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The Man who did not write the *Edda* Sæmundr fróði and the Birth of Icelandic Literature

“Scandinavia and Christian Europe” is the theme of this year’s Saga Conference. A most central figure in this connection is Sæmundr Sigfússon, known as Sæmundr (hinn) fróði “the wise”, who was born in the 1050s and died at Oddi on the 22nd of May in 1133. He is important in many ways: (a) We know that Sæmundr studied abroad. (b) He was central in building up the early church in Iceland; (c) He was the first known Icelandic author/historian; (d) His name has been attached to the *Elder Edda*. It is primarily the last point that has made him famous: Sæmundr is known world-wide as the man who did not write the *Edda*. In this respect he shares the fortune of other famous writers whose authorship is being disputed. This year I was trying to finish a manuscript with the title *Hvem skrev Snorre?* when I came across John Michell’s *Who wrote Shakespeare?*¹ which offers a panoramic view of the controversies concerning the authorship of Shakespeare’s works. There is also an interesting parallel in the destiny of the poem *Lorelei*, which in the Nazi period was labeled *Altes Volkslied*, making Heinrich Heine a world famous Unknown Author.

Apparently we know next to nothing about Sæmundr’s life and authorship. The small amount of information we do have, is nevertheless of great value. In this paper I will try to combine elements from different sources in a discussion about Sæmundr’s role as a link between Christian Europe and early Icelandic literature. These sources are:

- (a) Sæmundr’s biography.
- (b) The legends about Sæmundr fróði.
- (c) The scaldic poem *Nóregs konunga tal*.
- (d) The sources linking Sæmundr to the *Eddas*.

What do we really know about the person Sæmundr Sigfússon? His family background is very interesting. On his mother’s side he was descended from Guðmundr hinn ríki and Síðu-Hallr, the most powerful chieftains of the Northern and Eastern Quarters at the time of the Conversion of Iceland. Both of them seem to have had rather close connections with the rulers in Norway,² and Síðu-Hallr is known to have been one of the leaders of the party which welcomed the introduction of a new religion.³

On his father’s side it was the other way around. Sæmundr’s great-grandfather was named Svart. He was the one who settled at Oddi, being the first in the line of the *Oddaverjar*. We know the names of two of his brothers, Valgarðr and Rúnólfr, who both figure in the list of the leading chieftains in Iceland in the decade before the Conversion.⁴ Valgarðr is immortalized as the villain *Valgarðr grái* in *Njáls saga* (a saga which appears to be biased against the *Oddaverjar*). Even more interesting, Rúnólfr seems to have been the leader of the party which opposed the foreign religion.

At the end of Sæmundr’s life, when he had become of the most powerful men on Iceland and a prominent church leader, there were clear hints about his disreputable background. In a study published last year I have argued that nearly the whole text of the

¹ John Michell: *Who wrote Shakespeare?* Thames and Hudson Ltd, London 1996.

² About Guðmundr’s connections: ÍF X:7, 144; ÍF XXVII:215, 217.

³ *Íslendingabók* ch. 7; *Kristni saga* ch. 7, 11, in *Biskupa sögur* 1858:11-12, 22-24.

⁴ *Kristni saga* ch. 1, in *Biskupa sögur* 1858:4.

Kristni saga is written by Ari fróði in the 1120s.⁵ The highlight of this narrative, of which some excerpts form the 7th chapter in *Íslendingabók*, is the conflict between Gizurr hvíti and Hjalti Skeggjason, representing the Christians, and Rúnólfr goði, representing the Heathens.⁶ This is an early instance of what seems to be a recurring theme: the rivalry between the Oddaverjar and what later became known as the *Haukdælir*.

According to the annals Sæmundr was born the same year as Gizurr hvíti's son Ísleifr was ordained as the first Icelandic bishop. The annals say 1056, but this date is not supported by other sources. The pope from whom Ísleifr got his sanction died in April 1054,⁷ and in *Jóns saga helga* Sæmundr is said to be two years younger than his cousin Jón Ögmundarson, who was born in 1052.⁸ In *Íslendingabók* Sæmundr's return to Iceland from studies in *Frakkland* is connected with the change of lawspeaker in 1076: *Á þeim dögum kom Sæmundr Sigfússon sunnan af Frakklandi hingat til lands og lét síðan vígjask til prests*. "In those days Sæmundr Sigfússon came back to Iceland from the south, from the Land of the Franks, and was later ordained as a priest."⁹ It might be proposed that *á þeim dögum* refers to the new lawspeaker's period (1076 - 1081), but the continuation *lét síðan vígjask til prests* does not support this. According to Ari's prologue, Sæmundr was given the opportunity to revise the text of the first *Íslendingabók*, so in this case the source may have been Sæmundr himself. This is one of the few hard facts in his biography: A young man, about 22 years old, very learned, returned to Iceland in 1076, the same year as the Investiture Struggle broke out.

Where did he study? That is a difficult question, as was demonstrated by Peter Foote in an article published in 1975.¹⁰ Interesting enough, Sæmundr did not study within the the borders of the archdiocese Hamburg-Bremen, like bishop Ísleifr and his son Gizurr.¹¹ Writing in the 1070s, Adam of Bremen denounced the Norwegian king Harald Harðráði because he, among other things *cruentum imperium usque ad Island extendit* "extended his bloody rule right up to Iceland".¹² In strong contrast to this, Adam gives bishop Ísleifr credit for being *sanctissimum virum* "a very pious man".¹³ According to *Hungrvaka* Ísleifr had a lot of trouble during the first part of his episcopate,¹⁴ probably partially due to the influence of the Norwegian king. When Sæmundr is said to have studied in *Frakkland*, this may indicate that his family were among those who supported the king. King Haraldr himself had special connections with this part of the continent, because Philip I, the king of France at that time, happened to be the nephew of Haraldr's queen, Elisif, who was the daughter of the Grand Duke of Kiev. One of Adam of Bremen's severest grievances against Haraldr was that he let his bishops be ordained in France or England, violating ecclesiastical law.¹⁵

Peter Foote has shown that the term *Frakkland* has different meanings in Old Norse sources.¹⁶ He defines it tentatively as a territory "bordered by *Valland* (Normandy and the

⁵ John Megaard: *Heimskringla*-prologen - en nøkkel til Ari fróðis forfatternærverksomhet? in *Middelalderforum. Tverrfaglig tidsskrift for middelalderlitteratur*, Universitetet i Oslo, 2. årg. 1, Oslo 2002, pp. 7 - 102, about *Kristni saga*: pp. 80-91.

⁶ *Biskupa sögur* 1858:16-18, 20-25.

⁷ Leo IX, cf. *ÍF* 1.1:21, footnote.

⁸ *Biskupa sögur* 1858:157, 229-230.

⁹ *ÍF* 1.1:20-21.

¹⁰ Peter Foote: "Aachen, Lund; Hólar", in *Les relations littéraires Franco-Scandinaves au Moyen Age*, Actes du Colloque de Liège (avril 1972), Paris 1975, pp. 53 - 73.

¹¹ *Biskupa sögur* 1858:60,66.

¹² Lib. III, Cap. XVII; B. Schmeidler (ed.) Hannover und Leipzig 1917:159.

¹³ Lib. IV, Cap. XXXVI; 1917: 273.

¹⁴ *Biskupa sögur* 1858:62-63.

¹⁵ Lib. III, Cap. XVII, 1917:160.

¹⁶ Foote 1975:64-71.

lower Seine region), *Flæmingjaland* (Flanders), *Frisland* (Frisia), to the north-east by *Saxland* and to the south-east by *Langbarðaland* (Lombardy)".¹⁷ The *Oddaverjaannál* says that *Sæmundr frodji kom wr schola af Parijs*, while *Jóns saga helga* according to Peter Foote indicates that Jón Ögmundarson met Sæmundr somewhere near the pilgrim's route through Rhineland.¹⁸ The name *Frakkland* allows both possibilities. We should perhaps bear in mind that one solution does not necessarily exclude the other. For practical reasons it would be more natural to let a young Icelander study in an area where a Germanic language was spoken. Bad relations with the archdiocese in Bremen would not hinder Sæmundr from studying in places such as Flanders or Cologne, where you would find bitter adverseries of the mighty archbishop Adalbert in Bremen. (For additional arguments for the Rhineland alternative I refer to Peter Foote's article.)

In *Jóns saga* it is said that Sæmundr *hafði lengi verit í útlöndum, svá at ekki spurðist til hans* "had been in foreign countries for a long time, so that nothing was heard from him".¹⁹ In *Hungrvaka* Sæmundr is called *lærör allra manna best* "the best educated of all men".²⁰ *Jóns saga* tells us that he had been *með nokkurum ágætum meistara* "with some famous teacher".²¹ All this indicates that his studies had been rather advanced, which supports the assumption that Sæmundr has spent at least part of his time in Northern France. Richard C. Dales describes the monastic and cathedral schools in 11th century France in the following way:

The schools in France dominated intellectual life north of the Alps. Although we know of the existence of some respectably good schools both in England and in Germany [...] students from these areas who were serious about pursuing advanced studies customarily went to France for their higher education [...]. There seems to have been an intellectual continuum reaching from Tours on the Loire river to Laon in Picardy within which students and teachers moved rather freely. Hardly any scholar is associated with only one of these schools; most studied or taught at from two to four of them. In the eleventh century they seem still to have been utterly dependent on the fame of individual teachers. They possessed no institutional structure, set curriculum, examinations or degrees.²²

Oddaverjaannál says that Sæmundr had studied in *Paris*. Although we do not know the age of this source, it probably represents family tradition. This must be taken as a clear indication that Sæmundr had studied in *France*, but this does not necessarily mean that he had spent most of his time in Paris. Another centre which might be of interest is *Reims*. The reason is that the legendary stories that were told about Sæmundr after his death resemble very much stories circulating in the 11th century about *Gerbert of Aurillac*, later *Pope Sylvester II*, the scholar that made *Reims* famous as a centre of learning.

After Sæmundr returned to Iceland he started a school at Oddi. In 1074, two years before he came back, 7-year-old Ari was sent the long way from Breiðafjörðr to Haukadal, where he lived for 14 years.²³ This indicates that the school in Haukadal, which was run by the bishop's son Teitr, had already started or was about to start at that time. According to *Kristni saga* the Icelanders had chosen Ísleifr as their bishop because he was a very able teacher.²⁴ But we can imagine that in a time of intense party division, it was impossible for opponents of the bishop to send their sons to him. In that case, there would be a need for a

¹⁷ Foote 1975:69.

¹⁸ *Biskupa sögur* 1858:156, 227-229, cf. Foote 1975:68.

¹⁹ *Biskupa sögur* 1858:227.

²⁰ *Biskupa sögur* 1858:67.

²¹ *Biskupa sögur* 1858:228.

²² Richard C. Dales: *The Intellectual Life of Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, 2nd revised edition, Leiden, New York; Köln 1992:155-156.

²³ *Íslendingabók* ch. 9, ÍF I,1:20.

²⁴ *Biskupa sögur* 1858:27.

school run by a member of the opposition. But could Sæmundr be labeled a member of the opposition? If we are to believe *Sörla þáttur*, he could. According to this source, Sæmundr was married to Guðrún, the daughter of the Lawspeaker Kolbeinn Flosason, and two other daughters were married to Sæmundr's two brothers. Even more interesting, according to the same source Kolbeinn is said to have been buried *twice*.²⁵ Barði Guðmundsson thinks this means that Kolbeinn had died excommunicated,²⁶ what is supported by a notice in *Hungrvaka* about the troubles Ísleifr experienced during his time as a bishop, where one of the lawspeakers is condemned for his immorality.²⁷ In any case, the information in *Sörla þáttur* is very specific. It may be added that Sæmundr's wife Guðrún plays quite an important part in the legends about Sæmundr.

The early schools were a necessary instrument for developing an organized church. They were also an instrument for obtaining power, which is best illustrated by the fact that the descendants of Sæmundr and Teitr were to dominate Iceland's political scene for generations. This astonishing success cannot be explained only by the needs of the Icelandic church. Adam of Bremen tells us that the church organisation in Norway had suffered heavily during the reign of Haraldr Harðráði,²⁸ and even the words of the *Gulabingslög* imply that a priest was normally a foreigner.²⁹ This makes it highly probable that the church in Norway provided ample career opportunities for many Icelandic clerics, which is confirmed by the fact that at least two Icelanders were made bishops in the early Norwegian church.³⁰ In addition to that, it soon became customary to let sons of chieftains go to these schools. *Kristni saga* testifies that during the episcopate of Gizurr, Ísleifr's son and successor [...] *váru flestir virðingamenn læróir ok vígóir til presta, þó at hǫfðingjar væri* "most of the distinguished men were educated and ordained as priests, even though they might be chieftains."³¹

The real turning-point for the new church was the year 1097, when the law of church tithe was passed by the *Allþing*, many years before any such law was introduced elsewhere in the Nordic countries. In *Íslendingabók* Ari fróði is astonished that it had been possible to carry through such a wide-ranging reform.³² At this decisive moment Sæmundr appears alongside the two dignitaries, Gizurr the Bishop and Markúss the Lawspeaker. In explaining what brought about the decision, Ari mentions Gizurr's *ástæld* "popularity" and Sæmundr's *[for]tölur*³³ "persuasions". One possible interpretation is that Gizurr had support from one part of the representatives at the *Allþing*, but that Sæmundr managed to persuade those who were sceptical or hostile to the bishop. When Sæmundr hundred years later, in Gunnlaugr Leifsson's version of *Jóns saga*, was actually called *þann mann, er verit hefir einnhverr mestr guðs kristni til nytsemðar á Íslandi* "that man, who has been the most useful of all for God's Christianity in Iceland",³⁴ this may indicate that Sæmundr played a crucial role on this occasion. The same may be inferred from the words of Sæmundr's grandson Jón Loptsson in *Þorláks saga*, when he is presented with the Archbishop's decree to revise the law of 1097, abolishing the privileges of churchowners: *eigi hygg ek at hann vili betr né viti enn minir*

²⁵ ÍF X:113.

²⁶ Barði Guðmundsson: Goðorðaskipun og löggöðættir, in *Skírnir*, Reykjaví 1936, 55ff.

²⁷ *Biskupa sögur* 1858:62.

²⁸ Lib. III, Cap. XVII; 1917:159.

²⁹ *Norges gamle Love indtil 1387*, i Christiania 1846, p. 9 "Um kirkna forsiö".

³⁰ Arne Odd Johnsen: Biskop Bjarnhard og kirkeforholdene i Norge under Harald Hardråde og Olav Kyrre, in *Bjørgvins bispestol. Frå Selja til Bjørgvin*, Bergen 1968:21.

³¹ *Biskupa sögur* 1858:29.

³² ÍF I,1:22.

³³ *Íslendingabók* has *tölur*, *Kristni saga: umtölur* (*Biskupa sögur* 1858:28), *Hungrvaka: fortölur* (1858:68)

³⁴ *Biskupa sögur* 1858:84.

forellrar, Sæmundr hinn fróði ok synir hans "I do not think he [=the Archbishop] has any better will nor wisdom than my predecessors, Sæmundr fróði and his sons".³⁵

The big question is: What arguments could possibly have convinced the people at the Allþing that the church deserved such generous support? It is tempting to assume that the passing of this new law was a testimony of the strong feelings aroused by the First Crusade, news of which reached Iceland in 1096, one year before the Allþing made its decision. Count Paul Riant's *Expéditions et pèlerinages des Scandinaves en Terre Sainte au temps des croisades* from 1865, cites several sources which seem to refer to Icelanders taking part in the Crusade. Some sources mention crusaders *ex Anglia et aliis insulis Oceani* "from England and other islands in the ocean"³⁶; *de extremis Oceani sinibus* "from the furthestmost parts of the ocean";³⁷ *Danorum, Northmannorum ceterorumque transmarinorum exercitibus* "armies of Danes, Norwegians and others who live on the other side of the sea".³⁸ But there are also direct references, as when sailors in a fleet that was operating in the Mediterranean at the time the Crusade started, were said to be *ex Flandria, Antverpia, Tyla* [=Iceland], *Frisia*.³⁹ Paul Riant even calls attention to the curious words in the Icelandic annals for the year 1096: *Hófe lorsalaferð af Norðrlöndum* "The Crusade started from the Northern countries."⁴⁰

The part of Europe that formed the nucleus of the Crusade movement coincides very neatly with the area in which Sæmundr in all probability had done his studies, namely Northern France, Flanders and Rhineland. Some of the leaders of the Crusade were about his age, and Pope Urban himself had been teaching in Reims until 1070. It is not totally unlikely that Sæmundr during his years abroad may have crossed the path of someone who was later to play a part in the Crusade. The reason for this assumption is that Sæmundr towards the end of his life seems to have had special relations with two outstanding representatives of this movement, namely Archbishop Asser in Lund, and the Norwegian king Sigurðr Jónsalafari. The most tangible proof of these relations is the birth of Jón Loptsson in 1124, the result of a marriage between Sæmundr's son Loptr and the king's sister Þóra. That the boy was brought up near the king's dwellings in Konungahella, clearly demonstrates that Loptr's connection with Þóra had been accepted by Sigurðr.

Towards the end of his life Sæmundr appears as extremely *successful* in the eyes of his contemporaries. He had gained riches and influence, his school had been developed to become the leading centre of learning in Iceland, he had friendly relations with some of the most powerful persons in Scandinavia. At the same time there must have been a nimbus of mystery about a person who had spent years *nemandi ókunniga fróði* "learning unknown [or: occult] wisdom".⁴¹ These things put together must have nurtured the envy of his contemporaries, and given rise to rumours that he was a sorcerer. The legends about Sæmundr fróði seem to have flourished soon after his death, and it is interesting that one of these stories, the story of Sæmundr's flight from his teacher, appears in Gunnlaug Leifsson's *Jóns saga* from about 1200.⁴² From this we may gather that such stories had already become familiar lore at that time, and lost most of its original impact. Interesting enough, the motifs of some of these stories are reminiscent of the propaganda war that was being waged during the Investiture Struggle. The nucleus of the legends is an early version of the *Faust motif*: The

³⁵ *Biskupa sögur* 1858:283.

³⁶ Ordericus Vitalis, Lib. X, Cap. 4, cf. Riant 1865:134 footnote.

³⁷ Guibert de Nogent, Lib. I, Cap. 1, cf. Riant 1865:129 footnote.

³⁸ *Scriptores rerum Germanicarum* VI, p. 215, cf. Riant 1865:143 footnote.

³⁹ Albertus Aquensis, Lib. VI, Cap. 55, cf. Riant 1865:143 footnote.

⁴⁰ Gustav Storm (ed.) *Íslandske Annaler indtil 1578*, p. 110.

⁴¹ *Biskupa sögur* 1858:228.

⁴² *Biskupa sögur* 1858:228-229.

learned scholar who promises his soul to the Devil in order to attain all his wishes. The story in *Jóns saga* about the flight from the teacher/sorcerer is one of the stories found in William of Malmesbury *Gesta regum anglorum* about *Gerbert of Aurillac*, later to become *Pope Sylvester II* (999 - 1003)⁴³. The parallels between the careers of these two men are also quite striking: Gerbert had like Sæmundr studied abroad, in Muslim Spain. He was the greatest scholar of his time, his interests ranging from literary studies to mathematics, logic and natural sciences. He had the most powerful patrons such as the French ruler Hugh Capet and the German emperor Otto III. Rumours that he was a magician seem to have been circulating even during his life-time. It appears, however, that these rumours gathered momentum in the time of the Investiture Struggle, when stories about a pope making a contract with the Devil were used by the enemies of Gregor VII.⁴⁴ The fact that these stories later on were being told about Sæmundr, indicates that he, like Archbishop Asser, belonged to the party that supported the papacy's struggle against the Empire.

It is quite clear that Sæmundr both as teacher and church administrator helped laying the foundation for the flowering of literature among the Icelanders. But the big question is whether Sæmundr also produced literary works that were to influence the development of this literature. Our point of departure in searching for Sæmundr's authorship is a scaldic poem found in *Flateyjarbók*.⁴⁵ The poem, numbering 83 stanzas and eulogizing Sæmundr's grandson Jón Loptsson, is introduced by the words *Her hefr Noreghs kon[un]ga tal er Sæmundr froði orti* "Here is the beginning of the enumeration of Norway's kings that Sæmundr fróði made." The reign of each ruler is summarized in quite a few stanzas. Following the reign of king Magnús hinn goði, who died in 1047, the 40th stanza makes a summing-up: *Nu hefir ek talt / tíu landreka / þa er huerr var / fra Haralldi. / inta ek sua / æfui þeirra / sem Sæmundr / sagði hinn froði*. "Now I have enumerated ten rulers who all descended from Haraldr [Hárfagri], and also [the years of?] their reign as Sæmundr fróði has told." Certain differences between Sæmundr's chronology, as represented by *Nóregs konunga tal*, and Ari fróði's chronology have been investigated most thoroughly in Óláfía Einarsdóttir's *Studier i kronologisk metode i tidlig islandsk historieskrivning* from 1964.⁴⁶ These differences represent one of the main keys to Sæmundr's authorship, as they lead us to kings' chronicles and sagas where the influence from Sæmundr is noticeable.

There is quite solid evidence that Sæmundr wrote his book in *Latin*. In the prologue to *Heimskringla* Ari fróði is said to be the one who *ritaði fyrstr manna hér á landi at norrænu máli fræði, bæði forna ok nýja* "wrote as the first man here in this country history in Norse language, both old and new". That Sæmundr's book was in *Latin* is supported by the fact that its influence is most evident in the *Latin* chronicle *Historia Norvegiae* and in Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, which was originally a *Latin* work. In his pioneering article about Sæmundr's authorship published in 1896⁴⁷ Gustav Antonio Gjessing points to the geographical excursus which precedes the kings' history in *Historia Norvegiae*,⁴⁸ also referred to in Oddr Snorrason's saga,⁴⁹ as a remnant of Sæmundr's work.⁵⁰ Two things are quite conspicuous in this introductory part: *Norway* is said to have got its name from a king

⁴³ Lib. II, Cap. 167, Rolls Series 1887:193-195.

⁴⁴ Raphael Meyer: *Gerbertsagnet*. Studie over middelalderlige Djævelkontrakthistorier, København 1902:71-75.

⁴⁵ *Flateyjarbók* II:520-528.

⁴⁶ *Bibliotheca historica Lundensis* XIII.

⁴⁷ Gustav Antonio Gjessing: Sæmund frodes forfatterskab, in *Sproglig-historiske Studier tilegnede C.R. Unger*, Kristiania 1896.

⁴⁸ *Monumenta historica Norvegiæ* 1880, especially pp. 73-82, 92-97.

⁴⁹ Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1932:83-85.

⁵⁰ Gjessing 1896:134-140.

named *Nor*. Secondly, Old Norse geographical names are translated into Latin whenever possible. Examples are *Sinus orientalis* [*Vík austr*], *Insulae ovium* [*Føreyjar*], *Glacialis insula* [*Ísland*], *Viridis terra* [*Grænland*]. In an article published in 1999 I have argued that three unexplained place-names in *Jómsvíkinga saga*'s story about the battle in *Hjörungavágr* are reminiscences of Sæmundr's etymologizing.⁵¹

The eponym *Nor* attracts particular interest. This name appears in the story about *Nórr* and *Górr* which forms part of the legendary protohistory *Hversu Noregs byggðisk* in *Flateyjarbók*,⁵² and in another version used as an introduction to *Orkneyinga saga*. In a number of Danish sources the eponym *Dan* is the first name in the long lineage of Danish kings. It seems probable that *Nor* is coined on *Dan*, since the eponym *Danaus* to *Danamarcha* is mentioned by William of Jumièges ca. 1070.⁵³ A very curious coincidence is that Sæmundr's family, the Oddaverjar, traced their agnatic lineage - father to son - from *Danish* kings, many of whom figure in the *Skjöldunga saga*. We do not know when this genealogy was constructed, but Ari's lineage in *Íslendingabók* forms an exact parallel by tracing his *langfeðgatal* from *Swedish* kings originating with *Yngvi Tyrkjakonungr*. A direct reference to the *Skjöldungar* is found in Ari's genealogy when the fourth in the line beginning with *Yngvi*, *Njorðr* and *Freyr* is called *Fjölhnir*, *sá es dó at Friðfróða* "Fjölhnir, the one who died at Peace-Fróði's" [house],⁵⁴ referring to the story in *Ynglinga saga* about the king who drowned in a big mead vessel. In an article first published in 1969 Stefán Karlsson has drawn attention to a brief text in a 17th century manuscript. The text consists of a few chronological notes, allegedly written in the year 1137, which leads us to assuming that Ari fróði may have been the author. Among these notes the following is found:

[A]ugustus keisare Fridaði/ ad fyrer setning Guð: um allann heim/ þá er christur var borinn. En vier hyggðu/ ad i þann tíð/ væri Friðfróði konungur á Danm(ork)u Enn Fjölner i Svíþíðu/ sem Sæmundur prestur ætladi.

The emperor Augustus on God's command made peace throughout the world when Christ was born. And we think this was the time when Peace-Fróði was king in Denmark, and Fjölhnir in Sweden, as Sæmundr the priest thought [calculated?].⁵⁵

A related text appears in *Skáldskaparmál* in *Snorra Edda*:

*Skjöldr hét sonr Óðins er Skjöldungar eru frá komnir [...] Skjöldr átti þann son, er Friðleifr hét [...] sonr Friðleifs hét Fróði; hann tók konungdóm eptir föður sinn i þann tíð, er Ágústus keisari lagði frið um heim allan; þá var Kristur borinn. En fyrir því at Fróði var allra konunga ríkastir á Norðrlöndum, þá var honum kendir friðrinn um alla danska tunga, og kalla menn þat Fróða-frið*⁵⁶

there was a son of Óðin called Skiöld, from whom the Skioldungs are descended [...] Skiöld had a son called Fridleif who ruled the territory after him. [...] Fridleif's son was Frodi. He succeeded to his father's kingdom in the period when the emperor Augustus established peace over all the world. It was then that Christ was born. And because Frodi was the greatest of all the kings in northern countries, the peace was attributed to him throughout Scandinavia, and Scandinavians call it Frodi's peace.⁵⁷

⁵¹ John Megaard: Hvor sto "Slaget i Hjörungavágr"? Jomsvíkingeberetningens stedsnavn og Sæmundr fróði, in *alvissmál* nr. 9, Berlin 1999, pp. 29-54.

⁵² *Flateyjarbók* I:21-24.

⁵³ Lib. I, Cap. 3.

⁵⁴ ÍF I,1:27.

⁵⁵ Stefán Karlsson: Fróðleiksgreinar frá tólfu öld, reprinted in *Stafkrókar*, Reykjavík 2000, p. 99.

⁵⁶ Finnur Jónsson (ed.) København 1900, p. 106

⁵⁷ Anthony Faulkes (transl. and ed.) 1995:106-107.

What is very interesting is that the term *Fríð-Fróði*, which is used both in *Íslendingabók* and in the chronological text, seems to be dependant on *Snorra Edda's* *Fróða-fríðr*, which is clearly a coinage of *Pax augustana*. Moreover, it seems that the author has been aware of the similarity between the etymologies of *Augustus* and *Fróði*. The emperor's name is derived from *augeve* "increase", while the king's name has been related to adjectives like "luxuriant", "vigorous", "fat".⁵⁸

The chronological note and the text in *Snorra Edda* bear the stamp of medieval historiography, where national histories are "grafted" into the Christian history of the world. This history is divided into six or seven Ages of the World reckoned from the week of Creation, the 6th Age starting with the birth of Christ. The coupling of *Fróði* to *Augustus*, however, is paralleled in the presentation of the eponymic *Dan* in Danish sources. According to *Annales Ryenses* the Danes got their name because *tempore David regem habuerunt regem Dan* "at the time when David was king they had a king Dan".⁵⁹ Also in the *Lejre Chronicle (Chronicon Lethrense)* *Dan* is said to have reigned in *etate David*.⁶⁰ Here is a parallel in that the reign of king David marks the beginning of the 4th Age of the world. The *Lejre Chronicle* also tells us that *Nori* was *Dan's* brother.⁶¹

Historical writings in the Middle Ages usually reflect the conflicts of the time when they were written. In the case of the eponymic *Dan*, ostensibly living at time of king David, it is curious to hear that Denmark was threatened to be invaded by the *emperor*. We find a similar story in *Oddaverjaannál*, according to which *Fríðleifr*, the father of *Fríð-Fróði*, had to defend the Nordic countries against *Julius Caesar*:

*A þeim daugum er hinn víjðfrægi Julius heriadi oc vndir [Rom]uerskt valld villdi draga alla veraulld villdi hann og [i nordrit] heria og vndir sig leggja Nordur laund: þa ryktí sa kongur i Danmark sem hiet Fríðleifr snare: [...] þangat heriadi Julius og er ham sa macka Dana, Suija og Nordmanna bardi hann eigi beriaet: og giordi þann satimola vid Nordmenn ad þeir skylldu hallda homun til virðingar fædingar dag hans einu sinni a hueriu are med gledi og skemtun: þesa hatijð uðitoku Nordmenn [...] og kolludu Jól eda Júl's dag. Stod su hatijð leingi meðan heidun voru Nordur laund em er nu vn þreytt i Christi fædingar hatijð: og kallæst em Jól.*⁶²

In those days when the famous *Julius [Caesar]* was waging war, trying to subdue all the world, he also wanted to wage war in the north and subdue the Northern countries. Then there was a king in Denmark by the name of *Fríðleif snari*. [...] Right up to the Northern countries did *Julius* wage war, but when he saw the power of the Danes, the Swedes and the Norwegians, he did not venture a battle. And he made an agreement with the Scandinavians that they were to celebrate his birthday once a year with joy and merriment. The Scandinavians adopted this feast [...] and they called it *Jól* or *Júl's Day*. This feast was celebrated as long as the Northern countries were heathen, but now it is transformed into the celebration of the birth of Christ, and it is still called *Jól*.

If we are to look for some political message in the text, we may notice that the threat from the *Cesar* is emphasized, and also the need for Nordic unity. Could this reflect sentiments of rulers in Denmark at the time when the Nordic archdiocese was being established in Lund, in defiance of the archbishop in Bremen and the German emperor? That the story ends up in an etymological explanation is clearly reminiscent of *Sæmundr*. It would certainly help to explain why legends about him bear the imprint of the Investiture Struggle, if *Sæmundr* himself played an active part in this war of propaganda.

It is well known that in some 17th century sources *Sæmundr* is referred to as the author of the *Elder Edda*, and the originator of a first version of the *Younger Edda*. These references have not been taken seriously in modern times. In the words of *Finnur Jónsson*, it is

⁵⁸ Jan de Vries: *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Leiden 1977.

⁵⁹ *Annales Danici medii ævi*, ed. Ellen Jørgensen, København 1920, p. 62.

⁶⁰ *Scriptores minores historię Danicę medii ævi*, ed. M. Cl. Gertz, København 1917-1920, I:43.

⁶¹ Op. cit. p. 62.

⁶² *Íslandske Annaler indtil 1578*, udg. ved Gustav Storm. Christiania 1888, p. 430.

overflødig her at komme ind på disse fantastiske og ganske vilkårlige meninger og formodninger, der nu er eller i hvert fald burde være skrinlagte for bestandig.⁶³

The scope of this paper does not permit more than a few introductory remarks about this question. In my opinion there are two possible links between Sæmundr and the *Eddas*: The word *edda* appears in *Rígsþula* [or *Rígsmál*], meaning “great-grandmother” or “foremother”. This allegoric poem, which has always been the object of much scholarly interest, seems to be very central in relation to the *Edda* poems as a whole. Its relation with the mythological poems is obvious, and in its treatment of the *hieros gamos* motif, the *edda*, denoting “the foremother of humble origin”, plays a very central part. Scholars have also noticed that the *jarl*, representing the third level in the social pyramid, has *ǫtul* [...] *augu* / *sem yrmlingi* “terrifying eyes like a snake”, clearly reminiscent of the heroic poems in the *Elder Edda*. What is interesting in relation to Sæmundr is that the poem leads down to *Danr* and *Danpr*, who both figure in Arngrímur Jónsson’s version of *Skjöldunga saga*.

Rígs [...] *Danpri* *cujusdam, domini in Dampsted, filiam duxit uxorem, cui Dana nomen erat; qui deinde Regis titulo in sua illa provincia acquisito, filium ex uxore Dana, Dan sive Danum, hæredem reliquit; cuius Dani paternam dinonem jam adepti subditi omnes Dani dicebantur.*⁶⁴

Rig [...] married Dana, daughter of Dan in Dansted. He was the first who was called king in his country. He got a son with his wife, who was called Dan, and he inherited his father’s kingdom. When he had taken his heritage in possession, his people were named after him and called Danes.

In this way the poem combines four important elements: (a) the term *edda* (b) the link to the mythological poems (c) the link to the heroic poems (d) the link to *Skjöldunga saga*. In addition, a certain interest for etymology is witnessed in the terms *Rígr* [Celtic: “king”], *kon ungr* and *Danpr* as eponym to *Danpsted*. Even though the poem may have been written after Sæmundr’s time, it may nevertheless be indicative of some kind of connection between Sæmundr and *Edda*.

The other link is the much-discussed parallels between the Non-*Eddic* poems *Sólarljóð* and *Hugsvinnsmál* and the *Eddic* poem *Hávamál*, three poems which represent the *Christian*, the *classical* and the *heathen* background of the European Middle Ages. In the Icelandic tradition the authorship of *Sólarljóð* is attributed to Sæmundr fróði. That a single poem is ascribed to him has independent value in the context of this tradition, which has diligently preserved the names of so many poets, whereas the names of prose writers are mostly forgotten. Klaus von See, in particular, has asserted that *Hávamál* has its roots in the learned clerical culture of the Middle Ages, and that even the verse form *ljóðaháttur* is developed from the couplet form used in classical gnomic poetry, as for instance in *Disticha Catonis*, of which *Hugsvinnsmál* is a translation.⁶⁵

In the name of prudence, we should not definitively rule out the possibility that some of the poems about Sigurðr and Brynhildr may have been written by an Icelander who had studied somewhere in the vicinity of the Rhine. Or the possibility that a central part of our knowledge about Old Norse mythology may have come from one of the founders of the Icelandic church.

⁶³ *Den oldnorske og oldislandske Litteraturs Historie*, 2. udg., København 1920-23, II:343.

⁶⁴ ÍF XXXV:9

⁶⁵ Klaus von See: *Disticha Catonis und Hávamál*, in *Edda, Saga, Skaldendichtung*, Aufsätze zur skandinavischen Literatur des Mittelalters, Heidelberg 1981, esp. pp. 41-43.