



# LEARNING ABOUT PLACES AND PEOPLE: REPRESENTATIONS OF TRAVELLING CONNECTIONS AND COMMUNICATION SITUATION IN THE SAGAS OF ICELANDERS

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In chapter 119 of *Njáls saga* we hear about the deeds of a man called Þorkell hákr:

Þorkell hákr hafði farit utan ok framit sik í öðrum löndum. Hann hafði drepit spellvirkja austr á Jamtaskógi; síðan fór hann austr í Svíþjóð ok fór til lags með Sørkvi karli, ok herjuðu þaðan í Austrveg. En fyrir austan Bálagarðssíðu átti Þorkell at sækja þeim vatn eitt kveld; þá mœtti hann finngálkni ok varðisk því lengi, en svá lauk með þeim, at hann drap finngálknit. Þáðan fór hann austr í Aðalsýslu; þar vá hann at flugdreka.<sup>1</sup>

Þorkell has been to *Jamtaskógr* (forest of Jämtland), *Svíþjóð* (Sweden), *Austrvegr* (eastern road along the Baltics), *Bálagarðssíða* (Finnish coast), *Aðalsýsla* (western part of Estonian mainland). During his travels he has killed a robber, a strange creature being half-man, half-animal, and a flying dragon.

Although motives of fantastic nature are not as common among the sagas of Icelanders as in some other sagas, this passage is highlighted for an important reason. It demonstrates clearly the fusion between elements of a realistic tradition, and the creativity of saga writing. The text provides references to various places, which together form a setting for the saga. Within that framework the story is unfolded, and despite the concrete frames it is in this case characterised by a rather imaginary plot. Such a mixture of realistic and imaginary components is further emphasized by two moments. Þorkell bears a nickname “hákr” (which could be translated into English as “swashbuckler” and/ or “chatterbox”). The name may be regarded as a suggestion that Þorkell behaves in a boastful manner. This feature is strengthened by the statement, which follows the facts concerning his itineraries. After having killed the flying dragon, he is told to return to Sweden, then to Norway and then to Iceland where he has his heroic deeds carved over the bedcloset and on the chair before his high-seat.

What we can assume, is that the framework of toponymy is still deliberately realistic, and that place names must have added a certain realistic touch to the story that was being told. In a way, they can be regarded as the saga’s historical surface components – whether or not the



story itself is accurate. These references have a realistic effect even upon modern saga readers, which is one of the reasons why we attempt to learn more about their actual background.

The aim of this paper is to explore the background of sagas from an angle of travelling connections and communication situation. Our starting point consists of references to different places, since they bear a special meaning within the saga and its wider context. For one, they provide a setting for the story, as described above. Secondly, viewed together they form a map of the world that was known in the times of sagawriting, with its roots in the experiences of earlier times.

In the following step, matters of contacts and communication will be studied according to a similar approach, i.e. as part of the saga structure as well as of their cultural-historical surrounding. Our preliminary conclusion is that sagas can be used as sources for dynamic links between different periods of time, and as such, also in regards to the realities of the Viking Age.

## THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This paper deals with *Íslendingasögur*, the sagas of Icelanders (also called the family sagas). The label is generally used to denote a group of sagas dealing with the life of the Icelanders from the times of settlement (ca. 870-930) to around 1030.<sup>2</sup>

Such a definition is based on our modern understandings. Hence, our research material is in many ways a modern, standardised version of what could have existed in the beginning. We cannot expect clear-cut genre divisions to reflect the actual period of saga writing. Nevertheless, it is possible to distinguish between different types of stories, with *Íslendingasögur* being characterised by certain features which are not that significant in other Icelandic sagas.<sup>3</sup>

Traditional saga scholarship has been much concerned with the matter of whether sagas should be regarded as historical documents or fiction. Initially the focus was on identifying the historical realities of the period that sagas describe, and subsequently on sagas as literature. The more recent cultural-historical and anthropological studies illuminate the age of saga writing, its mentality and various social institutions. When describing the research situation by the end of the 1980s, Halldórsson has observed that:



Some scholars regard sagas as a kind of reflection of Icelandic society at the time of writing (1200-1300); others are more inclined to regard them as general cultural expressions of the same period. There are those who maintain that the spirit of the sagas is that of the Viking Age [...], while still others discover in them impulses of the Catholic Church.<sup>4</sup>

According to its critics, traditional research has not been able to explain why the sagas appear to combine features of both historical and poetic works.<sup>5</sup> Initial black-and-white oppositions have gained more shades in the course of time, and new views on saga research resist a clear separation between historical facts and fiction. A blending of perspectives can be seen in the suggestion that saga authors were making use of traditional knowledge, but also were being influenced by the literary tradition of their own time.<sup>6</sup> Scholars show that sagas can be approached from many different angles, from historical and anthropological as well literary and interpretational.<sup>7</sup> The problem is “how to integrate the approaches and thus read the sagas for what they are: simultaneously descriptions and interpretations of reality.”<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, the sagas should be understood as representing a complex process; they reflect the writer’s own reality, but contain also intertextual elements of distant discourses, from which follows that “the boundary between literary studies and linguistics, on the one hand, and anthropology and history, on the other, is not as important as is often implied.”<sup>9</sup>

Consequently, sagas can be studied from the point of view of a combined approach where an identification of textual premises is followed up by contextual studies of their possible cultural-historical relevance.

## TRAVELLING DESTINATIONS

The introductory quotation has already demonstrated how sagas locate events to different places. In general we can notice a rather impressive variety, the following is merely a fraction of some of the most common and/ or interesting places outside the sagas’ typical setting – i.e. outside Iceland and/ or Norway. Examples are accompanied by relevant saga quotations.<sup>10</sup>

One of the most popular regions along the saga characters’ travelling routes is *Danmörk*. In *Njáls saga*, ch. 30, it is named as the starting point of Gunnarr’s and Kolskeggr’s further travels. From *Danmörk* they go to east to *Smálönd*, then to *Rafali* and *Eysýsla*.<sup>11</sup> A passage from ch. 49 of *Egils saga* describes how Þórólfr and Egill set out on a journey *í Austrveg*, but



having reached *Vík* they sail south to *Jótland* and further on to *Frísland*. Finally they head back to *Danmörk*.<sup>12</sup>

References to the area called *Svíþjóð* are also common, as we already saw in the introductory passage, i.e. ch. 119 of *Njáls saga* where Þorkell hákr is said to travel east to *Svíþjóð*.<sup>13</sup> In addition to that, *Gautland* is a popular reference, often with distinctions being made between its eastern and western part, as in ch. 5 of *Njáls saga*. In the same example we hear also about the region of *Jamtaland*, a lake called *Lögr*, *Stokkssund*, *Eyrasund* and again about *Danmörk*.<sup>14</sup>

Turning our attention elsewhere, *England* is another popular destination. In most cases it occurs as a separate place name, but also rather often as a component of different compounds (e.g. in ch. 6 of *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*).<sup>15</sup> Besides *England*, also *Skotland* and *Írland* are well-known. *Laxdæla saga*, ch. 4, tells about Ketill flatnefr who reaches *Skotland*.<sup>16</sup> In an example from *Eiríks saga rauða*, ch. 1, *Írland* is mentioned alongside with *Suðreyjar*.<sup>17</sup>

Heading more to the north-west, *Grænland* and *Vinland* are among the places often referred to, both occurring in an example from ch. 48 of *Eyrbyggja saga*.<sup>18</sup> In some sagas – for example *Grænlandinga saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða* – most of the story is related to *Grænland*, which then becomes the place of settlement from where further trips are made to *Vinland*. With regard to other faraway regions, it is interesting to note that in a few cases we are told about *Bjarmaland*, an example can be found in ch. 37 of *Egils saga*.<sup>19</sup>

Focusing on a few “eastern” and “southern” references, we could point out *Garðaríki*. In *Bjarnar saga hitdælakappa*, ch. 4, it is told that Björn travelled to *Garðaríki* together with some merchants.<sup>20</sup> Travels to *Miklagarðr* in the south are mentioned more often, sometimes in connection with *Garðaríki* as in ch. 81 of *Njáls saga*.<sup>21</sup> Also *Grikkland* is mentioned a few times, for instance in ch. 19 of *Finnboga saga*.<sup>22</sup> Finally, there is the interesting case of *Serkland*, which, for example, is named in ch. 3 of *Jökuls þáttr Búasonar*.<sup>23</sup>

This limited selection shows that place names are introduced as a means of creating a physical setting for saga events. In most cases they are referred to as travelling destinations. This stands in close connection with general ways of life where travelling plays an essential role. Place names occur as signs marking the road of the heroes and locating their significant deeds.



Sometimes their function is to demonstrate personal connections, e.g. to show that a person comes from, or has been living in a certain region.

Travelling is in sagas described both as a custom and a natural part of one's career, The texts distinguish between different goals of going abroad, speaking for example about dividing time between trading voyages and raiding voyages, as in *Egils saga*, ch. 32.<sup>24</sup> Another common reason for going abroad is outlawry.

There is always certain glamour related to having been abroad, so Njál says to Gunnar (*Njáls saga*, ch. 74) that his second journey will bring him even greater honour than the first one.<sup>25</sup> It is also obvious that telling stories about one's travels and passing on that knowledge – for example in form of poems – is considered important.<sup>26</sup>

Usually merely the names are given without any extra information. The sagas that mention travels to *Vinland* make an exception to the general rule, as they include several informative details about the journey, the land and its inhabitants. Also in *Egils saga* we find some passages of more descriptive character. In ch. 14 we hear about the location of *Finnmörk*, and it is said to be a vast country with great fjords, high mountains, big lakes and huge forests.<sup>27</sup> In ch. 51 it is stated that *Norðimbraland* makes up one-fifth of *England*, that it used to be ruled by Danish kings, and that its capital is *Jórvík*.<sup>28</sup> In the same saga (ch. 46) we hear also a bit about a settlement in *Kúrland* where Egil and his companions are taken into captive.

In the following step, it is interesting to discuss the realistic and historical value of these statements. We could start with Meulengracht Sørensen's viewpoint according to which the sagas are all-inclusive in that they supply both their own text and context. He considers this the reason why there do not exist any roads to a reality outside them.<sup>29</sup>

Our claim is that the examples we have had a look at, do contain some real information in the form of the place names. Exactly these references can be regarded as signs along the roads that still show us the way out of the saga's "all-inclusive" structure. Despite the fact that the place names and the story are intertwined, the former manage to create a sense of reality as well as provide factual information. They build upon general historical and factual knowledge. In other words, they derive from a common background, which – as also Meulengracht Sørensen, in fact, has pointed out – includes topographical and geographical knowledge, knowledge of travel routes, trade, etc.<sup>30</sup>



Naturally, the geographical setting formed by the saga writers differs from the concepts of real space. It is “minimized by the distortion of distances due to the presentation of space as heroic, i.e. the space where the heroes acted.”<sup>31</sup>

In this light also the toponymy that the sagas identify becomes a much disputed topic. Our goal is not to discuss the nuances of various geographical interpretations, but to draw attention to the overall picture by providing identifications for a few examples. With certain references we can find potential parallels on the basis of modern interpretations that have been historically adjusted, whereas in other cases we can only operate with vague suggestions.

We started with *Danmörk* (Denmark) and *Svíþjóð* (Sweden). We can most likely place *Smálönd* to Sweden (Småland), and identify the lake *Lögr* as Mälaren and *Stokksund* as Norrström (both in central Sweden), and speak of *Gautland* as Gotland (Swedish mainland area called Götland). *Eysýsla*, for example, refers to the island of Ösel on the western coast of Estonia. Also *Rafali* has been placed to Estonia, more precisely to its northern part, where the name Revala used to denote a village, two parishes, a landscape and later also a town.<sup>32</sup>

These references seem to be rather unproblematic, but the question remains: how are they to be understood in the context where a 13th century saga writer depicts events of earlier times? Logically, varying understandings have been linked to the place names in different periods.

An interesting reference in this connection is *Austrvegr*, in saga-context most often understood as the travelling route along the eastern Baltic coast. On the other hand, it has been suggested that in an initial stage, the name might have referred to a wider area reaching all the way from the Eastern Baltic shorelands to Byzantium.<sup>33</sup>

A much disputed case has been *Vinland* with a possible location in the northern part of Newfoundland. *Bjarmaland*, in the north-east, remains even more mysterious. According to one theory, it lied somewhere in the White sea region.<sup>34</sup> Also the name *Serkland* has got different interpretations. It has been understood as the land of Saracenes, possibly somewhere in Southern Europe or Asia and Africa, but the precise location remains uncertain.<sup>35</sup> *Miklagarðr* and *Grikkland*, on the other hand, have been rather unproblematically identified with Constantinople and Byzantium.

When setting up a schematic map of the world that was known to the Icelanders of the Middle Ages, its outer borders would, according to Radvilavičius, run along the following lines:



western coast of North America, southwestern part of Greenland, Finnmark, The White Sea, Russia, Byzantium, the Middle East, Northern Africa, Portugal, Spain, the British Isles and Ireland.<sup>36</sup> He regards travelling experience and influences from Latin geographical tradition as the main sources of the sagas' oecumene, underlining the primary importance of practical knowledge gained during the Viking Age.<sup>37</sup> This is the conclusion reached also by other authors:

By the end of the Viking Age, their geographical knowledge became an important component in the culture of medieval Scandinavia. Information collected by several generations of vikings turned into traditional lore current in the society.<sup>38</sup>

Melnikova points out that the knowledge of the world becomes most apparent in sagas and in specialized geographical literature.<sup>39</sup> Despite influences from the West-European tradition, the oecumene of the Nordic people is different, and the world known to them includes several regions that are absent in the Latin writings.<sup>40</sup> Radvilavičius emphasizes also the fact that a major part of the sagas' place names have Norse origin.<sup>41</sup>

Viewed at from the textual perspective, going abroad and gaining experience are important aspects of the saga plot. Yet, this structure also bears historical evidence of ideas and activities of different times. The varied nature of toponymy found in sagas demonstrates the abundance of different regions and places that people in the North must have known about. On the one hand, we are here dealing with the "map" as it was known in the times of sagawriting, with knowledge having been accumulated from different sources; on the other hand, this map can be considered the empirical result of travelling experiences made during the Viking Age. Certain regions gain more attention than others, which shows that the Icelanders had either had more direct contact with these areas or simply heard more about them.

We can therefore observe dynamic links between the actual period of saga writing when one must have made conscious use of geographical data and earlier times that such knowledge – at least partly – originated from. By the 13th century certain "traffic routes" had become more remote for the Icelanders, which might explain the schematical nature of some textual references as well as the occurrence of supernatural elements.

Even if descriptive information is added, this functions merely as part of the plot and does not normally tell us anything historical about the particular culture. All in all, historical realities





are to be attached not to the event itself, but to the specific set of surface elements like the place names.

## PATTERNS OF CONNECTION AND COMMUNICATION

Earlier we outlined some of the most common motives for going abroad. In saga context, several characters can be described as travellers whose aim is to see the world:

Looking at the Icelandic saga hero [...] we find that his goals vary from one narrative to another: to seek fame and fortune, to gain recognition from a potentially hostile grandfather, to win a name for himself as a court poet or a warrior, to attain promotion above his own social level through associating with royalty, or even to do something for the benefit of his soul. Again and again, we see him taking part in dangerous, if sometimes profitable, campaigns against vikings in the Baltic or British Isles.<sup>42</sup>

On the basis of such textual premises, we can also start looking for the sagas' representations of various forms of cultural connections. The first facts are the place names themselves, mostly Norse in origin or adapted to the Norse tradition, and thus demonstrating the need to identify different regions with certain names. There are also some interesting personal names, often in form of nicknames given to the saga characters, like *Austmaðr*, *Englandsfari* etc. In this way, the sagas seem to emphasize the fact that a person comes from another country/region or has spent considerable time abroad. On the other hand, the sagas also tell about foreigners being taken captive by the Icelanders and then used as slaves. In some cases adapted versions of authentic foreign names are applied when speaking about them. Sometimes interesting cultural mixtures are recorded. In *Laxdæla saga* an Irish woman Melkorka teaches her son Ólafur to also speak Irish. Later he indeed makes use of his Irish and functions as an interpreter during his travels.<sup>43</sup>

When focusing on some more materialistic outcomes of contacts, the sagas tell us that things from other countries were considered attractive, so saga heroes often bring something along from their travels, for instance weapons.<sup>44</sup>

All the above-mentioned elements belong to the specific saga structure. As the next step, it is possible to describe their potential underlying historical realities. First of all we can assume that people from different regions came in touch with each other, or to borrow an expression from ch. 40 of *Laxdæla saga* – were willing to learn about the ways of other people.<sup>45</sup> Saga accounts of people travelling to different places can cast light upon the historical aspects of the





communication situation. On the one hand, we are dealing with the act of travelling. On the other hand, we are also looking at means of passing messages and spreading news. It is obvious that ships have an essential meaning for communication matters; they carry not only people and goods, but also messages and news, and saga passages show clear links between ships and the export and/ or import of news.<sup>46</sup> In this light the ships can be characterised as an early technical means of cross-cultural communication.

In the society that the sagas describe, information is spread by travelling. Therefore travelling equals to communication, and when sagas mention common travelling routes and repeatedly refer to certain places, this means that here we can identify also major communication routes, which enables us to analyse the understandings about the Viking Age communication situation.

On the other hand, the pattern of travelling might also connect with general humanistic concepts and ideas of the Middle Ages. According to Hermann Pálsson, in the medieval writings human life was sometimes presented as consisting of three phases: the first phase is early childhood when one identifies oneself with a certain place clearly separated from an alien world; the second starts when one goes travelling and acquires a feeling of belonging to the whole world; and finally, the third phase is the stage of true wisdom when one realises that one still remains a stranger in a foreign land.<sup>47</sup>

Pálsson describes the sagas as historical fiction – they attempt to provide an acceptable description of the past, but encourage also contemporary people to make sense of themselves.<sup>48</sup> At least partly, this “sense making” is also governed by the wish to create an understanding for the links between the past and the present. This is confirmed by Durrenberger’s observation that “the people of the time projected what they experienced in the present onto what they knew of the past in an attempt to identify the confusions of the present with the conditions of the past.”<sup>49</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

We have seen how the sagas (re)create historical reality in their own specific ways. Parts of that reality become real even for us, thanks to certain textual references. At the same time, they bear in themselves layers of old knowledge, in this case about different places and



people. The authentic nature of at least some of these concepts is proved by the Nordic runic inscriptions from the Viking Age, which is therefore an important comparative source.

Our main point has been that it is possible to use the sagas of Icelanders both in textual and cultural-historical studies, and to even consider certain aspects of sagas as still depicting the world of the vikings. In addition to accurately-recorded surface elements we have detailed descriptions of the everyday life of the people. All of that cannot simply be a creative construction of the 13th century saga writers, but documents also continuity with earlier experiences:

The family sagas were written in accordance with the knowledge of the past that was available at the time and their authors moulded that knowledge into one comprehensive picture. It is only in details and in evaluations of details that they differ from one another, never in the basic portrait of society and culture.<sup>50</sup>

Therefore, we can regard these sagas as belonging to a dynamic tradition, representing both continuity and change. Written down during the Middle Ages, they were directly related to that period's social strategies and needs, while at the same time also representing the tradition. This situation can best be determined as a dynamic continuity – as opposed to static continuity, in which phenomena continue to exist in a basically unaltered way. The concept of dynamic continuity adds a dimension of change to the overall picture and emphasizes gradual development. This is one of the ways of trying to find links between different periods of time.

According to Vésteinn Ólason, “the sagas are one of the roads that are open to us if we want to travel in our minds to this world, either to study it for its own sake or even try to view the present in the light of the past.”<sup>51</sup> As Bolli says to Snorri in *Laxdæla saga*, ch. 72, a man is thought to grow ignorant if he never learns about places outside Iceland: “Þat hefi ek lengi haft í hug mér, at ganga suðr um sinns sakar; þykkir maðr við þat fáviss verða, ef hann kannar ekki víðara en hér Ísland.”<sup>52</sup> We could end the paper by stating that a man is thought to grow ignorant if he does not see beyond his own time in order to gain an understanding about the past – a declaration that we can also make with regard to the sagas of Icelanders.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Íslenzk fornrit* (ÍF) XII: 302-303. Translation: Thorkel Bully had been abroad and had become quite famous in foreign lands. He had slain a robber in the forest of Jämtland and after that had travelled east to Sweden. Here he joined company with Sörkvir the Old, and together they harried in the Baltic shorelands. One evening it fell to Thorkel's lot to fetch water for the crew east of the Bálagard coast. There he encountered a fabulous monster and fought it for a long time before he was able to slay it. From there he travelled east to Adalsýsla where he slew a flying dragon. (*Njál's Saga*, translated by Carl F. Bayerschmidt and Lee M. Hollander, 1998: 237).

<sup>2</sup> The research corpus includes all *Íslendingasögur* published in the *Íslenzk fornrit* series. In addition to that, also *Íslendinga þættir* – shorter tales dealing with similar matters and the same period of time – are taken into consideration.

<sup>3</sup> Vésteinn Ólason, 1998:18.

<sup>4</sup> Óskar Halldórsson, 1989: 257-258.

<sup>5</sup> Meulengracht Sørensen, 1992: 33.

<sup>6</sup> Vésteinn Ólason, 1987: 41.

<sup>7</sup> Meulengracht Sørensen, 1992: 33.

<sup>8</sup> Op. cit., 28.

<sup>9</sup> Gísli Pálsson, 1992: 21.

<sup>10</sup> We start by providing the names in the form they appear in the saga context, possible modern English equivalents are found in the translations. We wish to point out that they do not always automatically refer to our modern geographical concepts; later during the paper a discussion of the possible meanings of some of these geographical labels is presented.

<sup>11</sup> Þaðan heldu þeir suðr til Danmerkr ok þaðan austr í Smálönd ok höfðu jafnan sigr. Ekki heldu þeir aptr at hausti. Annat sumar heldu þeir til Rafala ok mættu þar víkingum ok börðusk þegar ok fengu sigr. Síðan heldu þeir austr til Eysýslu ok lágu þar nökkura hríð undir nesi einu. (ÍF XII, 79). Translation: From there they sailed south to Denmark and then east to



Smáland, and they were victorious wherever they went. They did not return that autumn, and the following summer they sailed to Rafali, where they came upon vikings. They fought with them and were again victorious. Then they sailed east to the island of Ösel and lay there for a while behind a headland. (Bayerschmidt & Hollander, 1998: 56).

<sup>12</sup> En er vár kom eptir vetr þann, þá búask þeir Þórólfr ok Egill enn at fara í víking; en er þeir váru búnir, þá halda þeir enn í Austrveg. En er þeir koma í Víkina, þá sigla þeir suðr fyrir Jótland ok herja þar, ok þá fara þeir til Fríslands ok dveljask mjök lengi um sumarit, en þá halda þeir enn aptr til Danmerkr. (ÍF II, 126). Translation: When the winter was over and spring had come, Thorolf and Egil got ready once more for a viking expedition, and when everything was prepared they sailed east for the Baltic. But once they reached Oslofjord they sailed south by Jutland plundering there, then made for Friesland, where they spent most of the summer before turning back to Denmark. (*Egil's Saga*, translated by Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, 1976: 114).

<sup>13</sup> See footnote nr. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Atli hét maðr; hann var son Arnviðar jarls ór Gautlandi inu eystra. Hann var hermaðr mikill ok lá úti austr í Leginum; hann hafði átta skip. Faðir hans hafði haldit sköttum fyrir Hákonu Aðalsteinsfóstra, ok stukku þeir feðgar til Gautlands ór Jamtalandi. Atli helt liðinu ór Leginum út um Stokkssund ok svá suðr til Danmerkr ok liggir úti í Eyrasundi. (ÍF XII, 16-17). Translation: There was a man named Atli, the son of Arnvid, Earl of East Gotland. He was a great warrior and had had his haunt with a fleet of six ships [sic! eight] to the east in Lake Mälär. His father had held back his tribute from King Hákon, Aethelstan's foster son, and then father and son had fled from Jämtland to Gotland. Later Atli had sailed with his fleet from Lake Mälär through Stock Sound and then south to Denmark, and at this time was stationed in the Öresund. (Bayerschmidt & Hollander, 1998: 11). Note that the translation of *Gautland* to Gotland, does not refer to the island of Gotland, but to an area in the southern part of the Swedish mainland, modern Swedish Götland.

<sup>15</sup> Þar var Englandsfar albúit til útláts, ok þá tók Skúli Gunnlaugi far ok Þorkatli, frænda hans. En Gunnlaugr fékk Auðuni skip sitt til varðveizlu ok fé sitt, þat er hann hafði eigi með sér. Nú sigla þeir Gunnlaugr í Englandshaf ok kómu um haustit suðr við Lundúnabryggjur ok réðu þar til hlunns skipi sínu. (ÍF III, 70). Translation: There was an England-farer ready to put out.



And then Skúli took a passage for Gunnlaugur and Þorkell, his relative. And Gunnlaugur gave Auðunn custody of his ship and wealth which he did not have with him. Now they sail into the English sea and in autumn came south near London's landing, and hauled their ship ashore there. (*The Saga of Gunnlaugur Snake's Tongue*, translated by E. Paul Durrenberger and Dorothy Durrenberger, 1992: 93).

<sup>16</sup> Ketill flatnefr kom skipi sínu við Skotland ok fekk góðar viðtökur af tignum mönnum, því at hann var frægr maðr ok stórættaðr, ok buðu honum þann ráðakost þar, sem hann vildi hafa. (ÍF V, 6-7). Translation: Ketil Flat-Nose made land in Scotland and was well received by men of rank there, for he was famous and of noble birth; they invited him to stay there on his own terms. (*Laxdæla Saga*, translated by Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson, 1969: 51).

<sup>17</sup> Óláfr fell á Írlandi í orrostu, en Auðr ok Þorsteinn fóru þá í Suðreyjar. (ÍF IV, 195). Translation: Óláfr fell in battle in Ireland, and after that Auðr and Þorsteinn travelled to the Hebrides. (own translation).

<sup>18</sup> Eptir sætt Eyrbyggja ok Álptfirðinga fóru Þorbrandssynir til Grœnlands, Snorri ok Þorleifr kimbj; - við hann er kenndr Kimbavágr á Grœnlandi í millum jökla; - ok bjó Þorleifr á Grœnlandi til elli. En Snorri fór til Vínlands ins góða með Karlsefni. (ÍF IV, 135). Translation: When the peace-terms between the men of Eyr and those of Alftafjord had been arranged, Snorri Thorbrandsson and his brother Thorleif Kimbi sailed to Greenland. Thorleif lived there till he was an old man, and Kimba Bay between the glaciers in Greenland is named after him. Snorri went to Vinland the Good with Karlsefni. (*Eyrbyggja Saga*, translated by Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, 1989 [1972]: 127-128).

<sup>19</sup> Ok eitt hvert vár bjó Eiríkr blóðøx för sína til Bjarmalands ok vandaði mjök lið til þeirar ferðar. (ÍF II, 93). Translation: One spring he [Eirik Bloodaxe] made preparations for an expedition to Permian, taking every care to fit things out properly. (Hermann Pálsson & Edwards, 1976: 89).

<sup>20</sup> Fór þá Björn með kaupmönnum austr í Garðaríki á fund Valdimars konungs. (ÍF III, 120). Translation: And then Björn travelled together with the merchants east to Russia to find King Valdimarr. (own translation).

<sup>21</sup> Kolskeggr tók skírn í Danmörku, en nam þar þó eigi ynði ok fór austr í Garðaríki ok var þar einn vetr. Þá fór hann þaðan út í Miklagarð ok gekk þar á mála. Spurðisk þat síðast til hans, at



hann kvánaðisk þar ok var höfðingi fyrir Væringjaliði ok var þar til dauðadags, ok er hann ór sögunni. (ÍF XII, 197). Translation: Kolskegg was baptised in Denmark but was not happy there; then he journeyed east to Russia and stayed there an entire winter. From there he went on to Constantinople and entered war-service there. The last that was heard of him was that he married there and became a leader of the Varangians. There he stayed till his dying day, and he is now out of the saga. (Bayerschmidt & Hollander, 1998: 157).

<sup>22</sup> Síðan lét Finnbogi í haf, ok greiðist vel þeira ferð ok kómu við Grikkland. (ÍF XIV, 287). Translation: Afterwards Finnbogi set the sail, and their journey went well, and they came to Byzantium. (own translation).

<sup>23</sup> Hvítserkr svarar: “Ef eg réði, þá skyldum vér fara til Serklands.” (ÍF XIV, 57-58). Translation: Hvítserkr answers: “If I had the decision, then we would travel to Serkland. (own translation).

<sup>24</sup> Björn var farmaðr mikill, var stundum í víking, en stundum í kaupferðum; Björn var inn gørviligsti maðr. (ÍF II, 83). Translation: Bjorn Brynjolfsson was a man of outstanding talents and a great seafarer. He divided his time between viking raids and trading voyages. (Hermann Pálsson & Edwards, 1976: 81).

<sup>25</sup> Ok svá sem þér varð in fyrri utanferð þín mikil til sœmðar; þá mun þér þó sjá verða miklu meir til sœmðar. (ÍF XII, 181). Translation: If your first journey abroad brought you great honour, this one will bring you even greater honour. (Bayerschmidt & Hollander, 1998: 144).

<sup>26</sup> E.g. *Egils saga*, ch. 37: Í ferð þeiri var mart til tíðenda; Eiríkr átti orrostu mikla á Bjarmalandi við Vínu; fekk Eiríkr þar sigr, svá sem segir í kvæðum hans. (ÍF II, 93-94). Translation: Plenty happened on this voyage. Eirik fought a great battle in Permian on the River Dvina, and won the victory as poems about him tell. (Hermann Pálsson & Edwards, 1976: 90).

<sup>27</sup> Finnmörk er stórliga víð [...] en Finnmörk liggir fyrir ofan þessi öll lönd, ok eru víða fjallbyggðir upp á mörkina, sumt í dali, en sumt með vötnum. Á Finnmörk eru vötn furðuliga stór ok þar með vötnunum marklönd stór, en há fjöll liggja eptir endilangri mörkinni, ok eru þat kallaðir Kilir. (ÍF II, 36). Translation: Finnmark is a vast country [...] But Finnmark, lying beyond, is more mountainous than any of these other lands and there are plenty of highland settlements there, some in the valleys and others along the lakes. In Finnmark there are some



amazingly big lakes with vast forests between them. A high mountain range called Kjolen stretches right through the country. (Hermann Pálsson & Edwards, 1976: 44).

<sup>28</sup> Norðimbraland er kallat fimmtungr Englands [...] þat höfðu haft at fornu Danakonungar; Jórvík er þar höfuðstaðr. (ÍF II, 129). Translation: Northumberland is reckoned one-fifth of England [...] It used to be ruled by the kings of Denmark in the old days, and its main town is York. (Hermann Pálsson & Edwards, 1976: 117).

<sup>29</sup> Meulengracht Sørensen, 1992, 27-28.

<sup>30</sup> Op. cit., 34-35.

<sup>31</sup> Melnikova, 1995: 4.

<sup>32</sup> Tarvel, 1994: 59.

<sup>33</sup> Jackson, 1991: 231.

<sup>34</sup> For other versions, see Melnikova. Her conclusion is that “the name was never attached to a definite territory but was used to designate lands in the far northeast.” Melnikova, 1995: 18.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Radvilavičius, 1998: 116.

<sup>37</sup> Op. cit., 117.

<sup>38</sup> Melnikova, 1995: 3.

<sup>39</sup> Op. cit., 5.

<sup>40</sup> Op. cit, 9.

<sup>41</sup> Radvilavičius, 1998: 118.

<sup>42</sup> Hermann Pálsson, 1989: 31.

<sup>43</sup> Ólafur mælti ok svarar á írsku, sem þeir mæltu til. En er Írar vissu, at þeir váru norrœnir menn, þá beiðask þeir laga, at þeir skyldu ganga frá fé sínu, ok myndi þeim þá ekki gört til auvisla, áðr konungr ætti dóm í þeira máli. Ólafur kvað þat lög vera, ef engi væri túlkr með kaupmönnum. (ÍF V, 54-55). Translation: Olaf answered them, speaking in Irish as they had done. When the Irish realized that these were Norsemen, they cited their laws and told them to surrender their goods, in which event no harm would befall them until the king had judged





their case. Olaf replied that this was the law only when merchants had no interpreters with them. (Magnus Magnusson & Hermann Pálsson, 1969: 91).

<sup>44</sup> E.g. *Egils saga*, ch. 53: Egill hafði inn sama búnað sem Þórólfr; hann var gyrðr sverði því, er hann kallaði Naðr; þat sverð hafði hann fengit á Kúrlandi; var þat it bezta vápn; hvárgi þeira hafði brynju. (ÍF II, 136). Translation: Egil had the same kind of outfit. At his waist was a sword called Adder, taken in Courland, the very finest of weapons. (Hermann Pálsson & Edwards, 1976: 123).

<sup>45</sup> “Er þat várkunn mikil, frændi,” segir Þorsteinn, “at þik fýsi at kanna annarra manna siðu.” (ÍF V, 114). Translation: ‘It’s not surprising, kinsman,’ said Thorstein, ‘that you are eager to see the way other people live.’ (Magnus Magnusson & Hermann Pálsson, 1969: 143).

<sup>46</sup> E.g. *Laxdæla saga*, ch. 43: En er sumar kom, þá gengu skip landa í milli. Þá spurðusk þau tíðendi til Nóregs af Íslandi, at þat var alkristit. (ÍF V, 130). Translation: When summer came, and ships were able to sail, the news reached Norway that Iceland had been converted to Christianity. (Magnus Magnusson & Hermann Pálsson, 1969: 155).

<sup>47</sup> Hermann Pálsson, 1989: 38.

<sup>48</sup> Op. cit., 39.

<sup>49</sup> Durrenberger, 1992: 106.

<sup>50</sup> Meulengracht Sørensen, 1992: 28.

<sup>51</sup> Vésteinn Ólason, 1993: 26.

<sup>52</sup> ÍF V, 211. Translation: ‘I have always wanted to travel to southern lands one day, for a man is thought to grow ignorant, if he doesn’t ever travel beyond this country of Iceland.’ (Magnus Magnusson & Hermann Pálsson, 1969: 225).



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