

# THE VIKINGS GO SOUTH

Scandinavian Studies in Londrina, Brazil



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# **The Vikings go South**

**Scandinavian Studies in Londrina, Brazil**

Editora Itacaiúnas  
Ananindeua-PA  
2025

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1st edition

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**Electronic publishing/ layout/ cover:** Walter Rodrigues

**Text revision:** dos autores e organizadores

**International Cataloging-in-Publication Data (CIP) according to ISBD**

V694            The Vikings go South: Scandinavian Studies in Londrina, Brazil [e-book] /  
various authors; organized by Lukas Gabriel Grzybowski - 1st ed. –  
Ananindeua: Itacaiúnas, 2025.  
118p.: ill.: PDF , 1,75 MB.

Includes bibliography and index  
ISBN: 978-85-9535-378-7 (e-book)  
DOI: 10.36599/itac-978-85-9535-378-7

1. Medieval Scandinavian history. 2. Vikings. 3. Reception of the Middle  
Ages. 4. Nordic studies. 5. Londrina. 6. Brazil. I. Title.

CDD 948  
CDU 94(48)

**Index for systematic catalog:**

1. History of the Scandinavian countries: 94(48)
2. History of Scandinavia: 948

This book is published in PDF (Portable Document Format). Use [Adobe Reader](#) software for a better browsing experience.

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This work was published by [Editora Itacaiúnas](#) in December 2025.



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## Foreword

This volume brings together a selection of texts produced within the research group *LEM – Leituras da Escandinávia Medieval*, the result of collective work carried out over the past year by myself and my students. United by a shared interest in Scandinavian medieval history and its reception in modern and contemporary contexts, the group investigates how the medieval past of Northern Europe has been constructed, narrated, interpreted, and appropriated across different times, places, and media.

The chapters assembled here reflect the thematic diversity that characterizes LEM's research agenda, while remaining anchored in a common concern with the Scandinavian past as a historical and cultural problem. Readers will find studies on the Christianization of Iceland and the narrative strategies through which this process was shaped in medieval sources; reflections on medieval authorship and its implications for the reading and interpretation of Old Norse material; and analyses of the reception of so-called "Viking heritage" in twentieth-century Paraná, highlighting the circulation, re-signification, and local appropriation of medieval Scandinavian imagery far beyond its original geographic and cultural contexts.

One of the guiding principles of this book is to make visible research conducted outside the traditional centers of Scandinavian studies. Produced in South Brazil, these contributions seek not only to engage with established international scholarship, but also to demonstrate how the study of medieval Scandinavia and its afterlives can be meaningfully pursued from other academic and cultural locations. In this sense, the volume aims at readers interested both in Scandinavian history and in the broader question of how the Middle Ages are received, reimagined, and mobilized in modern and contemporary societies.

All texts presented here should be understood as partial results of ongoing investigations. They are deliberately conceived as *work in progress*: open-ended, exploratory, and intended to stimulate discussion, critique, and dialogue. It is our hope

that this volume will invite readers to engage with these studies not as final statements, but as contributions to a broader and continuing conversation on medieval Scandinavia and its many receptions.

Londrina, December 2025

## Making history: Narratives of Christianization and their shaping of Icelandic Christian identities in the 12th and 13th centuries.<sup>1</sup>

doi: 10.36599/itac-978-85-9535-378-7\_001

Lukas Gabriel Grzybowski<sup>2</sup>

The Christianization of Iceland appears at first glance to differ significantly from the cases of the Scandinavian kingdoms in the Middle Ages. In the Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish contexts, Christianization unfolded as a process closely aligned with the interests of aristocratic elites, especially royal authority. Kings and their courts were often cast as the central agents responsible for the diffusion and eventual imposition of Christianity in their respective realms. These processes were also frequently accompanied by the presence of foreign missionaries — sent from England or the Holy Roman Empire — and framed through hagiographical elements such as miracles, ordeals, or martyrdoms. In this way, a recurring pattern emerges in the conversion narratives from the region, one deeply embedded in long-standing European literary traditions surrounding Christianization.

The Icelandic case, however, breaks markedly with this pattern. It is notably devoid of royal imposition, foreign missionary success, or miracle-driven narratives. Instead, the dominant account — largely based on Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók* (1986) — portrays Christianization as a peaceful, politically negotiated process mediated by local chieftains and ratified through collective decision-making at the *alþing*. This version of events has come to shape both medieval Icelandic memory and modern historiography, standing as the default explanation of how Iceland became Christian at the turn of the first millennium.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at the 19th International Saga Conference in Katowice, Poland, in August 2025, and was subsequently revised in light of the discussions that followed. I am grateful to all colleagues who raised questions and provided valuable suggestions, both during the session and in subsequent informal exchanges.

<sup>2</sup> Professor of Medieval history at the University of Londrina and the Federal University of Paraná, in Curitiba.

This chapter sets out to examine how and why Ari's version of Christianization came to dominate over other available narratives — particularly those found in Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis* (1917) and the later *Hungrvaka* (2002). The central question is not which version is historically “more accurate,” but rather: *What conditions allowed Ari's narrative to prevail as the authoritative memory of Christianization, and what mechanisms of power, memory, and meaning were at work in this process of narrative selection and historiographical canonization?* To address this, I draw on analytical tools from the sociology of knowledge (Berger and Luckmann 1990), the concept of symbolic power (Bourdieu 2018), and the theory of cultural memory (Assmann 2018), proposing that these narratives must be read not only as reflections of events, but as discursive acts embedded in broader struggles over the construction of social and historical reality.

To understand how certain narratives of Christianization came to dominate over others, this chapter draws on key contributions from the social sciences, particularly the sociology of knowledge, theories of cultural memory, and the concept of symbolic power. These frameworks shift the analytical focus from the factual content of historical narratives to the social processes through which these narratives are produced, legitimized, and perpetuated.

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, in *The Social Construction of Reality* (1990), argue that reality is not an objective given but a product of social interaction. Through processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization, human beings construct shared worlds of meaning that become institutionalized and appear self-evident. Language plays a central role in stabilizing these meanings, enabling their transmission across generations. Particularly relevant here is the concept of the “reality of everyday life,” which refers to the commonsense world structured by routines and sustained through habitual interaction. Historical narratives, from this perspective, are not mere reflections of past events but instruments in the construction and reinforcement of collective meaning.

By taking these processes into account when reading narratives of Christianization, the researcher faces the challenge of apprehending practical reality through the lens of an intended construction, socially controlled by groups particularly invested in promoting a specific view of reality. Through historical discourse — at a moment when communicative memory is fading because of the temporal distance between events and

their narrative construction — Ari succeeds in introducing a particular interpretation into a more stable medium — a written book —, thereby shaping perceptions of the Christianization process in ways that favor his own sociopolitical context.

Jan Assmann extends Berger and Luckmann's insight with his theory of *kulturelles Gedächtnis*, or cultural memory. Unlike communicative memory, which is short-lived and rooted in lived experience, cultural memory is institutionalized and mediated through texts, rituals, and symbols. It enables communities to link the present with a selectively constructed past, shaping group identity and historical consciousness. This memory is always shaped by power — it reflects present needs and serves specific functions, including legitimizing authority and promoting social cohesion. The dominance of one narrative over others, therefore, tells us less about the past than about the present conditions under which that narrative was preserved and canonized.

If we therefore consider that the narrative of Christianization presented by Ari in his *Íslendingabók* constitutes an attempt to control past realities and to align them with the contemporary expectations of Icelandic society, it follows that Ari's work soon became a cornerstone in the construction of Icelandic cultural memory. His views gradually crystallized into the predominant narrative, through a process that excluded alternative perspectives, both local and foreign, such as those found in the *Gesta Hammaburgensis* or the *Hungrvaka*. This dynamic becomes especially evident in later historiography, from the thirteenth to the twenty-first century, in which Ari's conversion narrative is treated as the historical standard for interpreting the Christianization of Iceland. These processes, however, are not accidental. Rather, they reflect complex and nuanced power constellations that extend beyond the mere textual qualities of Ari's work or that of other authors. The selection of the *Íslendingabók* as the principal narrative of Iceland's Christianization thus constitutes a response to idealizations and cultural pressures that the historian cannot ignore.

In this respect, Pierre Bourdieu adds a critical dimension by theorizing symbolic power — the capacity to impose and naturalize particular worldviews without overt coercion. This power is exercised through language, education, and institutions, and it operates through misrecognition: individuals accept dominant meanings as legitimate because they appear neutral or self-evident. Historiographical authority, in this view, is not only a matter of archival access or philological skill, but also of positioning within the symbolic field — who gets to define what counts as legitimate historical knowledge.

These reflections by Bourdieu are particularly illuminating when applied to the historiographical construction of past realities concerning the Christianization of Iceland. As I demonstrate later through specific examples, Ari's perspective is most often presented as a matter of fact, with little critical confrontation, resulting in what can best be described as modern paraphrases of his account rather than as proper historical inquiries into the complex experience of religious change. Accordingly, in Bourdieu's terms, Christianization as framed by Ari's narrative has become, first and foremost, an object of historiographical belief rather than an object of critical investigation.

The Christianization of Iceland, as a theme of historical inquiry, thus appears to have remained largely unaffected by more recent developments in the theory of history (*Historik*) and in historical practice, particularly those associated with the cultural turn — most notably the French tradition led by Roger Chartier and his concept of representation. Although Chartier's work is primarily concerned with problems in the fields of art and literature as sources for cultural history, his reflections have had a profound impact on the treatment of historical sources more broadly. In essence, Chartier (1997) argues that the extant materials selected by historians as sources must be read through the lens of representation: they do not provide direct access to the realities they purport to depict (or upon which their narratives are constructed), but only to representations of those realities, which function as substitutes for the absent object itself.

Taking up Chartier's emphasis on the role of representation in the constitution of the source material examined by historians, yet following a markedly different approach grounded in German idealist philosophy, we may invoke Schopenhauer's insight (2021) — reinterpreted in light of modern theory — that representation is not merely a mirror of experience, but its very form. The narrative does not follow the world; it brings the world into being as intelligible and meaningful. Thus, the author of a conversion narrative is not simply recounting what happened but, in the very act of telling, constructing the world in which it happened. What is remembered and what is forgotten, what is emphasized and what is omitted, are not neutral choices — they are acts of interpretation embedded in broader processes of symbolic negotiation.

To demonstrate how current historiography is still very dependent on Ari Þorgilsson's description of the Christianization process, and how his account is taken in

a largely uncritical perspective, I point to three quite recently published overviews of the Christianization of Iceland.

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In the 1990s, Orri Vésteinsson advanced an influential reinterpretation of the conversion and Christianization of Iceland by combining archaeological evidence with literary, linguistic, and historical analysis (Orri Vésteinsson 2000). This interdisciplinary framework marked a significant departure from earlier, more narrowly delimited approaches and has since shaped much of the subsequent scholarship on the topic. Rather than conceiving conversion as a discrete or isolated event, Orri situated it within a broader process of social, cultural, and political consolidation, interpreted primarily through the institutional establishment of Christianity on the island. In doing so, his work engages with historiographical concerns such as identity formation, spatial organization, power relations, and the experiential dimensions of religious change.

A central question articulated by Orri — “what defines a Christian society” (Orri Vésteinsson 2000, 2) — functions as a guiding principle for his analysis and, more broadly, as a point of reference for the study of missions and conversions. While this question productively shifts attention away from purely doctrinal or event-based models, the answers proposed by Orri remain closely tied to the development of ecclesiastical institutions and formal structures. As a result, other dimensions of Christianization—such as competing normative frameworks, social practices, or the multiplicity of lived religious experiences—tend to be subordinated to an institutional narrative of gradual consolidation.

At the same time, the interpretative architecture of Orri’s study is strongly anchored in Ari Þorgilsson’s *Íslendingabók*, particularly in its account of a consensual decision for Christianity at the *Alþing* around the year 1000. Despite the methodological innovations of the work, Ari’s narrative functions largely as a stable framework rather than as an object of sustained source-critical interrogation. Composed more than a century after the events it purports to describe, the *Íslendingabók* represents a retrospective narrative shaped by specific authorial intentions, social contexts, and rhetorical strategies. The limited engagement with this temporal and discursive distance constrains the extent to which Ari’s account is treated as a historical construction, and the resulting reconstruction

of Christianization tends to reproduce, rather than fundamentally question, its narrative premises.

A comparable, though distinct, constellation of strengths and limitations characterizes Hjalti Hugason's *Frumkristni og upphaf kirkju* (2000), a monumental investigation produced in the context of the commemorations surrounding the presumed millennium of Iceland's Christianization. Hjalti's work is distinguished by the extraordinary breadth of its source base and by the systematic integration of textual, archaeological, and material evidence. Few studies offer a similarly comprehensive account of the emergence of Christian institutions, practices, and organizational structures in Iceland, and the empirical ambition of the project constitutes a major scholarly achievement.

Yet, despite this extensive engagement with diverse categories of sources, the interpretative horizon of Hjalti's study remains closely aligned with the narrative model established by Ari Þorgilsson. *Íslendingabók* continues to provide the implicit chronological and conceptual framework for reconstructing the process of Christianization, particularly through its portrayal of conversion as a consensual act ratified at the *alþing*. Rather than subjecting Ari's account to systematic narrative or source-critical analysis, Hjalti's study tends to corroborate and elaborate its core elements through additional evidence. Consequently, Ari's text functions less as a problem to be explained than as a narrative backbone to be substantiated, with the result that the reconstruction of early Icelandic Christianity, for all its empirical density, frequently amounts to a refined and well-documented paraphrase of Ari's version of events.

A further point of reference in the scholarship on Icelandic Christianization is provided by Jón Viðar Sigurðsson (2020), whose work offers a broad and influential overview of the conversion process within the wider context of social and political transformations in medieval Iceland and Scandinavia. Jón Viðar's contribution is characterized less by the introduction of new empirical material than by its synthetic ambition: his analysis brings together archaeological findings, saga literature, ecclesiastical history, and comparative perspectives in order to present a coherent account of the transition from pre-Christian to Christian society. In this sense, his work functions as a state-of-the-art summary that systematizes and stabilizes the main results of several decades of research.

This synthetic orientation, however, is accompanied by a largely uncritical adoption of the established narrative framework. Like Orri Vésteinsson and Hjalti Hugason, Jón Viðar treats the events associated with the *alþing* of 999/1000 as a historical given, accepting Ari Þorgilsson's account as a reliable description of a consensual decision to adopt Christianity (cf. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2020, 1650, 1664ff.). The *alþing* thus appears as a fixed chronological and interpretative anchor, structuring the transition from paganism to Christianity as a relatively clear-cut and collectively negotiated process. Little attention is devoted to the fact that this reconstruction rests overwhelmingly on a retrospective narrative produced more than a century after the supposed events, nor to the implications of treating that narrative as transparent evidence rather than as a discursive artifact.

As a consequence, Jón Viðar's overview consolidates rather than destabilizes the dominant model of Icelandic Christianization. By summarizing the current state of research within the parameters set by Ari's *Íslendingabók*, his work contributes to the normalization of a particular narrative logic, one in which the Christianization of Iceland is understood primarily as an orderly, consensual, and institutionally legible process. While this approach has undeniable heuristic value and provides a clear point of orientation for both specialists and non-specialists, it also reinforces a historiographical consensus that leaves limited room for questioning the narrative premises, silences, and retrospective constructions through which the Christianization of Iceland has been transmitted.

Taken together, the works of Órri Vésteinsson, Hjalti Hugason, and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson illustrate both the strengths and the limitations of the current historiographical consensus on the Christianization of Iceland. While differing in scope, emphasis, and methodology, these studies converge in their reliance on a narrative framework ultimately derived from Ari Þorgilsson, within which the events of 999/1000 function as a largely unproblematic point of departure. The repeated stabilization of this framework has contributed to a coherent and persuasive explanatory model, but it has also tended to obscure the extent to which our knowledge of Iceland's Christianization is mediated through texts produced in specific contexts, for particular purposes, and at varying chronological distances from the events they describe. It is therefore necessary to shift the focus from reconstructing the process of Christianization as such to examining the

sources themselves as acts of representation, in order to assess how differing temporal, institutional, and authorial positions shaped the ways in which this process was narrated and remembered.

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Turning our attention to three documents concerning the Christianization of Iceland in the Middle Ages, written at different times and places, we might see how these considerations operate in creating different, sometimes conflicting perspectives on past experiences, and how this affects the modern historian's work. To this end I will look into Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis* and its information on the first Icelandic bishop, Ísleifr; also into Ari Þorgilssons *Ísendingabók*, whose narrative constitutes the base upon which later historiography mainly based its views on the Christianization of Iceland; and *Hungrvaka*, a later work on the spreading of the church organization in Iceland from the establishing of the first bishopric in Iceland (at Skálholt) in 1056.

The *Gesta Hammaburgensis* was composed by Adam, a canon of Hamburg-Bremen, around 1075, with some revisions to the text possibly being added as late as 1085. The work celebrates the deeds of the archbishops of the archdiocese in which Adam served, and it stands as one of the main sources on the Christianization of Scandinavia in the Middle Ages. The Christianization of Iceland appears in Adam's text at two points. In chapter 77 of the third book, Adam states that "Ísleif he [Adalbert] sent to the island Iceland.<sup>3</sup>" (2005, 183). This brief note appears in the midst of a list of bishops consecrated by Adalbert and sent to various episcopal sees across Scandinavia. The focus is placed on Adalbert's actions, and Ísleifr, mentioned last in the list, illustrates the geographic and ecclesiastical reach of the Archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen.

Although extremely concise, the passage is nonetheless significant. Adam was a near contemporary of Ísleifr and was well informed about the affairs of the archdiocese in which he worked; his account therefore constitutes an important point of reference for modern historians seeking to reconstruct the ecclesiastical landscape of Scandinavia in the late eleventh century. At the same time, the brevity and context of the reference — embedded in a catalogue designed to highlight Adalbert's authority — require that it be

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<sup>3</sup> "Ísleph [Adalbertus misit] ad Island insulam." (Adam of Bremen 1917, III, 77, p. 224).

read not as a neutral record of events, but as part of a narrative shaped by the institutional priorities and representational strategies of the Hamburg-Bremen archdiocese.

Later, in the fourth book of the *Gesta*, known as the *Descriptio insularum aquilonis*, Adam addresses the topic in more detail. According to the chronicler, at the time of his writing, “all have now adopted Christianity<sup>4</sup>.” (Adam of Bremen 2005, 217). This information follows a brief description of the island, in which Adam emphasizes the poverty and simplicity of its inhabitants — qualities he interprets as blessings and signs of virtue. From this point onward, the chronicler begins to describe the Icelanders’ relationship with Christianity, their bishop, and the archdiocese of Hamburg-Bremen. In this account, several significant elements emerge: Adam reports that the Icelanders regarded their bishop as a king — a formulation that may deliberately invoke the figure of Melchizedek as an eschatological priest-king, closely associated in Christian exegesis with Christ and the end of times, and thus reflective of Adam’s broader apocalyptic horizon<sup>5</sup> — and that, even prior to their formal adoption of Christianity, they were said to have lived according to a “natural law” largely consonant with divine law. This characterization of the Icelanders justifies, for Adam, their request to Adalbert for the consecration of a native, Ísleifr, as their bishop. Ísleifr, in turn, is said to have been instructed by the archbishop, who planned a visitation to the region. Adam concludes his description by reaffirming the veracity of his account beyond that which is merely marvelous.

Adam’s characterization of the Icelanders as living in accordance with a form of “natural law,” largely consonant with divine law even prior to their formal adoption of Christianity, invites further reflection. Read against the institutional perspective that informs much of the *Gesta*, this portrayal may suggest that Adam was aware of an earlier or more gradual process of Christianization that unfolded without direct intervention from the archdiocese of Hamburg-Bremen. Such an implication sits uneasily with Adam’s broader historiographical agenda, which consistently emphasizes the centrality of Hamburg-Bremen in the organization and supervision of northern Christianity. One way of resolving this tension is to read the passage as a narrative resignification: by

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<sup>5</sup> Adam’s use of royal–priestly imagery should be read in light of his broader apocalyptic outlook, in which figures such as Melchizedek function as typological markers of the end-of-times rather than as neutral descriptive categories. For Adam’s apocalyptic views see (Grzybowski 2021), especially chapter 1 and the conclusion.

foregrounding the Icelanders' innate piety, Adam can acknowledge a degree of prior Christianization while simultaneously silencing — or at least downplaying — the absence of episcopal oversight from Hamburg-Bremen during this earlier phase.

At the same time, this implicit recognition of an externally unmediated Christianization aligns, in broad terms, with Ari Þorgilsson's presentation of Iceland's conversion as a process largely independent of sustained foreign coercion or direction. While this view is contested elsewhere in the tradition, most notably in narratives emphasizing the role of Óláfr Tryggvason, Adam's account nevertheless converges with Ari's in suggesting that the request for the consecration of a bishop presupposed a society already substantially Christianized. Rather than resolving the question of how and when Christianity took root in Iceland, Adam's description thus underscores the complexity of the narrative construction surrounding these events, revealing how institutional interests, theological categories, and retrospective coherence shape the representation of the past.

Writing fifty years later, Ari Þorgilsson provides a rather different account of the arrival of Christianity in Iceland. While he acknowledges the importance of Ísleifr (Ari, Þorgilsson 1986, 20) as the first native bishop on the island, he nevertheless places the adoption of Christianity a generation earlier than Ísleifr's consecration, in a singular episode within historiography. According to Ari, the Christianization of Iceland occurred within a broader context of relations between the island and Norway around the turn of the first millennium. Óláfr Tryggvason, the Christianizing ruler of the Norwegian kingdom, is said to have promoted tensions between Christians and pagans in Iceland through an aggressive Christianization policy, which included the sending of missionaries — who were not well received by the Icelanders — and the taking of Icelandic hostages in Norway (Ari, Þorgilsson 1986, 15). As a consequence, through the initiative of prominent chieftains Gizurr and Hjalti, the general assembly (*alþing*) is said to have formally adopted Christianity in the year 1000 (999) (Ari, Þorgilsson 1986, 14–18), thereby marking the beginning of the Christian period on the island.

Ari devotes two brief chapters of his work to the early years of Christianity in Iceland, during which the new religion was taught and spread by a series of foreign bishops — about whom little is known — and to the episcopate of Ísleifr, which is treated rather concisely. This phase, which could be considered parallel to Adam of Bremen's account, is employed by Ari as a clear reinforcement of the independent character of

Iceland's Christianization — perhaps also of its church —, since the foreign bishops appear collectively to have failed in their mission — Ari is silent on the matter, merely noting their presence in Iceland — and Ísleifr, in turn, is primarily presented as a prominent local chieftain, without immediate reference to traits typical of a missionary bishop.

Far from constituting an objective or neutral account — as it is often characterized in the historiography of Icelandic Christianization — Ari's narrative appears to be carefully calibrated to counter alternative explanatory models, most notably that articulated by Adam of Bremen. Foreign influence is consistently minimized, and even the figure of Ísleifr is presented in a markedly restrained, almost administrative manner, stripped of the traits typically associated with a missionary bishop. This narrative strategy allows the independent character of Iceland's conversion to emerge with particular clarity, not only through what Ari emphasizes, but also through what he chooses to omit or compress. The foreign bishops active before Ísleifr are acknowledged only briefly and collectively, without differentiation or evaluation, thereby neutralizing their potential significance as agents of external ecclesiastical authority.

This narrative positioning is further underscored by the formal structure of *Íslendingabók*. The conversion chapter occupies a central position in the work and is considerably longer—indeed, at least twice as long—than any other chapter. Whereas other sections summarize developments spanning decades in a few lines, the events surrounding the adoption of Christianity over the course of two or three years are treated in exceptional detail. Such disproportionality strongly suggests a deliberate historiographical emphasis rather than a simple reflection of source availability. It is therefore highly likely that Ari was responding, implicitly if not explicitly, to competing narratives of Christianization that foregrounded external agency, above all the claims of Hamburg-Bremen, whose ecclesiastical authority in the North had already been displaced by Lund in 1104.

At the same time, Ari's solution is a carefully balanced one. While resisting Adam's insistence on the decisive role of Hamburg-Bremen, Ari also avoids subordinating Icelandic Christianization directly to Norwegian royal power or attributing it to Danish ecclesiastical initiative. His narrative instead associates foreign missionary activity primarily with Norwegian agency and portrays it as largely ineffective, thereby neutralizing both ecclesiastical and royal external claims. The result is a historiographical

construction in which Christianization appears as an internally negotiated process, shaped by Icelandic actors and institutions, and only marginally influenced by unsuccessful outsiders. Read in this light, *Íslendingabók* emerges not as a transparent record of events, but as a sophisticated intervention in contemporary debates over ecclesiastical authority, political autonomy, and the ownership of Iceland's Christian past.

The third document relevant to this analysis is the *Hungrvaka*, which in many respects resembles Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis* in its aim to record and commemorate the actions of the bishops of Skálholt in Iceland. Written by an unknown author, but certainly someone close to the diocese of Skálholt and apparently with good access to both documents and witnesses or traditions, the *Hungrvaka* constitutes an important bridge between Latin and local vernacular traditions. Following the pattern of the other sources analyzed here, this text also presents the narrative of Christianization in a concise form and locates it vaguely around the turn of the millennium. Indeed, the *Hungrvaka* offers yet a third perspective on the Christianization process, emphasizing the central role of Gizurr *inn Hviti* and his lineage — both familial and ecclesiastical — in the consolidation of Christianity on the island.

As noted, the *Hungrvaka* presents a third perspective on the Christianization of Iceland, one that may be read as a kind of harmonization between the accounts of Ari and Adam. The author affirms that Gizurr, father of the first bishop Ísleifr, was the one who introduced Christianity in Iceland, in a passage that simultaneously omits the *alþing's* decision and immediately precedes the account of how Gizurr sent his son and future bishop to be educated in Herford, in Saxony, and built the first church in Skálholt. Thus, one possible interpretation of the *Hungrvaka's* author is that Gizurr was responsible for the effective introduction of Christianity in Iceland, even if the means by which he did so — whether through Ísleifr's education, the construction of the church in Skálholt, or the orchestration of the *alþing* of the year 999/1000 — remains open to interpretation.

While the *Hungrvaka* shares with Ari Þorgilsson a tendency to downplay the agency of Hamburg-Bremen in the process of Icelandic Christianization, it does not do so through simple omission. Instead, the text reframes the relationship between Iceland and external ecclesiastical centers by emphasizing Icelandic initiative in seeking Christianity. In this respect, the *Hungrvaka* aligns more closely with Adam of Bremen's assertion that the Icelanders themselves sent Ísleifr to be consecrated by Adalbert, yet it

embeds this episode within a broader narrative of preparation and intentionality. Ísleifr is not presented as a novice convert, but as an already educated Christian, raised and trained in Herford, within a fully Christian environment and with direct exposure to the ecclesiastical and political structures of the Saxon world. This emphasis implicitly acknowledges the importance of Hamburg-Bremen while simultaneously shifting the locus of agency away from the archdiocese and toward Icelandic actors.

Read in this light, the figure of Gizurr *inn Hviti* emerges as a central mediator between local ambition and transregional Christian networks. Although the precise circumstances of Gizurr's own conversion remain unclear, the *Hungrvaka* strongly suggests that he was operating within an already Christianizing milieu and that he possessed a clear awareness of the political capital attached to Christian education and ecclesiastical affiliation. Sending his son to be educated abroad appears less as an act of initial conversion than as a strategic investment in a social order undergoing profound transformation. Gizurr's actions are thus consistent with those of an Icelandic chieftain seeking to secure and enhance his family's position within an emerging Christian elite, rather than with the narrative of a sudden or spontaneous religious rupture.

Finally, the narrative form of the *Hungrvaka* itself points to a distinct cultural horizon. Its opening chapters and treatment of Christianization bear clear structural affinities with the developing saga tradition, privileging lineage, individual agency, and family strategy over institutional chronology or theological argumentation. In this sense, the text appears less as a direct response to either Adam of Bremen or Ari Þorgilsson than as the product of a milieu in which saga literature was becoming an increasingly dominant mode of historical representation. The resulting account of Christianization is therefore highly distinctive: it neither fully rejects external ecclesiastical influence nor reduces conversion to a collective political decision, but instead situates religious change within the socio-political strategies of elite families. Much of its meaning must be inferred through contextual reading, attentive both to the emergence of saga narrative conventions and to the need to move beyond the problematic notion of a sudden, "spontaneous" conversion. In doing so, the *Hungrvaka* offers a perspective in which Icelandic Christianization appears as a negotiated, gradual, and strategically mediated process, shaped as much by local power dynamics as by transregional ecclesiastical connections.

Given the narrative variations surrounding the Christianization of Iceland, historians have often sought a “more accurate” version of events — one grand narrative to which others must be compared. Ari’s account, especially in modern historiography, has been treated as this benchmark, while alternatives like the *Hungrvaka* have been regarded as incomplete, and Adam of Bremen’s dismissed altogether. However, as the theoretical framework suggests, this privileging is not the result of intrinsic superiority but of external factors — scholarly agendas, institutional power, and symbolic authority. As Bourdieu reminds us, what passes as truth is often the product of negotiated legitimacy within fields of power.

All three narratives agree that Iceland became Christian and was perceived as such. The divergence lies not in the fact itself, but in how that fact was constructed and claimed. The dispute between Ari and Adam is not about whether Christianization occurred, but about who had the right to define its meaning. Ari’s success was not immediate; only through the gradual layering of memory and the consolidation of Icelandic ecclesiastical independence did his version emerge as dominant — likely by the mid-13th century, as it constitutes the backbone of the narrative presented in *Kristni saga* (2003), for example — within the dynamics of cultural memory described by Assmann.

Although Ari frames his account as grounded in communicative memory, he effectively initiates a process of cultural memorialization — one aimed at forging social cohesion and collective identity, rather than recording “what really happened.” Like Adam and the author of the *Hungrvaka*, Ari constructs a version of reality that aligns with the needs and symbolic structures of his time. The authority of his narrative derives not from its factual superiority but from its narrative efficacy within a broader process of identity-making.

Adam’s version, in contrast, fails to resonate within the Icelandic context precisely because it ties religious identity to a foreign ecclesiastical authority — Hamburg-Bremen — rather than to local sociopolitical structures. This disjunction undermines his narrative’s staying power, particularly after Iceland’s ecclesiastical autonomy was established in 1104. Ari, by situating Christianization within Icelandic political culture and projecting it back to the *alþing* of the year 1000, masterfully anchors his version in the local symbolic universe. Whether consciously or not, he engages in the construction of historical reality as theorized by Berger and Luckmann.

Thus, the dominance of Ari's *Íslendingabók* is not the result of factual closeness, as is often assumed, but of its success in articulating a socially and culturally resonant narrative. Through his account, Ari accomplishes what Adam and the *Hungrvaka* do not: he makes Christianization not only a historical episode but a foundational element of Icelandic identity. In that sense, Ari does not simply record history — he makes it.

This case study invites us to reconsider how we engage with medieval narratives — not as transparent windows onto the past, but as dynamic interventions in the construction of meaning, identity, and authority. By foregrounding the narrative strategies and symbolic frameworks that shape historical memory, we shift the focus from verifying facts to understanding how histories are made, remembered, and institutionalized. The Christianization of Iceland thus becomes more than a religious or political event; it is a narrative battleground in which competing visions of the past sought, and still seek, to define the terms of collective identity. In examining how Ari's version came to dominate, we are reminded that historical truth is not merely discovered in sources — it is also produced through them. And in recognizing this, we take a critical step toward a historiography that is not only more reflexive, but also more honest about its own role in shaping the past.

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## The Icelanders as Christians: The Construction of Christian Identity in the Narratives of *Íslendingabók* and *Kristni Saga*

doi: 10.36599/itac-978-85-9535-378-7\_002

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This text aims to analyze the construction of Christian identity in Iceland through the narratives of two documents produced in Iceland in the vernacular. The *Íslendingabók*, written by Þorgilsson between 1122 and 1133, constitutes the earliest Icelandic account of the origins of settlement, the formation of political structures, and the conversion of Iceland. The second is the *Kristni Saga*, composed ca. 1250–1284 by an anonymous author. The objective is to understand how Christian identity was historically constructed, which elements constituted it, and the underlying reasons for this process.

According to Anders Winroth (2012, p. 103–104), it is necessary to distinguish between two meanings of the term conversion. First, there is an institutional process, which in the Icelandic case involved the adoption of Christianity by the local power (*goðar*), resulting in the legal conversion at the assembly of the year 999/1000 and, subsequently, in the formation of an ecclesiastical structure. On the other hand, conversion is also a gradual process of assimilating Christian practices and ideas. This process alters the ways that individuals perceive and interpret themselves and the world around them. Christianization thus entails entry into a new reality: Iceland is no longer merely an isolated island in the North Atlantic but becomes part of a larger entity, the medieval Christian world. Consequently, the entire pagan reality had to be reconstructed as Christianity entered individual consciousness.

In this sense, this study draws on the sociology of knowledge developed by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann. For these authors, everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted by its members and subjectively endowed with meaning, at the same time forming a coherent world (Berger & Luckmann, 2003, p. 35). This reality is constructed in the social world, originating in the thoughts and actions of individuals, and is presented

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as an intersubjective world shared by the members of the reality. It thus possesses an objective character, insofar as individuals understand this reality as real, natural, and independent of individual consciousness and will. Regarded by all members of society as correct and inherent, this reality organizes social conduct and interpretations of the world around us. At the same time, it also has a subjective character, namely the way in which individuals experience and interpret reality.

This study understands that the formation of Christian identity in Iceland required the construction of that reality as Christian. To achieve this construction, narratives of conversion have a fundamental role, because they reconstruct the past in a way that makes the maintenance of this identity possible, as argued by Siân Grønlie (2017). Icelandic literary tradition itself only emerges after the conversion, through the blending of Christian literary traditions with the oral culture that existed in pre-Christian Iceland. Consequently, writing about the Icelandic past was shaped by Christian ideas and conceptions.

This Christian literary tradition, used as a model for Icelandic literature, was produced almost exclusively by clerics, monks, or individuals educated in ecclesiastical schools. Their own conception of history reflected a close relationship between history and religion: the past was understood as being guided by God's designs, with historical events interpreted as manifestations of the "plan of God." History was thus conceived as part of medieval theology, giving rise to a notion of "historical theology." As a result, historiography assumed a moral function, educating proper behavior according to God's precepts (GOETZ, 2006, p. 23-25).

All such studies of the past are interpreted and motivated by the authors' present, explaining and legitimizing contemporary realities. These works were written in specific contexts and in response to present interests, such that authors employed the past as an authority to justify their own intentions or those of their institutions.<sup>2</sup>

To fulfill these objectives, this study is based on the theoretical and methodological assumptions of *Vorstellungsgeschichte*, developed by the German historian Hans-Werner

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<sup>2</sup> See: GOETZ, Hans-Werner. Historical Consciousness and Institutional Concern in European Medieval Historiography (Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries). In: **Making Sense of Global History: The 19th International Congress of the Historical Sciences Oslo–2000 Commemorative Volume**. 2001. p. 350-65. Also see: GOETZ, Hans-Werner. Historical Writing, Historical Thinking and Historical. In: **Revista Diálogos Mediterrânicos**. Número 2. Curitiba: Universidade Federal do Paraná, maio/2012. P. 110-128.

Goetz. This approach is concerned with the analysis and interpretation of the ideas and conceptions of “ordinary” individuals as expressed in the documents they produced, from an anthropological perspective. For Goetz, the historiographical account is not a “factual” record of what occurred, but rather the author’s individual and personal perception of the past, shaped by their conceptions, intentions, and objectives.<sup>3</sup>

Accordingly, the record of the past in the narratives to which we currently have access should not be understood as a direct account of what actually happened, but as the result of a process of perception and signification of that past. In this process, past events are perceived by the author, who conceives and interprets them through their own conceptual frameworks. The narrator then constructs this past in accordance with their intentions, shaping which elements are remembered or forgotten and how that past is to be remembered. The outcome of this process is the representation of the past in written form, determined by the linguistic and literary traditions current at the time of the narrative’s composition (*ibid.*, p. 18–20).

### **Reality and Identity**

The social world presents itself as both an objective and a subjective reality. Its construction takes place through a dialectical process consisting of four moments. First, in the correlation between human beings and their environment, there is a process known as externalization. In this process, humans collectively produce the social world through their interactions, by means of their conduct in the material world and through the externalization of subjective meanings onto the elements that constitute their reality. When the human products of externalization acquire a stable form and become independent of their creators, being perceived as natural, objectivation occurs. This transforms the social world into an objective reality, shared and accessible to all members of society.

This is followed by institutionalization, when this objective reality comes to be recognized by increasingly larger groups and persists over time. These institutions present

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<sup>3</sup> [...] historiographical report is not identical with the past, but a - more or less conscious - perception of (segments of) the past, that is, a personal and subjective perspective which pursues certain intentions, aims and functions. History and historiography are, of course, not identical because the authors did not write down what actually happened but what they thought or believed (or even wanted) to have happened (*ibid.*, p.18).

themselves as natural and inherent to reality and have their own historicity. Finally, internalization occurs, which is the moment when individuals assimilate the institutions of objective reality into their consciousness, incorporating them into their thought and behavior through the process of socialization. This process of construction takes place continuously, with reality being reconstructed with every social transformation and through the participation of its members.

According to Jan Assmann (2011, p. 111): “Identity is a matter of consciousness, that is of becoming aware of an otherwise unconscious image of the self.” Individual and collective identity exist only through the relationship between them. This perspective is similar the ideas of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann. For the authors, identity is derived from the dialectic between the individual and reality. In other words, reality presents itself as a world that I inhabit with others, and it is through interaction and participation within this reality that I come to understand myself as a person.

On this basis, it is possible to understand Icelandic conversion as a process that altered social dynamics and created new institutions, thus requiring the production of new meanings to integrate these new elements into the existing reality. This integration is only possible through a process of legitimation, which produces new meanings that are objectively accessible and subjectively plausible, thereby legitimizing the new social order. In other words, for Christianity to become part of Icelandic identity, it was necessary to construct a coherent reality aligned with these new principles. This was made possible by the authors, who constructed and rendered accessible the historicity of that reality.

### *Íslendingabók*

*Íslendingabók* was composed by the Icelandic priest and chronicler Ari Þorgilsson ca. 1122–1133. He was born around 1067/68 and lost his father in early childhood, after which he was raised by his grandfather Gellir at Helgafell. Following his grandfather's death, he went to live with Hallr Þórarinnsson in Haukadalur around 1074/75, where he received his education. In this environment, he became closely associated with the most powerful family in the region, the Haukdælir, who maintained dominance over the Icelandic ecclesiastical structure throughout the twelfth century (Vésteinsson, 2000, p. 19). This was largely because the first two Icelandic bishops, Ísleifr and his son Gizurr

Ísleifsson, belonged to this family and played an essential role in the formation of the ecclesiastical structure in the region. The Haukdælir were responsible for the establishment of the first episcopal see at Skálholt and later exerted strong influence over the second see established at Hólar, maintaining direct connections with the bishops of their time.

Moreover, the ecclesiastical education Ari received in the region is clearly reflected in his narrative. His work shows significant influence from Latin writings, particularly hagiographies, as well as from Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum* (XI) and Bede the Venerable's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (XVIII).

In the prologue, Ari states that he composed his work for the bishops Þorlákr Runólfsson of Skálholt and Ketill Þorsteinsson of Hólar, as well as for the priest Sæmundr Sigfússon, which demonstrates his close relationship with members of the Icelandic ecclesiastical establishment. In addition, Ari explicitly names his informants in the narrative, the most important of whom is Teitr Ísleifsson, son of Bishop Ísleifr and described by Ari as his foster father. This entire context of Ari's familial relationships and sources of information influenced his narrative composition, with numerous members of these families appearing as key figures in the events described.

The opening of *Íslendingabók* presents the arrival of the first settlers in Iceland, which at that time was already inhabited by figures referred to as the *Papar*. They are described as eremitic monks who left the island upon the arrival of the Norse because they did not wish to live among pagans, and whose Irish origin is inferred from the objects they left behind. The presence of these figures in the narrative is a particularly intriguing element; modern historiography continues to question their historicity, which suggests that they may be a narrative construction.<sup>4</sup>

Given the medieval conception of history, which was directly linked to theology, the figure of the *Papar* in Ari's account may have served as a means of constructing a Christian past for the region, creating a teleological vision in which the land was, in a sense, predestined to become Christian. It is also possible to draw a comparison with the

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<sup>4</sup> Ari probably based this account on Dicuil's *Liber de Mensura Orbis Terrae* (825), which reports the presence of Irish monks living on an island called Thule. This place was first described by authors of antiquity, and its precise location remains uncertain; however, medieval authors understood it to be located north of the British Isles (Jochens, 1999, p. 633).

biblical model of the Exodus, with individuals leaving Norway and fleeing the land they inhabited in search of a “Promised Land.” Iceland is described as wooded and fertile at the time of settlement and combined with the presence of an earlier Christian population, this portrayal promotes a notion of a “Promised Land” in accordance with the biblical model of the Exodus (Grønlie, 2006, p. XXI).

Conversion is presented with a focus on the political process, highlighting the figures of power involved. It begins with the dispatch of the missionary Þangbrandr by the Norwegian king Ólafr Tryggvason. Þangbrandr fails to Christianize the region as a whole; nevertheless, he is responsible for the conversion of several chieftains (*goðar*). Through them, conversion at the assembly of 999/1000 becomes possible, particularly through Hallr Þorsteinsson of Síða, Hjalti Skeggjason of Þjórsárdalur, and Gizurr Hvíti of Mosfell.

During the assembly, Icelandic society is divided into two groups, Christians on one side and pagans on the other, in a situation that threatens to escalate into armed conflict. Both groups declare themselves to be under separate laws. The resolution of this crisis is entrusted to the lawspeaker (*lögsögumaðr*) of the time, Þorgeirr, who is described as still being a pagan at that moment. After spending the rest of the day and the night in reflection, Þorgeirr delivers a speech the following day on the importance of maintaining a single law to preserve peace, arguing that without it Iceland would be consumed by conflict. All those present at the assembly agree with his reasoning and accept his verdict. His ruling proclaims that, from that moment onward, it would be established in law that all Icelanders were to become Christians.

The conversion as described demonstrates the fundamental role of law within Icelandic society.<sup>5</sup> According to Kirsten Hastrup (1990, p. 90), the conception of society in medieval Scandinavia was defined as a geographical space governed by a specific law,

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<sup>5</sup> According to Ari’s account, the laws were brought to Iceland by the Norwegian Úlfrjótr and were known as “Úlfrjótr’s Laws,” which were based on the laws of Gulapíng. These formed the foundation that would later develop at the *Alþing*. As discussed by Jón Jóhannesson (2007, pp. 35–38), assemblies had as their precedents ancient judicial customs and traditions brought from Norway by the first settlers, who in some sense sought to replicate the model of their former homeland. The Icelandic model thus emerged from the development of earlier Norwegian models. In Norway, however, customs and laws varied by region and no single system encompassed the entire territory, which complicated legal and political processes involving more than one region. By contrast, the Icelanders created a law code that applied to the whole of their territory, thereby avoiding this problem. In this way, the *Alþing* emerged as a means of encompassing all of Iceland, facilitating judicial processes and addressing matters of common interest.

with the members of that society being those who were encompassed by that law. Thus, the establishment of the assembly in 930 marks Icelandic independence through the creation of a “separate” law. Moreover, Hastrup further notes:

The establishment of the Althing and the conscious creation of specific Icelandic law were the constitutive events. While an autonomous political and legal structure thus came into being at one stroke, it was only through thought and social progress that this structure was gradually transformed into a system of meaning. Apparently this system of meaning was a prerequisite for the establishment of a separate identity, which was declared by a way of naming (*ibid.*, p. 205)

This importance of law is evident in the narrative through the number of chapters Ari devotes to addressing the formation of political and legislative structures. Accordingly, the decision by pagans and Christians to declare themselves under separate laws represents the formation of two distinct “societies” within the same geographical space (Hastrup, 1990, p. 205). This aspect is reflected in Þorgeirr’s speech, which emphasizes the importance of maintaining legal unity to preserve peace; should this unity fail, conflict would engulf Iceland. In this sense, the success of the conversion in Þorgeirr’s decision is grounded in the use of law to achieve it, invoking an ancient tradition. Conversion here thus symbolizes not only a process of religious change, but also the very maintenance of society itself. Accordingly, the fact that conversion takes place at the assembly—a distinctly Icelandic institution—constructs and signifies this event as a major social milestone of Icelandic unity and autonomy.

Throughout the narrative, the role of other regions in Icelandic history is evident. The first settlers came from Norway, and Christianization was initiated through King Ólafr Tryggvason. However, the construction of Icelandic identity requires a process of defining its own particularities through contrast with “others.” In the narrative, these external influences are presented while, at the same time, Icelandic society’s autonomy in its own formation is constructed and linked to Christianity. At the end of the work, these relationships become visible through the contrast between foreign bishops and the first two local bishops, Ísleifr and Gizurr Ísleifsson. While foreign bishops receive no particular emphasis, Icelandic bishops are acclaimed and described as responsible for the

formation of the ecclesiastical structure in the region. Ari does not even mention the role of the archbishoprics of Hamburg-Bremen or Lund; his narrative focus is instead on exalting Icelandic autonomy in the process of Christianization.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout *Íslendingabók*, Christianity is integrated into a coherent whole, intertwined with Icelandic history itself, thereby legitimizing the social reality of the period in which the work was composed by providing it with historicity. This relationship between present and past can be observed at several points in the work. The *Papar* provide a Christian origin myth for Icelandic society. In the account of settlement, Ari introduces four settlers who are ultimately presented as ancestors in the genealogies of the bishops of his own time.<sup>7</sup> The laws created at the origin of society are presented as the means through which conversion was accomplished.

Christianization is not represented as a process that profoundly alters existing traditions and structures, but rather as one that unfolds in accordance with them, aligning with the social model rather than transforming it. In this way, the narrative constructs a parallel between pre-Christian and Christian Icelandic society, with essential aspects being maintained in the transition between these two forms of society.

### ***Kristni Saga***

*Kristni Saga* was composed ca. 1250–1284 by an anonymous author and is preserved in the manuscript *Hauksbók*, written by Haukr Erlendsson around 1306–10. Throughout the narrative, the influence of *Íslendingabók* on its composition is evident, alongside inspirations drawn from other Icelandic documents of the period. Nevertheless, the work exhibits its own particularities, derived from the influence of Latin hagiographies and from its historical context.

The thirteenth century was marked by a period of power concentration in the hands of a select group of prominent families, which led to numerous political conflicts and a

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<sup>6</sup> The archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen held jurisdiction over the entire ecclesiastical structure of Scandinavia, including Iceland, during the early centuries of Scandinavian conversion. This jurisdiction was later transferred to the archbishopric of Lund, which held responsibility at the time *Íslendingabók* was composed.

<sup>7</sup> They were: Hrollangr, ancestor of Bishop Jón of Hólar. Ketilbjörn Ketilsson, ancestor of the bishops Ísleifr and Gizurr Ísleifsson, both of Skálholt. Auðr, ancestor of Bishop Þorlákr of Skálholt. Helgi, ancestor of Bishop Ketill of Hólar.

social crisis. This situation intensified between 1220 and 1262, a period known as the *Sturlungaöld* (the Age of the Sturlungs). This turbulent scenario was exploited by the Norwegian king Hákon Hákonarson, who, through the submission of local leaders interested in securing their positions within the political landscape, began to exert increasing influence in the region. Within a few years, the Commonwealth collapsed, sealed by the *Gamli Sáttmáli* (Old Covenant) of 1262–64, which made Iceland part of the Norwegian crown's dominion (BYOCK, 2001, p. 352). This was followed by the replacement of the law code known as *Járnsíða* with *Jónsbók*.

The author situates the process of Christianization within a long tradition of religious change, modeled on Latin Christian narratives, exalting the accomplishment of this process through the hardships inherent in missionary activity. The work presents two missionaries prior to Þangbrandr. The first is Þorvaldr Koðrásson, an Icelander converted by a bishop named Friðrekr in Saxland. After his conversion, Þorvaldr asks the bishop to accompany him back to his homeland to convert his relatives. The second is Stefnir, another Icelander, who was converted in Norway and, at the request of King Ólafr Tryggvason, returns to Iceland to preach Christianity.

The missionaries' activities are marked by tension between Christians and pagans.<sup>8</sup> Pagans are depicted as slandering the missionaries and attempting to burn down the church built by Þorvarðr. Conversely, Hjalti blasphemes against the goddess Freyja, and Stefnir destroys pagan temples and idols. The narrative thus presents conflicts initiated by both sides. These events result in deaths and legal consequences.

The presence of such violence may reflect aspects omitted by Ari in his narrative, but it may also reflect the turbulent period in which the author lived, revealing his own concerns. As the narrative unfolds, it articulates a moral reflection: Þorvaldr's violent actions are condemned by Bishop Friðrekr, whereas Hjalti and Gizurr are praised for their greater moderation.

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<sup>8</sup> It is worth emphasizing that the notion of "paganism" is itself a product of Christianity, with these groups being considered pagan only within Christian conception and culture, which—like other cultural systems—tends to attribute negative characteristics to "others." Christian culture emerged through contrast with pagan cultures and, furthermore, through the processes of conversion and incorporation of these "others" into its own definitions. Consequently, the two cultures are constructed as incompatible, a perspective that is reflected in Icelandic representations of their pre-Christian past (Hastrup, 1990, p. 208–209).

The author also places greater emphasis on the agency of the Icelanders themselves throughout the Christianization process, underscoring Icelandic autonomy in the face of foreign intervention. The work highlights that the missionary process was initiated by Þorvaldr, rather than by the will of King Ólafr as in *Íslendingabók*, and that Þorvaldr himself was responsible for transmitting the word of the new religion, since Friðrekr did not speak the local language. When recounting the reasons for Þangbrandr's failure, Gizurr points to the deaths caused by the missionary and notes that Icelanders found it difficult to tolerate such actions from a foreigner. The account also conveys popular pressure for Ísleifr and Gizurr Ísleifsson to be consecrated as bishops and recounts their deeds and importance for the local population and for the establishment of the ecclesiastical structure in the region. In this way, the author employs the Icelandic Christianization process to represent a past in which Iceland possessed autonomy in resolving its own conflicts.

Another aspect present in the narrative is the use of elements from the religious imagination, namely the presence of miracles and magic. It is important to note that, while today we understand these phenomena as “supernatural,” this term is anachronistic when applied to the Middle Ages, since it presupposes a distinction between the “natural” and the “supernatural” that did not operate during the period; rather, miracles and magic were integral to contemporary conceptions and worldviews (Phelpstead, 2020, p. 89). Representations from the period thus demonstrate a relationship of alterity between miracles—understood as reflections of God's action and presence in the world—and magic, which is associated with pagan practices.

In *Kristni Saga*, miracles serve two principal functions: those related to the conversion of individuals and those that demonstrate God's protection of the missionaries (Grønlien, 2006, p. XXXVIII). The most significant episode illustrating this is the conversion of Þorvaldr's father, Koðrán, which occurs after Bishop Friðrekr defeats the guardian spirit of the stone, thereby demonstrating the superiority of God's power. Both Friðrekr and Þangbrandr effect conversions after defeating berserks, consecrating the fire through which they pass; Þangbrandr even makes the sign of the cross over his sword.

These new elements that distinguish *Kristni Saga* from *Íslendingabók* reveal a relationship of alterity between paganism and Christianity. Thus, the past represented in the saga constructs a Christian identity by extolling the power of the Christian God as superior to ancient pagan beliefs and practices.

## Conclusion

Analyzing the Christianization of Iceland in the narratives of both selected documents, it becomes possible to understand how their authors constructed the historicity of their realities. *Íslendingabók* presents Christianity as a constitutive element of Icelandic society, extending from the formation of society, through conversion, and up to the period in which the work itself was composed. By contrast, the author of *Kristni Saga* introduces new elements into the conversion process by employing aspects of the religious imagination and emphasizing the difficulties inherent in this process. Through these narratives, Christianity becomes an element that constitutes both reality and individual consciousness, thereby forming a Christian identity.

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## ***Njáls saga* and its Norwegian landscapes: magic, pirates and dumb kings**

doi: 10.36599/itac-978-85-9535-378-7\_003

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### ***Njáls saga* voyages**

Some time ago, surfing through the net I had found a interesting article: *Hrút's Voyage to Norway and the Structure of "Njála"*, by Constance B. Hieatt (1978). She not just explored the voyages episodes within the saga but proposed a different interpretation regarding its structure. Commenting on predecessor tendency towards the parts in relation to the whole and defining that the practice in her time was much more like putting pieces together, she wisely wrote:

Thus, while earlier analysts assumed that irrelevant material could have intruded into the narrative by vagrant impulses of an author (or, worse, scribe), today it is more usual to suspect that if we do not understand the artistic relevance of part of a work of obvious merit, we may be missing important clues to the author's intention. (Hieatt 1978, 489)

Following Richard F. Allen's rejection of voyages in *Njála* as digressions (Allen 1971, 66), and Lars Lönnroth's "Travel Pattern" *schema* (Lönnroth 1976, 71-76) – departure, trials, homecoming –, Hieatt argued in direction of a structure based on voyages as narrative markers: the first Hrútr's travel set the tone and establish the pattern, with few killing and an initial marriage, the second expands the alliance chain and increase the feuds and vindications, expressed by the raising of murders, and the third as the action peak through the Battle of *Alþing* and the Battle of Clontarf, as well as the final conciliation before the pope. Henceforth, Hieatt concludes: "Feuds and battles provide

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the main action in both Works [*Njála* and *Beowulf*], but what appear to be “digressive elements” are often vital clues to the design and meaning of the whole.” (Hieatt, 1978, 493-494). Those ideas made me wonder: if the voyages to Norway or beyond can be important markers within the saga, what about the characterizations of people and geography? What could this tell us regarding the author mind?

With this in mind, I found myself inspired also by Torfi Tulinius (2000), especially when he clarifies that the *Íslendingasögur* were written as a kind of response to an atmosphere of ontological uncertainty (Tulinius, 2000, 259). This context, as I see it, presupposes movements toward a new and more carefully articulated representation of the self. At the same time, the social and political changes that took place in the second half of the thirteenth century highlighted for me the profound impact of Norwegian taxation and the transformations imposed on Icelandic society, particularly through the enforcement of *Járnsíða* and the later adoption of *Jónsbók*. As Sverrir Jákobsson (2021) points out, Norwegian influence on Icelandic affairs could be traced as far back as the writings of Adam of Bremen and Ari Þorgilsson in the mid-eleventh century. This influence, he argues, can be understood as unfolding in three distinct phases: first, a “special relationship” during the *Þjóðveldið*; second, a courtly or deferential posture adopted by certain chieftains toward King Hákon Hákonarson; and finally, a formal submission in 1262/4, consolidated through oaths of fidelity and new legal codes in 1273 e 1281 (Jákobsson, 2021, 587-588). It becomes clear, then, that discourses concerning Norwegian matters would have been a natural and perhaps inevitable stance among Icelandic literate elites, given the persistent presence of Norway as a decisive political actor.

Norway’s shores and the Norwegian king’s hall are landscapes we frequently saw throughout the saga *corpus*: Ketill *flatnefr* fled from the persecution of Haraldr *hárfagri*; Óláfr *pái* traveled through the peninsula when he discovered Mélkorka’s true name; Egill Skallagrímsson spent significant time in Norway and clashed repeatedly with King Eiríkr *Blóðøx* and queen Gunnhildr. Beyond that, Snorri devoted an enormous number of parchment leaves to the composition of his renowned *Heimskringla*: it is to Norway that the *Æsir* journeyed after leaving the land of the Turks. It is along the seas that wash the Norwegian coast that Hrólfr *kraki* and his champions sailed; and it is at Hjörungavágr

that Pálna-Tóki meets his death. In other words, within such narratives, I think Norway and Norwegians could be positively interpreted as fully *characters*.

In recent times, I have become increasingly interested in methodological plurality, and I try to channel this intellectual restlessness into attempts to devise new ways of seeing familiar materials. In this sense, my main reflections on Icelandic sagas, especially *Njáls saga* and the *Íslendingasögur*<sup>2</sup>, focus on the apprehension, construction, and representation of ideas concerning the world that surrounded medieval Icelandic minds. Furthermore, I have found valuable guidance in Michel Foucault's (2018) reflections on *power-knowledge* relations and in Deleuze and Guattari's (2011) concepts of *multiplicities*.

Moreover, as a result of the VII *Simpósio de Estudos Tardo-Antigos e Medievais* organized by LETAMIS (*Laboratório de Estudos Tardo-Antigos e Medievais Ibéricos/Sefaradis*)<sup>3</sup>, I developed work on several topics related to *Njála* that closely align with the purpose of this text. By examining the quarrel between Njáll's sons and Þráinn Sigfússon, the episode of the Christian conversion, and the lineage of the *Svínfellingar* through Flosi Þórðarson, I argued in favor of a specific interpretive stance regarding the author of *Njála*, one that goes beyond Lars Lönnroth's classical idea of a *clerical mind* (Lönnroth, 1976, 105). Although some of the results obtained at that time no longer answer certain questions I now consider essential, the analysis presented here may be understood as a continuation of some of the concerns expressed in that earlier work, now pursued, however, with a more solid theoretical and methodological framework and with more clearly defined research questions.

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<sup>2</sup> *Njáls saga* was deeply investigated in the course of twentieth century and nowadays. For the most relevant studies, cf. HELGASON, J. K. *The Rewriting of Njáls Saga. Translation, Ideology and Icelandic Sagas*. Topics in Translation: [s.n.], 1999; HAMER, A. J. *Njáls saga and its Christian background: a study of narrative method*. PhD Thesis, University of Groningen: [s.n.], 2008; MOOSBURGER, Théo de Borba. *Brennu-Njáls saga: projeto tradutório e tradução para o português*. 2014. 442 f. PhD Thesis, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Centro de Comunicação e Expressão, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Estudos da Tradução, Florianópolis, 2014; MILLER, W. I. *'Why is your axe bloody?'. A reading of Njáls saga*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. About *Íslendingasögur*, cf. PHELPSTEAD, C. *An Introduction to the Sagas of Icelanders*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2020; ROSS, M. C. *The Cambridge Introduction to Old Norse-Icelandic Saga*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2010.

<sup>3</sup> The conference name can be translated as *Seventh Symposium of Late Antique and Medieval Studies*, organized by the *Laboratory of Iberian and Sephardic Late Antique and Medieval Studies*, based at Federal University of Espírito Santo and held in 2024.

### Regarding method: *Vorstellungsgeschichte* and SKAD

Understanding how an individual constructed the world of his text presupposes an approach attentive to the mental specificities of the human being. More than that, social constructivism and historical anthropology present themselves as coherent methodological pillars for such an investigation. The author-redactor of the *Njála*, writing in the second half of the thirteenth century in an Iceland permeated by far-reaching transformations – the struggle for church ownership led by Bishop Árni Þorláksson, the growing closeness to the metropolitan see of Niðaróss, the legislative reforms of Magnúss *lagabættir* in the secular sphere and of Jón *rauði* in the canonical domain, as well as the emergence of a clerical elite with new shades<sup>4</sup> — produced an aesthetic-literary work firmly grounded in a well-established symbolic universe. Looking at these contours through tools capable of capturing their particularities therefore seems to me the most coherent option.

First, the *Vorstellungsgeschichte* of Goetz (1979) and Grzybowski (2012) establishes the object of inquiry: the mind of the author-redactor, accessed through his textual production. The vestige becomes a doorway to the human dimension underlying the text, rather than a direct window into the events it narratively represents. This method opens a procedure that simultaneously expands the history of ideas and complements the history of structures or events (Goetz, 1979, 258). Through the individual mind, one gathers material to understand the processes by which meanings, impressions, and interpretations of everyday reality were produced and received; anthropology provides the guiding orientation. Through Goetz's words:

Die „Vorstellungsgeschichte“ wendet sich dagegen an den Verfasser der Quelle selbst und fragt nach dessen Eindrücken, Auffassungen und Urteilen über die Vergangenheit, nach der Stellungnahme und Einstellung eines betroffenen, nämlich in den

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<sup>4</sup> On the context of transformation within Iceland and Norway, cf. ARNA SAGA. In: GRÍMSDÓTTIR, Guðrún Ása (ed.). *Íslenzk fornrit XVII: Biskupasögur III*. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1998; SIGURDSON, Erika. *The Church in Fourteenth-Century Iceland: The Formation of an Elite Clerical Identity*. Leiden: Brill NV, 2016; KARLSSON, Gunnar. *The History of Iceland*. London: C. Hurst & Co., 2000; BYOCK, Jesse. *Viking Age Iceland*. London: Penguin Books, 2001.

Ereignissen und Strukturen befangenen Zeitgenossen zu seiner Umwelt. Sie fragt also: „Wie hat der Zeitgenosse das Faktum X gesehen?“ (wobei X ebenso Ereignis wie Struktur sein kann). Sie will also nicht mehr bis zu der vergangenen Wirklichkeit im Sinne der „traditionellen“ Geschichtswissenschaft vordringen, sondern untersucht, wie sich diese (objektive) Wirklichkeit in der subjektiven Sicht der Zeitgenossen abgespielt hat. Die Ereignisgeschichte erfaßt gewissermaßen einen Punkt im Zeitgeschehen, im Geschichtsprozeß, die Strukturgeschichte eine mehr oder weniger lange Strecke, die „Vorstellungsgeschichte“ gewissermaßen die (begrenzte) Rundumsicht eines Menschen von einem Punkt, seinem Standort, aus. Damit erschließt sie zwar ebenfalls einen, wenngleich andersartigen Teil der vergangenen Wirklichkeit (sonst wäre sie kein Bereich der Geschichtswissenschaft mehr), ihr spezifisches Erkenntnisziel aber deckt sich nicht mehr mit dem der Ereignis- und Strukturgeschichte, denn sie sucht nicht - wie diese - den Geschichtsprozeß, das Geschehen selbst mit seinen Hintergründen, sondern den kommentierenden Menschen in diesem Geschehen zu erfassen. Verändert erscheint vor allem auch das Verhältnis zur Quelle, die nicht länger ein bloßes Medium zum historischen Faktum ist, über das sie berichtet, sondern den unmittelbaren Zugang zu ihrem Verfasser als dem Gesprächspartner des Historikers erlaubt (Goetz, 1979, 260).

On the other hand, an inquiry grounded in a *Vorstellungsgeschichte*<sup>5</sup> leads to a central problem: how can one situate an individual mind in relation to a mental framework that transcends that individual? In addition, how is it possible, when engaging with interpretations built upon the minds of multiple authors or producers – like the *sagamenn* –, to recognize the ties and continuities among these subjective worlds?

Second, as a possible response to this difficulty, the Sociology of Knowledge of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (2014) and its application to discourse through

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<sup>5</sup> More about *Vorstellungsgeschichte*, cf. GRZYBOWSKI, Lukas Gabriel. *Uma 'Terceira Via' para o estudo das ideias políticas: A Vorstellungsgeschichte como resposta aos problemas colocados pela Cambridge School of the History of Political Thought. Diálogos Mediterrânicos*, n. 3, nov. 2012, p. 143–159; GOETZ, Hans-Werner. *Gott und die Welt. Religiöse Vorstellungen des frühen und hohen Mittelalters*. Berlin: Akademie, 2011, p. 13–48; GRZYBOWSKI, Lukas Gabriel. *Fabricando a realidade: A narrativa histórica da Kristni Saga e a construção da cristianização da Islândia. Kristni Saga's Historical Narrative and the Construction of Iceland's Christianization. Revista Diálogos Mediterrânicos*, [S. l.], n. 25, p. 36-57, 2024.

Reiner Keller's (2011) SKAD<sup>6</sup> has proven productive. All of these approaches point toward the centrality of construction within the human cognitive lexicon. Individuals, groups, institutions, societies, and symbolic universes are fabrications of the human mind, upheld through language and through frequent, intensive exchanges of meaning. Berger and Luckmann outlined the direction of this process through the concepts of *externalization*, *institutionalization*, and *internalization*. While the first characterizes the projection of consciousness into the world and the creation of typifications through language, and the second marks the establishment of reality through habit supported by explanatory and legitimating schemes, the third completes the process by rendering the construction as natural and self-evident (Berger, Luckmann, 2014, 74, 75-76, 129). In this regard, Keller argues against the notable "passivity" of Berger–Luckmanns' model, emphasizing that the elements that maintain institutions and the symbolic universes that support them are far more complex than mere therapeutic and annihilation processes. For the German sociologist, knowledge and, by extension, reality is conceived, produced, perpetuated, and reaffirmed through *discourse*. In Keller's perspective, discourse refers to the multidimensional and relational processes through which actors, practices, rules, and available resources generate particular versions of reality:

Discourses are simultaneously both an expression and a constitutional prerequisite of the social; they become real through the actions of social actors, supply specific knowledge claims and contribute to the liquefaction and dissolution of the institutionalized interpretations and apparent unavailabilities. Discourses crystallize and constitute themes in a particular form as social interpretation and action issues (Keller, 2011, 52).

Discourses, as we can see, do not simply describe the world; they actively shape it, governing how phenomena are interpreted, legitimized, and made socially operative. As such, discourse analysis becomes a way of tracing how meanings are produced, stabilized, and contested within specific social arenas, revealing both the construction of knowledge and the power relations embedded in that construction.

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<sup>6</sup> The abbreviation for *Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse*.

In objective terms, I consider *Njáls saga* as a doorway into the mind of its author, a mind oriented by a socio-political universe marked by instability and profound transformation. Its author-redactor, a socially constructed individual who simultaneously reaffirmed this milieu, wove a literary construct that belongs to a broader universe of significations, one that both precedes the writing and is likewise nourished by it. A political fabrication born of a political mind.

I therefore proceed by combining these approaches: while *Vorstellungsgeschichte* grants access to the object itself, the Sociology of Knowledge and SKAD allow one to interpret and situate the created material within a larger environment of the construction and maintenance of realities. In this sense, I believe this framework also offers a fruitful path for investigating the dynamics of power and knowledge, revealed through the practices of creation and narration, even though such concerns are not the primary focus here.

In what follows, using an essayistic style, I intend to investigate some *Njáls saga*'s characters' voyages abroad: first the travel of Hrútr to Norway, its relation before the king as a pirate prosecutor, and his relationship with Gunnhildr, the king's mother; secondly I will draw attention upon the voyages of the brothers Gunnarr and Kolskeggr, their reception of power changings in Norway politics, the magical halberd, and the favours they grant with the well-known monarch Haraldr Gormsson. I will also explore some landscape representations concerning Norway and the Baltic Sea.

Then I ask: how Norway, Norwegians and spaces outside Iceland were characterized in *Njáls saga*, and what this could tell us about its author-redactor's intentions?

### **Hrútr's voyage to Norway**

*Njáls saga* opens with Morðr *gígja* and the half-brothers Hrútr and Hǫskuldr. Morðr, a powerful lawman, had a daughter named Unnr (*Njáls saga* 1954, I, 5-7). Hǫskuldr, hoping to find a bride for his brother, convinced him to propose to her. The

proposal was made during the alþing; Morðr accepted, and they agreed on the terms of Unnr's dowry. It then happened that Qzurr, the brother of Hrútr's father, arrived at the Hvítá River, bringing troubling news with him. The Icelander invited his uncle to stay with him for the winter, but the old man refused, saying: "*því at ek segi þér lát Eyvindar, bróður þíns; en hann leiddi þik til arfs á Gulapingi, ok munu nú taka óvinir þínir, ef þú kemr eigi til.*" (Njáls saga, 1954, II, 10). Faced with this situation, Hrútr asked Høskuldr for advice, and the brother suggested that the best option would be to negotiate with Morðr to postpone the wedding for three winters. Hrútr traveled to Rangárvellir, went to Morðr's house, and they established this new agreement (Njáls saga, 1954, 7-11).

Hrútr sailed with Qzurr for three weeks until they reached Norway. They came to the Hernar isles and then set course eastward to Vík. At that time, ruling from Konungahella, Haraldr *gráfeldr* was king over Norway. Eiríkr *blóðøx* was his father and Gunnhildr was his mother. He descended from Haraldr *hárfagri* on his father's side. Hearing of Hrútr and Qzurr's arrival in Vík, Gunnhildr began taking an interest in Hrútr's inheritance. She knew that the wealth was in the hands of a man named Sóti and saw in this an opportunity to approach Hrútr. She sent her servant Qgmundr to the travelers with her proposal: that Hrútr should spend the winter with her, and in return she would support his claim to the inheritance or anything else he might desire. Hrútr and Qzurr accepted, but the older man gave his nephew a warning:

*“Svá lízk mér, frændi, sem nú muni vit hafa gort ráð okkat, því at ek kann skapi Gunnhildar: jafn skjótt sem vit viljum eigi fara til hennar, mun hon reka okkr ór landi, en taka fé okkat allt með ráni; en ef vit forum til hennar, þá mun hon gera okkr slíka sæmð sem hon hefir heitit.”* (Njáls saga, 1954, III, 12-13).

In Konungahella, Hrútr and Qzurr greeted some relatives and met Qgmundr again. This time he told Hrútr to present himself before the king with strength and only afterward meet Gunnhildr, in order to avoid gossip. To do so, he should wear the ceremonial outfit Gunnhildr had sent him. The next day, Hrútr and Qzurr presented themselves before King Haraldr. Hrútr greeted the king, and explained that he had come both to see him and to claim an inheritance in Norway. It was the king's duty to uphold the law, yet he hesitated

to accept him. But Gunnhildr intervened on his behalf, praising his worth. The decision was made: Hrútr would be received as a court man, but he was to return within half a month, in accordance with the customs invoked by the king, and remain during that time as a guest in Gunnhildr's residence. Escorted by Ogmundr to the building where she lived, Hrútr was given the seat of honor and was soon welcomed by the queen, who ordered that he keep that place for as long as he was her guest; that night, and through the nights that followed during the half-month, Gunnhildr lay with Hrútr in her upper chambre; She threatened those in the residence: "*Þér skuluð engu fyrir týna nema lífinu, ef þér segið nokkurum frá um hagi vára Hrúts*" (Njáls saga, 1954, III, 15). When the time had passed, Hrútr offered her rich gifts and received her wishes for good fortune. Returning then to the king, he presented himself to take the promised position. So it was done: Gunnhildr assigned him the most honorable seat at court, and Hrútr remained there throughout the winter, well regarded by everyone (Njáls saga 1954, III, 11-15).

During the summer, Hrútr learned that Sóti had gone south to Denmark with the inheritance. Speaking with Gunnhildr about the matter, she gave him two longships and the *gétrhofðingi* Úlfr the dirty. She urged him to speak with the king before departing. Before Haraldr, Hrútr stated his claim, and the king asked what support his mother had given him. The Icelander answered, and the king also granted him two longships. The king offered him kind words, and Hrútr departed (Njáls saga, 1954, IV, 16). Atli, son of the *jarl* Arnviðr of eastern Gautland, was a warrior outlawed by the kings of Denmark and Sweden for raids and killings. He led his fleet of eight ships from Lake Løgr toward Eyrasund. Hrútr was sailing south in the same direction, and upon sighting Atli's fleet, he decided to face it. Úlfr advanced first, disregarding Hrútr's strategic plans; Atli readied his men and demanded to know who led the approaching ship. When he heard that Hrútr was a courtier of Haraldr, Atli attacked, and the battle began. Ásólf, the man on Atli's prow, leapt aboard and killed four before he was slain by Hrútr. Úlfr fought bravely, but Atli struck him with a spear and killed him. Atli then boarded Hrútr's ship and wounded many, until Hrútr confronted him. After exchanging blows, Hrútr seized Atli's sword and cut off his leg, killing him. Hrútr and his men seized great wealth and two of the finest ships.

Meanwhile, Sóti sailed past and continued on to Norway; he landed at Limgarðssíða, where he was recognized by Ogmundr. The queen's servant asked:

*“Hversu lengi ætlar þú hér at vera?” “Þrjár nætr”, segir Sóti. “Hvert ætlar þú þá?” sagði Qgmundr. “Vestr til Englands,” segir Sóti, “ok koma aldri til Nóregs, meðan ríki Gunnhildar er.”* (Njáls saga, 1954, V, 19) Learning of Sóti’s plans, Qgmundr informed Gunnhildr; she ordered her son Guðrøðr to kill him. Guðrøðr captured Sóti, hanged him, and took his wealth, sending it to Gunnhildr. Nearly by autumn, Hrútr returned with great riches, was well received by the king, and gave him a third. Gunnhildr told him that she had recovered his inheritance and had Sóti killed; Hrútr thanked her and gave her half of everything (Njáls saga, 1954, V, 16-19).

Hrútr remained with the king through the winter, held in high esteem, but when spring came he grew melancholic. Gunnhildr noticed and asked whether he wished to return to Iceland; he admitted he did and he had a bride waiting there for his return. Hrútr then requested permission from King Haraldr, who questioned whether he would find greater honor there, but allowed him to go, with Gunnhildr insisting he be granted leave. The king offered to provision him with as much flour as he wanted, despite it being a year of poor harvest. Preparing to depart with Qzurr, Hrútr visited the king and Gunnhildr. She called him, gifted him a golden bracelet, kissed him, and laid a curse:

*“Ef ek á svá mikit vald á þér sem ek ætla, þá legg ek þat á við þik, at þú megir engri munúð fram koma við konu þá, er þú ætlar þér á Íslandi, en fremja skalt þú mega vilja þinn við aðrar konur. Ok hefir nú hvárki okkat vel: þú trúðir mér eigi til malsins.”* Hrútr hló at ok gekk í braut (Njáls saga, 1954, VI, 20-21).

He thanked the king, received his praise and well-wishes, boarded the ship, and sailed with a fair wind. Hrútr returned to Iceland, was warmly received by his half-brother and prepared his marriage with Unnr. The union was celebrated as agreed, but as a result of Gunnhildr’s curse the marriage was never consummated: Hrútr’s excessively large member made consummation impossible, which left Unnr deeply unhappy, despite the fact that he treated her with most respect and granted her authority upon the farm. The following spring, she decided to visit her father during the *alþing*, and Hrútr accompanied her. There, Mq̄rðr perceived her sadness, yet no accusation could be brought against Hrútr. The couple returned home, but the problem persisted through the winter and into the next

spring, always as consequence of Gunnhildr's words. With Mǫrðr's guidance, Unnr followed a plan: she pretended to be ill, waited until Hrútr departed from home for the Western Fjords, and at the time of the *alþing* declared herself legally separated before witnesses, before fleeing eastward. Hrútr returned to find the house empty.

In the summer, at the *alþing*, Mǫrðr argued him for Unnr's property; Hrútr responded by challenging him to a *hólmganga*, and Mǫrðr refused, bringing shame upon himself. After the assembly, Hrútr and Hǫskuldr traveled on, took refuge at Lundr, and heard children mocking on the case. Hǫskuldr struck one of the boys, but Hrútr compensated him with a bracelet, earning fame. After this, the half-brothers returned westward. And here ends this episode concerning Hrútr (Njáls saga, 1954 VII, VIII, 23-29).

I argue that this episode can be divided into three analytical sets that are directly interrelated: the characterization of the figures involved, the characterization and function of the geographical space, and the events carried out between these two sets.

Hrútr is the hero of the episode, connected to the people of Laxardalr and with relatives in Gula and Vík, a Norwegian link; he travels to Norway in search of the inheritance left by his brother Eyvindr. His closest ties are with his brother Hǫskuldr, his paternal uncle Qzurr, and later with Gunnhildr while in Norway, and with Unnr in Iceland. The character circulates between spaces: the Icelandic sphere, where he arranges his marriage and family alliances, and the Norwegian sphere, an environment of violence, wealth, and prestige, elements strongly linked to the Norwegian king and the courtly intrigues orchestrated by Gunnhildr. Qzurr, Hrútr's uncle, enters the narrative to inform him of the inheritance in Norway and functions as a bridge enabling the journey. He seeks honor and reputation, and he is shrewd: he warns Hrútr about Gunnhildr and her temperament. These are Icelandic men: heroic, eager for wealth and opportunities to achieve honor and fame, perceptive in the face of dangers that threaten their lives and possessions, skillful in forming alliances and agreements, and wise enough to navigate plots and rivalries. Moreover, what of the Norwegians in this episode?

Haraldr *gráfelldr*, king over Norway and of distinguished lineage, rules from Konungahella; he receives the heroes in his hall while drinking. He is tied to this space

as a symbolic embodiment of the royal office. His chief concern is the upholding of the laws and the continuity of customary practice, although even stronger than that is his inclination to follow his mother's guidance. She suggests decisions, and he complies. Likewise, when Hrútr sets out to claim his inheritance, the king gives him two ships, exactly as his mother had done. He even asked about her gift and repeated it. The king is synonymous with hall, drink, law, and tradition, yet Haraldr concerns himself with any of these only if in accordance with his mother's actions. As for his mother, Gunnhildr, she is the queen *de facto*. She weaves intrigues when she secretly instructs Hrútr on how to enter her son's court; she is temperamental when she threatens those who know about her involvement with Hrútr, a clever narrative device to create tension that anticipates Úlfr's death when he mentions the matter. She recovers Hrútr's inheritance and delivers it to him as an act of power. She always acts in terms of ritual and symbolic power: the ceremonial garment she gives Hrútr, the longships she provides for the journey, the gold bracelet at the hero's departure. Yet she is as powerful as the king, and more cunning, cursing Hrútr never to obtain pleasure with the woman who awaits him in Iceland. Qgmundr is her voice beyond the halls, the queen's messenger, reaching places where she cannot be. With him, it is as if Gunnhildr were in two places at once, an extension of herself and an instrument of her schemes. Úlfr the dirty is the leader of the guests at Konungahella; proud in combat, he utters venomous words about Hrútr and Gunnhildr, which ultimately lead to his death. It is Gunnhildr's words that cut him down, one from her own retinue. He is the "Norwegian man": admitted to the court, formidable in battle, yet loose-tongued and ill-suited to strategy when facing enemy steel.

Sóti, on the other hand, appears only to be killed. In possession of the inheritance Eyvindr left to Hrútr, the narrative places him in the role of an outlaw, though not explicitly. He wishes to flee Gunnhildr as long as Norway remains in her hands. He expresses what the narrator wants the audience to hear. And he is killed by her son. Atli, in the absence of a formal proscription within the story, is the leader of the band of murderous raiders stationed at Eyrasund. He fled from Jamtland in the north to Gautland in the south, escaping the blade of *jarl Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri*. Atli kills Úlfr, an outlaw Norwegian kills a Norwegian in the king's service, and finds his own death at the blade of the hero Hrútr. Finally, Guðrøðr, another of Gunnhildr's sons, appears unexpectedly and immediately fulfills his role: he acts as Gunnhildr's executioner. He hunts down Sóti, hangs him, and delivers Hrútr's inheritance to his mother. These are the first Norwegians

summoned into the story: a conventional king who follows the will of his mother, far more powerful and influential than he; his retainers, armed with tongue and blade, and his enemies, a pirate seeking more plunder and a fugitive longing for peace elsewhere.

In this narrative, the setting is firmly established. The Gula assembly is where the events that catalyze the hero's journey take place. There the inheritance was confirmed, and from there came the news that Qzurr brought to his nephew. Along the voyage, the Hernar islands serve as navigational markers: to their east lies the landing place in Vík, and it is there that the heroes headed. From Konungahella, Gunnhildr and Haraldr exercise their power. It is there that Hrútr presents himself, and it is in its surroundings that he weaves his relations with Norwegian royal authority. It is likewise from there that wealth emanates, wealth so sought after by Icelandic men. Norwegian space shifts when the outlaw Atli and his men enter the story. He comes from northern Norway, having fled because of violent entanglements, and in the uncertain gulf of Eyrasund, vast and narrow at once, he meets his death. He crosses the peninsular world, from his point of origin to the moment of his downfall. The same can be said of Sóti, who seeks a way out of Gunnhildr's realm, but whose stop at Lingarðssíða only secures the rope around his neck.

In concise terms, the episode of Hrútr and his journey to Norway offers several significant characterizations: Haraldr *gráfeldr* is the generic king, he upholds the laws and customs; he performs power while drinking in the hall. He and his mother compete through a regime of symbolic power: she gives clothing, he gives rank; she gives ships, he gives ships; she grants a curse, he grants provisions (*mjöl*). Even so, he follows his mother's guidance, acting in accordance with her deeds. Gunnhildr rules more effectively than her son, the king. She does so through public actions (in the hall, advising, sponsoring expeditions) and private ones (messages delivered through her servant Qgmundr, conversations to herself, gifts to manipulate Hrútr's acceptance at court, the commissioned killing of Sóti). Characters speak of her temperament: Qzurr to Hrútr, Sóti to Guðrøðr. She threatened death to anyone who revealed her schemes or hinted at them, tightening the narrative around spoken words (as in the death of Úlfr the dirty). Finally, she curses Hrútr and his future marriage.

What is being communicated is this: if a Norwegian king is already bad for being male and dependent, a woman who is shrewd is even worse: cunning, manipulative, the

cause of intrigues, and the pivot of unparalleled bloodshed unleashed later in Iceland.<sup>7</sup> Her “fault” is being a woman. In this way, her characterization is connected to that of other women in the saga and the events they are involved in, such as Hallgerðr and Bergþóra, or to sagas of the same type, such as *Egils saga*. These tensions extend to those who serve Haraldr and Gunnhildr, reinforcing an even more specific characterization for this space and its inhabitants: Norway is a land of dangers and riches, and Norwegians are people to be approached with caution.

### **Gunnarr and Kolskeggr in the *Austrvegr***

Once the disputes involving Hrútr and his wanderings in Norway have passed, the saga turns briefly to his niece Hallgerðr and her deadly marriages, first to Þorvaldr, then to Glúmr. The families involved in the killings brought about by Hallgerðr’s temperament and by the axe of her foster-father Þjóstólfr are reconciled, as dictated by the literary model, thus ushering in the next narrative block. At this point Gunnarr Hámundarson of Hlíðarendi enters the story, the central hero for several chapters, along with Njáll Þorgeirsson of Bergþórshváll, his close friend and a key figure for the unfolding of the entire narrative from this point onward. Although Njáll’s role has been questioned in recent scholarship (Tirosh, 2014), and Gunnarr’s has been the focus of the classic study by Lars Lönnroth (1969), I focus here on a single episode within this block: the account of the travels of Gunnarr and his brother Kolskeggr along the *Austrvegr*.

A ship landed at Arnarbælisós, commanded by the *austmaðr* Hallvarðr the white, a man from Vík. He stayed the winter at Hlíðarendi with Gunnarr and repeatedly urged him to travel abroad. In the spring, Gunnarr sought Njáll’s counsel at Bergþórshváll; Njáll advised him to go and agreed to manage Gunnarrs’ finances during his absence. Gunnarr then decided to leave Iceland, taking his brother Kolskeggr with him. Hallvarðr told Gunnarr of his travels along the *Austrvegr*, from Bjarmaland til Garðaríki. They agreed then to journey together (*Njáls saga* 1954, XXVIII, 74-75). They sailed to Túnsberg and wintered there. By then, Haraldr *gráfeldr* and Gunnhildr were dead, and *jarl* Hákon Sigurðarson ruled Norway; he descended from Haraldr *hárfagri* by mother-side. Gunnarr

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<sup>7</sup> About gender relation on *Njáls saga*, cf. DRONKE, Ursula. *The Role of Sexual Themes in Njáls Saga*. London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1981; JAKOBSSON, Ármann. *Masculinity and Politics in Njáls Saga*. *Viator*, v. 38, n. 1, p. 191–215, jan. 2007.

declined to enter the *jarl's* court but proposed some action: “*Þá vilda ek, at vit færim í hernað,*” *segir Gunnarr*, “*ok réðim menn til með okkr.*” (Njáls saga, 1954 XXIX, 76). Hallvarðr supplied two longships and a crew in Vík, and together they sailed east to Hísing to meet his kinsman Qlvir. Impressed by Gunnarr, Qlvir added two more ships and crews, warning them about the brothers Vandill and Karl of East Gautland (Njáls saga, 1954, XXIX, 75-77). Soon after, Gunnarr, Kolskeggr, and Hallvarðr encountered these brothers and defeated them in a fierce river battle: Vandill was mutilated by Gunnarr, Karl killed by Kolskeggr, and rich spoils were taken. The band then ranged south toward Denmark and east to Smáloñd, victorious in every fight (Njáls saga, 1954, XXIX, 77-79).

The next summer they defeated pirates at Rafala and sailed on to Eysýsla, where Gunnarr met Tófi, who warned him of the formidable brothers Hallgrímur and Kolskeggr *vikingar*. After a hard-fought battle against superior numbers, Gunnarr killed Hallgrímur with his own enchanted halberd and then struck down Kolskeggr *vikingar*, taking their treasure and cementing his reputation. After the battle, the *vikingar* asked for piety, and Gunnarr granted it. He ordered that the dead be counted and that valuables be taken from those who had fallen, while those to whom he had given mercy were allowed to keep their weapons and clothing and were sent back to their homelands. Gunnarr took all the remaining valuables. Afterward, Tófi came to Gunnarr and asked him to follow him to where the *vikingar* had hidden their treasure, claiming it was greater than anything already taken. Gunnarr agreed and went to land with Tófi. They reached a place in the forest where large logs were piled together, and beneath them they found great quantities of gold and silver, fine clothes, and good weapons, all of which they carried back to the ships. When Gunnarr asked how he wished to be rewarded, Tófi said he was Danish and asked to be taken to his people. Gunnarr accepted him and decided, with Kolskeggr and Hallvarðr, to sail to *Norðrland* (Njáls saga, 1954, XXX, 77-82).

Gunnarr left the *Austrvegr* with ten ships and great wealth and sailed to Heiðaboer in Denmark, where Haraldr Gormsson was king. Hearing of Gunnarr's arrival and his unmatched prowess in Iceland, the king invited him to stay. Their fine relation could be seen vividly on what follows:

*Konungr hafði þat at gamni, at hann lét Gunnar reyna ýmissar  
iþróttir við menn sína, ok váru þeir engir, at ne eina iþrótt hefði til jafns*

*við hann. Konungr mælti til Gunnars: „Svá virðisk mér sem óvíða muni þinn jafningi fásk. “Konungr bauð at fá honum kvánfang ok ríki mikit, ef hann vildi þar staðfestask. Gunnarr þakkaði konungi ok lézk fara verða fyrst til Íslands at finna frændr ok vini (Njáls saga, 1954, XXXI, 82).*

Gunnarr gave the king a fine longship and much wealth, and in return received ceremonial garments, gold-woven gloves, a gold-knotted headband, and a hat from Garðaríki.

From Hísing, Gunnarr shared the spoils with Ólvir and, at Hallvarðr's urging, sailed north to Þrándheimr to meet *jarl* Hákon. Welcomed with honor, he stayed the winter, won universal esteem, and received a gold arm-ring at Jól; the *jarl* even seemed willing to marry him to his kinswoman Bergljót (Njáls saga, 1954, XXXI, 82-83). In spring Gunnarr chose to return to Iceland, and despite poor sailing conditions the *jarl* supplied him generously. Gunnarr, Kolskeggr, and Hallvarðr reached Arnarbœlisós in early summer, before the *alþing*, and rode home at once (Njáls saga, 1954, XXXII, 83-84). Though rich and renowned, Gunnarr returned unchanged in temper, a restraint that crowns his success abroad and leads directly into the later, tragic course of his marriage to Hallgerðr in chapter LXXVII.

To examine this episode, I can draw on the same analytical structure used previously, namely characters, geography, and events, which allows for direct comparison between the travels of Hrútr and those of Gunnarr.

Gunnarr is the exemplary hero; he possesses extraordinary strength and speed, combined with equal measures of charisma and prudence. His journey along the *Austrvegr* takes place only after the well-intentioned counsel of Njáll: “*Ráðligt þykki mér þat,*” *segir Njáll; “muntú þér bar vel koma, sem þú ert.”* (Njáls saga, 1954, XXVIII, 74). Accompanied by his brother Kolskeggr and by the *austmaðr* Hallvarðr, he seeks his share beyond Iceland. Unlike Hrútr, Gunnarr is not confronted by the designs of a cunning queen or by her subservient son. Although he does eventually gain access to the *jarl*'s court, this entry is not immediate; the condition of the Icelandic hero is first to prove himself and to gather sufficient spoils in order to stand on equal footing with the noblest men in honor and wealth. His figure deeply impresses both Ólvir and the Danish king

Haraldr Gormsson, and this impression is conveyed to the audience through Gunnarr's feats in combat: he catches a spear in mid-flight, strikes as though wielding three arms at once, cuts down the most formidable pirates of the band, and takes from one of them the halberd, an enchanted weapon, much like heroes of legendary narratives such as Gramr of Sigurðr *fáfnisbani* or Týrfingr of Hervor's lineage. Yet Gunnarr's violence is measured, as shown by his mercy toward defeated *vikingar* and by his protection of Tófi, a Dane wronged by pirates near Eysýsla, whom he agrees to return home. This act puts Gunnarr within the Denmark of Haraldr Gormsson, where hero and king meet as near equals, exchange gifts, and affirm mutual honor. Read against Haraldr's historical association with Christianisation, this encounter may be seen as a narrative anticipation of Iceland's own luck, suggesting that even before the cross was firmly planted on the island, leading Icelanders stood in good relation to powerful Christian rulers. Returning home with wealth and fame, Gunnarr remains free of arrogance, a restraint that crowns his virtue and foreshadows his later heroic fall. Kolskeggr, equally honorable yet quieter in presence, stands loyally at his brother's side, defined by decisive action rather than words, and reinforces the saga's portrayal of Icelandic martial excellence in the face of continental danger, as we see here:

*Kolskeggr tók hvíld á skipi Gunnars, ok sér Gunnarr þat ok mælti til hans: „Betri hefir þú þórum verit i dag en þér, því at þú hefir gort þá óþyrsta.” Síðan tók Kolskeggr jústu eina fulla af miði ok drakk ok barðisk eptir þat (Njáls saga, 1954 XXX, 78).*

Thus, the depiction of Norwegian men in this episode appears to function as a narrative and moral counterpoint to Icelandic heroism, articulating a clear typology that distinguishes useful mediators, legitimate authorities, and forms of excessive violence destined for destruction. Hallvarðr functions as a positive but clearly secondary mediator: an experienced *austmaðr* who introduces Gunnarr to the continental world, providing guidance and ships without ever assuming a limited leading role. His limited narrative stature underscores that Icelandic honor is not granted by Norwegians, only facilitated in foreign space. Qlvir plays a similar yet more institutional role, recognizing Gunnarr's superiority even over his own people and supplying ships and men; he confirms, but does not create, the hero's honor, which remains grounded in Icelandic judgment and leadership. *Jarl Hákon Sigurðarson* represents legitimate Norwegian authority, distant

and restrained rather than deceitful or oppressive. Gunnarr is received only after proving his worth, and gifts and hospitality follow merit.

In direct contrast to these exemplary Norwegians stand Vandill and Karl, figures who embody excessive and disorderly violence. As brothers, they act through ambush, violate the implicit norms of confrontation, and rely more on sudden aggression than on martial excellence. Their defeats are swift and unequal; Gunnarr mutilates Vandill, while Kolskeggr kills Karl. These outcomes signal both moral and technical inferiority when compared to the Icelandic brothers. They function as narrative obstacles rather than as adversaries truly equal to heroic virtue. More complex are Hallgrímr and Kolskeggr *vikingr*, figures renowned within the violent world of the continent. They possess magical weapons, prior fame, and a numerical force far superior to Gunnarr's. Yet they represent excess: power without measure and technique without prudence; Hallgrímr relies on an enchanted weapon, while Kolskeggr *vikingr* relies on reputation and brute force. Both fall, and their deaths reaffirm that even at the height of heroic violence, the Icelander surpasses the warrior not merely through strength, but through a skillful mastery of combat.

Another contrast emerges in the figure of the Danish men. Taken as a whole, they function as a moral and symbolic counterpoint both to the disordered violence of the continent and to the intrigues of Norwegian power. Unlike the narrative oscillation of the Norwegians, the Danes operate primarily as instances of ethical, political, and narrative validation of Icelandic heroism, situated in a transitional space between the pagan world of the sagas and a royal order associated with Christianity. Tófi occupies the most modest level in terms of social status, yet he is narratively decisive. He is not an agent of violence but its victim: a Dane held in Eysýsla due to the brutality of continental *vikingar*. His function is twofold. First, he acts as an informant, warning Gunnarr about Hallgrímr and Kolskeggr *vikingr*, thus allowing the hero to prepare for the confrontation. Second, and more importantly, he offers the narrative a moral test. His reward is neither gold nor prestige, but the simple wish to return to his homeland. By agreeing to take him back to Denmark, Gunnarr reaffirms a trait already observed in contrast to other heroes: his violence is regulated, subordinated to justice and the restoration of order. Tófi thus shows that Icelandic heroism is not defined solely by the capacity to kill, but also by the ability to protect and repair; a sort of reconciliation.

On a higher plane stands Haraldr Gormsson, king of Denmark. His characterization differs markedly from that of the Norwegian authorities. He does not subject Gunnarr to initial trials nor involve him in power games; rather, he receives the hero after Gunnarr has already demonstrated his worth in combat and prudence in decision-making. Their relationship is marked by symmetry and reciprocity: Gunnarr impresses the king with his skills and wealth, standing as his equal, and the two exchange gifts, a notorious action of symbolic power. Haraldr appears as a full king, associated with the hall, regulated competition, and the exchange of gifts, yet without the maternal dependence or atmosphere of intrigue that characterizes the Norwegian court of Gunnhildr; the king is a representation of an *effective Christian order* in mainland. Denmark thus becomes a space of ideological transition, where the heroic past articulates itself with an inevitable Christian future – something very close to the figure of the *papar* in Ari Þorgilsson's account, arguments on *something* rather than proofs.

Taken together, Tófi and Haraldr Gormsson delineate the two poles of the Danish presence in the narrative: while Tófi represents the common individual, wronged by continental violence, whose rescue confirms the hero's ethics, Haraldr represents supreme authority, whose approval grants Gunnarr international legitimacy. In contrast to Norway, a land of dangers, intrigues, and excesses, Denmark emerges as a space of recognition, balance, and consecration.

As in the analysis of the characters, geography in the Gunnarr episode functions not merely as a backdrop but as a structuring element that shapes narrative meaning and moral characterization. The spatial axis of the *Austrvegr* establishes a clear contrast between Iceland, Norway, and Denmark, each associated with distinct symbolic and ethical groups; Hallvarðr is representative: *Hann kvezk hafa siglt til landa þeira allra, er váru meðal Nóregs ok Garðaríkis — „ok svá hefi ek ok siglt til Bjarmalands.”* (Njáls saga, 1954, XXVII, 75); That is the *Norse world*, later recognised by the travel back to *Norðrland*. Iceland appears as the point of origin and return, a space of social equilibrium, kinship, and moral grounding; it is home; it is not a site of testing but of definition, where Gunnarr's virtues are already recognized and from which he departs without arrogance and to which he returns unchanged in his qualities.

Norway, by contrast, is a fragmented and unstable landscape. It is marked by multiplicity of regions: Vík, Hísing, Brándheimr and by constant movement along coasts, rivers, and straits. This spatial fragmentation mirrors the moral ambiguity of the *Norwegian world*: it is a land of opportunity, wealth, and contact with power, but also of violence, piracy, and latent disorder. Norwegian space is where honor must be proven through action rather than inherited status, and where authority, embodied by the *jarl* Hákon, is legitimate yet distant, only accessible after ordeal. The geography itself demands trial before recognition. Denmark, finally, occupies a mediating position, both geographically and symbolically. Places such as Eysýsla and Heiðaboer are not portrayed as chaotic or threatening, but as zones of resolution and validation: the first is where the main battle happened, the second the space of rewarding and prestige. Denmark lacks the narrative tension of Norwegian space and instead conveys stability, hospitality, and reciprocity.

This spatial progression Iceland-Norway-Denmark and back to Iceland traces a moral itinerary rather than a mere route of travel. Geography thus *encodes* narrative values: Norway tests, Denmark confirms, Iceland preserves. The movement through these spaces constructs Gunnarr's heroism as something forged in danger, recognized in order, and ultimately reintegrated into the homeland without decay. Finally, the return to Iceland resolves the argument by reaffirming the island as the ultimate horizon of value; Gunnarr's homecoming, marked by continuity of character rather than transformation, demonstrates that continental success does not supersede Icelandic norms but serves to validate them; the full sequence of departure, trial, recognition, and return functions not simply as narrative progression but as a statement: Icelandic heroism proves itself abroad only to be completed at home, intact in virtue and elevated in honor.

### **Final thoughts: Norway and other landscapes as a rhetorical construction**

When I consider the episode as a whole, it seems to me that Norway and the other Scandinavian spaces function less as neutral settings and more as *rhetorical landscapes* deliberately shaped by the narrative. At the level of themes, I read the journey as a sustained meditation on heroism tested through dangerous movement: piracy, ambush, and excessive violence characterize the continental world, while honor emerges only through action governed by prudence. Curses, magical weapons, and extraordinary feats

place the episode at the edge between legendary material and social narrative, yet I think these elements are consistently subordinated to ethical judgment. Magic does not guarantee victory; it must be mastered. Violence is abundant, but it is only justified when aligned with restraint, justice, and honor, something I see most clearly in Gunnarr's willingness to spare enemies and protect the vulnerable. From my perspective, the characters and their origins reinforce this spatial and moral logic. Icelanders, especially Gunnarr and Kolskeggr, are defined above all by individual virtue rather than inherited authority. Their honor must be earned abroad before it can be recognized at home. Norwegian figures, by contrast, seem to occupy an intermediate position. Mediators such as Hallvarðr and Ólvir enable movement and recognition but do not generate honor themselves. Figures of excess, such as Vandill, Karl, Hallgrímr, and Kolskeggr *vikingr*, embody unregulated violence and are removed from the narrative. Legitimate authority, represented by *jarl* Hákon, appears stable yet distant, offering recognition only after ordeal. The Danish figures complete this trajectory. Tófi functions, in my reading, as a moral test that foregrounds restraint, while Haraldr Gormsson provides international validation, transforming martial success into symbolic capital through hospitality and gift exchange. Lineage and kingship matter, but they never eclipse the primacy of personal merit as embodied by the Icelandic hero.

It also seems to me that geography binds these elements into a coherent narrative grammar. Norway appears fragmented, mobile, and morally ambivalent, a space of trial where honor must be proven through risk. Denmark, in contrast, emerges as a stabilizing and mediating landscape, where violence is resolved into order and recognition, and where the hero's worth is measured not only against warriors but against a king. Iceland, though largely absent during the action, remains the ethical horizon: the place to which the hero must return unchanged by success, resisting arrogance and completing the moral arc that will later culminate in tragedy.

In conclusion – if there is possible any kind of *ending* – this reading leads me to a series of broader questions. Does this kind of representation express a common approach to Norwegian space in the thirteenth century, or is it a specific construction shaped by this particular author mind? How does these episodes compare to other sagas, such as those mentioned earlier, where Norway plays markedly different roles? If we were to consider this portrayal a “bad construction” of Norway, are there also “good constructions” within

the *Íslendingasögur* genre? And, in any case, what might such narrative choices tell us about the author and the intended audience? To me, these landscapes appear less as reflections of historical geography and more as discursive instruments, revealing how saga authors and their audiences negotiated power, violence, morality, and memory in a world of deep changes. Contrary to Denton Fox's statement on *Njáls saga* as hardly a work about history (1963), I argue that it is history, but about its authors' time, feeding a *discourse*.

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## ***Nafnleysis sǫgur: constructing Authorship without an Author***

doi: 10.36599/itac-978-85-9535-378-7\_004

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### **On the question of authorship**

We, modern readers, are accustomed to knowing works by their author's names. When someone mentions J. R. R. Tolkien, the fantasy reader will understand that it is probably a reference to *The Hobbit*, or *The Lord of the Rings*, the same goes for instance, for Andrzej Sapkowski's *Wiedźmin*, more popularly known as *The Witcher*. This logic extends equally to canonical authors, such as Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Shakespeare, Machado de Assis and so on. We tie the author's name to its work, in such a way that the two cannot be dissociated, indeed it would make no sense to speak of any of these works and not mention their authors. When a book is published, after this same author has gone through the editorial process, the title will follow his name on the book cover, thus being marketed on the internet and in physical bookstores. That is how we know books, sometimes even choosing to read them solely on the basis of the author's name displayed on the cover. However, this is one point in which Medieval readers are somewhat different from us. Because of this difference, rather than departing from questions of individual authorship, this study adopts anonymity as a methodological starting point, treating named attribution not as something given, but as a historical and interpretative construction. That will now be concisely addressed.

If we think of the Medieval *Scriptoria*, we might picture libraries filled with books (that is if it was an important, and consequently rich one) and more books being copied little by little, every day. In this context, naturally there were no ISBNs, publishers, and so on. That is to say that even titles, chapter divisions and especially authors' names were conceived differently. If we are not thinking about great names of the church, such as St. Thomas Aquinas or Isidore, for instance, there was a great chance that there were no

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mentions of authorship at all. That is the case with all of the Medieval manuscripts of the texts I am dealing with in the present work, as we shall see. This however, does not mean that the texts were not significant, or that their meaning was somehow lost without a name attached to their opening pages. On the contrary, to the contemporaries of theirs, this knowledge was part of a greater body of cumulative knowledge, and giving a bunch of leaves a name was not a particularly significant detail. These material conditions are not merely codicological details, but directly shape how authorship could be conceived, transmitted and retrospectively assigned. I will now attempt to explain this through a brief thought exercise.

A paleographer, observing certain Medieval manuscript, that it is likely to be the result of a collective work of several hands, will notice this latter detail, just as any kindergarten teacher, teaching children how to read will observe in their assignments that their writing differs from each other, significantly, that is if this teacher can even read some of the indistinct bunch of letters of the preschoolers. But back to our hypothetical manuscript and paleographer. As the manuscript under scrutiny has passed through several hands, the evidence for that will emerge: different writing styles or linguistic features – which could also indicate different moments of redaction – mistakes made while copying, marginal annotations or drawings, etc. The point is, while we may associate a single name to a Medieval work, that might not be the case with the Medieval manuscripts upon which our modern editions were based, as those manuscripts might also be – and frequently are – the product of more than one copyist's work. Authorship, in this context, emerges not as a singular creative act, but as a layered process distributed across multiple agents and moments of transmission. To differentiate between these layers and what was written by whom is the work of the paleographer, but as a historian, one should at least ask how to deal with this situation when analyzing such texts.

In this section, I will discuss the authorship problems and attributions of the three texts I am working with, starting with the *Ynglinga saga*, and following with *Yngvars saga víðförla* and *Eiríks saga víðförla*. After presenting these sources and their authorship attributions, I will discuss the concept of Medieval authorship – through E. Goldschmidt's work – alongside *Vorstellungsgeschichte* and Todorov's narrative theory, in order to demonstrate my approach to the problem of (not) assigning a name to these texts. With that, the present study proceeds from the premise that these texts are best approached, in

the first instance, as anonymous products of a manuscript culture, leaving questions of individual authorship as secondary and historically contingent.

### *On the authorship of Heimskringla*

As I stated above, the first text whose authorship is to be discussed is *Ynglinga saga*. However, this saga was not preserved alone, at least not in this format<sup>2</sup>. On the contrary, the *Ynglinga saga* is compiled within what is probably the most famous *Konungasögur* work, *Heimskringla*. Because of that, it may not be thought of as completely independent from the remaining kings' sagas in the compilation. It is therefore natural to begin this discussion by addressing the state of the art when it comes to *Heimskringla*'s authorship attributions. After that, I shall move on more specifically to the *Ynglinga saga* itself.

Diana Whaley, in *Heimskringla: an Introduction*, states the following, at the very outset of her study: “Yet so strong is the impression of integrity and artistry which *Heimskringla* gives that it is reasonable to speak of an author, and, for reasons explained in Chapter One, that author must be Snorri Sturluson (1178/9-1241)” (1991, 9, my emphasis). Whaley nevertheless qualifies this assertion, noting that:

The author is not named in any surviving vellum manuscript of these works, but it is known that Snorri compiled books and was an authority on the Norwegian kings, and most scholars would agree that it was *Heimskringla* that he wrote (1991, 13).

I draw attention to two different versions of the work's prologue, both preserved in Medieval manuscripts: the one in *Jöfraskina 2* (J2) and the one in *Fríssbók* (F). Where in J2 there are no attributions, F assigns the work to Ari Þorgilsson. As Bjarni Alðabjarnarson (1941) already discussed, that is unlikely; however, this attribution is still a part of the manuscript. Even if the author is not named in any of the Medieval *vellum*, Whaley's whole book revolves around the idea that Snorri is in fact to be considered the author of *Heimskringla*. Although Whaley herself does not directly imply that Snori is to be taken as the sole author, her enthusiasm throughout the book points in that direction, as he is frequently referred to. Yet, that is not a consensus within scholarship – albeit, the

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<sup>2</sup> There is another version of this narrative, the *Ynglingatal*, which is “detached” from *Heimskringla* and written in verse. Nevertheless, that is out of the scope of this work.

idea that Snorri at least had some relation to the production and compilation of *Heimskringla* seems to be<sup>3</sup>. If we take, for example, Patrícia Pires Boulhosa, in *Icelanders and the Kings of Norway: Mediaeval Sagas and Legal Texts*, we will notice a rather contrary argument to that of Whaley.

Boulhosa challenges the claim that Snorri must be the author of *Heimskringla*, as stated:

Their major premise is that Snorri wrote all the kings' sagas known to us as Heimskringla: the assumption, though a common one, is in fact far from uncontroversial. There is little clear proof that Snorri was the author of Heimskringla, especially in the sense in which authorship is understood within Old Norse scholarship; there are no manuscripts which explicitly claim Snorri wrote the work, and the circumstances surrounding this attribution are particularly obscure. The most important piece of evidence which scholars bring forward in order to support Snorri's authorship is a Danish translation of a number of kings' sagas from about 1551, by the Norwegian Laurents Hanssøn, which was commissioned by Hans Svaning, a tutor of the Danish prince, later King Frederik II (King of Denmark and Norway from 1559 to 1588) (2005, 8-9, my emphasis).

In Hanssøn's translation, Snorri is briefly mentioned in the prologue, as it follows: "That which follows in the preface is nothing other than the chronology which one finds in the chronicle itself about each king after Saint Óláfr and before etc. Here ends the prologue of Snorri Sturluson from the Book of Kings" (*apud* Boulhosa, 10<sup>4</sup>, my emphasis). Boulhosa goes on:

In the case of Heimskringla, there is no mediaeval attribution; it is therefore necessary to concentrate on the mentions of Snorri Sturluson and Ari inn fróði in the headings of the prologue of the sixteenth century translation. These headings are not unambiguous; as seen above, the first heading does not mention authors; the second heading, which Hanssøn apparently wrote in order to mark a change of subject in the body of the prologue, ascribes a saga or

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<sup>3</sup> I must add, however, that the seemly "dominating" opinion is that Snorri is to be considered the author of *Heimskringla*, which may be exemplified by looking at one of the main encyclopedias of the field: "Ynglinga saga ("The Saga of the Ynglingar") is the first section of Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla [...]" (YNGLINGA SAGA 1993. In: Pulsiano, Phillip (ed.). *Medieval Scandinavia: an Encyclopedia*. New York & London: Garland Publishing Inc., 739, my emphasis).

<sup>4</sup> The translation was done by the above mentioned author, thus here follows the original, also provided by the same author: "*Thet som efter fylgir in prohemio er inthet annet æn Aara tall huilket man fyinnir i sellffue kronicke om huer kong ifra Sanct Oluff oc tillforenn etc. / Her Enndis fortalenn / Snorris Sturlesenn / vdi konninge Boghen*".

sagas to Ari inn fróði and a prologue to Snorri Sturluson. It is noteworthy that Hanssøn connects Ari and Snorri to the sagas only implicitly, and does not attribute the work to either of them in the prologue, or in the frontispiece of the book [...] (2005, 12).

Hanssøn states in his preface that he had two manuscripts to rely on for his translations, one of them probably being the above mentioned *Fríssbók*. Scholars have suggested that, since Hanssøn affirms he had these two manuscripts at hand, the other one could have been *Kringla*, which would contain a prologue where Snorri was mentioned as the author of the work. However, *Kringla* was burned in a fire in 1728, in Copenhagen. Today only one leaf remains – *Lbs* Fragm. 82, in the National Library of Iceland. In any case, Ásgeir Jónsson did transcribe *Kringla* before the fire, separating it in three volumes, none of which contains the prologue in question. As Boulhosa discusses, Hanssøn could have based his affirmation on other sources, such as the *Óláfs saga ins helga*<sup>5</sup>, which could have been thought by him as Snorri's work, and that would not have been a mere coincidence:

I suggest that Hanssøn consciously manipulated the information he had before him in such a way that he could present the names of both Ari inn fróði and Snorri Sturluson. Far from an unintended ambiguity, these headings give the book an 'authoritative authorship' (2005, 13).

This is not entirely surprising, as both Ari and Snorri's names would certainly carry some weight with regard to making the work more "authentic" in the eyes of a modern audience. Even during the Middle Ages in Iceland, both names were well known. F's prologue, we must remember, attributed the work to Ari. Sverrir Tómasson, in *Formálar Íslenskra Sagnaritara á Miðöldum* notices: "It is evident that Ari was an auctoritas at the end of the twelfth century and in the early thirteenth century" (1988, 279)<sup>6</sup>.

There is still another work from roughly the same time period as Hanssøn's, namely a translation of *Heimskringla*, made by Peder Claussøn at about 1599. However, in his version there was no attribution to Snorri, which was only made when Claussøn's work

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<sup>5</sup> Jon Gunnar Jørgensen (1995, 62), argument goes on about the same direction: "[...] the two translators were probably not working from the same manuscript, and that the manuscript sources supporting the attribution need be no other than texts of *Orkneyinga saga* and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*. Information about Snorri and his work might also have been in circulation in the literary and cultural life of Bergen during Laurents Hanssøn's lifetime; and Peder Claussøn could have learnt of the thoughts and theories of literary scholars in Bergen from the lawyer Jon Simonsson".

<sup>6</sup> *Það er augljóst að Ari hefur verið auctoritas í lok 12. aldar og á öndverðri 13. öld.*

was published in 1633 by Ole Worm (Boulhosa, 2005, 17). In this regard, Jon Gunnar Jørgensen adds:

If Peder Claussøn did not derive information about the authorship of *Heimskringla* from a lost manuscript of that work, it is not necessary to believe that he knew the Prologue at all. This could explain why the publisher of his translation, Ole Worm, derived the text of the Prologue from Laurents Hanssøn's translation rather than from a manuscript (1995, 62).

Finally, if we inquire about Snorri on other sources from about the same period, we will find that no other mention is made, as Whaley points out:

Not all the authorities of this period agreed, however. Christiern Pedersen (d. 1554), when gathering materials bearing on early Danish history, used a '*norsk krønike*' compiled from a manuscript of *Heimskringla*, *Bergsbók*, and a manuscript of *Fagrskinna*. He thought that this 'chronicle' was by Bishop Ísleifr or Ari the Priest. No author was named by Mattis Størssøn (d. 1569) in his translation of *Heimskringla*, nor by Arngrímur Jónsson 'the Learned' when he cited *Heimskringla*'s Prologue in his geographical and historical treatise about Iceland, the *Crymogaea* of 1609 (1991, 14).

In this case, it seems, if we take into account the written sources, both from the Middle Ages and early modernity attempting to attribute *Heimskringla* solely to Snorri, this will lead us to a methodological problem. Since there is not sufficient evidence – at least not based on the written accounts – to say with confidence that Snorri is to be the author here<sup>7</sup>. In fact, as Boulhosa and Jørgensen argue, the early modern attributions made to Snorri seem to revolve around a “historiographical debate, permeated by national rivalries” (2005, 14). And in this context, the author of a compilation of *Heimskringla*'s magnitude – be it Snorri, Ari, or whoever carried more weight – should be stamped on the first pages of said book, especially if this author was, in this context, Icelandic or Norwegian<sup>8</sup>. Because authorship claims were shaped by prestige and political concerns, they cannot serve as definitive evidence of Snorri's role; thus, the text's composition might be considered independently of these later constructions.

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<sup>7</sup> In this regard, even Whaley, who is of the opinion that Snorri is the author, agrees: “All these factors are far too vague actually to prove the theory of Snorri's authorship, but they are all compatible with” (1991, 15).

<sup>8</sup> As Boulhosa (2005, 14) explains, this was a period when Denmark sought to maintain sovereignty over the other Scandinavian kingdoms under its rule. In contrast, Norway was weakened, which explains why it would be interesting to look once again upon its “glorious past”, through its royal dynasties.

This is not, naturally, the only argument used to strengthen Snorri's authorship theory. As Whaley points out, through Peter Hallberg's study, vocabulary could favor some "unity" when dealing with *Heimskringla* (1991, 16). Although that does not provide us with any direct evidence regarding Snorri's role, rather, it could, however, suggest the possibility of a single author. As I mentioned, this role is not undisputed within academia, though many scholars do not entirely abandon the tradition of associating Snorri with *Heimskringla*. One example of this was Konrad Mauer, who disputed Snorri's authorship over the last section of *Heimskringla*: "Like others at that time and since, he felt the impress of Snorri's authorship to be weakest in the final sagas of the cycle, maintaining that the four sagas following the death of Sigurðr Jórsalafari in 1130 were not the work of Snorri at all" (Whaley, 1991, 15). In that regard, Mauer still thought of *Heimskringla* as somewhat related to Snorri, even if not entirely conceived by him. However, in light of the above discussion regarding the prologues, one may ask why we, as academics, continue to regard Snorri as the author of *Heimskringla* despite the lack of conclusive evidence. But the fact is we also cannot affirm that he was not the author. Neither hypothesis can be fully proven. What to do then? I shall come back to this question in a moment.

For now, what I wanted to highlight was exactly this need to tie Snorri to *Heimskringla*, which, in my view, is not productive for the advancement of the field. In fact, Snorri being one of the "major figures" when it comes to Old Norse studies has shown other concerning developments in the same regard, as Kólbrun Haraldsdóttir demonstrates<sup>9</sup>:

One sees in Snorri the reviver of Old Norse poetry and the great pioneer of classical saga literature. Almost everyone assumes that he composed the *Heimskringla*, the *Snorra-Edda*, and a separate version of the *Óláfs saga helga*, the so-called *Óláfs saga in sérstaka*. Arguments have been put forward that he wrote *Egils saga*, and even the *Prymskviða* and the extant version of the *Hávamál* are said to originate with him. The latest idea is that Snorri, with *Egils saga*, created a new literary genre, the *Íslendingasögur*; *Egils saga* would be the first *Íslendingasaga* and at the same time a kind of link between the *Konungasögur* and the *Íslendingasögur* (1998, 97)<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> All translations from Old Norse and other languages presented in this work are done by myself, unless stated otherwise. In that way, the original text always follows in footnote.

<sup>10</sup> *Man sieht in Snorri den Wiedererwecker der altnordischen Dichtkunst und den großen Wegbereiter der klassischen Sagaliteratur. Fast alle gehen davon aus, daß er die Heimskringla, die Snorra-Edda und eine*

The tendency to associate Snorri with multiple works, as Kólbrun notes, reflects the historiographical weight his name carries, which may bias attributions rather than reflect actual authorship. Since Gustav Storm in the 19th century, Snorri has been attached to almost any work deemed significant, something that can be seen by the attempts to attribute *Egils saga* to him, as well as in designating him the “founder” of the *Íslendingasögur*. In a way, these attempts are not so distant from the early modern attributions of *Heimskringla* to Snorri, made by Hanssøn or Christiern Pedersen (d. 1554)<sup>11</sup>, as then, Snorri’s name still lends authority to any work associated with him<sup>12</sup>. Taken together, these scholarly perspectives illustrate that even modern consensus is provisional and shaped by interpretive frameworks, supporting a reading of *Heimskringla* as potentially anonymous or multi-authored.

With this section, I hope the reader can see my argument regarding Snorri and *Heimskringla*, and why I avoid treating the work as solely his. There is simply not enough evidence to conclude that Snorri is the author or the sole author. Rather, it might be more fruitful to try and read the compilation as an anonymous work from the 13th century, or perhaps earlier, as suggested by Alan J. Berger in *Heimskringla is an abbreviation of Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* (2001). This is at least, the path I chose to address the double-edged sword problem with authorship: depart from the point that the work is anonymous in the first place.

The *Ynglinga saga* is, however, not amongst the final sagas of *Heimskringla*, but rather the very first in the compilation. Still, with the evidence I presented here pointing towards an anonymous work, I do not believe it is productive to isolate this saga from the collection. On the contrary, if we say *Heimskringla* is to be considered anonymous, we may read Mauer’s idea as follows: the final section may not be the work of the same

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*gesonderte Fassung der Óláfs saga helga, die sogenannte Óláfs saga in sérstaka, verfaßt hat. Man hat Argumente dafür angeführt, daß er die Egils saga geschrieben habe, und sogar die Prymskviða und die heute erhaltene Fassung der Hávamál sollen von ihm stammen. Und die neueste Idee ist die, daß Snorri mit der Egils saga eine neue literarische Gattung, die islendingasögur, geschaffen habe; die Egils saga sei die erste islendingasaga und gleichzeitig eine Art Bindeglied zwischen den Konungasögur und den Islendingasögur.*

<sup>11</sup> Pedersen attributes the work he called *Norsk Krønike* to either the bishop Ísleifr or Ari Þorgilsson.

<sup>12</sup> Still on *Egils saga*, it is worthy mentioning a recent indirect translation made to Brazilian Portuguese by Artur Avelar, published in 2023. On the apparently IA made cover, it is stamped the name “Snorri Sturluson”. It is also interesting to disclose that Avelar is not a specialist in Old Norse studies, rather an independent translator focused on “medieval classics” in general.

author as the earlier sections. In that way, we might conclude that there is a case of multiple authors, which is not unheard of in the Middle Ages.

### On the authorship of *Yngvars saga víðförla*

*Yngvars saga víðförla*'s authorship bears some similarities to *Heimskringla*'s, as we shall see. The tale of the adventurer sea-king Yngvarr and his son Sveinn, is usually classified as a legendary saga<sup>13</sup>, though only partially, since the víðförla sagas can be seen as a distinct subgenre, following Rudolf Simek.

When it comes to authorship *Yngvars saga víðförla* may be a product of the 12th-century, as Dietrich Hofmann (1981, 1984a, and 1984b) points out. Hofmann argues that the author of the text is Oddr Snorrason, a Benedictine monk at the monastery of Þingeryar, in the northwest of Iceland. This is indeed mentioned in the epilogues of both the main manuscripts that preserve the saga *i.e.*, GKS 2845 4to<sup>14</sup> and AM 343A 4to (*c.* 1450-1475). While the manuscripts mention Oddr, this alone cannot confirm authorship, as we have seen with the case of *Heimskringla*. The manuscripts present incomplete versions of the text, compiled among other Fornaldarsögur and Ridarasögur. In one epilogue, it is written:

This story is told by the monk Oddr, who had heard it from that priest who was called Ísleifr, and also another Glúm, son of Þorgeirr, and a third, who was called Þórir (1954, 459)<sup>15</sup>.

If we take the word of the copist at face value – as Quentin Skinner, in *Visions of Politics volume 1: Regarding Method*, suggests when dealing with ideas from other times (2002, 40-41) – at first glance, one might conclude that the author is a certain monk, who is called Oddr, at least for those involved in the production of the manuscript and potential readership. Besides this excerpt, however, Hofmann relies on the consensus about Oddr Snorrason's authorship of the *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, originally composed *c.* 1190, in

<sup>13</sup> This borderline classification is relevant because subgenre conventions may influence narrative structure and thematic choices, which in turn can provide clues about possible authorship or compositional context. However, discussing the saga subgenre classifications is out of the scope of this section.

<sup>14</sup> This manuscript contains both *Yngvars saga víðförla* and *Eiríks saga víðförla*, as well as other fornaldarsögur.

<sup>15</sup> *Þessa sögu segist Oddr munk heyrta hafa segja þann prest, er Ísleifr hét, ok annan Glúm Þorgeirsson, ok inn þriðji hefir Þórir heitit.*

Latin, which survives in translations to Old Norse, made around the 13th-century. Therefore, Hofmann's theory is that *Yngvars saga víðförla* complementary work by Oddr to his *Óláfs saga*, based on the on the parallels of both works. Antonsson, however, disagrees on these parallels, as he says that: "Most notably, the two texts are not conjoined around political and ecclesiastical issues. Rather they share a concern with salvation and, more specifically, with the fate of secular leaders in the afterlife" (2012, 76). Despite researchers such as Lars Lönnroth agreeing, partially, with Hofmann on the attribution of authorship to Oddr, the larger consensus is that this is a later invention. Antonsson goes beyond:

Indeed since the publication of Olsson's edition there seems to have been a consensus that the attribution to Oddr was a fourteenth-century invention which enhanced the authenticity of the saga and gave it an illustrious ancestry. Underpinning Hofmann's ascription of the saga to Oddr was his discovery that the earliest text of *Yngvars saga* had almost certainly been written in Latin rather than Old Norse (2012, 75, my emphasis).

Rudolf Simek, similarly to Hofmann, does not agree with the idea that the attribution to Oddr is an invention (*apud* Hofmann, 1984b, 106). However, he suggests that a later author — unlike Hofmann's dating to the 12th century — likely composed the saga in the 14th century: "knew only Oddr's letter and made use of it in order to lend greater authority to his *Yngvars saga víðförla*" (*apud* Hofmann, 1984b, 106)<sup>16</sup>.

On this first topic, I do not believe that there is enough evidence, as Hofmann assumes, to say with confidence that Oddr Snorason is our author here. Not only that, but the fact that we only have manuscripts from the 1400s containing this saga means that, even if we take Hofmann's hypothesis that the text is dated to the 12th century, we still do not have any manuscripts to confirm that this attribution is from that period rather than from later copying. That does not mean, of course, that the text itself could not be dated earlier than GKS 2845 4to and AM 343A 4to. On that regard, Hofmann produces two solid arguments to date it to the 12th century:

I would like to point out only two indications which, among others, speak particularly clearly in favor of an early dating of *Yngvars saga*. The expression at *alþjóðaliði* ("according to the common reckoning") in connection with the specification of the year of Yngvarr's death was

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<sup>16</sup> "Simek hält es aber auch für möglich, daß dieser späte Verfasser nur Odds Brief gekannt und sich seiner bedient habe, „um seiner *Yngvars saga víðförla* größeres Gewicht zu geben".

meaningful only for as long as another system of chronology – namely that of Gerlandus – was also in use in Iceland. The uncertainty resulting from this situation did not persist very long beyond the year 1200 and had long since been forgotten by the fourteenth century (SpN, pp. 197ff.). A saga author of the fourteenth century would scarcely have addressed the problem of Yngvarr’s sanctity – demonstrated through miracle-working – at all, and certainly not in the daring manner found in *Yngvars saga* (SpN, pp. 215ff.). This does not fit the fourteenth century, but fits very well the late twelfth century and Oddr in particular (1984b, 107)<sup>17</sup>.

On the one hand, Hofmann points to the linguistic argument: many aspects of the Old Norse prose present in the text point not only to an earlier date, but possibly to an earlier composition in Latin. In chapter XI, the term *Jaculus*<sup>18</sup> is used to refer to a winged creature that one could call “dragon”. On this same topic, Roland Scheel, in his book *Skandinavien und Byzanz*, wrote:

Since the Old Norse version also explicitly states that it dates Ingvarr’s death to 1041 (as do the Icelandic annals) at *alþýðu tali* (*secundam aeram vulgarem*), one must – also in view of the early linguistic forms – assume that the passage in question originated no later than the course of the binding introduction of the Dionysian computus around 1218, if not already earlier in conjunction with the process of vernacularization. Until that point, the Gerland computus had been in use at Þingeyrar, and it is plausible that the reference signals an innovation, or a deviation from the Latin exemplar (2016, 703)<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> *Im übrigen verweise ich nur auf zwei Indizien, die, neben anderen, besonders deutlich für die Frühdatierung der Yngvars saga sprechen. Die Wendung at alþjóðaliði ‚nach allgemeiner Zeitrechnung‘ war im Zusammenhang mit der Angabe von Yngvars Todesjahr nur so lange sinnvoll, wie man in Island auch a a nach einer anderen Zeitrechnung, nämlich der von Gerlandus, datieren konnte. Die dadurch gegebene Unsicherheit bestand kaum sehr lange über 1200 hinaus und war im 14. Jahrhundert längst vergessen (SpN, 197ff.). Ein Sagaverfasser des 14. Jahrhunderts hätte das Problem von Yngvars nicht durch Wundertaten ausgewiesener Heiligkeit schwerlich überhaupt und sicher nicht in so gewagter Weise behandelt, wie es in der Yngvars saga geschieht (SpN, 215ff.). Das paßt nicht ins 14., sehr gut aber ins ausgehende 12. Jahrhundert und zu Oddr ganz persönlich.*

<sup>18</sup> Which comes from Isidor of Seville, as Scheel and Hofmann already pointed out. This means that whoever has written the manuscript versions we have access to, likely had a latin education.

<sup>19</sup> *Da die norröne Version zudem hervorhebt, sie datiere Ingvars Tod 1041 (wie auch die isländischen Annalen) at alþýðu tali (secundam aeram vulgarem), muss man auch angesichts der frühen Sprachformen davon ausgehen, dass der fragliche Passus spätestens im Zuge der verbindlichen Einführung des Computus nach Dionysius Exiguus um 1218 entstand, wenn nicht schon früher zusammen mit der Vernakularisierung. Bis dato verwendete man in Þingeyrar den Gerlands-Computus, und es liegt nahe, dass der Hinweis auf eine Neuerung beziehungsweise eine Abweichung von der lateinischen Vorlage hindeutet. Da die norröne Version zudem hervorhebt, sie datiere Ingvars Tod 1041 (wie auch die isländischen Annalen) at alþýðu tali (secundam aeram vulgarem), muss man auch angesichts der frühen Sprachformen davon ausgehen, dass der fragliche Passus spätestens im Zuge der verbindlichen Einführung des Computus nach Dionysius Exiguus um 1218 entstand, wenn nicht schon früher zusammen mit der Vernakularisierung. Bis dato verwendete man in Þingeyrar den Gerlands-Computus, und es liegt*

As Hofmann, Scheel generally supports authorship attribution to Oddr and circumstantial dating to the 12th century. Returning to Hofmann, the other argument made for dating the text to the 12th century concerns the theme of sanctity and salvation. And again, it seems Hofmann is right, as in this century, the concept of sanctity was not yet fully systematized, whereas by *c.* 1300 canonization was already more centralized and organized under papal authority (Brown, 1981). Because of that, for a holy man to be properly canonized, there would need to be a proper list of miracles, either in life or posthumous, which required proper church investigation. This left little room for a 14th-century scribe to address canonization as it is done in *Yngvars saga víðförla*; by contrast, the 12th century provided much more fertile ground for such discussion. Thus, if the text was composed in the 12th century when the discussion of sanctity was more fluid, it makes Oddr's potential authorship plausible – albeit still circumstantial; conversely, a 14th century scribe would likely have treated the theme differently, weakening a late dating attribution.

If we consider then that the text was composed around the 12th century, then the argument of attributing the same to Oddr gets stronger. The several similarities to Oddr's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, pointed out by both Hofmann and Scheel as well as by Phelpstead, become even more evident. Nevertheless, in my opinion, it is still a leap to go from “the text belongs to the 12th century” to “Oddr is the author”. The similarities between both texts are indeed very much real, and yet this does not rule out the possibility that another scribe used Oddr's *Óláfs saga Tryggvason* to compose a first draft of *Yngvars saga víðförla*, possibly in Latin. Given the widespread practice of textual borrowing in the Middle Ages, it is entirely plausible that the author of *Yngvars saga* relied on Oddr's work. The same is valid for the dating, as the canonization question does not forbid one from writing about this theme, even in the early 13th century, especially if we consider the time it would take for information from the continent to reach a periphery such as Iceland and then be properly established there. For these reasons, here is how I am addressing both problems: a) Authorship: since there is insufficient evidence to confirm Oddr as the author, I will consider the text anonymous – a point I will clarify below; b) Dating: it is reasonable to suggest that the text could have been composed in Latin in the 12th or early 13th century. However, we do not have access to this hypothetical Latin

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*nahe, dass der Hinweis auf eine Neuerung beziehungsweise eine Abweichung von der lateinischen Vorlage hindeutet.*

draft, which means we may only infer upon linguistic evidence to point in that direction. That ultimately is to say that the Old Norse version we have of the text is our one and only material to work – besides of course, the Yngvarr runestones<sup>20</sup> – and there is no way to say with confidence what is residual from this Latin version and what is the scribe's creation in Old Norse. Still, there is enough evidence to say that at least the text was heavily influenced by Latin sources such as Isidor and Adam of Bremen. This underscores that while the text draws heavily on Latin sources, such influence does not necessarily indicate Oddr's authorship, as any educated scribe could have incorporated these materials.

### **On the authorship of *Eiríks saga víðförla***

Quite differently from our previous two cases, *Eiríks saga víðförla* seems to be widely accepted as an anonymous work. The last, and most up to date, critical edition of the text was made by Helle Jensen, as a part of the Danish series *Editiones Arnamagnæanæ*, and published in 1983. In it, Jensen wrote an extensive introduction – which was well received despite Rudolf Simek's critique (1984) – to the text, in which the scholar approaches authorship concisely.

Albeit not necessarily Jensen's main concern, the authorship question emerges in her introduction. However, not a single attempt is made to tie a name to the text. Jensen simply states that the author of the saga was a learned man who relied very much on the current literature of his time (1983, XXV). In this regard, the scholar goes on to explore the relations between the sources that the saga makes use of, such as the *Elucidarius* and *De imagine mundi*, which she defends were in Old Norse translation, rather than in Latin<sup>21</sup>, agreement with Margaret Schlauch's earlier observation in *Romance in Iceland* (1934). According to the uses of both the Latin texts – be it in translation or not – the implicit dating may be placed between the 12th and 13th centuries, a timeframe further supported by the saga's use of the revelation *motif* (Jensen, 1983). This is reflected in other scholar's texts, such as the above mentioned by Scheel, who wrote that “In the Eiríks

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Krakow, 2022 and 2023.

<sup>21</sup> In this point, R. Simek disagrees, as he thinks that the versions of these works utilized by whoever wrote the saga were actually in Latin, rather than in Old Norse. See Simek, Rudolf. 1984. *Die Quellen der Eiríks saga víðförla*. Skandinavisk, vol 14, n. 2, 114.

saga víðförla, composed around 1300 in Iceland, a heathen in ancient times sets out in search of the *Ódains akr*, that is, Paradise” (2016, 710, my emphasis)<sup>22</sup>.

In fact, when it comes to the saga of *Eiríkr*, there is no explicit attempt to link the text to a “famous” name, as it occurs with our other two sagas. This contrast highlights that the practice of attaching renowned names as in *Heimskringla* or *Yngvars saga*, was not universal and may reflect differences in audience expectations or textual purpose. Be it for the complete lack of modern claims – at least to my knowledge – or because it did not occur to anyone that it would be interesting to do so in this case, the fact is that anonymity suffices here. Even Hofmann does not do so, at least explicitly; for him, the syntax and conceptual structure of *Eiríks saga víðförla* is a sign of a Latin trained author that could be compared to Oddr – although he does not claim that Oddr is in fact the author of this saga (1981, 1984a), he merely suggests that it could be located in the same monastic horizon, namely Þingeyrar.

With that, I do not think it wise to attach a name to a text that does not appear to require one. Not because the text was not important during the Middle Ages and beyond, after all, as Alessia Bauer in *Fremd und Eigen in der Eiríks saga víðförla: die Umkehrung der Erzählperspektive* (2018, 3-4), Simek and Jensen remind us, there are more than fifty known manuscripts that preserve the saga, ranging from the end of the 14th century to the 19th century, with the oldest surviving copy likely being the *Flateyjarbók* (GKS 1005 fol.). The text made its way into our posteriority without the need of a name to bear, demonstrating the high regard of its audience and the diligence of those who preserved it over the centuries. In any case, as I will argue in the next subsection, there might be no need to name authors for any of the texts I discussed above, as the medieval audience appears to have been unconcerned with naming authors. As we shall see, textual authority often derived from content and tradition, rather than individual authorship in the Middle Ages.

### About Medieval Authorship

In *Medieval texts and their First Appearance in Print* (1943), Ernst Goldschmidt said: “I think this would be a simpler world if people left anonymous texts anonymous

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<sup>22</sup> *In der um 1300 in Island entstandenen Eiríks saga víðförla begibt sich gar ein Heide in grauer Vorzeit auf die Suche nach dem Ódains akr, also nach dem Paradies.*

instead of thinking up odd proposals for fathering them on a varied assortment of incongruous authors” (1943, 30). With that tone, I open this subsection to discuss how I address the three works hereby discussed as anonymous texts. To say a text is anonymous does not mean it did not have an author, or possibly several. After all, there would be no extensive scholarship, including this study if something had not been written centuries ago.

As I mentioned in the beginning of this section, Medieval authorship is rather different from authorship in our contemporary sense. We are accustomed to assume that if the work is published, it is typically the product of a single known author. This is especially intertwined with the advent of the book press, during early modernity. That is not, however, exactly the case for Medieval texts. On the one hand, during the Middle Ages, the notion of authorship was much closer to a collective than a single name (of course, there are exceptions, that is not a rule after all; we may quote so-called “great names” as St. Augustine or Isidore of Seville). On the other hand, with the advent of the press, a need emerges as well – evidently modern – to assign authors to circulating books and texts (Goldschmidt, 1943).

In this context – especially the first hundred years after the invention of printing, that is between 1450 and 1550 – Goldschmidt brought up three categories to understand the Medieval books then printed. The first one are books that were always in demand, such as the Bible, and the church fathers' works. Following the commerce rules of demand and offer, it is clear why these books were popular printing choices, selling quickly due to constant readership. The second group comprises those books by contemporary readers: “[...] wrote with a view to their immediate appearance in print” (1943, 41). But it is the third group that is of primary interest here, for it contains what Goldschmidt calls “resuscitated books”:

The demand of the booksellers for a greater range of titles, the spirit of the age of the revival of learning with its eager curiosity for every kind of literary relic of the past, the spiritual and philosophic tendencies of the Pre-Reformation period seeking for a purer religion and deeper knowledge in the days of the wiser forefathers, all contributed to make the printers search the libraries for books worth printing (1943, 41).

After the initial “boom”, when the “newly found” Greek and Roman classics were exhaustively printed and reprinted, the interest was turned to Medieval books. But, as we

already have seen, those manuscripts often did not contain any authorship attribution. Goldschmidt says the following, regarding how it was dealt with: “the copyists or printers got hold of a manuscript that did not give the author’s name and either left it at that or took the name of the author of the following or preceding tract in the volume to apply [...] (1943, 47). That may remind us of the earlier discussion on Laurents Hanssøn and Peder Clausson. Moreover, in the third chapter of his book, Goldschmidt states that:

I believe that the real cause of all these ‘pseudonyms’, all these false attributions, as well as the existence of a large body of hopelessly anonymous work, is twofold. It lies firstly in the physical circumstances under which books were studied, written, and multiplied before the invention of printing; and secondly in the psychological attitude towards conditions and differing widely from our modern views and judgements on the various forms of literary activity (1943, 89).

With that, the author points out to our modern distinction of “Manuscripts” and “Books”, which is not at all applicable to the pre-press era, when manuscripts and books were effectively equivalent. Moreover, as it is also demonstrated by the author, few of the surviving medieval manuscripts were worked on by “one hand”. That does not only mean that more than one scribe would have worked on said manuscript, but also that several of the pages could have been reorganized and recompiled by librarians or bookbinders, who created new volumes without concern for critical compilation. That meant that:

They would assemble loose peciae of similar size to preserve in one volume, and they would be guided primarily by the format and secondarily as far as possible by the nature r subject-matter of the texts, but practically never by considerations of authorship. They might endeavour to form volumes of homilies and sermons and other volumes of grammar, logic, and astronomy, because these two categories would be placed in different sections of the library. But within these two categories they would not mind in the least binding a ninth-century author next to a thirteenth-century one (1943, 95).

Then if we are dealing with several scribes working on a manuscript, or even reorganization of the leaves, the question of what was an author in this context becomes relevant. Goldschmidt provides an interesting reflexion:

It cannot be doubted that for many medieval writers the exact point at which they ceased to be 'scribes' and became 'authors' was not at all clear. What amount of 'comportation' of acquired information entitled a man to claim the standing of an 'author' of a new unit in the chain of transmitted knowledge? We

are guilty of an anachronism if we imagine that the medieval student regarded the contents of the books he read as the expression of another man's personality and opinion. He looked upon them as part of that great and total body of knowledge, the *scientia de omni scibili*, which had once been the property of the ancient sages. Whatever he read in a venerable old book he would take to be not somebody's assertion but a small piece of knowledge acquired by someone long ago from someone else still more ancient (1943, 113, my emphasis).

I think that is an interesting way of synthesizing the concept of medieval authorship, as it explains why assigning a name to a work was not a priority for medieval scribes, unlike the emphasis placed on authorship in early modernity. As Goldschmidt suggests, that seems to be strongly linked with the press and commerce logics, including large-scale book production and the distribution of copies to a growing readership, for which naming authors could provide market recognition. And if we turn back to our sources for a moment, more specifically to *Heimskringla*, as Diana Whaley reminds us:

Few nowadays, then, would question that Snorri, more than anyone else, is the author of *Heimskringla*. What needs further thought, though, is the nature of authorship in the Middle Ages, which was altogether less individual, more corporate than post-medieval and especially post-Romantic authorship. Two crucial ways in which this is so will be examined here. The first concerns the medieval author and those immediately around him. The opening sentence of Snorri's Prologue to *Heimskringla* contains the idiom *lét ek skrifa*, literally 'I caused to be written', and in *ÓlTrygg* 80 he uses *rita* and *rita láta* apparently interchangeably within a few lines. (He also applies the phrase *lét rita* to King Sverrir in *Hsona* 32.) These phrases suggest that Snorri's method of composing sagaworks was to make use of at least one scribe, sometimes dictating to him, and sometimes instructing him to incorporate a passage from a preexisting source, possibly with some prescribed alteration. Such a scribe would presumably be a man in holy orders, for there were several in Snorri's entourage (1991, 17, my emphasis).

Indeed that could suggest – or at least be meant to – the collaboration of several scribes on making the manuscript, as *lét ek skrifa* implies someone is dictating to the writer. As with Snorri, this part of the prologue should not automatically be regarded as more authoritative. However, the practice of dictating was attested in Medieval *Scriptoria*, and one should bear that in mind in this case. What is left, thus, if we chose here not to assign any work to a known name? In the first two cases, we could say that

*Heimskringla* is Snorris's work as much as *Yngvars saga víðförla* is Oddr's. We might then rely on biographical context, but as shown above, I adopt a different approach, which now is further justified.

As Goldschmidt and Whaley make clear on the excerpts above, it would be somewhat anachronistic to talk about authorship – at least in the way we are concerned with today – when working with Medieval texts, broadly speaking. In the first two examples, *Heimskringla* and *Yngvars saga víðförla* we might see how early modern editors addressed this problem by assigning names they considered authoritative. Their concern was not with anachronism, naturally, but as a 21st century Historian, that would be considered a sin to do. On the third case, *Eiríks saga víðförla*, we are left with several manuscripts of all ages but the Medieval, which demonstrates that anonymity was not a hindrance to a text's transmission or influence, reinforcing the Medieval conception of collective authorship. As it is obvious from the scholarship, that should be then treated as anonymous *a priori*. My question is then, in the light of the evidence, both circumstantial and direct, why should the first two not be taken as anonymous works as well? And then as we hereby consider them so, how to deal with those works? If we are not to assign a name, what can we do? I will discuss the solution I found best below.

### **Dealing with anonymity**

Before what we now call a “History of Ideas”, and especially if we look into 18th and 19th century historians, one would often say that the document “speaks for itself”. That is, there was no room for historical criticism, as the narrative presented by official documents was often taken for granted and therefore history itself was considered the science that narrated the past “as it was”. After the *École des Annales* and the “linguistic turn” popularized this “History of Ideas and Mentalities” approach however, historians started to look beyond the official documents, to those sources, both written and in other formats, in order to reconstruct this “unofficial” history, or even history “seen from below,” rather than focusing solely on dominant perspectives. This shift in historiography highlights the importance of examining the perspective of the narrators in sources, including those who remain anonymous.

The most important thing though, is that these narratives were no longer accepted uncritically as accurate mirrors of past events. That also meant that what History was,

essentially changed, since the implication was that we cannot know the past directly. We may only look into the past through indirect evidence, building a version of the past that we can understand and internalize. In 1979, the German Historian Hans-Werner Goetz was one to give voice to what he called a *Vorstellungsgeschichte*, in an article entitled „*Vorstellungsgeschichte*“: *Menschliche Vorstellungen und Meinungen als Dimension der Vergangenheit*. He wrote:

A “*Vorstellungsgeschichte*” does not reconstruct the past in its factuality, but the past as the “processed reality of the contemporary.” Since “history” today is increasingly defined as the image of the past held by the respective present, a “*Vorstellungsgeschichte*” in this sense indeed treats “the history of past times.” It does not reveal facts or structures, but the contemporary understanding of history, and thus, as I argue, it stands alongside event history and structural history, representing a third domain of past reality and a new (third) type of historical study with its own methods and results (1979, 256-257)<sup>23</sup>.

Moreover, he writes:

In short, it is applicable to all questions that do not aim to capture historical facts in their objectively occurring context, but rather focus on their filtering “in the mirror of the sources” – that is, on examining the ideas, views, and conceptions of people of past times. Here, the task is no longer merely to provide preliminary work for a source interpretation, but – beyond the source-critical approach – to see the real aim of knowledge in the conceptions of the authors of the sources themselves. Such an approach goes far beyond the remit of traditional intellectual history, because it does not aim at reconstructing “epoch-making ideas,” but investigates the thought-world and mental framework of individual contemporaries in their entirety. When applied consistently, this opens up a significant dimension of the past – the mental world of people of earlier epochs – that has hitherto received insufficient

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<sup>23</sup> Eine „*Vorstellungsgeschichte*“ rekonstruiert nicht die Vergangenheit in ihrer Faktizität, sondern die Vergangenheit als die „verarbeitete Wirklichkeit des Zeitgenossen“. Da man „Geschichte“ heute zunehmend als das Vergangenheitsbild der jeweiligen Gegenwart definiert, behandelt eine *Vorstellungsgeschichte*“ in diesem Sinn tatsächlich „die Geschichte vergangener Zeiten“. Sie erschließt weder Fakten noch Strukturen, sondern das zeitgenössische Verständnis von Geschichte, und tritt damit, wie ich meine, in eine Reihe neben die Ereignis- und Strukturgeschichte und repräsentiert gleichsam einen dritten Bereich der vergangenen Wirklichkeit und eine neue (dritte) Art geschichtswissenschaftlicher Betrachtung mit eigenen Methoden und Ergebnissen.

attention within historical scholarship, even though recent impulses concerning “ideas and mentalities” point in this direction (1979, 255-256)<sup>24</sup>.

That I believe is very relevant for us here, as it allows us to interpret the narrators of the texts discussed here as constructions reflecting contemporary understandings rather than personal authorship. Besides merely preparing and analysing a historical document regarding the event sequence presented in it, this perspective proposes to go beyond, and think about the conceptions and perceptions of the document’s narrator. One must then understand that which the source itself provides directly: the individual conceptions of the narrator. I am referring specifically to a narrator, because I believe calling for an author in this case, where we are dealing with Medieval texts, could be considered anachronistic – as demonstrated priorly. In that regard, the primary source becomes not a direct mirror of the past, but an indirect one. It is only direct when we think that it is the *reservoir* for this narrator’s conceptions. This narrator may represent a composite of multiple hands or voices, potentially spanning different periods or locations; however, for analytical purposes, we treat it as a single “constructed narrator” for the purposes of this study.

If then the source arms us with the possibility to grasp what the narrator’s thought, this once anonymous figure becomes somewhat more intelligible. For instance, if we look at both *viðförla* sagas, we will notice the already stressed religious theme very explicitly. If we then compare it with the heavy presence of Latin vocabulary present in both texts and the use, for example, of sources such as the *Elucidarius* and maybe *Stjórn* or *Hómiliubók*, we might reach the same conclusion as some of the authors cited above have argued: we are dealing with men who were well versed in Christian literature, which is not a surprise. We may even go further and say that the narrators were perhaps priests. In the case of the *Ynglinga saga*, we will notice that, even if the narrator is concerned with recounting the past, he is not very fond of pagan kings and paganism – although they present what they consider to be paganism of some sort – on the contrary, most of the

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<sup>24</sup> Kurz, er ist anwendbar auf alle Fragen, die die historischen Tatbestände nicht in ihrem objektiv abgelaufenen Geschehniszusammenhang zu erfassen trachten, sondern ihre Filterung „im Spiegel der Quellen“ zum Gegenstand haben, also die Ideen, Ansichten, Vorstellungen der Menschen vergangener Zeiten untersuchen und hier nicht länger lediglich Vorarbeiten für eine Quelleninterpretation leisten, sondern - über den quellenkritischen Ansatz hinaus - in den Vorstellungen der Quellenverfasser ihr eigentliches Erkenntnisziel sehen. Ein solcher Ansatz geht weit über die Aufgabe einer traditionellen Geistesgeschichte hinaus, weil er nicht auf die Erarbeitung „epochemachender Ideen“ abzielt, sondern die Gedanken- und Vorstellungswelt einzelner Zeitgenossen in ihrer Gesamtheit untersucht. Konsequenterweise angewendet, eröffnet sich hier mit der Vorstellungswelt der Menschen vergangener Epochen eine bedeutende Dimension der Vergangenheit, der bisher noch eine angemessene Beachtung innerhalb der Geschichtswissenschaft fehlt, wiewohl die neueren Anregungen über Ideen und Mentalitäten“ in diese Richtung zielen.

pagan kings presented there die either foolishly or because they were simply terrible kings. The fact is, we are always dealing with narrative, which is how these narrators talked to their audience. In *Poetics of Prose*, Tzvetan Todorov wrote about Benveniste's studies on the verb tenses:

He has shown the existence, within language, of two distinct levels of the speech-act: that of discourse and that of the story. These levels refer to the integration of the subject of the speech-act within what is spoken. In the case of the story, Benveniste tells us, "we are dealing with the presentation of phenomena which occurred at a certain moment of time without any intervention on the part of the speaker in the story." Discourse, on the other hand, is defined as "any speech-act supposing a speaker and a listener, and in the speaker an intention to influence the listener in some way" (1977, 25, my emphasis).

And moreover:

Literary narrative, which is a mediatized, not an immediate language and which moreover is subject to the constraints of fiction, knows only one "personal" category, the third person: that is, impersonality. The one who says I in the novel is not the I of discourse, that is, the subject of the speech-act. He is only a character, and the status of his words (direct style) gives them a maximum objectivity, instead of bringing them closer to the subject of the actual speech-act. But there exists another I, an I generally invisible, which refers to the narrator, that "poetic personality" we apprehend through the discourse. Hence there is a dialectic of personality and impersonality, between the I of the narrator (implicit) and the he of the character (which can be an explicit I), between discourse and story. Here is the whole problem of "point of view": in the degree of transparency of the impersonal he of the story in relation to the I of discourse (1977, 27).

Todorov's distinction between discourse and story allows us to interpret the narrator's intentions and world view without needing to rely on a specific name. That also aligns with *Vorstellungsgeschichte*, as we always must think about what is behind the text, that is, why was it written in the first place? This concerns of course the relation of what might be gained, legitimized, validated or invalidated. Who benefits from the text and who does not? To answer these questions is one way to gain access to the core of how the narrator thinks, what is their worldview and so on. However, that is of course not the only point to be addressed. The narrators are always showing themselves and what they think, be it by producing a third person discourse, which includes "simply narrating facts" –

although, as Goetz has already wrote “A medieval chronicler has not just written down „facts“ (although he himself may have believed that he has), but has handed down a personal „construction“ of his own perception of the historical process” (2012, 111) – or by reproducing its thoughts through the mouths of the characters. That means, directly or indirectly – in between the lines lies the face of our anonymous narrators. Although, for Todorov, the narrative interpretation does not aim at reconstructing the narrative intention, for a Historian that is in fact very informative. Nevertheless, for the author, interpretation is related to describing the internal laws of the narrative by which a text finally produces meaning. In any case, to address the anonymity and the construct of the narrator, Todorov’s narrative theory seems very promising, especially paired with *Vorstellungsgeschichte*; after all, giving a name to an author is as of as much importance in this case as being concerned with the factuality of the narrative, that is, neither issue is critical for our purposes here; the focus is on the constructed narrator and the text’s internal narrative logic. In this way, the narrator is different from the author, as it is a function created by the text and governed by its internal rules (1977). Through that function, a Historian can deduce much about the context and people behind the text, encompassing its narrative objectives and aspirations, but also keeping track of this narrative world which is inseparable from the text itself, for as Todorov said: “The absence of narrative signifies death [...] The man is merely a narrative; once the narrative is no longer necessary, he can die. It is the narrator who kills him, for he no longer has a function” (1977, 74-75).

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## Viking Pioneers? Vinland as a Narrative Device for Legitimacy

doi: 10.36599/itac-978-85-9535-378-7\_005

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### From Vinland to Londrina

What links an ecclesiastical chronicler in eleventh-century Germany, anonymous authors in thirteenth-century Iceland, and a newspaper in crisis in Northern Paraná<sup>2</sup> in 1975? At first glance, separated by oceans and centuries, these narrators share a common narrative device: the manipulation of memory regarding the Scandinavian presence in the Americas.

My aim here is to provide an analysis of the narratives surrounding viking pioneers in the Americas, employing texts from both the medieval and contemporary periods as sources. The medieval corpus comprises *Descriptio Insularum Aquilonis*, the fourth book of Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis*, written around 1075, and two Icelandic sagas produced in the thirteenth century by anonymous authors: *Grænlendinga Saga* and *Eiríks Saga Rauða*. In the contemporary era, the source utilized is a news report from August 1975, published in the *Jornal Panorama* in Londrina, in the State of Paraná. The affinity between these documents lies in their use of narrative as a tool to consolidate a reality specific to each case, yet always with the intention of modelling a truth that aligns with a particular context.

However, before embarking on this journey, I must clarify the title of this work. The term "pioneer" was chosen to engage with the narrative construction present not only in the history of the city of Londrina but in the entire Northern Paraná region, where European pioneers were, and still are, frequently portrayed as the true trailblazers of the

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<sup>2</sup> Northern Paraná is a specific historical and geographical region within the state of Paraná, in southern Brazil. Unlike the coastal areas colonized by the Portuguese in earlier centuries, this region was settled largely in the early 20th century through private colonization companies, which fostered a strong local mythology of "pioneers" turning the wilderness into civilization.

land and civilizing agents responsible for the progress and development of the state<sup>3</sup>. This narrative of the pioneers encourages not only the perpetuation of colonial memory but also the erasure of the indigenous presence and other subaltern groups in the region.

Regarding the second term, Muceniecks notes that:

The use of the term 'Viking', particularly in Brazil, is sometimes trivialized, employed without criteria or, more frequently, used with contemporary and post-romantic criteria. It has assumed an ethnic connotation linked to the Scandinavian peoples of the period prior to the conversion of Scandinavia to Christianity; thus, one frequently encounters references such as 'Viking civilization', 'Viking society', 'Viking mythology', 'Viking religion', 'Viking gods', without further explanation or delimitation. (Muceniecks 2010, 2).

Moosburger adds a reflection on the meaning of the expression: "The term, whose etymology is debated, commonly designates in medieval texts a raider, an enemy warrior, a pirate, and often carries a negative connotation for the saga authors" (Moosburger 2021, 18, note 2). Therefore, the choice of the word here is deliberate precisely because of its trivialization. In the popular imagination, the term "viking" has become an appealing label, where associating any word with it evokes a mythical and even magical past, as seen in cases like "Viking horoscope" or "Viking tattoo".

By connecting the two terms, I seek to examine with how popular culture and post-romantic narratives resignify medieval Scandinavians as heroic pioneers, trailblazing warriors, and conquerors. This reinforces an image analogous to that of the 20th-century European colonizer, praised in the history of Londrina. Thus, by attributing the "Viking" characteristic to the pioneer, I do not intend to evoke a mystical past, but rather to highlight this commercialized connotation, distancing the analysis from the colonizing discourse itself.

It is now essential to outline the theoretical and methodological foundations that underpin this analysis before turning to the sources. The following section aims to

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<sup>3</sup> "let the readers know that until 1930 Northern Paraná was a vast uninhabited backland [...] Of all that extensive region, only a narrow strip near the border with the State of São Paulo was known. It was then that there appeared, as if fallen from the sky, like an exceptional gift, a certain old, dynamic, almost visionary Englishman. He came from Africa, where he had been involved in colonization adventures. His name was Mister Arthur Thomas, and he was in every way a character out of Somerset Maugham (...)" (Gonçalves 1995, quoted in Tomazi 1997, 245). In this excerpt, the author highlights the glorification received by Europeans, idealized as heroes of civilization.

establish the concepts guiding the interpretation of discourses and the resignification of these histories through two perspectives: Narrative Theory and *Vorstellungsgeschichte*. The former exposes the discursive constructions that articulate memory, reality, and imagination to lend verisimilitude and meaning to the past, enabling the analysis of the structures and plots that shape historical accounts. The latter methodological approach emphasizes the centrality of the author and the intentions permeating the construction of historical narrative. It highlights that the reporting of facts is not a simple transposition of events, but a reconstruction laden with interpretive choices, memories, and cultural meanings that are reconfigured with each new reading.

Thus, integrating Narrative Theory and *Vorstellungsgeschichte* proves especially pertinent for exploring how narratives regarding Scandinavians were elaborated and reinterpreted, both in medieval texts and in their contemporary adaptations. By focusing on both discursive structures and the authors' intentions, this work establishes a foundation for understanding the multiple layers of meaning emerging from discourses on viking pioneerism and how they contribute to the construction of a dynamic and reconfigurable historical memory.

### **Narrative Function and Construction of Reality**

I reiterate the pivotal role of Narrative, which occupies a central place in the processes of understanding and constructing reality, whether in historical or literary contexts, or within the collective imagination. To address the function of this concept, however, one must understand its origin. When discussing narrative, Jerome Bruner (2003, 27) argues that “Even etymology warns that ‘to narrate’ derives from both ‘telling’ (*narrare*) and ‘knowing in some particular way’ (*gnarus*) – the two tangled beyond sorting”.

One who narrates not only reports a specific event but also possesses an awareness of it, thereby rendering it into reality. Bruner (2003, 27) also states: “Narrative are a version of reality whose acceptability is governed by convention [...] rather than by empirical verification [...] although ironically, we have no compunction about calling stories true or false”. Unlike logical and scientific constructions, which can be refuted by empirical falsification, narrative constructions operate under a different logic: they seek to achieve verisimilitude. They are versions of reality governed by convention and

narrative necessity.

On this issue, historian Hayden White (1980) offers an essential contribution to this study: "The reality of these events does not consist in the fact that they occurred but that, first of all, they were remembered and, second, that they are capable of finding a place in a chronologically ordered sequence" (White 1980, 23). Consequently, I am not concerned with verifying whether the accounts of Adam of Bremen, the anonymous thirteenth-century authors, or the author of the news report are factually "true"; rather, I must focus solely on how each of these realities was elaborated and how they interconnect.

Regarding the authenticity of events and Bruner's assertion that narratives achieve only a degree of verisimilitude, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of this word. For Tzvetan Todorov (1977, 82) the term does not refer to a relation with factual truth, but rather with what the majority of people believe to be reality, in other words, public opinion. Verisimilitude is the mask the text assumes to convince us of its conformity with the real world. A narrative that attains this degree of internal consistency gains credibility, acting as a symbolic filter that guides the reception of its content.

Therefore, among the characteristics of narrative pointed out by Bruner, one stands out for my analysis: "Narrative Accrual" (2003, 56). This is the capacity to accumulate stories of past events within a diachronic structure, providing elasticity to the narrative and allowing its continuity into the present. It is these narrative accruals that eventually give rise to what we call culture or tradition. This mechanism prevents historical accounts from being exhausted in their original form. Instead, they expand, gain new interpretive layers, and reflect the ideological transformations of each era. With every new reading, the discourse is polished, integrating new elements while retrieving traces of its origin.

To illustrate how narrative accrual operates, let us consider the context of Scandinavian accounts. The narrative of the "discovery" of the Americas was initially constructed in thirteenth-century Iceland, with the sagas recounting voyages to Vinland that eventually ceased without much explanation. However, leaping forward six hundred years, a revival movement emerged in the nineteenth century. Nationalist authors reclaimed these sagas not merely as literature, but as proof of identity.

As Geraldine Barnes demonstrates, this revival was intentional and ideological.

While J. Elliot Cabot asserted that the modern New England character had "[...] much more of the Norse than of the Saxon" (Barnes 2011, 144), the Teutonic supremacist Charles Kingsley went further, arguing in lectures in 1874 that the American Pilgrims were, in many cases, actual descendants of the Norsemen.

Here, narrative accrual is evident in action: the motives employed by nineteenth-century authors to validate Vinland diverge significantly from those of the medieval Icelanders. Cabot and Kingsley reinterpret the saga, polish the discourse, and integrate the element of direct descent, something that did not exist in the original saga. This reshaping fabricates a tradition. It is from the moment these discourses become culture that the path is cleared for a twentieth-century newspaper in the interior of Paraná to advocate for the same Scandinavian pioneerism.

To understand the depth of this maneuver, we turn to Quentin Skinner. In *Visions of Politics*, the author warns us that understanding a text requires going beyond what was said; one must capture "what their authors – writing at the time when they wrote for the specific audience they had in mind – could in practice have intended to communicate by issuing their given utterances" (Skinner 2002, 86). In other words, the key issue is not merely the text itself, but what the authors intended to communicate in practice. The essence Skinner conveys allows us to understand that both the medieval author and the journalist from Paraná are products of their own times. Writing is not merely the act of transcribing facts, but an intentional process that incorporates the judgments, practices, and values of an era.

Thus, discourse analysis reveals the multiple layers of meaning emerging from the interaction between author and context. In investigating these sources, I do not seek the factual truth about Vinland, but rather to understand how each narrator politically influenced their readers to transform this "discovery" into a cultural reality.

### *Vorstellungsgeschichte*

To comprehend the multiple layers of meaning attributed to the Scandinavian presence in the Americas, this work adopts *Vorstellungsgeschichte* as its methodological approach, a concept extensively discussed by Hans-Werner Goetz and Lukas Gabriel Grzybowski. Unlike traditional historiography, which seeks to reconstruct factual reality

— what actually happened — this approach shifts the focus to the individual's perception, investigating how contemporaries observed, interpreted, and transmitted specific events. As Goetz defines it:

The 'Vorstellungsgeschichte', by contrast, turns to the author of the source himself and inquiries into his impressions, conceptions, and judgments regarding the past, into the stance and attitude of a contemporary who was involved in the events and structures of his time towards his environment. It asks, therefore: 'How did the contemporary view Fact X?' (where X can be an event just as well as a structure). Thus, it no longer seeks to penetrate to the past reality in the sense of 'traditional' historical science but rather examines how this (objective) reality played out within the subjective view of the contemporaries. (Goetz 1979, 260)<sup>4</sup>

From this perspective, the focus of analysis shifts to the author and their intentions. When writing an account, the narrator acts not as a neutral mirror of reality, but as an agent who selects, organizes, and shapes facts according to the values, fears, and expectations of their time. As Quentin Skinner suggests, understanding a historical text requires capturing not only what was said but the author's intention in saying it within that specific context. Similarly, Goetz reinforces this idea when discussing what an author, a medieval chronicler, in this case, does when composing a text: “He does not report what actually happened, but how he believed that it happened, or how he imagined what happened or even how he wanted to see [...] that it happened” (Goetz 2012, 111).

This approach directly engages with Narrative Theory. More than a mere complement, I propose describing the relationship between these two concepts by borrowing a term from biology: mutualism<sup>5</sup>. Without narrative, the representation lacks the form and structure required for transmission; without an awareness of representation, the narrative risks being conflated with pure fact. They must work in tandem for historical memory to sustain itself.

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<sup>4</sup> “Die „Vorstellungsgeschichte“ wendet sich dagegen an den Verfasser der Quelle selbst und fragt nach dessen Eindrücken, Auffassungen und Urteilen über die Vergangenheit, nach der Stellungnahme und Einstellung eines betroffenen, nämlich in den Ereignissen und Strukturen befangenen Zeitgenossen zu seiner Umwelt. Sie fragt also: „Wie hat der Zeitgenosse das Faktum X gesehen?“ (wobei X ebenso Ereignis wie Struktur sein kann). Sie will also nicht mehr bis zu der vergangenen Wirklichkeit im Sinne der „traditionellen“ Geschichtswissenschaft vordringen, sondern untersucht, wie sich diese (objektive) Wirklichkeit in der subjektiven Sicht der Zeitgenossen abgespielt hat”.

<sup>5</sup> “Mutually beneficial association between different kinds of organisms.” MUTUALISM, In: Merriam-Webster. [S.l.] 2025. Disponível em: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mutualism> Acesso em: 13 de fevereiro de 2025.

As historical narrative is accumulated and repeated over centuries, it gains the force of tradition and comes to be perceived as reality, regardless of its empirical verification. This constant reconstruction aligns with the concept of “Narrative Accrual,” which describes the process by which stories expand, acquire new layers, and remain relevant. Each new interpretation does not replace the previous ones; rather, it reorganizes and recontextualizes them according to the demands of the present. Thus, the discourse on the viking pioneers does not vanish but transforms, answering the call of each epoch to become precisely the tradition of that moment.

All these layers of meaning come to coexist and intertwine. Accrual preserves the initial narrative of the Scandinavian presence in the Americas while simultaneously incorporating new perspectives that emerge in response to contemporary interests. This superimposition of versions does not eliminate contradictions; on the contrary, it accommodates them, creating a historical perception that, although fragmented, retains its symbolic coherence. Thus, the discourse answers the demands of Adam of Bremen and the Archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen in the eleventh century; the demands of anonymous authors in a troubled thirteenth-century Iceland; the demands of nationalist authors in the nineteenth-century United States; and, finally, the demands of the citizens of Londrina in the twentieth century.

### **Medieval Narratives: Northern Islands**

Building upon the preceding discussion regarding Narrative and *Vorstellungsgeschichte*, this text now turns to the three medieval narratives that incorporate Vinland into their accounts: the fourth book of Adam of Bremen’s *Gesta Hammaburgensis*, titled *Descriptio Insularum Aquilonis*, and the two Icelandic sagas, *Grænlendinga Saga* and *Eiríks Saga Rauða*. However, it is crucial to clarify that, to anchor the debate, the starting point will be the potential Scandinavian voyages to the Americas occurring around the year 1000<sup>6</sup>. From this factual baseline, I will present each of the three representations derived from it.

As previously noted, my objective is not to assess the veracity of these expeditions, since narratives achieve verisimilitude rather than absolute truth, as

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<sup>6</sup> Haraldur Bessason (1967) suggests this dating.

discussed earlier, but to analyse the interpretations that stemmed from this history. The aim is to understand how each author perceived the event, how they chose to transmit it, and the motives driving those decisions. I intend to examine each of these source narratives through the lenses of *Vorstellungsgeschichte* and Narrative Theory, ultimately describing each component of this framework according to the specific elements of their respective sources.

This section is therefore structured into two parts. The first addresses the work of Adam of Bremen, responsible for the earliest documentary mention of Vinland. The second concerns the two Icelandic sagas, which recount the Scandinavian expeditions to this new land themselves. Each part begins with an overview of the content within the respective stories, without categorizing them as true or false. Subsequently, the concepts established earlier will be mobilized to navigate between the lines of the documents, investigating what each reveal or chooses to omit.

The earliest mention of Vinland, though extremely brief, yields a wealth of information. Depending on how it is interpreted, it may convey geographical knowledge regarding a specific island or offer insights into the broader context underlying the intentions behind its production. Here is the brief account recorded by Adam of Bremen in the fourth book of the *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*:

He [*Sveinn Ástríðarson*] spoke also of yet another island of the many found in that ocean. It is called Vinland because vines producing excellent wine grow wild there. That unsown crops also abound on that island we have ascertained not from fabulous reports but from the trustworthy relation of the Danes.” (Adam Bremensis 1959, 219).

Further on, Adam continues, though offering no specific details regarding the island itself:

Beyond that island, he said, no habitable land is found in that ocean, but every place beyond it is full of impenetrable ice and intense darkness. Of this fact Martianus makes mention as follows: “Beyond Thule,” he says, “the sea is congealed after one day’s navigation.” The very well-informed prince of the Norwegians, Harold lately attempted this sea. After he had explored the expanse of the Northern Ocean in his ships, there lay before their eyes at length the darksome bounds of a failing world, and by retracing his steps he barely escaped in safety the vast pit of the abyss (Adam Bremensis 1959, 220).

If read strictly as geographical accounts, the excerpts above immediately inform

us that the island's name derives from the fine grapes of that land, while also noting the abundance of crops found there. Simultaneously, they reveal a lack of knowledge regarding any island beyond Vinland, indicating that this region represented the furthest limit to which navigators dared to venture. However, *Descriptio Insularum Aquilonis* must not be read as an objective geographical report, but rather as part of a broader narrative construction.

At this juncture, a brief introduction to the author who undertook not only to write a description of the Northern islands but also to recount the history of the Archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen is indispensable to navigate between the lines of his text. In his introduction to the translation of the *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*, Robert J. Tschan (1959) writes that Adam of Bremen<sup>7</sup> likely arrived in Bremen between 1066 and 1067. There, he was received by Archbishop Adalbert; subsequently, he was made a canon of the cathedral and later occupied the post of *magister scholarum* to serve in the cathedral school of Bremen.

From this moment on, as Tschan suggests, Adam realized that the history of the archbishopric's deeds had not yet been written. Furthermore, he became interested in the fact that the archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen were responsible for the conversion of the Slavs and Scandinavians. He was also intrigued by the news circulating in the region regarding the existence of lands in the North Atlantic and soon set out to write the *Gesta*. In addition to drawing upon the vast library and the members of his archbishopric to obtain information, Adam also turned to the then King of Denmark, *Sveinn Ástriðarson*.

Regarding the author's interests and sources, Tschan observes:

He was not content with recounting the story of the movements and doings of prelates and priests. He was also interested in the movements and doings of the peoples whom they sought to convert; in other words, to write the history of the Church in the North against the backdrop of the contemporary milieu. To his history of the prelates of Hamburg-Bremen he therefore appended a geographical account of the Baltic, North Sea, and North Atlantic regions. For this task he was exceptionally well-placed in Bremen, a city visited by the northern

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<sup>7</sup> German historiography contains a series of works regarding Adam of Bremen, debating his origin, his deeds, intentions, and other matters, each offering distinct interpretations. I offer a suggestion for those who wish to venture further. See: Dehio (1877), Schmeidler (1918), Trommer (1957), Buchner (1964), Schmale (2003), Goetz (2013).

merchants and sailors, men who could tell him things Svein Estrithson, with all his over-all knowledge and outlook, could not have known. Then, too, Adam had the advantage of access to the archives of his archbishops and to the books in their cathedral repositories (Tschan, 1959, p.xv).

It is evident that Adam of Bremen, during the research for his work, consulted numerous individuals, ranging from the king to merchants and adventurers, and utilized a diverse array of works: missionary biographies, books, and even letters and documents from popes and emperors. He also turned to other canons to verify the veracity of the information provided to him by King *Sveinn Ástriðarson*; consequently, all four books contain numerous alterations made by the author himself, adding or removing excerpts, thereby modifying the work.

Thus, although Tschan suggested Adam of Bremen's interest in the great deeds of the archbishopric, the converted peoples, and the northern islands, it becomes essential to discuss the chronicler's intention and bias when he decided to write the *Gesta*. Therefore, I will employ the historiographical review conducted by Grzybowski (2020, 2021) to explore distinct scholarly interpretations of the subject. As the author suggests, in early analyses, the core issue was the attempt to determine whether the reports of the *magister scholarum* were reliable and could be used as historical sources for knowledge regarding Christianization and other issues contained in his work.

According to Grzybowski, Georg Dehio (1877) initially believed in Adam's neutrality when writing the accounts, as if they were devoid of the author's interpretations, concepts, and intentions. In other words, Dehio's view aligns with the perspective cited earlier in the theoretical framework, where a narrative is studied without the methodological approach of *Vorstellungsgeschichte*; that is, Adam of Bremen proceeds from the fact and transposes what he heard or read directly into a representation.

Proceeding further, Buchner (1964), still aiming to investigate the possibility of using the accounts as reliable sources, understands that the *Gesta* is directly linked to the *legatio gentium* — the right to evangelize the peoples living to the North and East of Hamburg-Bremen. In this interpretation, Adam, as a member of the ecclesiastical body, writes with the intent of emphasizing the success of the evangelization process promoted by the archbishopric. Trommer (1957), meanwhile, retains the *legatio gentium* as a central theme but posits Adam of Bremen's political-ecclesiastical intention as an equally significant component, highlighting the archbishops' political acts, given that the

archbishopric had been enduring political and ecclesiastical pressures.

Still dealing with a factual perspective, as Grzybowski points out, Anders Winroth (2012) argues that Adam forged the narrative, altering what actually happened, as he was purportedly writing to ensure that the Christianization of the Scandinavians appeared as a product of Germanic influence, specifically, of the Church of Bremen. Thus, according to this interpretation, the chronicler falsified information for the benefit of Hamburg-Bremen. Furthermore, Henrik Janson (1998) also attributes a character of fabrication to the *Gesta*, asserting that Adam invented the information regarding the existence of a temple in Uppsala.

Moving away from factual perspectives, interpretations emerge that adopt anthropological elements to analyse Adam of Bremen, wherein:

Studies by David Fraesdorff, Volker Scior, Hans-Werner Goetz, and, to some degree, Thies Jarecki have also adopted this perspective. However, none of these authors has undertaken a systematic analysis of the *Gesta Hammaburgensis* as a whole. Rather, they have looked at specific elements of Adam's historical narrative in support of their analysis at a broader level. (Grzybowski 2021, xiii).

In these studies, Scior believes that the *Gesta* served as a significant foundation for constructing the identity of the "Other," while Fraesdorff analyses the construction of the "barbarian" identity, and Goetz proposes an investigation into the understanding of paganism. Thus, by presenting these distinct interpretations of the *Gesta Hammaburgensis*, my intention is to demonstrate how a single document is capable of generating countless ramifications.

The approach adopted in this work aligns with that of these latter authors, proceeding from an anthropological perspective that places factual accuracy in the background and concerns itself with Adam of Bremen's context and his present. In this way, I perceive in the *Gesta* the intention to highlight the archbishopric's evangelizing power and, simultaneously, the intent to respond to the political and ecclesiastical pressures it was enduring. I also recognize that the author made modifications to the accounts to suit his purposes, yet I do not limit my interpretation to this view. I understand that comprehending an author's writing is more complex than it appears, and Adam's intentions are not simple enough to be resolved within a single chapter.

For this reason, I will direct my focus to the insertion of Vinland into the narrative of Adam's fourth book. In light of Narrative Theory and *Vorstellungsgeschichte*, this island is more than a simple territory described based on oral accounts; it assumes a symbolic function that reinforces Adam of Bremen's ideological intentions in composing the work. Thus, Vinland may assume the character of a promised land, characterized as a fertile and prosperous space with grapes that produce excellent wine, while being situated at the most distant point, becoming almost impossible to reach.

In this sense, the mention serves to symbolically expand the dominion of the archbishopric, suggesting that evangelizing missions would eventually reach the farthest land, that is, Christianity would reach the very ends of the ocean. Furthermore, Adam of Bremen anchors his mention in the trustworthy testimony of the Danes to achieve verisimilitude, attempting to legitimize the Church's authority over the Northern lands.

By placing Vinland as the most distant island, in a sea plagued by monsters and darkness, the *magister scholarum* creates a delimitation, a kind of frontier, implying that nothing exists beyond it. Now, if nothing exists beyond the northern islands, it means that the entire world is already known, mapped, and described by authors, or rather, the entire world is almost completely controlled by the Church. And the missing pieces for total control — Vinland itself, for instance — which were previously unknown, are now present, described by Adam of Bremen, a member of the Archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen<sup>8</sup>.

*Descriptio Insularum Aquilonis* is, therefore, a sophisticated masterpiece of memory and power construction. By writing about Vinland, Adam of Bremen actively participates in the creation of a medieval imaginary regarding the Scandinavian space, transforming the territory into a threshold between the Christian world and the unknown, where the expansion of the faith was not merely a desire but a necessity. Thus, the analysis reveals not only Adam's political and ecclesiastical intentions but also the manner in which the narrative was shaped to serve a greater purpose: to expand the horizons of Christendom and reinforce the centrality of Hamburg-Bremen in this movement of expansion.

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<sup>8</sup> This idea aligns with the suggestion by Grzybowski (2020), in which the author attributes an eschatological character to Adam of Bremen's intentions. In this interpretation, Adam of Bremen was delimiting the boundaries of the world to declare that Christianity would reach this entire previously unknown region, converting everything understood as the "Other." Upon achieving such a feat, the prophecy of the sacred book would be fulfilled, initiating the end of the world.

## Medieval Narratives: Icelandic Sagas

Leaping forward a few hundred years to thirteenth-century Iceland, two texts were composed, distinct in several aspects yet recounting the same central event: the Scandinavian expeditions to an intriguing land across the ocean. Both texts belong to the same literary group, the so-called Sagas of Icelanders or Family Sagas.

*islendingasaga*, pi. *islendingasögur*, the group of sagas, mostly written in the 13th and 14th centuries, set mainly in Iceland and purporting to describe events between the settlement in the late 9th century and the middle of the 11th century, and including most of the best known sagas both within Iceland and abroad, e.g. *Njáls saga*, *Laxdæla saga*; also known as the Icelandic family sagas. The term is used here when it is necessary to distinguish this group from other genres, e.g. the kings sagas (*konungasögur*) and the heroic sagas (*fornaldarsögur*), literally ‘sagas of ancient times, sometimes called ‘mythical-poetic sagas or ‘legendary sagas [...]’ (Sigurðsson 2004, 3, note 3).

The first work analysed belonging to this subgenre is the *Grænlandinga Saga*, which deals with six voyages undertaken by Scandinavians from Iceland and Greenland to the Americas. The first voyage occurs with Bjarni Herjólfsson, who departs from Iceland with plans to reach Greenland, but his ship is blown off course until arriving near the coast of North America, as told:

Þá mælti Bjarni: ‘Óvitrlig mun þykkja vár ferð, þar sem engi vár hefir komit í Grænlandshaf.’[...] Eftir þat sá þeir sól ok máttu þá deila ættir, vinda nú segl ok sigla þetta dægr, áðr þeir sá land, ok ræddu um með sér, hvat landi þetta mun vera, en Bjarni kveðst hyggja, at þat mundi eigi Grænland. Þeir spyrja, hvárt hann vill sigla at þessu landi eðr eigi. Hann svarar: "Þat er mitt ráð at sigla í nánd við landit." Ok svá gera þeir ok sá þat brátt, at landit var ófjöllótt ok skógi vaxit, ok smár hæðir á landinu, ok létu landit á bakborða ok létu skaut horfa á land. Síðan sigla þeir tvau dægr, áðr þeir sá land annat. (*GRÆNLENDINGA Saga* n.d., 2).

After experiencing the same situation twice, sighting lands with descriptions distinct from those he had been told, Bjarni sights the fourth land, which was indeed Greenland. He finally disembarks and meets his father, Herjólfur. The second voyage, in turn, is undertaken by Leifr, who purchases Bjarni’s ship, gathers information regarding the sighted lands, and decides to set sail in that direction with a crew of thirty-five men. Leifr succeeds in his journey, finding the same lands sighted by Bjarni, but decides to step onto dry land. He names the first region, replete with glaciers and slabs of rock,

*Helluland*. The second land visited, full of forests, was named *Markland*, and the third region visited by Leifr and his companions, although its name is mentioned only a few pages later, is finally *Vinland*.

The third voyage was undertaken by Þorvaldr, Leifr's brother, who met his death while in Vinland, attacked by the *Skrælingar*. The fourth voyage was led by Þorsteinn, also Leifr's brother, and his wife, Guðríðr; however, it failed due to weather conditions, forcing their return to Greenland. Subsequently, Guðríðr and her second husband, Þorfinnr Karlsefni, set sail for Vinland with the intention of establishing settlements but faced hostile encounters with the *Skrælingar*. After returning safely to Greenland, husband and wife decided to return to Vinland, where they had a son, Snorri, the first child born in the new land. Finally, the last voyage was made by Freydís, Leifr's sister, who after a short time also decided to return to Greenland.

Furthermore, we have the second saga mentioned in this work, *Eiríks Saga Rauða*, which narrates only three voyages to North America. The first is Leifr's voyage, who, in this account, ends up finding Vinland by chance while departing on an expedition ordered by King Óláfr Tryggvason of Norway:

Eitt sinn kom konungur at máli við Leif ok sagði: "Ætlar þú til Grænlands í sumar?" "Þat ætla ek," sagði Leifr, "ef þat er yðvarr vili." Konungur svarar: "Ek get, at þat muni vel vera, ok skaltu þangat fara með erendum mínum, at boða þar kristni." Leifr kvað hann ráða skyldu, en kveðst hyggja, at þat erendi myndi torflutt á Grænlandi. Konungur kveðst eigi þann mann sjá, er betr væri til fallinn en hann, - "ok muntu giftu til bera." "Þat mun því at eins," segir Leifr, "ef ek nýt yðvar við." Lætr Leifr í haf ok er lengi úti ok hitti á lönd þau, er hann vissi áðr enga ván til. Váru þar hveitjakrar sjálfsánir ok vínviðr vaxinn. Þar váru þau tré, er mösurr heita, ok höfðu þeir af þessu öllu nökkur merki, sum tré svá mikil, at í hús váru lögð. (*EIRÍKS saga Rauða* n.d. p.7).

Following the success of Leifr's first voyage, Þorsteinn makes the second attempt but ends up with his ship blown off course, returning to Greenland. The third and final voyage of this saga was the work of Þorfinnr Karlsefni, who took several ships with men and women in an attempt to create settlements in Vinland.

Having provided a brief summary of the sagas, it is possible to note that they offer two distinct accounts. It is precisely these differences that reveal the plasticity of the stories and the manner in which they were shaped by the authors, reflecting the needs and

concerns of the context in which they were written. In this sense, historiography is replete with works related to the two sagas, with studies covering countless and distinct themes regarding Vinland. Sigurðsson notes that:

In these attempts, some have chosen to accept the word of *Grænlandinga Saga* over that of *Eiríks Saga Rauða*, and some the reverse; some have taken both as equally valid sources; and others have set about emending the texts to make them fit in with the topography of wherever their favored locations lie for the landings of the Vinland voyagers. (Sigurðsson 2004, 272).

Bessason (1967, 59) states that the theory positing *Grænlandinga Saga* as predating *Eiríks Saga Rauða* is the most widely accepted, though he cites how this idea has been altered over the years. The author further mentions the theory that an Icelandic monk named Gunnlaugr Leifsson invented the story that Leifr accidentally found the coast of North America, and that the author of *Eiríks Saga Rauða* subsequently adopted this tale for his own work. The explanation for this would be that the monk was seeking to enhance the narrative that King Óláfr of Norway brought Christianity to Greenland, choosing the renowned figure of Leifr as the great missionary to accomplish the deed. To further aggrandize the feat and render it memorable, he attributed the "discovery" of a new land, Vinland, to Leifr. According to Bessason, the simple fact that the author of *Grænlandinga Saga* does not mention Leifr's voyages to Norway leads to the conclusion that the story was written prior to the inventions of the monk Gunnlaugr Leifsson.

Studies on Vinland went further, initiating a discussion regarding the exact location where the Scandinavians landed and where exactly this land of vines would be. Among various authors who reflected on the location, in 1910, the botanist Fernald "[...] turned his attention much farther north, identifying the 'vínber' ('grapes') of the sagas with cranberries, which grow in more northerly regions" (Sigurðsson 2004, 274), concluding that the exact region would be Labrador. Beyond the botanist, a range of authors attempted to pinpoint the locations appearing in the sagas, as well as explanations for the nomenclature of each land and the elements associated with these choices.

Thus, moving beyond the factual question regarding knowledge of the exact spot where Leifr and his companions first stepped onto North America, it is important to understand what it meant for medieval Icelanders to recount these voyages. From the outset, one piece of information remains consistent throughout the historiography: the anonymous authorship of both sagas. There is no specific information regarding who

produced them, nor even exactly when they were written. It is known only that they are products of the thirteenth century, one of the centuries with the highest volume of saga production. Regarding this period, Byock asserts that:

The thirteenth century occupies a special place in Icelandic history. At midcentury (1262-1264) Iceland lost its independence to Norway, and the Old Icelandic Free State, founded more than three centuries earlier (ca. 930), came to an end. (Byock 1986, 27).

In this century, besides submission to Norway, Iceland suffered from internal conflicts, with incessant warfare between families, all contributing to a problematic situation. However, Byock emphasizes that, no matter how great these problems were, much of the chaos was created by historiography years later; that is, the author asserts that Iceland was not necessarily living through generalized chaos, even though it suffered from all these struggles.

The fact remains that, a century earlier, when Ari wrote the *Íslendingabók*, the Book of Icelanders, recounting the entire history of the people and the conversion, Iceland was viewed as a promising land. Grønlie even suggests that “Iceland, wooded and fertile, is the promised land, consecrated by the presence of Christian people there—the *papar*—before the arrival of the Norsemen” (2006, xxi). This vision of a promised land, which endured during the twelfth century in Ari’s writings, was no longer the same in the thirteenth century, following all the political, social, and economic conflicts; in other words, thirteenth-century Iceland could no longer be the promised land for the Icelanders.

In this context, the Icelandic people needed to cling to some new dream, to a new hope of paradise. Thus, an old story is resurrected by two (or more) authors, a tale passed down from person to person since approximately the year 1000, in which a figure named Leifr “discovers” a new land, featuring breathtaking landscapes and unseen flora. But I now borrow a query from Jerome Bruner, in which the author asks the reader: “Did the Greeks believe in their myths?” (2002, 98), to pose the question: did these medieval Icelanders really believe in the existence of Vinland?

Indeed, the author himself states in the following paragraph that, regardless of belief, “[...] they certainly took heed of those myths in how they lived their lives and experienced their world” (Bruner 2002, 98). Therefore, medieval Icelanders, regardless of whether they believed in its veracity, likely believed in the existence of this land as a

memory of the past, enabling it to be written about. Once one of these authors reflects upon, elaborates, and writes about Vinland, it becomes real — not necessarily true, but simply real — for both the writer and the reader. Just as myths were part of the Greeks' lives, Vinland was part of the lives of thirteenth-century Icelanders, not as an existing land that could be occupied at any moment as a symbol of a fresh start, but, again, as the heritage of a past defined by conquests, seafaring, and discovery.

In the light of *Vorstellungsgeschichte*, we can perceive that the Vinland narrated in the sagas is less a real land and more a symbol, a representation shaped by the intentions and, above all, the expectations of the authors who recorded it centuries after the purported events. Vinland is, therefore, nothing more than the projection of the dream of these medieval Icelanders, now frustrated in the thirteenth century. Vinland is what Iceland was meant to be; Vinland is the new promised land.

Moreover, when the two sagas are viewed separately, one can delineate the distinct intentions of each author. The *Grænlandinga Saga* and *Eiríks Saga Rauða* present significant variations in how they recount the arrival in Vinland. The former proves more concise, focusing on navigational processes and reporting the hardships endured during their time on land. The latter is more detailed, laden with elements of adventure and heroism. These contrasts indicate that the authors held differing intentions when narrating the same event, and it is precisely this that renders the analysis valuable from the perspective of the methodology employed here.

In the *Grænlandinga Saga*, the narrative appears more oriented toward recounting the explorers' deeds in a pragmatic manner. This may signify an interest in recording Vinland as part of this Icelandic exploratory legacy. In *Eiríks Saga Rauða*, however, the expeditions approach the romantic, positioning Leifr as an almost messianic protagonist who discovers Vinland following his conversion to Christianity. The author of *Eiríks Saga Rauða* may thus highlight Leifr with the aim of demonstrating that the voyage was an extension of the Christian world, a territory that could only be fully conquered under the auspices of the faith.

Furthermore, this same author, by recounting that the first expedition was undertaken at the behest of Óláfr Tryggvason, who wished to expand the Christian faith, may be classified as a supporter of Iceland's submission to Norway. This is because the author attributes the great feat of "discovery" to an order originating from the King of

Norway, aiming for the success of the religion. In other words, he links elements associated with Norway to positive deeds, conquests, and fortune to demonstrate that it was indeed possible to believe in Norway, to believe that Iceland was in good hands.

Thus, the existence of two divergent sagas regarding Vinland is, in itself, a clear instance of the process of Narrative Accrual described by Bruner. History is not fixed; it transforms with each new version. The Vinland of the sagas is not an endpoint, but a point of departure for multiple resignifications. And this malleability of the narrative is what allowed the stories of Scandinavian voyages to the Americas to be constantly revisited, from the thirteenth century to the reinterpretations of the nineteenth century.

The sagas, therefore, are not merely accounts of the past, but instruments for its construction. They accumulate layers of meaning, blending memory and imagination to create a narrative that need not be true to be effective; it suffices that it borders on verisimilitude. By mobilizing *Vorstellungsgeschichte*, one perceives that Vinland was not merely a distant land, but a representation of the tensions and aspirations of medieval Icelanders. Amidst conflict and political chaos, it symbolized the yearning for a new paradise, the zenith of Scandinavian expansion, and the triumph of conversion and the Christian faith.

### **The Resignification of Vinland**

A leap from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century is now necessary to contextualize and then, in the twentieth century, address another layer of narrative regarding the same history. In this work, the passage from one century (the thirteenth) to the other (the nineteenth) might seem to span a gap so vast it cannot be effectively bridged. For a long time, the Scandinavian narrative fell into oblivion, neither rescued nor reinterpreted, until it resurfaced with full force in the nineteenth century. Thus, this leap does not mark the oblivion of the Vinland narratives, but rather their latency. The Scandinavian stories, accumulated and reconfigured over time, were retrieved by groups who saw in these narratives an opportunity to validate their own conceptions of identity and belonging. If for medieval Icelanders Vinland was a potential paradise, for nineteenth-century individuals it became the proof of a pre-Columbian European heritage, capable of justifying the idea of an America that was essentially white and linked to Nordic roots

This process of retrieval was not arbitrary, but a clear example of the mechanism of Narrative Accrual. The sagas were not read as literary texts, but as documents that legitimized a specific historical origin, one that could be instrumentalized to serve ideological projects. Bruner has already demonstrated that narrative adapts, and *Vorstellungsgeschichte* teaches that there is another vision beyond the factual truth: the intention behind its resignification. Now, this section will investigate how the viking narrative was reactivated in this context, beginning with nineteenth-century nationalism, to finally arrive in the city of Londrina, in Paraná, where the myth of the pioneer found an echo in the idea that Scandinavians were the true "discoverers" of Brazil.

In the opening lines of his book, Rasmus B. Anderson alerts the reader that:

The object of the following pages is to present the reader with a brief account of the discovery of, early voyages to, and settlements in the Western Continent by the Norsemen, and to prove that Columbus must have had knowledge of this discovery by the Norsemen before he started to find America; and the author will not be surprised, if, in these pages, he should happen to throw out some thoughts which will conflict with the reader's previously formed convictions about matters and things generally, and about historical facts especially (Anderson 1874, 9).

The reader might not be so surprised to read these assertions, for such surprise may occur already in the title of the work: *America Not Discovered by Columbus*, which provides a preview of what the work entails. Anderson was, then, one of the first to promote the idea that Scandinavians had arrived in America long before Columbus, and that this fact should be a source of pride for their descendants. His book is part of a wave of works that emerged in the nineteenth century, retrieving the thirteenth-century narrative regarding the Scandinavian presence in Vinland.

Geraldine Barnes (2011) analyses how these narratives were shaped by the nineteenth century, which, gripped by nostalgia, saw in viking voyages a model of courage and pioneerism serving to justify territorial expansion and the sense of destiny. For Barnes, the retrieval of Vinland functioned almost as a foundational myth, one that erased the indigenous presence and repositioned Europeans as the "natural discoverers" of the continent. The author exposes, beyond the examples of J. Elliot Cabot and Charles Kingsley already cited in this work, other cases where this narrative accrual around Vinland occurred to favour European pioneerism:

The notion of Northern origins made nostalgia acceptable among the New England 'Fireside Poets,' Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier and James Russell Lowell [...] Forty years earlier, remains of alleged Norse provenance in New England had provided inspiration for his lyric fantasy of America's Northern past, 'The Skeleton in Armor' (1841), and for John Greenleaf Whittier's 'The Norsemen,' [...] The artifacts in question in Longfellow's poem were a skeleton found in Fall River, Massachusetts, in 1831 – almost certainly that of a Native American but claimed by some as the remains of a Viking warrior (Barnes, 2001, 123) – and the Newport Tower, a windmill of late-seventeenth-century [...] which Rafn identified as an eleventh-century Scandinavian church (Rafn, 1840–1841). A rock found in the eighteenth century beside the Taunton River, Massachusetts, with markings identified in *Antiquitates Americanae* as runic, was the acknowledged impetus for Whittier's 'The Norseman'. (Barnes 2011, 145).

The cases of the skeleton, the mill, and the "runic" stone are classic occurrences of adaptation and the construction of reality<sup>9</sup> to legitimize the Nordic descent of Americans. These individuals attempted at all costs to exploit archaeological traces, fabricating a narrative around the artifacts that would best suit their intentions by attributing new meanings to the objects. Furthermore, the same occurred in Brazil in the nineteenth century with the Brazilian Historic and Geographic Institute (IHGB), which witnessed the publication of texts in its journal defending the Scandinavian presence in the country (Langer 2001).

In 1840, Carl Christian Rafn wrote in one of the Institute's publications:

The discovery of America in the tenth century may be considered one of the most notable successes in the History of the world; and posterity can never deny the Scandinavians the honour that befits them for such a great discovery. We are convinced we can demonstrate in an indubitable manner the facts upon which we base our assertion. (Rafn 1840, 214-215)<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The expression "construction of reality" refers to the theory developed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), a central work in the Sociology of Knowledge. For the authors, social reality is not something given, natural, or immutable, but rather constructed by individuals through social interaction. Knowledge of the world and notions about the past are formed socially and consolidated through institutions, language, and daily practices. In this sense, what is understood as "real" in a society depends on historical, cultural, and symbolic processes that confer legitimacy upon certain interpretations to the detriment of others. Thus, when a group manipulates archaeological traces or produces historical narratives with the goal of affirming an identity or heritage, as in the case of the alleged Nordic presence in the Americas, it is participating actively in the social construction of reality, shaping the past to sustain a project of identity in the present.

<sup>10</sup> "O descobrimento da América no século décimo pode ser considerado como um dos sucessos mais notáveis da História do mundo; e a posteridade jamais poderá negar aos Scandinavos [*sic*] a honra, que

The author, Secretary of the Royal Society of Northern Antiquaries and a member of the IHGB, was at that moment granting total credit to the Scandinavians for having pioneered and "discovered" the Americas. In the following pages, he sets out to rescue and retell the history present in the sagas regarding Vinland, narrating the voyages undertaken, the plans made, and challenges faced, so that Brazil might come to know it.

From that moment on, the same operation that occurred in the United States began in Brazil: the attempt to create an identity, a medieval ancestry, originating from Scandinavia:

In the nineteenth century, the great concern of the Brazilian imperial elite was the construction of national identity, and to this end, there was a great effort by our research institutions in the search for a noble and ennobling past for the nation they intended to build. Expeditions in search of lost cities in the *sertões* of *Bahia* and investigations into the presence of ancient inscriptions on *Pedra da Gávea* are some examples of actions in this direction, since they sought to prove the Brazilian descent from ancient Mediterranean navigators or Scandinavian civilizations (Marschesotti 2011, 55)<sup>11</sup>

Once again, I underscore the notion that all these attempts to legitimize a Nordic past in the Americas consequently result in the erasure of the Indigenous past, the past of the true trailblazers of all these regions. In other words, these attempts constitute prejudice and supremacism, insofar as they diminish and even deny the achievements of Indigenous peoples, both in North and South America, attributing any success solely to the white European man.

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lhes cabe por tão grande descoberta. Temos convicção de demonstrar de uma maneira indubitável os factos sobre que fundamos nossa asserção”.

<sup>11</sup> “No século XIX a grande preocupação da elite imperial brasileira era a construção de identidade nacional e, para tal, havia um grande empenho de nossas instituições de pesquisa na busca de um passado nobre e enaltecedor para a nação que se pretendia construir. Expedições em buscas de cidades perdidas no sertão baiano e investigações sobre a presença de antigas inscrições na Pedra da Gávea são alguns exemplos de ações nesse sentido, já que buscavam provar a descendência brasileira de antigos navegadores do Mediterrâneo ou de civilizações escandinavas”.

### The Myth<sup>12</sup> of the Pioneer in Londrina and the *Jornal Panorama*

This very same narrative mechanism discussed in the previous topic reappears in Londrina, now in the twentieth century. The city, built upon the idea of the pioneer, cultivated the image of the European as a trailblazer who transformed the wilderness into civilization. When discussing the myth of the pioneer, created by the *Companhia de Terras Norte do Paraná* (CTNP)<sup>13</sup>, Nelson Tomazi states that:

A myth, therefore, utilizes every possible form of dissemination to sustain itself, for it needs to be repeated incessantly and remembered continuously. The press, newspapers, magazines, radio, and television located in Northern Paraná, since the 1930s, have been and remain an instrument for sustaining the Company's myth. This support is effectuated through reports, articles, special supplements, interviews, coverage of commemorative events, and diverse news items, including the deaths of "pioneers"; in short, through every possible form the press employs, where, in the absolute majority of cases, we find the reiteration of the Company's discourse, causing this speech to be disseminated uncritically among the population of the northern Paraná region. (Tomazi 1989, 133)<sup>14</sup>

Once again, what we encounter in this case is the notion of Narrative Accrual introduced by Bruner. It is the accrual of the pioneer narrative that, since the city's inception in 1934, has accompanied Londrina society. Tomazi cites various examples of this accrual further on:

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<sup>12</sup> I employ the definition of "myth" discussed by Nelson Tomazi, when he asserts: "[...] myth is an account, a constructed speech, a message, a communication system that seeks to fix a determined vision of history. [...] A myth, to be considered as such, must possess certain characteristics, among them transhistoricity and supratemporality, appearing as something situated above all contingencies. Another fundamental characteristic is the respectability and credibility essential to it, allowing it a constant permanence in the daily life of a city, region, or even individuals. To this end, a fundamental element enabling its long life is the reiterability of its discourse. Through the constant repetition of a determined discourse, which holds credit, the myth seeks to fix a specific historical situation, which actually happened, but which appears supratemporal and must serve as an example and paradigm for other generations." (Tomazi 1989, 102).

<sup>13</sup> The *Companhia de Terras Norte do Paraná* was a colonization enterprise established in 1925 as a subsidiary of the British firm *Paraná Plantations Ltd.* Responsible for acquiring, subdividing, and selling vast tracts of land in the region, the company planned and founded several cities, including Londrina. Its British origin and structured colonization model are central elements in the construction of the region's "civilizing" narrative.

<sup>14</sup> Um mito utiliza, pois, de todas as formas possíveis de divulgação para se manter, pois precisa ser repetido incessantemente e lembrado continuamente. A imprensa, os jornais, revistas, rádio e televisão localizados no norte do Paraná, desde a década de trinta, foram e ainda são um instrumento de sustentação do mito da Companhia. Esta sustentação se efetiva através de reportagens, de artigos, cadernos especiais, entrevistas, coberturas sobre os eventos comemorativos, notícias diversas incluindo as da morte do "pioneiros", enfim de todas as formas possíveis que a imprensa utiliza, onde, na maioria absoluta dos casos, vamos encontrar a reiteração do discurso da Companhia, fazendo com que esta fala seja disseminada de uma forma não crítica, no conjunto da população da região norte paranaense".

To restrict ourselves merely to the city of Londrina, whose name is already an element of automatic support for the myth, as it refers to the English origin of colonization ("Little London") and its direct relationship with the Company, we can find examples of these monuments there. We find, then, public thoroughfares in Londrina with the following denominations: Arthur Thomas Ave., Lord Lovat St., Antonio Moraes Barros St., João Sampaio St.; furthermore, one of the city's main squares bears the name of Willie Davids. [...] Another area of the city bears the name Arthur Thomas Park. But the process of sustaining this myth, beyond the forms presented here, also occurs in a manner that repeats itself systematically, that is, through celebrations that succeed one another, for example, on the anniversary of the municipality's official installation. [...] And to ensure these commemorations are not limited to commemorative dates [...] "Pioneer Day" was created, celebrated on August 21 of each year. This is the day when a caravan of employees and contractors of the company arrived at the *Patrimônio Três Bocas*, nowadays, Londrina, and took definitive possession of that company's lands. (Tomazi 1989, 134)<sup>15</sup>

Subsequently, the author provides other examples, such as the persistence of this myth in the textbook edited by the Municipal Government of Londrina, when it suggests that the history of Londrina begins with the arrival of the English and, principally, with the arrival of Lord Lovat and the Montagu Mission<sup>16</sup>. The author discusses the fact that this discourse became "true" within Londrina society, causing the population to grow up believing that this is the factual history of Londrina. Thus, we have another instance of the construction of reality, in which the CTNP fabricates a discourse, shaping the narrative to exalt the figure of the trailblazers of the Paraná hinterland as founders of civilization.

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<sup>15</sup> "Para ficarmos apenas na cidade de Londrina, cujo nome já é um elemento de sustentação automática do mito, pois remete à origem inglesa da colonização (pequena Londres) e sua relação direta com a Companhia, podemos encontrar aí exemplos destes monumentos. Vamos encontrar, pois, em Londrina vias públicas com a seguinte denominação: Av. Arthur Thomas, Rua Lord Lovat, Rua Antonio Moraes Barros, Rua João Sampaio; além disso, uma das principais praças da cidade, leva o nome de Willie Davids. [...] Em outra área da cidade, leva a denominação de Parque Arthur Thomas. Mas o processo de sustentação deste mito, além das formas aqui apresentadas, se dá também de uma forma que se repete sistematicamente, ou seja, através de comemorações que se sucedem, por exemplo, no aniversário da instalação oficial do município. [...] E para que estas comemorações não fiquem apenas nas datas comemorativas [...] foi criado o "Dia do Pioneiro" comemorado no dia 21 de agosto de cada ano. Este é o dia em que uma caravana de funcionários e contratados pela empresa chegaram ao Patrimônio Três Bocas, hoje Londrina, e tomaram posse definitiva das terras daquela empresa".

<sup>16</sup> "According to documents, the Montagu Mission had the task of '(...) studying the financial, economic, and commercial situation (of Brazil) with a view, on one hand, to the consolidation of our debt to England, and on the other, to the reformulation of our tax system.' Or '(...) studying the Brazilian economy and reorganizing the Ministry of Finance.' Or even '(...) to know its agricultural situation and participate in investments of this nature.' The presence of the Montagu Mission, which arrived in Brazil on December 31, 1923, was a significant factor in the occupation process of Northern Paraná." (Tomazi 1989, 25)

To further perpetuate the image of these pioneers, the CTNP published, in its fiftieth-anniversary commemorative book, a list of the names of the most important figures who were to be remembered by the people, as Tomazi (1989, 120) aptly highlights. Thus, these pioneers, exalted for their courage and intrepidity in renouncing their former lives to wager on a hypothetical alternative in a South American country, in reality arrived with fully drafted proposals and a millionaire plan that was already in place.

This discourse feeds the notion that everyone in Londrina had at their disposal the same opportunity afforded to these pioneers—the same chance to amass wealth and become the great names of Londrina's history. By constructing this narrative, the CTNP consequently and intentionally erases the memory of the “vanquished, [...] the biography of those who worked the entire time, had nothing and ended up with nothing, does not exist, insofar as they ‘have no name’ nor did they ‘make the history of the region’” (Tomazi 1989, 126).<sup>17</sup>

At this juncture, the discourse regarding Londrina's origins resembles that of the United States in the nineteenth century, as well as that of Brazil via the IHGB, in which there is an attempt to construct a foundational myth grounded in Europe, one that was only possible and only achieved success thanks to the fearless, courageous, and adventurous European. Subsequently, in 1975, yet another similarity between these cases emerges with the founding of *Jornal Panorama*.

To understand what the newspaper project consisted of, José Carlos Fernandes and Hiago Rizzi Zanolla state:

Between the years 1975 and 1976, totalling 20 months and 547 editions, a group of veteran journalists linked to the press of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro — particularly the alternative press and *Realidade* magazine — initiated a cooperation project with young journalists active in the city of Londrina, in Northern Paraná. From this “off-axis” encounter was born *Jornal Panorama*, a daily in broadsheet format, under the tutelage of one of the state's largest communication conglomerates, the Paulo Pimentel Group (GPP). (Fernandes and Zanolla 2022, 183)<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> “vencidos: [...] a biografia dos que trabalharam o tempo todo e nada tinham e com nada ficaram não existe, na medida em que eles ‘não tem nome’ e nem ‘fizeram a história da região’”

<sup>18</sup> “Entre os anos de 1975 e 1976, num total de 20 meses e 547 edições, um grupo de jornalistas veteranos ligados ao jornalismo paulistano e carioca – particularmente à imprensa alternativa e à revista *Realidade* – iniciou um projeto de cooperação com jovens jornalistas atuantes na cidade de Londrina, no Norte do

The plan relied on important names in Brazilian journalism such as “José Trajano, Nilson Monteiro, Walter Schmidt, Elvira Alegre, Célia Regina de Souza, Wilson Serra, and Domingos Pellegrini” (Fernandes and Zanolla 2022, 183) and came to fruition because Pimentel promised everyone an environment of editorial freedom, without the major constraints of traditional journalism. Thus, the published editions were replete with humour and irony, as well as elements derived from modern journalism, such as target-audience surveys and even “immersive fieldwork,” involving the journalists' participation in the reality and daily lives of the city's workers, everything the citizen of Londrina was not accustomed to reading at the time. The project quickly caught the city's attention, though not as positively as they might have liked, for regional businessmen and politicians rarely appeared in the stories, and when they did, their images were accompanied by criticism:

Important local figures were exposed and put against the wall, in deeper stories, without concessions to so-called uncritical, pro-establishment journalism. Londrina itself was also a target of criticism by the outsider reporters, demonstrating a possible difficulty for the journalists in adapting to the pace of a provincial city. (Mainardes et al. 2020, 81)<sup>19</sup>

Regarding the participation and involvement of Paulo Pimentel, the owner of the conglomerate and creator of the project, he became State Secretary of Agriculture in the Ney Braga administration in the early 1960s. During this period, he acquired the publishing house *Editora O Estado do Paraná S.A.*, which published the newspapers *O Estado do Paraná* and *Tribuna do Paraná*, with the intent of promoting his campaign for governor through control of these papers, as Cordeiro (2005) asserts. He became governor in 1965, expanding his media empire, as he initiated the *TV Iguaçu* project (Curitiba) in 1967, acquired *Rádio Guaicá* (Curitiba), and in 1969, *TV Tibagi* (Apucarana).

Furthermore, Pimentel was directly involved, ever since being politically sponsored by Ney Braga, with the *Aliança Renovadora Nacional* (ARENA)<sup>20</sup>. However,

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Paraná. Desse encontro “fora do eixo” nasceu o jornal *Panorama*, diário em formato *standard*, sob a tutela de um dos maiores conglomerados de comunicação do estado, o Grupo Paulo Pimentel (GPP)”.

<sup>19</sup> “Figuras locais importantes eram expostas e colocadas contra a parede, em matérias mais profundas, sem concessões ao chamado jornalismo chapa-branca. A própria Londrina também era alvo de críticas dos repórteres forasteiros, demonstrando uma possível dificuldade dos jornalistas em se adaptar ao ritmo de uma cidade do interior.”

<sup>20</sup> The *Aliança Renovadora Nacional* (ARENA), was a political party established in 1966 during the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964–1985). Created right after the Institutional Act No. 2 (AI-2), which imposed a mandatory two-party system, ARENA served as the official pro-government party supporting

he became embroiled in conflicts with then-President Ernesto Geisel and, subsequently, with his own mentor, Ney Braga. These disagreements, particularly when Pimentel decided to support the creation of a third political party, defying the two-party system of the Military Dictatorship, later culminated in the beginning of the failure of one of the GPP's projects: *Jornal Panorama*<sup>21</sup>:

This stance by Pimentel likely contributed to heightening the degree of repression he suffered from the federal government, for with this attitude he was challenging not only Ney Braga's political hegemony in Paraná but also the political structure imposed by the military dictatorship throughout the national territory. Thus, in the face of the risk that Pimentel might succeed in fracturing ARENA and initiating a third party, launching a movement that would gain strength across various Brazilian states and consequently escape federal control, he had to be stopped. (Cordeiro 2005, 152)<sup>22</sup>.

Due to these pressures, Pimentel decided to withdraw the *carte blanche* he had promised to the journalists from the Rio-São Paulo axis. In response, editor Narciso Kalili took the first step in disapproval of the decision, initiating a movement of opposition to *Panorama*, which the team of journalists promptly joined. Failure was starting:

[...] the language and approach of *Panorama's* stories, marked by the magazine style borrowed from *Realidade* and the irreverence of the alternative press, caused strangeness among Londrina readers. In parallel, the newspaper's irreverent tone toward the local power brokers caused a chain reaction among the region's politicians and businessmen. Despite the historic editions of the first month of circulation, editorial freedom—pressured by capital—suffered setbacks. That was when the bubble burst. In early April 1975, in a gesture of protest, the group of "outsider" journalists resigned collectively and noisily. (Fernandes and Zanolla 2022, 185)<sup>23</sup>

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the military regime, while the *Movimento Democrático Brasileiro* (MDB) acted as the authorized opposition.

<sup>21</sup> In this work, I did not set out to analyse in depth Paulo Pimentel's complex participation in the *Panorama* project, his political activities, his involvement with ARENA, and his conflicts with Ernesto Geisel and Ney Braga. However, these elements deserve due attention and will be addressed comprehensively in a future article.

<sup>22</sup> “Provavelmente essa postura de Pimentel contribuiu para aumentar o grau de repressão que ele sofreu pelo governo federal, pois com essa atitude ele estava desafiando não só a hegemonia política de Ney Braga no Paraná, mas a estrutura política imposta pela ditadura militar em todo o território nacional. Assim, ante o risco de Pimentel conseguir rachar a ARENA e dar início a um terceiro partido, iniciando um movimento que ganharia força em vários Estados brasileiros e que consequentemente fugiria ao controle do governo federal, ele deveria ser impedido”.

<sup>23</sup> “[...] a linguagem e a abordagem das matérias do *Panorama*, marcadas pelo estilo revista emprestado da *Realidade* e pela irreverência da imprensa alternativa, causaram estranheza nos leitores londrinenses. Paralelo, o tom pouco reverente do jornal aos donos do poder local causou reação em cadeia entre

*Panorama* had lost a large part of its alternative-style press corps in that circumstance for yielding to external pressures and withdrawing all the editorial freedom promised to the group at the project's inception. Beyond this impasse, on July 18, 1975, the famous Black Frost caused the collapse of Londrina's economy, bringing an end to the coffee cycle, which was responsible for driving and leveraging the city of Londrina, even granting it the title of World Coffee Capital. From that moment on, the newspaper began to rely on life support, as it had already been suffering great pressure from politicians and businessmen and now, had no way to sustain itself economically, which caused the remaining part of the journalist group to abandon the project

Thus arrives the new phase of *Jornal Panorama*:

Starting from the rupture, with the dismissal of *Panorama*'s “dream team,” a new phase begins. The newspaper rebuilds itself with journalists from the city of Londrina and also from other parts of the state, mainly Curitiba. Based on the evidence, we identify in this chapter of *Panorama*'s brief history the prevalence of a more traditional journalism, the so-called “*jornalão*” (NOBLAT, 2002), which nevertheless maintained some editorial tactics from the laboratory phase and the first month of circulation—as stated by interviewees Nilson Monteiro and Walter Schmidt. The post-Trajano, post-Kalili *Panorama* team attempted to reconstruct the newspaper's image in the city and draw closer to the population. (Fernandes and Zanolla 2022, 187)<sup>24</sup>

And finally, in this context, one month after the chaos generated by the Frost, the aforementioned news piece is published. At this moment in the work, we introduce the final source addressed here, which retrieves and reinterprets the Scandinavian presence in the Americas. The intent of including it is to demonstrate how the narrative is malleable, regardless of the historical period in question. The same story can thus be resignified in an archbishopric in Hamburg-Bremen in the eleventh century, in a random room in Iceland in the thirteenth century, or in a newspaper newsroom in Londrina in the

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políticos e empresários da região. À revelia das edições históricas do primeiro mês de circulação, a liberdade editorial – pressionada pelo capital – sofreu reverses. Foi quando a bolha furou. Em inícios de abril de 1975, num gesto de protesto o grupo de jornalistas “de fora” se desligou de forma coletiva e ruidosa”.

<sup>24</sup> “A partir da ruptura, com a demissão do “time dos sonhos” do *Panorama*, uma nova fase se inicia. O jornal se reergue com jornalistas da cidade de Londrina e também de outras partes do estado, principalmente de Curitiba. A partir das evidências, identificamos neste capítulo da breve história do *Panorama* a prevalência de um jornalismo mais tradicional, o chamado “*jornalão*” (NOBLAT 2002), mas que mantinha algumas táticas editoriais da fase de laboratório e do primeiro mês de circulação – conforme afirmaram os entrevistados Nilson Monteiro e Walter Schmidt. A equipe do *Panorama* pós-Trajano, pós-Kalili, tentou reconstruir a imagem do jornal na cidade e se aproximar da população”.

twentieth century. The content of this source, consulted in the periodical archives of the Historical Museum of Londrina<sup>25</sup>, features a provocative and prominent headline: “The Vikings discovered Brazil, not Cabral”.

The author, João Zicardi Navajas, presents in the article a series of “proofs” of the Scandinavian presence in Brazil in the pre-Cabraline<sup>26</sup> period, citing as a reference the ideas of the Frenchman Jacques de Mahieu. The latter, in turn, was writing a series of books at the time that retrieved the viking narrative, in a manner very similar to that done by the IHGB in the previous century. Furthermore, he strongly defended the presence of vikings in Brazil, using as an example the “runic” inscriptions scattered throughout Piauí, mainly in Sete Cidades. The author argued that these Scandinavians crossed the entire Amazon, leaving behind a portion of constructions, runic inscriptions on stones, and centres of religious worship, and further, that they collected a series of information and objects; for, upon departing for Normandy, they left indications that later served for Christopher Columbus to “discover” America.

At first glance, the reader might arrive at the realization that this is a simple, innocent “promotional piece” regarding the book that was going to be published by Jacques de Mahieu one year later, titled *Os vikings no Brasil* (The Vikings in Brazil). This work contained Mahieu’s main ideas to prove this European presence in Brazil. The problem is that Mahieu was already known in South America, as noted in the work of Giorgia Cardillo: “Among the first to arrive in Argentina was a former SS agent assigned to defend Hitler's bunker in Berlin, Jacques de Mahieu” (Cardillo 2019, 65)<sup>27</sup>. In another instance, it is stated that “Identified among them was Jacques de Mahieu, a former SS officer in France, who became a teacher in Buenos Aires and a journalist-collaborator for the Nazi magazine *Dinámica Social* [...]” (Cardillo 2019, 56)<sup>28</sup>.

Thus, given the French author’s reputation, particularly in South America itself, the news article cannot be interpreted merely as an innocent “promotional piece”. The

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<sup>25</sup> The entire digitized collection of the Historical Museum of Londrina can be consulted online via the website: <https://www.pergamum.bpp.pr.gov.br/>

<sup>26</sup> The term “pre-Cabraline” refers to the period preceding the arrival of the Portuguese fleet led by Pedro Álvares Cabral on April 22, 1500. While traditional historiography framed this event as the “discovery” of Brazil, contemporary studies critically redefine it as the beginning of an invasion and colonization process.

<sup>27</sup> “Tra i primi ad arrivare in Argentina ci fu un ex SS incaricato di difendere il bunker di Hitler a Berlino, Jaques de Mahieu.”

<sup>28</sup> “Tra di loro furono individuati Jacques de Mahieu, ex ufficiale delle SS in Francia, che divenne insegnante a Buenos Aires e giornalista-collaboratore della rivista nazista ‘Dinamica Social’”

evocation of the Scandinavian presence in the Americas, not only by Navajas but by *Jornal Panorama* itself, constitutes, in the light of Narrative Theory, a narrative accrual of the same story: yet another layer that cements European supremacy. And the newspaper's intention in undertaking such a retrieval was, through the lens of *Vorstellungsgeschichte*, to appease the very figures who had initially pressured the project: the same businessmen, the same politicians, and the same citizens of Londrina.

The publication regarding the Scandinavian discovery by *Panorama* was not a journalistic act, but an act of desperation. With Londrina's economy devastated by the Frost, and with the pressure Paulo Pimentel was enduring from Ney Braga and Ernesto Geisel, the newspaper struggled to survive amidst the bankruptcy of local businesses. The article was, in practice, an attempt to curry favour with the community and, principally, the Londrina elite. The objective was to employ this narrative to secure any benefit or support that might save the periodical from crisis and ensure the project did not close its doors.

And the theme chosen by the newspaper to appease society was already an old acquaintance of Londrina: European pioneerism. In a city that had embraced the CTNP myth since its inception, fixing the pioneer as the figure largely responsible for Londrina's history, foundation, and development, the news of European trailblazers not only in Londrina but throughout Brazil would fit like a glove. Now, the businessman, the politician, and the citizen of Londrina could see that the beginning of their city's history mirrored the very beginning of their country's history. Those who defended a supremacist and prejudiced discourse in Northern Paraná felt incredibly gratified by the news, seeing that their ideology was now grounded in the "History of Brazil."

The discourse conveyed by the article is characterized as supremacist and prejudiced by exalting the European man through the erasure of the Indigenous presence. Such ideology is not an isolated case; it echoes the same line of thought adopted in the nineteenth-century United States, when part of its elite declared themselves descendants of vikings to deny the achievements of the native peoples of North America. It is a logic analogous to that of the IHGB when positing the existence of runic inscriptions on Brazilian soil and, fundamentally, to that of Jacques de Mahieu, who defended alleged Scandinavian feats while, in a deliberate manner, relegating Indigenous achievements to oblivion.

In this framework, promoting the book of an author with notorious Nazi affiliation transcends innocence, constituting an act of discrimination. The analysis, however, does not seek to classify the journalist or *Jornal Panorama* as inherently Nazi, but rather to demonstrate how both leveraged an ideology for a specific end: to appease the Londrina elite and thereby guarantee the survival of their revenue stream. Even so, the intentionality behind the use of this discourse precludes any claim to innocence. Fundamentally, the article employs Vinland not as a geographical locality, but as a narrative concept. The text retrieves this medieval symbol, the "discovery of Vinland", in order to gather apparent historical support for its thesis. The objective was to construct an association with the present and validate the possibility that the same Scandinavian navigators, chronicled by Adam of Bremen and the sagas, had extended their reach as far as South America.

This use of Vinland as a narrative concept, however, is not a new phenomenon. On the contrary, herein lies the fundamental connection between the sources analysed here. Adam of Bremen himself, as early as the eleventh century, had transformed the region into a powerful symbol. By positioning it as the frontier between the known and unknown worlds, the last land before the darkness and the monsters, Adam not only demonstrated the Church's awareness regarding the limits of the world but also symbolically asserted the effectiveness of the Archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen and the expansion of the Christian faith.

At another juncture, considering this same point of connection, the anonymous authors of the thirteenth century also transformed the region into a broader concept, representing a new paradise to be enshrined in Icelandic history, given that Iceland itself could no longer hold that title, a paradise that had already been "discovered" by their own ancestors, fearless trailblazers. And finally, the authors of the nineteenth century, the French Nazi, and the Londrina newspaper also transformed the geographical Vinland into this narrative concept, serving to assert European domination in the Americas, a domination that would erase the deeds and presence of Indigenous peoples, as well as those of other marginalized groups.

### **Conclusion: A Past for Every Present**

The trajectory of the narratives regarding Vinland, analysed throughout this study,

demonstrates that there is, essentially, a past for every present. History is not a rigid entity, but a construction that is remodelled according to the intentions and needs of the narrators. Based on the approach of *Vorstellungsgeschichte* and the concept of Narrative, it was possible to observe that Vinland did not necessarily consolidate itself as a true region, but as a real symbol, resignified over the centuries.

The mutualism existing between Narrative and *Vorstellungsgeschichte* proved instrumental throughout the analysis employed here. From the former concept, elements were observed that were applied directly to the text, such as the search for verisimilitude, explained by Todorov, rather than veracity, implying that no narrative will be factually true, for it composes merely a representation of the fact. On the other hand, every narrative is *real* from the moment it arises in the narrator's idea and is conceived. Furthermore, what makes this same narrative live for so long, as Jerome Bruner suggests, is Narrative Accrual, where the more the same story appears interpreted, reinterpreted, and transmitted over time, the closer it approximates reality, becoming tradition and culture for a society.

From the latter concept, the importance of placing the author/narrator at the center of observation was extracted, examining how they interpreted and resignified a single fact through their concepts and transmitted it based on their personal intentions and bias. The ideas retrieved from Goetz and Grzybowski, as well as his conceptual scheme, allowed for the operation of *Vorstellungsgeschichte* in all analyses, as it establishes a dialogue between Anthropology and History.

Thus, when the two theoretical approaches were methodologically intertwined, it was possible to ascertain that, from the first mention of Vinland by Adam of Bremen, passing through the Icelandic sagas to its appropriation and retrieval in Londrina in the twentieth century, the Vinland narrative was continuously accumulated, reinterpreted, and instrumentalized for different ends. If for Adam the reference to a fertile land in the North Atlantic served as an element within the Church's missionary project, for the authors of the Icelandic sagas, it functioned as a space of adventure, reinforcing the memory of pagan ancestors, and principally as a space of idealization: the “new paradisiacal Iceland.” In the nineteenth century, the viking myth was recovered to sustain the idea of a glorious European past in the United States, only to reappear in the twentieth century in the city of Londrina as part of the discourse of supremacist pioneerism.

Highlighting the point of connection between all these stories, the transformation of Vinland into a narrative symbol, significantly expands the possibilities for analysis. That is, it becomes possible to encompass any representation of this land within the same study, for the only condition is that it be yet another remodelling of Vinland, regardless of the historical period in which this representation was conceived, the conditions, the context, or the authorship, since Narrative and *Vorstellungsgeschichte* account for these issues.

By traversing the trajectory of the concept of Vinland, from its origin as a symbolic frontier for Adam of Bremen's Christendom to its resignification as an ideological tool in a Londrina newspaper, this chapter demonstrates the remarkable plasticity of historical myths. The analysis reveals how a single narrative can be mobilized for distinct ends over the centuries: to consolidate ecclesiastical power, to forge an ancestral identity, or to serve local interests in a moment of deep crisis. Therefore, more than exploring an isolated case, this work evidences the urgency of understanding the mechanisms by which the past is continuously rewritten to legitimize the needs of the present, revealing how the evocation of Vinland intertwines in a complex and significant way with the myth of Londrina pioneerism.

In a present marked by fierce disputes over memory and the advance of historical revisionism on various fronts, the approach of *Vorstellungsgeschichte* and Narrative analysis proves not only pertinent but essential. The trajectory of Vinland investigated here serves as a paradigmatic example of this process, illustrating that the resignification of the past transcends academic debate to directly influence political discourses and claims of identity. It demonstrates, ultimately, that History remains a battlefield, where the instrumentalization of the past is a perennial weapon in the consolidation of identities and the justification of ideologies.

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