

# ÍSLENSK FORNRIT

*The leading Icelandic language edition  
of Old Icelandic texts*

THE OLD  
ICELANDIC  
TEXT SOCIETY

90<sup>th</sup>  
anniversary

HÍÐ ÍSLENSKA FORNRITAFÉLAG

The Old Icelandic Text Society

– Founded in 1928 –

## The Old Icelandic Text Society: the first 90 years

In 2018, the Old Icelandic Text Society (*Hið íslenska fornritafélag*) celebrates its 90th anniversary. The inaugural meeting was held on 14 June 1928, and the first page of the society's minute book includes an account of its foundation:

*Jón Ásbjörnsson, a Supreme Court advocate, describes the origins of the society in this way: during the summer of 1926 I was the guest of Þorsteinn sýslumaður Þorsteinsson at Staðarfell. We enjoyed discussing old literary texts and I decided that when I returned to Reykjavík I would try to raise funds for the publication of the best of those works in well-edited editions. Þorsteinn promised his full support in this initiative. My fund-raising efforts met with a very positive response. By April 1927 I had secured pledges of financial support from some thirty individuals, and I arranged a meeting with them for later that month (if memory serves) to discuss these matters.*

This meeting took place on 28 April 1927 and a preliminary committee was elected to oversee the foundation of the society. Its first members were Jón Ásbjörnsson, the bookseller Pétur Halldórsson, and Professor Ólafur Lárusson; soon afterwards they were joined by the Prime Minister, Tryggvi Þórhallsson, and Matthías Þórðarson, Director of the National Museum. The process of raising funds began in earnest, with a letter (dated 1 December 1927) sent to potential donors throughout the country, in which ambitious plans were outlined for the publication of a new scholarly edition of Old Icelandic sagas:

*Each volume will include an introduction, in which the edited work's literary context, and historical and artistic significance will be discussed. Detailed footnotes will explain individual verses, difficult words and idioms, and ancient customs and culture; there will be discussion of historical reliability and chronology, and references to comparative sources. Each edition will include maps, as required, to help elucidate key events; there will also be family trees, photographs of sagasteads, artefacts and buildings. [...] The editorial work will be shared between various scholars, with Professor Sigurður Nordal serving as general editor. We have no doubt that this project is in excellent hands.*

The following passage in the same letter serves as a kind of mission statement for the society:

*It need hardly be said that our early texts have long been Iceland's most precious possession. Our culture at home and our prestige abroad are rooted in them. It is a particularly painful sign of our impoverishment, that no satisfactory Icelandic editions of these works exist—indeed, some texts have never been edited at all. It borders on a national disgrace that the finest editions of our sagas have been produced overseas. No effort should be spared to ensure that our nation cultivates these works more assiduously, and reads them with greater enthusiasm and understanding. An edition such as this, which will gradually reach all foreign scholars who pursue Icelandic literature, will serve better than argument alone to remind them of the Icelandic ownership of these texts. The proprietorial attitudes of other nations in this field should be a source of distress for us.*

## Previous editions of early texts

It is no exaggeration to say that prior to 1928 the ‘finest editions’ of Old Icelandic texts had all been produced outside Iceland. Throughout the nineteenth century, and on into the twentieth century, the countries of northern Europe, not least Denmark, had shown great interest in these old works. Before the Old Icelandic Text Society was founded, saga editions proliferated, especially those published by learned societies such as the Royal Nordic Antiquarian Society (Det kongelige Nordiske Oldskriftselskab), the Nordic Literary Society (Det Nordiske Litteratursamfund), and the Society for the Publication of Old Norse Literature (Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur). More often than not with these projects, however, the scholars involved were Icelanders. The Old Norse Saga Library (1892–1929; Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek) marked a further stage in this process, with the *Íslendingasögur* published there in a series of editions that consistently sought to follow best scholarly practice: there were wide-ranging introductions by leading scholars, accessible texts in regularised old spelling, and detailed explanatory footnotes. It was a text series that all foreign scholars could be expected to make extensive use of in their research.

The Icelandic Literary Society (Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag) was founded in 1816. Among its first publications was *Sturlunga saga* (1817–20; two volumes), but almost forty years would then elapse before further medieval texts appeared under its auspices. Then the society published *Biskupa sögur* (1858–78), *Íslendingabók* (1887) and *Íslenzkar fornsögur* (1880–83; three volumes), which included *Víga-Glúms saga*, *Ljósvetninga saga*, *Reykðæla saga*, *Valla-Ljóts saga*, *Svarfdæla saga* and *Borleifs þátr jarlsskálds*. These editions were intended for Icelandic readers, and featured comprehensive introductions in that language.

Apart from these volumes, it was pure chance that governed whether individual works became available for the Icelandic common reader. It was therefore a blessing when the popular saga editions of Sigurður Kristjánsson (1891–1912; eleven volumes) appeared, published by Valdimar Ásmundsson. Only a few of the 38 sagas published were familiar to Icelandic readers, and many had only been available in scholarly editions produced and published abroad. The new volumes came with no glossary, however, or any other information that might have helped new readers to appreciate the texts better.

## The society’s early years

At the society’s inaugural meeting a board of twelve delegates was elected, and at its first meeting, held in the National Archive Reading Room on 14 June 1928, the five members of the preliminary committee (referred to above) were elected as the society’s governing council, with Jón Ásbjörnsson as president. The preparatory committee’s fund-raising efforts had generated pledges of 21,800 krónur. The Althing had promised to add 5,000 krónur, once the society had raised 25,000 krónur. The Danish King and Queen contributed 1,200 krónur and agreed to act as patrons.

From the outset, the society sought to be financially self-governing, with all profits reinvested in further publications. The council trusted that initial costs would be covered by voluntary contributions, but it was soon clear that sizeable annual subventions from the Althing would also be needed.

As already noted, Sigurður Nordal was appointed as general editor of the society’s publication series, and a list of projected volumes in the Old Icelandic text series was soon made available. Initially, 32 volumes were planned: the first would feature *Íslendingabók* and

*Landnámabók*, followed by the *Íslendingasögur* (10 volumes), *Sturlunga saga* (3 volumes), *Biskupa sögur* (3 volumes), and law texts (1 volume); thereafter, *Sæmundar-Edda* and *Snorra-Edda* would be followed by legendary sagas (2 volumes), *Heimskringla* and other kings' sagas (7 volumes); the three final volumes would consist of selected romance sagas and folktales, scientific and translated works, and a register of poems and poets. At a council meeting on 3 December 1932, a revised schedule of publications was presented, listing 35 volumes (there were to be three additional volumes of *Íslendingasögur*). Eventually, after further revisions on 16 February 1961, 50 volumes are listed, and this profile remains central to the society's vision going forward.

Initially, the council prioritised the publication of the *Íslendingasögur*. The first volume scheduled to appear was *Njáls saga* (initially listed as volume 9), but for various reasons *Egils saga* (volume 2) preceded it, while *Njála* was delayed for many years. At a council meeting on 3 July 1928, the president announced that Kveldúlfur hf (a fishing company) had offered to help finance the publication of *Egils saga* on behalf of the society; it would meet in full any shortfall in government funding. The company had felt itself under an obligation, and its chief executive, Haukur Thors, sat on the society's board of delegates and, later, on its council. At the council's first meeting there was discussion of how to fund the society's operations. The National Librarian, Guðmundur Finnbogason, proposed that they should explore the possibility of seeking regional funding for volumes whose narratives took place in those areas. During the discussion, Haukur Thors mentioned that he had written to all trawler captains and received pledges of financial support from several of them. On 23 September 1930, at the society's third Annual General Meeting, it was noted that during his recent visit to mark the millennial anniversary of the Althing, the society's royal patron, King Christian X, had gifted the sum of 15,000 krónur. The minute then reads: 'As a token of the society's gratitude, all council members rose to their feet'.

The society's early minutes indicate that the council made every effort to ensure that all published volumes would be produced to the highest standards, with top-quality paper, and specially designed covers. These were volumes intended to last a lifetime. The template was to be the Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek edition, but with higher production values; the volumes would be designed with the needs of Icelandic readers in mind, and would include sagastead illustrations and maps. In addition to normal contributions, the society's budget received additional subsidies, based on the publication of one volume every year.

### **Text editions: planning, process, orthography**

The contents as well as the appearance of each volume were determined from the start of the project. Draft guidelines were set out in the initial fund-raising letter (referred to above) circulated by the preliminary committee. The general editor, Sigurður Nordal, led the way with his edition of *Egils saga*, a volume which served as a model for later editors. In the preface he notes:

*These editions are intended primarily for those Icelandic readers who hold our old texts in high regard but who have no specialist knowledge of them. This should be born in mind in any fair assessment of the volumes. The highest priority is for each text to be as accurate and trustworthy as possible. Making the texts accessible for modern readers is also of great importance. To this end, each page has footnotes which explain unfamiliar vocabulary, customs and cultural features. As far as possible, such annotation should avoid any obtrusive scholarship or distracting editorial opinion. References to other works, whether editions or secondary scholarship, are intended, firstly, to direct inquisi-*

tive readers to further information which (for reasons of space) could not be included; and, secondly, to indicate the sources on which editors have drawn, particularly when more than one interpretation is possible. The introductions to each volume are intended to be wide-ranging, with editors able to develop their arguments at length concerning the age, authorship, sources, historical reliability, and chronology of the edited text(s). To a greater extent than is possible in footnotes, the introductions seek to enable the modern reader to approach the work in much the same way as its author's contemporaries did. Inevitably, however, the introductions themselves are subject to limitations of space and current knowledge. By no means all interpretative issues can be addressed or resolved. An introduction will have served its purpose best if it provides Icelandic scholars with the basis and stimulus for further research.

In the archives of the Old Icelandic Text Society there are hand-written drafts of Sigurður Nordal's guidance to editors concerning commentaries on texts, verses, manuscript readings and orthography. As regards textual variants, Sigurður discusses whether and to what extent an editor ought to take account of textual witnesses other than the base manuscript, by including variant readings in the footnotes:

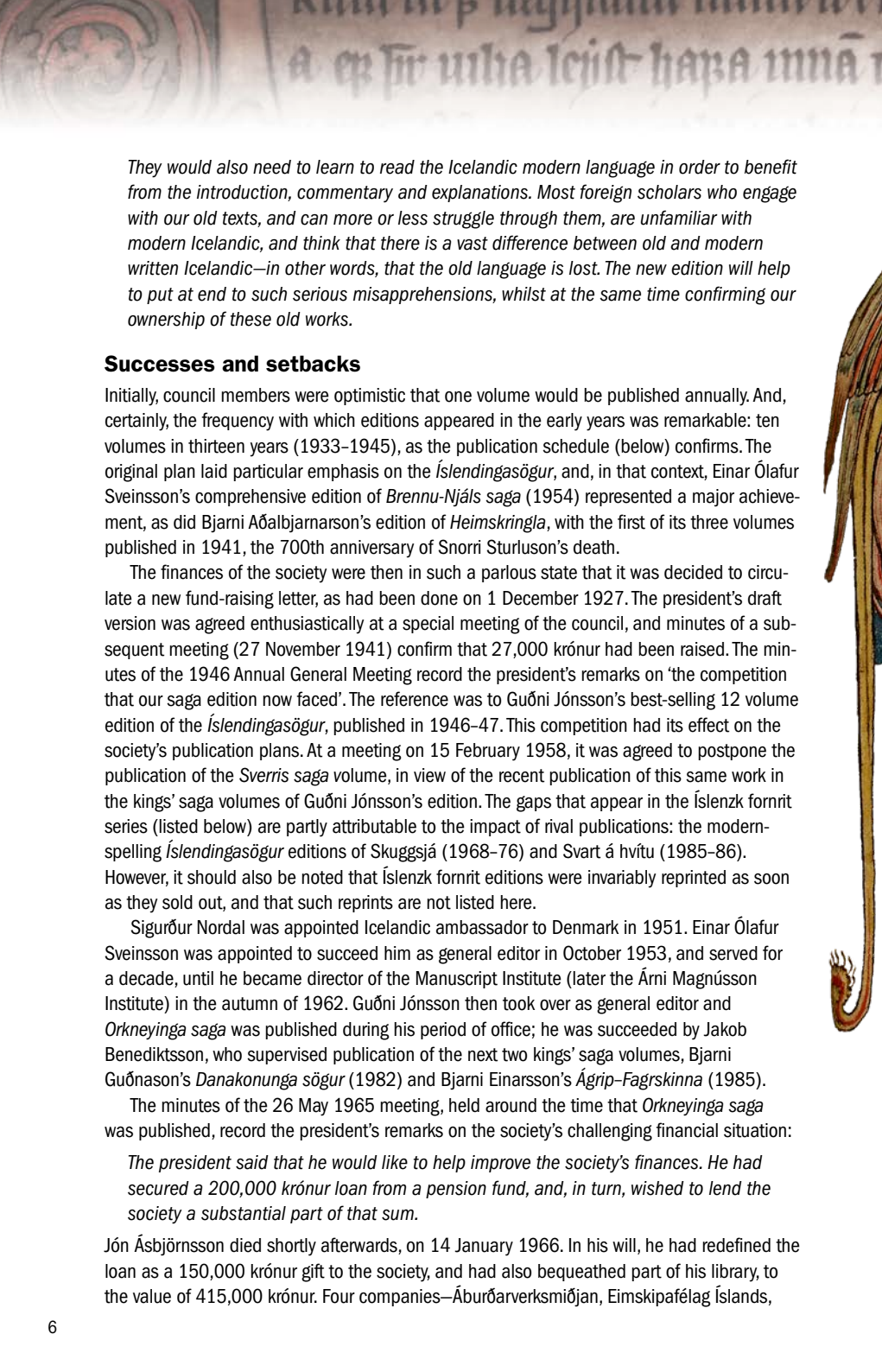
*This is not a problem for anyone who sees fit to list every variant, as in other so-called critical editions (that is, editions which require the exercise of no critical judgement before publication); and nor is it a problem for the editors of Sagabibliothek, for example, who offer no discussion of their treatment of texts, so that even speculative editorial readings are never indicated. In the present edition, I have thought it right to take the middle way: there is no piling up of textual variants, which would be of use to no-one, but nor is the reader left in the dark in respect of the editorial treatment of the text.*

By 'critical editions', Sigurður means those volumes in which the main text is printed in the middle of each page, while variant readings from other significant manuscripts are recorded in footnotes. In these (and, indeed, many other) editions, the text is presented exactly as it is written in the base manuscript, albeit with contractions expanded in italics. At that time, editions of early works were either diplomatic transcriptions, which were particularly user-unfriendly, or regularised old spelling texts, in which words and idioms were spelt according to established rules that took account of the state of the language at the assumed time of the saga's creation. During the first years of the Old Icelandic Text Society, early texts were not normally printed in modern spelling. A similar version of regularised spelling was used in Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek editions, and thus those volumes became part of accepted editorial tradition. Icelandic readers were untroubled by this practice, which also served a special purpose. Sigurður Nordal notes:

*In text editions such as these, intended for the common reader, it seemed natural to make use of regularised spelling. It ensures that the edited works are easy for any intelligent Icelander to read, while retaining the appearance of the old language allows inquisitive readers to explore the origins of words in all their forms.*

In 'Fornritaútgáfan. Metnaðarmál Íslendinga' [The *Íslensk fornrit* saga edition: a matter of honour for Icelanders], an article published in the 'Lesbók' of *Morgunblaðið*, 15 July 1928), the writer claims that the projected Old Icelandic Text Society volumes would be 'by far the best series of early Icelandic text editions ever published'. All foreign scholars wishing to familiarise themselves with Old Icelandic literature would feel obliged to purchase them:





*They would also need to learn to read the Icelandic modern language in order to benefit from the introduction, commentary and explanations. Most foreign scholars who engage with our old texts, and can more or less struggle through them, are unfamiliar with modern Icelandic, and think that there is a vast difference between old and modern written Icelandic—in other words, that the old language is lost. The new edition will help to put at end to such serious misapprehensions, whilst at the same time confirming our ownership of these old works.*

## Successes and setbacks

Initially, council members were optimistic that one volume would be published annually. And, certainly, the frequency with which editions appeared in the early years was remarkable: ten volumes in thirteen years (1933–1945), as the publication schedule (below) confirms. The original plan laid particular emphasis on the *Íslendingasögur*, and, in that context, Einar Ólafur Sveinsson's comprehensive edition of *Brennu-Njáls saga* (1954) represented a major achievement, as did Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson's edition of *Heimskringla*, with the first of its three volumes published in 1941, the 700th anniversary of Snorri Sturluson's death.

The finances of the society were then in such a parlous state that it was decided to circulate a new fund-raising letter, as had been done on 1 December 1927. The president's draft version was agreed enthusiastically at a special meeting of the council, and minutes of a subsequent meeting (27 November 1941) confirm that 27,000 krónur had been raised. The minutes of the 1946 Annual General Meeting record the president's remarks on 'the competition that our saga edition now faced'. The reference was to Guðni Jónsson's best-selling 12 volume edition of the *Íslendingasögur*, published in 1946–47. This competition had its effect on the society's publication plans. At a meeting on 15 February 1958, it was agreed to postpone the publication of the *Sverris saga* volume, in view of the recent publication of this same work in the kings' saga volumes of Guðni Jónsson's edition. The gaps that appear in the *Íslenzk fornrit* series (listed below) are partly attributable to the impact of rival publications: the modern-spelling *Íslendingasögur* editions of Skuggsjá (1968–76) and *Svart á hvítu* (1985–86). However, it should also be noted that *Íslenzk fornrit* editions were invariably reprinted as soon as they sold out, and that such reprints are not listed here.

Sigurður Nordal was appointed Icelandic ambassador to Denmark in 1951. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson was appointed to succeed him as general editor in October 1953, and served for a decade, until he became director of the Manuscript Institute (later the Árni Magnússon Institute) in the autumn of 1962. Guðni Jónsson then took over as general editor and *Orkneyinga saga* was published during his period of office; he was succeeded by Jakob Benediktsson, who supervised publication of the next two kings' saga volumes, Bjarni Guðnason's *Danakonunga sögur* (1982) and Bjarni Einarsson's *Ágrip-Fagrskinna* (1985).

The minutes of the 26 May 1965 meeting, held around the time that *Orkneyinga saga* was published, record the president's remarks on the society's challenging financial situation:

*The president said that he would like to help improve the society's finances. He had secured a 200,000 krónur loan from a pension fund, and, in turn, wished to lend the society a substantial part of that sum.*

Jón Ásbjörnsson died shortly afterwards, on 14 January 1966. In his will, he had redefined the loan as a 150,000 krónur gift to the society, and had also bequeathed part of his library, to the value of 415,000 krónur. Four companies—Áburðarverksmiðjan, Eimskipafélag Íslands,



Flugfélag Íslands and Loftleiðir—agreed to purchase these books from the society and to donate them to the Manuscript Institute.

Pétur Benediktsson succeeded Jón Ásbjörnsson as president, and served until his own death on 29 June 1969. At an adjourned meeting, held on 9 October 1969, Dr Jóhannes Nordal was elected president and continued in this role until the Annual General Meeting on 14 June 2018.

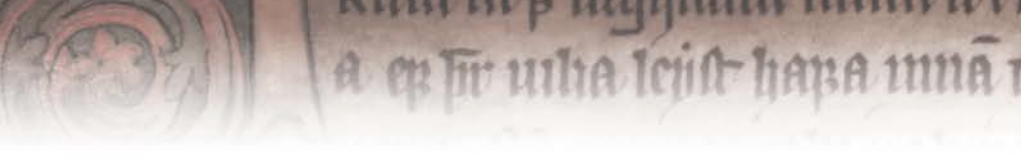
For a variety of reasons, after the publication of *Orkneyinga saga* (1965) and *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók* (1968), no further volumes appeared for another fifteen years. Priority was given to the reprinting of earlier volumes, thereby ensuring that all society publications were always available for purchase. Emphasis was also placed on advertising the society's publications overseas, partly by means of brochures sent to university libraries. In 1979, the 800th anniversary of Snorri Sturluson's birth was marked by the publication of a special limited edition of *Heimskringla*. By then, the society's financial

difficulties had become a thing of the past. The minutes from the 1979 Annual General Meeting confirm that the society was now debt-free.

Publication of new volumes recommenced during the 1980s, with the editions of *Dana-konunga sögur* and *Ágrip–Fagrskinna*. These were followed in 1991 by *Harðar saga*, a volume that had long been in preparation. Its appearance marked the completion of the original project to publish new editions of all the *Íslendingasögur*, and it was now possible to market them as a complete set. During this same period, the society identified as its next priority the preparation of a five-volume edition of the bishops' sagas. The project secured special funding from the Office of the Prime Minister, to mark the millennial anniversary of the adoption of Christianity in Iceland. Three volumes were published in 1998, 2002 and 2003. The publication of the final two volumes (containing the sagas of Guðmundr Arason) was delayed by the death of their editor, Stefán Karlsson. Younger scholars are now well advanced in completing his work.

The society's next major project is to complete the edition of the kings' sagas. The first volume, long in preparation and published in 2006, featured *Færeyinga saga*, together with Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga*. *Sverris saga* appeared in the following year, and then *Morkinskinna* (2011) and *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (2013), both editions in two volumes. The society agreed to publish all five volumes in a special edition, with the introduction in both Icelandic and Norwegian. This was presented as a gift from the Icelandic nation to Norway in 2005, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the restoration of the Norwegian monarchy. The publication secured financial support from the Icelandic government.

Jónas Kristjánsson became a member of the society's council in 1979, and played a major role in its activities, especially after retiring from his position as director of the Árni Magnússon Institute in 1994. Around the turn of the century, Jónas took on the editing of the first two volumes of bishops' sagas, with Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson as his assistant. In 2004 Þórður Ingi was



appointed joint general editor of the Íslenzk fornrit series, and he and Jónas served as general editors of the six kings' saga volumes. Since Jónas's death in June 2014, Þórður Ingi has been the sole general editor. It may be noted that, in the society's ninety-year history, he is the first and only person to have been appointed to a full-time position.

The retiring president, Jóhannes Nordal, has devoted himself tirelessly to the work of the Old Icelandic Text Society for almost half a century. During that period, the society has enjoyed a second renaissance and also laid the foundations for future projects. The new president, elected at the Annual General Meeting on 14 June 2018, is Halldór Blöndal; his fellow council members are Ármann Jakobsson, Guðrún Nordal, Haraldur Ólafsson and Svavar Gestsson.

From the society's beginnings, Bókaverslun Sigfúsar Eymundssonar acted as sales agent for all its publications. This arrangement was terminated in 1990, due to that company's financial difficulties. Since then, the Icelandic Literary Society (Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag) has dealt with book distribution and related services on behalf of the society. This has proved to be a most beneficial arrangement.

## Afterword

The highest priority of the Old Icelandic Text Society has always been the publication of edited texts of sagas whose events took place in Iceland and other Scandinavian countries, from the settlement period of Iceland to the time when these works were first written down. The concluding volumes in this series are due to appear over the next few years. At the time of writing, the final kings' saga volume, *Jómsvíkinga saga*, is in the press, and during the next three years *Sturlunga saga* (in three volumes) will appear, along with the remaining two bishops' saga volumes, which feature the sagas about Guðmundr Arason. The society's publications have also included other kinds of early text. The *Eddukvæði* edition of Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason was published in 2014, and future volumes will include editions of *Snorra-Edda*, legendary sagas, romance sagas, lawbooks, scientific works and translations.

It is certainly the case that, in a remarkably short period, the leading figures of the Old Icelandic Text Society succeeded in producing a set of scholarly editions that enhanced the nation's appreciation of its ancient literary inheritance, and secured for those texts an honoured place in the consciousness of foreign scholars. As evidence of the latter achievement, we may note that, whenever possible, overseas saga translators normally make use of Íslenzk fornrit volumes, while scholars at home and abroad almost invariably cite the individual editions in their critical writings. The text series has always had two objectives: accessibility for interested Icelandic readers, and credibility in terms of meeting the highest scholarly standards. The text series is, of course, a child of its time, and in recent decades other editions have appeared, featuring modern spelling and alternative styles of presentation, and addressing different priorities. In their own way, the Íslenzk fornrit volumes have also taken account of changing times and current research. They retain their validity and status, and the Old Icelandic Text Society retains its role as a vital source of new editions and a contact point between the scholarly community and the common reader.

In memory of Jónas Kristjánsson, scholarly mentor and friend.

Þorleifur Hauksson



## Íslenzk fornrit volumes

(in chronological order)<sup>1</sup>

1933	Íf. II: Egils saga
1934	Íf. V: Laxdæla saga
1935	Íf. IV: Eyrbyggja saga
1936	Íf. VII: Grettis saga
1938	Íf. III: Borgfirðinga sögur
1939	Íf. VIII: Vatnsdæla saga
1940	Íf. X: Ljósvetninga saga
1941	Íf. XXVI: Heimskringla I
1943	Íf. VI: Vestfirðinga sögur
1945	Íf. XXVII: Heimskringla II
1950	Íf. XI: Austfirðinga sögur
1951	Íf. XXVIII: Heimskringla III
1954	Íf. XII: Brennu-Njáls saga
1956	Íf. IX: Eyfirðinga sögur
1959	Íf. XIV: Kjalnesinga saga
1965	Íf. XXXIV: Orkneyinga saga
1968	Íf. I: Íslendingabók – Landnámabók
1982	Íf. XXXV: Danakonunga sögur
1985	Íf. XXIX: Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sögum – Fagrskinna
1991	Íf. XIII: Harðar saga
1998	Íf. XVII: Biskupa sögur III
2002	Íf. XVI: Biskupa sögur II
2003	Íf. XV: Biskupa sögur I
2006	Íf. XXV: Færeyinga saga – Óláfs saga Odds
2007	Íf. XXX: Sverris saga
2011	Íf. XXIII–XXIV: Morkinskinna I–II
2013	Íf. XXXI–XXXII: Hákonar saga I–II
2014	Eddukvæði I–II
2018	Íf. XXXIII: Jónsvíkinga saga

## Íslenzk fornrit editors

(volume numbers in brackets)

Ármann Jakobsson (XXIII, XXIV)
Ásdís Egilsdóttir (XVI)
Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (XXVI, XXVII, XXVIII)
Bjarni Einarsson (XXIX)
Bjarni Guðnason (XXXV)
Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (XIII)
Björn Sigfússon (X)
Björn K. Þórólfsson (VI)
Einar Ól. Sveinsson (IV, V, VIII, XII)
Finnbogi Guðmundsson (XXXIV)
Guðni Jónsson (III, VI, VII)
Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir (XVII)
Jakob Benediktsson (I)
Jóhannes Halldórsson (XIV)
Jón Jóhannesson (XI)
Jónas Kristjánsson (IX, Eddukvæði I–II)
Marteinn Helgi Sigurðsson (XXXIII)
Matthías Þórðarson (IV)
Ólafur Halldórsson (XX, XXV; IV) <sup>2</sup>
Peter Foote (XV)
Sigurður Nordal (II, III)
Sigurgeir Steingrímsson (XV)
Sverrir Jakobsson (XXXI, XXXII)
Tor Ulset (XXXI, XXXII)
Vésteinn Ólason (Eddukvæði I–II)
Þorleifur Hauksson (XXX, XXXI, XXXII, XXXIII)
Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson (XXIII, XXIV)
Þórhallur Vilmundarson (XIII)

## Book orders

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<sup>1</sup> The volumes are listed by their principal titles; many include additional sagas and short tales (*bættir*).

<sup>2</sup> In 1985 Ólafur published a supplement to Íslenzk fornrit IV (1935; now incorporated in the volume); it features an edition of the AM 557 4to (*Skálholtsbók*) text of *Eiríks saga rauða*.





## ÍSLENDINGABÓK LANDNÁMABÓK

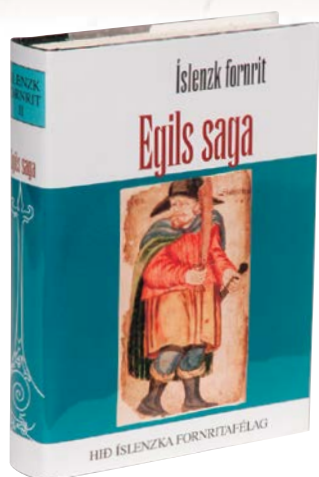
Íslenszk fornrit I

Edited with introduction and notes by  
Jakob Benediktsson.

ISBN 9979-893-00-1  
cliv + 525 pp.

**Íslendingabók.** 'Ari the Wise, son of Porkell Gellisson, was the first man here in the country to write history both ancient and modern in the Nordic language,' says Snorri Sturluson in *Heimskringla*. 'All his account seems to me most noteworthy.' In his Introduction Ari claims to have written *Íslendingabók* at the instigation of two bishops, Þorlákr Runólfsson and Ketill Þorsteinsson, and to have shown it also to the priest Sæmundr the Wise. He then rewrote the work, omitting the 'genealogies and lives of the kings', by which he meant Icelandic genealogies and the lives of the kings of Norway. Though the first version of the book is no longer extant, Snorri made use of the 'lives of the kings' in his *Heimskringla*. The surviving younger version of *Íslendingabók*, a short but trustworthy source, was composed around 1130 and provides an account of the history of Iceland from the settlement period up to the death of Bishop Gizurr Ísleifsson in 1118. Ari's narrative draws on the accounts of people whom he knew to be both knowledgeable and blessed with long memories. He could list all the law-speakers from Hrafn Hængsson in 1030, and signposts the events described in his narrative with reference to their periods of office. His account places particular emphasis on the conversion of Iceland in 1000, and on the history of the first bishops of Skálholt, Ísleifr Gizurarson and his son Gizurr.

**Landnámabók.** This work lists Iceland's most important settlers, identifies their places of settlement, and provides some account of their origins and descendants. It was compiled at the beginning of the twelfth century, and Ari the Wise may have been involved in the preparation of the first (now lost) version. The extant versions of *Landnámabók*, which date from the later thirteenth century or from the fourteenth, are much augmented with new genealogies and a variety of narrative materials. The oldest version is *Sturlubók*, composed by the lawman Sturla Þórðarson (d. 1284). The next oldest is *Hauksbók*, the work of Haukr Erlendsson the lawman (d. 1334), who claims to have based his text on 'that book which Sturla the lawman had written [...] and the other one which Styrmir the Wise had written.' Styrmir Kárason died in 1245, and his *Landnámabók* version is no longer extant. Only fragments remain of a third early version, *Melabók*, which is particularly regrettable as in many respects it represents the version closest to the original. Some of the additional material in *Sturlubók* (and in *Hauksbók*) derives from familiar works such as *Egils saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Vatnsdæla saga* and other *Íslendingasögur*. However, the original *Landnámabók* was certainly a valuable and reliable source, comparable with *Íslendingabók*. It has been noted that though the original text is uncertain in many places, or even completely lost, the extant versions of *Landnámabók* are the most remarkable sources which any nation possesses concerning its origins.



## EGILS SAGA SKALLA-GRÍMSSONAR

Íslenzk fornrit II

Edited with introduction and notes by Sigurður Nordal.

ISBN 9979-893-01-X

cv + 319 pp. with 6 illustrations.

Son of the pioneering Icelandic settler Skalla-Grímr, Egill was a mighty viking warrior, a formidable tenth-century chieftain in Borgarfjörðr, and medieval Iceland's most celebrated poet. The saga, one of the masterpieces of early Icelandic literature, tells of Egill's life from cradle to grave. It incorporates the hero's own poetry, early tales preserved in oral tradition, and a good deal of material attributable to the author himself. *Egils saga* is a subtle blend of scholarship and artistry, realism and invention, and as such has much in common with *Heimskringla*. It has long been argued that Snorri Sturluson may have been the author of both works, and attention has been drawn to the stylistic features that suggest common authorship. Both works certainly contain strikingly vivid scenes, and reveal a fondness for debate and dispute between characters, with the author deftly dramatising the views of each side with equal plausibility. More so than other *Íslendingasögur*, *Egils saga* matches *Heimskringla* in its extensive use of persuasive rhetoric.

*Egils saga* was, in the terms of its day, a work of historical record, but also a literary text shaped by the laws of narrative art. Egill twice escapes from situations of great danger by deploying his gifts as a poet. His enemies King Eiríkr Bloodaxe and Queen Gunnhildr seek to kill him in York, but Egill saves his neck by composing a twenty-stanza poem in praise of the king. And when, later, he considers ending his own life after the death of his son Böðvarr, his daughter Þorgerðr persuades him to produce a poetic elegy, which serves to assuage his grief and help him come to terms with the gods who had robbed him of his sons. 'Sonatorrek' survives as part of the saga, and is one of the great masterworks of Icelandic poetry.

Egill Skalla-Grímsson himself may be the most formidable figure described anywhere in Old Icelandic literature. In his physical stature, turbulent temperament and premature baldness he resembles his father and paternal grandfather; yet, at another level, he has the style and charisma of the two Þórólfr figures, his brother and uncle. Egill secretly yearns for the beautiful woman whom his elder brother, the elegant Þórólfr, had once enjoyed; and he duly wins her with the help of a loyal friend. Óðinn had granted Egill the gift of poetry that often helped him to explore his innermost thoughts, and eventually enabled him to find consolation when desolated by the deaths of brother and son. Throughout his life, Egill Skalla-Grímsson remained a memorable blend of brutish coarseness, human sensitivity, and divine inspiration.



## BORGFIRÐINGA SÖGUR

### Íslensk fornrit III

HCENSA-PÓRIS SAGA

GUNNLAUGS SAGA ORMSTUNGU

BJARNAR SAGA HÍÐCELAKAPPA

HEIÐARVÍGA SAGA

GÍSL S PÁTRR ILLUGASONAR

Edited with introduction and notes by  
Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson.

ISBN 9979-893-02-8

clvi + 365 pp. with 6 illustrations.

Probably written late in the thirteenth century, **Hœnsa-Póris saga** tells of events from the years 961–65. Hen-Pórir was a wealthy but unpopular merchant who, as his nickname suggests, sold hens. He was responsible for a worthy chieftain being burnt alive in his home, a shameful act for which he eventually received his just deserts. Though no master-work, the saga is skilfully narrated and has many poignant moments.

**Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu** is also a late thirteenth century work. In a prophetic dream at the opening of the saga, Helga the Fair, the (as yet) unborn daughter of Þorsteinn Egilsson of Borg, appears as a swan whose beauty attracts the rival attentions of two eagles, who fight fiercely over her with their sharp claws. These two birds of prey represent Gunnlaugr ‘Serpent Tongue’ Illugason and Hrafn Önundarson who eventually fight to the death over Helga. The saga is a masterly romance in a tragic mode and has enjoyed great popularity both in Iceland and abroad.

The subject matter of **Bjarnar saga Hítödelakappa** resembles that of *Gunnlaugs saga*, though it is a less accomplished work and must have been written a good deal earlier. In the saga the poets Björn Arngerirsson and Þórðr Kolbeinsson fight for the love of Oddný Islecandle. Though the narrative appears to favour Björn, it is Þórðr who eventually defeats his rival and wins the woman.

Often described as the oldest of the *Íslendingasögur*, **Heiðarvígá saga** is in many ways a rather rough-hewn and old-fashioned work. The first part tells of Killer-Styrr, a disruptive individual who eventually meets his fate when killed by a young man avenging his father’s death. The latter part of the work tells of the conflict between the men of Húnavatnssýsla and of Borgarfjörðr, notably the climactic battle fought on the heath separating these districts. The saga is poorly preserved, with the first part extant only as retold by the eighteenth-century scholar Jón Ólafsson of Grunnavík.

**Gísls pátrr Illugasonar** tells of how Gísl avenges his father by killing Gjafvaldr, a courtier of the Norwegian King Magnús ‘Barefoot’ Ólafsson. Norwegian-based Icelanders offer Gísl their staunch support, led by Teitr, son of Bishop Gizurr of Skálholt, and by Jón Ögmundarson, later bishop of Hólar. Eventually reconciled with the king, Gísl replaces Gjafvaldr in the royal retinue. This neat didactic tale promotes the virtues of bravery, steadfastness, honour and friendship.



## EYRBYGGJA SAGA

### Íslenzk fornrit IV

EYRBYGGJA SAGA  
BRANDS ÞÁTTR ÖRVA  
EIRÍKS SAGA RAUÐA  
GRÆNLENDINGA SAGA  
GRÆNLENDINGA ÞÁTTR

Edited with introduction and notes by Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson. Supplement to second edition edited by Ólafur Halldórsson.

ISBN 9979-893-03-6

xcvi + 439 pp. with 6 illustrations.

In manuscript copies **Eyrbyggja saga** is called 'Saga Þórsnesinga, Eyrbyggja ok Álftfirðinga' (The Saga of the Dwellers of Þórsnes, Eyrr and Álftafjörðr), a title which signals the work's close links with the peoples of Snæfellsnes. Though many-faceted, the saga is united from beginning to end by a single character—Snorri Þorgímsson, the greatest of the Snæfellsnes chieftains during his lifetime at the end of the tenth century and into the eleventh. Snorri features in many sagas other than *Eyrbyggja*—most notably in *Laxdæla saga*—and is everywhere described as wise, cunning and successful in all disputes. In many scenes the saga's narrative artistry is of the highest order, and readers familiar with the work regard it as among the finest of the *Íslendingasögur*.

**Brands þáttur örva** is a gem among Old Icelandic short stories. It examines the extent to which Brandr the Generous is worthy of his nickname, whilst also scrutinizing the king, who benefits from the hero's benevolence.

**Eiríks saga rauða** and **Grænlandinga saga** both tell of the discovery and settlement of Greenland, and of the northmen's voyages to Vínland the Good. Often known as the 'Vínland Sagas', the two works have much in common, but also some significant differences. They differ, for instance, in their identification of the discoverer of Vínland: *Eiríks saga rauða* names Leifr 'the Lucky' Eiríksson, whereas in *Grænlandinga saga* the honour belongs to Bjarni Herjólfsson (not mentioned in *Eiríks saga rauða*), while Leifr is said to have arrived later and explored the new land. The two sagas were probably composed independently, each drawing on oral tradition reaching back from the time of composition to the actual voyages at the end of the tenth century. The two works bear colourful witness to mighty feats of seamanship and exploration, and remain the principal literary record of one of the most remarkable feats in the history of mankind.

The events in **Grænlandinga þáttur** took place at the beginning of the twelfth century; the tale itself was written a century or so later. It is a trustworthy and touching account of disputes involving the leaders of the Greenland settlement.





## LAXDÆLA SAGA

### Íslenzk fornrit V

LAXDÆLA SAGA

HALLDÓRS ÞÆTTIR SNORRASONAR

STÚFS ÞÁTTIR

Edited with introduction and notes by  
Einar Ól. Sveinsson.

ISBN 9979-893-05-2

xcvi + 318 pp. with 6 illustrations.

**Laxdæla saga** is a tale of love and strife among the people of Laxárdalur in Dalasýsla before and after 1000. Though the saga is rooted in history, in that it deals with the lives of well-known individuals and clearly draws on oral tradition, its descriptions also reveal the influence of chivalric sagas that had been translated from French originals during the reign of King Hákon the Old of Norway, early in the thirteenth century. It seems likely, therefore, that *Laxdæla saga* dates from the middle of the same century. Its opening tells of the arrival and settlement in Iceland of Auðr the Deep-minded and her entourage. Such references are a frequent feature of saga openings, but in *Laxdæla* the early chapters serve specifically to illuminate the background and early life of Óláfr Peacock of Hjarðarholt. We then meet Kjartan his son, and Bolli his foster-son and nephew, and it is with the love of Kjartan and Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir that the saga's principal narrative thread is established. Guðrún duly develops into the saga's dominant figure. Kjartan's rival in love is Bolli, who eventually—and somewhat unscrupulously—wins the hand of Guðrún. Kjartan, arriving home from Norway, and learning of Guðrún's marriage, immediately arranges to marry Hrefna Ásgeirsdóttir. Relations between friends and kinsfolk deteriorate rapidly. At Guðrún's instigation her brothers ambush Kjartan, whom Bolli duly kills. Each killing, however, serves only to trigger fresh acts of vengeance. Kjartan's brothers and their followers find Bolli alone with Guðrún at a shieling; after killing him the bloody spear is wiped on Guðrún's tunic, a cruel deed later avenged by Bolli's sons. Guðrún eventually outlives all four of the husbands, who had first appeared to her in a symbolic dream when she was young. Asked eventually by her favourite son, Bolli Bollason, to identify the man she had loved the most, her reply has become one of the most famous remarks in the Icelandic language: 'I was cruellest to the one I loved the most.'

Of the two short tales about Halldórr, the son of Snorri the Chieftain, **Halldórs þáttir Snorrasonar II** is the better known, and rightly regarded as one of the finest examples of Icelandic narrative art. While still young, Halldórr journeyed with Haraldr Sigurðarson to Constantinople, where he had various adventures in the company of the young king-to-be. *Halldórs þáttir* tells how the young men's friendship cooled after their return to Norway. Halldórr's obstinacy and feistiness became incompatible with the ambitions of the newly-crowned Haraldr. Halldórr duly sails home to Iceland, and lives on into old age at Hjarðarholt.

**Stúfs þáttir** exists both as an independent tale and as an interpolation in the kings' sagas. It is an entertaining and skilfully told story about a cocky Iclander who flourishes at the court of King Haraldr Sigurðarson.



## VESTFIRÐINGA SÖGUR

### Íslensk fornrit VI

GÍSLA SAGA SÚRSSONAR  
FÓSTBRÆÐRA SAGA  
ÞÁTTR ÞORMÓÐAR  
HÁVARÐAR SAGA ÍSFIRÐINGS  
AUÐUNAR ÞÁTTR VESTFIRZKA  
ÞORVARÐAR ÞÁTTR KRÁKUNEFS

Edited with introduction and notes by  
Björn K. Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson.

ISBN 9979-893-06-0  
cxi + 394 pp. with 5 illustrations.

**Gísla saga Súrssonar** is among the most popular of the shorter *Íslendingasögur*. Though not without moments of humour, its narrative is essentially tragic, and all the more moving because it deals with conflict between close friends and kinsfolk. Gísli is sentenced to outlawry after killing one brother-in-law in order to avenge the death of another. Condemned to a life of internal exile, he survives longer than any other Icelandic felon except Grettir Ásmundarson, despite being hunted relentlessly by his enemies. He eventually perishes after a famous last stand. Gísli was a fine poet whose verses give memorable expression to his troubles, not least the bad dreams that torment him. To the end of his life, however, he enjoys the unbending support of his loyal wife Auðr.

**Fóstbræðra saga** tells of Þorgeirr Hávarsson and Þormóðr *Kolbrúnarskáld* Bersason. Blood-brothers from their childhood, each swore that 'the one who lives the longer shall avenge the other'. They are a contrasting pair: Þormóðr the lover and poet, Þorgeirr the turbulent spirit who would kill on the slightest pretext. After Þorgeirr himself is slain, Þormóðr journeys to Greenland in search of vengeance, and has many adventures. A man of good fortune, he fulfils his oath to his foster-brother, and eventually, as was his wish, falls in battle at Stiklarstaðir alongside St Óláfr Haraldsson. The saga's narrative artistry is seen at its best in the scenes describing the death of Þormóðr.

**Þáttur Þormóðar** tells of how the poet met the Danish king Knútr and then St Óláfr, king of Norway. For the most part independent of *Fóstbræðra saga*, the tale is preserved in *Flateyjarbók* and also in *Elsta saga* (*Helgisaga*) *Óláfs helga*. This indicates that the work is relatively old. Dating from the final period of medieval saga writing in Iceland, **Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings** contains a good deal of material reminiscent of legendary sagas. Its characters may be divided into two groups, the good and the bad. The wicked Þorbjörn kills Óláfr, son of Hávarðr; prostrate with grief for three years, the father then boldly avenges his much-loved son.

**Auðunar þáttur vestfirzka** is one of the finest and most celebrated of all medieval Icelandic short stories. It is a didactic tale about the staunch and true-spirited Auðunn, who endures all manner of danger and hardship in order to complete his travels to overseas royal courts. He is justly rewarded by each king, and repays their generosity in full by the end of the tale.

**Þorvarðar þáttur krákunefs** is another didactic tale about an Icelander bearing a generous gift to a foreign king, but the character roles are differently conceived and the narrative not as neatly resolved as in *Auðunar þáttur*.



## GRETTIS SAGA ÁSMUNDARSONAR

Íslensk fornrit VII

GRETTIS SAGA ÁSMUNDARSONAR  
BANDAMANNA SAGA  
ODDS ÞÁTRR ÓFEIGSSONAR

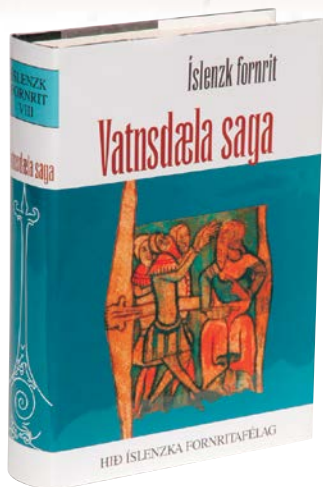
Edited with introduction and notes by Guðni Jónsson.

ISBN 9979-893-07-9  
civ + 407 pp. with 6 illustrations.

**Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar** is the life story of Iceland's most famous outlaw. Disruptive and mischievous as a child, Grettir grows up to be a man of prodigious strength and courage, who fights berserks, trolls and ghosts, thereby coming to the assistance of many ordinary folk. But his aggression and arrogance prove hard to control and his greatest feat of strength proves to be his worst misfortune. He kills the ghost Glámr, but not before the latter condemns him to an ill-starred life. Grettir then sails to Norway, where he performs many mighty deeds, but is also unwittingly responsible for burning down a house in which several Icelanders perish. On returning to Iceland bad news awaits him on three fronts: his father has died, his brother Atli has been killed, and he himself has been sentenced to outlawry at the Althing. After this he is permanently on the run from the law, tormented by fear of the dark and relentlessly pursued by his enemies. Through all his tribulations he retains a sense of irony, as reflected in his gnomic utterances, and he often receives help from the contrasting worlds of men and giants. Grettir's last years were spent on the island of Drangey, in the company of his brother Illugi. It is there that he is finally brought low by sorcery and treachery.

**Bandamanna saga** was probably written at the end of the Sturlung Age. Set for the most part at the Althing, the saga offers a comic critique of the greed and corruption of Icelandic chieftains. They band together to swindle the young merchant Oddr Ófeigsson. Initially the outlook is grim for Oddr, until his father comes to the rescue, first by winning the support of each chieftain in turn through bribery and flattery, and then by playing one chieftain off against another until their trickery is rendered ineffectual.

**Odds þátrr Ófeigssonar** also deals with Oddr Ófeigsson, though the tale has little in common with *Bandamanna saga*, except that its hero is presented as a worthy merchant in both works. This entertaining tale influenced the *Njáls saga* account of Þráinn Sigfússon concealing Killer-Hrapp on board his ship.



## VATNSDÆLA SAGA

### Íslenzk fornrit VIII

VATNSDÆLA SAGA  
 HALLFREDAR SAGA  
 KORMÁKS SAGA  
 HRÓMUNDAR ÞÁTTR HALTA  
 HRAFNS ÞÁTTR GUÐRÚNARSONAR

Edited with introduction and notes by  
 Einar Ól. Sveinsson.

ISBN 9979-893-08-7  
 cxxiii + 356 pp. with 6 illustrations.

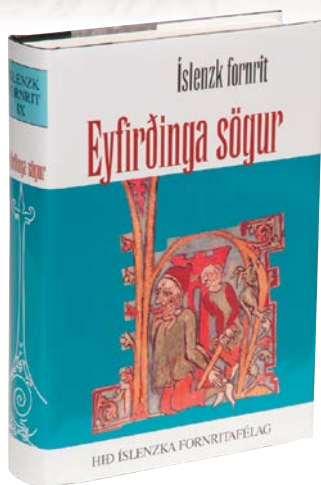
**Vatnsdæla saga** is, in every sense, the family saga of the Vatnsdalers, from the pioneering settlement of Ingimundr the Old around 900 up to the death of Þorkell the Scratcher at the beginning of the eleventh century. The author tends to group the principal characters of his saga into easily identifiable categories: the noble and wise (Ingimundr, his son Þorsteinn and his great-grandson Þorkell the Scratcher), the imprudent and impulsive (Bergþr the Brave, Jökull Ingimundarson), and the malevolent and skilled in magic (Þóroldr the Sledgehammer, Hrolleifr and Ljót his mother). Though *Vatnsdæla saga* has much in common with other later *Íslendingasögur*, with its elements of exaggeration and superficial characterisation, it must be a relatively early work because parts of it can be found retold in *Landnámabók*.

**Hallfreðar saga** tells of the turbulent love life of Hallfreðr and Kolfinna Ámundadóttir, and also of the hero's adventures overseas, notably his dealings with King Óláfr Tryggvason of Norway. Hallfreðr was the king's poet and composed a famous poem on his death. The saga is an amusing and accomplished work with links to several other sagas, including *Heimskringla*. It has been suggested that *Hallfreðar saga* is the older of these two works and that Snorri knew and made use of it.

In its subject matter **Kormáks saga** is related to *Hallfreðar saga*. Both eponymous heroes are in love with women for whom they compose elaborate verses, while being strangely reluctant to marry them. Generally regarded as the older work, *Kormáks saga* is thought to have influenced *Hallfreðar saga*. Though some have argued that *Kormáks saga* is essentially a work of fiction, whose verses were specially composed for inclusion in the narrative, the more widely held view is that the verses are genuinely old, that their attribution to Kormákr is correct, and that the saga narrative was created from the substance of these verses.

**Hrómundar þáttur halta** tells of terrible events that took place in Hrutafjörðr in the tenth century. Hrómundr accuses a group of overbearing Norwegian merchants of theft and has them found guilty at the Althing. They subsequently attack and kill the hero on his home farm, despite a brave last stand, during which several of his enemies die and others flee from his son Hallsteinn, who survives the fight. The saga's three verses are attributed to Hrómundr. The story is summarised in *Landnámabók*, which includes more verses than does the saga itself. This suggests that the extant version is a truncation of some lost original.

**Hrafns þáttur Guðrúnarsonar** is a didactic tale about a worthy man who runs into trouble but escapes unharmed thanks to the support of loyal friends. At the end he even benefits from the help of St Óláfr, who appears to the saint's son Magnús in a dream.



## EYFIRÐINGA SÖGUR

### Íslenzk fornrit IX

VÍGA-GLÚMS SAGA  
ÖGMUNDAR ÞÁTTUR DYTTS  
PORVALDS ÞÁTTUR TASALDA  
SVARFDÆLA SAGA  
PORLEIFS ÞÁTTUR JARLSSKÁLDS  
VALLA-LJÓTS SAGA  
SNEGLU-HALLA ÞÁTTUR  
PORGRÍMS ÞÁTTUR HALLASONAR

Edited with introduction and notes by Jónas Kristjánsson.

ISBN 9979-893-09-5  
cxix + 324 pp. with 6 illustrations.

Though the events of **Víga-Glúms saga** derive from the tenth century, the saga itself was not written down until the thirteenth century. The saga follows the life of its eponymous hero from cradle to grave. Slow to mature, Killer-Glúmr endures the hostility of relatives, before sailing for Norway, where he wins great renown; he then returns to Eyjaþjörðr and achieves a position of authority. He devises ways of retaining power and keeping the peace, before he is finally brought down after it is revealed that he has sworn an ambiguous oath. Exiled to Öxnadalr, Glúmr lives on to a great age, going blind and eventually dying just three years after the acceptance of Christianity in Iceland in 1000.

**Ögmundar þáttur dytts** tells of Glúmr's kinsman Ögmundur Dint, and the vengeance that he exacts for humiliations endured whilst in Norway. The most remarkable feature of the tale is its account of Gunnarr Half's adventures in Sweden, including details about worship of the god Freyr.

**Svarfdæla saga** is a narrative about life among the Svarfaðardalr folk in the tenth century, and includes accounts of many disputes and battles. Though, in its late extant form, the saga is marked by an element of stylistic extravagance, it also preserves much that is old and striking, as with its poignant account of the luckless but beautiful Yngvildr Faircheek.

**Porleifs þáttur jarlsskálds** has links with *Svarfdæla saga*, because Porleifr was Yngvildr's brother. The tale is a relatively late one, perhaps from the end of the thirteenth century or early in the fourteenth. It deploys a variety of wondrous motifs, and, in its most celebrated moment, Porleifr recites the denigratory poem 'Jarlsníð' about Earl Hákon Sigurðarson (d. 995), as a result of which terrifying marvels occur in the earl's hall.

**Valla-Ljóts saga** is a short and unambitious work, which represents a kind of continuation of *Svarfdæla saga*. It describes disputes between the people of Svarfaðardalr and Eyjaþjörðr, notably between Ljótr Ljótólfsson of Vellir and Guðmundr the Powerful of Möðruvellir.

By contrast, **Sneglu-Halla þáttur** is both amusing and entertaining. The tale survives in two different versions, in *Morkinskinna* and *Flateyjarbók*. It tells of Halli's life in the court of King Haraldr the Hardruler. In his dealings with both king and fellow courtiers the witty and shrewd Halli invariably comes out on top.

**Porvalds þáttur tasalda** and **Porgríms þáttur Hallasonar** tell of the valiant dealings of Icelanders with the Norwegian kings.





## LJÓSVETNINGA SAGA

### Íslenzk fornrit X

LJÓSVETNINGA SAGA MEÐ ÞÁTTUM  
REYKDÆLA SAGA OK VÍGA-SKÚTU  
HREIDARS ÞÁTTR

Edited with introduction and notes by Björn Sigfússon.

ISBN 9979-893-10-9

xcv + 282 pp. with 5 illustrations.

**Ljósvetninga saga** exists in two versions; the earlier one survives only in fragments, while the later, though a complete work, is supplemented by independent tales which cannot have been part of the original. Problematic in its extant forms, the original saga may itself have been awkwardly assembled out of three very different parts. The first section describes disputes caused by the troublemaking Sölmundr; in the middle part Þórir Helgason from Laugaland in Hörgárdalr, and Þorkell the Bully of Óxará, son of Þorgeirr the Chieftain of Ljósvatn, are the source of malicious rumours about Guðmundr the Powerful of Möðruvellir. Guðmundr reacts by confronting and killing Þorkell, who defends himself bravely but in vain. The saga's final section describes a variety of conflicts between the younger generations, descendants of Þorgeirr and Guðmundr. The events depicted at the end of the narrative took place after 1050 and are thus closer to the date of the saga's composition than is usually the case among *Íslendingasögur*. Its links with characters in contemporary sagas such as *Sturlunga saga* and the kings' sagas, and its rough-hewn, orally-based narrative form, suggest that the saga may be one of the oldest *Íslendingasögur*, dating from the early thirteenth century.

The events of **Reykðæla saga** happened in the same area as those of *Ljósvetninga saga*, but derive from an earlier period—the tenth century—and consequently the two works have little in common. *Reykðæla saga* has two distinct parts: the first deals periodically with Vémundr the Fringe (chapters 1–16), and the latter with Killer-Skúta (chapters 17–30). Another important character in the first part of the saga is Áskell the Chieftain, uncle of the trouble-making Vémundr. Always a man of peace, Áskell eventually conceals his death wound in order to avoid being the cause of further conflict: he represents a noble heathen conceived of by the saga author in terms of Christian virtues. The saga not only divides into two main parts, but also into many smaller thematically-linked sections; in all likelihood, it was clumsily assembled from oral narratives. Though difficult to date with any certainty, the saga's primitive style and frequent references to oral tradition suggest that it may be among the oldest of the *Íslendingasögur*.

**Hreiðars þáttur** is one of the gems of medieval Icelandic literature. Its eponymous hero is an Icelandic country boy who seeks fame and fortune in the courts of the Norwegian kings. Much mocked, he proves to be less stupid than he seems, behaving heroically on many occasions, and maturing steadily as the saga proceeds. Realising the advantages of returning to Iceland, he duly becomes a major figure in Svarfaðardalr, where he lives to a ripe old age.



## AUSTFIRÐINGA SÖGUR

### Íslensk fornrit XI

ÞORSTEINS SAGA HVÍTA  
 VÁPNFIRÐINGA SAGA  
 ÞORSTEINS ÞÁTTR STANGARHÖGGS  
 ÖLKOFRA ÞÁTTR  
 HRAFNKELS SAGA FREYSGOÐA  
 DROPLAUGARSONA SAGA  
 BRANDKROSSA ÞÁTTR  
 GUNNARS ÞÁTTR ÞÍÐRANDABANA  
 FLJÓTSÐÆLA SAGA  
 ÞORSTEINS SAGA SÍÐU-HALLSSONAR  
 DRAUMR ÞORSTEINS SÍÐU-HALLSSONAR  
 ÞORSTEINS ÞÁTTR AUSTFIRÐINGS  
 ÞORSTEINS ÞÁTTR SÖGUFRÓÐA  
 GULL-ÁSU-ÞÓRÐAR ÞÁTTR

Edited with introduction and notes by Jón Jóhannesson.

ISBN 9979-893-11-7  
 cxx + 379 pp. with 6 illustrations.

Set in the Icelandic settlement age, **Þorsteins saga hvíta** is a late work, written to amplify the opening of *Vápnfirðinga saga*. The main subject matter is the love life of Þorsteinn the Fair, modelled on *Bjarnar saga Hítðælakappa* and *Gunnlaugs saga ormsungu*.

**Vápnfirðinga saga** is among the more accomplished of the *Íslendingasögur*. Its poignant and tragic narrative details the tensions and conflicts between close family members and kinsfolk, notably Brodd-Helgi of Hof and Geitir of Krossavík and, later, their sons Bjarni Brodd-Helgason and Þorkell Geitisson. The saga is also a lesson on the values of tolerance and generosity of spirit that ultimately triumph.

**Þorsteins þáttur stangarhöggs** is a short and artful tale, based on the *Vápnfirðinga saga* depiction of the chieftain Bjarni Brodd-Helgason. Þorsteinn Staff-struck kills two of Bjarni's men in order to avenge an earlier insult. Bjarni challenges Þorsteinn to a duel, in which the latter's benevolence of spirit is confirmed. The two men are reconciled and Þorsteinn is invited to join Bjarni's household.

**Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða** is the most famous of the sagas from the eastern fjords. The work is a profound psychological drama about a powerful chieftain brought low by arrogance and the swearing of a fateful oath. Bitter experience brings a change in spirit, as Hrafnkell becomes 'good natured and calm', though he still exacts vengeance when opportunity eventually arises. Thus, by the end of the saga, equilibrium has been fully restored. Over the years, there has been much lively debate among scholars as to the origins and nature of *Hrafnkels saga*.

Written in the early thirteenth century, **Droplaugarsona saga** may be the oldest of the eastern fjord sagas, and indeed among the earliest works in the entire *Íslendingasögur* corpus. At its heart is the Eyvindardalur battle, celebrated in Icelandic annals, during which Helgi Ásbjarnarson kills Helgi Droplaugarson. The evidence of the extant texts of the saga suggests that its author made use of early oral tales.

The volume also includes a number of other tales, to which brief reference may be made here:

**Ölkofra þátr** is a comic satire on the early Icelandic judicial system and on the covetousness of chieftains.

**Brandkrossa þátr** represents an extension of *Droplaugarsona saga*, offering more detail about the origins of the saga's heroes.

The eponymous hero of **Gunnars þátr Þórandabana** kills Þiðrandi Geitisson from Krossavík. Seeking to avoid the dead man's brother Þorkell, Gunnarr lives as a fugitive in the east, before finding a safe haven in the west with Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir. *Laxdæla saga* retells the conclusion of the tale, and renames it 'Njarðvíkinga saga'.

**Fljótsdæla saga** survives in a single manuscript as a continuation of *Hrafnkels saga*—it has been described as a 'novelistic work with an element of historicity, written for the entertainment of its readers.' Its ending is either lost or was never written down: it was, or would have been, either a duplicate or recast version of the ending of *Droplaugarsona saga*. *Fljótsdæla saga* is a well-told tale, written in fine Icelandic.

An interesting feature of **Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar** is its account of Þorsteinn's participation in the Battle of Clontarf near Dublin in 1014. This conflict is also described in *Njáls saga*, and both accounts may derive from a single lost source.

**Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar** tells of the moment when Gilli, Þorsteinn's Irish slave, kills his master one night in order to avenge having been castrated on Þorsteinn's orders.

**Þorsteins þátr Austfirðings** recalls *Hreiðars þátr* (p. 19) and similar tales: a bashful Icelandic in the Norwegian royal court performs some brave deed which wins him respect in the court and renown on his return to Iceland.

**Þorsteins þátr sögufróða** takes place in the court of King Haraldr the Hardruler, and contains frequently cited evidence about story-telling as a traditional form of Icelandic entertainment.

**Gull-Ásu-Þórðar þátr**, named after an Icelandic poet who married in Norway, tells of the dealings of Norwegian chieftains with each other and with their king, Eysteinn Magnússon. This neatly structured tale preserves a number of witty retorts and rare aphorisms.





## BRENNU-NJÁLS SAGA

### Íslenzk fornrit XII

Edited with introduction and notes by  
Einar Ól. Sveinsson.

ISBN 9979-893-12-5

clxiii + 514 pp. with 12 illustrations.

**Brennu-Njáls saga** (or *Njáls saga*, *Njála*) is the longest and most celebrated of the *Íslendingasögur*. Though its events belong to the tenth and early eleventh centuries, the saga itself was not written until towards the end of the thirteenth century. With almost 300 years separating the writer from those early events, *Njáls saga* is unlikely to have been based primarily on verifiable oral tradition; the extant saga is generally regarded as predominantly a work of fiction. The *Njála* author had a remarkably rich imagination and panoramic worldview. The age in which he lived and from which he drew inspiration witnessed several important historical and cultural transitions, notably from Sturlung Age turmoil to the repose of Norwegian royal rule, and from national independence to subject-nation status. Not least, the saga reflects the intersection of indigenous tradition with southern European chivalric romance. The *Njála* author was familiar with, and makes artful use of, the generic variety of early Icelandic texts: sagas, poetry, learned treatises, genealogies, and law books. He draws on whole sections from such works, not in order to produce a historically accurate account, but rather to situate his narrative within Icelandic history. The author is able to lend an air of credibility to impossible events, and to establish a creative tension between reality and improbability, truth and fiction.

*Njála* has been compared to a multi-coloured autumnal forest, to a ripe fruit whose sweetness heralds the onset of decay, and to a great ocean with its shifting moods of calm and turbulence. Each section achieves its own climax and then finds repose—enemies never flinch from conflict, but, after hostilities have run their course, peace and calm are restored. Thus, after the burning of Njáll and his family, the saga's climactic moment, there follows a lengthy concluding section, full of narrative variety, which culminates in the reconciliation of the two surviving heroes. Only then is the reader finally able to step, cleansed in spirit, from the harrowing ordeal by fire that the tragic narrative represents.

Few works in world literature can match *Njála*'s richly varied cast of characters, all with their distinctive features: the phlegmatic and the high-spirited, the noble and the dubious, the glamorous and the wretched. Dark figures have their lighter tones, and none is so bright that he or she is not tellingly set off by an element of shadow. *Njála* can delight the mind of a child by the simplicity of its language and the grandeur of its events, whilst it can also challenge adults, for whom each reading will reveal new elements of narrative artistry and human truth.



## HARDAR SAGA

### Íslenzk fornrit XIII

HARDAR SAGA  
 BÁRÐAR SAGA  
 ÞORSKFIRÐINGA SAGA  
 FLÓAMANNA SAGA  
 ÞÓRARINS ÞÁTTIR NEFJÓLFSSONAR  
 ÞORSTEINS ÞÁTTIR UXAFÓTS  
 EGILS ÞÁTTIR SÍÐU-HALLSSONAR  
 ORMS ÞÁTTIR STÓRÓLFSSONAR  
 ÞORSTEINS ÞÁTTIR TJALDSTÆÐINGS  
 ÞORSTEINS ÞÁTTIR FORVITNA  
 BERGBÚA ÞÁTTIR  
 KUMLBÚA ÞÁTTIR  
 STJÖRNU-ODDA DRAUMR

Edited with introduction and notes by  
 Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson.

ISBN 9979-893-13-3  
 ccxxviii + 525 pp. with 8 illustrations.

Though most of the sagas in this volume probably date from the late fourteenth century, some existed in earlier versions that no longer survive. In the case of **Hardar saga**, along with the extant later versions, a short fragment survives, which is thought to derive from an otherwise lost earlier version. Hörðr is a brave but unruly hero who is eventually condemned to a life of outlawry. He and his followers, known as the *Hólmverjar*, end up living on Geirshólmr in Hvalfjörðr, where they survive by means of robbery until they are eventually betrayed and killed during a truce. Hörðr's wife Helga, the daughter of a Gotland earl, saves herself by heroically swimming from the island, along with their two sons.

**Bárðar saga** tells of Bárðr Dumbsson, of mixed descent from trolls and humans, who lives in Snæfellsjökull. Many regard him and his two children, Helga and Gestr, as guardian spirits of the district. The saga has plenty of larger-than-life supernatural incident, it contains a number of remarkable verses, and the story of Helga Bárðardóttir has a distinctively melancholy quality.

**Þorskfirðinga saga** (or *Gull-Þóris saga*) begins with the hero Þórir, whose nickname derives from the gold he seized from dragons, who lay guarding their hoard in a cave in the north by Dumbshaf (the Giant's Sea). These creatures had once been vikings. The saga reports the belief that Þórir himself eventually turned into a serpent and lay on his own chests of gold at Gullfoss in Þorskafljörðr.

**Flóamanna saga** is a fourteenth-century saga, featuring narrative material deriving from *Landnámabók* and the *fornaldarsögur* (legendary sagas). The work's hero is Þorgils Þórðarson, known as Örrabeinsstjúpr (Scar-leg's stepson). Particularly striking is the account of his journey to Greenland, during which he endured great hardship.

The volume also includes a number of shorter tales:

**Þórarins þáttir Nefjólfs sonar** is a didactic tale about an Icelander who falls out of favour with the Norwegian king as a result of false accusations made against him, before the truth is revealed and his status restored.



The hero of **Þorsteins þáttur uxafóts** fights against trolls, some of them alive and others dead but still haunting the community.

**Egils þáttur Síðu-Hallssonar** is an early exemplary narrative, written to illustrate the power and the glory of St Óláfr during his life.

Like *Þorsteins þáttur uxafóts*, **Orms þáttur Stórolfssonar** tells of a mighty strongman. These two stories have other features in common, and enjoyed great popularity. The description of Ormr is closely based on Grettir Ásmundarson, but his superhuman strength exceeds even that of the famous outlaw hero.

**Þorsteins þáttur tjaldstœðings** tells of a wealthy Icelandic settler, whose nickname derived from the tent he provided as shelter for sick travellers whom no-one else would help.

**Þorsteins þáttur forvitna** is an exemplary tale about a man who survives a testing journey undertaken as penance for his earlier compulsive curiosity.

**Bergbúa þáttur** and **Kumlbúa þáttur** are found together in manuscripts and in both stories we find supernatural beings reciting poetry for humans. In the first tale, Hallmundr the mound-dweller recites a set of verses which offer a remarkable description of a volcanic eruption. In the second story, a man called Þorsteinn takes a sword from a grave. Its owner then appears to him in a dream and, in a verse, warns him to return the weapon, but Þorsteinn replies with a defiant verse of his own.

The hero of **Stjörnu-Odda draumr** is Oddi, renowned in the twelfth century for his astronomical knowledge. The saga claims that he lived at Múli in Aðaldalr. The substance of the tale is a legendary narrative dreamt by Oddi; it includes fragments of two poems.





## KJALNESINGA SAGA

### Íslenzka fornrit XIV

KJALNESINGA SAGA  
JÖKULS PÁTRR BÚASONAR  
VÍGLUNDAR SAGA  
KRÓKA-REFS SAGA  
PÓRÐAR SAGA HREÐU  
FINNBOGA SAGA  
GUNNARS SAGA KELDUGNÚPSFÍFLS

Edited with introduction and notes by  
Jóhannes Halldórsson.

ISBN 9979-893-14-1  
lxxvi + 399 pp. with 5 illustrations.

The events of **Kjalnesinga saga** took place in the days of King Haraldr the Finehaired; the saga itself dates from the fourteenth century. It is a colourful and entertaining work, reminiscent in many ways of legendary sagas. The author was clearly familiar with the district in which the events of the saga are set, and the names of many characters echo local place names. The principal hero is Búi Andriðsson, who for a time lived with King Dofri in Dofrafell in Norway. There, he and Friðr, the king's daughter, had a son named Jökull, whose paternity Búi refuses to acknowledge. The eventual fight between father and son leaves Búi at death's door while his son disappears from the saga. An unknown scribe evidently felt that there was more to be said about Jökull, and chose to add **Jökuls pátrr Búasonar**, a tale whose events are even more improbable than those of the saga. We learn of the hero's dealings with trolls and monsters, and eventually of his being crowned as a king in Africa.

**Víglundar saga** is a delightful story of the love affair between Víglundr and Ketilríðr, which eventually triumphs after early trials and tribulations. The saga is one of the youngest of the *Íslendingasögur*, and was much influenced by chivalric sagas, especially *Tristrams saga*. It includes several poignant verses composed by Víglundr in praise of his beloved.

**Króka-Refs saga**, another poet's tale, is a late, skilfully composed and very entertaining work. Refr's name (which means Fox) reflects his reputation for cunning tricks and infallible schemes. Particularly striking is his word-play when reporting the death of Sheath-Grani to King Haraldr the Hardruler—this recalls the verbal puzzles in the 'Skáldskaparmál' section of *Snorra-Edda*. The saga also tells of Refr's remarkable adventures in Greenland.

**Pórðar saga hreðu** is extant in two versions, one complete and the other fragmentary. Though the saga is for the most part fictional, its spirit is that of early *Íslendingasögur* such as *Egils saga* or *Njáls saga*, rather than of legendary or chivalric sagas. Pórðr the Menace is a formidable warrior who, when necessary, defends himself against the simultaneous attacks of many enemies. He is also a master craftsman who builds celebrated halls in Flatatunga and elsewhere.

**Finnboga saga** is another colourful saga, composed in the fourteenth century and based on early *Íslendingasögur*. Finnbogi resembles Pórðr the Menace in his fondness for fighting and deeds of derring-do; he defends himself effortlessly against superior forces. The saga has links with *Vatnsdæla saga*, which tells of the dealings between Finnbogi and his kinsman Bergr the Brave and their enemies, the sons of Ingimundr. Each saga favours its own heroes, and significant inconsistencies between the two accounts may also be attributable to the influence of oral tradition.

**Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfífls** makes use of the same sort of narrative material as does *Kjalnesinga saga*. It is among the youngest *Íslendingasögur*, written perhaps in the fifteenth century.



## BISKUPA SÖGUR I

### Íslenzk fornrit XV

Part One: Scholarly material

Part Two: Texts

KRISTNI SAGA

KRISTNI ÞÆTTIR

JÓNS SAGA HELGA

GÍSLS ÞÁTRR ILLUGASONAR

SÆMUNDAR ÞÁTRR

Edited with introduction and notes by Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson and Peter Foote.  
General editor: Jónas Kristjánsson.

ISBN 9979-893-15-X

cccxcviii + 393 pp. with 16 illustrations.

Volume One of this series consists of two parts. The first contains a range of scholarly material relating to the bishops' sagas; the second contains the texts of the sagas themselves.

The mid-thirteenth-century **Kristni saga** is a concentrated history of Christianity in Iceland from its beginning in the late tenth century up to the early twelfth century. It draws on many sources, but is a unified work, bearing all the marks of single authorship. Its principal source was the short but informative *Íslendingabók* account of Pangbrandr's missionary work, of the conversion, and of the first bishops of Skálholt, up to the death of Gizurr Ísleifsson in 1118. *Kristni þættir* and *Kristni saga* contain much additional material, such as the detailed accounts of the first missionaries, Þorvaldr the Far-travelled and Bishop Friðrekr.

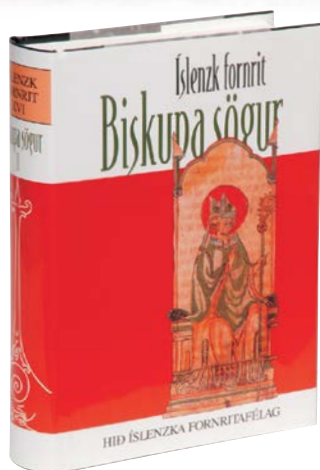
**Kristni þættir.** The work known as *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta* (the Great Saga of Óláfr Tryggvason) was written early in the fourteenth century. It is based on Snorri Sturluson's saga about the same king in *Heimskringla*, but includes additional material from other sources not used by Snorri, such as accounts of the arrival and acceptance of Christianity in Iceland. 'Óláfr Tryggvason introduced Christianity to Norway and Iceland,' claims Ari the Wise, and it is therefore appropriate that this additional material should be included in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta*. It appears at various points in the saga, but is edited here as an independent entity under the title 'Kristni þættir'. Though the narratives are of different ages and origins, and though they exist in various states of preservation, they represent an invaluable witness to the earliest stages of the conversion of Iceland. The first text (in three versions) is about Þorvaldr the Far-travelled; then come stories about the missionaries Stefniir Þorgilsson and Pangbrandr; a number of independent tales follow, dealing with various events connected with the conversion period; and, finally, there is a special account of the acceptance of the new faith.

**Jóns saga helga.** Missionary activity in Iceland began in the north, and it is therefore appropriate that the present volume also includes the saga of the first bishop of Hólar, St Jón Ögmundarson (1106–23). *Jóns saga* was written in Latin at an early stage by

Gunnlaugr Leifsson, a monk at Þingeyrar (d. 1218 or 1219), but it survives only in three Icelandic versions, named S, L and H (or A, B and C). *Jóns saga* was clearly influenced by medieval saints' lives and is partly modelled on *Þorláks saga*, but it also contains a good deal of original material about Jón's episcopal life and achievements, not least his remarkable school at Hólar, whose influence can be identified in the vigorous literary activity in the north of Iceland. In 1200 at the Alþing Jón was officially declared to be a saint worthy of veneration, and various miracle stories offer us a vivid and entertaining glimpse of life in his thirteenth-century diocese. Finally, there are two short tales related to *Jóns saga*: **Gísli þátrr Illugasonar** and **Sæmundar þátrr**.

*Viðauki I* [Appendix I] includes the conclusion to *Kristni saga* as found in the *Skarðsárþók* text of *Landámabók*. This is in some respects a more original version than that to be found in the principal manuscript of the saga. *Viðauki II* [Appendix II] presents passages about missionary activity and the conversion process in Iceland, deriving from important sources not printed in the present volume.





## BISKUPA SÖGUR II

### Íslenzk fornrit XVI

HUNGRVAKA

ÞORLÁKS SÖGUR HELGA

JARTEINABÆKR ÞORLÁKS HELGA

PÁLS SAGA BYSKUPS

ÍSLEIFS ÞÁTR BYSKUPS

LATÍNUBROT UM ÞORLÁK HELGA

Edited with introduction and notes by Ásdís Egilsdóttir.

General editor: Jónas Kristjánsson.

ISBN 9979-893-16-8

clxvi + 380 pp. with 16 illustrations.

**Hungrvaka** is a history of the first five bishops of Skálholt, from Ísleifr Gizurarson, who was consecrated as bishop in 1056, to Klængur Þorsteinsson, who died in 1176. The name of the work derives from the author's desire to arouse the intellectual hunger of young men in Iceland. *Hungrvaka*, which was written in the early thirteenth century, is a major Icelandic historical source. The distinctive characteristics of each bishop are described, notably those of Gizurr Ísleifsson. *Hungrvaka* notes that 'it was right to say that while he [Gizurr] lived he was both king and bishop of Iceland.'

**Þorláks sögur helga.** Klængur's successor as bishop of Skálholt was Þorlákr Þórhallsson, Iceland's first and most prestigious saint, who died in 1193. His sanctification was confirmed at the Althing in 1198, and his remains were exhumed and translated to Skálholt the following year. Though only fragments of Latin accounts of Þorlákr's life survive, there are two extant Icelandic works about the saint: the so-called Older and Younger *Þorláks saga* versions (sometimes known as A and B). The Older *Þorláks saga* was written shortly after 1200, at much the same time as *Hungrvaka*, but, like *Hungrvaka* and other early works, it survives, probably in somewhat truncated form, only in later copies. Though the opening of the Younger *Þorláks saga* closely resembles the Older version, the two versions diverge thereafter, notably through the inclusion in the Younger version of a lengthy section describing the conflicts between Bishop Þorlákr and secular chieftains over control of ecclesiastical lands. This account is known as 'Oddaverja þáttur', because the bishop's principal adversary was Jón Loftsson of Oddi.

**Jarteinabækur Þorláks helga.** The Older *Jarteinabók Þorláks helga*, known as *Jarteinabók I*, survives in one very early manuscript. It is likely that this work closely resembles the book of miracles which Þorlákr's successor, Bishop Páll Jónsson, had read out at the Althing in 1199. Accounts of new miracles were continually added. There are, thus, many extant collections of miracle stories about St Þorlákr, some of them more or less identical with each other. The present volume includes the oldest of these miracle collections, together with a complete version of one later collection, and material from some others.

**Páls saga byskups.** Þorlákr's successor as bishop of Skálholt was his nephew Páll Jónsson, who died in 1211. Páll was a well-educated man and an important ecclesiastical leader, and the saga gives a fine account of his own achievements and of various important events



in Iceland during his lifetime. Páll had a sarcophagus made in which his dead body was eventually laid; this stone coffin was unearthed during excavations at Skálholt in 1954, as were Páll's bones and a carved episcopal staff.

**Ísleifs þáttur byskups** is a brief but entertaining story about the journey undertaken by Ísleifr in order to propose marriage to Dalla Þorvaldsdóttir from Ásgeirsá in Víðidalr. The tale ends with Bishop Jón Ögmundarson's celebrated remark about Ísleifr: 'He always comes to mind whenever I hear mention of a good man.'

The final text in the present volume is a very old fragment of a Latin narrative about St Þorlákr, together with an Icelandic translation.





## BISKUPA SÖGUR III

### Íslensk fornrit XVII

ÁRNA SAGA BISKUPS

LÁRENTÍUS SAGA BISKUPS

SÖGUPÁTTUR JÓNS HALLDÓRSSONAR BISKUPS

BISKUPA ÆTTIR

Edited with introduction and notes by  
Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir.

ISBN 9979-893-17-6

clx + 493 pp. with 24 illustrations.

**Árna saga biskups** tells of the life and ministry of Árni Þorláksson, bishop of Skálholt 1269–98. Born at Svínafell in 1237, Árni was educated by Brandr Jónsson, abbot of Þykkvibær, who saw in his pupil ‘a very gifted craftsman and writer and a sharp-minded scholar.’ Árni was a royalist and a friend of the Archbishop of Niðaróss (Trondheim) and was thus a frequent visitor to Norway, where he died (in Bergen) in 1298. The extant saga treats the events of his life up to 1291; the final part of the work seems to have been lost. The narrative has two principal themes: conflicts in Iceland between clerical and secular authority concerning ecclesiastical property, and the ratification of *Jónsbók* at the Althing in 1281. The saga, clearly sympathetic to clerical authority, is believed to be the early fourteenth-century work of Árni Helgason, a kinsman who succeeded Bishop Árni, and a scholar well versed in the affairs of the Skálholt diocese. For its sources the saga draws on annals, medieval diocesan records, and oral tradition deriving from the bishop’s contemporaries. The saga is found in manuscripts containing the last part of *Sturlunga saga*, and it shares that work’s vivid descriptive and narrative style, for all that it is also heavily laced with pious reflections on the affairs of men. *Árna saga* is among the most important sources concerning Norwegian-Icelandic politics at this time.

**Lárentíus saga** tells of the life of Bishop Lárentíus Kálffsson, bishop of Hólar 1323–30. The saga is extant in two sixteenth-century manuscripts whose texts differ somewhat in content but resemble each other in their mellow style and vivid sense of humour. The saga is the work of Einarr Hafliðason, a priest at Breiðabólstaðir in Vestrhóp 1344–93. It tells of Lárentíus’s youth, his time in Norway, his early service as a priest at St Óláfr’s church in Niðaróss (Trondheim), and his subsequent trials and triumphs in love and life. After an ill-starred visit to Iceland to examine the progress of Christianity there, he later returned to become, first, a monk at Þingeyrar and, eventually, bishop of Hólar. The work is based primarily on annalistic sources and diocesan records and is an important contemporary source for our knowledge of Icelandic-Norwegian relations, monastic life, episcopal governance, book-making, music and dance, and other everyday customs.

**Sögupáttur Jóns Halldórssonar biskups.** Of Norwegian descent, Jón Halldórsson was educated in Paris and Bologna, and served as bishop of Skálholt 1322–39. The tale is

preserved in medieval codices alongside recreational or morally improving tales. Bishop Jón may himself have composed exemplary narratives and used them in his sermons. He features in *Lárentíus saga*, whose author he consecrated as priest. *Sögubáttur Jóns Halldórssonar* has much in common with more extended bishops' sagas: it tells of the life of a good man, for the spiritual edification of others.

**Biskupa ættir** (The Bishops' genealogies), which survive in a fourteenth-century manuscript, are in two parts. One is a miscellany of thirteenth-century northern Icelandic genealogies connected with either *Árna saga* or *Lárentíus saga*. The other sets out the genealogies of the first five bishops of Skálholt.



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## BISKUPA SÖGUR I–III



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Many of these sagas are very well written and make entertaining reading. Each text is accompanied by footnotes accessible to scholars and the general reader alike, and by a detailed introduction, which examines the saga's textual transmission, composition, chronology, principal characters and Icelandic literary context.



## MORKINSKINNA I-II

Íslenzk fornrit XXIII-XXIV

Edited with introduction and notes by Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson

General editors: Jónas Kristjánsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson.

ISBN 978-9979-893-97-4  
Ixxviii + 332 bls. / cxv + 270 pp.  
with 20 illustrations.

The early thirteenth-century **Morkinskinna** is a major collection of kings' sagas, which tells of the ruling kings of Norway after the death of St Óláfr Haraldsson at Stiklarstaðir in 1030. The narrative may have extended to the time when Sverrir Sigurðarson began his struggle for power in Norway late in the twelfth century, but the work's final section is missing. As it stands, *Morkinskinna* is the oldest detailed account of Norway's many early medieval kings.

The first volume of this edition includes *Magnúss saga góða* and *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar*. The former work describes how Magnús is removed from fostercare in Russia (Garðaríki) and made king of Norway. When he grew to manhood, he ruled sternly for a period, before becoming more compassionate on the advice of Sighvatr Þórðarson the poet; he was known subsequently as Magnús the Good. During the final year of Magnús's reign, his uncle Haraldr Sigurðarson arrived in Norway, and the two cousins ruled together for a while. After the sudden death of Magnús, Haraldr assumed the throne on his own. As a young man, he lived a life of adventure, spent time in Constantinople, and performed many feats, though his subjects thought him much harsher than Magnús. Haraldr was respected for his wisdom and love of storytelling, however, and, of all the kings of Norway, he is regarded as having been the most friendly towards Icelanders. *Haralds saga* ends with his fateful campaign in the British Isles, and his eventual death in the great Battle of Stamford Bridge in 1066.

The second volume includes sagas of the kings who ruled Norway after the demise of Haraldr Sigurðarson. The first of these was Haraldr's son, Óláfr kyrrí (the Peaceful), whose reign was long and prosperous, but stories about him are few. Óláfr's son was Magnús berfættir (the Barefoot), a formidable warrior who oppressed his neighbours, both to the east and west. After his death in Ireland in 1103, the kingdom was divided between his sons, who differed in temperament. Sigurðr became famous for his youthful expedition to Jerusalem, whereas his brother Eysteinn won fame as a strong leader, a lawman, and a well-loved figure among his subjects. Norway prospered during the reigns of the brothers, but was subsequently overtaken by misfortune. Cruel and foolish kings ruled, and civil war soon broke out. Brothers fought against one other, and there seemed no end in sight to the conflict when the *Morkinskinna* narrative ends.

The many short tales (*Íslendingaþættir*) included in *Morkinskinna* describe the dealings between the Norwegian kings and Icelanders living in Norway. Several of these stories are masterpieces of Icelandic narrative art. Also, few Icelandic historical texts contain as many verses as *Morkinskinna*, and many of these occur nowhere else.





## FÆREYINGA SAGA ÓLAFS SAGA ODD'S

Íslenzk fornrit XXV

FÆREYINGA SAGA  
ÓLAFS SAGA TRYGGVASONAR  
by the monk Oddr Snorrason

Edited with introduction and  
notes by Ólafur Halldórsson.

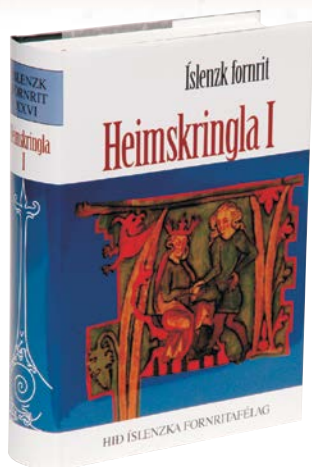
General editors: Jónas Kristjánsson  
and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson.

ISBN 9979-893-25-7  
ccv + 402 pp. with 16 illustrations.

**Færeyinga saga** traces the history of the *Götuskeggjar*, an aristocratic Faroese clan that took its name from the odal of Gøta on Eysturoy. The saga first tells of Þorbjörn *Götuskegg*, the father of Þrándr, the saga's protagonist. Þorbjörn's brother is Sigmundr from Skufof, the father of the brothers Brestir and Beinir, vassals of Hákon *Hlaðajarl*. The brothers hold half of the Faroe Islands in fief from Hákon, while Hafgrímr from Suduroy holds the other half in fief from King Haraldr Greycloak. Þrándr from Gøta manages to take power from these vassals of Norwegian nobility, until Sigmundr Brestisson, with the support of Hákon Hlaðajarl, comes to the islands after a long exile and great achievements on viking raids. Sigmundr avenges his father, settles on Skufof, and receives the islands in fief from Hákon. The saga then turns its attention to the struggle between two very different groups: on the one hand Þrándr and his kinsmen, and on the other Sigmundr and his descendants. Þrándr is a heathen, a sorcerous old fox, who stops at nothing to gain wealth and power, and who is ruthless in his struggles against the Norwegian nobility. Sigmundr, on the other hand, is a reproachless hero and is exceptionally skilled in feats of arms. He becomes a vassal of King Óláfr Tryggvason, is baptised, accepts the Faroe Islands in fief from Óláfr and brings Christianity to them. *Færeyinga saga* matches the greatest *Íslendingasögur* for suspense and drama.

Oddr Snorrason, a monk at the Þingeyrar monastery in Iceland in the second half of the twelfth century, wrote **Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar** in Latin. Nothing is preserved of this original version of the saga, but Icelandic texts of the saga exist in two nearly-complete manuscripts and in fragmentary form in a third. These texts are very dissimilar and actually represent three different versions of the saga, all of which, however, can be traced to an original translation of the Latin text. Oddr's *Óláfs saga* is in most respects composed as a hagiographical *vita*, conforming particularly to the model provided by lives of confessors.

Oddr does not attempt to make a case for the canonization of Óláfr Tryggvason, but he does emphasize how he was the predecessor to St Óláfr Haraldsson, just as John the Baptist preceded Christ. To support Oddr's presentation of Óláfr Tryggvason, he incorporates material from both the Bible and saints' lives. The saga is among the oldest written sources for the early life and upbringing of Óláfr Tryggvason, his evangelical mission, and the conclusion of his life.



## HEIMSKRINGLA I

### Íslenzk fornrit XXVI

YNGLINGA SAGA  
HÁLFÐANAR SAGA SVARTA  
HARALDS SAGA INS HÁRFAGRA  
HÁKONAR SAGA GÓÐA  
HARALDS SAGA GRÁFELDAR  
ÓLÁFS SAGA TRYGGVASONAR

Edited with introduction and  
notes by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson.

ISBN 9979-893-26-5  
cxi + 405 pp. with 8 illustrations.

*Heimskringla I-III* presents, in an uninterrupted sequence, Snorri Sturluson's sagas of the Norwegian kings, from legendary times through to the latter part of the twelfth century.

**Ynglinga saga** tells of the ancient kings of Sweden. They traced their origins back to the god Freyr, otherwise known as Yngvi-Freyr, who came from the east as a companion of Óðinn. The Ynglingar later moved to Norway, and became the ancestors of Norwegian royalty. The saga's principal source is Þjóðólfr of Hvin's remarkable poem 'Ynglingatal', which influenced many other early poets.

**Hálfðanar saga svarta.** Hálfðan ruled the lands to the east of the mountains in Norway. In a famous dream, his wife Queen Ragnhildr had a vision of their son Harald's birth. A tiny thorn seemed to sprout from her hand and to grow into a tree so mighty that its branches 'spread over all Norway and far beyond.'

**Haralds saga ins hárfagra** marks the beginning of the more obviously historical narratives in *Heimskringla*, with Snorri drawing extensively on the work of the royal court poets. Harald waged war against many regional leaders, defeating all of them, and ending up as the king of Norway. The settlement of Iceland began during Harald's reign, and Snorri claims that the king's tyrannical rule played an important part in encouraging Norwegians to abandon the land of their birth and head for Iceland.

**Hákonar saga góða.** At the age of 80, King Harald the Finehaired handed over power in Norway to his son Eiríkr, nicknamed 'Bloodaxe'. Harald's youngest son, Hákon, became a foster-child to King Athelstan of England. Returning to Norway while still young, Hákon assumed the throne and Eiríkr fled the land. Hákon ruled well for 26 years, and became known as Hákon the Good. At the end of the saga Snorri includes Eyvindr Finnsson's 'Hákonarmál', one of the finest among the scaldic poems.

**Haralds saga gráfeldar.** Late in Hákon the Good's reign, Eiríkr Bloodaxe's sons came from Denmark and made war in his kingdom. After killing Hákon in a famous battle at Fitjar on the island of Stord, they ruled Norway until Harald Greycloak was killed due to the trickery of Earl Hákon. He, in turn, ruled Norway towards the end of the tenth century.

**Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar** tells the story of the famous missionary king of Norway and Iceland. A viking in his youth, Óláfr then accepted Christianity and headed for Norway. Earl Hákon, by now an unpopular figure, was murdered by one of his slaves, and Óláfr became king. He promoted Christianity vigorously in Norway and in those lands (Iceland among them) whose pioneering settlers had come from Norway.



## HEIMSKRINGLA II

### Íslensk fornrit XXVII

#### ÓLÁFS SAGA HELGA

Edited with introduction and notes by  
Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson.

ISBN 9979-893-27-3

cxii + 481 pp. with 8 illustrations.

After living the viking life in his youth, as his namesake Óláfr Tryggvason had done, St Óláfr Haraldsson eventually came to power in Norway, where he completed the missionary work initiated by the first King Óláfr. He reigned 1015–30, but after conflict with powerful Norwegian landholders was eventually exiled to Hólmgarðr (Novgorod), where he lived with his brother-in-law King Jarislav. In the summer of 1030 he set off for Sweden, where he found support from the Swedish king, and also from Norway. With these followers he made for Trondheim. His Norwegian opponents had also assembled their supporters and the two sides met in a great battle at Stiklarstaðir in Veradalr on 29 July. King Óláfr and many of his followers perished in the fight. Almost at once, however, miracles associated with the king's mortal remains began to occur. In due time he became the principal Scandinavian saint in pre-Reformation times, with many pilgrims journeying to his resting-place in Niðaróss.

Much had been written about St Óláfr before Snorri Sturluson's time, a good deal of it, unsurprisingly, hagiographic in nature. Snorri was familiar with such texts by the time he began to create his own saga about the saintly king. He selected the most suitable material, reshaped and retold older narratives, rejected exaggerated tales, provided detailed and plausible accounts of events, and created intriguing characterisations. The completed saga represents medieval historical narrative at its most masterly.

Snorri subsequently added stories about those kings of Norway who had reigned before and after St Óláfr. So it was that *Heimskringla* emerged, a continuous narrative about Norwegian royalty from legendary times up to the reign of King Sverrir Sigurðarson, late in the twelfth century. There was no need for Snorri to write a saga about Sverrir; Karl Jónsson, abbot of Þingeyrar, had already produced such an accomplished narrative that there was nothing more to add.



## HEIMSKRINGLA III

### Íslenzk fornrit XXVIII

MAGNÚSS SAGA GÓÐA  
 HARALDS SAGA SIGURÐARSONAR  
 ÓLÁFS SAGA KYRRA  
 MAGNÚSS SAGA BERFÆTTS  
 MAGNÚSSONA SAGA  
 MAGNÚSS SAGA BLINDA OK HARALDS GILLA  
 HARALDSSONA SAGA  
 HÁKONAR SAGA HERÐIBREIÐS  
 MAGNÚSS SAGA ERLINGSSONAR

Edited with introduction and notes by  
 Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson.

ISBN 9979-893-28-1

cxv + 469 pp. with 8 illustrations.

After the death of St Óláfr, Norway was ruled by the Danes for a period, until Norwegian chieftains, once enemies of Óláfr, sought out his young son Magnús in Novgorod and made him king. When Magnús reached maturity he sought to avenge the death of his father, but the poet Sighvatr Þórðarson offered him cautionary advice in his poem 'Bersöglisvísur', of which Snorri makes extensive use in his saga. Wiser counsels duly prevailed with the king, who went on to earn himself the nickname 'the Good'. His uncle Haraldr Sigurðarson eventually came to the throne, an energetic but stern ruler, as his nickname 'the Hardruler' suggests. He died during the battle of Stamford Bridge in England in 1066. His son Óláfr assumed the throne, a man of peace whose nickname was 'the Peaceful'. With the arrival of Magnús Ólafsson, nicknamed 'Barefoot', the pace of events quickened once more. Magnús waged war far and wide and fell in Ireland in 1103.

For a time, three of Magnús's sons ruled together—Sigurðr, Eysteinn and Óláfr. Sigurðr undertook a celebrated journey to Jerusalem, from which his nickname 'Jerusalem-farer' derives. One of the finest scenes in *Heimskringla* is the flying match between Sigurðr and Eysteinn, with Snorri recasting and amplifying the story as recorded in *Morkinskinna*. Norway enjoyed 100 years of peace between the deaths of St Óláfr and Sigurðr. There then began the period of Norwegian history generally known as the 'civil wars', which lasted for 110 years, from Sigurðr's death in 1130 up to the time when the followers of King Hákon the Old made his throne secure by defeating Earl Skúli Bárðarson at Niðarhólmr in 1240. The first period of these conflicts is described in *Heimskringla*.

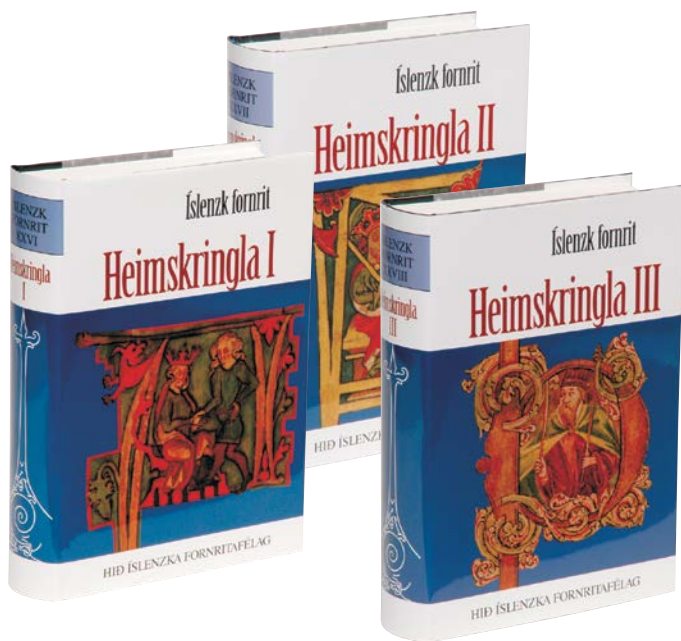
Gillikristr, otherwise known as Haraldr gilli, came from Ireland to join Sigurðr Jerusalem-farer, claiming to be his brother, and thus another son of Magnús Barefoot. After Sigurðr died, Haraldr made a bid for the throne, and came to rule over half the country, opposed by Magnús Sigurðarson. Haraldr eventually won a decisive battle between the two men. He had Magnús seized, blinded, mutilated, and confined in a monastery. Another candidate for the throne emerged—this was Sigurðr slembidjárn, also apparently a son of Magnús Barefoot. His plans for deposing Haraldr gilli came to nothing, and he himself was

eventually tortured to death. Haraldr's sons then came to power—Ingi, Eysteinn and Sigurðr the Mouth. Their respective followers fought constantly for supremacy, and all three leaders died in the ensuing conflict. Hákon Broadshoulders, son of Sigurðr the Mouth, became the next king. His saga is a natural continuation of *Haraldssona saga*, because it is Hákon's men who confront and kill Ingi Haraldsson. Earl Erlingr *skakki* avenges King Ingi by killing Hákon, thereby securing the throne for his own son Magnús. Though Magnús was not of royal descent on his father's side, he was the maternal grandson of Sigurðr Jerusalem-farer. It is Erlingr and Magnús who still hold sway in Norway when *Heimskringla* concludes.





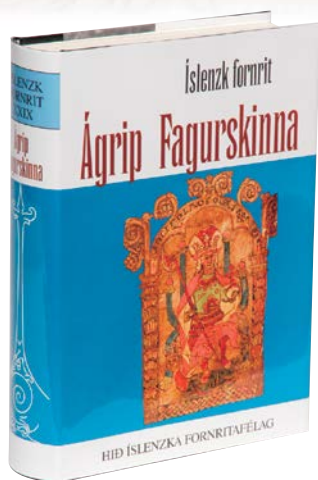
## HEIMSKRINGLA I–III



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**Three volumes for the price of two**

**Heimskringla** is a composite history of the kings of Norway from the legendary period of the Ynglings up to the late twelfth century, when Earl Erlingr saw his son Magnús crowned as king of Norway. Snorri Sturluson reconfigures and retells these early stories, creating vivid images of people and events over several generations. In doing so he created arguably the finest historical prose narrative in the European Middle Ages. *Heimskringla* is edited here with accompanying explanatory materials designed to meet the needs of both scholars and general readers. Each volume includes a detailed introduction which discusses of the work's textual transmission, chronology and literary characteristics. Readers can thus explore the golden age of Icelandic historical writing, in which *Heimskringla* is such a key element.



## ÁGRIP AF NOREGSKONUNGA SÖGUM FAGURSKINNA – NOREGS KONUNGA TAL Íslenzk fornrit XXIX

Edited with introduction and notes by Bjarni Einarsson.

ISBN 9979-893-29-X

cxxxi + 418 pp. with 8 illustrations.

**Ágrip af Noregskonunga sögum** (usually referred to as *Ágrip*) is, as its name suggests, a summary history of the Norwegian kings. Its narrative substance and vocabulary suggest that the work, which survives in a single Icelandic manuscript, may have been written in Norway in the 1190s. Though its beginning and ending are no longer extant, the work may well have begun with an account of Hálfðan the Black and have dealt with events up to 1177. Clearly the work of a scholar, and with its learned Latinized style, *Ágrip* represents the narrative core on which historical writers based later and more detailed works about the Norwegian kings, notably *Fagrskinna*, *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla*.

**Fagrskinna** is the name assigned by the seventeenth-century scholar Þormóður Torfason to an old manuscript; that same name eventually became associated with the sagas contained in the manuscript. Those sagas were also to be found in another manuscript under the title 'Nóregs konunga tal'. Both vellums were lost in the great fire of Copenhagen in 1728, but the sagas were preserved in good paper copies. *Fagrskinna* is to a great extent excerpted from three works: *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* by Oddr Snorrason, *Elsta saga* (*Helgisaga*) *Óláfs helga*, and *Morkinskinna*, all of which once existed in older versions than those which now survive. These same works were Snorri Sturluson's principal sources for *Heimskringla*. *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla* have much material in common, and Snorri may well also have known *Fagrskinna* itself. The *Fagrskinna* author treated his sources with some freedom, seemingly adding and omitting material at random. Thus, he enthusiastically expands battle narratives, yet completely omits the battle of Stiklarstaðir to which Snorri devoted so much space. To some extent he assumes the role of a judicious historian, omitting all supernatural or otherwise implausible material. Just as *Heimskringla* includes a good deal of old poetry, so *Fagrskinna* includes a number of remarkable verses and poetic fragments.



## SVERRIS SAGA

### Íslenzk fornrit XXX

Edited with introduction  
and notes by Þorleifur Hauksson.

General editors: Jónas Kristjánsson  
and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson.

ISBN 978-9979-893-30-1  
civ + 340 pp. with 16 illustrations.

**Sverris saga** is one of the greatest works of Icelandic literature. It is a so-called contemporary saga, the biography of the Norwegian king Sverrir Sigurðarson (d. 1202), and the oldest secular king's saga preserved in its entirety. According to the saga's preface, the first part of it was written by Abbot Karl Jónsson in the presence of Sverrir himself, who 'determined what should be written'. The saga is written with great artistry, and the description of King Sverrir is one of the clearest and most nuanced found in any Old Icelandic saga.

Sverrir Sigurðarson was raised and educated in the Faroe Islands, and was ordained as a priest there. He was, according to the saga, twenty-four years old when he discovered that he was in fact the illegitimate son of King Sigurðr Haraldsson, whose nickname was 'Mouth'. Upon this discovery, Sverrir decided to go to Norway, to 'see what would happen'. Within eight years he had vanquished all his opponents and become the sole acknowledged king over all of Norway. However, Sverrir did not rule in peace for long. Opponents were constantly joining forces against him, and he had fierce contests with the church, resulting in his excommunication by the pope in 1198. The saga clearly narrates events from Sverrir's point of view. In addition, an appendix to this edition presents passages from various other contemporary sources that shed light on these events from other perspectives. These sources are the so-called 'Speech Against the Bishops', which was written under Sverrir's supervision, Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum*, and three historical works written in England around 1200.

Among the riches of *Sverris saga* are many remarkable speeches that Sverrir delivered to his men, as well as descriptions of Sverrir's dreams and of the military tactics that over the course of time lifted this poor, unknown priest from the Faroe Islands to the Norwegian throne. Contemporary respect for the artistry and historical reliability of the saga is reflected, among other things, in the fact that all later writers of sagas about Norwegian kings, including Snorri Sturluson, conclude their histories in 1177, the year that Sverrir became the leader of the small and poorly equipped army of the Birkibeinar and began his pursuit of power.



## HÁKONAR SAGA I–II

Íslenzk fornrit XXXI–XXXII

BÖGLUNGA SAGA

HÁKONAR SAGA HÁKONARSONAR

MAGNÚSS SAGA LAGABÆTIS

Edited with introduction and notes  
by Þorleifur Hauksson, Sverrir Jakobsson  
and Tor Ulset.

General editors: Jónas Kristjánsson  
and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson.

ISBN 978-9979-893-98-1  
lxvii + 333 pp. / xcix + 341 pp.  
with 24 illustrations.

**Böglunga saga** begins where *Sverris saga* ends, and tells of the brief rule of Hákon Sverrisson, and of the violent power struggle that resulted from his sudden death. After its account of the 1208 settlement meeting at Hvítungseyjar, the saga presents a broad outline history of the chieftains up to Hákon Hákonarson's seizure of power in 1217. *Böglunga saga* survives in two versions; though the longer one exists only in fragmentary form, a complete text was translated into Danish around 1600 by the Norwegian pastor and scholar Peder Claussøn Friis.

**Hákónar saga Hákonarsonar** is by far the most important extant literary source for the history of Norway in the thirteenth century. The saga was written in 1264–65 by Sturla Þórðarson at the request of King Magnús Hákonarson. Hákon ruled from 1217 until 1263, longer than any other Norwegian monarch. The first part of the saga tells of Hákon's often turbulent relations with Earl Skúli Bárðarson. Though Hákon's marriage to Skúli's daughter Margrét helped promote a measure of harmony between the two men, ultimately not even the ducal title awarded by Hákon to Skúli in 1237 was sufficient to satisfy the earl's long-term ambitions. Within two years Skúli had assumed the title of king, which led to a complete breakdown in his relations with Hákon. A major battle between the two leaders in 1240 resulted in an overwhelming victory for Hákon. Many other rebellious groups sought to challenge Hákon's authority, but he succeeded in bringing peace and unity to Norway under his rule. He also came to exercise control over Iceland, Greenland and the northerly islands of Britain. It was during an expedition to Britain in 1263 that Hákon's health failed and he died. Hákon's dealings with Iceland feature prominently in the narrative. Though the two men never met, Sturla composed many panegyric verses about Hákon and his achievements, incorporating them into *Hákónar saga*. Sturla became a member of King Magnús Hákonarson's court and compiled a saga about him, most of which has been lost.

Sturla Þórðarson's **Magnúss saga lagabætis** also survives only in fragmentary form, on two vellum leaves. The text is included in the present edition, together with some annalistic entries thought to derive from lost parts of the saga.



## JÓMSVÍKINGA SAGA

Íslenzk fornrit XXXIII

JÓMSVÍKINGA SAGA

JÓMSVÍKINGADRÁPA · BÚADRÁPA

HAUKS ÞÁTTIR HÁBRÓKAR · SIGURÐAR ÞÁTTIR SLEFU

EINDRIÐA ÞÁTTIR ILBREIÐS · ÞORSTEINS ÞÁTTIR

SKELKS · EINDRIÐA ÞÁTTIR OK ERLINGS

RAUÐÚLFS ÞÁTTIR · VÖLSA ÞÁTTIR

Edited with introduction and notes by  
Þorleifur Hauksson and Marteinn Helgi Sigurðsson.

General editor: Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson.

ISBN 978-9979-893-38-7

cxviii + 326 pp. with 12 illustrations.

**Jómsvíkinga saga** is thought to have been written around 1200. Its opening tells of the earliest Danish kings for whom reliable sources exist: Gormr the Old, his wife Pyri, their son, Haraldr Bluetooth, and his son, Sveinn. The saga accounts of these Danish kings in no way correspond to descriptions in medieval European sources. Haraldr Gormsson kills his brother Knútr. This news leads to Gormr's death and Haraldr becomes king. Hákon *Hlaðajarl* Sigurðarson arrives at the court of Haraldr Gormsson. There the two leaders plot the deaths of Gull-Haraldr (son of Knútr Gormsson), King Haraldr Greycloak, and his mother Gunnhildr. The saga then tells of the campaign of the Holy Roman Emperor Otto 'the Red' to convert Denmark to Christianity, and how he succeeds with the support of Óláfr Tryggvason. Hákon abandons the new faith, flees to Norway, and stops paying taxes to King Haraldr.

*Jómsvíkinga saga* is virtually the only source which tells of Pálma-Tóki, a major figure in the latter part of the saga. Haraldr Gormsson has his uncle, Áki Tókason, killed, a deed for which Pálma-Tóki exacts humiliating revenge. Pálma-Tóki then travels to Wendland, constructs the Jómsborg stronghold, and establishes a viking fellowship, which attracts the mightiest warriors. The saga concludes with the Norwegian campaign of the Jómsvíkings, during which they encounter Earl Hákon and his son Eiríkr in a fierce battle at Hjörungavágr, and are defeated. The narrative reaches its climax with the execution of the Jómsvíkings, who display great heroism and bravado, taunting their captors.

The saga is primarily a work of entertainment, in which historical and geographical reality plays little part. One major characteristic of the saga is the complete lack of respect shown for monarchs and other leaders.

The present edition includes two heroic poems about the battle of Hjörungavágr: *Jómsvíkingadrápa* by Bishop Bjarni Kolbeinsson of Orkney, and Þorkell Gíslason's *Búadrápa*. This volume in the Íslenzk fornrit kings' sagas edition also includes several short stories (*bættir*), many of which are preserved in *Flateyjarbók*.





## ORKNEYINGA SAGA

### Íslensk fornrit XXXIV

ORKNEYINGA SAGA  
LEGENDA DE SANCTO MAGNO  
MAGNÚSS SAGA SKEMMRI  
MAGNÚSS SAGA LENGRI  
HELGA ÞÁTTR OK ÚLFS

Edited with introduction and notes by  
Finnbogi Guðmundsson.

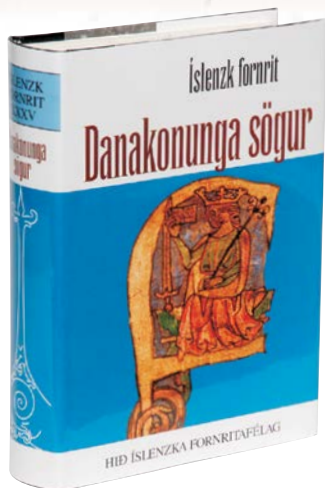
ISBN 9979-893-34-6  
cxli + 428 pp. with 7 illustrations.

**Orkneyinga saga** gives an account of the earls of Orkney in the period from c. 900 to the thirteenth century. Some scholars have argued that in its surviving form the saga is a later work than *Heimskringla*, and yet Snorri Sturluson clearly knew *Orkneyinga saga* in some form—he called it ‘Jarla saga’. The work clearly began as an historical saga but gradually developed into a saga of more contemporary times. It is a significant source for many important historical events. The saga has been linked with both the Oddaverjar family and the men of Hvassafell in Eyjafjörður, the descendants of Þorgeirr Hallason (d. 1169). Its composition could be the result of those connections.

**Legenda de sancto Magno**, a short Latin saint’s life of Magnús, Earl of Orkney, is included in the volume, together with the editor’s Icelandic translation.

**Magnúss saga skemmri** and **Magnúss saga lengri**. There are two independent sagas about St Magnús Erlendsson, Earl of Orkney. Though the opening of the shorter *Magnúss saga* is little more than a summary of *Orkneyinga saga*, the latter work is followed more closely when we reach the account of St Magnús himself. The longer *Magnúss saga* has been attributed to Bergr Sokkason, abbot of Munkaþverá in the fourteenth century. Based to some extent on *Orkneyinga saga*, the saga also includes lengthy sections translated from a Latin work by Robert of Cricklade, a twelfth-century prior of Oxford.

The events depicted in **Helga þáttur ok Úlfs** took place in the Orkney Islands around 1000; the work itself was written in the fourteenth century. It is a tale about the transition from paganism to Christianity over three generations.



## DANAKONUNGA SÖGUR

Íslenzk fornrit XXXV

SKJÖLDUNGA SAGA

KNÝTLINGA SAGA

ÁGRIP AF SÖGU DANAKONUNGA

Edited with introduction and notes by Bjarni Guðnason.

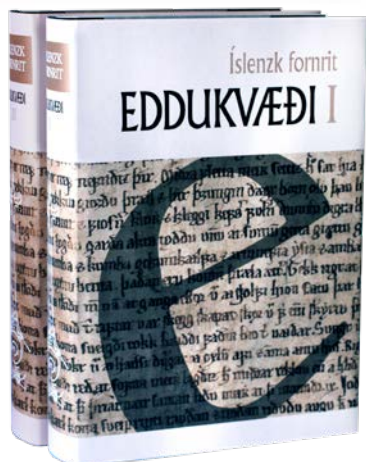
ISBN 9979-893-35-4

cxiv + 371 pp. with 8 illustrations.

**Skjöldunga saga** survives only in Arngrímur Jónsson's Latin translation or retelling, and also to an extent in both *Ynglinga saga* and Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*. The original work may have been written around 1200, and represents a pioneering achievement in Icelandic saga writing. In rather dense language the saga tells of the descendants of Skjöldr, the son of Óðinn, for some twenty generations down to King Gormr the Old. The so-called 'Sögubrot af fornkonungum' is believed to be all that survives of a later and longer version of *Skjöldunga saga*.

**Knýtlinga saga** presents a history of the kings of Denmark from ancient times down to Knútr Valdimarsson (d. 1202). Now lacking its original opening, the extant work begins with an account of the tenth-century King Haraldr Gormsson. The saga dates from the late thirteenth century and its author may have been Óláfr *hvítaskáld* Þórðarson, brother of Sturla the historian, who was Snorri Sturluson's nephew. In the saga we read: 'Óláfr Þórðarson was with him [King Valdimar] and absorbed much knowledge and many good stories from him.' The author of *Knýtlinga saga* made direct and indirect use of various Danish historical writings, including Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum*. Another significant source was Snorri's *Heimskringla*, as the author sought to write a complete history of the Danish kings, thereby emulating Snorri, who had written a history of the Norwegian kings. The author devotes most space to the story of St Knútr (d. 1086), just as Snorri's longest saga was about St Óláfr Haraldsson of Norway.

**Ágrip af sögu Danakonunga** is a genealogy of the Danish kings that also provides brief accounts of major historical events, often involving neighbouring countries, especially Norway. The work's principal sources are Danish annals and *Knýtlinga saga*. It seems to be Icelandic in origin, and the editor suggests that Sturla Þórðarson may have been its author.



## EDDUKVÆÐI I-II

### Íslenzk fornrit

Edited with introduction and notes by  
Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason.

General editor: Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson.

ISBN 978-9979-893-99-8

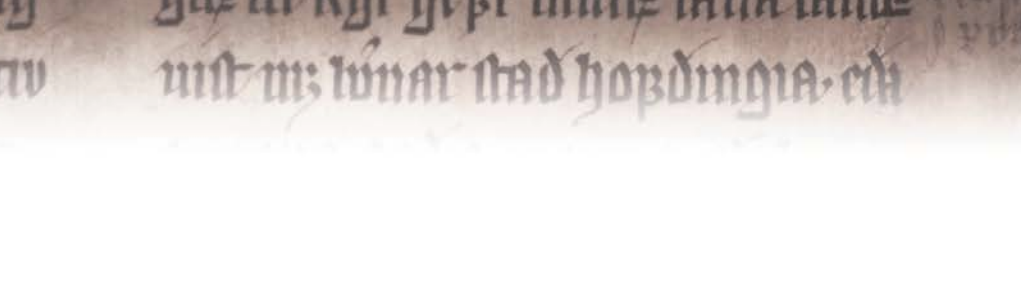
469 pp. / 466 pp.

Most of the poems in this edition are preserved in a small thirteenth-century vellum manuscript, usually known as *Konungsbók*. As in most editions of eddic verse, the present volumes, with their 36 poems, include a few additional works from other manuscripts. The eddic poems attracted scholarly interest after the bishop of Skálholt, Brynjólfur Sveinsson, acquired the manuscript in the seventeenth century and then forwarded it to the Danish king. After the publication (in 1665) of the first two poems, *Völuspá* and *Hávamál*, each with a Latin translation, their fame spread throughout Europe. The eddic corpus has now long been regarded as among the treasures of world literature. In these works we find poetic visions, profound wisdom, seering emotional conflict, and razor-sharp humour, all narrated in verse that is measured and yet free. The poems' origins lie in the religious beliefs of the old northern peoples, and in stories and poems about migration period heroes. It was during or after the viking age that the poems achieved the form in which they are now preserved.

The first volume presents the mythological poems. The most celebrated of these is *Völuspá*, which depicts the creation of the world and its eventual destruction during *ragnarök*. The sayings of *Hávamál*, assigned to Óðinn, offer wisdom about life in the world of men. Other poems dramatise adventures and conflicts within the realm of the gods; these works are often comic in nature, but fears about impending apocalypse are never far away. *Skírnismál* is a memorable tale of how Freyr wins the hand of Gerðr, a giant's daughter, through threats of violence, whilst, in the comic *Þrymskviða*, Þór recovers his magic hammer from the giants by disguising himself as a woman.

The second volume presents heroic poems about legendary figures such as Sigurðr, Brynhildr and Guðrún, and their families and kinsfolk. The heroes, men and women alike, are figures of surpassing splendour, but they are ultimately destroyed by their violent passions and uncompromising sense of honour. Among the oldest and most influential of the heroic poems is *Atlakviða*, in which Atli, the Hunnish king, deceives and destroys his kinsmen, the sons of Gjúki; his wife then exacts the cruellest of vengeance by killing Atli and their two sons.

In this edition, as in all Old Icelandic Text Society publications, the texts are presented as recorded in the manuscripts, though in standardised spelling. Each verse is accompanied by a detailed commentary, whilst the comprehensive introduction discusses the poems' narrative substance, their roots in northern European culture, and their artistic qualities.



*Íslensk fornrit – the edition to cite!*

## FORTHCOMING VOLUMES

**Over the next few years, the following volumes will be published:**

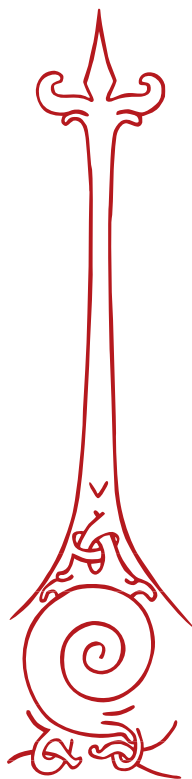
- *Sturlunga saga* (3 vols)
- *Guðmundar sögur byskups* (2 vols; *Biskupa sögur* IV–V)

Future plans include editions of the legendary sagas (*fornaldarsögur*), romance sagas (*riddarasögur*), *Grágás*, translated works and scientific texts.

*New publications will be announced on **[www.hib.is](http://www.hib.is)***

General editor: Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson.

English translation: Andrew Wawn.



**Íslenzk fornrit** editions have been published by the Old Icelandic Text Society (*Hið íslenska fornritafélag*) since 1933. The volumes set very high standards, in both scholarly methodology and production values. Particular emphasis is laid on producing the best possible edited text of each work, not least through extensive collation of manuscripts. Every text is accompanied by detailed commentary, written to serve the needs of scholars, students, and the general reader. Each edition also has a wide-ranging introduction, in which the transmission, chronology, and literary qualities of the edited work are discussed, along with other issues that may help readers to understand the nature and origin of the texts. **Íslenzk fornrit** editions are unrivalled in the range and extent of the explanatory material included. The volumes also provide many photographs and illustrations, as well as comprehensive indexes, genealogical tables and maps. These elements help to explain why scholars of Icelandic literature, both in Iceland and much further afield, cite the Old Icelandic Text Society volumes more often than any other edition.

2018 marked the 90th anniversary of the foundation of the Old Icelandic Text Society. The present booklet is a revised version of the one published in 2004. It features a catalogue, in which the contents of every **Íslenzk fornrit** edition published between 1933 and 2018 are summarised, and an outline history of the society itself, written by Þorleifur Hauksson, to mark this latest milestone in its history.

The society's website **[www.hib.is](http://www.hib.is)** will include details of new **Íslenzk fornrit** volumes as they appear, together with a general price list and information about special offers.

