

The North Sea Triangle: Iceland, England, and the Negotiation of Norway in the Sagas
(Abstract)

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The interwoven relationship between Iceland, England and Norway in the sagas is one that involves careful negotiation. In *Haralds saga hárfagra*, King Haraldr of Norway tricks King Æthelstan of England into fostering his son Hákon. At this point, the narrative of the saga specifically (and very consciously) points out that in such cases of fostering, the man who fosters another man's child is the lesser man. However, the two kings are subsequently carefully balanced when we are further told that neither king lost dignity from this fostering and that each was the best king in his own realm until his dying day. This example illustrates the attentive use of language and narrative that can be quite telling regarding Icelandic attitudes toward Norway.

Icelanders appear in England in several places in the sagas. They are perhaps most clearly visible in *Egils saga* where Egill's interactions with the English are dictated by his fraught relationship with the Norwegian king. A second type of relationship is also visible if we consider Gunnlaugr Serpant-Tongue, the title character of *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, whose support of King Æthelræd against the Danish king during his journey to England not only places him in the court of King Æthelræd, but situates him firmly on the side of the Norwegians. While the sagas may choose either to support Norway or not, it seems that an implicit understanding of Norwegian affairs underlies Icelandic relations with England in the sagas – Norway mediates the relationship between England and Iceland.

Finally, the way in which Norway informs the Icelandic narratives involving England illustrates two divergent saga trends in dealing with Icelanders abroad. Along with Denmark and Scotland to a large extent, England was an area of intense interest for the Norwegians. When the sagas depict Icelanders visiting these countries, the narratives maintain an interest in Norwegian affairs. This is at odds with Icelanders in Ireland, Wales, France, Sweden, and other countries that less directly fall within the Norwegian realm of interest. These countries seem to be allowed to have more of a direct relationship with Iceland and the Icelanders in the sagas. This paper then proposes to further explore the evolving relationship between Iceland, England, and Norway as exhibited in the sagas as a means of understanding how (and ultimately, why) the Icelanders positioned themselves in regard to Norway, and how sagas involving England play into this narrative interest.