

CHAPTER 3

The First Written Sagas of Kings and Chieftains

In his monograph *Fyrsta sagan* Bjarni Guðnason preempted the title of “first saga” for Eiríkr Oddsson’s **Hryggjarstykki*, a lost text referred to and paraphrased in *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla* and written sometime in the middle of the twelfth century.¹ This text is difficult to reconstruct even in outline and may have been narrowly focused on the ill-fated pretender Sigurður slembir (died 1139), as Bjarni Guðnason thought. If he is right, **Hryggjarstykki* was a contemporary saga in the style of *Sturlu saga* or *Guðmundar saga dýra* rather than a historical narrative with an oral prefiguration. Another saga with a claim to be “first” was the saga of King Sverrir Sigurðarson (died 1202), *Sverris saga*, which appears to have been begun by Abbot Karl Jónsson of the northwestern Icelandic monastery of Þingeyrar in the late 1180s but may not have been completed until a good many years later.² It too was a contemporary saga.

If we cast about for the “first saga” in the sense of a long traditional narrative with biographical proportions, the choice might well fall on the so-called *Oldest Saga of Saint Olaf* or on Oddr Snorrason’s (originally Latin) *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*. At one time there was a solid consensus that the former antedated the latter. Gustav Storm dated the *Oldest Saga* to 1155–1180, and Sigurður Nordal not much later (1160–1185).³ Oddr Snorrason’s saga is most often dated ca. 1190, but the priority is nonetheless difficult to resolve. In more recent years the antiquity of *The Oldest Saga* has been doubted, and neither saga is extant in the original form. We have six quite brief fragments of the

Oldest Saga, but the text as a whole is preserved only in the so-called *Legendary Saga of Saint Olaf*, a somewhat abbreviated redaction with at least two substantial interpolations. Oddr's Latin original is also lost and survives only in three differing redactions of an Icelandic translation of uncertain date.⁴ Although Oddr's original is commonly dated around 1190, a looser estimate of 1180–1200 would be considerably safer.⁵ At the same time, the work of Jonna Louis-Jensen and Jónas Kristjánsson has shaken the early dating of the *Oldest Saga*. The latter scholar believes that a date “around 1200” is more likely.⁶

In sum, then, it is difficult to determine which came first, the *Oldest Saga* or Oddr's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*. Yet there are several points of convergence, suggesting that one may have referred to the other. The Stockholm manuscript of Oddr's saga in fact refers in so many words to the person who “made the saga” (scil. of Óláfr Haraldsson), indicating that the writer of this redaction had access to a text of the saga of Saint Óláfr.⁷ But Bjarni Aðalbarnarson judged that the reference is not attributable to Oddr's original and may allude to *Heimskringla*.⁸ We are therefore thrown back on the wording of the texts in any attempt to ascertain whether the writer of one saga was familiar with the other.

A good point of departure is one of Konrad Maurer's epic footnotes.⁹ Without recapitulating the details, we may simply note that Maurer found enough similarity between Oddr's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* and the saga of Saint Óláfr that later became known as the *Oldest Saga* that he regarded both sagas as the work of Oddr Snorrason.

Sigurður Nordal rejected Maurer's idea that Oddr authored a saga about Saint Óláfr, but he found it tempting to believe that he knew such a saga and was inspired by it to write his own saga about Óláfr Tryggvason.¹⁰

Finnur Jónsson differed with Nordal's general view of *The Oldest Saga* largely to the extent that he believed it to have been much more extensively interpolated in the process of being transformed into the *Legendary Saga* than Nordal supposed.¹¹ Among the interpolations he identified were two important passages that will be discussed below: Saint Óláfr's encounter with a prophetic hermit and the episode in which Einarr þambarskelfir's bow bursts from his hands and metaphorically signals the loss of Norway.¹² Since Finnur Jónsson believed the versions in the *Legendary Saga* to be interpolations, he could not

make use of them in assessing the relationship between the *Oldest Saga* and Oddr's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*. Nonetheless, he states elsewhere that it is reasonable to think that Oddr knew the *Oldest Saga* and was led by his reading of it to write his biography of Óláfr Tryggvason.¹³ Bjarni Aðalbarnarson's detailed study of the relationships among the kings' sagas did not add anything new because he considered that Nordal had adequately clarified the relationship of the texts pertaining to Saint Óláfr, but he too was prepared to believe that Oddr was familiar with the *Oldest Saga*.¹⁴

Without commenting on the textual priorities, Lars Lönnroth argued that narrative material belonging originally to Saint Óláfr was later transferred to Óláfr Tryggvason.¹⁵ Thus the *Legendary Saga* (chapter 19), Theodoricus, and *Ágrip* agree that when Saint Óláfr came to Norway, he landed on an island with the auspicious name Sæla (= Selja). In Oddr's account Óláfr Tryggvason is also said to have landed on an island off western Norway, Mostr.¹⁶ (Mostr is, however, well to the south of Selja, and these landing traditions may be entirely separate.) Similarly, the report of Saint Óláfr's visit to a prophetic hermit (discussed below) is slightly closer to Gregory the Great's anecdote about King Totila's attempted deception of Saint Benedict, which stood model for the tale (Lönnroth, pp. 60–61). An analogous anecdote is attributed to Óláfr Tryggvason in *Ágrip* (ed. Driscoll, 30) and the *Historia Norwegiae* (MHN, 114), but the phrasing in these texts is slightly expanded and may therefore be secondary.

The anecdote about Einarr þambarskelfir and his bow is also attached to both Óláfrs, but Lönnroth argues that it is more likely to belong originally to Saint Óláfr because Einarr þambarskelfir figures prominently in his reign and because it seems unlikely that Einarr, who fell victim to Haraldr harðráði's treachery sometime after 1046,¹⁷ would have been old enough to participate in the Battle of Svölðr in the year 1000. Lönnroth describes these transfers in terms of tradition rather than as textual borrowings, but the old idea persists that the narrative of Saint Óláfr is anterior to that of Óláfr Tryggvason.

More recently, however, Lönnroth has revised his point of view. Noting the current dating of the *Oldest Saga* around 1200, he suggests that the earliest long prose narrative must have been Oddr's saga from around 1180, and he goes on to say that he had probably underestimated the importance of Oddr's biography for the development of

saga writing.¹⁸ A few pages later he is even more explicit: “When the *Legendary Saga* (or *Oldest Saga*) of *Olav the Saint* was written around 1200, its most important model was probably Odd’s Latin biography of Olav Tryggvason—or perhaps its Icelandic translation since the *Legendary Saga* was written in Old Norse and not in Latin.”¹⁹ It is this proposition that stands to be tested below.

The major break leading to Lönnroth’s reversal of the old priorities came in 1970 when Jonna Louis-Jensen raised questions about the early date traditionally assigned to the *Oldest Saga* (see note 6). Her work was quickly followed up by Jónas Kristjánsson, who at first thought it was quite likely that Oddr knew an early version of the saga about Saint Óláfr.²⁰ A few years later, however, he considered the problem in greater detail and came to the conclusion that there was no strong reason to believe that the *Oldest Saga* was written earlier than ca. 1200.²¹ His weightiest reason for this view is his rejection of Nordal’s arguments that the *Legendary Saga* was interpolated with excerpts from *Ágrip*.²² He therefore found no reason for thinking that these excerpts were not already part of the *Oldest Saga*.²³ Hence the *Oldest Saga* must be later than *Ágrip* (ca. 1190). As a result, he finds it difficult to settle on a chronological priority of one Óláfr saga over the other:²⁴ “Perhaps they were written at about the same time, but in different parts of Iceland, and in fact they are very unlike in construction—and moreover one of them is in Icelandic while the other was originally composed in Latin.”

Since there are no external criteria to guide our decision on priorities, we are obliged to make a close comparison of the texts if we wish to identify possible echoes of one in the other. In doing so I will cite Guðni Jónsson’s normalized texts for uniformity and ease of reference, bearing in mind that the comparison is more motival than textual because we have the *Oldest Saga* only in the altered reflection of the *Legendary Saga* and Oddr’s saga only in the approximation of an Icelandic translation.²⁵

The Infancies of Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson

The first suggestion of a correspondence is that both Óláfrs begin life in a little (or an old) shed:

Ok er hon vissi, at nálgaðist sú stund, er hon mundi barn fæða, kómu þau til vatns, er Rönd heitir, ok þar váru þau í litlu nausti, ok þar fæddi hon barn, ok var þat sveipt klæðum ok var nafn gefit ok vatni ausit ok kölluðu Óláf sveininn. (Oddr, p. 9; ÍF 25:131)

[And when she realized that the time was at hand when she would give birth to a child, they came to a lake called Rönd and stayed in a little boatshed, and there she gave birth to a child, and it was wrapped in clothing and given a name and sprinkled with water and they called the boy Óláfr.]

Engu kemr öðru við en barnit verðr út at bera. En þar hafði verit áðr forn skemma ok af ræfrit. Þangat var sveininn færðr ok settr niðr í gröf eina. (*Helgisaga*, p. 207)

[There was nothing for it but that they were obliged to carry the child out. There used to be an old shed there with the roof gone. The boy was taken there and put in a hollow.]

The situations are quite different. In Oddr's account the mother takes refuge in a "lítit naust" to give birth. In the *Helgisaga* the child has already been born (under magical circumstances) and is exposed in a "forn skemma," but in both cases the birth is associated with a shed. Oddr's version is close to Luke's story of Jesus's birth and is clearly modeled on it. The *Helgisaga* has no reminiscences of Luke. Furthermore, in this latter account the "skemma" seems quite unmotivated because children in Icelandic literature are not exposed in nearby sheds but in the wilds.²⁶ Oddr's version is not a story of exposure and is thus not modeled on the *Helgisaga*. If there is a connection, it is that the author of the *Helgisaga* vaguely remembered something about a shed in Oddr's narrative. Because of Oddr's deliberate use of Luke, the correspondence cannot be a case of transferred tradition but only of a textual transfer.

The following chapter 7 in the *Legendary Saga* (and presumably the *Oldest Saga*) deals with the death of Saint Óláfr's father Haraldr grenski at the hands of Sigríðr stórráða, whom he has had the temerity to woo. The author gives the following information on Sigríðr.

En í þann tíma réð fyrir Svíðþjóð Sigríðr in stórráða, er átt hafði Eiríkr inn ársæli. Hon var dóttir Sköglar-Tósta . . . ok margir segja hana fyrir Gautlandi hafa ráðit, fyrir því at konungr mátti eigi bera hennar ofsa. (*Helgisaga*, p. 209)

[At that time Sigrid the Imperious ruled Sweden, who had been married to Erik Harvestluck. She was the daughter of Sköglar-Tósti . . . and many people say that she ruled Gautland because the king could not endure her arrogance.]

The formula “many people say” can imply an oral transmission, but it can also refer to a written text. Such a written text is provided by Oddr in chapters 5 and 32. The first passage reads as follows:

Þá vǫru skilið ráð þeira Sigríðar stórráðu, dóttur Sköglar-Tósta [scil. ok Eiríks konungs]. En þat bar til at sumra manna sögn, at hon var stórráð ok þó ráðgjörn, en konungr vildi eigi hafa ofsa hennar. (Oddr, p. 16; ÍF 25:138–39)

[Then Sigrid the Imperious, the daughter of Sköglar-Tósti, and King Erik were separated. According to some people that was brought about because she was imperious and willful, and the king would not stand for her arrogance.]

Essentially the same information is repeated in chapter 32:

Eiríkr konungr átti Sigríði ina stórráðu, ok var þeira sonr Óláfr sænski. Þat segja menn, at konungrinn vildi skilja við Sigríði dróttningu ok vildi eigi hafa ofsa hennar ok ofmetnað ok setti hana dróttningu yfir Gautlandi. (Oddr, p. 90; ÍF 25:225–26)

[King Erik was married to Sigrid the Imperious, and their son was Óláfr the Swede. People say that the king wanted to separate from Queen Sigrid and would not stand for her arrogance and excessive pride, and he made her queen of Gautland.]

These passages share the report formulas “margir segja,” “at sumra manna sögn,” and “þat segja menn” as well as the phrasing “mátti eigi

bera hennar ofsa” or “vildi eigi hafa ofsa hennar.” In addition, they share the information that Sigríðr reigns over Gautland, but whereas Oddr gives a full account of the divorce, including variant versions, the author of the *Legendary Saga* does not explain the divorce and does not make it clear how Sigríðr ended up in Gautland. Therefore, assuming that the *Legendary Saga* reproduces the *Oldest Saga* at this point, Oddr’s account probably does not represent a borrowing from the *Oldest Saga*. On the other hand, the passage in the *Legendary Saga* could perfectly well be an abbreviated reference to the information in Oddr.

When the *Legendary Saga* goes on to recount how Sigríðr burned her two unwanted suitors Haraldr grenski and Vissivaldr in their separate halls, we might consider this too to be a borrowing from Oddr, who reports the burning in chapter 32. Sigríðr has an important role in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* as one of the fomentors of the plot against Óláfr. She is at home in this saga, whereas her role in the *Legendary Saga* is confined to the killing of Haraldr grenski. On the other hand, the author of the *Oldest Saga*, judging by the evidence of the *Legendary Saga*, either elaborated the episode freely or had access to a separate tradition about the burning of Haraldr grenski, because he provides a more dramatic version of the event. It includes an initial wooing of Haraldr by Sigríðr (chapter 1) and a drinking contest she stages between her competing suitors to make them more vulnerable to her designs.

If Dietrich Hofmann was correct in vindicating the attribution of *Yngvars saga víðförla* to Oddr, there is a further indication that the information on Sigríðr was primarily Oddr’s literary property. *Yngvars saga* begins with the following passage:²⁷

Eiríkr hét konungr, er réð fyrir Svíþjóðu. Hann var kallaðr Eiríkr sigrsæli. Hann átti Sigríði ina stórráðu ok skildi við hana sakir óhægenda skapsmuna hennar, því at hon var kvenna stríðlyndust um alt þat, er við bar. Hann gaf henni Gautland.

[Erik was the name of the king who ruled Sweden. He was called Erik the Victorious. He was married to Sigrid the Imperious and separated from her because of her difficult disposition, for she was most contentious about whatever happened. He gave her Gautland.]

This looks like a contracted version of the fuller account that Oddr gives in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, but whether it is primary or secondary, it would seem to suggest that the story is well anchored in Oddr Snorrason's writing and more likely to have radiated from that source into the *Oldest Saga* than vice versa. If the verbal echo "mátti eigi bera hennar ofsa" ("vildi eigi hafa ofsa hennar") is significant, the transfer may have come from the Icelandic translation of Oddr's text rather than the Latin original, as Lönnroth suggested.²⁸

The echoes persist in chapter 8 of the *Legendary Saga*, directly after the burning of Haraldr grenski. Here the author reports how the child Óláfr Haraldsson was baptized by Óláfr Tryggvason:

En í þann tíma kemr Óláfr Tryggvason í land ok boðar þegar trúna. Ok er hann kemr á Upplönd, þá kristnar hann þar. Ok sjálfr helt hann nafna sínum undir skírn Þá var hann fimm vetra gamall. (*Helgisaga*, p. 210)

[At that time Óláfr Tryggvason came to Norway and immediately preached the faith. And when he came to Upplönd, he brought Christianity there. And he himself held his namesake for baptism At that time he was five years old.]

In his prologue Oddr makes a programmatic comparison of Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson, emphasizing the former as the forerunner of the latter:

Ok á inu fimmta ári hans ríkis helt Óláfr konungr nafna sínum undir skírn ok tók hann af þeim helga brunni í þá líking sem Jóan baptisti gerði við dróttin, ok svá sem hann var hans fyrirrennari, svá var ok Óláfr konungr Tryggvason fyrirrennari ins helga Óláfs konungs. (Oddr, p. 3; ÍF 25:125)

[And in the fifth year of his reign King Óláfr held his namesake for baptism and raised him from the holy font just as John the Baptist did with the Lord, and just as the latter was His forerunner, so too was King Óláfr Tryggvason the forerunner of King Óláfr the Saint.]

There is a misunderstanding or a misconstruction in this second passage. If the sense is that Óláfr Tryggvason stood godfather to Óláfr

Haraldsson in the fifth year of his reign, the construction should have been “á inu fimmta ári síns ríkis.” The original text may therefore be distorted at this point, and the intention may have been to refer to the child’s age rather than the chronology of the king’s reign.²⁹

The passage would then be in line with the *Legendary Saga*, a significant correspondence inasmuch as other sources, notably Theodoricus and *Heimskringla*, make the boy three years old. There is also a match in phrasing between “sjálfr helt hann nafna sínum undir skírn” and “helt Óláfr konungr nafna sínum undir skírn.” Where the priority lies is not obvious, but the information is more conspicuously located in Oddr’s prologue, a location that would have been immediately obvious to the author of the *Oldest Saga*. The match in phrasing might again suggest that the author of the *Oldest Saga* already had the Icelandic translation of Oddr’s book in hand. If Oddr is the source and the *Oldest Saga* is the borrower, it appears that the author of the latter made drafts on Oddr in three consecutive chapters (6–8) that pertain to the most important moments in Óláfr Haraldsson’s early life, his birth, the death of his father, and his baptism.

The Transition to Kingship

The next sequences of echoes also appear in clusters, in chapters 16–19 of the *Legendary Saga* and chapters 12–14 of Oddr’s saga. In chapter 16 of the former the young Óláfr Haraldsson gains victory in fifteen battles that may well have been commemorated in skaldic stanzas and would have been accessible in that form. At the conclusion of this sequence Óláfr finds himself off Ireland on yet another viking expedition, but this time his ships are stranded by the outgoing tide and he faces a great host of militia gathering on land. Responding to an appeal from his men, he settles on a solution through the efficacy of prayer:

Ef þér vilið mitt ráð hafa, þá heitum nú allir á almáttkan guð ok látum af hernaði ok ránum ok hverfi hverr nú heðan í frá til þess, er guð hefir hann látit til berast, ok leiti nú hverr við at varðveita sína herferð með réttendum. (*Helgisaga*, p. 233)

[If you wish to follow my advice, let us all call on Almighty God and desist from raiding and plundering, and from now on let each man turn

to what God intended him for, and let each man seek to conduct his raiding with righteousness.]

All his men agree and clasp hands to confirm their vows. No sooner do they do so than their ships are refloated and they are able to make their escape out of the clutches of the Irish.

This episode, which, unlike the preceding ones, seems not to be based on skaldic authority, has a strong functional resemblance to the episode in Oddr's saga in which Óláfr Tryggvason and his men are raiding in Denmark and suddenly find themselves at the mercy of a gathering multitude. Óláfr addresses the emergency:

“Ek veit,” sagði hann, “at sá er máttugr guð, er himnunum stýrir, ok þat hefi ek heyrtr at þat sigrmark á hann, er mikill krafr er með, ok er þat kallat kross. Köllum nú á hann sjálfan, at hann leysi oss, ok föllum allir til jarðar ok lítillætum oss sjálfir. Tökum nú tvá kvistu ok leggjum í kross yfir oss. Gerið nú svá allir sem þér séð mik gera.” (Oddr, p. 37; ÍF 25:161)

[“I know,” he said, “that He who rules heaven is a powerful God, and I have heard that He possesses a victorious icon endowed with great power, and that is called a cross. Let us call on him to release us, and let us all fall to the ground and humble ourselves. Let us take two branches and lay them in the shape of a cross over us. Now you should all do as you see me do.”]

The vastly outnumbered men now become miraculously invisible, and after a repetition of the device for emphasis they make good their escape from the Danes. The functional similarity lies in the transition from a pagan (or viking) stage to a truly Christian way of life. In Oddr's saga there is no indication that Óláfr Tryggvason has a prior experience of Christianity; for him the episode constitutes a sort of anticipatory revelation. In the case of Óláfr Haraldsson, the chieftain is a Christian of long standing. For him the miracle does not serve the purpose of conversion. Instead it marks the passage from an unfettered viking life to an acknowledgment of Christian values. Both Óláfrs begin their adult lives as viking leaders, and both authors are confronted with the problem of explaining how they reform their

ways. Both authors hit on the same solution, one premonitory of conversion and the other admonitory to better conduct. Whether these miracles were hit on independently or interdependently is the question. But if one miracle is dependent on the other, it seems more likely that Oddr led the way because a premonitory conversion miracle is more convincing than a miracle conducive to marginal moral improvement. Indeed, the idea of “righteous raiding” in the *Legendary Saga* seems peculiarly awkward and contradictory.

In chapter 17 of the *Legendary Saga* Óláfr Haraldsson and his men encounter a pagan seeress. Óláfr’s companion Sóti asks permission to consult her, and, although Óláfr is quite averse, he finally yields. In response to Sóti’s inquiry the seeress is reticent, but she does make the following pronouncement about Óláfr:

Hann er svá mikils máttar ok dýrligs, at þar er mér fátt leyft at ræða, ok gagnstaðrligr er várr krafrt. Ógn er mikil yfir honum ok birting ok ljós. (*Helgisaga*, p. 234)

[He has such great and glorious power that I am not allowed to say much; our powers are opposed. There is great awe and brightness and light over him.]

This prophecy marks the end of Óláfr’s viking years and the beginning of his royal mission:

Nú lætr Óláfr af öllum hernaði ok renndi hug sinum til ættlanda sinna, hversu hann skyldi hana með sæmd sækja eða öðlast. En hversu margt sem sagt er í frá víðlendisferð Óláfs, þá kom þegar aftur, er guð vildi opna ríki fyrir honum. (*Helgisaga*, p. 234)

[Now Óláfr ceased all raiding and turned his mind to his ancestral lands, how he might honorably reach and acquire them. And however much is told of Óláfr’s travels abroad, he returned immediately when God wished to make the realm accessible to him.]

Óláfr Tryggvason is also initiated into his new life prophetically, by a voice from above and a vision of heaven and hell. He is commended for scorning the heathen gods and admonished to go to Greece

for further instruction. Here he is duly primesigned before returning to the north to convert the Russian king and queen (Oddr, chapter 13). The conversion sequence makes sense in Oddr's saga because Óláfr Tryggvason grew up at a pagan court and must be guided toward Christianity. Why Óláfr Haraldsson's Christianity must be reconfirmed is less clear; the narrative at this point may be no more than a pale reflection of the more crucial conversion experience in Oddr's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*. Óláfr Haraldsson's reluctance to consult a pagan seeress is in fact also reminiscent of Óláfr Tryggvason's visit with a prophetic Lapp, who advises him on how to rid himself of Þórir klakka in chapter 19. Like his namesake, Óláfr Tryggvason is also very reluctant to consult a pagan, though he finally accedes.³⁰

The emblematic miracles do not, however, complete the full Christian accreditation of either king. The final step is accomplished in interviews with specially empowered men of God. In chapter 18 of *The Legendary Saga* Óláfr Haraldsson encounters a prophetic hermit in England and resolves to test his powers:

Óláfr vill reyna, hvat hann veit, sendir til hans þjón sinn einn vel búinn ok vegliga með konungs búnaði. Fór sá á fund hans . . . ok fannst munkinum ekki um hann ok mælti: “þat ræð ek þér, góðr maðr,” sagði hann, “at leggja niðr þenna búnað, því at eigi samir hann þér. Ver heldr hlýðinn lávarði þínum.” (*Helgisaga*, p. 235)

[Óláfr wishes to test what he knows and sends to him one of his servants decked out in royal garb. He went to meet with him . . . but the monk did not like the look of him and said: “I advise you, my good man,” he said, “to take off that costume, because it does not become you. You should rather be faithful to your lord.”]

Convinced of the hermit's prophetic powers, Óláfr now visits him in person and learns that he is destined to be not only a temporal king but an eternal king as well.

This episode corresponds to chapter 14 of Oddr's saga, in which Óláfr Tryggvason encounters a distinguished abbot on the Scilly Isles:

Þess er getit, at Óláfr heyrði sögur frá einum ágætligum manni, er var í eyju nokkuri, er Syllingar heita; þat er skammt frá Írlandi. Sjá var þrýddr gift mikilli ok spáleiksanda almáttugs guðs. (Oddr, p. 41; ÍF 25:166)

[It is recounted that Óláfr heard reports about a distinguished man who lived on a certain island known as the Scilly Isles; that is not far from Ireland. This man was endowed with a great gift and the power of prophecy of Almighty God.]

It is, however, the function of this abbot not to prophesy Óláfr's impending royal status but rather to effect the final conversion of him and his men and to baptize them. Nor does the abbot exercise his "spáleiksandi" by seeing through the deception of a messenger disguised in royal garb. There is no sign of that motif in Oddr's account, but it does turn up in the biography of Óláfr Tryggvason recorded in *Ágrip*:³¹

... þá gærðisk svá til of síðir at hann lendi þar við í einum stað í Englandi sem var einn mikill guðs vinr ok sá einsetumaðr ok frægr af góðum vísendum ok margfróðum. Ok fýstist Óláfr at freista þess ok gerði einn sinn þjónustumann í konungs búnaði hans hjálpræða at leita sér undir konungs nafni, ok fekk þessur ansvor: "Eigi ertu konungr, en þat er ráð mitt attu sér trúr konungi þínum."

[It eventually came about that he landed at a place in England where there was a great friend of God, who was a hermit and famous for his good and great wisdom. Óláfr was eager to test this and sent one of his servants dressed in his royal garb to seek out his counsel under the king's name, and he received this answer. "You are not a king, but it is my advice that you be faithful to your king.")]

Sigurður Nordal offered detailed arguments for believing that the *Legendary Saga* was interpolated from *Ágrip*, while Jónas Kristjánsson believed that the interpolations were already present in the *Oldest Saga* (notes 22–24 above). But this uncertainty is not the only problem that besets a comparison of the prophetic episodes. If the *Legendary*

Saga or the *Oldest Saga* is interpolated from *Ágrip* at this point, the interpolator not only borrowed the anecdote but also transferred it from Óláfr Tryggvason to Óláfr Haraldsson.

Oddr Snorrason used a source close to Theodoricus for the early part of his saga.³² Accordingly Oddr's account of Óláfr's encounter with the abbot is very close to what we find in Theodoricus.³³ If the author of the *Oldest Saga* referred to Oddr, he would not have found the deception motif there, but he could have found it in *Ágrip* and availed himself of it to dramatize the story of Óláfr Haraldsson. Oddr clearly did not borrow the motif from *Ágrip*, the source of *Ágrip*, or the *Oldest Saga*. He retained the account found in the common source he shared with Theodoricus.³⁴

This is a case in which Oddr Snorrason could not have borrowed from the traditions of Óláfr Haraldsson, but it is possible that the author of the *Oldest Saga* was inspired by the encounter of the earlier Óláfr with a prophetic abbot on the Scilly Isles to devise a premonitory event for Óláfr Haraldsson before he returned to Norway. Oddr's abbot is "prýddr gift mikilli ok spáleiksanda" only in the sense that he foresees the arrival of Óláfr Tryggvason. The author of the *Oldest Saga* may have fastened on the word "spáleiksandi" to create a much more far-reaching prophecy pertaining to Óláfr Haraldsson's royal and saintly destiny.

The gist of the argument here is that chapters 16–19 in the *Legendary Saga* show traces of modeling on chapters 12–14 in Oddr's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*. Oddr is concerned with Óláfr Tryggvason's conversion to Christianity in the period between his youthful exploits and his claiming of the Norwegian throne. A preliminary miracle involves crosses that make him and his men invisible to the enemy during a viking raid, a revelation of heaven and hell, some initial conversion activity on Óláfr's part, and a formal conversion by a clairvoyant abbot on the Scilly Isles. The equivalent sequence in the *Legendary Saga* (and presumably the *Oldest Saga*), also covering the period between Óláfr Haraldsson's youthful viking activity and his return to Norway, passes through similar stages: miraculous salvation in response to a vow to abandon viking raids, a pagan seeress's glimpse of brightness and light over Óláfr (the future saint), and a visit with a prophetic hermit who foresees Óláfr's destiny.

In all probability Oddr took this sequence from a source on Óláfr Tryggvason's youth, as Theodoricus's matching report of the conversion on the Scilly Isles most clearly shows. The author of the *Oldest Saga* may not have had such clear narrative guidelines. He had Sigvatr's "Vikingarvísur" on Óláfr's viking years and he had a quantity of stanzas on later events, but he may not have had much on the transition between the years of roaming and Óláfr's royal career. It is conceivable then that he bridged the gap with an imaginative reworking of the equivalent period in Óláfr Tryggvason's life as he found it in Oddr's biography.

Further Considerations

There is one correspondence between the sagas of the two Óláfrs in which the verbal echo is palpable. It is found in the episode in which Einarr þambarskelfir's bow breaks and signals the "bursting" of Norway from the ruler's grasp. In the *Legendary Saga (Oldest Saga)* the anecdote is connected with the Battle of Nesjar, in which Sveinn jarl Hákonarson defends his claim to rule Norway against the invading Óláfr Haraldsson. Einarr puts his prowess with the bow in Sveinn's service and takes aim at Óláfr. The first two arrows miss the mark, and Óláfr, reluctant to wait for the third shot, wishes that someone would knock the bow away. That does not happen, but as Einarr prepares to shoot the third arrow, he becomes disoriented:

En er hann dró bogann, þá brast hann í sundr í tvau fyrir honum, ok vissi eigi, hví sætti. Þá mælti jarlinn: "Hvat er nú, Einarr, eða brast bogi þinn?" Einarr svarar: "Eigi brast bogi, heldr allr Noregr ór hendi þér." (*Helgisaga*, p. 247)

[When he drew his bow, it broke apart in two pieces in his grip, and he did not know what caused that. The jarl said: "What now, Einarr, did your bow burst?" Einarr replied: "The bow did not burst, but rather all of Norway burst from your grasp."]

The episode is duplicated in a passage found in Oddr's account of the great Battle of Svölðr, which is both the centerpiece and the culmina-

tion of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*. Here Einarr is in the service of Óláfr Tryggvason and takes aim at Eiríkr jarl Hákonarson, who is trying both to avenge his father and wrest Norway from Óláfr's grip. Einarr misses with his first two arrows. Eiríkr then echoes Óláfr Haraldsson by stating that he is not eager to wait for the third shot. Finnur af Herlondum, a great archer in his own right (as chapter 72 in Oddr's saga confirms), responds by saying that he will not shoot Einarr but will try to disable his bow:

Ok nú vildi Einarr skjóta inni þriðju ör ok dró nú bogann. Fiðr skaut þá á bogann Einars með bíldör, ok kom á þinurinn, ok brast í sundr boginn Einars. Óláfr konungr mælti, er hann heyrði brestinn: "Hvat brast?" Einarr svaraði: "Noregr ór hendi þér, konungr," segir Einarr. (Oddr, p. 180; ÍF 25:343)

[And now Einarr was about to loose the third arrow and drew his bow. Fiðr took aim at Einarr's bow with a leaf-shaped arrow and struck the bowpiece, and Einarr's bow burst apart. When King Óláfr heard the bursting sound, he asked: "What burst?" Einarr replied: "Norway burst from your grasp, lord," said Einarr.]

Lars Lönnroth argued that the episode is original in the *Oldest Saga*, noting that Einarr has an important political role in the story of Saint Óláfr but is mentioned only here in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*.³⁵ In addition, Einarr would have been very young to be in Óláfr Tryggvason's service at Svǫlðr fifteen years before the Battle of Nesjar. How and where the anecdote originated is hard to fathom, but, as the texts stand, the *Legendary Saga (Oldest Saga)* appears to be the borrower. In the first place, the episode is the culminating moment in the highly dramatic finale of a battle that Oddr himself describes as "the most famous battle in northern lands" (p. 183). The verbal exchange was surely part of the popular tradition that circulated about the battle and on which Oddr built his account. The monumental phrasing belongs in this context and not in the context of the lesser Battle of Nesjar and the very considerably lesser Sveinn jarl Hákonarson. For Óláfr Tryggvason the anecdote signals the end, but for Sveinn Hákonarson it signals no more than a retreat from battle.

Furthermore, the *Legendary Saga (Oldest Saga)* suggests its indebtedness with a blind motif. Sveinn Hákonarson asks that someone knock away Einarr's bow, but nothing comes of that request. Finn's Robin Hood shot, which is a crucial part of the mini-drama in the story of Óláfr Tryggvason, is lost in the *Legendary Saga*. Instead, Einarr becomes disoriented and his bow bursts spontaneously. We are no doubt meant to understand that Óláfr Haraldsson is protected against the third shot not by human agency but by a miracle. This is one of the legendary moments in the *Legendary Saga*. That it is supervenient is suggested by the fact that it leaves Óláfr's wish for mortal intervention, carried over from Oddr's version of the episode, exposed as a pointless motif.

Oddly enough, the episode echoes a second time in the *Legendary Saga (Oldest Saga)* at the moment when Áslákr Fitjaskalli kills Erlingr Skjálgsson (chapter 64). Óláfr understands that this killing dooms his chances of winning acceptance among the northern chieftains, and he reproaches Áslákr with the following words (*Helgisaga*, p. 324): "Högg allra manna armastr. Nú hjótt þú Noreg ór hendi mér" [that was a most wretched blow—now you have struck Norway from my grasp].³⁶ The author may simply have liked the phrase well enough to use it twice.

Two chapters after the episode of the burst bow, in chapter 27, there is another correspondence, perhaps not of great significance, but tangible enough to have been noted by Konrad Maurer.³⁷ We are told that Óláfr Haraldsson was the first to gain sole rule of Norway after Haraldr hárfagri:

Óláfr leggr nú allan Noreg undir sik, ok var hann nú til konungs tekinn í öllum Noregi. Óláfr eyddi öllum fylkiskonungum í landinu ok hafði nú einn allan Noreg undir sik lagðan næst eftir Harald inn hárfagra frá Ægistaf norðan ok alt til Elfar austr. (*Helgisaga*, p. 249)

[Olaf now subjected all of Norway to his rule and he was taken as king in the whole of Norway. Óláfr displaced all the petty kings in the country and had now placed the whole of Norway under his rule for the first time after Haraldr hárfagri from Ægistafr from the north to Gautelfr (Götaälv) to the east.]

This particular way of describing the extent of Norway echoes chapter 22 in Oddr, a chapter that provides a general topography of Norway:

Noregr er vaxinn með þrem oddum. Er lengd landsins ór útsúðri í norðrætt frá Gautelfi ok norðr til Viggistafs . . . (Oddr, p. 72; ÍF 25:203)

[Norway is shaped with three promontories. The length of the land from the southwest northward is from the Gautelfr [Götaälv] north to Veggistafr.]

As in some of the previous correspondences, the passage in Oddr is full and detailed and could have stuck in the memory of another writer interested in conveying topographical information. Furthermore, Oddr's chapter bears some similarity to the topography in the *Historia Norwegiae* and could have been taken over from a related geographical source.³⁸

By contrast the passage in the *Legendary Saga (Oldest Saga)* amounts to no more than a brief note in passing, hardly memorable enough to have been inserted into Oddr's geographical overview.

There is one final passage in the *Legendary Saga* (chapter 67) that looks as though it might be an echo of Oddr. Among the supernatural accounts in Oddr's biography is a long chapter (60) in which two of Óláfr Tryggvason's men overhear a conclave of trolls complaining about the ill treatment meted out to them by Óláfr. The treatment is described in some detail and involves Óláfr's burning grip as well as blows resulting in broken heads.³⁹ In the *Legendary Saga* there are no trolls, only a ghostly visitation. As Óláfr is making his way over the mountains to escape from Norway, he spends the night in prayer:

En um nóttina, er menn váru komnir í svefn, þá kvað við áskrámliga úti ok mælti: "Svá brenna mik nú bænr Óláfs konungs," sagði sú in illa vættr, "at ek má nú eigi vera at hýbýlum mínum, ok verð ek nú at flýja ok koma aldri á þenna stað síðan." (*Helgisaga*, p. 330)

[And at night when the men had fallen asleep, there was a frightful noise outside and these words were spoken: "King Óláfr's prayers now burn

me,” said the evil demon, “that I cannot stay inside my dwelling and I am obliged to flee and never return to this place again.”]

The burning sensation and the flight of the ghostly creature echo Oddr’s trolls. As in the previous instance, Oddr’s passage comes from a full story, whereas the passage in the *Legendary Saga* is a fleeting allusion. The priority, if we may speak of one, is therefore more likely to lie with Oddr.

We may conclude with a more general consideration. In chapter 52 of the *Legendary Saga* Óláfr attempts to convert the Gautish jarl Valgarðr, but the jarl refuses:

Hann segir eigi þat munu verða ok eigi þess leita. Konungr segir, at svá mun sýnast sem hann hafi vald at neyða hann til, en eigi segist hann þat munu gera, segir þat mest týja, at eigi hafi guð nauðga þjónustu, lætr Valgarð á braut fara. (*Helgisaga*, pp. 290–91)

[He said that that would not happen and not to attempt it. The king said that it might appear that he had the power to force him but that he would not do it; he said that the best thing would be that God not have forced service, and he let Valgarðr depart.]

The proposition that it is best for God not to have “forced service” is a striking departure from Oddr’s *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, in which conversion atrocities are a notable feature.⁴⁰ There are no such atrocities in the *Legendary Saga*, and, presumably, there were none in the *Oldest Saga*. Óláfr Haraldsson’s opposition to forced service looks as though it might in fact be a conscious rejoinder to the policy of conversion at swordpoint pursued by Óláfr Tryggvason. It is also difficult to imagine how Oddr Snorrason could have attributed such an unselfconsciously sanguinary policy to Óláfr Tryggvason if he had been familiar with the salutary principle that “the best thing would be that God not have forced service.”

In summary, it seems quite likely that the famous repique about the bow’s bursting out of Einarr þambarskelfir’s hands was transferred from Oddr Snorrason’s *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* into the *Oldest Saga/Legendary Saga*. In addition, there are some indications that *The Oldest Saga/Legendary Saga* made use of Oddr in fashioning the story of Óláfr

Haraldsson's birth and childhood. It is particularly the information on Sigríðr in stórráða, who assassinates Óláfr's father, that seems more securely anchored in Oddr's account and more likely to be original in that version. There are also several moments in Óláfr Haraldsson's transition from viking exploits to the throne of Norway, including the visit with a prophetic man of God, that appear to be influenced by Óláfr Tryggvason's precedent. Finally, tacit revulsion against conversion atrocities may suggest a response to Oddr's narrative.

Implications

It has been argued above that the balance of the textual evidence suggests that Oddr's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* preceded and influenced the composition of the *Oldest Saga of Saint Olaf* (as represented by the *Legendary Saga*). That proposition is quite hypothetical; the correspondences can, and no doubt will, be argued in the opposite sense. Or the criteria may be judged inadequate to support any connection at all between the two texts. If, however, Oddr is granted precedence, we may ask whether this ordering of the texts has any importance for our understanding of the earliest evolution of saga writing. As long as the *Helgisaga* was given precedence, there could be a tacit understanding that the first impulse for the writing of kings' sagas came from Norway, where there were accounts of Óláfr Haraldsson's sanctity and Latin synopses of kings' lives.⁴¹ This impression could then be reinforced by the prologue to *Sverris saga*, which tells us that King Sverrir supervised the beginning of his own biography written by Karl Jónsson. Karl Jónsson appears to have gone to Norway in 1185 and returned to Iceland before 1188.⁴² If we date Oddr's composition to 1190 or a little later, we might imagine that Karl Jónsson, having undertaken a royal biography himself, returned to Þingeyrar and passed the impetus along to Oddr Snorrason.⁴³ Oddr's saga would then in some sense have been inspired by the royal auspices under which Karl Jónsson worked.

But a different sequence of literary events is equally possible. If Oddr Snorrason composed his saga in the early 1180s, Karl Jónsson could have brought with him to Norway a tradition of saga writing already under way. King Sverrir's patronage would then not have constituted a royal initiative as much as a capitalizing on the new

biographical activity in Iceland, which Karl Jónsson would have been in a position to bring to King Sverrir's attention. The *Oldest Saga of Saint Olaf*, with its heavy dependence on Icelandic skalds and traditions, would similarly not have been spurred by Norwegian interests so much as by the newly initiated biographical school at Þingeyrar. In short, to put Oddr first is to reemphasize the Icelandic primacy in the emergence of saga writing. Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* should, under these circumstances, not be viewed as an Icelandic response to the Norwegian celebration of Saint Óláfr, as has sometimes happened,⁴⁴ but rather as the true inception of king's saga writing in Iceland.

An Antiroyalist Saga: **Hlaðajarla saga*

We will see in the next chapter that kings' sagas were not necessarily adulatory and that Icelandic writers could take a mixed view of Norwegian monarchs. This ambivalence is already apparent in the surviving texts of the sagas about the Orkney Islanders and the Faroe Islanders, the former most recently dated ca. 1190 and the latter ca. 1215.⁴⁵ It is a subtheme in both these sagas that the island chieftains felt pressured by the Norwegian kings, who wished to reduce their territories to fiefdoms subject to taxation by the crown. The chieftains' opposition to this arrangement is more pronounced in *Orkneyinga saga* than in *Færeyinga saga*, but we have the former only in later versions. It is therefore difficult to assess just how important opposition to royal hegemony was in the original. Such opposition may have been most palpable in a lost saga known as **Hlaðajarla saga*, which can only be hypothetically reconstructed from later compilations of kings' sagas that appear to have made use of it.

Finnur Jónsson seems to have been the first to speculate on the existence of a saga about the jarls of Hlaðir in Þrændalög.⁴⁶ He surmised that this lost text began with Hákon gamli Grjótgarðsson in the days of King Haraldr hárfagri, or perhaps even earlier, with a legendary preface based on Eyvindr skáldaspillir's "Háleygjatal." Such a preface might, he thought, explain the tale of Hersir jarl in chapter 12 of *Ágrip* (ÍF 29:18). The narrative would then have passed on from Hákon gamli to his son Sigurðr Hlaðajarl, accounting for his dealings with King Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri and Haraldr gráfeldr. It

would also have narrated the career of Hákon jarl and, in conclusion, the story of Hákon's son Eiríkr jarl, who is referred to as the subject of a saga in *Fagrskinna* (ÍF 29:138) and *Grettis saga* (ÍF 7:62). Finnur suggested further that *Hákonar saga Ívarssonar*, of which we have only fragments, was a continuation of the lost saga of the jarls.

Gustav Indrebø undertook a much fuller inquiry in his study of *Fagrskinna*.⁴⁷ His point of departure is the relationship between *Fagrskinna* and the various redactions of *Jómsvíkinga saga*. He argued that the author of the redaction in AM 510, 4to used two redactions of the saga, the redaction in AM 291, 4to and a shorter redaction, which he referred to as the oldest *Jómsvíkinga saga* and which he maintained was also used by the author of *Fagrskinna* (pp. 60–80). But this author had in addition some narrative material over and above the oldest *Jómsvíkinga saga*, and Indrebø reasoned that this extra material came from the same source that provided the main body of the narrative before and after the Jomsviking interlude (p. 80). This source he identified with Finnur Jónsson's lost saga of the jarls and called "Ladejarlssaga" (pp. 58, 81). It covered chapters 37–49 (pp. 58–80) in Finnur Jónsson's edition of *Fagrskinna* (= ÍF 29:103–21) on Hákon jarl and the subsequent narrative on Eiríkr jarl (ed. Finnur Jónsson 114–40 = ÍF 29:146–67). Indrebø (p. 83) also believed that this source provided Snorri's account of the dealings between Sigurðr Hlaðajarl and Hákon góði in *Heimskringla* (ÍF 26:167–73). Characteristic of this source were a special knowledge of Þrændalög topography (pp. 117–20, 268, 271) and a strong bias in favor of Hákon jarl (pp. 81, 145). Toralf Berntsen pursued the inquiry and focused particularly on the battles of Hjörungavágr and Svǫldr.⁴⁸ For the description of both he conjectures a common source used in *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*, because the similarities between these two texts cannot, in the case of Svǫldr, be explained as derivative from Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*. They must go back to a different source. In both battles Eiríkr jarl is the central figure. Berntsen therefore prefers to entitle the lost text not **Jarlasaga* (in Finnur Jónsson's coinage) but **Eiríks saga jarls*. Berntsen agreed with Indrebø that this text underlies chapters 37–49 (pp. 58–80 minus 69–74 in Finnur Jónsson's edition = ÍF 29:103–21 minus 111–16) and 65–67 (pp. 104–7 in Finnur Jónsson's edition = ÍF 29:137–39). That is, it covered four generations: Hákon gamli, Sigurðr Hlaðajarl, Hákon

jarl, and Eiríkr jarl, with whom the saga probably concluded. Berntsen also thought that the lost saga must have been Norwegian.

The next scholar to attack the problem was Johan Schreiner, who disagreed with Berntsen almost point by point.⁴⁹ He denies that a second source is necessary to explain *Fagrskinna*'s version of the Battle of Svǫlðr and holds that the account in *Fagrskinna* can be explained by the use of Oddr Snorrason and an occasional admixture of oral tradition (pp. 25–26). Similarly, the differences between *Fagrskinna* and AM 510, 4to in the account of the Battle of Hjörungavágr can be explained on the basis of differing oral transmissions (p. 28). Schreiner counters Berntsen's argument that *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla* used a common source on the Battle of Stafanessvágr by insisting that Snorri is directly dependent on *Fagrskinna* (p. 42). He denies further that Snorri's account of Hákon góði's dealings with Sigurðr Hlaðajarl is based on a **Hlaðajarla saga* and considers it to be Snorri's own creation, with perhaps some recourse to Þrændalög tradition (pp. 42–49). Schreiner also rejects Indrebø's view that Oddr's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* could have drawn on **Hlaðajarla saga* (p. 51). Finally, he argues that the story of Hákon jarl's stratagem to win Norway in *Fagrskinna* was taken from oral tradition, not from **Hlaðajarla saga* as all previous critics had agreed (pp. 53–54). Schreiner does concede that there may have been some narrative supplement available to the authors of *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla* on matters pertaining to the sons of Gunnhildr, Hákon jarl, Eiríkr jarl, and Óláfr Tryggvason, but he traces the supplement to Ari's *konunga ævi* (p. 58).

When Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson reviewed the problem ten years later in 1936, he was just as decisively opposed to Schreiner as Schreiner had been to Berntsen.⁵⁰ He reverted in the main to Indrebø's view of **Hlaðajarla saga*, judging that most of the narrative on the jarls of Hlaðir that cannot be traced to other known sources must come from **Hlaðajarla saga* (pp. 216–17). He argues against Schreiner's view that Hákon góði's dealings with Sigurðr Hlaðajarl are Snorri's innovation by analogy to Óláfr Tryggvason's conversion activity in Þrændalög, noting that Snorri would not have committed such a blunder as to suppose that Óláfr's conversion initiative would duplicate Hákon's (p. 219). He also vigorously disputes Berntsen's view that **Hlaðajarla saga* was primarily about Eiríkr jarl (pp. 220–21). If we are to identify a central figure, it would surely be Hákon jarl.

Unlike Schreiner, Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson agrees with Indrebø that Hákon's stratagem to win Norway is attributable to **Hlaðajarla saga* and is indicative of the artistic quality of the text (p. 223). Lastly, he disagrees with Schreiner's view that Snorri's description of the Battle of Hjörungavágr is predicated on *Fagrskinna*. He believes rather that it is not possible to work out the textual relationships in this section satisfactorily (pp. 223–24).

There is general agreement, at least among Finnur Jónsson, Gustav Indrebø, Toralf Berntsen, and Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, that a saga about the jarls of Þrændalög from the early thirteenth century must have existed. The assumption is based first of all on the mention of a saga about Eiríkr jarl, son of Hákon jarl Sigurðarson, in *Fagrskinna* (ÍF 29: 139): “Þetta er talit et fyrsta fra<ma>verk Eiríks jarls [scil. the killing of Tíðenda-Skopti] í hans sögu” [This is counted Jarl Erik's first great deed in his saga]. Gustav Indrebø (p. 81) pointed out that such references in *Fagrskinna* consistently imply a written source. The second reason for assuming the existence of such a saga is a cluster of well-told episodes bearing on the jarls of Þrændalög and not otherwise accounted for in the repertory of kings' sagas.

There is a consensus that the lost saga probably began with notes on Hákon jarl's ancestry, his grandfather Hákon gamli at Hlaðir (ÍF 29:65) and his father Sigurðr Hlaðajarl (ÍF 29:66, 80, 101). The main narrative then centered on Hákon jarl and his son Eiríkr jarl. There is, however, no consensus on how the saga may have ended: “There is no way of knowing what **Hlaðajarla saga* told about Jarl Sveinn and Jarl Hákon Eiríksson, or how it concluded.”⁵¹ The argument that will be advanced here is that **Hlaðajarla saga* (or a sequel) carried over into the next generation and included the life of Einarr þambarskelfir, who figures prominently at the beginning of *Morkinskinna* and is the last great leader of Þrændalög. The justification for this proposal is that Einarr is already conspicuous in the earlier narrative, and it would make little sense to drop him in mid-career. Furthermore, it is generally agreed that we are dealing with a regionally partisan narrative, and the true extent of that partisanship does not emerge until Einarr's career is in full swing.

We will begin with a recapitulation of what I theorize to have been the content of **Hlaðajarla saga*:⁵²

Jarl Hákon gamli asks Haraldr hárfagri for the fief of Sygnafylki but falls in a battle at Fjalir in Stafanessvágr, as recounted in “Háleygjatal” (*Fsk* 65–66). His son Sigurðr becomes King Haraldr’s jarl (*Fsk* 66). Sigurðr maintains his father’s heathen sacrifices at Hlaðir (*Hkr* 167–68). King Hákon urges the acceptance of Christianity at the Frostathing but is roundly rejected. Only the intercession of Jarl Sigurðr preserves the peace (*Hkr* 169–71). At a sacrificial feast at Hlaðir the farmers press the king to participate. Again Sigurðr finds a way to avert hostilities (*Hkr* 171–72). At a Yule sacrifice at Mærin the king is forced to participate, and Sigurðr warns him not to wage war in Þrándheimr, “er mestr styrkr er landsins” [which is the power center of the country] (*Hkr* 172–73). The sons of Eiríkr blóðøx kill Sigurðr at Ogló, as attested by Eyvindr skáldaspillir (*Fsk* 101; *Hkr* 207).

Sigurðr Hlaðajarl’s wife was Bergljót, the daughter of Þórir þegiandi and Álof, daughter of Haraldr hárfagri. After Sigurðr’s death their son Hákon goes harrying but spends the winters with Haraldr Gormsson (blátönn) in Denmark (*Fsk* 103). The author provides a physical and psychological portrait of Hákon. Haraldr Gormsson’s nephew Gull-Haraldr arrives at court. At this point Hákon either falls ill or appears to fall ill (*Fsk* 104). Gull-Haraldr claims part of his uncle Haraldr’s realm, and Hákon drives a wedge between them by appearing to side with each in turn (*Fsk* 105). Hákon suggests that Haraldr Gormsson should unleash Gull-Haraldr against Norway. He then recovers from his (alleged?) illness, and long discussions ensue (*Fsk* 106).

Haraldr Gormsson invites Haraldr gráfeldr, who is now ruling Norway, to Denmark (*Fsk* 107). Gull-Haraldr ambushes him in the Limfjord (*Fsk* 108). Haraldr gráfeldr falls in the ensuing battle, and Hákon then manages to turn Haraldr Gormsson against Gull-Haraldr (*Fsk* 109). It is settled that Hákon will get Norway. He meets, defeats, and kills Gull-Haraldr. Haraldr Gormsson then establishes him in Norway (*Fsk* 110), where he reinstates paganism (*Fsk* 113). Warm friendship prevails between Hákon jarl and Haraldr Gormsson (*Fsk* 116).

The king tries to compel Hákon to convert, but Hákon fails to comply (*Fsk* 118). Sometime later he ceases to pay tribute in the north (Þrændalög) and makes Vík into a war zone (*Fsk* 120). Haraldr

Gormsson undertakes a punitive expedition as far north as Staðr, then turns back (*Fsk* 121). At this point there must have been a substantial account of the events leading up to the Battle of Hjörungavágr, the battle itself, and the aftermath, but the details are hard to extract from *Fagrskinna*, *Heimskringla*, and the various redactions of *Jómsvíkinga saga* (*Fsk* 121–37; *Hkr* 272–86).

Hákon jarl's first son, later Eiríkr jarl, is born when his father is only fifteen years of age. Later Hákon marries Þóra, sister of Tíðenda-Skopti, and Tíðenda-Skopti himself marries Hákon's daughter Ingibjörg (*Fsk* 137). Hákon and Þóra have a son Sveinn and a daughter Bergljót, later married to Einarr þambarskelfir. After a quarrel over a mooring Eiríkr kills Tíðenda-Skopti (*Fsk* 138). Hákon and Eiríkr are enemies henceforth. Hákon begins to feel so confident in his position that he becomes arrogant and a womanizer, with the result that he is killed. In the meantime Eiríkr goes to Sweden (*Fsk* 139) and ultimately joins the alliance against Óláfr Tryggvason (*Fsk* 147). At the Battle of Svǫldr it is Eiríkr who observes Óláfr's advancing fleet and finally identifies Ormr inn langi (*Fsk* 148–51). Óláfr singles out Eiríkr as his worthy (Norwegian) opponent among the attackers (*Fsk* 153). Eiríkr closes in on Óláfr (*Fsk* 155). He boards Ormr inn langi (*Fsk* 158). Among other survivors Einarr þambarskelfir gets quarter from Eiríkr (*Fsk* 159).

As a result of the battle Eiríkr is allotted rather more than a third of Norway, but King Sveinn (tjúguskegg) of Denmark continues to control Vík (*Fsk* 163). The far north is ceded to Óláfr, king of the Swedes, who places it under the governorship of Sveinn Hákonarson. Of the two sons of Hákon, Eiríkr is described as the more powerful. His deeds are summed up, and it is noted that they figure in Eyjúlfr dáðaskáld's "Bandadrápa" (*Fsk* 164–65). Christianity prevails on the coast but paganism inland. Eiríkr does not maintain Óláfr Tryggvason's foundation at Niðaróss, but he does keep up the residences at Hlaðir as during Hákon's lifetime. He also builds a town at Steinker. The jarls marry their sister Bergljót to Einarr þambarskelfir and he becomes their confidant. All the *lendir menn* are well disposed toward Eiríkr except Erlingr Skjálgsson (*Fsk* 166). Eiríkr joins King Knútr (the Great) in his English campaign, leaving his son Hákon to rule in Norway. After returning from Rome he dies in England (*Fsk* 167).

Hákon jarl Eiríksson is surprised and captured by Óláfr Haraldsson

in Sauðungssund. He swears not to oppose Óláfr and is allowed to take refuge with Knútr in England. Óláfr tries to surprise Sveinn jarl Hákonarson at Steinker, but Einarr þambarskelfir warns him and enables him to escape. The local population acknowledges Óláfr as king (*Fsk* 170–73). Óláfr does battle with Jarl Sveinn at Nesjar and defeats him, but Sveinn escapes again with the aid of Einarr þambarskelfir (*Fsk* 174). He is well received by King Óláfr of Sweden and subsequently dies in Russia. After his death Einarr þambarskelfir returns to Sweden and spends time alternately in Sweden, Norðhelsingjaland, and Denmark (*Fsk* 177–78).

King Knútr sets out from England with Hákon jarl Eiríksson. He proceeds from Denmark to Norway, has himself proclaimed king in Agðir and Þrándheimr, and places Norway under the rule of Jarl Hákon (*Fsk* 190–93). Hákon organizes the coastal defenses against Óláfr Haraldsson, seizes his ships, and forces him to leave Norway (*Fsk* 196–97). Hákon then travels west to England to fetch his betrothed, but on his return he falls victim to a storm at sea. King Knútr now offers Eggjar-Kálfr (Árnason) the same position that Hákon jarl held under Haraldr Gormsson, but the upshot of the offer is not clear (*Fsk* 198).

Óláfr Haraldsson falls in the Battle of Stiklarstaðir (*Fsk* 200). After his death King Knútr's son Sveinn and Sveinn's mother Álfífa come north to Norway and subdue the country (*Fsk* 201). Sveinn Álfífuson defeats and kills Tryggvi, son of Óláfr Tryggvason, but at a subsequent thing meeting at Niðaróss Einarr þambarskelfir speaks out against Sveinn and Álfífa. Sveinn reads the writing on the wall and retreats south. King Knútr asks Eggjar-Kálfr to have Norse axes fashioned for him, but Kálfr replies that he will send him none, though he will supply his son Sveinn with enough to make him think that he has a great plenty. Kálfr and Einarr þambarskelfir subsequently go to Russia to repatriate Magnús Ólafsson (*Fsk* 206–7).

Morkinskinna harmonizes this initiative with a countervailing initiative clearly derived from a different source. According to this latter version King Jarizleifr (Yaroslav the Wise) dispatches Karl vesæli to Norway to explore the possibility of repatriation (ÍF 23:6–18). At the same time *Morkinskinna* is also fuller on the Þrændalög initiative led by Einarr þambarskelfir, and that version is quite in line with the emphases of **Hlaðajarla saga*. Einarr þambarskelfir acts as a

spokesman but is seconded by Rǫgnvaldr Brúsason, who has become a military leader at the Russian court. King and queen are doubtful about the fidelity of the Norwegians, but the queen notes that Einarr was not in Norway when Óláfr Haraldsson fell. Einarr then accomplishes his mission by agreeing to swear an oath of twelve with his followers. Magnús and Rǫgnvaldr Brúsason return to Norway with him. In Norway Kálfr and Einarr become foster fathers and advisers to Magnús (ÍF 23:23), with the implication that the reunification this time proceeds from Þrándheimr, in unstated contrast to the unification under Harald Fairhair, which proceeded from south to north (*Hkr* 97–99).⁵³

There follow three scenes from the life of Einarr þambarskelfir, the first introduced with the words “nú er þess við getit” [now it is reported], perhaps suggesting a written source. It tells how Einarr insisted on his regular seat next to King Magnús by sliding down into it from behind, thus forcing the king and Kálfr, who has usurped his prerogative, apart. The second anecdote tells how Einarr observed Kálfr tying a sword to his sword hand at the approach of unidentified men. In the third episode Einarr deflects the task of showing King Magnús the battle site at Stiklarstaðir onto Kálfr (ÍF 23:29–30). As a result of this compromising task Kálfr feels obliged to flee to Orkney, where he stays with his brother-in-law Þorfinnr jarl (ÍF 23:30).

King Magnús now becomes harsh toward the Þrændir, who were after all responsible for the death of his father. The Þrændir respond with an expression of patriotic outrage, citing the position of their province as the “heart of Norway” (“hǫfuð Nóregs”; ÍF 23:31 = *Fsk* 212). An uprising is prevented only by Sigvatr Þórðarson’s mediation in the form of his “Bersǫglisvísur” (ÍF 23:26–30 = *Fsk* 212–15). Magnús now mends his ways. He also establishes Rǫgnvaldr Brúsason as jarl in Orkney, with a resulting outbreak of hostilities between Þorfinnr and Rǫgnvaldr “sem segir í jarlasǫgum” [as is told in the sagas of the jarls] (ÍF 23:43 = *Fsk* 215). Magnús also takes Kálfr back into his good graces provided he will support Rǫgnvaldr.

When Magnús appoints Sveinn Úlfsson as jarl in Denmark, Einarr þambarskelfir comments that he is “ofjarl” [too much jarl] (ÍF 23:51 = *Fsk* 219). Prior to the Battle of Hlýrskógshéiðr Einarr accompanies

Magnús in disguise to scout the enemy. Together they visit a farmer, at whose cottage Magnús has an auspicious dream. Magnús recounts the dream to Einarr. Just before the battle Einarr facilitates the approach of a man who gives the king strategic advice (ÍF 23:61). This mysterious adviser later appears at Magnús's court (ÍF 23:132–33). Haraldr Sigurðarson (harðráði) approaches Magnús with a proposal to divide the realm, but Einarr rejects the idea (ÍF 23:138). Einarr's son Eindriði accepts a gift of horses from a certain Þorsteinn Hallsson, who has done business in Dublin without King Magnús's consent. Einarr has the very difficult task of making peace between his son and King Magnús (ÍF 23:140–43).

Sometime later Magnús falls ill and Einarr expresses apprehension (ÍF 23:167–68). After the king's death Einarr proclaims that he would rather accompany Magnús dead than Haraldr alive (ÍF 23:173 = *Fsk* 248). Accordingly he escorts the body home for burial, stopping on Samsø on the way. Here a poor blind man approaches the king, is given a little gold ring once in the king's possession by Einarr, and miraculously regains his sight (ÍF 23:175). The naval cortège now returns to Niðaróss, where Magnús is buried in Christchurch (ÍF 23:176 = *Fsk* 249).

Subsequently Einarr competes with King Haraldr in Þrændalög, to the extent of protecting a thief against him (ÍF 23:207 = *Fsk* 262). Haraldr tests the fidelity of his district chieftains with ostensible bribes from Denmark, and Einarr responds by vowing to defend Norway. King Haraldr approves his words (ÍF 23:212–13).

Einarr is invited by King Haraldr to a feast, where he is mocked by the king's relative Grjótgarðr. He retaliates by killing Grjótgarðr, much to the king's chagrin. A settlement is initiated, but Haraldr lures Einarr into a dark room and kills both him and his son Eindriði (ÍF 23:214–16 = *Fsk* 263).

It remains to be tested whether this outline represents a single continuous narrative. Should that be the case, the shape of the narrative is political. It traces the rise and fall of political fortunes in Þrændalög. The story may have begun at a low ebb with the subjugation of Þrændalög by Haraldr hárfagri and the continued subjection under Haraldr's sons. Jarl Hákon gamli tries to ally himself

with Haraldr but falls in the Battle of Stafanessvágr. His son Sigurðr Hlaðajarl also allies himself with Haraldr but is eventually killed by the sons of Eiríkr blóðøx. Sigurðr's son Hákon (Hákon jarl) therefore looks elsewhere for support and is able to manipulate the Danish king Haraldr Gormsson so cleverly that he regains Þrændaløg and is able to contest the whole of Norway with Denmark. Eiríkr jarl follows in his father's footsteps for a while but ultimately abandons Þrændaløg in favor of following King Knútr of England.

That leaves Norway to Óláfr Tryggvason and, following a Danish interlude, Óláfr Haraldsson. But after Óláfr's fall at Stiklarstaðir the magnates of Þrændaløg reassert themselves under the leadership of Einarr þambarskelfir and Kálfr Árnason by repatriating and sponsoring Óláfr's son Magnús. There ensues a period of political tension between the new king and the Þrændir, but Magnús learns to respect the ancestral autonomy of Þrændaløg. After his death the tension is renewed in a contest between royal privilege advocated by Haraldr harðráði and regional autonomy pressed by Einarr þambarskelfir. The death of Einarr and his son Eindriði at the hands of Haraldr marks the end of Þrændaløg's independent aspirations.

This tale of alternating political fortunes is predicated on the assumption that **Hlaðajarla saga* did not conclude with the death of Eiríkr jarl or some brief account of his brother Sveinn and son Hákon. It must rather have continued down into the days of Magnús góði and Haraldr harðráði, as related in *Morkinskinna*. As far as I know, it has never been suggested that the author of *Morkinskinna*, as well as the author of *Fagrskinna*, referred to **Hlaðajarla saga* in constructing this part of the narrative, but the possibility is worth exploring. The key to the continuity is the figure of Einarr þambarskelfir, who enters the story during the life of Eiríkr jarl (*Fsk* 138) and controls much of the narrative down to the days of Haraldr harðráði. He was not technically a "jarl" and therefore has not found entry into a text speculatively entitled **Hlaðajarla saga*, but he did marry into the house of Hlaðir and became a more dominant figure in the political tale than any of the jarls in the dynasty with the exception of Hákon jarl.

If *Fagrskinna* and *Morkinskinna* are combined, they produce the following narrative of Einarr's life:

1. He is destined to be married to Hákon jarl's daughter Bergljót (*Fsk* 138).
2. He is given quarter by Eiríkr jarl at the Battle of Svǫlðr (*Fsk* 159).
3. Eiríkr and Sveinn marry their sister Bergljót to him (*Fsk* 166).
4. He enables Sveinn to escape from Óláfr Haraldsson (*Fsk* 172).
5. He enables Sveinn to escape a second time from the Battle of Nesjar (*Fsk* 174).
6. He accompanies Sveinn to Sweden and Russia (*Fsk* 177–78).
7. He speaks out against Sveinn Álfússon and his mother (*Fsk* 206).
8. He goes to Russia to repatriate Magnús Ólafsson (*Fsk* 207).
9. He acts as spokesman in Russia (ÍF 23:6–18).
10. Together with Kálfr Árnason he becomes foster father and adviser to Magnús (ÍF 23:23).
11. He interacts with Kálfr in three episodes, ending with Kálfr's flight to Orkney (ÍF 23:29–30).
12. He opposes Magnús's appointment of Sveinn Úlfsson as jarl (ÍF 23:51 = *Fsk* 219).
13. He accompanies Magnús on Hlýrskógshéiðr (ÍF 23:59–60).
14. He opposes a division of the realm with Haraldr harðráði (ÍF 23:120–21 = *Fsk* 240).
15. He warns Magnús against Haraldr's encroachments (ÍF 23:137).
16. He makes peace between his son Eindriði and Magnús (ÍF 23:142–43).
17. After Magnús's death he returns his body to Niðaróss for burial with the comment that he would rather accompany Magnús dead than Haraldr alive (ÍF 23:173 = *Fsk* 248–49).
18. He competes with Haraldr for authority in Þrændalög (ÍF 23:207 = *Fsk* 262).
19. He is tested by Haraldr and demonstrates his Norwegian patriotism (ÍF 23:212–13).
20. He avenges himself by killing Haraldr's relative Grijótgarðr and is subsequently ambushed and murdered, together with his son Eindriði, by Haraldr (ÍF 23:215–16 = *Fsk* 263).

Most scholars would probably agree that at least the first part of the narrative was located in **Hlaðajarla saga*, perhaps items 1–6

ending with Sveinn Hákonarson's death in Russia. At this point Einarr is already well integrated into the story of the Þrændalög jarls. He has married Hákon jarl's daughter, has reached an accommodation with Eiríkr jarl Hákonarson, and has twice saved the life of Sveinn Hákonarson, whom he accompanies in exile. He has clearly established himself as the right-hand man of the jarls of Hlaðir, a role that comes to fruition under King Magnús.

Are we to imagine that the dramatic story of Einarr's staunch service to Þrændalög was dropped in midcourse? Did it stop with the death of Sveinn Hákonarson in Russia? That would be something of an anticlimax. We would have to imagine a story that reached its high point in the career of Hákon jarl and then petered out slowly in the decreasing successes of Eiríkr jarl and Sveinn Hákonarson.

If, on the other hand, we conceive of a saga that carried down to the murder of the last great defender of Þrændalög autonomy, a broad political canvas unfolds. It leads from the submerging of Þrændalög independence in the days of Haraldr hárfagri to the brilliant, albeit pagan, revival under Hákon jarl, through a second decline under Danish and Olavian rule, and ultimately to a second revival in which the monarch Magnús Ólafsson góði is for all intents and purposes the creation of the magnates of Þrændalög, particularly Einarr þambarskelfir. One of the problems in the reconstruction of **Hlaðajarla saga* thus far has been the lack of a clear dramatic line, but a culmination in the death of the last defender of Þrændalög autonomy would provide both a dramatic and a historically momentous conclusion.

This reading is attractive because it correlates the beginning with the end of the story. At the beginning the great unifier Haraldr hárfagri advances from the south and puts an end to an autonomous Þrændalög, but at the end Þrændalög, led by Einarr, fashions a new king, a reunifier, who this time advances from north to south to reassemble the splintered realm. This time Þrændalög is not the victim of monarchical ambition but the originator of a new enlightened monarchical policy. As *Fagrskinna* (212) and *Morkinskinna* (ÍF 23:31) both state, Þrændalög is the "höfuð Nóregs," the heart of Norway. This idea, like all dreams of empire, is illusory, but it was no doubt seen in retrospect as the proudest moment in Þrændalög history.

We may ask ourselves what the alternative might be to a

**Hlaðajarla saga* reconstituted as a panoramic sweep from Haraldr hárfagri's conquest to Einarr's death in Haraldr harðráði's darkened council chamber. We could imagine that the saga ended with Eiríkr jarl's straw death in remote England or Sveinn Hákonarson's straw death in remote Russia, but neither provides a vivid finale. We could imagine that **Hlaðajarla saga* just happened to end where *Morkinskinna* began, but we could also imagine that **Hlaðajarla saga* continued for some time and provided the basis for the remarkably Þrændacentric presentation at the beginning of *Morkinskinna*. The sources for this part of *Morkinskinna* are a mystery. Finnur Jónsson thought it was based on a separate independent saga of Magnús and Haraldr, but later scholars have been in doubt.⁵⁴ A **Hlaðajarla saga* stretching down to the death of Einarr þambarskelfir would have the advantage of explaining the Þrændalög bias in *Morkinskinna* and providing a narrative backbone for roughly 40 percent of the text. (Much of the narrative material on Haraldr harðráði would still require explanation.)

One question posed above is why a text such as **Hlaðajarla saga* would have established an important role for Einarr þambarskelfir only to foreshorten it. The same question might be posed about Kálfr Árnason. A combination of *Fagrskinna* and *Morkinskinna* provides the following account:

1. King Knútr offers Kálfr the same position that Hákon jarl had under Haraldr Gormsson (*Fsk* 198).
2. King Knútr asks Kálfr for some Norse axes and receives an acid reply (*Fsk* 206–7).
3. Kálfr participates in the repatriation of Magnús Ólafsson and becomes his foster father and adviser (ÍF 23:23).
4. He occupies Einarr's seat next to King Magnús and is forced aside (ÍF 23:28).
5. Faced by an advance of unidentified men, he ties his sword to his sword hand (ÍF 23:28).
6. He explains the battle site at Stiklarstaðir to Magnús and feels sufficiently imperiled that he flees to Orkney (ÍF 23:29–30).
7. Magnús offers to restore him to favor if he will support Røgnvaldr Brúsason in Orkney (ÍF 23:43).

There is a good chance that the first scene at least was taken over from **Hlaðajarla saga* because it refers to an episode that is virtually guaranteed for the saga, the account of how Hákon jarl became Haraldr Gormsson's deputy in Þrændalög. Kálfr's response to King Knútr's request for axes is also likely to have been in **Hlaðajarla saga* because it deals with the conflict between Danish overlordship and Þrændalög autonomy. Whether one believes that the remaining five items derive from the lost saga depends entirely on a decision about the extent of the saga and whether it included the Þrændalög sponsorship of King Magnús. If, however, we believe that the story of Einarr þambarskelfir was carried down into the time of Magnús, Kálfr must have figured prominently in the continuation as well.

Of particular interest are the last two items on Kálfr in Orkney, where he takes refuge with his brother-in-law Þorfinnr jarl. Magnús later sends Rognvaldr Brúsason to replace Þorfinnr as jarl, but Rognvaldr is not a chance candidate. He is presumably being rewarded for faithful service going back to the time when he and Magnús were in Russia and he supported Einarr's mission to bring Magnús to the Norwegian throne. If that mission was part of **Hlaðajarla saga*, Rognvaldr's reward in Orkney might logically also have been reported in the lost text.

Rognvaldr's arrival in Orkney naturally precipitates a conflict with Þorfinnr, and this conflict is referred to explicitly in *Msk* 31 (ÍF 23:43) and *Fsk* 215. The passage in *Msk* is as follows:

Magnús konungr kom Rognvaldi Brúsasyni til ríkis vestr í Orkneyjum ok gaf honum jarls nafn. Ok um hans daga síðan gærðisk ófriðr mikill í milli Rognvalds jarls ok Þorfinns jarls, fǫðurbróður hans, ok urðu þar um mǫrg stórtíðendi, sem segir í Jarla sögum.

(King Magnús brought Rognvaldr Brúsason to power to the west in Orkney and gave him the title of jarl. Later during his time there was great conflict between Jarl Rognvaldr and Jarl Þorfinnr, his uncle, and there were many momentous events, as is told in the sagas of jarls.)

The wording in *Fsk* is practically identical.

The reference here to "Jarla sögur" [sagas of jarls] is normally taken to apply to some version of *Orkneyinga saga*, in which the

battle between Þorfinnr and Rognvaldr at Rauðabjörg is described.⁵⁵ It is, however, difficult to establish any written link between *Orkney-ínga saga* and *Morkinskinna/Fagrskinna*.⁵⁶ If, on the other hand, we suppose that **Hlaðajarla saga* included Rognvaldr jarl's role in returning Magnús to Norway and his eventual reward in Orkney, then his conflict with Þorfinnr could have been mentioned in **Hlaðajarla saga* and the reference to "jarlasögur" could be to that text.

There is in fact the possibility of a third reference to this written source. If, once again, we assume that **Hlaðajarla saga* included the career of Einarr þambarskelfir, it would also have included the interaction between Einarr and Kálfr Árnason. In *Msk* (ÍF 23:28) this interaction is prefaced with the words:

Nú er þess við getit, þá er þeir váru á einni veizlu báðir, Kálfr Árnason ok Einarr þambarskelfir með Magnúsi konungi, en þetta var í Vík austr.

(Now it is reported that both Kálfr Árnason and Einarr þambarskelfir were at a banquet with King Magnús, and that was east in Vík.)

The verb *geta við* need not but can imply a written source, as the phrasing in the reference to "jarlasögur" in *Fsk* 215 suggests: ". . . gørðisk missætti milli Rognvalds ok Þorfinns fõðurbróður hans, sem getit er í Jarla sögunum" [. . . there was dissension between Rognvaldr and his uncle Þorfinnr, as is reported in the sagas of the jarls]. These three source references can, therefore, all be explained by a **Hlaðajarla saga* that included the career of Einarr as well as the jarls of Hlaðir.

We may now recapitulate briefly the outline of this hypothetical text. It seems to have begun with the suppression of Þrændalög independence in the days of Haraldr hárfagri, continued with a political reemergence of the region in the days of a still religiously and morally flawed Hákon jarl, declined again under Danish and Olavian rule, and culminated under the model rule of Magnús góði, who is both the religious and moral counterpoise to Hákon jarl. Magnús is also the political foil to Haraldr hárfagri because, under the tutelage of the Þrændalög magnates, he learns the necessary respect for regional law and custom. When his rule spreads south, as Haraldr hárfagri's rule once spread north, it is presumably informed by a new outlook, characterized by the true faith, moral rectitude, and respect for local

law. The saga may therefore have had a pleasing structural and historical symmetry. If it pursued the story down to the death of Einarr þambarskelfir, it must also have had a sense of political promise and ultimate failure.

In literary terms the author seems to have had an unusual capacity for scenic design. The dramatization of Hákon jarl's machinations to win Norway was suitably praised by Gustav Indrebø.⁵⁷ There must have been effective scenes from the Battle of Hjørungavágr and the Battle of Svǫlðr, although the details are difficult to disentangle from the accounts in *Jómsvíkinga saga* and Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*. If the saga went further, it must have included a full council scene at the Russian court, a tense depiction of the strain between Magnús and the magnates finally mediated by Sigvatr Þórðarson, a dramatic prelude to the Battle of Hlýrskógshéiðr, a mournful narrative of King Magnús's death underscoring Einarr's fidelity, and finally King Haraldr's treacherous murder of Einarr and his son in a darkened room. There seem to have been comic scenes as well: Hákon jarl's "diplomatic illness," Sveinn Álfífuson's discomfiture, Einarr's outmaneuvering of Kálfr Árnason, and the trick played by Grjótgarðr on an aging Einarr. The evidence suggests that **Hlaðajarla saga* was both a lively and dramatic text, which deservedly attracted the attention of other writers and underlies some of the best scenes in *Fagrskinna* and *Morkinskinna*.

The lost saga envisioned here seems not only to have had a certain literary distinction but also to have embodied a well-defined historical viewpoint, an antiroyalist and pro-regional perspective. Its focus is on the jarls of Þrændalög and their attempts to free themselves from the control of kings, Danish kings as well as native Norwegian kings in the persons of Haraldr hárfagri, the succession of Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson, and their reincarnation in Haraldr harðráði. They ultimately fail but there is not much doubt about where the author's sympathies lie. **Hlaðajarla saga* could therefore be described as an opposition saga, a corrective to the earlier celebrations of the two conversion kings as Christian heroes. It can of course be objected that this historical construction is predicated on a text we do not have, but the bias is perfectly clear in the surviving texts of *Morkinskinna* and *Fagrskinna*. It must therefore have derived, if not from **Hlaðajarla saga*, then from some equivalent source. We will see in the next two

chapters that a spirit of opposition to royal, or quasi-royal, autocracy was by no means isolated.

That was one strand of public opinion, but there would have been mixed views in Iceland. We have seen above in this chapter that Toralf Berntsen (1923:216) assumed that **Hlaðajarla saga* was Norwegian, although the evidence that any king's saga was written in Norway is thin. Norwegian origin has most frequently been weighed for *Ágrip af Nóregis konunga sögum* and *Fagrskinna*, but in both cases the issue is quite uncertain. On the whole saga writing is very predominantly Icelandic, and there is a strong probability that **Hlaðajarla saga* is also Icelandic. If, as I have argued here, it was drawn on by the authors of both *Morkinskinna* and *Fagrskinna*, it is most likely to have been written before 1220, but the question of where it was written and who the author might be has not been broached.

The Icelandic family in which the jarls of Hlaðir are most likely to have been remembered and cultivated is the distinguished lineage at Oddi. This lineage goes back to the colonist Ketilbjörn Ketilsson, who was married to Æsa, the daughter of the original jarl of Hlaðir, Grjótgardr, and the sister of his successor Hákon gamli.⁵⁸ Six generations later the family produced Sæmundr Sigfússon at Oddi, one of the founders of Icelandic literature in the early twelfth century. Sæmundr's son Loptr married a certain Þóra, who, according to the *Hauksbók* version of *Landnámabók*, was the daughter of King Magnús berfœttr of Norway (ÍF 1.2:341). Loptr and Þóra were the parents of Jón Loptsson (died 1197), who is routinely referred to as the greatest chieftain in Iceland and whose commanding role we observed in Chapter 1 in connection with *Sturlu saga*. In a land very much preoccupied with genealogy, the family at Oddi is unlikely to have forgotten or downplayed its ancestral association with the jarls of Hlaðir.

We know in fact that ancestral distinction was prized in Jón Loptsson's family. Their hereditary pride emerges with all possible clarity in an anonymous poem titled "Nóregis konunga tal" and composed by an unknown poet between 1184 and 1197. It celebrates Jón Loptsson and retraces his royal ancestry through his mother Þóra back to Hálfðan svartí and Haraldr hárfagri, forefathers of the Norwegian royal dynasty.⁵⁹ The existence of this poem may have provided an impulse to celebrate Jón's descent from jarls as well as kings and thus have inspired **Hlaðajarla saga*. Jón's son Páll became a bishop and

is duly memorialized in *Páls saga biskups*, which, it is assumed, was composed shortly after Páll's death in 1211.⁶⁰ We therefore know that there was ongoing literary activity attached to Jón's family, and the period between 1211 and 1220 is precisely the span in which **Hlaðajarla saga* must have fallen.

In "Nóregs konunga tal" Jón Loptsson was firmly connected to the Norwegian monarchy descended from Haraldr hárfagri, but this is the dynasty against which the author of **Hlaðajarla saga* seems to have reacted. We might therefore ask whether **Hlaðajarla saga* is in some sense a critical response to "Nóregs konunga tal," perhaps an argument to the effect that Jón's descent from the jarls of Hlaðir was as important as, or more important than, his descent from the kings of Norway. Or we could simply assume that the saga serves to supplement the poem and was written by an author with a special partiality for the jarls of Hlaðir. Such speculations no doubt go well beyond what can be deduced from a lost text; the saga could have been written far from Oddi and could have nothing to do with Jón Loptsson or "Nóregs konung tal." Yet the period 1211–1220 is notable for coinciding with the first climax in the contention between kings and jarls in Norway. After the death of King Sverrir's son and successor Hákon in 1204 there is an agreement that holds the succession in suspension between 1208 and 1217, when Hákon Hákonarson succeeds to the throne in the wake of a vigorous dispute. But Jarl Skúli Bárðarson in Trondheim becomes the true power behind the throne and lives in an uneasy power-sharing arrangement with King Hákon right down to his rebellion and death in 1240. Skúli's preeminence in Trondheim could well have given rise to the idea that he was a nostalgic resurrection of the house of Hlaðir and was in competition with the king. Indeed, an alternative to the possible connection with Jón Loptsson suggested above is that the author of **Hlaðajarla saga* was in the service of Jarl Skúli and was charged to promote the jarl's interests. Whatever the precise circumstances surrounding the composition of **Hlaðajarla saga* may have been, it seems clear that the text must in some way have reflected contemporary debates. It may therefore have provided not only the narrative source for the early chapters of *Morkinskinna*; it may also have inspired the political outlook favorable to Einarr þambarskelfir, the last of the powerful Trondheim jarls, as we will see in Chapter 5.