

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON HEIÐARVÍGA SAGA

I. Introduction

Heiðarvíga Saga is neither one of the best known, the best written nor the most entertaining of the Icelandic family sagas, although for a number of reasons it must be considered among the most remarkable.

Scholars assume that it is the oldest of all the sagas, written before or around year 1200, and thus it marks the beginning of the most important genre of Icelandic medieval literature. Therefore the saga is assumed to be closer to tradition than any of the other sagas and by examining its treatment of subject-matter and style, which in some respects is in obvious conflict with the classical sagas, it seems possible to understand the art of oral story-telling as well as the growth of a literary genre in the making. Heiðarvíga Saga is thus better suited than any other of the Icelandic Sagas to shed some light on the origin, the nature and the development of the whole genre.

In spite of this literary position of Heiðarvíga Saga it has not received the corresponding attention one might expect. Ever since 1817 when P.E. Muller published the first summary of the saga, claiming that it was the oldest and most reliable of all the Icelandic sagas, scholars have not radically changed their views on it, in spite of all the debate in the present century on the origins of the Icelandic saga and the new basic literary theories which have come to light during the last decades. Scholars have more or less ignored it.

The reason is clear. The saga in question is very difficult to understand because of its poor preservation. Scholars have directed their attention more to the story of its survival, which is somewhat fantastic, than to the saga itself.

The background of Heiðarvíga Saga is a cruel and primitive agricultural society in which respect for the law is minimal. The subject-matter of the story is blood feuds and slayings. No other saga is as purely a saga of vengeance as this one, although there is no lack of slaying in the family sagas in general. Men are killed for little or no reason (except Viga-Styr), they engage in slaying in other districts, travel abroad to Norway and even go as far as Constantinople for revenge. At first there is a man-for-man revenge, while towards the end the blood feuds have entailed warfare between two

districts. People do not retain their honour without revenge. This moral is openly expressed in the saga.

When Þuríður, the personification of the imperative of revenge, eggs her sons on to avenge for their brother, Hallur, she says:

ok eru þér orðnir langt frá yðrum ættmönnum, er
mikils eru verðir, ok eigi mundu þeir þvilíka
skömm eða neisu setit háfa, sem þér hafit þolat
um hrið ok margra ámæli fyrir haft.

And Þórarinn, Barði's fosterfather who plans the slayings on the heath, says that he applies himself greatly to his "honour".

Usually the eddic heroic poems give accounts of vengeance, love and death. The hero takes vengeance for his father, love is the driving force of the story and finally leads to the hero's death. In Heiðarvíga Saga, however, there is no love, only vengeance and death. The moving force of the saga is blood vengeance and its author does not seem interested in anything but the achievement of this end; there are no digressions which are irrelevant to the underlying principle of the work: a killing for a killing. Heiðarvíga Saga is more a saga of action than of the characters who perform it.

Now the question arises: Has the author of Heiðarvíga Saga a message to convey to his audience or readers? Was his sole purpose the desire to entertain with accounts of heroes and their heroic deeds? Every scholar so far has given an affirmative answer to this question by interpreting the saga in a literal sense (*sensus literalis*).

This approach is somewhat surprising since some scholars seem in no doubt whatsoever that the author belonged to the clerical profession. Björn M. Ólsen claims that the cleric "obviously enjoyed describing the disputes and killings of chieftains" and Sigurður Nordal asserts that the priest was affiliated to the Monastery of Þingeyri (a monk?).

I believe that on a close examination of the saga, some obvious indications can be detected which show that the author was not indifferent to the destructive murders and blood vengeance that he relates; that his intention was something beyond pure entertainment and that the saga contains a deeper understanding intended for people to learn a lesson from.

II. Plot

Heiðarvíga Saga falls into two almost equally long parts. The hero of the first part is Víga-Styr, Þarði Guðmundarson the hero of the second one. The main event of the saga is the slaying on the heath, (which lends name to the saga), where men from the South and the North engage in fighting on a heath in the beginning of the 11th century. At the division between the two parts the story is joined only by a very weak thread, Víga-Styr having disappeared from the scene, Barði taking over and the author assuming a different point-of view. Revenge is the uniting element between the two sections.

Heiðarvíga Saga begins, as mentioned earlier, with Víga-Styr reciting a strophe where he boasts of having killed 33 men (or 36). Styr is a man of injustice ("ójafnaðarmaður"), killing without making compensation for anyone. Finally he kills

Þórhalli, a fine farmer who is about to move to another district because of Styr's presumption and violence. Gestur, Þórhalli's son avenges his father.

Gestur leaves the country but is followed by Þorsteinn, Víga-Styr's son, who wants to have his revenge. In Norway Þorsteinn twice tries to kill Gestur; the first time he is saved from shipwreck by Gestur; the second time Þorsteinn attacks Gestur and wounds him, while Gestur saves him from being executed for the attempt. Gestur then travels to Constantinople in order to escape from Þorsteinn and joins a company of the Varangian Guards. Þorsteinn pursues him there, wounding him once more. The Varangians then wanted to execute him without delay in accordance with their rules, but on Gestur's entreaty they pardoned him, after receiving half of Gestur's money in return for granting Þorsteinn his life. At this point the case was fully settled between them, Gestur providing Þorsteinn with the means to travel homewards. Gestur, however, never returned to the Nordic countries.

As the revenge came to nothing, Snorri Goði, Víga-Styr's son-in-law went southwards to Borgarfjörður and killed one Þorsteinn Gíslason (and a young son of his) who had assisted Gestur in some way. These killings were settled at the Alþingi through compensation and thus the story could have been brought to an end.

At this point, however, two brothers are introduced, the sons of Hárekur and relatives of Þorsteinn Gíslason. In Norway they come across Kolskeggur, an attendant of Snorri Goði's, and make an attempt on his life. He manages to escape and in his distress turns to Hallur Guðmundsson, who is there on a trading journey, asking him for assistance. Hallur provides him with a ship and some money, enabling Kolskeggur to get to England. The sons of Hárekur, however, turn their vengeance on Hallur and murder him in a forest clearing.

Barði, Hallur's brother, wants to avenge his brother, but there is the snag that the sons of Hárekur were lost at sea. On the advice of his fosterfather, Þórarinn of Lækjamót, he invents charges against Gísli Þorgautsson, a relative of the sons of Hárekur, who was in no way associated with the murder of Hallur. Barði kills Gísli as he is cutting grass at his farm. Barði manages to escape with his followers while the Southerners pursue them up on the heath. A fight ensues and men are killed from both parties.

After the slaying on the heath the case is settled at the Alþingi and the story concludes with an account of Barði's subsequent career and death.

III. Some Crucial Places and Points

The author does not openly express what is on his mind. It must be deduced from a number of separate factors, such as characters and actions, point-of-view, coherence and unity. In the following remarks only a few of these aspects will be examined and in all essential points they should reveal the intentions of the author. These aspects are: 1) The King's judgement, 2) Þuríður's stones and strophe, 3) Víga-Styr and 4) The Sun from the East. To begin with I will confine myself to the vellum pages of the saga.

1. The King's Judgement.

A. Forneskja

Following the slaying on the heath Barði travels to meet Saint Ólafur, King of Norway, asking him to receive himself and his followers as winter guests. Strangely enough the King refuses. In the words of the saga:

Óláfr konungr inn helgi réð þá fyrir Nóregi; var hann í kaupbænum. Barði gengr fyrir konung ok hans förunautar, kvöddu konung vel, sem sæmði, - "ok er á þá leið, herra," segir Barði, "at vér vildim vera vetrgestir þínir." Konungr svarar á þá leið: "Vér höfum frétt til þín, Barði," segir hann, "at þú ert ættstórr maðr ok mikill fyrir þér, ok þér eruð vaskligir menn ok hitt í nökkur stórræði ok rekit harma yðvarra ok verit þó lengi fyrir, ok þó hafi þér nökkut forneskju ok þess konar átrúnað, sem oss er óskaptíðr, ok fyrir þá sök, at vér höfum þat svá mjök frá oss skilit, þá vilju vér eigi taka með yðr. En þó skulu vér vera vinir yðrir, Barði," segir hann, "ok mun nökkut mikilligt fyrir yðr liggja. En þat kann opt verða, er menn hitta í slíka hluti, ok verðr svá mikit rið at, ef nökkut verðr við blandit forneskju, at menn trúa á þat of mjök."⁶

The meaning of Saint Ólafur's words has eluded scholars, as a footnote to the text in Íslensk fornrit clearly shows. The editors rightly consider the word "forneskja" as the key word, but they take it as meaning "fjölkyngi" (witchcraft) and that Saint Ólafur does not wish to receive Barði because he has been associated with witchcraft. The following account of Barði's flight on horseback from the slayings on the heath is used as evidence:

Nú riðr Illugi eptir þeim með hundrað manna, ok nú lýstr á mjörkva miklum ok verða nú eptir at hverfa.

However, this explanation is not valid. A similar account occurs of Snorri Goði's ride to Borgarfjörður.⁸ Tales of this kind originate in the environment and weather in Iceland and there are many parallels to be found in contemporary Icelandic sagas. The essential point is that neither Barði nor Snorri Goði make use of witchcraft in the sagas.

The word "forneskja" can have three different meanings:

- 1) ancient times
- 2) heathendom; tradition and practices of heathen origin (cf. "fremja forneskju", to commit heathen practice).
- 3) witchcraft, black magic.

In the present context meaning 2) is the one to prefer as will now be substantiated.

When King Ólafur Haraldsson is introduced in the story he is referred to as "inn helgi" or "Saint". Of course it can be claimed that the cognomen merely distinguishes him from King Ólafur Tryggvason, but this could have been achieved by using the cognomen "hinn digri" or "the Fat", which is often used in his sagas. One may assume that the author is emphasizing King Ólafur's sainthood, as he adds that Barði and his companions greeted the king "vel, sem sæmði" (with respect, as was

befitting). Barði is confronted with a saint and it is in this light that Saint Ólafur's words should be understood.

It is worth paying attention to Saint Ólafur's words: "at vér höfum þat (i.e. forneskja) svá mjök frá oss skiliit, þá vilju vér eigi taka með yðr" (that we have so greatly parted from such things (i.e. heathen practice) that we do not want to receive you).

There are no sources indicating Ólafur's practising witchcraft in his earlier years, while there do exist accounts telling us that in his youth he spent his time in Viking expeditions, but later set his mind on the extirpation of heathendom and ancient customs and on the establishment of Christian law and commandments. Saint Ólafur does not wish to receive men who believe in their own might and main and commit deeds in the heathen tradition and thus disregard God's commandments.

Ólafur uses the expression that Barði had "hitt í nökkur stórræði" and Barði's mother, Þuríður, says she wants to join her sons on their commission to seek vengeance for Hallur:

Því em ek í ferðina komin, at mik vættir, at síðr mun fyrir farask nökkur stórræði.

It is therefore a question beyond any doubt that the word "stórræði" in both these instances is used to express "an killing of vengeance."

As far as I know scholars have not considered the possibility of Fóstbræðra Saga having made use of Heiðarvíga Saga as a source, yet I think it has, even though one cannot point to similarities of phrasing. The two sagas, however, shed light on each other, the former beginning with these words:

Á dögum ins helga Ólafs konungs...ok váru þeir allir mest virðir af guði, er konungi líkaði best við.

In this instance we have the saint, King Ólafur, as in Heiðarvíga Saga, but there are other and weightier arguments. Fóstbræðra Saga contains the following account of the brothers in arms Þorgeir Hávarsson and Þormóður Bersason, when they enter brotherhood:

Meir hugðu þeir jafnan at fremð þessa heims lífs en at dýrð annars heims fagnaðar. Því tóku þeir þat ráð með fastmælum, at sá þeira skyldi hefna annars, er lengr lifði. En þó at þá væri menn kristnir kallaðir, þá var þó í þann tíð ung kristni ok mjök vangör, svá at margir gneistar heiðninnar váru þó þá eptir ok í óvenju lagðir.

From this passage it is clear that in Fóstbræðra Saga blood vengeance is "gneistar heiðninnar" (the sparkles of heathendom, i.e. of "forneskja") and the same is true of Heiðarvíga Saga.

In all the Icelandic sagas it is an exception that Saint Ólafur does not take a hero of Barði's stature under his protection. It may be mentioned here that on his return from Greenland, after having slain a number of men to avenge for his sworn fosterbrother who also was one of the King's men, Þormóður Bersason was far from well received by Saint Ólafur. It seems to me that this incident in Fóstbræðra Saga is reminiscent of Heiðarvíga Saga, although I will not elaborate on that further at present.

B. Rið

Saint Ólafur says to Barði:

Þat kann opt verða, er menn hitta í slíka hluti
(þ.e. stórræði) ok verðr svá mikit rið at, ef
nökkut verðr við blandit forneskju....

The noun "rið" means "away, swing, throw, fall" ¹² and the phrase "verðr svá mikit rið at" then means "and then there is such swaying (i.e. too much killing)." Saint Ólafur is in other words implying that Barði has committed too many killings of vengeance in the tradition of heathen people ("blandit forneskju"). That is the reason why Saint Ólafur does not want to receive Barði.

Towards the end of the saga there is an interesting passage describing Barði's divorce from his wife, Auður, daughter of Snorri Goði:

Svá bar til einn morgin, er þau váru úti í skemmu bæði, at Barði vildi sofa, en hon vildi vekja hann ok tekr eitt hægendi lítit ok kastar í andlit honum, svá sem með glensí; hánn kastaði braut, ok ferr svá nökkurum sinnum; ok eitt sinn kastar hann til hennar og lætr fylgja höndina; hon reiðisk við ok hefir fengit einn stein ok kastar til hans. Ok um daginn eptir drykkju stendr Barði (upp) ok nefnir sér vátta ok segir skilit við Auði ok segir, at hann vill eigi af henni ofríki taka né öðrum mönnum; ekki tjár orðum við at koma, svá er þetta fast sett.

This exchange between the couple is a case of rið (i.e. a throw) "blandit forneskju" as Saint Ólafur alluded to. It starts in Auður's innocent frolick and throwing of cushions, followed by a slap on her cheek by Barði and ending in Auður's throwing of stone.

This little episode of a married couple's bedroom quarrel is without parallel in the Icelandic sagas and at the same time it reflects the moral of the saga as if in miniature. It is therefore a key episode.

Barði is a man of importance, he is brave and strong and in the slayings on the heath and elsewhere his performance reveals clearly that he has no equals in arms, yet at the same time he seems deprived of any qualities but violence of temper and lack of restraint. Björn M. Ólsen speaks of Barði's "stífni og einþikni" (stiff-neckedness and stubbornness) in his wife's bed and he has also pointed out that Barði is "ósjálftæður og viljalaus leiksoppur" (a weak and will-less tool) in the hands of Þórarinn of Lækjamót, in the preparation and execution of the slayings on the heath.

There is also a remarkable description in the saga of Barði at a peace meeting at Alþingi held just after the heath slayings. He challenges and threatens his enemies (and the assembly itself) with a brandished sword that had been broken when he slew their companions and relatives on the heath. ¹⁴

This conduct of Barði's is reminiscent of his brandishing of swords at the beginning of the fight on the heath. ¹⁵ Barði is a warrior both in war and peace and his spirit of vengeance or his violence usually lead to unhappiness in both minor things and more important ones, unless men of peace intercept the course of events (cf. Eiður Skeggjason at Alþingi). ¹⁶

Barði means "one who strikes" (and "one who is stricken"), a "warrior". Barði strikes his wife for little offence. I assume

that the name is thus symbolic and the name Auður similarly has a symbolic significance, meaning "fortune, happiness". Barði strikes a blow at his own fortune.

In Reykðala Saga there is an episode about Steingrímur at Kroppur who was struck by a sheep's head hitting his neck during a horse fight, an incident embodying the following predication: You are a sheep. Such a disgrace resulted in manslaughter.¹⁷ By analogy when Auður strikes at Barði with a stone her message might possibly be: "You are a stone" and Barði does not think twice and divorces his wife.

As cited above Saint Ólafur says to Barði: "Ok mun nökkut mikilligt fyrir yör liggja" (some great things may be in store for you). The saint can hardly be referring to anything but Barði's travel to Constantinople, where he joined the Varangian Guard, defended the realm of the king and ended his life:

Ok þar fell Barði við góðan orðstír, ok hafði
dregilega neytt sinna vápna til dauða.

It can hardly be a coincidence that both Gestur and Barði travel to Constantinople which in the 12th and 13th centuries was one of the major destinations of pilgrims on their way to the Holy Land. Gestur achieves atonement for the murder of Víga-Styr by forgiving Þorsteinn three times, while Barði seems to atone for himself by falling in battle with the pagans, although these are not directly mentioned in the saga.

Saint Ólafur's prediction had come true.

2. Þuríður's Stones and Strophe

A famous passage in Heiðarvíga Saga is an episode describing Þuríður as she is egging her sons on to take vengeance for her son Hallur, and distributing beef and stones on their plates. So the story goes:

Þeir spurðu, hvat þat skyldi merkja. Hon svarar:
Melt hafi þér þat bræðr, er eigi er venna til en
steina þessa, er þér hafit eigi þorat at hefna
Halls, bróður yðvars.

As the name "Hallur" means "stone", there is very probably a pun here, in that Þuríður challenges her sons by serving "Hallur" on their plates.²⁰

Þuríður is of a noble family, yet the author refers to her in curiously sarcastic words. When she deals out food to her sons, her son Steingrímur says
ok er á þessu mikit vanstilli, ok ertu nær
óvitandi vits.

Then the story tells of her walking "útan ok innar eptir gólfinu eiskrandi" (up and down the floor shrieking), i.e. in her fury, and her behaviour certainly does not resemble that of her mother, Þorgerður, in Laxdæla Saga as she incited her sons to take vengeance for Kjartan Ólafsson. Þuríður's uncontrolled fury is reminiscent of Barði. Neither one has any restraint. A strophe is put into Þuríður's mouth in which she tells Barði that he will be deemed a disgrace to the family unless he is ready to slay men (for revenge).

There are 17 stanzas in the Heiðarvíga Saga, in addition to a number of stanzas that were lost because of poor preservation. As usual scholars do not agree whether or not these strophes were actually composed by the characters they have been

attributed to in the saga. Björn M. Ólsen assumed that they were probably attributed to the right sources²¹, while Sigurður Nordal divided them into two different parts. On one hand, he claimed, there were the strophes of pure fiction, composed by authors of later origin, as some of them could neither have been composed under the circumstances described in the saga nor by the characters they are attributed to, (such as Swedish berserks or a ghost). In addition some of them, he believed, had been adapted in imitation of certain stanzas by some well-known skalds. The second part consisted of strophes considerably older than the 2nd saga and were thus possibly attributed to the right sources.

Einar Ólafur Sveinsson rejected this interesting conclusion, pointing out that similarities of phraseology in skaldic poetry are so common that they cannot be considered conclusive evidence.²³ Björn Sigfússon took a middle position in assuming some of the strophes to be composed in the 12th century. Therefore the author had been in good faith and there was no reason to believe that he himself had composed the strophes for his saga.²⁴

This debate will hardly be settled in a conclusive manner once and for all. As for myself, I tend to favour Sigurður Nordal's opinion to the effect that the author may be responsible for a larger share of the poetry than has hitherto been assumed.

Sigurður Nordal was particularly suspicious of the strophe attributed to Þuríður because it contains a kenning for gold, lauðrhyrr, which is also found in a strophe by Þindur Hallkelsson in the same saga (strophe no. 13) and nowhere else in Old Icelandic literature. Þindur, Nordal claimed, was an authentic court poet who could not have been familiar with Þuríður's strophe.

This hypothesis by Sigurður Nordal would be in accordance with my idea that Þuríður's character and her role in the saga is the creation of the author himself.

3. Víga-Styr

When discussing Víga-Styr it must be kept in mind that we are relying on Jón Ólafsson's version. Sigurður Nordal has this to say on Víga-Styr:

Þó að Styr sé lýst sem ójafnaðarmanni miklum, leynir sér ekki aðdáunin fyrir hreysti hans og höfðingsskap. (Although Víga-Styr is described as a man of great injustice, the author cannot hide his admiration for his physical strength and generosity).²⁵

This opinion can hardly be substantiated. Víga-Styr does not live up to the heroic ideal of eddic poetry where the hero challenges death by fighting all by himself against overwhelming odds and dying for the sake of his honour, thus becoming a model for others. On the contrary, among his "feats" are the slaying of elderly men whom he attacks for little or no offence, usually outnumbering his victims as they lie all alone in bed (Þorbjörn kjálki) or are travelling with their pack-horses (Þórhalli). In addition he brutally kills defenceless men who slip and fall on a wet ox-bide (Halli berserkur) or in a wet bog (Einar).

Þorbjörn kjálki and Þórhalli are, by contrast, exactly the characters who fall as they are alone, without any fear: "Þorbjörn kvezk hvárki mundu flýja né friðar beiðask" - and Þórhalli has a chance of escaping but he says to his labourer who runs for his life that he (i.e. Þórhalli):

aldri skulu svá hræddr, at hann renni undan mönnum þó fleiri sé, ok bindi svá með hræzlu sakar at sjálfum sér; víti hann eigi heldr, at hann hafi gört þær sakar við Styr at þess sé verðar, at hann leiti eptir bana sínum.²⁷

Furthermore the author of Heiðarvíga Saga treats Víga-Styr so badly that he makes him stay away from the actual fighting until Þorbjörn and Þórhalli start losing ground due to weariness from fighting and only then does he seize his weapons. Styr does not place himself in any danger, he does not fight, he kills. He disregards the law and the customs of society and he resembles Þorgeir Hávarsson of Fóstbræðra Saga in coming to his fall through his own pride and violence of temper (cf. hybrid), and in keeping with this he is slain by Gestur, a physically weak youngster who had never even carried arms. Þorbjörn kjálki and Þórhalli are the true heroes while Víga-Styr is the opposite, an antihero. He is a pure killer, an evil spirit rather than a human being, who even after his death causes the death of a young girl, Guðrífur. Styr means "stir, battle, warfare" and his name is presumably symbolic, in the same manner as that of Barði.

4. The Sun from the East

On the morning when Snorri Goði intends to ride southwards to Borgarfjörður in order to avenge for Víga-Styr he goes into the church and meets his son Guðlaugur who "hefir á þenum verit eptir venju sinni" (had been praying as was his habit". He is described as "siðprúðr ok bænrekinn ok hélt vel trú gína" (well-mannered and devout and observed his religion well).²⁸

Snorri asks Guðlaugur to join him and his brothers on their journey, but Guðlaugur begs to be excused and Snorri presses the issue no further. Snorri is quoted describing Guðlaugur as "rauðr sem blóð at sjá í andliti, ok hafi sér svá sem nökkur ógn af staðit" (red as blood in his face and it had caused him quite some fear." A probable explanation is that Guðlaugur's colour and expression is seen as a sign of God's anger at the atrocities that Snorra is about to commit.²⁹ Guðlaugur later travelled to England where he entered a monastery.

The adoption of Christianity is described in Heiðarvíga Saga in the following way:

Í þann tíma gerðusk þau góð tíðendi á landi hér, at forn-trú var niðr lögð, en réttir siðir upp teknir.³⁰

And when Snorri Goði enters church finding Guðlaugur there, it says in the saga: "skein þá sól úr austri" (the Sun shone from the east). These words should not be taken only literally, as sun also signifies "God", a symbol of the new religion.³¹

There are no other instances in the sagas of someone refusing to avenge for his maternal grandfather as Guðlaugur does, and this episode brings Saint Ólafur to mind as he refuses to receive Barði as his guest for the winter, because he had been

too observant of the heathen traditions or "fórneskja." A man who observes his Christianity and abides by God's commands as Guðlaugur does, does not take part in killings and a saint of King Ólafur's stature does not condone them.

IV Towards a Conclusion

In these observations only a few points have been discussed briefly. I hope to treat this subject in more detail before long. What emerges, however, is quite obvious so that the investigation is leading to conclusions that might be put in the following manner:

The author of Heiðarvíga Saga must have been a priest who views his age with horror, an age where men slay one another for their earthly honour and neither respect the law of God nor society. He considers the root of the killings to be the imperative of revenge which is still the determinant factor in human conduct in spite of the change of religion.

The author's intention is to demonstrate the wrong values of the former heroic ideal by showing that revenge only leads to new revenge and that this "fórneskja" must give way to a Christian spirit of reconciliation so that moderation, forgiveness and peace will replace violence, revenge and warfare. This is the unspoken message of the saga (sensus spiritualis) and at the same time the lesson to be learned from it.

Heiðarvíga Saga does not glorify the ancient heroic spirit, yet to all intents and purposes it assumes the garb of the heroic saga with certain crude characteristics intended to satirize and counteract its message which advocates revenge as its central force.

The author's aim is therefore the aim of the satire, while the method and the form is, in all essential points, the method of the travesty, such as describing atrocities as heroic deeds.

To my mind, therefore, Heiðarvíga Saga is a novel rather than an objective account of old events as has been the general belief to date.

References

1. Heiðarvíga Saga has only been preserved in one vellum manuscript from the year 1300 (Sth. 18, 4to), its first section (almost half the saga in 12 vellum pages) being lost in a fire in Copenhagen in 1728. However, before the fire Jón Ólafsson, Árni Magnússon's secretary, had copied this part of the saga, a copy which was burnt as well. He had memorized the story (its subject-matter and to some extent its style) and wrote it down from memory with the help of a list of rare words and phrases that he had compiled while reading the manuscript ("Archaismi et loqvendi modi rariorea"). It is generally agreed that this version by Jón Ólafsson is remarkably reliable. In addition to this, one page from the second section of the book had been cut away before it was brought to Sweden, a page that was rediscovered in 1951. (See Jón Helgason, Árbók Landsbókassafnsins 1950-51, pp 127-35). - The Saga of Gunnlaug Serpent-tongue and Three Other Sagas. Perg. 4:0 NR 18, Royal Library Stockholm. Vol XVI. Rosenkilde and Bagger. Copenhagen 1986, Ed. by Bjarni Einarsson. Concerning the preservation and the saga in general see also: Kr. Kaalund, Heiðarvíga saga, København 1904. - Jón Helgason, Jón Ólafsson frá Grunnavík, Kaupmannahöfn 1926 (Safn Fræðafjelagsins V), pp. 42-44. - Björn M. Ólsen, Um Íslendingasögur, Reykjavík 1937-39 (Safn til sögu Íslands VI), pp. 178-215. - Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, Borgfirðinga sögur, Reykjavík 1938 (Íslensk fornrit III; quotations are from this edition, referred to as ÍF). - Theodore M. Andersson, The Icelandic Family Saga (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1967.) pp. 142-52. - Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, "Heimild um Heiðarvíga sögu." Gripla III (Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, Reykjavík 1979), pp. 85-95.
2. ÍF III, p. 277.
3. ÍF III, p. 280.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 214
5. ÍF III, p. xxxvi.
6. ÍF III, p. 322.
7. ÍF III, p. 309.
8. ÍF III, p. 247.
9. Cf. Ólafs saga hin helga (ed. Oscar A. Johnsen, Kristiania 1922), Ch. 8-18. - Cf. also the words of Sigurður, Saint Ólafur's stepfather: "Því at þá er þú vart lítt af barnaaldri kominn, vartu þegar fullr af kappi ok ójafnaði í öllu er þú máttir." Heimskringla II (ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ÍF XXVII. Reykjavík 1945), p. 45.
10. ÍF III, p. 279
11. See Vestfirðinga sögur (Ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson. ÍF VI. Reykjavík 1943) p. 125. - See also Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar (ed. Guðni Jónsson. ÍF VII. Reykjavík 1936), p. 245.
12. "Bevægelse, hvori den Ting er, den eviges eller som vækler, balancerer saaledes, at den ene Yderlighed let kan faa Overvægten" (Fritzner).
13. *Ibid.* p. 206
14. ÍF III, p. 317 (Photostat ed.).
15. ÍF III. p. 312.

16. ÍF III, p. 317 (Photostat ed.).
17. Reykðala saga ok Víga-Skútu (ed. Björn Sigfússon. ÍF X. Reykjavík 1940), Ch. 12. - Cf. Davíð Erlingsson, "Sauðarhauoar, hrafnar, melrakkj og hánefur". Höggvínhæla (gerð Hallfreði Erni Eiríkssyni fimmtugum 28. des. 1982). Reykjavík (1982), pp. 12-23.
18. ÍF III, p. 325.
19. ÍF III, p. 277.
20. There is a parallel account in the sagas of Saint Ólafur (Hrútur as a name and "hrútur" for "slátur" - "slaughtered meat". See ibid. (1922), Ch. 85 and Hkr. II (ÍF XXVII), pp. 363-64. - See also Joaquín Martínez-Pizarro, "The Three Meals in Heiðarvíga saga: Repetitional and Functional Diversity". Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature (ed. by J. Lindow, L. Lönnroth, G. Wolfgang Weber. Odense University Press 1986), pp. 220-34.
21. Ibid. p. 211.
22. ÍF III, p. cxliii.
23. See Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Ritunartími Íslendingasagna (Reykjavík 1965), p. 100.
24. See Kulturhistorisk lexikon för nordisk medeltid. Malmö 1961. ("Heiðarvíga saga").
25. ÍF III, p. cxxviii.
26. ÍF III, p. 220.
27. ÍF III, p. 229.
28. ÍF III, p. 246.
29. In Ch. 18 of the Saga of Saint Ólafur (1922) where it says that he gave up warfare a prophetic says of him: "Ok gagnstaðrlegr er várr kraptr. Ógn er mikil yfir honum ok birting ok ljós."
30. ÍF III, p. 230.
31. In the sagas of Saint Ólafur there are accounts of his Christian mission in the Uplands of Norway. Saint Ólafur says to Dala-Guðbrandur and the farmers: "Ok lítið þér nú til ok séð í austr, þar ferr nú guð várr með ljósi miklu." Ólafs saga hins helga (1922), Ch. 38. - Hkr. II (ÍF XXVII), p. 189.
32. For comparison see Carl J. Clover, "Hábarðsljóð as Generic Farce", Scandinavian Studies, 51 (1979), pp. 124-45.