

HEIMSKRINGLA, EGILS SAGA, AND THE DAUGHTER OF EIRÍKR BLOÐÓX

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The main theme of my presentation is that the literary work Heimskringla - or more precisely, the ms. Kringla, and its attribution to Snorri Sturluson - have had an undue influence on saga studies. Saga scholars have shown a tendency to use Hkr as their point of departure or comparison, forgetting or ignoring the other works of historical writing which preceded and followed it. When we examine, not Heimskringla itself, but accounts that pre-date it or contain related material, we obtain not only a more nuanced picture of the Heimskringla author's methods but also a more accurate idea of the sources and development of historical writing in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In the following, I hope to illustrate these points in the course of a re-examination of the relationship between Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar and Heimskringla, and the attribution of both these works to Snorri Sturluson. (1) The first part of the paper, regarding the relationship between ES and Hkr, is a response to some recent work on the subject; the second part, concerning which medieval author/compiler deserves credit for what, is far more speculative, and is intended encourage re-thinking of the traditional attribution rather than to arrive at a firm conclusion.

The hypothesis that Snorri Sturluson was the author of both Egils saga (henceforth ES) and Heimskringla (Hkr) was first made by Grundtvig in 1818, and was kept alive by Guðbrandur Vigfússon; the first scholar to examine the subject seriously was Björn M. Olsen in 1904, and it received the stamp of approval of Sigurður Nordal who edited the saga for the series Íslensk fornrit. (2) With common authorship generally accepted, the next question to be answered was the order in which the two works were composed. It was necessary to account for the fact that although the two compositions had many passages in common, there were differences of detail that made it difficult to derive one from the other; further, the two works differ considerably in their attitude towards the kings of Norway, which is highly laudatory in Hkr, the opposite in ES.

The most recent detailed studies of these questions are those of Jónas Kristjánsson (1977) and Melissa Berman. Their articles prove conclusively that it is impossible to derive either ES or Hkr directly from the other; instead, both must depend on a common source, also used in the Þáttur of Hálfdan svarti and Haraldr hárfagri found in Flateyjarbók (henceforth Flat) I pp. 561-76. This conclusion had been anticipated by Gustav. A. Gjessing as early as 1873; Gjessing considered the lost work to be Ari Þorgilsson's konunga evi. (3)

Where Berman and Jónas Kristjánsson differ from previous scholarship is their view of the relative chronology of ES and Hkr. The general consensus has been that ES was the earlier work, Snorri having revised some of his conclusions or assumptions concerning the Norwegian kings as he progressed in the study of the scaldic verse which pertained to them and which he incorporated in Hkr. Jónas Kristjánsson, followed tentatively by Berman, argues that ES is the later

work, written when a disillusioned Snorri returned to Iceland in 1239. He bases his argument on the fact that ES clearly makes use of a work like Hkr, while Hkr contains nothing relevant to Egill's family.

This argument loses force in view of the evidence (adduced by Jónas Kristjánsson himself) that ES does not make use of Hkr, but a common source; the differences in material included in the two works, as well as the differences in attitude towards the kings of Norway, can be explained by the differing aims and interests of the author(s). As Jónas Kristjánsson points out, Hkr is, after all, a history of the kings of Norway, written for a Norwegian audience, while ES was composed for an Icelandic one. This in itself could account for the contrasting representations of Norwegian kings.

Opinions concerning the probable attitude of an author at different stages in his career must remain hypothetical; as has recently been pointed out by Kolbrún Haraldsdóttir, textual comparison can provide much more secure evidence for textual relationships. I would like to adduce additional evidence that Hkr appears to revise the course of events as described in ES, which must therefore be earlier. My example does not concern a comparison of parallel passages like those made by Gjessing, Jónas Kristjánsson and Kolbrún Haraldsdóttir, but rather the chronology of the visit(s) of Eiríkr blóðox to the Orkney Islands and the dating of the marriage of his daughter, Ragnhildr, to the son of the earl of Orkney.

Let me first summarize the accounts of Eiríkr's career after his departure from Norway, starting with the synoptic histories, all of which represent an earlier stage of historical writing than Hkr.

Theodricus monachus (Theod), known to have used Icelandic traditions, has Eiríkr sail to England, where he dies almost immediately. Theodricus is aware that Haraldr gráfeldr was brought up by King Haraldr Gormsson of Denmark (p. 11)

Historia Norvegiae (HN), in which Gunnhildr is daughter of King Gorm of Denmark, has Eiríkr flee to England where he is received and baptized by King Athelstan and put in charge of Northumbria. When the Northumbrians will suffer him no longer, he dies on viking expedition in Spain. Gunnhildr then takes her children to her brother in Denmark (pp. 105-6).

Agrip, which has a close textual relationship to both Theod and HN and used by the authors of Hkr and Fagr, has Eiríkr flee "first to Denmark ('til Danmarkar fyrst')" in the section where it discusses the rule of his brother, King Hákon (p. 8). After following Hákon's career (including his fights with Eiríkr's son) to its end, there is a flashback which states that "when he fled the land" Eiríkr went west to England (p. 12). Self-contradiction of this sort is typical of Agrip, which appears to awkwardly combine several sources. With regard to the first statement, it would certainly make sense for Eiríkr to and visit his wife's connections in Denmark. However I cannot help noting the possibility that in medieval script, perhaps unclear and full of abbreviations, "Danmarkar" and "Orkneyja" (see below) might not look too dissimilar. The second passage is clearly related to the corresponding section of HN; missing is the reference to Eiríkr's baptism, added the information that Gunnhildr

remained in Denmark with her sons until they were or mature age "rosknir menn mjök sva at aldri". In all other essentials (including Eiríkr's death in Spain) it resembles HN so closely that they must be derived from a common source.

The texts described above are interested primarily in the rulers of Norway, not in distant branches of their families; all that was important to them was the fact that Eiríkr went to England and died in the west. There existed, however, genealogical lore which recorded the fact that Eiríkr blóðöx and Gunnhildr had a daughter, who had married a son of the earl of Orkney. Any account of Eiríkr's activities which aimed to be comprehensive would have to incorporate this marriage at some point, and even a text which is not explicitly concerned with him makes passing reference to the event.

The text is the Separate Saga of St. Óláfr, which differs from the traditions which send Eiríkr from Norway straight to England. In Seps he goes first to the Orkneys and then attacks England until Athelstan offers him Northumberland and himself as a mediator between Eiríkr and his foster-son, Hákon. We are then told that Eiríkr fell on a viking expedition in the west ("i vestrvíking") and their children are listed, first their sons, and then their daughter, Ragnhildr, who married Jarl Arnfinnr, son of Jarl Þorfinnr (pp. 17-18).

This model is also used in Egils saga, which informs us that Ragnhildr was married in Orkney before Eiríkr went harrying, first in Scotland and then in England (p. 176). Athelstan moves against him, but eventually an arrangement is reached whereby Eiríkr is to rule Northumberland and defend it from the Scots and Irish. Egill Skalla-Grímsson avoids the Orkneys, which he believed to be under Eiríkr's power, but cannot escape Eiríkr in York. After his adventure there he learns that Eiríkr has been slain on a viking expedition in the west (vestrvíking), and that Gunnhildr and her sons are in Denmark (p. 211).

ES mentions Ragnhildr's marriage at what must have seemed the logical point, the only time when Eiríkr was in the Orkneys. The saga also contains the information that Haraldr gráfeldr was born in the year that Haraldr hárfagri appointed Eiríkr his successor (p. 163). The older Haraldr dies three years later (p. 164), and Eiríkr rules one year after that before Hákon comes from England (p. 175). He rules for an additional winter along with Hákon, then flees to England. From this information we can calculate that Haraldr gráfeldr was five years old when his father became king at York. (4)

Fagrskinna's initial description of Eiríkr and his family may well be related to the passage in Ágrip (cf. pp. 7, 74). Both make Gunnhildr daughter of Ózurr lafskegg north in Halogaland. However, in addition to the couple's sons, Fagr mentions Ragnhildr, "who married in the Orkneys" (p. 74). In a later passage (p. 77, again quite similar to Ágrip) we are told that Eiríkr went to England and was received by Athelstan - his baptism is also mentioned, as in HN. Eiríkr's harrying activity in the British Isles is described in more detail than is found in Ágrip. Some of this information is paralleled in Hkr, and presumably reflects the greater usage of scaldic verse in these works. Inserted abruptly and without introduction of any sort is the statement that "Þeir eru synir Torf-Einars jarls Arnkell, Erlendr, Þorfinnr hausakljúfr. Sonr Þorfinns, Hávarör, fekk Ragnhildar, dóttur Eiríks konungs" (p. 77). Since both the preceding and follow-

ing sentences describe the activities of Eiríkr blóðox, we must assume either that a description of Eiríkr's expedition to the Orkneys (which would introduce the earl's family) has been omitted, or that the sentence just quoted has been interpolated. It is loosely connected with the following passage, which informs us that that one summer, Eiríkr harried Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and then England, Athelstan being dead and his brother Edmund having acceded to the throne. His defeat and death, along with Arnkell and Erlendr, sons of the Orkney jarl, are related, and the erfidrápa commissioned by Gunnhildr is quoted. After Eiríkr's death, Gunnhildr departed for Denmark with her sons, and received sanctuary from Haraldr Gormsson, who took Haraldr, the son of Eiríkr, as a fosterling and kept him at court while his older brothers went harrying. (5) It is not until Hákon Aðalsteinnfóstri has ruled for 20 years that they appear to challenge his claim to the throne (pp. 81-81).

Before examining Hkr's text, let us assess the evidence so far. The earliest texts (Theod, HN, Ágrip; all of Norwegian provenance) send Eiríkr blóðox straight to England (via Denmark in Ágrip). The only Norwegian work which is aware of the existence and Orkney marriage of Ragnhildr Eiríksdóttir is Fagrskinna, in which the genealogical material appears in isolation from any narrative which might date it, and looks rather like an interpolation. In all these texts Gunnhildr is the leading figure, and some, at least, of her sons grow up at the Danish court (Theod does not mention this). It may be noted in passing that in these texts Eiríkr is received by Athelstan either with honor (Theod, HN) or as a suppliant (Ágrip, Fagr) rather than a viking. The Icelandic texts, SepS and ES - which are either unaware of or uninterested in the fate of Gunnhildr and her sons - have Eiríkr marry off his daughter in the Orkneys, presumably on the one occasion he was known to be there, en route to a harrying expedition in England. Athelstan's offer of Northumbria is a response to aggression rather than a generous offer to an exile.

Hkr presents a different scenario. Here again, Haraldr hárfagri lives 3 years after appointing Eiríkr his successor, and is said to have given his name to his grandson and "sprinkled him with water", although this event is not assigned to any particular year (Hkr. I p. 147). As in ES, Eiríkr goes first to the Orkneys, where he gathers troops before harrying in Scotland and England. Although the wording differs, the scenario envisaged (and Eiríkr's relationship to Athelstan) are similar to what is found in ES, although the enemies anticipated by Athelstan are the Danes, not Scots and Irish. (This is consistent with Hkr's vision of Anglo-Viking relations.) Not only Eiríkr, but his family and retinue, are baptized as part of the agreement.

We are then informed of Athelstan's death, and that the succession of his brother, Edmund, which caused Eiríkr to set out on the last, fatal, harrying expedition. Arnkell and Erlendr, sons of Torf-Einarr, accompany him and are slain. Some of the five kings who accompanied him are named, although the erfidrápa is not quoted. When they learn of this, Gunnhildr and her sons ('þau Gunnhildr') head to the Orkneys and "settle there for a time" (Hkr I p. 155) until they hear of the hostilities between Haraldr Gormsson of Den-

mark and Hákon Haraldsson of Norway. In fact, they take over, and use the Orkneys as a base for raiding. Before departing for Denmark, they marry Ragnhildr to Arnfinnr, son of Þorfinnr, who becomes jarl when they leave.

Hkr cites a verse by Glúmr Geirason as evidence for the Eiríkssons' activity at this time. The verse describes its protagonist, identified as Haraldr gráfeldr, as "barnungr", and Hkr goes on to tell us, like Fagr (and with certain verbal similarities) that Haraldr Gormsson adopted him and that Haraldr gráfeldr grew up at the Danish court. The author is clearly concerned with the age - or rather, youth - of the Eiríkssons. During their time in Denmark, some of them "went on harrying expeditions when they were old enough, and obtained wealth for themselves, and harried on the Eastern Way. They were handsome men early on, and mature in power and accomplishments rather than years." ("Sumir Eiríkssynir fóru í hernað, þegar er þeir höfðu aldr til, ok öfluðu sér fjár, herjuðu um Austrveg. þeir váru snimma menn friðir ok fyrr rosknir at afli ok atgórvi en at vetratali." Hkr I 162) While still in the Orkneys, we had been told that "Gamli was somewhat the oldest, but nonetheless he was not a mature man." (Gamli Eiríksson var þá nokkurru elstr, ok var hann þó eigi roskinn maðr. Hkr I 162) Given the general picture of youth of Eiríkr's family, it may have seemed wise to date Ragnhildr's marriage as late as possible. (7)

The significance of the relative dating of Ragnhildr's marriage in ES and SepS on the one hand and in Hkr on the other, assuming that all three are by a single author, is that ES and SepS may be presumed to reflect the state of that author's knowledge at an early stage of his study of the Norwegian material, when he was interested only in specific members of the royal family. To an author concerned primarily with St. Óláfr or the descendants of Skalla-Grímr, received tradition or an educated guess suggested a stop-over on Eiríkr's trip from Norway to Northumbria as the appropriate occasion for his daughter's marriage. The author of Hkr, however, had to examine in detail the reign not only of Eiríkr but of his son, Haraldr gráfeldr, including the scaldic verse relating to their careers. He would thus have had to give serious consideration to Haraldr's age. The annals which appear to be based on this material give Haraldr's age at the death of Athelstan (which precipitates Eiríkr's own death) as seven. This is indeed 'barnungr' - perhaps excessively so. Ingibjörg Snorradóttir, thirteen years old at the time of the Flugumýri burning, could still be considered "barn at aldri" (Sturlunga Saga (Reykjavík, 1945) I pp. 491, 494). In spite of his precocious development, Egill Skallagrimsson himself is thirteen before he leaves Iceland (ES pp. 101-3). While I can imagine the author of ES or SepS. revising his earlier ideas as he considered the chronology of Haraldr's life, I cannot imagine the author of Hkr jettisoning his carefully worked-out chronology for a simplified one which made the age problem even worse. In any case ES agrees not with Hkr but with the SepS, which scholars agree to have preceded Hkr.

It is not particularly original to suggest that the author of Hkr revised his sources; the innovation was Jónas Kristjánsson's suggestion that the received teaching on the ages of ES and Hkr be reversed. I was happy to note that in her response to his articles, Kolbrún Haraldsdóttir (p. 143)

mentions examples in which the the text of Flat is often closer to ES or SepS than Hkr (and thus to the "common source"); she advocates the traditional ordering of the three works attributed to Snorri: ES, SepS, Hkr.

Of course, if it is not assumed that ES and Hkr are by the same author, the difficulty vanishes; both works use a common source, also reflected in Flat and SepS. To my mind, both the assumption of common authorship of ES and Hkr and the identity of the author of the latter work are open to question. The similarities that caused various scholars to identify the works as proceeding from the same pen are no more than could naturally result from use of a common source by individuals whose own writing style might have been influenced by that very source. In fact it has recently been pointed out by Jørgensen that the attribution of Hkr to Snorri rests on evidence that is shaky, to say the least. The attribution rests on the assumption that the early translators, Laurents Hanssøn and Peder Clausson, both knew a lost ms. ascribing the work to Snorri. Jørgensen argues that if this were the case, the publisher of Clausson's translation would not have had to use Hanssøn's (translated) prologue. The attribution thus rests solely on Hanssøn's statement, unsupported by any manuscript evidence. In view of this argument, I would like to turn scholarly attention away from Snorri and towards another Icelander whose name is connected to the text by manuscript evidence: Ari borgilsson inn fróði. After the Prologue, and before the well-known opening sentence "Kringla heimsins", Codex Frisianus of Hkr. has the heading: "Her hefr vpp konvnga bok eftir savgn Ara prestz fróða. Oc héfr fyrst vm þriþvnga skipti heimsins. En sidan fra avllvm Noregs konvngvm." (8)

Clearly, one cannot attribute all of Hkr to Ari; it incorporates too much material of a later date. Indeed, the reference in Codex Frisianus is to Ari's "account" (sögn) not to his book, indicating that Ari's version of events, rather than his actual text, is being followed. I would like to suggest that Ari's presence in the heading (and also in the prologue to Hkr) derives ultimately from the introduction to the Separate Saga of St. óláfr (Hkr II pp. 419-21). (9) The shorter version of this introduction, printed on the lower half of the page in the Íslensk fornrit edition, begins with the description of Ari and his works (which includes abundant evidence that he would have knowledge about St. óláfr) and concludes simply "En bók þessa hefi ek látit rita eftir því, sem segir í kvæðum þeira Sighvats ok óttars svarta, er jafnan váru með óláfi konungi ok sá ok heyrðu þessi tíðendi, en sumt eftir sögn Ara presta ok annarra fróðimanna. Ok þykki mér kvæðin minnst ór stað foerð, ef þau eru rétt kveðin ok skynsamliga upp tekin." Here there is none of the discussion of early poetry such as Ynglingatal which is found in the prologue to Hkr (and, awkwardly enough, in the longer version of the Prologue to SepS, which has nothing to say of the Ynglings.) More striking is the fact that after a lengthy discussion of Ari and his sources, much (but not all) of which is paralleled in Íslendingabók, the author of the shorter version of the Prologue states that his primary sources are the poets Sighvatr and óttar. What is surprising is not so much that these apparent eye witnesses are to be preferred, as the fact that the material about Ari is included at all. Further, the book does NOT begin with St.

óláfr but with Haraldr hárfagri - the king who, according to Ari, ruled Norway when Iceland was settled.

I would like to suggest the following explanation. Although the poetry of contemporaries might be the best source for the actual life of St. óláfr, his family history was also important: no self-respecting author of royal biography begins with the birth (or even the parents) of its hero, but rather with as eminent a genealogy as possible. Luckily for our author, this material had already been provided - by Ari Þorgilsson. Ari was not, of course, as close to the events as Sighvatr and óttar; the period he dealt with is so far in the past that a certain amount of justification for its reliability is necessary. This justification took the form of a paraphrase of what I assume to be Ari's introduction to his work. That introduction would have included the reference to Oddr Kolsson Hallsonar af Síðu who studied with Þorgeirr afráðskollr who lived in Niðarnes when Jarl Hákon was slain (Hkr II pp. 419-20), not mentioned in the extant Íslendingabók, but clearly of importance in a work dealing with Norwegian kings. I would like to propose that the introductory "background material" describing the doings of Haraldr hárfagri and his sons in SepS either is - or is fairly closely based on - Ari's lost konunga ævi. The scribe of Codex Frisianus was aware of the connection (which might even have been in his exemplar) and thus included it as a title, not for the entire history of the kings of Norway, but for its early history - up to the time of St. óláfr (whose saga, interestingly enough, is NOT found in Codex Frisianus.) I have thus come fairly close to the position of Gjessing, who argued that Ari was the author of the lost text used by ES, Hkr, and Flat.

A further possibility must also be considered. The common source behind ES, Hkr, Flat and SepS was clearly written. However, a work such as Íslendingabók or the background history in SepS (c. 15 pages in an edition) could easily be memorized by a modern student, to say nothing of a medieval Icelander trained in genealogy or law. It is quite possible that the summary of Norwegian history and genealogy at the beginning of SepS reflects the sort of thing that was learned by rote at Haukadalsr and Oddi. Without attempting to revive the free-prose theory, it seems to me that modern scholars searching for textual parallels in the kings' sagas tend to overlook the possibility of oral transmission of memorized material such as regnal years or genealogy, or even bits of learning pertaining to "papar" or the conversion of Iceland. I am willing to bet that not a few present in this room, if asked to provide a brief overview of the early history of Iceland, would produce something that sounds very much like either Íslendingabók or the longer version found in Landnámabók, perhaps even with a few "verbal parallels". Oral, rather than written (or perhaps, in addition to written) memory could account for the similarities among the synoptic histories. (10)

I do not, however, wish to replace careful textual analysis with assumptions based on the contexts of an unknown text. Instead, I would urge scholars to examine these texts independently of the assumption that Snorri Sturluson (or even Ari Þorgilsson) was responsible for them.

## Notes

(1) The reader's indulgence is asked for the awkward representations of a number of letters that could not be produced by my keyboard. I have represented both hooked o and oe as ö.

The first part of this paper, the argument concerning the relative ages of ES and Hkr based on the conflicting statements concerning Ragnhildr Eiríksdóttir, was originally presented at the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study at Amherst, Mass. in 1991. I was delighted to discover that Kolbrún Haraldsdóttir had come to the same conclusion by a different route.

(2) For the history of scholarship on the subject, see Vésteinn Ólason's article of 1968.

(3) At the time of writing, I have access only to Gjessing's 1885 article. A clear and useful summary of the history of the textual arguments has recently been provided by Kolbrún Haraldsdóttir. I agree with her article on all points but one. On p. 140-41, she argues that the speech of Sölvi Klofi, found in ES and Hkr but not in Flat, indicates a direct connection between these texts in addition to the use of a common source by all three texts. It seems to me more likely that the scribe of Flat, or of one of the mss. on which it is based, simply omitted this material, on purpose or by accident. I have not yet examined her study under preparation at the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar.

(4) These bits of Norwegian royal chronology are unusual in ES. Further, although the saga mentions the fact that Haraldr had been king seventy years when he handed the kingdom over to Eiríkr, his youth (ten years) at the beginning of his career is not mentioned, any more than the age at which Eiríkr þlóðox received his first warships, namely twelve. This could be due to the fact that the saga is not, after all, a saga of the kings of Norway; but the mention of his age when he began to conquer Norway would have made him a rival to Egill in precocious development.

(5) Fagr.

(6) "tók til fósturs Harald Eiríksson ok knésetti hann. Foedisk hann þar upp" Hkr I 162.

(7) This point has been made by Björn M. Olsen.

(8) Neither the deadline for submission of this paper, and the time-limits for its presentation, allow for a thorough re-examination of either the mss. or the huge amount of secondary literature that has been devoted to Ari and his role in Icelandic historical writing, most of which is difficult to obtain in the U.S. I would be very much surprised if some of the suggestions I am about to make have not been anticipated by earlier scholars; I hope to fill in the footnotes to the secondary literature before arriving in Trondheim.



(9) It seems to me that the differences among the versions of the prologue to Hkr / Seps deserve more attention than they have received.

(10) For a summary of the discussion to date concerning Icelandic sources of the synoptic histories, see Andersson (1985).

#### Abbreviations and Bibliography. Primary Sources:

- Ágrip Ágrip af Noregskonunga sögum Fagrskinna - Noregs konunga tal ed. Bjarni Einarsson, Íslenzk Fornrit XXIX, Reykjavík, 1984.
- CF Codex Frisianus en Samling af norske Konge-Sagaer ed. C. R. Unger, Christiania, 1871.
- ES Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar, ed. Sigurður Nordal, Íslenzk Fornrit II, Reykjavík, 1933.
- Fagr Ágrip af Noregskonunga sögum Fagrskinna - Noregs konunga tal ed. Bjarni Einarsson, Íslenzk Fornrit XXIX, Reykjavík, 1984.
- Flat Flateyjarbók en Samling af norske Konge-Sagaer, 3 vols., ed. Guðbrandur Vigfússon and C. R. Unger, Christiania, 1860-1868
- Hkr Heimskringla, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk Fornrit XXVI-III, Reykjavík, 1941-79.
- HN Historia Norvegiæ in Monumenta Historica Norvegiæ Latinske Kildeskrifter til Norges Historie i Mid-dalderen, ed. Gustav Storm, Kristiania, 1880.
- Íslendingabók-Landnámabók, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, Íslenzk Fornrit I, Reykjavík, 1968.
- Seps Saga óláfs konungs hins helga: Den store saga om Olav den hellige, ed. Oscar Albert Johnsen and Jón Helgason, 2 vols, Oslo, 1941.
- Theod Theodorici Monachi Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium in Monumenta Historica Norvegiæ Latinske Kildeskrifter til Norges Historie i Middalderen, ed. Gustav Storm, Kristiania, 1880.

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- 1896, p. 125 ff.
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  - "Egils-sagas's Forhold til Kongesagaen," Arkiv for nordisk Filologi 2 (1885) 289-318.
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