

Magic Mirrors, Monsters, Maiden-kings (the Fantastic in *Riddarasögur*)

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The use of fantasy, including the description of magic objects, superhuman characters and supernatural human actions, is among the most important characteristics of *riddarasögur*, both translated and indigenous. In translated sagas the fantastic is usually inherited from the originals. In indigenous sagas it derives from oriental, ancient, medieval (mostly Latin and French) sources mediated by translated sagas and from native traditions of epic, folklore, mythology, literature. This paper attempts to distinguish all the kinds of supernatural used in the thirty-two indigenous *riddarasögur*.

I. Magic objects

Magic objects usually functioning in *riddarasögur* as assistants, as means of enabling the hero to survive in his struggle against supernatural forces, are as follows:

1. Magic transport: flying carpets, boats, etc. appear in five sagas. E.g.: *Samsons saga fagra* – golden cart; *Gibbons saga* – flying cloth; *Sigrarðs saga frækna*, *Victors saga ok Blávus* – flying carpet; *Valdimars saga* – stone boats without oars or sails.
2. Magic items of clothing occur in seven sagas. E.g.: *Bærings saga* – coat impervious to poison; *Gibbons saga* – magic gloves to play the harp, magic cloth to make the queen lose her strength; *Samsons saga fagra* – magic mantle of fidelity; *Sigrarðs saga ok Valbrands* – magic gloves to play the harp; *Sigurðar saga þøgla* – veil bringing love; *Victors saga ok Blávus* – garments impervious to poison; *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs* – saddle-cloth does not burn, skin and cloak protect from poison.
3. Magic objects for eating/drinking: tablecloths, drinking vessels, horns, flagons, magic food or drink are mentioned in six sagas. E.g.: *Adonias saga* – goblet reveals poison; *Gibbons saga* – charmed potions; *Nítida saga* – magic apples and herbs; *Victors saga ok Blávus* – table-cloth gives food, flask always full; *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs* – goblet helps men do without sleep for ten days; *Valdimars saga* – table-cloth provides food, wine-flagon always full, drink from horn increases strength.
4. Magic mirrors, stones, rings, caskets, chess-boards, etc. figure in eight sagas. E.g.: *Gibbons saga* – one stone shows distant places, second shows ugliness or beauty, third shows future; *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns* – gold ring causes love; *Nítida saga* – magic stones, vessel with four corners shows whole world; *Sigurðar saga þøgla* – chess set gives victory to owner, bed gives love, ring makes owner invisible and opens all locks, glass tablet changes appearance (makes a person appear as friend, troll, dwarf, swine-herd), magic stone shows world and reveals disguise; *Ejalar-Jóns saga (Jóns saga Svipdagssonar ok Eireks forvitna)* – magic ring drips gold; *Victors saga ok Blávus* – casket always full of gold florins; *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs* – chess board brings victory, stone makes man invisible; *Valdimars saga* – magic chess-board, mirror makes people ugly or beautiful, bag of black powder makes anything invisible.
5. Magic weapons which never break or miss appear in eight sagas. E.g.: *Adonias saga* – sword, two spears; *Ectors saga* – mail-coat that cannot be pierced; *Gibbons saga* – sword that cannot be blunted by magic; *Sálus saga ok Nikanors* – invincible

mail-coat, sword, spear, shield, helmet (all inherited from ancient heroes); *Sigrgarðs saga frækna* – magic weapon; *Sigurðar saga þøgla* – sword with healing stone (lyfsteinn); *Victors saga ok Blávus* – halberd and spear choose victims; *Vilhjálm's saga sjóðs* – greaves and threefold mail-coat bring victory.

6. Magic musical instruments figure in four sagas. E.g.: *Gibbons saga*, *Sigrgarðs saga ok Valbrands*, *Valdimars saga* – harp; *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns* – trumpet.

In *riddarasögur* magic objects are rarely destructive. Examples can only be found in three sagas. In *Ectors saga* a magic gold ring, put under a bondsman's tongue by the princess, sticks firmly in his mouth, preventing all speech and movement, so that he starves to death in a dungeon. In *Sigrgarðs saga ok Valbrands*, the evil Valbrandr has a magic flute which helps him to put the guards to sleep and kill Sigrgarðr. In *Samsons saga fagra* the giant uses a magic harp to lure women. In the same saga a magic object indirectly causes death – the magic mantle of fidelity is stolen by the giant who kills old Sigurðr, the owner of the cloak. In this saga as in *Móttuls saga* the magic mantle reveals the disgrace of all women except one. The origin of this magic object is unquestionable – it is borrowed from the French fabliau *Le Lai du cort mantel*. Similarly, almost all magic objects (with the exception of weapons and gold-dripping rings) must be attributed to Oriental, ancient or French sources.

II(a) Supernatural Beings as magic helpers

In contrast to magic objects, supernatural beings do not usually function as helpers. Of the many creatures mentioned in *riddarasögur* only dwarves and, very seldom, giants and trolls appear as helpful.

Dwarves act as helpers in ten sagas. In five of these they are marginal figures, makers of magic objects, usually weapons (but not always: in *Vilmundar saga víðutan*, they make Sóley's gold-adorned shoes which will never wear out). In *Ectors saga*, to thank Fenacius for saving his daughter, a dwarf gives him a shield, a sword, a helmet, a mail-coat, and some ointment to protect him from poison. In *Þjalar-Jóns saga* helpful dwarves bring up Jón, the son of king Svipdagr who had been killed. In *Valdimars saga* a bald little man (really Aper's son Nissus) helps Valdimar find his sister. In *Vilhjálm's saga sjóðs* a dwarf called Skállkr rears a horse for Vilhjálmr on snakes' milk, and another dwarf called Andvari makes steel greaves and a mail-coat. The weapons made by dwarves resist magic and bring victory to whoever wears them.

In the remaining five sagas dwarf helpers actively further the main action with their magic. Thus in *Gibbons saga* a dwarf takes the hero to the chamber of the maiden-queen Florentia and makes her helpless by spreading a cloth over her bed. In *Nitida saga* a dwarf gives a ring to Liforinus, which sticks on queen Nitida's bare neck and helps him capture her. In *Sigrgarðs saga ok Valbrands* a dwarf gives the hero a magic harp and magic gloves in exchange for his first-born son. After the hero's death, he saves the son, helping him avenge his father and become king. In *Sigurðar saga þøgla* a dwarf gives Vilhjálmr a sword bringing victory to its owner. Another dwarf helps Sigurðr take vengeance on Sedentiana. The action of *Victors saga ok Blávus* is also heavily dependent on the dwarf (Dímus) as magic helper: he gets magic weapons, sews a magic garment for the heroes and helps them win Fulgida.

Elves are seldom mentioned in the indigenous *riddarasögur*. The only instance is in *Ectors saga* where, in gratitude for saving her son from a giant, an elf-woman gives Trancival a magic horse who can discern the attitude of a stranger to the hero.

In contrast to dwarves, giants or trolls in *riddarasögur* very rarely function as helpers. Examples can only be found in five sagas, and in four of these, heroes are befriended by women-giants. In *Blómstrvallasaga*, one of the two brothers, Áki, lives with the giantess after slaying her parents. In *Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans*, a son of king Flóres is rescued after a shipwreck by a marine giantess (*margygr*). In *Sigurðar saga þøgla*, two troll-women give Sigurðr a chess set bringing victory to the owner, a bed giving love to those who lie in it, a magic tablet of glass, and a finger-ring with a stone which makes him invisible, protects him from fire and weapons and causes any woman to love him. In *Valdimars saga* a giant named Aper helps Valdimar to find his sister; giantesses give him a number of magic objects – a table-cloth, a flagon of wine, a mirror, a horn to increase his strength, a chess-board and a bag. A male giant as helper is found only in *Samsons saga fagra*: Skrymir, king of the giants, gives Sigurðr a miraculous mantle and a powerful staff. Unlike magic objects, all images of superhuman magic helpers appearing in the indigenous *riddarasögur* (dwarves, elves, giants, trolls) come from native Germanic tradition.

II(b) Supernatural Beings as destructive forces

Destructive forces in *riddarasögur* are also to a large extent inherited from Germanic mythology and folklore, chiefly giants (*risar*), *jötnar*, *þursar*, trolls, berserks and werewolves. Examples of borrowings from romances or classical tradition are few: elephants, flying monsters (dragons, griffons etc.). Both are found in *Kirialax saga*, which is exceptionally learned and borrows motives from various sources (Cook, 1982, 326): the first part of the saga narrates the fight of Egias with the monster Honocentaurus in a labyrinth; in the second part, which contains a description of marvellous birds in India (the phoenix, the cinnami, the sitacus), Kirialax fights griffons. Elephants are only mentioned in one other saga (apart from *Kirialax saga*) – in *Vilhjálm's saga sjóðs*, where the hero kills an elephant as high as the trees.

Werewolves occur in *riddarasögur* surprisingly rarely – only in two sagas. In *Ála flekks saga* Áli is transformed into a werewolf but his foster-mother recognises him by his unchanging eyes. In *Jóns saga leiksvéins* a wolf turns out to be Sigurðr, son of the king of Flæmingjaland, upon whom a wicked stepmother had placed a spell.

As the role of dwarves is confined to helping, they cause trouble only in three sagas, and in two of those they are driven to harmful actions either by a giant, as in *Samsons saga fagra*, where the second abduction of Valentina is carried out with the help of a dwarf who is in the pay of a giant, or by the violence of the hero, as in *Sigurðar saga þøgla* where the dwarf punishes Hálfðan for breaking the jawbone of his child by laying a curse on him. It is only in one saga (*Ectors saga*) that a creature described as an ugly little man, black as coal, is doing evil of his own will; he is trying to violate a young girl the size of a child of five and is killed by Fenacius.

Flying monsters are usually encountered by the hero in his adventures or constitute part of the enemy's army. In three sagas the hero frees a lion which has been caught by a dragon. The grateful lion (whose image could be borrowed from Chrétien's *Yvain* or indirectly through *Ivens saga*) then becomes a faithful friend of the

hero. Thus in *Ectors saga* knight Trancival saves a lion from a flying dragon spewing poison, in *Sigurðar saga þøgla* a dragon carrying a lion is killed by Sigurðr, and *Vilhjálm's saga sjóðs* also includes a fight with a dragon resulting in a lion's gratitude.

In the same saga we find one of the three instances of a fight with a water dragon, against which Vilhjálmr is protected by magic skins. There is a water dragon in *Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans* whose claw the hero cuts off to take home to his princess. It can be assumed that the dragon in *Sigrarðs saga frækna* is also a water dragon: magic powder poured by the hero makes it sink to the bottom of the lake.

Most of the dragons are flying monsters. They are found in six sagas, including those mentioned in connection with the grateful lion episode. Thus it is a flying dragon that carries off to its lair one of the two brothers Egtarð in *Blómstrvalla saga*. In *Jóns saga leiksveins* Jón kills a dragon and brings its tongue to the king. In *Valdimars saga* a fearsome dragon (queen Lúpa) seizes princess Marmoría and disappears into flames.

The main destructive forces are giants and associated monsters, and several sagas include enumerations of them. *Ectors saga* abounds in giants, trolls and berserks: Ermedon's army consists of *blámenn*, berserks, dwarves, giants, trolls, creatures with dogs' heads from India called *cenofali*, one-eyed creatures, headless beings with a mouth and eyes in their breast. In *Jarlmann's saga ok Hermann's* King Rudent summons monsters with his golden pipe: elves, norms, dwarves, fairies, ogres, giants, rock-dwellers, trolls with the giantess Þorbjörg, fiends and dragons. In the second part of *Kirialax saga* Kirialax defends the king of Phrygia against the pagan king of Babylon with his mighty army of frightful giants, terrible monsters, berserks, *blámenn* and elephants. In *Nítida saga* King Soldán assembles an army of all kinds of monsters not worth enumerating here again, as it appears that words denoting them function as contextual synonyms used primarily for purposes of intensification.

In some sagas there are no such lists but one specific kind of supernatural being, for example berserks. In *Adonias saga* berserks fight in Duke Constancius's army against king Lodovikus and young Adonias. In *Jarlmann's saga ok Hermann's* Ermanus has an insuperable army containing berserks and other terrifying creatures. In *Sigurðar saga þøgla* twelve berserks armed with iron clubs attack the heroes. In *Victors saga ok Blávus* two berserks can assume animal forms and spew out poison in battle. In *Ectors saga* a berserk Kaldanus, looks like a troll; a black berserk turns himself into a snake and lies on the gold for thirty years; a troll-like berserk is killed by Trancival's lion; the berserk Baldúlf leads the army of *blámenn* howling like wolves; King Tirus has an army of *blámenn* and berserks; the berserk Ermengillus has an army of many berserks. There is a tendency to use words denoting different monsters indiscriminately: berserks are occasionally described as trolls.

Trolls are no less frequent in *riddarasögur* than berserks. In *Ála flekks saga* Áli is bound by a spell and sent to the troll-woman Nött. In *Ectors saga* a terrible troll (Torqvatus) is killed by Ector. In *Sigrarðs saga frækna* the wicked stepmother and her two brothers turn out to be trolls. They are killed by Sigrarðr and Stígandi, who fight ninety other trolls. In *Sigurðar saga þøgla* two troll-women are defeated and offer to serve the hero; four more trolls attack Sigurðr; King Sarodaces is as big as a troll, and has an army of berserks and fifteen *blámenn* who cannot be harmed by iron.

The most common evil-doers in *riddarasögur* are giants. In *Dámusta saga* the hero defeats the giant Alheimr who caused Gratiana's death. In *Ectors saga* several

giants are specifically mentioned: a giant (Nocerus) is killed by Vernacius; other giants are killed by Florencius, Trancival and Ector. In *Gibbons saga* the hero defeats the giant Eskopart. In *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns* the giantess Þorbjörg the Fat is the strongest of all. In *Sigraróðs saga frækna a jötunn* (Gípar) is killed by Sigraróð; a þurs with three heads is killed by Hǫrðr, who later kills sixty trolls. In *Sigurðar saga þogla a jötunn* two huge men disappear with Sigurðr's bride. In *Sigurðar saga þogla a jötunn* with one eye and a horn is killed by Vilhjálmr, and other jötnar are also defeated; a magic sword is stolen by a jötunn Faunus, who is killed by Sigurðr; two brother jötnar known for wickedness and trolldom carry away two princess but are killed by Sigurðr.

Giants are usually confined to isolated episodes and determine the main action of only two sagas. The plot of *Samsons saga fagra* depends on a giant named Kvintalín who lures women with the sound of a magic harp and abducts Samson's fiancée Valentina. Samson has to fight Kvintalín's troll mother under a waterfall. Samson wounds Kvintalín and kills his father. Later Kvintalín kills old Sigurðr, steals the magic cloak of fidelity and brings it to Samson. In the end Kvintalín is hanged. In a similar way, the action of *Vilhjálmss saga sjóðs* is determined by trolls, jötnar and giants. King Ríkarðr wins a gold ring from a woman who later turns out to be a troll. He gives the ring to his son Vilhjálmr and disappears in a storm caused by trolls. In order to get a gold ring from Vilhjálmr, a jötunn challenges him to play chess. Vilhjálmr wins the first game but loses the second, as the jötunn brings his daughter (a troll) to distract Vilhjálmr. To redeem himself, Vilhjálmr has to come to the jötunn's den and give the names of ninety trolls. Vilhjálmr gives the trolls' names in the form of an alliterative poem, which makes them tear each other to pieces.

It is worth noting that not only are words denoting giants, such as *risi*, *jötunn*, *þurs* used as contextual synonyms (cf. an Icelandic proverb: *hár sem risi, sterkr sem jötunn, heimskr sem þurs*), but also words like 'troll' or even 'berserk' are frequently used indiscriminately to denote a fearful monster. It can be assumed that for the authors of *riðdarasögur* the denotation of these words has become weakened.

III. Human beings performing magic actions: (a) heroines

Women perform magic actions more frequently than men, who are usually involved in fights and battles requiring superhuman strength and valour. Of the women who practise magic, the most common evil-doers are step-mothers, undoubtedly an archetypal image adopted from folklore, whereas queens and princesses, whose images are probably not free from the influence of continental romance, usually provide the heroes with magic assistance. An undoubtedly borrowed motif occurs in *Kirialax saga*, which tells of a king's daughter who learned heathen magic, tamed a bull with witchcraft and idolatry, became pregnant from it and gave birth to the beast called Honocentaurus.

Most women who do harm by magic are wicked stepmothers. A unique example is when the mother herself brings harm to her son (in *Mirmanns saga* the hero kills his father; in revenge Mirmann's mother offers him a magic drink which gives him leprosy). In *Jóns saga leikveins* a stepmother places a spell upon Sigurðr, turning him into a savage wolf. In *Sigraróðs saga frækna* a wicked stepmother Hlégerðr, really a troll, changes one of her stepdaughters (Hildir) into a sow, another (Signý) into

a filly and lays a spell on the third, the maiden-queen Ingigerör of Taricia, who is made unfaithful and impossible to satisfy, always repaying good with evil.

Foster-mothers or aunts always serve as helpers. In *Sigraröðs saga frækna* Gerör, the wife of the hero's foster-father, gives the hero a magic bag, whose contents enable him to live under water. In *Samsons saga fagra* the hero's foster-mother, the sorceress Olimpia, using her power of changing shape, rescues Samson's bride Valentina from Kvintalin. In *Nitida saga* queen Alduria, the aunt of king Liforinus, gives him a piece of gold which makes him unrecognisable to both Nitida and his own sister.

Servant-women seldom cause ill will. Exceptions are found in only two sagas. In *Ála flekks saga* a wicked servant Blátönn binds Áli with a spell and sends him to the troll-woman Nött. In *Vilmundar saga viðutan* a rough maid Öskubuska (with whom the king's daughter Sóley changes appearance) becomes the mistress of a slave Kolr.

The main agents of magic in the *riddarasögur* are queens and princesses. Queen Semerana in *Adonias saga* is skilled in astrology and predicts the future. Princess Vindemia in *Bærings saga* makes a magic coat for the hero which is impervious to poison. In *Gibbons saga* the fairy-like daughter of king Filipus transports Gibbon magically to Greece on a flying cloth. In *Saulus saga ok Nikanors* the sight of the duke Nikanor's sister Potentialiana makes everyone joyful. Queens and princesses specialise in curing illnesses, just like heroines in the tradition of romances about Tristan (and the corresponding sagas, *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* and *Tristrams saga ok Isöddar*). In *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns Ríkilát* can cure any illness. In *Mírmanns saga* princess Cecilia has unsurpassed powers as a healer: she cures Mírmann of leprosy.

Heroines often have to use magic in the sagas of maiden-kings (*meykóngur*). In *Sigraröðs saga frækna* queen Ingigerör, bound by the spell of her stepmother Hlégerör, responds with a spell of her own: Hlégerör will never be able to speak another word. In *Victors saga ok Blávus* princess Fulgida exchanges appearances with Blávus. In *Dínus saga drambláta* princess Philotemia of Blálánd binds prince Dínus with a spell so that he desires her, another spell to make him and his men grow painful horns. In *Nitida saga* the queen swings a stone over her head and disappears in the air, she exchanges appearances with a slave-woman and makes herself invisible. Thus the magic performed by the heroines of maiden-king sagas is often aimed at helping them to retain their virginity by escaping marriage and is directed against their suitors.

(b) heroes

The heroes of *riddarasögur* are kings, princes, knights or valiant men excelling in all virtues and knowledge. Very few of the characters plot evil with the help of magic. These are usually described not as human beings but as trolls or giants associated with evil. Thus in *Adonias saga* the evil Duke Constancius is as big as a giant, cunning and cruel, makes the queen forget the murdered king and marries her. In *Bærings saga* the evil knight Heinrekr is a sorcerer and takes possession of the royal throne. *Ectors saga* abounds in all kinds of magicians: one of them (Argus) is skilled in trolldom, turns himself into a snake and lies on the stolen gold; a knight (Lutrector) is also skilled in trolldom; a married couple (Elvidus and Glebula) work spells and cast a spell on a she-wolf so that no weapon can harm her. In *Nitida saga* the eldest son of King Soldán

(Heiðarlogi) is skilled in witchcraft and always victorious. In *Rémundar saga keisarasonar* a wounded champion, Eskopart, casts a magic spell on Rémundr so that nobody can heal him except Eskopart's sister. In *Sigrgarðs saga ok Valbrands* Valbrandr, as strong as a giant, full of wiles and magic arts, kills Sigrgarðr and his younger son and turns himself into a poison-belching dragon; a duke in his army (Valdibrun) is more like a troll than a human being, and a warrior (Rudent) is as big as a troll and strong as a giant. In *Sigurðar saga þogla* two brothers (Bqrkr and Brúsi) are invulnerable to iron and can disappear into the earth, their weapons never failing to reach their mark. In *Vilmundar saga viðutan* an ugly slave (Kolr) has magic powers and makes sacrifices to a sow which seems to be invincible.

To oppose the evil done by magic destroyers, characters are introduced who can be described as magic helpers. These either produce magic objects or weapons, or use magic to help heroes. Thus in *Klári saga keisarasonar* the master Perus changes the appearance of prince Klárus as well as his own, so that Princess Serena cannot recognize them. In *Kirialax saga* a smith (Dydalos) constructs a labyrinth to help Egias kill a monster. In *Nitida saga* the hero acquires two magic helpers (with the meaningful names Refsteinn and Slægrefr) who are skilled in sorcery and witchcraft. In *Rémundar saga keisarasonar* Rémundr meets a mysterious man named Viðförrull who builds a carriage for the sick prince. In *Sigrgarðs saga frækna* the hero is given two magic helpers (Hqrð and Velstigandi) who are really the sons of his foster-father.

Some heroes of *riddarasögur* know all languages, others can interpret dreams. In *Drauma-Jóns saga* the hero can interpret and guess other people's dreams. In *Ectors saga* the hero can understand all languages. In *Vilhjálm's saga sjóðs* Vilhjálmr knows all languages and does not need an interpreter. The knowledge of foreign languages can be employed for evil purposes, as in *Konráðs saga keisarasonar* where the wicked Róðbert knows all languages and uses his knowledge to plot against prince Konráðr.

The main occupation of heroes in *riddarasögur* is fighting with monsters, giants and dragons. In *Gibbons saga* the hero fights and wins in single combat against the giant. In *Jóns saga leiksveins* the hero kills a dragon and brings its tongue to the king. In *Kirialax saga* prince Egias kills Honocentaurus, and Kirialax fights against King Soldan's army of monsters. In *Konráðs saga keisarasonar* the hero accomplishes an impossible task, bringing back a particular green gem from a serpent-infested land. In *Sigurðar saga turnara* nobody can hold up his shield against the hero who defeats even Count Hermóð, strong as a giant. In *Vilhjálm's saga sjóðs* Vilhjálmr takes on Sjóðr's appearance and wins the battle with Froilo, Griffon and the giants.

Just as the princesses in maiden-king sagas use magic to escape marriage, so the princes in these sagas frequently resort to magic to win the favours of their brides. Thus in *Dínus saga drambláta* Prince Dínus, bound in a spell by Princess Philotemia, takes revenge with the help of counter-spells, making her courtiers dance naked and transforming the princess and her maids into crows. At the third encounter, he holds her soldiers in check with a magic bag and succeeds in deflowering the princess, after which they marry. In *Victors saga ok Blávus* Victor has to carry Fulgida off on a flying cloth. In *Sigrgarðs saga frækna* Sigrgarðr changes appearance with a merchant called Jónas, taking his flying carpet and other treasures. Rejected by maiden-queen Ingigerðr a second time, Sigrgarðr takes the shape of the Viking Knutr, fights giants

and dragons, breaks the spell binding the three sisters and marries Ingigerðr. Among maiden-king sagas *Sigrgráðs saga frækna* uses fantastic characters most frequently, which can be accounted for by its general similarity to *fornaldarsögur*.

IV. Authorial comments on the fantastic

The use of the fantastic in *riddarasögur* is fully conscious and is frequently commented on by the authors. In several sagas the authors provide a rationalistic explanation of the supernatural, as if trying to forestall possible charges of untruthfulness. Thus *Vilhjálm's saga sjóðs*, which is among the sagas most frequently using magic characters and objects, begins with a prologue addressed to those who doubt the truth of the story. The author agrees that to some, especially those who are ignorant of geography, the bravery and speedy journeys of the characters may appear unlikely, but this is no cause for wonder, because nothing is impossible for a man whose progress fortune favours, whereas everything proves difficult for a man whom fortune is determined to overthrow. In other words the author is trying to account for the fantastic in the saga in terms of the exceptional luck accompanying his heroes.

The author of *Ectors saga* also provides a digression on the veracity of his story. After having related all kinds of supernatural events, he says that, although the courage and heroic deeds of the knights in his saga may seem incredible, it should be remembered that similar feats were achieved by Charlemagne, Alexander the Great and the warriors who accompanied them. He compares Ector to the heroes of the past and especially Alexander (Paris), son of king Priam. To reinforce the connections with ancient heroes, the narrator bestows on Ector material objects from classical mythology: Hercules's sword and Achilles's shield, in describing which he makes an allusion to *Trójumanna saga*, thus directly giving away the source from which he borrowed the incredible – the translated *riddarasaga*. In this way the fantastic deeds of the characters are accounted for by their descent from ancient heroes, the exceptional qualities of their weapons and by similar deeds of the glorious heroes of the past.

A supernatural event is sometimes placed in the saga in a wider context, literary or real. In the former case an allusion to a literary 'source' is provided. Among the most commonly used 'sources' are ancient epic and medieval romance. In the latter case allusion is made to a similar episode which had happened 'in reality'. Thus, *Vilhjálm's saga sjóðs* contains a reference to Homer – the author gives an allusion to the story compiled by meistar Humerus which was found on the stone wall in Babylon the great. The author of *Sigurðar saga þögla* refers to the authority of Lucretius after a most fantastic description of a lion – he says that *meistare* Lucretius calls lions holy in their nature because they do not harm human beings. *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns* opens with a reference to *meistari Virgilius* who has collected many stories for the entertainment of men in his book called *Saxafræði*. It was he who found the story told in the saga on the stone wall in the town called Licibon in France. The author of *Ectors saga* says that in the books of *meistari Galterus* as well as in *Trójumanna saga*, Ector is considered to be a hero not inferior to Alexander the Great, so his listeners cannot doubt the truth of the related story of the great battle, the date of which is given as the first of July, three hundred and seventy-seven years before the Passion of Christ.

Sometimes the author of the saga states that he is following the example of those who translated or ordered translation from other languages, e.g. Greek or French.

Thus *Victors saga ok Blávus*, where the fantastic plays a very important role, has an introduction putting the saga into a particular literary context. The author summons all good old men to put aside laughter, jumping and vanity and to follow the fine custom of Hákon Magnússon, king of Norway, who got great joy from good tales and had many *riddarasögur* turned into the Norse tongue from Greek and French. *Adonais saga* opens with a prologue, containing a reference to the many men who wrote in various languages and gathered together different kinds of information for the benefit and entertainment of posterity. Some of them related the events they learned about in their own tongues, but others wrote in Latin and embellished the narratives to give themselves a better opportunity of demonstrating their stylistic skills. *Klári saga* gives a more concrete indication that it was based on a Latin poem (now lost) and starts by giving away its source – the story told by bishop Jón Halldórsson, who found it written in Latin in France in the form called *rithmos* or *hendingar*. Similar references to the source must have become in the indigenous sagas a literary device which could have been inherited from translated sagas, often giving an indication of their original (*Móttuls saga*, *Alexanders saga* etc.).

Apologetic interpolations into the text of *riddarasögur* are explicitly aimed at persuading the audience of the truthfulness of a story involving the supernatural. These digressions include reassuring the audience that they should trust the story, indignation towards those who might suspect that it contains lies, and criticism of those who might disbelieve it because they haven't seen or heard about similar events. When the author of *Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans* wants to justify the fantastic, which abounds in his saga, he says that he dislikes people who do not appreciate imaginary stories and confesses that what he tells is considered by some as lies, but dismisses such judgments. *Sigurðar saga þogla* begins with a prologue, which is also found in two manuscripts of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* (AM 589f, 4^o, f. 13r; AM 567, 4^o, XI, β, f. 1r.), aimed at persuading the audience of the reality of its contents. The author of the saga says that of the many men who in former times have composed stories, some have followed old poems or learned men, but others old books which were first narrated in brief speech and later adorned with beautiful words. Some foolish people, he agrees, disbelieve what they have not seen or heard for themselves, especially things that are far from their own natures, like wise men's plans, and the strength and courage – and not least the magic powers – of men of old. The author admits that it is impossible to please everybody and no-one need believe such things if he does not wish to. Similar comments were also used in the translated sagas, such as the younger *Mágus saga*, in which most of the conclusion is concerned with the credibility of the story. The author is trying to justify the supernatural elements involved in the action by referring to the illusions of conjurers, to the heathen gods described by Snorri in the Edda, to the *nigromantia* of his own time, or even to the discrepancies between various (shorter or longer) versions of the story which appear in the course of time.

Although authorial comments on veracity are formulaic, they are hardly relics of oral tradition but rather a literary device constructing the effect of a fictitious narrator addressing a fictitious audience. The individual contribution of the author (or the ability of the translator to improvise) is manifested primarily in variations of formulaic phraseology imitating oral tradition (cf. *byrjum vér*, *heyrdum vér* etc.). However the affirmations of veracity are not purely rhetorical but to some extent

functional, because they occur in those sagas where fantastic characters and magic objects prevail. In sagas with few fantastic elements, comments on credibility are absent.

The nature of the fantastic in the indigenous *riddarasögur* distinguishes them from other types of sagas where the fantastic plays an important part in the plot, namely the *fornaldarsögur*, in which the creatures mainly responsible for magic are supernatural, and the quantity of magic objects used is innumerable (Schlauch, 1973, 146). In the indigenous *riddarasögur* the fantastic is to a large extent determined by the supernatural actions performed by human beings, the quantity of magic objects involved is fairly limited and easily classifiable, and so is the number of supernatural beings which only prevail in the group of sagas bordering on the original *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* (e.g. *Sigraröðs saga frækna*, *Sigurðar saga fóts*, the second part of *Samsons saga fagra* etc.). In some indigenous *riddarasögur* the fantastic is hardly used at all (e.g. *Saulus saga ok Nikanors*). It is worth noting that in *riddarasögur* fantastic objects and supernatural beings appear to be in complementary distribution with human beings performing superhuman actions. If there are many fantastic objects and supernatural characters, then human beings do not perform much magic. Cases in point are *Ectors saga* and *Vilhjálm's saga sjóðs*, which abound in supernatural characters and magic objects, but whose heroes themselves do not perform magic actions. On the other hand in some maiden-king sagas (*Dinus saga dramláta*, *Nitida saga*) supernatural beings are less numerous than in other *riddarasögur*, so most of the superhuman and magic actions are actually performed by the human beings themselves. It looks as if the quantity of magic contained in the saga is the same but redistributed among either magic characters and objects or human characters performing fantastic actions.

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