

Fragments of Fourteenth-century Icelandic Folklore

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Without in the least wishing to contest the broad appeal of *harðfiskur* and *hákarl*, I think it safe to say that Iceland has had rather more international success in exporting lexical items than in popularizing its delicacies. Two examples readily come to mind: 'geyser' (< *Geysir*), that quintessential icon of the Icelandic natural landscape, appeared in English (according to the *OED*) as early as 1763 and was fully naturalized in about a century, lending itself not only to the description of gushing hot springs in other parts of the world but also to similes and advertising cant; 'saga' (< *saga*), meanwhile, the very core of Icelandic cultural production, had entered English even earlier, and it too experienced a proliferation of secondary-sense uses from about the mid-nineteenth century. The *OED* confirms that English speakers came to see saga contours everywhere, from the Forsytes to Apollo 13. It is an open question whether those who employ such vocabulary in English are aware of its roots. Yet there the words are, still recognizably Norse and proud representatives of Iceland in foreign minds and on faraway tongues.

Ironically, these two Icelandic émigrés-made-good, practically kissing cousins in their current linguistic environs, barely seem to have known each other in the old country. '[I]t can scarcely be doubted,' Robert Bakewell's *Introduction to Geology* (1813, 245-6) explained to its readers, 'that the Geysers in Iceland [] are occasioned by the subterranean fires which extend under that island.' Subterranean fires are of course the key to Iceland's physical character. On its perch atop the active mid-Atlantic ridge, this c. 65 million years young island rivals Hawaii and the Pacific Rim as one of the world's most active volcanic regions. That the churning magma and its steamy offspring have remained indifferent to the sagas may call for no particular explanation, but it is perhaps more astounding that the sagas, in turn, seem almost entirely ignorant of the existence of underground fires and their consequences. Throughout the entire breadth of the medieval saga corpus, only the scantiest testimony to active volcanoes turns up.¹

An eruption reported on the occasion of Iceland's conversion furnishes a rare exception: *Þá kom maðr hlaupandi ok sagði at jarðeldr var upp kominn í Qlfusi* 'Then a man came running and said that earth-fire had come up in Qlfus', *Kristni saga* recounts. The pagans take it as an omen of divine anger, prompting Snorri goði's famous quip: *Um hvat reiddusk guðin þá er hér brann hraunit er nú stöndu vér á?* 'What were the gods angry about when the lava-field on which we now stand was burning?' (ÍF 15², 33).² Another dusting of references may be sifted from

¹ Sigurður Nordal notes in passing that 'the tale of Borgarhraum [in *Landnámabók*] shows that the first eruptions which the settlers saw excited their imaginations, and the capacity to create mythical tales was not completely dead' (1970-1, 112). To my mind, the degree to which eruptions evidently *failed* to excite Icelanders' literary imaginations is far more remarkable.

² All translations are mine, except as otherwise noted. ÍF = Íslenzk fornrit.

Landnámabók.³ But in the *Íslendingasögur* – the jewels in the crown of medieval Iceland's literary tradition – the silence surrounding volcanic fires persists unrelieved. The mystery of this reticence deepens when we consider the one apparent exception, a passage in *Grettis saga* that (at first sight) seems to point unequivocally towards a volcano:

Þat var eitt kveld harðla síð, er Grettir bjósk heim at ganga, at hann sá eld mikinn gjósa upp á nesi því, er niðr var frá bæ Auðunar. Grettir spurði eptir, hvat nýjungu þat væri. (*Grettis saga*, ÍF 7, 57)

'It happened one evening, extremely late, when Grettir was about to go home, that he saw a great fire erupt on the headland which was below Auðunn's farmstead. Grettir asked about it, what novelty it might be.'

What clearer attestation of subterranean fires might one ask for? But a second glance shows that it is not to be. Grettir learns that the flames indicate the location of a burial mound, whose occupant (not surprisingly) is not quite dead – though he will be soon, once Grettir and his sword have paid him a visit. Despite the suggestive language (*hann sá eld mikinn gjósa upp*; cf. Modern Icelandic *eldgos*, not attested in ON), this may hardly count as geothermal activity. Fires and will-o'-the-wisps play on grave-mounds elsewhere in the *Íslendingasögur* (for example, on Gunnarr's barrow in *Njáls saga*, ÍF 12, 193), and in any case the event recounted here takes place not in volatile Iceland but in geologically inert Norway. Thirteen thick volumes'-worth of *Íslenzk fornrit* text (ÍF 2-14), then, seem to know nothing of lava or ash plumes. How to account for this gaping lacuna?

The *Íslendingasögur* are tight-lipped in general about all kinds of natural calamity. Few wildfires or famines ravage the countryside in saga Iceland; harsh winters and disease seldom decimate the population; landslides and floods are mercifully rare; and ravenous polar bears, borne south on breakaway ice floes, are almost unheard of. The utter absence of volcanic eruptions may seem less extraordinary when weighed against a mere four avaianches or landslides, for example, half as many again mentions of sea ice, and not quite a third that tally of ursine incidents⁴ – a meagre sum, in all, which does little to disrupt the impression that

³ See ÍF 1, 98-9, 330-1 and 328). More ambiguous are ÍF 1, 304-5 and 323, possibly allusions to *jökulhlaup* (flash floods triggered by sub-glacial volcanic eruptions; see Þorvaldur Thoroddsen, 1899-1905, II 235-6). Mention of a farm site *sem nú er hraun brunnit* 'where there is now a field of burnt lava' (ÍF 1, 345) apparently refers to old basalt exposed through soil erosion; see Sigurður Þórarinnsson (1977, 669-70).

⁴ Not counting occurrences in *Landnámabók*, I find in the sagas six mentions of icebergs in Icelandic waters (*Eyrbyggja saga*, ÍF 4, 158 and 165; *Laxdæla saga*, ÍF 5, 196-7; *Fóstbræðra saga*, ÍF 6, 136-9; *Vatnsdæla saga*, ÍF 8, 42; *Bárðar saga*, ÍF 13, 114; see also *Landnámabók*, ÍF 1, 38-9), four mentions of *skriður* – 'land-', 'rock-' or 'snow-slides' – (*Hrafnkels saga*, ÍF 11, 97-8 [= *Landnámabók*, ÍF 1, 299]; *Eiríks saga rauða*, ÍF 4, 197-8, 405; *Gísla saga*, ÍF 6, 59-60; *Vatnsdæla saga*, ÍF 8, 96; and cf. *Bárðar saga*, ÍF 13, 156-7; see also *Landnámabók*, ÍF 1, 303-5 and 339, and one or two references to bears in Iceland (*Vatnsdæla saga*, ÍF 8, 42-4; implicitly, perhaps also *Eyrbyggja saga*, ÍF 4, 161, which casually speaks of a man going about northern Iceland armed with a *bjarnsvið[a]* 'bear-licence'); see also *Landnámabók*, ÍF 1, 219 and 285-7.

söguöld Iceland must have been a serene paradise, a sort of medieval Tahiti (so long as one steered clear of one's neighbours, that is).

Staying out of one's neighbours' (and thus out of harm's) way was no mean feat, of course. As we have just heard, the sagas only attend to weather in the first instance when it is in the service of literary effects (metaphor, mood-setting, characterization etc.). Meteorological extremes, in particular, typically appear as *gerningaveðr* 'performative weather', the work of witches kneading the natural environment to ill effect (Ogilvie and Gíslí Pálsson, 2006; the inspired translation of *gerningaveðr* is theirs). I submit that much the same is true of descriptions of natural phenomena more generally. Those at the more catastrophic end of the spectrum never appear by chance – a narrative purpose always motivates their occurrence in the text – and are almost invariably presented as the product of human or human-like agency. This point may be illustrated by examining reports of disease, for instance. A girl loses her mind after sneaking a peek at an undead corpse, and *linnti hon aldri af ópi ok umbrotum alla nóttina, þar til undir dag, þá deyr hon* 'She never let up her screaming and twitching the whole night, up to daybreak; then she dies' (*Heiðarvíga saga*, ÍF 3, 234). When interrogated about their illness, some scurvy sailors matter-of-factly *sögðusk orðnir fyrir gøringum* 'said they were afflicted by sorcery' (*Þorsteins þáttur tjaldstæðings*, ÍF 13, 430-1). And a woman about to succumb to a plague has a Bergmanesque vision of herself and others being led off by a whip-brandishing angel of death (*Eiríks saga rauða*, ÍF 4, 418; cf. 215). A first general principle we may thus formulate for the natural environment in the sagas, and for natural hazards in particular, is that they are seldom (if ever) natural. Narrative structure, not nature, determines their existence within the text (which is hardly surprising; see Barthes, 1968). A second principle states that deaths which we might classify as accidental or from natural causes are, in the sagas, generally the work of anthropomorphic agents: ogres, magicians or revenants. We may recall the bewildering provision in *Grágás* proscribing randomness: *Þat er mælt. at engi scolo verða vaða verc* 'It is decreed that there shall be no accidents' (*Grágás*, 1852, I 166; cf. 1879, 334). The law's sweeping rejection is presumably only meant to deny coincidence as an explanatory (and exculpatory) mechanism in human affairs. Saga narrative, refusing to recognize happenstance altogether, goes one better than *Grágás*, exterminating chance equally from the social and the extra-social spheres.

Focusing now on geological calamities, specifically, we may note that the shudders of the earth conform to these general principles. Only two or three passages in all of the *Íslendingasögur* attest to earthquakes, and of these, only one locates a seismic event in Iceland itself (cf. *Harðar saga*, ÍF 13, 41-3; *Bárðar saga*, ÍF 13, 169). (This spatial pattern is itself noteworthy; as a working hypothesis for our third rule of thumb, we may suggest that [un]natural calamities in the sagas tend to occur in far-off lands, where the boundaries between the real and the fantastic are more porous anyhow.) In the single episode set in Iceland, the renowned Óláfr pái hunts down a family of Hebridean *seiðmenn*; he and his men take precautions as best they can to ward off the sorcerers' dying curses. Three of the Hebrideans are disposed of without too much incident, but the fourth, Stígandi, is only captured some time later:

[Peir] taka nú belg ok draga á høfuð [Stíganda].... Rauf var á belgnum, ok getr Stígandi sét þörum megin í hlífðina; þar var fagrt landsleg ok

grasloðit; en því var líkast, sem hvirfilvindr komi at; sneri um jörðunni, svá at aldregi síðan kom þar gras upp. Þar heitir nú á Brennu. Síðan berja þeir Stíganda grjóti í hel. (*Laxdæla saga*, ÍF 5, 109)

'Now they take a sack and pull it over (Stígandi's) head.... There was a rip in the sack, and Stígandi catches sight of the hillside across (from them): it was a lovely piece of ground there and covered with grass; but thereupon it was just as if a whirlwind hit it. The earth was overturned, so that grass never grew there afterwards. It is now called "At the Burning" there. Afterwards they stone Stígandi to death.'

The saga chooses to present a lurching of the landscape as Stígandi's failed attempt to strike back at those about to kill him. Rather than Man at the mercy of forces beyond his control, we witness nature convulsing under the lash of a dominating human will. Similarly, in another passage where a witch finds her plans stymied, she laments her thwarted 'inten[tion] to overturn the entire lie of the land', counter-factually menacing her attackers before she dies, by saying, 'And you'd all have gone stark raving mad with terror' (*Hon kvazk hafa ætlat at snúa þar um landslagi öllu*, – 'en þér ærðizk allir ok yrðit at gjalti' – *Vatnsdæla saga*, ÍF 8, 70; cf. *Landnámabók*, ÍF 1, 222).

Such accounts of seismic tremors fit in seamlessly with the (admittedly few) saga passages attesting to other forms of natural disasters. Why then do volcanic eruptions not fall into the same cognitive schema? Why would lava, pumice and ash-fall not appear as raw materials for witches and evil-doers to draw on? A satisfactory solution is beyond the scope of this paper,⁵ but I believe we may begin to perceive the contours of an answer by considering comparative evidence from two other genres: poetry and ecclesiastical writings.

Gestures towards the inclusion of volcanic activity in the generalized supernatural arsenal may be found in verse. Sigurður Nordal long ago posited *Vöðuspá* as a distinctively Icelandic apocalypse, alluding to the poet's familiarity with hot springs (st. 35), flames shooting sky-high from the ground (st. 57), and ash-clouds veiling the face of the sun (st. 41).⁶ A more clear-cut description of volcanic unrest appears in 'Hallmundarkviða', a twelve-stanza *flokkr* tentatively dated to the thirteenth-century (ÍF 13, ccv, ccxi). Here, we hear how *jökla brenna* [] *spretta kámir klettar; knýr víðis ból hriðir; aurr tekr upp at færask undarligr ór grundu* 'Glaciers blaze [] coal-black crags burst; the curse of wood (i.e. fire) unleashes storms; a marvellous mud begins to flow from the ground,' and so on.⁷ It is noteworthy that the song is put into the mouth of a cave-dwelling giant: two men took shelter from foul

⁵ For a more detailed treatment of this issue, see my 'Norse Furies: The Cultural Construction of Violence in Medieval Iceland', unpublished manuscript, ch. 5.

⁶ I follow Nordal's stanza numbering (1984, 72-3, 81-2, 110-11). For his interpretation, see also Nordal (1970-1, 112; 1978, 122-3).

⁷ *Bergþúa þáttur*, 'Hallmundarkviða' stt. 5-6 (ÍF 13, 445-6). Guðmundur Finnbogason (1935, 172; cf. 173-4) compares these verses to first-hand accounts of various Karla eruptions to argue that [*þ*] *að er ekki líklegt, að nokkur maður hefði lýst eldgosu úr jökli eins vel og gert er í Hallmundarkviðu, nema sá, er sjálfur hefði verið sjónar- og heyrnarvottur að slíkum atburði* 'it is entirely unlikely that anyone might describe a volcanic eruption in a glacier so well as is done in 'Hallmundarkviða', other than one who had himself been eye- and ear-witness to such an event'.

weather and *heyrou þeir kveðandi harða ógurliga með mikilli raust* 'they heard singing, very awful and hugely loud'. What was being sung was evidently autobiographical: *Stig ek fjall af fjalli [] Einn ák hús í hrauni* 'I step from mountain to mountain [] I have a solitary home in the lava-field' (*Bergþía þátr*, including 'Hallmundarkviða', ÍF 13, 442, 446, 449). If *Vǫluspá* arguably appropriates vulcanicity to its vision of how the world comes apart at the seams, 'Hallmundarkviða' describes geological upheaval as a by-product of seemingly everyday giantish conduct. Unlike the usual saga procedure, neither poem insists that the disruption of the landscape is an exercise of supernaturally endowed will. Whereas Stigandi had to train his malevolent gaze deliberately on a patch of fair earth in order to wither it, the giant Hallmundr seems to roil the mountains simply by hiking through them. As a fourth general principle, we might thus propose that medieval Icelanders classified the causes of seismic and volcanic activity, be it voluntary or incidental, as lying just beyond the margins of workaday sensory reality, alongside dwarfs, *draugar* and dragons.

Icelanders likely also had available to them a body of learned writings accounting for volcanic activity in scientific or theological terms (in the Middle Ages, often the same thing, really). Patristic writings had already portrayed volcanoes as gateways to hell – a notion made famous, for instance, in Pope Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* (IV. xxxi.2-4, 1978-80, III 104-6), where the departed soul of the Arian Theodoric is cast into a seething Sicilian caldera by the righteous souls of two erstwhile victims of his persecutions (cf. the Old Norse translation, possibly twelfth-century, in *Helagra Manna Sögur*, 1877, I 245). By the twelfth century at the latest, this tradition had migrated to Iceland's volcanoes, as reported for example in the *English Chronicon de Lanercost*, s.a. 1275 (1839, 97):

Per idem tempus perhendinavit in Anglia apud Hertlepol Orchadiæ episcopus Willelmus, vir honestus et litterarum amator, qui multa miranda de insulis retulit Norwagiæ subjectis, quorum aliqua hic in sero memoriae causa. Dixit quod in Yslandia aliquo loco ardet mare spatio unius miliaris, et relinquit post se scorium nigram et sordidam. Alibi erumpit ignis e terra in certo tempore, septennio vel quinquennio, ac ex inopinato comburit villas et omnia reperta, nec potest extingui aut fugari, nisi per aquam benedictam manu sacerdotali consecratam. Quodque mirabilius est, dixit quod audiri possunt in illo igne sensibiles vagitus animarum ibidem tortarum.⁸

'At that time William, Bishop of Orkney, a noble man and a lover of learning, was on a visit in England at Hartlepool; he related many wonders concerning the islands subjected to Norway, some of which I reproduce here, that they may be remembered. He told how in Iceland the sea at a certain place burns for the space of a mile, leaving behind it black and foul soot. Elsewhere, fire regularly erupts out of the ground, every seventh or fifth year, and without warning torches villages and all it finds

⁸ Identification of Iceland's volcanoes with the fires of hell, first attested in Herbert de Mores's *Liber miraculorum* (ca. 1178-80; relevant portion edited in Sigurður Þorarinsson, 1968, 27-8), apparently originated in a Danish Cistercian context (Einar Már Jónsson, 1997, 253-7). Cf. also the Old Norse translation of Honorius Augustodunensis's *Elucidarius* (1989, 122-3).

in its path; nor may it be extinguished or turned back except with holy water blessed by the hand of a priest. And what is more wondrous, he said that, in that fire, loud shrieks can be heard of souls tormented there.'

The imported learned tradition was thus compatible with the principles we have discerned in the indigenous literature, both prosaic and poetic. It too saw geothermal fires as tangible manifestations of a reality thought to lie beyond the reach of everyday sensory experience, a reality that was neither natural nor unmotivated. And it placed this reality squarely within the moral framework of Christian cosmology. As the author of the didactic *Konungs skuggsið* (1945, 20) put it:

[E]nn nu má eingi dyliast við sá er síá má firi augum sier. firi þui at sliðkir hlutir eru oss sagðir frá pijslum heluittis sem nu má síá j þeiri ey er ijsland heitir.

'Now no one may deny it who can see it with his own eyes; because such things are told us concerning the torments of hell as one may now see on that island which is called Iceland.'

The prevalence of such a moralistic conception of subterranean fires (the volcanic verses of *Völuspá* and 'Hallmundarkviða' may well be thought to represent a naturalizing, or even paganizing, adaptation of this notion) seems to offer us one clue towards making sense of the sagas' silence on such matters. Unlike much contemporary literature elsewhere (and, for that matter, the *biskupa sögur* produced in Iceland in the same period), the *Íslendingasögur* consistently shy away from thumping their audience over the heads with blunt moralizing. Their authors may thus have considered volcanoes too vulgar, too imbued with a self-evident and unavoidable Christian ideology, to be useful. It appears that, when it came to volcanoes, Church teachings coalesced so fully with the general Icelandic view of the natural world, as narratively structured and anthropomorphically motivated, that no room could be found for vulcanicity in the secular sagas.

But if Hallmundr and Stígandi represent one dominant strand of Icelandic popular tradition, here and there we may detect some few traces of another tradition. Its clearest enunciation is in the passage in *Grettis saga* from which I quoted earlier. When Grettir enquires about the fire he has witnessed, at first *Auðunn kvað honum ekki á liggja þat at vita* 'Auðunn told him there was no urgency to know it'. Since he cannot get a straight answer, Grettir submits his own gloss for what the fire might be: 'Þat myndi mælt', sagði Grettir, 'ef slikt sæisk á vǫru landi, at þar brynni af fé', "'It would be declared", said Grettir, "if such a thing were to be seen in our country, that it's treasure (that) is burning there"' (*Grettis saga*, ÍF 7, 57)

The formula with which Grettir prefaces his interpretation – *Þat myndi mælt* [] *ef slikt sæisk á vǫru landi* – is the sort of thing that would prick up the ear of any passing folklorist, i.e. a displaced native informant's testimony about the lore of his home country, volunteered upon witnessing in his new environment a familiar phenomenon for which he has not learned a local label. Here, then (if Grettir can be taken at his word), may be a genuine relic of an otherwise lost folk tradition current in Iceland in the fourteenth century.

Proverbial tags are suspiciously ubiquitous in the *Íslendingasögur*, often labelling alleged traditional sayings that are nowhere else recorded.⁹ Given the fragmentary nature of our sources, we have no way of telling whether such sayings did indeed circulate widely and simply left the merest wisp of a trace in the manuscript record, or whether saga authors enjoyed making up their own sententious little verbal origami. We have some reason to think, however, that in the present case, at least, the author of *Grettis saga* did not just invent a catchphrase to suit his fancy. Supporting evidence comes from at least two other so-called ‘post-classical’ *Íslendingasögur* (see Cardew, 2004), where buried treasure seems to give off a magma-like glow.

Among the cartoon-like adventures recounted in the first part of *Þorskfirðinga saga* is the successful raiding of a dragons’ lair in Norway. Þórir, the protagonist, and his companions enter the dragons’ cave bearing torches *þar til er vindi laust í móti þeim, ok slokkuðu þá logn* ‘until a gust blew against them and the flames were extinguished’. Calling on his guardian spirit, however, Þórir summons a supernatural light into the cave, allowing the men to proceed as far as the sleeping dragons; *en þá skorti eigi ljós, er lýsti af drekunum ok gulli því, er þeir lágu á* ‘and then there was no shortage of light which shone from the dragons and the gold on which they lay’. In the ensuing battle, *hraut eldr af munni þeim með miklu eitri* ‘highly poisonous fire splashed from (the dragons’) mouths’, while an effusion of blood and venom from one dragon’s wound instantly kills a man it hits in the face, and nearly cripples another, whose leg is splattered (*Þorskfirðinga saga*, ÍF 13, 187-8). Nothing in this episode points explicitly at volcanic activity, but neither does it seem far-fetched (especially when informed by the clue in *Grettis saga*) to see the glowing dragons and their hoard as a stylized depiction of a volcanic crevice, and the devastating poisonous fire and blood as euphemisms for lava.

An even more outlandish passage occurs in *Bárðar saga*, where, upon the arrival of Gestr and his men in the wastelands of Greenland, [*h]já björgum nokkurum sjá þeir stengr tvær af gulli ok fastan við ketil, fullan með gull* ‘they see near some cliffs two poles of gold and, tied to them, a kettle full of gold’. Gestr sends two servants for the bounty (*Bárðar saga*, ÍF 13, 163):

[E]n er þau kvámu at fram ok ætlaðu at taka, þá rifnaði jörðin undir fótum þeim, ok svalg hon þau, svá at jörðin luktist fyrir ofan höfuð þeim, en horfit allt saman, ketillinn ok stengrnar.

‘But when they came forth to it and intended to take it, the earth tore open beneath their feet, and it swallowed them, so that the earth closed over their heads, and everything disappeared, the kettle and the poles.’

The saga does not specify how the items Gestr sees are arranged, but it seems plausible to suppose that we are meant to imagine something like a cauldron suspended from a bipod over a domestic cooking fire – except that this particular pot serves to cook precious metal. And again, it does not seem like much of a stretch to identify the bubbling gold with a pool of idly simmering lava, ready to swallow any who are foolhardy enough to approach.

⁹ See, for example, *Þorsteins þátr stangarhöggs* (ÍF 11, 72): *Lagðir verða forlagðir, ef fyrir sárunum verða* ‘Men’s resolve dissolves when faced with injury’. This rhyming maxim is only attested in this *þátr* and, in this form, only in one manuscript.

If it is conceded that these descriptions of earth-bound treasure refer to a vernacular theory of underground fires, the reasons behind saga reticence about geothermal phenomena may begin to come into clearer focus. It is not simply that the unrelenting Christian gloss of such fires offended the saga authors' secular sensibilities. Other natural disasters, after all, were equally apt to be presented as the instruments of demons and manifestations of hell on earth.¹⁰ But while both saga authors and Church teachings could accommodate witches or trolls, above-ground agents of malfeasance (who might also ultimately be minions or victims of Satan), they seem to have had greater difficulty harmonizing the attribution of subterranean fires to the glow of hidden gold with claims that the souls of the dead might be heard shrieking in an underground rotisserie.¹¹ It might not be mere coincidence that both Icelandic law and sagas are also expressly and consistently hostile to the idea of committing treasure to the ground.¹² Whereas too great a conformity with ecclesiastical lore may have prevented one strand of vernacular geological thinking from finding voice in the sagas, inability to conform to Church teachings at all may have excluded another.

The folk tradition might persist – it is always tempting to imagine a jackpot just beyond the horizon, or at least over the rim of the next crater, as the case may be – but it never quite got off the ground as a saga narrative motif. Such folklore would certainly have served useful social functions. Besides helping to explain to Icelanders the natural environment they saw all around them, it would have helped dissuade both treasure-hunters and would-be treasure-hoarders (if they did not relish the thought of turning into dragons or *draugar* themselves) from going through with their sordid plans. But, had not Grettir – like *saga* and 'Geysir' – travelled overseas, we might never have had occasion to perceive these fragments of fourteenth-century Icelandic folklore in their natural habitat.

¹⁰ For (super)natural forces Christianized through an interpretation as heathen or demonic power, see, for example, the account in *Kristnisaga* (ÍF 15², 19) and *Njáls saga* (ÍF 12, 259) of the narrow escape that the missionary Þangbrandr has from a sinkhole (which Nordal associates with a *jökulhlaup*; see Nordal, 1928, endorsed by Sigurður Þórarinnsson, 1968, 21).

¹¹ Cf. Hugo von Trimberg (1970, I 209), *Der Renner*, ll. 5045-7: *Swelch schaz begraben ist in der erden, / Der sol dem endekriste werden / Swenne er kumt, alsô hære ich sagen* 'Such treasure as is buried in the earth, it shall belong to the Antichrist when he comes, so I have heard said'. Note the proverbial tag.

¹² See, for example, *Grágás*, 1852, II 75; *Egils saga*, ÍF 2, 174, 297-8; *Eiríks saga rauða*, ÍF 4, 213, 416; *Grettis saga*, ÍF 7, 60; *Bandamanna saga*, ÍF 7, 352, 361; *Vatnsdæla saga*, ÍF 8, 75; *Þorsteins þátr tjaldstæðings*, ÍF 13, 431. Antipathy to the burial of treasure may be due to the pagan associations of this practice, if Snorri's mythography can be trusted on this point; see *Ynglinga saga* in *Heimskringla*, ÍF 26, 20; cf. Matthías Þórðarson, 1928, 109-10.

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