8 The Manuscripts in Context

The final chapter moves focus onto the last question: for what purposes were these texts produced? My guiding questions in this chapter are: what were the patrons trying to 'do' by copying and disseminating these manuscripts? How were they trying to shape their politics, society and culture, along with its beliefs and values?

To answer these, I begin by outlining the late fifteenth-century historical context: drawing on the works of various historians, I discuss how Iceland's political circumstances were transformed following the collapse of the Commonwealth and how they developed over the following centuries. Some specific examples of important individuals, locations, and events are given that are relevant to the discussion that follows, in which I explore the manuscripts' pre-archive transmission histories. Building on this, I suggest (in very general terms) where and for whom the manuscripts may have been made and make some suggestions about how they were used. In the final section, I place these findings into dialogue with the manuscripts as texts and media, focussing first on their original fifteenth-century context before considering their later reception.

8.1 Fifteenth-Century Iceland

With the collapse of the Commonwealth in 1262–1264, Iceland's internal political structures and international relations were transformed.[188] Although many of the *goðar* (chieftains) of the Free State had already turned to King Hákon Hákonarson for support during the Civil Wars and had, in return, become his vassals, following the formal country-wide surrender of power, this relationship was codified in law. The position of *goði* was abolished and replaced with a variety of royal officers who received their titles directly from the king. The most prominent among them was the *hirðstjóri* (governor),[189] who was followed by the *sýslumenn* (sheriffs) who covered the twelve new *sýslur* (sheriff's districts).[190] The *alþingi*, which had been Iceland's legislative body, was transformed into a *lögþing* (law assem-

188 The following summary of Icelandic political and economic development is based on Björn Þorsteinsson and Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1990; Björn Þorsteinsson and Sigurður Líndal 1978; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1995 and 2013; Sigríður Beck 2011; Sverrir Jakobsson 2013; Wærdahl 2011.

189 This title only emerges in the sources from 1320, although before that there were individuals who had comparable roles.

190 The exact number of *sýslumenn* could vary and there were at times more than one *hirðstjóri*.

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bly), which was presided over by two *lögmenn* and attended by the *sýslumenn* as well as eighty-four *nefndarmenn* (representatives) from across the districts (*Jónsbók*, 2010, ch. 1. 2, pp. 8–12). From these were selected thirty-six *lögréttumenn* (law-council men) who consented to new laws. Ultimate authority now lay with the Norwegian king who took over legislative responsibility and was entitled to make the final judgement at court (*Jónsbók*, 2010, ch. 1. 4, p. 14).[191] The new royally-affiliated titles gave members of the Icelandic elite entry into the king's retinue as either lords or retainers. According to Jón Viðar Sigurðsson (1995, 158), Icelanders seem to have made up five percent of the king's entourage in the late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth centuries.

With these political developments, the economic basis of the Icelandic elite also changed. One source of income for the king's new men were taxes: the royally-appointed *sýslumenn* were entitled to a portion of the tax paid by landholders to the king (*Jónsbók*, 2010, ch. 3. 1, p. 28). Their other principal source of income was the possession of land: they no longer needed to use their income to pay for gifts and feasts and could instead invest it in their own farms. Such is reflected in the post-Commonwealth laws where the term *höfuðból* (manor) gained a new prominence (*Jónsbók*, 2010, ch. 5. 7, pp. 96–98).[192] According to Magnús Már Lárusson (1971, 45), in the late Middle Ages there were thirty *höfuðból*, with the highest concentration in the Vestfirðir.

Over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the importance of land ownership only increased. After *c*. 1320, references to retainers stop appearing in the sources and it seems that service within the king's retinue ceased to be a productive means through which upper-class Icelanders could generate income. The plague (*Islandske annaler*, 1888, pp. 286–287) which devastated the population twice during the fifteenth century likely accelerated the process of accumulation, as it left large areas depopulated, and land was opened up for the taking by a small class of wealthy Icelanders.[193] It seems that there was a larger wealth disparity between the major landowners and the smaller householders during this period than during the thirteenth century, since the latter were no longer subsidised by a class of wealthy chieftains who were reliant on their support. Árni

191 However, Björn Þorsteinsson and Sigurður Líndal (1978, 66) and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson (2013, 214–220) emphasise that law was not wholly imposed from above, and the local elite retained a large degree of influence in its formulation.

192 Manors do seem to have been a part of Iceland's political and economic landscape from much earlier, one example being Hofstaðir in northern Iceland, which was a centre of power in the ninth and tenth centuries: Árni Daníel Júlíusson 2010, 7.

193 Gunnar Karlsson (1996, 268–276) estimates that this wave of the plague had a sixty-percent mortality rate.

Daníel Júlíusson (2010, 16 and 22–25) argues from the inventory evidence that the disparity was also much greater during this period than in the centuries after. For example, the Vestfirðir *höfuðból* Saurbær á Rauðasandi had forty-five cows in 1446 but only nineteen in the early eighteenth century.[194]

This was, as Glauser (1983, 57) writes, "die Zeit der reichen Männer" (the time of the rich men), and several figures stand out who were given the cognomen *ríki* (rich) and who, following Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir (2010, 378), we might describe as Iceland's "quasi-kings". One example was *sýslumaður* Guðmundur ríki Arason (born *c*. 1395; *ÍÆ*, *II* 1949, 123–124), who owned several Vestfirðir *höfuðból* (among them Reykjahólar and Saurbær á Rauðasandi) (*DI*, *IV*, 1897, pp. 683–694; Magnús Már Lárusson 1971, 43). Another was *hirðstjóri* of the north and west Loftur ríki Guttormsson (d. 1432; *ÍÆ*, *III* 1950, 395–396) who owned numerous estates that added up, in Jón Viðar Sigurðsson's (1995, 164) calculation, to a total of 4300 hundreds – equivalent to about 215 average-sized farms and twice as much as the land owned by Snorri Sturluson in the thirteenth century (Magnús Már Lárusson 1971, 47).[195] Loftur was a member of the rich Skarðverjar family, who took their name from Skarð in Skarðströnd (Breiðafjörður) – one of Loftur's many holdings (Magnús Már Lárusson 1971, 43). Another notable member of this family was Björn ríki Þorleifsson (*c*. 1408–1467), a *hirðstjóri* who owned extensive lands in the Vestfirðir and inherited the manor of Skarð through his marriage to Loftur ríki's daughter Ólöf (*ÍÆ*, *I* 1948, 256; Björn Þorsteinsson and Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, 1990, 106; Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, 2010, 327–328). In this economic context, marriage was an important tool for the elite to enhance their power and financial assets. Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir (2010, 299–376 and 432–435) has shown how marriage practices in this period aimed to ensure that family landholdings were not broken up (for example via dowries), and marriages were used to amass wealth instead. An example of this development is a prominent landowner in the north, the widow Margrét Vigfúsdóttir (1406–1486) – formerly the wife of Þorvarður (d. 1446), a son of Loftur ríki – who advantageously married her three daughters off in a *riddarasaga*-style triple wedding in 1465 to three *sýslumenn* (*DI*, *V*, 1899–1902, pp. 378–379; Orning 2017, 208).

In terms of international concerns, the elite's priorities did not remain stagnant as the post-Commonwealth period progressed. Most significant was the death of Olaf, the sixteen-year-old King of Norway and Denmark, in 1387. With no heir, Olaf was succeeded by his Danish mother Margrete (d. 1412), who united the

194 However, he also notes the opposite to be the case for the landholdings of the bishop's seat of Skálholt: Árni Daníel Júlíusson 2010, 16–17.

195 Jón Viðar bases this calculation on a document from 1430 where Loftur lists many of his landholdings: *DI*, *IV*, 1897, pp. 405–406.

Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish kingdoms under the Kalmar Union a decade later. This brought about an increased disconnect between the Icelandic elite and their monarchs; since Olaf was the last of the Norwegian kings descended from Haraldr hárfagri (to whom some prominent Icelanders traced their own ancestry), his death was, as Rowe (2005, 26) writes, "the last straw for the ideology of personal relationships that had long served as the mental framework within which Icelanders conceived their individual connections to the structures of power of their society". This became even more apparent in the following century. King Eric (Margrete's adopted son and heir) made Copenhagen his centre of power in 1417, and Helgi Þorláksson (2013, 279) has shown how from then on the Norwegian council became a new intermediary between the Icelanders and their kings, which was called on to not only "accept individual kings on behalf of the Icelanders but also to take care of Icelandic affairs". There seems to have been a sense of abandonment in Iceland: in a letter from the *alþingi* in 1419, leading Icelanders complained to King Eric that a commitment made as part of the *Gamli sáttmáli* (Old Covenant) that Iceland would receive six ships of provisions every year had not been kept for some time (*DI*, *IV*, 1897, pp. 268–69; Carus-Wilson 1993, 165).[196]

Nevertheless, the Kalmar kings maintained an interest in Icelandic affairs. This was because the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries saw a growth in international demand for Icelandic dried fish, known as *skreið*, which radically increased the presence of English and Hanseatic merchants in Icelandic waters.[197] English presence seems to have begun early in the fifteenth century and was a concern for the Danish crown because it caused a significant loss of tax revenue and threatened the lucrative monopoly of the Bergen merchants. Many attempts were made by the Kalmar kings to regulate English trade, but these proved largely futile, and it thrived for the first half of the century. Tensions came to a head in the 1460s: Christian I cancelled all English sailing privileges in 1466 after the English King Edward IV refused to ratify an article in a treaty concerning toll payments (*DI*, *XI*, 1915, pp. 20–21). A year later, the king's man Björn ríki Þorleifsson was killed by English merchants, and his son Þorleifur was taken captive, triggering a state of war between the English and Danish kings (*DI*, *V*, 1899–1902, pp. 497–503).

The Icelandic elite were not passive victims in these conflicts, rather they selectively collaborated with various international actors for their own political and economic gain. Many pursued a close relationship with the Kalmar kings,

196 *DI*, *IV*, pp. 268–69. On *Gamli sáttmáli* (possibly a fabrication of the fifteenth century), see Boulhosa 2005, 87–153.

197 The following summary of the late medieval Icelandic fish trade is based on Beck 2011; Björn Þorsteinsson and Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1990; Carus-Wilson 1993; Gelsinger 1981; Seaver 1996.

while others allied themselves with the English who, Baldur Þórhallsson and Þorsteinn Kristinsson (2013, 117) argue, provided them with "important economic and societal shelter". A clause in the *Langaréttarbót* (Long Law Code Amendment) of 1450 points towards an anxiety present in Denmark about this collaboration: it forbids foreigners from taking young or old people from Iceland except to go to Norway or on pilgrimage and Icelandic parents from giving or selling their children to foreigners (*DI*, *V*, 1899–1902, pp. 62–69). Nevertheless, much trade happened under the radar. As Eleanor Mary Carus-Wilson (1993, 162–163) writes, "the arbitrary decrees of distant kings, whether in London or in Copenhagen, could not actually put a stop to a business which in Iceland was equally opportune to both parties". This conclusion is borne out by the concentration of wealth in the areas of Iceland frequented by the English; many of the major landowners already mentioned, such as Loftur ríki Guttormsson and Björn ríki Þorleifsson, had their power bases in the west of the country, precisely the region where most trade occurred (Beck 2011, 223–225; Glauser 1983, 55).

The post-Commonwealth period also saw an increased separation between the clergy and the secular elite. This begun with a late thirteenth-century conflict spearheaded by bishop of Skálholt Árni Þorláksson (under the instruction of archbishop of Niðarós), who wanted to secure the landholdings of the church and end Iceland's long-held tradition of lay church-ownership. The conflict was resolved by 1297: the bishops assumed authority of the *staðir* (institutions where they owned all the local land) whereas landholders retained their rights to the *bændakirkjur* (those which were on farmer-owned land).[198] Erika Sigurdson (2016, 96–118) has shown how this created the conditions for the development of a class of clerical elites as the church, much like the secular elite, gradually increased its landholdings. These clerics also seem to have developed a distinct sense of identity that differentiated them from the secular magnates. Central to this identity, Sigurdson (2016, 174) argues, was their connection to the archbishop of Niðarós and their participation in a clerical learned culture that valued "knowledge and use of canon law, liturgy, writing, composition and Latinity".

Correspondingly, the secular elite seem to have developed a strong sense of identity that distinguished them from both the clergy and the non-land-owning classes. They expressed this in signs such as dress, coats of arms, and, most critically, literary production (Björn Þorsteinsson and Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1990, 74 and 106; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1995, 159). This was likely one of the reasons why control of churches was appealing: in addition to revenue, churches gave access to scribes who could contribute to "identitetsskapande verksamhet" (Beck

198 For an overview of the conflict, see Magnús Stefánsson 1978.

2011, 214) (identity-forming activities) like the production of genealogies and sagas. But lay literacy also appears to have been quite high in this period, and it seems that the secular aristocracy played a prominent role in manuscript production as both scribes and patrons, particularly in the fifteenth century (Stefán Karlsson 1999, 149–151; Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir 2018, 181–194). Several manuscripts have been associated with Möðruvellir fram during Margrét Vigfúsdóttir's time (Sanders 2000, 41–44; Stefán Karlsson 1999, 152–154). These are the saga manuscripts Holm perg 7 fol,[199] AM 81a fol (1450–1475),[200] AM 579 4to,[201] AM 445c II 4to (1440–1460),[202] AM 162a η fol (1459–1475),[203] and AM 343a 4to;[204] the legal collection AM 132 4to (1440–1460);[205] a copy of *Konungs skuggsjá* in AM 243a fol (1450–1475); and the model book AM 673a III 4to (Teiknibókin, 1450–1475). These manuscripts have been the subject of several studies by Orning, who has attempted to map out the mental universe of the Möðruvellir fram elites. He writes that "this milieu must be characterised as giving quite a secular impression" (Orning 2017, 312) due to the absence of clerical texts in their collection, while the presence of *Jónsbók*, *Konungs skuggsjá*, and *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* suggest a particular interest in (and perhaps an affiliation with) the Norwegian crown (Orning 2017, 310–311). But this elite's literary production included clerical as well as secular material (Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir 2018, 188–191). For example, Bjarni Ívarsson, Margrét Vigfúsdóttir's nephew, is known to have been the commissioner and illuminator of the liturgical manuscript AM 80b 8vo (1473, fragment), which was gifted to the monastery at Munkaþverá in Eyjafjörður (Stefán Karlsson 1999, 141–142).

199 *Rémundar saga keisarasonar*, *Elíss saga ok Rósamundu*, *Sigurðar saga turnara*, *Bevers saga*, *Konráðs saga keisarasonar*, *Ektors saga*, *Gibbons saga*, *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, *Sigurðar saga fóts*, *Partalópa saga*, *Adonias saga*. This manuscript and what it can reveal about the context in which it was produced is studied in detail by Kjesrud 2010.

200 *Sverris saga*, *Böglunga sögur*, and *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*.

201 *Elíss saga ok Rósamundu*, *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, *Adonias saga*, *Rémundar saga keisarasonar*, and *Ektors saga*.

202 *Svarfdæla saga*.

203 *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*.

204 *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns*, *Samsons saga fagra*, *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, *Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans*, *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*, *Yngvars saga víðförla*, *Ketils saga hængs*, *Gríms saga loðinkinna*, *Örvar-Odds saga*, *Áns saga bogsveigis*, *Sálus saga ok Nikanórs*, *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar*, *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, *Vilmundar saga viðutan*, and *Af meistara Perus*.

205 *Jónsbók*, *Kristinréttur Árna biskups* (Bishop Árni's Christian Law), *Kaflar úr kirkjulögum* (chapters from church law), *Lagaformálar* (legal prefaces), and *Réttarbætur* (amendments).

Many secular magnates from the west have also been connected to literary production: Ólafur Loftsson, son of Loftur ríki who was himself a poet (Jónas Kristjánsson 1990, 276–277), has been identified as the scribe of the saga manuscripts AM 557 4to (1420–1450)[206] and AM 162c fol (1420–1450).[207] His brother, *hirðstjóri* Ormur Loftsson, is credited with copying part of Holm perg fol 2 (1425–1445), a collection of saints' lives (Foote 1962, 11–12; Stefán Karlsson 1999, 141).[208] AM 152 fol contains a note claiming that one of its scribes was the brother of Björn Þorleifsson.[209] The Björn in question is likely the grandson of Björn ríki and the scribe his half-brother Þorsteinn Þorleifsson (Stefán Karlsson 1999, 142–143). The younger Björn is also believed to have been the writer of AM 667 V 4to (Reykjahólabók, 1525) and some fragments of other religious works (Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2014, 91; Kalinke 1996; Stefán Karlsson 1999, 143). Their father, Þorleifur Björnsson (son of Björn ríki), has been associated with a miscellany known as Codex Lindesianus (ManchRyl Ice 1, *c*. 1473; MacDougall 1983, 191–219), the medical text RoyalIrAcad 23 D (1475–1500; Örn Bjarnason 2004, 335–336), and was likely the commissioner of some additional pages in Flateyjarbók (Rowe 2005, 13 and 405).

But it was not only these major power players who were literary patrons. AM 471 4to[210] has been connected to three brothers – Jón, Þórkel, and Örnólfr Einarssynir – living at Hvílft in the Vestfirðir (Jónas Kristjánsson 1964, xxxix–xlvi). They were successful farmers and Örnólfr was a *sýslumaður*, but they were nevertheless, in Orning's (2017, 231) words, "situated further down the social ladder than Margrét Vigfúsdóttir" and the other figures already discussed. Finally, there are some other manuscripts from the same period that Glauser (1983, 75) has associated with the west of Iceland but which lack known scribes or patrons. These are

206 *Valdimars saga*, *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds*, *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, *Eiríks saga rauða*, *Rögnvalds þáttr ok Rauðs*, *Dámusta saga*, *Hróa þáttr heimska*, *Eiríks saga víðförla*, *Stúfs þáttr*, *Karls þáttr vesœla*, and *Sveinka þáttr Steinarssonar*.

207 *Ljótsvetninga saga*, *Vopnfirðinga saga*, *Finnboga saga ramma*, *Þorsteins þáttr stangarhöggs*, and *Sálus saga ok Nikanórs*.

208 His hand has also been identified in AM 238 fol VIII, another collection of saints' lives (Foote 1962, 17–18).

209 *Grettis saga*, *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*, *Flóvents saga*, *Sigurðar saga þögla*, *Þórðar saga hreðu*, *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, *Ektors saga*, *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, *Mágus saga jarls*, and *Gautreks saga*.

210 *Þórðar saga hreðu*, *Króka-Refs saga*, *Kjalnesinga saga*, *Ketils saga hængs*, *Gríms saga loðinkinna*, *Örvar-Odds saga*, and *Viktors saga ok Blávus*. This manuscript was originally joined with

AM 510 4to[211] and AM 593 a–b 4to (1450–1500),[212] in addition to 589a–f and 586, to which I shall turn now.

8.2 Localising the Manuscripts

To date, no details are known about the production of 589a–f and 586 such as who may have written them or for whom. The suggestion that they may have been made in the west of Iceland follows from Loth's observation of a unique detail in 586's *Þórðar saga hreðu* that places the title character's death in Hreðavatn in Borgarfjörður: when Þórðar dies, the text adds that "segia þat ok sumir menn at þordr hafi buit .á. hreduuatni i borgar firdi ok uard hann sott daudr" (586, fol. 30^{r}, ll. 47–48) (it is said by some men that Þórðar had lived at Hreðuvatn in Borgarfjörður and died of illness).[213] This provides "[s]light evidence that the original home of the two manuscripts was in western Iceland" (Loth 1977, 19).

There are, however, several other reasons to associate the manuscripts with this region. Firstly, several of their texts contain characters with affiliations to western Iceland. The title character of *Stúfs þáttr*, Stúfr Þórðarson, was the grandson of Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir and her second husband Þórðr Ingunnarson of *Laxdæla saga*, which takes place across the Breiðafjörður region. *Króka-Refs saga* takes place in the same region, and the protagonist is said to be from Kvennabrekka in Dalasýsla. Refr was (supposedly) the nephew of Gestr Oddleifsson who had his farm at Barðaströnd, on the south coast of the Vestfirðir peninsula, and features in several *Íslendingasögur*. Finally, one of the supporting characters of *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar* is Oddr, father of Gull-Þórir of *Gull-Þóris saga*, and he is associated with Þorskafjörður.

Further evidence is provided by the manuscripts' transmission histories. Loth has identified a number of names in their margins from the mid-sixteenth to seventeenth centuries that can, tentatively, be associated with known individuals who are either recorded in the biographies compiled by Páll Eggert Ólason (1948–1976) and Einar Bjarnason (1952–1955) or mentioned in documents edited in *Diplomatarium Islandicum*. When these figures are mapped out geographically and

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that now labelled AM 489 I 4to, which contains *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Kirialax saga*: Jónas Kristjánsson 1964, xxxix–xl.

211 *Víglundar saga*, *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns*, *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns*, *Jómsvíkinga saga*, *Finnboga saga ramma*, *Drauma-Jóns saga*, and *Friðþjófs saga*.

212 AM 593a 4to contains *Mírmanns saga* and *Adonias saga*; AM 593b 4to contains *Viktors saga ok Blávus* and *Sneglu-Halla þáttr*.

213 Transcribed with guidance of Loth 1977, 19.

genealogically and combined with what we know about who gave the manuscripts to Árni Magnússon, we can paint a rough picture of how the manuscripts travelled in the later part of their pre-archive lives and, accordingly, make some informed suggestions about who they were created for and why. Some simplified family trees are provided in Appendices 3–5 to help illustrate the connections between the individuals discussed below. A map is provided in Appendix 6 illustrating some of the significant locations.

8.2.1 AM 586 4to

Bjarni Bjarnason
Of the two manuscripts, there is comparably less data for 586. It was given to Árni Mágnusson by a wealthy farmer and lawyer named Bjarni Bjarnason (1639–1723, see Appendix 3). Bjarni had lived for a time at his father's residence at Hestur in Önundarfjörður (Vestfirðir) but spent much of his life at Arnarbæli in Fellsströnd (Breiðafjörður) (*ÍÆ, I* 1948, 158–159). For this reason Árni referred to 586 as Arnarbælisbók (Loth 1977, 23). Bjarni was the son of Bjarni Jónsson, the son of Jón yngri Magnússon, one of the many sons of the powerful *sýslumaður* Magnús prúði Jónsson (1525–1591) and his wife Ragnheiður Eggertsdóttir who lived at the *höfuðból* Saurbær á Rauðasandi on the southern shore of the Vestfirðir peninsula (*ÍÆ, III* 1950, 431).

Brynjólfur Jónsson
There is only one name in a marginal note of 586: on 25^{v} it is written (in Loth's transcription) "þetta hef eg skrifad / blindandi Briniolf*ur* Jonss*on*" (Loth 1977, 20) (I have written this while becoming blind Brynjólfur Jónsson). This is probably connected to another note on 26r, which reads "nu skal briniolf / lataz blinda" (Loth 1977, 20) (now shall Brynjólfur become blind). These notes are "rather crooked and wobbly" (Loth 1977, 20), making them impossible to date. Loth does not attempt to identify this individual, but there is record of a priest named Brynjólfur Jónsson who resided at Holt in Önundarfjörður and who probably died in 1578 (*ÍÆ, I* 1948, 278). He was the son of Jón Ólafsson (*ÍÆ, III* 1950, 233), a *sýslumaður* who lived nearby at Hjarðardal and acted as an *umboðsmaður* (agent) for his father (another *sýslumaður*) and the powerful *lögmaður* Eggert Hannesson (*c.* 1515–1583; *ÍÆ, I* 1948, 319–320), the father of Magnús prúði's wife Ragnheiður who lived at Saurbær á Rauðasandi before them, having bought it in 1544 (Kjartan Ólafsson 2019). Considering the regional and political connections between this Brynjólfur Jónsson and Bjarni Bjarnason, it seems likely that this individual was responsible for the marginal notes. However, it is not possible to associate any other people with 586, making the identification highly speculative.

8.2.2 AM 589a–f 4to

Björn Þorleifsson

Much more can be said about the readers of 589a–f, many of whom have genealogical connections to Bjarni Bjarnason but are localised further south. This manuscript was given to Árni Magnússon by Björn Þorleifsson (1663–1710, see Appendix 3), probably while Björn was visiting Copenhagen petitioning for the bishopric of Hólar, which he received in 1697 (Loth 1977, 23).[214] Björn was the son of Þorleifur Jónsson of Oddi and Sigríður Björnsdóttir. Sigríður was the daughter of Björn Magnússon (d. 1635), another of Magnús prúði's children (*ÍÆ*, *I* 1948, 235). Björn Þorleifsson grew up at his father's home of Oddi in Rangárvellir in the south of Iceland. He worked there as a priest before moving to Hólar where he remained until his death (*ÍÆ*, *I* 1948 258–259).

Hannes Ólafsson

589a–f contains several marginal notes with names that can help map out some of the manuscript's movements before it was acquired by Björn Þorleifsson. The seemingly oldest name is that of Hannes Ólafsson on 23^{r} of 589d. Loth (1977, 20) suggests this refers to the *lögréttumaður* of Kjalarnesþing who resided at Hvammur in Kjós (*LM*, *II* 1953, 236). His father was the *lögréttumaður* Ólafur Narfason (*c.* 1490–1554; *LM*, *IV* 1955, 421–442), the grandson of Bjarni Ívarsson, Margrét Vigfúsdóttir's nephew (see Appendix 4).[215] Hannes's mother was Sólveig Bjarnadóttir, the daughter of Guðrún Björnsdóttir and Bjarni Andrésson (the grandson of Guðmundur ríki) (see Appendix 3; *ÍÆ*, *I* 1948, 255–256). After Bjarni's death, Guðrún married *hirðstjóri* Hannes Eggertsson (*c.* 1485–1533) with whom she had many children, including the powerful Eggert Hannesson mentioned above. This made Guðrún's daughter Sólveig Eggert's half-sister, and Solveig's son Hannes Ólafsson his nephew. Hannes spent his youth with his uncle Eggert at Saurbær á Rauðasandi before taking over his father's estate further south in Kjós. Hannes could also trace his ancestry back to Margrét Vigfúsdóttir through his mother's line as well as his father's: Solveig's maternal great-grandmother was Ragnhildur Þorvarðsdóttir, one of Margrét's three daughters (see Appendix 4).

Helgi Vigfússon

The next oldest identifiable name is that of Helgi Vigfússon on 21^{r} of 589f, which is written in a hand probably from the beginning of the seventeenth century (Loth 1977, 20). Loth suggests this refers to the *lögréttumaður* from Hvítárvellir in

214 See also the slip at the front of 589a.

215 Bjarni Ívarsson is mentioned above as the illuminator of AM 80b 8vo.

Borgarfjörður, who was a great landowner (see Appendix 5; *ÍÆ*, *II* 1949, 346; *LM*, *II* 1953, 238–239).[216] Helgi was the son of Vigfús Jónsson, the illegitimate son of *lögréttumaður* Jón Grímsson and Kristín Vigfúsdóttir, Kristín being the great-granddaughter of Margrét Vigfúsdóttir via her daughter Guðríðr. As well as sharing some ancestors with Hannes Ólafsson, Helgi Vigfússon is connected to other names already discussed via his daughter Agatha who was married to Eyjólfur Ísleifsson, a grandchild of Magnús prúði via his daughter Sesselja and Ísleifur Eyjólfsson. Sesselja and Ísleifur lived at Ísleifur's residence of Saurbær in Kjalarnes, very near to where Hannes Ólafsson lived.

Guðrún Þórðardóttir and Henrik Þórðarson

The next two names can be discussed together. The names of Guðrún Þórðardóttir on 19^{v} of 589a and Henrik Þórðarson on 22^{v} of 589e were both written in hands from the seventeenth century (Loth 1977, 20). Loth suggests these are two children of the *sýslumaður* Þórður Henriksson (d. 1652; see Appendix 3) who was from Innrihólmur in Hvalfjörður (*ÍÆ*, *V* 1952, 100; *LM*, *IV* 1955, 539–540).[217] Þórður was the son of *sýslumaður* Henrik Gíslason (d. 1638) and his wife Guðrún Magnúsdóttir, yet another of Magnús prúði's children. Little is recorded about his son Henrik (in terms of family or location), but his daughter Guðrún married Jón eldri Ólafsson, the son of priest Ólafur Böðvarsson (d. 1650) of Saurbær in Hvalfjörður (*ÍÆ*, *IV* 1951, 34).

Brandur Jónsson and Sigríður Fúsadóttir

In addition to these individuals, there are several other names in 589a–f's margins that Loth has not associated with any known individuals but for some of whom candidates may be suggested. In the bottom margin of 2^{v} in 589b is written: "gud veri med branndi jonssyne og med sigridi fusa dottur og med ollvm dom (?) monnum" (God be with Brandur Jónsson and with Sigríður Fúsadóttir and with all (?) people). Loth (1977, 20) describes this note as being written in a "book-hand more or less of an age with the manuscripts themselves". There are two potential candidates for the identity of Brandur Jónsson. The first is a prominent figure contemporary to the manuscript: he died in 1494, was the *lögmaður* of the north and west from 1452–1478 and lived at Hofi in Höfðaströnd (northern Iceland) and then at Mýrar in Dýrafjörður (Vestfirðir) (*ÍÆ*, *I* 1948, 267). Slightly later, another Brandur Jónsson is named as a *lögréttumaður* (probably from Kjalarnesþing) who was present at a judgement in 1539 at Kópavogur concerning the *lögmaður* Erlendur

216 No birth or death dates are given for him, but his name is recorded in various documents from 1587 to 1634 making him somewhat younger than Hannes Ólafsson.

217 According to Páll Eggert Ólason, Þorður Henriksson was *sýslumaður* of Kjósarsýsla from 1636, while Einar Bjarnason states he was *sýslumaður* of Borgarfjarðarsýsla from the death of his father in 1638.

Þorvarðsson (d. 1576), another of Margrét Vigfúsdóttir's descendants (*ÍÆ*, *I* 1948, 447; *LM*, *II* 1953, 81). This Brandur Jónsson is perhaps a more likely candidate for the marginal note seeing as his regional and political affiliations are a closer match to those of the other individuals Loth has identified. Hannes Ólafsson, for example, was a *lögréttumaður* of Kjalarnesþing later in the sixteenth century. However, there does not seem to be a Sigríður Fúsadóttir, or indeed a Sigríður Vigfúsdóttir, associated with either Brandur Jónsson, making either identification far from conclusive.

Magnús Bjarnason

Next, on 18^{r} of 589f is the name Magnús Bjarnason written in an "unpractised hand probably from the beginning of the seventeenth century" (Loth 1977, 20). There was a *lögréttumaður* and *sýslumaður* by the name of Magnús Bjarnason who lived from *c*. 1600 to 1657 *(ÍÆ*, *III* 1950, 410; *LM*, *III* 1954, 360). He resided at Lærubakka á Landi and was *lögréttumaður* for Rangárþing and briefly *sýslumaður* of Vestmannaeyjasýsla. He does not seem to have any close connections to the individuals discussed so far and his regional ties are somewhat further afield. Rangárvallarsysla is, however, where the manuscript ended up later in the century (when it came into the hands of Björn Þorleifsson of Oddi) and the dates of this individual's life do match up with Loth's judgement concerning the age of the hand that wrote the name.

Jón Ívarsson

On 34^{r} of 589d is the name Jón Ívarsson in a "cursive hand probably from the last part of the seventeenth century" (Loth 1977, 20). There is no record of anyone by the name of Jón Ívarsson in the biographies of Páll Eggert Ólason or Einar Bjarnason, and the late dating places him outside the remit of the *Diplomatarium Islandicum*.

Jón Ketilsson and Teitur Pálsson

Finally, in the bottom margin of 28^{v} of 589f there is a longer piece of marginalia that Loth (1977, 20) determines to be near contemporary with the manuscript itself and which contains two personal names. It reads "þ*ei*m godu*m* m*onnum* se*m* þ*ett*a br*ef* sia ed*ur* hey*ra* sei*nder æg* jo*n* kettilss*on* yd*ur* teitt*ur* palss*yni* og þack*ar* æg þi*er* fyr*er* þav e*nv* godu knjfa kiorj*n*" ("to the good people who see or hear this letter, I, Jón Kettilsson, send to you, Teitur Pálsson, and I thank you for the very good knife") (Loth 1977, 20). Both Loth and Zitzelsberger have made suggestions about who these two individuals may be. The latter suggests that Jón Ketilsson may be the same person whose debts were listed around 1440 on 54^{v} of AM 232 fol and to whom a transfer of land is recorded in 1429 in a collection of letters belonging to the bishop Jón Vilhjálmsson (Craxton) (Zitzelsberger 1969, 308; *DI*, *IV*, 1897, pp. 618–619 and 393–394). Considering that the list of this individual's debts were recorded in 1440 when he died and the manuscript itself has been more

commonly dated to the second half of the century, it seems unlikely that the marginal note on 589f refers to the same individual. Zitzelsberger (1969, 305) also suggests that the Teitur Pálsson may have been the same person named in a marginal note on 21^{v} of AM 544 4to (Hauksbók). Again, this seems unlikely: as Jón Þórkelsson (1865, xi–xii) notes, this Teitur Pálsson travelled abroad in 1344 and attended the *alþingi* in 1375, a whole century earlier than 589a–f is believed to have been compiled.

Somewhat likelier candidates are suggested by Loth (1977, 20) who has found the two names in three fifteenth-century documents edited in the *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, although none of them feature both names together. The first that mentions a Jón Ketilsson was written at Hólar in 1481 and deals with the *Hvassafellsmál* case in which a farmer named Bjarni Ólason was accused of committing incest.[218] A Jón Ketilsson is listed among the supporters of the *lögmaður* Hrafn Brandsson, Bjarni Ólason's advocate (*DI*, *VI*, 1900–1904, pp. 379–381). The second document was written at Bjarnarhöfn in Helgafellssveit (Snæfellsnes) in 1485 and names Jón Ketilsson as a witness in a transfer of land (*DI*, *VI*, 1900–1904, p. 544). In addition to those that Loth identifies, there are some other occurrences of this name in other volumes of the *Diplomatarium Islandicum*. Perhaps the most interesting is one from 1521, which records an attack made by Ari Andrésson with a number of armed men on Núpur in Dyrafjörður, the home of Hannes Eggertsson (*DI*, *VIII*, 1906–1913, pp. 833–834). Ari was the grandson of Guðmundur ríki Arason and the brother of Bjarni Andrésson (Hannes Ólafsson's grandfather, see Appendix 3). Ari lived at Saurbær á Rauðasandi before Eggert Hannesson acquired it in 1554 (*ÍÆ*, *I* 1948, 12). The name Jón Ketilsson appears in the list of men who accompanied Ari on his attack on Núpur.[219] Other documents mention men by this name in the Laxárdalur region in 1492 (*DI*, *VII*, 1903–1907, pp. 108–109), at Hvanneyri in Borgarfjörður between 1510 and 1514 (*DI*, *VIII*, 1906–1913, pp. 331–332, 409–410, and 514–515), at Hvestuþing in 1533 (*DI*, *XI*, 1915, pp. 111–112), at Reynivellir in Kjós in 1549 (*DI*, *XI*, 1915, pp. 708–710), and in two 1552 account books – one of a Viðey priest named Jón Bárðarson and the other of Eggert Hannesson (*DI*, *XII*, 1923–1932, pp. 389 and 429). These documents were written some seventy years apart, but it is possible that some refer to the same individual; strikingly, they are concentrated in the west of Iceland and some are associated with names and places that have already cropped up. However, while they are certainly tantalising, there is no way of knowing which of these people, if any, was the individual named in the marginal note of 589f.

218 On this case, see Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir 2010, 211–212; Björn Þorsteinsson and Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1990, 132–134; *ÍÆ*, *II* 1949, 371–372.

219 On this dispute, see Arnór Sigurjónsson 1975, 460–461.

There is only one occurrence of a Teitur Pálsson in these records, which is mentioned by Loth (1977, 20). This document was written at Hlíðarendi í Fljótshlíð (in Rangárvallasýsla) in 1481 and lists him as a *lögréttumaður* who was witness to Erlendur Erlendsson (presumably the *sýslumaður* married to Guðríður Þorvarðsdóttir, daughter of Margrét Vigfúsdóttir) proving his ownership of his estate Lágafell í Eystrum Landeyjum (*DI*, *VI*, 1900–1903, pp. 413–414). Again, the lack of any other evidence means it is not possible to take this identification any further.

Jón Sigmundsson

Loth suggests an identification of one final figure from the manuscript's marginalia. That is the writer of several hymn verses that are copied onto various margins and which are all in the same seventeenth-century hand.[220] She identifies the writer "with some certitude" (Loth 1977, 21) as Jón Sigmundsson because he also wrote a letter to the bishop of Skálholt Gísli Oddsson around 1635 (*Alþingisbœkur Íslands, V*, 1930, pp. 390–391). Jón Sigmundsson was a parson in Kjalarnes from around 1620 but was deprived of the living in 1631 for marking somebody else's lamb (*ÍÆ*, *III* 1950, 256). He pleads with the bishop about this situation in his letter. He also had disagreements with *sýslumaður* Ormur Vigfússon of Eyjar (Kjós) and *umboðsmaður* Ísleifur Eyjólfsson, the latter being the husband of Agatha Helgadóttir, the daughter of Helgi Vigfússon discussed above (*ÍÆ*, *IV* 1951, 102).

Copies of 589a–f

Further individuals can be associated with 589a–f because of copies that were made before it came into the possession of Árni Magnússon. The first is Þorsteinn Björnsson (*c.* 1612–1675) who was parson at Útskálar in Reykjanes between 1638 and 1660 and who had many sagas copied around the year 1650, including several from 589a–f (Loth 1977, 14; *ÍÆ*, *V* 1952, 196–197). Árni Magnússon received these copies from a lawyer named Sigurður Björnsson (1643–1725) and divided the codex into several parts. The texts from 589a–f are *Samsons saga fagra* (AM 181b fol), *Ektors saga* (AM 181d fol), *Klári saga* (AM 181e fol), and *Ála flekks saga* (AM 181k fol). It seems that Þorsteinn also had a copy of *Kirialax saga* made, but this was removed by Árni Magnússon who gifted it to the bishop of Hólar in 1710, and it was never recovered (Kålund 1917, xv–xvi; Loth 1977, 15). Loth (1977, 15-16) notes that a copy of *Valdimars saga* was probably also included in Þorsteinn Björnsson's collection. This is suggested by AM 588q 4to (1690–1710), which contains a copy of *Valdimars saga* with a note saying that its exemplar had been in a book which Þorsteinn Björnsson and then Sigurður Björnsson had owned and which was in the hand of Magnús Þór-

220 For details on the hymns and their possible sources, see Loth 1977, 21–22.

ólfsson, who is known to have been employed by Þorsteinn (Werronen 2018b). We must assume that this refers to the same book.

589a–f's *Ektors saga* was also copied later in the seventeenth century by the scribe Jón Þórðarson into what is now AM 585a 4to (1675–1700) (Loth 1977, 16; Werronen 2018a). His exemplar may have been either 589a–f itself or Þorsteinn Björnsson's copy. Beeke Stegmann (2018, 170–171) has identified AM 585a 4to as part of what was formerly a larger codex that Jón compiled over the course of around ten years at the end of the seventeenth century, which was separated into at least twelve parts by Árni Magnússon at some point in the beginning of the eighteenth century.[221] This codex was given to Árni by the *sýslumaður* of Ísafjarðarsýsla Markús Bergsson. In Markús we find a potential connection between this copy and the other names discussed so far: he was closely associated with the family of the Vestfirðir magnate Magnús digri Jónsson of Vigur (1637–1702), another of Magnús prúði's great-grandchildren and a prolific manuscript patron (Stegmann 2018, 165; *ÍÆ*, *III* 1950, 433–434; Werronen 2018c).[222] Both Jón Þórðarson and Magnús Þórólfsson (who had previously copied 589c's *Valdimars saga* for Þorsteinn Björnsson) were, at various points, in the employ of Magnús digri. It is impossible to say precisely how 589a–f moved among these individuals (who received the manuscript from whom and when).[223] They do, nevertheless, seem to have been an offshoot of the same broad regional/familial network within which we know the manuscript was circulating.

8.2.3 Conclusions

As Loth (1977, 23) concludes, the various individuals associated with 589a–f's marginalia and copies clearly suggest that in the century and a half before it came into Árni Magnússon's possession it was in south-west Iceland: "Kjós, Hvalfjörður, Kjalarnes, Útskálar". No direct connections can be made between all these individuals making it impossible to map out the manuscript's precise transmission history. Having said that, if we assume that these identifications are largely accu-

221 For a full table of contents as well as the current shelfmarks of its constituent parts, see Stegmann 2018, 169.

222 However, it is worth noting that Jón Þórðarson's manuscript is not among those that are known to have been patronised by Magnús digri.

223 Loth (1977, 16) suggests that Magnús Þórólfsson may have passed it from Þorsteinn Björnsson to Jón Þórðarson when he left the employ of the former and entered that of Magnús digri. However, it is also possible that, considering his genealogical connections, Magnús digri was the link between this network of scribes and literary patrons and the familial one identified already.

rate, it is possible to draw some broad conclusions about how 589a–f was used in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which may shed some light on its original fifteenth-century context.

The individuals discussed here were not closely related but do seem to have been part of a wider elite familial network that shared prominent ancestors. Hannes Ólafsson and Helgi Vigfússon could both trace their ancestry to the daughters of Margrét Vigfúsdóttir and Þorvarður Loftsson (Ragnhildur and Guðríðr respectively). Hannes was also connected, via his grandmother Guðrún Björnsdóttir's second marriage, to the powerful *hirðstjóri* and *lögmaður* Eggert Hannesson and thus moved in the orbit of the *höfuðból* Saurbær á Rauðasandi. This manor came to be the home of Eggert's daughter Ragnheiður and her husband, the *sýslumaður* Magnús prúði Jónsson, and from them are descended several of the manuscript's subsequent owners/readers who resided further south, namely the siblings Henrik Þórðarson and Guðrún Þórðardóttir, and then Björn Þorleifsson. The manuscript also seems to have been passed among scribes (Magnús Þórólfsson and Jón Þórðarson) who were both at various points in the employ of Magnús digri, another of Ragnheiður Eggertsdóttir and Magnús prúði Jónsson's descendants who may have been the missing link between this familial network and the manuscript's seventeenth-century copies. Other individuals connected to 589a–f have regional ties if not genealogical ones. Both Jón Sigmundsson and Brandur Jónsson had positions in Kjalarnes, very close to the residences of Hannes Ólafsson (Hvammur in Kjós) and Þórður Henriksson (Innrihólmur) and slightly south of Hvítárvellir where Helgi Vigfússon was based. Finally, Magnús Bjarnason lived at Lærubakka á Landi in Rangárvallarsýsla, very near to where Björn Þorleifsson grew up (Oddi).

It seems that 589a–f was passed around quite fluidly. It does not seem to have been handed down from one generation to the next or held in any individual's collection for a long time. Rather, it seems to have moved laterally across near-contemporary households with familial and/or regional ties.[224] Its transmission history lines up neatly with the eighteenth-century description of the *kvöldvaka*, which I quoted in Chapter 1.3.4. It is worth repeating this description in the current context: Eggert Ólafsson and Bjarni Pálsson wrote that, "hvis Huusbonden er en Elsker af Historier, laaner han hos Naboerne eller andre gode Venner, saa mange Sagar, som han kan være forsynet med for heele Vinteren; og herved bliver den Arbeidende munter og vaagen" (Eggert Ólafsson and Bjarni Pálsson, *Reise igiennem Island, I,* p. 47) ("if the head of the household is a devotee of sagas, he will borrow

224 Of course, it should be pointed out that marginal notes by members of different households may in some cases have resulted from the movement of the individuals concerned rather than movement of the manuscript itself.

from his neighbours or other good friends a sufficient number of sagas to last him the winter and in this way the workers are kept contented and wakeful") (Driscoll 1997, 40). This is perhaps what was happening in the case of 589a–f, which does seem to have been passed between "neighbours and other good friends" and which, considering its size, presumably contained a "sufficient number of sagas" to provide entertainment for a winter. It also lines up the 'medium theory' expressed by the texts themselves.

This conclusion is supported by the artefactual evidence. As discussed in Chapter 2, 589a–f was produced relatively frugally and contains only very sparing ornamentation. Although the production of any manuscript required a considerable investment of time and resources and would always have been a status symbol, this one is particularly unadorned when compared to others that are roughly contemporary and have similar contents – that is, mostly *fornaldarsögur*, *riddarasögur*, and some *Íslendingasögur*. AM 152 fol, for example, contains many of the same texts but is much larger and considerably more decorated, although, as Ármann Jakobsson (2012, 25) notes, it is more of an exception than the rule. Having said that, some less expensively produced codices are somewhat more ornamented than 589a–f: AM 571 4to (1500–1550) and AM 556a–b 4to (Eggertsbók, 1475–1499) both have coloured initials with larger and more ornamented ones sometimes marking the beginning of a new text. A few can also be found in AM 577 4to and AM 579 4to, and many elaborate (although not coloured) initials can be found in AM 510 4to. These manuscripts might be said to represent a middle ground between the magisterial AM 152 fol and the "workaday" (Loth 1977, 7) 589a–f and 586. The latter are joined in their lack of ornamentation by GKS 2845 4to, AM 343a 4to, AM 471 4to, and Holm perg 7 fol. We cannot draw firm conclusions from these observations, but as I suggested in Chapter 1.4, they may suggest that the texts contained within the manuscript were considered more important than the physical beauty of the book itself. The creation of 589a–f would have certainly been an expensive endeavour. However, the patron's priority seems to have been the manuscript's length, perhaps because it was for the kind of consumption later described by Eggert Ólafsson and Bjarni Pálsson.

Due to a lack of evidence, there is comparably less to say about the life of 586, which does not seem to have been passed around as many people. It seems likely (although it is unprovable) that the two manuscripts were made for the same patrons, since they were written by the same two scribes, look very similar, and it seems likely that one of the same exemplars was used for both. The two manuscripts' transmission histories provide further evidence for their production in similar contexts: by the end of the seventeenth century, 586 was owned by an individual (Bjarni Bjarnason) with relatively close familial ties to several of the

known readers of 589a–f, which might suggest both manuscripts were originally produced for and transferred among members of that same family.

The difference in the afterlives of the two manuscripts suggests that 589a–f was read by a wider audience than 586, although the substantial erasures in the latter do evidence that it was read by people other than those who wrote it. There seem two likely reasons for its lesser circulation.[225] The first in fact relates to those erasures: three in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, which correspond with where we would expect three extramarital sex scenes to be found, and the lewd closing lines of *Vilmundar saga viðutan*. The erasures provide further evidence of the potentially controversial nature of the former text and are indicative of the generally less aristocratic quality of 586 compared to 589a–f. The fact that *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* (the *fornaldarsaga* most heavily-inflected by romance) was one of the most enduringly popular of the legendary sagas (O'Connor 2009, 375) suggests that the more aristocratic texts of 589a–f suited the tastes of later readers more than those in 586 did. The second reason is more practical and relates to 586's lacunæ: it has a total of twelve leaves missing, cutting off large portions of many of its texts. It is impossible to say when the missing folios were lost, but if it was at an early stage, the whole manuscript may have lost appeal to anyone other than later antiquarians. This may be why Bjarni Bjarnason had 586 in his possession. He was a learned man employed by Árni Magnússon's colleague Páll Vídalín and is named by Árni as a source for five other manuscripts: three law books,[226] a fifteenth-century fragment of *Ektors saga* (AM 567 XIII 4to), and one of the oldest manuscripts of *Breta sögur* and *Trójumanna saga* (AM 573 4to).[227] Bjarni was, moreover, not unfamiliar with controversy and seems to have harboured an interest in the occult: in his youth, he was expelled from school for writing *galdrastafir* (magical staves) (*ÍÆ, I* 1948, 158–159),[228] and there is an eighteenth-century folk story about the troubles he had with magic as an adult in the Vestfirðir (*Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri, I*, 1862, pp. 539–541). It may be that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, 586 lacked the communal appeal that 589a–f had and instead attracted the more niche interests of this small-scale collector.

225 While the limited marginalia comparable to that of 589a–f suggests that 586 was not passed around as frequently, it is certainly possible that the manuscript was enjoyed and cherished in private settings.

226 AM 135 4to (1340–1525), AM 160 4to (1540–1560), and Lbs 65 4to (1640–1655).

227 Bjarni Bjarnason has also been identified as a reader of AM 122b fol (1375–1399), which contains *Sturlunga saga*, *Árna saga biskups*, and *Guðmundar saga biskups* (Loth 1977, 23).

228 According to Páll Eggert Ólason this happened in 1651 whereas the folk story puts it in 1664 (*Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri, I*, 1862, p. 539)

To conclude, it seems likely that both manuscripts were produced in western Iceland for members of the secular elite, possibly with some connections to the family that would go on to acquire the *höfuðból* Saurbær á Rauðasandi. 589a–f seems to have been passed around several households across the west and then south of Iceland and, I would argue, was probably used in communal forms of entertainment. It is not possible at this stage to identify any particularly likely candidates for the manuscripts' late fifteenth-century patrons; neither tracing the ancestry of their later owners or the ownership of the manor associated with some of them seem to be particularly promising lines of enquiry. Although the late medieval Icelandic aristocracy were a relatively closed off group, the families within it were not distinct or fixed units, and the high degree of intermarriage that happened between them makes it possible to trace the ancestry of most members of the late medieval and early modern elites to one or more major power players of the fifteenth century – the kinds of people discussed in the first part of this chapter, such as Björn ríki Þorleifsson and his wife Ólöf ríka Loftsdóttir, or her brother Þorvarður Loftsson and his wife Margrét Vigfúsdóttir. Moreover, the manor, Saurbær á Rauðasandi, was caught up in a protracted inheritance dispute during the fifteenth century between different branches of this interconnected elite – Guðmundur ríki Arason and his descendants on the one hand and Björn ríki Þorleifsson and his descendants on the other.[229] The 1522 raid on Núpur by Ari Andrésson in which a Jón Ketilsson participated was just one moment of crisis in what had already been a decades-long quarrel. Thus, if we were to make a (very large) leap and assume that the manuscripts had some affiliation with Saurbær á Rauðasandi, it would be difficult to say much about who exactly may have initiated their production. With only a few pieces of evidence of what was probably a complex transmission process, the patrons of 589a–f and 586 must, for now, remain anonymous. The prominent fifteenth-century individuals named above may, however, be taken to represent the general milieu that they were from and representative of their general concerns.

8.3 Connecting Text, Book, and Context

In the final section of this chapter, I will connect those general concerns to the previous chapters' literary and media-focussed analyses of the manuscripts' texts. The focus will be on 589a–f, since it has been examined in considerably more depth and seems to have been more widely circulated, but mention will also be

229 A history of the manor is provided in Kjartan Ólafsson 2019. On the wider dispute, see Arnór Sigurjónsson 1975, 60–294, 349–350, 460–461; Orning 2013, 237–243; 2017, 321–329.

made of 586. I will begin with the international political context before moving on to discuss more local concerns – specifically these manuscripts' role in constructing class identities. However, since some work has already been done in this area, I will focus a larger part of the discussion on the political implications of these manuscripts' 'vocality' and explore their aural reception.

8.3.1 The International Situation

These manuscripts' patrons were clearly invested in the royal power structure of their time and seem to have identified strongly with their kings in Denmark. They likely saw themselves reflected in these sagas' royal protagonists since, on a local level, they functioned as 'quasi-kings' themselves. But since they also derived much of their status from their close relationship with their kings in Denmark, they probably also identified with those characters who elevate themselves through royal service (e.g. Bósi and Vilmundr). Moreover, both manuscripts feature flattering portrayals of the Danish royal house, although this is more the case in 589a–f than 586. As argued in Chapter 5.3, one of the overall effects of the former is to reimagine Europe's political and cultural geography to paint pre-Christian Denmark in a particularly favourable light.

The patrons' endorsement of Scandinavia's post-1397 political situation emerges most clearly in the intertextual dynamics of *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* and *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*. As discussed in Chapter 4.2.1, the eponymous hero of *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* takes a mocking stance on *Völsunga saga*. This has political implications since the Völsung legend served an ideological purpose. The only surviving manuscript of this saga, NKS 1845 4to, integrates the legend into that of Ragnarr loðbrók (via Sigurðr and Brynhildr's daughter Áslaug who goes on to marry Ragnarr) and thus into a genealogy that led all the way to the Norwegian King Haraldr hárfagri from whom the Norwegian kings (up until the death of Olaf) traced their ancestry. Many prominent Icelanders identified with this lineage: Haukur Erlendsson (d. 1334) traced his own descent back to Ragnarr and Áslaug and thus considered himself genealogically as well as politically connected to the Norwegian crown (*Hauksbók*, 1882–1896, pp. 68–69; Mitchell 1991, 124; Rowe 2012, 236–238). Thus, in mocking and displacing *Völsunga saga*, *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* undermines the ideological position that saga seems to have been employed to support – that is, political identification with the Norwegian monarchs. The movement of political allegiance south from Norway to Denmark is reflected in the father-son dynamic of *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*'s pairing with *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*; read side-by-side, they construct a narrative of development in which the old interpretation of the past is put aside in the

former's Norway for the reconstruction of something new in the latter's Denmark – the centre of power for the Kalmar kings.

The same dynamic is present in the text which precedes this pair in 589a–f: *Hákonar þáttr Hárekssonar*. This tale tells of a Norwegian farmer who squanders his father's wealth and flees from Norway in embarrassment. He eventually returns to his position after befriending King Sveinn Úlfsson of Denmark who provides him with training in various crafts and sends him to England where his skills are so great he is accused of witchcraft. Much like Göngu-Hrólfr, Hákon advances himself not in his home country of Norway but at the Danish court, which is rich and technologically advanced. It is significant that the court in question is that of Sveinn Úlfsson (*c.* 1019–1076), the first monarch in the House of Estridsen, which would eventually produce the Kalmar Union. Sveinn is also positively depicted in 586's *Króka-Refs saga*: Refr has an antagonistic relationship with the Norwegian King Haraldr Sigurðsson but finds refuge in Denmark with Sveinn Úlfsson who recognises his worth, praises his actions, and rewards him with land.

As we might expect, these manuscripts' patrons seem to have had a correspondingly ambivalent view of the English. In *Hákonar þáttr Hárekssonar*, the English are wholly outshone by a Scandinavian craftsman. The same dynamic is also present within *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* (as discussed in Chapter 5.3.2) and on a cross-textual level in the contrast between that saga's Denmark and the England of *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra* and *Ála flekks saga* (see Chapter 3.2.3 and Chapter 3.2.4). An interest in (and comparable attitude towards) England is also attested in 586 by the unflattering stories about the English King William II (*Af Vilhjálmi bastarði*) and his brother Robert (*Roðberts þáttr*). This can be understood against the backdrop of the *skreið* trade and the variable relationship that Icelanders had with the English. This trade context may also help explain the presence of some characters who have tense relations with kings: the freewheeling ethic of characters like Sturlaugr, Bósi, and Vilmundr may well have appealed to an elite who, although identifying with their king, still saw themselves as independent political actors.

The importance of overseas trade to these manuscripts' patrons is clear from the overall positive assessment of traders. The one moral line drawn by the otherwise callously violent Sturlaugr starfsami is that he does not kill merchants. Correspondingly, in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, killing merchants is the sign of one's evil character: the first antagonist encountered by Hrólfr is the Viking Jólgeirr who "for illa med [her]skap sinum rænti buþegna ok kaupmenn" (589f, fol. 17^{r}, ll. 21–22; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 6, p. 256) (plundered ruthlessly and robbed farmers and merchants). The transfer of goods is central to the relationship between Króka-Refr and King Sveinn, who tells Refr: "Nú af þ*ui* at þú hefer vorn fund sótt – hef*er* þú *og* þ*a*nn v*arnin*g flutt i l*a*nd vórt, s*em* oss er nu ecki v*m* hrid miög audf*ein*gur sak*er* vór[*r*]a fiand-m*anna*, s*em* e*r* suordr t*il* reida á skipu*m* vóru*m* – þá m*unu* ver v*id*

ydr taka" (*Króka-Refs saga*, p. 37) (Now because you have sought to meet with us and because you have brought these goods to our land which are not easily obtained because of our enemies, like walrus hide ropes for our ships, we will take you in).[230] For Refr, having access to valuable goods and the resources to transport them is a ticket to medieval high-society, a sentiment which likely reflected the views of prominent fifteenth-century Icelanders who were involved in the *skreið* trade.

This trade context is also surely reflected in the closing description of England in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, which provides an overview of England's main towns and exports. It has no known source but probably reflects, as Jacob Wittmer Hartmann (1912, 77) notes, the "common knowledge of the educated classes" during what is sometimes referred to as Iceland's 'English Age'.

> Eingland er kallad gagnaudigazt af uestr londum, þui þar er blasen allr malmr, ok þar fellr vin ok huette, ok allz kýns sædi ma þar hafa, er þar ok klæda gerd ok marghattadir uefir meir en i audrum staudum, lunduna borg er þar haufud stadr ok kruta borg þar er skanna borg ok hominga borg brandfurdu borg jork ok uincestr ok margir adrir stader ok borgir er her eru eigi nefndar (589f, fol. 36^{r}, ll. 7–11; *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, 1830, ch. 37, p. 360)
>
> (England is called the most productive of the western lands, because all sorts of metals are worked there, and vines and wheat grow, and all kinds of cereals. There are more varieties of cloth and textiles woven here than in other places. London is the main town, and then Krutaborg. There is also Skannaborg, Homíngaborg, Brandfurðuborg, York, Winchester and many towns and cities which are not named here.)[231]

To conclude, the international perspective of these manuscripts' patrons is in keeping with the realities of Iceland's political situation in the fifteenth century. They reflect an elite who seem to have strongly identified with the Kalmar kings and wanted to distance themselves from the old elite who had looked to those of Norway. This elite seems to have seen themselves as both the loyal subordinates of the Danish kings and independent political actors (or 'quasi-kings') in their own right. Thus, complicating the generally positive presentation of kingship runs an uncourtly voice of dissent, which surely reflects the interests of an elite who, in defiance of their king, were in regular contact with the English.

230 This occurs during the seventh lacuna of 586 so I have quoted from Pálmi Pálsson's edition.
231 589f's version of the description features some rather strange renderings of English place names: Krutaborg, Skannaborg, and Homíngaborg, which are elsewhere Kantaraborg (Canterbury), Skarðaborg (Scarborough) and Helsingjaborg (Hastings).

8.3.2 The Domestic Situation

Next, we move to matters of more local concern, specifically how these manuscripts functioned to support the local political agendas of their patrons. Not only does the interest in legitimate power-acquisition function to endorse the royal status quo, but it likely also chimed with the domestic concerns of the manuscripts' patrons who were probably involved in (or at least proximate to) the dispute over the inheritance of Guðmundur ríki Arason, which included Saurbær á Rauðasandi. This struggle would have made them keenly interested in the question of how to legitimately acquire territory and meant they would have had something to gain from promoting narratives that celebrated the defeat of those who were perceived as having done so illegitimately. Individuals on both sides of the conflict likely saw themselves as the rightful owners of the contested lands in western Iceland and surely saw their attempts to either retain or recover them reflected in the sagas of 589a–f and 586.[232]

As well as tapping into these inter-elite politics, the sagas also would have helped maintain the high status of the elite by providing ideological support to the prevailing power structure. This aspect of these texts has been discussed by several scholars so will not be dwelled on for long here. Of particular relevance is the work of Jürg Glauser (1983, 229–233), Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir (2012, 242–244; 2013, 107– 124), and Henric Bagerius (2009, 91–199) among others, and the following paragraphs' summary is indebted at various points to their insights.[233]

589a–f and 586 construct an aristocratic culture which is characterised by particular looks, skills, and manners. Central to this culture is a preference for alliance over violence: power is acquired through coalition building (via marriage or sworn-brotherhood) with members of the same social class while violence is directed against either monstrous non-humans, demon-worshipping pagans, or figures who otherwise threaten the social order. This creates a powerful sense of 'us vs. them', which enhances and justifies the closed-off aristocratic community created by these various forms of alliance. As Barnes (2000, 277) writes of the 'indigenous' *riddarasögur*, but which also applies to the *fornaldarsögur* I have discussed, "[t]he ultimate aim [. . .] is the acquisition, extension, and legitimization of power" – specifically upper-class male power. In support of this aim, these texts construct a set of ideal gendered behaviour patterns: the preference for alliance among elite men is mirrored by a model of elite femininity that is characterised by

232 Orning (Orning 2013, 243–258) discusses how this feud is reflected in the texts associated with Möðruvellir fram during the time of Margret Vigfúsdóttir.

233 See also Bandlien 2005, pp. 280–293; Barnes 2000, 276–283; Roby 2020, 48–57.

chastity and passivity. The boundaries of this aristocratic class are drawn by the various depictions of those who fall outside it. The lower classes do not partake in the same culture as the elite, despite sometimes being close to it: their ugliness, vulgarity, and lack of learning contrasts the aristocracy's beauty, refinement, and intelligence. Any relationship that crosses these class lines (between a noble hero and a lower-class woman, or vice versa) generally provokes either punishment or ridicule. If the relationship is sexual, it is temporary and does not produce any legitimate heirs. By the end of all the sagas, elite men marry elite women, and the lower classes are divided into either their opponents, who are subject to violence, or their allies, who are rewarded with some upwards social movement, although not total integration into the elite itself.

These gendered class dynamics corresponded with the political situation of fifteenth-century Iceland. Much like the sagas' protagonists, members of the elite in this period distinguished themselves from the lower classes through outward signs, used marriage as a mechanism for amassing and consolidating power, and negotiated with powerful international actors. The copying and subsequent oral dissemination of these texts can therefore be seen to have two broad effects: firstly, they would have inculcated this sense of identity – along with its corresponding values and behaviours – among the elite themselves; and secondly, they would have functioned to endorse the status quo beyond that elite by showing how the stability of human society depends on the superior skill and worth of its most powerful members. And just as they lay out what elite behaviour should look like, they also demonstrate how the lower classes should support them and what the consequences might be if they do not. The enduring popularity of 589a–f (the more aristocratic of the two manuscripts) suggests that this vision of the past, along with its class and gender politics, also spoke to the elite of later centuries who continued to circulate, promote, and identify with it.

But what has been discussed less than the identity-forming function of these texts, is *how* they form identities or how they generate cultural memories. What makes them take hold in the minds of communities and individuals? What makes them effective shapers of politics, society, and culture? This is where further consideration of the medium may have a role. In the final part of this chapter I will, therefore, return to the previous chapter's media-focus and explore the political implications of these manuscripts' 'vocality' – their status as both 'written' and 'oral'. I will begin by briefly discussing the role of literacy before turning to the slightly more nebulous, but arguably more interesting, subject of orality.

The appeal of the written word is quite obvious. In medieval culture, literacy had high status: it was the preserve of learned men and imbued with the authority of the church. Much like historical writing today, which is "bounded by a set of limiting disciplinary rules" (Confino 2011, 43) these texts' written status and the con-

straints that status placed on them would have been (in part) what allowed them to make claims to historical truth. For learned members of the audience, this effect would have been enhanced by references to Latin learning and other historical works, which position the texts in these manuscripts as participants in the existing canon of Christian learning. For the rest of the audience, the materiality of the books and the stability of their texts (in comparison to oral ones) would have had a similar function. As DuBois (2014, 61) writes, "cross-cultural ethnographic examination of the uses of reading and writing in oral societies illustrates powerfully the tremendous importance written sources can have in the repertoires of even predominantly illiterate people, particularly in a culture in which reading and writing hold high prestige". Fifteenth-century Iceland would, of course, be one such culture.

What is less obvious in light of this elite ideology is these manuscripts' debt to material circulating in oral tradition. Some reasons for this were discussed in the previous chapter. A key component of its appeal would have been its entertainment value, with entertainment being one of the central tenets of these texts' 'medium theory', and, as Glauser (1983, 224) argues, high entertainment value surely enhanced their political efficacy. The 'oral materials' may also have appealed to the secular magnates because they did not always fit within clerical standards of acceptability: they may have helped the individuals that sponsored these manuscripts distinguish themselves and their literature from (what they perhaps perceived to be) the effeminate and boring class of clerics. But it is also worth thinking about the effect this material may have had on the non-elite population too, since they likely formed a large portion of these texts' audiences when they were read out loud. These would have been the same groups of people associated with the 'unlearned nonsense' that these texts define themselves in opposition to. Much like Vilmundr's mother, they would have circulated their own stories about *álfar* and *tröll* – the kinds of stories collected by later folklorists and which formed a part of many medieval Icelanders' worldviews. It is worth asking, beyond increasing their entertainment value, what impact might these sagas' 'orality' have had on them?

I would argue that, beyond increasing entertainment value, these texts' proximity to orality and their distancing of the written word also formed part of their memory-generating appeal; that while their 'literacy' gave them high status, their 'orality' gave them familiarity – or, as Erll puts it, "referentiality". She writes that in order for literary texts (i.e. modern works of fiction) to generate "mnemonic authenticity" and effectively shape cultural memory, they must "be able to resonate with a memory culture's horizons of meaning, its (narrative) schemata, and its existing images of the past" (Erll 2011, 165). This may be, in part, what these texts' references to oral traditions were doing; they were engaging with the general population's "horizons of meaning" and making the narratives feel authentic in a way that the texts' literary aspects could not. A story with familiar elements

may well have been, to the general populace, more authoritative or meaningful than one with purely unfamiliar written sources and references. Like the characters in these sagas, ordinary Icelanders lived in a world where, quoting Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (2003, 149) again, there were "supernatural beings in the woods, the mountains and the lakes". And to those people – being read to from a book that they themselves could not read – what might have distinguished these stories from the other stories that were read to them (also from books by educated men, i.e. clerics) was their entertainment value and proximity to stories circulating in the community anyway. It may be that through the manuscripts' participation in and 'performance' of oral traditions, its elite ideological viewpoints were impressed upon the wider populace as well as those among its upper echelons.

It is also worth dwelling on the fact that supernatural empowerment had long been used by the secular elite as a means of solidifying their claims to power. An obvious example is Snorri Sturluson's investment in the 'cultural capital' of pre-Christian mythology (specifically Óðinn), which formed a central part of his political identity (Wanner 2008; Viðar Pálsson 2008, 129–131). Another example is Óðinn's patronage of the Völsungs, the genealogical significance of which has already been discussed. It may be, therefore, that in these texts we find an attempt to create a network of otherworldly figures on whom the new aristocracy could base their power, which were not tied to either the old elite (who had looked to Óðinn) or the ideology and literature of the church. This seems to be most explicitly the case in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, but it extends to many of the other texts too where the heroes receive some kind of magical, often non-human, sponsorship.

Moreover, the capacity for genuine belief and the idea that these texts had "referentiality" should not be reserved for exclusively the non-elite: although at something of a remove, it seems likely that the upper classes also had an interest in the folk beliefs more commonly associated with the illiterate population, which they selectively interpreted in relation to their own more learned worldviews.[234] This seems to have been the case in later centuries at least: in the early modern period, many Icelandic scholars (including men of the church) debated the existence and nature of beings like the *álfar*, *tröll*, and giants. As Terry Gunnell (2018) demonstrates, there was not one agreed position on these matters, rather each scholar drew on the sources available to them – both oral and written – to try and make some sense of them on their own. One notable example is the scholar Þormóður

234 The importance of balancing studies of 'folk belief' with a consideration of 'folk disbelief' and 'educated belief' is highlighted by Roper 2018.

Torfason (d. 1719) who wrote, for instance, on the question of whether or not *álfar* could have children with humans as was commonly believed (Gunnell 2018, 205).[235]

This learned discourse did not just apply to Iceland's 'small gods' but also to the practice of magic. This was, in part, a product of intellectual currents emanating from the continent in the later medieval period, that saw the emergence of a learned discourse on 'natural magic', which sought to manipulate the occult virtues of nature to achieve various effects (Bartlett 2008, 20–23; Collins 2015, 335–337; Kieckhefer 1994, 818–819). This discourse was somewhat controversial, and some medieval scholars saw no difference between 'natural magic' and 'demonic magic' (Bailey 2015, 366–371; Kieckhefer 1994, 820). Little work has been done tracing this debate in Iceland, and, as Mitchell (2019, 138) observes, a clear-cut distinction between the two kinds of magic is not articulated explicitly in medieval Nordic sources more generally.[236] Nevertheless, an awareness of learned magic is very clearly articulated in the 'indigenous' *riddarasögur*, which feature a positively coded conceptualisation of magic which is distinctly learned and aristocratic (Matyushina 2006; Johanterwage 2006). Pérús, who appears in *Klári saga* and two short tales in 586, arguably represents a similar understanding of magic: his skills are learned, occult, and clearly class exclusive (Marteinn Helgi Sigurðsson 2021, 174).

And while sources on late medieval learned magic may be lacking, the tenor of Iceland's early modern witch trials provide hints at the earlier situation. In Iceland, the figure of the 'witch' had a uniquely learned character: a large proportion of accused witches were men, many of whom were members of the elite, and they often enjoyed a high degree of popular support (Hastrup 1990a, 386, 398–399). The foundation of their learning was, however, traditional orally-transmitted knowledge: poetry, spells, runes, and *galdrastafir*. These were, in Kirsten Hastrup's (1990a, 390) words, "generally transmitted from one generation to the next without mediation", although they would occasionally enter the written record in *galdrabœkur* (magic books), written runes, or (arguably) texts like *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*. For early modern witch-hunters this learning was wholly demonic in character, but this seems to have been a minority position held more by particularly zealous figures of authority who had been educated abroad than the wider population, many members of the secular and clerical elites included (Hastrup 1990a, 392–397).

Interestingly, a heavy concentration of early modern witch trials occurred in the Vestfirðir and several people associated with magic in this period (on both

235 On debates about giants, see Kuusela 2021, 473–476.

236 He also comments that "far too little attention has been paid" to the concept of 'natural magic' in Scandinavia (Mitchell 2019, 144).

sides of the debate) were from the same circles as those among whom 589a–f and 586 were circulating. I have already discussed Bjarni Bjarnason, who was expelled from school for writing *galdrastafir*. Contemporary to Bjarni were individuals less inclined to magic. In particular, Páll Björnsson (1621–1706), another grandson of Magnús prúði and Ragnheiður, was a prominent witch-hunter and man of learning who had been educated in Copenhagen (*ÍÆ*, *IV* 1950, 111–112). He wrote a treatise called *Character Bestiæ* in which he made reference to Heinrich Kramer's *Malleus maleficarum* (a popular tract on demonology published in 1487) and described *galdr* as a branch of satanic learning (Hastrup 1990a, 394; Þorvaldur Thoroddsen 1898, 49–50). Páll was supported in his crusade by his half-brother Eggert Björnsson (1612–1681), a *sýslumaður* who inherited Saurbær á Rauðasandi (*ÍÆ*, *I* 1948, 314). Although neither Páll nor Eggert have been associated with 589a–f and 586, and likely would not have been very interested in them, they were part of the same familial network that is outlined above and closely related to individuals who we know owned the manuscripts: they were the first cousins once removed of Bjarni Bjarnason, the first cousins of Þórður Henriksson, and the maternal uncles of Björn Þorleifsson. They thus give some insight into the intellectual climate within which the manuscripts were circulating: it was one in which magic was very much alive and a hotly contested issue.

The post-Reformation evidence cannot, of course, be taken to wholly represent the intellectual conditions of the late fifteenth century when the manuscripts were produced. Indeed, Hastrup (1990a, 397–398) argues that the sharpening of moral standards that came with the Reformation was a necessary precondition for the witch trials to arise in the first place. However, the uniqueness of the Icelandic trials would suggest that before the seventeenth century, there was already an emerging tradition of learned magic that was in dialogue with folk belief, just one that did not yet arouse the suspicions of authorities (Hastrup 1990a, 385). There are clear resonances between the learned debates of the early modern period and the anxieties about the representation of magic which are expressed by the manuscripts' *apologiæ* and the introductions to Busla's curses. It is unlikely that the controversies of later centuries sprung out of thin air; their seeds must have been sown somewhere, and that process may be what we are witnessing in these texts.

In fact, more than just reflecting an early stage in these debates, these manuscripts may well have been one of many locations for their development. As Guðrún Nordal (2001) has argued, the twelfth-century manuscripts of *Snorra Edda*, which positioned orally transmitted knowledge about skaldic verse and its pagan imagery alongside the study of *grammatica*, functioned like modern textbooks in Iceland's early educational settings and paved the way for vernacular prose writing of later centuries. Although operating in a considerably less formal setting, the manuscripts under discussion here also warrant being understood as active texts (if not text-

books). The above attempt to localise them suggested that 589a–f at least was read and engaged with throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It therefore would have continued to be an active shaper of oral traditions and cultural memory beyond its original creation context (Glauser 1996). And indeed, in his discussion of early modern treatises on *álfar* and *tröll*, Gunnell (2018) argues that the surprisingly high degree of sympathy that many Icelandic intellectuals had for folk belief resulted from the country's unique farm-based social structure, in which different classes of society lived side by side and frequently came together for evening entertainment. He argues Þormóður Torfason's interest in these matters resulted from the fact that he grew up in "a world in which the church's academic vision of the unseen was in regular conflict with the rooted perceptions of popular culture, perceptions shaped by old beliefs and new experiences, reinforced by regular winter evening storytelling sessions in Icelandic farmhouses" (Gunnell 2018, 204).[237]

Judging by later observers, these sessions were lively affairs where people other than just the storyteller would speak. In the early nineteenth century, Ebenezer Henderson wrote that during evening readings,

> [t]he reader is frequently interrupted, either by the head, or by some of the more intelligent members of the family, who make remarks on various parts of the story, and propose questions, with a view to exercise the ingenuity of the children and servants. (Henderson, *Iceland, I*, 1818, ch. 9, p. 367)

Around the same time, Eiríkur Magnússon also noted that during readings, "[t]he handmaidens, as well as everybody else [. . .] make their laconic remarks as the story develops on the character of this or that hero, and on the tragic as well as the comic interest of the whole situation" (quoted in Driscoll 1997, 45). Although these observations relate to more modern practices, there is no reason to assume that audiences of the late medieval period were any less inclined to interrupt those who were reading to discuss the stories that they were being told. In fact, O'Connor (2005, 167) argues that this kind of participative storytelling context may have necessitated the writing of the *apologiæ* to begin with, which (in his words) were aimed at "silencing noisy sceptics". The content of the *apologiæ* suggest that such audience interventions would have extended beyond passing comments about the stories and their heroes to matters of some weight, such as their truth-value and relationship to church teachings.

That this evening entertainment may have had intellectual and/or religious ramifications is suggested by the concerns more conservatively minded clerics expressed about it. As Driscoll (1997, 14) points out, Reformation pioneer and Bishop

237 See also Hastrup 1990b, 191–192.

of Hólar Guðbrandur Þorláksson viewed it with suspicion. He took most issue with the recitation of poetry and songs but also described sagas and *ævintýr* as a kind of "Saurlifje med Ordunum" (Guðbrandur Þorláksson, *Sa store catechismus*, 1691, p. 155) ("fornication by word") (Driscoll 1997, 14). Interestingly, Guðbrandur was also proximate to the network within which we know 589a–f was circulating: his daughter Kristín was married to *sýslumaður* Ari Magnússon of Ögur, a son of Magnús prúði and the grandfather of Magnús digri (*ÍÆ*, *II* 1949, 114–115). It may be, therefore, that the sagas in 589a–f were precisely the kinds of texts that had aroused Guðbrandur's suspicions.

But despite the hostility of people like him, popular forms of oral and text-based entertainment endured for many centuries. This is presumably in large part because of the value they had for those among the secular elite who sponsored their production and facilitated their performance. With manuscripts such as 589a–f and 586, they could capitalise on the high status of the written word: they could appease the clerics and put forward an acceptable account of history. But by also incorporating into their texts material from oral traditions and then having them read out loud, they could also participate in the oral sphere. I would argue that this dual-mediality gave these texts broad appeal and helped them shape cultural memory across different parts of Icelandic society. As a result, it also created a space within which different kinds of knowledge could intermingle – in which oral traditions could be elevated to the sphere of literature/history and the secular elite could (on their own terms) share in the folk beliefs of the general population. Moreover, it seems likely that the performances prompted by the manuscripts in the decades and centuries that followed their creation facilitated further interaction between these two spheres and may have contributed to the learned discourses on folk belief and magic that arose in the written records of the early modern period.

8.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided some answers to the question of *why* 589a–f and 586 were produced, for which it was first necessary to identify who they were produced for. While it has not been possible to identify specific individuals, it seems likely that the manuscripts were created in the west of Iceland under the instigation of members of the late fifteenth-century secular elite – possibly some ancestors of the family that came to own the *höfuðból* Saurbær á Rauðasandi from the mid-sixteenth century onwards. The power of this elite was based on their ownership of property, which they would have amassed and maintained through strategic marriage alliances with other members of their class, and they would have

had a large number of people working on their estates upon whom their revenues relied. The most powerful among them may have been royal officers who derived additional income and prestige from their proximity to the kings in Denmark. They would have been aware of, and possibly involved in, the conflicts between the Danish crown and the English over access to Icelandic fish in addition to domestic conflicts over inheritance – specifically that associated with Guðmundur ríki Arason. Although high-ranking members of the church were drawn from the same economic class and the same families, the clerics had their own institutional identity and economic power base that separated them from the secular magnates who were likely responsible for the production of 589a–f and 586.

I have argued that a key stimulus for the production of 589a–f and 586 was the desire to uphold the prevailing power structure. Both manuscripts express a clear affiliation with the Danish crown and endorse the movement of power away from Norway to Denmark. The latter is given a new legendary past in which Icelanders (at least those of the upper classes) could share, culturally if not genealogically. This culture is characterised by specific ideals of male and female behaviour that seem to have been suited to preserve the power bases of the late-medieval elite. This culture would have helped that elite both distinguish themselves from the general population and to police behaviour among their own number.

Judging by the sagas' 'medium theory' and materiality, along with later descriptions of the *kvöldvaka*, it can be extrapolated that the manuscripts this elite produced were intended to form the basis of evening entertainments. This means they would have reached a large cross section of society. Beyond the immediate function of providing entertainment for both the sponsors and their dependents, these occasions would have provided an ideal setting for the secular elite to put forward their interpretations of the past and, in doing so, promote their own class and gender politics. The manuscripts' intended wide audiences may provide some explanation for the high number of references to oral materials in these texts. I have argued that these would have enhanced the texts' 'sticking power' by increasing their appeal and likelihood of being taken up and reintegrated into those same oral contexts. The 'small gods' may well have provided some kind of supernatural endorsement of these sagas' aristocratic vision of the past. But interest in this material was likely not restricted to the general, illiterate population. Evidence from later centuries suggests that learned members of the elite were themselves interested in, and variously sympathetic to, the orally-transmitted folk beliefs of the general population among whom they lived. It seems likely that the texts in these manuscripts acted as arenas in which those beliefs could be discussed and their relationships to church-teachings could be negotiated, both for the scribes/patrons when they were originally being written and when they were vocalised in performances from the late fifteenth century and beyond.