

An Eiríks þáttur málsþaka? Some Conjectures on the Source of Saxo's Ericus
Disertus

Of the legendary books of Saxo's Gesta Danorum, the fifth is perhaps the most complex; it covers a wealth of historical, legal, and fictional subject-matter, and it seems to have been hastily put together, so that many absurdities and narrative loose ends are to be found in it.¹ In his commentary of 1922 to the legendary part of the Gesta, Paul Herrmann analysed the sources of Book V in literature and legend, pointing out the most evident defects in its logic and composition.² In the following pages, I would like to take the analysis a few steps further and examine the first three chapters of the book in detail, so as to reveal every single contradiction and break of logical and stylistic continuity. On the basis of these flaws, which will here be listed by letter from A to T, I shall attempt to draw an outline of Saxo's main source and to recover its account of the career of Ericus the Eloquent. I shall also try to trace Saxo's hand at work re-fashioning his materials, and to explain his aims and the logic of his conception.

Though my conclusions differ in some respects from those of Paul Herrmann, this analysis is based on his work and assumes many of his points of view implicitly, in particular the Icelandic origin of the story of Ericus, and the inexistence of those legends of the Norwegian coast which Axel Olrik took to be Saxo's source.³

The study of lost sources is by necessity conjectural; it involves the dangerous but unavoidable premise that stories are quite logical in their earliest version and that all absurdities are introduced in the retelling, so that the form of a source may be discovered by removing contradictions and illogicalities. There is no conclusive proof in an analysis of this

kind; the hypothetical source is a construct the persuasive power of which depends entirely on the tightness of the reasoning behind it. My arguments here will be based predominantly on internal evidence; at certain points, however, they will also draw on our general knowledge of the vernacular genres and themes of medieval Scandinavian literature.

In the first half of Book V, the narrative is focused exclusively on the career of Ericus the Eloquent. For an analysis of the sources and composition of Saxo's tale of Ericus, we must isolate five segments:

1. the account of the sorry state of the Danish court during the minority of Frotho the Peaceful (Frode Fredegod),
2. the Brautwerbung or matrimonial embassy for Frotho's first wife, the Hunnish princess Hanunda,
3. the story of how Ericus became eloquent and visited the king of Norway,
4. the story of Ericus' journey to Denmark and of his reformation of Frotho and the Danish court,
5. Ericus' Brautwerbung for Frotho's second wife, the Norwegian princess Alvilda. Ericus has come down in tradition as "inn málsþaki", 'the eloquent'; the point of his story is the display and use of his wonderful gift, so that those episodes in which he shines only with other, more ordinary accomplishments, may be reasonably suspected of being late additions to the tale. In segment 5 Ericus, sent by Frotho to Norway to ask for Alvilda's hand, shows a certain ingenuity but is at no point called on to make use of his verbal skills. Segment 5, therefore, falls outside the scope of this analysis.⁴ Segments 3 and 4, on the other hand, must be considered the core of Ericus' story, since it is there that our hero gives the most varied demonstrations of his rhetorical powers and his wit.

Segments 1 and 2 are contained in the first chapter of Book V, and

their relevance to our subject may seem doubtful, since Ericus appears for the first time in the following chapter. However, the high point of segment 4 is the hero's revelation to Frotho of the adulterous relation between his wife Hanunda and Grep, his favorite counselor. In getting Frotho married, segment 2 is also preparing the scene for this greatest triumph of Ericus. In making Grep and Gøtwara Frotho's agents in the first Brautwerbung, segment 2 plays an essential part in the story of Ericus, as these two are to become his most dangerous enemies in 4.

But what about segment 1? Within Chapter 1, it seems inextricably tied to the Brautwerbung, since it describes the families of Gøtwara and Grep, and can also be said to set the scene for the decadent court which Ericus will later reform. Ericus does confront and destroy in 4 many of the corrupt courtiers introduced in 1. However, there are several logical gaps between 1 and the rest of the narrative:

- A. Ericus' confrontations in 4 with most of the villains introduced in 1 do not involve the use of rhetoric, while Gøtwara and Grep, both required by 2 (the former as head of the matrimonial embassy, the latter as seducer of the queen) confront the hero in sennur, exchanges of invective in which they are defeated.
- B. Some of the characters introduced in 1 have important functions or peculiar attributes, yet they are mentioned only once, early in Chapter 1, and do not play a role in the narrative that follows. Westmarus has twelve sons, three of whom are named Grep, yet of these three Greps only one has a part in the story. Isulfus and Aggo are guardians to Frotho and regents during his minority; they are mentioned early in 1 and never again.
- C. In 1, Grep attempts to seduce Gunwara, Frotho's sister, and makes her life impossible when she will not give in to his demands. In 2, however, he seduces Hanunda, Frotho's first wife. The persecution and attempted rape

of Gunwara never reach a critical point, and there is a clear impression that one narrative thread has been left in the air for the sake of another rather similar one.

- D. There seems to be a break between our image of Frotho in 1 and in the following segments. In 1 he is the child-king, with guardians and a regency council; he does not wish to marry on account of his tender age ["*teneritudo aetatis*"], and his counselor Grep betrays him by attempting to seduce his nubile sister. The Brautwerbung and Ericus' visit, however, require a king who can bear the brunt of a debate with "the Eloquent" throughout segment 4, who has given laws (iii, 9 "*ne ipse legis a se latae statutum solveret*," [not to relax the statute of the law which he had passed], whose guardians and regency council are nowhere in sight, and who is sinned against by adultery. It is also the Frotho of segment 4, a king no longer childish, who asks Ericus to obtain for him the hand of the Norwegian princess.
- E. The dividing line between 1 and 2 (V.i.5) is marked by a striking change of narrative style. From the elaborate picture of court life given in 1, which involves a multiplicity of offices and dignities, we go over to the world of the märchen- or lygisaga, where descriptions of royal courts often reflect the circumstances of a modest household: here the king of Denmark must get married so that his queen may mend the torn garments of the Danish warriors. For a fornaldarsaga with certain historical pretensions, this is a remarkable drop in level.
- F. Gøtwara and Grep, whose participation in the tale is assured by their roles in the Brautwerbung of 2 and by their sennur with Ericus in 4, have been incorporated to 1 by being made relatives of the corrupt ministers and counselors introduced there. Gøtwara is the wife of Colo, one of Frotho's instructors, while Grep is the son of Colo's brother Westmarus. Gøtwara

and Grep are therefore aunt and nephew. In 4, however, the relation has changed. As wife of Colo, Gøtwara was the mother of three sons, who are never mentioned after 1. After Grep and his eleven brothers, all supposedly Gøtwara's nephews, have been killed by Ericus and his men, Saxo describes Gøtwara as "consumptae infeliciter subolis exitio maesta simulque eam ulcisci avida," [sorrowing at the destruction of her children who had miserably perished, and eager to avenge them] and refers to Ericus in connection with her as "interfector filiorum," [the slayer of her sons.] She seems to have become Grep's mother, an oversight which can be satisfactorily explained if we take the family relations outlined in 1 as careless inventions serving to connect the story of Ericus with a traditional image of troubled court life.⁵

Saxo has placed the tale of Ericus, with its preliminary Brautwerbung, in a context familiar to him from legendary Danish narratives about Frode Fredegod, a king of the "younger dynasty" of the Scyldings.⁶ The setting, the decadent, helpless court awaiting a redeemer, recalls the saga of Ingeld and Starkad, as well as the court of the Scylding Hrothgar before the coming of Beowulf. Saxo has made this setting part of the story of Ericus by making the characters of 1 confront the hero in the course of his triumphal first day at court in 4, but he has not been able to make these characters serve the theme of eloquence that underlies his source. Every contact with the themes or characters of 1 turns Ericus into a very average sort of hero, remarkable for physical prowess and little else: he breaks Westmarus' back, and kills off all his children in the course of a battle on snowshoes over the frozen sea.⁷

In Chapter ii Ericus appears for the first time; we learn how he obtained his extraordinary eloquence, and what it was that made him decide to visit Denmark. The chapter is marred by a glaring absurdity: the hero

displays his gift and earns the agnomen "the Eloquent" before eating the magic food that will confer power over words.⁸

In Chapter ii as we have it, Saxo has carried out only structural alterations of the source, leaving the text unmodified and unadapted to the changed narrative.

G. Ericus appears for the first time without being introduced, not even as "a certain Ericus," and proceeds to give proof of his eloquence with a florid speech. This anticipation of a later episode is indeed crude, but Saxo seems to have had in mind further modifications which would have made the sequence more logical. The Norwegian king Gøtarus, at whose court Ericus has made this first speech, is particularly struck by his elaborate rhetoric because "frater siquidem eius Rollerus opinionem iuvenis eximio suae fulgore suppresserat," [for the young man's reputation had been kept in the shade by the exceeding brilliancy of his brother Rollerus.] If, as I assume, the brothers' subsequent return to their rural home, and the hero's acquisition of eloquence there by eating of the magic food prepared by his stepmother Craca for Rollerus, reflect episodes that in the source anteceded and made possible Ericus' brilliant speech at Gøtarus' court, then a simple inversion of the order of these episodes would have made the brothers arrive at the Norwegian court with Ericus already in a position of superiority. That Saxo changes this, letting Rollerus be the more brilliant of the two up to the very moment of Ericus' speech, indicates that he wanted the hero's entire transformation to take place away from home, spontaneously, as the debut of a "male Cinderella" on a prestigious stage. This intention in turn provides a clue to the inversion of episodes, since a spontaneous transformation of this sort would not have been compatible with the magic food. When he let Ericus appear for the first time at the

moment of his speech at Gótarus' court, Saxo meant to leave out the brothers' home background and the story of Craca's cooking altogether. Later, as an afterthought, he must have realized that these first episodes of the source story could not be omitted without damage to the narrative: the Craca of segment 3 also plays an important role in the Norwegian Brautwerbung of 5. Saxo had a fondness for the theme of the magic food concocted from the slaver of serpents, which he had used in the story of Balderus and Hotherus in Book III. These may have been some of his reasons for preserving the episode, which he now placed after his own version of Ericus' debut. We are left with two successive acquisitions of eloquence by one hero, another aspect of Book V which speaks for the incomplete, un-revised state of its text.

Paragraphs ii.5-9 describe the brothers' return from Gótarus' court to their parents home in Rennesø, ostensibly to collect the equipment needed for a journey to Denmark. The return to Rennesø and this intended expedition to Denmark create certain logical difficulties.

- H. The brothers would be going to Denmark in the service of Gótarus, who plans to invade Frotho's kingdom and needs reliable information on Danish affairs. This is why he lets Ericus and Rollerus recruit among his men a company of warriors to sail with them. How is it then that the leaders of the expedition have to get their equipment and funds ("necessaria tam longinqui itineris subsidia") at home?
- I. The decision to go to Denmark is made by Rollerus, and Ericus only makes up his mind to go along after prudent hesitation. This is no longer fitting now that Ericus has proved his genius; he should be the one to take the initiative.
- J. Rollerus' motives in travelling to Denmark are not compatible with his

mission as Norwegian spy: "Cuius famae experiendae gratia Rollerus, ut erat exterarum lustrator rerum ignotaque visendi avidus, Frothonis se vovit contubernio potiturum" [In order to examine this rumor, Rollerus, who was a great traveller abroad, and eager to visit unknown parts, made a vow that we would get into the company of Frotho.] To make sense of these statements, we must assume that they were taken over unadapted from the source. Rollerus' vow to visit Frotho and become a member of his hird must have been made before Ericus' transformation, at the time that the brothers still lived at home in the country, and heard seductive rumors about the great courts of Norway and Denmark. Rollerus, as Craca's beloved son, would take the lead in all important matters. Fascinated by stories of Frotho's court, he decided to join the company of warriors surrounding the Danish king. Ericus, a rather obscure figure in those days, chose to follow on his brother's steps.

Before leaving home, however, the two young men were properly outfitted by their parents.

- K. The buried treasures of their father Regnerus would have been of no use to them if, as Saxo has it, they were planning to travel to Denmark in order to spy for the king of Norway. If, on the other hand, they had been leaving their country home in quest of glory in a great foreign court, their father's gazae would have been in place.
- L. Craca, wishing to provide Rollerus with an advantage, prepares for him the magic food made from the slaver of serpents. Both Knabe and Herrmann find Saxo's account of this incident hopelessly bungled. According to the text (V.ii.6-9), Rollerus spied on his mother and saw her cook the food, yet at table later it was Ericus who, turning the dish around, ate from the potent black portion that had been set before his brother. Though the episode is carelessly told and perhaps insufficiently motivated, it seems to me to

make sense as it stands. Knabe and Herrmann believed that the brothers' names had been transposed twice in this account, but to have this happen twice in one paragraph and never again in the entire book seems too great a coincidence. Rollerus' knowledge of the origin of the food would not have made him eager to eat the black portion rather than the weaker white one: Saxo says explicitly that, not knowing that the snakes were harmless, he did not realize how much strength was being brewed for that meal ("Ignorabat enim innocuam anguium exstitisse naturam, nescius quantum illo vigoris epulo pararetur.") Ericus' appetite, on the other hand, is motivated simply by the invigorating effect of the first mouthful ("interni vigoris effectu epulas aestimans . . .") More information on the subject would have been prejudicial rather than helpful.

Having acquired the magic gift of eloquence in his country home, Ericus set off with his brother Rollerus to visit the court of Frotho. We may wonder about their reasons for stopping at the Norwegian court on their way there. Could they not have sailed to Denmark directly? Is the episode at Gótarus' court entirely Saxo's creation? The answer to this last question must be negative. Etiquette and expense at the Norwegian court are the subject of a pointed exchange between the hero and Frotho in segment 4. The young Danish king probes the foreign visitor with questions on the standards of his Norwegian rival, giving Ericus ample opportunity for criticism of Frotho's household. Throughout this scene, Ericus is assumed to be well acquainted with Gótarus' court, as he makes it his term of comparison. In the source, the Norwegian visit must have served a double function, as preliminary exercise of Ericus' new talents and as a setting for his nafnfestr, the earning of name and fame as "the Eloquent." After a number of adventures at sea, Ericus lands in Denmark, in the

neighborhood of Frotho's hall. Grep, who knows Ericus' reputation, rides out to meet him on the shore and engages him in a senna in the course of which the courtier is led to acknowledge the rumors of his adulterous liaison with the queen. This seashore altercation gives rise to some logical problems in segment 4.

M. Saxo hardly tries to motivate this encounter by the sea. He does not say how Grep came to hear of Ericus' arrival or of his fame. He neglects to mention where the two men met and who else was present at their senna. All we are told is that Grep hurried down to the seashore: "festinus ad mare contendit." Since Grep's self-betrayal apparently had no witnesses, it could not have hurt his standing at court. Saxo is forced to overcome this difficulty by making Grep ride back to Frotho's hall to proclaim his defeat in the senna: "at ubi domum pervenit, tumultuoso clamoris impetum regiam complet verbisque se victum vociferans . . ." [Now when he reached home, he filled the palace with uproarious and vehement clamour, shouting that he had been worsted in words . . .], an obviously absurd course of action.

N. This second act of self-betrayal by Grep leads Frotho later on to ask Ericus about the outcome of the senna. The hero answers by accusing Grep and Hanunda of adultery. This is Ericus' first appearance at the Danish court. King Frotho hates him and will in fact try to kill him twice in the remainder of segment 4, yet he is willing to believe the accusations against his wife and his close friend without a moment's doubt.

O. The altercation between Ericus and Grep echoes a number of vernacular phrases and terms of invective, and is certainly part of the source. It contains on Ericus' part several clear allusions to the treacherous servant who deceives his master:

"Nulla fides fidei vacuo praestanda putatur,
quem rumor sontem prodicionis agit".

[Men think no credit due to him that hath no credit, whom report accuses
of trachery.]

"Qui dominum fallit, qui foedas concipit artes,
tam sibi quam sociis insidiosus erit.
Aede lupum quicumque fovet, nutrire putatur
praedonem proprio perniciemque lari."

[He who betrays his lord, he who conceives foul devices, will be as great
a snare to himself as to his friends. Whoso fosters a wolf in his house
is thought to feed a thief and a pest for his own hearth.]

These last words hit Grep off guard and force him to admit his guilt
implicitly. Ericus triumphs in his final statement:

"Decipitur quisquis servum sibi poscit amicum;
saepe solet domino verna nocere suo."

[Whoso asks a slave to be his friend is deceived; often the henchman hurts
his master.]

These remarks are aimed as much at the master as at the servant; they
make little sense in the absence of Frotho. If the senna had originally
taken place in Frotho's hall and the culprits had betrayed their guilt in
the king's hearing, Grep with his own words, the queen by her cries and
countenance, Frotho's acceptance of Ericus' charges would be justified,
the words of the senna would make more sense, and we would be spared
Grep's unlikely ride back to the court to proclaim his defeat.

Saxo's displacement of this battle of words to the seashore can be
better understood once we realize that he was trying to expand the stage
of segment 4 in order to accomodate Ericus' numerous displays of eloquence
and his clashes with the new characters brought into the narrative with

segment 1 (Colo, Westmarus and his sons.) The source need only have included confrontations with Frotho, Grep, and Gótwara.

P. With the senna, Saxo has transplanted another small incident from hall to seashore. On setting foot on Danish soil, Ericus stumbles and then comments on this as an omen of good luck. Implicit is the proverb "Fall er fárar heil" [V.ii.2: "sibi in lapsu faustum ominatus eventum."] ¹⁰ Later, after his altercation with Grep, he arrives at Frotho's hall and, on crossing the threshold, trips on a slippery hide placed there by Frotho's un-hospitable courtiers. Prevented from falling by Rollerus, who walks behind him, he quotes the proverb "Berr er hverr á bakinu nema sér bróður eigi" [V.iii.8: nudum habere tergum fraternitatis inopem referebat]. ¹¹ On both occasions the hero is crossing a border and is about to have his wits and character tested in a hostile environment. The stumble is a reminder of the dangers of the situation, but also of the hero's luck. Though the two stumbles here belong to different types, one being proleptic, the other associated in Norse tradition with the phrase "sem fótr q̄trum" [as one foot the other], they serve a common function in this respect and constitute in Saxo's text an obvious duplication. ¹² The second stumble must be the original one, since its cause, the slippery hide, is mentioned elsewhere in the story both before and after Ericus' arrival. ¹³

The outline of Saxo's source which we can recover from internal evidence runs therefore as follows: Gótwara and her son Grep carry out a matrimonial embassy for the young King of Denmark. The mother obtains the bride-to-be's consent; later her son seduces the new queen.

Following an initiative of his brother Rollerus, Ericus, a young Norwegian living in the country, decides to go abroad in order to visit the Danish court. Before leaving, Ericus eats some magic good prepared by

his stepmother Craca for Rollerus, and becomes prodigiously eloquent.

On their way to Denmark, Rollerus and Ericus visit the court of Norway. There Ericus demonstrates his new abilities for the first time and acquires the agnomen of "the Eloquent." Aware of the brothers' intention to travel further, the king of Norway charges them with a secret mission in Denmark, as spies in his service.

On arrival in Denmark, Ericus and Rollerus proceed to the royal hall, where, by means of sennur and other forms of verbal aggression, Ericus discredits Gøtwara and Grep, and reveals to the king the latter's adultery with queen Hanunda. The king gets rid of his former favorites and takes Ericus as adviser and friend. The story revolves on the hero's eloquence, and this emphasis on the power of words must have exerted a strong attraction on Saxo, who was, as we know, very fond of rhetoric and verbal ornamentation. In Ericus' speeches before Gøtarus and Frotho, Saxo has left the brief De Eloquentia of a hybrid style that combines a mannered Late Latin virtuosity (e.g. in the speech to Frotho saved from drowning, V.iii.22) with the vernacular taste for obscure puns and allusions (e.g. Ericus' dialogue with Frotho on the journey from Rennesø to Denmark, V.iii.10).¹⁴

The triumph at court of a stranger newly arrived from the backwoods, who dazzles king and courtiers with his eloquence and wit: we have here a familiar formula of Old Norse narrative, a ǫátrr-type that has been described and studied by Joseph C. Harris in its numerous and varied versions.¹⁵ The type is known as the "king and Icelander" ǫátrr, for in these stories the newcomer to court (usually to the Norwegian court) is always an Icelander. This choice goes in hand with the stereotypical attribution of shrewdness and verbal skills to Icelanders in Norse literature. I would like to suggest that the core of Saxo's source is one of

these "king and Icелander" þættir.

In his early treatise on the division of Saxo's sources, Axel Olrik remarked that the þáttir stood formally between the fornaldarsaga and other saga types.¹⁶ In itself, the "king and Icелander" formula requires a measure of realism, and it is often used in the context of kings' sagas, but the story of Ericus as we have it has absorbed elements of the stjúpmóedrasögur in segment 3 (Craca and the magic food), and of the fairy-tale in segment 2 (the Brautwerbung, the queen needed to darn warriors' clothes and wooed with a magic potion). We have here a þáttir that is expanding to become a lygisaga. But even lygisögur respected certain chronological constraints: no Icелander could have been minister to a king of the legendary age. The hero's nationality was changed, and he was made a Norwegian. The Icелandic origin of Ericus would explain certain questions raised by his career:

- Q. If Rollerus and Ericus were Norwegians, why did they choose to serve a foreign king rather than Gótarus?
- R. Charged with a mission by the king of Norway, why did they give it up on arrival in Denmark? Why would they have gone into Frotho's service even before the Danish king had given them any reasons to feel grateful to him, or welcome at his court?
- S. In segment 5, Ericus and king Gótarus meet again, and yet not a word is said about betrayal, about the brothers' original mission to Denmark, or about Ericus' Norwegian nationality.

The use of the Norwegian court by an Icелander as a stepping-stone on the way to Denmark has an excellent model in the well-known þáttir of Auðun and the bear. There too, the hero prefers the Danish court and has conversations with the king of Norway in which the latter manifests curiosity and feelings of rivalry for Denmark.¹⁷

We may still wonder whether Saxo, who added segment 1 to his source and changed its narrative sequence considerably, could not also have been the one to expand this Eiríks þáttur málsþaka. More specifically, the question is whether the tale of the eloquent hero's visit to Frotho (our segments 3 and 4) came to Saxo's hands already preceded by the Brautwerbung of segment 2. The parts are too tightly and efficiently joined to have been put together by Saxo for the first time. Besides, Saxo is unaware of an element of continuity between 2 and 4 that can nevertheless be found in the text:

- T. In segment 2, Frotho pays Gótwara for her participation in the matrimonial mission by giving her a remarkable gold necklace which Saxo describes in detail (V.i.6). In segment 4, Ericus confronts Gótwara in a short and spicy senna, and she gages "a heavy necklace" ["torquem magni ponderis"] against his life. Narrative economy demands that the necklace she loses here be the same one with which she had been paid, but Saxo, who had given the most unnecessary details about this ornament when it first comes up, fails to make the connection.

In his commentary, Paul Herrmann has traced sources and analogues of the various elements in the story of Ericus. I would like to end this paper with observations on two possible sources of Saxo's version.

The incidents in Chapters 3 and 4 of the Historia Apollonii regis Tyri 18 have many elements in common with the plot of our tale:

- i. In both stories, the young hero sails to a foreign country.
- ii. He walks into the king's palace in spite of frightening signs placed at the entrance to scare him away (the sorcerers' níðstong; heads of dead suitors over the door of Antiochus' palace: ". . . et caput eius in portae fastigio ponebatur.") This particular motif in the Historia is

even more closely matched by an episode in Grep's persecution of Frotho's sister in segment 1: Gunwara had taken refuge in a fortified building; Grep summoned her many suitors to a banquet, had them all beheaded "ac deinde conclave, cui puella assueverat, desectis eorum capitibus cingens crudele ceteris spectaculum praeibit" [and then lined the customary room of the princess with their heads - a gruesome spectacle for all the rest]. This echo of the Historia in segment 1 shows that the influence of the late Greek romance on the tale of Ericus did not affect the source but only Saxo's version, since it was Saxo who first joined segment 1 to the rest of the story.

- iii. Someone at the king's court has a secret guilt of sexual nature (adultery, incest).
- iv. The hero is challenged to a test of wit (sennur, a riddle).
- v. The hero has extraordinary verbal skills. Apollonius is described as "fidens in habundantia litterarum" [confident in the power of literary learning], and the phrase may have suggested to Saxo a matching of this king of Tyre with the clever Norwegian adventurer of his main source.
- vi. The challenger, who is the possessor of the sexual secret, reveals his guilt in the very test that he proposes (Grep's self-betrayal in the senna; King Antiochus' riddle, which discloses his incestuous liaison with his daughter: "Nam quod dixisti: scelere uehor, non est mentitus: te respice; . . ." [For when you said "I thrive on crime," you did not lie; look but at yourself.]) All in all, it is a very full parallel, and yet, apart from the beheading of Gunwara's suitors, it seems difficult to determine for any of these elements in the story of Ericus whether it has been influenced by the Historia or reached its present form in Saxo's source already.

The influence of the lays of Helgi Hundingsbani on Saxo's tale of Ericus is not subject to doubt. There are several clear echoes of the lays in the senna between Grep and the hero.¹⁹ One aspect of their influence which has not been considered is the change of setting for this senna, which Saxo displaced from Frotho's hall to the seashore. This change serves to adapt Ericus' arrival in Denmark to the anabasis pattern of the Helgi lays and of Beowulf which Dietrich Hofmann has outlined in connection with the schemes of Viking-Age narrative: a landing and an altercation with a coastguard, followed by a march inland towards a hall.²⁰

Notes

- 1 Quotations from Saxo are taken from the standard edition, Saxonis Gesta Danorum, eds. C. Knabe and Paul Herrmann, revised by Jørgen Olrik and H. Raeder (Copenhagen: Levin and Munksgaard, 1931). Translations are adapted from The Nine Books of the Danish History of Saxo Grammaticus in Two Volumes, trans. Oliver Elton (London: The Norroena Society, 1905).
- 2 Paul Herrmann, Erläuterungen zu den ersten neun Bücher der dänischen Geschichte des Saxo Grammaticus (Leipzig: Wilhelm Engelmann, 1922), pp. 319-40.
- 3 Herrmann, pp. 11, 338.
- 4 Herrmann, p. 337, points out that this segment is unlike the rest of the story in that it refers to no vernacular Scandinavian Realien.
- 5 Herrmann unwittingly registers this contradiction in his summary of the story; in p. 332 he refers to Colo's wife as the "in jeder Art von Wortstreit unerschöpfliche Götvara," and to Grep as one of the sons of Westmarus, the eldest of the three who bear that name. In p. 328, however, he mentions "Götvar, die Mutter der Vestmarssöhne" as taking part in a senna with Ericus. "Götvara" and "Götvar" do not correspond to two different names in the Latin text, where the termagant's name is always Götvara.
- 6 See Axel Olrik, Danmarks Heltedigtning II (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad, 1910), *passim*.
- 7 Though Herrmann hazards no opinion on the composition of Saxo's source, he treats "Die Zustände am Königshofe" in pp. 322-25 as part of an account of Frotho's youth, and separately from "Die Eiríks saga málsþaka."

- 8 Herrmann, p. 333.
- 9 Saxonis Gesta Danorum, p. 110, notes to lines 4 and 15.
- 10 Herrmann, p. 394, quotes instances of the use of this proverb in saga literature.
- 11 Herrmann, p. 395.
- 12 For various narrative contexts of the stumble that shows the importance of having a brother, see Samuel Singer, Sprichwörter des Mittelalters I, Von den Anfängen bis ins 12 Jahrhundert (Bern: Herbert Lange, 1944), pp. 20-22.
- 13 In V.i.11, a passage that belongs to segment 1, though in Saxo's text it comes after the Brautwerbung of 2, the barbarous treatment of foreign guests at the Danish court is said to include a trick of placing over the threshold of the hall a slippery goatskin, which, pulled from under the feet of those coming in, causes them to fall: "aliis haedinum incedentibus corium substernentes lubrici tergoris offendiculo per occultum funis raptum incautos subegere gressus; . . ." In V.iii.12, Ericus, who has already experienced this inhospitable practice, asks Frotho for a hide from which to make snowshoes for himself and his men; the king replies "He who fell on a hide deserves a hide" ["Corium meretur qui corio concidit"].
- 14 For the tradition of obscure speeches and veiled references in Scandinavian literature and folklore, see J. Svennung, "Eriks und Gotvaras Wortstreit bei Saxo," Arkiv för nordisk filologi, 56 (1942), 76-98, esp. 78.
- 15 Joseph C. Harris, "The King and the Iclander: A Study in the Short

Narrative Forms of Old Icelandic Prose," (diss.: Harvard, 1969).

16 Kilderne til Saksens oldhistorie I. Forsøg på en tvedeling af kilderne (Copenhagen: Otto Wroblewski, 1892), p. 14.

17 "Auðunar þáttur vestfirzka" in Vestfirðinga sögur, eds. Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, Íslensk fornrit, 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1946), 359-68.

18 I quote from the Historia Apollonii regis Tyri, ed. Alexander Riese, revised ed. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1893; rpt. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1973).

19 Herrmann, pp. 389-20.

20 Dietrich Hofmann, Nordisch-Englische Lehnbeziehungen der Wikingerzeit, Bibliotheca Arnarnaganaeana, 14 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1955), pp. 129-30.