

*Categorizing Otherness
in the Kings' Sagas*

SIRPA AALTO

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to find out how the image of 'otherness' in the kings' sagas reflects the mental worldview of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere at the beginning of the thirteenth century. The main investigation also tries to answer how the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere defined its group boundary/boundaries and group identity. The Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere denotes in this study people sharing the same cultural, linguistic and historical background in the area covering approximately present-day Norway, Iceland, the Faroes and the Shetland and Orkney Islands, but the concept is to be understood as abstract and not confined to geography.

As a starting point for defining 'otherness' such terms as analogue and digital difference introduced by the anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen are applied, but it turns out that Eriksen's theory cannot be applied as such. The category of extreme 'otherness' (digital difference) is not a closed, exclusive category, but in spite of the big differences between the groups, there were also contacts. The study shows that even modern concepts concerning group identity and group formation can be applied to medieval sources.

Key words: Norway, medieval, sagas, otherness, group identity

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ABSTRAKTI

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoitus on osoittaa kuinka toiseuden kuva kuningas-saagoissa heijastelee norjalais-islantilaisen kulttuuripiirin mentaalista maailmankuvaa 1200-luvun alkupuolella. Pääkysymys pyrkii vastaamaan myös siihen kuinka norjalais-islantilainen kulttuuripiiri määritteli ryhmärajansa ja ryhmäidentiteettinsä. Tässä tutkimuksessa norjalais-islantilaisella kulttuuripiirillä tarkoitetaan niitä ihmisiä, jotka jakoivat saman kulttuurisen, kielellisen ja historiallisen taustan alueella, joka käsittää nykyään Norjan, Islannin, Fär-saaret, Shetlannin ja Orkney-saaret, mutta käsite on kuitenkin ymmärrettävä abstraktina eikä maantieteellisesti määrittyvänä.

Toiseuden määrittelyn lähtökohtana on sovellettu antropologi Thomas Hylland Eriksenin termejä analoginen ja digitaalinen toiseus, mutta tutkimus osoittaa, ettei Eriksenin teorioita ei voida soveltaa sellaisenaan. Äärimmäinen toiseus (digitaalinen toiseus) ei ole suljettu tai poissulkeva kategoria, sillä huolimatta suurista eroavaisuuksista ryhmien välillä oli myös kontakteja. Tutkimus osoittaa, että moderneja ryhmäidentiteettiä ja ryhmänmuodostusta koskevia termejä voidaan käyttää soveltaen keskiaikaisiin lähteisiin.

Avainsanat: Norja, keskiaikainen, saogat, toiseus, ryhmäidentiteetti

Preface

During the years that I have been engaged with this thesis I have often been asked how I ended up using sagas as sources and studying such an obscure theme. It was quite coincidental. While doing my MA I took a course in modern Icelandic and at the same time Professor Jukka Korpela, who was in charge of seminars at the Department of History, suggested that maybe I could write my seminar thesis about strangers or aliens in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (within *Heimskringla*). Here I am, still on that same path.

I would like to thank Professor Korpela for giving excellent guidance during these years. Even when busy, as he is most of the time, he has always found time for giving advice and reading the manuscripts. He has helped me to see the 'big picture' behind this theme. At this stage I would also like to thank Professor Tuomas Heikkilä and Professor Christian Krötzl, who gave me valuable comments on my Phil.Lic. thesis, which helped me to develop the theme and use of the sources further.

During the last year of work on this dissertation I had the great opportunity to visit the Centre for Medieval Studies in Bergen. I am grateful that I had the chance to discuss with Professor Sverre Bagge some key issues in my thesis and get feedback from other colleagues at the centre. Dr Kristel Zilmer at the Centre for Medieval Studies has given me valuable information on runic inscriptions and commented on my manuscript. Many thanks go to Inka Moilanen, who also commented on the manuscript. Special thanks go too to Dr Eldar Heide, with whom I had interesting discussions about the Sámi and the use of magic in the sagas!

While living in Joensuu I had the opportunity to work at the university's Department of History. I would like to thank all my colleagues there. After having done most of this work alone at my 'home office', I am thankful that I had the chance to share thoughts about my thesis face to face.

I am also thankful to a number of colleagues in Finland and abroad who have shared their thoughts on this theme, given me references for it or otherwise supported me in this effort.: Joonas Ahola (Univ. of Helsinki), Thomas Foerster (CMS Bergen), Anna Hansen (Univ. of New South Wales), Mari Isoaho (Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies), Ville Laakso (Univ. of Turku), John McKinnell, Jakub Morawiec (Silesian University), Riikka Myllys (Univ. of Joensuu), Agneta Ney (Univ. of Gävle), Susanna Niiranen (Univ. of Jyväskylä), Kati Parppei (Univ. of Joensuu). My warmest thanks to Tatjana Jackson (Institute of World History, Russian Academy of Sciences) for giving me references written in Russian, спасибо! I am sure that there are lot of other people who deserve to be named, and I would

like to express my gratitude to them. As a historian I have a bad memory because I have to remember too many things!

Doing research is mostly solitary work and hence I am thankful to those colleagues who have had the time to answer my emails and spur me on. Especially vital has been our unofficial society, or 'Academic Sewing Club' in Joensuu, which has had nothing to do with sewing but rather sharing thoughts about research and life in general. Thanks, girls!

Clive Tolley has carried the language revision for this dissertation. I am thankful, because he is not only a specialist in his native language but has the deepest knowledge in Old Norse studies in general.

Last but not least thanks to my closest ones. I would like to thank my parents, who have supported me although they have not always had the faintest idea what I have been doing, for example in Sweden and Iceland. My husband Mikko has been my most important supporter during these years and also the technical support when it comes to computers. Thank you for sharing an interest in history and travelling with me far and wide! I dedicate this thesis to him and our children Venla, Lauri and Veikko.

Sirpa Aalto

6 December 2009 (Independence Day)

Oulu, Finland

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Ágrip</i>	<i>Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sögum</i>
<i>CHS</i>	The Cambridge History of Scandinavia. Volume I. Pre- history to 1520
<i>KLNM</i>	<i>Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for nordisk middelalder fra vikingetid til reformasjonstid</i>
<i>Morkinskinna FJ</i>	<i>Morkinskinna</i> , ed. Finnur Jónsson
<i>Morkinskinna U</i>	<i>Morkinskinna</i> , ed. Unger

SAGAS IN *HEIMSKRINGLA*

Vol. I

Prologus

Ynglinga saga

Hálfðanar saga svarta

Haralds saga hárfagra (Haraldr Fine-Hair, 868–931)

Hákonar saga góða (Hákon the Good, 933–60)

Haralds saga gráfeldar (Haraldr Greycloak, 961–70)

Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar (Óláfr Tryggvason, 995–1000)

Vol. II

Óláfs saga ins helga (Saint Óláfr, 1015–30)

Vol. III

Magnúss saga góða (Magnús the Good, 1035–47)

Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar (Haraldr Sigurðarson, 1046–66)

Óláfs saga kyrra (Óláfr the Peaceful, 1067–93)

Magnúss saga berfætts (Magnús Barelegs, 1093–1103)

Magnússona saga (the sons of Magnús, 1103–30)

Magnúss saga blinda ok Haralds gilla (Magnús the blind and Haraldr Gillie, 1130–6)

Haraldssona saga (the sons of Haraldr, 1136–61)

Hákonar saga herðibreiðs (Hákon the Broadshouldered, 1157–62)

Magnúss saga Erlingssonar (Magnús Erlingsson, 1161–84; saga ends 1177)

1 Introduction

1.1 'OTHERNESS' AND DIFFERENCE

We create our identity in relation to others. It is a fundamental building block of group identity to define who belongs to 'us' and who the others are. This way, our view of those outside our own group reflects our society: what are its boundaries, what things are valued, what makes 'us' so different from the others. This study deals with the image of 'otherness' in the kings' sagas, and how this image reflects the mental worldview of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere at the beginning of the thirteenth century.

Familiar things around oneself mean security, and strangeness represents everything that is opposite to this: insecurity and unpredictability. It is only natural that strangeness arouses feelings of fear, prejudice or, more positively, curiosity in a human being. A stranger in a society is a frightening figure until tested, or he may be welcomed as a bringer of something new. Because defining strangeness is always a subjective matter, it is affected by such factors as age, education, cultural background and religious opinion. So, when defining 'otherness' there is already an idea that some things are experienced as familiar and close. What is left outside this 'circle' of familiarity is defined as strange. The authors of Antiquity defined strangeness by dividing the world between civilized *nationes* and uncivilized barbarians, who encircled these civilized nations and who lived on the periphery. For the Greeks the word *barbaroi* meant also those who did not speak Greek.¹ For Romans, barbarians were generally peoples (*gentes*) who lived in small communities in a vast area stretching from the North and Baltic Seas to the Black Sea.² This categorization of barbarians was so successful that these barbarians themselves adopted the definitions that the Greeks and the Romans had given them. Later the Church fathers declared that all pagans are barbarians.³ Scholars too have had difficulties in liberating themselves from these made-up descriptions and categories.⁴

Post-modern research has been interested in social identity and how it is created. After the Second World War the concept of identity was in progress: it was a time of decentring of 'imperial identities' because of decolonization. The question of 'the other' had a philosophical background, as it relates to questions about the

¹ Nippel 2007, p. 34; De Anna 1992, pp. 12–13.

² Geary 2002, p. 73.

³ Beller 2007b, p. 267.

⁴ Heather 1999, pp. 234–58; Wallerström 1997, p. 331.

nature of identity: 'Wherein lies the identity of a thing?' The concept of otherness has now reached into different scholarly branches, but the terminology originates from phenomenology and structuralist anthropology. In structuralist anthropology a culture was understood as a system of systems, and Claude Lévi-Strauss was the foremost representative of this approach. He studied cultures by using binary schemas, 'self' and 'other' being one of the oppositions. On the whole, the question of 'the other' seems to be a typical theme in the discourse concerning identity and differences in the Western cultural tradition. Many scholars emphasize the meaning of dualism in its European context and tradition.⁵ Post-modern research is focused on how 'otherness' is represented in discourse and images, and 'otherness' has been part of discourses on prejudice, ethnocentrism and racism.

There have been three 'basic' categories which have been the yardstick for 'otherness': race, class and gender. In fact, 'otherness' as a term is *passé* in some fields and it is no longer used in such scholarly branches as sociology, cultural and gender studies; instead, the terminology of *difference* has increasingly taken the place of 'otherness'. The reason is that this terminology is more neutral and less historically burdened than that of 'otherness'.⁶ Also such terms as *otherhood*, *alterity*, and *outsidehood* have entered the vocabulary of historians.⁷ 'Otherness' will be used in this study to describe difference because 'otherness' is studied from the point of view of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere and the viewpoint is thus not neutral or objective.

The study of others and strangers has mostly concentrated on the negative side of contacts: xenophobia and the creation of stereotypes have interested scholars more than the positive sides of contacts. In Antiquity the Greeks used the word xenophobia to describe hostility to strangers or to 'the other'.⁸ This is probably based on the fact that the 'other' is perceived as naturally different from the self and subordinate to a dominant category of the normal self.⁹ Nonetheless, we also have examples of tolerance and admiration of other cultures in history,¹⁰ and even though 'otherness' is based on dichotomy (us/them, inside/outside), it should be kept in mind that divisions are not always clear-cut.

'Otherness' as an object of study has also been adopted in the study of history during the last few decades. The studies have mostly dealt with different phenomena in marginality. In medieval studies such themes as witchcraft, heretics, homosexuals and criminals have been current. All in all, it is a current trend to study marginal phenomena in society and how people have taken up attitudes towards marginal groups. If we take a philosophical approach to the study of history, a historian is almost always studying something that is strange to him. As Aron Gurevich puts it:

⁵ Knuuttila and Paasi 1995, pp. 40–1.

⁶ Neverdeen Pieterse 2002, pp. 23–4.

⁷ Constable 2003, p. 6.

⁸ Fredrickson 2002, p. 6.

⁹ Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002, p. 108.

¹⁰ Lübke 1997, p. 178.

The historian who studies an epoch or civilization far distant from his own comes up against the Other (*l'Autre*): people who were guided in their lives by their own values, who had their own distinctive ideas about the social and natural universe, and who had worked out a 'world picture' and a system of reactions to the impulses they received, both of which were characteristic of those people alone.¹¹

'Otherness' can be studied from very different perspectives depending on the starting point of the study. It is possible to examine 'otherness' just on an abstract level and as a philosophical question, or to find out what 'otherness' means concretely.

This study will begin by outlining the methodology as well as definitions for key concepts and the sources. Structurally this study is divided into four parts: the first contains the introduction and methodological starting point; the second deals with 'otherness' and its relationship to ethnicity and identity from the viewpoint of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere; the third deals with 'otherness' in social contacts; the fourth is focused on looking at the results of the study.

1.1.1 Ethnicity and identity

To understand the image of 'otherness' it is necessary to define such concepts as ethnicity and identity, which are closely intertwined. 'Ethnicity' and 'identity' are widely used in social sciences as well as in studies of history. The extensive use of these has led scholars to question whether the terminology should be abandoned: instead of 'identity' should we use 'identifications', 'representations', 'categorizations', 'self-understandings', 'commonality', 'connectedness', 'groupness'?¹²

Identity as a concept is flexible: people have different identities depending on the social situation in which they are. It is not a stable phenomenon but it is constantly changing. In this study only one aspect of identity is focused upon, namely the group identity. The intention is to show the theoretical background for group identity in general, and to discuss what terminology is relevant for this study.

The word 'ethnicity' comes from the Greek word *ethnos*, 'a people'. Ethnicity as a concept began to appear in scholarly studies in the 1950s. The American sociologist David Riesman was one of the first to use it.¹³ There was a need for a word that could be used to classify people and relations inside human groups. Ethnicity was found suitable as it was not burdened by political ambitions and history like words such as race, tribe or nation.¹⁴ Especially 'race' and 'nation' show how difficult it is for a scholar to use these words without ballast.

Thomas Hylland Eriksen has defined ethnicity thus:

For ethnicity to come about, the groups must have a minimum of contact with each other, and they must entertain ideas of each other as being culturally different from themselves. If these conditions are not fulfilled, there is no ethnicity, for ethnicity is

¹¹ Gurevich 1992, p. 49.

¹² Vörös 2006, p. 33.

¹³ Riesman 1964.

¹⁴ Sollors 2002, p. 98.

essentially an aspect of a relationship, not a property of a group.¹⁵

Eriksen follows Ernest Gellner in his definition. Gellner has given two conditions for the concept of nation:

1. Two men are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture where culture in turn means a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating.
2. Two men are of the same nation if and only if they recognize each other as belonging to the same nation. In other words . . . nations are the artefacts of men's convictions and loyalties and solidarities.¹⁶

In this study it is appropriate to use the words 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic groups' rather than the word 'nation'. As this study deals with the beginning of the thirteenth century it would be anachronistic to talk about nations, because the concept – as we understand it today – was invented several hundred years later. I have also avoided using the word 'tribe', which is loaded with the romantic ideas of the nineteenth century. I will discuss further and motivate the use of the above mentioned terminology in ch. 1.7 'On Terminology'.

Just as it is anachronistic to talk about nations and nation states in the Middle Ages, so too would it be to speak of racism. Intolerance towards other people in the Middle Ages was not based, for instance, on outer appearance. In fact, no word exists analogous to the word 'race' in the thought of the Greeks, Romans, and early Christians. When Jews were persecuted in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Europe, the reason for this was their religion and not race, because the Christians blamed Jews for having killed Jesus Christ and Jews were considered to be 'children of the devil'.¹⁷

It is not possible to define ethnicity only in one way, because the criteria vary from time to time. Eusebius, for example, considered that the Christians were one *ethnos* among others.¹⁸ As Sian Jones puts it, ethnicity is only one way to define one's identity: 'On the basis of a processual "subjectivist" definition of ethnicity there is little to distinguish it from other forms of group identity such as gender, class and caste groups'.¹⁹ Fredrik Barth's definitions of ethnic groups are taken as starting point in many studies concerning group identity and nationalism. His definition for ethnic groups is following:

1. they are largely biologically self-perpetuating;
2. they share fundamental cultural values, realized in overt unity in cultural forms;
3. they make up a field of communication and interaction;
4. they have a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order.²⁰

¹⁵ Eriksen 2002, p. 12.

¹⁶ Gellner 1983, p. 7. On ethnicity as a concept see also Jones 1998, pp. 51, 54–5, 61.

¹⁷ Fredrickson 2002, pp. 17, 19, 23; Neverdeen Pieterse 2002, 17–18.

¹⁸ Heikkinen 2009, p. 204.

¹⁹ Jones 1998, p. 61.

²⁰ Barth 1969, pp. 10–11.

So, basically an ethnic group needs to have common things that the members of the group share. Forefathers are often taken as a uniting factor, but not even this criterion is waterproof: how many generations does it take for a group to talk about common ancestors?²¹ Boundaries between ethnic groups are not necessarily territorial but social, and there is communication and interaction between the groups. It is only wishful thinking that ethnic groups are or were 'neatly packaged territorially bounded culture-bearing units'.²² Besides, group boundaries are invisible. Ethnicity as a term also has different grades, meaning that on the one hand it can help to categorize people and on the other hand this categorization may have a deep impact for an individual.²³

Ethnicity has a flexible relation to culture; ethnicity is considered to express cultural differences, but still there is no direct connection or correspondence between ethnic and cultural differences.²⁴ All in all ethnicity is a status – similar to sex and rank – that an individual cannot disregard, and which superordinates most other statuses.²⁵ However, ethnicity can also be negotiable, and individuals may, under the right circumstances, change their ethnicity.²⁶

Both ethnic groups as well as nations can be seen as constructed or construed communities, which means that they are not phenomena that exist as a matter of course. Above all, ethnic classification and boundary establishment among social entities are phenomena that are relative and constantly changing. Against this background, Benedict Anderson is right with his concept of imagined communities, because 'Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined'.²⁷ Lars Ivar Hansen does not speak about imagined communities, but he emphasizes the meaning of communication for ethnicity and ethnic boundaries: 'As the drawing of ethnic boundaries is subject to an ever ongoing process of communication and discourse, whereby the constructed communities are being defined and redefined in relation to varying contexts, some ethnic boundaries are maintained and reinforced, whereas others may become less imperative, and even lose their significance'.²⁸ In other words, group definitions change constantly in people's minds.

The defining of 'the other' is necessary because ethnicity includes the idea of contacts with other groups.²⁹ We could say in other words that group identity is a process in which groups *negotiate* their identities. At the same time interaction means insecurity for the both parties, when they recognize that they do not belong to the same ethnic group. According to Barth insecurity means that the parties are not sure how the others define 'right' or 'wrong' and what is considered

²¹ Eriksen 2002, pp. 34–5.

²² Jones 1998, p. 104.

²³ Eriksen 2002, pp. 39, 41.

²⁴ Barth 1969, p. 14; Eriksen 2002, p. 58.

²⁵ Barth 1969, p. 17.

²⁶ Jenkins 1996, p. 65.

²⁷ Hansen 1996, p. 6.

²⁸ Hansen 1996, p. 37 and references.

²⁹ Hansen and Olsen 2004, p. 42.

'honourable' or 'morally condemnable'.³⁰ In order to interact successfully with the other group predictability of the other party is important. Successful interaction is dependent on how the parties represent themselves, because the parties need to assign attributes, that is, to place themselves within stereotypes. Placing the other party according to the stereotypes one has helps groups to understand the 'unknown' stranger.³¹

It is typical for a human being to categorize other peoples in groups and to identify himself with a certain group (the so-called in-group). This is a natural part of the creation of group identity. The meaning of this categorization and identification is to create a positive identity for the in-group. The positive identity is achieved when the difference between 'us' and 'them' (the so-called out-group) is as big as possible.³² Part of this creation of group identity is to exaggerate the already existing differences or even to make up new ones.³³ People can be classified in different groups and in these cases ethnicity is, as already mentioned, one criterion.

It is typical that the members of an ethnic group have a feeling of 'us' and those who stand outside their group are 'them' or 'the others'. Without this juxtaposition ethnicity could not exist. Generally people define themselves by describing what they are not, and they find their own definition by comparing themselves with 'the others'. Interestingly, at the same time as we define 'the others' we say something about ourselves.³⁴ Stuart Hall has suggested that national cultures strengthen their identities by confronting their own cultures with the others' culture. It seems that in order to act a human being needs meaningful concepts, of which many are in confrontation. These kinds of confrontations seem to be the basis for all linguistic and symbolic systems.³⁵ In other words, ethnicity and (group) identity are created by communication with the other groups.³⁶

Stereotypes are one part of ethnicity studies. A human being creates stereotypes in order to understand the social universe, which is otherwise very complicated. Stereotypes help him to define the boundaries and virtues of his own group, and the vices of the others. They may also entitle some group to use resources that the society has. It is not just the dominating groups that hold onto stereotypes but also the dominated ones. Assumed cultural differences tend to be magnified not only in stereotyping but also in intergroup competitions and during ethnic conflicts.³⁷

1.1.2 Mental worldview

The whole question of identity and its definitions relate closely to the idea of worldview. As this word has several meanings depending on which viewpoint

³⁰ Barth 1969, pp. 9–38.

³¹ Jenkins 1996, p. 123.

³² Hansen uses the terms 'in-group' and 'out-group'. Hansen 1996, p. 39.

³³ Liebkind 1988, p. 73.

³⁴ Jenkins 1996, pp. 80–1; Wallerström 1997, p. 301; Eriksen 2002, p. 19.

³⁵ Hall 1999, p. 82; Hansen 1996, p. 33: 'ethnic groups and peoples are constituted by a process by which certain features are established as a *repertoire of symbols*'.

³⁶ Jenkins 1996, p. 24.

³⁷ Eriksen 2002, pp. 24–5, 67.

one examines it from, it is necessary to explain what is meant by worldview in this study. To be exact, I prefer to use the term mental worldview in order to distinguish it from the worldview that includes the concrete, geographical world. The mental worldview expresses how people perceive in their minds the world and people around them. As for example László Vörös has pointed out, it is more meaningful to use the term 'mental world' or 'worldviews' when studying pre-modern societies than, for example, identities.³⁸

What is then the difference between the mental worldview and the concrete geographical worldview? For example, an individual may feel that certain peoples (geographically) close to him are strangers while others that are situated geographically further away may feel 'almost like us'. The culturally close people are situated close to the observer in his or her mental worldview, although they are situated in reality far away. The reason for this may be that the strangers that are geographically closer to one may be culturally or ethnically different from the observer.

In spite of the fact that this study deals with 'otherness' as a concept and how a mental worldview of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere can be constructed, it is necessary to say a few words about how the medieval man understood the real geographical world, too. In the Middle Ages the real physical world and the mental world were mixed. This is perceptible in the medieval maps: they show how people thought the world was, and there were real placenames mixed with invented peoples and monsters. Thus, the medieval maps cannot be looked at as exact geographical sources but must be understood as a part of literature and generally as part of people's worldview.

Admittedly, we can ask whether it is relevant to distinguish between geographical and mental worlds, if these concepts were not necessarily separate in the Middle Ages. In my opinion, Dick Harrison's concepts micro-space (*mikrorum*) and macro-space (*makrorum*) are useful in this case. According to Harrison, micro-space is the space around us that we can detect empirically. The size or dimension of this micro-space depends on the general cultural situation, the individual's age, sex, social background etc. Macro-space, on the other hand, has nothing to do with geography. Harrison calls it a cosmological category that includes God and religion. For example, when a pilgrim set out on pilgrimage, he left his micro-space and headed towards the Unknown – the whole idea of the pilgrimage was based on an idea that some places (holy places) had different quality from other, ordinary places. These holy places belonged to the macro-space, because people believed that in these places they could be in contact with 'the Holy'.³⁹

Is there a connection between the study of otherness and Harrison's concepts of micro- and macro-space? As Harrison states, people had different kinds of micro-spaces, which depended on how much they travelled. This has a direct connection to the mental worldview of an individual. However, in this case we are dealing

³⁸ Vörös 2006, p. 33.

³⁹ Harrison 1998, pp. 51, 57.

with the mental worldview of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere that is conveyed by the kings' sagas. It is impossible to speak about the micro-space of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere, which is an abstract community or entity. Individual Icelanders and Norwegians certainly had their micro-spaces but they must have been very different, depending on where these people lived and what kind of contacts they had with the world outside their local community. Instead, Harrison's concept of macro-space is useful, because the idea of otherness is abstract and it would exist outside one's own micro-space.

1.2 THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The main question in this study has two parts. Firstly, the purpose is to find out how the image of 'otherness' in the kings' sagas reflects the mental worldview of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere at the beginning of the thirteenth century. Secondly, the main question also tries to answer how the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere defined its group boundary/boundaries and group identity.

Next I should define what I mean by the term 'Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere', which represents the observer from whose viewpoint 'otherness' is defined. I am reluctant to divide the Norwegians and Icelanders into different 'nations' but prefer to use the term 'Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere' for the following reasons: 1. These groups were on the point of understanding themselves as 'nations' at the beginning of the thirteenth century; their self-awareness and group identity will be dealt with first in order to clarify from whose viewpoint 'otherness' is looked at (Ch. 2.2 'Icelanders and Norwegians – Defining the Observer'); 2. I do not consider the sources, the kings' sagas, either as Norwegian or Icelandic, but I prefer to see them as products of this Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere. The background of the sources will be dealt more thoroughly in Ch. 1.4 'Sources', which in my opinion motivates the choice of viewpoint.

Preben Meulengracht Sørensen has written on the Norwegian and Icelandic laws that 'Both Icelandic and Norwegian laws are applicable as a background to the literature of the sagas, inasmuch as *linguistic and cultural ties between the two countries were so close in the Middle Ages that we can to some extent talk of a common Norse culture*'.⁴⁰ In my opinion, this sentence can be applied to the kings' sagas too. Thus, I justify the use of the term 'Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere' because the sources used in this study do not belong or stem from a specific group, and we can see a linguistic, cultural and historical connection between Scandinavian peoples who lived in the area covering approximately present-day Norway, Iceland, the Faroes, Shetland and Orkney Islands.⁴¹ Although the Norse-Icelandic cultural

⁴⁰ Sørensen 1983, p. 15. Italics are mine.

⁴¹ Shetland was part of the dominion of the earls of Orkney in the Middle Ages; additional areas in the Norse-Icelandic sphere included the Hebrides and the Isle of Man, and a vast area of the British mainland. There is little point here in naming all these places. People in this geographical area spoke

sphere in this way has a geographical dimension, we must understand it in the end as an abstract concept which is not confined just to geography or culture or language, but is a combination of them.

The main topic of this study may be summarized as the *image* of 'otherness'. It is not itself the primary object of research, but the purpose is, with the help of that image, to examine the *mental worldview* of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere at the beginning of the thirteenth century. This assumption is based on other studies of group identities, which have shown that basically the relationship of the in-group (which in this case is the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere) to others surrounding it reveals something about the in-group itself. The image of 'otherness' in the kings' sagas reflects how people in the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere defined themselves and their place in the world, which I call the mental worldview.

So far I have deliberately used the term 'image of "otherness"' instead of plain 'otherness'. I want to stress the difference between these two concepts, because the image of 'otherness' is just a reflection of 'otherness'. It is not possible to assume that the image of 'otherness' would reveal totally what kind of attitude the Icelandic and Norse peoples had towards strangers in real life, but it is, as said, just a reflection of it. That is why it is relevant to connect the image of 'otherness' with the mental world and not the real, physical world. 'Otherness' cannot be studied and understood without understanding the identity of the subject, from whose viewpoint 'otherness' is looked at. This, again, leads to deeper pondering over the sources and their authors, and hence also their identity.

In order to define who the observer ('we') is in this study two things must be solved: whose opinions do the sagas convey and thus who 'we' are in the sagas. One of the main problems of this study has indeed been how to define the viewpoint: whose attitudes are reflected in the image of 'otherness'? The authors' attitudes or the Icelanders' and the Norse peoples' in general? The methodological starting point in this study is the historical anthropology and annalists' ideas about the history of mentality, which will be dealt with further in Ch. 1.3 'Methodology'.⁴² According to this approach, we can look at the kings' sagas not just as works of their authors but also as expressing the Norse *mentalité* of the time. We have to consider also the audience of the sagas: do the sagas express also their *mentalité* and view of 'otherness'? In this case we have to look at what we know about the authors of the sagas and the reception of the sagas, because the text is always written for somebody. Next I will briefly look at problems and possibilities of using the kings' sagas as sources for studying mentalities. The sources and their backgrounds will be dealt with more thoroughly in Ch. 1.4 'Sources'.

One of the biggest problems in medieval studies are the sources, because it is difficult to judge sometimes whether the texts tell more about ideas of the elite or whether they have any connection to the ordinary people. The majority of people

(and, outside Britain, still speak) languages which belong to the Western Scandinavian group. I have not wished to take the language or the language group as the only definition for the observer.

⁴² More about methodology and motivation for the use of historical anthropology as a method is given in the chapter on Methodology.

were illiterate and the nature of their culture was oral.⁴³ Therefore there is a need to justify the use of the kings' sagas as sources. In my opinion Sverre Bagge has justified very well the use of narratives as sources for studying mentalities: 'there must be some connection between the specifically medieval kind of narrative and contemporary actors' intentions and decisions; which means that the historical narratives become important sources for how medieval people understood themselves, their actions, and their society'.⁴⁴

It has been argued whether the kings' sagas represent general mentality or not, and scholars do not always agree on this. According to Bagge the narratives that were based on the oral tradition probably convey contemporary reality and express the mentality of the time.⁴⁵ Sometimes it is better to treat the texts as social products, as it may be impossible to establish which text can be assigned to a particular author.⁴⁶ Ármann Jakobsson, on the other hand, has a somewhat different opinion. He argues that the kings' sagas were written by clergymen and chieftains for other clergymen and chieftains. Hence, they cannot reveal what the ordinary people thought.⁴⁷ My viewpoint is something between these two: the sagas were written by the elite and thus they are characterized by the ideas of the educated upper class. Even if the kings' sagas – for example *Fagrskinna*, which may have been written on the order of King Hákon – were not necessarily the 'basic books' that were read for the audience, they were probably read aloud at least at the Norwegian court and in the upper-class circles.

However, considering the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere during the time of writing the kings' sagas (c. 1190–1235 if we confine the kings' sagas only to the four major compendia), it is highly probable that the texts reflect also something of the 'common people': the social differences especially in Iceland were not that great as, for example, in the feudal societies of Western Europe. We can assume that at least some of the stories in the kings' sagas were originally oral tradition, although we cannot say anything with certainty. I consider this to be sufficient evidence that the sagas express the *mentalité* of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere at the beginning of the thirteenth century. We have to accept, though, that we do not have sources that would reveal what the ordinary people (peasants, servants, slaves) *really* thought. Because writing and reading were rare skills even among the elite in the thirteenth century,⁴⁸ the kings' sagas were to some extent products of the elite, even if we take into account that they would have been based on oral tradition and they would have been read aloud to people.

Even when the problem of viewpoint is solved there is still the question of the subject: who is it that encounters the 'other'? The kings' sagas are in the first place

⁴³ Gurevich 1988, pp. 2–3.

⁴⁴ Bagge 2002, p. 14.

⁴⁵ Bagge 2002, p. 5.

⁴⁶ Pires Boulhosa 2005, p. 32.

⁴⁷ Ármann Jakobsson 1997, p. 47.

⁴⁸ We have some examples of laymen that could write, but principally the written texts were produced by different Church organizations and churchmen. Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 2006, p. 252.

stories about Norwegian kings written by Icelanders and Norwegians. The concept of 'otherness' has many aspects, which means that 'others' can be encountered in different situations. Due to the nature of the sources, two main aspects are dealt with in this study: encounters with 'otherness' that is based on ethnicity, language, culture or geographical distance, and encounters with 'otherness' on social situations, such as forming marriage alliances or trading.

To conclude, the key idea in this study is that the mental worldview of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere at the beginning of the thirteenth century can be constructed by looking at the image of 'otherness', how it is depicted and why. Who belongs to 'us' and 'them', i.e. what are the criteria for 'otherness'?

Why then study the mental worldview of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere especially at the beginning of the thirteenth century and not, say, in the eleventh century? I will justify my choice thus: on the one hand we do not have that many sources before the thirteenth century that would shed light on the Norse-Icelandic mental worldview. The sources written before the thirteenth century in Norway and Iceland in general consist of runic inscriptions, Latin sources (such as *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium* or *Historia Norvegiae*), vernacular religious texts and poetry. The source material would be too heterogeneous to give a coherent picture of a mental worldview. The major compendia of the kings' sagas, however, give this opportunity, because they were written down during a relatively short period of time between c. 1200 and 1235. This gives a unique opportunity to examine a fairly coherent set of sources.

The first half of the thirteenth century is also an interesting period considering the events in Norway and Iceland during that time: Iceland was heading towards serious internal conflicts, whereas in Norway the situation was becoming more stabilized gradually after about 100 years of civil war. King Hákon Hákonarson (1217–63) was confirming his grip of the realm and defeating the last uprisings. In other words, Norwegians and Icelanders were experiencing events that affected their identity as groups – Norwegians were gradually heading from the age of rival groups to a more stabilized centrally governed realm. Meanwhile, Icelanders were on the one hand facing an internal crisis that the rival leading families caused, and on the other hand they were rejecting the claims of overlordship by the Norwegian king. All these events could not have happened without affecting the identity of Norwegians and Icelanders. Moreover, it is interesting to examine the mental worldview of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere at the beginning of the thirteenth century because Christianity had been more or less part of society for about two centuries. How is this perceptible?

How then to define 'otherness' in the kings' sagas? The starting point has been that all the passages with mentions of foreigners, strangers or dubious characters are examined. In order to identify the other in the kings' sagas I have examined different kinds of contacts and sometimes even the lack of contacts between the characters or groups in the sagas, because groups define themselves in the first place by comparing themselves to other groups. These contacts reveal who is considered a stranger, because it is rarely said directly in the saga that somebody is a

stranger or an outsider. Communicative situations vary from short notions ('X was on a trading voyage in England') to short stories. Sagas do not describe anything that is not relevant for the story so none of the kings' sagas contain lively travel descriptions from distant countries or depictions on how strangers were dressed or what they looked like.

The starting point has been that definitions of the other must be found in the kings' sagas and not to invent them beforehand, because it is not reasonable to think that the Norse people at the beginning of the thirteenth century would define a stranger in the same way as we do today. For example, we cannot assume that only ethnic difference would be a criterion for a stranger in the Middle Ages. We must pose the following questions on the sources: What kind of criteria for 'otherness' can be found in the kings' sagas? How do they occur and in what situations? What kind of attitudes are there towards strangers and why? It is necessary to compare the image of 'otherness' with the historical facts that we have in order to analyse them. To what extent is the image of 'otherness' based on facts and to what extent is it an image, in which fiction or even mythical elements are mixed with facts? It is also important to think why the kings' sagas convey expressly the image of 'otherness' in question.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

Over the past sixty years or so the French *Annales* School – or movement⁴⁹ – of historians has had a deep impact on the study of history and especially on study of the Middle Ages. Annalists have wanted to show that the ordinary man, his everyday life and *mentality* of the people are worth studying. According to annalists, historians have forgotten the ordinary man and concentrated on studying phenomena that are visible in history: kings, poets, chroniclers and other 'heroes'. In the study of history mentality implies 'the presence of a common and specific intellectual equipment, a psychological framework shared by people of a given society united by a single culture enabling them to perceive and become aware of their natural and social environment and themselves'.⁵⁰ Consciousness converts perceptions and observations to a more or less organized picture of the world, which affects human behaviour. However, mentality is not an ideology. A historian studying mental structures is interested in the intersection between social psychology and the history of culture.⁵¹

One of the most famous spokesman for the annalist position and study of mentalities was historian Aron Gurevich. He supported historical anthropology as a starting point for studying history. This approach has been used by some

⁴⁹ Burke 1990, p. 2. Burke suggests that the Annales School is actually a movement.

⁵⁰ Gurevich 1992, pp. 4, 11.

⁵¹ Gurevich 1992, p. 41.

annalists since the end of the 1970s.⁵² According to Gurevich the task of historical anthropology is to reconstruct ‘images of the world which are representative of different epochs and cultural traditions’. This requires the reconstruction of the subjective reality which affected the content of people’s consciousness in a given culture and during a certain period of time. Historical anthropology means that a historian must also take into account other disciplines that deal with a human being in his studies. Human activity in all its expressions is worth studying and comes within the scope of historical anthropology. This kind of approach makes the study of history versatile. The historian may pose new questions that he has borrowed from other disciplines even if he cannot borrow their methodologies, but has to develop his own. In short, historical anthropology is interested in human behaviour, because material factors alone do not explain human actions and because people do not behave and act automatically. Such material factors as wars and population growth do not give answers to why people behave as they do in different historical situations, but material factors together with mentality and culture affect human behaviour. Gurevich admits that historical anthropology does not interest all historians but even they have to take mentality into account in their studies, because mentality is always present in history.⁵³ These *mentalités collectives* used by Gurevich as well as Jacques Le Goff or Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie to name but a few have been criticized. For example the Cambridge psychologist Frederick Bartlett has objected that they are ‘a fictitious entity’. The reason for this was, as Peter Burke has suggested, that especially British scholars had difficulties in understanding and accepting French terminology connected to the ideas of the annalist school.⁵⁴

According to Gurevich the historian must study phenomena behind the sources and look for the hidden social historical reality, which is not an easy task. The study of history means dialogue between cultures and epochs in history, and this dialogue is often controversial and complicated. The historian as a representative of his own time and culture observes easily things that are close and understandable to him. He may even see big contrasts between his own culture and the one he is studying.⁵⁵ This is not a problem if the historian lets the sources speak for themselves, so to say, and he does not unconsciously manipulate them to reveal ‘wrong’ things – that is, things or phenomena that he wants to see and observe. In other words this means that the historian should avoid anachronism.

Historical anthropology has given a methodologically suitable starting point in the study of the Icelandic sagas in recent years⁵⁶ and it has seemed suitable also for this study. To study an image of ‘otherness’ is something that is fundamentally connected to human mentality. Moreover, this study has also interdisciplinary features as the questions posed to the sources derive partly from social psychology. The

⁵² Burke 1990, p. 79f.

⁵³ Gurevich 1992, pp. 4, 19, 23, 48.

⁵⁴ Burke 1990, p. 97 and references.

⁵⁵ Gurevich 1992, p. 8.

⁵⁶ On historical anthropology and saga studies, see Clunies Ross 1994, pp. 12–13.

image of 'otherness' is an abstract concept which people create in their minds. The image may be based on first-hand evidence, i.e. direct contacts with the 'others', or they may be stereotypes which are based on oral tradition. However, people at the beginning of the thirteenth century probably did not think whether their image of 'others' was based on first- or second-hand information. For them, an exciting story describing far-off lands and peoples told by a skald may have felt as real as a meeting of foreign merchants in the town's market place.

1.3.1 Studying images

If the Annales School has generally emphasized the study of mentalities at a general level, I would next like to concentrate on a more practical approach, namely the use of images as sources. Since about the 1980s the concept of *imagology* has been presented in the field of history, but it has its roots in the 1920s, when the American researcher Walter Lippmann published his book *Public Opinion* (1922). Imagology means the study of images, but not in the concrete way, i.e. it does not use pictures or photos but abstract images. The purpose of imagology is not to make a visual study or study opinions, but the images represent someone's ideas or worldview. Images reflect the worldview of the observer and are subjective views of the world.⁵⁷ The image represents reality from the viewpoint of the observer: he or she has created this image based on the information he or she has, and the information has merged with the experiences of the observer. In other words, the image is representing the subjective view of the observer.

Imagology has been used mostly to study 'the origin, process and function of national prejudices and stereotypes, to bring them to the surface, analyse them and make people rationally aware of them', which means that imagology has mostly dealt with modern history. Imagologist studies deal with characteristics of other countries and peoples as they are expressed in texts. The aim is not to explain the society but to understand a discourse of representation.⁵⁸

The study of images in interdisciplinary, but it has many features which are reminiscent of the ideas of the Annales School: imagology studies *longue-durée* topics like the provenance and spread of attitudes and mentalities. Imagology is interested in the dynamics of those images which characterize the 'other' (*hetero-images*) and those which characterize one's own, domestic identity (*self-images* or *auto-images*).⁵⁹

Long distances and different cultural traditions create stereotypes, so called 'mass images', which tend to change when more information is available or circumstances change radically. It is typical for a mass image to contain stereotypes that are positively or negatively emotionally charged. For example, if we think of the image of a far-off land, it usually reflects the values and ideas that the creator of the image has, because the image of that land must fit into the identity and worldview of the observer. Typically this kind of image is also static. In this way,

⁵⁷ Fält 2008, pp. 37, 41.

⁵⁸ Beller 2007a, , pp. 7, 11–12; Leerssen 2007a, p. 27.

⁵⁹ Leerssen 2007a, p. 27; Leerssen 2007c, p. 342.

imagology is bound up with the study of identities. This kind of approach is used when for example newspapers are sources for the study. Newspapers as sources provide large-scale and many-sided materials for a study, but can this approach be applied in saga studies, and how?

It is important to specify the nature of the source before the actual study. In imagological studies it is acknowledged that the sources are subjective, and this subjectivity must not be ignored. It is important to ask what the text's target audience is. Moreover, it is beneficial if there is evidence of the reception and impact of the text. The sources may be very different. We can compare, for example, the kings' sagas and the newspapers. The latter comprise a large body of sources to a historian, who has to select his or her sources and motivate the choice, whereas the kings' sagas comprise only a small number of sources. If newspapers are studied in a broad perspective, they can be said to represent general opinion. The sagas were written by certain authors, most of them anonymous. Whether the kings' sagas represent general *mentalité* of the time or the opinions and ideas of their authors will be discussed in the course of this study. Even if imagology is mainly used for source material that is abundant and representative when it comes to general opinion, I am convinced that the basic idea behind this methodology is suitable also for this study, because the purpose is to study images of otherness as a reflection of people's mental world and group identity. As Manfred Beller says about defining an *image*: 'the mental silhouette of the other, who appears to be determined by the characteristics of family, group, tribe, people or race'.⁶⁰

1.3.2 Methods

According to Thomas Hylland Eriksen categorization of 'the other' means always that there are perceived degrees of difference. Some groups are perceived as 'not so different from us' whereas some other groups may seem to be 'very different from us'. He calls this type of categorization *analogue*. This means that the categorization does not encourage the formation of clear-cut group boundaries. Analogue difference has, of course, its opposite: *digital* difference. It means that all outsiders are regarded as 'more or less the same' without degrees.⁶¹ Hobsbawm calls this selective social vision, which means that the (digital) others 'all look alike to me'.⁶² I will apply Eriksen's theory in this study. His approach has its weaknesses and one may criticize it for being too undefined, but it is hardly possible to say anything exact about 'otherness', which cannot be measured with numbers and statistics.

The basic idea of division into analogue and digital 'otherness' is good, but this should not be seen as too definite or restrictive. Because of the flexible nature of identity the categorization of 'otherness' should also be flexible. Thus, sometimes it is possible to define different degrees of 'otherness' inside analogue and digital categories of difference, though sometimes the line between analogue and digital 'otherness' is not clear, but in the end it is a matter of opinion. In this study the

⁶⁰ Beller 2007a, p. 4.

⁶¹ Eriksen 2002, p. 66.

⁶² Hobsbawm 1990, p. 66.

concepts analogue and digital 'otherness' are methodological tools: they will be applied as a framework, but also developed further: it is not sufficient just to categorize 'otherness', but to think of the *criteria* for these categories and not to see the categories as restricting but flexible. 'Otherness' can be detected in different degrees and in several contexts, which overlap each other.

When searching for criteria for 'otherness' in the sources, two kinds of criteria were to be found: 1. references to people's or peoples' 'otherness' when it comes to geography, language, or sometimes, but very seldom, even outer appearance, and 2. a network of the upper class and its outsiders. The latter stems from the nature of the sources. The kings' sagas concentrate on the Norwegian kings and upper class, so it is only natural that they are in the centre of the action. The structure of this study follows the above-mentioned categories of otherness: part II focusing on geography and ethnic boundaries and part III focusing on social contacts.

1.4 SOURCES

Christianity brought the culture of written documents to Iceland. Icelandic priests who had studied abroad could write and they probably brought books with them. After Christianity was introduced into Iceland around the year 1000 religious and secular literature soon began to flourish. Religion was bound to Latin and Latin influenced also the text of the secular vernacular literature. It is difficult to say when the secular saga tradition began. Previously it was thought that the secular sagas developed gradually from Christian hagiography, but this theory has been questioned. The secular saga tradition seems to have originated in the twelfth century because those sagas that were written down around 1200 already show a flourishing developed saga style, and we can say that there was a fully elaborated saga style by the 1220s.⁶³ All in all, Old Norse literature is characterized by a certain interest in history, but it is difficult to define it purely as historiography. It is said that generally the medieval Icelandic taste for foreign literature is 'characterized by a consuming interest in history'.⁶⁴ The learned Icelanders were not isolated, and they had contacts abroad. Icelanders went to study in the British Isles or France.⁶⁵ Rudolf Simek has pointed out that the most important Latin works were known in Iceland in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which shows that in spite of the remote location of Iceland the European medieval culture had reached it.⁶⁶

The Icelandic sagas are not a homogeneous group of literature. On the contrary, the sagas are heterogeneous, and scholars have divided the sagas into genres. This is a problem because the division has been made *post factum*, and we do not know whether the Icelanders and the Norse people would have made such a division at

⁶³ Andersson 2008, pp. 16–17.

⁶⁴ Würth 2006, p. 156.

⁶⁵ Jónas Kristjánsson 1988, pp. 115–16.

⁶⁶ Simek 1990, p. 26.

all.⁶⁷ The kings' sagas that are used as the main sources in this study are so designated in that they constitute the group of sagas that deal with the Norwegian kings. These sagas could be compared with other European medieval historiography. Broadly speaking the kings' sagas were written between c. 1130/1150 and 1265,⁶⁸ but the four major compendia used in this study were written between 1190/1200 and 1230/1235. The reason for writing the kings' sagas may have been that Norwegian kings ordered them to be made, but there was also a general interest in the 'history of the kings' among Icelanders, especially among the upper class.⁶⁹

As the kings' sagas are part of the Norse-Icelandic saga literature the question of their trustworthiness as sources arises – the saga literature as a whole is often mixed with fairytales, and the word *saga* in modern Scandinavian languages (apart from Icelandic) has this meaning. Also in the English language the word *saga* has come to denote a chronicle or a story of a family (e.g. John Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga*). In this context it is necessary to have a closer look at the medieval concept of history and why the kings' sagas should be counted as part of it.

The medieval concept of history is intertwined with Christianity and the Christian concept of time. In short, the Christians in the Middle Ages believed that God's will was perceptible in history. People believed that the world was about to come to an end soon and that Doomsday was at the doorstep. This rather pessimistic view labelled the concept of history and time in the Middle Ages.⁷⁰ Stories from the past had relevance only as examples: it was important that people *learned* from history. The medieval historian was not interested in finding out causes for change or big trends, but in showing what the good people had done and what happened to the bad ones. Neither was he interested in finding out the truth in history: if there was different or even contradictory information, the historians preferred to combine all the information rather than trying to solve which part of the information was true or whether it was true at all.⁷¹

The problem with the sagas as sources for history has been that scholars have tried to approach sagas from the point of historicity. This is, however, not the right method: the sagas should be studied as remnants of their own time. For what reason were they written? Not for modern historians to reveal 'the absolute truth' somewhere in the far future. 'Truth' is a relative concept – especially for medieval historians – and we cannot know how far the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century saga narrators and audiences considered the accounts of the past to be truth. The later division into 'historical' and 'unhistorical' (i.e. unreliable) sagas made

⁶⁷ Úlfar Bragason thinks, for example, that it is not right to make a division between *Íslendingasögur* (so-called family sagas) and *samtíðarsögur* ('contemporary sagas') just on the basis of differences in narratives. He justifies his opinion through Lars Lönnroth's and M. I. Steblin-Kamenski's theories according to which the saga authors and the audience of the sagas did not distinguish between these two 'genres' in their own time. Úlfar Bragason 1996, p. 129.

⁶⁸ The first kings' saga could have been the lost (**Hryggjarstykki*); the last one was *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*.

⁶⁹ Bagge 1991, p. 18.

⁷⁰ Le Goff 1988, p. 187.

⁷¹ Bagge 2001, p. 223–4.

by scholars has led to the point that scholars have ignored most of the sagas as sources for history. Patricia Pires Boulhosa has rightly asked 'is a saga historical because it was written in a form which nowadays is recognized as historical, or is it historical because it reports past events truthfully?'⁷²

Torfi Tulinius has pondered the meaning of *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*, which are clearly fictional. He argues that these sagas may reflect the evolution of Icelandic society during the thirteenth century. By means of these sagas the Icelandic society 'projected itself backward in time, into the pagan past of Scandinavia', that is, the sagas tell about the society and people who created them.⁷³ I agree with Tulinius; the kings' sagas should be seen as a reflection of their own time. The concept of truth in the sagas is also closely related to the problem of oral tradition – a discourse that still goes on in the field of saga studies. Theodore Andersson has formulated this problem as follows: 'the sagas were considered to be truthful, that is to say, they were considered to stand in a narrative continuity descended from some original truth'.⁷⁴ When it comes to the kings' sagas, it is not perhaps relevant to pay attention to whether the sagas tell the historical truth as we define it, but to stress that they were thought to be truthful by their authors and audience.

I have chosen four collections of kings' sagas as primary sources for this study: *Ágrip af Nóregs konungasögum*, *Morkinskinna*, *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*. The obvious question is why these were chosen as sources and not for example contemporary sagas from other genres or the Latin predecessors of the kings' sagas. The first requirement for sources in a historical study is that they are relevant to the topic. In this case, in which the object of study is the mental worldview of Norse-Icelandic society at the beginning of the thirteenth century, it is easy to point out that the above-mentioned kings' sagas, which were written between c. 1190/1200 and 1230/35, give a fairly good perspective on this matter. The Latin works *Historia Norvegiae* or *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium* do not directly belong to saga tradition even if *Ágrip* seems to have or may have some kind of connection to *Historia Norvegiae* or *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium*.⁷⁵ In my opinion these two works, written in the second half of the twelfth century and in Latin, could not tell us much about the image of 'otherness' at the beginning of the thirteenth century. *Historia Norvegiae* and *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium* differ from the sagas not only in language but also in style: especially *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium* is characterized by the learned ecclesiastical style as the author was a monk. However, they cannot be disregarded and I have referred to Theodoricus Monachus' work and *Historia Norvegiae* whenever their content has had some relevance to this study.

There are other sources which might have been used, which are sometimes

⁷² Pires Boulhosa 2005, pp. 34–5.

⁷³ Tulinius 2002, p. 183.

⁷⁴ Andersson 2008, p. 12; generally on sagas and the problem of oral tradition, see Gísli Sigurðsson 2008, pp. 19–28.

⁷⁵ See the next chapter concerning the background of these works.

counted as belonging to the genre of the kings' sagas – such as *Jómsvíkinga saga* or *Orkneyninga saga*.⁷⁶ Considering for example the entertaining elements in the *Jómsvíkinga saga*,⁷⁷ it seems that it was written down because it was considered as entertainment, which means that its source value is at least questionable, and as it seems that the purpose for writing it was different from the kings' sagas. For example the so-called legendary sagas do not aim to tell of foreign peoples and countries but the far-off places function as part of the fantastic story.⁷⁸ Of course, even their information could be used as evidence and this evidence could be compared with information from the kings' sagas. One could ask then what makes the kings' sagas different from the legendary sagas. In my opinion the fundamental difference lies in the purpose for which these sagas were composed. I admit that it is impossible to give a water-tight answer to this question – we simply lack the direct evidence. But considering the style and the contents of the sagas, it seems reasonable to assume that the kings' sagas were composed (and written down) at the orders of the Norwegian kings, or the authors were otherwise inspired by the stories about the kings and wanted to write them down. The legendary sagas, as we interpret them today, seem to be pure entertainment. Whether the audience of the sagas in the Middle Ages interpreted it similarly is a subject for another study.

I have not included either *Sverris saga* or *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* in this study even though they could be included in the sources on the basis of the time when they were written down: the first one was written c. 1185–8 (the first part) and c. 1202–30 (the second part), and the latter was written in 1265.⁷⁹ However, the major reason for excluding these sagas is that they do not belong directly to the four compendia used as sources and they are more biographies of individual kings. I have also excluded the separate sagas of King Óláfr Tryggvason, but I have references to *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* in few cases. The reason for excluding the separate Óláf-sagas is also their contents, which concentrate on the person of King Óláfr Tryggvason, conversion and the point of view is emphatically ecclesiastical. The same applies to the so called Legendary saga of St Ólaf. References to it are made, however, when the context requires so. Generally the descriptions about 'otherness' are non-existent in the all Óláf-sagas, but some details are interesting as comparisons to the passages in the kings' sagas.

⁷⁶ Ármann Jakobsson has in his book *Í leit að konungi. Konungsmynd íslenskra konungasagna* (1997) selected his sources, so that he has included for example *Jómsvíkinga saga* and *Orkneyinga saga* with the other kings' sagas, but he has left out *Ágrip*, because according to him, it is expressly a Norwegian work, and hence irrelevant for his study, which is about the Icelandic view of kingship.

⁷⁷ *Jómsvíkinga saga*'s value as a truthful historical source has been much debated. Like *Orkneyinga saga* and *Færeyinga saga*, it was probably written by an Icelandic author in the early thirteenth century. Since the saga contains many elements from fairy tales, *fornaldarsögur* and other texts, its source value is doubtful. Würth 2006, p. 162.

⁷⁸ See Marold 1996, p. 199: 'Geographische Begriffe wie Ländernamen dienen, so könnte man Schluß ziehen, nicht so sehr der Lokalisierung von Begebenheiten in einem klar definierten Handlungsraum, sondern sie fungieren eher als Bezeichnung für Macht und Besitz. In einigen Fornaldarsögur wird die Erzählung dadurch strukturiert, dass sie eine Bildung eines Großreiches nachzeichnet'.

⁷⁹ Bagge 1996, pp. 15–17, 91.

To conclude my choice of sources: taking the four compendia *Ágrip*, *Morkinskinna*, *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla* gives a clear starting point for the investigation of mental worldview in the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere at the beginning of the thirteenth century. Because these kings' sagas stand in direct connection to each other, one borrowing from the other (see the next chapter), they give a fairly coherent image of 'otherness'. Also later interpolations refer to their being considered as a complex, and how later authors felt free to add and change the manuscripts. In addition, it is interesting how four different authors writing on the same topic have selected what to write down and what to leave out. Still, the kings' sagas are not a closed and separate entity even if they differ from the legendary sagas or family sagas by being closer to medieval historiography than literature (after all, the line between literature and history was more than vague during that time). The sagas have to be seen in a larger context: for example different *topoi* can be found in different genres. As already mentioned, the kings' sagas have adopted and adapted stories that are known for example from the legendary sagas.

In the end, it is a question of defining and limiting the sources. It would have been impossible in the scope of this study to take as sources all the sagas that were written down in the first half of the thirteenth century and compare them as sources. This, however, leaves the option of making further research in this field by including those sources that were excluded from this study.

The ultimate question is then, whether the kings' sagas can convey the mental worldview of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere and thus the image of 'otherness'. Considering the grounds that the historical anthropology gives, the answer is yes. However, we must still take into account to what extent the kings' sagas leave something out. The narratives are constructed and they tend to follow a formula. Thus, the narrative with its formula serves the *narratio*, and there is a possibility that the author is not telling something that is considered as general knowledge. That is why it is worth pondering whether the kings' sagas leave out some expressions of common *mentalité* if it is assumed that it is known by the audience. Unfortunately, this kind of question cannot be answered.

1.5 THE KINGS' SAGAS

The kings' sagas did not emerge out of nowhere. There were probably several reasons for writing down these histories of the Norse kings. Even if they are products of a Norse tradition, they still have connections too to other medieval European historiography. As was mentioned above, Icelanders (or Norwegians) did not lack contacts with England, France and other parts of Western Europe in the Middle Ages. The Norsemen had a genuine interest in placing themselves among other peoples both in historical and in geographical terms. Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* is a good example of this when, with its opening magnificent history of

the dynasty of *Ynglingar*.⁸⁰ We do not know for certain whether the kings' sagas were common amusement in Iceland and Norway. Probably some stories of different kings circulated, and maybe they were told in the court, as one episode in *Morkinskinna* suggests.⁸¹

Theodore Andersson divides the history of the kings' sagas into four periods. In the first period two so-called proto-kings' sagas were written by Ari Þorgilsson⁸² (1067/8–1148) and Sæmundr Sigfússon⁸³ (1056–1133). Their works have disappeared but later authors make frequent reference to them. Sæmundr wrote probably in Latin, because Snorri Sturluson mentions in the prologue to *Heimskringla* and in the *Separate Saga of Saint Óláfr* that Ari was the first one to write in Norse.⁸⁴ In the second period three Norwegian synoptic works were written: Theodoricus Monachus' *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium* (c. 1180); the anonymous *Historia Norvegiae* (probably before 1178); and the anonymous *Ágrip af Nóregs konungasögum* (c. 1190/1200) in the vernacular. The third period is almost contemporary with the second one, and according to Andersson those kings' sagas that were written between 1150 and 1200 belong to this period: **Hryggjarstykki*, **Skjoldungasaga*, *Orkneyingasaga*, some portion *Sverris saga*, **Hlaðajarla saga*, *Jómsvíkinga saga*, Oddr Snorrason's and Gunnlaugr Leifsson's versions of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* and the *Oldest Saga of Saint Óláfr*. These sagas have different tones, some being quite historical (**Hryggjarstykki*, *Orkneyingasaga* and *Sverris saga*), others are more or less adventurous (**Skjoldungasaga* and *Jómsvíkinga saga*), while others show hagiographic colouring (**Hryggjarstykki* and Oddr's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*).⁸⁵ Because the kings' sagas contain both sagas that concern individuals, such as Kings Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson, and stories of the origins of different 'nations' or groups, they can in principle be divided in two: *ævisögur* (*vitae*) and *þjóðarsögur* (*origines gentis*) as Sverrir Tómasson has termed them.⁸⁶ The fourth period covers the major compendia: *Morkinskinna*, *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*.

1.5.1 *Ágrip*

The name *Ágrip af Nóregs konunga sögum*⁸⁷ is given by modern scholars to a short text which deals with Norwegian kings. It is written in the vernacular and preserved in a single Icelandic manuscript, AM 325 II 4^{to}, which dates from the first

⁸⁰ Bagge 2001, p. 241.

⁸¹ King Harald harðráði listens to a story made of his travels and deeds. *Morkinskinna* FJ 200.

⁸² Ari was a Christian priest and a *goði*, a chieftain. According to Snorri Sturluson he wrote in Icelandic. It is assumed that he wrote *Íslendingabók*.

⁸³ Sæmundr was a priest and one of the first Icelanders to write sagas in the twelfth century. He probably did not write in Icelandic.

⁸⁴ Andersson 1985, pp. 198–9.

⁸⁵ Andersson 1985, pp. 201, 216.

⁸⁶ Ármann Jakobsson's (1997, p. 41) reference to Sverrir Tómasson's article in *Íslensk bókmenntasaga I*, pp. 358–401.

⁸⁷ The name is given by modern scholars. It derives from Finnur Magnússon's edition in *Fornmanna sögur X* ('Stútt ágrip af Noregs konunga sögum'), which was in turn probably suggested by Árni Magnússon. See M. Driscoll 1995, p. ix and references. The name *Ágrip* will be used hereafter.

half of the thirteenth century and is a copy of a Norwegian original. The manuscript is imperfect: the first leaf of the first quire has been cut off the rest, and there are two lacunae towards the end of the text. The manuscript breaks off in the end. It was written by two or three contemporary hands.⁸⁸

Ágrip is often called the third synoptic work, the others being *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium* and *Historia Norvegiæ*. It differs from the other two synoptic works in that it is written in the vernacular. However, its style is ‘learned and Latinate’, which has provoked speculations that it was originally written in Latin, but this is very uncertain. *Ágrip* was written around 1190 and certainly not later than 1200.⁸⁹

Ágrip covers the period from the death of King Hálfðan svarti to the accession of King Ingi (1136). Originally the text may have continued down to the accession of King Sverrir in 1177.⁹⁰ The author seems to have been Norwegian or at least he wrote in Norway, as is suggested by a number of factors (for example, anomalous morphological forms, ‘Norwegianisms’, and nicknames that are used). Unlike other saga authors the author of *Ágrip* shows surprisingly little interest in Iceland and Icelanders. The centre of the action is often Niðaróss (Trondheim) and the inhabitants of Trøndelag are mentioned several times, which suggests that the saga was composed there. Thus, the author of *Ágrip* was probably Norwegian. Matthew Driscoll also points out that there is an underlying Norwegian ‘national sentiment’ that can be detected in *Ágrip* – for instance, King Magnús Barefoot’s military campaign to Sweden is depicted as victorious whereas other sources, for example *Heimskringla*, describes it as a Norwegian defeat.⁹¹

Matthew Driscoll notes that ‘the only thing that can be said with any certainty about *Ágrip*’s sources is that very little indeed can be said with much certainty’.⁹² Especially *Ágrip*’s relationship to the other synoptic works, Theodoricus’ *Historia* and the anonymous *Historia Norvegiæ*, has been the subject of scholarly debate.⁹³ However, *Ágrip*’s influence on the subsequent kings’ sagas is much clearer. There is no doubt that *Ágrip* drew on oral sources such as skaldic poetry. The episode of Snæfríðr and King Haraldr hárfagri (later borrowed by Snorri) shows that the local Trøndelag tradition must have been one of the major sources for the author of *Ágrip*.⁹⁴ *Ágrip* is the shortest of the four kings’ sagas. Its style is terse compared with the other ones. The value of *Ágrip* lies in its being the predecessor of the other kings’ sagas, that made use of it as a source and interpolated it. Bjarni Einarsson’s edition of *Ágrip* will be used in this study and translations into English are taken from Matthew Driscoll’s (1995) edition and translation.

⁸⁸ Driscoll 1995, p. ix; Bjarni Einarsson 1993, pp. 5–6; Bjarni Einarsson 1985, p. v.

⁸⁹ Bjarni Einarsson 1985, pp. x–xi; Driscoll 1995, p. xii.

⁹⁰ Bjarni Einarsson 1985, p. xvii.

⁹¹ Jónas Kristjánsson 1988, p. 156; Driscoll 1995, pp. x–xii.

⁹² Driscoll 1995, p. xvii.

⁹³ Ulset 1983. Ulset’s conclusion is that the author of *Ágrip* has translated parts of his predecessors’ Latin works and used them in his own.

⁹⁴ Driscoll 1995, pp. xiii, xvii.

1.5.2 *Morkinskinna*

Morkinskinna as a source has been the most demanding compared with *Ágrip*, *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*, because there is no standard edition of this saga compilation. There exist two editions, one by C. R. Unger (1867) and the other by Finnur Jónsson (1928–32). I have preferred to refer to Finnur Jónsson's edition in this study. Even though the editions are very similar, Finnur Jónsson's edition is later and it contains for example a passage that Unger has omitted.⁹⁵ The lack of a standard edition has been one of the reasons why scholars have not paid much attention to *Morkinskinna*. Theodore Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade have tried to fill this gap by translating *Morkinskinna* into English.

The *Morkinskinna* manuscript (GKS 1009 fol.) is kept in Det kongelige bibliotek in Copenhagen. The manuscript is dated to the end of the thirteenth century.⁹⁶ It was written probably by two Icelandic scribes.⁹⁷ *Morkinskinna*, 'rotten parchment', got its name from Þormóður Torfason (Thormodus Torfæus), who borrowed the manuscript in 1682 to use it as a source for his *Historia rerum Norvegicarum*. In 1662 the manuscript had been sent from Iceland to King Fredrick III of Denmark by the Icelandic bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson. Today there are thirty-seven leaves left of the manuscript. It was written by two hands in Iceland, but the exact location is impossible to give. The internal evidence points to northern or north-western Iceland.⁹⁸

We do not know exactly when *Morkinskinna* was written, as is often the case with medieval texts. We do know, however, that Snorri wrote *Heimskringla* between 1225 and 1235, and that he used *Morkinskinna* and *Fagrskinna* as sources. *Fagrskinna* also made use of *Morkinskinna* so it is dated between *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla*. Certain details in *Morkinskinna*, mostly marriages and genealogies, point to a date of composition between 1217 and 1222.⁹⁹

Compared with the other kings' sagas *Morkinskinna* is different in that it does not cover the period before King Magnús Ólafsson, and it concentrates on King Magnús Ólafsson and King Haraldr harðráði.¹⁰⁰ All in all, *Morkinskinna* covers the period 1035–1157, maybe originally down to 1177, but we cannot be sure about this because the *Morkinskinna* manuscript is defective at the end. It is probable that the author of *Morkinskinna* was aware of other sagas concerning Norwegian kings and that he wanted to fill the blank period between 1030 and 1177. One feature in *Morkinskinna* that is not found in *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*, although they have used some version of *Morkinskinna* as a source, is the large number of semi-independent short stories (*þættir*).

⁹⁵ *Morkinskinna* FJ 145. Unger's edition lacks the passage, which mentions that King Magnús's body was moved from Denmark to Norway and the military expedition to Denmark was over.

⁹⁶ *Morkinskinna* is preserved also in two other fragmentary manuscripts: 1. in the later part of of Flateyjarbók (YFlb.) and 2. in AM 325 IV β and IX,3 4to. Louis-Jensen 1977, p. 194.

⁹⁷ Luis-Jensen 1993, p. 419.

⁹⁸ Andersson and Gade 2000, p. 5. For more on the *Morkinskinna* manuscript, see Andersson and Gade 2000, pp. 5–11, 67.

⁹⁹ Andersson and Gade 2000, pp. 66–7.

¹⁰⁰ Andersson and Gade have calculated that close to 60% of the text is about these two kings. Andersson and Gade 2000, p. 2.

Andersson and Gade have come to the conclusion that the author of *Fagrskinna* and Snorri tried to simplify their sagas by stripping the *þættir* away. *Morkinskinna* is not that sharp on biographical sketches and the various *þættir* make the overall picture blurred. Icelanders play major roles in *Morkinskinna*, and Andersson and Gade pose an apt question: whether *Morkinskinna* is ‘about Norwegian kings, or is it about the Icelandic experience of Norwegian kings?’¹⁰¹ So, there is no question about the Icelandic origin of the author and this can be confirmed by sub-themes. Not only do Icelanders play prominent roles in *Morkinskinna*, but there is the question of national autonomy and regionalism, which the author seems to support. It is understandable that this question of autonomy is important to the author: during the time when *Morkinskinna* was composed, the relations between Norwegians and Icelanders were tense. The Norwegian crown was seriously threatening Iceland with an invasion. This situation must have affected ideas of Icelandic identity. The author of *Morkinskinna* is clearly troubled with this. ‘On the one hand, he seems to be insistent on a sort of dual citizenship for the Icelanders . . . On the other hand, he takes a fierce view of Icelandic independence.’¹⁰²

1.5.3 *Fagrskinna*

Fagrskinna means ‘fair parchment’ and the name was applied to one of the two medieval manuscript books in the University Library of Copenhagen in the seventeenth century. Unfortunately the manuscript was destroyed in 1728 in the fire in the library. Luckily there were several paper copies made of *Fagrskinna* in the late seventeenth century. The name *Fagrskinna* was probably given to distinguish the manuscript from the other book, *Morkinskinna*. This name too was given by Þormóður Torfason. There are two versions of the manuscript, A and B. The A-version was probably written in the first half of the fourteenth century in south-eastern Norway. The B-version has been dated to the middle of the thirteenth century. A exists in following copies: AM 52 fol., AM 301 fol. and AM 303 4^{to}. Surviving copies of B are: UB 371 fol., AM 51 fol. and AM 302 4^{to}. Even though the B-version is older it has several lacunae. The first printed edition of *Fagrskinna* was made by P. A. Munch and C. R. Unger and published in Christiania in 1847. It was based on A-version. Subsequent editions follow the B-version (Finnur Jónsson’s edition of 1902–3 and Bjarni Einarsson’s *Íslenzk fornrit* edition of 1985).¹⁰³

The author was either an Icelandic or Norwegian scholar. Because we do not have the original manuscript it is difficult to determine the authorship, even though the manuscripts that we have contain Norwegian word forms.¹⁰⁴ The style of the author of *Fagrskinna* is ‘clear and terse’.¹⁰⁵ According to Indrebø, the author did not bother to explain the events, and he does not describe all the characters

¹⁰¹ Andersson and Gade 2000, p. 64.

¹⁰² Andersson and Gade 2000, pp. 78–9.

¹⁰³ Finlay 2004, p. 35–6.

¹⁰⁴ Bjarni Einarsson 1993, p. 177.

¹⁰⁵ Indrebø 1917, p. 236.

with the same depth, but at least he is independent in his opinions and logical.¹⁰⁶

It has been suggested that *Fagrskinna* was composed at the instigation of King Hákon Hákonarson. It is probable that the author had some connection to the king's court. Maybe *Sverris saga* was a model for the saga compilation. Although we cannot be sure whether the author was an Icelander or a Norwegian, it seems that he was an educated man who composed the saga in Niðaróss (Trondheim). The surviving page of the two earlier medieval manuscripts has been located in Niðaróss on palaeographical grounds.¹⁰⁷ *Fagrskinna* has been compared with its predecessor *Morkinskinna*. The author of *Fagrskinna* was 'a conservative arranger of earlier written sources'. The last part of the saga closely follows *Morkinskinna*, but it is not the version that we now have. Other sources used by *Fagrskinna* were Oddr Snorrason's Latin version of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (c. 1190) and **Hryggjarstykki*.¹⁰⁸

Another comparison has been made with *Heimskringla*. Snorri either used *Fagrskinna* or the same sources as *Fagrskinna*, and these two saga compilations have a good deal in common: 1. they terminate their narrative with the Battle of Ré in 1177; 2. they treat the history of kings of Norway from Hálfðan svarti to Magnús Erlingsson with the exception that *Ynglinga saga* has been added to the beginning of *Heimskringla*; 3. they cite skaldic poetry extensively; and 4. the authors are noted for their rationalistic and secular approach. However, *Fagrskinna* is overshadowed by *Heimskringla* because the latter has more vivid language and a more ample contextualization of events.¹⁰⁹

In this study Bjarni Einarsson's edition is used as a primary source. *Fagrskinna* has been translated only partly into modern Norwegian in 1926 by Johann Schreiner. The only complete translation is at the moment Alison Finlay's *Fagrskinna, A Catalogue of Kings of Norway*, which will be used in this study to give English translations of *Fagrskinna* passages.

1.5.4 *Heimskringla*

'Kringla heimsins, sú er mannfólkit byggvir, er mjög vágskórin . . .'. *Heimskringla* got its name after these first words in the first page of one of the manuscripts because there exists no cover page for the saga which could tell the name that was given to it.¹¹⁰ *Heimskringla* was written probably around 1230–5 by the Icelander Snorri Sturluson.¹¹¹ All six principal manuscripts of *Heimskringla* were destroyed in the fire of Copenhagen in 1728. They can be studied only through the medium of copies. In addition there are various short fragments as well as two lost manuscripts known only from translations and excerpts (Peder Claussøn's manuscripts and the lost Uppsala manuscript DG 3).¹¹² There are in

¹⁰⁶ Indrebø 1917, pp. 244–8.

¹⁰⁷ Bjarni Einarsson 1985, pp. cxxiii, cxxxi; Finlay 2004, pp. 15, 36; Indrebø 1917, p. 275 ff.

¹⁰⁸ Finlay 2004, pp. 2–3.

¹⁰⁹ Finlay 2004, pp. 17–18.

¹¹⁰ On *Heimskringla*'s manuscripts, see Louis-Jensen 1977; also Whaley 1991, pp. 41–7.

¹¹¹ The first to mention Snorri as the author of *Heimskringla* were the Norwegian antiquarians Laurents Hansson (1550) and Peder Claussøn Friis (1599). Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1985, *Heimskringla* I, pp. iii–ix.

¹¹² Louis-Jensen 1977, p. 191.

particular many manuscripts of the separate saga of St Óláfr. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson used a copy of a manuscript called Kringla¹¹³ in his *Heimskringla* edition in the Íslenzk fornrit series and the editions have been completed with five other manuscripts, all to some extent incomplete.¹¹⁴ Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson's editions have been used as sources in this study.

Patricia Pires Boulhosa has criticized how the saga editions in Íslenzk fornrit were compiled. She argues that the editors have used the manuscripts in order to recreate the authors' original text, which means that they could choose between 'good' and 'bad' manuscripts. However, Íslenzk fornrit is recognized as a standard edition series by scholars, even though Pires Boulhosa is right when she points out that 'The very multiplicity of texts indicates that these views were part of a continuous process of thought, which led to the writing and rewriting of the sagas'.¹¹⁵ This is the problem a historian studying the Middle Ages is constantly confronting: on the one hand the authorship may be difficult to define because of anonymous authors and constant rewriting and adding; on the other hand if we stick to these questions there is no way we can make further studies.

Heimskringla consists of sixteen sagas beginning from the mythical saga of the Ynglings (*Ynglinga saga*), who were the kings ruling from Uppsala. After that the saga tells about the Norwegian kings from Hálfðan svarti to Magnús Erlingsson. One third of the saga concentrates on King Óláfr Haraldsson, later known as St Óláfr. Snorri had earlier written a separate saga of King Óláfr so it must have been rather easy to attach this saga among the others. It is said that Snorri's style is at its best in this saga. Apparently Snorri had used Styrmir Kárasón's version of *Óláfs saga ins helga* for his own version.¹¹⁶ *Heimskringla* ends at the year 1177 and hence Snorri does not tell all about Magnús Erlingsson's reign and the chaotic situation in Norway. It has been speculated that Snorri did not want to continue to write about events that were already recorded in *Sverris saga*.

Sverre Bagge has argued that

Heimskringla represents the climax of Old Norse historiography in a double sense: it comes at the end of about half a century of extensive saga writing and includes material contained in most earlier works dealing with the Norwegian kings. It is also considered the best and most mature example of a kings' saga, both from a literary and a historiographical point of view.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ The manuscript Kringlan, which was written c. 1250–80, was destroyed in the great fire of Copenhagen in 1728 apart from one page. The text survives as copies from the seventeenth century. Louis-Jensen 1977, pp. 16–17. Other important *Heimskringla* manuscripts are Frísbók and Eirspennill, also known as AM 45 fol. And AM 47 fol. The manuscript called Jöfraskinna was also destroyed in the fire in Copenhagen in 1728 except for four pages. Ólafur Halldórsson 1979, pp. 119–20.

¹¹⁴ Kringla AM 35, fol. and Sth 18, fol. Additionally AM 39, fol., Frísbók AM 45, fol., Jöfraskinna (AM 37, fol., AM 38, fol., Upps., R 685), AM 325 VIII, 1, 4to, AM 325 XI, 1, 4to. On *Heimskringla*'s manuscripts, see Whaley 1991, pp. 41–7.

¹¹⁵ Pires Boulhosa 2005, pp. 28–31.

¹¹⁶ Jónas Kristjánsson 1988, 168–9, about Styrmir and his *Óláfs saga ins helga*, p. 160.

¹¹⁷ Bagge 1991, p. 14.

Because *Heimskringla* is the most extensive of all these four collections of kings' sagas, it overshadows them. From the point of view of this study, it is a little problematic, because many of the examples concerning the image of 'otherness' are from *Heimskringla*. Yet even if the emphasis lies on *Heimskringla* and its examples I do not consider it as a major problem: *Heimskringla* is borrowing from its predecessors, which is the most important reason why these four sources should be studied as an entity.

1.5.5 Snorri Sturluson

Snorri Sturluson (1178/9–1241) was the most influential Icelandic chieftain in his time.¹¹⁸ He was raised by his foster-father Jón Loftsson at Oddi, which was the centre of the cultural life in Iceland.¹¹⁹ There is no doubt that Snorri was an educated man. According to Marlene Ciklamini, Snorri's education at Oddi prepared him for the office of lawspeaker, trained him as a skald and a historian, and taught him the elements of rhetoric and saga-telling.¹²⁰ Snorri is considered to be more critical as a 'historian' (if he can be called by that name) than his predecessors. He did not just use his sources for composing a good story but he tried to find out the truth. Snorri mentions only one historian by name, Ari Þorgilsson, and another now lost source, **Hryggjarstykki*. Otherwise he uses skaldic poetry as source material, which often gives a contemporary, and therefore important, eyewitness account of events.¹²¹

Because Snorri defends his use of the poetry as a source in his prologue it seems that there may have been works which had been called into question because of their extensive use of the poetry.¹²² Later studies have shown that there is interdependence between the earlier kings' sagas and *Heimskringla*. There is no direct evidence of Snorri's use of Latin sources and it is still uncertain what kind of knowledge he had of Latin.¹²³ When it comes to Snorri's knowledge about the outer world, we can draw conclusions from his prologue in *Ynglinga saga* and *Heimskringla*. His idea of the world seems to have followed loosely the so-called T-O-map,¹²⁴ but he emphasized Asia's position as the centre of the world – after all, the Æsir came from there, according to him.¹²⁵

Snorri has a certain tendency towards source criticism and historical truth

¹¹⁸ For more about Snorri's life, see Whaley 1991, pp. 29–37.

¹¹⁹ For Snorri's life, see Gunnar Karlsson 1979, pp. 23–52.

¹²⁰ Ciklamini 1978, *Snorri Sturluson*, p. 23.

¹²¹ Jónas Kristjánsson 1988, pp. 168–9.

¹²² Tulinus 2002, p. 64.

¹²³ Whaley 1991, p. 74.

¹²⁴ Phillips 1998, pp. 178–9: 'Many of the *mappae mundi* were of the kind known as the T-O, or Sallust, or Noachid type, in which the classical idea of the *orbis terrarum*, comprising the three continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe, was joined to the idea derived from the Bible, that the continents had been distributed between the descendants of the sons of Noah. The world was depicted as a flat disc surrounded by the world ocean, forming the O shape; this was internally divided by the T with east at the top, the stem of the T representing the Mediterranean separating Europe and Africa, while the cross of the T was formed by the river Don (the classical Tanais) and the Nile, dividing Europe from Asia and Asia from Africa respectively'.

¹²⁵ Simek 1990, pp. 190, 322, 365.

because he collected material and studied his predecessors' works.¹²⁶ However, he applied source criticism whenever it suited him and he considered it necessary, for example to justify or explain events that were unbelievable. Snorri also copied passages directly from his predecessors' works.¹²⁷ Snorri should be seen in the first place as a medieval historian. Like other medieval historians, he had a strong didactic tendency: the intention was that the reader or listener should learn something. According to Snorri two things determined whether the source was trustworthy: 1. the eyewitnesses had to be wise and have objectivity; 2. one has to be able to prove the trustworthiness of the source. Snorri seems to trust very much in Ari Þorgilsson. He also mentions the *gamlir fræðimenn*¹²⁸ who told about the past, which seems to refer to oral tradition and its use as a source. Also Sæmundr Sigfússon and Ari Þorgilsson emphasized what the 'wise old men' had said, and they were considered as reliable sources because of their age and experiences.¹²⁹ According to Heinrich Beck Snorri's sources could be divided into oral and written/literary sources. The oral sources would have been genealogies, heroic poems and sagas, and the literary sources would have been works such as Ari's.¹³⁰ For Snorri history seems to have meant a series of events that were presented in a narrative and which were argued by reference to eyewitness accounts.¹³¹ *Heimskringla* does not escape its Icelandic character: Snorri relies on the Icelandic tradition and he is probably writing for Icelanders.¹³²

Snorri uses his sources with caution. He has had a striving for writing down and interpreting the traditions about the past. Snorri's sources for *Heimskringla* have been debated, and naturally it is impossible to say anything decisive about them. It must be admitted, though, that as Gísli Sigurðsson has pointed out, even if Snorri may have had ecclesiastic learning, he does not refer to any Latin authors in *Heimskringla* – Sæmundr fróði is the only author who wrote in Latin that he mentions. It has been claimed that Snorri's learning may have been based on discussions with learned men and that his cosmogony was derived from maps, not from books.¹³³

Heimskringla contains some episodes with supernatural elements, which is typical for the medieval historiography, but it has to be admitted that Snorri has managed to keep the number of supernatural creatures and events as few as possible. Supposedly supernatural elements may function as symbols for certain individuals or political situations. They may also be amusing short stories that would have otherwise sunk into oblivion.¹³⁴ Marlene Ciklamini argues that Snorri concentrates on the memorable and deliberately subordinates all the details to one end: 'the powerful revelation of character and conduct'. Snorri's

¹²⁶ Hallberg 1969, p. 35.

¹²⁷ Hallberg 1969, p. 35.

¹²⁸ *Heimskringla* I, Prologus, p. 4.

¹²⁹ Ellehøj 1965, p. 25.

¹³⁰ Beck 1996, p. 126.

¹³¹ Beck 1999, p. 9.

¹³² Whaley 1991, p. 123.

¹³³ Gísli Sigurðsson 2004, p. 8 and references.

¹³⁴ Whaley 1991, pp. 126, 132.

technique is based on oral saga-telling, but he tightened the presentation and honed his own style.¹³⁵

Heimskringla is the reconstruction of the past by Snorri. He has created a logical history as compared with his predecessors. Even if there are fictional elements in the sagas, they are, according to Sverre Bagge, just Snorri's way of reconstructing the past. For Snorri as well as for many other medieval authors history meant events followed by one another and the most important events were conflicts. In *Heimskringla* the conflicts create the framework, and there is not much space for other things, such as descriptions of unimportant peoples or places.¹³⁶ Snorri does not bother telling about details that are irrelevant for the story. Characters, even if they were kings and main characters, are described with very terse attributes, they are almost always described from outside and the descriptions follow a certain pattern. Snorri very rarely pays attention to surroundings, clothing, buildings and so forth.¹³⁷

Although it is generally accepted that Snorri Sturluson is the author of *Heimskringla*, his authorship has been debated for a long time and the opinions have altered greatly.¹³⁸ On the one hand it has been suggested that Snorri did not himself write *Heimskringla* but he had scribes do the job, as was suggested by Lars Lönnroth.¹³⁹ In this case, the authorship is a matter of definition and must be understood against this background. Snorri being himself of the upper class probably did not bother to write himself, but he may certainly have had scribes to do the job for him. On the other hand it has been suggested that *Heimskringla* conveys only Snorri's thoughts and ideas because he is the author. Nowadays the opinion seems to be somewhere in between these extremes. The scholars are quite unanimous that Snorri is the author of *Heimskringla*, which does not exclude the possibility that he could have used scribes to help.¹⁴⁰ According to Aron Gurevich, himself the spokesman of mentalities and historical anthropology, *Heimskringla* does not express just Snorri's ideas and thoughts, because the saga as a genre is something between folklore and literature. The saga author was not an author in the word's present-day meaning; instead, he was a compiler of different stories that he wrote down. This opinion emphasizes that the saga must have been influenced not just by the author's attitudes. According to Gurevich this means that it is no use of trying to find one systematic 'historical theory' in the saga.¹⁴¹

So, the question is what is Snorri's influence in *Heimskringla*? He has chosen to emphasize certain episodes while paying less attention to others. His education and worldview are perceptible in *Heimskringla*. That is why *Heimskringla* must be seen as tradition that is percolated down through Snorri. If we consider *Heimskringla*'s trustworthiness as a source we must bear in mind the nature of medieval

¹³⁵ Ciklamini 1978, p. 36.

¹³⁶ Bagge 1991, pp. 58, 64.

¹³⁷ Bagge 1991, pp. 46, 149, 179.

¹³⁸ About the debate, see for example Sawyer, B. 2003b, pp. 191–7.

¹³⁹ Lönnroth 1965.

¹⁴⁰ Ólafur Halldórsson 1979, p. 127; Whaley 1991, pp. 17, 19.

¹⁴¹ Gurevich 1992, p. 103.

historiography: even if a story was not based on real historical events the author could believe it to be true. The authors did not necessarily invent stories but they wrote down what 'reliable people' or eyewitnesses had told them. It was just the author's duty to write down what he had heard. The medieval written tradition used folklore and oral tradition as sources. Aron Gurevich has written about visions that 'For the historian of culture the problem is not whether these visions were "genuine" or fictional . . . The visions became facts of culture. As such they deserve to be studied.'¹⁴² Applying this we can say that the sagas deserve to be studied, too. Snorri differs in many respects from contemporary European historians: first of all, he was not a cleric and he did not represent the ecclesiastical tradition of history writing. He is interested in politics and struggles for power, and he tries to create a meaningful narrative and explain things without supernatural elements. Snorri does not just describe events but tries to find motivations for things and explain them.¹⁴³

Heimskringla is a many-sided piece of work which has puzzled scholars for at least two hundred years. Even today they debate how *Heimskringla* came to be, what the influence of oral tradition was on its contents, or what Snorri's personal input in the text was. Does *Heimskringla* reflect ideas of the thirteenth century? If it does, whose are they? Snorri's, Icelanders', Norwegians'? These questions divide scholars into different schools. Sverre Bagge has written a thorough study of *Heimskringla* (*Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla*, 1991) by using a comparative method. Bagge has compared *Heimskringla* and its sources in order to find out Snorri's own ideas and attitudes behind the text.¹⁴⁴ He agrees with Aron Gurevich and the ideas of the school of historical anthropology that Snorri's ideas may not always represent contemporary ideas and mentality, but because he is the product of his social and intellectual environment many of his 'basic assumptions may be regarded as the expression of common *mentalité*'.¹⁴⁵

Gurevich thinks that it would be wrong to study *Heimskringla* just as an expression of Snorri's ideas and opinions. He sees the sagas – and especially the kings' sagas – as a genre that is halfway between folklore and literature. According to Gurevich the contents and the structure of the saga cannot follow only the author's personal ideas, which means that it is, for example, impossible to find a systematic 'historical' theory in the kings' sagas.¹⁴⁶ I agree with Bagge and Gurevich, although I think that when it comes to *Heimskringla*, Snorri's personal experiences (education, travels) may be perceptible in some details.

In this study the purpose is to consider the Norse mental worldview by using the image of 'otherness' as a starting point, which does not require that Snorri's personal ideas should be enhanced or separated from the saga tradition. However, I have tried to analyse when possible for example how Snorri's personal background may have influenced the image of 'otherness' that is perceptible in *Heimskringla*.

¹⁴² Gurevich 1992, pp. 51–2.

¹⁴³ Bagge 1991, pp. 241, 249.

¹⁴⁴ Bagge 1991, p. 63.

¹⁴⁵ Bagge 1991, pp. 5–6, 237.

¹⁴⁶ Gurevich 1992, p. 103.

Snorri Sturluson, being the only author of the kings' sagas whose name and history is known, will inevitably receive special attention in every respect in this study.

1.6 THE RESEARCH TRADITION IN SAGA STUDIES

This study is generally part of the discourse in medieval history and saga studies – if we can use such an expression – but it does not mean that it will confine itself only to these fields of study. Considering the theme, it has been necessary to follow the discourse in anthropology, archaeology, philology, social studies and so forth. It would be too vast a task to go through the relevant literature and discourse in these fields. Part of the discourse, mainly the framework for this study, has been undertaken at the beginning of the study. The saga studies and their discourse will be dealt with in 'Sources'.

In recent years themes concerning 'otherness' have been a focus of interest in the humanities in general. Several books concerning the encounter with the 'other' in the Middle Ages have been published.¹⁴⁷ All in all, over the last couple of decades there has been general interest in studying 'otherness', especially in medieval studies. The others have been in these cases usually non-Christians (for example Muslims and heathens). 'Otherness' for the Northern peoples has been studied from the point of view of the Latin medieval sources.¹⁴⁸

Studying 'otherness' in the sagas is not a totally new idea. John Lindow was probably the first to introduce the concept of 'otherness' in saga studies with his article 'Supernatural Others and Ethnic Others: A Millennium of World View', in which he shows how ethnicity and 'otherness' are intertwined in some images of 'otherness'.¹⁴⁹ John McKinnell has studied 'otherness' in Old Norse myths and legends.¹⁵⁰ Myths and legends are, however, quite different source material from the kings' sagas: it is not difficult to recognize 'the other' in them, as McKinnell points out,¹⁵¹ whereas in the kings' sagas one is more than once forced to read between the lines in order to define 'the other'. Because the kings' sagas do not concentrate on everyday life and ordinary people, they do not deal with the real outcasts of society (except for the few cases of *seiðmenn*), namely the outlaws. In the family sagas, on the other hand, these 'real others' are basic characters of the sagas and their intrigues. In the Middle Ages there were different levels of outlawry depending on the severity of the punishment, but basically outlaws were excluded from society in Iceland and they had to live in the uninhabited area. Agneta Breisch has studied outcasts in Icelandic society.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ For example Foerster 2009; Classen 2002; Scior 2002; Ruotsala 2001.

¹⁴⁸ Foerster 2009; Scior 2002.

¹⁴⁹ Lindow 1995, pp. 8–31.

¹⁵⁰ McKinnell 2005.

¹⁵¹ McKinnell 2005, p. 7.

¹⁵² Breisch 1994.

Sverrir Jakobsson's dissertation 'Við og veröldin. Heimsmýnd Íslendinga 1100–1400' (2005) is probably the closest study to this thesis. Sverrir's starting point was to study the Icelandic worldview from around the year 1100, when the literary culture in Iceland began, up to c. 1400, when the 'written culture took on clearly defined features'.¹⁵³ Sverrir defines three main questions in his study: 1. how the worldview is part of common mentality; 2. the development of the Icelandic worldview; and 3. how the worldview is related to the identity of Icelanders. There is no question that Sverrir's study is thorough, and because there are several interests in common in his study and my own, it necessary to point out the differences between these two. This study is based on much narrower source material, because the attempt is not to find changes in worldview but to define the worldview within fairly congruent source materials that were produced during a relatively short period of time. In addition, anonymous authors – Snorri Sturluson being the exception – and several interpolations and borrowings indicate that these kings' sagas should be studied *en bloc*.¹⁵⁴ Sverrir clearly announces that he is studying the Icelandic worldview whereas I am reluctant to make a distinctive difference between the Icelandic and Norwegian worldview at the beginning of the thirteenth century. In the end, Sverrir is analysing the Icelandic worldview in a fairly concrete way, whereas this study is trying to clarify the mental worldview of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere and how it reflects the group boundaries and group identity.

The roots of saga studies lie in the seventeenth century, when manuscripts were collected and studied by such scholars as Árni Magnússon (1663–1730). Nobody questioned the contents of the sagas even though it was obvious already that the sagas were written down long after the actual events had taken place. Especially the kings' sagas were considered to be reliable sources for history. For example in Sweden they were used as sources when there were attempts to write a magnificent history for the newly emerged superpower. Olof Rudbeck, for instance, tried to prove in his *Atlantica* (1679) with the help of the sagas and Greek and Roman classics that Sweden was the Atlantis that Plato had described. Rudbeck justified the use of the sagas despite their contradictory information by comparing them with the Gospels, which also have conflicting information.¹⁵⁵

Árni Magnússon was one of the few who were critical of the information the sagas gave, but he was better known as a collector of manuscripts than as a critical scholar.¹⁵⁶ Árni did not believe that the sagas were transmitted as oral tradition before they were written down. His ideas were taken up by some German scholars in the eighteenth century. These scholars doubted the historicity of the sagas and they criticized especially the reliability of oral tradition. Because the Germans did not have the close relation to the sagas the Scandinavians did, they could criticize the sagas from another perspective. Some of the German scholars even claimed

¹⁵³ Sverrir Jakobsson 2005, p. 363.

¹⁵⁴ More about the kings' sagas and my grounds for treating them as one complex source material, see the chapter 'Sources'.

¹⁵⁵ Mundal 1977, pp. 10–13. About Rudbeck and his use of sagas as sources, see Wallette 2004, pp. 127–67.

¹⁵⁶ Árni's collection was the basis of the Arnamagnæan Institute, which conserves manuscripts.

that the sagas were novels.¹⁵⁷ During nineteenth-century romanticism Danish scholars defended the use of the sagas as sources and they considered them to be part of the 'common Nordic tradition'. They could not, however, neglect the criticism of the scholars of the Enlightenment and they had to take into consideration differences between the sagas. National romanticism was a strong movement in the nineteenth century and scholars often tried to find the historical 'core' in the sagas. At the same time the saga literature and its origin became embroiled in the question of (Scandinavian) nationality. According to the Danes the sagas were Nordic, but the Norwegians considered them to be Norse-Icelandic and asserted their view by pointing out that Icelanders were mostly Norwegian settlers. The founder of this so-called Norwegian school was Rudolf Keyser (1803–64).¹⁵⁸

In the 1860s the impact of romanticism diminished in the studies of the sagas. At the same time Icelanders themselves became aware of their literary inheritance. The debate about the 'nationality' of the sagas continued. In the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century the sagas as well as myths about the Vikings were used to confirm the national feelings both in Norway and in Iceland.¹⁵⁹ The German Konrad Maurer became involved in the debate with his thesis 'Ueber die Ausdrücke: Altnordische, Altnorwegische und Isländische Sprache' (1867). He argued the sagas were originally produced by Icelanders and that Norwegians could not claim that they had had anything to do with them. Maurer criticized also Keyser's statement that oral tradition would have preserved the sagas unchanged. These examples reveal that scholars were still more interested in the language of the sagas than their historicity. It was the Danish Edwin Jessen who brought up the question of the historical accuracy of the sagas.¹⁶⁰ The Icelandic Finnur Jónsson, who began his career at the end of the nineteenth century, posed an important question: who were the authors of the sagas? Finnur's view was that many of the authors must have been priests or monks. He defended this theory by pointing out that there had been monasteries in those areas where the saga literature had flourished in Iceland.¹⁶¹

At the beginning of the twentieth century two theories for interpreting the sagas emerged: the so-called freeprose theory (*Freiprosalehre*) and bookprose (*Buchprosalehre*) theory. The difference between these two theories lies in the way the scholars regarded the sources of the sagas and the saga authors. According to those favouring the freeprose idea the sagas manifested the last phase of the oral tradition that was then written down. They justified their view by pointing out that there are realistic and objective episodes in the sagas, the authors are often anonymous (which relates to oral tradition), and several sagas have common characters. The Norwegian Rudolf Keyser was one of the first supporters of the freeprose theory. Andreas Heusler developed the idea of this theory in his book

¹⁵⁷ Rühls 1812.

¹⁵⁸ Mundal 1977, pp. 17–50.

¹⁵⁹ Eriksen 1996, p. 49.

¹⁶⁰ Jessen 1872.

¹⁶¹ Clover 1985, pp. 239–40; Mundal 1977, pp. 73–80.

Die Anfänge der isländischen Saga (1914). It was Heusler who began to call the theory *Freiprosalehre*. The supporters of the bookprose theory had a totally different opinion: they considered the sagas to be novels. They justified their view by pointing out that the sagas contain artistic compositions and literary motifs, the episodes follow a certain pattern and that the authors had lived long after the episodes they wrote about.¹⁶² In particular the Swedish scholar Lauritz Weibull had a critical view about the sagas as sources for history. Along with his brother Curt he used a method called *bevisningspositivismen*, which was directed against the hermeneutical notion of science.¹⁶³

In the 1910s and 1920s the so-called Icelandic school, whose supporters considered the sagas as literature, was strong, but the freeprose theory still had its own supporters. In the 1930s the bookprose theory got more of a foothold in saga studies, but after the Second World War saga studies have changed gradually. Nowadays there is no clear division between supporters of the freeprose or the bookprose theory.¹⁶⁴ The tendency is to see the sagas as products of that particular time when they were written down. They can be used as sources for history but they must be seen in the context of the time and place. Joseph Harris has examined the relation of the sagas to historical novels. Harris points out that the sagas and the first historical novels have many interests in common: they contain both real and fictional episodes and characters. In the thirteenth century the saga authors felt that they wrote about events that were far off from them. Harris assumes that Christianity had brought the concept of linear history to Iceland.¹⁶⁵

The debate about oral tradition behind the sagas is still current today. We know that there was a tradition of *kvöldvaka* ('evening waking') in Iceland during the long wintermonths and part of this was *sagaskemmtun* ('sagadiversion') which continued well into the nineteenth century. This testifies that oral tradition was still strong and lively then. Interestingly, individual texts in the manuscripts sometimes close with thanks to those who read and those who listened, which shows the obscure line between oral and written culture.¹⁶⁶ Considering this evidence, we can assume that sagas were read aloud, at least to some extent. This means that the sagas were really written for a wide audience and not just for the few who could read. The oral tradition behind the sagas could also be one reason to see the sagas as an expression of common *mentalité*. Gísli Sigurðsson has promoted the idea that the written sagas really have their origin in the oral tradition. However, Sigurðsson does not claim that the sagas depicting history of the tenth century were reliable sources for that period. Concerning the connection between oral and written tradition he notes 'the writing of saga did not suddenly produce something

¹⁶² Jónas Kristjánsson 1988, p. 204; Clover 1985, pp. 239–40; Mundal 1977, pp. 141–2; Hallberg 1969, pp. 43–5.

¹⁶³ This L. Weibull's revolt against the hermeneutical school became apparent in his book *Kritiska undersökningar i Nordens historia omkring år 1000* (1911). Torstendahl and Nybom 1988, pp. 80, 93–4.

¹⁶⁴ Mundal 1977, pp. 163, 198, 275.

¹⁶⁵ Harris 1986, pp. 190–5.

¹⁶⁶ Driscoll 2006, p. 203.

new for people to use and to refer to, since the stories it contained existed before the time of writing and continued to exist after that'.¹⁶⁷

If the starting point for studying history is that the source-critical problems must be solved completely before history can be studied, the whole process of studying becomes impossible. Especially when it comes to medieval history the historian cannot afford to leave out a single source just because it is under source-critical debate. These last few hundred years of saga studies have brought us fairly reliable information about the sagas and their origins, but the debate goes on, as is only natural. Nowadays multidisciplinary studies have shown that the sagas have much to offer us. New methods give us new opportunities to gain information about the society and people who produced the sagas.

1.7 ON TERMINOLOGY

In this chapter I shall define the use of some key concepts that appear throughout this book. These concepts need to be clarified because some of these concepts are used in everyday language ('Vikings', 'nations'), but in this context their use needs to be properly argued.

1.7.1 Ethnonyms

One of the most challenging tasks in this study has been what kind of names to use for peoples and lands. Only in the last decades have scholars challenged the old fixed ideas about nations and states that already 'existed' in the Middle Ages. Scholars who have engaged with questions like how the states came into being as well as the terms for different nationalities or ethnicities have shown that the nineteenth-century national romanticism and its ideas about nation states have affected and still affect how we understand the history of states. We have long cherished the thought that the nation states were bound to arise, and that this development from, say, the Middle Ages to today was inevitable.¹⁶⁸ Doing so we have created a hypothesis and we have sought only that kind of evidence in history which supports it.

Names of different groups (ethnonyms) are names of ethnic collectivities.¹⁶⁹ They are interesting because they do not necessarily imply ethnicity. There is also a big difference if the name was given by the group itself or by another group. Usually people use names that mean 'people' or 'a man'. There is a tendency to use 'out-group' names when referring to other ethnic entities than one's own. Out-groups names were used by those who were in superior position to the other group (for example by enforcing tribute-exactions).¹⁷⁰ Out-groups, on the other

¹⁶⁷ Gísli Sigurðsson 2004, p. 332.

¹⁶⁸ On the birth of the concept of nations and nationalism, see Hobsbawm 1990.

¹⁶⁹ Hansen 1996, p. 81.

¹⁷⁰ Hansen 1996, p. 83. As an example of this we may use the word *Finnar* in the sagas. The name was

hand, may use belittling names for their neighbours. A human group may adopt its name from its religious identity or way of living, from the geographical area it inhabits or from a bigger administrative district.¹⁷¹

Most often the name has its origins in the spoken language of a group. According to the Christian worldview in the Middle Ages differences between languages originated when the tower of Babel collapsed and languages got mixed. It should be remembered that even if people were categorized according to their languages in the Middle Ages, languages covered larger and also different areas than today (e.g. 'the men from the north', which refers generally to plunderers coming from Northern Europe). It is not possible to separate smaller ethnic groups from bigger ones by using languages as a basis of categorization.¹⁷² Nearly all the present-day languages are semi-artificially constructed or virtually invented.¹⁷³ Thus, it is difficult to project back in time different language/dialect groups and their speakers.

Medieval sources are demanding when it comes to the names of different groups. How can we know which names refer to ethnicity? If the names do not refer to ethnicity, what is their background? What possibilities do we have in order to distinguish between names that describe ethnicity and other kinds of names?¹⁷⁴ There are more questions than answers. When medieval names of groups are studied one should always remember that these names may be and are often misleading and that they have often come into existence because of misunderstanding. This is true especially when groups that live in far-off lands are in question. It is a problem also when one name has been used for one group over a long period of time, but at the same time it is clear that the contents or meaning of the name has changed. People have usually used ethnic names for other groups when they needed to define them. Nonetheless, this kind of categorization based on ethnicity is only one way of categorizing 'otherness', as stated above.¹⁷⁵

My purpose is to show in the context of the sagas that it is by no means self-evident that we can use such terms as 'Icelander', 'Norwegian', 'Dane' or 'Swede' when we talk about the Middle Ages: they can be used, but their use must be properly justified. The problem is that we associate these names today with fixed geographical areas and states. These names were used already in the Middle Ages by the sources, but they certainly had different meaning. My starting point has been to use those ethnonyms that can be found in the sources and I have used their English translations. Hence, for instance, *Svíar* are 'Swedes', but we can ask who they actually were. Were the *Gautar* also part of this group? Did the name refer just to one social class?¹⁷⁶

definitely given by the out-group, i.e. the Norse speakers, and not used by the in-group, the Sámi.

¹⁷¹ Wallerström 1997, pp. 309–11.

¹⁷² Roslund 2001, p. 58. For example, the Vikings were called 'north men' by people in England or France, because they were not aware of where the raiders came from exactly.

¹⁷³ Hobsbawm 1990, p. 54.

¹⁷⁴ Wallerström 1997, p. 304.

¹⁷⁵ Wallerström 1997, pp. 307–8.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. p. 88 ff.

1.7.2 'Nations and countries' – or just peoples and realms?

In the Middle Ages people did not consider themselves as members of nations in the word's modern meaning, and they did not live in an area with fixed borders. According to the English Thesaurus 'nation' means commonwealth, realm, state or community, people, population, race, stock, tribe.¹⁷⁷ However, I consider that the word 'nation' is heavily biased by nineteenth-century romanticism, which enhanced nations as politically independent groups. In my opinion, we cannot apply this kind of definition to groups mentioned in sources from the thirteenth century. In other words, we have to evaluate every name for a group separately and contextualize it: is this a name used by the group itself? Is it a name for a people living in a certain territory, or is it a name for social group? Is it acting as an independent group or is it submissive to some other group?

My choice to approach the sources is to find groups on the basis of their ethnic or social background. I have already shown how 'ethnicity' as a concept has over-run 'nation' during the last few decades in social sciences, history and anthropology. It can be argued that 'ethnicity' or 'ethnic groups' are as modern as 'nation' – how can their use be justified in a medieval context? The problem itself is not the use of modern terms, but to understand that we can study only those phenomena in the past that existed. We can study homosexuals in the Middle Ages because homosexuality existed then although the word we use for it is later invention. We can study ethnic groups in the Middle Ages, because they existed then, but I argue that we cannot study nations in the Middle Ages, because they are a later phenomenon.¹⁷⁸

As an example of this problematic history of the concept and word 'nation' we can take Icelanders. During the emerging nationalism in Norway and Iceland in the nineteenth century the Norwegians considered that the Icelanders had been Norwegians in the Middle Ages whereas the Icelanders had the opinion that they already then formed a *þjóð* (nation). This question of what kind of awareness of identity a group of people had in the Middle Ages is very complicated – one of the reasons being that we should avoid mixing the consciousness of identity and self-awareness with the modern terminology of nations and nationalism. The medieval authors did not recognise the concept *natio* as something that would imply integration or national spirit.¹⁷⁹

Peoples were most often categorized according to what language they spoke – after all, the medieval ecclesiastical scholars cherished the theory of an original community of language. After the collapse of the Tower of Babel differentiation of languages was the first step in the formation of races and peoples.¹⁸⁰ Giles Constable has pointed out that 'the primary sense of belonging was to a *natio* rather than to a *regio*, and territory only gradually replaced descent as the main principle

¹⁷⁷ *English Thesaurus* 1997.

¹⁷⁸ This does not mean that I would deny the existence of the word 'nation' (Latin *natio*) in the Middle Ages.

¹⁷⁹ Ehlers 1993, p. 1036.

¹⁸⁰ Bartlett 1993, p. 198.

of identity'.¹⁸¹ If *natio* meant in general the inhabitants of a *regnum*, *gens* was used when referring to peoples who were of the same origin (e.g. a clan).¹⁸²

The Latin word *gens* used in the Middle Ages could be translated into Old Norse as *kind* 'family, tribe, people'. The more common word among speakers Scandinavian languages was probably *þjóð* 'people'.¹⁸³ Stefan Brink, who has studied how names for peoples and landscapes/lands came into being in Sweden, has come to the conclusion that the oldest territories are the so-called landscapes (Swedish *landskap*), which in prehistoric time were called *land*. According to Brink these provinces had their origin in legal districts, which is proved later by the medieval laws of different *landskap* (*landskapslagar*). Although laws themselves reflect the time they were written down (the thirteenth century), they indicate that there must have been a social organization that predates these laws and legal districts, but of which we have no knowledge.¹⁸⁴

According to Brink the sense of togetherness in the groups was based firmly on social organization and its legal district in Sweden. However, it should be pointed out that the social organization that made the laws consisted of the upper class and the free farmers as far as we can deduce whom the laws concerned and who were allowed to participate in the meetings (Swedish *ting*). If the legal districts were part of the creation of regional identity, can we say that it applied also to those people in the district that did not have anything to do with the law-making (the unfree, slaves)? Would their identity be more local than regional? This is just to pinpoint the complexity of the whole question of group identity and how it came about. Even if legal districts in Svealand and Götaland were important for the group identity of the Svear and the *Gautar*, this theory is not applicable as such to all Scandinavian realms. As Sverre Bagge has pointed out, the situation was different in all these realms. According to him, Norway was a special case because the unification of the country was rather easy: the long coastline gave an excellent line of communication for the ruler and even if there were small groups resisting this process, they were too small to prevent the unification of the rest of the country.¹⁸⁵ This question of different groups in Scandinavia and the rise of Scandinavian realms will be dealt more thoroughly in the chapter 3.

Instead of using the words 'kingdom' or 'country' the word 'realm' will be used in this study. This is appropriate because the Scandinavian countries did not exist as kingdoms or countries with fixed borders in the Viking Age or in the early Middle Ages. We must understand the concept of a realm not as a fixed territory, but as a reflection of the power of the king. The king held personal power and he exerted his power with the help of his retinue, who had sworn loyalty to him. Because the king travelled from one place to another – he was using his estates to feed his retinue and use the resources of a certain area – his power rested wherever

¹⁸¹ Constable 2006, p. 5.

¹⁸² Leerssen 2007c, p. 377.

¹⁸³ Brink 2008, p. 95; de Vries 1962, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, pp. 224–5.

¹⁸⁴ Brink 2008, pp. 96, 105.

¹⁸⁵ Bagge 2008, p. 154.

he was himself present. This situation changed gradually when kings began to organize their administration so that they did not have to travel around but their resources (tributes, taxes) were collected by their men, civil servants, and sent for example to the king or to the nearest estate owned by the king. At the same time it meant that the king's power did not only rest on his person but the administration extended his power to those places where a civil servant was taking care of the king's business.

1.7.3 Vikings and Scandinavians

It is necessary to define the concepts 'Viking' and 'Scandinavian', which show up every now and then in this study. First of all, the word 'Viking' was hardly ever used of peoples of Scandinavia by others in the Viking Age or in the early Middle Ages. The Frankish sources called them *Nordmanni*, or *Dani*, the English and the Irish sources Danes or heathens. The Russian sources call them Varangians or *Rus*,¹⁸⁶ Greek and Arabic sources refer to them as *Rus*. We do not know what the origin of the word *vikingr* is and it is questionable whether we can give a satisfactory explanation for it. Scholars have put much effort into explaining the meaning of the word 'Viking'. As Eldar Heide's theory about the word's etymology shows, the origin of the word itself had been forgotten even if the word itself lived on.¹⁸⁷

Most probably the word *vikingr* denoted people of diverse ethnic origin in the medieval sources, and it cannot be confined to one group or ethnicity. This is a plausible explanation if we look for example at the kings' sagas, in which the word 'Viking' could refer to Estonians, Wends or even Muslims. This is not surprising, because the people in the Viking Age or in the early Middle Ages did not usually stress the ethnic origin of a stranger. I want to emphasize that the word 'Viking' is used in this study to denote various peoples (usually active in the sea and plundering), and whose ethnic origin may be as well Scandinavian as Slavic, German or Finnic. The Viking Age is generally defined as the period c. 800–1100 in Northern Europe.

The non-Scandinavian contemporary sources use the words Northmen (*Norðmenn*) or Danes (*Danir*), which do not necessarily refer to Norwegians or Danes as we understand them today. 'Northmen' was used for the more northerly Norse, just as 'Danes' became a word for southern Scandinavians. The word 'Scandinavian' itself is problematic, too, because it somehow echoes the national romantic era of the nineteenth century. However, I am using the word here to denote the speakers of the Scandinavian languages. Eric Christiansen formulates it well, when he writes that the 'Scandinavians are a bloodless geo-political fiction' and that there is no satisfactory word for these speakers of Scandinavian languages

¹⁸⁶ In the Russian sources *Варяжы* could also refer generally to Western Christians.

¹⁸⁷ On the different hypotheses of the word *vikingr*, see Palm 2004, pp. 16–17. Eldar Heide has given the most plausible explanation: the word *viking[r]* would derive from the verb *vika* and it would have meant 'shifting oars'. Thus, the word would originate from the time before the sail was taken into use by the Germanic peoples, and men would have to change rowers. Heide 2005, pp. 41–54.

in the Viking Age.¹⁸⁸ Admittedly it is contradictory to use the word ‘Scandinavian’ considering the word’s background, but as we lack satisfactory vocabulary that would cover the speakers of the *ðönsk tunga*, the use of the word is acceptable.

The words ‘Icelander’ and ‘Norwegian’ will be clarified in the next chapter, because they form the observer group of the study, i.e. ‘otherness’ is viewed from their point of view and in relation to them. In English it is easy not to make a division between Icelanders and Norwegians, because their medieval society can be called Old Norse. However, the problem who is an Icelander and a Norwegian cannot be sidestepped in this context, as both the words *Íslendingr* and *Norðmaðr* occur in the sources and had a meaning. The purpose of Ch. 3 is to find out what kind of terminology Icelanders and Norwegians used of themselves in the sagas, and what it can reveal about their self-awareness and relationship to each other.

1.7.4 King and *hirð*

The whole idea of kingship in Scandinavia has been studied widely, and the purpose in this context is not to participate in this discourse but to say something about the use of the word in this study because they are relevant when looking at the social ties as a basis for groups and group identity. If the word *konungr* is used in the sources it will be used in this study and translated as ‘king’. The Scandinavian kings are referred to as *rex* or *senior* in medieval Latin texts. There were, however, different kinds of kings in Scandinavia. In Norway there were often several kings at the same time. Some of them were so-called petty kings, who acknowledged the superiority of another king. The sagas mention sometimes that somebody held the title of king.¹⁸⁹ We may only guess what it meant: was it an honorary title, or had the king taken the title himself? What kind of power did he have?

In the Eddic poem *Rígsþula* the etymology of the word *konungr* is explained: Rígr (who was the god Heimdallr in disguise, according to the poem’s prose preface) visited people and slept between a series of couples. Each woman then gave birth to a son. Faðir and Móðir had a son called Jarl. Jarl married a girl called Erna, and they had several children. Konr was the youngest of them (*Konr ungr* → *konungr*). He was skilful in many ways: he was for example skilled in runes, he could save people (if they were in trouble at sea) and he could calm the sea.¹⁹⁰ It can be debated whether or not this poem derives from the Viking Age or whether it is a later medieval construction. The point is that it gives an explanation to the origin of kings. They are sons of prominent men, and they are different from ordinary farmers and slaves. *Rígsþula* conveys the idea that society is supposed to be stratified (slaves, farmers and aristocrats).

The king’s retinue was called *hirð*. Originally it may have been the loyal men of a ‘gang leader’ who followed him on his tribute-collecting and plundering

¹⁸⁸ Christiansen 2002, pp. 1–4.

¹⁸⁹ Also sea-kings (*sækonungar*) are mentioned, which seems to imply that they were actually Viking chieftains. We also have to take into account the earls, referred to by the Old Norse title *jarl* in this study, who often held substantial power in a particular area.

¹⁹⁰ Finnur Jónsson 1932, p. 162.

expeditions. The *hirð* became an essential part of a king's power: these men not only protected the king but they were also his tools to exert power. The *hirð* was the core of the army in the battles and the most loyal men were chosen as members of it. About King Haraldr hárfagri's *hirð* it is said that

Þeir einir náðu hirðvíst með Haraldi konungi, er afreksmenn váru at afli ok hreysti ok alls konar atgørvi, þeim einum var skipat hans skip, en hann átti þá góð vøl á at kjósa sér hirðmenn ór hverju fylki. Haraldr konungr hafði her mikinn ok mǫrg stórskip, ok margir ríkismenn fylgðu honum.¹⁹¹

This reflects the first stage of how a *hirð* was made up: the king picked up 'men of strength', because the *hirðmenn* would engage in battles. The passage says also that there were influential men who were king's henchmen. It is not revealed how a 'man of influence' was defined. Probably the definition was broad but apparently a man of influence would have been a spokesman for the people in his local area and also wealthy. Thus, the king – or magnate – built his network of power on men who had influence on a local level. This alliance was reciprocal: the king or magnate paid for the loyalty by giving lands or the right to collect taxes from a certain area. One important aspect was also gift-giving as a show of power. A king was supposed to give precious gifts such as gold rings or swords to his loyal men.¹⁹² During the course of the Middle Ages the *hirð* was to change: in the beginning the *hirð* was literally a retinue that followed the king, but by the end of the thirteenth century *hirðmenn* had become part of the royal administration, so that some of them acted as representatives of the king in different parts of the country and were thus not physically present at the king's court.

1.7.5 Border, frontier, centre, periphery

Border, frontier, centre and periphery are terms that are connected with the concrete geographical world. Border and frontier are ambiguous, but the former means generally 'a line between two territorial units' and the latter is 'a diffuse zone between us and aliens'. For example, there was no exact border between the Christians and the Moslems/pagans in the Middle Ages but a diffuse frontier.¹⁹³ Because this study deals with mental worldview, boundaries between different groups are the most useful terms.

Centre and periphery are concepts that cannot be separated from each other. They may be understood as terms belonging to geography, to the physical world, but they are also used in social relations. In geography, a centre is a locus of power and prestige, and which is encircled by the periphery.¹⁹⁴ In this study the centre is

¹⁹¹ *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 9, 100–1; Hollander pp. 64–5: 'Only those men were accepted into King Harald's bodyguard who were of unusual strength and bravery and had all sorts of achievements. Only they were allowed on the ship, but then he had good choice in picking out men for his bodyguard from every district. King Harald had a large army and many large vessels, and many men of influence were his henchmen.'

¹⁹² On gift exchange, see the chapter 'Hospitality'.

¹⁹³ Korpela 2008; Katajala 2006, p. 87.

¹⁹⁴ Leerksen 2007b, p. 278.

the observer, i.e. the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere. Its relation to its out-groups defines how close or far away they are from this centre. This is an egocentric viewpoint, but it is suitable when describing out-groups and their place in the mental worldview of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere. Centre and periphery are concepts that are made up by modern scholars. It is difficult to relieve oneself of this modern worldview and look at the past in its own terms. Instead of looking for centres and peripheries we can look at the boundaries between different groups: centres existed side by side with boundaries (mental, political and ideological). These boundaries are fruitful for the study of otherness, because they show the limits of the group boundary.

In the thirteenth century the Latin Christian world made contacts with the East when the Christians came to know for example the Mongols. They were also introduced to those parts of Asia that lay outside the Mongol empire, such as India.¹⁹⁵ At the same time the Latin Christians still fostered the idea of monstrous races around the 'civilized' peoples. It took some time before people had the courage to call into question this view that had been accepted by such great authors as Augustine and Isidore of Seville.¹⁹⁶ Even though the kings' sagas used in this study as sources do not belong to the ecclesiastical tradition, it cannot be ignored that their authors were Christians and they were influenced at least to a certain extent by the Latin Christian ideology. Margaret Clunies Ross has noted that the Icelandic authors recreated the time before Christianity in a way that reflects the Christian modes of thought that underpinned their general worldview.¹⁹⁷ (The question of the Christian background of the authors will be dealt further in 'Sources'.)

1.7.6 Individual and community

According to Mats Roslund one could identify a stranger in the Middle Ages with the following definitions: he probably spoke another language and his clothing was different (and also revealed his social status).¹⁹⁸ Different ethnicities were also divided in the Middle Ages by their distinctive legal status. As Robert Bartlett puts it, 'The principle of 'personality of the law', according to which individuals had their own ethnic law – Gothic or Frankish or Roman – regardless of the territory they inhabited or the lord they served, was found not only in the early Middle Ages but throughout the High Middle Ages, especially, of course, in areas of mingling'.¹⁹⁹

The medieval man identified himself with a community. A man was in the first place part of a collective community – be it a family, a village community or social class. The Church was especially against the idea of individualism, because it thought that individualism would lead people to sin – the idea behind this was that people would not sin if they were under the control of other people, the

¹⁹⁵ P. Jackson 2004, p. 103.

¹⁹⁶ P. Jackson 2004, p. 94.

¹⁹⁷ Clunies Ross 1998, p. 82.

¹⁹⁸ Roslund 2001, p. 59.

¹⁹⁹ Bartlett 1993, p. 204.

community. If it was more difficult to become a sinner among other people; it was also easier to be saved through the community. It meant solidarity, obedience and submission to the community. This emphasis on the collectivistic nature of the community is visible in medieval art: people were not depicted as individuals but as representatives of their social class.²⁰⁰

Against this background it is easy to understand that people who stood outside communities – for example, lonely travellers – aroused suspicions. Strangers were associated with the unknown and disturbance. One of the reasons for this was that in the Middle Ages people lived under threat of Vikings, Mongols, Saracens and others, but also ‘ordinary’ robbers and highwaymen.²⁰¹ People were usually more or less bound to a certain place or community, and this did not just concern bondmen, but also other social classes, because there existed no such concept as travelling as a leisure activity in the Middle Ages. For example travelling by land routes was troublesome because of the poor roads – if roads existed at all in some places. And yet various people travelled – even kings, before capitals and consolidated power existed. Itinerant kings exercised their power in that very area where they happened to stay.²⁰² Those who travelled had always a destination and a reason for travel: they were merchants, pilgrims or wandering comedians, to name just a few. Besides these there were those who were real outsiders and who often lived on the fringes of organized society: criminals, ‘witches’, heretics and so forth.²⁰³ If they were not persecuted they could live among other people, or they could withdraw to uninhabited areas such as forests or mountains.

The earth was inhabited not only by peoples and animals, but also by monstrous races.²⁰⁴ These existed in the world of the medieval man, because they were a sign of God’s almightiness. The original meaning of the word *monstrum* was ‘demonstrative sign’. It is difficult from our modern viewpoint to understand or grasp this medieval worldview, which included both the spiritual and the physical, the real and the imagined. Therefore, strangers raised suspicions, because they could just as well be evil spirits. The distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ had basically three main categories: 1. people inhabiting the known continents (Asia, Africa and Europe) vs. the monstrous races (and possible inhabitants of the unknown continents); 2. civilized peoples vs. barbarians; 3. Christian peoples vs. non-Christians. This last category was the most obvious one.²⁰⁵

It has been debated whether the Middle Ages was especially an era of intolerance. As has been stated, both tolerance and intolerance existed then, but it would be wrong to study these phenomena by using the words in their modern sense. As

²⁰⁰ Le Goff 1988, pp. 279–80.

²⁰¹ Classen 2002, p. xxiii.

²⁰² Ohler 1996, p. 102.

²⁰³ Le Goff 1988, p. 322.

²⁰⁴ Monstrous races were described, for instance, in medieval bestials. *Xenology*, knowledge of ‘monstrous races’, had its roots in antiquity. Hoppenbrouwers 2007, pp. 54, 56; Classen defines xenology as ‘the critical investigation of intercultural, distance, tolerance, and aggression in ethnological, philosophical, sociological term’, Classen 2002, p. xxiv–xxv.

²⁰⁵ Hoppenbrouwers 2007, p. 58.

such they hardly existed in the Middle Ages. It is a matter of perspective whether we find the Middle Ages a xenophobic or tolerant period.²⁰⁶ It is true, for example, that many minorities or marginal groups suffered more persistent and more systematic persecutions *after* the Middle Ages.²⁰⁷

What is important to realize is that strangers could be accommodated – at least in most cases – within medieval society. According to George Fredrickson, ‘It is possible that relations among peoples before the late Middle Ages were sometimes characterized by the kind of hostility and exclusiveness that betokens racism. But it was more common, if not universal, to assimilate strangers into the tribe or nation, if they were willing to be so incorporated.’²⁰⁸

So, in the Middle Ages the group boundaries were not necessarily ethnically based, and if they were, the boundaries were flexible so that new members could be assimilated to the group. This happened for example in Schwerin, where in 1220 the count granted to a group of Slavs living in the village of Brüsewitz ‘German law’, *ius Teutonicale*, which meant that they were treated according to this law as ‘Germans’.²⁰⁹ Group membership was important in the legal tradition in another way too: in the Frankish empire royal agents could retain their legal autonomy wherever they were. This meant that they preserved their particular legal status, and in case of a law suit the person just declared his or her law.²¹⁰ In this sense, legal tradition could create unity among people as well as differentiate them from out-groups. To conclude we can say that the use of different concepts regarding peoples, territories and realms in the Middle Ages was very heterogeneous and inconsistent.

²⁰⁶ Classen 2002, pp. xvi, xviii and l.

²⁰⁷ Ruotsala 2001, p. 54.

²⁰⁸ Fredrickson 2002, p. 10.

²⁰⁹ Bartlett 1993, p. 219.

²¹⁰ Geary 2002, p. 154.

2 ‘Us and the Others’ – People in and around the Norse-Icelandic Cultural Sphere

This part of the study concentrates first on looking at direct mentions of *útlendingar* in the kings’ sagas: what is the meaning of the word and how it is used? After that the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere is looked at from the perspective of Icelanders and Norwegians. Especially the relationship between Icelanders and Norwegians is studied and also the expressions for their self-awareness as groups. All the groups mentioned in the sources will thereafter be dealt with individually. The order is loosely geographical, but this does not reflect necessarily their place in the Norse-Icelandic mental worldview.

2.1 ÚTLENDINGAR IN THE SAGAS

It was not a surprise that there were only a few direct mentions of *útlendingar* in the kings’ sagas. Let us look at three of them more closely. First, King Magnús Óláfsson, who was raised in the court of Prince Yaroslav of Austríki, was considered as a foreigner by the king’s men.

Sendir síþan avstr með þeim M. son s. oc taca þav við honom með soma. oc fœðiz hann þar vpp með hirþ oc eigi með minni ast oc elsko en þeira synir. Svmir menn hotöþo hann oc þotti oviþqvemilict at fœða þar vpp konvngs s. *vtlendan* oc tiaþo þat fyr konungi.¹

In another case two Norwegian merchants were travelling with their crew to the

¹ *Morkinskinna* FJ 3–4; Andersson and Gade 2000, p. 90: ‘After that he [Óláfr Haraldsson] sent his son Magnús east with them, where he was honorably received by king and queen and was raised there in the retinue with no less love and affection than their own sons. Some people rejected him and thought it was inappropriate to raise a *foreign prince*.’

Baltic Sea and they anchored at a big market place. But when the locals realized that they were Norwegians they refused to trade with them. According to the saga there were hostilities between the Norwegian king Sveinn Álfífuson and Prince Yaroslav, the 'king of Austrríki', and during that time there was no trade between the realms. The things were turning really bad for the Norwegians, as the locals were ready to attack them. The other Norwegian, Karl, then boldly addressed the locals and said: 'Þat mon metit til hvatvisi oc noccot sva diorfvngar at taca sliet fyrir hendr konvngi yðrom at meiða *vtlenda* menn eða rena. þott her comi með cavpeyri sinn oc gere yðr engan ofrið'.² Karl is probably referring to peace or *kaupmannafrið* that usually protected foreign merchants.³

In the third case the Danish jarl Sveinn Úlfsson is not satisfied when he hears that he is accused of not being loyal to his king, Magnús Ólafsson, who was Norwegian. Jarl Sveinn says that 'þotti mer þar til vera noccor varkvnn vm ettleifð mina. er *vtlendir hofpingiar* settvz a hana en ec hafða eigi'.⁴ In other words, according to Sveinn Denmark has been ruled by foreign chieftains, which must mean that he is referring to Norwegian chieftains as foreigners. This small number of references to *útlendingar* shows that the word cannot be seen as the only expression that somebody is foreign. For Icelanders living on an island it was a common expression to refer to someone as a countryman (*hérleznkr*) or from elsewhere (*útlenzkr*), and they do not as such refer to a person's origin.

As the above-mentioned examples show it is not sufficient just to study who is called *útlendingr* in order to find out the nature of 'otherness' in the kings' sagas. So, the features that characterize 'otherness' should be found by reading between the lines and not by pointing to only obvious words or designations. This means examining different contact situations. As already mentioned, communication and contacts help both individuals and groups to define themselves and through self-definitions also to define others. Johan Callmer, who has studied contacts between different groups in the Baltic Sea area, has divided contacts in two groups: social contacts (such as marriage, blood brotherhood, peaceful colonization) and non-social contacts (such as war, plunder, violent colonization). Callmer reminds us that it is not realistic to expect such a division to be applied in reality, which means that his model is just a framework.⁵ I have applied partly Callmer's ideas but mostly Thomas Hylland Eriksen's model of categorizing 'otherness' into analogue and digital difference in this study.⁶ I have not dealt with non-social contacts in independent chapters, but I have taken them into account and dealt with them in other chapters. It is always dangerous to make assumptions on what is left unsaid

² *Morkinskinna* FJ 6–7; Andersson and Gade 2000, pp. 91–2: 'It will be judged bold and rather reckless if you, in the king's name, injure or rob *foreigners* who come with articles for trade and do nothing to disturb your peace'.

³ For more on the concept of *kaupfriðr* see the chapter 'Trade'.

⁴ *Morkinskinna* FJ 91; Andersson and Gade 2000, p. 153: 'It seemed to me that there was some justification in light of my heritage, which was occupied by *foreign chieftains* while I got nothing'.

⁵ Callmer 1992, pp. 100–1.

⁶ On Eriksen's theory and my application, see ch. 'Methods'. On Callmer's division of social contacts and its adaptation to this study, see the chapter 'Social contacts'.

in the sources. Nonetheless, I have tried to comment with a few words on whether we can assume anything from the unsaid in the sagas.

However, different contacts alone are not enough to reveal the image of 'otherness', because in many cases there are none or just brief mentions of groups of people. What makes things more complicated is that these ethnonyms often had different meanings in the past from what they have today. Finding out what and who is meant when these names are used in the sources will help us to place or situate them in the Norse mental worldview and shed light on the image of 'otherness'.

2.2 ICELANDERS AND NORWEGIANS – DEFINING THE OBSERVER

Diana Whaley argues that *Heimskringla* was written for Icelanders; it 'insists on the separateness of Iceland and Norway' and it manifests the ideas of the thirteenth-century Icelanders.⁷ This separateness should not be understood as meaning national identity. As Jónas Kristjánsson has pointed out, the sagas – in general – supported the creation of the national identity of Icelanders hundreds of years later.⁸ But Whaley seems to be right in pointing out that Icelanders had self-awareness as a group by the beginning of the thirteenth century. This can be proved, for instance, by looking at the ethnonyms 'Icelander' and 'Norwegian'.

Gunnar Karlsson has studied the Icelandic self-awareness and the relationship to Norwegians in his article 'Upphaf þjóðar á Íslandi'.⁹ Karlsson's starting point is that people who came to Iceland and settled at the end of the ninth century never had any awareness that they were *Norðmenn*, because the concept 'Norwegian' was only on the point of emerging. The inhabitants of Norway in those days defined themselves according to which part of Norway they came from: *Sygnir* from Sogn, *Hǫrðar* from Hǫrðaland, *Mærir* from Mærir etc. *Íslendingar* was a term among others as well as *Háleyingar* or *Sygnir*. As Karlsson points out: 'Óvist er að hve miklu leyti þeim [íbúar Íslands] fannst þeir tilheyra einhverri þjóð, og vel getur það verið rétt að íslensk þjóðarhugmynd hafi verið að myndast smám saman frá landnámi og fram á 12. öld'.¹⁰ The inhabitants of Iceland began to call themselves *Íslendingar* after one or two generations because they could not use the old place names that were across the sea and from which their parents or forefathers had come. In this sense the connection to the 'home' of the forefathers broke.¹¹ The settlers in Iceland did not differ from other Norsemen who settled in the British Isles: they all organized their societies and held *þing*-meetings, and in the Faroes and in Greenland the

⁷ Whaley 1991, p. 40.

⁸ Jónas Kristjánsson 1988, p. 203.

⁹ Karlsson 1988, pp. 21–32.

¹⁰ Karlsson 1988, p. 30. Gert Kreuzer agrees with Gunnar Karlsson. Kreuzer 1996, p. 169.

¹¹ Liestøl 1930, p. 140.

assembly was often called *alþing*, as also in Iceland. In this sense Iceland formed only one of the many legal districts (*lagaumdæmi*) that the Norse settlers had established.¹² The importance of the legal districts becomes evident if we consider that those parts of England where the Scandinavians settled down and practised their laws was called the Danelaw – literally meaning that the law of the Danes was applied in the ‘district’.

Were medieval Icelanders then Norwegians, or did Icelanders and Norwegians consider each other as foreigners? In *Heimskringla* it is only once mentioned that an Icelander is a foreigner (‘einn útlendan mann’) in Norway. Namely, a certain Icelander Steinn Skaptason had been outlawed in Norway. He travelled to his friend Ragnhildr, who was married to a certain Þorberg Árnason, who was not at all pleased to meet the outlawed Steinn in his house. He said: ‘Ok kann ek mér meiri svinnu en at takask á hendr einn útlendan mann ok hafa þar fyrir reiði konungs’.¹³ This statement reveals that Steinn was considered as a stranger by Þorberg, even though the foremost reason for his reluctance seems to be the fact that having an outlaw in his household might bring troubles for him. Gunnar Karlsson has pointed out that even if someone was called *útlendr* it did not necessarily mean that the person in question would belong to another group of people. Karlsson explains this point of view by comparing the words *samlendr* and *útlendr*: *Samlendr* can have the meaning ‘sömu þjóðar maður’ (‘a man belonging to the same nationality’), but as we are dealing with the time before nations and nationalism, it would be better to translate it ‘a man belonging to the same group of people (as the speaker himself)’. This is complicated if we consider that the word may also denote just a person that is staying in the same country as the speaker. In the same way *útlendr* does not necessarily mean a foreigner, but also a person who is staying abroad.¹⁴ For example in one episode the Norwegian pretender Sigurðr slæmbir is visiting Iceland and he stays with a certain Þorgils. The saga states that there were also other foreigners (than Sigurðr) at Þorgils’s place,¹⁵ and here it seems that the foreigners were Norwegians.

But how to define ‘being abroad’? In the case of Iceland it seems obvious that when somebody left Iceland, say, for Norway, he went abroad and was thus *útlendr*. As a comparison we can take the Old Swedish term *utlændsk maþur*, which referred originally to a man from another *landskap* (province), and this is obvious also in the old *landskapslagar* in Sweden.¹⁶ If an Icelander leaves Iceland he is always going

¹² Karlsson 1988, p. 23.

¹³ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 138, p. 245.

¹⁴ Karlsson 1988, p. 27. As an example of the word *samlendr* Karlsson cites *Laxdælasaga*, in which Snorri goði gives advice to Guðrún to marry none other than Þorgils (in Iceland), because Þorkell Eyjólfsson, who was fancied by Guðrún, was then staying in Norway, that is, he was abroad. *Laxdælasaga* ch. 59, p. 178: ‘at þú sér engum manni samlendum gípt oðrum en Þorgísli, ok skal enda, því at Þorkell Eyjólfsson er nú eigi hér á landi’; *The Laxdale Saga*, pp. 208–9.

¹⁵ *Morkinskinna* FJ 409: ‘Þar voro fleire vtlendir menn oc hafði S. minzt ifirleti. Ein dag er Sigurðr com istofo teffldi anar avstmaðr við heimaman Þorgils’; Andersson and Gade 2000, p. 369: ‘There were other foreigners with Þorgils, and Sigurðr was the least esteemed. One day when Sigurðr came into the hall, another Norwegian was playing a board game with one of Þorgils’s farmhands.’

¹⁶ Kumlien 1982, pp. 382–3.

abroad. He can be called *útlendr* but it only designates that he is abroad, without defining his group identity. As soon as an Icelander comes back to Iceland from abroad he is *samlendr*. These examples show that we cannot compare the Old Norse *útlendr* and Old Swedish *utlændsk maþur* directly. Of course, the Swedish example of the use of the word derives from the High Middle Ages, which means that there was at that time some kind of regional identity among the Swedes, but we cannot be sure when it came about and whether it could be applied to circumstances, say, in Norway.

There are three other examples of the use of the word *útlendr* besides the already mentioned episodes. *Ágrip* mentions that every merchant, ‘*hérleznkr ok útleznkr*’, travelling (from Norway) to Iceland was obliged to pay tax.¹⁷ In *Morkinskinna* Sneglu-Halli travels from Iceland to meet the Norwegian king Haraldr harðráði and Sneglu-Halli is referred as a foreigner by the king and in a very hostile manner.¹⁸ These two cases will be analysed in the following chapters.

The third example is in *Fagrskinna*. King Hákon goði is preparing to wage a war against the sons of Eiríkr blóðøx, and he asks his subjects how many provisions they can give to fight against an ‘*útleznkum her*’.¹⁹ This means apparently that the enemy was somebody that was coming from outside, i.e. not from one’s own district. Even though the sons of Eiríkr were Norwegians, they relied on the support of the Danish king and his men. That is why *her* mentioned here can be translated as ‘foreign army’. On the basis of this meagre information that the sources give us, it seems that the word *útlendr* itself does not denote that someone was a stranger; if anything, the word seems to denote that the person was not staying in the same area at that very moment as the speaker, but for example across the sea.²⁰ However, *útlendr* could also mean a real foreigner, but mostly in the meaning that somebody is coming from abroad. The meaning of the word has to be decided in each case independently.

Icelanders had close connections to Norway: family ties, trade, religion. Some Icelanders travelled to Norway to serve the king. The Norwegians stood as close

¹⁷ *Ágrip* ch. 29, p. 29: ‘Maðr hvern, er til Íslands fœri, skyldi gjalda landaura *hérleznkr ok útleznkr*, ok helzk sjá lýðskyldi til þess, er Sigurðr konungr Jórsalafari gaf af ok bræðr hans flestar þessar ánauðir’. Driscoll 1995, p. 43: ‘Each man who sailed to Iceland, native or foreign, was to pay a land tax. These obligations remained until Sigurðr Jórsalafari and his brothers abolished most of these impositions.’

¹⁸ *Morkinskinna* FJ 235: ‘oc fer Halli afund konungs oc qveðr hann. oc villdim ver hera s. hann ydar fara. Konungr s. vanta verdr þat *vtlendom* monnom. oc abyrgs þic sialfr en eigi spari ec mat við þic’. Andersson and Gade 2000, p. 244: ‘Halli went to the king and greeted him: “We would like to be received by you, lord.” The king replied: “It is no place for *foreigners* and you should find your own lodging, but I will not be stingy with food for you.”’

¹⁹ *Fagrskinna* ch. 12, p. 82: ‘Hann gœrði ok nefnd í hverju þessu fylki, hversu mœrg skip eða hversu lœng at rúmatali skyldi vera ór hverju fylki at mœnnum ok vápnnum ok vistum fyrir *útleznkum her*, svá at hverr karlaðr, sá er vígr var ok frjáls, skyldi eiga skjöld ok kesju ok höggvápn’. Finlay 2004, p. 63: ‘He also imposed a *levy* in each district stating how many ships must be supplied, and how long they must be in terms of the number of rowing-benches, with men and weapons and provisions, against a foreign army, so that each man who was free and fit to fight must own a shield and a halberd and a hewing weapon’.

²⁰ Also in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* Óláfr Tryggvason is referred to as an ‘*vtlendan höfðingia*’, when he was still staying abroad. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* ch. 93, p. 206.

as possible to Icelanders when it comes to language, culture and politics. In fact, because of this close cultural tie it is sometimes impossible to say whether a thirteenth-century author of a book or a manuscript is an Icelandic or a Norwegian.²¹ Linguistically Icelandic and Norwegian writers can be differentiated around the beginning of the thirteenth century, but the problem is that the writer may not be the original author of the text.

We can say with certainty that Icelanders identified their own language as separate by the end of the twelfth century. The so called *First Grammatical Treatise* (*Fyrsta málfræðiritgerðin*) was written by an anonymous Icelandic between 1125 and 1175. In this manuscript the author repeatedly refers to 'our language' (*vár tunga*, *vårt mál*) as opposed to the 'Danish language', *dönsk tunga*. The aim of the author was to create an alphabet 'for us Icelanders' in order that it might become 'easier to write and read . . . both laws and genealogies'. However, the differences between Icelandic and Norwegian were probably not great until the fourteenth century.²²

According to Eric Christiansen, Icelanders had by 1050 all the qualifications for a medieval 'nation': a common body of law, a uniform vernacular language,²³ and a myth and foundation of descent.²⁴ It is difficult to give an exact date when Icelanders became aware of their difference from the others, especially from the Norwegians, but Helgi Þorláksson argues this must have happened by at least the twelfth century.²⁵ This is plausible because Icelanders were geographically located far from Norway, which must have helped them to build their regional identity. However, it would be interesting to compare how the people of the Faroes, the *Færeyingar*, or the Orkney Islands understood their group identity in the Middle Ages because they were also descendants of Norse settlers. It is not possible to solve the question in this context. Still, because of the language and cultural connection with Norwegians and Icelanders, they certainly belonged to the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere.

Icelanders used the words *austmenn* or *útlendingar* for Norwegians, but the words did not in the first place imply that Norwegians were strangers in the eyes of Icelanders. They meant that these people came across the sea, usually as merchants, and the word *austmenn* could also denote other Scandinavians who shared the same culture and language and who also came across the sea.²⁶ However, these names of Norwegians are used very rarely in the sources – in fact, *austmaðr* is mentioned for example only once in *Morkinskinna*.²⁷ This is probably due to

²¹ Ármann Jakobsson 1997, p. 35.

²² Gísli Pálsson 1989, p. 121–2.

²³ I would call into question the uniformness of the language. Even if the *First Grammatical Treatise* suggests how Icelandic should be written, there was no authority that could have controlled the orthography. The differences between Icelandic and Norwegian came about gradually and it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when we can talk about two different languages.

²⁴ Christiansen 2002, p. 124. Christiansen does not justify the year 1050 as a starting point: 1150 would suit better because the laws were written down, according to the tradition, around year 1118, and the *First Grammatical Treatise* may have been written down around 1150 or slightly later.

²⁵ Helgi Þorláksson 2006, p. 143.

²⁶ Hastrup 1985, p. 225.

²⁷ *Morkinskinna* FJ 410.

the point of view in the sagas: the authors have not examined Norwegians from outside but from inside, which means that there was no reason to refer to them as *austmenn*. The close ties between Icelanders and Norwegians were not, however, always positive.²⁸ Thus nicknames that the Norwegians gave to the Icelanders were not very flattering: they were called *mǫrlandar* or *mjǫrffjandar*, because Norwegians considered them lazy.²⁹ We have only one example of the use of this nickname in the kings' sagas. An Icelander called Þórðr was trading for a Norwegian woman called Ása. This was deeply condemned by Ása's male relatives, because Ása was unmarried. One of the Norwegians, Ingimarr, called Þórðr names and uses the word *mǫrlandr*.³⁰

The Norwegians sometimes wanted to emphasize that the Icelanders were originally from Norway, as did King Haraldr Sigurðsson in an episode in *Morkinskinna*. He gave captaincy of one of his ships to an Icelander, Halldórr Snorrason, which made one of his (Norwegian) captains called Sveinn angry. Then the king reminded him that Halldórr was no worse than Sveinn just because he was from Iceland and that it was not that long ago 'since those who now live in Iceland were Norwegians themselves'.³¹ Andersson and Gade see this episode as the author of *Morkinskinna* expressing the conflicting feelings about the standing of Icelanders. On the one hand the author is insistent on a sort of dual citizenship, on the other hand he supports the idea of independence.³²

Icelanders were very dependent on Norwegians by the thirteenth century when it came to trade, and this, of course, was a cause for tension too. Trade contacts with Norway were important for Icelanders because their own island could not provide them with everything they needed in their daily life, such as iron. Icelanders themselves sold for example wadmal and furs to Norwegians.³³ However, Icelanders tried to be self-sufficient and they did not develop a regular market for their products.³⁴ The Norwegian king controlled the trade with taxes (*landauri*),³⁵ which

²⁸ In the sagas the tension in this relationship is culminated between the Icelanders and the Norwegian kings, and they will be treated separately in the next chapter.

²⁹ Karlsson 1988, p. 28.

³⁰ *Morkinskinna* FJ 364: 'Ingimarr s. Eigi mon þat. en mislagþar ro þer hendr. dregr fram lvtá mǫrlandans. en þorir eigi at hefna foþor þins er drepiN var a Irlandi sem hvndr a beinom'; Andersson and Gade 2000, p. 333: 'Ingimarr replied: "That will not come to pass. but your energy is misspent in favoring this suet-eater though you dare not avenge your father, who was killed in Ireland like a dog gnawing a bone."'

³¹ *Morkinskinna* FJ 152: 'Sveinn s. Eigi com mer þat i hvgr at þv mondir islenzcan mann til þess velia. en taca mic fra scipstiorinn. Konvngur melti. Hans ett er eigi veri alslandi en þin her iNoregi. oc eigi hefir en allangt siþan lipit. er þeir voro norðnir er nv bygia Island'; Andersson and Gade 2000, p. 192: 'Sveinn said: "It did not cross my mind that you would choose an Icelander and demote me from command." The king said: "His ancestry in Iceland is no worse than yours is in Norway, and not that much time has elapsed since those who now live in Iceland were Norwegians themselves."'

³² Andersson and Gade 2000, p. 79.

³³ *Haralds saga gráfeldar* ch. 7, pp. 211–12.

³⁴ Helgi Þorláksson 2006, p. 137.

³⁵ About *landauri*, see the chapter 'Icelanders and the Norwegian King'. According to *Ágrip* all merchants paid taxes (*landauri*) for the trade between Iceland and Norway. *Ágrip* ch. 29, p. 29: 'Maðr hverr, er til Íslands fœri, skyldi gjalda landaura hêrlenzkr ok útlenzkr, ok helzk sjá lýðskyldi til þess, er Sigurðr konungr Jórslafari gaf af ok brœðr hans flestar þessar ánauðir.'

was payed only by Icelanders and not Norwegians. When Icelanders accepted the Norwegian overlordship in 1262–4 they demanded that the Norwegians should guarantee that trade ships would also come to Iceland in the future. Icelanders themselves had practically no ships at the end of the thirteenth century because they did not have wood to build them. The most serious conflict between Icelanders and Norwegians took place probably in 1215, when Norwegian merchants refused to pay prices that the Oddaverjar and Haukðelir, the two leading families in Iceland, had set. This led to violence; merchants from Bergen killed Ormr Jónsson, the son of Jón Loptsson, Snorri Sturluson's foster-father.³⁶ King Hákon and Jarl Skúli, who had honoured Snorri Sturluson with a title *skutilsveinn* ('page at the royal table') and then made him a baron, charged Snorri with a mission: he was to settle these hostilities between Norwegian merchants and Icelanders, and by doing so he probably prevented an imminent invasion of Iceland and postponed the Norwegian control over the island.³⁷

Because the kings' sagas concentrate on the Norwegian kings, it is obvious that there are not that many episodes which concern ordinary Icelanders and Norwegians, but the Icelanders' relations with the Norwegians culminate in the relationship between the king and Icelanders. My purpose here is not to examine how Icelanders regarded kingship,³⁸ but to shed light on group identities of Icelanders and those peoples living in Norway. Because the Icelanders were mostly originally from Norway, the Norwegian kings had the opinion that Iceland should be under Norwegian dominion. This is to be seen in episodes in which the kings tried to exert their power in Iceland. In reality, the kings could not control Iceland before Icelanders accepted the king's overlordship in 1262–4. However, before this the Norwegian kings tried to control Icelanders, for example by controlling the trade, or they exerted their power with the help of the Church. The archbishop's seat was in Niðaróss from 1152/3 onwards, and the archbishop consecrated the Icelandic bishops.

The Norwegians had confirmed their position in Iceland from the end of the twelfth century, so that they actually dominated the trade with Iceland.³⁹ If a merchant tried to avoid paying the tax, he would get into trouble. For example the Icelandic merchant Þorsteinn Halsson was outlawed for not paying the tax.⁴⁰ King Óláfr Haraldsson demanded that the Icelandic merchants should pay him tax, but

³⁶ Sørensen 1993, p. 65; Whaley 1991, p. 28.

³⁷ Ciklamini 1978, p. 27.

³⁸ On Icelanders and their attitudes towards kingship, see Ármann Jakobsson 1997.

³⁹ Hermann Pálsson 1999, p. 72. *Landaurlaup* was originally paid only by Icelanders, when they came to Norway, but later on King Sveinn Alfiússon ordered also Norwegians to pay it when they left for Iceland. This order was however, cancelled again by later kings and Norwegian merchants were exempted from payments. When Iceland accepted the overlordship of the Norwegian crown *landaurlaup* was banished. Authén Blom 1981, pp. 125–7; Magnús Már Lárusson 1981, pp. 127–9.

⁴⁰ *Morkinskinna* FJ 111: 'Sva er sagt at eitt sinni er Þorsteinn Hallz s. com or *caupferþ* af Dyflinni oc var þat ecci at konvngs vilia ne leyfi er hann hafði farit. sva oc hofþo þeir eigi golldit landavra ær gialdkerinn atti at heimta'; Andersson and Gade, p. 165: 'We are told that at one time Þorsteinn Hallsson came back from a trading voyage to Dublin, which had been undertaken without the approval or leave of the king. Nor had they paid the landing tax that the steward was entitled to collect'.

merchants asked for help from their fellow countryman Sigvatr, who was then skald in the king's court. He defended his countrymen with a poem and asked the king not to levy taxes from the Icelanders.⁴¹ Otherwise, Icelanders did not pay taxes to the Norwegian king because they did not belong to his *skattlond* before the annexation in 1262–4.

King Óláfr Haraldsson had conflicts with the Icelanders more than once. He demanded, for example, that the Icelanders should accept the laws that he had made and that they should pay him fines and taxes. He even took some Icelanders hostage to make his point clear. However, the Icelanders refused to accept the king's demands.⁴² King Óláfr also wanted to have the island of Grímsey just off the Icelandic coast, but the Icelanders were not willing to give it because they were afraid that the king would then have more power over them.⁴³ One Icelandic, Jökull, had got one of King Óláfr Haraldsson's former ships from Jarl Hákon, who was the king's enemy. However, Jökull was caught by King Óláfr and his men on Gotland and the king ordered him to be executed.⁴⁴ Whether or not *nomen est omen*, the name *Jökull* means glacier and is often used as a giant name.⁴⁵ This could, in my opinion, imply that it was appropriate that an opponent of the 'holy king' was associated with enemies of the Æsir. However, Jökull was not executed because he was an Icelandic, but because he was King Óláfr's opponent.

Gert Kreuzer argues that these episodes that concern Icelanders and Norwegian kings reflect the situation during the time when the sagas were written down, and that the sagas convey the following message: 'ein freier, selbstbewußter Umgang eines Isländers mit dem König möglich ist, daß im Idealfall beide von diesem Verhältnis profitieren, daß der Isländer aber nichts von seiner Freiheit aufzugeben bereit ist'.⁴⁶

Religion gave tools to the kings to pressure Icelanders. King Óláfr Tryggvason sent the priest Þangbrandr to Iceland to convert the population, but he was rather unsuccessful in his mission.⁴⁷ The king even tried to blackmail them to convert by keeping sons of some prominent Icelanders as hostages.⁴⁸ The Norwegian kings tried to use the Church in order to exert their power in Iceland: King Óláfr Haraldsson sent wood to Iceland for building a church⁴⁹ and King Haraldr Sigurðsson sent a clock to the very same church.⁵⁰ Because the king and the Church represented established power, the Icelandic priests began to think that the Norwegian king was also king of Iceland already before the annexation. In *Historia Norvegiae* Iceland is counted as one of the *skattlond* of the Norwegian king even if in the

⁴¹ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 43, pp. 54–6.

⁴² *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 136, pp. 240–1.

⁴³ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 125, pp. 215–17.

⁴⁴ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 182, pp. 331–2.

⁴⁵ Schulz 2004, p. 265; McKinnell 2005, p. 194.

⁴⁶ Kreuzer 1996, p. 174.

⁴⁷ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 84, pp. 332–3.

⁴⁸ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 95, p. 347.

⁴⁹ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 124, p. 214.

⁵⁰ *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* ch. 36, p. 119.

twelfth century it was not so in reality.⁵¹

Not all the Norwegian kings had conflicts with the Icelanders. King Haraldr Sigurðsson is particularly praised as a friend of the Icelanders in the sagas,⁵² although according to Andersson and Gade King Haraldr's reputation may be negative because the core of the Icelandic experience about him was based on *Halldórs þátrr Snorrason*, which depicts King Haraldr as tricky and unreliable.⁵³ Nonetheless, when there was a bad harvest he let four ships with corn sail to Iceland. Moreover, he let poor men who could get a place on the ships come from Iceland.⁵⁴ Maybe King Haraldr liked Icelanders because in his youth he had been accompanied by two Icelanders, Halldórr Snorrason and Úlfr Óspaksson, on his journeys abroad. Later Úlfr got the title of *stallari* from King Haraldr, and he also gave Úlfr his own wife's sister as a bride.⁵⁵ Halldórr, who belonged to King Haraldr's *hirð*, is depicted as curt but frank and daring in his speech, stubborn and reluctant to give up. He did not fit in to Haraldr's *hirð* with his stubborn attitude, so he travelled to Iceland after a while.⁵⁶ He went there around the middle of the eleventh century and lived for the rest of his life at the farm of Hjarðarholt. We cannot know for sure whether this depiction of Halldórr is genuine, or whether it reflects more generally the Icelandic attitude towards kingship. In the case of *Heimskringla* we may suspect that Snorri may have wanted to emphasize Halldórr's significance, because Halldórr was his forefather.⁵⁷

It is notable that the Icelanders in the kings' sagas often play a role in the king's *hirð*. They were skalds,⁵⁸ the kings hired them to collect taxes⁵⁹ or to act as negotiators,⁶⁰ or they served in the king's troops⁶¹ (they were thought to be good fighters⁶²), or did other favours. For example King Óláfr Haraldsson asked Þorarinn Nefjólfsen to take the king's enemy Hrærekr to Greenland into exile.⁶³ Hjalti Skeggjason was sent by King Óláfr Haraldsson as an envoy to *Svíaríki*, because he could negotiate with the Svear, who then had tense relations with the Norwegians. Hjalti himself said that 'Ek em ekki norrœnn maðr. Munu Svíar mér

⁵¹ Sørensen 1993, pp. 63–64; *Historia Norvegiae* pp. 92–7; *A History of Norway and the Passion and Miracles of the Blessed Óláfr*, pp. 10–12.

⁵² *Fagrskinna* ch. 56, p. 261: 'Hann [Harald] hefir ok verit allra Nóregskonunga vinsælastr við Íslendinga'; *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* ch. 36, p. 119.

⁵³ Andersson and Gade 2000, footnote 11 p. 194.

⁵⁴ *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* ch. 36, p. 119. This seems to indicate that King Haraldr let people come with their things and not to pay tax, which King Óláfr Haraldsson had made. See also K. Johansson, *Nordiska kungasagor III*, p. 98, footnote 78.

⁵⁵ *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* ch. 37, p. 120.

⁵⁶ *Morkinskinna* FJ 154; *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* ch. 36, p. 120.

⁵⁷ Hermann Pálsson 1999, p. 81.

⁵⁸ For example *Morkinskinna* FJ 354; *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 43, p. 54 and 160, p. 292.

⁵⁹ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 141, p. 255.

⁶⁰ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 68, p. 86.

⁶¹ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 209, p. 364; *Magnúss saga góða* ch. 28, p. 45; *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* ch. 9, p. 79.

⁶² *Hákonar saga herðibreiðs* ch. 3, p. 349.

⁶³ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 85, p. 127.

engar sakir gefa'.⁶⁴ This means that the Icelanders could be seen as impartial in the eyes of other Scandinavians – or at least by the Svear.

The status of the Icelanders in Norway is confirmed in the Icelandic law code *Grágás*,⁶⁵ which dates from the thirteenth century. According to tradition King Óláfr Haraldsson made the laws. Icelanders had similar rights in Norway as other free farmers ('hava hœldz rétt') but they were obliged to pay *landauri* when they came to Norway according to the law. The Icelanders had the right to inherit in Norway and the Norwegians had the same right in Iceland, which was only natural because of the close family relations between these groups. Those Icelanders who stayed in Norway were obliged to defend the country if it was attacked during their stay, but they were exempted from attending military expeditions that were made abroad by the Norwegians.⁶⁶ The close relationship between Icelanders and Norwegians thus gave Icelanders a special status in Norway: on the one hand they were outsiders who had to pay *landauri*-tax, but on the other hand they had to participate in the defence of Norway when staying there.

By the first half of the thirteenth century Icelanders had developed a sense of identity, and this is obvious also in the king's sagas. It is more difficult to say something about the sense of togetherness of Icelanders and Norwegians just on the basis of these sources. It is a general phenomenon that people have a sense of togetherness with those who stand nearest to them, that is, usually with those people who live in the same area and belong to the same cultural sphere. In the case of Icelanders and Norwegians both groups were separated from each other by geographical distance, but their cultural and linguistic roots bound them together. If we consider that the sources used here were written by authors who had close connections to the upper class, it would be reasonable to assume that this feeling of togetherness applied especially to the upper classes both in Iceland and Norway. They had contacts with each other (marriage, trade, serving in the king's court). Those Icelanders and Norwegians who stayed at home and perhaps met only people from the neighbouring villages may not have had the same kind of feeling of togetherness. Maybe in their sphere of life the 'others' were people from the next valley or rival clan. Arnved Nedkvitne has viewed Icelanders more as 'an aggregation of separate families than as one national community'.⁶⁷ Using Thomas Hylland Eriksen's categorization Icelanders and Norwegians seem to have had a relationship that could be categorized as analogue 'otherness'; they had close contacts and their attitude towards each other was that 'they are almost like us'.

⁶⁴ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 70, p. 91.

⁶⁵ Even though the two principal manuscripts of *Grágás* are dated to the mid-thirteenth century, it is generally assumed that the texts present the law of the twelfth century as it was recited by the lawspeaker. Fix 1993, pp. 234–5.

⁶⁶ Karlsson 2000, p. 48; *Grágás* 1992, pp. 479–80; King Óláfr Haraldsson's order (*forordning*) on Norwegians' rights in Iceland and Icelanders' rights in Norway. *Norges Gamle Love* I, pp. 437–8. The agreement (*Gamli sættmáli*) between Icelanders and King Hákon Hákonsson in *Norges Gamle Love* I, pp. 460–2.

⁶⁷ Nedkvitne 2004, p. 117.

2.3 NORWEGIANS – A NATION?

Sverre Bagge argues as follows about how Snorri's contacts with Norway affected *Heimskringla*:

Though it is not unreasonable to see some connection between the composition of *Heimskringla* and Snorri's contact with Norway, this work seems relatively unaffected by ideological bias, and may, despite its late date, be considered one of the best examples of the 'heroic' and 'objective' tradition in storytelling and saga writing. This is no doubt a consequence of its Icelandic origin.⁶⁸

Heimskringla concentrates on Norwegian affairs even if the author is an Icelander. Who is then a Norwegian in *Heimskringla*, not to mention in the other kings' sagas? This question is problematic as the word *Norðmaðr* existed already before there was a realm called Norway. To make things more complicated, the sagas do not use the word consistently, but instead they also refer to Norwegians by using names that derive from their home regions such as *Þrændir*. The question of Norwegian identity, or awareness of 'group identity', is closely intertwined with the question of when the realm of Norway was united. This study does not deal with that question, but it is relevant to point out the latest discussion in this field and ponder how it affects our understanding of self-awareness by the Norwegians at the beginning of the thirteenth century.

Basically there are two opinions concerning the self-awareness of Norwegians in the Middle Ages. Eric Christiansen calls into question any sort of 'national awareness among Norwegians' and he points out that 'the distinction of Norwegians from other Northmen was no sharper than the lines between Norwegian law-districts'.⁶⁹ Sverre Bagge, on the other hand, has suggested that people certainly did identify themselves with the local communities, but not necessarily with the law districts, which seem to have come up artificially and as a result of the unification of the country, with the exception of Trøndelag. Thus, the law districts were not something that people would identify themselves with.⁷⁰ Both Christiansen and Bagge admit that Norwegian identity may be born out of a negative reaction against the Danish overlordship, first in the 970s and later in the 1030s.⁷¹

But who were these people with 'Norwegian identity'? Was there a sense of 'Norwegian identity' among all slaves, farmers and aristocrats? If the Norwegian identity was born out of reaction against the Danes, could it be called regional identity? Or was it something that concerned only the upper class? A common enemy may have been a uniting factor among different groups in Norway. It is thus important that the concept *Norðmaðr* is clarified. Only by understanding what is meant by *Norðmenn* in the kings' sagas are we able to study further the image of 'otherness'.

⁶⁸ Bagge 1991, p. 204. Birgit Sawyer does not agree with this. According to her Snorri must have been affected by his time and the ideology of the king as the head of the state (*kungaideologin*). Sawyer 2003b.

⁶⁹ Christiansen 2002, p. 123.

⁷⁰ Bagge 2008, p. 154.

⁷¹ Bagge 2008, p. 156; Christiansen 2002, p. 123.

Sverre Bagge has examined the reasons for Norway as a realm coming into being. He poses the important question ‘why this kingdom [Norway] came to comprise this particular region, rather than, for instance the whole of Scandinavia’.⁷² As Bagge points out, the state formation began from various centres of power, which expanded until they met and divided the region between them. In spite of Norway’s mountainous geography it was not difficult to unite the Norwegians, who mainly lived on the coast line, and the sea route was the most convenient communication route for them.⁷³ As this study deals with the first half of the thirteenth century, it is crucial to understand what kind of realm Norway was then. It had suffered a long internal turmoil in the twelfth century, and which continued more or less until 1240. It is called a period of civil war (c. 1130–1240). This internal turmoil of the twelfth century was part of the process in which Norway began to emerge. By the beginning of the thirteenth century Norway was a realm, but it was not a united country or state with a centralized administration.

The realm of Norway gradually reached a relative stability after King Hákon Hákonarson became king. When Snorri Sturluson visited Norway for the first time in around 1218 King Hákon Hákonarson was ruling the realm (albeit his position was not that stable at that point), and the situation in the land had begun to stabilize. It is possible to call Norway a realm among other medieval European *regna*. Norway had the basis of the administrative structure: system of laws and taxation, military organization and civil servants.⁷⁴ However, Norway’s frontiers were still in many cases undefined, as we can see from the sources.⁷⁵

Was there then a ‘national awareness’ among Norwegians in the Middle Ages? According to Kåre Lunden this is difficult to prove just with the help of those sources that survive. Still, he argues that there was a certain national awareness in Norway in the High Middle Ages, but he does not argue that this national awareness was comparable with the national awareness of the nineteenth century or of today. Lunden points out that it was possible that the national awareness of Norwegians developed in the High Middle Ages because the political system began to centralize.⁷⁶ This means that centralizing of the realm actually supported or even created this awareness of ‘nationalism’ and integrity. However, I would call into question the nature of this ‘national awareness’ that Lunden is talking about, because the term itself is not fitting in terms of medieval history, and it is difficult to define whom it concerned. We must let the sources speak on the question of whether there was a sense of togetherness among *Norðmenn*.

As Snorri concentrates on Norwegian society in the most thorough way compared with the other kings’ sagas, it is easy to define his view of society. For Snorri there were three parts in society: the king, the aristocracy and the common people.

⁷² Bagge 1995, p. 3.

⁷³ Bagge 1995, p. 4.

⁷⁴ Bagge 1995, p. 5.

⁷⁵ *Morkinskinna* FJ 353; *Fagrskinna* ch. 30, pp. 178–80 ; *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 59, p. 74–7; ch. 63, p. 82; ch. 137, p. 241–2.

⁷⁶ Lunden 1995 pp. 31–32.

The king and the aristocracy end up in conflicts, but between the aristocracy and the common people solidarity prevails: the aristocracy reacts in politics and the common people (usually) support it.⁷⁷ Sverre Bagge argues that we can perceive two types of social organization in Norwegian society: those groups that scramble for power, and the individual who has his place in the hierarchy.⁷⁸ Snorri concentrates on depicting magnates who are as powerful as the king and who in fact are kings in the area they control. Magnates and jarls challenge the king over and over again. Some have wanted to see Snorri's descriptions as a metaphor reflecting the idea of strong regional units or regional power, which would also hint that Iceland had an autonomous position in relation to Norway. Still, it is a different thing to talk about local identities rather than regional power or units. Even if Norway was from time to time under the co-rule of kings (or jarls), this did not mean regional division. In fact, we find regional division in Norway only in the second and third phases of the civil war.⁷⁹

It is difficult to compare the image of the Norwegian society in *Heimskringla* and in the other kings' sagas, as *Heimskringla* overshadows them. *Ágrip* and *Fagrskinna* are merely briefly depicting Norwegian history whereas *Heimskringla* gives a more vivid and complicated image of the internal affairs of Norway. *Morkinskinna*, on the other hand, concentrates on a shorter period of time than the other kings' sagas and its strength lies in other areas than in describing the politics. Snorri, and also the authors of the other kings' sagas, had a goal when they described the conflicts between magnates, or magnates and the king: history for them meant history of events. It is a typical scene in *Heimskringla* that 'King X attacks King Y and conquers his land'.⁸⁰ Land can be concrete land, but as the king's power was not bound to land but to people who paid tribute, we must understand the expression as a metaphor. If Snorri's strength lies in describing the relations between kings and magnates, his descriptions of the foreign politics of the Norwegian kings or foreign regents are not that successful. As a result these descriptions lack a certain 'objectivity' which is characteristic of his descriptions of Norwegian kings and

⁷⁷ For example King Óláfr Tryggvason was opposed by *þegn* and *þræll* at the Frosta thing meeting when he wanted to convert the Norwegians to Christianity (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 65, pp. 314–15). Also in *Magnúss saga Erlingssonar* 'lendir menn ok bændr' were against the pretender Eysteinn (*Magnúss saga Erlingssonar* ch. 36, pp. 410–11).

⁷⁸ Bagge 1991, p. 111. On differing opinions concerning the causes of the Norwegian civil war, see Sawyer 2003a.

⁷⁹ Bagge 1999, p. 310.

⁸⁰ For example, *Ynglinga saga* ch. 49, p. 81: 'Hogni hét sonr Eysteins ins ríka Upplendingakonungs. Hann lagði þá undir sik Heiðmörk alla ok Þótn ok Haðaland'; Hollander, p. 49: 'Hogni was the son of Eystein the Powerful of the Upplands. He conquered all of Heithmork as well as Thótn and Hathaland'; *Hálfðanar saga svarta* ch. 2, p. 85: 'Dró hann þá her saman ok fór á Raumaríki á hendr Eysteini konungi, ok áttu þeir orrostu. Hafði Hálfðan sigr, en Eysteinn flýði upp á Heiðmörk'; Hollander, p. 51: 'Hálfðan the Black learned of these hostilities in Raumaríki and collected an army, with which he proceeded against King Eystein, and a battle ensued. Hálfðan was victorious, and Eystein fled to Heithmork'; *Haralds saga hárfágr* ch. 5, p. 98: 'Þar áttu þeir ina fyrstu orrostu við konung þann, er Grýting hét. Haraldr konungr fekk sigr, en Grýting var handtekinn ok drepit mikit lið af honum'; Hollander, pp. 62–3: 'and a man whose name was Grýting fought the first battle against the king. Harald was victorious. Grýting was made captive and many of his men were slain'.

magnates.⁸¹ We will come back to this question of the king's and *hirð's* part in group formation in the chapter 'Social Contacts'.

Norwegians were called *Norðmenn* when they were compared with other groups or they represented their realm, for example as merchants. However, the kings' sagas contain some passages with names that refer to inhabitants of certain parts of Norway. Of these names the *Þrændir* are mentioned most often.⁸² *Heimskringla* mentions also *Rygir*, *Egðir* and *Bilir*.⁸³ The reason for mentioning the *Þrændir* so many times could be that the jarls of Hlaðir, who were usually the most prominent opponents of the king, were from *Þrændalog*. It is also worth remembering that place names of different parts of Norway are used far more often than names for the inhabitants of that area. For example Jarl Hákon gamli, who was fighting with Jarl Atli, had an army of *Þrændir* and *Háleygir*.⁸⁴

Perhaps the most interesting passage concerning the use of the names of groups is in *Heimskringla* in *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* (ch. 29). King Magnús died in Denmark and his body was to be transported back to Norway: 'Þá bjokkusk allir Þrændir ok Norðmenn til heimfarar með líki Magnúss konungs, ok raufsk leiðangrinn'.⁸⁵ Why are the *Þrændir* and Norwegians mentioned separately? Were the *Þrændir* not considered as Norwegians? It seems possible that they are mentioned separately, because the *Þrændir* were following their own leader Einarr þambarskelfir, who was the most powerful man in Trøndelag at the time.⁸⁶ Perhaps this passage reveals that those who were called *Norðmenn* were men who were loyal to the king, but *Þrændir* referred to Einarr's men, who were loyal to him and only after that to the king. It is possible that being a *Norðmaðr* was a double identity: first there was the regional identity or identity that bound the individual to the local magnate (or jarl or king), and then there was the overlapping identity as being a *Norðmaðr* and loyal to the king. All in all, the term *Norðmenn* seems to have been very flexible and undefined.

Sverrir Jakobsson has pointed out that these sources 'which depict this Norwegian patriotism are to a large extent composed by Icelanders, none of whom seems to have had any other connection with Norway than through the king and his court'.⁸⁷ Do we have to consider then that Icelanders define the content of the word *Norðmaðr* in the sagas? This would undermine my original idea that the kings' sagas are products of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere. We face again the problem of who is writing and for whom. Arnved Nedkvitne argues that the chronicles helped to create a new elite identity in a situation where the old warrior society

⁸¹ Bagge 1991, p. 104.

⁸² For example *Morkinskinna* FJ 145 (this passage is missing from Unger's edition) and U 130; *Fagrskinna* ch. 80, 302; *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 7, p. 99; ch. 36, p. 141; *Hákonar saga góða* ch. 12, p. 164; ch. 18, p. 173; *Magnúss saga góða* ch. 29, p. 46.

⁸³ *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 18, p. 114.

⁸⁴ *Fagrskinna* ch. 3, p. 65.

⁸⁵ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 29, p. 107; Hollander, p. 600: 'Thereupon all Thronanders and Norwegians prepared to proceed homeward with the body of King Magnús, and the army broke up'.

⁸⁶ *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* ch. 40, p. 122.

⁸⁷ Sverrir Jakobsson 1999, p. 96.

was abandoned and the elite needed confirmation for their self-image and sought to justify the use of power. According to Nedkvitne the Icelandic and Norwegian elites shared the same values, which are expressed especially in the kings' sagas.⁸⁸

As the use of both regional names for people(s) and the term *Norðmaðr* and the flexibility and undefined nature of these terms show, this was something that was under development in the thirteenth century. As Sverrir himself also points out, the Icelandic upper class – the *stórgoðar* of the thirteenth century – had opportunities to travel to Norway and they had connections to the Norwegian upper class, whereas the poorer Icelanders had to find their identities elsewhere.⁸⁹ This theme will be dealt further in Part III of this study.

We can only guess what kind of meaning a smaller local area or village had to an individual as a basis for his group identity. In the light of the kings' sagas it is clear they must have had some importance as it is often mentioned which part of Norway (or Iceland) the character was from as well as his or her family relations, so both of these must have been essential for identifying a person. But as Mats Roslund has stated, it is difficult to say how this togetherness appears on an emotional level. People in a certain area based their togetherness on common myths or historical tradition, and these were bound to the past.⁹⁰ Before centralized state power and national awareness people identified themselves with the local 'unit' they belonged to (family, village). There is not, however, a direct connection between regional divisions at the beginning of the Norwegian civil war period (c. 1130–1240). In the later phase this took place but it was caused by the prolonged conflicts, not vice versa. Before the mid-thirteenth century the party division was based on family relations and friendship, which were in direct interdependence with the regional division.⁹¹

Those who were in power and had access to written culture – the nobility and clergy – would have certainly felt supra-regional togetherness. When the Late Iron Age graves in Scandinavia have been excavated and studied the conclusion has been that the lavishly decorated aristocratic graves paid little regard to regional ritual traditions. This proves that the aristocracy belonged to supra-regional networks of prosperous families, and 'unlike ordinary people their identity was attached to their position in society rather than to ties of regional community'.⁹² The peasants probably did not have this kind of sense of togetherness, because they were more bound to their local community.

The famous passage concerning the battle of Svölð in *Heimskringla* has often been taken as an example of how Norwegian 'national sentiments' were expressed already at the beginning of the thirteenth century. It shows how the Norwegians compared themselves to the Danes and to the Svear. King Óláfr Tryggvason was preparing for the battle against his united enemies the Danes, the Svear and some

⁸⁸ Nedkvitne 2004, pp. 31–5 and 124.

⁸⁹ Sverrir Jakobsson 1999, p. 99.

⁹⁰ Roslund 2001, p. 57.

⁹¹ Bagge 2008, p. 152–3; Bagge 1999, pp. 305, 313, 319.

⁹² Svanberg 2006, p. 300.

Norwegians in Svǫld around year 999 or 1000. When the king heard that the Danish King Sveinn was with the Danes, he stated that the Danes lacked courage. Then the king's men said that there was also the king of the Svear, Óláfr skautkonungr. King Óláfr Tryggvason replied to this: 'betra væri Svíum heima ok sleikja um blótbolla sína en ganga á Orminn undir vápnum yður'.⁹³ Then he asked who the men on the port side of the Danes were. He was told that they were Norwegians led by Jarl Eiríkr Hákonarson. The king replied: 'Hann mun þykkjask eiga við oss skaplígan fund, ok oss er ván snarprar orrostu af því liði. Þeir eru Norðmenn, sem vér erum.'⁹⁴

This episode reveals unusual 'national' awareness, and it has raised questions among scholars. It is difficult to know why Snorri included this dialogue in *Heimskringla*. It is possible that it belonged to the oral tradition on the battle of Svǫld. And still, it is most often in the dialogues that the author expresses his own opinions. Without judging whether this dialogue belongs to oral tradition or whether it is a later invention it is clear that the purpose is to emphasize the Norwegians' scornful and arrogant attitude towards their enemies. The attitude fits in with the situation in which the heroic King Óláfr Tryggvason fights with the overwhelming enemy and he shows his courage. Sverre Bagge has interpreted the Svǫlder episode as just one example of how it was the purpose of the sagas to enhance the Norwegians' courage compared with their neighbours, and that paradoxically the 'brave Norwegians' were actually fighting against their own king.⁹⁵ In my opinion, it is a manifestation of group identity: 'we' being superior to the 'others'. The equivalent manifestations of Danish superiority can be read in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*.⁹⁶

The fact that the sagas mention some groups of Norwegians by name, as shown above, does not prove anything about the group awareness of these peoples. Only the *Þrændir* may have had a strong feeling of togetherness, because they lived in a fairly densely populated area and they produced the dynasty of jarls of Hlaðir, which ruled Norway between 970 and 995 and again between 1000 and 1015.⁹⁷ Sverre Bagge has even stated that actually the Norwegians did not have to establish their self-awareness by comparing themselves with the neighbouring peoples: the coherence of the kingdom was achieved by pointing to the unique position of the king and the dynasty. But if we take into account the Svǫlder episode mentioned above, there was some kind of comparison with the out-groups, meaning here neighbouring peoples. In my opinion, we are dealing with group identity which manifests itself on two levels: on the one hand there is the regional identity which is emphasized by comparing oneself with the others (Norwegians vs. the Danes or the Svear); On the other hand, we are dealing with 'an elite held together

⁹³ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 104, p. 357. Hollander, p. 234: 'Better it would be for the Swedes to stay at home and lap their sacrificial bowls than attack the Serpent and encounter our weapons'.

⁹⁴ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 104, p. 357. Hollander, p. 234–5: 'Very likely he considers he has a bone to pick with us, and we may expect a smart fight with that force: they are Norwegians like us'.

⁹⁵ Bagge 1991, p. 105; Bagge 1995, pp. 8, 11; Bagge 2008, p. 162.

⁹⁶ Holmqvist-Larsen 2004, p. 84.

⁹⁷ Bagge 2008, p. 156.

by loyalty to the king, the dynasty, and an idea of a political community'.⁹⁸

Based on the accounts in the kings' sagas it seems that at the beginning of the thirteenth century there was an idea of who a Norwegian is – at least among the upper class – but as this idea was produced by the upper class we cannot say with certainty that the common people would have shared this idea. The common people in Norway still must have identified themselves in the first place as inhabitants of a smaller local area, and they would call themselves Norwegians when they wanted to distinguish themselves from people that lived across the sea or the mountains. At this point it is easy to agree with Sverre Bagge that 'the feeling of national unity in the population may not have been very strong, but it did not have to fight strong alternative units of identification'.⁹⁹ During the thirteenth century the definition of *Norðmaðr* came to denote those who acknowledged the king's sovereignty over them – albeit that the Icelanders after having accepted the king's overlordship (1262–4) certainly did not consider themselves as Norwegians and were not called *Norðmenn*.

2.4 SCANDINAVIAN NEIGHBOURS

It is often assumed that the Scandinavians, sharing the same cultural and linguistic background, have always felt some sort of awareness of togetherness. But to what extent is this assumption based on the nineteenth century's romantic ideas about the Scandinavian past? What kind of proof do we have that this kind of awareness of togetherness existed in the Viking Age and in the Middle Ages? In particular the linguistic background seems to have been the main criterion for this awareness. The fact is that the Scandinavians called their language – at least by the High Middle Ages before the Scandinavian languages had begun to differentiate from each other – *ḍonsk tunga* or *norræna*. *ḍonsk tunga* was used in the sources from around 1000 and it was used till around 1300. The term was used in various contexts to denote all the speakers of Scandinavian languages, or just speakers of Western Scandinavian languages (Norwegian and Icelandic). With the prepositions *á* (*á ḍanska tungu*) and *í* (*í ḍanskri tungu*) the term was used to designate speakers of this language (or should it be called group of languages/dialects?) in a geographical area in which the language(s) was/were spoken.¹⁰⁰

Sverrir Jakobsson has shown that the geographical area *Norðrlond* used in the sagas was very vague and could consist of not only the present-day Scandinavian countries but also parts of the British Isles. In fact, it could sometimes even consist of such countries as England, *Saxland* and *Frakkland*. I assume that the same applies to 'the geographical area of the *ḍonsk tunga*': because people did not live in a world of fixed borders the language areas must have been very flexible, too.

⁹⁸ Bagge 2008, p. 161.

⁹⁹ Bagge 2008, p. 166.

¹⁰⁰ Skautrup 1980, pp. 662–3.

Sverrir Jakobsson notices that the sense of common roots and history were important for the feeling of togetherness for the *norrœnn* people, not just the language.¹⁰¹ Thus, *Norðrland* covered the Scandinavian cultural area in general, whereas the concept ‘Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere’ in this study covers broadly speaking its western part.

The Scandinavian languages are divided into Eastern and Western language groups. Swedish and Danish developed from the Eastern language group, whereas Norwegian and Icelandic as well as Faroese belong to the Western language group. Because the line between a language and a dialect is very vague, it is difficult to give an exact date when a language was born or constructed. As Rune Palm states, when we have plenty of linguistic differences in the medieval manuscripts, we are dealing with different dialects within different languages.¹⁰² This Scandinavian linguistic world covered not only the present-day Scandinavian countries but also parts of the British Isles where Scandinavians had settled.¹⁰³

But did this linguistic background create a sense of togetherness among different groups? It has been stated by other scholars that particularly the common language created togetherness between people in the Middle Ages, but this opinion can be called into question.¹⁰⁴ It is true that medieval authors and classical authors defined peoples according to the languages they spoke. But language does not correspond necessarily to other cultural traditions such as jewellery, dress, pottery or weapons. If language forms a flexible boundary between groups, so too do these other cultural traditions: they could be used to create unity or claim difference.¹⁰⁵ Probably we should look at a language as a way to communicate, but lack of common language was by no means a hindrance for communication, which could be carried out by using single words or gestures.

However, people could be categorized according to the language they spoke in the Old Norse cultural sphere in the Middle Ages. We can take the Icelandic law code *Grágás* as an example, which categorizes foreigners according to the language they speak. Those who spoke *ðönsk tunga* had a better position, for example in cases of inheritance, according to the law than those who could not speak it.¹⁰⁶ This is an interesting aspect of how to define people. We cannot for example know

¹⁰¹ Sverrir Jakobsson 2005, pp. 198–9, 216.

¹⁰² Palm 2004, p. 329.

¹⁰³ Hastrup 1985, p. 224.

¹⁰⁴ Bartlett 1993, p. 198; Le Goff 1988, p. 277.

¹⁰⁵ Geary 2002, pp. 37 and 75.

¹⁰⁶ See for example *Grágás* 1992 (Erfðapáttur 6) p. 55: ‘Ef goði sá er til arftöku er taldur vegur mann, þá eigu arf og bætur samþingsgoðar hans. Ef síðar koma út erfingjar, þeir eru af danskri tungu, þá eigu þeir að taka arf og bætur ef þær eru, vaxtalausar. Enda á sá maður jafnan arf að taka eftir útlenda menn hér og frændlausa er bætur ætti að hafa ef þeir væri veginir. *Norrænir menn og danskir og sænskir eigu hér arf að taka eftir frændur sína þriðjabræðra og nánari*, en að frændsemi *af öllum öðrum tungum en danskri tungu skal eigi maður hér arf taka nema faðir eða sonur eða bróðir*, og því að einu þeir, ef þeir höfðu kennst hér áður svo að menn vissu deili á því’; (Vígslóði 37) p. 239. ‘Ef útlendir menn verða veginir á landi hér, *danskir eða sænskir eða norrænir*, úr þeirra konunga veldi þriggja er vor tunga er, þar eigu frædun þeirra þar sakir ef þeir eru út hér. En *ef öllum tungum öðrum en af danskri tungu* þá á engi maður hér vígsök að sækja af frændsemis sökum, nema faðir eða sonur eða bróðir, og því að einu þeir, ef þeir höfðu hér áður við kennst’.

for sure how those people would be treated who had learned the *dönsk tunga*, but whose native language was something else. Apparently, the law refers to people who spoke *dönsk tunga* as their native language, but after all, the change of ethnic identity was by no means impossible in the Middle Ages. Language must have been just the easiest way to define people.

In the nineteenth century historians and archaeologists claimed that the Scandinavian unity and feeling of togetherness was perceptible already in the pre-Christian religion. Nowadays the opinion among scholars is quite the opposite. The huge growth in (archaeological) source material has provided proof that the graves and thus death rituals are a direct reflection of religious ideas. The diversity in grave material shows that pre-Christian religion differed considerably in both ideas and practice from one area to another. There was no uniform religion among the Danes, the Norwegians, the Svear or the Icelanders. As Svanberg puts it, 'The pre-Christian religion consisted of a diversity of changing traditions and variations, and therefore contrasted sharply with the relatively uniform Christianity'.¹⁰⁷ In this sense, religion cannot have been a major determiner of a feeling of togetherness for pre-Christian Scandinavians. As Birgit and Peter Sawyer have pointed out concerning the terms 'Svear' and 'unity', 'There is no reason to doubt that Svear raided, traded and settled around the Baltic, but that does not mean that they recognized the king in Uppsala as their ruler; *linguistic and cultural unity did not imply political unity in Scandinavia* any more than it did in England or Ireland'.¹⁰⁸

In the Viking Age and early Middle Ages those people who lived outside Scandinavia often called these people just 'men of north', but they could actually differentiate three different groups among Scandinavians: the Norwegians, the Danes and the Svear (the people of Svealand). There was also a fourth group, the *Gautar*, who lived in Götaland (in modern Västergötland and Östergötland), but this group is mentioned very seldom and only then by some merchants or missionaries.¹⁰⁹

The close relations between the Norwegians and their Scandinavian neighbours are evident in the kings' sagas, which makes it very interesting to study the group boundaries between these peoples. In what degree is 'otherness' manifested in these relations and in what ways? There are some slight differences between the kings' sagas when it comes to their descriptions on internal affairs – mostly struggles – of the Norwegians, and their relationship to their neighbours.

2.4.1 The Svear (Svíar)

The name of the Swedes (*Svear*, ON *Svíar*) has been interpreted to be an autonym meaning 'we ourselves'. *Svíþjóð* denotes the 'people of the Svear', and it is identified with a core area of the Svear, the region around Lake Mälaren. *Svíaríki* and *Svíaveldi* were used for an extended Svear realm (*ríki*), later comprising regions

¹⁰⁷ Svanberg 2006, p. 301.

¹⁰⁸ Sawyer and Sawyer 2004, p. 266. The italics are mine.

¹⁰⁹ Sawyer and Sawyer 1997, p. 36.

obviously not originally under Svear control, such as the region of the *Gautar*.¹¹⁰ Besides, the collective noun *Svíþjóð* could also refer to the kings of the Svear, their chieftains and loyal men, or it could denote the territories where the Svear had settled or collected tribute. Also the name *Svíaríki* is sometimes used in the sources. Svealand and Götaland are mentioned separately in the sagas, which indicates that the Svear and the *Gautar* (Götar) were considered as separate peoples.¹¹¹

The names *Svear* and *Gautar* did not necessarily have ethnic or linguistic meaning in the beginning. It has been pointed out that the *Svear* may have denoted only the upper class of the society – maybe those warriors who travelled with their ships abroad for trade or plundering expeditions.¹¹² This would suit the theory of ‘proto-nations’, according to which nation/people is not understood to include more than a fraction of the inhabitants of the ‘state’, namely the privileged elite.¹¹³ The *Svear* are often said to be belligerent and they are also connected with navigation in general. These two things made them famous in the eyes of the outer world. Also their pagan religion was noted at least by the foreign missionaries. So, the name ‘Svear’ could denote as well as an inhabitant of Svealand also one of Götaland, and later the name became to denote the Swedish people.¹¹⁴

The difference between the Svear and the *Gautar* is perceptible also in the sources: because Svealand and Götaland did not constitute an integrated united realm, the Svear and the *Gautar* sometimes had differing opinions about how to deal with the Norwegians. For example when King Óláfr Svíakonungr wanted to fight with Norwegians Jarl Rognvaldr of Västergötland did not agree with this. He sent his men to King Óláfr Haraldsson and declared that he wanted to live in peace with his Norwegian neighbours. The Västgötar had a good reason for this: a war would damage their trade relations with the Norwegians.¹¹⁵

Heimskringla in particular shows that the Norwegians had contacts with their eastern and south-eastern neighbours in Svealand and Götaland. In fact, the role of the Svear is actually emphasized through the *Ynglinga saga*, which is the first saga in *Heimskringla*. This mythical saga creates a shared history for the Svear and the Norwegians. Anyway, there is a strong possibility that Snorri himself had visited Västergötland (in 1219?)¹¹⁶ on his first journey to Norway,¹¹⁷ so he should have had some idea of what kind of power concentrations there were east of Norway.

According to the kings’ sagas the Norwegians had more contacts with the Svear than with the *Gautar*. It is notable that the sagas distinguish between these two –

¹¹⁰ Brink 2008, pp. 102–3.

¹¹¹ For example *Historia Norvegiae* mentions Norway’s neighbours, p. 74: ‘sed de sole Swethiam, Gautoniam, Angariam, Jamtoniam’.

¹¹² See above *Svíþjóð*.

¹¹³ Hobsbawm 1990, p. 73; also Patrick Geary states that for example being a ‘Goth’ meant in the first place being member of the Visigothic kingdom’s elite. Geary 2002, p. 134.

¹¹⁴ Lindkvist and Sjöberg 2003, pp. 21, 33; Lindkvist 2003b, p. 221; Staecker 1999, p. 349.

¹¹⁵ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 90, p. 132–4.

¹¹⁶ Helgi Þorláksson 1979, p. 81.

¹¹⁷ Ciklamini 1978, p. 13.

for example, when the Norwegians attack both of them or they attack together.¹¹⁸ We can only speculate how this reflects the situation in reality, but it is only natural that the Norwegians could see this difference between their neighbours the Svear and the *Gautar* in the thirteenth century because *Svíaríki* was only about to emerge then. Considering the role of the Svear in the kings' sagas it seems that the reason for the emphasis on them is that the stories concentrate on the royal houses. The kings' sagas lack episodes that would deal with for example Norwegian merchants or peasants and their relations with their eastern neighbours.

Because there existed no fixed borders between *Norðmenn* and the Svear, the people living in present-day Jämtland and Hälsingland acknowledged the overlordship of the Norwegian king or the king of the Svear depending on the situation. The inhabitants themselves did not have any trouble with this, and they had their own views on which realm they belonged to – or to be exact, to which king they paid tributes. The troubles were caused by the rulers who wanted to levy taxes and control the area.¹¹⁹ *Hákonar saga góða* (ch. 12) in *Heimskringla* implies that the Jamtar, who originally came from Norway, travelled to both directions on their trading voyages. In the same chapter it is mentioned that some Norwegians had moved to Hälsingland, and that its inhabitants were subjects of *Svíþjóð*. The Norwegian kings were successful in their dealings with the Jamtar so that the Jamtar preferred to acknowledge the overlordship of the Norwegian king rather than that of the king of the Svear – at least according to the kings' sagas.¹²⁰

Sometimes the disputes concerning the areas in which the rulers wanted to exert their power led to war. For example the Norwegian King Magnús wanted to have parts of Götaland, so he waged a war against Ingi, the king of the Svear. The conflict ended up with a peace treaty which was confirmed with a marriage alliance, as was usual then: King Magnús married Margret, daughter of King Ingi.¹²¹ Marriage alliances between the Norwegian and Swedish royal houses were not uncommon. For example King Óláfr Haraldsson was married to Ástríðr,¹²² who was daughter of King Óláfr Svíakonungr (skautkonungr) and King Haraldr Gilli's daughter Brígiða was married to the king of the Svear, Ingi Hallsteisson.¹²³

The relations between the Norwegians and the Svear seem to have varied: from

¹¹⁸ *Fagrskinna* ch. 15, p. 103. Jarl Hákon is on military campaign: 'Hann herjaði um Svíaveldi ok Gauta'; *Fagrskinna* ch. 32, p. 182: 'Qnundr Svíakonungr fór með Svía her ok Gauta austan í mót'; *Morkinskinna* FJ 323: 'Oc nv varþ þat tíþinda at M. konvngv biosc at riða vpp aGavtland et vestra oc etlaþi at leGia vndir sic'; *Morkinskinna* FJ 396. King Sigurðr's son Magnús got a horse as a gift from Götaland: 'hestir ein gavzcr gersimi mikil oc sciotr agetliga'; *Morkinskinna* FJ 416 King Magnús (blindi) escapes to Götaland: 'M. konvngv flyþi þaðan avstr iGavtland til Karls Sørqvís s'.

¹¹⁹ See for example *Morkinskinna* FJ 353; *Fagrskinna* ch. 30; *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 59, 66 and 137. See for example Imsen 2006, pp. 61–85.

¹²⁰ *Morkinskinna* FJ 353; *Hákonar saga góða* ch. 12, p. 165; *Magnússona saga* ch. 15, pp. 255–6.

¹²¹ *Ágrip* ch. 48, p. 45; *Morkinskinna* FJ 329; *Fagrskinna* ch. 83, pp. 311–12; *Magnúss saga berfætts* ch. 12–14. According to *Heimskringla* Margret was later married to the Danish King Nicholas. *Magnússona saga* ch. 24, p. 263.

¹²² *Ágrip* ch. 25, p. 26; *Fagrskinna* ch. 30, p. 179; *Heimskringla* II *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 92, p. 146.

¹²³ *Morkinskinna* FJ 404; *Haraldssona saga* ch. 22, pp. 331–2. According to *Heimskringla* Harald Gilli was married to Ingi's granddaughter Ingerid. *Magnúss saga blinda ok Haralds gilla* ch. 1, p. 279.

time to time they waged a war against each other and then there was time for peace-making, which was often confirmed with marriage alliances. We can hardly speak of relations between the Icelanders and the Svear because they lived so far away from each other that they had only sparse contacts. In the *Heimskringla* we have a few episodes in which Icelanders act as envoys of the Norwegian king¹²⁴ in Götaland and in Svealand. An interesting episode is in *Óláfs saga ins helga* in which an Icelander, Þóroddr Snorrason, is sent by King Óláfr to levy taxes in Jämtland. The Jamtar decide, however, that they will pay taxes to the king of the Svear.¹²⁵ Þóroddr and his companions find out that the Jamtar are going to use them as human sacrifices in their pagan rituals. After an eventful adventure Þóroddr manages to flee.¹²⁶ The *topos* itself reflects the Christian depiction of heathens. The episode hints that the people living in remote frontier areas were still pagans and as such very suspicious and strange. Considering these attributes they would be categorized probably at least as ‘somewhat strange’ in the eyes of the Norwegians and the Icelanders. They would not represent extreme ‘otherness’ in the eyes of Christian Norwegians and Icelanders, but it is certain that they would be labelled as ‘others’. Compared with the other Scandinavians the Svear were very slow in converting to Christianity, and the Upplanders seem to have been one of the most reluctant to convert.¹²⁷

It has been debated whether there was pagan resistance against Christianity – especially in Uppland – and to what extent. For example Henrik Williams points out that the runestones in Uppland from the eleventh century were a Christian phenomenon. He stresses that the Christianization seem to have taken place slowly and peacefully, and that Christianity and the old pagan belief system did not necessarily collide and lead to violent disputes.¹²⁸ All in all, the conversion process in Sweden was long, and it was prompted by the social elite. At the same time the conversion meant profound changes in the social system.¹²⁹

However, there is a tendency in the sagas to see the Svear as relatively primitive and uncivilized in comparison with Norwegians and Icelanders. This attitude strengthened probably in the thirteenth century, when the literary culture flourished in Norway and Iceland, but not in Sweden.¹³⁰ Indeed, the sagas and some skaldic poems depict the Svear and the *Gautar* as heathens as late as the end of the twelfth

¹²⁴ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 70, pp. 90–2; ch. 72, pp. 95–100; ch. 91, pp. 134–46.

¹²⁵ The Jamtar lived in the frontier area where the Norwegian and the Swedish kings tried to extend their influence. It was only around 1180 when the Jamtar decided to pay taxes to the Norwegian King. As Steinar Imsen puts it, ‘Jemtland ble dermed et tributpliktig territorium, eller skattland, under det norske monarkiet, men var fortsatt ikke norsk grenselandskap i vår forstand, i og med at ingen norsk stat ennå gjorde seg gjeldende i landet’. Imsen 2006, p. 63.

¹²⁶ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 141, pp. 255–61.

¹²⁷ One of the most persistent myths related to the heathen past of the Svear is that they would have replaced their king Inge with a certain Blot-Sveinn, because Inge was Christian. None of the kings’ sagas mention this episode. About Svear and converting to Christianity see Gräslund 1996, pp. 19–44; Lönnroth 1996, pp. 148–9.

¹²⁸ Williams 1996, pp. 310–11.

¹²⁹ Lindkvist 2001, p. 119.

¹³⁰ Nedkvitne 2004, p. 145.

century, although according to some other sources they must have been Christians by that time – even if some resistance may have occurred.¹³¹ The numerous runestones with Christian prayers or other implications to Christianity in Uppland seem to indicate that the Christianization process there was very slow: it was imported for the newly converted to tell publicly about their religious opinion.¹³²

The kings' sagas are not very reliable sources when it comes to the Svear (or *Gautar*) and supposedly heathen practices. So, when King Óláfr Tryggvason implies his contempt for the Svear just before the battle of Svölð by saying of the Svear that it would be better for them 'to stay at home and lap their sacrificial bowls',¹³³ the anecdote reveals more about the Norse attitude on the Svear than real facts: it is just a way to boost the group identity by belittling the others. As Lars Lönnroth points out, these kind of anecdotes are embellished with folkloristic clichés and they serve as an interesting proof of the image of the Svear ('Sverigebilden') in the eyes of their Norse neighbours.¹³⁴ In short, the backwardness of the eastern neighbours is emphasized by using heathenism as one of the characterizations. According to Thomas Lindqvist the primitive image of the Svear in the Old Norse literature is due to the late date of the Christianization of the Svear (and the *Gautar*) and state formation in Sweden, which must be a plausible explanation.¹³⁵ In the end, the heathen image of the Svear has nothing to do with reality but is just the way to define the group boundary between Norwegians and their neighbouring peoples. As such, this heathen image of the Svear seems to be a made-up image by the Christian Norwegians and/or Icelanders.

It is a common *topos* in the kings' sagas that a Norwegian aristocrat or a king flees to Svealand or to Götaland if he has had conflicts with other Norwegian aristocrats. One of the most famous examples must be King Óláfr Haraldsson, who had to leave Norway and travel through Svealand all the way to Garðaríki.¹³⁶ There are several other cases too that are similar.¹³⁷ Norwegians fled both to Svealand and to Denmark. Of course, many Norwegians who were in opposition to the king wanted to get funding or men from the king of the Svear or Danes to fight with their own king. Based on just saga evidence it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine the reason why Svealand was more often a place of refuge than Denmark. Maybe the Svear were geographically close to Norwegians even if travelling by land was extremely toilsome. On the other hand, not even all the noblemen in Norway had the opportunity to flee by ship to the Danes.

To conclude, it seems that the Norwegians had varying relations with their eastern Scandinavian neighbours. The reluctance of the Svear to accept Christianity

¹³¹ Lönnroth 1996, pp. 141–2.

¹³² Sawyer, B. 2003c, pp. 148–9.

¹³³ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 104, p. 357.

¹³⁴ Lönnroth 1996, pp. 156–7.

¹³⁵ Lindqvist 1996, p. 222.

¹³⁶ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 181, pp. 328–30.

¹³⁷ *Morkinskinna* FJ 180, 417, 420; *Fagrskinna* ch. 97, p. 331; *Haralds saga gráfeldar* ch. 11, p. 215; *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 4, pp. 228–9 and ch. 51, p. 299; *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 54, p. 71; *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* ch. 69, p. 158; *Hákonar saga herðibreiðs* ch. 1, p. 347.

seems to have affected their image in the eyes of the Norwegians and Icelanders, and *Ynglinga saga*, which tells of the pagan past of the Svear, may have contributed to this. At the same time *Ynglinga saga* creates a common family tree for the Svear and the Norwegians, at least for the elite. These kinds of family trees were common in the Middle Ages when the elite was trying to show its continuous power from time immemorial. Descent was such an important issue that family trees were usually just made-up constructions – nobody could actually have access to the kind of sources that would lead centuries back in time. Moreover, no written source could prove a family connection to the ancient gods, so it was better to make the descent up.

The Svear could be categorized as ‘not so different from us’ in the scale of analogue difference. Common cultural roots probably affected the image as with others. Norwegian and Swedish royal houses shared a common history at least on a legendary level and the bonds between the Norwegian and Swedish elite were strengthened by marriage alliances. Also Norwegian magnates opposing each other sought support from the Swedish king.

2.4.2 The Danes (*Danir*)

Authors of the early Middle Ages who wrote in Latin or Greek, used the words ‘Dani’ or ‘Danoi’ of people who lived in *Dacia*.¹³⁸ Also Theodoricus Monachus and the anonymous author of *Historia Norvegiae* used the word *Dacia*.¹³⁹ We do not know what this word denoted, but probably it referred to a ‘northern people’. It seems that there was first the word for the people and only later the name for the land, but this theory is by no means certain.¹⁴⁰ As Ildar Garipzanov has shown, the term *gens Danorum* was constructed in Latin sources, especially in the Frankish, for different reasons: first, as a category for ethnic discourse and secondly, in the ninth century the concept of *gens Danorum* was constructed ‘in southern Jutland from people of different ethnicities in response to an approaching Carolingian expansion’.¹⁴¹ In other words, the Franks were not able to see a difference between the ethnic groups of the Northmen in Scandinavia, but to them *gens Danorum* was perceived as a political entity, which bordered the Carolingian realm in the early ninth century.¹⁴²

Denmark was the first area in Scandinavia where power began to concentrate around one king. There were several reasons why the Danes had hegemony in Scandinavia in the Viking Age: a relatively numerous population, easy access to all parts of their territory, and, above all, their control of the entrance to the Baltic Sea.¹⁴³ At the end of the tenth century Denmark was a real power in the area covering the North Sea, the Baltic Sea and Scandinavia, which is illustrated for example

¹³⁸ For example, Jordanes, *Romana et Getica*, p. 59.

¹³⁹ Theodorus Monachus, p. 10; *Historia Norvegiae* p. 74.

¹⁴⁰ Hald, pp. 643–4. About the discussion, see Brink 2008, p. 88.

¹⁴¹ Garipzanov 2008, p. 142.

¹⁴² Garipzanov 2008, p. 123.

¹⁴³ Sawyer 2003c, p. 22.

by the great fortresses that were built then. The power was based on a trade network in this area, which had been organized since the Merovingian Age.

According to the runestone in Jellinge King Haraldr Gormsson ruled over Denmark and subjugated also parts of Norway ('uan tanmaurk ala auk nuruiak'). It says on the runestone:

(side A)

haraltr : kunukr : baþ : kaurua

kubl : þausi : aft : kurm faþur sin

auk aft : þaurui : muþur : sina : sa

haraltr (:) ias : sār * uan * tanmaurk

(side B)

ala * auk * nuruiak

(side C)

*** auk * t(a)ni (* karþi *) kristna**

(*Rundata*, DR 42)

'King Haraldr ordered this monument made in memory of Gormr, his father, and in memory of Þyrvé, his mother; that Haraldr who won for himself all of Denmark and Norway and made the Danes Christian'.

In this runestone the word *tanmaurk* is used for the first time, at least in Scandinavian sources.¹⁴⁴ We do not know what was exactly meant by Denmark, but it most probably did not have an exact meaning in King Haraldr's days either. The latter part of the name, *-mark*, denoted in the Middle Ages a border or borderland in the Germanic languages. *Mark* was a name for those areas which were conceived as a deep zone of military defence, and where the *Markgraf* was acting on behalf of the king or emperor with special powers granted to him. Today *Mark* survives in 'fossilized' form in geographical, political and place names, especially in German (Steiermark, Mark Brandenburg). 'March' was also a *terminus technicus* in English which was used to describe a medieval border zone, which was beyond the control of government.¹⁴⁵ Denmark was, at least from the point of view of the emperor, border zone and out of his control. Should it be understood then, that the Danes themselves, too, adopted this view and thus their *territorium* was called *Danmark* and not *Danland*?

According to King Alfred's *Orosius* the following areas were under the Danish rule: *Langaland*, *Læland* (Lolland), *Falster* and *Scōneg* (Skåne).¹⁴⁶ The declaration on the Jelling runestone should be understood as meaning that King Haraldr had become the overlord of a tribute area which was called *tanmaurk*. According to the runes Haraldr won or subjugated Norway, but it should not be taken to denote the whole of Norway as we know it today but as a tribute area, probably around

¹⁴⁴ The Norwegian Olthere knew the name *Denamearc*, which was mentioned in King Alfred's *Orosius* at the end of the ninth century and *Denimerca* is also mentioned in the *Chronica* written by Abbot Regino of Prüm. Skovgaard-Petersen 2003a, p. 168; Hald 1980, pp. 643–4; *Orosius*, p. 16.

¹⁴⁵ Klusáková and Ellis 2006, pp. 5, 10.

¹⁴⁶ Hald 1980, pp. 643–4; *Orosius*, p. 16.

the Oslofjord. It is possible that in the mid-tenth century Denmark may have been split between a western kingdom ruled by the kings of the Jelling dynasty (the pagan Gorm (d. c. 958) and his son Haraldr Bluetooth), and an eastern kingdom, perhaps still under the control of the old Lejre dynasty.¹⁴⁷

None of the sources we have from that time or even from later period can tell us what kind of power King Haraldr exerted in his tribute area. Probably the grip in the Norwegian areas was not very strong. Maybe the Danish king was able to collect tribute from Norway, as one passage in the *Legendary Óláfs saga ins helga* suggests.¹⁴⁸ The events described in the Jelling runestone are described as follows in *Heimskringla*: King Haraldr Gormsson beats the Norwegian King Haraldr gráfeldr and gives the areas in Norway to the Norwegian Jarl Hákon and Haraldr grenski, who also got the title of *konungr*. Hákon got Rogaland, Hordaland, Sogn, Firðafylki, Sunn-Mœri, Raumsdal and Norð-Mœri, and the right to have the king's own estates (*Öll konungsbú ok landsskyldir*). Haraldr grenski got Vingulmörk, Vestfold and Agðir on the same terms as his relatives had had 'in the old days'.¹⁴⁹ Thus, King Haraldr was the overlord, and Hákon and Haraldr were his loyal men in Norway ruling for him. However, Jarl Hákon did not keep his Christian faith (King Haraldr had forced him to convert to Christianity) and raided in Haraldr's area. King Haraldr Gormsson took revenge by attacking Hákon's lands and raiding there.¹⁵⁰

Denmark was far from being a united, centrally governed realm in the Viking Age or at the beginning of the Middle Ages. There were several power centres in Denmark in the tenth century. According to Johan Callmer the most important ones were in Jutland (Jellinge), on the northern side of Sjælland (Lejre) and in the south-western part of Skåne. Eventually, Jellinge became the most important and powerful of these three.¹⁵¹ Danish kings travelled around their kingdom – as did the other Scandinavian kings – because their power was not bound to one place but was held personally.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ Gelting 2007, p. 76.

¹⁴⁸ King Óláfr Haraldsson would like to have the right to collect taxes, which is opposed in the þing. *Legendary Óláfs saga ins helga* p. 106: 'Maðr stænndr upp a þinginu, sa er Þorgrimr var kallaðr, oc mællte: "Engi man þat muna alldrigin, er hann sva gamall, at Noreksmenn se þangat skattgildir. Hitt munum ver um rið, at Daner toko skatt. En þat hugðu ver, at ver værem þann dag frælstir fra þui, er Svæinn konongr do."'

¹⁴⁹ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 14–15, pp. 238–40.

¹⁵⁰ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 33, p. 270. Birgit Sawyer has given an interesting explanation how the rune-stones in Norway could testify to Danish overlordship. According to her, the rune-stones are numerous in those parts of Norway where the Danes held sway. She takes as an example the rune-stone concentration in Rogaland, which was controlled by Erling Skjalgsson in 1020s and who was an ally of the Danish kings. Because the rune-stone fashion did not have much influence in other parts of Norway it must, according to Sawyer, in part be due to the rejection of Danish claims after 1035. However, she does not claim that this is dramatic evidence: Norway was scarcely populated in comparison with Denmark, with perhaps a third the overall population of Denmark's. Still, the number of rune-stones in relation to the population is much the same in both countries in the tenth and eleventh centuries. However, it should be noted that because the total number of the rune-stones in Norway is not determinable (maybe some 50–60 stones) it is questionable whether this can be used as an evidence for Danish overlordship in a particular area. Sawyer 2003c, p. 148.

¹⁵¹ Callmer 1991, p. 272.

¹⁵² Skovgaard-Petersen 2003b, p. 367.

The relations between the Norwegians and the Danes are clearly more complicated than for example between the Norwegians and their eastern neighbours the Svear and the *Gautar*. This is due to the fact that the Danes represented a considerable power in Scandinavia and they often tried to meddle in Norwegian affairs, not to mention the efforts in trying to conquer Norway. The relations between the Norwegians and the Danes in the kings' sagas are prominently concerned with the continuous conflicts. The Danes tried to either conquer or subjugate Norway, or at least the Danish regent usually supported pretenders to the Norwegian throne. The Norwegians had fewer opportunities to influence the Danish politics, but they did so for example during King Magnús Ólafsson's reign, who was king of both Norway and Denmark. As an example of the kinds of conflict this brought about may be mentioned the passage already quoted earlier: the Danish jarl Sveinn Úlfsson is not satisfied when he hears that he is accused of not being loyal to his king, Magnús.¹⁵³ The Norwegians, being less united than the Danes, made individual plundering expeditions in the areas the Danes controlled. Actually, both parties plundered each other. As an example could be mentioned King Hákon the Good's military campaign on Sjölland, where he 'tók gjöld ok skatta af landinu'. He continued his plundering in Skåne. It is mentioned that the Danes had carried out a similar plundering expedition against Norwegians before King Hákon's campaign.¹⁵⁴

It must be stressed that the conflicts between the Danes and the Norwegians did not mean that there were two 'nations' fighting against each other. Even though the awareness of being a Dane or a Norwegian was just about to emerge in the tenth and eleventh centuries the sagas still emphasize which part of Norway the Norwegian characters came from. So, it sometimes happened that the conflicting parties were 'heterogeneous': for example when King Magnús Ólafsson was fighting with King Sveinn of Denmark, he had both Norwegians and Jutlanders in his troops. King Sveinn had Scanians and men from Halland and Fyn.¹⁵⁵ In my opinion this is proof that it is impossible to consider Norwegians or Danes as homogeneous groups ('nations'). As stated in the chapter concerning the Norwegians, the different regional names for groups do not necessarily imply that there were strong regional identities. Kings and magnates could raise men for their support from different regions, but these campaigns were temporary. It is difficult to prove how this kind of temporary activity affected the group identity of men in a certain area.

As already mentioned, the Danish kings were eager to support pretenders to the Norwegian throne or other enemies of the Norwegian king. The opponents or pretenders usually fled from Norway either to the Svear or to the Danes. Denmark seems to have been a very attractive place as a refuge, because the Danish kings were usually generous. After all, pretenders gave the Danish kings opportunity to become involved in Norwegian internal affairs. As an example might be mentioned

¹⁵³ *Morkinskinna* FJ 91.

¹⁵⁴ *Ágrip* ch. 5, p. 8; According to *Fagrskinna* (ch. 10, p. 81) Hákon was fighting with Danish and Wendish Vikings in Halland, which was then Danish territory; *Hákonar saga góða* ch. 6, p. 157 and ch. 8, pp. 159–60.

¹⁵⁵ *Magnúss saga góða* ch. 29, p. 46.

King Eiríkr's widow Gunnhildr, who fled to Denmark with her sons. The Danish King Haraldr Gormsson took one of the sons as a foster-son and raised him in his *hirð*.¹⁵⁶ King Óláfr Tryggvason's enemies, the sons of Jarl Hákon, also fled to Denmark. Jarl Eiríkr Hákonsson married the daughter of the Danish King Sveinn and supported him in the battle of Svölð. Jarl Eiríkr is said to have stayed in Denmark during the winters and in the summertime he made plundering expeditions in the Baltic Sea.¹⁵⁷ King Knútr (the Great) was eager to host the opponents of King Óláfr Haraldsson and he rewarded them with great gifts.¹⁵⁸ When there was no war between the Danes and the Norwegians there was peace and/or truce, which was often confirmed by marriages. For example one of King Haraldr hárfagri's wives Ragnhildr was said to be the daughter King Eiríkr of Jutland¹⁵⁹; King Óláfr Haraldsson married Ingridr, who was the daughter of a certain Danish Vein; King Óláfr kyrri married the daughter of the Danish King Sveinn, and the Danish King Óláfr Sveinsson was married to Óláfr kyrri's sister.¹⁶⁰ These marriage alliances that occurred between Scandinavian royal houses will be dealt further in the chapter on 'Marriage Alliances'.

We know basically nothing more about the Danish-Norwegian relations on the basis of the kings' sagas. The Danish merchants are mentioned only a few times. The enmities between the Norwegians and the Danes must have influenced the trade relations at least to some extent. For instance the Danish king forbade the inhabitants of Vík to come to Denmark on trading voyages because of the hostilities between the Danes and the Norwegians.¹⁶¹ On the other hand, the Danish King Knútr gave the Norwegians great credit for helping the Danes on their expedition to England and granted them permission to trade wherever they wished.¹⁶² This must mean that the merchants could trade in any port of trade in Denmark.

The kings' sagas are not a good source for revealing what kind of relations Icelanders had with the Danes or what they thought of them, because there are few episodes concerning them. One episode in *Heimskringla* is, however, interesting. An Icelandic vessel was shipwrecked just off the coast in Denmark. The Danes robbed the ship because they insisted it was flotsam. This was decided by one of King Haraldr Gormsson's bailiffs. Icelanders became angry about the incident and they composed a mocking poem about King Haraldr.¹⁶³ He became angry and he sent a man with magical skills to Iceland to find out whether he could make a military intervention. The man took the shape of a whale and swam to Iceland.

¹⁵⁶ *Hákonar saga góða* ch. 10, p. 162.

¹⁵⁷ *Fagrskinna* ch. 26, pp. 164–7; *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 90, pp. 338–41.

¹⁵⁸ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 131, pp. 221–2; ch. 139, pp. 249–53; ch. 144, pp. 267–9; ch. 156, pp. 287–8; ch. 161, p. 293–6; ch. 170, pp. 305–6.

¹⁵⁹ *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 21, pp. 118–20.

¹⁶⁰ *Óláfs saga kyrra* ch. 5, pp. 207–8.

¹⁶¹ *Fagrskinna* ch. 115, p. 355.

¹⁶² *Morkinskinna* FJ 293.

¹⁶³ Skjald. B I, p. 166; *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 33; In this poem King Haraldr is shown as misusing his power, and he is insulted by being compared with a horse and implied to be impotent. In other words, it was an insulting *níð*-poem. Price 2002, p. 213; Sørensen 2000, p. 85.

First he came to the northern part of Iceland. But when he was going to go ashore he saw a dragon followed by a train of serpents, paddocks, and toads that blew poison towards him. He swam westwards to Eyjafjörður, where he saw that 'a bird flew against him, which was so great that its wings stretched over the mountains on either side of the fjord, and many birds, great and small, with it'. He continued his journey southwards and into Breiðafjörður. Then he saw a large grey bull run against him, wading into the sea, and bellowing fearfully, and he was followed by a crowd of land-spirits. Now he continued 'round by Reykjanes, and wanted to land at Vikarsskeið, but there came down a hill-giant against him with an iron staff in his hands'. Again he continued his journey, now eastwards. There was nothing but sand and vast deserts. He swam back to Denmark and said to the king that it was no use going to Iceland with the long-ships because the ocean between the countries was so wide that a long-ship could not cross it.¹⁶⁴

This peculiar story has raised many questions. It is a common motif in the sagas that someone changes shape and takes an animal shape, for example as a seal or whale. It is possible that the whales were considered to be some kind of witches or supernatural beings.¹⁶⁵ It seems clear that Snorri himself did not invent this story: it must have been part of the oral tradition he was familiar with or he picked it up from an earlier source. One theory is that Snorri wanted to write down this story because it did not exist as a written version, or that he thought it was an appropriate symbol for Icelanders and their relation to a foreign regent.¹⁶⁶ All in all, the story is very symbolic, not to mention that the poem mocking King Haraldr is extremely insulting, and thus the episode itself does not shed any light on how the Icelanders actually thought about the Danes. Those animals or monsters that appear in different parts of Iceland have been interpreted as being Icelandic chieftains, the four evangelists or four cardinal points. According to Tatjana Jackson and Alexander Podossinov the last alternative seems to be the most plausible.¹⁶⁷ Be that as it may, it is clear that the story is above all symbolic and it does not reveal anything about the Icelandic view about the Danes.

The relation between the Danes and the Norwegians can be perhaps described as one of rivalry. In particular *Fagrskinna* emphasizes this, which may be due to the fact that the author seems to have been connected with the Norwegian court or royal house.¹⁶⁸ The Danes had the supreme position in Scandinavia in the tenth century and the Danish kings tried to control parts of Norway. It seems that the relations vary between war or plunder and alliances. Those Norwegians who were in opposition often sought help and support from the Danes. Thus, from the Norse-Icelandic point of view the Danes were 'not so different from us'.

¹⁶⁴ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 33, pp. 270–2.

¹⁶⁵ Clunies Ross 1998, p. 34.

¹⁶⁶ Jackson and Podossinov 2003, p. 244.

¹⁶⁷ Jackson and Podossinov 2003, p. 248.

¹⁶⁸ Indrebø 1917, p. 257, 275 ff.

2.5 CONCLUSION

The kings' sagas do not reveal anything radical in the relationship between Icelanders, Norwegians, Danes or Svear. These peoples understood themselves as different from each other, but it would be wrong to talk about 'national awareness' or 'Scandinavian unity' in the Middle Ages. People identified themselves in the first place with the local community, but it is difficult to find proof of larger, regional identity. Their relationship to the ruler meant loyalty to him and paying tributes. The language played a double role in the group identification: on the one hand the language was not a problem when they communicated with each other, and thus it seems not to have been the factor that distinguished them from each other. On the other hand these peoples were distinguished as those who spoke the *ḍonsk* (or *norræn*) *tunga* and those who did not.

This is not perceptible in the kings' sagas, but it is a factor that defines different groups of peoples in the Icelandic law code *Grágás*. This text shows that those who spoke the *ḍonsk tunga* had a better position than other outsiders according to the law. However, if we consider that it must have been a small number of people who came to Iceland, mostly merchants from Norway, the law code does not reveal the whole picture, so to say. Moreover, even if the outsiders that came to Iceland – or to Norway – did not speak the *ḍonsk tunga* it did not mean that they could not communicate at all. The merchants who travelled around the North Sea area from England to Norway or from Frisia to Iceland certainly could sell and buy.

So, even if language defined different groups in *Grágás*, it was just for practical reasons, for example to make it clear how an inheritance should be shared if there were heirs abroad. This group definition based on language does not necessarily have anything to do with real group identities that people had, but was just a legal practicality.

If an Icelandic farmer at the beginning of the thirteenth century felt that he was an Icelander, not Norwegian, what did it mean in fact? Probably that he did not want to acknowledge the Norwegian king's authority and pay him taxes. Considering the Norwegian history of the formation of permanent royal power, this applied also among Norwegians: their self-awareness was based in the first place on their local community, and it was hard to accept an overlord, which would demand taxes or tributes. So, the kings' sagas, and especially *Heimskringla*, may manifest the Icelandic self-awareness, but what about the feeling of togetherness with other people living in the *Norðrǫnd*? As we have seen, the whole concept of *Norðrǫnd* is very flexible, so it is impossible to give a definite answer. We can read in the kings' sagas that if anyone travelled long distances it was the upper-class men – and we can exclude here merchants and military expeditions. Even when the magnates had to flee abroad they were welcomed by other men of the same social class (Swedish magnates seem to have been the favoured hosts of the Norwegian aristocracy). This hospitality will be discussed further in the chapter on 'Trade and Hospitality'.

To conclude, the Scandinavian neighbours of the Norse-Icelandic cultural

sphere could be called 'not so different from us' in the scale of analogue difference. It should be noted that in the kings' sagas it was most often members of the upper class that met each other. Taking the idea further: is the feeling of togetherness something that concerns the upper class, regardless of where they came from? This will be dealt further in the chapter on 'Social Contacts'.

3 Analogue Others

This chapter aims to look at ‘others’ who were considered as analogue. These ‘others’ were not completely different from the point of view of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere, which means that they all had some feature which would be recognized by Norsemen or Icelanders as familiar. These analogue ‘others’ have been categorized loosely in this chapter according to their geographical background.

3.1 THE BRITISH ISLES

Þá lagði Magnús konungr liðinu suður til Ílar, herjaði þar ok brenndi. En er hann hafði unnit þat land, þá byrjar hann ferðina suður fyrir Saltíri, herjaði þá á bæði borð á Írland ok Skotland, fór svá allt herskildi suður til Manar ok herjaði þar sem í ǫðrum stǫðum.¹

This passage is a very characteristic description in the kings’ sagas when it comes to the British Isles and their inhabitants. The Vikings had tormented Britain since at least 793, when the first Viking raid on the monastery of Lindisfarne was recorded. In a way the activity of the Norsemen reached its culmination in 1066: first King Haraldr harðráði of Norway tried to conquer England, but failed and was killed at the Battle of Stamford Bridge. Just few weeks after this battle the Englishmen had to face yet another enemy of ultimately Norse origin, William the Conqueror and his troops, and this time the Normans were successful at the Battle of Hastings.

When the Viking raids began the inhabitants of the British Isles could not very often tell from which part of Scandinavia the invaders came. The word ‘Viking’ is used quite seldom for example in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Instead, the invaders were called heathens.² The invaders were linked to their ‘activities’ rather than to their homelands.³ Later on the inhabitants of the British Isles tried to differentiate the Danes and the Norwegians from each other. In the Irish language conquerors were collectively called *Gaill*, and the original meaning of the word was ‘Gauls’ but the meaning of the word had changed; it had come to denote any stranger or foreigner. One theory is that the Danes were called *Dub Gaill* and the Norwegians *Finn Gaill* by the Irish writers in the ninth and tenth centuries. Scholars are not sure

¹ *Magnúss saga berfætts* ch. 9, pp. 220–1; Hollander p. 675–6: ‘Then King Magnús sailed with his fleet south to Ilay and harried and burned there. And after conquering that land he proceeded south past Saltire, harrying on both sides in Ireland and Scotland. He laid the land waste all the way south to Man, harrying there as elsewhere.’

² Smyth 1998, pp. 29, 37; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* 2000.

³ Valtonen 2008, p. 253.

what these names meant – maybe ‘dark foreigners’ and ‘fair foreigners’. However, this theory has been put into question and it is more probable that *Finn Gaill* and *Dub Gaill* were used to differentiate the rivalling Viking dynasties.⁴ In the Old English poem of the Battle of Brunanburh (937) the invaders are called *Norpmen*, because they were Norwegians that came from Dublin.⁵

The sagas distinguish different parts of the British Isles and the inhabitants living there: *Enskir*, *Írar*, *Bretar*, *Skotar*.⁶ Plundering and military expeditions to the British Isles are predominant in the kings’ sagas when it comes to the contacts with the English, the Scots and the Irish.⁷ We are told about numerous plundering expeditions to England, Scotland, Wales (*Bretaland*) and Ireland, some in detail and some just as short notions about these trips. It cannot be denied that these stories seem to reflect very well the situation at the end of the tenth and the beginning of the eleventh centuries, when the Viking activity was at its peak in the British Isles. The invaders also became settlers and for example the eastern part of England, called the Danelaw (*Danelag*) because the law of the Danes held there, was inhabited by them – it is still unclear how many Norse settlers actually came to the Danelaw.⁸ The English were forced to pay tribute, *Danegeld*, to the invaders. Between the years 991 and 1014 the Vikings amassed 150,000 pounds of silver from England.⁹ In the first half of the eleventh century England was controlled and ruled by the Danes and Danish-born regents. A more permanent phenomenon was that the Shetlands, the Orkneys, the Hebrides and the Isle of Man were under Norwegian dominion well into the thirteenth century.

Why did the Norsemen plunder the British Isles? One reason could be that all the resources, at least in Norway, were already exploited, although this does not seem to be probable. The great Viking expeditions had come to an end by the end of the eleventh century, but the kings and jarls still needed new resources, i.e. wealth. That may have been one of the reasons why the Norwegian kings tried to stabilize their power in the British Isles. Most probably the British Isles had a pull-factor effect – there were prosperous monasteries and towns to be plundered – which attracted the plunderers.

The Norsemen did not just plunder in the British Isles but they could also work as mercenaries in England, if we are to believe the sagas.¹⁰ *Heimskringla* mentions numerous opponents of King Óláfr Haraldsson who fled from Norway to England and were hired or otherwise welcomed by King Knútr.¹¹ Both *Morkinskinna* and

⁴ Hall 2007, p. 89.

⁵ Smyth 1998, pp. 28, 35; Gísli Sigurðsson 2000 [1988], p. 17.

⁶ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* uses also the word *skotzkan*. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* ch. 95, p. 212: ‘einn skotzkan er het’; ch. 97, p. 216: ‘j(arl) þann skotzkan er Margbioðr het’.

⁷ For example the raids done by King Magnús (Barefoot) and King Eysteinn Haraldsson: *Magnúss saga berfæts* ch. 8–11, pp. 219–25, ch. 23, p. 233, ch. 25, pp. 235–7; *Haraldssona saga* ch. 20, pp. 327–30. However, King Eysteinn’s expedition may be largely a fantasy even though the story may have a kernel of truth. Fjalldal 2005, pp. 67–8.

⁸ Richards 2004, p. 49.

⁹ Roesdahl 1998, p. 110.

¹⁰ Mercenaries worked everywhere all the way to Rus’ and Byzantium.

¹¹ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 139, pp. 249–55; ch. 144, p. 267–9; ch. 146, pp. 271–3; ch. 183, pp. 332–5; ch. 184,

Fagrskinna tell about so-called *þingamenn*, who were in the service of the English king when King Haraldr harðráði made his military campaign to England in 1066.¹² This was a group of elite soldiers that came from different countries but they spoke the *ðönsk tunga*, which implies that at least most of them were of Scandinavian origin.¹³ Also Óláfr Haraldsson is supposed to have been in the service of the English king before he became the king of Norway. Accounts of his deeds in England are, however, unreliable in the sagas.¹⁴

One question has especially occupied scholars: how did the Norsemen communicate with the local people in the British Isles? This is a vital question because it is entangled with the question of what kind of contacts the peoples of the British Isles and the Norsemen had. The English (Anglo-Saxons) spoke a language that belonged to the same linguistic family as the Old Norse, but there were also Celtic people that did not have anything in common with the Norsemen. At least in the Celtic-speaking areas where the Norsemen settled it seems that Old Norse gave loan words and affected the place names.¹⁵

However, the communication between the Norsemen and the English has raised more questions than given answers. According to Magnús Fjalldal the Icelandic texts provide at least five different explanations as to how the English and the Norsemen communicated:

1. They communicated as if they literally spoke the same language,
2. Old English and Old Norse were similar enough for speakers to be able to communicate in their own language and be understood by those speaking the other,¹⁶
3. A. H. Smith's hypothesis that there was an Anglo-Scandinavian dialect in Anglo-Saxon England, which was used by the Norse and the English as a *lingua franca*,
4. There is the view expressed by Olaf von Feilitzen that the English and the Norse could have communicated only 'by means of ribald gestures and uncouth noises',
5. A segment of the English population and/or the Norse were bilingual.¹⁷

Matthew Townend has suggested that there was 'a situation of adequate mutual intelligibility between speakers of Norse and English, rather than one involving widespread bilingualism or use of interpreters'.¹⁸ However, Magnús Fjalldal rejects this hypothesis and he points out that 'It is easy to find passages that would appear to suggest that Old English and Old Norse were mutually intelligible and

pp. 335–6; ch. 194, pp. 345–6.

¹² This is just a date given by historians. In reality it is of course impossible to give an exact date for when the Viking Age ended. For example the Viking raids continued, even if on a small scale, right up to the turn of the twelfth century.

¹³ *Morkinskinna* FJ 265; *Fagrskinna* ch. 60, p. 276.

¹⁴ Fjalldal 2005, pp. 41–2.

¹⁵ Roesdahl 1998, p. 213.

¹⁶ Michael Barnes supports this theory: 'The far-reaching structural and lexical similarities between Scandinavian on the one hand and Old Saxon, Old English and, as far as can be determined, Old Frisian on the other, seems likely to have made rudimentary communication possible without the need to resort to language learning, but it is hard to see how this can have arisen much above the slow articulation of simple phrases accompanied by gesticulation'. Barnes 2003, p. 101.

¹⁷ Fjalldal 2005, p. 12.

¹⁸ Townend 2002, p. 210.

equally easy to find examples to suggest that they were not'.¹⁹ We know for sure that the Norsemen and the English had to communicate somehow, but so far it seems to remain as an unsolved mystery how it happened. However, it may be that we exaggerate the difficulties of communication, as speaking of different languages has not been a major obstacle for people.²⁰ It is always possible that people speaking different languages can communicate if they learn some key words and use gestures.

One episode in the kings' sagas is interesting when it comes to the language and communication question. After the Battle of Stamford Bridge one of King Haraldr harðráði's men, Styrkár, managed to flee. On his flight he met a local peasant and he wanted to buy the peasant's leather jacket. The peasant would not sell it because he could hear from Styrkár's speech that he was Norwegian and the peasant said he would kill Styrkár if only he had a weapon. Styrkár killed the peasant and continued his flight.²¹ So, possibly the Norwegians spoke Old English with their own accent, but of course we cannot take this one incident as a proof that the Scandinavians in England spoke English in general.

The Viking activity in the British Isles was not just plundering and warfare; the Norsemen were engaged in trading. They were used to sell different merchandise, they had created a network of trade and they had good ships. It seems that the Norsemen introduced international trade in Ireland. The Irish had plenty of silver but they were not used to buying anything with it. Unfortunately, we have only scattered information on trade between the Norsemen and the Irish.²² According to Peter Sawyer it is possible that there were direct trading contacts between England and Norway and between England and Denmark even though the written sources from the thirteenth century are very brief about them. The Danes and the Norwegians had at least one merchandise that was in great demand: furs.²³ The kings' sagas are, unfortunately, also very brief about the trade relations between the Norsemen and the British Isles. We have short notions relating that some Norsemen made trading voyages to England.²⁴ They do not reveal what was traded and whether the trading relations were occasional or permanent.

Both Snorri in his *Heimskringla* and the author of *Fagrskinna* tell the story of Jarl Valþjófr (Earl Waltheof of Huntingdon), who would have fought against King Haraldr harðráði in England. This story is worth taking as an example because it shows how the sagas could give false information. To start with, they claim that Valþjófr was the son of Earl Godwine, but in fact he was son of Earl Siward of Northumbria.²⁵ They also tell how Valþjófr was beheaded by Willam

¹⁹ Fjalldal 2005, p. 123.

²⁰ Korpela 1995, p. 65 and references.

²¹ *Morkinskinna* FJ 280: 'Eigi þerna þv mont vera Norþmaþr oc keni ec þess a mali þino'; Andersson and Gade p. 273: 'you must be a Norwegian – I can tell by your speech'; *Fagrskinna* ch. 71, pp. 289–90; *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* ch. 94, p. 192.

²² Roesdahl 1998, pp. 221, 225.

²³ Sawyer, P. 1986, p. 199.

²⁴ *Morkinskinna* FJ 5, 111, 361; *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 74, p. 320; *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 64, p. 83.

²⁵ *Fagrskinna* ch. 63, p. 279; *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* ch. 75, p. 168.

the Conqueror, but the sagas are clearly not aware of the real reasons for this act. According to *Heimskringla* William wanted to make peace with Valþjófr but when he surrendered he was beheaded.²⁶

Fagrskinna tells a more detailed story in which William had forgiven Valþjófr and given him Northumbria as an earldom. Nonetheless, William had sent men to kill Valþjófr. When Valþjófr realized he was going to be killed he 'lay on the ground in the form of a cross and stretched both arms out, and then he was beheaded, and from his blood many people received cures, and Jarl Valþjófr is a true saint'.²⁷ This story has the kernel of truth: Valþjófr, or Waltheof, was beheaded on King William's orders, but only ten years after the Battle of Hastings. First Valþjófr was forgiven for aiding King Sveinn of Denmark and his invading troops in 1070. Five years later he was again plotting against King William to overthrow him. This time he was convicted and was beheaded at Winchester in the spring of 1076.²⁸ All in all, the point is that the sagas want to give a story of a pious jarl Valþjófr, whereas William the Conqueror is represented as a malicious tyrant. From the point of view of this study the story does not add much information on the inhabitants of England, except that they were Christians.

In spite of the plundering expeditions the Norsemen also allied with the inhabitants of the British Isles, and these alliances were, of course, often confirmed with marriages. It is always dangerous to draw conclusions from what a source does not tell, but one detail needs to be taken into consideration even if none of the kings' sagas is explicit about it: marriages between Scandinavian men and women in the British Isles. Thus, Scandinavian raiders and settlers certainly married women when they went abroad. For example the jarls of the Orkney Isles married Scottish women who were daughters of kings or earls.²⁹ King Magnús Barefoot married off his son to Bjaðmynja, who was the daughter of King Mýrjartak of the Irish.³⁰ King Óláfr Tryggvason is said to have married an Englishwoman, Gyða, but as Lars Lönnroth has pointed out this must be fiction, and the story did not even belong to the earliest tradition of King Óláfr Tryggvason.³¹

Now that present-day Icelanders' gene pool has been investigated, it has been shown that there is a substantial degree of Celtic origin: it has been estimated that about 14–40% of the first settlers in Iceland were of Celtic origin. They were most probably slaves and mostly women. Moreover, there may have been settlers from the British Isles, whose origins were in Scandinavia, but who already had mixed genes, that is, they were descendants of Norse settlers and local women.³²

²⁶ *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* ch. 97, p. 196.

²⁷ *Fagrskinna* ch. 76, p. 294; Finlay 2004, p. 235.

²⁸ Fjalldal 2005, p. 66.

²⁹ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 96, p. 160.

³⁰ *Ágrip* ch. 50, p. 47; *Magnúss saga berfætts* ch. 11, pp. 224–5. Both *Morkinskinna* and *Fagrskinna* give a slightly different description: according to them Bjaðmynja's father was King Melkólmr of the Scots. *Morkinskinna* FJ 323; *Fagrskinna* ch. 81, p. 309.

³¹ Lönnroth 1963, p. 90.

³² Gísli Sigurðsson 2000 [1988], p. 118; About marriages between Norse men and Irish women, see Jesch 1991, p. 107.

These marriage alliances would indicate that the Norsemen were in all probability assimilating to the local society, which is by no means a surprise.

Some of the Norwegian settlers (with their Celtic slaves³³) came to Iceland from the British Isles, for example from Dublin, where they had lost their foothold in 902. Around 2% of the names mentioned in *Landnámabók* can be described as Celtic. These settlers seem to have settled in south, south-western and western parts of Iceland, which corresponds to the distribution of place-names containing Celtic elements. Here it is tempting to ponder whether the Celtic-speaking part of the population in Iceland may have affected the laws. As mentioned already the law code *Grágás* distinguishes the speakers of *dǫnsk tunga* from non-speakers. Was this practice in use already in the tenth century, and if it was, were the speakers of Celtic languages separated from the Norse-speaking population? For example if an Icelandic farmer had children with a Celtic woman and the children spoke both Celtic and Old Norse, were they considered speakers of *dǫnsk tunga*? This is just to show that there must have been some reason why the language was taken as a feature that segregated people from each other in *Grágás*. Be that as it may, the Celtic impact in Iceland was permanent. Some names of Celtic origin such as Njáll (Niáll) or Kormákr (Cormac) are still recognisable in Icelandic. The slaves were often given new Norse names by their masters and the masters probably disapproved the use of the Celtic language.³⁴

We can, however, leave aside pondering whether or not marriages mentioned in the sagas actually took place, and instead we can examine what these marriage alliances reveal about the image of the English, Irish or Scottish peoples in the sagas. In this case, the question of marriage alliances as a guarantee of peace is closely intertwined with the plundering and military expeditions of the Norsemen. If the Norsemen made peace and alliances with the inhabitants of the British Isles it shows that their intentions were not just to make random raids there; in fact, making alliances is a sign that they wanted a permanent foothold. We could speculate further whether the permanent foothold meant exploiting the area and its inhabitants, or whether some of the Norsemen just wanted to settle there. The marriage alliances between the Norsemen and the English, Scottish or Irish women in the sagas reflect marriages that took place among the upper class, but it is plausible that even the 'ordinary' Norsemen married for example Irish women even though we do not have very much evidence for it.³⁵ Gísli Sigurðsson states that from the middle of the ninth century onwards Norsemen married Irish women. As a result we hear of *Gall-Ghaedhil* ('foreign Irish'), who were most probably of mixed parentage and most likely bilingual, at least to some extent.³⁶

We have some examples of this offspring of the Norwegian kings and their women in the British Isles in the kings' sagas. In *Óláfs saga ins helga* there appeared

³³ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* actually mentions that the first settlers of Iceland brought with them Irish slaves ('*þrælarnir irskv'*). *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* ch. 116, p. 262.

³⁴ Gísli Sigurðsson 2000 [1988], pp. 19–22, 27, 118.

³⁵ Jesch 1991, p. 107.

³⁶ Gísli Sigurðsson 2000 [1988], p. 19–20.

a certain Tryggvi Ólafsson, who insisted that he was the son of King Óláfr Tryggvason and his English wife Gyða.³⁷ More famous is the son of Magnús Barefoot, Haraldr gilli.

Haralldi var stirt malit *no[rrøna]* kylfþi hann mioc til orþanna oc hofþo margir menn þat] at spotti. En Sigurþr konvngr let þat ecki víþ veþri comaz þa er hann var við.³⁸

Haraldr gilli var maðr hár ok grannvaxinn, hálslangr, heldr langleitr, svarteygr, dökkhárr, skjótligr ok fráligr, hafði mjök búnað írskan, stutt klæði ok létt klæddr. Stirt var honum norroent mál, kylfði mjök til orðanna, ok hofðu margir menn þat mjök at spotti.³⁹

Haraldr gilli had come to Norway with his mother and a Norwegian called Hallkell húkr. Hallkell had met them in the Hebrides and he brought them to Norway, because Haraldr said that he was son of King Magnús.⁴⁰ The description of Haraldr reveals that he was considered as a foreigner among Norwegians. After all, he did not even speak their language properly. He was so special that Snorri considered it worth describing his appearance.⁴¹ Also the appearances of other kings and magnates are described by Snorri, but what makes Haraldr's description special is that Snorri mentions that he wore an Irish costume. Haraldr differed from Norwegians by wearing a different costume and by not speaking their language properly. Later on in the same passage Haraldr humiliates his nephew Magnús, son of King Sigurðr. Haraldr boasted that there are men in Ireland that can run faster than a horse. Magnús wanted to bet that this was not the case. However, Haraldr was a swift runner and he beat Magnús's horse. After this Sigurðr scolded his son for betting without knowing that 'útanlandsmenn temja sik við aðrar íþróttir en kýla drykk eða gera sik æran ok óføeran ok vita þá ekki til manns'.⁴² Sigurðr is referring to Haraldr being a foreigner. What is interesting is that despite Haraldr's 'foreign' background, or manners and appearance, he was able to become king of Norway. This shows that all that mattered was that he was (or claimed to be) of royal descent from his father's side.

The Icelandic lawcode *Grágás* mentions in several cases how those who came from the British Isles had to be taken into consideration,⁴³ which seems to indicate

³⁷ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 248, p. 411.

³⁸ *Morkinskinna* FJ 396: 'Haralldi var stirt malit no spotti. En S. konvngr let þat ecki víþ veþri comaz þa er hann var víþ'; Andersson and Gade 2000, p. 356: 'Haraldr was not fluent in *Norse and he stumbled over many words, so that many people ridiculed him*. But King Sigurðr would allow no hint of that when he was present'.

³⁹ *Magnússona saga* ch. 27, p. 267; Hollander p. 708: 'Harald Gilli was a man of tall and slender stature. He had a long neck and rather long face, black eyes, and dark hair. He was alert and swift [in his motions] and most often wore the Irish costume with short and light clothes. The Norwegian speech was hard for him to master, he often hesitated for words, and many ridiculed him for that'.

⁴⁰ *Morkinskinna* FJ 391; *Fagrskinna* ch. 93, p. 322; *Magnússona saga* ch. 26, p. 265.

⁴¹ Roslund 2001, p. 57.

⁴² *Magnússona saga* ch. 27, p. 268; Hollander p. 709: 'Did you not know before that people in other parts train themselves in other sports than filling their bellies with drink and rendering themselves senseless and unfit, so that they don't know what they do?'

⁴³ *Grágás* 1992, pp. 53, 65, 270.

the existence of close connections between the settlers in Britain and in Iceland. Because the Norse settlers were gradually assimilated to the local community the group boundary between the indigenous inhabitants of Britain and the Norse settlers changed: the Danelaw area particularly could perhaps be called a diffuse zone where the group boundary was blurred. Thus, the concept of *Norðrlond* extended to the British Isles.⁴⁴ There were probably many reasons for this, but the the most important reason must have been the strong Scandinavian presence, and possibly also intermarriage between the settlers and the locals.

The religious contacts between the Scandinavians and the English cannot be left aside when their relations are examined. The Viking Age was the time of expansion for Christianity in Scandinavia. Priests and monks came to Scandinavia to preach the new faith. The Anglo-Saxon and German missionaries competed for influence in this area, and the influence of the English missionaries extended all the way to *Svíþjóð*. For example the oldest coins in Sweden were minted under King Óláfr skautkonungr, and he had invited an English mint master to Sigtuna to do the work.⁴⁵ Two English priests are mentioned in *Heimskringla*: one was a bishop in Stavanger and friend of King Magnús blindi. Haraldr gilli accused the bishop of acquiring valuables from Magnús. The bishop denied all the accusations and wanted to prove his innocence. Haraldr gilli sentenced him to pay a fine of 15 gold marks, but the bishop was more willing to risk his life than make the church poor. As a result, Haraldr had him hanged.⁴⁶ Would Haraldr have hanged the bishop had he been Norwegian? At least he would have given it a second thought because the bishop's death might have been avenged by his family. It was easier to kill a foreign bishop because it was improbable that anyone would avenge him. If the bishop had belonged to a local, upper-class family, his death would have had consequences because the family honour would have been insulted.

The other English priest mentioned in *Heimskringla* had almost as miserable a fate as the bishop mentioned above. Two brothers lived in Uppland and they had a beautiful sister. The sister was fond of the English priest Richard (Ríkarðr), who was staying at her brothers' household. Malicious rumours began to spread and the brothers, who were very angry, summoned the priest. They took him to another *herað* and manhandled and tortured him. They cut out his tongue. The half-dead priest prayed to St Óláfr, who healed him and the priest was able to speak again.⁴⁷ Again, in this episode the meaning of the story is to emphasize the miracle done by St Óláfr, not the origin of the priest. But as has been pointed out in the above-mentioned episode, here too the priest was an Englishman and nobody would have taken vengeance on his behalf.

⁴⁴ Sverrir Jakobsson 2005, pp. 196, 198.

⁴⁵ The coins that are from the 990s are decorated with crosses and they have clear Christian influence in the texts such as *Situne Dei* (God's Sigtuna) and *in nomine Dei*. Moreover, the Viking Age runic ornaments in Middle Sweden show clear connections to the British Isles, and according to the legends the two early missionary bishops in the area of Lake Mälaren, Eskil in Södermanland and David in Västmanland, had English background or connection. Gräslund 1996, p. 41.

⁴⁶ *Magnúss saga blinda ok Haralds gilla* ch. 8, pp. 287–8.

⁴⁷ *Haraldssona saga* ch. 25, pp. 334–7.

We know that the English did missionary work especially in Norway and that they influenced the emerging Norwegian and Danish church organizations.⁴⁸ English priests were appointed to Church offices, English saints were popular and the English language affected the Old Norse when it came to terminology concerning Christianity and the Church. The first stone buildings in Scandinavia were influenced by English models and were built by aristocrats who had stayed in England.⁴⁹ The English missionary influence also reached Sweden. However, we cannot be sure what the reality was because the ecclesiastical sources we have were written by German monks and they emphasized their own input in the matter.⁵⁰

The kings' sagas very occasionally give information on the British Isles and their inhabitants. Magnús Fjalldal has used other Icelandic sources than just kings' sagas to reconstruct what was known about the Anglo-Saxons by Icelanders. His conclusion was that the information on the geography of the British Isles was inaccurate, as was the general knowledge about the West Saxon royal house. The sagas emphasize that England was wealthy and populous, which it must have been compared with the Scandinavian countries. It was a place for buying all kinds of quality merchandise not readily available in Scandinavia.⁵¹ As Magnús Fjalldal has pointed out in his study,

England does indeed function as a background for any author who wanted to give his saga hero a claim to being famous abroad . . . In the dreamy and frequently unrealistic descriptions of Anglo-Saxon England, one often senses a desire on the part of the Icelandic author, either conscious or unconscious, to create another, perfect Norway in England.⁵²

One paragraph in the Icelandic law code *Grágás* is especially interesting in what it says about the British Isles: namely, it deals with who can be a witness for a murder of an Icelander which has taken place in the British Isles. The outcome is that the British Isles were seen as 'special case' among other countries of *Norðrǫnd*.⁵³ But as Sverrir Jakobsson has pointed out the concept of *Norðrǫnd* was sometimes extended to England.⁵⁴ This must be due to the fact that there were Norse settlers in Britain and there were lively contacts between the Norsemen and the inhabitants of the British Isles. To conclude, it seems that the inhabitants of the British Isles were considered to be 'somewhat different from us' in the scale of analogue difference.

⁴⁸ Staecker 1999, p. 359. According to *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* ch. 107, p. 249 King Óláfr Tryggvason's hirð-bishop was from England.

⁴⁹ Roesdahl 1998, 260.

⁵⁰ For example the Swedish king Óláfr skautkonungr was baptized according to the tradition at Husaby by the English bishop Sigfrid around 1005, but this is very uncertain. It may be a later construction, because there has not been in Sweden any bishop Sigfrid from York. Jörn Staecker suggests that the story was made up by Archbishop Stephen, who was a Cistercian monk. Staecker 2006, pp. 318–19.

⁵¹ Fjalldal 2005, pp. 123–4.

⁵² Fjalldal 2005, p. 122.

⁵³ Grágás 1992, p. 270.

⁵⁴ Sverrir Jakobsson 2005, p. 198.

3.2 GARÐARÍKI

The Old Norse sources call the realm of Rus' (*Русь*) in the east Garðaríki. Rus' consisted of several centres which were loosely connected to each other. The clan of Rurikids held power in the realm with its centre in Kiev. Other princes were more or less independent of the prince in Kiev.⁵⁵ As Jonathan Shephard puts it, 'The land of Rus' is, even in the twelfth century, best understood as an archipelago of largely self-regulating communities, each with its own esprit de corps, mutual guarantees and patron saints'.⁵⁶ Scandinavians, who were called Varangians in the east and who settled in Garðaríki, seem to have had a notable position in society in the ninth and tenth centuries. Even if the original myth of the emergence of Rus' by the Varangian Rurik and his successors is much debated, scholars agree that the Scandinavians really had some kind of role in Rus': they probably belonged to the upper class. Jukka Korpela has pointed out that the ethnic origin played no part in the state formation process of the Rus', because there were many ethnicities in the emerging realm and that the awareness of 'us' (*Wir-Bewußtsein*) was born out of dynastic, economic and religious facts.⁵⁷

The present-day Northern Russia where some Svear had settled is called *Svíþjóð inn mikla* ('the Great Svíþjóð') in *Heimskringla* whereas Svealand itself was called *Svíþjóð inn litli* ('the Small Svíþjóð').⁵⁸ The naming *Svíþjóð inn mikla eða kalda* has raised questions. According to Jacques Bačič geographers that were from the temperate zone considered Scythia (which is *Svíþjóð inn mikla* in the Old Norse texts) as a cold place. Bačič rejects the view of Andreas Heusler, who proposed already in 1908 that some Norse writers had just replaced Scythia with *Svíþjóð*, and had thus ended up with Great Sweden and Cold Sweden.⁵⁹

According to Omeljan Pritsak Snorri's description of *Svíþjóð inn mikla* can be identified with an area which bounds the Volga Uplands and the Central Russian Uplands.⁶⁰ Pritsak's theory is: because the Cold Sweden is mentioned in *Þórsdrápa*, it proves that the name was used already in the Viking Age, which means that he is also rejecting Heusler's theory.⁶¹ I suggest that there may be no contradiction between these two theories. In the Viking Age *Svíþjóð inn mikla* was probably used to refer to the 'vast area in the east of the Baltic Sea'. The same area was known as Scythia in the Latin classics. It is possible, even though impossible to prove watertightly, that for example Snorri, who was a well-educated man of his time, replaced Scythia with *Svíþjóð inn mikla*, which was a place-name that the audience would recognize. This is also a fact that Bačič does not seem to take into account.

⁵⁵ Korpela 1995, p. 40.

⁵⁶ Shepard 2007, p. 404.

⁵⁷ Korpela 1995, pp. 97 and 122.

⁵⁸ *Ynglinga saga* ch. 1, p. 9; ch. 5, p. 14; Sawyer and Sawyer 1997, p. 53.

⁵⁹ Bačič 1995, p. 108; Heusler 1908.

⁶⁰ Pritsak 1981, p. 245.

⁶¹ Pritsak 1981, p. 267–8.

Already skaldic poetry calls the far-off eastern land ‘austr í Gørðum’, which is often a target for plundering expeditions. Also such names as *Austrríki*, *Austrlond* and *Austrvegr* (‘the way to the east’) are used to denote the realm of the Rus’, although they were geographically inaccurate. *Austrsvegr* means usually just the eastern side of the Baltic Sea and lands beyond it, which indicates that *Austrvegr* is not just the way to the east but also generally the area in the east.⁶² It is a typical *topos* in the sagas that semi-historical and mythical characters experience adventures on their journeys in the *Austrvegr*.⁶³ Tatjana Jackson has studied the toponyms that are connected with the east in Old Norse sources. According to her, *austr*-toponyms reflect the fact that Scandinavians had contacts in the east and with the Rus’ already in the ninth century. Little by little the toponym Garðaríki replaced the other toponyms mentioned above and it came to denote ‘the Old Rus’.⁶⁴ At some point also this toponym was replaced by ‘Ruzcia’ or ‘Ruzaland’. At least in *Hauksbók*, which was written at the beginning of the fourteenth century, the name ‘Ruzcia’ is mentioned. In *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur* that were composed in the fifteenth century the word ‘Rússa’ is used for the inhabitants of Garðaríki/Ruzcia/Ruzaland.⁶⁵

Garðaríki as well as the other parts of *Austrvegr* were tempting places for trading. In the kings’ sagas we have just a few episodes that mention merchants who were active in the east. One such character was Guðleikr gerzki. It is said of him that ‘Hann fór austr í Garðaríki optliga, ok var hann fyrir þá sök kallaðr Guðleikr gerzki’.⁶⁶ Also a certain Sveinn is called *gerzki* in *Morkinskinna*, but the reason for his nickname is not revealed.⁶⁷ Maybe he had also made some trading voyages to Garðaríki. Guðleikr’s mission was to buy luxury items for King Óláfr Haraldsson. However, on their way back from Garðaríki he and his crew were robbed and killed near *Eyland* (Öland).⁶⁸ Eastern trade could also suffer from hostilities between the regents: King Sveinn Alfífúson of Norway and King Jarisleifr of Garðaríki were hostile to each other because according to King Jarisleifr the Norwegians had betrayed Saint Óláfr when they killed him. These hostilities caused a cessation in trade between the countries for a while according to *Morkinskinna*.⁶⁹

Several Scandinavian jarls and kings made plundering expeditions in *Austrvegr*. Sometimes it is mentioned that the plundering was done in Garðaríki. About Jarl Eiríkr’s expedition *Heimskringla* says:

⁶² It is notable that *austrvegr* is used in singular opposed to *vestrvegar* in the plural, which shows that there were many routes to the west. *Norðvegr* was the present-day Norway, ‘the way north’, but such a term as *suðrvegr* does not exist in the sources. Palm 2004, p. 43.

⁶³ Noonan 1998, p. 326. For more on the *austr*-toponyms, see Jackson 2001, pp. 40–4.

⁶⁴ Jackson 2001, pp. 40–6. About the etymology of the word ‘Garðaríki’, see Jackson 2001, p. 59.

⁶⁵ Sverrir Jakobsson 2005, pp. 236–7. Bačić rejects the view that the word Rus’ originated from Roslagen: instead he suggests that the name Russi has its roots in the colour red. Bačić 1995, p. 33.

⁶⁶ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 66, pp. 83–4; Hollander p. 297: ‘Frequently he travelled east to Garthariki, for which reason he was called Guthleikr Gerzki’.

⁶⁷ *Morkinskinna* FJ 104.

⁶⁸ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 66, p. 84.

⁶⁹ *Morkinskinna* FJ 5. Saint Óláfr was Jarisleifr’s brother-in-law.

Eiríkr jarl sigldi um haustit aptr til Svíþjóðar ok var þar vetr annan. En at vári bjó jarl her sinn ok sigldi síðan í Austrveg. En þá hann kom í ríki Valdamars konungs, tók hann at herja ok drepa mannfólkit ok brenna allt þar, sem hann fór, ok eyddi landit. Hann kom til Aldeigjuborgar ok settisk þar um, þar til hann vann staðinn, drap þar mart fólk, en braut ok brenndi borgina alla, ok síðan fór víða herskildi um Garðaríki.⁷⁰

Eiríkr's brother Sveinn also made a plundering expedition to Garðaríki one summer.⁷¹ In these episodes as well in others it seems that the authors were not aware of where in the Rus' realm these events took place, even though the most important towns were known at least by name.⁷² The descriptions are brief and undefined. However, *Morkinskinna* is unusually wordy when describing the court of King Jarizleifr: he 'had a splendid hall constructed in magnificent style, ornamented with gold and precious stones. He manned it with excellent fellows, tried and true to a high degree'.⁷³ However, the description does not contain unique details. Any king or jarl could have a splendid hall and 'excellent fellows' in his service so the description should be seen as part of the tradition of how to describe a regent and his surroundings.

In addition to short mentions of Garðaríki in connection with trade or plundering there are some episodes that occur in almost all the kings' sagas. The first is King Óláfr Tryggvason's early years in the court of King Valdimar (Vladimir)⁷⁴ of Garðaríki, where he was considered to be an outsider.⁷⁵ The second episode concerns King Jarizleifr's (Jaroslav)⁷⁶ marriage with Ingigerðr, daughter of King Óláfr of the Svear.⁷⁷ The third is when King Óláfr Haraldsson seeks refuge at Jarizleifr's

⁷⁰ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 90; Hollander p. 223: 'In the following autumn, Earl Eirík returned to Sweden and remained there another winter. But in spring the earl readied his force and sailed into the Baltic. And when he came to the realm of King Valdamar he began to harry and to kill people, and to burn down everything where he went, thus laying the land waste. He reached Aldeigjuborg and beleaguered it until he conquered that town, killing many there, and breaking down and burning the entire town. Thereupon he went about Gartharíki, raiding far and wide.'

⁷¹ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 55, p. 71.

⁷² Hermann Pálsson and Edwards 1989, p. 33.

⁷³ *Morkinskinna* FJ 1: 'dyrliga holl með mikilli fegrð. pryða með gulli oc gimsteinom. scipaþi hana síðan með goðom drengiom oc reyndom með agetom lvtom'; Andersson and Gade 2000 ch. 1, p. 89.

⁷⁴ Prince of Novgorod 978–1015.

⁷⁵ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 6–8, pp. 230–2, ch. 21, pp. 251–2. Also *Ágrip* ch. 17, pp. 19–20; *Fagrskinna* ch. 23, pp. 141–6; *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* ch. 58, p. 109: 'En þa uarð sem opt kan henda þar er vtlendir menn hefiaz miok til Ríkis e(ðr) sva til mikillar frægdar at þeir uerði vm fram inn lendzka menn. at margir fundaðu þat. huersu Olafr var kær konungi ok eigi siðr drotningu'. Óláfr Tryggvason was thus considered as an outsider, foreigner. Snorri Sturluson based his information on Óláfr Tryggvason's stay in Garðaríki on his predecessor's Oddr Snorrason's saga of Óláfr Tryggvason. Snorri omitted the passages concerning Valdimar's conversion to Christianity and Óláfr's travel to Greece where he learned of Christianity. According to Oddr it was Óláfr Tryggvason who made Valdimar to convert to Christianity.

⁷⁶ Reigned 1019–54.

⁷⁷ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 93, pp. 147–8; *Fagrskinna* gives a slightly different version of the story: according to it Jarizleifr gave Aldeigjuborg to Jarl Eilífr, son of Jarl Rognvaldr, after his father had died so that he would defend it against the heathens (*heiðnum monnum*). *Fagrskinna* mentions nothing about Aldeigjuborg being given to Ingigerðr by her husband. *Fagrskinna* ch. 30, pp. 179–80, and ch. 51, p. 227. See also Melnikova 2007, pp. 74–5.

and Ingigerðr's court and Óláfr's son spends part of his childhood in the court. When King Óláfr Haraldsson stayed there he showed, according to *Heimskringla*, for the first time his abilities as a healer, which is a clear sign of his holiness.⁷⁸ The fourth is when Óláfr Haraldsson's brother Haraldr is staying at the service of King Jarisleifr and later marries his daughter Ellisif.⁷⁹

The marriages between King Jarisleifr and Ingigerðr and King Haraldr Sigurðsson and Ellisif are the most famous examples of marriage alliances between the Scandinavian royal houses and the Rurikids.⁸⁰ The sagas also mention some other examples. King Sigurðr Jorsalafari married Málmfríðr, daughter of Haraldr Valdemarsson of Novgorod. Málmfríðr's mother was Krístin, daughter of King Ingi of the Svear, which further shows the close connections between the Scandinavian royal houses and the Rurikids.⁸¹

One episode in *Heimskringla* reveals that not all the marriage negotiations were successful. Queen Sigríðr, who had been married to King Eiríkr sigrsæll, was widowed. She got suitors from Norway (King Haraldr grenski) and Garðaríki (King Vissavaldr). King Haraldr and Sigríðr did not get along because Sigríðr was unwilling to convert to Christianity. When King Vissavaldr arrived to propose to Sigríðr, she organized a party for the king and his men. The guests were drinking heavily and finally they fell asleep inside the house. Then Queen Sigríðr ordered the house to be set on fire and so King Vissavaldr and his men were burnt to death. Those who tried to get out of the burning house were killed. Queen Sigríðr said that 'she would make these small kings tired of coming to court her'.⁸² According to Anne Heinrichs, this episode is 'another trace of folkloristic origin, Sigríðr reflecting the type of the maiden queen reluctant to marry'.⁸³ However, Vissavaldr may well have been a historical person, although it is very uncertain: a son of Prince Vladimir was called Vsevolod and he lived around the same time as Queen Sigríðr.⁸⁴ We have thus two possibilities: either Vissavaldr/Vsevolod travelled all the way to Östergötland to propose to Queen Sigríðr, or Anne Heinrichs is right about the 'folkloristic origin' of the story and that Vissavaldr just happens to be a name that was picked up for the story.

It is worth examining what the kings' sagas tell about the geography of Garðaríki.

⁷⁸ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 189, pp. 341–2 and ch. 251, p. 415; *Ágrip* ch. 33, p. 32; *Fagrskinna* ch. 44, p. 207.

⁷⁹ *Ágrip* neither mentions Haraldr's stay at Jarisleifr's court nor marriage with Ellisif. *Morkinskinna* FJ 87; *Fagrskinna* ch. 51, 227–39; *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* ch. 2, pp. 69–71; ch. 16, pp. 89–90; ch. 17, pp. 90–1.

⁸⁰ Also the Danish royal house had connections with the Novgorodian Princes. One of the Danish princes, Valdemar Knutsson (d. 1182) was Russian from his mother's side and he was raised in Russia. Hermann Pálsson and Edwards 1989, p. 34; de Baumgarten 1939, pp. 51, 79.

⁸¹ *Morkinskinna* FJ 357; *Magnússona saga* ch. 20, p. 258.

⁸² *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 43, pp. 287–9. 'svá skyldi hon leiða smákonungum at fara af öðrum lǫndum til þess at biðja hennar'; Hollander, p. 186: 'in this way she was going to break kinglets of the habit of visiting her to ask her in marriage'. See also *Legendary Óláfs saga ins helga*, p. 36, which Snorri has used as a source.

⁸³ Heinrichs 1986, p. 129.

⁸⁴ Melnikova 2007, p. 74; Larsson, M. 2005, p. 163; Korpela 1995, p. 226 and references.

Snorri mentions two places in Garðaríki: Hólmgarðr and Aldeigjuborg.⁸⁵ *Ágrip* and *Fagrskinna* mention just Hólmgarðr.⁸⁶ According to Snorri it was the place where the kings of Garðaríki lived, but for some reason he does not mention Kænugarðr (Kiev), which was another important city. In fact, Hólmgarðr is the most common place name in Garðaríki that is mentioned in the runestones and in written sources. Aldeigjuborg and Kænugarðr are both mentioned in the runestones, but not that often in the Old Norse written sources.⁸⁷ The reason for this may be that Kænugarðr was geographically more distant than Hólmgarðr.⁸⁸ Aldeigjuborg, called Staraja Ladoga nowadays, was also a lively centre for trade and known by the Scandinavians.⁸⁹ It emerged as an emporium around the mid-eighth century and it was inhabited by Finno-Ugrian, Scandinavian and Slavic inhabitants. Aldeigjuborg was an essential part of the eastern goods exchange – and plundering – route, *Austrvegr*, and the Scandinavians travelled there to buy luxury items and to sell furs. All in all, it seems that Hólmgarðr and Aldeigjuborg were more familiar names to Snorri and to authors of the other kings' sagas than Kænugarðr, and this may reflect the Scandinavian knowledge about Garðaríki.⁹⁰

Garðaríki was a special case among the 'neighbouring' countries of the Scandinavian peoples, as Sverrir Jakobsson has pointed out. Its kings and princes were considered as equals with the Scandinavian chieftains and kings, and the dealings between these, too, were often friendly. What is remarkable is that despite Garðaríki's relatively distant position it was not considered as alien, but as a Christian realm that was not part of the strange countries of the east.⁹¹ This must be due to the fact that the Scandinavians had had lively trade with the Rus' people already in the Viking Age. Moreover, Scandinavians, especially the Svear, seem to have settled down in the realm as merchants and mercenaries, maybe even as rulers as the story of Rurik implies. In fact, our thoughts of juxtaposition of east and west have been projected onto the past, when we think that there 'must' have been differences between east and west. For example in the twelfth century the people of Rus' were not considered as enemies by the Roman Catholic Church although they did not acknowledge the pope as the head of the Church and their Orthodox tradition was developing independently from the Roman Catholic tradition. There were Roman Catholic monks working in Rus', and there were Roman Catholic Churches as well.⁹²

As an interesting detail, the Icelandic law code *Grágás* and *Íslendingabók*

⁸⁵ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 7, pp. 230–1, and ch. 8, p. 231; *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 90, p. 338; *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 93, p. 147–8; ch. 251, p. 415; *Magnúss saga góða* ch. 1, p. 3; *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* ch. 17, p. 91.

⁸⁶ The Scandinavians called Novgorod Hólmgarðr. For example *Ágrip* ch. 17, p. 20; *Fagrskinna* ch. 30, p. 180.

⁸⁷ Roesdahl 1998, p. 292.

⁸⁸ Jackson 2001, pp. 83–104.

⁸⁹ Franklin and Shepard 1996, p. 15.

⁹⁰ Generally about the place names of Rus' in the Old Norse sources, see Jackson 2003, pp. 29–56.

⁹¹ Sverrir Jakobsson 2005, p. 239.

⁹² Korpela 1994, p. 418.

mention (*h*)*ermskir* and *girskir* priests or bishops: people were allowed to listen to their ceremonies but they were not allowed to receive spiritual aid from them. In *Hungrvaka* it is said that foreign bishops (*biskupar af öðrum löndum*) came to Iceland and that Archbishop Adalbertus condemned them and nobody was to use their services.⁹³ The passage in *Grágás* has been connected to three foreign bishops who were active in Iceland between 1056 and 1072. The adjective (*h*)*ermskir* has been connected with heretics from the east, namely Armenian Paulicians, and the term *girskir* with the Byzantine Greeks, although we cannot be sure what the confession of these bishops was or to which religious sect they would have belonged.⁹⁴ It seems hard to understand, but not impossible to believe, how these bishops ended up in Iceland. Maybe with Haraldr Sigurðursson who came back from Constantinople to win the Norwegian crown?⁹⁵ As a comparison we may take Gotland, where there was persistent Orthodox influence until around 1150, and this must have been due to the lively trade connections to the east.⁹⁶

According to *Eymundar þáttir* in *Flateyjarbók* there were ‘evil peoples’ such as Bjarmians, Turks and *Bløkumenn* that were living as neighbours to the people of Garðaríki.⁹⁷ In a way, the inhabitants of Garðaríki were thus living on the outskirts of the known world. The kings’ sagas do not emphasize in any way that Garðaríki and its inhabitants were Christians, but for example the miracle performed by King Óláfr Haraldsson implies, in my opinion, that the country was Christian according to Snorri.⁹⁸ Because Óláfr’s first miracle in *Óláfs saga ins helga* took place in Garðaríki it had a special meaning. It was a clear sign of the holiness of the king for the audience. Could King Óláfr have shown his heavenly healing powers in a heathen country?

However, we must bear in mind that what is written in the kings’ sagas about Garðaríki and its inhabitants is really just the Norse mental worldview of them and it does not always have to do with reality. For example the fact that the people living in Garðaríki were Orthodox and did not acknowledge the pope as the head of their church did not have any relevance for the Scandinavians visiting Garðaríki. As late as the twelfth century the Russian Orthodox Church listed some Scandinavian saints in an All Saints’ Litany, which shows that the Russian-Scandinavian contacts (especially between the royal houses) were not affected by the

⁹³ *Hungrvaka*. *Biskupa sögur* I, pp. 4–5. *Hungrvaka* is the first part of the so called bishops’ sagas, *biskupasögur*.

⁹⁴ *Grágás* 1992 (*Kristinna laga þáttir*) ch. 6; *Laws of Early Iceland*. *Grágás I* 2006, p. 38; *Íslendingabók* ch. 8, p. 18; Pritsak 1981, pp. 479–81. Pritsak refers also to Magnús Már Lárusson’s theory according to which (*h*)*ermskir* were from Ermland (Warmia) on the southeast coast of the Baltic Sea and *girskir* stood for *gerzkr*, ‘Rus’. Pritsak points out that Ermland was not Christianized until about 1230 by the Teutonic Knights, which makes Lárusson’s first suggestion untenable.

⁹⁵ Dashkevych considers the saga evidence quite reliable when it comes to Armenian bishops, and he suggests that they may have come to Iceland from Constantinople with King Haraldr Sigurðsson. Dashkevych 1990, pp. 87–97.

⁹⁶ Blomkvist, Brink and Lindkvist 2007, p. 184.

⁹⁷ *Eymundar þáttur Hringssonar*, *Flateyjarbók* II, pp. 118–34.

⁹⁸ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 189, p. 341–2. King Óláfr heals a sick boy who has a sore boil upon his neck. This is his first healing.

two churches' split.⁹⁹ Marriage alliances were made between the royal houses and religion was not an issue in these cases. The Russians were never considered as heathen enemies in the Old Norse sources as were the other peoples of *Austrvegr*. The sources continuously repeat the tradition of the Christian kings of Garðaríki.¹⁰⁰ However, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* is an interesting exception: it clearly states that King Valdimar and his wife Allogia were heathens, and that young Óláfr Tryggvason refused to worship their gods even though he himself had not converted to Christianity at this point.¹⁰¹ But as *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* deviates from the kings' sagas with its clear Christian emphasis, this detail is not remarkable. After all, it states also that Óláfr Tryggvason converted King Valdimar and Queen Allogia to Christianity.¹⁰²

Elena Melnikova has argued that the relations between the royal house of the Rus' and the Scandinavians culminated at the beginning of the eleventh century under the rule of Prince Jaroslav the Wise with 'a new type of relations between Eastern and Northern Europe that emerged in the reign of Jaroslav and continued on for several centuries, up to the time of saga-writing'.¹⁰³ The image of the inhabitants of Garðaríki in the kings' sagas seems to be special because they were considered as Christians among the heathen peoples of the east. Because they were Christians they were definitely considered as 'one of us' and there is actually no sign that would indicate their difference from the Norse people. No cultural or linguistic differences come across in the kings' sagas. Considering this background, we can assume that the inhabitants of Garðaríki would fall into the category of 'somewhat different from us' in the scale of analogue difference. As Sverrir Jakobsson has stated, the concept of *Norðrlond* reached even Garðaríki in some cases.¹⁰⁴

This is remarkable if we consider that Garðaríki was geographically situated far away from Norway or Iceland. There can hardly be any other explanation for the image of otherness of the inhabitants of Garðaríki than the close relations between the Scandinavians and the inhabitants of Garðaríki that were established in the Viking Age, which were cherished still in the sagas written down in the first half of the thirteenth century. The relationship between the Scandinavian royal houses and the Novgorodian or Kievan princes was not bad in the thirteenth century, but certainly there was tension. The Norwegians and Swedes competed with Novgorodians in the hinterlands of Finnmark and Karelia, and the Swedes faced rivalry from the Novgorodian side when they began to consolidate their power in Finland. These political facts were not, however, reflected in the sagas, which continued to regard the inhabitants of Rus' as some kind of extension of the Scandinavian world to the east.

⁹⁹ Lind 2001, p. 136.

¹⁰⁰ Sverrir Jakobsson 2005, p. 243.

¹⁰¹ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* ch. 57, pp. 106–7.

¹⁰² *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* ch. 76, pp. 152–8.

¹⁰³ Melnikova 2007, p. 77.

¹⁰⁴ Sverrir Jakobsson, p. 198.

3.3 SAXLAND

The Saxons appear very rarely in the kings' sagas. They are referred to by such names as *Saxar* or *Suðrmenn*.¹⁰⁵ The place name *Saxland* seems to appear more often than the ethnonyms. In *Heimskringla* *Saxland* is already mentioned in *Ynglinga saga*, where Óðinn comes from *Garðaríki* to *Saxland*, or when King Óttarr of Uppsala makes a plundering expedition to *Saxland* and takes with him a Saxon slave woman who becomes his queen.¹⁰⁶ Emperor Otto of *Saxland* is mentioned occasionally, for example when he attacks Denmark.¹⁰⁷ The sagas seem not to distinguish which Otto it was (there were three emperors or kings with the same name during the tenth century).¹⁰⁸ The name Otto seems to characterize the Saxons, as the half-sister of King Magnús the Good was married to Duke Otto (in reality, Ordulf) of *Saxland*. He, incidentally, waged a war with the Wends against King Magnús and his troops.¹⁰⁹ This is not the only marriage with the Saxons: the Danish King Knútr married off his daughter Gunnhildr to King Henry.¹¹⁰

In some episodes Saxons or *Saxland* is connected with trade. For example *Heimskringla* mentions that Saxon merchants came to Norway and even settled there. Norwegians themselves made trading voyages to *Saxland*.¹¹¹ These are just glimpses of the trade relations between the Saxons and the Scandinavians, and the episodes do not give an overall picture of the scale of the trade.

The Saxons had an important part in bringing Christianity to Denmark. Widukind of Corvey was the first to tell how the Danish King Haraldr Gormsson was baptized: the Saxon priest Poppo managed to convince him of the superiority of Christ by passing an ordeal. After this King Haraldr abandoned the pagan deities and adhered to the cult of Christ.¹¹² This same episode is also told in *Heimskringla*, except that in this version Poppo is not a priest but a bishop.¹¹³ We know that King Haraldr was converted after his defeat by the Saxons, but the priest or bishop Poppo should not be taken as a fact. He proved the superiority of Christ by carrying glowing iron in his hands, which remained unhurt, and this seems to belong to the medieval tradition which is repeated in the sagas.

One Saxon man is described in detail in *Heimskringla*, namely the priest Þangbrandr.¹¹⁴ He stayed for two winters in Óláfr Tryggvason's court. Þangbrandr is

¹⁰⁵ Adjective *saxneskr*, or even *saxlendzkr* are used in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* ch. 132, p. 284.

¹⁰⁶ *Ynglinga saga* ch. 5, p. 14; ch. 28, p. 56.

¹⁰⁷ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 24, p. 254.

¹⁰⁸ Larsson 2005, p. 131.

¹⁰⁹ *Magnúss saga góða* ch. 26, p. 41.

¹¹⁰ *Fagrskinna* ch. 40, p. 204. King Henry is Henry III, who became emperor after Gunnhildr's death in 1038 (1039–56).

¹¹¹ *Morkinskinna* FJ 5; *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 35, p. 140; *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 64, p. 83.

¹¹² Widukind, *Res gestae Saxonicae* III.65 (at 140–1); Gelting 2007, p. 80.

¹¹³ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 27, p. 259.

¹¹⁴ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* gives a much more detailed background for Þangbrandr as a son of a Saxon count Vilbald ('greifa af Brima borg'). Þangbrandr played a part in Óláfr Tryggvason's life already before his conversion and after that as his *hirðprestr*. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* ch. 74, pp. 149–50; ch. 81, p. 168.

described as a difficult person. He was violent and ‘a great man-slayer’, but also a good priest and a clever man. But because Þangbrandr was such a difficult personality King Óláfr wanted to send him away, so he was sent to Iceland. Þangbrandr preached there, but as he was such a difficult man he got into trouble with the Icelanders. Two Icelanders, Þorvaldr and Vetrliði, composed a mocking poem about him, which angered him and he killed them both. Before Þangbrandr left for Norway he had killed three men. In Norway he told King Óláfr that it was impossible to convert Icelanders to Christianity.¹¹⁵

The characterization of Þangbrandr is controversial. On the one hand he is a hot-tempered violent man but on the other hand he was a priest and decent man. In the Middle Ages it was not necessarily a negative feature to be hot-tempered if the person was defending Christianity devotedly. In my opinion Þangbrandr’s character should be considered without deliberating too much whether or not he was a historical person. He seems to be a personification of a fervent Christian, which means that his negative side – violent behaviour – was not probably considered very negative by the audience. He defended Christianity and also his own honour when he avenged the two skalds who had composed the mocking poem. In short, Þangbrandr’s character is not an image of a Saxon but an image of a defender of Christianity. His ethnical background may just hint that the Saxons were active in missionary work in Scandinavia.¹¹⁶ Interestingly, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* mentions a Saxon bishop Friðrekr, who came to Iceland to preach God’s word. The saga mentions that the bishop could not speak the language of Icelanders and he had an interpreter, Þorvaldr, who had originally asked the bishop to come to Iceland.¹¹⁷ Þangbrandr is not mentioned as having problems with the language, but if we are to believe *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* and its account, Þangbrandr was King Óláfr Tryggvason’s *hirð* priest and thus he must have been able to preach in the *ðönsk tunga* already before going to Iceland.

The Saxons seem to have been rather distant people according to the kings’ sagas as not much is told about them. They are not, however, described with features that are connected to ‘otherness’, so they seem to have belonged to other Christians in the minds of the Norse people. That is, they were considered to be ‘somewhat different from us’ in the scale of analogue difference.

3.4 CONCLUSION

To conclude, analogue ‘otherness’ can be said to have two aspects in the kings’ sagas: on the one hand there are the descriptions of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere in relation to its Scandinavian neighbours. Even if the Icelanders and the Norwegians shared the same roots of language and culture, it was of primary

¹¹⁵ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 73, pp. 319–20; ch. 84, pp. 332–3.

¹¹⁶ Nilsson 2001, pp. 61–3.

¹¹⁷ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, ch. 132, p. 283.

importance for the group identity of Icelanders to distinguish themselves from Norwegians, who were considered closest to Icelanders ('almost like us'). The Norwegians, on the other hand, created their group identity by constituting group boundaries with their Scandinavian neighbours. Even if these groups were not considered very different by the people of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere, they were juxtaposed in order to create group boundaries. From the Norwegian point of view, they were 'not so different from us'.

Other groups that could be categorized as analogue others but stood a little further along this scale were generally other Christians. They did not have active contacts with Icelanders and Norwegians and did not play a major role in the group identity process, but it should be kept in mind that in this case the sagas may not reveal the whole truth. For example trade contacts with the English and the Saxons get very little attention in the sagas. Based on the information given by the kings' sagas, these peoples could be categorized as 'somewhat different from us'. Interestingly such a group as the inhabitants of Garðaríki were part of this category even if they were geographically situated far away. This shows that 'otherness' is or was by no means bound to geographical distance but such criteria as common religion or the basis for similar culture could bring those groups closer to the observer in his mental worldview.

4 Digital Others – Beyond the Boundary?

This chapter deals with ‘others’ that are categorized as representing extreme difference. Again, as in the previous chapter, they are dealt with according to their geographical location. The order in which they are represented does not imply a correlation with their degree of difference.

4.1 THE WENDS

En sá sem þér er vituð, at allir Danir hafa í sumar gǫrzk mínir menn, þá er nú landit hǫfðingjalaust, er ek em í brot farinn, en þar er, sem þér vituð, mjök herskátt af Vinðum ok Kúrum ok ǫðrum Austrvegsmönnum eða svá Sǫxum.¹

King Magnús the Good was concerned about Denmark and its defence because he himself was in Norway and was not able to defend the southern part of his realm. He gave the title of jarl to his relative Sveinn Úlfsson and ordered him to be responsible for the defence of Denmark. The passage above reveals that *Austrvegs-menn* were a serious threat to Denmark. However, the relations between Danes or Norwegians and peoples living in *Austrvegr* were not just hostile.

The name ‘Wends’ (*Vinðr*) refers to West Slavic tribes who lived in present-day northern Germany and Poland (Pomerania) in the Middle Ages. Helmold von Bosau relates that the following tribes were called Wends: *Wagiri*, *Obotriti*, *Kycini* and *Circipani*.² It seems that the Scandinavians used the word *Vinðr* to signify all the West Slavs. At least in German the word *Wenden* referred to Slavic peoples who lived in the area between the River Elbe and the Baltic Sea.³ This is slightly misleading because the Wends hardly had any concept of themselves as a single people. They were a group of West Slavic tribes who spoke dialects closely related

¹ *Magnúss saga góða* ch. 23, p. 37; Hollander, p. 558: ‘But as you know, all Danes have this summer sworn allegiance to me, and now the land will be without ruler when I leave it. But as you know also it is much exposed to incursions of the Wends, Kurlanders, and other tribes along the Baltic, as well as of Saxons.’

² Helmold, *Slawenchronik* ch. 6, pp. 52–5: ‘Inde extendur termini ad Winithos, eos scilicet qui dicuntur Wagiri, Obotriti, Kycini, Circipani’; ‘vom dort dehnt sich ihr Gebiet zu den Wenden aus, welche Wagrier, Obotriten, Kessiner und Zirzipanen genannt werden’.

³ Graus 1980, p. 74.

to each other. They had no supra-tribal sovereignty to unite them.⁴

For the Danes one West Slavic tribe was especially important: the Obodrites. At the end of the eighth century the Danes and the West Slavs had become neighbours to the Frankish Empire, which was expanding its territory north and east. The result was that the Danes allied with some West Slavs and the Franks against other tribes. At the beginning of the ninth century, for example, the Danes allied with the Wilzer. Probably in 808 the Danish king Godfred undertook a military campaign against the Obodrites, who had allied with Charlemagne, and he collected tribute from them. Moreover, he destroyed the emporium of Reric⁵ and forced the merchants to move to the Danish emporium of Hedeby (*Haithabu*). In the following year Godfred's men killed the leader of the Obodrites, Thrasco. However, the Obodrites allied already in 817 with Godfred's sons only to change sides after the new Frankish regent had come to power.⁶

In the tenth century the Danes and the Obodrites allied again to fight their common enemy, that could now be called the Ottonian Empire. The Danish king Haraldr Gormsson was married to the daughter of Prince Mstivoj (c. 967–990/995?) of the Obodrites, and Prince Mstivoj was married to Haraldr's daughter Tofa.⁷ King Haraldr had lost some parts of Jutland after his defeat to the Empire in 974. When the Franks were defeated by the Saracens in Capo Colonna the West Slavs saw that this was their opportunity to rebel against the weakened Empire and they began the so called Slavic Revolt in 983. King Haraldr wanted to cash in on the situation and gain back the areas that he had lost after his defeat in 974; both King Haraldr and Prince Mstivoj took back the areas they had earlier lost to the Franks.⁸ The relations between the Danes and the Obodrites were good even afterwards: King Haraldr's granddaughter was married to Mstivoj's grandson, and their son Gottschalk was married to the daughter of King Sveinn Estridsson of Denmark.⁹

The Danes and the Wends had contacts through thick and thin. The common enemy made them allies. Archaeological excavations have shown evidence that the Danes living in the eastern side of the Danish realm had more contacts with their eastern neighbours (Balts and Slavs) than with England and Western Europe.¹⁰ On the southern shores of the Baltic Sea have been found Viking ships, and the Slavs probably learned shipbuilding from the Scandinavians. The Slavic influence is to be seen in the pottery and jewellery found in Denmark. It is possible that the

⁴ Vlasto 1970, p. 142.

⁵ Probably the same place that was later known as Oldenburg. Herrmann 1982, p. 304; Roesdahl 1998, p. 120.

⁶ Roesdahl 1998, p. 282.

⁷ Lübke 1993, p. 884. Tofa seems to be identical with Pyra that is mentioned in the kings' sagas as the sister of King Sveinn. In Sønder Vissing in Denmark there is a runestone (DR 55) that records this marriage alliance: 'Tōfa lēt gōrva kumbl, Mistivis dōttir, øft mōður sīna, kona Haralds hin gōða Gorms sunar'. Lerche Nielsen 1994, p. 167.

⁸ Lübke 1995, pp. 2003–2004; Lund 1995, p. 218; Vlasto 1970, p. 148.

⁹ Lund 1995, p. 216.

¹⁰ Roesdahl 1977, pp. 164, 198. The Danish runic material is too meagre to indicate any foreign influence or contacts. Lerche Nielsen 1994, p. 181.

Danes learned the technique of bridge-building from the Slavs.¹¹ Moreover, some have suggested that the big Danish fortresses from the end of the tenth century were built under Slavic influence. After all, King Haraldr and King Sveinn both had Slavic wives, which demonstrates lively contacts.¹²

There may have been Slavic inhabitants on the most southerly Danish islands of Lolland and Falster: the old place names refer to Slavs.¹³ The written sources do not give direct information about Slavs living in Denmark. The names *Gnemerus* and *Dobicus*, which Saxo Grammaticus mentions in his *Gesta Danorum*, may have been of Wendish origin and the above-mentioned men were active in the Danish fleet.¹⁴ It seems that some Scandinavians settled in the Slavic area in Pomerania. They may have been merchants or warriors. It would not have been unusual if Scandinavian warriors were hired by Slavic princes in the Viking Age. Considering this, the story of the legendary Jómsvikings, for example, who were mercenaries hired by the Wendish King Búrizláfr,¹⁵ may be based on reality.¹⁶

The Danes were not the only Scandinavians who had contacts with Wends. We can speak of the Baltic Sea as a big cultural and trade route, which spread cultural impulses around its shores. Archaeological finds show that the Slavs and the Balts influenced their Scandinavian neighbours and vice versa. All in all, the archaeological finds testify that there were on the one hand lively contacts between southern Scandinavia, central Sweden and Pomerania, and on the other hand with the northern part of present-day Poland and Lithuania during the Migration Period and the Viking Age.¹⁷

If we consider all the passages about the Wends in the kings' sagas, we observe the following three main themes: 1. the alliances with the Wends are confirmed by marriages; 2. the Wends are enemies, which is sometimes enhanced by referring to them as heathens; 3. the Wends play the role of the evil heathens in some miracle stories. As a minor theme could be mentioned the Jómsvikings, who were according to the sagas Vikings that were hired by the Wendish King Búrizláfr. They will not be treated in this study.¹⁸

According to *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla* King Óláfr Tryggvason was married to a Wendish princess Geira (or Geila) before he became king of Norway.¹⁹ King Sveinn Forkbeard was married to a Wendish princess who was the daughter of King Búrizláfr, and Búrizláfr was married to Sveinn's sister Þyra.²⁰ Not only did

¹¹ Roesdahl 1998, p. 283.

¹² Roesdahl 1977, p. 175.

¹³ Larsson 1991, p. 286.

¹⁴ Saxo XIV.18.6, XIV.23.20 and XIV.44.9; Damgaard-Sørensen 1991, pp. 171–4.

¹⁵ The identity of Prince or King Búrizláfr is unclear. He could have been Prince Mstivoj, Polish King Bolesław Chrobry or his father Mieszko I depending on the source.

¹⁶ Herrmann 1982, p. 61. See also Aalto 2009a.

¹⁷ Wyszomirska-Werbart, pp. 231–48; Larsson 1991, pp. 275–90.

¹⁸ About the Jómsvikings and their historicity and ethnical background, see Aalto 2009a.

¹⁹ *Fagrskinna* ch. 23, p. 144; *Heimskringla* I *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 22, pp. 252–3. *Ágrip* does not mention at all Óláfr's and Geira's marriage.

²⁰ *Ágrip* mentions only that Sveinn's sister was given to 'a Wendish duke' and it does not mention Sveinn's marriage with Búrizláfr's daughter. *Ágrip* ch. 20, pp. 22–3; *Fagrskinna* ch. 19, p. 123; *Óláfs saga*

the Norwegian and Danish kings have Wendish spouses: King Óláfr of the Svear was married to or had as a concubine Edla, who was the daughter of a Wendish jarl, but this detail is mentioned only in *Heimskringla*.²¹ One of their children was Ástríðr, who was married to King Óláfr Haraldsson. We are told that Ástríðr's brother Emund was sent to be raised in Wendland, where he is described as having given up Christianity.²² In this case the saga reveals indirectly that the Wends were heathens.

As the passage at the beginning of this chapter showed, the Wends were often considered as enemies along with the other 'men of the *Austrvegr*'. Just to take a few examples: a certain Skeiðar-Brandr died in a battle in Wendland,²³ King Hákon the Good fought with Wendish and Danish Vikings in Halland,²⁴ King Haraldr Gormsson fought in Wendland,²⁵ King Magnús the Good fought with the Wends in Wendland²⁶ and in Denmark (the battle of Hlýrskógsheiðr),²⁷ Sigurðr slembir fought with the Wends in the Sound (*Eyrarsund*).²⁸ These battle scenes do not reveal much because they tend to be rather laconic mentions along the lines of 'the king fought with the Wends'. Sometimes the name *Vinðr* is replaced by calling them heathens, as in *Fagrskinna* ch. 49, when King Magnús is fighting with them. However, the epithet 'heathen' is not used, of course, before the Norwegian and Danish kings themselves were Christians.

The characterization of the Wends is interesting, because they are labelled as heathens so outspokenly in some episodes. Moreover, it is especially *Heimskringla* that labels the Wends heathens. *Ágrip* refers to the Wends as heathens once.²⁹ *Fagrskinna* does so only a few times: King Sveinn's sister Þyra refuses to marry King Búrizláfr by insisting that she does not want to marry an old heathen man³⁰ and *Heimskringla* mentions also Þyra's reluctance to marry Búrizláfr because of his 'heathen beliefs'.³¹ This may be just a later literary construction without factual background.

It is true that Wends remained heathen until the end of the twelfth century, but the fact is that some West Slavic princes had accepted Christianity already at the end of the tenth century. For instance Prince Pribigev-Udo (later known as Gottschalk) of the Obodrites was some sort of Christian. He was in exile in Denmark, but he regained his lands in 1043 with the help of the Danes. After all, he was married to King Sveinn Estridssen's daughter, which explains the Danish support.

Tryggvasonar ch. 34, pp. 272–3.

²¹ However, according to the *Legendary Óláfs saga ins helga* her name was Ástríðr and she was said to be *vindværs*. *Legendary Óláfs saga ins helga*, p. 104.

²² *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 88, pp. 130–1.

²³ *Ágrip* ch. 2, p. 4.

²⁴ *Fagrskinna* ch. 10, p. 81; *Hákonar saga góða* ch. 8, p. 160.

²⁵ *Fagrskinna* ch. 19, p. 121.

²⁶ *Fagrskinna* ch. 49, pp. 219–21; *Magnúss saga góða* ch. 24, pp. 38–40.

²⁷ *Fagrskinna* ch. 50, pp. 221–6; *Magnúss saga góða* ch. 26–8, pp. 41–5.

²⁸ *Haraldssona saga* ch. 5, p. 309; *Morkinskinna* FJ 419.

²⁹ *Ágrip* ch. 53, p. 48.

³⁰ *Fagrskinna* ch. 19, p. 123 and ch. 24, p. 146.

³¹ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 92, p. 341.

He tried to promote Christianity among the Obodrites peacefully with the encouragement of Archbishop Adalbert of Hamburg-Bremen, but the people resisted. In general it can be said that the Wends were hostile to Christianity, because the Saxons tried to convert them with violence. The Wends also understood that accepting Christianity meant that they would have to submit to the Saxon lords. In the end, the Wends considered that Christianity was just a tool to suppress them. Therefore there was again in 1066 a widespread revolt of the Slavs. The Obodrites rebelled against their leader Gottschalk and his Christian and pro-Saxon policy. Gottschalk was assassinated and Christians were persecuted.³²

One of the longest passages concerning Wends is in *Heimskringla*, which gives a rather detailed description of the siege of the emporium of Konungahella by the heathen Wends, which took place probably around 1135.³³ According to the saga Wendish King Rettibur came with his fleet to Konungahella. The inhabitants fled to the fortress and so began the siege. The saga is full of vivid description how the courageous Christian inhabitants of Konungahella defended themselves. In my opinion, it is obvious that the intention with the story is to emphasize that the enemy is heathen. For example, it is said that they howled like dogs or wolves, which may recall Fenrisúlfr of Scandinavian mythology.

Howling is associated with wolves, and wolves with Scandinavian heathen beliefs and mythology. There is also a possible connotation with berserks, who were sometimes called *ulfheðnir*.³⁴ Interestingly, in many of the medieval *chansons de geste* the Saracens are portrayed rushing into battle and making noises comparable to barking dogs. It is difficult to judge whether this association between dogs and 'infidels' would have affected the above-mentioned episode concerning the Wends, but it is important to notice that it was used elsewhere in Europe.³⁵

The following passage is the climax of the siege:

Síðan veittu heiðingjar harða atsókn. Þá var sá einn af heiðnum mönnum, er svá nær gekk at kastalahurðunni ok lagðisverði þann mann, er fyrir innan stóð hurðina, en menn báru at honum skot ok grjót, ok var hann hlífðarhlauss, en svá var hann fjölkunnigr, at ekki vápn festi á honum. Þá ok Andréás prestur vígðan eld ok signaði ok skar tundr ok lagði í eld ok setti á orvarodd ok fekk Ásmundi, en hann skaut þessi oru at inum fjölkunnnga manni, ok beit þetta skot svá, at honum vann at fullu, ok fell hann dauðr á jörð. Þá létu heiðingjar illiga sem fyr, ýldu ok gnístu.³⁶

³² Vlasto 1970, pp. 145, 149–51.

³³ P. A. Munch pointed out already in the nineteenth century that this episode is depicted from the viewpoint of priest Andreas Brúnsson, who was both Jón Loptsson's and Snorri Sturluson's fosterfather. Louis-Jensen 1977, pp. 3–4 and references. Jón Loptsson himself had lived in Konungahella in his childhood. Helgi Þorláksson 1979, p. 55.

³⁴ Näsström 2006, pp. 45, 63–6.

³⁵ Montañó 2002, pp. 124–5.

³⁶ *Magnúss saga blinda ok Haralds gilla* ch. 11, p. 293; Hollander, p. 728: 'Thereupon the heathens attacked them fiercely. One of the heathens approached so near as to come to the very castle gate, and lunged at a man who stood within the gate. But they [made at him] with arrow shots and rocks. He had no shield but was so skilled in magic that no weapon could pierce him. Then Andréás the Priest took consecrated fire and blessed it. He cut some tinder, ignited it and placed it on an arrow head which he handed to Ásmund. And with that arrow he shot at the man protected by magic, and that shot took full effect, so

One of the attackers is said to be *ffolkunnigr*, which is a common stereotype for an outsider in the sagas. We can conclude that the others during this episode are given attributes that are opposite to those of a Christian. The Christian element in this case is emphasized when the *ffolkunnigr* enemy is killed with a burning arrow that had been lit with fire blessed by a priest.

In spite of their resistance the inhabitants of Konungahella were forced to capitulate. The Wends promised to save their lives, but they did not keep their promise. Those who could not be taken with them as slaves were killed. The Wends plundered the church, but King Rettibur gave the priest Andréas the church (which was, however, burnt down by the heathens), the shrine, the holy cross, the Bible, the altar-book, and four clerks.

Þá fóru þeir Andréas prestur á konungsskipit ok með krossinn helga. Þá kom ótti yfir heiðingja af þeirri bending, er yfir konungsskipit kom hiti svá mikill, at allir þeir þóttusk nær brenna. Konungr bað túlkinn spyrja prestur, hví svá varð. Hann sagði, at almáttigr guð, sá er kristnir menn trúðu á, sendi þeim mark reiði sinnar, er þeir dirfðusk þess ar hafa með höndum hans píslarmark, þeir er eigi vilja trúa á skapara sinn.³⁷

Even though the heathen Wends won the battle against the Christian inhabitants of Konungahella, the story seems to emphasize that they cannot beat Christianity. Another detail in this episode is also interesting: the Wendish King Rettibur is said to have used an interpreter. This is not the only time in the kings' sagas when the saga refers to the Wends and the Scandinavians being unable to communicate without an interpreter, but it is certainly rare.³⁸

Ágrip refers to this episode in Konungahella, but only briefly. It tells how King Sigurðr Jorsalafari built a church in the frontier area, 'almost in the heathens' land', and put a fragment of the True Cross there believing that it would protect the land. But the heathens (i.e. the Wends) came and burned the church and captured the cross and the priest. However, then a miracle took place.

Kom síðan at anum heiðnum hiti sva mikill, at þeir þóttusk nálaga brenna ok óttuðusk þann atburð sem skyssi, en pretrinn segir þeim, at sá bruni kœmr af guðs megni ok af kraft en [he]lga kross, ok þeir skutu þá báti ok settu bæði til lands, krossinn ok prestinn.³⁹

that he fell down dead. Then the heathens set up a howl like before, howling and snarling.'

³⁷ *Magnúss saga blinda ok Haralds gilla* ch. 11, p. 295; Hollander, p. 729–30: 'Then Andréas the priest and his clerks entered the king's ship bearing the Holy Cross. Thereupon a fear befell the heathens, following the portent that so great a heat came over the king's ship that all thought they would almost burn. The king bade the interpreter ask the priest what caused it. He said that the almighty God the Christians believed in sent it as a mark of his wrath for those daring to lay hands on the symbol of his martyrdom who did not believe in their maker.'

³⁸ *Legendary Óláfs saga ins helga*, p. 120. A Dane called Sigurðr uses an interpreter when he trades with the Wends.

³⁹ *Ágrip* ch. 53, p. 48; Driscoll 1995, p. 73: 'Thereafter such a greta heat came upon the heathens that they thought themselves almost burning and this terrified them as a bad omen, and the priest told them that this fire came from God's might and the power of the Holy Cross, so they put out a dinghy and put both the Cross and the priest ashore'.

The Wends play the role of the evil heathen in some other episodes as well. In one of the episodes a Christian Dane was captured by the heathens and taken to Wendland. He tried to escape, but he did not succeed. The other prisoners (or slaves) pitied him and encouraged him to pray to St Óláfr for help. So it happened that he was able to escape with the help of the saint.⁴⁰ In another episode a man called Halldórr was manhandled by the Wends. They mutilated him, cut open his neck, took out the tongue through the opening, and cut out his tongue root. Halldórr prayed to St Óláfr and he got back his ability to speak.⁴¹ In these miracle stories it seems that the Wends were easy to depict as adversaries of Christianity and bloodthirsty heathens. After all, they were living relatively close to the Scandinavians. These two stories are in the first place part of the legend of St Óláfr, not factual evidence of Wends.

The case of the Wends shows that their image clearly changes when Christianity begins to play a major role in the sagas, especially in *Heimskringla*: before Norsemen become Christians the Wends are just enemies, but after the conversion the Wends are explicitly heathen enemies. When the Wends are characterized as fierce heathens in the above-mentioned episodes the emphasis is clearly Christian. It is probable that the Scandinavians and the Wends had a long history of enmity already before Christianity was introduced into Scandinavia. Such epithets as *Vindā myrðir* ('murderer of Wends') or *Vindum háttir* ('danger to the Wends') that were used for several Scandinavian rulers in the skaldic poetry seem to be proof of this long history of enmity, and they do not refer to a specific raid or war.⁴² The Wends also have other less flattering epithets in poetry: they are called for instance *óþjóð* or *heiðit folk* in a poem from the eleventh century that refers to King Magnús's military campaign in Wendland.⁴³ King Magnús's troops beat the Wends in the battle of Hlýrskógsheiðr and just before the battle Magnús sees his saintly father King Óláfr in a dream, which is, of course, a sign of victory. King Óláfr says in the dream that Magnús should not be afraid of the heathens and that he will be beside his son in the battle.⁴⁴ All in all, especially Snorri seems to follow the Christian medieval tradition when describing the Wends as fierce enemies of Christianity. The Wends also had the role of the evil heathen in other sources than sagas: for example according to the legend of the Swedish St Botvid the saint was killed by a Wendish slave.⁴⁵

The heathen image of the Wends must be seen against the contemporary background. In the twelfth century the Danes and the Wends plundered each other's coastal areas. The Danes were interested in getting a foothold in the Wendish areas.

⁴⁰ *Magnússona saga* ch. 31, pp. 272–5.

⁴¹ *Haraldssona saga* ch. 24, p. 334.

⁴² On epithets concerning the Wends, see Morawiec 2006, pp. 707–17; Sverrir Jakobsson 2005, p. 228; Aalto 2009a.

⁴³ Skjald B. Rettet text, I, p. 309. Also the Danish King Eiríkr eygóðr Sveinsson's (d. 1103) military campaigns against the Wends are praised in Markús Skeggjason's (d. 1107) *Eiríksdrápa*. Clunies Ross 2005, pp. 129–30.

⁴⁴ *Magnúss saga góða* ch. 27, p. 43.

⁴⁵ Blomkvist, Brink and Lindkvist 2007, p. 186.

The first large-scale attempt to conquer the island of Rügen took place in 1124–5. There is at least one historical event that may have affected the image of the Wends in the eyes of Christian writers like Snorri; the Danes and the Saxons joined forces in a crusade against some West Slavic tribes in 1147. The island of Rügen was annexed to the bishopric of Roskilde after this military campaign.⁴⁶ If we are to believe Saxo, there was in the 1150s also a guild of sea-warriors in Denmark who combined fighting against the pagan Wends with pious exercises.⁴⁷ Rumours about the crusade or the warriorband fighting against the Wends may have spread all over Scandinavia and even to Iceland. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson argues that Snorri had heard about the Wends and the plundering of Konungahella from his foster-father Jón.⁴⁸ Also the later Danish-Saxon campaigns against the Wends, which took place between 1160 and 1185, may have been known by the saga authors. In 1168 King Valdemar of Denmark conquered the island of Rügen and a heathen sanctuary of Arkona was destroyed.⁴⁹ Whatever Snorri's sources may be, these Danish campaigns against the Wends in the twelfth century could explain why the Wends were considered as heathens still in the sagas in the thirteenth century.

As Sverrir Jakobsson has pointed out the image of the heathen Wends in the sagas is unclear, and it was not until the twelfth century that the battles fought against them were depicted as crusades. At this time the sagas also mention the first Christian rulers of the Wends. After the Wends were converted to Christianity and subjugated by the Danes and Saxons, they do not appear in the sagas.⁵⁰ Snorri's accounts are far from being reliable eyewitness accounts, but they surely reveal something about the attitudes towards the Wends: even if the Wends had been allies of the Danes during the heathen times, they were more generally labelled as heathen enemies and as such 'others' not belonging to the Christian world. The image of the Wends in the kings' sagas could be concluded with Sverrir Jakobsson's words that it is biased and bound to the time.⁵¹ The Wends were definitely 'totally different from us', i.e. digital others. This image is strongly dependent on the nature of the sources and medieval tradition, which will be dealt with further in the chapter on 'Religion: Christians vs. heathens'.

4.2 THE *FINNAR*

The *Finnar* are an interesting group of 'others' in the kings' sagas and not least because of the word's indefinite content. In modern Icelandic the word 'Finni'

⁴⁶ Christiansen 1997, pp. 54–6; Lund 2004, p. 161.

⁴⁷ Gelting 2007, p. 99.

⁴⁸ Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1979, *Heimskringla* I, p. xxiii.

⁴⁹ Vlasto 1970, pp. 153–4.

⁵⁰ Sverrir Jakobsson 2005, p. 230, 232; We must not forget that for example *Knýtlinga saga*, even though it is not directly connected to the kings' sagas, but is some what contemporary with them, gives a lively description on King Valdimar's crusade against the Wends. *Sögur Danakonunga*, p. 262.

⁵¹ Sverrir Jakobsson 2005, p. 233.

means an inhabitant of Finland, but it is clear that this word had other meanings in the Viking Age and in the Middle Ages in the Old Norse language. Moreover, the meaning of the word may have changed depending on whether the word was used by an Icelander, a Norwegian, a Dane or a Swede. In the Old Norse language the words *Finnr*, *Fiðr* and *Finni* denoted a Sámi man.⁵² A Sámi woman was called either a *Finna* or a *Finnkona*.

The question of the words *Finnar* and the *Lappir* does not directly affect the kings' sagas which do not use the word *Lappir*, but it is important to raise the question as some of the contemporary sources use both of these words. The question becomes even more complicated if we take into consideration how the word *Lapp* (pl. *Lappir*) is used in Norwegian: the East Norse sources use the word *Lapp* in the same meaning as the West Norse ones use *Finnr*. There is only one example of the word 'Lappir' in the West Norse sources, but with such a small material it is difficult to draw conclusions whether the West Norse *Lappir* had exactly the same meaning as the East Norse *Lapp*.⁵³

The use of these two words and the uncertainty about the definite meaning of the word would hint that not even the Norwegians always knew who was meant by these words. Unto Salo has tried to solve the problem by pointing out that the words may have their origins in prehistory. According to Salo the word 'Finni' derives from the time when there was not a remarkable difference between the Finns and the Sámi people, meaning that they were both hunter-fishers who inhabited the area of present-day Finland – and the Sámi people, of course, large areas in northern Scandinavia. This would have been the situation around the end of the third millennium BC or slightly later. Salo has based his assumptions on the studies of E. Itkonen, according to whom the word *Finni* would derive from the verb *finna* (to find).⁵⁴ The word would have been connected with people who lived as hunter-gatherers and fishermen.⁵⁵ Salo speculates that the word *Finni* would have remained even though the people living on the Finnish coastline became farmers. It should be noted that this name is given by Scandinavians, and the Finnic peoples living in the vast area of Fennoscandia would use other names of themselves.⁵⁶

Salo's speculations are based on the Swedish language use, but maybe it has a point. Thus, Stefan Brink has drawn the conclusion that the place name *Finnveden* in Sweden is based on a similar etymology: 'This word is related to the verb *to find*

⁵² The Sámi people were also called as *semsveinar* (pl.) in *Vatnsdøla saga* and *Lappar* (pl.) in *Flateyjarbók*. Hermann Pálsson 1997.

⁵³ Mundal 1996, p. 98. Mundal points to such West Norse sources as *Orkneyinga saga* and *Fundinn Nóregr* which have a close connection to each other. *Fundinn Nóregr* uses the word *Lappir*; *Flateyjarbók* I, p. 219; *Finnar* in the sagas have been studied earlier also by Mikko Häme. Häme 1987.

⁵⁴ E. Itkonen 1980, pp. 276–8.

⁵⁵ Even though hunter-gatherer as a term is widely accepted in archaeology, it is not fully suitable for example for Finnic peoples in Fennoscandia. It seems that fishing was an important livelihood for them and therefore they should be actually called hunter-fishers, which will be used in the text from now on. On this issue, see Korpela 2008, p. 140.

⁵⁶ Korpela 2008, p. 141.

(< Pr.-Germ. **finþan*) with cognate in Old English *fundian* “to hunt, to go”, giving it an older meaning of “mobile people who hunt”.⁵⁷ People in *Finnveden* were thus different in the eyes of their neighbours because their livelihood was based on hunting and fishing. It seems plausible, considering this evidence, that the word *Finnar* actually derives from the livelihood of these people(s). Depending on the point of view and the source, the word *Finnr* could denote 1. the Sámi people; 2. Finns or Sámi; 3. Finns and Sámi; 4. any mobile hunting population regardless of ethnic identity; or 5. the meaning varied in different texts.⁵⁸ Because of the confusion between the Finns and the Sámi – for example in saga translations – it is necessary to look at the background of these peoples. The problem of Finnish and Sámi prehistory has been widely debated in archaeology as well as in linguistics.

According to the present understanding based on the archaeological information the forefathers of the Sámi and the Finns lived in Fennoscandia already in the Stone Age. It seems that there was not that great difference between the Finns and the Sámi people until agriculture was introduced into Fennoscandia: the Finns and the Sámi people may have lived in mixed groups in the inner parts of Finland. However, by the Viking Age there was already a difference between the Finns, who had begun to cultivate land, and the Sámi, who continued their hunter-fisher way of living. However, this difference should not be exaggerated, because even the sedentary Finns continued to fish and hunt in the uninhabited or sparsely inhabited areas inland. Moreover, some Finns were accustomed to slash-and-burn cultivation, which meant that their way of life could be characterized as semi-mobile as they had to move on when the crops began to decrease. In general, specialization in either agriculture or the hunter-fisher way of living may be one of the reasons why the Finns and the Sámi people began to form different ethnicities – after all, the basis for different ethnicity did not derive from ‘race’ but from, for example, livelihood.⁵⁹ As Lars Ivar Hansen has said, ‘Contrasts between the indigenous people of northern Fennoscandia and the Kola peninsula, and their neighbours may have been overrated, while variation in social forms within Saami society may have been underrated’.⁶⁰

The Finnish language and the Sámi language are related to each other, but it is questionable whether they had a common intermediate proto-language within the Uralic family. However, we know that the Finnic language(s) spoken in present-day Finland and Sámi languages have had long-lasting and intensive mutual contacts.⁶¹ The hypothesis is that the Proto-Finnish and Proto-Sámi languages began

⁵⁷ Brink 2008, p. 108.

⁵⁸ Valtonen 2008, p. 382 and references.

⁵⁹ Zachrisson 1997, p. 13 and references; Pentikäinen 1995, p. 73.

⁶⁰ Hansen 1995, p. 131.

⁶¹ The Proto-Sámi language expanded, according to present understanding, at the beginning of the Iron Age. Considering the loanwords from Germanic and Baltic languages, it is possible that the language was developed in the southern part of Finland. Aikio 2006, pp. 40 and 46–7. Although Aikio accepts the hypothesis that Christian Carpelan has presented that the Sámi people can be connected with the Kjelmøy culture (c. 700 BC – AD 300) in northern Fennoscandia, he does not support Carpelan’s view that there were linguistic segments. Carpelan 2006, pp. 75–82.

to differ from each other around 3000 years ago, and it is assumed that this was due to the introduction of agriculture. Those people who continued their hunter-fisher life are assumed to have spoken Proto-Sámi language. Linguistic theory thus supports the view that when other groups in Finland adopted agriculture and a more sedentary life, it also affected their language. It is then assumed that hunter-fishers continued their traditional way of life inland. They may have been the speakers of a Finnic language, but at least archaeologists are cautious about drawing direct conclusions about the ethnicity of the inland people *c.* 1600–300 BC.⁶²

To make things more complicated, the latest genetic research results show that the Finns and the Sámi people are not genetically closely related, although genetic comparisons show that there is more mixing of genes between the Sámi and the Finns than with the Sámi and other European populations. However, we must remember that these results reflect the genetic inheritance of today's peoples. It should be taken into account that if we could study the DNA of medieval bones the result might be different.⁶³

The paradox is that even though the Finns and the Sámi today speak languages that are related to each other they seem not be closely genetically related. This has been explained that there was Indo-European population that had moved into Finland and brought agriculture with it and it had adopted the Proto-Finnish language. Hansen and Olsen have also aroused the question whether the modern Sámi people and Finns are really separate peoples or whether the Sámi people are descendants of those speakers of Sámi, who were marginalized to the extreme periphery while other Sámi speakers and forest dwellers were assimilated into other populations.⁶⁴ Anyway, the outcome seems to have been that those people who became sedentary agriculturalists began to define themselves and thus their ethnicity differently from hunter-fishers inland.

It is usually assumed that the Sámi people were some kind of homogeneous group, whose members had same kind of livelihood based on a hunting-herding culture and who spoke one language. The Sámi or their forefathers inhabited a large part of the Fenno-Scandic region stretching from somewhere in central Norway to the Kola Peninsula, which means that they lived in various ecologically distinct habitats: by the Arctic coasts, in the forests, river valleys, in the fjells or even in the high mountain areas above the tree line. Their livelihoods would vary from hunting, gathering, herding, to fishing. We have no firm evidence that reindeer-herding was an important livelihood before the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but the Sámi certainly had tamed reindeer, and decoy reindeer were captured for hunting purposes.⁶⁵ As Inger Storli has suggested, the Sámi began to define their identity in earnest during the Viking Age when some of them came into close contact with their Scandinavian neighbours through trade. In archaeology we can see that the Sámi culture begins to acquire more homogeneous features (burials, silver

⁶² Aikio 2000, pp. 42–3; Lavento 1998, p. 54.

⁶³ Sajantila 2000p. 40; Savontaus and Lahermo 1999, pp. 60–2; Eriksson 1999, p. 67.

⁶⁴ Korpela 2008, p. 123 and references; Hansen and Olsen 2004, pp. 43–45.

⁶⁵ Christiansen 2002, p. 128–9; Pennanen 2000, p. 74.

hoards, metal deposits) in the Viking Age. The Sámi identity manifested itself, for instance, in religious practices and rites.⁶⁶

It is notable that the Norwegian Ohthere, whose account of conditions in the north of Norway is recorded in the Old English *Orosius*, mentions that he himself owned reindeer. This implies that the hunting or keeping of reindeer was not exclusive to the Sámi, and not all the Sámi people were engaged with reindeer-hunting or herding.⁶⁷ In spite of the fact that the sources do not distinguish the Sámi people who had different livelihoods, it is something that we should keep in mind. They can be divided roughly into at least three groups: Coastal or Sea Sami, Fisher or Forest Sami in the river valleys, and Mountain or Reindeer Sami.⁶⁸ There was a clear difference in the livelihood of the Mountain Sámi and the Forest Sámi. According to Zachrisson the latter were integrated into the economic redistributive system of the north Norwegian chieftain society, and they were the elite of the Sámi people.⁶⁹ Also Inger Storli has suggested that during the Viking Age and the Middle Ages an elite grew up among the Sámi. This elite had close contacts with the Scandinavian neighbours.⁷⁰

Today the Sámi people speak nine or ten different Sámi languages (depending on the definitions). The so-called Proto-Sámi language began to divide maybe around AD 800.⁷¹ Sámi was spoken in vast areas of present-day Finland still in the twelfth century.⁷² The numerous place names with Sámi roots – especially in the eastern part of Finland – testify to this.⁷³ The development in languages and cultures among Finnic peoples was probably slow. We do not know whether the difference between different Finnic peoples would have been possible for speakers of Scandinavian languages to notice. Maybe they would have seen the difference in their livelihoods (agriculturalists and hunter-fishers), but they were all more or less forest dwellers in their eyes. Thus, my hypothesis is that we may suspect that the speakers of Old Norse may not have distinguished between the Finns and the Sámi, if they did not have personal contacts with them, or information directly from those people who had contacts with them. Let us look at the descriptions about the *Finnar* in the kings' sagas.

4.2.1 The descriptions of the *Finnar*

The *Finnar* appear only occasionally in the kings' sagas – especially in *Heimskringla* – as individuals. In these episodes they have a decisive role.

⁶⁶ Storli 1994, pp. 138–41.

⁶⁷ Valtonen 2008, p. 297; *Orosius*, p. 15.

⁶⁸ Even though we now use the term 'Sámi', it should be kept in mind that there are actually nine different (but closely related) Sámi languages. The Sámi people share the same ethonym, *sabme*. Pentikäinen 1995, p. 86.

⁶⁹ Zachrisson 1997, p. 191.

⁷⁰ Storli 1994, p. 89.

⁷¹ Lehtola 2002, p. 11; Aikio 2006, p. 46.

⁷² Saarikivi 2006, pp. 26 and 295. According to the old theory Finnish and Sámi began to differentiate from each other around 2000 BC, so by AD 1000 they were already distinctively different languages.

⁷³ Itkonen 1920, pp. 1–11.

Maðr er nefndr Fiðr litli, upplenzkr maðr, en sumir segja, at hann væri finnskr at ætt. Hann var allra manna minstr ok allra manna fóthvatastr, svá at engi hestr tók hann á rás. Hann kunni manna bezt við skíð ok boga.⁷⁴

This is the best description of a *Finnr* in *Heimskringla*. *Finnr* or *Fiðr litli* was short, 'swift of foot' and a 'well-exercised shooter with the bow'. He is said to be 'upplenzkr maðr' and 'finnskr at ætt', which would suggest that he was a Sámi coming from Uppland in Norway. Is this description then reliable? It seems plausible that the Sámi people were generally shorter than Norwegians, but basically anyone could be 'swift of foot'. This passage, however, does resemble another one in *Heimskringla*: in *Magnússona saga* we are told that Haraldr gilli, who came from Ireland, was so swift a runner that he could beat a horse.⁷⁵

It is hard to see any connection between these two descriptions, but maybe being 'swift of foot' could be just a stereotype that could be used to describe foreigners. It would have been only natural to say that the *Finnar* were good at skiing, because they must have used skis a lot during the winter time, so this skill mentioned in the description of *Finnr litli* confirms his Sámi background. Shooting with a bow may have been another stereotype that was connected to the *Finnar*. *Finnr litli* was not the only good shooter with a bow in the sagas. This skill is connected to another *Finnr* (who is also called very imaginatively *Finnr*) in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*. In that episode Jarl Eiríkr has a *Finnr* among his troops in the battle of Svölð.⁷⁶ Also in two skaldic poems arrows are called 'tributes' or 'compensation of the Sámi'.⁷⁷

The connection between the *Finnar* and their good shooting skills with a bow are not literary fiction: *Finnbogi* was a composite bow made of two different sorts of wood glued together. This bow type was estimated to be 50 per cent more effective than the Scandinavian, which may explain the reputation of the *Finnar* as excellent shooters.⁷⁸

The appearance of the *Finnkonur* has not interested the authors of the sagas. Only of *Snæfríðr*, who married King Haraldr hárfagri is it said that she was 'the most beautiful woman'.⁷⁹ This, however, may be just a *topos*, because the kings do not marry ugly women. These descriptions do not give any negative connotations but still it is rather unlikely that we should take them for granted as genuine depictions: after all, they tend to be part of the *topos*. The *Finnkonur* appear in a few episodes as wives of kings. The most famous of them was the above-mentioned *Snæfríðr*, who is mentioned by *Ágrip* and *Heimskringla*.⁸⁰ The marriages and image

⁷⁴ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 82, p. 120; Hollander, p. 323: 'There was a man called Finn the Little, of Uppland origin, though some say he was Finnish. He was of unusually small stature, but extraordinarily fleet so that no horse could overtake him. He was also a fast runner on skis and an excellent shot.'

⁷⁵ *Magnússona saga* ch. 27, pp. 267–8.

⁷⁶ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 108, p. 362.

⁷⁷ Halldór skaldri, *Útfarardrápa*: 'Finns rauð gjöld', in: *Magnússona saga* ch. 7, p. 247; see also Andersson and Gade 2000, p. 320; Þjóðólfr Arnósson, *Sexstefja*: 'Finna gjöld í skjöldum' in: *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* ch. 63, pp. 149–50. *Morkinskinna* does not give the end of the poem. Andersson and Gade 2000, p. 229.

⁷⁸ Zachrisson 1991, p. 193; Zachrisson 1994, p. 178.

⁷⁹ *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 25, p. 126: 'kvinna friðust'.

⁸⁰ *Ágrip* ch. 2–3, pp. 4–6; *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 25, pp. 125–7.

of the *Finnkonur* will be treated in a separate chapter, 'Marriage between Kings and *Finnkonur* – a *hieros gamos*?'

We may also speculate why the *Finnar* were not depicted in the sagas. Because there was nothing special to depict? Because they did not in fact differ from the Germanic peoples of Scandinavia? Archaeological excavations in Vivalden, Sweden, have shown that a man buried in grave number 9 was a Sámi, but he wore garments and jewellery that are associated with Scandinavian women. This grave has aroused questions among scholars: these objects have moved from a one context (settled, agrarian society) to another (mobile, nomadic society). They also moved across a border of gender. We may only speculate what kind of symbolic changes the 'dress' and 'jewellery' had undergone. As Neil Price puts it: we can only speculate as 'to whether this individual went about in life dressed as he was in death. Did his Nordic neighbours know how these objects were being used?'.⁸¹ Objects moving from one culture to another may be used in different contexts that they were originally intended. The Sámi men used sometimes jewellery that was originally made for Scandinavian women, but when the jewellery was brought to the Sámi culture their purpose was changed. Furthermore, it has been speculated that for example the Sámi shamans may have used garments that were robe-like.⁸²

Morkinskinna associates the *Finnar* with lying, another negative characteristic.⁸³ There is also one incident in *Morkinskinna* that may imply that the *Finnar* may have been hostile to the Norwegians. A certain Viðkunnr wanted to remind Sigurðr Hranason that he had helped him when the *Finnar* seized his farm.⁸⁴ This incident is very obscure and we are not told whether the *Finnar* just attacked the farm (as they probably did) or did they try to take over the whole farm, not to mention that the reason for the attack remains obscure. These passages show that the *Finnar* were associated with negative connotations.

The names of the *Finnar* in the sagas can reveal something about their image. If they are named, the names are usually not very imaginative, like Finn(r) or Fiðr. It is apparent that *Heimskringla* as well as the other kings' sagas use the word *Finnr* or *Fiðr* without further explaining its contents.⁸⁵ It is, however, notable that the name *Finnr* was very popular among Norwegians in the Middle Ages.⁸⁶ This could be investigated further, but we could speculate that the *Finnar* did not have a negative reputation among the upper class, if the name *Finnr* really derives from an ethnonym *Finnr/finni*. Usually the names of the *Finnar* in the sagas were connected to (nature) phenomena associated with them such as snow (*Drífa*, 'Blizzard'; *Snær*,

⁸¹ Price 2002, pp. 277–8.

⁸² For more on the connection between jewellery, dresses and magic see the chapter '*Seiðr, ergi* and the question of gender'.

⁸³ *Morkinskinna* FJ 308: 'Snēliga snvggir sveinar qvoþo Finnar atto andra fala'; Andersson and Gade 2000, p. 293: "'There's a whiff of snow, lads,'" said the Lapps. They had snowshoes for sale.' The proverb seems to mean that the Lapps are luring customers with false promises of snow. We are to understand that the king's words (mentioned in the episode before) are equally false.

⁸⁴ *Morkinskinna* FJ 362.

⁸⁵ Holmberg 1976, p. 178.

⁸⁶ Mundal 1996, p. 111.

‘Snow’) or skiing (Gísl, ‘Stick’; Qndur, ‘Ski’). On the one hand these names emphasize the stereotypical image of the *Finnar*, and their purpose may have been to characterize the characters.⁸⁷ But on the other hand, it has been suggested that the names of the *Finnar* were real Sámi names that were only translated.⁸⁸ If we compare the names of the *Finnar* with the Baltic-Finnish names,⁸⁹ it seems that the saga authors have not used or known them. Thus, it seems more probable that the names may be actually translated Sámi names, although nothing can be said with certainty.⁹⁰

The descriptions about the outer appearance of the *Finnar*, scarce as they are, may be based on reality, but it is notable that these descriptions have also been influenced by the idea of the giants in the Old Norse mythology. As Hermann Pálsson has said, ‘the combination of a dark complexion, ugly features, and witchcraft is certainly suggestive of Sámi ancestry’. He is referring to *Egils saga*, in which many of the prominent characters are descendants of Kveld-Úlfr, whose maternal grandmother appears to have been a Sámi.⁹¹ On the whole the Sámi people were considered to have dark complexion.⁹²

The kings’ sagas give some glimpses into the life of the *Finnar*. In *Haralds saga hárfagra* it is mentioned twice that the *Finnar* lived in a hut (*gammi*, in South Sámi *gåetie*). A certain *Finnr* called Svási asked King Haraldr to visit his hut.⁹³ Later King Haraldr’s son Eiríkr found his future wife Gunnhildr dwelling with two *Finnar* who had taught her magic. Gunnhildr hid Eiríkr and his men in a hut before the *Finnar* could find them.⁹⁴ *Heimskringla* also cites a poem in which the word *gammi* is mentioned.⁹⁵

⁸⁷ Lönnroth 1986, p. 82.

⁸⁸ Zachrisson 1997d, p. 173. Zachrisson takes as an example the giant name Tjatse, which means ‘water’ in Sámi. Names mentioned in the text could be real, translated Sámi names. Prof. Pekka Sammallahti pers. comm., 22.1.2009.

⁸⁹ On Baltic-Finnish names, see for example Stoebe 1964.

⁹⁰ The oldest Sámi names known from Finland are from the sixteenth century. The meaning of the names vary from different objects (‘bow’, ‘sledge’) to colour (‘black’) and names that are derived from verbs. The Sámi names have been loaned also from Scandinavian languages (Blind, Storm(i), Svart) and Finnish and Russian. T. Itkonen 1984, pp. 492–521.

⁹¹ Hermann Pálsson 1999, p. 17.

⁹² Eriksson 1999, p. 67: ‘Kontrast till andra folkgrupper i nordvästra Europa . . . är samerna kortvuxna, starkt pigmenterade i hår och ögon (iris)’; Hermann Pálsson 1997, p. 24: ‘Á hinn bogin þóttu Samar bysna dökkir yfirlitum. Svipuðu máli kann að gegna um aðrar þjóðir í norðri, enda segja skáldin að ásjóna þeirra sé blökk [. . .]. Sérstakt má það teljast að samíski galdramaðurinn í Historia Norwegiae sortnaði allur þegar hann framdi forneskju sína. Um ýmsa aðra galdramenn er tekið fram að þeir væru svartir, þótt ekkert sé staðhæft um þjóðerni þeirra að visu’; Pentikäinen 1995, p. 73. On the colour of complexion and its meaning, see also the chapter ‘Blámenn’.

⁹³ *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 25, p. 126.

⁹⁴ *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 32, p. 135.

⁹⁵ *Haraldssona saga* ch. 6, pp. 310–12. Zachrisson 1997f, pp. 190, 193. These ‘Sámi huts’ are considered in archaeology as a proof of Sámi culture, and remnants of them can be found all over in Northern and Central Scandinavia. Inger Zachrisson has called into question the general view that the *gammi*-huts were only temporary. Instead, she proposes that some of the huts may have been dwellings of a permanent nature. They were made of wood and covered with birch bark and turf. The problem is that there is not much left of these buildings and thus the archaeologists have tended to consider them as temporary.

In another episode to be found in *Morkinskinna*, *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla* the *Finnar* are connected with boat-building. The pretender Sigurðr slæmbir was staying with some *Finnar* and they built him two boats.⁹⁶ The reference to boat-building is interesting because we know from other sources that the Sámi really did build them. They were made with a special technique ('klinkteknik') and they could carry two persons.⁹⁷ After all, fishing was an important livelihood for the Sámi people, especially for those who lived by the sea. We cannot judge on the basis of these sagas whether Sigurðr slæmbir really had contacts with the Sámi, but it would be plausible that he sought help from the Sámi who may have stood outside these political intrigues. Moreover, because Sigurðr is not described as a hero type, it may have been convenient to connect him with the *Finnar*, who are generally regarded as dubious characters in the saga literature.

On the basis of this information given in the kings' sagas, they seem to lack genuine descriptions about the *Finnar* and their way of life. Surprisingly *Historia Norvegiæ* gives more detailed information on the way of the life of the *Finnar*, mentioning hunting, skiing and huts as well as their way of practising magic.⁹⁸ We may, of course, speculate on the reasons for this difference. In my opinion, the kings' sagas lack detailed descriptions of the life of the *Finnar* because they were not interesting from the point of view of the story. Certain details, such as huts or boat-building are mentioned when they are relevant for the story. The author of *Historia Norvegiæ* is instead interested in depicting the *Finnar* because he wants to take them as a bad example for Christians.

4.2.2 Finnmark and Finnland

According to the sagas the *Finnar* mainly lived in *Finnmørk*, which is roughly the same area as the present day Finnmark in northern Norway.⁹⁹ This would indicate that the word 'Finnar' denoted the Sámi people. On the other hand the *Finnar* are mentioned also as the inhabitants of *Finnland* in *Heimskringla*.¹⁰⁰ It is important to look at these two toponyms to find out whether it has any relevance when the sources use Finnland instead of Finnmark.

King Óláfr Haraldsson was in his youth on a plundering expedition in the Baltic Sea. He had already plundered Eysýsla (Ösel) and after that he came to *Finnland*. According to the saga the *Finnar* fled into the woods and they surprised Óláfr and his men. The *Finnar* shot at them with bows and arrows and King Óláfr and his troops had to retreat back to their ship. Many of Óláfr's men died or were wounded. During the night the *Finnar* conjured up a storm but nevertheless the

⁹⁶ *Morkinskinna* FJ 425; *Fagrskinna*. ch. 99, p. 333; *Haraldssona saga* ch. 6, pp. 310–12.

⁹⁷ Fjellström 1985, pp. 27, 372–3. '1672 där det nedtecknats att de [samerna] får sin mesta näring från boskap som kor, getter, gris samt något litet åkerbruk, att de även fångar pälsdjur och bygger "jekter" dvs båtar'.

⁹⁸ *Historia Norvegiæ*, pp. 82–7.

⁹⁹ Authén Blom 1981, pp. 281–7.

¹⁰⁰ *Ynglinga saga* ch. 13, pp. 28–9; ch. 19, pp. 37–9. On the *Finnar* in general in saga literature, see Hermann Pálsson 1997; Holmberg 1976.

king and his men were able to flee.¹⁰¹ King Óláfr Haraldsson's plundering expedition to *Finnland* is probably the only episode in the kings' sagas that can be said to concern the Finns and not the Sámi for sure.

In a poem connected to this episode in *Heimskringla* two toponyms are mentioned: *Herdalar* and *Bálagarðssíða*. Scholars have tried to connect them with real places in present-day Finland:¹⁰² it has been suggested that *Bálagarðssíða*, 'the coast of *Bálagarðr*', could contain the word *bál*, 'beacon'. It is believed that beacons were used as a warning system by the Finnish coast when an enemy fleet was approaching.¹⁰³ In the saga the *Finnar* fled to the woods, which was, of course, only a natural place to hide. There were some hill fortresses in Finland that were probably used as refuges. The Finnish archaeologist J.-P. Taavitsainen has, however, pointed out that even though some of these fortresses were situated near roads/paths or waterways, they did not necessarily have any systematic connection with the communication routes.¹⁰⁴ This means that the theory of a warning system with beacons and hill fortresses is questionable.

Inger Zachrisson suggests that *Herdalar* in the above mentioned passage could be actually Härjedalarna, i.e. Härjedalen in present-day Sweden. According to Zachrisson Snorri Sturluson may have wanted to use *Finnland* instead of *Finnmørk* in *Heimskringla* in order to emphasize the difference between these areas (but not necessarily the difference between the peoples).¹⁰⁵ The word *mørk* denoted forest or frontier zone in Old Norse, whereas *land* referred to places that were inhabited. *Finnmørk* covered the whole area where the *Finnar* lived: it stretched from central Scandinavia up to the north, and this area did not, of course, have exactly defined boundaries. After all, the meaning was to express that it was the area where the *Finnar* lived. Generally *mørk* was a frontier area, maybe sparsely inhabited. This is not confined just to the Old Norse language and thinking but is also perceptible elsewhere in Europe.¹⁰⁶

Zachrisson has suggested that all areas outside the lands inhabited by Christians were known as *Finnmarkir*. Even if this is just a hypothesis, it is interesting to note that in the Borgarþing law people who did not bring their children to baptism were condemned to live in the 'heathen lands, where no Christians live'.¹⁰⁷ In the medieval Norwegian context it would be easiest to interpret this as meaning that outlaws had to live in the hinterlands, where the Sámi lived too. *Finnland* would then be a place where there was permanent settlement in contrast to *Finnmørk* that

¹⁰¹ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 9, pp. 10–11; *Fagrskinna* ch. 27, p. 167 just mentions that King Óláfr was fighting in Finland: 'Þriðja sinni barðisk hann á Finnlandi austr'. The *Finnar* or the Finns are frequently associated with winds and storms in other sources. Moyne 1981, p. 14.

¹⁰² Kyösti Julku for example has argued that 'Finnland' in the Old Norse texts refers to south-western Finland. Julku 1986, pp. 52–91.

¹⁰³ Gallén 1984, p. 256; about *Herdalar* and *Bálagarðssíða*, see Holmberg 1976, pp. 175–6.

¹⁰⁴ Taavitsainen 1990, p. 126.

¹⁰⁵ Zachrisson 1991, p. 192.

¹⁰⁶ Hansen and Olsen 2004, p. 80. Frontier zones such as forests where places of otherness, i.e. symbolically threatening, for medieval people. Classen 2002, p. xlii.

¹⁰⁷ *Norges Gamle Love* I, p. 341: 'han hæfir firergort fe oc friði lande oc lausum öyri. fare a land hæiðit þo vill han ægi kristin uera'.

would denote a sparsely inhabited, peripheral area. Zachrisson refers also to other toponyms, especially in Norway, which begin with *Finn-* and which seem to imply that the places were inhabited by the Sámi people. She acknowledges, though, that toponyms beginning with *Finn-* can have other meanings, too.¹⁰⁸

Basically we can assume that *Finnland* and *Finnmörk* mean different places in *Heimskringla*. Also Sigvatr Þórðarson's poem that is attached to the above episode mentions not only the place names *Herdalar* and *Bálagarðssiða*, but also the inhabitants, called *Finnlendingar*, not *Finnar*. Even if I agree with Zachrisson that *Finnland* and *Finnmörk* must have been different places, I do not agree that *Finnland* was situated in Härjedalen. If we look at the saga description of the plunder route, it would be more reasonable to think that Óláfr's expedition continued from Ösel to the Finnish coast. I would suggest that it is possible that this episode mentioning *Finnland* and its inhabitants (*Finnlendingar*) really may refer to present-day south-west Finland (also called Finland Proper). Still, I would hesitate to make any conclusions whether the toponyms mentioned in *Óláfs saga ins helga* could be connected to real places.¹⁰⁹

To conclude, the word *Finnar* usually denoted the Sámi people, who lived in *Finnmörk*, but at least the *Finnar* in *Óláfs saga ins helga* seem to have been another Finnic group. As an additional proof could be mentioned that also *Fundinn Noregr* mentions both *Finnland* and *Finnmörk*, and *Hversu Noregr byggðiz* mentions *Finnland*, which seems to support the view that the Scandinavians distinguished between *Finnland* and *Finnmörk*.¹¹⁰ There are basically two details that indicate that *Finnland* mentioned in *Óláfs saga ins helga* is Finland Proper: 1. geographical evidence: the fact that King Óláfr Haraldsson was coming to *Finnland* after having plundered Ösel suggests that he was heading next in this direction;¹¹¹ and 2. ethnonyms: the inhabitants are called *Finnlendingar* in the poem and not *Finnar*.

The inhabitants of *Finnland* conjured up a storm in the saga. Of course, the Sámi people – or their shamans – are also connected with control over weather, but the same applies also to the Finnish shamans (*noidat*).¹¹² The use of magic is one thing that connects the Finns and the Sámi, which is another reason to assume that the Scandinavians may have found it impossible to distinguish the Finns from the Sámi. But if we consider the latest evidence that the differences between the Sámi and the Finns were not that great in the Viking Age and in the early Middle Ages

¹⁰⁸ Zachrisson 1997d, p. 171; Zachrisson 1997e, p. 185.

¹⁰⁹ For example in the *Legendary Óláfs saga ins helga*, p. 42. *Bálagarðssiða* is connected with the coast of Själland, which, however, is very inconsistent with the saga's content.

¹¹⁰ *Fundinn Noregr*, p. 219 in *Flateyjarbók I*; *Hversu Noregr byggðiz*, p. 21 in *Flateyjarbók I*. *Fundinn Noregr* is survived in the opening of *Orkneyinga saga*, which may have been composed around 1200. *Hversu Noregr byggðiz* survives only *Flateyjarbók*, which dates from the latter half of the fourteenth century.

¹¹¹ Although *Legendary Óláfs saga ins helga*, p. 42 states that 'Þriðia sinni barðezt hann [Óláfr] a Finnlande austr oc hafðe bætr. Þaðan hellt hann til Balagarzsiðu a Siolande oc hæriaðe þar'. This means that the saga implies that *Bálagarðssiða* was situated in Själland, which, however, does not fit the plot. Maybe the author of the saga has made a mistake here and mixed two different battles: in *Vikingavísur* were King Óláfr's battles are mentioned the third battle takes place near *Bálagarðssiða*, but the fourth is in Denmark. *Vikingavísur*, str. 3 and 4, Skaldic database.

¹¹² Moyne 1981, p. 14.

as we have thought, the use of the word *Finnar* in Old Norse sources makes it understandable: it was a general reference to Finnic forest dwellers. In my opinion there is enough evidence to show that the concepts *Finnland* and *Finnmörk* were considered to be different, but it must have depended on the author how well he was acquainted with them whether he could make a distinction between them. Nonetheless, distinguishing between two different geographical areas does not mean that there was a need to distinguish between the inhabitants of these areas.

King Óláfr's expedition to *Finnland* is not a unique event, even if the plundering expeditions all the way from Norway could not have been frequent. According to the evidence that we have from the runestones, the Svear may have made such expeditions to *Finnland*, and even to *Tafæistaland* 'Häme', which is situated inland in Finland. The runestone in Söderby in Gästrikland was raised by a certain Brúsi for his brother Egill who 'varð dauðr á Tafæistalandi' during the expedition that was led by Brúsi. The runestone in Söderby-Karls Church was raised in honour of Ótryggr who 'var drepinn á Finnlandi' and he was not the only one mentioned like this.¹¹³ These areas were lucrative enough to tempt raiders to try their luck.

Apart from the above-mentioned plundering expedition, *Finnland* is also mentioned in the following episodes in *Heimskringla*: in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 14 and 19, and in *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 80. In *Ynglinga saga* the episodes concern plundering expeditions to *Finnland* and marriage alliances with *Finnkonur*.¹¹⁴ In *Óláfs saga ins helga* the Swedish *lagmaðr* Þorgnýr mentions how the earlier kings of the Svear made plundering expeditions to 'Finnland ok Kirjálaland, Eistland ok Kúrland ok víða um Austrlond'.¹¹⁵ In the latter case presented above *Finnland* is mentioned but only as a place among others in *Austrvegr*. As Snorri is the only one among the authors of the kings' sagas who mentions *Finnland*, we can assume that he was probably acquainted at least with oral tradition which mentions *Finnland* and *Finnmörk*. It does not, however, prove anything about his geographical knowledge. The Svear, who had contacts with the Finns in Finland Proper and with the Sámi, most probably knew that there was a difference between the Sámi and the Finns but we may doubt whether this information reached their western neighbours. In reality traders and raiders of *Austrvegr* who came from Norway and Denmark may have visited the trading stations in Finland, but they certainly had their targets further to the east. As the few finds for example in the outer skerries off the Finnish coasts in Hiittinen suggest, the Vikings may have stopped by on small islands and continued their way to the east.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Runestones Gs 13 and U582, also G 319, dated to 1200–50, mentions that a man died in Finland: **si[h] tris : aruar[r] : litu : giera : st[alen] : yfir : auðu-l- : broður : sin : a : finlandi : do : aglia . . .** Sigtryggs(?) arfar létu gera stein yfir Auðv[all](d)(?), bróður sinn, á Finnlandi dó <aglia . . . >. Rundata; Palm 2004, p. 55.

¹¹⁴ These marriage alliances will be treated in more detail in the chapter 'Marriages between Kings and *Finnkonur* – a *hieros gamos*?', and the 'Finnish' witches mentioned in these episodes will be dealt in the chapter 'Magic of the *Finnar*'.

¹¹⁵ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 80, p. 115.

¹¹⁶ Edgren 2008, pp. 470–1. A remnant of a workshop, which seems to have been in use at the end of the eleventh century, was found in Hiittinen. The finds contain bronze bars, scrap metal for casting, glass, mosaic beads, small whetstones, amber and small pieces of German and Anglo-Saxon silver coins for

4.2.3 Targets of exploit or trade companions?

The Sámi people had relations with their Scandinavian neighbours in good times and bad. They traded with the Sámi but they also exploited them by making them pay tribute. Often the line between trade, tribute and plunder must have been very vague. One of the ways for the Norwegian king to control the northern parts of Norway (mainly Hálogaland and north of it) was to give the right to collect tribute from the *Finnar* (*finnkaup*) or the right to trade with the *Finnar*. As a result the king got perhaps a small sum of money as compensation, but the real winners were those magnates who had this right and who profited from it. Thomas Wallerström has pointed out that for example the Norwegian Ohthere, whose account was written down in King Alfred's *Orosius*, may have considered the tribute that he collected as compensation for transporting and selling the goods.¹¹⁷ *Finnkaup*, *finnför*, *finnferð* and *finnskatt* are all mentioned in *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla*.¹¹⁸ Apparently these words were often synonyms. They referred to this Norwegian trade and tribute system with the *Finnar*, which reveals how intimately the two concepts, that we would consider separate, were intertwined. Maybe *finnkaup* was earlier a right that had belonged to the jarls of Hlaðir. Before the royal intervention the matter may have been a local one between northern magnates and their Sámi clients.¹¹⁹

The following examples concern the concept of *finnkaup* in the kings' sagas. In *Óláfs saga ins helga* the Norwegian Hárekr is said to have *finnkaup* for a long time and he was taking care of the king's business in Finnmark.¹²⁰ Later in the same saga Hárekr and Þórir hundr took the oath of fealty to the Danish King Knútr. They were both rewarded with great gifts and *finnferð*.¹²¹ It is said that Þórir had the *finnferð* for two years and during this time he gathered himself wealth by trading in various wares with the *Finnar*.¹²² The saga does not reveal the nature of this trade: was it more trading or collecting tribute? In Þórir hundr's case the connection with the *Finnar* had importance because Þórir had let them make him twelve large coats of reindeer-skin with witchcraft so that no weapon could cut or pierce them. This proved to be an important detail in the battle of Stiklastaðir, in which King Óláfr Haraldsson died, and the king's opponent Þórir survived.

Morkinskinna also gives a few examples of trade and tribute-collecting among the *Finnar*. Einarr fluga 'was in charge of collecting the Lapptax on the king's behalf'.¹²³ He took care that nobody could trade with the *Finnar* in secret. He searched a

the production of jewellery.

¹¹⁷ Wallerström 1995, pp. 187, 210.

¹¹⁸ *Morkinskinna* FJ 241, 254–5, 367–8; *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 104, p. 175, and ch. 170, p. 306; also *Historia Norvegiae* mentions trade with *Finmi*. *Historia Norvegiae*, p. 78.

¹¹⁹ Christiansen 2002, p. 129.

¹²⁰ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 104, p. 175; *Historia Norvegiae* mentions that the *Finnar* payed tribute to the Norwegian king, p. 85: 'Sunt etiam apud Finnos scuriones quam plures ac mustelæ, de quarum omnium bestiarum pellibus regibus Norwegiæ, quibus et subjecti sunt, maxima tributa omni anno persolvunt'.

¹²¹ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 170, p. 306.

¹²² *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 193, pp. 344–5.

¹²³ Andersson and Gade 2000, p. 249; *Morkinskinna* FJ 241: 'hann hafði þa finnför af konungs hendi.'

Norwegian ship that belonged to Oddr Ófeigsson, because he suspected that Oddr and his crew had traded with the *Finnar* despite having no right to do so.¹²⁴ Even if the Norwegian kings had to rely on the men that were given the right for *finnferð/finnkaup/finnskatt* they did not always trust them. King Sigurðr accused Sigurðr Hranason 'of having appropriated part of the royal fisc and having collected the Lapp tribute with private greed'.¹²⁵

These examples indicate in my view that the line between trading and collecting tribute was extremely vague. However, we must not see the trade/tribute system between the Norwegians and the Sámi just as one party exploiting the other. Lars-Ivar Hansen has pointed out that the Sámi people seem to have had a specialized status in the resource exploitation: the reciprocal exchange of goods and products was mutually profitable because both partners benefited from transferring the surplus production and they got in exchange sought-after 'use-values' produced by the other (the Norwegian magnates got their furs and the Sámi people got for example agricultural products or money). Products that were changed or bought may also have had social functions within the group. Hansen takes as an example the Finno-Ugric jewellery in the Sámi graves, which he interprets as 'a means of communicating ethnic identity by using the jewellery in a new context', or the north Norwegian elite of the Iron Age who were provided furs – definitely a status symbol in the community – by the Sámi.¹²⁶ In other words, the Sámi people were not necessarily the target of exploitation but business partners. The Sámi with their specialized skills in hunting and preparing pelts of animals were important trading partners to the Scandinavians. Collaboration between the Sámi and the Nordic peoples intensified during the Viking Age.¹²⁷

Trading and collecting tribute from the Sámi people in the Middle Ages (in particular during the late Middle Ages) must be seen in the context of Norwegian state formation and the kings' struggle for centralized power. The assertion of the king's authority did not just include trade and taxation but also the Christianization of the Sámi. As long as the Sámi were nomadic heathens they were actually not part of the Norwegian political and judicial community. They were only subjected to the Norwegian kings in limited respects such as paying tribute.¹²⁸ Hansen has pointed out that as long as the Sámi people and the Norwegian magnates co-operated in the resource exploitation the status of the Sámi may not have been bad. However, after the Norwegian king and the Catholic Church had replaced the Norwegian chieftains these new powers did not have 'the capabilities or the will to take on the legacy of the chieftains, regarding their relationship to the Sámi'.¹²⁹

What this actually meant for the Sámi was that at least in the case of the area of

¹²⁴ *Morkinskinna* FJ 254–5.

¹²⁵ Andersson and Gade 2000, p. 336. *Morkinskinna* FJ 369: 'gaf hann þa soc S. Hrana s. at hann hefði heimt fiarhlvt konvnga. oc dregit vndir sic *finnscattin* meþ agirnd oc at vvlilia þeira er atto'.

¹²⁶ Hansen 1990, p. 129; Hansen 1996, p. 34.

¹²⁷ Zachrisson 2008, p. 38.

¹²⁸ Hansen 1996, p. 67–8.

¹²⁹ Hansen 1990, p. 271.

Astafjord, which Hansen has used as an example in his study, they had to adapt to a new livelihood, because the king and the church were not interested in the furs and other products of the Sámi. The Sámi population that lived on the coastal area specialized in fishing whereas the inland Sámi population adapted to trading interests emerging from the east: the merchants of Novgorod, their Karelian middlemen, the *birkarlar*. The emerging power of the Norwegian king (and the Church) did not just mean choosing between different livelihoods for the Sámi people: it also meant that the Norwegian settlers moved to northern Norway. During the control of the Norwegian chieftains this was not possible, because the chieftains must have had sanctions to deny any potential Norwegian individual from moving into the Sámi fjords and taking up a clearing or a farm. The reason would be that these settlers would have jeopardized the prime foundations for the chieftains' economic power. All these changes are reflected also in the archaeological finds. The Norwegian coins in the Sámi sacrificial sites are missing from the turn of the twelfth century, and the metal artefacts on the whole after c. 1350. Until this date northern Fennoscandia had been the interest sphere of the Norwegians, but now the Swedes, Finns/Karelians and Novgorodians also came to play a part in exploiting the Sámi people and the resources of the vast northern Fennoscandia.¹³⁰

The kings' sagas do not reveal how the Sámi people reacted to this pressure from the Church and the King, but the archaeological material proves that they tried to adapt to the changing situation. Hansen's conclusion is that the status of the Sámi began to deteriorate after the beginning of the consolidation of the monarchy and the Church in Norway. Simek notes that one cannot leave unmentioned that the *Finnar* in the sagas are often opposed to the Norwegian king. The relationship between the Norwegians and the *Finnar* had its peaceful and positive side, but they were also characterized by conflicts and injustice.¹³¹

The medieval Norse texts actually seem to show the transition phase in the relations between the Norwegians and the *Finnar*: the Norwegians began to exploit and subjugate their neighbours. Because marginality and periphery are always defined by a centre/power centre, it is plausible that the image and status of the *Finnar* in the kings' sagas reflect the political situation in Norway in the thirteenth century, when the kings reasserted and consolidated their power.¹³² The newly born or emerging administration was forcing people into regularity and similarity, and any acceptance of divergence would be in conflict with the principles of the administration.¹³³ This did not apply just in Norway: as Jukka Korpela has pointed out, there was a similar clash of cultures in the area of East Fennoscandia in the Middle Ages, when the Swedish crown and the Christian Church began to consolidate their position. People had different opinions about land-ownership and land use, their mental world was very different from the Christian one and they spoke

¹³⁰ Hansen 1990, pp. 179, 270–2. Also Zachrisson 1997d, p. 174.

¹³¹ Simek 2001, p. 244.

¹³² Wallerström 1997, p. 341.

¹³³ Wallerström 1995, p. 169.

an incomprehensible language, or languages.¹³⁴ In this sense, the Norwegian laws and the kings' sagas seem to represent the view of the monarchy, the Church and the elite. The Sámi people could not adjust to the society on their own terms but had to be forced to change their livelihood and religion.

It is difficult to interpret the archaeological material and the written sources in order to get a coherent picture of the contacts between the Norwegians and the Sámi in the Viking Age and in the Middle Ages. The present understanding is that the Norwegians and the Sámi lived side by side without conflicts in northern Norway, but they did not apparently live in mixed societies even though intermarriage¹³⁵ occurred. The Norwegians had settled on the coastline and the Sámi lived in inner fjords and in inland areas. The real Norwegian expansion in the north began in the thirteenth century. Bjørnar Olsen argues that three things affected Norwegian-Sámi relations: 1. the economical change; also the Novgorodians (as well as Finns) got involved with the fur trade, and this caused more pressure on the Sámi; 2. the political change: the north Norwegian magnates were confronted by the monarchy, which wanted to exert control and power also in northern Norway, which had traditionally belonged to the magnates; 3. Christianization. Old Norse paganism and Sámi paganism could live side by side because they were connected to the particular society and culture, and they did not seek to expand or get new members. Christianity changed this, because it condemned all kinds of paganism.¹³⁶ The effect of Christianity on Norwegian-Sámi relations will be dealt further in the chapter on 'Religion'.

4.2.4 The *Finnar* – real 'others'?

Eric Christiansen depicts the environment of northern Scandinavia and Fenno-Scandia as harsh, unfriendly and difficult to cope with. He juxtaposes the civilized Europe, which consisted of villages, towns and kingdoms, with the wilderness of the north, which had 'no fixed villages, no harvests, no wheels, no kingdoms and no churches'.¹³⁷ I would call this view into question, at least partly. It is true that for example the way of living of the Sámi differed a great deal from the agricultural and pastoral livelihood of the Germanic Scandinavians – or the Finns, who had adopted it too. Christiansen insists that the settled communities that were living 'on the edge of the frontier' were deeply affected by the closeness of the alien world.¹³⁸ In my opinion he is exaggerating. It is too simplistic to make a dichotomy between the hunter-fisher Sámi and the sedentary farmers of the North Germanic or Finnic populations.¹³⁹ As the archaeological evidence and religious studies show, the Scandinavians were living with the Sámi and accepting and even perhaps adopting some features of their religion. According to Zachrisson, their

¹³⁴ Korpela 2008.

¹³⁵ See the chapter 'Marriages between Kings and *Finnkonur*'.

¹³⁶ Olsen 2000, p. 36.

¹³⁷ Christiansen 1997, pp. 8–10.

¹³⁸ Christiansen 1997, p. 9.

¹³⁹ Valtonen 2008, p. 315.

relationship was symbiotic in the Viking Age and in the Early Middle Ages.¹⁴⁰

When Christianity was introduced in Scandinavia, the change began: the Church was strengthening its foothold together with the incipient royal administration, and the difference between a Christian Norwegian (or Swede) and a heathen Sámi was emphasized by Church doctrine. As evidence we can point to the Norwegian lawcodes, which denied any contacts with the Sámi. According to Else Mundal Christianity clearly affected the attitudes towards the pagan Sámi in Norway. Before Christianity got a foothold in Norway religion did not affect the relationship between the Norwegians and the Sámi but after the Norwegians were Christianized they were forbidden to be in any contact with the heathen *Finnar*. Mundal points out that for example Borgarþing law and Eidsiváþing law forbade people to be in contact with the *Finnar*.¹⁴¹ It was illegal to visit them or ask them to foretell the future. These prohibitions actually reveal that the contacts between the Norwegians and the *Finnar* were close because they had to be forbidden by the law.¹⁴² However, this demand for not being in contact with the heathen Sámi came from above and it must have been difficult to accept for the ordinary Norwegians, who were used to being in contact with the Sámi (trade, tribute, marriage, healing).¹⁴³

The *Finnar* in the sagas are generally associated with the cardinal point north. As Hermann Pálsson has shown such place names as *Jötunheimar*, *Risaland* and *Glasisvellir* were also associated with the north. Those people who lived in the north, i.e. mainly the *Finnar*, were associated with giants and other supernatural creatures.¹⁴⁴ Katja Schulz has pointed out that giants could be called *Übergangs-characteren*; these human-like characters lived in a zone between the human world and the monstrous races. They existed there where the 'known' (*das Bekannte*) ended and the 'strange' (*das Fremde*) began.¹⁴⁵ It suited the image of the *Finnar*, who lived somewhere between the known civilized world and the unknown periphery.

However, there is a fundamental difference between the giants of mythology and the *Finnar* of the sagas. The giants are counterbalanced to the gods: they represent destruction and they have their role in Ragnarök, the end of the world. In this way the giants are an acceptable part of the world and there is balance between good (gods) and evil (the giants). The *Finnar*, however, do not fit in the Christian worldview, which is based on a dichotomy: Christians vs. heathens. Christianity, being a missionary religion, did not seek to understand or live in peace with heathens in the Middle Ages. The ultimate goal was to convert the heathens, and thus

¹⁴⁰ Price 2002, p. 237–8; Zachrisson 1994, p. 178 and also the map, which shows the presumed distribution between Sámi area and Scandinavian area c. AD 1000, p. 174.

¹⁴¹ *Norges Gamle Love* I, pp. 350–1 and p. 389. Borgarþing's area consisted of Ranrike, Vingulmork and Vestfold and even Neset (Brunlanes), Arup Seip 1980, pp. 148–9; Eidsivating's area consisted of Opplandene and Viken, Knudsen 1980, pp. 526–7.

¹⁴² Mundal 1996, pp. 97, 102–3.

¹⁴³ This issue will be discussed further in the chapter 'Clash of the mental worlds – Christians vs. heathens'.

¹⁴⁴ Hermann Pálsson 1997.

¹⁴⁵ Schulz 2004, pp. 231, 235.

the Sámi, for example, could not continue their way of life as before. This goal was supported also by regents who sought after a consolidated and centralized power in their realms. Here we may take East Fennoscandia as a comparison, where the conquerer (the realm of Sweden, the Latin Church) brought administration, legislation and religion to an area which lacked these. It took hundreds of years before the local population had adopted the ways of their masters.¹⁴⁶ The situation must have been similar in Norway.

In Old Norse mythology the giants are contrasted with the people living in the south. Cardinal points divide people for example in *Ketils saga hængs*. Vésteinn Ólason has pointed out that the inhabitants of north and south were juxtaposed in general:

Their direct opposites are the people of the South in general. In *Ketils saga* there is also a group of mediators on both sides of the borders: the Finns and the men of Hrafnista. The Finn women are a step closer to the giants than the Hrafnista heroes, and hence they are socially unacceptable, but at the same time they are necessary allies of the hero. They represent an Other at the borders of humanity.¹⁴⁷

All the features that describe the *Finnar* in the sagas support the view that they were mixed with the giants of Scandinavian mythology, and that they were considered to be 'others' in the eyes of the Norse people. The reputation of Finns or Sámi as sorcerers was widespread elsewhere in Europe. Such medieval authors as Bartholomeus Glanvil (or Anglicus) believed that the Finns/Sámi could control winds and that foreign merchants could purchase their knowledge.¹⁴⁸ Marko Lamberg has stated: 'The image of the Finns as sorcerers reflects the fact that a people living far away in a peripheral corner of Europe could be both physically integrated into West-European civilization and morally quite alien in the eyes of "more civilized" peoples'.¹⁴⁹

According to John McKinnell those passages which mention the *Finnar* in the sagas do not tell about the Sámi way of living; they are more or less reflections of how Norsemen projected their old mythology onto the Sámi of their own time.¹⁵⁰ It is thus possible that the sagas deliberately give a negative image of the *Finnar* because it was in the interest of the Church that the Norwegians did not co-operate with the heathens. The king had his own interests in trying to control the Sámi people as well as his other subjects. In Snorri's case it is interesting to deliberate whether he was using the Old Norse mythology and perhaps other oral tradition on the *Finnar* when describing them, or whether he had personal experiences or second-hand information on them. There is no way we can ever find out whether Snorri met a single *Finnr* on his journeys in Norway, but one would suppose that he would have at least heard stories about them from Norwegians.

¹⁴⁶ Korpela 2004, pp. 224–39.

¹⁴⁷ Vésteinn Ólason 1994, p. 110.

¹⁴⁸ Saxo Grammaticus writes that the Bjarmians were able to control winds. Saxo I.8.16.

¹⁴⁹ Lamberg 2006, p. 129.

¹⁵⁰ McKinnell 2003, p. 128.

As the examples in the sagas show, the *Finnar* were present in the Norwegian world even if they are described as 'others'. They were business partners and they took part in military expeditions. The status of the *Finnar* and the attitudes towards them must have changed gradually, as Christianity got a foothold in Norway, but as the laws with their prohibitions reveal, they could not be excluded totally.

The *Finnar* appear in saga episodes that have something to do with marriages (with kings), targets of military and plundering expeditions, trade and tribute collecting. What unites these descriptions of the *Finnar* is that they are usually involved with helping or dealing with people who are enemies of the 'good' kings. Thus, even if it is not explicit in the sagas the *Finnar* are associated with conspiracies. When the *Finnar* appear in the sagas they cause something negative in one way or another.

The image of the *Finnar* in the kings' sagas is thus unclear and negative. Even if the word *Finnr* refers mainly to the Sámi people in the sagas it may in a few cases have denoted the Finns. However, the Norwegians or the Icelanders probably did not have sufficient information on the Finns to differentiate them from the Sámi. It is obvious that the reason for the lack of information was that the Finns were geographically so remote. Concerning the ethnonym *Finnar* the following should be kept in mind: 1. originally the name *Finnar* may have emerged as a designation for practitioners of a certain livelihood (hunter-fishers); 2. it is an ethnonym given by outsiders; 3. the descriptions are strongly biased.

Why was the image of the *Finnar* so negative in the kings' sagas? In my opinion two aspects are mixed in the image of the *Finnar*: they were enemies of both the Church and the king (meaning here the overall process of the secular power to consolidate its status). The *Finnar* were associated with the giants and trolls of Old Norse mythology,¹⁵¹ which was very convenient from the viewpoint of the Church and the king. It was easy to enhance this image of the enemy with the old stereotypes. In the sagas it is sometimes mentioned that a person could be a half-troll (*hálf troll*), which indicates that either the mother or father of the character was 'finnzkr at ætt'. The connection with magical skills overshadowed all the other characteristics of the *Finnar*.¹⁵²

To conclude, the information on the *Finnar* in the kings' sagas may give glimpses of the life of the Sámi people in the Middle Ages but the information is characterized by Christian prejudices as well as Old Norse mythology to some extent. The image of the *Finnar* shows that they were considered as a marginal group by the Norwegians (Christian elite), and that is why they could be categorized as digital others. This marginality and thus 'otherness' was enhanced by emphasizing the 'weird' characteristics of the *Finnar*: their heathenism and connection with magic.¹⁵³ However, the kings' sagas or the Norse medieval sources in general are

¹⁵¹ Clunies Ross 1987, p. 168. See also the chapter 'Marriages between Kings and *Finnkonur*'.

¹⁵² Holmberg 1976, p. 181; Hermann Pálsson 1997, p. 17. Those Icelanders that may have had Sámi blood in their ancestry could be called *hálf troll*.

¹⁵³ Aalto 2003, p. 6.

not the only ones describing the *Finnar* as strange and inferior.¹⁵⁴ In the end, the image of the *Finnar* in the kings' sagas is the product of the thirteenth-century authors, who themselves were affected by Christianity and its view of heathens.

4.3 THE BJARMIANS (*BJARMAR*)

One thing is obvious when it comes to Bjarmians (*Bjarmar*)¹⁵⁵ and their land *Bjarmaland* in the kings' sagas: they are definitely a tempting target for plundering expeditions. The mentions of these expeditions are often brief, like for example this passage from *Fagrskinna*:

Fjórða sumar fór hann með her <inn> norðr á Bjarmaland ok átti þar mikla orrostu á Vínubakka ok drap mikit fólk, fekk þar bæði gull ok silfr ok mikit annat fé ok fór aptr sama haust.¹⁵⁶

Ágrip does not mention *Bjarmar* or *Bjarmaland* at all, but the other kings' sagas do, even if only few times.¹⁵⁷ The most thorough account is in *Heimskringla* in *Óláfs saga ins helga* (ch. 133) – and which is given in brief also by *Fagrskinna*.¹⁵⁸ In this episode the Norwegian Þórir hundr and his companions make a trading voyage to

¹⁵⁴ De Anna 1992, p. 19.

¹⁵⁵ Some scholars have suggested that because the words *bjarm* and *perm* resemble each other the Bjarmians were Permians. Permian, situated in northern Russia around the River Kama, was a lively trading centre between Europe and Asia. Especially some Russian scholars accepted this view. It was rejected by such scholars as Kuznetsov and Ross. They justified their view by pointing out that the Permians were not active around the White Sea area. Moreover, their language was very different from the Sámi language. Finnish scholars have tried to explain the origin of the word from a different point of view. According to them the word *bjarm* is linked to merchants or their organization. For example Kustaa Vilkkuna argues that the word *perm(i)* in Finnish means a Karelian merchant who came from the northern part of Karelia by the White Sea. However, Vilkkuna admits that it is almost impossible to know the etymology of the word for sure, but he bases his claim about the Karelian merchant-theory on different references in the sources and dialects in the Finnish language. See the chapter 'Bjarmaland – Permian maa' in Vilkkuna 1964. Christian Carpelan also supports Vilkkuna's view about the Bjarmians, not as an ethnic term, but as referring to a trade organization. See also Jackson 1992, p. 123; Davidson 1976, p. 35; Kirkinen 1963, pp. 35–40. Mervi Koskela Vasaru has made an extensive study on Bjarmaland (2009).

¹⁵⁶ *Fagrskinna* ch. 14, p. 103; Finlay 2004, p. 79: 'The fourth summer he went north with his army to Bjarmaland, and there fought a great battle on Vínubakki and killed many people there, and got there both gold and silver as well as many other valuable goods, and returned the same autumn'. See also *Haralds saga gráfeldar* ch. 14, p. 217: 'Haraldr gráfeldr fór á einu sumri með her sinn norðr til Bjarmalands ok herjaði þar ok átti orrostu mikla við Bjarma á Vínubakka. Þar hafði Harald konungr sigr ok drap mart fólk, herjaði þá víða um landit ok fekk ófa mikit fé'; Hollander, p. 140: 'One summer Harald Greycloak sailed with his fleet north to Permian, harried there, and had a great battle with the Permians on the bank of the Dvina River in which Harald was victorious and killed many people, whereupon he plundered the land far and wide and acquired an immense amount of property'.

¹⁵⁷ *Morkinskinna* FJ 297; *Fagrskinna* ch. 8, pp. 76–80; ch. 14, pp. 95–103; ch. 31, pp. 180–2; ch. 80, pp. 302–6; *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 32, pp. 134–6; *Haralds saga gráfeldar* ch. 14, pp. 217–19; *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 133, pp. 227–34; *Magnúss saga berfætts* ch. 2, p. 212; also *Historia Norvegiae*, p. 75: 'utrique Biarmones'.

¹⁵⁸ *Fagrskinna* ch. 31, p. 182: 'Þórir hundr var ok ríkr maðr, hann hafði farit til Bjarmalands ok drept þar ríks manns son, er Karli hét, er farit hafði með hönunum'.

Bjarmaland. After having traded with the Bjarmians the Norwegians come back and plunder their graveyard. The whole voyage began when King Óláfr Haraldsson sent a certain Karli upon his business to the north. It was agreed that the king should be in partnership with Karli, and each of them have the half of the profit. The king had provided Karli with money and a ship. Karli and his brother Gunnsteinn sailed with their merchant goods to Bjarmaland. However, Þórir hundr had heard of this voyage and he offered to sail with the brothers with his own ships. In Bjarmaland they went to an emporium to trade. The Norwegians bought a number of furs, and beaver and sable skins, but the last mention must be a mistake.¹⁵⁹

When the fair ended they sailed out of the Vína River ('út eptir ánni Vínu'). Then Þórir suggested that they could go on land and get booty, because he knew that the Bjarmians buried valuables with their dead. The others agreed and they went on land when night fell. The Norwegians came to a large clearing, where there was a high fence upon which there was a gate that was locked. It was guarded by the Bjarmians. The Norwegians opened the gate and went in. Þórir said that they could rob other treasures but not the statue of *Jómali* that was the god of the Bjarmians. However, Karli did not believe him, because he had seen that Þórir himself had taken a silver bowl that had been on the knee of the statue. Karli saw a thick gold ornament hanging around the statue's neck, he lifted his axe and cut the string with which the ornament was tied behind its neck. The stroke was so strong that the head of *Jómali* rang with a great sound. The watchmen heard the sound and the Norwegians had to flee quickly back to their ships.

Þórir was prepared for this, and he had something that was like ashes with him. Þórir took this in his hand, and strewed it upon the footpath, and sometimes over the people. The Bjarmians rushed out after them, but apparently they could not see the Norwegians. Apparently spreading the ashes had a magical effect, which hindered the Bjarmians from seeing the fleeing Norwegians.¹⁶⁰ The Norwegians reached their ships and went on board. They managed to avoid the Bjarmians and sailed with their booty across *Gandvík*.

This account in *Heimskringla* is the longest in the kings' sagas that tells about the Bjarmians and *Bjarmaland*. Similar accounts cannot be found in the other kings' sagas, but in *fornaldarsögur* travels to *Bjarmaland* are depicted. Two place names are given in *Óláfs saga ins helga*: the River Vína and *Gandvík*. It has been suggested that the River Vína would be Severnaja Dvina (Finnish Viena), which runs into the

¹⁵⁹ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 133, p. 229: 'Þórir fekk óf grávöru ok bjór ok safala'; Hollander, p. 404: 'Thórir acquired an abundance of grey furs as well as beaver and sable pelts'. The trade with sable skins must be a mistake because sable has never lived in Fennoscandia. It is possible that sable was mixed with pine marten. Huldén 2004, pp. 176–8; Wallerström 1995, p. 315: 'levande exempel av denna art [sobel] har veterligen aldrig existerat väster om Petjora-floden i östra delen av europeiska Ryssland eller väster om floderna Dvina eller Mezen'.

¹⁶⁰ The spreading of ashes is connected to the *Finnar*. For example in *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 32 Gunnhildr spreads ashes inside and outside the Lapp hut so that the two *Finnar* living there would not find Eiríkr Bloodaxe and his men. According to *Erfidrápa* Þórir was familiar with the magic of the *Finnar*. Later he even ordered them to make him twelve magical furs (*Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 193); *Erfidrápa* 16, pp. 242–3: 'Mildr fann gǫrst, hvé galdrar, gramr sjlafr, meginrammir fjólkunnigra Finna fullstórum barg Þóri, þás hyrsendir Hundi húna golli búnu (slætt réð sízt at bíta) sverði laust of herðar'.

White Sea near Arkhangelsk. Gandvík may derive from the Finnish *Kantalahti*, which is a name of part of the White Sea. However, in this case *Gandvík* seems to be the Old Norse name for the White Sea. The meaning of this study is not to point out where *Bjarmaland* was situated exactly, but according to the saga information we can assume that *Bjarmaland* was supposed to be somewhere around the White Sea.¹⁶¹

Because *Bjarmaland* was situated so far off Norwegians probably could not even define its location exactly. *Historia Norvegiae* mentions *utrique Biarmones* which would suggest that may have been two Bjarmalands. Tatjana Jackson has explained this by comparing analogies in Olaus Magnus's *Carta Marina*. In this map there is *Bothnia occidentalis* – *Bothnia orientalis* meaning the both sides of the Gulf of Bothnia, and *Lappia occidentalis* – *Lappia orientalis*. Jackson's conclusion is that the White Sea separated the two Bjarmalands, meaning that it was situated somewhere around the White Sea.¹⁶²

The sagas are not the only source for information about the Bjarmians. The Norwegian chieftain Ohthere visited King Alfred of Wessex at the end of the ninth century. Ohthere's account of his homeland and his journeys to the north is recorded in King Alfred's Old English version of Orosius's world history. Ohthere was from the northern part of Norway, Hálogaland. There were only *Finns* living north of his home district. Ohthere travelled all the way to the White Sea, but he did not dare to sail further, because he did not have peace with the Bjarmians ('for unfriþe'), which implies that he did not have the agreement of the Bjarmians, which would guarantee his integrity in the Bjarmian land.¹⁶³

Still, Ohthere had met Bjarmians who had told about their land and neighbouring lands. He was not sure what was true and what was not because he himself had not visited *Bjarmaland*. Perhaps this was the reason why the information about *Bjarmaland* was left out of Alfred's *Orosius*. Ohthere could tell that he had seen fields by the river estuary, where he had stopped by on his journey. According to him the *Finns* and the Bjarmians spoke languages that resembled each other.¹⁶⁴ If we are to believe Ohthere's account Norwegians and Bjarmians had trade relations already in the ninth century, and Alfred's *Orosius* is the first written evidence of this. However, when it comes to the eastern imports in northern Fennoscandia the archaeological evidence shows that the trade route via the White Sea was not the main line of trade between the northern Fennoscandia and the White Sea area. It seems that the internal waterways in present-day Finland were of greatest importance.¹⁶⁵ This supports the view that not only Norwegians traded in the northern Fennoscandia, but also other Finnic peoples and Russians had their share of the trade.

¹⁶¹ See Koskela Vasaru's (2009) extensive study on this.

¹⁶² *Historia Norvegiae*, p. 74; Jackson 1992, p. 125. On the location of Bjarmaland, see also Jackson 2002, pp. 165–79.

¹⁶³ Valtonen 2008, p. 365; *Orosius*, p. 14. See also the chapter 'Kaupfriðr'.

¹⁶⁴ Ross 1940, pp. 16–23; Davidson 1976, pp. 32–3; *Orosius*, p. 14.

¹⁶⁵ Makarov 1992, p. 340.

If the *Finnas*, who most probably were the Sámi people, and the Bjarmians spoke a language that resembled each other as Ohthere says, it brings up the interesting hypothesis that the Bjarmians spoke a Finno-Ugric language.¹⁶⁶ Þórir hundr mentions that the Bjarmian god's name was *Jómali*, which recalls the Finnish word *jumala* ('a god'). Mervi Koskela Vasaru has drawn the conclusion that the Bjarmians were an independent group that spoke a Baltic-Finnic language, and who later assimilated with the Karelians.¹⁶⁷ But as Maj-Lis Holmberg has pointed out, Icelanders or the saga audience could not have thought of the Bjarmians as a people that would have had a connection with the *Finnar*, because this is never stated in the sagas.¹⁶⁸ In my opinion, this does not preclude the notion that the *Finnar* and the Bjarmians may have been linked with each other in the Norse mental world. These two groups had a lot in common: they both lived far away in the north, they were exploited by the Norwegians, they were considered strange because of their language and habits, and they were associated (Bjarmians less than the *Finnar*) with magic and thus heathenism.

The image of the Bjarmians in *Óláfs saga ins helga* is negative because the Bjarmians were heathens and worshipped an idol. The wealth of the Bjarmians is bound to the god *Jómali* – after all, the treasures were placed in the cemetery and the statue of *Jómali* was decorated with them – which gives the audience a hint that the wealth is questionable, maybe from the devil. As an interesting detail, it could be mentioned that worship of the Bjarmian god *Jómali* resembles the Sámi or generally Finnic practices of religion. Even though we have no records of Finnic peoples worshipping idols that were statues, we know that cult monuments (Finnish *seita*, Sámi *siei'di* or *seijdde*) in nature were worshipped. The concept of *seita* varies, but usually they were separate stones, stone formations or stone statues but also trees, tree statues or stumps.¹⁶⁹ People offered different kinds of things to these cult monuments: jewellery, money, food.

Nonetheless, the treasures taken from the Bjarmian graveyard do not bring luck to Karli, who is later killed by Þórir, so we may assume that the Bjarmian treasures were somehow cursed. Þórir himself turns out to be an evil man and opponent of King Óláfr Haraldsson. We do not know why Snorri included Þórir's journey to *Bjarmaland* in *Óláfs saga ins helga* but at least it gives some background to his character. It shows that he was from the beginning 'an evil character'.

In other than the kings' sagas the Bjarmians are also described as a hostile tribe, for example in *Qrvar-Odds saga*.¹⁷⁰ Even if we consider that there were trade relations between Norwegians and the Bjarmians, it seems not to have affected the

¹⁶⁶ The Bjarmians have been identified with at least following ethnic groups in the research literature: the Permian ancestors of Komi (Zyryans), or Baltic-Finnish-speaking peoples (either the Votes, the Vepsians or the Karelians). Hansen 1996, p. 45 and references.

¹⁶⁷ Koskela Vasaru 2009, p. 430.

¹⁶⁸ Holmberg 1976, p. 171.

¹⁶⁹ Korpela 2008, pp. 60–1.

¹⁷⁰ *Qrvar-Odds saga*, *Fornaldar sögur Norðrlanda* II, 1829, pp. 175–8; Hermann Pálsson and Edwards 1989, p. 36. Koskela Vasaru has collected references to Bjarmaland in the sagas and in the Latin sources as well. Koskela Vasaru 2003, pp. 57–86.

image of the Bjarmians positively. The Bjarmians living far off and not being Christians was sufficient to characterize them as very strange, so they would have been categorized as digital others. Still, we may suspect that the image of the heathen and evil Bjarmians may not correspond to reality if we consider the trade relations they had with the Norwegians. As with the case of the *Finnar*, maybe the authors wanted to stress the heathen image of the Bjarmians while in reality it was not an obstacle for trade. Thus, the Bjarmians fall into the same category of otherness as the *Finnar*.

4.4 THE *BLÁMENN*

The distant Muslim countries of southern Europe and the Middle East form a special case among images of ‘otherness’. These places and their inhabitants appear in the kings’ sagas only occasionally, and in fact, they are depicted more in detail in for example *riddarasögur* than in the kings’ sagas. All the kings’ sagas tell more or less about King Sigurðr Jorsalafar’s crusade to Spain and Palestine, and this episode contains references to the heathen *blámenn*. King Sigurðr is known to have been in Palestine around year 1110, so the saga is at least based on factual events.¹⁷¹ The other mentions about the heathen *blámenn*, i.e. the Muslims, are more or less scattershot and fragmentary.

King Sigurðr’s crusade is something unique in the whole Scandinavian history so it is no wonder that all the kings’ sagas tell about it except for *Ágrip*.¹⁷² *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla* give the most thorough accounts of this crusade. *Heimskringla* depends in this tradition on *Morkinskinna* and sometimes cuts and shortens the account. For Snorri it was obvious that King Sigurðr was making the crusade in order to help other Christians, but scholars have pointed out that the reasons for the crusade may also have been ‘booty, prestige and adventure’.¹⁷³ On his way to the Holy Land King Sigurðr fought in ‘heathen’ Spain (nowadays Portugal and Spain) with the *blámenn*. The line between the Christians and heathens is drawn very clearly in this saga. When King Sigurðr arrives in Lisbon, we are told that the town was half-Christian and half-heathen (Muslim). The land west and south of Lisbon was ‘heathen’. King Sigurðr fought again with the heathens in the towns of Sintre and Alcácer do Sal as well as on the Balearic Islands. The battle that was fought on the island of Formentera is described in detail. King Sigurðr and his men were facing there ‘herr mikill heiðinna blámanna’. King Sigurðr, of course, wins the battle and the arrogant heathens – who are also called bandits (*illgerðamenn*) – lose.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Phillips 1998, p. 46.

¹⁷² *Ágrip* describes King Sigurðr and his brothers, but the saga does not tell about his crusade. *Ágrip* ch. 59, p. 52; *Morkinskinna* FJ 338–49; *Fagrskinna* ch. 86–90, pp. 315–19; *Magnússona saga* ch. 4–11, pp. 240–52.

¹⁷³ Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1979, *Heimskringla* I, p. lii; Bagge and Walaker Nordeide 2007, p. 157.

¹⁷⁴ Compare with *Eymundar þáttir Hringssonar* in *Flateyjarbók* II, p. 126: ‘Tyrkir ok Blákumenn ok mǫrg

Who were these ‘blue’ men in fact? *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla* use the varying names *blámenn* and *heiðinjar/heiðin menn*. *Fagrskinna* calls them also ‘Blámenn ok Serkir’.¹⁷⁵ Generally we can say that the word *blámenn* referred to peoples living in Spain/Portugal and south of the Mediterranean Sea. The adjective *blár* can mean ‘blue’ but in this context it is to be interpreted to mean ‘black’. In other words, *blámenn* were coloured men, but the concept included also Arabs and Moors whose complexion was not necessarily very dark. The use of the word *blár* indicates that it was intended to emphasize that these peoples were of different ethnic background than the Scandinavians. The Scandinavians used also the word *svartr* (black) to denote skin colour, but it was used of Scandinavian people who had darker complexion than other ones. So, for example King Haraldr hárfagri’s son was called Haraldr svartí and the nickname was referring to the colour of his complexion.¹⁷⁶ As Kirsten Wolf has pointed out, colour is ‘above all a social phenomenon’, in reference to the different meanings of the word *blár* in Old Icelandic. According to Wolf, the colour *blár* meant in origin just dark colour. The dyeing of textiles was developed from the thirteenth century onwards and in the fourteenth century it was possible to dye textiles in deep black tones. Thus, the colour *blár* which had denoted also shades of black, was attached firmly to the blue spectrum later in the Middle Ages.¹⁷⁷

As mentioned above, only *Fagrskinna* uses the word *Serkir*, which means Saracens. This ethnonym is almost as obscure as *blámenn*, who are also mentioned as the inhabitants of *Serkland*, so these two ethnonyms referred to the same peoples.¹⁷⁸ *Serkland* is a place name in the sagas that cannot be located with certainty as probably not even the authors using the word could do that. *Serkland* was situated in Africa, Mesopotamia, Palestine, Spain, or in Asia Minor depending on the source. So, it seems that *Serkland* cannot be understood geographically but politically and culturally. The peoples of the *Austrlǫnd* were called *Serkir* in the sagas whether they were ancient Persians or contemporary Muslims, which means that this ethnonym cannot be bound to a certain time and place.¹⁷⁹

The Christian Europeans had – not surprisingly – a somewhat black-and-white image of the Muslims, who were thought to represent all things evil and Muhammad was considered to be the Antichrist.¹⁸⁰ Even though there were already in the Middle Ages educated men among Christians who had knowledge about the

önnur ill þíod’. The opponents of the Christians were labelled as ‘bad men’.

¹⁷⁵ *Fagrskinna* ch. 86, p. 316.

¹⁷⁶ Lindow 1995, p. 13. See also *Ágrip* ch. 59, p. 52: The brothers Sigurðr, Ingi and Eysteinn are described. Eysteinn is described as ‘dark and curly-haired’ and Ingi as ‘fair’: ‘Sigurðr konungr var mikill maðr vexti ok liðmannligt, ramr at afli, marglyndr ok málsnjallr, vandlyndr ok vanstilltr, hraustr ok glaðr. Eysteinn konungr var hár maðr ok styrkr ok bermálugr, slægvittr, undirhyggjumaðr, fastr ok fégjarn, svartr ok skrífhárr. Ingi konungr var hvítr maðr ok vænn í andliti, vanheill, hryggbrottinn ok visnaði fótr annarr.’

¹⁷⁷ Wolf 2006, pp. 1078–9.

¹⁷⁸ King Eysteinn mentions Sigurðr’s crusade and that he fought against the *blámenn* in *Serkland*. *Magnússona saga* ch. 21, p. 261: ‘meðan þú brytjaðir blámenn fyrir fjándann á Serklandi’.

¹⁷⁹ Sverrir Jakobsson 2005, pp. 146–7.

¹⁸⁰ Kangas 2006, pp. 111–13; Le Goff 1988, p. 145.

belief of the Muslims and they had a more versatile image of them,¹⁸¹ the general opinion was that the Muslims were first and foremost opponents of Christianity.¹⁸² As Sverrir Jakobsson points out, Icelanders shared the same image of the *Austrlǫnd* as other West Europeans in the Middle Ages. Moreover, if the (educated) Europeans in the south and west of Europe got to know the ways of Muslims because of the crusades, this information did not reach Icelanders. For them all the heathens were the same.¹⁸³

The use of the word *blámenn* is interesting in the context of the kings' sagas, because in the *fornaldarsögur* it referred to secular creatures of evil ('*blámenn ok berserkir*'). When the *blámenn* are described in the *fornaldarsögur* their skin colour is only one feature that characterizes them, the other qualities showing that they were supernatural.¹⁸⁴ John Lindow has even found an example in which the word *blár* refers to a *Finnr*, which is another proof, that *blár* was connected with evil things. *Bláfinnr* was a name for a pond which was situated in the border of Norway and Sweden. The name of the pond is found on a document from the thirteenth century. The pond had got its name from a *Finnr* (a Sámi) who was an enemy of the first Christian inhabitant in that area. So, apparently – and not surprisingly – the Sámi people had inhabited the area before the Scandinavians. Nonetheless, there are many possibilities how to interpret the name and its contents, which can refer to witchcraft, the supernatural or even to a line between different races (group boundary).¹⁸⁵

The use of the word *blámenn* in the kings' sagas seems to indicate that there was a need to emphasize that the enemy was not just ethnically different but the word *blár* must have brought a connotation of evil, if the audience could see the connection through the alliteration '*blámenn ok berserkir*' used in the *fornaldarsögur*. Here it is appropriate to mention that Icelanders faced difficulties when they met indigenous peoples in Greenland and in North America, *Skrælingjar*, because they lacked vocabulary to describe these peoples. Hence, the indigenous people were called black even if 'a sufficient number of Icelanders appear to have seen Africans for it to have been clear that the Skraelings of Vínland were not black Africans'.¹⁸⁶ Because these Skraelings were so different and thus frightening in the eyes of Icelanders, negative descriptions were used for them: they were endowed with supernatural powers, they were all in all *illiligr* (malignant) and had *illt hár* (evil hair). They were classified as *illþýði* (villains).¹⁸⁷ This is just to show that something that is unknown or difficult to explain and understand is easy to label as evil and frightening.

¹⁸¹ They knew for example that the Muslims believed in one God but that they did not believe that Jesus was his son. Barber 1992, p. 504.

¹⁸² Southern 1978 [1962], pp. 47–51. Southern refers to William Rubroek and his account on the dispute between Christians, Buddhists and Muslims in the court of the Mongol khan.

¹⁸³ Sverrir Jakobsson 2005, p. 150.

¹⁸⁴ Lindow 1995, pp. 14–16.

¹⁸⁵ Lindow 1995, p. 18.

¹⁸⁶ Sverrir Jakobsson 2001, p. 100.

¹⁸⁷ Sverrir Jakobsson 2001, pp. 98, 100.

King Sigurðr's crusade is the most thorough account on how Scandinavians encountered the heathen *blámenn*. However, there are some other shorter references to pilgrimages or plundering expeditions directed to areas controlled by the Muslims. According to *Ágrip* King Eiríkr Bloodaxe was killed in Spain (*Spaníaland*), which seems very unlikely.¹⁸⁸ According to the other sagas Eiríkr was killed in England. Spain must have sounded a very exotic country to die in even though *Ágrip* does not mention that Eiríkr would have fought with *blámenn* or heathens there. *Heimskringla* tells that King Haraldr harðráði was in his youth serving in the army of the emperor of Byzantium and that he took his men to *Affríka*, which was also called *Serkland* by the Varangians.¹⁸⁹ In this context there is no mention of how the inhabitants of *Serkland* were called. Both *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla* also tell about a Norwegian aristocrat, Erlingr skakki, who left for Jerusalem. On his way there he fought in 'heathen Spain'.¹⁹⁰

The image of the *blámenn* reveals that they were considered not to be different from those heathens that lived closer to Scandinavians (for example the *Finnar*). The authors of the kings' sagas had little information about the Muslims. This means that there was a tendency to generalize when there was not enough knowledge. According to Sverrir Jakobsson, the descriptions of the *blámenn* seem to be similar to those of the contemporary Western European descriptions about the East.¹⁹¹ However, I would add here that the descriptions of Saracens in medieval romances (meaning here literature from the area of German and Romance languages) are more vivid and full of fantasies, whereas the descriptions in the kings' sagas lack these features. This is, of course, due to the fact that people in central and southern parts of Europe, especially in the Iberian Peninsula, had real contacts with the Saracens and they had the need to emphasize the otherness of their enemies.

Even if the Scandinavians had only scant knowledge of what was going on in the Holy Land and who the Saracens were, they knew that the Saracens were opponents of Christianity. The important thing was to make it clear for the audience of the sagas that the encounters between Christians and the heathens were ultimately encounters between good and evil. The key concept is juxtaposition between these two groups. To conclude, the image of the *blámenn* reveals that the Christian worldview had pervaded the Norse mental worldview by the beginning of the thirteenth century. However, whereas the *blámenn* remained as distant heathens, the *Finnar* were the closest – and most threatening – example of heathens in the eyes of the Norwegian (and Icelandic) Christians.

¹⁸⁸ *Ágrip* ch. 7, p. 12. Also *Historia Norvegiae* tells the same story.

¹⁸⁹ *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* ch. 5, p. 74.

¹⁹⁰ *Morkinskinna* FJ 441; *Haraldssona saga* ch. 17, p. 324.

¹⁹¹ Sverrir Jakobsson 2005, p. 150 and references.

4.5 SCATTERED INFORMATION ABOUT FOREIGNERS

It is always questionable to draw conclusions about things that the sources do not say or things they lack. However, I am going to examine some passages that are mentioned only a few times in the kings' sagas, and what they can tell about the image of 'otherness'.

4.5.1 Eistland

Eistland is mentioned among other lands in *Austrvegr*,¹⁹² and it is generally considered to refer to present-day Estonia. The group called *Eistr* lived in *Eistland*. Probably the best-known episode connected with them is in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*¹⁹³ in which Óláfr and his mother, while on their way the Garðaríki, are kidnapped by some Vikings that are said to be *Eistr* and they are sold as slaves. This story is also in *Ágrip* although in a much shorter version.¹⁹⁴ Óláfr, still being a child, is sold to a man called Klerkón (*eistneskr maðr*), then to Klerkr, and finally to Réás and his wife Rékón, who had a son called Rékóni. These names have, of course, interested scholars and they have been explained, but as the names have nothing to do with real Estonian names, it is most probable that they were invented because it is a common feature in saga literature that a character should have a name; the names for characters were often invented if they were unknown for the tradition.¹⁹⁵ Later Óláfr is saved by his uncle Sigurðr, who is under the service of King Valdimar of Garðaríki and collecting taxes for him.

Eistland is either a place where the Norsemen plunder¹⁹⁶ or it is a destination for merchants, as for example for the Norwegian Loðin.¹⁹⁷ The place names *Eysýsla* and *Aðalsýsla* are mentioned in these passages. *Eysýsla* refers to the island of Ösel (Saaremaa) and *Aðalsýsla* is thought to refer to the mainland of Estonia. Still, these toponyms show up very seldom in the kings' sagas. If we consider that the main trading routes to the east in the Baltic Sea went via the Åland Islands, the Finnish archipelago, the Tallinn area, River Neva, or via the Gulf of Riga to the River Dvina, the trade routes may not have directly touched *Eistland*. Instead, the Svear, for instance, may have made direct plundering expeditions to *Eistland* and *Kúrland* as the sagas – and some rune-stones – imply. Thus, *Eistland* is just a far-off place where the saga intrigue takes place and actually not much is said about the country or its inhabitants.

As the information concerning *Eistr* and *Eistland* is very limited in the sagas

¹⁹² In *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 80, p. 115 lawspeaker Þorgnýr mentions that his grandfather plundered every summer and 'lagði undir sik Finnland ok Kirjálaland, Eistland ok Kúrland ok víða um Austrlond'; Hollander p. 320: 'subjecting to his sway Finnland and Kirjálaland, Eistland and Kurland and wide reaches of other lands in the east'.

¹⁹³ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 6, p. 230.

¹⁹⁴ *Ágrip* ch. 17, p. 20.

¹⁹⁵ Zilmer 2005, p. 294 and references. For example Jukka Korpela has explained that the name Klerkon derives from Greek and means a priest. Korpela 1995, p. 175.

¹⁹⁶ *Fagrskinna* ch. 8, p. 79; ch. 27, p. 167; *Ynglinga saga* ch. 32–3, pp. 61–3; *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 32, p. 134; *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 90, p. 339; *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 8, pp. 9–10.

¹⁹⁷ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 52, pp. 301–2.

(*Morkinskinna* does not mention them at all), it is difficult to draw conclusions. It seems that because the contacts were limited to plunder and only in one case to trade, the image of the *Eistr* is not easy to define. It is not clearly negative, but as they live in the remote corner of *Austrvegr* they were probably considered as ‘very different from us’ by the Norwegians and Icelanders.

4.5.2 Kirjálaland

In spite of the fact that *Kirjálaland* is mentioned only twice in the kings’ sagas,¹⁹⁸ and its inhabitants, *Kirjálar*, are not mentioned at all, it is necessary to examine it. First of all, the passages that mention *Kirjálaland* place it in the east, of course in a very undefined way. According to *Heimskringla*, it is one of the places along *Austrvegr*, and according to *Fagrskinna* it must be situated near *Austrriki*. In all the probability, this points to the fact that *Kirjálaland* is Karelia, an area which today is divided between Finland and Russia, but which in the Viking Age denoted approximately the area of Viipuri region and the Karelian Isthmus, the centre being on the north-west coast of Lake Ladoga.

The word *Kirjálaland* has been explained as deriving from the place name Kurkijoki, which is situated in the north-western shore of Lake Ladoga and which is referred as *Kirjaškoi* in Russian.¹⁹⁹ Based on archaeological material there is actually nothing that contradicts the connection between *Kirjálaland* and the area of Kurkijoki. Several Viking Age sites and finds in and around the area of Kurkijoki testify lively connections with Scandinavians.²⁰⁰

The Finns and Karelians participated in trade on the *Austrvegr*, but they were not only passive peddlers of furs but also made trading and plundering voyages in northern Fennoscandia. They competed with Norwegians in Finnmark, where they collected tributes from the Sámi people. This competition is apparent for example in *Egils saga*, which mentions *Kvenir*, *Kirjálar* and *Kylfingar*.²⁰¹ Thus, the kings’ sagas lack descriptions about the people of *Kirjálaland*, but the almost contemporary *Egils saga* mentions them as one of the rivals of the Norwegians in Finnmark. The Karelians did not play an important enough role to be described and mentioned by the kings’ sagas. Karelians as well as *Eistr* could be labelled as one of those numerous peoples along the *Austrvegr* whose name is known but

¹⁹⁸ *Fagrskinna* ch. 29, p. 178; *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 80, p. 115.

¹⁹⁹ About the etymology of the word, see Uino 1997, p. 185. The etymology cannot be confirmed with certainty, and the place-name Karelia itself has several etymological explanations, one of them being the suggestion by Tuomo Pekkanen that the name originates from Scandinavian word **gaira*. Pekkanen 1984; on alternative etymologies, see Korpela 2004, pp. 23 and references; Kirkinen 1963, p. 30.

²⁰⁰ Uino 1997, pp. 114 (Fig. 4:6) and 182. Kurkijoki was a small emporium which was probably temporary. The population in the area was Finnic and no traces of Scandinavian population are to be found. Kurkijoki never became as important as Staraja Ladoga in the south, because it was not situated on the direct trade route. Still, the eastern trade route, *Austrvegr*, affected even the remote inland areas of present-day Finland and Karelia, because the inhabitants were often involved with trade in one way or another. Even though the *Kirjálar* are called Karelians in this study, I am aware that there were also other Finnic populations in the area, such as the Veps, which might also be called *Kirjálar* by the Scandinavians.

²⁰¹ *Egils saga* ch. 10, p. 27; ch. 14, pp. 35–7.

nothing else. They were digital others in the sense that they could be categorized in no other way than ‘very different from us’ from the Norse point of view.²⁰²

4.5.3 *Frísar, Frakkar, valskir menn*

It is surprising that the kings’ sagas mention for example *Frísland* and *Flæmingjaland* or their inhabitants (*Frísar*) very seldom or not at all.²⁰³ There must have been trade relations with Frisia,²⁰⁴ but it seems that there were no interesting stories related to the area or its people. The Germanic peoples, often referred to as *Saxar* or *Suðrmenn* in the sagas, play only minor roles. Also the French (*Frakkar*, *Valir* or *Valskir menn*) are mentioned very rarely in the kings’ sagas. One would expect that they would appear more often. Valland, which referred to France south and east of Flanders and Normandy and south and west of Lorraine and Burgundy, is mentioned a few times.²⁰⁵ Even though the geographical area of Valland seems to be somewhat well defined by the standards of the Norse thirteenth-century saga literature, the name *Valska* was not. As Jónas Kristjánsson points out, this name (like the English ‘Welsh’) referred ‘originally to what was foreign and is the language spoken by foreigners’. For Scandinavians there would have been no great linguistic troubles when encountering English, Frisians or Saxons, but Slavonic, Celtic and Romance languages posed problems.²⁰⁶ In *Morkinskinna* a certain knight Giffarðr from Valland is staying at the court of King Magnús Barefoot. He was mocked in a poem because he was apparently not acting very bravely in the military expedition in Götaland.²⁰⁷ Otherwise, we have no further accounts of *Valir* in the kings’ sagas.

The authors of the kings’ sagas were not interested in writing about events outside the *Norðrlönd*. They do not connect their histories with other countries by mentioning for example that ‘during this time Emperor X was ruling in Saxland’ or ‘Pope Y was then the head of the Church’. This does not mean that the authors were indifferent to the world outside the *Norðrlönd*. They just did not follow the conventions of the Western European medieval historiography. Distant places as well as their inhabitants serve as background for the story itself in the sagas. Edith Marold, who has examined the place names in *fornaldarsögur*, argues that the place names do not actually locate different places geographically but they express ‘Macht und Besitz’. For example in some of the *fornaldarsögur* the structure

²⁰² Aalto and Laakso 2009, pp. 6–10.

²⁰³ *Ágrip* does not mention *Frísar*; *Morkinskinna* FJ 236. *Morkinskinna*’s description on this Frisian man called Túta is not conventional. It describes how Túta was short and ‘plump as a dwarf’. King Haraldr harðráði and his retinue make fun of him by giving him a helmet and a sword, and he has to parade before the retinue in the drinking hall; *Fagrskinna* ch. 17, p. 116; *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 29, p. 263; *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 11, p. 13; ch. 64, p. 83; *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* 78, p. 172; ch. 79, p. 175; *Magnúss saga berfætts* ch. 20, p. 231.

²⁰⁴ At least *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 64 mentions that the inhabitants of Viken made trading voyages to *Flæmingjaland*.

²⁰⁵ *Morkinskinna* FJ 323, 340; *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 30; *Magnúss saga berfætts* ch. 20, pp. 231–2; *Magnússona saga* ch. 4, p. 240; *Haraldssona saga* ch. 17, p. 324.

²⁰⁶ Jónas Kristjánsson 1988, p. 318.

²⁰⁷ *Morkinskinna* FJ 323.

is formulated so that it describes a magnificent big realm.²⁰⁸

I think that distant places give a certain emphasis to events whether or not we are dealing with the kings' sagas or other saga genres. As Edith Marold's conclusions show, the meaning is not to pinpoint geographically exact locations but to support the story. If we take as an example the episodes in the kings' sagas which deal with Byzantium (Haraldr harðráði's early years in the service of the emperor²⁰⁹ and King Sigurðr Jorsalafari's visit to *Miklagarðr*²¹⁰), it is easy to see that this magnificent distant realm gives the opportunity to enhance the glory of these kings. Haraldr is told to be very successful in the service of the emperor and King Sigurðr was received well by the emperor. *Morkinskinna* even tells an interesting detail: namely, that King Sigurðr thanked the emperor for his gifts in Greek!²¹¹ Snorri, who describes Sigurðr's crusade to Jerusalem and visit to Byzantium in detail, may have had his reasons for doing so; after all, his foster-father Jón was a descendant of King Sigurðr himself.

4.6 CONCLUSION

The cases of analogue 'otherness' are far more numerous than digital 'otherness' in the kings' sagas. In other words: peoples that are not so different from the observer are depicted more often and interaction with them is lively compared with digital others. However, these digital others were very important for the group identity process: Icelanders and Norwegians, who were Christians, juxtaposed themselves with the heathens, who were considered as the extreme others in the kings' sagas. They were definitely considered as 'totally different from us'. The lack of real and factual information just emphasized the need to point out differences and make up new ones. However, we may suspect that this view of heathens as extreme others may reflect rather the opinion of the educated elite than the opinion of the masses. This seems to be true at least when it comes to the image of the *Finnar*: the archaeological evidence shows contacts between the Sámi people and the Norwegians, but the contemporary laws forbade the Norwegians to be in any contact with them. This also calls into question the idea of clear-cut boundaries existing between the in-group (the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere) and its digital others.

Distant countries and peoples are only mentioned to support the main story, but what then can be said about their position in the Norse-Icelandic mental world-view? The fact is that the information the Norse people had about these distant countries must have been very vague, which is, of course, reflected in the mental

²⁰⁸ Marold 1996, p. 199.

²⁰⁹ *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* ch. 3–15, pp. 71–89.

²¹⁰ *Ágrip* ch. 54, pp. 48–9; *Morkinskinna* FJ 349; *Fagrskinna* ch. 90–1, pp. 319–20; *Magnússona saga* ch. 12–13, pp. 252–4.

²¹¹ *Morkinskinna* FJ 349: 'S. konvngur stoþ þa vpp oc toc hringana oc dro ahond ser. Siþan talaþi hann ørendi agricsco oc þaccaþi keisara með fogrom orþom sina storlyndi.'

worldview. But even if the digital others mainly lived in geographically far-off and distant places, the case of the *Finnar* shows that extreme difference could be found also near the in-group.

5 Social Contacts

In the first part of this study 'otherness' has been dealt with as something that has to do with ethnicity or geographical distance. The purpose of the following part is to reveal what criteria we can use for 'otherness' when the social contacts are the starting point. Social contacts have to be understood here in a broad sense: they cover trade and hospitality as well as religious contacts. Because the kings' sagas concentrate on the Norwegian kings and the upper class, the upper-class social networks have a special emphasis. How did the upper-class network define itself? Who stood outside this network and why? What kind of positive and negative contacts inside this network of power? How does this network overlap with the definitions of 'otherness' that have been given so far in this study?

In this context Johan Callmer's definitions for social and non-social contacts between the groups become relevant.¹ Social contacts include such encounters as marriage and trade, the latter including travelling. Non-social contacts mean that the groups involved end up in a conflict, which means that war and plundering expeditions fall into this category. However, one category could basically fall into both depending on the episode in question, namely religion. Religion as a criterion is somewhat ambivalent because it can be seen as something that divides people (heathenism vs. Christianity) or something that unites them (unity among Christians, *Christianitas*). Inevitably religion as part of the social or non-social contacts brings in the problem of time perspective. We can basically see three different phases concerning religion and its effects on social contacts in the kings' sagas: 1. the time of heathenism; 2. the clash between heathenism and Christianity; 3. established Christianity. Especially the time when Christianity was introduced in Norway and the kings were converting people with force is problematic, because then religion is clearly involved with social and non-social contacts in the network of the Norwegian upper class. I concentrate on this period in the chapter that concerns religion.

If we consider the main question of this study (what does the image of 'otherness' reveal of medieval Norse-Icelandic society's worldview), it is clear that the positive contacts are more fruitful to this study than the negative, especially given that negative contacts tend to be just mentions of warfare and plunder in the kings' sagas. However, they cannot be neglected, but I have chosen to analyse them among positive contacts, which means that they will be mentioned in appropriate contexts (e.g. when trade contacts are cut off because of warfare, or when a war ends and peace is confirmed with a marriage alliance).

¹ Callmer 1992, pp. 100–1.

In the first part of the study the observer was defined as belonging to the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere. However, when we are dealing with social contacts, it must be emphasized that the kings' sagas concentrate on depicting the upper class, aristocracy. In my opinion, we must pay special attention to this fact. In this study, the upper class is understood in its broad sense. It is not in the scope of this study to define what aristocracy strictly speaking in the sagas is. In fact, as has been pointed out by other scholars, the whole definition of aristocracy before the High Middle Ages is vague. The Latin word *nobilis* was rarely used in the sources in Western Europe, and depending on the viewpoint, the whole term 'aristocracy' can be seen as a reconstruction of modern scholars.² In this case, the upper class in the sagas consists of king, his retinue as well as his opponents with their retinues. This is a well justified starting point as the kings' sagas can be seen to concentrate in essential parts on how the upper-class network worked: people in this network competed with each other and allied themselves with each other. This is manifested in the kings' sagas on the one hand as feuds and warfare, and on the other hand as alliances confirmed by marriages and mutual friendship. The purpose of the next chapters is not to present a deep analysis of networks of power in the kings' sagas but to give an overview of how networks of power are presented and manifested in the sagas, and how the networks of power provide definitions for in- and out-groups.

5.1 ARISTOCRACY AND *HIRÐ*

Sverre Bagge has made an extensive study of the Norwegian upper class in *Heimskringla*, which is the most extensive of the collections of kings' sagas. As can be expected, Snorri offers no strict definition of the upper class. It consists not only of men of title, but generally of esteemed men who had positions as local leaders and spokesmen. The upper class is vaguely separated from the king and the people, which seems to reflect the reality. A man belonging to the upper class held the office of *lendr maðr*, which means that the king had granted him incomes from royal estates for entering into his service. The office was not hereditary.³ The upper class was not a defined, closed rank, but a conglomerate. As Lars Hermansson states about the Danish upper class in the twelfth century, it was a prerequisite for an upper-class family to co-operate with the families of the elite. The upper class was formed and held together by mutual loyalties and personal relationships and allegiances, which could change.⁴ This means that the upper class can be seen as an in-group. Inside this in-group there is an on-going process of defining group boundaries between families, clans, allies and opponents.

² Hermansson 2000, p. 29. Hermansson refers, for example, to Susan Reynolds, who has pointed out that historians seek only technical terminology and evidence that can prove this model.

³ Bagge 1999, p. 306; Bagge 1991, p. 125.

⁴ Hermansson 2000, p. 10.

Sverre Bagge has defined four elements vital to magnates: kin, wealth, charisma and task (or status) bestowed by the king.⁵ But even if a leader had the power of his kin and his wealth as well as the task bestowed by the king, he would not become a great leader without charisma. Personal qualities as a leader were indispensable to a magnate as well as to a king. The political game concentrated on the 'great personalities' and the different factions came into being around these personalities. This phenomenon may be termed 'big man's society' in anthropology. These leaders, 'big men' or 'gang leaders'⁶ as they also have been called, also acted as spokesmen for the common people, and it seems that the people were incapable of doing anything without their (local) leaders in the sagas. However, this upper class that produces the leaders is not a strictly defined and closed rank, as mentioned already, but there is mobility downwards and upwards in society.⁷

We may say that the development of social ties in the Viking Age and the early Middle Ages in Scandinavia followed the same pattern as elsewhere in Europe. A king, or a magnate, could thus build his network of power based not only on his kin, but he could also extend it to other kins by attaching them to his retinue and by bestowing on them a task. Important allies could be attached to one's family by marriage alliances. Members of the retinue were the core of a king's/magnate's power, and in terms of group identity, it was the in-group. The out-group would have been the king's or magnate's enemies, who were excluded from the in-group. Between the in- and out-group would be people who were not in the core of the in-group, but were part of it: elders of a village, free and unfree peasants – those who paid tribute. In this way, the group boundaries must have been flexible because they changed according to the political situation.

The kings' sagas with their accounts of the *hirð* surely reflect more the situation in the thirteenth century than, say, around 1000. During the thirteenth century, when the Norwegian king was consolidating his power, the *hirð*-system also went through changes, becoming more elaborate and part of the royal administration.⁸ In the kings' sagas the king is actually always surrounded by his retinue. The men follow the king when he changes residence from one place to another. Wealth was an inseparable part of power: magnates and kings rewarded their closest men with precious gifts or a right to collect tribute from a certain area. In order to hold their power, the leaders needed the support of other upper-class men. The king rewarded his closest men: giving gifts is related to the concept of hospitality, but

⁵ Bagge 1991, pp. 124–5.

⁶ Sverre Bagge introduced this term in his book *From Gang Leader to Lord's Anointed: Kingship in Sverris saga and Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (1996).

⁷ Bagge 1991, p. 144.

⁸ King Magnús's *hirð*-law from 1265 gives guidelines for *hirð*'s functions and titles given to its members. The highest rank was *hirðstjóri*, which comprised men holding titles of *lendr maðr* or *skútilsveinn*. The latter took personal care of the king's safety. The next rank consisted of *stallari* and *merkismaðr*. *Kertisveinn* was a title given to a page, and these were always sons of prominent men who came to the king's court to serve there for awhile. The core of the *hirð* were of course the actual *hirðmenn*. The lowest level of *hirð* was so called guests, *gestir*, who did not hold a permanent position in the *hirð*. The *hirð* usually had also its own priest or bishop as well as chancellor. Imsen 2000.

also to the concept of mutual loyalty and friendship. This so-called formal friendship should be mentioned in this context. It was common for the upper-class men to form a relationship called *vinfengi* or *vinátta*, which could be translated as ‘formal friendship’, because the emphasis was on a political contract which implied reciprocity, that is, mutual help and protection.⁹ Thus, *vinfengi* or *vinátta* was a fictive kinship, which served principally to form networks of pre-established relationships. Formal exchange of gifts and the holding of feasts were important parts of *vinfengi*.¹⁰

A gift could be also given as a token of loyalty and respect, as in *Haralds saga ins hárfagra*, in which a peasant called Áki gave his twelve-year-old son as a servant to King Haraldr.¹¹ Áki seems to have wanted to prove to the king that he was a loyal subject. As a comparison it can be mentioned that Áki did not give anything to King Eiríkr of the Svear, who was also visiting Áki at the same time. This is a clear sign that Áki wanted to show his loyalty to King Haraldr. The reciprocity between the subject and a king/ruler meant that subjects offered hospitality and gave gifts to the rulers and hoped that they would be given protection and presents in return.¹²

Expensive gifts would reveal that the king appreciated the man and his services. The king rewarded his *hirðmenn* once a year and they were also entitled to have part of the booty in a plundering expedition. Norwegian kings gave their closest men fiefs called *veizlur* (Norwegian *veitslejord*). At least from the year 1273 they had to compensate for this by providing armed forces for the king, but this must have been the case in the earlier times, too. Even if the retinue basically consisted of men who followed the king, there were also members who did not stay permanently in the *hirð* but would join the king, for example on his expeditions. Generally, the *hirðmenn* became the elite because the king gave them the status. This close affiliation is reflected in the legislation, because the king could require compensation if his *hirðman* was killed or murdered.¹³ Usually compensation in the case of homicide was paid only to the members of the family of the victim.

Receiving and giving gifts as a sign of formal friendship was an institution which had its rules, which could be used to humiliate the other party. King Aðalsteinn of England sent a precious sword as a gift to King Haraldr hárfagri. When King Haraldr grabbed the sword, King Aðalsteinn’s envoy said that now King Haraldr had become King Aðalsteinn’s man (*þegn*). King Haraldr understood he was being mocked, but he did not show his anger. Instead, King Haraldr sent one of his loyal men, Haukr, to England with a ship next summer. Haukr had Haraldr’s son Hákon with him. King Aðalsteinn welcomed them at his court. Then Haukr suddenly put Hákon in the king’s lap. Haukr explained to the amazed king that King Haraldr

⁹ Helgi Þorláksson 2006, p. 144.

¹⁰ Byock 1990, pp. 127, 130–2. *Vinfengi* agreements were usually made between men of equal status, but agreements might also be reached by people of different status. Such relationships may have been kept in secret. Sometimes chieftains and farmers who entered into them shared nothing but a mutual need for support.

¹¹ *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 14, p. 110.

¹² Gustin 2004, p. 155.

¹³ Helle 1991, pp. 201–3.

had asked him to raise his son, who was born out of wedlock. King Aðalsteinn was furious and threatened to kill the boy. Haukr pointed out that the king had already taken the boy into his lap (meaning that he had already taken him as a foster-son). Haukr left the court and Hákon stayed in England as the king's foster-son. Later on he was nicknamed Aðalsteinsfóstri.¹⁴

By giving his son to King Aðalsteinn King Haraldr showed that he could also be Aðalsteinn's overlord, because it was considered less worthy to raise other's children.¹⁵ The episode shows how giving and receiving gifts was a custom that had certain rules. King Haraldr hárfagri was lured by King Aðalsteinn to receive the precious sword, which turned out to be a symbol of submission. King Haraldr replied with as cunning a plan by giving his son as a foster-child to King Aðalsteinn. However, giving children to fosterparents was by no means rare in the upper-class circles. Foster-children usually had a special bond with their fosterparents, and this bond confirmed the bond between two families, even if the saga states that it was less worthy to raise another's children. Fosterage was a way to form new non-blood relationships.¹⁶ Snorri Sturluson himself is an example of how foster-parentage was part of bonding: he became Jón Loftsson's foster-son when he was only two or three years old, and he had close ties to his foster-family. Fostering a child was different from keeping hostages, which was also a way to guarantee peace.¹⁷

If the higher-ranking men in the retinue held permanent positions and were considered as part of the in-group, the *gestir* did not belong to this core. In the kings' sagas we have two mentions of guests (*gestir*) in the *hirð*. In *Fagrskinna* it is mentioned that King Óláfr Haraldsson had sixty 'guests' in addition to his sixty *hirðmenn*, which was clearly considered as a great number of men.¹⁸ In *Heimskringla* too it is mentioned that King Óláfr Haraldsson had 'guests' in his troops when he was trying to gain power again in Norway. In this case, the 'guests' seem to have been Icelanders; the king addresses some Icelanders and sends them to kill a certain Hrútr who was his opponent:

¹⁴ *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 38, pp. 143–4: 'Nú tóktu svá sem vár konungr vildi ok nú skaltu vera þegn hans, er þu tókt við sverði hans'.

¹⁵ *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 39, p. 144–5.

¹⁶ Helgi Þorláksson 2006, p. 144.

¹⁷ In *Ágrip*, for example, King Magnús the Good and the Danish King Hjørðr-Knútr both considered that they had right to rule each other's kingdoms. They made an agreement that the one who would live longer would rule both realms. This agreement was confirmed by exchanging hostages, who were sons of important men. Thus, when King Knútr died, Magnús took Denmark without opposition, because rebellion against him would have meant that he could have killed his hostages. *Ágrip* ch. 35, p. 34; Driscoll 1995, p. 49. *Morkinskinna*, *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla* do not mention hostage exchange. *Morkinskinna* FJ 23; *Fagrskinna* ch. 47, p. 211; *Magnúss saga ins góða* ch. 18, p. 32. It is notable that changing hostages as a guarantee was a different case from that when only the other party had hostages. For example when King Óláfr Tryggvason was keeping sons of prominent Icelanders as hostages in order to get the Icelanders converted to Christianity, he was not actually negotiating but blackmailing Icelanders. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 95, pp. 347–8.

¹⁸ *Fagrskinna* ch. 79, p. 301: 'en forn lög váru til þess, at konungr skyldi hafa eigi meira en sex tigu hirðmanna. Hann [Óláfr Haraldssonr] hafði <auk> sex tigu gesta.'

Síðan mælti konungr, at *gestir* skyldu fara at móti Hrúti ok taka hann af lífi. Váru menn þess verks fljótir. Þá mælti konungr til þeira Íslendinga: 'Svá er mér sagt, at þat sé siðr á Íslandi, at bæendr sé skyldir á haustum at gefa húskorlum sínum slagasauð. Nú vil ek þar gefa yðr hrút til slátr's'.¹⁹

In *Konungs skuggsjá*²⁰ the meaning of *gestir* in the king's retinue is explained. The king had *húskarlar* who were called *gestir* and they had the right to be a 'guest' or in other words stay over night with whomever they wished, because they were hired by the king. They got the half of the pay of a *hirðmaðr*. The status of the guest was lower than a *hirðmaðr*'s: they were not allowed to have meals in the king's hall except at Christmas and Easter. Their duty was to look after the king's safety (that is why Hollander translates *gestir* as 'bodyguard') and seek after his enemies and if possible, to kill them. They also helped *lendmenn* and *syslmen* on a local level, if they needed assistance in administrative tasks. Those men known to have the nickname *gestir* could be for example tax-collectors. They were called collectively *gestasveit* and their leader was called *gestahöfðingi*. *Gestir* were in other words a mixture of policemen and civil servants in the duty of the Norwegian king.²¹ Guests were thus part of the king's retinue, but they did not enjoy the same status as the members of the *hirð*. This information about the status of the guest in the *hirð* is based on *Konungs skuggsjá*, which inevitably reflects the idea of a guest in the thirteenth century, but basically the status of a guest must have been the same already a few hundred years earlier. He was originally a man that had a temporary status in the *hirð*, as the name implies.

Gradually, the meetings of the retinue came to serve as a council for the king in the thirteenth century, and the *hirðmenn* got administrative tasks. Even though the king's *hirð* consisted at first of men who were loyal to the king, later the *hirð* comprised also members who were not resident, and who, for example, were acting as local administrators on the king's behalf. From the king's point of view, the retinue was an instrument to attach the majority of the leading men to the king's service and thus under his submission. In a way, the retinue was a centre of the network of power in the realm: it became part of the royal administration and at the same time the organization of the upper class. This is apparent also in the kings' sagas, where action concentrates on kings and magnates, their retainers and their opponents.²²

¹⁹ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 209, p. 364; Hollander p. 500: 'Then the king ordered his bodyguard to fall upon Hrút and kill him. The men were quick to do this. Then the king said to the Icelanders in his flock, "I have heard it said that it is a custom in Iceland for farmers to have to give their man servants a sheep to slaughter in fall. Now I will give you a ram to slaughter." Hrútr signifies 'ram'.

²⁰ Also known as *Speculum Regale*, this was written around the mid-thirteenth century, probably for the education of a prince or princes. It contains a dialogue between a father and his son. The son asks questions that concern for example foreign lands, the king's court and behaviour. Holtsmark 1981, pp. 61–8.

²¹ Arup Seip 1981, p. 336–8; *Konungs Skuggsjá*, p. 80.

²² Bagge 1993, p. 284; Helle 1991, pp. 200 and 204.

5.2 GROUP BOUNDARIES INSIDE THE ARISTOCRACY

In this chapter the purpose is to look at the networks of the upper class and how the network defines its 'in' and 'out' members. Naturally, the starting point will be to look at the king's retinue. There is no need to go into detail to describe the feuds or wars between the king and his opponents, but to look at the definitions which separate the 'in' and 'out' groups in general on the basis of some specific cases. Because *Heimskringla* is the most extensive of all the sources and especially vivid in describing the social contacts of the upper class, the emphasis lies inevitably on its accounts.

There are numerous cases in the kings' sagas in which magnates engage with quarrels and battles either with the king (or, with one of the kings) or another magnate. The following examples taken from the kings' sagas show what kind of conflicts there were, and how they were solved. The intention is to point out how the political factions came into being and how they operated.

King Haraldr hárfagri is presented as the first king to unite Norway in the kings' sagas. This has been questioned in later research but apparently Haraldr was striving to overcome local leaders – often called literally 'small kings', *smákonungar*. Jarl Hákon became King Haraldr's ally and this alliance was confirmed by marriage: 'Þann vetr fekk Haraldr konungr Ásu, dóttur Hákonar jarls Grjótgarðssonar, ok hafði Hákon þá mestan metnað af konungi'.²³

Next King Haraldr secured new allies when Jarl Rognvaldr of Mœrir swore allegiance. King Haraldr rewarded him by appointing him as the 'governor over two districts as well as lending him the support of both large landholders and farmers'.²⁴ Thus, Jarl Rognvaldr was connected to the network of King Haraldr and he did this of his own will. As a reward, King Haraldr gave him the two districts to govern. The phrase 'lending him the support of both large landholders and farmers' must be understood as meaning that the locals were king's supporters but as Jarl Rognvaldr became the local leader, he needed the support of the people and the king gave it to him symbolically.

King's men, even if belonging to the same faction, could not always agree, which led to internal strife and battles. *Fagrskinna* tells that King Haraldr hárfagri had given *veizlur* to Jarl Atli, and they consisted of Sognfylki and Fjalir. This meant that the king's men were allowed to feast at Jarl Atli's place. However, Atli was angered by this because the king himself did not attend the feasts, but the king's men invited their friends and relatives to the feasts and they behaved badly. In the fourth summer Atli drove the men away and he told the king to attend the feast himself or accept payment in lieu of it. King Haraldr was angered by this, and he

²³ *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch 9, p. 100; Hollander, p. 64: 'That same winter he [King Haraldr] married Ása, daughter of Earl Hákon, the son of Grjótgarth, and the king conferred great honors on Hákon'.

²⁴ *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 10, p. 104: 'Konungr setti hann hofðingja yfir fylki þessi þvau, Norð-Mœri ok Raumsdal, ok fekk honum þar styrk til bæði af ríkismönnum ok bóndum'; Hollander, pp. 66–7: 'and the king had set him as governor over the two districts of North Mœr and Raums Dale, lending him the support of both large landholders and farmers'.

gave the *veizlur* to Hákon gamli on same terms as he had given it to Atli. In the same year Hákon moved south with his army of *Brændir* and *Háleygir*. Hákon's and Atli's men fought, Hákon fell and Atli was wounded and died five days later.²⁵

Heimskringla has a slightly different version of the story. King Haraldr hárfagri had appointed his ally Jarl Hákon to govern the fjord district. According to *Heimskringla* Jarl Hákon told another magnate, Jarl Atli, to move from Sogn and become the jarl of Gaular Dale as Hákon himself had been before. Apparently this was a matter of prestige: Jarl Atli could not accept Jarl Hákon's request without consulting King Haraldr. This quarrel led to war and both jarls died because of that.²⁶

This episode shows that even the men who swore loyalty to the same king could not always agree. They did not seek to make up or ask the king to arbitrate in the matter. It was a matter of honour because Jarl Atli did not want to submit to Jarl Hákon, and the quarrel could not be solved without losing one's honour, and battle was the way to solve it. Although we may suspect how reliable this story is, it still implies that the network of power around the king was not totally under his control. Magnates serving one and the same king could have their own interests, which they tried to promote. Even if the network of power could be seen as an in-group and the enemies outside it as an out-group, the tensions inside the network made up factions. The division between 'us' and 'them' could thus be relative and bound to the political situation.

Especially *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* and *Óláfs saga ins helga* in *Heimskringla* show that conversion to Christianity was a political matter. Of course, there is no way of telling how the people in reality reacted when they were forced to abandon their old beliefs and accept the new faith that the king – or kings – brought with them. The kings' sagas, however, give the impression that the conversion was a political matter to the upper class, and this is also confirmed, for example, by Alexandra Sanmark's study.²⁷

We can study as an example the episode in which King Óláfr Tryggvason met resistance at the *Gulaping*-assembly. The king wanted to speak first to the chieftains of the land. One of the leaders, Olmóðr, declared that they intended to oppose the king, if they had to abandon their old laws and subdue by force. However, Olmóðr was ready to pledge allegiance if the king on his part was ready to give some advantage to him. Olmóðr suggested that he become the king's ally by marriage: King Óláfr should marry his sister to Olmóðr's kinsman Erlingr Skjálgsson. The king promised to agree, if he got the consent of his sister. After Erlingr was betrothed to Ástríðr, he and Olmóðr spoke to the assembly and no one dared to oppose them: 'Then all the people there were baptized and converted'.²⁸ *Fagrskinna* omits the details of this passage and states that Erlingr married Óláfr's sister Ástríð and 'acted on behalf of the king in all the east of the country'.²⁹

²⁵ *Fagrskinna* ch. 3, pp. 65–6.

²⁶ *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 12, p. 108; Hollander p. 69; *Fagrskinna* ch. 3, pp. 65–6.

²⁷ Sanmark 2004, p. 287.

²⁸ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 56–7, pp. 306–7: 'Var þá skírt þat allt fólk ok kristnat'; Hollander, pp. 197–8.

²⁹ *Fagrskinna* ch. 23, p. 145; Finlay 2004, p. 115.

The episode continues when Erlingr married Ástriðr. According to *Heimskringla* King Óláfr offered Erlingr a jarldom – maybe because Ástriðr did not at first think of him as worthy of her and called him ‘commoner’ – but Erlingr rejected the earldom and suggested instead that the king would give him the title of *hersir*, because his kinsmen had held that title before, and that he would be then ‘the greatest of this title in the country’. The king granted him this title.³⁰ Again, this is not stated by *Fagrskinna*, which just says that Erlingr was married to Ástriðr and that he acted on behalf of the king in the east of the country.³¹ The example shows flexibility in ranks: Erlingr could have become jarl because the king had the power to give him the title. Instead, Erlingr is portrayed as a modest man, who did not want to have a better title and rank than his forefathers had had before him. This may be, of course, just a literary device to enhance Erlingr’s character as a great man.

This episode is a classical example of how the upper-class network works in the sagas. First, there is a possibility of conflict. The conflict can be solved either by battle or agreement. In this case the agreement itself is the marriage alliance between Erlingr Skjálgsson and Ástriðr, but it could have been something else – for example jarldom – but the agreement would probably have been confirmed by a marriage alliance anyway. When Erlingr Skjálgsson became part of the king’s network it was appropriate that he was given a title that both was an honour for him and strengthened his loyalty to the king.

In another episode that closely follows the above mentioned episode of Erlingr Skjálgsson, the outcome is rather different. King Óláfr Tryggvason asked farmers to accept Christianity at the assembly in Frosta. They refused and King Óláfr could not fight against them because his men were outnumbered. The king changed his tactics and announced that he was ready to meet the men at their sacrificial place and suggested that they decide there which faith they would adopt. The farmers agreed on this and it was decided that the king would attend the midsummer sacrifice. Because the king had seen that he could not negotiate with the farmers – or to be exact, their spokesmen – he decided to use a cunning plan. First of all, he acted as if he would agree with the farmers and make sacrifices as the heathen kings had done before him. The king declared after a feast in *Hlaðir* that he would make human sacrifices and he would sacrifice ‘the noblest of men’ to the gods. The meaning was, of course, to scare the leaders of the farmers. At this point, the farmers could not fight against the king’s men, because they were outnumbered. They had no choice but to accept baptism which was the alternative to the human sacrifice of the leaders. When the king finally arrived at the actual sacrificial place, he again asked the farmers and their leaders to accept Christianity. Again, the farmers refused and told the king to make a sacrifice. The king went into the temple as if wanting to see the sacrificial place but instead he destroyed the statue of Þórr and at the same time his men killed Járnskeggi, the spokesman of the local farmers. Then the king gave the farmers two alternatives:

³⁰ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 58, p. 307; Hollander, pp. 198–9.

³¹ *Fagrskinna* ch. 23, p. 145.

either to accept Christianity or to go to battle with him.³²

The farmers were helpless without their leader, as so often in the sagas,³³ and they accepted the king's terms and were baptized. In contrast with the episode of Olmóðr and Erlingr Skjálgsson, this one shows that if the king could not find an agreement with his opponents and thus could not attach them to his network, he had no other choice but to destroy them. One of the famous examples of this is when King Haraldr harðráði kills his long-standing enemy Einarr þambarskelfir and Einarr's son. Einarr, being a powerful magnate, had opposed the king for many years, but it seemed that the two could come to terms. However, a minor quarrel in which neither of the men wanted to make the first step towards reconciliation led to the murder of Einarr and his son by King Haraldr.³⁴

These examples show that the king could expand his power either by force or negotiation. His retinue, being the in-group, played an important role, because it was the king's tool to exert his power. In other words, the king's power was dependent on the men he managed to get in his in-group: they had to be sufficient in number and preferably have prestige and wealth in their local community, which would then help the king to extend his power on a local level (i.e. collect tribute).

In the upper-class network, in which a king or magnate was the centre, the group boundaries were far from well-defined. They were relative and indeterminate. It was convenient for the king's politics because he could adopt new members into his network when it suited him, and if the enemies could not be allies, they were preferably killed.

Who then could be accepted into this network? Obviously a man who had power, prestige and wealth. Because the aristocracy was not a closed and strictly defined social class in Norway until the thirteenth or fourteenth century, it was up to the king to decide who was important enough to be accepted into the upper class. As the sagas depict it, the upper-class men were representatives of free farmers, but the farmers themselves did not play a major role. They were the 'grey masses': their allegiance was decided by their spokesmen, so they did not actually belong to the core of the in-group. Maybe they can be described as being in the outskirts of it, or as belonging to the sphere of influence of the in-group.

Before the law of succession was passed in 1163/4 the practice in Norway was that all the sons of the former king were eligible to ascend the throne. Co-ruling often took place, but it usually caused rivalry. For example Magnús Ólafsson ('Bareleg' or 'Barefoot') became king of Norway with his cousin Hákon Magnússon. According to *Heimskringla* Hákon abolished all Christmas dues, duties and landtaxes for those *Þrændir* and *Upplendingar* who acknowledged him as king. *Morkinskinna* and *Fagrskinna* are briefer and mention that King Hákon granted many kinds of improvements in the rights of the *Þrændir*. According to *Heimskringla* this caused

³² *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 65–9, pp. 314–18.

³³ Bagge 1991, p. 123.

³⁴ *Morkinskinna* FJ 179–80; *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* ch. 44, pp. 125–6.

tension between Magnús and Hákon, but *Morkinskinna* and *Fagrskinna* point out that the reason for their tension was that King Magnús was not satisfied with having a smaller part of the country under his control (and thus smaller revenues) than his father had had.³⁵

Hákon was backed by a magnate called Steigar-Þórir. It seemed that the factions would end up in war against each other, but then Hákon suddenly fell ill and died. Þórir was still King Magnús's opponent and he backed another pretender, Sveinn. Armed forces of the king's men and Steigar-Þórir met in a battle. Steigar-Þórir's troops won this battle, but later he was caught and hanged. Also a landed man called Egill Áskelsson, who had been on Þórir's side, was hanged. The king may have wanted someone to intervene and ask for Egill's life to be spared, because he said afterwards that 'Good kin are of little benefit to him'.³⁶ As Driscoll points out, maybe the king himself could have intervened as he was Egill's wife's distant relative.³⁷ This shows that it was not always the goal to kill opponents – especially if they were relatives – because they could be useful as allies.

What this episode exemplifies is that even if a king had his own power network consisting of his *hirð* and other supporters, there were always opponents who formed an opposing faction. The opponent could be his co-ruler or a powerful magnate. Thus, the networks of the upper class did not concentrate only on one king. Moreover, the upper-class men competed with each other as well, even inside the same group. We may also detect some regional antagonism in the above episode, as the *Þrændir* often show independence when choosing a leader in their *þing*. As the sagas imply, Hákon may have won the loyalty of the *Þrændir* because he granted them improvements.

About a century before the clash between King Magnús and Hákon the situation was rather different after the death of King Óláfr Tryggvason. Jarls Eiríkr and Sveinn were the most influential men in Norway, although – at least nominally – they were vassals of the Danish king. It is said that Jarl Eiríkr was displeased that Óláfr Tryggvason's ally Erlingr Skjálgsson still held royal revenues. Jarl Eiríkr tried to collect revenues from the same areas as Erlingr but he managed to secure little of them. However, it is further stated that Jarl Eiríkr did not care to fight with Erlingr because he had 'many and influential kinsmen and was powerful and popular'. This reveals that none of the Norwegian magnates was influential enough to subjugate the others. Because Jarl Eiríkr and his brothers did not consider it wise to fight against Erlingr, they decided to make him their ally. Jarl Sveinn and Erlingr came to an agreement, which was sealed by a marriage between Erlingr's son Áslákr and Sveinn's daughter Gunnhildr. Erlingr and Áslákr were to have all

³⁵ *Magnúss saga berfætts* ch. 1–2, pp. 210–11; *Morkinskinna* FJ 298; *Fagrskinna* ch. 80, p. 302.

³⁶ Driscoll p. 67; *Ágrip* ch. 47, p. 44: 'Ílla koma hónum góðir frændr í hald'; *Morkinskinna* FJ 305: 'Ílla qvomo þer gopir frendr íþaurf'; Andersson and Gade 2000, p. 291. 'Your friends were no help to you in your need'; *Fagrskinna* 80, pp. 302–6: 'Ílla koma þér góðir frædr í hald'; *Magnúss saga berfætts* ch. 6, p. 217: 'Ílla koma þér góðir frændr í þorfr'; Hollander, p. 673: 'Of little avail are your good kinsmen to you'.

³⁷ *Ágrip* ch. 45–7, pp. 42–4; *Magnúss saga berfætts* ch. 4–6, pp. 213–17. About Egill's wife's family connections, see Driscoll p. 67, footnote 136.

those revenues that King Óláfr Tryggvason had given to Erlingr. It is said that Erlingr became a close friend of the earls and that they confirmed their friendship with 'binding oaths'.³⁸

Former enemies became allies, and this kind of turn of events is by no means rare in the kings' sagas, and the marriage alliances as part of reconciliation and peace-making will be dealt with in the next chapter. The above episode shows how the group boundaries inside the aristocracy were flexible, and they could change quickly. The core of the group, the in-group, would have been a magnate or a king and his closest retinue. The farmers would probably be involved in these political games only as supporters of their lord, and they would engage in battle if they were summoned to form an army.

The relations between the Norwegian king and the upper class have been interpreted in different ways. It has been suggested that the king and the upper class were allied against the farmers, or that kingship was a tool in the hands of the secular and ecclesiastical elite.³⁹ What we see in the kings' sagas is not uniform groups or groups that would act against a king or people, but individuals who participate in the political game.⁴⁰ Individuals were loyal to the king, because he held power personally. The Norwegians in the Middle Ages would have found it impossible to understand loyalty to a nation, which is a fairly modern concept.⁴¹ The kings' sagas show that the political struggles were fought inside the upper class, which is not a unique phenomenon. Lars Hermansson has shown in his study concerning the Danish upper class in the twelfth century that the situation was similar in Denmark.⁴²

If the political factions formed in-groups and the out-groups were the opposing factions, could there have been other kinds of out-groups too? Were there analogue and digital 'others' on the basis of these social contacts? This is unlikely, because there were no digital others inside the Norwegian society – the Sámi, who lived side by side with the Norwegians, were not part of the organized society but they lived in the fringes of it, as has been pointed out earlier in this study. The political groups seem to have been flexible and able to change according to the political situation, which means that the 'otherness' of the out-groups was relative and not total, i.e. not digital 'otherness'. Maybe one reason for this flexibility was that the factions did not come up just on the basis of family ties, but there was individual choice. This applied also in contemporary Icelandic society, in which the political factions were not necessarily based on family ties but formal friendship between men.⁴³

³⁸ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 22, pp. 28–30 and ch. 31, p. 39; Hollander, pp. 260, 266–7. *Fagrskinna* is not aware of this agreement, but it says that 'all the landed men were friends of Jarl Eiríkr except Erlingr Skjálgsson'. *Fagrskinna* ch. 26, p. 166; Finlay 2004, p. 132.

³⁹ Hermansson 2000, pp. 39–40 and references.

⁴⁰ Bagge 1991, p. 250.

⁴¹ Bagge 1995, p. 7.

⁴² Hermansson 2000, 246.

⁴³ Byock 1990, pp. 124–35.

5.3 MARRIAGE ALLIANCES

The previous chapter has already shown how marriage alliances were used in creating and strengthening the network of power. Let us now have a closer look at marriage as an institution and what kind of marriages can be found in the kings' sagas. Generally it can be said that marriage was an important factor in social networks of society in the Middle Ages. Family was the most important unit for an individual, who got his or her status in the society through the family. An individual without family ties and alliances had practically no clear status in the patriarchal society. There were, of course, also other kinds of social ties (guilds, corporations, religious sects), but the rank given by one's family gave the basis for how an individual was ranked in the society.

Close family ties meant also that the individual was subordinate to the family: it was the family who decided the marriage alliances of the family members. The family co-operated as a collective group whether it was about inheritance or law suit against a family member (e.g. paying fines). All in all, individualism was not encouraged in the Middle Ages, because it was generally thought that people were led on the 'paths of sin' more easily if they were alone. It was believed that the community, or in fact the group pressure, could prevent sins being committed. This emphasis of collectivistic society is probably best shown in the arts: medieval pictures of peoples do not present personal qualities, but qualities that are connected with them as representatives of their rank. So, the noblemen were often depicted with blond hair and blue eyes, and important characters, such as kings and bishops, were bigger in size than other characters.⁴⁴

Marriage alliances concerned the whole family or kin. This was especially true when the family was high-ranking in the society and was wealthy. For these families marriage alliances meant possibilities of gaining more wealth and status, creating a network with other families and confirming peace. The Church forbade children younger than seven to be promised in marriage, but exceptions were made when marriages were contracted as guarantees for peace.⁴⁵ Even if the Church required that the groom and the bride should accept each other in principle, it was the family which made the decision.⁴⁶ Marriage had two aspects: on the one hand it was in a way trade between two families, because the marriage also concerned money, and on the other hand it was an alliance between the families.⁴⁷ This aspect of alliance as part of group formation will be emphasized in this context when marriage alliances in the kings' sagas are studied.

Family structure and relations are closely connected to inheritance. Around the

⁴⁴ Le Goff 1988, pp. 278–81.

⁴⁵ Fleming 2001, p. 14.

⁴⁶ Fleming 2001, p. 36; Goody 1983, p. 185; Korpiola 2004, pp. 68–70. Those parents that were not high-ranking or did not have significant wealth did not probably influence their children's marital choices because children's marriages could not affect the family's future prosperity significantly. Fleming 2001, pp. 25–6.

⁴⁷ Steinsland and Sørensen 1994, pp. 118–19.

year 1000 significant changes began to occur in the European family and inheritance system. Gradually it became more common for the oldest son to inherit practically all the property his parents had (primogeniture), but this system did not completely replace older inheritance systems. At the same time people started to venerate their family forefathers and past, which also meant that leading families wanted to stand out by using a family name and coat of arms.⁴⁸ It also meant that family trees were constructed or even forged, to emphasize the glorious past of the family.⁴⁹

This development did not reach Norway and Iceland, except for the law of succession: according to the new law of succession in Norway (passed either in 1163 or 1164) the eldest legitimate son of the king was the heir of the crown. In Scandinavia the inheritance was divided between heirs, but a family could increase its wealth by making a marriage alliance with a rich heir or heiress. Snorri Sturluson's own family is a good example of how marriage alliances were part of politics: the Sturlungar had a great part of Iceland under their control at the beginning of the thirteenth century, and the family had gained its power position specifically by arranging marriages.⁵⁰

In Scandinavia the kinship was bilateral and it must stem from the Germanic tradition. Bilateral kinship meant that only the close relative, siblings, belonged to the same kindred, and that an individual belonged to two kins. It also explains why maternal uncles were considered important relatives. Interestingly kinship was at the same time important and unimportant in Scandinavia: on the one hand belonging to a kin (especially to a renowned one) was an honour, and for example the slaves did not have kins in the same sense as the free men had. On the other hand, bilateral kinship meant that the kinship did not swamp out a man's individuality.⁵¹ This meant that the political factions did not necessarily stand up as a consequence of kinship, but the individual could decide to which faction to pay loyalty.⁵²

In *Morkinskinna* a man called Þrándr from Uppland addresses King Magnús at a þing: "'Sire", he said, "we are aware that our kinsmen were hostile to your kinsmen, but we were not present at the momentous events that inspired your hatred, to wit the death of your father"''.⁵³ Þrándr wanted to prove to the king that even if their families had had hostilities in the past, things did not have to continue as they were. Even if small factions may have been determined by kinship ties, this probably did not apply to larger factions, which were formed through other ties or individual choice. Snorri, for example, was not very concerned about kinship ties as an explanation of faction loyalties.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Herlihy 1995, p. 146; Goody 1983, p. 184.

⁴⁹ Wolfram 2004, p. 15.

⁵⁰ Auður Magnúsdóttir 2001, p. 66; Sawyer 2003a pp. 43–73.

⁵¹ Steinsland and Sørensen 1994, p. 122.

⁵² Bagge 1991, p. 116; Bloch 1989 (1961), p. 137.

⁵³ Andersson and Gade 2000, p. 159; *Morkinskinna* FJ 103: 'Hera s. hann. kvnnict er monnom þat at frendr varir voro ovinir yþara frenda'.

⁵⁴ Bagge 1991, pp. 115–16.

Marriage as a means of politics is obvious when we study the cases found in the kings' sagas. *Heimskringla* in particular is full of accounts of how marriage alliances were used by chieftains and kings to secure and maintain peace as well as to create new alliances. Brothers-in-law were often reliable allies. According to Hermansson, brothers-in-law brought with them new resources and thus balance to the family.⁵⁵

Official marriage alliances were not the only important factor in the political network but concubines of rulers and magnates could also play a role.⁵⁶ Other kings' sagas than *Heimskringla* are less interested in the Norwegian internal affairs in detail, and hence mention only those marriages that are relevant for the story. Birgit Sawyer has emphasized that marriage alliances were an essential part of politics between the royal houses in the Middle Ages. On the one hand these marriage alliances strengthened the royal power, but on the other hand they also created problems when it came to succession.⁵⁷

It is notable that marriage alliances mean in the first place changing of women, not men, between different groups. As Claude Lévi-Strauss puts it, brides were the most precious category of exchange goods, and 'exogamy is the archetype of all other manifestations based upon reciprocity'.⁵⁸ We could take as an example the Old Norse mythology, where the Vanir give their women to the Æsir (but never vice versa) and gods could marry giantesses, but giants would never get wives from the race of gods. This is, of course, a poor example in the sense that it shows that the parties involved are not equal but that was not always the situation in real life either. These examples from mythology show that there were groups that were subordinate to others and that men could marry a woman who belonged to the 'others' but not the other way round. The point is that the marriage alliances presented in the kings' sagas are exogamous. Lévi-Strauss emphasizes that exogamous marriage results in a social benefit, because endogamous marriage would result in 'fission and segmentation' of the group. Thus, exogamous marriage alliances are necessary so that the group can maintain itself as a group.⁵⁹

It is impossible to verify whether all the marriage alliances described in the kings' sagas really took place, but some of them can be verified with the help of other sources. It is actually not relevant to study the historicity of these marriage alliances here, but to analyse what they can reveal of communication with 'the others'. *Heimskringla* is obviously the richest source because of its length and interest in marriage alliances. Its vast material is not many-sided, although it gives plenty of details on Norwegian and Scandinavian marriage alliances. Snorri was not interested in or did not have enough information about other European royal houses and marriages between them to make reference to them.

In order to study how marriage alliances were part of communication with 'the

⁵⁵ Hermansson 2000, p. 175.

⁵⁶ Auður Magnúsdóttir 2001; Hermansson 2000, pp. 173–4.

⁵⁷ Sawyer 2003a.

⁵⁸ Lévi-Strauss 1970, pp. 60 and 481.

⁵⁹ Lévi-Strauss 1970, pp. 479–80.

other' in the kings' sagas, it is necessary to divide them into categories even if the categorization here is somewhat artificial.

1. The first category is short mentions of who was married to whom. As already mentioned, *Heimskringla* is full of these mentions as it was important to write down who the ancestors of the main characters were, and what kind of alliances existed.
2. The second category is marriage alliances that were arranged to secure and guarantee peace or a treaty. Cases that fall into this category can be found in all the kings' sagas.
3. The third category is marriage alliances between Norse men and foreign women. Sometimes there is just a mention of how a Norse king was married to a woman from another cultural sphere, but sometimes there is a longer story behind the mention.

A special case are the marriage alliances between Norse kings and *Finnkonur*, which will be treated separately in the next chapter. For this study it is relevant to have a closer look at categories 2 and 3. These categories overlap each other in some cases – for example when a peace treaty between two realms is confirmed with a marriage alliance. The second category has another aspect that has been dealt partly in the previous chapter: marriage alliances were an essential part of making and strengthening political alliances among the upper class. Marriage alliances will be looked at from the point of view of group boundaries. We will first look at the marriage alliances with those outside the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere.

5.3.1 Marriages with 'others'

The Danish King Sveinn Forkbeard was kidnapped by the leader of the Jóms-vikings, Sigvaldi, and handed over to his enemy, the Wendish prince Búrizláfr. According to the saga Prince Búrizláfr had demanded Sigvaldi bring him King Sveinn, if Sigvaldi wished to marry Búrizláfr's daughter Ástriðr. When King Sveinn was brought to Wendland Prince Búrizláfr wanted to make peace with him, and he offered his daughter Gunnhildr as wife to Sveinn. Búrizláfr himself wanted to marry Sveinn's sister Þyra. Sveinn, who had no choice, married Gunnhildr and they got back to Denmark.⁶⁰ However, Sveinn's sister Þyra refused to marry Prince Búrizláfr, the reason being that the king was 'heathen'. Wends and Danes had a long history of enmity behind them, so these marriage alliances were meant to secure the peace, even if Sveinn was forced into this peace, according to *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*.

Another peace treaty that was confirmed with a marriage alliance and was depicted in the kings' sagas was between the Norwegians and the Irish or Scots (depending on the source). King Magnús Barelegs had plundered in the British Isles and he then made peace with the Irish king Mýrjartak (according to *Ágrip* and *Heimskringla*) or the Scottish king Melkolmr (according to *Morkinskinna* and

⁶⁰ *Fagrskinna* ch. 19, p. 122–3; *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 34, p. 2. *Ágrip* just mentions that Þyra was engaged to a Wendish 'duke'. *Ágrip* ch. 20, p. 22.

Fagrskinna). Magnús's son Sigurðr and King Mýrjartak's/Melkolmr's daughter were married after the peace. According to *Morkinskinna* and *Fagrskinna* Sigurðr and his bride were only children, 9 and 5 years old respectively, which must have been an unusual age for marriage for it to be mentioned in the saga. It seems that a marriage alliance was necessary for the peace treaty even if the groom and bride were under age. Both *Morkinskinna* and *Fagrskinna* also mention that later Sigurðr left his wife (or fiancée) and came back to Norway.⁶¹

Both these examples show how peace is confirmed by a marriage alliance, and moreover, Norse men marry foreign women. It is notable that Sveinn's sister Pyra refused to marry the Wendish prince. According to the sagas her excuse was that Prince Búrizláfr was 'heathen', but we could also play with the thought that the marriage between a Norse woman and stranger was not in fact appropriate in the same way as in the mythology, where the Æsir did not give their women to 'the others'. If Pyra could not marry Búrizláfr because he was heathen, the case may not have been the same if a Norse man married a heathen woman.

It is said in *Ágrip* that King Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri was married to a heathen woman. King Hákon 'departed much from Christian ways for her sake . . . although he kept the holiness of Sunday and the Friday fast'.⁶² Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri was not perhaps the most fervent Christian king of Norway, and he was not successful in converting the Norwegians, so it is not remarkable that he had a heathen wife. The saga, written by a Christian during a Christian time, may show King Hákon as weak in his faith, but in reality there must have been coexistence of Christian and heathen practices during King Hákon's time. The heathen wife is mentioned probably because the saga implies, or actually says directly, that the reason for King Hákon's weak faith was his heathen wife. Because the saga is written clearly from a Christian perspective that condemns the heathen ways, we can surmise that King Hákon's wife was regarded as an 'other'.

If we look at the marriage alliances in the kings' sagas, we can hardly find examples of marriages between Norse women and non-Norse men. The Swedish King Óláfr gave his daughter Ingigerðr to King Jarisleifr of Garðaríki,⁶³ and it is mentioned that King Óláfr Haraldsson's and Ástriðr's daughter Gunnhildr was married to Duke Otto of Saxland.⁶⁴ If we consider on the basis of the first part of this study that Garðaríki and its inhabitants were not that strange to Norsemen, we can hardly claim that Ingigerðr was given to 'the others'. Also the Saxons were only somewhat different in the scale of analogue difference, so it is questionable whether we can actually talk about Norse women marrying men, who would have been considered as 'extreme others'.

⁶¹ *Ágrip* ch. 50, p. 46–7; *Morkinskinna* FJ 322–3; *Fagrskinna* ch. 81, p. 308 and ch. 85, p. 315; *Magnúss saga berfætts* ch. 11, p. 224.

⁶² *Ágrip* ch. 5, p. 8; Driscoll 1995, p. 9.

⁶³ *Ágrip* ch. 25, p. 26; *Fagrskinna* ch. 30, p. 179–80; *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 93, p. 147.

⁶⁴ *Ágrip* ch. 25, p. 26; *Fagrskinna* ch. 30, p. 179–80; *Óláfs saga ins helga inni serstøku* ch. 214, p. 447. Gunnhildr's name was Úlfhildr in other sagas (*Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*), and Duke Ottó's real name was Ordulf.

Certainly the kings' sagas do not give an overall and truthful picture of all the marriage alliances that were made in reality, but in my opinion it is an important detail that the Norse women do not generally marry non-Norse men in the kings' sagas. If we now ignore the fact that this may not reflect reality, but assume that it reflects the mental worldview, we could find the following reasons for the lack of this type of marriage: 1. Norse society did not give its women to 'the others' because it held itself above other groups that stood outside its boundaries. This is interesting because then we would find an analogue with the Old Norse mythology and the Æsir who do not give their women to outsiders. Can we consider this as an explanation that can be taken seriously? Maybe it is too far-fetched to make a comparison between Old Norse mythology and the sagas from the thirteenth century. 2. If Norse women married non-Norse men, it was not worth mentioning, because the marriages did not concern upper classes but lower classes. As a curiosity could be mentioned a grave of a Germanic woman among the medieval Sámi settlements in Sweden. It shows that the marriage alliances between Scandinavians and the Sámi existed in both directions.⁶⁵ With reference to the discussion in the chapter concerning the *Finnar*, this archaeological evidence may show that group boundaries were not so clear-cut as the sagas imply. These are just hypotheses, and it is true that Norse men were married to foreign women for the obvious reason that they travelled and stayed abroad whereas Norse women stayed mainly at home, if they did not follow their fathers, brothers or husbands to new lands.

5.3.2 Marriage alliances as part of a political game

The kings' sagas – especially *Heimskringla* – have plenty of examples of marriage alliances between the Norsemen, the Danes and the Svear.⁶⁶ What does this indicate? The obvious reason why relations between Scandinavians are emphasized in the kings' sagas is, of course, the theme itself: the history of the kings of Norway. In my opinion the marriage alliances also reveal something about the group boundaries: it was considered important to create alliances and strengthen them between groups that were neighbouring each other. These Scandinavian 'gang leaders' must have found it rather easy to exchange women between the groups as there were not big linguistical or cultural obstacles. So, the Danish king Sveinn could easily give his daughter to his Norwegian supporter Jarl Eiríkr,⁶⁷ or the Norwegian king Óláfr Haraldsson could marry Ástriðr, daughter of King Óláfr of the Svear.⁶⁸ However, the marriage alliances between Scandinavian royal houses were not a unique phenomenon, but the marriage alliances connected them also to

⁶⁵ Storli 1994, p. 89; Zachrisson 1997f, p. 219; Zachrisson 1994, p. 178.

⁶⁶ For example *Ágrip* ch. 25, pp. 26–7; ch. 48, p. 45; *Morkinskinna* FJ 329; *Morkinskinna* FJ 404; *Fagrskinna* ch. 26, pp. 164–7, ch. 30, pp. 178–80; ch. 79, pp. 297–302; *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 21, pp. 118–20; *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 90, pp. 338–41; *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 92, p. 142; ch. 164, pp. 298–9; *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* ch. 41, p. 122; *Óláfs saga kyrra* ch. 5, pp. 207–8; *Magnúss saga berfætts* ch. 15, pp. 228–9; *Magnússona saga* ch. 22, p. 262; *Magnúss saga blinda ok Haralds gilla* ch. 1, pp. 278–9; *Haraldssona saga* ch. 22, pp. 331–2.

⁶⁷ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 90, p. 340.

⁶⁸ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 92, p. 146.

royal houses in neighbouring areas such as the Piasts of Poland and Rurikids of the Rus'. These marriages just reflect the supraregional contact network of the elite.

Already the examples given in the chapter 'Group boundaries inside aristocracy' show that marriage alliances were constantly used as a means of politics. Peace was guaranteed and allies were confirmed by marriage alliances. Interestingly, in the High Middle Ages it seems that the men tended to marry women of higher rank than themselves. For those men who came to the political arena by marrying for example a daughter of a king, the marriage alliance was crucial for social status.⁶⁹ As an example could be mentioned Erlingr Skjálmgsson's marriage to the sister of King Ólafr Tryggvason, taken as an example also in the previous chapter. Erlingr belonged to a family that had an important position in Western Norway, but he was not a man with a title. However, he was appointed *lendr maðr* by the king, and he received *veizlur* from him, becoming the most powerful man in Western Norway. Marriage also brought women into the political game even though they did not have chance to decide about their own marriage. Still, they could influence their male relatives and through them be part of the political game.⁷⁰

5.3.3 Women – 'others' inside society?

When it comes to marriages it is appropriate to examine how the image of 'otherness' is related to women. People's identities consist of many elements, gender being one of them. Women in the sagas and in the Viking Age have been objects of studies not to mention women and their status in the society in the Middle Ages.⁷¹ In the kings' sagas, which concentrate on kings and not on queens, women rarely play major roles. The kings' sagas are played out in the world of men, and women are left aside. Were women then 'others' in relation to men? The sagas alone cannot give an answer to this question. It is true that even if the sagas give examples of powerful queens or heroic wives of magnates, they are still given only a small role. The world of action is the world of men, and women have a 'walk-on' part in the story. How well this reflects real life is another thing and not in the scope of this study.

If we look at the runestones and archaeological evidence it seems that the women, if they were freeborn, had a fairly good status in the society. It may be exaggeration to take the independent and strong women as a model of all Norse women, but they were certainly respected by their husbands and sons. Even if women had to operate within the strategies of a male-dominated system, they cannot be considered as others because of their gender.⁷² Carol Clover has suggested the reason for 'womanless' passages in the sagas is that they reflect a real-life situation in which women were in short supply. This stemmed from the tradition of preferential female infanticide (at least in Iceland).⁷³ Maybe, but one of the reasons

⁶⁹ Hermansson 2000, p. 172.

⁷⁰ Hermansson 2000, p. 172; Bagge 1991, pp. 116–17.

⁷¹ For example Jesch 1991; Jochens 1995.

⁷² Christiansen 2002, p. 17.

⁷³ Clover 1988, p. 182.

must have been that women were not expected to take an active part in the society, which means that they are left aside also in the sagas.

It would be too strong to claim that women were ‘others’ in their own society, but certainly they did not hold the same kind of position as free men, who ran the society. If the king and his retinue and loyal men formed the in-group, women were left outside it. They were, however, attached to this in-group by their family ties – as wives, daughters and mothers – and could, at least to some extent, influence their male relatives and their policies. In- and out-group divisions work when we look at societies or groups as a whole, but if we divide one society into in- and out-groups, it is difficult to decide whether women belong to this male-dominated social structure as independent actors. In my opinion, a deeper study of in- and out-groups of the Norwegian society in the Middle Ages would demand a different approach that would also take women into consideration.

5.3.4 Marriages between kings and *Finnkonur* – a *hieros gamos*?

The marriages between kings and *Finnkonur* deserve a closer look as a special case among marriage alliances in the kings’ sagas.

Vanlandi hét sonr Sveigðis, er ríki tók eptir hann ok réð fyrir Uppsalaauð. Hann var hermaðr mikill, ok hann fór víða um lönd. Hann þá vetrvist á Finnlandi með Snjá inum gamla ok fekk þar dóttur hans, Drífu.⁷⁴

This passage is one of the two examples in *Ynglinga saga* in which a king of Uppsala marries a *Finnkona*. King Vanlandi married Drífa, who was the daughter of Snjár inn gamli. However, Vanlandi travelled away and left his wife in *Finnland*, and he did not come back even though he had promised. Drífa turned to Hulð, who was a *seiðkona*, and asked her to use her magic (*seiða*) so that Vanlandi would either come back to her or die. Vanlandi was then in Uppsala and he suddenly got a lust to travel to *Finnland*, but his advisors prevented him. They suspected that it was caused by the magic of the *Finnar*. The outcome was, of course, bad for Vanlandi. He became tired and after he had fallen asleep, he screamed that a *mara*⁷⁵ was attacking him and he was killed by it.⁷⁶

Later on another king of Uppsala, Agni, was as unlucky as Vanlandi:

Þat var eitt sumar, er Agni konungr fór með her sinn á Finnland, gekk þar upp ok herjaði. Finnar drógu saman lið mikit ok fóru til orrostu. Frosti er nefndr höfðingi þeira. Varð þar orrosta mikil, ok fekk Agni konungr sigr. Þar fell Frosti ok mikit lið með

⁷⁴ *Ynglinga saga* ch. 13, pp. 28–9; Hollander, p. 16: ‘Vanlandi was the name of Sveigthir’s son who succeeded him and ruled over the Uppsala crown goods. He was a great warrior and fared far and wide from country to country. He accepted an invitation to pass the winter in Finnland with Snær [“Snow”] the Old, and there he married his daughter Drífa [“Snowdrift”].’

⁷⁵ ‘A nightmare, an incubus’. Zoëga 2004; Price 2002, p. 59: ‘It is described most often as a threatening dream-creature, sometimes a horse. Occasionally it is the spirit-form of an evil sorcerer, and sometimes an agent of supernatural destruction unleashed upon an enemy’. On the *mara*-figure in this episode, see the chapter ‘*Seiðr, ergi* and the question of gender’.

⁷⁶ *Ynglinga saga* ch. 13, pp. 28–9.

honum. Agni konungr fór herskildi um Finnland ok lagði undir sik ok fekk stórmikit herfang. Hann tók ok hafði með sér Skjálfr, dóttur Frosta, ok Loga, bróður hennar.⁷⁷

King Agni plundered in *Finnland* and was victorious. He took with him two *Finnar*: Skjálfr, daughter of King Frosti, and her brother Logi. Agni married Skjálfr. She asked Agni to give a memorial party for her dead father King Frosti. A big festivity was organized. King Agni wore a golden necklace, and Skjálfr asked him to take care of his necklace. During the party King Agni became heavily intoxicated and he went to his tent to sleep. While he was sleeping Skjálfr came with a thick rope and tied it round the necklace. Then men loyal to Skjálfr hanged Agni on a tree.⁷⁸

King Haraldr Fairhair was luckier than Vanlandi and Agni, because he did not die because of his wife. He, too, met a *Finnkona* called Snæfríðr, daughter of a certain Svási. Svási had got permission from King Haraldr to set up his tent (*gammi*) 'on the other side of the hill' and he asked the king to pay a visit to him. King Haraldr came and he was offered mead. The saga implies indirectly that it was love potion, because after he had drunk the cup of mead, King Haraldr immediately wanted to sleep with Snæfríðr the same night. Svási said that it was not possible before Haraldr had engaged Snæfríðr, and King Haraldr agreed on this. King Haraldr was so madly in love with Snæfríðr that he forgot to take care of his kingdom. Haraldr and Snæfríðr had children,⁷⁹ but then she died. King Haraldr did not let her body be buried. Her body was uncorrupted, and King Haraldr mourned her three winters. Then the king's loyal man Þorleifr spaki suggested that they should change Snæfríðr's clothes. But when the body was removed from the bench, a terrible smell came out of it. The body was burned and it turned blue. All kinds of snakes, reptiles and other sorts of disgusting creatures came out of it. But King Haraldr came to his senses and began to rule his kingdom again.⁸⁰

It is not necessary to prove whether the above mentioned episodes were historical,⁸¹ but it is relevant to examine what the meaning of these stories was

⁷⁷ *Ynglinga saga* ch. 19, p. 37; Hollander, p. 22: 'One summer King Agni proceeded to Finnland with his fleet, landing and harrying there. The Finns collected a great force to oppose him. The name of their leader was Frosti. A great battle ensued, and King Agni was victorious. Frosti and a great many others fell there. King Agni harried far and wide in Finnland, subjecting it and making enormous booty. He took Skjálfr, Frosti's daughter, prisoner and carried her away together with Logi, her brother.'

⁷⁸ *Ynglinga saga* ch. 19, pp. 37–8.

⁷⁹ According to *Ágrip* Haraldr and Snæfríðr had only one son (ch. 2, p. 5): 'Rognvaldr reykil, er sumir kalla Ragnar, er var sonr Finnkonu einnar, er kolluð var Snjófríðr'; *Fagrskinna* mentions twenty sons of Haraldr but does not mention their mothers (*Fagrskinna* ch. 3, p. 71); According to *Heimskringla* Haraldr and Snæfríðr had four sons (*Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 25, p. 126): 'Sigurðr hrísi, Hálfðan hálegg, Guðrøðr ljómi, Rognvaldr réttilbeini'. This is also what *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* tells. Haraldr hárfagri and Snæfríðr had four boys: 'Sigurðr hrísi. Hálfðan hæggr. Guðrøðr ljómi. Rognvaldr réttilbeini. þeir voru synir Snjófríðar finnzkú'. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* ch. 2, p. 5.

⁸⁰ *Ágrip* ch. 3, pp. 5–6. It is assumed that this story of King Haraldr and Snæfríðr show that the author was using the tradition that had its roots in Trøndelag; *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 25, pp. 125–7. Snorri used *Ágrip* as a source for his version of the story. *Historia Norvegiae* does not mention Snæfríðr at all, even though it mentions Haraldr's son Rognvaldr réttilbeini and that he was inclined to magic. *Historia Norvegiae* pp. 104–5.

⁸¹ Compared to the other sagas of kings in *Heimskringla*, *Ynglinga saga* is fictitious, and it has raised questions of why Snorri wanted to begin with such a mythological episode. However, considering

and what they conveyed to the audience. Even if there are just these few cases of marriage alliances between the Norse kings and the *Finnkonur*, they stand out as something very peculiar. This has led scholars to look for the roots of these episodes in mythology and the marriage alliances between gods (Æsir and Vanir) and giantesses. The Æsir considered themselves as a group above the others and they did not give their women to other groups. Instead, gods sought women from other groups, especially giantesses. The marriage pattern reflects the idea of exogamy, but as stated, the change of women was not reciprocal.

The first example of a marriage between a god and a giantess in the Old Norse mythology is probably the marriage of Njörðr and Skaði. Their marriage was unhappy, because Njörðr, who was a god of seamanship and sailing, wanted to live by the sea, whereas Skaði wanted to live in the mountains. They divorced and it is said that Skaði afterwards had children with Óðinn. Later the god Freyr was married to a giantess Gerðr,⁸² and their son Fjölfnir became king of the Svear.⁸³ However, it should be noted that actually Gerðr first rejects Freyr's suit, which is unheard of. After all, Gerðr, being a giantess and thus possessing lower status than Freyr should have been pleased to have a god as a suitor. But as Clunies Ross has pointed out, Gerðr seems to have been self-sufficient and thinks that the world of giants is as good as the world of gods.⁸⁴ According to Gro Steinsland the marriage pattern presented in Old Norse mythology continues in the sagas; gods become kings and giantesses are replaced by *Finnkonur*.⁸⁵

The question is, why *Finnkonur*? First of all, we could compare giants and the *Finnar* as characters in the mythology and in the sagas. Giants lived on the outskirts of the known world in a cold place called Útgarðr or in Jötunheimar.⁸⁶ Giantesses liked to ski and hunt. It does not need imagination to connect these attributes to the Sámi people (the *Finnar*), who were neighbours of Scandinavian peoples. However, it needs to be pointed out here that even if Tacitus, Procopius and Olaus Magnus depicted Sámi women hunting with Sámi men, it seems more than probable that the information is not based on reality. At least in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Sámi women did not take part in hunting. In fact, there are taboos in the Sámi concerning hunting, and women are not allowed to take part in it. This is not a unique Sámi cultural feature, but is common also to

marriage alliances between the *Svear* and the *Finnar*, it is not impossible that this kind of alliance would have taken place in reality. South-western Finland and Svealand had trading ties already before the Viking Age and these ties were strengthened during this period. The material culture in this part of Finland was affected by the Scandinavian culture, which is to be seen in weapons and jewellery. Marriage alliances between merchants and the locals would have strengthened the ties. Huurre 2000, pp. 190–1; DuBois 1999, pp. 10, 26; Schauman-Lönnqvist 1999, pp. 65–70.

⁸² In *Ynglinga saga* nothing is told of Gerðr's background so Snorri probably assumed that the audience knew her from *Skírnismál*. Steinsland 1991, p. 190.

⁸³ *Ynglinga saga* ch. 10, pp. 23–4.

⁸⁴ Clunies Ross 1994, p. 135.

⁸⁵ Steinsland 1991, p. 212.

⁸⁶ Clunies Ross points out that the location of giantland is not necessarily as peripheral as has been presumed: 'one has the impression that it is a distant but not impossibly remote territory somewhere in the east'. Clunies Ross 1994, p. 52.

other similar societies and cultures. However, the image of an independent Sámi woman is not a fairytale in the sense that it seems that women inherited in the Sámi society as much as men and they were economically quite independent.⁸⁷

But to come back to the similarities between the *Finnar* and the giants: the giants in the sagas had names that referred to winter and coldness (*Snær* 'Snow', *Frosti* 'Frost', *Jökull* 'Glacier'). These same names were used for the *Finnar*, too. Katja Schulz has pointed out the paradoxical role of the giants: 'Es scheint, daß vor allem zwei Faktoren bei der Einsetzung riesischer Vorfahren eine Rolle spielen: zum einen ihre Position als erste und älteste Bewohner eines Landes, zum anderen ihre Rolle als „Andere“, als nicht der eigenen Gruppe oder dem eigenen Volk zugehörige Bevölkerungsgruppe'.⁸⁸ This paradoxical role of the giants as forefathers and also as 'others' can be transferred also to the *Finnar*. Schulz has suggested that King Haraldr's and Snæfríðr's son was called Sigurðr *hrisi*, 'giant', because of this connection, but according to footnote in the *Heimskringla* edition the nickname should be understood as *hrísungr*, 'bastard'. Also Alison Finlay has translated the name as 'Bastard'.⁸⁹ Admittedly, *hrisi* and *hrisi* are different words, but Schulz justifies her argument by pointing out that in a Norwegian manuscript the nickname is written as *risi*. Could this refer to the fact that the scribe has mixed the words? This would need further investigation on manuscripts. But if a character had a nickname 'Giant' or 'Bastard', does it make a difference? Being an illegitimate son of a king was not a bad thing in the Middle Ages, but being a 'Giant' could refer to one's Sámi ancestors, if the *Finnar* were really associated with the giants of mythology.

Giantesses were progenitors of important families. They were associated with earth, which was personified as Jörð, who was a feminine figure. She was probably also identified as a giantess.⁹⁰ Giants are problematic characters in Norse mythology, because they are so ambivalent. On the one hand they have positive qualities such as courage, wisdom and wealth. But on the other hand they are described as ugly and deformed. Moreover, they are not a homogeneous group.⁹¹ In short, they are the unnatural element in the world and they are aliens in the world of the Æsir. Margaret Clunies Ross points out that a giantess is a manifestation of extreme 'otherness' in Norse mythology.⁹² As the examples from the mythology show, the relationship between gods and giants (or giantesses) was ambivalent, and in fact these ambivalent relationships are the very core of the mythology. Even if the giants are as characters negative and in opposition to the gods, it cannot be denied that the gods also need giants, their skills and their wealth.⁹³ Ambivalence also characterizes the relationship of the Norsemen and the *Finnar* in the kings'

⁸⁷ Zachrisson 1997c, p. 147.

⁸⁸ Schulz 2004, p. 263.

⁸⁹ Schulz 2004, p. 275; Finlay 2004, p. 52; *Haralds saga hárfagra* p. 126, n. 3; Icelandic *hrísungr* derives from *hrís*, 'brushwood, scrub'. Another word for a bastard is *hornungr*.

⁹⁰ Clunies Ross 1994, pp. 55–6.

⁹¹ Steblin-Kamenskij 1982, p. 77.

⁹² Clunies Ross 1994, pp. 66–9, 164–5.

⁹³ Steinsland 2007, pp. 152–3.

sagas: on the one hand the *Finnar* are enemies, but on the other hand the *Finnkonur* enter into marriage alliances with the kings, and the Norsemen seek help from Sámi magic.

The marriage alliance between the Norse kings and *Finnkonur* in the sagas represents a *hieros gamos*, a holy matrimony, according to Gro Steinsland.⁹⁴ In Norse mythology two completely different elements are combined in a marriage between a god and a giantess in order to create something new, a (proto-)king.⁹⁵ Because of this the king was neither a god nor a giant: he was something special that differed from 'ordinary' men.⁹⁶ According to Steinsland's theory there is a social tension between the upper class and the ordinary people in the sagas, but the *hieros gamos* myth may also represent a geographical tension between 'hjemlig og fremmed', when a king marries a woman who comes from a distant land and is obviously one of 'the others'. Steinsland takes as an example the marriages of King Haraldr and Snæfríðr, and King Eiríkr Bloodaxe and Gunnhildr.⁹⁷ Gunnhildr is depicted very differently in the kings' sagas. *Ágrip* states that she was daughter of Qzurr lafskeggr⁹⁸ and not a *Finnkona*, but according to *Fagrskinna* she was daughter of Mottul Finnakonungr, who was a very skilful magician (*allra fjölkunnigastr*).⁹⁹ *Heimskringla* does not follow *Fagrskinna* at this point, but tells that Gunnhildr, daughter of Qzurr toti (again a different name for her father), had lived with two *Finnar* and that they had taught Gunnhildr how to use magic.¹⁰⁰

Gunnhildr's case shows that the label or character of a *Finnkona* could be transferred to a woman who was not necessarily a *Finnr*. The relationship between a king and a *Finnkona* can be interpreted as representing the king's relationship to the land, and the *Finnkona* (like the giantess in the mythology) is a personification of earth.¹⁰¹ However, I would not categorize Gunnhildr's case thus; in my opinion Gunnhildr's connection with the *Finnar* is a way to emphasize her evil, and as such, I consider it to be a later literary construction. After all, Gunnhildr's evil emphasizes the cruelty and evil of her husband Eiríkr.

Steinsland's theory about the Norse kings, the *Finnkonur*, and the *hieros gamos* myth is plausible, because it represents an alliance with extreme 'otherness' and the myths concern the upper class of the society. The meaning of the *hieros gamos*

⁹⁴ Simek does not agree with this, arguing that the poem lacks elements that would be needed for a wedding, so *Skírnismál* does not describe a *hieros gamos* in the strict sense of the word. Simek 2001, p. 234.

⁹⁵ On marriages between the Æsir, the Vanir and giants in the Old Norse mythology, see Vestergaard 1991, pp. 29–32.

⁹⁶ Steinsland 1991, p. 311. 'Den prototypiske fyrsten er fremstått av alliansen mellom tilværelsens polære krefter, dette betinger både hans enestående status og hans særegne karakter'.

⁹⁷ Steinsland 1991, p. 207.

⁹⁸ *Ágrip* ch. 5, p. 7.

⁹⁹ *Fagrskinna* ch. 8, p. 79.

¹⁰⁰ *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 25, pp. 135–6; Also *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* ch. 3, p. 8–9. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* says that Qzurr toti was Gunnhildr's father. According to *Historia Norvegiae* Gunnhildr was a daughter of the Danish King Gormr and she is not said to have anything to do with the *Finnar* and magic, but her evil is emphasized nonetheless; *Historia Norvegiae* p. 105; see also the chapter 'Seidr, ergi and the question of gender'.

¹⁰¹ Steinsland 1991, p. 120.

was to symbolize the king's power and the fact that he was 'united' with the land.¹⁰² Olof Sundqvist has given another explanation of the *hieros gamos* myth concerning the marriage between King Agni and Skjálf. According to Sundqvist this marriage may reflect the religious ideology of kingship. Skjálf could be compared with the fertility goddess Freyja to whom the divine king is sacrificed in a fertility cult. Sundqvist suggests that the wedding was enacted as a drama at a large cultic feast.¹⁰³ However, these alliances turn out to be unlucky or even disastrous in the sagas, and again reason for this is explained by the example of mythology, namely the unsuccessful marriage of Njörðr and Skaði.¹⁰⁴ Apart from the marriage examples in the *Ynglinga saga*, it is difficult to apply this view as such to the marriage of King Haraldr and Snæfríðr. The difference is that Ynglingar kings are killed by their wives or their helpers, whereas King Haraldr is only enchanted by his wife and later after her death the spell is broken.

Preben Meulengracht Sørensen has given his own interpretation of the marriage of King Vanlandi and Drífa: these type of stories show what happens when one disobeys the rules, makes the forbidden contact with 'the other' and thus crosses the social boundary. In the Vanlandi episode *Finnland* lies somewhere on the edge of the known world, and the *Finnar* are representatives of those who do not belong to the descendants of Adam (that is, the *Finnar* are representatives of non-culture). The episode does not actually end when Vanlandi dies. His son Vísburr becomes the next king. Vísburr has two sons (Gísl and Qndurr) with a woman who is a daughter of a chieftain. But Vísburr leaves his wife and marries another woman. If this was not bad enough, he does not give back the golden necklace given to him by his first wife when the sons Gísl and Qndurr ask for it. Then the sons make a prophecy that the necklace would cause the death of the best man in Vísburr's family, and they definitely excluded themselves from their father's family. The *seiðkona* Hulð, maybe the same that appeared already in the Vanlandi episode, helps Gísl and Qndurr with her magic and promises that there would always be murders in the family of the Ynglingar.¹⁰⁵ In this way *Ynglinga saga* explains the reason for the unhappy events in the Ynglingar-family.¹⁰⁶ It is said that the Vísburr-episode is characterized by the prejudice that the Norwegians – or the Norse people – had against the *Finnar*.¹⁰⁷ At least it is clear that the magic of the *Finnar* does not bring anything good in these cases.

There are also other approaches to explain this *topos* of marriage alliance between a Norse king and a *Finnkona*. Else Mundal agrees with Steinsland on the *hieros gamos* myth, but she also has a more concrete approach to the theme. According to her, the leader or 'King' Svási of the *Finnar* wanted to have good relations with

¹⁰² Steinsland 1991, pp. 207, 307.

¹⁰³ Sundqvist 2006, p. 305.

¹⁰⁴ Steinsland 2007, pp. 157–8; Mundal 1996, pp. 111–12; On marriage alliances between Norwegians and *finnkönur*, see also Hermann Pálsson 1997.

¹⁰⁵ *Ynglinga saga* ch. 14, pp. 30–1.

¹⁰⁶ Sørensen 1993, pp. 141–3.

¹⁰⁷ Lönnroth 1986, p. 92.

King Haraldr, and a marriage between him and Svási's daughter would enhance these relations. This marriage would 'confirm that his [Svási's] tribe and his land were part of the new unity'. Even though we should not consider the marriage of King Haraldr and Snæfríðr as a historical fact, it cannot be denied that it could reflect reality – after all, it was a custom for magnates and kings to have concubines. As Mundal herself points out, King Haraldr's marriages with many women may symbolize his sovereignty over a particular area that was conquered.¹⁰⁸ The title 'the king of the Sámi' people is not a fairytale: the Icelandic annals mention that in the year 1313 the Sámi 'king' Marteinn came to meet King Hákon of Norway, although it must be understood that this 'king' was probably a leader or a chieftain compared to King Hákon. The Sámi people did not have kings, but maybe it was necessary for the Norwegians to name someone as the king of the Sámi so that their king would have an equivalent counterpart.¹⁰⁹

Mundal claims that the Norwegian king could use such epithets as 'king of the people from Agðir' or 'king of the people from Sogn', but he could not call himself 'king of the Sámis'. The Norwegian king could or would hardly have called himself 'king of the Sámis', if the Sámi people did not even live in a particular area of Norway, as Mundal writes, and if we look at the situation from the perspective of a Christian king, would he really want to be called 'king of the Sámis', which would probably be the same thing as to declare oneself the 'king of the heathen people', or even worse the 'king of the strange heathen people who practise magic'. We cannot know for sure what the Norwegian attitude towards the *Finnar* in the Middle Ages was, but according to Mundal there are signs that their attitudes were not as negative then as later on.¹¹⁰

Then again, Rudolf Simek has given a more concrete interpretation of Haraldr's and Snæfríðr's marriage:

The integration of the Northern Scandinavian Sámi minority into the Norwegian kingdom emerging at the end of the ninth century through the efforts of Harald hárfagri could well be not, as depicted in the sagas, a case of a personal infatuation with an attractive, if socially-ethnically inferior girl, but rather reflection of a 'hostile take-over' [. . .], i.e. an integration of the ethnic minority at least partly by means of threats.¹¹¹

The integration of the Sámi people into Norway was a long process. As the archaeological record shows, the Norwegians and the *Finnar* could live side by side, but things changed when Christianity was introduced into Norway and the kings wanted to exert their power and control over the areas further to the north. The Sámi people were integrated in a hostile way into Norwegian society. When Christianity and especially the control by the Church reached the lower levels of Norwegian society, the interaction with the *Finnar* became complicated.

¹⁰⁸ Mundal 1996, p. 108.

¹⁰⁹ Zachrisson 1997c, p. 145.

¹¹⁰ Mundal 1996, pp. 109–10.

¹¹¹ Simek 2001, p. 246.

As Mundal says, 'because the laws forbid Norwegians to contact Saamis for help, it must have been common that they did so'.¹¹²

5.4 TRADE AND TRAVEL AS WAYS OF COMMUNICATION

Even though trade and travel do not stand in the centre of action in the kings' sagas, they are part of social contacts which involve contacts with the 'other'. In the Middle Ages travellers always had a purpose: merchants travelled between different emporia, monks from one monastery to another, missionaries on their way to Christianize heathens, itinerant kings from one castle or manor to another. Crusading and warfare meant travelling, but neither these nor the aforementioned travelling was done for leisure, even though it has been said that this kind of activity came into being among the upper class in the late Middle Ages.¹¹³ In the High Middle Ages the number of travellers was increasing, one reason being pilgrimages. Pilgrims did not necessarily have much money or valuable gifts to pay their costs, so people, especially those living along the lively roads, started to complain about the costs the travellers caused them. In Scandinavia this gave rise to special houses (*sáluhús*) in the towns to take care of the pilgrims and poor travellers.¹¹⁴

Travelling was dangerous and toilsome. One could not be sure that other people would always be friendly and show hospitality. It was necessary to rely on people's hospitality because there was not always a guesthouse available. Guesthouses became more common in cities in Northern Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, so before that the travellers had to seek food and shelter wherever they happened to be. In Sweden in the last decades of the thirteenth century there seems to have been an organization along the roads that was supposed to make travelling easier, at least for the king's men. The laws (*landskapslagar*) ordered that the local chiefs (*häradsövdingar*) should appoint an official (*rättare*) to be responsible for receiving the written documents that allowed the passenger to change horses.¹¹⁵ The phenomenon of *Kaupmannshöfe* such as the Hanseatic merchants had did not exist in the early Middle Ages.¹¹⁶ On the one hand travellers may have roused suspicions, but on the other hand, they were also welcomed, because people were generally eager to get acquainted with newcomers, and travellers could tell news, which was important during a time without media. In the sagas travelling is associated with news, which shows the communicative character of it.¹¹⁷

Travelling is a typical narrative motif in the sagas. In the family sagas a young hero often travels abroad, because it was an old tradition and travelling was part

¹¹² Mundal 1996, p. 103.

¹¹³ Wade Labarge 2005, p. 249: 'Many of these fifteenth-century travellers actively enjoyed their journeys and admitted to a heightened curiosity and fascination with the strange and the unfamiliar'.

¹¹⁴ Bø 1981, pp. 338–41.

¹¹⁵ I. Larsson 2003, p. 38.

¹¹⁶ Peyer, pp. 1132–4.

¹¹⁷ Zilmer 2003, p. 551.

of his education.¹¹⁸ The purpose of travelling was on the one hand to learn to know new peoples and cultures, but on the other hand stories about travels and experiences themselves were worth writing down. Travels and events abroad also functioned as a physical site for the saga intrigue.¹¹⁹ The runestones are contemporary sources on travelling in the Viking Age. Compared with the sagas, the rune-stones are, however, very brief: Birgit Sawyer has pointed out that the rune-stones that mention travellers do not reflect Viking expeditions or travelling patterns in general, because so few of the inscriptions mention them at all. The rune-stone inscriptions are very brief, only mentioning that someone has gone abroad and maybe died there.¹²⁰ Still, they give us valuable information – even with their laconic expressions.

In order to understand trade as a social contact it is important to understand the preconditions for trade in Norway as well in other parts of Scandinavia. When it comes to the trade contacts and thus contacts with the ‘others’ the emporia were, of course, important. They were in contact with the local network of power. Johan Callmer divides the power centres into local, regional and supra-regional places of exchange. Local places of exchange were more or less in permanent contact with the supra-regional networks: they paid tolls or tributes to a regional lord or overlord, but the control was weak.¹²¹ Usually the purpose of the overlord was not to gain territorial control but the acceptance of his power and right to collect tribute. However, trading centres and political centres did not necessarily lie in the same place. Sometimes non-permanent trading places were established in the neighbourhood of political centres. Because the political control over trade increased at the end of the tenth century a new type of town began to take shape in Scandinavia, which combined the political centre and the trading place.¹²²

Interaction between different ethnic groups increased in the Baltic Sea area in the second half of the ninth century and at the beginning of the tenth century, which is shown by the archaeological evidence: the exchange of objects between different regions is a clear sign of this.¹²³ Trade brought foreign merchants to Scandinavia. In the Baltic Sea area the groups active in coastal shipping were dominated by people sharing Scandinavian cultural traits in the Viking Age.¹²⁴ Even if long-distance trade must have been fairly lively in Scandinavia, the fact is that the busiest trade must have been between local emporia. One of the reasons for successful trading and raiding expeditions was the superior ship-building technique which the Scandinavians had developed. All these expeditions meant contacts with ‘others’. But in the end, the merchants were not interested in people who

¹¹⁸ Hastrup 1985, p. 223.

¹¹⁹ Zilmer 2003, pp. 549–50.

¹²⁰ Sawyer, B. 2003c, pp. 117–18, 123. According to Michael Lerche Nielsen, the rune-stone inscriptions in Denmark are insufficient to tell about the relations between ‘hjemligt og fremmed’ in the Viking Age Denmark. Lerche Nielsen 1994, p. 181.

¹²¹ Callmer 1994, pp. 52–3.

¹²² Callmer 1994, pp. 70, 79.

¹²³ Gustin 2004, p. 203.

¹²⁴ Callmer 1994, p. 59.

bought their products, but they were willing to trade 'wherever they could find hard money and easy credit, rulers who protected merchants and punished robbers, and safe roads or seaways'.¹²⁵

Excavations have taken place in cemeteries near old emporia in Scandinavia, which prove that for example Frisians, Saxons and Slavic peoples lived in them. It is possible that English merchants also travelled to Scandinavia. This would be plausible at least in the case of western parts of Norway and Denmark. If we consider the size of these emporia, they were usually fairly small. It has been estimated that the number of inhabitants in an emporium may have been comparable with populations of about one hundred persons in average-sized villages in southern Scandinavia, and much smaller units of some tens of inhabitants in central Sweden, Finland and Estonia.¹²⁶ Even if the long-distance trade required that Scandinavians also travelled abroad, what kind of conclusions can we draw from this information? At least one: the number of people who were actually in contact with foreigners was relatively small. Trading networks may have been large, but the number of people who took care of the actual trade was not great. With the help of the trading networks merchandise even from peripheral areas, for example furs from east Fennoscandia, reached consumers in western and southern Europe, but it did not bring the people from the periphery to the centres.

Merchants were probably the most numerous group of foreigners arriving in Scandinavia. It is possible that local rulers could employ foreign specialists in their courts or military troops. This seems to have been the case as far as we know in the West Slavic areas. The legendary *Jómsvíkinga saga* tells of such men, mostly Danish, who were hired by a West Slavic prince to protect his lands. But in the end we can hardly speak of cultural exchange that pervaded the whole society; trade and contacts with foreigners concentrated, at least in Scandinavia, on a few emporia where their safety and status could be guaranteed by the local ruler. It was mostly the upper class and a few merchants in the emporia that had contacts with foreigners, not the ordinary peasants.¹²⁷

Trade contacts are interesting as part of social contacts because there were certain rules and practices that the people involved in trade followed. First of all, a foreign merchant had to have some kind of status in the society where he arrived in order to trade. The merchant did not automatically have a status and hence the protection of the law in the society into which he came, so it was necessary to confirm his status somehow. Otherwise, basically anyone could rob or even murder him without any consequences. It was important that the merchant who was coming to the emporium signalled that he was coming in peace and wanted to trade. In Scandinavia this was done in the Viking Age and at the beginning of the Middle Ages by lifting a white shield up and if the merchant was approaching with a ship, the shield would be lifted up on the mast. If the merchant came alone,

¹²⁵ Urban 2001, p. 50

¹²⁶ Callmer 1994, p. 63.

¹²⁷ Lübke 1997, pp. 179–82; on Jómsvíkings, see Aalto 2009a.

he could lift the shield above his head. When the request for *kaupfriðr* ('security for trade')¹²⁸ was accepted, it lasted till the exchange was over.¹²⁹ The merchant and his customer had a social relationship: it was decided beforehand who was trading with whom. The economical side of the trade played a minor role, and during the transaction it was not appropriate to haggle over the price.¹³⁰

The local rulers tried to secure the status of the foreign merchants in their area, because merchants brought money and desirable items with them. Trade meant more tax incomes for the rulers, and control over the ports of trade was an instrument of power.¹³¹ As Jukka Korpela has pointed out, in order to get merchants to the emporium, peace was needed:

The concept of *peace* meant, first of all, a trade agreement or treaty that guaranteed peaceful and well-regulated commerce. The opposite of a peace (*Frieden*) was not war, but non-peace (*Unfrieden*). Thus the various negotiations about peace and references to such negotiations in the documents do not imply military conflicts but intensive commercial relations which had a judicial base that had to be renewed from time to time.¹³²

Thus, hospitality was an essential part of trade contacts. Gifts and return presents belonged to this transitional rite, in which the merchant was 'adopted' by the local society. Little by little hospitality developed into *Gastrecht*, a right that allowed the merchant to stay and trade freely in the emporium. In the Baltic Sea area emporia such as Birka and Hedeby were juridical havens for foreigners, guaranteed by the local ruler.¹³³ The concept of hospitality will be treated further in the next chapter.

Sometimes two rulers could make a treaty to guarantee the safety of their subjects in each other's *territorium*. It was sometimes possible that an individual would be treated according to the law that applied in his or her homeland or town or ethnic group even when he or she was staying abroad.¹³⁴ When a ruler gave status to a foreign merchant, he took the role of his ruler. The merchant compensated for this privilege by paying taxes or by giving gifts (e.g. prestige items) to the ruler, both being actually the same thing. So, originally payments that were called tolls were not payments for merchandise but payments for personal integrity. The oldest payments in the North were called *forban* or *farban*, which meant that the merchants had to pay a certain sum for the local ruler in order that they were free to leave the emporium.¹³⁵

Niels Lund suggests that for example in Anglo-Saxon England, the foreigner may have had a status that was parallel to an aristocrat as far as we are to believe

¹²⁸ Zoëga 2004.

¹²⁹ Gustin 2004, pp. 220–1.

¹³⁰ Gustin 2004, p. 176.

¹³¹ Lindkvist 2003a, p. 163.

¹³² Korpela 2006, p. 377.

¹³³ In Iceland prominent Norwegian merchants could stay at some *goði's* household. Local hosts could even help the merchant to find customers. Gustin 2004, p. 178–80; Aalto 2009b.

¹³⁴ Bartlett 1993, p. 204.

¹³⁵ Enemark 1981, pp. 119–23.

the Anglo-Saxon laws.¹³⁶ Icelandic merchants had a special status in Norway: as Else Mundal states they had almost the status of ‘dual citizenship’, because the Icelandic merchants had the status of *holdr*, which was the highest rank of the free peasants, in Norway.¹³⁷ Still, they were not equal with the Norwegians in that Icelandic merchants had to pay tax (*landauri*), but the Norwegians were exempted from it. An example of how this was thought unjust by Icelanders is provided by an episode in *Morkinskinna*: an Icelander, Þorsteinn Hallsson, considered that he or men accompanying him should not have to pay the tax because Þorsteinn himself belonged to the king’s retinue. When King Haraldr harðráði heard this he became angry, because he had not promised exemption from *landauri*.¹³⁸

The so-called *Bjarkeyjar rétt* was the first law for towns in Norway, although we do not know how the law came into being. It was probably also used in other Scandinavian towns. The oldest fragment of such a law for the town of Niðaróss is from the first part of the thirteenth century, but these kinds of laws must have existed as oral tradition before they were written down. The law defined for example the status of the town’s inhabitants, so in a way it replaced the Viking Age practice, which meant that the merchant had to personally seek the protection of the local leader. Later, at the end of the thirteenth century a new law (*Byloven*) for towns in Norway was enacted.¹³⁹

If merchants felt that they were unprotected in a certain area, they may have avoided going there, as did the Norwegian Ohthere, who told in King Alfred’s *Orosius* that he did not dare to go to the land of the Bjarmians because he did not enjoy *frið* there.¹⁴⁰ *Morkinskinna* is the only one of the kings’ sagas which uses the word *kaupfriðr* and only once, when the Norwegian king Sveinn Álfífúson and King Jarisleifr of *Austríki* had hostilities between them. The Norwegian merchants Karli and Björn came to *Austríki*, but the locals refused to trade with them when they heard that the men came from Norway. The Norwegians were taken to King Jarisleifr. However, their lives were saved by the king’s foster-son Magnús Ólafsson, who considered that it would not be a good thing for his future if the

¹³⁶ Lund 1987, p. 260. In the High Middle Ages we have examples of merchants who adopted in fact two identities, as did for example the German settlers in Swedish towns. German immigrants became part of the Swedish juridical system. These immigrants had far better status in society than so called ‘guests’, who were not allowed to possess houses, trade in retail or conduct trade in a town that was other than the one they used as a base. As intermarriage was common between Swedes and Germans, the ethnicity of the children was determined by the background of the father. Wubs-Mrozewicz 2004, pp. 53–67.

¹³⁷ King Óláfr Haraldsson’s order on Norwegians rights in Iceland and Icelanders’ rights in Norway. *Norges Gamle Love* I, p. 437: ‘Íslendingar eigo at hava hoeldz rétt i Noregi’; Mundal 1997, p. 485.

¹³⁸ *Morkinskinna* FJ 111.

¹³⁹ The law was enacted first for Bergen in 1276. Wessen 1980, pp. 655–8. The name ‘Bjarkeyjar rétt’ means literally ‘a law of [a place called] Bjarkey’. Emporia under this name or Kaupang were common in the Viking Age, the most famous being probably Birka in Lake Mälaren. It seems that the name was brought even to Finland, which has for example an old trading place called Pirkkala near the present-day city of Tampere.

¹⁴⁰ Roesdahl 1998, p. 118; Ross 1940, p. 18. There is also another explanation: Ohthere was perhaps not afraid of the Bjarmians but he just did not have a contract with them to trade in their area in peace. Lund 1987, p. 255.

Norwegian merchants were killed.¹⁴¹ The lack of *kaupfriðr* in this case meant in practice that the rulers did not guarantee the safety of merchants who came from the country with which they were in conflict. Thus the rulers could prevent the merchants from trading or allow it.¹⁴²

Trade and merchants thus do not play major roles in the kings' sagas, but they do appear in some episodes. Sometimes it is simply mentioned that some Norwegians or Icelanders travelled abroad in order to trade,¹⁴³ or that there were foreign merchants – usually from *Saxland* or from England – in Norway.¹⁴⁴ We know that Scandinavians sold or exchanged slaves, furs, walrus tusks and iron, and they bought luxury items such as jewellery, weapons and glass.¹⁴⁵ German merchants were interested in furs, and for example in Norway, they began to trade with corn. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries Norwegians had bought corn from England, but before 1250 the Germans had begun to import corn from the coastal area between Lübeck and the River Oder. Germans also bought raw materials such as iron from Scandinavia.¹⁴⁶ The founding at the end of eleventh century of Bergen by King Óláfr kyrri is mentioned in all the kings' sagas except for *Ágrip*, and the sagas tell that 'wealthy men' lived in Bergen.¹⁴⁷ Before Bergen, Niðaróss had been the major emporium in Northern Norway. It was easier for foreign merchants to travel to Bergen than north to Niðaróss.¹⁴⁸ Other sources such as archaeology help to interpret the scarce saga evidence, which hints at the lively trading contacts.

Garðaríki as well as other parts of *Austroeygr* were attractive places to trade, at least according to the saga accounts, but *Valland* is also mentioned as a destination for merchants, and one man has a nickname *Englandsfari* in *Morkinskinna*, which suggest that he travelled frequently to England.¹⁴⁹ Being a merchant was a risky business, so merchants often travelled together or even formed a loose partnership (*félag*). How did the merchants communicate with their clients? The kings' sagas do not give an answer to the question. The merchants were hardly interested in the ethnic background of their clients or what languages they spoke, but they had to communicate somehow.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴¹ *Morkinskinna* FJ 5: 'Nv er vfrípr milli Sveins Alfífos. oc Iarizleifs konvngs. þvi at Iarizleifr konvngr virði sem var at Noregsmenn höfðu níz a enom helga Olafi konvngi. oc var þar noccora stvnd eigi cavpfripr i milli.'

¹⁴² *Fagrskinna* ch. 115, p. 355: The Danish king denies the inhabitants of Viken to trade in Denmark, because there were hostilities between Denmark and Norway. *Morkinskinna* FJ 293: The Danish King Knútr gives Norwegians the right to trade freely anywhere (in Denmark) as thanks for help on military expedition to England.

¹⁴³ *Morkinskinna* FJ 5; *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 52, pp. 301–2, ch. 74, p. 320; *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 43, ch. 160, p. 292; *Magnúss saga blinda ok Haralds gilla* ch. 13, pp. 297–8.

¹⁴⁴ *Morkinskinna* FJ 5–6; *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 35, p. 140; *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 52, pp. 301–2. *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 64, p. 83; *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 66, pp. 83–5.

¹⁴⁵ Roesdahl 1998, p. 115.

¹⁴⁶ Sawyer and Sawyer 1997, p. 156.

¹⁴⁷ *Morkinskinna* FJ 289; *Fagrskinna* ch. 79, pp. 299–300; *Óláfs saga kyrra* ch. 2, pp. 204–5.

¹⁴⁸ Sawyer and Sawyer 1997, 157.

¹⁴⁹ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 160, p. 292; *Morkinskinna* FJ 148.

¹⁵⁰ In the legendary *Óláfs saga ins helga* we have a rare passage in which it is mentioned that a Danish merchant used an interpreter when he was trading with Wends, and the saga states that this was a

Episodes that concern trade are far too few in the kings' sagas to be able to conclude reliably how the Norse people and foreign merchants regarded each other. *Grágás* reveals that foreigners were not equal with the Norse-speaking people, when it came to claiming inheritance in Iceland. If a foreigner (in practice most probably a merchant) died in Iceland, his heirs could demand the heritage if they spoke *í danskri tungu*. If they did not speak the language, they could claim the inheritance only if the deceased person was a father, son or brother and he had earlier acknowledged the kinship with the heir(s) 'so that men knew details of it'.¹⁵¹

It was necessary for the foreign merchants that their status was secured, usually by the local chieftain or king. In *Heimskringla* it is mentioned once that there was peace between peasants and merchants so that neither of them damaged each other or each other's property.¹⁵² Merchants that are mentioned in this passage are not necessarily foreigners, but I am inclined to think that these groups represented some form of 'otherness' to each other. Even if they were people from the same area, they had different sources of livelihood. Otherwise we do not have information about conflicts between foreign merchants and locals.

Trading could thus cause conflicts and even turn to plunder – in fact, there was a thin line that divided a trade voyage or expedition from a military expedition before the seventeenth century.¹⁵³ As an example could be mentioned Þórir hundr's Bjarmian expedition: first the Norwegians traded with the Bjarmians and after that they robbed their cemetery. The sagas made a distinction between a trade voyage and a Viking expedition.¹⁵⁴ If an emporium had a weak defence system it was a tempting target for plunderers.

Even though trading must have been a friendly way of having contacts with strangers, it was not always guaranteed what the outcome would be. For that reason, it was extremely important for the foreign merchants that they could rely on the protection of the local ruler and that they would enjoy some kind of hospitality. The system of (*kaup*)*friðr* or *Gastrecht* was in fact a concrete way to make the alien, 'other', fit into society, at least during his stay. Without this system it would have been impossible for the merchants to carry on their businesses.

common practice. *Legendary Óláfs saga ins helga* p. 120. 'Þat er sact, at æinn ríkr maðr i Danmarku het Sigurðr, sunn Aka Vagnssunar. Eit sumar for hann or lande til Vinlanz, at afla dyrlega luta. . . . Þesconar menn ero kallaðer brakunar, þa er þionastu hava at kaupar oc vera firir tulca.' Also *Konungs skuggsjá* gives instructions to (presumably) Norwegian merchants who travelled abroad that they should preferably speak such languages as Latin or *völsku* (referring here to French). Maybe it was not necessary to mention German, because the Norwegians could at least to some extent understand the language of the Hanseatic merchants that came from northern parts of Germany. *Konungs skuggsjá*, pp. 7–9.

¹⁵¹ *Grágás* 1992 (*Erfðaféttur* 6), p. 55; *Laws of Early Iceland. Grágás II*, pp. 11, 244–5.

¹⁵² *Hákonar saga góða* ch. 11, p. 163.

¹⁵³ Ohler 1996, p. 64.

¹⁵⁴ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 133, pp. 227–34; *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 64, p. 83. The inhabitants of Vik made trading expeditions to England, Scotland, Saxland, Flæmingjaland and Denmark. Some of them made also Viking expeditions. In *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* the German merchants in Bergen had conflicts with the locals and in *Sverris saga* the German merchants sold cheap wine, which caused unrest in Bergen, but these sources are beyond the scope of this study, and even they do not furnish abundant descriptions of trade and merchants. *Konunga sögur. Sagaer om Sverre og hans efterfølgere*, p. 350; *Sverris saga etter Cod. AM 327 4*, p. 109.

5.5 HOSPITALITY

Leopold Hellmuth has come to the conclusion that hospitality was born out of paradox: on the one hand people were afraid of the 'other', the strange, and yet they had to find out how to encounter it. When a single stranger was encountered one could not know whether he was carrying with him secret (and thus supernatural) powers or whether he was just a harmless wanderer (for example a merchant). In this context it is appropriate to remember that for example in the Old Norse mythology one of Óðinn's characters was a wandering stranger and he was called (among other names) *Gestr* and *Gestumblindi*. In Christian times this heathen god could still reveal himself to people according to the sagas.¹⁵⁵ Óðinn was by no means a god of hospitality as Zeus and Jupiter were in the Greek and Roman cultures, but he had features that characterized Mercury, who was the god of trade and travellers and who also was one-eyed just like Óðinn.¹⁵⁶ When he reveals himself in the sagas it seems to symbolize an underlying heathenism after Christianity had won or was accepted generally.¹⁵⁷

So one could not know beforehand whether a stranger was a threat, because lonely travellers might also be outcasts and outlaws who were evicted from their own societies.¹⁵⁸ This worked the other way round too: the stranger or visitor could also be uncertain about the place where he sought hospitality: he could not know beforehand what kind of household he would enter into when he asked for shelter, as the Eddic poem *Hávamál* states.¹⁵⁹ As Hellmuth points out, this ambivalent attitude towards strangers is also obvious when the etymology of the German word 'Gast' is examined. The original meaning of this word was 'a stranger' (*Fremder*), but it came gradually to mean enemy (*Feind*).¹⁶⁰ If Hellmuth's theory is right, hospitality arose because it was a reaction in an unpredictable situation. It was safer to encounter the stranger amicably than to show him hostility, because the stranger could use his 'powers' to harm his host (*Gastgeber*) if he was not satisfied with the welcome.¹⁶¹

A guest, *gestr*, can be defined as a man (or woman) who stayed at another man's house to whom he was not related, and the guest enjoyed hospitality. The Old

¹⁵⁵ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 64, pp. 312–14. Hellmuth calls this kind of topos 'Theoxeniesaga', in which the god Óðinn visits the people (usually Norwegian kings) and in the end his identity is revealed. Hellmuth 1984, p. 338.

¹⁵⁶ Steinsland 2007, pp. 188–9.

¹⁵⁷ Hellmuth 1984, p. 351.

¹⁵⁸ The outlaws were not only evicted from their societies, but their property was confiscated. The wife and heirs could keep their share. Nobody was allowed to help outlaws so they had to stay in forests and in the uninhabited parts of the land. Anyone could kill an outlaw without consequences. Bøe 1981, pp. 601–3; Magnús Már Lárusson 1981, pp. 603–8.

¹⁵⁹ *Hávamál*, p. 39. The first 79 stanzas of *Hávamál* consist of counsels to guests. *Hávamál* can give us a glimpse of how hospitality was appreciated in Old Norse society. The poem has been translated as 'Wisdom of the Vikings' because it is supposed that it dates back to the ninth century although the surviving manuscript is from the end of the thirteenth century.

¹⁶⁰ Hellmuth 1984, pp. 19–22; The word 'Gast' is used as a pun in *Livländische Reimchronik*. Murray 2001, p. 244.

¹⁶¹ Hellmuth 1984, p. 24.

Norse concept of hospitality (*frið*) can be seen as part of Germanic hospitality, *Gastfreundschaft*.¹⁶² As the Old Norse word *frið* reveals, hospitality did not mean in the first place giving food and shelter. It meant that the stranger was given a guarantee of his physical integrity. It was considered despicable to harm, or even worse, to kill the guest. The host's duty was to stand between his own social group and his guest, and offer his protection to the guest.¹⁶³ Of course food, drink and shelter were important for the traveller and they were part of the hospitality, but the most important thing was to have protection.

In the kings' sagas hospitality is usually shown between people who already know each other, which means that they are not very good examples of how hospitality was shown to total strangers. As the sagas concentrate on the kings and the upper class, we do not get a many-sided picture of how hospitality was shown by the lower classes. It is notable that hospitality concerned only free men, not the unfree. Moreover, it was preferable that the host and the guest were of the same social rank.¹⁶⁴ It is a typical scene in the kings' sagas – especially in *Heimskringla* – that when an aristocrat was visiting another aristocrat 'he was warmly welcomed' and that when they departed they were friends and exchanged gifts.¹⁶⁵ It was self-evident that a noble man would show hospitality to another noble man even if they did not know each other beforehand, because hospitality was both virtue and duty.¹⁶⁶ Hospitality among the upper class must be seen as a form of social contact and formal friendship.

A guest was supposed to give a gift to his host when departing to compensate for all the food and drink he had received. The exchange of gifts was a rite which belonged essentially to hospitality. A gift was also a token of friendship.¹⁶⁷ There was an unwritten rule that a gift should be compensated for. People of equal status or rank recompensed the gift the other party had given. If a gift was left unrecompensed, the one that had received it was considered to be dependent on or submissive to the giver. In other words, giving or exchanging gifts was on an obligatory basis.¹⁶⁸ However, if a king gave a gift it was of course an honour and there was no need for recompense, because the king assumed that he was rewarded by loyalty. The exchange of gifts also had other meanings: giving precious gifts was one way of manifesting one's power. As the sagas tell us, the men of the upper class gave valuable gifts such as rings or swords to their guests or allies. Not only prestige items were given: a king could for example donate lead to the cloister roof and

¹⁶² Hellmuth 1984, p. 347.

¹⁶³ Hellmuth 1984, p. 135–6.

¹⁶⁴ Hellmuth 1984, p. 229.

¹⁶⁵ For example *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 51, pp. 229–300; *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 31, p. 39, ch. 56, p. 72, ch. 69, pp. 88–90, ch. 92, p. 146, ch. 124, p. 214; *Magnúss saga góða* ch. 4, pp. 10–11; *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* ch. 16, pp. 89–90; *Magnússona saga* ch. 8, p. 247, ch. 10, pp. 249–50. *Heimskringla* gives so many examples of hospitality, because it concentrates on the inner affairs of Norwegians more than the other kings' sagas. The other sagas, however, do not lack examples of hospitality, but I have not included them here.

¹⁶⁶ Jesch 2006, p. 131.

¹⁶⁷ Bø 1981, pp. 338–41.

¹⁶⁸ Gustin 2004, p. 105; Lindkvist 2003a, p. 163; Sundqvist 2002, pp. 204–5.

receive in return prayers for himself.¹⁶⁹

We have plenty of episodes in the kings' sagas in which gifts are given and exchanged.¹⁷⁰ They are either manifestations of power or *vinfengi*, formal friendship (see the chapter 'Aristocracy and the *hirð*'). As the case of *vinfengi* shows, hospitality and rites belonging to this formal friendship overlapped. One episode in *Heimskringla* is interesting, because in my opinion it shows that the king did not want to owe a debt to a peasant, even though he could have left the peasant's gift uncompensated. King Óláfr Tryggvason was once plundering in Ireland when he met a peasant, who wanted the king to give back his cows that he had taken from him by force. The king said that the peasant could have them back if he could recognize his own cows among the others. The peasant had a dog and he let it free. The dog herded a group of cows together and they were all marked in the same way. The king asked if the peasant could give him the dog. The peasant gave the dog and the king gave him a gold ring and his friendship in exchange.¹⁷¹

The episode shows that the king wanted to reward the peasant with a gift that was at least as valuable. The gold ring itself was precious, but the fact that the king gave his friendship means here that basically the peasant could rely on the king's protection. Of course, it may not have had remarkable relevance for the peasant as King Óláfr was only on a plundering expedition in Ireland. In *Morkinskinna* an Icelander, whose name is not revealed, came to King Haraldr harðráði and asked for hospitality. This did not mean that the Icelander was seeking a place to overnight but that he wanted to stay the whole winter. The king asked if the Icelander had any sort of learning, and the Icelander told stories and entertained in the king's court, which was his payment for the food and accommodation. When he left the court, the king, who was pleased to hear a story about his adventures in his youth, said that the Icelander would be welcomed in his court whenever he wished. The king also gave precious gifts and the Icelander became a prosperous man.¹⁷² In this case, the king showed that he was generous and willing to reward his closest men lavishly.

According to the kings' sagas kings and aristocrats were usually warmly welcomed in foreign courts. For example, Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson were welcomed in *Garðaríki*,¹⁷³ the dukes of Normandy welcomed Óláfr Haraldsson and considered themselves as relatives of the Norwegian kings,¹⁷⁴ King Sigurðr was welcomed in Constantinople and he got valuable gifts from the emperor as well as from other kings he met on his way back to Norway,¹⁷⁵ and so forth. However, we have to take these kinds of passages with a grain of salt. While they probably reflect real habits and conventions, they are also literary devices in the sagas. It

¹⁶⁹ Gustin 2004, p. 155.

¹⁷⁰ See for example *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 62, p. 82; *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* ch. 23, p. 98.

¹⁷¹ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 32, p. 269.

¹⁷² *Morkinskinna* FJ 200.

¹⁷³ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 21, pp. 251–2; *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 181, pp. 328–30.

¹⁷⁴ *Óláfs saga ins helga* 20, pp. 26–7.

¹⁷⁵ *Morkinskinna* FJ 349.

was convenient to highlight the kings as powerful men who were respected also by other rulers.

Hospitality could also be misused: a certain King Sigurðr visited Klyppr, who was not at home then but the king was welcomed by Klyppr's wife. The king raped her, and as a consequence Klyppr killed the king later on.¹⁷⁶ It could also happen that the host was killed by the guest, as when the Swedish king Eiríkr killed his host Áki.¹⁷⁷ In another case King Eysteinn was fleeing and he asked a peasant to give him shelter, but he was killed by the latter.¹⁷⁸ This was not, however, considered honourable. Sometimes hospitality was denied: when Óláfr Tryggvason's mother Ástriðr was fleeing her enemies to Svíþjóð, she was denied lodging by a certain Björn eitrkveisa, but later she was welcomed by a peasant called Þorsteinn, who also helped Ástriðr to flee her enemies.¹⁷⁹ When the Iclander Sigvatr, who was King Óláfr Haraldsson's envoy, came to Västergötland, the peasants were unwilling to give him lodging. Instead Jarl Rognvaldr welcomed him warmly and helped him in all matters.¹⁸⁰ Maybe the purpose was to show that the peasants could not show hospitality as could the upper class, i.e. they did not possess the virtues of noble men. One might also wonder whether Snorri himself had had bad experiences of the hospitality shown by the peasants on his travel in Västergötland.

5.6 RELIGION: CHRISTIANS VS. HEATHENS

The position in the kings' sagas of heathenism is challenging because there are three different aspects or questions: 1. how the heathen forefathers are depicted; 2. the Christianization process (in Norway); and 3. heathens as viewed by the Christians. The sagas are written in a Christian period and by Christian authors. What is the possibility that the sources tell truthfully about the heathen religion of the Norse people, or how objectively do they describe non-Christians? It is crucial to understand that these descriptions are from the thirteenth century and they are projected onto the past. This means that the descriptions must be seen as the reflection of ideas and thoughts current in the thirteenth century.

Secondly, the sources are very uneven in their descriptions of heathens. *Heimskringla* depicts vividly how Norwegians were Christianized, and occasionally the neighbouring heathens are mentioned. *Ágrip* and *Fagrskinna* are in general very brief in their mentions of heathens. *Morkinskinna* does not cover the period before King Magnús the Good, so it does not contain descriptions of the conversion to Christianity. However, compared with the other sources, *Morkinskinna* gives a vivid picture of King Sigurðr Jorsalafari's crusade and battles against the heathen *blámenn*.

¹⁷⁶ *Haralds saga gráfeldar* ch. 14, pp. 218–19.

¹⁷⁷ *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 14, pp. 108–11.

¹⁷⁸ *Magnúss saga Erlingssonar* ch. 42, pp. 415–16.

¹⁷⁹ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 3–4, pp. 227–9.

¹⁸⁰ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 91, pp. 134–46.

Because we know practically nothing about the authors of *Ágrip*, *Morkinskinna* and *Fagrskinna*, we also do not know what their relationship to Christianity was. We have only Snorri Sturluson and the information on his life that can cast some light on what kind of attitude a Christian writer might have had towards heathenism. Snorri was born in a Christian society and culture in Iceland. Oddi, where he was raised, was an important cultural centre at the end of the twelfth century. Because the learned culture was then linked to Christianity and the Church, Snorri's upbringing and education must have been Christian. Moreover, his foster-father Jón was a deacon. Even though we have information about Snorri's life, we do not know Snorri's personal ideas about Christianity. However, it should be remembered that Snorri was looking at the world from a Christian perspective.¹⁸¹

Gísli Pálsson has argued that there must have been some kind of understanding of the heathen past in Norse society in general. The texts were copied in monasteries by monks, and Gísli points out that if the monks had not understood the heathen past, they would have left out the episodes that had something to do with pagan magic or witchcraft. They were probably the liveliest example of heathenism that lived on even after people had converted to Christianity. What could be more revealing in this matter than the laws that forbade the use of magic?¹⁸² Maybe the priests and monks understood the heathen past because they wrote about it, but this was not necessarily the case; the monks and priests could have accepted the descriptions of magic and witchcraft because they also served as negative examples to Christians. The use of magic is never described in a positive sense, at least in *Heimskringla*, and the other kings' sagas do not mention it. We can, nevertheless, detect good sides of magic in other sources, and this will be dealt with further in this chapter.¹⁸³

In a way, Snorri is no easier to understand as an author than the other anonymous authors of the kings' sagas when he is writing about heathens: he does not clearly condemn them, and staying true to the saga style, he remains in the background. Nor does he emphasize the miracles of St Óláfr, which is not typical in the Middle Ages, when authors of even non-hagiographical texts tried to show 'the touch of God's hand' in everything that was happening in the world. All this has led to false conclusions about Snorri being an objective author and comparable with modern historians. Snorri's 'objectivity' is misleading because it is a typical feature of the saga literature that the author is somewhere in the background, expressing himself instead through descriptions of characters or dialogues.¹⁸⁴

It would be erroneous to think that Snorri had the same kind of starting point as modern scholars or authors have, because he was as bound to his time and culture as we are to our own. Snorri had to explain the heathen beliefs of his forefathers,

¹⁸¹ Bagge 1991, p. 230.

¹⁸² Gísli Pálsson 1991, p. 165.

¹⁸³ Gísli Pálsson also notes that witches and the use of magic are not necessarily always depicted negatively. For example Egill Skalla-Grímsson cures a sick girl with magic runes. Gísli Pálsson 1991, p. 160.

¹⁸⁴ Bagge 1991, pp. 61–2.

which he does conveniently by pointing out the good characters among them (Lars Lönnroth uses the term ‘noble heathen’ in this context), and Snorri is by no means the only medieval author who tries to see the ‘noble heathen’ in heathen forefathers and thus projected Christian ethics onto the past. A similar approach has been detected in Saxo’s *Gesta*.¹⁸⁵ Even if Snorri is quite reasonable when depicting religious miracles, he does not imply in any way that these miracles were not believable. According to Anne Holtsmark Snorri’s attitude towards history and reality was that of a Christian and he juxtaposed Christianity and heathenism. Holtsmark also refers to Walter Bætke’s *Die Götterlehre der Snorra-Edda* (1950) in which he points out that ‘Snorre utvilsomt er en god kristen, hans oppfatning av de hedenske guder avviker ikke fra tidens teologi, selve ideen til synkvervingen kan han ha fått hos Augustin’.¹⁸⁶ Holtsmark concludes that Snorri understood skaldic poetry because he himself was a skald and therefore understood the pre-Christian mythology, but nevertheless he shared the same attitude as the Church towards pre-Christian religion.¹⁸⁷ This may be true but nonetheless it was a dilemma for the saga authors in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries how to describe their heathen forefathers. The authors tried to understand them and one solution was to portray the ancestors as ‘noble heathens’. At the same time the authors projected their Christian concepts onto the past.¹⁸⁸

The positive image of the heathen ancestors is especially obvious in *Heimskringla*. Snorri concentrates on the positive sides of the characters, and tries to show that they were noble, courageous and righteous even though they were heathen. For example in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* after having described Jarl Hákon’s death, Snorri reminds the audience of Hákon’s positive sides. Nevertheless, Snorri declares that the heathen times were about to come to an end and the new faith was coming.¹⁸⁹ The Christianization of Norwegians is a central theme in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* and *Óláfs saga ins helga* in *Heimskringla*.

Were the heathen forefathers then ‘us’ or ‘others’? I believe that Christian authors such as Snorri wanted to see the forefathers as belonging to ‘us’, and this was especially the reason why there was a need to expalain their heathenism. If the beliefs of the forefathers were downplayed by euhemerism and their good qualities enhanced, it was easier to accept that the forefathers had been heathens. Because the forefathers were ignorant about Christianity, their heathenism could be forgiven. This is a markedly different attitude from that towards contemporary heathens, as we shall see.

¹⁸⁵ See for example on Saxo and his heathen characters Kvændrup 2004, p. 26.

¹⁸⁶ Holtsmark 1964, p. 15.

¹⁸⁷ Holtsmark 1964, p. 83.

¹⁸⁸ Harris 1986, pp. 199–200.

¹⁸⁹ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 50, p. 299: ‘Manna orvastr var Hákon jarl, en ina mestu óhamingju bar slíkr höfðingi til dánardægrs síns. En þat bar mest til, er svá varð, at þá var sú tíð komin, at fyrirdæmask skyldi blótskaprinn ok blótmenninir, en í stað kom heilög trúa ok réttir siðir’; Hollander, p. 193: ‘Earl Hákon exceeded everyone in generosity, and it was great ill fortune that a chieftain such as he should have died as he did. But the reason for this was chiefly that the time had come when heathen worship and idolators were done away and Christianity took their place.’

5.6.1 Christianization: the clash between mental worlds

It should be noted that even though the sources make a clear distinction between a Christian and a heathen, this does not reflect reality as such; the image is more of a medieval literary convention. The Christian authors emphasized the distinction between Christians and heathens. In reality, the Christianization process took many centuries, especially in peripheral areas such as in Fennoscandia.

Considering the situation in Norway at the end of the tenth century and at the beginning of the eleventh, the kings' sagas present religion as the clearest example of an ideological conflict. The question of Christianization in Norway as well as in other places is problematic because it is so closely connected to the process of the realm taking shape. For a scholar it is easy to point to the connection between religion and politics, but we cannot know how the people living in that reality perceived it.

This study does not aim at proving how Christianization or state formation proceeded in Norway; the purpose is to try to understand what kind of group boundaries existed or arose between Christians and heathens. When Christianity was introduced to Norway and promoted by the kings, there was a new basis for group formation: religion. This was a new situation because paganism and Christianity had very different starting points. Whereas Old Norse paganism was an ethnic religion which was a fundamental part of the particular society in which it belonged, Christianity had a universal message, a systematic doctrine based on revelation.¹⁹⁰ Old Norse paganism could live side by side with other religions, but Christianity sought actively to convert people. From the point of view of this study it is interesting to look at how Christianization is described in the sources and how it affected the group formation and group boundaries.

Again, *Heimskringla* is the best source in this matter. Snorri's narrative focuses on some dramatic events, but this is not the whole picture. Christianity had firm roots in Norway already by the end of the tenth century when King Óláfr Tryggvason began his aggressive conversion campaign. The sagas that depict for example king Óláfr's predecessor King Hákon the Good as weak in defending Christianity seem not be truthful because 'Christianity held a stronger position in the country during his reign than the sagas directly admit'.¹⁹¹

When King Óláfr Tryggvason tried to convert Norwegians to Christianity it was not so much about religion as politics. This reveals that the kings' sagas are not hagiographic texts, and politics, not religion, is a starting point in them. The Norwegian peasants did not fight against Ólafr Tryggvason or Óláfr Haraldsson because the kings wanted to convert them to Christianity, but because these kings wanted to exert power over them and claim overlordship. Norwegians could easily change alliances as well as religion, as can be seen for instance in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 53. The Danish king Haraldr Bluetooth sends two jarls to Vík in Norway to baptize Norwegians, and a lot of people let themselves be baptized. But

¹⁹⁰ Bagge 2005, p. 110.

¹⁹¹ Bagge 2005, pp. 110 and 122.

after King Haraldr's defeat people began to practise their old heathen customs. When King Óláfr Tryggvason came to Viken he declared that he would convert all the Norwegians to Christianity, and he began with baptizing the inhabitants of Vík. Because the chieftains in Vík supported Óláfr's efforts, other people followed their example. Hence, change of religion was a political act and it probably did not have anything to do with people's personal religious opinions. One aspect is that there was a strong attachment to leaders and their gods, which means that people following a leader could rather easily worship the gods (or a God) of the popular and successful leader. This was possible because there was no sharp division between the secular and religious spheres of life.¹⁹²

If we look at the matter of conversion from the other point of view, it seems that the Norsemen – or 'Vikings' in general – were very pragmatic and even tolerant when it came to religion. Many merchants or soldiers had themselves 'prime-signed' because it helped them to deal with the Christians. For example in *Egils saga* Egill and his brother Þórólfr were among some three hundred men who had themselves prime-signed when they entered the military service of the English king Æthelstan.¹⁹³ Prime-signing meant that they were given the sign of the cross, after which they expressed a willingness to become members of the Christian community. Still, they did not have to retain their old beliefs.¹⁹⁴ Considering this, it is then Christianity and the Church organization's intolerance towards other religions which caused the clash between Christianity and heathenism, when the Church began to consolidate its position. It is interesting that during the tenth century, when Christianization was spreading in Scandinavia, people needed to show their religious convictions, which the archaeological evidence proves: people wore cross pendants or Þórr's hammers. It has been suspected that because the cross and the hammer are relatively similar in form, heathen people copied the new Christian custom. Maybe it was at the same time a reaction against the new religion.¹⁹⁵

Inevitably there was a clash of mental worlds, heathen and Christian, and it was by no means self-evident that Christianity would win the battle, even if the sagas present it like that. Heathenism was not declining when Christianity was introduced in Scandinavia. The sagas were written down two centuries after the conversion and they are affected by Christian thought: the conversion is described as God's will in history. They represent the conversion in Norway as a rather rapid, dramatic event which was led by the two Óláfrs. The present understanding of how the conversion took place in Norway is that Christianity had gradually penetrated Norwegian society through contacts with Christian Europe (trade, military expeditions) and successive Christian kings. The Christian kings on their part promoted Christianity by banning the heathen practices and helping to establish the Church organization.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Bagge 2005, p. 116.

¹⁹³ *Egils saga* ch. 50, p. 128.

¹⁹⁴ Stæcker 2006, p. 316.

¹⁹⁵ Stæcker 2006, p. 321.

¹⁹⁶ Bagge 2005, p. 123.

It is interesting to notice that there is a turning point in *Heimskringla*, when Óláfr Tryggvason becomes Christian. From then on heathenism is condemned and especially Óláfr's heathen adversaries. With King Óláfr Tryggvason begins the history of the Christian kings of Norway – even if Óláfr's predecessor King Hákon the Good was a Christian, he was not powerful enough to resist the heathen chieftains and his own faith seems not to have been very strong according to the sagas.¹⁹⁷ But King Óláfr Tryggvason is described as a strong personality and he attacks his heathen adversaries without remorse – a good Christian king would fight against heathens according to the medieval ideal. Again, the ultimate goal was not converting people, but forcing people to accept the king's power to rule them.

5.6.2 Heathens from a Christian point of view

People in Latin Western Europe identified themselves with Christianity with the pope as the head. The concept of 'Europe' was yet to emerge and it did not have a great impact on the identity of Western Europeans, as the majority of them probably had not even heard the word. What should be kept in mind, too, is that the concept of Europe and *Christianitas* were synonyms at least from the thirteenth century onwards. As Nora Berend puts it, '*Christianitas* and *Europa*, however, projected a notional, rhetorical unit and unity, linked to papal and royal agendas and ideology, rather than reality, masking the variety of practices and institutions that evolved locally'.¹⁹⁸

The Christians understood the world consisting of Christendom (*Christianitas*, *societas Christiana*, *corpus Christianorum*), which meant at the same time civilization, outside which were heathen barbarians and infidels. Also those people who lived in distance places – from the Western European point of view – were categorized according to their relationship to Christianity. This religious intolerance has also been called religious racism.¹⁹⁹ This means that Christianity was the main criterion when the Christians categorized other people and made a division between 'us' and 'them'. Originally this division was set between the Christian inhabitants of the Roman Empire and the heathen people who lived across the empire's borders. Later on, when these 'barbarians' were also converted to Christianity and Christendom spread to a larger territory, the criteria for defining the 'others' changed: the 'others' were not only Muslims outside Christianity, but also those who did not fit into Christian society, such as Jews, gypsies, regional minorities, heretics etc.²⁰⁰

Even if Christianity in this context is characterized as a unity, this was not of course the case in reality. On a mental level Christians may have felt togetherness or solidarity in principle, especially if they were facing heathen enemies on crusades, but being a Christian was just one identity. Christians were also part of some ethnic group, held a rank in society, family or clan members, or members of political factions. There were clashes of interests, and even the same religion could

¹⁹⁷ *Hákonar saga góða* ch. 15, p. 169. According to *Ágrip* Hákon's wife was a heathen. *Ágrip* ch. 5, p. 8.

¹⁹⁸ Berend 2007, p. 38.

¹⁹⁹ Ruotsala 2001, p. 56; Bartlett 1993, pp. 19, 23.

²⁰⁰ Neverdeen Pieterse 2002, pp. 18–19.

not prevent feuds and wars. Christianity was a remarkable channel of contacts in the Middle Ages, both in good times and bad.

Is then the idea of *Christianitas* projected onto the past by the authors of the kings' sagas? The presupposition is that if it is, then we can find a strong division between 'us' and 'them'. Let us now look at the episodes that are connected to the conversion. When King Óláfr Tryggvason was converting the Norwegians, he attempted to convert a certain Eyvindr, who refused to be baptized, as Eyvindr was a spirit who had acquired his human body with the help of the magic of the *Finnar*.²⁰¹ It was thus no use converting him.

King Óláfr tried also to convert a man called Rauðr. First of all, when Óláfr and his men arrived in the fjord where Rauðr was supposed to be, the weather was stormy. A bishop, who was accompanying King Óláfr, read the Bible, prayed and sprinkled holy water on the ship and they were able to get ashore safely. Rauðr was caught, but he refused to be baptized. A snake was put into his mouth and it came out of his side. Rauðr's men were baptized and those who refused were tortured and killed. Snorri writes that King Óláfr was tormented by trolls and *véttir* on these trips, but that he did not want to write about them. He wanted to write of how King Óláfr converted the Norwegians.²⁰²

These stories probably belonged to the lore of King Óláfr Tryggvason as a converter,²⁰³ and Snorri, wanting to avoid too much 'ecclesiastical emphasis' in his work, left most of the conversion stories out. Instead, King Óláfr Tryggvason is described as having fought persistently against his heathen countrymen by destroying their temples²⁰⁴ and by forcing them to accept Christianity at the *þing* meetings,²⁰⁵ i.e. by using very practical methods. He gladly welcomed those Icelanders that had converted to Christianity, but tried to blackmail and threaten those who had not.²⁰⁶

The boundary between Christianity and heathenism is on the one hand a boundary that can be passed: a heathen can become part of Christendom by converting. The heathen forefathers were described in a manner that sought to understand their heathenism (they were ignorant and yet they had such qualities as were appreciated by Christians – the 'noble heathen'). In other words, in spite of their heathenism the forefathers were part of 'us' in the long chain of generations. On the other hand, the heathen peoples such as the *Finnar* or the Wends are represented just as 'others', enemies of Christianity. The sagas do not pay attention to how these people should or could be converted.

The nature of Snorri's relationship to Scandinavian mythology and Old Norse

²⁰¹ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 76, p. 323. Eyvindr says: 'Ek em einn andi, kviknaðr í mannslíkam með fjölkynngi Finnar, en faðir minn ok móðir fengu áðr ekki barn átt'; Hollander, p. 211: 'I am a spirit brought to life in human shape by the sorcery of the Finns, my father and my mother could not have child before'.

²⁰² *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 80, p. 328.

²⁰³ Lönnroth 1963, p. 90.

²⁰⁴ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 59, pp. 308–9, ch. 69, 317–18.

²⁰⁵ For example *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 54, pp. 303–4, ch. 55, pp. 305–6, ch. 57, p. 307.

²⁰⁶ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 81, pp. 328–9, ch. 95, p. 347.

paganism has raised questions among scholars. On the one hand, on the basis of *Ynglinga saga* Snorri seems to have believed like his contemporaries that the old gods existed but that they were like demons. In his *Gylfaginning* ('Delusion of Gylfi') Snorri eulogizes the old gods.²⁰⁷ Gylfi, king of Sweden, visits Ásgarðr and the Æsir in disguise. He is tricked into believing the Æsir are gods. Hence, Snorri's explanation for the belief in the old gods is that the people were spiritually ignorant, which caused the worship of the Æsir.²⁰⁸ On the other hand Snorri differs from those contemporary authors who had an ecclesiastical background in that he distinguishes between the natural and supernatural. His explanations are based mostly on the natural.²⁰⁹

Still, Snorri is using an *interpretatio Christiana*,²¹⁰ which is very clear in the cases in which he describes heathens, and in this way *Heimskringla* reflects Snorri's time and norms. It is clear that the episodes that concern the conversion to Christianity juxtapose Christians and heathens. From the Christian perspective it was right to convert people. At the same time the heathens were taken into the 'in-group', the adherents of *Christianitas*. As Kurt Villads Jensen has pointed out, the impression that there existed an age-old antagonism between Christians and heathens, may be false. The medieval chroniclers 'wrote for those political agents seeking confrontation more than *convivencia* and that they wrote to justify their actions'.²¹¹

The only one of the kings' sagas to describe in detail this clash of Christianity with heathenism and the struggle for overlordship in Norway is *Heimskringla*. *Morkinskinna* does not cover the period before King Magnús, and hence does not contain descriptions of this clash, but *Ágrip* and *Fagrskinna*, which basically might give information on it, are very brief about it. If the author of *Ágrip* was satisfied with making short notions about what had happened, Snorri took the opportunity to make a much more vivid and lively history, because he had a good education, his predecessors' works available for study and the overall general knowledge and worldview and personal contacts which he picked up on his travels.

5.6.3 Óðinn as the arch-enemy of Christianity

It has already become clear that the Christian worldview, which juxtaposes Christians and heathens, is perceptible in the kings' sagas, especially in *Heimskringla*. Let us look at how heathenism and heathen ways are actually depicted in *Heimskringla*. Óðinn as head of the Old Norse pantheon is in many ways the symbol of Old Norse heathenism:

Þá er Ása-Óðinn kom á Norðrlönd ok með honum díar, er þat sagt með sannendum, at þeir hófu ok kenndu íþróttir þær, er menn hafa lengi síðan með farit.²¹²

²⁰⁷ Snorra-Edda 2006 [2003], pp. 11–84.

²⁰⁸ Ciklamini 1978, p. 45.

²⁰⁹ Bagge 1991, pp. 216–17, 225.

²¹⁰ Boyer 2001, p. 40.

²¹¹ Villads Jensen 2001, p. xxi.

²¹² *Ynglinga saga* ch. 6, p. 17; Hollander, p. 10: 'It is said with truth that when Ása-Óðin came to the Northlands, and the *díar* with him, they introduced and taught the skills practiced by men for a long

Óðinn skipti hómum. Lá þá búkrinn sem sofinn eða dauðr, en hann var þá fugl eða dýr, fiskr eða ormr ok fór á einni svipstund á fjarlæg lǫnd at sínum ørendum eða annarra manna. Þat kunni hann enn at gera með orðum einum at slökkva eld ok kyrra sjá ok snúa vindum hverja leið, er hann vildi.²¹³

Óðinn takes many shapes in Norse mythology. As *Ynglinga saga* says in ch. 7, he could change his appearance, which refers to his shamanistic abilities, but he also had other qualities.²¹⁴ Óðinn is also an archetype of a stranger in mythology, and in fact one of his characters was a stranger who visited the human world. He would wander around wearing a big hat and carrying a staff with him. He appears in this way also in *Heimskringla*, when he comes to visit King Óláfr Tryggvason:

Svá er sagt, þá er Óláfr konungr var á veizlunni á Ogvaldsnesi, at þar kom eitt kveld maðr gamall ok orðspakr mjök, hafði hǫtt síðan. Hann var einsýnn. Kunni sá maðr segja af ǫllum lǫndum. Hann kom sér í tal við konung. Þótti konungi gaman mikit at rœðum hans ok spurði hann margra hluta, en gestrinn fekk órlausn till allra spurninga, ok sat konungr lengi um kveldit. [. . .] Eptir um morgininn lét konungr kalla til sín steikara ok þann, er drykkinn varðveitti, ok spyrr, ef nǫkkurr ókunnr maðr hefði komit til þeira. Þeir segja, at þá er þeir skyldu matbúa, kom þar maðr nǫkkurr ok sagði, at furðu ill slátr suðu þeir til konungs borðs. Síðan fekk hann þeim tvær nautsiður digrar ok feitar, ok suðu þeir þær með ǫðru slátri. Þá segir konungr, at þá vist alla skyldi ónýta, segir, at þetta myndi engi maðr verit hafa ok þar myndi verit hafa Óðinn.²¹⁵

This is not just a description of a stranger, but the meeting of King Óláfr and Óðinn symbolizes the encounter of the old *ásatrú* and Christianity. Because Óláfr Tryggvason is portrayed as the ‘converter’ of Norway – and later also equated with John the Baptist – it is not an accident that Óðinn comes to meet him. This visit shows that old heathen beliefs are difficult to overcome, because they still exist and they are apt to turn up at any time. Óláfr Tryggvason shows his quality as a Christian king when he understands that the visitor was Óðinn and he orders his servant to throw away the piece of meat that Óðinn gave them. Moreover, the story

time afterwards’.

²¹³ *Ynglinga saga* ch. 7, p. 18; Hollader, pp. 10–11: ‘Óthin could shift appearances. When he did so his body would lie there as if he were asleep or dead; but he himself, in an instant, in the shape of a bird or animal, a fish or a serpent, went to distant countries on his or other men’s errands. He was also able with mere words to extinguish fires, to calm the sea, and to turn the winds any way he pleased’.

²¹⁴ Steinsland 2007, p. 206.

²¹⁵ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 64, pp. 312–14; Hollander, p. 203–4: ‘it is told that one evening when King Ólaf was being entertained at Ogvaldness an old and very wise-spoken man came in. He wore a hood coming low down over his face and was one-eyed. This man had things to tell of every land. He engaged in conversation with the king, and the king found much pleasure in his talk and asked him about many things. The guest had an answer to all his questins, and he stayed up long in the evening with him. [. . .] on the morning following, the king had the cook called before him and also the man who attended to the drink and asked them if any stranger had come to see them. They said that when they were about to prepare the meal some man they did not know approached them and said that they were preparing marvellously poor meat for the king’s table. And then he gave them two fat and thick sides of beef, which they boiled, together with other meat. Then the king said that they were to destroy all that food – that this had probably not been any human but Óthin.’

may have its model in *Grímnismál*, in which Óðinn disguises himself and visits King Geirrðr. Lars Lönnroth suggests that the story of St Martin and the gods of Antiquity visiting him may also have been one of the models for this *topos*.²¹⁶

It is worth looking closer at the character of Óðinn, because he seems to be the embodiment of Scandinavian heathenism, at least in *Heimskringla*. According to John Lindow the character of Óðinn, as he is described by Snorri, ‘contains not one item that could not be attributed to a real human being’.²¹⁷ In other words, the mythical elements of Óðinn described in *Ynglinga saga* can be explained by Snorri’s motivation of euhemerizing this god. Snorri is not just making Óðinn with his magical tricks to look very suspicious, but he is also making him an outsider, because Óðinn came from Tyrkland, and Lindow suggests that Snorri is, in the context of ancient Scandinavia, describing an outsider, ‘rather like the Sámi’.²¹⁸ Snorri’s purpose was to euhemerize the old Scandinavian gods, but in doing so, he actually portrays Óðinn as an arch type for an outsider – from a Christian perspective of course. It is worth remembering that these descriptions on heathen gods and witchcraft are actually just reflections of what people at the beginning of the thirteenth century thought of them, but as such they serve purposes of this study.

Óðinn’s abilities of changing shape and using magic have been associated with Sámi shamanism, and Lindow points out, that the whole portrayal of Óðinn in *Ynglinga saga* may be based on what Snorri knew about Sámi shamanism. Lindow does not claim that different forms of shamanism would not have existed also among the Scandinavians, but he states that ‘Snorri’s picture of the historical Óðinn . . . was the result of cultures in contact’, meaning that the Scandinavians adopted something from their neighbours and vice versa.²¹⁹

The question whether the Old Norse paganism had adopted shamanism and the practice of magic known as *seiðr* from the Sámi religion is still debated. According to Steinsland there is no point in trying to find out whether these phenomena were loans from one culture to another. She emphasized that they should be studied from their own premises: they are parallel phenomena which existed in two ethnic cultures, which lived had lived side by side for a long period of time in Scandinavia. Shamanism and the practice of *seiðr* can be interpreted as expressions of encounters of these two cultures.²²⁰ Clive Tolley has criticized the opinion, expressed especially by Neil Price, that we should rely on the saga accounts and Eddic poetry as evidence of actual Old Norse shamanism. The sources are, after all, if not produced then at least recorded in a Christian society. Tolley also expresses his concern that the archaeological materials may be overinterpreted.²²¹ In this study it is not the aim to deliberate whether these sources from the thirteenth cen-

²¹⁶ Lönnroth 1963, p. 89.

²¹⁷ Lindow 2003, p. 105.

²¹⁸ Lindow 2003, p. 103. Lindow states that he is not taking up the issue of kingship arriving from outside the social group in this context, which he thinks, is also relevant.

²¹⁹ Lindow 2003, pp. 105–6; See also Hermann Pálsson 1997.

²²⁰ Steinsland 2007, p. 342.

²²¹ Tolley 2009, pp. 581–2.

tury can be used as an evidence for the practice of magic and shamanism. When looking at the depictions or references to these phenomena, we can conclude that the authors of the sagas connected the heathen gods and heathens in general with them. This was one way of emphasizing the difference between the in-group and the extreme otherness outside it.

5.6.4 *Seiðr*, *ergi* and the question of gender

The inhabitants of the northern parts of Norway were generally more inclined to use magic than people living in other parts of Norway.²²² The same applies to Icelanders that had forefathers from Hálogaland or had even Sámi forefathers in their family.²²³ However, Sverre Bagge doubts that Snorri is exaggerating when he connects magic with marginal groups.²²⁴ This may be true but it is plausible that Snorri is emphasizing this feature when he wanted to show that certain characters were deviating from ‘normality’ (i.e. Christianity) and were ‘marginal’. Because Snorri himself lived in a Christian society, the use of magic would have been abnormal to him. Agneta Breisch has pointed out that those Icelanders who either practised magic or were suspected of it were outsiders in the society.

Genom sina övernaturliga krafter drogs också de trollkunniga ut i samhällets randområden. För att få bukt med det okontrollerade och magiska behandlades trollkunniga med misstänksamhet och våld. Det okontrollerbara i trolldomen, liksom allt annat som skedde i lönnedom, skulle elimineras. Rädslan för magiska krafter var konstant; även i de senare lagtexterna uttrycks en markerad oro inför trollkonster, om dessa till exempel ansågs främja hedendom eller spå framtiden.²²⁵

Ynglinga saga is one of the most important sources for understanding what was meant by *seiðr* in the Old Norse literature and mythology. *Seiðr* can be translated as magic. A person who practises *seiðr* tries to bend things to his or her will. Steinsland juxtaposes the practitioners of public cult and the practitioners of *seiðr*, but she does not categorize *seiðr* purely as a private cult.²²⁶ It seems probable that *seiðr* was a marginal phenomenon. As far as we know, the practitioner of *seiðr* could be a woman (*volva*) or a man (*seiðmaðr*). The sources – often Christian – reveal that these men and women were both respected and feared in the society. This aspect seems to enhance their marginality. In Norse mythology *seiðr* originates among the gods. It is said in *Ynglinga saga* that Freyja, who belonged to the Vanir, taught the Æsir to use *seiðr*: ‘Dóttir Njarðar var Freyja. Hon kenndi fyrst með Ásum seið, sem Vönum var títt.’²²⁷ Originally the Æsir lacked the skill of magic. With the help of *seiðr* one could predict the future, control the weather or harm other people so that they would lose their strength or become crazy. Therefore it is possible to make a

²²² Bagge 1991, p. 216.

²²³ Hermann Pálsson 1999, pp. 16–17.

²²⁴ Bagge 1991, pp. 215–16.

²²⁵ Breisch 1994, p. 165.

²²⁶ Steinsland 2007, p. 338.

²²⁷ *Ynglinga saga* ch. 4, p. 13.

division between the two forms of *seiðr*: the white one (foretelling) and the black one (cursing).²²⁸

The question of gender and the practice of *seiðr* has been debated: on the one hand it is typical for the saga literature that the practice of magic is associated with either gender or ethnicity – women or outsiders²²⁹ – but on the other hand the gender does not play an important part: Gísli Pálsson has pointed out after studying the family sagas that numerically ‘gender does not seem to be a significant factor, for roughly the same number of men and women are labelled as witches – 39 men and 38 women’.²³⁰ However, Clive Tolley points out that in the Old Norse material it is mostly women that engage in *seiðr*, whereas in circumpolar cultures shamanism is usually practised by men. This reflects probably cultural differences, because female shamanism appears strong in societies that are not primarily based on hunting whereas in those societies that rely on hunting male shamanism is dominant.²³¹

The reason why gender is an issue is that the practice of *seiðr* itself was dubious, because it was associated with *ergi*,²³² and hence not honourable for men to practise; it was associated with a passive role in a homosexual act. In the mythical stories goddesses learn how to practise *seiðr*, because it was not dishonourable for them.²³³ Óðinn learns how to use *seiðr* at the cost of symbolic feminization. But as Clunies Ross has pointed out, the members of the dominant class (the *Æsir*) can use attributes that otherwise would be thought of as a point of weakness.²³⁴

In fact, it has been suggested that the very practice of magic itself was either a real or simulated sexual act. If completion of a *seiðr* ritual really involved an actual sexual performance, with an emphasis on the woman’s physically receptive role in intercourse, this could explain, according to Neil Price, why it held such negative connotations for men.²³⁵ According to Jenny Jochens the ‘connection between women and goddesses suggests that not only divination but also magic had originally been a female monopoly’.²³⁶ This may be exaggeration, but considering Tolley’s remarks on how female shamanism was more bound to agrarian societies and thus may have derived from fertility worship, Jochens’s statement may not be discounted.

In my opinion the connection between *ergi* and *seiðr* does not necessarily imply a female monopoly in the practice of magic; it only shows that it was considered to

²²⁸ Clunies Ross 1998, p. 32–3; Hedeager 1997, p. 118.

²²⁹ Lionarons 1997, p. 419.

²³⁰ Gísli Pálsson 1991, p. 160. See also Dillman 1986.

²³¹ Tolley 2009, pp. 165–6.

²³² *Ergi* means sexual perversion and that a man lets another man use him sexually. Fjeld Halvorsen 1981, pp. 9–10; There are several forms of the word: the noun *ergi*, adjective *argr* and the metathesis *ragr/ regí*, and the passive verb *ergjask*, ‘to become argr’. Sørensen 1983, p. 18; According to Zoëga 2004 *ergi* can be translated as 1) lewdness, lust; 2) wickedness, devilry.

²³³ Tolley 2009, pp. 155–64.

²³⁴ Clunies Ross 1994, pp. 70 and 208.

²³⁵ Price 2006, p. 290; About the complexity between the connection *seiðr* – *ergi*, see Schjødt 2008, pp. 370–1; See also Steinsland 2007, pp. 340, 358–60 and Clunies Ross 1994, p. 211.

²³⁶ Jochens 1991, p. 307

be something negative. As Preben Meulengracht Sørensen has stated, as heathen practices of witchcraft included sexual activities and taboo-breaking (as far as we are to believe sources that are written by Christians), ‘it is not surprising that the practice of sorcery and sexual perversion could be taken as one and the same thing’.²³⁷ The studies of peoples who still have or had in the near past a lively shamanistic tradition in their culture has revealed that a shaman, when in contact with the spirits, in an ecstatic state or trance, is described as being penetrated by the spirits.²³⁸ This means that there was not necessarily a sexual act involved with the *seiðr* ritual, but the receptive role in fact had symbolical meaning.

Such was the association of *seiðr* with sexual perversion that it was used in curses. On one of the runestones in Sønder Vinge in Northern Jutland there is this curse: ‘værði særði auk séðretti sár mannæs æs óði minni því’. The stone is slightly damaged so there are multiple explanations for this curse, but the message seems to be that ‘the one who dares to destroy the stone shall be a pervert and devoted to *seiðr*’.²³⁹

It was so dishonourable for a man to be accused of *ergi*²⁴⁰ that according to the law code *Grágás* one was allowed to kill the accuser. The use of the word for another man could also lead to a punishment, namely outlawry, which means that as a crime the accusation or *ergi* through a *níð* poem is equated with murder and rape.²⁴¹ Because the use and practice of *seiðr* was so dishonourable for men, it was mostly practised by women, who had a low status in the society, or by those who belonged to the margins.

However, Jochens has made an interesting remark concerning the gender of the practitioner of magic in *Báttur Þorvalds ens Viðfjörla*: the author has changed the gender of the performer of magic from female to male. This may be due to Christian influence, which tried to increase the number of men in what had been primarily a female profession during the pagan period, or it must be ‘credited also to the older patriarchal tenor of Indo-European culture’.²⁴²

Nevertheless, some men performed *seiðr* even if it brought with it dishonour and social rejection. According to Price some men were still ready to practise *seiðr*

²³⁷ Sørensen 1983, p. 19.

²³⁸ Siikala 1992, pp. 206–10.

²³⁹ Palm 2004, p. 157; DR 83: *SP -u(p)(i) : b(i)–(l)i : rispi : stin ¶ : þensi : uftiR : uruku ¶ auk : kaþu : brupr : ¶ sino : tuo : ¶ ... sarpi : auk ¶ siþ : r(a)(t)i : saR : monr : ¶ ias : auþi : mini : þui*; *SP* Guði <bi--li> raised this stone in memory of Órókia and Kaða, his two brothers . . . wounded and bewitched(?). A warlock(?) (be) the man who destroys this memorial! *§Q* Auði Steward raised this stone in memory of Órókia and Kaða, his two brothers. [May he be considered] a pervert and a wizard(?), that man who destroys this memorial. We can find seven (five in Denmark, two in Västergötland) inscriptions with spells cursing anyone who disturbs the monument. ‘Since the use of magic and such pagan curses cannot have been acceptable to Christians, these seven inscriptions must be regarded as explicitly pagan’. Sawyer 2003c, p. 128.

²⁴⁰ If somebody composed a *níð*-poem or made a *trénið* he insulted in this someone of being *ergi*. Sørensen 1983, p. 28.

²⁴¹ Fjeld Halvorsen, pp. 9–10. The lawcode does not use the substantive *ergi*, but the adjective *ragr*, which is thought to be a (possibly euphemistic) metathesis of the word *argr* (from which *ergi* derives). *Grágás* 1992 (*Víglöð* 115), pp. 273–4; Sørensen 1983, p. 18; Sørensen 2000, pp. 78–88; Price 2002, p. 212.

²⁴² Jochens 1991, pp. 308, 314.

because in spite of 'its very risks [it] also brought male sorcerers a peculiarly vital power'.²⁴³ It is interesting that the Norwegian law codes such as *Gulaping* law required the permanent outlawing of those convicted of 'sodomy' (homosexuality). John Boswell has suggested that the prohibition of 'sodomy' was an addition of the period in question, which would support his conclusions that in the latter half of the twelfth century there appeared a more virulent hostility to gay people in the European popular literature and it eventually spread to theological and legal writings as well. According to Boswell reasons for this intolerance cannot be adequately explained but they were probably closely related to the general increase of intolerance of minority groups in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.²⁴⁴ But to come back to the question of *ergi*, the point in the accusation was not sexual perversion; the meaning was moral as the accused man was considered effeminate and cowardly.²⁴⁵

When it comes to men as practitioners of *seiðr* and the connection with *ergi*, it is worth deliberating on what may underlie this connection or connotation. Belittling the enemy's (in this case the heathen adversary's) masculinity has been one way of emphasizing the superiority of Christians. Louise Mirrer has studied medieval Castilian ballads and Jewish and Muslim men in them. According to her, these ballads largely denied the masculinity of Muslim and Jewish men in order to enhance the supremacy of Christian men. The Muslim men are repeatedly linked to their mothers, or Jewish men's locus of activity is the home, whereas the real men are active in the battlefield.²⁴⁶

We can compare the image of the Muslim/Jewish men of the Castilian ballads with the men who practise *seiðr* in the sagas: these men, who are usually *Finnar*, deny their masculinity and are thus contemptible from the point of view of Christian 'real' men. The archaeological evidence from the Sámi graves shows that the prominent Sámi men wore not only status symbols of Scandinavian men, but also with those of Scandinavian women, although the jewellery had been changed to suit its carrier and thus had lost its original meaning.²⁴⁷ This women's jewellery must have had another meaning in Sámi society, but in the eyes of their Scandinavian neighbours it may have looked peculiar: a man wearing women's jewellery could not have been very convincing.

Another example is a grave found in Klinta on Öland: a man was buried with objects conventionally used in female graves ('female' jewellery, needle-working tools).²⁴⁸ However, we have no evidence whatsoever how cross-dressing men were perceived in Norse society. Neil Price refers to picture stones (numbers I and IV) in Gotland, in which there are figures that are dressed in typical flowing dress used to indicate women. It is possible that the figures are a result of a local carver and

²⁴³ Price 2006, p. 289.

²⁴⁴ Boswell 1980, pp. 291, 334.

²⁴⁵ Sørensen 2000, p. 81.

²⁴⁶ Mirrer 1994, pp. 171–3, 181.

²⁴⁷ Zachrisson 1994, p. 177; Zachrisson 1997b, p. 80.

²⁴⁸ Price 2002, p. 216.

his style, but Price does not exclude the possibility that the picture stones depict a gathering of *seiðmenn* or similar.²⁴⁹

In some cases, these practitioners of magic were members of the Norwegian royalty: King Haraldr Fairhair's wife Snæfriðr and their son Rognvaldr réttillbeini,²⁵⁰ Rognvaldr's grandson Eyvindr kelda and King Eiríkr Bloodaxe's wife Gunnhildr. In spite of their royal connection, these four characters are somehow marginal. Snæfriðr was the daughter of Svási, who was a *Finnr*.²⁵¹ Obviously through this family connection Haraldr's and Snæfriðr's son Rognvaldr had an 'inherited' tendency towards the use of magic. In some other contexts, for example in *Historia Norvegiæ*, Rognvaldr is said to have been fostered by a *spákona* (*fitonissa*) – a detail that is not given by either *Ágrip* or *Heimskringla*.²⁵² Eyvindr kelda, grandson of Rognvaldr, continues the line of *seiðmenn* in the family.

Gunnhildr's case is more complicated because depending on the source, she is either the daughter of a Norwegian nobleman²⁵³ or daughter of a king of the *Finnar*.²⁵⁴ In reality, she may have been sister of the Danish King Haraldr Bluetooth, but the sagas portray her as an evil character.²⁵⁵ The point in the sagas seems to be that it was important to stress Gunnhildr's evil, and what would be a better way to do it than by associating her with the *Finnar*, who had taught her magic?

As Driscoll has pointed out, Gunnhildr is identified in *Historia Norvegiæ* as daughter of the Danish King Gormr gamli (and thus King Haraldr's sister). It is the Icelandic tradition that associates her with the *Finnar* and with Norwegian (or even Sámi) origin. There is no explanation for this confusion, but Driscoll suspects that it may be due at least partly to Icelandic hostility toward Gunnhildr.²⁵⁶ *Ágrip* even gives a very unlikely story of how Gunnhildr ended her life: the Norwegian Jarl Hákon asked the Danish King Haraldr to trick Gunnhildr by promising to marry her. When Gunnhildr arrived in Denmark she was killed by sinking her in a bog.²⁵⁷

It seems that the same applies to the opponent of King Óláfr Haraldsson, Þórir hundr. He is associated with the *Finnar* and their magic, and the reason for this may be that it was easier to emphasize his evil character when he was associated with the practice of magic and the *Finnar*. Even though the practitioners of magic

²⁴⁹ Price 2002, p. 214.

²⁵⁰ *Ágrip* calls him Rognvaldr reykil. According to footnote 6 *rykill* and *rykill* also appear in other sources. *Ágrip* ch. 2, p. 5.

²⁵¹ *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 25, pp. 125–7.

²⁵² *Historia Norvegiæ* pp. 104–5; Hermann Pálsson 1997, p. 133.

²⁵³ *Ágrip* ch. 5, p. 7; *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 32, p. 135.

²⁵⁴ *Fagrskinna* ch. 8, p. 79.

²⁵⁵ Gunnhildr seems to have had a widespread image of being an evil character, because she is mentioned as such also in Theodoricus Monachus' work and in *Historia Norvegiæ*. Theodoricus Monachus, *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium* pp. 12–13; *Historia Norvegiæ* pp. 105.

²⁵⁶ Driscoll 1995, p. 9, footnote 15; *Historia Norvegiæ* p. 105.

²⁵⁷ *Ágrip* ch. 11, p. 15. The story of Queen Gunnhildr was brought back to daylight when a mummified body of a woman was found on 20 October 1835 in Haraldskjær Bog in Denmark and philologist and historian N. M. Petersen identified the body as Queen Gunnhildr. Later studies have shown that the body is much older and than the eighth or ninth century. Sanders 2009, pp. 1–46.

are mainly associated with the *Finnar* in the kings' sagas, this is not the case in other saga genres and we cannot generalize that the practice of magic was associated with only the *Finnar*. They just happened to be the closest example of living heathenism for Norwegians.

Rognvaldr réttilbeini's case shows clearly how the practice of magic was associated with *ergi*. King Haraldr did not like his son's doings and he sent his other son Eiríkr Bloodaxe to meet Rognvaldr, obviously with the intention of killing him: Rognvaldr was burned inside a house with eighty other *seiðmenn*. This deed was much praised according to the saga.²⁵⁸ It is notable that Rognvaldr's brother Eiríkr Bloodaxe was not Snæfríðr's son, but he was sent to kill his half-brother. The saga does not give any grounds why King Haraldr ordered his son to be killed. Considering the connection of *seiðr* and *ergi*, and thus the implication of abandonment of masculinity, it would seem plausible to think that King Haraldr considered that Rognvaldr was a shame to his family. Supposedly the saga audience understood this by reading between the lines. *Historia Norvegiæ* expresses clearly that Rognvaldr was 'infamous for the disgrace customarily attached to degrading practices' and that he was thrown into a whirlpool by order of his father.²⁵⁹ Even if King Haraldr, being heathen himself, accepted the practice of *seiðr*, he could not accept that one of his male descendants would be involved with it and thus would dishonour his father and the whole kin.

We may further ponder what it means for the story itself that it was written down by Christians. For the audience, Rognvaldr's practice of magic and thus connection with *ergi* cannot have been a surprise, because Rognvaldr was after all the son of Snæfríðr, the dubious *Finnkona*. So, Rognvaldr was a marginal character because of his mother and his practice of magic, and was probably thus sexually perverted. This made him an outsider, and must have been the grounds for killing him even though this is not stated in the saga. Steinsland considers that it is possible that the story is a later construction from the Christian period.²⁶⁰ Clive Tolley has suggested that accusations against Rognvaldr and other *seiðmenn* may have been invented by Rognvaldr's enemies.²⁶¹ This would seem a plausible explanation, because such accusations could be very useful when the goal was to stain the name of one's political enemy. In this case, it is not relevant whether the accusation is true or not: in any case it reveals how the character of Rognvaldr is marred by the accusations.

In a way the Rognvaldr story is repeated in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, in which Rognvaldr's grandson Eyvindr kelda is the opponent of King Óláfr. Óláfr tries to burn Eyvindr inside his home, but Eyvindr escapes. Later on, Eyvindr and his *seið-*

²⁵⁸ *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 34, pp. 138–9. 'Hann brenndi inni Rognvald, bróður sinn, með átta tígu seiðmanna, ok var þat verk lofat mjök'. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* gives the same depiction ends that 'Guðríðr liomi druknadi fyrir laðri' (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* ch. 4, p. 11). Guðríðr was mentioned earlier as Rognvaldr's brother.

²⁵⁹ *Historia Norvegiæ* p. 109: 'sed Rognvaldus rettilbein usitatam inertissimæ artis igniminiam infamatus jussu patris in Hathalandia fertur ingurgitatus'.

²⁶⁰ Steinsland 2007, p. 360.

²⁶¹ Tolley 2009, p. 154.

menn try to attack Óláfr, but they fail: Eyvindr had summoned magical darkness to confuse his enemy but the spell is turned back upon them. Eyvindr and his men are captured, and they are drowned among the outer skerries.²⁶² Not much can be deduced from this episode, but it certainly repeats the *topos* of a man who loses his name and dignity by being involved with the practice of *seiðr*.

The Viking Age societies in Scandinavia held extreme prejudices against homosexuality.²⁶³ The law codes, such as *Grágás*, show that it was a very grave crime to accuse or even hint that a man was involved in a homosexual relationship. The point is that the accusation was directed at the man's masculine status. A man who was hinted to be willing to play the female part in sexual relations was labelled as effeminate and cowardly, and indeed perverse.²⁶⁴ We do not know whether the *níð*-strophes²⁶⁵ that are to be found in the sagas date from pre-Christian era – probably not. Thus the *níð*-strophes must be seen as expressions of Christian thought rather than genuine examples from heathen times.²⁶⁶

The sagas in general associate heathen characters with the practice of magic, and the *Finnar* seem to be the ones most often guilty of this. Using magic (*seiðr*) was of course against the principles of Christianity, so all sorts of magic and witchcraft were condemnable. Obviously, it was not a good thing to practise *seiðr*, which was done for instance by Óðinn and goddesses.²⁶⁷ *Seiðr* is closely connected to the word *gandr*,²⁶⁸ which is also associated with Sámi practices of magic, but the word does not occur in the kings' sagas.

In *Heimskringla* men are more often mentioned as practitioners of magic than women, although according to Gísli Pálsson gender is not a significant factor if someone is labelled as a witch.²⁶⁹ Also François-Xavier Dillman has drawn the conclusion that the practitioners of magic in pre-Christian Iceland were both men and women, and they could be children as well as adults.²⁷⁰ It may be a coincidence, but the practitioners of magic in *Heimskringla* were men and *Finnar*, or at least they had connections with the *Finnar*, like Rognvaldr réttilbeini.

Again, we may speculate that one way of showing the inferior status of the male *Finnar* was to belittle their masculinity by associating them with *seiðr* and *ergi*. Sometimes the marginal character of these practitioners of magic is enhanced by their place of living, because they usually live in the northern part of Norway.

²⁶² *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 62–63; Hollander, pp. 201–3.

²⁶³ Price 2006, p. 289.

²⁶⁴ Sørensen 1983, p. 58.

²⁶⁵ *Níð* is a mocking poem. Almqvist 1981, pp. 295–9.

²⁶⁶ Sørensen 1983, pp. 56, 80.

²⁶⁷ However, in some circumstances Christians might be pardoned for involvement in *seiðr*, the most famous example being in ch. 4 in *Eiríks saga rauða* in which the Christian woman Guðríðr Þorbjarnardóttir participates in a séance to help discover whether Greenlanders who were suffering a very bad season could expect a better one next year. *Eiríks saga rauða*, ch. 4, pp. 206–9; Clunies Ross 1998, p. 33.

²⁶⁸ We do not know exactly what *gandr* meant, but it could be a staff. Those who possessed magical skills could travel on a *gandr*, which meant that in dreams or in ecstasy the soul or spirit could free itself. The best description of *gandr* is in *Historia Norvegiae*. On *gandr*, see Heide 2006; *Historia Norvegiae* p. 86.

²⁶⁹ Gísli Pálsson 1991, p. 160.

²⁷⁰ Dillman 2006, p. 590.

For example Rognvaldr réttilbeini lived in Hálogaland, as did Þórir hundr – even though he was not a *Finnr*, but their magical skills were useful for him. To conclude, the group boundary between ‘us’ and the extreme others is emphasized in the sources by pointing to their connection with magic, which further implies the effeminacy of the (male) ‘others’.

5.6.5 The magic of the *Finnar*

We have already seen in the previous chapter how the *Finnar* were associated with the practice of magic. In this chapter we will look at the passages that actually describe the use of magic. Concerning the use of magic and the *Finnar* *Heimskringla* is the best source of all the collections kings’ sagas. *Ágrip* and *Fagrskinna* are very brief on the *Finnar* in all matters and *Morkinskinna* concentrates on describing trade relations with them or how Norwegians levied taxes from them. The combination of the use of magic and the *Finnar* is something that has only negative effects in *Heimskringla*, and such white magic as foretelling or healing by the *Finnar* does not occur in the kings’ sagas.²⁷¹

The *Finnar* themselves are negative characters in the sagas, and characters who have learned how to use magic from the *Finnar* are either evil or things turn out badly for them. From a Christian perspective it certainly cannot have been an unfounded claim that the *Finnar* used magic. The Sámi continued to practise their own religious beliefs long after the Middle Ages. There were no serious attempts to convert the Sámi before the seventeenth century, and the building of churches in Finnmark was slow. For example one church was built in Vardø in 1307.²⁷² We must remember, however, that this is only a relative viewpoint: for example in Karelia the church-building and Christianization process was even slower. For the Church in Norway the Sámi people were a living example of heathenism and also a threat, because it had to convince Christian Norwegians that it was not desirable to be in contact with heathens, as Else Mundal has shown.²⁷³ Because the king and the Church tried to prevent people from being in contact with the Sámi people, it is to be assumed that the contacts between these two had been usual, maybe even lively.

Heimskringla describes in the following passages how the *Finnar* used their skills in magic. In *Ynglinga saga* in ch. 13 a *mara* kills King Vanlandi; in *Haralds saga hárfagra* the beautiful Snæfríðr gives mead that is supposedly a love potion to King Haraldr and bewitches him in this way;²⁷⁴ in the same saga King Eiríkr Bloodaxe’s wife Gunnhildr has learned how to use magic when she was staying with two *Finnar* in Finnmark: Gunnhildr’s magic seems to be connected somehow with the spreading of ashes.²⁷⁵ This pattern is repeated later in *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch.

²⁷¹ In the *Legendary Óláfs saga ins helga* King Óláfr Haraldsson is said have had a *fiðr* in his troops, and he could foretell that Óláfr would defeat Hákon. *Legendary Óláfs saga ins helga*, p. 68.

²⁷² Bagge and Walaker Nordeide 2007, p. 141; Norderval 2000, p. 16.

²⁷³ Mundal 1996, p. 102.

²⁷⁴ *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 25, pp. 125–7.

²⁷⁵ When Eiríkr and his men first find Gunnhildr in a hut, Gunnhildr says that she must hide them before the two *Finnar* come back. She takes a sack, which contains ashes, and she spreads ashes both

133 in the famous episode in which Þórir hundr and his companions plunder the Bjarmian graveyard and save his companions by spreading ashes on their tracks and on themselves so that the Bjarmians chasing after them would not notice them. Þórir hundr is a dubious character, because he has connections with the *Finnar*. He bought for instance magical reindeer skins from the *Finnar* and trusted in the magic of the *Finnar*.²⁷⁶ Because of this magic no weapon could penetrate the skins, and Þórir wore these skins at the Battle of Stiklastaðir. In *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 9 it is said clearly that the *Finnar* conjured up a storm.²⁷⁷ This is a common *topos* known from other sources. It is not stated in the saga whether the storm was conjured up by a witch. In Sámi shamanism the wind that causes the storm may be seen as the soul of the shaman who conjures up the storm.²⁷⁸

None of these stories depict in detail how magic was practised. They do not imply shamanism – except maybe King Vanlandi's death by a *mara*.²⁷⁹ The scholars have not agreed whether a shaman, who used *gandr*,²⁸⁰ used his or her own spirit or whether it was a spirit helpers or a guardian spirit.²⁸¹ Anyway, the *mara* that kills King Vanlandi is somehow connected with the *seiðkona* Hulð. However, it has to be pointed out that a *mara* is not specifically a phenomenon that could be connected with the *Finnar*. On the contrary, the word has a background in the Germanic culture and languages. The word itself is thought to derive from a Germanic word *mer*, which would mean 'to crush, to smash'. The word *mara* was known for example in Old Swedish, Old High German, Icelandic, and in the form of *mare* in Danish and Norwegian; the English equivalent is 'mare' in 'nightmare'. This last English word explains perhaps best what was originally meant by a *mara*. It was usually a female being that came during the night and attacked sleeping people and animals. She could go through keyholes. Her attack caused anguish, unpleasant feelings and breathlessness, which are very typical for a nightmare in general. The *mara* could also have an erotic aspect when she attacked men.²⁸² It is difficult to say in the case of Vanlandi whether he was attacked by the spirit of the *seiðkona* Hulð, or if it was herself in another guise.

The following points are interesting from the point of view of this study: 1. *mara* is not a phenomenon connected only to the magic of the *Finnar*, but known generally in Germanic culture; 2. the attack of a *mara* has no connection with shamanism, nor has it any cult, initiation rites or cultic figure. As Catharina Raudvere has pointed out, soul travel is all too common a phenomenon in different religions

outside and inside the hut. The *Finnar* come back and they do not notice anything even though they are suspicious that something has happened. When the *Finnar* fall asleep Gunnhildr calls Eiríkr and his men to come out of hiding and they kill the *Finnar*. *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 32, pp. 135–6.

²⁷⁶ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 193, pp. 344–5. See also *Legendary Óláfs saga ins helga*, p. 152.

²⁷⁷ *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 9, p. 11. 'Þeir Finnar gerðu um nóttina æðiveðr með fjölkynngi ok storm sjávar'.

²⁷⁸ Heide 2006, pp. 196–204.

²⁷⁹ *Mara* is a nightmare or incubus. Zoëga 2004.

²⁸⁰ *Gandr* can be translated for example a 'magic staff'; *renna göndum* means 'to ride a witch-ride'. Zoëga 2004. Apparently the word could also refer to the spirit or generally to magic (of the *Finnar*).

²⁸¹ Heide 2006, pp. 126–7.

²⁸² Raudvere 1991, pp. 88 and 98.

to associate it specifically with shamanism.²⁸³ What we can conclude from the case of the *seiðkona* Hulð is that her magic is not emphatically Sámi (or Finnic) magic. Also the fact that shamanism was a taboo for women in the Sámi culture would undermine the reliability of the story.²⁸⁴ The story of Vanlandi does not reflect how magic was practised in reality but the role of Vanlandi's wife and the *seiðkona* Hulð are in my opinion very symbolical.

If shamanism is considered to be ecstatic techniques, shape-changing or rituals with drums, dress or mask,²⁸⁵ then it is missing from the kings' sagas. In my opinion, this would imply that the authors of the sagas had not actually seen how the Sámi practised their magic but their information was based on other sources. The other possibilities are, as Eldar Heide and other scholars have pointed out, that 1. the sources are silent because they either assumed that the audience was familiar with the theme and it was unnecessary to describe it in detail, or 2. the sources omit mention of it because of the 'indecent' that was associated with the practice of magic, or 3. that the authors knew little about the practices of magic.²⁸⁶

If we extend our source material in this case to Latin sources from the end of the twelfth century, *Historia Norvegiæ* gives surprisingly the best account of this matter when describing a man (probably a shaman) who is shifting his shape in order to save a woman whose soul has been taken by an evil spirit, and this has often been taken as a classical example of a shamanistic séance.²⁸⁷ However, the author may have interpreted the séance wrongly, because he himself was not a Sámi. In the *Legendary Óláfs saga ins helga a Finn* is supposed to have caused illness to King Óláfr Haraldsson's men and been hired by King Knútr of England.²⁸⁸ If we ignore the frame story but concentrate on the claim that a Finn caused illness, we can say that it is something general that is associated with the use of magic. These examples do not belong to the core of our source material but as they are contemporary or nearly contemporary, they should not be passed over. Maybe they should be seen as indicating that the Scandinavians knew that the *Finnar* practised magic and it was still a common phenomenon – and here we could add the Norwegian laws with their prohibitions to be in contact with the *Finnar* as a further proof. Considering the relationship between fact and fiction, it is difficult to get objective information on the *Finnar* in the sagas, because the information is written by those who did not belong to their society and who had prejudices against them or even despised them.²⁸⁹

Features that are associated with the magic of the *Finnar* in the sagas are thus shape-shifting, control over the weather, healing, prophecies. We know that at least healing and control over the weather were in reality part of Sámi and Finnish

²⁸³ Raudvere 1991, p. 98.

²⁸⁴ Pentikäinen 1995, p. 190.

²⁸⁵ Pentikäinen 1996, p. 66.

²⁸⁶ Heide 2006, p. 266.

²⁸⁷ *Historia Norvegiæ* pp. 85–6.

²⁸⁸ *Legendary Óláfs saga ins helga*, p. 118.

²⁸⁹ Mundal 1996, p. 97.

magic.²⁹⁰ Because the Church did not yet at the beginning of the thirteenth century have clear definitions for witchcraft,²⁹¹ the passages in the law texts seem to derive from genuine practice of the Sámi culture and beliefs. The kings' sagas and the laws do not actually reveal anything of how the *Finnar* practised their magic, but we get some kind of picture of what was considered to be the magic of the *Finnar*. Still, it is worth remembering that the practice of magic was not something that was exclusive to the Sámi but it must have been part of Norse heathenism in one way or another. In fact, the rituals and religious beliefs of the Sámi, the Norsemen and the Finns show close affinities, which supports the theory that these peoples really did not oppose each other but lived side by side and influenced each other's religious beliefs and cultures. There may even have existed some kind of syncretism, but this is difficult to prove.²⁹² Anders Andrén has stated that 'The outer limits of Scandinavian religion must . . . be perceived as open and diffuse'.²⁹³

Even if the practice of magic has generally negative connotations, both in the kings' sagas as well as in other Old Norse sources, we cannot generalize this view because it seems to convey the view of the Christian elite. The use of magic did not disappear immediately the Norwegians were converted to Christianity, although it may have changed or altered (e.g. using saints' names instead of heathen gods in magical formulas). It must have been for everyday use: to ensure good luck in harvest, protect the cattle and for getting fish and game. This was especially true in agricultural societies.²⁹⁴ Magic cannot be said to have been exclusively negative because there are also examples of 'good' magic in other sagas, for example healing, or bringing fish to the bay.²⁹⁵ We have not got a direct example of this kind in the kings' sagas, but we have an implication that King Haraldr hárfagri got love-potion from his wife-to-be Snæfríðr.²⁹⁶ It is a matter of opinion whether this was beneficial or malevolent magic: after all, King Haraldr was unable to rule his kingdom properly when he was under the magical spell cast by Snæfríðr.

5.6.6 The magic of other heathens

The *Finnar* are not the only heathens appearing in the kings' sagas: the Wends and the *blámenn* are also mentioned as heathens. However, their heathenism is not usually emphasized by associating them with the practice of magic. The exception is the episode concerning the siege of Konungahella, in which we find a heathen Wend who cannot be hurt in any way because of the magic spell he has cast upon himself. Then the priest Andréas, who is in Konungahella with other Christians, gives the blessed fire to Ásmundr who shoots an arrow lit with this fire, and when

²⁹⁰ Siikala 1992, pp. 64, 72.

²⁹¹ The Inquisition was established in the 1230s and in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries witchcraft was defined by theologians and scholars. Russell 1979, pp. 25–6.

²⁹² Price 2002, pp. 233–78, 324; Norderval 2000, p. 17.

²⁹³ Andrén 2006, p. 263.

²⁹⁴ Siikala 1992, p. 72.

²⁹⁵ On beneficial magic, see Dillman 2006, pp. 65–71; Heide 2006, p. 242 and references to *Gríms saga loðinkinna*.

²⁹⁶ *Haralds saga hárfagra* ch. 25, pp. 125–7.

it hits the heathen Wend, he falls down dead. This episode does not reveal anything special about the heathen Wends: nothing is told of how the magical spell was made and the whole scene just fits in the story.

In contrast with the heathen Wends described as fierce enemies of Christianity, the *blámenn* and their heathenism lack this kind of description. They are best described in the passages concerning King Sigurðr's crusade, when he engages in battle with the *blámenn* on his way to the Holy Land. However, even these descriptions do not reveal what kind of heathens they were. Interestingly, the term *heiðinn* could be used for *blámenn* but there was no need to explicitly tell of their heathenism.

In the end, there is not much to be said about the magic of other heathens because the sources are silent about it. The reason for this must be simple: the magic of the *Finnar* was known at least as second-hand information for the authors of the sagas whereas not much was known about the other heathens. It was more convenient to depict them only generally as enemies of Christianity.

5.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has dealt with otherness from the perspective of social contacts. It has shown that 'otherness' is not confined to only ethnicity or geographical location, but there are several other ways of creating or forming in-groups. As the kings' sagas – especially *Heimskringla* – concentrate on depicting the Norwegian upper class, we can detect how the social contacts inside it defined in- and out-groups. Usually we can detect several groups who were rivals. Still, rivalry did not make them extreme 'others' to each other, but there were ways to negotiate and accept members of the opposing group to one's own. These ways were usually formal friendship (*vinfengi*) or marriage alliances.

Trade and travel do not play major roles in the kings' sagas, but when they do, they are connected with the encounters with the 'other' and the concept of hospitality. There were at least two kinds of hospitality at the beginning of the thirteenth century. On the one hand there was the hospitality that foreign merchants enjoyed. For them hospitality meant in the first place that the atmosphere in the emporia was friendly and tolerant when it came to ethnicity or religion. On the other hand hospitality was an institution that was part of social contacts in the upper-class circles. Especially *vinfengi* was a bond that was strengthened by showing hospitality and giving gifts to the other party.

Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar is a turning point in *Heimskringla* when it comes to depicting 'otherness' from the point of view of religion: when King Óláfr is baptized the description of 'otherness' acquires new content. The perspective is that 'we' are the Christians and everybody outside Christendom is considered as 'them', the 'others'. Without speculating further when the Christian worldview was established in the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere it is hardly plausible that around

year 1000 Christian converts would have suddenly changed their opinion about their heathen neighbours on religious grounds. However, by the beginning of the thirteenth century Christianity had pervaded the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere so that at least the elite had adopted it and formed its worldview according to it.

As the examples in this chapter show, the image of the heathens in the kings' sagas is mostly based here on *Heimskringla*, which gives us a Christian view of them. When it comes to *Ágrip* it is difficult to say anything certain about what its view was towards heathens: it states that someone was a *seiðmaðr* or *heiðinn*, but it lacks fervent descriptions of the doings of 'evil heathens'. *Fagrskinna* mentions the Wends as heathens in a few cases and King Sigurðr's battles against the *blámenn*. *Morkinskinna* opposes the Christians and the heathen *blámenn*, which shows that these sagas, too, did not escape the Christian emphasis.²⁹⁷

It is not surprising that the Christian worldview is perceptible in the kings' sagas because the authors were Christians themselves and presumably well-informed and educated. The reason for intolerance of non-Christians in the society of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was increasing at the same time with the emerging centrally governed realms: even if individuals could accept religious difference (as the ordinary Norwegians neighbouring the Sámi people probably did), it could not be accepted by the royal administration whose ally the Church was. We do not hear the voices of these heathens, because history was written by their opponents.

The result is, then, that the worldview of the elite and its group boundaries are emphasized in the kings' sagas. We know that the stratification of society had already begun in Scandinavia in the Iron Age. This process continued during the early Middle Ages when first the higher stratum of the clergy was part of the Western European Latin culture owing to their education (and sometimes social background) and then in the thirteenth century also the secular elite became more and more connected with the European upper-class culture through the court.²⁹⁸ Does this then mean that we cannot detect the Norse-Icelandic mental worldview in the kings' sagas, but that it is rather the worldview of the elite? As the results in this study have shown, this is partly the case. The question is intertwined with the question of the origin of the kings' sagas. Arnved Nedkvitne argues that especially the kings' sagas reflect how the Norse elite searched for a new identity in the thirteenth century. According to him, the reason for writing the sagas was the tension between Church, courtly and warrior norms.²⁹⁹ Still, as I argue, the kings' sagas were not written *exclusively* from the elite viewpoint. The main argument for this is that the sagas are based on oral tradition – even if we do not know the extent of it and scholars still debate whether we can detect this oral tradition in the written sagas – and this oral tradition was not only confined to the elite.

²⁹⁷ *Ágrip* ch. 2, pp. 4–5, ch. 5, pp. 7–9, ch. 53, p. 48; *Fagrskinna* ch. 19, pp. 121–3, ch. 24, pp. 146–62, ch. 86, pp. 315–17; *Morkinskinna* FJ 342–5.

²⁹⁸ Bagge 2001, p. 302.

²⁹⁹ Nedkvitne 2004, pp. 129 and 139.

6 Explaining the Results

The purpose of this study was to find out 1. how the image of ‘otherness’ in the kings’ sagas reflects the mental worldview of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere at the beginning of the thirteenth century, and consequently 2. what can be said about the group boundaries in the kings’ sagas on the basis of it. The premise was that the kings’ sagas convey the mentality of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere. The result was not simple to achieve: on the one hand when looking at images of extreme (digital) otherness, we cannot say that the worldview and group boundaries reflect in all cases the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere in general, but they must be seen as the reflection of ideas of the thirteenth-century Norse-Icelandic upper class. On the other hand the worldview conveyed by the kings’ sagas does not exclusively represent the views of the elite. The sagas themselves were by no means created exclusively by the elite, but their foundation is in the oral tradition. We can detect traces of the upper-class worldview in the ways the heathens are depicted, which has a clearly Christian emphasis.

The results of this study can be illustrated with two schemes. Fig. 1 conveys the mental worldview of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere. Because the worldview is produced by looking at contacts between Norwegians and Icelanders and their out-groups, another scheme (Fig. 2) shows how different groups are placed in relation to the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere, and what kind of contacts the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere had with them.

The definition of ‘otherness’ in this study was based on concepts of analogue and digital difference introduced by Thomas Hylland Eriksen. In Fig. 1, analogue difference can be divided into three spheres. If the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere forms the first sphere in the middle, in the second sphere are the Scandinavians who speak *dönsk tunga*, and they are considered by the Norse-Icelandic society as ‘not so different from us’. The Scandinavians living in the British Isles belong partly to this sphere. The dotted line that divides them from the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere reflects the idea that they are very closely connected to each other. The third sphere consists of other Christians, which form the *Christianitas*. Heathens, who represent digital, i.e., extreme ‘otherness’, are divided from *Christianitas* with a thick line, which reflects their position as an out-group.

Analogue difference can thus be divided into two groups: 1. people of Norðrlönd: although peoples inside this sphere were close to each other because of language and culture, they compared themselves with each other in order to emphasize differences between them, which is a normal way to create a group identity; 2. other Christian peoples: these peoples are not depicted very often in the kings’ sagas and

they are not important for the group identity of Icelandic or Norse peoples in the kings' sagas simply because of the sporadic contacts, although *Christianitas* forms a framework in this worldview and thus reflects mainly the mental worldview of the upper class. All Christians are contrasted with heathens, who represent digital 'otherness'.

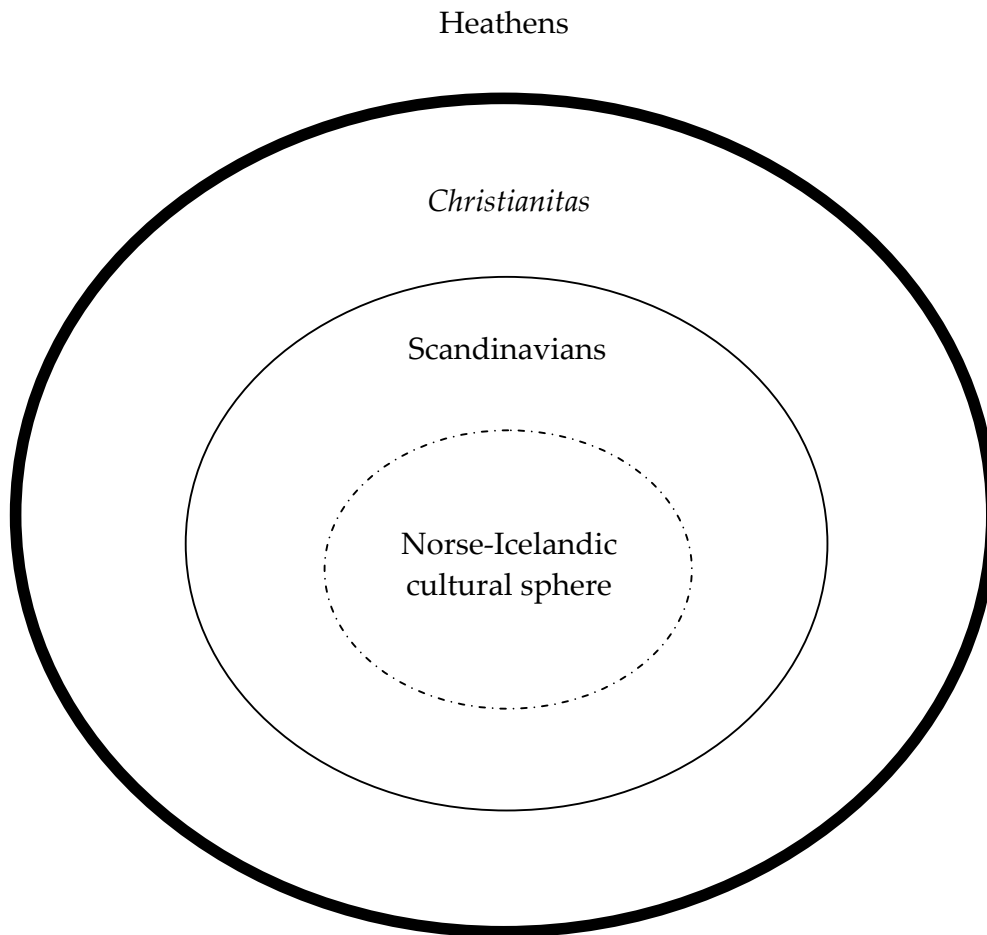


Fig. 1. The Norse-Icelandic Mental Worldview in the Kings' Sagas

Fig 1. depicts the 'otherness' of the out-groups in a scheme that consists of circles. This scheme is egocentric, placing the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere in the middle. Kirsten Hastrup (1985) has described medieval Icelandic society similarly: the meeting places and farms were the centres and the social world was around them. The scheme forms a good representation of the mental worldview in the kings' sagas, in which the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere stands in the middle.

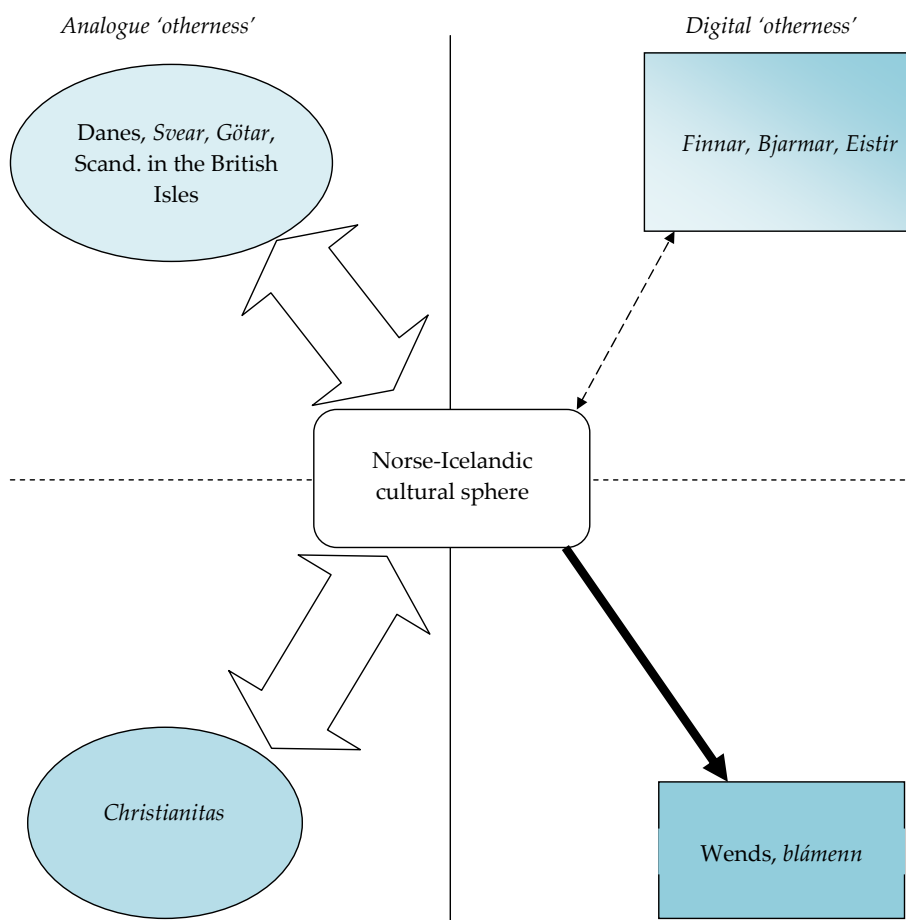


Fig. 2. Contacts between the Norse-Icelandic Cultural Sphere and its Outer Groups

Fig. 2 shows how the contacts between the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere and the analogue and digital out-groups can be illustrated. In the centre of the scheme is the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere. On the left side are analogue others: in the upper corner are the Scandinavian neighbouring groups and the Scandinavians living in the British Isles are included to this group. The thick arrow shows the strong and lively contacts between these two. The dotted line divides this group from other Christians, marked as *Christianitas*. The arrow showing mutual contacts between them and the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere is narrower than the one between the Scandinavian neighbours, which points out that the contacts between these two are weaker: the trade contacts are fewer as well as marriage alliances.

On the right side of the scheme are the digital others. In the upper corner are those groups that have not only negative contacts, but as the contacts with the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere are ambivalent, this is indicated by the dotted arrow. In the lower right side corner are the two groups of digital others that have only negative contacts with the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere: the Wends and the *blámenn*. The thick one-way arrow indicates that the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere has only negative contacts with them, and that the two groups do not show any positive contacts towards the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere.

At the beginning of this study it was necessary to define the subject, which is called in this case the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere. It denotes Scandinavian people living in Iceland and Norway. The Norwegians and Icelanders had a close relationship as Icelanders, or at least most of them, were originally from Norway. Even if the Icelanders did not accept the Norwegian overlordship officially until 1262–4, it is reasonable to speak of them as a cultural sphere, because they shared the same language and culture. In the scale of analogue difference, they would have considered each other ‘almost like us’.

It was easy to begin with examining the Scandinavian neighbours of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere because they appear very often in the kings’ sagas. The eastern neighbours, the Svear and the *Gautar*, seem to be neighbours both in good and bad senses. Sometimes the Norwegians waged a war with these neighbours, but as often they had good relations with them. Very often Norwegian ex-kings, pretenders and magnates left for *Svíþjóð* or to Denmark to seek refuge.

Especially the Svear have a slightly obscure image in the kings’ sagas because they are labelled in different contexts as reluctant to accept Christianity, or they bear the label of their heathen ancestors even after they were converted to Christianity. Maybe this was a way to define the group boundary. In the scale of analogue difference the Svear and the *Gautar* would have been – in spite of allusions to heathenism – ‘not so different from us’. The Danes, on the other hand, clearly have a different image in the eyes of Icelanders and Norwegians: they often pose a threat to the Norwegians and there seems to be an underlying tendency in the kings’ sagas to show how Norwegians were superior to the Danes, which is just one way of boosting the group identity of the in-group.

However, Icelanders and Norwegians considered their Scandinavian neighbours who spoke the *ðönsk tunga* and shared the same culture and religion as closest to them. They were considered to be ‘not so different from us’ in the scale of analogue difference. This cultural and linguistic connection was so strong that in the mental worldview also those people who lived in the British Isles and spoke the *ðönsk tunga* were considered to belong to this same sphere of ‘not so different from us’. The strong cultural and linguistic connection as a common denominator between Scandinavians is apparent in the law texts of *Grágás*.

The information the kings’ sagas give on other Western European realms and peoples is poor and thus it is difficult to draw conclusions about their image of ‘otherness’. These realms are mentioned occasionally when needed: as destinations for trade or travel, or if someone comes from there. There is no practical way of telling just on the basis of the kings’ sagas what Icelanders and Norwegians thought for example about Frisians or French in reality. The question has to be asked the other way round: what does it tell us that there is only scarce information about them?

First of all, one could point out that nothing negative is told about the peoples of Western European realms. They exist in the mental worldview of Icelanders and Norwegians, but on the other hand their existence is ‘far off’, not to say almost irrelevant. One could assume that they could be categorized as belonging to the

community of Christians (*Christianitas*), but that they were categorized as 'somewhat different from us' in the scale of analogue difference. In other words, they did not much affect the group identity of Icelanders or Norwegians. The reason must have been that the contacts with these groups were limited, and the contacts were mostly commercial. Commercial activities were confined to the few towns, which means that actually only a small number of people in Norway were in direct contact with foreigners.

An interesting exception among analogue 'others' is the inhabitants of Garðaríki: in spite of their being located geographically far from Scandinavians, they were closely connected with the Scandinavians in the mental worldview. One reason for this was, of course, that the lively eastern trade route went through the rivers of the Rus' realm with its strong Scandinavian presence. Even after the trade in the east declined at the end of the tenth century the connections were lively. Especially in the first half of the eleventh century the royal houses of Scandinavian realms and the Rurikids were connected to each other by marriage alliances, and Scandinavian kings and magnates sought refuge and support in Garðaríki. In a way, the Scandinavian cultural sphere, at least on the upper class level, extended to Garðaríki as well.

In contrast with analogue 'otherness' digital 'otherness' is far more interesting because it reveals what is considered totally different from the observer's point of view and it defines the group boundary. Total difference is perceptible as negative descriptions in the kings' sagas. The ultimate negative attribute in a medieval Christian world was heathenism. The following out-groups that are named in the kings' sagas fall into this category: the *Finnar*, the Bjarmians (*Bjarmar*), the Wends and the *blámenn*.

The *Finnar* were the closest example of heathens because they lived side by side with the Norwegians. As the case of the *Finnar* shows, the geographical distance was not big but this did not prevent them being placed far away in the Norse-Icelandic mental worldview. The *Finnar* seem to represent the archetype of a heathen in the eyes of Icelanders and Norwegians. Their descriptions contain certain stereotypes such as the use of magical skills. In many ways it is clear that the *Finnar* in the kings' sagas have adopted the role of the giants of the Scandinavian mythology, which shows that their image of otherness had roots in the earlier heathen tradition: *Finnkonur* marry with Norwegian kings (*hieros gamos*), they (mainly) live in the north, use their magical skills and thus cause trouble and misfortune. The Norwegian laws that forbade any contact with the *Finnar* are a concrete example of how they were considered to be inferior and even alien in Christian Norwegian society.

The Bjarmians are not described in the kings' sagas as often as the *Finnar* but they seem to share many attributes with them. They were not Christians because they worshipped their heathen god *Jómali* and they seem to have been wealthy according to the sagas because the Norwegians are told to have made plundering expeditions to Bjarmaland. Both *Finnmørk* and *Bjarmaland* were situated somewhere in the far north, and because north was associated in the Scandinavian mythology with the giants, the connotation is quite obvious.

It is perhaps surprising that when peoples that lived south and east of Scandinavians are mentioned in the kings' sagas, they may have completely different images of 'otherness'. The heathen peoples of the Baltic Sea are mentioned as *Austrveghsmenn*, or specified as 'Kúrir ok Vinðar'. They ravaged and plundered Christian countries. The Wends are labelled as arch-enemies of Christians. The Wends get to play the role of the evil heathens especially in the saga episodes that concern the miracles done by St Óláfr. In addition they are told to have made several attacks on Christians in Denmark and Norway. These attacks may have a historical basis but we may assume that the Wends made plundering expeditions in Scandinavia even before Scandinavians were converted to Christianity.

The long history of enmity between Scandinavians and Wends is perhaps the reason why several Scandinavian rulers are called by such epithets as 'murderer of the Wends' in skaldic poetry. After the conversion to Christianity it was easy to emphasize the negative attributes of the enemy by adding that they were heathens. It is probable that in the image of the Wends the heathen label is so strong because of the crusades made in the twelfth century against them. Even though these crusades play no direct role in *Ágrip*, *Morkinskinna*, *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*, they probably affected the image of the Wends still in the first half of the thirteenth century, when the sagas were written down.

But if the West Slavic tribes are arch-enemies of Christians the view of East Slavs in Garðaríki is different, as mentioned already. The inhabitants of Garðaríki are never mentioned as heathens in the kings' sagas: the exception is *Historia Norwegiæ*, which is not used as a main source here, and it represents the earlier twelfth-century Latin tradition. So, East Slavs seem to be Christians who live among heathen tribes of the east. Being Christians they would belong to *Christianitas* and hence categorized as 'somewhat different from us' in the degree of analogue difference.

The *blámenn*, on the other hand, differ from the other heathens described in the kings' sagas, because the term refers to Muslims (Saracens). The Scandinavians did not have close connections with the *blámenn*, who lived geographically far away. The *blámenn* of the kings' sagas are mentioned only when a crusade or pilgrimage is made to the Holy Land, and this is not often. What is interesting in the case of the *blámenn* is that the Norse language has used the word *blámenn* for them and not adopted a word from other languages. In *fornaldarsögur* the *blámenn* were associated with evil creatures such as the berserks. In addition the word refers to skin colour – *blár* meaning 'black' – so in the minds of Icelanders and Norwegians the *blámenn* must have been literally black, which would just have been another indication of their evil. All the kings' sagas show more or less that in the mental worldview there was a gap between the Christians and the heathens, which follows the contemporary Christian worldview. It cannot be left aside that the kings' sagas are written by the elite of the society, so the secular view is also perceptible in the descriptions.

Here it is interesting to make a comparison with another study: Irmeli Valtonen, who has studied the concept of the North in the Old English *Orosius*, has drawn the conclusion that by the end of the ninth century, when *Orosius* was translated, there

was an 'intellectual shift from identifying Britain with a pagan north to identifying it with the Christian south',¹ which means that Christianity helped define the identity of the Anglo-Saxons and also defined their worldview. Of course, *Orosius* and the kings' sagas cannot be compared directly as sources, but because the Christian worldview is obvious in the kings' sagas, we could also speculate that the authors and the elite may have preferred to identify themselves with *Christianitas* in opposition to heathens. This speculation could be backed with Nedkvitne's argument on the kings' sagas being an effort to create identity for the elite. This opposition, or dichotomy, did not necessarily comprise the idea of cardinal points like north in the Old English *Orosius*, because there was no point in confining the heathens to one particular area or cardinal point: the *Finnar*, who are the most prominent representatives of heathenism in the sagas, lived not only to the north of the Norwegians, but also among them. The Wends, who are also mentioned several times in the kings' sagas, are also not confined to a specific cardinal point. This may be due to the fact that they were living far away from the Norwegians (and especially Icelanders), although they came on their plundering expeditions all the way to the Sound and a little north of it. It may have been difficult for the authors as well as to Norwegians and Icelanders in general to locate Wendland, except relatively (locating it in the *Austrvegr*).

The *Finnar* are given the label of the ultimate enemy in the kings' sagas, because they were not just the enemies of the Church but also of the Norwegian king. Extreme 'others' such as Wends and *blámenn* did not pose a threat to the Church or magnates in Norway, because they were more distant and they could be described on a more general level as enemies of Christianity. The kings' sagas reveal that the ultimate difference was between the Christians and the heathens. Language, ethnicity and geographical distance do not play a role in this case. Especially in the case of the *Finnar*, whose depictions show different layers, it is obvious that their image in the eyes of their Scandinavian neighbours changed after the conversion. On the one hand the depictions seem to be based on Norse mythology, so that the *Finnar* have replaced the giants in the stories. On the other hand, there is a fundamental difference between an evil giant in Old Norse mythology and an 'evil' *Finnr* in a kings' saga. The difference lies in the fact that the giants were part of the universe in the mythology and even if they were opponents of the *Æsir*, they could for example have children together. From the perspective of the Church the heathen *Finnar* were not something that the Church could live with, but the only way to act with them was either to try to convert them or to keep the already converted Norwegians away from them.

If we consider that the archaeological evidence shows that there were everyday contacts with the Norwegians and the Sámi people, it must be admitted that there is a fundamental difference between the view the kings' sagas give us and the reality: at least the lower-class Norwegians living in contact with the *Finnar* did not exclude them but lived with them side by side. Probably the religious differences

¹ Valtonen 2008, p. 252.

were not important for these ordinary people. The biggest difference between the Norwegians and the Sámi was economical, i.e. their different sources of livelihood. This is hardly a surprising result. Even if we only seldom hear (or read) what the ordinary people generally thought about other cultures and religions, their witnesses often give a different picture of the 'other' from the official records. As Albrecht Classen puts it, 'More often than not their [ordinary people's] testimonies indicate that the confrontation with the other was not considered a threat, but instead as an enrichment'.²

If the authors of the kings' sagas were somehow connected to the king and the Church – as we know for sure in Snorri Sturluson's case – it is obvious that we can say that when it comes to the image of digital others, they do not represent the general mentality of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere: the image of digital 'otherness' in the kings' sagas expresses the view of the elite *at least in the case of the Finnar*. This strengthens the view that the Norwegian elite – maybe to some extent also the Icelandic elite – was increasingly creating an identity that connected them to the other European elites and distinguished them from the lower classes.

Both schemes (Figs. 1 and 2) lack social contacts as a way to encounter the 'other' and they enhance religious difference as a decisive factor between the group boundaries. However, social contacts that were depicted in the kings' sagas reveal the picture is not unequivocal. Group boundaries could be surpassed for example in marriage alliances, or trade could be conducted with 'others'. Especially the group boundaries inside the upper class were flexible and continuously renewed.

The two schemes which are drawn as a conclusion from this study can be seen only as rough presentations how the image of 'otherness' is presented in the kings' sagas. There should be a third scheme to present how in- and out-groups were formed among the Norwegian upper class. This would depict how the social contacts defined the group boundaries inside it. However, this was out of the scope of this study, and the scheme depicting it would need to be three-dimensional and added to Fig. 1, so that it could present how the group boundaries overlap each other. Different factions (in- and out-groups) in the Norwegian upper class show how the group identity was formed around a king or a magnate. The group boundaries were flexible so that members of the out-group could be accepted through social ties, either blood-ties (marriage alliances) or non-blood-ties (loyalty to the king/magnate and recompense for that, or *vinfengi*).

² Classen 2002, p. 1.

7 Conclusion

The mental worldview of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere conveyed by the kings' sagas is emphatically Christian, when it comes to the image of extreme difference, which refers to heathens. This is nothing new but it confirms what has been pointed out already, for example by Sverrir Jakobsson in his study of the worldview of Icelanders in the Middle Ages. Although it can be argued that the kings' sagas can convey the general mentality of the Norse-Icelandic cultural sphere because of its oral background, it must be admitted that the Christian emphasis in them seems to originate from the authors, who are part of the elite.

What this study has shown is that basically modern ideas about group identities can be applied also to medieval sources in order to reconstruct how the people perceived themselves and the world outside their own in-group. It was possible to find different criteria for 'otherness', and the concept of 'otherness' was not unequivocal. To a certain degree Thomas Hylland Eriksen's categories of analogue and digital difference could be applied as a basis for these criteria. However, extreme 'otherness', which Eriksen calls digital, turned out not be a closed, exclusive category. The best example of this was the *Finnar*. They have the character of extreme 'others' in the sagas, which must be due to the Christian worldview of the authors. The authors, although we do not know most of them, must have belonged to the elite as people who were able to read and write and had a certain level of education. In spite of this extreme difference of the *Finnar*, Norwegians had contacts with them. The information from other sources than the kings' sagas (archaeology, laws) reveals that these contacts really existed. This, on the other hand, reveals that there was by the thirteenth century a division between the elite and ordinary people who did not necessarily share the same worldview in spite of their common linguistic and cultural background. I consider it to be the most important result of this study.

The political factions as in-groups could be studied further in all of the kings' sagas. It would be interesting to see how the group boundaries between factions arose and were maintained. Marriages and formal friendship were ways of creating and confirming alliances, but were there other ways? How does this fit with the picture we have on the Norwegian state formation process in the Middle Ages? Similarly group boundaries inside the Icelandic upper class in the thirteenth century could be studied, too, for example on the basis of the family sagas. Also the fact that the elite worldview was diverging from the worldview represented by peasants could be studied further. One interesting question would be how long the elements from the heathen period persisted in the peasant worldview. As there are more questions than answers, it shows that there is work to be done.

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