

6 Overview of AM 586 4to

In the second half of this book, I examine the relationship between text and context, seeking to understand not how the legendary sagas in question reconstructed the past, but how they functioned as mediums of memory that shaped how individuals and communities in late medieval Iceland remembered their legendary histories. To do so, I draw on the additional evidence of 586. Before beginning the analysis I will provide a brief overview of this manuscript (its texts, editions, and lacunæ) and then summarise the general trends in how its sagas construct the past, with a particular focus on the *fornaldarsögur* among them.

The layout of 586 is very similar to that of 589a–f: its leaves are roughly the same size, the text is also written in one column, and there is little ornamentation. It contains similar marginalia, although there is less of it, and a few notable erasures: three large sections of *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* (fols 16^v–17^r, 17^v, and 18^r) and the end of *Vilmundar saga viðutan* (fol. 25^r, ll. 35–36). 586 is considerably shorter than 589a–f: it is now made up of only 33 leaves (in contrast to 589a–f's 141), and it has eight lacunæ.

6.1 Texts and Editions

586's contents along with its current folio numbers and corresponding editions are:

Af þremr kumpánum (1^r–2^r)¹³⁹
Af þremr þjófum í Danmörk (2^r–3^v)¹⁴⁰
Um bryta einn í Þýskalandi (3^v–5^r)¹⁴¹
Af meistara Perus (5^r–6^r)¹⁴²
Af Vilhjálmi bastarði ok sonum hans (6^r–6^v)¹⁴³
Roðberts þátr (7^r)¹⁴⁴
Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans (7^r–12^v)¹⁴⁵

¹³⁹ *Af þrimr kumpánum*, 1882. Gering's editions of all the short narratives cited here are based on AM 657a–b 4to, with variants from 586 labelled the F-text.

¹⁴⁰ *Af þrimr þjófum í Danmörk*, 1882.

¹⁴¹ *Af brytja ok bonda*, 1882.

¹⁴² *Af meistara Pero ok hans leikum*, 1882, chs. 2–3, pp. 223–231.

¹⁴³ *Af Vilhjálmi bastarði ok sonum hans*, 1882.

¹⁴⁴ *Frá ferðum Roðbertz ok hans manna*, 1882.

¹⁴⁵ *Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans*, 1927. Lagerholm uses AM 343a 4to as his base text and provides some variants from 586 as the B-text.

Bósa saga ok Herrauðs (12^v–19^r)¹⁴⁶
Vilmundar saga viðutan (19^r–25^r)¹⁴⁷
Hálfðanar saga Eysteinssonar (25^r–26^v)¹⁴⁸
Frings saga ok Tryggva (27^r)¹⁴⁹
Pórðar saga hreðu (27^r–30^r)¹⁵⁰
Króka-Refs saga (30^v–32^v)¹⁵¹
Ásmundar saga kappabana (32^v–33^v)¹⁵²

No copies were made of this manuscript that are comparable to those of 589a–f, so where I have needed to quote text that would have occurred in the lacunæ, I have used the editions. The lacunæ of 586 are listed in Appendix 2.

6.2 The Legendary Past in AM 586 4to

The manuscript's first six texts are short narratives, usually now labelled *ævintýri* – an ambiguous term used to describe both fairytales and *exempla*. The first, *Af premr kumpánum*, describes three noble men who entertain each other one night in the forest by recounting the most dangerous encounters of their lives. The other tales are more exemplary in character but have a secular focus: they are largely concerned with morality among the laity, both from the upper and lower classes, rather than the deeds of clerics like some *ævintýri* are.¹⁵³ In two of them (brought under the title *Af meistara Perus*), we reencounter Pérús of *Klári saga*, and the final two (*Af Vilhjálmi bastarði ok sonum hans* and *Roðberts þátr*) paint particularly unflattering portraits of the greedy English King William II and his brother Robert.

¹⁴⁶ *Die ältere Bósa-saga*, 1893. Jiriczek uses 586 as his base text.

¹⁴⁷ *Vilmundar saga viðutan*, 1962. Loth uses 586 as her base text and fills the lacuna with AM 577 4to (1450–1499) and GKS 1006 fol (1600–1700).

¹⁴⁸ *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinssonar*, 1917. Schröder's edition is based on AM 343 4to and provides some variants from 586 as the B-text.

¹⁴⁹ *Frings saga ok Tryggva*, 1965. Loth uses AM 489 I–II 4to as her base text and provides some variant readings from 586; both are only fragments.

¹⁵⁰ *Pórðar saga hreðu*, 1959. Jóhannes Halldórsson uses AM 564a 4to (1390–1425) as his base text and provides some variants from 586.

¹⁵¹ *Króka-Refs saga*, 1883. Pálmi Pálsson uses AM 471 4to as his base text and provides variant readings from 586 as the C-text.

¹⁵² *Ásmundarsaga kappabana*, 1891. Detter provides side-by-side transcriptions of 586 (M-text) and Holm perg 7 4to (S-text), the latter being more complete.

¹⁵³ For example, see Hjalti Snær Ægisson 2021.

These moralistic stories arguably balance out the sagas that follow, which have a generally less chivalric outlook than those of 589a–f, and none of them feature the level of courtly lexis found in the likes of *Kirialax saga* or *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*.¹⁵⁴ The heroes of this manuscript are, by contrast, considerably more rough around the edges: those of *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* and *Vilmundar saga viðutan* are not the princes – Herrauðr and Hjarrandi, who are well versed in knightly pursuits – but rather men of slightly lower station who have unrestrained brute strength and would not be at home in the *riddarasaga*-inflected courts of 589a–f (Hermann Pálsson and Edwards 1971, 40–42; Vésteinn Ólason 1994, 116–117). In fact, the characterisation of these sagas' heroes has several things in common with 589a–f's villains: Bósi is a killer of noble men who loses the favour of Herrauðr's father (the king) by murdering one of his sons, and instead of procuring his wife Edda by wooing her or demonstrating his heroic credentials, he uses threat. His grandson, Vilmundr, grows up far away from royal society, and when he leaves home, a detailed description is given of his dress which may remind audiences of *Samsons saga fagra*'s Jötunheimar-dwelling Sigurðr: he wears a “biarn-skinz stacki raudum lodnum [...] oturskinnz kuf á hófdi [...] breidaaxe mikla silfurrekna i hennde” (*Vilmundar saga viðutan*, 1962, ch. 9, pp. 155–156) (bear-skin coat, red and furry [...] an otterskin cowl on his head [...] in his hand was a great broadaxe inlaid with silver) – not exactly a *riddarasaga*-style knight.¹⁵⁵

But the roughness of these heroes is, as Vésteinn Ólason (1994, 117) notes, mostly restricted to the surface-level, and the overarching political perspective of their sagas is much the same as those of 589a–f. They have a similarly aristocratic focus with clearly-delineated class boundaries, and they elevate comparable (if not identical) conceptualisations of ideal upper-class masculinity and femininity. As in the other manuscript, alliances between members of the elite are promoted, and relationships of sworn-brotherhood are common. The anti-Viking sentiment of 589a–f is evident across these sagas too: power is, as a rule, acquired through marriage to passive and amenable women rather than conquest. An illustrative comparison may be made between *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar*'s villainous usurper Úlfkell and the eponymous hero Hálfdan whose chosen methods of power acquisition resemble those of Eiríkr and Hrólfr of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* respectively. Even at the end of *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* when it is said that Bósi went with a large force to Bjarmaland and demanded to be accepted as king, it is

¹⁵⁴ Note the relatively few references to the ‘sphere of chivalry’ in 586's *fornaldarsögur*: Hallberg 1982, 34–35.

¹⁵⁵ This occurs during 586's third lacuna so I have quoted from Loth's edition.

also noted that: “suo hellzt mega bæta landzmonum þann mannskada sem þeir hofdu af honum feingit at uera konungr yfir þeim, ok styrkia þa med laugum ok rettarbotum” (586, fol. 19^r, ll. 1–3; *Die ältere Bósa-saga*, 1893, ch. 16, p. 61) (so may the people of the land be compensated for the men he had killed, if he was king, and he would strengthen them with laws and justice). He may be no courtly knight, but Bósi is not a wholly unjust usurper.

These sagas also have a similarly ambivalent attitude to legendary traditions. This comes through firstly in genealogical connections: Herrauðr of *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* and the eponymous hero of *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar* are both descended from Óðinn and are integrated into the family trees of *Völsunga saga* and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*. Herrauðr’s daughter is Ragnarr loðbrók’s first wife Þóra, whereas Hálfdan’s mother Ása is said to be the granddaughter of Sigurðr ormr-í-auga, one of Ragnarr’s sons with his second wife Áslaug (Sigurðr and Brynhildr’s daughter). Additionally, Hálfdan’s eventual wife Ingigerðr, princess of Aldeigjuborg, is the foster-daughter of Earl Skúli of Álaborg, supposedly the brother of Heimir who fostered Brynhildr.¹⁵⁶ *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* also makes reference to the legendary Battle of Brávellir and places its title characters within its armies.¹⁵⁷ It also borrows several motifs from its legendary and mythological predecessors; for example, as Lars van Wezel (2006, 1037–1040) shows, Bósi is positioned as a kind of a mock-Óðinn in his three euphemistic information-gathering sex scenes (which would have occurred in the erasures mentioned above). This saga’s borrowings are more parodying than ‘participatory’ (to return to Lachmann’s terminology) and, combined with the genealogical information and reference to Brávellir, function to displace dominant legendary narratives and replace them with comic, romance-tinged stories about the restoration of kingship. *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar* is less mocking in its tone, but the genealogical connections – and, as Rowe (2013, 205–208) notes, particularly the comparison between Brynhildr and Ingigerðr – nevertheless function to create an alternative to those legends’ tragic trajectories.

And it is precisely this kind of trajectory that *Ásmundar saga kappabana* depicts. This saga is based on a seemingly ancient tradition known as the ‘Hildebrand legend’, the great tragedy of which is that a father and son must duel each

¹⁵⁶ Elsewhere, the closing genealogy of *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar* mentions Göngu-Hrólfr and contradicts the information recorded in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* itself. However, the place where this would occur is now missing in 586 (Lacuna 4), and so we cannot know if the scribes saw this contradiction as a problem and, if so, how they dealt with it. See Lavender 2018, 105–106.

¹⁵⁷ On the battle and texts where it is mentioned, see Hui 2018b, 66–68 and 215–217.

other, not knowing of their kinship.¹⁵⁸ In this saga, however, it is two half-brothers who must fight, a situation which came about because their mother had been forced to marry a second time when her father's kingdom was invaded. The morals of 589a–f's courtly societies are totally overturned in this text: power is acquired through conquest, women are taken as prizes, and brothers are forced to fight one another to the death. *Ásmundar saga kappabana* arguably represents the legendary world that heroes like Göngu-Hrólfr, Sturlaugr, and even Bósi have superseded.

586 further taps into the interpretation of history articulated in 589a–f by invoking the myth of Trojan origins. Following an *apologia*, *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* begins with: “hringr hefir konungr heitit er red fyrir eystra gautlandz, hann uar sonar gauta konungs sonar odens er konungr uar i suiþið [ok] komin uar utan af asiam, ok frægaztar konunga ættir eru fra komnar her a nordrlaundum” (586, 12^v, ll. 27–29; *Die ältere Bósa-saga*, 1893, ch. 1, p. 3) (There was a king named Hringr, who ruled over East-Gautland. He was the son of King Gautr, the son of Óðinn, who was the king in Svíþjóð who came from Asia, and the most famous kings in the Northern lands are descended from him). As in *Sturlaug's saga starfsama*, this functions to position pre-Christian Scandinavia within a wider European community rather than on its outside. This is similarly furthered by the placement of another unambiguously demonic temple in Bjarmaland, which Bósi and Herrauðr raid.¹⁵⁹ The demonic interpretation of paganism manifests in other texts too: for example, in villains like Kolr in *Vilmundar saga viðutan* and Úlfkell in *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar*.

But, as in 589a–f, there are helpful magical figures in this manuscript as well. One example is the wife of the impoverished Hrifflingr who helps Hálfdan Eysteinsson by healing him: she is said to have “maelti mórgum fógrum orðum yfir honum” (*Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar*, 1917, ch. 12, p. 119) (said many fairly spoken words over him), presumably charms, and gifts him with several enchanted objects.¹⁶⁰ But perhaps the most significant example of a helpful magic practitioner is Bósi's foster-mother Busla who, like *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*'s Möndull, plays what seems to be a controversial role. Both these figures, and the light they shed on the medium, will be discussed further below.

¹⁵⁸ See further Halvorsen 1951. On the inconsistencies between the verse and the saga, see Nagy 2018.

¹⁵⁹ See further Glazyrina 1994; Hui 2018a.

¹⁶⁰ This occurs during 586's fourth lacuna so I have quoted from Schröder's edition based on AM 343a 4to, an independent fifteenth-century witness.