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OBSERVATIONS ON THE INFLUENCE OF PIÐRIKS SAGA ON  
ICELANDIC SAGA WRITING

In two of the Icelandic sagas a group of armed men is observed while resting under some trees. The shepherd who has noticed them later on describes them thoroughly to the main person in that part of the saga, so that the latter is able to guess correctly the identity of them all. The group in Laxdœla saga ch.63 consists of ten men who are described to Helgi Harðbeinsson, and in Njáls saga ch.69 it consists of twenty-four men described to Njáll. The discussion as to the possibility of influence from Laxdœla saga on Njáls saga at this point may be summarized as follows: Finnur Jónsson believed in it, Einar Ól. Sveinsson was sceptical about it, Theodore Andersson and Heimir Pálsson do not think it necessary to speak of direct influence. Irrespective of which side you may take concerning this question, most people will agree that both these descriptions remind the reader of Piðriks saga ch.200<sup>1</sup>, although each of them does so in its own way. This is reflected in Heimir Pálsson's sketch, in as much as he is most inclined to reckon on a common "erlend fyrirmynd" for both Laxdœla and Njála<sup>2</sup>. Whether or not this model was Piðriks saga is not discussed by him.

And this question was of course of less importance for him, since he only intended to explore the dependence of Njála on Laxdæla.

Description of a whole group, by means of which A enables B to identify all the people observed, may be used as a motif in rather different contexts, and it is, no doubt, to be found in languages and texts other than the three under consideration. But the third book of the Iliad, which has been mentioned in this connection several times, has actually very little in common with the Icelandic texts, as may be readily understood. Beautiful Helena and old King Priamos are sitting together, looking down at the recently arrived Greek army. Priamos asks for the names of some men who are conspicuous by their appearance. Helena has grown up amongst these Greek heroes and consequently knows them well. Thus it is easy for her to identify them to Priamos, seeing the heroes in front of her. The difference is obvious.

Piðriks saga ch.200 is not handed down in exactly the same way in all manuscripts. In the Norwegian vellum from the second half of the thirteenth-century - and Einar Ól. Sveinsson obviously judged the text by this only - the story is told as follows:

Sigurðr sveinn is watching some magnificent tents on the plain near the stronghold of King Ísungr. He does not see the strangers; they are supposed to be sitting inside their tents. But Sigurðr sees thirteen shields with different coats of arms attached to the outside of the tents. He goes to King Ísungr and describes the shields to him. While Sigurðr is giving his report, the story-teller interposes an identification of each shield after its description: "There he saw ..." or "That is the shield of ..." and so on.

Sigurðr apparently does not recognize the significance of the emblems on the shields. The same seems to be true of King Ísungr, since he afterwards asks Sigurðr to go to these strangers in order to enquire who they are. This is most probably not the original shape of the story. The enumeration of the thirteen coats of arms does not serve any purpose. And in view of the fact that the thirteen men in question are introduced as being among the most important heroes of their time, it rather casts doubt on King Ísungr's knightly education if he is unable to identify any of the coats of arms described to him.

I therefore prefer the reading in the Icelandic manuscripts, which in this case seem to be nearer to the original. In some of these manuscripts it is quite

clear that Sigurðr himself, after describing each shield, makes a remark concerning whose shield it ought to be. In accordance with this, all that is said afterwards is that Sigurðr should go to the strangers to make sure who they are.

After this we may look at Njála ch.69. As well as the incredible things in this paragraph noted by Einar Ól. Sveinsson<sup>3</sup>, we should be aware of three more:

- (1) While being observed, the twenty-four men slept - obviously all in company.
- (2) They are said to have hung up their shields on branches above them.
- (3) The shepherd later describes their weapons and clothing - but not their shields.

The number of men who go to attack someone in Icelandic family sagas is not usually twenty-four. The number varies of course, but if we were to find a classic number for such occasions, it would be eighteen. If we look for groups consisting of twenty-four men, we find one in Hallfreðar saga, and some examples in Piðriks saga - perhaps not merely by chance. Turning back to the three points first mentioned, we have to consider:

- (1) In Laxdæla ten people were observed, eating breakfast, sitting on their saddles. In Njála the twenty-four men suddenly get tired, lie down and sleep soundly. People

may get tired on the way, of course, but the normal thing to do on such an occasion would be for at least one of them to keep watch, as is found in Njála ch.62, where Gunnarr is resting with far fewer companions. Thus, it is rather beyond belief that twenty-four men should all sleep at the same time, especially when the purpose of their ride is taken into consideration.

(2) The shields hung up above the heroes are not paralleled in Laxdoela, but only in Piðriks saga. One may say that in Njála they hang there just for decoration, being of no use later in the saga. But I cannot help calling it rather thoughtless behaviour, since they are intent on taking a man's life, to sleep on the way without a guard, and then above all to hang up twenty-four shields, which must draw the attention of anyone passing within a reasonable distance.

(3) It would not have been an easy thing for a shepherd to remember twenty-four different coats of arms, perhaps not even for the story-teller to invent them! Consequently the topic is dropped when the shepherd arrives at Njáll's house. We are then told only that the shepherd describes the strangers' weapons and clothing - although it is rather dubious just how much he could have seen of the clothing on people who were sleeping - the scene is said to take place at night, which, Icelandic conditions taken into consideration, probably means at dawn. Let

us remind ourselves of the strangers in Laxdœla, who were awake, sitting on their saddles in broad daylight, and there were only ten of them. From the first paragraph in Njála one would have thought that only the shields were visible, and so possible to describe plainly, because they were hanging on branches. But the storyteller did not like to go into details about this, and I believe for good reasons. So in fact, the feat of identifying a whole group of persons after receiving a good description is here already used as a cliché, a feature typical of the later stages of saga-writing. But even if the author of Njála knew Laxdœla, which for other reasons it is reasonable to suppose he did, a detail obviously came to him which is not in Laxdœla, but only in Piðriks saga: the shields hung up above the partly or totally invisible group under consideration.

While arguing the case that the author of Njála knew Piðriks saga, I would like to remind you of two other points which may be due to his use of the same source. One of these is Gunnarr's dressing up as Kaupa-Heðinn in ch.23; the other one concerns some details relating to Skarpheðinn.

In ch.23, when as a result of a dream Høskuldr gets interested in the person he had put up the night before, one man says: þat sá ek, at fram undan erminni kom eitt

gullhlað ok rautt klæði; á hœgri hendi hafði hann gullhring. Hǫskuldr realizes then that the guest had been nobody else but Gunnarr frá Hlíðarenda. Jan de Vries has pointed out that the same motif occurs in Ǫrvar-Odds saga and that we have here a typical fornaldarsaga motif. He may be right, but when trying to get further back in time, it is once again Þiðriks saga we come upon, as perhaps the oldest example in Iceland. In ch.132 Vildifer comes to Þiðrikr in poor clothing and with a hat hanging down over his face, as Gunnarr did, whilst Ǫrvar-Oddr has only váskufl einn mikinn ok síðan yfir klæðum sínum (ch.36) - no hat, you see. The fact that Vildifer is of noble kin is detected in the same way as in the case of Gunnarr, though neither of them has taken off his poor coat. The thick gold ring is seen by chance, because of a sudden movement of the arm. In the case of Vildifer one sleeve is pushed up while he is washing his hands, and so Viðga gets a chance to notice it. The case of Ǫrvar-Oddr is somewhat different in this respect as well: the heavy gold ring is mentioned only when he takes off his coat. So I would say that even if it is the same motif as in Njála and Þiðriks saga, it is used in a different way, and of these two texts there is no doubt which was the earlier.

Skarpheðinn, who once performed a real piece of villainy in killing an innocent young man attached to

his family, and who at last stands alone in a burning house, has much in common with Hogni as depicted in Piðriks saga. I cannot here deal in extenso with the details which might be considered, but would just like to mention one. Theodore Andersson discusses in a special chapter, "The heroic legacy", the impact of heroic lays on the Icelandic sagas. He mentions, with reference to Knut Liestøl, that Skarpheðinn reminds us of Hogni<sup>4</sup>. Doubtless he is right; the comment is nevertheless only part of the truth. Hogni as a person standing erect against a wall in a burning house does not occur in the Poetic Edda, but in Piðriks saga.

I assume we are right in tying up the loose ends now and concluding that the author of Njála knew Piðriks saga. Njála is dated at approximately 1280. Since the main purpose of my paper is to discuss how far back in time we may trace examples of reasonably certain influence of Piðriks saga on Icelandic saga-writing, I will not say anything about later examples such as Erex saga, Mágus saga, Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans, and others. Neither will I spend long on Grettis saga, since it does not really lead us back in time, but in passing I may just mention the dynbjöllur with which Þorsteinn's bridge in ch.53 is equipped to warn Þorsteinn of anyone crossing it. According to Guðni Jónsson, these dynbjöllur have no



parallel elsewhere in Old Icelandic literature save in Piðriks saga.

We move on to Laxdoela saga, which gives the description of a whole group of men in ch.63. Here the shepherd has been told to watch any mannaferðir near Helgi Harðbeinsson's shieling (sel). The man comes back and describes the ten men he has seen, sitting in a circle on their saddles. No special remark is made on their shields or coats of arms. Their weapons are scarcely mentioned. There is however one thing, neatly outlined for five men and thus remarkable in a way, and that is what kind of saddle they had. Apart from this special feature most emphasis is put on the men's appearance, the colour of their hair, their eyes, the shape of their faces and their figures, and a little is said about their clothing. This description, which at first sight may appear rather realistic, is, however, anything but that. It is for instance difficult to imagine how the shepherd from a reasonable distance was able to see not only that a man had strong arms, but also that he had beautiful hands. Or - in view of the fact that there were ten men to be remembered - that he got the following impression of Bolli's eyes: he was eygðr allvel, bláeygr ok snareygr ok nokkut skoteygr (he had very fine eyes - blue and sharp and seldom still). But the minute details

are in this case due to the fact that the reeling off in Laxdœla ch.63 is a refined edition of a description of a group to be found in Íslendinga saga ch.84. In this saga we are concerned with real people and the descriptions were not part of a guessing game. Thus there was nothing unreasonable in including such details as that Snorri Loftsson was kurteiss um hendr sínar. The disproportion in Laxdœla has arisen simply because the author did not distinguish strictly between what is possible in a literary portrait and what is meaningful in a description which has a practical purpose<sup>5</sup>. Beyond that the parallel in Íslendinga saga is of no further importance to our case, since we are mainly concerned with the guessing-game, which is not found in Íslendinga saga.

In Laxdœla ch.63 the guessing-game is managed more logically than in Njála and Piðriks saga. The author makes use of the occasion to revel in forms and colours. Therefore it is not strange that Finnur Jónsson believed that Piðriks saga was secondary and influenced by Laxdœla saga. In fact, I pondered for a long time wondering whether he was right. But I do not think he was. The motif, a guessing-game in connection with description of a group, could have been invented by the author of Laxdœla without knowing Piðriks saga. The

descriptions themselves can on no account be traced back to the corresponding scene in Piðriks saga. That these descriptions on the other hand have much in common with descriptions in other parts of Piðriks saga can hardly be called significant either, since there might have been other texts, lost texts, where the same details were emphasized. Besides, the "Catalogue of heroes" in Piðriks saga ch.172-88, which Kålund especially alluded to, has often been suspected of being added later, although the passage is to be found in the Norwegian vellum. Here we are treading on uncertain ground, and when I hold that the author of Laxdoela knew Piðriks saga, then I do so mainly for other reasons. I assume that the same is true for Paul Schach, when he speaks of Laxdoela "whose author drew on both Piðriks saga and Tristrams saga"<sup>6</sup>.

As far as I can see, a paragraph of primary importance for the question under consideration is to be found in the description of Bolli Bollason in ch.77:

Bolli rode away from the ship with eleven men. They were all attired in scarlet clothes, and rode in gilded saddles . . . He (Bolli) was dressed in silk clothes which the king of Miklagarðr had given him. He wore a scarlet red cloak, and was girded with Fótbítr; its hilt was inlaid with gold and its haft wound with gold. He wore a gilded helmet and had

a red shield at his side, on which a knight was traced in gold. He carried a lance (glaðel) in his hand, as is the custom in foreign countries. Wherever they took lodging, the women could not help gazing at Bolli and his companions with all their finery.

The shield with a knight traced on it in gold Rolf Heller suggested was a literary loan from Knýtlinga saga. Paul Schach wrote some years later, in the paper cited above, that Heller might be right, but that the description as a whole "reminds us of Tristram and of his father Kanelangres". The description of Kanelangres cited by Schach shows no direct parallel to the items above except the ladies' gazing upon the hero. Besides, neither Kanelangres nor Tristram nor anyone in Knýtlinga saga holds a glaðel in his hands. Therefore I do not feel entirely convinced that the description of Bolli demonstrates that the author of Laxdœla knew Tristrams saga. Even if he actually knew both Knýtlinga saga and Tristrams saga (which I do not intend to discuss here and now), it is still more likely that he knew Piðriks saga. This is shown by the fact that he wrote: hann hafði glaðel í hendi, sem títt er í útlöndum (He carried a glaðel in his hand, as is the custom in foreign countries). Even if we were inclined to suppose that this special type of lance originally occurred in Knýtlinga saga or in Tristrams saga, and that it is only

because of bad preservation that the word is not to be found in these texts nowadays, that would still be of little help. For the simple fact is that these two sagas take place mainly in one country. Piðriks saga is quite different - the scene changes unceasingly, the glaðel occurs in different places and twelve times in all. The first man carrying a glaðel is the knight Samson frá Salerni in ch.3. The next one is Piðrikr himself in ch.91. In ch.92 Viðga, recently arrived from Denmark, bears a glaðel. In ch.206 it is king Ísungr from Bertangaland and his fellows who have a glaðel (glafel) each. In ch.243 we meet Valtari frá Vaskasteini, at the moment riding on horseback, on his way from Attila, with whom he had been staying for seven years. Íron frá Brandinaborg (ch.263) and the Niflungar (ch.377) use "gladels", Íron as part of his hunting-equipment, the Niflungar as part of their herneskjá while riding to see Attila. And so on.

Apart from the texts under consideration the word glaðel only occurs in Karlamagnús saga and Elis saga, later on also in Konungs skuggsjá, Mírmanssaga, and Kirjalax saga. Even if we suppose a handful of other texts to be lost, which maybe included the word glaðel, I think most people would agree that there is only a very slight chance that any text other than Piðriks saga could have offered as good a foundation for the remark in Laxdæla, "as is the custom in foreign countries".

The same clause also indicates yet another important fact: the author of Laxdoela had obviously rather limited experience when it came to knowing what the custom in foreign countries really was at that time: at least in Hákonar saga and Knýtlinga saga the word glaðel does not occur even once. As for the ladies gazing upon the hero, we must realize that the picture occurs in Piðriks saga as well, so there was no need to resort to Tristrams saga to get this idea. Further, the paragraph about Bolli can hardly be suspected of having been added later: the picture outlined of Bolli as he comes riding from the ship, with a precious sword, with a golden helmet, with an emblazoned shield, and with a following all dressed in coloured clothing - this is a picture the reader has seen before, in ch. 44, when Kjartan was riding home from the coast.

There are some more words to be said about the first glaðel-bearing hero in Piðriks saga, Samson. In Hákonar saga ch. 332 we read of King Hákon, that he was eygðr mjök, ok þó vel . . . bliðr maðr var hann við fátaka menn ok þurftuga, svá at aldri var hann í svá þungu skapi, at eigi svaraði hann þeim bliðliga. This is of course one of the virtues often attached to a rex iustus, and most people would probably feel inclined to think of something like Konungs skuggsjá as a suitable background for such

a remark. But here we are in danger of being led astray. The fact is that the author or his oral source did not need to know anything but the beginning of Piðriks saga to get the idea that this detail could be included with advantage in the current literary portrait. We are told of Samson in ch. 1: Hann var nokkut hofugeygðr, bliðr ok litilatr við alla menn ríka ok úríka, sva at hinum minzta manni svaradi hann hlæiandi. ok engi var sva fatækr at hann firirliti. I feel reluctant to press the texts, but it would not be especially astonishing if there were a connection between these two paragraphs. Piðriks saga was a well-known story when Hákonar saga was composed, a fact which is evidenced by Volsunga saga, for example, whose author took over the whole description of Sigurðr and a bit more than that.<sup>7</sup>

We turn back to Laxdoela, whose author in my opinion knew Piðriks saga fairly well. There are, apart from the description of Bolli in ch. 77, two other features which seem to be of significance in this connection. One of them is the quarrel between Guðrún and Hrefna. The struggle between them begins in the scene where Guðrún, who was used to having the best seat at the table at Hjarðarholt ok annars staðar, is disregarded in favour of Hrefna. However it is not she, but Kjartan who says in ch. 46: "Hrefna is to sit in the highseat, and she is

always to be placed first as long as I am alive...Guðrún heard this and looked at Kjartan and coloured, but said not a word." It has in fact been pointed out several times that the antagonism between the Guðrún and Brynhildr of the heroic party here appears dimly in the background. But considering the occasion on which the enmity becomes audible and visible for the first time, we find that it is neither in the Poetic Edda nor in the Nibelungenlied that placing at table proves to be a matter of consequence. It is so however in Piðriks saga ch. 343, where Brynhildr demands the best seat in the hall, since she, Gunnarr's wife, has become first lady í Niflungalandi. Guðrún does not deny that, but emphasizes that it is her own mother's seat, and that she is no verr til komin to take it. In both cases it is a clash between an honour attained by marriage and a kind of customary right. Brynhildr, who is then humiliated by being told how she was deceived on her wedding-night, brings the scene to an end exactly as Guðrún does in Laxdoela: she blushes and goes off without saying a word. So even if the heroic legacy is a factor in this scene of Laxdoela, we should add the remark "in the version we otherwise know from Piðriks saga".

Another feature of interest is the number twelve, in particular where the age of a young man is concerned.



In Laxdoela ch. 16 we are told about Óláfr Peacock: "When he was twelve years old he rode to the Assembly, and people from other districts thought it worth their while to come just to see how exceptionally well-built he was." In ch. 37 we read: "One of Hrótr's sons was called Kári; he was then twelve years old, and was the most promising of all Hrótr's sons." When Helgi Harðbeinsson is attacked in ch. 64 only a few people are staying with him: his twelve-year-old son Harðbeinn, the shepherd, and two outlaws. In ch. 74 we are told of Gellir, that he was a manly and well-built youth from his earliest years. When he was twelve years old, he went abroad with his father. And finally Bolli Bollason, the posthumous son of Bolli, avenges the death of his father at the age of twelve (ch. 64), a fact which from the point of chronology both within the saga and in other sources is rather dubious. This revenge has made more than one scholar rack his brains and most probably the suggestion that the whole episode was invented for the purpose of enhancing Bolli Bollason's prestige is right. Moreover, five boys at the age of twelve in the same saga, all of them undertaking something of interest at that age, seems to be rather a lot. Emphasis on facts about twelve-year-old boys does not seem to have been a convention from the very beginning of Icelandic saga-

writing. In Heiðarvíga saga and Bjarnar saga Hítödelakappa no twelve-year-old boy is mentioned and the same is true of Fóstbrœðra saga. In Hallfreðar saga nobody's age is mentioned at all. Then, at last, in Kormáks saga, we meet one twelve-year-old boy. The Kings' Sagas do not show anything totally different. Twelve-year-old boys occur, indeed, but then we are concerned with the main character of the saga and, besides, even in these cases no firm tradition seems to have existed. The most eminent example is, no doubt, Óláfr Tryggvason, who according to Historia Norvegiae and Ágrip avenged his foster-father at the age of twelve. This tradition was scarcely a very old or very strong one, since it did not prevent Oddr Snorrason, Snorri Sturluson or the compiler of Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta from maintaining that Óláfr was nine years old when he achieved his revenge. In addition, in the most famous of the translated sagas, Tristrams saga, there are no twelve-year-old boys. On the other hand, looking at Piðriks saga, we find it teeming with heroes performing all kinds of stunts at the age of twelve. The feature occurs so many times that it is detrimental rather than enjoyable. The series begins with Péttmarr, Piðrikr's father, in ch. 9. Piðrikr himself is knighted at the age of twelve in ch. 14. Exactly the same happens to

Hildibrandr in ch. 15. When Attila is twelve years old, in ch. 39, he is ranked above all other chieftains in the country by his father. In ch. 57 Velent at the age of twelve is already returning home from Mimir after a training period of three years. Viðga, Velent's son, on attaining the age of twelve, asks for equipment to go abroad; he has made up his mind to see Piðrikr and he really does so (ch. 80-81). And so on. Finally, we also meet in this saga a posthumous son avenging the death of his father at the age of twelve: it is Aldrian, Hogni's son, in ch. 423-6. The revenge of Aldrian has sometimes been suspected as a late invention, but it is in the Norwegian vellum<sup>8</sup>. And even if it were theoretically possible that Piðriks saga borrowed from Laxdoela (or from Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar) in the matter of Aldrian's revenge, we must admit that the explanation is not adequate to cover all the other promising youngsters of the same age. Besides, the dependence of Piðriks saga on Laxdoela is most unlikely because of what has been said concerning the word glæðel. Obviously it was the author of Laxdoela who knew Piðriks saga.

In reference books we find Piðriks saga dated about 1250 with the greatest regularity. Laxdoela saga is usually dated at 1244-50; more recently it has been assigned to a later date. Rolf Heller goes as far as

to date it to the years after 1270, but he does not seem to find support for this view. Dating it to a time after 1255, however, has proved reasonable in the opinion of some scholars. I do not intend to go into details concerning the dating of Laxdoela saga, but I must emphasize that there is no need to make Laxdoela younger because of its dependence on Piðriks saga. Piðriks saga is, as far as I can see, considerably older than from about 1250. The only place where I have found this thought expressed in print is in the above-mentioned article by Paul Schach, published in 1969. There he speaks of Piðriks saga "which was probably compiled at the Norwegian court not long after the translation of Thomas's Tristan romance" (p.93). I do not know, of course, exactly what Schach meant by saying "not long after", but if he thought of a space of roughly ten years, implying that Piðriks saga was written between 1230 and 1240, he is right in my opinion. This agreement is based not only on a consideration of the features discussed above, but also on consideration of the sources used by the compiler of Piðriks saga. The most thorough treatment of this question in more recent times is Roswitha Wisniewski, Die Darstellung des Niflungenunterganges in der Thidreks saga, Tübingen 1961. Her results, which seem to have convinced Jan de Vries, imply, to put it briefly, that the compiler of Piðriks saga used mainly two sources.

One of these was an older and rougher version of the Nibelungenlied, a version which in the opinion of most scholars in the field must once have existed and which is usually called the Ältere Not. The second source was a kind of chronicle, in Latin or in Low German translation from Latin, which for many good reasons may be connected with Weddinghausen, a monastery situated only about 14 miles away from Soest, a town belonging to the Hanseatic league; this chronicle was most probably written between 1210 and 1230. The compiler of Piðriks saga did not make use of the courtly Nibelungenlied. That is a fact which people realized long ago, and it is not least for this reason that I find it difficult to imagine that Piðriks saga was written as late as c. 1250. The Nibelungenlied was composed about 1200 and it is preserved in 24 manuscripts from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Since the compilation of Piðriks saga is usually thought of in connection with the interest in a refined courtly culture which began to stamp itself on the literary life of Norway early in the reign of King Hákon, it is remarkable that the writer of Piðriks saga did not try to get hold of the courtly Nibelungenlied as his model. A satisfactory explanation may be found if we assume that Piðriks saga was compiled considerably earlier than 1250. The part of Germany with which Bergen maintained relations was

not the district where the courtly epic hailed from, and we do not know how fast the epic displaced the older version or versions in different parts of the country. It is an attractive conjecture that an older manuscript was sold or given away just because the owner had got hold of a new and better edition, which we know under the name of Nibelungenlied. But this and any other possible explanation sounds less convincing, the later we date Piðriks saga. As far as I can see, about 1250 people would have preferred another text to the Ältere Not even in Bergen. Besides, the Norwegian manuscript from the second half of the thirteenth century already combines two different versions of Piðriks saga: most likely these needed more than a few years to get established. For these reasons I feel inclined to conclude that Piðriks saga is from before 1250 and probably from the decade 1230-40.

On this basis it may be reasonable to reappraise other parallels between Piðriks saga and the Icelandic sagas. When, for example, Finnur Jónsson says that the raw oxhide which is spread out in order to make the heroes slip in Niflungasaga reminds us of the same cunning trick in Eyrbyggja saga, we have to ask if the direction indicator should perhaps be reversed. Though the storytelling is generally of a different kind, elaborate knightly equipment is occasionally mentioned in Eyrbyggja

saga. Thus we read in ch. 13 of a nicely coloured saddle, which is a rather rare feature in Icelandic saga-writing:

Porleifr had bought the finest horse he could find, and he also had a magnificent stained saddle. He carried an elaborately ornamented sword and a spear inlaid with gold, a dark blue shield richly gilded, and his clothes were of the finest material.

Before coming to an end I should like to mention one other well-known feature. As Hermann Pálsson tells us in Art and Ethics in Hrafnkel's Saga, blue clothing is conventionally worn in the sagas by killers (p. 28). I still remember how I used to puzzle over this fact when I first began to read Icelandic sagas. Why just blue clothing? The feature did not seem to have been a convention since the very beginning of Icelandic saga-writing. There was no blue clothing in Heiðarvíga saga, Kormáks saga, Hallfreðar saga. We find blue cloaks in Bjarnarsaga Hitdœlakappa and in Fóstbrœðra saga, in the latter on a rather peaceful occasion: the blue cloak is mentioned only when Þormóðr gives it to Lúsa-Oddi. Neither here nor in Bjarnarsaga is the blue cloak worn by a man who is going to kill anyone in the next chapter. I did not really understand it, until I found the explanation in Piðriks saga. In ch. 174 we read in the description of Heimir's coat of arms: Oc merkir blár litr kallt

brióst oc grimt hiarta. There was no need to state that when everybody knew it already. Well, I would not dare to assert that this meaning was completely unknown in Iceland, before Piðriks saga was imported. Probably the statement may be defended, however, that people became aware of how they could make use of it, just at the time when Piðriks saga became well-loved by Icelandic readers.



## NOTES

1. References to chapters are given according to the edition by C.R.Unger, Oslo 1853.
2. "Rittengsl Laxdælu og Njálu", Mímir 11 (1967), p. 10.
3. Um Njálu, Reykjavík, 1933, p. 324.
4. The Icelandic Family Saga, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 28, 1967, p. 69.
5. On the difference between these forms see F. De Tollenaere in the introduction to his book De schildering van den mensch in de oudijslandsche familiesaga, Leuven 1942.
6. "The influence of Tristrams saga on Old Icelandic Literature", 1969, p. 99.
7. On this relationship see e.g. Jan de Vries in his Altnordische Literaturgeschichte, 1967.
8. For a fuller discussion of the problems concerning Aldrian see Kurt Wais, Frühe Epik Westeuropas und die Vorgeschichte des Nibelungenliedes, Tübingen 1953, esp. pp.131-57.