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Finding a Founding Father: Memory, Identity, and the Icelandic *landnám*

By

Verena Jessica Hoefig

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Scandinavian Languages & Literatures

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor John Lindow, Chair
Professor Jonas Wellendorf
Professor Mark Sandberg
Professor Niklaus Largier

Fall 2014

Finding a Founding Father: Memory, Identity, and the Icelandic *landnám*

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Abstract

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Doctor of Philosophy in Scandinavian Languages & Literatures

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This study explores the bearing that theories of cultural and collective memory and national identity have on Icelanders' preoccupation with competing versions of their past, especially their foundational story. To enable a narrower focus, I place an emphasis on representations of the figure of the founding father and first settler of Iceland, the Norwegian chieftain-son and Viking Ingólf(u)r Arnarson, said to have settled on the island in the year 870 or 874. The material covered ranges from the twelfth century to the present, and comprises various forms of media, such as the earliest preserved texts in the Icelandic vernacular, geographical treatises in Latin, baroque and romantic poetry, visual art, political petitions and protest songs, and newspaper editorial letters.

In Chapter One, I look at current and past scholarly debates about who the first settlers were, and at the most recent attempts to date the settlement of Iceland. I analyze the controversial character of a present debate about some archaeological finds that pre-date the year 871 by understanding the settlement of Iceland, the *landnám* as we know it from the texts, as a cultural memory figure. Jan Assmann's concept of cultural memory lends a cultural-studies based perspective to foundational narratives and the way memory focuses on selected points in the past and condenses versions of the past into symbolic figures. Viewing both the *landnám* and the figure of the founding father as such memory figures enables to shift focus away from a dichotomy between historicity and fictionality, and towards the normative and formative power that mythicized foundational history can exert. Much of the frustration and intensity in Icelanders' current debates about their origin may be understood not by analyzing the foundational narrative itself – or the archaeological artifacts that may prove it wrong – but by studying the underlying mechanisms that hold a specific version of remembered history in place.

Chapter Two covers the re-discovery of the figure of the first settler in the service of Iceland's modern independence movement. I look at the oldest known depictions of Ingólfur, then focus on the genesis of the notion to erect a statue commemorating the first Iclander, and follow the process of how this task was realized. The people behind this project were members of Reykjavík's small middle class, and while they advocated for

Iceland's independence, many of them were educated in Copenhagen or even stemmed from Danish families. I follow their re-discovery of Ingólfur Arnarson and his heritage as a pioneer and explorer who entrusted his fate to the pagan gods he worshipped. I look at early print media accounts, the first telegrams sent to and from Iceland, and the first public lectures about Icelandic history (years before Icelanders got their first university). Benedict Anderson's imagined communities, his framework of discursive nationalism based on print media, the advance of capitalism, the rise of a new middle class and the role of colonialism lends itself well to the history behind the earliest depictions of Ingólfur Arnarson, as they are products of modernity and the nineteenth and twentieth century.

In Chapter Three, I take a more critical look at modernist theories of nationalism, creating a chronology of attempts to locate the first farm and presumed home of Ingólfur Arnarson. I start with the earliest localization (*Landnámabók* chapter 8) and end with excavations carried out in Reykjavík as recently as 2012. In this survey of the search for the First Farm, I analyze the deep attachments and passions generated by the sense of identity that Icelanders derive from archaeological finds, and from the search for the country's oldest farm in particular. Nationalism scholar Anthony Smith's framework of "ethno-symbolism" allows for a much wider definition of nationalism than Benedict Anderson, as he is interested in the underlying cultural resources, the memories, myths, values, traditions and their representation as artifacts and texts that feed into people's passions and sense of who they are. It is here where Smith's framework intersects in an interesting way with Jan Assmann's concept of cultural memory, in their common focus on pre-modern material and its agency in processes of identity formation and the definition of foundational memory.

Chapter Four, finally, investigates the origins of Icelanders' foundational memories in the earliest preserved texts in the vernacular, dating into the twelfth and thirteenth century. Compiling and comparing all medieval text passages referring to Ingólfur Arnarson, I explore how medieval authors and compilers have presented the *landnám* to their audiences, and have created a version of Icelanders' earliest past that must have competed with other memories, which were later forgotten. I posit that the authors of Icelanders' earliest manuscripts understood themselves as members of a small, educated and literate community that sought to streamline memories of the *landnám* with other foundational narratives. In doing so, the members of this community created the idea of a "pre-nation," the merging of legal and cultural boundaries in the Icelandic commonwealth, in their literary imagination and in retrospect. Using foreign misconceptions about their heritage, the *papar* and Gaelic slaves and settlers as the silent and mostly absent "other" against whom to define themselves, Icelanders created a literary memory, their own "great narration" of migration and settlement, embodied and represented by a Norwegian of noble birth, called Ingólfur.

To Leonardo

In Erinnerung an meine Mutter, Gabriele Höfig Kobras (1959-2012)
meinen Grossvater, Ludwig Kobras (1927-2012)
und meine Grossmutter, Marga (1933-2012)

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Finally, my deepest gratitude, respect, and love is reserved for my husband, Leonardo.

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“To forget - and I will venture to say - to get one's history wrong are essential factors in the making of a nation” (Ernest Renan)

Introduction: *Kreddur um landnámið* or on the Dogma of the *landnám*

On June 4, 2011, readers of *Fréttablaðið*, Iceland's most popular newspaper, were confronted with a provocative headline on the newspaper's front page. In an article entitled “Invalidating the *landnám* Dogma,” archaeologist Bjarni Einarsson took on the established view of the settling of Iceland in light of his recent excavation of an eighth-century turf building in Hafnir, which sits on the Reykjanes Peninsula.¹ This *skáli* was most likely not a farm house, but an outpost for temporary visitors to the island who came during the summer months to fish and hunt birds, whales, and walruses, and abandoned the building after the year 770 c.e., about 100 years before Iceland's colonization is commonly believed to have begun. To Bjarni Einarsson, this find was an important reason why the traditional view of the settlement of Iceland, dated to the year 870 or 874 c.e., and ascribed to the Norwegian chieftain-son Ingólfur Arnarson, had to be revoked:

That is how habitation in Iceland evolved, from being an outpost occupied part of the year to a permanent settlement. This replaces the image of a long-haired, angry king in Norway driving off chieftains to Iceland, which is the utmost fabrication and romanticization of our inception, used to try to justify Icelanders as part of upper-class Scandinavia.²

Later the same day, *Fréttablaðið* published an interview on its online platform with the director of *Fornleifarvernd Ríkisins*, the Archaeological Heritage Agency of Iceland, Kristín Huld Sigurðardóttir. Asked if history books in Iceland would now have to be rewritten, Kristín was quick to defuse the situation, stating that there was no reason to change the history of Ingólfur Arnarson at this point.³ After all, claims about finds that would revolutionize the chronology of Iceland's settlement were numerous in recent years, though most were disputed or, at least, subject to ongoing scholarly discussion. This may in part explain the confrontational choice of wording in Bjarni's interview, since his research dedicated to challenging the standard story of settlement in Iceland has spanned many years.⁴

An interesting parallel to this development can be observed in the Faroe Islands, where recently found remains at á Sondum in the village of Sandur stirred media attention, as they have been dated to the period of 300 - 500 c.e., providing evidence of habitation as early as 500 years before the presumed first permanent settlers arrived.⁵ While this appears

¹ “Fellir kreddur um landnámið.” *Fréttablaðið* (4 June 2011): 1 and 6.

² All translations into English, unless otherwise noted, are my own. “Þannig hefur búseta á Íslandi þróast úr því að vera útstöð hluta úr árinu yfir að endanlegu landnámi. Það kemur í stað þess að ímynda sér síðhærðan, reiðan kóng í Noregi sem rak höfðingja í burtu til Íslands. Það er hreinasti tilbúningur og rómantisering á upphafi okkar, til að réttlæta Íslendiga sem hluta af efri stétt Skandinava” (“Fellir kreddur um landnámið.” *Fréttablaðið* (4 June 2011): 1).

³ “Engin ástæða til þess að breyta sögu Ingólfs Arnarsonar.”

⁴ Beginning with his 1995 dissertation; cf. Bjarni Einarsson. *The Settlement of Iceland – A Critical Approach. Granastaðir and the Ecological Heritage*. Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1995.

⁵ Símun Arge. Personal communication. 13 January 2013; “Måske var der landbrug og mennesker på Færøerne før vikingetid.” *Videnskab.dk*. (27 January 2013); <http://videnskab.dk/kultur-samfund/forsker->

to have caused less controversy in the Faroe Islands than the claims by Bjarni Einarsson did in Iceland, the Icelandic media immediately took interest in these new findings, as they fit into the general discussion about who first settled the North Atlantic Islands.⁶

This study offers a theoretical view on the significance of discussions about origins for Icelanders – both today and in the past. Questions addressed along the way seek to answer what it is about founding myths and narratives (such as the story of Iceland's first settler Ingólfur Arnarson who came at the end of the ninth century), that challenges to the typical account of Iceland's settlement still make front-page news in 2011. Why are stories of origins and *origines gentium* important at certain times and places, while not attracting much attention at others? Is the search for a place of origin, for a location where it all began, an exclusively modern phenomenon in Iceland?

Chapters One to Three are dedicated to these questions while simultaneously trying to give a more general overview of the current state of research about when, where, and by whom Iceland was settled, as well as Icelanders' response and general stance on these questions. Each chapter employs a specific theory or subset of theoretical approaches, which is then applied to a "test case" revolving around the first settler(s) of Iceland:

1. Memory Theory, Remembering and Dating the *landnám*.
2. Discursive Nationalisms and Depictions of a Founding Father.
3. Ethno-Symbolism and Finding the First Farm.

Chapter One will test the concepts of *collective memory* and *cultural memory* as developed by Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assmann as a framework to understand the cultural relevance of the *landnám*, or permanent settlement, for present-day Icelanders. I analyze the controversial character of current and ongoing debates about the dating of Iceland's earliest settlements by understanding the *landnám* as a *cultural memory figure*.

Chapter Two addresses the political dimensions of Icelanders' myth of origin by offering a historical survey of depictions of the founding father. Iceland's small national movement will be understood as an *imagined community*, utilizing Benedict Anderson's framework of discursive nationalisms, as the chapter follows the (re-)discovery of Ingólfur Arnarson and his post-nineteenth century reputation as a pioneer and explorer.

Chapter Three discusses the limits of modernist approaches to nationalism studies. Here, I use the attempts of locating Ingólfur Arnarson's farm as a test case to investigate the theoretical limits of the concept of nationalism. I analyze the deep attachments and passions generated by the sense of identity that Icelanders derive from archaeological finds dating to the Viking age and the country's early settlement period. Departing from Anderson's theory, Anthony Smith's concept of *Ethno-Symbolism* provides an alternative to constructivist nationalism theories, stressing continuities and arguing that there is more to the past of a nation than "the past" as seen and reconstructed by the interests of later generations. Smith's framework, like the idea of a specific cultural memory, enables an analysis of pre-modern texts and artifacts, and allows consideration of this material agency

maske-var-der-landbrug-og-mennesker-pa-faeroerne-vikingetid; Church et al. "Vikings were not the first."

⁶ "Landnám í Færeyjum fyrir víkingaöld." *RUV* (12 September 2011); <http://www.ruv.is/frett/landnam-i-faereyjum-fyrir-vikingaold>

in processes of identity formation and the definition of foundational memory, at the times of both its creation and in later periods.

In Chapter Four, finally, I provide a survey and in-depth discussion of the origins of Icelanders' foundational narrative and the memory figure of the *landnám*, arguing for the existence of an imagined community of Icelanders active in compiling and disseminating selected memories connected to their earliest past and their first settler(s) during the late twelfth and thirteenth century. While the argument brought forward here essentially returns to the constructivist idea of rediscovering the past for present needs—in this case to prove the existence, dignity, and continuity of an early Icelandic nation in the literary imagination—the picture is complicated by more archaic characteristics present in the foundational memory that evade such a simple categorization.

First, however, it is necessary to look at the sources of “imagination” – to return to Bjarni Einarsson's words – that is, the medieval texts that reported on the settlement of Iceland. Since these texts will be analyzed in more detail in Chapter Four, the survey given here is short, but necessary in order to illuminate current debates on the role of medieval writing in Icelanders' understanding of themselves and their collective cultural identities.

Earliest Written Sources on the Settlement

Iceland has been considered by some a *Terra Nova*, in that it is a society which documented its origins and its creation of a new political and social order in textual form.⁷ Others have employed the term “New Nation” in this context, emphasizing the special mechanisms at work in societies that are newly founded by overseas migration, and which lack an indigenous population at the time of colonization or settlement.⁸ The most recent research has further developed this notion from the perspective of *diaspora studies*, implying that the various Scandinavian overseas settlements in the North Atlantic can be understood as diasporic societies.⁹

Along with New Zealand and other islands in the North Atlantic, Iceland belongs to one of the last substantial land masses on the planet that were colonized around the end of the first millennium. While New Zealand was settled by Melanesian seafarers, Greenland, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands were colonized by Norse settlers and their slaves.¹⁰ With the great new interest by scholars in disciplines such as history, sociology, anthropology, and archaeology, the sudden appearance of New Nations has proven equally fascinating to modern inhabitants of these societies, which eventually became entities with separate national identities, some even autonomous nation-states. For Icelanders, this relatively recent and—to some extent—documented origin of their people has significantly shaped their self-perception and self-understanding throughout the last millennium. An entire branch of the country's earliest literature, the sagas of Icelanders, along with the island's earliest historical vernacular writings, cover at length, or at least in significant portions refer to the seminal event in the history of Icelanders: the *landnám*, or permanent settlement or colonization of the island. Some of the sagas written by Icelanders deal with

⁷ Cf. Schier.

⁸ Cf. Tomasson and Hoefig.

⁹ Cf. Jesch and Abrams.

¹⁰ Adolf Friðriksson and Orri Vésteinsson 139.

the discovery and colonization of Greenland, the Faroe Islands, the Orkneys, and even North America, while others offer a view of the earliest settlement of Iceland itself, or use brief anecdotes or chronologies of the first settlers to anchor subsequent narratives about their descendants in what is presented as historical truth.¹¹

Most sagas that refer to the *landnám* were first put into writing in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, while two historical works in the vernacular, *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók* are presumed to have been committed to vellum during the twelfth century – almost three centuries after the start of the event as established by these texts.¹²

Íslendingabók is the oldest preserved text in the Icelandic vernacular.¹³ It provides a short survey of the history of the island, from the first settlers until the year 1118, with a focus on a number of central events such as the establishment of the National Assembly or *Alþingi* in 930 and the conversion of Icelanders circa 1000.¹⁴ In contrast to most other works from Iceland's earliest literature, its author Ari fróði Þorgilsson is known by name, though his first version of the text, presumably written shortly after 1122, is not preserved.¹⁵ The version we have today stems from two seventeenth-century copies of a now lost manuscript from Ari's revised version, which was probably not known to most early compilers of the sagas of Iceland.¹⁶ Therefore, while this work was not a major source—at least in written form—for the *landnám* events in many of the sagas, it was both admired and inspirational to some of Ari's near contemporaries and perceived as a foundation of Icelandic historical writing. Snorri Sturluson, Iceland's most famous medieval author, credits Ari fróði as the first person who wrote *fræði*, or learned works, in the Norse tongue in his prologue to *Heimskringla*.¹⁷ Snorri may have had his own interests in mind when he emphasized Ari's authority in all things related to history and learnedness, not least because his works on the Norwegian kings relied on the now lost works of Ari. Snorri also took over the Reykholt farm from the family of Ari's granddaughter, Hallfríðr, perhaps allowing him direct access to some of Ari's writings housed there.

Until today, Ari's *libellus islandorum*, as the text refers to itself in Chapter 1, is seen as the seminal work establishing a brief and trustworthy chronology of the settlement of Iceland, as well as the transition of religious faiths. Many texts regarding medieval Iceland, especially introductory texts, emphasize Ari's diligence in disclosing his sources and praise his account as a “first-class historical source” with “unassailable authority.”¹⁸ Other scholars have pointed to an ideological stance behind the selective recording of information in Ari's work, based on his close family ties to most of the witnesses he quotes, as well as some of the main actors to which he refers, for instance, the first two bishops of Iceland or to three of the four first *landnámsmenn*, or settlers, of Iceland.¹⁹ As Siân Grønlie contends, “This early history is as much family history as it is ecclesiastical history or national history; it provides an explanation of how the leading families of Ari's

¹¹ Hume 602.

¹² Vésteinn Ólason “Family Sagas” 114-116; Meulengracht Sørensen “Social Institutions” 24.

¹³ Mundal 111.

¹⁴ Vésteinn Ólason “Dialogues” 23.

¹⁵ Grønlie xiii.

¹⁶ Meulengracht Sørensen “Social Institutions” 27.

¹⁷ ÍF XXVI 5, 7.

¹⁸ Grønlie xvi n42. See also the references in Guðrún Nordal, Sverrir Tómasson and Vésteinn Ólason 292-9.

¹⁹ G. Turville-Petre 91; Grønlie x-xvi n42.

own day had got to where they were.”²⁰

The second seminal historical work, *Landnámabók*, exists in several preserved versions or redactions. It covers the colonization of Iceland with a clockwise description of the various settlements on the island. This work mentions more than 430 individual settlers who are said to have arrived in the time span between 874 and 930, enumerates more than 1,500 farm names, and provides an additional 3,000 personal names of later descendants of the first settlers. Though seemingly coming in the shape of a historiographical work, it has been suggested that *Landnámabók* served a mostly legal function in connection with land holding rights, comparable to the Norwegian *odelsrett*.²¹ While the first version of this list of settlers and their properties may date to the year 1100, later redactions of *Landnámabók* significantly changed the structure of the text. Two of the five preserved redactions interpolate a foundational narrative or a discovery account at the beginning of the work, and conclude with a version of *Kristni saga*, a text dedicated to the conversion and ecclesiastical history of Iceland up to the year 1118. These two versions – *Sturlubók* and *Hauksbók* – not only aim to establish a fixed chronology and provide a narrative beginning and conclusion to Iceland’s settlement but also emphasize that some settlers were already Christian when they arrived on the island.

The relationship between *Landnámabók* and *Íslendingabók* is complicated: The preserved version of Ari fróði’s text may have been influenced by an early version of *Landnámabók*, which in itself may have its earliest roots in some of Ari’s lost writings.²² Both *Landnámabók* and *Íslendingabók* establish Ingólfur Arnarson as the first permanent settler of Iceland. *Íslendingabók* introduces him in the first chapter: “It is said with accuracy that a Norwegian called Ingólfur travelled from there to Iceland for the first time when Haraldr the Fine-Haired was sixteen years old, and a second time a few years later; he settled in the south in Reykjarvík [sic].”²³ The *Sturlubók* and *Hauksbók* redactions of *Landnámabók* first enumerate various temporary visitors to Iceland before elaborating on Ingólfur Arnarson and his foster brother Hjörleifur in Chapter 6. Following a short biographical overview, which includes the mention of the murder of a suitor to Ingólfur’s sister, Helga, as their motivation to leave Norway, Ingólfur and Hjörleifur leave by ship to search for an island they had heard about from a previous explorer, Hrafna-Flóki. They spend one winter on the island and return to Norway in the spring to prepare for a permanent relocation to Iceland the following year, which was to include families, farm animals, and slaves. Chapter 8 in the *Sturlubók* and *Hauksbók* redactions specify the time of this event and also discuss the location of their settlement.

The summer Ingólfur and Hjörleifur went to settle in Iceland, Harald Fine-Hair had been king of Norway for twelve years; that was 6073 years from the Beginning of

²⁰ Grønlie xviii.

²¹ Sveinbjörn Rafnsson “Landnámabók” 613. While Sveinbjörn Rafnsson’s proposal of a legal purpose of *Landnámabók* is accepted by most scholars, some of his views have not been universally accepted; cf. Benediktsson “Review” 311-18. I will discuss his views in chapter 4.

²² Sveinbjörn Rafnsson “Landnámabók” 613; G. Turville-Petre 98-102; Andersson “Kings’ Sagas” 202-206; Grønlie xiii.

²³ Grønlie 4. “Ingólfur hét maðr nórrœnn, es sannliga es sagt at fœri fyrst þaðan til Íslands, þá es Haraldr enn hárfagri vas sextán vetra gamall, en i annat sinn fám vetrum síðarr; hann byggði suðr í Reykjarvík” ÍF I.1 5.

the World, and 874 years from the incarnation of our Lord.²⁴

According to the text, Ingólfur erects a preliminary hall until his slaves locate his high seat pillars, which he had cast overboard while on the journey, asking the gods to indicate where they wanted him to settle. Hjörleifur is soon killed by his slaves, but Ingólfur's slaves, Viðill and Karli, locate his pillars, and this is the location where he and his descendants decide to settle:

He made his home at the spot where his high-seat pillars had been washed ashore, and lived at Reykjavík. The high-seat pillars can still be seen in the hall there. Ingólfur claimed possession of the whole region between Ölfus River and Hvalfjörður south of Brynjúdale and Oxar Rivers, including all the Nesses.²⁵

Before Chapter 10 moves on to other *landnámsmenn*, Chapter 9 emphasizes the outstanding position of Ingólfur and clarifies that he was indeed the first settler: “Ingólfur was the most famous of all the settlers, because he came to this country when it was still uninhabited and he was the first man to settle here permanently. After that, other settlers came and followed his example.”²⁶

As Sveinbjörn Rafnsson points out in his analysis of *Landnámabók*, when the above quoted sections from the two redactions establish both the time and the location of the original settlement in Iceland, they do so by breaking up the overall structure of *Landnámabók*, which in an older fragmentarily preserved version (*Melabók*) covers each of the quarters of the island separately and in clockwise order, starting in the southwest. Both *Sturlubók* and *Hauksbók* divide the section on the southern quarter into two parts, one of which is devoted to Ingólfur and Hjörleifur's settlements, and discussed as a later interpolation by some scholars.²⁷

Several of the sagas of Icelanders join *Landnámabók* and *Íslendingabók* in their emphasis on Ingólfur Arnarson as first settler and founding father of Iceland, among them *Egils saga*, *Flóamanna saga*, *Grænlandinga saga*, *Kjalnesinga saga*, and *Pátr af Gerimundi Heljar-Skinns* and *Íslendinga saga* found in the *Sturlunga saga* compilation. The compilers of these texts may have done so in recourse to oral memory, or versions of *Landnámabók*, but were probably not familiar with *Íslendingabók*.²⁸ Two Norwegian works from the twelfth century, the anonymous *Historia Norvegiae* and Theodoricus monachus' *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium*, likewise mention this version of Icelandic settlement; *Historia Norvegiae* refers to a certain “Yngwar,” who along with

²⁴ “Book of Settlements” 20. “Sumar þat, er þeir Ingólfur fóru til at byggja Ísland, hafði Haraldr hárfagri verið tólf ár konungr at Nóregi; þá var liðit frá upphafi þessa heims sex þúsundir vetrar ok sjau tígir ok þrír vetr, en frá holdgan dróttins átta hundruð ok sjau tígir ok fjögur ár” ÍF I.1 42.

²⁵ “Book of Settlements” 21. “. . . hann tók sér bústað þar sem öndvegissúlur hans höfðu á land komit; hann bjó í Reykjavík; þar eru enn öndugissúlur þær í eldhúsi. En Ingólfur nam land milli Ölfusár ok Hvalfjarðar fyrir utan Brynjúdalsá, milli Öxarár, ok öll nes út” ÍF I.1 45.

²⁶ “Book of Settlements” 21. “Ingólfur var frægastr allra landnámsmanna, því at hann kom hér at óbyggðu landi ok byggði fyrstr landit; gerðu aðrir landnámsmenn eptir hans dæmum” ÍF I.1 46.

²⁷ Sveinbjörn Rafnsson “Landnámabók.”

²⁸ If Snorri was indeed the author of *Egils saga*, as has been suggested by Peter Hallberg and others, it can be assumed that he may have had access to *Íslendingabók* (Meulengracht Sørensen “Social Institutions” 27).

“Hiorleifr” and their families, settled in Iceland.²⁹ I will return to these texts in more detail in Chapter Four.

What can be summarized at this point is that the two seminal historiographical works which are preserved in the Icelandic vernacular, and two of the earliest historical works preserved in Norway, all refer to a man called Ingólfur, who is claimed to have been the first permanent settler of Iceland. None of the early texts preserve a version that deviates from this version of the *landnám*. These texts have established a firm tradition, inspiring generations of collectors and scholars, along with “common” Icelanders, to understand themselves as *Ingólfs sögu-þjóð*, or “Ingólfur’s saga people,” which is the expression chosen by the poet Matthías Jochumsson in “Til konungs,” a poem dedicated to the Danish king on occasion of his first visit to Iceland in 1874 (celebrating the millennium of Ingólfur’s settlement).³⁰ At the same time, the weight of the tradition of this foundational narrative has been perceived by some as a major hindrance for Icelanders who seek an objective or more detached handling of their past. Be it in discussions about the genetic heritage of Icelanders, or in quarrels about the origins of the saga literature, these discussions that reference *Íslendingabók*, *Landnámabók* and Ingólfur Arnarson as a symbol and personification of Icelanders’ myth of origin are usually kept within close sight. Bjarni Einarsson’s complaint, which marked the beginning of this section, proves this point just as well as Krístin Huld Sigurðardóttir’s appeasing statement: “Engin ástæða til þess að breyta sögu Ingólfs Arnarsonar!” (No reason to change the story of Ingólfur Arnarson as this point). For two of Bjarni’s colleagues, archaeologists Orri Vésteinsson and Adolf Friðriksson, this “overbearing presence of medieval literature and the weight attached to it by centuries of scholarship” prompted their publication of a critical assessment of the historiography of the *landnám*, including a deconstruction of *Landnámabók* that I will return to in Chapter Four.³¹

While my project relies on medieval texts regarding Iceland’s settlement, which thus seemingly runs counter to Orri Vésteinsson’s and Adolf Friðriksson’s demand to shake off the weight of this tradition, my desired outcome is a better comprehension of the societal importance of literature that deals with origins and beginnings for Icelanders, but also an analysis of the mechanisms that hold those foundational narratives in place. Thus, while adding another study about *landnám* traditions might at first seem redundant, my discussion of a wide selection of medieval and modern representations of the founding father will lead to a fuller understanding of why the settlement story could come to be such a dominant presence—and Ingólfur Arnarson such a productive figure—in modern Iceland.

A note on spelling: Chapters One to Three, which focus on modern debates and representations of Ingólfur Arnarson, use the modern Icelandic spelling of personal and place-names. In Chapter Four, I will use Old Norse normalized versions. Readers unfamiliar with the geography of Iceland, or confused by the tricky textual landscape of *Landnámabók* will find a **Map of Southern Iceland** in the **Appendix** (courtesy of Leonardo Covis), along with diagrams adapted from Jón Jóhannesson’s and Sveonbjörn Rafnsson’s works on the making of *Landnámabók*.

²⁹ *Historia Norwegie* 68.

³⁰ “Til konungs” *Þjóðólfr* (4 August 1874): 171.

³¹ Adolf Friðriksson and Orri Vésteinsson 157.

1. Remembering and Dating the *landnám*

In order to understand what Ari fróði, the author of *Íslendingabók*, and Ingólfur Arnarson, the first settler, came to symbolize for present-day Icelanders, it is necessary to first look at what current archaeological research suggests about the *landnám*. Further, it is even more illuminating to analyze how this research is perceived by the general public and scholars working in various disciplines.

Apart from Bjarni Einarsson, whose excavation in Hafnir in the south of Iceland is ongoing, Margrét Hermanns-Auðardóttir ranks most prominently as the first among those who have proposed to rethink the timing of the *landnám*, suggesting that it should be dated back to the seventh or eighth century. Her claim is backed by the results of her radiocarbon dating (14C) of excavation finds from Herjólfssdalur on Heimaey in the Westman Islands, which she documented in her 1989 dissertation.³² However, her radiocarbon method for her dating of the objects has been criticized and her research results disputed, though the discussion about how to deal with 14C results that pre-date 870 in Iceland is ongoing. In 2004, Árný E. Sveinbjörnsdóttir, Jan Heinemeier, and Garðar Guðmundsson suggested that the charcoal samples which are often used for radiocarbon dating in archaeological finds should be avoided, in favor of samples from seeds of annuals or bones of domestic animals. The reasoning for this is simple: since the first settlers in Iceland may have used dead wood for their fires, which they either collected as driftwood or brought with them, the 14C dates for the coal samples from their fires show an older age than comparable samples of, for instance, charred grains found in the same excavation layer.³³ Because of this issue, alternatives to the radiocarbon method have been suggested. Geologists Haukur Jóhannesson and Sigmundur Einarsson, who researched the Ögmundarhraun area in southern Iceland in the late 1980s, found a well-preserved turf structure near Krísuvík which did not show the typical *landnám* tephra (volcanic ash) layer in any of its layers or underneath – an indication that it may have been erected before 871. Thus, no radiocarbon dating was required here, since tephrochronology, the analysis of volcanic ash layers as temporal markers, could be used to date the structure.³⁴

One of the most controversial and prominent proponents of radiocarbon dating in Iceland is the physicist Páll Theodórsson, who has published numerous articles on the dating of the *landnám*. His two most recent publications, which will be discussed momentarily, give a good overview of the most recent scholarship dedicated to changing the chronology of the *landnám*.

To what extent the settlement is indeed an important aspect in Icelanders' broader public discourse at the present time is best illustrated by a recent scholarly debate in the journal *Skírnir*. *Skírnir* prides itself in being the oldest, continuously published magazine in the North, published by *Hið Íslenska Bókmenntafélag*, the Icelandic Literary Society,

³² Margrét Hermanns-Auðardóttir 45, 70. In an interview in 1989 entitled *Landnámskonan* (Landnám Woman), Margrét Hermanns-Auðardóttir explains how she has struggled with her role as female scholar and first archaeologist to reveal evidence that challenged the textual sources – and how both she and her family were exposed to the criticism of the public: “Landnámskonan” *Morgunblaðið* (1 October 1989): 12-13. For a critical survey of Margrét Hermanns-Auðardóttir's work, cf. Adolf Friðriksson “Sagas” 44.

³³ Árný Sveinbjörnsdóttir, et al. 393.

³⁴ Haukur Jóhannesson and Sigmundur Einarsson 87. The 14C dating of remains found adjacent to this layer gave results of 845±45 c.e., but the more precise result 871±2 c.e. was provided through dating the ash layers preserved in the GRIP ice core in Greenland; cf. Grønvold et al. 150.

founded by Árni Helgason and the Danish philologist Rasmus Rask in 1816.³⁵ Formerly called *Íslenzk Sagnablöð*, *Skírnir* succeeded the Society's first annual journal in 1827. It is published biannually and covers topics in fields such as literature, history, philosophy, and politics, all of which comprise, in the words of the publishers, the “societal matters that concern the nation.”³⁶

In what has become a lively and ongoing debate about the dating and location of the *landnám*, scholars Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson, Gunnar Karlsson, and Páll Theodórsson have discussed the effects of recent archaeological findings vis-à-vis the traditional view of the settlement. Just as with Bjarni Einarsson's remarks in *Fréttablaðið*, or Margrét Hermanns-Auðardóttir's research, the general Icelandic media has followed this debate on the *landnám* closely, to the point where even publications aimed at tourists and non-Icelandic speakers report on the controversy.³⁷

With his provocatively titled article “Beginning of the *landnám* in Iceland 670AD—was Ari the wise really knowledgeable?” published in the autumn 2009 volume of *Skírnir*, Páll Theodórsson commenced the debate with his call for a complete rethinking of the *landnám*, refuting any doubts regarding the reliability of the 14C dating of the coal.³⁸ According to Páll, the birchwood picked up for fire by the first settlers could not have lasted more than a century in the Icelandic climate without decomposing. In the second step to his argument, he lists nine instances of burials located in all four quarters of Iceland that are dated 870-890 and indicate an early, widespread habitation of the island. This contradicts the settlement accounts found in *Landnámabók* and *Íslendingabók*.³⁹ He concludes with an articulate call to rethink the *landnám* and Ari fróði's chronology:

When will Icelandic scholars cease to blindly defend the chronology of Ari the Wise, start looking clearly at the older settlement, and analyze thoroughly all the evidence in the matter. Those who wish to come as close as possible to the truth about the settlement and the development of Icelandic society in its first century must make it clear to themselves that the beginning and end of the story is not to be found in Ari the Wise, but rather, beneath the surface of the earth. A huge amount of work awaits us there.⁴⁰

In the consecutive issue of *Skírnir*, in his response to Páll's demand, science historian Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson leads the discussion away from questioning Ari's account to a more general investigation of the term *landnám*. As he indicates, Ari uses the word *byggðist*

³⁵ “Skírnir – Elzta tímarit á Norðurlöndum” *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins* (23 June 1963): 1 and 6.

³⁶ “samfélagsmál sem varða þjóðina” <www.skirnir.is>.

³⁷ “New View on the Origin of First Settlers in Iceland” *Icelandreview* (4 June 2011) http://www.icelandreview.com/icelandreview/daily_news/A_New_View_on_the_Origin_of_First_Settlers_in_Iceland_0_378670.news.aspx; “Professor Disputes Earlier Settlement in Iceland” *Icelandreview* (16 June 2011) http://www.icelandreview.com/icelandreview/daily_news/Professor_Disputes_Earlier_Settlement_in_Iceland_0_378999.news.aspx.

³⁸ Páll Theodórsson “Upphaf landnáms” 266.

³⁹ Páll Theodórsson “Upphaf landnáms” 268.

⁴⁰ “Hvenær hætta íslenskir fræðimenn að verja blint tímatal Ara fróða, en fara að horfast í augu við eldra landnám og kryfja til mergjar öll rök í málinu. Þeir sem vilja komast sem næst hinu rétta um landnám og þróun þess fyrstu öldina verða að gera sér ljóst að upphaf og endi sögunnar er ekki að finna hjá Ara fróða, heldur undir yfirborði jarðar. Þar bíður mikil vinna” (Páll Theodórsson “Upphaf landnáms” 274).

when referring to Ingólfur Arnarson's *landnám*, with which he distinguishes this event—the colonization of the island—from *mannvist*, the temporary occupation of isolated areas.⁴¹ This distinction represents the core of his argument: “The settlement of a specific country is a social phenomenon, as previously discussed: we are in fact talking about a series of distinct events on the order of one family sailing across the sea and settling in a new country.”⁴² When Ari's settlement chronology commences with the phrase “*í þeim tíð*” (to this time), it does not claim to provide an exact year for the event, but rather, it anchors it in a specific period, which would allow for the integration of other early visitors to the island on his timeline. Þorsteinn emphasizes that while it is not necessary to literally believe some of the discovery accounts from *Landnámabók*, a temporary *mannvist*, as indicated by archaeology for various places in southern Iceland, would also not openly contradict the accounts.⁴³ The findings from Herjólfsdalur on the Vestmannaeyjar show the obvious quality of the place as a good, natural harbor which enabled sporadic visitors from Norway and elsewhere to land without much danger. He continues that “people will have to become increasingly aware that *landnám* is not necessarily a specific and isolated event that starts in a given year without antecedents” and concludes with a request for caution using single-dating methods, such as radiocarbon, and a call for a more open attitude towards what the *landnám*, as understood by Ari and his contemporaries, might have comprised.⁴⁴

If Páll and Þorsteinn's debate could have ended here, on the common ground that there was temporary settlement activity before the time indicated by Ari fróði, the discussion would have died down. However, it did not end there. Instead, Páll responded in the autumn 2010 issue of *Skírnir*, referring to the 14C dating of micro-charcoal particles found in the remains of a Viking Age longhouse discovered in Reykjavík,⁴⁵ as well as recent finds in the Faroe Islands, both of which indicate a much earlier settlement than indicated by the earliest written accounts.⁴⁶ Þorsteinn's cue to distinguish between various forms of temporary visit, semi-permanent settlement, and finally, *landnám* is repudiated by Páll as “orðflækjuháttur” (hairsplitting), and an attempt to sidestep the possibility of settlement activity before the year 870.⁴⁷

Responding to Páll's article with what is presently the most recent contribution in *Skírnir*, historian Gunnar Karlsson acknowledges the existence of man-made material predating the year 871, but brings the focus back to the more general problem of exactly when a community starts to exist – whether it is with the actual arrival of a certain number of explorers, visitors, or settlers, or rather, when the historians and their audience agree that the event happened:

When have enough people come together for it to be considered a community?

⁴¹ Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 6.

⁴² “Landnám manna í tilteknu landi er félagslegt fyrirbæri eins og áður var rakið: Við erum í rauninni að tala um marga einstaka atburði á borð við það að ein fjölskylda siglir yfir hafið og sest að í nýju landi” (Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 9).

⁴³ Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 7-8.

⁴⁴ “Í fyrstu lagi munu menn í vaxandi mæli gera sér ljóst að “landnám” er ekki endilega tiltekinn og afmarkaður atburður sem byrjar á tilteknu ári án aðdraganda” (Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 21).

⁴⁵ I discuss the longhouse remains in greater detail in Chapter 3.

⁴⁶ Páll Theodórsson “Hvað hét” 513.

⁴⁷ Páll Theodórsson “Hvað hét” 521.

Concerning this there is no recognized rule, but if you would like my opinion . . . it is when a historian and his readers agree that a community has been formed.⁴⁸

With this strongly constructivist view of history, Gunnar Karlsson represents the exact opposite of the more objectivist argumentation presented by scientists such as Páll Theodórsson and Bjarni Einarsson, who focus on the oldest existing artifacts as indicators for the start of the *landnám* and find in their very existence enough proof to repudiate Ari fróði as a reliable chronicler. In turn, Gunnar Karlsson and Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson seek to integrate historical accounts and early artifacts, and show the same caution to not prematurely repudiate traditional Icelandic historiography and break with what they perceive as common agreement between responsible historians and their contemporary audience:

If all of the latest research were always included in general histories, the cohesion of the subject would be broken up into sheer points of controversy and hypotheses. The general historian is thus condemned to a certain conservatism, although naturally there are also limits as to how long it is wise to stick to the old theories. All history must renew itself to some extent.⁴⁹

This debate about the origins and nature of the *landnám* may be expected to continue into the foreseeable future, since both the unearthing of additional archaeological material predating 871 is to be expected, and because the various parties involved argue on different levels with different goals, showing little interest in reconciliation.

If the dispute in *Skírnir* truly revolved around the actual nature and precise dating of the *landnám*, it could be “solved” by accepting settlement activity occurring in various phases, beginning before the “official” *landnám* activity, around the year 871. That the dispute about the date and nature of the event is only one side of the coin can be seen in the response to Helgi Skúli Kjartansson, who in 1997 suggested just such a model of phased settlement, and who based his argument on tephrochronology and the earliest signs of animal husbandry in Iceland.⁵⁰ According to his research, the first wave of settlement activity must have been characterized by a few, large parties of settlers who first subsisted on hunting and gathering, and who might have journeyed back and forth across the North Atlantic multiple times in order to transport livestock.⁵¹

While this *landnám* must have occurred before the 870s, a second phase may have also started around that time, which attracted members from high standing and wealthy families in Norway. The descendants of these noblemen, members of a literate, Christian upper-class, later emphasized their lineage's influence for the *landnám* in the sagas and

⁴⁸ “Hvenær telst fólk þá nógu margt saman komið til að það myndi samfélag? Um það er auðvitað ekki til nein viðurkennd regla, en ef ég á að svara því . . . er það þegar sagnfræðingur og lesendur hans eru sammála um að samfélag hafi orðið til” (Gunnar Karlsson “Upphaf” 6).

⁴⁹ “Ef öllu því nýjasta væri ævinlega hleypt inn í yfirlitsritin mundi saga viðfangsefnisins leysast upp í einber ágreiningsefni og tilgátur. Yfirlitssagnfræðingurinn er því dæmdur til nokkurrar íhaldsemi, þótt auðvitað séu líka takmörk fyrir því hve lengi er skynsamlegt að halda sig við það gamla. Öll saga verður að endurnýja sig að einhverju leyti” (Gunnar Karlsson “Upphaf” 29).

⁵⁰ Helgi Skúli Kjartansson 22-34; also cf. Orri Vésteinsson. “Patterns of Settlement in Iceland: a Study in Prehistory.” *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* 25.1 (1998): 26.

⁵¹ Helgi Skúli Kjartansson 24.

other learned writings, while the memory of the “original” and presumably illiterate first settlers vanished.⁵²

On a formal level, the dispute in *Skírnir* could be settled if Helgi Skúli's approach was accepted by both sides – after all, it would acknowledge Bjarni Einarsson's demand to abandon the claim that Iceland's earliest settlers descended from Norwegian noblemen and would allow for the possibility of a much earlier *landnám*, as suggested by Páll Theodórsson and Bjarni's recent finds in Hafnir.⁵³ At the same time, it provides an explanation and legitimation of settlement chronologies established by Ari fróði and the compilers of *Landnámabók*, and even allows for the elucidation of some core characteristics of *Landnámabók* as a text – for instance, in its invention or reconstruction of some of the names of the settlers which have been shown to be based on false place-name etymologies.⁵⁴

Contrary to what one would expect from a debate about settlement chronology, Ari fróði's reputation moved to the center of the disagreement.⁵⁵ To some, Helgi Skúli's approach was disqualified because of the “shameless disrespect” he pays to the traditional value of Ari fróði as the chronicler of the early events.⁵⁶ Too provocative for Gunnar, Helgi Skúli claimed that Ari's chronology must be repudiated in his succinct statement that, “Ari's chronology of the settlement is invalidated.”⁵⁷ Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson seems likewise offended by Páll Theodórsson's reference to Ari fróði, taking it as motivation to offer an alternative understanding of the term *landnám*.⁵⁸

What has fueled this conflict is not a disagreement along the lines of fact versus fiction, or about the proper interpretation of archaeological and textual artifacts. Rather, what moved into the foreground is the value of historiography in shaping what an audience conceives of and agrees to as “their” history, and then the weight or shadow that this history may cast onto groups that, for various reasons, do not agree with this version of the past.⁵⁹

⁵² Helgi Skúli Kjartansson 32-33.

⁵³ In his 1995 dissertation “The Settlement of Iceland; A Critical Approach,” Bjarni argues for a North Norwegian and Sámi origin of settlers in the Eyjafjörður region.

⁵⁴ Meulengracht Sørensen “Social institutions” 16; Sveinbjörn Rafnsson “Studier” 203; Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson 273-5.

⁵⁵ This is not the first time a more general debate on Iceland's earliest history culminates in a debate about Ari. The reactions to Sigurður Línal's 1969 article on Úlfljótr's laws in *Skírnir* triggered a similar reaction. Línal had claimed that Úlfljótr's journey to Norway and his obtaining of the laws there was an invention used to legitimize the rule of those in power at the time (Línal 15). Arnór Sigurjónsson's response to Línal's doubt in Ari strongly resembles the rhetoric of the present *Skírnir* debate, and also brings to mind the sharp criticism Sveinbjörn Rafnsson was exposed to after his book on *Landnámabók* appeared (for instance by Kristín Geirsdóttir in *Skírnir* 1979). As Harald Gustafsson concludes, “Att röra vid de nationella myterna kan väcka starka känslor.” (To touch on national myths can awake strong sentiments) (35n21).

⁵⁶ “blygðunarlaust virðingaleysi Helga Skúla” (Gunnar Karlsson “Upphaf” 10).

⁵⁷ “Tímatál Ara um landnámið er sem sagt fállíð” (Helgi Skúli Kjartansson “Landnámið” 32).

⁵⁸ Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 6.

⁵⁹ A hotly debated topic in the past, the discussion of the presence of Irish visitors or “hermits” in Iceland at the time of the Norse settlement is strangely absent from the most recent debates, both in *Skírnir* and the media coverage of Bjarni Einarsson's finds in Reykjanes. It appears that the “nationalistic dimension of the denial of the Gaelic element in Iceland,” that Gísli Sigurðsson so poignantly addressed in his works, is still present (“Gaelic Influences” ii). I will return to the *papar* and Gaelic settlers and slaves in Chapter Four.

Collective and Cultural Memory

Of the theoretical approaches that will be discussed as suitable concepts to frame this survey of Iceland's myths of origin and the figure of the founding father in cultural representations, I will begin with Maurice Halbwachs's notion of collective memory, developed in works from the 1920s onwards, and then Jan Assmann's application and advancement of Halbwachs's concepts.

With the publication of Jan Assmann's 1992 book *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, Egyptologists and cultural anthropologists Jan and Aleida Assmann's work on memory and mnemonics introduced French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs's work to a wider audience in the humanities. Several publications in the past 20 years have worked within Halbwachs's and Assmann's framework and applied it to areas outside Ancient and Middle Eastern studies. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning's 2008 *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* includes contributions from diverse fields, including history, sociology, political science, literary and media studies, and psychology, and aims to provide a conceptual foundation for a newly emerging interdisciplinary field, "cultural memory studies."⁶⁰ As Erll readily admits, memory studies as a distinct field of inquiry is challenged by the seemingly limitless range of themes and objects related to memory, and the "fledgling stage" of its conceptual tools is a recent, interdisciplinary phenomenon.⁶¹ In order to avoid inconsistencies in terminology, for the purpose of this project I will limit the overview to key texts, mostly utilizing Jan Assmann's *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis* along with Maurice Halbwachs's book *On Collective Memory*.

Halbwachs's central approach to memory, which Jan Assmann readily takes up, is that memory is socially constructed; that is, a social frame of reference is necessary for individuals in order to preserve or form memory.⁶² If the social framework changes, the collectively created memory changes as well, since any perceived memory has already been conditioned by social frames which direct an individual's capacity for attention and interpretation.⁶³ This social-constructivist view distinguishes Halbwachs's thought from his former teacher, Henri Bergson, whose individualistic philosophy placed a strong emphasis on subjectivity as the one true source of knowledge.⁶⁴ However, like Bergson, Halbwachs is interested in both subjective and objective concerns of the past and the variability of memory. Until today, Halbwachs's assumption that no individual memory can form and exist outside of communicative processes remains controversial as a premise which willingly ignores some of the neurological and physiological brain mechanisms that create and sustain memories.

As Jan Assmann points out, one attractive feature of Halbwachs's theory of memory is that it explores remembering as well as forgetting, in that both groups and individuals are only able to remember reconstructed aspects of the past within the reference framework of their own present, while aspects that have lost an immediate

⁶⁰ Erll and Nünning 3.

⁶¹ Erll and Nünning 3.

⁶² Halbwachs 43.

⁶³ Halbwachs 43.

⁶⁴ Olick 154.

context in or relevance for the present are forgotten. Assmann explores this interplay between social frameworks and the acts of remembering and forgetting in Chapter 5 of *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, dedicated to “Israel and the shock of forgetting,” in which he examines the fifth book of Moses as a new form of collective mnemotechnics, as a document against a socially conditioned forgetting of the Exodus.⁶⁵ Assmann’s analysis of Deuteronomy distills the distinction between communicative and cultural memory as the text’s basic problem, that is, the transformation of memory which is embodied by eyewitnesses into memory formed and supported by institutions, which he calls cultural memory.⁶⁶

The distinction and tensions between communicative and cultural memory stand in the center of Assmann’s theory on forms of collective memory. In recourse to theories of oral history and oral traditions, Assmann employs ethnologist Jan Vansina’s term of the “floating gap” when looking at unwritten (but later, written) historical memory: *Ursprungsberichte*, meaning accounts of origins of different groups and individuals, all share the fact that they illustrate the differing stages of the “floating gap.” When taken together, Vansina claims that all of the various accounts of origin found for a particular group form a three-tiered whole. While genealogical information of the recent past exists in abundance, it tapers off when moving back through time, until only a few names can be given for earlier periods, or potentially, none at all. Then, for even earlier periods, a multitude of information of names and places can be enumerated, which mark the accounts at hand as traditions of origin.⁶⁷ In other words, while relatively recent genealogical details are remembered well, and details about a group’s earliest past—its coming into being or myth of origin—tends to be remembered in great detail as well, a “floating gap” marks a time period between these two phases where much has been forgotten. In some genealogies, recent past and traditions of origins can even be grouped within a single generation, a phenomenon which then moves along as newer generations take over: “Historical consciousness works on only two registers: time of origin and recent time. Because the limit one reaches in time reckoning moves with the passage of generations, I have called the gap a floating gap.”⁶⁸ The way in which the floating gap phenomenon is a productive way to understand some of the core characteristics of Old Norse written texts will be demonstrated in Chapter Four.⁶⁹ For Assmann, the floating gap principle gives way to his central observation, that collective memory can be distinguished into communicative and cultural memory: While recent time is reflected in communicative or biographical memory, traditions of origin comprise the cultural memory of a given group.⁷⁰

Communicative memory encompasses memories which are shared by contemporaneous individuals, for instance, generational memory. These memories form within a group, and disappear with their carriers, where we see that the period of 40 years, which is half the generational estimate of 80 years, appears to be a critical threshold in this context. Even in literate contemporary societies, communicative memories do not extend beyond the time frame of 80 years. This has been demonstrated by research conducted by

⁶⁵ J. Assmann “Cultural Memory” 200 and 175.

⁶⁶ J. Assmann “Cultural Memory” 200 and 175.

⁶⁷ Vansina 23-24 (paraphrased in J. Assmann “Cultural Memory” 34-35).

⁶⁸ J. Assmann “Cultural Memory” 34.

⁶⁹ Also, cf. Riber Jørgensen.

⁷⁰ J. Assmann “Cultural Memory” 36.

the *Oral History* movement, a recent approach to the study of history outside of textual sources.⁷¹ In modern literate societies, what extends beyond communicative or biographical memory and the “floating gap” is not myths of origin, as in illiterate societies, but official versions of the past as represented by monuments, textbooks, and other memorial signs.⁷²

If on the one hand communicative memory needs social interaction, even in literate societies, cultural memory on the other hand relies on what Assmann calls *institutionalisierte Mnemotechnik*, institutionalized mnemotechnics, which he defines as “fixed objectifications both linguistic and nonlinguistic, such as rituals, dances, myths, patterns, dress, jewelry, tattoos, paintings, landscapes . . . all of which are kinds of sign systems.”⁷³ Cultural memory focuses on selected points in the past, but as it is not able to preserve the past, it instead condenses it into figures of a symbolic kind to which memory attaches itself. Examples of this include the Exodus (Assmann's preferred case), exile in general, tales of patriarchs, or, as it will be understood for this project, the *landnám*.⁷⁴

Central to Assmann's conception of cultural memory is his understanding of myth. Myths rank among the figures of memory Assman enumerates, and they illustrate the closeness of his framework to Halbwachs's treatment of history: History *is* myth, since cultural memory inevitably transforms factual historical truth into remembered history, and with that, into myth. As he writes:

Myth is foundational history that is narrated in order to illuminate the present from the standpoint of its origins. The Exodus, for instance, regardless of any historical accuracy, is the myth behind the foundation of Israel; thus it is celebrated at Pesach and thus it is part of the cultural memory of the Israelites. Through memory, history becomes myth. This does not make it unreal – on the contrary, this is what makes it real, in the sense that it becomes a lasting, normative, and formative power.⁷⁵

The strong normative and formative power inherent in medieval representations of the Icelandic *landnám* is exemplified in the recent contributions regarding the settlement in *Skirnir* and *Fréttablaðið*, which marked the beginning of this chapter. Much of the intensity of argumentation and frustration in some of the scholars' responses can be understood as opposition to this version of remembered history, and its “weight” and “overbearing presence,” as remarked by Adolf Friðriksson and Orri Vésteinsson.⁷⁶

Ari fróði, as chronicler of events, and Ingólfur Arnarson, as a memory figure of the settlement, both symbolize this version of the past—even if Ari's text may not have been as widely known before the twentieth century—and accordingly, the core of the debate revolves around these two symbols. On the side of the defense are those who, by profession, deal with institutionalized forms of memory: historians, who then work either

⁷¹ J. Assmann “Cultural Memory” 37.

⁷² J. Assmann “Cultural Memory” 37.

⁷³ J. Assmann “Cultural Memory” 37.

⁷⁴ In the original German version of his 1992 book, Assmann even uses the term *Landnahme* in his enumeration of common *Erinnerungsfiguren*, figures of memory, though in a much wider sense, and in reference to the Ancient world (J. Assmann “Das kulturelle Gedächtnis” 52). The German word *Landnahme* is a direct loanword from the Icelandic term *landnám*.

⁷⁵ J. Assmann “Cultural Memory” 38.

⁷⁶ Adolf Friðriksson and Orri Vésteinsson 157.

with or against such forms, and who are at the core of the system that renegotiates and then publishes official representations of the past. Gunnar Karlsson readily admits that his role as established historian in charge of textbooks and brochures, the “institutionalized mnemotechnics” of literate societies, make him perhaps more cautious towards calls for a radical rethinking of the earliest history of Icelanders. Despite all critique, he also expresses appreciation to Páll Theodórsson as his opponent:

During my career it fell to my lot to renew in various forms general information on the history of Iceland, for school students, foreign tourists and Iceland enthusiasts, as well as the Icelandic public. In such a task one is inevitably somewhat critical of the attempts of scholars to expound new theories and interpretations. [...] Páll Theodórsson has placed himself on watch, to scout for evidence for some of the most radical reinterpretations of Icelandic history that one can imagine, which lengthen it by centuries. In this, different procedures would be most useful: to be responsive to innovative ideas, even poorly supported, and try one’s hardest to find reason to accept them as valid, although in this there must also be limits as to how receptive it is wise to be.⁷⁷

In turn, Bjarni Einarsson, Páll Theodórsson, Orri Vésteinsson, and Adolf Friðriksson work on a new version of settlement history, and while archaeological proof for settlement activity earlier than 870 may exist, what they face is not the struggle of proof for events that lie more than 1,100 years in the past, but the weight that the memory figure of the *landnám* in its present form still possesses in Icelandic society. Subsequent chapters of this project will show the (re)invention and (re-)interpretation of the settlement myth during various stages of Icelandic history, most notably during the twelfth, thirteenth, and early twentieth centuries. As a memory figure the *landnám* does not only encompass a *version* of remembered history, but may in itself be part of a tradition of historical memory; it is a memory figure intricately tied to Icelanders’ self-conception as an independent people, from the beginning of nineteenth century until today.⁷⁸

Of the relationship of memory and history, Maurice Halbwachs stated that the two come in sequence. Once the past is either no longer remembered or its collective memory ends, history begins: “It seems that history must wait until the old groups disappear, along with their thoughts and memories, so that it can busy itself with fixing the image and the sequence of facts which it alone is capable of preserving.”⁷⁹ But “history” as such, or to return to Assmann’s terminology, cultural memory, may develop a life of its own, and may be perceived as obstructions to groups which would like to work on the fixing of the

⁷⁷ “Það kom í minn hlut á starfsferli mínum að endurnýja í ýmsu formi yfirlitsfróðleik um sögu Íslendinga, fyrir skólanemendur, útlanda túrista og Íslandsáhugamenn, einnig íslenskan almenning. Í þeirri iðju er óhjákvæmilegt að vera nokkuð gagnrýninn á tilraunir fræðimanna til setja fram nýjar kenningar og túlkanir. [...] Páll Theodórsson hefur tekið sér stöðu á annari vakt, að svipast um eftir vitnisburðum um einhverja róttækustu endurnýjum Íslandssögunnar sem maður getur hugsað sér, að lengja hana um aldir. Þar hljóta ólíkar vinnureglur að eiga best við, að vera móttækilegur fyrir nýstárlegum hugmyndum, jafnvel illa rökstuddum, og finna í lengstu lög rök til að taka þær gildar, þótt þar hljóti líka að vera takmörk fyrir því hve galopinn sé skynsamlegt að vera” (Gunnar Karlsson “Upphaf” 28-29).

⁷⁸ Nationalism scholar Birgir Hermannsson speaks of the self-hermeneutics of national discourses about the past in Iceland. I will explicate his views in full in Chapter 3.

⁷⁹ Halbwachs 100.

sequences of “facts” or images much in the way that the generations before them did. In passing, Jan Assmann mentions the conservative German historian Ernst Nolte, who coined the expression of a past that does not want to pass away, “Das nicht-vergehen-wollen der Zeit,” when referring to Germany’s Third Reich and the question of guilt and responsibility of ordinary German people. Nolte used this expression in a much-debated 1986 article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, which fueled the “Historians’ Dispute,” an academic quarrel among left- and right-wing intellectuals in the late 1980s in Germany.⁸⁰ What Nolte had in mind was a call for more objectivity and *Gleichbehandlung*, or equal treatment, of the Third Reich as a subject of study in historiography when compared to other epochs of German history.

Although the stakes of Holocaust studies are quite different than commemoration of a national origin such as the *landnám*, as one of the leading fields of memory studies, Holocaust studies has generated some useful concepts and demonstrated interesting ways of applying terminology to analyze the preservation of memory. Both events seem to cause a parallel effect, in that they are particularly sturdy figures of memory, occupying not only the spheres of cultural memory but also communicative memory, or in Halbwach’s terminology, they comprise both memory and history. To call for more “objective” surveys of the Holocaust in Germany, regardless of the questions of individual guilt and responsibility, was an understandable affront to many Germans in 1986, since survivors, eyewitnesses, and perpetrators were still alive, and the event remained part of the collective communicative memory shared by millions of people at that time. To bring Vansina’s conception of the “floating gap” back into this discussion, and the critical threshold of 40 years that Assmann sets for the transition from communicative to cultural memory, it seems to make sense to have the year 1986, 41 years after the end of World War II, be the starting point for the discussion of the historiographical treatment of the Holocaust. But what is it about the settlement of Iceland that makes this event such a powerful figure of memory in 2011? Simply subtracting 40 years and investigating the years circa 1971 in detail is certainly not the answer, but considering the past 80 years of Icelandic history as relevant for the special resistance that the memory figure of the *landnám* seems to possess will help. Understanding the *Skírnir* debate as a marker for the beginning transition of the *landnám* as a memory figure will prove to be of use as well, as will a heightened sensitivity towards what may have been forgotten or left out of debates about the first settlers, whether contemporary or medieval.

⁸⁰ Ernst Nolte. “Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will. Eine Rede, die geschrieben, aber nicht gehalten werden konnte.” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (6 June 1986): 25.

2. Depictions of a Founding Father

The previous chapter illustrated how the *Skírnir* debate involved two distinctive positions along an imagined frontline: A foundational narrative, preserved in texts from the twelfth and thirteenth century is juxtaposed with a series of archaeological artifacts, and with this, a text-based, traditional evaluation of the past set side-by-side in what is presented as an objective approach to its history. Since these pairs are, in fact, not in true opposition to one another (and the existence of so-called “objective approaches” can be questioned), the debate continues.

When speaking of the foundational “myth” of the Icelandic settlement, or the “myth of Ingólfur Arnarson's settlement” while referring to the *landnám* accounts found in *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók* texts, the discussion that follows is not meant as a quality judgment of these two texts. Understanding the *landnám* as a myth allows for a focus apart from the past itself, towards those transformations and representations of the past that historical memory inevitably produces; it also enables a discussion of the functions that such memories may fulfill.

Jan Assmann understands all forms of remembered past as myth, regardless of whether the content of a text may be fact or fiction.⁸¹ He distinguishes two functions of myth, foundational and contra-present, which are defined by the particular use, or the dynamic that a myth could produce during the various times of its reception. The foundational function of a given myth refers to the immediate present, to which the myth as a form of remembered past provides “something meaningful, divinely inspired, necessary, and unchangeable.”⁸² My later discussion of locating the *landnám* in Chapter Three will illustrate this particular function of political myth.

The contra-present function can be framed as providing relief during times in which a decline of some sort is perceived and a deficiency experienced, for instance, during a period of economic recession or political turmoil. The conjuring up of a past that is portrayed as a heroic or “golden” age may help to provide an alternative draft for what may have gone wrong, and led to the present decline. In this way, a sense of dislocation, or general failure in the present can be explained and relativized by looking at a “glorious and great past.” Furthermore, this version of the past may serve as motivation to change the present, the undesired *status quo*. Jan Assmann reads Homer's epics as examples of this contra-present function of myth, claiming that *The Odyssey* and *The Illiad* were composed during a period of transition perceived by members of the Greek aristocracy as a time of collapse and decline.⁸³ Indeed, many of the Sagas of Icelanders can be read in a similar context, as expressions of nostalgia, of a longing towards the better times of the settlement period, which were put into writing centuries later during the chaotic and politically unstable period of the *Sturlungaöld*. Both Vésteinn Ólason and Thomas Fechner-Smarsley have suggested reading the sagas as such a “crisis literature.”⁸⁴

In the pages to follow, I will argue that the foundational narrative of Ingólfur Arnarson and his settlement in southwestern Iceland can be understood as myth serving both foundational and contra-present functions, and, in addition to that, as a specifically

⁸¹ J. Assmann “Cultural Memory” 59.

⁸² J. Assmann “Cultural Memory” 62.

⁸³ J. Assmann “Cultural Memory” 62.

⁸⁴ Vésteinn Ólason “Dialogues” 22; cf. also Fechner-Smarsley.

political or national myth. Departing from Jan and Aleida Assmann's remarks on myth and memory, this chapter will further explore the political and social dimensions of Icelanders' myth of origin. The rediscovery of Ingólfur Arnarson and his heritage as a pioneer and explorer in the service of the independence movement will be discussed in the context of modernist theories of nationalism and identity creation, especially Benedict Anderson's framework of discursive nationalisms and imagined communities. I will argue that the process of lending a shape to the founding father, first occurring in printed media and later through a single, national monument, reproduced in many different forms, allowed Icelanders to imagine themselves as fellow citizens and a community of common descent from Norway. With this, I will slightly expand Anderson's premise that imagined communities rely necessarily on the simultaneous consumption of printed media, and add that the dissemination of an icon of a nationalizing figure may have served in a parallel function in the Icelandic case.

Political Myth

What characterizes a myth as specifically political? In his theoretical introduction to political myth, Christopher Flood draws a dividing line between political and sacred myths. While sacred myths cover the existence of the cosmos and its relationship to reality, political myths center on the way collective identity is shaped by narratives.⁸⁵ According to Flood, a political myth constitutes "an ideologically marked narrative which purports to give a true account of a set of past, present, or predicted political events and which is accepted as valid in its essentials by a social group."⁸⁶ As Rudolf Speth points out, such a definition of political myth is to some extent problematic, since any myth can be used in a political context, once it is employed to legitimize or delegitimize the structure of a society.⁸⁷ In turn, any purported worldly myth can also be used in a sacred understanding, or draw on formal characteristics of myths concerned with cosmogony, as John Lindow discusses in his article "*Íslendingabók* and Myth."⁸⁸

Instead of focusing on the content or formal composition of a myth, Speth proposes that we consider reception, the social context or *Sitz im Leben* of a myth, as its defining characteristic. This ties in with Claude Lévi-Strauss's definition of political myth as a form consisting of mythicized history (or based on such history) that is used by societies to internalize their past as a *mythomoteur*, or motor of development, a term nationalism theorist Anthony D. Smith renders in English as "mythomotories."⁸⁹ In response to Christopher Flood's distinction of the "sacred" versus the "political," Jan Assmann instead proposes to separate myths concerned with the relationship between cosmos and reality, or *historia divina*, from myths that engage in the sacralization of history and society, thus *historia humana*.⁹⁰

In a slight modification of her husband's concept of cultural and communicative

⁸⁵ Flood 3-12.

⁸⁶ Flood 3-12.

⁸⁷ Speth 115-118; also Lerner 62-67.

⁸⁸ Lindow "Íslendingabók" 462.

⁸⁹ A. Smith "Ethnic Origins" 15.

⁹⁰ J. Assmann "Memory, Narration" 3.

memory, Aleida Assmann proposes that there are four main formats embodied by memory, which she calls individual memory, social memory, cultural memory, and political memory.⁹¹ Aleida Assmann thus expands Jan Assmann's binary model of cultural and communicative memory by understanding communicative memory as social memory and by adding individual memory (a concept neglected by Halbwachs) and political memory to the approach. According to Aleida Assmann, political memory is selected and mediated as a prerequisite for political myth-making, as it is created by groups without such memory that consciously fashion political memories either collectively or in an institutionalized way using memorial signs such as texts, ceremonies, or monuments as aids. Therefore, political memory can reside in practices, rituals, ceremonies, or material media, which then “have to be engrafted into the hearts and minds of individuals.”⁹²

While political memories can be represented in manifold ways, as material or immaterial *lieux de mémoire*, myths represented in texts remain a prominent form, though myths concerned with *historia divina* have “mostly run dry since ancient cosmotheism gave way first to monotheism and then to secularization.”⁹³ Myths covering *historia humana* flourish however, and as they are not affected by secularization, they may constitute a source of sacredness even today, as Chapter Three will demonstrate.

The way in which the political myth of the *landnám* has served Icelanders since the secularization will be examined in the following overview, which discusses how Icelanders imagined, and subsequently fashioned, their first settler from the late seventeenth century onwards. What kind of person was the first settler to them, and what should he look like?



Fig. 1. Ingólfur in Þórður Þórláksson's 1688 edition of *Landnámabók*

The Pioneer: Sigurður málari

The oldest known depiction of Iceland's first settler can be found in the first printed edition of *Landnámabók*, which was edited and published by Bishop Þórður Þórláksson in 1688.⁹⁴ This depiction shows Ingólfur wearing traditional contemporary European armor of the Early Modern period, posed in a typical stance with his head in profile and sword brandished. The armor is not precise and practical, consisting of immovable shoulder parts, a cuirass ending in what resembles a loincloth instead of tassels. Comparing this depiction with entries in an image library/database reveals parallels of posture and upper body armor to sixteenth century woodcuts, such as a depiction of emperor Charles V in his armor, made by Erhard Schoen in 1528 or an engraving of St. George on foot made by Albrecht Dürer in 1504.⁹⁵ Ingólfur in *Landnámabók* can

⁹¹ A. Assmann “Memory, Individual” 211.

⁹² A. Assmann “Memory, Individual” 215.

⁹³ J. Assmann “Memory, Narration” 5.

⁹⁴ Þorleifur Óskarsson 9.

⁹⁵ *Artstor Digital Library* (15 September 2013) <<http://www.artstor.org/index.shtml>>.

therefore be understood as a highly stylized depiction of a knight and ruler, bringing Iceland's first settler in line with rulers and saint warriors as they were shown in the earliest printed media. Furthermore, Ingólfur stands in iconic parallel to the earliest depiction of another famous settler and explorer, Eiríkur rauði, first settler of Greenland, who is depicted in Arngrímur Jónsson's *Gronlandia*, printed in the same year as *Landnámabók*.



Fig. 2. Eiríkur rauði in Arngrímur Jónsson's *Gronlandia*

The next known attempt to visualize the first settler occurred when the painter Sigurður “málari” Guðmundsson proposed in 1863 during a meeting of the Evening Society, or *Kvöldfélagið*, to erect a public monument in Reykjavík in honor of the first Icelandic settler.⁹⁶ Sigurður died before such a monument could be completed, but his influence on its creation was critical. The Evening Society was a secret society composed of young intellectuals debating cultural and political issues who were dedicated to promoting education and Icelandic culture in Reykjavík.⁹⁷ At this point in time, Reykjavík was a small trading town of approximately 1,450 inhabitants, and the island was still a dependency of Denmark. The kingdom of Denmark had transformed from absolutist rule to a constitutional monarchy in 1848, only fifteen years prior to the first meeting of the Evening Society.⁹⁸ Despite calls for more autonomy, or even independence, Iceland remained a Danish colony, and

Icelanders had to live with the fact that their parliament, Alþingi, which had been dissolved by Danish colonial power in 1800 but reinstated in 1845, served only as a consultative assembly.⁹⁹ Still, the reestablishment of the old parliament – now no longer on the historical site of Þingvellir, but in Reykjavík – began the slow transformation of Reykjavík from a farmstead and Danish trading outpost of around 300 inhabitants in 1800 to “the nucleus of an Icelandic capital.”¹⁰⁰ Sigurður málari had been educated in Denmark, like practically all members of Iceland's small, intellectual elite, and it must have been in Copenhagen that he came into contact with the ideas of national-romanticism, and the new fashion of erecting monuments to honor individuals of historical significance. Sigurður málari's bequest was comprised of several drawings of monuments erected elsewhere in Europe, which he must have copied from foreign periodicals and books that he likely accessed while living in Copenhagen.¹⁰¹ The minutes of the Evening Society's meetings indicate that Sigurður's original proposal occurred on January 30, 1863, when he suggested that since all civilized nations commemorate their first settlers with a statue, it was a matter

⁹⁶ Helgi Þorláksson and Orri Vésteinsson 70.

⁹⁷ Hrefna Róbertsdóttir 79, 108.

⁹⁸ The 1869 census lists 1,444 inhabitants for Reykjavík, and 4,484 inhabitants for the greater surrounding area Höfuðborgarsvæði (*Hagskinna* 86-87).

⁹⁹ Gunnar Karlsson “Iceland's 1100 Years” 207.

¹⁰⁰ Gunnar Karlsson “Iceland's 1100 Years” 206.

¹⁰¹ Júlíana Gottskálksdóttir 208-209.

of honor for Icelanders to do the same.¹⁰² As a befitting occasion for the establishment and unveiling of a monument of that historical importance, Sigurður proposed the year 1874, which would mark the millennium of the first settlement of Iceland (using the date mentioned in *Landnámabók*). The protocols from the meetings show that other members were not necessarily convinced of the idea, instead favoring the purchase of a steamship or the construction of a parliament building over the commission of what would be Iceland's first public monument.¹⁰³

At that time, Iceland's Parliament convened every other year for a period of four weeks in the Latin School building (currently *Menntaskólinn*, located in central Reykjavík). While Sigurður had initially proposed that Iceland's millennium festivities would make for the best possible occasion to have the statue ready, he could not gather enough support for this idea. Shortly before his death in 1874, he changed his strategy and pointed to a similar project in the United States, where a statue dedicated to Leifur Eiríksson – the first European said to have set foot on American ground, according to two Icelandic sagas – was in its planning phase.¹⁰⁴ If not this event, then what could better inspire his fellow countrymen to prove they were capable of publicly commemorating their most famous forefathers themselves?

Sigurður had envisioned Arnarhóll Hill as a suitable location for the monument, and produced a first, albeit somewhat amateurish, sketch of the statue. His first settler stands proud in contrapposto pose, his left hand on his fastened sword, while with his right hand he holds aloft a flaming torch. The torch is a reference to settlement traditions mentioned in *Landnámabók*, according to which settlers in Iceland could only claim as much land as they managed to walk around while holding a burning torch (or shoot a burning arrow across).¹⁰⁵

While his idea of a visible memorial to the *landnám* and the first settler never passed the planning stage, Sigurður had been active in simultaneously preserving and defining Icelanders' idea of their national heritage in other ways. In an 1862 article published in the bi-monthly newspaper *Þjóðólfur*, Sigurður pushed for the establishment of an antiquarian collection on the island, both as a patriotic measure to instill pride and national awareness, as well as to protect Icelanders from losing their heritage and their sense of uniqueness.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Excerpts of the Minutes, which are unpublished elsewhere, are found in Júlíana Gottskálksdóttir 209. On *Kvöldfélagið*, cf. Hrefna Róbertsdóttir 35.

¹⁰³ Lúðvík Kristjánsson 166.

¹⁰⁴ Júlíana Gottskálksdóttir 209.

¹⁰⁵ Bödl 152 and Strömbäck.

¹⁰⁶ Sigurður Guðmundsson "Hugvekja til Íslendinga." *Þjóðólfur* (24 April 1862): 77.

Nearly all precious manuscripts preserving Iceland's medieval writings had been sent abroad by this time as a result of the work of humanists and collectors such as Arngrímur Jónsson, Árni Magnússon, and bishops Oddur Einarson, Brynjólfur Sveinsson, and Þorlákur Skúlason. Icelandic manuscripts began to be systematically collected abroad during the seventeenth century, notably in Denmark, after Arngrímur's works drew the attention of historiographers to the fact that Icelanders had preserved some of the most important sources of Nordic antiquity.¹⁰⁷

Sigurður's motivation seems equally based in a sense of loss and contemporary crisis and the idea that an awareness and pride in one's past are pivotal for becoming an independent nation worthy and capable of standing its own ground among other nations. His now famous remarks in *Þjóðólfur* targeted the passivity of Icelanders in their unwillingness to stand up against the loss of their most valued artifacts, and criticized the ruthless calculation of foreigners who came to the island to take away as much as they could with them:



Fig. 3. Sigurður málari's sketch of the Ingólfur statue

People should know: the vellum manuscripts have all gone their separate ways, and so thoroughly, that nothing of any use remains in the very capital of the country to show the foreign tourist who has traveled a great distance to see at least one manuscript of our famous sagas. Is this satisfactory? We have likely reached the last and most dangerous limit possible, because foreign tourists come in waves and snatch up all the objects of antiquity that they get their hands on, forcing us to make a decision, both in this and other matters; and if we wish to be a nation, then we must consider what befits a nation, how we can live with dignity as a nation. Otherwise we must die in shame.¹⁰⁸

Out of this sense of crisis and loss of their cultural and national identity, Sigurður called for a concerted effort to preserve and collect what was left of Iceland's cultural heritage. With this, he asked his compatriots to understand that the re-appropriation of Iceland's past, represented by manuscripts and artifacts, had to be their first step towards

¹⁰⁷ Neijmann, 189, 198.

¹⁰⁸ "Víti menn: skinnbækurnar eru allar farnar sína leið, og það svo rækilega, að eingin að gagni er eptir í sjálfum höfuðstað landsins til að sýna útlandum ferðamanni, sem hefir komið hingað um lánan veg til að sjá að minnsta kosti eitt handrit af okkar frægu fornsögum; er þetta sómasamlegt?"

Vér erum nú líklega komnir á þau seinustu og hættulegustu takmörk, sem orðið getr, því útlendir ferðamenn koma hingað hrönnum saman og láta greipar sópa um allar þær fornmenjar, er þeir fá hönd á fest, svo vér verðum nú að hugsa annaðhvort af eða á, bæði í þessu og öðru, og ef vér viljum vera þjóð, þá verðum vér að hugsa um það, hvað einni þjóð sæmir, að vér getim lifað með sæmd sem þjóð, að öðrum kosti verðum vér að deyja með skömm" ("Hugvekja til Íslendinga." *Þjóðólfur* (24 April 1862): 76-77).

independence. This call by Sigurður illustrates that his understanding of Iceland's past was, in essence, contra-present. Reminding his fellow countrymen of a once glorious past must be the first step against further cultural deterioration, and with that, national decline. Slightly later in 1863, he became the first staff member of the newly established *Forngrípasafn*, Iceland's Antiquarian Collection, which was the predecessor to the National Museum. As an artist interested in historical scenes and working within the genre of history painting, Sigurður also developed a keen awareness of clothing, and devoted himself to reconstructing the way people dressed during the Viking and Scandinavian Middle Ages. He is credited with fashioning the modern Icelandic national costume, *skautbúningur*, in part based on traditional costumes and his reconstructions, and in part based on his own tastes.¹⁰⁹

Sigurður's plans for the statue of Ingólfur were not used in his own lifetime, and furthermore, Iceland's first public monument and statue was not connected to the *landnám*, as he had hoped. Another sculpture was publically unveiled on the occasion of the 1874 festivities. This sculpture was a self-portrait by the Danish-Icelandic artist Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770-1844), which was a gift from the Copenhagen City Council and placed in Austurvöllur Square. The statue marked the first display of public art in Iceland, but was in 1931 replaced by a statue of the leader of Iceland's independence movement, Jón Sigurðsson, and moved to a park near Tjörnin where it still stands today.¹¹⁰

‘A New Age of Settlement is Coming to Iceland!’

In 1906, the idea of erecting a statue of the first settler came back into focus when a delegation of parliamentarians of the Icelandic Alþingi visited Denmark by invitation of the Danish king. Iceland had been granted a constitution and partial home rule by the Danish king in 1874, which was expanded to full home rule in 1904, allowing the Icelandic parliament to choose and appoint an Icelandic minister to the Danish parliament.¹¹¹ In Copenhagen, the hosts told their visitors that they would like to present them with another statue by Bertel Thorvaldsen, this time a bronze cast of his sculpture of the Greek hero Jason.¹¹² Unlike the first time a Thorvaldsen work was given to them, the guests showed some reluctance, as did their hosts after reconsidering their offer. Instead of presenting their guests with a Greek hero, it seemed that a Nordic hero would be a much more suitable gift. In the small Icelandic media, the newspapers *Ingólfur* and *Ísafold* were quick to call for an entirely Icelandic solution, and connected the incident to Icelanders' demands for independence: Icelanders needed no further presents from Denmark, but instead ought to be able to honor whomever they themselves wished.¹¹³ An anonymous article in *Ísafold*, published August 25, 1906, reminded readers of Sigurður málari's idea of an Ingólfur memorial. The article mentioned Einar Jónsson, a young, talented Icelandic sculptor living in Copenhagen, who apparently had already fashioned and presented a maquette of the first

¹⁰⁹ Margrét Guðmundsdóttir 29.

¹¹⁰ Hrefna Róbertsdóttir 45.

¹¹¹ Gunnar Karlsson “Iceland’s 1100 Years” 271.

¹¹² Júlíana Gottskálksdóttir 210.

¹¹³ Sigríður Matthíasdóttir 78.

settler in a Danish exhibition that same year.¹¹⁴



Fig. 4. Einar Jónsson's maquette of Ingólfur Arnarson

Unlike in 1863, the idea found enthusiastic support, and the comment in *Ísafold* demonstrated an anxious anticipation of receiving an image of “the Norse Viking and, in addition, the most famous man in the history of our country other than Snorri Sturluson - Iceland's Columbus.”¹¹⁵

For the events that next transpired, we can refer to the memoirs of the engineer and later Mayor of Reykjavík, Knud Zimsen (1875-1953), which were edited and published by Luðvík Kristjánsson in 1948. The memoirs provide an invaluable source of information, as Zimsen dedicates an entire chapter to “Ingólfur á Arnarhóli.” According to Zimsen, it was the carpenter Jón Halldórsson who first brought up the idea of refusing the Danish gift in favor of making this an entirely Icelandic project: “In this matter Icelanders must realize their dignity: they must raise a monument to Ingólfur themselves, and do so unsupported.”¹¹⁶ The two men deliberated on the matter in a conversation rendered in Zimsen's memoir, and apparently decided then and there that the local Craftsmen's Association, *Íðnaðarmannafélagið*, should take the matter into its own hands by organizing a

committee dedicated to raising the necessary funds for the project.¹¹⁷

The Craftsmen's Association, like the Evening Society, was a group dedicated to promoting culture and education, and was composed of professionals – in this case, exclusively craftsmen and apprentices. Like the members of the Evening Society, members of this association shared the goal of diminishing the dominant influence of Danish merchants in Reykjavík and of promoting Icelandic culture.¹¹⁸ Among the projects supported by the association were a library and a Sunday school open to the public, which offered classes in English, orthography, and math.¹¹⁹

Less than a month after Knud Zimsen's and Jón Halldórsson's conversation, the first meeting of the newly founded *Ingólfsnefnd*, or Ingólfur-committee occurred, during which the members pledged an initial 2,000 krónur to the project. Besides determining how the

¹¹⁴ “Jason eða Ingólfur?” *Ísafold* (25 August 1906): 218.

¹¹⁵ “[N]orrænan víking og þar á ofan frægasta manninni í sögu þessa lands, annan en Snorra Sturluson, - Kólabus Íslands” *Ísafold* (25 August 1906): 218.

¹¹⁶ “Í þessu máli verða Íslendigar að sjá sóma sinn, þeir eiga sjálfir að reisa Ingólfi minnisvarða og gera það óstuddir” (Luðvík Kristjánsson 165).

¹¹⁷ Luðvík Kristjánsson 165.

¹¹⁸ Hrefna Róbertsdóttir 108.

¹¹⁹ Hrefna Róbertsdóttir 74.

Icelandic population could be approached for donations as well, the committee thought of ways to inform and educate the public about Ingólfur Arnarson, so as to raise more awareness of his significance as the founding father of Iceland. The philosopher Guðmundur Finnbogason, who knew the artist Einar Jónsson from his student days in Copenhagen, was hired to give an open lecture about the first settler on November 4, 1906.¹²⁰ Tellingly, informing and reminding the public about Ingólfur Arnarson appears to have been a necessary undertaking at this point. Using Aleida Assmann, we can understand it as political memory in the making, carried out by Iceland's foremost national educator.¹²¹ To create this new, political memory, it was not enough to decline a well-meaning gift from Denmark, which would have involved a neo-classical artwork fashioned by an artist whose father was Icelandic. The Icelanders rallying in support for their “own” statue seemed to know who they did not want it to be – recipients of yet another well-meaning gift from the Danish colonial power – yet, they still had to define who their own chosen hero to be displayed should be, and just as importantly, what he should look like.¹²²

Guðmundur's lecture on November 4 of that year, later published and re-printed in 1948, commenced with a thorough overview of the Old Icelandic textual sources dealing with Ingólfur's *landnám*. After this survey, he moved on to a contra-present and cyclical interpretation of the Ingólfur myth, employing the metaphors of dawn and dusk, yet with a specifically Northern twist: he stated that even if the present appears as a period of decline to his compatriots, what presents itself as dusk can quickly and seamlessly turn into dawn—a common phenomenon during Iceland's short polar summer nights. In his lecture, he stated:

... the dawn becomes more beautiful the more the sunset shares its rays - that the hopes for the nation's future will become more beautiful as the memory of all that is brightest and fairest in our history shines more vividly in the minds of men. This is why they wish to raise a sculpture of Ingólfur Arnarson.¹²³

Following the overview and detailed evaluation of the literary sources, Guðmundur proceeded with an interpretation of the presumed character and physical features of the

¹²⁰ “Ingólfur Arnarson kemur” *Ingólfur* (23 September 1906): 1. Guðmundur's later writings, especially from the 1920s and 30s show an interest in eugenics and disclose his belief that the “Icelandic race,” *kynstofn Íslendinga* was purified and improved due to the geographical isolation of the island and the fact that only the best of the settlers managed to survive, cf. Lerner, 85.

¹²¹ A. Assmann “Memory, Individual” 215; Sigríður Matthíasdóttir 80-81.

¹²² In 1904, just two years prior to this episode, Icelanders had achieved full home rule, but still remained part of the Danish kingdom. Numerous questions were raised. Should full independence be a goal of Icelanders or not? Who were Icelanders—a cultural community, an ethnic group, or a people truly fit to be an independent nation? Such questions underlay Guðmundur Finnbogason's elaborations on the first Icelander in his speech, which demonstrates that the year 1906 was a peak moment for the Icelandic independence movement. Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, who is currently the President of Iceland, but who is also a political scientist and expert on nationalism, differentiates between six stages of nationalism in pre-1918 Iceland; 1906 falls into the sixth and final stage of “the union campaign and economic take off” (Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson 28).

¹²³ “. . . morgunroðinn verður því fegri sem kvöldroðinn gefur honum fleiri geisla – að vonirnar um framtíð þjóðarinnar verða því fegri sem endurminningin um allt það sem bjartast er og fegurst í sögu vorri skín skærar í hugum manna. Þess vegna vilja þeir reisa mynd Ingólfs Arnarsonar” (Guðmundur Finnbogason 5).

first settler, whom he, drawing on a description in *Landnámabók*, portrayed as being of noble birth, pious, trustworthy, considerate, handsome, and a person always intent on obeying the will of the gods. Considering the patriotic nature of his subject, Guðmundur showed a surprising awareness of his own role in the shaping of a political memory, reflecting on his approach of simultaneously interpreting literary sources and idealizing the first settler:

. . . he was a noble man. [. . .] We have no stories that cast even the slightest shadow on those qualities of his that history displays or suggests. This is why we now have the right to consider him as noble a man as we desire. In our minds he should have all of the features that history gives us, and those that we add from our own hearts must be in accordance with them. In other respects, we are all free to imagine him as we please.¹²⁴

In essence, as long as it did not contradict saga sources, all Icelanders should be free to imagine their own version of the founding father. The philosopher then continued with a full endorsement of the statue project. To him the project embodied a conscious choice from Icelanders to align themselves with the nature and core characteristics of their founding father, who was, in contrast to other visitors to the island before him, a true and born pioneer by descent, an inheritable characteristic running in certain families.¹²⁵ Following up on this thought, Guðmundur stated that, “Raising his likeness signifies appreciation for what he did: it signifies that we want his qualities to be our own, it signifies that we all want to be Icelanders.”¹²⁶ The core of his argument here is that for Icelanders to be an independent people, they need to adopt this version of their origin and choose to erect the monument as a symbol of their desire to be autonomous. In so doing, Icelanders would demonstrate their political will to utilize the “mythomoteric” character of this foundational myth as internalized, historical memory to promote their concrete political demands for independence.

In an additional contra-present twist of his interpretation of the myth of Ingólfur, Guðmundur continued that, despite the loss of independence and other humiliating experiences of the past, the example of the first settler could serve as proof that Icelanders were able to control their own fates:

Often foreign wealth and power have cast a cold shadow on it [Icelanders’ ambition to be free]. Often we have become slaves where we should have been masters, although ambition still lives in the embers. We have the ambition to be a separate nation. We have the ambition to desire to determine our own destiny, and in that be

¹²⁴ “. . . hann hafi verið göfugur maður. . . Vér höfum engar sögur, er bregði hinum minsta skugga á þá eiginleika hans, sem sagan sýnir eða bendir til. Þess vegna höfum vér nú rétt til að hugsa oss hann svo ágætan mann, sem vér óskum. Í huga vorum verður mynd hans að hafa alla þá drætti sem sagan gefur oss, og þeir sem vér bætum við frá eigin brjósti verða að vera í samræmi við þá. Að öðru leyti er hverjum frjálst að hugsa sér hann eins og honum er geðfeldast” (Guðmundur Finnbogason 15-16).

¹²⁵ “. . . slíkt legst í ættir” (Guðmundur Finnbogason 21).

¹²⁶ “Ef vér reisum mynd hans, þá táknar hún þökk fyrir það sem hann gerði; hún táknar að vér vildum kjósa sjálfum oss til handa eðli hans og einkenni, hún táknar, að Íslendingar viljum vér allir vera” (Guðmundur Finnbogason 24).

beholden to none other than the judgment of history itself.¹²⁷

If Icelanders chose to understand their heritage as descending from pioneers and settlers, and were willing to approve and support the statue project, they would demonstrate the will to end their existence as colonized subjects. As an additional aspect of value in nurturing national pride and the ambition for full independence, Guðmundur mentioned Iceland's unique role in preserving ancient Nordic culture:

We have the ambition to preserve the consecrated flame of culture in the far north, nearest to the northern lights. And this ambition we wish to display in how we preserve and hold in honor all the best that we have as a land and nation. We wish to take up where our ancestors left off, add to our inheritance and watch it flourish. We wish to be *landnámsmenn* in a new understanding.¹²⁸

The act of taking land, of exploring and colonizing land, represents progress, as does, figuratively speaking, the rediscovery and appropriation of one's past in the service of becoming an independent nation. The philosopher, therefore, declared the beginning of a new settlement period, in which an “inner discovery” would lead his compatriots to find themselves by discovering their ancient culture:

. . . a new age of settlement is coming to Iceland. . . . But as it is with the land, so it applies to our national culture. Our culture is in many respects an unsettled country. We have of course claimed as our own what our forefathers have left to us of literature, of customs and habits.¹²⁹

The project to create a statue dedicated to the first settler, the man Icelanders chose to see as a symbol, and the source of their national character, can be understood as a conscious exploration of the past. Furthermore, in its material existence as a visual marker of the past, the statue would communicate with both the past and the future in a very concrete way. Just as it was customary among the forefathers of the settlers to erect bautastones, which were memorial grave markers dedicated to relatives and allies to communicate their honor for the deceased to future generations, a statue would fulfill the same purpose, also creating a historical continuum.¹³⁰

Guðmundur Finnbogason's contribution to establishing a political memory of Ingólfur Arnarson focused not on an external “other,” but understood Icelanders'

¹²⁷ “Oft hefir útlendur auður og vald kastað á hann köldum skugga. Oft höfum vér gjörst þegnar, þar sem vér áttum að vera herrar, en metnaðurinn lifir samt í glæðunum. Vér höfum þann metnað, að vera sérstök þjóð. Vér höfum þann metnað, að vilja sjálfir ráða orlögum vorum og hafa þar engum öðrum reiking að lúka en dómi sögunnar sjálfrar” (Guðmundur Finnbogason 24).

¹²⁸ “Vér höfum þann metnað, að varðveita vígðan eld menningarinnar norður við heimskaut og næstir norðurljósunum. Og þennan metnað viljum vér sýna í því, að vér varðveitum og höldum í heiðri allt sem vér eigum bezt í landi og þjóð. Vér viljum taka þar við sem forfeðurnir hættu, auka arfinn og ávaxta hann. Vér viljum vera landnámsmenn í nýjum skilningi” (Guðmundur Finnbogason 24-25).

¹²⁹ “. . . ný landnámsöld er að renna yfir Ísland. (...) En eins og það er með landið, eins er því varið með þjóðmenningu vora. Menning vor er að miklu leyti ónumið land. Vér höfum að vísu kastað eign vorri á það sem forfeður vorir hafa oss eftir skilið af bókmenntum, af síðum og háttum” (Guðmundur Finnbogason 25-26).

¹³⁰ Guðmundur Finnbogason 27.

immediate past as that against which to define who they wanted to be. In harkening back to the beginnings of their country, the golden age of the settlement time, Icelanders could now pick up where their ancestors left off and become *landnámsmenn* in a new understanding through the rediscovery and appropriation of their past as embodied by Ingólfur Arnarson—a founding father that, as Guðmundur put it, “we are all free to imagine . . . as we please.”¹³¹

Einar Jónsson's 'Ingólfur'

The artist Einar Jónsson received a short message on September 29, 1906 stating that the Craftsmen's Association had assumed fundraising activities for the Ingólfur statue, and that he could begin working on the project. This message, in fact, constituted the first telegram ever to be sent from Iceland; in his memoirs, Knud Zimsen remembers its precise wording:

Craftsmen's Association arranges fundraising for your Ingólfur statue. Work confidently.¹³²



Fig. 5. Einar Jónsson working on "Ingólfur"

Einar Jónsson's statue was completed in 1907, and included bas-reliefs that were supposed to be applied to the pedestal, along with the four high-seat pillars.¹³³ The artist sent six pictures along with written explanations of his work to the Ingólfur committee for its approval. As Zimsen recalls, the settler was shown standing, but leaning against the edge of his high-seat, a halberd in his left hand while his right held a shield in the shape of Iceland. The pillar to the first settler's right was adorned with a runic inscription spelling *Sjálfur leið þú sjálfan þig* (Lead Thyself). The four bas-reliefs which were to be attached below were entitled *Ingólfshaugur* (Ingólfur's Mound), *Flótti guðanna undan kristindómnum til Íslands fjalla* (The Flight of the Gods before Christianity to the Mountains of Iceland), *Nornir* (The Fates), and *Ragnarökkur*

(Ragnarök).¹³⁴ Three of the bas-reliefs are now lost, but we can view all four in Einar Jónsson's photographs.¹³⁵

¹³¹ “er hverjum frjálst að hugsa sér . . . eins og honum er geðfeldast” (Guðmundur Finnbogason 15-16).

¹³² “Íðnaðarmannafélagið gengst fyrir fjársöfnun til Ingólfs myndar þinnar. Starfaðu öruggur” (Lúðvík Kristjánsson 168).

¹³³ Júlíana Gottskálksdóttir 214.

¹³⁴ Lúðvík Kristjánsson 169.

¹³⁵ Ólafur Kvaran 70.

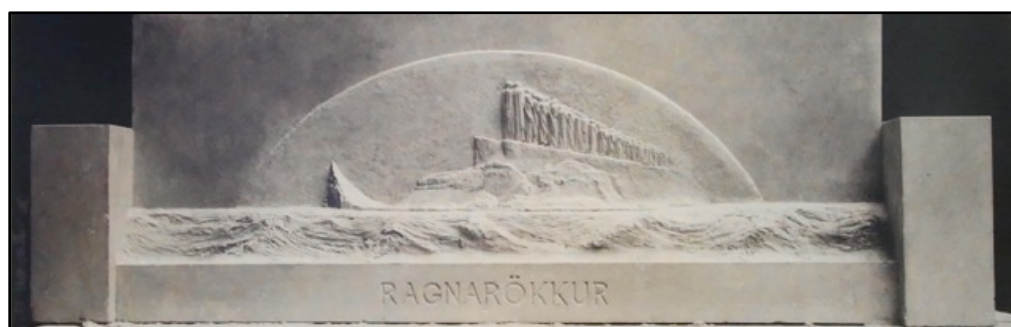
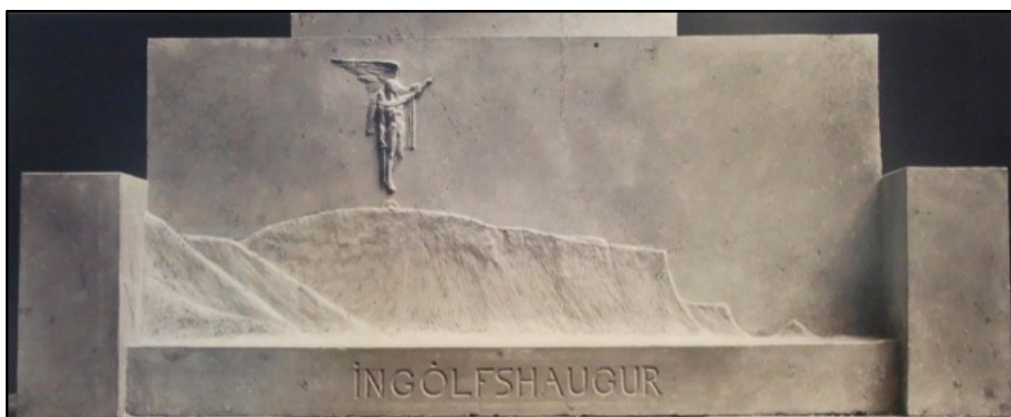
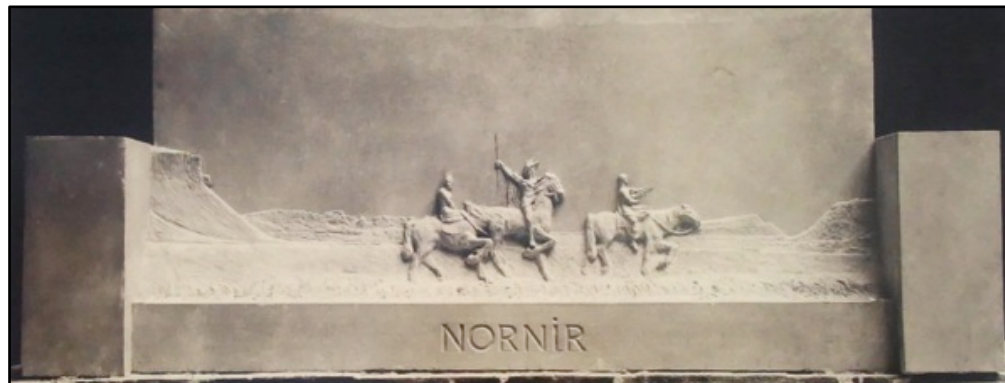


Fig. 6-9. *Nornir, Flótti guðanna undan kristindómnum til Íslands fjalla, Ingólfshaugur and Ragnarökkur* by Einar Jónsson

Shortly after the committee evaluated the pictures, Einar Jónsson received a second message sent from Iceland:

Will definitely not buy 'Ingólfur' with those 'reliefs' on the pedestal and the motto on the rim.¹³⁶

The committee refused to buy the work because it did not coincide with their vision of the first settler. Einar answered with an even shorter message in Danish that read,

Ingólfur won't be changed. Do what you want.¹³⁷

Specifically, Zimsen recalls that the committee was alienated by the motto inscribed in the pillar, and disliked the bas-reliefs. The Craftsmen's Association had expected a less allegorical work, and something more in-line with textual sources which, just as Guðmundur Finnbogason emphasized in his speech, suggested an interpretation of the first settler as a pious, peaceful pagan who entrusted his future to the will of the gods when he ventured out to find his final place of settlement. In contrast, to see Iceland portrayed as the last refuge for the old gods, as was espied in Einar's relief *The Flight of the Gods*, seemed too controversial to the committee.

In his sculptural work, Einar used Sigurður málari's sketch of the first settler as a model. Einar has Ingólfur standing tall with one arm raised, but in Einar's interpretation we see the first settler depicted as a much younger and stronger figure, with a vital, male body, and with piercing eyes.¹³⁸ Art historian Júlíana Gottskáldsdóttir ascribes the committee's confusion about Einar's work to their unfamiliarity with the artist's oeuvre. The only other works by the artist on display in Iceland were two naturalistic early works, a sculpture of the poet Jónas Hallgrímsson on Lækjargata, and *Outlaws*, purchased in 1904 by a merchant and on display in the parliament building.¹³⁹



Fig.10. Detail of
Einar Jónsson's statue

¹³⁶ "Kaupum alls ekki "Ingólfur" með þessum "relieffum" á fótstalli og þessu mottói á bríkinni." (Lúðvík Kristjánsson 168).

¹³⁷ "Ingólfur forandres ikke, gør saa hvad de vil." (Lúðvík Kristjánsson 170)

¹³⁸ I will address the connection between masculinity and nationalism in more detail in Chapter Three.

¹³⁹ Júlíana Gottskáldsdóttir 215. Among Einar's other works are depictions of several historical figures, for example a statue of Jón Sigurðsson (now in Reykjavík, another one in Manitoba) and one of Þorfinnur Karlsefni, one of the Vinland-voyagers in 1003 (on the East River Drive in Philadelphia): Leach 222-228 and *Listasafn Einars Jónssonar* (27 January 2013); <http://lej.is>.



Fig. 11 and 12. "Jónas Hallgrímsson" and "Outlaws" by Einar Jónsson

As a young artist and student of the Norwegian sculptor Stephan Sinding in Copenhagen, Einar Jónsson became interested in symbolism and worked with a radical group of sculptors known as *De frie Billedhuggere*, or "The Free Sculptors." When Einar Jónsson expressed "his own idiosyncratic symbolic interpretation of the settlement in Iceland" on the bas-reliefs, he challenged the craftsmen's understanding of the textual evidence on Ingólfur as well as their more stylistically conservative preferences in art.¹⁴⁰ On his bas-reliefs, Einar Jónsson chose not to parallel accounts found in *Landnámabók* and depict the settlement in chronological order, but instead used allegorical scenes, such as showing the three norns (female goddesses or beings connected to the fate of men) in an Icelandic landscape, thus suggesting that it was Icelanders' destiny to settle on the island.

The relief *The Flight of the Gods* caused the strongest response among the members of the committee. We can see it preserved in detail in the photograph by Einar Jónsson, and find it described in Knud Zimsen's memoir.¹⁴¹ The artwork shows the pagan gods

¹⁴⁰ Júlíana Gottskálksdóttir 215.

¹⁴¹ Helgi Þorláksson and Orri Vésteinsson 69.

racing in the direction of the mountains of Iceland, guided by a figure on horseback, presumably Óðinn, while simultaneously moving away from an oversized hand, found in the upper-right quadrant, on which we see a crucified Christ. Regarding this specific relief, the Ingólfur committee stated:

We do not understand what place “Ragnarök,” “the Fates” and “the Flight of the Gods” have on the Ingólfur memorial. In particular, we find the bas-relief “Flight of the Gods to the Mountains of Iceland” very poorly suited, since neither Ingólfur nor any other settler fled to Iceland from Christianity. The old gods continued to reign in Norway for around 100 years after Ingólfur went to Iceland. Apart from that, the image is tasteless and ugly. We absolutely have no desire to support this ghastly hand with a nailed-on man being bought by the Icelandic nation as a “symbol” of the religions.¹⁴²

In a letter to Einar Jónsson, the committee proposed to buy the statue without any reliefs, which they anticipated would also lower the price of the artwork. If the artist insisted, the committee could also accept the work with altered bas-reliefs showing scenes from Ingólfur Arnarson's life, preferably illustrating his faithful nature and trust in the pagan gods.¹⁴³ The committee also demanded that the inscription on the pillar be changed to *Fréttin vísar til Íslands* (The oracle points to Iceland). The artist replied with a long letter and signaled cautious agreement to change the motto of the artwork, but refused to alter the bas-reliefs.¹⁴⁴ His elaboration of his choice of motto illustrates the extent to which his image of the founding father differed from the expectations of the committee, who had wished to see the devotion and determination of the first settler emphasized, not his individual genius or independent spirit, which would lend itself less well to the national monument they intended. As Knud Zimsen, Magnús Benjamínsson, Jón Halldórsson, and Sveinn Jónsson signed in a newspaper comment in 1908, “The motto Einar Jónsson has chosen: ‘Lead Thyself’ cannot in our eyes kindle a man's love for the fatherland or his desire to serve the land or the people.”¹⁴⁵

The artist, in turn, wished to focus on the pioneering spirit of the original settler, his courage and willpower, which he found discernible in the way Ingólfur relied on his own judgment when he left his old life. To Einar Jónsson, such an attribute constituted a characteristic of all northern Germanic people. His own art, therefore, would follow the same trajectory, that of an exploration of unknown paths, and thus demonstrate the same willingness to deviate from the usual. If the committee wanted a mere pictorial representation of Ingólfur's *landnám* as known from the sources, Einar stated, there would

¹⁴² “Vér skiljum ekki, hvað “Ragnarökkur,” “Nornin” og “Flótti guðanna” á að þýða á Ingólfsmynd. Sérstaklega þykir oss myndin “Flótti guðanna til Íslandsfjalla” mjög illa viðeigandi, þar sem hvorki Ingólfur né nokkur annar landnámsmaður flýði til Íslands undan kristindóminum. Gömlu goðin ríktu í Noregi um 100 ár eftir að Ingólfur fór til Íslands. Þess utan er myndin smekklaus og ljót. Vér viljum alls ekki stuðla að því, að þessi tröllslega hönd með ánegldum manni verði keypt af hinni íslenzku þjóð sem “symbol” trúarbragðanna” (Lúðvík Kristjánsson 171).

¹⁴³ Lúðvík Kristjánsson 171.

¹⁴⁴ Júlíana Gottskáldsdóttir 217.

¹⁴⁵ “Þau einkunnarorð, sem Einar Jónsson hefur valið: “Sjálfur leið þú sjálfan þig” finsst oss ekki geta vakið í brjósti nokkurs manns ættjarðarást eða löngun til að leggja eitthvað í sölurnar fyrir land og þjóð.” (“Ingólfsmyndin.” *Lögretta* (14 December 1908): 225-226).

be no need for an artistic rendering of the events in a statue or any other artistic form:

It is difficult for artists to fight against the sort of people who cannot or will not understand that a monument should never be a lifeless, by-the-book representation, both because it is often neither pretty nor pleasant to bring it into material form and because, if it is a lifeless, literal copy, then the image becomes superfluous, and the only thing you need is the original description....you only wish to have the unadulterated copy.¹⁴⁶

While the committee wanted to commission an official version of the past, a visual marker and *lieu de mémoire* dedicated to the memory figure of the first settler that would lend itself to create a political memory and symbol for Iceland's independence struggle, Einar Jónson aimed at creating an individualistic, artistic interpretation of the *landnám*. When it came to the critique of his reliefs as unsuitable memorial signs for the specific political memory the committee wanted to create however, he dismissed all objections as based on individual tastes, and not on the actual artistic value of his artwork:

This is only your own taste, but no proper reason. You, the committee responsible for this monument, should present us clear and irrefutable reasons. Taste has no place here and is invalid until the majority of the nation agrees with the committee members, because what we are talking about here is a national monument.¹⁴⁷

Both the artist and the committee found themselves in difficult terrain when trying to bridge their differing expectations of the statue. In order to mediate the matter, the committee approached two scholars working in the field of Icelandic studies and history for advice. Finnur Jónsson, professor of Nordic philology, and Valtýr Guðmundsson, a lecturer in Icelandic history, both of whom were located in Copenhagen. They commented solely on the historical accuracy of the depiction, and suggested minor changes to the weaponry and clothes of the settler. Still, Einar Jónsson insisted on his version of the bas-reliefs, and several attempts to reach agreement failed. In the end, Valtýr Guðmundsson agreed to meet the artist in Berlin to negotiate an agreement, which was signed on January 31, 1910. The agreement stipulated the removal of the motto "Lead Thyself" in exchange for "The Oracle Points to Iceland." Additionally, the bas-relief *The Flight of the Gods* would be changed in a manner that would remove any physical reference to the Christian faith and would not make reference to events in the life of Ingólfur Arnarson that were not mentioned in the sources dealing with his settlement. Finally, the agreement stipulated that

¹⁴⁶ "Það er erfitt fyrir listamenn að berjast við svoleiðis fólk, sem ekki getur eða vill skilja það, að minningarstytta á aldrei að vera dauður bókstafur, bæði vegna þess, að það er oft ekki fallett eða viðfelldið að koma því fyrir í "Plastik" og vegna þess, að ef það er dauð eftirlíking eftir bókstafnum, þá er myndinni ofaukið, þá þarf ekki annað en bókstafinn . . . þér viljið aðeins hafa þrælbundna eftirlíkingu" (Lúðvík Kristjánsson 172-173).

¹⁴⁷ "Það er aðeins ykkar eigin smekkur, en engin ástæða. Þér, sem nefndarmenn fyrir minnismerki þessu, eigið að koma með óhrekjandi skýrar og skörinortar ástæður. Smekkur segir hér ekkineitt og fær ekki gildi, fyrr en meiri hluti þjóðarinnar er á sama máli og nefndarmenn, því að hér er að tala um þjóðarminnismerki" (Lúðvík Kristjánsson 175-176).

the four high-seat pillars would be attached to the pedestal, along with a nameplate.¹⁴⁸

The conflict between Einar Jónsson and the committee illustrates the process of selection and mediation which is necessary in the creation of a new political memory, as defined by Aleida Assmann.¹⁴⁹ In the case presented here, the *landnámsöld*, or settlement time of Iceland, as a past understood to have been glorious and successful, was to be expressed through the memorial sign of a statue of the first Iclander, a form fitting into the native tradition of setting stones as monuments to commemorate the past. This monument utilized both the foundational and contra-present functions of his myth: “Ingólfur” should express that the first settler followed the will of the gods, as “the Oracle” pointed him to Iceland, lending a meaningful, unchangeable and divinely inspired character to his arrival on the island (the foundational function).¹⁵⁰ At the same time, the statue was created to remind Icelanders of their heroic past *and* their present decline, serving as a motivation to change the present, and become an independent nation (the contra-present function). Einar Jónsson’s suggestion to emphasize the individual achievement of the settler as a pioneer would have not fit this interpretation or lent itself to the political memory the committee wanted to create, and therefore had to be removed, as would have his interpretation of Iceland as the last resort for the pagan faith or allegorical representations of the end of the world, or of Ingólfur’s grave.

Funding a National Monument

The funding of the statue delayed the project by another 14 years. Einar Jónsson had finished a full-sized model of the statue by 1907 but because he had not been paid, the statue was still not cast in bronze. The Ingólfur committee struggled to raise the 20,000 krónur that the project was estimated to cost, which included the materials.¹⁵¹ The committee printed and sold Guðmundur Finnbogason’s speech in the hopes that the publication could create some revenue, but in the end, their efforts netted them negative 83 krónur. A tombola at Hotel Ísland brought in 1,207 krónur, and members took up an additional loan of 1,000 krónur to be able to pay Einar Jónsson, but they still needed to raise more funds to be able to afford the bronze casting. A new idea was then hatched. The carpenter Sveinn Jónsson donated land in the center of Reykjavík and suggested that the committee – consisting, after all, of craftsmen and engineers – could build a house there and create a lottery to raffle it off. The tickets were to cost two krónur.

¹⁴⁸ Lúðvík Kristjánsson 175-180.

¹⁴⁹ A. Assmann “Memory, Individual” 215.

¹⁵⁰ J. Assmann “Cultural Memory” 59

¹⁵¹ The Icelandic króna was tied to the Danish krone until the year 1919. Before 1914, 1 króna equaled approximately US\$3.73 (*Hagskinna* 695).

The members created an advertisement with a fine illustration of a two-story building complete with a cellar, announcing that it would be completed the following autumn. Three men were sent on horseback around the country to sell the lottery tickets, and were guaranteed 15 percent of the share of the value of the tickets they sold as

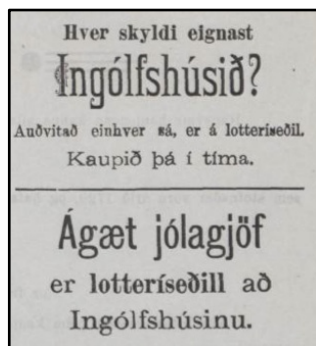


Fig. 13. Advertisement for "Ingólfslotterí"

payment. The tickets were also advertised in the country's newspapers. Yet, the construction of the house, initially thought to be a collaborative volunteer effort of several craftsmen, proved to be more expensive than planned, since additional workers had to be hired to finish the house before the winter. The committee had to take out another 5,000 krónur loan to pay contracted workers to finish the building, while the first round of ticket sales brought in a disappointing 2,500 krónur. "Most thought it probably too expensive to acquire a twelve thousand krónur house for a two krónur piece," as school principal Torfi í Ólafsdal put it when he was asked to buy his share of lottery tickets.¹⁵²

The lottery salesmen travelled around the country once more, and the committee shipped additional lottery tickets across the Atlantic to Canada, targeting Icelanders who had migrated to Winnipeg. Unfortunately, Canadian customs refused to process the shipment, as it was classified as gambling material.

The drawing for the winner of the splendid new house on Bergstaðarstræti 70 was finally announced January 2, 1914. The lucky winner was ticket number 8665, which belonged to Bishop Þórhallur.¹⁵³ In the end, all remaining costs for the statue had to be shared among the members of the committee, and it was to take another eight years before sufficient funds were gathered to be able to afford the bronze casting. Finally, on February 24, 1924, the statue of the "Founding Father of Icelanders" was unveiled on Arnarhóll, after 38,000 krónur had been raised to pay for the material and the artist's work. The statue was revealed, but because of the cost, it had been stripped of three of its intended four high-seat pillars and had no bas-reliefs at all.¹⁵⁴

The committee, *Ingólfsnefnd*, represented by the carpenter Jón Halldórsson, festively presented the statue to all Icelanders, and Minister of Iceland Sigurður Eggerz thanked the committee and Einar Jónsson for their work. Since the artist was not present, his brother, cinema director Bjarni Jónsson, read a message on his behalf.



Fig. 14. Unveiling of the statue on Arnarhóll in 1924

¹⁵² "Það hefur sennilega flestum þótt of mikið að eignast tólf þúsund króna hús fyrir einar tvær krónur" (Lúðvík Kristjánsson 185).

¹⁵³ Lúðvík Kristjánsson 181-185.

¹⁵⁴ Lúðvík Kristjánsson 189. In 1924, taking into account inflation, 38,000 krónur equaled approximately \$5,292 (*Hagskinna* 695).

The well-visited event was framed by musical performances of several compositions written for the occasion, among them the following song by poet and editor of *Morgunblaðið*, Þorsteinn Gíslason, in praise of the father of the nation.¹⁵⁵

1. Nú hyllum vjer, þjóðfaðir, þig!
Þú stýrðir hjer fyrstur inn fleyi,
steigst fyrstur á ströndina af legi.
Og óþekta landið úr álögum þú
og aldanna þokuhjúp leystir,
og hjetst á þinn drottinn í heilagri trú,
er húsvegginn fyrsta þú reistir.
Og hús þitt varð hamingju ból.

2. Þú trúðir á örlaga orð:
að alfaðir ætt þína leiddi
til óðals og veg henni greiddi.
Þú horfðir hjer forðum af hólnum í kring,
barst heilsan frá nýreista bænum
til foldar, með nesjanna og fjallanna hring,
og flóa með eyjunum grænum.
Og ætt þín varð ágæt og stór.

3. Svo liðu fram aldir og ár
með skiftandi skuggum og ljósi.
Þín skartaði minning í hrósi.
Nú aftur þú stendur hjer ungur og hár,
og útsýnin heilsar þjer fríða.
Hjer flyturðu þjóðinni fegurstu spár
um Frón hinna nýjustu tíða
og komandi aldir og ár.

4. Ver ljósvættur landi og bæ!
Bendi fólki til frama og dáða,
sem fyr þá mun hamingjan ráða.
Það land, sem þú vígðir, á æskudraum enn
í endurreisn frelsisins mista.
Og enn þarf hjer leiðandi landnámamenn
með lifandi trú sem hinn fyrsta.
Ver hollvættur framtíðar Fróns.

1. Now we praise you, Father of our Nation!
Here you first steered your boat,
Stepped first onto shore from the sea.
And the unknown land you redeemed from spells
and the centuries' helm of fog,
and vowed to your Lord in holy faith,
when the first wall of your dwelling you raised.
And your house became an abode of happiness.

2. You believed in destiny's words:
that Alfater would lead your kin
to an estate and clear their path.
From here on the hill you gazed of old,
your greeting was carried from your newly raised farm
to the land, along the ring of peninsulas and peaks,
and bays with green islands.
And your kin grew noble and flourished.

3. So passed centuries and years
with shifting shadows and light.
Your memory is adorned with praise.
Now once again you stand here young and tall,
and the beautiful view greets you.
Here you deliver to the nation the fairest prophecies
on Iceland of the newest times
and coming centuries and years.

4. Protect, spirit of light, land and settlement!
Guide your people to fame and glory,
then as ever good fortune will prevail.
The land, which you consecrated, still has its childhood
dream in the restoration of lost liberty.
And here we still need leading pioneers
with faith as vibrant as the first.
Protect, guardian spirit, Iceland's future.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ "Ingólfrlíkneskið afhjúpað." *Morgunblaðið* (26 February 1924): 1, 3.

¹⁵⁶ Translated by Philip Roughton.

Ingólfur Arnarson is understood as the father of the Icelandic nation, and, with the performance of Þorsteinn Gíslason's composition, he was publicly celebrated as a shared, collective memory by everyone gathered on Arnarhóll that day, and by those who later read about the event in the newspaper. The emphasis on the settler's faith conforms to the way the Ingólfur committee wanted to see the founding father presented, and resonates strongly with the foundational function of this political myth: It is by the grace of the pagan gods (or pagan god, as the poem specifically refers to Óðinn, "Alfather") that the first permanent settler of the island chose Reykjavík for his farm, neither by mere coincidence, nor by his individual choice, but because of divine foreordination. As such, his settlement in Reykjavík, and the shared memory of his arrival, provided a "meaningful, divinely inspired, necessary, and unchangeable" character to the aspiring nation of Icelanders, whose independence could no longer be questioned.¹⁵⁷

Einar Jónsson was Iceland's first sculptor proper, as Bertel Thorvaldsen was half Danish and permanently based in Denmark and Italy. The Ingólfur statue was among the first monuments to be erected in the country. The artist's later residence on Skólavörðuhæð, in mid-Reykjavík, became the country's first museum after he died in 1954. Besides lending a face and shape to the first settler, Einar played an influential role in Iceland's artistic and cultural history, both by being a pioneer in his own art, as well as by providing the first official space for the display of art in the country.¹⁵⁸

While the statue was created in response to a public outcry and the rejection of a gift by the Danish monarch, it also was intended to give a face to the first Icelanders during a tumultuous time in Icelandic history.¹⁵⁹ During this highly unusual transitory period, the statue came to symbolize the exceptional spirit of the time. Rejecting the gift of the Danish parliamentarians, it constituted an identification figure for the fledgling nation, which saw itself as a young, self-confident country, with the good ancestry of Ingólfur, who was not only its founder but also its spiritual core. This young man was a peaceful and faithful follower of the will of his gods, prepared to pioneer a new society, yet ready to fight if necessary. The same held true for Icelanders: the question was no longer who Icelanders were not and from whose influence they sought to free themselves, but rather, who they imagined themselves to be and how they defined their new community and legitimized its authenticity. It is interesting in this context to note the dichotomy in the chosen embodiment of their national character: a young, strong, male pioneer whose strength is not guided by his individual talent, upbringing, or armor, but by fate and destiny, as emphasized by the motto attached to the statue. Even if at first glance appearing ready to fight, what ultimately guides this figure is determination, destiny, and faith, features that can also be ascribed to Iceland's national movement, which was a peaceful movement that did not resort to the use of violence.

Visual art depicting the first settler in other, more peaceful roles, or even in the company of his wife and slaves, date to the time after Iceland achieved its full independence in 1944, therefore corresponding to the periods of "cold" or more "banal" nationalism, in Michael Billig's terminology.¹⁶⁰ The catalog to the exhibition on Iceland's

¹⁵⁷ J. Assmann "Cultural Memory" 59.

¹⁵⁸ Júlíana Gottskálksdóttir and Ólafur Kvaran 75.

¹⁵⁹ Iceland secured full home-rule in 1904, and was recognized as a sovereign state in 1918 (though still in personal union with Denmark until becoming a republic in 1944).

¹⁶⁰ Billig 190.

settlement “Reykjavík 871±2. Landnámssýningin” lists several of these depictions. The first, which includes Ingólfur's wife Hallgerðr, is a painting by Jóhan Briem from 1956.¹⁶¹ My investigation into the history of Ingólfur depictions has revealed an 1850 work by the Danish painter Johan Peter Raadsig, *Ingolf tager Island i besiddelse* (Ingólf takes Iceland into his possession), which includes the first settler's family, slaves, and dog but interestingly, also appears to show the settler's mother in a clear iconographic parallel to the Virgin Mary.



Fig. 15. Johan Peter Raadsig, "Ingolf tager Island i besiddelse"

There is no Icelandic depiction of the first couple preceding the country's independence in 1944 however, nor, to my knowledge, is there any Icelandic artwork depicting Ingólfur's



Fig. 16. Ingólfur and Hallveig at the Reykjavík Saga Museum

foster brother Hjörleifur represented alongside the founding father. In Gunnar Gunnarsson's 1918 novel *Edbrødre*, which thematizes the relationship of the two sworn brothers, Hjörleifur's impetuous character serves as a contrasting figure to Ingólfur, a suggestion also made by the literary scholar Preben Meulengracht Sørensen for the *landnám* account in *Landnámabók*, which I will discuss in Chapter Four.¹⁶² The Reykjavík Saga Museum, which opened in 1991, shows Ingólfur and his wife as life-sized silicon figures under the title “Ingólfur Arnarson – the first Icelander.” What is shown here however are the first *two* Icelanders: An elderly couple holding hands, in the background a ship. The depicted figures draw very much on the founding father myth yet add a founding mother to the picture, maybe even evoking Biblical parallels to Abraham and Sarah. Ingólfur and his wife

¹⁶¹ Helgi Þorláksson and Orri Vésteinsson 71.

¹⁶² Cf. Meulengracht Sørensen “Sagan.”

appear as a harmonious couple of older age dressed as farmers ready to cultivate, build and parent a new community.

Reproducing the Monument

Although Einar Jónsson's Ingólfur statue was originally created in response to the refusal of a gift by the Danish monarch, an accurate copy of it became itself a gift from the Icelandic republic to Norway. The story of how the replica came to be erected in a foreign land starts with Icelanders' search for the place of Ingólfur's birth and early life. There has been a long-standing historical dispute about where in Norway Ingólfur Arnarson may have lived when he left for Iceland. Several scholars and certain amateur historians have attempted to locate the "Dalsfjörður á Fjalir," where Ingólfur's family is said to have had their family home, according to several of the *Landnámabók* redactions.¹⁶³

Icelandic historian Helgi Þorláksson critically surveyed the varying approaches to locate "Fjalir" (or "Fjaler" in modern Norwegian) and concluded that since the name referred to all the mainland in the area around Dalsfjord in southwestern Norway, it is impossible to pin down his residence to one specific location. Instead, "Fjalir" may have designated the entire district and reached from "the mouth of Dalsfjord (beyond Kjøsnes) [...] north to Stongfjorden to the mouth of Fördefjord [...] to the land alongside all the north side of Dalsfjord, and was probably also used for the area around the river Gaul or Gaula."¹⁶⁴

The first Icelander in search of Ingólfur's origins in Dalsfjord, the historian Thormodus Torfæus (1639-1719), commissioned the local priest Iver Leganger (1629-1702) in Vik to conduct research about place names and local traditions in the fjord to try to locate the old "Fjalir". Leganger, however, had to conclude that the plague had devastated the area to a point that no oral or written traditions which could have provided such information about the past had survived.¹⁶⁵

The Icelandic carpenter Sveinn Jónsson, a member of Reykjavík's Craftsmen's Association, who had been active in establishing the lottery to raise funds for the Ingólfur statue in Reykjavík, travelled to Norway in 1924 with the same mission – to find out more about the settler's origins.¹⁶⁶ In Dalsfjord he met Nikka Vonen, a retired school principal, who pointed him to two burial mounds located on her farm compound, each of which had a *bautasteinn*, or a memorial stone, atop the rises. She informed Svein Jónsson that local tradition held that those were the graves of the fathers of Ingólfur and Hjörleifur.¹⁶⁷ Vonen also told him that a pauper in the area had found a small treasure close to one of the stones, which was thought to belong to Hjörleifur's father, Hróðmar. Since this stone was adorned with a cross in traditional Irish style, she connected this fact to the description of Hjörleifur discussed in *Landnámabók* as someone who had traveled to Ireland and later refused to partake in pagan sacrifices. From this, the locals in the Dale area contended that Hjörleifur

¹⁶³ ÍF I.1 38.

¹⁶⁴ Helgi Þorláksson and Orri Vésteinsson 72.

¹⁶⁵ As cited in Fagerheim 182.

¹⁶⁶ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson et al. 235; "Frá Dal í Dalfirði." *Morgunblaðið* (27 July 1925): 3.

¹⁶⁷ "Frá Dal í Dalfirði." *Morgunblaðið* (27 July 1925): 3.

and his father were Christians.¹⁶⁸

Bautastones were used as markers on early Iron Age graves, often on the farm mounds of allodial farmers, and therefore it is unlikely that the stones in Dale and the additional 15 stones found around the fjord were raised by later Icelandic settlers or contemporary residents.¹⁶⁹ Local historian Ragnvald Fagerheim additionally pointed out that the manor on the Dale compound had been of such great size and wealth in the Viking Age that it was an unlikely fit for any family of relative newcomers to the fjord; in other words, it did not add up, since Ingólfur's and Hjörleifur's ancestors are said to have originally come from Telemark and would have been new to the area.¹⁷⁰ Still, the idea that some of these bautastones were linked to Ingólfur and Hjörleifur had persisted, and the local inhabitants of Dale, Kleppenes, and Rivedal have appeared to be the most outspoken about linking their properties to the settlers.¹⁷¹

In 1955 Icelandic President Ásgeir Ásgeirsson and his wife visited Norway, and while journeying through the county Sogn og Fjordane, their ship planned also to travel through Dalsfjord.¹⁷² When the boat passed by Rivedal, the President ordered an unplanned stop to meet locals who had taken the initiative to sail out to persuade him to take a spontaneous trip ashore (the President's boat could not dock since there was no pier). Many people had gathered at the memorial stone attributed to Hjörleifur and, singing songs and waving flags, welcomed Ásgeir Ásgeirsson. Two young girls presented the President with a potted plant in what appears to have been an improvised celebration of his visit. As writer Árni Óla remembers in his coverage of the presidential visit in *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins*, “this was a rather unspectacular plant to look at, but still, it had its historical value, because it had sprouted from soil which was taken from the area right next to the bautastone.”¹⁷³

After this event, the President climbed aboard his ship, but then ordered another unplanned stop at Kleppenes, where the second memorial stone was located, and where he was again warmly received by the locals. After the President returned from his trip to Dalsfjord and Sognefjord, the potted plant that he had received as a gift from the Rivedal girls was kept in a place of honor at the presidential residence in Iceland, since it contained soil from the mound underneath one of the memorial stones.¹⁷⁴

In 1957, 50 Icelanders, mostly members of the Alþingi, along with the ministers for education and social affairs, travelled to Norway on an organized educational trip entitled *Egill Skallagrímssons fotefar* (In Egill Skallagrímsson's Footprints).¹⁷⁵ As guests of the local government, they were also invited to come to both Dale and Rivedal, where they were cordially received. After two receptions, replete with food, songs, and speeches, the idea was hatched in Rivedal to present the Norwegian nation with a statue of the first settler.¹⁷⁶ After the guests returned to Iceland, parliamentarians Bjarni Benediktsson, Pétur

¹⁶⁸ “Frá Dal í Dalfirði.” *Morgunblaðið* (27 July 1925): 4.

¹⁶⁹ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson et al. 37.

¹⁷⁰ Fagerheim 180-183.

¹⁷¹ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson et al. 37.

¹⁷² “Áttahgar Ingólfs.” *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins* (24 July 1955): 397.

¹⁷³ “Þetta var ósköp hversdaglegt blóm á að líta, en það hafði þó sitt sögulega gildi, því að það var sprottið upp úr jarðvegi sem tekinn var rétt við bautasteininn” *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins* (24 July 1955): 400.

¹⁷⁴ *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins* (24 July 1955): 400.

¹⁷⁵ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson et al. 235.

¹⁷⁶ Helgi Þorláksson and Orri Vésteinsson 74.

Ottesen, and Gylfi Gíslason drafted a parliamentary resolution on “Ingólfseðlið,” (Ingólfur's nature), formally decreeing that Rivedal in Dalsfjord was indeed where Ingólfur came from. The 1957 document, the 63rd Parliamentary Resolution (*Þingsályktunartillaga*), stipulated the following:

The first settler of Iceland, Ingólfur Arnarson, formerly lived in Dalsfjord in Norway. In this area the locals believe that his home was at Rivedal in the fjord. In many places in Norway, sincere friendship is shown to Icelanders, though nowhere more than in the old home grounds of Ingólfur Arnarson.¹⁷⁷

After the resolution passed, and funds were allocated for the statue, four parliamentarians joined a committee established by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs to implement the project. Unlike what had occurred 50 years prior, the financing and logistics of the statue proved much less of an obstacle, and in 1961, a replica of Einar Jónsson's Ingólfur statue was ready to be unveiled in Rivedal.¹⁷⁸ To join in the unveiling festivities, approximately 150 Icelanders sailed to Dalsfjord on board the ship “Hekla,” including the newly elected Prime Minister, Bjarni Benediktsson. Although the ship nearly sank due to bad weather, it arrived at the fjord, though one day later than expected. On September 17, 1961, more than



Fig. 17. Bjarni Benediktsson at the unveiling festivities

3,000 people gathered on the shore in Rivedal, where the statue was to be unveiled at a spot chosen by County Governor Schei.¹⁷⁹ Bjarni Benediktsson officially presented “Ingólfur” to the Kingdom of Norway, and Bjarni’s wife dropped the cloth to reveal the artwork.¹⁸⁰ Norway's Justice Minister and the County Governor received the gift on behalf of all Norwegians.

An eyewitness to the event, Icelander Elísabet Thors, later reported to *Morgunblaðið* that she and her compatriots were deeply moved by the friendly reception and by the festive atmosphere around the celebration, where children in traditional costumes sang the Icelandic anthem and other songs in both Norwegian and Icelandic, and the local village opened

¹⁷⁷ Alþingistíðindi 1957 A, 216 (63. Tillaga til þingsályktunar). “Fyrsti landnámsmaður Íslands, Ingólfur Arnarson, átti áður heima í Dalsfirði í Noregi. Þar um slóðir hyggja menn, að heimkynni hans hafi verið í Rivedal þar í firðinum. Viða í Noregi verður vart einlægrar vináttu til Íslendinga og hvergi þó fremur en í hinum fornu heimkynnum Ingólfs Arnarsonar.”

¹⁷⁸ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson et al. 235.

¹⁷⁹ Helgi Þorláksson and Orri Vésteinsson 75.

¹⁸⁰ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson et al. 235.

its doors to all the guests.¹⁸¹

It is important here to take a moment to summarize the events and some of the general conceptions and themes surrounding Ingólfur Arnarson before moving on to a theoretical analysis of the role of the foundational myth for the creation of the Icelandic nation after 1860.

Several moments of imagining Ingólfur Arnarson have now been drawn up, starting with the idea to commemorate the settler with a monument, as was customary in other European nations. This demonstrated that Icelanders, too, were to be reckoned as a sovereign nation both capable and desiring to preserve and value their unique heritage. The next event shed light on the decision that the effigy of the hero and founding father of all Icelanders ought to be borne by the efforts of Icelanders themselves; the sculpture was to be fashioned and financed by Icelanders, without any assistance or connection to the Danish colonial authorities. The fundraising and the decision about the design of the statue was a relatively private initiative, unaffiliated with political leadership, apart from the local authorities of Reykjavík, in a collaborative effort driven by members of Reykjavík's new middle class, gathered together in the Craftsmen's Association. The process of agreeing on the shape and overarching theme of the first settler statue proved to be complex in many ways. Before the Ingólfur committee could agree with Einar Jónsson that the first settler ought to be depicted as a devout follower of the gods, a philosopher had to publicly



Fig. 18. The statue at Rivedal

educate Reykjavík's citizens about how to imagine their founding father. Guðmundur Finnbogason's speech awoke Icelanders to the significance of their ancestry, from its first settlers, to how it conjured up a "national" characteristic of the pioneering spirit centered around the ability to start anew, conquer unknown lands, and rely on one's own destiny. Icelanders were asked to conceive of themselves as modern *landnámsmenn*, ready to grasp their independence by (re-) discovering and (re-) colonizing their ancient culture and history. Drawing on the foundational, as well as contra-present function of the myth of the first settler, Guðmundur argued that the key to freedom and liberation could only be found in the appropriation of Iceland's cultural heritage, which he hoped would serve as a source of

legitimation, guidance, and self-esteem to his compatriots.

Imagining and fashioning Ingólfur Arnason as a public monument, and then, 55 years later in 1961, reproducing and fixing this monument on Norwegian ground, served not only the young Icelandic nation-state but also Norway. For Icelanders, it cemented, literally, the connection of their shared heritage on Norwegian soil and made a clear statement against acknowledging other (first and foremost Danish, but also Celtic) influences in the young republic. The underlying message was clear: Icelanders came from Norway, shared a common history with Norway, and are appreciated and liked in Norway.

¹⁸¹ "Noregur var eins og opinn faðmur." *Morgunblaðið* (26 September 1961): 3.

The rejection of the “foreign” statue of Jason in 1906, the creation of their own monument in response, and finally, the fact that a copy of this monument was presented to Norway, clarified to the world which nation Iceland wanted to remain closest to. For Norwegians, the shared history and culture with Icelanders seems to have been an important aspect of a regional identity: the 1961 statue event’s keynote speaker was the Justice Minister, and the people gathered were mostly locals. Still, the origin of Ingólfur and Hjörleifur was successfully promoted to the outside world in September 1961, and further incorporated into local Norwegian folk celebrations, for instance, with the *Gaularspelet*, an open-air show that has been held annually at Dalsfjord since 1987, a “Viking Age Festival” which reenacts Ingólfur and Hjörleifur’s journey together.¹⁸² Additionally, potentially, somewhere in the presidential residence in Bessastaðir, Iceland, there may still be the potted plant growing in “sacred” soil, believed to have been taken from the grave of Ingólfur’s father, celebrating and commemorating Icelanders’ roots in Norway.¹⁸³

Imagining a Founding Father

Utilizing these four specific moments of imagining the founding father of Icelanders, we can now move to a more general discussion of the creation of the Icelandic nation after 1860, an evolution that conforms with historical materialist and neo-Marxist approaches to the emergence of national movements, which also focus on economic progress, colonialism, and the role of the new middle class.

In his 1983 book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson offers a broad study of the origins of national consciousness, centered on three premises which enabled a growing number of people to reflect on their roles in society and relate themselves to other members of the same group in new ways.¹⁸⁴ For Anderson, “nations” are an entirely modern phenomenon, an “imagined political community [...] inherently limited and sovereign.”¹⁸⁵ From such an angle, nationalism is not an ideology, philosophy, or school of thought – discernible by the lack of intellectual treatment or attempts to systematize what nationalism actually entails. On the contrary, Anderson proposes that we consider nationalism as a “cultural artifact of a particular kind, not an ideology or philosophy – it has never produced its own grand thinkers.”¹⁸⁶ Understanding nationalism, or the need for people to imagine themselves as members of a community, as a cultural and man-made phenomenon, “as if it belonged with kinship and religion, rather than with liberalism or fascism,” opens the way for an entirely different perspective.¹⁸⁷

Anderson’s three premises for the formation of national consciousness all rest on specific developments tied to modernity and cultural progress. The first of these is the abandoning of a particular, privileged script language, for instance Latin, in favor of the vernacular. Secondly, the decline of feudal and absolutist monarchies, and with this, an abolition of the belief that leadership is to be exercised by a central power justified by a

¹⁸² Helgi Þorláksson 55; *Gaularspelet* (22 May 2013) <<http://www.gaularspelet.no/>>.

¹⁸³ Further investigations into the whereabouts of this plant have unfortunately not met with any success.

¹⁸⁴ Anderson 36.

¹⁸⁵ Anderson 6.

¹⁸⁶ Anderson 4-5.

¹⁸⁷ Anderson 5.

form of divine dispensation. Thirdly, he argues for a change in perception of time, and the entry of “homogenous, empty time,” in which events that occur are put in sequence with modern time-measuring techniques, such as calendars and watches, while print media, for instance novels and newspapers, enabled the emergence of a national consciousness.¹⁸⁸

Anderson's approach is essentially modernist, in that at its center stands a discussion of the onset of capitalism. He argues that this resulted in the production of books and print media as the “first modern-style-mass produced industrial commodity,” and which led to increasingly rapid communication between a growing number of people.¹⁸⁹ Vernacular books and newspapers revolutionized the way readers conceived of both themselves and the events around them. If the invention of the printing press first resulted in the production of mostly Latin works, Anderson observes that it took less than 150 years for Latin printings, mostly of the Bible, to saturate the book market.¹⁹⁰ The ensuing discovery of a market for vernacular prints, along with the slow establishment of vernacular languages utilized in government administrations, led to a new immutability of these languages. At the same time, the emerging market of books and newspapers, printed in the native languages of new and growing middle classes, now enabled people to see themselves as part of a new form of imagined community – the nation. For Anderson, the act of reading newspapers is a significant example of community imagination. Anyone reading the morning news,

... is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated by thousands (if not millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated at daily or half-daily intervals throughout the calendar. What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned?¹⁹¹

Instead of emphasizing an exclusive, violent character of nationalism, seeing it as a means of social control or as a product of economic changes following industrialism and urbanization, Anderson focuses on print and vernacular language, along with changed perceptions of time and space. This view lends itself well to the specific situation of nineteenth- and twentieth- century Iceland, even if the material presented thus far expands Anderson's model by adding the creation of a visual monument to the list.

Iceland's journey towards independence was a peaceful process driven by a small, urban, liberal intellectual elite who collaborated with socially more conservative farmers. Both groups were united in their desire to fend off the influence of the Danish tradesmen, without necessarily expecting full independence or considering violent means to reach their goal.¹⁹² In the exemplary case of people rallying for the Ingólfur monument, the

¹⁸⁸ Anderson 36.

¹⁸⁹ Anderson 34.

¹⁹⁰ An estimated 77 percent of books printed before 1500 were in Latin; the number of Bibles printed before the year 1500 is estimated as more than 20,000.000 (Anderson 34-37).

¹⁹¹ Anderson 35.

¹⁹² Karlsson “Iceland's 1100 Years” 239. As Guðmundur Hálfðanarson has shown, the farmers stood united with the urban middle class in the goal of pursuing independence, though both groups had their separate reasons: to the farmers, Danish liberalism and ideas about individual freedom posed the actual threat they wanted to avoid (Guðmundur Hálfðanarson “Old Provinces” 155-61; Gunnar Karlsson “Iceland's 1100 Years” 232). For the non-violent character of Iceland's small national movement, cf. Guðmundur

movement was dominated by a small circle of middle-class men, many of whom were educated abroad in Denmark, thus giving them an ambiguous relationship to Danish colonial power.¹⁹³ “In Iceland, and probably in all European rural societies that came to know liberalism and nationalism, there was a constant conflict between the secure old and the tempting new alternatives, between the fear of innovation and the wish for a better life.”¹⁹⁴ As a principal means of communication and dissemination of their ideas in a country as sparsely populated as Iceland, the group relied on print media and organized events such as public speeches and gatherings. The events surrounding the Ingólfur statue project—the quarrel with the artist, the design of the statue, milestones such as the first telegram sent from Iceland, and the unveiling festivities—were covered by the media, so that the accounts were readily accessible in the national newspapers (and later, in Knud Zimsens' memoirs). Guðmundur Finnbogason's speech was printed and published, not just for communicating his thoughts but also as a means of fundraising and advertising for the statue project. The advertisements for the lottery project were published and printed widely in newspapers and put on flyers, which were distributed on horseback to even the most remote areas around the country, ensuring that all Icelanders would know about the statue. And when the presidential couple visited Norway in 1955, writer Arni Óla wrote and published his reports of the trip back home in Iceland as it was happening, where readers could follow Arni's vivid and detailed impressions of Norway each Sunday in *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins*.



Fig. 19. Cover and two pages of *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins* 24 July 1955

Arni's reports featured black-and-white photographs of the bautastones, of flags and celebrating Norwegians and Icelanders, allowing his readers to imagine themselves as a

Hálfðanarson “Icelandic Nationalism” 2-7.

¹⁹³ While this chapter emphasizes the “masculine” character of Iceland’s nationalist movement, which focused mostly on Denmark and considered women’s liberation as less important or even harmful. The reality, of course, was more complex: Sigríður Matthíasdóttir’s study *Hinn sanni Íslendingur* examines the role of women for the nation building process in Iceland and shows that there were various stages in the development of the women’s liberation movement and female participation in the island’s public and political life. Icelandic women had entered the political sphere from 1907 onwards, and gained full citizenship in 1911. However, their full citizenship was quickly followed by a conservative backlash and a new “housewife ideology,” intertwined with conservative nationalistic movements (Sigríður Matthíasdóttir “Hinn sanni” 373-374).

¹⁹⁴ Gunnar Karlsson “Iceland’s 1100 Years” 232.

member of the new “old” Icelandic nation, all descended from western Norway, and with that, as members of a cultural community quite different from a people dominated by the former colonial power of Denmark.

Einar Jónsson’s finished statue and the unveiling of the monument in 1924 (and again in 1961), gave a face and shape to the first Icelfander, which became iconized almost right away, as a symbol or embodiment of “the” Icelfander, to be commoditized and printed on postcards, flags, napkins, ashtrays and other every day items, including the country’s currency, allowing for Icelfanders’ distant yet simultaneous consumption of this nationalizing figure.¹⁹⁵ Even if initially a single, spatial monument, Ingólfur Arnarson, as



Fig. 20. Logo for “Íslenski Barinn”

presented in Einar’s artwork, became a lasting and widely circulating symbol of

Icelandicness. This is most convincingly demonstrated by the cover of the year 2000 annual report of deCODE genetics, a research company using the genetic data of 140,000 Icelfanders to identify human genes associated with diseases.¹⁹⁶ On the report’s cover, deCODE chose to print a young blonde woman and Einar Jónsson’s statue as typical placeholders of Icelandicness and Icelfanders’ origins, easily recognizable to all.¹⁹⁷ Even tourists looking for a place to drink and eat in Reykjavík will be greeted by Ingólfur’s likeness, should they choose the suggestively titled *Íslenski Barinn* or “The Icelandic Bar,” located on Ingólfstræti or “Ingólfur’s Street” in downtown Reykjavík.

Aside from the convergence of print technology and capitalism as a major premise for the emergence of national consciousness, there is one additional aspect of Anderson’s work that resonates with the four moments of imagining a founding father described above, namely, the role of colonialism and education. According to Anderson, a second, albeit later aspect promoting the development of imagined communities in colonized areas was the fact that dominant colonial powers provided education to colonialists, but usually did not admit them as full members of society.¹⁹⁸

Formally, Iceland had been under colonial rule since at least 1262, first as part of the Kingdom of Norway, and later, as part of the Kalmar Union and its successor, the Dano-Norwegian monarchy. With the introduction of absolutism in Denmark, the administration

¹⁹⁵ Several of the items mentioned are in the collection of Þjóðminjasafn Íslands (The National Museum of Iceland): Freyja Hlíðkvist Ómarsdóttir, personal communication 18 June 2014. Einar Jónsson’s Ingólfur is printed on the 5 krónur bill from 1957. *Opinber gjaldmiðill á Íslandi* 43. Other motives popularly found on Icelfanders’ currency are the *Fjallkona* or “Mountain Woman,” the leader of the independence movement Jón Sigurðsson, the gyrfalcon (since 1903 official symbol of Iceland, replacing the crowned stockfish used before), or prominent natural features such *Geysir*, *Gullfoss* or the plains of *Pingvellir*.

¹⁹⁶ deCODE’s work to identify genes and capitalize on Icelfander’s genetic data has been controversially discussed in the country; the company’s attempt to establish a database containing medical records of all Icelfanders has failed as it was turned down by the Icelandic Supreme Court in 2003, but more than 140,000 Icelfanders have nonetheless volunteered to release their data for deCodes research.

¹⁹⁷ *deCODE genetics Annual Report 2000*.

¹⁹⁸ Anderson 55.

of Iceland was reorganized in the 1680s, and Iceland was to be governed by a *stiftamtmand*, usually a Dane residing in Denmark, and several Icelandic regional governors and assistants.¹⁹⁹ The official administrative language was Danish, though the status of Icelandic as a language separate from Danish had been acknowledged at least since 1540, when Oddur Gottskálksson's translation of the New Testament was recognized by the Danish Church and published in Roskilde.²⁰⁰ After Norway entered into a union with Sweden in 1814, following the Napoleonic Wars, Iceland remained under Danish rule. When Denmark introduced compulsory school education the same year, no such provisions were made in Iceland, where children were expected to learn how to read and memorize the catechism, but were mostly trained at home by their parents. The first educational institutions for children in Iceland were founded privately, for instance Reykjavík's primary school began in 1830 with 18 students. From the 1860s onwards, education in rural areas was covered in part by itinerant schools, organized by the farmers themselves in their private homes for a few weeks at a time.²⁰¹

Secondary education was exclusively provided by the Latin School in Reykjavík, which prepared students for the priesthood or a university education. This lasted until the late 1870s, when the first occupational schools were established in Reykjavík.²⁰² Students who graduated from the Latin School could move directly to priesthood. This lasted until 1847, when a theological seminary was established in Reykjavík, joined by a medical school in 1876. All other university education was only accessible abroad. In Denmark, Icelandic students were not only eligible for free lodging at student dorms and for financial support to cover basic living expenses, but also enjoyed preferential treatment when it came to admission based on grades, as “the Danish royal government wanted to encourage prospective students from the distant province.”²⁰³ The opportunity for free and assured access to the University of Copenhagen would have been lost to Icelanders if their country separated from Denmark, a factor to bear in mind when considering the slow, non-violent step-by-step approach Icelanders took on their journey towards full independence. After 1874, the so-called revision movement *endurskoðunarhreyfing*, worked towards the establishment of a university or a law school. The Althing passed this proposal multiple times, but each time it was declined by the Danish government. It would take until 1911 for Icelanders to establish their own university, Háskóli Íslands, which combined a theological seminary, medical school, and a new law school, and which enrolled 45 students in its first year.²⁰⁴ For this reason, much of Iceland's romantic national awakening and its early independence movement happened not on the island itself, but among Icelandic students in Copenhagen, who came into contact with the national romantic movement during their studies abroad.²⁰⁵ To use Benedict Anderson's terms, these Icelanders could be considered educational pilgrims, who were not fully integrated into Danish society (even if the crown provided for their education and accommodation), and

¹⁹⁹ Gunnar Karlsson “Iceland’s 1100 Years” 152.

²⁰⁰ Neijmann 177. The first Icelandic dictionary by Magnús Ólafsson was published in 1650.

²⁰¹ Gunnar Karlsson “Iceland’s 1100 Years” 256.

²⁰² There used to be two Latin schools, one at each bishopric in Hólar and Skálholt, which were later united after the earthquakes of 1784. It moved to Bessastaðir in 1805-45, and then finally to Reykjavík. (Gunnar Karlsson “Iceland’s 1100 Years” 183).

²⁰³ Guðmundur Hálfðanarson “University of Iceland” 292. The same holds true for students from Greenland.

²⁰⁴ Guðmundur Hálfðanarson “University of Iceland” 286.

²⁰⁵ Aðalgeir Kristjánsson 18.

who began to imagine themselves as an independent community abroad when confronted with their own restricted career options and limited social mobility, both in the colonial motherland and at home.²⁰⁶ Because of the geographical, historical, and linguistic differences between Denmark and Iceland, and the fact that written texts in Old Icelandic had been preserved since the twelfth century, it may seem obvious that Icelanders would have felt “different” from Danes all along. When philologists first rediscovered the Icelandic language and medieval literary culture in the wake of national romanticism and historicism, they assumed that Old Icelandic represented the original common language of all Scandinavians. Icelandic culture, it was argued, was thus the key to an “original” Nordic culture, providing an idea of what a pan-Scandinavian past may have looked like while at the same time offering an alternative source for the origins of civilization in Europe, and an alternative to the premise that Greece and Rome were the only progenitors of Western ideals and thought systems. In consequence, Icelanders were not necessarily perceived as an independent ethnic group or nation—for many Danish dignitaries, Icelandic literature and the Icelandic language provided the source for an original Nordic—or even Danishness, as in the case of N.F.S. Grundtvig’s translations of Icelandic medieval literature after 1814.²⁰⁷ Icelandic medieval culture was valued and in fashion in Denmark during the early nineteenth century, and more than a few Icelanders earned their living as copiers, editors and translators of old Icelandic manuscripts for learned societies in Copenhagen.²⁰⁸ The fancy and respect for the Icelandic literary heritage and language can even be seen in the policies of the Danish kingdom for Danish government officials in Iceland, who were obliged to not only understand Icelandic, but also to speak it on official occasions and in all dealings with Icelanders.²⁰⁹

For an Icelandic like Guðmundur Finnbogason in 1906, it seemed just as natural and right to praise Icelanders for preserving the ancient culture of all people of the North, yet to him, this fact justified the claim for Iceland’s independence.²¹⁰ In Benedict Anderson’s framework, Iceland would constitute a late-wave nationalism state, which arose when nations had already become the norm elsewhere. One reason for this can be found in Iceland’s small population and the rural and backward socio-economic structure of the country, with its small middle class and even smaller educated elite, which depended upon and benefitted from the educational system of Denmark. As Eric Hobsbawm remarked, “the progress of schools and universities measures that of nationalism, just as schools and universities became its most conscious champions.”²¹¹ Without an organized system of even primary education in place before the twentieth century, the small size of Iceland’s independence movement should come as no real surprise.

Iceland’s pre-modern political institutions were non-dynastic until 1262, when they became colonial; this is a further aspect to keep in mind when viewing the peaceful, late onset of a national movement carried by the urban middle class and some of the farmers in the country. The act of imagining and fashioning a founding father, then, emerged from the side of the small urban middle and upper-middle classes gathered in the Evening Society

²⁰⁶ Anderson 64.

²⁰⁷ Lundgreen-Nielsen 44.

²⁰⁸ Guðmundur Hálfðanarson “Non-violent” 9.

²⁰⁹ Guðmundur Hálfðanarson “Non-violent” 9.

²¹⁰ Guðmundur Finnbogason 24-25.

²¹¹ Hobsbawm “Age of Revolution” 166.

and the Craftsmen's Association, under the influence of continental traditions of erecting monuments and celebrating figures of (presumed) historical significance. In imagining and creating this embodiment of the first settler (and reproducing it in Norway), Icelanders imagined themselves as a community defined by a common descent from pioneers and *landnámsmenn*, with the Danish colonial power as their “Other.” Public art, print media, and public gatherings and celebrations served as vessels for this imagination of their community, with the monument of the first settler as the most suitable, and lasting subject for this cause, visible and reproduced until today.

3. Finding the First Farm

While Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities defines communities as composed of equal members who are united in the contemplation of their common past, he does little to acknowledge that most of these groups are highly exclusive. As Marion Lerner points out using the example of Icelanders imagining themselves as a community of descendants from settlers and pioneers, this claim of equality and unity among the members is fictional, as it rests on the two factors of ethnicity and gender.²¹² While Anderson acknowledges that most imagined communities are masculine, he does not discuss gender as an exclusive factor in the formation of these groups.

Joan Nagel has researched the connections between nationhood and manhood, especially as displayed in the constructions or icons of nationalist ideology such as patriotic manhood or exalted motherhood.²¹³ Einar Jónsson's "Ingólfur" can be easily read as a celebration of patriotic masculinity, and understood in the context of early twentieth century ideals and definitions of manhood, which George Mosse sees as paralleling the rise of nationalism in his 1996 book, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity*.²¹⁴

The discussions that took place among the artist and the committee illustrate what Nagel, in recourse to Mosse, isolates as the three normative, manly traits that were used in late-nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe and North America as ideals of "manliness," and ultimately, of nationhood:

1. Masculine achiever: competitiveness, independence, persistence;
2. Christian gentleman: willpower, restraint, discipline;
3. Masculine primitive: strength, virility, courage.²¹⁵

Was "the" first Icelander imagined to be an achiever or a pious gentleman? Was he someone characterized by his virility, strength, and courage? Which of these traits would be most effective for communicating Icelanders' ideas about themselves and the core characteristics of their community and, ultimately, their nation? Clearly, Einar Jónsson favored a combination of "achiever" and "primitive." He celebrated the male body and its evocation of strength and courage in the figural representation of his first settler, while supplying characteristics fitting into the "achiever" ideal, with the motto and bas reliefs that he wished to attach to the statue. The committee, in turn, wanted to emphasize features fitting into the second category: a founding father characterized by his discipline, restraint, and ultimately, his faith. The final product sends an ambivalent message. On the one hand, "Ingólfur" is a young, strong, armed man ready to fight, while at the same time, he is meant to be a devout and peaceful farmer and founding father, which was emphasized by

²¹² Lerner 104.

²¹³ Nagel 242.

²¹⁴ Mosse 7. The Icelandic historian Sigríður Matthíasdóttir has demonstrated that both Guðmundur Finnbogason's 1906 speech and Einar Jónsson's statue are prime examples for Moss' thesis, as Iceland's independence movement sought to use masculine stereotypes in their effort to establish an independent nation-state following Western standards. Sigríður Matthíasdóttir "Hinn sanni" 81-2 and "Ídeón om det nationale" 34 and 39.

²¹⁵ Nagel 245.

the new motto attached to the artwork. As mentioned in Chapter Two, his wife, Hallveig, and his slaves are largely absent in depictions and contemplations of his character, especially those dating before Iceland's independence.²¹⁶ As Lerner remarks about the ambivalent character of Ingólfur in Einar Jónsson's monument:

Furthermore, there is the ambivalence that, while he cut a martial figure, the settler was nevertheless described as a representative of peace. In any case, in keeping with this enumeration of characteristics, the inevitable conclusion is: the settler is a ruler, and the settler is a man. He stands uniformly for masculine attributes. He does not let himself be oppressed; he is not dependent; he is not weak, never disadvantaged; and he is certainly no woman. Inherent in the widespread usage of the symbolism of the settler, therefore, is exclusion.²¹⁷

Thus, one disadvantage of applying Anderson's framework to Iceland is his focus on the positive and inclusive mechanisms of nationalism, neglecting the violent factors that are often present in nation-formation processes and nationalisms.²¹⁸ While the slow formation of the Icelandic nation was nonviolent and seemingly lends itself well to Anderson's approach, its underlying currents were nonetheless driven by concepts of exclusivity, chosen-ness, and purity, not only in terms of gender, but also of race.²¹⁹

A second critique of Anderson's "discursive" nationalism, which is based on print media, the advance of capitalism, and the role of vernacular languages, regards a more general "weakness" of so-called modernist approaches to the study of nationalism. Established as the dominant school of thought in the study of nationalism during the 1960s and 1970s, the modernity of nations became a proclaimed truth after the trauma of the Second World War and the Holocaust. Before those events, a widely held view of nationalism, for instance in Germany, equated the concept of nationhood with common

²¹⁶ If patriotic manhood found its representative in Ingólfur, motherhood was celebrated in the *Fjallkona* or "Mountain Woman," a poetic image developed by Eggert Ólafsson and taken up in Bjarni Thorarensen's *Eldgamla Ísafold (Íslands minni)*. The allegorical representation of Iceland as a woman, comparable to the German *Germania* or the French *Marianne* turned into a popular trope in the publications of Iceland's independence movement, where the woman soon became a mother, an "abundant and ice-white mother" (*hagsælda hrimvíta móðir*) as in Jónas Hallgrímsson's famous poem *Ísland* from 1835 (Koester 580, Lerner 105, and Inga Dóra Björnsdóttir "Þeir áttu sér móður").

²¹⁷ Translated by Kenneth Fockele. "Darüber hinaus ergibt sich die Ambivalenz, dass er zwar ein soldatisch-kriegerisches Bild abgibt, aber als Vertreter des Friedens beschrieben wurde. Gemäss dieser Aufzählung ist jedoch eines unhintergebar: Der Landnehmer ist ein Herrscher und der Landnehmer ist ein Mann. Er steht durchweg für männlich konnotierte Attribute. Er lässt sich nicht unterdrücken, er ist nicht abhängig, er ist nicht schwach, nicht benachteiligt und er ist ganz gewiss keine Frau. Damit ist der so weitreichend angewendeten Symbolik des Landnehmers Ausgrenzung inhärent" (Lerner 104).

²¹⁸ Lerner 102.

²¹⁹ I will discuss the concept of chosen-ness and Icelanders' ethnogenesis for the Medieval period in Chapter Four. Guðmundur Hálfðanarson discusses the underlying reasons for why Icenlad's struggle for independence was non-violent, "almost to the extreme" in *Icelandic Nationalism: A Non-Violent Paradigm?* (2-3 and 7, quotation on 2). Despite its non-violent character, he emphasizes that Icelandic nationalism had the same propensity for violence as any other ethnic nationalism, because its ultimate goal was not negotiable and its inflated rhetoric on the character of the Icelandic nation invited a sense of racial superiority. Unnur Karlsdóttir's article *Maður íslenskur. Hugmyndir á fyrri hluta 20. Aldar um samband íslensks Þjóðernis og kúnpáttar* enumerates concrete examples of xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and racism in early-twentieth-century Iceland.

ethnic ancestry and native culture (often termed “ethnic” nationalism).²²⁰ This was abandoned in favor of seeing nations as products of modernity, specifically concerning the political and economic factors, which were considered the driving forces behind nation formation—and with that a “civic” concept of nationhood closer to the French or American models, based on principles of freedom and individual rights.²²¹ Therefore, accordingly, one factor downplayed by many modernists is the role of religion and religious sentiments both for and within nationalist movements. It should be noted here, however, that the distinction between “modernist” and “perennial” or “primordial” approaches to nationalism can be seen as unnecessarily polarized as well.²²²

Benedict Anderson does not fully ignore religion or claim that nationalism historically superseded religion—an assumption found in some of the earlier works by nationalism scholars. Instead, he assumes a lingering influence of religion, accepting that even secular nations retain religious features, such as sacred texts, prophets, and priests. What nationalism and religion commonly offer to the people, according to Anderson, is an answer to the problem of the existence of evil and human suffering, whereas modern frameworks, such as Marxism or Darwinism, have failed to provide equivalent solutions to these major issues. The void created by the Enlightenment and the onset of secularization made death and suffering seem arbitrary, so “what was required was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning,” and with that, “the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny.”²²³ Instead of resorting to a simplistic explanation of nationalism as “produced by the erosion of religious certainties,” however, Anderson acknowledges that the origin of nationalism is more complex, and enumerates several instances of religious nationalisms to corroborate his statement.²²⁴ Still, what nationalism could offer was a better alignment with “the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which—as well as against which—it came into being.”²²⁵ Nationalism could occupy a social space that had previously been filled by religiously imagined communities; the idea of “goodness” was believed to be inherent in a nation, and could be transformed into a matter of faith among community members, and as such, it was akin to a religious belief.²²⁶

Despite the acknowledgement of the role of religion for some nationalism movements, Anderson, like most other modernists—for instance, Kedourie, Gellner, or Hobsbawm—does not address the underlying, strong passions and deep attachments which feed into national identity, and with that, “the great and dilating appeal of nations and nationalism,” as put by the sociologist Anthony D. Smith, one of Anderson's strongest critics.²²⁷ For Smith, a conclusive understanding of the origins and foundations of most nations, and with that, the members' often passionate willingness to sacrifice their lives for their nation, can be found only in

. . . the sense of the sacred and the binding commitments of religion. Behind and

²²⁰ Smith “Civic” 179.

²²¹ Smith “Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism” 7.

²²² Birgir Hermansson 81-115, especially 87.

²²³ Anderson 11.

²²⁴ Anderson 12.

²²⁵ Anderson 11.

²²⁶ Smith “Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism” 20.

²²⁷ Smith “Chosen Peoples” 4.

beyond ethnicity, language and the state, albeit entwined with all three, lie the fundamental sacred sources of national identity. Hence, my attempt to map out some of the *sacred foundations* of national identity through an exploration to the modern belief-system of nationalism, and of its deep cultural resources.²²⁸

Smith readily acknowledges that nations are imagined, but adds that they are also “willed and felt, communities of will and emotion.”²²⁹ He defines his own position as that in line with a modified modernism, offering a nuanced, but radical critique of typical modernist approaches.²³⁰

What Anderson and Smith have in common is a concept of nationalism surmounting the field of political ideology, assigning it a broader cultural role. To Smith, nationalism can comprise “a type of belief system” in itself, based on cultural resources such as symbols, memories, myths, values, and traditions, as well as the expressions of these resources in artifacts and texts, for instance in sculptures, paintings, scriptures, epics, or chronicles.²³¹ Therefore, for Smith, understanding nationalism, especially its origins and supporting factors, requires an analysis of the cultural resources of a given national community or nation. It is here that Smith's approach intersects in an interesting way with Jan Assmann's concept of cultural memory: both scholars assign pre-Modern material agency in the processes of identity formation and the definition of foundational memory at the time of its creation, as well as throughout its reception history.

What makes Smith's framework especially interesting for this project is his core assumption of the possibility for the sacred and ancient origins of cultural resources that can be used for imagining a national or a cultural community. His modified critique of constructivist nationalism theories, starting with his early works on the role of *ethnies* and intelligentsias, is in line with most of the basic assumptions of modernist scholars, such as Hobsbawm or Gellner, who understand nations as actual sociological communities. Smith diverges with these scholars in certain premises, however, such as the belief that nations are consciously engineered by elites, mostly for the purpose of social control, using invented traditions or linguistic and symbolic practices and the media to their own ends.²³² Ultimately, what his approach achieves is a departure from the “orthodoxy” of modernist nationalism theories towards some aspects still deemed valid from primordial or perennial theories of nationalism. The modified assumption of neo-perennialism holds that some nations can have pre-Modern predecessors or varieties, represented for instance by Hugh Seton-Watson, who distinguishes between “old” and “new” nations in Europe, using the late-eighteenth century as a dividing line, which is also a position shared by several other scholars.²³³ While the extent of Iceland's mobilization of a pre-Modern variety of

²²⁸ Smith “Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism” 5.

²²⁹ Smith “Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism” 22.

²³⁰ Smith “Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism” 13.

²³¹ Smith “Chosen Peoples” 18.

²³² Smith “Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism” 12.

²³³ Seton-Watson 9. According to Seton-Watson, old nations comprised the English, Danish, Scots, and French, nations which did - in contrast to “new” nations - enjoy relative autonomy without the need for mobilization of national movements to achieve independence. Additional scholars arguing for pre-Modern varieties of nation are for instance Stephen Grosby, who argues in *Biblical Ideas of Nationality: Ancient and Modern* for the existence of nations in ancient Armenia, Egypt and Israel, while medievalists Adrian Hastings, Joseph Strayer, John Gillingham and Patric Wormald see evidence for an English

nationhood (even an imagined one) will be of interest in Chapter Four, what follows here is an exploration of the role of religious sentiment and “sacred” legitimization for the Icelandic national movement in general, and the study surrounding the founding father of Iceland in particular. Following Smith's premise that dedication and passion for a nation originate in factors beyond language, ethnicity, or economic development, and are based on “long term sacred sources,” the following overview of the search for the first farm and the location of the oldest settlement serve to test this assumption. What the following pages aim to achieve is to demonstrate that the shared cultural memory of the first settler provided Icelanders with a sacred foundation, both figuratively and literally, and a deep cultural resource for their national identity from the twelfth century until today.

In Search of the First Farm

Chapters Eight and Nine of the *Sturlubók* and *Hauksbók* versions of *Landnámabók* establish a location for both Ingólfur and Hjörleifur's settlements on the island. While Hjörleifur, along with his family and slaves, settled in the south, Ingólfur erected a temporary settlement and sent his slaves out to locate his high-seat pillars. Once these pillars were located in Reykjavík, he followed what he believed to be the will of the gods and moved his farmstead to the Seltjarnarnes Peninsula. At the time of the compilation of *Landnámabók*, the audience is reassured that the high-seat pillars that marked this original place of settlement were still visible: “the high-seat pillars could still be seen in the hall there.”²³⁴ The memory of the exact location of the first settlement is thus unmistakably anchored to the ground in Reykjavík, and to a textual tradition established by *Landnámabók*.

An antiquarian interest in relics linked to the *landnám* can therefore be traced back to at least to the late-twelfth or early thirteenth century, and in addition to Ingólfur Arnarson, *Landnámabók* also includes descriptions of other early visitors and explorers of the island. For instance Flóki Vilgerðarson, whose dwelling, Flókatóftir in Vatnsfjörður in the Westfjords, is mentioned in chapter 5 of the *Hauksbók* version of *Landnámabók*, inspired the first archaeological expedition of the newly founded Icelandic archaeological association *Fornleifafélag* in the late-nineteenth century.²³⁵ This interest in the markers of the first settlement reappears in the earliest Humanist historiographical works. Arngrímur Jónsson's *Crymogæa*, from 1609, uses the *Landnámabók* account almost word for word; in book 1 of volume 3 dedicated to the cosmographic, geographical, and historical descriptions of the Icelandic people, Arngrímur writes about the pillars and how they were found: “However, [Ingólfur] missed the posts of the house of which we have spoken for three entire years; they were found at last in the place which is named Reycharwich.”²³⁶

In the second half of the seventeenth century, encouraged by an ongoing correspondence with the Danish scholar Ole Worm, Brynjólfur Sveinsson, then bishop of

nation, and Colette Beaune for a French national identity by the fourteenth century, even if confined to a small elite around the court and clergy. A more critical position is represented by Patrick Geary in *The Myth of Nations. The Medieval Origins of Europe*.

²³⁴ Herrmann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, 21: “þar eru enn öndugissúlur þær í eldhúsi” (ÍF 1.1, 45).

²³⁵ Adolf Friðriksson “Íslensk Fornleifafræði” 19.

²³⁶ “Attamen postes ædium quas diximus, integrum triennium desiderans, repperit tandem in eo loco, qui *Reycharwich* nominatur; ibiq; habitationem condidit” (Arngrími Jonæ 23).

Skálholt, set out to lead an excursion to Ingólfsfjall in search of Ingólfur Arnarson's grave.²³⁷ Tradition at that time had not only preserved the name Ingólfsfjall for a prominent mountain near today's Selfoss but also ascribed the name Ingólfshóll, "Ingólf's mound," to a smaller mound on the hill (which is shown on one of Einar Jónsson's bas-reliefs for the Ingólfur statue I have discussed in Chapter Two). Excavating the mound, Brynjólfur could find no traces of human remains or artifacts there. Instead, he inspired the poet and later priest Stefán Ólafsson, then working for him, to compose a poem entitled "Á Ingólfshaugi" (On Ingólfur's Mound) in 1641 about the rather uncanny experience of digging into a suspected grave mound.²³⁸

Despite Brynjólfur Sveinsson's failed excavation attempt, but maybe owed to the poem it inspired, the idea that the first settler's grave was located on Ingólfsfjall lived on in popular folk belief, evidenced by Jón Árnason and Magnús Grímsson, who were the first to record and collect folktales in Iceland in the second half of the nineteenth century.²³⁹ Volume 2 of *Íslenzkar Þjóðsögur og Æfintýri* preserves tales about ancient Icelanders in a chapter entitled *Frá Fornmönnum*, where two shorter stories specifically revolve around Ingólfur's grave on the mountain. Both include the detail that a large treasure chest was located in his grave (possibly contained in his coffin), which in the first tale is discovered by locals from the area, who find it impossible to lift it out of the grave. In the story, no matter how hard the men tried, the chest could not be lifted up to ground level, and in the end, it falls back into the hole, taking the soil and earth that had been dug out along with it.²⁴⁰

A second folk tale connects the pregnancy of a woman from the area along the Ölfusá River to several dreams in which Ingólfur approached her and asked her to share her bed. In the tale, he tells her that the child resulting from the encounter was to be called Ingólfur, and when reaching the age of twelve, he should be sent up Ingólfsfjall to his grave mound to retrieve a treasure. When the boy turned twelve and went up the hill, he found a large chest, yet he was unable to open it. When he went back later to try again, the chest had disappeared.²⁴¹

That the historical memory about Ingólfur as preserved in *Landnámabók* was considered superior to other (oral) traditions connected to the *landnám*, and how it had

²³⁷ *Breve fra og til Ole Worm*, 327-335. Brynjólfur Sveinsson credits Ole Worm's interest in Nordic antiquarianism for his own research, praising him as "vort Fædrelands Fader, Oldtidens Haandhæver og Nordens enestaaende Opretholder . . . du har dels gennem dine Skrifter, dels gennem dit Eksempel opvakt mig af den fælles Søvn til at efterforske det gamle Nordens Fortidsskikke" (328).

²³⁸ Stefán Ólafsson 73. Hálfðan Jónsson "Lýsing Ölvshrepps 1703" *Landnám Ingólfs III*, Reykjavík 1937-1939: 14 (paraphrased in Adolf Friðriksson "Íslensk Fornleifafræði" 37n100.) The early modern *Þórðarbók* redaction of *Landnámabók* adds to the passage about Ingólfur in chapter 8 that Ingólfsfjall was the place Ingólfur was buried according to some people: "þar sem sumir menn segja, at hann sé heygðr" (ÍF1 45n6). Likewise, Hjörleifr's mound was suspected in Hjörleifshöfði, cf. ÍF1 44n1, a tradition still present, cf. "The Second Settler in Iceland."

²³⁹ This tradition is also mentioned in *Frásögur um Fornaldarleifar 1817-23* ("Reports on Remnants of Antiquity in Iceland 1817-23") which were initiated by the Danish Commission for the Conservation of Antiquities in 1817. Cf. *Frásögur um Fornaldarleifar* 223-5.

²⁴⁰ Jón Árnason 75. In *Frásögur um Fornaldarleifar* 224, Sigurður Sigurðsson, priest in Arnarbæli, elaborates that Ingólfur's treasure, not the first settler himself, was believed to be buried up on the hill, and connects several local place-names as derived from the names of Ingólfur's three slaves, who had to hide the treasure up on the hill and were later killed.

²⁴¹ Jón Árnason 75-6.

established itself as authoritative for Iceland's earliest modern writers, is illustrated by collector Árni Magnússon's report in his *Chorographica Islandica* from 1712. According to the observations he made while traveling around Iceland on commission by the Danish king between 1702 and 1712, the inhabitants of Seltjarnarnes believed that the name “Reykjavík,” which translates as Smoke-Bay in English, stemmed from Ingólfur's high-seat pillars. Tradition at the time held that the pillars had not landed on the Seltjarnarnes Peninsula itself, but on the outlying island of Örfirisey, which seemed unfit for settlement. According to the telling, the pillars were then burned by the first settler, and when the smoke drifted towards the mainland, he understood that this would be the final settlement place, which he named “Smoke Bay”:

The people of Reykjanes believe that Reykjavík was named from when Ingólfur cast his highseat-pillars, and they landed on Effersey. It seemed unlikely to Ingólfur that they would indicate such a small area for his *landnám*, and he had the pillars burnt at what is now Reykjanes on Effersey, and resolved to accept the area the smoke drifted to as his *landnám*. The smoke drifted to a bay which since is called Reykjavík. Nonsense, which does not agree with *Landnáma[bók]*.²⁴²

To Árni Magnússon, who as a collector and conservator was familiar with *Landnámabók*, anything that stood in contrast to this established version of the event of the settlement constituted *nugae* – nonsense. It remains curious that he deemed this alternative tradition worth recording nonetheless.

While Árni Magnússon may or may not have seen the actual remains of an old farmstead in Reykjavík in person, in 1772 the poet and explorer Eggert Ólafsson visited what to him clearly represented “Iceland's oldest farm and the first estate established by the first settler,” leading him to compose the poem *Mána mál* in praise of the “hallowed supreme ruins” he encountered there.²⁴³ Eggert, whom many of Iceland's early nationalists later considered their ideological and intellectual father, and his contemporary, the treasurer Skúli Magnússon, both recorded that they found the first settler's name preserved in local place names in the immediate area, for instance with Ingólfur's Well, *Ingólfs Brønd*, “after den første Islands Beboer”(after the first Icelandic inhabitant) or *Ingólfsnaust* (Ingólfur's boathouse).²⁴⁴ Another tradition connected a large rock on Reykjavík's shoreline, demolished before 1820, with Ingólfur, and it was assumed by some that it was used by him as a dock for his ship.²⁴⁵

If travelers in the late-eighteenth century claimed to be able to locate the ruins of the old farmstead on the Peninsula, there were no visible traces remaining a century later, when the first farm became the subject of various speculations and attempts to localize it.

²⁴² “Reykjavík segja Seltjarnarnesingar heiti þar af, að þá Ingólfur skaut öndvegissúlum sínum fyrir borð, hafi þær rekið í Effersey. Það hafi Ingólfi þótt ólíklegt, að þær visuðu sér að svo litlu landnámi, hafi því súlurnar þar brennt, er nú heitir Reykjanes á Effersey, og viljað láta sér vera landnáms tilvisan þar reykinn lagði á. Reykinn hafi lagt á Víkur stæði og síðan heiti það Reykjavík. Nugæ, qvæ non conveniunt cum Landnámu” (Árni Magnússon 60).

²⁴³ Helgi Þorláksson and Orri Vésteinsson 76; Eggert Ólafsson 41-46.

²⁴⁴ Þorkell Grímsson 56; and *Ferðabók Eggerts Ólafssonar og Bjarna Pálssonar* I, 42 and II, 154-156 and 258-259. Skúli Magnússon *Beskrivelse af Gullbringu og Kjósar sýslur* 107 (more on Ingólfur's *landnám* on p. 9, 18-19.). *Forsøg til en Kort Beskrivelse af Island* 9, 22, 46.

²⁴⁵ Þorkell Grímsson 62.

What had happened in the meantime was the slow transformation of Reykjavík from a single farm to a trading town, founded by royal decree from Denmark in 1786, and which by 1801, according to the census that year, held 307 registered residents.²⁴⁶ When Árni Helgason, priest in Reykjavík in 1821, was asked to report about ancient antiquities and tales in his parish for the Danish Commission for the Conservation of Antiquities, he responded that he was surprised that so little was preserved in the area:

It is even more surprising that no tales are preserved here about Ingólfur the Old, but quite a few about Vifill, to whom Vifilsfell is connected, but those are somewhat fictitious, and it is quite likely that he never lived in my parish.²⁴⁷

Among the first individuals to try to systematically collect traditions about Reykjavík's first farm and connect them to artifacts and local memories was Sigurður málari, who had also drafted the first sketch of a possible Ingólfur statue and co-founded Iceland's first antiquarian collection.²⁴⁸ Sigurður's extensive notes on the subject of the first farm remain unpublished today, but they are preserved in Iceland's National Museum, and were studied by Þorkell Grímsson in the late-1960s. Based on witness accounts that he collected, Sigurður was convinced that the old Reykjavík farmstead must have been located on the spot of a later farm called Gröndalsbær.²⁴⁹ Incited by Sigurður málari's interest and promotion of Icelanders' cultural heritage, a more general public interest regarding the whereabouts of the old farmstead arose in the late-nineteenth century. There was general agreement at the time that Ingólfur's farm must have been in immediate proximity to the ruins of the oldest remaining farmhouse in Reykjavík, which was demolished around 1830, and sat adjacent to the Old Church (which today is Fógetagarður Square). Several texts document that a lively discussion took place during the last quarter of that century as to whether the farm had stood closer to Arnarhóll, Aðalstræti, or Tjarnargata. In an 1886 essay written on the occasion of Reykjavík's centennial founding as a town, Eiríkur Briem, then president of the recently organized Icelandic Archaeological Association (*Hið íslenska fornleifafélag*), argued that Ingólfur's farm could still be located, and that previous attempts which had suspected its location at Arnarhóll were false:²⁵⁰

Regarding where Ingólfur's farm was located, it may be mentioned that at the start of the 18th century there was a farm named Reykjavík, along with a barn and stackyard west of the old churchyard; it was thus west of Aðalstræti, southward between Túngata and Brattagata; it could not have been any further north, because above that there was, well into the 19th century, a tract of bouldery ground ²⁵¹

²⁴⁶ *Hagskinna* 86-87.

²⁴⁷ "Hitt er þó enn furðanlegra að engar sögur er hér að fá um Ingólf gamla þar sem Vifill, sem Vifilsfell er kent við, enn þær eru þá og nokkud lygilegar, og er það vel að hann bió ekki í minni sókn." (*Frásögur um Fornaldarleifar* 252.)

²⁴⁸ Þorkell Grímsson 54.

²⁴⁹ Þorkell Grímsson 54 and 59.

²⁵⁰ Briem 3.

²⁵¹ "Viðvíkjandi því hvar bær Ingólfs hafi staðið má geta þess, að í byrjun 18. aldar var Reykjavíkurbær ásamt fjósi og heygarði vestur af gamla kirkjugarðinum; hefir það því verið vestan við Aðalstræti sunnanvert milli Túngötu og Bröttugötu; norðar hefir hann eigi getað verið, því að þar ofantil var langt fram á 19. öld stórgrýtisurð . . ." (Eiríkur Briem 3).

Since the suspected site was then in use and not available for examination, no excavations were carried out at the time, and the question remained unresolved. In 1937, a proposal by several parliamentarians to convince the city of Reykjavík to buy the wider area around the western corner of Aðalstræti, specifically with the intention of conducting more research in the area, as well as to declare it a national heritage site, never went beyond the planning stage.²⁵²

When the city announced in 1959 that it planned to create an extensive development in the area and wanted to erect a new *Landssímahús* (an administrative building for the national telephone company) on the spot, there was a public outcry. An appeal of the plan, signed by numerous Icelandic intellectuals, was sent to the National Parliament, Alþingi, and to the city council of Reykjavík demanding that the suspected area of the ancient farmhouse be preserved.²⁵³ Among the signers were the archaeologist and future president of Iceland, Kristján Eldjárn, the bishops Bjarni Jónsson and Sigurbjörn Einarsson, the poet Tómas Guðmundsson, the rector of the University of Iceland, Þorkell Jóhannesson, professor of law Ólafur Lárusson and two philologists, Sigurður Nordal and Einar Ólafur Sveinsson. In detail, the appeal asked for the protection of the farm site as a “national shrine” (*þjóðlegur helgistaður*). Even though the farm still had not been specifically located by this point, it was considered certain that Ingólfur's farm had been situated south of Aðalstræti, on the western side, across from the place where, later, the old church and cemetery had been. Furthermore, the appeal encouraged the erection of a monument and public park, a project for which the 1,100 year celebration of the settlement of Iceland, as established by *Landnámabók*, could be used as a time frame:

It is also our resolution that the preservation of this place should not be contingent on construction of a special building or other structures on the site, but that a monument of some kind should be placed there, or the place should be marked for the time being, and that around it should be a public garden. The year 1974 will offer a time for a worthy stage to be achieved in this matter, when 1100 years will have passed from the settlement of Iceland and Ingólfur's arrival.²⁵⁴

While some archaeological fieldwork undertaken at the site in 1961 revealed traces of early human habitation in the area, it would take until 1971 for the city of Reykjavík to commission a large-scale excavation of vacant lots on the presumed farmhouse site.²⁵⁵ Several proposals for development of the area in question throughout the 1960s had been halted. The writer and radio journalist Helgi Hjörvar, who had been one of the organizers of the 1959 appeal, remained a key advocate on the matter and wrote numerous articles and letters on the subject of the first farm, many of which *Morgunblaðið* published.²⁵⁶ Helgi

²⁵² “Ráðstafanir á bæjarstæði Ingólfs Arnarsonar fyrir þjóðminjasafn eða opinbera byggingu” (*Alþýðublaðið* 9 April 1937, 1 and 4).

²⁵³ Reprinted in Helgi Hjörvar 1-3.

²⁵⁴ Helgi Þorláksson and Orri Vésteinsson, 79. “Það er og ályktun vor, að friðhelgun þessa staðar sé ekki og skuli ekki vera háð sérstakri húsbyggingu né miklum mannvirkjum á þessum stað, heldur skyldi reisa þar minnismerki í einhverri mynd, eða marka staðinn að sinni, en friðaður gróðurreitur fyrir almenning gerður þar umhverfis. Árið 1974 mætti gefa efni til, að virðulegum áfanga væri náð í þessu máli, en þá mun verða talið ellefu alda afmæli Íslandsbyggðar og landnáms Ingólfs” (Helgi Hjörvar 3).

²⁵⁵ Þorkell Grímsson 63-70.

²⁵⁶ Overview in “Fornminjar og skipulagsmál í miðborginni.” *Morgunblaðið* 17 June 2001.

Hjörvar's accurate reasoning of where the farmhouse was located would astonish scholars a generation after him, but his assertions were not necessarily convincing to all at the time of his articles. Before any archaeological survey of the area was undertaken, he had narrowed the area in question to a half circle with a radius of 35 meters, the center of which he located at the intersection of Kirkjustræti and Aðalstræti.

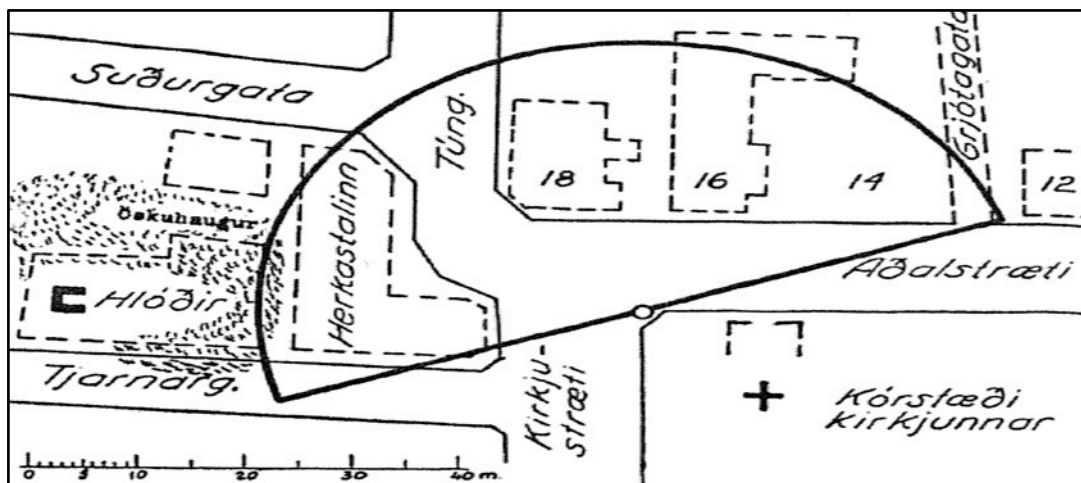


Fig. 21. Figure from Helgi Hjörvar, *Bæjartóftir Ingólfs. Til alþingismanna og forráðamanna Reykjavíkur*. Reykjavík: Víkingsprent, 1962: 33.

While many shared the general idea that the farmhouse site must have been in the wider area, Helgi Hjörvar's insistence on such a small radius seemed bold, as did his demand to build a new Parliament house for Icelanders on the spot, regardless of the success or failure of any excavation work done at that location. It also revealed that he was not necessarily interested in the historical value of the remains of the earliest farm, but in the symbolic and mythical quality of the location:

But a new Parliament Building must surely be constructed within ten to fifteen years. It is a key element in this case. The parliament of the Icelandic Republic should construct its house on the foundation of the farm of Ingólfur, the first settler in Iceland, on the foundations of the farm of Þorsteinn Ingólfsson, who himself was a pioneer for the commonwealth in Iceland.²⁵⁷

This desire to place the heart of the Republic – its Parliament – on the specific location of the home of Ingólfur, his son, the law-speaker Þorsteinn, and their descendants would have symbolized not only continuity in legal terms but also would have provided a meaningful, sacred, and legitimate line to the present, the young and newly independent nation of Iceland. Helgi Hjörvar could not find a majority in support of this project, even if other writers joined him in reminding the public of their “chief obligation” (*höfuðskyldu*) to

²⁵⁷ “En nýtt Alþingishús hlýtur að verða reist innan 10-15 ára. Það er meginatriði þessa máls. Alþing hins íslenska lýðveldis ætti að reisa hús sitt á bæjartóftum Ingólfs, hins fyrsta landnámsmanns á Íslandi, á tóftum Þorsteins Ingólfssonar, sem var sjálfur frumkvöðull að allsherjarríki á Íslandi” (Helgi Hjörvar 16).

protect the location of the first settler's farm.²⁵⁸

In 1971, when the 1,100th anniversary of the settlement was rapidly approaching, three vacant lots at Aðalstræti 14 and 18 and at Suðurgata 3-5 were finally excavated by a team of archaeologists led by Else Nordahl and Bengt Schönbeck.²⁵⁹ The excavators first revealed the remains of Reykjavík's earliest factories, the *inréttingar* workshops that processed wool and hides, established by Treasurer Skúli Magnússon in the 1750s in an attempt to bring modest industrial development to Iceland.²⁶⁰ On the lot of Aðalstræti 18, a small hall from the Viking Age was uncovered in close proximity to wall fragments, which possibly predated the year 874. Close by, on Suðurgata, a forge and another small hall from the same time period were also revealed.²⁶¹

Helgi Hjörvar had found an audience some years earlier when he had appealed to the public to preserve the suspected farmhouse area without any factual proof of Viking Age activity. Yet at the time the excavations were finished in 1975, which successfully provided this proof, the public's interest had faded. As Orri Vésteinsson notes, "there was relatively little discussion of the excavation in the press, or coverage of the discovery of Viking-Age relics," along with "little interest in making an issue of the archaeological site."²⁶² What had happened? One answer to this question could have been the fragmentary character of the finds, which did not allow archaeologists to pinpoint the exact location of a main hall. Maybe the finds were also too modest to constitute what people imagined Ingólfur's farmstead to look like. Additionally, at the time, the "Icelandic school" of saga research was still dominant; it had called for a refocusing of the scholarship towards source criticism and the fictional character of the sagas as pieces of art, and away from external factors, such as the root of a text in its contemporary social context or its oral, historical background. This may have inhibited a more open discussion of the finds in relationship to the sagas of Iceland.²⁶³ An additional blow preventing such a discussion may have been Sveinbjörn Rafnsson's radical critique of *Landnámabók*, which he first expressed in his doctoral thesis in 1974, and then expanded upon in several publications after that.²⁶⁴ The spirit of the time was therefore marked by scholarly doubt in the historicity of the Icelandic sagas and other early vernacular writings. For this reason, the finds may have been viewed with a certain skepticism. Such caution, or indeed, skepticism, can be heard in the words of Iceland's most popular archaeologist, Kristján Eldjárn, who served as the country's third president in 1974, when he gave a lecture entitled "He Settled South in Reykjavík" (*Hann byggði suður í Reykjavík*) on the occasion of the festivities dedicated to the millennium of Ingólfur's *landnám* that year. The event itself drew a quarter of Iceland's total population to Þingvellir, where a public session of the Icelandic Parliament, Alþingi, was held in the open, on the plains where it had convened before 1262.²⁶⁵ In his speech, President Kristján Eldjárn cautioned his audience not to expect too much from archaeology, which could not

²⁵⁸ Author Árni Óla, who had joined the presidential couple on their 1955 journey to Norway, in an article entitled "Verndið staðinn þar sem bær fyrsta landnámsmannsins stóð." *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins* 18 February 1968: 8-10.

²⁵⁹ Helgi Þorláksson and Orri Vésteinsson 78.

²⁶⁰ Gunnar Karlsson "Iceland's 1100 years" 175.

²⁶¹ Nordahl 180.

²⁶² Helgi Þorláksson and Orri Vésteinsson 78.

²⁶³ Clover and Lindow 241.

²⁶⁴ Cf. Sveinbjörn Rafnsson "Studier."

²⁶⁵ Guðmundur Hálfðanarson "Þingvellir" 7.

reveal facts about the identities of the inhabitants of the structures found in Reykjavík. It was not the purpose of archaeology, he said, to confirm or refute the content of “folk tales” (*þjóðsagnaefni*).²⁶⁶ Published in the same volume as Eldjárn’s speech is a survey by Þorkell Grímsson, in which he attempted to trace any efforts to locate Reykjavík’s oldest farmstead. In it, he also proposed that Arnarhóll could be the possible location.²⁶⁷ Unlike the Arnarhóll knoll, where Einar Jónsson had placed his statue of the founding father, Þorkell Grímsson suspected the location of the original Arnarhóll farther to the east; this was a location used as the construction site of Reykjavík’s harbor, making it nearly impossible for archaeologists to access.²⁶⁸

In addition to scholarly doubts and presidential admonitions regarding Iceland’s foundational myth, there was, of course, also general skepticism towards nationalist and patriotic undertones resulting from the social and economic changes of the 1960s and ‘70s that eventually reached Iceland. The best way to sum up a younger generation’s attitude towards all things relating to Ingólfur Arnarson is probably through the words of the singer Magnús Þór Jónsson, known as Megas, whose debut, self-titled, 1972 album caused a national controversy over its satirical, and at times downright “evil” lyrics, which resulted in National Radio banning his music. Several of his songs—some of which were previously published as poems—deal with well-known figures from Icelandic history and from the sagas. In *Um óþarflega fundvísi Ingólfs Arnarsonar*, Megas expresses skepticism about political celebrations and speeches in praise of a first settler, whom he wished had never made it to the island in the first place²⁶⁹:

Um óþarflega fundvísi Ingólfs Arnarsonar

Ingólfur hét hann sem endur fyrir löngu
Ísaland fann og nam og bjó sér þar ból
og stjórnámálamennirnir minnst hans í ræðum
og menn geta séð hvar hann stendur uppiá
Arnarhól

En hvað er það sem verndar viðkomu landans?
vitið þér hvað það er? mér er það hulið
því á landsmenn og konur herja eldar og ísar
en allra verst er þó bannsett næturkulið

Því segi ég skál fyrir Fróni og Fjölni og allt það
og firðum snjóllum sem hafa skrímt og hrokkið
við minnumst Ingólfs Arnarsonar í veislum
en óskum þess að skipið hans það hefði sokkið

On The Unfortunate Talent for Discovery of Ingólfur Arnarson

Ingólfur he was called, who a long time ago
found Iceland and settled and lived there on a
farm, and the politicians remember him in
speeches, and the people can see where he
stands up on Arnarhóll

But what is it that protects the country's
prosperity?
do you know what it is? It is hidden from me
because fire and ice destroy landsmen and -
women, but worst of all is of course the
damned nightly wind

Therefore I say cheers to Frón and Fjölnir and
all that
and the canny fjords have shrunk in retreat
we remember Ingólfur Arnarson in celebrations
but wish that his ship had sunk.

²⁶⁶ Kristján Eldjárn 32.

²⁶⁷ Þorkell Grímsson 60.

²⁶⁸ Þorkell Grímsson 60.

²⁶⁹ Magnús Þór Jónsson 63.

What had been uncovered during Nordahl and Schönbeck's excavation was soon sent back into obscurity: the trenches of the site were backfilled in 1975, and then turned into a parking lot. The results of the excavations were published eight years later, but only in English and Swedish, without attracting much attention in Iceland.²⁷⁰ No visible markers or signs were left on the spot at Aðalstræti and Suðurgata. All this, despite the fact that Nordahl had concluded in her report that the finds that they had uncovered belonged to one of the first *landnám*-farms in Iceland, which must have had additional buildings, still needing to be located:

The hall fragments described above mainly reveal the development of a part of the habitation on this farm ground, one of the first *landnám*-farms in Iceland. We know that the farm was much larger, because additional buildings, which belonged to or were situated close to the one examined, could be traced in all trenches and on other lots close to Suðurgata.²⁷¹

Even though the project had been conducted and financed in commemoration of the 1,100 year anniversary of the settlement of Iceland, which was celebrated in 1974, and had produced artifacts which could be understood to affirm the settlement accounts established by Iceland's literary tradition, the Icelandic people showed little interest in this place, let alone thought of it as a serious contender for the relocation of the Parliament building.

The Hall at Aðalstræti 14-16

When a new hotel was to be built in this area in 2001, professional archaeologists were hired once again to excavate the remains of the small longhouse that had been unearthed during the 1971-75 excavations. The idea was to document the finds, using the newest methods, and then remove them in order to create the necessary space for the hotel project.²⁷² However, the archaeologists carrying out this later excavation found more than they had expected. Between the structures that had been unearthed thirty years earlier, they discovered the remains of a nearly complete, large longhouse from the Viking Age, 85.5 square meters in size.²⁷³ The panel of archaeology experts which supervised the work reported back to the Reykjavík City Council that this find ought to be preserved and displayed as part of an exhibition on the history of settlement and Reykjavík's later urban development.²⁷⁴ The Council agreed, but also kept the original plan to permit the construction of a hotel on the site, which was to be done in combination with preserving the artifacts. The idea was to allow for the economic revitalization of this part of Aðalstræti, and simultaneously to display the conserved archaeological finds, following a

²⁷⁰ Cf. Nordahl.

²⁷¹ "De ovan beskrivna huslämningarna ger i huvuddrag utvecklingen av en del av bebyggelsen på denna gård, en av de första landnámsgårdarna på Island. Vi vet, att gården varit betydligt större, eftersom ytterligare hus, som varit hopbyggda med eller legat intill de undersökta, kunde spåras i alla schaktväggar och på andra tomter vid Suðurgata" (Nordahl 188).

²⁷² Helgi Þorláksson and Orri Vésteinsson 81.

²⁷³ Cf. Roberts "Fornleifarannsókn."

²⁷⁴ Helgi Þorláksson and Orri Vésteinsson 81.

somewhat altered design plan, in the hotel's basement.²⁷⁵ Once this plan became public, it aroused a great deal of negative attention in the media. Many Icelanders were outraged by the idea of exhibiting what could be Iceland's oldest farm in a basement, sandwiched between a garage and the hotel's entrance floor. A group called “Friends of Ingólfur's Farm” (*Hollvinir Ingólfsbæjar*) formed and drafted a petition to Reykjavík's mayor, Sólrún Gísladóttir, calling for a more “respectful setting” (*veglegan umbúnað*) for the “national treasure” (*þjóðargersemi*) that had been found.²⁷⁶ For the signers of this petition, there was no doubt that the home of one of the first settler families had been discovered, “more than likely . . . Ingólfur Arnarson and Hallveig Fróðadóttir” (*fátt líklegra en Ingólfur Arnarson og Hallveig Fróðadóttir*).²⁷⁷ A public debate ensued, where a majority of Icelanders disapproved of the City Council's intention to build the proposed hotel.²⁷⁸ However, the city stuck to its development plans, and decided that the finds should be conserved *in situ*, in the basement of the hotel – a very expensive project, since the conservation of turf structures indoors was a complete novelty.²⁷⁹

After the exhibition opened in 2006, which allowed the general public to walk around the foundations of the exhumed early-tenth-century house, the question of whether this indeed was the farm of the first settler, and with that, the origins of the Icelandic nation, returned in public interest and debate. The creators of the exhibition were careful to keep literary accounts about the *landnám* separate from the presented artifacts in the main room of the exhibition. Today, as it was then, visitors entering the museum find quotations from *Landnámabók* and *Íslendingabók* on display in the lobby area, which is divided by a wall from the hall or *skáli* and additional artifacts found during the excavation. While Ingólfur Arnarson is briefly mentioned in the quotations displayed in the lobby, the exhibition itself makes no claims as to the farm's proposed first occupants. As outlined by Hjörleifur Stefánsson and Þórunn Þorgrímsdóttir:

The exhibition should focus on the cultural relics and research on them, while the settlement myth would briefly be recounted before visitors entered the exhibition proper, and also in a computer-center accessible to visitors. The distinction between historical sources and the archaeological excavation was to be clearly drawn.²⁸⁰

The full name of the museum, *Reykjavík 871±2. Landnámssýningin. The Settlement Exhibition*, was to emphasize this “scientific approach” chosen by the developers of the exhibition.²⁸¹

While for many of the domestic visitors the hall represents Ingólfur's Farm (an assumption not openly contradicted by the exhibition itself, but refuted in its catalogue), the find, in fact, is an unlikely candidate for the first farm. As mentioned in Chapter One, the oldest known remains of Viking-Age activity were found in southwestern Iceland,

²⁷⁵ Helgi Þorláksson and Orri Vésteinsson 83.

²⁷⁶ “Mótmæla öllu umróti sem þrengi að Ingólfsbæ.” *Morgunblaðið*. 8 November 2001: 14.

²⁷⁷ “Mótmæla öllu umróti sem þrengi að Ingólfsbæ.” *Morgunblaðið*. 8 November 2001: 14.

²⁷⁸ “Á að byggja yfir landnámsbæinn í Aðalstræti?” *Fréttablaðið*, 12. November 2001: 2.

²⁷⁹ The creators of the exhibition had to find a way to dry and stabilize the turf, which was accomplished using tetraethyl silicate, cf. Helgi Þorláksson and Orri Vésteinsson 82-83, and Hjörleifur Stefánsson and Þórunn Sigríður Þorgrímsdóttir 134.

²⁸⁰ Hjörleifur Stefánsson and Þórunn Sigríður Þorgrímsdóttir 133.

²⁸¹ Hjörleifur Stefánsson and Þórunn Sigríður Þorgrímsdóttir 132.

along with a wall fragment in Reykjavík, which was discovered at the bottom of Grjótagata, and which is on display at the museum as well. As the exhibition catalogue clarifies, this wall fragment

... indicates that the farm site at the northwest corner of the lake dates back to very early times, and this may be evidence that it is by far the oldest habitation in the region. On the other hand, this site has been more intensely excavated than any other in Reykjavík, while scarcely any archaeological research has taken place on Viking-Age levels on other farm sites. Excavations at Nes and Viðey revealed only glimpses of Viking Age structures, but both places are likely to have been settled at an early stage. Another likely place is Arnarhóll hill, where only the most recent layers have been excavated. Other farm sites could therefore originate as early as Reykjavík, or earlier, but it is impossible to say at this stage.²⁸²

The hall that was found at Aðalstræti 14-16, which dates to the early tenth century, was situated on a light slope with marshy ground, which must have caused water to trickle down from the slope (and in wintertime, additional water from snow building up high on the hillside). It was, therefore, a location unsuitable for prolonged habitation.²⁸³ Most likely this building was a short-term solution meant to house either members of a family that was expanding, or alternatively, newly arrived settlers who needed shelter and who would later move on to claim their own land elsewhere.²⁸⁴ The main farmhouse structure in the area has still not been located. Excavations near the Parliament building in Reykjavík, which were carried out in 2008 and 2009, revealed additional features dating to the ninth century, among them tools, ovens and slag, a wooden pathway, and several other items that indicate that the area was used as an outdoor space for iron working.²⁸⁵ In total, the scope of the find surprised the excavators, but further fieldwork on the site is necessary in order to determine if the iron produced there was intended for local, still-undiscovered households or if it was used for trade; either case would suggest earlier and more widespread habitation of the area.

To sum up, the finds from Reykjavík indicate that settlers must have arrived and settled in the area before 871±2, but their homes have not yet been found. It can be speculated that the core of the first farm was located in the wider area between Kirkjustræti, Vonarstræti, Tjarnargata, and Suðurgata—and with that, in immediate proximity to Aðalstræti hall and the Parliament building—or under the churchyard west of Tjarnargata. Without actual finds, however, both possibilities are only educated guesses.²⁸⁶ As of July 2014, no other unequivocally acknowledged older finds have been made elsewhere in Iceland that have been proven to be situated under the *landnám* tephra—or

²⁸² Árni Einarsson and Orri Vésteinsson 94. Cf. “Er búið að finna bein Ingólfs Arnarsonar?”

²⁸³ Most farm houses in Iceland are built high up, usually on the edge of a slope or on hillocks where snow cannot build up around them. There is proof of other, early Viking age halls which were abandoned shortly after, probably because the inhabitants realized that the locations on the foot of slopes were unsuitable. This was the case, for example, of Hofstaðir in Mývatnssveit and Skallakot in Þjórsárdalur (Árni Einarsson and Orri Vésteinsson 97).

²⁸⁴ Árni Einarsson and Orri Vésteinsson 96-97.

²⁸⁵ Vala Björg Garðarsdóttir 43.

²⁸⁶ Orri Vésteinsson. Personal communication. January 2013.

ash layer.²⁸⁷

'These Are Our Pyramids!'

The archaeologists working on the Aðalstræti 14-16 site from 2001 onwards were surprised by the attention given to their work and the public response to the treatment of their discoveries, even after it had been clarified in the media that the hall could not have been the first farm or the location of the first settlement. The routine “treatment” for a find on the scope of the Aðalstræti hall would have been excavation, documentation, removal, and the covering over of the area.²⁸⁸ This process had been done in numerous other cases of excavated Viking-Age halls in Iceland, some of which were larger and better preserved than the hall at Aðalstræti. It came as a pleasant surprise to the experts working on the site that public interest, political will, and funding allowed for the preservation and display of the finds *in situ*. The connection to the first settler provided a good opportunity for the scholars involved in the project to inform and educate the public about the early history and colonization of the wider Reykjavík area. What the experts on the panel were unprepared for, or at least did not expect to such a degree, was the media debate surrounding the find. “Primarily symbolic, emotional, even religious” arguments were thrown into question about what to do with the discoveries.²⁸⁹ As a poll conducted by *Fréttablaðið* showed in autumn 2001, 67% of Icelanders were against the plan to erect the hotel above the finds. Instead, this group thought that the hall should be displayed in a museum.²⁹⁰ The comprised solution of having *both* a hotel and a museum came about as a reaction to the multitude of public statements and letters sent to newspapers and political representatives alike, this populace standing united in the assumption that the hall constituted a national treasure and embodied the starting point of the Icelandic nation.²⁹¹ As one reader put it in a letter to *Fréttablaðið*, “these are our pyramids.”²⁹² The same reader also took the opportunity to bash Iceland's younger generation of literary scholars and historians, who had emphasized the fictitious, non-historical character of many facts and chronologies pulled from Medieval texts, but were—in the eyes of the reader—not only proven wrong in their assessment but also traitors to their country:

I am speechless that the city of Reykjavík intends to build over the farmstead of the first settler and build a hotel over the archaeological site found on Aðalstræti. When it has finally been proven that the sagas of Icelanders told the truth. For centuries nobody doubted that the sagas of Icelanders were the truth. But young scholars had started belittling the sagas, and talking about them as if they were fiction and folklore. Then it transpired that of course it was true, and Ingólfur Arnarson lived on Aðalstræti, just as we were taught in school. And now these youngsters, whom education has made into postmodernists and almost traitors to their country, are trying to bury their mistakes in some hotel basement. This must not happen. These

²⁸⁷ Adolf Friðriksson. Personal communication. July 2014. Orri Vésteinsson and Thomas McGovern 207.

²⁸⁸ Helgi Þorláksson and Orri Vésteinsson 85.

²⁸⁹ Helgi Þorláksson and Orri Vésteinsson 85.

²⁹⁰ “Á að byggja yfir landnámsbæinn í Aðalstræti?” *Fréttablaðið*, 12. November 2001: 2.

²⁹¹ The few opposing views were mostly expressed in the tabloid *DV*, cf. Helgi Þorláksson and Orri Vésteinsson 82.

²⁹² “Þetta eru okkar píramídar!” (“Fornleifarnar lifi. Ari skrifar.” *Fréttablaðið*, 7 November 2001: 10)

are our pyramids.²⁹³

Not only did the finds represent proof of authenticity for the sagas and learned, vernacular texts to this particular reader, he is also not too shy to compare the hall at Aðalstræti to one of the seven wonders of the Ancient world. This letter, along with countless others following the same lead, indicate that the question over what to do with the hall evoked strong sentiments in certain members of the Icelandic population. These can not only be understood as partaking in a specifically patriotic, national discourse but also as expressions of nearly religious sentiment, following a functional or anthropological understanding of religion. In such an approach, “religion” is not meant to designate an individual’s quest for salvation, but as a moral or social framework uniting its adherents in a community of the faithful, as they follow practices distinguishing the sacred from the profane.²⁹⁴ Such a functional definition, going back to Émile Durkheim’s analysis of the elementary forms of religion, understands religion as a moral, or social force which provides members with “dogmas, symbols, altars and feasts” and iterative rites that create a bond and enthusiasm among its worshippers.²⁹⁵ That religion in such an understanding can refer to seemingly secular ideologies and regimes is argued by Durkheim using the example of the French Revolution where “things purely laical in character were transformed by public opinion into sacred things: these were the Fatherland, Liberty, Reason.”²⁹⁶ Seen from the vantage point of a functional understanding of religion, differences between ideologies such as nationalism and religion are therefore secondary, “a matter of successive symbolism” as at the center of both are faith and cult.²⁹⁷ The hall find at Aðalstræti became such symbol, a matter of faith, and some reactions in the media prompted archaeologist Orri Vésteinsson to suggest that the hall was turned into a shrine, a perceived kernel of Icelandic-ness, representing authentic proof for the cultural memory of the nation’s origin:

This was not the discourse of scholarship, museums or tourism, but of religion. Many people saw—and see—the hall site as an affirmation of shared values, a manifestation of Icelandic nationality. The hall is in this sense a religious object, a holy relic, evidence of something that everyone believes, but still likes to see confirmed by evidence. If the hall was a shrine, the obvious corollary was that a hotel would desecrate it. [It was] a shrine of national consciousness . . . [a] memorial to the origins of the Icelanders and the Icelandic nation.²⁹⁸

²⁹³ “Ég næ ekki upp í nefið á mér yfir því að Reyhavikurborg ætlar að láta byggja yfir bæ fyrsta landnámsmannsins og reisa hótél yfir fornleifarnar sem búið er að sanna að Íslendingasögurnar sögðu rétt frá. Öldum saman þurfti ekkert að segja þjóðinni það tvisvar að Íslendingasögurnar væru sannleikur. En ungu fræðimennirnir voru farnir að blása á fornritin og tala um þau eins og skáldsögur og þjóðsögur. Þá kemur í ljós að auðvitað var þetta sannleikur og Ingólfur Arnarson bjó í Aðalstræti eins og okkur var kennt í barnaskóla. en þá ætla þessir krakkar sem mentunin er búin að gera að póstmodernistum og hálfgerðum þjóðniðingum að reyna að grafa sín eigin mistök í einhverjum hótélkjallara. Það má ekki gerast. Þetta eru okkar píramídar” (“Fornleifarnar lifi. Ari skrifar.” *Fréttablaðið*, 7 November 2001: 10; translated in Helgi Þorláksson and Orri Vésteinsson 82).

²⁹⁴ Smith “Chosen People” 26.

²⁹⁵ Durkheim 214, Smith “Chosen People” 26-7.

²⁹⁶ Durkheim 214.

²⁹⁷ Smith “Chosen People” 28.

²⁹⁸ Helgi Þorláksson and Orri Vésteinsson 85.

Some of the public's reactions to the hall find suggest that it was understood to lend a sacred legitimation to the Icelandic nation, confirming the medieval texts that described its earliest settlers. The founding father and his farm provide thus what Anthony Smith refers to as a "long time sacred source" to Icelanders, allowing for an ethnic definition of their community as "a named community of common ancestry and descent, usually putative, and of shared memories."²⁹⁹ To cherish and defend the shared memory of the first settler, Ingólfur Arnarson, the chieftain son from Norway, therefore provides one base of what it means to be Icelandic.³⁰⁰ The disparaging comments about the influence of postmodernism and contemporary literary criticism reveal that what lies at the center of the debate is the question of authenticity; this is much the same as with the *Skírnir* debate covered in Chapter One of the present work. Where and when is the "true" beginning of the Icelandic nation? Is it an abstract location that can only be pinpointed in the cultural memory of Icelanders, or an actual place? Can the idea of an ancient "nation" replace or serve as a proxy for the actual location, and thus operate as the *lieu de memoir*, or is finding and locating the first farm a necessity? To Anthony Smith, the question of authenticity, which he discusses as a parallel to the idea of holiness in many belief systems, leads to the center of the "religious" or "sacred" character of nationalism:

The authentic is the irreplaceable and fundamental, that which we cannot do without or think away. It is this necessity that separates us from them, our nation from all others, and makes it and its culture unique and irreplaceable. In that sense, the nation becomes the source of collective meaning and hence 'sacred'.³⁰¹

The cultivation, and if necessary, the defense of what is perceived as "authentic" remains a pivotal task in conversations about Iceland, especially in times of transition, crisis, or outside pressure. This cultivation not only (re-)defines—or imagines—a community but also provides a sense of meaning and justification to its members: "The cultivation of authenticity becomes the inner-worldly salvation, rediscovering one's roots and cultivating one's true self are central to the salvation drama of nationalism."³⁰² As we have seen in examples as diverse as Árni Magnússon's denigrating comment about *nugae*, Sigurður málari's attempt to preserve Icelanders' cultural heritage by establishing the later National Museum, Guðmundur Finnbogason's speech from 1906, or the editorials from 2001, the defense and maintenance of this particular version of the shared memory of the past has proven productive during various times in Icelandic history. This (preventive) defense and tendency to authenticate is palpable, even in the earliest texts about the *landnám*, which again, explicitly reassured the audience that visible markers of the event were still present at the time that the author or compiler was discussing the account.

What the example of the first farm demonstrates is that the cultivation and authentication of the cultural memory of the settlement has remained a central task for this

²⁹⁹ Smith "Chosen People" 32.

³⁰⁰ For a wider view on the formation of national identity in Iceland, cf. Guðmundur Hálfðanarson's article in *Skírnir*: "Hvað gerir Íslendinga að þjóð? Nokkrar hugleiðingar um uppruna og eðli þjóðernis," *Skírnir* 170 (vor 1996): 7-31; and Part Two of Birgir Hermannsson's dissertation *Understanding Nationalism. Studies in Icelandic Nationalism 1800-2000* (Stockholm: Akademityrck, 2005).

³⁰¹ Smith "Chosen Peoples" 40.

³⁰² Smith "Chosen Peoples" 40.

small nation, from the time of the earliest learned writings to the present day. The preferred medium dedicated to this cultivation is the written form, as illustrated by the pamphlets, newspaper commentaries, and museum catalogues mentioned in this chapter. The memory of the settlement constitutes one of Iceland's defining characteristics, in need of periodic repetition, verification, and re-memorialization. It provides a source of particular pride, reinforcing the idea of chosen-ness to Icelanders as a people who are unique and independent, precisely because they can connect to their “true” history of coming into being. This history—or story—comprises the realms of historiography and spirituality alike, as well as providing Icelanders with a specific, sacred location of naissance. The following excerpt from an article by Magnús Jónsson, published in 1923 in the journal *Iðunn*, illustrates this fact:

Various nations have folk narratives concerning how their capitals came to be. This is not insignificant, and better still is if the gods and higher powers were involved. Other nations, young in years, have true stories concerning the same, but these cities are merely man-made. One nation, however, has a true story of how the gods directed their cherished son to the location of the capital city. This man was also the father of the nation, the first man, the origin of the nation.³⁰³

This idea of destiny, chosen-ness, and absolute authenticity of the Icelandic nation tied to the display of the place of original settlement reappeared in newspaper comments in 2001, such as the one below by a reader of *Morgunblaðið*:

Can destiny have bestowed on any nation in Europe, or even in the world, such a rare gift as has come to the Icelanders by the excavations on Aðalstræti? What nation can show its children and its visitors the place where the first family settled in the country, to found such a chieftain's manor that, when it rises from the soil after 1100 years, it may truly be called the nation's leading manor, the family seat of the whole nation. It is no small responsibility to be entrusted with such a treasure.³⁰⁴

The conceptions of both chosen-ness and uniqueness, along with the cultivation of versions of the past as preserved in its ancient literature, serve as core cultural legitimation for the Icelandic nation. Nationalism scholar Birgir Hermannsson speaks of “nationalist self-hermeneutics” in this context, suggesting that Icelanders' collective memories of the past

³⁰³ “Ýmsar þjóðir geyma þjóðsagnir um það, hvernig höfuðborgir þeirra hafi til orðið. Það þykir ekki ómerkilegt, og bezt er þó, ef guðir og æðri völd hafa verið þar að verki. Aðrar þjóðir, sem ungar eru að aldri, eiga sannar sögur af þessu sama, en þá eru þær borgir mannaverk eingöngu. En ein þjóð á sanna sögu af því, hvernig guðirnir bentu ástvíni sínum á höfuðborgastæðið. Þessi maður var einnig faðir þjóðarinnar, fyrsti maðurinn, vísirinn að þjóðinni” (Magnús Jónsson 120).

³⁰⁴ “Ætli forsjónin hafi fært nokkurri þjóð í Evrópu eða jafnvel öllum heiminum annað eins fágæti að gjöf og Íslendingum féll í skaut við fornleifauppgröft í Aðalstræti? Hvaða þjóð önnur getur bent niðjum sínum og gestum á staðinn þar sem fyrsta fjölskyldan settist að í landinu og reisti sér þvílíkt höfðingssetur að þegar það rís úr moldu að ellefu öldum liðnum má það með sanni heita höfuðból landsins, ættaróðal allrar þjóðarinnar. Því fylgir ekki lítill ábyrgð að fá slíkt dýrmæti til vörslu” (Einar Bragi “Höfuðból eða fjósbaðstofa.” *Morgunblaðið* 24 August 2001: 34; translated in Helgi Þorláksson and Orri Vésteinsson 82).

“awoke the nation to an awareness about independence,” which it could gain by utilizing and interpreting it in a national context.³⁰⁵ In this way, the collected cultural memories of Icelanders’ origin fed into the creation of a new “sacred creation myth of the Republic,” defining the identity of the modern Icelandic state through periodic recourses to its “authentic” myth of origin. As Birgir Hermannsson states, “Icelandic nationalism was inspired by history, as well as by using arguments and justifications sought in history.”³⁰⁶ Icelandic nationalism succeeded through its self-hermeneutics and its tendency to write its own history: “A vital part of Icelandic nationalism is therefore its auto-history.”³⁰⁷ The following chapter will now seek to explore the extent to which this characteristic of Icelandic nationalism can be discerned in Icelanders’ earliest writings, the vernacular literature from the twelfth century onwards. In what ways are texts from this period active in Icelanders’ quest to authenticate a specific cultural memory of the settlement?

³⁰⁵ Birgir Hermannsson 349-50.

³⁰⁶ Birgir Hermannsson 15.

³⁰⁷ Birgir Hermannsson 15. This idea leads back to Claude Lévi-Strauss's definition of political myth as a form of mythicized history (or based on such history), which is then repeatedly used by societies to internalize their history for the purpose of using it as a *mythomoteur*, or motor of development. Cf. Chapter One.

4. Memories of a Chosen People

This chapter explores the origins of the cultural memory figure of the *landnám* and of Icelanders' descent from Norwegian and Northern European settlers, symbolized and embodied by Ingólfr Arnarson. The following pages aim to illustrate that the origins of the Icelandic nation, and a specifically Icelandic identity, are not only to be found in the realms of language and ethnicity, nor understood as modern achievements gained through the rise of print communities or the establishment of an educated, urban middle class. Instead, certain aspects of such an identity are discovered in traces of mythical foundations that are present in Icelanders' earliest literary output in manuscripts written, copied, and circulated from the late-twelfth century onward. Here I explore the extent to which the texts preserving an account of Ingólfr Arnarson's land-taking reflect on and demonstrate consciousness of their own role in the preservation and creation of a specifically "Icelandic" memory. I will refrain from using an anachronistic term such as "national" here, since this would imply that many if not all Icelanders during the twelfth, thirteenth or fourteenth century understood themselves as a people sharing a common, cultural memory of their past, subscribed to the same myth(s) of common descent, spoke the same language, or were parties to one legal community or system of governance entirely detached from the rule of the Norwegian king.

While some Icelanders—at least as witnessed by the texts they compiled, some of which will be discussed here shortly—thought of themselves as being members of a uniquely Icelandic *þjóð*, or "people" (a term rendered as "nation" by some translators, and denoting "nation" in modern Icelandic), scholars such as Kirsten Hastrup have demonstrated that there is no evidence that there was a sufficient merging of both legal and cultural boundaries during the twelfth and thirteenth century to justify speaking of an Icelandic nation.³⁰⁸ Also, from the perspective of their Norwegian rulers, Icelanders remained a tributary island, as witnessed for instance in the second half of the thirteenth century by the author of the anonymous *Historia Norwegie*, a text I will return to later.

What I will suggest instead, based on the material I reviewed that preserves memories of Ingólfr Arnarson and his land-taking, is that Icelanders were an imagined community—a "nation" in the literary imaginary, based on the presence of a pre-national consciousness that existed and indeed was created in some of Icelanders' earliest preserved texts claiming historical veracity, which in retrospect were invested with the idea of an independent and free Icelandic commonwealth.³⁰⁹

These texts were produced by a small circle of literate and highly educated Icelanders, often clerics or individuals raised in the spiritual milieu of a few small centers of learning, such as the church-farms of Oddi and Haukadalr, or the two episcopal sees in Skálholt and Hólar, to name the four earliest examples.³¹⁰ In many cases, the stories that these writers and compilers preserved had their roots in oral storytelling and a general

³⁰⁸ Hastrup "Island" 93.

³⁰⁹ Hastrup "Island" 100. Cf. also Schier.

³¹⁰ Vésteinn Ólason 44-47. " . . . at the large church farms where they received their education young student rubbed shoulders with elderly men and women, and it was these older members of the household who educated them in matter such as genealogy. It is quite likely that the milieu of clerical education, whereby religious mixed with secular, young with old, and people of high birth with those of lower origin, played a significant part in the direction subsequently taken by Icelandic letters." (45)

stock of circulating tales popular among many Icelanders, regardless of sex or social position. Still, it was a small community of learned and literate members of influential families who were invested in either the commissioning, compiling or composing of narrative and entertaining literatures such as the sagas and *þættir* (short tales), or of *fræði* (learned works on for instance history or poetics).³¹¹

In contrast to early writing communities elsewhere, the writers of these early Icelandic texts were dedicated to the use of the vernacular, and to applying certain unifying stylistic features to the stories that they so diligently composed, recorded, or copied.³¹² In the course of doing so, Icelanders became known as “memory specialists,” a perceptual assessment given to them by themselves and those in Norway and Denmark. They were sought-after court poets, often commissioned to write or compose poetry or sagas; for instance, the Norwegian king Sverrir had the Icelandic Karl Jónsson from the Þingeyrar monastery compose his saga.³¹³

These Icelanders who were literate, and well versed in *fræði* and old lore became members of a new educated class, who were also invested in preserving and circulating a specific version of their community’s origin, a story of common descent from Norway. While this happened on a very small scale, the codification and distribution of the memories regarding Icelanders’ migration, settlement, and establishment of an early legal community, and with that the merging of legal and cultural boundaries, created an imagined community. This imagined community may not be comparable in scale to those of Benedict Anderson’s modern imagined communities, which he defines as reliant on the rise of print media and capitalism. What the small literate Icelandic community shares with Anderson’s groups, however, is the creation and circulation of memories shared and enjoyed by a community of fellow Icelanders using a new medium: in Iceland, this was the writing of vellum manuscripts in the vernacular. For this, Icelanders not only used a new medium, but also created a new narrative format, that of the long prose form of the saga, writing in their vernacular language instead of Latin.³¹⁴ Furthermore, as the text examples about to be presented show, many of the works of this new literature operate in a chronological and spatial continuum created relative to (or structured by) Ingólfr Arnarson’s *landnám*, and several other key moments of early Icelandic history, such as the bringing of the laws, foundation of the Alþingi, or the Christianization, putting events in sequence following a new, relative chronology. A final and not irrelevant parallel to Anderson’s imagined communities found in this early literature is a clear anti-monarchical element, as many of the heroes in the sagas, and individuals mentioned in *Landnámabók*, commonly flee the tyranny of the Norwegian ruler, Haraldr hárfagri, to join the new community of free independent farmers they find in Iceland.

One of Icelanders’ first preserved texts, the *First Grammatical Treatise* or so-

³¹¹ Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir “Cultural Memory” 384. For a discussion of the terms *saga* and *fræði* (arguing against the common conception that the two were thought to be in direct opposition) cf. Preben Meulengracht Sørensen “Saga” 107-8.

³¹² When using the term “saga” in the following, I refer unless otherwise specified to the *Íslendingasögur* or so-called family sagas, long prose narratives about the past, using traditional material often deriving from oral antecedents. For a discussion of Icelanders’ unique narrative style and key features of saga writing, both in the family sagas and other genres, cf. Carol Clover “Medieval” and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen “Saga.”

³¹³ ÍFXXX 3.

³¹⁴ Clunies Ross “Textual Territory” 12-3.

called *Fyrsta Málfræðaritgerðin*, a short treaty on Icelandic phonetics written before 1175, reflects on the role of the vernacular in creating an Icelandic identity, and the unifying aspect of the use of a specifically “Icelandic” language.³¹⁵ In his short treatise, the author expresses his aim to provide Icelanders with their own alphabet to account for the phonetic peculiarities of the language, which had just begun to be written down:

In most countries men chronicle in books the great events that have come to pass within their country, or whatever seems most memorable from abroad, or they write their laws, each nation in its own tongue. But as languages are all unlike, ever since they parted and branched off from one and the same language, it is now needful to use different letters in writing them, and not the same for all . . . but each nation writes its language with letters of its own . . . Yet Englishmen write English with Latin letters, as many as can be rightly pronounced in English, but when these no longer suffice, they add other letters, as many and of such a nature as they need, rejecting those that cannot be rightly pronounced in their language.

Now to follow their example, since we are of one tongue with them, even though one of our languages has been greatly changed or both of them somewhat, I have composed an alphabet for us Icelanders as well, in order that it might be made easier to write and read, as is now customary in this country as well, the laws, the genealogies, the sacred writings, and also that historical lore which Ari Thorgilsson has recorded in his books with such understanding wit. I have used all the Latin letters that seemed to fit our language well and could retain their proper sound, as well as some other letters that seemed needful to me, while those were put aside that did not suit the sounds of our language.³¹⁶

The writer, often termed the first grammarian, distinguishes between *land* and *þjóð* in his text, and while it is not entirely clear from the passage if *land* is understood to comprise geographical units alone or also include legal realms, *þjóð* on the other hand clearly refers to and creates a language- (and implicitly, ethnically-) based unit. The fact that the author distinguishes these two functional alternatives in his vocabulary may not indicate an index of an existing ethnic identity yet, but certainly open the potential to establish such an identity through this new awareness.³¹⁷ The first grammarian furthermore shows a keen awareness of the first works produced by Icelanders’ small literary circle, referring to the

³¹⁵ Hreinn Benediktsson 32.

³¹⁶ Haugen 12-3 “Í flestum löndum setja menn á bœkr annat tveggja þann fróðleik, er þar innanlands hefir gǫrzk, eða þann annan, er minnisamligstr þykkir, þó at annars staðar hafi h]eldr gǫrzk, eða lǫg sín setja menn á bœkr, hver þjóð á sína tungu. En af því at tungurnar eru [ó]líkar hver annarri, þær þegar er ór einni ok inni sömu tungu gafa gengizk eða greinzk, þá þarf ólíka stafi í at hafa, en eigi ina sömu alla í qllum . . . heldr rítr sínum stǫfum hver þjóð sína tungu. . . . En þó ríta enskir menn enskuna látínustǫfum, qllum þeim er rétræðir verða í enskunni, en þar er þeir vinnask eigi til, þá hafa þeir við aðra stafi, svá marga ok þesskonar sem þarf, en hina taka þeir ór, er eigi eru rétræðir í máli þeira. Nú eptir þeira dæmum, alls vér erum einnar tungu, þó at gǫrzk hafi mjök qnnur tveggja eða nokkut báðar, til þess at hœgra verði at ríta ok lesa, sem nú tíðisk ok á þessu landi, bæði lǫg ok áttvísi eða þýðingar helgar, eða svá þau in spakligu fræði, er Ari þórgilsson hefir á bœkr sett af skynsamligu viti, þá hefi ek ok ritit oss íslendingum stafróf, bæði látínustǫfum qllum þeim er mér þótti gegna til várs máls vel, svá at rétt ræðir mætti verða, ok þeim qðrum, er mér þótti í þurfa at vera, en ór váru teknir þeir, er eigi gegna atkvæðum várrar tungu.” (Haugen 12-3)

³¹⁷ Hastrup “Island” 78.

pioneering works of Ari fǫði, religious texts and laws. The *First Grammatical Treatise* is modeled on continental traditions and consciously self-identifies “us Icelanders” as a group different from “other peoples,” who, like other peoples elsewhere, need an alphabet reflecting their own linguistic peculiarities. In doing so, the first grammarian creates the new category “Icelandic,” despite the at-that-time still persisting linguistic continuity between the Nordic languages, commonly referred to as *dönsk tunga*, or Danish tongue, for instance in Icelanders legal collection of the *Grágás*. The *First Grammatical Treatise* demonstrates an early awareness of the use of the vernacular among a community the text itself names and categorizes as Icelanders, a perceived community of literate Icelanders, who were thus from the start aware of who the others were, what people “proper” did, and, most importantly, how they wrote.

Contours of a Founding Father

What then is known about Ingólfr Arnarson in medieval texts from Iceland and elsewhere? Is it possible to trace back how and when the cultural memory of the *landnám*, and Ingólfr’s arrival on the island was created? And did he really exist, or was he invented? The position held here is that we do not know and indeed cannot know. And maybe we do not even need to know. What a thorough study of the material preserving memories of Ingólfr’s *landnám* can reveal is medieval Icelanders’ approach to their history, their beginnings (and, presumably, their ethnogenesis), pointing to mechanisms and phenomena paralleling those known from other medieval and early medieval *origines gentium*. Patrick Geary has studied the medieval origins of later European nation states, analyzing several myths of origin known from the migration period and early Middle Ages. He argues against static notions of history and the attempts of contemporary Europeans who trace back national identities to the Franks, Celts, Gauls or the Huns. Instead, Geary sees the history of the European peoples in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages as one of constant change and radical discontinuity: “The history of European peoples in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages is not the story of a primordial moment but of a continuous process. It is the story of political appropriation and manipulation of inherited names and representations of pasts to create a present and a future.”³¹⁸ In line with Geary’s findings, the material about to be presented here about Iceland’s primordial moment reveals that Icelanders wrote about their earliest history and the beginnings of their community as they would have wished it to be, shaped by the expectations of a small circle of learned and literate members of Iceland’s ruling families, and brought in line with learned traditions known from other cultures. This does not mean that Icelanders necessarily “invented” traditions of their past, or tried to manipulate facts about their past intentionally. Rather, it demonstrates that the cultural memory of the *landnám* followed the same mechanisms that are observable for traditions of origins elsewhere: what is remembered in written form are selected moments of the past, condensed into figures of symbolic kind—or memory figures to return to Jan Assmann’s terminology—to which memory then attaches itself.³¹⁹

As Ingólfr is introduced in chapter 7 of *Geirmundar þáttir heljarskinns* in the

³¹⁸ Geary 156-7.

³¹⁹ J. Assmann “Cultural Memory” 37-8.

Sturlunga saga compilation, “Ingólfr Arnarson was the first settler to take up land in Iceland from whom men could trace their lineage; Ingólfr was the father of Þorsteinn, the father of Þorkel máni the Lawspeaker.”³²⁰ The *Sturlunga saga* compilation is a collection of sagas covering the history of Iceland from the early twelfth century until the second half of the thirteenth century, which is when Icelanders, according to most historians, officially accepted the rule of the Norwegian king after years of internal conflict between several leading families.³²¹ From all we know today, the statement above might be true: if Ingólfr Arnarson indeed existed, he was quite likely the first Icelandic settler from whom contemporaries of the late-thirteenth century compiler of the *Sturlunga saga* might be able to trace their lineages. While there must have been other settlers who had come before or around the same time as Ingólfr, whose names were forgotten, he is the person highlighted in the preserved texts that cover the Icelandic *landnám*, not least because his descendants were said to have held important positions in the newly established Icelandic community. As one example, *Geirmundar þáttur heljarskinns* mentions his grandson, Þorkell máni, who became a law-speaker at the newly founded Alþingi.

One of the individuals suggested to be the author of *Geirmundar þáttur heljarskinns*, as he also contributed *Íslendinga saga* to the *Sturlunga saga* compilation, is Sturla Þórðarson (1214-84), nephew of Snorri Sturluson, a law-speaker himself, and author of the *Sturlubók* redaction of *Landnámabók*, the major textual source covering the *landnám*.³²² *Sturlubók* is the first preserved version of *Landnámabók* to interpolate a longer narrative section about Ingólfr Arnarson and Ingólfr’s travelling companion, Hjörleifr, elaborating on how and why the two left their native Norway and found their respective places of settlement in Iceland – a tale “that bears all the hallmarks of the storyteller’s art,” as Heather O’Donoghue puts it in her introduction to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature.³²³

In the story, Ingólfr and Hjörleifr are presented as foster brothers³²⁴ and second cousins with the same great grandfather. They team up with the sons of Jarl Atli, who are somewhat formulaically named Hásteinn, Hersteinn and Hólmsteinn, and go on a Viking raid. During a feast the following winter, Hólmsteinn swears an oath to marry either Ingólfr’s sister, Helga, or no woman at all. His vow is not too well received by the people present, and causes Hjörleifr to turn red in the face and everyone present to part on cool terms with Atli’s sons once the feast is over. When the foster brothers go on another Viking expedition the following spring, they meet Atli’s sons out on the open sea at Hísargafl and are attacked by them, yet manage to kill Hólmsteinn before they get away

³²⁰ “Ingólfr Arnarson hann staðfestisk fyrstr á Íslandi landnáms-manna, svá at menn kunni ættir sínar til at telja. Ingólfr var faðir Þorsteins, föður Þorkels mána lögsögu-mannz . . . “ (*Sturlunga saga* 5)

³²¹ The official date of this event has recently come under scrutiny. Patricia Pires Boulhosa has stipulated that the so called Old Covenant or *gamli sáttmáli*, before thought to have formalized Icelanders’ subjugation to Norway in 1262, was in fact written in the fifteenth century, with the intent to create an explanation why Icelanders were no longer independent from Norway. Cf. Boulhosa, 146 and 151-3.

³²² Nordal et al. 324.

³²³ O’Donoghue 18.

³²⁴ The term *fóstbróðir* can refer both to a relationship between blood- or oath-brothers, or actual foster-brothers, who acquired this connection by having been raised together. This is commonly done in the sagas, and there is also circumstantial evidence in one saga, *Gísla saga* that shows how men already related to each other undertake an additional ceremony to become blood-brothers. The result of such a fictive kinship included the duty to avenge the other, implying that the “obligations of kinship, friendship, and affinity needed occasionally to be supplemented by obligations explicitly undertaken with great formality.” (Miller 173-4).

with the help of a relative. Hersteinn makes a revenge attack next winter, during which he is killed. The foster brothers offer compensation to Jarl Atli and his one remaining son, Hásteinn, and the settlement reached demanded the total possessions of the two. Ingólfr and Hjørleifr then make ready a ship and go out in search of “the land Raven-Flóki had discovered, by that time called Iceland” with the intent to migrate there.³²⁵ After spending the winter on the island and agreeing that the south seemed a better place to settle than the country’s north, they return to Norway. Hjørleifr goes on a Viking expedition to Ireland where he acquires ten slaves and much loot (such as a gleaming sword which he fought away from a person in an underground chamber, presumably a grave-mound), while Ingólfr stays in Norway and puts all his money into preparing his relocation. At this point, the narrator also informs the audience that Hjørleifr and Ingólfr’s sister, Helga, had married. Finally, that winter, Ingólfr holds a sacrifice, and asks the gods for advice and good fortune, and “the oracle told Ingólfr to go to Iceland.”³²⁶ The two foster brothers each prepare a ship, Ingólfr with their common possessions and Hjørleifr with his loot and slaves, and they sail for Iceland and settle there in the year 874.

Both *Sturlubók* and *Sturlunga saga* were compiled during a time of active literary production in Iceland, a period during which most of the sagas of Icelanders were put into written form, and thus a time marked by the consolidation of memories and storytelling traditions of all things, both past and present. At the same time however, the thirteenth century was a tumultuous time in Icelandic history, marked by large family feuds, political instability and at times civil war-like conditions.³²⁷ Some of the descriptions found in the sagas can therefore be read as expressions of nostalgia, of a longing towards the supposedly better times of the settlement period. Both Vésteinn Ólason and Thomas Fechner-Smarsly have suggested reading the sagas as a “crisis literature.”³²⁸

It is interesting to note in this context how a compilation primarily focused on conflicts and contemporary history, and with that, immediate, communicative memory, as the *Sturlunga saga* was, incorporates the memory of Ingólfr Arnarson in a very pragmatic way, shown as the first inhabitant of the island to whom ancestry could be traced. In contrast, *Sturlubók* operates on the other side of the continuum, as a text invested in the cultural memory of Iceland’s foundation several centuries before, mythicizing the story of Ingólfr and Hjørleifr as a tale of two foster brothers who, in leaving behind the troubles and restrictions of their home community, set out to settle and cultivate a free and uninhabited land. Both texts, which stem from the same intellectual milieu, most likely even from members of the same family (perhaps even the same author), thus operate in different modes when relating present and past.³²⁹ While the *Sturlubók* redaction of *Landnámabók* is dedicated to the geographical description of the island and to chronicling past events of settlement related to the cultivation of a new space and with that the promise of a new and better life, *Sturlunga saga* covers the tumultuous last years of the Icelandic commonwealth. Accordingly, this latter work has no interest in glorifying Ingólfr; instead, it offers a sober nod and a point of reference in the direction of the founding father of Iceland.

³²⁵ “. . . ok fóru at leita lands þess, er Hrafna-Flóki hafði fundit ok þá var Ísland kallat.” (ÍF I.1 41)

³²⁶ “Fréttin vísaði Ingólfi til Íslands.” (ÍF I.1 42).

³²⁷ Karlsson “Iceland’s 1100 years” 79-86.

³²⁸ Vésteinn Ólason “Dialogues” 22; cf. also Fechner-Smarsley.

³²⁹ Simek and Pálsson 368-9.

Still, the author or compiler of *Geirmundar þáttir heljarskinns* thought it necessary to refer to Ingólfr explicitly as, “the first settler to take up land in Iceland from whom men could trace their lineage.” This is in spite of the fact that the hero of the *Þáttir*, Geirmundr heljarskin, was an early and prominent settler of Iceland himself, the son of a Norwegian jarl praised in *Hauksbók* as “the most noble or excellent . . . of all landnáms-men in Iceland,” owing his influence and wealth most likely to his trading activities, which included the import of slaves.³³⁰

Nonetheless, referring to the first settler and with that, the memory figure of the *landnám* and a specific version of Iceland’s settlement is a frequent occurrence in several of the sagas of Icelanders dedicated to a description of the country’s earliest years. However, not all of the large, preserved, and popular texts dealing with the fates of specific families or geographical areas during the *saga age*—the time period stretching from the first settlement until the establishment of the church in Iceland—specifically mention a “first settler.” This is especially true of those sagas found in the northern and eastern parts of the country, where the focus usually lies on the arrival of the main protagonists of the story, for instance *Hrafnkels saga*. Elsewhere, especially in Iceland’s south and west, a reference to Ingólfr is often used to contextualize or anchor the narrative in what is presented as a memory of historical truth—a specific version of Iceland’s settlement, purposefully recalled and referred to in order to both demonstrate and confirm that individuals or areas connected to the first settler were part of the literary memory of Icelanders’ imagined community.

Ingólfr in Medieval Icelandic Texts

Ingólfr Arnarson is mentioned in several of the sagas of Icelanders, among them *Egils saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Flóamanna saga*, *Grœnlendinga saga*, *Kjalnesinga saga*, and *Geirmundar þáttir heljarskinns* and *Íslendinga saga* in the *Sturlunga saga* compilation. Of these texts, only *Flóamanna saga*, set in the south of Iceland and following the later descendants of Hallsteinn Atlason, dedicates a significant section to the first two settlers, narrating the events leading to the killing of Hallsteinn’s two brothers and the reason why Ingólfr and Hjörleifr decided to leave Iceland.³³¹ The text takes the time to explicitly characterize Ingólfr, Hjörleifr and Ingólfr’s sister Helga, and dedicates greater detail to the conflict with the Atlasons than *Sturlubók*, which the author of the saga was familiar with as he directly refers to it in the text.³³²

Kjalnesinga saga mentions that Ingólfr had a daughter, Þórný, who is married to Helgi bjóla Ketilsson, a pagan settler who came to Iceland from the Hebrides and, according to *Landnámabók*, “spent his first winter with Ingólfr and took possession of all of Kjalarnes at his counsel.”³³³ Their son is Þorgrímr goði, who later operates a large *hof* where he holds sacrifices.

³³⁰ “goðgastr . . . allra landnámsmanna á Íslandi” (ÍF I.1 155 (H87)). On Geirmundr’s trading network cf. Bergsveinn Birgisson (I will return to Birgisson’s research on Geirmundr later in this chapter).

³³¹ ÍF XIII 233-7.

³³² ÍF XIII 237.

³³³ ÍF XIV 3. “. . . var með Ingólfi enn fyrsta vetr ok nam með hans ráði Kjalarnes allt” (ÍF I.1 50 and 51). This is the only text that claims Helgi was married to Ingólfr’s daughter. *Landnámabók* (S 399 and H 356) claims he was Christian and mentions two additional sons not accounted for in *Kjalnesinga saga*.

In *Grænlandinga saga*, Herjólfur, a male relative of Ingólfr, is mentioned, who likewise received land from the first settler's land-taking, in this case the area between Vágr and Reykjanes.³³⁴ While a reference to Ingólfr may thus explain a settler's acquisition of land, or highlight the descent of the people from for instance the Kjalarnes area, most other sagas use Ingólfr's land-taking to contextualize events in a relative chronology. *Eyrbyggja saga* for instance dates Þórólfr Mostrarskegg's conflict with Haraldr hárfagri, and his departure from Norway relative to Ingólfr: "This was ten winters after Ingólfr Arnarson had begun to settle in Iceland, and his journey had become very famous, because those people returning from Iceland said that there was good quality soil."³³⁵ In *Egils saga*, Kveldúlfur and Skalla-Grímr are described as friends and relatives of Ingólfr, who seek to find land to settle in the western part of the country after their arrival on the island, "because they had found out that Ingólfr had taken residence there."³³⁶

Aside from the passages mentioned above, which are predominantly set in southwestern Iceland, Ingólfr is also featured in the fragment of a *kvæði*, used by Ólafur hvítaskáld Þórðarson, in his *Málskrúðsfræði* (the second part of the *Third Grammatical Treatise*) as an example for prothesis, the addition of a sound or syllable at the beginning of a word:

Út réð Ingólfr leita
ógnreifr með Hjörleifi.³³⁷

(Ingólfr the battle-cheerful
headed out with Hjörleifr.)

This is the only preserved passage about the two foster brothers that is in poetic form. Ólafur hvítaskáld uses the two lines to demonstrate the phenomenon of metaplasm, a change in the spelling of a word, and does not further contextualize or elaborate on their origin. It cannot be ruled out therefore that he himself composed the two lines to have an (albeit not very good) example of a metaplasm. As Sturla Þórðarson's brother Ólafur must have been familiar with, even if not involved in, his brother's work on *Sturlubók*, it is therefore difficult to assume that the short verse could attest to an older poetic tradition about the two foster brothers.

Finally, Ingólfr is mentioned in several late-medieval documents from Iceland. For instance he is listed in *Annales regii*, *Skálhólts annaler*, *Gottskalks Annáll*, and *Oddaverja Annáll*, or as a famous forefather to later priests and notables in *Nafnaskrá íslenzkra presta* and *Máldagi um osttoll til Viðeyjar*.³³⁸ As in the examples of the sagas, he is usually referred to as Ingólfr Arnarson, though at times also without the patronymic as Ingólfr landnámsmaðr (in *Nafnaskrá íslenzkra presta* and *Máldagi um osttoll til Viðeyjar*), or

³³⁴ ÍF IV 244. "Herjólfur var Bárðarson Herjólfssonar. Hann var frændi Ingólfs landnámamanns. Þeim Herjólfur gaf Ingólfr land á milli Vágs og Reykjaness."

³³⁵ "Það var tíu vetrum síðar en Ingólfr Arnarson hafði farið að byggja Ísland, ok var sú ferð allfræg orðin, því að þeir menn, er kómu af Íslandi, sögðu þar góða landakosti." (ÍF IV 7). (*Egils saga* preserves an almost identical passage: "Fám vetrum áðr höfðu þeir Ingólfr ok Hjörleifr farit at byggja Ísland, ok var mǫnnum þá alltíðrætt um þá ferð; sögðu men þar vera allgóða landkosti." (ÍF II 58).

³³⁶ "Því at þeir höfðu þat spurt, at Ingólfr hafði sér þar bústað tekit." (ÍF II 71).

³³⁷ Krömmelbein 163.

³³⁸ *Skálhólts Annaler* 174, *Gottskalks Annáll* 312, *Oddaverja Annáll* 458-9; *Nafnaskrá íslenzkra presta* 187 and *Máldagi um osttoll til Viðeyjar* 495.

simply “Ingólfr” (in *Skálhólts annaler* and *Gottskalks Annáll*), where his arrival on the island is dated in accordance with the chronology of his settlement laid out in either *Íslendingabók* or *Landnámabók* as 870 or 874.

Several of the sagas, most of them set in southern or western Iceland, thus mention that Iceland was first settled by a man named Ingólfr (in *Flóamanna saga* said to have been in the company of his foster brother, Hjörleifr). Such references to the first settler serve as tools to streamline Icelanders’ earliest history, as they contextualize both the arrival and the later fates of their protagonists within the spatial and chronological continuum created by the *landnám*. Many of these texts have been shown to be interdependent (for instance, *Kjalnesinga saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga*,³³⁹ *Sturlubók*, *Egils saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga* or *Sturlubók* and *Flóamanna saga*).³⁴⁰ This dominant historical memory continues into later chronological works, such as annals and church registers, and appears in a short verse used by a thirteenth century skald in his treatise on poetics.

While this fact can easily be explained with the smallness and interconnectedness of the Icelanders’ literary community, it is nonetheless startling that no other preserved text in Old Icelandic provides a deviating account of the country’s earliest history, or mentions a different first settler. Admittedly, several sagas focus on other, early settlers who arrived in areas far from the southern part of Iceland, such as *Hrafnkels saga*, which is focused on events in the eastern part of the country, or *Gísla saga* which is set in the north. Still, as Adolf Friðriksson and Orri Vésteinsson emphasize in an article dedicated to the historiography of the settlement, of the altogether 24 sagas and *þættir* that include details about the settlement period, only *Svarfdæla saga* contains information that is significantly different from *Landnámabók*.³⁴¹ This saga, which is preserved only in fragments, discusses the *landnám* of a Norwegian Viking, Þorsteinn, who settles in Svarfaðardalur Valley in northern Iceland, and provides genealogical information that deviates from *Landnámabók*.³⁴² All other preserved sagas comply with information given by *Landnámabók*, thus indicating that most saga writers did use a redaction of this text as a source, as indicated by the *Flóamanna saga* quotation above, or were familiar with the same oral traditions and memories that underlay its compilation. With the possible exception of *Svarfdæla saga*, the sagas do not contain any evidence about the *landnám* that can be considered independent. Instead, pre-dating most if not all of the sagas in the written form we have today, there must have been a concentrated effort to collect and record all the information of the first settlers in Iceland, creating presumably one or several lists of settlers, and maybe the earliest version of *Landnámabók*.³⁴³ What is interesting to note here, is that archaeologists have to this date not discovered any finds that could confirm any of the dwellings of the settlers mentioned in *Landnámabók*. This is in spite of the fact that several attempts to locate the farms of prominent saga heroes have been undertaken, some of which are ongoing.³⁴⁴ Before further discussing this problem, and in order to better understand how medieval Icelandic writers may have understood their earliest history and with it the cultural memory of the *landnám*, the literary origins of

³³⁹ Simek and Pálsson 227.

³⁴⁰ ÍF I.1 lxxiii.

³⁴¹ Adolf Friðriksson and Orri Vésteinsson 144.

³⁴² ÍF IX 151-2. About the difference from *Landnámabók*, see ÍF IX lxxv-lxxvi, ÍF I.2 252n4 (S219), and Jón Jóhannesson “Gerðir” 110.

³⁴³ Adolf Friðriksson and Orri Vésteinsson 144.

³⁴⁴ Adolf Friðriksson. Personal communication 2 July 2014.

Ingólfr Arnarson as the founding father of Iceland should be explored. Here, I will first look at *Íslendingabók* as the earliest preserved literary attestation for this figure, and then explore the complicated transmission history of *Landnámabók* (though Ari fróði might have been involved in writing or compiling the first version of *Landnámabók* as well).³⁴⁵ Focusing on *Íslendingabók* first and then covering *Landnámabók*, I will discuss what specific strategies are employed in these texts to either create or further promote the memory figure of the *landnám*, as represented by Ingólfr Arnarson. What is it that makes this first settler such a productive, and dominating memory figure of Icelanders' beginnings? And why are there no differing versions of Icelanders' past preserved? Finally, are there any contemporary non-Icelandic texts that could illuminate these questions?

Íslendingabók: Ingólfr *Who?*

Ari fróði's *Íslendingabók*, a short survey of the settlement written circa 1122-1133 and preserved in two early modern copies is Iceland's earliest surviving vernacular work that is dedicated to the country's history.³⁴⁶ It is also one of the first written sources to use the term "Icelander."³⁴⁷ The text chronicles the settlement, emerging laws, establishment of administrative and political structures, and Christianization of the country. Additionally it contains a list of lawspeakers and bishops at its end. In the prologue of this work, Ari remarks that he had written a longer text about Icelanders earlier, possibly a different version of *Íslendingabók*, which had included more extensive genealogies and information on the lives of the Norwegian kings. He states that he wrote the revised version as a commission from the Icelandic bishops Þorlákr and Ketill, who had given him substantial comments on his previous literary work. He also states that Sæmundr Sigfússon fróði, an author himself of a non-extant Latin history of the Norwegian kings, had also provided him comments on his *Íslendingabók*.³⁴⁸ This is an important mention, as Sæmundr Sigfússon fróði was the founder of Oddi, one of Iceland's earliest and most important centers of learning, situated near the southern coast. Seeing that Ari refers to these three persons as authorities who implicitly legitimize his account allows us to characterize *Íslendingabók* as the first preserved written text on Iceland's past that is still closely connected to oral traditions, yet at the same time, a church-approved and official version of the country's history.³⁴⁹ It is thus the first text to preserve a memory of Icelanders' founding father, Ingólfr, and does so in accordance with the expectations of an intellectual milieu based in and around the major centers of learning in Iceland of the time, Skálholt, Hólar and Oddi.³⁵⁰

The structure of *Íslendingabók*, which utilizes a prologue and captioned chapters as well as the application of certain stylistic features such as the use of Latinisms and Latin words, suggests that Ari was familiar with continental historical and hagiographical

³⁴⁵ ÍF I.1 cvii-cxv, and Sveinbjörn Rafnsson "Studier" 88-92.

³⁴⁶ ÍF I.1 xvii and Grønlie xiii-xiv.

³⁴⁷ Grønlie ix.

³⁴⁸ ÍF I.1 3.

³⁴⁹ Grønlie ix.

³⁵⁰ As discussed in chapter one, the preserved version of Ari fróði's text may have been influenced by an early version of *Landnámabók*, which in itself may have its earliest roots in some of Ari's lost writings.

writing.³⁵¹ The frequent characterization of his informants as *spakr* or *fróðr* also reminds of the continental custom of referring to sources as *sapiens* or *doctus*.³⁵² Several scholars have therefore discussed the extent to which Ari's work might have been influenced by continental historical and hagiographical writing.³⁵³ Aside from the works that were circulating at the time in Iceland and that Ari might have had access to, first while being educated at Haukadálr, a church farm in western Iceland where one of Ari's relatives ran a small school, and later while in the service of bishop Gizurr of Skálholt, it has also been suggested that he may have traveled abroad and visited Lund, which was the seat of the archbishop for Scandinavia beginning in the year 1103.³⁵⁴ With its cathedral school, Lund was one of the most important centers of learning in Northern Europe in that era. In any event, assuming that *Íslendingabók* is indeed the first vernacular history of the Icelandic community, it is vital to explicate how the text uses and establishes Ingólfr Arnarson as Icelanders' founding father.

Chapter 1 of *Íslendingabók*, entitled "Frá Íslands byggð" (On the Settlement of Iceland), makes two different claims as to the supposed first settler(s).³⁵⁵ This chapter indicates a point in time when settlement commenced, "and that was 870 years after the birth of Christ," and then sets this event in relation to the martyrdom of a Saint, St. Edmund, by the Vikings in that year.³⁵⁶ It is curious that the passing of an English king and a later saint, killed by the son of Norse hero Ragnarr loðbrók, is used for the relative dating of this event.³⁵⁷ After establishing the timeframe, the text then refers to "a Norwegian called Ingólfr," and puts his journey to Iceland into a broader perspective:

It is said with accuracy that a Norwegian called Ingólfr traveled from there [Norway] to Iceland for the first time when Haraldr the Fine-Haired was sixteen years old, and a second time a few years later; he settled in the south in Reykjavík. The place to the east of Minþakseyrr where he first came ashore is called Ingólfshöfði, and the place to the west of Ölfossá, which he later took possession of, is called Ingólfsfell.³⁵⁸

³⁵¹ Hagnell, 1938 73. The foreign works most often proposed as possible models for *Íslendingabók* are Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, and Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* as well as his metrical *Life of St. Cuthbert*, though not enough evidence is found to prove these connections. Ólafía Einarsdóttir 22-29 and Mundal 119.

³⁵² Grønlie xix. There has been a long standing debate about the historicity of this work in scholarship, as already mentioned in chapter 1. John Lindow pointed to mythic discourses in this text, and Pernille Hermann examined *Íslendingabók* as an integral work, as neither history or myth but dealing with historical subject matter and mythological elements alike. Cf. Lindow "Íslendingabók and myth" and Hermann "Íslendingabók and history"

³⁵³ Grønlie xix-xx.

³⁵⁴ Grønlie x-xi and xx.

³⁵⁵ ÍF I.1 4.

³⁵⁶ Grønlie 16fn11, ÍF I.1 xxix-xlii.

³⁵⁷ As a possible explanation, Jan deVries argues that this event might have been seen as significant during the time Ari wrote his text, as Edmund was sanctified in 1122 in Oxford (de Vries 349), while Jakob Benediktsson (ÍF I.1 xxix-xxxv) points to the fact that several Icelanders were descended from King Edmund, among them some of Ari's informants. Ólafía Einarsdóttir argues that this alleged ancestry of Ari and other Icelanders to Ragnarr loðbrók might be the missing link to understand this reference (62-8).

³⁵⁸ Grønlie 4. "Ingólfr hét maðr norræn, es sannliga es sagt at fœri fyrst þaðan til Íslands, þá es Haraldr enn hárfagri vas sextán vetra gamall, en í annat sinn fám vetrum síðarr; hann byggði suðr í Reykjavík. Þar es Ingólfshöfði kallaðr fyr austan Minþakseyri sem hann kom fyrst á land, en þar Ingólfsfell fyr vestan

Ari dates Ingólfr's first journey in relation to the reign of King Haraldr the Fine-Haired. In chapter 3, he states that Haraldr died in either 931 or 932, and mentions that he was king for seventy years, living into his eighties. According to this, Ari must have assumed that Haraldr was born at the latest around 851 or 852, and thus dates Ingólfr's first journey to Iceland no later than 867 or 868.³⁵⁹

Comparing this short section about the Icelandic foundational myth regarding Ingólfr to other early sources, such as the *Sturlubók* redaction of *Landnámabók*, what first stands out in *Íslendingabók* is the fact that instead of a settler pair of foster brothers, only Ingólfr is mentioned. His exact origin, other than Norway, is not specified, and readers are not informed about his genealogy or his patronymic. This sits in contrast to other settlers mentioned by Ari, for example, in his introduction of "Hrollaugr, son of Rognvaldr earl in Mœrr."³⁶⁰ This is also different from the extended information given about the first settler's origin, family, and descendants in *Landnámabók*, to be discussed momentarily. What remains of the memory of the first settler are thus place-names, such as Ingólfrshöfði or Ingólfsfell, as spatial markers of the area Ingólfr claimed as his *landnám*.

Instead of discovery and settlement as the achievement of a brother pair, one single individual is mentioned by Ari and he does so in a manner that does not explicitly exclude potential earlier settlers or comment on the pioneer discoverers of Iceland. Instead of Ingólfr and Hjörleifr, the text highlights four altogether different first settlers and founders of the country's four quarters:

Hrollaugr, son of Rognvaldr earl in Mœrr, settled in the east on Síða; from him the people of Síða are descended.

Ketilbjörn Ketilsson, a Norwegian, settled in the south at upper Mosfell; from him the people of Mosfell are descended.

Auðr, daughter of Ketill Flatnose, a Norwegian lord, settled in the west in Breiðafjörðr; from her the people of Breiðafjörðr are descended.

Helgi the Lean, a Norwegian, son of Eyvindr the Easterner, settled in the north in Eyjafjörðr; from him the people of Eyjafjörðr are descended.³⁶¹

These four settlers are also presented as forefathers of the bishops of Skálholt and Hólar in the genealogical list that follows the tenth chapter of *Íslendingabók*.³⁶² Here, Ketilbjörn is connected to Ísleifr, the first bishop of Icelanders. Hrollaugr's line of descendants is traced

Qlfossá, es hann lagði sína eigu á síðan" (ÍF I.1 5).

³⁵⁹ ÍF I.1 xxxv. Several scholars have point to the fact that this date contradicts the accounts found in some of the Old Icelandic annals, for instance *Konungsannáll* and *Gottskálksannáll*, which set the date of Haraldr's birth to 848, and others, such as *Resensannáll* and *Forni annáll* or *Skálholts annáll*, which employs the year 852 (ÍF I.1 xxxvi). *Landnámabók* uses the year 874 for the date of Ingólfr's permanent settlement in Iceland, which is a date that is probably based on later calculations, as well. Cf. ÍF I.1 cxxxv-cxxxix.

³⁶⁰ Grønlie 4. "Hrollaugr, sonr Rognvalds jarls á Mœri, byggði austr á Síðu; Þaðan eru Síðumenn komnir.

³⁶¹ Grønlie 4. "Hrollaugr, sonr Rognvalds jarls á Mœri, byggði austr á Síðu; Þaðan eru Síðumenn komnir. Ketilbjörn Ketilsson, maðr nórrœnn, byggði suðr at Mosfelli enu øfra; þaðan eru Mosfellingar komnir. Auðr, dóttir Ketils flatnefs, hersis nórrœns, byggði vestr í Breiðafirði; þaðan eru Breiðfirðingar komnir. Helgi enn magri, nórrœnn, sonr Eyvindar austmanns, byggði norðr í Eyjafirði; þaðan eru Eyfirðingar komnir." (ÍF I.1 6).

³⁶² ÍF I.1 26.

down to Jón, the first bishop of Iceland's second diocese, Hólar. Auðr's descendants include Þorfinnr Karlsefni, one of the leaders of the Viking expeditions to the New World, and bishop Þorlákr, bishop Gizurr's successor at Skálholt. Lastly, Helgi the Lean is presented as ancestor of bishop Ketill of Hólar.³⁶³

Besides fitting neatly into the quartered political and geographical or administrative divisions of Iceland, which Ari mentions in chapter 5 of *Íslendingabók* as occurring several generations after the settlement, the four settlers also illuminate the ancestry of the first bishops of Hólar and Skálholt, as well as of two of Ari's contemporaries and commissioners of the text, bishops Ketill and Þorlákr.³⁶⁴ Thus, the first settlers are presented in a symmetrical and typological manner, one for each quarter, with a heavy emphasis on each settler's connection to royalty in Norway and the clerical authority of Iceland, while omitting information that could tie each of the individuals to other worldly regions, for instance, Auðr and Helgi's ties to Ireland, which we know from other texts.³⁶⁵

Concluding *Íslendingabók* is an overview of the ancestry of the people of Breiðafjörður, traced back to the mythical Yngling dynasty. Ari sketches his own familial line by way of his father, Þorgils, back to *Yngvi Tyrkjakonungr*, *Njorðr Svíakonungr* and *Freyr*—three Norse gods that Ari euhemerizes and presents as members of Scandinavian royalty, which is in line with other classical texts about the origins of the people of the North and, earlier on, the Germanic tribes.³⁶⁶ Ari's portrayal of the history of the Icelandic people and the history of his own family thus strives to first integrate these accounts into a wider context of Norwegian royalty, as in case of the four settlers, and then, secondly, into the context of greater Scandinavian origins, which, while inevitably pagan, still reaches back to the most noble descent possible in the context of his time, that is, the legendary Yngling dynasty.³⁶⁷

But what is revealed by Ari dutifully reporting that Ingólfr was, accurately, the one who first came from Norway to Iceland and ascribing two place-names to his settlement? Further, why does he take care to establish a chronology that adds Ingólfr's first expedition and his final *landnám*, all without disclosing more about his ancestry or possible travel companions? One answer to these questions comes from Else Mundal, who argues that Ari wrote *Íslendingabók* as an ecclesiastical history, in particular as a history of the bishops of Skálholt, purposefully intended to establish a genuine Christian Icelandic identity linked to local bishops.³⁶⁸ As Mundal notes, the book finds its structural climax in the seventh chapter, which deals with the conversion, which is also the longest and most elaborate chapter. Additionally, she points to the appendix of the text, which adds an episcopal chronicle focused on the bishopric of Skálholt.³⁶⁹ The emphasis on four

³⁶³ ÍF I.1 13.

³⁶⁴ ÍF I.1 12 and Gunnar Karlsson "Iceland's 1100 Years" 22.

³⁶⁵ ÍF I.1 136 and 248.

³⁶⁶ Ari's assumption that there was a migration of peoples from the Black Sea to Scandinavia agrees with other classical texts about the origins of the Germanic tribes (for instance *Gesta Francorum* or Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*), later also taken up in the North, for instance by Snorri in his prologue to *Snorra Edda*. The Yngling dynasty specifically is covered in *Ynglingatal* and *Ynglinga saga* and furthermore mentioned in *Historia Norvegie*, *Langfeðgatal frá Nóa*, *Ættartala Haralds frá Óðni*, and in *Hauksbók* in a section entitled *Af Upplendingakonungum*. Ari's account is closest to *Historia Norwegia* (Grønlie 31fn109).

³⁶⁷ Mundal 114.

³⁶⁸ Mundal 111.

³⁶⁹ Mundal 114.

prominent settlers, one per quarter, each of whom was an ancestor to a later bishop, at least two of whom were even already Christian at the time of their arrival, fits this reading.³⁷⁰ It would also make sense then to keep the section dedicated to Ingólfr short, since he arrived as a pagan and his descendants—albeit among Iceland’s most influential men of their time—were not directly involved in the establishment of the church on the island. As elaborated in *Landnámabók*, Ingólfr’s son, Þorsteinn, was the founder of the local thing at Kjalarnes, a predecessor to the later Alþingi, while his grandson, Þorkell, served as lawspeaker at the Alþingi as well as *allsherjargoði*, serving from an elevated position along with the other *goðar*, whose tasks may have comprised the sanctification and the corralling of the thing areas.³⁷¹ Þorkell’s son, Þormóðr, who was Ingólfr’s great-grandson, served as *allsherjargoði* at the Alþingi at the time when Christianity was introduced, yet he does not seem to have held an important role in the decision to accept the new faith. It is possible that Þormóðr was even among those rejecting the new Christian laws, which would explain the relative silence about him in *Landnámabók*, where he is only mentioned briefly in chapter 9 of *Sturlubók* and *Hauksbók*, or his absence altogether from *Kristni saga* and other sagas discussing Iceland’s change of faith.³⁷² In *Íslendingabók*, it is the pagan lawspeaker Þorgeirr who in the end decides that Icelanders ought to accept the new faith. One possible explanation for the brief coverage of Ingólfr without disclosing any further genealogical information therefore could lie in the later deeds of his descendants, which did not fit into a tidy and acceptable ecclesiastical history of Icelanders.

In contrast to Mundal’s theories, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen suggests that Ingólfr’s ancestry was deliberately withheld by Ari to uphold the impression that early Icelandic society was built by and based on a power balance involving individual descendents from different and independent Norwegian families. With this, he reads *Íslendingabók* as a text invested in the political history of early Iceland—thus, a literary image of a very first communal or even national history of Icelanders (Sørensen speaks of “an independent nation, backed up by its own history” in this context).³⁷³ This reading, like Mundal’s suggestion, would not explain why Ari thought it was necessary to mention Ingólfr in the first place, especially since he does not refer to other early island discoverers or explorers as *Sturlubók* does, nor why he later emphasizes the four different settlers as Iceland’s founding fathers (and mothers), each given a quarter of the island.

Rather than avoiding the obvious, namely that the Icelandic commonwealth as presented in textual sources was based on and governed mostly by a few powerful families, we might assert that Ingólfr’s background might have been withheld for other reasons. This would reveal a set of different strategies in emphasizing his elevated role, specifically involving a conscious mythologization of his background. As shown in the following text examples, beginning with a short glance at Ingólfr’s genealogy as established in the different *Landnámabók* redactions, the family that is said to have descended from Ingólfr settled widely over the southern part of Iceland, sharing familial or friendship ties with numerous figures represented in the Icelandic sagas.

³⁷⁰ ÍF I.2 396 (S399 and H 356).

³⁷¹ Strömbäck 43, ÍF I.1 46n3.

³⁷² “Son hans var Þormóðr, er þá var allsherjargoði, er kristni kom á Ísland. Hans son var Hamall, faðir Más ok Þormóðar ok Torfa” (ÍF I.1 46).

³⁷³ “sjálfstæðu þjóðríki með eigin sögu að baki”. Preben Meulengracht Sørensen “Sagan” 29 (quotation on 20).

In *Landnámabók*, Ingólfr's ancestry differs depending on the redaction—he is either the son of Qrn from Telemark as in all versions following *Sturlubók*, or the son of Björnólfr from Hordaland in *Þórðarbók*, presumably going back to the oldest fragmentarily preserved redaction, *Melabók*.³⁷⁴ The sixth chapters in both *Sturlubók* and *Hauksbók* introduce Ingólfr as Arnarson, the son of Qrn, and establish his ancestry as going back to Hrómundr Gripsson, a legendary warrior and hero known from a now lost *fornaldarsaga* that was quite popular in medieval Iceland:³⁷⁵

There was a man called Björnólfr, and another called Hróaldr, sons of Hrómundr Gripsson. They left Telemark because of some killings and settled down at Dalsfjord in Fjalar Province. Björnólfr had a son called Qrn who was the father of Ingólfr and Helga. Hróaldr had a son called Hróðmarr, father of Leifr.³⁷⁶

Ingólfr and Hjörleifr are presented as second cousins, whose grandfathers, both sons of Hrómundr, had to leave their home district of Telemark because they had killed someone, (which foreshadows Ingólfr and Hjörleifr's own reason for leaving Norway). Using *Þórðarbók*, which might allow us to glimpse how Ingólfr Arnarson was presented in the now lost parts of *Melabók*, we find a different variant of Ingólfr's ancestry: "Ingólfr was a Norwegian man from Hordaland, the son of Björnólfr of Fjalir, the brother of Heyjangrs-Björn."³⁷⁷ Thus, instead of stemming from Hrómundr and a family based originally in Telemark, Ingólfr here is said to come from a line from Hordaland; Björnólfr, his grandfather in *Sturlubók* and *Hauksbók*, is now presented as his father. This lineage in *Þórðarbók* is likely to have been taken from *Melabók*, and might go back to *Styrmisbók* and the oldest lists of settlers on which the *Landnámabók* was based.³⁷⁸ A Norwegian text, Theodoricus monachus's *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium* (from around 1180) likewise refers to Hordaland as the place of origin for both Ingólfr and Hjörleifr.³⁷⁹

Ingólfr's brother—or his paternal uncle,³⁸⁰ the passage about Heyjangrs-Björn cited above is not entirely clear—is mentioned elsewhere in *Landnámabók*, as three of his sons,

³⁷⁴ Readers confused by the various redactions of *Landnámabók* may find the two diagrams in the appendix useful.

³⁷⁵ The seventeenth-century *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar*, a prose *fornaldarsaga* work based on late-medieval *rímur*, preserves the story of Hrómundr. A performance of this story is discussed in chapter 10 of *Borgils saga ok Hafliða*, which speaks of it as part of the entertainment at the wedding at Reykjahólar in 1119. While this description of *Borgils saga ok Hafliða* was written long after the event of the actual wedding, the account nevertheless suggests the long interest and general popularity of this saga in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Iceland. Cf. Jesch "Hrómundar saga Gripssonar" 305.

³⁷⁶ "Book of Settlements" 18. "Björnólfr hét maðr, en annarr Hróaldr; þeir váru synir Hrómundar Gripssonar; þeir fóru af Þelamork fyrir víga sakir ok staðfestusk í Dalsfirði á Fjólum. Sonr Björnólfs var Qrn, faðir þeira Ingólfs ok Helgu, en Hróalds son var Hróðmarr, faðir Leifs." (ÍF I.1 38 and 40)

³⁷⁷ "Ingolffur var maður norræn haurdskur ad kyne son Biornolfs af fjólum brodir Heyiangs biarnar." (*Skarðsárþók* 10n10).

³⁷⁸ Jón Jóhannesson "Gerðir" 133-4, ÍF I.1 lxxi.

³⁷⁹ *Monumenta Historica Norvegiæ* 8-9; "Theodoricus Monachus" ix and xxiii for dating the text. I will return to this text shortly.

³⁸⁰ Finnur Jónsson argues that Björnólfr was Heyjangrs-Björn's brother, based on his reading of *Þórðarbók*, but Jakob Benediktsson rejects this theory, arguing that it would make more sense chronologically if Heyjangrs-Björn was Ingólfr's half-brother (since Heyjangrs-Björn is said to have had a different father). Cf. ÍF I.1 lxxii.

Bárðr, Ásbjörn, and Helgi, are said to have settled in the eastern quarter of Iceland.³⁸¹ His nephew, Qzurr, is named one of the most outstanding settlers of the Eastfjords in *Sturlubók*, and in *Hauksbók* he is even referred to as Ingólfr's brother, whose son settled the area around Álptanes, west of Reykjavík.³⁸²

These somewhat confusing, even conflicting familial relations ascribed to the first settler may have been another reason Ari omitted Ingólfr's patronymic. Perhaps the historical Ingólfr Arnarson was, in fact, called Ingólfr Björnólfsson, or Ari faced two conflicting traditions about a man called Ingólfr. Alternatively, the patronymic could have been entirely unknown to him. It is also possible of course that the first settler was invented altogether. Certainly, the preserved texts lead to questions about his identity.

In order to reconcile the different, older tradition of "Ingólfr Björnólfsson," Old Norse scholar Jakob Benediktsson suggested that Björnólf must have had Qrn as a middle name or a byname, and that this was later confused and thought to be his first name.³⁸³ A more likely possibility, however, could be Ingólfr's connection to Arnarhóll as his final settling place, which in a later attempt to explain the place-name, could have been connected to an ancestral *kuml*, or grave-mound, conceivably of Ingólfr's father, Qrn (the genitive of which would be Arnar-). There are several examples of settlers whose names were later inventions, made to explain existing place-names, and it would not be inconceivable that Ingólfr could be among them.³⁸⁴ After all, the place of his final settlement, Reykjavík, strangely enough does not bear his name or refer to any other early settler, so Arnarhóll could have been connected to the first settler and his patronymic in a later attempt to explain the etymology of the place name and link it to existing *landnám* traditions.

Finally, to be the son of Qrn, or "Eagle," opens up a mythical layer in the description of the founding father, as it can connect the first settler to Óðinn, who was known to have been able to shift into the shape of an eagle, and whose name Arnarhǫfði ("Eaglehead") is preserved among the *heiti* in Snorra Edda.³⁸⁵ Granting the first settler such a mythical quality finds its parallel in other foundational narratives from medieval Scandinavia and the continent, something I will discuss in the section on *Landnámabók* below. That Sturla also chose to establish a connection between Ingólfr and the legendary hero Hrómundr Gripsson may confirm that he wanted to emphasize such a mythical quality of the first settler. According to *Þorgils saga ok Haflíða* (preserved in the *Sturlunga saga* compilation), so-called *lygisögur* (lying stories) were performed at a wedding at Reykhólar, among them a saga about Hrómundr Gripsson to whom, according to the narrator, quite a few guests claimed to be related.³⁸⁶ It should be briefly noted here that there are several interesting parallels between the tale of Hrómundr Gripsson and the Story of Ingólfr and Hjørleifr as preserved in *Sturlubók* and the redactions dependent on it, which could suggest that the description of Hjørleifr's character and his Viking expedition to Ireland was influenced by storytelling traditions about Hrómundr. The seventeenth-century *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar* describes Hrómundr as a viking in the service of King Óláfr,

³⁸¹ ÍF I.2 273, 320 and 323 (for Bárðr); 320 (Ásbjörn); 320-2 (Helgi); 335 (Ásbjörn's son, Qzurr).

³⁸² ÍF I.2 336 (S335) and 395 (H353).

³⁸³ ÍF I.1 lxxiii.

³⁸⁴ Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson 273-5; Sveinbjörn Rafnsson "Studier" 203; Jakob Benediktsson "review" 317-8.

³⁸⁵ Finnur Jónsson 672.

³⁸⁶ *Sturlunga saga* 19.

the warrior-king, for whom he battles a berserker and later breaks into a grave mound of an undead king, Þráinn, whose sword and other treasure he takes before killing him. In the end, Hrómundr gets to marry the king's sister. Both heroes, Hrómundr and Hjörleifr travel abroad, break into a grave mound and battle for a special sword, and later get to marry a desired woman. In Hrómundr's case, he marries the king's sister, while Hjörleifr marries Ingólfr's sister Helga.

In *Íslendingabók*, Ingólfr is notably referenced only by his first name, and in an elevated position as the first prominent settler of Iceland with a dateable arrival. He shares this status with two other individuals who were connected to important milestones in the evolution of the Icelanders' commonwealth in Ari fróði's text. The first is Úlfljótr, who is credited with introducing a legal code to Iceland in chapter two:

And when Iceland had been settled widely, an Easterner called Úlfljótr first brought laws out here from Norway (Teitr told us so) and they were subsequently called Úlfljótr's laws; he was the father of Gunnarr, from whom the people of Djúpadalr are descended in Eyjafjörðr.³⁸⁷

Úlfljótr's laws are preserved only in fragments, for instance in a chapter of the *Hauksbók* redaction of *Landnámabók*.³⁸⁸ The fact that Iceland's first legal code, said to have been brought by Úlfljótr from Norway, bears his name suggests that the constitution of the legal code from the Gulapíng was personified by Úlfljótr, and that he effectively came to represent the memory figure of Iceland's early legal community.

The third individual known by his first name is Þorgeirr, a pagan law-speaker living at the time when the Norwegian king Óláfr Tryggvason, sought to Christianize Icelanders. In chapter 7 of *Íslendingabók* Þorgeirr was entrusted at the Alþingi gathering with deciding whether Icelanders should adopt Christian law, and with that, the new faith:

Then the Christians asked Hallr on Síða to speak the law, the one that was to go with Christianity. But he freed himself from this responsibility towards them by agreeing with [paying the]³⁸⁹ lawspeaker, Þorgeirr, that he should speak it, although he was still heathen at the time. And later, when everyone had returned to their booths, Þorgeirr lay down and spread his cloak over himself, and rested all that day and the following night, and did not speak a word.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁷ Grønlie 4. "En þá es Ísland vas víða byggt orðit, þá hafði maðr austrænn fyrst lög út hingat ýr Norvegi, sá es Úlfljótr hét; svá sagði Teitr oss; ok váru þá Úlfljótslög kǫlluð;-hann vas faðir Gunnars, es Djúpdælir eru komnir frá í Eyjafirði" ÍF I.1 7.

³⁸⁸ ÍF I.2 313.

³⁸⁹ The verb construction "keypti at" might indicate that the two either reached an agreement, or that Hallr paid Þorgeirr to speak the law and decide (Grønlie 25n71).

³⁹⁰ Grønlie 8-9. "Þá báðu enir kristnu menn Hall á Síðu, at hann skyldi lög þeira upp segja, þau es kristninni skyldi fylgja. En hann leystisk því undan við þá, at hann keypti at Þorgeiri lögsgumanni, at hann skyldi upp segja, en hann vas enn þá heiðinn. En síðan es men kvómu í búðir, þá lagðisk hann niðr Þorgeirr ok breiddi feld sinn á sik ok hvíldi þann dag allan ok nóttina eptir ok kvað ekki orð" (ÍF I.1 16). The question of what exactly Þorgeirr did under his cloak has been discussed by several scholars, with suggestions ranging from the preparation of his speech the following day at the Alþingi to a shamanistic ritual, asking supernatural forces for advice on what to do next (Cf. Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 103-23).

The next day, Þorgeirr informed everyone present of his decision that Icelanders should share one law, and “it was then proclaimed in the laws that all people should be Christian, and that those in this country who had not yet been baptized should receive baptism.”³⁹¹

Pernille Hermann suggests that Ari may have modeled his history of the Icelanders who were initially pagan on the history of the Israelites, using typological elements as a learned strategy to make sense or integrate Icelanders’ pre-Christian past into a meaningful history, thus paralleling the biblical exegesis of the Old and New Testaments as both promise and fulfillment.³⁹² In this history, the Norwegian settlers approached a fertile land that had already been inhabited, and with that, consecrated by the *papar*, the holy men of the religion that the new society was soon going to adopt. As John Lindow and Margaret Clunies Ross argue, even if many of the new inhabitants were pagan, the land could be understood as Christian thanks to the religious objects that the *papar* had left behind.³⁹³ Trying to write a history of Iceland comprising both a pagan phase and a Christian phase, Hermann argues, Ari used the formal pattern of the Bible, which included highlighting three individuals as representatives for the different phases, to parallel the history of Icelanders to that of Christian Salvation history as, for instance, outlined in Romans 5:12-5:16.³⁹⁴ History here is divided into three phases, personified by Adam, Moses, and Christ. The first phase is the time before the law, or *ante legem*, reaching from Adam until divine law is handed down to Moses and brought to the people. The second phase, a time when men lived according to written law, called *sub lege*, stretches from Moses until the arrival of Christ. Christ’s arrival then initiates the third phase, or *sub gratia*, during which man lives by the grace of God.³⁹⁵ The way Ingólfr, Úlfjótr, and Þorgeirr are referred to in *Íslendingabók*—without introduction or patronymics—suggests that Ari assumed that his audience was familiar with these three figures and understood their signifying potential as both references to and symbols for (1) the *landnám*, (2) the bringing of the laws, and (3) the change of faith.

This fact supports Hermann’s theory that the three held elevated positions, and that Ari understood *Íslendingabók* and Icelanders’ history to be part of a general salvational history of humankind as elaborated in scripture. Instead of making the analogy of Ingólfr to Adam (and with that, the first human in the biblical creation myth, who was also responsible for the fall of man due to his and Eve’s disobedience of God), using the comparison of the founding father to the patriarchs can offer an alternative. Ingólfr, as first settler, could be understood in typological reference to Abraham, the first of the biblical patriarchs, who left Mesopotamia for a new land, following God’s will. Seeing that Ari emphasized four major settlers for each part of the country might have been understood by learned medieval readers as analogous to the four tribes—Judah, Simeon, Benjamin, and Levi—and the establishment of the Kingdom of Judah after these tribes refused to accept Solomon’s son Rehoboam as their king. In his version of the Icelanders’ first settlement,

³⁹¹ Grønlie 9. “Þá vas þat mælt í lögum, at allir menn skyldi kristnir vesa ok skírn taka, þeir es áðr vátu óskírðir á landi hér” (ÍF I.1 17).

³⁹² Pernille Hermann “Íslendingabók” 23.

³⁹³ Lindow “Íslendingabók” 456 and 460, Margaret Clunies Ross “Textual territory” 21, Pernille Hermann “Íslendingabók” 25. Auðr’s choice of a burial practice, as attested elsewhere, would speak against such a reading (cf. Vanherpen 65).

³⁹⁴ Pernille Hermann “Íslendingabók” 28.

³⁹⁵ Pernille Hermann “Íslendingabók” 28.

Ari does not elaborate much on the reasons for the settlement of Iceland or expand on Ingólfr or the other four settlers' arrival. The motif of the first settlers fleeing the rule of the Norwegian king, Haraldr hárfagri, which is used prominently in many other early texts, is alluded to in chapter 1 of *Íslendingabók*, where Ari mentions that King Haraldr had to ban his people from leaving Norway because he feared the depopulation of his land.³⁹⁶ Slightly modifying Hermann's model, I suggest that Ari sought to streamline his version of Icelanders' earliest history through a typological interpretation of the events of Icelandic settlement using the foundational narrative of the Old Testament as subtext.

In his 1969 article entitled “Sendiför Úlfljóts” (Úlfljótr's Mission) Sigurður Línal argues that Úlfljótr's mission to bring the laws from Norway was a myth of origin linking Úlfljótr to Moses and other law-bringers or *auctores legum*.³⁹⁷ Línal doubts that the Icelandic chieftains would have entrusted a single person with such a crucial mission of memorizing and bringing back one specific legal code. Furthermore, he argues that the difference between the earliest written Icelandic laws and the *Gulapingslög* do not suggest that those were the laws adopted by Icelanders in the tenth century.³⁹⁸ Instead, Úlfljótr, and Ingólfr as well, were highlighted in Ari's text because both provide the mythical foundation for the start of Icelanders' community—one as the bringer of a legal code connected to a specific area in Norway, the other as the alleged forefather of the later family connected to running the Kjalarnes thing site and passing on the office of the *allsherjargoði*. Both share that relatively little is known about their descendants, and that they do not feature prominently in the sagas or poetry, except as reference figures.³⁹⁹ So were both of them invented? Línal is careful in his assessment of the matter:

It will not be argued here that the accounts of the settlement of Ingólfr and of Úlfljótr's mission were fabrications from the start, although it is not possible to rule out that that could be the case. One aspect speaks specifically against this assumption: if we were talking about a complete fabrication it would be likely that more would have been spun about it. This however is not the case.⁴⁰⁰

The debate following Línal's article from 1969, which he had published in *Skírnir*, resembles the debate held about the archeology of the *landnám* that I discussed in Chapter One.⁴⁰¹ Arnór Sigurjónsson's response to Línal centered around what he believed to be a direct attack against Ari fróði's honor as a chronicler of Icelanders' earliest history, which was supported by trustworthy oral sources.⁴⁰² What Arnór Sigurjónsson's intense reaction further revealed, is that in doubting the historicity of some of Ari's descriptions about Icelanders' earliest laws, or the events leading to the adoption of the Christian faith, there

³⁹⁶ ÍF I.1 5-6.

³⁹⁷ Línal 22.

³⁹⁸ Línal 9.

³⁹⁹ Línal 14 and 18.

⁴⁰⁰ “Hér verður því að vísu ekki haldið fram, að frásögurnar af landnámi Ingólfs og sendiför Úlfljóts séu tilbúningur frá rótum, enda þótt ekki sé unnt að útiloka, að svo kunni að vera. Gegn því mælir sérstaklega eitt: Ef hér væri um að tefla algjöran tilbúning, er líklegt, að eitthvað frekara hefði verið spunnið utan um. Þetta er hins vegar ekki gert” (Línal 15).

⁴⁰¹ Arnór Sigurjónsson, cf. Gustafson 22-3.

⁴⁰² Arnór Sigurjónsson 19.

are no other, independent sources about these events to resort to.⁴⁰³ In the case of the first settler and founding father of Icelanders' there is of course one other source, and that is *Landnámabók*.

Ingólfr and Hjörleifr in *Landnámabók*

If Ari fróði referred to the Bible as a subtext for his history of the Icelanders, the authors and compilers of *Landnámabók* used a different strategy for their foundational myth and expression of the memory of Icelanders' first settlement. As mentioned, the first of the *Landnámabók* redactions that preserves the narrative section on the founding foster brothers and Ingólfr Arnarson is found in *Sturlubók*.

It is generally assumed that preceding versions, for instance *Melabók*, were set up differently and did not interrupt *Landnámabók*'s general structure of short descriptive sections of the first settlers starting clockwise in southern Iceland with the interpolated foundational narrative about the foster brothers.⁴⁰⁴ That is not to say that *Melabók* did not include Ingólfr (even though the preserved fragments make no mention of him), but that he might have been placed in a less elevated position, mentioned only as the son of Björnólfr and brother or nephew of Heyjangers-Björn, as *Melabók*'s geographically led narrative covered the area of his *landnám* in southwestern Iceland.

In his analysis of the story of Ingólfr and Hjörleifr, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen states that Sturla interpolated the narrative about Ingólfr and Hjörleifr as an *exemplum* or moral tale. Sørensen argues that Sturla deliberately changed Ingólfr's genealogy, and in doing so, withheld the information that Ingólfr (as a male relative of Heyjangers-Björn) must have been a descendant of Björn buna, "a powerful and outstanding chieftain in Norway." According to *Hauksbók*, most of the influential men in Iceland descended from Björn buna's three sons; indeed, three of the four settlers highlighted by Ari were related to him, either directly or by marriage.⁴⁰⁵

The foundational story served to juxtapose the pious, noble and independent heathen Ingólfr, who held a sacrificial feast and used divine guidance to find his place of settlement, as opposed to his unruly blood-brother, who refused to sacrifice, was a man of ill fortune, and who was eventually killed by his slaves.⁴⁰⁶ According to both *Sturlubók* and *Hauksbók*, in order to determine if he should relocate to Iceland the winter before the planned departure, Ingólfr holds "a great sacrifice to ask for good fortune for his future, but Hjörleifr never wanted to sacrifice."⁴⁰⁷ The two brothers leave, each on his own ship: Hjörleifr with his loot, and Ingólfr with their common possessions.

⁴⁰³ Gustafsson 22-3 and 32.

⁴⁰⁴ Jón Jóhannesson "Gerðir" 132 and 224. ÍF I.1 lxxxiii-iv.

⁴⁰⁵ "hersir ríkr ok ágætr í Nóregi" (ÍF I.1 49 (H11)). Preben Meulengracht Sørensen "Sagan" 28-9. Auður was a direct descendant of Björn, and both Ketilbjörn and Helgi were related to him by marriage.

⁴⁰⁶ Preben Meulengracht Sørensen "Sagan" 26.

⁴⁰⁷ "Þenna vetr fekk Ingólfr at blóti miklu ok leitaði sér heilla um forlög sín, en Hjörleifr vildi aldri blóta" (ÍF I.1 42).

Once Ingólfr and Hjörleifr's boats approach the coast of Iceland, they become separated. Ingólfr casts his high-seat pillars overboard "til heilla" ("for good fortune") and announces that he would settle where they would eventually land.⁴⁰⁸ His boat alighted in the south of Iceland, "where it is now called Ingólfshöfði."⁴⁰⁹ Hjörleifr, in turn, is driven further to the west, landing at a place called Hjörleifshöfði. He is said to have built his final dwelling on that spot, and as mentioned, is ambushed and killed by his slaves the following spring. While Hjörleifr's slaves deceived him, Ingólfr relies on his two slaves, Vífill and Karli, to search for his high-seat pillars. When the two slaves travel west, they find Hjörleifr and his men slain and report this news back to their master. Ingólfr buries his foster brother and then tracks down his slaves, who had fled to islands lying off the coast of Iceland, along with all the women. Upon finding them, Ingólfr kills the slaves, retrieves the women and the various possessions they had stolen, and spends the winter at Hjörleifshöfði before moving further west.⁴¹⁰ The first settler's reaction to finding his foster brother dead is the following: "this is what always happens to those who won't hold sacrifices."⁴¹¹ This seems indicative of an underlying moral character of the story.⁴¹² Despite being a pagan settler, Ingólfr is shown as both a pious and modest first Iclander, who trusts in the will of his gods to find his final resting place. In this version of the story, it is Hjörleifr's desire to marry Helga, Ingólfr's sister, that starts the conflict with the three sons of jarl Atli in Norway, resulting in the two killings that ultimately motivate the two brothers to leave for Iceland. While Ingólfr sacrifices and transports their possessions, along with his family and at least two slaves to the new land, Hjörleifr arrives on the shores transporting his loot, amongst it the ten Irish slaves who will kill him in the end. Ingólfr is both pious and modest, moves within the realms of propriety when settling Iceland, and is shown to be a "noble heathen" in this story.⁴¹³ Hjörleifr, on the other hand, goes abroad on a Viking expedition, breaks into a burial mound, takes a (supposedly magic, and maybe cursed) sword along with other items, and consults the gods neither when approaching the new land nor when taking residence on the south coast of the island.⁴¹⁴

⁴⁰⁸ ÍF I.1 42.

⁴⁰⁹ "er nu heitir Ingólfshöfði" (ÍF I.1 42).

⁴¹⁰ ÍF I.1 42-45.

⁴¹¹ "svá hverjum verða, ef eigi vill blóta" (ÍF I.1 44).

⁴¹² Preben Meulengracht Sørensen "Sagan" 34.

⁴¹³ A "noble heathen," as defined by Lars Lönnroth, is a person subscribing to, or living under, some of the basic tenets of the Christian faith before the new faith was introduced. Though some of Ingólfr's practices, as mentioned in *Landnámabók*, would not necessarily qualify him as a noble heathen in Lönnroth's definition—for instance his sacrifice of the use of the high seat pillars—other characteristics, such as his restraint or merciful behaviour in freeing his slaves, would suggest otherwise. His grandson, Þorkell máni, is said to have been one of the "noblest heathens" to have lived in Iceland, having led a life "as blameless as the best of Christians" ("livat svá hreinliga sem þeir kristnir menn, er bezt eru siðaðir") (ÍF I.1 46). Cf. Lönnroth.

⁴¹⁴ There are several cursed swords that feature prominently in the sagas, for instance, *grásíða* in *Gísli saga*, *fótþír* in *Laxdæla saga*, and *tyrfingr* in *Hervarar saga* (Cf. Preben Meulengracht Sørensen "Sagan" 34-5). That there was something uncanny thought to have happened about his death can also be seen in the fact that the area of Hjörleifr's settlement was later thought to be cursed (cf. ÍF I.2 333).

Dioscuric Traditions and Icelanders' Foundational Memory

Aside from providing an *exemplum* of the idealized settler and founder of the community of Icelanders, the tale of Ingólfr and Hjörleifr is also reminiscent of certain other foundational narratives from Western antiquity and the Middle Ages. For example, Helgi Þórláksson points to parallels concerning the founding of homelands by mythical brother pairs. This includes Romulus and Remus, the so-called founders of Rome; Dan and Angel, who according to Saxo Grammaticus were the founding brothers of the Danes; and Hengist and Horsa, the leaders of the Saxons who settled in Kent, as mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and by Bede in his ecclesiastical history of the English people.⁴¹⁵

In a study entitled *The Divine Twins: An Indo-European Myth in Germanic Tradition*, Donald Ward argues for the existence of a general Indo-European tradition of divine twins or dioscuroi (going back to a universal mythological theme), which was also known among the Germanic peoples.⁴¹⁶ According to Ward, “divine twins have traditionally been associated with the founding of new settlements,” as witnessed by famous founders such as Romulus and Remus and other pairs, not all of them necessarily twins.⁴¹⁷ Even though they are neither twins nor actual brothers, but instead bound by a fictional kinship tie, the tale of Ingólfr and Hjörleifr parallels several characteristics and themes involving dual kingship known from older Germanic traditions. Many of the twin pairs discussed by Ward share that their father is unknown, unmentioned, or that they stem from separate fathers, one of whom is a divine figure, often Óðinn.⁴¹⁸ In his collection, he presents several “dioscuric mythological legends in heroic garb” that involve semi-historical migrating brother pairs known from early medieval histories.⁴¹⁹ Paulus Diaconus for instance mentions the brothers Ibor and Aio in *Historia Langobardorum* (I 2-8), who along with their mother, Gambara, migrate from their native Scandinavian homeland to Scoringa, where they meet a migrating tribe led by another brother pair, Ambri and Assi.⁴²⁰ The story of Ibor and Aio is also included by Saxo Grammaticus in Book 7 of his *Gesta Danorum*. Other brother pairs active in migration and new foundations are Raos and Raptos, who according to Cassius Dio’s *Roman History*, are the leaders of the tribe of the Hasdingi, one of the two main tribal groups of the Vandals. Ward similarly discusses the heroic kings Vinnill and Van(d)ill as such a migrating brother pair, who are also briefly mentioned in the *heiti* of *Snorra Edda* (albeit here as sea kings).⁴²¹ They share their presence in *Snorra Edda* with Hengist, who is mentioned in the prologue as a descendant of one of Óðinn’s sons, put in charge to rule over Saxony.⁴²²

Hengist and Horsa leading the Anglo-Saxon invasion of the British Isles in 449 c.e. belongs to the most recently preserved traditions about a founding brother pair in Ward’s

⁴¹⁵ Helgi Þórláksson “Tradition” 54.

⁴¹⁶ The existence of the divine twin brothers or *dioscuroi* among the Germanic tribes was long disputed, but as Rudolf Simek notes, there are indications already in the earliest texts, for instance Tacitus, and archaeological finds from the Bronze age that suggest they were venerated in Germanic antiquity (Simek “Northern Mythology” 59-60).

⁴¹⁷ Ward 51.

⁴¹⁸ Ward 3 and 54.

⁴¹⁹ Ward 54.

⁴²⁰ Ward 50.

⁴²¹ Ward 53; “Snorri Sturluson. Edda: Skáldskaparmál” 110. Vandill is also mentioned among the Giant *heiti*.

⁴²² “Snorri Sturluson. Edda: Prologue” 5.

collection. The two brothers are said to come the aid of the Briton King Vortigern to help to defeat the Picts and Scots. The texts preserving this tradition date to the eighth century or later (Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.15, Geoffrey of Monmouth *Historia Regum Britanniae* 6, or *Historia Brittonum*), yet share several similarities with older traditions from the continent, for instance a divine origin, in their case from Óðinn, or commanding three ships during a sea battle, which can also illuminate some elements in the later-preserved narratives of Ingólfr and Hjørleifr.⁴²³

As foster- and presumably blood brothers, Ingólfr and Hjørleifr are bound by the closest possible tie existing between two men in the Old Norse world, the duty to avenge each other's death. They are joined by Ingólfr's sister, Helga, who is married to Hjørleifr. The inclusion, and often the rescue, of an accompanying sister is a frequent trope of the twin-pairs mentioned by Ward in his study. One of the brothers often dies young: Hjørleifr dies, as does Remus or Castor; and so does Horsa, who as Ward comments, "gradually fades from the scene, leaving Hengist as the sole leader of the Anglo-Saxon invaders" in the preserved texts.⁴²⁴

As mentioned, a striking number of the pairs of brothers mentioned by Ward fight in heroic battles at sea, several of whom command three ships and later liberate an abducted sister or wife.⁴²⁵ This strongly resonates with the tale of Ingólfr and Hjørleifr in *Sturlubók*, where the two brothers fight the sons of Jarl Atli while on a Viking expedition out on the open sea. They are attacked by Holmsteinn Atlason (who wanted to marry Helga, Ingólfr's sister) and his brothers, and they fight for a good while before a kinsman appears and helps them defeat Atli's sons, killing Holmsteinn.⁴²⁶ *Flóamanna saga*, which preserves an extended narration of the story of Hjørleifr and Ingólfr before their departure to Iceland, adds some details to the events of the battle, specifying that Hjørleifr had three ships under his command, and was outnumbered by the six ships of Atli's sons, yet won the battle.⁴²⁷ In *Landnámabók*, and after having arrived in Iceland, Ingólfr has to rescue his sister Helga from the slaves who had abducted her to an island after the killing of Hjørleifr.

The named examples point to an apparent echo of dioscuric traditions in Iceland's foundational myth. These traditions may explain several aspects of the story that could go back to earlier and to more universal traditions involving a founding brother pair: the unclear paternity or descent from a legendary hero, Hjørleifr's marriage to Ingólfr's sister, the battle at sea involving three ships, Hjørleifr's early death, and Ingólfr's mission to rescue his abducted sister. Ingólfr's patronymic "Arnarson" furthermore hints at a connection to Óðinn, which he would share with several of the other twin brother pairs and founders, for instance Hengist and Horsa, whose line is directly traced to Óðinn and Freyja in most of the histories.⁴²⁸

This echo of dioscuric traditions can be interpreted twofold: firstly, some of *Landnámabók's* compilers, certainly Sturla Þórðarson since his is the earliest preserved version to interpolate the story of Ingólfr and Hjørleifr, were familiar with textual evidence about dioscuric traditions. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* and

⁴²³ Ward 54 and Simek "Northern Mythology" 139.

⁴²⁴ Ward 55.

⁴²⁵ Ward 55 and 61.

⁴²⁶ ÍF I.1 40.

⁴²⁷ ÍF XIII 236.

⁴²⁸ Ward 54.

probably also Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* were translated or adapted from Latin in Iceland, probably already towards the end of the twelfth century, so it is quite likely that Sturla was familiar with traditions about Hengist and Horsa.⁴²⁹ But is there further evidence that could reveal a more widespread and earlier presence of dioscuric myth in Iceland and the North, one that was maybe no longer fully understood by the late twelfth or thirteenth century?

Another striking feature about several of the brother pairs mentioned by Ward is a connection to the veneration of wooden pillars, often two in number. Ward's earliest example of a veneration of twin brothers among the Germanic tribes refers to the Alcis, a divine twin pair whose veneration is briefly described by Tacitus (*Germania* 43).⁴³⁰ In his description of their sacred grove, Tacitus remarks that the two are worshipped not as images, *nulla simulacra*, which Ward understands with Jacob Grimm and Rudolf Meringer as the veneration of trees or wooden pillars located at the center of the grove.⁴³¹ The names of Raos and Raptos, the twin brothers mentioned by Cassius Dio, have been connected to Old Norse *raptr*, English *rafter*, "wooden pillar" and could provide further evidence for a worship of wooden beams by a Germanic tribe.⁴³² The Old Norse word for "beam or post," *áss*, can also refer to "(pagan) god" (albeit as a u- and not an a-stem).

The etymology of Hengist and Horsa clearly leads to horse, as already mentioned (a parallel to several other twin-deities with theriomorphic names) and not to a wooden object. Interestingly though, two wooden idols seem to have been associated with their worship, since horse head-shaped gable ends on farmhouses in Northern Germany were called "Hengst and Hors" until the late nineteenth century.⁴³³

Ward furthermore cites archaeological finds for wooden beams and pillars (always two in number) connected to cult sites from Holstein and Jutland which could further corroborate a veneration of the dioscuri in such a form.⁴³⁴

The names Ambri and Assi in Paulus Diaconus have been connected to Old Norse *askr*, "ash(tree)," suggesting a connection of the two migrating brothers to *Askr* and *Embla*, the first two humans in the world in the anthropogeny in the Poetic Edda (*Völuspá* 17 and 18) and further elaborated by Snorri in the Prose Edda (*Gylfaginning* 9).⁴³⁵ While



Fig. 22. Gable ends on a farmhouse in Wedemark, Germany

⁴²⁹ Würth 156.

⁴³⁰ A more conventional interpretation of the passage from Tacitus is that the cult of the Alcis was aniconic and their worship without any kind of representation. There is a rich archaeological record of wooden figures among the Germanic people however, cf. van der Sanden and Capelle.

⁴³¹ Ward 43-4. Ward also points to a parallel to the *dókana*, the two upright posts or beam figures representing the *dioscuri* as they were venerated by the Spartan army.

⁴³² Ward 44 and 53.

⁴³³ Ward 54 and Simek "Northern Mythology" 139.

⁴³⁴ Ward 44.

⁴³⁵ Ward 52. W. Steinhauser sees *Ambri* related to Latin Pl. *imbrices*, "horizontal beams" while other scholars have pointed to Gothic *ans* "wooden pillar" (all from Ward 52).

the identification of *Askr* with ash-tree is widely accepted, the etymology of *Embla* is disputed, ranging from the name of the elm-tree to a twining plant, such as vine, to a variant form of water-pot.⁴³⁶ In *Völuspá*, *Askr* and *Embla* as the first two humans are found by the gods “á landi,” rendered by most scholars as “on the shore,” which is supported by Snorri’s version of the anthropogenic myth where the gods were walking along the sea shore when they found two trees or wooden pieces, “tré tvau,” which they picked up and turned into human beings.⁴³⁷ The connection of the origin of man to trees or wood can be found in many mythic traditions in ancient Europe and Indo-European-speaking peoples.⁴³⁸ To trace the origin of mankind to trees might also underlie the popularity of *kenningar*, or poetic circumlocutions of men and women that use the analogy between humans and trees in Old Norse skaldic poetry.⁴³⁹

Where this resonates with *landnám* traditions as preserved in *Landnámabók* and several of the sagas is not with the etymology of Ingólfr and Hjörleifr directly but with one of the rituals connected to land-taking, the casting of the highseat pillars, or *ondvegissúlur*, as described for Ingólfr Arnarson’s *landnám* in *Sturlubók* and *Hauksbók* chapter 9. As already mentioned, Ingólfr and several other *landnámsmenn*, for instance Þórólfr Mostrarskegg, Hrollaugr Rognvaldsson or Hásteinn Atlason cast their pillars overboard at sea and let the place where they washed ashore determine the final location of their settlement.⁴⁴⁰ Text passages describing such pillar casting can also be found in several of the sagas and *Þættir* as well. Jonas Wellendorf enumerates altogether nine such instances in a recent article dedicated to this subject.⁴⁴¹ The exact form and design of the highseat pillars is not preserved; the pillars are always referred to in the plural form however, so they must have at least come in pairs. The highseat was the most important seat in the Old Norse hall, structurally supporting the roof; several scholars have therefore suggested that the pillars could have been understood as part of a microcosmic analogy of the Old Norse universe, the hall representing the cosmos and the highseat representing the world tree, world pillar, or *axis mundi* therein.⁴⁴² Archaeological finds of large pillars, post-holes and post-hole deposits in buildings from the Viking Age throughout Scandinavia suggest that there was a cultic significance ascribed to roof-carrying posts.⁴⁴³ Setting the highseat pillars in connection to the world tree would not explain their plural number, however.

The practice of throwing the pillars into the ocean to ask for supernatural guidance in the process of taking new land has been interpreted as the transport of sacred power from the old land to the new, requesting divine help to ensure a suitable new place for settlement can be found.⁴⁴⁴ In the case of one settler, Þórólfr Mostrarskegg, the pillars are explained in connection to Þórólfr’s veneration of the god Þórr, as his image is said to have

Rudolf Simek is rather critical of attempts to connect *Askr* and *Embla* to the Vandal kings Assi and Ambri however, cf. Simek “Northern Mythology” 74.

⁴³⁶ Overview in Hultgård, and Lindow “Norse Mythology” 62-3.

⁴³⁷ “Snorri Sturluson. Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning” 13, “Edda” 5.

⁴³⁸ Hultgård 61.

⁴³⁹ Hultgård 60.

⁴⁴⁰ ÍF I.1 42 and 45 (Ingólfr), 124-25 (Þórólfr) and ÍF I.2 317 (Hrollaugr), 371 (Hásteinn). A more detailed overview can be found in Bödl 163-176 and Wellendorf 5-9.

⁴⁴¹ Wellendorf 8-9.

⁴⁴² Bödl 171-4 and Gunnell 193.

⁴⁴³ Bödl 175.

⁴⁴⁴ Wellendorf 10, Clunies Ross “prolonged” 143 and “Textual Territory” 19.

been carved onto them according to *Eyrbyggja saga*.⁴⁴⁵ Jonas Wellendorf has pointed to the occurrence of the motif of pillar throwing both in Old Norse and several Latin hagiographic texts from Ireland, and suggests that the ritual was understood by medieval writers to emphasize the pious character of those among the settlers who were said to entrust the location for their final settlement to the will of the Christian God or the pagan gods.⁴⁴⁶

In his analysis of *landnám* traditions, Klaus Bödl emphasizes that the writers and compilers of the sagas often used traditional material they themselves did not necessarily understand, which becomes quite apparent in connection with the tradition of the throwing of the pillars, since their precise function once found again by the land-taker remains so enigmatic in the texts. As Klaus Bödl remarks, this stands in contrast to other elements concerning the old pagan faith:

Since other elements of pagan belief are in fact commented on in the Sagas, albeit usually from a Christian perspective, it can be assumed that the exact meaning of the highseat pillars in the process of land taking was no longer known to authors of the High Middle Ages.⁴⁴⁷

Based on the fact that the highseat pillars were used in connection with migrating and settling, always referred to in the plural form, and doubtless connected to wooden objects (though in some texts not necessarily in pillar shape but also as *setstokkar*, presumably other pillars, bench-posts, or even a coffin as in *Egils saga*), it could be that this tradition is likewise echoing dioscuric myth.⁴⁴⁸ Wooden objects in pillar shape are connected to mythic motifs dealing with the creation of new civilizations, both as expressed in the anthropogenic myth of the creation of the first two humans in *Völuspá* and *Gylfaginning*, who are found on the shore by the gods, and in traditions involving the names of mythical brother pairs active in migration and the foundation of new societies. Even modern examples of house gables are connected to such brothers as in the case of Hengist and Horsa in northern Germany.

That such pillar pairs were a presence in the landscape no longer necessarily understood by the writers and compilers of Old Norse texts could be further indicated by a rather enigmatic passage preserved in *Hávamál* 49 in which the narrator (presumably Óðinn) states that he gave his clothes “to two wooden men” he saw standing along a way.⁴⁴⁹ Finally, even the first redactor of *Landnámabók* to mention the old hall in Reykjavík, maybe Sturla Þórðarson, found it worth mentioning that “the high-seat pillars can still be seen in the hall there.”⁴⁵⁰ The precise function of these pillars, and their

⁴⁴⁵ ÍF IV 7.

⁴⁴⁶ Wellendorf 19-20.

⁴⁴⁷ “Da andere heidnische Glaubenselemente in den Sagas durchaus kommentiert werden, wenn auch in der Regel aus christlicher Perspektive, liegt es nahe anzunehmen, dass die genaue Bedeutung der Hochsitzpfeiler im Landnahmeakt den hochmittelalterlichen Autoren nicht mehr bewusst war.” (Bödl 166).

⁴⁴⁸ Hásteinn Atlason casts his *setstokkar* (ÍF I.2 371) while Skalla-Grímr throws out his deceased father in a coffin and settles where it lands on (ÍF II 72).

⁴⁴⁹ “The Poetic Edda” 21. “Edda” 24.

⁴⁵⁰ “Book of Settlements” 21. “þar eru enn ǫndugissúlur þær í eldhúsi.” ÍF I.1 45. *Landnámabók* also reports about one settler, Hrosskell, who set down a pole he called *Landkǫnnuð*, “Land-explorer” on the edge of

signifying potential, however, may no longer have been readily understood by him or his audience.

It is possible that Sturla, or an earlier redactor of *Landnámabók* who recorded the memory of the founding father, Ingólfr, either combined or completed this memory utilizing written or oral traditions about founding brother pairs going back to dioscuric traditions. It seems unlikely that Ingólfr and Hjörleifr were conceived as a (foster) brother pair from the start, since Hjörleifr not only goes unmentioned in *Íslendingabók* but is also absent in all of the Icelandic sagas with the exception of the *Flóamanna saga*.⁴⁵¹ Maybe Hjörleifr was invented, or perhaps he was a companion or relative of Ingólfr, who was promoted or highlighted to provide Icelanders' founding father with a (foster) brother worthy of the start of a new community. It is also quite probable that several traditions were conflated in the figure of Hjörleifr, such as the mentioned dioscuric elements, the themes connected to Hrómundr Gripsson (the motif of breaking a mound, taking the sword, and marrying the king's sister), and finally, traditions about other supposed family members of Ingólfr. *Hauksbók*, for example, mentions another foster brother of Ingólfr, Herjólfur, who is said to have settled in the southwest after receiving this land from Ingólfr. This passage is also in *Skarðsárþingabók* and *Þórðarþingabók*, but instead of a foster brother, *Sturlubók* mentions him briefly as a *frændi*, or male relative of Ingólfr elsewhere.⁴⁵² Could Herjólfur the foster brother have been promoted to Hjörleifr the foster brother?

Challenging the *landnám*

What I would like to suggest about *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók*'s approaches to and the treatment of the memory of a first settler of Iceland is that both works use different strategies to integrate this figure, which allows us to gain a deeper understanding of each of these texts and its targeted audience. While *Íslendingabók*, a commission for two bishops, uses typological parallels with either the biblical creation myth or allusions to salvational history, *Landnámabók*, starting with Sturla's redaction, streamlines its foundational narration with elements of oral storytelling and secular traditions of founding brother pairs from early medieval Europe and Late Antiquity, which may go back to even earlier universal themes of founding narratives that were widely known. Aside from being accompanied by his foster brother, in *Sturlubók* Ingólfr is said to have used supernatural guidance in determining his final settling place—he both sacrifices and uses his high-seat pillars. This practice points to the presence of more indigenous rituals used in connection with migration and land-taking, just as described for several other settlers in *Landnámabók*, some of the sagas of Icelanders, and even hagiographical texts from elsewhere in Northern Europe.⁴⁵³

Landnámabók is thus a compilation, and indeed, a creation, regarding the history of Icelandic settlement that provides a major source for the cultural memory of the *landnám*,

the area he claimed as his *landnám*. (ÍF I.2 230-1.)

⁴⁵¹ Hjörleifr is mentioned in two early Norwegian sources, *Historia Norwegie* and *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium*, and also the fragment of a *kvæði* by Óláfr hvítaskáld Þórðarson, which I discuss below.

⁴⁵² ÍF I.2 395, *Skarðsárþingabók* 186. S91 and H79 mention Herjólfur as “frændi Ingólfs landnámamanns” elsewhere (ÍF I.1 132-4).

⁴⁵³ Cf. Wellendorf.

which has effectively overwritten deviating settlement traditions in Icelanders' communicative, oral memory. At the same time, however, the text preserves some elements of traditions of migration and the foundation of new civilizations that lead back to a myth once known widely among Indo-European-speaking peoples. The origin of Icelanders, in the forms where we find it preserved and discussed in medieval writing, is the product of a specific and targeted effort to streamline the traditions of the settlement of Iceland in a small number of texts, authored by a small circle of literate and educated individuals. These writers, authors, and compilers created an Icelandic foundational narrative in line with similar narratives from abroad, featuring and highlighting a single first settler, Ingólfr, along with several other prominent first settlers, among them, the four settlers highlighted by Ari in *Íslendingabók*, whose land-claims documented in *Landnámabók* spanned areas so large they were probably vastly exaggerated.⁴⁵⁴ Thus, what the authors, redactors, and compilers of the texts reviewed to this point share in common is a commitment to a specific version of Iceland's earliest history, its codification and canonization. This enabled anyone reading or hearing the information recited from the late-twelfth or thirteenth century onward, to imagine themselves as members of an imagined community of Icelanders, a community that was built, organized, and governed by members of a chosen few families from Norway, who are said to have controlled large areas of the country right from their first arrival.

This coherent literary image has been challenged recently on several levels. As demonstrated in the preceding chapters, there is archaeological evidence that the bulk of settlers arrived on the island during the time period stipulated in the written texts, roughly from 870 until 930. At the same time, however, it has also been shown that some areas were settled earlier than this, and certainly in manners different from the descriptions found in the texts discussed. As has been mentioned earlier, of all the first settlers mentioned in *Landnámabók*, no archaeological finds have been discovered that could confirm the existence of any of their dwellings. At the same time, studies have revealed that some of the settlers mentioned in *Landnámabók* were later inventions, based either on false place-name etymologies or invented in an effort to fill in the gaps of *Landnámabók's* imaginary map of the island, while some land-claims of historical settlers were expanded to justify the landholding rights of later families.⁴⁵⁵ So who could have been the other settlers inhabiting early Iceland?

Íslendingabók, *Landnámabók*, and *Historia Norwegie* all refer to the presence of early Christian anchorites on the island, *papar*, who are said to have left behind bells, books, and croziers.⁴⁵⁶ The Irish monk Dicuil writes in his 825 *Liber de mensura orbis terrae* of monks who temporarily lived on an island called *Thule*, and this island matches the description of Iceland.⁴⁵⁷ Many attempts have been undertaken to locate very early Celtic remains in Iceland and to prove the presence of Irish people before or during the *landnám* using philological or anthropological means.⁴⁵⁸ There are a few archaeological

⁴⁵⁴ Adolf Friðriksson and Orri Vésteinsson 148; Sveinbjörn Rafnsson "Studier" 166-81; Anders Gade Jensen 139-61.

⁴⁵⁵ Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson 273-5; Sveinbjörn Rafnsson "Studier" 203; Jakob Benediktsson "review" 317-8.

⁴⁵⁶ *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók* use the exact same line here, "bækr írskar, bjöllur ok baglar" (ÍF I.1 5 and 32.)

⁴⁵⁷ Dicuil 28-30.

⁴⁵⁸ For instance, Matthías Þórðarson in 1931, T. C. Lethbridge in 1950, overviews in Gísli Sigurðsson, and more recently, Kristján Ahronson (cf. Gísli Sigurðsson 24-25; Adolf Friðriksson 22-35).

finds which appear to confirm an early Irish presence: small bells and bronze pins that could have been used as *styli*, and several man-made caves decorated with cross engravings that have parallel features with early Christian crosses in western Scotland.⁴⁵⁹ There is no solid agreement, however, that these finds stem from the *papar*, and not, as some have indicated, from later settlers of Gaelic origin. The scholar Christopher Morris even suggests that the *papar* had lived as missionaries alongside the settlers for long periods of time.⁴⁶⁰

Place-names incorporating *pap-* as an element have been documented in the Faroes, Shetland, Orkney, the Hebrides, and southeastern Iceland, but may go back to naming traditions that were formed before the places in question were settled and brought along by the settlers.⁴⁶¹ Several sagas, in addition to *Landnámabók*, mention Icelandic settlers of Gaelic origin who came as wives, slaves, or independent settlers. About two percent of the personal names mentioned in *Landnámabók* are of Gaelic origin, though the redactions vary in their focused interest on the subject, with *Hauksbók* in particular dedicating a significant amount of attention to Irish settlers.⁴⁶² Place-names and archaeological items indicating Gaelic influence are most frequently found in Iceland's west and south.⁴⁶³ Despite the rather scant representation of Icelanders of Gaelic origin in *Landnámabók* and the family sagas (with some exceptions, for instance, in *Laxdæla saga*), several historians and literary scholars have argued that there was a much larger proportion than has been previously assumed, not only based on onomastics and archaeological finds but also in the discussions of the parallels between several genres of Old Icelandic and Gaelic literatures and popular poetic meters.⁴⁶⁴ Studies based on Icelanders' blood groups and hair color carried out from the 1950s onward have likewise pointed to a closer link of many living Icelanders to ancestors from Scotland and Ireland, but it has not been until modern DNA research that this could be definitively confirmed. In an article published in 2000 in *Nature Genetics*, Einar Árnason and others argue that Iceland had a genetically more variable founding population than, for instance, France.⁴⁶⁵ Other mitochondrial DNA studies have now confirmed that about 66 percent of the original male settlers of Iceland came from Scandinavia; this is compared to 37.5 percent of the female settlers. The remaining 62.5 percent of females were of Gaelic origin.⁴⁶⁶ A large percentage of these non-Scandinavian ancestors were probably brought as slaves, though it is difficult to estimate exactly how many. Gísli Sigurðsson cites studies estimating that between 20 to 40 percent of the

⁴⁵⁹ Kristján Áhrnsson 80. Bells and pins are shown and discussed by Adolf Friðriksson "Sagas" 27 and 29.

⁴⁶⁰ Morris 181-4.

⁴⁶¹ Grønlie 17 and Fellows-Jensen 116-7.

⁴⁶² ÍF I.1 lxxx. The *Landnámabók* redactions remain silent about the origin of more than half of the settlers. Only about 130 of the altogether 430 first settlers mentioned are identified as having come from Norway. Another 50 came "vestan um haf," which, if specified, were references to Suðureyjar (the Hebrides) and Ireland. Some settlers are traced back to Kjarval Írakonungr (S 208, 217, H 307, S 366, S 392). Six of the settlers are said to have come from Sweden or Götaland, and one from Denmark. Of the settlers whose origin is said to have been Norwegian, a clear majority descended from southwestern Norway (ÍF I.1, cxxx- cxxxi).

⁴⁶³ Gísli Sigurðsson "Gaelic Influence" 27.

⁴⁶⁴ Cf. Árni Óla "Landnám," Hermann Pálsson "Keltar," Gísli Sigurðsson "Gaelic Influence," and the works mentioned here.

⁴⁶⁵ Einar Árnason et al. 82.

⁴⁶⁶ Agnar Helgason et al. 735.

earliest population in Iceland were slaves.⁴⁶⁷

That the earliest settlers came accompanied by their slaves is clearly stated in several of the settlement accounts in *Landnámabók*, among them Icelanders' foundational narrative. Hermann Pálsson has connected Hjørleifr's acquisition of ten slaves while raiding in Ireland to Irish sources that document the killing and carrying off of "ten hundred" people from Armagh, which is mentioned in Irish annals for the year 869.⁴⁶⁸ Irish annals mention that Briton and Pictish slaves were also traded in great numbers in Dublin in the years around 871, and that a large number of people were abducted and carried off by Vikings for a number of years after that.⁴⁶⁹

In a recently published book entitled *Den svarte Vikingen* [The Black Viking], which uses a combination of fictional and non-fictional elements, Old-Norse scholar Bergsveinn Birgisson explores the biography of an Icelandic settler, the already mentioned Geirmundr Heljarskinn. Breaking with the romantic idea of Iceland as an island inhabited by independent farmers fleeing a despotic ruler in Norway, Birgisson instead draws a portrait of a brutal, aristocratic leader and large-scale importer of Irish slaves who dominated the northwestern part of Iceland during the late ninth and early tenth century. As Bergsveinn comments in a section about Ari fróðis's "clean" history of Icelanders,

In many ways, I can understand these first historians well: a nation built on greed, pillaging and slavery? That's not exactly a pretty beginning.⁴⁷⁰

It may not come as a surprise in this context then that most genealogies preserved in the sagas and *Landnámabók* tend to be traced back to free and noble ancestors, such as chieftains or legendary heroes—a far preferable option than thinking of oneself as a descendent of a slave, or worse, of a person responsible for the abduction and human trade of people captured during the Viking raids.⁴⁷¹

The prologue to the *Þórðarþók* redaction of *Landnámabók*, gives the following reason for the use of the study of genealogies and Iceland's settlement:

People often say that writing about the Settlements is irrelevant learning, but we think we can better meet the criticism of foreigners when they accuse us of being descended from slaves or scoundrels, if we know for certain the truth about our ancestry. And for those who want to know ancient lore and how to trace genealogies, it's better to start at the beginning than come in at the middle. Anyway, all civilized nations want to know about the origins of their own society

⁴⁶⁷ Gísli Sigurðsson "Gaelic Influence" 31. Slavery was abrogated in Iceland in the late twelfth century or somewhat later than that—*Sturlunga saga* does no longer mention slaves in its coverage of events in the late twelfth and thirteenth century. This was possibly due to the inefficient use of slave labor that was difficult in an environment with widespread inland livestock farming (as, for instance, sheep herding is hard to supervise) and the long winters during which the cost of providing food for additional slave labor was high. Cf. Karras 80-3 and 135-6 and Foote "Þrælahald" 69-70.

⁴⁶⁸ Paraphrased from Gísli Sigurðsson "Gaelic Influence" 31.

⁴⁶⁹ Gísli Sigurðsson "Gaelic Influence" 32.

⁴⁷⁰ "På mange måter skjønner jeg disse første historikerne godt: en nasjon tuftet på profittbegjær, rovfangst og slaveri? Det er ikke akkurat noe vakkert opphav!" (Bergsveinn Birgisson 211).

⁴⁷¹ There are, of course, several popular characters in the sagas who descended from slaves, for instance, Guðrīður Þorbjarnardóttir in the *Vinland sagas* and Ólafr pái in *Laxdæla saga*.

and the beginnings of their own race.⁴⁷²

This passage stems from a seventeenth-century manuscript, written when prose against misconceptions of Iceland was a leading theme in much of the country's literary output. This type of writing is represented, for instance, by Arngrímur lærði's *Crymogaea*, or his *Brevis commentarius de Islandia*, which he specifically composed to contradict foreign misconceptions about Iceland, such as late-Baroque beliefs in the inferiority and lack of cultivation of the people of the North, or the then-common notion that the gateway to Hell was to be found in Iceland. The above quoted passage from *Þórðarbók* makes sense in the context of such early modern humanistic writing, but taking *Landnámabók*'s complicated transmission history into account, the passage could also go back to one of its earliest redactions, such as *Melabók* or even *Styrmisbók*.⁴⁷³

It is interesting that the passage above directly confronts the idea that Icelanders stem from slaves and criminals, and claims that it is a hallmark sign of *vittrar þjóðir*, a civilized people (or "nation," in Pálsson and Edward's translation), to know one's ancestry. The foundational narrative preserved in the *Landnámabók* redactions from *Sturlubók* onward feature the story of two people who were outlawed for murder in their native Norway and who had to leave their home, taking their slaves and loot acquired during a Viking expedition. Still, in juxtaposing the different characters of the two foster brothers, and turning Ingólfr into an *exemplum*, the tale succeeds in reconciling him as an exemplary founding father. Yet, this leaves us with two questions: Do we know how Icelanders were perceived by others during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; and are there indications that their descent from criminals and slaves was a view held elsewhere?

Constructing Culture from the Gaze of Others

Two of the earliest preserved synoptic histories of Norway written in Latin, *Historia Norwegie*⁴⁷⁴ and Theodoricus Monachus's *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagensium*, both refer to the settlement of Iceland and preserve a textual memory of the founding foster brothers. *Historia Norwegie*, an anonymous Norwegian history, mentions "Yngvar" and "Hjorleiv" as the first settlers in a section dedicated to Iceland entitled *De Glaciali Insula*, and indeed adds that the two left Norway because they were accused of murder:

Still farther west is situated that large island called by the Romans Ultima Thule, which today is inhabited by a great host of settlers, but which was once a vast

⁴⁷² "Book of Settlements" 6. "Það er margra manna mál að það sé uskilldur frodleikur að rita Landnam. Enn uier þikiunst heildur suara kunna utlendum monnum. þa er þeir bregða oz þui, að uier sieum komner af þrælum eda illmennum, ef vier vitum vijst vorar kynferdir sannar. Suo og þeim monnum er vita vilia fornn fræde, eda rekia ættar tolur, að taca heildur að uphafi til, enn hógguast i mitt mal. enda ero suo allar vitrar þioder at vita uilia uphaf sinna landzbygda, eda huers huerge tilhefjast eda kynsloder" (*Skarðsárabók* 157n333).

⁴⁷³ "Book of Settlements" 6-7.

⁴⁷⁴ This is the title given to this work by Gustav Storm in his 1880 edition. The text's original title—if it had one—was most likely *Ystoria Norwagensium* (cf. *Historia Norwegie* 8 and *Ystoria Norwegie* in Kuhn and Phelpsstead's translation "*History of Norway*" 9).

wilderness and unknown to mankind right up to the days of Harald Fairhair. Then two Norwegians, Yngvar and Hjørleiv, fleeing their homeland because they had been accused of murders, took ship with their wives and children and through pitching ocean waves sought the island, earlier discovered by Gardar and afterwards by Odd, till at long last they found it.⁴⁷⁵

It is unknown where exactly *Historia Norwegie* was composed, either in western Norway or outside of the country.⁴⁷⁶ Quite likely, it came about as a high-prestige project, written in schooled Latin by an author who was educated abroad and who was aware that his text confronted a subject “hitherto unattempted in the Latin tongue.”⁴⁷⁷ The text marks “the earliest literary monument by a Norwegian . . . it represents the beginning of Norwegian literature,” as Lars Boje Mortensen puts it in his introduction to a recent edition.⁴⁷⁸ Mortensen dates the text to the second half of the twelfth century, maybe as early as 1160-1175, while more conservative estimates date it to simply “before 1195.”⁴⁷⁹

Historia Norwegie comprises many textual parallels to continental learned works, and can therefore be understood as belonging to a very early writing tradition. It is clear that its author was well versed in the continental and learned literature of his time, and it is probable that he had received his education abroad at a Danish or Saxon center of learning. He may have also known one of the earliest written documents from Iceland, Sæmundr Sigfússon’s now lost Latin history.⁴⁸⁰ While the author was definitely familiar with other Latin works, he seems not to have known the second Norwegian work on the history of the Norwegian kings that mentions the settlement of Iceland, Theodoricus Monachus’s *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium*, which likewise seems unaware of *Historia Norwegie*.

Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium, a history of the Norwegian kings from Harald Hárfagri to Sigurður Magnússon, was authored around 1180 by Theodoricus, which is probably a latinization of the Norwegian name Þórir, a monk and presumably member of the Benedictine community closest to the cathedral at Niðaróss, as his work is dedicated to the archbishop Øystein Erlendsson.⁴⁸¹ Theodoricus states that he did not use written sources, but instead that he utilized oral traditions and informants from Iceland as his sources:

In this book I have set down the count of years which I ascertained by making the most diligent inquiries I could among those whom we in our language call Icelanders. It is well known that they without doubt have always been more

⁴⁷⁵ *Historia Norwegie* 69 and 71. “Deinde uersus occasum illa magna insula, que ab Italis 'ultima Tile' dicta est, nunc quam magna frequentia colonum culta, quondam uasta solitudo et usque ad tempus Haraldī Comati hominibus incognita. Tunc quidam Norwagenses Ingwar et Hiorleifr ob reatus homicidiorum patriam fugentes cum coniugibus et pueris naues ingredientes insulam, prius inuentam a Gardaro post ab Oddo, inquirendo per pendulas pelagi undas tandem reperierunt. Et in quinquaginta fere annis ubique inhabitata, ut nunc est distributa.” (*Historia Norwegie* 68 and 70)

⁴⁷⁶ *Historia Norwegie* 23.

⁴⁷⁷ *Historia Norwegie* 51 “sed hucusque Latino eloquio intemptatum” (*Historia Norwegie* 50)

⁴⁷⁸ *Historia Norwegie* 9.

⁴⁷⁹ *Historia Norwegie* 9 and 24, and “*History of Norway*” 83.

⁴⁸⁰ The interdependence of Norway and Iceland’s earliest historical works is a complex problem, cf. Theodore M. Andersson 197-227, esp. 200-209.

⁴⁸¹ “*Theodoricus Monachus*” ix and xxiii, and Andersson 201.

knowledgeable and more inquisitive in matters of this kind than all the other northern peoples ⁴⁸²

Ingólfr and Hjörleifr are referred to as brothers-in-law, who traveled on a single ship along with “many others.” Theodoricus refers to them as “prominent among these” men, who set out and searched for Iceland, setting the beginning of their settlement in relation to Haraldr hárfagri’s rule:

In the ninth or, as some believe, the tenth year of Haraldr’s reign, certain traders sailed to the islands which we call the Faroes, where they were caught in a storm and suffered a long and hard ordeal at sea. Finally they were driven to an exceedingly remote land, which some believe was the island of Thule; but since I do not know I neither affirm nor deny the truth of the matter. They accordingly disembarked and explored round about and even scaled some mountains, but found no trace at all of human habitation. So they returned to Norway and told of the land which they had found; and by praising it greatly they emboldened many others to go in search of it. Prominent among these was a man of noble blood by the name of Ingólfr, from the province which is called Hörðaland. He made ready a ship and had with him his brother-in-law,⁴⁸³ Hjörleifr, along with many others. He set out in search of the aforementioned land, found it, and in about the tenth year of Haraldr’s reign he and his people began to settle it.⁴⁸⁴

In contrast to *Historia Norwegie*, Theodoricus neither mentions an underlying motivation for Ingólfr and Hjörleifr’s search for and relocation to the island nor does he connect them to criminal activity. Both *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium* and *Historia Norwegie* are early and independent Norwegian sources about Ingólfr and Hjörleifr, each preserving a version of Icelandic settlement.⁴⁸⁵ The author of *Historia Norwegie* might

⁴⁸² “*Theodoricus Monachus*” 5. “Hunc numerum annorum Domini, investigatum prout dilligentissime potuimus ab illis, quos nos vulgato nomine Islendinga vocamus, in hoc loco posuimus: quos constat sine ulla dubitatione præ omnibus aquilonaribus populis in hujusmodi semper et peritiores et curiosiores extitisse.” (*Monumenta Historica Norvegiæ* 6)

⁴⁸³ The word Theodoricus uses for Hjörleifr is *socer*, would effectively make him Ingólfr’s father in law.

⁴⁸⁴ “*Theodoricus Monachus*” 6. “Anno Haraldi nono, vel ut quidam putant decimo, navigaverunt mercatores quidam ad insulas, quas nos Pharias vocamus, ibique tempestate correpti multum diuque fatigati per oceanum tandem appulsi sunt ad quandam terram valde remotam, quam quidam arbitrantur esse Thule insulam, sed nos quia nescimus rei veritatem nec affirmamus nec negamus. Ascendentes itaque de navi et circumquaque vagantes sed et montana conscendentes nihil penitus reppererunt humanæ habitationis. Reversi igitur in Norwagiam nunciaverunt terram quam invenerant multumque laudantes plures animaverunt ad quærendum. Inter quos tamen præcipue vir quidam nobilis, Ingulfus nomine, de provincia, quæ dicitur Horthaland, navem paravit socerumque suum sibi Hiorleifum nomine cum multis aliis associavit, prædictam terram quæsivit, invenit et cum suis inhabitare coepit anno pæne decimo regni Haraldi.” (*Monumenta Historica Norvegiæ* 8-9)

⁴⁸⁵ Theodoricus did not know or use Adam von Bremen’s history of the bishops of Hamburg. Instead, he seems to have structured his work around the fates of the Norwegian kings and the short, interspersed digressions on Paulus Diaconus’s *Historia Langobardum*, as noted by Peter Foote, suggesting that he was familiar with French and Roman sources (“*Theodoricus Monachus*” viii). In contrast to that, the author of *Historia Norwegie* knew several German sources, for instance Adam von Bremen’s *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* (1070), and Honorius of Autun’s encyclopedia *Imago mundi* (1110-1139), a work composed in southern Germany, and from which he borrowed phrases and may have taken his general interest in natural phenomena and *mirabilia* (*Historia Norwegie* 17 and 20).

have learned about the two first settlers, as well as the other early visitors to Iceland, from Sæmundr's lost work or other early written documents, though the fact that the text uses the phonetically somewhat alike "Yngvar" for "Ingólfr" would suggest that he might have had access to oral traditions about Iceland's settlement, and that whatever written sources were available to him at the time of his writing most likely did not contain the *landnám* account as found in other Icelandic sources. Theodoricus, in turn, had access to informants' oral versions of the events, quite plausibly from some of the many Icelanders present in Niðaróss. These informants could have told him of a first settler worthy of mention, a "man of noble blood," which differs significantly from the account in *Historia Norwegie*, where it is said that the two first settlers were suspected murderers, fleeing their sentence.

Additionally, it is interesting to note how the section in *Historia Norwegie* dedicated to Iceland, *De Glaciali Insula*, discusses Iceland as one of Norway's "tributary islands," which is then listed in a group with other such areas, for example the Orkneys and the Faroe Islands. For his part, Theodoricus refers to Icelanders not just as a geographically defined people, but also as a people he calls specifically "Icelanders" and sees united with the unique characteristic of being "memory specialists," who "have always been more knowledgeable and more inquisitive" when it comes to memories of things past. In *Historia Norwegie*, Icelanders are a subgroup of Norwegians, defined as subjects under the rule of the Norwegian king, living on one of the most outlying tributary islands, and incorporated as a community founded by two people accused of murder after fleeing the Norwegian mainland with their families. It is possible, then, to posit that the passage from *Þórðarbók*, and with that, the early *Landnámabók* redactions, were written in response to this perception and this criticism brought against Icelanders by foreigners.

Both *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók*, as well as family and contemporary sagas featuring Ingólfr, can be read as compositions directed against the notion that the island was founded as a community of slaves and outlaws. What is emphasized in these accounts is that Iceland was formed by a select group of early settlers (predominantly from Norway), who left during the rule of a king who tried to create a united kingdom, partly by seizing farmers' land. This memory of Icelanders' earliest arrival on the island is presented in accordance with typological parallels seen in the Old Testament, as in the case of *Íslendingabók*, or in line with more universal traditions about founding myths and migration narratives as in *Landnámabók*. The story of Ingólfr and Hjørleifr as it is preserved in *Sturlubók* is a short piece of masterful storytelling, including the themes of love, jealousy, conflict, and betrayal. It also effectively highlights an *exemplum* of a first settler and founding father for Icelanders: a person who piously sacrificed to his gods, letting them determine his final place of settlement; one who later freed his slaves; and one whose descendants followed in his footsteps to become productive and virtuous members of their community. Quite symptomatically and in contrast to Ingólfr's success in *Sturlubók*, Hjørleifr drifts helplessly along the Icelandic coast on his second and final journey to the island before landing on at Hjørleifshöfði. Later, he is killed by his rebelling slaves, who flee to islands lying off the coast of Iceland, called Vestmannaeyjar, islands of the men from the west, a term commonly used in the sagas for the Irish. When Ingólfr tracks down the slaves there, and rescues his sister Helga, he kills their leader, Dufþakr, at a place then called Dufþaksskor.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸⁶ ÍF I.1 44.

Seeing the absence of other, deviating versions of the Icelandic settlement, and the much more diffuse and complicated picture about early Icelandic history as suggested by the archaeological record and mitochondrial DNA studies of Icelanders' ancestry, what Icelandic writers have preserved in their earliest texts was the start of their society as it *should have been*. In writing against misconceptions from abroad, and using the *papar* and the Gaelic slaves as the silent and mostly absent “other” against whom to define themselves, Icelanders created a literary memory and version of their own “great narration” of their migration and settlement, effectively forming an imagined community of a chosen people.⁴⁸⁷ This narration—as illustrated in the passage on Dufþakr's death and the Vestmannaeyjar above—shows how place-names that could have indicated an early Gaelic presence in Iceland are not explained as such, but instead used to commemorate how people from Ireland were effectively erased.⁴⁸⁸

As the text examples discussed in this chapter have demonstrated, Iceland's writers commonly subscribed to one memory of the settlement and their descent, disseminating this memory in the new medium of written text, specifically in the vernacular, and soon enough, they did this while exploring new narrative genres such as the sagas, thus creating an imagined community of Icelanders in literary form beginning in the late-twelfth century onward. The members of this community belonged to a small, select circle of educated and literate Icelanders, who wrote, read, and commissioned works which created and circulated the cultural memory figure of the *landnám*. Selected aspects of the past were thus condensed into the symbolic figure of Ingólfr and his *landnám*, and preserved in the *Landnámabók* redactions and several of the sagas of Icelanders, which soon circulated in multiple copies and allowed for a widespread and simultaneous consumption of this memory—and for readers and listeners to understand themselves as members of one, coherent group.

This was done by authors and compilers who had just about lost access to the last bearers of the oral, communicative memory about the events themselves, but who must still have known about differing oral traditions about Iceland's origin that they chose not to include to their texts. These authors and compilers had been educated at Iceland's few and small centers of learning where they were exposed to learned literature from the continent. In so doing, they created a fictive, but dynamic ethnic identity of Icelanders: A free people living in a chosen land sharing in a common ancestral myth, specific legal traditions, and a particular system of governance—in short, together, they shared and formed Icelanders' imagined community.

⁴⁸⁷ On the *landnám* as Icelanders' “great narration” cf. Glauser 2000, 212.

⁴⁸⁸ O'Donoghue 20.

**Ingólfur Arnarson was the first
settler in Iceland, more than
1100 years ago.**

**His trip from Norway lasted four
days and there were no napkins.**



Fig. 23. Icelandair napkin (2006)

Postscript: Finding a Founding Father

In concluding this study of Ingólfur Arnarson as the embodiment of Icelanders' earliest past and their founding father, some final questions need to be answered: How did the memory figure of the *landnám* come to last, and how could it so effectively inscribe itself into Icelanders' consciousness, to a point where it still appears in newspaper headlines today? What is it about the figure of Ingólfr and the small imagined community of Icelanders in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century that could preserve this memory throughout centuries of eventful Icelandic history? What makes the first Icelandic a name or icon to be presented to foreign tourists when they order a drink on an Iceland-air flight, or visit "the" Icelandic Bar in Reykjavík? In other words, how could the memory of the *landnám* and Ingólfur Arnarson become so inherently . . . *Icelandic*?

The answer, I believe, can be found in two different aspects: First, the fact that the memory figure of the *landnám* as preserved in the texts and later iconized by Einar Jónsson's statue, served to fulfill both contra-present and foundational functions of a myth of origin, and could therefore cater to the special needs of Icelanders triggered by historical forces during times of crisis, *while also* providing a long-term and sacred source of (pre-) national identity. A second factor I see is Icelanders' relation to nature and their landscape as an additional important source in preserving memories and relating the present to the past through what is perceived as a legendary topography.

Iceland is largely devoid of man-made remains of the past, especially pre-dating the eighteenth century. Unlike the rest of Europe, there are no castles, fortresses or cathedrals. Instead, historical events are tied to features in the landscape, with the description of landscape, and the mapping of nature into culture, being omnipresent in the early secular literature. In the sagas and *Landnámabók* this is frequently done by negotiating and utilizing space through descriptions of landownership and the origins of place-names, or by attaching storytelling traditions to certain natural or man-made markers, such as mountains or grave mounds. I have discussed several such markers and the place-names and traditions attached to them in this project, for instance Arnarhóll, Ingólfsfell, Ingólfsaugr or the Vestmannaeyjar.

Such a use of landscape, filling it with significance and endowing it with signs, is what Jürg Glauser has called the semioticization of landscape in an article dedicated to the sagas and *þættir*, which he sees as literary representations of a new social space.⁴⁸⁹ This new social space was decisively defined by the literary memory of the *landnám*, which found its imprint as we have seen in countless place names, in a complex way of asserting ownership and control over territory and memory through the creation of a legendary topography. These place names preserve the cultural memory of Iceland's settlement and serve as mnemonic tools to highlight the deeds of specific settlers and establish a cult of ancestry for figures from the sagas and their descendants. In this way, they create a poetic landscape (an *ethnoscape* for Anthony Smith, or a *mnemotope* in Jan Assmann's framework), describing an area in which landscape and people are merged subjectively

⁴⁸⁹ Glauser "Sagas and *þættir*" 209.

over time, and in which each belongs to the other.⁴⁹⁰ Such a landscape naturalizes memories, so they become extensions of a community's terrain and its natural features—an outsider seeing and perceiving the landscape may be told that it is impossible to understand “the people” or their culture without understanding their landscape and vice versa.⁴⁹¹ Such a view—in slight variation—can be found in Old Norse scholar Jónas Kristjánsson's 1988 preface to *Eddas and Sagas*, which expresses the conviction that only in speaking Icelandic *and* in perceiving and seeing the Icelandic landscape one can fully fathom Old Icelandic literature:

. . . if there is a slight disadvantage in the fact that the book was written *for Icelanders*, there ought to be a decided advantage in the fact that it was written *by an Icelander*, for none but Icelanders can fully participate in this unique national literature. Only we speak this ancient language and only we have the setting of the sagas in our daily view. Thus it ought to be of benefit for foreigners to be led through this landscape by an Icelandic guide.⁴⁹²

Here, we find the conviction that there is something about the connection of language, culture and landscape that is necessary to fully comprehend Icelanders' national literature and the memories preserved in it.⁴⁹³ At the same time, the naturalization of memories within the Icelandic landscape and the legendary topography created by it carried traditions about the *landnám* through centuries of Icelandic history, often in interplay with the textual heritage. We have seen Árni Magnússon's response when he encountered diverging traditions about the onomastic origin of Reykjavík in Chapter Three: what does not agree with *Landnámabók* is considered nonsense. The episode demonstrates how literary texts can become canonized and control and assert ownership over landscape.

The memory figure of the *landnám*, as represented by Ingólfur Arnarson, and preserved in the textual heritage and Icelanders' legendary topography, refers to a myth of origin that could serve both contra-present and foundational functions and has therefore proven to be both lasting and versatile.

In its contra-present function, the memory figure has provided relief during times of perceived decline in Iceland, through the conjuring up of a Golden Age past, providing an alternative draft for how to change a present *status quo* that is unsatisfactory. This function can be found in the exemplary qualities ascribed to Ingólfur in *Sturlubók* or *Flóamanna saga*, where a virtuous and pious man becomes forefather to rulers and notables in charge of the local and later national thing assembly. Such an interest in an exemplary forefather, and an individual characterized by his proper conduct, may be understandable also in the context of the turbulent times of the *Sturlungaöld* as a period marked by internal crisis and political instability, during which these texts were compiled.

⁴⁹⁰ Smith “Chosen Peoples” 136 and J. Assmann “Cultural Memory” 44-5.

⁴⁹¹ One site that especially embodies such a merging of landscape and people is Þingvellir, site of the ancient Alþingi, which historian Guðmundur Hálfðanarson analyzed as the perfect national symbol for Icelanders, representing the merging of nature and history. Cf. Guðmundur Hálfðanarson “Þingvellir.”

⁴⁹² Jónas Kristjánsson 7.

⁴⁹³ Interestingly, this note is exclusive to the English edition of *Eddas and Sagas* and not contained in the German version – would German readers had a chance at a better understanding because of the closer linguistic proximity of their language?

Ingólfur's personal qualities return into focus in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, during Icelanders' independence struggle, when a visual marker of a young and armed founding father was erected in symbolic representation of better times, and as a call for the re-appropriation of a past glory. This function of the myth, effective during moments of crisis, demonstrates that historical forces trigger special interests at special times—a fact illustrated by the statue project, the shifting interests in the location of the first farm, or the *Skirnir* debate which commenced shortly after Icelanders faced a severe political and economic crisis in the wake of the 2008 financial breakdown.

At the same time, the memory of the founding father served not only as a contra-present and political myth, but also in a foundational function, here relating to more constant models of the past and a general human need for memories of origins to provide something deep, meaningful, divinely inspired and unchangeable. For Icelanders, this includes the connection of memory to nature and the use of their landscape as a mnemotope. This mnemotope conveys details of a land-taking and settlement in accordance with concepts of divine guidance, providing thus a sacred soil and homeland to Icelanders. The memories connected with this function could preserve elements of traditions about the foundation of new civilizations with roots in some of the earliest recorded history in Europe. These memories provide a deep, cultural resource to Icelanders—deep both in a literal and figurative understanding, as they are inspired and challenged by the practice of digging into the ground, the breaking open and moving of soil, the preservation of archaeological artifacts, or the cementing of a visual marker and spatial monument of the first settler into the ground on Arnarhóll or Rivedal.

Rarely is what one finds after scratching away the surface and digging into the ground exactly what was expected. Sometimes there is little underneath to be found, which is what I expected at the onset of this study. At other times, however, one finds traces and glimpses of things previously unexpected and ancient, and so it has been for me in conducting this research project. I would like to dig on, but it is time to stop for now. With Stefán Ólafsson, the poet who in 1641 followed Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson on his expedition up Ingólfsfjall to assist in the excavation of what was believed to be Ingólfur's grave, I hear still a faint rumbling underneath the soil that calls for more attention.

Ordered by the Bishop to compose a poem while watching his workers fill in the mound again and erecting a cairn ("heath-marker") on top, Stefán composed

“Á Ingólfshaugi” (On Ingólfur’s Mound).⁴⁹⁴

Stóð af steindu smíði
staður fornmanns hlaðinn,
hlóðu að herrans boði
heiðiteikn yfir leiði.

Monument of stone stood piled
a place of a man from the old time,
they filled again, on the master's order
with a heath-marker over the grave

Haugur var hár og fagur
hrundinn saman á grundu,
en draugur dimmur og magur
drundi björgum undir.

The mound was tall and fair
now it has collapsed on the ground,
but a dark and thin ghost
rumbled under the rocks

⁴⁹⁴ Stefán Ólafsson 73.



Fig. 24. "Ingólfur" unveiled in Rivedal (1961)

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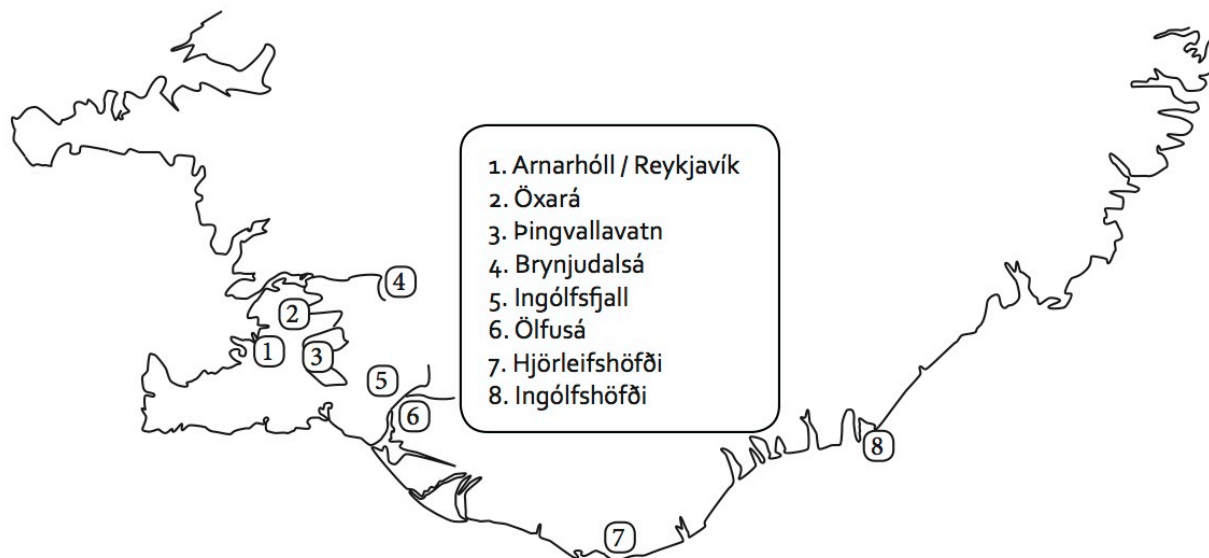
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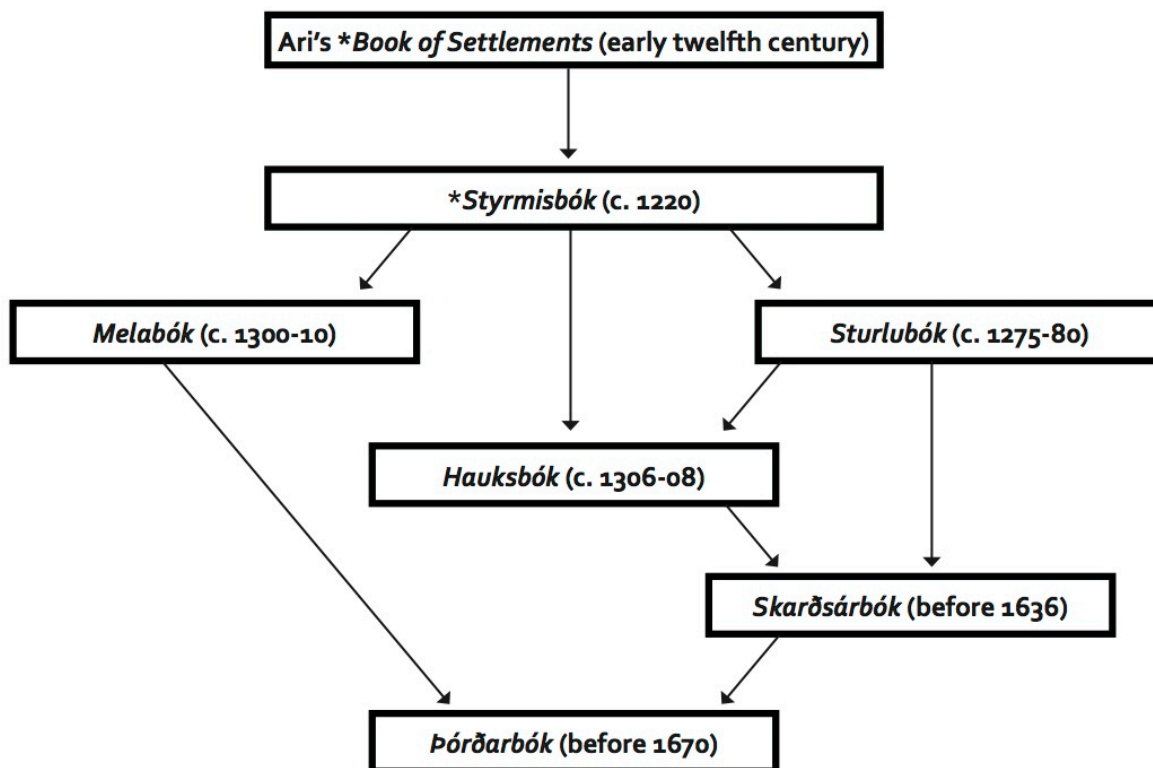
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Appendix

1. Map of Southern Iceland, indicating locations of Ingólfur's *landám* (Leonardo Covis)



2. Jón Jóhannesson's stemma of *Landnámabók* (Jón Jóhannesson "Gerðir" 226)



3. Sveinbjörn Rafnsson's stemma of *Landnámabók* (Sveinbjörn Rafnsson "Studier" 81)

