

QUANTE AMERICHE?

EUROPEI NEL NUOVO MONDO PRIMA DI COLOMBO
FRA STORIA E INVENZIONE

A CURA DI MICHAEL MICCI E FEDERICA FAVERO



Quante Americhe?

Europei nel Nuovo Mondo prima di Colombo fra storia e invenzione

a cura di Michael Micci e Federica Favero

Ledizioni

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LITERARY ROUTES TO THE NEW WORLD: THE VÍNLAND SAGAS

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Abstract

This article investigates *Eiríks saga rauða* and *Grænlandinga saga*, together known as the Vínland sagas, as literary artefacts shaped by the ideological and cultural context of thirteenth-century Iceland. While archaeological discoveries, such as the settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows, lend support to the historical plausibility of Norse exploration in North America around the year 1000, the sagas' transmission, narrative structure, and ideological orientation suggest a more complex negotiation between memory and fiction. The study explores how Christian morality, social memory, and narrative tropes are embedded in the depiction of landscapes, characters, and events. The main conclusion is that the sagas reflect a deliberate authorial effort to inscribe the colonial memory of Vínland within the evolving Icelandic identity in the thirteenth century.

Keywords

Vínland sagas, *Eiríks saga rauða*, *Grænlandinga saga*, travel literature, America

1. Introduction

The discovery of a mention of a mysterious land beyond the western ocean called Marckalada in the *Cronica universalis* (1340) by the Milanese Dominican Galvano Fiamma has rekindled some interest in the European presence on the American continent

before the expedition of Christopher Columbus.¹ Prior to the publication of the *Cronica*, which only briefly mentions this land, the texts that for centuries have served as the key testimony of European presence in America were the Vínland sagas.²

The term refers to two Icelandic narratives, likely composed in the thirteenth century but preserved in later manuscripts: *Eiríks saga rauða* (The Saga of Eiríkr the Red) and *Grœnlendinga saga* (The Saga of the Greenlanders).³ Both texts recount the voyages of Norse settlers who sail westward in search of fertile and climatically favorable lands.⁴ While they share a number of characters and plot elements, they differ in several respects, which has prompted scholars to investigate their relationship in terms of mutual influence or as distinct approaches to a common oral narrative tradition.⁵

Broad academic consensus about a Norse settlement in North America around the year 1000 has been reached since the archaeological excavations of the 1960s and 1970s at L'Anse aux

¹ Some contributions on pre-Columbian America which stemmed from the recent revival of Galvano Fiamma's work have been published by Paolo Chiesa (2021 and 2023) and Francesco D'Angelo (2024). For an edition of the *Cronica*, see Chiesa & Favero (2024). For more information on Galvano and his work, see Federica Favero's chapter in this book.

² Passing references to Vínland are included in other Old Norse-Icelandic texts – as highlighted by Stefano Ghiroldi in this volume – and in a short geographical treatise included in the manuscript Copenhagen, Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, AM 194 8vo, as pointed out by Crocker (2020: 93-94).

³ In footnotes, quotes, and references to specific passages, the sagas are abbreviated as *ES* and *GS*. The page numbers refer to the editions published by Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson in the fourth volume of the *Íslenzk fornrit* series (1935).

⁴ In fact, the motivations of the settlers in Vínland sagas vary, as underlined by Hermann (2021: 9): “some of the travelers are merchants who wish to bring valuables home to increase their wealth, while others intend to settle”. In any case, since the protagonists are Icelandic settlers and the style is sober and objective, despite numerous paranormal elements, the two narratives are typically classified within the *Íslendingasögur* (Sagas of Icelanders) genre. Fantastic features and adventurous journeys to exotic lands are usually associated with other saga genres, such as the *fornaldarsögur* (Sagas of the Ancient Times) and the *riddarasögur* (Sagas of Knights). For an overview on saga genres, see Bampi (2017) and Ferrari (2022: 51-90).

⁵ This matter will be addressed in greater detail in the following section, but a useful comparison of the two sagas' plots is offered by Gísli Sigurðsson (2004: 237-240).

Meadows (LAM), Canada, coordinated by Helge and Anne Stine Ingstad.⁶ Archaeological evidence, however, has not put an end to speculations regarding the precise dating and modes of the voyages of the settlers, the exact location of the places mentioned in the literary sources, nor has it discouraged studies on the relationship between history and fiction in these texts.⁷ In fact, academic contributions dedicated to the study of the two sagas as potential historical documents or as sources that may correspond with archaeological evidence have multiplied.

As Elizabeth A. Williamsen (2005: 452) points out, “the overwhelming concern with determining what parts of the sagas are factual and what parts fictional” has led to surprisingly little attention being paid to the texts as “literary rather than historical artifacts”. Among the scholars that have analysed the two sagas as literary products influenced by the tastes and trends of their time, we recall Kirsten Wolf (1996: 475), who notes that “scholarly interest in these works has focused primarily on questions of their historicity and not their varied literary dimensions”.

⁶ Cf. Ingstad (1985); Gísli Sigurðsson (2004: 241-243). Research at LAM has resumed in recent years thanks to a team of archaeologists led by Veronique Forbes (University of Newfoundland and Labrador). We wish to thank her and Paul Ledger for sharing the preliminary results of their work at the conference “Quante Americhe? Il Nuovo Mondo prima di Colombo fra storia e invenzione”, held at the University of Bergamo on June 13, 2024. For further details on their ongoing project “Biocultural and Archaeological Legacies at L’Anse aux Meadows”, see Forbes *et al.* (2020). On this topic, see also the contribution of Luna Polinelli and Ryan Fenster in this volume.

⁷ The greatest interest in the possible European presence in America before Columbus can be traced back to the work of the Danish scholar Carl Christian Rafn, who produced the first diplomatic edition of the Vínland sagas. Throughout the twentieth century, the discussion on Norse presence in America continued, particularly after the archaeological discoveries. For an overview on the learned research produced on the Vínland sagas up to the late 1990s, see Bergersen (1997). Coinciding with the celebrations of the thousandth anniversary of the temporary settlement at LAM, the early 2000s saw a “resurgence in investigations into the Norse expeditions to Vínland and the texts associated with them” (Larrington 2004: 91). Regarding the Italian literary landscape, the recent translation of the Vínland sagas and the *Grænlandinga þáttur* (The Tale of the Greenlanders) by Roberto L. Pagani (2018) should be noted. Before Pagani, Marco Scovazzi had published a translation of *Eiríks saga* in *Piloto Di Castri* (1991), while Caprini (1995) translated both texts shortly thereafter.

Carolyne Larrington (2004) also anchors the texts in their historical-cultural context, examining them in relation to other medieval travel narratives and key notions in medieval literature, such as those of *miracula* and *mirabilia*. A similar approach is taken by Pernille Hermann (2021: 1), who deals “with literary plotting of geographical space” and the depiction of otherness, making significant comparisons between the Vínland sagas and later milestones of colonial literature, such as *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad (1899).⁸

This essay does not aim to be yet another analysis of the sagas as sources of information for locating the sites of Norse explorations on a map, as numerous works have already addressed this topic, some of which are quite compelling and exhaustive.⁹ Rather, this contribution seeks to present the two texts as literary products of their time, engaging with the issue of the relationship between historical reality and narrative fiction, while focusing on the narrative devices that appear to guide the reader’s evaluation of characters and events, revealing a certain degree of authorial intent.

To anchor *Eiríks saga rauða* and *Grœnlendinga saga* within their historical and cultural context, it is important to begin with their transmission – that is, the manuscripts in which they were copied and preserved. The overview of the texts will then continue with a reflection on the history-versus-fiction debate, followed by a brief reconstruction of their plots that highlights the shared elements between the two sagas and a few divergent ones. I will then conclude with an analysis of the most distinctly fictional aspects of the texts. This approach aims to provide readers engaging with the Vínland sagas today with a valuable framework for critical analysis and an understanding of the multifaceted nature of these narratives.

⁸ Among the scholars who have paid particular attention to the historical and social context of the sagas, we mention Sayers (1993) and Baumgartner (1993).

⁹ Gísli Sigurðsson (2004: 251-271) offers a particularly thorough reconstruction in this regard, complete with tables and maps.

2. Manuscript context

Grœnlendinga saga survives in a single manuscript from the late fourteenth century, the *Flateyjarbók* (The Book of Flatey; Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, GKS 1005 fol.), which was written between 1387 and 1394. This is the largest manuscript of the Icelandic Middle Ages and one of the most significant ones, containing mostly lives of Scandinavian kings, thus proposing models of rulership and governance, but also expanding this topic with various additional materials, such as short stories (*þættir*) and poems, which entail legendary materials, and sagas focused on exploration and settlement of foreign lands, such as *Orkneyinga saga* (The Saga of the People of the Orkney Islands) and *Færeyinga saga* (The Saga of the People of the Faroe Islands).

In fact, *Grœnlendinga saga* appears embedded within *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar hin mesta*, one of the medieval versions of the biography of King Ólafr Tryggvason of Norway. The first chapter is separated from the other ones by some forty pages, since the original text lacked an initial section recounting Eiríkr rauði's arrival in Iceland and Greenland. This part of the story was supplied by the scribe using the version of *Landnámabók* from the manuscript known as *Sturlubók*. According to Sverrir Tómasson (2001: 35), the material related to Vínland may not have been perceived as an independent saga, given the fragmentation of the text and its strong ideological connection to *Ólafs saga*. Indeed, both texts display a pronounced hagiographic dimension and a marked taste for *miracula*.¹⁰

Eiríks saga rauða appears in two redactions, one is preserved in the early fourteenth-century *Hauksbók* (Copenhagen, Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, AM 544 4to) and the other in the fifteenth-century *Skálholtsbók* (Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, AM 577 4to). Although the differences between the versions of *Hauksbók* (The Book of Haukr) and *Skálholtsbók*

¹⁰ For more information on the description and history of the *Flateyjarbók*, see Kolbrún Haraldsdóttir (1993: 197-198).

(The Book of Skálholt) are largely stylistic rather than substantive, particular emphasis has been placed by Larrington (2004: 94) on the manuscript context of the former. Unlike *Flateyjarbók*, the codex places greater emphasis on the marvelous and the wondrous – that is, on the genre of *mirabilia* rather than on hagiographic *miracula*. The manuscript, allegedly compiled by the lawspeaker Haukr Erlendsson († 1334), contains encyclopedic texts and *summae* in Old Icelandic translation, such as the *Elucidarius* and excerpts from Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologiae*, alongside historical-legendary material like *Trojumanna saga* (The Saga of the Trojans) and mythological works such as the *Völuspá*.¹¹

Although this kind of encyclopedic information is present in various Old Icelandic sources, the size and the scope of *Hauksbók* make it especially important for a medieval Icelandic worldview.

As Sverrir Jakobsson (2007: 23) states:

Hauksbók provides rich insight into the world view of the intellectual elite of medieval Iceland. This was a hegemonic, Catholic world view which bore indelible marks of Iceland’s peripheral status in Europe at the time of its composition.

Sverrir refers to the scribe as “an educated royal official with an aristocratic background” and proposes a long list of possible sources – either explicitly mentioned in *Hauksbók* or simply adopted as models – such as Isidore, Honorius of Autun, Vincent of Beauvais, Venerable Bede, and Ælfric of Eynsham (p. 25).

As for *Skálholtsbók*, it is a fragmentary collection of sagas, many of which belong to the adventurous *riddarasögur* genre or to the later *Íslendingasögur*, often rich in fantastic elements.¹²

¹¹ *Hauksbók* also features a section focused on *Geographia, Physica, Astronomia, Theologia*, and Augustine’s sermons (ff. 1r-14v). It includes a written description of the world, knowledge about universal history, and a map of Jerusalem (f. 19r).

¹² As O’Connor (2017: 93) points out: “While many scholars now hold that the ‘classical’ *Íslendingasögur* had a historical function of some kind, this function is usually denied to the heterogeneous subgroup of *Íslendingasögur* often referred to as ‘post-classical’ and assumed to be later compositions”. A telling feature that distinguishes the classical *Íslendingasögur* from their later counterparts lies, for instance, in the idealization and exaggeration of certain heroic traits – under the influence of chivalric

The codex has received far less scholarly attention than *Hauksbók*, but it appears to exhibit a certain thematic coherence. As Larrington (2004: 94) observes,

Eiríks saga belongs then in a context where history, myth and topography are prominent and where *mirabilia* (natural, but extraordinary happenings) dominate; by contrast *Grœnlendinga saga* is preserved within an ideological context of *miracula* (events requiring divine intervention).

Although Larrington (2004: 94) argues that “manuscript context notwithstanding, both texts demonstrate a near-equal fascination with both *mirabilia* and *miracula*”, it is nevertheless striking that they have been preserved in this kind of manuscript tradition – one that reflects the fascination of medieval Icelandic culture with the wondrous and the marvelous.

As Ralph O’Connor (2017: 101) highlights: “We are now increasingly aware of the importance of viewing attitudes towards history or fiction within a manuscript context”. Thus, despite the historical basis of certain details in the Vínland sagas, their transmission offers insights into the possible expectations of their contemporary audience – one that may have perceived the sagas, to a significant extent, as historical fiction rather than historical accounts.

Finally, the scholarly community has not reached a consensus with regard to the possible relationship between the two texts. After a philological analysis, Jón Jóhannesson (1962) suggested that *Grœnlendinga saga* was older than *Eiríks saga* and served as its model, whereas later scholarship came to different conclusions. In particular, Ólafur Halldórsson (1978: 293-400 and 1985: 341-399) presented compelling arguments for viewing the two sagas as independent adaptations of a shared oral tradition, based on the real-life experiences of the first Norse settlers, though naturally enriched with a substantial amount of literary invention. This

literature – and in the increased presence of supernatural elements. Vésteinn Ólason (2007: 19) has highlighted these aspects, while also noting that the contemporary audience’s perception may not have changed significantly over time, since even the later sagas “all pretend to be history”.

position was strongly endorsed by Gísli Sigurðsson (2004: 240-241), although it has not entirely supplanted the idea that *Eiríks saga* may have been influenced by *Grænlandinga saga*, as Wolf (1996: 474) has argued.

Regardless of their relationship, it is important to remember that both texts are preserved in manuscripts dating from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and the versions contained in these codices are derived from copies of earlier manuscripts in a process of textual transmission that does not extend beyond the early thirteenth century. This implies that – assuming the copying process did not introduce significant alterations to the content – we are confronted with texts committed to writing at least two centuries after the events they recount.

It is clear that we cannot fully reconstruct the form these narratives may have assumed during their oral diffusion, nor can we determine with certainty which aspects of the Vínland explorations are derived from eyewitness accounts and which stem from later reinterpretations. The gap between the events themselves and the written preservation of the sagas is not merely temporal; it is also marked by profound social transformations within Icelandic society. Around the year 1000, Iceland adopted Christianity, ushering in not only a new religious framework but also the manuscript culture that would eventually lead to the composition of the very texts of the sagas. By the thirteenth century, this ideological backdrop had become a stable and integral part of the island's cultural fabric.

3. *History vs. Fiction*

Even the earliest pseudo-historiographical texts composed in Iceland with the intent of preserving the collective memory of the local community are written some two hundred years after the first settlements of Norwegian colonizers and, in the case of the North American explorations, at least a hundred years later. Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók* (The Book of Icelanders) is thought to have been written between 1122 and 1133. The text briefly

mentions Vínland in the context of the Norse settlements in Greenland, noting the presence of goods similar to those used by the people “es Vínland hefir byggt ok Grœnlendingar kalla Skrælinga” (“who had settled Vínland and whom the Greenlanders called *skrælingar*”).¹³

The *Landnámabók* (The Book of Settlement), usually dated to the twelfth century, mentions thousands of families of Icelandic settlers and their locations. It records kinship and descent, presumably with the aim of creating a direct link to later generations of Icelandic readers. The book includes references to the colonization of Greenland, a recurring theme in both Vínland sagas, as many of the explorers set out from there to reach the new territories. As Gísli Sigurðsson (2004: 235) points out, some names and details in *Landnámabók* align with those found in *Eiríks saga*, such as the presence of a Christian man from the Hebrides in Eiríkr’s crew during his first voyage to Greenland.

A Latin work predates the mention of Vínland in *Íslendingabók* by a few decades, namely Adam of Bremen’s *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* (1073-1076). Here, the author cites information he received from the Danish king in 1068 or 1069 about an island in the west called Vínland, where both grapes and self-propagating wheat were said to grow.¹⁴ Gísli Sigurðsson (2004: 236) attempted to demonstrate the plausibility of a connection between Bremen and the Greenlandic explorers, based on a passage in *Grœnlendinga saga* in which a valuable wooden item from Vínland, called a *húsasnotra* (a term of uncertain meaning), is said to have been sold to a man from Bremen.¹⁵ Gísli states that “this *húsasnotra* might have been accompanied by some kind of narrative or other details of its origins, and that this information may have then been passed on by the Bremen merchant”.

¹³ Jakob Benediktsson (1968: 13-14). Translations are all mine, unless otherwise stated.

¹⁴ For more information on Adam’s *Gesta* and the medieval Latin sources on lands beyond the Atlantic, see Stefano Ghiroldi’s chapter in this book.

¹⁵ For a study on this term and this passage in *GS*, cf. Sayers (2003).

Except for the passing references mentioned above, the *Vínland sagas* represent the earliest extensive sources on the explorations and settlement attempts of European groups in North America. As such, they have served as ideal material for reflections on the complex relationship between historical reality and literary invention in the Old Norse-Icelandic sagas. This issue is part of a broader debate that, in the last century, has sought to determine whether and to what extent an oral tradition predating the Christianization of Iceland may have influenced the writing of the sagas. A key consequence of this discussion is the question of the reliability of these texts in recounting events that predate the manuscript writing by centuries.

The issue can be summarized in the opposition between two schools of thought that dominated the academic debate in the last century: *Freeprose* and *Bookprose*. Supporters of the *Freeprose* theory argue that the memory of the events described in the sagas, particularly those about the first settlers of Iceland and their explorations, was passed down in a largely complete form through the generations, before writing arrived on the island. According to this view, the scribes' role was simply to transcribe what had already been preserved. In contrast, the *Bookprose* theory regarded the sagas as a product of a purely literary effort, downplaying or even dismissing the influence of eyewitnesses and subsequent oral transmission. Both positions have been replaced by more nuanced and context-driven analyses, supported by interdisciplinary approaches.¹⁶

Many recent contributions to the study of the nature of Icelandic sagas have focused on a more complex negotiation between history, memory, and the formation of a collective cultural identity. These perspectives are often grounded in the work of Egyptologist Jan Assmann (2008), who argues that the

¹⁶ For an overview of this topic, see Ferrari (2022: 31-41). The case of the *Vínland sagas* is particularly complex, as there is no evidence of any books available in thirteenth-century Iceland that could provide information about the lands to the south and west of Greenland. This suggests that the authors must have relied primarily on oral transmission (cf. Gisli Sigurðsson 2004: 234).

preservation of memory, in this case through written texts, is an essential faculty in the formation of both individual and collective identity. Recording elements of collective memory, such as the settlement of Iceland, Greenland, and the lands beyond the Atlantic, would not be a simple or naïve act of transcription, but a reworking intended to create an image of the collective self, involving an inevitable phase of selection and adaptation.¹⁷

As Maurice Halbwachs (2013: 34) suggests, no memory is possible without a context that determines what should be preserved. Individuals, even when not fully aware, remember by placing themselves in relation to the social context to which they belong, and similarly, the group constructs its memory through its individuals. According to Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir (2013: 379), the same principle would have guided the survival of certain texts and manuscripts over others, which have instead been lost and forgotten.

The memory of a social group thus develops through narratives that are not necessarily governed by historical accuracy, but by the possibility to fit certain events into the image that the élites in control of the cultural activity had or wished to create of the community itself. These recent perspectives have allowed for the overcoming of the history vs. fiction dichotomy in favor of a more complex negotiation between the two aspects.¹⁸ The same can be said of the now saturated Freeprose vs. Bookprose debate, which is too simplistic to capture the complexity of the Old Norse-Icelandic sagas.¹⁹

The Vínland sagas too, therefore, strike a delicate balance between what was known of the past and the present of the

¹⁷ As for the position of Vínland in the Atlantic Ocean, this information is to be attributed to the perspective of modern scholars. In fact, passing references in contemporary texts to the Vínland sagas seem to suggest a completely different perception among the Icelanders, who placed the new land in the proximity of Africa; cf. Sverrir Jakobsson (2012: 503); Hermann (2021: 4-5).

¹⁸ Cf. Hermann & Mitchell (2013: 263).

¹⁹ Glauser (2007: 13-18; 20-21) and Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir (2012: 210-212) relate some still influential academic trends designed to overcome this strict opposition between the two schools of thought.

thirteenth-century authors. One must ask what the reasons are that led *Eiríks saga* and *Grænlandinga saga* to earn a prominent place among the *sögulegar* stories – those “worthy of being remembered and passed down” – and what the communicative intentions of the authors were, beyond the mere pursuit of historical truth.²⁰ The position of the Vínland sagas within the *Íslendingasögur* (Sagas of Icelanders) corpus is relevant as it aligns with other texts in the same tradition that narrate the dynamics of the colonization of Iceland. They encapsulate the memory of a period of great transformation in which the Icelandic people embarked on a series of explorations in search of new lands to settle and name.

The *landnám*, the “colonization”, became ingrained in local memory as the key event that shaped the collective identity, involving the discovery of new territories even beyond Iceland, such as Greenland and Vínland itself. The excavations at LAM have only confirmed the connection between the texts and the actual explorations of Icelanders and Greenlandic settlers at the end of the tenth and beginning of the eleventh century, suggesting some degree of oral transmission prior to the writing of the texts.

As Larrington (2004: 102) notes in her analysis of the sagas, “the explorers seem to have some idea of what to expect in the new country, and to be inclined to treat it as if it were *terra nullius*, in need of naming and capable of being formally appropriated”. Indeed, when compared with other types of texts, such as those describing journeys to the remote East, filled with magic, exotic and fantastic elements, the Vínland sagas appear much closer to the *Íslendingasögur*, which are at least partially rooted in the historical events of the Icelandic settlement and present a rather objective narrative style.²¹

²⁰ This question has been tentatively addressed by Vohra (2008), who examines the Vínland sagas through multiple lenses, specifically those of individual memory, family memory, and social memory.

²¹ Several sagas within the Old Norse-Icelandic corpus recount long journeys to the east (*austrvegr*), often classified as “tales of the widely-travelled”, as pointed out by Sverrir Jakobsson (2006: 936). Notable examples include *Yngvars saga víðförla*, *Eireks saga víðförla*, *Þorvalds þátr víðförla*, and *Örvar-Odds saga*. Although these narratives may have exerted some influence on the Vínland sagas, they characteristically feature *exotica* that are absent from the latter.

This suggests, for Gísli Sigurðsson (2004: 240), a connection to “memories of former times passed down orally from generation to generation”. Supporting this view, Gísli (2004: 251) also highlights a similarity between the descriptions of sea voyages in search of land in the Vínland sagas and those concerning the early attempts at Icelandic colonization:

The records tell us that Eiríkr *rauði* spent three years exploring Greenland from south to north [...]. A similar picture emerges from the accounts of the early explorations of Iceland recorded in *Landnámabók*. The first explorers sailed all around the country, testing conditions at various places both north and south.

Pernille Hermann (2021: 4) underlines how “the travels to the west of Greenland were perceived as an extension of the known frame of reference rather than an encounter with a new continent”.²²

A comparison between the travels depicted in the Vínland sagas and those included in medieval travel descriptions (about men who were said to be *viðförlir*, “widely-travelled”) or the indigenous *riddarasögur*, produced in Iceland in the fourteenth century, supports Gísli’s argument to place the former among the historically plausible narratives of the Old Norse-Icelandic saga corpus. Late medieval fiction, inspired by continental chivalric romances, legends, and folktales, presents a much more pronounced spatiotemporal abstraction.²³ For instance, Larrington (2004: 113) compares the Vínland sagas and *Yngvars saga víðförla*, noting that “whatever the historical basis in tradition of Yngvarr’s journey to the east, the marvel which he and his son Sveinn encounter [...] are much less naturalised than anything in the Vínland sagas, apart from the uniped”.²⁴

²² Cf. Barnes (2001: xii-xiv).

²³ This aspect is highlighted by Ferrari (1995). The rise of fiction in Iceland is also the object of a pivotal study by Tulinius (2002). For an introduction to the indigenous *riddarasögur*, see Kalinke (1985), Barnes (2000), and Driscoll (2005).

²⁴ The creature in question is a one-legged being (*einfaetingur*), described in *ES* as part of a group of natives with whom the Norse colonizers come into contact. It appears to have stepped directly out of the encyclopedic literature devoted to the *mirabilia* of the

The presence of monsters, *draugar*, like the revived Þorsteinn, and other paranormal elements, such as prophecies, doppelgängers, and an unnatural sleep that overtakes Þorvaldr's crew, still reveals a significant degree of creative elaboration on the part of the authors.²⁵ Therefore, it would be a mistake to embrace the contents of these narratives as entirely reliable. The fundamental assumption is that the Vínland sagas, like any other text from the *Íslendingasögur* corpus, should neither be seen as completely detached from historical reality nor as wholly objective and reliable transcriptions of past events.²⁶

Nonetheless, because of their connection to real events of the Viking period (ca. 790-ca. 1050), the Vínland sagas have always held a particular appeal, including within popular culture. Notably, they challenge widely held beliefs – even in contemporary public opinion – beginning with the notion that Christopher Columbus was the first European to set foot on the American continent.²⁷ Since the early studies concerning the possible Norse presence in America, both individuals and local institutions have used the topic to promote alternative historical narratives, sometimes veering into nationalist and supremacist ideologies that sought to obscure the cultural heritage of indigenous populations.²⁸

world, such as Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia* (VII,II,23) or Isidore's *Etymologiae* (XI,III,21). It is difficult to assess how literally such literary *topoi* were understood by medieval audiences – though authors like Pliny and Isidore were certainly held in high regard.

²⁵ See the sections *Synopses* and *Narrative Devices* for a more detailed analysis of these aspects.

²⁶ This idea is encapsulated in the notion of “syncretic truth” proposed by M. I. Steblin-Kamenskij in the 1970s – namely, in the words of O'Connor (2017: 91), “a kind of truth which was neither purely historical nor purely artistic but had something of both”.

²⁷ Cf. Inga Dóra Björnsdóttir (2001).

²⁸ The topic is addressed by Mancini (2002: 874), who discusses the impact of the Norse presence in the American continent, defining “this craze for Viking discovery” as one of the triggering factors of a trend towards “racialized history” (p. 877). The author adds that “the literature of Viking discovery [...] argued that Scandinavians, as the progenitors of the American ‘race’ and the creators of democracy itself, were America's ancestors in body and mind”, since “for Scandinavians, discovery did not begin with Columbus and did not end in genocide” (p. 871). For other contributions

Christopher Crocker (2020) has recently offered a partial reconstruction of the history of the complex reception of both the Vínland sagas and the archaeological discoveries of the Ingstads in the New World.

Clearly, supremacist interpretive biases are the result of arbitrary readings of the texts and prejudices rooted among certain groups of readers. However, this is also closely linked to the degree of historical reliability we decide to attribute to the Vínland sagas and the distortions that can arise from a failure to maintain a critical perspective on both the texts as literary works and the archaeological evidence. Excavations at LAM have confirmed the presence of a temporary settlement, completely abandoned by the colonists by the early eleventh century, and little else can be inferred from the remains.²⁹ It is therefore difficult to determine the true impact, if any, of the Norse presence in America.

What seems far more significant is to attempt a critical reading of the texts to assess their literary value, striving to understand their function in the historical and cultural context in which they were produced, and hypothesizing what the expectations of the contemporary audience might have been. The aim is not to uncover historical facts, but rather to reconstruct a process of storytelling. As Ralph O'Connor (2017: 102-103) points out:

The question of whether medieval sagas were composed, intended, and received as fiction or as history must be answered anew for each text as well as each so-called genre, and with reference to manuscript context as well as narrative content.

in this regard, see also Höfig (2020). Zachary J. Melton also addresses this topic in his chapter in this volume.

²⁹ After the Ingstad excavations, scholars proposed that LAM was a temporary stopover for Norse expeditions heading further south, primarily used for overwintering and ship repairs. Artefacts such as flint and chainmail fragments point to connections with Iceland, Greenland, and the Viking settlements in the British Isles – aligning with the sagas' accounts of the settlers' origins and the composition of their crews. No significant evidence has been found further south, and several hoaxes have emerged.

Even if Eiríkr, Leifr, Þorfinnr, Guðríðr, and the other figures that populate the *Vínland sagas* truly existed, this does not preclude the literary reworking of events and characters. The very discrepancies in plot between the two sagas attest to a certain level of elaboration of a perhaps common narrative core, which we can only uncover by stripping both sagas of their apparent creative elaborations, remaining faithful to the basic information they share.

For these reasons, we can only affirm that groups of Greenlanders and Icelanders reached the coasts of North America at some point between the late tenth century and early eleventh century. They established at least one temporary settlement at what is now LAM, where they stayed for a period ranging from a few months to several years. They came into contact with indigenous populations, with whom they had both peaceful and violent interactions, and eventually decided to abandon these places and return to Iceland and Greenland.

Little else can be concluded with certainty based on the contents of the *Vínland sagas* and the archaeological evidence. Any other information, even that which seems most objectively plausible, may have undergone significant alterations during the transmission of the texts, first orally and then in writing; therefore, as Larrington (2004: 92) affirms, “the modern reader cannot be confident about what happened to Leifr, Þorvaldr, and the rest in a phenomenological sense”, but “much can be learned from the sagas about the thirteenth-century Icelandic authors’ modes of representation”. We cannot exclude the possibility that the authors considered much of their narrative to be real, or at least plausible, although, as Larrington notes, “attempts to tell the truth are not the truth itself”.

Following the discussion above, we can conclude that any reading of the *Vínland sagas* should be approached with an awareness of the considerable gap that separates the authors not only from the initial eyewitnesses but also from the scholars that interpreted the texts in recent times.

All three stages of reception – oral tradition, written text, and modern interpretations – inevitably reflects the cultural and ideological background of their respective times, alongside the inevitable loss of details and information. Acknowledging the complexity of the relationship we must establish with these texts does not entirely preclude the possibility of investigating their historical roots; however, it calls for a cautious, case-by-case approach.

4. Synopses

Eiríks saga rauða and *Grænlandinga saga* share several elements, both recounting voyages from Iceland and Greenland to lands lying west and south of Greenland. However, they differ markedly in narrative structure: *Eiríks saga* includes three expeditions, while *Grænlandinga saga* describes six. The latter (*GS* II,246-252) features Bjarni Herjólfsson's accidental sighting of unknown lands around 985, followed some fifteen years later by Leifr Eiríksson's voyage. Leifr winters in the new territory and is followed by his brothers Þorvaldr and Þorsteinn, whose expeditions end in failure. Þorfinnr *karlsefni* (the Promising) then leads a larger expedition, briefly establishing a settlement with sixty people (*GS* VII,260-264). Finally, Freydis, Eiríkr's daughter, organises her own voyage, ultimately betraying and killing her brothers, Helgi and Finnbogi, out of greed (*GS* VIII,264-267). *Eiríks saga*, in contrast, omits Bjarni, crediting Leifr with the discovery (*ES* V,209-214). His expedition is followed by the failed mission of his brother Þorsteinn, and finally by that of Þorfinnr *karlsefni* and his wife Guðríðr, who reach the new lands with 160 men (*ES* VIII-XII,221-234).

In *Grænlandinga saga* (III,248-252), following his time in Norway and baptism, Leifr buys Bjarni's ship and sets sail, inspired by his predecessor's account. In both versions, Eiríkr *rauði* – about to depart either with Leifr (*GS*) or with Þorsteinn (*ES*) – falls from his horse and must turn back, abandoning the voyage. Leifr goes on to discover and name Helluland (Flat-

Stones Land), Markland (Forest Land), and Vínland (Wine Land), earning the nickname *heppni* (the Fortunate) after rescuing a group of shipwreck survivors (*GS* IV,371-374).

In both sagas, a woman named Guðríðr occupies a central role as the wife of Þorfinnr *karlsefni* and one of the explorers who have already embraced the Christian fate. She loses her second husband Þorsteinn to a harsh famine that strikes their settlement. Shortly after, he returns as a *draugr* to deliver a prophecy to Guðríðr about her future with Þorfinnr and their descendants.³⁰ In *Grænlandinga saga* (VI,257-260) the two do not marry immediately: Þorsteinn first sets out for Vínland to retrieve the body of his brother Þorvaldr, who had died there. A storm forces the crew back to Greenland, where they land at Vestribyggð, the settlement where Guðríðr lives.

Guðríðr remarries Þorfinnr and travels to Vínland in both texts. Moreover, in *Eiríks saga* (VIII,222) it is Þorfinnr and not Leifr who discovers and names Helluland and Markland. Þorfinnr also names the headland of Kjalarnes, after a beach where he and his crew come across a keel (*kjölnur*). In *Grænlandinga saga* (V,255), this location is part of Þorvaldr's expedition. After discovering a wooden cabin, likely built by the indigenous inhabitants for storing wheat, Þorvaldr and his men continue exploring until the keel of their ship breaks. They repair it in a nearby bay, which they name Kjalarnes. There, they encounter three canoes, under which *skrælingar* are hiding.³¹ Þorvaldr's men capture them, but one

³⁰ A *draugr* (pl. *draugar*) is a revenant, a creature that traverses the boundaries between life and death, as well as between Christianity and paganism, as portrayed in the sagas (cf. Bennet 2014: 42-43). The recent conversion of Greenland to Christianity does not imply the disappearance of figures such as revenants; rather, it points to a persistent syncretism between the two belief systems. Revenants, in fact, appear frequently in saga literature, so much so that “the fact that Þorsteinn comes back from the dead to speak to Guðríðr [...] is not particularly unusual” (Bennet 2014: 43). A significant re-interpretation of revenants in the *Íslendingasögur* is offered by Ármann Jakobsson (2009); see also Keyworth (2007) and Burge (1994-1996).

³¹ The word, which in modern Icelandic means “barbarian” and “uncivilized people”, may derive from the Old Norse *skrá* (“dried skin”), indicating the animal pelts worn by the natives, thereby signifying “skin-clad people” (cf. Jahr & Broch 1996: 233).

escapes. Soon after, the entire crew hears a soothing, mysterious voice that sends them into a deep sleep. While they sleep, the *skrælingar* attack, and Þorvaldr is killed.

In *Eiríks saga* (x,227), after their stop at Kjalarnes, Þorfinnr and his crew encounter some canoes paddled by *skrælingar* on a river. Initially, peaceful trade is established, until a bull breaks loose from its tether and frightens them, prompting their retreat. Soon after, the *skrælingar* return – this time to attack (*ES* xi,228-231). Some of the settlers hide in the brush, while Freyðís flies into a rage and manages to send them away. After three years, Þorfinnr decides to abandon the settlement, deterred by the threat posed by the native population. On the journey to Greenland, the crew stops in Markland, where they encounter five more *skrælingar* (*ES* xii,233-234). Þorfinnr and his men capture the group's children, baptise them, and raise them as their own, learning their names and a few words of their language. Þorfinnr eventually returns to Iceland with Guðriðr.

In *Grænlandinga saga* (vii,261-262), Þorfinnr's trade with the *skrælingar* initially proceeds peacefully, despite their attempt to get weapons from the settlers. During their stay, Guðriðr gives birth to a son named Snorri. Soon after, the *skrælingar* return in greater numbers to resume trading, but as they try to steal the settlers' weapons, a conflict rises between the two parties (*GS* vii,263-264). Although the attack is repelled, Þorfinnr and his companions set up an ambush near a large lake. The plan succeeds, but the group ultimately concludes that it would be wiser to return to Greenland.

5. Narrative Devices

As we can know so little about the historical events that inspired the Vínland sagas, it becomes all the more feasible to ask ourselves what these texts can reveal about the society that produced them. As previously noted, it is worth asking which elements within the stories of American explorations rendered them worthy of being remembered and transmitted – and thus motivated the composition of the two sagas in the form we know

today. A first element I propose, which also characterizes the *Íslendingasögur* more broadly, is the potential to link the exploits of the great explorers of Vinland directly to the contemporary world of the authors and readers, which means to prominent figures of their time, or possibly to the patrons who commissioned the texts. This need is reflected in a widespread narrative device found throughout the saga tradition, which is the inclusion of extended genealogies, typically positioned at the beginning and end of the texts.

a. *Genealogies*

Sagas such as the indigenous *riddarasögur* also make use of genealogies, but their prologues are more frequently occupied by apologetic insertions from the authors – an attempt to bolster the credibility of the narrative in light of its exaggerations and fantastical elements.³² By contrast, in the *Íslendingasögur*, including the Vinland sagas, the authorial voice is far less prominent. Prologues tend to focus instead on tracing the origins of the figures who will become the central characters, while epilogues are devoted to outlining their distinguished lineages.

Geraldine Barnes (2001: 1), building on the theories of Haraldur Bessason (1967-1968), identifies this strategy of connecting notable figures from the early period of colonization with the sagas' audience or patrons as one of the main motivations behind the composition of these texts. In the case of the Vinland sagas, for instance, we are told in the epilogues that the great-grandsons of Guðríðr and Þorfinnr – Þorlákr Rúnólfsson and Björn Gilsson – became bishops of Skálholt (1118-1133) and Hólar (1147-1162), respectively; one of their great-great-grandsons, Brandr Sæmundarson, succeeded Björn at Hólar. Brandr is named as the source of information for *Grænlandinga saga*, if not its author, as pointed out by Jón Jóhannesson (1962: 66).

³² Cf. Kalinke (1985: 319). On genealogies as a principle of literary organization around which the *Íslendingasögur* might have been built, cf. Clunies Ross (1993). For a structural model of *Íslendingasögur* which includes genealogies, see Andersson (1964: 3-30).

The first chapter of *Eiríks saga rauða* focuses on the ancestors of Ólafr hvíti (the White), then recounts his marriage to Auðr djúpuðga (the Deep-Minded) and her subsequent relocation to Iceland. It is only in the second chapter (*ES* II,197) that we finally encounter Eiríkr, who is likewise introduced through a genealogical framing: “Þorvaldr hét maðr; hann var sonr Ásvalds Úlfssonar, Øxna-Þórissonar. Eiríkr rauði hét sonr hans” (“There was a man named Þorvaldr. He was the son of Ásvaldr, son of Úlfr, son of Öxna-Þórir. His son was called Eiríkr the Red”).

This kind of genealogical preamble establishes a sense of historical rootedness and continuity, anchoring the saga’s protagonists within a broader network of ancestral prestige.³³ The narrative significance of the characters is thus legitimized in the prologue, while the epilogue serves to legitimize their descendants, linking the protagonists to the society that would have engaged with these texts. In *Eiríks saga* (xiv,236-237) the reader is provided the following information:

Dóttir Snorra Karlsefnissonar var Hallfríðr, móðir Þorláks byskups Runólfssonar. Þau áttu son, er Þorbjörn hét; hans dóttir hét Þórunn, móðir Bjarnar byskups. Þorgeirr hét sonr Snorra Karlsefnissonar, faðir Yngvildar, móður Brands byskups ins fyrra. Ok lýkr hér þessi sögu.

The daughter of Snorri Karlsefnisson was Hallfríðr, mother of Bishop Þorlákr Runólfsson. They had another son named Þorbjörn, whose daughter was Þórunn, mother of Bishop Björn. Another son of Snorri Karlsefnisson was Þorgeirr, father of Yngvildr, mother of Bishop Brandr I. And thus, this story comes to an end.

In *Grænlandinga saga*, this process of legitimization is even more explicit. Bjarni Herjólfsson, credited with the first sighting of the new lands, is presented as a distant relative of Ingólfr Arnarson, the first recognized settler of Iceland and a prominent

³³ As Clunies Ross (1993: 378) points out: “Icelandic genealogists were well able to adopt various means of reckoning the ancestry of an individual or a group, using either the male or the female line or both, in order to devise the most prestigious genealogy”.

figure in the island's collective memory. After an opening chapter focused on Eiríkr *rauði*'s family – which some editions and translations treat as a standalone prologue – the saga (*GS* II,244) states:³⁴

Herjólfur var Bárðarson Herjólfssonar. Hann var frændi Ingólfrs landnámamanns. Þeim Herjólfri gaf Ingólfr land á milli Vágs ok Reykjanes. Herjólfur bjó fyrst á Dreppstokki. Þorgerður hét kona hans, en Bjarni sonr þeira ok var inn efniligsti maður.

Herjólfur was the son of Bárður Herjólfsson. He was a kinsman of Ingólfr, the first settler. Ingólfr granted Herjólfur land between Vágur and Reykjanes. Herjólfur first lived at Dreppstokkur. His wife was named Þorgerður, and their son was Bjarni, a most promising man.

It is significant to note how important it was for the author not only to situate the characters within a genealogical tree, but also to anchor them in specific geographical locations that would have been familiar to contemporary readers. The process of colonization thus emerges as a crucial element of Icelandic identity – a fundamental point of reference used to ennoble the protagonists' image and, by extension, that of their descendants. By linking Bjarni to Ingólfr, the saga reinforces the authority and prestige of its protagonist, embedding his voyage within the broader narrative of Iceland's foundational history.

The epilogue of *Grœnlendinga saga* does not differ significantly, except for the greater emphasis placed on Guðríður's choice of a religious life upon her return from Vínland. After her son's marriage, Guðríður undertakes a pilgrimage to Rome and then becomes “nunna ok einsetukona” (“a nun in seclusion” - *GS* IX,269).³⁵ The saga then traces Snorri's descendants, beginning with Þorgeirr: “Hann var faðir Yngvildar, móður Brands byskups” (“He was the father of Yngvildur, mother of Bishop Brandr”).

³⁴ For instance, Pagani (2018) treats it as a standalone prologue, whilst the Íslensk fornrit edition of the text does not.

³⁵ All subsequent quotes are from the same page.

It proceeds with Snorri's daughter Hallfríðr, "kona Runólfs, fôður Þorláks byskups" ("wife of Runólfr, father of Bishop Þorlákr"), and finally mentions Björn, another son of Þorfinnr *karlsefni* and Guðríðr: "Hann var faðir Þórunnar, móður Bjarnar byskups" ("He was the father of Þórunn, mother of Bishop Björn"). At this point, the connection with the author's present becomes explicit: At this point, the connection with the author's present becomes explicit: "Fjöldi manna er frá Karlsefni kominn [...]. Ok hefir Karlsefni gørst sagt allra manna atburði um farar þessar allar, er nú er nokkut orði á komit" ("A great many people are descended from Karlsefni [...]. And Karlsefni has been accounted the man who told most clearly of all these journeys now somewhat spoken of"). Thus, the conclusion anchors the narrative to the Icelandic present. Regardless of the historical accuracy of these genealogical details – some of which may have been deliberately modified or invented by the authors – what matters for modern interpretation is the clear need that emerges to reinforce the sagas' role as instruments of collective memory and cultural identity.

The prominence of notable figures from Iceland's religious establishment among the descendants of Guðríðr and Þorfinnr should come as no surprise. Although the sagas depict a situation of syncretism, with both pagan and Christian characters – a reflection of the historical reality of Iceland around the year 1000 – they were composed in a Christianized context. It is this ideological framework that shapes the authors' perspectives, prompting them to devote particular attention to certain characters and families.

Another aspect of the narratives that seems to have particularly inspired the creative elaboration of the authors of the Vínland sagas lies in the representation of nature and the forces of the weather. As I will show in the next paragraph, the journeys to the new lands, laden with mystery and danger, provide an ideal context for the introduction of unsettling or supernatural factors that not only shape the course of the narrative but may also guide the reader's interpretation of events.

b. *Forces of Nature*

In *Eiríks saga*, we are told of the conversion of Leifr *heppni*, who sets out on a mission to evangelize Greenland at the command of King Ólafr himself. Although the close relationship between Leifr and the king is historically improbable, this detail may reveal the author's communicative aims, serving to legitimize Leifr's voyage and to frame the saga within a Christian perspective.

The expedition gains even further prestige when Leifr, while en route to Greenland, is mysteriously blown off course to the shores of new lands (*ES* v,211):

Lætr Leifr í haf ok er lengi úti ok hitti á lönd þau, er hann vissi áðr enga ván til. Váru þar hveitiakrar sjálfsánir ok vínviðr vaxinn. Þar váru þau tré, er mǫsurr heita, ok höfðu þeir af þessu ǫllu nokkur merki, sum tré svá mikil, at í hús váru lögð.

Leifr set out and was long at sea before he reached places he had never expected. There were self-propagating fields of wheat and vines growing. There were also trees known as ahorn, and they took samples of everything, including some trees so large that they were suitable for building houses.

The action of natural agents is not always tied to characters who have converted to Christianity. In *Grænlandinga saga* (II,246), although his father shows friendship towards a Christian man from the Hebrides, Bjarni himself is not explicitly described as one. Nevertheless, he seems to be aided in the discovery of new lands by favorable northern winds and the sudden descent of a mysterious fog surrounding his ship: “En þá tók af byrina, ok lagði á norrænur ok þokur, ok vissu þeir eigi, hvert at þeir fóru, ok skipti þat mǫrgum dægum” (“Then the wind dropped, and it turned to northerlies and fogs, and they did not know where they were going, and this lasted for many days”).³⁶

³⁶ In this case, one may note the possible influence of a literary motif already found in texts such as the *Navigatio sancti Brendani*, as highlighted by Ghiroldi in his chapter.

There are also cases, such as the attempted expedition of Þorsteinn and Guðríðr in *Grænlandinga saga* (vi,257), where the intervention of adverse weather seems more clearly to serve fundamental developments in the plot. Þorsteinn's prophecy appears in both sagas, supporting the idea that it was an important narrative core – perhaps already present in the oral transmission of the story. The fact that Þorsteinn must die during the famine in Greenland and prophesy Guðríðr's future could be interpreted as the underlying reason for the storm that drives him off course: “Þau velkði úti allt sumarit, ok vissu eigi, hvar þau fóru” (“They were tossed about at sea all summer and did not know where they were heading”).

It is important to note that the pervasive role of natural forces in the sagas may be more accurately attributed to the influence of other travel literature than to the ideological background of the authors. In this regard, Syed Manzurul Islam's reflection (1993: 2) proves particularly useful. He emphasizes the necessity of creating a spatial limit – a boundary whose crossing triggers the experience of the unknown, the unexpected, and ultimately, the encounter with otherness: “Before a narrative of difference can begin, the text must establish points of departure, lines of boundary, whose crossing enables the very possibility of representing otherness”. Building on Islam's insights, Williamsen (2005: 454-455) explains many of the unsettling phenomena experienced by explorers in the Vínland sagas.

Another moment in which natural agents play a pivotal role is the episode involving Þórhallr and the beached whale in *Eiríks saga*. At some point during Þorfinnr *karlsefni*'s expedition, the group reaches a barren and inhospitable area. One member of the expedition, Þórhallr, prays to Þórr for sustenance, and soon after, a whale washes ashore (viii,224): “Drjúgari varð inn rauðskeggjaði nú en Krístr yðvarr? Hefi ek þetta nú fyrir skáldskap minn, er ek orta um Þór, fulltrúann; sjaldan hefir hann mér brugðizk” (“Has the red-bearded one [Þórr] just proved more generous than your Christ? This is the reward for the poem I composed about Þórr, my patron. He has rarely failed me”).

However, upon hearing these words, most of the crew rejects the whale's remains, refusing to eat it, and instead turns to pray to God.

At this point, not sure about how to proceed, the group splits. Some follow Þórhallr, while others remain with Þorfinnr, who continues south, discovering an area rich in vines, fish, and wild wheat, which he names Hóp. Meanwhile, Þórhallr and his companions sail east, trusting that the pagan god will protect them. However, the ship is driven by storms to the coast of Ireland (*ES* ix,226): “Þá kom móti þeim vestanveðr, ok rak þá upp á Írlandi, ok váru þeir þar barðir ok þjáðir, ok lét Þórhallr þar líf sitt, eptir því sem kaupmenn hafa sagt” (“Then a storm from the west struck them and drove them ashore in Ireland, where they were beaten, mistreated, and where Þórhallr lost his life, according to what merchants have reported”). The narrative clearly frames his death as a consequence of misplaced faith, reinforcing the saga's Christian perspective.

c. *Prophecies and Visions*

Prophecies and visions are other narrative devices employed in the Vínland sagas, allowing the authors to guide the course of events and shape the reader's judgement. One prophetic moment tied to Guðríðr and her destiny as a Christian figure appears in chapter IV of *Eiríks saga*, where a pagan seeress (*völva*) named Þorbjörg delivers a prophecy. The woman arrives dressed in traditional ritual garb and asks for someone to perform a mysterious chant called *varðlokkur* to aid her in her prophecy (pp. 207-208):

Hon bað ok fá sér konur þær, er kynni fræði þat, sem til seiðsins þarf ok Varðlokur hétu. En þær konur fundusk eigi. [...] Þá segir Guðríðr: “Hvárki em ek fjölkunnig né vísindakona, en þó kenndi Helldís, fóstura mín, mér á Íslandi þat kvæði, er hon kallaði Varðlokur”. Þorkell segir: “Þá ertu happfróð”. Hon segir: “Þetta er þat eitt atferli, er ek ætla í engum atbeina at vera, því at ek em kristin kona”.

She asked to be provided with women who knew the lore needed for the *seiðr* ritual and the songs called *varðlokkur*. But no such women were found. [...] Then Guðríðr said: “I am neither versed in magic nor a wise woman, but my foster mother, Halldís, taught me a chant in Iceland, which she called *varðlokkur*”. Þorkell said: “Then you are fortunate”. Guðríðr replied: “This is the one act in which I do not want to take part, for I am a Christian woman”.

It is crucial for Guðríðr to declare her Christian faith. Nevertheless, she ultimately agrees to sing, having learned the chants in her youth. Her singing successfully invokes the spirits, and Þorbjörg prophesies that the famine will end and that Guðríðr will enter into two prosperous marriages – one in Greenland and one in Iceland – thereby founding a distinguished lineage.³⁷

This episode proves particularly interesting for an analysis of the relationship between Christianity and paganism within the saga. Although the seeress practices *seiðr* – a form of pagan magic often associated with shamanism – the intervention of Guðríðr’s voice seems to bring the event back within the bounds of acceptability.³⁸ The seeress’s prophecy is not only ultimately accepted by the community but also proves to be accurate, suggesting a form of religious syncretism in which pre-Christian practices are accommodated within a now Christianized society, provided they are interpreted through a Christian lens.³⁹

³⁷ Regarding the *völva* Þorbjörg, beyond the unusually detailed description of her attire, one may note the absence of a patronymic, which could suggest a foreign origin – either Celtic, given that Celtic slaves often lacked patronymics, or, more plausibly, Sámi (cf. Jochens 1999: 85). In the *Íslendingasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*, characters of Sámi descent frequently embody the stereotype of figures associated with occult practices (cf. Hermann Pálsson 1999). On the performance of the ritual and the *varðlokkur*, cf. also Gunnell (2014: 136) and Price (2019: 170).

³⁸ On *seiðr* and other magical practices in the Old Norse-Icelandic sagas, cf. Dillmann (2006); Mitchell (2003); Korecká (2019).

³⁹ Kellogg (2001) suggests that the saga authors approached the Conversion with a sense of indulgence. While conscious that their forebears had once adhered to false beliefs, they nonetheless chose to portray them with a degree of admiration, particularly for the devotion they displayed. According to Kellogg (p. 33), paganism is represented in the sagas “as a foreshadowing for a truer belief”. In this light, the term that Þorbjörg uses to address Guðríðr at the end of her speech – *dóttir* (“child”) – may also be better

When this framing does not occur – as in the case of Þórhallr, who brazenly boasts of Þórr’s superiority over Christ – the consequences are inevitably dramatic, if not fatal.

Finally, it is important to recall the moment of great famine that leads to the death of Þorsteinn Eiríksson in chapter VI of *Eiríks saga*. One evening, Sigríðr – the wife of another man named Þorsteinn – asks Guðríðr to accompany her to the latrine outside the settlement. However, upon reaching the door, Sigríðr suddenly stops and begins to scream, alarming Guðríðr, who urges her to give up and return. Sigríðr’s response, however, sounds like a tragic premonition (*ES* VI,215): “Eigi er fært at svá búnu; hér er nú liðit þat allt it dauða fyrir durunum, ok Þorsteinn, bóndi þinn, ok þar kenni ek mik; ok er slíkt hǫrmung at sjá” (“It is not possible to proceed as things stand. Here at the door march all the dead, including your husband Þorsteinn, and I see myself among them. It is a dreadful sight”). After the vision passes, the two women withdraw.

Nonetheless, Sigríðr’s premonition proves true, and Þorsteinn’s death represents an opportunity for the saga’s author to frame the events within a Christian religious perspective. Upon rising from death, Þorsteinn utters these words before sending for Guðríðr (*ES* VI,215): “Guð vill, at þessi stund sé mér gefin til leyfis ok umbótar míns ráðs” (“God wills that this time be granted to me to part this life and make amends for my affairs”). Guðríðr approaches him, worried yet confident that everything will be well thanks to God’s protection (p. 216): “Vera kann, at þetta sé ætlat til nokkurra þeira hluta, er síðan sé í minni hafðir, þessi inn undarligi hlutr, en ek vænti, at guðs gæzla mun yfir mér standa” (“It may be that this strange event is meant for some purpose that shall later be remembered, and I trust that God’s protection will be over me”).

understood. Grønlie (2006: 308) interprets this moment as a symbolic passing of the torch between the two faiths. Guðríðr would later establish herself as a matriarch of the Christian faith in both Greenland and Iceland, marking a transition between eras.

At this point, Þorsteinn's voice seems to merge with that of the author himself, as seen in the indirect speech preceding his address to Guðríðr (*ES* vi,216): “En þat mælti hann svá at allir heyrðu, at þeir menn væri sælir, er trúna heldu, ok henni fylgði öll hjálp ok miskunn, ok sagði þó, at margir heldi hana illa” (“And he said, so that all could hear, that those men were blessed who kept their faith, for all help and mercy followed it, though he added that many did not keep it well”). Before prophesying Guðríðr's future and returning to death, Þorsteinn criticizes the recent burial customs in Greenland: “Er þat engi hátt, sem hér hefir verit á Grœnlandi, síðan kristni kom hér, at setja menn niðr í óvígða mold við litla yfirsongva. Vil ek mik láta flytja til kirkju ok aðra þá menn, sem hér hafa andazk” (“It is no proper custom, as has prevailed here in Greenland since Christianity came, to bury men in unconsecrated ground with little ceremony. I wish to be brought to a church, along with the others who have died here”).

In both sagas, Þorsteinn advises Guðríðr not to marry a Greenlandic settler but to return to Iceland. In *Grœnlendinga saga*, he urges her to undertake a pilgrimage to Rome, build a church in Iceland, and become a nun; whereas in *Eiríks saga*, he instructs her to divide their possessions between the church and the poor. Guðríðr subsequently marries Þorfinnr *karlsefni* in both narratives and accompanies him on his voyage.

I believe that the prophecy of the undead serves at least three narrative purposes in the Vínland sagas: firstly, it establishes Guðríðr as a model of Christian devotion, as she is instructed either to build a church and become a nun or to donate Þorsteinn's goods to the ecclesiastical institution, thus reinforcing her role as a positive figure; secondly, it facilitates her return to Iceland, where it is crucial that she found a prestigious lineage; and thirdly, it enables her to participate in the exploration of the new lands, after marrying Þorfinnr, whose very nickname (*karlsefni*) conveys the idea of a capable young man.

d. *Guðríðr and Freydís*

One feature of the *Vínland sagas* that has particularly captured the interest of literary scholars is the opposition between Freydís, daughter of Eiríkr, and Guðríðr, who, although not a direct relative of Eiríkr, is nonetheless part of the Greenlandic settler community associated with him. Gísli Sigurðsson (2008: x-xi) has proposed that this contrast – between Freydís, a figure of cruelty, impulsiveness, and deceit, and Guðríðr, an exemplar of Christian virtue – is suggested in their very names. Guðríðr, as a compound, incorporates *guð* (“God”) in its first element, thus the Christian deity; Freydís, on the other hand, appears to reference the pagan cult of Freyja, goddess of fertility, thereby reinforcing the ideological contrast and further aligning Guðríðr with the Christian values promoted in the sagas.

The importance of Guðríðr as a behavioral and moral exemplar, as well as the significance of her lineage with Þorfinnr, has already been discussed. Þorsteinn himself, during his prophecy in *Grænlandinga saga* (VI,260), speaks of their offspring as “þroskasamt, bjart ok ágætt, sætt ok ilmat vel” (“vigorous, bright and noble, sweet and fragrant”). Freydís, on the other hand, is consistently portrayed as impulsive and domineering in both sagas. In *Grænlandinga saga* (II,245-246), the narrator accuses her of marrying her husband, Þorvarðr, for his wealth: “Hon var svarri mikill, en Þorvarðr var lítilmenni; var hon mjök gefin til fjár. Heiðit var fólk á Grænlandi í þann tíma” (“She was very headstrong, and Þorvarðr was a weakling. She was fond of money. People in Greenland were still pagan at that time”).

Although the connection between Freydís’s immoral traits and the persistence of paganism in Greenland may not seem immediately apparent, the overall narrative strategies of the *Vínland sagas* clearly show the authors’ intention to convey Christian messages. It seems thus no coincidence that Freydís’s pagan background is contrasted with the Christian virtues embodied by Guðríðr and Leifr. Although Freydís and Guðríðr never confront each other directly, their opposing moral qualities

establish two antithetical models of femininity. As for Leifr, Eiríkr's converted son, he is the one who ultimately curses Freydís and her descendants following the tragic events of her voyage to Vínland in *Grænlandinga saga*.⁴⁰

In a chapter often titled “Ódæðisverk Freydísar á Vínlandi” (“Freydís's Atrocities in Vínland”),⁴¹ Freydís organizes the final expedition after persuading her brothers, Helgi and Finnbogi, to accompany her. She proposes that their ships and crews should be equally equipped but secretly smuggles additional men aboard her own vessel. One morning, after a private conversation with Finnbogi, she falsely claims to her husband that she has been mistreated and demands that he avenge her honor (*GS* VIII,266): “En þú, vesall maðr, munt hvárki vilja reka minnar skammar né þinnar, [...] ok mun ek gera skilnað við þik, útan þú hefnir þessa” (“But you, wretched man, will neither seek to avenge my shame nor your own, [...] and I shall leave you unless you take vengeance”).

Worn down by Freydís's accusations and complaints, her husband alerts his men, and they launch an attack against her brothers (p. 266):

Nú váru þar allir karlar drepnir, en konur váru eptir, ok vildi engi þær drepa. Þá mælti Freydís: ‘Fái mér øxi í hönd’. Svá var gert. Síðan vegr hon at konum þeim fimm, er þar váru, ok gekk af þeim dauðum.

All the men there were killed, but the women were spared, as no one wanted to harm them. Then Freydís said: ‘Give me an axe in my hand’. And so it was done. She then struck at the five women who were there, killing them all.

⁴⁰ The saga authors' emphasis on genealogies makes such a curse particularly severe for an individual. As Wolf (1996: 471) notes: “While Leifr is strangely reluctant to resort to punitive measures [...] the narrator of the saga, in the guise of the public opinion, resorts to what is probably the worst punishment in the world of the sagas”. As we read in *Grænlandinga saga* (IX,268): “engum þótti um þau vert þaðan í frá, nema ills” (“after that, no one thought anything but ill of them”).

⁴¹ For instance, this title appears in Guðni Jónsson 1953's edition of the saga.

In *Eiríks saga*, the events involving Freydís differ slightly, though she is portrayed as equally impulsive and aggressive. During Þorfinnr's expedition and the confrontation with the *skrælingar*, Freydís flies into a rage, accuses the men in her group of lacking courage, and behaves in a way that causes the natives to flee (*ES XI,229*):

Hon fann fyrir sér mann dauðan [...]. Sverðit lá bert í hjá honum; tók hon þat upp ok býsk at verja sik. Þá komu Skrælingar at henni; hon dró þá út brjóstit undan klæðunum ok slettir á beru sverðinu. Við þetta óttask Skrælingar ok hljópu undan á skip sín ok reru í brott.

She found a dead man nearby [...]. His sword lay bare beside him. She picked it up and prepared to defend herself. Then the *skrælingar* approached her. She drew out her breast from under her clothing and struck it with the bare sword. At this, the *skrælingar* became frightened and fled back to their boats, rowing away.

An additional layer to Freydís's negative characterization emerges in her dehumanization of the native peoples, whom she refers to as *búfé* ("livestock"). This choice of language reveals her perception of them as non-human and inferior, an attitude that reinforces her sense of superiority and legitimizes, in her view, the use of violence against them.⁴²

While the fate of Freydís and her husband remains uncertain in *Eiríks saga*, in *Grœnlendinga saga* she returns to Greenland, where she is cursed by her brother Leifr for her wicked deeds, as previously mentioned. The criminal actions of Freydís can be contrasted with the Christian character of Guðríðr, who is already exalted before her journeys to Vínland through premonitions and visions. In *Grœnlendinga saga* (VII,262-263), her encounter with the *skrælingar* takes a very different turn compared to that

⁴² Cf. Hermann (2021: 11). The exceptional degree of wickedness attributed to Freydís has been noted by Björn Þorsteinsson (1962-1965: 185), who describes her as "the most evil creature one can find in all the Old Icelandic literature". As for the possible inspirations behind the portrayal of Freydís, Wolf (1996: 482-485) traces this depiction back to the classical tradition of the Amazons.

of Freydís. An indigenous woman enters Guðríðr's quarters and claims to bear the same name:⁴³

Þá bar skugga í dyrrin, ok gekk þar inn kona í svörtum námkyrtli, heldr lág, ok hafði dregil um höfuð ok ljósþorp á hár, fólleit ok mjök eygð, svá at eigi hafði jafnmikil augu sét í einum mannshausi. Hon gekk þar at, er Guðríðr sat, ok mælti: “Hvat heitir þú?” segir hon. “Ek heiti Guðríðr; eða hvert er þitt heiti?” “Ek heiti Guðríðr”, segir hon.

Then a shadow fell across the doorway, and a woman entered, wearing a black cloak, rather short in stature, with a hood over her head and light brown hair, pale-skinned and with very large eyes, larger than had ever been seen in a human head. She walked over to where Guðríðr was sitting and said: “What is your name?”. Guðríðr replied: “My name is Guðríðr; and what is yours?”. “My name is Guðríðr”, said the woman.

Unlike Freydís, Guðríðr welcomes the stranger and invites her to sit; yet, at that very moment, cries from outside announce the beginning of a conflict, and the mysterious visitor disappears. The unsettling description of her physical appearance is followed by an even more disturbing supernatural occurrence, as “engi maðr hafði konu þessa sét, utan Guðríðr ein” (“no man had seen this woman except for Guðríðr alone”). It can be speculated that this native *doppelgänger* of Guðríðr serves as a further indication of her key role as a model figure, even in exotic and mysterious settings such as the exploration of the new lands.

e. North America, or just a topos?

A final noteworthy aspect concerns the depiction of the natural environment of Vínland and the other territories explored by the characters. It has been suggested that the descriptions of the landscape and the abundant resources found in the new lands – both in *Eiríks saga* and *Grænlandinga saga* – may have been

⁴³ For a more detailed analysis of this episode, cf. Almqvist (2001).

influenced by widely known medieval literary *topoi*, such as the *locus amoenus* and the Garden of Eden, as well as by other, lesser-known traditions that likely circulated in Iceland regarding legendary and magical lands in the western ocean.⁴⁴

One of the most prominent supporters of this hypothesis was the polar explorer Fridtjof Nansen (1911). He believed that the Norse did travel to the coasts of North America but maintained that the sagas' representation of these explorations drew mostly on contemporary travel literature and geographical lore.⁴⁵ Another aspect that has been highlighted, for instance, is the suitability of the natural resources described in Vínland to the needs of a Christian community. Gísli Sigurðsson (2008: xi) has suggested a possible link between the reported abundance of vines and wild wheat in Vínland and the symbolic potential of producing wine and host for the celebration of the Mass – an association made all the more plausible given that the land is discovered by Leifr during his missionary journey.

It is likely not coincidental that immediately following Leifr's discovery we find the episode of Leifr rescuing a group of shipwrecked men, a commentary on his exceptional generosity, and the conversion of the group to the Christian faith (*ES* v,211-212): “Leifr fann menn á skipflaki ok flutti heim með sér. Sýndi hann í því ina mestu stórmennsku ok drengskap [...]. Hann kom kristni á landit, ok var jafnan síðan kallaðr Leifr inn heppni.” (“Leifr found men shipwrecked and brought them home with him. In doing so, he showed the greatest generosity and honor. He introduced Christianity to the land, and he was thereafter called Leifr the Lucky”).⁴⁶

⁴⁴ On this topic, cf. Hermann (2021: 4); Kuldkepp (2018); Egeler (2017); Gísli Sigurðsson (2004: 234); Frakes (2001); Kellogg (2001: 36).

⁴⁵ Cf. Frakes (2001: 157-158).

⁴⁶ Through a comparison between *ES* and *Eireks saga víðförla* (The Saga of Eirekr the Widely-Travelled), Kuldkepp (2018: 210-213) explores the portrayal of Leifr as a spiritual figure. Characters such as Leifr and Eirekr, the protagonist of *Eireks saga*, acquire traits of sanctity through their journeys to distant and exotic lands. According to Kuldkepp, the motifs of travel and holiness “are interconnected to an inseparable degree” (p. 216).

It remains uncertain whether this coincidence alone is sufficient to suggest that every detail in the natural description of these territories is the result of an ideological elaboration shaped by religious concerns.

Marvelous elements also feature prominently in the depiction of the new lands in *Grænlandinga saga* (III,250), such as the episode where Leifr and his companions taste the dew on the grass: “Dögg var á grasinu, ok varð þeim þat fyrir, at þeir tóku höndum sínum í döggina ok brugðu í munn sér ok þóttusk ekki jafnsœtt kennt hafa, sem þat var”. (“There was dew upon the grass, and it so happened that they took the dew into their hands and brought it to their mouths, and it seemed to them that they had never tasted anything so sweet”).

Shortly thereafter, the narrator lingers on the abundance of salmon in the rivers and the absence of winter frost (p. 251):

Hvárki skorti þar lax í ánni né í vatninu, ok stœrra lax en þeir hefði fyrr sét. Þar var svá góðr landskostr, at því er þeim sýndisk, at þar myndi engi fénaðr fóðr þurfa á vetrum; þar kómu engi frost á vetrum, ok lítt rénuðu þar grös.

Neither the river nor the lake lacked salmon, and the salmon were larger than any they had previously seen. The land, as it appeared to them, was of such excellent quality that no livestock would require fodder during the winter. No frosts came in winter, and the grasses scarcely withered.

At the same time, elements of realism are equally noticeable, particularly in the detailed and plausible depiction of their movements (*GS* III,250):

Síðan fóru þeir til skip síns ok sigldu í sund þat, er lá milli eyjarinnar ok ness þess, er norðr gekk af landinu; stefndu í vestrætt fyrir nesit. Þar var grunnsævi mikit at fjöru sjávar, ok stóð þá uppi skip þeira; ok var þá langt til sjávar at sjá frá skipinu.

Afterwards they returned to their ship and sailed into the channel

lying between the island and the headland that stretched northwards from the mainland; they then sailed westward past the headland. There was a great shallow at low tide, and their ship was left grounded a considerable distance from the sea.

Walter Baumgartner (1993: 23) suggests that the *Vínland* sagas reflect themes from the Creation narratives in the book of *Genesis*, interpreting them as allegories of a biblical Paradise, complete with motifs of sin and expulsion, as all the explorers ultimately abandon their attempts to settle following violent clashes with the natives. In contrast, John R. S. Phillips (1988: 172) contends that, despite the marvelous qualities attributed to *Vínland*, it was “also a very real land, as the descriptions of the native inhabitants and of their hostility make clear, it was certainly no Garden of Eden”.

If not directly inspired by the widespread medieval *topos* of the Garden of Eden, the sagas may have drawn on the more general motif of the *locus amoenus*, described by Isidore of Seville (*Etymologiae* XIV,viii,33) as an idyllic natural landscape, removed from human activity, typically characterized by blossoming plants and the presence of water. Such a setting, being distant from the structures of ordinary social interaction, offers a space where individuals may be freed from societal constraints and meet the other and the marvelous. Remaining within the scope of Isidore’s writings, Ólafur Halldórsson (1985: 388) has explored the parallels between the description of *Vínland* and that of the Fortunate Isles as presented in the *Etymologiae*.⁴⁷

Gísli Sigurðsson (2004: 233-235) has argued that the descriptions of *Vínland* in the sagas may have been influenced by Irish folk tales about legendary islands in the western sea. His study draws on the presence of individuals of British descent among the settlers of *Breiðafjörður*, the Icelandic area from which many of the protagonists of the sagas come from.⁴⁸ According to Gísli, this points to the circulation – or at least the lingering

⁴⁷ On this topic, see Frakes (2001: 158) and Ghiroldi’s chapter in this book.

⁴⁸ Cf. Gammeltoft (1998: 226-227).

memory – of such stories, traces of which he identifies in legendary places within Old Norse-Icelandic tradition, such as Ódáinsvellir (Fields of the Undying) and Hvítramannaland (Land of the White Men). Among the typical features of these legends, Gísli highlights “inexhaustible wine, rivers full of enormous salmon, and everlasting bliss”. These are indeed part of the descriptions of Vínland, often accompanied by self-propagating wheat.

As previously discussed in the section on the relationship between history and fiction, it is highly likely that the sagas are the product of both the recounting of real events and the subsequent elaborations which took place during their oral transmission. These later reworkings may have exaggerated the positive features of the new lands, possibly under the influence of learned and popular narratives already known and widespread at the time. As Gísli Sigurðsson (2004: 240) points out:

Even though the Vínland sagas are literary products, cast in the mold of the dominant form of the time when they were written and colored by the prevailing beliefs and assumptions, they are equally clearly based on memories of former times passed down orally from generation to generation by the people of Iceland. They are not spun out of thin air like creative fiction, and they are most certainly not to be viewed as myths or legends. There can thus be little doubt that they contain genuine memories about actual people and events that took place around the year 1000. But it is equally certain that the saga accounts of these characters and events do not mirror historical reality in every respect.

Further evidence of this can be found in the fact that even the earliest sixteenth-century settlers gave names to places commonly recognized as part of Vínland (such as LAM, the southern shores of the Gulf of St Lawrence, and the southern side of Miramichi Bay in New Brunswick) that were linked to the abundance of wild grapes (*Vitis riparia*) growing there. Examples include the name Île de Bacchus, given by Jacques Cartier to a site near

present-day Quebec City, and Baie de Vin.⁴⁹ The self-propagating wheat mentioned in the sagas may in fact refer to wild rye (*Elymus virginicus*), a plant native to the same region that closely resembles wheat.

Mats G. Larsson (1992: 314) has proposed this explanation, suggesting that Vínland should be located in what is now Nova Scotia. Larsson's contribution offers a comprehensive and valuable analysis, comparing the flora and fauna described in the sagas with that of Nova Scotia, both in the present day and as it would have appeared at the time of the Norse explorations. From this point of view, LAM would be explained as a temporary settlement, strategically useful for expeditions further south, where the explorers would have encountered richer vegetation and a milder climate. According to Gísli Sigurðsson (2004: 242), the territory explored by the Norse corresponds to the southern shores of the Gulf of St Lawrence, an area that "was also the habitat of the sought-after plant species of which traces have been found at the camp: three butternuts (*Juglans cinerea*) and a lump of burlwood from the butternut tree, with marks caused by an iron implement".

Studies such as those discussed above, supported by archaeological evidence, seem to confirm a blending of historical reality with narrative embellishment. It is therefore important to consider the complexity of these texts as the products of multiple layers of reworking. These embellishments were probably not the result of mere creative fancy but were rather guided by ideological aims well established in thirteenth-century Iceland, particularly the promotion of positive Christian models. It is perhaps for this reason that figures such as Leifr are given a central role in the voyages of discovery, and that the landscapes of the territories explored are portrayed with idyllic features, reminiscent of the Garden of Eden and other legendary places known to those who committed the Vínland sagas to writing.

⁴⁹ Gísli Sigurðsson (2004: 250).

6. Conclusions

The Vínland sagas occupy a unique position at the crossroads between historical memory and literary imagination. As this study has shown, while archaeological evidence supports the historical core of Norse voyages to North America around the year 1000, the sagas themselves must be read as complex, multi-layered texts shaped by the cultural, ideological, and literary milieu of thirteenth-century Iceland.

Far from being straightforward historical records, *Eiríks saga rauða* and *Grœnlendinga saga* reflect the narrative strategies, ideological concerns, and literary conventions of their time. Their use of genealogies, their portrayal of figures such as Guðríðr and Freydís, the integration of Christian ideological frameworks, and the depiction of Vínland through both marvellous and realistic elements, all suggest a careful negotiation between memory and invention. Through narrative devices such as prophecies, visions, miraculous landscapes, and moral *exempla*, the sagas construct a coherent and compelling literary image of the New World and its explorers.

Ultimately, recognizing the Vínland sagas as products of literary craftsmanship rather than mere repositories of historical fact allows us to better appreciate their richness and complexity. They reveal as much about the imaginative and ideological world of medieval Icelanders as they do about the Viking Age events that they purport to recount. Future research should continue to explore these texts at the intersection of history, memory, and fiction, acknowledging their invaluable contribution to our understanding of medieval Icelandic cultural identity and narrative practices.

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