Matthias Egeler

Atlantic Outlooks on Being at Home

Gaelic Place-Lore and the Construction of a Sense of Place in Medieval Iceland

Much of both Icelandic and medieval Irish literature is, in one way or another, storytelling about places, reflecting a deep engagement with the concept of 'place' and the creation of a 'sense of place'. This book takes as its starting point the shared interest that Icelandic and Irish storytelling have in 'place' and asks whether the medieval Icelandic sense of place, as reflected in Icelandic narrative culture, has been influenced by the close contacts that existed during the Viking Age between Iceland and the Gaelic-speaking world of Ireland and Scotland. In attempting to answer this question, the book contributes to the long-standing debate about Gaelic influences in Icelandic culture, the much more recent discourse on the spatiality of medieval Icelandic literature and storytelling, and the cultural history of the Icelandic Settlement Period. Obliquely, the findings of the book may even shed light on the origins of Icelandic saga literature. Along the way, it also offers insights on a number of general points of spatial theory as well as, in particular, on two medieval Icelandic texts that are especially place-focused: *Landnámabók*, the 'Book of Settlements', and *Eyrbyggja saga*, the 'Saga of the Inhabitants of Eyr'.

Cover: The view towards the cliffs of Poll Dick bay, Inishmore, Aran Islands, Ireland. Photo: Matthias Egeler, 2015.

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FF COMMUNICATIONS

EDITED FOR THE FOLKLORE FELLOWS

by

Satu Apo Hermann Bausinger

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Sadhana Naithani Lotte Tarkka

Vol. CCCXIV

No. 314

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Folklore Fellows' Communications is part of the publishing cooperation
between the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters
and the Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters

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M uch of both Icelandic and medieval Irish literature is, in one way or another, storytelling about places, reflecting a deep engagement with the concept of 'place' and the creation of a 'sense of place'. This book will take as its starting point the shared interest that Icelandic and Irish literature have in 'place' and will ask whether the medieval Icelandic sense of place, as reflected in Icelandic narrative culture, has been influenced by the close contacts that existed during the Viking Age between Iceland and the Gaelic-speaking world of Ireland and Scotland. By attempting to answer this question, the book will contribute to the long-standing debate about Gaelic influences in Icelandic culture, the much more recent discourse on the spatiality of medieval Icelandic literature, and perhaps even (if in a rather more speculative and oblique manner) the debate about the origin of Icelandic saga literature.

To approach the question of a Gaelic impact on the Icelandic sense of place, Chapter 1 will first outline some general theoretical and structural aspects of the problem. The first section of this chapter will serve as introduction to the concept of 'place' in modern theorising, which tends to understand 'place' as signifying 'space made meaningful'. This will be the basis for all further discussion and in particular it will clarify what exactly is meant by the creation of 'place' and a sense of place in medieval Iceland and Ireland. Furthermore, the concept of 'home' will be introduced as it is approached by some classic theoretical works. After the scene has been set theoretically, the second section of the chapter will outline the broader historical context of the question. This will be done by giving a general outline of contacts between Iceland and the Gaelic-speaking world during the Viking Age, including apparent or arguable transfers of Norse place-names from Scotland and the Scottish Isles to Iceland. It is only after the theoretical and historical groundwork has been laid in this way that the last section of the chapter will then begin to examine parallels between the Icelandic and the Irish narrative engagement with space and place. More specifically this last part of the chapter will highlight some structural similarities; as early as the 1960s it was Theodore Andersson who remarked that in the modern study of narratives 'influences are conceived not

only in terms of matter but also in terms of attitude and technique',[1] and the present study will attempt to consider both. Therefore, even though 'attitude and technique' are notoriously tricky to study and compare in a systematic fashion, the last section of Chapter 1 will highlight at least some of the most striking parallels between the Irish and the Icelandic techniques of engaging with space and place through narrative.

Chapter 2 will then turn to the 'matter' of place-storytelling, that is to say: it will analyse, in their wider Atlantic and specifically Gaelic context, Icelandic place-narratives that seem to be borrowings or adaptations of place-stories otherwise known from medieval Irish literature or upon which Gaelic motifs and practices have at least had a formative impact. This chapter will be introduced by a section on method, which will discuss how to decide whether a motif, or a whole tale, is a borrowing or an adaptation from Irish storytelling. Then the chapter will proceed to discuss nine specific examples of Icelandic-Gaelic place-lore adaptations: the water-horse story in *Landnámabók* H71/S83; the account of Ørlygr Hrappsson's settlement in *Landnámabók* H15; the biographies of 'Saint' Ásólfr in *Landnámabók* S24 and H21; the account of Auðr the Deep-Minded and the Krosshólar Hills in *Landnámabók* S97; the accounts of *papar* in *Landnámabók* (S1/H1, S320/H280, S323=H283) and *Íslendingabók* (ch. 1); the early modern folklore of the Ódáinsakur in the Hvanndalur Valley and its possible Viking Age prehistory; the accounts of houses of excessive hospitality in *Landnámabók* (S72/H60; S86/H74; S200=H168) and *Eyrbyggja saga* (ch. 8); the story of Þórólfr Twist-Foot and his transformation into a splendid but violent bull in *Eyrbyggja saga* (especially chs 33–34, 63); and the report of Hvítramannaland in *Landnámabók* (S122/H94). With some important *caveats*, these nine examples aim to be an exhaustive survey of major Icelandic adaptations of Gaelic place-lore. They will be discussed in considerable depth and with full attention given to their structures and various wider contexts, be they historical, social, or (in one case) even art-historical. Particular attention will also be paid to the use of toponyms in such narratives and to the specific historical situation of the Icelandic settlement, including the strong emphasis on the narrative construction of 'home' that results from this historical situation.

In Chapter 2 these stories are presented in detail but with a focus on the respective individual Icelandic narratives and their Gaelic elements rather than on cross-connections between the Icelandic tales. Chapter 3 will begin with a summary of the main findings of this chapter and will then go on to analyse the material laterally, highlighting themes that appear to recur and

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1   Andersson 1964: 97.

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play dominant roles across the Icelandic material, rather than connecting the Icelandic with the Irish material. Among the most notable of these recurrent themes are a marked emphasis on the Christian religious semantisation of the land and a pervasive focus on the creation of 'home' – both of which arise naturally from the overall historical situation of the Settlement Period where early Icelandic Christianity was first and foremost dependent on Irish and Scottish Christianity and where the settlement on a previously entirely empty island necessitated a concerted effort to establish a bond between the settlers and this new, empty land. Taking the implications of this emphasis on the creation of 'home' one step further, the chapter and the book will then conclude by considering some recent and classical contributions to the discussion of the origins of Icelandic saga literature. Here the book will close with the question as to whether the Icelandic reception of Gaelic place-lore, which first and foremost seems to reflect a deep yearning for 'home', might not be just another expression of the same need that was also to bring forth the Icelandic sagas more generally.

While the number of examples of an Icelandic reception of Irish place-lore discussed in this book is limited, focusing just on the nine clearest instances, these examples will be discussed in considerable detail and will be presented as if the reader were entirely unfamiliar with the chosen texts. Since none of the selected passages are particularly obscure and most will be familiar to any reader conversant with the Icelandic material, this might need a word of explanation. The first and more obvious reason for choosing such a presentation of the material is of course that this book should be accessible not only to scholars of Icelandic literature but also to readers more familiar with the Irish material, hoping that the Icelandic reception of Gaelic place-lore will be of as much interest to the Celticist as it is to the Norse scholar. Perhaps even more important, however, is a methodological reason. Past proposals of Gaelic influences on Icelandic literature and culture all too often have suffered from a regrettably cursory presentation of the material, which often has meant that not only was material used in a way that a closer analysis would have shown to be extremely problematic but this was also made virtually impossible to spot for any reader not profoundly familiar with this material, as he or she is given insufficient information to make an informed assessment of the proposed parallels and influences.[2] This present book prefers to err on the side of caution. In order to allow the reader a more informed assessment of the proposed arguments, I will give a detailed summary and where possible a complete translation of the relevant stories or sections of narratives, both

2   Cf. my detailed critique in Egeler 2013.

Gaelic and Norse. I hope this will make for a transparency sadly lacking in much previous research on Irish-Icelandic relationships.

Acknowledgements

ignoring somebody's well-considered advice. Finishing touches were put to the manuscript, and the argument presented here, during a fellowship at the *Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin*, which turned out to be probably the best place imaginable to complete a book project. For corrections to my English style and grammar, I owe thanks to Courtney Burrell, Colmán Etchingham, John Henry Levin, and Kevin McAleer. Any remaining infelicities of course are my own responsibility.

All maps used in this book are based on data from the National Land Survey of Iceland (Landmælingar Íslands 2014/2017), used by permission (Landmælingar Íslands – License 2017).

I dedicate this book to my parents Sigrid and Reinhold Egeler and to my grandfather Johann Thür, who ungrudgingly accepted the long absences from home that its making entailed.

<div align="right">

Berlin, January 2018
Matthias Egeler

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1 Place, Naming Place, and Playing with Place

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1.1.   Place

When World War I broke out, Bronisław Malinowski, who would go on to become one of the most influential anthropologists of the twentieth century, found himself marooned in the south-western Pacific Ocean. Spending several years among the natives of the Trobriand Islands, he not only became one of the founding fathers of modern anthropological fieldwork but also developed a deep awareness of the close interrelationship between 'historical' and mythological narratives and the places where they are set. Thus he remarked about the district of Dobu:[3]

> [I]t is studded with spots of special, mythological interest. Its charming
> scenery, of volcanic cones, of wide, calm bays, and lagoons overhung by
> lofty, green mountains, with the reef-riddled, island-strewn ocean on the
> North, has deep, legendary meaning for the native. Here is the land and sea
> where the magically inspired sailors and heroes of the dim past performed
> feats of daring and power. As we sail from the entrance into Dawson Straits,
> through Dobu and the Amphletts to Boyowa, almost every new configuration
> of the land which we pass is the scene of some legendary exploit.

By highlighting the importance of 'spots of special ... interest' for the cultural environment which the Trobriand islanders were inhabiting, Malinowski anticipated an insight which would take several more decades to become established in more abstract theorising: the importance of the concepts of 'space' and 'place' for human culture. Since the middle of the twentieth century, however, these concepts have become central to much research across the humanities and social sciences. Michel Foucault, in a lecture presented in 1967, was even able to celebrate this trend by programmatically proclaiming the twentieth century to be an 'epoch of space'.[4]

In contemporary theorising there is no general agreement on the definition of either the concept of 'space' or the concept of 'place'; there are, however, some clear overall tendencies.[5] One point that is fundamental for most of this

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3   Malinowski 1922: 40.
4   Foucault 2006 (1967): 317.
5   In general cf. Cresswell 2015; Tally 2013; Hubbard and Kitchin 2011; Dünne *et al.*
     2006.

discourse is the distinction between a marked and an unmarked space: on the one hand, a space that has been humanised by being filled with meaning and significance, and on the other hand the purely abstract space of mathematics. This basic distinction had already established itself before Foucault; early prominent examples are found for instance in the works of Martin Heidegger and Gaston Bachelard.[6] The latter classically formulates the distinction between marked and unmarked space as a distinction between 'space seized by the imagination' and the 'space of the surveyor':[7]

> Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor. It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the particularity of the imagination.

Since the 1950s, when both Heidegger and Bachelard were writing on the topic, a far-reaching (though not universal) tendency has become established to use the term 'space' to denote unmarked, empty, 'meaningless' space, the space of geometry which Bachelard describes as the space of the surveyor; whereas marked, 'meaningful' space has become connected with the term 'place'.[8] One could say that 'space' is the raw material from which 'place' is created by giving it some kind of significance or 'meaning'. Applying this modern terminological usage to the paragraph from Malinowski's ethnography of the Trobriand Islands, his 'spots of special, mythological interest' would then be exactly what 'place' as a theoretical term is now meant to describe: sites which have been lifted from the continuum of topographical space by being invested with 'deep, legendary meaning', a meaning constituted by an association with the deeds of heroes of the past and by being the site of one or another of their exploits.

The creation of 'place' through the ascription of meaning and significance to particular localities has recurrently been connected with the human desire to create 'home'.[9] To some extent this was inherent already in the work of Heidegger and Bachelard, this latter choosing to develop his exploration of the concept of space through the example of the house and its different rooms,

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6   Heidegger (1993: 355–358, 360, 361–362) in his lecture 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking', originally delivered in 1951, though the way that he argues his point will not fail to remind the medieval scholar of the methodology employed by Isidore of Seville; Bachelard (1994 [1958], especially p. xxxvi) in his classic *The Poetics of Space*.
7   Bachelard 1994 (1958): xxxvi.
8   Cf. Cresswell 2015.
9   For a survey cf. Cresswell 2015: 39–41. On the term 'home' cf. Tuan 1991: 101–103, and see below.

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every single one of which he saw as connected with associations and meanings of their own: here 'home' stood at the centre of the investigation through 'the home' as his chosen example of space under scrutiny.[10] Importantly, Bachelard saw this space of home, which he perceived as created through the engagement of the imagination with the raw 'space of the surveyor', as something deeply homely and comforting. In his own words: 'it nearly always exercises an attraction. For it concentrates being within limits that protect.'[11] Similarly, Heidegger chose a farmhouse in the Black Forest to exemplify his concept of what living in a place should be like, expounding with remarkable pathos on its homely aspects, or at least on what he appears to have perceived as such:[12]

> Let us think for a while of a farmhouse in the Black Forest, which was built some two hundred years ago by the dwelling of peasants. Here the self-sufficiency of the power to let earth and sky, divinities and mortals enter *in simple oneness* into things ordered the house. It placed the farm on the wind-sheltered mountain slope, looking south, among the meadows close to the spring. It gave it the wide overhanging shingle roof whose proper slope bears up under the burden of snow, and that, reaching deep down, shields the chambers against the storms of the long winter nights. It did not forget the altar corner behind the community table; it made room in its chamber for the hallowed places of childbed and the 'tree of the dead' – for that is what they call a coffin there: the *Totenbaum* – and in this way it designed for the different generations under one roof the character of their journey through time.

Such emphasis on the concept of 'home' is not restricted to mid-twentieth-century authors like Bachelard and Heidegger. A contemporary key contributor to the discourse on 'place' is Yi-Fu Tuan, the main representative of 'humanist geography'. In his emphasis on the importance of 'home' as an analytical concept, Tuan even goes so far as to define geography as 'the study of the earth as the home of people': here, as he himself emphasises, 'home' becomes the unifying key word for all subdivisions of geography.[13] Tuan defines the concept of 'home' in the following manner:[14]

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10   Bachelard 1994 (1958); cf. Cresswell 2015: 39–40.
11   Bachelard 1994 (1958): xxxvi.
12   English translation: Heidegger 1993: 361–362. Cf. Cresswell 2015: 27–29.
13   Tuan 1991: 99; quote: *ibidem*.
14   Tuan 1991: 102.

> [H]ome is a unit of space organized mentally and materially to satisfy a peo-
> ple's real and perceived basic biosocial needs and, beyond that, their higher
> aesthetic-political aspirations.

In the context of this book, particularly important is Tuan's observation that home is not only created materially (e.g. by building a farm and fencing its field or by demarcating the borders of a country) but also in a symbolic fashion. Here he allocates a prime role to language: 'speech calls homes into being'.[15] Tuan exemplifies this creation of home through speech by referring to cultures of hunter-gatherers who leave hardly any material traces in their environment but still thoroughly humanise it by naming natural features and connecting them with stories. The ethnographic record shows that this is done to a much greater extent than what would be technically necessary for survival, and that features are named, connected with narratives, and emotionally charged way beyond any purely practical needs. Similar observations can be made about societies that are more technologically advanced. Tuan refers to the European colonisation of North America and Australia, where he points to the acts of surveying, name-giving, mapmaking, and 'the writing of epics of exploration', all of which he classifies as 'familiarizing rites ... that symbolically transform space into home'.[16]

For the investigation that is to be undertaken on the following pages, one should particularly note Tuan's highlighting of 'the writing of epics of exploration' as a core strategy of creating home: many of the narratives to be discussed in the following could well be ascribed to this category. Furthermore, those of the tales discussed in Chapter 2 which are unconnected to exploration or settlement, certainly fall within the category of 'local or national histories and geographies', at least if understood broadly: this again ties into Tuan's proposals for how home is created, as he considers the writing of such texts essentially a technique that serves the maintenance of the meaning which establishes a person's home.[17] The same purpose can also be served by symbolic alterations to the material landscape.[18] In the following, we will encounter examples of this as well, especially in Chapter 2.5, where the crosses erected by Auðr the Deep-Minded will be discussed. Nevertheless, it should at least be mentioned that the creation of home, and the emphasis on the importance of home in humanist geography, can also have a downside that has been highlighted particularly by feminist geographers. In much

15   Tuan 1991: 102.
16   Tuan 1991: 102.
17   Tuan 1991: 102.
18   Tuan 1991: 102–103.

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research on the concept of 'home', women are notable only by their absence, and the idealising view of home that prevails in this discourse glosses over the fact that 'home', for those in a subordinate social position, can also be a place of abuse and oppression.[19] One person's home can be another's hell – a fact which makes it particularly worthwhile to note just how reactionary Heidegger's idealisation of a centuries-old farmhouse in the Black Forest was even in the 1950s, and how well this backward-looking attitude toward place and home ties into Heidegger's political aberrations. In the following, however, this aspect of 'home', its potential unhomeliness, will not be pursued in any systematic fashion.[20] The reason for this is not that there was no such thing as abuse and oppression in Old Norse-Icelandic society; there certainly was, and not only because early Icelandic society was a society of slaveholders. Rather, this aspect of Icelandic culture is largely obscured by the nature of our sources: the extant narratives of medieval Iceland present us with the perspective of the ruling elite, not the perspective of the oppressed. In Icelandic literature, the oppressed are denied a voice.

In summarising Tuan's conceptualisation of 'home', I already mentioned the importance he ascribed to naming places. Place-names are widely, and rightly, considered a key factor in the construction of 'place'. To name a location means to lift it out of the ('meaningless') anonymous general topography and to invest it with individuality. Furthermore, naming a location allows it to become the object of discourse; only a location that has been named can be easily grasped by language, or as Tim Robinson puts it: 'Placenames are the interlock of landscape and language'.[21] By connecting a location with language, a place-name allows it to become associated with stories and other kinds of verbalised meaning[22] – again in Robinson's words: 'The act of naming, or of learning its name, strikes a place like lightning, magnetizing it, attracting observations and the accumulation of placelore.'[23] This of course directly affects how people interact with the places they are encountering in the course of their daily lives. Once a place has been named and becomes part of verbalised discourse, it no longer is simply a stretch of woodland or a mass of rock but becomes a forest or mountain that can amass a rich trove of culturally determined associations. This in turn affects how people react and behave towards such a site – a sacred grove or a holy mountain is perceived and

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19 Cresswell 2015: 40.
20 Though cf. p. 207, below.
21 Robinson 1996c: 155.
22 Cf. Macfarlane 2015: 20.
23 Robinson 1996c: 163.

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treated differently from a mere source of timber or minerals, or as Christopher Tilley puts it in a more abstract fashion: 'Place names ... transform the sheerly physical and geographical into something that is historically and socially experienced.'[24]

On the Trobriand Islands, Malinowski also intensely experienced how closely places, names, narratives, and social experience interlocked in the culture of the islanders. In a pioneering way, he noted:[25]

> the influence of myth upon this vast landscape, as it colours it, gives it meaning, and transforms it into something live and familiar. What was a mere rock, now becomes a personality; what was a speck on the horizon becomes a beacon, hallowed by romantic associations with heroes; a meaningless configuration of landscape acquires a significance, obscure no doubt, but full of intense emotion. Sailing with natives ... I often observed how deep was their interest in sections of landscape impregnated with legendary meaning, how the elder ones would point and explain, the younger would gaze and wonder, while the talk was full of mythological names.

Here, 'meaning' is a core term; one should note how even in this short passage it appears three times. This 'meaning' is what turns 'space' into 'place', creating a habitable, familiar world with a deep cultural significance out of mere locations. Particularly worth highlighting is Malinowski's observation that the connection of the land with stories could engender 'intense emotion' as well as deep interest, creating a bond between the land and the people inhabiting it. This emotional bond, which is similarly highlighted by Bachelard,[26] is the foundation of the cultural construction of 'home'.

Two other aspects of this passage deserve singling out. One is Malinowski's use of the term 'landscape'. Malinowski employs this term to denote the complex ensemble that is created by the different places which have been made meaningful by their mythological associations, and this way of using the term is still today its dominant usage in the landscape-theoretical discourse. As is the case with most theoretical terms, there are also divergent conceptualisations of 'landscape',[27] but the term's most common use in the field is to denote a larger area of land – bigger than one single, strictly localised 'place' – which through cultural associations has been turned into something filled with 'meaning' and significance. This 'meaning', however, need not provide

24 Tilley 1994: 18; cf. Macfarlane 2015: 25–26.
25 Malinowski 1922: 298.
26 Bachelard 1994 (1958): xxxvi (see above, pp. 22–23).
27 E.g. Cresswell 2015: 17–18.

26

blanket coverage. More commonly, the character of a 'landscape' is created by (meaningful) 'places' interspersed with more neutral territory, giving the landscape a kind of pulse in which densely semanticised places alternate with stretches of non-semanticised space, with the interplay and balance between the two contributing much to the overall character of the land. Central in this particular discourse is that 'landscape' is not meant to refer to physical topography but to the way the perception of this topography is culturally constructed. The term 'landscape' does not primarily refer to mountains and forests, rivers and meadows, but to how these physical features are perceived and interpreted – which is something very different from what they 'are' in any objective sense. In the words of Tim Robinson, landscape is 'not just the terrain but also the human perspectives on it, the land plus its overburden of meanings'.[28] As such it is not primarily the work of nature but a 'work of the mind'.[29]

Simon Schama once described this 'work of the mind' as a 'scenery ... built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock',[30] highlighting the central function of memory for the construction of landscape. This aspect is also alluded to in the Malinowski quotation when he describes how he experienced the interaction between younger and older members of Trobriand society as a central aspect of their engagement with the landscape: the landscape is not self-explanatory but is explained by the elders who function as the bearers of memory. Their explanations constitute the passing-on of memory; and in this passing-on, and the resulting reactions of their audience, landscape is constituted, since only this handing-down of memory allows the younger generation of Trobriand islanders to understand the landscape that surrounds them. As Robert Macfarlane writes in the context of an analysis of a very different landscape: 'We *read* landscapes ... we interpret their forms in the light of our own experience and memory, and that of our shared cultural memory.'[31] Along these same lines the young Trobriand islanders learn to 'read' the landscape of the Trobriand Islands by listening to the tales of their elders. It is also important to note that the 'memory' which allows them to understand their 'landscape' of course does not have to be a factually correct memory of things 'that really happened'. Rather, landscape is constructed out of 'cultural memories' in Jan Assmann's sense of the term: these memories are not so much recalling what is factually correct but

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28   Robinson 1996c: 162.
29   Schama 1996: 7.
30   Schama 1996: 7.
31   Macfarlane 2008: 18.

are instead constructions that view the past in light of the present and espe-cially in light of present needs.[32] This memory does not primarily reproduce what is reputedly being remembered but serves the one who is remembering. Consequently it fluctuates through time, changing according to the needs of the respective presents. Thus the association between places and such cultural memories creates 'memory places';[33] these places are not markers of the past 'as it really happened', though, but rather they give presence to a past 'as it should have happened', or in any case 'as it should be remembered' according to the interests and biases of the remembering societies. What is remembered is selective at best and may even be largely or entirely fictional, and this also directly affects the selection of memories that are inscribed into places. Memories of the past are fluid, and so is the way in which places and land-scapes that memorialise this past are perceived. But this does not imply that the act of remembering, seen from a synchronic perspective, is an arbitrary one or leaves much freedom to the individual: seen from an emic perspective, i.e. through the eyes of somebody belonging to the culture under scrutiny, such cultural memories may be entirely binding and authoritative, however fortuitous they may seem to an outsider. This was probably the case for the young Trobriand islanders listening to the explanations given by their elders in Malinowski's account, and time and again the engaging nature of many cultural memories even affects modern scholarly analysis. Simon Schama, in his groundbreaking book on *Landscape and Memory*, gives a powerful account of what made him understand the relationship between 'landscape' on the one hand and 'memory' on the other. In his case this was the mound at Giby in north-eastern Poland where a monument has been erected to memo-rialise the death of several hundred men and women murdered by Stalin's security police in early 1945.[34] In the face of this memorial, emic and etic perspectives merge in Schama's account, illustrating the power that cultural memory and its moral message even have over their analyst.

This power that is exercised by places and their memories is often a nor-mative one. By carrying 'meaning' in the form of '(cultural) memories', a place not only constitutes a spatial monument that literally gives the past a place in the present but by doing so it creates a point which can be used to provide orientation. Monuments like the mound at Giby are not merely places of historical recollection but the memories which find a place there are meant to shape perceptions of self, the other, and what kind of futures

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32   Assmann 1992; cf. Hermann 2009.
33   Cf. Assmann 1999: 298–339.
34   Schama 1996: 23–26.

and associated behaviours are desirable – and which are not. Memorialising Stalin's crimes reasserts Polish independence while clearly implying that Poland *should* be independent; it makes as much a statement about what the present and the future should look like as it makes a statement about the past (which of course is the reason why the construction of such a monument was only possible after the Iron Curtain was raised and Poland regained its political independence).[35] By incorporating ('em-place-ing'?) 'memories', places provide paradigms for desirable and undesirable behaviour and developments and thus provide guidance for how the members of a culture should act. This feature of 'place' again seems to be one which transcends the boundaries of the cultures of Europe. In a long-term ethnographic study of the Western Apache, for instance, Keith H. Basso has shown that the normative force of 'place' is a core feature of its conceptualisation and social use in this culture. Among the Western Apache, place-names generally are semantically clear (as are the medieval Norse and Irish ones) and evoke certain narratives which tell of happenings that occurred in these places in a primeval past and thus lead to the coining of their names. These happenings often imply strong moral messages, meaning that also the places themselves, via their names, carry moral connotations. This in turn means that places can be used to chastise anybody who breaks the moral and social rules of Apache society. Such a chastisement can be effected simply by dropping a place-name: via its story the place-name has moral connotations and the offending person will know these connotations and therefore be reminded that their behaviour is falling short of the standards set by the place-story. Such an act of chastisement through a place is characteristically thought to be a particularly effective form of moral rebuke since the chastised person is not only chastised in the particular moment when somebody confronts them with a place-name but is chastised every time he or she sees the relevant place. Henceforth, every time the offender passes a relevant place the connotations of this place will remind them that their behaviour has fallen short of the standards 'em-placed' there. Thus do the Western Apache consider places a major factor in the upkeep of moral norms and social standards.[36] In this way 'place' not only provides orientation but also enforces conformity with the implied rules.

Some current theorising puts this function of providing and enforcing orientation at the very heart of the human relationship to space and place. Jürgen Mohn,[37] studying space and place from the perspective of comparative studies

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35 Cf. Assmann 1999: 138.
36 Basso 1996.
37 Mohn 2007. Cf. Egeler 2016b: §2b.

of religions, even sees here a core function of religion, which in the current context is of interest because most of the material discussed in the following chapters is indeed religious in nature. According to Mohn, one of religion's more central features is to create places by singling them out from the amorphous continuum of unstructured 'space', thus breaking up this continuum and establishing points which can serve as building blocks for the creation of an ordered world and in this way providing orientation. Playing a particularly key role in this process are 'sacred places'. As Mohn interprets them, sacred places are places which are 'different' from normal unmarked space. Being different, they structure this space, and by doing so they give fundamental guidance for the conduct of human life. Sacred places fulfil this function on very different scales but in structurally comparable ways: on a very large scale, Jerusalem and Mecca perform precisely the same function as a local sacred grove or a cross by the wayside. They all carry meaning, lift a 'place' out of unmarked 'space', and in this way can take on a normative function.

Yet in spite of this normative aspect of 'place', which can order the world by providing an orientation based on the 'meanings' created by the 'memories' it carries, the memory inscribed into the landscape and everything that comes from it is ultimately fluid. Even Schama's mound at Giby illustrates this: when he visited the site, its transformation from a mere hill into a memorial was still a work in progress, as it has only been Poland's recent emergence from under the Soviet yoke which has made it possible to give Stalin's victims a place in public memory. So landscape and its perception is not something that is simply a given. Landscape can be and is indeed created. This creation is an active process, with name-giving, the erection of monuments, and the selection or when necessary the invention of memories as central techniques through which it is accomplished. This insight of current and classic theorising on place and landscape – the nature of both as actively created cultural constructs – is ultimately at the core of this book. If places, a culture's sense of place, and even whole landscapes are cultural constructs then this raises the question of *how* they are constructed; and this in turn permits one to ask – as will be done in the following chapters – what was the role of Gaelic approaches to place and landscape in the genesis of an Icelandic sense of place.

1.2. Place-Names on the Move: Atlantic Outlooks on Icelandic Toponymy

The General Historical Background: Contacts between Iceland, Ireland, and Scotland during the Early Middle Ages

According to one strand of native Icelandic tradition, the very discovery of Iceland was bound up with Norse travels to the Gaelic-speaking world. The account in question is found in one of the medieval recensions of *Landnámabók*, the 'Book of Settlements'. *Landnámabók* is an Icelandic history of the first settlement of Iceland which describes the discovery of the island and gives an account of the settlers who took land there, stating exactly where in Iceland they took land and in many cases where they had originally come from.[38] *Landnámabók* is not contemporary with the happenings it purports to describe. Its earliest extant recension, the *Sturlubók*-recension, dates from circa 1275–1280 but is extant only in a seventeenth-century copy. The next extant version is the somewhat more detailed *Hauksbók*-recension, which was compiled by the politician and man of letters Haukr Erlendsson at some point between the years 1302 and 1310 and is partly extant in Haukr's autograph. These two earliest recensions of *Landnámabók* agree in broad outline as well as most details, and in fact Haukr Erlendsson drew extensively on the slightly earlier *Sturlubók*-recension when he composed his own version, expanding, altering, and correcting the text according to his own sources and predilections. In his version of the narrative, the first man to discover Iceland was a certain Garðarr (*Landnámabók* H3):[39]

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38   In general on *Landnámabók* cf. for instance Ármann Jakobsson 2015; Egeler 2015a; Egeler 2015c; Sveinbjörn Rafnsson 2001; Haraldur Matthíasson 1982; Boyer 1973; Jakob Benediktsson 1966–69.

39   The *Sturlubók*-recension presents Garðarr as the second Norseman to reach Iceland: *Landnámabók* S4. Both recensions are ed. by Finnur Jónsson 1900 and Jakob Benediktsson 1968. As the latter edition partly conflates the two texts on the basis of S, my quotations follow the edition by Finnur Jónsson 1900. For full translations of the *Sturlubók*-recension see Boyer 1973; Hermann Pálsson and

Gardar het madr son Svavars hins svænska. hann atti iardir i Siolandi. en var fæddr i Sviariki. hann fór til Sudreyia. at heimta faudur arf konu sinnar. ᴇɴɴ er hann sigldi i gegnum Pettlandz fiord þa sleit hann vndan vedr ok rak hann vestr i haf. hann kom at landi fyri austan Horn.

'A man was called Garðarr, the son of Svávarr the Swede. He had estates in Sjóland, but he had been brought up in Sweden. He went to the Hebrides to claim the paternal inheritance of his wife; but when he sailed through the Péttlandsfjǫrðr Fjord, a storm carried him off course and drove him westwards into the ocean. He reached land east of Horn.'

Here the discovery of Iceland is ascribed to a Norseman of Swedish extraction but settled in Denmark and who was married to a woman from the Hebrides, i.e. probably the daughter of one of the Norse settlers who had taken land on the at least partly Gaelic-speaking Western Isles of Scotland: sailing to the Hebrides to claim her inheritance, he gets blown off course and ends up in Iceland where he lands to the east of the promontory of Horn. The detail that he lands east of Horn is worth noting, as the lagoon east of Horn, where Garðarr's ship would have found shelter, bears the name *Papafjörður* – 'Fjord of the Gaelic Anchorites' – which constitutes another cross-reference to the Gaelic-speaking world.[40] It seems, at least in the Icelandic conception of Icelandic history, that Ireland and Scotland loomed large across media as diverse as historical narrative and toponymy.

The account of the settlement of Iceland in *Landnámabók* enumerates some 400 settlers – i.e. the men and (very few) women who led individual settlement parties – who together with their families and retinues came to Iceland to take land there. For just under half of them the text gives details about where they had come from: for about 130 settlers this is said to have been Norway, and for some fifty others it is said that they came from Britain or Ireland, mostly from Ireland and the Hebrides.[41] If these numbers are representative of the overall situation then this would imply that about a quarter of the settlers came to Iceland from one or another part of the Gaelic-speaking world. Furthermore, Norse society made extensive use of slave labour, a practice that was continued by the early settlers of Iceland. Poul Holm has estimated that about a quarter of the tenth-century population of Iceland consisted of slaves, and if the literary accounts are anything to go by, most of these were

Edwards 1972; for a translation of the *Hauksbók*-recension see Egeler, forthcoming b.

40 Cf. below, pp. 169ff. and p. 181.

41 Fellows-Jensen 1996: 119.

of Gaelic origin.[42] Thus for instance *Landnámabók* contains a long tale about how the Westman Islands off the southern Icelandic coast got their name *Vestmannaeyjar*, 'Islands of the Westmen (i.e. Irishmen or Hebrideans)':[43] according to this story, they were called such because of a number of escaped Gaelic slaves who were caught and killed there (S8/H8). A famous passage in *Laxdœla saga* (chs 12–13)[44] about the descent of Óláfr Peacock, one of the leading men of Laxárdalr Valley, claims that he was the son of an Icelander and an enslaved Irish princess. The underlying idea of an abduction of free-born Irish women by Norsemen to serve as slaves tallies with the picture painted by the Irish annals where, for instance, the *Annals of Ulster* note the abduction of a large number of women by Norse raiders in the year 821.[45] But the relationship between Norse slavers and Gaelic slaves was not only characterised by violence (or at least that is what the Icelandic sources want us to believe). According to *Landnámabók*, the female settler Auðr the Deep-Minded not only had a number of Gaelic slaves but she also placed these slaves in important positions of trust and after moving to Iceland even gave some of them their freedom and land to settle on as a reward for distinguished service (*Landnámabók* S96=H83, S103). If the picture of Icelandic society that is painted here comes close to the historical truth, there was at least a degree of social permeability which allowed some Gaelic slaves to become established members of Icelandic society who stood on a more or less equal footing with Icelanders of Scandinavian stock.

Not all of these slaves or of their masters arrived in Iceland from or via Ireland. By the time the Viking Age began in the late eighth century, Gaelic culture and language had already spread far beyond Irish shores, encompassing large parts of the Hebrides and the Scottish mainland, even though other parts of Scotland and the Scottish islands still remained Pictish.[46] In the Gaelicised areas of Scotland, encounters between Norse raiders and settlers

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42   Holm 1986: 323. Cf. Valante 2008: 86–90; Gísli Sigurðsson 2000: 30–34.

43   Cf. Fellows-Jensen 1996: 119.

44   Ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934.

45   Ed. and transl. by Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill 1983: 276/277.

46   According to Jennings and Kruse 2009: 79, at the end of the eighth century Pictish was still spoken 'in Skye and the Outer Hebrides and Gaelic in Dál Riata [i.e. south of Ardnamurchan] and in monasteries to the north.' Culturally and esp. in religious contexts, however, there would have been a strong Gaelic influence also in areas that were not Gaelic-speaking as such, with Gaelic being used as a religious language also in Pictish areas (Jennings and Kruse 2009: 78).

and a native Gaelic population took place at least as much as in Ireland.[47] The biography of Auðr the Deep-Minded again provides a good example, even taking into account that the reliability of its detail is more than debatable.[48] According to *Landnámabók* (S95/H82) Auðr was a daughter of Ketill Flat-Nose, who had made himself ruler of the Hebrides (S13/H13); this may suggest that the Hebrides might have been where she grew up. Later she was married to a Norse king of Dublin, and after his death Auðr returned to the Hebrides. Her son Þorsteinn the Red then conquered vast territories on the Scottish mainland. It was there too that Auðr now spent some time, and after Þorsteinn was killed she moved to Orkney before finally setting sail for Iceland. Thus Auðr would have spent large parts of her life before her emigration to Iceland in areas which culturally and linguistically were at least partly Gaelic, both in and beyond Ireland. Also Auðr's slaves partly were of Scottish rather than Irish descent and are explicitly said to have accompanied her to Iceland (S96=H83). This account thus illustrates Gaelic-Norse encounters and exchange taking place across the whole extent of the Gaelic world, with Scotland and some of the Scottish islands – references to which will recur throughout this study – occupying a prominent place in this theatre of interaction. It might be particularly worth highlighting how *Landnámabók* here claims in a surprisingly clear way that this also had a direct impact on the composition of what was to become the population of Iceland.

Not all the available evidence, however, paints as conciliatory a picture of Norse-native interaction in Scotland and on its Western Isles as is done by the *Landnámabók*-account of Auðr's intimate relationship to her Scottish servants, who accompanied her in positions of trust and to whom she later

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47   In general on the Norse on the Hebrides cf. McDonald 2015; Schorn and Quinn 2014; Jennings and Kruse 2009; Woolf 2007; Jennings and Kruse 2005; Kruse 2005; Sharples and Parker Pearson 1999. On Gaelic-Norse contacts on the Orkneys cf. Almqvist 1978–1981. For a later period, a particularly striking example of the intensity of Norse-Gaelic interaction on the Isle of Man is the Middle Irish poem *Baile Suthach Síth Emhna* (ed. and transl. by Ó Cuív 1955–1957). This text is a Gaelic praise poem from c. AD 1200 on the Norse king Raghnall, King of Man (d. 1229), i.e. the King Rǫgnvaldr of *Orkneyinga saga*, whom the saga claims was the greatest warrior in the western lands (ch. 110; ed. by Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1965). A Norse saga hero becoming the object of Irish praise poetry illustrates like almost no other single piece of evidence the close symbiosis that could develop between Norse and Gaels at least in some parts of the Gaelic world.

48   For a discussion of its problems as a historical source cf. for instance Woolf 2007: 279–285. For a detailed discussion of the semantisation of space in the account of Auðr cf. below, pp. 156ff.

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gave their freedom. The toponymy of much of the Hebrides, and the Outer Hebrides in particular, reflects a virtually complete replacement of the pre-Norse place-names by new Norse toponyms. The same is also the case on the northern part of the Scottish mainland. The extreme extent to which this can be observed is at the very least suggestive of the complete cultural dominance of the Norse and perhaps even of a large-scale displacement of the pre-Norse population, both Gaelic and Pictish. For the area between Muckle Flugga on the northernmost tip of the Outer Hebrides, the Dornoch Firth, and Ardnamurchan – i.e. an area comprising the whole Outer as well as parts of the Inner Hebrides along with the northernmost part of the Scottish mainland – the place-name evidence has led Alex Woolf to speak of 'as clear-cut a case of ethnic cleansing as can be found in the entirety of British history.'[49] The mechanisms and time scale of this displacement, however, cannot be reconstructed with any degree of accuracy. Woolf assumes that the spread of the Norse language reached its maximum extent at some point before the year 1200, by which time most of Scotland north of the Dornoch Firth appears to have become not only monolingually Norse but the toponymy of the region had become completely Scandinavianised.[50] At the same time, annalistic evidence suggests that even in the middle of the tenth century structured Gaelic ecclesiastical life was still possible on the Western Isles: in the year 961 the *Annals of the Four Masters* note the death of 'Fothadh, son of Bran, scribe and bishop of the Hebrides' (*Fothadh, mac Brain, scribhnidh ⁊ espucc Insi Alban*) who in the 950s had been exiled from St. Andrews and probably found asylum in the Columban monastery of Iona, implying that life in the monastery at this time was not made entirely impossible by what Scandinavian presence there was.[51] Even in the year 980 monastic life in Iona seems to have been continuing in a way fit for a king, as the *Annals of Tigernach* and the *Annals of the Four Masters* note for this year that – following upon his devastating military defeat – the Norse king of Dublin Óláfr *kváran* (or to use the Gaelic form of this name: Amlaíb Cúarán) retired to Iona 'in repentance and in pilgrimage' (*a n-aithrighe ⁊ a n-ailithri*) and ended his life there.[52]

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49   Woolf 2007: 12–13, cf. pp. 289–293.

50   Woolf 2007: 276.

51   Woolf 2007: 200–201; *Annals of the Four Masters* (ed. and transl. by O'Donovan 1848–1851), there *s.a.* 961.2.

52   *Annals of Tigernach* (ed. and transl. by Stokes 1895–1897), there *Revue Celtique* 17 (1896): 341 (=quote); *Annals of the Four Masters* (ed. and transl. by O'Donovan 1848–1851), there *s.a.* 978.3; Woolf 2007: 214–216; Gísli Sigurðsson 2000: viii; Jennings 1998: 51–52; Rekdal 1998: 284. On the relationship between Iona and

Importantly the last-mentioned testimony also shows that the monastery not only continued to function as an ecclesiastical centre but had acquired a position of respect among the Norse incomers. In material culture an even more concrete reflex of a peaceful and deeply respectful Norse engagement with Iona is constituted by a cross-slab found at the monastery, perhaps of late tenth-century date,[53] which carries a runic inscription proclaiming that it was placed by a certain Kali Ǫlvísson over his brother Fogl, apparently so as to cover his grave.[54] Runic evidence for a degree of peaceful interaction between Norse incomers and the Hebridean population, or more particularly the local Christian Church, is also provided by the Kilbar cross-slab from Barra, one of the islands of the Outer Hebrides: on its obverse this cross-slab shows a Celtic cross decorated with a Scandinavian interlace pattern, while most of its reverse is covered by a Christian inscription written in large boldly carved runes.[55] Andrew Jennings furthermore emphasises the significance of a fragment of Norse poetry as testifying to the relationship between the Hebridean Norse and the Gaelic Church organisation.[56] The fragment in question is preserved in *Landnámabók* (S91/H79) and *Grænlendinga saga* (ch. 1).[57] Its text and context in the former run as follows (*Landnámabók* S91):[58]

> Heriolfr ᴇɴ yngri for til Grænlandz þa er Eirekr ᴇɴ ʀaudi bygdi landit. Med honum var æ skipi Sudreyskr madr kristinn sa er orti Hafgerdinga ᴅrápu. þar er þetta stef i. Miɴar bid ek at mvnkareyni meinalausan farar beina heidis halldi harar folldar hallar ᴅrottiɴ yfir mer stalli.

> 'Herjólfr the Younger went to Greenland when Eiríkr the Red settled the land. With him on the ship was a Christian man from the Hebrides who composed the *Poem in Praise of the Sea Mountains*. It contains this refrain:

>> I pray to the monks' blameless examiner
>> to support my journey.
>> The lord of the high hall of the earth
>> may hold the hawk's pedestal over me.'

the Norse in general, and its continued operation as a religious house throughout the period, also cf. Jennings and Kruse 2009: 99; Jennings 1998.

53 Liestøl 1983: 92.
54 Jennings 1998: 46–47; Liestøl 1983 (with detailed discussion and illustrations of the stone). For a runological discussion cf. Holman 1996: 212–214.
55 Cf. below, p. 167.
56 Jennings 1998: 47.
57 *Grænlendinga saga* ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935.
58 Ed. by Finnur Jónsson 1900; my translation.

> The monks' blameless examiner = Christ. The high hall of the earth = the
> sky. Hawk's pedestal = arm; may hold his arm over me = protect me.

Since the 'Sea Mountains' (*Hafgerðingar*) appear to be particularly huge
(and by implication extremely dangerous) waves encountered off the coast of
Greenland, this poem seems to have been a call for help in a situation of dis-
tress at sea turned into poetry. Jennings highlights the detail in the poem when
it circumscribes Christ as the 'examiner of the monks' (*mvnkareynir*): this, he
argues, expresses a Gaelic Church ethos.[59] Jennings' argument rests on the
traditional model of 'Hiberno-Scottish Christianity' as essentially and dis-
tinctively monastic, which has since been called into question.[60] Yet monks
were still an important part of the church organisation of Iona even if Iona was
not monastic through and through, and so this aspect of Iona could indeed be
what is behind the poetic language of this Hebridean explorer, connecting this
language to an important aspect of how the Church was institutionally present
in the Hebrides.

That there was a well-established association between Christianity and
Scandinavians who had at some point in their lives lived in the islands sur-
rounding Iona can also be illustrated by a number of further passages in
Landnámabók; Jennings showcases the examples of Auðr the Deep-Minded,
Ketill the Foolish, and Ørlyggr Hrappsson, all of whom will play key roles
in the following discussion.[61] Indeed, drawing on this and other evidence
such as the saints to whom churches on the Hebrides were dedicated, the
Irish annals, *papar*-toponyms, and the two aforementioned runic inscriptions,
Jennings argues that the most likely scenario for the religious situation of the
Viking Age Hebrides is that the organisational structure of the local Church
hierarchy centred on Iona was able to survive not only in Iona itself but in
wide parts of the Western Isles, including the islands most strongly affected
by Norse settlement; and that this surviving ecclesiastical organisation as a
whole played a key role in converting the Hebridean Norse to Christianity.[62]

All this means that during the time which most of the Icelandic sources
discussed in the following claim to be talking about, i.e. the Icelandic
Settlement Period between circa AD 870 and 930, the Hebrides were still an
area characterised by an intricate cultural and linguistic mix and equally so

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59   Jennings 1998: 47.
60   Etchingham 1999.
61   Jennings 1998: 43–46; below, pp. 110ff., 156ff., 175ff.
62   Jennings 1998: 43–51. Cf. also Fisher 2005, esp. p. 164; on the basis of an analysis
     of Atlantic cross-sculpture, Fisher judges that 'a Hebridean contribution to the
     Norse conversion of the islands [i.e. the Faeroes] merits serious consideration.'

in terms of religion, hovering between native Norse paganism and Columban Christianity. During this early period, and especially before the beginning of large-scale Norse settlement perhaps in the last quarter of the ninth century, Norse interaction with the native population on the Northern and Western Isles probably was generally characterised less by complete displacement than by a combination of plundering, slaving, and peaceful coexistence.[63] Within this blend, and leaving aside the topic of ecclesiastical organisation, a detail of the *Landnámbók*-account of Auðr the Deep-Minded, for what it is worth, certainly underscores the importance of the latter and thus the possibility of cultural transfers. According to *Landnámabók* S95, Auðr's grandson, born after she and her son Þorsteinn the Red had moved to the Hebrides, was given the name Óláfr *feilan*. This is important because of Óláfr's nickname: by contrast with established Norse practice, where it was common to give semantically clear Norse nicknames that made an outspoken statement about the person they were attached to, *feilan* is not a Norse word but an Irish one: the term *fáelán*, 'little wolf'. Since Norse nicknames generally were meant to be understood, this implies that Óláfr got his name in an environment which was fundamentally bilingual, indicating a close and to some extent peaceful interaction between Norse incomers and a native Gaelic-speaking population.[64] It might also be worth noting that some of the areas previously conquered by the Norse, especially Galloway and the Isle of Man, had by the late twelfth century become predominantly Gaelic-speaking.[65] The development of the vernaculars under Norse rule was not necessarily a one-way street heading in a pre-determined direction, and this serves to underscore the intensity of contact that existed between linguistically and culturally Norse and linguistically and culturally Gaelic people (as well as the English, the Welsh, and the generally less fortunate Picts, all of whom play no role with respect to the topic of this book and therefore can be left aside here).

In sum, what we know about the origin of the earliest population of Iceland seems to suggest that the relationship between Gaelic and Norse culture in Iceland must have been almost symbiotic at times, especially insofar as Christian settlers were concerned. In such an environment it goes without saying that the Gaelic element left its imprint on the culture which was to emerge from the ethnic melting-pot that was early Iceland,[66] where settlers

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63   Woolf 2007: 287–288.
64   Cf. below, p. 163.
65   Woolf 2007: 293.
66   For a general survey cf. Gísli Sigurðsson 2000; as case studies cf. for instance
      Egeler, forthcoming a; Egeler 2015b; Egeler 2013: 33–131; Sayers 1995 (1997);

coming directly from Scandinavia mingled with Norse settlers from Ireland, Scotland, and the Scottish Isles as well as people of direct Gaelic descent. One of the most obvious impacts of this cultural mix is seen in the Icelandic repertoire of personal names, where even some prominent names are direct borrowings from Irish: *Njáll* is a borrowing of Old Irish *Níall*, *Kormákr* of Irish *Cormac*, *Konáll* of *Conall*.[67] Yet in medieval Iceland there are also more subtle traces of Gaelic culture and the cultures of Britain and Ireland more broadly. For instance *Kjalnesinga saga*, the 'Saga of the People of Kjalarnes',[68] engages with the Irish heroic narratives of the Ulster Cycle both by making reference to the legendary Irish king Conchobar and by adapting motifs traditionally connected with the hero Cú Chulainn.[69] Also in *Njáls saga*, arguably the most famous of the Sagas of Icelanders, Gaelic story-telling motifs may have left their trace: Sámr, the hound owned by Gunnarr of Hlíðarendi (*Njáls saga* 70, 76–77),[70] is not only described as originally coming from Ireland but also recalls the great hounds of Irish heroic literature as they appear,[71] among others, in the section about the 'Boyhood Deeds of Cú Chulainn' (*Macgnímrada Con Culainn*) in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (the 'Cattle Raid of Cúailnge', ll. 540–607),[72] in *Aided Cheltchair maic Uthechair* (the 'Death of Celtchar, son of Uthechar'),[73] or in *Scéla Mucce Meic Dathó* (the 'Tales of the Pig of Mac Dathó').[74]

Even Old Norse mythology shows traces of a surprisingly broad reception of Gaelic as well as British storytelling motifs.[75] Thus the myth of how the god Thor slaughtered, cooked, and resuscitated one of his goats when he spent the night as a guest in a poor household (*Gylfaginning* 44)[76] finds an exact parallel in Wales in a miracle ascribed to Saint Germanus in *Historia*

Power 1985; Young 1937; and the literature listed below, note 75.

67 Etchingham *et al.*, forthcoming, ch. 5; Craigie 1897; Stokes 1876–1878a.

68 Ed. by Jóhannes Halldórsson 1959.

69 Cf. Gísli Sigurðsson 2000: 90–93; Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1957: 15.

70 Ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954.

71 Gísli Sigurðsson 2000: 101–102; cf. Sayers 1997.

72 Ed. and transl. by O'Rahilly 1976.

73 Ed. and transl. by Meyer 1906: 24–31.

74 Ed. by Thurneysen 1935.

75 For overviews cf. Egeler, forthcoming a; Egeler 2013: 33–131; Gísli Sigurðsson 2000: 73–85. Noteworthy or at least historically important contributions are also Chesnutt 1989; Power 1985; Almqvist 1978–1981; Chesnutt 1968; Chadwick 1953–1957; Krappe 1937; von Sydow 1920; von Sydow 1910; Bugge 1899; Bugge 1889.

76 Ed. by Faulkes 2005.

Brittonum (ch. 32),[77] a text from the ninth century. There, prefiguring the role of Thor in the later Icelandic narrative, Germanus spends the night in a poor household and after dinner resuscitates his host's single calf, which had been slaughtered to provide something to eat for the saint. The parallelism of these and other details, especially an emphasis which both tales put on the inviolability of the animal's bones, is so close that it may suggest that the Thor-miracle is a direct adaptation of the Christian miracle story. This may perhaps reflect a situation of direct contact and competition between Norse paganism and the Christianity of Britain and Ireland where a pagan god needed to be ascribed the same powers that the Christian side claimed for their saints.[78] Characteristically, however, it is not clear where exactly the Norse would have encountered the hagiographic motif of the 'animal resurrected after cooking', as the Welsh *Historia Brittonum* is by no means the only attestation of the motif in the medieval literatures of Britain and Ireland, even though it may provide the closest motivic counterpart to the Norse myth, paralleling it even in some comparatively minor details. For the motif is also widely attested in medieval Irish hagiography, even though these parallels are somewhat more general.[79] In Ireland the motif appears as early as the *Vita sanctae Brigitae*, which Cogitosus probably wrote around AD 680.[80] Later it is attested in Irish texts such as the eleventh or twelfth-century Life of Saint Brigit in the Book of Lismore (*Betha Bhrigde*, ll. 1665–1667),[81] the late twelfth-century Life of Saint Columba in the Book of Lismore (*Betha Choluim chille*, ll. 1055–1063),[82] the late twelfth or early thirteenth-century Life of Finnian of Clonard in the Book of Lismore (*Betha Fhindéin Clúana hEraird*, ll. 2700–2703),[83] the probably fourteenth-century *Vita sancti Mochua* (ch. x, where the miracle is performed with twelve stags rather than the more usual cattle),[84] and the *Vita sanctae Monennae* by Conchubranus from the eleventh or twelfth century, where the miracle is performed once with a piglet (ch. 9) and once with a bull

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77   Ed. by Mommsen 1898: 111–222.
78   For a fuller discussion cf. Egeler 2013: 33–35, 42–43 (but where the Irish attestations of the motif have been overlooked); von Sydow 1910: 67, cf. pp. 65–105.
79   For a detailed list of medieval Irish attestations cf. Bray 1992: 88.
80   *Patrologia Latina* [Migne] t. 72, c. 785D–786A. Date: Sharpe 1991: 13, but cf. McCone 1982: 108–109, who places Cogitosus's Life 'around the third quarter of the seventh century' (p. 109).
81   Ed. and transl. by Stokes 1890: 34–53, 182–200. Dating: Ó Riain 2011: 124.
82   Ed. and transl. by Stokes 1890: 20–33, 168–181. Dating: Ó Riain 2011: 213.
83   Ed. and transl. by Stokes 1890: 75–83, 222–230. Dating: Ó Riain 2011: 319–320.
84   Ed. by Plummer 1910, vol. 2, pp. 184–189. Dating: Ó Riain 2011: 469.

calf (ch. 15).[85] Another possible instance of a reception of Gaelic storytelling motifs in Norse mythology seems to be constituted by the boar Sæhrímnir in Valhalla. Every day this boar is slaughtered, cooked, and revived to be slaughtered again the next day in order to provide eternal food for the dead heroes abiding in Odin's hall (*Gylfaginning* 38). This finds direct counterparts in a number of pigs of Irish literature: these pigs likewise are slaughtered, cooked, and revived on a daily basis as part of an otherworldly feast. Such pigs appear in Irish storytelling for the first time in the short tale 'Concerning the Seizure of the Fairy Mound' (*De Gabáil in t-Śída*),[86] a text which has been dated to the ninth century at the latest;[87] this date is early enough to suggest that the miraculous boar of the Icelandic otherworld is directly based on an Irish prototype.[88] And this still does not exhaust the apparent adaptations of Gaelic motifs in Norse myths. Even the long mythological narrative of Thor's journey to Útgarðaloki and of the happenings that befall him and his companions in Útgarðaloki's castle (*Gylfaginning* 46–47), in spite of chronological problems, would seem to be largely based on an Irish story about the hero Finn mac Cumaill that is attested to in more than fifty manuscript witnesses from the late sixteenth century onwards, and even in modern Irish folklore it still survived in more than ninety variants.[89]

The state of research on Gaelic traits in medieval Icelandic culture thus clearly indicates that it is based, among other things, on Norse-Scandinavian culture with a strong (though not dominant) admixture of Gaelic elements. Therefore the question to be pursued in this book is not *Were there Gaelic influences in Icelandic culture?* but much more specifically: *Did Gaelic culture influence the Icelandic sense of place?* If this question can be answered in the affirmative, then this answer will deepen our understanding of a part of Gaelic-Icelandic cultural relationships which has never been in the focus of research to date, and which can shed considerable light on a fundamental aspect of how Iceland for Icelanders was turned into 'home' and thus how a central category of Icelandic culture was established.

85   Ed. by Esposito 1910; date: p. 203.
86   Ed. and transl. by Hull 1933.
87   Hull 1933: 54.
88   Egeler 2013: 81–84; cf. Davidson 1988: 46; Lorenz 1984: 466; de Vries 1956–1957:
     §582 (p. 379, note 1); von Sydow 1910: 78.
89   Egeler 2013: 35–42; Power 1985.

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Transatlantic Place-Names

As mentioned above in connection with the theoretical introduction of the concept of 'place', one core element of how a sense of place is constructed is place-names.[90] Being the 'interlock of landscape and language',[91] place-names allow places to become part of speech. Thus they turn them into an object of spoken discourse and in this way into something that is connected with verbalised meaning – or put more simply, they allow a place to be talked about and stories to be told about it. Place-names, therefore, stand at the core of a sense of place like few other phenomena. When enquiring into the possible Gaelic contribution to the Icelandic sense of place, this raises the question of whether there might have been such a contribution already on the level of place-naming.

Indeed there are some links between the toponymy of Iceland and that of Scotland. These links only concern a very small percentage of the Icelandic place-names and one has to consider that pre-Norse Scotland in parts was Pictish rather than Gaelic-speaking; yet they still deserve mentioning, if only because the relevant names are spread across vast parts of Iceland.[92] The Old Norse name for Caithness at the north-eastern tip of the Scottish mainland was *Katanes*, 'the headland of the [tribe known as the] Cats'; this toponym makes two appearances in Iceland as the name of a farm,[93] including one on the shores of the Hvalfjörður Fjord that exists to this day.[94] The Norse name of York, *Jórvík*, was transferred (in a way quite similar to the much later, and much more westerly, naming of New York) onto four Icelandic settlement sites:[95] two still-existing farms in southern Iceland, located just south of Selfoss and on the eastern edge of the Mýrdalssandur sand plain respectively;[96] an abandoned site some thirty-five kilometres north of Egilsstaðir in eastern Iceland;[97] and another abandoned site in the eastern Icelandic valley of Suðurdalur, about forty-five kilometres south of Egilsstaðir as the crow

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90 Above, p. 25
91 Robinson 1996c: 155; above, p. 25.
92 The following summary is primarily based on the survey by Fellows-Jensen 1996.
93 Bandle 1977: 63, cf. p. 66.
94 Ferðakort 2006: sheet 2, square J10. Note also that one of these appearances is connected with a settler said to have been 'Irish' (*irskr*; cf. Bandle 1977: 63 and below, pp. 131, 155).
95 Fellows-Jensen 1996: 122.
96 Ferðakort 2006: sheet 1, square L12, and sheet 6, square T13.
97 Ferðakort 2006: sheet 23, square AG5.

Map 1: Katanes on the Hvalfjörður Fjord (star) and the four Jórvíks (round dots).
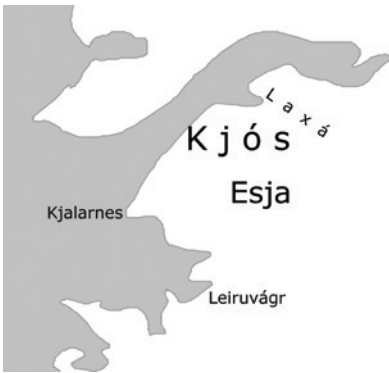
Map 2: Esja, Kjós, Leiruvágr, Laxá, and Kjalarnes in western Iceland. Note that the river Laxá is flowing into the Hvalfjörður Fjord on whose northern shore Katanes is located (cf. map 1).

flies (map 1).[98] The two Icelandic place-names *Papey* and *Papýli* – the former of which belongs to an island off the south-eastern coast of Iceland, while the location of the latter is lost – have at least twenty-eight counterparts on the Northern and Western Isles of Scotland and on the Scottish mainland.[99]

In one case it has even been suggested that a whole assemblage of place-names appears both in Iceland and on the Western Isles.[100] Hermann Pálsson highlights four toponyms as the most significant

98   Ferðakort 2006: sheet 20/21, square AF8.
99   To be discussed in detail below, pp. 169ff. (with map 6).
100 Hermann Pálsson 1996: 16–18; Fellows-Jensen 1996: 122; Helgi Guðmundsson 1997: 193–194.

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ones. In Iceland *Kjós* is the name of an area immediately to the north of Mount *Esja*; *Leiruvágr* (today's Leiruvogur) is a bay some three kilometres south of Esja; and through Kjós there flows a medium-sized river called *Laxá*, 'Salmon-River', which, fittingly, today is advertised as a tourist destination for salmon-fishing (map 2). He argues that this toponymic complex finds a direct counterpart on Lewis in the Outer Hebrides, where exactly the same place-names might, in a Gaelicised form, be preserved in the following toponyms:[101]

- *Leirebhagh* < Old Norse *Leiruvágr*, 'Sea/Bay of the River **Leira*';
- *Easabhal* < Old Norse *Esjufjall*, 'Mountain of Esja [*esja*, "soapstone, steatite"]';
- *Ceòs* < Old Norse *Kjós(s)*, 'Hollow', 'a low lying area surrounded by high hills or mountains';
- *Lacasaidh* < Old Norse *Laxá*, 'Salmon River'.

Over and above these 'main' toponymic correspondences, Helgi Guðmundsson highlights the Icelandic toponyms Melar, Akranes, Garðar, Hólmur, Kross, and Sandvík, all of which are located between the Borgarfjörður Fjord and Mount Esja.[102] He also notes that a number of the relevant Icelandic toponyms (half of those highlighted by Hermann Pálsson as particularly significant) recur in multiple variants in this same area: there is a Laxá south of the Borgarfjörður Fjord as well as the Laxá flowing by Kjós, and the bay called Leiruvogur and a river called Leirvogsá south of Mount Esja are mirrored by the river Leirá and the bay Leirárvogur just north of Akranes.

According to Helgi Guðmundsson, the further Icelandic toponyms from the extended area around Akranes and Mount Esja might also have counterparts on the Isle of Lewis, specifically in the following place-names:[103]

- *Melbost* < Old Norse *Melbólstaðr*, 'Sand-bank Farm';

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101 Etymologies after Hermann Pálsson 1996: 16. I have silently normalised his spellings of Gaelic place-names in accordance with the spelling of the current Ordnance Survey maps (Ordnance Survey 2017); he does not state his sources for his name forms.

102 Helgi Guðmundsson 1997: 193. The location of Kross cannot be verified on Landmælingar Íslands 2017. The toponym Sandvík has now fallen out of use, but it is mentioned as the name of a place on Kjalarnes in *Landnámabók* H15 (see below, p. 111).

103 Helgi Guðmundsson 1997: 193 does not give the Gaelic names but only Old Norse names, following the reconstructions of Magne Oftedal (1954). To make the reconstructed nature of the Old Norse toponyms transparent, I give the modern

- *Aiginis/Aignish* < Old Norse *Akrnes*, '(Corn-)Field Promontory', via intermediate *Aknes*;

- *Garrabost* < Old Norse *Garðabólstaðr*, 'Farm of the Fences, Farm of the Several Farmyards';

- *Holm Farm* < Old Norse *Holmr*, 'Islet; Small Hill surrounded by Flat Land';

- *Crosbost* < Old Norse *Krossabólstaðr*, 'Farm of the Crosses';

- *Sanndabhaig/Sandwick* < Old Norse *Sandvík*, 'Sand Bay'.

Taken at face value, the arguments presented by Hermann Pálsson and Helgi Guðmundsson would mean that almost a dozen place-names from a limited area in Iceland have counterparts in a limited area of the Isle of Lewis. On this basis, it has been suggested that 'the occurrence of the same group of names within a comparatively small radius does suggest that they must have been transferred deliberately'.[104] In fact, in the discussion of the last decades, this toponymic complex has become established as a classic example of a transfer of Norse names from Scotland to Iceland.

The story, however, may not be quite as straightforward as it has been told. To start with, an Old Norse origin of the Lewis toponyms cannot be upheld with confidence in all these cases. The toponym 'Holm Farm', which Helgi Guðmundsson on the basis of the work of Magne Oftedal thought to be Norse,[105] is much more likely to be a semi-translated, semi-anglicised form of the name's Gaelic form *Tac Thuilm*, 'Holding of the Hill', than a Norse name: here, *tac* ('holding') seems to have been translated as 'farm', while the rest of the name (the genitive of *tolm*, 'hill') was anglicised (i.e. *Holm* represents the pronunciation of the Gaelic word *Thuilm* in an approximate English spelling).[106] In this way, a hybrid form 'Holm Farm' was created that superficially looks Norse but in fact is Gaelic mixed with English. This is also supported by the topography of the farm, which is located on a hill, matching the semantics of the Gaelic name *Tac Thuilm* much better than the semantics of Old Norse *holmr*, which much more commonly refers to a small island than to a hill.[107]

Gaelic and/or English names as represented in the current Ordnance Survey maps (Ordnance Survey 2017) as well as Oftedal's (1954) reconstructed Old Norse forms.

104 Quote: Fellows-Jensen 1996: 122; cf. Hermann Pálsson 1996: 16.

105 Oftedal 1954: 394.

106 For the name form Tac Thuilm see Ordnance Survey 2017 and cf. Am Faclair Beag 2017 *s.v.* 'tac', 'tolm'. For parallels to this interpretation of the genesis of the English toponym Holm Farm cf. Forbes 1923: 180 (*s.v.* 'Eas Thuilm'), 184 (*s.v.* 'Eilean Tuilm').

107 Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson 1874, *s.v.* 'hólmr'; *ONP*, *s.v.* 'holmr'.

Melbost, Aiginis, Garrabost, and Crosbost are likewise not unproblematic, though in a different way. These names contain individual elements that also occur in their alleged Icelandic counterparts Melar, Akranes, Garðar, and Kross, but these elements are not used in the same ways. Thus, Melbólstaðr is 'Sand-bank Farm' while Melar is 'Sand-banks', i.e. the plural of the simplex rather than a compound; Ak(r)nes is '(Corn-)Field Promontory' while Akranes is 'Promontory of the (Corn-)Fields' with the first element of the compound being a genitive plural rather than a nominative singular or a stem; Garðabólstaðr is 'Farm of the Fences' while Garðar is simply 'Farmyards', i.e. again a simplex rather than a compound. It is possible to see a parallelism here, but it is not necessary to do so. These are not identical names, but merely different names that happen to draw on a shared corpus of onomastic elements.

The same problem also applies to the equation Esja – Esjufjall: the Icelandic and the reconstructed Norse-Hebridean toponym are not actually identical, but merely share an element that on Lewis appears as part of a compound whereas in Iceland it is used as a simplex. This does not preclude a direct connection, but it certainly weakens the case for assuming one. Furthermore, this place-name equation also has another problem. Oftedal assumed that there was an Esjufjall on Lewis which he reconstructed from the modern name Eishal.[108] This is one of Oftedal's more daring reconstructions, and one that seems perhaps possible but not necessarily compelling. In fact, it seems that Hermann Pálsson did not actually embrace Oftedal's identification of Esjufjall and Eishal, as he refers to Easabhal rather than Eishal as the Hebridean equivalent of Esjufjall.[109] Phonetically, his identification of Easabhal and Esjufjall seems much more plausible than Oftedal's identification of Eishal and Esjufjall, and is likely to be correct. Topographically, however, it does Hermann Pálsson's argument rather a disservice. This becomes clear if one looks at the locations of his core group of toponyms.[110] As Hermann Pálsson claims, the toponymic element *Leirebhagh* is indeed present in Lewis, where it appears in the name of Leiravay River and in the name of the bay *Tob Leireabhaigh*, 'Bay of Leirebhagh'.[111] Moreover, Ceòs

108 Oftedal 1954: 395.
109 Hermann Pálsson 1996: 16 (using the spelling *Eshaval*).
110 For help in identifying the location of Hermann Pálsson's places, I owe thanks to Christina Murray and Nina Macdonald.
111 Cf. Am Faclair Beag 2017, *s.v.* 'tòb'. Incidentally, this is not the only appearance of the name element in the Outer Hebrides. A second one is *Loch Leirebhagh*, which is the historical name (today apparently fallen out of use) of 'the lower portion of a Saltwater Loch which Extends from Island Wiay to near Craigory' (Inverness-shire

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(anglicised: *Keose*) and Lacasaidh (anglicised: *Laxay*) are located in Lewis, on the northern shore of Loch Èireasort; in the Ordnance Survey Name Books from the middle of the nineteenth century the river flowing past Lacasaigh, which then was still spelled Lacsaigh, is even still called Amhuinn Lacsaigh ('River Laxay').[112] Today a fish farm is fittingly located on this river. The latter two places in particular correspond to the modern situation of Kjós and the River Laxá north of Esja rather nicely (up to and including the modern economic use of the river). Easabhal, however, is not located in Lewis, but much further south: it is a large hill south of Loch Baghasdail on South Uist, almost on the opposite end of the Outer Hebrides. By implication, Hermann Pálsson's core group of Outer Hebridean place-names seems to be spread out over virtually the whole length of the archipelago – not a distance which can necessarily be called 'a comparatively small radius'.

Thus, in sum, a noteworthy part of the toponymy of the area around Mount Esja does indeed seem to have counterparts on the Outer Hebrides, even though these counterparts appear to be neither as exact nor as tightly clustered together on Lewis as it seems to have been widely held. Yet even so, the correspondences between the toponymies of the area around Mount Esja and of the Outer Hebrides are tantalising and might not be entirely without significance. This is even more so if one considers another aspect of the toponymy of the Esja area. Right in the middle of Hermann Pálsson's main group of Hebridean-paralleled Icelandic place-names lies the peninsula of Kjalarnes (map 2). According to *Landnámabók*, Kjalarnes was the place where a settler from the Hebrides took land and, in so doing, even furnished the area with suspiciously Gaelic-looking stories.[113] Furthermore, as mentioned above, *Kjalnesinga saga*, the 'Saga of the People of Kjalarnes', provides some of the classic examples of a reception of Gaelic storytelling motifs in the Sagas of Icelanders, as it directly mentions the Ulster Cycle figure of King Conchobar and draws on motifs connected with the Ulster Cycle hero Cú Chulainn to characterise its main protagonist.[114] Thus, a tantalising (if problem-fraught) toponymic argument may in this case tie in both with the explicit statement

Ordnance Survey Name Books, 1876–1878, vol. 11, p. 51 = OS1/18/11/51; digitised at Scotland's Places 2017); i.e. it is a body of water cutting into the Isle of Benbecula, an island of the Outer Hebrides south of Lewis.

112 Ross and Cromarty Ordnance Survey Name Books, 1848–1852, vol. 90, p. 16 (=OS1/27/90/16) and vol. 91, p. 10 (=OS1/27/91/10). Cf. the Ordnance Survey Six-Inch Map, Ross-shire (Island of Lewis), sheet 32, published 1852. (All digitised at Scotland's Places 2017.)

113 Hermann Pálsson 1996: 16–17; cf. below, pp. 110ff.

114 See above, p. 39, and below, note 237.

of a historical source and with close literary affinities to support a Hebridean-Gaelic connection of the area in a remarkably strong way.

In these instances – Katanes, Jórvík, Papey and Papýli, and perhaps the toponymy of the Esja-area – it seems that Icelandic place-names are derived from place-names of Scotland and northern England, suggesting that the approach which some of the earliest settlers took in their endeavour to endow Iceland with a certain familiarity was based on cultural techniques deriving from Britain and the Gaelic-speaking world. In all instances quoted so far, however, these Icelandic place-names are not based on native Irish and British toponyms but on either Norse toponyms or on the Norse forms of local Scottish or northern English toponyms. This implies that the source of the underlying transfer was not the native population of Ireland and Britain but rather the Norse settlers there.

There is, however, at least one instance in which an apparently genuinely Gaelic term for a place seems to have been transferred to Iceland: the toponym *Dímon*.[115] *Dímon* seems to be Irish *dí muin*, 'two tops, two ridges'.[116] Names of this type are always connected with places that have a strong 'duplicity', i.e. they either have two peaks or form part of a distinctive set of two peaks. Thus there is the pair of the two islands *Stóra Dímon* and *Litla Dímon*, 'Great Dímon' and 'Little Dímon', in the Faeroes,[117] and off Yell and Northmaven in Shetland there are two sets of rock stacks both of which are called *Da Dimons*.[118] In Iceland *Dímonarklakkar* is the name of a rock island in the Breiðafjörður Fjord that is dominated by two steep towering peaks,[119] and a number of further attestations – in Iceland there are about a dozen relevant toponyms – continue this pattern (map 3).[120] In these toponyms, which appear to be attested across the Norse colonies in the west, there is a perfect convergence between the Gaelic semantics of the name and the topography of the sites described by it. What is puzzling about these place-names, however,

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115 For a detailed discussion with a list of attestations cf. Gammeltoft 2004: 31–35, 46. Further cf. Brink 2016: 161–162; Fellows-Jensen 1996: 117–118; Bandle 1977: 63, 66; Stokes 1876–1878a: 186–187. Skeptical on primarily phonetic grounds are Etchingham *et al.*, forthcoming, ch. 5. Etchingham *et al.* note that a Norse phonetic rendering of an Irish *dí muin* should result in an Old Norse form †*Dífun*; the actual form *Dímon* would have to be based not on a purely oral transmission but would necessarily be influenced by Gaelic spelling.

116 Cf. *eDIL*, *s.v.* '1 muin'; Brink 2016: 161.

117 Gammeltoft 2004: 33–34 (with fig. 2); Fellows-Jensen 1996: 118.

118 Gammeltoft 2004: 33.

119 Gammeltoft 2004: 32–33 (with fig. 1); cf. Brink 2016: 161.

120 For a detailed list cf. Gammeltoft 2004: 33.

is that they do not actually appear to be attested in purely Gaelic-speaking areas: *dí muin* does not seem to have been part of the native Irish or Scottish repertoire of place-names but was only used in places where Gaelic and Norse populations mingled.[121] Thus it seems that what was borrowed by the Norse was not a Gaelic toponym but a Gaelic phrase which was then incorporated into the Norse onomasticon: *Dímon* is not so much a Gaelic place-name as a Norse place-name formed on the basis of a Gaelic loanword.[122] Nevertheless, it is interesting that the Norse settlers on the Western Isles of Scotland seem to have adapted this Gaelic turn of phrase for naming places and that they then carried this new Hiberno/Scotic-Norse name element on to Iceland while correctly preserving its semantics, as this shows both a cultural transfer in the area of the semantisation of space and a certain understanding of Gaelic phraseology. One wonders whether the latter, to some extent, should be seen in the context of a degree of Norse-Gaelic bilingualism among the first generation of Icelandic settlers, for which there is scattered but good evidence.[123]

Furthermore, something which is particularly striking is the wider toponymic context of two of the Icelandic sets of *Dímon*-names (map 4). In the southern Icelandic Þjórsárdalur Valley there is a mountain slope by the name of *Dímon*: this *Dímon* is located below two peaks, which may be the topographical referent of the name, and less than five kilometres to the southwest of it lies the farm of Ásólfsstaðir, 'Ásólfr's-Steads'.[124] Similarly, *Litla-Dímon* and *Stóra-Dímon*, two prominent rocky hills that face each other across the Markarfljót River, lie only about fifteen kilometres to the northwest of the church of Ásólfsskáli, 'Ásólfr's Hall', located between the slopes of Eyjafjallajökull and the south Icelandic coast.[125] This double-association between the apparently Gaelic place-name element *Dímon* and a place named after one Ásólfr just might be significant, as a certain Ásólfr was among the most prominent settlers that arrived in Iceland from Ireland; and what is more, his short biography in *Landnámabók* reads like the life of an Irish saint,

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121 Leaving aside the very insecure settlement name *Dimna* in Norway: Gammeltoft 2004: 33.

122 Gammeltoft 2004: 35. A direct though less obviously descriptive parallel to this is the name of the mountain peak *Bagall*, whose name is the Old Norse *bagall*, 'an episcopal staff, crozier', which in turn is a loan-word from Irish *bachall* (which in turn is a Latin loanword based on *baculum*, 'staff; sceptre'): Svavar Sigmundsson 2004: 308; cf. *eDIL*, *s.v.* 'bachall'.

123 Cf. below, pp. 103–104, 163.

124 Ferðakort 2006: sheet 4, square P11.

125 Ferðakort 2006: sheet 5, square P13.

Map 3: Dímon-toponyms in Iceland. Round dot: simple Dímon (Dímon in Rangárþing ytra; Dímon in Skeiða- og Gnúpverjahreppur); star: Dímunarklakkar; bar: pair of features named Stóri-Dímon and Litli-Dímon (Stóri-Dímon and Litli-Dímon in Grímsnes- og Grafningshreppur; Stóri-Dímon and Litli-Dímon in Rangárþing eystra; Stóri-Dímon and Litli-Dímon in Rangárþing ytra). Not separately noted are secondary Dímon-names such as the Dímonsgil, 'Ravine of Dímon', that is named from the mountain Dímon in Skeiða- og Gnúpverjahreppur, nor does the map show toponyms derived from Díma, whose relationship to Dímon is insecure. Map based on the place-name database of Landmælingar Íslands 2017.

Map 4: Dímon (black circle) and Ásólfsstaðir (black star); Litla-Dímon and Stóra-Dímon (grey circles) and Ásólfsskáli (grey star).

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further emphasising the Irish connection.[126] So even if Norse *Dímon*-names were Norse names formed with a Gaelic loanword rather than Gaelic names, their 'Gaelicness' still might have been felt strongly enough to also convey a feeling of 'Gaelicness' onto the areas where they were applied and to make these areas prone to attract Gaelic stories – unless both the Gaelic toponyms and the Gaelic stories go back to the same Gaelic-influenced settlers. These specific stories, however, will be treated in a later chapter, and before engaging with them it seems appropriate to outline some general tendencies shared by the Norse and Gaelic engagement with toponyms in storytelling.

126 Cf. below, pp. 128ff.

1.3.   Playing with Places: Three Irish and Three Norse Place-Stories

Are there any fundamental structural parallels between Iceland and the Gaelic world when it comes to the engagement with 'place'? Is it possible to say that both cultures, especially both narrative cultures, have a characteristic and significantly similar way of humanising the land? In the preceding section on 'place-names on the move', I have posited some tantalising possible connections between the toponymy of Iceland and that of the Gaelic-speaking world, especially the Hebrides. These connections, however, only extended as far as the names of places; they did not really extend to how people engaged with these names and with the places named by them. This latter point – how place-names, and places more generally, are engaged with in the narrative cultures of Iceland and the Gaelic-speaking world – will be the focus of the present section. The question to be pursued on the following pages will be: if one compares stories about 'place' in medieval Icelandic and medieval Irish literature, can any significant parallels be seen to emerge in the respective cultural attitudes to space and place as expressed through narrative? If this were so, then this would be important as it could be indicative of a direct cultural transfer connecting these two cultures of storytelling. Along the way, this section will also make a number of more general observations. These include a critique of a certain tendency in classic landscape writing to overlook playful engagements with space in favour of deeply meaning-laden, ethically-focused interpretations; the probability of Christian ideological statements being woven deeply into the fabric of seemingly pagan place-storytelling, especially by disarming pagan connotations of the land by turning them into something humorous; and the importance of reading place-narratives on multiple layers, as their different layers could, in many cases, arguably be meant to be understood as directly interacting with each other.

In order to approach the question of structural parallels between Icelandic and Gaelic place-storytelling, I will first present three place-stories taken from Irish literature. This will be followed by a presentation of three place-stories from Icelandic literature. These six stories will then form the basis for

a comparison that will highlight certain fundamental structural parallels in their engagement with 'place'.[127]

Three Irish Place-Stories

Heather Mound: From Topographical Feature to Person

The warrior-hero Fróech mac Idaith is one of the more prominent minor figures of medieval Irish heroic narrative, appearing in a number of stories told in both prose and verse.[128] As a stand-alone tale, the most well-known of these Fróech-tales is the Old Irish *Táin Bó Froích*, the 'Cattle-Raid of Fróech', which tells how he wooed the daughter of Queen Medb of Connacht.[129] Fróech, however, not only appears as a hero but as a man from whom place-names are said to originate. The two core narratives about Fróech and place are the tale of his death in the Old Irish 'Cattle Raid of Cúailnge' (*Táin Bó Cúailnge Recension I*, ll. 833–857)[130] and the *Dindshenchas* of Carn Froích.[131] In both texts Fróech – whose name means 'heather' or (in a secondary meaning) 'heath, moor' where heather is growing[132] – provides an origin for the place-name *Carn Froích* ('Heather Cairn, Heather Mound') or *Síd Froích* ('Heather Hill, Fairy Mound of Heather').

In *Táin Bó Cúailnge* the story is set within the broader context of a huge raid: the men of Connacht, led by Queen Medb, attack the men of Ulster in order to abduct their famous bull, the Donn Cúailnge or 'Dark One of

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127 In recent years a number of studies on space, place, and landscape in medieval Irish and Icelandic literature have been published (e.g. McMullen and Carella 2017; Lethbridge 2016; Mayburd 2014; Barraclough 2012; Siewers 2009; Benozzo 2004; also Egeler 2016–2017; Egeler, forthcoming c). A comparative study of attitudes to space and place in Irish and Icelandic literature, however, has so far been lacking.

128 For a survey of Fróech-material cf. Meid 1974: ix–x.

129 Ed. by Meid 1974; ed. and transl. by Meid 2009.

130 Ed. and transl. by O'Rahilly 1976. On the date of the text cf. below, p. 233.

131 Cf. below, note 137.

132 *eDIL*, *s.v.* '1 fráech': '(a) heather, and in wider sense low scrub growing on moorland, including bilberries, *etc.* ...; (b) a heath, moor'. In the following discussion, I normalise the spelling of names to the Old Irish standard; however, this has the sole purpose of not confusing readers unfamiliar with the caprices of Irish orthography and is not meant to imply any statement about the dating of the tales in question.

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Cúailnge'.[133] Again and again, however, their efforts are thwarted by the almost invincible hero Cú Chulainn, who single-handedly brings the advance of the men of Connacht to a virtual stop. At some point, comparatively early on in the tale, Queen Medb summons the hero Fróech and asks him to challenge and kill Cú Chulainn in single combat. Fróech agrees, sets out with a small company, and finds Cú Chulainn bathing in a ford. Fróech now takes off his clothes and challenges Cú Chulainn to a formal wrestling match in the water of the river. This match then takes its very predictable course: Cú Chulainn turns out to be the stronger fighter and submerges Fróech. He does not kill Fróech outright but rather, after nearly drowning him, lifts him out of the water again to offer him his life if he agrees to surrender. Yet Fróech refuses, forfeiting his life for the sake of his pride. Now the tale continues (ll. 852–857):[134]

> Atnaig Cú foí atherruch conid appad Fráech. Tocurethar for tír. Berait a muinter a cholaind co mboí isin dúnud. Áth Fraích iss ed ainm ind átha sin co bráth.
>
> Coínti a ndúnad n-ule Fráech. Co n-accatar banchuri i n-inaraib úanib for colaind Fraích meic Idaid. Focessat úadib issa síd. Síd Fraích ainm in tsída íarom.
>
> 'Cú Chulainn thrust him down again and Fráech died. He came to land. His people carried his body to the encampment. Ever after that ford was called Áth Fraích.
>
> The whole encampment mourned for Fráech. They saw a band of women dressed in green tunics bending over the corpse of Fráech mac Idaid. They carried him off into the fairy mound which was called Síd Fraích ever afterwards.'

In this episode there are two place-names created: *Áth Froích* and *Síd Froích*. As typically the case with Gaelic place-names, both toponyms are semantically clear, meaning 'Ford of Heather, Heather Ford, Ford of the Heath' and 'Heather Mound' or 'Moor Mound' respectively. In fact the semantics of both names are not only clear but relatively banal: both simply take a prominent topographical feature (a ford; a mound) as their base element

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133 This bull will be at the centre of Chapter 2.9, on 'Bulls and Places' (below, pp. 221ff.).

134 Ed. and transl. by O'Rahilly 1976: 27/149.

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and then further determine this feature by adding a reference to 'heather' or 'moorland', the latter in the form of a genitive construction. These relatively 'banal' semantics, however, are not enough for our storyteller. Rather than simply taking the place-names for what they are – references to a ford and a mound lying in scrubland – this storyteller presents us with a more interesting origin: they denote the ford where the warrior Mister Heather was killed fighting the most famous of all Old Irish heroes, and the mound where Mister Heather was then translated to the otherworld by a group of beautiful otherworld women. What this story does is to take semantically clear names and explain them through a story which takes a conscious step away from the obvious semantics of the toponyms, twisting the meaning of these toponyms to create a slightly surreal, entertaining story.[135]

That this story is indeed not meant to be believed, but to be understood as fictitious, becomes even clearer from the *Dindshenchas* of Heather Mound. The *Dindshenchas*, literally 'Lore of High Places', is a genre of tales about the origins of place-names: in both prose and verse, following a more or less set pattern, it does nothing but tell stories about how places got their names.[136] The *Dindshenchas* of Heather Mound is a typical example of the genre.[137] The Prose-*Dindshenchas* commences with the traditional opening

135 That the hero Fróech ('Mister Heather') has been created out of a place-name element was already noted by Thurneysen 1921: 37, who classically remarks: 'Seit Anfang der Sagenüberlieferung finden wir, daß die Erzähler sich Helden zum Teil dadurch schaffen, daß sie Teile von Ortsnamen auf Personen beziehen, nach denen sie sie benannt sein lassen. ... Einer der ersten Helden, die in dem ,Wegtreiben der Rinder von Cuailnge' durch CūChulainn fallen, ist Fræch; er wird in *Āth Froich* ,Furt des Heidekrauts' ertränkt und seine Leiche nach *Sīd Froich* ,Heidekraut-Elfenhügel' getragen; so ist das Heidekraut (*fræch*) zum Helden geworden. Und in derselben Sage wie in vielen anderen, namentlich in der Vorgeschichte Irlands, sind eine Unmenge von Personennamen auf diese Weise gewonnen. Besonders seit dem 10. Jahrhundert finden wir dann ganze Gedichte, die Ortsnamen erklären, indem sie die angeblich darin genannte Person dort umkommen lassen oder sonstwie mit dem Ort in Verbindung bringen.'

136 For an introduction with an exhaustive bibliography cf. Murray 2017; with focus on the ('serious') cosmological and moral aspects of the *Dindshenchas*, which are strongly present in many stories but are not at the centre of my discussion, cf. Toner 2014. For editions with translations cf. *Metrical Dindshenchas*, ed. and transl. by Gwynn 1903–1935; *Bodleian Dindshenchas*, ed. and transl. by Stokes 1892; *Rennes Dindshenchas*, ed. and transl. by Stokes 1894–1895; *Edinburgh Dindshenchas*, ed. and transl. by Stokes 1893a.

137 Prose tale: *Rennes Dindshenchas*, ed. and transl. by Stokes 1894–1895, there *Revue Celtique* 16 (1895): 136–139. Metrical version: *Metrical Dindshenchas*, ed. and

question *Carnd Fraich, canus rohainm*niged*?* ('Carn Froích, whence was it named?') and then goes on to tell how the place got this name – but it does not offer a sole explanation, instead giving several alternative ones in a way that is a fundamental characteristic of the genre.[138] According to the *Dindshenchas*, the toponyms *Carn Froích* or *Síd Froích* (both of which are used interchangeably in this text, and both of which are semantically roughly equivalent, meaning 'Heather Mound' with the connotation respectively of an artificially constructed mound and a fairy mound) could be explained by the following stories:

- Mister Heather was the son of Conall, the foster father of the legendary King Conn of the Hundred Battles; he fell in combat against another Mister Heather, who was the champion of a rival king, and after his heroic death he was brought to the Hill of the Assembly near the Connacht royal seat of Crúachain. There he was buried in a cairn, which was then named *Carn Froích*, 'Heather Mound'.

- Mister Heather, son of Fídach, wooed the daughter of Queen Medb of Connacht. In order to prove his love, he shook a rowan tree that grew over a monster-infested lake. The resident water monster wounded him badly, but he was healed in an otherworld mound (in Irish literature, mounds and hills frequently offer access to the otherworld) which henceforth was called *Carn Froích*, 'Heather Mound'.

- Or perhaps, the text continues, Mister Heather was killed by said water monster and the mound got its name because he was buried there. But the *Dindshenchas* itself quickly emphasises that this is not true, pointing to the account of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, where Mister Heather was killed by Cú Chulainn, implying that he could not have been killed by a water monster.

- Finally the *Dindshenchas* recounts the tale of the *Táin* according to which the body of Mister Heather, after his death by the hand of Cú Chulainn, was fetched into an elf mound by a group of otherworldly women; this mound has been called *Síd Froích*, 'Heather Mound', ever since.[139]

What this text does is to present its audience with a broad range of possible explanations of the toponym 'Heather Mound'. Each of these not only moves

transl. by Gwynn 1903–1935, part 3, pp. 356–365.

138 The *Metrical Dindshenchas* (above, note 137) restricts itself to two alternative explanations, being the first and last of the four options expounded by the Prose-*Dindshenchas*.

139 Cf. Thurneysen 1921: 248.

a big step away from its 'obvious' (and banal) semantics but each of them also seems to aim at being even more implausible than its respective predecessor: from a story about a comparatively normal dead human hero fallen while trying to repel another human warrior, the hyperbole intensifies to engender a water-monster story and then culminates in the hero's post-mortem translation to the otherworld by a band of otherworld women who bodily enter this world to fetch the hero's corpse. This juxtaposition of several increasingly surreal alternative explanations may be intended to function as a narrative stratagem to emphasise that none of these variant explanations should be taken too seriously. It seems that stories like the tales of Heather Mound were not meant to be believed; rather, this assemblage of contradictory stories was meant to be understood as a narrative strategy for providing witty entertainment. That these stories make no claim to historical truth – other than in the most tongue-in-cheek way – is also implied by the detail that one variant's claim to historicity is even rejected by the *Dindshenchas*-text itself. The text makes an explicit and pseudo-'source critical' statement that Heather Mound is not the grave mound where Mister Heather was buried after being killed by a water monster because this is contradicted by the *Táin*. This can be read as a signpost for the audience: by pretending a pseudo-critical methodology, this detail further ironises the whole discourse on the origin of 'Heather Mound'.[140] This way of telling stories about places certainly bestows 'meaning' (in the sense of culturally specific associations) onto the places it plays with, but this 'meaning' has very little to do with the serious, deeply-felt ethical issues that Simon Schama placed at the roots of his understanding of 'place'.[141] This approach to place-storytelling instead lightens the mood by playing with concepts of heroism and the otherworld in a deeply ironic way.

140 Alternatively, it would in principle also be possible to interpret such a weighing of sources against each other as a genuine attempt to determine the 'true' form of a particular place-name tradition. Yet while it cannot be precluded that some readers understood the 'source-criticism' displayed by some *Dindshenchas*-stories in such a way, such a reading does, in the face of the blatant grotesqueness of many tales, not seem a plausible general interpretative approach to this corpus. Cf. already Thurneysen 1921: 46 on the liberty which medieval Irish authors took in treating place-name stories and which clearly was a conscious one. (Similarly on the treatment of nicknames in early Irish literature cf. Carney 1969: 165.) At the same time, it should also be noted that not everything in the *Dindshenchas* was mere entertainment, a point that we will return to below (esp. p. 83).

141 Cf. above, p. 28.

Medb's Venerated Tree: Places and Horse-Riding

Located somewhere between a story about a place-name and a story about the materiality of a place is the account of *Bile Medba*, 'Medb's Venerated Tree', in the Old Irish *Táin Bó Cúailnge*.[142] Of the two constituent elements of the toponym *Bile Medba*, 'Medb' is the legendary queen of Connacht who led the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, the 'Cattle Raid of Cúailnge', against the men of Ulster in order to abduct their famous bull, the Dark One of Cúailnge. Medb is one of the most central and colourful characters of the Ulster Cycle, the most important heroic narrative cycle of the Irish early Middle Ages. In this cycle of tales, she is depicted as a larger-than-life figure who sometimes comes close to transcending human nature by turning into a personification of sovereignty itself, while at the same time being the target of some acerbic literary misogyny. Furthermore, it has repeatedly been suggested (as well as vehemently rejected) that this literary figure might be a euhemerised reflex of a pre-Christian goddess.[143] The other element of the toponym *Bile Medba*, the '*bile* of Medb', is a term for a particularly large and important tree: *bile* can denote isolated large trees, trees serving as landmarks, and especially ancient and venerated trees, including the tree from which the True Cross was made.[144] Designating an element of the landscape that by definition would have been widely visible, it is a rather common element in place-names, and normally translated as 'sacred tree'.[145] In the *Táin*, *Bile Medba* is explained very much in passing, in the form of a simple one-sentence statement. This short statement is found in the context of an account of Medb's return from a military side-campaign. The text concisely describes the effects of Medb's travels on the toponymy of the land. Thus it is said that fords and hills where Medb spent the night respectively were named *Áth Medba*, 'Medb's Ford', and *Dindgna Medba*, 'Medb's Hill, Medb's Mound, Medb's Landmark'. Place-names of the type *Bile Medba* come into being in a similar way, being explained in the following manner (*Recension I*, ll. 1534–1535):[146]

> Nach airm trá i Cuib in ro sáidi Medb echfleisc, is Bile Medba a ainm.

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142 Ed. and transl. by O'Rahilly 1976. In general on *Bile Medba* cf. Hogan and Ó Corráin 2017, *s.v.* '4393: bile medba'; Egeler 2012: 69; Ó Riain *et al.* 2005: 146; Edel 1997: 158 (with note 61); Thurneysen 1930: 108; Hogan 1910, *s.v.* 'bile medba'.

143 In general on Medb cf. Irslinger 2017; Egeler 2012; Dominguez 2010; Ó Cathasaigh 2009; Thurneysen 1933; Thurneysen 1930; Ó Máille 1928.

144 *eDIL*, *s.v.* '1 bile'; cf. Bondarenko 2014: 57–98.

145 Ó Riain *et al.* 2005: 145–147.

146 Ed. and transl. by O'Rahilly 1967: ll. 1534–1535 (pp. 47/167), but the translation adapted by me.

'Every place in Cuib where Medb planted her horsewhip, its name is Bile
Medba.'

Nothing more is said about *Bile Medba*. In marked contrast to the treat-
ment of 'Heather Mound' elsewhere in the same text and in a dedicated
Dindshenchas narrative, all we are given is a single sentence. This illustrates
to which extent place-lore could be alluded to merely in passing, something
which implies that the text's audience was deeply familiar with the concepts
and workings of place-stories and needed no more than a one-sentence out-
line to understand and appreciate their narrative potential. The second aspect
that is central to this minimalist place-story is its strangeness: the biggest
trees in the land are explained as having derived from a horsewhip planted
in the ground. As Doris Edel remarks, this could well be interpreted as an
example of the grotesque.[147] Viewed against the background of the story of
'Heather Mound', it is in fact difficult to imagine a different reading.[148] Just
as the place-story of 'Heather Mound' – which grotesquely explains 'Heather
Mound' as the place of Mister Heather's translation to the otherworld rather
than as a mound covered in heather – this place-story also takes a semantically
transparent toponym and 'explains' it through a story which takes a conscious
and somewhat grotesque step away from the obvious meaning of the place-
name. In this case it is done by explaining a place-name that makes reference
to a huge tree by claiming it is derived from a small wooden implement being
stuck into the ground. Again, grotesqueness is consciously constructed with

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147 Edel 1997: 158. A comparison with a miracle recounted in the tenth-century
     Tripartite Life of Saint Patrick may perhaps serve to underscore the grotesqueness
     of this story: on one occasion Saint Patrick plants his horsewhip into the ground,
     which then becomes a bush (*Vita tripartita*, ed. and transl. by Stokes 1887: 158, ll.
     22–23). It may be significant that even the horsewhip of Saint Patrick, who in the
     Tripartite Life is by no measure depicted as a humble man, does not attain the size
     of a *bile*. (Though the term *dos* that is used in the Life can, apart from a bush, also
     denote a full-sized tree: *eDIL*, *s.v.* '1 dos'.) Similarly cf. the transformation of a holly
     stake, which had previously been used to dig a holy well, into a bush in the *Life of
     Senán, son of Gerrcenn* (*Betha Shenáin meic Geirginn,* ll. 2375–2387, ed. and transl.
     by Stokes 1890: 54–74, 201–221; Bray 1992: 86, 109, 129). In an even broader hagi-
     ographic context, and for purely typological purposes, one might also remember
     the Holy Thorn of Glastonbury, folklorically derived from the walking stick of Josef
     of Arimathea; here again the size-relation between the rather small bush-like
     thorn tree and the walking stick is notably less grotesque than the relationship
     between the horsewhip and the huge *bile*.
148 Cf. Egeler 2012: 69.

the help of a literary technique which, at least on one level, arguably aims at creating witty entertainment.

Beltraw Strand: Bodily Matters

In contrast to the preceding examples, the engagement with the landscape that we can observe in an episode of *Cath Maige Tuired*, the '(Second) Battle of Mag Tuired',[149] seems to have a clear focus primarily on the materiality of the land; yet even so it maintains a love of the grotesque.[150] This text, probably an eleventh-century compilation based on ninth-century material,[151] describes one of the great battles of Irish literary mythology, fought between the two otherworldly peoples of the Túatha Dé Danann and the Fomore. The narrator's sympathy clearly lies with the Túatha Dé Danann, who are often considered the old gods of pre-Christian Ireland. In *Cath Maige Tuired* they are wronged by the Fomore and justly defend themselves, shaking off the yoke of the Fomore's rule. One of the most important members of the Túatha Dé is the Dagda, who contributes significantly to their final victory, not least by painstakingly orchestrating the run-up to the battle. These preparations include one episode in which he goes to great lengths to delay the final encounter long enough to ensure that, before the decisive engagement, everything is in place which will be necessary for the Túatha Dé to triumph.

In this episode the Dagda goes to the camp of the Fomore to ask for a truce. The Fomore grant this but they also force him to enjoy a truly monstrous hospitality: they prepare a porridge of four score gallons of milk and the same amount of meat and fat, and furthermore add goats, sheep, and pigs – and the Dagda is forced to eat it all on pain of death, and in order to do so he must ladle this gargantuan meal from a hole in the ground. The Dagda indeed manages to consume this monstrous repast, and finally he leaves in a kind of mock-triumph, his belly distended from the superhuman amount of food he had to ingest (§§88–93). But his tribulations continue (§93):[152]

> Luid úaidib íer*um* co T*rá*cht Aebae. Níruho herosai t*rá* den láec[h] imd*echt* lie m*éit* a bronn. Ba drochruid a cong*r*aim ... . Gabol gicca roth*ach* feidm

149 Ed. and transl. by Gray 1982; Stokes 1891.
150 For general discussions of this episode cf. Williams 2016: 118–126; Edel 2006: 99–101. On roughly comparable motifs elsewhere in early Irish storytelling cf. Edel 1997: 157–158.
151 Gray 1982: 11.
152 Ed. and transl. by Gray 1982: 46–49.

o*cht*air ina diaid, go mba lór do clod coic*rí*ce a sli*cht* 'na degaidh. Gonad dei dogaror Sli*cht* Loirge an Dag*dai*. Is ed de*nucht* leb*ar* pe*nn*tol. ... A mboí íe*rum* og imdect *co n*-acu an n-ingen foro cind go ndeilb nderscoighte. Sí cáemt*r*ilsich. Luid m*en*mo an Dagd*ai* díi, *acht* náruho túaloigg lia a p*r*oinn. Gabois an ingen fora cáin*ed*h ... .

'Then he went away from them to Tráigh Eabha. It was not easy for the warrior to move along on account of the size of his belly. His appearance was unsightly ... . He trailed behind him a wheeled fork which was the work of eight men to move, and its track was enough for the boundary ditch of a province. It is called "The Track of the Dagda's Club" for that reason. His long penis was uncovered. ... As he went along he saw a girl in front of him, a good-looking young woman with an excellent figure, her hair in beautiful tresses. The Dagda desired her, but he was impotent on account of his belly. The girl began to mock him ... .'

This girl then requests that the Dagda carry her on his back, and when he refuses she resorts to fisticuffs:

Duscaru aitherr*ach* ⁊ slaithe go léir, gorolín na futhorbe imbe do caindiubur a p*r*onn; ⁊ nos-égnith*er* gondo-ruccoud f*or*a muin fo th*rí*. ... 'Ná himber cuitb*iud* form ní bos móu, a ingen,' al *sé*. 'Bid atégen tacuo,' al síe. Is íar*um* gonglóisie asin d*er*c íar telcodh a p*r*ond. Sech ba hairi sin boí furech na hin-gene dó-som go cíoa*n* móir. At*r*aoí-sium íer*um*, ⁊ gabaid an ingen f*or*o muin; ⁊ dob*er*t téorae clochau ina cris. *Ocus* dofuit cech cloch ar úair aire – *ocus* atberud bat*ar* íat a ferdai deroc*r*atar úad. Lingthe an ing*en* foair ⁊ doslais t*ar*a tóin é, ⁊ lomort*ar* a caither frithrosc. Gondric íer*um* ion Dag*dae* frie a bancharoid, ⁊ dogníead cairdene íer*um*. Atá a llát*r*ach for T*r*ácht Eoboile áit a comarnacht*ar*.

'She fell upon him again and beat him hard, so that the furrow around him filled with the excrement from his belly; and she satirized him three times so that he would carry her upon his back. ... "Do not mock me anymore, girl," he said. "It will certainly be hard," she said. Then he moved out of the hole, after letting go the contents of his belly, and the girl had waited for that for a long time. He got up then, and took the girl on his back; and he put three stones in his belt. Each stone fell from it in turn – and it has been said that they were his testicles which fell from it. The girl jumped on him and struck him across the rump, and her curly pubic hair was revealed. Then the Dagda gained a mistress, and they made love. The mark remains at Beltraw Strand where they came together.'

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Fig. 1: Mulán Cholm Cille, 'Columba's Boulder', on the shore of Port Chorrúch on Aran. This erratic block is clearly distinct from the rock in its surroundings already due to its different colour, which predestines it to become the focus of a place-story. © M. Egeler, 2015.

Later the girl reveals herself as a powerful sorceress indeed and single-handedly destroys one-ninth of the Fomore army.

In this episode, places and more specifically landscape features play a key role. For one, some of the place-names mentioned localise the action of the tale, even if they are not brought into being by it (at least insofar as it is possible to say; Trácht Eoboile/'Beltraw Strand' is obscure, and Tráigh Eabha seems to mean 'Eve's Beach'[153] and thus may be a purely literary creation anticipating the Dagda's encounter with his forceful and not very courteous lover). Furthermore, the tale gives an account of how a number of the land's physical features are created. The 'Track of the Dagda's Club' (*Slicht Loirge an Dagdai*) sounds suspiciously like a prehistoric linear earthwork of the type represented by the Black Pig's Dyke which runs through several counties in south-west Ulster and north-east Connacht, or by the Claidh Dubh or 'Black Ditch' in County Cork. The three stones known as the Dagda's testicles

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153 Cf. *eDIL, s.v.* 'Eba'.

may have been glacial erratics, and the traces (*láthrach*)[154] of the Dagda's intercourse with the girl at Beltraw Strand might have been some sort of impression on the shoreline that evoked the bed of a couple's lovemaking. Typological parallels that suggest such a reading of the latter two elements are provided by twentieth-century as well as medieval folklore about the traces left behind by Irish saints. Thus *Mulán Cholm Cille*, 'Columba's Boulder', is a block of metamorphic rock from Connemara that the movement of the ice during the last Ice Age shifted to the limestone shore of Aran (fig. 1). Folklorically, this boulder is identified as the boat which the saint used to cross over from the Irish mainland to the island in Galway Bay where it is now located: being geologically different from the surrounding rock, this foundling is an anomaly in its landscape that stands out visually and thus fostered a story to explain its origin.[155] Exactly the same may have been the case with the foundlings explained as the Dagda's testicles. Similarly, the traces of the Dagda's rough lovemaking on the shore of Beltraw Strand may find a certain typological parallel in a story about Saint Enda and Saint Columba that is set near Cill Éinne, again on Aran, on the shore a couple of miles to the south-east of Columba's Boulder. According to this story, the two saints Enda and Columba get into a fierce argument about whether Enda should grant Columba a little bit of Aran. This argument soon turns violent: Enda grabs Columba and dashes him against the coastal rocks, and the marks left by Columba's ribs are supposedly still to be seen there. These marks, as they appear in the story, may refer to some fissures in a sheet of rock near the low-tide mark.[156] This piece of saintly if violent folklore illustrates how even comparatively inconspicuous natural features of the shoreline can be imbued with 'meaning' through stories that explain their origin as an imprint left by a human body. The 'mark' left by the Dagda's lovemaking with the girl may have been a similar kind of feature. That such marks, which inscribed stories into the rock of the landscape, were already a feature of medieval Irish narrative is made clear in a very explicit way in the tenth-century *Tripartite Life* of Saint Patrick. On one occasion Patrick blesses the veils worn by two nuns in taking

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154 *eDIL, s.v.* 'láthrach' gives the meaning of the term as 'site, position' and 'imprint, trace'.

155 Robinson 2009a: 246–251. On my use of Tim Robinson's literary ethnography of the western Irish landscape cf. below, note 205. For a close parallel that probably is already medieval cf. the story connected with Saint Declan's Stone, which is connected with a glacial erratic on the foreshore below Ardmore (below, pp. 110ff. and fig. 10 [with caption]). Further on the mythologisation of conspicuous boulders cf. Egeler 2016–2017.

156 Robinson 2009a: 305–306.

their final vows, and the nuns' feet leave an impression in the stone on which they are standing.[157] The motif of an angel leaving his footprint in a rock already appears in the treatments of Patrick's life by Muirchú (I.11[10].7; I.15[13].3) and Tírechán (III.1 50.1) from the late seventh century.[158] The 'physical impression of a body left in the landscape' seems a stock motif that was present in Irish storytelling (and the Irish engagement with the Irish landscape) in the earliest strata of Irish literature and could be worked into the most varied types of tales.

In sum, the account of Beltraw Strand and its surroundings in *Cath Maige Tuired* once more illustrates how fond place-storytelling is of the grotesque: this tale of food, excrement, and sex, as well as the humiliation of a major mythological figure, presents a series of episodes that are connected with named places and physical features of the landscape. The land seems charged with comedy – though, at the same time, comedy is not all there is. As mentioned above when I introduced 'place' as a concept, current landscape-theoretical writing puts a strong focus on the depth and importance of the 'meaning' which is connected to the landscape, a meaning that can provide guidance and orientation for human life. This type of meaning certainly does not form the surface layer of the grotesquely comical account of sex and excrement that we are presented with by *Cath Maige Tuired*; there seems to be an aspect of comedy here which has been largely neglected by current landscape writing. Yet there may also be a more serious layer. The Dagda's encounter with the girl leads to the acquisition of her help, which makes a major contribution to the ultimate defeat of the Fomore. Thus, while seemingly humiliated, the Dagda ultimately is triumphant, and this triumph leads to a liberation of the land from the tyranny of the Fomore and to the reestablishment of the just order of things.[159] So while there is comical grotesqueness, this grotesqueness is within a context that is full of 'meaning' in the sense employed by the current landscape-theoretical discourse: a 'meaning' that refers to the establishment of the right order of the world.[160]

157 *Vita tripartita*, ed. and transl. by Stokes 1887: 90, ll. 13–16; dating: Sharpe 1991: 20.
158 Muirchú and Tírechán both ed. and transl. by Bieler 1979: 1–167; dating: Sharpe 1991: 12–14.
159 Cf. Williams 2016: 122.
160 Cf. above, p. 28.

Three Icelandic Place-Stories

Gufuskálar: From Topographical Feature to Person

Probably the single most place-focused text of Old Norse literature is *Landnámabók*, the 'Book of Settlements', which, following a largely geographical order, tells the story of the places of Iceland: how they were settled, by whom their names were established, and the incidents connected with their earliest inhabitants and, in many cases, with the names that were given to them.[161] Both W. A. Craigie and Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson have considered this work to be largely folkloric in nature:[162] a collection of folklore about Icelandic places cast into written form. There certainly is a grain of truth in this, but it also has to be remembered that *Landnámabók* is nothing like a simple recording of oral lore. Rather, it is first and foremost a literary text extant in revisions of revisions. Yet at the same time one can never say for certain whether a later revision that differs from an earlier one has given an entry a primarily literary twist, or whether it has 'corrected' it in order to bring it closer to a (perhaps widely known) oral, 'folkloric' tradition. Even less is there a straightforward way of judging just how old are any of the traditions recounted in *Landnámabók*.[163] Nevertheless, *Landnámabók* is the closest we have to a systematic account of Icelandic place-lore, be it folkloric or literary (or both), and the present discussion will return to this text time and again.

One story preserved in *Landnámabók* that reveals much about this text's (and the underlying tradition's) attitude to space and place is the account of how Ketill Steam (*Ketill gufa*) took land. Amongst other things, this text is interesting because it provides a striking example of the particular dynamics that can develop between the semantics of place-names as words and the stories that can be told to explain these place-names. The oldest extant version of this story is found in the *Sturlubók*-recension of *Landnámabók*. The generally more detailed version, however, is the recension in *Hauksbók*. While the two accounts do not in this case diverge in any significant points, I will quote the slightly later *Hauksbók*-version. The reason for this is that the account of the settlement of Ketill Steam ends with Ørlygr Hrappsson, whose story will later

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161 Cf. above, p. 31.
162 Craigie 1893: 119; Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1999: 146. Cf. also Gísli Sigurðsson 2000: xvii, who characterises the approach that *Landnámabók* takes to its material as 'very typical of oral cultures'.
163 Cf. Egeler 2015c; Jakob Benediktsson 1966–1969.

demand considerable attention – but only in the specific form in which it is found in *Hauksbók*.[164] The story of Ketill Steam's arrival in Iceland runs as follows (H97; cf. S125):[165]

> A man was called Ketill Steam (*gufa*), the son of Ørlygr, son of Bǫðvarr, son of Vígsterkr. Ørlygr was married to Signý, daughter of Óblauðr, the sister of Hǫgni the Fair. Their son Ketill came out [to Iceland] late in the time of the settlements. He had been plundering in the West and had brought Irish slaves from Ireland. One was called Þormóðr, another Flóki; Kóri and Svartr and two named Skorri. Ketill took Rosmhvalanes Peninsula. There he spent the first winter at Gufuskálar, 'Steam's-Houses', and in spring he went further inland on the peninsula and spent the second winter at Gufunes, 'Steam's-Peninsula'. Then Skorri the Elder and Flóki ran away together with two women and much livestock. They were in hiding in Skorraholt, 'Skorri's Forest'; but they were killed in Flókadalr, 'Flóki's Valley', and Skorradalr, 'Skorri's Valley'. Ketill did not acquire a residence on the headlands, and he went further into the Borgarfjǫrðr Fjord to find a residence for himself, and he spent the third winter at Gufuskálar, 'Steam's-Houses', by the river Gufá, 'Steam-River'. The fourth winter he spent at Gufuskálar, 'Steam's-Houses', on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula. Early in spring he went deeper into the Breiðafjǫrðr Fjord to find a residence for himself. There he was at Guðmundarstaðir, 'Guðmundr's Steads', and asked for the hand of Ýrr, the daughter of Guðmundr, and obtained her. Geirmundr then pointed Ketill to lands west of the fjord. Ketill's slaves ran away from Snæfellsnes and in the night appeared at Lambastaðir, 'Lambi's-Steads'. At that time, Þórðr, the son of Þorgeirr *lambi*, lived there. The slaves then carried fire to the houses and burned Þórðr and all the members of his household inside. Then they broke into a storage shed and took much merchandise in movable property and turned in the direction of Álptanes Peninsula. In the morning, when they had just gone away, Lambi the Strong, the son of Þórðr, came from the assembly. He went after them and had men with him; and when the slaves saw that, everyone ran his own way. They caught Kóri on Kóranes, 'Kóri's Peninsula', and some went into the water. They took Svartr on Svartssker, 'Svartr's Skerry', and Skorri on Skorrey, 'Skorri-Island', and Þormóðr on Þormóðssker, 'Þormóðr's Skerry'. That is a nautical mile away from the land. Ketill Steam took Gufufjǫrðr, 'Steam's Fjord', and Skálanes Peninsula

164 Cf. below, pp. 110ff.
165 My translation after the text of Finnur Jónsson 1900; for the original Old Norse text cf. the appendix to this sub-section.

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as far as the Kollafjǫrðr Fjord. Oddi was the son of Ketill and Ýrr; he was married to Þorlaug, daughter of Hrólfr from Ballará River and of Þuríðr, the daughter of Valþjófr, son of Ørlygr from Esjuberg Cliff.

Two things become clear from this entry in *Landnámabók*: that the Icelanders had a certain inclination to name places after slaughtered Irish slaves; and that Icelandic place-names could provide steam enough to make a man.[166] Or to put it differently, the main interest of this passage lies, on the one hand, in the close connection that it claims between Icelandic toponymy and the Gaelic world; and, on the other hand, in the person of Ketill Steam. The former aspect is the more straightforward of the two. This passage presents one of a number of accounts which refer to the Norse practice of slaving in Ireland and thus illustrate the resulting forced migration of captive Gaels to Iceland. Above I have already mentioned the exactly parallel case of the Westman Islands: at least according to *Landnámabók*, these islands also received their name because they were the place where a number of runaway Gaelic slaves were killed. Thus in both accounts there are place-names given which refer to the killing of escaped slaves of Gaelic origin.[167] As a narrative strategy this pattern allows the storyteller both to acknowledge a Gaelic element in Icelandic toponymy and to assert that there is nothing genuinely Gaelic about Iceland, as the place-names merely 'testify' to the ultimate superiority of the Norse over whatever Gaels reached Iceland. Here, we seem to be observing a deeply ethnocentric and racist perspective on the process of Norse colonial expansion. Nevertheless, it is of some interest to note that the storyteller who recounts this tale finds it at all necessary to say that Icelandic toponymy reflects the presence (if silenced) of Gaels in Iceland. It seems that maybe this presence was so prominent that it could not simply be denied but had to be dealt with some other way. This arising suspicion of a strong Gaelic presence certainly combines interestingly with the fact that this entry in *Landnámabók* ends with 'Ørlygr from Esjuberg Cliff', whom we will meet again below, as he was a strongly Gaelicised Norse settler from the Hebrides who appears to have filled his lands with narrative lore of a decidedly Gaelic kind[168] and whose backyard mountain Esja has a name that also reappears on the Outer Hebrides.[169]

166 See below.
167 Cf. above, pp. 32–33.
168 Below, pp. 110ff.
169 Cf. above, pp. 43ff.

Fig. 2: The lava field at Gufuskálar in north-western Snæfellsnes. © M. Egeler, 2014.

The second point of particular interest about our narrative is the person of *Ketill gufa*, 'Ketill Steam'. The *Landnámabók*-account presents Ketill's nick-name *gufa* as the basis for the naming of the places where Ketill spent shorter or longer periods of time:

- *Gufuskálar*, 'Steam's-Houses', on Rosmhvalanes;
- *Gufunes*, 'Steam's-Peninsula';
- *Gufuskálar*, 'Steam's-Houses', by the river *Gufá*, 'Steam-River';[170]
- *Gufuskálar*, 'Steam's-Houses', on Snæfellsnes (fig. 2);
- *Gufufjǫrðr*, 'Steam's Fjord'.

Ketill Steam here is presented as a founder-hero acting in the primeval *illud tempus* of the Settlement Period, the Icelandic Dreamtime, wandering the land and naming its places after himself wherever he sits down to rest. On one level there is nothing at all special about this: within the narrative cosmos of *Landnámabók* the most common way that a farmstead receives its name is from the first settler who takes land there. Seen from this per-spective it is perfectly normal, even ordinary, that Ketill should name places after himself. What sets this account apart, however, is the almost Odyssean scale of Ketill's supposed wanderings, during which he perambulates a large

170 On the linguistic formation of the latter toponym cf. below, note 345.

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swathe of western Iceland, naming no less than six places after himself: three identically named farms (Gufuskálar), one peninsula, one river, and one fjord. These places are, furthermore, not named after his primary name Ketill but after his nickname 'Steam'. This is striking not least because *gufa* ('Steam') is hardly a typical element of personal names; it is an appellative referring to, among other things, the steam of volcanic hot springs – and in Iceland steaming hot springs are arguably a much more common feature of the landscape than steaming persons. As Oskar Bandle noted several decades ago,[171] and as Gillian Fellows-Jensen has reasserted more recently,[172] what is happening here is that a settler is created as a back-formation from a group of place-names: the places named *Gufu*-X are said to be derived from Ketill *gufa*, but in fact the person of Ketill has been invented to furnish the very pragmatic, environmentally descriptive *Gufu*-toponyms with a story. Thus topographical features are turned into a person.

Interestingly, there may even be a hint in this account that this move from topography to person is a very conscious one which perhaps was meant to be understood by the story's original audience. For not only the nickname *gufa* but also the personal name *Ketill* is a semantically clear name: the noun *ketill* is the common word for a 'cauldron'. Thus the supposed name-giver of places named for the vapour of hot springs is called 'Cauldron Steam'. It seems most unlikely that this double-reference to boiling water is due to mere chance; rather, whoever invented Mister Steam to account for the semantically clear toponyms formed with *gufa*, took these semantically clear toponyms and narratively twisted them to refer to a steamy person, and in order to heighten the entertainment value of this invention he encoded this personalising twist also in Mister Steam's first name, 'Cauldron'. In a way, all the storyteller did was to take steaming places and transpose their boiling water from the hot volcanic bedrock into a human vessel.

However, if all this be so, it then raises a fundamental question about the corpus of storytelling connected with Icelandic toponymy: how much of it is based on narrative back-formations that create persons from places rather than reporting the 'true' origins of place-names? How much is a conscious, playful invention? In the case of Ketill Steam and the *Gufa*-toponyms, the excessive number of steam-places and the marking of the narrative invention by the use of the name 'Cauldron' make it unusually clear that we are dealing with a consciously fictional narrative creation. Yet how many cases are there in which the same is happening, merely in a way less marked? To stay with

171 Bandle 1977: 52, 62.
172 Fellows-Jensen 1996: 120.

the example of the narrative quoted above, are Skorraholt ('Skorri's Forest'), Skorradalr ('Skorri's Valley'), and Skorrey ('Skorri-Island') really named after a person called Skorri or are these names perhaps derived from the bird known as *skorri* (perhaps the oystercatcher)?[173] And is Lambastaðir really 'Lambi's-Steads' or rather 'Farm of the Lambs', i.e. 'Sheep Farm'? It might just be the case that Cauldron Steam is simply the most obvious among many cases where a place became a person rather than the other way round.[174]

173 Cf. Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson 1874, *s.v.* 'skorri'. I owe thanks to Kevin J. Gaston for suggesting the tentative identification of this bird, which Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson enigmatically translate as 'pie', with the oystercatcher (see Egeler, forthcoming c, note 20).
174 Cf. above, note 135.

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Appendix: The Old Norse text of Ketill Steam's settlement account according to the H-recension of Landnámabók (ch. 97; ed. by Finnur Jónsson 1900).

Ketill ɢufa het madr svn Orlyx Bodvarss(vnar) Vigsterks sunar. Orlygr atti Signyiu Oblaudsdottur systur Hogna hins ʜvita. Ketill s(vn) þeira kom vt sid landnama tidar. hann hafdi verit i vestr viking ok haft af Irlandi þræla irska. het einn Þormodr annarr Floki. Kori ok Svartr ok Skorar íj. Ketill tók Rosmhvalanes. sat hann þar hinn fysta vetr at Gufuskálum. en vm varit fór hann inn a nes ok sat at Gufunesi annan vetr. þa liópu þeir Skorri hinn ellri ok Floki a brott med konur ij ok fe mikit. þeir varu a laun i Skorra hollti. enn þeir voru drepner i Flokadal ok Skoradal. Ketill feck engan bustad a Nesium ok for hann inn i Borgarfiord at leita ser at bustad. ok sat hinn ííj vetr a Gufuskalumm vid Gufa. hinn íííj. vetr var hann a Sniofiallznesi at Gufuskalum. snemma vmm varit for hann inn i Breidafiord at leita ser at bustad. þa var hann a Geirmundarstodum. ok bad Yrar dottor Geirmundar ok feck hennar. visadi Geirmundr þa Katli til landa fyri vestan fiord. þrælar Ketils liopu brott af Sniofialls nesi ok kvomv framm vm nott a Lambastodumm. þar bio þa Þorþr s(vn) Þorgeirs ʟamba. þrælarner baru þar elld at hvsumm ok brendu Þord inni ok hivn hans oll. þeir brutu þar upp eitt búr ok toko voro mikla i lausa fe ok sneru a leid til Alftaness. Lambi hinn sterki s(vn) Þorþar kom af þingi vmm morguninn þa er þeir voru ny farner brott. hann ferr eptir þeim ok menn med hanum. en er þrælarnir sia þad liop sinn veg hvorr. þeir tókv Cora i Koranesi. enn sumer genngu a sund. Svart tóku þeir i Svartz skeri. en Skora i Skorrey enn Þormod i Þormodzskeri. þat er vika vndan landi. Ketill ɢufa nam Gufuf(iord) ok Skalanes til Kollaf(iardar). Oddi var s(vn) þeira Ketils ok Yrar er atti Þorlaugu Hrolfsdottur fra Ballar á ok Þuridar dottur Valþiofs Orlygs s(vnar) frá Esiubergi.

Flugumýrr: Places and Horse-Riding

Place-names in Iceland need not be derived from persons; animals also play a role in place-lore. One of the most elaborate faunal place-stories in *Landnámabók* is the account of how the moorland farm Flugumýrr – today's Flugumýri in northern Iceland – got its name (fig. 3). This account is virtually identical in the *Hauksbók*- and *Sturlubók*-recensions of *Landnámabók*, leaving aside some confusion in the personal names of the H-recension which might be taken to suggest that a copyist grew somewhat befuddled by a surplus of similar names. In the older (and clearer) S-version, the story runs as follows (S202; cf. H169):[175]

> Þórir Dove's-Beak was a freedman of Þórir-of-the-Oxen. He came with his ship into Gǫnguskarðáróss Estuary. At that time the whole district was settled in the west. At Landbrot Land-Slip he crossed the Jǫkulsá River in a northerly direction and took land between Glóðafeykisá River and Djúpá River and lived at Flugumýrr Moor. At that time a ship [came] out [to Iceland] into Kolbeinsáróss Estuary, loaded with livestock, and they lost a foal in the Brimnesskógar Forests, and Þórir Dove's-Beak bought the chance of finding it [i.e. he acquired the right to keep it in case he should find it] and did so. That was the fastest of all horses and was called Fluga: 'Fly'.
>
> Ǫrn was the name of a man. He sailed between the outermost ends of the land. He was versed in witchcraft. He waylaid Þórir in Hvinverjadalr Valley when he was meant to go southwards over Kjǫlr, and he made a bet with Þórir about whose horse would be faster; for he had a very good stallion; and each of them staked one hundred pieces of silver. They both rode southwards over Kjǫlr until they came to the stretch of road which has since been called Dúfunefsskeið, 'Dove's-Beak's Stretch of Road'; and the difference in speed between the horses was no greater [H: smaller] than that Þórir came up to meet Ǫrn in the middle of the stretch of road [i.e. by the time Ǫrn had covered half the distance, Þórir had covered it one and a half times, his horse being three times as fast as Ǫrn's]. Ǫrn bore the loss of his money so badly that he did not want to live any longer and went up to the foot of the mountain which is now called Arnarfell, 'Ǫrn's/Eagle's Mountain', and killed himself there. And Fly remained behind there because she was very exhausted. And when Þórir went home from the Assembly he found a grey stallion with a remarkable mane beside Fly. She had conceived from him.

175 My translation after the S-text as edited by Finnur Jónsson 1900; for the original Old Norse text cf. the appendix to this sub-section.

Fig. 3: Modern-day Flugumýri as seen from the slope above the farm. © M. Egeler, 2014.

> Eldfari was born to them, which was brought abroad and killed seven men at Mjǫrs on a single day, and there he himself died. Fly was lost in a quagmire on Flugumýrr, 'Fly Swamp'.

In this story the almost supernaturally swift mare Fluga ('Fly') is acquired by a certain Þórir Dove's-Beak and, at the end of a life of adventures with racing sorcerers and strange (otherworldly?)[176] stallions, gives a name to her owner's farmstead by dying in a local swamp. Along the way the narrative also mentions how other places are named: the road section Dúfunefsskeið, 'Dove's-Beak's Stretch of Road'; and the mountain Arnarfell which – like the *skorri*-toponyms mentioned above –[177] makes one wonder whether it is really named after a person ('Ǫrn's Mountain') or whether it is perhaps named after a resident eagle ('Eagle's Mountain') which in turn was linked to a somewhat grotesque story about the suicide of a gambling but lethally parsimonious sorcerer named 'Eagle'/Ǫrn. The main thrust of the story, however, is clearly the narrative of Fluga and the naming of Flugumýrr; everything else just leads up to this. What makes the story of Fluga interesting in the present context

176 The grey stallion that impregnates Fluga recalls the otherworldly grey stallion which visits the farm of Auðun the Stutterer, cf. below, pp. 99ff.

177 Above, p. 70.

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is (in a way reminiscent of many of the preceding examples) the semantics of the horse's name on which the toponym is based: the noun *fluga* means a 'fly, gnat, moth'.[178] It is not entirely impossible that this term might have been used as a name for a horse. In favour of this notion one can point to the Modern Icelandic phrase *eins og fluga*, 'swift as a fly',[179] which might indicate that *fluga* could indeed have been seen as a fitting name for a particularly fast horse. This, however, is not the only possible reading of the tale. Fluga gives her name to a *mýrr*, a 'moor, bog, swamp', i.e. a stretch of wetland; and wetlands are the favourite habitat of flies, gnats, and midges. Elsewhere in Icelandic toponymy this association between flying insects and wetlands is mirrored in the name of Lake Mývatn, 'Fly-Water', which is named for the swarms of midges that breed there and whose name is a stem compound of *mý* ('midge, gnat') and *vatn* ('water'). The same idea that is expressed in the toponym *Mývatn* might also be behind the 'Fly Swamp' Flugumýrr: perhaps this place is not named after a wondrous horse that drowned in a local swamp but for the swarms of gnats and midges that bred in the water of this swamp and made a nuisance of themselves on the farm. The story might then be a kind of humorous exorcism, dispelling the vexing insects from the place's story at least – even if one couldn't be rid of them in real life. In a tongue-in-cheek way the place-story of Flugumýrr thus seems to take the clear semantics of the toponym's component parts and create an ironic story by twisting these semantics in a direction which moves it some distance from the primary associations connected with the term *fluga*. In this way the 'meaning' of the place-name is recast: from a down-to-earth description of the local wildlife it is turned into an account that transcends the banality of this wildlife into something a bit more magical. Thus the landscape is, in a way, mythologised – though one should be careful not to read too much into this mythologisation. While the place-story of Flugumýrr is construed as a tale of the supernatural, it clearly is not meant to be taken too seriously, nor does it take itself all that seriously. This is seen best in the treatment of the mountain-name Arnarfell: the tale is clearly intended as a lighthearted one insofar as this name is explained as derived from the death of a sorcerer who lost a bet and then committed suicide because he was so devastated by the loss of his money that he wished to die. Employing grand rhetoric that includes magic and the supernatural, the story of Flugumýrr takes a swipe at the local insect population but

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178 Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson 1874, *s.v.* 'fluga'; apropos this place-name cf. Bandle 1977: 58.
179 Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson 1874, *s.v.* 'fluga'.

is under no illusion that it can do no more against the little beasts than just grin and bear them – yet grin, at least, it can.[180]

Appendix: The Old Norse text of the story of Flugumýrr according to the S-recension of Landnámabók (ch. 202; ed. by Finnur Jónsson 1900).

Þorir ᴅufunef var leysingi Yxna-Þoris. hann kom skipi sinu i Gaunguskardzærós. þa var bygt herat allt fyrir vestaɴ. hann for nordr yfir Iokuls æ at ʟandbroti ok nam land æ milli Glodafeykis ær ok Diup ær ok bio æ Flugumyri. I þann tima kom vt skip i Kolbeins ær óse hlaþit kvikfe. Eɴ þeim huarf i Brimnes skógum vnghrysi eitt. Eɴ Þorir ᴅufunef keypti vonina ok faɴ siþan. þat var allra hrosa skiotazt ok var kaullut Fluga. Aurn het madr hann for landzhorna i millum ok var fiolkuɴigr. hann sat fyrir Þori i Vinveriadal er hann skylldi fara sudr vm Kiol. ok vediadi vid Þori huors þeira hros mundi skiotara. þuiat hann hafdi allgodann hest. ok lagdi hvor þeira vid hundrat silfrs. þeir ridu bader sudr vm Kiol þar til er þeir kvomu æ skeid þat er siþan er kallat Dufunesskeid eɴ eigi vard meiri skiotleiks munr hrosa eɴ Þorir kom i moti Erni æ midiu skeidi. Orn vndi so illa vid felát sitt at hann villdi ei lifa ok for upp undir fiallit er nu heiter Arnarfell ok tyndi ser þar sialfr. eɴ Fluga stód þar eptir þviat hun var miok mod. Eɴ er Þorir for af þingi faɴ hann hest fauxottann ok gran hia Flugu. vid þeim hafdi hun fengit. vndir þeim var aliɴ Eldfari er vtann var færdr ok vard vij. manna bani vid Miors æ einum deigi. ok lezt hann þar sialfr. Fluga tyndizt i feni æ Flugumyri.

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180 The suggestion that the narrative is based on Celtic prototypes (Almqvist 1991a: 116) is unfounded.

Dritsker: Bodily Matters

The two examples of Icelandic place-lore discussed above were both taken from a single text, *Landnámabók*. Place-lore in Icelandic literature, however, is hardly restricted to this one source. In *Eyrbyggja saga*,[181] the 'Saga of the People of Eyr' from the mid-thirteenth century,[182] a substantial section of the saga narrative is focused on how the sacred landscape of the peninsula of Þórsnes in western Iceland was established by its first settler and on how the order of this landscape was changed in the following generation.[183]

The first establishment of this sacred landscape was undertaken by Þórólfr Beard-of-Mostr, a settler from Norway (ch. 4). Already before his departure from Norway, Þórólfr had been a very religious man and even on his home-island of Mostr in Norway he had been the owner of a temple. When he had to leave Norway after he had fallen into disfavour with the king, he took the timbers of this temple with him to Iceland. Among these timbers were his high-seat pillars, which were decorated with an image of the god Thor. When Þórólfr came within view of the western Icelandic coast, he cast these pillars overboard, vowing to settle down where they washed ashore. This happened on the peninsula of Þórsnes, which Þórólfr then named 'Thor's Peninsula' (*Þórs-nes*) and where he indeed took land. He sanctified his new land by means of a fire ritual and gave names to its different parts, many of which make reference to the god Thor and his cult: Hofsvágr, 'Temple Bay'; Þórsá, 'Thor's River'; Hofstaðir, 'Temple-Steads'. The saga account of how Þórólfr took land and sanctified his land-claim then concludes with the following passage:[184]

> Þórólfr kallaði Þórsnes milli Vigrafjarðar ok Hofsvágs. Í því nesi stendr eitt fjall; á því fjalli hafði Þórólfr svá mikinn átrúnað, at þangat skyldi enginn maðr óþveginn líta ok engu skyldi tortíma í fjallinu, hvárki fé né mǫnnum, nema sjálft gengi í brott. Þat fjall kallaði hann Helgafell ok trúði, at hann myndi þangat fara, þá er hann dœi, ok allir á nesinu hans frændr. Þar sem Þórr hafði á land komit, á tanganum nessins, lét hann hafa dóma alla ok setti þar heraðsþing; þar var ok svá mikill helgistaðr, at hann vildi með engu móti láta saurga vǫllinn, hvárki í heiptarblóði, ok eigi skyldi þar álfrek ganga, ok var haft til þess sker eitt, er Dritsker var kallat.

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181 Ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935.
182 Böldl 2005: 24.
183 For a detailed discussion cf. Egeler 2017b, where also discussed are differring approaches in the associated historiography (e.g. Phelpstead 2014).
184 Ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935; my translation.

'Þórólfr called the peninsula between the Vigrafjǫrðr Fjord and Hofsvágr, "Temple Bay", Þórsnes, "Thor's Peninsula". On this peninsula there is a mountain; Þórólfr had such great faith in this mountain that no man should look there unwashed and one should kill nothing and nobody on the mountain, neither animals nor men, unless they went away by themselves. He called that mountain Helgafell, "Holy Mountain", and believed that he and all his relatives on the peninsula would go there when they died. Where Thor had come ashore, on the tip of the peninsula, he let all courts of law be held and instituted a district assembly there. There was such a great holy place that he wanted in no way to let the field be polluted, neither by spilled blood nor should one relieve oneself there, and for that there was a skerry which was called Dritsker.'

On a superficial level Þórólfr constructs a sacred landscape which consists of sacralised landscape features that function as material manifestations of the otherworld in this world and of institutions of cult and (in the case of the district assembly) a sacralised societal order. The sacred nature of this landscape is marked by sacral toponyms and protected by certain rules of behaviour, banning conduct which would pollute the land or otherwise violate its sanctity. This act of constructing Þórsnes as a sacred landscape ends with and by implication culminates in the establishment of Dritsker, which almost has the rank of an institution in its own right: a skerry which functions as a toilet and thus helps to keep the most sacred part of the mainland free of pollution from human excrement. The saga does not explicitly state that the name of Dritsker is derived from the function of this skerry, but since the bulk of the preceding toponyms clearly are linked to their respective functions (Hofstaðir, 'Temple-Steads'; Helgafell, 'Holy Mountain' etc.) this seems to be insinuated. In any case, all recent commentators and translators have understood it that way and have translated Dritsker, the name of the toilet island, as 'Shit-Skerry',[185] 'Kackschäre',[186] 'Scheiß-Schäre',[187] 'Dirt Skerry',[188] or 'Skideskær'[189].

In the plot's further development, Dritsker and the rules associated with it play a central role. As long as Þórólfr lives, his rules of ritual purity are generally respected. After his death, however, the members of the family of the Kjalleklingar revolt (ch. 9): pointing out that at every other assembly one can

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185 Phelpstead 2014: 9; Quinn and Regal 2003: 77; Quinn 1997: 134.
186 Böldl 2011: 262.
187 von See 1972: 25.
188 Hermann Pálsson and Edwards 1989: 30 (note 7); Hermann Pálsson and Edwards 1972: 46.
189 Stavnem 2014: 166.

relieve oneself directly on the assembly site, they argue that the idiosyncratic rules of purity which are in force on the Þórsnes assembly merely reflect the arrogance of Þórólfr and his descendants, who think that they and their land stand above all others. When the Kjalleklingar now refuse to go out to Dritsker and try to relieve themselves on the assembly site instead, violence breaks out: several men are killed, even more are badly wounded, and the holy soil is drenched in blood. After this bloodbath a new peace has to be negotiated (ch. 10). As part of the resulting settlement, the now-defiled assembly site is moved away from the site of the slaughter, apparently to the location of the modern-day farm of Þingvellir ('Assembly Fields'), a few kilometres to the south-east of Stykkishólmur. There a new assembly is installed, including the pagan sacral accoutrements of a stone circle and a sacrificial stone used as an altar for human sacrifice. In this way Dritsker becomes as central to the saga plot as it is marginal to the area's topography: it becomes the pivot around which the conflict turns which leads to the re-ordering of the local landscape of cult and power. Only now, after Dritsker has acted as a catalyst, is the final order of this landscape established.

What is happening here, at a superficial level, are fundamentally important processes of negotiating the social and religious order of the land and its very deepest significance. At the same time, however, the catalyst which leads to the final establishment of this order is an argument about where to answer the call of nature. As Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards have observed, this point, which is so central to the narrative, might easily appear trivial and even comical.[190] The grotesqueness of the situation is reinforced if one pays close attention to the semantics of the name of the place at the centre of the argument: Dritsker. This toponym is a compound of *sker*, 'skerry', and *drit*. The latter word denotes 'excrement', but in Old Norse literature the noun is solely attested as denoting the excrement of animals and especially birds, implying that it is not a general term for bodily waste but should rather be translated as 'dung, guano'.[191] This seems supported by its use in compounds, where *drit* in Old Norse literature only appears in connection with terms for birds (*dúfnadrit*, 'dove droppings'; *fugladrit*, 'bird droppings')[192] and in toponyms referring to elements of coastal landscapes (Dritsker, '*drit*-skerry'; Dritvík, '*drit*-bay'). The latter formations again are suggestive of a connection with

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190 Hermann Pálsson and Edwards 1989: 5.
191 Cf. Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson 1874, *s.v.* 'drit' ('*dirt*, esp. of birds'). The attestations are collected in the Copenhagen *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*: ONP, *s.v.* 'drit'.
192 *ONP*, *s.v.* 'dúfnadrit', 'fugladrit'.

birds, as bird droppings are the only kind of excrement that on the North Atlantic coast is prominent enough to warrant that whole landscape features should be named for it.[193] Even in modern Icelandic, *drit* still refers specifically to bird droppings.[194] All this indicates that the name *Dritsker* should be understood – and would have been understood by a medieval audience – to mean 'guano skerry'. But this has the consequence that there is a massive discrepancy between the toponym and the tale of human excrement associated with it. Similar to what is happening in the place-stories discussed in the preceding sections, I would suggest that this again is a strategy to create a tension between the story's plot and its most central place-name, a tension which suggests ironic distance and an element of the grotesque. As if the story as such were not already grotesque enough, this tension highlights the fact that the story is not to be taken all too seriously and is primarily meant to add an element of colourful (if mostly red) lightness to the narrative. It cannot be stressed enough that this happens at the very point which the saga presents as the pivot around which the final construction of the local sacred landscape turns: in this way the whole construction of a pagan sacred landscape is given an ironic twist.

In *Eyrbyggja saga*, such a use of bodily matter to mark a tongue-in-cheek approach to the landscapes of pagan antiquity is not restricted to Dritsker, the tale's guano-lubricated narrative pivot. Towards the very end of its account of the newly created sacred landscape of Þórsnes, the saga relates how on the new assembly site there was a stone circle where men were doomed to be sacrificed and in this circle stood the altar on which these human sacrifices were performed (ch. 10):[195]

> í þeim hring stendr Þórs steinn, er þeir menn váru brotnir um, er til blóta váru hafðir, ok sér enn blóðslitinn á steininum.

> 'In that circle stands Thor's Stone where the men were broken who were used as sacrifices, and one still sees the colour of the blood on the stone.'

In the late nineteenth century W.G. Collingwood and Jón Stefánsson noted that there really is a prominent boulder on the land of the farm of Þingvellir ('Assembly Fields'), which appears to be named after the old assembly; and

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193 As a typological parallel cf. the inlet *Fó na gCacannaí*, 'creek of the droppings', on the island Oileán Imill in the Slyne Head archipelago in Connemara, western Ireland, which has its name from the guano left by the local cormorants: Robinson 2009b: 346.

194 *ISLEX orðabókin Stofnun Árna Magnússonar*, *s.v.* 'drit'.

195 Ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935; my translation.

further they noted that inclusions of iron in this boulder make it look as if this stone were spattered with blood.[196] In all likelihood this is the boulder that was seen by whoever invented the story of the gory human sacrifices to Thor, and this stone provided the raw material for this tale: the tale of the sacrificial stone on which bloodstains were still to be seen was – in the fashion of an aetiological tale – spun out of the materiality of this boulder with its rust-brown stains. What is happening in this narrative parallels the use of Dritsker on several levels. Both episodes tell of vicious pagan bloodshed inspired by what the saga's Christian audience would have viewed as the religious delusions of the pre-Christian period (rules of purity; blood sacrifices). Both episodes develop their narrative content out of a feature of the real-world landscape (a toponym; a boulder), and both episodes grotesquely reinterpret an element of this landscape as a reflex of human bodily matter: guano becomes human excrement; iron in rock becomes congealed blood. For a contemporary audience the grotesqueness of the connections that both narratives establish between their stories and the land would have been equally obvious in both cases: just as native speakers of Old Norse would immediately have understood 'Dritsker' to mean 'Guano Skerry', these members of a farming society would also have been under no illusion that bloodstains on a stone could resist frost and rain for more than two centuries. Both episodes develop a story out of a feature of the real-world landscape but neither of these two tales seeks to be held for plausible; rather, they are consciously grotesque.

In its own right, this element of the grotesque cannot be seen as much more than a narrative strategy to provide witty entertainment. Yet the two grotesque tales of Dritsker and Thor's Stone also have a common denominator that may imply a genuine statement about the contemporary meaning of the landscape. As I have already mentioned, both stories present narratives of unnecessary bloodshed caused by paganism, and both do so in a way which seems geared to making this bloodshed appear as grotesque as possible while still tying it to the land. What may be lurking behind the gory surface of these tales could be a contemporary Christian statement about the meaning of the landscape of Þórsnes: paganism and its connection to the land are defamed as delusive and, in equal measure, dangerous and ridiculous.

Since the saga writer was working more than two centuries after the official conversion of Iceland in the year 999/1000, one might at first glance wonder why this author would have found it necessary to make such a statement at

196 Collingwood and Jón Stefánsson 1899: 95–96 (with fig. 82). More recently cf. Böldl 2005: 213; Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1999: 40 with note 45; Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935: 18 (note 3).

all. Yet perhaps we need not go far to find his motivation. Looking at the treat-
ment of Þórnes in *Eyrbyggja saga*, it is worth noting that this saga presents
us with one of the most detailed narratives about the construction of a pagan
sacred landscape that we find anywhere in medieval Icelandic saga litera-
ture. Clearly the 'meaning' and the semantics of the land were dear to the
author of this saga and were a topic he was particularly concerned with. This
author was a Christian and perhaps even one of the monks of the monastery
at Helgafell. Yet at the time when he was writing – and even today this has
not changed – the toponymy of the land still largely reflected the meaning
that a pagan religious cosmos had instilled in the land three centuries ear-
lier: toponyms like Helgafell ('Holy Mountain'), Hofsvágr ('Temple Bay'),
Þórsá ('Thor's River'), Hofstaðir ('Temple-Steads'), and not least Þórsnes
('Thor's Peninsula') all still evoked paganism to everybody who listened
to these names of the land. In a way, through its toponyms, the landscape
of Þórsnes was almost as pagan in the thirteenth century as it had been in
the ninth. For a toponymically-minded writer this must have been a fact that
would have been impossible to overlook, certainly puzzling, and perhaps
even deeply troubling. The emphatically grotesque way in which our author
tackled this landscape, which had preserved so much of its old pagan voice,
may have been a way to take the sting out of its blatantly pagan semantics.
It almost seems as if he was uncomfortable, did not feel at home among this
pagan toponymy, and as if he was trying to neutralise the spiritual threat that
it constantly emanated by rewriting it as something ludicrous. The treatment
of Þórsnes in *Eyrbyggja saga* may be an instance of a writer being challenged
by a landscape's toponymy to write a counter-history that rejected the obvious
meaning of its names, names that he was both inspired and unsettled by.[197]

197 Possible corroboration that such a feeling was possible may be offered by the
case of Jónsnes: as *Eyrbyggja saga* (ch. 4) describes the settlement of Þórólfr
Beard-of-Mostr, the name *Þórsnes* in the first instance seems to have been
attached to the south-western spur of what today is called Þórsnes. This spur of
land at a later point in time (apparently between 1200 and 1378, i.e. potentially in
the same period that the saga was written) was renamed as Jónsnes, '[St] John's
Peninsula', suggesting a Christian toponymic re-sacralisation. Cf. Ólafur Lárusson
1935: 204, who proposed: 'Einhverjum ábótanum á Helgafelli hefir þótt það illa
viðeigandi, að jörð, sem klaustrið átti, þar rétt í nánd við sig, skyldi bera nafn hins
heiðna goðs. Honum hefir þótt betur fara á því, að hún bæri nafn hins blessaða
Jóns postula, sem var verndardýrlingur kirkjunnar og klaustursins að Helgafelli.
Þór hefir svo orðið að víkja fyrir Jóni postula.' I owe thanks to Colin Gioia Connors
for pointing me to Ólafur Lárusson's study.

The 'Meaning' of Six Places

In the general introduction to the concept of 'place' and to fundamental aspects of the field of landscape theory at the beginning of this chapter, I tried to illustrate how much of classic as well as current writing on the topic is focused on deep issues of 'meaning'. Much of this discourse is about how fundamental orientation is provided through the creation of a feeling of 'home'. This already begins with Heidegger's simile of the homely farmhouse in the Black Forest that perfectly blends in with its surroundings and central aspects of human life such as death, childbirth, and the human relationship to the divine; and from there this focus forms a thread running through the discourse up to and including the most recent writers, Yi-Fu Tuan even using the term 'home' as one of the defining terms of humanist geography.[198] The examples of Irish and Icelandic place-stories chosen above form a certain contrast to this general tendency in past and current research: there the element of a deep 'meaning' is present but often in a marginal or secondary fashion. The author of *Eyrbyggja saga* seems to take an implicit stance for Christian religious orientation by systematically undermining the pagan semantics of the landscape of Þórsnes, which was probably where he was living and whose pagan toponyms appear to have disconcerted him. So on some deep level this text addresses fundamental issues of the meaning of the land and our orientation in this world and the next. Yet this concerns a very deep level of the saga indeed; closer to its narrative surface it seems first and foremost to be occupied with telling a good yarn that delights in the absurd, grotesque, and darkly comical. One might also wonder about the story of Medb's Venerated Tree in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. If Queen Medb of Connacht is a euhemerised reflex of a pre-Christian goddess, and if there really were trees called 'Medb's Venerated Tree' or places named after such (perhaps long-felled) trees, then it might be that these trees were old sacred ones. Such trees, or places named after them, could therefore have had lingering associations of a former pagan cult. But if so then it just might be that the grotesque explanation of such trees or tree-toponyms was a Christian way of making light of what remained of the land's lingering pagan connotations. At a certain level something similar might again be happening in the stories of the Dagda in *Cath Maige Tuired*. The episode discussed above gives a picture of the Dagda (one of the ancient gods of Ireland) that is primarily droll and grotesque, even while preserving some underlying magnificence. Thus when places in the landscape are created that

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198 Above, pp. 22ff.

make reference to the Dagda, as is done by the boulders called 'the Dagda's Testicles', these ultimately pagan references, having been turned into something droll, become less troubling for a Christian society than they might otherwise have been. In this way, both in the Irish and in the Norse examples I have chosen, there is a certain undercurrent of engagement with 'meaning'; yet it never dominates the narratives, just remaining in the background.

It should be emphasised that it is largely due to my choice of examples that the engagement with 'meaning' and orientation is not at the centre of these stories. A different selection of material might have painted a very different picture indeed. In a recent survey, for instance, Gregory Toner has highlighted the fact that many of the tales in the Irish *Dindshenchas* place-lore corpus have a strong moral and cosmological significance.[199] Thus the *Dindshenchas* of Loch Garman derives the name of this sea-lake – today's Wexford Harbour – from a certain Garman Garb. The story goes that the Feast of Tara was being held; this was the most important of all feasts, as Tara was the most important ritual and royal centre of Ireland. At this feast there was no theft or any kind of wrongdoing. Yet then the unspeakable happened and Garman broke the peace, stealing the crown of a noble woman. This did not go undetected for long, and the Prose-*Dindshenchas* tells that Garman was finally caught at the well of Port Cáelranna. There his pursuers drowned him and the waters of the well rose to form the lake of Loch Garman. According to the *Metrical Dindshenchas*, the lake had already formed when Garman was seized, so he could be drowned in the lake (rather than the well); this suggests that the well burst forth to form the lake in reaction to Garman's unprecedented crime, which ultimately constituted nothing less than a violation of the cosmological order. Toner rightly highlights the fact that this story seems to be all about supernatural retribution and the order of the world: the landscape itself reacts when a crime is committed which violates the inviolate peace at the Feast of Tara.[200] Even at its most basic level a tale like this can clearly be analysed in terms of 'meaning' and the provision of orientation, and Toner has collected a large number of examples from the *Dindshenchas*-corpus which can be read from the same perspective. Also in the following chapter we will meet a number of place-stories that are first, second, and last about the construction of 'meaning' in the most profound sense possible; the stories to be discussed

199 Toner 2014.
200 Toner 2014: 277–278; *Rennes Dindshenchas*, ed. and transl. by Stokes 1894–1895, there no. 40 (§3) in *Revue Celtique* 15 (1894): 428–431; *Metrical Dindshenchas*, ed. and transl. by Gwynn 1903–1935, part 3, pp. 168–183.

below will approach the issue of 'meaning' in particular through the creation of 'home'.[201]

Yet in the discussion thus far it has seemed to me inappropriate to focus on this aspect of North-West Atlantic place-lore, since from an intercultural perspective it is too common to throw a very specific light on the relationship between the Icelandic and the Irish sense of place. The ethnographies of Bronisław Malinowski in the Western Pacific and Keith H. Basso among the Western Apache, for instance, have long shown that the connection of place, landscape, and 'meaning' – and the orientation achieved through this connection – is a feature that may well be universal or at least recurs cross-culturally without any need to assume historical connections between its individual occurrences.[202] That it also recurs between Ireland and Iceland – as *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Cath Maige Tuired* may imply and as many of the examples in the following chapter will further elaborate – is therefore no indicator of any particular closeness between the Irish and the Icelandic 'senses of place': something near-universal may recur between two cultures, but this recurrence provides no evidence per se for an intercultural exchange. The examples chosen above, therefore, have been selected to illustrate something much more specific and which seems particularly characteristic of Ireland and Iceland: their peculiar love of seeing places through a lens of the grotesque.[203] In Ireland the story of Carn Froích explains 'Heather Mound' as the burial place (or even something yet more strange) of Mister Heather rather than as the obvious heathery mound. Medb's towering Venerated Tree becomes a tiny rod stuck into the ground. Boulders in the landscape become the testicles of a god, dropped between a gargantuan act of over-eating, defecating, and lovemaking; and this lovemaking, in turn, performed by a god after being beaten by a girl and after filling a trench with excrement, leaves its trace on

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201 For a general introduction to Irish (mythological) narrative and its relationship to the Irish sense of place which chooses exactly this perspective cf. Mac Cana 1988, who emphasises the crucial importance of a sense of place for Irish narrative culture and the way that it creates 'home' (though he does not use the term). He concludes by emphasising that, also in Ireland, '[t]o get to know the features of one's environment and their names is to form an indissoluble association with them, amounting at times almost to a kind of empathy' (1988: 341). While Mac Cana's formulation of this conclusion is independent of Gaston Bachelard, it is in some ways remarkably similar to Bachelard's conceptualisation of the space of home (cf. above, pp. 22–23).

202 Cf. above, pp. 26, 29.

203 *Pace* the claim of Theodore Andersson that the place-name traditions found in Icelandic saga literature are primarily informational: Andersson 2006: 12.

the shore to mark it as a titanic love-spot. In Iceland, following a strikingly similar narrative illogicality, houses named for nearby hot steaming springs become the foundations of a Mister Cauldron Steam. The insects breeding in the swamp by a farm and giving it its name 'Fly Swamp' turn into a wondrous mare. A guano rock on the margin of a pagan sacred landscape is reinterpreted as a sacral toilet which acts as the pivot for a reordering of this landscape; and this reordering culminates in a boulder, with clearly visible traces of iron, that is turned into a blood-spattered sacrificial altar. Ireland and Iceland and their 'senses of place' strikingly meet in a shared love of the grotesquely comical as a central way of 'semanticising' place. As the treatments of Þórsnes and the Dagda's Testicles suggest, this love of the grotesque is sometimes also used for the serious purpose of undermining the old pagan associations of places whose pagan undertones are impossible to overlook in the face of their semantically clear toponyms; yet this is by no means always the case.

In this fascination with the grotesque, a strong general similarity between Icelandic and Irish attitudes to space and place becomes visible, raising the question of whether this similarity might be due to intercultural exchange. Furthermore, even in the limited number of examples selected here, more specific structural parallels also seem to emerge, which strengthen the possibility of such an exchange underlying them. In both cultures the place-stories can take their starting point both from physical features of the landscape (the mark left by the Dagda's lovemaking; boulders turning into testicles and altars) and from place-names. In both cultures the place-stories based on toponyms have a tendency to follow a common and even fixed pattern: the story takes a semantically clear place-name ('Heather Mound'; 'Houses of Steam') and 'explains' this place-name through a narrative which takes a conscious step away from the obvious semantics of the toponym, redeploying its elements in a way which gives them a consciously grotesque twist (plants of the *ericaceae* family turning into a warrior; volcanic hot water becoming a settler). Both narrative cultures tend to highlight this playing with place-names as a conscious one that is not to be believed but recognised for the playful engagement with place that it is: for this purpose the Irish *Dindshenchas* texts give several increasingly grotesque explanations for each single toponym, and the Kjalleklingar highlight the absurdity of the interpretation of 'Guano Skerry' as a sacred toilet by emphasising that it is historically unprecedented. Furthermore, there is a strong tendency towards what one could call 'humanisation': the tales of Heather Mound and Steam's Houses both turn topographical features into persons. In both cultures this kind of place-storytelling is so deeply ingrained that it needs little if any elaboration to be appreciated by its audience: neither the story of Steam's Houses nor the tale of Medb's

Venerated Tree need go into any detail to be understood by their audiences. The latter even condenses its story into a single sentence while still expecting it to be understood.

In both cultures this shared love of the grotesque, and the shared techniques of creating it, appear to have a function deliberately aimed at entertainment value – yet not exclusively so (which for a moment brings us back to the landscape-theoretical focus on 'meaning'). In both these storytelling cultures the bizarre can be placed in the service of establishing the right order of the world, and it is worth highlighting as a specific Irish-Icelandic parallel that this order of the world can be established through narratives of the bizarre and grotesque: while dropping testicles and marking love-spots, the Dagda paves the way for bringing Ireland back under the rightful rule of the Túatha Dé Danann. It seems to be a very specific characteristic of both narrative cultures, furthermore, that this establishment of the right order of the world takes the form of rendering the land's pagan connotations harmless by ridiculing them even within the context of narratives that, on their surface, present themselves as un-polemical accounts of the deeds and adventures of the heroes of the pagan past. Queen Medb is just such a primordial heroine, whose Venerated Tree becomes a mere horsewhip, thus losing its grandeur as well as any residual threat it may have carried: a pagan sacred tree may be spiritually dangerous; a pagan joke in the landscape is not. Similarly, the bizarre place-stories about how the ancestral founders of Iceland during the venerated Settlement Period acted around Dritsker and Thor's Stone succeed in breaking the dense pagan semantisation of the landscape of Þórsnes. Being full of semantically clear toponyms that make unmistakable reference to pre-Christian paganism, this landscape would have remained spiritually disconcerting even long after the conversion; yet by making it half a laughingstock (Dritsker) and half an example of the evil of paganism (Thor's Stone), *Eyrbyggja saga* neutralises this spiritual threat. Thus in both narrative cultures, out of seemingly pagan stories, Christian landscapes emerge purified by laughter.

In sum, the instances of Irish and Icelandic place-lore that have been discussed on the preceding pages show a strong similarity in the general Irish and Icelandic 'attitudes' to space and place – at least insofar as we can grasp these attitudes in the extant, highly literary sources. This similarity includes some of the specific techniques that are used to express these shared attitudes. (Similarities in the specific material rather than in general attitude and narrative technique will be the topic of the following chapter.) There seems to be a shared delight in playing with places, a playfulness which at times *can* (but by no means must) take on a serious aspect, especially when it touches upon the pagan mythological connotations of the land. This basically playful attitude to the landscape, as well as some of the specific ways in which it expresses itself, constitute a close parallel

between the Icelandic and the Gaelic way of engaging with 'place' as we meet it in the extant literature. The closeness of this parallel suggests the possibility that it might have some of its roots in a direct intercultural exchange. It does not, however, prove such an exchange; it cannot do more than provide a general background for the much clearer cases of apparent Icelandic adaptations of specific Gaelic place-lore that will be discussed in the next chapter. This is even more so as there are not only similarities, but there is also a marked and apparently systematic difference between Gaelic and Icelandic place-storytelling. This difference is a difference in tone, and it is almost iconically represented by the two core instances of boulder-lore mentioned above: while in Ireland a remarkable boulder is turned into the testicle of a pagan deity, in Iceland it is a mere, comparatively banal, and (comparatively speaking) historically realistic pagan sacrificial altar. While both Gaelic and Icelandic place-lore show a marked love of the bizarre and grotesque, in Iceland this tendency is rather more restrained than in Ireland.[204] In Iceland, the grotesqueness of place-lore is tuned down to something almost realistic. When a topographical feature turns into a person, Icelandic narrative merely makes a man out of a volcanic spring, while Irish narrative cannot but add otherworldly women and a fairy mound; bodily matter enters the narrative in Iceland as the excrement of men and birds, in Ireland as the excrement of gods. By comparison, Icelandic tales tend to be just a bit less grotesque, which could make them *almost* plausible, merely a bit strange rather than outright impossible.

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204 Already Kuno Meyer remarked on the extreme love of the grotesque found in Irish place-stories: Meyer 1910b: 16; Meyer 1894: 316. The comparatively lesser prominence of this feature in Icelandic literature has been remarked upon ever since Andreas Heusler, cf. Heusler 1913: 43–44; Andersson 1964: 59.

2 Narrating Place: a Survey of Place-Stories on the Move

2.1. How to get from Place to Place: Methodology, or, Cliffs Opening

Half a mile or so west of the prehistoric fort Dún Áonghasa, on the south coast of Aran, the bulging cliffs, which here rise to the greatest height they have anywhere on the island, suddenly pull back into a broad, shallow recess. For a stretch, the rugged cliff face suddenly turns into one that is almost smooth. Its rock overhangs the waves of the Atlantic Ocean with a mild but constant slant, until, at its base, it abruptly pulls inwards; there, a series of low caves opens up that seems to suck in and swallow the sea every time a series of breakers runs up the narrow foreshore. The little bay formed by this recess in the cliff is called An Sraoilleán (fig. 4).

Comparative studies that try to determine how a certain feature of one culture – in the case of the present book, its sense of place and how it is constructed through stories – is related to the equivalent feature of another culture always face the vexing question of method. How can one say that something is a borrowing from, or at least inspired by a feature of another culture, rather than being an independent native feature? How can one distinguish historical

Fig. 4: An Sraoilleán on the south-western coast of Aran. © M. Egeler, 2015.

dependency from chance parallel, diffusion from polygenesis? When all is said and done, one has to admit, with the scant and fragmentary material available for the Early Middle Ages, one can only very rarely, if ever, do so with certainty. What one can do, however, is to distinguish degrees of probability; and there is a number of methodological rules of thumb that allow one to assess such degrees of probability. The aim of the present section is to lay out some of these rules, most of which can be illustrated on the example of An Sraoilleán. The value of this place and its place-lore for the present context is that this bay is connected with a story that at first glance appears to find strikingly close parallels in Icelandic storytelling, suggesting some sort of intercultural dependency; yet if analysed more closely, intercultural dependency becomes untenable. In this way, this site and its story can serve to illustrate some of the methodological rules of thumb that can be used to decide whether similarities between stories in different cultures are more likely to be due to interdependence or to coincidence.

Thus, let us turn to An Sraoilleán and its place-lore. The bay and the overhanging cliff of An Sraoilleán are connected with a twentieth-century story about what happened there at exactly the point in time when, on the other side of the island, a boat capsized and was lost with all hands. This story, as written out by a local Araner for Tim Robinson in the 1970s or 1980s, runs as follows:[205]

> It always was a ghostly, weird place. The evening that Colm Mór, Labhràs Phatch Sheáin and Patch Tom Sheáin were drowned off the north coast of the island, there were several men in currachs at anchor in the mouth of An Sraoilleán fishing for bream. They hadn't heard a hint or a rumour of the misfortune. At twilight they felt something strange and ghostly about them that they could not understand. They drew together. They knew that the sounds they heard were coming from the other world – talk and tumult and old

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205 Robinson 2009a: 116. I am aware of the limitations of Tim Robinson's literary ethnography of the Aran islands, which, rather than observing the standards of modern folkloristic research, is first and foremost guided by an artistic agenda, if an unusually learned one. However, since I am here, as well as in the following chapters, drawing on Robinson's accounts in a purely typological and illustrative manner, the shortcomings of his books as scholarly works do not affect their value for the present purpose, which is to develop ideas for the interpretation of medieval texts and the methodologies used for doing so, rather than an in-depth engagement with the folklore of Aran as such. For my purposes, the usefulness of his texts would not even be diminished if he had invented the place-stories he recounts (though far be it from me to claim that he did).

warcries of 'abú, ullallú!' And then they suddenly saw an apparition of boats and currachs in the bay and lights peering out at them from the cliffs. There was a noise of battle and slaughter, of boats coming ashore and launching out again. They heard disputes, threats and blows. They took fright, and, winding in their lines and pulling up their anchor stones, they rowed off as fast as they could.

Here, men die at sea; at nightfall, the cliff face opens; light shines out of the rock; and the sounds of the otherworld are heard by the fishermen of this world.

In medieval Icelandic literature, there are a number of shorter and longer passages which appear to recall this twentieth-century incident on Aran.[206] In *Njáls saga*, the 'Saga of Njáll' written around AD 1280,[207] a certain Svanr is said to have been drowned together with his crew and then to have been seen entering a coastal cliff (ch. 14):[208]

> Þau tíðendi spurðusk ór Bjarnarfirði norðan, at Svanr hafði róit at veiðiskap um várit, ok kom at þeim austanveðr mikit, ok rak þá upp at Veiðilausu ok týndusk þar. En fiskimenn þeir, er váru at Kaldbak, þóttusk sjá Svan ganga inn í fjallit Kaldbakshorn, ok var honum þar vel fagnat; en sumir mæltu því í móti ok kváðu engu gegna, en þat vissu allir, at hann fannsk hvárki lífs né dauðr.

> 'From the Bjarnarfjǫrðr Fjord from the north these tidings were heard that Svanr had in spring rowed out to fish, and a great easterly gale overtook them and they were thrown ashore at Veiðilausa and perished there. And the fishermen who were at Kaldbakr thought that they saw Svanr go into the mountain Kaldbakshorn, the "Horn of Kaldbakr", and he was given a warm welcome there; but some spoke against that and said that there was nothing to it. But all knew that he was found neither alive nor dead.'

Today, Kaldbakur is a farm on Kaldbaksvík Bay in the West Fjords, located opposite, and with a direct view of, Kaldbakshorn; the latter is a coastal mountain whose perpendicular cliff face rises almost straight from the sea to a height of 508 m. The anecdote in *Njáls saga* tells that this mountain opened after the drowning of Svanr, and that afterwards the fishermen working off Kaldbakur saw him enter the cliff and be made warmly welcome. Thus, this anecdote parallels the twentieth-century tale of An Sraoilleán in the following

206 For a survey of the relevant material, cf. Heizmann 2007.
207 Simek and Hermann Pálsson 2007: 281.
208 Ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954; my translation.

elements: (1) after somewhere else a boat has been lost with all hands, (2) fishermen (3) working off a high coastal cliff (4) observe this cliff opening, giving access to the otherworld.

A narrative reminiscent of this anecdote is also found in the mid-thirteenth-century *Eyrbyggja saga*, whose engagement with the sacred landscape of Þórsnes we have already met above.[209] There it is told how the first settler Þórólfr Beard-of-Mostr decreed that a certain rock outcrop on the peninsula of Þórsnes should be called *Helgafell*, 'Holy Mountain', and would be the place where he and his descendants would go after their deaths (ch. 4; fig. 5).[210] Somewhat later in the narrative, this idea is taken up again in the account of the death of Þórólfr's son Þorsteinn Cod-Biter (ch. 11):[211]

> Þat sama haust fór Þorsteinn út í Hǫskuldsey til fangs. Þat var eitt kveld um haustit, at sauðamaðr Þorsteins fór at fé fyrir norðan Helgafell; hann sá, at fjallit lauksk upp norðan; hann sá inn í fjallit elda stóra ok heyrði þangat mikinn glaum ok hornaskvǫl; ok er hann hlýddi, ef hann næmi nǫkkur orðaskil, heyrði hann, at þar var heilsat Þorsteini þorskabít ok fǫrunautum hans ok mælt, at hann skal sitja í ǫndvegi gegnt feðr sínum. ... Um morguninn eptir kómu menn útan ór Hǫskuldsey ok sǫgðu þau tíðendi, at Þorsteinn þorskabítr hafði drukknat í fiskiróðri, ok þótti mǫnnum þat mikill skaði.

> 'That same autumn, Þorsteinn went out to Hǫskuldsey Island to fish. One evening in autumn, a shepherd of Þorsteinn's went to look after lifestock north of Helgafell. He saw that the mountain opened on its north side; inside the mountain he saw great fires, and he heard great festive noise from there, and the sound of drinking horns at a banquet, and when he listened whether he would be able to understand a few words, he heard that Þorsteinn Cod-Biter and his crew were there bidden welcome, and he was told that he should sit in the high-seat opposite his father. ... The following morning, men came back to the mainland from Hǫskuldsey and told those tidings that Þorsteinn Cod-Biter had drowned while rowing out to fish; and people thought that was a great loss.'

Here again, a man rows out to sea to fish, drowns, and is then seen being welcomed in an otherworld located behind a cliff-face. A number of elements of this tale parallel the story connected with An Sraoilleán: (1) somebody is lost at sea; (2) that evening, a rock face is seen opening; (3) an otherworldly

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209 Above, pp. 76ff.
210 Cf. above, pp. 76–77.
211 Ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935; my translation.

Fig. 5: Helgafell on the Þórsnes Peninsula, Snæfellsnes, western Iceland.
© M. Egeler, 2014.

sound is heard and (4) a light is seen shining from inside the rock; (5) and only afterwards news of the drowning are received.

Thus, both the tale of the drowning of Svanr and the tale of the death of Þorsteinn Cod-Biter show some noteworthy parallels to the narrative that Tim Robinson recorded about An Sraoilleán. All three are place-stories told about particular cliffs or rocks, located by or (in the case of Helgafell) at least within sight of the sea, that are said to have been seen opening, emanating light and sound, when somewhere else a boat was lost, and in this way they foreshadowed the news of these recent deaths. Yet how should these parallels be assessed? Are these tales historically related, and do they bear testimony to some shared element in the Irish and Icelandic sense of place?

At first glance at least, the parallels between the two traditions – the medieval Icelandic and the twentieth-century Irish one – could be taken to speak in favour of a direct or indirect connection between the two. The strongest argument for this would be that the parallels between the two traditions are complex, comprising not just one single isolated motif, but a whole bundle of correspondences that include some very specific details. So the similarity is not a trivial one: its detailed, complex nature, taken by itself, suggests that the general probability points in favour of a connection.

Yet, there are also strong arguments against assuming a connection. Firstly, there are not only similarities between the tales, but also notable differences.

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Both Icelandic accounts report that the cliffs open to allow the drowned men to be given a warm welcome in an inner-mountainous land of the dead. In the Aran tale, in contrast, the cliffs open to allow an otherworldly fleet of curachs to be put to sea, and the sounds heard are not sounds of welcome and celebration, but battle-cries and the sounds of fighting. In the Aran tale, it does not really become clear what actually is going on here, except that a major and violent commotion is happening; but it is clear that whatever it is, it is something very different from the straightforward and purely positive welcoming of drowned men that is described in the Icelandic stories.

A point that again could speak in favour of comparing the Aran tale of An Sraoilleán and the Icelandic traditions of mountains of the dead is that both traditions allow us to grasp something of a common real-life context for these tales: they are rooted in a common ground in that they deal with unexpected drownings in the context of societies that are dependent on fishing to supplement the meagre resources offered by the lands they are inhabiting, but which are not technologically equipped to avoid a considerable loss of life when harvesting vital marine resources. This common real-life context (or, to use the exegetic term, this common *Sitz im Leben*) means that Norse and Aran fishermen would have been able to exchange stories such as these on the solid basis of a considerable common ground, constituted by exactly those everyday-experiences that these stories were dealing with. A Norseman, when told such a tale by an Irishman (or vice versa), would immediately have known what the storyteller was talking about.

Yet there is also the crucial problem of chronology. Comparing the stories of Helgafell and Kaldbakshorn with the tale of An Sraoilleán, one compares material from the thirteenth with material from the twentieth century. There are some seven centuries between the composition of the Icelandic sagas and the recording of the oral tale from Aran; it cannot be emphasised enough that already this alone would make it bold indeed to make a confident claim for a connection between the two traditions, however similar they may seem at first glance. A lot can happen in seven centuries, and to argue across a gulf of such depth is to build an argument in empty space. Rather, if the compared material is not contemporary, at least a convincing case has to be made for why one should assume continuity across the time not covered by our extant material.

At this point, the question of source-criticism becomes important and, in this case, decisive. In the present case of An Sraoilleán, this question could, for instance, take the form of an enquiry that asks whether there are any clear medieval Irish precedents for the twentieth-century story. Yet, while there is plenty of contact between this world and the otherworld in medieval Irish literature, I am not aware of any instance of a coastal cliff opening when a

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boat is lost at sea – or even of a coastal cliff opening under any circumstances. Given the considerable number of medieval Irish texts dealing with encounters with the otherworld, this silence has to be accepted as significant. This means: if the story of An Sraoilleán is subjected to a source-critical analysis, it fails this analysis. The story of An Sraoilleán, however suggestive its resemblance to the tales of *Njáls saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga* may be, is most likely a modern creation. The parallels between the two traditions are probably due to nothing more than coincidence facilitated by an independent parallel response to parallel experiences and concerns: the dangers of a fisherman's life, and the uncanny (and objectively dangerous) looming cliffs of the North Atlantic environment.

The example of An Sraoilleán has been meant to give a first impression of some of the methodological questions of research into intercultural exchange. There is not just one single factor that would allow us to decide whether a story found in one culture is directly connected to a similar story found in another. Rather, a number of factors have to be considered and weighed against each other. These include questions such as:[212] (1) How detailed are the parallels between the traditions that are being compared? Do they comprise just single, isolated motifs, or do they extend to complex correspondences in specific details? (2) What differences are there between the stories? Substantial differences have to be taken into consideration just as much as noteworthy parallels. (3) What real-life contexts are the tales embedded in, and can these contexts contribute anything to our understanding of possible processes of transfer and adaptation? (4) Are the compared narratives comparable not only in terms of their structure and content, but also in terms of their chronology? If there are substantial chronological gaps, can these gaps somehow be bridged? (5) Can the compared narratives withstand a source-critical examination? Are they representative of the material as it would have been at the time for which intercultural contact is assumed? Only if such and similar questions are systematically posed, is it possible to come close to a methodologically sound answer to the problem of whether it is justified to assume the transfer of a story from one culture to another.

Yet even this cannot be the end of the investigation. Research into intercultural exchange cannot stop with the question of whether story X has been transferred from culture A to culture B. Rather, in a way, this question is merely the starting point. Even if there is reason to assume that a story has been borrowed from one culture to another, one still has to ask what this borrowing and its circumstances can tell us about the process of borrowing itself:

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212 Cf. Egeler, forthcoming a; Egeler 2013: 128–129.

why and in what historical, political, social, and literary context was a motif borrowed? How was it changed in the course of the process of borrowing, how was it adapted to the specific situation of the society by which it was borrowed? And what do these adaptations tell us about contemporary interests and perspectives? In short, what does the borrowing tell us about the history of the people who told the tales, rather than merely about the pedigree of the motif? For, ultimately, the main aim of comparative studies is not a history of mere motifs, but a history of encounters between living human beings, and of how these human beings made sense of their world – including the places and landscapes of this world, places and landscapes that they were working in, living in, and moving through on a daily basis. In the remainder of this chapter, this question will be pursued through nine specific case studies.

2.2.   Hoofprints: the Water-Horse of Auðun the Stutterer in Landnámabók

On the south-western coast of Aran, not far from the ruins of the medieval church of Teampall Bheanáin, there is a particularly bleak stretch of pasture that gently slopes down towards the cliffs of Poll Dick bay. The land consists more of stone than of meadow: more than half of the ground's surface is formed by blank slabs of black rock, with some occasional bits of grass interspersed. Even when only a modest wind is blowing from the sea, the run-off, which from this bare surface quickly drains towards the cliff's edge in a thousand tiny rivulets, is blown back from the edge of the cliff in an arch of spray that is lashed back onto the land, creating the impression that huge breakers are thundering against the base of the cliff even when nothing like that is happening yet. When the real waves are coming in from the ocean with a great storm, not only spray is driven onto the land: when the sea is at its worst, the breakers can wash even over the cliffs themselves. Their force then is such that they clear away any loose earth or rock from behind the cliff edge for several metres, creating a smooth and entirely bare surface of bedrock running along the edge of the land, and behind this cleared and smoothed stretch of coastline, they pile up a storm beach, a wall of large chunks of stone heaped up nearly as tall as a man. Perhaps even more so than the cleared stretch of land immediately behind the cliff edge, this wall is a monument to the fury that the Atlantic Ocean can throw against this coast.

Some forty paces above the edge of this storm-beaten shore, on a large slab of bedrock close to a field wall, the erosion caused by the water running off the barren rock has engraved two series of horseshoe-shaped ripple marks (figs 6, 7). Following the direction in which rain water is draining away, these two lines of horseshoes point straight towards the sea. Collecting Aran lore in the 1970s and 1980s, Tim Robinson recorded a tradition which interpreted these series of ripple marks as the traces left behind by a water-horse and its foal: leaping up the cliff from the ocean, and apparently somewhat misjudging their jump, the two horses made a less than elegant landing, skidding along the rock and leaving these two series of marks.[213] In the Old

213 Robinson 2009a: 45. On my use of Tim Robinson's literary ethnography of the Aran landscape cf. above, note 205.

Fig. 6: Above Poll Dick bay on the south-western coast of Aran. The series of horse-shoe-shaped ripple-marks runs from the bottom-left corner of the image towards the sea. © M. Egeler, 2015.

Fig. 7: The slab of rock with the 'horseshoe-marks'. © M. Egeler, 2015.

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Irish 'Voyage of Bran' (*Immram Brain*), ocean waves are called *gabra réin*, 'mares of the sea'.[214] Whether or not there is any kind of continuity between the Old Irish poetic image and the fantastic animal of modern folklore, it is clear that there is a close association between the sea and its creature. Above Poll Dick, this seems to inscribe a deep irony into the land. Behind the cliff edge, the violence of the sea has cleared the bedrock like an empty, blackened plate, and piled up the boulder wall of the storm beach as a monument to its might. However tranquil the weather might be, the untamed fury of the sea is a constant presence through the traces it has left in the very stones of the land. Yet, just a few paces above this memorial to the violence of the ocean, there are the marks left by its two creatures – and they have the hoof-size of two Shetland ponies. The discrepancy is so glaring that the story of the water-horse and its foal almost seems to belittle the ocean and the rocky shores it is washing against. Looking across the miserable coastal pasture above Poll Dick, more rock than grass, one wonders in particular whether this not-really-awe-inspiring image of the little sea-pony jumping across the storm-beaten cliff edge might not on some level be a way of making light of the land and of the conditions of a poverty-stricken farmer who has to work it, trying to make a living from a land not made to live on.[215]

The water-horse is a well-established motif of the folklore of Ireland and Scotland, attested in a multitude of stories.[216] Horses emerging from the water are not exclusively a modern motif, however, nor are they peculiar to the

214 Ed. and transl. by Mac Mathúna 1985, but transl. adapted (Mac Mathúna translates 'sea-horses').

215 Cf. Robinson 2012: 110, 180 and Robinson 1996d: 165–166 on place-stories as a coping-strategy helping to handle situations of pervasive scarcity.

216 For more water-horse lore cf. Fomin and Mac Mathúna 2016: 27, 46, 57–58, 59, 70, 72, 73, 74, 75; Butler 2015; Robinson 2009a: 45–46; MacDonald 1994–1995: 50–51; Almqvist 1991a; Almqvist 1991b: 236–239; MacPhail 1896: 400; Thomas 1857–1859: 130–132. In addition to this published material on the water-horse or *ech uisce*, there is also a wealth of still unpublished archival material; I owe thanks to Maxim Fomin for pointing me to the following memorates on the water-horse legend selected by the *Stories of the Sea* project (Ulster University; cf. Stories of the Sea 2017) from the D.J. Macdonald Collection (material from Uist from the 1950s) and from the Mac Lagan Collection (late-nineteenth-century material) at the School of Scottish Studies Archives at the University of Edinburgh: D.J. MacDonald Collection from South Uist, Book 1, pp. 20–21; Book 13, Story 4, pp. 1205–1210; Edinburgh audio file SA 1953 127.7; Edinburgh audio file SA 1958 156.3; SA MacLagan 303–303b; SA MacLagan 8055; SA MacLagan 8118; SA MacLagan 716; SA MacLagan 8118-8119; SA MacLagan 8119; SA MacLagan 8119–8120; SA MacLagan 8122–8123.

Gaelic world. According to *Landnámabók*, a horse emerging out of a body of water made its appearance in Iceland at the very beginning of the Settlement. This story is set on the peninsula of Snæfellsnes in western Iceland, where *Landnámabók* gives the following account of the settlement of Auðun the Stutterer (I quote from the fuller H-recension, ch. 71; cf. S83):[217]

> Audun stoti s(vn) Vala hins sterka hann att(i) Mýrunu dottur Biadmaks Ira konungs. hann nam Rauns fiord allann fyri ofan Raun a millim Svinavatz ok Trolla háls. hann bio i Raunsfirdi. þadann eru Hraunfirdingar komnir. hann sa vm haust at herstr apalgrár liop ofann frá Horns[218] vatni ok til stodroza hans. sa hafdi vndir stodhestinn. þa for Audun til ok tok hinn gra herst ok setti fyrir tveɢia yxna sleda ok ók samann alla todu sina. herstrin var gódr medferdar vm hadegit. enn er aleid ste hann i vollinn hardan til hofskeɢia. en epter sólarfall sleit hann allann ʀeiding ok liop til vatz upp. hann sast ecki siþan.

> 'Auðun the Stutterer, son of Váli the Strong, he was married to Mýrún, the daughter of Bjaðmakr, King of the Irish. He took the whole Hraunsfjǫrðr Fjord above Hraun Lava Field between Lake Svínavatn and Trǫllaháls Ridge; he lived in Hraunsfjǫrðr. From there the Hraunfirðingar are descended. One autumn he saw that an apple-grey horse ran down from Lake Hornsvatn and to his stud-horses. It subdued the breeding-stallion. Then Auðun went there and took hold of the grey stallion and yoked him before a two-ox sledge, and he pulled together all the hay from his home-field. The stallion was easy to manage through midday. Yet when the hour was advanced, he stomped into the hard ground up to the hoof-tufts; and after sunset he broke the whole harness and ran up to the lake. He has not been seen since.'

This entry in *Landnámabók* tells a place-story about a farm and a lake on Snæfellsnes; the transmission of the name of the lake in the different manuscripts and recensions of *Landnámabók* is problematic, and the modern toponymy of the area has changed in any case, but probably the lake in question is to be identified with Lake Hraunsfjarðarvatn.[219] Yet, however that may be, the story tells that one day an apple-grey stallion emerged from this lake, was temporarily tamed by the farmer, performed a titanic feat of strength by pulling a sledge designed for two oxen (which is remarkable as oxen are stronger draught animals than horses), but then broke the harness and disappeared back into his lake. The last act, the stallion breaking his harness, is

217 Ed. by Finnur Jónsson 1900; my translation.
218 Ms: Hardns
219 Jakob Benediktsson 1968: 121 (notes 4, 6).

accompanied by him 'stomping into the hard ground up to the hoof-tufts'. It may be an important detail (missing in the *Sturlubók*-version of the narrative) that the ground is explicitly qualified as 'hard' (*harðr*). If not simply meant to emphasise the preternatural strength of the stallion, this detail could be taken to suggest that the stallion's stomping creates lasting hoof-prints; thus it would inscribe his presence into the materiality of the landscape. Here, we may be encountering a reflex of a place-story just like the one from Aran: it may well be that the tale of Auðun's water-horse was tied to some horseshoe-shaped impression in some rock on the land of Auðun's farm, which formed the tale's main focus and was 'explained' by it.

Landnámabók claims that Auðun was married to one 'Mýrún, the daughter of Bjaðmakr, King of the Irish', furnishing him with a direct genealogical connection to Ireland. To some extent, such genealogical connections to Ireland, and Irish royalty in particular, are a stock motif of Icelandic literature.[220] In the case of Auðun, however, this genealogy is given at least a ring of authenticity by the detail that *Mýrún* seems to be a fairly accurate, if slightly Icelandicised, representation of a genuine Irish name, *Muirenn*.[221] The name of her supposed Irish royal father Bjaðmakr, furthermore, may be a reflex of the reasonably common Irish name *Blathmac*.[222] This shows that there was at least a minimum knowledge of things Gaelic involved in the growth of the traditions surrounding Auðun.

Two further details may also point in a similar direction. According to *Landnámabók* (H60/S72), Auðun was not a settler who had come to Iceland directly from Scandinavia. Rather, Auðun's father, Váli the Strong, had emigrated to the Hebrides, which suggests that Auðun may have, or at least may have been imagined to have, grown up on the Hebrides,[223] i.e. in the environment of a mixed culture composed of a Gaelic native population and Norse

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220 Cf. the genealogy of Óláfr Peacock in *Laxdœla saga*, above p. 33.

221 Egeler 2014: 54; Etchingham *et al.*, forthcoming, ch. 5. The name is attested as having been in use in high-status circles at least as early as the seventh century: the *Annals of Ulster* (ed. and transl. by Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill 1983) note the death of a Queen Muirenn, daughter of Cellach of Cualu and wife of Írgalach, for the year 748 (*s.a.* 748.6); as the death of her husband Írgalach had been noted already *s.a.* 702.2, she must have been born in the seventh century. The death of an abbess of Kildare of this name is noted *s.a.* 831.2.

222 Egeler 2014: 56 (note 8); Etchingham *et al.*, forthcoming, ch. 5. The S-recension gives the name of Mýrún's father as *Maddaðr*, which probably is meant to represent the Irish name *Matudán*, a name borne by a number of Irish kings of the Viking Age: Egeler 2014: 54–55; Etchingham *et al.*, forthcoming, ch. 5.

223 *Pace* Sayers 1995 (1997): 164.

settlers. Along these lines, also Auðun's nickname *stoti*, 'the Stutterer', may be significant: perhaps his 'stuttering' was not a speech impediment, but rather an imperfect command of the Norse language by a Norseman who had grown up in a Gaelic-speaking environment and was a Gaelic-speaker more than a Norse-speaker. A parallel to such an interpretation of Auðun's nickname is provided by the story of Haraldr *gilli*. According to *Magnússona saga*,[224] Haraldr *gilli* was a man from Ireland who claimed to be an illegitimate son of the Norwegian king Magnús Barefoot; after coming to Norway to claim to be acknowledged as such, he was laughed at because of his imperfect command of the Norse language (ch. 27). Thus, from the various pieces of information that *Landnámabók* gives about Auðun, a coherent (if not necessarily histori-cally accurate) picture emerges: the Auðun of this tradition was a man who may have been of Norse descent but in everything else appears to have been fundamentally Gaelicised.

If this is so, it becomes particularly interesting that the story of Auðun's water-horse not only finds a parallel in the modern folklore of Aran, but also in early Irish heroic literature – and a much closer one at that.[225] The most famous horse of Irish heroic narrative is the horse of the hero Cú Chulainn, the central hero of the Ulster Cycle of tales, the most prominent heroic cycle of early medieval Irish literature:[226] this horse is the stallion called the *Líath Macha* or 'Grey of Macha'. An account of how Cú Chulainn first acquired this horse is given in a section of the tale *Fled Bricrenn* ('Bricriu's Feast'; §§31–32).[227] On linguistic grounds, Rudolf Thurneysen interpreted this pas-sage as an interpolation dating to the eleventh century.[228] The context of this passage is an argument among the wives of the most prominent heroes of the Ulstermen. The women, goaded on by Bricriu, have started to squabble about who of their husbands is the greatest of these heroes. To settle the dispute, the warrior Conall Cernach challenges Cú Chulainn to a duel, wishing to decide once and for all who is the strongest among them. Yet Cú Chulainn, quite out of character, declines. The reason he gives for doing so is that he has, on that

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224 Ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–1951, vol. 3, pp. 238-277.

225 Cf. already Egeler 2014 (which also contains a discussion of the relationship between Norse traditions about Sigurðr's horse Grani and the water-horse in Irish heroic literature, which will not be repeated here); Sayers 2007: 388–390; Sayers 1995 (1997): 164; Almqvist 1991a: 117–118, 119; Young 1937: 119. The study by Almqvist 1991a came to my attention only after I had published my discussion in Egeler 2014.

226 Still the best general survey of Irish heroic literature is Thurneysen 1921.

227 Ed. and transl. by Henderson 1899; ed. by Best and Bergin 1929: 246–277.

228 Thurneysen 1921: 462–463.

very day, caught and broken in his new horse, the Grey of Macha – a feat which has left him completely drained. A narratorial comment then confirms Cú Chulainn's statement:[229]

> Ba fír ém dosom da*no* ani sin fo dagin iss *ed* láa and sin immanarnic dosom frisin Liath Macha hi taib Lindi Leith. hi Sleib Fúait. Ro selaig Cu C*hulaind* chuci iar tichtain dó asind loch co tarat a di laim imma brágit. co ragaib etorro oc gleic coro thairmchellsat tír nÉrend fon n-innasin. co toracht inn aidchi sin cona eoch riata leis co Emain Macha.

> 'This was indeed true, because that is the day on which he met the Grey of Macha by Lind Léith, the "Lake of the Grey", in the Slíab Fúait Upland Area. Cú Chulainn stole up to him after he had come out of the lake and brought his two hands around his neck, so that they had a wrestling-match and in that manner made a circuit of the land of Ireland, until he reached Emain Macha that evening, having his broken horse with him.'

This passage is important because it tells that the Grey of Macha, just like Auðun's water-stallion, was a water-horse that came out of a mountain lake; and that it was an exceptionally strong animal, even though in the Irish heroic text this strength is not illustrated by its ability to pull a load designed for two oxen but by the detail that it requires Ireland's strongest hero to tame it – and even Cú Chulainn is entirely worn out after he has wrestled down the Grey. Just what a feat it was to tame the Grey of Macha is further underlined by a speech then given by Cú Chulainn (*Fled Bricrenn*, §32), where he enumerates all the places to which his wrestling-match with the Grey has led them while the stallion did his best to throw off his future master. There it is also mentioned that Cú Chulainn caught his second horse, the Dub Sainglend, in exactly the same way at another lake. Ireland, at this time, seems to have boasted a considerable population of lake-horses fit for heroes.

Further aspects of medieval Irish lake-horse lore are added by the Old Irish tale of the 'Great Rout of Mag Muirthemne' (*Brislech mór Maige Muirthemni*).[230] This narrative, which on linguistic grounds can be dated to the early eighth century,[231] tells of how Cú Chulainn is manoeuvred into a situation where he has to violate certain magical injunctions that he is under the obligation to observe. This violation weakens him to such a degree that his enemies are able to overcome and kill him. In one passage of this text, a spear

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229 Text: Best and Bergin 1929: 257 (ll. 8457–8462); my translation.
230 Ed. and transl. by Kimpton 2009.
231 Kimpton 2009: 8–10.

aimed at Cú Chulainn hits and sorely wounds the Grey, after which horse and hero bid each other farewell:[232]

> La sin do:lléici Erc in gai fair conid:ecmaiṅg issin Líath Macha. Gataid Cú Chulaind in ṅgai ass et celebrais cách dia chéile díb. La sodain léicthi in Líath Macha ⁊ leth a chuṅga fo brágit co ndechaid i lLind Léith i Slíab Fúait. Is ass do:dechaid [dochum] Con Culaind. Is inti dano do:chúaid íarna guin.

> 'With that Erc casts the spear at him so that it strikes the Grey of Macha. Cú Chulainn removes the spear and each bade farewell to the other. With that the Grey of Macha leaves him, with half of his yoke under his neck, until he came to Linn Léith, the "Lake of the Grey", in the Slíab Fúait Upland Area. It is from there that he came to Cú Chulainn, and it is there that he went after being slain.'

Two aspects of this passage are important. First, it tells us that the Grey of Macha not only originates from, but (like Auðun's water-horse) at the end of his time in the human world also returns to his mountain lake; and second, its early date shows that the motif was present in Ireland already before the beginning of the Viking Age. This latter point in turn has two important implications. First, Norse settlers in Ireland, and (given Cú Chulainn's preeminent position as the most famous hero of early medieval Irish heroic narrative) probably elsewhere in the Gaelic-speaking world, could have heard this or similar stories throughout the time of the Norse settlement in Ireland and Scotland. And second, any similarities between Irish and Icelandic tales of water-horses cannot be explained through a borrowing from Norse into Irish narrative culture. Rather, if a borrowing there was, it must have taken place from Ireland to Iceland.

To sum up, this material presents a picture in which striking parallels are visible between Auðun's water-horse and the water-horses of medieval Irish storytelling. Both in the story about the water-horse of Snæfellsnes and in the Ulster Cycle, a

1. grey
2. stallion
3. emerges from a lake in the mountains,
4. is temporarily tamed by a man,
5. performs huge feats of strength,

232 Ed. and transl. by Kimpton 2009: 22, 42 (§18); translation slightly adapted. Cf. Stokes 1876–1878b: 180; Thurneysen 1921: 553.

6. and finally ends his time in the human world by returning into the mountain lake that he had originally come from.

The parallels between the two stories, or cycles of stories, are so detailed and specific that already in their own right they suggest that the tales are unlikely to be entirely independent from each other. Rather, these parallels suggest a direct dependency of the Icelandic lake-horse tale on the Irish one, a dependency in the other direction being precluded by the chronology of the attestations, as the Irish variety of lake-horse is attested already before the beginning of close contacts between Norse and Irish culture during the Viking Age. This impression is further reinforced by the context which *Landnámabók* gives for the Icelandic lake-horse tale: this story was told about the land of a settler whose father had emigrated to the (at least partly Gaelic-speaking) Hebrides, who himself may have spoken better Gaelic than Norse, and who had married into an Irish family. Thus, *Landnámabók* itself implies that the story of the lake-horse is set in a deeply Gaelicised context. If, however, a tale that seems composed of Gaelic motifs is already by its source text set into a context marked as Gaelic, the simplest interpretation of the material is probably that what we are dealing with is indeed a Gaelic place-story that has been adapted to an Icelandic place.

The (typological) comparison with the Aran tale might even suggest a very specific context for this adaptation. If the idea to tie water-horse stories to horseshoe-shaped hollows in suitably located rocks occurred already during the Middle Ages (and the wide international spread of similar motifs strongly suggests that this is an idea that could easily have been invented many times over on many occasions),[233] then the idea to connect a tale of this type with a farm on Snæfellsnes might have been suggested by a similar 'hoof print' somewhere in a rock there. Exactly this indeed seems to be hinted at in the *Hauksbók*-version of the tale. Importantly, this should be seen in the context of the overall socio-cultural situation. At the time when Auðun would have come to Iceland, Iceland was empty. The situation of the Norse settlement of Iceland was one of the rare occasions in documented human history in which a country was settled which previously had not had any human occupation. Iceland would have had no settlements, no history, no place-names – it was an entirely blank slate. For the first settlers, this must have been a deeply

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233 Cf., for instance, how the modern touristic self-portrayal of the area of Thale in the Harz mountains in eastern Germany mythologises a faintly horseshoe-shaped impression in a local rock as a hoofprint left by Odin's horse Sleipnir: Egeler 2016c: 19–20 (note 12).

unsettling experience: culturally, they were moving into a completely empty space. In this context, they might have seized every opportunity to create some familiarity. In such a situation, if a horseshoe-shaped mark was found that recalled similar marks that back home had been the object of stories, this might have been enthusiastically welcomed as a prime chance to dispel at least something of the alienness and emptiness of the land. Essentially, what seems to be happening in the story of Auðun's lake-horse is that a probably deeply Gaelicised settler uses Gaelic stories to turn the new, empty landscape into which he has moved into something that feels like 'home'. By filling his farmland with an Irish story, he is almost turning his new farm into a facsimile of the Gaelic landscapes he would have been familiar with from the Hebrides, countering something of the feelings of unfamiliarity and alienness that the new land on Snæfellsnes would have provoked.[234] It is unlikely to be chance that the story used for this purpose seems to be patterned on a story from the Ulster Cycle: since the Ulster Cycle was the favourite heroic cycle of the Irish elite of the early Middle Ages, its stories would have had a particular ring of 'home'. Inscribed into the new landscape, they would have been effective like few others to dispel any otherness this landscape might have had.

To conclude, it might be worth highlighting as an aside just how self-deprecating the story of Auðun's lake-horse is. While apparently patterned on a famous heroic tale, it has few heroic pretensions indeed. Whereas Cú Chulainn tames the Grey of Macha to perform feats of heroism together with him, Auðun tames his lake-horse to pull a load of hay;[235] and to make matters even worse, Auðun is not even able to hold on to the lake-horse, but only manages to handle it for a single day, after which it disappears again into its lake above his farm. Amidst the self-important and oftentimes violent boastfulness that characterises so much of Icelandic storytelling, this almost anti-heroic treatment of the lake-horse motif stands out as unusually likeable. While there

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234 This reading of the process emphasises the agency of the individual settler. As H. Glenn Penny points out to me, however, it should be acknowledged as an alternative possibility that a horeshoe-shaped mark in the rock could also have been interpreted by its beholder as an indication of the ('genuine' rather than narrative) presence of the same kinds of supernatural beings in both countries: 'ah, there are water-horses here too, like at home'. The overall effect for the process of turning the new land into 'home' would be very similar, but the way how one got there would be different and, on a conscious level, much less active.

235 Stories of a water-horse being harnessed to do farm work still appear in modern Scottish and Irish folklore. In some instances, these folkloric attestations are strikingly similar to the narrative of Auðun and his water-horse; cf. MacDonald 1994–1995: 50 (F94); Almqvist 1991a: 110–114.

certainly is no direct historical connection between the two, this feature again recalls the treatment of the water-horse motif in the Aran tale located above Poll Dick. There, the violence of the Atlantic Ocean is transformed into a pony-sized animal; here, the animal that normally serves its heroic rider to kill and to maim is used to do farm work. Can we detect here a hint of swords-to-ploughshares? There certainly seems to be a break with the near-constant feuding, raiding, and warfare that during the Viking Age so fundamentally characterised the world of the Norse colonies in Britain and Ireland. This makes one wonder whether the meaning that the story of Auðun's lake-horse inscribes into the land of his farm involves not only turning it into 'home' by evoking Ireland and the Hebrides, but equally creates a certain distance from the violence that haunts these lands. Perhaps the story, as much as a yearning to create home, also expresses a desire to have, at long last, peace, even if that means emigrating to what was then the end of the world.

2.3. Floating Church Bells: the Settlement Account of Ørlygr Hrappsson in Landnámabók

On the south-eastern shore of the wide bay Faxaflói in western Iceland, about half an hour's drive north of Reykjavík, the small Kjalarnes Peninsula juts out into the sea. Today, the historical as well as religious focal point of the little headland is the church of Brautarholt. This small, black-painted wooden building was erected as early as 1857 and boasts a bell dating from the year 1740, which alone in an Icelandic context already gives it considerable historical significance. A recent Icelandic survey of local churches, however, goes even further than pointing out the church's eighteenth-century roots as established by its bell, and proudly considers Brautarholt Church to be a direct descendant of 'the first church in Iceland' built by the Hebridean settler Ørlygr Hrappsson.[236] This contemporary perception of Brautarholt Church as the most recent in a line of churches going back to the very beginning of Icelandic Christianity is largely based on *Landnámabók*, which recounts the story of the settlement of Kjalarnes in unusual detail.[237] As it is the case also

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236 'Brautarholtskirkja á Kjalarnesi ... *má teljast afkomandi fyrstu kirkju á Íslandi, þeirrar kirkju sem suðureyski landnámsmaðurinn Örlygur Hrappsson reisti á Esjubergi skömmu fyrir árið 900 og frá segir í Landnámu og víðar.'* (Anonymous *s.a.*, highlighting original.)

237 In general on the account of the settlement of Kjalarnes by Ørlygr Hrappsson cf. Grønlie 2017: 132–134; Egeler 2015a: 75–79; Barraclough 2012: 93–94, 95; Wellendorf 2010: 13–16; Clunies Ross 2002: 32–33; Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1999: 23; Jennings 1998: 44–46; Herman Pálsson 1996: 16–18; Sayers 1994: 137–138; Young 1937: 119–120. It is a curious coincidence that Kjalarnes, of all places, also is the setting of the one Icelandic Family Saga in which the reception of Irish story themes is clearer than in any other: *Kjalnesinga saga* (ed. by Jóhannes Halldórsson 1959), the 'Saga of the People of Kjalarnes', makes its engagement with the Irish heroic literature of the Ulster Cycle explicit by not only using motifs traditionally connected with the Ulster Cycle hero Cú Chulainn, but even naming the Ulster Cycle ruler King Conchobar as the figure who drives Ørlygr (who in this text is described as an Irishman) out of Ireland. Cf. Gísli Sigurðsson 2000: 90–93; Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1957: 15. Since *Kjalnesinga saga* is, however, primarily a family tale rather than a place-story, the Irish elements in this text will not be pursued further.

with other stories in *Landnámabók*, crucial material is missing in the version of the narrative found in the text's *Sturlubók*-recension (S15) and is, in the extant medieval versions, only preserved in the *Hauksbók*-recension. There, the story of Ørlygr Hrappsson and the church on Kjalarnes runs as follows (H15):[238]

> Ørlygr was the name of a son of Hrappr, son of Bjǫrn the Ungartered. He was in fosterage with Bishop Patrick the Holy on the Hebrides. He wanted to go to Iceland and asked Bishop Patrick to help him. The bishop obtained timber for a church for him and asked him also to take a plenarium and an iron bell and a gold penny and blessed earth with him that he should put under the corner post and have as a consecration, and he should dedicate [this church] to Saint Columba. Then Bishop Patrick said: 'Wherever you take land, only settle there, where you see three mountains from the sea, and a fjord that opens up a view between all mountains, and a valley in each mountain. You shall sail to the southernmost mountain. There will be a forest there, and to the south under the mountain you will find a clearing and three piled-up or erected stones; there you shall erect a church and dwell there.' Ørlygr put to sea, and on the second ship was the man who was called Kollr, his foster-brother; they sailed together. ... And when they came near the land, a great storm broke loose over them, and it drove them westwards around Iceland. Then Ørlygr called upon Bishop Patrick, his foster-father, that they might reach land, and he would name the place after him where he would reach land. They did not wait a long time after that before they saw land. He came with his ship to Ørlygshǫfn, 'Ørlygr's Harbour', and therefore he named the fjord Patreksfjǫrðr, 'Patrick's Fjord'. But Kollr called upon Thor; they were separated in the storm, and he came to the place called Kollsvík, 'Kollr's Bay', and there he lost his ship. There they spent the winter. Some of his oarsmen took land there, as it will yet be said. And in spring Ørlygr got his ship ready and sailed off with all his possessions. And when he came south past Faxaóss, there he recognised those mountains towards which he had been pointed. Then the iron bell fell over board and sank, and they sailed inland along the fjord and took land there where it is now called Sandvík Bay on Kjalarnes Peninsula. There, the iron bell then lay in a heap of sea-weed. On the advice of his relative Helgi *bjóla* he lived at the foot of Esjuberg Cliff and took land between Mógilsá River and Ósvífrslœkr Brook.

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238 My translation after the H-recension of *Landnámabók*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson 1900. The Old Norse text of this passage, too long to be quoted here, is given in an appendix to this sub-chapter.

He built a church at the Esjuberg Cliff, as he had been told. His wife was called Hjálp; their son was Valþjófr, who came to Iceland with Ørlygr as an already grown-up man. Later, Ørlygr was married to Ísgerðr, the daughter of Þormóðr, son of Bresi; their son was Geirmundr, the father of Halldóra, who was married to Þjóstólfr, the son of Bjǫrn Gold-Bearer; their son was Þorleifr, who lived at the Esjuberg Cliff after his grandfather Geirmundr. They believed in Saint Columba, even though they were not baptised. Þorleifr had uncanny powers and nevertheless accepted Christianity; many men are descended from him. ...

According to this account, Ørlygr Hrappsson was a Christian settler from the Hebrides. Brought up by a Hebridean bishop by the name of Patrick the Holy (*Patrekr enn helgi*),[239] Ørlygr asks for his fosterer's guidance when he decides to emigrate to Iceland. Bishop Patrick then provides Ørlygr with building material and furnishings for a church that he should build and dedicate to Saint Columba, including an iron church bell;[240] and furthermore he gives him an (apparently prophetic) description of the place where Ørlygr should settle. Thus prepared, Ørlygr puts to sea. He does, however, not travel alone, but in the company of his foster-brother (*fóstbróðir*) Kollr. Since Kollr is the foster-brother of a fosterling of Bishop Patrick the Holy, the story seems to imply that he also is a fosterling of Patrick's,[241] but nothing is said about

239 To Etchingham, the spelling of the Old Norse form of Patrick's name suggests scribal transmission of the Irish name, perhaps in the form of a written origin legend of the church: Etchingham *et al.*, forthcoming, ch. 5, *s.v.* 'Patrekr' and ch. 5.2.2. ('Conclusions'). Alternatively, I wonder whether the spelling could not equally be explained by assuming interference from the probably well-known Latin spelling of 'Patrick' (*Patricius*) – though of course this also is a form of scribal transmission (in contrast to a purely oral tradition going back to the Settlement Period). Yet in any case it seems unlikely to me that the origin of the form *Patrekr* ultimately can help us to make a statement about the specific source of the Ørlygr-narrative, as the place-name *Patreksfjǫrðr* suggests that by the time the H-text was written, the form *Patrekr* simply was conventional. So whatever form the immediate source of the Ørlygr-narrative would have used, it would probably have been normalised to *Patrekr*.

240 On the kind of bells, as material objects, that would have been in use at the time cf. Bourke 1980; on their role in literature cf. Ní Chatháin 2015.

241 Technically, this conclusion is not compulsive within a Gaelic, or strongly Gaelicised, context. Within the Irish legal system, it was common that children of high rank were fostered consecutively by different fosterparents, and for men of very high birth it even seems to have been expected that they had several foster-fathers (Kelly 1988: 90; cf. *Vita tripartita*, ed. and transl. by Stokes 1887: 100, l. 17; Tírechán III.1 26.5 [cf. note 265]; and the example below, p. 229). Thus, Ørlygr and

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Kollr asking for the bishop's advice. After coming within view of Iceland, things go awry for the two foster-brothers: a storm drives them off course and they have to fear the worst, but Ørlygr saves his ship by invoking Patrick the Holy and promising to dedicate the land to him where he would reach shore again. In the event, this happened at the fjord which henceforth has been known under the name of 'Patrick's Fjord', Patreksfjǫrðr. Kollr, however – even though the story seemed to imply that he had been fostered by the saintly bishop as well – does not invoke the powers of Christianity, but the old god Thor – and he promptly wrecks his ship. The following spring, Ørlygr continues his voyage until he reaches the mountains and the fjord that Patrick had described to him, apparently the triad of Esja, Akrafjall, and the cluster of mountains around Skarðshyrna, between which (as predicted by Patrick) the Hvalfjörður Fjord opens up a view. Then something strange happens: the iron church bell that Ørlygr had received from Patrick falls over board, even though one should assume that it would have been treated as a well-guarded treasure – but no harm is done. When Ørlygr reaches Kjalarnes and takes land there, he finds the iron bell lying on the shore – apparently it has drifted ahead of him and already reached his destined settlement site before him. Ørlygr now consults with his relative Helgi *bjóla*, who appears to have a Gaelic nickname.[242] He then builds his church 'at Esja's Cliff' (*at Esjubergi*); the place where he erects his church he names from the Esja massif, whose cliffs rise up immediately east of Kjalarnes.[243] His descendants continue the worship of Saint Columba that had been decreed by Patrick the Holy.

This narrative can and should be seen in a broad range of contexts. Thus, the motif of the church bell falling overboard and coming ashore on Ørlygr's destined place of settlement on some level evokes the pagan Norse motif of the high-seat pillars, which, sometimes dedicated to the god Thor, could be thrown overboard just off the coast of Iceland and would then lead settlers to their final and divinely decreed place of settlement. The most prominent, but by no means the only, example can be found in the account of the settlement

Kollr could have been thought of as having had another foster-father in common. Such an idea, however, could only have occurred to an Irish audience and not to an Icelandic one, even leaving aside that there is nothing in the account of *Landnámabók* to support it.

242 Colmán Etchingham suggests a connection to Old Irish *bél*, 'lip', pl. *béoil*, 'lips, mouth': Etchingham *et al.*, forthcoming, ch. 5, *s.v.* 'Bjólan'.

243 There is an abandoned farm by the name of 'Esjuberg' some four kilometres to the south-east of Kjalarnes, but since 'Esjuberg' simply means 'Esja's cliff', this toponym does not have to be very old, but could have been coined at any time in a straightforward descriptive fashion.

of Þórsnes in *Eyrbyggja saga* 4 and *Landnámabók* S85=H73.[244] Furthermore, the apparently involuntary character of the loss of Patrick's bell is suggestive of the story of the settlement of Ingimundr the Old, whose settlement site was marked by the recovery of a lost silver image of the god Freyr (*Landnámabók* S179=H145; *Vatnsdœla saga* 8–15).[245] However, the most striking parallels to the story of Ørlygr Hrappsson and his bell are to be found in medieval Irish hagiography.[246] This seems to be of particular importance not least because the account given in *Landnámabók* itself makes explicit reference both to the Gaelic world in general (as the Hebrides at the time would have been at least partly Gaelic-speaking)[247] and to Irish saints in particular.

The Irish narrative in question is found in the *Vita sancti Declani episcopi de Ard Mor*, the 'Life of Saint Declan, Bishop of Ardmore'.[248] Ardmore in County Waterford was an important early monastic site in Munster, located on the south coast of Ireland, some fifty kilometres to the east of Cork. Its patron saint, Saint Declan, is traditionally ascribed to the fifth century and considered one of four missionaries whose activity pre-dated the conversion of the (rest of the) Irish by Saint Patrick.[249] During the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, Ardmore had the status of a bishopric. Extensive Romanesque ruins (including in particular a 'cathedral' church, a small oratory that is popularly identified as the burial place of Saint Declan, and a round tower with a height of 29 m) still vividly testify to its importance during that time (figs 8, 9).[250] The extant Latin Life of the saint cannot be dated with any degree of certainty and shows evidence of substantial later revisions, but may be based on a prototype written during the same period.[251]

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244 Cf. already Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1999: 22–23. On the high-seat pillar motif cf. Wellendorf 2010; Böldl 2005: 163–176; Clunies Ross 2002: 30–33; Clunies Ross 1998: 142–146, 155–157. *Eyrbyggja saga* ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935.

245 Cf. Egeler 2015a: 75–79. *Vatnsdœla saga* ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1939.

246 This has first been noted by Young 1937: 119–120; more recently cf. Wellendorf 2010: 15–16.

247 Cf. above, p. 33.

248 The Latin Life has been ed. by Plummer 1910, vol. 2, pp. 32–59. An Early Modern Irish translation of this Life is ed. and transl. by Power 1914: 2–73; the relevant passages there are chs 11, 19. For a discussion and further literature on the Life cf. Ó Cathasaigh 2015.

249 In general on Saint Declan cf. Ó Riain 2011: 258–260.

250 Halpin and Newman 2006: 435–437; Harbison 1992b: 19, 324–325; Power 1914: xxii–xxiv.

251 Cf. Ó Cathasaigh 2015: 291–292; Ó Riain 2011: 258, 259; Sharpe 1991: 31–32, 349.

Fig. 8: The remains of the medieval monastic complex of Ardmore, with the round tower and the 'cathedral' behind it. © M. Egeler, 2016.

Fig. 9: 'Saint Declan's Oratory', where the saint is believed to be buried, overlooking the bay below Ardmore. This little chapel may in parts go back to the eighth century. © M. Egeler, 2016.

In this text, Saint Declan's bell plays a prominent role as the core element of the founding story of Ardmore. Its importance is already made clear in the account of how Saint Declan came into its possession. On one occasion during one of his many travels, Declan was celebrating mass, and the following happened (ch. 10):[252]

> Offerens beatissimus pontifex Declanus in quadam ecclesia in itinere, missum est ei a Deo de celo paruum cymbalum nigrum, et uenit per ecclesie fenistram ad eum, et super altare stetit ante eum. Quod sanctus Declanus cum gaudio accipiens, gratias Christo reddidit; et de tali munere vir sanctus firmabatur contra barbaram ferocitatem gentilium. ... Quod cymbalum Scoti uocant Dubyn Declani, dantes ei nomen ex nigredine sua, et asscribentes ipsum Declano. Per quod silicet ab illo die usque hodie multa signa Dei gratia per sanctitatem sui possessoris facta sunt; et manet honorifice in ciuitate sancti Declani.

> 'While the most blessed bishop Declan was celebrating mass in a certain church on his journey, a small black bell was sent to him from God from heaven, and it came to him through the window of the church and stood on the altar in front of him. Saint Declan accepted it with joy and gave thanks to Christ; and by such a gift the holy man was strengthened against the barbaric ferocity of the heathens. ... The Gaels call this bell Declan's *Duibín*, "Little Dark One", giving it this name from its darkness, and ascribing it to Declan. Naturally, from that day until the present day, many signs have been wrought through it by the grace of God through the holiness of its owner; and it remains with honour in the city of Saint Declan.'

Thus, according to the *Vita*, Declan's bell was a direct gift from heaven, which made it a sacred object of the first order. Indeed, the *Vita* emphasises that it had not only reached Declan through a miracle, but that it also worked miracles itself. Particularly worth noting, furthermore, is the explicit missionary context of the bell's appearance. This is expressed by the statement that the bell 'strengthened' Declan against the 'barbaric ferocity of the heathens' whose beliefs he spends much of his life combating. This missionary aspect is made even clearer in the Irish version of the text, where *et de tali munere vir sanctus firmabatur contra barbaram ferocitatem gentilium* is rendered as *agus do bi inntinn daingen aicce inaccaidh ainffesa agus mírésuin na geinntlighechta ona beith aicce* ('and it filled him with much courage

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252 Ed. by Plummer 1910; my translation.

Fig. 10: Saint Declan's Stone on the shore of Ardmore during low tide. Today (2016), it is advertised by an explanatory sign mounted on the seawall above the stone. In the early twentieth century, the Rev. P. Power still was able to describe it as an object of intense popular devotion (Power 1914: xxiii). The stone – a glacial erratic originally stemming from the Comeragh Mountains – is geologically different from the coastal bedrock on which it is perched, which must early on have raised the question of its origin, leading to the aetiology provided by the *Vita Declani* and making it virtually certain that this is indeed the same stone that is mentioned in the medieval Life. © M. Egeler, 2016.

to combat the error and false teaching of heathendom').[253] Thus, the bell becomes more than a generic holy object: it is a divine tool serving the spread of Christianity. As such, the bell appears to have been a central part of the public cult of the missionary bishop Declan (*et manet honorifice in ciuitate sancti Declani*, i.e. in Ardmore).

Crucial is the bell's role in the actual foundation legend of Ardmore,[254] a story which the *Vita* recounts in a depth of detail that mirrors the story's importance for the ecclesiastical centre where the text may have been written (ch. 15). The plot of the tale runs as follows. Given its divine origin and its ability to work miracles,[255] Declan never parts with the bell, but has it

253 Irish *Life of Saint Declan* ed. and transl. by Power 1914, ch. 11.

254 To tie narratives to real-world objects which then serve as 'proof of occurrence' for the narrative is a quite common trait of early Irish storytelling both secular and ecclesiastic (e.g., *Echtra Nerai*, §§9, 19 [cf. below, p. 235 with notes 583, 585]); for a discussion with a collection of examples see Murray 2000.

255 For an example of a miracle worked by the bell cf. ch. 11 of the Latin and ch. 12 of the Irish Life.

constantly carried by the most trusted member of his retinue. On one of his travels, however, Declan goes to Britain, and while the saint is organising passage from Britain back to Ireland, the bell is passed on to a less trustworthy man, who in turn puts it on a rock on the shore in order to have his hands free to attend to some other business. Of course he then forgets to retrieve it before embarkation, and the bell is only remembered when the ship is already halfway to Ireland. Declan is distraught and prays for a miracle. His wish is granted, and soon the rock on which the bell had been left on the shore is seen crossing the sea and overtakes Declan's ship, with the bell sitting on top of it. Declan then orders that the ship should follow the floating rock, prophesying that where the rock with the bell would come ashore, there would be Declan's episcopal see for the rest of his life. Now the rock floats just ahead of the ship, at quite the right speed for the ship to follow. Finally, both rock and ship reach a certain peninsula on the Irish coast (fig. 10). On this peninsula, there is a little height called *Ard na Choerach*[256] (*Ard na gCaorach*), 'Height of the Sheep'. Seeing this height, one of Declan's disciples asks him how this 'little height' should support all his followers. Yet Declan tells him that this height shall never be called a 'little height', but rather it will be a 'great height'; and ever since it has been called *Ard Mór*, 'Great Height'.[257]

While the *Vita* tells this tale in too elaborate a manner to quote the passage in full, this summary of its plotline should already be sufficient to show both the parallels and the differences between the bell-episodes of the *Vita sancti Declani* and of the settlement account of Ørlygr Hrappsson. In the *Vita*, the whole tale is consistently told in the miracle-rich register of hagiographic writing, and the element of divine intervention is made explicit and, indeed, emphasised. The story of Ørlygr's settlement in Iceland in *Landnámabók*, in contrast, is told in a rather more 'realistic' mode, recounting the various incidents in a way which insinuates divine intervention but consistently stops just short of pronouncing it. Thus, in the *Vita*, the bell is a gift from heaven and crosses the Irish Sea on a boulder-turned-boat, while in *Landnámabók* the bell is a gift from a holy bishop and crosses Faxaflói in an unspecified manner. These differences, however, are differences of genre rather than of subject matter. Looking beyond the difference in register that separates the miracle-story of a Saint's Life from the (comparatively speaking) prosaic report of a historical work, both accounts tell the same basic story: *a sacred bell that had been received as a holy gift is lost in connection with a sea crossing,*

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256 *Sic* Plummer 1910, vol. 2, p. 42.

257 It is typical for this type of place-story that in fact 'Great Height' simply is a very fair description of the physical aspect of the headland of Ardmore with its steep cliffs.

inexplicably makes its way to the shore, and in doing so indicates the place where a Christian settlement is to be founded and a church to be built in surroundings which at the time of the church's construction are still pagan, but where the construction of this church heralds the arrival of Christianity and of the cult of Gaelic saints.

The correspondence between the story of the early Christian settler Ørlygr and the missionary saint Declan is so close that it might be taken to indicate a direct dependence of the one upon the other – especially given that not only the motif of the bell-crossing-water recurs in both narratives, but that they are both also embedded in the same broader, missionary or quasi-missionary context: the propagation or first arrival of Christianity in a largely pagan environment. This correspondence of both motif and context could suggest that the two tales are not only related, but that the Norse story might even be a conscious adaptation of the Irish Saint's Life. Yet, whatever the case may be, the *Landnámabók*-account at least highlights a conscious general connection of Ørlygr's settlement story to the Gaelic-speaking world. This is done in two ways.

First, the story names a bishop 'Patrick the Holy' as the foster-father and advisor of Ørlygr (and the source of the bell). Historically, it is anything but clear who this person might have been. Jakob Benediktsson notes that no Patrick the Holy or Bishop Patrick is known from the Settlement Period,[258] but while this is true, this absence of historical corroboration has to be seen in the context of our general ignorance of the Hebridean bishops of the time: as Jennings remarks, not only do we not know of a ninth-century Hebridean bishop called Patrick, but we also do not know the names of any other bishops of this period.[259] So theoretically, there might have been a Hebridean bishop called Patrick during the Settlement Period.

Yet this is not the only possibility. One alternative is that the storyteller with whom this element of the tale originated simply inserted the name of the first Hiberno-Norse bishop that came to his mind, and here the second bishop of the diocese of Dublin, Bishop Patrick of Dublin (1074–1084), would have been as good a candidate as any.[260] In this case, 'Bishop Patrick of the Hebrides' would have been transferred, through mistake or poetic licence, from the closest major Norse diocese.[261] However, the specific role that 'Bishop

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258 Jakob Benediktsson 1968: 52 (note 2).
259 Jennings 1998: 53 (note 19).
260 On the life of Bishop Patrick of Dublin cf. Gwynn 1955: 1–7.
261 Cf. Etchingham *et al.*, forthcoming, ch. 5, *s.v.* 'Patrekr', for a discussion of this
    and other possibilities of a 'historical' interpretation of the Patrick of the

Patrick of the Hebrides' plays in Ørlygr's settlement account seems to suggest that another possibility may be more likely. Ørlygr's Patrick providing the Icelandic settler with a bell and a plenarium for his church strikingly evokes a number of passages in the *Tripartite Life* of Saint Patrick of Ireland, a text probably of the tenth century.[262] There, Saint Patrick is described as handing out bells, as well as an occasional plenarium, book of gospels, or other ritual items, to various churches and saints: to Mochae he gives a gospel, a credence-table, and a crozier; in fifty churches in Connacht, he leaves fifty bells, fifty chalices, and fifty altar-cloths; among the Men of Imchlar, he leaves one of his disciples together with his (Patrick's) book of ritual and his bell; and to Fíacc, whom he ordains as bishop of Leinster, Patrick gives a bell, a credence-table, a crozier, and *pólairi* (i.e. writing-tablets?)[263] (*Vita tripartita*, p. 40, ll. 3–11; p. 146, ll. 16–19; p. 170, ll. 5–7; p. 190, ll. 12–14).[264] The bulk-distribution of fifty bells and other liturgical items, including gospel books and books of law, even already appears in the treatment of Patrick's life by Tírechán from the later seventh century (II.1).[265] This suggests that the bishop who supplies Ørlygr with a bell and other accoutrements for his church – including, in particular, a book – might have been called Patrick because Patrick was not only one of the most prominent saints of Ireland, but also well-known as a supplier of ritual equipment for newly-founded churches – including bells and books.

At the same time, however, it may also be worth mentioning that bells generally recur in Irish foundation legends of churches and monasteries. Leaving aside the Patrician examples and the example of Ardmore, Próinséas Ní Chatháin, for instance, points to the legend of the foundation of the church of Formáel by Saint Fínnachta, where again the saint's bell plays a core role.[266] Furthermore, in the Life of Findchua of Brí-Gobann in the Book of Lismore (*Betha Fhinnchua Brí Gobhunn*, ll. 2887–2896),[267] probably written in the fourteenth century,[268] Saint Findchua determines the location where he is to found a monastery by wandering through the land until he reaches

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Landnámabók-account.

262 Ed. and transl. by Stokes 1887. Date: Sharpe 1991: 20.

263 Cf. *eDIL*, *s.v.* 'pólaire'.

264 Furthermore, the hand-bell that Patrick leaves behind on one occasion is ultimately transferred into a church (*Vita tripartita*, p. 248, ll. 9–15), apparently as an object of worship, and also the making of bells is mentioned several times in the Life (*Vita tripartita*, p. 250, ll. 24–25; p. 266, ll. 4–5).

265 Ed. and transl. by Bieler 1979: 122–167; dating: Sharpe 1991: 13.

266 Ní Chatháin 2015: 251, 256.

267 Ed. and transl. by Stokes 1890: 84–98, 231–246.

268 Ó Riain 2011: 336.

a place where his bell rings without human intervention.[269] The bell motif thus illustrates that it is generally not possible to identify any particular text as the source of a particular hagiographic motif with any degree of certainty. Irish Saints' Lives liberally draw on a pool of shared stock-motifs which the authors of these Lives use as they see fit, adapting the ever-same motifs in countless permutations.[270] For the study of Norse-Gaelic cultural relations this means that, while in order to maintain clarity of the argumentation I always refer to specific texts, generally speaking any Norse adaptations of Gaelic motifs are more likely to be drawn from this amorphous 'pool' of oral and written saints' lore rather than from any of the specific written Lives that happen to have been preserved.

However, to return to the question of 'Patrick of the Hebrides', if one accepts that on some level the reference to a 'Patrick the Holy' refers to the Irish Saint Patrick – which seems likely –, then this raises the question of what exactly the tale wants to express by his transferral to the Hebrides. One might be tempted to speculate about whether the transferral of (*the* or a) Patrick to

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269 For a collection of attestations of the motif of a saint's bell ringing at the site of a monastery cf. Bray 1992: 104, 127 (Lives of SS Bairre, Ciarán of Saighir, Findchua, Mochoemog, Mochua, and Ruadán). In medieval Irish hagiography, the bells of saints generally are treated as miraculous objects with great frequency; for a large number of attestations cf. Bray 1992: 99, 104–105, 126–128. It might also be worthwhile noting that bells play a prominent role in Irish toponymy. As Kevin Murray points out to me, there is a parish in County Limerick named *Tuoghcluggin*, i.e. *Tuath Chluigín*, which probably means 'District of the Little Bell'; two townlands in this parish bear the names *Cluggin* (<*Cluigín*, 'Little Bell') and *Castlecluggin* (<*Caisleán Cluigín*, 'Castle of the Little Bell'). Cork has two townlands (Lower and Upper Bellmount) whose Gaelic form, though of unclear age, is *Ard an Chloig*, 'Height of the Bell'. Furthermore, there is a number of Irish places called *Clogga(gh)* (<*Clogach*) (cf. Logainm 2017); while the meaning of *clogach* is not certain, its most obvious interpretation would be 'abounding in bells' or 'bell-like'. In all likelyhood, such place-names do not originally refer to foundation legends involving bells; more likely is that they, or at least most of them, refer to bell-shaped features in the landscape. Even Joyce, working in the nineteenth century, took some of the names formed with *clog* to refer to round, bell-shaped hills: Joyce 1995, vol. 2, p. 17; vol. 3, p. 204 (*s.v.* 'Clog'). At least secondarily, however, such bell-names could then in turn be connected with the sacred bells of the Irish saints. About Ballyclog (*Baile chluig*, 'Town of the Bell') in Tyrone, Joyce thinks that this place was so named because it was held by the family who acted as the keepers of Saint Patrick's bell; see Joyce 1995, vol. 2, pp. 184–186, where he quotes examples of bell-toponyms actually referring or thought to refer to ecclesiastical bells.

270 Cf. Bray 1992.

an area heavily colonised by the Norse might be a form of cultural appropriation; yet this cannot be more than speculation.[271] One could also speculate about whether the subordination of Patrick to Saint Columba that seems implied when Columba is made the dedicatee of the church might, perhaps in a tongue-in-cheek kind of way, be intentional, expressing a certain feeling of superiority of Hebridean-Norse Christians with a Columban orientation over Patrician-oriented Irish ones. In the *Tripartite Life*, accepting a bell from Patrick certainly seems to suggest a submission to his authority, and also the Norse text may be playing with this idea. Yet however that may be, in any case the reference to 'Patrick the Holy' (and his bell and book) functions as a tie that binds the narrative directly to the Gaelic-speaking world and its Church.

Later in the narrative, a second explicit reference to the Gaelic-speaking world is constituted by the reference to Saint Columba. The forms of the saint's name in the *Sturlubók*- and *Hauksbók*-recensions differ in an interesting way: the *Sturlubók*-recension (S15) uses the form *Kolvmba*, which is based on the Latin form of the saint's name (*Columba* as in Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*), whereas the *Hauksbók*-recension uses the form *Kolvmkilla* (H15), which is based directly on the saint's vernacular Irish name *Colum Cille*,[272] indicating a closer connection to an Irish vernacular tradition (though not necessarily an oral one, since the accurate spelling of the Norse form with doubled *-ll-* is suggestive of a copying of a Gaelic written form[273]). In either case, the mention of Saint Columba recalls another complex of hagiographic motifs, which might again also find an echo in the tale of Ørlygr. Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*,[274] a text from the very end of the seventh century,[275] invests Columba with considerable powers of prophecy (just as, incidentally, the Hebridean Bishop Patrick of the *Landnámabók*-account appears to have prophetic powers). One of his prophecies concerned a certain Cormac úa Léthain. This Cormac was a monk who, following established Irish monastic practice,[276] set out in a boat

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271 Bergdís Þrastardóttir, a native of Patreksfjörður, points out to me that the local inhabitants unequivocally, and contrary to the statement of *Landnámabók*, derive the name of their fjord and town from Saint Patrick of Ireland (*pers. comm.*, 25 November 2016). Since the Patrick the Holy that Ørlygr interacts with in *Kjalnesinga saga* (ch. 1) likewise (and notwithstanding the chronological impossibility) appears to be Saint Patrick of Ireland, this modern belief should perhaps not be discounted too quickly.

272 Cf. Jesch 1987: 19–20.

273 Etchingham *et al.*, forthcoming, ch. 5, *s.v.* 'Kolumba/Kolumkilla'.

274 Ed. and transl. by Anderson and Anderson 1991.

275 Cf. Sharpe 1995: 55.

276 Cf. Charles-Edwards 2000; Egeler 2015b: 281–320.

to find a place suitable to serve as a retreat in which to practice undisturbed meditation and ascetic exercise. Cormac failed in this endeavour in spite of repeated attempts at finding such a place, and on one occasion Saint Columba, using his prophetic insight, identified the reason for this failure: it was due simply to the fact that Cormac had allowed a monk to accompany him who had not obtained his abbot's permission for doing so (*Vita Columbae* I.6).

This incident again reflects a stock-motif of Irish monastic literature. As Séamus Mac Mathúna has observed, the motif of the 'unauthorized companion(s)', who either cause the outright failure of a voyage or at least have to suffer dire consequences themselves after forcing their way into the voyaging crew, plays a central role in four out of five major Irish Voyage Tales; the latter is a genre of tales about ecclesiastical sea voyages that we will meet again in later parts of this study.[277] Specifically, this occurs in the *Vita sancti Brendani* (the 'Life of Saint Brendan', extant in several recensions), the *Navigatio sancti Brendani* (the 'Voyage of Saint Brendan'), *Immram Curaig Maíle Dúin* (the 'Voyage of Mael Dúin's Leatherboat'), and *Immram Curaig Ua Corra* (the 'Voyage of the Leatherboat of the Uí Corra').[278] The *Navigatio sancti Brendani*,[279] the 'Voyage of Saint Brendan', probably is the most well-known such text and, importantly, was already in existence during the Icelandic Settlement Period.[280] In this text, Saint Brendan prepares a boat and selects a crew to find the Earthly Paradise on an island in the ocean, the 'Paradise of God in the vastness of the sea' (*paradisus Dei in spacio maris*). When all preparations have been made and boat and crew are ready to put to sea, suddenly three monks from Brendan's monastery throw themselves down at the saint's feet and demand to be taken along; otherwise, if he would leave them behind, they would starve themselves to death. Thus, Brendan has little choice but to take the three men with him, but prophecies that this would end well only for one of them (ch. 5). In the course of the voyage, this prediction turns out to be true: one of the men is adopted into a spiritual community which the expedition finds on an island in the ocean (ch. 17), whereas the other two, who had led sinful lives, become victims of the devil (chs 7, 24). Thus, none of the three ever reaches the 'Paradise of God in the vastness of the Sea', and none of them ever comes home again.

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277 Cf. below, esp. pp. 170ff., 240, 252ff.
278 Mac Mathúna 1994: 335. Cf. below, p. 171.
279 Ed. by Selmer 1959, and cf. Carney 2000.
280 Wooding 2011 dates the text to the ninth century. The dating of the *Navigatio* has been much discussed, with proposal ranging from the late eighth to the tenth century; for a collection of literature cf. Egeler 2015b: 287 (note 1097).

In the current context, the motif of the unworthy participants who cannot achieve the goal of the voyage is of interest in view of the strangely pagan behaviour of Ørlygr's foster-brother Kollr. As already mentioned, Kollr, being the foster-brother of a bishop's fosterling, should be a Christian, but when Ørlygr and Kollr are driven off course in a storm, Kollr does not invoke the Christian god, but the god Thor – which promptly results in a shipwreck. Given the clear and prominent adaptation of Irish hagiographic material in the rest of the tale (Patrick; Columba; the floating-bell-motif), this might make one wonder whether this element of the narrative is also an adaptation of an Irish hagiographic stock-motif, in this case drawn from the rich Irish narrative tradition of ecclesiastical sea voyages in search of a place of spiritual retreat. A motif from this context might easily have lent itself to be adapted to a story about a search for a place at which to settle down.

To sum up, I suggest that the tale of the Christian settler Ørlygr Hrappsson can be read as an adaptation of Irish hagiography that brings together, and combines in a creative way, various strands of Irish hagiographic lore, especially traditions about Saint Declan of Ardmore, Saint Patrick of Ireland, and a motif drawn from the literature of ecclesiastical sea voyages. The latter material was widely known and had a huge impact throughout the European Middle Ages. The *Navigatio sancti Brendani* was in due course translated into a wide range of languages (including Old Norse) and became a veritable medieval 'bestseller'.[281] Furthermore, motifs from this genre have also been adapted elsewhere in Old Norse literature,[282] even leaving aside the fact that the motif of the supernumerary voyagers is part of the hagiography of Saint Columba, who is mentioned explicitly in the Ørlygr narrative. Somewhat different is the case of Saint Declan's bell. Rather than being a commonplace stock-motif of medieval Irish hagiography, the bell motif in the particular form of the floating (or rather: floated) bell is very specifically connected with this particular saint. Moreover, the Latin Life in which it appears may not be very old, and the Irish Life is directly based on this Latin Life, implying that it has no independent value as a source. Yet, while the motif may play only a restricted role in the extant literature, it may have had a wide and early oral circulation. The *Vita Declani* notes that the bell was preserved in Ardmore and was worshipped as an important relic, which means that its cult legend probably both predated the *Vita* and would have been familiar to a considerable number of people. Besides, since Ardmore is a coastal site, its traditions could

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281 For the surviving fragment of the Old Norse *Brandanus saga* cf. Unger 1877, vol. 1, pp. 272–275.

282 Cf. below, pp. 250ff.

have spread widely in just the same way in which the tale of Hvítramannaland seems to have been transmitted to the Norse through a sea port.[283] Such a transmission of the cult legend of Ardmore through the ports of Ireland is plausible especially because Ardmore, being located in County Waterford, was not far from the Norse settlements of Woodstown and Waterford, the latter of which was to become one of the most important Viking settlements in Ireland, on a par with and sometimes rivalling Limerick and Dublin.[284] Along such maritime routes, the story of Saint Declan's bell could well have reached Iceland. Furthermore, the more general motif of the bell as playing a core part in the foundation legend of a church is attested widely in Patrician and other Irish hagiography and can indeed be considered a classic hagiographic stock-motif. Thus, it illustrates that perhaps one should not be too confident in trying to identify a specific Irish source for a motif that seems to have been adapted in Iceland: in this as in other instances, such an Icelandic adaptation may be based on a miracle story connected with one Irish saint just as well as on a similar story connected with another. Therefore, while an identification of Ørlygr's bell with the bell of Saint Declan may not easily be established with confidence, the overall convergence of the Icelandic and the Irish material still seems to suggest that the story of Ørylgr's bell (just as, according to the story, the bell itself as a material object) is an import from the Celtic West that was brought to Iceland in order to invest Kjalarnes with something of the sanctity of the Gaelic saints.

283 *Landnámabók* mentions explicitly that the Hvítramannaland tale was first told by a Norseman who had long lived in the western Irish port town of Limerick (S122=H94); cf. below, pp. 250ff. On the Norse in Limerick cf. Wilson 2014: 31–32. That Norsemen could (if on a rather different level) be interested in bells from Britain and Ireland is also exemplified by the Litlu-Núpar boat burial from northern Iceland, where a bell from northern England or Scotland was found among the grave goods (Roberts 2008/09: 38–39).
284 On the Norse in Waterford cf. Wilson 2014: 23–24, 25, 27–31; Downham 2004. On Woodstown in particular cf. Russell *et al.* 2014.

Appendix: The Old Norse text of Ørlygr Hrappsson's settlement account according to the H-recension of Landnámabók (ch. 15; ed. by Finnur Jónsson 1900).

Fra Orlygi

Avrlygr het svn Hraps Biarnar svnar bvnv. han*n* var at fost*r*i með Patreki b*yskv*pi hinv*m* hœlga i Svðreyiv*m*. h*ann* fystiz at fara til Islanðz *ok* bað Pátrek b*yskv*p at h*ann* sæi v*m* með h*anv*m. b*yskv*p feck h*anv*m ki*r*kiv við *ok* bað h*ann* hafa m*eð* ser *ok* plenariu*m* *ok* iarnklockv *ok* gvllpening *ok* molld vigða at han*n* skylldi le*G*ia vnd*ir* horn*n*stafi *ok* hafa þat fyri vixlv *ok* skylldi h*ann* hœlga Kolvmkilla. þa m*æll*ti Patrekr b*yskv*p hvargi er þv tekr la*n*d þa bygðv þar at eins er sér .íij. fioll af hafi *ok* fiorð at sia a milím hv*er*s fiallz *ok* dal i hv*er*iv fialli. þv skallt sigla at hino synzta fialli. þar man skogr v*er*a *ok* svn*n*an vnder fiallinv mantv rioðr hitta *ok* lagða vp*p* eða reista .íij. steina. reistv þar kirkiv *ok* bv þar. Orlygr let (i) haf *ok* sa maðr a oðrv skipi er Kollr het fostbroðir h*ans*. þ*eir* hofðv sam flot. ... en*n* er þeir ko*m*v i la*n*dvon ge*r*ði at þeim storm mikin*n ok* rak þa vestr v*m* Island. þa het Orlygr a Patrek b*yskv*p fostra sin*n* ti*l* la*n*dtokv þei*m ok* han*n* skylldi af hans nafni geva ornefni þar sem han*n* tœki land. þeir v*arv* þaðan fra litla rið aðr en*n* þ*eir* sa land. han*n* kom skipi sinv i Orlygs hofn *ok* af (þvi) kallaði han*n* fiorðin*n* Patrex fiorð. en*n* Kollr het a Þor. þa skilði i storminv*m ok* ko*m* han*n* þar sem Kollz vik heiter *ok* bravt h*ann* þar skip sitt. þar v*arv* þ*ei*r vm vetrin. hásetar hans namv þar svmer land sem en*n* man sagt v*er*ða. en vm varit bio Orlygr skip sitt *ok* siglði brott m*eð* allt sitt. *ok* er han*n* kom svðr fyri Faxa óss þar kendi han*n* fioll þav er h*anv*m var til visat. þar fell vtbyrðiz ia[rnk]lockan *ok* sock niðr en þ*ei*r siglðv in*n* efter firði *ok* tokv þar la*n*d se*m* nv hei[ter] Sandvík á Kíalar nesi. þar lá þa iarnklockan i þarabrvki. h*ann* bygði vnder Esiv bergi at raði Hœlga biolv frænda sins *ok* na*m* la*n*d a millim Mogils ár *ok* Vsvifrs lœkiar. han gerði kirkiv at Esiv bergi se*m* h*anv*m var boðit. Hialp het kona hans. þ*ei*ra svn var Valþiofr er fvlltiða kom til Islanðz m*eð* Orly*G*i. si*þan* atti Orlygr Isg*er*ði d(ottvr) Þormoðs Bresa svnar. þ*ei*ra svn var

Geirmvndr faðir Halldorv er atti Þiostolfr svn Biarn*n*ar gvllbera. þ*ei*ra svn var Þorleifr er bío at Esiv be*r*gi efter Geirmvnd moðvr foðvr sin*n*. þ*ei*r trvðv a Kolvmkilla þo at þ*ei*r væri vskirðir. Þorlefr var trollavkin *ok* tok þo kristni. fra h*anv*m er mart m*ann*a komit.

2.4.   Saints and Salmon: the Lives of Ásólfr alskik in Landnámabók

Saints are not always nice people, nor do they tend to be particularly patient ones. Saint Germanus once burned a whole royal citadel with heavenly fire, including every man and woman in it (*Historia Brittonum* 34).[285] Saint Patrick nearly put an everlasting curse even on the family of a fellow saint (*Vita sancti Declani* 19);[286] when a man who did not want to meet him pretended that he was sleeping, Patrick simply turned this sleep into his last sleep (*Vita tripartita*, p. 184, l. 23 – p. 186, l. 4);[287] and he killed even his own sister after she had sinned, even though she had repented and met him to ask for his forgiveness (*Vita tripartita*, p. 234, ll. 14–28).[288] Similarly, Saint Brigit cursed an apple grove with barrenness because its owner wanted to give some of its apples to the saint rather than to some passing lepers, and smote one of her nuns with a revolting temporal leprosy for not wanting to lend her cloak to a leper while his clothes were being washed (*Vita prima sanctae Brigitae* 32, 56).[289] Also a certain Icelandic saint of the Settlement Period was not above such saintly impatience with his less saintly contemporaries. The man in question is Ásólfr, son of Konáll.[290] In the oldest extant recension of *Landnámabók* in *Sturlubók*, Ásólfr is described as a self-professed misanthrope – or, to put it more kindly, as a man of eremitical inclination with no

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285 Ed. by Mommsen 1898: 111–222. Incidentally, the account of Saint Germanus's life in *Historia Brittonum* (§32) also contains the above-mentioned episode that may have constituted the source of, and certainly is a strikingly close parallel to, the myth of Thor's revivification of his goats (above, pp. 39ff.).

286 Ed. by Plummer 1910, vol. 2, pp. 32–59; cf. the Irish Life (ch. 23) ed. and transl. by Power 1914: 2–73.

287 Ed. and transl. by Stokes 1887.

288 Cf. Doherty 2016: 132–133.

289 Transl. by Connolly 1989. Cf. Bray 1992: 19.

290 In general on Ásólfr cf. Grønlie 2017: 135–137; Clunies Ross 2002; Jesch 1987; furthermore Egeler 2015a: 79–81; Wellendorf 2010: 11–13. Jesch 1987 also includes a discussion of the very limited material on Ásólfr preserved outside of *Landnámabók*, which seems to be at least largely based on *Landnámabók* and not least for this reason is irrelevant for the following analysis of the *Landnámabók*-accounts of Ásólfr (esp. pp. 21–22, with all texts gathered together and translated pp. 30–36).

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liking for social intercourse – who, however, is a Christian and in the end is worshipped as a saint (*Landnámabók* S24):[291]

> A man was called Ásólfr. He was a relative of Jǫrundr in Garðar Yards. He came out [to Iceland] towards the east in the Ósar Estuaries. He was a good Christian and did not want to have anything to do with heathen men, and he did not want to receive food from them. He built a hall for himself at the foot of the Eyjafjǫll Mountains, at the place which is now called 'at *Ásólfsskáli enn austasti*', 'at Easternmost Ásólfr's Hall'. He did not associate with people. Then, folk became curious what he had for food, and in the hall men caught sight of many fish. And when people went to the brook that flowed by the hall, it was full of fish, so that the men thought they had never seen such a wonder. And when the men of the area became aware of this, they drove him away and did not want that he should enjoy these boons. Then, Ásólfr removed his house and home to Miðskáli and was there. Then, all fish disappeared from the brook, when people wanted to catch it. But when folk came to Ásólfr, then the watercourse which flowed by his hall was full of fish. Then he was again driven away. He moved to *Ásólfsskáli enn vestasti*, 'Westernmost Ásólfr's Hall', and everything happened the same way. And when he moved away from there, he went to see his relative Jǫrundr, and he invited Ásólfr to stay with him; but he said that he did not want to be near other men. Then Jǫrundr had a house built for him at Inner-Hólmr Holm and brought him food there, and he was there as long as he lived, and there he was buried. Now a church stands where his grave is, and he is called the holiest man.

In this account, Ásólfr is a man so emphatically Christian that he abhors having anything to do with his pagan neighbours, and who keeps himself to himself to such a degree that the farmers living around him finally start wondering how he is supporting himself. When they go to find out, they discover that he lives on a miraculous abundance of fish, and, begrudging this, they drive him away – just to find that the fish go with him. This happens several times over, and in the end, Ásólfr retires to a hermitage on the land of a relative of his in western Iceland, where this relative supports him until his death and where then a church is erected over his burial place. There, Ásólfr appears to be worshipped as a saint.

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291 My translation after the S-recension of *Landnámabók*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson 1900. The Old Norse text of this passage, too long to be quoted here, is given in an appendix (a) to this sub-chapter.

The Ásólfr of *Sturlubók* is a character that, although becoming the focus of a saintly cult, overall does not seem to be painted in the most sympathetic of lights. He is depicted as the victim of pagan aggression, yet this aggression has nothing directly to do with his religious convictions, but rather Ásólfr provokes it through the scorn he shows for his neighbours who (understandably, if not fairly) then treat him with a resentfulness that merely mirrors the contempt that Ásólfr previously had shown towards them. It may be telling that Ásólfr's neighbours in the first instance go to investigate because they wonder how, given his self-chosen isolation, he is supporting himself: that this question is asked in this particular way speaks volumes about how brittle the economic basis of early Icelandic life was, at least as it was imagined by the author of this passage. The social context of Ásólfr's eviction seems to be a situation in which survival was crucially dependent on cooperation, something that Ásólfr rejects, thus both raising the question of how he manages to survive and losing any claim to his neighbours' loyalty. He is persecuted not for this faith, but for his refusal to integrate into a social order based on, and indeed dependent on, mutual support. So even though Ásólfr's fundamentalist self-centredness is nothing particularly out of the ordinary within the broader context of medieval Saints' Lives, especially as it is used as a motivating factor for the universal hagiographic stock-motif of the saint's persecution by his pagan environment, the Ásólfr of *Sturlubók* is not an easy man to have sympathy for, and his de-facto canonisation at the end of the short narrative almost comes as a bit of a surprise.

In Haukr Erlendsson's recension of *Landnámabók* in *Hauksbók*, the whole depiction of Ásólfr is completely recast, setting it into a very explicitly international context, thoroughly exculpating Ásólfr, and supplying a detailed reason for his veneration in a dedicated church. To achieve all this, Haukr is willing to almost treble the passage in length, which makes the revision of Ásólfr's 'vita' one of the most massive single expansions undertaken in the

H-recension of *Landnámabók*.[292] The expanded version, which now virtually constitutes a classic Saint's Life, runs as follows (H21):[293]

> Þormóðr the Old and Ketill, sons of Bresi, went from Ireland to Iceland and took the whole Akranes Peninsula between the rivers Aurriðaá and Kalmansá. They were Irishmen. Kalman, after whom the river is named, was also Irish, and was the first to live on Katanes Peninsula. These brothers divided the lands between themselves in such a way that Þormóðr had [the lands] south of the rowan-tree grove of Reynir and as far as Kalmansá River and lived at Inner-Hólmr Holm, and his brother Ketill had [the lands] west of Reynir and north of Akrafell Mountain as far as Aurriðaá River. His son was called Bersi, father of Þorgestr, father of Starri at Hólmr Holm, father of Knǫttr, father of Ásdís, who was married to Klœngr, son of Snæbjǫrn, [son] of Harbour's-Ormr. Geirlaug was the daughter of Þormóðr the Old, mother of Tongue's-Oddr. Jǫrundr the Christian was the son of Ketill, son of Bresi; he lived in Jǫrundarholt Forest; that is now called 'in Garðar Yards'. To his dying day he held on well to the Christian faith and in his old age he was a hermit. Jǫrundr's son was Kleppr, father of Einarr, father of Narfi. Another son of Kleppr's was called Hávarr, the father of Þorgeirr. Eðna was the name of the daughter of Ketill, son of Bresi. In Ireland she was married to the man who was called Konáll. Their son was Ásólfr *alskik*, who went from Ireland to Iceland during that time and came to the East Fjords. They came from the east as a group of twelve, until they came to the farm of Þorgeirr the Hǫrðalander in Holt Forest under the Eyjafjǫll Mountains and put up their tent there. And his three companions were then ill. They died there, and Presbyter Jón, son of Þorgeirr, father of Grímr in Holt Forest, found their bones and brought them to a church. Then Ásólfr built himself a house, close to that which is now the church corner at Ásólfsskáli, 'Ásólfr's Hall', following the advice of Þorgeirr, because Þorgeirr did not want to have them by

292 It should be noted that there is no way of telling which version, S or H, is closer to the 'original' story of Ásólfr. Given that we are dealing with the founding legend of a church, Etchingham, for instance, considers the possibility that there was a written text of this legend which was much abridged in *Sturlubók*, i.e. that the H-recension preserves the original narrative more faithfully than the slightly older S-recension: Etchingham *et al.*, forthcoming, ch. 5, *s.v.* 'Eðna'. For a different opinion cf. Jesch 1987: 19–21, who summarises reasons which in her opinion suggest that Haukr's expansion of the 'Vita Ásólfi' was due to Haukr himself, 'without dependence on any one specific outside source' (p. 19).

293 My translation after the H-recension of *Landnámabók*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson 1900. The Old Norse text of this passage, too long to be quoted here, is given in an appendix (a) to this sub-chapter.

his house. A river flowed past Ásólfr's own house. That was an early winter. The river immediately became full of fish. Þorgeirr said that they were on his fishing ground. Then, Ásólfr went away from there and built another house to the west by another river. That [river] is called Írá, 'Irishmen-River', because they were Irish. And when men came to the river, it was so full of fish that the men thought they had never seen such a marvel, and everything was gone from the eastern river. Then the men of the area drove them away from there, and he went then to the westernmost hall. Everything happened the same way. The farmers called them sorcerers, but Þorgeirr said that he thought that they were good men. In spring they went away and to the west to Akranes Peninsula. He built a farm at Hólmr Holm at Kirkjubólstaðr, 'Church's Farmstead'. ... And when Ásólfr got old, he became a hermit. His cell was where the church is now. There he died and was buried there at Hólmr Holm. And when Halldórr, son of Illugi the Red, lived there, a dairymaid had the habit to wipe her feet on the mound which was on Ásólfr's grave. She dreamed that Ásólfr rebuked her for wiping her dirty feet on his house. 'And then we will be reconciled,' he says, 'if you tell your dream to Halldórr.' She told him, and he did not ascribe significance to what the woman dreamed, and paid no attention to it. And when Bishop Hróðólfr went away from Bœr Farm, where he had lived, three monks remained behind. One of them dreamed that Ásólfr spoke to him: 'Send your farmhand to Halldórr at Hólmr Holm and buy the mound from him which is at the cattle trail, and pay a mark of silver.' The monk did so. The farmhand was able to buy the mound and dug the earth from there and found there the bones of a man; he picked them up and went home with them. The following night, Halldórr dreamed that Ásólfr came to him and said that he would make both his eyes burst from his skull, unless he bought his bones for the same price for which he had sold them. Halldórr bought Ásólfr's bones and had a wooden shrine made and set over the altar. Halldórr sent his son Illugi abroad for timber to build a church; but when he was coming back to Iceland and came between the peninsulas of Reykjanes and Snæfellsnes, then he was, because of the ship's owners, unable to go ashore where he wanted. Then he threw all the timber for the church over board and prayed that it should get where Ásólfr wanted. And the Norwegians came west to Vaðill. And three nights later the timber reached the Kirkjusandr, 'Church's-Beach', at Hólmr Holm, except that two trees came to Raufarnes Peninsula in Mýrar Moors. Halldórr had a church built measuring thirty and covered in wood, and dedicated it to Columba together with God.

In this narrative, Ásólfr the misanthrope, who even refuses to live with his relative Jǫrundr unless allowed to keep apart from his household, has virtually

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disappeared. Whereas the Ásólfr of the *Sturlubók* narrative had explicitly refused social intercourse with his pagan neighbours, this new Ásólfr becomes the innocent victim of the unfair greed of Þorgeirr the Hǫrðalander: Þorgeirr allocates land to Ásólfr, and, unprovoked, withdraws it after seeing the richness of fish found in the brook by Ásólfr's hall. His behaviour is particularly reproachable, as he and Ásólfr do not even seem to be separated by the divide between paganism and Christianity: since Þorgeirr's son Jón is a Christian priest, Þorgeirr himself is likely to have been a Christian as well, making it almost tragic that his greed leads him to chase away a Christian saint.[294] Furthermore, from a solitary settler, Ásólfr has been re-written as a man who travels with companions. In this, the narrative recalls the standard depiction of prominent Irish saints, who generally travel with a large number of retainers that in turn often are depicted as saintly themselves. Examples are found in all the Irish Saints' Lives mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.[295] Apart from the general existence of such a retinue, in Ásólfr's case also the number twelve may be significant, recalling as it does the Twelve Apostles;[296] this is underlined by the detail that Ásólfr's companions seem to partake of some measure of sanctity by having their bones buried in a church. This re-written Ásólfr himself withdraws from worldly life only in his old age, when he becomes a hermit. Thus, he restricts his desire for solitary meditation to a socially acceptable measure that shows his deep spirituality without cutting him off from society and its norms. This is the more so since the now-expanded ancestry of Ásólfr provides him with a legitimising role model for his old-age withdrawal to a hermitage: also his uncle Jǫrundr the Christian had at the end of his life become a hermit, thus establishing a pattern for Ásólfr to follow. Thus, overall, Ásólfr is turned from an anti-social zealot on the margin – or even outside – of society into a man who, in spite of his spiritual inclinations, lives his life well within the established boundaries of Icelandic social norms.

Another change in the depiction of Ásólfr is that now he is firmly rooted within the context of Irish Christianity and its transferral to Iceland by Norse settlers who, before finally moving on to Iceland, had spent shorter or longer periods of time in the Gaelic world of Ireland and Scotland. In the *Sturlubók*-account, there is not a single hint of a Gaelic connection: neither the account of Ásólfr himself, nor the scarce genealogical information preceding it (S22–23),

294 As a literary motif, this may be meant to anticipate Halldórr's later misjudgement of the situation, who as well fails to recognise Ásólfr's sanctity.

295 Above, p. 128.

296 Cf. Jakob Benediktsson 1968: 62 (note 2).

give any indication that there would have been a connection between the saint and the Gaelic world. In a marked and striking contrast to this, *Hauksbók* turns Ásólfr into a man whose roots are quintessentially Hiberno-Norse: not only is it stated explicitly that Ásólfr himself had come to Iceland from Ireland, but also his maternal kin is said to have come to Iceland from Ireland; his father had the Irish name *Conall*, Icelandicised to *Konáll*; his mother had the equally Irish name *Eðna* (~Irish *Ethne*);[297] and the name of her grandfather *Bresi* may be derived from the Irish name *Bress*.[298] Furthermore, the church finally built to honour Ásólfr's mortal remains was dedicated to the Gaelic saint Columba.[299] Haukr Erlendsson's rewriting of the *vita* of 'Saint Ásólfr' appears to have had an agenda of making Ásólfr as Irish as possible.[300]

Since the 'Life of Saint Ásólfr' in *Landnámabók* in itself presents a founding legend of the church at Hólmr (and a tale accounting for the place-name Kirkjusandr, 'Church's Beach', connected with it, as well as other toponyms tied directly to Ásólfr),[301] this 'Gaelicising' agenda in itself tells us something about the role of things Irish for the construction of an Icelandic sense of place in *Hauksbók*. To explain (and thus to constitute) the significance of this church, the *Hauksbók*-account closely ties it to the Irish and Hiberno-Norse element of the settlement of Iceland. Thus, the church at

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297 Etchingham *et al.*, forthcoming, ch. 5, *s.v.* 'Eðna'.

298 Etchingham *et al.*, forthcoming, ch. 5, *s.v.* 'Bresi'.

299 Cf. below, appendix b.

300 At first glance, this may recall a pervasive Breton tendency to turn saints worshipped in Brittany into 'Irish' saints even when there is not the slightest evidence suggesting that the saints in question really had any kind of connection to Ireland (in detail cf. Le Duc 2001; more generally cf. Sharpe 1991: 4–5, who notes the tendency towards a 'Hibernisation' of saints in a broader European context). As a typological parallel, this highlights the possibility that Haukr is, for reasons of his own, purposefully and unhistorically creating a new Irish saint for Iceland. Yet while this possibility cannot be precluded, it should be noted that the picture painted by Haukr fits very well into the overall religious-historical situation of the Settlement Period, and that the lack of Irish references in S may, as Etchingham (above, note 292) has remarked, just as well be due to an abridgement of the story in S as to an expansion in H. Note also that Ásólfr as an Irish saint in Iceland would in no way be isolated; cf. the discussion of the *papar* below (pp. 169ff.), the role of Patrick in the preceding chapter (above, pp. 110ff.), and the various references to the cult of Saint Columba in Iceland (pp. 111, 132).

301 The localisation of the two places called Ásólfsskáli, 'Ásólfr's Hall', is not straightforward, but cf. above (p. 49 and map 4) on the perhaps significant Gaelicising toponymic context of the modern places Ásólfsskáli and Ásólfsstaðir.

Hólmr becomes a 'memory place',[302] memorialising the partly-Gaelic roots of Christian Icelandic religion, culture, and society, and in this way puts this place into a not just Norse, but much broader Atlantic perspective. This, furthermore, may not only be the case in the general and somewhat unspecific sense that the account creates links to the Gaelic world by mentioning Hiberno-Norse settlers. Rather, it seems that also the narrative in which these settlers appear as protagonists may to some extent be constructed out of motifs shared with – and perhaps derived from – Gaelic hagiography.

The most obvious use of Gaelic hagiography in the construction of Ásólfr's story is of course the dedication of his church to Saint Columba; but there may also be other echoes of Gaelic tales of saints. This may even concern the most central aspect of Ásólfr's biography in *Sturlubók* as well as its conclusion in *Hauksbók*, where Ásólfr respectively lives as or, at the end of his life, becomes a hermit. One of the most characteristic elements of Irish monasticism was the practice of *peregrinatio*:[303] the search for an ascetic retreat outside of the protective social structures one had been born into, abandoning the security of home and handing oneself over into the hands of the deity. This Irish monastic practice had its roots in a characteristic feature of the Irish legal and social system: one's social and legal status was valid only within the confines of one's home kingdom, and whoever left their home kingdom in Ireland entirely lost whatever status they had there. Thus, abandoning home was tantamount to absolute renunciation, and in this way it became the ultimate ascetic exercise, building on biblical passages such as the dictum in Matthew 19.29: *et omnis qui reliquit domum vel fratres aut sorores aut patrem aut matrem aut uxorem aut filios aut agros propter nomen meum centuplum accipiet et vitam aeternam possidebit* ('and everybody who will abandon home or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or sons or fields for my name will receive hundredfold and will possess eternal life').[304] Within Ireland, however, this act of total renunciation soon came to bestow such spiritual prestige on the ascetic that this prestige, and the new status of the *peregrinus* that went with it, rendered void the actual sacrifice that the *peregrinatio* had originally been meant to be. One way to address this problem was to choose a *potior peregrinatio*, a 'stronger pilgrimage', leaving

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302 On the term cf. above, p. 28.

303 Cf. Charles-Edwards 2000; Egeler 2015b: 281–320.

304 Cf. the Life of Saint Brenainn in the Book of Lismore, which makes explicit reference to this biblical dictum as the motivation for *peregrinatio*: *Betha Bhrenainn meic Fhinnlogha*, ed. and transl. by Stokes 1890: 99–116, 247–261, there ll. 3556–3562.

not only one's Irish home kingdom, but leaving Ireland entirely for foreign shores. This led to forays into the ocean such as that of Cormac úa Léthain or (in a more literary manner) Saint Brendan.[305] Equally, it provided a central part of the impetus behind the foundation of the *Schottenklöster* of continental Europe, whose designation as *schottisch* perpetuates the medieval use of *Scotus* as referring equally, and indistinguishably, to the Gaelic-speaking areas of Ireland and modern-day Scotland.

Looking at Ásólfr's somewhat erratic social demeanour in the *Sturlubók*-version of his story in the light of the emphasis on his Irish roots that is added in the *Hauksbók*-version, one wonders whether what we are observing here is not the somewhat desperate striving of a *peregrinus* to keep his distance from human society in a land that started off empty but is quickly filling up. Maybe Ásólfr's seeming misanthropy, thus, is an echo of an Irish monastic practice. This is particularly tempting to assume since Ásólfr's refusal of social intercourse with, and of requesting any help from, his pagan neighbours tallies with a ninth-century account from Ireland which describes the traditions and practice of the monastery of Tallaght, which played a prominent role in the monastic reform movement of the *Céili Dé* or 'Servants of God'.[306] One passage of this account stipulates that wealth should not be accepted from lay persons, or should be accepted merely to be passed on to the poor, and that, generally, it is preferable not to accept anything unless the giver is himself a holy man (*The Monastery of Tallaght*, §35).[307] Other passages address the worries of particularly devout monks and hermits with moral qualms about accepting support even from churches if these are not sufficiently devout (§4; §77). The text aims to disperse such fundamentalist qualms, but the very fact that its author felt it necessary to do so illustrates the extreme scruples that some contemporary ecclesiastics appear to have had about accepting support from any but the most 'pure'. At the same time, the movement of the *Céili Dé* markedly lacked any proselytising spirit.[308] Rather than aiming to reform society (or even only the Church as a whole), the *Céili Dé* aimed at a contemplative life that withdrew from the world's temptations and irritations to such a degree that some of them even refused to give spiritual guidance to a laity on which such guidance was felt to be wasted (cf. *Monastery of Tallaght*, §§23–24). This again tallies with the attitude that *Sturlubók* ascribes to Ásólfr,

305 Cf. above, p. 122.
306 Cf. Carey 1998: 246.
307 Ed. and transl. by Gwynn and Purton 1911; dating: Gwynn and Purton 1911: 122.
308 Carey 1998: 246.

who reacts to his pagan neighbours not with any attempt to convert them, but simply by withdrawing from them.

Similarly, if in a slightly different way, also Ásólfr's becoming a hermit in the *Hauksbók*-recension of his biography may be linked to Irish monastic custom, tying in with the possibility for a monk of advanced years to retire to the life of a hermit. Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* III.23 [131b] mentions a certain Fergnae who, after many years as a common monk, spent another twelve years as an anchorite.[309] In the same way, the ever-so-Irish *Hauksbók*-Ásólfr may crown his life as a spiritual but still somewhat worldly man by retiring to the wilderness.

A further element of the 'Vita sancti Ásólfi' which seems to evoke – and certainly parallels – a motif of Irish hagiography is Ásólfr's threat to Halldórr to 'make both his eyes burst from his skull' (*kuezt bædi augu mvndv sprengia or hausi hanum*). In Ireland, this same curse appears in the Old Irish 'Life of Brigit' (*Bethu Brigte*),[310] a ninth-century Saint's Life based on a Latin text probably of the early eighth century.[311] There, Saint Brigit is less than pleased when her family does not want to accept her wish to remain unmarried. When one of her brothers tells her that 'the beautiful eye which is in your head' (*int shuil alaind fil it chiund-su*) will be betrothed to a man irrespective of whether she wants that or not, she thrusts her finger into one of her eye sockets and gouges out the eye, arguing that surely now nobody would want to marry her any more. When her brothers then try to wash the wound, they find they have no water for doing so. Brigit now miraculously creates a spring, and at the same time punishes her brother for his insolence (§15):[312]

> *Ocus* do-bert mal[l]a*cht* for Baccene �7 fora sil, �7 dixit:
> 'Mos-memdatar do di suil it chiund'.
> *Et* sic factum est.

> 'And she cursed Bacéne and his descendants, and *said*:
> "Soon your two eyes will burst in your head".
> And it happened thus.'

In the Old Irish Life of Brigit, the vengeful destruction of the victim's eyes is motivated by the miracle's context as established by the saint's preceding

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309 Sharpe 1995: 56.
310 Ed. and transl. by Ó hAodha 1978.
311 Ó hAodha 1978: xxv–xxvii; McCone 1982: 126.
312 Ed. and transl. by Ó hAodha 1978: 5, 23.

self-mutilation. In the story of Ásólfr, in contrast, there is no contextual reason why the saint should, of all possible afflictions, choose the destruction of Halldórr's eyes to motivate him to build a shrine for Ásólfr. This lack of a contextual motivation could be taken to suggest that the motif of the saintly destruction of a person's eyes could be derived from some other hagiographic narrative, and the parallel provided by the Life of Brigit, together with the strong emphasis on Irishness that permeates the Ásólfr story, might suggest that this source could have been an Irish one. This is the more so since Saint Brigit was one of Ireland's most prominent saints, making it particularly likely that the stories connected with her would have had a wide circulation.

At the same time, as was the case with Ørlygr's bell above,[313] the motif of the bursting eyes is not restricted to the hagiography of Saint Brigit and could just as well have found its way to Iceland from a different narrative. In an Irish Life of Mo Laisse of Daim-Inis that has been ascribed dates as early as the twelfth century and as late as c. 1500,[314] the saint demands land from a king; when the king refuses, his eyes are taken from him (*rucad a shúile a cédóir ó'n rígh*), to be restored only when he yields to the saint's will shortly afterwards.[315] In a somewhat grotesque inversion, the motif of the saint's curse leading to the bursting of an eye is connected with Saint Ruadán of Lorrha. In the Middle Irish tale of the 'Death of Diarmait mac Cerbaill' (*Aided Diarmata meic Cerbaill*, §10),[316] King Diarmait and the saint, after an argument between them has turned out to be virtually unresolvable, get into a cursing contest in which each of them heaps curses upon the other; at one point, the King curses Ruadán that his body should be disfigured, and immediately one of the saint's eyes bursts.[317] The King's curse also appears in the Latin Life of the saint, which probably was written not before the second quarter of the twelfth century,[318] though in the Life it is not explicitly said to be effectual (*Vita sancti Ruadani*, ch. xvii).[319] Both texts also contain a more conventional episode in which a servant of the king loses his sight when he acts against

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313 Above, p. 121.
314 *Betha Mholaise Dhaimhinse*, ed. and transl. by O'Grady 1892, vol. 1, pp. 17–37; vol. 2, pp. 18–34. For a collection of dating suggestions for this text cf. Sims-Williams 2011: 255 (note 127).
315 O'Grady 1892, vol. 1, p. 26; vol. 2, p. 25.
316 Ed. and transl. by Wiley 2000: 89–164; O'Grady 1892, vol. 1, pp. 72–82 (ed.); vol. 2, pp. 76–88 (transl.).
317 Wiley 2000: 121, 149; O'Grady 1892, vol. 1, p. 77; vol. 2, pp. 82–83.
318 Ó Riain 2014: 72.
319 Ed. by Plummer 1910, vol. 2, pp. 240–252; transl. by Ó Riain 2014: 74–85.

the saint, but has his sight restored when he repents (*Aided Diarmata*, §8;[320] *Vita sancti Ruadani*, ch. xv).[321] In the collection of Saints' Lives in the Book of Lismore, the taking (mostly followed by the later restoration) of some-body's sight by a saint is ascribed to Saint Finnian of Clonard (*Betha Fhindéin Clúana hEraird*, ll. 2624–2627; late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century)[322] as well as to Saint Ciarán of Clonmacnois (twice: *Betha Chiaráin Clúana meic Nois*, ll. 4399–4401 and 4183–4190; undated).[323] Furthermore, a strikingly close and early parallel to the treatment of the motif in the Old Irish Life of Brigit is found in 'The Evernew Tongue' (*In Tenga Bithnua*), probably a ninth-century text.[324] There, a descendant of Judas Iscariot doubts the apostle Philip's description of the tree from which the shaft of the True Cross was crafted and in punishment for his sin is granted a vision of this tree in all its splendour, which immediately blinds him (§61):

> Talmaidiu iarsin ni ro fhuilngsetar na suili peccthacha sella[d] frisna liga noiba. Madit a shuili inna cinn.

> 'Suddenly then the sinful eyes endured not to look at the holy hues. His eyes burst in his head.'

This parallel to Saint Brigit's curse is particularly important because it uses almost the same phrase as *Bethu Brigte* and thus shows that even the recurrence of the combination of 'head' and 'both/two eyes' in both the 'Vita sancti Ásólfi' and in *Bethu Brigt*e does not constitute evidence of a direct dependency of the 'Vita sancti Ásólfi' specifically on *Bethu Brigte*. Ásólfr threatens that Halldórr's '*both eyes* [would] burst from his *skull*' (*bædi augu … sprengia or hausi hanum*), while Brigit tells her brother that 'soon your *two eyes* will burst in your *head*' (*mos-memdatar do di suil it chiund*), which at first glance could seem like evidence for a specific intertextual connection; yet the recurrence of 'his *eyes* burst in his *head*' in the *Evernew Tongue* shows

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320 Wiley 2000: 118–119, 146–147; O'Grady 1892, vol. 1, p. 76; vol. 2, p. 81.

321 The various versions of the clash between Diarmait and Ruadán of Lorrha in a range of historical and hagiographic sources, not all of which are discussed here, are treated in the ongoing doctoral research of Catherine Ostrander, University College Cork, on 'Forging Dynasties: The Literary Identity of Diarmait mac Cerbaill'.

322 Ed. and transl. by Stokes 1890: 75–83, 222–230. Dating: Ó Riain 2011: 319–320.

323 Ed. and transl. by Stokes 1890: 117–134, 262–280.

324 Ed. and transl. by Stokes 1905b; more recently translated also in Carey 1998: 77–96 (but the quotation below is taken from Stokes's edition). Dating: Carey 1998: 276.

that it is not.[325] Rather than proving direct literary intertextuality, even this seeming verbal echo cannot indicate more than a common connection to a shared trove of motifs.[326] What seems to be circulating between the North-West Atlantic cultures are, in a manner of speaking, not specific, identifiable texts, but stock-motifs.

In the present context even more interesting, since they are specifically related to the cultural construction of place, are three further possible Irish echoes in the *Hauksbók*-account of Ásólfr. One has been discussed in some detail already in connection with the settlement story of Ørlygr, and therefore does not need too much elaboration here: the miraculous divine guidance provided by a floating object that reaches the shore on the very spot where a Christian cult is to be established. In connection with Ørlygr, we have met this motif in the form of the floating church bells that indicated where both Ørlygr and Saint Declan of Ardmore were to found their respective churches.[327] In the Ásólfr-narrative, a variant of the same motif seems to appear in the form of Illugi's prayer to Ásólfr, in which Illugi asks the saint to let the timber for the construction of his church come ashore where he would need it. In the Ásólfr-narrative, this turn of the plot is even memorialised in a specific place-name (Kirkjusandr, 'Church's-Beach'), which marks the spot where almost

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325 In a later text, almost the same phrase is also used in the Life of Saint Ciarán of Clonmacnois in the Book of Lismore (*Betha Chiaráin*, l. 4401, ed. and transl. by Stokes 1890): *Mebhuis focétair a ænsuil 'na cinn la breitir Ciaráin.* ('Straightway at Ciarán's word Trén's one eye brake in his head.') Note also that the direction of the bursting in the Icelandic and the Irish phrases is not identical: in the Irish example an intransitive verb (*eDIL*, *s.v.* 'maidid') is used to describe the bursting of eyes 'in' a head, seemingly suggesting a kind of implosion, whereas in the Icelandic example a transitive verb is used (*sprengja*, 'to make burst', cf. Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson 1874, *s.v.*) and the victims eyes are threatened to burst 'out of' a head, suggesting an explosion.

326 Beyond the hagiographic register, further prominent examples of the motif of the bursting of eyes as a punishment for a transgression are found in the *Dindshenchas* of the Boyne: *Metrical Dindshenchas*: ed. and transl. by Gwynn 1903–1935, part 3, pp. 26–33 (Boand I); *Bodleian Dindshenchas*: ed. and transl. by Stokes 1892: §36 (p. 500); *Rennes Dindshenchas*: ed. and transl. by Stokes 1894–1895, no. 19 (*Revue Celtique* 15 [1894]: 315–316). For a recent discussion of this story about the Boyne cf. Toner 2014: 279–282.

327 Cf. above, pp. 110ff.; also Jesch 1987: 21 and Wellendorf 2010: 13–14 point to Ørlygr's story as a parallel. Cf. also above, pp. 113–114 with note 244, and Jesch 1987: 20–21 and Wellendorf 2010: 11, 13, on the Norse pagan parallel of the floating high-seat pillars. Wellendorf 2010: 11–13 furthermore points to a parallel in the life of Saint Giles of Nîmes.

all the timber reached dry land and establishes a direct toponymic connection between this spot and the construction of Ásólfr's church. Thus, the importance of the hagiographic motif for the social – or more specifically: narrative – construction of place is emphatically brought to the fore.

The second possible echo is constituted by Ásólfr's request for a transfer of his remains. The late seventh-century account of the Life of Saint Patrick by Tírechán contains the following episode (III.1 16.8–10):[328]

> (8) Et uenit in campum Rein et ordinauit Bruscum praespiterum et aeclessiam illi fundauit; qui dixit mirabile post mortem eius altero sancto, qui fuit in insola generis Cotirbi: (9) 'Bene est tibi dum filium tuum habes; ego autem, tedebit me mors mea, quia solus sum in aeclessia in diserto, in aeclessia relicta ac uacua, et non offerent iuxta me sacerdotes.' (10) In noctibus <tribus> somnium +factus est: tertio die surrexit sanctus et arripuit +anulum et trullam ferrumque et sepulcri fossam fodiuit et portauit ossa Brusci sancti secum ad insolam in qua sunt, et resticuit.

> '(8) And he [i.e. Saint Patrick] came to Mag Réin and ordained Bruscus a priest and founded a church for him; Bruscus said something extraordinary after his death to another holy man, who was in the monastery of the family of Cothirbe: (9) "All is well with you because you have a son; I loathe my death because I am alone in a solitary church, a church deserted and empty, and no priests offer beside me." (10) For three nights (the holy man) had this dream; on the third day he got up, took ... and an iron shovel and dug up the moat of the grave and took the bones of holy Bruscus with him to the monastery where they (now) are, and (Bruscus) spoke no more.'

This account shares a number of elements with Haukr's version of the Ásólfr-narrative: (a) a holy hermit (b) dies and is buried; (c) in the long run, however, he is not happy with his burial site, and (d) therefore he appears to somebody living in a dream; (e) this dream appearance does not immediately lead to action being taken; (f) only after the restless dead holy man has made several appearances, (g) including appearances to fellow ecclesiastics, is his wish taken heed of and (h) his bones are disinterred; (i) then the saintly bones are brought to a church, where they have remained ever since and where they still are 'now', in the time of the storyteller, enhancing the church's sanctity and thus contributing to its establishment as a sacred place. The structural parallelism between the 'reburial section' of the Ásólfr-narrative and this episode from Patrician hagiography again underlines that the 'Vita sancti Ásólfi'

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328 Ed. and transl. by Bieler 1979: 122–167; dating: Sharpe 1991: 13.

in *Hauksbók* at least in some of its traits could be seen in exactly the Irish context which it itself claims for its main protagonist.

In the case of the postmortem appearance of Ásólfr, it is perhaps also worth noting the contrast which the dead saint's way of communicating with the living seems to form to how more 'classical', pagan saga heroes address the living from their graves. In *Landnámabók* (S72/H60), a certain Ásmundr Atlason is buried in a mound together with a slave of his. After the mound has been closed, a man passing by the grave hears the dead Ásmundr speak a stanza from his tomb in which he complains about the presence of the slave, which unduly cramps his space; and so the mound is opened again and the slave is removed from it. In *Njáls saga* (ch. 78), Skarpheðinn and Hǫgni see how Gunnarr's burial mound opens, revealing a view of the dead man seated in a brightly lit space and speaking a stanza that exhorts them to face their enemies. This they take as a prompting to take revenge for Gunnarr's murder, which they do immediately. In these instances of pagan Icelanders making pronouncements from their graves, the dead men speak to an audience which is awake and physically close to their burial places, implying a physical encounter in something like a face-to-face situation. This may serve as a foil to Ásólfr's disembodied dream appearance that shows how deeply the latter may be indebted to an Irish hagiographic motif rather than to native Norse ideas of communication between the dead and the living.

A similar, though not quite as marked, contrast can be observed if the Ásólfr-story is compared with Christian Icelandic hagiography rather than 'pagan' saga heroes. Judith Jesch notes that the closest Icelandic parallel to Ásólfr's dream-appearance is found in a miracle story connected with Bishop Jón of Hólar in *Jóns biskups saga* (ch. 30):[329] during a period of epidemics, foul weather, and famine, a magnificent man (probably the dead bishop himself) appears to a poor woman in a dream and tells her that Jón's coffin should be dug up and made the object of worship, which would help the situation.[330] However, in both its spirit and the details of its structure, this story is indeed far removed from the Ásólfr narrative. To highlight just a few marked differences, in the Ásólfr narrative there is no general crisis, the saint is not obeyed (at least not in the first instance), and the saint makes no promises to society at large but merely tries to improve his own postmortem situation. Thus, even the text proposed by Jesch as the closest parallel in Icelandic hagiography merely serves to emphasise just how much closer Ásólfr's dream-appearance is to Irish hagiography than to anything found in Iceland.

329 Ed. by Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandr Vigfússon 1858: 149–202.
330 Jesch 1987: 24–25.

Finally, as yet another possible Irish echo in the *Hauksbók*-account of Ásólfr, there is also the curious relationship between Ásólfr and fish: every time Ásólfr settles by a brook, it fills with fish beyond imagination, providing the saint with sustenance. That holy men are good for fish – especially salmon – also appears elsewhere in medieval Icelandic literature. In *Egils saga* (ch. 29), Skalla-Grímr chooses a hermit to guard his salmon fishing grounds on the river Gljúfrá,[331] and in *Þorvalds þáttr víðfǫrla I*, Máni *inn kristni* ('the Christian') during a famine feeds the hungry with salmon caught below a waterfall that then bears his name ever after: *Mánafors*, 'Máni's Waterfall' (ch. 8).[332] Yet more importantly, as they parallel the episode in *Hauksbók* much more closely, in Ireland fish miracles quite reminiscent of Ásólfr's peculiar association with an abundance of fish are a stock-motif of medieval hagiography. One instance is connected with a well on Inishmore, the largest of the Aran Islands.[333] On the northern shore of this island, some one hundred metres above the beach in the townland of Eochaill, lie the ruins of Teampall Chiaráin, 'Ciarán's Church'. This church is closely associated with two wells. One of these is Tobar Chiaráin, 'Ciarán's Well', located just west of the church ruins. There, Ciarán's Well is fenced in with an almost megalithic stone enclosure, and a small tree with colourful ribbons tied to its branches testifies to the still-lively cult connected with it. The second well at this locality, just a couple of dozen metres further to the west, is Tobar an Bhradáin, the 'Well of the Salmon'. Today, the water of this well is collected in two tanks, an older one of concrete and a newer, rather larger one of riveted corrugated sheet metal, painted in green and streaked with rust (fig. 11). Notwithstanding this modern utilisation of the well, its name 'Well of the Salmon' can in all likelihood be associated with a narrative preserved in the Latin Life of Saint Enda

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331 Ed. by Bjarni Einarsson 2003. On the passage cf. also Barraclough 2012: 85.

332 Jesch 1987: 23. *Þorvalds þáttr víðförla I* ed. by Sigurgeir Steingrímsson *et al.* 2003: 49–89. Cf. also the Old Norse account of a miracle wrought by Saint Martin of Tours quoted by Jesch 1987: 23–24, in which Saint Martin procures a one-off catch of a huge salmon.

333 Discussion of this site and its hagiographic associations: Robinson 2009a: 257–258; Robinson 1996b: 35; map: Robinson 1996a. It should be noted that the following discussion of the local toponymy follows Robinson's account, which is based on his recording of the local micro-toponymy in the 1970s and 1980s; modern touristic presentations sometimes differ from his account (e.g., Aran Islands 2016, which simply identifies Tobar Chiaráin and Tobar an Bhradáin), but in a way which suggests a dependency on a simplifying misreading of Robinson's work. On my use of Tim Robinson's literary ethnography of the Aran landscape cf. above, note 205.

Fig. 11: The sheet metal tank collecting the water of Tobar an Bhradáin, the 'Well of the Salmon' (invisible in the background above the tank); to the left and above the reservoir, the ruins of Teampall Chiaráin, 'Ciarán's Church'. © M. Egeler, 2015.

of Aran, a text which in its extant form dates from the thirteenth century or later.[334] This Life tells the following anecdote about how Enda and his disciples arrived on Inishmore (*Vita Endei*, ch. xxii):[335]

> Assumptis igitur secum suis sanctis discipulis, ad insulam celitus sibi concessum, silicet Aran nomine, peruenit; atque in portu qui Lemhchaill dicitur, applicuit. Ieiunantibus itaque in eodem loco per triduum, misit Deus eis piscem mire magnitudinis in fontem qui fons Lemchaille dicitur. Ex quo pisce pauit Cunctipotens centum et quinquaginta qui erant cum sancto Endeo.

> 'Having then taken his holy disciples with him, he came to the island granted to him from heaven, obviously called Aran; and he landed in the harbour which is called Lemhchaill. When they then for three days were without food in that same place, God sent them a fish of wonderful size into the well which is called the Well of Lemhchaill. With that fish the Almighty fed the one hundred and fifty who were with Saint Enda.'

334 *Vita Endei* ed. by Plummer 1910: 60–75; dating: Sharpe 1991: 370–371, 393.
335 Ed. by Plummer 1910; my translation.

Here, a monastic community is, by divine grace, provided with sustenance in the form of an abundant diet of fish. The location where the story is set is, at first glance, somewhat problematic, as there is no 'Lemhchaill' on Aran. Yet already John O'Donovan plausibly identified the 'Lemhchaill' of this passage of the *Vita Endei* as a mistake for 'Eochaill', the name of the townland where Teampall Chiaráin and its wells are located, observing:[336]

> Eochoill is certainly the ancient name of this townland, but it is called by mistake Leamchoill in the Life of St. Enna ..., for Leamhchoill is the name of the next land on the opposite shore of Garomna island, from which St. Enna is said to have set sail for Aran. ... St. Enna set sail from Leóchoill and landed at Eochoill, would appear to have been the original text ... .

If this comes anywhere close to the truth, then it seems likely that the idea of a monastic-miraculous salmon-well by Teampall Chiaráin goes back well into the medieval period. The story is particularly miraculous if one considers the geography of the area: the 'Well of the Salmon' does not lie far from, but quite far above the sea, and there is no stream or waterway that a salmon could possibly have used to enter it, which underscores the miraculous character of a salmon's appearance in the well (fig. 12).

Further examples of the appearance (or disappearance) of fish caused by the intercession of a saint are found, in a quite remarkable number, in the *Tripartite Life* of Saint Patrick, a text which, on linguistic grounds, can probably be dated to the tenth century and which above has already been mentioned for its bells.[337] In this text, the word of the saint has a remarkable double-effect on various fish populations. One example that illustrates the ambivalence of saintly intercession in this narrative is connected with the river Búall (*Vita tripartita*, p. 142, l. 24 – p. 144, l. 3):[338]

> Fecht do Pat*r*aic íartuid*echt* f*or* Ber[n]*us* H*u*a nAilella dodul hiMag Luirgg, cotorchair imBúaill .i. ob dothæt alLoch Techet. ... Romallach Pat*r*aic alleth sair dond huisciu. '*Ocus* alleth o áth síar,' ol a muint*er*, 'cid ainges lat?' 'Ticfa' (olPat*r*aic) 'm*acc* bethad géb*as* and iartain (*ocus*) bid ferr leiss uisci

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336 Quote: John O'Donovan in his Ordnance Survey Letters for Galway (1839), vol. 3, ms. p. 230, quoted from the typescript copy (vol. 3, p. 110) directed by Rev. M. O'Flanagan (1928) held by the library of University College Cork. Robinson 2009a: 257 claims that O'Donovan in the Ordnance Survey Letters identified the salmon-well of the *Vita Endei* with Tobar Chiaráin, but I cannot find such an identification in the letters.

337 Above, p. 120.

338 Ed. and transl. by Stokes 1887.

Fig. 12: The view of the coast as seen from above the sheet metal tank. Note the considerable elevation that separates Tobar an Bhradáin from the shore. © M. Egeler, 2015.

torthech icob(ali).' .i. Col*um* cille m*ac*c Feidlimidh oc Ess (mac) nEirc. Óndáth (.i. cosinloch) súas iasc*ra*d isdech in hÉri lacách and: húad sís ní mór gabar ann.

'Once as Patrick was after passing by Bernas Ua-Oilella to go into Mag Luirg, he fell into Búall, that is, a river which comes out of Loch Techet. ... Patrick cursed the eastern half of the water. "And the half from the ford westward, why hast thou spared it?" "There shall come," saith Patrick, "a son of Life, who will set up there afterwards, and he will prefer (to have) a fruitful water at his stead." That is, Colomb Cille son of Feidlimed at Ess macc nEirc, from the ford, that is, to the lake, upwards. The best fishing in Ireland every one has there. (But) from thence down not much is caught there.'

Here, for an utterly trivial reason, Saint Patrick turns part of a river into a barren stretch of water, while at the same time blessing another part with an abundance of fish. The latter is then explained with reference to Saint Columba, who would stay there at a later point and would therefore appreciate the good fishing. So while it is not made quite as explicit as in the *Vita Endei*, again an abundance of fish created by a saintly miracle apparently will serve to provide sustenance for monks, and at the same time Patrick also displays the same ability to make fish disappear from a place as is shown, if

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in a much more understated way, by Ásólfr. Both the miraculous creation of particularly good fishing grounds in rivers and estuaries and the destruction of a river's fishing recur several times in the *Tripartite Life*.[339] Patrick curses the estuaries of Inver Domnann and of Inver Ainge with barrenness because he does not find fish there (*Vita tripartita*, p. 34, ll. 23–27), blesses the Inver Boinde estuary because he does find fish in it (p. 36, ll. 7–8), and curses the river Seile after a king attempts to kill him, so there will never be any salmon there (p. 70, ll. 4–5). In the river Slicech, he has salmon caught even out of salmon season and afterwards ensures through his blessing that there is fish to be caught in this river year-round ever after (p. 142, ll. 1–8; p. 250, l. 15). He curses the river Dub and blesses the river Drobéss, because the locals are respectively unfriendly and welcoming, and the blessed river henceforth produces the finest salmon in Ireland (p. 146, ll. 7–14; p. 250, l. 13). The river Sameir he partly curses with an absence of fish, where it belongs to a king who resisted him, while the rest of the river is blessed with good fishing; only after Saint Columba takes possession of the barren part of the river, does it become rich in fish as well (p. 148, ll. 13–21; p. 250, ll. 16–18). Somewhat in passing, Patrick blesses the estuaries belonging to the population group of the Cenél Conaill (p. 150, ll. 16–17). On the river Bann, he changes the fishing from night-fishing to day-fishing (p. 160, ll. 12–15; p. 250, l. 14). And finally, he curses and blesses the river system of the river Suir in such a way that the tributaries of the Suir become barren (partly because he had dropped his books into one of them), while the Suir itself is rich in fish except where the cursed tributaries enter it (p. 210, ll. 1–7). This list abundantly illustrates that a saint's power over fish was a motif that could be associated with a broad variety of places just as much as it was associated with more than one saint.

Another saint connected with fishing-related miracles, in addition to the two saints already mentioned, is Saint Columba. In the Columban tradition, fish miracles already appear in Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* from the late seventh century:[340] one chapter of Adomnán's Life of Saint Columba (II.19) is dedicated to two miracle stories in which the saint tells people when to cast their nets in order to catch salmon of exceptional size, while in another the saint provides a poor layman with a stake that catches an abundance of game, including a salmon so big that the man hardly manages to take it home (II.37). Furthermore, yet another saint connected with fish miracles is Saint Fínán: both his Latin and his Irish Life contain accounts of how, on the saint's orders, a disciple of his obtains fish from a dry flood-meadow (*Vita sancti Finani*, ch.

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339 Cf. Ó Cuív 1989–1990: 98–99.
340 Cf. above, p. 122.

xxvii;[341] *Beatha Naomh Fionáin*, ch. XVI[342]). In the *Tripartite Life* (p. 88, l. 20 – p. 90, l. 6), a certain bishop Mel is said to have obtained fish from a rain-filled furrow in a field.[343]

The examples from the *Vita Columbae* also illustrate the motif's remarkable time-depth, proving its existence already in the seventh century. At this time, the motif likewise was already firmly established in the Patrician tradition: in the account of Patrick's life by Tírechán from the later seventh century, Patrick is mentioned several times as having blessed or cursed watercourses (III.1 9.2; III.1 46.4–5),[344] even if much less detail is given in these early instances than in the later *Tripartite Life*.

The wide geographical spread of medieval Irish fish miracles recalls the large number of places which in the Life of Saint Ásólfr in *Landnámabók* are associated with the fish miracles worked by him: Ásólfsskáli enn austasti ('Easternmost Ásólfr's Hall'), Miðskáli ('Middle-Hall'), Ásólfsskáli enn vestasti ('Westernmost Ásólfr's Hall'), and the river Írá ('Irishmen-River'),[345] as well as, by association, the church at Hólmr. At the heart of Ásólfr's fish miracles stands the provision of basic sustenance for an eremitic life. This finds a close counterpart on the Aran Islands and equally recurs in other treatments of the motif in Ireland, and the connection of a large number of places with both 'positive' and 'negative' fish miracles wrought by one and the same saint is well-exemplified by the Patrician tradition. Taken together, the exactitude and number of these Irish parallels to the Norse account not only show that there is a strikingly close correspondence between Irish and Norse fish miracle lore, but they again illustrate a point already highlighted above in connection with the motif of the bell as a saint's founding gift to a church:[346] some, if not all, of the seemingly Irish hagiographical motifs found in Iceland simply have too many counterparts in Ireland to identify a specific source for a borrowing, if there indeed was a borrowing.

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341 Ed. by Plummer 1910, vol. 2, pp. 87–95.

342 Ed. by Macalister 1899.

343 Bray 1992: 103 (motif 'Saint gets fish from dry land').

344 Ed. and transl. by Bieler 1979: 122–167; dating: Sharpe 1991: 13.

345 Linguistically, *Írá* is a contraction of *Íra-á*, 'River of the Irishmen', with 'elision of an unstressed thematic vowel (-*a*-) before a generic element beginning with a vowel', on which as a regular phenomenon in the formation of place-names cf. Mees 2009: 178. Cf. *Pap-óss* with elided ending of the genitive plural in contrast to *Papa-fjörður* with preserved genitve plural ending. Today, the Írá River runs about one kilometre to the west of present-day Ásólfsskáli in Rangárþing eystra, a few kilometres to the south-west of Eyjafjallajökull.

346 Above, p. 121.

In a Christian context, the question of whether a fish miracle has been borrowed from a different Christian culture or been developed independently is particularly difficult to decide, for within such a Christian framework, fish miracles are not intrinsically unlikely, since they find possible biblical models in the New Testament. One such potential model is the story of the Feeding of the Five Thousand. This miracle account describes how Jesus took five loaves of bread and two fishes and made them last to sate the hunger of five thousand men (Luke 9:1–17); thus it establishes a narrative pattern that could, time and again, be adapted to local needs.[347] A similar pattern is established in John 21:1–14. In this story, which is set after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, seven of the disciples are fishing in the Sea of Tiberias but fail to catch anything, until the risen Jesus appears to them, tells them to cast their net on the right side of the boat, and they catch so much fish that they are unable to haul in the net, but have to drag it to shore through the water.[348]

Yet the fish miracles of the various Irish saints on the one hand and of Saint Ásólfr on the other are much more similar to each other than they are to the Feeding of the Five Thousand or to Jesus's appearance at the Sea of Tiberias. Admittedly, the Irish and the Norse accounts are not completely identical in all cases. In an almost realistic fashion, the Icelandic story describes streams full of fish, while the story from the Life of Saint Enda tells of a grotesquely big miraculous salmon sufficient to feed 150 men; and while in *Landnámabók* the fishes simply disappear after Ásólfr has moved away, the *Tripartite Life* notes that the barrenness of specific rivers was the consequence of Patrick's curse. Yet what differences there are between the Norse and the Irish stories exactly parallels the different treatment of the floating-bell-motif in the stories of Ørlygr and Saint Declan: the Norse accounts, found in a historical text, tone down the miraculous element to a point where it seems almost rationalised,[349] whereas the Irish accounts, found in hagiographic texts in the strict sense, actively emphasise the miraculous nature of the happenings.[350] What little difference there is between the fish-miracles of Ásólfr, Saint Enda of Aran, Saint Columba, Saint Fínán, and Saint Patrick, seems to be due to different genre conventions rather than reflecting any real differences in the plotlines

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347 Cf. Bray 1992: 11; Williams 2016: 67.
348 For an adaptation of this biblical narrative in Irish mythological writing cf. Williams 2016: 245. For an example illustrating that the writers of Irish Saints' Lives were not above adapting biblical miracles see the story about how Saint Declan parted the sea in *Vita Declani* (ch. xvi) and the Irish *Life of Saint Declan* (ch. 20).
349 Cf. Young 1937: 120.
350 Cf. above, p. 118.

of the respective narratives: they are differences of register rather than of substance. So given the extreme emphasis that *Hauksbók* puts on Ásólfr's Irish roots, it should at least be considered a possibility that this motif complex is part of the Irish narrative lore that has been adapted into the 'Vita sancti Ásólfi' whose summary is presented to us in *Landnámabók*. This is the more so given that the *Tripartite Life*, Tírechán, and the *Vita Columbae* attest to the presence of the relevant motifs in Ireland already during the Viking Age, when Norse presence there would have been at its strongest.[351]

To sum up, reading the story of Ásólfr in *Landnámabók* in the light of medieval Irish hagiography, it seems that virtually all basic elements found in the two versions of the narrative may be based on a creative adaptation of motifs from Irish Saints' Lives:

- Ásólfr's seeming misanthropy in its various forms may be a play on the eremitic lifestyle of an Irish *peregrinus*, which formed an established part of the ecclesiastical culture of early medieval Ireland.

- Ásólfr's threat to make Halldórr's eyes burst from his skull is paralleled in the hagiography of Saint Briget, one of Ireland's most prominent saints, as well as in a substantial number of other Saints' Lives and the treatise *The Evernew Tongue*.

- The miraculous guidance provided by a floating object that reaches the shore on the very spot where a Christian cult is to be established recalls, again, the founding legend of the ecclesiastical centre of Ardmore.

- The dead Ásólfr's request that his remains be transferred to a church, and the way in which he communicates with the living by means of a dream vision, find a direct parallel in Patrician hagiography.

- The connection of particular places with the miraculous appearance of an abundant provision of fish that constitutes the economic basis for a monastic or eremitic life recurs on the Aran Islands as well as in Patrician, Columban, and other Irish hagiography.

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351 *Pace* Jesch 1987: 20, who already noted that Ásólfr's fish miracles recall fish miracles wrought by Irish saints, but explicitly and emphatically refrains from suggesting that this element of the Ásólfr-story was derived from Ireland. Her central argument against assuming a connection between the Ásólfr-story and Irish hagiography is a miracle ascribed to Saint Martin of Tours in an Icelandic text in which Saint Martin, on a single occasion, catches one huge salmon (pp. 23–24, 28). As a parallel, however, this is rather far removed from Ásólfr's repeated quasi-permanent filling and emptying of streams with/from fish, whereas Irish and particularly Patrician hagiography provide an exact counterpart to Ásólfr's fish miracles.

- Equally, Patrician hagiography provides a counterpart to the disappearance of all fish from the streams abandoned by Ásólfr, as Patrick is almost as fond of inflicting barrenness on rivers as he is of blessing them with abundance.

Furthermore, the account of Saint Ásólfr repeatedly puts an explicit emphasis on his Irish affinities, in particular by

- connecting Ásólfr's cult with the cult of Saint Columba (who, incidentally, in Irish hagiography is also recurrently mentioned as being good with fish)
- and highlighting the Irish background of both Ásólfr himself and of several members of his family.

The church of Hólmr, and the other places associated with Ásólfr, appear to undergo an in-depth narrative Hibernisation: through the use of both direct references to Ireland and of Irish story patterns and motifs, the places connected with Ásólfr are turned into places which are oriented towards Ireland to such a degree that they virtually establish footholds of a 'Little Ireland' within the larger framework of Icelandic space. More than any other individual element of the Ásólfr story, the river Írá is iconic for what can be observed here: a river called 'Irishmen-River' is named from the household of an Icelandic 'saint' of Irish stock who performs just the same kind of miracle there as a particular Irish saint does on the Atlantic coast of Ireland and others do across the island. It is almost as if the river Írá and the well Tobar an Bhradáin, or the many rivers blessed by Saint Patrick, were directly looking towards each other; and perhaps this is not so surprising, seeing that they all flow into the same sea.

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Appendix a: The Old Norse texts of the 'Vita sancti Ásólfi' from the S- and H-recensions of Landnámabók (S24/H21; ed. by Finnur Jónsson 1900).

Landnámabók S24

Asolfr het madr. hann var frændi Iorundar i Gaurdum hann kom vt austr i Ósumm. hann var kristinn vel ok villdi ekki eiga vid heidna menn ok ei villdi hann þiɢia mat at þeim. Hann giaurdi ser skála vndir Eyiafiollumm þar sem nu heiter at Asolfs skæla enum austasta. hann fann ekki menn. þa var vm forvitnazt huad hann hafdi til fæzlu ok sa menn i skalanum æ fiska marga. Eɴ er menn gengu til lækiar þess er fell hia skálanumm var hann fullr af fiskumm suo at slik vndr þottuzt menn ei sed hafa. Eɴ er ʜɛradz- menn vvrdu þessa varer raku þeir hann æ brutt ok villdu ei at hann nyti gæda þessa. þa færdi Asolfr bygd sina til Midskála ok var þar. þa hvarb æ brutt veidi aull or ʟæknum er menn skylldu til taka. Eɴ er komit var til Asolfs þa var vatnfall þat fullt af fiskum er fell hia skala hans. var hann þa eɴ brutt rekinn. fór hann þa til ens vestasta Asolfs skala ok fór enn allt a saumu leid. Eɴ er hann for þadann æ brutt for hann æ fund Iorundar frænda sins ok baud hann Asolfi at vera med ser. Eɴ hann letzt ekki vilia vera hia audrum monnum. þa let Iorundr giaura honum hv́s at Holmi enum idra ok færdi honum þangat fæzlu. Ok var hann þar medan hann lifdi. ok þar var hann grafiɴ. stendr þar nv kirkia sem leidi hans er. ok er hann eɴ helgazti madr kalladr.
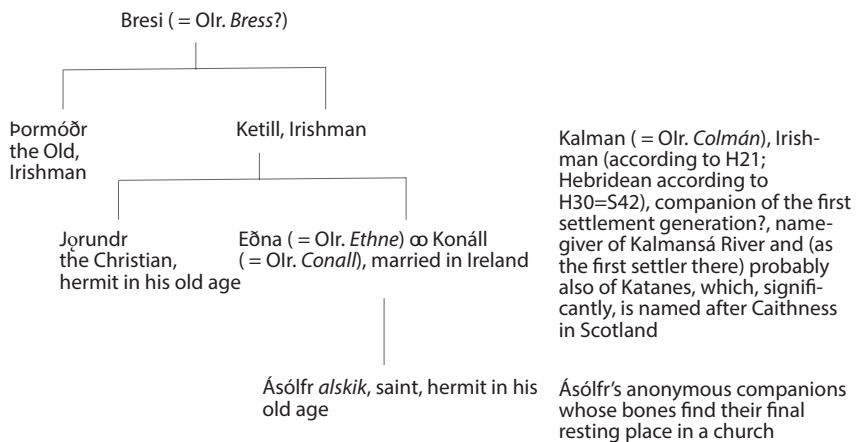
Landnámabók H21

Þormodr hinn gamli ok Ketill Bresasvnir foru af Iʀlandi til Islandz. ok námu Akranes allt æ milli Auʀida ár ok Kalmans ár. þeir voru irskir. Kalman var ok irskr er ainn er vid kenn(d). ok bio fyst i Katanesi. þeir brædr skiptu londum med sier sua at Þormódr atti fyri sunnann Reyni ok til Kalmans ár ok bio at

Hólmi hinum idra. Eɴ Ketill bróder hans atti fyri vestann Reyni
ok fyri nordann Akra fell til Auʀida ár. Berse het svn hans f(adir)
Þorgestz f(odur) Stara at Holmi f(odur) Knattar f(odur) Asdisar
er atti Klængr Snæbiarnarsvn (svnar) Hafnar-Orms. Geirlaug var
d(ottir) Þormóds hins gamla modir Tungu-Odds. Iorundr hinn
kristni var svn Ketils Bresas(vnar). hann bio i Iorundarhollti. þat
er nu kallat i Gordum. hann hellt vel kristni til dauda dax. ok var
einsetu madr i elli sinni. svn Iorundar var Kleppr f(adir) Einars
f(odur) Narva. Havaʀ het íj svn Kleps f(adir) Þorgeirs. Edna het
dotter Ketils Bresas(vnar). hon var gift æ Irlanndi þeim manni er
Konall het. þeira svn var Asolfr ᴀlskik er i þann tima fór af Irlandi
til Islandz ok kom i Austfiordu. þeir fóru xíí. samann austann
þar til er þeir komu at gardi Þorgeirs hins ʜordska i Hollti vnder
Eyiafiollum ok settu þar tialld sitt enn faurunautar hans ííj. voru þa
siúker. þeir ondudust þar en Ion prestr Þorgeirss(vn) f(adir) Grims
i Hollti fann bein þeira ok flutti til kirkiu. siþan gerdi Asolfr ser
skála þvi ner sem nu er kirkiuhornit at Asolfs skála at rádi Þorgeirs
þviat Þorgeirr villdi þa ei hafa vid hvs sín. a fell vid skala Asolfs
sialfann. þat var aundverdan vetr. ainn vard þegar full med fiskum.
Þorgeirr sagdi at þeir sæti i veidi stod hans. siþan for Asolfr brott
þadann (ok) gerdi annan skála vestar vid adra æ. sv heiter Irá þviat
þeir voru irsker. enn er menn komu til ærinnar var hun full med
fiskum sua at slikt vndr þottust menn ei sed hafa. enn brottu var
allt or hinni eystri anni. þa raku herad(s)menn þa brott þadann ok
fór hann þa til hins vestasta skalans. fór allt æ somu leid. bœndr
kaulludu þa fiolkunga enn Þorgeiʀ kvezt hyɢia at þeir mundu vera
gódir menn. vm vorit foru þeir brott ok vestr æ Akranes. hann
gerdi bv at Holmi æ Kirkiubolstad. hans svn var Solvi f(adir)
Þorhilldar er atti Brandr sun Þorgrims Kiallakss(vnar). þeira s(vn)
Þorleifr f(adir) Bardar f(odur) Iofridar er atti Arni Torfvs(vn). þeira
d(ottir) Helga er atti Arngrimr Gudmundarsvn. Eɴɴ er Asolfr elldizt
gerdizt hann einsetumadr. þar var kofi hans sem nu er kirkian.

þar andadist hann ok var þar grafinn at Holmi. ᴇnn þa er Halldorr
s(vn) Illuga hins ʀauda bio þar þa vandizt fióskona ein at þeʀa
fætr sina æ þúfu þeiri er var a leidi Asolfs. hana dreymdi at Asolfr
avitadi hana vm þat er hun þerdi fætr sina saurga a hvsi hans. enn
þa munu vit satt segir hann ef þu seger Halldori draum þinn. ʜun
sagdi hanum ok qvad hann ecki mark at þui er ᴋonur dreymdi ok
gaf ecki gaum at. ᴇnn er Hrodolfr byskup for brott or Bæ þar er
hann hafdi buit þa voru þar epter munkar ííj. einn þeira dreymdi at
Asolfr mællti vid hann. sendtu hvskarl þinn til Halldors at Holmi
ok kaup at hanum þvfu þa er a fiosgotu er ok gef vid mork silfrs.
mvnkrinn gerdi sva. huskarlinn gat keypta þvfuna ok grof siþan
iordina ok hitti þar manns bein. hann tok þau upp ok for heim
med. ena nestu nott eptir dreymdi Halldor at Asolfr kom at hanum
ok kuezt bædi augu mvndv sprengia or hausi hanum nema hann
keypti bein hans sliku verdi sem hann selldi. Halldorr keypti bein
Asolfs ok let giora at treskrin ok setia yfir alltari. Halldorr sendi
Illuga svn sinn vtann epter kirkiuvidi. enn er hann fór vt aptr (ok)
er hann kom millim Reykianess ok Sniofiallsness þa nadi hann ei
fyrir styrimonnum at taka land þar er hann villdi. þa bar hann fyri
bord kirkiu vidinn allann ok bad þar koma sem Asolfr villdi. enn
Austmenn komu vestr i Vadil. enn ííj. nottum sidar kom vidrinn æ
Kirkiu sand at Holmi. nema ij tre komu æ Raufarnes a Mýrumm.
Halldorr let gera kirkiu xxx. ok vidi þackta ok helgadi Kolumkilla
med ɢudi.

Appendix b: Select annotated genealogy of Ásólfr alskik according to the H-recension of Landnámabók (H21)

This select annotated genealogy gives an overview of those family members and companions of Ásólfr that establish explicit connections with Christianity and/or Ireland.

Bresi (= OIr. *Bress*?)

Þormóðr the Old, Irishman

Ketill, Irishman

Jǫrundr the Christian, hermit in his old age

Eðna (= OIr. *Ethne*) ∞ Konáll (= OIr. *Conall*), married in Ireland

Kalman (= OIr. *Colmán*), Irishman (according to H21; Hebridean according to H30=S42), companion of the first settlement generation?, namegiver of Kalmansá River and (as the first settler there) probably also of Katanes, which, significantly, is named after Caithness in Scotland

Ásólfr *alskik*, saint, hermit in his old age

Ásólfr's anonymous companions whose bones find their final resting place in a church

2.5.   High Crosses in Western Iceland: the Krosshólar Hills of Auðr the Deep-Minded in Landnámabók

Auðun the Stutterer, whose farm on Snæfellsnes was said to have been haunted by a very Irish water-horse, was claimed to have been married to the daughter of the king of Ireland. Another member of Irish, or at least Hiberno-Norse, royalty is Auðr the Deep-Minded. According to *Landnámabók* (S13, 95–97),[352] Auðr was the daughter of Ketill Flat-Nose,[353] who had made himself the Norse ruler of the Hebrides; in all likelihood, this is where she would have spent her youth.[354] Later, she was supposedly married to king Óleifr the White who had conquered Dublin and made himself king there, and thus she became a Norse queen in Dublin. This, however, was not to last. At some point, her husband, Óleifr, was killed while warring in Ireland.[355] Auðr then took her son Þorsteinn the Red and went back to the Hebrides. There, she married her son off into a local noble (and Christian) family, and he went on to become a successful warrior king who conquered large territories in Gaelic

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352 The following discussion will be restricted to the *Sturlubók*-recension of *Landnámabók*, as the counterpart to the most central passage in ch. S97 is lost in the *Hauksbók*-recension, due to a lacuna in the manuscript. Quotations follow the edition by Finnur Jónsson 1900.

353 On the historical identification of Ketill Flat-Nose, and problematising common attempts at such an identification, cf. Woolf 2007: 295–297; Jennings 1998: 53 (note 14).

354 In contrast to the literary reworking of Auðr's biography in *Laxdœla saga* (ch. 7; ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934), the *Landnámabók*-account of Auðr the Deep-Minded and her religious convictions, in its basic outline, may well be historically accurate, *pace* Sveinbjörn Rafnsson 2001: 615. The main reason for this assessment is that Auðr's story does not follow any established narrative patterns, indicating that it is not the stuff of folk narratives, and fits very well into the general historical context of the time in which it is set. For a detailed discussion of the question of the historicity of this account cf. Egeler 2015c: 84–85; Egeler 2015d; from a different angle cf. also Grønlie 2017: 130. In general on the Krosshólar cf. Egeler 2016b: §4; Jennings 1998: 43–44; Magnús Már Lárusson 1964.

355 On Óleifr the White and Þorsteinn the Red as historical figures, and the considerable problems of the *Landnámabók*-account as a chronicle of specific historical events, cf. Woolf 2007: 279–285.

Fig. 13: In 1965, a stone cross was erected on the rock outcrop of Krosshólaborg on the north-eastern tip of the Hvammsfjörður Fjord to commemorate Auðr as the first, Christian settler at Hvammur, who reputedly erected crosses in this area already in the Age of Settlements. © M. Egeler, 2011.

Scotland. When his Gaelic subjects (the term used is *Skotar*, 'Gaels') finally kill him and word of this reaches Auðr in Caithness, she leaves Scotland for Orkney. There she establishes further marriage alliances before moving on to the Faeroe Islands and then, in the end, to Iceland, taking some Gaelic servants with her. In Iceland, she travels through the country for a while until she finds the right spot to settle down. This finally happens on the head of the Hvammsfjörður Fjord in western Iceland, where she names the places of the land and builds her farm at Hvammr. At the time when *Landnámabók* was written down, the place of her original settlement was named from the ruins of her farm: 'there it is called "Auðr's Ruins"' (*þar heita Audartopter*), as the text says, remembering her through the physical traces she left (or was thought to have left) in the landscape.

A physical construction of meaning in the landscape, however, is connected with Auðr not only in the way in which she was remembered. Rather, a physical creation of a meaningful landscape was ascribed to her as something she had already done herself; for, after she has organised her worldly life,

according to *Landnámabók,* she sees to her spiritual needs in the following manner (S97):[356]

> hun hafdi ʙænahalld sitt æ Kroshólum. þar let hun reisa ᴋrosa þviat hun var skird ok vel truud.

> 'She performed her prayers at Krosshólar, the "Cross Hills"; there she had crosses raised, because she was baptised and very devout.'

Thus, she creates a landscape that is thoroughly Christianised not only in its toponymy, but also through the construction of a Christian monument (fig. 13). This makes the story of Auðr one of comparatively few instances where we see an Icelandic settler physically acting upon the landscape in order to imbue it with significance. In her attempt to turn the empty space of newly-settled Iceland into a meaningful place, Auðr does not only give names and stories to the land, but in addition to naming the land she also erects a physical monument that acts as an unmistakable marker of the meaning she wants her land to have: she wants it to be a land of Christian piety, visibly as well as toponymically.

This physical, visual aspect of how Auðr turned her new land into a meaningful place suggests that to understand her motivation for choosing this strategy, it might in this particular case be promising to ask not so much 'what stories did Auðr hear in Ireland and on the Scottish islands?', but rather 'what did Auðr see there?' And what she saw, during her whole life in Ireland and Scotland, would have been free-standing crosses. Even before the eighth century, the tombs of the founders of Irish monasteries were marked by free-standing stone slabs decorated with incised crosses.[357] Even Adomnán's Life of Saint Columba from the end of the seventh century in two passages mentions the erection of wooden crosses, which served as memorials and to mark spots to meditate on the miracles that accompanied the lifes of the saints, and in doing so the text emphasises that these crosses could still be seen at the time when the saint's Life was written.[358] One story in the *Vita Columbae* (I.45 [46a-b]) tells of how Saint Columba, upon parting from his old uncle Ernán, prophesies that he would never see him again alive. When Ernán falls gravely ill a little later, he wishes to be brought to Columba to see him one last time before his death; but the saint's prophecy is not to be undone:[359]

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356 Ed. by Finnur Jónsson 1900.
357 Herity 2000: 11.
358 On the date cf. Sharpe 1995: 55.
359 Ed. and transl. by Anderson and Anderson 1991; my emphasis.

Sed cum esset inter ambos quasi xxiiii. pasuum interuallum subita morte praeuentus, priusquam sanctus faciem eius uideret uiuentis, exspirans in terram cicidit; ne uerbum sancti ullo frustraretur modo. Vnde in eodem loco ante ianuam canabae crux infixa est; et altera ibi sanctus restitit illo exspirante similiter crux *hodieque infixa stat*.

'But when there was between the two a distance of some twenty-four paces, he was overtaken by sudden death, and fell to the ground dying, before the saint could see his face in life; so that the saint's word should not be rendered vain in any way. And therefore the cross was set up in that place before the doorway of the shed; and likewise the other cross, set up where the saint stood when Ernán died, *stands even today*.'

In another passage of the text, a further cross, erected by a roadside, is connected with the death of the saint himself. After prophesying his own impending death, the saint, by that time a very old man, returns to his monastery but, halfway to his destination, he has to sit down to rest. This provides the aetiology of a cross seen by the Life's author (*Vita Columbae* III.23 [127a]):[360]

In quo loco postea crux molari infixa lapidi *hodieque stans in margine cernitur uiae*.

'In that place a cross that was later fixed in a mill-stone is *seen, standing by the roadside, even today*.'

These two passages illustrate that visually prominent cross monuments played an important role in the Christian culture of the Gaelic early Middle Ages. Further examples for the prominent role of such cross monuments could easily be found. A diagram on the last page of the Book of Moling, an early Irish manuscript of the gospels dated to around the year 800, may represent a schematic plan of a monastery showing twelve crosses which could represent High Crosses erected in and around the monastic complex.[361] A poem attached to the Old Irish 'Martyrology of Óengus' (*Félire Óengusso*) in the Lebar Brecc manuscript describes the saint's monastery as 'a pious cloister

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360 My emphasis.
361 Herity 2000: 11. Trinity College Dublin, MS 60, f. 94v. On the interpretative challenges of this diagram cf. already Lawlor 1894–1895: 36–45, and esp. Nees 1983, who interprets the diagram primarily in the context of Carolingian manuscript illumination rather than that of the spatial arrangement of Irish monasteries.

behind a circle of crosses' (*cathair credlach iar cuairt cross*, stanza 2):[362] this seems to illustrate the importance of monumental crosses for the first visual impression made by an Irish ecclesiastical complex. In the accounts of the life of Saint Patrick by Muirchú and Tírechán from the later seventh century as well as in his tenth-century *Tripartite Life*,[363] free-standing crosses are mentioned on a regular basis,[364] and it is even said about Saint Patrick that he used to visit every cross he saw or heard of while he was travelling through Ireland.[365] On one occasion, Patrick is described as tarrying by 'a small mound with a cross thereon' (*fert mbecc cocrois and*);[366] this mound is particularly reminiscent of the 'Cross Hills' Krosshólar, even though *fert* tends to refer to a burial mound rather than a natural hill, albeit the term can also designate other types of mounds.[367] As a combination of cross-monuments and a place-name derived from them, the Krosshólar Hills are evoked particularly closely by *Cross Patraic*, 'Patrick's Cross', which in the *Tripartite Life* is both the name of a specific free-standing cross and a place-name derived from this cross.[368]

If in this way the Irish literary tradition highlights the role of monumental, highly visible crosses, the same is done even more emphatically by the material record. Wooden crosses such as the ones mentioned in Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* already early on began to be imitated in stone, and the resulting practice of erecting monumental stone High Crosses spread across a broad area of the Gaelic-speaking world reaching from County Cork on the south coast of Ireland as far north as the Hebrides.[369] The dimensions that these High

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362 Ed. and transl. by Stokes 1905a: xxiv–xxvi.

363 Muirchú and Tírechán both ed. and transl. by Bieler 1979: 1–167; dating: Sharpe 1991: 12–14. *Tripartite Life*: cf. above, p. 120.

364 For references to free-standing crosses cf. *Vita tripartita* (ed. and transl. by Stokes 1887), p. 38, ll. 10–11; p. 72, ll. 17–18; p. 130, ll. 14–17; p. 138, l. 20; p. 234, l. 18; p. 236, ll. 6–7; p. 238, ll. 5–6; p. 240, l. 18; Muirchú I 12(11).2; Muirchú II 1; Muirchú II 2; Tírechán III.1 34.1, III.1 41.1, III.1 43.3. Cross carvings in flagstones or similar contexts are mentioned in *Vita tripartita*, p. 78, ll. 16–17; p. 136, ll. 10–11; Tírechán III.1 45.1. A cross whose type is unspecified but which is widely visible in the landscape is mentioned in *Vita tripartita*, p. 110, ll. 16–17.

365 *Vita tripartita*, p. 124, l. 11 – p. 126, l. 8; cf. Muirchú II 1.

366 *Vita tripartita*, p. 138, ll. 19–20.

367 *eDIL*, *s.v.* '1 fert'. Even if *fert* here refers to a burial mound, however, the comparison may not be going far astray, as Auðr's descendants, after they had returned to paganism, interpreted the Krosshólar as the place where they would go after their death: *Landnámabók* S97.

368 *Vita tripartita*, p. 130, ll. 14–17, 25; p. 132, ll. 10, 20, 22.

369 Herity 2000: 11.

Crosses could reach are illustrated by such monuments as the early granite High Cross at Moone, which today is 5.3 m high;[370] Muiredach's Cross at Monasterboice from c. AD 900 with its height of 4.4 m;[371] or the 6.5 m high West Cross at Monasterboice, the tallest surviving High Cross in Ireland.[372] By the tenth century at the latest, the practice of erecting large cross sculptures had spread beyond the confines of the ecclesiastical compounds proper and led to the erection of monuments often interpreted as market crosses; tenth-century examples are known from Kells and Armagh.[373]

Returning to Auðr and how *Landnámabók* narrates her biography, the sight of such crosses would have accompanied her throughout her life in Ireland and on the Scottish islands. In County Dublin, medieval High Crosses are extant at Finglas, Kilmainham, Kilgobbin, Kill of the Grange, and Tully.[374] Of these surviving crosses, at least the Finglas High Cross may be of ninth-century date,[375] and thus would already have been standing when Auðr would have been queen in Dublin according to *Landnámabók*. But it is not actually necessary to move this far forward in her literary biography to see her encountering monumental High Crosses. As a daughter of Ketill Flat-Nose, who conquered the Hebrides in the name of Haraldr Fair-Hair but then ruled them as his personal domain (S13), she would have already grown up in a landscape dominated by High Crosses of its own.[376] The Kildalton High Cross on Isley, a cross probably from the second half of the eighth century with a height of 2.7 m and arms spanning 1.3 m, is one of the most famous cases in point (fig. 14).[377] Even more prominent of course are the crosses of Iona, in the heart of the Inner Hebrides, which was the most important spiritual centre

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370 Herity 2000: 12; Harbison 1992a, vol. 1, pp. 154–156.
371 Herity 2000: 13; Harbison 1992a, vol. 1, pp. 140–146.
372 Herity 2000: 13; Harbison 1992a, vol. 1, pp. 146–152.
373 Herity 2000: 13; cf. Harbison 1992b: 18. For a critique of the idea that early Irish church settlements held 'markets' (and by implication of the idea that there were crosses which functioned as 'market crosses') cf. Etchingham 2010. The uncertainty about the functional interpretation of such crosses erected outside of the monasteries proper does not, however, affect their prominence in the landscape, which is what matters in the present context.
374 Harbison 1992a, vol. 1, pp. 441 (distribution map), 90 (Finglas), 130 (Kilmainham), 116–117 (Kilgobbin), 130 (Kill of the Grange), 179 (Tully).
375 Harbison 1992b: 131.
376 For a detailed survey cf. Fisher 2001.
377 Fisher 2001: 22, 48–49, 138–139; Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland 1984: 206–212; Graham 1895: 83–89. Date: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland 1984: 209.

Fig. 14: The Kildalton High Cross on Islay, Inner Hebrides. After Graham 1895, plate XXIV.

of the islands at the time when Ketill Flat-Nose would have ruled them:[378] St Oran's Cross, whose surviving fragments have a height of 3.5 m; St John's Cross, which was about 5.3 m high; St Martin's Cross with its above-ground height of 4.3 m; or St Matthew's Cross, the last of the great crosses of Iona to be erected (ninth or early tenth century), and which in the eighteenth century still was 2.1 m high.[379] After the death of her husband Óleifr the White, the first thing Auðr is said to have done was to go back to the Hebrides. The way *Landnámabók* tells her story, it seems that this landscape for her was home, was security, perhaps even in the sense formulated by Bachelard;[380] and thus this landscape would have been exactly the kind of landscape she would have wanted to replicate in Iceland after moving there in her later years.

Thus, overall, the impression gained from this material is that what Auðr is doing when she has the Krosshólar crosses erected is to re-construct a Gaelic sacred landscape of High Crosses in Iceland. Before this, the head of the Hvammsfjörður Fjord where she settled down had had no human history at all, and thus before Auðr's arrival it was a landscape of complete emptiness; culturally (if not ecologically), it was deeply inhuman. Yet through Auðr's erection of High Crosses, this emptiness was tamed, and this part of Iceland was transformed into something which recalled the landscapes in which Auðr had grown up and lived in the Norse societies of Ireland and Scotland, which

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378 Cf. above, p. 35, and Jennings 1998: 43, who sees the *Landnámabók*-account of Auðr as a direct reflex of Iona's cultural influence on the Norse in the Hebrides.

379 Fisher 2001: 1, 48–53, 131–135. St Oran's, St John's, and St Martin's crosses probably date from the second half of the eighth century, like the Kildalton Cross: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland 1984: 208–209.

380 Above, p. 23.

had been 'home' for her in her younger years. As in the case of Auðun's Irish water-horse, Auðr's Gaelic High Crosses also seem to be a construction of 'home' in the empty new land by a Norse settler who, culturally, was partly or largely Gaelicised. Apart from this creation of a Gaelic landscape in Iceland, just how Gaelicised Auðr's family was is perhaps best shown by the name of her grandson Óláfr *feilan* (S95). The nickname *feilan* is not Norse, but it is the Irish term *fáelán*, 'little wolf', and since Norse nicknames were always descriptive epithets that were meant to be understood, this implies that Auðr's descendants in Scotland were not only living in a Gaelic environment, but may even have been thinking about themselves in Gaelic.[381]

So far, the discussion of Krosshólar has been presented as if there really had been a historical figure Auðr, and as if the *Landnámabók*-account of this figure were basically accurate. Whether or not there was a historical Auðr, and whether or not she was the person described in *Landnámabók* (whose details are most unlikely to be historically reliable),[382] the literary account given by this text points us in the right direction how to interpret a widespread feature of Icelandic landscape construction. Among the sacral toponyms of Iceland, names formed with *Kross-*/*Krossa-* as their first element are comparatively common. The medieval recensions of *Landnámabók*, where the story of Auðr is told, list five such toponyms:[383] the 'Cross River' Krossá in Þórsmörk in southern Iceland (S343=H301, S346/H305); the 'Cross Ridge' Krossáss on the Öxarfjörður Fjord in northern Iceland (S257=H221); the 'Bay of Crosses' Krossavík in the Vopnafjörður Fjord in the north-east (S267=H229, S271/ H233); a second Krossavík Bay in the immediate vicinity of the Reyðarfjörður Fjord in the centre of the Icelandic East Fjords (S294=H255); and Auðr's 'Cross Hills' Krosshólar in the west of the country (S97). It might be worth noting that these *Kross-* place-names do not cluster around Auðr's land-claim, but are evenly spread across the whole island (map 5), indicating that naming places from crosses was not just a personal quirk of Auðr's, but a pan-Icelandic option in place-naming. Here it is particularly interesting to note that in the one other attestation where it is explained how such a *Kross-*place came

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381 Cf. Etchingham *et al.*, forthcoming, ch. 5; Egeler 2015d; Jakob Benediktsson 1968: 137 (note 4); Craigie 1897: 445, no. 27; Stokes 1876–1878a: 187, no. 13.

382 For a discussion of some of the problems of this account as a historical source cf., for instance, Woolf 2007: 279–285.

383 For more medieval examples cf. Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson 1874, *s.v.* 'kross'. The Early Modern Þ-recension of *Landnámabók* adds a *Krossnes* as another *Kross*-toponym: Jakob Benediktsson 1968: 46 (note 3). The index of the Ferðakort Road Atlas lists 81 places in Iceland whose name begins with the elements *Kross-* or *Krossa-*: Ferðakort 2006: 72. For a discussion of *Krossá* cf. Egeler 2015a: 81–82.

Map 5: *Kross-/Krossa-* toponyms in the medieval recensions of *Landnámabók*. Some locations are very approximate, as not all places can be clearly identified today.

by its name, this name is again derived from a cross having been erected there (S257=H221):[384]

> Eɴ i þridia stad settu þeir kross. þar nefndu þeir Krosás svo helgudu þeir ser allann Auxarfiaurd.

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384 Text: *Sturlubók*-recension after Finnur Jónsson 1900. It might be worth mentioning as an aside that in this passage as a whole, three places are made 'meaningful' by the erection of respectively an axe (creating the place-name Øxarfjǫrðr, 'Fjord of the Axe'), an eagle (creating the toponym Arnarþúfa, 'Eagle's Mound'), and a cross. This combination certainly is strange at first glance, even leaving aside the question of what exactly is meant by erecting an eagle. If read in an Irish ecclesiastic-hagiographical context, however, it might be possible to read it as consistently Christian-themed: while the Christian symbolism of the cross is obvious, the eagle is the animal of John the Evangelist, and the tenth-century *Tripartite Life* of Saint Patrick contains a story about the foundation of the church of Cell Mór ('Great Church') in whose centre stands an axe: Saint Patrick prophesied that Bishop Olcan should found his church where his axe would fall from the travelling bishop's back, and thus it happened (*Vita tripartita*, p. 136, ll. 19–23).

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> 'And on the third place they placed a cross. They named the place there
> Krossáss, "Cross Ridge". Thus they sanctified the whole Öxarfjörður Fjord
> for themselves.'

Here as well, the erection of a cross serves to give the landscape meaning
and to make it habitable. The actions ascribed to Auðr thus reveal themselves
as part of a broader trend rather than as a purely individual reaction to the set-
tlement situation. Even if understood as a broad trend, however, these actions
may well be directly dependent on Irish and Scottish customs, as it is sug-
gested by the specific case of Auðr.

Furthermore, just as little as such an interpretation is dependent on the
historicity of Auðr as a person, is it dependent on a narrow Viking Age
chronology. *Kross-* place-names cannot be dated as such, and neither can any
hypothetical standing crosses they might originally have referred to; most such
crosses probably were made of wood like the crosses mentioned in Adomnán's
Life of Saint Columba and therefore have long since perished,[385] whereas the
few extant medieval instances of Icelandic stone crosses are not datable.[386]
Yet the hypothesis that Icelandic standing crosses, and place-names arguably
referring to them, are based on a Gaelic model is not dependent on a Viking
Age date of such monuments or toponyms: the High Crosses of Ireland and
Scotland could have inspired an Icelandic equivalent at any time, also after
the Settlement Period proper. After all, not only did the early High Crosses of
Ireland remain visible in the landscape, but new crosses also continued to be
erected – the 'St Patrick's Cross' that formerly stood on the Rock of Cashel
may serve as just one famous example of a post-Viking Age (in this case,
probably twelfth-century) High Cross.[387] Another one is the twelfth-century
High Cross of Monaincha (fig. 15),[388] a place which will get a chapter of its
own later in this book.[389] Furthermore, the crosses of the Isle of Man with
their mixture of 'Celtic' form (cross slab) and Norse iconographic content
illustrate that Norse settlers in the west did intensely grapple with the Hiberno-
Scottish custom of erecting free-standing crosses as a type of monument,[390]

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385 See above, p. 158. On the fragments of possible wooden crosses from Papey,
     which probably are much later, see Guðrún Sveinbjarnardóttir 2002: 104.
386 Three stone crosses, ranging from 35 cm to 53 cm in height, are known from the
     yard of a church at Þórarinsstaðir in Seyðisfjörður; however, these crosses offer
     considerable problems for dating: Fisher 2005: 165–166.
387 Harbison 1992a, vol. 1, pp. 34–35.
388 Harbison 1992a, vol. 1, pp. 138–139, 384.
389 Below, pp. 188ff.
390 Cf. Abrams 2012: 36–37; Margeson 1983; Kermode 1907.

Fig. 15: The twelfth-century High Cross of Monaincha. © M. Egeler, 2016.

as does the appearance of a number of High Crosses on Shetland and even on the Faeroes.[391] Thus, throughout the medieval history of Iceland, the Norse settlers there could have adopted a 'Gaelic' approach to the use of the cross as a symbol to give meaning to the land they had moved into. This seems to show both in the place-names and in the stories of Iceland – and it may even be seen in the Old Norse-Icelandic term for 'cross' itself: Old Norse *kross* appears to be a borrowing from Irish.[392] Irish *cros* in the first instance denoted the cross as a religious symbol, in the second instance the monastic cross as an object of devotion – a class of objects of which the High Cross is the most monumental representative –, and only then branches out to further semantic aspects like 'a cross-shaped object'.[393] Thus, it just might be that the High Crosses of Ireland and Scotland not only left their mark in Icelandic landscape, place-lore, and toponymy, but perhaps even in the Icelandic language.

To conclude, however, perhaps even more telling than the origin of a piece of Old Norse religious vocabulary is a very particular spotlight provided by

391 Fisher 2001: 1; cf. Ahronson 2015: 160; Fisher 2005. Note also the recent finds of crosses in Seyðisfjörður (above, note 386).

392 In this, *kross* does not stand alone among Old Norse terms connected with Christianity; cf. Old Norse *bagall*, 'an episcopal staff, crozier' < Old Irish *bachall* (above, note 122).

393 *eDIL, s.v.* 'cros'.

a Viking Age monument from the Hebrides. Auðr was a Hebridean, and the account of her settlement seems to suggest that she humanised her new land in Iceland by erecting High Crosses in the Gaelic fashion. As I have argued on the basis of examples like St Patrick's Cross in Cashel or the High Cross of Monaincha, a Norse author could at any time during the Middle Ages have become familiar with the practice of erecting crosses, and thus the account of Auðr's doing so could, at any time before the writing of *Landnámabók*, easily have been created in a purely literary or folkloric fashion, possibly ret-rojecting Gaelic practice from a much later period into Icelandic prehistory. On the other hand, however, there is one piece of evidence that, like none other, suggests that the *Landnámabók*-account of Auðr might just as well be a reasonably accurate reflection of something that really happened during the Settlement Period: this piece of evidence is the Kilbar cross-slab from Barra, one of the islands of the Outer Hebrides.[394] This, incidentally, is the island from which the wife of Auðr's grandson Óláfr *fáelán* is said to have come: Álfdís *en barreyska*, 'the Barra-Islander' (S109).[395]

The Kilbar cross-slab, which measures 1.5 m in height and has been dated to the tenth or early eleventh century,[396] was found in the burial ground of the church of Kilbar. The stone has been worked on both sides: its front has been carved with a relief showing a Celtic cross decorated with a Scandinavian interlace pattern,[397] whereas most of its reverse is taken up by a large runic inscription. This inscription, in as far as the text can be deciphered more or less clearly, reads as follows:[398]

> **...(t)ir.þur.kirþu:s(t)in(a)r**
> **...r.is.kurs:sia(:)r-str**
> **...**

> Eptir Þorgerðu Steinarsdóttur es kross sjá reistr. ...

> 'After Þorgerð Steinar's daughter is this cross erected. ...'

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394 Jennings 1998: 46; Liestøl 1983: 90 (fig. 7), 92. For a detailed runological discussion of this cross-slab cf. Holman 1996: 201–205.

395 Cf. above, p. 163, and cf. Etchingham *et al.*, forthcoming, ch. 5, *s.v.* 'Konáll'.

396 Dating and measurements after museum information, National Museums Scotland, inv.-no. X.IB 102.

397 Illustration: Liestøl 1983: 90 (fig. 7).

398 Transliteration after Holman 1996: 202; normalised text and translation sightly adapted after Jennings 1998: 46. For the original runes cf. Holman 1996: 202.

This stone provides clear evidence for a degree of peaceful interaction between Norse incomers and the Hebridean population, and more specifically the local Christian Church. In particular, it illustrates in a very concrete fashion that, just as *Landnámabók* claims, some Norse settlers on the Hebrides did indeed become Christian (albeit *Landnámabók* ascribes such conversions to a slightly earlier period). Furthermore, it shows that such Christianised Hebridean Norse did indeed adapt the Gaelic custom of erecting free-standing crosses, as *Landnámabók* ascribes the practice to Auðr. And last but perhaps not least, it makes one wonder whether it is by pure chance, or perhaps rather as a result of a certain factual cultural continuity, that both *Landnámabók* and the inscription on the Kilbar cross use the same phrase, *at reisa kross*, to describe the erection of such monuments.

2.6.   Papar: Gaelic Anchorites in Place-Names and Place-Stories in Íslendingabók and Landnámabók

Ireland, the 'island of saints',[399] has from an Icelandic point of view tradi-
tionally not only been considered as saintly, but also as a preeminent exporter
of this particular commodity. The Icelandic historical tradition that is repre-
sented by *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók* claims that Irish hermit-monks
were the first human beings to reach Iceland. The oldest relevant testimony is
Ari Þorgilsson's 'Book of Icelanders' (*Íslendingabók*),[400] an early history of
Iceland written in the first half of the twelfth century and considered to be the
earliest extant narrative prose text in the Old Norse language.[401] Ari gives the
following account of Iceland at the time when the first settler Ingólfr reached
the island in, according to Ari's reckoning, AD 870 or 869 (ch. 1):[402]

> Þá váru hér menn kristnir, þeir es Norðmenn kalla papa, en þeir fóru síðan á
> braut, af því at þeir vildu eigi vesa hér við heiðna menn, ok létu eptir bœkr
> írskar ok bjǫllur ok bagla; af því mátti skilja, at þeir váru menn írskir.

> 'At that time, there were Christian men here whom the Northmen call *papar*;
> and they went away then, because they did not want to be here with heathen
> men, and they left Irish books and bells and croziers behind; from which one
> could see that they were men from Ireland.'

A similar story is told in *Landnámabók*. The oldest extant recension in
Sturlubók, dating from the last quarter of the thirteenth century, mentions
such Irish *papar* in its prologue:[403]

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399 On the history of the appellation of Ireland as an 'island of saints' cf. Sharpe 1991:
    3–5. The phrase *insula sanctorum* is first attested as being used of Ireland in a
    chronicle entry written in a monastery at Mainz in the 1070s; its modern promi-
    nence, however, goes back to a seventeenth-century revival of the phrase by Irish
    Catholic scholars forced to leave Ireland for the continent.
400 Ed. by Jakob Benediktsson 1968; my translation.
401 Simek and Hermann Pálsson 2007: 208.
402 On Ari's chronology cf. Grønlie 2006: 16 (note 11).
403 Ed. by Finnur Jónsson 1900; my translation.

> En adr Island bygdizt af Noregi voru þar þeir menn er Nordmenn kalla ᴘapa
> þeir voru menn ᴋristner ok hyggia menn at þeir hafe verit vestan vm haf þvi
> at funduzt epter þeim bækr ɪʀskar biollur ok baglar ok en fleire hlutir þeir er
> þat matte skilia at þeir voru Vestmenn. Enn er ok þess getit æ bókum ᴇnskum
> at i þan tima var farit milli landana.

> 'And before Iceland was settled from Norway, there were the men there
> which the Northmen call *papar*. They were Christian men, and people
> believe that they were from the West across the sea, because after their disap-
> pearance Irish books, bells, and croziers and even more things were found
> which might suggest that they were Westmen. That as well is mentioned in
> English books that during that time there was traffic between the lands.'

Both texts tell that before the arrival of the Norse settlers, Iceland had
already been inhabited by Irish ascetic monks which the Norse called *papar*.
The term *papar* is a loanword apparently based on Old Irish *pápa*, which
is used of the Pope and of anchoritic monks.[404] In the Old Norse-Icelandic
reception of the term, it was adopted specifically as referring to Gaelic ancho-
rites. Since this particular usage is attested but exceptional in Ireland, one
wonders whether the Old Norse borrowing might be based on a specifically
northern Scottish use of the word; this would then correspond to the Scottish
focus of the distribution of place-names formed with this term.[405]

The culture-historical background of the Old Norse loan is found in the
Irish concept of *peregrinatio*, already mentioned above in connection with
Saint Ásólfr.[406] The Irish *peregrinatio* is an ecclesiastical ascetic exercise in
which renunciation is performed through the act of leaving one's home, thus
forsaking the security and social status one had enjoyed there. There were
several possibilities for doing this: one could leave one's Irish home kingdom
for another Irish kingdom; one could leave Ireland and go abroad to Britain
or the European continent (which was considered a *potior peregrinatio*); or
one could leave the inhabited Irish mainland for one of the smaller islands off
the shores of Ireland, hoping to find oneself a place of ascetic retreat from the
world somewhere in a maritime wilderness.

Among the various ways in which *peregrinatio* could be performed, the
last of these three possibilities was the one which captivated the Irish imagina-
tion the most and even led to the creation of a whole genre of storytelling that

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404 *eDIL*, *s.v.* 'pápa'; cf. Ahronson 2015: 68–69; Grønlie 2006: 17 (note 18); Rekdal 1998:
      284; Fellows-Jensen 1996: 116.
405 Cf. above, p. 43. I owe this idea to Colmán Etchingham (*pers. comm.*).
406 Above, p. 135.

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dealt with the adventures and experiences of such ocean-hermits: the genre of *immrama* or 'Sea Voyages' (literally, 'Rowing-Abouts').[407] The most famous of these texts is the *Navigatio sancti Brendani abbatis*, the 'Voyage of Saint Brendan the Abbot',[408] a probably ninth-century text in which Saint Brendan sets out on a seven-year voyage in search of the 'Paradise of God in the vastness of the sea' (*paradisus Dei in spacio maris*). Other texts of this genre, already mentioned in passing above,[409] are *Immram Curaig Maele Dúin* (the 'Voyage of Mael Dúin's Leatherboat'),[410] *Immram Curaig Ua Corra* (the 'Voyage of the Leatherboat of the Uí Corra'),[411] and *Immram Snédgusa ocus Maic Riagla* (the 'Voyage of Snédgus and Mac Ríagla').[412] But however much the idea of a *peregrinatio* on the ocean sparked the Irish literary imagination, it was not merely a literary phenomenon, but also a real-world ecclesiastical practice.[413]

One of the most colourful testimonies to the real-world practice of maritime *peregrinatio* is provided by the work of Dicuil. Dicuil was an Irish scholar who, probably towards the end of the eighth century, left Ireland for the European continent to become a prominent man at the court of Charlemagne.[414] Around AD 825 he completed the geographical treatise *Liber de mensura orbis terrae*, 'Book about the Measuring of the World', into which he incorporated eye-witness accounts of such Irish ecclesiastical practice on the islands of the Atlantic Ocean.[415] In one passage, he mentions being told by a cleric that this man, spending two days and two nights on the ocean in a small boat and having a favourable wind, had reached many of the islands to the north of Britain (VII.14). According to Dicuil's sources, such voyages would have been commonplace for at least a century until the practice was made impossible by the depredations of the Vikings (VII.15):[416]

> Illae insulae sunt aliae paruulae, fere cunctae simul angustis distantes fretis;
> in quibus in centum ferme annis heremitae ex nostra Scottia nauigantes

407 In general cf. Wooding 2000a; Wooding 2004.
408 Ed. by Selmer 1959, and cf. Carney 2000.
409 Above, p. 123.
410 Ed. and transl. by Oskamp 1970.
411 Older recension ed. by van Hamel 2004 (1941): 93–111, 139–141; ed. and transl. by Stokes 1893b.
412 Poetic version ed. by van Hamel 2004 (1941): 86–92; transl. by Ó hAodha 1997.
413 Cf. Wooding 2015.
414 Tierney 1967: 11.
415 Ed. and transl. by Tierney 1967; dating: Tierney 1967: 17.
416 Ed. and transl. by Tierney 1967: 76/77.

habitauerunt. Sed sicut a principio mundi desertae semper fuerunt ita nunc causa latronum Normannorum uacuae anchoritis plenae innumerabilibus ouibus ac diuersis generibus multis nimis marinarum auium. Numquam eas insulas in libris auctorum memoratas inuenimus.

'There is another set of small islands, nearly all separated by narrow stretches of water; in these for nearly a hundred years hermits sailing from our country, Ireland, have lived. But just as they were always deserted from the beginning of the world, so now because of the Northman pirates they are emptied of anchorites, and filled with countless sheep and very many diverse kinds of sea-birds. I have never found these islands mentioned in the authorities.'

Here, Dicuil says that certain Atlantic islands beyond Britain and Ireland were common destinations of anchorites from the late seventh century onwards until the beginning of the Viking raids in the late eighth century. Today, it is a widely held opinion that these islands are to be identified with the Faeroes,[417] although Dicuil's description equally fits probably just about any other North Atlantic archipelago, all of which have a plentiful fauna dominated by sheep and birds.[418] Be that as it may, Dicuil's report illustrates maritime *peregrinatio* as a real-life practice, a practice which apparently led to repeated encounters between Norsemen and Gaelic island hermits.

Íslendingabók and *Landnámabók* claim that such Irish hermits – the *papar* of Old Norse-Icelandic tradition – were the first human beings to discover and spend extended periods of time in Iceland, leaving only when the pagan Norse settlement began. Thus, these two Icelandic texts tell exactly the same story about Iceland that Dicuil tells about his unnamed *insulae aliae paruulae*. The core question for our understanding of the Icelandic tradition of the original discovery of Iceland by Irish *papar* is how this exact correspondence should be interpreted. One way of interpreting it would be to argue that both Dicuil and the Icelandic tradition describe, in a reasonably accurate way, patterns of events that recurred repeatedly during the Viking Age: pagan Norse raiders and settlers pushing Irish anchorites out of their world of ascetic island retreats. A testimony that, at first glance, seems to support such a 'realistic' reading of the *papar* of *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók* is a famous passage,

417 Ó Corráin 2008: 428; Ahronson 2007: 1 (note 2); Ó Corráin 2001: 17; Wooding 2000b: 239; Jónas Kristjánsson 1998: 260; Mac Mathúna *s.a.*: 178; Mac Mathúna 1997: 211; Fellows-Jensen 1996: 116.
418 *Pace* the rash agreement with the *communis opinio* in Egeler 2015b: 284–285.

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likewise found in Dicuil, which describes the island of Thule (*Liber de mensura orbis terrae* VII.11):[419]

> Trigesimus nunc annus est a quo nuntiauerunt mihi clerici qui a kalendis Febroarii usque kalendas Augusti in illa insula manserunt quod non solum in aestiuo solstitio sed in diebus circa illud in uespertina hora occidens sol abscondit se quasi trans paruulum tumulum, ita ut nihil tenebrarum in minimo spatio ipso fiat, sed quicquid homo operari uoluerit uel peduculos de camisia abstrahere tamquam in presentia solis potest. Et si in altitudine montium eius fuissent, forsitan numquam sol absconderetur ab illis.

> 'It is now thirty years since clerics, who had lived on the island [i.e. Thule] from the first of February to the first of August, told me that not only at the summer solstice, but in the days round about it, the sun setting in the evening hides itself as though behind a small hill in such a way that there was no darkness in that very small space of time, and a man could do whatever he wished as though the sun were there, even remove lice from his shirt, and if they had been on a mountain-top perhaps the sun would never have been hidden from them.'

This passage has repeatedly been read as a description of Irish anchorites in Iceland,[420] which would provide an exact counterpart to the accounts of *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók*. But strictly speaking, there is nothing in this account to warrant an identification of Dicuil's 'Thule' with Iceland. What Dicuil seems to have done was to take the concept of a remote northern island of Thule, which was well known to him from classical literature (much of which he excerpts in his book),[421] and then simply to identify this Thule with the northernmost island that the voyaging monks known to him had encountered. There is no reason to identify this island with Iceland.[422]

Later Icelandic writers, of course, did identify Iceland with Thule: *Landnámabók,* right at the beginning of its very first chapter, identifies Iceland with the island of Thule as described by Bede (S1/H1). This, however, is Icelandic conjecture, not ancient tradition. Nevertheless, it may be important for understanding the Icelandic idea that there were *papar* in Iceland before there were Norsemen. *Landnámabók* mentions 'English books' (i.e. books

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419 Ed. and transl. by Tierney 1967: 74/75.

420 Cf. Wooding 2000b: 241, with further literature; Egeler 2015b: 283; Jónas Kristjánsson 1998: 260.

421 *Liber de mensura orbis terrae* VII.7–10, excerpting the remarks about Thule in the works of Pliny the Younger, Isidore of Seville, Priscian, and Solinus.

422 *Contra* my agreement with the *communis opinio* in Egeler 2015b: 283.

Map 6: Icelandic places discussed in this chapter. Round dots: *pap*-places (the island of Papey with Papatættur and Írskuhólar; the Papafjörður Fjord with Papós and Papatættur; Papafell up towards the West Fjords); star: Kirkjubæjarklaustur with Hildishaugr, 'Hildir's Mound'.

that had somehow reached Iceland via Britain) as a source of its knowledge of pre-Settlement human presence in Iceland, and the almost verbally identical account in *Íslendingabók* may have drawn on exactly the same sources (as well as itself being used by the compilers of *Landnámabók*). This suggests the possibility that Icelandic scholars, after having identified Iceland with Thule, looked up what contemporary learned literature could tell them about Thule, only to discover that Thule-Iceland had already been reached by Irish monks well before its Norse discovery. In this way, the learned presentation of Irish anchorites in Iceland could, in its entirety, be derived from the learned literature of Britain, Ireland, and the European continent. The exact correspondence between Dicuil's report of the *insulae aliae paruulae*, abandoned by Irish anchorites because of the Norsemen, and the reports of *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók* about Iceland, imagined to have been abandoned by Irish anchorites because of the Norse settlement, probably is most easily explained by assuming that this Norse learned tradition about the *papar* largely constitutes a direct literary reworking of Dicuil's account after Icelandic scholars had identified Iceland with Thule, thus turning Dicuil's description of Thule

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into a source of Icelandic prehistory.[423] The mentioning of 'Irish books and bells and croziers' in *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók* does not in any way support Icelandic claims to an early Irish monastic settlement either. If there were indeed any 'Irish books and bells and croziers' being handed down as heirlooms on twelfth- and thirteenth-century Icelandic farms (which might well have been the case), then they were not holy relics from abandoned Hiberno-Icelandic hermitages but Viking Age plunder that the Norse themselves had brought over from Ireland and Scotland.[424]

So much for the learned tradition – but there is more to the presence of *papar* in Iceland than the above deconstruction of *Íslendingabók* and the prologue of *Landnámabók* can account for. Below the learned stratum of Icelandic ideas about *papar*, there also seems to have been a more popular, folkloric stratum, which we meet in place-names and place-storytelling (map 6).

In its account of the settlement of southern Iceland, *Landnámabók* tells the following story about the history of Kirkjubœr ('Church's-Farm'), modern-day Kirkjubæjarklaustur ('Church's-Farm's-Monastery') in southern Iceland (S320/H280, S323=H283):[425]

> Maðr het Ketill en fiflski son Ioruɴar ᴍanvitzbrekku d(ottur) Ketilz ꜰlatnefs. hann fór af Sudreyium til Islandz. (hann) var ᴋristiɴ. hann nam land milli Geirlandz áár ok Fiardar áár fyrir ofann Nykoma. Ketill bio i Kirkiubæ. þar haufdu áádr setet ꜰapar ok eigi mattu þar heidner menn bua. ... Eyteiɴ son Hrana Hilldiss(onar) ꜰaraks for or Noreigi til Islandz. ... hans baurn voru þau Hillder ok Þorliot er atti Þorsteiɴ at Kelldugnupi. Hillder villdi færa bv sitt i Kirkiubæ epter Ketel ok hugdi at þar mundi heidinn madr mega bua. En er hann kom nær at ᴛungardi vard hann brad daudr þar liggr hann i Hilldishaugi.

> 'A man was called Ketill the Foolish, the son of Jórunn Woman-Wisdom's-Slope, the daughter of Ketill Flat-Nose. He went to Iceland from the Hebrides and was Christian. He took land between the rivers Geirlandsá and Fjaðrá above Nýkomi. Ketill lived at Kirkjubœr, "Church's-Farm". Before, *papar* had sat there, and pagan men could not live there. ... Eysteinn, the son of Hrani, son of Hildir Difficulty, went to Iceland from Norway. ... His children were Hildir and Þorljót, who was married to Þorsteinn at Keldugnúpr Peak. Hildir wanted to move his residence to Kirkjubœr after [the death of]

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423 Cf. already Wooding 2011: 24; Wooding 2000b: 242; Helgi Guðmundsson 1997: 85–100.

424 On the literary-religious function of the 'Irish books and bells and croziers' within the conversion narrative of *Íslendingabók* cf. Grønlie 2017: 127–128.

425 Ed. by Finnur Jónsson 1900; my translation.

Fig. 16: The rock formation today identified as 'Hildir's Mound', Hildishaugr, near Kirkjubæjarklaustur. The formation is natural, but, protruding sharply from an otherwise flat meadow, it looks strikingly out of place in its surroundings, which probably was a major factor for why it was furnished with an origin legend. © M. Egeler, 2014.

> Ketill and thought that a pagan man would be able to live there, but when he came near the fence of the home-field, he suddenly dropped dead. There he lies in Hildishaugr, "Hildir's Mound".'

This story connects the place-name Kirkjubœr ('Church's-Farm') with a tale about the former presence of *papar* at the site and the reverberations that this had for the place itself, making it uninhabitable for pagans ever after. Indeed, for a pagan merely to enter the place is described as immediately lethal, a lesson underlined by naming a mound from a victim of the *papar*'s vengeance (fig. 16).

This tale is interesting in several respects. For one, it provides an unusually clear illustration that the semantically clear place-names of Iceland were indeed perceived as furnishing a place with a character that was tied to the semantics of its name: the place named 'Kirkjubœr' is not only called 'Church's-Farm', but also narratively it is seen as a fundamentally Christian place. In the present context, however, it is even more important that the specific story connected with the 'Church's-Farm' is a story about *papar*. W. A. Craigie and Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson viewed the body of *Landnámabók* as

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essentially a collection of Icelandic folklore of the time.[426] Lacking independent sources, it is hard to assess to which extent *Landnámabók* really bears the voice of local traditions; but if Craigie's and Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson's assessment is not too far off the mark, then the tale of the Kirkjubœr-*papar* illustrates that they were an important and firmly established part of the medieval folklore of Iceland.

When reading the *papar*-story connected with Kirkjubœr, furthermore, the tale strikes one as having a certain 'Irish ring', even though it does not have an Irish precedent as such. There is a certain remarkable vengefulness about the idea that attempting to settle down on an abandoned piece of land will lead to instant death simply because one adheres to the wrong religion. The *papar* of this anecdote are not nice, and certainly they are not gentle people. Within Icelandic literature, their vicious rejection of pagan life recalls the antisocial behaviour displayed by Ásólfr, the Christian de facto-saint of Irish stock who was considered 'the holiest man' (*ᴇɴ helgazti madr*), and his uncompromising opposition to pagan social life. And perhaps even more, it recalls the ruthless vindictiveness of the saints of Ireland and Britain: Saint Brigit blinding her brother, Saint Patrick uttering curses and killing his sister, and Saint Germanus burning a whole citadel with heavenly fire that devours everybody living in it.[427] The specific kind of saintliness that the *papar* appear to stand for in the medieval Icelandic folklore of *Landnámabók* is very much in line with broader patterns observable in the Celtic West.

Considering this, it may be important to note that according to the account of *Landnámabók*, the tradition of the *papar* at Kirkjubœr came down through a grandson of the Hebridean Ketill Flat-Nose: Ketill the Foolish, who took land there, was descended through his mother from Ketill Flat-Nose, whose daughter, Auðr the Deep-Minded, we have already met as the woman who erected Gaelic High Crosses in western Iceland to turn her new home on the head of the Hvammsfjörður Fjord into a facsimile of the Christian landscape of the Hebrides. Thus, just as it is the case with the Krosshólar Hills, also the place-story of Kirkjubœr is tied to a Hebridean-Norse Christian family.[428] Since Ketill the Foolish was the first man to take land at Kirkjubœr, the claim that Kirkjubœr was first settled by Irish anchorites must have come down through him – he would have been the only one to meet them or find their

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426 Cf. above, p. 65.
427 Cf. above, pp. 128, 137.
428 Cf. the appendix to this sub-chapter.

remains, or rather, the only one to be in a position to claim to have done so.[429] Given his roots in the Hebrides, and thus in an environment that was culturally Gaelic, this ties in with the Gaelic saintly vindictiveness of the particular kind of Christian sanctity that these *papar* bestow on their former land at Kirkjubœr: the place-story of Ketill's land is so beautifully in tune with the character of the Gaelic saints that it is unlikely to be chance that such a story is tied to land taken by a settler from the Gaelic world. This, furthermore, has direct implications for the relationship between history and folklore in the account of the Kirkjubœr *papar*: the Irish anchorites of Kirkjubœr are not an echo of real historical Irish anchorites in southern Iceland, but are a piece of Gaelic folklore that a perhaps deeply Gaelicised Norse settler used to imbue his new land with a Hebridean feeling of 'home' – just in the same way in which Auðr the Deep-Minded seems to have used cross sculptures to turn the head of the Hvammsfjörður Fjord into a landscape whose 'feel' evoked the Hebridean landscapes of her childhood.[430]

If, however, this place-story about *papar* does not hearken back to any real historical presence of *papar* at the place in question, then one wonders whether something similar might not be true also about *papar* place-names. So far, I have not actually mentioned Icelandic *papar*-toponyms per se. In the place-story of Kirkjubœr, the place-name seems to be connected with *papar* implicitly, but 'Kirkjubœr' ('Church's-Farm') is not as such a *papar*-toponym. Yet there are a number of place-names in Iceland that make direct reference to *papar*, and such place-names become intertwined with the accounts of *papar* in Icelandic historical literature at some point as well. The earliest testimonies for *papar* in Iceland, quoted above, make reference to learned sources like 'English books' as well as exceedingly implausible 'archaeological' finds of 'Irish books and bells and croziers', the latter most likely to be, if not entirely fanciful, Viking Age plunder handed down as heirlooms and re-interpreted

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429 Cf. Bandle's assumption that the toponym Kirkjubœr might indeed already stem from the Settlement Period: Bandle 1977: 61.
430 Thus, my reading of the story of the Kirkjubœr-*papar* essentially inverts the approach championed by Jónas Kristjánsson, who interprets the Icelandic *papar* as a historical reality and sees the story of Ketill the Foolish and his land as a reflex of pagan attitudes to the former presence of real *papar*, concluding (1998: 261): 'One can easily imagine that the peculiar ways of the Irish hermits instilled contempt and fear in the heathens.' Thus, he reads the story as a reflex of a pagan perspective upon actual *papar*, whereas I would strictly read it as a reflex of a Christian perspective upon Norse-Icelandic paganism that uses fictional narrative tools mined from Irish hagiography. For a reading of the story in the context of Icelandic conversion narratives cf. Grønlie 2017: 137–138.

after the conversion, when a relic voluntarily left behind by a saint would have become more socially acceptable than one stolen during a raid on a monastery. In a later stratum of the tradition, however, another type of material enters the discussion. The *Hauksbók*-recension of *Landnámabók* expands the account given in the *Sturlubók*-recension, and in doing so it adds a reference to *papar*-places (H-*Landnámabók*, ch. 1, my emphasis):[431]

> ꜱɴ adr Island bygdizt af Nordmonnum voru þar þeir menn er Nordmenn kalla Papa. þeir voru menn kristnir ok hyɢia menn at þeir muni verit hafa vestan vm haf þvi at funduzt eptir þeim bækr irskar ok biollur ok baglar ok en fleiri luter þeir at þat matti skilia at þeir voru Vestmenn. *þat fanzt i Papey avstr ok i Papyli.* er ok þers getid á bókum ꜱɴskum at i þann tíma var farit millim landana.

> 'And before Iceland was settled by the Northmen, there were the men there which the Northmen call *papar*. They were Christian men, and people believe that they will have been from the West across the sea, because after their disappearance Irish books, bells, and croziers and even more things were found, those that might suggest that they were Westmen. *That was found eastwards in Papey and in Papýli.* That as well is mentioned in English books that during that time there was traffic between the lands.'

This addition to the *Landnámabók*-text in *Hauksbók* for the first time connects *papar* with Icelandic *pap*-toponyms. Thus, it illustrates that medieval Icelanders saw a connection between such place-names and the Irish anchorites called *papar*. Etymologically, at least, this appears to be correct: linguistically, *pap*-toponyms are indeed based on the word *papar*, even though the exact pattern underlying the formation of an individual place-name cannot always be securely reconstructed. Thus, Papýli[432] is variously held to be a contraction of an earlier **Papa(r)býli*,[433] **Pap(a)-býli*,[434] or **Pap-býli*,[435] but in any case, it is a compound of *papar + býli*, 'an abode'.[436] Thus, the place-name means '*papar*-Abode'. Similarly, Papey means '*papar*-Island'.

The location of such *pap*-places is not always unproblematic (map 6). Papey is an island off the village of Djúpivogur in eastern Iceland, a few

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431 Ed. by Finnur Jónsson 1900; my translation.
432 This is the form in H1; in H273, the toponym appears with a slightly different spelling as 'Pappýli'.
433 Ahronson 2015: 67–68.
434 Bandle 1977: 61.
435 Jakob Benediktsson 1968: 32 (note 2).
436 Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson 1874, *s.v.* 'býli'.

Fig. 17: The island of Papey ('*papar*-Island') as seen from Djúpivogur in eastern Iceland. © M. Egeler, 2014.

Fig. 18: The Papatættur ('*papar*-Ruins') at Papós ('*papar*-Estuary') at the mouth of the lagoon of Papafjörður ('*papar*-Fjord') in southern Iceland. © M. Egeler, 2014.

kilometres off the mouth of the Hamarsfjörður Fjord (fig. 17). Its present-day micro-toponymy even continues the Gaelic theme, adding Írskuhólar ('Irish Hills')[437] and Papatættur ('*papar*-Ruins') to the record of Gaelic- and *papar*-themed names.[438] It might also be worthwhile highlighting that the (literal) juxtaposition of 'Irish Hills' and '*papar*-Ruins' underscores that these place-names were understood and used in full consciousness of their meanings. The place called Papýli, in contrast, can no longer be located.[439] Its context in H273 could, but does not have to, be taken to imply that it was located somewhere in the West Fjords, but if this was so, it could suggest some kind of connection with the modern hill-name Papafell ('Hill of the *papar*') on the south-western shore of the Hrútafjörður Fjord.[440] A third cluster of (modern) *papar*-names is found near Höfn in south-eastern Iceland, less than fifty kilometres as the crow flies to the south-west of Papey: there, the lagoon Papafjörður ('Fjord of the *papar*'),[441] its mouth Papós ('*papar*-Estuary'), and the Papatættur ('Ruins of the *papar*') are located immediately to the north-east of the headland of Horn. The last of these three toponyms refers to the ruins of a turf-walled building complex which folklore still associates with the Christian-mythological *papar* (fig. 18).[442]

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437 Linguistically, *Írskuhólar* consists of a fossilised nominative plural masculine weak adjective plus a plural masculine noun (<*hinir írsku hólar*). For a better-known parallel cf. *Helgafell* ('Holy Mountain'), which likewise consists of a fossilised weak adjective + noun (<*hit helga fell*).

438 Ferðakort 2006: 8, square AG9; Guðrún Sveinbjarnardóttir 2002: 102–103 (with Fig. 7.2).

439 Cf. Jakob Benediktsson 1968: 32 (note 2).

440 Cf. Mapcarta ('Papafell') 2016, and the place-name map of the National Land Survey of Iceland (Landmælingar Íslands 2017, *s.v.* 'Papafell').

441 At least today, the toponym Papafjörður does not refer to a fjord in the geological sense (i.e. a flooded glacial valley), but to a large stretch of open water at the mouth of the river Fjarðará that is cut off from the ocean by a large sandbank.

442 Eva Kristín Dal and Elín Ósk Hreiðarsdóttir 2015: 11–12. In the discussion so far, a number of other *pap*-toponyms has been brought forward as part of the Icelandic material as well: a pool called Papi in one of the many rivers called Laxá (Fellows-Jensen 1996: 116; Ahronson 2015: 60 [Table 3.1]), a cross-carving in a cliff-face on the Westman Islands called Papakross (Ahronson 2015: 60 [Table 3.1]), and a southern Icelandic cave with a variant name Papahellir (Ahronson 2015: 60 [Table 3.1]). Since both last-mentioned names are explicitly considered to be possibly rather late (Ahronson 2015: 60 [Table 3.1]) and 'Papi' breaks the general pattern by being a simplex rather than a compound, which makes it virtually impossible to interpret, these names will be left aside here.

Such place-names anchor the myth of the *papar* to the ground and in this way imbue the Icelandic landscape with Christian religious significance: Iceland, by such place-names and the associations connected with them, is turned into an 'island of saints'. But do they refer to a real historical presence of *papar*?

Considering how the *papar* are used in the medieval folklore of Kirkjubæjarklaustur, and furthermore that the *papar*-toponyms enter the learned discussion of the presence of *papar* in early Iceland only in the recension of *Landnámabók* in *Hauksbók* from the early fourteenth century, this seems unlikely.[443] Ketill the Foolish, who told the tale of *papar* in Kirkjubæjarklaustur, was a Hebridean by descent, and furthermore he was a close relative of the same Auðr who turned the head of the Hvammsfjörður Fjord into a facsimile of the Christian sacred landscape of the Hebrides. This becomes highly relevant for understanding the Icelandic *pap*-toponyms if one considers that on the Hebrides, *pap*-names are commonplace: on the Outer Hebrides, Pabay (Strath, Isle of Skye), Papadil (Small Isles, Rùm), Pabbay/Pabaigh (Kilbarr, Barra), Pabbay/Pabaigh (Kilphedir, South Uist), Paible/Paibeil (Kilmuir, North Uist), Paible/Paibeil (Taransay, Harris), Paible (Taransay), Pabanish and Pabay/Pabaigh (Uig, Lewis), and Bayble/Pabail (Ui, Stornoway, Lewis) are all names whose modern forms go back to Old Norse *papar*-toponyms, namely the two types represented by Papey and Papýli. Another eighteen instances are found on the Orkneys, the Shetland Islands, and on the coast of the Scottish mainland in Caithness.[444] In marked contrast to the situation in Iceland, these Scottish *pap*-names have indeed been coined in an environment where anchoritic monks of the Irish type – i.e. *papar* – were present. One might recall that the monastic centre of Iona was only

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443 From a different angle cf. also Fellows-Jensen 1996: 116, who notes that most *pap*-toponyms in Iceland 'originally denoted geographical features' and concludes: 'It is possible that the Vikings gave the features these names because of some association with Irish monks, but it is just as likely that they were so named because of their remote location and mysterious atmosphere.' In respect of names of the type *Papey* and *Papýli* she suggests that they appear to have 'become stereotypes that could be given to any locality that resembled the original "anchorites' retreat" or "anchorites' island"'. (Fellows-Jensen 1996: 116.)

444 Cf. The Papar Project 2016, an extensive database of all places in the Northern Isles of Scotland and in Caithness which have the name Papay (=Papey) or Papil (=Papýli). Specifically for the Hebridean *pap*-names see The Papar Project (Hebrides) 2016. Cf. also the overview maps in Ahronson 2005: 34 (Illustr 3.1) and Ahronson 2007: 6 (Illustr 2); Table 3.1 in Ahronson 2015: 60–61; Ahronson 2007: 9 (Table 1).

a stone's throw away from the Outer-Hebridean examples of *pap*-toponyms quoted above, and that clerics attached to Iona may have been active in the Western Isles, including the Outer Isles, even after the beginning of the Norse settlement there and may have played a central role in their conversion.[445] Thus, Hebridean *pap*-names may well have referred to places which were – or, in other cases, had been before the advent of the Norse –[446] directly used or served by holy men of this type.[447] The latter possibility is exactly how Andrew Jennings interprets the significance of the *pap*-names of northern Scotland and the Hebrides. Especially for the latter area he assumes that such names are connected with places which the Norse settlers accepted as estates held by the Church and which were served by clerics attached to Iona.[448] But how likely is it that something like that was also the case in Iceland? The literary-historical tradition of *Íslendingabók* and the oldest extant recension of *Landnámabók* appears to be based entirely on a reinterpretation of Viking Age plunder that was still extant in Iceland, and on a re-reading of learned mentionings of Irish ocean hermits in contemporary historical literature which Icelandic scholars took to refer to Iceland after Iceland had been identified with Thule. Or in other words: the earliest stratum of Icelandic literary references to *papar* appears to be a classic pseudo-historical construct that served Icelandic cultural memory but had little relationship to the actual history of Iceland. Thus, the burden of proof for an early presence of *papar* in Iceland lies with the folklore of Kirkjubæjarklaustur and the toponymic evidence.[449]

445 Cf. above, pp. 35ff., and Jennings 1998, esp. pp. 48–49.
446 Cf. Fellows-Jensen's (1996: 116) suggestion that *papar*-toponyms 'may originally have been given to sites that had been abandoned by the monks', but were retained later on and sometimes finally transferred to nearby settlements.
447 For a broader discussion pertaining to this question cf. Ahronson 2015: 70–74.
448 Jennings 1998: 49.
449 Recently, Ahronson has argued that a tephrachronological analysis of material identified as building debris from the construction of the man-made cave Kverkarhellir in southern Iceland suggests a time of construction around AD 800 or earlier for this cave (2015: 127–129). He then connects this cave to modern local *papar*-toponyms and folklore, which leads him to suggest that it might have been constructed by such Irish monks (2015: 129, 198–199). This idea he attempts to strengthen by a comparison of crosses carved into the walls of caves and alcoves in southern Iceland with crosses from esp. the British Isles (2015: 147–199, esp. pp. 194–199). Ahronson's work is tantalising, but ultimately unconvincing. The folkloric and toponymic material, by its very nature, is Norse rather than Irish as well as being extremely late, and for both reasons it is impossible, drawing on this material, to come to any definite conclusions about a pre-Norse presence of *papar* in Iceland. Furthermore, the crosses discussed by Ahronson are so simple

Yet the former has a hagiographic ring to it which may suggest that it is based on Gaelic concepts of sainthood as they were common in the literary production of Irish monastic centres (such as Iona in the Inner Hebrides was one),[450] and the latter finds numerous exact counterparts in the toponymy of the mixed Gaelic-Norse environment of the Northern and Western Isles of Scotland and

in their design that similarities to crosses elsewhere cannot constitute evidence for historical interdependencies. Most likely, what similarities there are simply are due to the limited number of possibilities one has to create a simple cross-shape with next to no decoration or elaboration. Furthermore, parts of the similarities claimed by Ahronson (esp. the 'bold V-cuts': 2015: 197) simply are due to the limited number of ways in which one can carve a line into rock without specialist stone-working skills; to stay with the example of the V-cuts, the Stone Age reindeers of Hell or the reindeer of Bøla in Norway are crafted using a very similar technique, which illustrates that this feature is meaningless as a point of comparison. Perhaps even more importantly, even if the similarity that Ahronson postulates between the Icelandic and Scottish cross-carvings were to be considered significant, the question should be posed why this similarity should be attributed to Gaelic *papar* in Iceland rather than to Hibernicised, Christian Norse settlers. (Ahronson considers this possibility in passing, but argues it is 'less likely' than an ascription of the Icelandic cross carvings to voyaging Gaelic monks: 2015: 199.) This last point is particularly relevant as the expanded-terminal crosses of Argyll – mostly found on some Hebridean islands and the adjoining Scottish mainland – that Ahronson uses as a core part of his comparative material appear to be closely associated with Saint Columba and the monastic houses connected with him (Ahronson 2015: 162–165, 194): this recalls the references to Saint Columba in the Icelandic traditions about the early Christian settlers Ørlygr Hrappsson and Ásólfr, as well as more generally the recurrent Hebridean connections of settlers who appear to have adopted Gaelic strategies for the semantisation of the landscape. Therefore, some of the earliest cross-carvings of Iceland could possibly constitute a close and fascinating parallel to Auðr's High Crosses, but even if this were so, they cannot provide evidence for a historical presence of *papar* in Iceland (cf. Fisher 2005: 162, 164). It also has to be critically noted that Ahronson does not include illustrations of even a single example of the Scottish crosses he uses as comparative material for contextualising the southern Icelandic cross carvings from the Seljalandshellar caves; this means that in practice, he merely claims, but does not demonstrate any actual similarities between the Icelandic and the Scottish material. (For further methodological weaknesses of Ahronson's approach cf. Langeslag 2016: 108.)

450 Here, it might be worthwhile recalling that the tenth-century Hiberno-Norse king of Dublin Óláfr *kváran* in 980 died on pilgrimage to Iona (above, p. 35), both showing the continued importance of the monastery and exemplifying that there was at least some degree of interaction between the monastic centre and the Norse in Ireland and Scotland.

the coasts of the northern Scottish mainland. This might be taken to suggest that, as Oskar Bandle indeed suggested already thirty years ago,[451] the *pap*-names of Iceland were not coined in Iceland but were transferred as fully formed toponyms created in the environment of the Christian Gaelic-Norse culture of northern Scotland. This would have been done just in the same way as settlements in California were given names such as 'Manchester' and 'Dublin' much later: when moving into a new land, one does not necessarily invent new place-names, but one can also bring one's place-names from back home. Furthermore, naming a place with a toponym that made reference to saintly monks would have blessed and sanctified the place, just as such monks themselves could be thought of as bestowing blessings on their surroundings. Naming a place 'Abode/Island of the Holy Hermit' would have been a strategy that was slightly more generic but functionally equivalent to naming a place '[Saint] Patrick's Fjord' (*Patreksfjörður*) or '[Saint] Ásólfr's Hall' (*Ásólfsskáli*) – or, to stay with the Californian comparison, 'San Francisco'. On one level, such place-names are ideological statements of identity, marking a place (and, by implication, its inhabitants) as belonging to a certain culture, or a certain sub-set of a culture, that the place-name originally derived from. In the case of the *pap*-names, there may have been a statement of affiliation to the Christian culture of the partly Gaelicised Hebridean Norse in contrast to the pagan culture of many of the Norse settlers coming directly from Norway.[452] On another level, such names are condensed prayers: a *pap*-name invokes the holiness and the miracle-working powers of the saintly

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451 Bandle 1977: 61, 63–64, 66. More recently cf. Guðrún Sveinbjarnardóttir 2002: 101; Ahronson 2005: 33–104; Ahronson 2007; Ahronson 2015: 58–74. Ahronson 2005: 33, Ahronson 2007: 5, and Ahronson 2015: 58–59, 64 claims that before his (i.e. Ahronson's) research, scholars had generally and simplistically claimed that *pap*-names are straightforward evidence for settlement of Christian ecclesiastics. Ahronson is right to challenge such interpretations, but his claim to novelty is unjustified. Further along similar lines, considering the Icelandic toponyms as based on the toponymy of the Norse colonies, cf. Grønlie 2006: 17 (note 18); Fellows-Jensen 1996: 116–117 (esp. p. 117: 'It seems most likely ... that the *papar*-names in Iceland and the Faroes do not reflect contact between the first Viking settlers and Irish anchorites but are the result of the transfer of place-names from the Viking colonies in the Northern and Western Isles. Perhaps the word *papar* was also used to form place-names which were considered suitable for sites that were remote or deserted or in some way mysterious.'). For examples of the interpretative approach challenged by Ahronson cf. Rekdal 1998: 284; Jónas Kristjánsson 1998: 261.
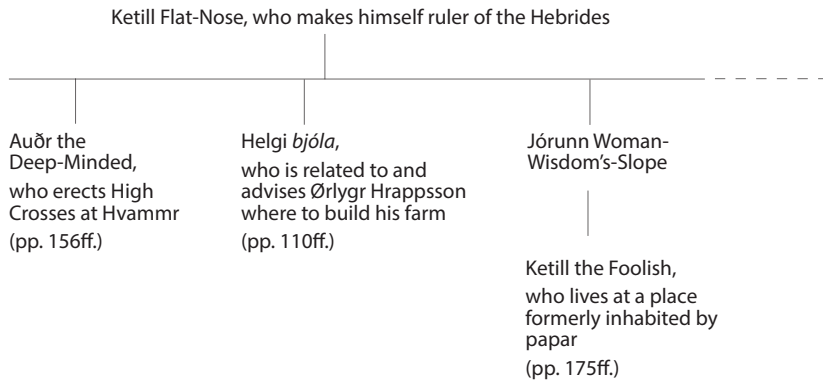
452 In general on the development of specific identities in the Norse 'diaspora' of the Viking Age cf. Abrams 2012.

holy hermits, a power that in Kirkjubœr ('Church's-Farm') is effective even though it has been refracted through a 'church'-toponym. Yet again, we seem to be dealing with a sanctification of the landscape, but yet again also with a yearning for home and an outlook on the new land that is neither able nor willing to tear itself away from the homeward gaze – a homeward gaze not directed towards Scandinavia, but towards Gaelic Scotland and Ireland. What reverberates in the *pap*-names are deeply-ingrained approaches to the land that had been developed in the Gaelic world.[453]

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453 This conclusion is, ultimately, independent of whether one assumes this to have happened during the Settlement Period or at a later point in the history of Iceland. For a summary of the discussion about the problematic dating of *pap*-toponyms cf. Ahronson 2015: 64, 66, 72–73, where he collects suggestions for dating such place-names which range from the ninth to the twelfth century; Ahronson himself favours an early dating (Ahronson 2015: 73). While ultimately the point is impossible to prove, the coherent picture that arises from the comparison of the *Landnámabók*-accounts of Ketill the Foolish and Auðr the Deep-Minded seems to suggest to me that both accounts may, at least in core elements, be reasonably good reflections of actual Settlement Period attitudes to the semantisation of the landscape. This in turn makes an early dating of some *pap*-names seem a plausible possibility, though others may well be late.

Appendix: Genealogical table of selected descendants of Ketill Flat-Nose

(Cf. Jakob Benediktsson 1968: 404.)

Ketill Flat-Nose, who makes himself ruler of the Hebrides

Auðr the
Deep-Minded,
who erects High
Crosses at Hvammr
(pp. 156ff.)

Helgi *bjóla*,
who is related to and
advises Ørlygr Hrappsson
where to build his farm
(pp. 110ff.)

Jórunn Woman-
Wisdom's-Slope

Ketill the Foolish,
who lives at a place
formerly inhabited by
papar
(pp. 175ff.)

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2.7.   Life, Death, and Immortality: the Folklore of the Hvanndalur Valley

Beyond a cattle-gate in Tipperary, there is a flat stretch of drained moorland, out of which rises, on a shallow elevation, the well-preserved ruin of a Romanesque church: the church of Monaincha (fig. 19).[454] The name Monaincha (*móin na h-inse*, 'bog of the island') is a comparatively modern one; in the course of the eighteenth century, it superseded the site's medieval name Inis Locha Cré, 'Island of Loch Cré', which recurs repeatedly in the Irish Annals. The old name, better than the modern name (or, for that matter, the site's modern appearance), recalls that up to the 1700s, the focus of the monastic site of Monaincha was an island located in a lake surrounded by marshland. Around the middle of the eighteenth century, the local landowner had this lake drained, leaving the monastery island stranded, as it were, in the centre of a large pasture. The shallowness of the rise on which the ruins are located suggests that this former lake never was very deep; nor was the island a very large one. The buildings on the former islet only form a very small and compact complex, consisting of no more than the church building proper and, directly attached to it, a two-storied annex that may have served as a sacristy, with the upper story perhaps providing some cramped living quarters. Today, the church is surrounded by graves, and the inside of both church and 'sacristy' is filled with sepulchres, as is the case with many abandoned churches in Ireland. The twelfth-century High Cross that has been re-erected in front of the church's entrance has already been mentioned above.[455]

Monaincha, or Inis Locha Cré, makes its first appearance in the Irish Annals as early as the first decade of the ninth century, when the *Annals of Ulster* (*s.a.* 807.5)[456] note the demise of a famous local anchorite. Irish hagiography even claims that the monastery had roots going way back to the time when Christianity took hold in Ireland in the sixth century, when the first hermitage

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454 For a survey of the site's history and the remains visible above ground cf. McNeill and Leask 1920. The following outline of the history of Monaincha and the (very tentative) interpretation of the function of the buildings are based on this survey.

455 Harbison 1992a, vol. 1, pp. 138–139, 384; above, pp. 165–166.

456 Ed. and transl. by Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill 1983.

Fig. 19: Approaching Monaincha. © M. Egeler, 2016.

at the site is said to have been founded by Saint Cainnech of Aghaboe,[457] a contemporary and personal friend of Saint Columba (and ultimately indeed probably identical to him).[458] A much more curious piece of information about the ideas connected with the island monastery, however, is given by an Irish collection of *mirabilia* written around the end of the Viking Age, more specifically in the years between 1054 and 1118,[459] titled 'About the Wonders of Ireland according to the Book of Glendalough' (*Do ingantaib Erenn andso da rer lebair Glind da-lacha*).[460] This text preserves the following piece of medieval folklore about Monaincha (marvel no. 31):[461]

> Inis locha Cre i crich Eili ; nis lamait ethaide boinenda no anmannai boinenna do mil no do dhuine, 7 ni epil pecthach indi, 7 ni cumacar a adnacul inte.

> 'The island of Loch Cre, in the territory of Eile. No female bird, or female animal, whether beast or man, dare enter upon it. And no sinner can die on it, and no power can bury him on it.'

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457 In general on Saint Cainnech cf. Ó Riain 2011: 138–140.
458 McNeill and Leask 1920: 20–21. On the identity of Cainnech and Columba cf. Ó Riain 2011: 139.
459 Carey 1999: 9–10.
460 Ed. and transl. by Todd and Herbert 1848: 192–219.
461 Ed. and transl. by Todd and Herbert 1848: 216/217, there no. 31.

According to this text, access to the island was reserved strictly for male beings, and 'sinners' were banned from dying or being buried there (though the latter interdiction has not prevented the church ruin from being filled with sepulchres). A. Heiermeier has pointed out that *pecthach*, 'sinner', from the late Middle Irish period onwards is very commonly used as a term for 'human being' in general (since everybody sins). Hence it is a conflation that was even carried over to the use of *sinner* for 'human being' in some Anglo-Irish literature.[462] This metaphorical use of *pecthach* probably ultimately harkens back to biblical usage, where in Mark 8:38 for instance, the present world is described as a *generatio adultera et peccatrix*, a 'whoring and sinful generation' (cf. Tobias 13:7; Isaiah 1:4).[463] Thus, one could argue that the phrase 'no sinner can die on it' (*ni epil pecthach indi*) should perhaps be understood to mean 'nobody can die on it', turning the little monastic island into an island of general immortality.[464] The one potential problem of such an interpretation is that a Hiberno-Latin treatment of the motif of the island of immortality exists that may slightly predate *Do ingantaib*. It appears to refer to the same island and explicitly restricts the immortality offered by this island to 'sinners' in the literal sense of the word. This treatment is found in the *Versus sancti Patricii episcopi de mirabilibus Hiberniae*,[465] a text traditionally ascribed to Bishop Patrick of Dublin (1074–1084), the second bishop of the diocese constituted by the Hiberno-Norse city. The relevant passage reads (section xxi, ll. 148–155):[466]

> *De insula quadam satis admiranda*
>
> Est quoque in hac patria mirabilis insula parua,
> Quam fugiunt omnes uolucres nec adire uolentes
> Feminei generis, nequeunt quia tangere terram
> Sanctam seu frondes: sexus sed uisitat alter.
> In qua more hominum est auium diuisio mira.
> Illic nemo mori peccator seu sepeliri potest
> Quit, soli sed rite uiri qui ascendere possunt meritis
> Ad celum: exemplis multis quod sepe probatur.

462 Heiermeier 1944: 272.
463 Cf. Blaise 1966: 550.
464 As I, following Heiermeier (1944: 272) and unaware of the *Versus sancti Patricii episcopi de mirabilibus Hiberniae*, have done in Egeler 2015b: 362.
465 Ed. and transl. by Gwynn 1955: 56–71.
466 Ed. and transl. by Gwynn 1955: 66/67.

Of a very wonderful island

'There is also in our country a small wonderful island,
Which is shunned by all female birds, nor will they approach it:
They are unable to touch its holy ground
Or its boughs: but birds of male sex visit it.
Here in this strange division birds follow the ways of men.
No sinner can die there nor there be buried,
But those only who lawfully may rise by their merits
To Heaven, as is often proved by many examples.'

The author of this versified collection of marvels desists from giving the names of any of the places he talks about. According to his own statement at the beginning of the poem, this is to save space (ll. 4–5),[467] but even so it seems to indicate a rift between his stories and the places they are connected to as well as a certain detachment of his storytelling from the living place-lore tradition. Yet, since the Latin poem, just as the vernacular text, combines the marvel of the immortality of sinners with the marvel of the absence of female birds as well as any other female beings, it is clear that the poem is talking about the same island which the Irish collection of *mirabilia* quoted above identifies as the 'island of Loch Cré', i.e. Monaincha. While this Latin poem is traditionally ascribed to Patrick of Dublin, more recent research by Elizabeth Boyle has shown that the date of composition as well as the author of the text are anything but certain: a firm *terminus ante quem* is given by its earliest manuscript witness, which predates the end of the twelfth century, but otherwise clear indications for the text's date are regrettably scarce.[468]

The close structural parallelism between the description of Monaincha in *Do ingantaib Erenn* and *De mirabilibus Hiberniae* strongly suggests that there must be a close connection between them. Yet the nature of this connection is not as clear as one would wish. The same impression is also conveyed by the overall structure of the two collections. *Do ingantaib* recounts thirty-four wonders, of which twenty-four also occur in *De mirabilibus Hiberniae*, implying a close connection between the texts. Nevertheless, *Do ingantaib* is not simply an expanded reworking of the whole of *De mirabilibus*, as the latter also contains two marvels not found in the vernacular collection.[469] In any case, the vernacular text contains a rich repertoire of place-names that is

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467 Cf. Gwynn 1955: 127, 131; Boyle 2014: 257–261.
468 Boyle 2014: 234, 255–256.
469 Boyle 2014: 247.

entirely absent from the Latin collection. Hence there is an extremely close and far-reaching overlap between the two texts, but each of them goes beyond their shared core of material. On this basis, Boyle is right to conclude that the two collections, rather than one of them being an adaptation of the other, probably 'both draw on a common, or related, source or sources'; she assumes that both were probably written in the eleventh century, with *De mirabilibus* perhaps being the older text.[470] Soon we will see why the dependence of both texts on a common source is of crucial importance for the reconstruction of the earliest form of the place-story of Monaincha that is within the reach of the extant material.

A century or so after the composition of *Do ingantaib* and *De mirabilibus*, in the 1180s, Gerald of Wales spent a year travelling in Ireland, and on the basis of this experience he then wrote his 'Topography of Ireland' (*Topographia Hibernica*).[471] Rather than presenting a simple account of the physical layout of the land, as its title might be taken to suggest, this work effectively attempts a detailed ethnography of Ireland and the Irish of Gerald's time, and in many cases also includes legendary and supernatural material. In one such passage, Gerald summarises what he has heard about Loch Cré, and in doing so he presents us with our most detailed extant medieval account of the place-lore of Monaincha (*Topographia* II.4):[472]

> *De duabus insulis ; in quarum altera nemo moritur ; in alteram feminei sexus animal non intrat.*

> Est lacus in Momonia boreali, duas continens insulas, unam majorem et alteram minorem. Major ecclesiam habet antiquae religionis. Minor vero capellam, cui pauci cœlibes, quos Cœlicolas vel Colideos vocant, devote deserviunt.

> In majorem nunquam femina, vel feminei sexus animal aliquod, intrare potuit ... .

> In minori vero insula nemo unquam mortuus fuit, vel morte naturali mori potuit. Unde et viventium insula vocatur.

> Morbo tamen letali gravissime interdum vexantur, et usque ad extremam exhalationem miserabiliter afficiuntur. Cumque nihil amplius spei, nihil jam vitæ vitalis superesse præsentiunt; cumque, invalescente valetudine, tam finaliter afflicti fuerint, ut morte mori malint quam vitam ducere mortis, in majorem demum insulam se navicula deferri faciunt. Qui statim ut terram attingunt, spiritum reddunt.

470 Boyle 2014: 247–248 (quotation: p. 247).
471 Ed. by Dimock 1867.
472 Ed. by Dimock 1867.

About two islands; on the one of them nobody dies; the other a being of female sex does not enter.

'There is a lake in northern Munster which contains two islands, a larger one and another, smaller one. The larger one has a church of venerable sanctity. The smaller one, however, has a chapel which is devotedly served by a small number of ascetics whom they call *Coelicolae* or *Déili Dé*.

Never has a woman, or any animal of female sex, been able to enter the larger one ... .

On the smaller island, however, nobody has ever died, or been able to die a natural death. Therefore it is also called "Island of the Living".

Nevertheless they are sometimes most severely tormented by a lethal disease, and are miserably tortured to their last breath. And when they feel that there is no hope, no living life left; and when they, while their health does [not][473] improve, are so completely smitten down that they prefer to die rather than to live a life of death, they finally let themselves be brought by boat to the larger island. As soon as they touch the ground, they give up the ghost.'

Gerald records essentially the same legends here, if in a much more concise fashion, already catalogued in the lists of *mirabilia* presented in *Do ingantaib* and *De mirabilibus*. The main differences are that, instead of the one island in the older account, there are now two islands. In addition, the immortality on the monastic island, rather than being ambiguous like in *Do ingantaib* or clearly restricted to sinners in the strict sense as in *De mirabilibus*, is explicitly a universal one. Furthermore, Gerald adds a curios detail to the miracle of the absence of death: since this absence of death is merely an absence of dying, but not an absence of illness or pain, it sooner or later turns into a curse, as the island is not free from suffering, but merely free from the possibility of escaping it. Thus, those afflicted by immortality ultimately have to have themselves brought away from the island to be able to find a release from their suffering in death.

Another two generations (or so) later, a fourth testimony appears to refer to Monaincha yet again. Around 1260, the Norwegian *Konungs skuggsjá* ('King's Mirror') was written.[474] This Old Norse text, even though it was

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473 Apparently Gerald has misunderstood *in-valescere* ('to become strong') as 'to become weak, lose strength', most likely mislead by the suggestive but false analogy of words like *in-validus* ('weak').

474 Ed. by Holm-Olsen 1983; dating: Simek and Hermann Pálsson 2007: 234; cf. Meissner 1944: 2–3, 6–7.

written for the Norwegian court, incorporated a collection of Irish *mirabilia*.[475] This text also includes an account of the island of immortality:

> Ða er þar ænn ẏatn æitt miket þat er heiter logri. en i þẏi ẏatni liggr eẏ ein litil oc / ero þar í reinlifis mænn þa er calla ma hẏart er ẏil kanonca eða eremita oc ero þeir mæð ‖ sẏa myclum fiolða at þar er full conỹænt af. stunndum ero þeir fleiri. En sẏa er sagt fra œy þeiʀi at hon er heilsom oc æcki sottal oc sæinna ælldazc mænn þaʀ íþeiʀi œy en íaðrum stoðum alaŋdino. En þægar er mænn ælldazc sẏâ mioc eða sykiaz at þeiʀ sia sinn ænndadag ætlaðan af guðe þa ẏærðr þa or at flytia eynni til lannz þar sæm hann ma dœyia. þẏiat ængi ma i œynni liflatenn ẏærða at sottum en sykiaz ma maðr þaʀ í en æigi deyia fyʀr en hann er or flutr eynni.[476]

> 'There is also a large water, which is callen *Logri* ... . And in that water lies a small island, in which are men of pure life whom one may call what he likes, either *canonici* or hermits. And they are in such great numbers that there is a full convent of them. Sometimes they are more numerous. And of that island it is told that it is wholesome and not visited by diseases, and men grow old later there than in other places on the mainland. And as soon as men grow so old, or sicken so that they see the day of their end appointed by God, then they have to be moved out of it to some place on the land where they may die. For nobody may in that island lose his life from illness; though men may sicken in it, yet they die not before they are removed out of it.'[477]

In content, this version roughly corresponds to the tale as told by Gerald of Wales: there is the island monastery, the general immortality, and the nasty twist that immortality implies neither eternal youth nor eternal health. Thus at the end of a long-extended life, the monks have to have themselves carried off the island to be able to enjoy death as an escape from the suffering of old age and illness. Yet in spite of these correspondences, this passage is not simply based on Gerald's *Topographia Hibernica*. Rather than repeating Gerald's claim that there are two islands, it talks of only one island, and rather than locating it simply in a general way in 'a lake in northern Munster', it gives a specific name for the lake: *Logri*. This lake of *Logri* appears to be Loch Ree,

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475 Translations and discussions specifically of the Irish section of *Konungs skuggsjá* have been published by Heiermeier 1944; Meyer 1910b; Meyer 1894. A new discussion is forthcoming in Etchingham *et al.*, forthcoming.

476 Ed. by Holm-Olsen 1983: 23; from a different manuscript, the same passage is also ed. on pp. 134–135.

477 Transl. by Meyer 1910b: 7.

a very substantial lake far to the north of Monaincha;[478] thus, the Norwegian King's Mirror does apparently not talk about Monaincha as such. However, Heiermeier already rightly considered the possibility that Loch Ree/*Loch Ríg* is a mishearing of *Loch Cré*, pointing out that this could have been encouraged by the fact that the former is the much larger and more well-known of the two lakes, and that the pronunciation of the two names is indeed very similar.[479] This makes it likely that, as in the other testimonies of this tradition, the lake of Monaincha was meant at least at some point in the transmission of the tale, later to be confused with the larger and similarly-named Loch Ree. And if this is the case, then the Norwegian King's Mirror represents an independent source for (a dislocated variant of) the place-lore connected with Monaincha.

The story of the island of immortality at Monaincha did have a remarkably long life. In 1590, Ludolf von Münchhausen, a member of the landed gentry of Lower Saxony, undertook a journey which led him through the Netherlands, England, Scotland, Scandinavia, as well as Ireland, where he travelled in February and March 1591. In his travel diary,[480] he devoted particular attention to his visit to Monaincha. According to his account, after his arrival by ship in Waterford, he made enquiries about what to do and see in Ireland, and then firmly set his sights on the monastery of Monaincha, which was presented to him as the holiest pilgrimage destination in Ireland.[481] Of the long description he gives of his visit, its first paragraph is probably the most striking:[482]

> 5 March: another four miles northwards to the island which was the purpose of this trip. It is called by the Irish *Lan nimmeo*[483], that means *Insula viventium* (Island of the Living). The prior lives half a mile from the island; some old brothers are living nearby. An old hermit, lying in bed, was administering absolution to those who wanted to visit the island. Through my interpreter I asked him whether everything I had heard about this Island of Life was true (although I had little doubts or else I would not have undertaken the journey).

478 Etchingham *et al.*, forthcoming; Heiermeier 1944: 270; Meyer 1910b: 7.
479 Heiermeier 1944: 271, 273.
480 The parts of his diary that relate to Ireland have, in English translation, been published by Ó Riain-Raedel 1998.
481 Ó Riain-Raedel 1998: 228, 231.
482 I quote Ó Riain-Raedel's (1998: 230) English translation of her unpublished transcript of the original diary.
483 This is a phonetically correct rendering of *Oilean na mbeo*, 'Island of the Living' (Ó Riain-Raedel 1998: 225).

(*f 292*) Thus I wanted to know (in order to be prepared for the sceptics else-
where) how one could be sure that nobody is able to die on the island. The
old man gave me to understand that he himself had been living there for 10,
20, 30, 40, 50, 60 (thus he counted the years one by one) 70, 80, 90, 100 and
more years, without being able to die. Likewise, none of his brethren was
able to die and when they were tired of life, they, just as he did himself, did
not go there anymore so that they could die.

Here, theatrically acted out, we find again the story of Monaincha as a place
where it is impossible to die, but where immortality is a burden rather than
a blessing. Thus the inhabitants have to flee this place in order to be able to
find release from their suffering in death. Two manuscript pages later, Ludolf
von Münchhausen states a second time that it is generally believed that it is
impossible to die on the island: 'People are also convinced that nobody could
die or ever had died on the island.'[484] Furthermore, he also still encountered
the belief that it was impossible for women to come to the island. Indeed, a
woman who had tried to break this law was supposedly turned into a stone,
a stone which von Münchhausen was then shown as evidence.[485] Somewhat
acerbically, von Münchhausen connects the persistence of the belief in the
lake island as a place of immortality with its lack of inhabitants, and stresses
the remoteness of the place:[486]

> The island is surrounded for about ten miles by bog and only a few passable
> ways lead to it. It is very small, apart from wild trees, it possesses a church
> and a chapel, both of them ruined and roofless. The surrounding water is not
> very wide, mainly swampy and home to ducks and swans. In the water there
> is a stone, roughly an elbow high, which they claim to be the inobedient
> woman. ... I do not believe that nobody can die on the island. However, it is
> quite plausible that nobody died on it since there is nobody living on it. It can
> be believed or not that a hermit who had lived there to an old age, until he
> did not want to live any more, left the island voluntarily and then died.

It is also worth noting that von Münchhausen refers to the pilgrimage to
Monaincha as the holiest of the Irish pilgrimages – which, if perhaps not
true in the eyes of the whole of the Irish population, must at least be what
he was told locally; and in this particular case 'locally' seems to mean at

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484 Ó Riain-Raedel 1998: 231.
485 Ó Riain-Raedel 1998: 231.
486 Ó Riain-Raedel 1998: 231.

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least as far away as Waterford, from where he had set out specifically to visit Monaincha:[487]

> The Irish think a lot about this island, *Lanimmeo*, and believe that there is no pilgrimage holier than this one.

In von Münchhausen's account, we meet again the same story that had been told by Gerald of Wales four centuries earlier. Even after these centuries have passed it still is a central part of the living folklore of this place. It seems that the folklore of the monastic place of immortality where one has to run away from eternal life has been remarkably stable over a long period of time. The local importance of the place, which is so strongly highlighted by von Münchhausen, may well have contributed to the stability of its place-lore.

The ambiguousness of the earliest stratum of the tale's transmission is all the more striking because of this stability. The earliest stratum of the story, represented by *Do ingantaib Erenn* and *De mirabilibus Hiberniae*, apparently presents us with two independent re-workings of an earlier common source, or common set of sources, which emphasised the island of Monaincha was a place where a 'sinner' could not die. In the Irish version, this is ambiguous: it can mean that nobody at all can die (which would agree with the later tradition), or it could mean that somebody who is not a sinner might be able to die. The Latin version lacks this ambiguity: in this version, it is stated explicitly that only sinners in the literal sense are unable to die, in marked contrast to the situation in the whole later tradition. There are several possible explanations for this tension between the version of the tale in *De mirabilibus* and in the rest of the tradition. Maybe there was a range of different versions of the tale of Monaincha from the beginning. Or perhaps the tale of Monaincha changed at some point around 1100 from 'no sinners can die' to 'nobody can die'. Or maybe, and this seems to be the simplest explanation in my opinion, the close connection between *Do ingantaib* and *De mirabilibus* holds the key for explaining the difference between the two texts as well as between *De mirabilibus* and the later tradition. *Do ingantaib* and *De mirabilibus* both seem to be derived from a common source, which they both closely follow, apparently up to and including the description of the group of people that are unable to die as sinners. The agreement of the two texts in this detail also suggests that their common source used the term 'sinner', be it in its vernacular form *pecthach* or in the Latin form *peccator*/*peccatrix*. However, this term could denote either 'somebody who has sinned' in particular or, metaphorically, a 'human being' in general. Thus, the explanation for the difference

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487 Ó Riain-Raedel 1998: 231.

between *De mirabilibus*, which is the only text to restrict immortality clearly to somebody who had sinned, and the rest of the tradition could be that the author of *De mirabilibus*, working from a written text, could have interpreted his source in an overly literal manner. Then he could have based his two moralising verses on sinners and non-sinners on his literally-minded reading of his source text. This would tally with the text's apparent separation from the living oral place-lore tradition, which is suggested by the text's disregard of place-names. In the spirit of Ockham's razor, furthermore, it would also be the most economical explanation of the divergence between our various extant sources for the place-lore of Monaincha: such an interpretation of the material implies that there was only one misrepresentation of the tradition by a single individual (by 'Bishop Patrick of Dublin') rather than a fundamental change in the tradition as a whole. That a fundamental change in the local place-lore should have occurred is perhaps also made somewhat implausible (though not impossible) by the later *longue durée* of the narratives connected with this place, which after the eleventh century remain remarkably stable: the local lore written down by von Münchhausen in the late sixteenth century is still virtually identical with the place-lore recorded in the twelfth, not only with respect to the immortality theme but also in regards to the exclusion of female beings from the site. This stability of the local tradition may be connected with the regional importance of the site as a pilgrimage destination, but in any case, it underlines how surprising the divergent presentation in *De mirabilibus* is. So, in sum, all this taken together seems to suggest that the idea of immortality at Monaincha being restricted to the sinful is probably a figment of the literary imagination. Indeed, it was most likely never part of the living tradition of the place now found behind a cattle-gate in Tipperary.

If this is actually the case, Monaincha was a place that, in a remarkably idiosyncratic way, was thought of as a place of immortality by the late Viking Age at the latest: a place where immortality turns into a curse and forces its victims to leave the place in order to find release from their suffering in death. Idiosyncratic, that is, unless one considers a remote valley in northern Iceland. The place in question is the Hvanndalur Valley on the northern tip of the peninsula of Tröllaskagi, located east of the Héðinsfjörður Fjord, where it opens up towards the Eyjafjörður Fjord. The earliest testimony of the tale is a late-seventeenth-century book by Thomas Bartholin the Younger. In this book, published in 1689, Bartholin grappled with what he perceived as the remarkable contempt for death shown by the Norsemen of the pagan period. In the course of his discussion, he quotes a curious piece of Icelandic folklore:[488]

488 Bartholin 1689: 587. Also reprinted (including its context) in Heizmann 1998: 99.

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Est qvoq; locus in Boreali Islandia, in præfectura Vaudloþingi, territorio Hedinsfirdi, *Vdaensakrs* nomine etiamnum gaudens; de qvo eâ vanâ opinione imbuti fuerunt multi accolarum, neminem ibi, etiamsi letali morbo infectum, animam exspirare posse, sed priùs extra ejus loci limites efferendum. Addunt fabulæ qvidam [*sic*], freqventem qvondam habitatoribus eundem locum fuisse, qvi omnes eum deseruerunt, qvod miserabile esset, inter terrores mortis constitutos, exoptatum vitæ finem non posse sortiri.

'In northern Iceland, in the Vöðluþing prefecture, in the area of the Héðinsfjörður Fjord, there is also a place which even today still rejoices in the name "Ódáinsakur" ("Field of the Not-Dead", "Field of Immortality"). Many of the local residents had the idle opinion about it that nobody would be able to breathe their last breath there, even if infected with a lethal disease. Certainses [*sic*] tales add that this place was once settled by many inhabitants, who all left it, as it was miserable to be unable to reach the longed-for end of life amidst the terrors of death.'

Here, we are virtually met with the same story as the one associated with the monastic island of Monaincha. There is a place, clearly located in the real world, where it is impossible to die; yet while it is impossible to die, it is not impossible to contract horrible diseases and to waste away because of them. Thus, to escape from this suffering, one has to leave the place of life in order to find relief from one's pain in death.

Just as in Ireland, this story of the place of immortality seems to have been remarkably persistent in Iceland. Almost a century after Thomas Bartholin, in 1777, Olaus Olavius travelled in the area, and a few years later he published his observations, first in Danish and then in German. His travel report also included a detailed account of a visit to the Hvanndalur Valley and the Ódáinsakur:[489]

Fra Gaarden Ytreaae og lige til Landsenden, som ligger paa den vestlige Side af Olafsfiorden, ere lutter steile Bierge med en snæver Strandkant, hvor Hvanndalebierget, som holdes for at være 60 Favne høit eller derover, er meest bekiendt. Paa den Side af Landsende-Næsset som vender til Heidinsfiorden, ere og Biergene ligesaa steile, samt Strandkanten small, som paa den modsatte. Sirdalen blev ellers, ligesom Hvanndalene, meget berømt for deres rare og vellugtende Urter, hvilket gav Anleedning til, at jeg, skiønt ikke uden Møie, klavrede op i de sidste, hvor mig blev anviist en

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489 Olavius 1780, vol. 2, p. 288; my translation. For the corresponding passage in the German edition cf. Olavius 1787: 193.

Fig. 20: The Ódáinsakur in the Hvanndalur Valley. Today, the toponym 'Ódáinsakur' designates the stretch of land between the river, the coast, and the mountain slope on the right-hand margin of the picture. © M. Egeler, 2011.

jævn og græsrig liden Mark, kaldet Odáinsager, fordi man har troet, at der skulde voxe saadanne Urter, som Døden skulde skye; men denne Egenskab er dog endnu ikke bekiendt hos følgende Urter, som befandtes sammesteds, nemlig [...now follows a catalogue of plants found at the Ódáinsakur, as well as a comment on the inaccessibility of a neighbouring valley...]. For deres Græsrigheld fortiene de [i.e. the Hvanndalur Valley and the neighbouring Sirdalur Valley] vel at roeses, men derfor vil det dog neppe være at vente, at de blive beboede, deels formedelst Strandens Steilhed, samt de usikkre Landinger, og deels fordi de ligge alt for langt borte fra de rette Bøigder.

'From the farm of Ytreaae and up to Land's End, which lies on the western side of the Olafsfjord, there are only steep mountains with a narrow shore-line, among which the Hvanndalabjarg is the most well-known, which is held to have a height of sixty fathoms or more. On that side of Land's End Peninsula, which faces towards the Héðinsfjord, there are also mountains just as steep and with a shore just as narrow, as on the opposite side. Furthermore, the Sirdalur Valley, like the Hvanndalur Valley, was much praised for its rare and sweet-smelling herbs, which became an incitement for me to climb up into the latter – nicely not without effort –, where I was shown a level and grassy little field called Ódáinsakur, because one believed that such herbs should be growing there which death would shun; but this feature has not yet become known with the following herbs that were found at that same place, being [...now follows a catalogue of plants found at the Ódáinsakur, as well as a comment on the inaccessibility of a neighbouring valley...]. For their richness in grass they [i.e. the Hvanndalur Valley and the

neighbouring Sirdalur Valley] deserve well to be praised, but still it is hardly to be expected that they will be settled, partly because of the steepness of the shore, together with the insecure landing sites, and partly because they lie all too far away from the proper settlements.'

Olavius, in the late eighteenth century, is still told that the Ódáinsakur, the 'Field of the Not-Dead' or 'Field of Immortality' in the Hvanndalur Valley, is a place notable for the immortality it conveys (fig. 20). In the version of the tale he encounters, this immortality is rationalised to be caused by special herbs growing there. Olavius, a man of the Enlightenment, then thoroughly catalogues the herbs he finds, just to conclude dryly that none of them have any known effect against death. The detail that the immortality at the Ódáinsakur ultimately leads to suffering and forces its victims to abandon the place is not recorded by Olavius. Yet folklore recorded even later than his time shows that this idea must still have been in circulation as a variant of the tale: as late as the years 1940 and 1978, is was recorded from two local informants that the farm in the Hvanndalur Valley had been abandoned because it had turned out that it was impossible to die there.[490]

The remote Icelandic Hvanndalur Valley is connected with virtually the same motif complex that also constituted the most notable aspect of the medieval place-lore of Monaincha: the motif complex of a place of immortality where it is impossible to die, but where it is not impossible to age or to contract diseases, so ultimately the immortality offered by this place turns into a curse which makes it necessary to abandon this place in order to find release from one's suffering in death. Furthermore, the name of the Ódáinsakur ('Field of the Not-Dead'), on which the tale of immortality in the Hvanndalur Valley is focused, closely recalls the name *Insula Viventium*/*Lan nimmeo*/*Oilean na mbeo* ('Island of the Living'), which is featured in the Irish tradition: both names present concise summaries of the respective place-lore in the form of a semantically clear toponym. Thus, overall, the parallels between the place-lore and toponymies of Monaincha and the Hvanndalur Valley are so close that they seem suggestive of a direct connection. The question of chronology, however, is not straightforward. In Monaincha, the tale of immortality that turns into a curse can probably be traced back all the way to the late Viking Age. In Iceland, the earliest attestation of the tale dates from 1689. Yet Wilhelm Heizmann has observed that there is good reason to assume that the

490 Heizmann 1998: 76 (with note 14); Einar G. Pétursson 1980: 161–162.

Fig. 21: The steep shore of the Hvanndalur Valley. © M. Egeler, 2011.

Fig. 22: The view southwards from the pass across Víkurbyrða, illustrating the difficult accessibility of the Hvanndalur Valley from its landward side. © M. Egeler, 2011.

story was also present in Iceland as early as the time of the first settlement of the island during the Viking Age.[491]

A central part of the reasons for making such an assumption can already be gleaned from Olavius's report about his visit to the Hvanndalur Valley. Olavius strongly emphasises the effort it took him to reach the valley: to approach it, he had to endure a long and strenuous climb. When assessing the overall economic potential of the valley, he notes that it possesses good pasture, but on balance he still decides that it is not suitable for settlement. His reason for this appraisal is that the valley simply is too remote, and this remoteness did not only refer to its landward access, but also to the absence of good landing-sites for boats. Indeed, if one visits the Hvanndalur valley today, it is still clear what Olavius was referring to: the valley opens towards the Arctic Ocean, but while it looks out to sea, it actually has neither a beach nor any kind of sheltered anchorage. Rather, it ends in a steep, near-perpendicular drop of several metres that bars access from the sea almost like a wall (fig. 21). Taken together with the valley's difficult accessibility from the landward side – the easiest access leads over the south-western Víkurbyrða slope, crossing a pass at 703 m which one has to reach from sea-level and from which one then has to climb back down to sea-level (fig. 22) – this suggests that Olavius was right to judge the valley uninhabitable even due to its remoteness. Olavius has also been proven right by the valley's historical record: no attempt to settle the valley has been successful over a long period. The last such attempt in the late nineteenth century indeed failed so spectacularly that in 1896, the valley was bought by a neighbouring community with the expressed aim to prevent further attempts at settlement.[492]

Wilhelm Heizmann was the first to notice that, in the light of this topographical and economic framework, the events associated with the Hvanndalur Valley during the Settlement Period are quite remarkable. In *Landnámabók*, the following account is given of the first settlement of this valley (*Sturlubók*-recension, ch. S215):[493]

Þormódr enn ʀammi ... deilldi vm Hvaɴdali vid Olaf ʙekk ok vard xvi manna bani ædr þeir sættuzt. Eɴ þa skylldi sitt sumar hvorr hafa.

'Þormóðr the Strong ... argued with Óláfr Bench about the Hvanndalur Valley and killed sixteen men before they settled their dispute. And then each should have it in turn for one summer.'

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491 Heizmann 1998: 72–73, 82.
492 Einar G. Pétursson 1980: 162, 165.
493 Ed. by Finnur Jónsson 1900; my translation.

According to the recension of *Landnámabók* in *Hauksbók*, Þormóðr even killed seventeen men in this argument (H182). As Heizmann has noted, this excessive bloodletting makes the fight about the Hvanndalur Valley the most violent and bloody fight over land-rights in the whole recorded history of the Icelandic settlement: no other such fight has demanded a comparable death toll. This, as he has further observed, is particularly remarkable given the extreme inaccessibility of this valley – a trait which would have been obvious to any of the early settlers of Iceland, all of whom were essentially farmers who would have immediately spotted the drawbacks of the valley's location.[494]

The contrast between the excessive escalation of the fight on the one hand and its utter lack of economic rationale on the other throws the strangeness of these happenings into focus: viewed from the purely utilitarian perspective of the valley as a location for a farm, these happenings seem utterly irrational and disproportionate. Yet perhaps this is the wrong way of looking at it, as Heizmann has observed. Perhaps the solution for the mystery of what Þormóðr the Strong and Óláfr Bench were fighting about with such ferocity is not found in the valley's economic potential, but in its folklore: if the idea that the Hvanndalur Valley was a place of immortality, as it is attested from the seventeenth to the twentieth century, is not a late development, but was connected to this place already in the time of the Settlement, then this could offer an explanation as to why the two early settlers were so viciously obsessed with this valley. Perhaps they were not fighting about a place to build a farm at, but about a place to be immortal. This is the solution that Heizmann suggests,[495] and so far no better explanation has been proposed. If this interpretation of the material comes close to the truth, it does not only highlight a deep irony (so much death being caused by a quest for life), but it also implies that the same idiosyncratic mythology was associated with a place in Iceland and with a place in Ireland *at the same time*. On both islands, and apparently during the same period, a place became imagined as a place where it is impossible to die, which on the one hand led to the necessity to flee this place and the horror of immortality, while at the same time it attracted people to this place – which in the Irish case led to the establishment of what Ludolf von Münchhausen reported to be the holiest pilgrimage in Ireland,[496] while in the Icelandic case,

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494 Heizmann 1998: 72–73.

495 Heizmann 1998: 82.

496 Cf. above, p. 197. For earlier testimonies for the ascription of a particular holiness to Monaincha cf. Ó Riain-Raedel 1998: 227–228; Mac Cana 1988: 331.

it seems to have caused the most violent fight over land-rights to enter the historical record of the Icelandic Settlement Period.

In a general way, the motif of extending life without extending youth, leading to a nightmare of suffering, is not peculiar to medieval North-West Atlantic Europe. Well-known from the classical world is the story of the Cumaean Sibyl, who was granted a thousand-year-long life by Apollo but missed the right moment to ask for eternal youth to accompany it, so her extended lifespan merely brought her an extended time of suffering and wasting-away until she was barely more than an almost disembodied voice wishing for death (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* XIV.130–153; Petronius, *Satyricon* 48).[497] Similar was the fate of Tithonus, whose lover Eos persuaded Zeus to grant him eternal life but likewise forgot to ask for eternal youth for him (esp. *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* 218–238).[498] Yet while these classical tales constitute a general thematic parallel to the place-lore of Monaincha and of the Hvanndalur Valley, they do not display the very specific traits that connect the Irish and the Norse narrative, both of which are stories about *places* that convey immortality, but not youth or health. Hence, it becomes necessary (but, in contrast to the classical tales, also remains possible) to flee them. Additionally, both are given parallel names following the pattern '[place] of [immortality/the immortal, ever-living]'; both are located in inaccessible locations near bodies of water; and both are uninhabited, longed-for, and visited at the same time.[499] The parallelism of the two North-West Atlantic place-narratives is much closer than the parallels between these narratives and the classical tales of the Sibyl of Cumae and of Tithonus. This Norse-Irish parallelism does indeed seem so close that, taken in conjunction with the comparable chronology of the two traditions, it suggests the possibility of a direct dependency of the Icelandic conceptualisation of the Hvanndalur Valley and the Ódáinsakur, the 'Field of the Not-Dead', on the Irish conceptualisation of the Island of the Living.

Yet how could the legend of Monaincha have reached Iceland? With respect to Auðun's water-horse, Ásólfr's fish, or the High Crosses erected by Auðr the Deep-Minded, this question has not posed a problem as these tales explicitly make reference to the Gaelic world of Ireland and the Hebrides themselves, connecting their apparently Gaelic motifs with this world. In the story of the Hvanndalur Valley, such an explicit Gaelic connection is missing.

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497 Cf. Buchholz 1909–1915, cols 796, 800.
498 Cf. Schmidt 1909–1915, cols 1024–1025.
499 Cf. the tabular summary of traits shared by the place-lore of the Hvanndalur Valley and of Monaincha in the appendix below.

Furthermore, Monaincha was an inland site far removed from the Norse set-
tlements in Ireland. One might also remember von Münchhausen's emphasis
on the remoteness and inaccessibility of the site, which was widely sur-
rounded by swamps and accessible on 'only a few passable ways'.[500] Yet
at the same time, it should be noted that von Münchhausen was drawn to
Monaincha by what he had been told in Waterford, and Waterford was an
important Norse site during the Viking Age.[501] We do not know how far the
fame of Monaincha had spread by the tenth century; but if the monastery
was as famous during the Viking Age as it was six centuries later, when the
roofs of its churches had already collapsed,[502] then the Norse of Waterford
could have heard of it and would have been able to pass on its story. In fact,
there is good evidence that Monaincha, much to its sorrow, was known
to the Norse in Ireland. The *Annals of the Four Masters* note for the year
921:[503]

> Flaithbheartach, mac Ionmainéin, do ghabháil do Ghallaibh i n Inis Locha
> Cré, ⁊ a bhreith co Luimneach.

> 'Flaithbheartach, son of Inmainén, was taken by the foreigners on the
> island of Loch-Cre, and conveyed to Limerick.'

The Norse were drawn to Monaincha just as much as von Münchhausen
was six centuries later, though in a considerably less peaceful fashion. It is
also interesting to note that the abducted Flaithbheartach was, of all places,
brought to Limerick: later on, we will meet Limerick again as the place
where Hrafn the Limerick-Farer, 'who had long been in Limerick in Ireland'
(*er lengi hafdi verit i Hlymreka a Iʀlandi*), seems to have heard the story
of Hvítramannaland, which then entered the Icelandic geographical imagi-
nation as a land somewhere between Ireland and Canada.[504] Thus, there
was a road that led from Monaincha, via Limerick, to Iceland and to how
medieval Icelanders imagined their world. This road certainly was not taken
by Flaithbheartach himself, who in his day was a leading ecclesiastical and
political figure, for he appears to have been ransomed; this is implied by an
entry in the *Annals of the Four Masters*, which record his death, as King of

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500 Above, p. 196.
501 Cf. above, note 284.
502 Above, p. 196.
503 Ed. and transl. by O'Donovan 1848–1851, vol. 2, pp. 610/611.
504 Below, pp. 250ff.; in general on the Norse in Limerick cf. Wilson 2014: 31–32.

Cashel, for the year 942.[505] Yet during the raid in which he was captured, Flaithbheartach certainly was not the only one to be taken prisoner; and who knows, perhaps one of his luckless companions, sold on a slave-market in Limerick like a head of cattle, was ultimately carried off to Iceland, bringing nothing with him but memories of a happier past and a happier place in the boglands of Tipperary; and perhaps the men killed by Þormóðr the Strong were ultimately his revenge for what had been done to him and his fellow captives.

505 Ed. and transl. by O'Donovan 1848–1851, vol. 2, pp. 650/651. Cf. *Annals of Ulster* (ed. and transl. by Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill 1983) *s.a.* 944. I owe thanks to Colmán Etchingham for drawing the ransoming of Flaithbheartach to my attention.

Appendix: Tabular summary of the parallels between the traditions connected with the Hvanndalur Valley and Monaincha

	Hvanndalur / Ódáinsakur	Monaincha / *insula viventium*
Narrative	Absence of death	Absence of death
	Presence of old age and disease	Presence of old age and disease
	Necessity of abandoning the site to find release from eternal suffering in death	Necessity of abandoning the site to find release from eternal suffering in death
Toponym	Ódáinsakur: 'Field of the Not-Dead', i.e. 'Field of Immortality'	*Insula Viventium/ Lan nimmeo/ Oilean na mbeo*: 'Island of the Living'
Location	Inaccessible coastal valley (inaccessibility / water)	Inaccessible island site (inaccessibility / water)
Social practice	Desired possession	Longed-for pilgrimage destination
	Uninhabited, but destination for visitors	Ecclesiastical buildings abandoned and in a state of ruin, but destination of pilgrims and other visitors

It might also be noted that there is something grotesque about both narratives, both of which concern places of immortality that are both initially desired but later abandoned, as the longed-for immortality turns out to be a curse in disguise.

2.8.   Hospitable Halls: the Houses of Utmost Hospitality in Landnámabók and Eyrbyggja saga

There is hardly an Icelandic saga that does not, sooner rather than later, present its reader with detailed genealogies of its main protagonists. Such genealogies outline the web of family relations in which the narrative's protagonists are entangled and which, given how much of Icelandic literature deals with the fate of families, can be a core setting for the plot-line of the narrative. To understand the importance of genealogy for Icelandic storytelling, one need only remember *Gísla saga*, the 'Saga of Gísli the Strong', whose whole tragedy unfolds within the tension created by conflicting claims of family loyalty. Similarly, genealogy can be used to allude to narratives without explicitly mentioning them: time and again, the persons mentioned in a genealogy themselves appear elsewhere as main protagonists of narratives of their own, and in this way their mention in a genealogy also evokes the tales connected with them. Thus, a genealogy is not only a family tree, but a tree heavy with implied stories. Sometimes, this can even be crucial for our whole understanding of a narrative. Thus, the story of the pagan waterfall-cult of Þorsteinn Rednose in *Landnámabók* (S355=H313) only reveals its whole significance if it is seen in the context of the genealogy by which it is prefaced: only this genealogy shows it as consciously interlinked with other tales which, taken together, form a mosaic presenting the religious history of Iceland as one of a progressive decline of paganism and a gradual transition to Christianity.[506]

Also in the Icelandic reception of Irish place-lore, at least as we meet it in the extant literature, genealogical connections have their place and constitute potentially interesting cross-references.[507] Already at the beginning of the present chapter, we met the story of Auðun the Stutterer and his water-horse, and it may be of some interest that this Auðun is also mentioned in the following paragraph of *Landnámabók* (H60, cf. S72):[508]

506 Cf. Egeler 2016a: 278–289.
507 Cf. already Young 1937: 119.
508 Ed. by Finnur Jónsson 1900; my translation.

Vali en st*er*ki h(et) hirðm*að*r Hara*lld*z k*onvng*s hins harf*agra*. h*ann* va víg
í vev*m ok* varð vtlagr. h*ann* for ti*l* Svðr eyia en s(ynir) (hans) forv .íij. ti*l*
Isl*and*z. Hlif h*er*stagelld*ir* va*r* ᴍ*oð*ir þei*ra*. ein h(et) Atli an*na*ʀ Alfvarin .íij.
Avðvn stoði. Atli Vala s(vn) *ok* Asm*vn*dr s(vn) (hans) namv l*an*d fra Fvrv
ti*l* Lysv. Asm*vn*ðr bio a Langa hollti at Þorv toftv*m*. h*ann* atti Langa hollz
Þorv en þa er Asm*vn*dr elldiz skildiz h*ann* vi*ð* Þorv f*yr*i ma*nn*kvæmd *ok* for i
Oxl at bva ti*l* davða dax. ... Þora let g*er*a skala of þioð bravt þv*er*a *ok* let þar
ia*m*nan standa borð en ho*n* sat vti a stoli *ok* bavð hv*er*iv*m* e*r* mat villdi eta.

'Váli the Strong was the name of a liegeman of King Haraldr Fairhair. He
committed manslaughter on holy ground and was outlawed. He went to the
Hebrides, and three sons of his went to Iceland. Their mother was Hlíf the
Horse-Gelder. One was called Atli; the second Álfarinn; the third Auðun the
Stutterer. Atli, son of Váli, and his son Ásmundr took land from the Fyra
to the Lýsa.[509] Ásmundr lived at Langaholt Forest at Þórutóptir, "Þóra's
Ruins"; he was married to Langaholt's-Þóra. And when Ásmundr grew old,
he broke up with Þóra because of the number of visitors and went to Ǫxl
to live until his dying day. ... Þóra had a house built at right angles across a
main road and always had a table standing there, and she sat outdoors on a
chair and asked everybody to eat who wanted food.'

The first few lines of this section comprehensively outline the history of a
family's emigration to Iceland, spanning several generations. In the first stage
of this emigration, Váli the Strong, the family's Norwegian ancestor, commits
a crime that forces him to go abroad, and thus he moves to the Hebrides. In the
second stage, his sons and at least one grandson in turn move on to Iceland. It
is not stated explicitly at which point Váli's sons were born during this two-
stage emigration and how long they stayed on the Hebrides before moving
further west to Iceland. There are clues, however. Váli's son Atli took land in
Iceland together with his (Atli's) son Ásmundr, which seems to suggest that
Váli's grandson Ásmundr was a grown man when he accompanied his father
to Iceland; and this in turn suggests that the family may have spent a rather
long time on the Hebrides before moving on. This also seems to be implied by
the details given about Auðun in the section about his water-horse, discussed
above. Auðun, Váli's son, married into a Gaelic family, and his nickname 'the
Stutterer' may indicate that his Gaelic was better than his Norse; so it seems
that he had grown up on the Hebrides rather than in Norway, which in turn
suggests that Váli founded his family on the Hebrides. Thus, from the scarce

509 *Sic;* two rivers.

information given by these passages of *Landnámabók*, there appears to arise a picture of a very slow westwards-move indeed. Apparently, Váli moved from Norway to the Hebrides; at least one of his sons grew up only after this move, and one grandson grew to maturity there, implying a stay of almost two generations; and only then did the younger members of the family move to Iceland. This is important because the slowness of this move, and the length of time implied for the stay on the (partly Gaelic) Hebrides, implies the possibility of a deep Gaelicisation of the whole family – a possibility borne out already by the story about Auðun's water-horse that introduced this chapter.

In the current context, it is particularly interesting how the settlement account treats Ásmundr and his marriage. No genealogical information is given for his wife Þóra. Her nickname 'Langaholt's-Þóra' tells us nothing about her origins, as it is derived from her later abode on Ásmundr's farm of Langaholt. Yet given that Ásmundr seems to have reached Iceland already a grown man, it is at least possible that he brought his wife with him from the Hebrides.

The marriage between Ásmundr and Þóra is not a happy one: in the end, Ásmundr leaves her and moves away because she received too many visitors for his taste. *Landnámabók* notes that in due course, she even had a house built right across the road and invited every passing traveller for a meal. This is not the only example that Norse literature provides for such excessive hospitality. Another one is found somewhat later in *Landnámabók* (H168=S200):[510]

> Þorbrandr orrekr nam vpp fra Bolstadar á Silfrastada ʟid alla ok Nordr ár dal fyri nordann. ok bio æ Þorbranns stodumm ok let þar gera elldhus sva mikit at allir þeir menn er þeim meginn fóru vmm dalinn skylldu þar bera klyfiar i giegnum. ok vera ollum matr heimoll. ... h*ann* va*r* gofvgr m*að*r *ok* kynstor*r*.

> 'Þorbrandr *ørrekr* took the whole slope of Silfrastaðahlíð upwards from Bólstaðará River, and Norðrárdalr Valley in the north, and he lived at Þorbrandsstaðir and had a heatable hall built there so big that all the men who travelled through the valley on their side were meant to carry their pack-loads through on their horses, and there should be food available for all. ... He was an eminent man and of noble birth.'

Here again, a settler erects a building purposefully designed to force all passers-by to accept his hospitality. Other than this, the only thing we are told about Þorbrandr *ørrekr* is that he was an eminent and high-born man; *Landnámabók* gives us no further information about his genealogy or about

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510 Ed. by Finnur Jónsson 1900; my translation.

where he came from. Only his nickname *ørrekr* might contain a hint. Old Norse nicknames generally made a semantically clear statement about their bearer; *ørrekr*, however, is not elsewhere attested as a Norse word and thus breaks the general pattern, as it does not recognisably make a meaningful statement about Þorbrandr. This has two possible explanations: either *ørrekr* just happens to be a *hapax legomenon*, or it might be a Gaelic nickname. In the latter case, the situation would be similar to that of Auðr's grandson Óláfr *feilan* (S95), whose nickname is the Irish term *fáelán*, 'little wolf',[511] reflecting the deep Gaelicisation of his family on the Hebrides. Various possible Gaelic interpretations of *ørrekr* have been proposed.[512] Most recently, William Sayers, among other possibilities, suggests an interpretation of *ørrekr* as an Icelandicised form of *aire échta*, 'noble of death-deeds',[513] which was an Irish technical term for a man entrusted with the execution of blood-vengeance.[514] Sayers argues that such a nickname would be roughly comparable to Old Norse *kappi*, 'champion', which is regularly used as a nickname.[515] But this interpretation is not certain, even if one favours a Gaelic interpretation of the nickname. The word could also be derived from *airech*, 'distinguished' or (as a noun) 'chief, noble, leader' – to pick just one example of a possible alternative interpretation of *ørrekr*.[516] Such an interpretation of *ørrekr* would directly mirror the statement of *Landnámabók* that Þorbrandr *ørrekr* 'was an eminent man and of noble birth'. Be that as it may, if *ørrekr* is indeed to be interpreted as a Gaelic nickname, then this would imply that Þorbrandr *ørrekr* was just as deeply Gaelicised as Óláfr *fáelán* and his family, or as at least parts of the kin-group of Auðun the Stutterer appear to have been – perhaps including Þóra of Langaholt.

A third instance of the motif of the hospitable hall in Iceland is found in *Landnámabók* S86/H74 and *Eyrbyggja saga* 8.[517] The account in *Landnámabók* reads as follows (S86; the sentence in italics is missing from the version of the story in H74):[518]

511 Cf. above, p. 163.
512 For an overview cf. Sayers 1995 (1997): 165–166.
513 Sayers 1995 (1997): 165–166 (but cf. also *ibidem* p. 169, where Sayers seems to favour a derivation from *airech* 'heedful', cf. *eDIL*, *s.v.* '4 airech').
514 *eDIL*, *s.v.* 'écht'.
515 E.g., Ketill *kappi* in *Landnámabók* S79/H67; Úlfarr *kappi* in S86=H74; Vébjǫrn *Sygnakappi* ('Champion-of-Sogn') in S138/H110.
516 *eDIL*, *s.v.* '1 airech'.
517 Ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935.
518 Ed. by Finnur Jónsson 1900.

... Geirraudr nam land ɪɴ fra Þorsá átil Langadals ǽr. hann bió æ Eyri. ...
Geirridr het syster Geirradar er att hafdi Biorn son Baulverks ʙlindingatriónu.
Þorolfr het son þeira. Þau Geirridr foru til Islandz epter andlat Biarnar.
ok voru ᴇɴ fysta vetr æ Eyri. vm vorit gaf Geirraudr systur sinni bustad i
Borgardal. ᴇɴ Þorolfr for vtann ok lagdizt i viking. *Geirridr spardi ekki mat
vid menn ok let giora skala sinn wm þiodbraut þvera. hun sat æ stoli ok
ladadi vti gesti ᴇɴ bord stod inni iafnann ok matr æ. ...*

'Geirrøðr took land inland from Þórsá River as far as Langadalsá River; he
lived on Eyrr Gravel Bank. ... Geirríðr was the name of a sister of Geirrøðr,
who had been married to Bjǫrn, the son of Bǫlverkr Blind-Man's-Snout.
Their son was called Þórólfr. Geirríðr and her people went to Iceland after
the death of Bjǫrn and spent the first winter on Eyrr Gravel Bank. In spring,
Geirrøðr gave his sister a residence in Borgardalr Valley, and Þórólfr went
abroad and took up raiding. Geirríðr did not give food to men sparingly and
had her house built at right angles across a main road. *She was sitting on
a chair, and outdoors she invited guests, and indoors a table was standing
there at all times, and food on it.*'

The counterpart of this passage in *Eyrbyggja saga* describes the same
basic story, though with some differences in detail. Most importantly, in
the saga account, Geirríðr's guests seem to be riding through her hall, as is
the case with the hospitable hall of Þorbrandr *ørrekr*,[519] and she is not, as
Landnámabók claims about her, explicitly said to sit outside the hall, waiting
to invite people in. Nevertheless, the account highlights that Geirríðr's hos-
pitality increased her social standing. Furthermore, the saga also maintains
the emphasis on the close family relationship between Geirríðr and Þórólfr,
who is to play an important role throughout the rest of *Eyrbyggja saga*. The
idea may be to use genealogical connections to give this anti-hero a fittingly
prominent and extravagant introduction into the narrative. The saga's account
reads (ch. 8):[520]

Í þenna tíma kom út Geirríðr, systir Geirrøðar á Eyri, ok gaf hann henni
bústað í Borgardal fyrir innan Álptafjǫrð. Hon lét setja skála sinn á þjóð-
braut þvera, ok skyldu allir menn ríða þar í gegnum; þar stóð jafnan borð ok
matr á, gefinn hverjum er hafa vildi; af slíku þótti hon it mesta gǫfugkvendi.
Geirríði hafði átta Bjǫrn, sonr Bǫlverks blindingatrjónu, ok hét þeira sonr
Þórólfr; hann var víkingr mikill.

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519 Cf. Sayers 1995 (1997): 164.
520 Ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935; my translation.

'At that time Geirríðr, the sister of Geirrøðr on Eyrr Gravel Bank, came [to Iceland], and he gave her a dwelling-place in Borgardalr Valley inside the Álptafjǫrðr Fjord. She had her hall erected at right angles across a main road, and all people should ride through it there; there stood always a table and food on it, given to everybody who wanted to have it; from this she was considered the greatest noblewoman. Geirríðr had been married to Bjǫrn, the son of Bǫlverkr Blind-Man's-Snout, and their son was called Þórólfr; he was a great viking.'

To sum up, in each of these three passages a settler comes to Iceland and displays their extreme munificence in the most public way possible by building a hall right across a main road and offering hospitality to all that are thus forced to pass through their house. In the context of the first settlement of Iceland, where all these reports are set, this is remarkable not least because one wonders which roads there would have been to build a hall across; it is hard to imagine that, at this time, there were any roads in Iceland that would have been worthy of the name, which makes these stories sound somewhat out of place. In a slightly wider context than that of the Icelandic road network, however, these tales can be placed unusually well: as it has already been observed by Jean Young, G. J. Marcus, and William Sayers,[521] the hospitable halls of these three anecdotes are virtually identical to the contemporary Irish *bruiden* or 'hostel'.

The *bruiden* or 'hostel' is a very prominent motif of medieval Irish storytelling. In the Old Irish tale *Scéla Mucce Meic Dathó* (the 'Tales of Mac Dathó's Pig'), a text from the Ulster Cycle that was originally composed roughly around AD 800,[522] the *bruiden* of Mac Dathó is the place where the whole story is set. There, this *bruiden* is introduced in the following manner:[523]

Is <s>í sin in chōiced bruden ro·boī i nHērinn isind aimsir sin, ocus bruden Da-Derg i crích Cūalann ocus bruden Forgaill Manaich ocus bruden Me[i]c Da-Rēo i mBrēfni ocus bruden Da-Choca i n-īarthur Midi. Secht ndoruis isin bruidin ocus secht sligeda trethe ocus secht tellaige indi ocus secht cori. Dam ocus tinne in cach coiri. In fer no·t<h>ēged iarsint śligi do·bered in n-aēl isin coiri, ocus a·taibred din chētgabāil, iss ed no·ithed. Mani·tucad im*murgu* ní din chéttadall ni·bered a n-aill.

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521 Young 1937: 118–119; Sayers 1995 (1997); Marcus 1998: 47.
522 Thurneysen 1935: iv.
523 Ed. by Thurneysen 1935; my translation.

'That was one of the five hostels (*bruiden*) which there were at that time in Ireland, in addition to the hostel of Da Derga in the territory of Cúalu, the hostel of Forgall Manach, the hostel of Mac Da-Réo in Brefne, and the hostel of Da-Choca in the western part of Mide. There were seven entrances into the hostel and seven roads through it, and seven hearths were in it and seven cauldrons. There were beef and salted pork in each cauldron. The man who went along the road thrust the flesh-fork into the cauldron, and what he got from the first taking, that is what he ate. If, however, he did not get anything from the first taking, then he did not get another.'

Like the Icelandic hospitable halls of *Landnámabók* and *Eyrbyggja saga*, the Viking Age 'hostel' of Mac Dathó is a hall built at an intersection of roads where every passer-through is offered a chance of hospitality in the form of free food. Such halls are the main setting of a number of Irish heroic tales.[524] Some of the most prominent of these narratives are about the destruction of such halls. Core texts are the 'Destruction of the Hostel of Da Derga' (*Togail Bruidne Da Derga*),[525] which may be an eleventh-century compilation of ninth-century material,[526] and the 'Hostel of Da Coca' (*Bruiden Da Choca*), whose earliest extant recension may be dated to the first half of the twelfth century.[527] Furthermore, the concept of the hospitable hall is not restricted to narrative literature, but also occurs in the legal tracts. A legal commentary stipulates that the owner of such a hall had to have his house at the meeting of three roads, was not permitted to refuse anybody, and was not to hold it

524 In general on the *bruiden* of Irish literature, including the reflexes of this institution in the Irish legal material, cf. Hellmuth 2006; Mac Eoin 1999; MacKillop 1998: 61; Mac Eoin 1997; Sayers 1995 (1997): 166–171; Sayers 1993: 38–50; Kelly 1988: 36–38; McCone 1984; O'Rahilly 1946: 120–127, 132–133. In many cases, the *bruiden* can take on traits of a distinctly otherworldly banqueting-hall; in modern usage, this aspect has so much come to dominate the semantics of the term that Modern Irish *bruidhean* denotes a fairy dwelling (O'Rahilly 1946: 121–122 [note 3]; MacKillop 1998: 61; cf. McCone 1984: 6). The otherworldly halls of Irish storytelling may lie behind the disappearing hall of the frame story of Snorri's *Gylfaginning* as well as behind the disappearing hall of Útgarðaloki in the same text (cf. Power 1985; Krappe 1937 [whose underlying idea is considerably superior to its confused presentation]).
525 Ed. by Knott 1936; cf. Sayers 1995 (1997): 168–169.
526 Thurneysen 1921: 627.
527 Ed. and transl. by Toner 2007. Dating: Toner 2007: 3, 61, 89.

Map 7: The three 'hostels' of Iceland at Langaholt on the southern coast of Snæfellsnes, Borgardalr on its north coast, and Þorbrandsstaðir in northern Iceland (location of the latter after Guðmundur St. Sigurðarson and Bryndís Zoëga 2008: 9).

against somebody if they visited him repeatedly.[528] The necessity of the hall being located at a crossroads also appears elsewhere in the legal corpus.[529]

The Old Irish term for the owner of a *bruiden* or 'hostel' was *briugu*, 'hospitaller'. Such a person who provided hospitality for everyone could achieve a legal status equal to that of a petty king – which, importantly, meant that the provision of free and universal hospitality served as an access to higher social status in a society which was otherwise rigidly stratified, providing few possibilities for social mobility.[530] This connection between acting as a *briugu* and an elevated social status corresponds to the social status of at least two of the three Icelandic 'hospitallers': both Þorbrandr *ørrekr* in *Landnámabók* and Geirríðr in *Eyrbyggja saga* were considered persons of exceptional nobility.[531] The case of Langaholt's-Þóra is more ambivalent, as

528 Mac Eoin 1999: 171; Mac Eoin 1997: 488; Kelly 1988: 36–37; McCone 1984: 3; cf. Sayers 1995 (1997): 167 (with note 9); Binchy 1978, vol. 6, p. 2273, ll. 39–41.
529 Cf. Mac Eoin 1999: 171; Mac Eoin 1997: 488–489; Sayers 1995 (1997): 167; Kelly 1988: 36.
530 Mac Eoin 1999: 169; Mac Eoin 1997: 482, 484–485, 492–493; Kelly 1988: 36–37; cf. Sayers 1995 (1997): 166–167, 172.
531 Cf. Sayers 1995 (1997): 164.

her husband divorces (*skiljask*) her because of her hospitality (which he considers excessive). Yet in her case as well, there is a connection to nobility, as her husband's aunt Mýrún, the wife of Auðun the Stutterer, was said to be an Irish princess.[532] Here it might also be worthwhile to remember the tongue-in-cheek way in which the waterhorse-motif is treated in the story of Auðun, where the heroic horse is used to make hay and Auðun then fails to keep it from running back to its mountain lake. The detail that Langaholt's-Þóra is left by her husband for running an Irish-style open house may reflect a similar tongue-in-cheek attitude to what appears to be an Irish motif.

There is, however, also one substantial difference between Irish hospitallers and their Icelandic counterparts. While two out of the three owners of hospitable halls in Icelandic literature are female, real-world Old Irish hospitallers normally appear to have been male.[533] Yet this does not mean that female hospitallers were unknown in Ireland. They certainly appear in Irish heroic storytelling, where they are attested in an anecdote about the hero Finn mac Cumaill that is preserved in the Old Irish glossary, *Sanas Cormaic*. The short version of this glossary may have been directly connected with Bishop Cormac mac Cuilennáin of Cashel, who died in AD 908; this would place its composition into the late ninth or early tenth century.[534] In this anecdote, it is mentioned that Finn had a woman waiting for him in every area he frequented, and that these women were 'female hospitallers' (*banbrugadha*) and supported him and his men. Discord and violence erupt, however, when one of these women is caught sleeping with a warrior other than Finn. The implication of this tale seems to be that the 'female hospitallers' of heroic storytelling not only offered shelter and food, but also sex. If this was the case, however, then this suggests the possibility that the story of Langaholt's-Þóra is tongue-in-cheek in a very knowledgeable way: maybe Þóra's husband, who after all had close personal ties to the Hebrides, disapproved of her behaviour because he considered it, in a good Gaelic fashion, inacceptable *for a woman* on the grounds that the female hospitallers of contemporary Gaelic storytelling were not exactly known for their marital faithfulness. What might support such a reading, which would presuppose a very conscious play with Gaelic narrative motifs, is the detail that both Icelandic female hospitallers

532 For a summary of these genealogical relationships cf. below, the appendix to this sub-chapter.
533 Mac Eoin 1999: 169–170.
534 Dating: Russell 2006; ed. by Stokes 1862: 1–46, there pp. 34–35. The relevant tale is also ed. from the longer version of *Sanas Cormaic* in Meyer 1910a: xix–xx (with ascription to the ninth century) and transl. by Stokes 1862: XLVI–XLVII.

are described as sitting in front of their halls, actively inviting guests to enjoy their hospitality. This has a counterpart in an Irish legal commentary, which stipulates that the owner of a *bruiden* has to have a man posted on the roads leading to his hostel whose duty it is to ensure that nobody would pass by the hostel without enjoying its hospitality.[535] This correspondence suggests a very detailed awareness of the conventions connected with an Irish 'hostel', which may well have extended to the connotations of being a female hospitaller in a heroic narrative.

In Ireland, the stories about such 'hostels' were place-lore. One may note how the above quotation from the Ulster Cycle tale *Scéla Mucce Meic Dathó* carefully places the different 'hostels' of Ireland geographically, and other texts pay similar attention to their localisation.[536] The motif of the hostel makes its appearance as well in the specific place-lore genre of the *Dindshenchas*: the destruction of the hostel of Da Coca is mentioned in the *Dindshenchas* of Druim Suamaig.[537] Futhermore, the *bruidne* or 'hostels' of Ireland have also left their mark on local toponymy: Bohernabreena in County Dublin is *Bóthar na Bruidhne*, 'Road of the Hostel',[538] and Breenmore and Breenbeg (County Westmeath),[539] 'Great *bruiden*' and 'Little *bruiden*', are thought to refer to the *bruiden* of *Bruiden Da Choca*, which in folklore is identified with the remains of an old fortification on a prominent hill located there.[540] The *bruiden* here is used as a narrative tool to make sense of places, and to develop a sense of place that gives these places depth in time, connotations of nobility, and – perhaps most importantly – an association with vast wealth in the form of an abundance of food.

What is happening in Iceland seems to be exactly the same. Apart from *Eyrbyggja saga*, the main (and indeed only) source for the hospitable halls of this island is *Landnámabók*, which presents us with a geographically-ordered account of the early history of the places of Iceland: here, the tales of the three hospitable halls are preserved in what is first and foremost a collection of place-lore, and are clearly localised by this text (map 7). In contrast to the

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535 Binchy 1978, vol. 5, p. 1608, ll. 36–37; Mac Eoin 1997: 488–489; Sayers 1995 (1997): 167, 169 (note 20).

536 Cf. O'Rahilly 1946: 120–121.

537 *Bodleian Dindshenchas*, ed. and transl. by Stokes 1892: 508–509; *Metrical Dindshenchas*, ed. and transl. by Gwynn 1903–1935, part 4, pp. 234–239, where the *bruiden* is mentioned in both poems. This place cannot any more be identified.

538 O'Rahilly 1946: 121.

539 O'Rahilly 1946: 132; Stokes 1892: 509.

540 O'Rahilly 1946: 132; cf. Stokes 1892: 509.

situation in Ireland, Iceland never saw enough of these halls in either story or history to prompt the coining of a specific name for such buildings. Thus, there are no Icelandic toponyms like the Irish *Bóthar na Bruidhne*, 'Road of the Hostel'. Yet nevertheless, these tales are also concerned with the naming of the land, if only implicitly. Þorbrandsstaðir, where the hospitable hall of Þorbrandr *ørrekr* supposedly stood, simply means 'Þorbrandr's-Steads', naming the place from the builder of the hostel; and Þórutóptir, 'Þóra's Ruins', appears to be named from the supposed ruins of Þóra's hostel.[541] Thus, in the *Landnámabók*-account, 'space' is turned into 'place' both on the level of story (associating specific places with a Gaelic expression of limitless wealth, if sometimes in a tongue-in-cheek way) and on the level of toponymy (which, to rephrase Tim Robinson,[542] creates an interlock between landscape and story that directly ties the lore to the land).

In *Eyrbyggja saga*, the engagement with place is, while present, perhaps not quite as prominent, or at least not quite as obvious, as it is in *Landnámabók*. Yet the place-story of Geirríðr's hospitable hall is not only clearly located here as well (at Borgardalr), but also stands in a wider context of place-storytelling: in *Eyrbyggja saga*, it serves to introduce the figure of Geirríðr's son Þórólfr Twist-Foot. Thus, it illustrates the close entanglement of genealogy, story, and place; for Þórólfr is soon to turn into one of the most prominent characters of the saga, a character whose relationship to the making of Icelandic places by means of Gaelic stories will be the focus of the next chapter.

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541 It may even be that nineteenth-century folklore still identified these places; cf. Collingwood and Jón Stefánsson 1899: 71, 100–101 (with fig. 86) on the locations of Geirríðr's and Þóra's 'hostels', who do not state their sources for their identifications, but must have been pointed there by local informants, at least in the case of the ruins of Borgardalur.

542 Cf. above, p. 25.

Appendix: The genealogical embeddedness of Langaholt's-Þóra according to Landnámabók (S72/ H60, S83/H71), with annotation highlighting Gaelic connections

Váli the Strong
(who emigrated to the Hebrides)
∞ Hlíf the Horse-Gelder

Maddaðr
(or: Bjaðmakr),
'King of the Irish'

Atli   Álfarinn   Auðun the   ∞   Mýrún
                                 Stutterer   (who was the
                                 (who caught   daughter of an
                                 a Gaelic   Irish king)
                                 water-horse)

Ásmundr ∞ Langaholt's-Þóra
(who ran a Gaelic 'hostel')

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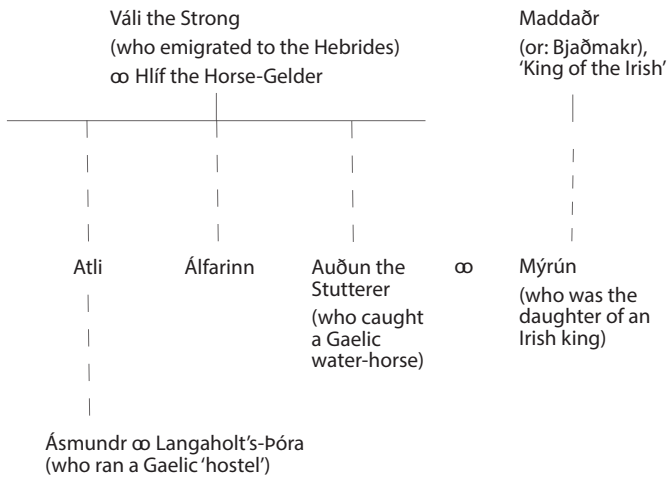
2.9. Bulls and Places: the Topographical Biography of Þórólfr Twist-Foot in Eyrbyggja saga

One of the most interestingly evil characters of Icelandic saga literature is Þórólfr Twist-Foot. Þórólfr is one of the main protagonists of *Eyrbyggja saga*, the 'Saga of the Inhabitants of Eyr',[543] which is generally thought to have been written around the middle of the thirteenth century.[544] There, his entrance into the story and his final exit almost frame the saga narrative, with his first appearance already occurring in ch. 8, and his last appearance taking place, with devastating effect, only in ch. 63, out of a total of 65 chapters. The setting of the story is the western Icelandic peninsula of Snæfellsnes, where also the story of the waterhorse of Auðun the Stutterer is set and where Geirríðr had her hospitable hall built.[545] In fact, the Geirríðr who erected an Irish-style hospitable house on Snæfellsnes is Þórólfr's mother. On a textual micro-level, this genealogy already puts Þórólfr's biography into a context of (Gaelic-influenced) place-lore. The place-lore aspect is even more pronounced if one considers the wider narrative context: *Eyrbyggja saga* as a whole presents us with a novelistic account of the settlement of a part of Snæfellsnes by a number of different families, whose relationships are often more than strained, and the fates of the descendants of the first settlers. Thus, even on its textual macro-level, *Eyrbyggja saga* can be read as a place-story: it is the story of Snæfellsnes, and it is not incidental that its title contains a reference to a place: it is the 'Saga of the Inhabitants of Eyr', and not the 'Saga of the Descendants of Geirrǫðr', the first settler on Eyr (ch. 7).[546]

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543 Ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935; translations are mine.

544 For a general discussion of this saga with particular attention to its supernatural elements cf. Böldl 2005. Dating: Böldl 2005: 24.

545 Cf. above, pp. 99ff. and pp. 212–213.

546 The place-reference is highlighted not only by the saga's title (which is not modern, but, sometimes with some expansion, already attested in the manuscripts), but also in the saga's final sentence (ch. 65): *Ok lýkr þar sǫgu Þórsnesinga, Eyrbyggja ok Álptfirðinga.* 'And there ends the saga of the inhabitants of Þórsnes, the inhabitants of Eyr, and the inhabitants of the Álftafjörður Fjord.' It is a saga about people *that are defined by where they live.*

Þórólfr Twist-Foot, the son of Geirríðr and of one Bjǫrn, is not born in Iceland but comes to the new land already a grown man, having first made a name for himself as a 'great Viking' (*víkingr mikill*, ch. 8). He spends his first winter in his mother's house, but comes to feel that she does not have enough land. So Þórólfr challenges the elderly and childless Úlfarr the Champion to a duel, kills him, and appropriates his estate: thus, already his first action in the saga characterises Þórólfr as a violent bully who ruthlessly uses his strength to terrorise his surroundings. This is also memorialised in Þórólfr's nickname, as it is in this unjust duel that Þórólfr receives the leg-wound that is to give him a limp ever after and gives cause to his nickname 'Twist-Foot' (*bægifótr*). The saga-writer's judgement of Þórólfr is even made explicit, and it may not be by chance that this explicit condemnation of Þórólfr's character and behaviour is made in one breath with his localisation, virtually turning his destructive character into place-lore (ch. 8): 'He built a farm in Hvammr in Þórsárdalr Valley. He took over Úlfar's lands and was a very unjust man.' (*Hann gerði bú í Hvammi í Þórsárdal. Hann tók lǫnd eptir Úlfar ok var inn mesti ójafnaðarmaðr.*) Today, the farm of Hvammur in Þórsárdalur Valley is abandoned, but the place-name still lingers.[547]

As the saga narrative unfolds, Þórólfr's life in Iceland continues as it had begun. He supports some of his peers in their attempt to dispute the rules of purity that Þórólfr Beard-of-Mostr had established for the local assembly site, causing a major violent confrontation that leads to the death of several men (ch. 9); his daughter is knowledgeable in witchcraft (ch. 15); and when he starts growing old, he soon becomes entirely insufferable, evil, and even more violent than he had been in his younger years. In the end, even his relationship to his son Arnkell deteriorates when Þórólfr's bullying of a neighbour makes Arnkell stand up to his father, leading to a confrontation that increasingly escalates and in the course of which several men are killed (chs 30–32). As a result of this, Arnkell refuses to support Þórólfr in an argument with Snorri the Priest later on – a refusal that is particularly understandable given that this argument centres on a piece of land that Þórólfr had given to Snorri in exchange for the latter's support against Arnkell. Having been rebuffed by Arnkell, Þórólfr goes home and sits down on the high-seat in his hall, talking to nobody, eating nothing, and remaining sitting on his high-seat even when everybody else goes to bed. The following morning, he is found still sitting there, dead.

The members of Þórólfr's household are thoroughly spooked by the manner of his death and by how he was found. When Arnkell is fetched to

547 Cf. Mapcarta ('Hvammur') 2016.

take matters in hand, he lifts Þórólfr from his seat, gripping him from behind and warning everybody against stepping in front of the body. He then blind-folds the corpse and has him pulled out of the house through a hole that is broken into the wall just for this purpose. Þórólfr is then buried under a cairn of big stones in the valley of Þórsárdalur (ch. 33). Yet, in defiance of these precautions, the area is now haunted by Þórólfr. Soon, it becomes impossible to be out in the dark, livestock that comes near Þórólfr's grave die miserably, and the farm's shepherd is bodily pursued, and finally killed, by Þórólfr. Even birds that alight on the gravemound drop dead. The more time progresses, the worse Þórólfr haunts the valley, driving even his widow insane and causing her death. One farm after the other has to be abandoned, until the whole valley is turned into a wasteland. When spring comes, Arnkell, who alone is not harassed by the revenant, enlists the help of many men, goes to Þórsárdalur and exhumes the undecayed body of his father. Using a sledge drawn by two oxen, they pull the corpse up the slope of Úlfarsfell Mountain, aiming for the headland of Vaðilshöfði. This plan fails, however, as the oxen pulling the sled soon go mad and, after bolting and escaping along a route described in some detail, die. So Þórólfr is re-buried closer by, on the small headland of Bægifótshöfði, 'Twist-Foot's Headland'. There Arnkell buries the corpse and cuts the burial site off from the rest of the land by erecting a high wall across the whole headland, 'and one still sees traces of that' (*ok sér enn þess merki*). By emphasising the ongoing presence of the remains of this wall in the saga-author's present, the narrative establishes a close connection between the tale and the real-world place, just as the episode is generally closely tailored to the lay of the land – in fact, all the place-names of this episode still live on in the modern micro-toponymy of the area, making it possible to map the detailed route of the grisly procession.[548] Be that as it may, after this re-burying by his son, Þórólfr is quiet as long as Arnkell lives (ch. 34).

Towards the end of the saga, however, he makes yet another reappearance (ch. 63). Immediately after Arnkell's death, Þórólfr Twist-Foot resumes his hauntings, again killing men and livestock, and the inhabitants of one farm after the other are driven away. Finally, the new local landowner, Þóroddr

548 Cf. Mapcarta ('Bægifótshöfði') 2016; Mapcarta ('Vaðilshöfði') 2016; Mapcarta ('Úlfarsfell') 2016; Mapcarta ('Þórsárdalur') 2016; as well as the place-name map of the National Land Survey of Iceland (Landmælingar Íslands 2017, *s.v.* 'Bægifótshöfði', 'Vaðilshöfði', 'Úlfarsfell', 'Þórsá [Helgafellssveit]'). As a *caveat* it should be noted that it is not entirely clear whether this local toponymy reflects a continuity that reaches from the time of the writing of the saga to the present or whether the local toponymy has, in an antiquarian fashion, at some point been derived from the saga.

Þorbrandsson, leads some men out to Bægifótshöfði. There, they open the burial mound, finding the corpse of Þórólfr undecayed, black, trollish-looking, 'and big like an oxen' (*ok digr sem naut*; the bovine comparison may be a hint of things to come). They find it impossible to move the corpse and just about manage to lever him out of his grave, finally burning him on the shore until nothing is left but ashes. Even the fire takes a long time to burn the corpse. The wind spreads his ashes widely, but what the men can gather of them is thrown into the sea.

When Þóroddr returns home from this business, he accidentally startles a cow that then breaks a leg (a detail which may constitute a literary cross-reference to Þórólfr's twisted foot which he had acquired when he killed his elderly neighbour).[549] Þóroddr manages to nurse the cow back to health, and after its leg has healed, it is brought to a rich pasture on the mountain above Bægifótshöfði to fatten up. The saga then tells (ch. 63):

> Kýrin gekk opt ofan í fjǫruna, þar sem bálit hafði verit, ok sleikði steinana, þar sem askan hafði fokit. Þat er sumra manna sǫgn, at þá er eyjamenn fóru útan eptir firði með skreiðarfarma, at þá sæi þeir kúna upp í hlíðinni ok naut annat apalgrátt at lit, en þess átti engi maðr ván. En um haustit ætlaði Þóroddr at drepa kúna; ok er menn skyldu sœkja hana, fannsk hon eigi.

> 'The cow went often down onto the foreshore, where the pyre had been, and licked the stones where the ash had been driven by the wind. Some men said that when the island-men came in along the fjord with a shipment of dried fish, that they then saw the cow up on the slope, and a second animal, apple-grey in colour, and nobody had expected that. And in autumn Þóroddr wanted to slaughter the cow. And when people were to fetch her, she was not found.'

Shortly before Christmas, the cow returns to Þóroddr's farm of its own accord, and it is in calf. When it calves, twins are born; first a female calf and soon after a much bigger bull calf. Due to the size of the latter, this second birth is a difficult one and the cow dies shortly after. Both calves are now reared in Þóroddr's house. The first time that the bull calf bellows, its bellowing is heard by an old clairvoyant woman, who asks Þóroddr to kill it, recognising its bellowing as the 'sound of a troll' (*trolls læti*). Yet in spite of the old woman's pleading, Þóroddr raises the calf, merely concealing it from the old woman and pretending to her that it is dead. Yet when, some months later, it is let out to the pasture, it bellows again, and the old woman

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549 Sayers 1995 (1997): 175.

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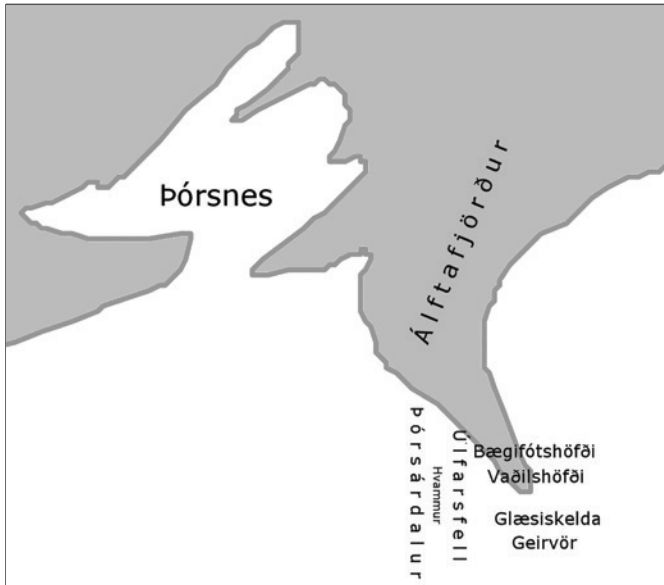
Map 8: Schematic map of the saga-toponymy of the Álftafjörður area. Locations based on the place-name map of the National Land Survey of Iceland (Landmælingar Íslands 2017), supplemented from Mapcarta 2017.

recognises its bellowing, calls it a troll (*troll*), and prophesies that it will bring great harm. With an eerie speed, the bull calf grows into a huge bull, which is given the name *Glæsir*, 'the Shining'. Within a few years, this bull grows into an increasingly frightening animal of great size, with a monstrous, terror-inspiring bellow ('always when he bellowed, he made a hugely terrible noise', *jafnan, er hann beljaði, lét hann stórum afskræmiliga*), and acting in an increasingly aggressive way. The old woman continues her pleading, but Þóroddr does not heed her warnings. So things unfold as they must, and one morning Glæsir turns against his owner. When the bull, which previously had never interfered with the haymaking, is found one morning to be on a systematic rampage destroying the haystacks, Þóroddr tries to scare him off. Yet Glæsir now attacks Þóroddr. The saga gives a long description of their fight. At first, Þóroddr is able to keep Glæsir at bay, but as he tires, he can only manage to grasp the bull around its neck, holding fast onto the animal and being carried up and down the field. This, however, merely delays the inevitable, and in the end Glæsir impales Þóroddr on one of his horns, wounding him fatally, ...

> ..., en griðungrinn rak við skræk mikinn ok hljóp ofan til árinnar eptir
> vellinum. Heimamenn Þórodds hljópu eptir Glæsi ok eltu hann um þvera

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skriðuna Geirvǫr ok allt þar til, er þeir kómu at feni einu fyrir neðan bœinn at Hellum; þar hljóp griðungrinn út á fenit ok sǫkk, svá at hann kom aldri upp síðan, ok heitir þar síðan Glæsiskelda.

'..., and the bull let loose a great scream and ran down across the field to the river. Þóroddr's farmhands ran after Glæsir and chased him athwart over the scree field Geirvör and all the way until they came to a bog below the farm at Hellar. There the bull jumped out onto the quagmire and sank so that it has never since come up again, and the place there has since been called Glæsiskelda.'

Only this, finally, is the end of Þórólfr Twist-Foot and his story, which in this way concludes with yet another unnecessary violent death and the naming of a place. Just as it has been noted above for the place-names that are mentioned in the account of Þórólfr's re-burial at Bægifótshöfði, this story can also be traced in the current toponymy of the area where it is set: Geirvör and Glæsiskelda are located just south of the tip of the Álftafjörður Fjord, some two kilometres south of Bægifótshöfði (map 8).[550]

Both main elements of the episode's finale – the death and the place-name created by it – are fitting ends for the Twist-Foot narrative. Its violent conclusion reflects Þórólfr's characteristic violent tendencies, which indeed are a pervasive trait of many of the main protagonists of the saga as a whole.[551] Similarly, the episode's final act of naming a place mirrors a tendency highlighted repeatedly both within the episode itself and in the wider context of the saga. As already noted above, the reference that the saga's title makes

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550 Mapcarta ('Glæsiskelda') 2017 and Mapcarta ('Geirvör') 2017, as well as the place-name map of the National Land Survey of Iceland (Landmælingar Íslands 2017, *s.v.* 'Glæsiskelda', 'Geirvör [Helgafellssveit]'). It might be worth noting as an aside that this landscape is toponymically haunted also over and above the tale of the supernatural that is inscribed into the land by the saga toponyms: in the Þórsárdalur Valley just west of Úlfarsfell there is the 'Troll-Woman's Stone' Tröllkonusteinn, which correlates with the 'Troll-Woman's Waterfall' Tröllkonufoss some two kilometres to its north-west (Landmælingar Íslands 2017, *s.v.* 'Tröllkonusteinn', 'Tröllkonufoss'). Also Gaelic associations are toponymically present in this landscape: as Josef Juergens has pointed out to me, a few kilometres to the west of the Álftafjörður Fjord there is a mountain named Írafell, 'Mountain of the Irish' (Landmælingar Íslands 2017, *s.v.* 'Írafell'). Furthermore, a skerry to the north of the mouth of the fjord is called Írland, 'Ireland' (Landmælingar Íslands 2017, *s.v.* 'Írland [Helgafellssveit]').
551 Cf. Hermann Pálsson and Edwards 1989: 5, who note 'undercurrents of unreasoning pride and smouldering neurotic violence' in *Eyrbyggja saga*.

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to a *place* rather than a specific person marks the saga as a place narrative, in keeping with its geographical focus on northern-central Snæfellsnes. In the microcosm of the Þórólfr-story, this is mirrored by its constant reference to the toponymy of the local micro-geography (most prominent, perhaps, in the account of Þórólfr's reburial by Arnkell), its reference to remains 'still visible' locally, which establish a direct connection between the narrative and the physicality of the landscape, and its implicit and explicit accounts of acts of naming the land (explicit in the episode's final culmination in a violent and terminal act of place-naming, and implicit in the case of the name Bægifótshöfði, 'Twist-Foot's Headland', whose derivation from the second burial of Þórólfr Twist-Foot is not stated, but clearly implied).

Many elements of the Þórólfr-episode have close parallels elsewhere in Icelandic literature. The revenant returning from his grave, becoming ever more powerful, swelling up in death to the point of being impossible to move even with the help of animals, threatening to turn a whole valley into a waste-land, and providing saga heroes with a challenge to prove themselves has its most famous counterpart in the revenant Glámr, who lays waste to the valley of Forsæludalr in *Grettis saga* until stopped by Grettir the Strong (chs 32–35).[552] Similarly, the 'apple-grey bull' (*naut apalgrátt*) that, according to 'some men', the cow is seen with before it becomes pregnant, recalls the mysterious 'grey stallion' (*hestr grár*) that sires a foal on the horse Fluga[553] as well as the 'apple-grey stallion' (*hestr apalgrár*) that emerges from the mountain-lake above Auðun's farm.[554] The latter is a particularly interesting parallel because it is tied to a place so close to Bægifótshöfði: the distance between the Hraunsfjörður Fjord, where *Landnámabók* locates Auðun's farm, and Bægifótshöfði, close to where the 'apple-grey bull' would have been sighted, is barely twenty kilometres. So if Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson is right to describe *Landnámabók* as largely a collection of folklore,[555] then the motif of the otherworldly apple-grey male animal would, it seems, have been a firmly established part of the folklore of northern-central Snæfellsnes. As such, it could have been reused in both the Auðun- and the Twist-Foot-narrative – unless it was adapted directly from the one into the other.

In marked contrast to such well-established motifs as the hauntings of a revenant, Þórólfr Twist-Foot's return through the womb of a cow is unparalleled in Icelandic literature. This part of the tale, however, has close and

552 Ed. by Guðni Jónsson 1936.
553 Cf. above, pp. 72ff.
554 Cf. above, pp. 99ff., esp. p. 102.
555 Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1999: 146.

prominent parallels in medieval Ireland. The most striking single element of the Twist-Foot-narrative is how he appears to return for one last act of destruction after his undead corpse has been exhumed and burned: a cow licks the stones where the ashes from his pyre have been blown, and later this cow gives birth to twin cattle, one of which is a bull calf that is to grow into a murderous monster. The implication appears to be that the cow ingests something of Þórólfr Twist-Foot's being, which then goes directly into her womb and thus returns into the world. The motif of conception through ingestion – in particular as the last stage in a series of transformations – is a well-established one in medieval Irish storytelling. One instance is found in the older recension of *Compert Con Culainn*, the 'Conception of Cú Chulainn', a tale whose oldest recension is (among others) preserved already in the Book of the Dun Cow; there it is written in the hand of the scribe Mael Muire, who was killed in the year 1106.[556] Linguistically, however, the text is even older, belonging to the Old Irish period.[557] This story gives an elaborate account of the multi-stage conception and birth of the Ulster hero Cú Chulainn. In this tale, an otherworldly flock of birds lures the king of Ulster, Conchobar, and his men into an otherworldly house. There, Conchobor's daughter Deichtine, who had accompanied her father as his charioteer, acts as a midwife to the otherworldly couple that hosts them, helping with the birth of a boy. The next morning, the house has disappeared,[558] but the boy is still there. The Ulster heroes take the child with them and Deichtine tries to raise him. Yet the little boy soon falls ill and dies, and Deichtine is heartbroken. Coming home after the funerary celebration, she wants to have a drink from a copper vessel, but every time she tries to drink, a little animal jumps towards her mouth; yet whenever she puts the vessel down, the animal is invisible. That night, the great otherworld lord Lug appears to her in a dream, revealing that he had been their host in the otherworldly house, that the boy had been his son, and that now the boy has gone over into her body and that she is pregnant. This is indeed so, and the men of Ulster think that Deichtine has been made pregnant incestuously by her father Conchobar. Deichtine therefore is so embarrassed about her pregnancy that she induces a miscarriage before going on to get married to an Ulsterman. After that, she soon gets pregnant again and finally gives birth to Cú Chulainn, the greatest of the Ulster heroes.

556 Ed. by Best and Bergin 1929: 320–322; dating: pp. xii, xl. Standard edition: van Hamel 1933.
557 van Hamel 1933: 1; cf. Thurneysen 1921: 268, 666.
558 Irish otherworldly houses commonly disappear overnight; on the Norse reception of this motif cf. above, note 524.

Linguistically later, though genealogically set somewhat earlier within the framework of the Ulster Cycle of tales, is the second recension of the tale *Compert Conchobuir*, the 'Conception of Conchobar'.[559] Rudolf Thurneysen thought this text to be from perhaps the tenth or eleventh century.[560] This tale tells, as its title indicates, of how King Conchobar was conceived and born. According to the version of the events presented by this recension, Conchobar's mother Nes was the wife of the warrior-druid Cathbad – even though their relationship was not an easy one, as Cathbad had killed Nes' twelve foster-fathers and had forced her at sword-point to marry him. One night, Nes goes to fetch water for Cathbad to drink. She draws this water from a nearby river, straining it through her veil. When she brings this strained water to Cathbad, he looks at it in the light of a candle and discovers two worms in it. He becomes so angry at this that he draws his sword and forces Nes to drink the water herself, worms and all. Nes now becomes pregnant, and the tale states that some say that she became pregnant because of the worms, whereas others say that she became pregnant by her young lover Fachtna Fáthach. After the allotted time has passed, she gives birth to a boy; this child is born holding a worm in each hand, and its birth is accompanied by prophecies of its future greatness. It is to grow up to become the great King Conchobar of Ulster, the central king of the Ulster Cycle, who plays a very similar role for medieval Irish heroic literature as King Arthur does for the *matière de Bretagne*.

Another tale that has been preserved, although only in a fragmentary form, in the Book of the Dun Cow,[561] with a complete copy extant in another manu-script, is *Tochmarc Étaíne*, the 'Wooing of Étaín'. Thurneysen dated this text to the ninth century.[562] Étaín Echraide is the daughter of the human king Ailill, but is wooed by Midir, one of the nobles of the otherworld of the *áes síde*, the 'People of the Fairy Mound'. Midir wins Étaín, but his wife Fuamnach begrudges him his new lover.[563] Fuamnach is herself one of the Tuatha Dé Danann (the 'elves'), and in her jealousy she uses her magical skills to trans-form Étaín into a pool of water in the middle of the house (part I, §16). The

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559 Ed. and transl. by Meyer 1883–1885: 173–182; transl. by Carey in Koch and Carey 1995: 48–51. For a discussion of both recensions cf. Thurneysen 1921: 273–276; the older first recension does not contain the motif of conception-by-ingestion.
560 Thurneysen 1921: 274.
561 Ed. by Best and Bergin 1929: 323–332 (fragmentary version in the Book of the Dun Cow). Standard edition and transl. of the complete text: Bergin and Best 1938.
562 Thurneysen 1921: 667.
563 Within an early medieval Irish upper-class social context, polygyny was legal and seems to have been a widespread practice: Kelly 1988: 70–71.

heat in the house causes this pool to turn into a worm and then into a beautiful purple fly as big as a man's head; in this form, Étaín now accompanies Midir again (part I, §17). Fuamnach then conjures up a magical wind that separates the purple fly that is Étaín from Midir. For years she is driven about the land and is further harassed by Fuamnach (part I, §§18–21), until finally she falls into the cup of the wife of one of Conchobar's champions, 'so that she swallowed her with the liquid that was in the beaker, and in this way she was conceived in her womb and became afterwards her daughter' (*condo sloicsidhe lassin dig bai isin lestur coimperta di šuide foa broind combo hingen iar tain*, §21).[564] She is reborn and again called Étaín (part I, §21), and she is the fairest woman in Ireland (part II, §2). After many more adventures, she is finally reunited with Midir.

Another attestation of the motif of a series of transformations being followed by a rebirth based on a conception by ingestion is provided by *Scél Tuáin meic Chairill*, the 'Story of Tuán, son of Cairell',[565] a text of the second half of the ninth century.[566] In this story, the missionary saint Finnia meets Tuán son of Cairell and asks him to tell him the whole history of Ireland, from its very first settlement up until the present. Tuán obliges, and the reason why he is able to do so is that he has lived through all of it, witnessing every stage of the history of Ireland: first in the shape of a man, then consecutively in the shapes of a stag, a wild boar, a hawk, and a fresh-water salmon. Finally, when he took the shape of a salmon, Tuán was caught by a fisherman and brought to the wife of king Cairell, to be cooked, eaten, and reborn as a supremely wise prophet:[567]

> 'Cuman lim dano co ndombeir in fer ⁊ fomnoí, ⁊ nom ithend in ben a oenur co mbá ina broind. Cuman lim dano ind airet ro mbá ina broind ⁊ rl., ⁊ an no ráided cách ria chéile isin taig ⁊ a ndorónad i nÉire ind eret sin. Cuman lim dano amal dománaic labrad amal cach nuídin ⁊ rofinnaind cach rét dogníthe i nÉre ⁊ robsa fáith ⁊ dobreth ainm dam .i. Tuán mac Cairill. Co tánic iarom Pátraic co creitem. Aes már dam i ssuidiu ⁊ rom báisted ⁊ ro creites im oenur Ríg na n-uili cona dúilib.' ... Nach senchas ⁊ nach genelach fil i nHére is ó Thuán mac Cairill a bunadus.

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564 Ed. and transl. by Bergin and Best 1938.

565 Ed. and transl. by Carey 1984. For a later reworking of the story that includes the motif of the transformations and of impregnation through ingestion cf. *Lebor Gabála Érenn* (ed. and transl. by Macalister 1938–1956), §236 (=vol. 3, pp. 42/43) and poem XXXIX (=vol. 3, pp. 80–83).

566 Carey 1984: 95–97.

567 Ed. and transl. by Carey 1984.

'"I remember then how the man takes me and cooks me, and the woman alone eats me so that I was in her womb. I remember then the interval when I was in her womb, etc., and what everyone said to his fellow in the house, and what was done in Ireland during that time. I remember then how speech came to me as to every infant, and I found out everything that was done in Ireland, and I was a prophet, and a name was given to me, that is, Tuán son of Cairell. Then Patrick came with the Faith. I was very old then, and I was baptized, and of my own accord I accepted belief in the King of All, with His creatures." ... Whatever history and genealogy there is in Ireland, its origin is from Tuán son of Cairell.'

Thus, after undergoing a number of transformations, the man who incorporates all knowledge of the history of Ireland is reborn through a pregnancy caused by ingesting him in the shape of a fish.[568]

These Irish stories show a noteworthy structural resemblance to the Twist-Foot-narrative in *Eyrbyggja saga*. In these narratives, (1) a being undergoes a number of transformations, at the end of which it (2) enters a liquid and is (3) ingested, which (4) causes or accompanies a pregnancy. In all narratives, there are also male beings around (a grey bull, a father suspected of incest, various husbands, and a youthful lover) that could have caused the pregnancy in a more mundane fashion, but a direct connection between the pregnancy and the ingestion is sometimes made explicit. Then, the being is (5) reborn as something or somebody truly exceptional: a huge and murderous calf, the greatest king or hero, the wisest man, the most beautiful woman. However, all these parallels, close as they may be, are merely structural. In all cases cited so far, the Irish tales lead to the rebirth of a human being as a human being – in marked contrast to the narrative in *Eyrbyggja saga*, where a human being is reborn as a bull. Yet Ireland does not only provide purely structural parallels to the Þórólfr-narrative. Also a strikingly specific one is provided by a number of texts: the narratives that record the story of the great bulls of Ulster and Connacht.

The two single most important texts that, taken together, provide us with a complete picture of this story are *De Chophur in dá Muccida*, 'About the Conception(?)[569] of the two Swineherds', and *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, the 'Cattle Raid of Cúailnge', both Old Irish heroic texts from the Ulster Cycle of tales.

568 For another hagiographic example of what seems to be a somewhat more meta-phorical variant of the motif of 'conception through ingestion' cf. *Vita tripartita*, p. 58, ll. 9–14.
569 On the *hapax legomenon* 'cophur' cf. Windisch 1891: 248, 261 (note 1); Roider 1979: 62–78.

How everything began is told by the former, *De Chophur in dá Muccida*.[570] The older of the two extant recensions of this text (the version preserved in the Book of Leinster) has been dated to the ninth century on linguistic grounds.[571] This narrative tells how a bitter quarrel developed between two otherworldly swineherds. These two swineherds were servants of the kings of the 'fairy mounds' (*síde*) of Munster and Connacht respectively. They had an agreement that in lean years, when their home province would not yield enough mast to fatten up their pigs, they would drive their livestock into the respective other province: when the year was bad in Connacht, the Connacht swineherd would drive his pigs to Munster, and vice versa. Then the people of Connacht claim that their swineherd is the more powerful one, and the people of Munster claim the same about theirs. Thus, egged on, the two swineherds, rather than continuing their successful cooperation, start to compete. So when the next lean year comes, the Connacht swineherd drives his pigs to Munster, but by means of magic, the Munster swineherd ensures that the Connachtman's pigs do not grow fat; and indeed, when the Connacht swineherd drives his pigs back home, they are so emaciated that they just barely manage to get back to Connacht. The next year, exactly the same happens with roles reversed: now the Munster pigs come to Connacht, but return home just as skinny as they had been when they set out. The result is that both swineherds are sacked by the otherworld kings whom they had served. After that, they take to fighting each other directly, rending and wounding each other for many years in a whole kaleidoscope of shapes: first they fight in the shapes of two birds (*senén* – ravens? hawks? crows?);[572] then they fight as two water animals; as two stags; as two warriors; as two spectres (*dā sīabuir*); and as two dragons (*dā draic*) that throw snow(!)[573] on each other's land. Finally, they turn into two water-worms (*dī dorbbi*):[574]

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570 Ed. and transl. by Roider 1979; Windisch 1891.

571 Thurneysen 1921: 278, cf. p. 667; cf. Roider 1979: 19.

572 Cf. Windisch 1891: 261 (note 10); *eDIL, s.v.* '1 én'.

573 The idea of snow-dragons seems to have originated from an Irish interpretation of Psalm 148:7–8, where dragons, snow, and ice are juxtaposed (all being under God's command); see Carey 2009: 290 with reference to an eighth-century Hiberno-Latin gloss on these verses that explains dragons as a kind of flying serpents that inhabit the part of the atmosphere where there also are wind, snow, and frost (*Glossa in Psalmos*, ed. by McNamara 1986: 308, *ad* CXLVIII.7).

574 Ed. by Roider 1979 (with German transl.); my English transl. on the basis of Roider's edition and analysis and Hogan 1910.

Do·fuittet díb línaib assi*n*d áer, co*mtar* dī dorbbi. Tēit i*n*dala n-aí i topur Glaisse Cruind i Cūalngiu, *con*da·essib bó Dáiri m*ei*c Fiachnai. *Ocus* tēit alaile i *n*-Ūarán nGa*r*ad la Con*n*achta, *con*da·ib bó Medba *ocus* Ail*el*la, *con*id díb ro·chinset i*n* dā tha*r*b, i*n* Fin*n*be*n*nach Aí *ocus* i*n* Dub Cūalngi.

'They both fall out of the sky, so that they were two water-worms. The one of them goes into the well of the river Glais Cruinn in Cúailnge, so that a cow of Dáire son of Fiachnae drank him. And the other goes into the well Úarán nGarad in Connacht, so that a cow of Medb and Ailill drank it, so that it was from them that the two bulls were descended, the Whitehorned of Aí and the Black of Cúailnge.'

Thus, after a transformation which ends with their ingestion by two cows, the two swineherds are finally reborn in the shape of the two mightiest bulls of Irish heroic literature.

Exactly these bulls stand at the centre of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, the 'Cattle Raid of Cúailnge'.[575] The 'cattle raid' described in this long narrative is a full-scale military campaign led by queen Medb of Connacht and her husband Ailill against the men of Ulster; their objective is to abduct the famous bull of the Ulstermen, the Dark One of Cúailnge. As one might expect when one province of Ireland goes to war against another, the narrative culminates with a huge battle between the forces of Ulster and the 'men of Ireland'. Yet it does not conclude with this battle. Rather, the last battle to be fought in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* is the fight between the two great bulls of Ulster and Connacht – that is to say, the Whitehorned of Aí and the Dark One of Cúailnge. The dating of this text is a delicate matter. Already the earliest extant recension of the *Táin* is a compilation of material of different origins. Thurneysen ascribed the passage recounting the battle of the bulls to the ninth century,[576] and more recent work on the linguistic dating of Old Irish texts suggests that, overall, his dating of the *Táin* text should perhaps be pushed a century further up to the eighth.[577] Thus, the fight of the two bulls was an established part of the Ulster Cycle already very early on.

The fight between the two bulls is of such momentousness that it is watched by everyone on both sides, the Ulstermen and 'men of Ireland', who have survived the preceding battle.[578] It goes on for two days and two nights, during which the Whitehorned of Aí at first seems to have the upper hand,

575 Ed. and transl. by O'Rahilly 1976.
576 Thurneysen 1921: 109–113, 216–218.
577 Cf. Breatnach 1977: 101–103, 107.
578 *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, ll. 4125–4155.

but then is wrestled down by the Dark One of Cúailnge. Indeed, during the second half of the fight, the Dark One carries the Whitehorned on his horns for a full day and a night, until finally he dives into a lake, coming out 'with the loin and shoulder blade and liver of his opponent on his horns' (*co lúan ⁊ leithiu ⁊ tromchridiu a chéli for*[*a*] *díb n-adarcaib*). But the killing and dismemberment, described in much gory detail as it is, is not all there is to this battle scene. By and throughout the fight and its aftermath, place-names are created, and once it is even noted that a place had previously borne a different name. The plain where the two bulls fight receives the name *Tarbga*, which the *Táin* explains as *tarbguba nó tarbgleó*, 'Bull-sorrow or Bull-battle'. When one of the Whitehorned's horns is violently broken off and ricochets against a mountain, this mountain receives the name *Slíab nAdarca*, 'Horn's Mountain'. When the Dark One, going home to Ulster after tearing his opponent limb from limb, has a drink somewhere along the road and drop's the Whitehorned's shoulder, the place is called *Finnleithe*, 'White-Shoulder'. *Áth Lúain*, the 'Ford of the Loin', receives its name when the Dark One drops the Whitehorned's loin. Where he drops the Whitehorned's liver, the place is henceforth called *Troma* (which can mean 'liver'[579]). *Étan Tairb*, 'Bull's Forehead', is where he rests his forehead against a hill. Where he paws up the ground, a place is named *Gort mBúraig*, 'Field of Fury' or 'Field of the Trench'.[580] At *Druim Tairb*, 'Bull's Back'/'Bull's Ridge', the Dark One dies and creates his last place-name through his death. Occasionally, places are also connected with the bull although this connection does not provide an aetiology of their name: at *Iraird Cuilinn*, 'High Ground of the Holly-Tree', the bull bellows so loudly that he is heard across the whole province.

Some of the place-names explained or narratively addressed in this passage of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* have implications whose significance goes far beyond their picturesque value. Thus, the explanation of the toponym *Slíab nAdarca*, 'Horn's Mountain', which derives its name from a broken-off horn of the Whitehorned, stands in an interesting contrast to the explanation of a similarly-formed toponym in the tenth-century *Tripartite Life* of Saint Patrick. The *Tripartite Life* gives the following explanation for the name of the holy well *fons Óenadarcæ*, 'the well of Oen-adarc ("one-horn")':[581]

> dinchnuchai aird bic talman fil inna [f]arrad ro-ainmniged intopur.

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579 Cf. *eDIL*, *s.v.* '2 trom'; but cf. also *eDIL*, *s.v.* '1 trom' (the word for an elder-tree), where a connection is suggested between the place *Tromma* and the elder-tree word.

580 Cf. *eDIL*, *s.v.* 'búrach'.

581 *Vita tripartita*, ed. and transl. by Stokes 1887: 134, ll. 18–20.

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'From the steep little hillock of earth that is near it the well was so named.'

In a way which is most untypical for medieval Irish place-name litera-
ture, this explanation of the toponym does not 'explain' it with an equally
fancy and unlikely story, but opts for an 'obvious', strikingly mundane (and
probably correct) explanation, deriving the name 'One-Horn' from the well's
location next to a single horn-shaped geological formation. Thus on a fun-
damental level, this illustrates that a medieval Irish audience did not view
place-names in a way entirely different from how we would view them today,
but was very well aware of their normally quite mundane roots. This, in turn,
is of importance for the interpretation of the literary treatment of the place-
name *Slíab nAdarca*, 'Horn's Mountain', in the *Táin*, because it implies that
the text's contemporary audience would have been well aware that this name
probably simply referred to the mountain's shape, and not to a semi-myth-
ical bull. Thus, the *Tripartite Life* tells us much about how the tale of the
Whitehorned's broken-off horn would have been viewed by its target audi-
ence: it strongly suggests that this target audience would have seen this tale as
an entertaining cock-and-bull story, and would have enjoyed it as such. This
is important to keep in mind as the background for the analysis of the place-
name story of *Áth Lúain*, which will be presented below.

Another important motif that appears in the *Táin*'s concluding description
of the fight of the bulls is the bulls' terrible bellowing. This motif deserves
being highlighted in particular for how closely it recalls the emphasis that
the Twist-Foot-narrative of *Eyrbyggja saga* puts on the bull's bellowing: in
Eyrbyggja saga, the bellowing of the bull calf is mentioned no less than nine
times. This seems to tally with the detail that in the Irish tradition, the bulls'
bellowing is accentuated not only apropos the toponym *Iraird Cuilinn*, but
repeatedly. For instance, the Egerton-version of *De Chophur* emphasises
that neither bull would tolerate any other bull bellowing in their respective
province (ll. 324–327);[582] and in *Echtra Nerai*, the bellowing of a bull calf
provokes the Whitehorned to a fight,[583] an episode which also appears in the
Prose-*Dindshenchas* of Athlone.[584] The incident described in *Echtra Nerai*
may be of particular interest. *Echtra Nerai*, the 'Adventure of Nera', is a
(comparatively) early heroic tale that has been ascribed both to the eighth
as well as to the time from the tenth century onwards.[585] In this story, the

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582 Ed. and transl. by Roider 1979.
583 Ed. and transl. by Meyer 1889.
584 Cf. below, p. 239.
585 Eighth century: Dumville 1976: 88; Radner 1985: 550; tenth century or later: Mac
     Mathúna 1985: 250 (note 25).

Connacht warrior Nera enters the otherworld, where he marries and settles down. When a son is born to him, his otherworld wife gives a cow to the boy. This cow, however, is abducted by the battle-demon Morrígain, who brings it to the Dark One of Cúailnge to be bulled and then returns it to the otherworld. From the union of this cow and the Dark One, a bull calf is born, and as this calf leaves the otherworld a while later, it bellows three times. When this bellowing is heard at the royal court of Connacht, it is interpreted as a portent of violence about to erupt. Indeed, soon afterwards, the bull calf and the Whitehorned meet and immediately begin to fight. When the bull calf is beaten after a three-day struggle, it bellows again, and the cowherd of Queen Medb of Connacht interprets its bellowing as a challenge to the Whitehorned, which claims that the Whitehorned would never be able to defeat the Dark One. As a reaction to this, Queen Medb swears an oath that she would see the two bulls fighting. Thus, in this version of the story, the bull calf's bellowing turns into the provocation that brings about the 'Cattle Raid of Cúailnge' (*Táin Bó Cúailnge*), the greatest and most destructive war of early Irish heroic literature. From a different perspective, a central part of this episode is also told in the ninth-century tale *Táin Bó Regamna*.[586] In this version of the story, the uncanny intervention of the battle-demon Morrígain is emphasised and elaborated on.[587] The repeated appearance of the bull calf incident in Irish storytelling attests to its importance within the narrative complex of the great bulls and their fight. This makes it even more notable that the image of the uncanny calf whose bellowing presages disaster finds an echo in the bellowing of the quasi-demonic calf of *Eyrbyggja saga*.[588]

In the bull calf stories, the ferocious and monumental battle that the two bulls fight in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* is presented as being caused by a semi-otherworldly calf. In contrast, in the tradition presented by *De Chophur*, this battle seems like the logical continuation and worthy conclusion of the feud between the two otherworldly swineherds-turned-bulls. In the earliest recountings of the latter version of the tale in the oldest extant recensions of *De Chophur in dá Muccida* and *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, this relationship between the fight of

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586 Ed. and transl. by Corthals 1987; cf. Thurneysen 1921: 309–311. Dating: Thurneysen 1921: 667. Corthals 1987: 15: early Middle Irish.

587 For a detailed discussion of the Morrígain and related figures cf. Egeler 2011: 116–172.

588 Another instance of a terrifying bellowing presaging impending disaster and violent death is found in the tale *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* ('The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu', ed. and transl. by Hull 1949; Hull [1949: 29–33] considers that the tale reflects an eighth- or ninth-century text modernised around AD 1000 or shortly thereafter). There, however, the motif is transposed to an unborn child (§§1–5).

the swineherds and the fight of the bulls remains largely implicit – but not entirely so. Early on in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, the hero Dubthach chants a poem in which he states that the imminent bloodshed will occur '[b]ecause of the companionship of the two swineherds' (*di gnáis inna muccaide*, l. 197).[589] Just as explicit is a second recension of *De Chophur*, dating from the early twelfth century,[590] in which one of the swineherds states clearly that their rebirth as two bulls will lead to a great war.[591] While not told in complete detail by one single early text, the fight of the otherworldly swineherds and the fight of the bulls thus form a single narrative complex not only in the eyes of the modern beholder but also within native Irish tradition. In the present context, it is central that this narrative complex constitutes an extremely close parallel to the Twist-Foot-narrative, both in its general structure and in some specific details:[592]

1. In both cases, human (or at least anthropomorphic) beings with strong otherworldly characteristics (which are pervasive in the case of the otherworldly swineherds and in Þórólfr's case are reflected by his repeated return from the dead) undergo a number of transformations. These transformations at first show a tendency towards an increased monstrousness, which is then followed by a collapse towards something tiny that can be easily ingested (ashes on the shore; water-worms).

2. At the point in the chain of transformations when the beings reach the nadir of their power, they are ingested by cows in a watery environment (the shore; a well).

3. This ingestion goes hand in hand with the cows getting pregnant, and the beings are re-born as bull calves.

4. These bull calves possess extraordinary strength, and their bellowing is momentous.

5. While honoured at first, the bulls are ultimately greatly destructive (Glæsir kills Þóroddr; the cowherd-bulls bring about the war described in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*).

6. Both narratives culminate in the deaths of the bulls, which perish after wreaking considerable destruction and in doing so create place-names.

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589 Ed. and transl. by O'Rahilly 1976. Cf. Davies 2016: 288.
590 Thurneysen 1921: 668–669; cf. Roider 1979: 19.
591 Egerton-version (ed. and transl. by Roider 1979), ll. 308–309.
592 Cf. the tabular summary below in appendix a to this section.

The parallels between the Þórólfr-narrative and the cowherd-narrative seem so close, both structurally and with respect to very specific details, that this closeness is most easily accounted for by assuming a direct dependency of the one on the other. If, however, the one narrative is an adaptation of the other, then the chronology of the attestations clearly indicates the direction of this cultural contact. The earliest Irish versions of the story of the cowherds predate the Norse narrative in *Eyrbyggja saga* by several centuries, and indeed may be as old as the very beginning of the Viking Age. Since the Viking Age would have been the first period in which any noteworthy contact occurred between the Norse and Ireland, this implies that the Norse tale, if things are as they seem, must be derived from Irish motifs, rather than the other way round. This is also supported by the firm embeddedness of the cowherd-story within the wider context of Irish literature: as has been seen above, the motif of a conception through ingestion is a rather common one in medieval Ireland, indicating that the Irish bull story simply draws on Irish standard motifs. In Iceland, in contrast, the tale of Twist-Foot and his bull-transformation stands largely alone, like an erratic boulder that seems to stem from a different geological environment.

A further point in favour of considering the Twist-Foot-narrative an adaptation of an Irish story is the prominence of the tale of the bulls in Ireland. This prominence does not just mean that later versions of the story continued to be written; I have already mentioned that a second version of *De Chophur* was composed in the twelfth century,[593] and *Táin Bó Cúailnge* likewise underwent later re-writings.[594] It also meant that the story also appeared outside of the genre of heroic narrative that has been the focus of the discussion so far.

The treatment of the death of the bulls in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* put an intense focus on the creation of place-names that accompanied their fight and demise. Such a marked interest in place-stories pervades much of early Irish literature. From the late Old Irish period onwards, this general cultural interest in place-lore led to the creation of a dedicated genre of writing about place-names in both prose and verse, the *Dindshenchas*.[595] This genre of storytelling also treats two places whose stories, extant in both prose and verse versions, are based on the narrative of the swineherd-bulls: Athlone in the centre of Ireland, and Limerick at the head of the estuary of the Shannon.

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593 Cf. above, p. 237.
594 Cf. the version in the *Book of Leinster* (ed. and transl. by O'Rahilly 1967) and the even later Stowe-version (ed. by O'Rahilly 1961).
595 Cf. above, note 136.

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Today, Athlone, Irish *Áth Lúain*, is a small town in County Westmeath that lies about as far from the sea as any place in Ireland can possibly lie. The recension of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* quoted above already provides a highly condensed place-story to 'explain' its name: *Áth Lúain*, the 'Ford of the Loin', is the place where the Dark One of Cúailnge dropped the corresponding body part of his old enemy. Both the prose and the verse version of the *Dindshenchas* of Athlone (the latter a substantial poem of 27 stanzas) pick up on this motif.[596] The verse version, whose earliest manuscript witness is already the twelfth-century Book of Leinster,[597] essentially summarises the narrative of the *Táin*, adding some discussion of the person of queen Medb of Connacht but none of the mythological prehistory of the fight of the bulls that is given by *De Chophur in dá Muccida*. In contrast, the prose version gives a broad account focusing exactly on this prehistory. It summarises the story of the swineherds and their transformations; adds some detail quarried from the tale *Echtra Nerai*, the 'Adventure of Nera',[598] where the bellowing of a bull calf sired by the Dark One provokes the Whitehorned, thus creating a kind of prequel to the final fight between the bulls of Ulster and Connacht; and finally, this Prose-*Dindshenchas* concludes with a version of the fight of the bulls as told in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. Thus, the Prose-*Dindshenchas* of Áth Lúain illustrates that the narrative complex of the otherworldly swineherds and the fight of the bulls was indeed perceived as a single narrative complex, as well as being treated also beyond the heroic genre, strictly speaking. The latter point is also underlined by the *Dindshenchas* of Limerick, Irish *Luimnech*, which again is extant both in prose and in verse, with both prose and verse versions presenting essentially the same narrative.[599] Today, Limerick is the name of the western Irish city and county, but formerly it referred to the whole estuary of the Shannon.[600] The *Dindshenchas* of Limerick takes up a comparatively minor episode of the swineherd-story found in *De Chophur in dá Muccida*. It bases a fanciful and tongue-in-cheek explanation of the name Luimnech/Limerick on the encounter that the two swineherds had when they

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596 *Metrical Dindshenchas*: ed. and transl. by Gwynn 1903–1935, part 3, pp. 366–375, 544–546; *Rennes Dindshenchas*: ed. and transl. by Stokes 1894–1895, no. 66 (*Revue Celtique* 15 [1894]: 464–467).

597 Gwynn 1903–1935, part 3, p. 366 (*apparatus criticus*).

598 Ed. and transl. by Meyer 1889.

599 *Metrical Dindshenchas*: ed. and transl. by Gwynn 1903–1935, part 3, pp. 270–275, 526–527; *Bodleian Dindshenchas*: ed. and transl. by Stokes 1892, no. 20 (pp. 486–488); *Rennes Dindshenchas*: ed. and transl. by Stokes 1894–1895, no. 57 (*Revue Celtique* 15 [1894]: 452–454).

600 Gwynn 1903–1935, part 3, p. 526.

Fig. 23: The ('cloaked'/'shielded': *lumnigthe*/*luimnechda*) Shannon in Limerick (*Luimnech*). © M. Egeler, 2017.

took on the shape of warriors:[601] when they meet, a great multitude of specta-tors gathers to watch them fight, and this multitude of men is so engrossed in the spectacle that they allow themselves to be surprised by the tides and lose their cloaks (or their shields) in the river. Therefore, the river is hence-forth called *lumnigthe*, 'cloaked' (or *luimnechda*, 'shielded'), thus creating the name *Luimnech*, Limerick (fig. 23).

Taken by itself, the *Dindshenchas* of Limerick may seem rather quaint (though it is a good example of its kind), but it becomes highly interesting if one considers a certain appearance of Limerick in Old Norse literature. *Landnámabók* S122=H94 claims that a certain Ari Másson was driven off course to Hvítramannaland (the 'Land of White Men') during a voyage, never to be seen again. The passage also gives some detail about this faraway country. In the current context, the main interest of this episode is that the geographical myth of Hvítramannaland and all the details given about it in *Landnámabók* are derived from the Irish literary genre of *immrama* or 'Sea Voyages', as has long been widely acknowledged.[602] What makes this relevant with regard to the *Dindshenchas* of Limerick is that the *Landnámabók*-report about Hvítramannaland is one of only very few cases in Old Norse literature where an Irish motif has been adopted and the way of transmission is stated virtually explicitly. For the Hvítramannaland-account also reports who first introduced

601 Version in the Book of Leinster: ll. 75, 88; Egerton-version: ll. 108–224.
602 Cf. the next chapter below, pp. 250ff.

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the concept of Hvítramannaland to the Norse: 'Hrafn the Limerick-Farer was the first to tell about this, who had long been in Limerick in Ireland' (*fra þersu sagdi fyst Rafn Hlymreks fari er lengi hafdi verit i Hlymreka a Iʀlandi*, H94). Here, an Irish story is adapted into *Landnámabók*, with a direct explanation being given for how the storytellers of Iceland came to know about it: through the agency of a man who had long lived in the port town of Limerick. It may not be possible to prove, but it is a fair guess that the *Dindshenchas* of Limerick would have been known in Limerick, and so Hrafn the Limerick-Farer probably could have picked up the story of the bulls just as easily as he picked up motifs from Irish voyage literature. This does not mean that Hrafn was indeed the person who transmitted the Irish motifs to Iceland that we meet in the Twist-Foot-narrative of *Eyrbyggja saga*; but it does illustrate that there is nothing fundamentally problematic in the assumption that such motifs could have reached Iceland. This seems even more plausible since Limerick had a reputation as a place of sea-faring, and thus of international contact, not only among Scandinavians: even the metrical *Dindshenchas* of Limerick calls the town *Luimnech na loingse*, 'Limerick of the voyages' (l. 14), a busy port town where stories from all over the Atlantic world could have been traded.

Finally, from a very different perspective, Athlone also may throw a bright spotlight on the Icelandic reception of Irish place-lore. The bovine etymology of Athlone as it is presented both by the *Táin* and by the *Dindshenchas* 'explains' the toponym Áth Lúain as 'Ford of the Loin' (*lón*), deriving it from a torn-off leg of the Whitehorned dropped there by the Dark One. This is, of course, not likely to be the 'real' meaning of the toponym – bulls just don't tear each other's legs off. Much more likely to be the 'actual' meaning of the place-name is the interpretation proposed by Pádraig Ó Riain, Diarmuid Ó Murchadha, and Kevin Murray, who opt to translate Áth Lúain as 'Ford of Brightness (*lúan*)'.[603] This translation has just as much linguistic plausibility as the medieval literary explanation but,[604] in terms of content, it makes a lot

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603 Ó Riain *et al.* 2003: 140 (*s.v.* 'Áth Luain').

604 Cf. *eDIL, s.v.* '2 lúan' ('radiance, light') *vs. eDIL, s.v.* '2 lón' ('haunch, rump, buttock; hip'). As a small *caveat* it should perhaps be noted that *lúan* in the sense of 'radiance, light' had, by the time when the extant Irish literature was written, become a somewhat poetic term, which outside of the toponymic corpus seems to have been restricted to the phrase *lúan láith*, 'warrior's radiance' (*vel sim.*), apparently a kind of light that appeared above the head of a warrior in battle. In this phrase, however, it was quite common. Nevertheless, this *caveat* implies that the primary meaning of *Áth Lúain* as 'Ford of Brightness' might not have been obvious to every contemporary – which in turn, if the interpretation of *Glæsiskelda* suggested below is correct, has interesting implications for the level of Irish language

more sense: the toponym's original imagery seems to be based on the reflection and refraction of sunlight on flowing shallow water. Thus, the toponym combines the aquatic aspect of the place (*áth*, 'ford') with the additional layers of refracted light (*lúan*) and the bull's submerged body part (*lón*), and furthermore, it may allusively tie these layers together with the submerged bull's name as another layer: the loin swallowed up by the bright water is the loin of the 'White-horned' (*Finn-bennach*), who, perhaps significantly, carries brightness in its name. This possibly implies a cross-reference between the element 'white, bright, fair' (*finn*)[605] in the bull's name and the name of the body of water named for its 'brightness'/'loin' (*lúan*/*lón*).

This being so, it is worthwhile returning to *Eyrbyggja saga*. There, the story of the murderous bull Þórólfr Twist-Foot/Glæsir ends with the creation of the toponym Glæsiskelda when the bull runs off and drowns in a swampy pool (*fen*), which is then called Glæsiskelda. The image evoked by the action taking place here is the image of a bull getting stuck and drowning in some treacherous bog. This, however, is not quite what the place-name would suggest if taken on its own. The term *kelda* can, in a specifically Icelandic sense, indeed denote 'a stagnant pit in swampy ground'; its primary meaning, however, is 'well, spring'.[606] The word *glæsir*, the second component of the toponym, is not quite unproblematic in its detailed morphology. Yet there is good evidence that to an Icelandic audience, it evoked ideas of brightness and shininess. One important witness is the seventeenth-century scholar Johannes Stephanus Stephanius: closely collaborating with the Icelandic bishop and antiquary Brynjólfur Sveinsson, he translated the mythological toponym *Glæsisvellir*, which is based on the same element (plus *vellir*, 'fields'), as

proficiency that the story's Norse adaptor appears to have possessed. That Norse settlers who had grown up in a Gaelic-speaking environment would at least in some cases have acquired a level of proficiency in the language that would allow them to appreciate even an elaborate poetic register is also suggested by the Middle Irish praise poem *Baile Suthach Síth Emhna*, which was written by a Gaelic poet for the Norse King Rǫgnvaldr who ruled the Isle of Man in the early thirteenth century (above, note 47). Similarly, there appears to be evidence that some Norsemen could, on a high linguistic level, play with Irish personal names: the alleged *Írakonungr* Gljómall in *Landnámabók* S96=H83 has a name which is not attested in Ireland, but appears to have originated from genuine Irish vocabulary (*gléo*, 'combat' + *mál*, 'chief', resulting in a composite meaning 'warlord') and may be a play on the genuine Irish name Cathmal, whose components have the same meaning: Etchingham *et al.*, forthcoming, ch. 5, *s.v.* 'Gljómall'.

605 Cf. *eDIL*, *s.v.* '1 finn'.

606 Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson 1874, *s.v.* 'kelda'.

splendidi campi, 'Shining Fields'.[607] Furthermore, Old Norse *glær* means 'clear'; *glæsa* means 'to make shining'; *glæsi-ligr* is 'shining, splendid'.[608] As a word, therefore, the toponym *Glæsiskelda* seems to mean something like 'Well of Brightness' – one is led to think of sunlight sparkling in clear water bubbling up in a spring. The imagery of the toponym is essentially the same as that of Áth Lúain – and not only does the Norse toponym have the same primary imagery as the Irish one, but similar to the Irish toponym, it also combines this imagery with a play on the name of the bull who, partly or entirely, is swallowed up by the water: Glæsir, 'the Shining', stands behind the name of the 'Well of Brightness' Glæsiskelda, just as Finnbennach, 'the White-horned', stands behind the name of the 'Ford of Brightness' Áth Lúain. Given all the other parallels between the place-stories of Glæsiskelda and Áth Lúain, one is tempted to wonder whether it can really be pure chance that in both cases, the toponym claimed to be created by how a bull came to a sticky end actually seems to refer to the interplay of water and light and at the same time manages to combine this with an allusion to the name of the respective eponymous bull. The parallelism makes it tempting to suspect that the adaptation of the Irish story of the bulls in *Eyrbyggja saga* might have been based on a truly in-depth understanding of the Irish place-story in all its detail, and including all its layers – even those accessible only through the Irish language and the linguistic formation of the Irish toponym itself.[609] The resulting tale in

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607 Stephanius 1645: 104. Cf. Egeler 2015b: 36–37.

608 Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson 1874, *s.v.* 'glær', 'glæsa', 'glæsi-ligr'.

609 There is some evidence in the toponymy of the Hebrides that, in this particular environment, there was at least some degree of mutual understanding of place-name formation in Old Norse and Gaelic, providing a possible context for the detail that place-stories could sometimes have been borrowed including their place-names. Hermann Pálsson (1996: 15) points out that *Loch Sanndabhat* (i.e. 'Loch Lake of the Sands' < Gaelic *loch*, 'lake' + Old Norse *sanda-vatn*, 'lake of the sands') on Lewis finds a purely Gaelic counterpart in *Loch na Gainmhich*, 'Loch of the Sandy Place', located likewise on Lewis (though Hermann Pálsson's claim that the two are located closely together is a bit of an overstatement; cf. Scotland's Places 2017; I have silently normalised his spellings of names in accordance with the spelling of the current Ordnance Survey maps). Even more interesting may be the case of *Loch Uisg' an t-Soluis*, 'Lake Water of the Light' (cf. the Ross and Cromarty Ordnance Survey Name Books, 1848–1852, vol. 71, p. 31 [=OS1/27/71/31], digitised at Scotland's Places 2017): as a direct Old Norse parallel to this toponym, Hermann Pálsson (1996: 15–16) points to the Icelandic lake-name *Ljósavatn*, 'Bright-Water', a compound of a weak form of the adjective *ljóss* 'light, bright' and *vatn* 'water, lake' (cf. the formation pattern of *Helga-fell*). Thus, the Gaelic toponym could be a calque of the Old Norse one – or the other

Eyrbyggja saga is quintessentially Icelandic, substituting Irish 'fairy' swine-herds with a run-of-the-mill Norse revenant and tuning the bull's torn-off leg down to a bull stuck in a swamp; the latter rationalisation strikingly recalls the tuning-down that also happens between Saint Declan's bell floating on a stone and Ørlygr's bell found in a heap of seaweed: the outright grotesque is characteristically reduced to the almost-possible.[610] This transformation of the story of the bulls into a truly Icelandic place-story happens in a way that seems to reflect an informed act of cultural translation that appreciated the full richness and complexity of the Irish literary outlook on place. This even includes such details as how it constructs a conscious tension between the purely linguistic, 'inherent' semantics of toponyms as words and the stories that can be connected with these words by reading them against their grain, consciously choosing the most unlikely homonyms to re-read toponyms as the basis for stories. The Icelandic author seems to go where an Irish sense of place leads him, and he appears to follow this Irish sense of place using an extremely large-scale map.[611]

The scale of this map is indeed such that it is suggestive of a fully bilingual context for the Norse adaptation of the Ulster Cycle bulls in the Twist-Foot episode. Such a context may be most likely sought during the Settlement Period, in connection with arguably bilingual settlers – like Auðun the Stutterer barely twenty kilometres to the west of where the Twist-Foot tale

way round. Incidentally, both Loch Sanndabhat and Loch Uisce an t-Soluis, which are located about halfway between Liurbost and Stornoway, lie only about half a dozen kilometres north of the above-mentioned Ceòs and Lacasaidh whose names find possible counterparts below the slopes of Mount Esja (above, pp. 43ff.). Furthermore, of course, the Land of the Living in the Hvanndalur Valley illustrates that a place-story could move together with its place-name. The story of the Land of the Living, where one could not die but ended up finding out the hard way that immortality can quickly turn into something somewhat undesirable, is extant in Latin (Giraldus Cambrensis), Irish (*Do ingantaib Erenn*), and in Icelandic folklore; in all three incarnations, not only the plotline of the story appears, but in all three variants also the toponym connected with it has been translated, making the toponym just as trilingual as the story: *insula viventium*; *Lan nimmeo/Oilean na mbeo*; *Ódáinsakur*.

610 Cf. above, p. 149.

611 Note that the 'etymology' of *Glæsiskelda* is not the only occasion where *Eyrbyggja saga* plays with the semantic layers of a place-name: the same is also done by the Dritsker-episode discussed in the introductory chapter (above, pp. 76ff.). This reinforces the impression that the treatment of the toponym Glæsiskelda is indeed consciously playful.

is located –[612] who had acquired a Gaelic sense of place during extended stays in Ireland or Gaelic Scotland. If such a contextualisation comes close to the historical truth, then it would seem to imply that the Twist-Foot episode in *Eyrbyggja saga* tells a tale that had been connected to its location on the shores of the Álftafjörður Fjord already at a very early point in the history of Iceland. Furthermore, it might also be worthwhile highlighting that the Twist-Foot story appears to be an adaptation of a narrative from the Ulster Cycle of tales, the favourite heroic cycle of the Irish elite during the early Middle Ages. In this, as in its localisation in north-central Snæfellsnes, the Twist-Foot episode seems to directly parallel the story of Auðun's water-horse: this water-horse seems to be an adaptation of the heroic horse of Cú Chulainn, the greatest hero of the Ulster Cycle, just as the Twist-Foot narrative appears to be an adaptation of the culmination point of the greatest war of this cycle (much of which is single-handedly fought by Cú Chulainn). Furthermore, the hospitable hall of Twist-Foot's mother Geirríðr is also located in the same area and has counterparts in the 'hostels' of tales like, among others, the Ulster Cycle story *Scéla Mucce Meic Dathó*. Looking at these three place-lore complexes, located geographically just as closely together as they are in terms of narrative themes, one gets the impression that some partly Gaelicised early settlers have tried to turn the north coast of Snæfellsnes into 'home' by filling it with famous tales and motifs from Gaelic heroic storytelling, transforming northern Snæfellsnes into a landscape of Gaelic, Ulster Cycle-focused heroism.[613]

612 See above, p. 227.
613 Cf. above, p. 108.

Appendix a: Tabular summary of the parallels between the narrative of Þórólfr Twist-Foot in Eyrbyggja saga and its main Irish counterparts

story / transformations (in chronological order)	Þórólfr Twist-Foot in Eyrbyggja saga	Compert Con Culainn	Compert Conchobuir	Tochmarc Étaine	Scél Tuáin meic Chairill	The great bulls of the Ulster Cycle (De Chophur; Táin)
	violent, evil human being				man	swineherds / birds / water animals
	revenant from Þórsárdalur			beautiful woman	stag	stags
	quietly locked away behind the wall cutting off Bægifótshöfði			pool of water	wild boar	warriors
	revenant haunting the area from Bægifótshöfði after Arnkell's death	adoption and death of an otherworld child		worm	hawk	spectres / dragons
	ashes on the sea shore	little animal in a cup	two worms in a cup full of strained river-water	beautiful large purple fly, finally falling into a cup	fresh-water salmon	water-worms in wells

conception through ingestion	– conception through ingestion by a cow – (parallel suspicion of conception from apple-grey bull)	– conception through ingestion – (parallel suspicion of incestuous conception from Conchobar)	– conception through ingestion – (by a married woman with a young lover)	– conception through ingestion – (by a married woman)	– conception through ingestion – (by a married woman)	– conception through ingestion by cows –
rebirth(s)	murderous bull with troll-like bellowing	abortion; second pregnancy and final birth of the greatest hero of Ulster	greatest King of Ireland	most beautiful woman in Ireland	prophet of all historical and genealogical knowledge of Ireland	the two great bulls with their terrible bellowing: the Whitehorned of Aí and the Black of Cúailnge
place-naming: water, light, and (part of) a brightly-named bull drowned	Glæsiskelda, 'Swampy Pit of [the Bull] Glæsir' / 'Spring of Brightness', named from a brightly-named bull Glæsir, 'the Shining', that is swallowed up by the water there					Áth Lúain, 'Ford of the [Bull's] Loin' / 'Ford of Brightness', named from a body part of the brightly-named bull Finnbennach, 'the White-horned', that is swallowed up by the water there

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Appendix b: Cows and places

Given the Irish affinities of the narrative about the bull Glæsir in *Eyrbyggja saga*, it might be worthwhile to at least mention another cattle narrative that shows certain structural parallels to typically Irish narrative uses of cattle – though it should be emphasised from the outset that this case is in no way conclusive and is merely presented here as a pensive postscript to the much clearer Icelandic reception of Irish 'cattle-lore' in *Eyrbyggja saga*. In *Landnámabók* H18 (cf. S18), the settler Hvamm-Þórir loses a heifer by the name of Brynja. After a long time, this heifer is found again in the valley which is then called Brynjudalr, 'Brynja's Valley'. Instead of one heifer, however, there are now forty head of cattle, all descended from Brynja. Yet since Brynjudalr is owned by another man, named Refr, there are now two men who claim this unexpected herd: the owner of its ancestor-cow and the owner of the land where it has been found. The argument escalates to the point that Þórir attacks Refr with eight men; the site of the fight is henceforth called Þórishólar, 'Þórir's Hills'. According to S18, Þórir is killed in this skirmish. This fight about cattle recalls, in a general kind of way, that in medieval Irish literature, cattle raiding tales – 'Tána Bó' – are a favourite genre of heroic storytelling. The most famous example is *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, the centrepiece of the Ulster Cycle, which has already been mentioned. Yet many other tales could be added, such as *Táin Bó Fraích*, *Táin Bó Regamain*, *Táin Bó Regamna*, *Táin Bó Dartada* (where forty milk cows feature repeatedly and are, in the end, driven off), *Táin Bó Flidaise*, etc.[A1] Single cows can be marked out by giving supernaturally-huge quantities of milk, and then may be particularly desirable targets (*Aided Con Roi I*, §2,[A2] which may or may not go back to the Old Irish period;[A3] the late *Táin Bó Flidaise II*;[A4] also in hagiography: *Vita Endei*, ch. xxii).[A5] Yet the excessive fertility ascribed to Brynja, whose forty descendants within a few years are a biological impossibility, is to the best of my knowledge not paralleled in an Irish cow. Excessive bovine fertility is, however, connected with the Dark One of Cúailnge. According to the recension of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* in the Book of

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Leinster (early twelfth century),[A6] the Dark One would bull fifty heifers every day, and each of them would then give birth to a calf within twenty-four hours or burst (ll. 1320–1323). So there are certain parallels in Irish literature to Hvamm-Þórir's cattle-raid against Refr over a supernaturally fertile cow. These parallels, however, remain too abstract to be certain about their interpretation, and in violent agricultural societies, fighting over livestock, as well as fantasies about the multiplication of the existing herds, would probably have been endemic in any case. So the case of the place-story about the cow Brynja must remain undecided.

A1 Cf. the still-fundamental survey by Thurneysen 1921.
A2 Ed. and transl. by Thurneysen 1913, cf. the parallel passages collected *ibidem*, pp. 197 (from *Siaborcharpat Con Culainn*), 198–200 (*Dindshenchas* of Findglais), 211 (introduction to *Brinna Ferchertne* in Laud 610), with discussion of the miraculous cows on pp. 224–230.
A3 Thurneysen 1921: 666.
A4 Thurneysen 1921: 340.
A5 *Vita Endei* ed. by Plummer 1910: 60–75.
A6 Thurneysen 1921: 113–115; ed. and transl. by O'Rahilly 1967.

2.10. Beyond the Horizon: the Transmarine Land of Hvítramannaland in Landnámabók

The eight preceding chapters have discussed places and place-stories located in Iceland as well as their Irish counterparts. To conclude this survey of what appears to be a recurrent Icelandic reception of Gaelic place-lore, we will look beyond the horizon of Iceland proper and towards one of the mythological places that were thought to lie far off its shores: Hvítramannaland, the 'Land of White Men'.[614]

Loss of life during the crossing from Scandinavia, Scotland, or Ireland to Iceland was, if not an everyday, certainly not an entirely uncommon occurrence. One of the most extraordinary treatments of a ship lost at sea in Icelandic literature is the account of the disappearance of Ari, son of Már of Hólar. *Landnámabók* tells the following about his disappearance (S122; cf. the almost identical text of H94):[615]

> hann vard sæhafi til Hvitra maNa landz. þat kalla sumer IRland ed mikla. þat liGr vestr i haf nær Vinlandi env goda. þat er kallat vi. dægra sigling vestr fra IRlandi. Þadan nadi Ari eigi æ brutt at fara ok var þar skirdr. þessa saugu

614 Hvítramannaland is a classic but not the only example of the Norse reception of the Irish geographical mythology of transmarine places. Another instance of such a reception seems to be represented by the literary conceptualisation of Vínland, which is based on the Graeco-Roman myth of the Islands of the Blessed as it probably became known to the Norse through Ireland or Scotland. This complex will not be discussed in this book; cf. in detail Egeler 2017a.

615 Ed. by Finnur Jónsson 1900; my translation. There is one further explicit reference to Hvítramannaland in Icelandic saga literature (*Eiríks saga rauða* 12; ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935) as well as one passage which is generally thought to refer to it (*Eyrbyggja saga* 64 [ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935]; cf. for instance Jakob Benediktsson 1968: 162 [note 2]), even though the name 'Hvítramannaland' is not used by the latter text. In these treatments, Hvítramannaland has been recast in the context of a literary engagement with the Norse encounter with the native population of North America, and has been adapted to this purpose to such a degree that its original conceptualisation, as it is reflected in *Landnámabók*, is largely obscured. I will therefore not further discuss these reworkings of the motif; for a dedicated analysis cf., for instance, Mundal 2011.

sagdi fyst Hrafn Hlymreks fari er lengi hafdi verit i Hlymreki æ Iʀlandi. Suo
kuad Þorkell Gellisson seigia ɪslendska menn þa er heyrt haufdu fra seigia
Þorfiɴ i Orkneyium at Aʀi hefdi kendr verit æ Hvitra manna landi ok nadi
eigi brutt at fara eɴ var þar vel virdr.

'He was driven off his course to Hvítramannaland, the "Land of White Men".
Some call that Greater Ireland. That lies in the sea to the west, near Vínland
the Good. It is said to lie six days' sailing west of Ireland. Ari was not able
to sail back from there and was baptised there. Hrafn the Limerick-Farer,
who had long been in Limerick in Ireland, was the first to tell this story.
Thus said Þorkell, son of Gellir, that men from Iceland say when they had
heard Þorfinnr tell about it on the Orkneys, that Ari had been recognised in
Hvítramannaland and was not able to sail back from there, but was highly
valued there.'

According to this passage of *Landnámabók*, there was a land somewhere
between Ireland and Canada that was called Hvítramannaland, 'Land of White
Men', or Írland et Mikla, 'Greater Ireland'. This was a Christian land (as Ari
was baptised there), but also a place that the chance-visitor was not able to
leave again. Nevertheless, it was not a bad place to be, as Ari was held in high
esteem there. The origin and transmission of the tale are firmly localised in
Ireland and on the Northern Isles of Scotland: the first to tell this story would
have been a certain Hrafn *Hlymreksfari*, the 'Limerick-Farer', about whom it
is said that he had spent much of his life in Limerick (as also his nickname
unsubtly hints at); his account was then passed on to some Icelanders by Jarl
Þorfinnr on the Orkneys;[616] these Icelanders relayed the tale to Þorkell, son
of Gellir;[617] and by him, apparently, it was told to the author of this passage
of *Landnámabók*. In particular, it should be noted that the original formation
of the tale took place in Ireland and Scotland, and perhaps also that some of
its transmission involves a markedly aristocratic context.

Already more than a century ago, Fridtjof Nansen was the first to realise
that virtually every element of the account of Hvítramannaland either finds
direct parallels in Irish storytelling of the Viking Age, or even directly refers
to Ireland.[618] It may also be particularly noteworthy that the texts that provide

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616 The detail that Þorfinnr was a jarl is added by the H-recension (H94).

617 For Þorkell Gellisson's role as a lore-keeper cf. also *Íslendingabók*, chs 1, 6 (ed.
by Jakob Benediktsson 1968), where Ari the Wise quotes him as one of his most
important sources for the history of early Iceland.

618 Nansen 1911, vol. 1, pp. 353–355; vol. 2, pp. 42–51. More recently cf. Young
1937: 120–126; de Vries 1956/57: §580; Löffler 1983, vol. 1, p. 338; Ingstad 1985:

the best parallels to the Old Norse account not only all come from Ireland, but even all belong to the same Irish literary genre: the genre of *immrama* or 'Sea Voyages'.

The *immrama* are a group of texts that treat, as their name suggests, adventurous ocean voyages.[619] It is a characteristic of all these tales that these voyages have a strong otherworldly element, either in the form of a reworking of (actual or seemingly) pagan mythological motifs or in the form of a Christian monastic framework. The former possibility is exemplified by the Old Irish text *Immram Brain*, the 'Voyage of Bran', which was written as early as the eighth, perhaps even the late seventh century,[620] and indeed constitutes one of our earliest extant narrative texts in the Irish vernacular. The latter possibility, however, is by far the more common one and generally engages with the ascetic practice of *peregrinatio*, the abandoning of one's home for the sake of a higher spiritual goal.[621] Prominent texts of this latter type are the *Navigatio sancti Brendani abbatis*, the 'Voyage of Saint Brendan the Abbot', which probably dates to the ninth century, or *Immram Curaig Maele Dúin*, the 'Voyage of Mael Dúin's Leatherboat', from the ninth or tenth century.[622] Stock motifs of this openly clerical variety of the 'Sea Voyages' are the search for the Earthly Paradise on an island of the ocean to the west of Ireland, an engagement with questions of conversion and moral improvement, and encounters with idealised monks and hermits in remote island monasteries and hermitages.[623]

If one analyses the account of Hvítramannaland in *Landnámabók* for its component parts, it consists of the following individual elements: (1) The story tells of a place called 'Land of White Men', a name which suggests that it has male inhabitants and that these are somehow connected with the colour white. (2) When this place is called 'Greater Ireland', its size is compared to that of Ireland, with the implication that Hvítramannaland is larger than the latter. (3) It is located in the ocean to the west of Ireland. (4) It is an

318; Almqvist 1997: 229; Ó hÓgáin *s.a.*: 256; Mac Mathúna 1997: 214–221; Mac Mathúna *s.a.*: 180–187; Mundal 2011: 83–86; Egeler 2015b: 505–511; Egeler 2015e; Egeler 2017a. Marcus 1998: 47 is generally sceptical of all attempts to explain the story of Hvítramannaland. Woolf 2007: 285 tries to equate Hvítramannaland with Ireland as seen from Dál Riata.

619 Cf. above, p. 171.
620 McCone 2000: 43–47.
621 Cf. above, pp. 135, 170.
622 Cf. above, p. 171. Dating of *Immram Curaig Maele Dúin*: Clancy 2000: 197–198; Oskamp 1970: 47–48.
623 For a collection of important research on the 'Sea Voyages' cf. Wooding 2000a.

emphatically Christian land, since its visitor is baptised. (5) Its visitors may not be able to leave it again. (6) Nevertheless, visitors forced to remain there are honoured guests rather than prisoners. (7) The story was first told by a man who spent a significant part of his life in Ireland. All these elements tie in with Irish 'Sea Voyage' tales.

[1, 4] In the clerical 'Sea Voyages', encounters with (male) hermits and monks living on little islands generally play a central role, and such monks and hermits are repeatedly connected with the colour white. In one episode of the *Navigatio sancti Brendani*, Saint Brendan arrives at an island inhabited by the hermit Paul who is clothed solely in the hair of his body, which, just like a coat of fur, covers him entirely and is as white as snow, turning him into a 'white man' in a very literal sense (ch. 26). The same 'attire' also 'clothes' the last hermit encountered by Máel Dúin, the hero of the 'Voyage of Máel Dúin's Leatherboat' (*Immram Curaig Maíle Dúin*, §33). Perhaps it is also important that this particular encounter is crucial for Máel Dúin's conversion to a proper Christian lifestyle, recalling the detail that Ari is converted and baptised in Hvítramannaland. When the *Navigatio sancti Brendani* describes Brendan's visit to the island monastery of the community of Ailbe, it emphasises the snow-white hair of the monk who receives Saint Brendan – even though the monks living in this holy island monastery are otherwise not touched by old age (ch. 12). Thus, in sum, islands inhabited by such monks and hermits could fittingly be described as 'Lands of White Men'.

[2, 3] The location of Hvítramannaland to the west of Ireland and its description as being larger than Ireland find their closest parallel in the earliest text of the genre, *Immram Brain*. There it is said (§25):[624]

> Fil trí coícta inse cían
> isind oceon frinn aníar;
> is mó Érinn co fa dí
> cach aí díïb nó fa thrí.

> 'There are thrice fifty islands far away
> in the ocean to the west of us;
> each of them is twice or three
> times the size of Ireland.'

Such a land consisting of 'thrice fifty islands', each 'twice or three times the size of Ireland', can be well described as a 'Greater Ireland' (*Írland et Mikla*). While the imagery of *Immram Brain* largely draws on seemingly

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624 Ed. and transl. by Mac Mathúna 1985.

pagan otherworld narratives, this concept of a land of promise located specifically to the west of Ireland is also fundamental for the more openly ecclesiastical representatives of the genre: also the 'Paradise of God in the vastness of the sea' (*paradisus Dei in spacio maris*) in the *Navigatio sancti Brendani* is located to the west of Ireland (ch. 1).

[5, 6] The two details that the visitor to Hvítramannaland may find himself unable to leave, but nevertheless is an honoured guest rather than a prisoner, are likewise found in both the 'mythological' *Immram Brain* and in the openly monastic 'Sea Voyages'. The whole plot of *Immram Brain* revolves around how one day an otherworldly woman comes to Bran's castle and exhorts him to set sail for her land in the west, where she promises him eternal life. Bran finds he cannot resist the allure of this promise, sets sail, finds the island of the otherworld woman, and there becomes the honoured guest of the eternal feast in her hall. Yet in the course of time, when one of his men becomes homesick and wants to return to Ireland, Bran and his crew have to realise that their voyage has been a one-way journey and that a return to the human world is impossible. While they may enjoy eternal life in an insular otherworld, to set foot on Irish soil now is death, and whoever does so crumbles to dust as if he had been buried for centuries. So Bran has no choice but to remain out there somewhere in the miraculous world of the ocean. Similarly, though without the perhaps tragic element of *Immram Brain*, a return to the secular world is not always possible in the *Navigatio sancti Brendani* as well. On one of the islands in the ocean that Saint Brendan and his monks visit, they encounter a community of holy men that consists of three choirs (one of which is clothed in white robes), which perform an eternal chant in praise of God. When Brendan lands there, these holy men request him to 'return our brother to us' (*reddite nobis fratrem nostrum*), and Brendan has to comply with this request by leaving one of his monks behind on this island. This monk is then admitted into the community of the holy men of this island, and his fate is described as a great honour (ch. 17).

Thus, every single feature of Hvítramannaland finds a direct and exact counterpart in Irish stories that were current in Ireland as early as the Viking Age.[625] Even the social strata in which the narratives are set are directly comparable: just as the Hvítramannaland-narrative was passed on by a Norse jarl on the Orkneys, also the protagonists of the Irish tales – Bran, Máel Dúin, the holy abbot Brendan – all belong to the noble stratum of Irish society. If these correspondences are taken together with the explicit statement of *Landnámabók* that the first Norseman to tell the story of Hvítramannaland

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625 Cf. the summary table below in the appendix to this sub-chapter.

was a man 'who had long been in Limerick in Ireland',[626] and who was so fundamentally characterised by his place of residence that he even derived his nickname 'Limerick-Farer' from it, then it seems beyond reasonable doubt that Hvítramannaland is exactly what it appears to be: a close Norse adaptation of an Irish imaginary island.

It is probably particularly significant that the context of the first telling of this tale is the loss of a ship at sea. It seems that somebody, rather than accepting that Ari Másson had found a watery grave, preferred to think of him as having reached an Irish imaginary land of salvation. Here, poignantly, geographical myth turns into a strategy for coping with loss, and the vastness of the ocean is turned into a place where, to the point of self-delusion, there resides hope.

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626 In general on the Norse in Limerick cf. Wilson 2014: 31–32.

Appendix: Tabular summary of the parallels between the account of Hvítramannaland in Landnámabók S122/H94 and Viking Age Irish narratives of the immrama-genre

Hvítramannaland in *Landnámabók*	The imaginary Atlantic islands of the *immrama*
'Land of White Men'	Islands inhabited by white-haired/white-furred monks and hermits
'Greater Ireland'	'fifty islands … twice or three / times the size of Ireland'
Location in the ocean to the west of Ireland	Location 'in the ocean to the west of us' in *Immram Brain*; location of the *paradisus Dei in spacio maris* in the *Navigatio sancti Brendani*
Christian land; baptism	Islands of monks and hermits; conversion of Máel Dúin to a Christian life
Impossibility of leaving	Bran unable to return to the human world; Saint Brendan forced to leave behind one of his monks to become part of a spiritual island community
Ari Másson is honoured	Bran an honoured guest of the otherworld; Brendan's companion entering the spiritual island community described as an honour
First told by Hrafn the Limerick-Farer who had long lived in Limerick	Common motifs of Irish storytelling of the Viking Age, when the Norse presence in Ireland, and its exchange with the Norse settlers in Iceland, would have been at its most intense – as exemplified by Hrafn the Limerick-Farer

3   Epilogue: Hoofprints and Sagas

3.1.   Naming and Narrating Place: Summary of the Evidence and Some Initial Conclusions

Summary of the Evidence

Standing on the edge of Aran, at the hoofprints of the water-horse and her foal above Poll Dick, and facing outwards towards the Atlantic Ocean beyond the cliff, the tableau presented by the site seems like an almost iconic reflection of the relationship between Irish and Icelandic place-lore. More of the surface of this 'pasture' is formed by blank sheets of black bedrock than by grass, and there is nothing to break the force of the Atlantic winds. During the winter storms this wind can lash the ocean even over the perpendicular walls of the cliffs, piling up the boulder-wall of a storm beach that marks the end of the area where any grass is able to grow at all and beyond which there is nothing but smooth wet rock. Caught between a rock and a wet place, as it were, the land here is among the most miserable and forbidding that agricultural land can possibly be. Yet the pony-sized hoofprints, left by two skidding sea-horses that misjudged the jump up the cliffs, inject a note of humour and the grotesque into the mood of the land, which somewhat breaks its harshness and turns it into something much more homely. In Iceland this seems mirrored by the hoofprints left by Auðun the Stutterer's sea-horse on Snæfellsnes: it was there, somewhere below the towering Snæfellsjökull glacier, that he caught a lake-horse fit for a hero, used it to bring his hay home from his home-field, and in the end had nothing to show for his trouble but the imprints that its hoofs left in the hard ground when the water-horse lost its patience. This is not only a story which in its main features is composed entirely of elements of medieval Irish heroic narrative, it also shares the humour and love of the grotesque which seems to shimmer through the hoofprints at Poll Dick. Furthermore, just as the hoofprints in Aran seem to turn a fundamentally bleak stretch of land into something almost homely, the use of Gaelic stories in Iceland appeared to be a strategy for turning the new and empty land into 'home', a home that recalled the areas of Norse settlement in Ireland and Scotland where many of the first Icelandic settlers would have learned what to perceive as 'home'. Evoking as they do the tale of Auðun the Stutterer and

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his lake-horse as well as some of the moods and apparent functions of many such tales, the hoofprints at Poll Dick can act as a reminder that there are both general structural parallels between Irish and Icelandic place-lore and connections created by the recurrence of very specific individual stories or story-elements.

The first part of this book, after introducing the general theoretical and historical background of the discussion, focused on specific toponymic links between Iceland and Scotland and attempted to outline a number of fundamental structural parallels between some aspects of Gaelic and Icelandic storytelling about places. The discussion of the toponymic links summarised how the toponyms Katanes, Jórvík, Papey, and Papýli, as well as perhaps the toponymy of the Esja-area, illustrate that in some cases Norse settlers in Iceland seem to have given names to Icelandic places that did not originate in Scandinavia but had been coined in Scotland or northern England. The toponym *Dímon*, furthermore, suggested that a Gaelic phrase could be borrowed into Old Norse specifically to be used in the onomasticon of the Norse colonies in Scotland and in Iceland.

Structural parallels between Gaelic and Icelandic place-storytelling were then explored in the longest section of the chapter. This section contrasted the Irish place-lore of 'Heather Mound', 'Medb's Venerated Tree', and Beltraw Strand with the Icelandic place-stories of Gufuskálar, Flugumýrr, and Dritsker. The comparison of these six place-stories suggested that there were indeed close parallels in the way in which Gaelic and Icelandic culture approached space and place through narrative: these tales showed a prominent common tendency towards a remarkably tongue-in-cheek approach to the 'meaning' of places, especially in the way that both Irish and Icelandic place-stories tended to take their starting point from a semantically clear toponym which was then 'explained' by a story that took a conscious and grotesque step away from the semantics of the place-name, twisting them into an entertaining and consciously implausible narrative. In both cultures it was also a recurrent feature that such stories contained narrative markers which made clear to their audiences that they were not to be believed as 'historical' but understood as the witty constructs they were. Another parallel between the two narrative cultures was that the physicality of the landscape could be treated in very similar ways, showing the same pervasive love of the absurd, grotesque, and darkly comical that characterised their respective treatments of place-names. This particular 'grotesquely-minded' attitude to space and place has to be noted as something that potentially constitutes a very specific parallel between Gaelic and Icelandic culture. Work such as the ethnographies of Bronisław Malinowski in the Western Pacific and Keith H. Basso among the Western

Apache suggests that the use of landscape for the creation of 'meaning' in the sense of providing fundamental orientation may be a near-universal feature of human culture. In an interesting contrast to such a 'serious' approach to the land, both in Ireland and in Iceland there is a pervasive love of playful approaches to the landscape that view it through the lens of the grotesque. This may constitute a noteworthy and non-trivial structural parallel between the Irish and the Icelandic 'senses of place'.

The core chapter of this book, *Narrating Place*, then presented a survey of a number of specific Icelandic place-stories which suggest a direct adaptation of Gaelic place-narratives and other ways of creating spatial 'meaning' (in the broadest sense) that seemed derived from the Gaelic cultures of Ireland and Scotland.

After a general introduction that outlined a methodology for distinguishing direct 'borrowings' or adaptations from chance parallels, the first theme to be discussed, in the section on *Hoofprints*, was the motif of the water-horse and the imprint it left on the landscape. The tale of the water-horse that appeared on the farm of Auðun the Stutterer on Snæfellsnes seemed to be a very close adaptation of motifs taken from Irish place-lore, which in Ireland had gained considerable prominence through its connection with Cú Chulainn, the central hero of the Ulster Cyle of tales.

The section *Floating Church Bells* then discussed the foundation legend of the church built by the Hebridean settler Ørlygr Hrappsson on the western Icelandic peninsula of Kjalarnes. Claiming that the church was built where a holy bishop's iron bell had been washed ashore, this tale strikingly parallels the foundation legend of the important monastic complex and episcopal see of Ardmore on the south coast of Ireland, as well as evoking the importance of bells for Irish ecclesiastical founding legends more generally. Furthermore, the Icelandic tale incorporates several explicit references to the Gaelic world. The similarity of this Norse founding legend to Gaelic ones, and taken together with such explicit references, strongly suggests that what looks like a Gaelic story may indeed be just that. By implication it seems that the sacralisation of the local landscape of Kjalarnes directly followed patterns of the semantisation of space that were derived from Gaelic-speaking regions of Ireland or Scotland.

Saints and Salmon engaged with another foundation legend, in this case the foundation legend of a church on Akranes, again a peninsula in western Iceland. This church is tied to the figure of Ásólfr, a Christian of Irish stock whose miracle-working powers, eremitic tendencies, and rejection of any social intercourse with his pagan environment suggested that his biography might be most appropriately read as the *vita* of an Irish saint. In particular it

could be read in the context of the Irish monastic practice of *peregrinatio* and of miracles found, among others, in the Old Irish 'Life of Brigit', the Latin Life of Saint Enda of Aran, and various texts from Patrician and Columban hagiography.

High Crosses in Western Iceland then made a slight detour from the engagement with Icelandic adaptations of Gaelic narratives by approaching the *Landnámabók*-account of the crosses erected by Auðr the Deep-Minded on the Krosshólar Hills, yet again in western Iceland. Here I suggested that Auðr, who is described as probably a Hebridean by birth and somebody who had spent most of her early life in Ireland and Scotland, replicated the Hebridean-Irish custom of erecting High Crosses to turn the landscape of her new home on the Hvammsfjörður Fjord into a facsimile of the Hebridean landscape of her youth. Thus, rather than adapting a Gaelic narrative to the new land, she adapted the physical strategy of engaging with the landscape by erecting Gaelic monuments, achieving the same effect of giving the landscape a Gaelic 'meaning' as is elsewhere achieved through stories. This interpretation of the Krosshólar may also throw some light on a common type of Icelandic toponyms formed with *Kross-*/*Krossa-*.

The section on *Papar* approached the pseudo-historical Icelandic idea that the first human beings to discover Iceland had not been the Norse of the Viking Age but saintly Irish hermits in search of a space for ascetic retreat. Re-analysing the historical, medieval folkloric, and toponymic sources for this idea, I propose that the *papar* did not belong to history 'as it really happened' but rather were a figment of the Icelandic cultural memory which, largely adapting techniques developed in close contact with the Gaelic monastic culture of Scotland and the Scottish isles, effectively served the purpose of turning Iceland into an 'island of saints' in order to imbue the newly discovered land with Christian concepts of sanctity.

A strikingly idiosyncratic way of combining notions of *Life, Death, and Immortality* recurs both in the northern Icelandic valley of Hvanndalur and at the Irish monastic site of Monaincha in County Tipperary: both places are connected with the peculiar idea that they are places where it is impossible to die but where the impossibility of death in combination with the presence of old age and disease ultimately makes it necessary to flee these places in order to find release from one's pain in death. As with respect to both places there are indications that their narratives may go back as far as the Viking Age, and as the monastery at Monaincha was (to its sorrow) known to the Viking Age Norse, it would seem that here again a piece of Gaelic monastic place-lore was transferred to Iceland.

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Less ecclesiastical are the *Hospitable Halls* of Ireland and Iceland, houses of excessive hospitality which straddle roads and pride themselves on offering food and shelter to every man or woman passing. Given the exact correspondence between the (tales of this) practice in Ireland and Iceland, and given the explicitly direct connections to the Gaelic world established in part of the relevant Icelandic material, it seems here that Icelandic accounts of the history of places have adapted Gaelic strategies to illustrate the magnificence of the former inhabitants of these places and, by implication, of the places themselves. Here it may be particularly noteworthy how places, in an environment that probably was not the most affluent in contemporary Europe, were turned into 'em-place-ments' of wealth and abundance, and especially of an abundance of food.

Curious relationships between *Bulls and Places* are described in *Eyrbyggja saga* and in prominent Irish narratives of the famous bulls of Ulster and Connacht, the Dark One of Cúailnge and the Whitehorned of Aí. Tales of conception through ingestion, the rebirth of semi-otherworldly men as bulls, and the creation of place-names playing on themes of water and light through the death of such a bull recur in both the Icelandic saga and in various Irish texts in a way which suggests that a grotesque Icelandic tale of transformations, bulls, and bloodshed has been directly adapted from Irish narrative culture. Furthermore, like no other example, it shows to what an extreme degree such an adaptation can reflect an informed act of cultural translation that appreciated the full richness and complexity of the Irish narrative outlook on place, including even details that in the Irish tale would have been accessible only to an audience with an in-depth understanding of the semantics of the place-names involved in the story.

The last section looked *Beyond the Horizon*. In the Icelandic geographical imagination, Hvítramannaland or 'White Men's Land' was a mysterious Christian land located somewhere to the west of Ireland in the vastness of the Atlantic Ocean. What makes this idea interesting in the present context is that Hvítramannaland not only exactly parallels Irish concepts of wondrous islands out in the Atlantic (in every last one of its elements) but *Landnámabók* also gives us the name of the man who first told this tale – and this is a man 'who had long been in Limerick in Ireland' (*er lengi hafdi verit i Hlymreka a Irlandi*). Here we are told almost explicitly that Norsemen in Ireland were indeed interested in Irish conceptualisations of space and place and transmitted the place-lore they heard to Iceland.

Some Initial Conclusions

The primary object of the survey presented here was Icelandic place-narratives that to a substantial extent appear to be based on or influenced by Gaelic strategies of giving 'meaning' to place. One fundamental challenge in such an undertaking is that the object studied by a survey of this kind must itself first be established through an act of interpreting a very open corpus of material: it is not 'obvious' that a place narrative, for instance, is based on a Gaelic approach to place but rather such a Gaelic connection must be painstakingly demonstrated before it at all becomes clear that something should be counted among the material to be covered by the survey. Nor is it 'obvious' how extensive a tradition must be to qualify as a narrative that should be discussed, or how close its relationship to a place must be to qualify as place-lore.

To give some examples of these kinds of challenges, William Sayers argues that the account of the land-taking of Seal-Þórir and the packhorse Skálm in *Landnámabók* S68/H56 closely corresponds to the Irish geographical mythology connected with Lough Neagh.[627] I do not think that the parallels between these traditions are close enough to warrant a detailed discussion in the present context,[628] but others might well disagree with this assessment. Similar is the case of Loðmundr the Old, who diverts a flood of the river Jǫkulsá from his farm by sticking the tip of his staff into it (*Landnámabók* S289/H250): the use of a staff to tame a flooding river finds a medieval Irish counterpart in the *Vita sancti Colmani* (ch. 21; 'Salamanca' version: ch. 29)[629]

627 Sayers 1995 (1997): 175 (note 36); cf. Sayers 1985. Recently on the mythology of Lough Neagh cf. Toner 2014: 277–288.

628 In addition to the alternative parallels pointed out by Hermann Pálsson 1988, a closer (though still inconclusive) parallel is also found in the *Tripartite Life* of Saint Patrick where on one occasion a fully-loaded packhorse lies down with its load and cannot be made to get up again until Patrick himself comes and intervenes, which results in a place being named (*Vita tripartita*, p. 240, ll. 12–20, cf. p. 248, ll. 19–20). Furthermore, there are a number of instances in Irish hagiography where a saint is buried where oxen stop (for attestations in various Lives of Saint Enda, Saint Molua, and Saint Patrick see Bray 1992: 88) or where an animal points the way to the site of a monastery (for attestations in various Lives of Saint Berach, Saint Ciarán of Clonmacnoise, Saint Fínán, Saint Mochoemog, Saint Molua, Saint Patrick, and Saint Ruadán see Bray 1992: 90). Just like the tale of Seal-Þórir and his horse, all these narratives tell of the creation of places by means of an animal oracle, but the parallels are not necessarily close enough to confidently posit a direct connection between the tales.

629 Ed. by Plummer 1910, vol. 1, pp. 258–273; 'Salamanca' version ed. by Heist 1965: 209–224. Sharpe 1991 ascribes the 'Salamanca' version of this Life to the

where the staff of Saint Colmán Élo is used to avert a flood from a monastery that had, unwisely, been built at a confluence of two rivers prone to winter floods. This parallel use of the staffs of the Irish saint and the Norse sorcerer is curious – but is it significant in any way? Another instance of this kind of interpretative challenge is presented by the accounts of burnings that are found in both literatures. In Icelandic literature in particular it is a stock-motif that a building is burned with some or all of its inhabitants inside. The burning that forms the culmination of *Njáls saga* is just the most famous among a multitude of examples. In Irish literature such a burning is prominently attempted in the eighth/twelfth-century tale *Mesca Ulad*, the 'Intoxication of the Men of Ulster'.[630] Yet is it justified to postulate any kind of historical connection between such tales of burnings in Irish and Icelandic literature, given that both these literatures were created by violent societies where such brutalities were just simply part of real life? The same question is also raised by accounts of fights at fords that lead to the creation of place-names. In *Njáls saga* (chs 71–72) Gunnarr of Hlíðarendi is ambushed by a large number of his enemies. Foreseeing their attack, he decides to confront them at a nearby ford. There Gunnarr and his companion Kolskeggr put up a truly heroic fight against the overwhelming number of men attacking them, slaying, drowning, and wounding their assailants until in the end the attackers give up their assault when one of their leaders, a certain Þorgeirr, is killed by Gunnarr who impales him on his halberd, lifting him up and throwing him out into the river. The body then drifts downstream until it catches on a boulder in the ford, *ok heitir þar síðan Þorgeirsvað*, 'and the place there has since been called Þorgeirsvað, "Þorgeirr's Ford"'. This episode quite closely recalls the Irish stock-motif of Cú Chulainn fighting his enemies at a ford: a large part of the plot of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, the 'Cattle Raid of Cúailnge', consists of a series of duels that Cú Chulainn fights at fords, facing one Connacht champion after the other and thus severely delaying the advance of the Connacht army. We have already encountered one instance of these fights at fords, when Cú Chulainn fought the Connacht hero Fróech. Just as in the *Njáls saga* fight, the hero's opponent is killed; and just as in the Icelandic case, the ford is named in memory of this killing: *Áth Fraích iss ed ainm ind átha sin co bráth.* 'Ever after that ford was called Áth Fraích, "Fróech's Ford".'[631] This pattern recurs repeatedly in

'O'Donoghue group' of Irish Saints' Lives (Sharpe 1991: 297), for which he suggests a date of composition before the year 800 (Sharpe 1991: 334).

630 For a discussion and summary cf. Thurneysen 1921: 473–484; dating: Thurneysen 1921: 667–668. Ed. by Watson 1941; transl. by Watson 1942.

631 Above, p. 54.

the *Táin*.[632] The common pattern seen in these and similar tales – a heroic fight at a ford leading to a place-name derived from the man who died in this fight – makes it very tempting indeed to suspect a direct connection at least in terms of underlying attitudes to the naming of fords; this all the more so since Gunnarr is also connected with an Irish motif in the form of his hound Sámr.[633] Yet ultimately the similarities between the accounts are simply not far-reaching and complex enough to warrant any degree of certainty. Thus, this as well as the preceding examples illustrate the problem that in many cases it is anything but clear whether a particular Icelandic place-story should be considered as based on Gaelic place-lore motifs.

Another and perhaps more fundamental problem is exemplified by the question of whether the whole of Christian toponymy should be seen as having been impacted by Gaelic approaches to place in Icelandic culture: this may serve to illustrate the basic problem of how extensive a tradition must be to qualify as place-lore which should be discussed in this study. According to *Landnámabók*, the settler Helgi the Lean had been brought up partly on the Hebrides and partly in Ireland (S217/H184) and when he came to Iceland he hallowed his land-claim with pagan fire rituals but also named his dwelling-place Kristnes or 'Christ-Peninsula' (S218/H184). The *Sturlubók*-recension explicitly connects this name with Helgi's Christian faith (S218): 'Helgi believed in Christ and therefore named his dwelling-place after him.' (*Helgi trudi ꜹ Krist ok kendi þui vid hann bustad siɴ.*) Helgi's biographical context as told in *Landnámabók* clearly implies that this act of naming the land was inspired by Helgi's Irish-Hebridean Christian faith, i.e. it clearly reflects a Gaelic religious approach to space and place, and the same might have been true for most early acts of a Christian religious semantisation of the land. So

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632 Other fords that in the first recension of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (ed. and transl. by O'Rahilly 1976) are named after slain enemies (and the occasional slain bystander) are *Áth Lethan* (l. 950), *Áth Cuillne* (l. 1231), *Áth mBuide* (l. 1506), *Áth Céit Chúile* (ll. 2068, 2071), *Áth Tamuin* (ll. 2486–2487), *Áth Ḟir Diad* (ll. 2548, 3868, 3886), and *Áth Féne* (l. 3513, 'Ford of the Troop of Fighting-Men', a troop which was collectively annihilated there). *Áth nGabla* (l. 335) or 'Ford of the Fork' is explained as being named after a forked branch on which Cú Chulainn impaled the severed heads of several opponents he killed there. *Áth Tolam Sét* (l. 1520, 'Ford of the Speedy Path' or 'Ford of the Speedy Treasure') gets its name through word-play when Cú Chulainn kills the satirist Redg there. *Áth Traiged* (ll. 2029–2030, 'Ford of the Step') is explained as being named after the backwards step that Cú Chulainn took from an already lethally wounded opponent, granting the dying man his last wish to have the great hero yield ground to him.

633 Above, p. 39.

the point could be made that one should include all such traditions. But the survey presented in Chapter 2 has not provided, nor did it aim to provide, complete coverage of such 'fleeting' place-lore where indeed very little narrative is given. Chapter 2 instead focused on place-lore that involved more extensive narratives and thus allowed a much more far-reaching analysis. This had the consequence, however, that a line had to be drawn between 'enough narrative' (e.g. Auðr's crosses) and 'not quite enough narrative' (e.g. Helgi's Christ-Peninsula) and the question as to where exactly one was to draw this line was not decided by the material but by its interpreter.

Similar is the situation when a decision must be made as to whether a tale should be considered place-lore rather than a narrative about persons that just happens to take place somewhere and whose setting seems largely interchangeable and inconsequential. For example a case could be made that the account of the witch Ljót in *Landnámabók* (S180/H147) contains strong and perhaps significant Irish reminiscences. The grotesque behaviour of Ljót when she attempts to perform a last feat of magic, walking backwards with her head between her legs, recalls Irish descriptions of magical practice and practitioners such as the monstrous woman Cailb in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* ('The Destruction of the Hostel of Da Derga', §§61–63)[634] or Lug's magical performance in *Cath Maige Tuired* ('The [Second] Battle of Mag Tuired', §129).[635] The end of this particular encounter in *Landnámabók*, which culminates in a beheading, also recalls *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* which ends with the decapitation of the king (§157). Furthermore, Ljót's statement that had her magic been successfully completed it would have driven her enemies to insanity, reminds us that a particular term for madness caused by the terrors of battle and the threat of violent death was borrowed from Irish into Old Norse (*verða at gjalti*, 'to go mad with terror' < Irish *geilt*).[636] In line with this, Cailb in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* also causes a great supernatural terror (§63) and the Irish demonesses of battle can even inspire such fear that a hundred men die from it (*Táin Bó Cúailnge*, ll. 3942–3944 and 4033–4035).[637] However, even though the tale of the witch Ljót is extant in *Landnámabók* and thus appears in a strongly place-focused context, it was not incorporated into the survey presented above. The reason in this case was that the story of Ljót seems to lack any clear focus on place: of course it plays itself out at a number of places, but in contrast to the nine narratives discussed above it tells

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634 Ed. by Knott 1936.

635 Ed. and transl. by Gray 1982; Stokes 1891.

636 Bergholm 2012: 57–76, esp. pp. 68–76. Cf. *eDIL*, *s.v.* '1 geilt'; *ONP*, *s.v.* 'gjalt'.

637 Ed. and transl. by O'Rahilly 1976. Cf. Egeler 2011: 166–169.

us nothing about the making of a place, the local remains 'still visible' at that place, or its properties. While it is set at a place, its relationship to 'place' as a concept seems too tangential to treat it as an actual place-story.[638]

All this just serves to emphasise that the selection of material discussed in this study is (to use a pet term of today's humanities and social sciences) 'constructed'. But this, as such, is not a problem – if only because it is a feature of all scholarly work. If one were to present a survey of medieval stone sculpture, one would face exactly the same kind of challenges when having to decide where to draw the line between a 'sculpted' stone and one merely 'dressed'. But even so, and perhaps for this very reason, one must be aware of the unavoidably 'constructed' nature of the corpus and especially of the fact that the somewhat fluid boundaries of its construction mean that the presented corpus cannot in any meaningful way be 'complete' in an absolute sense. This even more so since a 'complete' survey of the reception of Gaelic place-lore in Icelandic place-storytelling would presuppose a complete and in-depth comparison of two of the largest vernacular literatures of medieval Europe – not a realistic undertaking by any standards. This being said, and within the boundaries of both practical restrictions and a consciously constructed corpus, completeness was still intended in a common-sense sort of way even though it certainly has not been achieved in any absolute sense: after Chapter 1 presented some general context, the survey in Chapter 2 assembled a 'complete' overview of the Icelandic place-narratives that I have become aware of as reflecting a marked and – in most cases apparently conscious – reception and adaptation of Gaelic place-lore.[639]

638 Cf. the problems of 'Ortssage' as a critical term noted by Petzoldt 2003.
639 The aim of 'completeness' is also the reason why some sections cover material which I have already discussed elsewhere; this is especially true for the motif of the water-horse (Egeler 2014), Hvítramannaland (Egeler 2015e; Egeler 2017a), and the Ódáinsakur/'Island of the Living' (Egeler 2015b). I would, however, like to emphasise that revisiting this material does not imply simple repetition. My first attempt at engaging with the water-horse of Auðun the Stutterer fell much short of understanding the social processes and motivations at work; in my previous engagements with the Ódáinsakur I had overlooked important evidence on the Irish side; and my previous approach to the myth of the *papar* (Egeler 2015b: 282–285) simply followed the predominant opinion of assuming a real historical presence of *papar* in pre-Norse Iceland, which I now have come to reject as entirely unlikely and is unsupported by the nature of the material, which represents nothing more (but also nothing less) than an ultimately fictional construction of a cultural memory aimed at construction of a 'home' rather than a recording of history. The discussions presented in this book advance the results of a genuine revisiting of the material in a spatial perspective markedly different

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The question now is: What conclusions does this survey allow? Was there an 'Atlantic outlook' on place and on 'being at home'? The nine examples discussed above are enough to fill a book – but are they also enough to show a marked Gaelic influence on the Icelandic perception and construction of space, place, and home?

It certainly would be unhelpful to try to quantify how much of the Icelandic outlook on place was shaped in a Gaelic mould, nor does the extant material allow us to put a percentage on the Gaelic influence on the Icelandic sense of place: narrative – and especially a corpus of narrative whose transmission is as much due to chance as that of the medieval corpus – is much more suited to qualitative than to quantitative approaches. Yet whatever one may think about percentages, the nine examples discussed above do seem to make clear that the Gaelic cultures of Ireland and Scotland did have an impact on the construction of space and place in medieval Iceland. That the results of this impact, or at least some of them, survived long enough to be recorded in our extant sources implies that they 'made sense', or at least enough sense, to a general Icelandic public so as to be handed down the generations rather than being replaced with more purely Norse approaches at the first opportunity. Perhaps this preservation more than anything else indicates that it is indeed justified to speak of an (however abstract and structural) 'Atlantic outlook' on place and home: the Icelandic attitude to space seems to have allowed for the widespread integration of Gaelic component parts into the Old Norse-Icelandic repertoire of attitudes and techniques on how to engage with space and turn it into home. It seems that there were sufficient structural parallels between Norse and Gaelic approaches to place, some of which have been outlined in Chapter 1.3 on *Playing with Places*, to allow specific Gaelic place-stories to be integrated into the Norse-Icelandic corpus of place-lore, creating an overall corpus of stories and techniques that transcended its primary cultural roots in Scandinavia and became something broader, something which perhaps could be termed 'North-West Atlantic'.

A corpus of nine place-stories does not indicate that the Old Norse-Icelandic outlook on place became fundamentally Gaelic; such a claim would stretch the evidence to breaking point. But it does indicate that Gaelic heritage did play a role for what was to become the Icelandic sense of place, and that this role was not negligible. As I have emphasised above, the Icelandic narrative corpus does not lend itself to quantification; certainly not to a quantification that would reliably reflect the whole picture. For purely illustrative purposes,

from my previous approaches, and they correct previous misinterpretations more often than I am happy to admit.

Map 9: The 'geographical' distribution of religious and supernatural elements in the *Sturlubók*-recension of *Landnámabók*. The appearance of pagan motifs is marked by black circles (●), the appearance of Christian motifs by hatched circles (⊘); places which have both pagan and Christian associations are marked with circles half hatched and half black (◐). Localisations in many cases are tentative. For some places whose location is too obscure, no localisation has been attempted, so this map cannot make a claim to completeness.

however, it might be worthwhile to look at some quantities in at least one text – even though it is virtually impossible to make a meaningful decision about how representative this is for the overall cultural situation, which ultimately is irrecoverable. Yet with this *caveat* in mind, it is still interesting to have a look at 'numbers' in *Landnámabók*, our most important source for Gaelic-influenced Icelandic place-lore.

Perhaps most interesting, and just about manageable, are the places with religious or supernatural associations. The *Sturlubók*-recension of *Landnámabók* connects about 93 more or less mappable sites with religious or supernatural associations in the form of either place-stories or religious place-names, both pagan and Christian (map 9). Of these 93 sites, 6 sites (6.5%) are directly connected with the stories discussed in Chapter 2. Another 5 are *Kross-/Krossa-* toponyms that might be connected with similar ideas as reflected by Auðr's High Crosses on the Krosshólar Hills (cf. map 5). This would bring the total percentage of arguably 'Gaelicised' places up to 11.8%. Given the crucial role of the Gaelic world for early Christianity in Iceland

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one might also wonder whether the whole 19 mappable 'Christian' places of *Landnámabók* could not, in some measure, be considered affected by a Gaelic sense of place. Taken together with the water-horse story, this would bring the total number of arguably Gaelic-influenced supernatural/religious sites in Iceland as reflected in *Sturlubók* up to 20, i.e. 21.5% of the total.

There are too many insecurities attached to this material to make it worth-while continuing this game with numbers; as I have emphasised earlier, this material cannot in any meaningful way be quantified, at least not with any claim to accuracy or representativity. But nevertheless, even with such reservations, mulling over the numbers of places with religious and supernatural connotations in S-*Landnámabók*, and the percentages of such places that could or should probably be seen in Gaelic contexts, this material could serve to illustrate that the nine tales discussed in Chapter 2 could well tell a bigger story than their, on the surface, comparatively small number might at first suggest.

3.2.   Recurrent Themes, and Some Further Conclusions

If one looks at the distribution of the instances of Icelandic adaptations of Gaelic place-lore and Gaelic strategies for the semantisation of space discussed in Chapter 2, there seems to be, at first glance, a certain western Icelandic focus (map 10). The examples of such an adaptation, however, are not restricted to western Iceland, nor is their clustering more prominent than the general clustering of extant narrative lore in the west of the island: overall, eastern Iceland generally is connected with considerably fewer narratives than the western half of the country,[640] which ties in with the generally better conditions for human settlement in the west and north-west of Iceland. Thus it seems that the reception of Gaelic strategies for semanticising the landscape overall was distributed roughly equally across the main areas of settlement. This is reinforced by the distribution of the Scottish-Norse place-names Jórvík/York (above, map 1) and the various *pap*-toponyms (above, map 6), which have no particular western focus at all, just as there is no western focus in the distribution of *Kross-* toponyms (above, map 5), which might be toponymic reflexes of High Crosses as they were erected in the Hebridean fashion by Auðr the Deep-Minded.

Much more marked than any western focus in Iceland is the recurrence of Hebridean connections (map 10). Auðun the Stutterer, whose lake-horse so much recalls the Grey of Macha in the tales of the Ulster Cycle, is the son of Váli the Strong, who emigrated to the Hebrides when he had to leave Norway. Ørlygr Hrappsson, whose church on the Kjalarnes Peninsula was furnished with virtually the same origin legend as Ardmore, was a Hebridean by upbringing, having been fostered by the (if arguably unhistorical) Hebridean bishop Patrick. Auðr the Deep-Minded, who seems to have erected Gaelic High Crosses on the shores of the Breiðafjörður Fjord, was the daughter of Ketill Flat-Nose, who had made himself the Norse ruler of the Hebrides; so in all likelihood, this is where she would have spent her youth, and in any case this is where she returned after the death of her first husband. Ketill the Foolish, whose land at Kirkjubœr was associated with a legend about the Christian-mythical *papar*, was a Hebridean Christian and the grandson of

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640 Cf. map 9 and map 11.

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Map 10: The overall location of the main cases of an Icelandic reception of Gaelic place-stories and other Gaelic strategies for semanticising the landscape: [1] Water-Horse Hoofprints; [2] Floating Church Bells; [3] Saints and Salmon; [4] High Crosses; [5] Papar; [6] Life, Death, and Immortality; [7] Hospitable Halls; [8] Bulls and Places; [9] Beyond the Horizon: Hvítramannaland. Tales explicitly connected to the Hebrides are marked in grey. Additional implicit connections to the Hebrides can be assumed at least for all *papar*-lore.

Ketill Flat-Nose. Finally, one of the three hospitable halls of Iceland was run by the wife of a grandson of Váli the Strong, the father of Auðun the Stutterer. For more than half the stories discussed in this book there is an explicit Hebridean connection. This is worthwhile emphasising, not least because in today's research, the Hebrides are a marginal area both from the perspective of medieval Celtic studies and from the perspective of Scandinavian studies. That they appear to have played an absolutely central role in the Icelandic adaptation of Gaelic attitudes to space and place helps to remind us that this seemingly marginal archipelago during the Viking Age was anything but marginal and culturally as well as geographically occupied a central position in the world of the North-West Atlantic cultures.

Similarly it might be worthwhile noting how much of this material is connected with protagonists who, in one way or another, are related to each other. Three of the nine narrative complexes are connected to the descendants of

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one man, the Hebridean ruler Ketill Flat-Nose:[641] Auðr the Deep-Minded, who erects High Crosses at Hvammr, is his daughter; Helgi *bjóla* – who is a 'relative' (not further specified) of Ørlygr Hrappsson and advises him on where exactly to build his farm after the episcopal iron bell has been washed ashore to mark the place for construction of a church – is his son; and Ketill the Foolish, who lives at a place formerly inhabited by *papar*, is his grandson. Two more complexes are connected with the descendants of Váli the Strong: Auðun the Stutterer is his son, and Langaholt's-Þóra, who runs a hospitable hall, is his granddaughter-in-law. Almost as much as geography, genealogy also acts as a unifying element within the Icelandic reception of Gaelic place-lore. Yet it is not simply a 'family business': while some families indeed seem to have been particularly prone to using Gaelic place-lore to give 'meaning' to Icelandic places, not all of this reception of Gaelic techniques of engaging with space and place can be traced back to the families of Ketill Flat-Nose and Váli the Strong. The instances of such a reception which cannot be connected to these families show that the potential for such a reception was there throughout Icelandic society. This is also confirmed by the evidence of place-names: the geographical distribution of toponyms like Jórvík and Katanes, which have been imported to Iceland from Scotland and northern England, clearly illustrates that the reception of approaches to place derived from Britain and the Gaelic world was (albeit thinly) spread throughout the whole of Iceland and its settlers.

A central leitmotif of the Icelandic reception of Gaelic attitudes to place appears to have been a particular affinity towards the supernatural and especially towards a Christian semantisation of the land. Of the toponyms discussed in this book, *papar*-names and the Christian toponyms formed with *Kross-/Krossa-* ('Cross-') are among the most numerous,[642] and even clearer is the prominence of religion and the supernatural in the stories discussed: of the nine narrative complexes reviewed above, the motif of the 'hospitable halls' is the only one that has no clear religious or supernatural overtones.[643] Of the remainder, three make use of supernatural motifs which at least in their Icelandic reception have no clear Christian connotations: water-horses; a bull coming into existence because a cow swallows a supernatural being and thus gets in calf; and the curse of immortality, which in Ireland is connected to a

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641 Cf. above, p. 187.

642 Map 5; map 6.

643 Leaving aside that in Irish literature, the *bruiden* often has traits of an otherworld hall; however, this is not taken over in the adaptation of the motif in Icelandic place-lore, though it may have influenced Eddic literature (cf. above, note 524).

monastic site, but seems to have no Christian-religious undertone in Iceland. All the rest, more than half of the total, clearly seem to aim at a Christian religious semantisation of the landscape: the tales of Ásólfr and Ørlygr Hrappsson that provide the founding legends of two Icelandic churches; High Crosses; 'prehistoric' monks; and the notion of a Christian land far out in the ocean that can give 'meaning' to being lost at sea. The techniques for giving 'meaning' to the land that Icelandic settlers seem to have imported from Ireland and Britain predominantly appear to have been Christian religious ones.

Yet of course nothing else should have been expected. Since Ireland had been Christian since the sixth century at the latest, the culture that the Norse encountered there was a Christian culture to the core, and much of the 'meaning' given to the landscape inhabited by this culture was a Christian meaning as a matter of course. This alone implies that Norse settlers adapting Gaelic approaches to space and place would in many cases have ended up adapting approaches that expressed Christian concepts. Yet there is also another factor which probably gave particular prominence to specifically Christian techniques for the semantisation of space. The Norse settlers that came via Ireland and Scotland did not have to learn from scratch how to deal with space: already in the Norse homeland in Scandinavia, space had a meaning, and Norse culture had a rich repertoire of techniques for creating and expressing this meaning.[644] So, for all practical purposes, settlers of Scandinavian stock would not have *needed* a Gaelic input to learn how to make sense of place. For one specific purpose, however, this native Scandinavian repertoire of techniques on how to engage with space and place would have had a marked lacuna: since Viking Age Scandinavia was still predominantly pagan, there would not have been any established techniques for inscribing a Christian meaning into the landscape. This means that when a Norse settler converted to Christianity and wanted to express this in his engagement with the land, he could not draw on time-honoured Scandinavian customs because for this purpose there were none. The only place to find inspiration on how to express Christian beliefs in the landscape would have been Christian lands, which in this case means first and foremost: Ireland and Scotland. This means that what we see in the above survey of place-stories is just what would have been expected. The one aspect of their engagement with place where Norse settlers would have felt a *particular* need for following 'foreign' models would have been the specifically Christian semantisation of

644 Cf. for instance Vikstrand 1999; Vikstrand 2001; Brink 2001; Vikstrand 2002; Brink 2008; Særheim 2012.

the land; and this indeed is where Gaelic approaches to space and place were adopted with the greatest intensity.

Almost as an aside, it is worthwhile reiterating here also a further leitmotif of the above discussion: in virtually all cases treated in this book, the *specific* Gaelic source for the Norse reception of an apparently Gaelic narrative motif or spatial practice cannot be determined. The general reason for this is simply that there are too many possibilities: Auðr's High Crosses, Ásólfr's fish miracles, Auðun's water-horse, the *papar*-toponyms, Ørlygr's bell, or the hospitable halls of Iceland find just too many counterparts in Gaelic story-telling and spatial practice to claim any single particular text as the source of their Norse adaptation. The Norse reception of Gaelic place-lore motifs probably draws not so much on any of the specific extant texts of medieval Irish literature, but rather on the elusive and somewhat amorphous collective of medieval folklore that underlies this literature. The extant medieval Irish narratives thus are perhaps not so much the source of their Icelandic counterparts as they are written reflexes of a broader (and probably largely oral) and somewhat fluid narrative culture that underlies both its textualisation in Ireland and its adaptation in Iceland.

Perhaps the most important leitmotif of the Norse reception of Gaelic place-lore is the reason why I have put 'foreign' into inverted commas above: most and perhaps all of the techniques discussed in this book were about constructing home. Of course the stories and place-names discussed here do not say explicitly why this or that story was connected to this or that place – unless we chose to accept these stories as literal historical truth, which would seem inadvisable for any of them; generally, cows do not get in calf because they lick the ashes of a pyre. The underlying motivations as to why these stories were told always remain purely implicit. But *Landnámabók* in particular gives us so much context about the men and women involved with the places where these stories were told that if there is even a kernel of historical truth to its reports then it allows us an educated guess as to what motivated the telling of these tales. The lands of Auðun the Stutterer and of Ørlygr Hrappsson were the lands of Hebrideans connected with Gaelic story motifs about water-horses and holy bells. The story of Ásólfr, which suspiciously reads like an Irish Saint's Life, culminates in the translation of the saint's relics to a church on Akranes, a peninsula which had been settled by two settlers coming from Ireland, Þormóðr the Old and Ketill. Auðr the Deep-Minded was a woman with a close connection to the Hebrides, where she probably had grown up, and by erecting High Crosses at the place of her settlement in Iceland she seems to have turned the landscape where this settlement was located into a replica of the landscapes of the Hebrides. Ketill the Foolish was a Hebridean

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who connected his land in Iceland with a story about saintly Hebridean monks. At least one of Iceland's three hospitable halls was said to have been run by a woman married to a Norse settler of Hebridean stock. In all these instances a piece of land whose owner has a connection to the Gaelic world, and generally stems from the Norse settlements in the Gaelic world, is connected with a story derived from the Gaelic world, echoing the origin of the settler. While this is not strictly speaking possible to prove, what seems crucial here is the correspondence between personal origin and that of the story. The impression gleaned from this correspondence is that what may be going on here is a construction of 'home': in such instances the Norse settlers coming from Norse colonies in the Gaelic-speaking world, and they themselves to varying extents Gaelicised, turn the land they take in Iceland into a facsimile of the land where they had grown up, or at least lived, before moving on to their final place of settlement. There may be an undercurrent of homesickness here, or at least a certain nostalgia for the land abandoned in favour of Iceland, and the way to tackle this homesickness was to turn the new land conceptually into a copy of the old one. Doing this seems like a way of transforming the new land from an empty slab of rock far out in the North-West Atlantic into something that itself can be perceived as 'home' and feels like it.

When Iceland was first settled by the Norse, this settlement was one of the rare occasions in recorded human history when a human population for the first time ever moved to a new land. At this point the newly settled land was empty beyond imagination: there were no settlements, no history, no stories, no names. There was nothing to which the imagination could cling so that humans might feel a personal relationship to the land. This experience must have been an experience of alienation in the most profound sense: moving into such an empty land must have been like a complete severing of all connection to the place where one was living. To establish such connections for the first settlers would have been one of their most pressing tasks. The preoccupation of Icelandic saga literature with name-giving seems to grow directly out of this, and here also belong the place-names transferred from northern Britain to Iceland such as Jórvík, Katanes, and Papey. To imbue the land with complete stories, rather than merely with names, would have been a much more elaborate technique to achieve the same goal, namely to humanise this newly settled, empty landscape so as to establish a mental connection between a place and the people living in it – or in other words: to turn empty space into home. It seems to be a core characteristic of the Icelandic reception of Gaelic place-lore that this reception was part of an attempt by partly Gaelicised Norse settlers to do just that. For these Gaelicised settlers this struggle to turn early Iceland into home was won by drawing on what they had learned

to see as 'home' in the Gaelic world. Thus it virtually meant that Iceland – by means of a backward gaze that in the case of a specific part of its early settlers appears to have been directed towards Ireland and Scotland rather than towards Scandinavia – was narratively turned into a 'Nova Hibernia' or 'Nova Scotia'.

The focus on the construction of 'home' in the context of the situation of the Settlement of Iceland may also be part of the reason for one final recurrent theme: the importance of *Landnámabók* as a source of Gaelic-inspired place-stories.[645] It is a striking feature of the corpus of tales discussed in this book that seven out of nine narratives are attested solely or primarily in *Landnámabók*, the two exceptions from the general tendency being the Ódáinsakur/'Island of the Living', whose main sources are folkloric (though *Landnámabók* is central as an indicator for the dating of the underlying tradition), and the story about Þórólfr Twist-Foot and the bull Glæsir in *Eyrbyggja saga* (though this story is genealogically interlinked with the account of the hospitable hall run by Þórólfr's mother Geirríðr, which in turn reappears in *Landnámabók*). Given how small a section of Icelandic saga literature *Landnámabók* represents, this is quite a remarkable bias. The reasons why so much of the material collected here stems from *Landnámabók* are probably varied and complex. One reason may be connected with the author himself: as a translator of H-*Landnámabók*, I am much less likely to have overlooked an Irish place-story in this text than in any other. This cannot, however, account for the overwhelming prominence of *Landnámabók* in the corpus. At least in part the apparent interconnection between *Landnámabók* and Gaelic place-lore in Iceland must have to do specifically with *Landnámabók* and thus with the subject matter treated in this text. This subject matter is the first settlement of Iceland and how Iceland was turned from empty 'space' into an inhabited 'place'. This focus on 'place' has the consequence that *Landnámabók*, in comparison with other texts of Icelandic literature, contains a disproportionate amount of place-lore. To some extent this qualifies the degree to which in the present context it stands out among other Icelandic texts. Up to a point, it preserves more Gaelic-Icelandic place-lore simply because it contains more place-lore than other texts; on a fundamental level, it is a greater collection of place-lore than any other work of Icelandic literature. But given the extreme prevalence of *Landnámabók* as a source of Gaelic-Icelandic place-lore, this still cannot be everything. One more factor seems crucial: *Landnámabók* tells

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645 Cf. Jónas Kristjánsson's (1998: 259) observation that *Landnámabók* is 'the work that has most to tell us about the relations between Ireland and Iceland in early times.'

the history of the Settlement. That the bulk of Gaelic place-lore in Iceland is found in this context seems eminently telling. The uniform and consistent context in which *Landnámabók* presents Gaelic place-lore in Iceland strongly suggests that the most prominent situation in which Gaelic place-lore was adapted into Icelandic narrative culture was indeed the situation of the Settlement. And if this is so then it has the important implication that the recurrent ascription of such narratives to early settlers seems to have some kind of basis in historical fact, i.e. it seems to imply that these traditions in Iceland are not only ascribed to but really go back to the Settlement Period. Nothing else can account for why such place-lore is ascribed to the Settlement Period with such consistency, even in cases where the Gaelic origin of the motifs would not have been obvious to the compilers of *Landnámabók*. And this in turn suggests two things: that *Landnámabók* not only claims to be historical but does indeed allow us a degree of access to the history and cultural situation of the Settlement; and that the Icelandic reception of Gaelic place-lore steeply declined and perhaps largely or even entirely came to an end at conclusion of the Viking Age.[646]

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646 The prominence of *Landnámabók* as a source of place-lore, as well as the suspicion that its account has a strong historical element, would also correlate with Oskar Bandle's assessment that *Landnámabók* constitutes our most important source for the earliest stratum of Icelandic toponymy and presents us with a largely accurate picture of this toponymy in the first two centuries after the Settlement: Bandle 1977: 47–48. The findings of Etchingham *et al.*, forthcoming (ch. 5 *passim*) on orally transmitted Gaelic personal names in *Landnámabók* also point in a similar direction.

3.3. The Backward Gaze and Saga Writing

When the story of Auðun the Stutterer in the *Hauksbók*-recension of *Landnámabók* looks for the origins of the water-horse hoofprints on Snæfellsnes, metaphorically speaking its gaze is directed towards Aran and the hoofprints above Poll Dick. Above Poll Dick, in a way, we stand at the roots of the story told in *Landnámabók*. In the same (metaphorical) way, we can stand at the roots of the story of Ørlygr Hrappsson by stepping next to Saint Declan's Stone on the foreshore below Ardmore. These Norse stories represent a backward gaze directed towards the Gaelic world, where they have their roots in Gaelic storytelling and their origin in the symbiosis of Norse and Gaelic culture in the areas of Norse settlement in Gaelic Scotland and Ireland.

In Scandinavian studies, the question of the origins of Icelandic story-telling, and specifically of Icelandic saga literature, has long been at the centre of a lively scholarly debate. Icelandic saga literature does appear to be something specifically Icelandic; there is no evidence from medieval Norway that there was such a thing as Norwegian saga writing.[647] Yet if saga literature is a characteristically Icelandic development, what are its roots? A major controversy that for a long time dominated the discussion about this question is the argument regarding 'book prose' (*Buchprosa*) versus 'free prose' (*Freiprosa*). The two terms go back to Andreas Heusler who in 1913 coined them to summarise the main theories about the origin of the Icelandic sagas that were current in the early twentieth century.[648] The 'book prose' approach was characterised by a view of Icelandic saga literature that emphasised its character as written literature which should be seen in the context of other written literature and with a strong focus on intertextual relationships. In this approach the saga author is seen primarily as a writer who bases his work on the range of written sources available to him and out of which he creates a new literary

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647 Clunies Ross 2010: 37–38.

648 Heusler 1913, who himself was a representative of the 'free prose' approach. An attempt to supersede both approaches was already presented by Baetke 1956, though this attempt was again not without considerable problems of its own (cf. Andersson 1964: 79–81, 108–116). For summaries and assessments of the 'book prose' *vs.* 'free prose' debate cf. Clunies Ross 2010: 39–41; Byock 2001; Jónas Kristjánsson 1986: 187–188; Byock 1984–1985: 153–154; Andersson 1964: 65–81.

composition that should be read and analysed within the cosmos of written works available at the time. The 'free prose' approach, on the other hand, emphasised the oral roots of saga literature: for this approach, the Icelandic sagas were derived from narratives that originally existed in the form of oral prose tales which were memorised by storytellers, eventually to be written down and thus become the written sagas. Early proponents of the 'free prose' approach tended to assume that the original oral narratives underlying the sagas had a core function of serving to maintain historical lore, were historically true, and that their oral transmission was a rather stable one, implying also that the written sagas were historically accurate representations of the events they recount. For adherents of a 'book prose' approach, by contrast, the intention of the saga authors was nothing more and nothing less than to create pieces of plausible (but not 'true') historical fiction. In more recent years the dichotomy between the assumption of purely written creation, on the one hand, and the oral transmission of historically accurate accounts of real happenings, on the other, has been broken down by an increasing awareness of research into oral literatures and their performance practices. This has created a greater appreciation of the possible complexity as well as the variability of oral narratives. The latter feature in particular, their variability, might tie in with the variation that can be observed between various tellings of what basically are the same narratives in different Icelandic sagas. So rather than being consciously fictional creations, the Icelandic sagas might to some extent be bona fide (but not necessarily accurate) written accounts of events that, albeit in various versions, were current in the oral memory of the time when the texts were written down.[649] Furthermore, the written and oral traditions might have fed into each other throughout the time when the sagas were created.[650]

In a book published a few years ago, Theodore Andersson suggested that the oral tradition which existed before and underneath the written sagas must have contained seven categories of narratives. Andersson argued that these types of narratives are so recurrent in the extant written saga literature that

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649 Clunies Ross 2010: 41–43. Cf. Gísli Sigurðsson 2000: ix–x, xix. For a critique both of classical 'book prose' and of what he calls 'new book prose' approaches cf. also Byock 2001.

650 Clunies Ross 2010: 48–49. Considering the linguistic form rather than the content of the sagas, a strong point has been made in favour of seeing at least part of the diction of saga literature as essentially based on early vernacular translations of hagiographic texts: Jónas Kristjánsson 1986: 192–195; Schach 1972: 131; Turville-Petre 1967: 142. This, however, does not explain all features of saga narration; cf. Andersson 2006: 12.

they must have had a precedent in the oral tradition. These seven categories are:[651]

1. biographical traditions, or at least material that could be formed into biographies;
2. ghost and sorcerer stories;
3. complex genealogical traditions;
4. regional traditions or traditions about particular families;
5. traditions about lawsuits;
6. traditions about armed conflict;
7. and traditions about places and place-names.

It is worthwhile noting that of these seven categories, two are spatial or at least potentially spatial ones: the regional or family traditions, where it is hard to say whether the primary defining feature of the narrative is the place or the people inhabiting it; and the place-name traditions. In Andersson's list, these spatial categories occupy positions four and seven, with specifically place-focused traditions being located firmly at the very end of the list. I do not want to challenge the degree to which this reflects the priorities of the later, evolved, and highly literary form of the Sagas of Icelanders. There a specific place-focus can indeed be secondary (or less). At the same time, however, texts such as *Eyrbyggja saga* can get extremely involved in the explanation and semantisation of places – it is not by chance that two sub-chapters of the present book discuss material from *Eyrbyggja saga*, the 'Saga of the Inhabitants of Eyr',[652] which already by its title refers as much to a place as to the people inhabiting it. The latter feature, notably, is not restricted to *Eyrbyggja*: generally speaking, regionally focused sagas carry a certain place-focus already in their name. Further examples would be *Laxdœla saga*, *Vatnsdœla saga*, and *Vápnfirðinga saga* where titles like 'Saga of the People of the Laxárdalr Valley', 'Saga of the People of the Vatnsdalr Valley', and 'Saga of the People of the Vápnafjǫrðr Fjord' denote tales of places as much as tales of their inhabitants. There might even be some, albeit ambiguous,[653]

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651 Andersson 2006: 16–17, 19. Cf. Clunies Ross 2010: 49.
652 Cf. above, pp. 76ff. and 221ff.
653 The following interpretation of *Möðruvallabók* along the lines of humanist geography as represented by Yi-Fu Tuan (cf. above, p. 23) of course is not the only possible approach to this codex. The comparison with, for instance, *Hauksbók*, whose contents are markedly encyclopaedic and historical, suggests that the intention of *Möðruvallabók* might well have been a historical one. It has indeed been suggested that the arrangement of the sagas contained in *Möðruvallabók* might,

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manuscript evidence suggesting that spatial considerations could have been important for how the Sagas of Icelanders were viewed. Containing eleven sagas is the Icelandic vellum codex *Möðruvallabók* (AM 132 fol.) from the first half of the fourteenth century,[654] which is generally considered one of the most important manuscripts of the Sagas of Icelanders to survive from the Middle Ages:[655]

1. *Njáls saga*
2. *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*
3. *Finnboga saga ramma*
4. *Bandamanna saga*
5. *Kormáks saga*
6. *Víga-Glúms saga*
7. *Droplaugarsona saga*
8. *Ǫlkofra þáttr*
9. *Hallfreðar saga*
10. *Laxdæla saga*
11. *Fóstbrœðra saga*

If one 'maps' these sagas according to where most of their plot is set (map 11) they come strikingly close to providing coverage for the whole of Iceland. There is some clustering in the area between the Breiðafjörður Fjord and the Skagi Peninsula, yet overall there seems to be an attempt to spread saga coverage evenly across the country, providing tales equally for the south and north, west and east;[656] and while numerically the codex con-

allowing for some deviations, in its general tendency be partially dependent on *Landnámabók* (see Müller 2001: 27–28, 45). While Claudia Müller in her detailed analysis of the Sagas of Icelanders in *Möðruvallabók* is hesitant to put too much emphasis on any parallelism between this codex and *Landnámabók*, as such a parallelism can at best be valid for a comparatively small part of the manuscript (Müller 2001: 215), this would to some extent corroborate a primarily historical reading of *Möðruvallabók*. Historical and humanistic-geographical approaches to this codex are, however, complementary rather than mutually exclusive: after all, the 'meaning' of 'place' is largely constructed through cultural memory as represented by history (cf. Schama 1996; Assmann 1999). The same also holds true for the genealogical connections between most of the sagas in *Möðruvallabók* that have been highlighted by Müller 2001: 217–222.

654 Simek and Hermann Pálsson 2007: 270. Faksimile: Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1933.
655 See Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1933: 9.
656 An indication of the geographical outlook of *Möðruvallabók* could also be
      provided by the widely held opinion that the arrangement of part of the sagas

Map 11: The Sagas of Icelanders in *Möðruvallabók* according to the main settings of their plots.

tains more sagas set in the north than sagas set in the south of Iceland, this is more than offset by the sheer bulk of the southern Icelandic *Njáls saga*, which is the most monumental by far of all extant Sagas of Icelanders. Similar to what one can observe in *Landnámabók*, *Möðruvallabók* apparently aims to bring together, in a more or less balanced fashion, stories about the whole island. Importantly, this statement might easily (and perhaps even should) be inverted: as *Möðruvallabók* brings together stories about the whole of Iceland, inversely it imbues the whole island with stories. The contents of the codex thus might be suggestive of an attempt to turn Iceland from (empty, culturally meaningless, history-less) 'space' into a 'place' that has meaning,

in *Möðruvallabók* is based on a geographical approach, mimicking the arrangement of *Landnámabók*; however, Claudia Müller's critical discussion of this interpretative approach has been able to show that it has some substantial problems (esp. Müller 2001: 215–216). Yet Müller herself also views the codex at its core as primarily geographically determined, interpreting it as based on a regionally focused collection of 'Nordland-Sagas' in which most sagas at least have a genealogical connection to northern Iceland (Müller 2001: 215–222). This she connects with Margaret Clunies Ross's observation that one 'important creative impulse in Icelandic saga writing seems to have been the desire to compose the history of a particular region and its human population' (Clunies Ross 1998: 217;

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carries associations, and that one can identify with through its history. Or in other words: it could be read as suggestive of an attempt at constructing 'home' – and doing so through the medium of saga narrative.

Margaret Clunies Ross has recently remarked that the 'creative spark' which led to the genesis of the Icelandic saga genre cannot be recaptured.[657] She is undoubtedly right in saying that it is impossible to attain any certainty as to just what constituted this spark. Yet perhaps the convergence between the possible function of the Sagas of Icelanders to create 'home' and that same function which can be seen again and again underlying the Icelandic reception of Gaelic place-lore would tend to suggest – if not ultimately prove – an identification of this spark. Perhaps the spark that was to ignite the Icelandic storytelling tradition which eventually created the famous tales about the farmers and families of Iceland was a deep desire to turn the empty space of Iceland into a 'place' – to humanise it and to turn it into home. It would seem that this spark was not struck once but many times over. It was struck when Auðun's water-horse sank its hoofs into the 'hard ground' by his farm, and equally so when Ørlygr Hrappsson's bell struck the shore of Kjalarnes. Likewise it was struck on many an occasion, real or purely fictional, that lay beyond the scope of the present book because it in no way involved the Gaelic world: when Kveld-Úlfr's coffin was washed ashore near Borg (*Landnámabók* S29–30; *Egils saga* 27–28),[658] or when the fire was lit for the burning of Njáll's farm at Bergþórshváll, which is the heart and culmination of *Njáls saga*, an event that is mentioned in a variety of genres of Icelandic literature ranging from the historical account of *Landnámabók* (S342=H300) to the Icelandic annals.[659]

It would be utterly unjustified to claim that Icelandic saga literature was sparked specifically by the Icelandic reception of Gaelic place-lore – looking

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Müller 2001: 217). By including material like *Egils saga* with its strongly southwestern Icelandic focus, or the southern Icelandic *Njáls saga*, this project could then at a later stage have been expanded to cover Iceland as a whole. That such an expansion occurred is also suggested by details like the different layout of the part of the codex that contains *Njáls saga*: this part has an average of 42 lines per column, whereas the rest of *Möðruvallabók* has an average of 41 lines per column (Müller 2001: 215–216). Similarly, *Egils saga* starts with an unusually large initial that might indicate that it originally formed the beginning of a codex of its own (Müller 2001: 216).

657 Clunies Ross 2010: 38.

658 Cf. Clunies Ross 1998: 145–146.

659 On the historicity of Njáll's burning cf. Cook 2001: viii; he calls it 'one of the best documented events of the so-called "saga age" in Iceland' and asserts that 'there is no reason to question it as historical fact.'

back, so to speak, to the hoofprints in the bedrock above Poll Dick.[660] There are significant individual instances of Gaelic influences on the Icelandic sense of place, but overall the nine tales discussed in this book are of insufficient number to make any claim that Icelandic storytelling about places is, at its core, based on Gaelic patterns – especially if the concept of 'storytelling about places' is used so broadly as to include regionally focused Sagas of Icelanders in general. Rather, what this material suggests is that the Icelandic reception of Gaelic place-lore was part of a concerted effort undertaken by the early Icelandic settlers to turn Iceland into 'home' and that as such it formed part of the same fundamental desire to give meaning to the land that might also have been at the core of Icelandic saga literature. Both the emergence of Icelandic storytelling about Iceland and the Icelandic reception of Gaelic place-lore seem to some extent to have been rooted in the necessity to humanise an empty land that was engendered by the specific situation of the first human settlement of Iceland. Or in other words, the Icelandic storytelling tradition that was to develop into saga literature had those same roots which apparently also motivated the borrowing and adaptation of Gaelic place-lore as it has been discussed in this book – a relationship, I tentatively propose, which is a parallel rather than a causal one. Thus the main contribution that studying the Icelandic reception of Gaelic place-lore makes to our understanding of the emergence of saga literature perhaps ultimately is a typological one: the specific nature of this material may allow us a glimpse of the reasons why early Icelanders told stories about the land – and it is here perhaps that we see not only the reason for the reception of Gaelic place-lore by early Gaelicised settlers but that we also gain a deeper insight into how early Icelandic settlers in general coped with the situation of settlement in an entirely empty land: by telling stories about it. The Gaelic place-lore in Iceland makes this context, and its underlying motivations, clearer than the 'great' sagas; it has not engen-dered them but allows us a better understanding of the time and context in which their underlying creative spark seems to have been struck. And it is in this sense – as half Gaelic and half Icelandic typological comparative material that may illuminate the situation which brought forth Norse-Icelandic story-telling about Iceland – that the backward gaze from the rocks of Auðun's farm

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660 Others have been less sceptical: the hypothesis that the Icelandic storytelling tradition which was to develop into the Sagas of Icelanders was based on a Gaelic impulse has been proposed most prominently by Andreas Heusler (Heusler 1913: 48–50; cf. Andersson 1964: 60–61). In general on suggestions of the possible roots of Icelandic saga literature in Irish storytelling cf. Gísli Sigurðsson 2000: xii–xiii, xxi, 86–102; Andersson 1964: 56–61.

to the shore of Aran, where the hoofs of the sea-horse struck and left their mark in the limestone, might indeed be iconic for that striking of the creative spark from which Icelandic saga literature was to develop.

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