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### Christian Skaldic Rhetoric in Einarr Gilsson's *Selkolluvisur*

Einarr Gilsson was a fourteenth-century Icelandic lawman in the north and west of Iceland in 1367-9 (Jón Helgason 1950: 19; Gurún Nordal 2001: 116). He was one of several men who composed poems in honour of Guðmundr Arason, bishop of Hólar 1203-37, as part of a concerted but unsuccessful campaign to have him canonised following the second translation of his relics in 1344.<sup>1</sup> The other poets of this northern Icelandic group were Arngrímr Brandsson (d. 1361), monk and abbot of Þingeyrar and Árni Jónsson, abbot of the Benedictine monastery of Munkaþverá. Arngrímr was almost certainly also the author of the youngest extant Icelandic prose life of Guðmundr (version D, Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon II 1878: 3-184), which was translated from a Latin original designed to impress a foreign readership, and ultimately the Pope as head of the Roman church, of the bishop's worthiness to be canonised (Jón Helgason 1950: 9-14). Two manuscripts of the Icelandic translation, which appears to have been made not long after the Latin version, contain many verses by Arngrímr himself and by Einarr Gilsson, about whom little else is known, except that his versatile poetic talents are also evidenced in *Flateyjarbók*, to which he contributed the prefatory text *Óláfs ríma Haraldssonar*, probably the oldest extant Icelandic *ríma* (usually dated c. 1350), a single canto of 65 stanzas (Fianur Jónsson 1905-12: 1-9). One assumes that Arngrímr and Einarr were working in tandem to ornament the prose of *Guðmundar saga*, but the nature of their connection is unknown beyond the fact that Einarr seems to have lived in the districts in which Arngrímr was acting as abbot and 'officialis', namely Hólar and Þingeyrar.

In all 61 *dróttkvætt* stanzas by Einarr on Bishop Guðmundr's life and miracles are distributed throughout the D-version of *Guðmundar saga*, either singly or in groups. The largest of these groups, comprising 21 stanzas, has usually been considered a separate poem and entitled *Selkolluvisur*, 'Seal head verses'. In *Skjaldedigting* A and B Finnur Jónsson divides Einarr's *dróttkvætt* verses into two separate poems, the first, of 40 stanzas, entitled *Et digt (drape?) om Guðmund Arason, biskop*, the second being the *Selkolluvisur*.<sup>2</sup> The text of the latter appears in *Skj* A II: 8-11 and *Skj* B II: 434-40. Jón Helgason, on the other hand, considered that Einarr's verses in *Guðmundar saga* were never intended to form a connected poem or, in the case of the verses about Selkolla, a separate composition, but were only to be read as part of the prose saga (1950: 21). Almost all derive from the same source, the *Guðmundar saga* called B in *Biskupa sögur* I (Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1858). Be that as it may, the verses about Selkolla do form a coherent entity because they relate to a discrete narrative, and they do appear as a continuous citation in the two manuscripts that contain them, Holm Perg. 5 fol (5) and AM 396 4<sup>o</sup> (396). They will therefore be considered to form a coherent whole here, though the analysis offered will be mindful of their role in the saga as a whole.

The *Selkolluvisur* tell the story of how Guðmundr exorcised a seal-headed troll-woman named Selkolla, who had been plaguing the people of the Vestfirðir. There is a condensed account of this same narrative in Arngrímr Brandsson's *Guðmundardrápa*, sts 27-30 (*Skj* A II:

<sup>1</sup> His corpse was exhumed for the first time in 1314.

<sup>2</sup> Einarr also composed a poem of 17 stanzas in  *hrynhent* about Bishop Guðmundr (*Skj* A II: 404-8).

353-4; *Skj* B II: 378-9). The Selkolla verses are cited, and attributed to Einarr,<sup>3</sup> in chapter 43 of the saga after the prose narrative of Selkolla, the subject of which is introduced in chapter 38, and occupies chapters 39, 40, 42 and 43 of the saga. Chapter 39 explains Selkolla's genesis. A young woman had just given birth to a girl child, and she and her partner had set out intending to bring the as yet unbaptised infant to the parish church for baptism. However, as they passed by a large stone, named in the prose text as Miklasteinn, they were tempted into sin. They laid down their unbaptised child by the stone and went off to have sex. When they came back, the baby appeared to be both dead and horrible to look at. They were about to flee, when they heard crying. When they turned back again, the child now appeared to be alive, but looked so hideous that they could not bring themselves to come near it. They went home and related what had happened, but when people came looking for the child, it had disappeared. However, not long afterwards an unknown person appeared in the district, sometimes in the form of an attractive-looking woman, sometimes with a seal's head. This *míðdegisdjofull* was named Selkolla by the local people.

It can be presumed that the larger rhetorical objective of the *Selkolluvísur* was to enhance the sanctity and dignity of Guðmundr Arason by enhancing the stylistic register and complexity of the saga, by composing a miracle story about one of his more spectacular feats in vernacular verse, and, further, in the skaldic verse-form of highest traditional prestige and greatest difficulty, *dróttkvætt*.<sup>4</sup> This suggests that the intended audience of the poem was not the Icelandic populace at large, but rather the mid-fourteenth century intellectual elite of clerics and laymen who might be moved to support the case for Guðmundr's canonisation. This is a group whose tastes for skaldic verse and interest in it as a political weapon have been thoroughly explored by Guðrún Nordal in her *Tools of Literacy* (2001). If this assumption is correct, it follows that such an audience is likely to have appreciated the finer points of skaldic rhetoric, including the use of kennings, and mythological and other allusions, as well as imitations of the compositions of older skalds, while demonstrating the ability to highlight points of Christian doctrine within the conventions of skaldic diction.

Samples of Einarr's work will now be examined to determine exactly what resources a mid-fourteenth-century skald had at his disposal and how and for what ends he used them. For the purposes of this paper, we will look particularly at stanzas 1 and 2, which traverse the prose narrative of Selkolla's genesis, summarised above, and stanzas 18 and 19, which describe Selkolla's attempt to wreck a boat and its crew and her overthrow by Guðmundr. Holm perg. 5 fol (5) has been taken here as the main manuscript, with the text on fol. 22vb-23ra, and variant readings are given from AM 396 4° (396).

1. Askr fór éls ok Røskva  
 ósvinn dalar tvinna –  
 grands var gaurt af stundu  
 gjarm – með heiðnu barni;  
 lögðu jóð, en ugðu  
 ngva grein, hjá steini,  
 beint meðan þorðuz punti,  
 þaugrein ok Týr fleina.

<sup>3</sup> 'Eptir Selkollu sögu kvað Einarr Gíllsson xx vísur ok eina, ok er þetta upphaf á' (Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon II 1878: 82; Guðni Jónsson 1953: 284).

<sup>4</sup> Aside from three stanzas by 'herra Arngrímr', all the *dróttkvætt* verses in *Guðmundar saga* are by Einarr; their other verses are in *hrynhent* measure.

*Variant readings:* [3] gautr: gaurr 396 [6] ǫngva: aunga 396 [7] þorðuz punti: baruz pinu 396  
*Prose word order:* Askr éls dalar ok ósvinn tvinna Rǫskva fór með heiðnu barni – gautr var af stundu gjarn grands; baugrein ok Týr fleina lögðu jóð hjá steini, en ugðu ǫngva grein beint meðan þorðuz punti.

*Translation:* [An ash tree of {the shower of the bow}] [FIGHT > WARRIOR] and {a foolish twine of Rǫskva}[<mythological woman, sister of Þjálfri> WOMAN] travelled with a heathen baby – the man was straightaway eager for sin; {the ring-land}[WOMAN] and {the Týr <god> of spear-shafts} [WARRIOR] laid the newborn beside a stone, but feared nothing, just while they had sexual intercourse.

*Notes:* – *Askr éls dalar*, ‘ash tree of the shower of the bow’ [1-2]: a warrior- or man-kenning; the word *dalr*, ‘bow’ is relatively uncommon (cf. *Gsurs* 36/7 *dals dagg*, *SnE* 1998 I: 122). – *Tvinna* < *tvinni*, m. (sewing) thread, twine, base-word of woman-kennings, whose determinant is the name of a mythological female, cf. *Gsurs* 34/6 *Syn tvinna*, and *Vígl* 20/6 *Bil tvinna*. [2]: – *Gautr*, ‘warrior’, man’ [3]: *Skj B* has *gaurr*, ‘ruffian, boor’, following the reading of 396, claiming (*LP2*) that 5’s reading is ‘umulig’, but it is hard to see why (as *NN* § 1550 observed), if *gautr* is used, following the man-kenning of l. 1-2, in accordance with the traditional skaldic convention of *heiti* for men that refer to gods or heroes (Gautr being one of Óðinn’s names, and also frequently the base-word of kennings for shield, sword, as well as being a man- or warrior-kenning as a simplex). The disparity between diction and referent here is addressed in the body of this paper. – *Með heiðnu barni*, ‘with a heathen baby’ [4]: The child is said to be ‘heathen’ because it is unbaptised, having been newly born, and not yet brought to a church. – *Meðan þorðuz punti*, ‘while they engaged with the penis, had sexual intercourse’ [7]. In *LP2* *puntr* is given as the only instance of this word, meaning ‘penis’, in the skaldic corpus. 396’s *pinu*, from *þína*, ‘torture, torment’, is difficult to apply in context.

2. Hugðuz barn, áðr bæðri  
brynjumeið, ok reiða,  
girndar óhreinn andi  
undrgjarn, taka mundu;  
sýndisk fljóð, en fundu  
fláræðin þau bæði,  
illiligt með ǫllu,  
ofgrand af tál fjanda.

*Prose word order:* Hugðuz mundu taka barn ok reiða, áðr undrgjarn óhreinn andi girndar bæðri brynjumeið; fljóð sýndiz illiligt með ǫllu, en þau bæði fláræðin fundu ofgrand af tál fjanda.

*Translation:* They thought they would be able to take the child and ride away [with it], before the extremely eager, impure spirit of lust opposed {the mail-coat tree}[WARRIOR]; the woman [viz. female child] appeared completely hideous, and both those misguided ones experienced powerful injury from the wiles of the devil.

*Notes:* – *Reiða [barn]*, ‘hold a child in front of one on a horse’ [2]: the only recorded usage of *reiða* in this sense in skaldic poetry. The parents’ intention, as the prose saga makes clear, was to take their child to the district church for baptism. – *Undrgjarn*, ‘extremely eager’ [4]: Although both elements of this compound adj. are unremarkable, their conjunction is the only recorded instance in skaldic verse. *Undr* may here be used in a pejorative sense of ‘spectacle, monstrosity’, as *Skj B* and *LP2* suggest, a sense that also appears as a simplex in the prose text, ch. 39, or, as *NN* § 2642 prefers, as an intensifier, the meaning adopted here. *Ólveinni audi* (l. 3) also appears in the prose text (ch. 38) to refer to Selkolla. – *Fljóð*, ‘woman’ [5]: With Finnur Jónsson (*Skj B II*:

434, 'møbarnet viste sig i alle henseender gueligt af udseende'), I assume this word refers to the baby, whose female gender is mentioned in the prose text (*meybarn*, ch. 39) but not previously in the poem. The assumption, unstated in both prose and poem, is that the baby's unbaptised status allows it to be possessed by the devil after death. In st. 3 the parents abandon the dead baby, and from its corpse emerges a black troll-woman, *svört Gneip* <giantess> (3/6), described as like a seal at one end (*selr í annan enda* 3/7-8). This is the monstrous *Selkolla*.

[On one occasion, *Selkolla* had changed herself into a big dark knuckle-bone (*ein stór ok svört beinknúta*), and concealed herself on board a ship, from where she proceeded to try to cause the boat to sink and the men on board to drown. Before they had set out, however, Bishop *Guðmundr* has blessed them and warned them to be on their guard against unsuspected danger.]

18. Bátr seig, borð var lítit,  
brast súgr um lið drjúgan,  
salt þó húfi héltum,  
hrönn fell í kné mǫnnum,  
áðr hreytendr hétu –  
húm lá svalt í rúmum –  
at Guðmundr grandí,  
Góins stéttar, þeim létti.

*Variant readings:* [1] lítit: lítað 5, with a corrected to i [3] héltum: hölltum 396 [6] salt: svalt 396  
*Prose word order:* Bátr seig, borð var lítit, súgr brast drjúgan um lið, salt þó héltum húfi, hrönn fell í kné mǫnnum, áðr hreytendr Góins stéttar – svalt húm lá í rúmum – hétu at Guðmundr létti þeim grandí.

*Translation:* The boat started to sink, the side just topped the water, the sucker [sea] crashed strongly around the troop of men, the salt [sea] washed the ice-covered hull, the wave fell into men's laps, before [the distributors of {Góinn's <snake's> path}][GOLD > GENEROUS MEN] – the cold dark one [sea] lay in the rowing-stations – called upon *Guðmundr* to free them from harm.

*Notes:* – *Súgr*, lit. 'the sucker' [2]: *heiti* for the sea, appears in a *pula* (cf. *SnE* 1998 I: 124); – *Húfi héltum*, 'the ice-covered hull' [3]: Cf. *Arn Mdr* 2/5 *salt skar húfi héltum*; *salt*, n. salt, and by metonymy, the sea; – *Húm*, 'the dark, dim one', another name for the sea [6]: This word sometimes seems to be masculine (cf. *SnE Skm* Faulkes 1998 I: 94/25) and sometimes neuter, as here. The *helmingr* quoted in *SnE* in support of *húmr*, m., and there attributed to *Brennu-Njáll*, though in *Morkinskinna* and *Hulda* to *Haraldr hárfórði*, contains two other words, *húfr* and *rúm*, found in *Selkolla* 18. In addition *húmrúm* provides full rhyme in both cases. – *Góins*, from *Góinn*, m. [8]: name of a snake associated with the World Ash *Yggdrasill*, according to *Grí* 34, quoted in *SnE Gylf* (Faulkes 1982: 19).

19. Borð flutu, byrr kom Njörðum  
blíðr sköfnunga hríðar,  
sjór lék stafn ok stýri,  
stírb inn at Miðfirði.  
Þar lét kastat knútu  
kát ferð á hǫfn verða;  
hafa sönuviðir séna  
Selkollu þá Heljar.

*Variant readings:* [7] séna: seima 396 [8] Heljar: so 396, þolla 5

*Prose word order:* Stírið borð flutu inn at Miðfirði; blíðr byrr kom Njörðum hríðar sköfnunga; sjór lék stafn ok stýri. Þar kát ferð lét knútu kastat verða í höfn; sönviðir Heljar hafa þá séna Selkollu.

*Translation:* {The firm boards} [SHIP] floated in at Miðfjörð; a pleasant fair wind came to {the Njörðrs <sea god> of [the storm of the sword]}[BATTLE > SEA-WARRIORS]; the sea played against stem and steering. There the happy crew had the knuckle-bone thrown into the harbour; {the trees of Hel's <axe name> clang} [(lit. clang-trees of Hel) BATTLE > WARRIORS] had then seen Selkolla.

*Notes:* – At *Miðfirði* [4]: Miðfjörðr, in northern Iceland, only named here in the corpus of skaldic verse. According to the saga (ch. 43), the sailors ‘ráðit hafa sína skipferð norðr yfir þann fjörð eða flóa, sem liggir meðal nyrðra byskupsdæmis.’ – There are two points of divergence between the mss in lines 7-8. 396 reads *seima* for *séna* in l. 7; *seimr*, m. means gold thread and is sometimes used in kennings for generous men; however, this connotation seems inappropriate here; in addition, it does not fit with the rest of the warrior-kennings in these lines. On the other hand, 396's *Heljar* is preferable to 5's reading *polla* in line 8 both for reasons of sense and in order to align the *aðalhendin* with strongly stressed syllables. The inverted warrior-kennings of 7-8 has a very literary character, if the interpretation of LP2 (followed here) is correct. *Són* or *sóinn* < Latin *sonus*, ‘sound’, is combined with the uncommon Hel as the name of Óláfr the saint's axe. The only other poetic text to allude to this axe by name is Arn *Mdr* 10/7, *Hel klauf hausa fqlva* (cf. echo of Arn *Mdr* 2/5 in st. 18/3).

### Einarr's rhetorical strategies

There are a number of distinctive elements in the stylistic repertoire of this accomplished mid-fourteenth-century skald which deserve analysis and comment. They can be closely connected to his overall purpose in composing the *Selkolluvisur* and to the circumstances of their composition, if Jón Helgason's deductions (1950: 18-21) are any guide.<sup>5</sup> It would seem that Arngrímr Brandsson, the translator and fellow-poet with Einarr in their elevation of the fairly plain prose style of the Icelandic translation of the youngest *Guðmundar saga* decided that their most effective rhetorical strategy in giving their narrative *gravitas* within the Icelandic stylistic register was to ornament it with elaborate verses. Earlier versions of *Guðmundar saga* contained only a small number of verses, either 5 or 7, the majority of them by Guðmundr's arch-enemy Kolbeinn Tumason (Jón Helgason 1950: 18-19; Guðrún Nordal 2001: 108-10),<sup>6</sup> while the version of the text in Holm perg. 5 fol and AM 396 4<sup>o</sup> is rich in verses in both *dróttkvætt* and *hrynhent* by Arngrímr and Einarr. For the most part these celebrate Guðmundr's many miracles or his dealings with important foreign churchmen, like, for example, Einarr's 17-stanza *hrynhent* poem celebrating the conversation between Guðmundr and Archbishop Þórir of Niðarós. The prose usually draws attention to the lavish number of verses and – secondarily – the primacy of Guðmundr's *vita*, by prefacing their citation with an announcement of who composed about what event and often how many verses there are. Interestingly, and in spite of the presumably literate

<sup>5</sup> Björn M. Ólsen 1902: 297-301, had previously reached similar conclusions.

<sup>6</sup> The verses ascribed to Kolbeinn are of a very different character to those of Arngrímr and Einarr, direct and forceful. Note ch. 33, ‘En eptir þetta, segist at Kolbeinn kvæði vísur þessar’... (Jón Sigursson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon II 1878: 68) This statement prefaces Kolbeinn's hymn to Christ before his final battle with the bishop's men. On its style, see Ejarri Einarsson 1974 and Stefán Karlsson 1996.

and literary nature of these compositions, the verb *kveða* continues to be used of the poets' activities.

However, in all other respects the position of the verse in relation to the prose *vita* is clearly of a secondary and dependent nature. Here there is no suggestion, fictional or otherwise, that the poems are part of an integrated *prosimetrum* or are the direct utterances of protagonists in the saga, with the exception of the older verses ascribed to Kolbeinn.<sup>7</sup> They are poems about the figure honoured in the *vita* and about his holy deeds. They ornament the high points of the saga with elaborate amplification in the indigenous high style and for this they use a variety of skaldic resources, which these poets may well have learnt in part from manuals such as the *Third Grammatical Treatise* or Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* and also from Latin poetry, hymns and the psalter.<sup>8</sup>

Another pointer to the lack of structural and narrative integration of Arngrím's and Einarr's verse in the prose saga is the lack of independent comprehensibility of some of the verse references. This is particularly striking as much of the verse is of a narrative character (cf. Lindow 1982: 117-18, who argues that the verse closely parallels the prose narrative). Verses 1-2 and 18-19 from *Selkollhvísur* display several instances of this phenomenon. In the first verse, the prose account (or a prior knowledge of the story) is required to understand why the mother is said to be *ósvinnr* (aside from a possibly generalised misogyny) and why the child is described as *heiðinn*, and in stanza 2 it is not clear from the verse alone what the parents' aim was in purposing to ride away. A good deal of the detail of stanza 2 requires a knowledge of the prose text (the gender of the baby, the changing appearance of the baby as it is possessed by the devil). There is a similar situation in stanza 19, where it is not really apparent from the verse alone that after the knuckle-bone has been thrown overboard it was transformed back into Selkolla and that her identity was now plain to the men on board.<sup>9</sup> This kind of imprecision is of a different order from the obscurities of earlier skaldic verse, because it depends neither on abstruseness of mythological or metaphorical references produced by kennings, nor on syntactic fracture and consequent logical ambiguity in the relationships between clauses or even phrases. Clearly, here, Einarr expected his verse to be filled out by the prose context of the saga.

Aside from the very fact that Einarr decided to compose in *dróttkvætt*, surely by the middle of the fourteenth century a signal that he wished to dignify his subject by employing the metrical resources of classical skaldic poetry, his use of kennings and *heiti* proclaims a desire to endow his subject with antique and elevated connotations. This should, I think, be seen as the predominant motive for the use of kennings with pagan mythological elements to refer to ordinary Icelanders, such as the young couple who abandoned their baby, and to the sailors who are nearly drowned by Selkolla, for example. These kennings are not ironic, as some may be in earlier skaldic verse when applied to stylistically inappropriate subjects, but are rather deployed in the service of a Christian rhetoric that regarded the acts of God and his saints, in this case Guðmundr Arason, as the most important and dignified subject for poetry. Whatever was caught

<sup>7</sup> This is true even of the *hrynheim* 'conversation' between Guðmundr and Archbishop Þórir, which inserts direct speech within a third-person narrative.

<sup>8</sup> The latter source of inspiration is particularly likely in the case of some of Arngrím's verses in the later chapters of the saga.

<sup>9</sup> Here the prose seems to diverge slightly from the implication of the verse: 'Veltist [hún] með varpi sjófarins upp í flæðarmál, sér þá skyggn maðr, at þar ríss upp Selkolla ok gengr á land' (Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon II 1878: 82, Guðni Jónsson 1953: 284).

up in such holy narratives was also important *sub specie aeternitatis*, and so to call a nameless young Icelander ‘an ash-tree of the shower of the bow’ was to treat a participant in the Christian drama seriously in terms of traditional skaldic rhetoric. At the same time, direct and possibly sometimes colloquial registers (e.g. *meðan bgrðuz punti 1/7*) are used to describe the actions of the human participants in the narrative, while the Christian *sermo humilis* also allows for the inclusion of local place-names, such as Miðfjörðr. Morally pointed adjectives and nouns with strongly religious connotations serve the purpose of indicating an overarchingly pious authorial point of view.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, it cannot be said that Einarr’s kennings and *heiti* are always merely ornamental, as many scholars have inclined to say about the use of kennings with pagan reference in Christian skaldic poetry (cf. Louis-Jensen 1998: CXVII and 91). He seems often to have made a deliberate choice of a mythological term which has relevance in its narrative context, as, for example, in his choice of the base-word Njörðr, name of the god of the sea, in a kenning for sailors.

One of the most striking things about Einarr’s poetic style is the extent to which it imitates that of earlier skalds and the frequency with which he uses *heiti*, in descriptive passages such as stanza 18, which are to be found largely or only in *þulur*. Such neo-classical stylistic traits are unusual in the mid-fourteenth century, at a time when most Christian skaldic poets were representing themselves as practitioners of a new clarity in verse, renouncing *hulin fornyrðin* (*Lilja* 98/3). A few examples reveal the ‘learned’ character of Einarr’s verse, learned, that is, in the rhetorical arts of traditional skaldic poetry. They suggest that here, indeed, may be a poet who had been schooled – or had educated himself – in the close study of the works of his Icelandic predecessors of the period before the thirteenth century, whether in manuals of poetics, through a knowledge of their works acquired orally, or through reading written saga texts, or through all three methods.

Three clear ‘literary’ influences upon stanzas 1-2 and 18-19 of the *Selkolluvisur* stand out; they are Arnórr jarlaskáld’s *Magnússdrápa*, two of the dream-woman verses ascribed to Gísli Súrsson, and a stanza attributed in Snorri Sturluson’s *Edda* to Njáll Þorgeirsson but more plausibly to Haraldr harðráði in both Morkinskinna and Hulda. I strongly suspect that two of these echoes derive from Einarr’s knowledge of Snorri’s *Skáldskaparmál*. They come in stanza 18, a spirited description of Selkolla’s attempt to whip up a storm at sea and sink a ship. Whether consciously or unconsciously, I think Einarr was drawing upon the section of *Skáldskaparmál* that poses and then answers the question: ‘Hver ro sævar heiti?’ (Faulkes 1998 I: 92). Two relevant stanzas are quoted here to illustrate a number of sea-*heiti*. The first is by Arnórr (= *Magnússdrápa* 2/5-8; Whaley 1998: 119; Faulkes 1998 I: 94) and illustrates the *heiti salt* in the line *salt skar húfi héltum* (cf. *Selkolluvisur* 18/3). The second, within half a page of the first, is the *helmingr* attributed to Njáll, illustrating *húnr* (cf. *Selkolluvisur* 18/6), in which we find the rhyme *húmrúm*, as well as the word *húfr*:

Senn jósu vér, svanni,  
Sextán en brim vexti  
– dreif á hafskips húfa  
húmr – í fjórum rúmum. (Faulkes 1998 I: 94)<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> For example *ósvinnu vinnna Róska* 1/1-2; *með heidnu barni* 1/4; *grands gjarni* 1/3-4; *undrgjarn óveinn andi girndar* 2/3-4; *fláreðin þau bæði* 2/6; *illilgi: með qlu* 2/7; *ofgrand af tál fjanða* 2/8; *grandi* 18/7.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Together sixteen of us baled out, lady, in four stations, and the surf rose. The dark was driven on to the main-ships’ strakes.’ (Faulkes 1987: 141)

However, Einarr probably knew more of Arnórr's *Magnússdrápa* than was quoted in *Snorra Edda*, for his kenning for the sailors in stanza 19/7-8 suggests he knew stanza 10 of the same poem, where Arnórr names Magnús Ólafsson's axe Hel, an inheritance from his father. This is the only other use of this word in skaldic poetry where the primary reference is to the axe (not to the underworld goddess Hel), and one of the very few allusions to the actual name in Old Norse literature (Whaley 1998: 203). In addition, if Einarr knew other stanzas of *Magnússdrápa* (e.g. stanza 3), he may have seen a parallel between the Norwegians' calling upon Magnús to protect them from stormy seas and the Icelandic sailors in this story calling upon Bishop Guðmundr. The probable echoes of Gísli's dream-woman verses (of uncertain age) are perhaps less persuasive but still plausible. They both occur in stanza 1 line 2, and involve the use of *dair* to mean 'bow' and *tvinni* as the base-word of a woman-kenning, uncommon uses which occur in Gísli's *lausavísur* 36 and 34 respectively.

In the context of *Guðmundar saga* (D), for which they were evidently composed, Einarr Gilsson's *Selkolluvísur* presuppose an audience knowledgeable in traditional skaldic verse, one that could appreciate the rhetorical elevation imparted to the Selkolla story, and other of Guðmundr's miracles, by the addition of *dróttkvætt* verses to the existing saga prose. If, as Jón Helgason supposed (1950: 18-19), these verses were added to the saga at Þingeyrar on the instructions of the abbot himself (who was also one of the poets concerned), it is possible that they were actually recited to the monks and perhaps to other local audiences around the time they were inserted into the saga text. While their ultimate rhetorical purpose was indubitably religious persuasion, they reveal at the same time the intellectual importance that the practice of traditional skaldic verse still maintained in at least some circles of the Icelandic community in the middle of the fourteenth century.

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