in comparison to the younger suitors. At the core of both unions is what Björn Bandlien (2005, 19–41) describes as a “heroic” conceptualisation of love, in which the man's heroic deeds and the woman's acknowledgement of them are central. He identifies “heroic love” in the eddic poems of the *Codex Regius*, writing that “[w]omen's support and love spring from “objective” norms for heroic behaviour” and that “[l]ove is almost a social imperative in the sense that women *must* love the best man” (Bandlien 2005, 39–40).

But the bridal quest of *Sturlaug's saga starfsama* does not conclude with a union based on heroic love. Haraldr is presumably fearful that Ása will not respond favourably and so forces Hringr to arrange the betrothal without consulting her. Kalinke (1990, 33) writes that “Harald's comportment as suitor shows that he cannot be the hero: that role belongs to Sturlaugr”. This is true to some extent,

<sup>97</sup> This quotation is from the longer redaction. For the equivalent scene in the shorter redaction, see *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, 1891, ch. 2, pp. 3–6.



since Sturlaugr does end up successful, but he does not win Ása's hand by performing the heroic deeds which she seems to expect. Instead, he takes advantage of Haraldr's cowardice. This is enabled by the arrival of yet another hopeful suitor named Kolr who challenges Haraldr to a duel, the winner of which will marry Ása. Haraldr's first champion is killed and so, at a loss, he agrees to transfer his betrothal to Sturlaugr if he is willing to take on Kolr in his place.<sup>98</sup> Sturlaugr agrees and quickly marries Ása, who has no say in the matter at all. Although the reversal of *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*'s bridal quest functions to undermine the character of Haraldr, it does not, by contrast, demonstrate the superior worth of Sturlaugr, at least not within the parameters of heroic love: all the heroic deeds he goes on to perform (his journey to Bjarmaland and rise to petty-kingship in Sweden) have no bearing on the acquisition of his wife who recedes from the plot quickly after the marriage has been effected. By turning what elsewhere is a narrative structuring principle into a brief introductory motif, *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* rejects love as a measure of worth, setting up the rest of the narrative to be a distinctly different kind of story to either *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* or *Völsunga saga*.

*Sturlaugs saga starfsama* contains several other references to *Völsunga saga* in the form of borrowed motifs. The first is an adaptation of the scene in which Sigmundr burns Siggeir alive in his hall to avenge the killing of Völsungr, and Signý (Siggeirr's wife and Sigmundr's sister) walks into the flames out of guilt for her part in his killing (*Völsunga saga*, 1965, ch. 8, pp. 12–14). The equivalent scene in *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* sees the humiliated Haraldr rally four hundred men in an attempt to burn down Hringr's hall while he and Ása are still inside. Immediately upon arriving at the scene, however, Sturlaugr realises that Hringr and Ása have already escaped “nedan ur iordu i riodri einu” (589f, fol. 6<sup>r</sup>, l. 14; *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, pp. 17, 142) (from below the earth into a clearing in a forest). Not only is the cowardly King Haraldr afraid of entering combat, but his inability to enact vengeance against those he holds responsible means he is barely even a shadow of the Völsung ideal.

The remainder of the motifs borrowed from *Völsunga saga* relate to Sturlaugr. The first occurs when he visits the old seeress Véfreyja who advises him on how to defeat Kolr. Like Sigurðr is said to have lain with Brynhildr with a sword between them when he was disguised as Gunnarr (*Völsunga saga*, 1965, ch. 29, p. 50), Sturlaugr and Véfreyja spend the night together with a “stokk” (589f, fol. 3<sup>v</sup>, l. 2; *Sturl-*

<sup>98</sup> Alaric Hall (2005, 8) sees a parallel between Sturlaugr's duel with Kolr and that which Angantýr and his brothers fight with Örvar-Oddr and Hjalmar in *Heiðreks saga*.



*aug's saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, pp. 13, 93) (log) between them.<sup>99</sup> As Sanders (2006, 881) writes, “[t]he scene is comically well-informed in itself, but the extra effect of ostensibly aiming to ensure chastity with the help of a log (possibly a tree-trunk) probably produced an extra laugh”. There is another play on *Völsunga saga*’s ‘wooing by proxy’ later in the saga when Sturlaugr’s ally Frosti disguises himself as Sturlaugr to trick the Finnar princess Mjöll into marrying him (Sanders 2006, 882). As soon as she has proffered the information which he seeks, Sturlaugr has no qualms about burning the two of them alive in their marriage bed, making a mockery of Brynhildr’s tragic death on Sigurðr’s pyre (*Völsunga saga*, 1965, ch. 33, p. 61). The third borrowing relates to the earlier generations of the Völsungs: when Sturlaugr and his sworn-brothers are in Hundingjaland, they are imprisoned in a stone, evoking the scene in *Völsunga saga* where the same fate befalls Sigmundur and Sinfjötli (*Völsunga saga*, 1965, ch. 8, pp. 10–12; Sanders 2006, 881). But whereas the Völsung men are saved by Signý, who secretly drops a sword in their prison before it is sealed, the sworn-brothers free themselves with a halberd that Sturlaugr received earlier from a troll woman named Hornnefja; the heroic Signý is here replaced with a grotesque and dehumanised troll-woman who (as will be discussed below) is violently murdered as a joke.

Like Haraldr, Sturlaugr is no Völsung. But rather than serving to demonstrate his failings, the *Völsunga saga* motifs that relate to him are deployed in a way that positions Sturlaugr as distinct from them; they do not evoke a standard by which we ought to measure him, negatively or otherwise. They maintain the Völsung ideal as a frame of reference, but the lack of consequence that they have for the hero renders that frame of reference all but irrelevant as a metric by which to assess Sturlaugr’s value.

#### 4.2.2 *Jómsvíkinga saga*

A similar treatment is given to *Jómsvíkinga saga*.<sup>100</sup> After the sworn-brothers have completed the mission to recover the aurochs’s horn and Sturlaugr has become a petty king in Sweden, he and two of his sworn-brothers swear oaths (*heitstreinging*) at a Yule feast. As Zitzelsberger (1969a, 5) notes, this is clearly based on a scene in *Jómsvíkinga saga* where the Jómsvíkings (a troop of warriors who have their base at Jómsborg) are invited to a Yule feast in Denmark by King

<sup>99</sup> This motif also appears in *Edda*, 1983, p. 207; *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, 1999, ch. 66, p. 162.

<sup>100</sup> The oldest manuscript of *Jómsvíkinga saga* is AM 291 4to (1279–1299), which is followed by the slightly abbreviated Holm perg 7 4to (1300–1325). The saga is also interpolated into Flateyjarbók’s *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, and a longer redaction is extant in AM 510 4to.

Sveinn who convinces them to plan an attack on Earl Hákon of Norway (*Jómsvíkinga saga*, 1969, ch. 27, pp. 160–164).<sup>101</sup> King Sveinn first makes an oath to attack Æthelred of England, and then an oath is made by Sigvaldi, leader of the Jómsvíkings, to attack Hákon, and his brothers-in-arms all agree to support him. One of them, Vagn, additionally vows to kill Þorkell leira and get into the bed of his daughter Ingibjörg without the permission of her kin. For the Jómsvíkings, the vows make real their bonds of loyalty to each other, a loyalty which, according to Alison Finlay (2014, 75), the saga compiler wanted to promote more than any one individual hero. In her reading, the *heitstreinging* scene is integral to this because it highlights the failings of Sigvaldi whose individualism is the weak link that ultimately destroys the group's integrity and results in their defeat in battle.

On the surface, *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* also seems concerned with the topic of brotherly loyalty. Sturlaugr's many sworn-brothers are introduced at the beginning of the saga, and after completing his duel with Kolr, he acquires yet another colleague – Kolr's brother Franmarr, who he initially fights before eventually deciding they are equally matched and they swear oaths of allegiance to each other, merging their respective gangs of sworn-brothers into one. But although the brothers are high in number and support Sturlaugr when necessary, the saga shows little interest in glorifying the bonds between them: they are interchangeable and undeveloped characters who appear sporadically to further the plot when necessary, and they are rarely shown interacting with each other let alone making the kinds of commitments made by the Jómsvíkings.

Unsurprisingly, the *heitstreinging* scene in *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* is far from serious and does not highlight their brotherly loyalty. Sturlaugr makes the first oath: he vows to discover the origins of the aurochs's horn within three years or die. Franmarr then makes a vow which echoes that of *Jómsvíkinga saga*'s Vagn: that he will go to the bed of Ingibjörg, daughter of King Yngvarr in Garðaríki, and kiss her, or else die. Sighvatr vows to follow the two in their endeavours. The scenes describing the fulfilling of these vows are loosely and comically narrated: they feature macabre and grotesque humour and have absolutely nothing in common with the great battle narrated in *Jómsvíkinga saga*. Rather than a heroic act, Sturlaugr's vow concerns the acquisition of information which does not have any practical purpose beyond his own entertainment. The fulfilment of Franmarr's vow is, as Sanders (2006, 881) says, “maintainably absurd”: after making several failed attempts to get close to Ingibjörg, he stumbles upon sworn-brother Guðormr as he retreats from a fight with his intestines hanging

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101 Ólafur Halldórsson's edition of *Jómsvíkinga saga* is based on AM 291 4to, with lacunæ filled in by the Flateyjarbók version.

out. Guðormr elicits the sympathies of one of Ingibjörg's chambermaids when she goes outside to relieve herself, and Ingibjörg decides to nurse him back to health. While she is preoccupied, Guðormr manages to sneak Franmarr into the chamber where he is able to steal a kiss from the princess and thus fulfil his vow.

*Jómsvíkinga saga's heitstreinging* scene is used as an opportunity for humour. But rather than undermining the worth of Sturlaugr, it is, as with the references to *Völsunga saga*, the values of the source text which are challenged: unlike the ill-fated Jómsvíkings, Sturlaugr is triumphant in all his endeavours and is said to have “[u]ann maurg frægdaruerk” (589f, fol. 13r, l. 8; *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, pp. 29, 299–300) (performed many feats) before dying peacefully of old age. *Sturlaugs saga starfsama's* relationship to these texts and *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* can, therefore, be described as one of “troping”: references are made to them in order to undermine the heroic values they expound and de-centre the version of the past which they depict. The referent texts are summoned and pushed aside, used to evoke a frame of reference which, the saga tells us, is not worth trying to live up to.

### 4.3 The Journey to Bjarmaland

In the most substantial episode of the saga, the journey to Bjarmaland, several intertextual references are brought together to create something to replace these texts. The journey is initiated by Haraldr: after Sturlaugr has caught him failing to burn Hringr and Ása alive, he challenges Sturlaugr in rage to find an aurochs's horn which he once lost – a challenge he is certain will be a death sentence. At this point he also gives Sturlaugr his byname, *starfsami*, meaning hard-working, with the intention of condemning him to a life of toil. Sturlaugr accepts the mission and goes to consult Véfreyja who advises him to seek the counsel of her sister Snælaug, wife of the King of Hundingjaland in the far north of Scandinavia.

But before that, Sturlaugr and his sworn-brothers must navigate an encounter with three *tröllkonur*. First, Áki strikes a bargain with one named Torfa while he is keeping watch at night, then Franmarr does the same with her sister Hrimilldr. Sturlaugr then awakes and meets a third troll-woman named Hornnefja. She requests to see Sturlaugr's sworn-brother Hrólfr nefja because she has heard “at hann se hue [rium] manni nefliotari” (589f, fol. 7<sup>r</sup>, ll. 27–28; *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, pp. 18, 166) (that he is the most ugly-nosed of all men).<sup>102</sup> In return, she gifts Sturlaugr a halberd that is as small as a pin but capable of cutting everything

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<sup>102</sup> The beginning of l. 28 is damaged.

against which it is struck. Sturlaugr then wakes Hrólfr nefja and dresses him in a goatskin, rubs soot on his face, thrusts a stick into his mouth, places an ox's horn on his head, and has him sit up high on a rock. When Hornnefja sees him, she is in awe and declares that "[þat er] satt at segia at allgaufugligur madr ertu ok eigi hefir uerit ofsögum fra sagt þess[um] manni er suo itarligr" (589f, fol. 7<sup>v</sup>, ll. 17–19; *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, pp. 19, 174) (It is true to say that you are a very noble man and no unfair things have been said about this man who is so fine).<sup>103</sup> She swells in size as she reaches up towards him, but Sturlaugr stabs her with the halberd and ends her life, returning to his ship and sailing away with a fresh breeze.

There is no specific identifiable source for this scene, but encounters with this kind of 'Hostile Giantess' are common in the *fornaldarsögur* (Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2013, pp. 65–73). As several scholars have argued, these encounters act as mechanisms through which to test and reinforce gender norms. Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir (2017, 340) writes, for example, that with their strange appearance, lack of intelligence and unrestrained sexuality, *tröllkonur* "are the antithesis of what we believe to be normal, both in appearance and behaviour". They embody subversive feminine characteristics which make them deserving of the violence that is perpetrated against them, and their defeat highlights the superior intelligence and martial skill of the sagas' male heroes and positions those heroes as bastions of the social order (Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2013, pp. 65–73; Kress 1993, 119–127; Bagerius 2009, 145–147). This scene in *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* was, as Sanders (2006, 882) suggests, probably intended to be humorous. But humour is not neutral. As Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir (2015, 223) argues, it is a mechanism of power used in the construction of gender norms; to laugh at another is to exert power over them. Her discussion relates to the *meykongr* trope, but the same can be said of Hornnefja: when the audience laughs at her, they position themselves on the side of Sturlaugr, justifying his violence and endorsing the social norms which it reasserts. But although this scene is stereotyped, *Sturlaugs saga starfsama's* *tröllkonur* are somewhat unusual. When compared to other 'Hostile Giantesses', those in this saga are particularly docile, and Hornnefja is a victim of Sturlaugr's self-interest rather than a legitimate antagonist. The humour in this scene has, therefore, another effect: by turning what elsewhere might have been a legitimate obstacle into an unthreatening laughing-stock, the result is to not only shame Hornnefja but also neutralise the subversive

<sup>103</sup> The end of ll. 17 and 18 are damaged.

power of the *tröllkona*-figure. As with the borrowings from *Völsunga saga* and *Jómsvíkinga saga*, Sturlaugr again proves himself to be a hero for whom conventional obstacles mean little.

The same power dynamic is played out in Sturlaugr's next interaction. After sailing away from the inlet, he and his sworn-brothers arrive in Hundingjaland. Sturlaugr, Áki, and Franmarr go ashore and approach a large hall where "stodu þar menn i dyrum ok uar hakan groin i bringu þeir giolltu sem hundar" (589f, fol. 8<sup>r</sup>, ll. 6–7; *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, pp. 19, 181–182) (there stood men in the doorways and their chins stretched to their chests. They yelped like dogs). The sworn-brothers immediately kill these dog-like guards and enter the hall where Snælaug sits on a dais. Áki recognises her as a member of his kin and places both hands round her neck to kiss her in greeting, enraging her husband, King Hundólfr, who summons his guards with trumpets blaring. Snælaug quickly manages to give the sworn-brothers the information they need about the location of the aurochs's horn before a troop of guards storm into the hall and drag them to the forest where they are imprisoned in stone. As discussed above, Sturlaugr is able to free them using the halberd he had received from Hornnefja, and they escape back to their ship.

Whereas the troll-women were drawn from Icelandic tradition and could be seen to represent 'nature', the threat the sworn-brothers face in Hundingjaland is a Latin import which represents, as Katja Schulz (2004, 248–252) notes, an alien form of civilisation. The creatures who guard the hall seem to be same as the *hundingjar* that are described in the lists of wondrous races found in Hauksbók and the encyclopaedic manuscript AM 194 8vo (1387). According to the Hauksbók version, "þar ero menn þeir enn er haka er groen við bríngu niðr. þat heita Hundingjar. Þeir ero sua við menn sem olmer hundar" (*Wundervölkerverzeichnis der Hauksbók*, 1990, p. 467) (There are people whose chins stretch down to their chests. They are called the *hundingjar*. They are to men as savage as dogs).<sup>104</sup> A pictorial depiction of such creatures can be found in AM 673a I 4to (1190–1210), a fragment of the Icelandic *Physiologus*, a Norse adaptation of a widely circulated Latin text, which was itself translated from Greek (see Fig. 3; Halldór Hermannsson 1938, 14). The *hundingjar* are unique to the Icelandic lists but, as Simek (1992, 80) has shown, their roots can be found in the work of Isidore of Seville and mix together characteristics of the *Cynocephali* (men with the heads of dogs) and the *Blemmyes* (men whose eyes and mouth are on their chests). In Latin geographical traditions, these wondrous races were placed in the unknown world, usually on its eastern and southernmost fringes. As a specifically Latin learned figure, the

<sup>104</sup> The information given in AM 194 8vo about the *Hundingjar* is the same.



**Fig. 3:** AM 673a I 4to, fol. 2<sup>r</sup>; fragment of the Icelandic *Physiologus*, featuring a pictorial depiction of the *hundingjar*. Source: handrit.is. Printed with permission. Copyright © of the Árni Magnússon Institute, Iceland.

*hundingjar* provide a counterpoint to the myth of Trojan origins evoked at the beginning of the saga, demonstrating that Scandinavia is within Europe rather than outside it. They suggest that Sturlaugr is not just as a typical troll-killing *for-aldarsaga* hero, but also a civilised European one.

The construction of this northern border continues in the episode which follows: the raid on the temple in Bjarmaland. After escaping the stone prison, Sturlaugr sets sail again and makes his way to Bjarmaland, sailing down the Vína river (Northern Dvina) to the pagan temple Snælaug spoke of.<sup>105</sup> The temple is described with a level of detail quite unique in the otherwise hastily narrated saga:

en er þeir koma þar uar þar suo hattad dyrum sem fyrr uar sagt ganga þeir at þeim dyrum sem uoru i ut norðr á hofinu þui þær uoru opnar þeir sa fyrir innan þroskulldin uar gróf full af eitri ok þar næst ein stor sla ok felld i ofan suerdzegg ein i dyrunum uar murat um huerfis grófina suo at eigi matti spillazt umbudir af ofar gangi eitrsins [. . .] hann litr nu inn i hofit ok ser huar þor sitr aluegligur i aunduegi ok frammi fyrir honum eitt bord silfr laugat þar uar urar horn á bordi fyrir þór þat uar suo fagurt sem á skinanda [gull sæi] fullt uar þat af eitri tafl ok taflbord sa hann þar hanga huortueggia af lysi[gulli] gert skinandi klædi ok

<sup>105</sup> On this river, see Jackson 2019, 112.

gull hringar uoru þar upp festir á steingur .xxx. kuenna uoru [inni] i hofinu ok uar su ein er af bar ollum, hun uar suo stor sem risar bla sem hel di[gr] sem naut uidrlita mikil suart eyg ok munnuid ok suipud illa, þo uar sia kona vel buin [hon] þionar fyrir bordi þors (589f, fols 8<sup>v</sup>, l. 22 – 9<sup>r</sup>, l. 5; *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, pp. 21, 199–206).<sup>106</sup>

When they came there they saw that the doors were as had been said. They went to the set of doors which was on the northern side of the temple because they were open. They saw inside the threshold there was a pit full of poison and there next to it a large beam and fitted on the underside a sword's edge. Inside the doors there were walls around the pit so that the furniture would not be destroyed by an overflow of poison [ . . . ] he looks now in the temple and sees where Þórr sits seriously in the high seat and in front of him was a table laid with silver. There was the aurochs's horn on the table in front of Þórr which was beautiful as if it were shining gold. It was full of poison. He saw chess and a chessboard hanging there, each was of bright gold. Shining clothes and gold rings were fastened to poles. Thirty women were inside the temple and there was one who surpassed them all. She was as large as a *risi* and blue as Hel, stout as a great ox, black-eyed and wide-mouthed and evil-looking. Nevertheless the woman was well dressed. She attended Þórr's table.

The thirty women prophesy to the protagonists using the eddic *fornyrðislag* meter:

komenn er sturlaugr	[hinn] starfsami
horn at sækia	ok hringa fiold,
her er i huse	haufd blot mikit
gull ok gersemar	grimt er oss i hug.

(589f, fol. 9<sup>r</sup>, ll. 5–7; *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, pp. 21, 206)

Sturlaugr inn starfsami has come to fetch the horn and a multitude of rings. Here in the building there is gold and treasures for a major sacrifice; our mood is ugly. (*Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, 2017, p. 783)

This is followed by a single stanza spoken by the lead priestess:

skal hann i heliu,	huilldar niota
ok margskonar	meina kenna,
þa mun sturlaugr	hinn starfsami
med góma kuern	gradinn i stykki,

(589f, fol. 9<sup>r</sup>, ll. 8–10; *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, pp. 21–2, 207).

He shall enjoy rest in Hel and experience many kinds of injuries. Then Sturlaugr inn starfsami will be torn to shreds with the hand-mill of the gums [TEETH]. (*Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, 2017, p. 784)

<sup>106</sup> The beginnings of several lines on 9<sup>r</sup> are damaged.



There is also an idol to Óðinn in the temple: it is stated shortly after this description that “hrolfr hliop inn yfir hellurnar, ok snyr hann þegar fyrir þor ok odin” (589f, fol. 9<sup>r</sup>, l. 21; *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, pp. 22, 211) (Hrólfr jumped over the slabs, and turned in that direction, in front of Þórr and Óðinn).

As a site of sacrifice and idolatry, the temple in Bjarmaland would have been interpreted by medieval audiences as one of demonic worship. In contrast to *Snorra Edda*’s sympathetic interpretation of paganism as a benign delusion, in the demonic interpretation the Norse gods were understood as devils in disguise and pre-Christian religions were considered forms of devil worship.<sup>107</sup> Although this interpretation is not applied explicitly to the temple in *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, as Clunies Ross (2018, 121) notes, “[s]uch ideas form the conceptual background to a great deal of Old Norse literature” and the imagery used parallels the accounts of idolatry found in, for instance, the sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason in which Óðinn and Þórr appears as devils.<sup>108</sup> As Schulz (2004, 225) and Zitzelsberger (1969b, 307) both note, strikingly similar imagery also characterises Adam of Bremen’s famous description of the pagan temple at Uppsala in his eleventh-century *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* (Adam of Bremen, *Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte*, 1917, book 4, ch. 26, pp. 257–260).<sup>109</sup>

The perspective on paganism represented by the temple is, therefore, vastly different to the sympathetic account outlined in the *Snorra Edda*’s Prologue. This complicates the saga’s otherwise participatory relationship with that text, the aim of which had been, in part, to defend the art of skaldic poetry and the mythologi-

<sup>107</sup> On this interpretation in Icelandic texts, see Lassen 2018, 107–111.

<sup>108</sup> For example, in Oddr Snorrason’s *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* where the devil appears in disguise as both Óðinn and Þórr, and Óláfr is said to destroy an idol to the god Freyr: Oddr Snorrason, *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar*, 1932, chs. 43–44 (A-text) and ch. 33 (S-text), pp. 131–136; ch. 47 (A-text) and ch. 35 (S-text), pp. 147–148; ch. 59 (A-text) and ch. 47 (S-text), pp. 173–174. Another example is the story of Gunnar helmingr, which forms part of what is now known as *Ögmundar þátttr* in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, in which an idol to Freyr at Uppsala is inhabited by a demon: *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, II, 1961, ch. 174, pp. 10–17. Oddr Snorrason’s *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* is preserved in two redactions, the longer A-recension (AM 310 4to, 1250–1275) and the shorter S-recension (Holm perg 18 4to, c. 1300), both of which are cited here. A two-leaf fragment of the saga’s end is also preserved in De la Gardie 4–7 and represents a further branch of transmission, the U-recension. The oldest manuscript of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* is Flateyjarbók, which is followed by AM 61 fol (1400–1450), which Ólafur Halldórsson uses as his base text; *Ögmundar þátttr* is preserved in both. For an overview of texts where Óðinn is presented as a devil, see Lassen 2006, 126–131.

<sup>109</sup> Although the parallels are compelling, it’s impossible to say whether Adam’s history was used as a direct source, as Zitzelsberger is inclined to believe. A short excerpt (*Hamborgar historia*) is extant in Icelandic translation in AM 415 4to (1310) and in Flateyjarbók. However, there is no direct evidence for the transmission of the temple description to Iceland.

cal narratives underpinning its complex system of kennings, central to which was the figure of Óðinn. Although *Sturlaug's saga starfsama* reasserts the Prologue's interpretation of the deity as a hero of Troy and progenitor of Scandinavian dynasties in its opening line, by placing an idol to him in this demonic temple, it stops short of wholeheartedly embracing the mythology which that Prologue had been designed to defend. Instead, it lays out what *Snorra Edda* had only gone as far as implying: that the pre-Christian religion of the north, and its god Óðinn, was a creation of the devil.

But the intertextual resonances of the Bjarmaland episode make sure that Sturlaugr (and the Scandinavian kingdom from which he has travelled) is kept distinct from this brand of paganism. The probable source for the episode, *Óláfs saga helga*, provided both the destination for Sturlaugr's quest and what happens when he arrives there: the temple raid (Glazyrina 1994; Schulz 2006, 902).<sup>110</sup> After the priestesses have spoken their verses, Sturlaugr leaps over the stone slabs that guard the entrance and seizes the aurochs's horn. He is attacked by the main priestess, but when she is distracted by a swarm of men entering the temple (presumably the sworn-brothers), he stabs her with Hornnefja's halberd and kills her. He then escapes back to his ship, pursued by the Bjarmar, and Franmarr calls for the wind promised to him by Hrimilldr, allowing the sworn-brothers to sail away. Later in the saga it is said that Sturlaugr returns to the far north and razes both Hundingjaland and Bjarmaland to the ground – in case audiences were in any doubt about his dominance.

The overall shape of the narrative is the same in the source text although the details are very different. In *Óláfs saga helga*, King Óláfr Haraldsson sends the brothers Karli and Gunnsteinn to trade in Bjarmaland. On hearing about this, Þórir hundr plans his own trip. The two parties first trade peacefully with the Bjarmar but, once the trading peace is brought to an end, Þórir goes back with his men to raid and Karli and Gunnsteinn follow him. They make their way to a clearing with an unguarded high fence which both Þórir and Karli climb over to find an enclosure containing a pagan idol and treasure which they raid. The pair are then pursued by the Bjarmar but return safely to their ships and sail away, eventually reconvening to discuss the sharing of the booty. They are unable to come to an agreement, and eventually Þórir kills Karli. Þórir describes the temple as follows:

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<sup>110</sup> There are several sagas about Óláfr Haraldsson, but the Bjarmaland episode is only given in full in what is known as Snorri's *Separate Saga* and in the *Heimskringla* version (quoted below). On the relationship between the two texts, see Whaley 1991, 52–57.

Í garði þessum er haugr, hrært allt saman gull og silfr ok mold. Skulu menn þar til ráða. En í garðinum stendr goð Bjarma, er heitir Jómali. Verði engi svá djarfr, at hann ræni. (Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, II, 1941, p. 230).

(Inside this enclosure is a mound, with gold, silver and earth all mixed together in it. Men are to attack it. But inside the enclosure stands the god of the Bjarmar, who is called Jómali. Let no one be so bold as to plunder him.) (Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, II, 2014, p. 153)

After they have plundered the temple together and Karli and Gunnsteinn have turned to go, it is also said that:

Þórir veik aptr til Jómala ok tók silfrbolla, er stóð í knjám honum. Hann var fullr af silfrpenn-ingum. Steypði hann silfrinu í kilting sína, en dró á hönd sér höddu er yfir var bollanum, gekk þá út til hliðsins. Þeir fõrunautar vǫru þá komnir allir út ór skíðgarðinum, urðu þá varir við, at Þórir hafði eftir dvalizk. Karli hvarf aptr at leita hans, ok hittusk þeir fyrir innan hliðit. Sá Karli, at Þórir hafði þar silfrbollann. Síðan rann Karli að Jómalanum. Hann sá, at digrt men var á hálsi honum. Karli reiddi til øxina ok hjó í sundur tygilinn aptan á hálsinum, er menit var fest við. Varð högg þat svá mikit, at höfuðit hraut af Jómala. Varð þá brestr svá mikill, at öllum þeim þótti undr at. Tók Karli menit. Fóru þeir þá í brot. (Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, II, 1941, pp. 230–231)

(Þórir went back to Jómali and took a silver bowl that was standing on his lap. It was full of silver coins. He poured the silver into the skirts of his tunic and drew the handle that was on top of the bowl onto his arm, going then out to the gate. The whole company were then come out of the enclosure, then realised that Þórir had stayed behind. Karli turned back to look for him, and they met inside the gate. Karli saw that Þórir had the silver bowl there. Then Karli ran to the Jómali. He saw there was a thick necklace on his neck. Karli swung his axe and struck the band that the necklace was fastened with on the back of his neck in two. The blow was so heavy that Jómali's head flew off. There was then such a loud crash they were all amazed at it. Karli took the necklace. Then they went away.) (Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, II, 2014, p. 153)

At the core of this narrative are orally transmitted stories about Viking Age contact with the Finno-Ugric Bjarmar (Power 1984; Andersson 2012, 104–106). However, when incorporated into the saga, this oral knowledge took on a new distinctly literary significance: Bjarmaland provides a counterpoint to the Christian kingdom of the future saint-king. When Óláfr dies at the Battle of Stiklestad, the same Þórir hundr is the sole witness to his first posthumous miracle: as he spreads a cloth over the dead king's body, some of Óláfr's blood gets onto Þórir's hand and heals his wound, and thus "[v]áttaði Þórir sjálfr þenna atburð, þá er helgi Óláfs konungs kom upp, fyrir alþýðu" (Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, II, 1941, p. 287) ("Þórir himself bore witness to this incident when King Óláfr's sanctity became known, before the whole people") (Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, II, 2014, p. 258). While the journey to Bjarmaland cannot be considered an explicitly

anti-pagan polemic since Þórir hundr is a staunch pagan himself, it is, nonetheless, a violent encounter between two parties in which religious difference is foregrounded, and Þórir hundr, who both plunders the temple and spreads the news of Óláfr's sanctity, is a thread in the narrative that contrasts two religious extremes. On the one hand, he has witnessed (and prevailed over) the heathenism of Bjarmaland and, on the other, been the recipient of the healing power of God channelled through a saint.

In *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, when the same motif is used in precisely the same setting, a hierarchical contrast of religions is also implied. However, rather than an unfamiliar Finnic religion, the Bjarmar of this text follow a demonic version of Norse paganism: the idols which furnish their temple depict Norse gods, and the priestesses who speak in eddic verse evoke the association between femininity, fate, and death which is elsewhere embodied by the mythological *völur* (prophetesses), *nornir* (norns), and *valkyrjur* (Valkyries) (Quinn 1998, 45; Quinn 2006c). Thus when Sturlaugr travels to Bjarmaland and encounters devil-worshipping, distinctly Norse pagans when he gets there, he is implied to be something different: a kind of 'noble heathen'. Although, as Lassen (2009, 271) notes, he doesn't go as far as explicitly condemning pagan worship, not only does he not take part in it, but he violently overcomes those who do. The result is a sanitizing of his own heathenism: he may be reliant on the seeress Véfreyja, but that is of little concern when compared with the truly terrifying pagans who live in Bjarmaland. The use of the scene from *Óláfs saga helga* allows Norse pre-Christian religion to be presented in both sympathetic (noble heathen) and polemic (demonic) terms; it clears pre-Christian Scandinavia of its demonic associations and re-associates them with the Bjarmar instead.

As with Sturlaugr's other encounters in the far north, the pagan temple aids in the construction of a border to the north of Scandinavia. In the temple, Sturlaugr overcomes another form of subversive femininity and is again positioned as the defender of the boundary between the civilised and the uncivilised (Lassen 2009, 271). Accordingly, Lassen argues that this scene's principal effect is to highlight Sturlaugr's "høviske opførsel" (Lassen 2009, 271) (courtly behaviour). She notes that, as well as evoking *Óláfs saga helga*, the journey to Bjarmaland has intertextual resonances with Arthurian romance – the journey echoes the Arthurian 'quest' pattern and, as Lassen (2009, 270) notes, the object of the mission (the aurochs's horn) may have reminded audiences of the Holy Grail, known in Iceland via *Parcevals saga*. And indeed, Sturlaugr is shown elsewhere to follow some kind of vaguely 'chivalric' moral code and there are some parallels between his behaviour and those of the knights in the manuscript's first half: the oath he swears with Franmarr after they find themselves equally matched in a duel echoes those of Egill and Ásmundr and Villifer and Kvintatus (pp. 44–45), and, as Sanders (2006, 883) observes, the protagonist's violence is not wholly unabashed:

it is all directed at figures who are marginal or ‘monstrous’ in some way and do not belong to his own class. The *tröllkonur* and *hundingjar* are obvious cases, but this applies also to the *Finnar* princess Mjöll (who is skilled in magic) and her probably-Sámi husband Frosti whose name aligns him with the far north and is the only sworn-brother Sturlaugr despatches himself.

However, Sturlaugr’s proximity to the knights of romance should not be overstated. The only incursion of any kind of ‘courtly lexis’ in this saga occurs in *Hundingjaland*, beyond the northern border: as Schulz (2006, 900–901) observes, Snælaug’s dais and King Hunding’s trumpets evoke the image of a European court more so than any of the saga’s other settings, and Hunding’s outrage when Áki steals a kiss from his wife is the closest the saga comes to referencing ‘courtly love’. The narrator comments afterwards that “ok ma nu ætla huersu grimt honum mun[di] nu i hug at eirn utlendr madr hliop a hals henne ok kysti hana fyrir augum honom” (589f, fol. 8<sup>r</sup>, ll. 14–15; *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, pp. 20, 185) (one may now imagine how angry he would feel if a foreign man jumped to her neck and kissed her before his eyes). This scene may be a play on an episode in *Parcevals saga* where the naïve youth Parceval (who has not been educated in chivalric manners) kisses a maiden without her permission and angers her lover (*Parcevals saga*, 1999, ch. 2, p. 110).<sup>111</sup> But as with the motifs borrowed from *Völsunga saga* and *Jómsvíkinga saga*, this one has little significance for the narrative. Whereas Parceval goes on to receive his courtly education with Arthur, Áki and Sturlaugr escape King Hunding’s vaguely courtly hall with ease and no change of behaviour follows; in fact, the motif is repeated later on in *Franmarr’s* vow to kiss princess Ingibjörg. Although these sworn-brothers may follow some kind of vague moral code and are happy to police the boundaries of the ‘civilised’ world, they certainly cannot be said to display the kind of ‘courtly behaviour’ we would expect from a *riddarasaga*-style knight.

Moreover, when he returns to Haraldr, it becomes clear that Sturlaugr has no interest in becoming such a figure. Rather than taking his seat at court like a good knight would, he approaches Haraldr and “rekr hornit .á. naser konungi suo at þegar staukk blod ur nausum hans ok brotnudu ur honum fíorar tennr” (589f, fol. 9v, ll. 14–15; *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Version A, 1969, pp. 22, 220–21) (then drove the horn at the king’s nose so that blood sprung from his nose and broke out four of his teeth). Instead of glorifying his king, Sturlaugr’s completion of his quest humiliates him. This brings to the fore the other key function that the ‘journey to Bjarmaland’ has in *Óláfs saga helga* which is, according to Theodore M. Ander-

111 *Parcevals saga* is transmitted in two branches represented by the fragment NKS 1794b 4to (c. 1350) and Holm perg 6 4to, which Wolf’s edition is based on.

sson (2012, 106 and 113), to help illustrate the fragility of Óláfr Haraldsson's royal power. Without Óláfr's sponsorship, Þórir hundr successfully acquires great riches in the north, kills the king's chosen agent, and returns to become one of the figures who brings about Óláfr's downfall. In much the same vein, when Sturlaugr proves himself more capable than Haraldr had anticipated, he further undermines any authority that the old king might have had left at this point in the saga. Sturlaugr then leaves Haraldr to make a name for himself in Sweden – hardly the life of toil which the king had threatened him with when he gave him the name of *starfsami*.

The intertextuality of the journey to Bjarmaland is considerably more multifaceted than that outlined in the first two parts of this chapter and both complicates and extends those relations. In one regard, the many monsters Sturlaugr encounters in the north serve to create a border to the north of Scandinavia that complements the saga's participation in the myth of Trojan origins. These encounters also bolster the saga's dismissal of traditional heroic ethics, since the *tröllkonur* and *hundingjar* pose no serious threat to the hero. These "troping" tendencies are extended to the translated *riddarasögur* too: the resonances with Arthurian quests and the reference to Perceval's youth position the knights of the round table as another alternative standard by which we might judge this saga's protagonist. But these texts are hardly dwelled on; they hover in the background, reminding audiences of another kind of hero that Sturlaugr is not. Instead, in his dramatic encounter at the temple, arguably the saga's most central scene, we see a truly transformative example of intertextuality where Sturlaugr steps forward as a hero in his own right and puts forward an alternative kind of heroism to replace that which he elsewhere rejects.

## 4.4 Conclusion

The interpretation of the past that the saga situates itself within is provided by the Prologue to *Snorra Edda*, which is paraphrased in the opening lines. *Sturlaug's saga starfsama* reaffirms the Prologue's interpretation of pre-Christian Scandinavian history, positioning its heroes as northern counterparts to those of the classical world. In the journey to Bjarmaland, the saga's political geography is sketched out further: by combining native and Latin symbols of marginality in its representation of the far north, and by disassociating Scandinavia from the demonic interpretation of its own paganism, the saga shows that Europe's northern border is above Scandinavia rather than below it. As a result, the figure of Óðinn is given two, geographically distinct, representations: in the first, he is not a figure of myth but part of the grand narrative of universal history and the ancestor of

Scandinavian royal lines, whereas in the second, he is the subject of devil-worship in a heathen temple. By presenting contradictory interpretations of the pre-Christian deity in this way, the saga is able to recover the framing narrative of *Snorra Edda* while simultaneously rejecting the mythological material it was written to defend. It then goes on to also reject one of the most canonical legends associated with those myths, that of the Völsungs, the royal dynasty which, although not descended from Óðinn was (according to the saga) certainly nurtured by him. Through the numerous borrowed and comically adapted motifs, *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* constructs a world where its leaders are either pale imitations of that legend's heroes or totally uninterested in attempting to live up to its ideals. The approach the saga takes to *Völsunga saga* also characterises its handling of material from *Jómsvíkinga saga* and *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*. Unlike the reference to the myth of Trojan origins, these sagas are written into the narrative in order to be undermined: *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* defines itself, and its hero, by opposition to them, and the puppet-master Óðinn is nowhere to be found in the lives of these almost-'noble heathens'.

With the rejection of these narratives also comes a wholesale rejection of Norwegian kingship. Not only does Haraldr compare negatively to traditional Scandinavian heroes, but the mission he gives Sturlaugr makes a total mockery of Arthurian quests. In place of the inept old king, the saga promotes an ethic of male domination which is enacted by Sturlaugr, the young son of a farmer, and his team of sworn-brothers who are of similarly humble origins. Although they do not live up to the ideals of the Jómsvíkings and do not exhibit proper courtly manners, they nevertheless represent a coalition based on gender, class, and age which the saga elevates above their various opponents: the cowardly king, the various forms of subversive femininity found in the north, the *hundingjar*, and the devil worshippers in Bjarmaland. Although exaggerated and comic, their journey to Bjarmaland, which is based on that of *Óláfs saga Helga*, does not feature the same kind of mocking which characterises the references to *Völsunga saga*, *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* and *Jómsvíkinga saga*. Instead, by giving Sturlaugr a number of adversaries in his quest for the horn, the saga is able to explore what kind of hero he is: a vanquisher of monsters, a protector of the social order, and – perhaps most significantly – an adversary of demonic paganism. It is in this saga's relationship to 589a–f's final text that this self-made hero is brought into the narrative of history articulated by the rest of the compilation.