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Chapter 21

Imagining the Holy Land in the Old Norse World

In Old Norse literature as elsewhere in the literature of medieval Europe, many images of Jerusalem and the Holy Land are to be found, not mutually exclusive, but rather adding to a range of functions and meanings. In an Icelandic twelfth-century itinerary, we encounter the pious pilgrim, admiring the blood of Christ on the ground where the cross had stood. From twelfth-century Orkney, by contrast, we have runic and poetic evidence of boastful Viking crusaders, belittling the cowards who stayed at home and viewing the concept of the Holy Land through the lens of the world of the sagas. In thirteenth-century Iceland, we find a peculiar version of the Holy Land in a local setting, fully integrated into Icelandic saga style. As late converts on the fringe of the known world, the Nordic peoples were removed in time and space from the events and sites that mattered most to salvation. In the Orcadian and Icelandic material, we see a creative negotiation of both the spatial and temporal distance. This chapter focuses on the attitudes to Jerusalem and the Holy Land found in some Old Norse sources, as well as the strategies used for making them, as it were, domestic.

The first obvious act of domestication lies in the name *Jerusalem* itself, which in Old Norse was called *Jórsalir*. This is apparently the result of a reanalysis of the name, and it is likely that the name meant something like “royal halls” or “the city of the king” at the time of imposition. This topic is treated in full in Myrvoll’s chapter in this volume, and it may suffice to note here that the adaptation of the name also amounted to an interpretation, providing some meaning to the name in the local vernacular.¹ In the following, I wish to focus on two other examples that I believe to be particularly telling of how the sagas of the North and perceptions of the Holy Land could sometimes feed into each other, resulting in a synthetic, secular yet spiritual, world. I do not think it expedient to distinguish sharply between Jerusalem and its surroundings in this context, since the sources suggest that they were seen as parts of the same holy landscape.

¹ Chapter 2 (Klaus Johan Myrvoll), 42–7.

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The “Jerusalem men” in the Orkney Mound

There is little to suggest that Jerusalem was much more than a distant name in the period before the crusades. In the twelfth century, however, we get some intriguing references to it, and what is perhaps most striking is the narrative element. The runic inscriptions in the burial chamber of the Neolithic mound of Maeshowe, Orkney (c.3000 BCE) are interesting in this regard. They were carved by Nordic intruders into the mound around 1150, at least some of which seem to have belonged to the retinue of earl Rognvaldr of Orkney (c.1103–1158), who after his death was venerated as a saint.² In the following, I give inscriptions in normalised Old Norse, with references to transcriptions and transliterations in notes. An inscription on Maeshowe’s corner stone in the north reads: *Jórsalamenn brutu haug þenna* (The Jerusalem men broke this mound).³ We seem to be dealing with pilgrims or crusaders here, and from *Orkneyinga saga* (c.1200) we know of one major expedition from Orkney to the Holy Land in the middle of the twelfth century, under the leadership of earl Rognvaldr.⁴ On the south-eastern wall, another inscription reads:

Jórsalafarar brutu Orkhaug. Hlíf, matselja jarls, reist

[The Jerusalem travellers broke Orkhaugr (the Orkney mound). Hlíf, the earl’s housekeeper, carved]

Jórsalafarar brutu Orkhaug. Hlíf, matselja jarls, reist (The Jerusalem travellers broke Orkhaugr [the Orkney mound]. Hlíf, the earl’s housekeeper, carved) (Fig. 21.1). Here, the information about who broke the mound is repeated, and this female carver specifies her position in the earl’s retinue. Earl Rognvaldr gathered men in the winter of 1150–1151 and the expedition lasted until late in 1153.⁵ *Orkneyinga saga* chapter 93 reports that Earl Haraldr Maddaðarson and his men sought shelter in the mound before Rognvaldr’s return, and if that date is correct, the “Jerusalem men” who opened the mound were probably on their way to Jerusalem, rather than returning from it, when they broke the mound.⁶ Whatever the precise date, the reference to the “Jerusalem men” implies that they were a well-known group. This makes it almost certain that we are dealing here with members of the only known

² Chapter 6 (Pål Berg Svenungsen), 123–4.

³ Michael P. Barnes, ed. *The Runic Inscriptions of Maeshowe, Orkney*, Runrön (Uppsala: Institutionen för nordiska språk, Uppsala Universitet, 1994), 114–118.

⁴ This expedition is thoroughly discussed in Chapter 6 (Pål Berg Svenungsen), 95–131.

⁵ Barnes, *Runic Inscriptions of Maeshowe*, 117.

⁶ *Orkneyinga saga*, ed. Finnogi Guðmundsson, Íslenzk Fornrit 34 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1965) On the identity of the carvers, see Barnes, *Runic Inscriptions of Maeshowe*, 32–36, 40–41, 117–18, 89–90.

Fig. 21.1: Rune inscriptions on the SE wall in Maeshowe, Orkney, c.1150. Third line from the top reads “Jerusalem-travellers broke Orkhaugr. Hlíf, the Earl’s housekeeper, carved” [Jórsalafarar brutu Orkhaug. Hlíf, matselja jarls, reist].

major expedition from Orkney to the Holy Land, in particular since the inscriptions indicate a mid-twelfth century date on typological and linguistic grounds.⁷

Apart from providing useful information about the identity the carvers, the two Jerusalem inscriptions imply that the breaking of the mound was an achievement worthy of these intrepid crusaders. In the later *Orkneyinga saga*, the expedition is described as an heroic adventure, and the carvers may have cultivated a similar image of themselves. Indeed, a comparison with some of the other inscriptions suggests that the world of the sagas and of the Holy Land were far from mutually exclusive in the minds of the carvers. I begin with additional inscriptions. On the western corner stone, one may read:

Pat man satt, er ek segi, at fé var foert á brott. Þrim nóttum var fé brott foert, heldr en þeir
br[yti] haug þenna

⁷ Barnes, *Runic Inscriptions of Maeshowe*, 47–49.

[It is true as I say, that treasure was carried away. Treasure was carried away three nights before they broke this mound]⁸

We now enter into a world that we know from later sagas, particularly those of a more fantastic streak, where the breaking of mounds and the extraction of treasure from them is a recurrent motif. The breaking of Maeshowe seems to have made the carver feel that the old stories were coming true.⁹ On two adjacent slabs in the south-eastern wall there is a remarkable constellation of inscriptions. The first of these reads:

Sjá haugr var fyrr hlaðinn heldr¹⁰ Loðbrókar. Synir hennar, þeir vöru hvatir; slíkt vöru menn, sem þeir vöru fyrir sér

[This mound was built before Loðbrók's. Her sons, they were bold. Those were real men, such as they were"].¹¹

In later sources, *loðbrók* (woolen trousers) is the nick-name of Ragnarr loðbrók, a legendary hero who is supposed to have lived in the ninth century and who had a number of famously martial sons, and there is obviously a reference to them here. Uniquely, the inscription refers to *Loðbrók* as a woman, but what matters most in this context is that the inscription ties into the conceptual world of the sagas (the actual sagas are at least half a century younger, but the narrative material apparently circulated before then).¹² Below this is the inscription about the Jerusalem travellers carved by Hlíf. Beside and under Hlíf's inscription are four inscriptions discussing the riches that the carvers thought had at one point been stored in the mound:

Útnorðr er fé folgit mikit
[In the north-west great treasure is hidden]¹³

8 Barnes, *Runic Inscriptions of Maeshowe*, 71–77. Although there are some difficulties in the reading, the meaning of the inscription is clear (*fyrr* in *fyrr heldr* seems to have dropped out).

9 Moundbreaking is generally considered a fantastic motif, and the more fantastic family sagas are considered to be young by most scholars. Daniel Sävborg has convincingly shown, however, that fantastic sagas have probably existed alongside other sagas from early on in the tradition of saga writing. Daniel Sävborg, “Den ‘efterklassiska’ islänningasagan och dess ålder,” *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 127 (2012).

10 *Heldr* is here used for *áðr*. See Barnes, *Runic Inscriptions of Maeshowe*, 184.

11 Barnes, *Runic Inscriptions of Maeshowe*, 178–86.

12 The word *brók* (trousers) is feminine, but grammatical gender seems an insufficient explanation for the wording; in all likelihood, the feminine pronoun must refer to a woman. The wording has also been explained as an oblique reference to Ragnarr's unmanliness, but I fail to see how this fits either the hero as we know him from other sources or specifically an inscription with a focus on the manliness of his sons. See Barnes 1994, *Runic Inscriptions of Maeshowe*, 185 for a discussion of this suggestion.

13 Barnes, *Runic Inscriptions of Maeshowe*, 190–93.

Pat var löngu, er hér var fé folgit mikit
[It was long ago that great treasure was hidden here]¹⁴

Sæll er sá, er finna má þann auð hinn mikla
[Happy is he who can find that great wealth]¹⁵

Hökon einn bar fé ýr haugi þessum
[Hökon alone carried treasure from this mound]¹⁶

It would appear that to these carvers, entering the mound meant entering the world of the sagas, and in the sagas, the person who enters mound is the hero.

The lines of the inscriptions on the right slab are not straight, but rather, each inscription follows the angle of the inscription above it, suggesting that they were carved in sequence from top to bottom. The Loðbrók inscription is on top, then Hlíf's inscription about how the Jerusalem travellers broke the mound, then "it was long ago", then "happy is he", then "Hökon alone". We see here how the discourses about saga mounds, the actual mound, and the "Jerusalem men" (and women, including Hlíf) are interwoven, each building on the other. In some places in Norway, we also find clusters of inscriptions featuring saga motifs, such that "gold and witchcraft" [*gull ok villur*] is hidden under the rock on which the inscription is found, that travellers from the land of giants [Risaland] have hidden gold in the stone, or that a "strong giant" [*rammr jötunn*] carved the runes.¹⁷ In the Norwegian inscriptions there is no overlap between the world of the sagas and that of pilgrimage, but the apparent dialogue on the slabs in Maeshowe suggests that these were not necessarily mutually exclusive. Maeshowe is a special case, since the mound is a real-life saga motif of sorts, and breaking into it certainly is. It shares this feature with the Holy Land, where the actual localities of Scripture are found, and a pilgrimage is not only spiritual journey, it is also an adventure – not least when it also amounts to a crusading expedition, like the one from Orkney. In both instances the places visited are suggestive of a connection to a plane of existence where the limitations of everyday life are relaxed: In Maeshowe, treasure could be extracted the night *before* the mound was opened, and the Holy Land was where God had walked the earth and miracles had happened and continued to happen. Theologically, Maeshowe and the Holy Land were worlds apart, but conceptually, they partly overlapped, not least, one may assume, to those who were the protagonists of both adventures. For this reason, the progressions from the mound of Loðbrók, the Jerusalem travellers breaking the mound, and Hökon extracting the treasure from the mound makes more sense than it might first appear, and this cluster of inscriptions

¹⁴ Barnes, *Runic Inscriptions of Maeshowe*, 193–95.

¹⁵ Barnes, *Runic Inscriptions of Maeshowe*, 195–917.

¹⁶ Barnes, *Runic Inscriptions of Maeshowe*, 197–203.

¹⁷ These are the inscriptions at Hennøy, Ystines, and Hjelmeset, NlYR, vol. IV, 226–42 (Hennøy), 445–29 (Hjelmeset); NlYR, vol. V, 80–95 (Ystines).

offers a valuable insight into the conceptual world of some twelfth-century pilgrims from Orkney.

Orkneyinga saga presents us with a comparable image of what the Holy Land meant to these crusaders. In the first part of the saga, the action is set in the North and the style is relatively sober. Once they set out on the pilgrimage/crusade, however, the tone becomes less serious. In the Holy Land, they visit Jerusalem and “alla ina helgustu staði” [all the most holy places]. This matter is quickly dealt with, however, and the major event in the narrative about the Holy Land is when earl Rognvaldr takes a bath in the Jordan, as pilgrims did. The religious significance of this act is not mentioned, but rather, Rognvaldr and his companion Sigmundur swim across the river, tie a knot to a bush on the other side and proclaim a number of stanzas about how the loiterers at home are unlikely to make this journey. It would almost appear that they made the trip only to be able to boast of it afterwards. This is, of course, a saga account, written about fifty years later with an eye to entertainment, but the contemporary Maeshowe inscriptions, carved by members of the expedition, suggest that the author was not far off the mark. Perhaps it was because of pilgrims like these that the author of *Konungs skuggsjá* in the middle of the thirteenth century wrote that

Ef úfróðr maðr fer til Jórsala, þá trúir hann sjálfr at hann sé fróðr ok segir í frá sinni ferð ok þat flest er fróðum manni þykki enskis vert nema gabbs ok háðs.

If an unwise man goes to Jerusalem, then he thinks that he is wise and he relates his travels, and most of what he says will appear worth nothing other than contempt and scorn to the wise man.¹⁸

The author of *Konungs skuggsjá* was a learned man, presumably a cleric, and deeply concerned with Biblical history and allegory. Many of those who were able to finance a journey to the Holy Land, however, had a secular power base, and wish though he might, the author of *Konungs skuggsjá* was probably rarely in a position to make them properly understand what they had actually experienced.

Medieval attitudes to Jerusalem expressed in religious literature came in many varieties and changed over time (see, for instance, Oen’s chapter in this volume).¹⁹ Some of them may be alien to us, but at least, they generally live up to our minimal expectations of being, precisely, religious. In secular Norse literature, however, the religious aspect is often mixed with other elements, as in *Orkneyinga saga*, and in the Maeshowe inscriptions, it appears to be absent altogether. This is not to say, of course, that these people were not religious, but that a journey to the Holy Land, or the thought thereof, could serve various purposes. In the case of Rognvaldr, the masculine framing of the Holy Land is matched by his overall attitude to learning

¹⁸ *Konungs skuggsjá*, ed. Ludvig Holm-Olsen, *Norrøne tekster* 1 (Oslo: Norsk historisk Kjeldeskrift-Institut, 1983). See also Chapter 23 (Jørn Øyrehagen Sunde), 501–5.

¹⁹ Chapter 13 (Maria Husabø Oen), 245–67.

and religion. In one stanza he boasts of his bookish learning as one of his several accomplishments, which also include shooting and rowing.²⁰ The secular and masculine tenor of the stanza is unmistakable. In another stanza, he comments on the appearance of sixteen men, who are tonsured and bear no arms, and scornfully refers to them as *kollóttar meyjar* [bald girls].²¹ These are, of course, monks, and while the saga suggests that Rognvaldr and his men could not figure out what kind of people these were, such ignorance is highly unlikely among the ruling elite at this time. Accusations for femininity between men were common, however, and this is clearly what we are dealing with here. Somewhat surprisingly, we hear that this happened when Rognvaldr was attending a holy service. Not even then would his secular masculinity give way to a religious perception of monks. This is, of course, a literary recreation of events, but all instances discussed here involve stanzas that are attributed to Rognvaldr and which have a strong claim to authenticity.

Jerusalem, along with other religious or ecclesiastical phenomena, could apparently be fully integrated into a secular discourse, even when the context might suggest otherwise. The fluid borders between the saga world and the pilgrimage are suggestive of a conceptual sphere where Jerusalem and the holy places were made familiar through insertion into well-known frames.²² So far, we have only examined hints of this connection between what might be viewed as two diametrically opposed yet superimposed centre-periphery relations: To these carvers, poets and authors, the North was the centre of known things to which Jerusalem was a largely unknown periphery, whereas from a religious perspective, Jerusalem was the centre to which the North was a distant and newly converted outpost. The tension between these two conceptual schemes appears to have given rise to a wish to negotiate the distance between them. One way of doing so was to go to the holy places and thus to incorporate them into the world of known things, or to read or write about them and so make them known at least at second hand. Another possibility was to map the holy topography and history onto the places and events of the North. The most thorough and interesting attempt of this kind may be the first ten chapters of the thirteenth-century *Eyrbyggja saga*. I turn now to these.

²⁰ *Orkneyinga saga*, 130.

²¹ *Orkneyinga saga*, 163.

²² This adheres to the semiotic category *imitation*, cf. Kristin B. Aavitsland's introductory chapter, "Jerusalem: Navel of the Storyworld in Medieval Scandinavia", p. 20.

The Old Testament Landscape of Pre-Christian Iceland

As Kevin Wanner has noted, the beginning of *Eyrbyggja saga*, treating the settlement of the peninsula of Þórsnes in western Iceland by the pagan Þórólfr, is replete with Pentateuch analogues.²³ Wanner focuses on purity and pollution, but as we shall see, the saga offers many additional pointers to a Christian interpretation of the local landscape and its history, and the following analysis takes an inclusive approach. It should be noted, however, that the saga appears to mix motifs of different backgrounds. Some motifs in the text probably derive from pre-Christian tradition without much adaptation, some appear to have been adapted to Christian interpretation, and some are probably invented by the author. I will not focus on the historical authenticity or otherwise of individual motifs, but it may be noted that motifs that are present simply because of the antiquarian interests of the author may not be intended to carry any secondary meaning.

In the saga, the chieftain Hrólfr lives on the island of Moster, off the west coast of Norway. He is such a great friend [*mikill vinr*] of the god Þórr that his name was changed from Hrólfr to Þórólfr (that is, *Þór-Hrólfr*). Þórólfr could not come to terms with king Haraldr hárfagri (Harald Fairhair, d. 932), and when consulting his beloved friend [*ástvinr*] Þórr about what to do, Þórólfr was told to go to Iceland. Þórólfr then dismantled Þórr's temple and took it, as well as the soil underneath the altar, with him to Iceland. Already at this point, there are a number of analogues to Moses and the Exodus.²⁴ The new monarch, Pharaoh or Haraldr, has made life intolerable for the protagonist, who has a particularly intimate relation with the deity. In the Old Testament, no one has such a close personal relation to God as Moses, and while Þórólfr is not completely unique in this regard (most notably, Hrafnkell in *Hrafnkels saga* has a very intimate relation to Freyr), this is a rare phenomenon in Old Norse literature. Furthermore Þórólfr dismantles the temple to bring it to Iceland (but see footnote 29). The Israelites constructed their portable tabernacle along the way, rather than at the point of departure, but they did so from treasures brought from Egypt (Exod 12:35–36). Hrólfr also has his name changed to Þórólfr. In Old Norse literature, people might be given nicknames or present themselves under a false name, but they do not, as a rule, add the name of a deity to a pre-existing name to produce a new one. Þórólfr later does this also to his son, who was called Steinn, but whom he dedicated to Þórr giving him the name Þorsteinn, and Þorsteinn in turn did the

²³ Kevin Wanner, "Purity and Danger in Earliest Iceland: Excrement, Blood, Sacred Space, and Society in *Eyrbyggja saga*," *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 5 (2009): 239.

²⁴ Here and below, I include Leviticus, Numeri and Deuteronomy under the concept of the Exodus, since these books belong within the same narrative frame (quotations from the Vulgate follow the Clementine version).

same to his son Grímr and called him Þorgrímr.²⁵ Whether such a practice may have existed in the pagan period is unclear, and it is of little import here: No one named Hrólfr is likely ever to have had his name changed to Þórólfr, since that name has developed out of Þór-ulfr (Þórr-wolf).²⁶ There are, however, other examples of name change instituted not for, but by the divinity in Genesis. There Abram has his name changed to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, and Jacob to Israel (Gen 17:5; 17:15; 32:28). Moses, however, always remains Moses. Nonetheless, name change is a recurrent motif connected to the patriarchs. It thus makes sense in the context of this founding figure who, as we shall see, has so many points of contact with motifs found in the Pentateuch. Of these motifs – intolerable monarch, personal relationship with the deity, portable temple, name change to reflect devotion – only the first is a commonplace in Icelandic settlement stories, and their constellation therefore suggests Old Testament influence.

With regard to the soil underneath the altar that Þórólfr brings with him, another motif seems to have entered the mix, namely the practice of bringing soil from one holy place to sanctify another. Constantine's mother Helen is said to have sent soil from the Holy Land to Rome, and Irish saints' lives from the twelfth through sixteenth centuries report that soil was brought from Rome to local cemeteries.²⁷ This does not conform to the Exodus template, but relates more generally to a practice connected to the Holy Land in the Middle Ages. A plausible reason for the inclusion of this detail may be that Þórólfr's native Moster was the symbolic fountainhead of Christianity in Norway, since this was where the missionary king Óláfr Tryggvason later would land, erect Norway's first church, and begin the process of converting the region, then under the sway of the apostate earl Hákon.²⁸

²⁵ *Eyrbyggja saga*, ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, Íslenzk fornrit 4, Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1935: 12, 19.

²⁶ Kristoffer Kruken and Ola Stemshaug, *Norsk personnamleksikon*, 3rd ed., Oslo: Samlaget, 2013, 567, s.v. "Torolv." Hrólfr is itself a compound name, derived from *Hrōð-ulfr (glory-wolf). Kruken and Stemshaug, *Norsk personnamleksikon*, 480, s.v. "Rolv." This, however, is not likely to have been known in the Middle Ages. Hauksbók's statement that such changes were part of pagan practice appears to be based on *Eyrbyggja*, *Hauksbók*. *Udgiven efter de Arnemagnæanske håndskrifter no. 371, 544 og 675, 40, samt forskellige papirshåndskrifter af Det Kongelige Nordiske Oldskrift-Selskab*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen: Thieles Bogtrykkeri, 1892–1896: cxxxv, 503–04.

²⁷ Lucy Donkin, "Earth from Elsewhere. Burial in *terra sancta* Beyond the Holy Land," in *Natural Materials of the Holy Land and the Visual Translation of Place, 500–1500*, ed. Renana Bartal, et al. (London: Routledge, 2017), 118–19.

²⁸ The Icelandic kings' saga in existence at the time of the writing of *Eyrbyggja saga* that makes the most of this motif is *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* by Oddr munkr. It is also mentioned in *Heimskringla*, *Ágrip*, and *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium*, *Færeyinga saga*. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar eftir Odd munk Snorason*, ed. Ólafur Halldórsson, Íslenzk fornrit 25 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2006), 212–14, 301; Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla 1–3*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk fornrit 26–28 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1979), vol. 1: 293; *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sögum*. *Fagrskinna – Nóregskonunga tal*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, Íslenzk Fornrit 29 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1985), 22; *Monumenta*

From the retrospective viewpoint of the author, this was indeed *terra sancta*, and the pilgrim analogy was thus apt, even though it upset the Exodus template.²⁹

The choice of the god Þórr may be due to a number of factors. For one thing, the peninsula in question was named Þórsnes and the settler, whose historicity there is no particular reason to doubt, was named Þórólfr. With regard to the Biblical analogues, it is worth noting that Þórr's fishing expedition, when the god went fishing for the great sea serpent, appears sometimes to have been understood as a pagan prefiguration of how Christ defeated the Devil. This is borne out both by eleventh-century stone art in Scandinavia and England and by Norse homiletic literature, including the Icelandic Book of Homilies.³⁰ Furthermore, the author emphasises the "mighty nails" or "divine nails" [*reginnaglar*] in the effigy of Þórr.

Historica Norvegiæ. Latinske Kildeskrifter til Norges Historie i Middelalderen, ed. Gustav Storm (Kristiania: A. W. Brøgger, 1880), 17. We know that Helgafell housed a library of at least a hundred volumes in the late twelfth century, and a manuscript containing the Greater Saga of Óláfr Tryggvason is thought to have been written there, attesting to the interest in this missionary king, Ólafur Halldórsson, *Helgafellsbækur fornar*, Studia Islandica (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfa Menningarsjóðs, 1966), 41, 51. The Greater saga was composed after *Eyrbyggja saga*, but it draws on older material and it contains the passage where Óláfr is said to have built Norway's first church in Moster, *Flateyrbok: En samling af norske Konge-Sagaer med indskudte mindre Fortællinger om Begivenheder i og udenfor Norge samt Annaler*, 3 vols, ed. Guðbrandur Vigfússon and C.R. Unger (Christiania: Mallings, 1860–1868), vol. 1: 229.

29 After writing this chapter, I have come to doubt that the dismantling of the temple and the transfer of sacred soil are exclusively external, Christian motifs. The first and most obvious point is that all large timbers had to be brought to Iceland, since they were not to be found there. Furthermore, two passages in *Landnámabók* are of specific relevance. In both S and H, we read that Órlygr, who was a Christian from the Hebrides, brought church timbers and *mold vígð* [consecrated soil] with him to Iceland (*Íslendingabók. Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson. Íslenzk fornrit 1. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1986: 52–53). It is possible that a pagan practice has here been attributed to one of the early, Christian settlers. About the *hofgoði* [temple priest] Þórhaddr on Mæri, we read that he dismantled the temple and brought the *hofsmold* [temple soil] and *súlur* [pillars] to Iceland, and that he would not allow for the killing of anything but cattle for domestic needs in all of Stöðvarfjörður (*Íslendingabók. Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson: 307–08). I cannot exclude a pagan (or pragmatic, in the case of the timbers) background for these features, but given other Christian analogues in these chapters of *Eyrbyggja saga*, I would still assume that they have been selected at least partly for their resonance within a Christian conceptual framework.

30 Three stones are likely to depict Þórr's fight with the Miðgarðsormr and are set in Christian contexts: Gosforth, Hørdum, and Altuna. On the carver of Altuna, Balli, and his work on stones carrying crosses, see Otto von Friesen, *Upplands runstenar. En allmänfattlig öfversikt*. Uppsala, 1913: 59–63. Generally, and on the influence of this motif on hagiography, see K. Brøndsted, "En kirkelig allegori og en nordisk myte," *Historisk Tidsskrift* 2, no. 3 (1882); Otto Gschwantler, "Christus, Thor und die Midgardschlange," in *Festschrift für Otto Höfler zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Helmut Birkhan and Otto Gschwantler (Vienna: Verlag Notring, 1968); James Marchand, "Leviathan and the Mousetrap in the *Niðrstigningasaga*," *Scandinavian Studies* 47 (1975); Henrik Janson, "Edda and 'Oral Christianity': Apocryphal Leaves of the Early Medieval Storyworld of the North," in *The Performance of Christian and Pagan Storyworlds*, ed. Lars Boje Mortensen, et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013).

Decorative nails have been found on wooden effigies from the ninth century, clearly belonging to a pre-Christian context, and the author may be aware of such an historical practice.³¹ Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that he emphasises the nails in a wooden effigy of a god whom we know to have been associated with the God who was nailed on wood. If this is intentional, it may be understood as a hint forward in history, when the truth about the crucifixion would become known, suggesting that Þórólfr had already gotten some things right, even though he did not grasp their implications. Below, we shall see a more unequivocal Christological parallel, which may support this interpretation. This would imply that the author understood his story about Þórólfr in a manner similar to how the Old Testament was understood in art and exegetical and homiletic literature, namely that it contained prefigurative pointers to the New Testament, as yet not fully revealed to the Jews under the Old Covenant, but visible in hindsight to those who had come to an understanding of salvation history through knowledge of Christ's passion.

When he arrives in Iceland, Þórólfr erects the temple again, as the Jews would do in Jerusalem. The author then launches into a description of the temple, bringing to mind the long description of the Tabernacle in Exod 36:8–39:43. The point of reference, however, is that of a Christian church:

There he had a temple built, and it was a great house. There was a door on the side wall, near the further end. Inside the door were the high-seat pillars, and they had nails in them; they were called nails of the gods/powerful nails [earlier, one of these posts is said to carry the effigy of Þórr].³² All the area inside was a sanctuary. Further in from the temple was a house looking as choirs in churches now look, and there was an altar [*stalli*] on the middle of the floor like an altar [*altari*], and on it lay a ring, fashioned with an opening and weighing twenty ounces, and upon it all oaths should be taken. The temple priest was to carry that ring on his arm to all public gatherings. On the altar, furthermore, there was to be a bowl for sacrificial blood, and in it a sprinkler for sacrificial blood [*hlautteinn*], like a sprinkler for holy water [*stokkull*], <and with it one should sprinkle the blood, which was called *hlaut*, from the bowl: That was blood from the killing of the victims that were sacrificed to the gods.> Around the altar in the annex, the gods were arranged. All men had to pay a fee to this temple, and they were obliged to follow the temple priest on all journeys, just as legal retainers now have to do for their chieftains, and the priest had to maintain the temple at his own expense, so that it would not fall into decay, and hold sacrificial feasts inside.

[Þar lét hann reisa hof, ok var þat mikit hús; váru dyrr á hliðveggjum ok nær öðrum endanum; þar fyrir innan stóðu öndvegissúlurnar, ok váru þar í naglar; þeir hétu reginnaglar; þar var allt friðarstaðr fyrir innan. Innar af hofinu var hús í þá líking, sem nú er sönghús í kirkjum, ok stóð þar stalli á miðju gólfinu sem altari, ok lá þar á hringr einn mótlauss, tvítögeyringr, ok skyldi þar á sverja eiða alla; þann hring skyldi hofgoði hafa á hendi sér til alla mannfunda.

³¹ For a discussion of these nails, see Margaret Clunies Ross, "Reginnaglar," in *News from Other Worlds. Tíðendi ór öðrum heimum. Studies in Folklore, Mythology and Culture in Honor of John F. Lindow*, ed. Merrill Kaplan and Timothy R. Tangherlini (Berkeley: North Pinehurst Press, 2012); Janson 2013, "Edda and 'Oral Christianity':" 117–8.

³² *Eyrbyggja saga*, 7.

Á stallanum skyldi ok standa hlautbolli, ok þar í hlautteinn³³ sem stökkull væri, <ok skyldi þar stökkva með ór bollanum blóði því, er hlaut var kallat; þat var þess konar blóð, er svæfð vǫru þau kvikendi, er goðunum var fórnat.>³⁴ Umhverfis stallann var goðunum skipat í afhúsinu. Til hofsins skyldu allir menn tolla gjalda ok vera skyldir hofgoðanum til allra ferða, sem nú eru þingmenn höfðingjum, en goði skyldi hofi upp halda af sjálfs síns kostnaði, svá at eigi rénaði, ok hafa inni blótveizlur.]

Unlike the analogues discussed above, the comparison between pagan and Christian architecture and practices is here explicit.³⁵ Some aspects of this description, notably the significance accorded to the high-seat pillars and the nails in them, as well as the ring for taking oaths, may reflect pre-Christian practices.³⁶ There is no obvious reason to doubt the significance of high-seat pillars in pre-Christian times, and they are referred to in several sagas.³⁷ In this settler literature, it is a topos that a chieftain would throw them overboard and follow them to a propitious spot for settlement. This is also what Þórólfr does before the passage quoted here.³⁸ Given the general prominence of high-seat pillars in the literature, it seems plausible that this topos has some ritual background, but it is again noteworthy that there is an Exodus parallel: When the Israelites are crossing the Red Sea, God leads the way in the shape of a pillar [*columna*] of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exod 13:17–14:29).³⁹ In the Norse translation of Exodus, the word *pilar* is

³³ Thus paper manuscripts. Medieval manuscripts have *hlvtrinn*, *lutinn*.

³⁴ *ok . . . fórnat* only in paper manuscripts.

³⁵ See Klaus Bödl, *Eigi einhamr. Beiträge zum Weltbild der Eyrbyggja und anderer Isländersagas* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), 218–25.

³⁶ For a general discussion, see Bödl 2005, *Eigi einhamr*. Kabell's hypotheses that the entire concept of a ring for taking oaths is based on a misunderstanding of the word *baugeiðr* in *Hávamál* 110, but this leaves him with much to explain away, including the Anglo-Saxon source, see Aage Kabell, "Baugi und der Baugeid," *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* 90 (1975). For a rebuttal of Kabell and a discussion of the famous Forsaringen as a possible oath-ring, see Stefan Brink, "Forsaringen – Nordens äldsta lagbud," in *Beretning fra femtende tværfaglige vikingesymposium*, ed. Else Roesdahl and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (Højbjerg: Hikuin, 1996). For a general background, see F.P. Magoun, "On the Old-Germanic Altar- or Oath-ring (*Stallahringr*)," *Acta Philologica Scandinavica* 20 (1949). For related motifs in the Nestor Chronicle, see Martina Stein-Wilkeshuis, "Scandinavians Swearing Oaths in Tenth-Century Russia: Pagans and Christians," *Journal of Medieval History* 28 (2002): 163–4.

³⁷ Wellendorf counts nine instances, Jonas Wellendorf, "The Interplay of Pagan and Christian Traditions in Icelandic Settlement Myths," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 109 (2010): 9. On high-seat pillars generally and their possible cultic background, see Bödl 2005, *Eigi einhamr*: 163–176; Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society: The Reception of Norse Myths in Medieval Iceland*, 2 vols., vol. II (Odense: Odense University Press, 1998), 122–57; Dag Strömbäck, "Att helga land. Studier i *Landnåma* och det äldsta rituella besittningstagandet," in *Folklore och filologi* (Uppsala: Almqvist och Wiksell, 1970 [1928]), 136–139.

³⁸ Similar stories are told also of saints, and it is noteworthy that the outcome is always positive, irrespective of religion, Wellendorf 2010, "Interplay of Pagan and Christian Traditions:" 12–16.

³⁹ The Exodus-motif of the pillar leading the way occurs in some of the texts discussed in Chapter 12 (Stefka G. Eriksen), 230–4.

used, but in *Heilagra þriggja konunga saga* (the saga of the three holy kings), the word *súla* is used, just as it is of the high-seat pillars.⁴⁰ Even if indebted to tradition, the literary motif may have been positively reinforced by the Biblical one, and at least in the case of *Eyrbyggja saga*, where there appear to be so many echoes of the Pentateuch, such a subtext seems quite plausible.

There are three explicit analogues to churches in this passage, namely the “house looking as choirs in churches now look” and the pagan and Christian terminology for altars and sprinklers. The author makes no explicit comparison with the tithe, but the temple fee would certainly feel quite familiar to a medieval audience. The point of comparison in the explicit references is the future situation in Iceland itself. This, presumably, reflects the teleological view of local history of the thirteenth-century author. Reflexes of the Exodus may, however, be found in the strong emphasis on the temple and its connection to the main protagonist. Moses, furthermore, also built an altar, sacrificed animals, poured their blood into bowls and sprinkled it:

then Moses took half of the blood, and poured it into bowls, and the rest he poured upon the altar [. . .] and he took the blood and sprinkled it upon the people (Exod 24: 6–8)⁴¹

The arrangement of the gods around the altar may be derived from the same Biblical passage. In Exod 24:4, we read that Moses

“built an altar at the foot of the mount [ædificavit altare ad radices montis], and twelve titles [titulos] according to the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Petrus Comestor (1100–1179) comments on this passage, summing up the views of the exegetes on these “titles.” According to one view, “titles” meant altars, presumably with the name of the tribe inscribed on them and therefore referred to as titles. According to another interpretation, the reference was only to one altar with all of the names inscribed on it.⁴² Nonetheless, a common understanding was that Moses built an altar as well as twelve other altars in connection to it. This is quite reminiscent of the main altar with the gods arranged around it in *Eyrbyggja saga*.

Just after the description of the temple, we learn that Þórólfr placed so much faith in a mountain on the peninsula that no one should look at it without washing

⁴⁰ ‘*Stjörn*’. *Tekst etter håndskriftene*, 2 vols, ed. Reidar Astås, Oslo: Riksarkivet, 2009) (ONP s.v. *súla*).

⁴¹ “tulit itaque Moses dimidiam partem sanguinis et misit in crateras, partem autem residuam fudit super altare [. . .] ille vero sumptum sanguinem respersit in populum.”

⁴² Peter Comestor, *Historia scholastica*: “[. . .] forsán duodecim altaria, titulos dixit. Vel potius unum ex duodecim lapidibus, et in singulis singula nomina filiorum Israel scripsit, quasi titulus tribuum duodecim.” [perhaps twelve altars, [though] he said titles, or rather one [made] from twelve stones, and he inscribed the individual names of the children of Israel on the individual [stones], as the title of the twelve tribes], Peter Comestor, *Historia scholastica*, PL, 198, col. 1168D.

first, and that nothing should be killed on the mountain (on this feature, see footnote 29). He called this mountain *Holy Mountain* [*Helgafell*], and he believed that he would go there when he died. In the place where the high-seat pillars had come ashore, he established an assembly, and this place was also so holy [*svá mikill helgistaðr*] that blood spilled in strife or human excrements might not defile it. For the latter purpose, people had to go out to a small island called Dirt-Skerry [*Dritsker*].

As noted by Wanner, we find a number of analogues to Moses and the Exodus in this landscape. The most obvious one is that of the holy mountain, corresponding to Mount Sinai in the Exodus.⁴³ Unlike Moses, however, Þórólfr does not go up on the mountain to communicate with his god. Nonetheless, the surrounding circumstances are strikingly similar. In Exodus, the people should wash before they look toward God who will appear on the mountain (Exod 19:10–11). In *Eyrbyggja saga*, they should wash before they look toward the mountain. In Deuteronomy, the Jews are required to leave the camp to relieve themselves (Deut 23: 12–14). In *Eyrbyggja saga*, they must leave the assembly place to do so. Here, however, local topography and onomastics enter the picture. In Deuteronomy, it is only specified that the Israelites must leave the camp, whereas in *Eyrbyggja saga*, it is also specified where they must go, namely to *Dritsker* (Dirt-Skerry). Presumably, the use of this particular Biblical analogue was prompted by the name of the islet.⁴⁴

The name's actual background has been debated. The saga's explanation is unlikely to have an historical background: While it is perhaps conceivable that religious sentiment could have led to a prohibition against defecating on the assembly site, it is highly implausible that members of the assembly would be required to make the cumbersome trip to the little island in order to relieve themselves. The way to today's *Dritsker* can with some trouble be traversed on foot at low tide, but not at high tide. The name may have moved and the landscape changed, but the accessibility of the saga's *Dritsker* can hardly have been much better, since it is called a *sker*, "skerry", rather than a *nes*, "peninsula." Nils Hallan proposed that *Dritsker* and comparable names derive from fishermen's habit of going ashore on an island or a peninsula to defecate, since it was hazardous to lean over the railing of a small boat.⁴⁵ It is, however, doubtful that people have ever gone ashore for this purpose, since it entails unnecessary labour. All boats needed to have a bucket, which could be used not only to get rid of excessive water, but also to throw human waste overboard, and Hallan refers to this as a common practice in preindustrial times. Furthermore, several of the names which Hallan quotes derive from the Old Norse word *þorfr* (need; the names

⁴³ For a general discussion of *Helgafell* as abode of the dead, see Wilhelm Heizmann, "Totenberg," in *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, ed. Heinrich Beck and et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007).

⁴⁴ Wanner, "Purity and Danger in Earliest Iceland", 239.

⁴⁵ Nils Hallan, "Tarva," *Namn og nemne. Tidsskrift for namnegransking* 6 (1989).

are Tarv, Tarvo, Þarfar), which could designate the call of nature, but it is perhaps more likely that these names denoted places where one could go ashore in bad weather, that is, when one *needed* it in order to avoid danger. For these reasons, Hallan's explanation seems doubtful.

Matthias Egeler, without reference to Hallan, argues on lexicographical grounds that the name *Dritsker* derives from bird droppings.⁴⁶ Lexical items containing the element *drit* generally refer to bird droppings, and this supports Egeler's interpretation. At least the present-day *Dritsker*, however, does not fit the description of being visibly covered with droppings, and to the best of my knowledge, this is more commonly the case with steep cliffs, such as *Hvitserkr* (white gown) in Northern Iceland, a free-standing rock dressed in white garments by the birds. *Dritsker* is not steep, and neither was the *Dritsker* of the saga, since men walked onto it. The two other *Dritsker* in Iceland, one islet in northern Breiðafjörður and a group of islets on the northern side of the mouth of Borgarfjörður, are comparable formations, not cliff-sided. Egeler adduces only one onomastic analogue, from Ireland rather than Iceland or Scandinavia, namely the cliff-sided inlet of *Fó na gCacannaí* (creek of the droppings).⁴⁷ Egeler's interpretation therefore also remains tentative.

A final possibility, not suggested before, is that the name is metaphorical. Egeler avoids nicknames in his lexical material, but the nicknames *drithljóð* (dirt-sound) and *drityrði* (dirt-words) suggest a metaphorical use of the word.⁴⁸ In general, words meaning "excrement" could be used as the first element of derogatory compounds in Old Norse, e.g. *skítkarl* (shit-man), and *skítráðr* (giving shit-advice). Such words still fulfil this function in modern Scandinavian languages. Maritime names based on such use of the root *drit-* are attested in Norway: *Dritaren* (roughly "the shitter") in the Oslo fjord is an uneven bank where fishing equipment could easily get stuck, and *Dritarodden* (roughly "the shitter headland") appears to have caused trouble for fishermen, rather than having anything to do with any kind of excrement.⁴⁹ If this is the rationale behind the name *Dritsker*, it may be due to the fact that it blocks the way between the bay of Hofstaðir and the sea, and the tongue of land leading out to it is submerged at high tide and thus potentially dangerous in bad weather. For lack of a full survey of maritime toponyms derived from bird droppings versus derogatory toponyms in the North Atlantic and Scandinavia, it must remain somewhat unclear which of the three interpretations presented here is correct. Nonetheless, it seems safe to assume that the saga's explanation is *ad hoc*, and that a Biblical dimension of sacral purity has overruled the underlying rationale of the name.

⁴⁶ Matthias Egeler, "Constructing a Landscape in *Eyrbyggja saga*: the Case of *Dritsker*." *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 132 (2017): 105–08.

⁴⁷ Egeler, "Constructing a Landscape in *Eyrbyggja saga*": 107.

⁴⁸ ONP, s.v. *drit*.

⁴⁹ Gustav Indrebø, *Stadnamn fraa Oslofjorden* (Oslo: Jacob Dybwad, 1929), 174.

Like sagas of Icelanders generally, *Eyrbyggja saga* is thoroughly Icelandic and founded in local lore and topography, and the stylistic ideal is one of show-don't-tell. Intertextual connections to Latin and other literatures are thus not readily visible. The case of Dritsker is a good example of this, and so is the next one. According to the saga, a group of people at one point refused to go out to Dritsker and decided to relieve themselves where they saw fit. Several men fell in the fighting that ensued, with the result that the assembly site was defiled, not by faeces, but by blood. For this reason, the assembly was moved, and on the new site, people were allowed to heed the call of nature as they pleased. We also learn that the new assembly site had a ring of stones. One of these was the stone of Þórr, over which human victims were broken [*brotnir*] – “and the colour of blood may still be seen on the stone”.⁵⁰ Indeed, the red colour on the stone was visible not only in the thirteenth century, but is so still, due to its iron content (Fig. 21.2). In this regard, it is similar to another stone upon which a human sacrifice was conducted, namely the rock at Golgotha in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where Christ's cross once stood. Information about the colour of that rock would have been spread across Europe by pilgrims, and it is mentioned in Níkulás Bergsson's *Leiðarvísir* – the Icelandic twelfth-century itinerary to the Holy Land that Denys Pringle and Stefka G. Eriksen present in their chapters.⁵¹ There, we read that

the door of the church which stands in Calvary is in the south, and when you enter there is a chapel to your right where the blood came down from the cross of our Lord, and the blood is still visible [on the ground].⁵²

This was the human sacrifice around which Christian faith revolved, and *Eyrbyggja saga*'s report about human sacrifices in Iceland is unique. The centrality of the Christian motif as well as the lack of local analogues suggest that the point of reference is the sacrifice which changed all of human history, and it should be noted that the stone is named after Þórr, the god who in other contexts served as an analogue to Christ. We have now left the Old Covenant of Moses and entered the New, and this is underlined by the fact that the Old Law is abandoned: Everyone is now free to defecate where they see fit. When connected to the local variety of the crucifixion, this humorous point becomes rife with meaning.

But which meaning exactly? Even by the largely associative standards of monastic exegesis, the referential scheme seems to become very messy at this point. The sacrifice postdates the sacrifices that Þórólfr made in his temple, so that we,

⁵⁰ “ok sér enn blóðslitinn á steininum,” *Eyrbyggja saga*, 18.

⁵¹ Chapter 11 (Denys Pringle), 203–6; Chapter 12 (Stefka G. Eriksen), 218–43.

⁵² “sunnan eru dýrr á kirkju þeiri er stendr í Calvarie loco, ok er inn kemr er til hægri handar stúka er blóðit kom niðr af krossi dróttins, ok sér enn á blóðit,” *Alfraedi Ízlensk: Íslandsk encyclopædisk litteratur*, 4 vols, ed. Kristian Kålund, I. Cod. Mbr. AM. 194, 8vo, Copenhagen: S.L. Møllers bogtrykkeri, 1908–1918.

Fig. 21.2: The reddish stone with Helgafell (The Holy Mountain) in the background. The red area on top of the stone is barely visible in the picture.

in the parallel history of the Bible, should have reached the point of Christ's crucifixion here. The abandonment of the Old Law points in the same direction. One should therefore have expected the prefigurative mode of the local Moses and Exodus to have been left behind. But how could it have been superseded by anything less than the advent of the Gospel itself, which was still far off in the future according to the saga narrative? The text gives us no clue whatsoever in this regard. We must probably conclude that narrative about local history operated with a more open-ended scheme of prefiguration than what one may generally find in religious texts. The text prefigures mainly through analogy to the Exodus, as one would expect given the settlement context. Motifs from the New Testament, however, seem to fulfil a comparable function. They become written into what is, in effect, the Old Testament landscape of pre-Christian Iceland. Indeed, it would appear that the landscape itself was a decisive factor in which elements were drawn into the analogy. The prohibition against defecation in the camp is not a prominent feature in the Pentateuch, but the name of the little island, and possibly the author's sense of humour, made it so. Calvary is central indeed to the Christian worldview, but it could not have been connected to local topography in this way

if there had not been a red stone by the assembly site. The name of the mountain was *Helgafell* (the holy mountain), and it was thus eminently well suited to serve as a local version of Mount Sinai.

We see here that perceptions of landscape worked in two ways. Some of the most significant localities of the Holy Land were grafted onto the local landscape, presumably because of their religious importance, but also based on what names and topographical features were available in the area. The Holy Land was thus metaphorically translated to Iceland. With Dritsker, however, a blank spot within holy topography is filled. In the Pentateuch we never learn where the Israelites went to defecate, but in the local variety of the Exodus we get a designated spot. Somewhat at odds with most description of holy topography, however, the religious significance of the landscape does not induce the author to refrain from using his sense of humour: I have as yet encountered no reader of *Eyrbyggja saga* who does not find the description of the conflict over Dritsker amusing. This curious blend of saga style and exegetical discourse is comparable to the Orcadian material discussed above, but when the Holy Land is imported to Iceland, rather than actually visited, the discourse becomes even more adapted to local conventions.

But why did the author opt for Moses and the Exodus as his main models? First of all, of course, it makes sense that a settler nation would look for their Moses figure. Nonetheless, I am not aware of any equally close analogues to Moses in Old Norse literature, and the rarity of the motif suggests that more specific circumstances may have been at play. I would suggest that the known details of the historical Þórólfr may have influenced the choice of motif. In the saga's account, Þórólfr first held sway over Moster, and as noted above, this was where the conversion of Norway was thought to have begun. From Moster, Þórólfr followed Þórr's lead to Þórsnes, where his pious feelings were specifically directed toward the mountain Helgafell. This was the future site of an Augustinian convent and the resting place of Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir (c.970–c.1060).⁵³ As described in *Laxdæla saga*, a text known to the author of *Eyrbyggja saga*, she was the first nun in Iceland.⁵⁴ Þórólfr thus moved between two well-known places of significant “firsts” in the history of Christianity in Norway and Iceland. The second of these, furthermore, was the site of an important religious centre. The fact that Þórólfr moved between two places which would later become imbued with religious significance may be part of the reason why he was chosen to serve as the local Moses, since the points on the map themselves indicated that the journey was of religious importance. The centrality of the holy mountain – Sinai or Helgafell – may be another reason for the choice of this analogy. This is far from a perfect match, of course, since Egypt was not holy

⁵³ Jón Jóhannesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth* (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1974 [1956]), 195–7.

⁵⁴ *Laxdæla saga*, ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, Íslenzk fornrit 5, (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1934), 228–9; *Eyrbyggja saga* 1935: 180.

and Sinai lay along the way, not at the final destination. Exegetical interpretation, however, tended to be generous regarding what analogies could be found and largely indifferent to logical flaws, unless they supported the argument.

Grafting the Holy Land onto the Local Topography: The Issue of Authorship

The considerable admixture of what appears to be monastic exegetical speculation connected to Helgafell and its surroundings in the saga strengthens the assumption of several scholars that it was most likely produced at the convent there.⁵⁵ This interpretation runs counter to the view of some scholars that Sturla Þórðarson (1214–1284), the nephew of Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241), is the author of the saga.⁵⁶ This assumption, however, is based on equivocal evidence. First of all, the author knows the geographic area well, but that would be true also of an author active in the convent. Second, there is some verbal overlap between poetry in Sturla's *Íslendinga saga* and in *Eyrbyggja saga*. The most significant similarities, however, are between two poems named *Hrafnsmál*.⁵⁷ Both poems are in the rare metre *Haðarlag*, and the name of the poems, the rare metre and the verbal overlaps show that Sturla paraphrased the older poem. We may thus conclude that the author and Sturla both knew the same poem. This may indicate that they are the same person, but another explanation is possible. Sturla's version of *Landnámabók* shows affinity to *Eyrbyggja saga*, particularly in the description of Þórólfr. This, as well as the poetic overlap, may be taken as indications that Sturla is the author of *Eyrbyggja saga*. It may also mean, however, that Sturla had access to *Eyrbyggja saga* and traditions relating to it, such as, perhaps, the entirety of *Hrafnsmál*. He was an important literary scholar with good connections, and he certainly procured many texts for historiographical purposes. As a child, he appears to have made repeated visits to the vicinity of Helgafell together with his father.⁵⁸ As an adult, he mostly lived at Staðarhóll in the Dalir region, at the bottom of Hvammsfjörður which extends to

55 *Eyrbyggja saga*, xliii–lvii; *Die Saga von den Leuten auf Eyr*, ed. and trans. Klaus Bödl, Munich: Diederichs, 1999; Wanner 2009, “Purity and Danger in Earliest Iceland:” 231–2, 234, 243, 245 and further references there.

56 Peter Hallberg, “*Eyrbyggja sagas* ålder – än en gång,” *Acta philologica Scandinavica* 32 (1979); Elín Bára Magnúsdóttir, “*Eyrbyggja saga*: efni og höfundareinkenni. *Studia Islandica* 65 (Reykjavík: Bókmennta- og listfræðastufnun Háskóla Íslands, 2015).

57 *Eyrbyggja saga*, xlix–li; Magnúsdóttir, “*Eyrbyggja saga*,” 77–9.

58 *Eyrbyggja saga*, lii–liv.

the east from Þórsnes.⁵⁹ It therefore seems likely that he may have been influenced by *Eyrbyggja saga* or material connected to it, but it does not follow that he must have been its author. Third, Peter Hallberg has found similar ratios of the use of some words in texts known to be authored by Sturla (*Íslendinga saga* and *Hákonar saga*) and in *Eyrbyggja saga*. He studies common adverbs and other words that authors would probably have used more or less unconsciously, thus attempting to preclude intertextual influence as an explanation. This appears to be a sound method, but his results are inconclusive, as he himself admits.⁶⁰ Finally, Elín Bára Magnúsdóttir has compared the use of more marked verbal expressions in the same works, but this entails that intertextual influence becomes an equally plausible explanation as authorship.⁶¹ In sum, apart from arguments relating to topographical knowledge, which are moot for the present discussion, only Hallberg has attempted to use a methodology that makes intertextual influence an unlikely explanation, and his results are inconclusive. From this perspective, intertextual influence and authorship are equally plausible explanations, and scholars agree that Sturla was influenced by *Eyrbyggja saga*, whether he wrote it or not.⁶²

The thorough alignment of the opening of *Eyrbyggja saga* with the Exodus is another matter. Some factors suggest such a deep engagement with religious texts and discourse that the author is most likely to have belonged to the regular clergy. The prohibition against defecating in the camp is found in Deuteronomy and is in no way central to the Pentateuch. The oblique reference to the Passion by means of the red stone is indicative of an ongoing concern with specific places in the Holy Land. The connection of the Passion to the abolishment of the Old Law bears witness to a highly developed sense of the dynamics of salvation history. These motifs are considerably more exegetical in their nature than what one may generally encounter in Old Icelandic secular literature, and they suggest that the author was active in a setting where exegesis was cultivated. Sturla does not fit this bill, neither through his known biography nor his texts. Furthermore, some topographic bias may be detected in Sturla's *Íslendingabók*, primarily for Reykholt, where he was raised, and for Staðarhóll, where he lived as an adult.⁶³ The opening of *Eyrbyggja saga*, by contrast, focuses on minor topographical details in the direct vicinity of

⁵⁹ Helgi Þorláksson, "The Bias and Alleged Impartiality of Sturla Þórðarson," in *Sturla Þórðarson. Skald, Chieftain and Lawman*, ed. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 205–206.

⁶⁰ Hallberg, "Eyrbyggja sagas ålder – än en gång," 208–9.

⁶¹ Magnúsdóttir, "Eyrbyggja saga", 173–200, 41–51, 306–39.

⁶² See, for instance, *Íslendingabók. Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, lxiii–lxvi.

⁶³ Helgi Þorláksson, "The Bias and Alleged Impartiality of Sturla Þórðarson", in *Sturla Þórðarson. Skald, Chieftain and Lawman*, eds Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 205–06.

the convent. For these reasons, I find it likely that *Eyrbyggja saga* was composed at Helgafell and later used by Sturla.

It would appear, then, that one of the reasons for composing *Eyrbyggja saga* was to supply the convent at Helgafell with its own Old Testament and its own holy landscape, showing that its place in salvation history and in the physical world had been planned all along.⁶⁴ This is similar to but also quite different from what we find in the Orcadian material. In both cases, perceptions of the Holy Land blend with those of saga narrative and in both instances, features in the landscape are at the centre of attention: the burial mound of Maeshowe and the Jordan in the Orcadian material, Helgafell, Dritsker and the red stone in *Eyrbyggja saga*. In Orkney, however, the Holy Land is in the here and now, and this was of course true in so far as these crusaders actually went there. This experience seems to have gone hand in hand with a feeling of living the saga: a rare experience indeed. Both religious and secular history have here been moved into the present. In *Eyrbyggja saga*, by contrast, the movement is not through time but through space. Here, history remains in the past, but the significance of the Holy Land is mapped onto the local landscape. We here see two strategies of domesticating the Holy Land, as it were, producing quite different results, but both predicated on the same narrative world of the sagas and both bringing the Holy Land closer, either in time or in space.

⁶⁴ This corresponds to the semiotic category *contiguity*, cf. the introduction in Chapter 1 (Kristin B. Aavitsland), 20.