

**Bede and his Disciples: The Development of Universal History in Iceland
(Abstract)**

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It is generally accepted that the chronographical works of Bede played a significant part in the education of the Icelandic clergy in the first centuries of Christianity and may have influenced the earliest writers of indigenous history. In his treatises *De temporibus* (703) and *De temporum ratione* (725), Bede included accounts of the six ages of the world which were to exert considerable influence on writers of universal history in Europe over the next three centuries, and even longer. Bede's *aetates mundi* were thus an important element in the development of the genre of universal history which can be traced back to the Latin chronicle St Jerome adapted (c. 380) from Eusebius' *Kronikoi kanones*, and which by the end of the Middle Ages had yielded a wide array of works in verse as well as in prose, many in Latin but others written in the vernacular.

The oldest manuscripts containing Icelandic texts which might fall under the definition of universal history date from the late fourteenth century. There is, however, reason to believe that the writing of universal history was practised much earlier in Iceland; indeed it has been suggested that Sæmundur fróði Sigfússon (1056-1133) may have produced a work in that vein. Some of the pertinent evidence is to be sought in post-reformation manuscripts from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (cf. Stefán Karlsson. 'Fróðleiksgreinar frá tólfu öld', *Afmælisrit Jóns Helgasonar*, Reykjavík, 1969). The aim of this paper is to re-examine the evidence for early attempts at universal history writing in Iceland, trace the development of the genre in Iceland up to the Reformation and assess the part Bede's works played in that development.