

Lost in Translation
*Adapting Supernatural Concepts from Old French Chivalric
Literature into the Old Norse riddarasögur*

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Háskólaprent ehf.

To my parents in gratitude

Abstract

While the post-millennial research of Old Norse literature saw an increased interest in the study of translated *riddarasögur*, the scholarly focus in these studies rests, for the main part, on the effects of translation, the role and representation of women and the studies of emotion portrayed in the narratives. However, the effect of translation on supernatural concepts – especially of Old Norse concepts – has, so far, been left unaddressed. The present thesis, thus, aims to bridge this gap in scholarship by investigating how the Old Norse translations and adaptations of Old French chivalric works had an altering and long-lasting effect on the Old Norse mythological landscape. Indeed, the present research project hopes to establish the translated *riddarasögur* as a valued source for the study of the development of Old Norse supernatural concepts. By highlighting the influx of foreign Old French ideas and their impact on the Old Norse literature and mythology, this study aspires to present new approaches regarding the understanding of the development of Old Norse supernatural concepts as well as their subsequent changes.

Bearing the human element in translation as well as medieval translation practices in mind, the present thesis investigates twelfth- and thirteenth-century Old French courtly romances and associated material as well as the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Old Norse translations, redactions and reworkings thereof. The supernatural motifs (specifically the *álfar*, *dvergar*, *jötunar* and different forms of magic and magic wielders) described in these narratives will be examined in detail. The thesis includes an article concerning each concept which studies the differences and similarities in the concept's presentation and measures the potential long-term effects initiated by the said translations by investigating later *fornaldarsögur*, indigenous *riddarasögur* and Icelandic folk legends.

The first paper contained in the present thesis concerns the use of the Old Norse supernatural concept of the *álfar* (sg. *álfr*) as a translation for the Old French term *fées* (sg. *fée*), while the second article investigates the usage of the word *dvergar* (sg. *dvergr*) as a translation for the Old French *nains* (sg. *nain*) in the investigated literary corpora. The penultimate article examines the utilisation of the concept of the Old Norse *jötunar* (sg. *jötunn*) as a translation for the Old French idea of the *jaiants* (sg. *jaiant*), and the fourth and final article investigates the different notions and manifestations of magic and magic wielders displayed in the investigated Old French sources as well as their respective Old Norse renditions.

This research project hopes to open this particular field of research to the broader scientific community by laying down what may be seen as the first stepping-stone for a series of related studies.

Ágrip

Rannsóknir fræðimanna á þýðingum riddarasagna hafa eflst til muna eftir aldamótin en hið sama gildir ekki um rannsóknir á sjálfum efniviðni sagnanna, svo sem hvernig birtingarmynd kvenna er sýnd gegnum tilfinningar þeirra í sögunum. Hingað til hefur lítið verið kannað hvort og þá hver áhrif þýðingar efnis um yfirnáttúrulega hluti og atburði sem snúa að norrænni trú hafa verið. Markmið þessarar ritgerðar er að sýna fram á áhrif fornra franskra riddarasagna á hugmyndaheim norrænna manna um umhverfi sitt og landlýsingu, auk þess að sýna fram á áreiðanleika riddarasagna að því er varðar hugmyndir norrænna manna um hið yfirnáttúrulega. Ritgerðin greinir slíkar hugmyndir í hinum fornfrönsku bókmenntum og skoðar áhrif þeirra og innblástur í norrænum bókmenntum og goðafræði og sýnir þannig hvernig skilningur manna á yfirnáttúrulegum atburðum hefur þróast í aldanna rás. Í ritgerðinni er athyglinni einkum beint að hinum norrænu þýðingum tólfu og þrettánda aldar ástarsagna fornfranskra bókmennta og skoðað sérstaklega hvaða hlutverki hinn mannlegi þáttur og þeirra tíma þýðingarhefðir gegna. Yfirnáttúrulegar verur, svo sem álfar, dvergar og jötnar, auk ýmissa galdrahugtaka, sem fram koma í þessum frásögnum eru teknar til ítarlegrar skoðunar, og fjallað er um hverja áður nefnda tegund í sérstökum kafla. Með samanburði við seinni tíma fornaldarsögur, upprunalegar riddarasögur og íslenskar þjóðsögur eru þessar þýðingar skoðaðar í þeim tilgangi að greina áhrif á hin yfirnáttúrulegu fyrirbæri í þeim.

Í fyrsta hluta þessarar ritgerðar er fjallað um álfa í norrænum heimildum og goðsögulega tengingu þeirra við forn-franska hugtakið *fées* (eint. *fée*), annar hlutinn fjallar um dverga og hliðstæða tengingu þeirra við fornfranska hugtakið *nains* (eint. *nain*) með bókmenntafræðilegri nálgun. Meginkafla ritgerðarinnar fjallar á sama hátt um jötna og hliðstæða tengingu þeirra við fornfranska hugtakið *jaiants* (eint. *jaiant*). Í síðasta kaflanum er svo fjallað um norrænar galdrahefðir og galdratrú með hliðsjón af birtingarmynd þeirra í fornfrönskum bókmenntum.

Með ritgerð þessari vonast höfundur til að opna gátt inn á lítt kannað fræðasvið sem getur eflt og víkkað rannsóknarhugmyndir og -aðferðir fræðimanna í fornorrænum rannsóknum.

(Ingunn Ásdísardóttir þýddi.)

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List of Abbreviations

<i>ANF</i>	Arkiv för nordisk filologi
C.E.R.M.E.I.L.	Centre d'Études et de Recherches sur le Merveilleux, l'Étrange et l'Irreel en Littérature
CSEL	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
RGÄ Ergänzungsbande	Ergänzungsbande zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde
<i>Hum. Stud.</i>	Human Studies: A Journal for Philosophy and the Social Sciences
ÍF	Íslensk fornrit
<i>JIAS</i>	Journal of the International Arthurian Society
KTRM	Klassische Texte des romanischen Mittelalters in zweisprachigen Ausgaben
MGH Auct. ant.	Monumenta Germaniae Historica Auctores antiquissimi
MGH Epp. sel.	Monumenta Germaniae Historica Epistolae Selectae
MGH LL	Monumenta Germaniae Historica Leges (in Folio)
MGH SS rer. Germ.	Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi
MGH SS rer. Germ. N. S.	Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi, Nova Series
MGH SS rer. Lang.	Monumenta Germaniae Historica rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum
MGH SS rer. Merov.	Monumenta Germaniae Historica rerum Merovingicarum
<i>MLR</i>	The Modern Language Review
<i>MM</i>	Maal og Minne
<i>MSCAN</i>	Mediaeval Scandinavia
NPNF	A Selected Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series
ONP	Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog (from the website https://onp.ku.dk)
<i>PMLA</i>	Publications of the Modern Language Association of America
SATF	Société des anciens textes français

SMS	Studia Medievalia Septentrionalia
STUAGNL	Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur
TMC	The Medieval Countryside
TCNE	Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe
VMS	Viking and Medieval Scandinavia
ZBLG	Zeitschrift für bayerische Landesgeschichte
ZfdA	Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur
ZfdPh	Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie

1 Background and Structure

The aim of the present thesis is to examine how supernatural Old Norse concepts were potentially influenced through the process of translation (on the use of this term in the thesis, see further below). The framework for this investigation will be the so-called “translated *riddarasögur*” which will be investigated with regard to the said Old Norse concepts mentioned in them. From this viewpoint, the translated *riddarasögur* will be compared with the respective source material in order to determine the difficulties involved in translation and the possible degree of influence exerted by these sources on the local concepts used in the sagas considering how foreign beliefs were represented with motifs of local Scandinavian origin. The aim is to examine the degree to which the Scandinavian translators were willing to incorporate foreign mythological motifs into their translated narratives (and if so, whether this material exerted further, long-lasting influence on local ideas), or whether such foreign motifs were avoided and replaced with more easily understandable indigenous perceptions.

One question that must be addressed right from the start is exactly what the translated *riddarasögur*, the focal point of the present thesis, are and where they originated. As will be discussed (see Chapter 4.1), the term translated *riddarasaga* denotes a saga which is essentially a direct translation, adaptation or reworking of Continental chivalric work unlike the indigenous *riddarasögur* which appear to be a hybrid of translated *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* and which were presumably created locally in Iceland.¹ Just like the *Íslendingasögur* or *fornaldarsögur*, the translated *riddarasögur* are regarded as a form of vernacular Old Norse and Old Icelandic literature. Their source material are narratives that revolve around the Arthurian *matière* and the Continental heroic epics. Unlike other sagas which originated in the oral

¹ For further information, it is worth pointing to Glauser’s comprehensive study (in German) on indigenous *riddarasögur*: *Isländische Märchensagas: Studien zur Prosaliteratur im spätmittelalterlichen Island*, Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie 12 (Basel/ Frankfurt a. M.: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1983) as well as “Romance – A Case Study”, in Massimiliano Bampi, Carolyne Larrington and Sif Ríkharðsdóttir (eds), *A Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre*, Studies in Old Norse Literature (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2020), pp. 299–311. With regard to the influence of French courtly literature on Scandinavian literary production: see the extensive article (in French) by Knud Togeby, “L’influence de la littérature française sur les littératures scandinaves au moyen âge”, in Hans Robert Jauß and Erich Köhler (eds), *Grundriss der Romanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters*, Vol. I: *Généralités* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1972), pp. 333–95.

tradition and were composed directly in the vernacular, the source material for the translated *riddarasögur* was material that was already circulating in written form in other European languages. Indeed, the majority of translated *riddarasögur* actually seem to have experienced translation at various levels, the initial stage being that from the source language into Old Norse before going on from there into Old Icelandic.² This many-staged translation process, which often also involved adaptation and rewriting, certainly exerted an influence on various plots and motifs and not least on supernatural concepts which were changed, dropped, re-rendered or expanded upon within the said procedure. But how and when did these Old Norse translations of continental Arthurian and heroic material into Scandinavian vernaculars come about?

As is often stated, the *riddarasögur* were frontrunners in the agenda of King Hákon Hákonarson (born 1204, r. 1217–1263) to promote continental European courtly ideas, lifestyle and sociological hierarchy in his Scandinavian sphere of influence.³ King Hákon, who appears to have been specifically fascinated by Old French chivalric literature (the *chansons de geste*, the *matière de Bretagne* and the *matière de France*), commissioned (or at least oversaw) the production of various translations of French works into Old Norse during his lifetime, the

² It is necessary to give a brief note on terminology here: In the following investigations, the term Old Norse is used both as an overarching and collective idiom to denote both the Old Norwegian and Old Icelandic languages and literatures (as opposed to Old French literature, for instance) as well as signifying Old Norwegian when the said expression is specifically used in differentiation from Old Icelandic (for example, when manuscript traditions of sagas mention both Old Norse manuscripts and Old Icelandic manuscripts).

³ See Marianne E. Kalinke, “Introduction”, in Marianne E. Kalinke (ed.), *The Arthur of the North: The Arthurian Legend in the Norse and Rus’ Realms*, Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages 5 (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), pp. 1–2, and “The Introduction of the Arthurian Legend in Scandinavia”, pp. 9–10; Jürg Glauser, “Mittelalter (800–1500)”, in Jürg Glauser (ed.), *Skandinavische Literaturgeschichte* (Stuttgart/ Weimar: Verlag J. B. Metzler, 2006), pp. 29–30; Claudia Bornholdt, “The Old Norse–Icelandic Transmission of Chrétien de Troyes’ Romances: *Ívens saga*, *Erex saga*, *Parcevals saga* with *Valvens þáttur*”, in Marianne E. Kalinke (ed.), *The Arthur of the North: The Arthurian Legend in the Norse and Rus’ Realms*, Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages 5 (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), pp. 98–9; Geraldine Barnes, “Scandinavian Versions of Arthurian Romance”, in Helen Fulton (ed.), *Companions to Arthurian Literature*, Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture 58 (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012), pp. 189–90; and Nicola Jordan, “Eine alte und doch immer neue Geschichte: Die *Ívens saga Artúskappa* und der *Iwein* Hartmanns von Aue als Bearbeitungen von Chrétiens *Yvain*”, in Vera Johanterwage and Stefanie Würth (eds), *Übersetzen im skandinavischen Mittelalter*, SMS 14 (Wien: Fassbaender, 2007), p. 145. Regarding the reception and commission of Old Norse literature in general, see, for example, Lars Lönnroth’s article “Sponsors, Writers, and Readers of Early Norse Literature”, in Ross Samson (ed.), *Social Approaches to Viking Studies* (Glasgow: Cruithne Press, 1991), pp. 3–10.

oldest extant work being *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* (hereafter *Tristrams saga*) which is said to have been compiled in 1226.⁴ As Jürg Glauser remarks:

Th[e] dating of the Norwegian translations to the decades around the mid-thirteenth century is primarily based on two criteria. On the one hand, the *riddarasögur* are seen in the context of the civilizing and feudalizing efforts energetically undertaken by King Hákon during his reign; the general view is that transmission of the new chivalric ideology, as deliberately targeted by Hákon, could be achieved especially effectively through the medium of literature. On the other hand, the dating is based on details in *riddarasögur* manuscripts, where references are made to King Hákon as commissioner in the prologues and epilogues of some sagas (for example, *Tristrams saga*, *Elís saga*, *Strengleikar*, *Ívens saga*, *Mottuls saga*). However, one must keep in mind here that these references are often found in recent, sometimes post-Reformation manuscripts and are of uncertain value as sources.⁵

Unfortunately for the translated *riddarasögur*, however, manuscripts dating back to their Norwegian time of blossoming are scarce. Less than a handful of works are preserved in Norwegian manuscripts, namely the *Strengleikar*, *Elís saga ok Rósamundu* [henceforth *Elís saga*], *Flóres saga frakkakonungs* and *Karlamagnús saga (ok kappa hans)* (fragmentary) [hereafter *Karlamagnús*

⁴ As Marianne E. Kalinke notes: “*Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* is beyond a doubt the most important and invaluable of the translations commissioned by King Hákon Hákonarson. There is scholarly consensus that it was the first of the translations of foreign literature in the North and that it set the tone for the translations that were to follow”: Marianne E. Kalinke, “Sources, Translations, Redactions, Manuscript Transmission”, in Marianne E. Kalinke (ed.), *The Arthur of the North: The Arthurian Legend in the Norse and Rus’ Realms*, Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages 5 (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), p. 27. See further: Jürg Glauser, “Textüberlieferung und Textbegriff im spätmittelalterlichen Norden: Das Beispiel der Riddarasögur”, *ANF* 113 (1998), pp. 22–3; and Kalinke, “The Introduction of the Arthurian Legend in Scandinavia”, p. 10.

⁵ Jürg Glauser, “Romance (Translated *riddarasögur*)”, in Rory McTurk (ed.), *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture 31 (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 375. See also Kalinke, “The Introduction of the Arthurian Legend in Scandinavia”, p. 14; and “Sources, Translations, Redactions, Manuscript Transmission”, p. 23. For other scholarly views: see, for example, Henry Goddard Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 6 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921), p. 153. It is worth noting, however, that neither *Erex saga* nor *Parcevals saga* give any information as to why, when or how they came into being: see Kalinke, “The Introduction of the Arthurian Legend in Scandinavia”, p. 11.

saga].⁶ All other chivalric works are only found in later Icelandic manuscripts and readings, something that adds to the already troubled transmission history of the *riddarasögur*.⁷ As Marianne E. Kalinke notes:

Are the deviations of these texts [i.e. the *riddarasögur*] from their sources, be that in content or structure, to be understood as evidence of acculturation at the court of King Hákon Hákonarson or in the rural environs of Iceland? [...] Repeatedly scholars have addressed the reliability of the extant texts not only for assessing the abilities of the translators but also for the insight they give into the cultural context and motivation that permitted the importation to Norway and Iceland of a literature quite foreign. [...] Icelandic copyists could be quite cavalier toward the texts they were copying. They asserted their right to improve a text if they found it wanting.⁸

⁶ Geraldine Barnes, “The Riddarasögur: A Medieval Exercise in Translation”, *Saga-Book* 19 (1977), p. 403. As Barnes says: “[The] Icelandic copies [that is of the Old Norse *riddarasögur*] are generally assumed to be unreliable guides to the original form of the translations because scholars have attributed to successive generations of scribes a mania for drastic omission and revision, possibly owing to influence from the style of *Íslendingasögur*”: “The Riddarasögur: A Medieval Exercise in Translation”, p. 405. For support of this perception: see Kalinke, “The Introduction of the Arthurian Legend in Scandinavia”, p. 15, and “Sources, Translations, Redactions, Manuscript Transmission”, pp. 30–1; Geraldine Barnes, “Some Current Issues in *riddarasögur* Research”, *ANF* 104 (1989), p. 74; and Glauser, “Romance (Translated *riddarasögur*)”, pp. 377 and 382.

⁷ There are, however, some special problems with regard to the Old Norse-Icelandic Arthuriana, which express themselves with considerable vagary in the manuscript transmissions, involving differences in style and content as well as deviations from the originals and other source materials. One point of grievance that weighs heavily with regard to the scholarly understanding of the *riddarasögur* is the gap of up to four centuries between the supposed date of origin of a saga and the oldest extant manuscript in which the saga is contained. A prime example for this issue is *Tristrams saga*, which, as noted above, was the first Arthurian material to be translated in Scandinavia, and also the saga with the most troubled transmission. Indeed, *Tristrams saga* suffers from the considerable distance that exists between the time of translation, with roughly 300 years between its presumed date of origin in 1226, and the oldest manuscript fragments that contain it (four leaves in total: the three leaves of AM 567 4to XXII and one leaf of the Reeves Fragment, both of which are dated to the fifteenth century). On the other hand, we have *Mǫttuls saga* which appears to have suffered the least during the translation and transmission process from Norwegian into Icelandic manuscripts. *Erex saga* is a special case in the sense that the text corpus appears to have suffered substantially from reduction, reworking and revision of a presumed thirteenth-century Norwegian translation: see Kalinke, “Sources, Translations, Redactions, Manuscript Transmission”, pp. 30, 32–3, and 35.

⁸ Kalinke, “Sources, Translations, Redactions, Manuscript, Transmission”, pp. 22–3 and 35.

This is usually the point at which the history of the *riddarasögur* abruptly ends, leaving one guessing as to how and why they enjoyed so much attention in Iceland. It was Jürg Glauser, however, who first pointed out the importance of Icelandic history for the survival of the *riddarasögur* as a whole, regardless of any “genre” discussion (see Chapter 4.1).

At the time of King Hákon Hákonarson’s reign, and even prior to it, the so-called Sturlungaöld (1220–1262/4) – named after the progenitor of the Icelandic lineage that proved to be the most influential during and after this struggle, Sturla Þórðarson or Hvamm-Sturla (1116–1183), father of Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241)⁹ – marks a period of civil unrest which was caused by the smouldering conflicts that were instigated by the governing system at the time. Iceland had been split into governing districts called *goðorð*, with each part being presided over by a so-called *goði* (pl. *goðar*). The 39 *goðorð* that were available during the Sturlungaöld had all come to be in the possession of the six most influential families and clans at that time, the Svínfellingar, Oddaverjar, Haukdælir, Sturlungar, Vatnsfirðingar and the Ásbirningar.¹⁰ As a result, the accumulation or expansion of one clan’s power was now only possible at the cost of another’s.¹¹

The Sturlungaöld thus saw various bloody and gruesome conflicts, for example the Örlygsstaðabardagi (“The Battle of Örlygsstaðir”) in 1238. This was followed up by the Flóabardagi (“The Battle of the Gulf”) in 1244 and culminated in the atrocious Flugumýrabrenna (“The Arson at Flugumýri”) in 1253.¹² Snorri Sturluson proved to be one of the key actors in this age of strife and, his arch-enemy, Gissur Þorvaldsson (1208–1268), also known as Gissur *jarl* (the only Icelander to have ever received the honour of bearing this title), offered his service to Hákon Hákonarson who was trying to exert influence in Iceland with the ultimate goal of incorporating it into his kingdom.¹³ After he

⁹ See further Gunnar Karlsson, *Iceland’s 1100 Years: The History of a Marginal Society* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2000), pp. 79–82; and Glauser, *Isländische Märchensagas*, pp. 32–3.

¹⁰ For a concise summary of each of the family’s spheres of influence and pedigree, see Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga*, Vol. I: *Þjóðveldisöld* (Reykjavík: Almenna bókafélagið, 1956), pp. 72–82 and 274–9; and Sigurður Línal (ed.), *Saga Íslands*, Vol. II: *Frá þjóðveldi til konungsríkis – Kirkjuvald eflist – Bókmenntasaga – Myndlistarsaga – Tónmenntasaga – Almennir þjóðhættir* (Reykjavík: Bókmenntafélagið, 1975), pp. 31–9.

¹¹ See Sigurður Línal, *Saga Íslands*, II, pp. 36–9; and Árni Daníel Júlíusson, “Peasant Unrest in Iceland”, in Kimmo Katajala (ed.), *Northern Revolts: Medieval and Early Modern Peasant Unrest in the Nordic Countries*, *Studia Fennica Historica* 8 (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2004), pp. 120–4.

¹² Sigurður Línal, *Saga Íslands*, II, pp. 39–48.

¹³ See Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga*, I, p. 322; and Sigurður Línal, *Saga Íslands*, II, pp. 49–53.

had had Snorri assassinated with the help of Gissur *jarl* in 1241, Hákon's campaign gained momentum and Iceland became part of the Norwegian crown in the early 1260s.¹⁴ The union was initially legally recorded in the *Gissurarsáttmáli* in 1262, a treaty which was later renewed with the *Gamli sáttmáli* ("The Old Covenant") of 1302.¹⁵

It was this unification that ultimately led to an increase in Norwegian-Icelandic cultural relations, eventually resulting in the arrival of the *riddarasögur* and their associated themes in Iceland.¹⁶ Here, the *riddarasögur* would go on to spawn the saga style of *lygisögur*, also known as *Märchensagas* or indigenous *riddarasögur* in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (see Chapter 4).¹⁷ They would also influence the creation of *rímur* poetry. As Ástráður Eysteinnsson notes:

Hinar þýddu riddarasögur voru að sjálfsögðu ein helsta uppspretta þeirra íslensku riddara- og fornaldarsagna sem keppst var við að skrifa hér löngum, og eins voru þær efniviður í bundinn kveðskap. [...] Í þessum þýðingum er tungumálið borið að framandi hugmyndaheimi sem örvar til nýrrar tjáningar og reynir á sveigjanleika þess og nýsköpunarmátt.¹⁸

Despite the constant smouldering of civil unrest going on around it, the influx of the *riddarasögur* occurred during a time which is often referred to as "the golden age" of Icelandic literature and literature production, a time during which a significant number of *fornaldarsögur* and *Íslendingasögur* were composed, among them such illustrious works as *Njáls saga*, *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar* and *Gísla saga Surssonar*.¹⁹ Prior to the Sturlungaöld, translations from Latin into Icelandic had, of course, already been taking place in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries in Iceland, the two Benedictine monasteries

¹⁴ Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga*, I, pp. 322–30.

¹⁵ Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga*, I, pp. 328 and 332–8. See also Arngrímur Jónsson's *Crymogæa* (1609) with regard to this era: Arngrímur Jónsson, *Crymogæa: Þættir úr sögu Íslands*, trans. Jakob Benediktsson, Safn Sögufélags 2 (Reykjavík: Sögufélagið, 1985), pp. 223–6.

¹⁶ Kalinke, "The Introduction of the Arthurian Legend in Scandinavia", p. 15.

¹⁷ See, for example, Glauser, *Isländische Märchensagas*, p. 10–3 and 17–22.

¹⁸ Ástráður Eysteinnsson, *Tvímæli: Þýðingar og bókmenntir*, Fræðirit 9 (Reykjavík: Bókmenntafræðistofnun, 1996), pp. 48–50. In line with the tradition in studies of Old Norse Religions at the University of Iceland, translations will only be given for quotations that are not in Icelandic or the other Nordic languages.

¹⁹ Kalinke, "The Introduction of the Arthurian Legend in Scandinavia", p. 7.

at Þingeyrar and Munkaþverá acting as centres of such translation work.²⁰ Unfortunately, no manuscripts from this period survive. The earliest writing that can be traced back to this phase survives only in codices dating to the late twelfth or early thirteenth centuries.²¹ In terms of Norse Arthuriana, *Merlínussþá* by Gunnlaugr Leifsson (d. 1218/9) is the first attested translation drawing on a *matière de Bretagne* work, dating to roughly 1200 and probably written at the monastery of Þingeyrar, where Gunnlaugr served as a monk.²²

The aforementioned tradition of copying manuscripts, which was already ongoing before King Hákon Hákonarson began to commission the new translations of Continental works, naturally had a role in the translation, transmission, preservation and rewriting of *riddarasögur* in Iceland. Also influential was the fact that during this time literacy seems to have been widespread throughout Icelandic society.²³ Bearing this in mind, it is often highlighted that a chief feature of the Old Icelandic translations, adaptations and reworkings of the Arthuriana is that they were composed in the vernacular.²⁴ As Simonetta Battista remarks:

In comparison with the rest of Europe, the process of development of a vernacular literature – including both translations and original works – seems to have been faster in Iceland. Even though it started later, due to the late acquisition of the technical means for literary production, it was more concentrated.²⁵

²⁰ Karl G. Johansson, “Texter i Rörelse: Översättning, Original Textproduktion och Trädning på norra Island 1150–1400”, in Vera Johanterwage and Stefanie Würth (eds), *Übersetzen im skandinavischen Mittelalter*, SMS 14 (Wien: Fassbaender, 2007), p. 83.

²¹ See Johansson, “Texter i Rörelse”, pp. 83 and 97; and Geraldine Barnes, “Travel and *translatio studii* in the Icelandic *riddarasögur*”, in Vera Johanterwage and Stefanie Würth (eds), *Übersetzen im skandinavischen Mittelalter*, SMS 14 (Wien: Fassbaender, 2007), pp. 124–5; as well as Arngrímur Jónsson, *Crymogæa: Þættir úr sögu Íslands*, pp. 197–9.

²² See Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy: The Role of Skaldic Verse in Icelandic Textual Culture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), pp. 168–9. See also Kalinke, “Introduction”, p. 1; and “The Introduction of the Arthurian Legend in Scandinavia”, pp. 6–7.

²³ Glauser, *Isländische Märchensagas*, p. 65.

²⁴ Kalinke, “The Introduction of the Arthurian Legend in Scandinavia”, p. 7 and “Sources, Translations, Redactions, Manuscript, Transmission”, p. 42.

²⁵ Simonetta Battista, “Translation or Redaction in Old Norse Hagiography”, in Peter Andersen (ed.), *Pratiques de Traduction au Moyen Age: Actes du colloque de l'Université de Copenhague 25 et 26 octobre 2002/ Medieval Translation Practices: Papers from the Symposium at the University of Copenhagen 25th and 26th October 2002* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2004), p. 100.

In short, in Iceland, a broad range of people could both produce literature and receive it. Since reception at this time and over the next few centuries also involved hearing the works read out loud, this meant that even those people who could not read or write were exposed to literary works and their influences.

As is well known, Icelandic saga literature (the *Íslendingasögur*, *konungasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*) formed part of a long-standing local cultural tradition which originated in the oral tradition, before being put into writing. The same seems to have applied in some degree to the *riddarasögur*, even though they began as written works and were not a product of local oral tradition. As can be seen from their popularity in post-medieval centuries which was reflected not only in the extensive production of sagas but also of other related works drawing on various popular motifs that were initially introduced and made popular by the translated *riddarasögur*, this form of literature clearly formed an influential part of the Nordic literary tradition in the Middle Ages. These works were possibly read (aloud and to an audience) during the *kvöldvökur* (“evening wakes”), an Icelandic tradition that, according to Hermann Pálsson (1921–2002), had its roots in evening entertainment activities traceable at least as far back as the thirteenth century.²⁶ During these *kvöldvökur*, sagas would be read out aloud and sometimes retold alongside poetry, ballads, *rímur*, sermons and the Bible to accompany domestic hand work on farms on winter evenings.²⁷ As Glauser states:

Ein bemerkenswertes Charakteristikum der isländischen Kultur-, Literatur- und Mediengeschichte, das sie allenfalls mit der irischen teilt, besteht nämlich darin, dass die Sagaüberlieferung am Ende des Mittelalters keineswegs zu Ende war, dass vielmehr im 17. Jh. nach einer Unterbrechung während des Reformationszeitalters an die Tradition der handschriftlichen Vermittlung mittelalterlicher Erzählinhalte und -gattungen angeknüpft wurde, dass die Transmissionsform des Manuskripts für die Sagas und Rímur auch nach Einführung des Buchdrucks [...] existierte und dass diese prolongierte, quasi-mittelalterliche Handschriftlichkeit erst mit der Auflösung der sogenannten Abendwachen (*kvöldvökur*) [...] im

²⁶ See Hermann Pálsson, *Sagnaskemmtun Íslendinga* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1962), pp. 14–5, 19, 39–47 and 105.

²⁷ See Magnús Gíslason, *Kvällsvaka: En isländsk kulturtradition belyst genom studier i bondebefolkningens vardagsliv och miljö under senare hälften av 1800-talet och början av 1900-talet*, *Studia Ethnologica Upsaliensia* 2 (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 1977), pp. 57–60 and 77–87.

Zeitraum zwischen etwa 1880 und 1920 ihre Funktion verlor und aufgegeben wurde.²⁸

During these *kvöldvökur*, other stories containing saga protagonists and/ or local supernatural phenomena would be told alongside earlier saga readings, meaning that saga characters and preternatural folkloristic creatures from the oral tradition probably began to intermingle over the course of time.²⁹ Although this process did not originate with the *kvöldvökur* and can already be seen in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century sagas such as *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, the effects of this mingling of motifs can also be seen in those types of literature which originated elsewhere but had been translated in such a way that they were starting to resemble local forms and made sense to local audiences.³⁰ However, the opposite process could also occur. These works, too, were bound to have an influence on local concepts and understandings. This, of course, would have applied in particular to foreign ideas concerning the nature of the supernatural.

As noted at the start, this thesis deals with translation, and the way in which Old Norse/ Old Icelandic supernatural concepts were potentially influenced through the process of translation, focusing in particular on influences that the

²⁸ Glauser, “Mittelalter (800–1500)”, p. 50. Translation: “A remarkable feature of Icelandic cultural, literary and media history that Icelanders share with the Irish is the fact that saga transmission was anything but over by the end of the Middle Ages. Instead, after a severance during the Age of Reformation, Iceland could draw on a tradition of written transfer of medieval narrative contents and genres, the manuscript serving as a transmission vehicle for sagas and *rímur* even after the introduction of printing. [...] This prolonged, quasi-medieval form of writing did not lose its function and was not abandoned until the discontinuation of the so-called evening wakes (*kvöldvökur*) between 1880 and 1920.” Unless otherwise stated, all translations in this work are those of the author.

²⁹ As Hermann Pálsson remarks with regard to the importance of the oral transmission of saga material, for instance: “[...] Íslendingar segði munnlega þær sögur, sem komizt höfðu á bókfell. Þeir lásu þær upp af bókum til skemmtunar áheyrendum, en lögðu þær ekki á minnið”: see Hermann Pálsson, *Sagnaskemmtun*, p. 40.

³⁰ The Old Norse philologist Matthew James Driscoll has written an article in which he investigates the post-Reformation *lygisögur* and the possible sources of their textual volatility. This investigation, naturally, also involves an assessment of the influence exerted by the *kvöldvökur*. Although it is impossible to access the profoundness of this influence, since all oral as well as most of the possible written evidence was lost, Driscoll states that “[t]he *lygisögur* [...] although themselves literary products, even as they were, or could be, re-written each time they were copied, were, or could be, recomposed each time they were read aloud or retold from memory”: see Matthew J. Driscoll, “The Oral, the Written, and the In-Between: Textual Instability in the Post-Reformation *Lygisaga*”, in Hildegard L. C. Tristram (ed.), (*Re*)*Oralisierung*, *ScripOralia* 84 (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1996), p. 154.

translated *riddarasögur* might have had on the supernatural concepts of the *álfar*, *dvergar*, and *jötnar*, as well as those relating to magic and magic wielders. As Sif Ríkharðsdóttir states:

Translations not only provide evidence of the cultural conditions of their creators, but are the prime site for cultural encounter. They therefore reveal active engagement with the conceptualisation of linguistic and cultural identity, played out in the reconstruction of foreign or ‘differing’ literary material.³¹

A study of this kind naturally focuses on the transformation of concepts that occurs when a text transcends cultural contexts and periods.³² Especially interesting in this regard are those alterations that take place to narratives as a result of the process of translation. As will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, translated medieval texts were both a part as well as a result of a process which involved various individuals, such as commissioners, translators, and the audience(s) – all of them agents who were naturally in constant dialogue with one another –, rather than snapshots, so to say, of a stable archetype.³³ And while the process of translation itself is of significant interest here, so too are the human beings involved in it. As Zrinka Stahuljak notes in her article “Medieval Fixers: Politics of Interpreting in Western Historiography”:

Translation in the Middle Ages was a crossroads of multilingual and multicultural contacts and encounters; in fact, it was understood in much broader terms than our modern linguistic translation. [...] Medieval translation was [...] a nexus of a will to knowledge and technologies of power; *translatio* theorized the origin and the effect of their transmission, but not its medium, that is, human agency. Put differently, even when medieval *translatio* refers specifically to linguistic translation, it does not highlight or theorize issues of

³¹ Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse: The Movement of Texts in England, France and Scandinavia* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), p. 2.

³² Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse*, p. 3.

³³ Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse*, p. 9; and Keith Busby, “‘Or volsko’, ‘Na den walschen boucken’, ‘Out of Frenshe’: Towards a Model of Adaptation”, in Karl G. Johansson and Else Mundal (eds), *Riddarasögur: The Translation of European Court Culture in Medieval Scandinavia*, Bibliotheca Nordica 7 (Oslo: Novus Forlag, 2014), p. 30.

linguistic difference and identity and it rarely gives us the privilege of seeing the human being behind translation.³⁴

In order to account for the role played by the “human being behind translation”, as Stahuljak puts it, the present thesis understands the modifications that were made to translated texts not as “errors” or representations of the inadequacies of the translator (or of later copyists for that matter), but rather as dynamic engagements of individuals with the narratives which were carried out in order to adjust the texts to the new environments in which they were supposed to be received.³⁵ Granted, while providing medieval translators and copyists with such a *carte blanche* might at first appear naïve, it is not without precedent. Indeed, Marianne E. Kalinke has earlier noted the readiness, especially of Icelandic copyists, to encroach on both the structure and narrative of texts. As Kalinke notes: “With but few exceptions, Icelandic copyists seem to have perceived their role, whether consciously or not, more as editors than scribes. They amplified or reduced texts; they modified their plot, distinct style or structure.”³⁶ As she adds: “A remarkable aspect of Icelandic literature is the proclivity of copyists, better said, authors, to tinker with existing texts, to rewrite them with a view to telling a better story.”³⁷

This leads to the central question of whether such amplification, modification and rewriting does not and did not form part of any process of translation, especially when it comes to the question of translating concepts. As will be shown in more detail in Chapters 2, 2.1.1 and 2.1.2, the understanding of translation in the Middle Ages was somewhat different to that we know today, involving essentially the movement of a given text from one culture to another, something that included a great deal of leeway. While it is logical to use terms like “adaption” and “re-writing” to explain the exact nature of a translation, when it comes down to it, both of these forms come under the overall heading of a “translation” as this thesis understands the term.

This leads us directly on to a brief consideration of the exact nature of vehicles that contain the studied narratives. Here, it is pivotal to bear in mind certain key problems relating to the transmission history that are eventually bound to plague any comparative study of translated medieval narratives. As Kalinke rightfully states: “Not a single manuscript from which an Arthurian text

³⁴ Zrinka Stahuljak, “Medieval Fixers: Politics of Interpreting in Western Historiography”, in Emma Campbell and Robert Mills (eds), *Rethinking Medieval Translation: Ethics, Politics, Theory* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), p. 148.

³⁵ Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse*, p. 5.

³⁶ Marianne E. Kalinke, *Stories Set Forth with Fair Words: The Evolution of Medieval Romance in Iceland* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2017), p. viii.

³⁷ Kalinke, *Stories Set Forth with Fair Words*, p. ix.

was translated in either Norway or Iceland has either been preserved or identified. The translations deviate in many respects from the sources available to us in editions.”³⁸ It is also worth remembering the age of any given manuscript does not necessarily mean that the narratives it contains are either considerably closer to or further removed from the initial translation.

For logical reasons, this study utilises a comparative approach in order to be able to highlight the potential transformations made to the said concepts as they were moved from Old French into Old Norse/ Old Icelandic. Such a comparative approach using these parameters naturally focuses on the Old Norse/ Old Icelandic societies as receiving cultures, considering both the previous, comparatively unique understandings of the supernatural concepts in question and the changes these concepts seem to have undergone at different points in time. The overall aim is to highlight the potential role that the translated *riddarasögur* might have played in the process of transformation that evidently took place with regard to these concepts. Once again, and with regard to the extant translated *riddarasögur*, it is worth bearing in mind that one can never be certain when potential changes or alterations to the narrative might have been introduced as part of the the overall process of translation that resulted in the extant texts. Be that as it may, it is evident from these works that some form of transformation has taken place which was likely to have consequences, and that the probability is that it took place at an early stage in the process. The key question is *why* such a transformation in the understanding of the concept should have occurred.

With regard to the overall structure of the following thesis: This doctoral research project is being submitted to the School of Social Sciences at the University of Iceland in line with the regulations of the university concerning theses that take the form of *söfn greina*, that is, collections of thematically connected essays or articles, accompanied by a so-called *kápur* (“covers”) which contain introductory and supporting chapters relating to the project as a whole, as well as an overall conclusion in which the findings the said case studies are pulled together. With regard to the present project as a whole, it is worth bearing in mind that since such a study of the Old Norse translation of the concepts portrayed in Old French Arthuriana has never been conducted before, no set of tailor-made methods exists that this study could exploit. For this reason, this study has to some extent had to set its own parameters and guidelines in the following chapters and the case studies that form Chapter 5.

Following on from giving an outline of the historical circumstances that not only preceded but were largely contemporaneous with the emergence of the first

³⁸ Kalinke, “Sources, Translations, Redactions, Manuscript Transmission”, p. 23. See also Busby, “‘Or volsko’, ‘Na den walschen boucken’, ‘Out of Frensshe’”, pp. 20–1.

riddarasögur given above, the following moves directly onto the key question of the precise nature of translation past and present, underlining the potential difficulties that are always involved in the translation process. The study then goes on to present various examples demonstrating the difficulties that can regularly occur in the translation of various ethical, cultural and supernatural concepts, noting at the same time the possible consequences that can arise from such translations. These examples include translations relating to the nature of the Biblical Tree of Life (ethical concept), various difficulties relating to the Latin *templum* and *fānus* and French *chastel* or *castel* and *chevalier* (cultural concepts), the translation of *jǫtnar* in English, and Ibn Faḍlān’s narrative involving the figure of the “Angel of Death” as well as examples of how Germanic deities were commonly correlated to Classical divinities by means of the *interpretation Romana* (supernatural concepts).

Chapter 4 then starts by presenting a *Stand der Forschung* of previous research into the *riddarasögur* including a discussion of how this term came into being and which sagas have been considered to belong to this genre on the basis of scholarly research so far. From there, the chapter goes on to which sagas are considered in the present study and which not, and why such decisions have been taken. After this, each of the sagas dealt with in the case studies is introduced briefly, information also being provided about its connections to early Old French material, the extant manuscripts of both the original and the Old Norse/ Icelandic “translations” (see below on how this term is understood here) and the possible problems that seem to have occurred in the transmission history. The plot of each saga is then outlined, each segment concluding with a brief outline of which supernatural concepts appear in the saga, and which will consequently be examined as part of one of the thesis’ four case studies.

Chapter 5, which contains the four individual case studies that have been submitted for publication in the shape of articles, begins with a brief transition sub-chapter leading into the case studies which outlines the potential changes the Old Norse supernatural concepts of the *álfar* and *álfkonur*, *dvergjar*, *jǫtnar* and various forms of magic and magic-wielders (see Case Studies 1–4 below) are likely to have experienced as they were subjected to foreign influence in the shape of the translated *riddarasögur*. Considering the broad variety of concepts under discussion (both Old Norse and Old French), the fact that we are dealing here with two rather different societies over a period of at least 200 years, and diverse, changing understandings of supernatural concepts, various interlaced yet tiered approaches have to be applied in order to gauge such potential developments.

The thesis ends with a conclusion in Chapter 6 which draws together the main findings of the four case studies, offering some general conclusions and suggestions about where we can potentially go from here.

2 *Að þýða, to translate or übersetzen?*

As scholars of translation studies often proudly state, the process of translation has served as a basis for the development of many civilisations, empires and cultures, not least as a means of exchanging ideas. As Ástráður Eysteinnsson and Daniel Weissbort write:

Translation has been instrumental in the formation of writing and literary culture in every European language [...], building linguistic bridges across the channels that divide language spheres and cultural regions, whether by rewriting of messages and works in another tongue, or through other interventions by individuals who possess knowledge in more than one language and can therefore act as cultural mediators.³⁹

There is certainly little question about the profound influence that translation has played on the development of world literature including that of medieval Scandinavia.⁴⁰ In social terms, however, translations have also often effectively served as a catalyst for change, evolution and revolution. Early prime examples of individuals contemplating translation, and its benefits and potential problems in this (social) sphere include illustrious names such as Cicero (106–43 BC), Horace (65–8 BC) and St Jerome (347–420) as well as Ælfrēd, King of Wessex, also known as Alfred the Great (848/9–99) (see further below).⁴¹ In the Western Hemisphere, where the church quickly understood the value of writing as a means of preserving and passing on ideas, the medieval focus in translation was naturally on the study and translation of the Holy Bible and other Holy works or scriptures.⁴² The European humanist movement of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries increased tensions by adding to the demands for increasing secularisation. This movement, which in 1521 led Martin Luther (1483–1546) to start translating the New Testament into German, naturally

³⁹ Ástráður Eysteinnsson and Daniel Weissbort, “General Introduction”, in Daniel Weissbort and Ástráður Eysteinnsson (eds), *Translation – Theory and Practice: A Historical Reader* (Oxford/ New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 1.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Gauti Kristmannsson, *Literary Diplomacy I: The Role of Translation in the Construction of National Literatures in Britain and Germany 1750–1830*, *Scottish Studies International* 37 (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 2005), p. 17.

⁴¹ See, for example, Jeremy Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Application* (London/ New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 13; Ástráður Eysteinnsson, *Tvímæli*, p. 44; and Douglas Robinson, *Western Translation Theory from Herodotus to Nietzsche* (London/ New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 6–7, 14, 22–23 and 37.

⁴² Glauser, “Mittelaler (800–1500)”, p. 26.

induced the greatest schism the Church had endured up to that date, spawning the birth of Protestantism.

Translation may have played a central role here, but it appears evident that another key question under dispute at the time involved the actual *nature* of this translation. Luther's translation was not verbatim. Indeed, he himself claimed that for the translation he had “dem deutschen Volk aufs Maul geschaut” (analogous to “observing how the common people talk”),⁴³ creating various new words that did not exist previously in German (for example *Feuerprobe* [“ordeal by fire”], *Gegenbild* [“antithesis” or “counter-image”], *Nächstenliebe* [“love of neighbour”] or *Feuereifer* [“ardour”]).⁴⁴ Here we see translation serving as a means to enrich or develop a language and the concepts within it.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, such an approach raised yet further questions as to the creativity, and “authorship” of the translator and the ownership of the translation in question. In a dispatch, for example, Luther complains grievously about copycats who take “his German” in order to make a profit:⁴⁶

Ich wolt noch gern den Papisten ansehē/ der sich erfur thet/ vnd etwa
eine epistel S. Pauli oder einen Propheten verdeutschet/ So fern/ das
er des Luthers teutsch vñ dolmetzschen nicht da zu gebraucht/ da solt
man sehen ein fein/ schön/ loblich deutsch odder dolmetzschen/ Deñ
wir haben ja gesehē/ den Sudler zu Dresen [*sic*]/ der mein New
Testament gemeistert hat ... der bekennet/ das mein deutsch susse

⁴³ Werner Scholze-Stubenrecht et. al. (eds), *Duden: Zitate und Aussprüche*, Der Duden in 12 Bänden (Mannheim et. al.: Dudenverlag, 1993), p. 458.

⁴⁴ Johannes Erben, “Luther und die neuhochdeutsche Schriftsprache”, in Friedrich Maurer and Heinz Rupp (eds), *Deutsche Wortgeschichte*, 2 Vols, Grundriss der Germanischen Philologie 17 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1974), I, pp. 460–1 and 492; and Robinson, *Western Translation Theory*, pp. 83–4.

⁴⁵ It is worth noting that prior to Martin Luther in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, two compatriots of his had already made a name for themselves with regard to the introduction of neologisms into the German language. The two clergymen Meister Eckhardt and Konrad von Megenberg had felt themselves in need of new words in the German language which they composed themselves in their translations of Latin religious treatises: see Ingeborg Glier, *Die Deutsche Literatur im späten Mittelalter 1250–1370*, Vol. II: *Reimpaargedichte, Drama, Prosa*, Geschichte der Deutschen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart 3(II) (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1987), pp. 254–68 and 350–4 (especially pp. 266 and 352); and Gisela Drossbach, “Neue Forschungen zur spätmittelalterlichen Rezeptionsgeschichte Konrads von Megenberg”, *ZBLG* 72 (2009), pp. 12 and 14.

⁴⁶ Luther writes regarding the copy work of his rivals: “Das merckt man aber wol/ das sie aus meinem dolmetzschen vnd teutsch/ lernen teutsch reden vñ schreiben/ vñ stelen mir also meine sprache”: see Erben, “Luther und die neuhochdeutsche Schriftsprache”, p. 477. Translation: “One notices this well/ that they [the papists] take from me my interpretation and German/ [they] learn to read and write German/ and thus steal my language from me.”

vnd gut sey/ vnd sahe wol/ das ers nicht besser machen kundt ... vnd
nam fur sich mein New Testament/ fast von wort zu wort/ wie ichs
gemacht hab ... schreib seinen namen/ vorrhede vnd gloß dazu/
verkaufft also mein New Testament vnter seinem namen⁴⁷

Similar developments were taking place at a similar time in Britain and France. Here, too, translation was affecting language and ways of thinking, something that could have extreme consequences for the translators themselves. A good example is the theologian William Tyndale (c. 1484–1536) who was having a great deal of influence on congregations as a result of his translation of the Bible into English. This work, which he produced in exile, would serve as a foundation for the English Bible versions that followed, such as the King James edition. Unfortunately for Tyndale at the time, his work was not recognised by his contemporaries. He consecutively suffered persecution by King Henry VIII (1491–1547), and, ultimately, paid for his translation work with his life.⁴⁸ In France, Étienne Dolet (1509–1546) suffered a similar fate for slightly different reasons. In his French translation of Plato’s dialogues, an apparent addition made by Dolet about the question of what comes after death was deemed heretical by an investigative committee of the University of Sorbonne. The result was that Dolet, like Tyndale, was burned at the stake.⁴⁹ These are just a few early examples of the influence translation can have.

As the examples given above show, the question of exactly what a translation was expected to do was becoming highly problematic. There is good reason to consider what the action of translation was seen as involving during the Middle Ages. But what actually *is* translation? As simple and yet intriguing as this question may at first glance appear, it is hard to find a sophisticated and satisfactory answer, something which is not made easier by the fact that the word “translation” itself poses difficulties. The Latin word *translatio* (“transporting”) itself derives either from the word *transfere* (“to carry over”)

⁴⁷ Erben, “Luther und die neuhochdeutsche Schriftsprache”, p. 477. Translation: “I gladly want to see the papist/ who initiates/ and Germanizes, say, an epistle of Paul the Apostle or of a prophet/ in such a way/ that he does not make use of Luther’s German and interpretation./ There one should see a lovely/ beautiful/ laudable German or interpretation./ We have seen the Defiler of Dresen [*sic*] [that is Hieronymus Emser who published his version of the New Testament in Dresden in 1527 which heavily utilised Luther’s edition]/ who had used with my New Testament [...] who acknowledges/ that my German was sweet and good/ and who saw clearly/ that he could not do better [...] and took my New Testament for himself/ almost word for word/ as I have done it [...] added his name/ a preface and a glossary./ He sells now my New Testament under his name.”

⁴⁸ Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies*, p. 37.

⁴⁹ Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies*, p. 37.

or *transducere* (“to translate” in the sense of “to move” or “to transfer”).⁵⁰ *Translatio* can literally mean any action involving movement which alters the position of any given object, be it a physical or geographical location. In a more abstract sense, it can refer to a word or text which is “carried over” into a different language or society. The English word *translation* derives either from the said Latin *translatio/ transferre* or from the Old French *translation* which is obviously derived from the Latin words.⁵¹ In German, “to translate” corresponds to *übersetzen*, the noun “translation” to *Übersetzung*. The verb *übersetzen*, however, also has two other meanings attached to it, namely “to ferry over” or “to cross over” (as with *translatio*) and, more rarely, also “to convert” or “to transform” (an item into/ a force onto another) which implies some kind of change taking place in the process of movement.⁵² On etymological grounds, it is supposed that this word, like its English and French counterparts, has a direct connection to the Latin words *transferre* or *transducere*.⁵³ Yet another implication can be seen in the Old Norse language which has two terms for “to translate”: *að snúa* (which appears frequently at the end of sagas in typical sentences such as that in *Ívens saga*: “Ok lýkr hér sögu herra Íven er Hákon kóngur gamli lét snúa ór franzeisu í norrænu”); and the modern *að þýða*.⁵⁴ The former term is fairly interesting since it implies some sort of turning around or twisting of the original text in the source language as it is put into Old Norse and the implications involved in this. The latter term, however, requires more attention. According to *Íslensk orðabók: handa skólum og almenningi*, *að þýða* means “snúa úr einu máli á annað, endursegja á öðru máli sömu hugsun og tjáð er á fyrri málinu.”⁵⁵ Although the verb *að þýða* is traceable back to the twelfth century according to the *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* (ONP in the following), it is worth highlighting that this only

⁵⁰ See, for example, the definitions regarding these words in: P. G. W. Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary: Sopo – Zythum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 1957, 1963 and 1966.

⁵¹ Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies*, p. 8; and Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, “Introduction: The Middle Ages”, in Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Luise von Flotow and Daniel Russell (eds), *The Politics of Translation in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 233 (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2001), p. 17.

⁵² https://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/uebersetzen_dolmetschen_uebertragen.

⁵³ https://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/uebersetzen_dolmetschen_uebertragen.

⁵⁴ Ástráður Eysteinnsson, *Tvímæli*, p. 25; and for the citation of *Ívens saga*: see *Ívens saga*, ed. Marianne E. Kalinke, in Marianne E. Kalinke (ed.), *Norse Romance*, Vol. II: *The Knights of the Round Table*, Arthurian Archives 4 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999), p. 98.

⁵⁵ Árni Böðvarsson, *Íslensk orðabók: handa skólum og almenningi* (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfan Menningarsjóðs, 1983), p. 1222; and Ástráður Eysteinnsson, *Tvímæli*, p. 25.

applies for the word's initial meaning, that is “to win over”, “to explain (a dream)”, or “to signify”.⁵⁶ The usage of *að þýða* in the modern sense of “to translate” only goes back to the sixteenth century and the Icelandic Bible translations of the New Testament, although there, too, the focus is still on “meaning” rather than “translation” directly.⁵⁷

While the initial medieval understanding of *translatio*, as described above, initially referred to the “translation” of relics and remains of saints and martyrs from one location to another,⁵⁸ the idea of other kinds of items or ideas being moved to a different locality was something that gained increasing popularity in the Middle Ages. Thus, various different interpretations of the word *translatio* arose, each having a specific ideological implication associated with it. Two of the more popular concepts were *translatio imperii* and *translatio studii* which will be briefly discussed in the following in order to outline the underlying motivation and structure of many medieval translations.⁵⁹

Translatio imperii was a popular notion during Antiquity and subsequently gained prominence during the Middle Ages, something which it retained to a lesser degree into the Early Modern Age. In essence, this interpretation of the original word *translatio* understood it as referring to the movement of centres of

⁵⁶ Walter Baetke, *Wörterbuch zur altnordischen Prosaliteratur*, Sitzungsberichte der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig Philologisch-historische Klasse 111 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008), p. 795. See also the following entry in ONP <https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o91200>.

⁵⁷ Keneva Kunz, “Icelandic Tradition”, in Mona Baker and Gabriela Saldanha (eds), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (London/ New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 443.

⁵⁸ Glauser, “Mittelalter (800–1500)”, p. 26.

⁵⁹ A substantial examination of both *translatio imperii* and *translatio studii* is given in Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Other lesser known forms of *translatio* include, for example, *translatio atrium* which converted the *translatio* idea into the movement of artistic commodities such as books, and *translatio sapientiae* which is based on the assumption that human knowledge is conceived via communicating with the divine. Revelation, and therefore science, is thus seen as being of divine origin. As a result, science cannot be seen as being unattached to religion and God and is always second to them: see Hans J. Vermeer, *Das Übersetzen im Mittelalter (13. und 14. Jahrhundert)*, Vol. I: *Das arabisch-lateinische Mittelalter* (Heidelberg: TEXTconTEXT Verlag, 1996), p. 257. For a concise yet informative overview regarding *translatio sapientiae*: see, for example, the chapter “Translatio Sapientiae” in Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, *Philosophia perennis: Historical Outlines of Western Spirituality in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought*, International Archives of History and Ideas/ Archives internationales d’histoire des idées 189 (Dordrecht: Springer, 2004), pp. 409–41. For *translatio artium*: see, for example, Franz Josef Worstbrock, “Translatio artium: Über die Herkunft und Entwicklung einer kulturhistorischen Theorie”, *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 47 (1965), pp. 1–22.

power throughout the ages after the fall of Rome, rather than that of sacral remains.⁶⁰ This idea came to prominence especially in the Holy Roman Empire in the tenth to fourteenth centuries, when the various ruling dynasties were competing amongst each other for kingship and even imperial rule. In the act of “interpreting” Charlemagne (748–814) as the founding father of German sovereignty as well as the legitimation thereof, the various German dynasties such as those of the Ottonen, Staufer, Salier and Welfen families, who were engaged in fighting an intra-German battle for succession, came to present him as the progenitor of their rule. They consequently used the *translatio imperii* to justify shifts in hegemony.⁶¹ In general, as Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski remarks in her introduction to the publication *The Politics of Translation in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, it must be said that:

[the two] areas where medieval monarchs and aristocrats found useful material in ancient Latin texts were the establishment of the legitimacy of their rule (especially in the case of new dynasties taking over) and precepts for government and kingly virtue.⁶²

The philosophy behind *translatio studii*, on the other hand, while building on the aforementioned idea of *translatio imperii*, shifted the focus away from

⁶⁰ Werner Goetz, *Translatio Imperii: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Geschichtsdenkens und der politischen Theorien im Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1958), pp. 17, 37, 77, 104 and 257; and Glauser, “Mittelalter (800–1500)”, p. 26.

⁶¹ Goetz, *Translatio Imperii*, pp. 62–76. Regarding the Holy Roman Empire, which featured an elective monarchy throughout its existence, *translatio imperii* was perceived as reflecting a vertical movement whereby kingship shifts from one dynasty to another. The seldom-used term *translatio religionis*, nonetheless, saw *translatio imperii* as a horizontal movement: the power of sovereignty bestowed upon a secular individual was granted by God above, the Latin *regnum* being perceived as representing both the worldly reign as well as *regnum Dei*: see Goetz, *Translatio Imperii*, pp. 378–81. Similar notions can be seen in other European countries at the same time. Like their German counterparts, French sovereigns, trying to justify claims to both cultural and political power, used Charlemagne’s death to support their claims with the legitimacy and credibility needed to prove their heritage of “*imperium* (power or legitimacy) from Rome and of *studium* (knowledge or learning) from ancient Greece and Rome.” The same can be said of Anglo-Norman rulers. Here, “the myth of Brutus, ‘first’ king of Britain and descendant of Rome’s Trojan founder Aeneas, secured for Anglo-Norman monarchs a line of descent that also extended back to ancient Greece and Rome”: see, for both citations, Emma Campbell and Robert Mills, “Introduction: Rethinking Medieval Translation”, in Emma Campbell and Robert Mills (eds), *Rethinking Medieval Translation: Ethics, Politics, Theory* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), p. 1. See also Blumenfeld-Kosinski, “Introduction: The Middle Ages”, p. 19; and Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages*, p. 135.

⁶² Blumenfeld-Kosinski, “Introduction: The Middle Ages”, p. 18.

worldly power onto the movement of knowledge and centres of learning. It was thus understood that over the course of time, just as worldly power moved, so too did the centre of culture and education move from one city or country to another. The (generally supposed) succession of centres was seen as being reflected in the movement from Athens to Rome and on to France (which, in the shape of the Sorbonne in Paris and the universities in Toulouse, Orléans and Montpellier, established some of the oldest universities in Europe).⁶³ Paris, for example, was given the nickname “The New Athens” during the later twelfth to the fourteenth centuries.⁶⁴

As Geraldine Barnes has observed, this concept of the movement of knowledge can arguably be seen as being reflected in the saga plots of the *riddarasögur* themselves, which show many a hero travelling through Europe as well as to numerous Oriental cities and lands in the course of their adventures (a similar ideology naturally being found also in the respective Old French sources).⁶⁵ Movement can nonetheless also be considered in temporal terms. As Sif Ríkharðsdóttir has highlighted, it can be argued that the Arthurian narratives and characters are themselves also subject to the passing of time on a narrative level in as much as the narratives themselves are received and utilised throughout the centuries in different fashions. As Sif notes:

The impossibility of temporal rigidity is made particularly apparent in Arthurian romance, which fundamentally depends on a conscious blurring of such boundaries and a wilful suspension of temporal

⁶³ Glauser, “Mittelalter (800–1500)”, p. 26. Bagdad, after the fall of Rome, became a prominent centre of civilisation, education and translation. Here many famous Greek philosophers were translated from Greek into Arabic, making Bagdad a focal point for translations and higher learning in the eighth and ninth centuries, albeit not an occidental one (it is, thus, rarely considered as such by medieval Europeans). Ástráður Eysteinnsson remarks: “Eftir hrun Rómaveldis hnignaði veraldlegum menntun allverulega og ýmis meginrit grískrar menningar féllu í gleymsku og dá. En þá gerist það að lykka verður á sögu evrópskrar menningar, því áhugi á grískum menntum hafði vaknað í Austurlöndum nær og er Aristóteles til að mynda þýddur á sýrlensku á sjöttu öld. Hinir fornu Sýrlendingar voru jafnframt einskona menningarlegir milliliðir fyrir arabaheiminn og komu við sögu þegar skipulögð þýðingastarfsemi fór fram í Bagdad á áttundu og níundu öld. Þar voru Platon, Aristóteles og fleiri grískir hugsuðir þýddir á arabísku. Þessar þýðingar bárust síðan um hinn arabíska menningarheim og enduðu meðal annars á Spáni, þar sem menning Mára stóð í blóma [...]”: see Ástráður Eysteinnsson, *Tvímæli*, p. 42. For more information on Early Oriental and Asian ideas on translation: see, for example, Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies*, pp. 32–6.

⁶⁴ Barnes, “Travel and *translatio studii* in the Icelandic riddarasögur”, p. 128.

⁶⁵ Barnes, “Travel and *translatio studii* in the Icelandic riddarasögur”, pp. 125 and 128, and, for a brief case study of *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs* (albeit an indigenous *riddarasaga*: see below): see especially pp. 131–2. See also Zrinka Stahuljak, “An Epistemology of Tension: Translation and Multiculturalism”, *The Translator* 10 (2004), pp. 39–49.

border, inasmuch as its later recipients would have to juggle multiple versions of this fictive Arthur, including his previous textual history. Arthurian romance in some sense can be said to celebrate anachronism as it adopts the legend of the pre-courtly warrior king and refashions him as the ultimate symbol of chivalric glory.⁶⁶

Logically, it might be said that dissimilar cultures with different social environments in different centuries received the same matter in different ways and tended in their translations to focus on certain aspects which they thought would best suit their respective ideal or cause.

This, finally, leads to the important question of untranslatability. In his famous essay *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzters*, Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) memorably said that:

Auch im Bereiche der Übersetzung gilt: ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, im Anfang war das Wort. Dagegen kann, ja muß dem Sinn gegenüber ihre Sprache sich gehen lassen, um nicht dessen intentio als Wiedergabe, sondern als Harmonie, als Ergänzung zur Sprache, in der diese sich mitteilt, ihre eigene Art der intentio ertönen zu lassen.⁶⁷

Although the quotation above needs to be read in the context of Benjamin's theory of a "pure language,"⁶⁸ the underlying notion is nevertheless relevant. In

⁶⁶ Sif Ríkhardsdóttir, "Chronology, Anachronism and *Translatio imperii*", in Leah Tether and Johnny McFayden (eds), *Handbook of Arthurian Romance: King Arthur's Court in Medieval European Literature* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017), p. 139.

⁶⁷ Walter Benjamin, "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzters", in Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (eds), *Walter Benjamin: Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. IV(1): *Kleine Prosa, Baudelaire-Übertragungen*, Suhrkamp-Taschenbuch Wissenschaft 934 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), p. 18. Translation: "In the realm of translation, too, the words *En archēi ēn ho logos* ["In the beginning was the word"] apply. On the other hand, as regards the meaning, the language of a translation can – in fact, must – let itself go, so that it gives voice to the *intentio* of an original not as reproduction but as harmony, as a supplement to the language in which it expresses itself, as its own kind of *intentio*": *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings: Vol. I, 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge/ London: Belknap Press, 1999), p. 260.

⁶⁸ Benjamin's notion of a "pure language" (or "reine Sprache" in German) can aptly be surmised with the explanation given by Peter Bush: "[Benjamin's] ideas on pure language come informed by the jagged edges of historical experience and are inimical to any notion of blood or racial purity. [...] For him, pure language is a force hidden within certain texts, a poetic potential, a kernel that is striving to go beyond the immediate shell of words. It is the task of the translator to reach out to and release that potentiality. [...] A translated work can [...] renew the original work by giving it myriad 'after-lives' and in so doing create new linguistic forms within a variety of target languages, new approximations to the hidden, underlying purity of the poetic unspoken: that is, an approximation to pure language": see Peter Bush, "Pure Language", in Mona

short, the intention of the translation will always be in continuous conflict with the intention of the original and thus total harmony between the two can never be established.⁶⁹ All the same, in spite of this troubled relationship between the original and the translation, the latter still needs to establish some kind of harmony with its audience in order to be deemed useful and meaningful.⁷⁰ This naturally includes the process of rendering (untranslatable?) concepts with those that are known to the audiences, something that pertains particularly to the supernatural concepts under discussion in this thesis.

The variety of meanings of the word *translatio* and its counterparts in the various languages discussed above give some sense of the type and depth of discussions regarding the nature of translation and how to translate that were taking place during the Middle Ages. The earlier-noted upsurge in the interest in translation in the Middle Ages was not least due to the rise and expansion of Christianity which created the need for some kind of inner-ecclesiastical consensus regarding the translation of the Bible, sermons and holy scriptures and not least the concepts involved in these. However, as has been noted, the various contemplations and thoughts regarding the nature and mode of translation that took place in this time had their roots in Antiquity. They were nonetheless also based on the contemporary, medieval political, religious and social readings of *translatio*, which, as has been shown, had often been utilised by both religious and secular rulers in order to manifest or expand their influence. As Blumenfeld-Kosinski remarks regarding medieval translation:

Translation could [...] never be a neutral act. Secular rulers as well as religious leaders were heavily invested in this activity, which made hitherto exclusive texts available to a much broader audience. While some groups wanted to preserve their privileges of Latin learning in order to safeguard their roles as intercessors with the divine, others succeeded in exploiting the translations of Latin texts for their own purposes: for example, laying claim to legitimate rule by inventing

Baker (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (London/ New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 194–5.

⁶⁹ Strahuljak, “An Epistemology of Tension”, p. 34.

⁷⁰ In their influential work *Grundlegung einer allgemeinen Translationstheorie*, Reiß and Vermeer state the following regarding textual coherence: “Eine Nachricht gilt als ‘verstanden’, wenn sie vom Rezipienten als in sich hinreichend kohärent mit seiner (Rezipienten-)Situation interpretiert werden kann bzw. wird”: see Katharina Reiß and Hans J. Vermeer, *Grundlegung einer allgemeinen Translationstheorie*, Linguistische Arbeiten 147 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1984), p. 109. Translation: “A message is regarded as ‘understood’ if it is or can be interpreted by a recipient as being coherent with his (recipient) situation.” That, which in the above quotation is restricted to a single message, can naturally be expanded to cover an entire text or, for example, a supernatural concept.

illustrious lineages, vouched for by the authority of the ancient text. Thus if we speak of translation [that is medieval translation], we must necessarily also speak of the politics of translation.⁷¹

Bearing this in mind, the following section will give some consideration to the overall debate that was taking place with regard to verbatim or sense-oriented translation in the Middle Ages, another discussion that had originated in Antiquity. It will also consider the various readings of the concept of *translatio* (most notably *translatio imperii* and *translatio studii* discussed above) that had the most impact on everyday medieval life, and without which any discussion regarding medieval translation would be imperfect. In this thesis, the following conception of translation by Emma Campbell and Robert Mills will be followed, which states that:

it is difficult to conceive of a theory of cultural transmission in the Middle Ages that is not, in some way, bound up with the senses of *translatio* associated with early articulations of empire and the ethical and political issues this inevitably raises.⁷²

Some thoughts will also be given to the numerous means that could be used to translate the “other”, that is foreign ideas and (supernatural) concepts, considering, among other things, the problems and challenges this entails and how this process could potentially influence the understanding of the supernatural in the respective receiving culture, both past and present.

2.1 Translating in the Middle Ages: The Quest of the *fidus interpres*

Prior to the medieval period, a long-lasting debate regarding the mode of translation had already come into being, something that Jörn Albrecht refers to as the “älteste Dichotomie der Übersetzungstheorie” (“the oldest dichotomy within the [field of] translation theory”).⁷³ This dialogue was to last up until the early twentieth century and was, as George Steiner (1929–2020) points out, a somewhat “steril” conversation about whether text should be translated *ad*

⁷¹ Blumenfeld-Kosinski, “Introduction: The Middle Ages”, p. 25.

⁷² Campbell and Mills, “Introduction: Rethinking Medieval Translation”, p. 2.

⁷³ Jörn Albrecht, *Literarische Übersetzung: Geschichte – Theorie – Kulturelle Wirkung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998), pp. 61–2. A good, yet concise overview of the *Stand der Forschung* in medieval translation studies and translation theory is given in Campbell and Mills, “Introduction: Rethinking Medieval Translation”, pp. 8–20.

verbum (“word-for-word”/ “literal”) or *ad sensum* (“sense-for-sense”/ “free”).⁷⁴ The apparent point of origin of this discrimination can be traced back to the writings of Cicero and, most influentially, St Jerome (mentioned above, Chapter 2).⁷⁵ Cicero, in a well-known and frequently often quoted passage from the fifth chapter of his *De optio genere oratorum* (46 BC), discriminates between the approaches of what he calls the *interpres* (the literal translator) and the *orator* (the “sense-for-sense” translator):⁷⁶

nec converti ut interpres, sed ut orator, sentiētiis isdem et earum formis tamquam figuris, verbis ad nostram consuetudinem aptis. In quibus non verbum pro verbo necesse habui reddere, sed genus omne verborum vimque servavi.⁷⁷

Although Cicero never directly uses the Latin equivalent of the terms “word-for-word” or “sense-for-sense” here, most scholars feel that this is what he is talking about (although other valid translations of this passage also exist).

St Jerome used Cicero’s approach as justification for his Bible amendment, which would later be referred to as the Latin *Vulgate* (late fourth century),⁷⁸ reasoning that an *ad verbum* approach would diffuse the sense of the original, and result in an illogical translation. St Jerome clearly disapproved of the “word-for-word” translation, his style of translation being one that was designed to best convey the overall message of a given text. In his letter to Pammachius

⁷⁴ George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (London/ Oxford /New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 319. See also Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies*, pp. 29–30; and Vermeer, *Das Übersetzen im Mittelalter*, pp. 11–2; as well as Albrecht, *Literarische Übersetzung*, pp. 62–3.

⁷⁵ Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies*, p. 30.

⁷⁶ Robinson, *Western Translation Theory*, pp. 7–10.

⁷⁷ For the Latin original: see <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/cicero/optgen.shtml>. The English translation reads as follows: “And I did not translate them as an interpreter, but as an orator, keeping the same ideas and the forms, or as one might say, the ‘figures’ of thought, but in language which conforms to our usage. And in so doing, I did not hold it necessary to render word for word, but I preserved the general style and force of the language”: see Robinson, *Western Translation Theory*, p. 9, and especially footnote 6 on the same page, for possible yet deviating interpretations of the Latin sentence. Horace follows a similar idea. In his *Ars poetica* (c. 20–10 BC), he writes that one should “nec verbum verbo curabis reddere fidus interpres”: see Horace, *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, trans. H. R. Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 194 (London: Heinemann, 1970), p. 460. Translation: “[One should] no[t] trouble to render word for word with the faithfulness of a translator”: see Robinson, *Western Translation Theory*, p. 15. For further information regarding correlations between Cicero’s and Horace’s passages and the problems emerging from these: see Albrecht, *Literarische Übersetzung*, pp. 54–6.

⁷⁸ Robinson, *Western Translation Theory*, p. 23.

(395 AD, Letter LVII), a histrionic yet waspish written pamphlet designed to defend his translation ethic against those critics that accused him of forgery, St Jerome writes:

ego enim non solum fateor, sed libera uoce profiteor me in interpretatione Graecorum absque scripturis sanctis, ubi et uerborum ordo mysterium est, non uerbum e uerbo, sed sensum exprimere de sensu..⁷⁹

A slightly different approach was taken by Ælfrēd, King of Wessex, who proclaims that he applies a mixture of *ad verbum* and *ad sensum* in his Old English translation of the *Consolatio philosophiae* (*Consolation of Philosophy*) by Boethius (c. 477–524).⁸⁰ Regarding his translation conventions here, it is stated that Ælfrēd translated “hwilum word be worde, hwilum andgit of andgi[e]te” (“sometimes he set word by word, sometimes meaning of meaning”).⁸¹ The terms *ad verbum* and *ad sensum* were nonetheless often used

⁷⁹ For the citation: see *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae*, Vol. I: *Epistulae I–LXX*, ed. Isidor Hilberg, CSEL 54 (Lipsiae: G. Freytag, 1910), p. 508. The English translation reads as follows: “For I myself not only admit but freely proclaim that in translating from the Greek (except in the case of the holy scripture where even the order of the words is a mystery) I render sense for sense and not word for word”, St. Jerome, *The Principal Works of St. Jerome: Letters and Selected Works*, ed. Philip Schaff and trans. W. H. Fremantle, NPNF 2, 6 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), p. 214. Pratt gives the Latin section in question as “non uerbum e uerbo, sed sensum exprimere de sensu”: see Karen Pratt, “Medieval Attitudes to Translation and Adaptation: The Rhetorical Theory and the Poet Practice”, in Roger Ellis (ed.), *The Medieval Translator*, Vol. II, Westfield Publications in Medieval Studies 5 (London: Centre for Medieval Studies, Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London, 1991), p. 3. See also Robinson, *Western Translation Theory*, p. 25; Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies*, p. 31; Albrecht, *Literarische Übersetzung*, p. 59; and H. F. D. Sparks, “Jerome as Biblical Scholar”, in P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans (eds), *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, Vol. I: *From the Beginnings to Jerome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 510–41. It needs to be highlighted, however, that St Jerome himself was somewhat contradictory in his approach as to how “proper” translations should be carried out, on some occasions preferring a literal translation, and on others a more sense-related approach. Elsewhere, St Jerome states that “si ad uerbum interpretor, absurde resonant.” Translation: “It sounds absurd if I translate word for word”: see Albrecht, *Literarische Übersetzung*, p. 67. For more information on St Jerome’s inconsistent understanding of a “proper” way of translating: see Sparks, “Jerome as Biblical Scholar”, p. 537–41.

⁸⁰ The original manuscript is currently kept in the Bodleian Library as part of the UK Memory of the World Register which itself forms part of UNESCO’s Memory of the World Programme: see https://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/news/2011/2011_may_23.

⁸¹ *King Alfred’s West-Saxon Version of Gregory’s Pastoral Care*, ed. and trans. Henry Sweet, Early English Text Society Original Series 45 (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 7. Modern scholars are nonetheless quick to highlight that there is, in fact, little word-for-word translation in this text: see Eyvind Fjeld Halvorsen,

indistinctly at the time, and differences seem to have been somewhat blurred. Scholars have highlighted that these differing translation strategies were even employed interchangeably throughout the medieval period as in the case of Ælfrēd.⁸²

Vermeer nonetheless concludes that “Wenn das Mittelalter vielfach ‘frei’ übersetzte, so tat man es damals aus einer eigenen Text‘theorie’ [*sic*] und Sachlage heraus.”⁸³ Indeed, the naming of sources was often regarded as something that was superfluous, at times considered as something that would question the knowledge and credibility of the translator or redactor. Since someone was learned and knew their sources, it was felt there was no necessity to name them (of course, there were not as many sources available then as in our own time).⁸⁴

It should also be remembered that a key quality of medieval translation was that it was mostly aimed at locals, especially if the translation was into a vernacular language and followed a popular mode of narration, as was the case with Old Norse translations of chivalric material discussed in this thesis.⁸⁵ The essential principle for the translator was to make a translation that people could comprehend (when read out aloud), something that allowed for the translator’s personal agenda and their personal preference to choose certain words over others or leave out words entirely if they thought it served the overall intelligibility of the final product (see Chapter 2.1.1).⁸⁶ The main intention was to try to pass on the story as can be seen in the fairly accurate translatory work of the translated *riddarasögur* discussed here; however, as will be shown, some freedom was certainly retained with regard to supernatural concepts which were naturally problematic.

Nevertheless, additional forms of translation are imaginable.⁸⁷ Indeed, translation can also be seen as a “genre” involving the imitation of a given source text.⁸⁸ It is also clear that besides focusing on the translation of the *meaning* of a text, translation can sometimes also involve a “translation” of the

“Translation – Adaptation – Imitation”, *MSCAN* 7 (1974), p. 57; and Robinson, *Western Translation Theory*, p. 37.

⁸² Vermeer, *Das Übersetzen im Mittelalter*, p. 11; and Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies*, pp. 29–31.

⁸³ Vermeer, *Das Übersetzen im Mittelalter*, p. 14. Translation: “In the Middle Ages [people] often translated ‘loosely’; this was done according to a personal text ‘theory’ and depending on circumstances.”

⁸⁴ Vermeer, *Das Übersetzen im Mittelalter*, pp. 261–2.

⁸⁵ Vermeer, *Das Übersetzen im Mittelalter*, p. 264; and Jordan, “Eine alte und doch immer neue Geschichte”, p. 154.

⁸⁶ Vermeer, *Das Übersetzen im Mittelalter*, p. 263.

⁸⁷ For additional possibilities: see Gauti Kristmannsson, *Literary Diplomacy*, pp. 18–83.

⁸⁸ Gauti Kristmannsson, *Literary Diplomacy*, pp. 19–20.

framework of the text, that is, the form in which it is preserved.⁸⁹ This especially applies to poetic works. To give one example: In the study of Old Norse literature, there has been a long-standing debate about how the Eddic and Skaldic poems should be eloquently and correctly translated. Some earlier scholars (German translators such as Felix Genzmer [1878–1959] in the editions of the *Thule* collection and American translators like Lee Milton Hollander [1880–1972]) opted for a translation that was faithful to the metric form of these poems accounting, among other things, for what they felt was the need for alliteration.⁹⁰ The outcome was often difficult-to-read, clumsy translations that, occasionally, altered meaning to fit the form. Others, meanwhile, have focused on the meaning of Old Norse poems, devoting themselves to conveying the sense rather than the form. The result have been translations (those, for example, by Larrington, Orchard and Dodds discussed in Chapter 2.1.1) that, while meticulously accurate with regard to the wording and meaning of the translated poem, often lack the style, measure and/ or music of the original.⁹¹

2.1.1 The Translator’s Quandary: Crafting a Translation

It needs to be borne in mind, however, that over and above the choices of mode or content in any given translation, any undertaking to produce a translation involves more than just the final stage of the text. The publication of a translation (which can be said to include scholarly editions of works) is a process that involves various individuals, materials and stages of work, something that applied in the Middle Ages, just as it does in our own times. It

⁸⁹ Gauti Kristmannsson, *Literary Diplomacy*, pp. 21–3.

⁹⁰ See, for example, Genzmer’s first two publications in this series: *Edda*, Vol I: *Heldendichtung*, ed. Felix Genzmer, Thule 1 (Jena: E. Diederichs, 1928); and *Edda*, Vol. II: *Götterdichtung und Spruchdichtung*, ed. Felix Genzmer, Thule 2 (Jena: E. Diederichs, 1932). For works by Lee Milton Hollander: see, for example, *Old Norse Poems: The Most Important Non-Skaldic Verse not Included in the Poetic Edda*, ed. and trans. Lee M. Hollander (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936); and *The Poetic Edda*, ed. Lee M. Hollander (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).

⁹¹ See, for example, the poems in the various editions of *Snorra Edda* by Anthony Faulkes: *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*; *Skáldskaparmál*; *Háttatal*, ed. and trans. Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society of Northern Research, 1998–2007). A far more profound approach has been undertaken in the commentary series on the Eddic poems *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda* by Klaus von See and Beatrice La Farge, which amounts to eight volumes (seven volumes and one register). Granted, this substantial publication does not classify as a translation in the precise sense of the word. Nonetheless, this commentary dissects every poem, providing a scholarly analysis of every word, phrase, *kenning*, passage and paragraph: see Klaus von See, Beatrice La Farge et. al. (eds), *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, 8 Vols (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Carl Winter, 1997–2019).

goes without saying that no translation can forgo an original from which to translate, and the original, naturally, needs an author. From there, someone needs to have interest and be willing to spend resources on conducting (or arranging) a translation of the original.⁹² If these two cornerstones (an original work and a commissioner) are set, the translator commences his work, often, in the medieval period, accompanied by an illustrator who takes care of the illuminations in the work (if there are any) which can naturally be seen as another form of translation.⁹³ In many cases, the final work is then reviewed by a corrector, a very common feature in Occidental writing. Finally, the translation is crafted with a designated audience in mind.⁹⁴ It is, nonetheless, not so easy to draw clear lines between the said various vocations, since, especially in medieval times, the lines between “author”, “translator”, “compiler” and so on, were often blurred, making it difficult at times to differentiate these professions from that of a “scribe”.⁹⁵ Regarding the problem of the production of a translation in the Middle Ages, and the different stages and people involved in this process, Halvorsen remarks that:

if you produce a translation that does make sense and brings out the full sense of the original, do you not run the risk of producing not so much a translation, where the wording of the original is respected, as an adaptation, even a total paraphrase? And this is the real difficulty with all these oldest texts derived from foreign sources: we mostly

⁹² Logically, the need for an original does not apply to so-called pseudotranslations, which “are original works which display the polyphonic nature and linguistic features associated with translations by referring to sources that they themselves create through modelling after or mixing together several actual texts”: Paolo Rambelli, “Pseudotranslation”, in Mona Baker and Gabirela Saldanha (eds), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (London/ New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 441.

⁹³ That illuminations serve as modes of translation of their own can be seen in the broad and varied tradition of the *Biblia pauperum* (“Paupers’ Bible”), a variant of the Bible where the Biblical context is solely presented in pictures so that illiterates can receive it. For further reading: see Henrik Cornell, *Biblia Pauperum* (Stockholm: Thule-tryck, 1925). For a visual example of a *Biblia pauperum*: see <https://www.loc.gov/books/?fa=segmentof:rbc0001.2009rosen0019/&sb=shelf-id&st=gallery>.

⁹⁴ Vermeer, *Das Übersetzen im Mittelalter*, p. 23; and Glauser, “Mittelalter (800–1500)”, p. 27.

⁹⁵ Johansson, “Texter i Rörelse”, p. 100; Stefanie Würth, *Der “Antikenroman” in der isländischen Literatur des Mittelalters: Eine Untersuchung zur Übersetzung und Rezeption lateinischer Literatur im Norden*, Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie 26 (Basel/ Frankfurt a. M.: Helbing und Lichtenhahn, 1998), p. 184; and Ástráður Eysteinnsson, *Tvímaeli*, p. 145.

cannot know what principles inspired the men who transferred them [...].⁹⁶

Even in modern times, the process of crafting a translation is clearly a very intricate and meticulous operation, involving many individuals and as many different work steps.

The amount of such influence a translator will exert on a given translation is another contentious question. A translator, as a human being, will naturally always influence the translated text in some way, maybe even subconsciously, with each choice of word they make. During this process, the personal experiences and background of each translator will naturally also wield various influences. A central question is whether the translator should contain and limit such experience as best as they can, or work with it, potentially giving the recipient of their translation a different flavour than that conveyed by the original?⁹⁷

Aside from these more philosophical and metaphysical questions, one can mention another key problem which emerges when dealing with translation, in other words, the question of volatility.⁹⁸ In the case of translations, there are no doctrines, nothing is carved in stone. Variation and uncertainty is implicit in the process. In short, the very same original text translated by two translators will, ultimately, produce two translations.⁹⁹ As Laurence Venuti expresses in his work *Translation Changes Everything*:

A translation never communicates in an untroubled fashion because the translator negotiates the linguistic and cultural differences drawn from the source text by reducing them and supplying another set of differences drawn from the receiving situation to enable the translation to circulate there. The source text, then, is not so much

⁹⁶ Halvorsen, “Translation – Adaptation – Imitation”, p. 57.

⁹⁷ For a more in-depth discussion of this problem: see Lawrence Venuti, *Translation Changes Everything: Theory and Practice* (London/ New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 32–56. Here, Venuti discusses various challenges that are inherent in the task of a translator, which start with the translator’s own *habitus*, and the intentional or unintentional application of words and terms based on the translator’s dominant cultural, social and linguistic values, or, as Venuti puts it, the “translator’s unconscious”: see Venuti, *Translation Changes Everything*, p. 7. This problem naturally applies to the translation of medieval works from one language into another modern language whereby the translation is rarely made into the medieval form of the target language but into a modern form. Typical examples of such are the works of Chaucer, which in the original will seem more complex to English readers than they are to those reading the modern translation.

⁹⁸ Ástráður Eysteinnsson, *Tvímæli*, p. 193.

⁹⁹ Glauser, “Mittelalter (800–1500)”, p. 27.

communicated as domesticated or, more precisely, assimilated to receiving intelligibilities and interests through an inscription.¹⁰⁰

Implied in the above is the basic fact that the process of translating, even when conducted with great wariness in the hope of achieving objectivity, is bound to affect the outcome in such a way that the received result will become, in a sense, a work of its own. In short, it is bound to be different to the original, and will be different to all other translations. This holds especially true for the manifold ideas and concepts that have to be dealt with as part of the translation of any given text, for, more often than not, they will become “blurred” in order to be made generally intelligible and receivable to the receiving culture.

One can take a *riddarasaga* such as *Ívens saga* as a paradigm of this development. The “original” source material is the French *Yvain le Chevalier au lion*, believed to have been written by Chrétien de Troyes in around 1170 or 1180.¹⁰¹ The work was rendered into Old Norse at the court of King Hákon Hákonarson in the thirteenth century, an act that removed the original text from its initial cultural background (language, culture, ethics, and supernatural concepts and so on) and introduced it into medieval Norwegian society. There, compared to the assumed source material, it naturally became an “other” (initially without any positive or negative label attached to it). However, as noted above, the process of translation will always have involved a number of problems, and not least those mentioned by Halvorsen (see Chapter 4): namely how to deal with foreign concepts that would have been new or unknown in the culture into which the text had been introduced? That the Old Norse translation was not the final stage of the translation process can be seen in the fact that the Old Norse variant of *Ívens saga* was reworked into Old Icelandic some 100 years later (see, for example, the fourteenth-century manuscript Holm perg 6 4to). By this stage, some of the originally foreign French ideas will have been translated, and subsequently introduced into courtly Norwegian society, potentially influencing pre-existing concepts. However, one can expect that as the Old Norse work was adapted into Old Icelandic, there will once again have been many in medieval Icelandic society who would not have understood certain notions (some French, some Norwegian), which would have needed to be implemented and explained for the Icelandic audience.

In short, over the course of the process of translation as the Old French chivalric romance moved into Old Icelandic, many original French concepts are likely to have found themselves twisted and turned twice, meaning that modern recipients of the Old Icelandic variant of *Ívens saga* would be looking at an

¹⁰⁰ Venuti, *Translation Changes Everything*, p. 11.

¹⁰¹ Chrestien de Troyes, *Yvain*, ed. and trans. Ilse Nolting-Hauff, KTRM 2 (München: Eidos, 1962), p. 7.

account that was blurred as it passed through two imperfect panes of glass.¹⁰² This process forms part of what has earlier been discussed with regard to the term of “untranslatability” (see Chapter 2), a problem that numerous scholars working in the field of translation studies have tackled and tried to provide satisfying solutions for (scholars such as Walter Benjamin or Martin Heidegger [1889–1976], for example).¹⁰³ Untranslatability can naturally incorporate these problems associated with the notion generally understood as the “other”. In this thesis, however, the “other” will be defined in a slightly narrower fashion, focusing especially on the supernatural concepts of the “other”. In the following chapter, the key focus will be on the various approaches that have been taken to translating such “other” concepts in pre-modern and modern scholarly translations of Old Norse works into English. As has been indicated above, the word “translation” here can be said to include free translations that will sometimes come under the headings of adaptations or rewritings, something that is, when it comes down to it, particularly applicable to the translation of supernatural concepts (as the case studies will show).

¹⁰² See, for example, Chrestien de Troyes, *Yvain*, p. 7; Rudolf Simek, *Artus-Lexikon: Mythos und Geschichte, Werke und Personen der europäischen Artusdichtung* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 2012), pp. 371–2; Hanna Steinunn Þorleifsdóttir, “Dialogue in the Icelandic Copies of *Ívens saga*”, in Vera Johanterwage and Stefanie Würth (eds), *Übersetzen im skandinavischen Mittelalter*, SMS 14 (Wien: Fassbaender, 2007), p. 167; and Rudolf Simek and Hermann Pálsson, *Lexikon der altnordischen Literatur*, Kröners Taschenausgabe 490 (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 2007), p. 210. Regarding concepts becoming more indistinct through the process of translation, Albrecht famously talked of the translator being a “servant of two masters”, one master being the author of the source material to which the translator vows to be faithful, while simultaneously trying to render the material as understandable for his other master, the recipient: see Albrecht, *Literarische Übersetzung*, p. 73. Dennis Howard Green has even gone so far as to invoke Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave” to address this matter, saying that “the poet [i.e. the translator] resembles the prisoners who, facing backwards, see only the shadows cast by the fire, so that the product of the poet is twice removed from reality”: see Dennis Howard Green, *The Beginnings of Medieval Romance: Fact and Fiction, 1150–1220* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 1.

¹⁰³ Walter Benjamin’s notion of “pure language” has been discussed above (see Chapter 2). In the same article, however, (that is *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*) Benjamin expresses the notion that translations themselves are untranslatable because, according to him, any meaning inheres to them too fleetingly: see Benjamin, “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers”, pp. 10–1 and 19–20. Martin Heidegger’s approach was not so different from that of Benjamin, however, in that he focused precisely on what is perceived as being “untranslatable” or has no equivalent on the target language. In so doing, Heidegger values the creative process that lies within the conflict of differences: see Martin Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1957), pp. 65–7.

2.1.2 The “Other”: (Un)known, (Un)eerie, (Un)translatable?

As has been mentioned above, scholars working in translation studies have considered various approaches in terms of how to deal with the translation of concepts that belong to what we might refer to as the “other”. Oversimplified, the “other” can be applied to anything (cultural, ethical, philosophical, psychological, religious and the like) that is seen as originating outside the target group which is thus often viewed as “foreign” to the target audience. Although these features have been given various other descriptions (such as “alien”) over the course of time, the concept of “otherness” actually dates back to Antiquity, and, more precisely, to the Roman poet Marcus Annaeus Lucanus (39–65 AD) and the first book of his work *De bello civile* in which Lucanus describes the perception of the afterlife amongst the German tribe, the Vangiones. Here, he states that the Vangiones perceive afterlife as a resurrection of their bodies in an *orbe alio*, a different “other” place:

Sacrorum, Dryadae, positis repetistis ab armis. Solis nosse deos et caeli numina vobis aut solis nescire datum; nemora alta remotis incolitis lucis; vobis auctoribus umbrae non tacitas Erebi sedes Ditisque profundi pallida regna petunt: regit idem spiritus artus *orbe alio*; longae, canitis si cognita, vitae mors media est.¹⁰⁴ (My italics.)

There are, however, many other, more intricate means of defining what constitutes the “other”, and how it should be dealt with in translating texts.

In his 1996 monograph, *Das Übersetzen im Mittelalter*, Hans Vermeer (1930–2010) identifies three types of assimilations that can occur while encountering the “other” as part of translation work.¹⁰⁵ The first type of

¹⁰⁴ Lucan, *The Civil War: Books I–X (Pharsalia)*, trans. J. D. Duff (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 36. Translation: “And the Druids, laying down their arms, went back to the barbarous rites and weird ceremonies of their worship. (To them alone is granted knowledge – or ignorance, it may be – of gods and celestial powers; they dwell in deep forests with sequestered groves; they teach that the soul does not descend to the silent land of Erebus and the sunless realm of Dis below, but that the same breath still governs the limbs in a *different scene*. If their tale be true, death is but a point in the midst of continuous life.)” (My italics.): see Lucan, *The Civil War*, p. 37.

¹⁰⁵ It is important to bear in mind, however, that, in these discussions, Vermeer nonetheless discriminates between the two terms “other” and “foreign” which he says have different connotations. For him, the “other” is always accompanied with some degree of hostility that is felt by the receiving culture. This aggression can surface in two different forms: On the one hand, belligerence is expressed by the receiving culture towards the “other” culture (as has often happened, for example, during the colonial eras of countries and with regard to the colonial rulers). On the other hand, the aggression may be felt by the receiving culture as emanating from the source culture. Vermeer uses the expression “foreign” when there appears to be some acceptance of the

assimilation, according to Vermeer, is best surmised with a term taken from biology, *Einverleibung* (“annexation”).¹⁰⁶ In this form, assimilation is

two cultures’ standpoints, both sides making efforts to understand the respective other. Thus, what is referred to above as the “other” would be understood as “foreign” for Vermeer, that is, it relates to a mutual effort by two cultures to establish understanding: see Vermeer, *Das Übersetzen im Mittelalter*, p. 104. Translation can, of course, be understood by some as an act of aggression by the source culture against the target society. This may occur in times of conquest or imperialism, when one culture tries to undermine the other to further their influence, often using translation for this purpose. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, considering Roman translations of Greek philosophers’ writings, regarded such an action as “translatory conquest”, something that Karl Vossler refers to as “cultural imperialism”: see André Lefevre, *Translating Literature: The German Tradition from Luther to Rosenzweig*, *Approaches to Translation Studies* 4 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1977), pp. 97–8; Robinson, *Western Translation Theory*, pp. 261–3. Venuti, highlighting the limited usefulness of such an approach, states that translation comprehended as a form of aggression only works from the viewpoint of nationalism: “Translation can be described as an act of violence against a nation only because nationalist thinking tends to be premised on a metaphysical concept of identity as a homogenous essence, usually given a biological grounding in an ethnicity or race and seen as manifested in a particular language and culture. Since translation works on the linguistic and cultural differences of a source text, it can communicate those differences and thereby threaten the assumed integrity of the national language and culture, the essentialist homogeneity of the national identity”: see Venuti, *Translation Changes Everything*, p. 116.

¹⁰⁶ Vermeer, *Das Übersetzen im Mittelalter*, p. 99–100. Vermeer also refers to this category as *Anverwendung* (“adaptation”) or *Umverwandlung* (analogous to “conversion”). In Vermeer’s discussion regarding assimilation, “culture” and “change” are frequently used terms. It is Eric Kramer, however, an influential figure in the field of communication, who best explains these two terms (“culture” and “change”) with regard to acculturation. According to Kramer, culture is “[...] a repository for competencies and wisdom that can be passed on via a shorthand process of linguistic and other forms of codexical communication.” Change, however, occurs when two different cultures interact with each other on a long-term basis. Change of this kind is generally regarded as being reciprocal, meaning that it affects both cultures involved in the exchange. As Kramer notes in this context: “Change [...] cannot be evaluated as progressive or regressive. All that can be said is that some structures of awareness manifest more dimensions than others”: see Eric Mark Kramer, “Dimensional Accrual and Dissociation”, in Jeremy Grace and Eric Mark Kramer (eds), *Communication, Comparative Cultures, and Civilizations*, Vol. III: *A Collection on Culture and Consciousness* (New York: Hampton Press, 2013), p. 124 for the former citation and p. 133 for the latter. The idea of acculturation originated in the field of sociology in the 1930s and was originally used to describe the influences and impact of immigrants on their new society and the way in which they themselves adjust. As Robert Redfield, Ralph Linton and Melville J. Herskovits note in their 1936 pamphlet on acculturation: “Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups”: see Robert Redfield, Ralph Linton and Melville J. Herskovits, “Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation”, *American Anthropologist* 38 (1936), p. 149. Although acculturation is

understood as a basic process of translation of lexemes from language A to language B. Here, language A naturally remains unaffected, but the vocabulary or meaning of words in language B is forced to expand and is altered in order to explain it. Then, after a long period of usage of this new lexeme, language B forgets about the lexeme's original background and uses it as if it was inherent to language B from the very beginning. As a result, the sense of "otherness" (that is the specific strange concepts of language A) fades over time because it has been assimilated completely into language (and culture) B.¹⁰⁷ To give an example, the English loan word "music" originally stems from the French word "musique" but eventually the concept was anglicised with the word's orthography being made compliant to English grammar rules, the word starting to be used as an English one.

The second type of assimilation is labelled *Angleichung* ("convergence") by Vermeer. This refers to a situation when the culture/ language of group B already approximates to the culture/ language of group A, meaning that concepts from both languages can converge comparatively easily.¹⁰⁸ In short, the degree of "otherness" here is less great. There are, however, many subgroups of this type. One type of convergence involves what is referred to as an "asymptotic" approach, by where the culture/ language of group B moves as far as possible towards the culture/ language of group A in an attempt to create understanding, without leaving their own standpoint, that is, their own culture/ language.¹⁰⁹ A good example of this, because of it being very extreme, is the so-called *Balkan Sprachbund* ("Balkan language area"), where, due to cultural contact between 800 BC and 170 AD, the phonology, morphology and syntax of, among others, Albanian, Bulgarian, Romanian and Greek were permanently altered. This led to the assumption that these languages belonged to the same language family, something that was in fact not the case since each aforementioned language belonged to a different, distinct language family of Indo-European (Albanian, Hellenic [Greek], Romance [Romanian] and Slavic [Bulgarian] respectively).¹¹⁰ A simpler version of language convergence occurs

thought to be initially neutral, it needs to borne in mind that research has shown that one group is more likely to be impacted on, or that the impact of one group is more sophisticated than that of the other: see Jennifer A. Skuza, "Humanizing the Understanding of the Acculturation Experience with Phenomenology", *Hum. Stud.* 37 (2007), pp. 448–9.

¹⁰⁷ Vermeer, *Das Übersetzen im Mittelalter*, p. 103.

¹⁰⁸ Vermeer, *Das Übersetzen im Mittelalter*, p. 101.

¹⁰⁹ Vermeer, *Das Übersetzen im Mittelalter*, pp. 102–3.

¹¹⁰ Donald Winford, *An Introduction to Contact Linguistics* (Malden: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 65 and 70–8. For an overview of this feature: see Helmut Wilhelm Schaller, *Die Balkansprachen: Eine Einführung in die Balkanphilologie*, Sprachwissenschaftliche Studienbücher (Heidelberg: Winter, 1975); and Olga Mišeska Tomić, "Balkan

between Chinese, Thai and Vietnamese, which form a linguistic zone based on their tonal phonetical distinctions.¹¹¹

Vermeer's third type of assimilation is referred to as *Anähnelung*.¹¹² This type is essentially a soft variant of the second category which in translations avoids convergence but makes use of appendices, introductions or footnotes to deepen the understanding of those reading the translation by highlighting similarities and differences in the target language to that of the source language (for example, using phrases such as “resembling” or “close to” to explain the translation).¹¹³ This third type might also try to negotiate a degree of common overlap (of words, lexemes, syntax and the like) as a means of allowing cultural entities to communicate with one another without loss to the receiving culture.¹¹⁴ The fairly recent saga compilation *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, for example, offers an explanatory glossary at the end of the fifth volume clarifying various key concepts that are encountered throughout the various narratives for an audience that may not understand their implications. Explanations are given, for example, to the concepts of “giant”, “nature spirit” and “magic rite”, all of which are italicised when they first occur in each translation.¹¹⁵ The explanation of the latter contains the following insight, underlining the degree to which the rite in question is different to those the reader might have previously encountered:

The exact nature of magic ritual, or *seiður*, is somewhat obscure. It appears that it was originally a ceremony that was only practised by women. Even though there are several accounts of males carrying out *seiður* [...], these men are almost always looked down on as having engaged in an “effeminate” activity.¹¹⁶

It is worth highlighting, however, that, as noted above, translations are always matters of judgement and are bound to invite criticism. The various different styles of translation of concepts and techniques of cultural assimilation discussed above, which represent only a brief selection of the scholarly terms,

Sprachbund Features”, in Bernd Kortmann and Johan van der Auwera (eds), *The Languages and Linguistics of Europe: A Comprehensive Guide* (Berlin/ Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), pp. 307–24.

¹¹¹ Terry Crowley and Claire Bown, *An Introduction to Historical Linguistics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 271.

¹¹² Vermeer admits that such a lexeme does not exist in German. In English, the word (as a noun) would be close to “sth. takes the resemblance of sth. else”.

¹¹³ Vermeer, *Das Übersetzen im Mittelalter*, p. 101.

¹¹⁴ Vermeer, *Das Übersetzen im Mittelalter*, p. 103.

¹¹⁵ *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders including 49 Tales*, ed. Viðar Hreinsson et. al., 5 Vols (Reykjavík: Bókauktgáfan Leifur Eiríksson hf., 1997), V, pp. 405–17.

¹¹⁶ *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, V, p. 412.

approaches and notions that have contributed to the field of translation studies over the years, hint at the need for and effect of employing varying methods and styles in crafting a translation. It comes as no surprise that a scholar may think one redaction unaesthetic, badly worded or worked, and therefore embark on a translation of their own.¹¹⁷ As the target culture changes or develops or approaches change, this new translation may in time find itself deemed outdated, resulting in yet another translation being commissioned (which will almost certainly differ from the previous two redactions) (see also Chapter 2.1). Thus, interestingly enough, while the original work remains unchanged, two new versions of it will have appeared in another languages each of which can be viewed as a separate work (see Chapter 2.1.1 above).

To give one example, the oldest English Eddic translation which covers a considerable variety of poems was published as early as 1797 by Amos Simon Cottle (1766–1800).¹¹⁸ Some 70 years later in 1865, Benjamin Thorpe (1782–1870) published his own edition of the Eddic poems, a publication that was followed just ten years later by Rasmus Björn Anderson (1846–1936) with his own 1875 translation.¹¹⁹ Their respective works, however, read very differently to the two-volume edition undertaken by Guðbrandur Vigfússon (1827–1889) and Frederick York Powell (1850–1904), *Corpus poeticum boreale: The Poetry of the Old Northern Tongue from the Earliest Times to the Thirteenth Century*, which was published in 1883, and which can be regarded as the first “edition proper” in the English-speaking sphere. This work gave the Eddic poems in their entirety in both Icelandic and English, along with explanatory notes, a commentary and possible deviating readings.¹²⁰ Lee Milton Hollander then published a new rather poetic translation of the Poetic Edda in the later 1920s, and was followed by Ursula Dronke (1920–2012) publishing other annotated translations of the Eddic material starting in the 1960s.¹²¹ Her work was soon

¹¹⁷ Jane H. M. Taylor, “Rewriting: Translation, Continuation and Adaptation”, in Leah Tether and Johnny McFadyen (eds), *Handbook of Arthurian Romance: King Arthur’s Court in Medieval European Literature* (Berlin/ Boston: de Gruyter, 2017), p. 169.

¹¹⁸ *Icelandic Poetry or the Edda of Saemund*, trans. Amos Simon Cottle (Bristol: N. Biggs, 1797).

¹¹⁹ *Edda Sæmundar Hinns Frôða: The Edda of Sæmund the Learned from the Old Norse or Icelandic with a Mythological Index*, ed. and trans. Benjamin Thorpe (London: Trübner & Co., 1865); and *Norse Mythology or the Religion of Our Forefathers: Containing all the Myths of the Eddas*, ed. and trans. Rasmus Björn Anderson (London: Trübner & Co., 1875).

¹²⁰ *Corpus poeticum boreale: The Poetry of the Old Northern Tongue from the Earliest Times to the Thirteenth Century*, Vol. I: *Eddic Poetry*; Vol. II: *Court Poetry*, ed. and trans. Guðbrandur Vigfússon and F. York Powell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1883).

¹²¹ *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Lee M. Hollander (Austin: University of Texas, 1928); and *The Poetic Edda*, Vol. II: *Mythological Poems*; Vol. III: *Mythological Poems II*, ed. and

followed up in 1969 by the very different poetic translation of a selection of Eddic poems by the Anglo-American poet Wystan Hugh Auden (1907–1973) working in collaboration with Paul Beekman Taylor.¹²² The last two decades have been particularly fruitful regarding the publication of various new translations and editions of Eddic poetry, a selection of which include those of Carolyne Larrington in 1996 (revised 2014), and Andrew Orchard in 2011, and those made by the poet Jeramy Dodds, whose publication from 2014 was followed just a year later by the work of Jackson Crawford.¹²³ Throughout this time, the original Eddic poems have naturally never changed,¹²⁴ while the redactions have differed greatly in style, language, and even ordering of the poems. As noted above, the reasons for undertaking new editions have included,

trans. Ursula Dronke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969–2011). This phenomenon of rendering concepts from another culture with words from one own's vocabulary is naturally not limited to English translations, but applies to all translations regardless of society, culture, time and/ or the source they were translated from. As was noted earlier in Chapter 2.1 as well as in footnote 90, Genzmer, for example, had his own approach to translating the Eddic poems into German, in other words that of using archaic language to echo the sound and metric of the original. Arnulf Krause, on the other hand, opted for a more language- and sense-oriented rendering of the material in his translations of the Eddic matter. Manfred Stange and Karl Simrock, in turn, created a translation which focuses on the popular recipient rather than on the scholar, meaning that their translation is fairly easy to read, but of less scientific value than that of Krause: see *Die Heldenlieder der Älteren Edda*, trans. Arnulf Krause, Reclams Universal-Bibliothek 18142 (Stuttgart: Phillip Reclam jun., 2001); *Die Götterlieder der Älteren Edda*, trans. Arnulf Krause, Reclams Universal-Bibliothek 18426 (Stuttgart: Phillip Reclam jun., 2006); and *Die Edda: Götterlieder, Heldenlieder und Spruchweisheiten der Germanen*, trans. Karl Simrock and Manfred Stange (Eltville: Bechtermünz, 1995).

¹²² *The Elder Edda: A Selection*, trans. Paul Beekman Taylor and Wystan Hugh Auden (London: Faber and Faber, 1969).

¹²³ See *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Carolyne Larrington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, revised 2014); *The Elder Edda: A Book of Viking Lore*, trans. Andy Orchard (London: Penguin Books, 2011); *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Jeramy Dodds (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2014); and *The Poetic Edda: Stories of the Norse Gods and Heroes*, ed. and trans. Jackson Crawford (Indianapolis/ Cambridge: Hackett, 2015).

¹²⁴ Naturally, the spelling, ordering and wording of the original text in publication has regularly varied as scholars have blended manuscript wordings in their presentation of the template, compare, for example: *Norræn fornkvæði: Islandsk Samling af Folkelige Oldtidsdigte om Nordens Guder og Heroer, Almindelig kaldet Sæmundar Edda hins fróða*, ed. Sophus Bugge (Christiania: P. T. Mallings Forlagsboghandel, 1867); with *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern: I: Text*, ed. Gustav Neckel, Germanische Bibliothek 2 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1914); *Eddadigte*, Vol. I: *Völuspá, Hávamál*; Vol. II: *Gudedigte*; Vol. III: *Heltedigte (første del)*, ed. Jón Helgason, Nordisk filologi 4, 7 and 8 (København: Munksgaard, 1951–2); *Eddukvæði*, ed. Gísli Sigurðsson (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1998); and most recently *Eddukvæði*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, 2 Vols (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2014).

among other things, different tastes in culture, not least when it comes to approaches to the aesthetics of a given text or the “genre” in which it is presented.¹²⁵ In order to illustrate the points made above, the following table present a side-by-side comparison of the different translations of st. 2 of *Völuspá* given in the above-mentioned publications as a means of highlighting the fact that different translators produce distinctly different works in spite of utilising the same source material, which has itself remained unchanged throughout the centuries:¹²⁶

<i>Edda</i>	Ec man iotna ár um borna,/ þá er forðom mic fædda höfðo:/ nío man ec heima, nío íviði./ miotvið mæran fyr mold neðan.
Cottle (1797)	–
Thorpe (1865)	The Jötuns I remember/ early born./ those who me of old/ have reared./ I nine worlds remember./ nine trees,/the great central tree,/ beneath the earth.
Anderson (1875)	–
Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Powell (1883)	I remember the Giants born of yore, who bred me up long ago. I remember nine Worlds, nine Sibyls, a glorious Judge beneath the earth.
Hollander (1928)	I call to mind the kin of etins/ which in times long gone did give me life./ Nine worlds I know, the nine abodes/ of the wondrous world-tree, the welkin beneath.
Auden and Taylor (1969)	I tell of giants from times forgotten,/ Those who fed me in former days:/ Nine Worlds I can reckon, nine roots of the Tree,/ The wonderful Ash, way under the ground.

¹²⁵ Glauser, “Mittelalter (800–1500)”, p. 27.

¹²⁶ The examples given in the table are taken from (in order of appearance from top to bottom): *Edda*, p. 1; *Edda Sæmundar Hinns Froða*, p. 3; *Corpus poeticum boreale*, I, p. 193 (incorporated into st. 1); *The Poetic Edda*, p. 2; *The Elder Edda: A Selection*, p. 145 (here as st. 6); *The Poetic Edda*, II, p. 7; *The Poetic Edda*, p. 4; *The Elder Edda: A Book of Viking Lore*, p. 5; *The Poetic Edda*, p. 26; and *The Poetic Edda: Stories of the Norse Gods and Heroes*, p. 2. Cottle does not feature *Völuspá* in his edition, but discusses it briefly in his introduction before moving on to compare the Old Norse with the Classical Greek mythology. However, at the end of his preface, Cottle remarks: “The translator has omitted one ode in this series, on account of its containing nothing of the Northern Mythology. It is filled with little else but the absurd superstitions of the Church of Rome”: *Icelandic Poetry or the Edda of Saemund*, pp. xxix–xxx. Unfortunately, Cottle does not give a name for the ode he omits or provide further information which might help to identify the poem. Likewise, Anderson does not give a full translation of *Völuspá*, rather citing selected stanzas to support his discussions of certain aspects of Old Norse mythology. He nonetheless alludes to st. 2 when he discusses what he refers to as “Mimer’s Fountain” without giving any translation or even paraphrase: See, for example, *Norse Mythology or the Religion of Our Forefathers*, p. 171 (for a translation of sts 1 and 3) and p. 209 (for the aforementioned reference in the discussion of “Mimer’s Fountain”).

Dronke (1969–2011)	I remember giants/ born early in time,/ who long ago/ had reared me./ Nine worlds I remember,/ nine wood–ogresses,/ glorious tree of good measure,/ under the ground.
Orchard (2011)	I recall those giants, born early on,/ who long ago brought me up;/ nine worlds, nine wood-dwelling witches,/ the famed tree of fate down under the earth
Dodds (2014)	I recall being reared by Jotuns,/ in days long gone. If I look back, I recall/ nine worlds, nine wood-witches,/ that renowned tree of fate below the Earth.
Larrington (rev. 2014)	I remember giants born early in time/ those nurtured me long ago;/ I remember nine worlds, I remember nine giant women,/ the mighty Measuring-Tree below the earth.
Crawford (2015)	I remember the giants/ born so long ago;/ in those days/ they raised me./ I remember nine worlds,/ nine giantesses,/ and the seed/ from which Yggdrasil sprang.

Table 1: Comparison of different scholarly translations of *Völuspá* st. 2.

While numerous minor differences can be seen in all translations, , it is worth paying special attention to the way in which two chief concepts in this stanza are dealt with, namely the “*iotnar*” and the “*íviði/ íviðjur*”,¹²⁷ making apparent how different the results of translations can be. While the “*iotnar*” are occasionally translated as “*etins*” or “*Jotuns*”, they are most commonly rendered with the English term “*giants*” which, as has been discussed above, can be said to be an ill-fitting match. Considerable disagreement clearly exists with regard to the translation of “*íviði/ íviðjur*” (partly depending on the reading of the original), every single translation presenting the reader with a different term (ranging from “*sibyls*” to “*wood-witches*”, “*roots*”, “*trees*”, “*abodes*” and “*giantesses*”), each of which will have important implications for the meaning of this part of the poem.

In short, it is clear that over time, the form(s) of translation and approaches to it have regularly adapted to suit accepted forms within the Western world. While it is understood that the translator will have influence on the text, as has been discussed in Chapters 2.1 and 2.1.1 above, it is also believed today that the degree to which they can exert this influence should be fairly limited, not least as a result of modern copyright restrictions. In the Middle Ages, however, such legislative restrictions did not exist, thus possibly prompting the creation of a new transmission chain that started with each rendition of any given text, something that was particularly evident in the case of the process behind the *riddarasögur* translations (see Chapter 2).¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Note that Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason read “*íviði*” as “*íviðjur*” in their recent *Eddukvæði*, a reading nowadays accepted by most scholars.

¹²⁸ The concept of copyright was only introduced as late as the eighteenth century, meaning that the Middle Ages lacked any law underlining the idea of enforcing

In the following, various examples of the effect of translation on ethical, cultural and supernatural concepts will be discussed in order to highlight how medieval translators dealt with the numerous problems and challenges that arise during the process of translation.

ownership of writing and written ideas: see Ástráður Eysteinnsson, *Tvímæli*, p. 44; and Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (London/ New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 47.

3 The Translation of Concepts

As has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, in the process of translation, one culture, in order to establish understanding and communication interculturally, will tend to resort to words and concepts that are familiar to readers or listeners while simultaneously trying to keep to the original ideas of the source culture in the material that is being translated. This process, however, involves an elementary yet intriguing question: if the mere translation of simple facts can create potential problems in linguistic terms, what about those involved in the translation of foreign ideas and ethical, cultural and supernatural concepts, or those philosophies that exist in a different or foreign tongue and have a background in a different culture, but no direct parallel in the target culture itself? As will be shown in the following chapter, in the process involved in the so-called *interpretatio Romana* and *Germanica* used in medieval translations (see Chapter 3.4.1), the problem of “translating” gods for readers and listeners in the Middle Ages seems to have revolved around deciding a basis for a translation which often involved a simple correlation of divinities. Such an approach naturally caused problems and spawned various questions: for example, whether one decides to establish a correlation on the basis of the gods’ corresponding positions within their respective pantheon, or their qualities, attributes or assets? How much attention is devoted to the divinities’ comparative popularity amongst the two populations? Indeed, considering what has been said earlier about the use of similar terms in translation (see Chapters 2 through 2.1.2), what role do similar sounding names occupy?

In the following discussion, several brief case studies of medieval translation will be given that will hopefully demonstrate the various approaches that have been used to approach such problems of conceptual translation in different times and different cultures, showing how people in the medieval period in particular tried to establish a consensus on ethical, cultural and especially supernatural concepts, starting with consideration of those translations of Biblical and Christian ethical concepts relating to the tree of knowledge. This will be followed by a brief analysis of the potential effects of the translation of cultural concepts, considering the problematic use of the words *templum* and *fānus* in Latin (as translations for pre-Christian Nordic sites of worship), and the difficulties involved in translating the Old French ideas of *chastel/ castel* and *chevalier*, considering their respective adaptations in medieval Scandinavia. These brief examples will be followed by a discussion of the problems that have arisen in the translation into English of the Old Norse

supernatural concepts of *jotnar* (followed up in Case Study 3); the translation difficulties involved in Ibn Faḍlān’s account of the “Angel of Death”, and, ultimately, the depiction of Germanic divinities in both Latin and other foreign sources.

3.1 Ethical Concepts

Translations of the Bible, easily one of the most important and influential works of humankind, prove to be a gold mine with regard to questions relating to the translation of concepts, be they ethical, cultural or supernatural. Having been translated into approximately 700 different languages,¹²⁹ the Bible is naturally also particularly apt for considering the implications of such translations, as was noted in the previous chapter. In the following sub-chapter, the implications involved in different translations of the “tree of knowledge” mentioned in *Genesis* 2:9 will be investigated.

The initial Hebrew passage, according to the Westminster Leningrad Codex, reads as “*וְעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע*”,¹³⁰ which literally means “the tree of knowledge of good and evil”. The Latin *Vulgate* nonetheless has the tree as “*libor sapientiae bene et mali*”, literally “the tree of *discernment* between good and evil”, with *sapientia* being closer to “insight” or “discernment” rather than knowledge. The Greek variant of the Bible, the so-called *Septuaginta*, meanwhile has “*το ξύλον του ειδέναι γνωστόν καλού και πονηρού*”, which means literally “the tree, the one to know knowing good and evil.”¹³¹ Here, as in the Hebrew version, the highlight is on *knowing* both good and evil, rather than “discerning between” or “having insight into” good and evil, which are stressed in the Latin translation.

Modern Bible translations reflect this dilemma of meaning, with the English King James version having “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”, thus

¹²⁹ The Bible in its entirety has actually been translated into 670 languages. The New Testament alone has even been translated into over 1500 languages. For the numbers as of January 2021: see <https://www.wycliffe.org.uk/about/our-impact/>.

¹³⁰ The interlinear reading would be: “and-tree-of the-knowledge good and-evil”: see *The NIV Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament: Four Volumes in One: Genesis-Malachi*, ed. John R. Köhlenberger III (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1987), p. 4. Howard Clark Kee argued that the original Semitic understanding of “knowledge” incorporates the aspect of action. He thus argues that the prohibition of eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge in *Genesis* 2:17 is due to the fact that, having eaten the said fruit, a person may go on to perform both good and also evil acts: see *The Cambridge Annotated Study Bible: New Revised Standard Edition*, ed. Howard Clark Kee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 2.

¹³¹ *The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament*, trans. Launcelot Charles Lee Brenton (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1879), p. 3.

following in the Hebrew-Greek tradition of “knowing” good and evil.¹³² The German and French translations, however, have “der Baum der Erkenntnis von Gut und Böse” and “L’arbre qui donne la connaissance du bonheur et du malheur” respectively, which are respectively translatable as meaning “the tree of insight into good and evil” and “the tree that grants discernment of what is good or evil”, therefore, reflecting more the Latin notion of *sapientia*.¹³³

An interesting shift in translation can be observed in the early Icelandic Bible translations, which moved further from “discernment” and “insight” to “understanding”. The Old Norse translation of historical material from the Old Testament, referred to as *Stjórn* after the labelling of Unger’s first edition of the said material, a work which may date back to the first half of the thirteenth century, describes the tree of knowledge as follows:¹³⁴

enn annat uitzkutre milli gods ok illz. þiat fyrr enn madrinn aat þar af.
kunni hann fyrir þann skyld aungua grein aa illu. að hann hafði þat
eigi adr prouat. þiat siukleik uanmegn ok allt meinlæti kaullum uær
illt.¹³⁵

The Old Norse *vizka* can be translated with “wisdom” or “sagacity”, although the verb *að vita* that lies behind it correlates more with “to know”.¹³⁶ The latter reading appears to be closer to the way the word is understood here, since the short explanation of the tree states that before man ate from the tree’s fruit, he could not commit anything evil, emphasising the aspect of someone needing “knowledge” of evil in order to be able to commit evil. Interestingly, a new variant was understood in the first “edition proper” of the Icelandic Bible, dating to 1584/5 which was undertaken by Guðbrandur Þorláksson (1541–1627). This variant mentions “skilnings trèð góðs og ills”, which can be

¹³² *The New Scofield Reference Bible: Holy Bible: Authorized King James Version*, ed. C. I. Scofield et. al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 4–5.

¹³³ *Die Bibel: Einheitsübersetzung der Heiligen Schrift* (Stuttgart: Katholische Bibelanstalt, 1984), p. 21; and *La Bible: Traduction Œcuménique de la Bible comprenant l’Ancien et le Nouveau Testament* (Paris: Société Biblique Française, 1977), p. 26.

¹³⁴ It has been argued by Kirby that there are, in fact, three different versions of *Stjórn*, each preserved in different stages, lengths and manuscripts, supporting the notion of three different variants existing of the same framework: see Ian J. Kirby, *Bible Translation in Old Norse*, Publication de la Faculté des Lettres 27 (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1986), pp. 51–73. The estimated date of origin for the *Stjórn* is thought to lie in the early thirteenth century: Kirby, *Bible Translation in Old Norse*, pp. 72–3.

¹³⁵ *Stjórn: Gammelnorsk Bibelhistorie fra Verdens Skabelse til det Babyloniske Fangenskab*, ed. C. R. Unger (Christiania: Feilberg & Landmarks Forlag, 1862), p. 31.

¹³⁶ Baetke, *Wörterbuch zur altnordischen Prosaliteratur*, pp. 750 and 752.

translated with “tree of *understanding* good and evil”.¹³⁷ This new concept, different to the idea of knowledge and insight, has remained in the Icelandic understanding of the word.

The meaning of הדעת, the key word here, was heavily disputed amongst the early church fathers. Whereas Origen of Alexandria (185–c. 254) opted for a metaphorical interpretation, reading it in a mythical or spiritual sense, St Jerome and Augustine of Hippo (354–430) (followed later by Thomas Aquinas [c. 1225–1274] and Martin Luther) had a rather verbatim or historical perception of what this “knowledge” involved.¹³⁸ That this discussion still wages in modern times can be seen in the current dialogue which offers various readings of how the knowledge bestowed by the tree could be understood, partly relating the similar questions of what “טוב” (“good”, “gut”, “bonheur”, “góður”) and “רע” (“evil”, “böse”, “malheur”, “illur”) mean. The most prominent readings are: 1) sexual knowledge in the sense of how Adam and Eve, after having eaten the forbidden fruit, recognised that they were naked, thereby discovering sexuality;¹³⁹ 2) knowledge involving a broader meaning of “good and evil” rather than the mere ethical one in accordance with *II Samuel* 13:22 where it means “salutary and harmful”;¹⁴⁰ 3) knowledge which implies a connection between the tree and the Eucharist, in the sense that the knowledge given by the

¹³⁷ *Biblía: það er öll heilög ritning* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska Biblíufélag, 1859), p. 2. For possible Christian influence on the pagan idea of the Tree of Life: see Pétur Pétursson, “Völuspá and the Tree of Life: A Product of a Culture in a Liminal Stage”, in Kristina Jennbert, Anders Andrén and Catharina Raudvere (eds), *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives: Origins, Changes, and Interactions*, Vægar till Midgård 8 (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2006), pp. 313–9.

¹³⁸ Marius Reiser, *Bibelkritik und Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift: Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese und Hermeneutik*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 217 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), pp. 361–5 and 371. It is a well-known fact that much debate ensued over the “right” translations of the Bible, in some cases boiling down to questions of single phrases or words that could be read or translated differently. The modern scholarly notion regarding the tree of knowledge appears to be that there is no problem about the translation the Hebrew source word being translated into the various other meanings. That is to say, a consensus seems to have been reached about how to translate the Hebrew “עץ הדעת טוב ורע” in each of the different target languages (even if these translations often differ in meaning). This can be deduced from that fact that the tree of knowledge, and the whole passage in *Genesis* 2:9 for that matter, is absent in Hulst’s list of problematic terms in the Old Testament which starts with *Genesis* 4:7: see A. R. Hulst, *Old Testament Translation Problems, Helps for Translators 1* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960), p. 2.

¹³⁹ B. S. Childs, “Tree of Knowledge, Tree of Life”, in George Arthur Buttrick et. al. (eds), *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), p. 696; and Willibald Sandler: *Der verbotene Baum im Paradies: Was es mit dem Sündenfall auf sich hat* (Kevelaer: Topos, 2009), pp. 120–3.

¹⁴⁰ Childs, “Tree of Knowledge, Tree of Life”, p. 696.

tree is knowledge that even God cannot give, an idea originating with the Austrian Catholic theologian Willibald Sandler;¹⁴¹ 4) ethical knowledge in the form of moral judgement.¹⁴² It has nonetheless also been argued that in Antiquity “good and evil” was used as a trope to say “everything”.¹⁴³ In short, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil represented the tree of universal knowledge.

As can be seen, translation can have deep implications, since the different wording or varying meanings of approximating words in different cultures will commonly be differently charged. In the case of the translation of concepts which were often understood in differing ways over the course of time, they could also result in influential debates (see, for example, St Jerome’s stance on translation discussed in Chapter 2.1) leading to new ideologies, new vocabulary and even changes in culture. Indeed, one must acknowledge the fact that, as was noted in Chapters 2 and 2.1.2, certain concepts, words or structures are simply impossible to translate or paraphrase in other languages or cultures, something which is bound to affect the nature of the said translation and its implications. This holds true especially when new ideas or concepts, like those relating to Christianity, are introduced into a culture.

To give another example, while remaining within the ecclesiastical milieu: Medieval missionaries who sought to spread the word of God and the influence of the Holy Scripture regularly came into contact with various different cultures (and their languages) which were not familiar with the philosophy or certain key concepts contained in the scriptures. These missionaries naturally had to work from Latin or, more commonly, their own native language in order to be understood by those they sought to proselytise. Numerous communicative hurdles certainly needed to be overcome, sometimes relating to the simplest of words or smallest ideas.

The predicament of how to “properly” translate ethical concepts, such as “knowledge”, “good”, “evil” and “understanding” discussed above, is logically also highly applicable to other cultural concepts. If we continue to consider how medieval missionaries worked in Scandinavia and how they interacted with the belief systems they encountered there, it is worth considering how they themselves described the areas or sanctuaries of worship they encountered when writing home. In reports sent back to the abbots or bishops who sent them forth, we find various clerics reporting in Latin that the heathen worship of the

¹⁴¹ Sandler, *Der verbotene Baum im Paradies*, pp. 87–8.

¹⁴² Childs, “Tree of Knowledge, Tree of Life”, p. 696.

¹⁴³ Cyrus H. Gordon and Gary A. Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (New York: Norton, 1997), p. 36.

Germans was conducted in so-called *fānī* (sg. *fānus*) or *templī* (sg. *templum*).¹⁴⁴ But what was it that these monks actually perceived that made them choose to use the Latin word *templum*/*fānus* as a form of description for something that was almost certainly quite different? And how did those at home understand what they were talking about? This and other cultural concepts, such as *chastell/castel* and *chevalier*, which were translated into the Old Nordic culture as *kastali* and *riddari* will be discussed in the following subchapter.

3.2 Cultural Concepts

If one investigates pagan sites of worship in early medieval Scandinavia, one of the most important accounts is that given by Adam of Bremen (c. 1050–1081/5) in Book 4, chapters 26 and 27 of his *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* (c. 1070–1076).¹⁴⁵ There, and in the main text, Adam of Bremen

¹⁴⁴ A good example can be found in Beda Venerabilis' (c. 673–735) *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* ("Ecclesiastical History of the English People") dated to c. 731, in which a letter mentions efforts undertaken by the East Saxons who had rebuilt sacred structures that had been laid to waste earlier, but found them reinstated as the people began to revert to the veneration of idols during a plague epidemic in 665 AD, the letter describing the situation as follows: "Quae uidelicet prouincia cum praefatae mortalitatis clade premeretur, Sigheri cum sua parte populi, relictis Christianae fidei sacramentis, ad apostasiam conuersus est. Nam et ipse rex et plurimi de plebe siue optimatibus, diligentes hanc uitam et futuram non quaerentes, siue etiam non esse credentes, coeperunt *fana*, quae derelicta erant, restaurare, et adorare simulacra, quasi per haec possent a mortalitate defendi." (My italics): see *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 322. Translation "When this kingdom was suffering from the disastrous plague described above, Sigehere, together with his part of the nation, deserted the sacraments of the Christian faith and apostatized. For the king himself and the majority of both commons and nobles loved this present life, seeking no other and not even believing in any future existence; so they began to restore the derelict *temples* and to worship images, as if they could protect themselves by such means from the plague." (My italics): see *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, p. 323.

¹⁴⁵ The idea of those sacrifices described by Adam of Bremen as occurring every nine years appears to echo one of his sources, namely the *Chronicon* of Thietmar of Merseburg (975–1018). In chapter 17 of the first book of this work, Thietmar describes how "Northmannos et Danos" ("Northmen and Danes") conduct a sacrifice of humans and animals near Leire on Zealand every nine years: "Est unus in his partibus locus, caput istius [...] regni, Lederun nomine, in pago, qui Selon dicitur, ubi post VIII annos mense Ianuario, post hoc tempus, quo nos theophaniam Domini celebramus, omnes convenerunt, et ibi diis suimet LXXXX et VIII homines et totidem equos, cum canibus et gallis pro accipitribus oblati, immolant [...]": *Die Chronik des Bischofs Thietmar von Merseburg und ihre Korveier Überarbeitung*, ed. Robert Holtzmann, MGH SS rer. Germ. N. S. 9 (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1935), pp. 22 and 24. Translation: "In those parts, the centre of the kingdom is a place called Leire, in the region of Seeland. Every nine years, in the month of January, after the day on which we

describes the illustrious and lavishly decorated pagan temple of Gamla Uppsala as follows:

Nunc de supersticione Sueonum pauca dicemus. Nobilissimum illa gens *templum* habet, quod Ubsola dicitur [...]. In hoc *templo*, quod totum ex auro paratum est, statuas trium deorum venerator populus [...] Corpora autem suspenduntur in lucum, qui proximus est *templo*. Is enim lucus tam sacer est gentilibus, ut singulae arbores eius ex morte vel tabo immolatorum divinae credantur.¹⁴⁶ (My italics.)

As one can see, the word *templum* is used to describe a pagan cult or ritual site, a word that in English means “temple”, the perception being that of a structure or compound with an altar in the sanctuary. The background idea of the word was drawn from Roman and Greek temples meaning that the understanding of the word would not have reflected the experience of those who had been to Gamla Uppsala. As Richard Allan Tomlinson writes:

They [the Romans] placed their temples on high bases, approachable by a flight of steps at the front only. Timber and mud brick, with tiles and embellishment in terra-cotta, were the normal building materials. [...] In essentials, a Roman temple functioned like the Greek as a house for a god and for offerings to the god. Burnt sacrifices were made at an altar, which was usually placed immediately in front of the temple at the bottom of the steps so that worshippers faced the altar (and the temple) rather than surrounding it. Where possible, the

celebrate the appearance of the Lord [6 January], they all convene here and offer their gods a burnt offering of ninety-nine human beings and as many horses, along with dogs and cocks – the latter being used in place of hawks”: *Ottonian Germany: The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg*, trans. David A Warner, Manchester Medieval Studies (Manchester/ New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 80. For further information regarding Thietmar of Merseburg and the utilisation of his *Chronicon* by Adam of Bremen: see David Fraesdorff, *Der barbarische Norden: Vorstellungen und Fremdkategorien bei Rimbert, Thietmar von Merseburg, Adam von Bremen und Helmold von Bosau*, *Orbis Mediaevalis* 5 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2005), pp. 135–43 and 147.

¹⁴⁶ Adam von Bremen, *Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte*, ed. Bernhard Schmeidler, MGH SS rer. Germ. 2 (Hannover/ Leipzig: Hahn, 1917), pp. 257–60. Translation: “Now we shall say a few words about the superstitions of the Swedes. That folk has a very famous *temple* called Uppsala [...]. In this *temple*, entirely decked out in gold, the people worship the statues of three gods [...]. The bodies [of those sacrificed in a ritual that occurs every nine years] they hang in the sacred grove that adjoins the temple. Now this grove is so sacred in the eyes of the heathen that each and every tree in it is believed divine because of the death or putrefaction of the victims.” (My italics.): Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, trans. Francis J. Tschan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 207–8.

temple stood in a colonnaded precinct, which also emphasized the axial symmetry.¹⁴⁷

Heinz Kähler (1905–1974) similarly noted that:

Beide – griechischer wie römischer Tempel – sind Haus der Gottheit. Als solches sind beide durch gewisse Eigentümlichkeiten vor anderen Bauten als heilig ausgezeichnet, etwa durch die Säulen und das auf ihnen ruhende Giebeldach.¹⁴⁸

Even so, it appears that the procedure of referring to pagan places of veneration as temples was essentially a later medieval *modus operandi*, a supposition that can be deduced from the fact that neither Roman (such as Caesar [100 BC–44 BC] and Tacitus [c. 56/8–c. 120]) nor Greek writers (such as Procopius of Caesarea [c. 500–c. 554]) who had first- or second-hand knowledge of such sites ever seem to use *templum* or *τέμενος* or any related word to describe holy heathen structures. On the contrary, Caesar mentions “locis consecratis”, while Tacitus notes that “lucos ac nemora consecrant deorum[...]”.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ R. A. Tomlinson, “Temple: Ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean Temples”, in Mircea Eliade et. al. (eds), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. XIV (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), p. 386.

¹⁴⁸ Heinz Kähler, *Der römische Tempel*, Ullstein Buch Nr. 36065 (Frankfurt a. M.: Verlag Ullstein GmbH, 1982), p. 7. Translation: “Both – the Greek as well as the Roman temple – are a house of the deity. As such, both are distinguished from other structures via certain features, such as the pillars or the gabled roof on top, as being sanctified buildings.”

¹⁴⁹ Caesar makes this note when describing the forms of worship of the Gauls that had been observed. The full passage in *De Bello Gallico* VI.17 runs as follows: “Huic [that is Mars] cum proelio dimicare constituerunt, ea quae bello ceperint plerumque devovent: cum superaverunt, animalia capta immolant reliquasque res in unum locum conferunt. Multis in civitatibus harum rerum extractos tumulos *locis consecrates* conspicari licet [...]” (My italics.) Translation: “To Mars, when they have determined on a decisive battle, they dedicate as a rule whatever spoil they may take. After a victory they sacrifice such living things as they have taken, and all the other effects they gather into one place. In many states heaps of such objects are to be seen piled up in *hallowed spots* [...]” (My italics.): Caesar, *The Gallic War*, trans. H. J. Edwards, Loeb Classical Library 72 (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1958), pp. 341 and 343. For the description of Germanic holy sites by Tacitus, see Chapter 9 of his *Germania*. Translation: “Their holy places are woods and groves [...]”: see Tacitus, *The Agricola and the Germania*, ed. and trans. H. Mattingly and S. A. Handford (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1970), p. 109. In his *Annales*, Tacitus recalls the horrific sight of the remains of Varus’ legions which were found by an expedition lead by Aulus Caecina Severus as follows: “*lucis propinquis barbarae arae, apud quas tribunos ac primorum ordinum centuriones mactaverant.*” (My italics.): P. Cornelii Taciti, *Annalium ab excess divi Augusti libri: The Annals of Tacitus*, Vol. I: *Books I–VI*, ed. Henry

The application of the term *templum* with regard to the sanctuaries of the German and Scandinavian tribes would perhaps be explained with developments that took place in the Nordic area in the fifth century. Indeed, the scholarly understanding is that the veneration of deities in the landscape started fading in the early half of the fifth century, leading to holy forests, groves and lakes gradually being abandoned,¹⁵⁰ and being replaced by worship in buildings which were nonetheless still quite different from the Greek and Roman temples.¹⁵¹ Various factors have been proposed for such a development, the chief factors being the social and cultural upheavals that occurred in the wake of the *Völkerwanderung* which correlates to the Vendel period (fifth century) in Scandinavia, following on from dramatic changes in the climate.¹⁵²

Furneaux (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 261. Translation: “In groves nearby were the outlandish *altars* at which the Germans had massacred the Roman colonels and senior company-commanders.” (My italics.): Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, trans. Michael Grant (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1978), p. 67. Regarding the word Latin word *āra* (pl. *ārae*) meaning “altar”: see P. G. W. Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary: A – Libero* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 158. Elsewhere in the *Annales*, however, Tacitus uses the word *templum* to describe a structure dedicated to the goddess Tanfana: “profana simul et sacra et celeberrimum illis gentibus *templum* quod Tanfanae vocabant solo aequantur.” (My italics.): P. Cornelii Taciti, *Annalium ab excess divi Augusti libri*, pp. 246–7. Translation: “Religious as well as secular centres were utterly destroyed – among them the *temple* of Tanfana, the most revered holy place of those tribes.” (My italics.): Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, p. 62. In Book 6 Chapter 15 of his mid-fifth-century *Ἐπεὶ τῶν Πολέμων Λόγοι* (“*History of the Wars*”), Procopius describes the customs of the people of Thule, saying that “θεὸς μέντοι καὶ δαίμονας πολλοὺς σέβουσιν, οὐρανίους τε καὶ ἀερίους, ἐγγεῖους τε καὶ θαλασσίους, καὶ ἄλλα ἅττα δαίμονια ἐν ὕδασι πηγῶν τε καὶ ποταμῶν εἶναι λεγόμενα. [...] ἱερεῦνται δὲ τὸν αἰχμάλωτον οὐ θύοντες μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ ξύλου κρεμῶντες.” Translation: “[...] but they reverence in great numbers gods and demons both of the heavens and of the air, of the earth and of the sea, and sundry other demons which are said to be in the waters of springs and rivers. [...] And the manner in which they offer up the captive is not by sacrificing him on an altar only [...]”: Procopius, *History of the Wars, Books V and VI*, trans. H. B. Dewing (London: William Heinemann, 1919), p. 420; for the translation: see p. 421.

¹⁵⁰ Bo Gräslund and Neil Price, “Twilight of the Gods? The ‘Dust Veil Event’ of AD 536 in Critical Perspectives”, *Antiquity* 332 (2012), pp. 433–4 and 438–40; and T. Douglas Price, *Ancient Scandinavia: An Archaeological History from the First Humans to the Vikings* (Oxford/ New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 259 and 316–20.

¹⁵¹ See footnote 159 in the following for a more in-depth discussion of this topic.

¹⁵² The climatic changes (dimmed sunlight, cooling of temperatures) in 536 AD which affected the Northern hemisphere were due to an immense dust veil which was caused by a substantial volcanic eruption around the same year (533–534 AD ±2 years): see L. B. Larsen et. al., “New Ice Core Evidence for a Volcanic Cause of the A.D. 536 Dust Veil”, *Geophysical Research Letter* 35 (2008), pp. 1–4; and Morten Axbøe, “The Year 536 and the Scandinavian Gold Hoards”, *Medieval Archaeology* 43 (1999), pp. 186–8; and Gräslund and Price, “Twilight of the Gods?”, pp. 430–6 and 440.

Almost 300 years after these dramatic changes, in a letter dated to the 25th of May 773 and written by Abbot Eanwulf (active in the eighth century) to congratulate Charlemagne on his victory against the Saxons (followed by his destruction of their sacred tree “Irminsul”),¹⁵³ one reads how Abbot Eanwulf demands the destruction of all pagan “temples” located within Charlemagne’s sphere of power. The abbot nonetheless still does not use the word *templum* in this case but refers to the sacral pagan sites as *fānī* (another word that had particular Roman connotations) (see below):

Et ideo, gloriosae rex, eam quam accepisti divinitus gratiam sollicita mente custodi. Christianam fidem in populis tibi subditis extendere festina; zelum rectitudinis tuae en eorum conversione multiplicata; idolorum cultus insequere; *fanorum* aedificia everte [...].¹⁵⁴ (My italics.)

That this was actually a quite unprecedented request can be seen in a letter by Pope Gregory I (c. 540–604), who, some 150 years earlier, had explicitly instructed Abbot Mellitus (d. 624), a member of a Gregorian mission who was about to embark on a mission to Britain in 601, to destroy only the idols kept within heathen *temples* but to leave the buildings themselves untouched. Here, once again, the word *fānus* is used:

Cum ergo Deus omnipotens uos ad reuerentissimum uirum fratrem nostrum Augustinum episcopum perduxerit, dicite ei quid diu mecum de causa Anglorum cogitans tractauit; uidelicet quia *fana* idolorum destrui in eadem gente minime debeant, sed ipsa quae in eis sunt idola destruantur, aqua benedicta fiat, in eisdem *fanis* aspergatur, altaria construantur, reliquiae ponantur. Quia, si *fana* eadem bene constructa sunt, necesse est ut a cultu daemonum in obsequio ueri Dei debeant commutari [...].¹⁵⁵ (My italics.)

¹⁵³ Dorothy Whitelock, *English Historical Documents c. 500–1042*, English Historical Documents 1 (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979), p. 832.

¹⁵⁴ *S. Bonifatii et Lullii Epistolae*, ed. Michael Tangl, MGH Epp. Sel. 1 (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1955), p. 256. Translation: “And therefore, illustrious king, guard with careful heart that grace which you have received from heaven, hasten to spread the Christian faith among the peoples subject to you, increase your righteous zeal for their conversion, suppress the worship of idols, cast down the buildings of their *temples* (My italics)”: Whitelock, *English Historical Documents c. 500–1042*, p. 833.

¹⁵⁵ *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, p. 106. Translation: “However, when Almighty God has brought you to our most reverend brother Bishop Augustine, tell him what I have decided after long deliberation about the English people, namely that the idol *temples* of that race should by no means be destroyed, but only the idols in them. Take holy water and sprinkle it in these *shrines*, build altars and place relics in

In a sense this act which can be seen as its own particular form of translation was a practical part of the *interpretatio Christiana* (see Chapter 3.4.1), involving the assimilation and reinterpretation of pagan elements in accordance with the Christian faith. As a tactic, it was very successful, as it built upon the understanding of the importance of pagan sites for the heathen population. As Pope Gregory I writes elsewhere in the very same letter:

[...] ut dum gens ipsa eadem *fana* sua non uidet destrui, de corde errorem deponat, et Deum uerum cognoscens ac adorans, ad loca quae consuevit familiarius concurrat.¹⁵⁶ (My italics.)

them. For if the *shrines* are well built, it is essential that they should be changed from the worship of devils to the service of the true God (my italics).”: *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, p. 107.

¹⁵⁶ *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, p. 106. Translation: “When this people see that their *shrines* are not destroyed they will be able to banish error from their hearts and be more ready to come to the places they are familiar with, but now recognizing and worshipping the true God.” (My italics.): *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, p. 107. By banning idolatry and destroying the idols which were kept within those structures, Christian missionaries had certainly cleansed the place of its heathen past. This next step, however, involved re-using the same places, but under Christian doctrine. A prime example of this method can be found on the Swedish island of Frösö. Being literally called “Freyr’s island”, it comes as no surprise that an old sacrificial grove was found there, innumerable animal bones later being unearthed during the archaeological excavation around the remains of a large tree thought to have been sacral. What is most astonishing is that the tree stub was located directly under the altar of a later Christian church which was built right on top of the said tree: see Margaret Hildebrandt, “Frösö kyrka på hednisk grund”, *Formvårdaren* 24 (1989), pp. 153–66; and Julian D. Richards, *Die Wikinger*, Reclams Universal-Bibliothek 18691 (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 2005), p. 37. Various other pagan cult houses (the word now used because of the confusion that the word “temple” caused) have been unearthed in various locations in Scandinavia and the British Isles, most notably those at Uppåkra and Borg in Sweden; Mære and Hov in Norway; Tissø, Gudme and Lejre in Denmark; Hofstaðir and Sæból (debated) in Iceland; and Yeavinger in England. For further information regarding these sites as well as the problems caused by the abundance of terms used for differing usages of sites, see, for example, the following publications: Olaf Olsen, *Hørg, Hov og Kirke: Historiske og Arkæologiske Vikingetidsstudier* (København: Bianco Lunos Bogtrykkeri, 1966); Terry Gunnell, “Hof, Halls, Goðar and Dwarves: An Examination of the Ritual Space in the Pagan Icelandic Hall”, *Cosmos* 17 (2001), pp. 3–36; Gavin Lucas and Thomas McGovern, “Bloody Slaughter: Ritual Decapitation and Display at the Viking Settlement of Hofstaðir, Iceland”, *European Journal of Archaeology* 10 (2007), pp. 7–30; Paul Frodsham, “Forgetting *Gefrin*: Elements of the Past in the Past at Yeavinger”, *Northern Archaeology* 17/18 (1999), pp. 191–207; Lars Jørgensen, “Kongsgård – kultsted – marked: Overvejelser omkring Tissøkompleksets struktur og funktion”, in Kristina Jennbert, Anders Andrén and Catharina Raudvere (eds), *Plats och praxis: Studier av nordisk förkristen ritual*, *Vägar till Midgård* 2 (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2002), pp. 215–47; and Lars Larsson, “Ritual Building and

As has been demonstrated above, like *templum*, the word *fānus* was often used to refer to a Germanic/ Old Norse sacral site, in the sense of denoting a “shrine” or a “temple”. For the Latin population, the word initially denoted consecrated ground but later came to refer usually to a *structure*.¹⁵⁷ It needs to be borne in mind, however, that, like *templum*, this was a concept with particular (Roman or Christian) implications. As with *templum*, the word brought to mind a sacral precinct for Romans, which was not what observers of the Germanic/ Old Norse phenomena would have seen. In short, these words created for readers (and many later scholars) the wrong image for the buildings/ sacred sites – which on the basis of archaeological research probably looked very different, and probably involved very different practices.¹⁵⁸ In short, reference to such structures with the use of a certain pre-existing Classical term can be seen as a form of translation, albeit one in which these structures/ sites were transformed (for the receiving audience) from what they actually were to something Classical. Logically, as has been demonstrated with the supernatural concept of

Ritual Space: Aspects of Investigations at the Iron Age Central Site Uppåkra, Scania, Sweden”, in Kristina Jennbert, Anders Andrén and Catharina Raudvere (eds), *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives: Origins, Changes, and Interactions*, Vågar till Midgård 8 (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2006), pp. 248–53.

¹⁵⁷ P. G. W. Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary: A – Libero*, p. 676. For a reconstruction based on archaeological evidence how such a temple structure may have looked like: see, for example, Javier Á. Domingo, Ricardo Mar and Patrizio Pensabene, “El *Templum* Divi Claudii: Decoración y elementos arquitectónicos para su reconstrucción/ The *Templum* Divi Claudii: Decoration and Architectural Elements for Reconstruction”, *Archivo Español de Arqueología* 84 (2011), pp. 207–30.

¹⁵⁸ A similar notion can be observed in Adam of Bremen’s reference to the site at Gamla Uppsala as resembling a *theatrum*, for example. The commentary *Scholia* 135 added to Chapter 26 of the fourth book of Adam of Bremen’s *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae Pontificum* (“Deeds of the Bishops of Hamburg”) states the following regarding the *templum*: “Catena aurea templum illud circumdat pendens supra domus fastigia, lateque rutilans advenientibus, eo quod ipsum delubrum in planitie situm montes in circuitu habeat positos ad instar *theatri*.” (My italics.) Translation: “A golden chain goes round the temple. It hangs over the gable of the building and sends its glitter far off to those who approach, because the shrine stands on level ground with mountains all about it like a *theatre*.” (My italics.): Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, p. 207. It is clear that what being was described in *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* (see above) should not be understood as a Roman theatre, but rather a place where the atmosphere is akin to that in a Roman theatre, focusing on performative actions surrounded by an audience: see Terry Gunnell, *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995), pp. 79–80. Arguably, similar problems of translation are found later in an Old Norse description of a *hof* being like a church. *Eyrbyggja saga* describes the *hof* that Þórólfr Mostrarskegg let build as follows: “Jnnar af hofinv var hv s j þa liking sem ær savnghvs af kirkivm. ok stod þar stalli æ midiv golfvi sem alltari [...]”: *Eyrbyggja saga: The Vellum Tradition*, ed. Forrest S. Scott, Editiones Arnarnagæanæ Series A, 18 (Hafniæ: C. A. Reitzels Forlag, 2003), p. 14.

the *jǫtnar*, such labelling would potentially have also exerted some degree of influence on those later scholars whose first encounter with such sacred sites took the form of the Latin text rather than the archaeological remains.

Various questions remain. Considering the abundance of Old Norse terms for places of veneration (such as *hof*, *vé*, *hǫrgr*, *lundr* or **al*),¹⁵⁹ one can only guess whether the Christian missionaries writing in Latin meant *fānus* (and also *templum* for that matter) to refer to a specific kind of sacral place or whether they were using it in a general sense as a collective term for any sacral pagan site (if they ever saw one)? Did the usage of the terms *fānus* and *templum* refer to a building or could they also refer to an altar as they did in the Roman world (see above)? Did they simply mean any pagan building associated with worship? These thoughts naturally also demand some consideration of the question of how the monks and the Church would have understood the concepts of *fānus* and *templum* at differing times, and whether their usage or meaning changed with the introduction of monasticism proper in Scandinavia in the eleventh century.¹⁶⁰ Considering the above, one can understand why scholars in recent times have dropped the word “temple” in favour of the more neutral “kulthus” when relating to buildings or sites that might have had provided some degree of cultic function, such as those in Gamla Uppsala in Sweden, Tissø on Sjælland, or Gudme on Fyn, the latter two of which are located in Denmark.¹⁶¹

3.2.1 Of Knights and Castles

Similar questions naturally arise about the Old Norse translation of other cultural concepts that are more closely related to the subject of this thesis, concepts which often shifted in meaning as they moved into the receiving culture, in this case the medieval Scandinavian societies. Two examples that are central to the chivalric tradition that lies behind the *riddarasögur*, and without which no courtly concepts would have been able to function, are logically those concerning the castle and the knight, in Old French *chastel* or *castel* and *chevalier*. In the Old Norse corpus of the *riddarasögur*, one finds the two loanwords *kastali* (pl. *kastalar*) and *riddari* (pl. *riddarar*) regularly being used

¹⁵⁹ See, for example, Stefan Brink, “How Uniform was the Old Norse Religion?”, in Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop and Tarrin Wills (eds), *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, TCNE 18 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 105–36.

¹⁶⁰ Tore Nyberg, “Early Monasticism in Scandinavia”, in Jonathan Adams and Katherine Holman (eds), *Scandinavia and Europe 800–1350: Contact, Conflict, and Coexistence*, TCNE 4 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), pp. 197–205.

¹⁶¹ See, for example, Terry Gunnell, “*Hof*, Halls, *Goðar* and Dwarves”, pp. 3–9 and 25; and Luke John Murphy, “Continuity and Change: Forms of Liminality in the Sacred Social Spaces of the Pre-Christian Nordic World”, *VMS* 12 (2016), pp. 140 and 154–6.

for the aforementioned Old French terms. Since these are loanwords, they constitute and are subject to what Vermeer described as *Einverleibung* (see Chapter 2.1.2).¹⁶²

From their problematic usage, one can deduce that in the process of translation these previously unknown concepts (rather than the lexemes themselves) shifted in meaning and use in Scandinavia. It is noteworthy that the *kastalar* themselves, which French listeners knew from experience, are rarely described for Icelanders – most of whom had never encountered castle walls, turrets, draw-gates, or courtyards. One notes how, in accounts of kings in later Icelandic and Norwegian folktales, the respective king is not specifically said to own a castle or palace, although repeated mention of a *kongsgård* (“royal residency”) is made. One cannot help but think that the Icelandic-Norwegian perception of a king and his castle in the Middle Ages would have been closer to that of an influential and wealthy farmer living on a large farmstead rather than that of a monarch in the medieval continental sense (something that is perhaps exemplified by the following picture that accompanied the Norwegian folktale “Presten og Klokkeren” in the 1879 edition of Asbjørnsen’s *Norske Folke og Huldre-Eventyr*).¹⁶³

¹⁶² See also Otto Höfler, “Altnordische Lehnwortstudien I”, *ANF* 47 (1931), pp. 267–8, 270 and 278. The oldest extant example of the word *riddari* in writing appears in *Óláfs saga hins helga* preserved in the DG 8 manuscript which is dated to c. 1225–1250. The word *kastali* also occurs in *Óláfs saga hins helga* in the very same manuscript, although somewhat earlier. It also appears in Homily 24 preserved in Holm perg 15 4to which is dated to c. 1200: see <https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o64892> and <https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o42687> respectively.

¹⁶³ The picture is taken from Peter Christen Asbjørnsen, *Norske Folke og Huldre-Eventyr* (Kjøbenhavn: Gyldendalske Boghandels Forlag, 1879), p. 222.



Figure 1. *Presten og Klokkeren*. Engraving by Frederik Hendriksen (1847–1938).

Bearing the above in mind, one notes that “key” concepts that tend to follow the possession of a castle in France (such as, for example, the ideas of chivalry, courtly love or *Minne*, jurisdiction and tournaments) are marginalised or even omitted in Old Norse translations of *riddarasögur*.¹⁶⁴ All in all, the *kastalar* in the *riddarasögur* appear to resemble large housing facilities in which selected

¹⁶⁴ Even in mainland Scandinavia, few castles of the kind known in France, England and Germany were ever constructed. In her study of Swedish castles (one of which is Saxholmen of the latter half of the twelfth century), Svensson states that “[t]he symbol for the aristocrat’s [that is knights and nobles] home was the castle with its walls and battlements. But precious few Swedish nobles were permitted a castle unless allowed by the monarch. Royal power was key in terms of castle building, and nobles who built castles did so with the king’s permission or on the king’s behalf. Instead, the privileged orders marked their social position by fortifying their estates [...which] were relatively small in European terms. Many were built in wood rather than stone, and large stone castles with several towers and battlements were uncommon. Most castles had brief lives, standing maybe just for fifty years”: see Eva Svensson, *The Medieval Household: Daily Life in Castles and Farmsteads: Scandinavian Examples in their European Context*, TMC 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), pp. 22–3.

knights either live alongside their masters as on an Icelandic farm (as is the case in, for example, *Bevens saga*¹⁶⁵) or in those quarters set aside for the kings' knights.

Indeed, *Elis saga ok Rosamundu*, an Old Norse translation of the Old French *Chanson de geste, Élie de St. Gilles*, seems to avoid the use of the word *kastali* entirely, referring instead to such buildings as *hóll*, once again suggesting parallels to a large Icelandic longhouse. This highlights the possible misunderstanding or insecurity that seems to have been associated with the use of the word. The compiler(s) appear to have substituted the word with a term both they and their audiences were more familiar with, simultaneously changing essential aspects of the story, as can be seen in the following two examples, where the word *kastali* seems to have been used in the original: “Nu var þat at æinnri hatið hins Helga Dionisij, sem þessi hinn riki hertogi sat i holl sinni, er oll var gor af malmara stæinum með allzkonar litum [...]” and “[...] oc i þessum orðum geck hann i brott, oc er hann var ofann kominn af ollum hallarinnar gradum, þa kæmr faðer hans laupande eftir honum [...]”.¹⁶⁶

A similar uncertainty seems to hold true for the overall concept of the European *riddari* which is, once again, never explained in detail for Nordic readers. In the following, some attention will be paid to several excerpts which highlight the problems that seem to have been inherent in the use of the Icelandic *riddari*-concept, problems which can be seen particularly well in *Karlamagnús saga*. The saga states how, after Karlamagnús had got rid of his competition, exhausting his forces, Varner of Pirafunt saw his chance to seize various cities from the emperor with the help of numerous “riddarar”:

Nú hefir Varner af Pirafunt fregit, at Karlamagnús var til konungs tekinn ok hann hafði drepa latit þá er mót honum váru, þá kom honum í hug, at hann þóttist mikit mega ok vera sterkr maðr ok eiga marga kastala ok sterka ok þrjár borgir Reins ok Loun ok Anuens, ok hann var höfðingi af öllum þeim löndum, er um þær borgir eru. Hann heyrði sagt, at konungr hefði tekit Jrikun, ok þótti honum þat illa.

¹⁶⁵ See *Bevens saga: With the Text of the Anglo-Norman Boeve de Haumtone*, ed. Christopher Sanders, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi Rit 51 (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 2001), pp. 21–37.

¹⁶⁶ See *Elis saga ok Rosamundu*, ed. and trans. Eugen Kölbing (Heilbronn: Verlag Gebr. Henninger, 1881), pp. 2 and 7. *Élie de St. Gilles*, meanwhile, has the following depictions (ll. 32 and 164 respectively): “Juliens se seoit ens el palais de marbre” and “Li danseus en avale les degrés marberins”: *Élie de Saint-Gilles*, ed. Bernard Guidot, *Classiques Français du Moyen Âge 171* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2013), pp. 158 and 162. Translation: “Julien was seated in the marble palace” and “The young man ran down the marble steps”: *Elye of Saint-Gilles: A Chanson de Geste*, ed. and trans. A. Richard Hartman and Sandra C. Malicote (New York: Italica Press, 2011), pp. 5 and 13.

Hann stóð upp einn morgin ok fór með 100 riddara til Pirafunt ok tók kastalann ok setti lið sitt í, ok sendi síðan eptir lið í land sitt ok fékk tvær þúsundir riddara; fór síðan til Orliens ok bygði kastalann ok tók borgina ok styrkti, ok lét borgarmenn sverja sér eiða ok allan landslýðinn ok lét gæta kastalans. Síðan fór hann til Brettolia ok gerði slíkt it sama ok svá í Jrikun, ok ætlaði at standa móti Karlamagnúsi konungi, sagðist hann fyrr skyldu hafa þessar borgir allar ok landit með, en hann skyldi honum til handa ganga.¹⁶⁷

One notes that no detailed description is given here of a castle or a “riddari” for Icelandic readers. (Of course, French readers did not need one.) Both are largely left up to imagination. Yet elsewhere, the saga describes the concentration of Karlamagnús’ troops before a decisive battle in his campaign against competitors for his kingdom:

Ok var þá er saman kom í Eiss alt liðit 400 þúsunda riddara fyrir utan lið páfans. En Geirarðr fór heim til Numaia ok bjóst þaðan kurteisliga ok fékk 20 þúsundir riddara ok fór til Eiss ok kom mánaði fyrr en annat liðit.¹⁶⁸

Later on, Karlamagnús confers the accolade of knighthood upon no fewer than 80 men who have proven themselves worthy in battle dropping in, without any explanation of its chivalric complexity, the concept of “að dubba”:

Síðan dubbaði hann til riddara 80 sveina, þá sem farit höfðu með Freri erkibyskupi ok Herfa hertuga.¹⁶⁹

It seems that for most Old Norse readers, the *riddari* would have been understood as a common horse-warrior. No additional information is given in the sagas to suggest he was an elite fighter with a certain social standing, something that, once again, French readers would have taken for granted (hence the lack of explanation). No introduction is given either to various other aspects that were regularly associated with knights in European chivalry, such as prowess, nobility, *largesse* (the idea of providing entertainment, food and drink and gifts to retainers) and *Ritterfrömmigkeit* (“chivalric piety”) all of which appear to be absent in the Old Norse *riddarasögur*.¹⁷⁰ Indeed, the overall idea of

¹⁶⁷ *Karlamagnús saga ok kappá hans: Fortællinger om Keiser Karl Magnus og hans Jævnninger i norsk Bearbejdelse fra det trettende Aarhundrede*, ed. C. R. Unger (Christiania: H. J. Jensen, 1860), pp. 25–6.

¹⁶⁸ *Karlamagnús saga ok kappá hans*, p. 16.

¹⁶⁹ *Karlamagnús saga ok kappá hans*, p. 24.

¹⁷⁰ On these aspects: see further Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven/ London: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 44–5, 51 and 247–9; and Richard W. Kaeuper, *Chivalry*

the knight in France or Britain being seen as a *miles Christi* (“soldier of Christ”) or *miles Christianus* (“Christian soldier”), a concept which has roots in Biblical references,¹⁷¹ would seem to be totally absent in the *riddarasögur*, something that can be seen from the fact that in some sagas antagonists labelled as heathens are said to deploy “riddarar” as common foot soldiers.¹⁷² This reference effectively underlines exactly how much the Icelandic understanding of the *riddari* differed from that of the knight in Europe.

In every discussion regarding the translation of (especially cultural) concepts, it is pivotal to keep in mind that such translations were undertaken not in solitary confinement. Various social and cultural influences within a given society (or societies) interacting with each other are likely to have an impact on the translators and the development of the understanding of a concept as it moved through the process of translation. Translators, modern and medieval, naturally form an active part of their culture and society. As has been shown above, some translators might be more influenced by their society and culture while others might be more influential. The following brief historical excursus relating to the medieval Scandinavian courts between the early to mid-twelfth century to the early thirteenth century will help put some of the previous discussion about the translation of *chastel/ castel* and *chevalier* into Old Norse

and Violence in Medieval Europe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 161–3, 193–5, and 208–11. For further information: see the following two chapters by Maurice Keen, “War, Peace and Chivalry” and “Chivalry and Courtly Love”, in Maurice Keen, *Nobles, Knights and Men-at-Arms in the Middle Ages* (London: Hambledon Press, 1996), pp. 1–20 and 21–42 respectively. John W. Baldwin has nonetheless likened the *largesse* of French kings with the feasts of Scandinavian chieftains: see John W. Baldwin, *Aristocratic Life in Medieval France: The Romance of Jean Renart and Gerbert de Montreuil, 1190–1230* (Baltimore/ London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), pp. 69–70, 141–8, 194–203, 215–23 and especially 98–104. While this might have been true, other aspects of courtly medieval life would have been very different.

¹⁷¹ This notion was probably based on Biblical verses such as *Ephesians* 6:11: “Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wile of the devil”: see *The Cambridge Annotated Study Bible*, p. 185. That this involved a stark contradiction to the sixth commandment was already evident in medieval times. Usually, a 40–day penance was set on killing in war. However, as early as 1095, Pope Urban II (c. 1035–1099) pronounced absolution for those taking part in the First Crusade, thereby legitimising killing under the pretext of Christianity, and solidifying the perception of the knight as a proponent of Christian faith: see Keen, *Chivalry*, p. 46.

¹⁷² Agulando, a Muslim rival during Charlemagne’s Spain campaign, is described in *Karlamagnús saga* as saying: “[...] Affrikamenn, verit eigi nú harmafullir eða latir, góðir riddarar, blásit nú hornum ok lúðrum ok ríðit sem skjótast á hendr þeim, ok takit með yðr 20 þúsundir riddara”: *Karlamagnús saga ok kappa hans*, p. 321.

into a little more perspective in this regard.¹⁷³ The so-called *Jyske Lov* (“Code of Jutland”), issued by King Valdemar II of Denmark (1170–1241, r. 1202–1241) in 1241, lists two chapters from the third book that are of particular interest in this regard: these are Chapter 7, “Vm kvnungs mæn oc biskops”, and Chapter 8, “Hwa mæn mughæ takæ”.¹⁷⁴ One notes that these laws refer to those men who bear arms simply as *mæn* (“men”) rather than knights. Whether these men were understood to be “knights” in the Old French sense is left to speculation. The earliest textual evidence of a specific persons being awarded a knightly accolade and concomitant ceremony in Denmark is from around 1287.¹⁷⁵

In Sweden, the evidence for knights only to become apparent during the rule of Magnus III of Sweden (c. 1240–1290, r. 1275–1290).¹⁷⁶ The chronicle referred to a *Erikskrönikan*, estimated to have been composed by an unknown author in the 1320s in *knittelvers*,¹⁷⁷ mentions that Magnus III had considerable sympathy for foreign retainers (referred to as “*riddarar*”), noting that such alliances (and probably also cultural influences) had reciprocal benefits for both sides (the retainer and the liegeland):

HAN älskade gerna utlenska men,
 som ädla herra plägga ok än.
 Hwar riddera ok swena warde fordriffne,
 frome helade raska ok triffne,
 tha sökia the gerna en ädela herra
 for bättra skuld ok ey for wärta,
 at han skal dagtinga them fridh
 ok giffwa them thet the torffwa wid.
 Ok the skulo honom til thieniste wara,

¹⁷³ See, for example, Stephen Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas and Ballads*, pp. 78–88, and “Courts, Consorts, and the Transformation of Medieval Scandinavian Literature”, in Martha Berryman, Kurt Gustav Goblirsch and Marvin Taylor (eds), *Germanic Studies in Honor of Anatoly Liberman*, North-Western European Language Evolution 31–32 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1997), pp. 229–241.

¹⁷⁴ *Valdemar den Andens Jyske Lov efter den Flensborgske Codex tilligemed den 1590 foranstaltede ny Udgave af Loven og den af Ekenberger 1593 besörgede plattyske Oversættelse af same*, ed. P. G. Thorsen (Kjøbenhavn: Berling, 1853), pp. 216–7.

¹⁷⁵ Karl-Erik Löfqvist, *Om Riddarväsen och Frälse i Nordisk Medeltid: Studier Rörande Adelsståndets Uppkomst och Tidigare Utformning* (Lund: Håkan Ohlssons Boktryckeri, 1935), p. 27. This dating might be compromised by different readings of the Latin terms of “*miles*” and “*militari*” and the consideration of whether the terms in question actually denoted a warrior comparable to a “knight”: see Löfqvist, *Om Riddarväsen*, pp. 27–8.

¹⁷⁶ Löfqvist, *Om Riddarväsen*, p. 89.

¹⁷⁷ *Erikskrönikan*, ed. Sven-Bertil Jansson (Stockholm: Tidens Förlag, 1986), p. 10.

thet styrker hans heder ok hans ära.¹⁷⁸

If we take *Erikskrönikan* at face-value as a historical accurate account, one of the earliest references to a dubbing ceremony would be to the knighting of Magnus III's father, Birger *jarl* (c. 1210–1266), as a “riddari”, subsequent dubbings then being conducted by Birger himself. As the chronicle states: “Konung Birger war ther til riddara giord/ [...] Sidhan wart aff konungs Birgers hand/ en förste riddere aff främade land:/ hertugh Albrikt aff Brunswik,/ en stolt herra ok höwelik./ Sidhan wart ather aff hans hende/ wel fyretighio riddara för han wende.”¹⁷⁹ All the same, while *Erikskrönikan* represents one of Sweden's oldest and most valuable narrative sources, scholars are still debating the authenticity of the chronicle's portrayal of chivalric mechanisms in Sweden during the time in question and whether or not the author was following a certain agenda with his work.¹⁸⁰ Whether this is true or not, the chronicle nonetheless seems to provide valuable evidence about the increasingly multi-cultural nature of the court.

With regard to the Norwegian court, and by extension, the experience of certain Icelanders, there seems to be some tenuous evidence that the Norwegian king was promoting certain individuals with foreign titles such as “baron” already in the latter half of the twelfth century. We thus find in the *Annales vetustissimi* (also referred to as *Hauksannáll*, and contained in the manuscript AM 415 4to, dated to c. 1310) an entry for the year 1277 which contains the following information: “Magnvs konvngr gaf lendvm monnvm ok skutil sveinvn herra nofn.”¹⁸¹ Another annal, the *Annales Reseniani* (also called *Resensannáll*), probably from the same period, corroborates this event, noting for the same year: “Magnus konongr gaf Barvna nafn lenvm monnvm. herra

¹⁷⁸ *Erikskrönikan*, pp. 59–60. Translation: “He held foreigners in high regard, as noble lords still do. When knights and squires – good warriors, skilful and valiant – are exiled, they tend to look for a noble lord in order to improve their situation and not worsen it, so that he will offer them protection and give them what they need. And they must enter his service, which increases his honour and renown”: *The Chronicle of Duke Erik: A Verse Epic from Medieval Sweden*, trans. Erik Carlquist and Peter C. Hogg (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2012), pp. 74–5. On an example of knights were compensated, see, for example, *Erikskrönikan*, p. 148.

¹⁷⁹ *Erikskrönikan*, p. 66. Translation: “King Birger was knighted [...]. Then King Birger for the first time knighted a foreigner: Duke Albrecht of Brunswick, a proud and chivalrous man. Then Birger knighted another forty men”: *The Chronicle of Duke Erik*, p. 84. For another later example, see *Erikskrönikan*, p. 148.

¹⁸⁰ *Erikskrönikan*, p. 12; and Löfqvist, *Om Riddarväsen*, p. 98.

¹⁸¹ *Islandske Annaler indtil 1578*, ed. Gustav Storm, Det norske historiske Kildeskriftfonds Skrifter 21 (Christiania: Grøndahl & Sønns Bogtrykkeri, 1888), p. 50.

nafn Riddvrvm.”¹⁸² Another decree, “Kong Haakon Magnussöns Retterbod om haandgangne Mænds og Biskopsmænds Rettigheder med Hensyn til Leding”, issued on 15th May 1311 in Bergen, Norway, and concerning so-called “*handgegnir men*” (“men submitting to a [noble] superior as their liegeland”), clearly uses the term “riddarar” when referring to a specific type of these men.”¹⁸³ According to Löfqvist, the earliest extant account of an official dubbing ceremony attested in Norway dates to 1316, and interestingly uses the loanword “að dubba”.¹⁸⁴ The event is described in two Icelandic annals which give the amount of knights (“riddarar”) being dubbed as 24 and 25 respectively. *Gottskálksannáll* (the “Annals of Gottskálk”) states the following: “Hakon kongr dubbadi xx og v til riddara. þa gerdis herra Eireki og herra Gvdmundr,”¹⁸⁵ while *Flateyjarannáll* (the “Annals of Flatey”) states (for the years 1313–1316): “hofdu gerst fiorir ok xx. riddarar a einum degi i Noregi.”¹⁸⁶ Both works underline in the very least that the concept of dubbing knights was at least understood by some people at this time in Iceland. How widespread this understanding was is of course another matter.

All in all, it can be said that the dates and historical events outlined are essentially a *terminus ante quem*, making it feasible to assume that certain mechanisms of chivalry similar to those known in the courts of neighbouring countries had already been established to some degree in the courts of Norway, Sweden and Denmark prior to these dates. And this brief discussion can never paint an entire picture of the degree to which the Nordic people as a whole understood the various concepts associated with the chivalric world, Löfqvist’s statement that “Ett namn är också en makt, och med namnet följer gärna något av den bakom liggande realiteten”¹⁸⁷ naturally has some validity. In the very least, these examples show that the development of the social class of knights in Scandinavia (arguably less well known in Iceland) was taking place in the same period as the emergence of translations of courtly Continental literature,

¹⁸² *Islandske Annaler indtil 1578*, p. 29. While the *Annales Reseniani* is only preserved in the post-medieval manuscript AM 424 4to (dated to c. 1700), it is nonetheless estimated to have been recorded around the turn of the thirteenth century: *Islandske Annaler indtil 1578*, pp. VI–VII.

¹⁸³ *Norges gamle love indtil 1387: Ifølge offentlig Foranstaltning og tillige med Understøttelse af det Kongelige Norske Videnskabers Selskab*, ed. R. Keyser et. al., 5 Vols (Christiania: Chr. Gröndahl, 1849–1895), III, p. 90.

¹⁸⁴ Löfqvist, *Om Riddarväsen*, p. 136

¹⁸⁵ *Islandske Annaler indtil 1578*, p. 344. Löfqvist has speculated that the granting of the title of “herra” to Eirekr and Guðmundr was part of the dubbing ceremony, the two men thus representing two Icelandic knights: Löfqvist, *Om Riddarväsen*, p. 136.

¹⁸⁶ *Islandske Annaler indtil 1578*, p. 393.

¹⁸⁷ Löfqvist, *Om Riddarväsen*, p. 135.

underlining not only foreign courtly influences but also an increasing interest in literature that stemmed from this milieu. As Löfqvist states:

Trots dessa differenser kan man ställa de tre nordiska länderna sida vid sida och behandla dem som en sluten grupp, dels emedan riddarväsendets införande ligger rätt nära i tiden länderna emellan [...]. Om än den danske och den svenske konungen i ‘sina män’ och derassammankomster endast ägde en blek avskuggning av den norska hirdorganisationen, var det dock snarare en grad- än en artskillnad i de övre klassernas gruppering omkring konungen och denna likhet bidrog till att riddarväsendet upptogs likformigt i alla tre rikena.¹⁸⁸

Bearing what has been said above in mind, it seems logical to assume that both ethical and cultural concepts that are foreign to a target culture are commonly prone to being misunderstood and being changed in both Latin and Old Norse translations. Considering the focus of this thesis, it is now logical to go on to consider how supernatural concepts foreign to the target culture are dealt with in translation and what effects such translations can have. In the following sub-chapter, the English translations of various supernatural concepts, such as the *jötnar*, Ibn Fadlān’s “Angel of Death” and various correlations of Latin and Germanic deities will all be discussed briefly in order to demonstrate still further the inherent problems involved in moving concepts between languages.

3.3 Supernatural Concepts

The aim of the first part of this sub-chapter is not to anticipate the investigations with regard to the appearance of the *jötnar* in translations, redactions and reworkings of *riddarasögur* which will be presented in Case Study 3 below but rather to focus on the way in which these Old Norse supernatural concepts have been treated in the translation process over the course of time in various cultures outside their own. The aim is once again to demonstrate the problems implicit in the translation of concepts and the implications that such translations can have.

As has been regularly noted, the Old Nordic belief system seems to have involved innumerable supernatural concepts centring around the two divine dynasties of the *Æsir* and the *Vanir* and a considerable group of “other” beings such as the *dísir*, *dvergar*, *valkyrjur*, *jötnar* and *álfar*. These entities, while being mythical and supernatural, are themselves not divine although it seems

¹⁸⁸ Löfqvist, *Om Riddarväsen*, pp. 151–2.

that some of them may have experienced veneration. Many of them either support the divinities or constitute a reason for the gods to leave their dwellings and go forth on adventures. All of them are different in nature to those supernatural beings encountered outside Scandinavia.¹⁸⁹

The *jötnar* and the *álfar* are prime examples to highlight the effects of translation when supernatural concepts are twisted and turned over the course of several centuries. On the surface, both of these two concepts slightly resemble certain notions encountered in other contemporary pagan European religions (among others in the Celtic religions). They are also faintly reconcilable with the Christian faith. They first occur and then reappear regularly in a broad variety of Old Norse sources (such as various saga “genres”, as well as both Eddic and Skaldic poetry and name lists or *pulur*) over a long period of time, ranging from their earliest traceable appearance in works that might go back to the tenth century like *Völuspá* to more recent *rímur* and then folk legends recorded in the nineteenth century.¹⁹⁰ They still appear in our own times in a

¹⁸⁹ For further information on those beings: see, for example, the following: Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, Vol. I: *The Myths*, The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilization 7 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1994), pp. 42–56; Terry Gunnell, “How Elvish Are the *Álfar*?”, in Andrew Wawn, Graham Johnson and John Walter (eds), *Constructing Nations, Reconstructing Myth: Essays in the Honour of T. A. Shippey*, Making the Middle Ages 9 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 111–30, and “National Folklore, National Drama and the Creation of Visual National Identity: The Case of Jón Árnason, Sigurður Guðmundsson and Indriði Einarsson in Iceland”, in Timothy Baycroft and David Hopkin (eds), *Folklore and Nationalism in Europe During the Long Nineteenth Century* (Leiden/ Boston: Brill, 2012), pp. 301–4; Rudolf Simek, *Religion und Mythologie der Germanen* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003), pp. 165–72; Gro Steinsland, *Norrøn Religion: Myter, Riter, Samfunn* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 2005), pp. 17–8 and 24–6; and John McKinnell, *Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), pp. 11–2. In this latter book, John McKinnell offers a chapter labelled “A Few Guidelines”, the first of which reads as follows: “Some major deities were known to all the pre-Christian Germanic peoples, but without written scriptures or a centralised authority to regulate belief, their mythology was probably subject to continual change. Some aspects of Old Norse myth may be ancient, but the attempt to reconstruct a common Indo-European religion (if such a thing ever existed) is a hopeless task, because the surviving evidence is much too recent. Structural similarities between one Indo-European mythology and another are at least as likely to result from independent re-creations of the same archetypes as from common ancestry”: McKinnell, *Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend*, p. 34.

¹⁹⁰ Simek and Hermann Pálsson, *Lexikon der altnordischen Literatur*, pp. 430–1. The dating of Eddic poetry as a field of study has attracted a lot of attention and debate since the first publications were made of Eddic material in the later part of the eighteenth century. For a substantial survey of the debate on dating Eddic poetry throughout the centuries: see Bjarne Fidjestøl, *The Dating of Eddic Poetry: A Historical Survey and Methodological Investigation*, ed. Odd Einar Haugen, Bibliotheca Arnarnagæana 41

wide range of sources (ranging from literature, paintings and music to movies and entertainment software).¹⁹¹ The problems inherent in translating *álfar* as “elves” has been examined in some detail by Terry Gunnell and will be returned to in Case Study 1 below.¹⁹² Here, as noted above, the focus will be on what happens when *jǫtnar* are translated into English as “giants”.

For the main part, in both Eddic and Skaldic poetry the *jǫtnar* are presented as “others” to the gods. They live in halls and are ascribed with a specific set of attributes (most notably primeval age, primordial wisdom and genealogical knowledge),¹⁹³ something that can be seen clearly in, for example, the Eddic poem *Vafþrúðnismál* sts 1 and 6:

1. Ráð þú mér nú, Frigg, allz mic fara tíðir
at vitia Vafþrúðnis;
forvitni micla qveð ec mér á fornóm stǫfom

(Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Forlag, 1999), pp. 9–186; and Bernt Ø. Thorvaldsen, “The Dating of Eddic Poetry”, in Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn and Brittany Schorn (eds), *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 72–91. Regarding the *rímur*: see, for example Finnur Sigmundsson, *Rímnatal*, 2 Vols (Reykjavík: Rímnafélagið, 1966), I, pp. 13–5. Concerning Icelandic folk tales: see, for instance, Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri*, 2 Vols (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1862–1864), I, pp. 1–130 (for folk legends regarding *álfar*) and 141–221 (for folk tales with regard to *jǫtnar*, although grouped with other supernatural figures under the heading of “tröll”).

¹⁹¹ With regard to entertainment software, similar figures appear in products such as *The Banner Saga* 1 and 2 (developed by Stoic and released in 2014 and 2016 respectively); *Jotun* (developed by Thunder Lotus Games and released in 2015); and *Kingdoms of Amalur: The Reckoning* (developed by Big Huge Games and released in 2012). The latter is a role-playing game in which the player can choose between races, among others, the *Ljosalfar* and *Dokkalfar*, and compete against such foes as the *Dverga* and *Jottun*. The film industry has also picked up on an apparent trend relating to the Viking theme with the four series of *Vikings* (produced by the History network and aired from 2013 onwards), *Game of Thrones* (produced by HBO, and aired from 2011 to 2019), *The Last Kingdom* (produced by BBC Two and Netflix, and airing from 2015 to present) and *Norsemen* (original title *Vikingane*, produced by NRK, and aired from 2016 to 2020), all of which play on Old Nordic mythologic motifs. Each of the above makes use of Old Norse mythological concepts which have been translated to fit their respective universes and ideas, each going on to spawn new translations as the programmes are translated into other languages.

¹⁹² See Gunnell, “How Elvish Are the *Álfar*?”.

¹⁹³ For a more detailed list of denotations of *jǫtnar*: see Katja Schulz, *Riesen: Von Wissenshütern und Wildnisbewohnern in Edda und Saga*, Skandinavistische Arbeiten 20 (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2004), pp. 55–8 for Eddic material and pp. 137–9 for attributes given in the *fornaldarsögur*; Ingunn Ásdísardóttir, *Jǫtnar in War and Peace: The Jǫtnar in Old Norse Mythology: Their Nature and Function* (Unpublished Dissertation, University of Iceland, 2018), pp. 235–44; and Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, I, pp. 48–56 and 60–66.

við þann inn alsvinna iotun.’

6. ‘Heill þú nú, Vafðrúðnir! nú em ec í hqll kominn,
 á þic síalfan síá;
 hitt vil ec first vita, ef þú fróðr sér
 eða alsviðr, iotunn.’¹⁹⁴

It is worth noting immediately that no comments are made here (or in fact elsewhere in the poem) regarding the *jotunn*’s size or stupidity. Quite the opposite: Óðinn is only able to win the wisdom contest with Vafþrúðnir by cheating and asking information about which only Óðinn knows the answer.

In the work of Snorri, and later legendary saga literature, the *jotnar*, who have already started to blend with the figures of *þursar* and *tröll*, progressively lose the comparatively neutral character of their earlier manifestations found in Eddic and Skaldic poetry, their image gradually incorporating the more negative connotations of other beings.¹⁹⁵ As Katja Schulz has noted, this made them more suitable for the antagonistic roles that heroic and legendary saga literature needed them to take on, in other words narrative devices of evil figures that heroes need to overcome in order to demonstrate their prowess,¹⁹⁶ something aptly demonstrated by the following section described in *Bevens saga*:

þat veit Maumet s(eger) hun at þu [that is Bevers] talar mikla fólsku þar sem þu bidur mik matar ok ert kristinn madur. minn bondi er einn jotun bædi mikill ok sterkur ok grimmur. [...] Nw tok jotuninn geir sinn ok mæki ok einn storann jarn vaul ok hliop þegar at B(euis) ok spurdi huadan hann hefði stólit þui goda essi er hann sat æ ok ek þickiumzt kenna at broder minn Bra(ndimon) kongr [a Muslim king Bevers killed earlier who is by no means a *jotunn*] hefer ætt. [...] sem jotu(ninn) heyrði þetta þa hugdizt hann þegar mundu drepa B(euis) ok slo til hans med sinum jar<n>uaul. [...] Nu laust jo(tuninn) geir sinum til B(euis) en gud hialpadi honum er þat hogg tok hann eigi.

¹⁹⁴ *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, Vol. I: *Text*, ed. Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn, Germanische Bibliothek 4 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1983), pp. 45–6 (henceforth abbreviated as *Edda* in references).

¹⁹⁵ See further Ingunn Ásdísardóttir, *Jotnar in War and Peace*, pp. 244–7; and Tom Grant, “A Problem of Giant Proportions: Distinguishing *Risar* and *Jötmar* in Old Icelandic Saga Material”, *Gripla* 30 (2019), pp. 77–102. On the concept of the *tröll* as well as its development: see, for example, John Lindow, *Trolls: An Unnatural History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014).

¹⁹⁶ Schulz, *Riesen*, pp. 168–84 and 231–41.

[...] ok varð B(euis) þui feginn ok hliop vpp æ briost honum ok *hið af honum báðar hendr ok hid leidiliga hofut.¹⁹⁷

This development, alongside the obvious demonisation apparent in the quotation above, can be clearly seen in later folk legends which present them as large, dumb and ugly creatures living in caves which have now ultimately been deprived of all their wit and genealogical as well as historical knowledge.¹⁹⁸ The earlier beauty of their women has also disappeared and been replaced with ugliness.

A key problem is that the translations used for this term in other languages include none of this development. While the early thirteenth-century *Gesta Danorum* does not represent an Old Danish gloss, it may nonetheless serve here as a prime and invaluable example of how a well-educated medieval Danish clergyman might have thought of the nature of the concept of *jǫtnar*. Saxo Grammaticus (c. 1160–c. 1220) certainly tends to utilise the Latin term *gigantes* in *Gesta Danorum* for beings that he might have referred to (in Old Danish) as *jǫtnar*, especially in the in which he informs his readers about the potential origin of passage tombs in Denmark as follows:

Danicam uero regionem *giganteo* quondam cultu exercitam eximie magnitudinis saxa ueterumbustis ac specubus affix testantur. Quod si quis ui monstrosa patratum ambigat, quorundam montium excelsa suspiciat dicatque, si callet, quis eorum uerticibus cautes tante granditatis inuexerit. Inopinabile nanque quiuus miraculi huius estimator aduertet, ut molem super plano minime uel difficile mobilem in tantum montane sublimitatis apicem simplex mortalitatis labor aut usitatus humani roboris conatus extulerit. Utrum uero talium rerum auctores post diluuialis inundationis excursum *gigantes*

¹⁹⁷ *Bevens saga*, pp. 137–41. This quotation is taken from a chapter which, in some redactions, bears the caption “Bevens drap jotunnin”.

¹⁹⁸ Typical and exemplary of such a development are the Swedish folk tales revolving around the figure of a *jätte*, those Swedish folkloristic variant of a giant or troll. The Swedish folklorist Bengt af Klintberg proposes a motif index for such Swedish folk tales in his 2010 work *The Types of the Swedish Folk Legend*: Type J63 involves the umbrella category of an old giant on an island, with the types J63A (Sailor meets the giant), J63D (The revenge gift), and J63E (Releasing the giant’s dog) forming its sub-categories: Bengt af Klintberg, *The Types of the Swedish Folk Legend*, FF Communications 300 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 2010), pp. 161–3.

extiterint an uiri corporis uiribus ante alios præditi, parum notiæ traditum.¹⁹⁹ (My italics.)

Early descriptions of this kind (along with Classical education) would help lay the foundation for later historiographic works in Latin such as the 1609 work entitled *Crymogæa* by Arngrímur Jónsson (1568–1648) and other early scholarship drew on Nordic and Classical mythology and their concepts of τῑτάνες (“*titanes*”) and γυγάντες (“*gigantes*”) in order to explain *jǫtnar*, something which has impacted on scholarly terminology and perception (*jǫtunn* = “giant”) until the present day.²⁰⁰ A child of his time, Arngrímur is convinced that the primordial inhabitants of Scandinavia were what he refers to as “*Gigantes*”, a notion based on Biblical passages such as *Genesis* 6:4 and *Baruch*

¹⁹⁹ Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum: Danmarkshistorien*, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen and trans. Peter Zeeberg, 2 Vols (København: Gads Forlag 2005), I, p. 84: Translation: “That the Danish area was once cultivated by a civilisation of *giants* is testified by the immense stones attached to ancient barrows and caves. If anyone is doubtful whether or not this was executed by superhuman force, let him gaze at the heights of certain mounds and then say, if he can, who carried such enormous boulders to their summits. A person assessing this marvel must find it inconceivable that ordinary human effort could raise such a bulk to that point of altitude. Even on level ground it would be difficult, possibly beyond your power, to budge it. There is too little evidence to decide whether those who contrived these works were *giants* who lived after the irruption of the Flood or men of preternatural strength”: Saxo Grammaticus, *History of the Danes*, ed. Hilda Ellis Davidson and trans. Peter Fisher, 2 Vols (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1979), I, p. 9. The intrinsic connection to larger-than-human size of the *gigantes* as Saxo understood them is also present in a later passage in *Gesta Danorum* Book I, 5,3, when he remarks the following regarding their size: “Horum primi fuere monstrosi generis uiri, quos gigantes antiquitas nominauit, humane magnitudinis habitum eximia corporum granditate uincentes”: Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, I, p. 108. Translation: “The first of these [species of wizard] were creatures of monstrous size, whom the ancients called giants, far surpassing human beings in bodily stature”: Saxo Grammaticus, *History of the Danes*, ed. Hilda Ellis Davidson and trans. Peter Fisher, 2 Vols (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1979), I, p. 21.

²⁰⁰ In his 1711 four-volume publication on the history of Norway, Þormóður Torfason iterated this notion by devoting three chapters of the third book in the first volume to the origin of *gigantes* and how they came to Norway, simultaneously identifying the “*Risi*” as “*gigas*”: see Þormóður Torfason, *S: R: M: Daniæ et Norvegiæ, & C. Rerum Norvegicarum Historiographi, et in Coll. Consistor. Assessoris, Historia Rerum Norvegicarum in Quatuor Tomos Diuisa: In Qva, Præter Norvegiæ descriptionem, Primordia Gentis, instituta, mores, incrementa; & inprimis Heroum ac Regum, tam ante quàm post Monarchiam institutam, successiones, erumq; domi juxta ac foris gesta, cumq; vicinis gentibus commercia; Genealogia item, Chronologia, & quæcunq; ad Regni Norvegici illustrationem spectant, Singula ex Archivis Regiis, & optimis, quæ haberi potuerunt, Membranis, aliisq; fide dignissimis Authoribus, eruta, Luci publicæ exponuntur. Cum Prolegomenis & Indicibus necessariis*, 4 Vols (Hafniæ: Joachim Schmitgen, 1711), I, pp. 113–20.

3:26.²⁰¹ He even tells of recent encounters that people have apparently had with these beings in Norway, thereby making a correlation of *jotnar*/ “Gigantes” to the folkloristic “Rise” or “Rese” and “Jættis” while also adding a Biblical context and taking this blended concoction into (his own) modern times:

Recentius adhuc est, de Gigantibus aliquot Norvegiæ, auspiciis Olai Tryggonis Norvegiæ Regis deletis, circa annu C. 995. Recentissimum veró, Anno 1338 Magno Erici filio Norvegiæ Rege, Gigantem 15. cubitorum á quatuor viris occisum esse: ut in annalibus reperitur. Adde quód provincia quædam Norvegiæ seu Finnmauchiæ Contermina, Risaland/id est, Gigantum terra (nam en Rise & Rese Gigantem significat) antiquitus dicta est: á qua non longe abest Jøtum heimar/id est, Gigantum habitatio (unde etiamnum en Iæt Gigas dicitur) ut nihil híc dicam de Jøtumland: quo nomine nostratibus dicebatur olim, quæ hodie vocatur Jytland [...] sicu etiam de Gotthis & Gettis (forte q. Jættis) aliisq; similibus.²⁰²

Another like-minded scholar was the Icelandic philologist Finnur Magnússon (1781–1847), who, in his *Bidrag til nordisk Archæologie*,²⁰³ retained the notion that the Norse and Greek mythologies are comparable.²⁰⁴ Finnur goes on to refer to the *jotunn* Hymir as a “jætte” and remarks regarding passage graves found in Denmark that:

²⁰¹ See, for example, Arngrímur Jónsson, *Crymogæa sive rerum Islandicarum: Libri III* (Hamburg: Philipp ab Ohr, 1609), pp. 33–4 and 41.

²⁰² Arngrímur Jónsson, *Crymogæa*, p. 42. Translation: “Enn síðar er sagt frá risum nokkrum í Noregi sem drepnir voru kringum árið 995 fyrir tilstilli Ólafs Tryggvasonar Noregskonungs. Nýjast er að árið 1338, í konungstið Magnúsar Eiríkssonar Noregskonungs, drápu fjórir menn fimmtán álna háan risa, eftir því sem segir í annálum. Því má bæta við að landsvæði nokkurt við landamæri Noregs eða Finnmerkur var að fornu kallað Risaland, en skammt þaðan eru Jötunheimar, það er heimkynni risa (því er og risi ennþá kallaður *en jæt*), svo að ekki sé minnst á *Jötunland*, en svo nefndist forðum á vora tungu það sem nú heitir *Jytland* [...] svo og um Gota og Geta (e.t.v. sama sem *jætter*) og annað þvílíkt”: Arngrímur Jónsson, *Crymogæa: Þættir úr sögu Íslands*, p. 123.

²⁰³ See Finnur Magnússon, *Bidrag til nordisk Archæologie meddeelte i Forelæsninger* (Kjöbenhavn: Beekens Forlag, 1820). See also his work on Old Norse mythology: Finnur Magnússon, *Priscæ veterum borealium mythologiae lexicon, cuncta illius cosmologica, theosophica & daemonica numina, entia et loca ordine alphabetico indicans, illustrans et e magna parte cum exteris, ista contingentibus, comparans: accedit septentrionalium Gothorum, Scandinavorum aut Danorum gentile calendarium, ex Asia oriundum, jam primum expositum et cum variis cognatarum gentium fastis, festis et solennibus ritibus vel superstitionibus collatum* (Havniæ: Gyldendal, 1828), p. 215.

²⁰⁴ Finnur Magnússon, *Bidrag til nordisk Archæologie*, pp. 8–9.

Man kalder dem hos Os i almindelighed Jættestuer, et Navn taget fra den hedenske Mythologie, da Almuen indbilder sig, at de ere blevne opførte eller beboede af Jætterne, eller det gigantiske Folkeslag, som man antager for at have været Nordens ældste Indvaanere.²⁰⁵

That this century-old naming convention, which, as noted above, was initially based on Classical learning and literal readings of the Bible, still looms in present-day scholarship can still be seen in numerous current publications regarding the *jötnar*.²⁰⁶ Most recently, Ingunn Ásdísardóttir has gone to great lengths to underline the problems of using international stereotypes in translations, highlighting the loss of complexity and overall misunderstanding that can come about when figures like the *jötnar* are labelled as “giants” and successively treated as such.²⁰⁷

This kind of problem is, of course, not only applicable to the concept of the *jötnar* (see further Case Study 3). As noted above, similar problems occur when *álfar* are called “elves”. Indeed, as Ármann Jakobsson has demonstrated in his article “Remnants of Indigenous Beliefs in the Other World in Saga Literature” from 2018, developments in the meaning and wording of concepts seems to have been regularly taken place with regard to the various traces of Old Norse

²⁰⁵ Finnur Magnússon, *Bidrag til nordisk Archæologie*, pp. 43–4.

²⁰⁶ See, for example, Katja Schulz’ substantial contribution on *jötnar* from 2004 in which without any qualms she refers to them as “Riesen” (that is “giants”) throughout: see Schulz, *Riesen*, pp. 14–7 and 40. Another example can be seen in the wording of Tommy Kuusela’s recent doctoral thesis, in which he states the following regarding the *jötnar*: “Jag använder jätte som en paraplyterm för en grupp väsen som vistas utanför gudarnas territoriella gränser. Jättar utgör ett kollektiv som benämns med en uppsättning olika termer”: Tommy Kuusela, “*Hallen var lyst i helig frid*”: *Krig och fred mellan gudar och jättar i en fornnordisk hallmiljö* (Stockholm: Universitetservice US-AB, 2017), p. 24.

²⁰⁷ Ingunn Ásdísardóttir, *Jötnar in War and Peace*, pp. 36–7. Ruminations about terminology (and, to some extent, genre) such as those noted here have a long-standing history in both ethnography as well as folkloristics and can be traced back to at least the early 1920s: see Bronislaw Malinowski, “The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Language”, in Charles Kay Ogden et. al. (eds), *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism* (London/ New York: K. Paul et. al., 1923), pp. 451–510. Such decisions about wording and classification logically represent a double-edged sword. While one can certainly be extremely precise in the usage of concepts when one stays within a specific culture, time period and/ or language (as with the early use of the term *jötunn*, for instance), such limitation naturally limits the effectiveness of scholarly discourse by hampering potential dialogues that reach beyond the confinements of the said language/ culture. For a knowledgeable and well-informed discussion of such issues: see Dan Ben-Amos, “Analytical Categories and Ethnic Genres”, in Dan Ben-Amos (ed.), *Folklore Genres*, Publications of the American Folklore Society Bibliographical and Special Series (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), pp. 215–242.

belief found in the *foraldarsögur*. Once again underlining the difficulties involved in translations, Ármann considers the verbal denunciations uttered by Þorbjörg against Sturla Þórðarson in *Sturlu saga* (c. 1300)²⁰⁸ noting how she:

says that she wants to make Sturla *þeim licaztan, er þv vill licazstr vera, enn þat er Óþin*. [T]he comparison is not meant to honour Sturla, nor indeed Óðinn. The latter is being referred to not as a god worthy of worship but as a prankster and witch, a treacherous and demonic figure known for being frequently in disguise and for practising witchcraft, shape-shifting and gender-bending. Apart from highlighting Sturla's treacherous and deceitful nature with the comparison, Þorbjörg clearly wants to mark him as a semi-pagan, a primitive male witch whose wiles are unholy and even demonic. [...] we must still draw the conclusion that by the end of the twelfth century the pre-Christian gods were considered no better than trolls, perhaps they had become trolls, and thus it was an insult to be likened to them.²⁰⁹

Naturally, a simple translation of the passage in question without any explanation of how the name of the god that has changed in meaning could have a number of important consequences, not only on how Sturla was understood but also the god himself. There is little question that translations could not only exert lasting influences on the understanding of local concepts but also result in a degree of religious confusion relating to the overall nature and role of gods and other supernatural figures. Another example of this can be seen in the translation of Ibn Faḍlān's account in Arabic of the role played by the figure referred to in English as the “Angel of Death”, who seems to officiate in a Rus funeral on the Volga river, discussed in the following.

3.3.1 Ibn Faḍlān and the “Angel of Death”

There is little question that no series of case studies regarding the problems that can be involved in translation of supernatural concepts of Old Norse belief would be complete without some discussion of those involved in the now near infamous depiction of the so-called “Angel of Death” in the travelogue of Aḥmad Ibn Faḍlān (active in the tenth century), dated to 922 AD, and which was written under the commission of Caliph al-Muqtadir (895–932).²¹⁰ In this

²⁰⁸ Simek and Hermann Pálsson, *Lexikon der altnordischen Literatur*, pp. 367–8.

²⁰⁹ Ármann Jakobsson, “Remnants of Indigenous Beliefs in the Other World in Saga Literature”, in Margaret Clunies Ross (ed.), *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: Research and Reception*, Vol. I: *From the Middle Ages to c. 1830*, The Pre-Christian Religions of the North 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), p. 134.

²¹⁰ See the translation in James E. Montgomery, “Ibn Faḍlān and the Rūsiyyah”, *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 3 (2000), p. 1.

work, Ibn Faḍlān describes, among other things, various interactions with a people he refers to as the “Rūsiyyah”, and, most importantly provides a description of a Rūsiyyah boat burial he experienced, noting in particular the role played by a female figure he refers to as الموت ملك (transcribed as “malak almawt”), literally, in English translation, the “Angel of Death”.²¹¹ Regarding the nature of the Rūsiyyah, numerous scholarly speculations have taken place regarding the origin and nature of these people. It seems that Ibn Faḍlān used the term employed by the Rūsiyyah to describe themselves. The Rūsiyyah encountered by Ibn Faḍlān by the Volga evidently had a Nordic background and retained a substantial Scandinavian aspect in their culture, something that can be clearly seen from the description of their burial practices. As Neil Price notes: “[...T]his very strongly suggests not only that Ibn Faḍlān’s *al Rūsīyyah* – or at least the decision-making members of the group – were Scandinavians, but also that their actions among the Bulgar closely resembled what they did at home.”²¹² In a recent article, Þórir Jónsson Hraundal argues with regard to the funeral described by Ibn Faḍlān that “it may be more appropriate to view the ceremony as specific to the particular time and place in which it occurred instead of appropriating it for one determined, supposedly uniform culture.”²¹³ Whatever the case, many scholars continue to use the description when discussing Old Norse funeral activities. This naturally leads us on to consider how the event is translated into English.

Ibn Faḍlān actually mentions the “Angel of Death” numerous times during his description of the ship burial as the event unfolds,²¹⁴ describing her as “a gloomy, corpulent woman, neither young nor old.”²¹⁵ Her duties, he says,

²¹¹ *Ibn-Fozzlan’s und anderer Araber Berichte über die Russen älterer Zeit*, ed. and trans. C. M. Frähen (St. Petersburg: Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1823), pp. 12, 16 and 18.

²¹² Neil Price, “Passing Into Poetry: Viking-Age Mortuary Drama and the Origins of Norse Mythology”, *Medieval Archaeology* 54 (2010), p. 133.

²¹³ Þórir Jónsson Hraundal, “New Perspectives on Eastern Vikings/ Rus in Arabic Sources”, *VMS* 10 (2014), p. 91.

²¹⁴ The recurrent mention of the term “Angel of Death” in Arabic excludes the possibility that we are dealing with a scribal error, which has been thought to be the cause of some unreliable passages: see, for example, Montgomery, “Ibn Faḍlān and the Rūsiyyah”, p. 14, footnote 45.

²¹⁵ Montgomery, “Ibn Faḍlān and the Rūsiyyah”, p. 15. A different translation is given by Richard N. Frye which reads: “I saw that she [that is “the Angel of Death”] was an old giantess, fat and grim to behold”: see *Ibn Fadlan’s Journey to Russia: A Tenth-Century Traveler From Baghdad to the Volga River*, trans. Richard N. Frye (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2010), p. 68; another variant reading is “I saw that she [that is “the Angel of Death”] was a witch, thick-bodied and sinister”: see *Ibn Fadlān and the Land of Darkness: Arab Travellers in the Far North*, trans. Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2012), p. 51.

include the sewing of the funeral garments for the deceased chieftain and the ritual killing of a slave girl by stabbing her between the ribs with a dagger.²¹⁶ There is, nonetheless, much debate regarding exactly what ritual acts Ibn Faḍlān may or may not have personally observed and what he managed to understand from the descriptions of his translator.²¹⁷ Of most interest here, however, is what exactly he meant by the “Angel of Death”.

As various scholars have stressed, to understand exactly what Ibn Faḍlān meant, we must start by forgetting our modern worldview and instead take up a medieval Islamic understanding.²¹⁸ The Islamic faith, like its other Abrahamic counterparts, certainly understood angels (Ar. sg. *malak* or *mal’ak*, Ar. pl. *malā’ikah*) as celestial servants of God.²¹⁹ Islamic angels, however, unlike their Christian counterparts, are seen as being inferior to human beings for they cannot grasp God’s nature.²²⁰ There are, however, a total of four archangels who are subservient only to God, one of them being ‘Izrā’īl (إِزْرَائِيل; also known as Azrael), the Angel of Death who has the form of a *psychopomp* (from Greek

²¹⁶ Montgomery, “Ibn Faḍlān and the Rūsiyyah”, pp. 15 and 18–19; and E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), pp. 272–3.

²¹⁷ This idea has been proposed by Jens Peter Schjødt in his 2007 article “Ibn Fadlan’s Account of a Rus Funeral: To What Degree Does It Reflect Nordic Myths?” but has since been challenged by Þórir Jónsson Hraundal: see Jens Peter Schjødt, “Ibn Fadlan’s Account of a Rus Funeral: To What Degree Does it Reflect Nordic Myths?”, in Pernille Hermann, Jens Peter Schjødt and Rasmus Tranum Kristensen (eds), *Reflections on Old Norse Myth*, Studies in Viking and Medieval Scandinavia 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 133–48; and Þórir Jónsson Hraundal, “New Perspectives on Eastern Vikings/Rus in Arabic Sources”, pp. 82–3.

²¹⁸ Montgomery states that: [...]it is no exaggeration to say that, with a few very conspicuous exceptions, the majority of the scholars who refer to it [that is Ibn Faḍlān travelogue], who base their observations upon it and who argue from it, are at best improperly familiar with classical Arabic”: Montgomery, “Ibn Faḍlān and the Rūsiyyah”, p. 1. Price highlights that “[e]ach textual reference should be considered in context, and in the case of Ibn Fadlan it is striking how often scholars ignore the telling details of his account in favour of broad-brushed reference to the supposedly insoluble complexities of Rus’ ethnogenesis”: Price, “Passing Into Poetry”, p. 132. Þórir Jónsson Hraundal likewise bemoans that “[a] tendency in the scholarship is the practice of adapting the Arabic material to fit the evidence provided by other sources [...] the archaeological record, and even in some cases Old Norse literature”: Þórir Jónsson Hraundal, “New Perspectives on Eastern Vikings/ Rus in Arabic Sources”, p. 77.

²¹⁹ Cyril Glassé, *The Concise Encyclopædia of Islam* (London: Stacey International, 1989), p. 42.

²²⁰ Glassé, *The Concise Encyclopædia of Islam*, p. 42.

ψυχοπομπός, meaning “guide of souls”).²²¹ *Surah* 32:11 (as-sağda) of the Qur’an grants some information regarding the duty of this angel:

ثُرَجْعُونَ رُبُّكُمْ إِلَىٰ ثُمَّ بِكُمْ وَكُلَّ الَّذِي الْمَوْتِ مَلَكٌ يَتَوَقَّأَكُم قُلٌّ²²²

It is natural to entertain the idea that Ibn Fadlān was referring to this verse rather than anything we would recognise from Christianity when he described the old lady, the term “Angel of Death” thus referring essentially to her role within the burial ceremony (that is of guiding the soul of the deceased), rather than suggesting that she actually represented an angel.²²³ Granted, such a notion only appears feasible if it is assumed that Ibn Fadlān knew the verse and felt it logical to use it intentionally as a metaphor to describe whatever it was he beheld. One might naturally also consider the fact that the image was not based on Ibn Fadlān’s own wording, but rather that of his translator and interpreter who used it to help Ibn Fadlān understand the burial ceremony. The former is nonetheless most probable.

Considering the latter approach, a number of scholars such as Else Roesdahl, Neil Price and James Montgomery have tried to link the figure in question to Nordic mythology, focusing on the potential usage of the word *valkyrja* as a title for an Odinic priestess, underlining the element of human sacrifice conducted by the “Angel of Death” as support for the idea that the woman was such a priestess.²²⁴ Roesdahl, Price and Montgomery, however, have taken a slightly different approach, building their respective interpretations

²²¹ See Alison Coudert, “Angels”, in Mircea Eliade et. al. (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. I (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), p. 284. Regarding *psychopomp*: see footnote 224 below.

²²² See <http://al-quran.info/#32:11>. Translation: “Say: ‘The angel of death, who is set over you, will take your souls. Then you shall be brought to your Lord’”: *Translation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur’an in the English Language*, ed. Muhammad Taqī-ud-Dīn Al-Hilālī and Muhammad Muhsin Khān (Madinah: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur’an, 1998), p. 556.

²²³ The idea of supernatural beings acting as a guide for the deceased into the afterlife, figures often referred to as *psychopomp*, can be found in ancient religions such as that of Egypt (with the deity Anubis) as well as in Greek mythology (the ferryman Charon), and remained fairly actual until the Late Middle Ages, as can be seen in the figure of the Christian giant St Christopher, one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers of Roman Catholicism: see David Williams, *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), pp. 286–97. Matthias Egeler has shown that such an idea can also be seen in the figures of the Old Norse *valkyrjur*: see Matthias Egeler, *Walküren, Bodbs, Sirenen: Gedanken zur religionsgeschichtlichen Anbindung Nordwesteuropas an den mediterranen Raum*, RGA Ergänzungsbände 71 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), pp. 45–50, 111 and 114–5.

²²⁴ Else Roesdahl, *Viking Age Denmark* (London: British Museum Publications, 1982), p. 170.

on the idea of the use of the expression “Angel of Death” as a reference to a winged figure, wings being a distinctive feature of angels in Abrahamic religions. As has been maintained by these scholars, the notion of wings points once more to potential connections to the apparently flying *valkyrjur* in their role as the “choosers of the slain”, descending onto the battlefields to escort the worthy fallen back to Valhöll.²²⁵ As these scholars say, one might even see a reference to the goddess Freyja here, considering her close connections to death as well as the *fjaðrhamr* (“feather costume”; also referred to as *valshamr*, “falcon costume”) she is said to possess.²²⁶ Whatever the case, it is clear that the word “angel” used in translation without an explanatory note can easily be misleading and have a range of consequences.

The key feature here, which is often lost in the scholarly discussion, is the fact that we have to understand the words used to describe such a figure in the context of translation. If we talk to an English-speaking audience about the “Angel of Death” without bearing this pivotal aspect in mind, this concept is prone to be misunderstood. The “Angel of Death” thus serves as a prime example of the problems of translation (here as a foreign concept is first translated into the Arabic language and worldview, and then translated into English). As noted above, for the Arabic audience, to whom this concept apparently was initially introduced, while the features of wings and transport into the world of death would have been passed on, a number of additional features would have become automatically attached to the term in line with Islamic belief, thereby transforming the figure into something quite different from that understood by the participants of the ritual by the Volga. Those English readers with a Christian background will meanwhile see the figure of “the angel of death” from a very different viewpoint. Here the element of “wings” is less likely to be important than the “angelic”. There is certainly little likelihood that they will think of an Islamic angel, any more than the original participants did. As noted above, the idea that the figure Ibn Faḍlān was trying to describe might have worn feathers of some kind would seem to find early support in the ancient (supposedly female) figures in avian costumes found

²²⁵ Roesdahl, *Viking Age Denmark*, p. 170; Price, “Passing Into Poetry”, pp. 133–4; and Montgomery, “Ibn Faḍlān and the Rūsiyyah”, p. 18.

²²⁶ For Freyja’s connections to the slain and death: see *Grímnismál* st. 14 and *Gylfaginning* 24: *Edda*, p. 60; and Snorri Sturluson, *Prologue and Gylfaginning*, p. 24. Freyja’s *fjaðrhamr* is mentioned in *Þrymskviða* st. 5, while *Skáldskaparmál* G56, 18 and 19 refers to it as *valshamr*: *Edda*, p. 111; and Snorri Sturluson, *Skáldskaparmál*, I, pp. 2, 24 and 30. Egeler, in his study of the *valkyrjur* notices that, in later Medieval sources, these beings are regularly described as adopting *hamir* or are said to ride through the sky. However, no contemporary sources from heathen times attest to these ideas: see Egeler, *Walküren, Bodbs, Sirenen*, pp. 66–79 and 112–5.

carved on a stone slab at the Bronze Age burial site in Kivik, Sweden as well as the aforementioned *valkyrjur* and the Nordic goddesses with their feather cloaks. Indeed, the traditional associations connected with such figures that might have provided further some support for the choice of “translating” this figure as an “Angel of Death”, now on the basis of her potential function as a *psychopomp* (a notion that would have been in line with the archangel Azrael’s function in Islamic tradition), as she guides the soul of the deceased chieftain (and arguably also of the doomed slave-girl) into the afterlife.²²⁷ Whatever the case, as shown here, the example of Ibn Fadlān’s “Angel of Death” effectively highlights the conceptual misunderstandings that can take place as part of the process of translation, not only for the original target audience, but also for subsequent generations as the process continues from one culture to another.

3.4 The Depiction of Germanic Deities in Latin and Other Foreign Sources

Considering the translation of the supernatural, another interesting conundrum relevant both directly and indirectly to the process of medieval translation as a whole relates to the works of the historians of the Roman Empire and Late Antiquity as well as the Early Medieval written descriptions of the idols and deities in pagan Central and Northern Europe. How should the pagan gods of the Germanic and early Nordic peoples be “translated” into Latin and other languages for foreign readers? General contemporary evidence of the native names and characteristics of the earlier Germanic pagan deities is highly limited. However, some insight into these divinities and their possible worship in the Germanic area is provided by the latter of the two Merseburg Charms and the *Altsächsisches Taufgelöbnis* (“The Old Saxon Baptismal Vow”, also known as *De Utrechtse doopbelofte*: “The Utrecht Baptismal Vow”).

A considerable amount of uncertainty surrounds both the Merseburg Charms and the manuscript they are preserved in. A myriad of scholars have tried to identify a composition time, estimations ranging from 200 AD to the twelfth century.²²⁸ It, nonetheless, appears that the charms themselves are older than the recording. The manuscript itself, according to a cautiously optimistic estimate, may date back to the first third of the tenth century, with the charms themselves potentially dating as far back as the first half of the eighth century, in other

²²⁷ On this see further Luke John Murphy, “*Herjans dísir: Valkyrjur*, Supernatural Femininities, and Elite Warrior Culture in the Late Pre-Christian Iron Age” (Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Iceland, 2013), pp. 136, footnote 530, and 145–6, footnote 558.

²²⁸ Wolfgang Beck, *Die Merseburger Zaubersprüche*, *Imagines Medii Aevi* 16 (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2003), pp. 231–5.

words, prior to the writing of Einhard (c. 770–840) (discussed below).²²⁹ The exact location of the recording, however, is both unclear and debated. Two sites are favoured by scholars, the Fulda monastery being the preferred choice over the city of Merseburg itself.²³⁰ What is evident from the Second Charm, however, is that during the time span of around 800/50–1035, the entities named in the charm seem to have experienced some form of veneration in central Germany, in regions that correspond to the federal states of Hesse and Thuringia in modern-day Germany.²³¹ The beginning of the charm runs as follows:

Phol ende Uuodan uuorun zi holza.
Du uuart demo balderes uolon sin uuoz birenkict.
Thu biguol en Sinhtgunt, sunna era suister,
thu biguol en Friia, Uolla era suister,
thu biguol en Uuodan, so he uuola conda²³²

A more concrete correlation from this period connecting the Germanic heathen gods with demons as well as their Latin equivalents was made in a Frankish synodal document dated to the ninth century. It is recorded that, during the Saxon campaign by Charlemagne, the church sought to proselytise the then heathen Saxons.²³³ For this reason, a synodal document which came to be known as *Indiculus superstitionum et paganiorum* (“A Small Index of Superstitions and Paganism”) was put together in order to help Christianise the newly conquered areas. Since the Saxons at the time were still heathen, a vow was crafted which a newly converted Saxon needed to recite, in which he recanted his belief in demons and other entities. This vow is commonly referred to as *Altsächsisches Taufgelöbnis* (see above) and, in the segment called *abrenuntiatio* (“recantation of the old gods”), it makes clear the connections Christians saw between the devil and non-Christian divinities:

²²⁹ Beck, *Die Merseburger Zaubersprüche*, pp. 230 and 238.

²³⁰ Beck, *Die Merseburger Zaubersprüche*, pp. 243–9.

²³¹ Regarding the various gods mentioned in the poem and especially the enigmatic Phol and Sinthgunt: see Beck, *Die Merseburger Zaubersprüche*, pp. 91–119, 121–6, 136–53, 163–75 and 178–87.

²³² Beck, *Die Merseburger Zaubersprüche*, p. 90. Translation: “Phol and Wodan were riding to the woods,/ and the foot of Balder’s foal was sprained./ So Sinthgut [*sic*], Sunna’s sister, conjured it;/ and Frija, Volla’s sister, conjured it;/ and Wodan conjured it, as well as he could”: Benjamin W. Forster IV, *Indo-European Language and Culture: An Introduction*, Blackwell Textbooks in Linguistics 19 (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 325.

²³³ For information regarding key problems of how paganism was understood in Carolingian times and the usage of *interpretatio Romana*: see James Palmer, “Defining Paganism in the Carolingian World”, *Early Medieval Europe* 15 (2007), pp. 402–25.

Forsáchistu Diobolae? et respondeat: ec forsacho Diabolae.
 end allum diobolgelde? respondeat: end ec forsacho allum
 diobolgeldae.
 end allum dioboles uercum? respondeat: end ec forsacho allum
 dioboles uercum and uordum Thunaer ende Woden ende Saxnote
 ende allēm them unholdum the hira genotas sint.²³⁴

The vow is immediately followed by a list of headings naming a total of 30 capitularies. Fascinatingly, among the 30 entries are two capitularies that are of particular interest, namely capitularies number 8 and 20, *De sacris Mercurii, vel Iovis* and *De feriis quae faciunt Iovi vel Mercurio* respectively,²³⁵ which shed some light on a possible nature of the earlier-mentioned deities in the local pagan perception at the time and the parallels that the Latin writers saw in classical mythology. One is, nonetheless, left somewhat in the dark as to exactly whom those Latin names refer, since, as noted above, the Old Saxon Baptismal Vow lists *three* (apparently popular) Saxon divinities. Is Mercurius the Woden who must be recanted (as suggested by Tacitus or Paulus Diaconus [c. 720s–797/9] for example; see below) and is Jupiter/ Jove meant to denote Thunaer (as suggested by Willibald [active in the eighth century, chaplain at Mainz 755–786], for example; see below) or Saxnōt? Or should both Latin names be disconnected from the deities mentioned in Old Saxon? Unfortunately, the

²³⁴ *Capitularia regum Francorum*, ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz, MGH LL 1(I) (Hannover: Hahn, 1835), p. 19. Translation: “Do you recant the Devil? And he would answer: I recant the Devil./ And all devil worship? He would answer: And I recant all devil worship./ And all deeds of the Devil? He would answer: And I recant all deeds and commandments of the Devil, Thunaer and Woden and Saxnōt and all those fiends that are their companions.” Interestingly, a Frankish Baptismal Vow, the *Fränkische Taufgelöbnis* (dated to 775–800), has also survived. Unlike the *Altsächsisches Taufgelöbnis* quoted above, the Frankish variant is more general in the third line, not targeting any specific pagan deities but rather their entirety in its *abrenuntiatio*: “Forsahhistu allem them bluostrom indi den gelton indi den gotum, thie im heidene man zi bluostrom indi zi geldom enti zi gotum habent? Ih fursahhu”: *Die kleineren althochdeutschen Sprachdenkmäler*, ed. Elias von Steinmeyer (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1916), p. 23. Translation: “Do you recant all the offerings, sacrifices and gods that pertain to be offerings, sacrifices and gods among the heathens? I recant.” The lack of naming specific deities has led some scholars to interpret the *Fränkische Taufgelöbnis* as the “textual counterpart” to the Second Merseburg Charm: Siegfried Berger, *Die Merseburger Zaubersprüche* (Halle: Brandt, 1939), p. 17. For further information regarding the *Fränkische Taufgelöbnis*: see Beck, *Die Merseburger Zaubersprüche*, pp. 225–6.

²³⁵ *Capitularia regum Francorum*, pp. 19–20.

capitularies are unexplained and the actual legislative and administrative acts that would have accompanied each respective heading are lost.²³⁶

In spite of the uncertainty, it is enticing to continue considering which Saxon deities might have lain behind these semi-translated aliases? What appears to be certain is that the Mercurius listed here was not the Latin deity. Furthermore, there is some evidence that the regular correlation of Latin names to pagan European gods as part of the *interpretatio Romana* (see below and Chapter 3.4.1) was in no way as unanimous or uniform as it might at first glance appear. First of all, it is questionable whether there was any “pan-Germanic” pantheon that could offer a clear parallel to those known in Greece and Rome.²³⁷ Indeed, even if the various Germanic tribes did think in terms of pantheons, the probability is that different tribes or groups of tribes had their own set of divinities.²³⁸ Certainly, the worship of gods may very well have fluctuated somewhat in accordance with local needs or an impending situation (famine, harvest or war, for example). It should thus come as no surprise that various historical writers in the Middle Ages, like those before them, could only have been able to provide a vague and somewhat variable correlation between the gods and the then-known Latin pantheon.

In many cases, it is clear that those writing in Latin avoided naming heathen deities, simply calling them (in a sense translating them as) “demons” (lat. sg. *daemon*, pl. *daemonēs*) rather than giving their pagan appellation or a Latin name correlating to the respective god (see below; see also Chapter 3.4.1). In so doing, they naturally turned the heathen divinities into something new, equally powerful, but negative: In his *Casus sancti Galli* dated to the late eighth century, for example, Ratpert of St Gallen (c. 855–911) mentions how the fellowship around St Columban (c. 540–c. 615) and his fellow St Gallus (c. 550–c. 646) were given the task of finding a place suitable for worship by the

²³⁶ Holger Homann, *Der Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum und verwandte Denkmäler* (Göttingen: Georg-August-Universität, 1965), pp. 58–66 and 111–2. See also Holger Homann, Eckhard Meineke and Ruth Schmidt-Wiegand, “Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum”, in Johannes Hoops (ed.), *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, Vol. XV: *Hobel – Iznik* (Berlin/ New York: de Gruyter, 2000), pp. 369–84.

²³⁷ See further Terry Gunnell, “Pantheon? What Pantheon? Concepts of a Family of Gods in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religions”, *Scripta Islandica* 66 (2015), pp. 58–60 and 68–70. See furthermore Andreas Nordberg, “Continuity, Change and Regional Variation in Old Norse Religion”, in Catharina Raudvere and Jens Peter Schjødt (eds), *More than Mythology: Narratives, Ritual Practices and Regional Distribution in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religions* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2012), pp. 119–51.

²³⁸ See Jens Peter Schjødt, “Diversity and its Consequences for the Study of Old Norse Religion: What Is It We Are Trying to Reconstruct?”, in Leszek P. Słupecki and Jakub Morawiec (eds), *Between Paganism and Christianity in the North* (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2009), pp. 10–8 and 21.

Austrasian King Theudebert II (586–612, r. 596–612). They seem to have found such a place at Tuggen at the northern end of the Lake Zürich in modern-day Switzerland. An account is given of a short encounter between the men and the locals as the Christian men tear down pagan idols to make the place suitable for Christian worship. Ratpert describes the encounter as follows:

A quo accepta potestate per Alemanniam locum eligendi aptum divinae servituti, Tuconiam advenerunt, quæ est ad caput lacu Turicini; ubi cum consistere vellent populumque ab errore/ demonum revocare – nam adhuc idolis immolabant – Gallo idola vana confringente et in lacum vicinum demergente, populus in iram conversus non sine multo et ignominioso damno sui generisque futuri sanctos exinde pepulerunt.²³⁹

Two hundred years later, Charlemagne’s courtier Einhard describes the worship of the gods of pagan Germans in a similar way, focusing specifically on the veneration of gods conducted by the Saxons. Einhard, like Ratpert, paints a sinister picture of the Saxons, describing their worship as a demon cult that took place in various locations. A good example of this approach can be seen in the seventh chapter of his eighth-century *Vita Karoli Magni* when Einhard considers the nature of the Saxons in their war against the Franks:²⁴⁰

Quo nullum neque prolixius neque atrocious Francorumque populo laboriosius susceptum est; quia Saxones, sicut omnes fere Germaniam incolentes nationes, et natura feroces et cultui daemonum dediti nostraeque religioni contrarii neque divina neque humana iura vel polluere vel transgredi inhonestum arbitrabantur.²⁴¹

²³⁹ Ratpert, *St. Galler Klostersgeschichte (Casus sancti Galli)*, ed. and trans. Hannes Steiner, MGH SS rer. Germ. 75 (Hannover: Hahn, 2002), pp. 138 and 140. Translation: “After they [the expedition of Abbot Columban and Gallus] had received the authorization to select a place suitable for service [from Theudebert II] in Alemannia, they reached Tuggen which is located on the upper end of Lake Zürich. Because they dwelt there and wanted to dissuade the people from the wrong track of the demons – because until now they had sacrificed to idols – Gallus shattered the inane idols and plunged them into the nearby lake. The people flew into a rage and expelled the holy men from there causing no limited and ignominious damage to themselves and the future generation.”

²⁴⁰ Charlemagne’s Saxon campaign, usually referred to as the “Saxon War” or “Saxon Wars”, lasted from 772 until 804: see Timothy Reuter, *Germany in the Early Middle Ages c. 800–1056* (London/ New York: Longman, 1991), pp 65–9.

²⁴¹ *Einhardi Vita Karoli Magni*, ed. G. H. Pertz and G. Waitz, MGH SS rer. Germ. 25 (Hannover/ Leipzig: Hahn, 1911), p. 9. Translation: “Never was there a war more prolonged nor more cruel [*sic*] than this, nor one that required greater efforts on the part

One can only speculate as to the reasons for this avoidance of naming the gods (or even the use of the word “god”). Maybe (as noted above) the author feared they would invoke the wrath of the church if they were to name any pagan (and therefore false) deity or suggest that there were actually deities. Maybe they did it out of disdain. One wonders whether it was an element in the propaganda led by the Christian church against pagan religions and beliefs, resembling a sort of *Kulturkampf* (“culture struggle”), in order to prevent the names from gaining any cultural foothold outside Saxony. Another answer is, of course, that these men simply did not know the names of the pagan deities they were writing about. In any case, here we can see very clearly the way in which translation of terms (albeit indirect here) can have a political purpose.

Other scribes and written sources before and after Einhard, nevertheless, took the other common approach mentioned earlier in which the names of German gods are replaced with those of Latin deities which are felt to be approximate in nature. This was, naturally, another form of translation. As will be seen from the examples given below, this approach, which was used for some time, shows recurring patterns. Over time, however, interesting developments and changes can be made out, for example, as the sources start to mention both the Latin name and the local pagan appellation. Interestingly, one also finds that over time, and especially in Scandinavia, the name of the Latin god used as an approximation changes over time. These alterations offer the faint possibility that changes also occurred in the perception of the pagan deities in certain areas. Naturally, the said changes in perception would have been evident to both the chroniclers and the heathens alike.

The term *interpretatio Romana* was seemingly first coined by Tacitus and deserves particular discussion here, not least because as an approach, like the other examples of concept translations noted earlier (see Chapters 3.1 through 3.3), it can sometimes cause more problems than it solves. In Chapter 43 of his *De origine et situ Germanorum liber* (98 AD; referred to as *Germania* in the following), Tacitus describes the veneration of two Germanic gods by a Suebian tribe. The gods in question are apparently youthful twins that are “*deos interpretatione Romana Castorem Pollucemque memorant.*”²⁴² It is very

of the Frankish peoples. For the Saxons, like most of the races that inhabit Germany, are by nature fierce, devoted to the worship of demons and hostile to our religion, and they think it no dishonour to confound and transgress the laws of God and man”: *Early Lives of Charlemagne by Einhard and the Monk of St Gall*, ed. and trans. Arthur James Grant (London: Chatto & Windus, 1922), p. 16.

²⁴² P. Cornelius Tacitus, *Germania*, ed. and trans. Manfred Fuhrmann, Reclams Universal-Bibliothek 9391 (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 2000), p. 58. Translation: “the deities are said to be the counterpart of our Castor and Pollux”: Tacitus, *The Agricola and the Germania*, p. 137. See also: Bernhard Maier, *Dictionary of Celtic Religion and Culture*, trans. Cyril Edwards (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), p. 158.

important to bear in mind here, however, that translation(s) and interpretation(s) also need to be considered from the viewpoint of the mindset of the translator(s)/ interpreter(s), who in most cases wrote for a specific audience. Tacitus uses the same device elsewhere in his work (see Chapter 3.4.1), providing Latin names for German deities, in other words using names to which his Roman audience could relate. In doing so, it could be argued that Tacitus was rendering his portrayal of the Germanic gods more fathomable to his audience, but at the same time potentially more problematic for modern research. A good example of this is found at the beginning of Chapter 9 of his *Germania* which reads as follows:

Deorum maxime Mercurium colunt, cui certis diebus humanis quoque hostiis litare fas habent. Herculem et Martem concessis animalibus placant. pars Sueborum et Isidi sacrificat [...].²⁴³

Here, we are clearly dealing with a degree of translation: Mercurius seems to be used to describe Wotan or Óðinn, while Hercules seems to refer to Thunaer, Donar or Þórr and Mars to Tîwaz although, once again, we need to be wary of over-interpreting the parallels. On several other occasions, however, it is interesting to observe that Tacitus seems to abandon such direct correlations, utilising only the expression *terra mater* (“Mother Earth”), in Chapter 40 of *Germania* when he describes a goddess he labels Nerthus using a Latinised version of a Germanic name.²⁴⁴ Here, it would seem that he could find no fitting translation.

²⁴³ Tacitus, *Germania*, p. 14. Translation: “Above all other gods they worship Mercury, and count it no sin, on certain feast-days, to include human victims in the sacrifices offered to him. Hercules and Mars they appease by offerings of animals, in accordance with ordinary civilized custom. Some of the Suebi sacrifice also to Isis”: Tacitus, *The Agricola and the Germania*, p. 108.

²⁴⁴ Many scholars have been intrigued by Tacitus’ account and in particular by the figure of Nerthus, a goddess that is shrouded in mystery and has been interpreted in various ways. Näsström, for example, has to admit that the common interpretation of Nerthus as a female counterpart to the Nordic god Njörðr contradict the *terra mater* quality Tacitus suggests Nerthus had when he compares her to local Roman gods he knew, just as he compares another goddess to Isis: Britt-Mari Näsström, *Freyja: The Great Goddess of the North*, Lund Studies in History of Religions 5 (Lund: University of Lund, 1995), pp. 49–52. As Näsström adds, the idea of the *terra mater* naturally invites the possibility of comparison to Nordic fertility goddesses such as Jörð, Fjörgyn and Hlōðyn (of whom little is known): Näsström, *Freyja*, pp. 50–1; and Nils Lid, *Religionshistorie*, Nordisk Kultur 26 (Oslo: Det Mallingske Boktrykkeri, 1942), p. 111. For remarks regarding the respective goddesses noted here: see Snorri Sturluson, *Skáldskaparmál*, I, pp. 14–5, 86–7 and 130. In another article that, up until now, has not received much attention, Lotte Motz, nonetheless, highlights the fact that in his early, influential edition of Tacitus’ *Germania*, Jacob Grimm deliberately chose the name

Some 500 years after Tacitus, the same general approach and a similar stress on Mercurius and Mars is used by St Gregory of Tours (c. 538–594), when he describes a dialogue between the heathen Frankish King Clovis I (c. 466–511) and his Christian wife Clotilda (c. 474–548; also known as St Clotilde) in Chapter 29 of the second book of his late-sixth century *Historia Francorum*. The following words are ascribed to Clotilda:

Nihil sunt dii quos colitis, qui neque sibi neque aliis potuerunt subvenire. Sunt enim aut ex lapide aut ex ligno aut ex metallo aliquo sculpti. Nomina vero quae eis indedistis homines fuere, non dii, ut Saturnus, qui a filio ne a regno depelleretur, per fugam elapsus aderitur, ut ipse Iovis omnium stuprorum spurcissimus perpetrator, incestatur virorum, propinquarum derisor, qui nec ab ipsius sororis propriae potuit abstinere concubitum, ut ipsa ait: *Iovisque et soror et coniux*. Quid Mars Mercuriusque potuere? Qui potius sunt magicis artibus praediti, quam divini nominis potentiam habuere.²⁴⁵

variant *nerthum* over other extant forms of the name found in other manuscripts simply because of the name's analogy to Njǫrðr: Lotte Motz, "The Goddess Nerthus: A New Approach", *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 36 (1992), p. 3. Motz, therefore, underlines that we must consider this version as part of "Grimm's bias" and be wary of making any general conclusions regarding the origin and veneration of this goddess on the basis of this version of the name. Indeed, both the etymology of the name given in Jacob Grimm's favoured text and various shared maritime qualities have led many scholars, such as George Dumézil, Hilda E. Davidson and even Motz herself to point to connections between Njǫrðr and the Vanir lineage of gods (associated with fertility): see George Dumézil, *Gods of the Ancient Northmen*, ed. Einar Haugen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 75–6; Christopher Abram, *Myths of the Pagan North: The Gods of the Norsemen* (New York: Continuum, 2011), p. 57; and Lotte Motz, *The King, The Champion and The Sorcerer: A Study in Germanic Myth*, SMS 1 (Wien: Fassbaender, 1996), pp. 11–32; as well as E. O. G. Turville-Petre, "The Cult of Freyr in the Evening of Paganism", *Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society: Literary and Historical Section* 3 Part 6 (1935), pp. 324–7. Other inconclusive connections have been drawn to the sky god Tîwaz, to whom Nerthus could possibly have been a spouse: see Hilda R. Ellis Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), pp. 110–1. As Motz notes, the tendencies towards finding Vanir connections to Nerthus can already be seen in the works of Jacob Grimm, in the first edition of his *Deutsche Mythologie* of 1835: see Jacob Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie* (Göttingen: Dietrichsche Buchhandlung 1835), pp. 140–1.

²⁴⁵ *Gregorii episcopi Turonensis: Libri Historiarum X*, ed. Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison, MGH SS rer. Merov. I(1) (Hannover: Hahn, 1951), p. 74. Translation: "The gods you [that is Clovis, her husband] worship are nothing, and they will be unable to help themselves or anyone else. For they are graven out of stone or wood or some metal. And the names you have given them are names of men and not of gods, as Saturn, who is declared to have fled in fear of being banished from his kingdom by his son; as Jove himself, the foul perpetrator of all shameful crimes, committing incest with men, mocking at his kinswomen, not able to refrain from intercourse with his own sister as

A more direct correlation was given in the next century by the Italian Columbanian monk and hagiographer Jonas Bobiensis (c. 600–659). In the first book of his *Vita Columbani*, the extant manuscript of which is dated to the late-eighth century, he describes an encounter between St Columban and the Suebi (“Swabians”) in which St Columban tries to proselytise. St Columban observes a group of Swabians gathered around a casket filled with beer performing a pagan offering and asks their intention. Jonas gives their answer as follows:

Ad quem vir Dei accessit sciscitaturque, quid de illo fieri vellint. Illi aiunt se Deo suo Vodano nomine, quem Mercurium, ut alii aiunt, autumant, velle litare.²⁴⁶

The Lombardian Benedictine monk and scribe Paulus Diaconus, writing at a similar time, corroborates this supposition of a connection between Wotan and Mercurius. Paulus is, of course, most renowned for his description of the origin myth of the Lombards in his *In Nomine Domini Incipit Origo Gentis Langobardorum*, in which a certain “Godan” and “Frea” play an important role (without any translation).²⁴⁷ Be that as it may, however, in Chapter 9 of the first book of his late-eighth century *Historia Langobardorum* (also referred to as *Pauli Historia Langobardorum*), when Paulus describes such customs of veneration as existing not only amongst the Lombards, but amongst all Germanic people, he clearly underlines the link he sees as existing between Wotan, Godan and Mercurius:

she herself says: Jovisque et soror et conjunx. What could Mars or Mercury do? They are endowed rather with the magic arts than with the power of the divine name”: Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, ed. Ernest Brehaut, Records in Civilisation 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1916), p. 38. The italicised sentence which is not translated by Brehaut translates as “Jupiter’s sister and his wife”, underlining the incestual intercourse Clotilda accuses her husband’s gods of having taken pride in. (Of course, as *Ynglinga saga* suggests, incest was seen as being a particular characteristic of the Vanir rather than the Æsir gods: Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 3 Vols, ÍF 26–28 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1941–1951), I, p. 13.)

²⁴⁶ *Iconae Vitae Sanctorum Columbani, Vedastis, Iohannis*, ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH SS rer. Germ. 37 (Hannover/ Leipzig: Hahn, 1905), p. 213. Translation: “On Columban’s asking what they intended to do with it, they answered that they were making an offering to their God Wodan (whom others call Mercury)”: *Life of St. Columban, by the Monk Jonas*, ed. Dana Carleton Munro, Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History 2(VII) (Philadelphia: P. S. King and Sons, 1895), pp. 31–2.

²⁴⁷ *Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum saec. VI–IX.*, ed. Georg Waitz et al., MGH SS rer. Lang. 1 (Hannover: Hahn, 1878), pp. 2–3.

Wotan sane, quem adiecta littera Godan dixerunt, ipse est qui apud Romanos Mercurius dicitur et ab universis Germaniae gentibus ut deus adoratur; qui non circa haec tempora, sed longe antierius, nec in Germania, sed in Graecia fuisse perhibetur.²⁴⁸

That the use of these names (Mercurius for Wotan, Mars apparently for Týr, and Hercules for Thunor) for the Germanic gods was not uniform amongst scholars can nonetheless be seen in an account by the clergyman Willibald (also active in the eighth century, serving as a chaplain in Mainz 755–86) which mentions a *robor Iobis* (also written *robus Iovis* which has been translated as “The Oak of Jupiter”) in his *vita* of St Boniface, entitled *Vitae Sancti Bonifatii archiepiscopi Moguntini*.²⁴⁹ As is well known, trees held a special place in Germanic and Norse cosmology, cosmogony and religion, something that can be inferred from the references to the famous world ash Yggdrasill in the Eddic poems²⁵⁰ and the Saxon Irminsul which is said to have been destroyed by Charlemagne in 772 in the late-eighth to early-ninth century *Annales regni Francorum* and the *Annales qui dicuntur Einhardi*.²⁵¹ In Willibald’s account, the sacred tree is clearly associated with the ruling Latin lightning deity Jupiter whose name, one can assume, is used as *interpretatio Romana* for that of the thunder god, Þórr (Thunor or Donar). All the same, over half a millennium prior to this, Tacitus, in Chapter 34 of his *Germania*, had mentioned something he describes as *columnae Herculis* (“Pillars of Hercules”) which stood in an area inhabited by a people he identifies as Frisii.²⁵²

²⁴⁸ *Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum*, p. 53. Translation: “Wotan indeed, whom by adding a letter they called Godan [also Guodan] is he who among the Romans is called Mercury, and he is worshipped by all the peoples of Germany as a god, though he is deemed to have existed not [around] these times, but long before, and not in Germany, but in Greece”: Paul the Deacon, *History of the Langobards*, trans. William Dudley Foulke (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1907), pp. 18–9.

²⁴⁹ *Vitae Sancti Bonifatii archiepiscopi Moguntini*, ed. Wilhelm Levison, MGH SS rer. Germ. 57 (Hannover/ Leipzig: Hahn, 1905), p. 31.

²⁵⁰ Regarding the importance of trees and their veneration: see Jan Aksel Harder Klitgaard, *In Search of askr Yggdrasill: A Phenomenological Approach to the Role of Trees in Old Nordic Religions* (Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Iceland, 2018).

²⁵¹ *Annales regni Francorum inde ab a. 741 usque ad a. 829, qui dicuntur Annales Laurissenses maiores et Einhardi*, ed. G. H. Pertz and Friedrich Kurze, MGH SS rer. Germ. 6 (Hannover: Hahn, 1895), pp. V–VII (regarding the dating), pp. 32 and 34 (for the respective passage in the *Annales regni Francorum*) and pp. 33 and 35 (for the respective passage in the *Annales qui dicuntur Einhardi*).

²⁵² The passage in which Tacitus refers to these pillars is the following: “ipsum quin etiam Oceanum illa temptavimus: et superesse adhuc Herculis columnas fama vulgavit, sive adiiit Hercules, seu quicquid ubique magnificum est, in claritatem eius referre consensimus”: Tacitus, *Germania*, p. 48. Translation: “We have even ventured upon the Northern Ocean itself, and rumour has it that there are Pillars of Hercules in the far

Another account that provides both Latin and pagan names of deities, underlining clearly what the translations refer to, is a homily entitled *De falsis diis* composed by the English abbot Ælfrīc (c. 955–c. 1010) in the last decade of the ninth century.²⁵³ In this work, Ælfrīc provides some valuable insight into what he sees as the particularly *Danish* conception of the gods.²⁵⁴ However, as can be seen from this somewhat contradictory passage as well as elsewhere throughout the text, it is clear that he viewed Danish paganism with contempt, mostly spurred by the experiences of the raiding parties that had ravaged England in the ninth century. The relevant section in the homily runs as follows:

Ʒes Iouis is arwurðust ealra þæra goda
 þe þa hæþenan hæfdon on heora gedwylde;
 and he hatte Þór betwux sumum þeodum,
 þone þa Deniscan leoda lufiað swiðost.
 His sunu hatte Mars, se macede æfre saca,

north. It may be that Hercules did go there; or perhaps it is only that we by common consent ascribe any remarkable achievement in any place to his famous name”: see Tacitus, *The Agricola and the Germania*, p. 130.

²⁵³ *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection Being Twenty-One Full Homilies of his Middle and Later Career for the Most Part Not Previously Edited with Some Shorter Pieces Mainly Passages Added to the Second and Third Series*, ed. John C. Pope, 2 Vols, Early English Text Society 259, 260 (London/ New York/ Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1967–1968), I, pp. 147–8. Ælfrīc’s homily *De falsis diis*, amongst other texts, apparently served as a source of inspiration for Haukr Erlendsson (d. 1334) when he made his own correlation of the Latin gods to those of Old Norse heathendom, as can be inferred from a section preserved in *Hauksbók*. See John Frankis, *From Old English to Old Norse: A Study of Old English Texts Translated Into Old Norse with an Edition of the English and Norse versions of Ælfric’s De Falsis diis*, Medium Aevum Monographs 33 (Oxford: Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 2016) for general information. See further Ármann Jakobsson, “‘Er Saturnús er kallaðr en vér köllum Frey’: The Roman Spring of the Old Norse Gods”, in Leszek P. Słupecki and Jakub Morawiec (eds), *Between Paganism and Christianity in the North* (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2009), pp. 158–64, and especially p. 160 footnote 4.

²⁵⁴ The term “Danish” here may refer to any language spoken in Scandinavia in the ninth and tenth centuries as is evident from the umbrella term *danska/ dönsk tunga* (“Danish language”) used in, for example, the *First Grammatical Treatise* which dates to the mid-twelfth century. Differentiation between East and West Norse seemingly does not happen until the twelfth century and the appearance of the *norrønt mál* (“Norse language”) to denote Norwegian and Icelandic, something that once again underlines the need for explanations of concepts: see Kjartan Ottósson, “Old Nordic: A Definition and Delimitation of the Period”, in Oskar Bandle et. al. (eds), *The Nordic Languages: An International Handbook of the History of the North Germanic Languages*, 2 Vols, Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft/ Handbooks of Linguistics and Communication Science/ Manuels de linguistique et des sciences de communication 22(I–II) (Berlin/ New York: de Gruyter, 2002–2005), I, p. 789.

and wrohte and wáwan he wolde æfre styria[n].
 Pisne wurðodan þa hæðenan for healicne god,
 [...]

 Þone macodan þa hæþenan him to mæran gode,
 and æt wega gelætum him lac offrodan,
 and to heagum *beorgum him brohtan onsæg[ed]nysse.
 Ðes god wæs [a]rwyrdæ betwyx eallum hæþenum,
 and he is Óðon geháten oðrum naman on Denisc.
 Nu secgað þa Deniscan on heora gedwylde
 þæt se Iouis wære, þe hi Þór hátað,
 Mercuries sunu, þe hi Oðon hatað;
 ac hi nabbað na riht, for þam þe we rædað on bocum,
 ge on hæþenum ge on Cristenum, þæt se hetola Iouis
 to soðan wære Saturnes sunu²⁵⁵

Ælfrīc’s homily was taken up soon afterwards by the Archbishop of York, Wulfstan II (d. 1023), who expands upon it, writing a sermon entitled *De falsis deis* (dated to the early eleventh century). Wulfstan echoes the idea that *Denisce men* (“Danish men”) make a connection between Jupiter and Þórr and also iterates the correction noted earlier by Ælfrīc that Jupiter should, in fact, be seen as the son of Saturnus rather than of Mercurius:²⁵⁶

Nu secgað sume þa Denisce men on heora gedwylde þæt se Iouis wære þe hy Þor hatað, Mercuries sunu, þe hi Oðon namiað, ac hi nabbað na riht, forðan þe we rædað on bocum, ge on hæþenum ge on Cristenum, þæt se hetola Iouis to soðan is Saturnes sunu.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁵ *Homilies of Ælfric*, II, pp. 683–4. Translation: “This Jove is most honored of all the gods whom the heathens had in their heresy. Among some nations he is named Thor, whom the Danish people love most. His son is named Mars, who always made contention and strife, and always liked to stir up woe. The heathens worshipped Mars as a chief god [...]. The heathens made him [that is a man called Mercurius] into an exalted god and offered him sacrifices at crossroads, and brought him sacrifices at high mountains. This god was honored among all heathens, and he is named another name, Odin, in Danish. Now the Danish say in their heresy that Jove, whom they called Thor, is Mercury’s son, whom they called Odin. But they are not correct, for we read in both pagan and Christian books that the evil Jove was indeed Saturn’s son [...].”: Diana Elizabeth Szurszewski, *Ælfric’s De falsis diis: A Source-Analogue Study with Editions and Translations* (Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Services, 1997), pp. 238–9.

²⁵⁶ Regarding this chronologically problematic passage: see *Homilies of Ælfric*, II, pp. 673–4.

²⁵⁷ Dorothy Bethurum, *The Homilies of Wulfstan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 223. Translation: “Now said some of the Danish men in their heresy that he Jove was, and he Thor named, Mercury’s son, and he (Mercury) Odin named, but they were not right, therefore that we read in book, both among heathens and in Christendom, that the

Another somewhat different interpretation of Óðinn/ Wotan is nonetheless offered around the same time by Adam of Bremen. In his description of the temple at Gamla Uppsala in the fourth book of his *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* mentioned above (see Chapter 3.2), Adam interestingly makes different connections between the Swedish gods that he describes and their Latin counterparts when he writes: “Wodanem vero sculpunt armatum, sicut nostri Martem solent; Thor autem cum sceptro Iovem simulare videtur.”²⁵⁸ Here, Wotan is correlated to Mars probably due to his apparent importance during war which Adam noted earlier when he describes the idols that are said to be kept confined within the temple compound: “[...] Wodan, id est furor, bella gerit hominique ministrat virtutem contra inimicos.”²⁵⁹ The interpretation of Wotan as Mars rather than Mercurius is then echoed in Book II (7,25–6) of Saxo Grammaticus’ later *Gesta Danorum* which borrows from Adam’s work.²⁶⁰ As noted above, both of these comparatively late accounts may reflect a development in the concept of Óðinn as he had come to manifest himself in the Nordic countries.

As is clear from the above, Wotan or Mercurius appears in most of the passages mentioned here which taken together cover centuries and span vast geographic areas of Central and Northern Europe. It may, nonetheless, well be that the Wotan venerated by the Saxons in the eighth century (mentioned in the *Altsächsisches Taufgelöbnis*) deviated from the “Godan” that according to Jonas Bobiensis is said to have been worshipped about 200 years earlier in the northern region of Lake Zürich. Despite the fact that these entities seem to have

evil Jove in truth is Saturn’s son”: Richard Marsden, *The Cambridge Old English Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2004), pp. 205–8. On the problem of this correlation: see further Bethurum, *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, pp. 336–8.

²⁵⁸ Adam von Bremen, *Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte*, pp. 258–9. Translation: “But Wotan they chisel armed, as our people are wont to represent Mars. Thor with his sceptre apparently resembles Jove”: Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, p. 207.

²⁵⁹ Adam von Bremen, *Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte*, p. 258. Translation: “[...] Wotan – that is, the Furious – carries on war and imparts to man strength against his enemies”: Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, p. 207.

²⁶⁰ Saxo Grammaticus underlines this correlation in a conversation he gives between Biarco and Ruta in his version of *Bjarkamál*: “‘Et nunc ille ubi sit, qui uulgo dicitur Othin/ Armipotens, uno semper contentus oculo?/ Dic mihi, Ruta, precor usquam si conspicis illum.’ Ad hæc Ruta: ‘Adde oculum propius et nostras perspice chelas,/ Ante sacraturus uitrici lumina signo,/ Si uis præsentem tuto cognoscere Martem.’”: Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, I, p. 186. Translation: “‘But now, where is the one whom the people call Odin, powerful in arms, content with a single eye? Tell me, Ruta, is there anywhere you can spy him?’ Ruta replied: ‘Bring your gaze nearer and look through my arm akimbo. You must first hallow your eyes with the sign of victory to recognise the war-god safely face-to-face.’”: Saxo Grammaticus, *History of the Danes*, I, pp. 62–3.

shared a name, their set of attributes may well have varied and, of course, the same applies to conceptions of the Latin gods they were compared to. As noted, this possibility of change and development may well be reflected in the differing Latin gods that the divine concept of Wotan is correlated to in the texts given above. Did Wotan correspond more to Mercurius or Mars? Certainly, each of these Latin deities has certain individual attributes or character traits that Wotan has been ascribed with in different situations, but are they congruent with one another? This raises the key question of what influences the translations that we are dealing with here potentially has on our conception of the Nordic god and those of the contemporary readers? Indeed, can we trust that all these conceptions were the same?

Numerous problems can clearly arise whenever one tries to deduce any certain information based on the intercultural translations of concepts, and especially those that refer to such nebulous and elusive figures as the early pagan divinities in pre-millennial Central and Northern Europe. Some of these problems relate to assessing the nature of the respective deity's role and function in both the mythological as well as the social setting, both of which were regularly undergoing change. Other difficulties include the questions of whether the god referred to was actually a local phenomenon (like Saxnōt mentioned above who appears to have been exclusively adored among the Saxons) or a broader shared concept recognised across various tribes and areas which, nonetheless, would have had certain local and temporal variations.

As noted above, the problematic translation method employed by the sources discussed above has commonly been referred to as *interpretatio Romana*,²⁶¹ and involves a foreign word or concept being correlated with a similar Latin term in order to enable understanding within the Latin population who would not have found it easy to grasp the alien notion. For logical reasons, the following chapter will briefly engage in a little further discussion about the *interpretatio* approach which was also used in other forms of translation (especially in the Middle Ages), considering both the general nature of its approach and the other potential problems it caused. As this thesis will show, there are a number of obvious parallels between this approach and that used in the medieval period to translate supernatural concepts (not least in the translated *riddarasögur*).

²⁶¹ Georg Wissowa, "Interpretatio Romana: Römische Götter im Barbarenlande", *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 19 (1916–19), p. 1.

3.4.1 The Role of *interpretatio Romana* and *interpretatio Germanica* in Translating Theophoric Concepts

As has been noted above (see Chapter 3.4), although the term *interpretatio Romana* originated with Tacitus, he was not the first author to try to “translate” foreign divinities by the means of correlating them with gods from the pantheon that the author or his audience was familiar with. A similar narrative device can be observed in the *interpretatio Graeca* found in, for example, the *ιστορίαι* (“The History”) dated to c. 440 BC by the Greek writer Herodotus (c. 484–c. 425 BC). In the second book of this treatise about ancient politics, cultures and tradition among other things, which comprises nine books, Herodotus “translates” the names of the various deities of other Mediterranean peoples (most notably Egyptian and Phoenician divinities), thereby making them seem part of the Greek theotechny:

θεοὺς γὰρ δὴ οὐ τοὺς αὐτοὺς ἅπαντες ὁμοίως Αἰγύπτιοι σέβονται, πλὴν Ἰσιός τε καὶ Ὀσίριος, τὸν δὴ Διόνυσον εἶναι λήγουσι· τούτους δὲ ὁμοίως ἅπαντες σέβονται. [...] Ἄμοῦν γὰρ Αἰγύπτιοι καλέουσι τὸν Δία. [...] ἔπλευσο καὶ ἐς Τύρον τῆς Φοινίκης πυνθανόμενος αὐτόθι εἶναι ἱρὸν Ἡρακλέος ἄγιον [...].²⁶²

In this classical scheme of interpretation, the respective other culture is (usually) perceived as barbarous or inferior to one’s own culture, the gods and the pantheon of the “inferior” culture often being seen as misinterpretations of the deities “proper” of one’s own religious belief systems and worldview, simultaneously underlining an idea of the home belief system being more correct. Any *interpretatio* notion, be it cultural (as with the *interpretatio Romana*, *interpretatio Germanica* and *interpretatio Graeca*) or religious (as with the *interpretatio Christiana* and *interpretatio Arabica* which involve similar approaches²⁶³ (see Chapters 3.2 and 3.3.1) thus at heart involves the

²⁶² *Herodotus*, trans. A. D. Godley, 4 Vols (London: Heinemann, 1966), pp. 326, 328 and 330. Translation: “For no gods are worshipped in common by the whole of Egypt save only Isis and Osiris, whom they say to be Dionysus; these are worshipped by all alike. [...] for Amun is the Egyptian name for Zeus. [...] I took ship to Tyre in Phoenice, where I heard that there was a very holy temple of Heracles [that is the Tyrian god Melkart]”: *Herodotus*, I, pp. 327, 329 and 331.

²⁶³ Granted, the *interpretatio Arabica* is rarely encountered in the field of Old Norse religion (see, for example, the writings of Ibn Faḍlān mentioned in Chapter 3.3.1) and is only cited here for the sake of completeness. It is perhaps more applicable to other regions on the globe, for example Egypt, about which Okasha El-Daly devotes an entire chapter entitled “The Making of an *Interpretatio Arabica* of Ancient Egypt” in his contribution regarding the occurrence of Egypt in Medieval Arabic writings: see Okasha El-Daly, *Egyptology: The Missing Millennium: Ancient Egypt in Medieval Arabic Writings*, University College London Institute of Archaeology Publications 33 (London/

correlation of ideas belonging to the divine spheres of “barbaric” peoples to similar ideas associated with divinities of one’s own culture and theotechny (see Chapter 3.2). Like other forms of translation, it was and is essentially a means of creating and establishing understanding: in this translation process, the “otherness” of the foreign divinities is thus mitigated if not removed.²⁶⁴ At the same time, however, it naturally helped to encourage religious change.

As has been noted above, this approach always has the potential of misleading, causing confusion, and even changing the understanding of the original concepts since it naturally sometimes bestows them with new features. Indeed, the same applies to other supernatural concepts that are translated, as we have seen with the discussion of the translations proposed for the *jǫtnar* and the *álfar* (see Chapter 3.3 above and further Case Studies 1 and 3 below).²⁶⁵ That the *interpretatio* approach in the translation and correlation of deities and other supernatural entities from one culture to another did not always run frictionless is particularly apparent if we return to the *interpretatio Romana*. As has been stated above, Tacitus applies the *interpretatio Romana* to the Germanic tribes and their respective gods. However, it is evident that this approach was also applied to other kinds of more indirect translation between the two cultures which had a permanent effect on the target cultures. Even though, unlike the *interpretatio Romana*, few written accounts suggest the existence of a written *interpretatio Germanica* or *Nordica* being used for translations of the names of Latin deities into Old Germanic or Old Norse,²⁶⁶ notions of it are certainly traceable in the naming of the weekdays in the Germanic and Nordic languages which are clearly based on the Roman model, as with the Roman *dies Martii*, which builds on the correlation of Mars=*Tiwaz (that is Ziu, Týr), becoming

New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 9–29. Regarding the *interpretatio Romana* in Old Norse hagiographic texts: see John Lindow, “Norse Mythology and the Lives of the Saints”, *Scandinavian Studies* 73 (2001), pp. 437–56.

²⁶⁴ See Rudolf Simek, *Lexikon der germanischen Mythologie*, Kröners Taschenausgabe 368 (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 2006), pp. 220–2; and Maier, *Dictionary of Celtic Religion and Culture*, p. 158.

²⁶⁵ Regarding the *álfar*, see Gunnell, “How Elvish Are the *Álfar*?”.

²⁶⁶ In his article “Norse Mythology and the Lives of the Saints” mentioned above, John Lindow has highlighted the fact that various *heilagra manna sǫgur* contain correlations of Old Norse and Latin divinities based on the Latin sources the respective saga compiler worked with. These approximations, however, are far from uniform and one is left to wonder what the Latin equivalents of, for example, Ullr, Skaði or Heimdallr might have been. In light of this, Lindow concludes his article, by saying that “[...] the verses that are the primary sources of our mythology were taken down from oral tradition, but the expectations of the medieval writers who recorded and systematized the verses and of their audiences may well have been partly shaped by the pious literature that also had things to say about the pagan gods”: Lindow, “Norse Mythology and the Lives of the Saints”, pp. 443–4, and for the citation: see p. 455.

Old English *tiwesdæg*, Old High German *zî(o)stag*, modern Scandinavian languages having *tisdag* (Swedish) and *tirsdag* (Danish and Norwegian) respectively.²⁶⁷ What is interesting here is the way in which *dies Iovi* becoming *torsdag* (in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish) and *tórsdagur* (in Faroese) shows Jupiter, obviously being correlated to Þórr, even though, as noted earlier in Chapter 3.4, some Romans in earlier times seem to have seen Þórr as being closer to Hercules.²⁶⁸

The *interpretatio* approach to translation, whichever way it goes, is perhaps best summarised in Bernhard Maier’s statement that:

[t]he basis for the equation of two divinities was a quite specific link, the nature of which is not always clear to us now. Consequently, only a vague view of the nature of an indigenous divinity can be obtained [...].²⁶⁹

This vagueness can naturally be said to permeate all attempts to translate foreign concepts. At the same time, however, it is important to bear in mind the power that such translations have. As has been demonstrated, and as will be demonstrated in the case studies presented later in this thesis, translations always have the potential to affect various ethical and cultural understandings in the target culture, something which applies not least to those which relate to the otherworldly and the supernatural.

It is now time to turn to the *riddarasögur* themselves and the ways in which they deal with problems like those discussed above when dealing with supernatural concepts. First, though, a review needs to be given of how the *riddarasögur* have been dealt with past research.

²⁶⁷ See Simek, *Lexikon der germanischen Mythologie*, pp. 221 and 492–3.

²⁶⁸ See, for example, the beginning of chapter 9 in Tacitus’ *Germania* (which has been quoted earlier, see Chapter 3.4). Saxo Grammaticus remarks (in *Gesta Danorum* Book VI, 5,4): “Ea enim, quæ apud nostros Thor uel Othini dies dicitur, apud illos Iouis uel Mercurii feria nuncupatur”: Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, I, p. 380. Translation: “What we call Thor’s or Odin’s day is termed by them Jove’s or Mercury’s day”: see Saxo Grammaticus, *History of the Danes*, I, p. 171.

²⁶⁹ Maier, *Dictionary of Celtic Religion and Culture*, p. 158.

4 *Stand der Forschung*

Compiling a concise yet accessible *Stand der Forschung* for the field of translated *riddarasögur* is not an easy task, not because so little has been written on this subject, but rather because the scholarly debate is as problematic as it is warring on many topics.²⁷⁰ Some of these debates have gone on for over a century and will most likely never be satisfactorily resolved. Some of the key overall questions naturally include the definition of *riddarasögur* themselves, in other words the problem of “genre”, which revolves around which sagas should be included or excluded and which criteria to use.²⁷¹ Another problem derives from the manuscripts themselves: Apart from a few exceptions, the sagas in question are extant only in Icelandic and not in the Norwegian manuscripts. This raises obvious questions regarding the transmission and adaptation of manuscripts, their reliability and their literal genealogy.²⁷² Last but not least, many saga editions suffer from obsolescence. Thus, the following summary of the state of the art in the research of *riddarasögur* by no means claims to be comprehensive and meticulous, but is to be taken for what it is: an overview that highlights main points along the rocky and windy road that the scholarly research into the *riddarasögur* has so far taken, noting some of the the most important and influential thoughts and publications along the way.

²⁷⁰ See, for example, Jürg Glauser, “Romance (Translated *riddarasögur*)”, p. 378; and Geraldine Barnes, “Some Current Issues in *Riddarasögur* Research”, p. 73; and “Scandinavian Versions of Arthurian Romance”, pp. 190–2.

²⁷¹ On the problems regarding the use of the term “genre” when speaking of medieval texts: see, for example, Hans Robert Jauß, “Theorie der Gattungen und Literatur des Mittelalters”, in Hans Robert Jauß (ed.), *Alterität und Modernität der Mittelalterlichen Literatur: Gesammelte Aufsätze 1956–1976* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1977), pp. 327–58. The problem of a “genre” discussion with special regard to Old Nordic saga literature can be found in, among others, Lars Lönnroth, “The Concept of Genre in Saga Literature”, *Scandinavian Studies* 47 (1975), pp. 419–26; and Joseph Harris, “Genre in the Saga Literature: A Squib”, *Scandinavian Studies* 47 (1975), pp. 427–36. See, furthermore, the articles in Massimiliano Bampi, Carolyne Larrington and Sif Ríkharðsdóttir (eds), *A Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre*, *Studies in Old Norse Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2020).

²⁷² See, for example, Geraldine Barnes, “Romance in Iceland”, in Margaret Clunies Ross (ed.), *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, *Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature* 42 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 273–6; and Jürg Glauser, “Mittelalter (800–1500)”, pp. 29–33. See furthermore Stephen A. Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas and Ballads* (Ithaca/ London: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 8–43 (generally dealing with the *fornaldarsögur*) and especially pp. 8–16 (where *riddarasögur* are included as part of Mitchell’s portrayal of the genre problem).

One important issue must be addressed right at the outset both from a chronological standpoint as well as one dealing with importance, namely the biased scholarly discourse that loomed over the *riddarasögur* like the sword of Damocles from the beginning of the nineteenth until the first part of the twentieth centuries. This dilemma is best summed up with the expression used by Klaus Rossenbeck: “*Ex aquilone omne bonum*”.²⁷³ This phrase roughly translates as “everything that comes from the North is good” and highlights the overall perception and scholarly judgement about which saga material was regarded as “better”, ascribing more (cultural) “value” to indigenous Scandinavian literary works (such as, for example, the *Íslendingasögur*). By the same token, material that depicted foreign influence (such as, for example, the *riddarasögur*) was viewed by many scholars with considerable mistrust and usually judged as being inferior or of lesser “value” than the native narratives. As Rossenbeck remarks:

Diese Zurückhaltung mag zum einen darin begründet sein, daß die Riddarasögur als Werke von zu geringer Selbstständigkeit angesehen wurden. Zum anderen waren sie in ihrer literarischen Qualität seit je übel beleumdet [...].²⁷⁴

This, unfortunately, leads us back to one rather influential publication that would brand the *riddarasögur* in a negative fashion and foreshadow the debate on them for the better part of one and a half centuries. The work in question was the third volume of *Sagabibliothek*, published in 1820 by Peter Erasmus Müller (1776–1834). In it, Müller states the following with regard to his personal reading experience of the *riddarasögur*:

Endnu større er Tallet paa de Oversættelser og Efterligninger af fremmede Romaner, hvilke Islændere have forfattet fra Begyndelsen af det trettende Aarhundrede indtil vore Dage. Min Hensigt var at behandle disse om end kortere, dog paa samme Maade som Sagaerne; men efter at have læst en Deel deraf, forgik Taalmodigheden mig, saa usle vare de Fleste baade af Foredrag og Indhold.²⁷⁵

²⁷³ Klaus Rossenbeck, *Die Stellung der Riddarasögur in der altnordischen Prosaliteratur: Eine Untersuchung an Hand des Erzählstils* (Frankfurt a. M.: J. W. Goethe Universität, 1970), p. 7.

²⁷⁴ Rossenbeck, *Die Stellung der Riddarasögur in der altnordischen Prosaliteratur*, pp. 25–26. Translation: “This restraint may, on the one hand, be founded on the idea that the *riddarasögur* were viewed as works of insufficient autonomy. On the other hand, they were always ill reputed terms of in their literary quality [...].”

²⁷⁵ Peter Erasmus Müller, *Sagabibliothek med Anmærkninger og indledende Afhandlinger*, 3 Vols (Kjøbenhavn: Schultz, 1820), III, p. X.

Müller's disparagement of the *riddarasögur* is underlined by the fact that while he devotes a total of 292 pages to Norwegian material in his description of sources, he only spares a mere four pages in his register for what he entitles as “Alphabetisk Register over islandske af fremmede Sprog oversatte eller efterlignede Romaner”.²⁷⁶

Müller was not alone with such a position, however, as can be seen in the utterances by scholars such as Gísli Brynjúlfsson (1827–1888), who, in his 1851 article on *Tristrams saga*, stated that the *riddarasögur*, to his mind, were re-imports of narrative material that had originated in Norway, and then traveled to the Continent where it was translated only to be re-translated and re-introduced into the Old Norwegian and Old Icelandic narrative cycles.²⁷⁷ Gísli would, admittedly, correct this view in a later publication in which he acknowledged the age of the *Tristan* matter as a whole as well as its cultural importance for Celtic and Cymric culture, citing limited space as the cause of possible misunderstandings.²⁷⁸ As early as 1878, in his edition of *Tristrams saga*, Eugen Kölbing (1846–1899) was highlighting the “hybris” that had befallen Gísli when he thought he was dealing with the oldest version of the *Tristan* matter in the form of *Tristrams saga*.²⁷⁹ While not all scholars would go so far as Müller or Gísli Brynjúlfsson, many would resonate with their criticism,²⁸⁰ something

²⁷⁶ Müller, *Sagabibliothek*, III, pp. 480–4.

²⁷⁷ “Men ligesaa sikkert er det, at dets [that is that of *Tristrams saga ok Ísoddar*] förste egentlige romantiske Bearbejdelse kun skyldes Normannerne, uden at det dog saaledes med Bestemthed lader sig afgjøre, hvornaar denne ældste Bearbejdelse först er blevet til”: Gísli Brynjúlfsson, “Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd: I Grundtexten med Oversættelse og Anmærkninger”, *Annaler för Nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie* 5 (1851), p. 147.

²⁷⁸ “Bag ved Udgaven af den kortere Tristramssaga i “Annal. f. nord. Oldk. 1851” har jeg derfor ogsaa givet en kortfattet Oversigt over disse forskjellige Bearbejdelse; men der maatte den Gang for Pladsens Skyld udelades meget af hvad jeg allerede havde skrevet [...] og jeg tillader mig derfor her først at gjengive dette Afsnit mere fyldigt og med nødvendige Tillæg og Rettelser. Jeg skal dernæst anstille en nøjagtigere Sammenligning imellem den nu udgivne Saga og dens særlige franske Original, end det den Gang var mig muligt [...]. [...] Sagnet [om Tristan] dog under alle Omstændigheder er meget gammelt, og nationalt for de keltiske, i det mindste de kymriske Folk i Wales og Bretagne”: Gísli Brynjúlfsson, “Om Originalerne til Tristramssaga og Möttulssaga samt om disse selv”, in *Saga af Tristram ok Ísönd samt Möttuls saga*, ed. Gísli Brynjúlfsson (Kjöbenhavn: Kongelige Nordiske Oldskrift-Selskab, 1878), pp. 371–2.

²⁷⁹ *Die Nordische und Englische Version der Tristan-Sage*, Vol. I: *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, ed. Eugen Kölbing (Heilbronn: Gebr. Henninger, 1878), p. XV.

²⁸⁰ Josef Dünninger, for example, shunned the *riddarasögur* as displaying “unformed diffuseness and voluptuous fancy”: see Josef Dünninger, “Untersuchungen zur Gøngu-Hrolfs Saga: I”, *ANF* 47 (1931), p. 309; and Margaret Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1934), p. 169. The statement by Eric Valentine Gordon that the *riddarasögur* “had a most unhappy effect on native prose, for writers

which heavily impacted the early scholarship relating to the *riddarasögur* which came to think of itself as a “Science of Errors”.²⁸¹

In spite of this, prior to the nineteenth century, numerous *riddarasögur* were edited, some of which, to this day, have not received an update. The editorial area was dominated by the work of scholars including, among others, the likes of Carl Richard Unger (1817–1897) and his editions *Saga Ðiðreks konungs af Bern* (ed. 1853) and *Karlamagnús saga (ok kappá hans)* (ed. 1860); Kölbing who translated *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* (ed. 1878), *Elis saga ok Rosamundu* (ed. 1881) and *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr* (ed. 1896) as well as publishing a compilation labelled “Riddarasögur” which included *Parcevals saga*, *Valvers þáttur*, *Ívens saga* and *Mírmans saga* in 1872; Gustaf Cederschiöld (1849–1928) with his influential work *Fornsögur Sudrlanda* (ed. 1884 including, among others, *Bevens saga* and *Flóvents saga frakkakonungs*); and finally, Oskar Klockhoff (1850–1929) with his edition of *Partalopa saga* (ed. 1877).

During this time, and beginning roughly in the 1870s, the focal interests of scholarly research regarding the *riddarasögur*, when it took place, were twofold. The first field of interest considered the chivalric sagas essentially as a cultural phenomenon, a vessel that was employed by King Hákon Hákonarson among other things to make his court and kingdom resemble those of continental Europe. An early publication working along these lines is “Islands und Norwegens Verkehr mit dem Süden vom IX. – XIII. Jahrhunderte” by Konrad Maurer (1823–1902), which highlighted the cultural and historical backgrounds of the Scandinavian, British and Continental areas and the connections that existed between them in order to account for similarities that existed in their heroic epics and selected mythological stories, noting among other things southern influences (France and the Mediterranean area).²⁸² More profound in that regard was the influential 1921 monograph *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia* by Henry Goddard Leach (1880–1970) in which Leach, like Maurer before him, focused on the trade and cultural relations that existed between medieval Britain and Scandinavia, crediting the former for bringing

straightaway abandoned the traditional sobriety of the sagas” is within the same area of perception: see Eric Valentine Gordon, *An Introduction to Old Norse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), pp. lv.

²⁸¹ See, for example, Karl Stackmann, “Mittelalterliche Texte als Aufgabe”, in William Foerste and Karl-Heinz Brock (eds), *Festschrift für Jost Trier zum 70. Geburtstag* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1964), p. 256; and Joachim Bumke, “Der Unfeste Text: Überlegungen zur Überlieferungsgeschichte und Textkritik der Höfischen Epik im 13. Jahrhundert”, in Jan-Dirk Müller (ed.), *“Aufführung” und “Schrift” in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, Germanische Symposien, Berichtsbände XVII (Stuttgart/ Weimar: Verlag J. B. Metzler, 1996), p. 125.

²⁸² Konrad Maurer, “Islands und Norwegens Verkehr mit dem Süden vom IX. – XIII. Jahrhunderte”, *ZfdPh* 2 (1870), pp. 445–68.

about the acceptance of courtly literature in the latter.²⁸³ Some 19 years later, Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1899–1984) devoted a chapter in his 1940 work *Sturlungaöld: Drög um íslenska menningu á þrettánda öld* to the question of French and Mediterranean influence, concluding that Icelanders themselves were to blame for the disappearance of the lyrical beauty that existed in the original sources of the *riddarasögur*:

Margt er merkilegt og fallett í þeim; víða er á þeim lýriskur blær [...]. En þetta hverfur í norsku þýðingunum og íslenskum uppskriftum þeirra, og að mörgu öðru leyti verða Íslendingar að kenna á meinsemi forlaganna.²⁸⁴

With this gradual awaking of a grudging interest in the *riddarasögur* as a cultural phenomenon, scholars also started applying a text-critical approach to them. Unfortunately, this approach could never entirely rid itself from the shackles of a perceived inferiority of the *riddarasögur* and the extraneousness of the *riddarasögur* in comparison to more local saga types.²⁸⁵ Kölbing, who was a leading scholar in this field of research, was the first to adopt a textual and source-historical take on the translated *riddarasögur*, as can be seen, for example, in his meticulous study of the different versions of *Tristrams saga*.²⁸⁶ Another German scholar from the same period who focused heavily on the ascribed quality of the translated *riddarasögur* was Rudolf Meissner (1862–1948). In his examination of the *Strengleikar*, he devoted a couple of pages to the quality of the Old Norse translation that appears unappealing to him, saying that:

der poetische gehalt war bei den meisten geschichten gering, nur die kunst der dichterin hat die blasse zeichnung mit farbe und leben erfüllt; alles simple und fade aber, das die verse der Marie de France uns vergessen lassen, tritt uns in den Strengleikar ganz reizlos und öde entgegen.²⁸⁷

²⁸³ Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*, pp. 151–9 and 227–36.

²⁸⁴ Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Sturlungaöld: Drög um íslenska menningu á þrettánda öld* (Reykjavík: Nokkrir Reykvíkingar, 1940), p. 44.

²⁸⁵ Glauser, “Textüberlieferung und Textbegriff”, p. 12.

²⁸⁶ *Die Nordische und Englische Version der Tristan-Sage*, I, pp. XVII–CXLVIII. This textual and source-critical approach can be seen in every one of Kölbing’s editions.

²⁸⁷ Rudolf Meissner, *Die Strengleikar: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Altnordischen Prosalitteratur* (Halle a. S.: Niemeyer, 1902), p. 294. Translation: “the poetic concentration was minor in the most stories, but the art of the poetess [that is Marie de France] has filled the faint drawing with colour and life; but everything simple and

Around the turn of the century, a new movement was making itself heard in the field of *riddarasögur* research. This notion arose in France and is reflected in various noteworthy publications, most notably those by Gaston Paris (1839–1903), who coined the term *amour courtois* (“courtly love”) for the *fin’amors* or *minne* of the French and German medieval chivalric ethos. This would become a particularly vital concept in later decades. While working on this concept of courtly love, Paris focused on the works of Chrétien de Troyes, underlining that love was perceived by writers as an art form, which followed a certain set of rules.²⁸⁸ Although this spark of interest was short-lived, its influence could still be seen when the interest in the possible connections between the Nordic sagas and French courtly literature was re-ignited in the 1950s by scholars such as Eyvind Fjeld Halvorsen (1922–2013) and Paul Aebischer (1897–1977), albeit in a dialogue that was almost exclusively focused on the Charlemagne epic dealing with the *matière de France*.²⁸⁹

Within the circle of scholars of Old Norse literature, interest was gradually beginning to increase in the themes and motifs found in the *riddarasögur*. This material was then either compared to the overall corpus of saga material in general (as had been done by, for example, Margaret Schlauch [1898–1986] and was later followed up by Einar Ól. Sveinsson), or a specific set of sagas (see for example Paul Schach [1915–1998] and Odd Nordland [1919–1999] for comparisons with the *Íslendingasögur*).²⁹⁰ During the 1950s and 60s, however,

bland that the verses of Marie de France make us forget, faces us quite charmlessly and drearily in the *Strengleikar*.”

²⁸⁸ Gaston Paris, “Études sur les romans de la Table Ronde (suite)”, *Romania* 12 (1883), pp. 518–20 and 534.

²⁸⁹ In his 1959 monograph regarding the Old Norse version of the *Chanson de Roland*, Halvorsen discusses both *Karlamagnús saga* as well as the *Roland* matter: see Eyvind Fjeld Halvorsen, *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland*, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana 19 (København: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1959). Important contributions by Paul Aebischer include the two monographs *Rolandiana Boreala: La Saga af Runzivals bardaga et ses Dérivés Scandinaves Comprés à la Chanson de Roland: Essai de Restauration du Manuscrit Français Utilisé par le Traducteur Norrois*, Publications de la Faculté des Lettres 11 (Lausanne: Université de Lausanne, 1954), and *Les Versions Norroises du “Voyage de Charlemagne en Orient”*: *Leurs sources*, Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l’Université de Liège 140 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1956). A publication by Peter Foote entitled *The Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle in Iceland: A Contribution to the Study of the Karlamagnús saga* (London: London Mediæval Studies, 1959) follows the same stream of thought.

²⁹⁰ See, for example, Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland*, pp. 12–3 and 180–87. Einar Ól. Sveinsson’s preface for Jónas Kristjánsson’s 1964 edition of *Viktors saga ok Blávus* is a noteworthy contribution regarding the investigation of motifs: see Einar Ól. Sveinsson, “*Viktors saga ok Blávus*: Sources and Characteristics”, in Jónas Kristjánsson (ed.), *Viktors saga ok Blávus* (Reykjavík: Handritastofnun Íslands, 1964), pp. CIX–CCVIII. The articles by Schach mentioned above both deal with *Tristrams saga*: see Paul

the grip of comparative disdain for the *riddarasögur* was still in evidence, the spotlight of scholarly interest still resting rigidly on other, native “genres”.²⁹¹

A shift in the focus of the research, nonetheless, began to take place between the 1960s and 1970s, as scholars started moving away from arguing about the perceived quality of the works towards considering the translated Arthurian romances as independent works in their own right. All the same, as Sif Ríkharðsdóttir and Stefka G. Eriksen state:

While [the] early critical views have more or less died out, the scholarly attitude towards the Nordic Arthurian texts as intrinsically subsidiary by virtue of their nature as *transmitted* materials has persisted.²⁹²

This period saw scholars focusing on two new, intertwined research questions. The first was a quest to uncover the translator, in other words, the sole individual that was responsible for the translation of any of the *riddarasögur*. This approach is clearly reflected in Halvorsen’s conclusion to his research into the *Roland* material, where he states that the author of the Old Norse version of the *Chanson de Roland* was “probably a priest or a monk” from Norway due to “the lack of skill in the handling of the theme [that is courtly French subjects]” as well as “[t]he numerous mistakes [...], e.g. the misunderstanding of [...] terms [which] prove that he [that is the translator] cannot have lived among the French-speaking people for any length of time.”²⁹³ Although this judgement appears rather harsh, it can be better understood if one considers Halvorsen’s perception of the task of a translator as being the art of precisely reconstructing a source text in a target language.²⁹⁴ As has been underlined in Chapter 2.1, it is important to realise that this is not how medieval scribes saw their craft. As Sif Ríkharðsdóttir has pointed out:

Schach, “Some Observations on *Tristrams saga*”, *Saga-Book* 15, pp. 102–29; and “The Style and Structure of *Tristrams saga*”, in Carl F. Bayerschmidt and Erik J. Friis (eds), *Scandinavian Studies: Essays Presented to Dr. Henry Goddard Leach on the Occasion of His Eighty-Fifth Birthday* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965), pp. 63–86. Nordland’s publication pointed to above is an article which focuses especially on a comparison of Old Norse and European literary loans in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*: see Odd Nordland, “Norrøne og Europeiske Litterære Lån i Grettis Saga”, *MM* 44 (1953), pp. 32–48.

²⁹¹ See Rossenbeck, *Die Stellung der Riddarasögur in der altnordischen Prosaliteratur*, pp. 13–4.

²⁹² Sif Ríkharðsdóttir and Stefka G. Eriksen, “État present: Arthurian Literature in the North”, *JIAS* 1 (2013), p. 8.

²⁹³ Halvorsen, *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland*, pp. 276–7.

²⁹⁴ Halvorsen argued that the Old Nordic translations were flawed and deficient, since they showed a poor understanding of the source texts: see Halvorsen, *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland*, p. 103.

The supposition that a translation, by virtue of its status as a translation (rather than an adaptation, for instance), requires a precise reconstruction of the source text in the target language negates the medieval conception of translation as well as the impact of cultural and historical context and linguistic differences in the creative process. Many of the errors Halvorsen points out in fact reflect the translator's effort of adjusting his material to his new audience.²⁹⁵

Another example that may be given here is Schach's study into the works of one of the translators whose name was preserved into modern times, namely Brother Róbert. Schach concludes his 1975 investigation titled "Some Observations on the Translations of Brother Róbert", stating that the five works closely connected to King Hákon Hákonarson (*Elís saga*, *Ívens saga*, *Mottuls saga*, the *Strengleikar* and *Tristrams saga*) all share eerily similar usages of specific adverbs, denoting a "style" which could point to them all going back to a single scribe. Schach plays with the idea that this one scribe was the aforementioned Róbert, first brother and later abbot, who is explicitly connected with two of them.²⁹⁶

The second focus of scholars in the 60s and 70s was closely connected to the former question and revolved around research into the style and vocabulary of the translated material. This approach was structuralistic at heart and involved an attempt to categorise the various sagas according to a perceived style or mode in which the translation was written. Most of this discussion was directed towards the question of which sagas would fit into the proposed classifications, and the qualities that characterised these groups.

Halvorsen, in his earlier-mentioned publication, *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland*, argued that the *riddarasögur* are comprised of three subdivisions: "Court Style", "Translator's Prose" and "Late Style".²⁹⁷ His "Court Style" includes narratives that portray "an ornate, strongly rhetorical, and usually flexible and effective style" (for example, *Tristrams saga*, *Strengleikar* and *Konungs skuggsjá*), the redactor to his mind being "by far the greatest master in this field."²⁹⁸ The next category, "Translator's Prose" features, according to Halvorsen, less usage of rhetorical devices, the language being

²⁹⁵ Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse*, p. 5.

²⁹⁶ Paul Schach, "Some Observations on the Translations of Brother Róbert", *Les Relations Littéraires Franco-Scandinaves au Moyen Âge: Actes du Colloque de Liège (avril 1972)*, Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l'Université de Liège 208 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1975), pp. 117–9 and 132–3.

²⁹⁷ Halvorsen, *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland*, p. 10. Halvorsen then goes on to describe each saga he classifies as "translated sagas" briefly: see Halvorsen, *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland*, pp. 17–24.

²⁹⁸ Halvorsen, *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland*, pp. 10–1.

closer to that of *fornaldarsögur* than that of the narratives of the “Court Style”-group. Sagas of this kind, to his mind include, for example, *Karlamagnús saga* and *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*. The “Late Style” is then seen as developing out of the “Court Style”, imitating the Latin syntax (often to an absurd degree, as Halvorsen notes).²⁹⁹ Pseudo-historical and historiographic works as well as renditions from Latin texts belong into this section (for example, *Breta sǫgur*, *Trójumanna saga* and *Clarus saga*).³⁰⁰

A different classification was proposed by Thorkil Damsgaard Olsen in his 1965 article “Den høviske litteratur”, in which he created the idea of “høvisk litteratur” (“courtly literature”) rather than *riddarasögur* as a description of the class.³⁰¹ As Damsgaard Olsen understands it, this class encompasses any literature that deals with a courtly theme or narrative, or at least externalises the “høvisk stil”. The group in question for him is fairly broad, bringing together pseudo-historical works (such as *Breta sǫgur*, *Trójumanna saga* and *Veraldar saga*); translations of Old French narratives of the *chanson de geste* type; and the works of Chrétien de Troyes, along with other Arthurian romances, as well as both *Karlamagnús saga* (in its entirety), *Piðreks saga af Bern* (henceforward *Piðreks saga*), and, interestingly, the Norwegian offshoot of *Speculum* literature known as *Konungs skuggsjá*.³⁰²

Kurt Schier, in his *Sagaliteratur* published in 1970, opted for yet another dichotomous classification, dividing the *riddarasögur* into a French and a Celtic-Romanesque group.³⁰³ According to Schier, the French group consists of translations of the *chansons de geste* (*Elís saga*, *Flóvents saga frakkakonungs*

²⁹⁹ Halvorsen, *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland*, p. 10.

³⁰⁰ Unlike Kurt Schier, Halvorsen does not grant *Piðreks saga* a category of its own: see Halvorsen, *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland*, p. 24. See also Kurt Schier, *Sagaliteratur* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1970), p. 92. For an overview of the debate regarding the various types of “styles”; which sagas should be included under which category of “style”; and the scholarly discourse concerning this: see Reidar Astås, “Lærd Stil, Høvisk Stil og Florissant Stil i Norrøn Prosa”, *MM* 78 (1987), pp. 24–38.

³⁰¹ Thorkil Damsgaard Olsen, “Den Høviske Litteratur”, in Hans Bekker-Nielsen, Thorkil Damsgaard Olsen and Ole Widding (eds), *Norrøn Fortællekunst: Kapitler af den norsk-islandske middelalderlitteraturs historie* (København: Akademisk Forlag, 1965), pp. 100–17.

³⁰² Damsgaard Olsen, “Den Høviske Literatur”, pp. 97, 100–1, 103, 110, 112 and 115–7. For further information regarding Chrétien de Troyes: see Joseph J. Duggan, *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes* (New Haven/ London: Yale University Press, 2001). See also Jens Eike Schnall, “*Nunc te, fili carissime, docebo*: Anfang und Aufbau der *Konungs skuggsjá*”, in Jens Eike Schnall and Rudolf Simek (eds), *Speculum regale: Der altnorwegische Königsspiegel (Konungs skuggsjá) in der europäischen Tradition*, SMS 5 (Wien: Fassbaender, 2000), pp. 63–89.

³⁰³ Schier, *Sagaliteratur*, p. 93.

and large parts of *Karlamagnús saga*) and the works of the *matière de France* (potentially including *Mágus saga jarls*), whilst the Celtic-Romanesque class incorporates the redactions of works of the *matière de Bretagne* (*Strengleikar* and narrations related to the Arthurian cycle); as well as the *Roman d’aventure* (*Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*, *Partalopa saga* and potentially *Clári saga*).³⁰⁴ Completely excluded from the *riddarasögur* here are the later Icelandic creations, which Schier sees as belonging rather to the class of so-called *lygisögur*,³⁰⁵ stating:

Die [...] “jüngere[n] (nichtübersetzte[n]) Riddarasögur” [...] stehen nach meiner Auffassung in so enger Verbindung zu den Märchensagas, daß sie besser mit ihnen als mit den Übersetzungen behandelt werden sollten.³⁰⁶

Other scholars, such as Peter Hallberg (1916–1995) and Foster W. Blaisdell, Jr. (1900–1976) approached the matter from a linguistic standpoint. Their purpose was to try to verify or disprove the existence of what they labelled the “Tristram–group” of Old Norse chivalric romances.³⁰⁷ This group, according to Hallberg, was comprised of *Ívens saga*, *Parcevals saga* with *Valvers þáttr*, *Mottuls saga* and the *Strengleikar*.³⁰⁸ The aim was to examine these narratives

³⁰⁴ Schier, *Sagaliteratur*, pp. 93–4.

³⁰⁵ Regarding the (modern) understanding of *lygisaga* and what the term encompasses, this thesis follows Glauser’s understanding of these sagas as being original Icelandic prose narratives which have their origins as a hybrid of *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* after 1300. The *lygisögur* introduced various linguistic and narratological stylistic innovations, such as exotic scenery, a focus on bridal-quests and happy endings as well as numerous fictive elements: see Jürg Glauser, *Isländische Märchensagas*, pp. 10–3.

³⁰⁶ Schier, *Sagaliteratur*, pp. 92–3. Translation: “The ‘younger (untranslated) *Riddarasögur*’ are, in my opinion, so closely related to the *Märchensagas* [also known as *lygisögur*], that they should rather be approached alongside them rather than with the translations.”

³⁰⁷ See Peter Hallberg, “Is there a ‘Tristram-Group’ of the *Riddarasögur*?”, *Scandinavian Studies* 47 (1975), pp. 1–17, and two other articles by Hallberg on the same matter, namely “Norröna riddarasagor: Några språkdrag”, *ANF* 86 (1971), pp. 114–38; and “Broder Robert, *Tristrams saga* och *Duggals leizla*: Anteckningar till norska översättningar”, *ANF* 88 (1973), pp. 55–71. See also Foster W. Blaisdell, Jr., “The So-Called ‘Tristram-Group’ of the *Riddarasögur*”, *Scandinavian Studies* 46 (1974), pp. 134–9. Blaisdell, Jr. had earlier advanced in the direction of a linguistic analysis of the style of *riddarasögur* in the mid-1960s: see Foster W. Blaisdell, Jr., “Some Observations on Style in the *riddarasögur*”, in Carl F. Bayerschmidt and Erik J. Friis (eds), *Scandinavian Studies: Essays Presented to Dr. Henry Goddard Leach on the Occasion of His Eighty-Fifth Birthday* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965), pp. 87–94.

³⁰⁸ Hallberg, “Is there a ‘Tristram-Group’ of the *Riddarasögur*?”, p. 2.

on the basis of linguistic features such as their style and vocabulary in order to discern whether this group of narratives could all have been composed by the aforementioned Róbert (see above), a translator closely associated with *Elís saga* and *Tristrams saga*. An attempt was also made to see whether those features could be used to establish a linguistic relationship between this group of sagas and other indigenous saga material such as *Íslendingasögur* or *fornaldarsögur*.³⁰⁹

In the 1980s, the attention shifted, once again, towards a new focus on the socio-political, historical, literary and cultural requirements that were thought to have either been in place or needed to be there in order for continental material to be translated in Norway in the thirteenth century. R. Howard Bloch's 1980 article "Wasteland and Round Table: The Historical Significance of Myths of Dearth and Plenty in Old French Romance" was a foreunner in this role. In the article, Bloch, while focusing on the legend of Percival, highlights the delicate role the romances played in an era of social change, conclusively stating that:

[...] Arthurian literature functions always to displace critically felt social issues behind the temporally distant veil of a fairylike king. [...] Arthurian romance is a future-oriented, socially determining literary form whose importance in the demographic, political, and economic shifts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries far outweighs the search for sources.³¹⁰

In 1981, Marianne E. Kalinke published her groundbreaking monograph *King Arthur, North-by-Northwest*, in which she examines the *riddarasögur* not merely as offshoots of continental French narratives, but also as creative works in and of themselves,³¹¹ considering the contextual position of the *riddarasögur* in the receiving Scandinavian culture. Perceiving Hákon Hákonarson's court as a multiculturally organised institution, Kalinke sees the aim of the *riddarasögur* as being largely one of entertainment. Concentrating on the transmission of the translations as well as the cultural context in which they were created (considering both the scribal environment and the preferences of the audiences, among other things), she clearly spearheaded a new movement in the scholarly

³⁰⁹ See Hallberg, "Is there a 'Tristram-Group' of the *Riddarasögur*?", pp. 1–2; and Blaisdell, Jr., "The So-Called 'Tristram-Group' of the *Riddarasögur*", p. 134.

³¹⁰ R. Howard Bloch, "Wasteland and Round Table: The Historical Significance of Myths of Dearth and Plenty in Old French Romance", *New Literary History* 11 (1980), p. 273.

³¹¹ Marianne E. Kalinke, *King Arthur, North-By-Northwest: The Matière de Bretagne in Old Norse-Icelandic Romances*, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana 37 (Hafniæ: C. A. Reitzel, 1981). See also, Marianne E. Kalinke, "The Foreign Language Requirement in Medieval Icelandic Romance", *MLR* 78 (1983), pp. 850–61.

research of the translated romances. It is therefore not surprising that scholarly research has made such a wide use of Kalinke's contributions (as can be seen below and throughout this thesis).

Glauser follows up Kalinke's argument in his 1985 article "Erzähler – Ritter – Zuhörer: Das Beispiel der Riddarasögur – Erzählkommunikation und Hörergemeinschaft im Mittelalterlichen Island" which is devoted to the question of whether the *riddarasögur* had no purpose but that of entertainment or whether it can be said that they actually involved a cultural and social element of education.³¹² Glauser concludes that, bearing in mind the conception of the *riddarasögur* as works that were read aloud and received by an audience, one can say that they occupied a function as a model for both the Norwegian court and the nobility.³¹³ According to Glauser, the *riddarasögur* appear not to have been consumed as popular reading material until sometime later.³¹⁴

Following on from this, in 1986, Hermann Reichert, who was researching the tangible effects of chivalry and Arthuriana, took the argument a step further. For him, the apparent lack of any palpable influence of the chivalric ethos and chivalric ideas in general in the Nordic countries, in spite of the stress on these features in the Arthurian romances, did not diminish the value of the work of translation nor the interest that people evidently had in these works. Accordingly, he states:

Contributing to this lack of personal experience in Norway was partly the poverty of even the royal court until the middle of the 13th century, obvious from the account of Hákon's coronation. Yet most of all it was probably the fact that, after Sigurðr Jórsalafari (1107–11), Scandinavian kings no longer took part in crusades to the Holy Land, and this was where the rest of European chivalry picked up the newest fashions. [...]his was the main reason for the limited contact the Scandinavians had with the Arthurian world. The crusades of the 13th century, particularly that of Friedrich II in 1228, were what had acquainted European chivalry with these amusements.³¹⁵

³¹² Jürg Glauser, "Erzähler – Ritter – Zuhörer: Das Beispiel der Riddarasögur: Erzählkommunikation und Hörergemeinschaft im Mittelalterlichen Island", in Régis Boyer (ed.), *Les Sagas de Chevaliers (Riddarasögur): Actes de la V^e Conférence Internationale sur les Sagas, Toulon, Juillet 1982*, Civilisations 10 (Toulon: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 1985), pp. 93–4.

³¹³ Glauser, "Erzähler – Ritter – Zuhörer", p. 109.

³¹⁴ Glauser, "Erzähler – Ritter – Zuhörer", p. 109.

³¹⁵ Hermann Reichert, "King Arthur's Round Table: Sociological Implications of its Literary Reception in Scandinavia", in John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth and Gerd Wolfgang Weber (eds), *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature: New Approaches to*

The quest to answer whether the requirements for the influx of continental material in Scandinavia were of a socio-political, historical, literary or cultural nature was broadened by the one key question noted earlier by Glauser (see above): were the *riddarasögur* originally intended “til skemmtunnar og gamans” as some of the works claim themselves (for example, *Mottuls saga*³¹⁶ and *Strengleikar*³¹⁷) or was there an instructional, didactic sense of mission underlying their composition that extended beyond the scope of entertainment? Feeling the urge to “explain the astounding popularity” of the *riddarasögur* in Iceland, Gerd Wolfgang Weber (1942–1998) argued that the Old Norse chivalric romances “remain primarily ‘entertaining stories’ (*skemmtiligar frásagnir*), as is shown by the large corpus of ‘originale riddarasagaer’ which appears on the literary stage from the 14th century onwards.”³¹⁸ Contrasting the *riddarasögur* to didactic literature, Weber underlines how didactic literature is allegorical, abstract and fictional whereas, to his mind, *riddarasögur* are historical (or at least set within a historical frame), some of their features such as the *amour courtois*, never being intended as something to be lived by.³¹⁹ All the same, as he points out: “ON [*sic*] adaptations incorporated the courtly romances into the mainstream of medieval narrative epic genres with a traditional set of semiotics [...]”³²⁰

A similar approach is seen in the work of Stephen A. Mitchell. While not mentioning Weber, Mitchell’s opinion regarding the scholarly debate about the possible sense of mission of the translated *riddarasögur* is that these works are “highly fabulous [and only] weakly traditional” considering their “lack of continuity in Scandinavia”.³²¹ In this sense they were unlike the “native *riddarasögur*” (that is the “original” or “indigenous” *riddarasögur*) which

Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism, The Viking Collection 3 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1986), pp. 412–3.

³¹⁶ “En þvílík sannindi sem valskan sýndi mér þá norræna<ða> ek yðr áheyrendum til gamans ok skemtanar [...]”: *Möttuls saga*, ed. Marianne E. Kalinke, in Marianne E. Kalinke (ed.), *Norse Romance*, Vol. II: *The Knights of the Round Table*, Arthurian Archives 4 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999), p. 16.

³¹⁷ The *Forræða* of the *Strengleikar* preserves the following: “þa syndizc oss at fræða verande oc viðrkomande þeim sogum er margfroðer menn gærðo um athæve þeirra sem i fyrnskunni varo ok a bokom leto rita. til ævenlægrar aminningar til skæmtanar. ok margfrædes viðr komande þioða”: *Strengleikar: An Old Norse Translation of Twenty-One Old French Lais, edited from the Manuscript Uppsala De la Gardie 4–7 – AM 666 b, 4º*, ed. Robert Cook and Mattias Tveitane, *Norrøne Tekster 3* (Oslo: Norsk Historisk Kjelteskrift-Institut, 1979), p. 4.

³¹⁸ Gerd Wolfgang Weber, “The Decadence of Feudal Myth”, in John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth and Gerd Wolfgang Weber (eds), *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature*, The Viking Collection 3 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1986), p. 432.

³¹⁹ Weber, “The Decadence of Feudal Myth”, pp. 434–6.

³²⁰ Weber, “The Decadence of Feudal Myth”, p. 437.

³²¹ Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas and Ballads*, p. 17.

Mitchell perceives as having been “highly fabulous, moderately traditional”, and which, to his mind, “[...] would include those texts with a strong sense of unreality but whose heroes and narrative patterns are neither as continuous within the Nordic context nor as reliant on folkloristic patterns as [the *fornaldarsögur*].”³²² An analogous chord was struck by Bernd Kretschmer, who, citing social differences in Norway and France at the time of King Hákon Hákonarson’s reign, echoed Kalinke’s earlier arguments in seeing the *riddarasögur* as being rather a medium for entertainment than a vehicle for education.³²³

Arguably, the 1990s saw a return to earlier points of interest in *riddarasögur* scholarship, and the consideration of the literary caste that dominated King Hákon Hákonarson’s court during the time at which some of the translated *riddarasögur* were produced as a means of fathoming their potential role in the said production of Old Norse chivalric material. Questions were now also raised with regard to the role of the audience in the transmission of the *riddarasögur* alongside that of their creators and commissioners, and whether these sagas can be seen as a geopolitical attempt by King Hákon Hákonarson to strengthen his possible claim to the British throne as Susanne Kramarz-Bein has suggested.³²⁴ This approach could be seen vividly in the Eighth International Saga Conference in Göteborg in August 1991 which was held under the title “The Audience of the Sagas”.³²⁵ Other scholarly interest focused once again on the examination of the *riddarasögur* as translations, although now the understanding of translation was one of “rewriting and interpretation rather than [of] imperfect copying.”³²⁶ The problem of “genre”

³²² Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas and Ballads*, p. 17.

³²³ Bernd Kretschmer, *Höfische und altwestnordische Erzähltradition in den Riddarasögur: Studien zur Rezeption der altfranzösischen Artusepik am Beispiel der Erex saga, Ívens saga und Parcevals saga*, Wissenschaftliche Reihe 4 (Hattingen: Verlag Dr. Brend Kretschmer, 1982), pp. 230–2.

³²⁴ Susanne Kramarz-Bein, “Höfische Unterhaltung und ideologisches Ziel: Das Beispiel der altnorwegischen *Parcevals saga*”, in Stig Toftgaard Andersen (ed.), *Die Aktualität der Saga: Festschrift für Hans Schottmann*, RGA Ergänzungsbände 21 (Berlin/ New York: de Gruyter, 1999), p. 82.

³²⁵ <http://www.sagaconference.org/SC08/SC08.html>. See, for example, the sessions by Bengt R. Jonsson, “With Ballad Poets in the Audience: A Special Kind of Reception”; Hans Kuhn, “The *rímur* Poet and his Audience”; Edith Marold, “Der Skalde und sein Publikum”; and Carlo Santini, “Leser, Zuhörer und Publikum in den *Gesta Danorum* von Saxo Grammaticus”.

³²⁶ For the citation: see Geraldine Barnes, “Scandinavian Versions of Arthurian Romance”, p. 191. Two works may be mentioned here as examples of this approach, namely Jonna Kjær, “La Réception Scandinave de la Littérature Courtoise et l’Exemple de la *Chanson de Roland/ Af Rúnzivals bardaga: Une Épopée Féodale Transformée en*

and which works should be included under the umbrella term “*riddarasögur*” nonetheless persisted, albeit to a lesser degree than in the past.³²⁷ Another profound field of scholarly interest during this period involved comparative studies in which the *riddarasögur* were placed within the broader context of continental chivalric romances and European courtly literature in general. The comparative study of isolated motifs was also re-introduced by Marianne E. Kalinke’s 1990 publication in which she investigated the *topos* of the bridal-quest.³²⁸ Matthew Driscoll, meanwhile, who looked outside the Middle Ages and studied the legacy of the indigenous *riddarasögur*, noted their popularity in post-Reformation Iceland, something which clearly continued until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the form of *rímur*.³²⁹

Recent post-millennial research into the *riddarasögur* has, for the most part, been focusing on the question of how the deconstruction and reduction of the original material and the courtly schemata that lay behind it could shed light on the construction (and genesis) of a specific saga type which appeared to be engaged in ironical, yet productive play with the said *topoi*, something that seems to have been a central feature of the *riddarasögur*?

New methods, theories and ideas regarding the genre have also been proposed, as scholars have started to research various elements and concepts that have so far been omitted from the field of research of the corpus of the *riddarasögur*. In a sense of “make do and mend”, various earlier scholarly fields are also being revisited with the application of some of the new ideas and theories hinted at above.³³⁰ Now the focal point of scholarly curiosity generally lies in precisely the feature of the *riddarasögur* that they so long have been shunned for, namely their foreign nature. Naturally, since (as noted in Chapters 2, 2.1.1 and 2.1.2), translation involves innumerable different factors, scholarly interest in this field has similarly branched off into a myriad aspects, such as cultural and social requirements behind translation, and the effects of this, the scope of ethical dilemmas and emotions, and the influence of questions relating

Roman Courtois?”, *Romania* 114 (1996), pp. 50–69; and Würth, *Der “Antikenroman”*, pp. 3–5 and 187–91.

³²⁷ See Weber, “The Decadence of Feudal Myth”, pp. 420–1 and 425–8; and Geraldine Barnes, “Parcevals saga: Riddara skuggsjá?”, *ANF* 99 (1984), pp. 49–50.

³²⁸ See Marianne E. Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland*, *Islandica* 46 (Ithaca/ London: Cornell University Press, 1990).

³²⁹ See Matthew Driscoll, *The Unwashed Children of Eve: The Production, Dissemination and Reception of Popular Literature in Post-Reformation Iceland* (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1997).

³³⁰ See, for example, Marianne E. Kalinke, *Stories Set Forth With Fair Words*, in which she focuses on the earliest stages of translation of Old French chivalric works into Old Norse, thereby revisiting numerous of the questions contemplated by earlier scholarship. For a more in-depth overview than can be provided here: see Sif Ríkharðsdóttir and Stefka G. Eriksen, “État present”, pp. 3–28.

to gender (both inter-literal and social) as well as isolated narrative motifs. In the following, attention will be given to some of these more recent fields and respective influential publications.

As has been outlined above, the historical and sociological aspects of translation moved into a focal position during this period. To give one example, Karl G. Johansson published an article in 2007 titled “Texter i Rörelse: Översättning, original textproduktion och trädning på norra Island 1150–1400” in which he investigated the social and historical conditions under which the production of texts took place in northern Iceland.³³¹ This study concludes not only that texts of different “genres” were evidently compiled into manuscripts, but also that the usage and re-usage of texts and their subsequent alternations changed with differing requirements and purposes over the centuries against the backdrop of the monastic environment in which they were crafted.³³² Similarly, in the article “The Genesis of *Strengleikar*: Scribes, Translators, and Place of Origin”, Ingvil Brügger Budal explores the various questions concerned with translation such as where works were translated, by whom, how and where the respective translator(s) attained the *savoir-faire* to craft such polished works.³³³ The *mouvance* of texts as well as medieval theories of translation such as *translatio imperii* or *translatio studii* (see Chapter 2) have also garnered substantial consideration,³³⁴ the hermeneutic aspects of translation being scrutinised in the 2014 publication *Writing and Reading in Medieval Manuscript Culture: The Translation and Transmission of the Story of Elye in Old French and Old Norse Literary Contexts* by Stefka G. Eriksen, for example. In this monograph, Eriksen investigates the possibility of different versions of one work (here *Elís saga*) having existed as well as that of a single version of a work being read differently depending on the situation and audience. As she remarks, the process of writing in the Middle Ages “involved cognitive internalization of existent material and its hermeneutic interpretation and transformation in the production of something new.”³³⁵

³³¹ Johansson, “Texter i Rörelse”, pp. 83–106.

³³² Johansson, “Texter i Rörelse”, pp. 105–6.

³³³ Ingvil Brügger Budal, “The Genesis of *Strengleikar*: Scribes, Translators, and Place of Origin”, in Martin Chase (ed.), *Eddic, Skaldic, and Beyond: Poetic Variety in Medieval Iceland and Norway*, Fordham Series in Medieval Studies (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), pp. 31–43.

³³⁴ See, for example, Sif Ríkharrðsdóttir, *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse*; and “Chronology, Anachronism and *Translatio Imperii*”, pp. 135–49; and Geraldine Barnes, “Travel and *translatio studii* in the Icelandic *riðdarasögur*”, pp. 123–39.

³³⁵ Stefka G. Eriksen, *Writing and Reading in Medieval Manuscript Culture: The Translation and Transmission of the Story of Elye in Old French and Old Norse Literary Contexts*, TCNE 25 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), p. 3.

The translation of speech, both rhetorical, verbal and narrated, has also been scrutinised by, for instance, Hanna Steinunn Þorleifsdóttir in her article “Dialogue in the Icelandic Copies of *Ívens saga*”, which concludes that the shortening process may be caused by accident as part of the transmission and translation process. It nonetheless also appears that “choices have been made at certain points with the aim of placing emphasis within the story [...which] could also be a sign of a particular fascination with the dialogue [...]”.³³⁶ Various scholars have also dedicated their time and attention to researching the transmission history of given *riddarasögur* and related material. Roger Andersson, for instance, has investigated the transmission history of *Eufemiavisor* to gain insight into the cultural concerns of fifteenth-century Sweden’s political leaders through their potential reading habits,³³⁷ while Nicola Jordan concludes her article relating to the transmission history of *Ívens saga* arguing that it is a relatively faithful transmission of its template.³³⁸ The translation from verse to prose has also been tackled, for instance, in Christopher Sanders’ contribution “*Bevens saga* and Old Norse Historical Prose” in 2008. Here, Sanders argues that the translation into prose caused *Bevens saga* to be more explanatory and less focused on humour than its Old French source material.³³⁹ Others have taken up the question of which preserved variant of a story best represents an archetype of a translated respective narrative. To give one example, one can here refer to the article “*Le Chevalier au Lion*: Un texte dénudé en traduction? Le cas d’*Ívens saga*” of 2002 by Hanna Steinunn Þorleifsdóttir in which she analyses two manuscripts of *Íven saga* (Holm perg 6 4to and AM 489 4to). For Hanna Steinunn, the comparison of the two manuscripts with the Old French template shows mainly two things: Firstly, that the initial translation was apparently more complete than those which are

³³⁶ Hanna Steinunn Þorleifsdóttir, “Dialogue in the Icelandic Copies of *Ívens saga*”, p. 176.

³³⁷ Roger Andersson, “Eufemiavisens Publikum” in Bjørn Bandlien (ed.), *Eufemia: Oslos Middelalderdronning* (Oslo: Dreyers Forlag, 2012), pp. 233–45.

³³⁸ Jordan, “Eine alte und doch immer neue Geschichte”, p. 164. See furthermore Sofia Lodén’s articles in which she argues for a successive translation sequence of the Old Norse *Ívens saga* and the Swedish *Hærra Ivan*, rather than a contemporary and contending one: see Sofia Lodén, “Rewriting *Le Chevalier au lion*: Different Stages of Literary Transmission”, in Karl G. Johansson and Else Mundal (eds), *Riddarasögur: The Translation of European Court Culture in Medieval Scandinavia*, Bibliotheca Nordica 7 (Oslo: Novus Forlag, 2014), pp. 91–106; and “*Herr Ivan*: Chivalric Values and Negotiations of Identity”, in Leah Tether and Johnny McFadyen (eds.), *Handbook of Arthurian Romance: King Arthur’s Court in Medieval European Literature* (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2017), pp. 339–53.

³³⁹ Christopher Sanders, “*Bevens saga* in the Context of Old Norse Historical Prose”, in Jennifer Fellows and Ivana Djordjević (eds), *Sir Bevis of Hampton in Literary Tradition* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), pp. 65–6.

extant; and secondly, that various omissions were seemingly made on purpose rather than lost having been lost accidentally either during or after the translation process.³⁴⁰

The aspect of (the potentially differing) ethics portrayed in the literary record of the *riddarasögur* in comparison with the Scandinavian legal system of the time and their display in the respective source material has also had its fair share of attention. For instance, in her 2014 article “Arthurian Ethics in Thirteenth-Century Old Norse Literature and Society”, Stefka G. Eriksen investigates *Elís saga* and the *Strengleikar* anthology among others with regards to the question of the relationship between literary and then contemporary legal norms.³⁴¹ Eriksen aims to answer how large the gap between the Arthurian legal code portrayed in the literature and the actual application of law was, if any. She concludes that the “Arthurian ethical dilemma of Love versus social responsibilities was only one of many ethical debates [...], emphasiz[ing] the centrality of ethical rumination in the writing, reading and interpretation of texts in thirteenth-century Norway.”³⁴² Another publication dedicated to this field of research is the monograph *Å finne den rette: Kjærlighet, individ og samfunn i norrøn middelalder* by Bjørn Bandlien published 2001 in which Bandlien explores the different incarnations of love in medieval Scandinavia, studying, for example, love in a courtly setting, the role of love in holy matrimony and the power of women in tying the knot.³⁴³ Moving in a similar direction is the dissertation *Frillor och Fruar: Politik och samlevnad på Island 1120 – 1400* by Auður Magnúsdóttir submitted in 2001 in which she studies the influence of other forms of cohabitation than the ecclesiastical accepted form of marriage

³⁴⁰ Hanna Steinunn Þorleifsdóttir, “Le *Chevalier au lion*: Un texte dénudé en Traduction? Le cas d’*Ívens saga*”, in Peter Andersen (ed.), *Pratiques de Traduction au Moyen Age: Actes du colloque de l’Université de Copenhague 25 et 26 octobre 2002/ Medieval Translation Practices: Papers from the Symposium at the University of Copenhagen 25th and 26th October 2002* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2004), pp. 27–8.

³⁴¹ See Stefka G. Eriksen, “Arthurian Ethics in Thirteenth-Century Old Norse Literature and Society”, in Karl G. Johansson and Else Mundal (eds), *Riddarasögur: The Translation of European Court Culture in Medieval Scandinavia*, Bibliotheca Nordica 7 (Oslo: Novus Forlag, 2014), p. 175.

³⁴² Eriksen, “Arthurian ethics in thirteenth-century Old Norse literature and society”, p. 198.

³⁴³ Bjørn Bandlien, *Å finne den rette: Kjærlighet, individ og samfunn i norrøn middelalder*, Den Norske Historiske Forening 5 (Oslo: Den Norske Historiske Forening, 2001).

(such as concubines and consorts) on the social and political landscape of medieval Iceland.³⁴⁴

As can be inferred from the titles given above, a closely related subject to the study of ethics is the realm of emotions, interest in which has soared within the last one and a half decades. A yield of this increased attention was the emergence of numerous influential publications both in medieval Old Nordic written sources in general and in the translated *riddarasögur* specifically. With regard to the *riddarasögur*, it is natural that the study of emotion leads back to the relationship between the *riddarasögur* and both intra-Scandinavian literatures as well as foreign and translated works (more often than not the respective source material of a saga). The main point of interest lies in the question of the degree to which emotions might have differed in divergent cultural zones and epochs were similar, or may have been altered by the act of translation. One important publication is the almost 700-page-long volume *Sagan om kärleken: Erotik, känslor och berättarkonst i norrön litteratur* brought forth by Daniel Sävborg in 2007, which concludes with the following assessment:

Beläggen visar att hövisk kärlek i Norden inte var ett isolerat fenomen som prövades tillfälligt i *riddarasögur* vid kung Håkons hov. Tvärtom var den höviska kärleken ett långvarigt mode spritt över stora delar av Norden i olika genrer och konstformer. Den norröna 1200-talspubliken förstod, uppskattade och återgav kontinentens höviska kärleksskil-dring.³⁴⁵

In her 2017 monograph *Emotion in Old Norse Literature: Translations, Voices, Contexts*, Sif Ríkharðsdóttir devotes her first chapter directly to the problem of translating emotions from the Old French chivalric romances into Old Norse and the changes that this process naturally involves. Her study shows that the expression of emotion seems to have been translated from the Old French works into Old Norse in accordance with and modelled on (or adapted to) Old Norse customs, stating that this “establish[ed] parameters of coded conduct against which readers and audiences could assess the emotive behaviour of characters and imbue them with meaning.”³⁴⁶

³⁴⁴ Auður Magnúsdóttir, *Frillor och Fruar: Politik och Samlevnad på Island 1120 – 1400*, Avhandlingar från Historiska institutionen i Göteborg 29 (Göteborg: Elanders Graphic Systems, 2001).

³⁴⁵ Daniel Sävborg, *Sagan om kärleken: Erotik, känslor och berättarkonst i norrön litteratur*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis Historia Litterarum 27 (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2007), p. 271.

³⁴⁶ See, for example, Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, *Emotion in Old Norse Literature: Translations, Voices, Contexts*, Studies in Old Norse Literature (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017), pp.

As another adjacent field of research, Gender Studies, has also begun to feature in the research of *riddarasögur*, albeit almost exclusively in connection with different aspects other than gender, most commonly social status, violence and magic. Examples of the application of Gender Studies are, for example, the 2016 article by Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir “‘How Do You Know if it is Love or Lust?’: On Gender, Status, and Violence in Old Norse Literature” in which she compares *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* with regard to the male emotions towards women, trying to establish whether a woman’s role impacted upon her social status,³⁴⁷ and F. Regina Psaki’s 2002 contribution “Women’s Counsel in the *Riddarasögur*: The Case of *Parcevals saga*” in the collective volume *Cold Counsel: Women in Old Norse Literature and Mythology* in which (using the example of *Parcevals saga*) Psaki explores how female counsel reverberated in translated Old Norse works originating in a different culture.³⁴⁸ Attention has also been paid to the role of women in the cultural background of the works in question, as with Henriette Mikkelsen Hoel’s investigation of the

25–56 and for the citation: see pp. 55–6. See also a further publication in which Sif Ríkharðsdóttir shows that the Old Norse audience had the tendency to reduce the emotional depth of Arthurian characters in comparison with their initial Old French incarnations: see especially Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, “Translating Emotion: Vocalisation and Embodiment in *Yvain* and *Ívens saga*”, in Frank Brandsma, Carlyne Larrington and Corinne Saunders (eds), *Emotions in Medieval Arthurian Literature: Body, Mind, Voice*, Arthurian Studies 83 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015), pp. 161–79; as well as other articles in the same publication. See also Frank Brandsma, “Where are the Emotions in Scandinavian Arthuriana? Or: How Cool is King Arthur of the North?”, in Björn Bandlien, Stefka G. Eriksen and Sif Ríkharðsdóttir (eds), *Arthur of the North: Histories, Emotion, and Imaginations*, *Scandinavian Studies* 87 (2015), pp. 94–106. Another noteworthy contribution regarding the study of emotion is Edel Porter and Teodoro Manrique Antón, “Flushing in Anger, Blushing in Shame: Somatic Markers in Old Norse Emotional Expressions”, *Cognitive Linguistic Studies* 2 (2015), pp. 24–49.

³⁴⁷ Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, “‘How Do You Know if it is Love or Lust?’: On Gender, Status, and Violence in Old Norse Literature”, *Interfaces* 2 (2016), pp. 189–209. See also Ingvil Brügger Budal, “A Wave of Reading Women: The Purpose and Function of the Translated French Courtly Literature in Thirteenth-Century Norway”, in Karl G. Johansson and Else Mundal (eds), *Riddarasögur: The Translation of European Court Culture in Medieval Scandinavia*, *Bibliotheca Nordica* 7 (Oslo: Novus Forlag, 2014), pp. 129–54 in which Brügger Budal reconsiders the question of whether the translated *riddarasögur* can be viewed as didactic works or entertainment especially considering the (social) role of women.

³⁴⁸ See F. Regina Psaki, “Women’s Counsel in the *Riddarasögur*: The Case of *Parcevals saga*”, in Sarah M. Anderson and Karen Swenson (eds), *Cold Counsel: Women in Old Norse Literature and Mythology: A Collection of Essays* (New York: Garland, 2002), pp. 201–24.

influence of Queen Eufemia (1317–1370) on the commission of the *Eufemiavisor*.³⁴⁹

Recently, other scholars such as Massimiliano Bampi and Jonatan Pettersson have introduced into the field of *riddarasögur* research the polysystem theory originally conceptualised by the Israeli cultural scientist Itamar Even-Zohar.³⁵⁰ If applied successfully, this theory might potentially enable further understanding of the complex interactions that existed between both literature and language, either in one isolated community (for example, in thirteenth-century Norway, considering the voice of the narrator in one particular saga) or in several interlinked communities, as well as within to grander socio-cultural systems (for instance, examining the cultural exchange that took place between the North Atlantic sphere and Continental Europe). Another theory that has gained some currency in recent years with regard to the study of the *riddarasögur*, is that relating to New Philology. Originating in the 1970s, New Philology has been combined with the study of manuscripts, focusing here on the dynamic behind Scandinavian manuscript production.³⁵¹

Investigation of subjects as wide-ranging as the fantastic, “the other” and the *matière* of monsters has also been brought to bear on the *riddarasögur*. Here, one can mention, for example, the more general article by Rudolf Simek, “Monstra Septentrionalia: Supernatural Monsters of the Far North in Medieval Lore” from 2016; Hendrik Lambertus’ monograph *Von Fremden in den originalen Riddarasögur: Zur Darstellung und Funktion des Fremden in den originalen Riddarasögur* from 2013, studying “the other” in indigenous *riddarasögur* (focusing mostly on *risar*, *jǫtnar* and *tröll*); Anna Hansen’s article from 2009 “Crossing the Borders of Fantastic Space: The Relationship between the Fantastic and the Non-Fantastic in *Valdimars Saga*” which focuses on the

³⁴⁹ Henriette Mikkelsen Hoel, “Dronning Eufemia og Eufemiavisene”, in Lars Hermanson and Auður Magnúsdóttir (eds), *Medeltidens genus: Kvinnors och mäns roller inom kultur, rätt och samhälle: Norden och Europa ca 300–1500*, Skrifter Utgivna av Medeltidskommittén 1 (Göteborg: Göteborgs Universitet, 2016), pp. 73–94.

³⁵⁰ Massimiliano Bampi, “Literary Activity and Power Struggle: Some Observations on the Medieval Icelandic Polysystem after the *Sturlungaöld*”, in Massimiliano Bampi and Marina Buzzoni (eds), *Textual Production and Status Contests in Rising and Unstable Societies, Filologie medievali e moderne 2/ Serie occidentale 2* (Venezia: Edizioni Ca’ Foscari, 2013), pp. 59–70; and Jonatan Pettersson, “*Riddarasögur* in the North Atlantic Literary Polysystem of the Thirteenth Century: The Value of a Theory” in Karl G. Johansson and Else Mundal (eds), *Riddarasögur: The Translation of European Court Culture in Medieval Scandinavia*, Bibliotheca Nordica 7 (Oslo: Novus Forlag, 2014), pp. 107–27.

³⁵¹ See, for example, the overview provided in Stefka G. Eriksen, “New Philology/ Manuscript Studies”, in Leah Tether and Johnny McFadyen (eds), *Handbook of Arthurian Romance: King Arthur’s Court in Medieval European Literature* (Berlin/ Boston: de Gruyter, 2017), pp. 199–213.

fantastic and its effects on the emotional development of the protagonist in *Valdimars saga*; or Ingvil Brügger Budal's article "A Translation of the Fantastic", which explores various fantastic elements such as shape-shifters and magical bijous in the *Strengleikar*.³⁵²

The translation of supernatural concepts in the corpus of the *riddarasögur* has, nonetheless, so far, been left unaddressed. Arguably, Terry Gunnell opened up this field of research in his article "How Elvish Are the *Álfar*?", in which he explores the broad variety of possible terms in different languages which have been used in translation processes to represent the Old Norse perception of the *álfar*, noting how the concept seems to have changed with the development of the *riddarasögur*.³⁵³ Discussion has also recently been going on about the applicability of the word "giants" as a translation for the non-gigantic *jötnar* and *vice versa* (see Chapter 3.3 above),³⁵⁴ something that also has relevance to the use of the word *jötnar* for the giants that appear in chivalric literature. It is precisely this point regarding the influence that translation can have that the present investigation will be developing.

4.1 Regarding the *termini technici riddarasaga* and *riddarasögur*

This brings us back to the questions of the reliability of the preserved Icelandic manuscripts of the translated *riddarasögur* as reflection of potential initial Norwegian translations and reworkings, their background and the influence these works had on each other. The first question will, unfortunately, never be able to be answered satisfactorily not least because of the limited number of extant Norwegian texts. An increasing number of sagas have received modernised scholarly editions in recent decades, including those of *Erex saga*,

³⁵² See, for example, Rudolf Simek, "Monstra Septentrionalia: Supernatural Monsters of the Far North in Medieval Lore", in Eleanor Rosamund Barraclough, Danielle Marie Cudmore and Stefan Donecker (eds), *Imagining the Supernatural North* (Edmonton, Alberta: Polynya Press, 2016), pp. 55–75; Hendrik Lambertus, *Von Fremden in den originalen Riddarasögur: Zur Darstellung und Funktion des Fremden in den originalen Riddarasögur*, Beiträge zur Nordischen Philologie 52 (Tübingen: Francke, 2013); Anna Hansen, "Crossing the Borders of Fantastic Space: The Relationship between the Fantastic and the Non-Fantastic in *Valdimars Saga*", *Parergon* 26 (2009), pp. 57–74; and Ingvil Brügger Budal, "A Translation of the Fantastic", in John McKinnell, David Ashurst and Donata Kick (eds), *The Fantastic in Old Norse/ Icelandic Literature: Preprint Papers of the 13th International Saga Conference, Durham and York 6th–12th August 2006*, 2 Vols (Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), I, pp. 149–58.

³⁵³ See Gunnell, "How Elvish Are the *Álfar*?".

³⁵⁴ This issue has most recently been addressed in Ingunn Ásdísardóttir, *Jötnar in War and Peace*.

Ívens saga, *Partalopa saga*, *Bevers saga* and *Parcevals saga*, in which one can find updated discussions of their background. Many of the other *riddarasögur* are, nonetheless, still in dire need of updated editions, including *Flóvents saga frakkakonungs*, *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*, *Elís saga* and *Karlamagnús saga*, all of which are still only available in editions from the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Over and above these difficulties, there are two other fundamental questions that need answering before we can go any further: First of all, the eternal question of which sagas should be counted amongst the *riddarasögur* (see further Chapter 4 on previous research), and secondly which works will be considered in the present investigation? Interestingly, the term *riddarasaga* was a term that was already being used for a particular type of saga in the Middle Ages. According to the electronic database ONP, the first recorded mention of the term appears in the cartulary of the see at Hólar dated 12th of May 1396 which lists “Riddara sogur a tueim bokum” without giving any detail as to which sagas these books might hold.³⁵⁵ Two sagas, namely *Victors saga ok Blávus* and *Mágus saga jarls* also mention the term. Whereas the fourteenth-century *Victors saga ok Blávus* simply states that King Hákon Magnússon (1270–1319) gained much joy from *riddarasögur* of which he had many translated from French and Greek,³⁵⁶ the longer version of *Mágus saga jarls (in meiri)* from around 1350 gives a more exhaustive annotation:

En þótt ófróðir kalli lygi þær sögur, sem nú segjast með lengra máli en nú hafi þeir heyrðar, þá birta þeir sína óvizku, því þat gerra spakir menn, að þeir vilja heyra þær frásagnir, sem þeim þykir kátlegar til gamans, svo sem er Þiðriks saga, Flóvents saga eða aðrar riddarasögur, þær sem nú mætti mest ýki kallast, að því síður mundu þeir vinna þau þrekvirki, sem slíkir eðr aðrir þvilíkir frægðarmenn gerðu með stórum höggum ok sterkum atreiðum, að þeir mundu nú varla hug til hafa að sjá upp á.³⁵⁷

In modern scholarship, the term appears to have first been used by Hannes Erlendsson (n. d.) and Einar Þórðarson (1818–1888) in their 1852 edition

³⁵⁵ *Islandske Originaldiplomer indtil 1450*, Vol. I: *Tekst*, ed. Stefán Karlsson, Editiones Arnarnagnæanæ Series A, 7 (København: Munksgaard, 1963), pp. 124–5.

³⁵⁶ *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson, *Riddarasögur* 2 (Reykjavík: Handritastofnun Íslands, 1964), pp. XCII–XCIII and 1. Frederic Amory has shown that the indication of Greek material being source material for the *riddarasögur* seems to be more a medieval literary trope rather than an actual reference to a possible provenance: see Frederic Amory, “Things Greek in the *Riddarasögur*”, *Speculum* 59 (1984), pp. 509–23.

³⁵⁷ *Riddarasögur*, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, 6 Vols (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagna-útgáfan, 1949–1951), II, p. 429.

entitled *Fjórar riddarasögur*, although the four sagas covered in this publication would be categorised as *lygisögur* by modern standards.³⁵⁸ However, 26 years later, Kölbing's earlier-noted 1878 edition of *Parcevals saga*, *Valvers þátr*, *Ívens saga* and *Mágus saga jarls* was also entitled *Riddarasögur*, making him the first to use this term for an edition containing sagas that by modern standards are still regarded as belonging to this category (the exception being *Mágus saga jarls* which is usually counted among the *lygisögur* by modern scholarship³⁵⁹).

All the same, other expressions continued to be used after this period. In 1893 and in an article regarding Nordic literature for the profound *Grundriss der Germanischen Philologie* by Hermann Paul (1846–1921), Eugen Mogk (1854–1939) refers to this kind of saga as “Fornsögur Suðrlanda”. Within this classification, Mogk proposed a broad group of sagas nowadays seen as *riddarasögur* (now including *Breta sögur*) alongside several other “extraneous sagas”, showing his perception that they were all a type of translation literature which had southern (that is Continental) roots.³⁶⁰

In his 1901 publication *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*, Finnur Jónsson (1858–1934) devoted roughly 20 pages to summaries of those sagas he classifies as “Romantiske sagaer og andre dermed beslægtede frembringelser.”³⁶¹ It is noteworthy that, while his list was similar to Mogk's, Finnur Jónsson now also includes *Karlamagnús saga*. He, nonetheless, also includes both *Amíkus saga ok Amilíús* and the fragmentary *Pamphilús ok Galathea*, alongside the usual suspects such as *Ívens saga* or *Bevers saga*.³⁶²

In spite of being loosely associated in earlier times with various sagas and compilations of sagas, the term *riddarasaga* does not appear to have been

³⁵⁸ See *Fjórar riddarasögur*, ed. Hannes Erlendsson and Einar Þórðarson (Reykjavík: Prentsmiðja Íslands, 1852). The sagas included in this publication are *Ajax saga frækna* (*keisarasonar*), *Sálus saga ok Nikanórs*, *Valdimars saga* and *Þorgríms saga konungs* (*ok kappa hans*).

³⁵⁹ Glauser, *Isländische Märchensagas*, p. 13. For further information regarding *Mágus saga jarls*: see the following publications by Andrew Hamer, “*Mágus saga – Riddarasaga or Fornaldarsaga?*”, *Fourth International Saga Conference, München, July 30th – August 4th, 1979* (München: Institut für nordische Philologie der Universität München, 1979), pp. 1–13; and “*Mágus saga jarls*: Invisible Spouses and Saga Relations”, in Helga Kress (ed.), *Litteratur og kjønn i Norden: Foredrag på den XX. studiekonferanse i International Association for Scandinavian Studies (IASS), arrangert av Institutt for litteraturvitenskap, Islands universitet, i Reykjavík 7. – 12. August 1994* (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 1996), pp. 59–66.

³⁶⁰ Eugen Mogk, “Nordische Literatur”, in Hermann Paul (ed.), *Grundriss der Germanischen Philologie*, 2 Vols (Strassburg: Trübner, 1893), II(1), p. 134.

³⁶¹ Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*, 3 Vols (København: Gad, 1920–1923), II(2), pp. 963–82.

³⁶² Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*, II(2), p. 975.

firmly introduced into the scholarly vocabulary until the arrival of the six-volume edition entitled *Riddarasögur* edited by Bjarni Vilhjálmson (1915–1987) which was originally published between 1949 and 1951. This collection established a definitive list which has since been largely accepted.

As should be apparent from the brief discussion above, scholars have long had different opinions regarding exactly which sagas should be considered as belonging to the *riddarasögur* and how the sagas in question should be described. Over the course of the last two centuries, many terms have been used in an attempt to aptly describe this perceived “genre”, scholars regularly using their own respective *terminus technicus* for these works ranging from Mogk’s “Fornsögur Sudrlanda” to “Fornaldar Sögur Suðrlanda”, “høvist litteratur”, “chivalric romances” and “romantiska sagor” before eventually returning to the medieval term “riddarasögur”. The present investigation will, nonetheless, use the label “translated *riddarasaga*”/ “translated *riddarasögur*” for the sagas that will be discussed to underline the focus on those *riddarasögur* that originated abroad rather than those which were written in Iceland (see Chapter 4.2). The list of the material that has been chosen for discussion here has, nonetheless, been streamlined even further to fit the theme of the study which, as noted earlier, focuses on the translation of supernatural concepts. The sagas chosen share the following features:

- they have a courtly subject matter of extra-Scandinavian origin
- they are translations, adaptations, rewritings or copies of Old French narratives, all of which come under the heading of “translation” in the understanding of the term discussed in Chapter 2
- they have an estimated date of composition in the early thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries
- they include no pseudo-historical accounts or examples of *Speculum* literature (such as *Breta sögur* or *Amicus saga ok Amilíus*)
- they include the use of supernatural concepts

This categorisation leaves us with a total of 13 sagas along with the anthology entitled *Strengleikar*, which, while it is not a saga, nonetheless has the same cultural background and involves the same translation problems:

- *Bevens saga*
- *Clarus saga*
- *Elís saga ok Rósamundu*
- *Erex saga*
- *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*

- *Flóvents saga frakkakonungs*
- *Ívens saga*
- *Karlamagnús saga (ok kappá hans)*
- *Mottuls saga*
- *Parcevals saga* (including *Valvers þátrr*)
- *Partalopa saga*
- *Strengleikar*
- *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*
- *Þiðreks saga af Bern*

In the following sub-chapter, the sagas under investigation will be introduced in a little more detail and their plots summarised in order to provide the reader with a general background to the key elements that will be focused on in the individual case studies. Each outline will provide some information about the form, general context and background of the saga, ending with a short paragraph noting the supernatural concepts of interest in each saga which will be examined in the case studies that follow.

4.2 *Dramatis sagae*

In spite of the fact that they touch on the supernatural in some way, it is clear that not all of the translated *riddarasögur* that have been investigated contain enough material and information relating to supernatural concepts to be considered in any detail in the present thesis. Those sagas that will receive little or no mention hereafter include the following narratives: *Clarus saga*, *Flóvents saga frakkakonungs*, *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr* and *Parcevals saga* as well as *Valvers þátrr*.

- *Clarus saga*, also known as *Klári saga*, is the fourteenth-century Old Norse prose version of a presumably lost Latin verse epic which, according to the saga's prologue, was brought from France to Iceland by Jón Halldórsson, Bishop of Skálholt from 1322 until his death in 1339.³⁶³ *Clarus saga*, which is supposed to be the model on which later *meykongr*-narratives were formed,³⁶⁴ does not mention any of the supernatural concepts investigated in the current thesis. The saga, although counted amongst the translated *riddarasögur*, will thus be left

³⁶³ *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*, ed. Eugen Kölbing. Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek 5 (Halle a. S.: Max Niemeyer, 1896), pp. V–VII. See also Marianne E. Kalinke, “*Clári saga*, *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, and the Evolution of Icelandic Romance”, in Karl G. Johansson and Else Mundal (eds), *Riddarasögur: The Translation of European Court Culture in Medieval Scandinavia*, Bibliotheca Nordica 7 (Oslo: Novus Forlag, 2014), pp. 274–6.

³⁶⁴ Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland*, pp. 98–107.

out. Supernatural concepts in general appear not to fit into this style of narration.

- *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr* (henceforth *Flóres saga*) is an early thirteenth-century Old Norse saga based on the narrative of the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman verse romance *Floire et Blancheflor*. The saga mentions how the pagan King Felix sells Blankiflúr, the lover of his son Flóres, into slavery fearing his son's feeling for the Christian maiden. Blankiflúr is sold to the ruler of Babilón who has her imprisoned in a harem-like enclosure, the so-called *meyjarturn*. Incorporated within the lavish description of the compound surrounding the *meyjarturn*, the saga provides the information that these are structures "er jötnar gerðu [...]", a motif not unknown in Scandinavia, as can be seen in the origin myth of Sleipnir and the master builder in the *Prose Edda*.³⁶⁵ Of the two surviving Old French versions of *Floire et Blancheflor*, only the *dite aristocratique* version features a remark to a builder in the corresponding segment. There, the singular individual is referred to as a very wise *engignier* ("craftsman, carpenter"), who is said to have built the said structures (ll. 1624 and 1636 respectively).³⁶⁶
- *Flóvents saga frakkakonungs* is a thirteenth-century translated *riðdarasaga* which was presumably composed during the latter years of King Hákon Hákonarson's reign. Despite its name, *Flóvents saga frakkakonungs* shares no similarities with the Old French *chanson de geste*, *Floovant*, but appears to borrow some features from Middle Dutch and Italian narratives.³⁶⁷ The saga exists in two redactions: 'I' and 'II'. The second redaction features a brief introduction to one of Flóvent's adversaries called earl Josez *hinn gamli*, stating that "hann hafði þa .ccc. vetra; hann var mikil æ vóxt sem risi ok sterkr [...]" and during the men's fight it is said that "Flouent sat ok suo fast j sodlinum firir þessum risa [...]."³⁶⁸ No further information can be deduced from the text over and above the already known features that *risar* ("giants"; sg. *risi*) appear to be of larger-than-normal body height and to have considerable strength. Since we do not have a potential original here, it is impossible to say exactly what meaning lies behind the term *risi*. Granted, the reference to an age of 300 years is worth noting, great age appearing to be an intrinsic feature of the mythological *jötnar*. This might be said to lend further support to the idea that the two terms were

³⁶⁵ *Flóres saga*, p. 46. With regard to the master builder episode, which is preserved in *Gylfaginning* 42: see Snorri Sturluson, *Prologue and Gylfaginning*, pp. 34–6.

³⁶⁶ *Floire et Blancheflor: Poème du XIII^e siècle publiés d'après les manuscrits avec une introduction, des notes et un glossaire*, ed. M. Édélstand du Ménil (Paris: P. Jannet, 1856), p. 66.

³⁶⁷ Otto J. Zitzelsberger, "Flóvents saga Frakkakonungs", in Phillip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf (eds), *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 202.

³⁶⁸ *Fornsögur Sudrlanda: Magus saga jarls, Konraðs saga, Bærings saga, Flovents saga, Bevers saga*, ed. Gustaf Cederschiöld (Lund: Fr. Berlings Boktryckeri och Stilgjuteri, 1884), pp. CXCIII–CCXV and 177–8.

already starting to blend in meaning in both the popular and the learned understanding.

- *Parcevals saga* (including *Valvens þátr*), is the mid-thirteenth-century Old Norse prose translation of Chrétien de Troyes' *Li Contes del Graal* which was presumably composed around 1180. The saga shortens the narrative noticeably, and, since *Li Contes del Graal* was never finished, the scribe fashioned an ending in which Parceval marries his beloved Blankiflúr. Furthermore, it seems clear that the Gauvain narrative string was extracted from the Parceval matter and crafted into its own composition labelled *Valvers þátr* (also *Valvens þátr*). In addition, the grail scene underwent expansion and modification in detail and motifs. *Parcevals saga* preserves the mention of a *tröll* in a curse. The young Parceval comes across a lady in a tent and behaves inappropriately to which the saga states that the lady "bað tröll hafa hann [...]". We cannot be certain what "tröll" was a translation of. Although *Valvers þátr*, like *Clarus saga*, does not mention any of the investigated supernatural motifs, the story itself revolves around an "accursed maiden". Judging from a French point of view and the way in which this figure is presented, one can assume that this figure might be a *fée* (see Case Study 1), although the *þátr* never refers to her as such.³⁶⁹ There is thus reason to leave this figure out of the present discussion.

In addition to the above, *Karlamagnús saga* and *Þiðreks saga af Bern* will receive little mention in the following, as not only is their source material of a blended (predominately Old French and Middle High German) nature with a presumably wide range of oral transmission behind it, but also because of the fact that they feature slightly different supernatural concepts. To give one example, here, the word *risi* is used rather than *jǫtnar* to describe larger-than-human beings.³⁷⁰ While this is in part due to the homophone translation of the

³⁶⁹ See *Parcevals saga with Valvens þátr*, ed. Kirsten Wolf and trans. Helen Maclean, in Marianne E. Kalinke (ed.), *Norse Romance*, Vol. II: *The Knights of the Round Table*, Arthurian Archives 4 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999), pp. 105 and 112–3; *Die Saga von Parceval und die Geschichte von Valver*, ed. Rudolf Simek, Wiener Arbeiten zur Germanischen Altertumskunde und Philologie 19 (Wien: Verlag Karl M. Halosar, 1982), pp. V–XI; and Pierre Gallais, *La Fée à la Fontaine et à l'Arbre: un archetypé du conte merveilleux et du récit courtois*, C.E.R.M.E.I.L. 1 (Amsterdam/ Atlanta: Rodopi, 1992), pp. 16, 69, 191 and 326.

³⁷⁰ The *þátr* ("short narrative"; pl. *þættir*) *Af Agulando konungi* contained in *Karlamagnús saga* features the heathen *risi* Ferakut that is deployed by the Saracen king Agulando in a last-ditch effort to win against Karlamagnús: see *Karlamagnús saga ok kappa hans*, pp. 277–81. In *Þiðreks saga*, *risar* are a frequent component of the narrative, serving mostly as antagonists to the respective hero in focus, as can be seen, for instance, in those sections usually labelled as *Vilkina saga* or *Ævilok Heimis ok Þiðreks konungs*, in which *risar* appear as coercions throughout such as the infamous characters of Viðolfr *mittumstangi* or Aspilian. *Velents þátr smiðs* famously features Vaði risi, the father of Valent (that is Wayland the Smith): see *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, ed.

Middle High German word *rise* used to denote these beings, it nonetheless represents a different supernatural entity to those discussed here, a concept which deserves its own investigation in the future. It is, however, worth outlining the background and contexts of these works briefly.

- Like its fellow compilations, the *Strengleikar* anthology and *Þiðreks saga*, which will be discussed below, *Karlamagnús saga* is actually a collection of various narratives rather than a single saga. The main difference is that *Karlamagnús saga* is centred around the Charlemagne cycle rather than the Arthurian cycle, drawing on various Old French sources such as the *Chanson de Roland* and other, partly unknown, *chansons de geste*.³⁷¹ Although also originating during the reign of King Hákon Hákonarson, the compilation utilises other, older translations of the subject matter.³⁷² As Unger states in his 1860 edition of the narrative, the saga is extant in two different redactions: ‘A’ is the older redaction which is only fragmentarily preserved in Norwegian manuscripts, whereas ‘B’ is only found in Icelandic manuscripts from the fourteenth century onward.³⁷³ Since the saga’s body is organised into segments and *þættir* which vary significantly in their length and sequence in the preserved manuscripts, *Karlamagnús saga* is comprised of a total of ten chapters in its synoptic version.³⁷⁴ The noteworthy parts contained in *Karlamagnús saga* are found first of all in *Af Agulando konungi* which undoubtedly constitutes the longest section of the saga. The account revolves around Karlamagnús’ famous Spanish campaign, and especially the hero Rollant’s deeds during it, and features the *risi* Ferakut. *Landrés þátr* (or *Af frú Ólif og Landrés syni hennar*) meanwhile features an encounter between Landrés and four *dvergar* during his search for his mother.³⁷⁵
- Like *Karlamagnús saga* and the *Strengleikar*, the mid-thirteenth-century *Þiðreks saga* is a compiled work. The foundation of the saga is the so-called *Dietrichepik*, which is an umbrella term for various Middle High German epics and legends centring around the life and deeds of Theoderic the Great (454–526), king of the Ostrogoths (475–

Henrik Bertelsen, 2 Vols, STUAGNL 34 (København: S. L. Møllers, 1905–1911), I, pp. 73–133.

³⁷¹ Marianne E. Kalinke and P. M. Mitchell, *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romances*, *Islandica* 44 (Ithaca/ London: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 61; and *Karlamagnús saga: The Saga of Charlemagne and his Heroes*, trans. Constance B. Hieatt, 3 Vols, *Mediaeval Sources in Translation* 13, 17 and 25 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1975–1980), I, pp. 16–21.

³⁷² Simek and Hermann Pálsson, *Lexikon der altnordischen Literatur*, p. 221.

³⁷³ *Karlamagnús saga ok kappá hans*, pp. III–XIII.

³⁷⁴ See *Karlamagnús saga ok kappá hans*, pp. XIII–XLI; and Susanne Kramarz-Bein, “*Þiðreks saga* und *Karlamagnús saga*”, in Susanne Kramarz-Bein (ed.), *Hansische Literaturbeziehungen: Das Beispiel der Þiðreks saga und verwandter Literatur*, RGA Ergänzungsbände 14 (Berlin/ New York: de Gruyter, 1996), p. 187.

³⁷⁵ *The Saga of Charlemagne and his Heroes*, I, p. 17; and II, pp. 9–32.

526) and the Visigoths (511–526) as well as ruler of Italy (493–526).³⁷⁶ As with the Icelandic *Völsunga saga* and heroic Eddic poems, this bedrock material is embroidered with other narratives regarding the lives of Attila, Sigurðr *Fáfnisbani* and Valtari (Walter of Aquitaine) as well as material concerning the downfall of the Niflungs and Wayland the Smith (here called Velent). Although similar material was known in Iceland, as the prologue of *Piðreks saga* states, the source material here is of German origin: “Þesse sagha er ein af þeim stærstum søghum er gerfuar hafa verit j þyverskri tunnghu [...]”.³⁷⁷ Scholars suspect the material to have originated in a Northern Germanic milieu, underlining the likelihood that it travelled via Hanseatic trade to Bergen where the translation process might have taken place. Nonetheless, the question of the degree of the influence of oral transmission from Germany to Norway is still debated.³⁷⁸ *Piðreks saga* survives in three main manuscripts: the Norwegian manuscript Holm perg 4 fol. (dated to c. 1275–1300) and two Icelandic manuscripts, AM 177 fol. and AM 178 fol., dated to 1690–1691 and c. 1600–1700 respectively.³⁷⁹ While *Piðreks saga* features numerous interesting larger-than-human figures in the forms of *risar* as well as an interesting version of the Wayland the Smith subject matter in the form of *Velents þátr smiðs*, these are not considered here due to the earlier mentioned uncertainties regarding their source material as well as the fact that these beings constitute a category of their own different to *jötnar*.

In the following sub-chapters, the translated *riddarasögur* investigated here will be presented in alphabetical order, beginning with *Bevens saga* and ending with *Tristrams saga*. Brief information regarding the origin of each work, its form, its potential source material and influence, and its transmission history as well as details about the main surviving manuscripts will be provided.³⁸⁰ Following this in each case will be a short description of the plot of each saga.

4.2.1 *Bevens saga*

Bevens saga, also called *Bevis saga*, is the late-thirteenth-century Old Norse saga based on the Anglo-Norman romance *Boeve de Haumtone*, which itself is dated to the last decade of the twelfth century, and only survives in Icelandic

³⁷⁶ Thomas Hodgkin, *The Barbarian Invasions of the Roman Empire*, Vol. III: *The Ostrogoths 476–535* (London: The Folio Society, 2002), pp. 405 and 426–7.

³⁷⁷ *Piðreks saga af Bern*, I, p. 1.

³⁷⁸ Kramarz-Bein, “*Piðreks saga* und *Karlamagnús saga*”, pp. 204–9.

³⁷⁹ *Piðreks saga af Bern*, I, pp. I–XVI.

³⁸⁰ Unless otherwise stated, the information regarding the various manuscripts mentioned in the following are taken from Kalinke and Mitchell, *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romances*; <https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?m>; and <https://handrit.is/>. The dating of BL Add 4859 fol. is given in accordance with <https://icelandicscribesproject.com/manuscripts/london-bl/add-4859/>.

manuscripts and fragments.³⁸¹ Although the saga features only a few low-dosed phantastic elements, it features many motifs that would become very popular in the indigenous *riddarasögur* later on. It is for this reason that many scholars believe *Bevens saga* had a profound influence on this particular brand of literature.³⁸² The popularity of the work is reflected in the fact that there is good reason to believe that *rímur* versions of the *Bevis* matter also once existed if we can trust an autograph in the Icelandic manuscript JS 98 4to dated to 1836.³⁸³ The two fragmentarily preserved *Bevusar tættir* and *Bevusar ríma* certainly show that the circulation of the *Bevis* matter extended to the Faroe Islands.³⁸⁴ As Christopher Sanders (1948–2013) has shown in his recent edition, the saga itself is preserved in 24 manuscripts, of which 18 are paper manuscripts and thus deemed secondary.³⁸⁵ The four main manuscripts are all Icelandic, each manuscript being regarded as representing its own narrative tradition.³⁸⁶

The saga tells the story of the son of an English jarl, Bevers, who, in his youth, is sold into slavery in Egypt by his malevolent stepfather Guion. He is bought by the pagan king Erminrikr who has a beautiful daughter called Josuena. Bevers serves Erminrikr and becomes a renowned warrior. Josuena then falls in love with Bevers, resulting in Bevers' incarceration by Erminrikr when he gets to know of the love affair. Bevers is set free after seven years, only to find out that Josuena has been married off to another man, King Brandamon. Furious, Bevers starts a campaign against Brandamon in order to retrieve Josuena, ultimately killing Brandamon in single combat. He regains Josuena who has managed to keep her virginity by means of a chastity belt. Bevers then undertakes various other quests in which he, among other things, kills the nameless *jötunn* brother of King Brandamon and vanquishes another *jötunn* by the name of Eskopat, who Bevers spares in exchange for his loyalty. With the aid of Eskopat, Bevers and Josuena then return to Britain where both Eskopat and Josuena are baptised and Bevers finally marries Josuena. The saga does not end there, however, and continues to describe how Josuena is abducted by Eskopat who now has turned traitor. Fortunately for Bevers, though, Eskopat is soon killed by Sabaoth, Bevers' old and trusted teacher, allowing Bevers and

³⁸¹ See *Bevens saga*, pp. xii and cxliii; and *Der Anglonormannische Boeve de Haumtone*, ed. Albert Stimming, Bibliotheca Normannica 7 (Halle: Niemeyer, 1899), pp. CII–CXXX. Regarding the dating of the *Boeve de Haumtone*: see Judith Weiss, “The Date of the Anglo-Norman *Boeve de Haumtone*”, *Medium Ævum* 55 (1986), pp. 237–41.

³⁸² Simek and Hermann Pálsson, *Lexikon der altnordischen Literatur*, p. 38.

³⁸³ *Bevens saga*, p. cxxxv.

³⁸⁴ *Bevens saga*, pp. cxxxv–cxl.

³⁸⁵ *Bevens saga*, p. xiii.

³⁸⁶ *Bevens saga*, p. xiii. For a meticulous description of each of the four main manuscripts as well as the secondary manuscripts: see *Bevens saga*, pp. xv–cxxxiv.

Josuena to be reunited for good. From here onwards, *Bever's saga* describes various campaigns undertaken by Bevers in order to reclaim his hereditary territories. The narrative ends with brief accounts of the peaceful deaths of both Bevers and Josuena.

The supernatural motifs that are of interest in *Bever's saga* are first and foremost the two *jotnar* mentioned above: the unnamed pagan brother of the Saracen king Brandamon (who himself is humanoid) and Eskopat, the late henchman of Bevers who turns traitor towards the end of the saga. Another interesting account tells of how the heathen king Jvorius plots against Bevers and instigates his servant Jupiter to steal Bevers' famous and well-bred horse Arundela. The servant is described pejoratively as a ghastly creature, with dark-toned skin and fuzzy black hair. When Jupiter approaches the stables where Arundela is held, he has no key but uses *trölldómr* in order to gain access and steal Arundela. Unfortunately, however, there is hardly anything that can be deduced from this rather short episode regarding the horse theft and brief description of Jupiter himself.³⁸⁷ (See further Case Studies 3 and 4.)

4.2.2 *Elís saga ok Rósamundu*

Elís saga is the mid-thirteenth-century Old Norse prose translation of the Old French *Chanson de geste Élie de St. Gilles*, commissioned by King Hákon Hákonarson and produced by Robert *aboti*.³⁸⁸ As with *Karlamagnús saga* and *Clarus saga*, *Elís saga* is one of the few translated works that has a source within the heroic poetry as opposed to the Arthurian cycle. That *Elís saga* enjoyed wide-spread attention and popularity can be surmised from the large amount of surviving manuscripts in which it is preserved, which total over 40. The main manuscripts are considered to be, amongst others, De la Gardie 4–7 (henceforth DG 4–7; dated to c. 1270), AM 580 4to (dated to c. 1300–1325) and Holm perg 6 4to (dated to c. 1400–1425).³⁸⁹ Later versions nonetheless expand on the ending of the saga.³⁹⁰

Elís saga follows the story of the saga's protagonist, Elís, who is the son of a Provençal king. He leaves his father's court after an argument, and shortly thereafter encounters four knights who have been taken hostage by heathens in Ungarie. Elís kills the pagan captors and frees the knights. Unfortunately, he is then taken prisoner by heathen reinforcements. From there, the heathens, under

³⁸⁷ For this particular description: see *Bever's saga*, pp. 307–9.

³⁸⁸ “en Roðbert aboti sneri, oc Hakon konungr, son Hakons konungs, lét snua þessi nærrœnu bok yðr til skemtunar”: *Elís saga ok Rosamundu*, p. 116. See also *Élie de Saint-Gilles*, pp. 22–4.

³⁸⁹ *Elís saga ok Rosamundu*, pp. VIII–XLI.

³⁹⁰ *Elís saga ok Rosamundu*, pp. 116–39.

the leadership of their king, Maskalbret, set sail and return home to Sobrieborg, taking Elís with them. There, Maskalbret intends to have Elís teach his daughter Rósamunda the “valska tunga”, that is French. As it turns out, however, Elís killed Rósamunda’s betrothed Maliprant during his rescue of the four knights. In spite of this, Rósamunda and Elís fall in love. Elís then leaves Sobrieborg in order to undertake various adventures. In the meantime, a rival king to Maskalbret, King Juben of Balldasborg, besieges Maskalbret’s castle and demands tribute as well as Rósamunda in marriage. Elís, however, manages to return in time and Rósamunda convinces him to ride against the far greater army of Juben, and Elís kills Juben in the ensuing battle. Thereafter, Elís takes Rósamunda back to France where she converts to Christianity. At this point, the earlier redactions end. The later manuscripts, nonetheless, end with the merry wedding of the two lovers.

Elís saga is of particular interest for the present investigation as the saga appears to mention *álfkonur* on various occasions and in different narrative functions. *Álfkonur* are specifically said to have sewn a mantle that is worn by Rosamunda in one scene detailing the finesse of their craft as well as the duration of the creation and information about where the garment was made. More fascinating, however, is the description of Elís’ henchman Galopin regarding the ill fate that has befallen him which was, he tells us, caused exclusively by those *álfkonur* who kidnapped him shortly after his birth. (See further Case Studies 1 and 4.)

4.2.3 *Erex saga*

Erex saga is an Old Norse reworking of a presumed Norwegian translation of Chrétien de Troyes’ work *Erec et Enide* which is dated to the later third of the twelfth century.³⁹¹ Although, again, the saga is thought to be translated in thirteenth-century Norway, *Erex saga* is only preserved in Icelandic manuscripts. The earliest surviving fragments (the first 20 lines) of *Erex saga* are preserved in Lbs 1230 III 8vo (dated to c. 1475-1500).³⁹² In its entirety, *Erex saga* is only preserved in the manuscripts AM 181 b fol. (dated to c. 1650) and

³⁹¹ See Kristian von Troyes, *Erec und Enide: Textausgabe mit Variantenauswahl, Einleitung, Erklärenden Anmerkungen und Vollständigem Glossar*, ed. Wendelin Foerster (Halle a. S.: Niemeyer, 1909), p. X; and *Les Romans de Chrétien de Troyes édités d’après la copie de Guiot (Bibl. Nat. fr. 794): Vol. I: Erec et Enide*, ed. Mario Roques, Les Classiques Français du Moyen Age 80 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1953), pp. XXVI–XXVII.

³⁹² *Erex saga*, ed. and trans. Marianne E. Kalinke, in Marianne E. Kalinke (ed.), *Norse Romance*, Vol. II: *The Knights of the Round Table*, Arthurian Archives 4 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999), pp. 219–20.

Holm papp 46 fol. (dated to 1690).³⁹³ Additionally, *Erex saga* is preserved in BL Add 4859 fol. (dated to 1693-1697) as well as in seven manuscripts and fragments dated to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³⁹⁴ The gap between the presumed date of origin and the earliest surviving manuscript is the second longest in the group of the translated *riddarasögur* after *Tristrams saga* (see Chapter 4.2.8), something which highlights the troubled transmission history of the saga.³⁹⁵ The saga has experienced various reworkings and rearrangements of its source material, as can be seen, for example, in the conflation of similar different Old French segments into one Old Norse episode, and the intentional re-organisation of the narrative's structure, as well as the utilisation of *Piðreks saga* for ideas.³⁹⁶ Furthermore, with regard to the writing style of the saga, Kalinke notes that:

Erex saga also differs markedly in style from the other translations of Arthurian narratives thought to have been produced in the thirteenth century. These are characterized by a rhythmic alliterative and often tautological language [...] very little of which is still evident in *Erex saga*. In this respect, the saga appears to mimic the laconic style prevalent in the classical Icelandic sagas.³⁹⁷

The saga tells of how the Arthurian knight called Erex is keeping Artús' wife entertained during a hunt. It is then that the queen is approached and insulted by a *dvergr* and his master, the knight Maliprant. The queen orders Erex to follow the odd pair, which he does until, in the ensuing combat, he kills Maliprant near a small village. After his victory, Erex recovers in the nearby village where he meets the daughter of an impoverished nobleman named Evida. The two fall in love and Evida is introduced at King Artús' court. However, as a result of the deep love he has for Evida, Erex forgets his chivalric duties. Evida, lamenting Erex' neglect of his office, proposes that Erex undertake various adventures in order to restore his reputation. Erex accepts this under the condition that Evida swears a vow of silence during the course of these quests. The breaking of this vow, nonetheless, saves Erex on various occasions, allowing him to be the victor of every encounter. The saga thus sees Erex and Evida free many prisoners from his rivals, and meet various kinsmen and relatives before they are finally married and crowned king and queen over the dominions of Erex' father.

³⁹³ *Erex saga*, pp. 219–20.

³⁹⁴ Simek and Hermann Pálsson, *Lexikon der altnordischen Literatur*, p. 83.

³⁹⁵ *Erex saga*, pp. 219–20.

³⁹⁶ *Erex saga*, p. 219.

³⁹⁷ *Erex saga*, p. 219.

With regard to the supernatural motifs discussed in the present investigation, *Erex saga* offers a variety of relevant themes. The two major points here are the brief encounter between Erex and two *jǫtnar* and the description of Evida's coronation mantle. The former episode describes how Erex and Evida, during their questing journey, have a chance encounter in a forest with a lady who bewails the apparent loss of her husband and 20 of his knights to two marauding *jǫtnar*. Erex then sets out and kills the two *jǫtnar*, saving and returning the husband to the woman in the process. The delination of Evida's mantle is interesting because, a little like that in *Elís saga*, it is said to have been fashioned by *álfkonur* under the earth and said to depict the four liberal arts. In addition, *Erex saga* mentions a *dvergr* that guards a city gate, controlling the entry into the city of King Effuen. However, since this figure is only mentioned in one sentence, hardly any substantial information can be deduced about him from this description alone. (See further Case Studies 2 and 3.)

4.2.4 *Ívens saga*

Ívens saga, also *Ívents saga* or *Ívents saga Artúskappa*, is a mid-thirteenth-century Old Norse translation of Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain ou Le chevalier au lion* and was commissioned – like many other translations discussed earlier and hereafter – by King Hákon Hákonarson.³⁹⁸ The work is not a verbatim copy of a French original as is apparent from the various cuts to the plot, none of which make any major adjustments to the content.³⁹⁹ *Ívens saga* survives in three primary manuscripts, namely Holm perg 6 4to, AM 489 4to (dated to c. 1450), as well as Holm papp 46 fol.⁴⁰⁰

The narrative revolves around the Arthurian knight Íven who sets out from Artús' court in order to avenge the defeat of his kinsman Kalebrant by an unknown knight. The duel in question occurred after Kalebrant apparently provoked the knight by pouring water from a well onto a stone. Íven finds the said well and summons the knight in the same fashion as his relative did. Unlike Kalebrant, however, Íven mortally wounds the knight who then flees the scene. Íven pursues the knight into his castle and becomes trapped there even though his wounded adversary perishes. He tries to hide and receives the help of the maiden Lúneta, who also arranges a meeting between Íven and her mistress (unlike its Old French source, *Ívens saga* never mentions her name, only

³⁹⁸ See *Ívens saga*, p. 35; Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvain*, pp. 7–8; and *Les Romans de Chrétien de Troyes édités d'après la copie de Guiot (Bibl. Nat. fr. 794): Vol. IV: Le Chevalier au Lion (Yvain)*, ed. Mario Roques, Les Classiques Français du Moyen Age 89 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1967), pp. XXI–XXII.

³⁹⁹ *Ívens saga*, p. 35.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ívens saga*, pp. 35–6.

presenting her as *frúin* [“the lady”]),⁴⁰¹ the wife of the knight Íven has killed. The two fall in love with each other and are betrothed. In the meantime, Artús and his fellowship have followed Íven and they are now invited to a banquet by Íven’s wife. Íven is then convinced by his fellow Arthurian knights to join them on several quests. His lady grants him leave for the period of one year and a week, after which he has to return to her, otherwise their relationship will be nullified. Needless to say, Íven fails to return within the given time and is encountered by Lúneta and informed of his failure. Driven mad by this, he casts off all his clothing and heads for the woods. He only comes to his senses again after he stumbles across a lion being attacked by a fierce dragon. He kills the dragon and saves the lion in the process. The lion then becomes Íven’s trustworthy companion, giving him his French sobriquet. After this, Íven survives various perils and adventures, eventually duelling with Valven because both knights have taken opposing positions in an inheritance dispute. After the duel, which ends in a draw, Íven is finally reunited with his still unnamed lady.

Of interest for the following investigation with regard to supernatural concepts is the episode in which Íven encounters and defeats a *jötunn* who has ravaged the landscape and captured a handful of hostages from the surrounding countryside. He is accompanied by a *dvergr* that serves the *jötunn* as a taskmaster for the captives. (See further Case Study 3.)

4.2.5 *Möttuls saga*

Möttuls saga is the title of a mid-thirteenth-century Old Norse prose redaction of the French *fabliau*, *Le lai du cort mantel* (also known as *Le Mantel mautaillié* and *Le conte du mantel*).⁴⁰² In spite of a certain faithfulness towards the narrative structure of its source material *Möttuls saga* nonetheless amplifies the narrative by means of literary devices, such as alterations, and may thus be regarded as an interpretation rather than a translation.⁴⁰³ It is preserved in a total of five manuscripts, although unfortunately, the oldest three only preserve a

⁴⁰¹ On the forms of addresses in the *riddarasögur*: see Rudolf Simek, “Die Anrede in den Riddarasögur: Anmerkungen zu einer stilistischen Komponente altnorwegischer und altisländischer höfischer Literatur”, in Otto Gschwantler, Károly Rédei and Hermann Reichert (eds), *Linguistica et Philologica: Gedenkschrift für Björn Collinder (1894–1983)*, *Philologica Germanica* 6 (Wien: Wilhelm Braumüller Universitäts-Verlagsbuch-handlung, 1984), pp. 449–59.

⁴⁰² See F.-A. Wulff, “*Le conte du Mantel*: Texte français des dernières années du XII^e siècle”, *Romania* 14 (1885), pp. 343–58; and *The Lay of Mantel*, ed. and trans. Glyn S. Burgess and Leslie C. Brook, *French Arthurian Literature* 5 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013), pp. 5–25 and 55–6.

⁴⁰³ *Möttuls saga*, p. 3.

fragmentary version of the saga.⁴⁰⁴ The manuscripts in question are AM 598 I β 4to (dated to c. 1300–1350), of which only one leaf is preserved, but forms a branch on its own; and a second branch which consists of two other fragmentary manuscripts, AM 598 I α 4to and Holm perg 6 4to (both dated to c. 1400–1425). There are, however, also two seventeenth-century paper manuscripts which contain a complete version of *Möttuls saga*, namely AM 179 fol. (dated to c. 1600–1700) and AM 181 b fol.⁴⁰⁵

The subject matter of *Möttuls saga* forms the bedrock of fifteenth-century *rímur* entitled *Skikkjurímur* which also draw on the material of *Samsons saga fagra*. The *Skikkjurímur* are preserved in three manuscripts: AM 309 4to (dated to 1498), Holm papp 15 4to (dated to c. 1650–1700), and the paper manuscript AM Acc. 22 (dated to 1690–1700).⁴⁰⁶

The narrative of *Möttuls saga* runs as follows: An unknown man arrives at Artús' court where he presents a magical mantle. The man promises the mantle, the best piece of handicraft anyone present at the court has ever beheld, as a reward to the lady whom it fits perfectly. The mantle, however, has a spell woven into its fabric by an *álfkona*, which makes it shorter or unsuitable when the respective lady has been unfaithful to her husband. Beginning with the queen, many a noble lady comes to be humiliated as the mantle does not fit anyone who tries it. Ultimately, however, the beloved of the knight Karadín eventually tries the mantle and it fits her perfectly, proving the purity of her maidenhood.

As it may be seen in the plot description of *Möttuls saga* given above, the delineation of yet another *álfkona* producing a mantle that is in the limelight of the narrative as well as the spell that is woven into it is of key interest. Albeit with slight divergences in description, it appears that this is the same mantle which is also mentioned in the indigenous *riddarasaga* *Samsons saga fagra*. (See further Case Study 1.)

4.2.6 *Partalopa saga*

The Old Norse *Partalopa saga* derives from an Old French *roman courtois* called *Partanopeu de Blois* and was being circulated in Iceland presumably prior to the fourteenth century.⁴⁰⁷ There is, however, some uncertainty as to

⁴⁰⁴ *Möttuls saga*, p. 3.

⁴⁰⁵ *Möttuls saga*, p. 3.

⁴⁰⁶ *Skikkjurímur*, ed. and trans. Matthew James Driscoll, in Kalinke (ed.), *Norse Romance*, II, pp. 269–71.

⁴⁰⁷ See *Partalopa saga*, ed. Lise Præstgaard Andersen, Editiones Arnamagnæanæ Series B, 28 (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Forlag, 1983), pp. XIII and XV; and *Le Roman de Partonopeu de Blois, édition, traduction et introduction de la rédaction A* (Paris,

whether the saga is based on the surviving version of *Partanopeu de Blois* which is estimated to date between 1170 and 1185 or rather a lost redaction of the same narrative.⁴⁰⁸ The overall narrative can be divided into two broad versions that deviate in content: the Y-class and the Z-class.⁴⁰⁹ The main distinguishing factor is the beginning of the narrative which starts either in the place of birth of the hero in France (Y-class) or in the birthplace of the heroine in Greece (Z-class).⁴¹⁰ Additionally, the Z-category gives the plot in chronological order, unlike the Y-class narrative which focuses on striking events and informs both the reader as well as the hero about the heroine's eventual fate. However, this detail has not been noted in *Partalopa saga*.⁴¹¹ *Partalopa saga* belongs to the Z-category of the narrative, although, like this, it has two differing redactions: 'A' and 'B'.⁴¹² A total of 31 manuscripts survive which contain the saga, ten of which are deemed to be of "text-critical significance" by Lise Præstgaard Andersen.⁴¹³ These manuscripts include AM 533 4to (dated to c. 1450–1500), Holm perg 7 fol. (dated to c. 1450–1475), and JS 27 fol. (dated to c. 1670), all of which belong to the 'A' redaction, while Holm papp 46 fol. is the sole manuscript showing features of the 'B' variant.⁴¹⁴ The narrative itself is a motif complex not dissimilar to the story of Cupid and Psyche. As Præstgaard Andersen writes:

A supernatural being falls in love with a mortal, visits the beloved one by night but is invisible by day. The mortal is finally persuaded by his or her relations to break the vow not to attempt to discover the

Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 2986) et de la *Continuation de récit d'après les manuscrits de Berne* (*Burgerbibliothek*, 113) et de *Tours* (*Bibliothèque municipale*, 939), ed. Olivier Collet and Pierre-Marie Joris, *Lettres gothiques 4569* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 2005), pp. 15–22. See also Kalinke, *Stories Set Forth with Fair Words*, p. 92.
⁴⁰⁸ *Partalopa saga*, p. XIII; and Simek and Hermann Pálsson, *Lexikon der altnordischen Literatur*, p. 302.

⁴⁰⁹ The Y-class consists of the surviving Old French *Partanopeus de Blois*, various Middle English versions, and a number of renditions into Italian, High and Low German as well as Dutch. The Z-category, on the other hand, is comprised of the Old Norse *Partalopa saga*, the Danish *Persenober og Konstantianobis*, a Spanish prose variant and its Catalan translation, as well as a fragment of an English redaction: see *Partalopa saga*, pp. XIII–XIV.

⁴¹⁰ *Partalopa saga*, pp. XIV–XV.

⁴¹¹ *Partalopa saga*, pp. XIII–XV.

⁴¹² *Partalopa saga*, pp. XXV–XXVII.

⁴¹³ For information regarding the other six key texts as well as further detailed information about all the core manuscripts: see *Partalopa saga*, pp. XXVI–LX. A concise survey of the secondary manuscripts is also offered by Præstgaard Nielsen: see *Partalopa saga*, pp. XC–XCV.

⁴¹⁴ *Partalopa saga*, pp. LXXXIV–LXXXIX.

identity of the supernatural partner and consequently has to undergo much suffering before at last being reunited with the beloved one.⁴¹⁵

Unlike other translated *riddarasögur* which, despite various rewritings, omissions and shortenings, remain generally faithful to their respective source material, *Partalopa saga* clearly experienced more profound alterations than appear to have been usual.⁴¹⁶ The Christian emphasis that underlies the Old French version is only apparent at the end of the saga, and Partalopi's family are shown to be more hostile towards the supernatural aspects of the figure of Marmoria than they are in the Old French source. A striking feature is that the original "fairy mistress" background of the heroine has been reworked, Marmoria being portrayed as an independent queen, or *meykongr*.⁴¹⁷ It is also worth bearing in mind that the *Partalopi* material was later worked into two sets of *rímur* (a third set is supposed, but clearly did not survive) which are dated to the late seventeenth century and the middle of the nineteenth century respectively.⁴¹⁸

The narrative tells how the father of Marmoria (Saragus, King of Constantinople [A]; Emanuel, King of Greece [B]) perishes before he is able to find her a partner in marriage; indeed, he has deemed no one as being suitable for her. However, as his successor, Marmoria takes matters into her own hands, sending messengers to each kingdom in search of the most accomplished heir. Her counsellors come to the court of Hlodver of France and his son Partalopi, who is the most outstanding man in his father's dominion. During a hunt in a nearby forest, Partalopi gets separated from his hunting party and becomes lost. Ultimately, he ends up in a miraculous castle which is full of noise and furniture, yet without any residents. As night falls, Partalopi is directed to a bed by levitating candles. In this bed, he feels the presence of another person, Marmoria. Partalopi spends a year there with Marmoria until he falls homesick. Marmoria explains to him that the king of the Bretons (Markauld [A]; Mannǫldur [B]) has attacked his father and urges him to return to France and help in the defense. In France, Partalopi vanquishes the king who, after being spared, agrees to pay tribute to him and his father and returns to Brittany. Partalopi stays with his father for a year before returning to Marmoria. However, Partalopi's uncle, a bishop, tries to interrupt their relationship by the

⁴¹⁵ *Partalopa saga*, p. XVI.

⁴¹⁶ *Partalopa saga*, pp. XXIII–XXIV; and Kalinke, *Stories Set Forth with Fair Words*, pp. 92–106.

⁴¹⁷ *Partalopa saga*, p. XXIV; and Kalinke, *Stories Set Forth with Fair Words*, pp. 92–3.

⁴¹⁸ *Partalopa saga*, pp. XCV–XCVI. See also the brief entry in Finnur Sigmundsson, *Rímnatal*, I, pp. 378–9.

means of a magical ring with which Partalopi can make Marmoria visible. Several encounters and quests are now completed by Partalopi, one striking episode involving Partalopi being abducted by the *rísi* Grimar whom he ultimately kills. The saga concludes with the marriage of Partalopi and Marmoria and Partalopi's coronation (as emperor of Constantinople [A]; or ruler of Greece and various other dominions [B]).

As has been briefly mentioned earlier, apart from the figure of Marmoria herself and the ring, another supernatural concept that is of interest here is the *rísi* Grimar. Grimar, however, is only said to be a *rísi* in the 'B' variant of the saga, while the 'A' redaction calls him either Garmur or Gramur and describes him simply as "eigi allitill"/ "ecki mi g ljíttill."⁴¹⁹ Nonetheless, the frame of the narrative is similar in both 'A' and 'B': Partalopi gets washed ashore on the island that Grimar governs. He is taken prisoner. As it turns out, Grimar wants to gain the hand of Marmoria in the upcoming tournament. Partalopi is able to make his escape with the help of Grimar's human wife. He then goes on to kill Grimar in single combat when the two are matched against one another during the said tournament. (See further Case Study 4.)

4.2.7 The *Strengleikar* Compilation

Strengleikar is a collection of 21 translations of French *lais* and, like its other counterparts, was crafted during the rule of King Hákon Hákonarson.⁴²⁰ The name derives from that of the compilation's first edition by Rudolph Keyser (1803–1864) and Unger in 1850.⁴²¹ Of the 21 translations it contains are eleven of the twelve *lais* attributed to Marie de France (the *Eliduc* not being found in any surviving Scandinavian manuscripts).⁴²² Unfortunately, however, not all of the sources for every narrative are known. The various *Strengleikar* are preserved in various manuscripts, many of which date to between the late seventeenth and late nineteenth centuries, only preserving excerpts or selected works. Although defective, the manuscripts DG 4–7 and its erstwhile part AM 666 b 4to (dated to c. 1270) represent the only extant manuscripts to contain the

⁴¹⁹ *Partalopa saga*, p. 97.

⁴²⁰ See *Strengleikar eða Lioðabók: En Samling af romantiske Fortællinger efter bretoniske Folkesange (Lais), oversat fra fransk paa norsk ved Midten af trettende Aarhundrede efter Foranstaltning af Kong Haakon Haakonssøn*, ed. Rudolf Keyser and Carl Richard Unger (Christiania: Feilberg & Landmarks Forlag, 1850), pp. X–XII; and *Strengleikar*, pp. XIV–XV.

⁴²¹ *Strengleikar eða Lioðabók*, pp. XII–XIV.

⁴²² For an estimate of the relationship between the Old French and Old Norse versions of the *lais* and *ljóðs*: see *Die Lais der Marie de France*, ed. Karl Warnke, Bibliotheca Normannica 3 (Halle a. S.: Niemeyer, 1925), pp. LXIV–LXXX. See also *Strengleikar*, pp. XVI–XXII and especially XXII–XXVIII.

Strengleikar.⁴²³ As noted above, *Strengleikar* is, of course, not a saga. Nonetheless, the compilation is relevant to be included here, because of a shared cultural background with the other sagas considered in the present study as well as involving the same translation problems.

The first poem to have relevance here is *Guiamars ljóð* which is the Old Norse take on Marie de France's *Guigemar*. This tells of Guiamar who is the son of Dridias, vasall to Odels, King of Britain, who tries to make a name for himself as a knight in France. One day on a hunting trip, he fatally wounds a snow-white hind. However, he is injured as well. With its dying breath, the hind curses Guiamar's wounds, saying he can only be cured by a woman who is willing to suffer for their love as much as Guiamar is. Guiamar traverses the forest and comes across a river with a boat on it. Prepared to die, he boards the vessel. The boat then magically steers itself to a castle previously unknown to Guiamar, where an old king is keeping his unnamed young wife imprisoned in a turret out of jealousy. She, nonetheless, has access to a garden that borders on a river. Needless to say, the boat carrying the dying Guiamar comes ashore by her garden, and the two fall in love during the time she attends to his wounds. After one and a half years, their love is, nevertheless, discovered and Guiamar is forced to leave. Before he leaves, however, he gives her a belt that only he can untie and she ties a knot into his shift that only she can loosen. Guiamar then departs and returns to his master's court where he is warmly welcomed. His lover is then incarcerated once more by her husband. After two years, however, she manages to flee her prison into the garden and onto the ship by which Guiamar came and went. The vessel then brings her to the shores of Britain where it runs aground. She is found by the local king named Meriadus who takes her into his castle, and falls madly in love with her. Successive attempted rapes are, nonetheless, prevented by the knotted belt. Later, Meriadus holds a tournament which Guiamar attends. The two lovers meet there once again and she recounts what happened to her after Guiamar was forced to leave her. Guiamar requests Meriadus to release her, which he refuses. Guiamar subsequently besieges Meriadus' castle, ultimately overcoming him and taking his dominions. The story ends with the happy marriage of Guiamar and his love.

The third poem of relevance is *Guruns ljóð*, the source of which remains unknown. This poem tells the story of Gurun, a promising youth from a good lineage in Brittany. When he comes of age, he is sent to his uncle, the King of Scotland for further education. There, he is made a *jarl* and placed over the people of Vales. As time passes, Gurun begins to love the niece of the queen but is hesitant to reveal his feelings to her. One day, when he is out hunting, Gurun is accompanied by a famous harper. He then asks the harper to tell the maiden

⁴²³ *Strengleikar eða Lioðabók*, pp. XVII–XXII; and *Strengleikar*, pp. IX–XIV.

of his love for her. The harper agrees and when entertaining the ladies at court later that day discloses Gurun's feelings for the maiden. She is flattered, yet says that she is only following the advice of a *dvergr* as her father has asked her to do. The *dvergr* then sets out to meet Gurun in order to decide on the matter. However, the *dvergr* is not convinced that Gurun is a good husband since, as the *dvergr* states, Gurun lacks all the necessary chivalric and martial capabilities, focusing on hunting and entertainment rather than on proving himself on the battlefield. Gurun, nonetheless, becomes the maiden's lover. The narrative then goes on to explain how the kingdom gets attacked. When Gurun proves himself worthy in the ensuing battle, he is severely wounded. On his sickbed, he then instructs the harper to compose a *strengleikr* with the most beautiful notes and tunes, which should be called "Gurun". When he has recuperated, Gurun goes to his beloved and performs this *strengleikr* in front of the court. His uncle is delighted, and Gurun goes on to become the best and most renowned knight of his generation.

The *Strengleikar* composition is thus fairly interesting for the present thesis as it features a broad variety of interesting supernatural concepts. As shown above, *Bisclaretz ljóð*, features a very interesting take on werewolves which deserves comparison with shape-changing in Old Norse literature which, of course, has its fair share of werewolves and other shape-changers. What sets *Bisclaretz ljóð* apart from the other accounts under discussion here is the fact that the translator has added a story of a werewolf sighting of his own,⁴²⁴ thereby giving the narration in question a touch of authenticity and credibility. Unfortunately there was too little space in this thesis for a comparison of this kind which will have to be taken up in a later article. *Guíamars ljóð*, however, has particular value because of the attribution that Guíamar's lover is as beautiful as an *álfkona*. This aspect becomes even more interesting when one takes into consideration the fact that *Gvímars saga* – the Old Norse saga translation of Marie de France's *lai Guigemar* which, despite being younger than *Guímars ljóð*, is thought to preserve a version of the narrative that is close to the original – features the same correlation.⁴²⁵ As noted above, *Guruns ljóð* presents an intriguing courtly *dvergr* who is not only acts as a counsellor to the King and his family (especially the King's daughter), but also acts as a moral figure when he judges the conjugal and martial qualities of Gurun. (See further Case Studies 1 and 2.)

⁴²⁴ *Strengleikar*, pp. 98–9.

⁴²⁵ Marianne E. Kalinke, "Gvímars saga", *Opuscula 7* (1979), pp. 106–20 (especially p. 113) and p. 134.

4.2.8 *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*

The Old Norse translation of the *Tristan* subject matter, which, according to the saga itself, was undertaken by a certain “Bróðir Robert” in 1226 and commissioned by King Hákon Hákonarson, is regarded as having been the first work to be translated during King Hákon’s reformative agenda.⁴²⁶ *Tristrams saga* is not only the oldest translated *riddarasaga*, but as noted earlier, also the one with the longest gap in the transmission history of roughly five hundred years. The oldest manuscripts that preserve *Tristrams saga* in its entirety date to the seventeenth century, although heavy fragmented versions are preserved in fifteenth-century manuscripts (see below). What is more, *Tristrams saga* survives solely in Icelandic manuscripts. As has been noted above (see Chapter 1), its source material is the *Tristan* narrative cycle which has suffered horrendously from loss: various portions (sometimes up to 20 percent) of the surviving renditions of this subject matter have been lost.⁴²⁷ It is generally understood that the source for *Tristrams saga* is Thomas d’Angleterre’s *Tristan* (roughly 1150–70), also known as *versione courtoise*.⁴²⁸ The two oldest manuscripts which feature *Tristrams saga*, albeit in a fragmentary form, are manuscript AM 567 XXII 4to (dated to c. 1450–1500) and the so-called Reeves fragment (dated to the fifteenth century).

As noted by Kalinke, for instance, it has long since been understood that *Tristrams saga* was invaluable for literary production in Iceland, serving as a reservoir of ideas for a variety of “genres”, including the *Íslendingasögur*

⁴²⁶ It is generally believed that the “Bróðir Robert” who composed *Tristrams saga* is identical to Robert *aboti* who composed *Elís saga* (see Chapter 4.2.2). The idea is that Robert ascended in ecclesiastical ranks during the time that passed from the translation of one saga to the other: see *Tristrams saga*, ed. and trans. Peter Jorgensen, in Marianne E. Kalinke (ed.), *Norse Romance*, Vol. I: *The Tristan Legend*, Arthurian Archives 3 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999), pp. 25 and 28–9.

⁴²⁷ *Tristrams saga*, pp. 25–6.

⁴²⁸ The term *version courtoise* (“courtly version”) was chosen specifically to denote the *Tristan* work by Thomas d’Angleterre in opposition to Béroul’s work. The *version courtoise*, as the title suggests, focuses more on courtly interactions and love, as well as proceedings amongst the knights and at the court: see *Le Roman de Tristan et Iseut*, trans. Joseph Bedier (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1981), pp. 12–9. It has been debated whether this might be a possible source along with another unknown source that seems to have served as a template for Béroul’s *version commune* (roughly 1170–90). The term *version commune* (“town version”) was given to Béroul’s work of the *Tristan* narrative in order to discriminate between his work and that of Thomas d’Angleterre’s similarly titled composition (see above). This expression also tries to highlight the focus of Béroul’s *Roman de Tristan* which is more on the common, non-courtly aspects (such as the fighting, for instance) of the *Tristan* matter: see *Le Roman de Tristan par Béroul et un Anonyme Poème du XII^e Siècle*, ed. Ernest Muret, SATF 49 (Paris: Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1913), pp. I–XXV; and *Tristrams saga*, pp. 25–6.

(*Laxdæla saga* and *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* in particular), ballads (*Tristrams kvæði*), folk tales (*Tristram ok Ísól bjarta*), and parodies (*Tristrams saga ok Ísoddar*).⁴²⁹

The first part of *Tristrams saga* (up to Chapter 15) is concerned with Tristram's father Kanelangres, his deeds and how he got to know Tristram's mother. Unfortunately for Tristram, however, Kanelangres is killed in a fierce battle before his birth. His mother, riddled with grief, manages to give birth to Tristram only to die shortly thereafter. Tristram is then cared for by his foster-father who, after recognising Tristram's potential as a knight, sends the boy off to distant lands so that he can hone his skills. On his way, Tristram is captured and released in an unknown country where he manages to secure the recognition of Markis, the King there. As it turns out, King Markis is Tristram's uncle. He is still paying tribute to the King of Ireland at the time of Tristram's arrival, the tribute being collected by the emissary to the Irish King, Morhold. Tristram challenges Morhold over the payment and kills him in single combat. Unfortunately, Tristram is injured by Morhold's poisoned weapon and only Queen Ísodd of Ireland possesses the knowledge to treat such wounds. Ísodd cures Tristram's wounds despite him having killed her brother. It is at the Irish court that Tristram encounters Ísodd, daughter of Ísodd and the Irish King, and a marriage between the two is suggested. However, this turns out to be a plot to obtain a reason to kill Tristram over the loss of tribute and to avenge Morhold's death. Tristram devises a plan to flee with Ísodd, but has to postpone it as a dragon is threatening the realm. It is announced that he who brings the king the head of the dragon will be rewarded with marriage to Ísodd. In spite of killing the dragon and saving the realm once again, Tristram is denied his rightful reward due to treachery, which is this time conducted by the King's steward. Ultimately, Ísodd is married off to Tristram's uncle King Markis and, after the Irish king's death, Ísodd marries Tristram. The love between Tristram and Ísodd, nonetheless, never ceases. They continue their affair in secrecy, and it grows in intensity and becomes very pure. King Markis, however, fears that his wife may well have been entertaining an affair with Tristram ever since their marriage. Finally, everyone becomes aware of the extra-marital relationship between Tristram and Ísodd and the deceptions with which they have tried to disguise it and Tristram leaves to take part in further adventures. During one quest, he is mortally wounded and tries to receive the help of Ísodd whose medical skills are needed. Tragically, Tristram expires before the aid can reach him. Lamenting over his dead body, Ísodd dies of grief.

Tristrams saga features numerous supernatural concepts that are worth investigation, the most famous of which is the courtly *dvergr* that serves as a

⁴²⁹ *Tristrams saga*, p. 25.

counsellor to King Markis, a figure who is both loyal and treacherous, devising various plots for his lord in order to unmask the adulterous relationship between Tristram and Markis' wife Ísönd. Tristram also encounters a total of three *jötnar* throughout his adventures, two of which even appear to be relatives. Finally, the saga contains an interesting iteration on the philosophical question of the origin of the *álfar*. When the two lovers are found in a cave after they have fled Markis' distrust, the saga states that the person who found them did not know whether they were heavenly or earthly creatures or *álfa kyns* ("álfar lineage"). (See further Case Studies 1, 3 and 4)

A brief recapitulation of the topics and examples discussed so far in this thesis would seem to be in order before we move on to the individual case studies that have been previously submitted for publication. The first chapter introduced the historical framework and context that lies behind the present study, outlining the overall structure of the examination. This was followed up by a comprehensive delineation of translation, the potential meanings of the term, and the relevant areas of application, also noting its inherent problems and consequences. An entire sub-chapter was devoted to discussion of translation in the Middle Ages, the underlying mindsets, the people involved in it, as well as the different forms of translation that took place. This was followed by a brief discussion of the concept of the "other" and such questions were dealt with it in the translation process. The next chapter (Chapter 3) then gave various examples of such problems, examining the application and consequences of various types of translation of concepts (ethical, cultural and supernatural) during both Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Chapter 4 contained a *Stand der Forschung* of the translated *riddarasögur* as well as a discussion of the label "translated *riddarasögur*", noting what sagas have been seen to come under this classification from the time of the earliest cataloguing until the present day, and which of these have been seen as having some relevance for the present study. Following this, each of these relevant sagas is presented, information being provided about the possible Old French narrative "templates", the number and condition of the extant manuscripts, and the potential transmission problems. This is followed by a brief outline of the narrative of each respective saga, noting those elements that have relevance for the present study which are examined in the case studies. Chapter 5, which comes next, will begin by giving an introduction to the four case studies, outlining how the different aspects and facets of (medieval) translation processes noted in Chapters 2, 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 may have impacted upon each particular case study. As will be seen, each case study is devoted to the research of one supernatural concept (*fées/ álfar* and *álfkonur, nains/ dvergjar, jaiants/ jötnar*, and magic including magic wielders), its depiction in the Old Norse saga material outlined in Chapter 4 and the Old

French narratives that lie behind these accounts, the aim being to examine the problems involved in the translation, and gauge exactly how much the supernatural Old Norse concept in question might have been influenced and altered during the process of translation, if at all. The conclusion in Chapter 6 will then briefly summarise the argumentation and results of each of these case studies before attempting to draw the various threads together, exploring the potential circumstances and longevity of the changes that took place in the process of translation (if they occurred at all), and ending with a consideration of other related themes that might be worth considering as a follow-up to the present thesis.

5 Case Studies

After having outlined the nature of medieval translations, the problems involved in the process of translation (not least the translation of concepts), and the potential influences that this can have (see Chapter 2) as well as introducing the translated *riddarasögur*, previous research relating to them and those works involving the supernatural concepts that the present project has focused on, it is now time to introduce the four case studies that make up the core of this study. As noted at the beginning of the thesis, each study focuses on one specific supernatural concept, how it was rendered into Old Norse from its Old French template and then the potential influence of the translation as it becomes part of the local tradition (literary and oral). They deal with (in the following order): the translation of *fées* as *álfar/ álfkonur* (dealt with in Case Study 1, accepted for publication in *Scripta Islandica*); the translation of *nains* as *dvergar* (Case Study 2, accepted for publication in the *European Journal for Scandinavian Studies*); the translation of *jaiants* as *jǫtnar* (Case Study 3, submitted to *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*); and the translation of various forms of “magic” and those who wield it (Case Study 4, submitted to *Medium Ævum*). In each case, an examination is given of the various concepts as they seem to have been understood at the time in the source and target cultures, noting the potential problems and consequences involved in the translation process. This is then followed by detailed examinations of the various works, both the Old French material as well as the *riddarasögur* in which such translations, redactions and reworkings can be found, noting exactly what changes seem to be introduced with regard to the Nordic concepts. Each of the respective case studies ends with considerations of the potential influences of the said translations on both the oral and literary culture of the Nordic countries, noting in particular the literary influences that can perhaps be seen in the indigenous *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* (which naturally went on to join the translated *riddarasögur* in the *kvöldvökur* gatherings, all of them providing material for the *rímur*).

Where space is available, consideration is given to many of those features noted in the previous chapters with regard to the ever-present human element involved in the translation process and overall *function* of the selected motifs (see above) and the questions of how they could go on to influence other adjacent, indigenous concepts, something that would naturally depend on the degree of foreign influence, and the understanding and perception of the audience in question.

Naturally, like all manuscript-based investigations, this project has to cope with what Kjartan G. Ottósson has labelled the “corpus problem”, that is, the

earlier-mentioned random preservation and equally random loss of text and/ or manuscripts.⁴³⁰ While the loss of manuscripts itself represents a great tragedy, the loss of text due to the deficient and fragmentary state of some of the preserved manuscripts can be equally challenging for the present investigation, as these lost segments (in either the Old French or Old Norse) may have contained supernatural concepts or their features (or variations of them), which are now unrecoverable. This naturally also applies to the archetypical material (that is the original version of any given text); indeed it must be considered highly likely that the source texts and translations, redactions and reworkings used in the present examination are themselves crafted from copies and adapted versions. These versions are, logically, as prone to influence and change like any other text (on the human element, see Chapter 2.1.1 and above), something which might apply, among other things, to the plot, the figures involved and their character traits. Closely connected to this, regarding both the Old French as well as the Old Norse material under investigation here, is the (varyingly long and interrupted) history of written transmission before the extant manuscripts came to be recorded. To recapitulate, *Tristrams saga* as well as *Erex saga*, for instance, all involve a gap of several hundred years between the supposed date of their composition and the earliest extant manuscript (or text fragment) (see Chapters 4.2.3 and 4.2.8 as well as footnote 7). This break widens even further if one considers the first manuscript to contain either of the examples mentioned above in its entirety. Just like the various other problematic aspects discussed above, this raises the challenge of exactly how “accurately” one can discuss changes taking place during the translation process or pinpoint the time of the insertion of any given motif in either originals or subsequent renditions. Was the specific supernatural concept in the narrative from the beginning, and if so, at what point in the transmission process might transformation in translation have occurred?

Another additional condition to bear in mind in this regard is that, once gain, apart from less than a handful of sagas discussed in the present study (see Chapter 4.2), almost all translated *riddarasögur* are only preserved in Icelandic manuscripts rather than in those from Norway.⁴³¹ This is, however, not

⁴³⁰ Kjartan G. Ottósson, *The Icelandic Middle Voice: The Morphological and Phonological Development* (Lund: Department of Scandinavian Languages, Lund University, 1992), pp. 28–9. In relation to this and other related questions, I am extremely grateful to Katrín Lísa van der Linde Mikaelisdóttir for giving me an early draft of her dissertation which enabled me to read up on the idea of “invariation”: see Katrín Lísa van der Linde Mikaelisdóttir, *Norwegianisms in Icelandic Manuscripts from 1350 to 1450* (Unpublished Dissertation, University of Iceland, forthcoming).

⁴³¹ The only works for which we have Norwegian manuscripts are the *Strengleikar* compilation and *Elís saga ok Rósamundu* contained in the manuscripts DG 4–7 and AM

surprising, as Keith Busby has generally remarked regarding gaps in the transmission history of manuscripts that:

[t]he chronology of manuscript production rarely corresponds to that of romance composition, and there are few extant first generation copies. This is true of medieval vernacular literature in general before the middle of the fourteenth century, when author's interests in books containing their own works and a more aggressive awareness of authorial identity begin to emerge.⁴³²

The implication of this is nonetheless that when conclusions are made about potential influences on later folk tales and legends, one has to first and foremost consider the Icelandic rather than the Norwegian material (there are similarities between the two, but naturally also many differences).⁴³³ In this regard, one must also bear in mind that the extant folklore (largely recorded in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) will not necessarily reflect the state of folk belief in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

This leads us to two other partially intertwined points that need attention, namely the fact that different narratives had varying degrees of popularity and influence and that the varying nature of the expected audiences of these stories would have had some influence on choices of wording used in translation and the degree of influence exerted by any one narrative. It is noticeable that – within the corpus of the translated *riddarasögur* studied in the present examination – *Elís saga ok Rósamundu* and *Partalopa saga* are both attested in at least 30 manuscripts and fragments (39 and 31 manuscripts and fragments respectively), while other narratives such as the *Strengleikar* compilation and *Ívens saga* are preserved in fewer than five extant manuscripts (two and three manuscripts respectively).⁴³⁴ While this by no means necessarily reflects the actual number of manuscripts containing these works that were circulating in

666 b 4to and *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr* preserved in NRA 65. *Ívens saga* is interesting inasmuch as while there is no extant Norwegian manuscript, yet there is intertextual evidence indicating the existence of such manuscripts.

⁴³² Keith Busby, “The Manuscript Context of Arthurian Romance”, in Leah Tether and Johnny McFadyen (eds), *Handbook of Arthurian Romance: King Arthur's Court in Medieval European Literature* (Berlin/ Boston: de Gruyter, 2017), pp. 97–8.

⁴³³ See, for example: Reimund Kvideland and Henning K. Sehmsdorf, *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legend*, The Nordic Series 15 (Minneapolis/ London: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), pp. 8–12.

⁴³⁴ Here, each manuscript is counted as a single entity, disregarding their potential fragmentary state and the amount of text they subsequently provide for each saga in question. Regarding the number of manuscripts: see *Elís saga ok Rósamundu*, pp. VII–XXI; and *Partalopa saga*, p. XXVI; as well as *Strengleikar*, p. IX–XI; and furthermore *Ívens saga*, p. 35.

the Middle Ages, it may nonetheless underline the fact that some narratives may have had more influence with regard to the supernatural concepts or specific aspects attached to them than others.

With regard to the influence of audiences, while in most cases a respective author, translator or copyist will have been responsible for those changes or choices that take place with regard to wording (see Chapters 2, 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 above), one cannot ignore the possibility (indeed probability) that texts are likely to have been shaped by these individuals in accordance to audience's wishes, needs and levels of understanding, something that will have applied to all levels in a saga's transmission history (and many extant versions of texts are comparatively recent). To give just one example, one can mention the earlier-noted figure of Garmur who, in an early redaction of *Partalopa saga* is said to have been "einn madvr eigi allitill" ("a man not so small"), but later becomes a *rísi* in a later manuscript tradition (see Chapter 6 below). This change in the nomenclature of Garmur may well indicate the rise of the popularity of the giant-figure among audiences and a subsequent heightened demand for it being featured in narratives.

Not limiting himself to medieval French texts but certainly focusing on them, Taylor remarks that "medieval readers, and translator-rewriters, were not uncritical: not all rewritings, of predecessors in general and writers of romance in particular, were admired" and that "the rewriters claim, not without reason, to be extending the expressive relevance of their originals."⁴³⁵ This, logically, suggests that the intrusions on the narrative that potentially occurred with regard to the Old Norse texts will also have affected their Old French source material. In short, both would have been affected by the changing worlds, worldviews and understandings that surrounded their genesis. Hence the need for some careful considerations of the meanings of the Old French and Old Norse concepts in the various case studies that follow.

To summarise the above, it is clear that the present study (including the case studies in the case studies presented below) cannot identify certainties with regard to the nature of translation (in all its aspects), only raise suggestions and draw conclusions based on the limited extant evidence, the nature of medieval translation, and the culture and changing worldviews of the respective societies. It is nonetheless my hope that the present investigation will give some intimation of the potential influences of various kinds that the translated *riddarasögur* had on the understanding of Old Norse supernatural concepts in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. These influences evidently continued to affect the perception of the concepts in question up until the first recordings of folk legends made in Scandinavia in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries as the various *riddarasögur* continued to be read aloud and be rerecorded and took new shape in the form of *rímur*.

⁴³⁵ Taylor, "Rewriting: Translation, Continuation and Adaptation", pp. 169 and 177.

Case Study 1

Of Magical Beings and Where to Find Them: On the Concept of *álfar* in the translated *riddarasögur*

FELIX LUMMER

1. Introduction

The process of translation attempts to enable the understanding of foreign concepts and ideas, something which naturally involves the use of both words and concepts that are already extant in the receiving culture. This naturally involves linguistic problems, but more interestingly often results in the overlapping, alteration and merging of concepts, something that can have long-term consequences on language and cultural understanding. This article aims to explore how the Old Norse mythological concept of the *álfar* in the Nordic countries (especially Iceland due to its preserved manuscripts) may have been altered through the influence of the translation of Old French romances into Norwegian and Icelandic during the Middle Ages. As will be shown below, the mythological concept that lies behind the introduction and use of the female variant of *álfar* (sg. *álf*) known as *álfkonur* (sg. *álfkona*) in Old Norse literature (and culture) appears to have been that of the Old French *fée* (pl. *fées*). Indeed, prior to the translation of foreign (especially Continental) works, some of which appear to have been initiated by the Norwegian King Hákon Hákonarson (1204–1263) in the early thirteenth century, the *álfkona* (and motifs associated with her) seem to have been mostly absent in Old Norse literature and folk belief (one minor exception is, for example, *Fáfnismál* st. 13).¹

The present investigation will thus consider those instances in which Old Norse *álfkonur* appear in the corpus of the translated *riddarasögur*, exploring the concepts that lie behind them in the respective source material, and noting similarities as well as discrepancies in the said

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all information regarding Eddic poetry, such as the number of stanzas cited are taken from the two-volume edition titled *Eddukvæði* by Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason published in 2014.

concepts. In so doing, various questions will be posed, such as: What caused the need to introduce the new concept of *álfkönur* when other supernatural female beings (*normir* and *dísir*, for instance) already existed in Old Norse, especially if the various attributes of the Old French *fées* seem to have warranted a translation using either *dís* or *norm*? How much potential background was there for the development of the concept of the *álfkona* in local folklore and popular beliefs in the Nordic countries in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries? Last but not least, the article will consider how far reaching the influence of translators and their attempts to adapt foreign material to fit local beliefs was and what influence it had on the nature of the translated stories. This last question is of particular interest as it appears that in most cases the respective Old Norse translators seem to have regularly transformed, altered and adapted their material to fit the worldviews of their new Nordic audiences, either on the basis of demands by the commissioner of the translation or because of their personal urge to do so (possibly simply in order to enable or further understanding by the designated audience or because they themselves misunderstood the original concepts).

It needs to be borne in mind that supernatural concepts, especially those of the *fées* and *álfar*, cannot be regarded as having been steady concepts. As will be demonstrated below, they changed over the course of various centuries and of course varied by area. The question of how such conceptual translations resonated in the receiving society at any given time thus naturally presents several problems. These evidently include various conundrums regarding how the sources were understood at the time of translation, the time span involved in the process of writing and translating, and the taxonomy of the supernatural concepts investigated. The sources and the concepts used in them pose similar difficulties, one being that the act of tracing developments in two different cultures over the course of at least two centuries on the basis of translated works can only use extant material which has been randomly preserved, meaning that the available evidence has been conserved by chance. In other words, while the picture one might reach on the basis of comparing the extant Old French and Old Norse literary *corpora* to examine the translation of *fées* to *álfkönur* may be tangible, it is bound to be somewhat speculative. It is also evident that the multi-faceted

supernatural concepts involved seem to have been undergoing change between the late 12th and 14th centuries, in both France and in Scandinavia. Because of the difficulty in finding any term in modern English that encompasses the meaning of the original terms,² in the following, the concepts involved will be addressed using the indigenous expressions for the said concepts, that is *fée* (sg.) or *fées* (pl.) for the Old French texts and *álfr* (sg.), *álfar* (pl.) as well as *álfkona* (sg.) and *álfkonur* (pl.) for the concept referred to in the Old Norse works. With regard to the overall shared concept involved (in other words an overarching term for the general class of being represented by “*fées* and *álfar* / *álfkonur*”), the English lexeme “fairy-folk” (in quotation marks) will be used here flavorlessly, void of the modern connotations attached to it in the longer, more general introductory and concluding sections. While being another unsatisfactory translation, it nonetheless avoids unnecessary repetition of all of the original terms in each case. Indigenous words and phrases will be given in italicised form to enable them to portray their initial, unspoiled meaning, English translations being provided in brackets.

Before the investigation can be commenced, the etymology of the two main Old Norse and French terms for “fairy-folk” must be addressed, explaining in part how and why certain key characteristics are frequently associated with each of them. The root of the Old Norse *álfr*, Anglo-Saxon *ælf* and Middle High German *alp*, appears to be the Indo-European root **albho-* meaning “white” (Pokorny 1959: 30).³ This stem has cognates in various languages, for example, the Greek *ἀλφός* (‘white rash’), the Latin *albus* (‘white’), the Cymric *elfydd* (‘earth, world’) as well as the Old High German *albiz* (also *elbiz*), the Anglo-Saxon *aelbitu* (or *ielfetu*) and the Old Norse *elptr*, all of which mean ‘swan’ (Pokorny 1959: 30). Interestingly, Julius Pokorny suggested the terms *álfr*, *ælf* and *alp* may initially have denoted “whitish mist shapes” (1959: 30). Whatever the case, clear connections exist with the word ‘white’ – and therefore a suggestion of brightness and / or fairness – an attribute that

² Terry Gunnell has shown that the word *álfr* has had different meanings attached to it throughout the ages (2007: 111–130).

³ Jan de Vries has suggested otherwise, namely that the word may derive from the Sanskrit *ऋभु* (‘*ṛbhu*’) denoting divine and very skilled artisans (de Vries 1956: 257, n. 2). With regards to *ælf*, see, for example, Peters 1963: 250–257.

will prove to be fairly common to both the *álfar*, the *ælf*e and the *fées*, as will be shown in the following.

As Claude Lecouteux has highlighted, the masculine term *elf* (pl. *elfes*) has only existed in the French language since the nineteenth century arising as a loan word from German (Lecouteux 1988: 121–122). The original French term for supernatural (albeit usually female) figures of the “fairy” kind was *fée* (pl. *fées*). The supposed etymology for the word *fée* is more nebulous than that for the Old Norse *álf*r. The first two proposed origins interpret the word as being a derivate of other words or forms. The first idea is that it derives either from the Persian word پری (sg. *pari*, pl. پارِی *pariān*; known in Turkish as *peri*), which refers to winged spirits that are well-known for their beauty, or from the second syllable *-pha* of the Latin *nympha*, a word that ultimately derives from the Ancient Greek word *νύμφη* (*nymphē*; ‘bride, nymph’) (Williams 1991: 462). The other suggestion is that it derived from other words with similar semantic fields, denoting similar concepts, such as the Old English *fægen* (‘joyful, glad’) or the Latin *fatuus* (‘silly, foolish’) (Williams 1991: 462). The most accepted proposal is that the origin of the word *fée* lies in the Latin *fatum* (‘things said’), neut. pl. *fata* (Williams 1991: 462; Simek 2001: 225–226). This word *fatum* was apparently misunderstood (or reimagined) by some in the Early Middle Ages, the sg. fem. being used for ‘fate, female goddess’, and later, the *matronae* (figures of Roman mythology potentially equivalent to the Old Norse *dísir*) (Briggs 1969: 174 and 1978: 37; Williams 1991: 462; Simek 2011a: 220–223). It is this latter etymology which has led Williams to argue that the initial meaning of the word *fairy* was ‘fatedness’ (since he understood the *matronae* to be goddesses of destiny) (Williams 1991: 472).

The following two sections will consider the medieval perceptions of *fées* and *álfar* as well as that of the culturally connected Anglo-Saxon *ælf*e, examining both their shared features and the unique attributes each of these supernatural concepts were seen as having (at different times) in their respective cultures. Following this, the article will go on to consider the problems involved in translating the Old French *fée* with the Old Norse *álfkona*, considering the use of these terms in the written evidence, that is in both the translated *riddarasögur* and the respective French source material.

1.1 *Fées*

Prior to the emergence of *fée*-like creatures in the written material, it is evident that various other concepts appear to have been circulating in medieval France, some of which bled into, shaped and / or gave rise to the later perception of the *fées*. France naturally had its fair share of pre-Christian mother goddesses and various other local beliefs in supernatural beings that had over time been imbued or transformed by Christianity (Saintyves 1936: 163–170; Walter 1992: 12–16). Indeed, the history of France in the Middle Ages shows many different cultures bringing their culture and (folk) beliefs into the country, making it a fertile breeding ground for a rich inventory of folklore and folk material. In the beginning of the sixth century, various tribes, such as the Franks, Burgundians and Vandals, had ventured into French territories, and these had been followed by Viking raids from the last decade of the eighth century onwards, which concluded with the appointment of Rollo I as Duke of Normandy in 911 (Ferro 2001: 37–40 and 56). All of these naturally introduced a range of new cultural concepts. Additional Muslim influences, propelled by the early Muslim conquests instigated by the prophet Muhammad in the seventh century, became tangible in France in the decade from 720 to 732 (Ferro 2001: 51–52). It was against this tumultuous historical background that the medieval French folk beliefs were taking final shape from the eleventh century onwards.

From the period of the fifth century onward, it is evident that Latin works such as *Etymologiae* by Isidore of Seville (c. 560–636) and *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* by Martianus Capella (active in the fifth century) use words like *fata*, *nympha* or *dryades* to denote various supernatural beings of the “fairy” kind known in southern Europe.⁴ In

⁴ Isidore of Seville, for example, states in Book 8 *De Ecclesia et Sectis* of his *Etymologiae*: “Nymphas deas aquarum putant, dictas a nubibus. ... Ipsas autem dicunt et Musas quas et nymphas, nec immerito. Nam atque motus musicen efficit. Nympharum apud gentiles varia sunt vocabula. Nymphas quippe montium Oreades dicunt, silvarum Dryades, fontium Hamadryades, camporum Naides, maris Nereides” (Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum Sive Originum Libri XX 1911: 8.96–97) (“They believe *nymphae* to be the goddesses of the waters, so called after the clouds. ... Moreover, they also call *musae* [those] which are *nymphae*, not undeserved. For, also, [their] motion produces music. Among the pagans exist various names for the *nymphae*; since they call *nymphae* of the mountains *oreades*, of the forests *dryades*, of the springs *hamadryades*, of the plains *naides*, of the sea *nereides*.” [Unless otherwise stated, all

scholarship, such figures are described as *fées marraines* (‘Godmother *fées*’) to highlight their origin and to differentiate this type of *fées* from another incarnation, namely that of the *fées amantes* (‘lover *fées*’) encountered in later vernacular literature (see below) (Harf-Lancner 1984: 27–34 and 2003: 25–43).⁵ As with the *álfar* and *ælfe* respectively (see below), it seems clear that the *fées* and their predecessors experienced demonization under the Christian faith, something that can be seen in, for example, *Sermon XV* of the collection of sermons entitled *Super Apocalypsim* by Geoffrey of Clairvaux (also of Auxerre; c. 1115/1120–after 1188) (see sections 1.2 and 1.3 below) (Goffredo di Auxerre 1970: 185; Lecouteux 1992: 83; Harf-Lancner 1984: 411–416 and 420–431 and 2003: 175–180, 205–210 and 214–218). While this had an influence on their presentation – as can be seen in the narratives related to the *Chevalier au cygne* cycle or the ambivalent development of the figure of Morgan le Fay, for instance – this did not seem to impede the popularity of the *fées* in popular tradition (Harf-Lancner 1984: 184–196 and 390–409 and 2003: 59–65 and 175–203). Indeed, over time, a different image of the *fée* started emerging in the literature of the aspiring social cast of the knights which drew heavily on earlier popular folk motifs and traditions. As Harf-Lancner has argued, it appears to have been this advent of *aventure*-literature in the twelfth century (represented by, for example, the *lais* of Marie de France and the *chansons de geste*; see below) that gave rise to the *fées amantes* as literary entities (Harf-Lancner 1984: 34–42 and 2003: 47–65). It is worth dwelling on these figures a little longer, for they are the most prominent “type” of *fées* encountered in the literature considered for this article.

As has been discussed above, medieval France was a cultural melting

translations in this article are those of the author]). In Book 2 §167 of his work *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, Martianus Capella (fl. c. 410–420) conjures the following image of all kinds of beings living in nature: “... qui habitant silvas nemora ... lacus fontes ac fluuios appellanturque Panes Fauni Fones Satyri Siluani Nymphae Fatui Fatuaque uel Fantuae uel etiam Fanae a quibus fana dicta quod soleant diuinare”(Martianus Capella 1866: 45) [“... which [i.e. the earth] they inhabit forests, woods, ..., lakes, springs and rivers and they were addressed as Pans, Faunuses, *Fones*, *Satyri*, *Silvani*, *Nymphae*, *Fatui*, *Fatua* and even *Fantuae* and also *Fanae* after which temples [lat. sg. *fanum*, pl. *fana*] are named because they would be used to divine”].

⁵ As late as 1881, Paul Sébillot recounts a story collected in Le Gouray, Brittany, that a group of *fées* called Margots give presents to newly born infants of nobility and predict their future (Sébillot 1882: 110–111).

pot in which Roman, Christian, Muslim and pagan cultures had contributed to a broad variety of different folk beliefs and traditions. In his work *La Fée à la Fontaine et à l'Arbre* (1992), Pierre Gallais has proposed the idea of an essentially literary archetype for the *fées amantes*. Gallais argues that this trope consists of a specific set of motifs, namely the idea of a solitary, supernatural woman (the *fée*) being encountered by the hero of the narrative by a beautiful fountain or a lone tree (a *locus amoenus*) something which always has consequences (1992: 331; Sébillot 1905: 190–191 and 195–199). He argues that this initial concept of the *fée* and her connection to woodland is the embodiment of a re-invented and perception of nature re-imagined under a Platonian *Demiurg* and made prominent by the troubadours and the *pastourelle* in the twelfth century, an image which was then seized on and developed by other writers in the thirteenth century who gave the *fée* the shape of the mother of all beauty (Gallais 1992: 326–330).⁶ As Gallais notes:

Pour les romancier “symbolistes” du XIIe siècle et du début du XIIIe, comme pour les conteurs populaires, la Fée à la fontaine, emanation de son *locus amoenus*, personification des forces naturelles de vie, unissant le charme de la jeune fille à l’efficacité protectrice de la mère, est une représentation pure de l’*anima*. (1992: 332)

(For the ‘symbolist’ novelists of the twelfth and early thirteenth century, as for the popular storytellers, the ‘Fairy by the Fountain’, the emanation of the *locus amoenus*, a personification of natural forces of life uniting the charm of the young girl and the protective efficacy of the mother, is a pure representation of the *anima*.)

One can summarise the most prominent traits of the medieval French *fées* as being that besides their supernaturality and femininity and their connection to trees and water, they are fair and possess magical capabilities (divination, prediction of destiny, and illusions) (Sébillot 1882: 73–74 and 1905: 410–414; Harf-Lancner 2003: 214–218). They tend wounds, and, while they are not described as fighting, they are very

⁶ A *pastourelle* is a terse narrative that describes a meeting between a knight and a beautiful shepherdess as well as his advances and the outcome thereof from the knight’s point of view. The *pastourelle* was very popular in thirteenth-century France and especially in the Provence (Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, s.v. “Pastourelle”).

capable at textile work – both spinning and weaving – as well as the crafting of weaponry and armour (see, for example, *Élie de Saint-Gilles* discussed below) (Harf-Lancner 2003: 148). Although the above features are not limited to the accounts of *fées amantes*, they are most prominent in these accounts. Another important aspect that needs to be borne in mind in this respect, however, is the potential connection of the earlier *fées marraines* with the idea of changelings, something that can be seen most clearly in the association of the *fées* with childbirth (see above and section 2.2).⁷

The narrative prominence of this type of *fées* can be roughly said to begin in the twelfth century, gradually fading out in the fifteenth century congruently with the fall of the chivalric class and the literature associated with them. It must be borne in mind, however, that these changes did not only affect the conceptualisations of *fées*, who were but one of a variety of other supernatural creatures known in France in the Middle Ages (Harf-Lancner 2003: 239–241).

1.2 *Álfar*: An Enigma of the North

The *álfar* seem to have experienced a more troubled history of development than the French *fées*, going through various stages from their earliest appearances, often under influence from other concepts, some of which appear to have been foreign. At one point, we even find them being separated into two distinct groups of beings (light and dark) by the early Icelandic scholar Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241) under apparent influence from the Old Norse translation of the Christian *Elucidarius* (dated to c. 1200).⁸ The *álfar* are nonetheless tangible figures

⁷ The literary and folkloristic *fées* have amongst their ranks various famous named figures, such as Mélusine and Morgan le Fay. The figure of Mélusine will be of interest in the discussion of the connection of *fées* and *álfkonur* as progenitors of lineages (see section 2.4 below). It is nonetheless worth bearing in mind that the *mélusienne* accounts (‘Mélusinian stories’) highlight the “positive” aspects of women (such as motherhood, protectiveness, fidelity in marriage), while the *morganienne* stories on the other hand revolve around features that are perceived as more dangerous (such as magic skills, sexual desire, and deviousness) (Sébillot 1882: 117–119; Gallais 1992: 12; Harf-Lancner 2003: 149, 151–155 and 214–418).

⁸ See *Skáldskaparmál* 1998: 41 and 45; and *Elucidarius* 1992: 8–11. Various research questions have arisen from Snorri’s distinction between the *ljós-* (‘light’-), *dökk-* (‘dark’-) and *svartálfar* (‘black *álfar*’) in *Skáldskaparmál*, and not least in connection with the description of angles in *Elucidarius* (See, for example, Holtsmark 1964: 37;

in Old Norse textual accounts between the eleventh to the mid-fifteenth century, going on to take an enduring role in Icelandic folklore, even today.⁹

Mentions of the *álfar* reach as far back as the earliest surviving mythological material, the most prominent mentions appearing in the manuscripts of the so-called *Poetic Edda* in the late thirteenth century, in which the *álfar* never appear as protagonists. They nonetheless appear frequently in various re-occurring and frequently used formulaic phrases that show their close connections to the two divine lineages, the *æsir* and *vanir* (Shippey 2005: 177–178; Gunnell 2007: 121–123; Ármann Jakobsson 2015: 216).¹⁰ The Eddic connections between the *álfar* and the *vanir* gods nonetheless appear to have had more gravity than the others. For example, the *vanir* god Freyr is said to receive the world of Álfheimr as *tannfé* (a gift received upon growing or losing one’s first tooth) in *Grímnismál* st. 5, and the sun which Freyr seems to be closely connected to is referred to as *álfroðull* (‘álf-wheel’) in *Vafþrúðnismál* st. 47 and *Skírnismál* st. 4 (Simek 2017a: 208; Motz 1973/1974: 95). These aforementioned links between gods and the *álfar* in earlier times may also be inferred from the verses the early Icelandic poet Egill Skallagrímsson utters in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* (dated to the first half of the thirteenth century) before he erects a *níðstǫng* against the Norwegian King Eiríkr *blóðøx* and his associate Queen Gunnhildr, calling on a god about whom he uses the (potentially) synonymous terms *landálf* and *landáss* (Almqvist 1965: 92–93 and 108–109; Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1999: 153–157),¹¹ suggesting that the words *áss* and the

Gunnell 2007: 127–128; Hall 2007: 23–27; Simek 2013: 335–336 and 2017a: 211–212). Owing to limitations on length, it is impossible to take this question further here.

⁹ As has been recently highlighted by Gunnell, the *álfar* appeared to have retained some actuality in Icelandic learned works during the late Middle Ages and the Age of Enlightenment (2018: 191–209). Gunnell has also highlighted traditions regarding *álfar* that are still practised in present-day Iceland (2012: 301–323 and 2014: 338–342).

¹⁰ The formulaic use of *álfar* has been extensively studied, especially with regard to mentions of them in the role of demons and illness-causing entities: see various publications by Rudolf Simek (2011b: 26–47; 2017a: 206–212; 2017b: 140–141).

¹¹ The reference to *landáss* is in *lausavísa* 28 (A-redaction of *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*; *lv.* 27 in B-redaction; *lv.* 26 in C-redaction) and that to *landálf* in *lausavísa* 29 (A-redaction; *lv.* 28 in B-redaction; *lv.* 27 in C-redaction). The *níðstǫng* is erected in chapter 57 in the A-redaction of *Egils saga*: (Egils saga 2001: 105–106 and 110).

álfr were also synonymous (Gunnell 2007: 121; Ármann Jakobsson 2015: 216). Other surviving secular texts from the same period relating to the history of Iceland nonetheless use the term in a different sense, suggesting a development in meaning. The idea of an *álfablót* (a seasonal sacrifice to the *álfar*) is mentioned in st. 5 of the *Austrfararvísur* of the *skáld* Sighvatr Þórðarson (995–1045).¹²

Works such as *Landnámabók* (thought to be composed in the twelfth century) mention beings and concepts such as *landvættir* (referring to both nature spirits and the spirits of the dead) or *bergbúar* (‘rock dwellers’) and tell of people who were believed to “die into the hills”.¹³ At first, the *landvættir* appear to have been seen as something quite different to the *álfar*, hinting at the two being quite different concepts, as can be seen in *Egils saga* (Gunnell 2007: 117).¹⁴ However, over time a development seems to have started taking place whereby the word *álfr* was also starting to be used (as now) for beings related to rocks or *hólar* (Gunnell 2007: 118–119). Such a development can be inferred from a description which is preserved in chapter 9 of *Heimslýsing ok helgifræði* contained within the *Hauksbók* manuscript (composed around 1300), describing how women sacrifice food to rocks to please entities referred to as *landvættir* (*Hauksbók* 1896: 167; Shippey 2005: 182–183; Gunnell 2007: 120). In short, the *álfar* were becoming *landvættir*. The best example that highlights this development is the early thirteenth-century *Kormáks saga*, in which a blood sacrifice to a rock prior to a *hólmgangr* duel is described as an *álfablót* rather than making any reference to *landvættir* (*Vatnsdæla saga*, *Hallfreðar saga*, *Kormáks saga*, *Hrómundar þátrr halta*, *Hrafns þátrr Guðríðarsonar* 1939: 288; Shippey 2005: 183; Gunnell 2007: 118–119; Simek 2013: 329 and 335).

From here onwards, the *álfar* appear to take diverging roads in

¹² All references to Skaldic poems are to the versions contained in the Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages database (<https://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk/db.php>).

¹³ It may suffice to refer to two examples given in *Landnámabók*, namely the chapters 68 and 85 (as given in *Sturlubók*, dated to between 1275 and 1280). Chapter S68 mentions how Sel-Þórir and his retinue think they would die into Þórisbjörg, whereas chapter S85 (H73) imparts how Þórólfr and his kinsmen believe they would die into Helgafell (*Íslendingabók*, *Landnámabók* 1968: 94, 96, 98 and 124–126).

¹⁴ From Egill’s curse it becomes apparent, that the *landvættir* he calls upon indwell the landscape rather than living inside mountains, and that they can be subjected to the effects of the *níðstǫng* (*Egils saga* 2001: 110).

Christian works, being either classed with other *óvættir* ('fiends, evil entities') as in, for example, *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* (dated to the early fourteenth century), or even made synonymous with angels (Gunnell 2007: 119–120; Simek 2013: 327–328 and 2017a: 206 and 219).¹⁵ The same process of demonization which, as noted above also applied to the *fées*, is effectively highlighted in various medieval lead amulets that have been discussed by Klaus Düwel and Rudolf Simek (Düwel 2001: 237–252; Simek 2013: 326 and 329–335). The lead amulets in question here are dated to a time between the eleventh and twelfth centuries and have been found in an area spanning Jutland, Schleswig and Halberstadt (in the eastern region of Saxony-Anhalt, Germany). The most interesting incision is preserved on a small lead sheet found in a church in Romdrup near Limfjord, Jutland (Denmark) and is dated to shortly before 1200. It features the following adjuratory formula: “*adiuro uos eluos uel eluas aut demones ...*” (“I conjure you, elves [masc.] or elves [fem.] and demons ...” [Simek 2017a: 215]) (Düwel 2001: 239; Simek 2017a: 215). What is worth highlighting here is the fact that the formula seems to distinguish between male and female elves which the forms *eluos* ('male elves') and *eluas* ('female elves'). As will be stressed below, however, this is the only mention of female *álfar* in the period alongside *Fáfnismál* (see above). It should be borne in mind that inscriptions such as this may reflect the notion of an omnipresence of demonic or malevolent entities in medieval times (Simek 2013: 321–325 and 328–329; 2017a: 213–219 and 2019: 377–386).

Ultimately, it is likely that the brief outline given above only scratches the mere surface of how the *álfar* might have been perceived in the Nordic countries in the early Middle Ages and how this perception changed over the course of time. One can nonetheless draw some conclusions. As Terry Gunnell has underlined, the obvious multifarious concept of the *álfar* suggests that, like the *fées*, these beings cannot be viewed as having constituted a single concrete group like the *æsir* or *vanir*, for example (Gunnell 2007: 129; Ármann Jakobsson 2015: 216 and 220). They rather appear to represent a broad concept which rejects any attempts to categorise them in simple terms. Their character was

¹⁵ Similar ideas can also be found, for example, in st. 2.1 of the so-called “Buslubæn” curse in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* (Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda 1944: 474).

evidently both volatile and changeable. The Nordic *álfar* of the Middle Ages are fittingly summarised in the following statement by Rudolf Simek:

What must be kept in mind ... is that detailed concepts of what an *álf* actually was and did may have varied widely in time and space over the Germanic area, even after the time of the Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons in the seventh century and up until the High Middle Ages, when the *álfar* were still conjured up, even if to ban them from harming people. (2017a: 219).

It is nonetheless clear that by the time of the translated *riddarasögur*, the *álfar* in Iceland were beginning to take on the role that they have maintained since in Iceland, as a kind of nature spirit, albeit one that at this stage was essentially male, and had few connections with magic, childbirth or textile work. As the above quote suggests, similar developments appear to have been taking place in Anglo-Saxon England, both preceding as well as simultaneously to those shifts in the perception of the Nordic *álfar* that have been outlined above. Naturally, both areas have a similar cultural background, meaning that it is also worth briefly investigating the Anglo-Saxon perception the *ælf* if we wish to understand the overall background of this concept and its potential for change and adaptation.

1.3 The Anglo-Saxon *ælf*/ *ælf*e

The perception of figures associated with the *álfar* (usually referred to as *ælf* (sg.) or *ælf*e (pl.) in Old English) are tangible in various written accounts from Anglo-Saxon England going back to the eighth century. That the perception of the *ælf*e was as multi-faceted in Britain as it was in Scandinavia can be seen in a variety of sources. A good example is found in the early Old English glosses on various Latin works dating to the ninth and tenth centuries which highlight the existence of a broad variety of “types” of *ælf*e,¹⁶ *driades* (‘dryads’) being described as *wood-ælfenne*, and *musae* (‘muses’) being described as *landælf*e among others. One naturally needs to bear in mind that like the translated *riddarasögur*,

¹⁶ See, for example, the *Carmen de virginitate* by Aldhelm (c. 639–709) (Aldhelmi Opera 1919: 353).

these glosses constitute somewhat problematic sources (Hall 2007: 78–79 and 81–83).¹⁷ All the same, a recurring feature of the Anglo-Saxon *ælf*e (like their Scandinavian counterparts) is their brightness or beauty, as can be seen in the use of the Old English poetic term *ælfscinu* which translates as ‘*ælf*-beautiful’ (Shippey 2005: 172; Hall 2007: 88–94). The usage of this word can be substantiated on three different occasions, all of them being connected to the description of females (Hall 2007: 92–94).¹⁸

Negative connotations like those associated with the *álfar* are also encountered with the *ælf*e, some potentially deriving from their possible association with other, known, antagonistic supernatural beings known in Britain. Indeed, it might be argued that even at this time, the *ælf*e were regarded with more severity in the Anglo-Saxon world than in the Nordic countries, perhaps because of the church which was well established much earlier in Britain (during the sixth to eighth centuries) (Padberg 2009: 74–93). As Alaric Hall, in particular, has shown, in Britain the *ælf*e were frequently interpreted as being the root of physical afflictions. Old English preserves various words for manifold illnesses that are thought to have been caused by *ælf*e, the most prominent of which is *ælf*e *gescot* (‘*ælf*-shot’) mentioned at an early point in the well-known late tenth-/early eleventh-century text commonly referred to as *Wið fǣrstice* in the collection of texts known as *Lacnunga* (Anglo-Saxon Remedies 2001: 90–95; Hall 2007: 96–118).¹⁹ The idea is that of a stinging pain induced by an outside (supernatural) force by the means of a shot projectile (Cameron 1993: 140–144).²⁰

Of particular interest is, as with the Nordic *álfar*, that the Anglo-

¹⁷ It may suffice to mention one example here, namely the *Third Cleopatra Glossary* which contains, amongst other texts, *Carmen de virginitate* by Aldhelm which was discussed above. It thus comes to no surprise that Aldhelm’s terminology can also be found in the glossary (Gretsch 1999: 132–184 [especially 140–141]).

¹⁸ The word *ælfscinu* appears two times in *Genesis A* (ll. 1827 and 2731) and once in *Judith* (l. 14), (The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records 1931: 55 and 81 and 1965: 99).

¹⁹ Regarding the dating of Harley MS 585 which contains the *Wið fǣrstice* text, see http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?-ref=Harley_MS_585. The belief that ailments or even death could be caused by elvish projectiles remained popular even in later centuries in the British Isles (Hall 2005: 19–36).

²⁰ Similar ideas are found in the Nordic countries, as has been pointed out by Reichborn-Kjennerud (1928: 51 and 87–88) and Lauri Honko (1959: 41–48).

Saxon *ælf*e almost exclusively seem to point to *male* figures. As has been stated by Hall, it is noteworthy that the glossators of eighth century England used the Latin loanword *nympha* when referring to potentially female *ælf*e. This suggests that there was no vernacular Old English word for a female counterpart to the *ælf*e (Hall 2007: 83). It is only later, under the influence of foreign narratives, that changes start taking place. One of many examples is Laȝamon's description of Queen Argante in his late-twelfth-century *Brut* which points to the late development of the word *alven* (to denote specifically female *ælf*e) (Shippey 2005: 175–176; Hall 2007: 75–76).²¹ As Hall remarks:

The rise of the female denotation to *ælf* appears concurrently ..., with the transference to *ælf* to the weak declension. But although this morphological change could have been a factor in creating the conditions for semantic change, it is not a sufficient explanation for it: other innovative early Middle English weak plurals like *cnihten*, *kingen* or *brethren* continued to denote males alone. The arrival of female *elven* in English culture must have involved other factors, linguistic and extra-linguistic. (2007: 88)

As with the Icelandic *álfkonur* (see below), the *elven* should thus be seen as additions that were introduced at a later stage when the concept of the male *ælf*e (and *álfar*) had been established for many centuries. It is tempting to speculate whether this development, like that in Iceland, was prompted by the influence of Anglo-Norman, Breton or generally French literature like that which will be considered in the following section.

2. Of Magical Beings and Where to Find Them

2.1 Introduction

As has been stated in the introduction, the aim of this article is to research the changes and alterations in concept that took place as the Old French term *fée* was translated to the Old Norse *álfar* and *álfkona* in the

²¹ In his twelfth-century work entitled *Brut*, Laȝamon describes Queen Argante in l. 28613 as *aluen swiðe sceone* ('an elf most fair') and in l. 28639 as *fairest alre aluen* ('the fairest of all elves') in the Cotton Caligula A.ix. manuscript (Laȝamon's *Brut* 1847: 144–145).

translated *riddarasögur*. Since translation usually involves translocation (even if it is as abstract as text or language), it will often involve concepts being moved from one culture to the other. This seems to have been particularly the case in this example since, as has been noted above, the image of female *álfar* is almost totally absent in both textual as well as archaeological evidence in the Nordic countries prior to the arrival of the translated *riddarasögur* and their continental motif inventory (see above). There is thus good reason to consider whether that the concept of female *álfar* was introduced into the Old Norse sphere through intercultural interactions between Scandinavia and the Continent in the thirteenth century, at a time when the *fées* had already manifested their position as narrative devices in France (see above).

This naturally brings us to the question of which narratives and the translations should be included in the current investigation. Logically, those Old French narratives that have no surviving Old Norse translation (regardless of whether any translation ever existed) are excluded, as are those translated *riddarasögur* that do not feature the word *álfkona* / *álfkonur* in their Old Norse rendition. Thus, narratives of this kind are not considered here, with the exception of the Breton *lai Guigemar* which features the only description of a woman as being “beautiful as a *fée*” (Sinaert 1984: 61) which has been transported into the Old Norse corpus of translated *riddarasögur*.

The sources upon which the following investigation rests are thus limited to four French works that feature *fées* and their respective Old Norse redactions:²²

- *Érec et Énide*, surviving in thirteen manuscripts (two of which are fragmentary) and generally dated to c. 1170, and the translation *Erex saga* dated to the mid-thirteenth century, which is extant in three manuscripts dating from the sixteenth century (*Erec et Enide* 1968: III–VI and XXVIII–XXXII; *Erex saga* 1999: 219–220). The narrative follows the Arthurian knight *Érec* (*Erex*) who finds his wife *Énide*

²² Unless otherwise stated, all information regarding the various Old Norse manuscripts, such as their dating and the number of extant manuscripts are taken from the *Ordbog over det Norrøne Prosasprog database* (<http://onp.ku.dk/onp/>) and from Sif Ríkharðsdóttir and Stefka G. Eriksen (2013: 24–25).

(Evida in Old Norse) during his first adventure and, giving in to love, loses sight of his chivalric duties. He is urged on to a second series of quests by his wife which leads to his reinstatement in rank and glory.

- *Élie de Saint-Gilles*, which survives only in the BnF 25516 manuscript²³ which is dated to the latter two decades of the thirteenth century, and the translation *Elís saga ok Rósamundu* (henceforth *Elís saga*), which has been preserved in over forty manuscripts dating from between the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries. The original translation is dated to the first half of the thirteenth century (*Élie* 2013: 9–10; *Elís saga* 1881: VII–XVII). The story tells how Elye (Elís), the son of a Provençal ruler named Julien (Juliens) is reprimanded for being an unpromising knight and leaves his father's court. During his travels, he rescues four Christian knights but gets captured in the process. Elye manages to vanquish the antagonistic king Lubien de Baubas (Jubien) with the help of the pagan princess Rosamonde (Rósamunda), who promises to be baptised and the two return to France. (The Old French original continues, making Elye the godfather of Rosamonde. While some Icelandic translations break off here, other later renditions have the two marry.)
- *Le mantel mautailé* (also known as, for example, *Le court mantel*), surviving in six manuscripts and dated to the late twelfth / early thirteenth century, and its close Old Norse translation *Mottuls saga*, dated to the mid-thirteenth century, and surviving in six manuscripts (*The Lay of Mantel* 2013: 5 and 7–8; *Mottuls saga* 1999: 3–4). The story tells of how a stranger brings a mantle to Arthur's court, offering it in reward to any lady that it fits. However, the mantle has been enchanted, becoming either too long or too short whenever the maiden in question has been unfaithful to her love,

²³ For a description of the manuscript BnF 25516 located in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits (National Library of France, Department of Manuscripts): see (in French) <https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc71766w>.

something which humiliates almost every woman at court until one finally proves worthy.

- The Breton *lai Guigemar* attributed to Marie de France, surviving in four manuscripts, and dated to the later decades of the twelfth century, and its two translations *Guimars ljóð* contained within the *Strengleikar* compilation (and preserved in two fragmentary Norwegian manuscripts dated to the thirteenth century) and *Gvímars saga* (extant in the Icelandic Lbs 840, 4^{to} manuscript which is dated to 1737) (*Die Lais der Marie de France* 1925: LX–LXI and LXIV; *The Lais of Marie de France* 2009: 8; *Gvímars saga* 1979: 108–109 and 112–120).²⁴ This tells how the outstanding knight Guigemar (Gviamar or Gvijmar) gets wounded during a hunt, then finding a fair woman and following her to her realm. He takes his leave after being healed. His love follows him some time later but is captured by the king Mériaduc (Meriadus). Guigemar then vanquishes Mériaduc, takes over his kingdom and rescues his beloved.

The scenes in which the *fées* (*álfkönur* in the translations) appear can be roughly grouped into three groups which will be covered in the following sections which will focus on: 1) craftsmanship; 2) the bestowing of fate and changelings; and 3) beauty.

2.2 *Fées* and *Álfkonur* as Exceptional Craftswomen

That both the *fées* and the Icelandic *álfkönur* of later times are seen as being exceptionally skilled in the art of crafting objects, ranging from wonderful clothes and shoes to magical items has been long accepted. It thus comes to no surprise, that the translated *riddarasögur* and their respective Continental sources that feature such beings in their narratives after make use of these tropes in order to explain the origin of magical objects. Three of the four narratives that involve *fées* and / or *álfkönur* show them as supernatural artisans who produce either beautiful and exquisite or magical objects (four times a mantle and once a weapon).

²⁴ Regarding the difficult transmission history and the interdependence of the manuscripts and the possibility of *Gvímars saga* being acutally closer to an original than the extant Norwegian manuscripts (Brügger Budal 2014: 40).

No better point of departure for such an investigation can be found in Old French chivalric literature than in the elaborate description of a mantle given in Chrétien de Troyes' *Érec et Enide* ll. 6671–6743 (*Erec et Enide* 1968: 203–205). The description is given as part of the coronation scene of Érec, in which he receives the piece as one of his coronation gifts. The account opens by describing the mantle's origin, namely that it was fashioned by four *fées*, and then continues with an in-depth description of the embroidery with which the mantle was adorned,²⁵ depicting the four liberal arts (also known as *quadrivium*): geometry, arithmetic, music and astronomy (in that order), each *fée* being responsible for the crafting of one illustration (*Erec et Enide* 1968: 203–205).

Erex saga contains a loose translation of this passage, although interestingly enough, here Evida is granted the mantle instead of Erex. The corresponding passage, which is not as exhaustive as its French counterpart, runs as follows:

Artús kóngr gaf Erex kórónu af gulli gerva í vígslunni ... En Evida gaf hann [that is King Arthur] dýrliga skikkju; þar váru á skr<i>faðar allar höfuðlistir. Hún var öll skínandi ok svá dýr at engi kaupmaðr kunni hana at meta. Hún var ofin nfu rastir í jörð niðr af fjórum álfkonum í jarðhúsi, þar er aldri kom dagsljós. (*Erex saga* 1999: 258)

King Arthur gave Erex a crown of gold at the consecration ... But to Evida gave he [that is King Arthur] a precious robe; on it were depicted the liberal arts. It glittered all over and was so precious that no merchant could estimate its value. It was woven by four [*álfkonur*] in an underground dwelling nine leagues under the earth where no daylight ever reached. (*Erex saga* 1999: 259)

A striking point in this translation is that fact that the Old Norse deviates in its depiction of the *álfkonur* working in the darkness below the surface of the earth – an aspect one might associate rather with *dvergar* – something that the Old French does not mention. The translator thus seems to be building on Snorri's idea of the *svartálfar*, rather than *álfar*,

²⁵ Ll. 6682–3 describe the origin of the mantle: “Quatre fees l’avoient fet / par grant san et par grant mestrie” (*Erec et Enide* 1968: 203) (“... It was woven / By four fairies, working / As great and masterful craftsmen” [*Erec and Enide* 1997: 212; here ll. 6747–9]).

who, as noted above, tended to be associated with light.

Another account that features *fées* as craftswomen is the Old French *lais* *Le mantel mautailé*, in which another very prominent magically induced mantle serves as the driving force for the narrative. This mantle was also meticulously woven by a *fée* as the following vivid description shows (ll. 193–211):

Si en a tret fors .I. mantel;
Onques nus hom ne vit tant bel,
Car une fee l'avoit fet.
Nus hom ne savroit le portret
Ne l'uevre du drap aconter.
Or lesson de l'ovraigne ester,
Si vos dirai une merveille
A qui nule ne s'apareille:
La fee fist el drap une oeuvre
Qui les fausses dames descuevre.
La dame qui l'ait afublé,
Se ele a de riens meserré
Vers son bon seignor, s'ele l'a,
Li manteaus bien ne li serra.
Et des puceles autresi:
Cele qui vers son bon ami
Avra mespris en nul endroit,
Ja puis ne li serra a droit,
Qu'il ne soit trop lonc ou trop cort. (The Lay of Mantel 2013: 68)

And drew out from it a mantle;
No one has ever seen one so fine,
For a fairy had made it.
No one could describe it.
Or account for the workmanship in the cloth.
Let us now forget the workmanship,
And I shall tell you a marvel
That has no equal:
The fairy incorporated into the cloth a device
That reveals unfaithful ladies.
If the lady who has put it on
Has done wrong in any way
Towards her good husband, if she has one,
The mantle will not fit her properly.
And the same for the maidens:
Any one of them who towards her beloved

Has erred in any respect
Will find that it will never fit her truly,
Without being too long or too short. (The Lay of Mantel 2013: 69)

The corresponding passage in *Mottuls saga*, features a close translation of the Old French section and reads as follows:

Þenna [that is the mantle] gerði ein álfkona með svá mörgum ok ótrúanlegum hagleikum at <í> öllum þeim fjölda, er þar váru saman komnir hagra manna ok hygginna, fanz eigi sá er skynja kunni með hverjum hætti klæðit var gert. Þat var allt gulli ofit með svá fögrum laufadráttum at aldri váru ein önnur þvílík sén, þvíat engi kunni finna enda né upphaf, ok þetta á ofan sem kynligast var, at þeir sem gerast hugðu at, þeir gátu sízt fundit hversu sá hinn undarligi hagleikr var samtendr. (Mottuls saga 1999: 12)

An [*álfkona*] had fashioned it [that is the mantle] with such great and inconceivable skill that in that whole assembly of skilful and intelligent men gathered there, there was no one who could perceive in what manner the garment had been made. It was shot through with gold in a pattern of such beautiful embroidered leaves that never the like was seen, for no one could find either the beginning or the end. What was strangest, moreover, was that those who scrutinized it most closely could least discover how that wondrous piece of workmanship was put together. (Mottuls saga 1999: 13)

Mottuls saga then goes to great lengths to establish for the audience that the court and especially the ladies in the court understood how the background of the mantle came about and what the spell it was imbued with causes,²⁶ resulting in no lady being interested in owning it (Mottuls saga 1999: 16–17).

In short, both accounts iterate the same qualities – the *fair*y-esque origin of the mantle, the magic spell that was woven into the cloth, its

²⁶ The saga explains the nature of the mantle as follows: “En álfkonan hafði ofit þann galdr á möttullinn at hver sú mæR sem spilz hafði af unnasta sínum, þá mundi möttullinn þegar sýna glæp hennar er hún klæddiz honum, svá at hann mundi henni vera ófsíðr eða ofstuttr, með svá ferligum hætti at þannig mundi hann styttaZ at hann birti með hverjum hætti hver hafði syndgæZ” (Mottuls saga 1999: 12) [“The [*álfkona*] had woven a charm into the mantle so that the misdeed of every maiden who had been intimate with her beloved would be revealed at once when she dressed in it: it would become very long or very short in a flagrant manner so as to reveal how she had sinned” (Mottuls saga 1999: 13)].

beauty and the outstanding craftsmanship that goes along with it – encapsulated in the same narrative frame that the said mantle is used as a means of compromising the women at King Arthur’s court.²⁷

Interestingly enough, *Elís saga* features an additional description of a mantle or cape, worn by Elís’ lover Rósamunda which is not featured in *Élie de Saint-Gille*. The description occurs when Rósamunda is asked to appear before her father King Malkabres of Sobrieborg because his rival King Jubien has demanded that Malkabres not only pay tribute to him but also give him Rósamunda in marriage. Rósamunda dresses herself in her best attire before entering the throne room only to reject Jubien’s demand. The description of her garment is the following:

en mottull sa hinn litli, er hon toc yfir sik, var sendr uestan or hæiðinni undan solar setu, or landi þui, er hæiter Occidens; þriar álfkonur vafu þat klæði þraðum hins bezta gullz með allzconar haglæiki með sua miclum uirkðum, at þer satu yfir IX vetr þessu klæði, fyrr en full ofit væri. þessi mottull var allr ofinn storum fuglum, allr með gulli, oc setr hinum agætostum gimstæinum. (Elis saga 1881: 86)

(And the small mantle that she pulled over herself was sent westwards from the pagan world below the sunset, from the country which is called Occidens; three *álfkonur* weaved this cloth with threads of the best gold, with sundry skill and with such great carefulness that they set over this cloth for nine winters before it had been completed. This mantle was embroidered with large birds, all with gold, and edged with the most beautiful gemstones.)²⁸

²⁷ It is interesting to note here, that an indigenous *riddarasaga* from the fourteenth century, *Samsons saga fagra*, mentions a similar mantle of supernatural origin and powers that, according to the saga itself, echo those of the mantle in *Mottuls saga* (referred to as *Skikkju saga*). The mantle in *Samsons saga fagra* nonetheless appears to be different from that in *Mottuls saga* in numerous aspects: It is said to have been 18 years in the making before it was considered finished by four *álfkonur* below the earth in a *hellir* (“cave”). The four *álfkonur* are here said to be the daughters of the *þurs* Krapí, retainer to King Skrímnir of Jötunheimr, and are said to operate a weaving mill. The mantle is described as having various natures. For example, it shows when women break their oaths or are indolent to their tasks and shortens when the respective lady gives herself to an extramarital lover (Samsons saga fagra 1953: 31, 34, 36, 40 and 47). The same mantle also occupies a focal position in *Skikkju rímur* (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2017: 342 and 347).

²⁸ The above cited passage is from *Elís saga* as preserved in the De la Gardie, 4–7 fol. manuscript. It might be noted that variant readings offered in other manuscripts,

In the original, the Old French version only describes the mantle as being the gift of a wealthy emir (clearly foreign origin) to Rosamonde, stating that it took a considerable effort to produce such attire. The account lacks any reference to *fées* in particular (ll. 1693–1700):

S'est faite la puchele gentement atoner:
En son dos a vestu .I. hermin engoulé,
D'une lasnete d'or ot estrais les costés,
Unes cauches molt riches, solers bien pointurés;
Un mantel covoitous ot a son col jeté:
Uns rices amiraus li ot fait presenter,
.III. ans mist on a faire, ains que fust parovrés,
Et fu d'un cabetenc tout environ ourlés. (Élie 2013: 214)

And she had herself nobly attired.
She put on a collared ermine robe –
With a golden cord she had bound the sides –
And wore rich hose and exquisitely-painted slippers.
She put around her neck an envy-inspiring cloak
A gift from a powerful emir.
It was [three] years in the making before it was completed.
Its expensive cloth was embroidered all around. (Elye 2011: 111)

This leaves us with an interesting question: Why add *álfkonur* when the original does not feature *fées* in this specific section? Is the translator simply borrowing the motif from Chrétien de Troyes (or elsewhere) as a means of underlining the wonder of the garment? Is this similar to the oral tradition where formulaic motifs are commonly added to extend a scene (Lord 1981: 130–131 and 138)? Is it a borrowing of motifs from elsewhere since the details are otherwise in the written saga?

The *Élie de Saint-Gille* narrative nonetheless does elsewhere feature *fées* that are skilled in the art of crafting objects. In this particular case, however, it is not a textile that is beautifully woven or has a spell woven into it as in the case of *Le mantel mautailé* and *Mottuls saga*. In this case it is a staff or cudgel which Elie's henchman Galopin is said to go into battle with and is made by four *fées* on an isle in the ocean (ll. 2370–2374):

replacing the amount of *álfkonur* with four (Holm perg 7 fol.) or omitting the number entirely (Holm. perg. 6, 4^{to}) and changing the time it took to create the mantle to seven instead of nine years (Holm. perg. 7 fol.) (Elis saga 1881: 86–87).

Quant Galopins le vit, li preus et li senés,
Rosamonde la bele a congiet demandé.
De la tor avala les marberins degrés,
En la bataille entra, coureçous et irés.
En sa main le baston, u tant a richetés,
Que les fees ovrerent en .I. ille de mer. (Élie 2013: 238)²⁹

When Galopin saw him [that is Elie in grave danger], the worthy and wise man,
He asked leave of the beautiful Rosamonde.
He ran down the marble steps of the tower,
He entered the battle, angry and sorrowful.
In his hand was the richly decorated staff,
Which fairies had made on an island in the sea. (Elye 2011: 155)

It is noteworthy, however, that in this case none of the Old Norse redactions feature a correlating passage. While the idea of Elís fighting certainly exists in the Old Norse translation, the remark with regard to Galopin’s cudgel does not.

In a brief excursus it might be added that *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* features an episode in which Tristram receives his utmost stalwart hunting hound from a Polish duke as a reward for ridding the duke’s dominions of a *jötunn* (with regards to the information presented in this paragraph see *Tristrams saga* 1999: 152–159). The duke is said to have himself received the dog as a token from an *álfkona* from the island of Polin in Álfheimr. The hound is of wondrous colours, has a soft fur and a sweet-sounding bell attached to his collar, all of which makes Tristram forget his sorrows. Unfortunately, due to their fragmentary nature, both the *Tristan* of Béroul (active in the late twelfth century) as well as that of Thomas d’Angleterre (fl. c. 1170–1180) do not preserve this episode. Thus, the significance of this story remains questionable.

Considering the translations of passages in which *fées* appear as

²⁹ The motif of crafting *fées* working on an island in the sea seems to also be used employed in the *Continental Version I* (dated to the thirteenth century) of the *Beuve de Hamton* in which the *fées* craft a hauberk (a section is not in the Anglo-Norman version or *Bevens saga*) which runs as follows (ll. 7522–7527): “Vest un hauberk qui molt fist a lœr, / Fees le fissent en un ilse de mer, / D’or sont les mailles, d’argent sont li clavel ...” (Der festländische Bueve 1911: 248) (“[He] dons a hauberk which many would praise / *fées* crafted it on one island in the sea / The meshworks are made of gold, the rings are made of silver”).

craftswomen in the stories noted above from a Scandinavian perspective, one might argue that on the basis of the local tradition it would have been more natural for the translations to show powerful magical women or sorceresses crafting these cloths rather than *álfkonur*. Certainly, the image of women crafting noteworthy clothing is not uncommon in saga literature dating to roughly the same period of the translations (albeit in other sagas than the translated *riddarasögur*), be the clothing normal or magically enhanced. For example, *Landnámabók* mentions the two women Hildigunnr Beinisdóttir (S75 / H63) and Ljót, mother of Hrolleifr *enn mikli* (S180 / H147).³⁰ While Hildigunnr is said to craft clothing twice, the *kyrtill* ('tunic') of Hrolleifr may be inferred of having been made by Ljót. However, the clothes' feature seems to be that they are impenetrable by iron. Furthermore, one might think of the cloth described in the late 13th-century *Qrvar-Odds saga*,³¹ or *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*,³² where the clothes are admittedly practical rather than beautiful or intricate. All the same, the changing of the amount of *álfkonur* crafting Rósamunda's mantle from the Old French four to the more local number three, does show a more effective adaptation of foreign ideas to local ones, three (or a multitude of it) being apparently a commonly used number in Old Norse and especially when it comes to powerful women.³³

Be that as it may, the problematic scene featured in *Élie de Saint-Gille* and dropped in *Elís saga* in which *fées* manufacture a cudgel on an island still remains. As noted above, the *álfar* are not connected to the crafting of weaponry. One might thus be forgiven for assuming that the translator,

³⁰ All following information with regard to *Landnámabók* is taken from *Íslendingabók, Landnámabók* (1968: 106–107 and 220).

³¹ While in Ireland, Oddr raids the underground home of four women, the fairest of which he intends to take hostage. However, the woman offers a magical shirt in exchange for her freedom, the magical qualities of which are manifold and include the wearer not becoming hungry and sleepy as well as being invulnerable to sword strikes unless he flees (*Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* 1944: 313–314).

³² Before departing on his last raid, Ragnar is said to be given a shirt by his wife Áslaug. The shirt is said to make him invulnerable to sword blows (*Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* 1944: 132–133; Finnur Jónsson 1973: 257).

³³ Regarding the importance of the triad in connection with powerful women, see, for instance, in *Völuspá* st. 20 the three *nornir* or the *þursar meyar* ('þurs-maidens') in st. 8 and the thrice burned and thrice reborn Gullveig in st. 21. See furthermore, for example, Schüick 1941: 22–29 and Wagner 1980: 202–208.

with a Nordic audience in mind, avoided a direct translation as it did not reflect the culture and worldview of Scandinavian recipients. Granted, such a contemplation only retains validity if the manuscript / manuscripts that served as a template for the saga definitely featured this scene. However, as said, since *Élie de Saint-Gille* only survives in one manuscript, we may most likely never know whether there were other versions of this story which make no mention of such an origin of Galopin's weapon and might have served as a model for the Old Norse translations. All the same, however, it is clear that the introduction of *álfkonur* into the Old Norse literary inventory is new, as is the idea of them living underground – a motif that clearly caught on in both the sagas and folklore (see further below).

2.3 Fate and Stature

The investigation will now turn to consider the textual instances in which *fées* and *álfar* respectively are associated with the bestowing of fate on Galopin in both *Elye de Saint-Gille* and *Elis saga*.

The story tells how during his adventure, Elye encounters four robbers and asks to share their meal, which they agree to. They nonetheless request his steed in payment, something Elye adamantly refuses. In the ensuing brawl he brutally slays two of the robbers while the third flees into the woods. The remaining man falls to his knees begging for mercy. In his appeal for clemency, the thief reveals his identity as Galopin, recounting the fate that has befallen him (ll. 1183–1191). The Old French passage runs as follows:

A l'ore qui fui nés ceste paine m'avint:
.IV. fees i ot; quant vint al departir,
Li une me voloit a son eus detemir,
Mais les autres nel varent endurer ne souffrir,
Et prierent a Dieu qui onques ne menti
Que jamais ne creüsse, tous jors fuisse petis,
Se n'eüsse de lonc que .III. piés et demi,
Et s'alaisse plus tost que cheval ne ronchin.
Certes, et je si fac, por voir le vous plevi. (Élie 2013: 197)

At the hour I was born, this tragedy befell me:
Four fairies were present. When it came time to take leave,
one of them sought to keep me as her servant.

But the others wouldn't endure or bear it,
And they prayed to God, who never told a lie,
That I'd never grow more than three and one half feet in height,
And that I'd run faster than a warhorse or packhorse.
Believe me, I swear it's true ... (Elye 2011: 77)

In short, in the Old French three *fées* who come to the birth quarrel with a fourth who wishes to take Galopin as an apprentice, prays that God will curse him with restricted growth while granting him equine swiftness. This idea of quarrelling fairies would of course be reflected later in the start of the German folktale *Dornröschen* or *Sleeping Beauty* (ATU 410) collected by the Grimm brothers, in which twelve fairies are invited as guests at the birth of Beauty, while a thirteenth is not invited owing to the lack of cutlery (Grimm and Grimm 1812: 225–229).³⁴ As in *Elye de Saint-Gille*, the evil fairy curses while the others attempt to mitigate the curse. In *Elís saga*, the correlating passage runs as follows:

Sem móðir min hafði fœtt mik, þá toku mik í brott um nottina þriar álfkonur or buri þúi, sem ec var í lagðr, oc villdi æinn af þæim raða mer oc hava með ser; en hinum firer þotti tuæimr, oc mællti þa huar þæirra til annarrar, at ec skyllda aldre upp vaxa ne mikill verða, en sua mikit laupa skyllda ec, at alldregi skop guð þat kuikuendi, er iammikit ma fara. (Elis saga 1881: 65)

(After my mother had given birth to me, then three *álfkonur* took me from the cradle in which I had been laid, and one of them wanted to command me and have me with her; but this displeased the other two, and one said to the other that I should never grow up nor become large, yet should run faster than any other being that God had created.)

While the above passage does not preserve the correlation about Galopin's agility to horses, it otherwise for the main part follows the Old French closely except for the fact that the number of *álfkonur* is once again given as three (the B-redaction, however, keeps four *álfkonur*). Another interesting deviation made in the Old Norse saga away from the Old French source text is that the saga omits the invocation of God's curse by the three *fées*, the mention of God here being transferred to the

³⁴ Charles Perrault collected a French variant of this tale in 1696 called *La Belle au Bois Dormant*, in which the number of fairies is seven (Perrault 2012: 342).

animals He has created. It is possible that the translators feared this might hint at a connection of the *fees* / *álfar* to God (and therefore Christianity) which Old Norse beliefs did not reflect.³⁵

It is worth bearing in mind the fact that here, once again, new talents are being bestowed on *álfar*: In Old Norse belief, while the role of deciding fate at birth is given to females (often three as in *Völuspá* st. 20), it is traditionally in the hands of *nornir*. Also worth noting, is the way in which the Old Norse subtly alters small details. As pointed out above, the Old French describes the *fées* as *being present at Galopin's birth* (the *fées marraines* trope: see above), while in the Old Norse account the *álfkonur* *steal Galopin after his birth*, changing the overall *topos* entirely into one potentially relating to changelings. Nevertheless, as Roger Sherman Loomis pointed out, the Old French section presents a picture that closely resembles the visit of the *nornir* at the birth of Helgi Hundingsbani as described in *Helga kviða Hundingsbana in fyrri* sts 2–3 (Loomis 1959: 108). Be that as it may, as Séamas Mac Philib has pointed out, this theme (ML 5085) is found in both Celtic and Germanic folk narratives (Christiansen 1958: 109–113; Mac Philib 1991: 121). It deals essentially with the abduction of a human child, which is replaced in its manger by an elven changeling, which can range from an (old) elvish man or child to a simple log of wood. Scholars such as Mac Philib, Susan Schoon Eberly and John Lindow have all suggested that this idea tries to culturally and logically explain why some children may be born deaf, mute or with deformations (Mac Philib 1991: 131).³⁶

It seems safer to assume this section in *Elís saga* shows a subtle movement away from the unnatural idea of *álfar* deciding fate to a more

³⁵ If we focus on the missing invocation of God in the Old Norse variants, it is worth noting that in the Old Norse world figures such as the *nornir* are the figures most commonly linked to the concept of fate in Old Norse beliefs. *Álfar* seem not to ever have such a function. As an example for the connection of *nornir* and fate, one may quote *Fáfnismál* st. 11 which offers the term *nornar dómur* ('The Judgement of the Norns') as a kenning for death: "Norna dóm þú munt fyr nesiom hafa / Oc ósvinnz apa; / Í vatni þú drucnar, ef í vindi rær: / Alt er feigs forað" ("The judgement of the norns you'll get in sight of land, / and the fate of a fool; / you'll drown in the water even if you row in a breeze; / all fate is dangerous for the doomed man" [The Poetic Edda 1996: 159]).

³⁶ Regarding the possibility of disabilities influencing folk beliefs in generally and changelings in particular, see Susan Schoon Eberly (1988: 58–77) and John Lindow (2008: 218 and 232).

local tradition of nature spirits stealing children, an idea that became very popular in more recent times in Iceland. One might even go so far as to suggest that this brief episode in *Elís saga* is one of the earliest (if not the earliest) account of a changeling narrative in the Old Norse record. However, in later Icelandic folktales, it is evident that the idea of changelings came to be associated with the notion of the later *huldufolk* / *álfar*.³⁷

One nonetheless wonders why the translator chose *álfkönur* and not *nornir* if they wanted to follow the original text directly?³⁸ Was the passage deliberately altered in an attempt to suit Nordic expectations (*nornir* never being closely associated with the fates of the lower classes in Old Norse texts)? This is worth further investigation.

2.4 Beauty and Seduction

It has been stated at the outset that narratives involving to the F302 (Fairy Mistress) motif would not be considered due to the absence of references to the women as *fées* in the French source texts. The exception is *Guigemar*, a Breton *lais* attributed to Marie de France which features the only characterisation of a woman as being as beautiful as a *fée*, which was also rendered into Old Norse in the translation. Two extant Old Norse translations have been preserved: one is *Guimars ljóð* preserved in the *Strengleikar* compilation, the other being *Gvímars saga* (see above). The reason why these works will be considered here is because they are the only instance of a correlation between *álfkönur* and beauty in the corpus of translated *riddarasögur*.

The section of interest in *Guigemar* happens after Guigemar and his lover become separated and her ship runs ashore in Brittany with the wreck being subsequently discovered and searched by the local king Mériaduc. He finds Guigemar's lover inside the wreckage and is stunned

³⁷ See, for example, the stories given by Jón Árnason in the section dedicated to stories regarding *álfar*, *huldufólk* and *umskiptingar* (“changelings”) (Jón Árnason 1862: 40–45). The earliest surviving mention of the term *huldufólk* can be traced back to around 1500 in *Jarlmanns rímur*, as Haukur Þorgeirsson has pointed out (Haukur Þorgeirsson 2011: 53). And as can be seen from the material presented above, the use of the term *álfar* is older.

³⁸ It is worth noting that the only connection between *álfar* and *nornir* is made in the earlier-noted *Fáfnismál* st. 13 where Fáfnir describes how some *nornir* are *álfkunngar* (i.e. from the *álfar* lineage).

by her beauty which is akin to that of a *fée* (ll. 699–706):

Il [that is Mériaduc] descendi par un degré;
sun chamberlain a apelé.
Hastivement a la nef vunt;
par l'eschiele muntent a munt.
Dedenz unt la dame trovee,
ki de belté resemble fee.
Il la saisist par le mantel;
od lui l'en meine en sun chastel. (Die Lais der Marie de France 1925: 33)

He [that is Mériaduc] went downstairs
and called his chamberlain;
quickly they went to the ship,
climbed up its ladder;
inside they found the woman
who had a [*fée*-]like beauty.
He took her by the cloak
and brought her with him to his castle. (The Lais of Marie de France
2009: 49)

The same segment is fairly accurately rendered in *Guimars ljóð* as follows: “oc gængo [that is Meriadus and a servant] þær þa baðer skyndelega ovan til skipsens. oc fundu þær þar æina friða fru sæm alfkona være. oc tok hann þa i skikkioskaut hennar oc læidde hana með ser i kastalann” (*Strengleikar* 1850: 11–12) (“and then they both went quickly down to the ship and found there a woman as beautiful as an *álfkona* would be. And then he took the skirt of her cloak and led her with him to the castle”). The same holds true for the account given in *Gvímars saga* which is almost identical: “... og geingu þeir [that is Meriadus and a servant] þá skindelega ofan til skipsens og fundu þar svo frijda frü, sem álfkona være, tók hann þá i skickiu skaut hennar og leidde hana med sier til kastalans ...” (*Gvímars saga* 1979: 134) (“... and then they went quickly down to the ship and found there such a beautiful woman as an *álfkona* would be. Then he took the skirt of her cloak and led her with him to the castle.”)

Both accounts thus echo the idea of the Breton *lai* that the beauty of Guigemar’s lover is like that of a *fée*. Following the original, both Old Norse translations then go on to explain how Meriadus’ court marvels about her beauty, further underlining the implicit attribute the lady’s

exceptional fairness.

The fact that the Old Norse renditions translate this passage accurately without alterations underlines that the concept caused no problem, since, as noted above, the Scandinavian sphere already attributed *álfar* with beauty.

3. Conclusion

The above investigation has considered the way in which the concept of the magical creative *álfkona* was brought into Old Icelandic in the mid-13th-century as a result of the translation of Continental romantic works which demanded the creation of conceptual terms that had not previously existed in the indigenous cultural vocabulary of the north. Apparently, the use of the word *álfkona* as a translation for *fée* rather than any other term was not seen as being problematic with regard to the local understanding of the *álfar* in Iceland at this time, as they were already beginning to blend with nature spirits. Nonetheless, it did involve the introduction of a female equivalent to a group of figures that were previously largely male like the *dvergjar* if we trust the evidence of the Eddic poems and *Snorra Edda*. This motif of a specifically female sex of *álfar* had clearly entered the Scandinavian realm by the thirteenth century. As has been shown, these new figures are intrinsically connected to textile weaving and the crafting of beautiful magical garments. That this motif seems to have occasionally been adapted to local beliefs can be seen from the changing of the numbers of the *álfkonur* in the account of Galopin's fate demonstrated above, a development which is worth further investigation.

There nonetheless appears to have been more wariness with regard to the adoption of the seen attributes of prophecy, cursing and fate associated with *fées*. These were abilities commonly associated with *nornir* rather than *álfar* in the Old Norse worldview and were thus clearly unfitting for the *álfkonur*.

Equally intriguing, however, are other motifs that may well have come from the translated *riddarasögur* if they had not come from the folklore blend of *álfar* and *landvættir*: this was the idea of beings being taken into

mountains (also referred to as *bjergtagning* in later folk legends)³⁹ something that builds on the idea of *álfkonur* working below the surface of the earth in some of the accounts given above, as well as the changeling motif (ML 5058),⁴⁰ which would prove to be a very rich idea in folkloric literature. As has been shown above, the Old French version of *Elye de Saint-Gille* has four *fées* arguing about one of them wanting to have Galopin as her servant. While the Old Norse transports this general idea, the motif of the *fées*' argument *at* his birth is changed to the idea of the *álfkonur* stealing him *after* Galopin being born. It nonetheless needs to be borne in mind that unlike later Icelandic folk stories such as the famous “18 barna faðir í Álfheimum” (“The Father of 18 Children in Álfheim”) or “Tökum á, tökum á” (“Let’s seize it, seize it”), no substitution with a changeling child is made here (Jón Árnason 1862: 42–43 and 43–44 respectively).

Despite the cautiousness with which the translators operated, carefully selecting and/or adapting the motifs of the *fées* to fit the Scandinavian worldview of their audience evidently worked as the tropes that were kept clearly clung on in local tradition. The creating of garments has already been addressed above and it thus may suffice to mention the Icelandic account of “Sýslumannskonan á Bustarfelli”, as just one of the numerous folktales which depict *álfkonur* (or *huldukonur*) as having particular weaving or embroidery skills (motif number F271.4.2) (Thompson 1975: 53),⁴¹ this account telling of a beautifully crafted altar cloth which is obtained by the woman from a *huldukona* (Jón Árnason 1862: 13–15).⁴² The fact that stories of the “fairy-folk” being skilful

³⁹ For information regarding the motif of *bjergtagning*, see, for example, the work by the Danish folklorist Feilberg (1910).

⁴⁰ For the changeling in general, see the publication by Christiansen (1958: 109–113). With regard to the motif in France (see above), see, once again, the work by Sébillot (1882: 117–119). For the motif in the British Isles, see, for example, the articles by Katharine M. Briggs (1957: 274–5) and Donald Archie MacDonald (1994/1995: 51–52 [here listed under type numbers F61–66]). For Ireland, see the above-quoted article by Mac Philib (1991). With regard to Sweden, see the monograph by Bengt af Klintberg (2010: 192–197 [here grouped under types K141–169]).

⁴¹ Another narrative that mentions how an altar cloth is donated to a church by an *álfkona* is “Rauðhöfði” (Jón Árnason 1862: 83–84).

⁴² Interestingly, Þjóðminjasafn Íslands (The National Museum of Iceland) has an altar cloth on display which is said to be the cloth from the folktale: see <http://www.culturehouse.is/-vefleidsogn/inn/room-iii/alfkonudukur-fra-bustarfelli-en>.

tailors has roots elsewhere is nonetheless reflected in the way stories of this kind have certainly lived on in Celtic-speaking areas. In Scotland, various narratives describe fairy women working a spinning wheel, giving help with spinning, doing “wool work” or waulking, which have been collected under the Scottish type number F118 “Fairies Help With Clothworking” by MacDonald (1994/1995: 76). In Ireland, meanwhile, similar stories involving the common motif F343.5.1 “Fairy Gives Magic Cloak (And Shirt)” have been noted by Cross (1952: 261). This motif is nonetheless less common in the Nordic countries.

Another connection which seems to have quickly caught on was that of the connections to rocks and underground dwellings, something that can be seen from the earlier-mentioned *Qrvar-Odds saga* for instance. This the saga tells of how Oddr finds an underground dwelling place of four women, the most beautiful of which he intends to take hostage. This woman, however, promises him to craft him a shirt, the magical properties of which include the feature that the wearer feels no hunger or cold and is invulnerable to sword blows except when in flight (Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda 1944: 313–14). The parallels to the translated accounts noted above are striking.

Other sagas, such as two fourteenth-century indigenous *riddarasögur* *Hektors saga* and *Vilmundar saga viðutan* play on exactly the same idea. In *Hektors saga*, a knight by the name of Trancival meets an *álfkona* living in a hillock and saves her abducted son. In return, Trancival receives a beautiful armoured horse in reward as well as the promise that he will receive any information he desires from the *álfkona*. The same *álfkona* and her skills are referred to later in the same saga when Ector recalls her divination abilities (Late Medieval Icelandic Romances 1962: 107–110, 124–126, 131 and 170). *Vilmundar saga viðutan*, meanwhile, notes how Vilmundr’s future wife Sóley is given to a foster-mother and her daughter who live in a stone to be educated. These women then give the saga protagonists foreknowledge of various events so that they can react accordingly (Late Medieval Icelandic Romances 1964: 153–155, 162, 182–184 and 194–197). There is little question that the foreign concept of the underground weaving and prophesying *álfkonur* had become a literary tradition. Since such works were read out aloud alongside other stories in the so-called *kvöldvökur* (‘Evening Wakes’)

one can understand how the translated foreign material would have impacted upon local oral tradition (*Elís saga* with its more than 40 surviving manuscripts underlines both the popularity and influence of some of these translated works) (Hermann Pálsson 1962: 14–15, 19 and 39–47; Magnús Gíslason 1977: 57–60 and 77–87). While Einar Ól. Sveinsson, in his *Um íslenzkar þjóðsögur*, sees the most influence on folk tradition as having arisen from the indigenous *riddarasögur* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1940: 157–158 and 2003: 80), the probability is that one needs to go back even further, considering where the writers of the indigenous sagas got their ideas and concepts from. Certainly, some aspects of the *fées* were dropped or altered by Old Norse translators, as has been highlighted above. Others, however, lived on. This applies particularly to the *álfkönur*, as one can see from their process from the translated and indigenous *riddarasögur*. However, their most prominent association of creating beautiful cloths would be taken further in the local tradition. It would not be long before they were not only stealing children (see above), and issuing curses (as in “Álfkonan í Skollholt” or “Álfkonan í Múla”) and spinning (for example, “Álfarnir og Helga bóndadóttir” and “Ingibjörg á Svelgsá og álfkonan”), but also entrancing young males (as in, for instance, “Frá Eyjólfri og álfkonu” and “Sagan af Álfa-Árna”), giving birth to children (for example, “Stapa-álfarnir” and “Álfkona í barnsnauð”), washing clothes (for example “Álfkonan og áfaaskurinn”) and asking for milk (for instance, “Álfkonan þakkláta” or “Borghildur álfkona”); in short, all the “archetypical” roles one might expect of powerful, supernatural women (Jón Árnason 1862: 7–9, 15–16, 34–37, 82–83, 93–100 and 120–123; Einar Guðmundsson 1981: 26–27).⁴³

As noted above, the introduction of *álfkönur* may well hint at changes that were already beginning to take place both in mythological and folk traditions, suggesting that Old Norse mythology and folk belief – in a land that had a multi-cultural background – were seen as being comparatively malleable, ideas coming in and fading out in accordance with needs, new ideas or regional preferences.

⁴³ With regard to the trope of *álfkönur* giving birth to children, a wide-spread motif which is catalogued under the signature ML 5070 “Midwife To The Fairies” (Almqvist 2008: 273–322; Mac Cárthaigh 1991: 133–143).

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Summary

This paper forms part of a doctoral thesis in Old Nordic Religions at the University of Iceland, which seeks to examine the use of Nordic supernatural concepts (such as *jotnar*, *dvergar* and *álfar*) in the Old Nordic translations of Old French, Occitan and Anglo-Norman chivalric and courtly romances and *lais* in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. This present article focuses on the use of the word “álfar” as a translation for the French word “fées”, considering not only the narrative purposes involved in the choice of such a word, but the potential influences on Icelandic folk beliefs that might have been caused by such a translation (as these translation were read out alongside more local narratives).

Keywords: Old Nordic Religion, *álfar*, translated *riddarasögur*, Folklore, Translation Studies

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Case Study 2

“ek hræðumz ekki þik” – The *dvergar* in translated *riddarasögur*¹

Abstract

This article forms part of a doctoral thesis which aims to investigate the usage of Old Nordic supernatural concepts in the Old Nordic translations of Old French and Anglo–Norman chivalric romances and courtly *lais* from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. This paper focuses on the usage of the term *dvergr* as a translation for the Old French *nain*, reflecting not only the narrative purposes involved in the choice of this word as a translation, but also the possible consequences it could have had on Icelandic folk belief when these works were read out loud alongside other works that formed part of Icelandic literature and Icelandic oral tradition.

Keywords: Old Nordic Religion, *dvergar*, translated *riddarasögur*, Folklore, Translation Studies

Introduction

Translation may be defined as a process in which alien ideas and concepts existing in a foreign language are rendered into one’s own language, usually involving already existing vocabulary. The key problem here is that the ideas and concepts in the target language are often subtly different, something which can result in the overlapping and adjustment and/ or amalgamation of (pre-)existing, local ideas with new, introduced ones. This can have long-lasting consequences on both the target language and culture, as the foreign ideas exert influence in the receiving linguistic and/ or cultural sphere (Reiß and Vermeer 1984, 28–9 and 58).

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The aim of the present article is to examine how the Old Norse mythological perception of the *dvergar* (sg. *dvergr*) in Iceland (and potentially elsewhere in the Nordic sphere) may or may not have been altered in the wake of the influence of Old French chivalric romances translated into Old Norse in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Sif Ríkharðsdóttir 2012, 18–23). It will be argued that the Old French *nains* (sg. *nain*) of the sources were slightly different from the Old Norse *dvergar* (the word used as a translation) and that these divergent conceptualisations ostensibly competed to some degree. While the foreign conceptions seem to have had little influence on the *dvergar* in later Icelandic folklore, it seems evident that their literary conception changed over time under foreign influence.

The present investigation will focus on the Old Norse translated *riddarasögur* that feature *dvergar*, considering passages involving them alongside the correlating passages in the preserved Old French narratives. Thus, the key sources consulted are the Old French romances *Érec et Énide* (henceforth *Érec*) and *Yvain ou le chevalier au lion* (henceforward *Yvain*) and the Breton *lai Désiré* as well as their respective Old Norse translations, *Erex saga*, *Ívens saga* and the *strengleikr Desire ljóð* (see below). Both parallels and discrepancies in the said two concepts will be noted in each case, bearing in mind Lotte Motz’s argument that the *riddarasögur* brought additional and fresh ideas into the Old Norse realm, including the understanding of “dwarves” (Motz 1973–4, 105–6). It is nonetheless clear that only some of these foreign ideas are reflected in indigenous *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*, underlining that not all of the Old French perceptions of the *nains* found in the chivalric romances caught on in Iceland.

It must also be remembered that due to the absence of a standardised medieval orthography, the spelling of the said investigated concepts varies in the written accounts. In order to circumvent confusion outside quotations, the Old French and Old Norse concepts will be written as *nain/ nains* and *dvergr/ dvergar* respectively. Other foreign works, ideas and concepts will be written in accordance with their originating language in italicised form to highlight their special standing. The English lexemes “dwarf”/ “dwarves” will be used as blanket terms when referring to the Old French and Old Norse concepts simultaneously or the overarching, Germanic supposition of these beings.

Before considering the written evidence for both terms and the problems attached to the substitution of *nain* by *dvergr*, some attention will be paid to the proposed etymologies of these two words, as this provides additional information about their background and potential meaning. Forms of the word “dwarf” are extant in various Germanic languages. Besides the Old Norse *dvergr* we find Old English *dweorh* (the West Saxon *dweorg*; and Mercian *duerg*), Old High German *twerg* and Middle High German *twerc*, *zwerc*, *querh*

or *getwerc* (Old Saxon *gidwerg*) and Old Frisian *dwerch* (de Vries 1962, 89; Battles 2005, 31–2). In modern languages we have the Swedish *dvärg*, Norwegian *dverg*, Danish *dværg*, Faroese *dvørgur*, Dutch *dwerf*, English *dwarf*, and German *Zwerg* (de Vries 1962, 89). While these words are clearly related, various ideas have been brought forward with regard to the etymology of the word “dwarf”. Various scholars suggest, for instance, the Indo-European **dhuergh-* (“low [in stature], crippled”) or **dhuer-* (“to ruin by deceiving, to harm”), the Proto-Germanic **dwerzaz* or **dwezgaz*, or the Sanskrit *dhvaras* (“demonic being”) as potential roots (Pokorny 1948–69, I, 276 and 279; Lecouteux 1981, 372–3; Libermann 2002, 257–60).

The earliest preserved mentions of *nain* in Old French appear to occur in Bérout’s *Tristan* from the last quarter of the twelfth century and Chrétien de Troyes’ *Érec* dated to c. 1170 (Martineau 2003, 15). The etymology of Old French *nain* (bearing the same meaning in modern French) is not as riven and cloudy as the proposed etymologies of “dwarf” discussed above, as the word appears to derive from Latin *nānus* (pl. *nanī*), meaning “dwarf” in the sense of beings suffering from an achondroplastic condition (Schoon Eberly 1988, 64, 68 and 73–4). The Latin word, in extension, derived from the Ancient Greek *vāvoç* (*nānos*) with the same meaning.

This examination of the respective etymologies underlines that from the outset, while both the *nain* and the *dvergr* are clearly essentially concepts (one clearer than the other), the *nain* was intrinsically connected with a small stature while the word *dvergr* does not initially provoke such a correlations. If anything, the word *dvergr* appears to have originally been more related to something demonic or disabled, although, as will be shown below, this feature is much less apparent in most old Norse sources. We can now go on to consider the medieval understanding of the Old French *nain* and the Old Norse *dvergr* on the basis of written evidence prior to and during the period of translation in the thirteenth and fourteenth century in order to highlight the differences and similarities inherent in the said concepts. Logically, the Old French concept of the *nain* will be considered first, as it is the template for the *dvergar* of the Old Norse translations.

Les Nains

As has been stated above, the earliest accounts of *nains* preserved in Old French literature are to be found in *Tristan* by Bérout and Chrétien de Troyes’ *Érec*, both of which are dated to the later quarters of the twelfth century. Indeed, it would appear that the Old French *nains* can be found in two main groups as

Anne Martineau has suggested: the rich and the poor (Martineau 2003, 17). While the poor *nains* are usually servants, the rich ones, either sons of kings or kings themselves, such as Bilis in *Érec*, belong to a group loosely referred to as *petits chevaliers* (“little knights”) (Wohlgemuth 1906, 99–100; Martineau 2003, 17–22 and 70–3). The *petits chevaliers* are not encountered in the translated Old Norse material, meaning that emphasis here will be placed on the *nains* in a serving role.

Several general characteristics are uniform amongst the *nains*. One is that they seem to be understood as being of smaller-than-usual stature. If any specifications with regard to their body height are given, some *nains* are described as being between three and five feet tall, Aubéron of *Huon de Bordeaux* (between 1260 and 1268) and Agrapas in *Aliscans* (second half of the twelfth century) standing at three feet in height, for example (Wienbeck et al. 1903, 361; Kibler and Suard 2003, 2; Wohlgemuth 1906, 80; Martineau 2003, 29).

Also, and in addition to their vertical physiognomy, the *nains* are often shown to be obese. For instance, the *nain* accompanying Harpin de la Montaigne in *Yvain* is said to be *come boz anflez* (“puffed like an ox”) (Nolting–Hauff 1962, 206; Raffel 1987, 123). Martineau has proposed that this particular feature highlighted the *nains*’ attraction to physicality: while the *petits chevaliers* are formidable knights that can compete with the best of Arthurian knights, the servant-*nains* not only admire the prowess and aptitude of their master but are also said to fight on their behalf (Harward, Jr. 1958, 117–9; Martineau 2003, 29–31 and 51). Most *nains* are depicted as hunched and big-headed, typical examples being the *nain* of the knight Yders in *Érec*, Ferocin in *Tristan* by Béroul and Druidain in the thirteenth-century romance *La Vengeance Raguidel* (Friedwagner 1909, II, 120–1; Lacy 1989, 62–5; Kibler and Suard 2003, 174; Wohlgemuth 1906, 81–2; Lütjens 1911, 7).

Although the appearance of *nains* may contradict the ideal of an Arthurian knight in almost every regard – something that often leads to humour – monstrous *nains* are encountered exceedingly rarely in the Old French Arthurian literary corpus (Martineau 2003, 32–6; Susskind 1961, 186–7).² While benevolent *nains* also appear in the narrative record, however, rebellious ones are the most frequently encountered variant of *nains* (Martineau 2003, 32–6). In the midst of these mischief-makers is a group of *nains* that has gained such notoriety that they are given a special type designation: *larrons* (sg. *larron*,

² Although Susskind does not mention *nains* in particular, the humorous aspects of physical disproportions may very well be understood as having been linked to them as well.

“robber, thief”). Amongst the chief representatives of this illustrious group is, for example, Maugis d’Aigremont who steals the swords of many renowned knights and delights in causing harm to Charlemagne, the best example for such behaviour being described in the *chanson de geste Renaut de Montauban* from the late twelfth century (Thomas 1989, 222–3; Wohlgemuth 1906, 90–1 and 97; Brandin 1938, 81–2).

Fascinatingly, and on rare occasions, spouses, parents or siblings are attributed to *nains*. The *nain*-knight Groadain of the *Lancelot en prose* (between 1215–35) is fond of quoting his mother, and in the work *Perlesvaus* (early thirteenth century), the *nain* in service of Marin le Jaloux is the brother of the *nain* of the Château de la Pelote (Branch VI) (Micha 1978–83, VIII, 156; Strubel 2007, 300–21; Ferlampin–Acher 2002, 273–4; Martineau 2003, 22–7). It appears unsurprising that the *nains* (like the *dvergar*, see below) are almost exclusively understood as being male. Of the roughly 160 *nains* of Old French Arthurian literature spanning three centuries and comprising about 50 works investigated by Martineau, she only found six *naines* (that is, female *nains*) figures which remain mostly uninteresting and shallow (Martineau 2003, 13 and 29). Only in isolated instances are *nains* given names; generally, they remain anonymous (as far as the names are concerned) (Ferlampin–Acher 2002, 273–4; Martineau 2003, 13).

In terms of skill, the *nains* appear to be usually understood as masters of various crafts, namely cooking, caring for horses, passing on messages and espionage (Harward, Jr. 1958, 106–10; Martineau 2003, 57–61). The model *nain* capable of all of these skills appears in the Breton *lai Desiré*, in which a knight of the same name encounters a *nain* in a forest that first takes care of Desiré’s horse before giving the knight his meal and bearing a message for him. Elsewhere, Ferocin spies on Tristan and Yseult in both of the *Tristan* romances while the *nain* of Yders in *Érec* actively speaks on his master’s behalf (see below). The peculiar yet interesting figure of the *nain* Ferocin – who plays an important role in *Tristran* by Béroul – is not only described as a vicious character, but as someone who can see his personal future in the stars and serves as a counsellor to his liege King Marc (Lacy 1989, 16–7; Wohlgemuth 1906, 93 and 101–2). It is worth noting, however, that the Old French *nains* are not portrayed crafting items and are never portrayed as smiths, making them different from their Old Norse mythological and literary brethren (see below).

Another interesting feature is that it is not uncommon for servant-*nains* to appear as mirror images of their masters (Martineau 2003, 48). When they misbehave, it is difficult for the protagonist to punish them, since their master is shown to be as unmannered as his *nain*, something which is best portrayed in *Érec* and *Yvain* (Martineau 2003, 31).

In conclusion, one can accept the proposed three-stage development of the Arthurian *nains* proposed by Martineau.³ Initially, between the twelfth and the first third of the thirteenth century, *nains* seem to be more disruptive than comical. They cause action and motivate plot progression, thereby creating the expectation of stir whenever a *nain* is mentioned in a narrative. In the thirteenth century, however, the focus on their comical aspects seems to gain more prominence, as the *nains* shift into a role in which they serve as key actors in narratives within narratives (Theodor 1913, 41–2). In the later works of the fourteenth century and beyond, the earlier supernatural origin of the *nain* starts to become more distorted and eventually gets lost, although certain folkloristic elements still shine through. These features nonetheless appear more in the shape of non-focal tropes rather than as key elements important to the story in question. It would appear that, unlike the Old Norse *dvergar* discussed next, the *nains* had no mythological aspects attached to them. They remain always in the realm of folklore and literature (Ferlampin–Acher 2002, 276).

***Dvergar*: The Covetous Craftsmen of Old Norse Mythology**

One of the most defining features of the Old Norse *dvergar* which sets them apart from other mythological entities and concepts such as the *álfar* or *dísir* (and appears only to be matched by the *valkyrjur*) is the number of names preserved attached to them. The aptly named *Dvergahulur*, dating to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, preserve 94 speaking names of *dvergar* (Gurevich 2017, I, 692–706). The meanings of the names are connected to some of the best-known attributes of the *dvergar* (see below), such as wisdom, craftsmanship, and associations with death and the earth. While the early thirteenth century *Snorra Edda* also preserves its fair share of these names,⁴ they mostly appear to be taken from what the scholarship has labelled *Dvergatal*, referring to *Völuspá* sts 9–16 (Simek 2007, 49).

³ The following paragraph is rendered in accordance with Martineau 2003, 16–7.

⁴ Apparently drawing on contemporary Christian doctrine and teaching in *Gylfaginning* 17, Snorri Sturluson seems to regard the Old Norse notion of the *álfar* as being equal to the Christian idea of angels and demons, dividing them into types, namely the *ljósálfar* (“light *álfar*”) and the *dökkálfar* (“dark *álfar*”) (Simek 2013, 335–6). The latter group appears to be the equivalent to the so-called *svartálfar* which are initially mentioned in *Skáldskaparmál* 35. In the present context, it is worth noting that Snorri seemingly correlates the *svartálfar* to the *dvergar*, for example in *Skáldskaparmál* 39. Snorri’s depiction of the *dvergar* as a group of *álfar* is perhaps in part based on the name *Gandálfr* (composite name of “magic staff” and *álfr*) which appears amongst other “dwarfish” names in *Dvergatal*.

Dvergar are featured in numerous mythological and heroic Eddic poems, most notably *Alvíssmál* which features a *dvergr* as one of the protagonists.⁵ The poem revolves around a competition of knowledge between Þórr and the *dvergr* Alvíss (“exceedingly wise”) who intends to marry Þórr’s daughter without the father’s consent. Alvíss, however, loses this contest when he is turned into stone at first light (*Alvíssmál* st. 35).

As has been outlined above, *dvergar* are found in various mythological narratives, many of which are connected to the creation of valuable items for the Old Norse gods (Liebermann 2002, 260). All of these objects are vital for the divine lineages in Eddic poetry – as well as heroes and protagonists in the *foraldarsögur* (see below) – and take the form of weapons or items of utility, often going on to serve as a distinctive feature of a specific deity. One prominent mythological narrative is preserved by Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál* 35: After having cut off Sif’s hair, Loki is forced to make up for this by a raging Þórr and engages in a blacksmithing competition with two *dvergar*, creating various important items such as Sif’s golden hair, the foldable ship *Skíðblaðnir*, Óðinn’s iconic spear *Gungnir*, his ring *Draupnir* and Þórr’s signature weapon *Mjöllnir* as well as the boar *Gullinborsti*.⁶ Furthermore, *dvergar* are said to be the creators of Freyja’s necklace *Brisingamen* (for instance, *Þrymskviða* sts 13 and 19; *Gylfaginning* 34 and *Skáldskaparmál* 20). The *dvergar* also appear in the mythological narrative surrounding the creation of the *skáldskapar mjöðr* (“the Mead of Poetry”) as described by Snorri Sturluson in *Skáldskaparmál* G57.

Following on from the evidence relating to the *dvergar* in the extant Nordic mythology, their key attributes can be summed up as follows: it comes as no surprise that they appear as exceptional craftsmen, their artistry being further implied by their names, such as *Brokkr* (lit. “smith, who works with fragments (of metal)”), *Fíli* (“file”), *Hannarr* (lit. “skilled”) or *Kíli* (“wedge”) (Gould

⁵ Unless otherwise stated, all references to Eddic poetry are taken from Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason 2014 and Klaus von See et. al. 1997–2019. If not otherwise specified, all references to the *Snorra Edda* are given in accordance with the editions by Faulkes 1998–2007. Except where otherwise stated, all references to skaldic poetry are taken from the *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* database (accessed via <https://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk/db.php>). If not otherwise provided, all datings of Old Norse sagas and related material are taken from Simek/ Hermann Pálsson ²2007.

⁶ The ship *Skíðblaðnir* is also mentioned in *Gylfaginning* 43–4 and *Grímnismál* st. 43–4 for instance. The spear *Gungnir* is iterated upon in *Gylfaginning* 51 and *Sigrdrífumál* st. 17 for example. The ring *Draupnir* is mentioned in *Skáldskaparmál* 35 and Book III, 2,5, of Saxo Grammaticus’ *Gesta Danorum* (Friis–Jensen and Zeeberg 2005, I, 192–3). The hammer *Mjöllnir* appears in various mythological poems such as *Þrymskviða* or *Hymiskviða*, but also in Book III, 2,10 of *Gesta Danorum* (Friis–Jensen and Zeeberg 2005, I, 196–7).

1929, 943–50; Motz 1973, 106–7; and 1983, 90–5). The *dvergar* are nonetheless not only physically skilled, they are also depicted as being wise, with names such as *Alvíss*, *Fiðr* (“magician”) and *Fjølsviðr* (“very wise” [also an *Óðinsheiti*]) for instance (Gould 1929, 941 and 946–7). This magical knowledge, as seems apparent from *Alvíssmál*, may also be reflected in the belief that they were sometimes thought of as the cause of illness.⁷ Interestingly, the idea of *dvergar* causing headaches is reflected in the fourteenth-century *Sigurðar saga þögla* (Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1982, III, 117–20), which describes how King Hálfðan, after having hurt the child of a *dvergr* with a stone, is said to be hit so hard on the head by its father in his sleep that he can hardly move the next day, and his condition is only cured after Hálfðan has formally apologised (Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1982, III, 120).

The wisdom of the *dvergar* seems to be in accordance with another feature connected to them: their age. Indeed, they seem to be almost as old as the Old Norse deities and *jotnar*, either emerging from the blood of Bláinn and the bones of Brimir after the creation of the cosmos (as in *Völuspá* st. 9) or arising from the corpse of the slain primordial being Ymir in whose flesh they apparently used to abide in as maggots according to *Gylfaginning* 14. Their homes are regularly said to be in mountains and rocks, as can be seen in *Völuspá* st. 48 and *Alvíssmál* st. 3, and accounts like *Völsunga saga* or the late fifteenth-century *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns* (Finch 1965, 23; Loth 1963, III, 49; Motz 1983, 90). This link to rocks and dwellings below the surface of the earth is also seen in the word *dvergmál*, used for “echo” for example in the older *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* and *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943, II, 341 and 488; Gould 1929, 943–4 and 951; Motz 1977, 55). *Ynglinga saga*, for example, mentions how King Svegðir gets lured into a rock by a *dvergr* only to never be seen again (Finnur Jónsson 1966, 11), a passage which indicates the possibility of a connection of *dvergar* with death. Indeed, as noted above, numerous *dvergar* names can be given which support such a link, as with *Náinn* (“corpse-like, relative”), *Dáinn* (“deadlike”) and *Eggmóinn* (“slain by the sword”) (Gould 1929, 959–67; Saulus and Taylor 1969, 76–81; Battles 2005, 71).

There is little to no evidence to suggest that the *dvergar* of Old Norse mythology were ever conceptualised as being of smaller stature than other

⁷ Regarding “dwarfish” magic, see, for example, Reichborn-Kjennerud 1938–40, I, 13–6 and 51–3; III, 7–8; Motz 1973–4, 103; 1977, 57; Battles 2005, 33–5. An extra-cultural link to “dwarves” as the cause of pain can be found in the Anglo-Saxon charm anthology referred to as *Lacnunga* in the form of a charm. This charm, called “Wið dweorh” (also spelled *Þið Dpeorh*; “Against a dwarf”) details a procedure to work a charm to heal a disease (Pettit 2001, 72–5).

beings (even gods), as later folklore depicts them to be (Battles 2005, 78). The only exceptions might be the prose introduction to *Reginismál* where Reginn is said to be *dvergr of vǫxt* (“a *dvergr* in statue”) and the description of the *dvergr* Littr being kicked onto Baldr’s funeral pyre by a distressed Þórr who may have found him between the god’s feet. In spite of this, neither account necessarily indicates small stature (Polomé 1997, 441). The former may rather refer to a bulky, heavy set stature associated with the *dvergar* due to the nature of their work.

Although the *dvergar* appear to be exclusively male in Old Norse mythology, it is worth noting that Snorri deploys the circumlocution *Ívalda synir* to refer to specific *dvergar*, suggesting they have parents (and thus a mother?). Certainly, *Fáfnismál* st. 13 mentions a triad of *nornir* as *dætr Dvalins*. Similar ideas might be seen in the *kenningar* employed to describe *dvergar* which describe them as kinsmen of a named *dvergr*, such as *rekka Þorins* (“of the men of Þorinn”) or *burar Billings* (“of the son of Billingr”). All the same, it is never explicitly stated what the maternal side might have been and whether these were “dwarfish” females. Interestingly enough, the first direct mentions of *dvergar* of a female sex appear around the fourteenth century with the introduction of the *dyrgjur* (sg. *dyrgja*; “female dwarf”).⁸ It is thus not surprising that Anatoly Libermann has argued that they appear to be “the development of late medieval story telling and the efflorescence of medieval romances [...]” (Libermann 2002, 262).

“ek hræðumz ekki þik” – The *dvergar* in Translated *riddarasögur*

As has been stated, it goes without saying that translation involves some degree of change and alteration of the subject of translation, a fact that appears to hold currency with regard to the translation of supernatural concepts. In fact, seeing the “dwarves” as a pan-European phenomenon, the Scandinavian perception of *dvergar* appears to parallel those of the Old French *nains* noted above which, as will be demonstrated, do not seem to have caught on in Nordic folk belief. There is good reason to contemplate the possible reasons for why this occurred with the various new attributes associated with the *nains*.

⁸ *Dyrgjur* appear in, among others, *Gibbons saga* and *Þjalar-Jóns saga* (both fourteenth century): see Tan-Haverhorst 1939, I-LXVIII, 10–4 and 19–22; Page 1960, IX–XXX and 37.

To start with, however, we must decide which Old French narratives and Old Norse translations should be considered. Naturally, while all Old French works that feature *nains* will be studied to build up some understanding of the term, those texts that have no surviving Old Norse rendition assignable to them will be excluded from the comparison. This leaves us those three Old French sources which feature *nains* and their corresponding Old Norse translations:

- The romance *Érec* is estimated to have been written in c. 1170 by Chrétien de Troyes (c. 1140–1190). The Old Norse reworking, *Erex saga*, is presumed to have been composed in the mid-thirteenth century. However, and due to the defectiveness of the manuscripts, *Erex saga* has a problematic transmission history (Roques 1968, III–XVI and XXVIII–XXXII; Kalinke 1999, 219–20).
- *Yvain*, another work by Chrétien de Troyes, is estimated to have been composed after *Érec et Énide* and between 1170 to 1180. The Old Norse translation of *Yvain*, *Ívens saga*, is dated to the mid-thirteenth century (Nolting–Hauff 1962, 7–14; Kalinke 1999, 35–6). *Ívens saga*, like *Erex saga*, has a troubled transmission history again due to the condition of the surviving texts.
- The Breton *lai Désiré* survives in two manuscripts dated to the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century respectively. Yet, the original date of composition must be earlier since an Old Norse variant appears on the *Strengleikar* compilation (Burgess and Brook 2007, 11 and 14–6; Cook and Tveitane 1979, 106–7). The *Strengleikar* collection is dated to the early- to mid-thirteenth century.

Considering the accounts noted above, the sections in the Old Norse translations in which the *dvergar* occur can be grouped into two different categories which echo the categories of the *nains* noted above: 1) those telling of *dvergar* working as counsellors to a king; and 2) those in which they are servants to a master (knight or else). In the following examination of the material presented above, however, only the “dwarves” serving a master will be considered, as the preserved information for the counselling “dwarves” is too little in both literature traditions to justify a separate investigation.

***Nains* and *dvergar* as Servants to Masters**

As outlined above, *nains* are, amongst other things, often depicted as figures in the service to a master. Both Old French romances investigated in the present study, *Érec* and *Yvain*, feature such *nains*. The description of the *nain* serving the knight Yders in *Érec* is more exhaustive than that of the nameless *nain*

serving a *jaiant* in *Yvain*. It is incorporated into Érec’s first adventure and is therefore discussed first. In the beginning of the story, Érec accompanies Queen Guinevere in a forest as the Arthurian court sets out to amuse itself with the hunt of game. It is in the woods that they encounter an unknown knight who is accompanied by his beloved and a *nain*, the latter being described as riding on a rouncey and carrying a knotted whip, a device prominently deployed by him in the following (ll. 145–148) (Roques 1968, 5). *Erex saga*, too, features this passage, albeit adding that the *dvergr* is *ljótr* (“ugly”) and his mount being no longer a rouncey, but he is sitting *á stórum hesti* (“on a large horse”) (Kalinke 1999, 224–5).

The Queen, intrigued to know more about the knight’s identity, sends one of her maidens to him. However, the servant girl’s request is denied and she is even assaulted as she refuses to yield before the *nain* and his demands (ll. 161–186).⁹ In this passage, the *nain* is described as *molt fel* (l. 171; “very evil”) and *de pute ere* (l. 171; “of evil origin”) as well as *petit* (l. 162; “short”). He is also said to wield a whip (ll. 162 and 178).¹⁰ *Erex saga*, now, while it reduces the overall length of this segment, still features the dialogue between the maiden and the *dvergr* in which she is rather harshly rebuked to turn back and not proceed further on her errand to uncover his master’s identity (Kalinke 1999, 224). However, as she is not intimidated and tries to move past him, he whips her hand bloody. The main differences are that the maiden addresses the *dvergr* politely by calling him *góði* (“good one”) while in the Old French the maid only addresses him as *nain* (l. 167), the absence in the saga of the remarks on the evil nature (l. 171; *fel*), low status, and wicked origin of the *nain* (l. 171; *de put ere*).

The next step in the narrative tells how Queen Guinevere, outraged at this conduct, sends Érec to him in order to enforce her wish to get to know the knight (ll. 195–204; Roques 1968, 7). The dialogue between Queen Guinevere and Érec also exists in the Old Norse saga, although here the queen denounces the *dvergr*’s behaviour as *niðingsverk* (“infamous action, disgraceful deed”) (Kalinke 1999, 224). Both narratives then continue with the meeting of Érec/*Erex* and the “dwarf,” with the Arthurian knight suffering the same treatment as the servant–maiden before him (ll. 208–224).¹¹ Yet again, the *nain* is described as wielding the knotted whip (ll. 219 and 222) with which he strikes Érec. Once more, the wickedness and evil character of the *nain* is underlined as he hinders the Arthurian knight on his errand, being called *fel* twice (ll. 214 and 218; “evil”) as well as *enuieus* (l. 213; “morose”) and *contraieus* (l. 214; “hostile”).

⁹ The information in the following is in accordance with Roques 1968, 6.

¹⁰ If not otherwise specified, the meaning of Old French vocabulary is given in accordance with the dictionary by Tobler and Lommatzsch 1955–2018.

¹¹ This segment is in accordance with the information given in Roques 1968, 7–8.

Erex saga, with the expected reductions, nonetheless renders this episode fairly accurately. Important information regarding the *dvergr* can be drawn from his dialogue with Erex, who is addressed as *fól* (“fool”):

Erex segir: ‘Skríð burt, þú leiðileg skepna; en ek mun fara minn veg fyrir þér,’ ok skaut honum frá sér. ‘Nei, nei,’ segir dvergrinn, ‘ek hræðumz ekki þik, þvíat minn meistari hefnir mín skjótt, ef þú gerir mér illt.’ (Kalinke 1999, 224).

Erex says: ‘Creep off, you loathsome creature; I’ll keep on my way whether you like it or not,’ and he shoved him aside. ‘No, no,’ says the dwarf, ‘I’m not afraid of you, for my master will avenge me at once if you do me harm.’ (Kalinke 1999, 225).

Although the Old Norse and Old French narratives use slightly different words to describe the “dwarf’s” deeds, the outcome remains the same, namely the condemnation of these acts as being excessively harsh and violent. The way in which *Érec* and Erex address their counterpart nonetheless shows some differences, as the Old French version is considerably meaner about the *nain*. Both narratives nevertheless describe the “dwarf” as ugly, the Old French stressing his low birth and hostility, an interesting note that the Old Norse text omits.¹² *Erex saga* adds, however, that Erex is knocked unconscious by the *dvergr*’s blow, a detail that is absent in the Old French *Érec*. Without overinterpreting this little detail, one wonders whether it may be due to the supposed strength of Old Norse *dvergar* connected to their blacksmithing work. Similar to the Old French, the saga echoes the stature for the *dvergr*, as Erex vilifies him as a *leiðinleg skepna* (“irksome creature”) (see above). Yet, the remarks that the *nain*’s actions are a mirror of his master’s character and that he will be held responsible for his servant’s behaviour are kept in the Old Norse saga.

After having been humiliated by the “dwarf”, *Érec*/ Erex vows to defend his honour and that of the Queen and follows the unknown knight to challenge him to single combat. Over the course of his pursuit, *Érec* merely mentions the presence of the *nain* alongside the unknown knight – whose name turns out to be Yders in the Old French and Maliprant in the Old Norse – without giving any further descriptions of him. The Old Norse saga shortens this passage,

¹² The Old French *Érec* further refers to the *nain* as a “vile, outrageous fellow” (l. 239) and as “haughty” (ll. 241–2) (Roques 1968, 8).

completely omitting the presence of the *dvergr* in the process.¹³ After Érec/ Erex has overcome Yders/ Maliprant in a duel, the defeated knight is granted clemency under the condition that he surrenders himself, his beloved and his “dwarf” to the Queen’s mercy. Here Érec/ Erex iterates upon the viciousness of the “dwarf’s” earlier behaviour, with the Old French calling the *nain anrievre* (“evil, spiteful, insidious”) (ll. 1009–33) while the Old Norse remarks on the *dirfð* (“audacity, presumptuousness”) of the *dvergr*’s deeds (Roques 1968, 31–2; Kalinke 1999, 230).

Both narratives then follow Yders’/ Maliprant’s journey to Arthur’s court at Cardigan, the Old Norse again shortening this passage dramatically. In both narratives, the knight encounters the Queen, begging for her clemency and forgiveness for his “dwarf’s” behaviour and his negligence in not penalising him for his conduct, and the Queen then shows him compassion. In this part of the narrative, the “dwarf” is said to be present but neither the Old French nor the Old Norse narratives offer any more details about him. The same holds true for the inner monologue of Érec during his fight with Yders – a segment the Old Norse does not convey – where Érec remembers the humiliation at the hands of the *nain* but does not comment further on the *nain* himself.¹⁴

Another “dwarf” is also featured in the Old French *Yvain* and its Old Norse translation, *Ívens saga*, in a similar role to that of his counterpart of Érec and Erex *saga* discussed above. Unlike his peer, this “dwarf” who has no speech, is tersely described and only appears briefly. The figure appears in a passage in *Yvain* in which the *jaiant* Harpin de la Montainge has slain three and captured four sons of a nobleman and has a *nain* who is said to be *come boz anflez* (see above) leading the captives, lashing at them repeatedly with his whip (ll. 4103–12; Nolting–Hauff 1962, 206). *Ívens saga* also features this episode but is somewhat terse in its description of the *dvergr*, merely stating of the sons (here of a *jarl*) that “a [*dvergr*] led them” (Kalinke 1999, 79).¹⁵ The translation thus foregoes the negative detail typical of *nains* that he is bloated, underlining that instead of the *dvergr* the *jötunn* named Fjallshafir (the equivalent of Harpin) wields the whip (Kalinke 1999, 78). The *Yvain* narrative goes on to tell how Yvain overcame Harpin, telling the man to send his sons, his sole daughter and the *nain* to King Arthur’s court in order to tell of Yvain’s deeds (ll. 4273–9; Nolting–Hauff 1962, 214). *Ívens saga* once again renders this information

¹³ In order to minimise the length of footnotes here, it will hopefully suffice here to provide the relevant lines in *Érec*: ll. 778–9 and 793–4 (which mention the *nain* as Érec is pursuing Yders) and ll. 917–20 and 985–6 respectively (iterating on the evil deed of the *nain*) (Roques 1968, 24–5, 29 and 31).

¹⁴ Examples of this are, for instance, ll. 917–20 and 985–6 (Roques 1968, 29 and 31).

¹⁵ The original reads as follows: “[e]n dvergr leiddi þá” (Kalinke 1999, 78).

accurately, albeit in a more concise fashion, merely stating that the *jarl* ought to send his sons, his daughter as well as the *dvergr* to King Artús' court (Kalinke 1999, 78).

Thus, with all information about the “dwarves” in the Chrétienian sources and their Old Norse translations being exhausted, we turn to the only *lai* in the investigated material, the so-called *Désiré*, as well as its Old Norse adaptation. The Old French *lai Désiré* tells the story of the knight Désiré and his beloved, a *fee*-mistress, and of their initial meeting, problems and ultimate reunion. A nameless *nain*, shown to be in the service of a woman, serves in propelling the plot, aiding Désiré to recover his beloved. According to Martineau, he can be regarded as a *nain à-tout-faire* (“jack of all trades”), considering his complete display of the three major skills of Old French *nains*, something that is usually only hinted at in other narratives (see above) (Martineau 2003, 57).

The most interesting segment begins after Désiré gets lost in the woods. As night falls, he spots a campfire and a nobleman beside it and heads thither (ll. 569–715),¹⁶ with the man turning out to be a *nain*. Although greeted warmly repeatedly, the *nain* does not reply and remains silent (ll. 582–7 and 601), instead rushing to take care of Désiré's horse and preparing a meal. It is Désiré's noble and well-mannered conduct during the sharing of the meal that makes the *nain* break his silence: “mes que j'en doie estre batuz” (“even if I have to be beaten for it”) (l. 636), causing him to reveal his mission to Désiré: he says he was sent there by Désiré's beloved in anticipation of the knight's arrival to prepare his lodgings. Ultimately, the nameless *nain*-servant offers to guide Désiré to his beloved. Once there, however, Désiré falls, wounding himself, and only escaping from the hostile environment with the help of a maid-servant of his lover. The two then head back to the *nain*, who is beaten by the maiden, before being chased off, shunned for his disloyal behaviour and described as *fel* (“evil”) and *esbahis* (“foolish one”) (ll. 711–5).

The Old Norse rendition of *Désiré*, entitled *Desire ljóð*, remains comparatively truthful to its source material.¹⁷ For the segment considered here, *Desire ljóð* follows the plot as outlined by the Breton *lai*. Remaining silent like his French counterpart, the *dvergr* rushes to feed Desire's horse before sharing his meal with the knight. After having positively identified the knight as being Desire, the *dvergr* unveils his mission. His purpose, however, is slightly different with the Old Norse saying that the *dvergr* had been tasked to directly

¹⁶ The information in the following is in accordance with Burgess and Brook 2007, 66–73.

¹⁷ The information in the following is in accordance with Cook and Tveitane 1979, 127–31.

lead Desire to the bed of his beloved. Analogous to the Old French *lai*, the *dvergr* then adds that, compelled by Desire’s beauty and courteous manners, he wants to serve him. As in the *lai*, Desire blunders and has to flee the scene, again aided by a maiden. She follows him to where the *dvergr* is waiting. There, she rebukes the *dvergr*:

ok mællti hon þa reiðom orðum. Þu hinn illgiarne oc hinn dalegi dvergr. hui villdir þu suikia þenna hinn dyrlega mann. ok laust hon dverginn með lofa sinum firir briost honum. ok mællte. fly undan með honum sem skiotast mattv” (Cook and Tveitane 1979, 130).

[...] and then she spoke in angry words: ‘You malicious and wicked [*dvergr*], why did you want to deceive this excellent man?’ Then she struck the [*dvergr*] in the chest with the palm of her hand and said: “Take him away from here as fast as you can” (Cook and Tveitane 1979, 131).

Regarding the Longevity of Foreign Motifs

Considering the differences between the Old French *nains* and the Old Norse *dvergar*, one might expect some aspects of the character of the *nains* in the Old French texts to be lost in the process of translation – not least as part of the work of the Old Norse translators. However, this would appear not to be the case. Certainly, the scenes in which a *nain* appears seem to be cut down in the Old Norse translations, but the overarching idea of an ugly “dwarf” accompanying his master and committing cruel deeds either with or for him has clearly been correctly rendered in the Old Norse in spite of the fact that it might seem to have contradicted local ideas about the nature of the *dvergar* (an exception may potentially be the figure of Reginn although, as noted, he is never directly said to be a *dvergr* and has a wider Germanic background) (Andersson 1980, 83–98). In short, it looks as if the authors of the later sagas, who were evidently happy to go on using the local Nordic motifs associated with *dvergar* (such as the ideas of them living inside stones or under the earth, their artistry, their strength, and their skill at forging and/ or their curing/ damaging abilities), felt this foreign view of servile “dwarves” was unbecoming or in contradiction to their local understanding of these beings. This applies especially to the idea that a “dwarf” should be naturally low born, something that is not reflected in the Old Norse where individuals associated with blacksmithing seem to have enjoyed considerable social acknowledgement in spite of their apparent self-interest. This is something that can be seen not only in the *dvergar*-related mythology discussed above, but also in archaeological

and toponymical evidence relating to blacksmiths in mainland Scandinavia.¹⁸ One feature that does seem to catch on, however, as Schäfke notes in his study on the prototype–semantical analysis of the *dvergar* in 29 *fornaldarsögur*, indigenous *riddarasögur* and associated *þættir* from 2010, is that they become small in stature, which becomes a prominent feature in the *fornaldarasögur*, *þættir* and indigenous *riddarasögur* (Schäfke 2010, 211–3), along with elements of ugliness and large heads, features which seem to be associated with each other (Schäfke 2010, 212). There is thus a strong possibility that these elements originated in the translated chivalric material.

Another feature that seems to have started catching on over time (at least in literary terms) is the question of places of abode. As noted above, almost all early indigenous Old Norse sagas and poems seem to depict *dvergar* as inhabiting rocks or stones. In the later legendary saga material, however, while the *dvergar* are comparatively immobile unless the plot requires their movement (Schäfke, 2010, 237), and while some are still said to dwell in rocks or hillocks, others are clearly based at a liege’s court (that of a king or *jarl*), as is the case with Túta in *Sneglu–Halla þáttur* or Reginn in *Egils saga einhenda* (Jónas Kristjánsson 1956, 269–75; Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–4, III, 186; see also Schäfke 2010, 226–7). Others follow their masters, some of whom are depicted as residing at a court, as with Ferocin in Bérout’s *Tristan* who resides at the court of his master, the *nain* serving Marin le Jaloux and his brother in *Perlesvaus* or the nameless servant–*nain* of Yders in *Érec*, who is sent to Arthur’s court in Cardigan alongside his master after Yders loses to the Arthurian knight in a duel (see above). It stands to reason that the *topos* of subservient *dvergar* residing in our world at courts of the social elite might be another idea that was introduced into the Scandinavian literary landscape by means of the Old Norse translations of Continental chivalric works.

Despite the Old Norse *dvergar* in all genres being associated with the crafting and provision of magical items, they are, in comparison, remarkably unproductive in terms of creation in the translated *riddarasögur*. They thus appear to mirror their Old French source templates (see above). While combat

¹⁸ I am referring here to the toponymic data gained from the research into so-called central places, assembled by scholars such as Stefan Brink. As has been shown, a central place where a ruling figure lived would commonly be surrounded by various place names often associated with particular crafts which show the important role of the smith for these dominant communities: see, for instance, Brink 1996, 240–2; 1999, 433–4. Regarding the social standing of *dvergar*, see Acker 2002, 215–20 and Gunnell forthcoming. I am thankful to Terry Gunnell for providing me with a draft of his article on *dvergar* which is to be published in *Pre-Christian Religion of the North: History and Structures* (forthcoming). See also Ármann Jakobsson (2005, 65–6) and his brief remark regarding *dvergar* in late- and post-medieval sources which he argues to have potentially been “influenced by a different tradition or a literary invention” (2005, 54).

prowess like that found in the Old French *nains* and the *dvergar* in the translated *riddarasögur* is somewhat new to the Old Norse *dvergar*, the aspect of strength seems to be shared, and is thus unlikely to have arisen as a result of foreign influence.

In spite of the continuation of *dvergar* as a literary motif in the Nordic countries (albeit with those minor changes noted above), it seems apparent that these figures were disappearing from Nordic folk belief.¹⁹ It is noteworthy that Reimund Kvideland and Henning K. Sehmsdorf do not feature any “dwarf”-related folk legend in their collection of Nordic legends, *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legend* (1988, 224, 227 and 230–1).²⁰ Granted, the collection includes a range of stories revolving around “mound folk”, but these tend to be *huldre* (“elvish nature spirits”) rather than “dwarves”. The belief that remains takes the form of vestiges. A handful of folk legends recorded by Jón Árnason (1819–1888) and Arngrímur Fr. Bjarnason (1886–1962) certainly show some limited belief in *dvergar* living on Iceland in some areas.²¹ These accounts nonetheless underline that the translated stories of the *nains* seem to have had little effect on Icelandic belief. Those few motifs that remain tend to have Old Nordic rather than Gallic roots. The stories in question, which tend to depict the *dvergar* in a limited narrative framework, usually still tend to revolve around a *dvergasteinn* (“stone of the dwarves”) in which such beings are thought to dwell, and stories attached to that very rock. “Gullsteinn á Gufudalshálsi,” for example, tells of how a very prominent stone in the Gufudalsháls area of Gufudalur in Gufufjörður got its name, either because *dvergar* are thought to forge gold there or because some gold was found in the vicinity of the stone. This story, once again, underlines the age-old connection of *dvergar* with metals. Another story, “Guðmundur Bergþórsson,” tells the story of a *skáld* of the same name, who became sick and sought the medical advice of two *dvergar*, both of whom live in a stone but far apart of one another. By far the most prominent story featuring a *dvergasteinn* is the story “Dvergasteinar í Bolungavík”, which tells of certain stones on the heathland of Bolungavíkurheiði which apparently have been inhabited by *dvergar* since ancient times, and once again have the ability of curing the sick. On a side note, it is interesting to observe that the majority of these folk legends were either collected or set in the Vestfjords of Iceland.

¹⁹ That these figures did not live on in Iceland may in part be due to the lack of mines in Iceland or the lack of a special class of blacksmith.

²⁰ With regard to Swedish folk legends, Lindow does not list any dwarf-related folktales in his 1978 publication. However, af Klintberg does feature four tales featuring mountain smiths in his study on Swedish folk legends (2010, 135).

²¹ The following information is given in accordance with Jón Árnason 1954–1961, I, 453–5; Arngrímur Fr. Bjarnason, 1959, II(1), 171 and III(1), 91–4.

Conclusion

In conclusion, one can say that Schäfke's recent argument about the image of "marginalised *dvergar*" dwelling at court or houses of rulers in Old Norse literature (Schäfke 2010, 267) needs a little qualifying. The evidence of the present investigation seems to point to the possibility that the notion of lower-class *dvergar* living with a ruler as their servants was a later introduction which had its origin in Continental literary works, reaching the Nordic world by means of translation (later going on to be borrowed in other works created at home, such as a few *fornaldarsögur* and indigenous *riddarasögur*). Other borrowings (ideas not found in the Old Norse mythological material) seem to include the idea of short size, ugliness, a big head, and some degree of fighting prowess. Since all of these features are found in both the Old French romances and in those translations made of them, there is good reason to question whether these were purely local developments. The likelihood must be that they were imported.

Arguably, this article can be said to answer Schäfke's call for a study of the European features of saga *dvergar* (Schäfke 2010, 288). Hopefully, this article has also shed some further light on the range of influences that the translated *riddarasögur* seem to have had, and not least on the nature of the supernatural figures found in the *fornaldarsögur* and original *riddarasögur*. What seems to be evident, however, is that they had little influence on Nordic folk belief in which the role of *dvergar* as earth-dwellers was being overtaken by other beings (as noted above). Arguably, the only place left for them was in romantic fantasy, where they were free to develop in line with the needs of the story.

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Case Study 3

“Hvat er jötunn nema þat?”

A Study of the Effect of Translation on the Old Norse Supernatural Concept of the *jötunn*

Felix Lummer

Introduction

“Great translations help to break down the barriers of time, place, and language of unique customs and traditions” (Friar 1971, 199). This statement by the Greek–American poet and translator Kimon Friar (1911–93) highlights one of the key aspects a translator is faced with when translating both from as well as into another language – both now as well as in the past. The re–creation of a given text aptly into another language naturally provides a fertile ground for cultural comparisons of various kinds. This especially applies to the translation of concepts (not least supernatural concepts) from one source culture and language into a target culture and language. Bearing this in mind, it is worth considering the potential dangers or other effects that such translations or adaptations can have on the target culture. This article, which follows up on two others relating to the translation of other supernatural concepts from Old French into Old Norse and *fées* into *álfar*¹ and *nains* into *dvergar*², considers especially the results of translating the Old French *jaiant* (pl. *jaiants*; “giant”) with the Old Norse *jötunn* (pl. *jötunnar*; “*jötunn*”) in the translations and redactions of Old French chivalric literature of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries into Old Norse in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.³

By illustrating the similarities as well as the differences between these two supernatural ideas in the two cultures and the ways they are used in the various works (both the Old French and the Old Norse works), I hope to shed some light on the question of whether there was more to the choice of *jötunn* as a translation for *jaiant* than the fact that the two words have similar phonological features. Indeed, as will be shown, the use of the Old Norse concept *risi* (lit. “giant”) as a translation might have made more sense for most of the figures

¹ Lummer forthcoming 2021a.

² Lummer forthcoming 2021b.

³ The supernatural concepts under investigation here will be referred to in their respective original languages in order to underline the various connotations these ideas may have had at the time of translation.

figures in question considering its more intrinsic size associations. In what sense were the words *jaiant* and *jǫtunn* equivalent in the medieval mind (especially considering Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* [c. 1220–25], a work which certainly reflects such changes which have continued into our own time; English-speaking scholars still [wrongly] using “giant” as a translation for “jǫtunn”)?⁴

As hinted above, the basis of this investigation are the translated Old Norse *riddarasögur* (chivalric romances), which were initiated under the rule of King Hákon Hákonarson (1204–63, r. 1217–63) and their respective Old French sources. It goes without saying that only those texts that feature *jaiants* in the original narrative have been considered. It is worth noting immediately that the word *jaiant* in these stories is always translated with the word *jǫtunn*, although, as will be shown below, these *jǫtnar* are on certain occasions also referred to as *tröll* rather than *jǫtnar*, something that suggests that the two terms were already becoming interchangeable. Tracing cultural and religious developments like those noted above over the course of several centuries and in two different cultures naturally poses numerous difficulties, especially when conclusions are entirely based on extant written accounts. Texts can be both lost as well as preserved randomly, meaning that material that might express views differing from those preserved might well have existed. In addition, it is important to remember that the worldview of a specific translator may well have differed ever so slightly from that of another, thereby altering the outcome of the translation. These and other hurdles mean that the results presented in this paper can only be speculative. They nonetheless open up important questions.

It seems evident that the Old Norse word *jǫtunn* was initially discerned from other Old Norse terms denoting similar supernatural concepts such as *þurs*, *risi*, *bergbúi* or *tröll* with which it came to merge in later times.⁵ The etymology of the word *jǫtunn*, though uncertain, appears to be the following: It seems to derive from the Indo-Germanic root **ed-* meaning “to eat” (and various other terms related to the semantic field of “to eat” as well as the word “tooth”) which evolved into the Proto-Germanic root **etunaz* (“glutton; anthropophagus”) (Pokorny 1959–69, 287–89; de Vries 1962, 295–96). From there, various cognates can be found in numerous languages, with Old English preserving related words such as *e(ō)ten* (“etin; monster”) and *e(ō)tenisc* (“monstrous”), and Old Saxon featuring *etan* (“to eat”) and *āt* (“food”) for example, while Old

⁴ Similar discrepancies in conceptual translation have already been tackled in adjacent fields, among other things with regard to Greek mythology and the difference between giants and titans. This began more than half a century ago: see Delcourt 1965, 210; and Ingunn Ásdísardóttir 2018, 13–36.

⁵ It may also be useful here to refer to studies conducted by Ármann Jakobsson with regard to *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*: see Ármann Jakobsson 2006a and 2008.

High German has *ez(z)an* (“to eat”) and *ezzen* (“to feed”). The word “jötunn” is then reflected also in the modern Scandinavian *jätte* (Danish and Norwegian) and *jätte* (Swedish) respectively, all of which now mean “giant” in a very general sense. As can be seen, the word *jötunn* appears to have originally been essentially associated with voracious beings (possibly related to the world of death) (Alexander Jóhannesson 1951–52, 322; de Vries 1962, 296) with any connections to wisdom or larger-than-human size being later additions. As will be shown below, the former feature (along with the connection to death) is only evident in the oldest Old Norse sources.

The etymology of the Old French *jaiant* (*géant* in the modern spelling) proves to be somewhat clearer than that of the word *jötunn*. From the start, it has very different connotations. It appears to have been derived from the Greek *γίγαντες* (“gigantes”; sg. *γίγας*, “gígas”) referring to (more “worldly”) beings such as the *τιτῶνες* (“titans”; sg. *τιτάν*, “titan”) or *κύκλωπες* (“kýklōpes”; sg. *κύκλωψ*, “kýklōps”), who are well known in Greek mythology.⁶ It seems appealing to suppose that the word might have reached France not only via the Romans and contact between the Latin and French languages, but also through translations of the *Bible*. The *Septuaginta* (mid-third century BC–400 AD), the earliest Koine Greek translation of the Jewish *Bible* in Hebrew, translated the Hebrew concept *נְפִילִים* (“*nefilim*”; English spelling “Nephilim”), only attested in the *Bible* in Genesis 6.1–4, with *γίγαντες* (Brenton 1879, 7).⁷ This rendition in the Greek *Septuagint* led directly to that in the *Latin Vulgate* (late fourth century) in which the Greek concept *γίγαντες* was rendered as the Latin *gigantēs* (sg. *gigāns*) (Tweedale 2006, 5). The idea of the *nefilim* being “giants” could thereby easily have been manifested as part of the ecclesiastical teaching canon taught by the French clergy, of which the first ecclesiastical structures are traceable back to the end of the second century (Bresc 1982, 252 and 255; Dupâquier et. al. 1988, I, 104–11). As Einhorn notes, “Old French [...] derived mainly from Vulgar Latin, the colloquial Latin introduced into Gaul from the second century B.C. onwards as a result of the Roman conquest and occupation” (Wohlgemuth 1906, 49; Einhorn 1974, 1).⁸ In the following, the

⁶ See, for instance, Hesiod’s eighth-/ seventh-century BC work *Θεογονία* (“Theogony”) in which he gives an overview of (his understanding of) Greek mythology as well as the genealogy of mythological characters: see Most 2006–7, I, 6–7, 18–21 and 56–57.

⁷ Regarding the Hebrew word *נְפִילִים* (“*nefilim*”) and its contested meanings, see their discussion in Kosior 2018.

⁸ There appears to be some disagreement regarding potential outside influences that might have acted upon the concept of the *jaiants* in France. Whereas Wohlgemuth can hardly detect any Germanic or Abrahamic and only isolated Celtic influences, Bresc is far more positive with regard to Celtic (especially in Brittany) and Abrahamic influences having impacted on the concept: see Wohlgemuth 1906, 38–40, 46, 51, 57, 61 and 79; and Bresc 1982, 251–52.

supernatural concepts associated with the *jaiants* and the *jotnar* as they existed in the early Middle Ages will now be scrutinized in more detail (in that order) in order to highlight the similarities and differences in their use. Only then can we consider the consequences of one concept translated as the other.

The Old French *jaiants*

It is noteworthy that the *jaiant* figure of the Old French romances and *chansons de geste* appears most notably on the side of the Saracens. In all cases, they are “others”. If one wants to follow the scheme proposed by Francis Dubost, these *jaiants* can be roughly grouped into three types: 1) the Saracen champion; 2) the terrorising giant; and 3) the outlaw knight (Dubost 1978, 300).⁹ Only the first two categories are encountered in the material considered for the present study. In the accounts in question, these figures are usually two-dimensional in their portrayal, the focus lying heavily on their physical size and diabolical associations (the latter of which is mostly related to the *jaiants*’ Muslim faith since they pose a threat to Christianity as is the case with Escopart in the late-twelfth-century *chanson de geste Boeve de Haumont* [henceforward *Boeve*]; see below) (Dubost 1978, 302–7 and 309; Guidot 2004, 88–89). Other features, which will be discussed below, are, for the most part, dependent on the story in question and its respective narrative needs. These, however, like other individual, additional features found in the different *jaiants* here can hardly be said to have contributed to any general *status quo* in the *jaiant* motif inventory.

As said, the most notable feature of the Old French *jaiants* is their larger-than-human size, usually said to range somewhere between seven and fourteen feet (or two to four meters), although outliers in both directions exist (Dubost 1978, 299–300; Houdeville 2000, 81; Guidot 2004, 83–4). Sometimes, however, their size is only alluded to by other references, as for instance, in the case of Corsolt of the twelfth-century *chanson de geste* called *Le couronnement de Louis* (ll. 1050–53; henceforth *Louis*) (Langlois 1984, 33).

The size of the *jaiants* is intrinsically connected to them being heavy set, generally circumscribed by the idea that they are usually unable to ride on horseback, something which applies, for example, to Nasier in the *chanson de geste Gaufrey* dated to the thirteenth century (ll. 2959–61) (Guessard and Chabaille 1859, 90). They also produce enormous noises when they are killed and tumble to the earth as with Harpin de la Montaigne in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Yvain ou le chevalier ou lion* (c. 1180; henceforth *Yvain*; ll. 4244–47) (Nolting–

⁹ Granted, there are some exceptions to the rule, in which *jaiants* are described as handsome and helping the Christian cause. These *jaiants*, however, are not encountered in the studied corpus and are thus not further considered here: on this feature, see, for instance, Wohlgenuth 1906, 27.

Hauff 1962, 212). *Jaiants* are naturally depicted as very strong individuals, as with, for instance, Corsolt in *Louis* (ll. 3011–311) or Valegrape in the *chanson de geste Aliscans* dated to the second part of the twelfth century (ll. 6489–90) (Langlois 1984, 11; Régnier et. al. 2007, 418).

The physiognomy of the Old French *jaiants* is usually presented as being rather unpleasant, drawing on a large variety of details. They tend to be shown to have dark skin as with Escopart *Boeve* (l. 1751) and Nasier in *Gaufrey* (ll. 2972 and 3596), something which, again, denotes them as being Saracens (Guessard and Chabaille 1859, 90 and 109; Stimming 1899, 66). In numerous instances, the *jaiants* are also described as having a large space between their eyes, as can be seen with Nasier in *Gaufrey* (l. 2971) and Haucebier d’outre Carfanaon in *Aliscans* (ll. 369–72), something which may indicate that they had wide heads as well, a feature which is more closely associated with the Old French courtly *nains* (Guessard and Chabaille 1859, 90; Régnier et. al. 2007, 84). A handful of *jaiants* are also described as having animal heads: Estragot in the late thirteenth–/ early fourteenth–century *chanson de geste La destruction de Rome* is for example said to have the head of a boar (l. 1092) while Otifal in *Le Roman d’Alexandre en vers*, dated to the twelfth century, has a dog’s head (Michelant 1846, 336; Speich 1988, 142). If their eyes are described, they tend to be fiery red like burning coal, as in the case of Agrapart in the *chanson de geste Huon de Bordeaux* dated to between 1260 and 1268 (l. 6499) for instance (Kibler and Suard 2003, 360). Their heads are commonly dominated by a large and ugly mouth with long, white teeth, as with Escopart in *Boeve* (l. 1761–62) (Stimming 1899, 66). They are sometimes also said to have long ears as in the cases of Machabré in *Gaufrey* (ll. 5963–66) for example, and/ or a crooked nose as, again, with Escopart in *Boeve* (l. 1752) (Guessard and Chabaille 1859, 180; Stimming 1899, 66). Furthermore, they are said to have loud voices with which they provoke their adversaries, as with, among others, Tabur in the twelfth–century *chanson de geste La chanson de Guillaume* (ll. 3197–98), voices which may turn into an animal–like grunt or squeal when they are struck and wounded in combat, as is the case of Harpin de la Montaingne in *Yvain* (l. 4228) (Iseley 1961, 93; Nolting–Hauff 1962, 212).

Additionally, Old French *jaiants* are sometimes described as having long and shabby hair which covers their entire body and may serve them as protection, as is the case with, for instance, Nasier in *Gaufrey* (l. 2974) and Escopart in *Boeve* (l. 1759) (Guessard and Chabaille 1859, 90; Stimming 1899, 66). Despite their general disregard of armour and shields, some *jaiants* are described as wearing animal pelts, Marmonde in the *chanson de geste Anseïs de Cartage* dated to between 1230 and 1250 (l. 6743) and Harpin de la Montaingne in *Yvain* (l. 4197) wearing bear pelts, while Nasier in *Gaufrey* (l. 3278) and Valegrape in *Aliscans* (ll. 6491–93), for example, are said to wear serpent skins

(which may explain their invulnerability) (Guessard and Chabaille 1859, 99; Alton, 1892, 247; Nolting–Hauff 1962, 210; Régnier et. al. 2007, 418). These features naturally add to their otherness and animal–like qualities.

As far as weaponry is concerned, as noted above, most *jaiants* shun armour and shields, solely relying on their strength, often carrying heavy, crude clubs (or staves) and whips (see below). Considering their strength, it is only befitting that these weapons are usually so large and heavy that other people have difficulty lifting them as with Corsolt’s branched tree in *Louis* (ll. 631–35) and Escopart’s *mace* (ll. 1746–47) (Stimming 1899, 66; Langlois 1984, 20–1).

The narrative function of the *jaiants* in the accounts noted above can best be described with the following quote by Bernard Guidot:

les géants sarrasins, personnages chthoniens, projections imagées d’antagonismes manichéens, appartiennent à un imaginaire constamment associé à l’effroi, mais qui va commencer à évoluer dès la fin du douzième siècle, et peut-être avant. De fait, dans les chansons de geste, la peur devrait être au centre de la vie chevalresque. Pourtant, les héros épiques la ressentent rarement et, en fin de compte, la dominant toujours. Dès lors, la peinture des géants a pour rôle essentiel dans le récit de valoriser les chevaliers chrétiens qui triomphent (2004, 83).¹⁰

As Guidot notes, a change regarding the perception of the *jaiants* seems to have been taking place during the period in question, something that also applies to the *joṭnar* discussed in the following pages. This becomes seemingly evident in the five early modern novels that make up *Gargantua et Pantagruel* (1532–64) by the French author François Rabelais (1483/94–1553), which tell of the adventures of the two giants Gargantua and his son Pantagruel, figures that are never referred to as giants despite the novels featuring the word over 30 times in first four of the five volumes. It is also clear that such figures were associated with the construction of megalithic tombs, dolmens and ruins (Dubost 1978, 309–10) (Sébillot 1907, 32–33; Bresc 1982, 247) in later French folklore. Another potentially relevant extra–textual incarnation of the French *jaiants* in the Middle Ages and thenceforth, was the development of the so–called *géants processionnels* (“processional giants”), larger–than–human wooden and beautifully decorated constructions, carried by individuals through

¹⁰ Translation: “[...] the Saracen giants, Chthonian figures, imaginary projections of Manichean antagonism, belong to an imagination constantly associated with dread, but which will begin to evolve at the end of the twelfth century, or possibly even prior to that. In fact, in the *chansons de geste*, fear ought to be at the centre of chivalrous life. All the same, the heroes of the epics rarely feel it, and, at the end of the narrative, they always dominate it. Thenceforth, the portrayal of the giants has as its essential role in the narrative to enhance the value of the Christian knights who triumph.” (If not otherwise stated, all translations are those of the author.)

the streets during festive processions. Similar traditions can be found in various European countries in the Medieval period, but nowhere in Scandinavia, to which the focus will be shifted in the following (Meurant 1963 and 1967).

On the Old Norse *jötnar*

The Old Norse *jötnar* have been subject to a long-standing scholarly debate.¹¹ These investigations have produced a plethora of fascinating observations and spawned interesting ideas regarding the *jötnar*, which here can only be summed up in a brief overview due to the limitations of this article. The names of the *jötnar* are a good starting point for the following overview, not least due to the fact that their names speak and hint at the functions and features of these beings. Indeed, there are roughly 200 male names and only slightly fewer female names preserved in Eddic and Skaldic poetry, saga literature and *þulur* recorded in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, all of which seemingly have specific gendered indications (Motz 1984, 105; Ingunn Ásdísardóttir 2018, 197–99).

As with the names of female *jötnar* discussed below, male names of *jötnar* hint at their functions and thus the way in which they were perceived by people at some point.¹² Key elements of many names include elements such as *verkr* (“creator, worker”) as in *Stórverkr* or *Fjölverkr*, *valdi* (“ruler”) as in *Þrívaldi* or *Ölvaldi*, or *þrúðr* (“powerful”) as in *Vafþrúðnir* or *Þrúðgelmir* which underline their connection to power and rulers. Nature as well as specific parts or aspects of it also plays a prominent role amongst the names of male *jötnar*, as in names such as *Svaði* (“slide”), *Vásuðr* (“wetness”), *Brúsi* (“he-goat”), *Vagnhöfði* (“whale-headed”), and *Leiði* (lit. “favourable wind”) indicate. Elsewhere, the magical capabilities and knowledge of *jötnar* (see below) may be reflected in names such as *Mímir* (possibly from Old English *māmrīan*: “to wonder”) or *Fornjótr* (related to *forneskja* “old lore, witchcraft”) as well as names such as *Galarr* or *Gaulnir* which may be connected to the Indo-European root **ghel-* (“to sound”) and thenceforward to Old Norse *gala* (“to chant”) and *galdr* (“spell”) (Motz 1987, 306; Pokorny 1959–69, 428), also suggesting a connection to sound. Bodily deficiencies (such as blindness or deformed feet) and notions of death or harming actions are preserved in names such as *Hel-* and *Viðblindi* (from *blindr*: “blind”), *Rangbeinn* (“crooked-legged”) and likewise *Alfarinn* (“worn out”), *Dúrnir* (from *dúra*: “to sleep”) or *Dumbr*

¹¹ If not otherwise specified, all references to Eddic poetry are given in accordance with Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason 2014. Unless otherwise stated, all references to *Snorra Edda* are taken from the editions by Faulkes 2005–7. If not otherwise provided, all references to skaldic poetry are taken from the *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* database (accessed via <https://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk/db.php>).

¹² For a more detailed list of male as well as female *jötnar* names: see Motz, 1981 and 1987 as well as 1984, 105–6 from which the above selection has been taken.

(“weak, mute”). Names of female *jötunar* meanwhile include the term *brúðr* (“bride”), as in Hölgabruðr, as well as *fríðr* (“beautiful”). Interestingly, names constructed with *-vör* or *-varð* (both of which are connected to guard or watchman) are only found in feminine *jötunar* names.

Alongside the two divine families of the *Æsir* and the *Vanir*, the *jötunar* are one of the most significant actors in the Old Norse mythology that had been passed down orally before being recorded in writing. In fact, it appears as though the *jötunar* were not only seen as ancestors but also providers of various items as well as (female) mates for the *Æsir* and *Vanir*. However, this provision of objects and brides seems to be essentially involuntary, the *jötunar* being robbed or ravished without consent or being given anything in return (see below), a relationship Clunies Ross has referred to as “negative reciprocity” (Clunies Ross 1994–98, I, 103–43). All the same, they are regularly shown as having the same desire to rob from the gods as in the cases of Iðunn’s abduction by Þjazi (*Skáldskaparmál* G56) or Þrymr’s theft of the hammer in order to be given Freyja in marriage (*Þrymskiða*).

The central feature of the *jötunar* in the oldest materials (the *Poetic Edda*), however, is not so much their size as the fact that they are said to be ancient, so old, in fact, that their existence is said to predate the creation of the first *Æsir* deities, in the form of the primordial being referred to as Ymir or Aurgelmir (Motz 1982, 80; Schulz 2004, 60–61; Ingunn Ásdísardóttir 2018, 213–14). The *jötunar* then play key roles as a form of “other” throughout the cosmological and mythological material, and it is only fitting that they are not only key actors in the creation of the world but also play a central part in the eschatology of Old Norse mythology (Ingunn Ásdísardóttir 2018, 227–30). While the mythological *jötunar* as a whole are said to inhabit various different worlds (such as *Jötunheimr*–ar or *Muspellsheimr*), it is evident that, just like the Old Norse gods, they live in halls as *Vafþrúðnir*, *Gymir* or *Ægir* are described as doing in *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Skírnismál* and *Lokasenna* respectively.

As has been noted above, the *jötunar* are regularly shown to be ancient creatures, and this age seems to directly hint to their intrinsic wisdom and knowledge. Indeed, *jötunar* such as *Vafþrúðnir* are considered to be so knowledgeable of past events that even Óðinn seeks their advice or enters a competition of knowledge with them in order to gain insight. They are also capable of certain kinds of magic such as shape shifting, as in the case of Þjazi in *Skáldskaparmál* G56, while the *jötunn* *Hræsvelgr* sits at the edge of the world in the form of a giant eagle, producing the winds with his wings (see *Vafþrúðnismál* sts 36–37 and *Gylfaginning* 18). Elsewhere, the *jötunn* *Bölgþorn* gives Óðinn nine magical charms according to *Hávamál* st. 140, while *Hlebárðr* loses a magical wand to the same god according to *Hárbarðsljóð* st. 20.

Vafþrúðnismál st. 43 meanwhile mentions certain “jötna rúnir” (“*jötnar* runes”), once again connecting the *jötnar* to magic.

It is worth bearing in mind in terms of comparison to the *jaiants* that, when it comes down to it, the mythological corpus never states that the *jötnar* are physically larger than the Old Norse gods (Motz 1982, 70; Eldevik 2005, 85).¹³ The first extant work to portray the *jötnar* in this way would be *Snorra Edda* compiled by Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241) (Ingunn Ásdísardóttir 2018, 211–13). Indeed, Snorri seems to be somewhat unclear about their nature in general. For instance, it is Snorri who introduces the primordial being Ymir as a “hrimþurs” (“frost þurs”) in the shape of a human (“manns líkandi”), only later calling him a *jötunn* (*Gylfaginning* 5) implying that he saw no difference between *þursar* and *jötnar* (Ármann Jakobsson 2006b, 103). Similar confusing statements regarding the taxonomy of the supernatural concept of the *jötnar* occur frequently throughout the *Prose Edda*, another example being the statement that the *jötunn* Hrungnir (see above) is a *tröll* (*Skáldskaparmál* 17). Arguably, this intermingling of the various different terms for supernatural beings that have roots in earlier oral tradition might be said to form part of a process already ongoing in the thirteenth century, in which a blending of various apparently similar concepts were being used with regard to these beings which were gradually losing differentiation from other beings referred to in mythology (Gunnell 2016, 92–6; Thorvaldsen 2016, 72–90). It should be remembered, however, that such confusion seems to have been much less evident in earlier times. There is thus good reason to consider whether the use of the word *jötunn* for *jaiant* in the translated *riddarasögur* had some influence on this process.

“*hvat er jötunn nema þat*”

Introduction

As as been outlined above, the present investigation has aimed to track the differences in cultural thinking that may have been brought about by translation as the Old French *chansons de geste* and romances were rendered into the Old Norse language and culture. The Old Norse supernatural concept of the *jötnar* as a translation for *jaiants* proves to be a pivotal point of interest here, in part because of the intrinsic differences in these concepts (see above), but not least because of the aforementioned inner–Nordic changes which this concept was

¹³ This notion is based on the idea that the world is made from Ymir (which does not mean that he is larger than the gods) and the story of Útgarda–Loki, who is misconceived to be a *jötunn*: see Ingunn Ásdísardóttir 2018, 8.

evidently going through from the twelfth century onward (if not before). By the time the Old Norse *riddarasögur* translations were undertaken, this process appears to have already gathered considerable momentum, and it is thus interesting to consider whether the translated literature had some impact on this process.

When discussing medieval translation, several points need to be addressed before one can proceed forward with the investigation proper. As is well known, medieval translation, like translation in later times, was a multi-staged procedure which could involve numerous different individuals (including, for example, a commissioner, a translator and an illustrator), and was ultimately aimed at locals particularly if the translation was both into a vernacular language and involved popular literature, as was the case with Old Norse translations of Old French chivalric material discussed in this article (Vermeer 1996, 264; Jordan 2007, 154). It was thus bound to draw on both foreign and local understandings of concepts. The end result naturally also involved a degree of volatility, meaning that two translators are prone to produce two different translation when working with the same source text (Ástráður Eysteinnsson 1996, 193; Glauser 2006, 27). Adding to this, one always needs to bear in mind the fact that although the translated *riddarasögur* were initially translated in Norway in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, they are almost exclusively preserved in later Icelandic manuscripts, dating to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Kalinke 2012 172–3 and 2017, 1–18). This is important, because it means that differences in meaning found in the translations may either be the result of the initial translation process, or a result of the later copying procedure which was in the hands of scribes (Vermeer 1996, 263).¹⁴ Thus, one must be cautious about the conclusions one draws about deviations from the original found in the target text.

Be that as it may, this leads us to a brief outline of which Old French narratives and translations thereof will be included in the present study. It goes without saying that those Old French narratives that do not have a preserved Old Norse translation (notwithstanding the consideration of whether such a translation ever existed) have been excluded. Furthermore, the studied Old French text must mention *jaiant/ jaiants* and have a surviving, corresponding Old Norse version. Likewise, those translated *riddarasögur* that do not have a discernable extant Old French source or do not feature a *jötunn* have not been considered. The present study is thus left with three Old French and Anglo-Norman *chansons de gestes* and romances that feature description of *jaiants* along with their respective Old Norse versions:

¹⁴ For a more in-depth discussion of the intrinsic problems involved with regard to medieval translation, see Lummer forthcoming, 14–92.

- *Boeve de Haumtome* (henceforth *Boeve*) is an Anglo–Norman *chanson de geste*, surviving in two fragmentary manuscripts, the earliest of which is dated to the last decade of the twelfth century. Its translation as *Bevens saga* is generally dated to the late thirteenth century (Stimming 1899, III–V; Sanders 2001, XIII–XC).
- *Erec et Enide*, an Old French romance composed by Chrétien de Troyes (c. 1140–90) around 1170, survives in a total of eleven manuscripts and two fragments. Its Old Norse reworking *Erex saga* is dated to the mid–thirteenth century, albeit only surviving in three manuscripts that date from the sixteenth century and later (Roques 1968, III–VI and XXVIII–XXXII; Kalinke 1999, II, 219–20).
- *Yvain*, another Old French romance attributed to Chrétien de Troyes, is estimated to have been composed between 1170 and 1180, and survives in twelve manuscripts, some fragmentary, with the greater part being dated to the thirteenth century. The Old Norse redaction, *Ívens saga*, is extant in four manuscripts, the earliest of which are dated to the mid–fifteenth century. The transmission history of *Ívens saga* is problematic due to the fragmentary nature of the manuscripts (Nolting–Hauff 1962, 7–14; Kalinke 1999, II, 35–36).
- The version of *Tristan* attributed to Thomas d’Angleterre is thought to have been composed around c. 1180 and survives in a total of nine fragments, two of which have now been lost (Gregory 1998, 3–5). The Old Norse *Tristrams saga*, a translation of Thomas’ *Tristan* if the saga’s prologue is taken at face value, is considered to have been composed in 1226, a date given in the saga itself (Jorgensen 1999, 25). However, *Tristrams saga* suffers greatly from the considerable distance that exists between the said date of composition given in the saga, and the oldest manuscript fragments that contain it (AM 567 4to XXII and the so–called Reeves fragment, both dated to the fifteenth century) (Jorgensen 1999, 25–6).

The following investigation will consider the various instances of translations of *jaiants* as *jǫtnar* in the above presented narratives, noting the potential problems that might have arisen in the translation process. The main aim is to present a coherent picture of the potential changes to the concept *jaiants* in its transmissions via the Old Norse concept of *jǫtnar*, and what influences such translations may have had on the way in which *jǫtnar* were understood at home.

Boeve de Haumtone and Bevers saga

The Anglo-Norman *chanson de geste* *Boeve* and its Old Norse translation *Bevers saga*¹⁵ offer fascinating insights into not only the problems involved in the translation of the supernatural concept of the *jaiants* (spelled “geant” in *Boeve*) with *jotnar* but also the way in which both terms seem to have been associated with various (ecclesiastical) ideas relating to devils and demons. Particularly important is the fact that this narrative offers the longest account dealing with a *jaiant* in the material in question. It thus contains the most detail, thereby offering valuable information about both the nature and effects of translation. It needs to be borne in mind that some elements of the figure in question, Escopart, (such as his longer legs, his speed as well as his durable fingernails) are necessary for the plot to play out and therefore cannot be avoided in translation if the narrative as a whole is to operate. Bearing this in mind it is thus important to give the two descriptions (the Anglo–Norman as well as the Old Norse) of this character in some detail.

The depiction of the *geant* Escopart in *Boeve* runs as follows (ll. 1741–1802; quoted here below are ll. 1743–65):

Il se regarde un petit avant,
 par desuz un tertre vist un veley n gesant,
 ke ben out nof pez de grant:
 en sa main tint un mace pesant,
 que dis homes a peine ne portassent,
 a son geron un bon branc trenchant,
 entre se deus oyls un pe out de grant,
 le front out large com croupe de olifant,
 plu neyr ou la char ke n'est arement,
 le nez out mesasis e cornus par devant,
 le jambes out longues e gros ensement,
 les pez larges e plaz, mult fu lede sergant,
 plu tost corust ke oysel n'est volant.
 Kant il parla, il baia si vilement,
 com ceo fust un vilen mastin abaiant.
 Le veylen estoit mult grant e mult fers,
 le chivels out longes com come de destrer

¹⁵ For the present study, only the manuscript version marked as “B” in Sanders’ 2001 edition of the saga has been considered, redactions “C” and “S” only offering slight differences (mostly in terms of the spelling of characters or place names), with two main exceptions: “C” mentions in passing at the end of Chapter 15 that Bevers killed “einn sterkann jautunn” (“a strong *jotunn*”) without giving any further detail: see Sanders 2001, 147. “S”, a younger rendition of the saga, meanwhile offers a completely different narrative regarding the death of Escopart.

e les oyls granz com deus saucers
e les dens longes com un sengler,
la boche grant, mult fu lede bachelor.
E le vilen estoit grant e metailez,
le brace out longes e enforcez,
les ungles si dures [...]”¹⁶

As will be seen, the corresponding Old Norse passage provides a very close adaptation of its source material, something that applies to all the investigated text passages. In spite of this, the translation contains some interesting variations on the Anglo-Norman *Boeve*. Escopart’s description according to *Bever’s saga* runs as follows:

Nv sem þau hófðu leingi ridit þa sa B(evers) fram firer sik á stofnn eins tres mikinn jötun hann var uel xv feta langr. Jsinni hendi hafði hann stora klumbu suo þunga ath x. akkr kallar gatu eigi meira borith vid sik hafði hann einn meki. milli hans augna var þriggia fæta langt han<s> hold var svart sem kol. nasar hans voru leidiligar ok framann æ krokr. hann hafði stor beinn ok löng. illa voru hans fætur skapader. hann matti meira hlaupa enn fugl fliuga. hans ródd var sem þa er tiu hundar geyia. harith var suo langt sem hestz hali. Augunn voru stor ok svart sem ketil botn. tenn hafði hann sem villigólltr. munrinn var miok vidr ok ath öllu var hann leidiligr skapadr.¹⁷

¹⁶ Stimming 1899, 66–68 (see pp. 66–67 for the citation). Translation: “He glanced ahead a little way and saw, reposing on top of a hill, a churl who was certainly nine feet tall. In his hand he held a heavy club, which ten men could hardly carry, and by his side a good sharp sword. The space between his eyes was a foot wide, his forehead was as large as an elephant’s buttocks, his skin was blacker than ink, his nose was misshapen and knobby in front, his legs too were long and thick, and his feet long and flat. He was a hideous fellow, a faster runner than a bird on the wing. When he spoke, he barked as horribly as if he were a vile baying hound. The churl was extremely large and very fierce; his hair was as long as a horse’s mane, his eyes as big as two saucers, his teeth as long as a boar’s, his mouth large – he was a most ugly young man. And the churl was large and misshapen; his arms were long and strong, his nails so long [...]”: see Weiss 2008, 58.

¹⁷ Sanders 2001, 173 and 175. Translation: “Now that they have ridden for a long time, then Bevers saw forward in front of him a big *jötunn* on a stump of a tree. He was well fifteen feet long. In his hand he had a big club so heavy that ten farm hands could not carry more. He had a sword with him. [The distance] between his eyes was three feet wide. His skin was black as coal. His nose was hideous and crooked at the front. He had big and long legs. His feet were badly shaped. He could run faster than birds fly. His voice was as if ten hounds bark. The hair was as long as a horse’s tail. The eyes were as big and black as the bottom of a kettle. He had teeth like a wild boar. The mouth was very wide and generally he was hideously shaped.”

As one can see, the *Bevens saga* account is somewhat terser than that in *Boeve*. Of particular interest here is that the Anglo-Norman version does not refer to Escopart directly as a *geant* at this point in the text, only noting that he is *grant* (“large”). In fact, Escopart is only once referred to as a *geant* in the entire narrative, compared to the seven times that King Brandon’s large brother is headed as such (see below).¹⁸ For the main part, Escopart is addressed as *velein* (“peasant, churl, vellein”), *paien* (“pagan, heathen”), *bachelor* (“young man”), *garson* (“page, servant boy”) and various other, non-supernatural words, as well as being associated with the devil (see below). It is noteworthy that the Old Norse depiction omits various comments about his ugliness and fierceness as well as references to his size in this section.¹⁹ Other important differences in the translation include the following: his size is expanded from nine feet to fifteen; the space between his eyes is three feet as opposed to being one foot in *Boeve*; and his skin is “black as coal” unlike the Anglo-Norman version which has “black as ink”. Escopart’s eyes in *Bevens saga* meanwhile are as large as the bottom of a kettle rather than the size of saucers as in *Boeve*. The overall remark regarding his fingernails has also been shortened; and the description of his nails omitted (despite them playing the same role later in the saga as they do in *Boeve*). Last but not least, Escopart does not refer to himself as a *un fere publicant* (l. 1780; “a fierce pagan”) in the Old Norse saga. Interestingly, the weapons Escopart carries in *Boeve* (the club and the sword) both figure in *Bevens saga*. This segment nonetheless includes an interesting aspect of acculturation, that is certain features that would make sense for an Anglo-Norman audience which seem to be deliberately toned down (or omitted) for the Old Norse audience (such as the emphasis laid on faith). Otherwise, everything that might have caused misunderstandings seems to have been either deliberately omitted or adapted to facilitate understanding. In spite of this, in *Boeve*, Boeve’s question regarding Escopart’s provenance (and the subliminal entertainment involved in it) is translated almost verbatim, Escopart having apparently fled his country because he was called a “nain” or “dvergr” (“dwarf”) by others where he lived.²⁰ It is nonetheless crucial to bear in mind

¹⁸ For the reference to the use of this term for Escopart, see l. 2265; for its use for King Brandon’s brother, see ll. 1289, 1309, 1314, 1319, 1322, 1355, 1410; the *geant* that is killed by Terri, friend of Boeve, is not further characterised and his mention is only in one single line, see l. 3503. All references are with regard to Stimming 1899, 52–54, 56, 82 and 118.

¹⁹ In fact, the Old Norse account never describes Escopart as being fierce, in spite of the fact that the Anglo-Norman does so twice. Remarks about his ugliness occur twice in the Old Norse text but four times in *Boeve*. The account in *Boeve* mentions Escopart’s size four times, whereas *Bevens saga* does so only twice.

²⁰ See ll. 1784–91 in Stimming 1899, 67. Translation: “‘Pagan,’ said Boeve, ‘you look very ugly: is everyone in your land so large and terrifying?’ ‘Yes, by Tervagant!’ said

that the apparent reason for rendering Escopart as a *jötunn* in Old Norse seems to stem from his size. The other differences in the above considered passages may ultimately stem from a different Anglo–Norman version being used to craft an Old Norse translation from which *Bever*s saga derives.

The introduction and description of Escopart noted above is followed by another scene in which Boeve attacks the *jaiant* as Escopart wants to take Boeve’s lover Josiane from him.²¹ Escopart proves to be a formidable foe as he survives Boeve’s initial attack unharmed, only to snarl terrifyingly before charging Boeve with his enormous club. His attack fails as Boeve dodges, and the club fells a tree which stands close by. Eventually, Escopart falls to the ground wounded at the attempt to cut his head off. Josiane nonetheless interferes on behalf of Escopart, begging for Escopart to be granted mercy if he becomes a Christian and servant to Boeve. Escopart hears this, and “commença done a crier,/ ke tretu le boys fet a resoner” (ll. 1831–32; “began to roar so that the whole wood rang”) (Stimming 1899, 69; Weiss 2008, 60), saying that he is willing to become a Christian and serve Boeve if he is allowed to live, to which the Christian Boeve agrees. Once again, the Old Norse translation follows *Boeve* closely. There are however some minor deviations: The entire scene is not as elaborate, Escopart yet again being called “fierce” less often and his first snarl is omitted. In spite of this, the Anglo–Norman statement that the wood shook at Escopart’s growl is rendered into Old Norse almost verbatim: “þa æpti hann suo hátt ath gall j skoginum”.²²

Directly after the defeat and subsequent subsumption of Escopart, the story continues, telling how Boeve intends to marry his Josiane.²³ However, before they can be wedded, the pagan Josiane must be baptized, and the three thus intend to sail away to carry this out. The Anglo–Norman *Boeve* then tells how during the acquisition of a naval vessel, the Saracen crew refuses to yield to

the Escopart. ‘When I was in my land, everyone, great and small, mocked me and called me a dwarf and said I’d never grow. I was so ashamed of their mockery that there was no way I would bear it; I came speedily to this land [...]’”: see Weiss 2008, 59. *Bever*s saga has the following: “B(evers) m(ælti) huort eru suo storer aller jþinu landi. hann sv(arar) þat veitt Maumet ath menn kölludu mik þar duerg ok ek skommudumz þar at vera ok flyda ek þui j brott ath ek var suo litil”: see Sanders 2001, 175. Translation: “Bever asked whether all in your country are so tall. He answers: ‘That knows Maumet that the people there called me a dwarf and that I was so ashamed to be there, and I fled away because of the fact that I was so little.’”

²¹ All information given in this passage is in accordance with Stimming 1899, 68–69 (ll. 1798–840) and Sanders 2001, 175, 177 and 179.

²² Sanders 2001, 179. Translation: “Then he cried out so loud that it echoed in the forest.”

²³ All information given in this passage is in accordance with Stimming 1899, 69–70 (ll. 1841–67) and Sanders 2001, 179 and 181.

Escopart. Subsequently, Escopart boards the ship and bludgeons the entire crew to death except for those that jump overboard and drown. The same passage is preserved in *Beveris saga*, albeit that the overall length of the passage has been reduced.

After disembarking, Boeve, Josiane and Escopart head for Cologne/Colonia, where both Josiane and Escopart are to be baptized.²⁴ While the baptism of Josiane proceeds without any incidents, the same cannot be said for that of Escopart. In the Anglo–Norman source text, the Archbishop of Cologne is terrified at the sight of him, crossing himself three times, and asking who “*ceo malfé*” (l. 1921; “this demon”) is. They then have to baptize Escopart in a tub so heavy and large, that even 20 men could not have lifted it (something that again underlines his size). In the end, it is Escopart himself who jumps into the tub, after which he is given the new (and Christian) name Gui. However, the water is so cold that the naked Escopart leaps out quickly, yelling that they mean to drown him, onlookers thinking that “*il fust un deble ke vousist manger*” (l. 1977; “he was a devil who wanted to eat”) (Weiss 2008, 62 note 190). The Old Norse *Beveris saga* also features the astonishment of the Archbishop at the sight of Escopart. Here, however, the Archbishop, after crossing himself more than 20 times (rather than three), asks “*hvaðan þat tröll væri*” (“where this *tröll* came from”), rather than who he is as in *Boeve* (the term *tröll* here apparently referring to the nature of the person rather than their origin). This translation of the word *malfé* (“demon”) into *tröll* in the utterances of the respective Archbishop is interesting and will be discussed in more detail below. Also of interest is the way Escopart’s entire behaviour regarding the cold water, the idea of eating and the reference to the devil are all left out of the saga.

One of the longer episodes of the narrative, which features Escopart acting on his own volition, is the so-called “Miles–episode”.²⁵ After the baptism of Josiane and Escopart, Boeve leaves on a campaign, leaving Escopart behind to guard his newly-wed wife. During this time, a local count/ *jarl* by the name of Miles sees Josiane and wants to have her for himself. However, he fears the revenge of Escopart and devises a plot to trap Escopart in an empty tower (*Boeve*) or castle (*Beveris saga*) located on an island in the sea under the pretext that Boeve wishes to talk to him there. Escopart agrees to be ferried there by Miles (his eager acceptance of Miles’ “offer” being apparently based more on narrative grounds than the result of Escopart being dull-witted). However, once locked in the building, Escopart becomes furious, clawing away at the walls

²⁴ For the following passage see translation with Stimming 1899, 71–73 (ll. 1895–987) and Sanders 2001, 185 and 187.

²⁵ All information given in this passage is in accordance with Stimming 1899, 75–79 (ll. 2051–185) and Sanders 2001, 193, 195, 197, 199 and 205.

until they collapse into the sea. He then jumps into the water and tries to board a merchant ship which happens to be sailing past. The reaction of the mariners at the sight of the swimming Escopart is once again of interest, as Escopart is described both as *deble* (“devil, monster”) and *Lucifer* as he boards the ship.

The Anglo-Norman *Boeve* describes the event as follows (ll. 2088–91):

‘Seignors,’ dist l’Escopart, ‘lessés moi o vus entrer.’
Kant cil oirent le deble si hautement escrier,
pur verité quident ke se seit Lucifer,
de grant pour sailent tuz en la mer²⁶

Bevens saga has the following description: “Nu sem kaupmenn sǫ́ hann suo liotliga skapadann ok hann svam mikit j hafinu þa hugdu þeir ath fiandinn sialfr væri ok saker hræzlu hlupu þeir aller vttbyrdis”.²⁷ It is interesting to see how while the mention of Lucifer in the Anglo-Norman has instigated a translation into Old Norse as “fiandinn sialfr” (“the devil himself”), the Anglo-Norman description of Escopart as “deble” (“devil, monster”) has been rendered into “liotliga skapadr” (“shaped in an ugly manner”) in *Bevens saga*. One wonders why the word *tröll* should not have been used here as it was with *malfé*.

In another brief episode, the same skills are seen when Escopart leads a third of a combined army against the emperor who has killed Boeve’s father, Boeve and Sabaoth (Boeve’s mentor) leading the remaining thirds respectively.²⁸ Prior to the battle, the emperor refers to Escopart as “un geant mult fer,/ ne resemble pas home, mes le deble d’enfer” (ll. 2265–66; “a very fierce giant – more like a devil of Hell than a man”) (Stimming 1899, 82; Weiss 2008, 67). In the heat of the encounter, after Escopart has ravaged his opponents, Boeve instructs Escopart to reach the emperor, to capture and bind him and bring him to a nearby castle owned by Sabaoth. Yet again, avoiding translating Escopart’s appearance as being like that of a devil, *Bevens saga* follows the Anglo-Norman text closely, conveying the very same information. No attempt is made to align Escopart with the mythological *jötnar*.

²⁶ Stimming 1899, 76. Translation: “He saw a merchant passing by in a ship. ‘My lord,’ said the Escopart, ‘let me get in with you.’ When they heard the monster calling out so loudly, they thought it must surely be Lucifer; out of terror they all jumped into the sea [...]”: see Weiss 2008, 64.

²⁷ Sanders 2001, 199. Translation: “Now when the merchants saw him shaped in such an ugly manner and how he swam so quickly in the sea, they thought that [he] was the devil himself and in fear all jumped overboard.”

²⁸ All information given in this passage is in accordance with Stimming 1899, 80–85 (ll. 2193–379) and Sanders 2001, 213, 219 and 221.

Escopart's eventual downfall in both the Old French as well as in the Old Norse narratives is a result of his treachery to Boeve.²⁹ The reason for this is that he is affronted that Boeve does not take him along on an expedition. Although compensated for this by Boeve, Escopart heads straight back to his old master, the Saracen king Yvori de Monbrant/ Jvorius, disclosing the whereabouts of Josiane. The lady is subsequently captured by Saracens. The Anglo-Norman *Boeve* then tells of how Sabaoth, grieving about this news, heads straight to St. Gilles in order to repent for his perceived guilt that he was not more vigilant. During the naval passage, Sabaoth, clad in pilgrim's clothing, beholds both Josiane and Escopart, attacking and killing the latter with his pilgrim's staff. *Bevens saga* deviates from the Anglo-Norman text only slightly: the city is not St. Gilles but rather "Orliens" in France and the encounter between Sabaoth and Escopart does not occur on a ship but rather in the city itself, as Sabaoth stumbles upon a pagan army led by Escopart. Again, Sabaoth kills Escopart with a staff.

It is worth bearing in mind that, as pointed out earlier, Escopart is not the only *geant* to be called a *ǰotunn* by the translator, underlining that the use of the term for Escopart was no exception. A far less elaborate *geant* is the nameless brother of the (humanoid) Saracen King Brandon whose meeting with Boeve (prior to Escopart's appearance) is only brief (ll. 1271–328).³⁰ After the battle in which he has killed Brandon, Boeve finds himself wandering thirsty in an unknown countryside where he reaches a castle. Here, he demands food and lodging from a maiden living there. She, however, refers to her husband who is "un geant mult fort e fer" (l. 1289; "a strong and fierce giant"). This *geant*, who carries a javelin, a hunting spear and a club, turns out to be the brother of King Brandon who refuses Boeve any hospitality due to their conflicting religious affiliations. The encounter escalates when the *geant* recognises Boeve's horse as being that of his brother Brandon and the two opponents fight (ll. 1309–28). Despite a grievous wound sustained in the fight, Boeve manages to overcome his opponent, severing every single limb from the *geant*'s trunk before beheading his opponent whose "anme va a malfez" (l. 1328; "soul went to the devil"). Somewhat later in the narrative, Boeve confesses his sins to the Patriarch of Jerusalem, explaining how he vanquished a powerful giant (l. 1355), making a similar statement later on when he encounters Josiane for the first time (l. 1410).

²⁹ All information given in this passage is in accordance with Stimming 1899, 93–96 (ll. 2646–765) and Sanders 2001, 239, 241, 243, 245, 249 and 251.

³⁰ All information given in the following segments is in accordance with Stimming 1899, 52–54 and Sanders 2001, 139 and 141.

Bever's saga, once again, preserves a relatively close rendition of this encounter. As in the Old French counterpart, the woman in question refers to her husband, who is said to be a “jötunn mikil ok sterkr” (“large and strong jötunn”), once again refusing Bevers’ wish for food on religious grounds. The fight is then described as follows:

Jot(unninn) s(eger) ath hann skal reyna hvat manna hann er adr einn þeir skilia. Nv tok jot(unninn) geiR sinn ok einn storann vól [...] B(evers) [...] hliop vpp á briost honum ok hio af hendr hans ok fætur ok hans hith leiduligha hófuth.³¹

As can be seen, divergences mostly refer to the weaponry of the *geant/ jötunn*. The most dramatic, and also interesting, deviation from the Anglo–Norman text is yet another reference to a *jötunn* being an “illr fjandi” (“evil devil”), something which seems unprovoked by the source material. *Boeve* here runs “Boves saut a pe e tret le branc asceré,/ le geant refert ne li ad esparnié,”³² not making any mention of the devil or any other religious connotations. If one might hazard a guess at what is going on here, it is possible that the Old Norse translator tried somehow to incorporate (or misunderstood) the idea of the line “l’anme va a malfez” of *Boeve* (a description as such not preserved in *Bever's saga*) in the words “illr fjandi”. However, such a thought appears unlikely since the entire passage itself appears to be otherwise rendered fairly accurately. Indeed, it seems dubious for a small addition occurring at the end of the Anglo–Norman passage to have been somehow worked into the Old Norse narrative at an earlier point.

Leaving the *Boeve* narrative for now, this article will now turn to these *jaiants* depicted in the works of Chrétien de Troyes which are also translated as *jötnar* in their respective Old Norse renditions, noting possible differences as well as potential similarities as has been done with regard to the descriptions of Escopart and the *geant-/ jötunn*–brother of Brandon/ Brandamon.

³¹ Sanders 2001, 139 and 141. Translation: “The *jötunn* says that he shall test the kind of man he is before they part. Now, the *jötunn* took his spear and one large staff [...] Bevers [...] ran up onto his chest and cut off his hands and feet and his ugly head.” The “C” variant of *Bever's saga* offers slightly different information. Here, the *jötunn* is also said to be “grimmur” (“grim, fierce”) and falls into a rage after missing Bevers with a swing. Larger differences can be spotted in “S”, where the addressing of the maiden by Bevers is skipped and Bevers calls on the *jötunn* directly. The *jötunn* asks about Bevers’ rich spoils which he apparently recognizes, and the account of the subsequent fight runs slightly differently as here the hands are removed from the *jötunn*. Additionally, no description is given of the weaponry of the *jötunn*.

³² Stimming 1899, 53. Translation: “Boeve jumped to his feet and drew his steel blade, returning the giant’s blow unsparingly”: see Weiss 2008, 51.

Chrétien’s *jaiants* and the Old Norse *jǫtnar*

As has been mentioned above, two late–twelfth century romances by Chrétien de Troyes contain episodes that feature *jaiants*. In *Erec*, the knight Cadoc de Cabruel is saved by Erec from the clutches of two nameless *jaiants*, while *Yvain*, on the other hand, sees the protagonist vanquish the *jaiant* Harpin de la Montaigne who proves to be a thorough menace as he ravages the lands of a local lord. As with *Bevens saga*, the translations given in *Erex saga* and *Ívens saga* provide us with valuable information with regard to the use of *jǫtunn* as a translation of *jaiant* (which happens in both cases), simultaneously allowing us to assess how the Old Norse translators seem to have adapted the Chrétienian texts to suit the mindset of an Old Norse audience and their understanding of *jǫtnar*.

The romance *Erec* shows its protagonist defeating two *jaiants*, rescuing a fellow knight in the process. This segment, which might be called the “Saving Cadoc de Cabruel”–episode, runs to over more than 250 lines (ll. 4279–541),³³ and starts with Erec and Enide coming across a maiden running about a forest, crying in distress. Erec approaches her, only to find out that the lady’s lover, a knight by the name of Cadoc de Cabruel, has been kidnapped by two of his sworn enemies, who are *jaiants* (ll. 4315–18). During the combat that follows, these two figures are described as being “felon” and “crüel” (l. 4317; “evil, wicked” and “cruel”) as well as “fort et fier” (l. 4412; “strong and savage”). Erec vanquishes the first *jaiant* by piercing him through the eye with his lance. The second *jaiant* proves to be more of a challenge, managing to exchange blows with the knight, before Erec manages to cut him in half atop his horse. One notes also various remarks underlining the physicality of the *jaiants* and, once again, their use of clubs (rather than swords) which are swung fiercely. The apparent lack of armour of the *jaiants* is also worth noting. One also notes the mention of a whip which, as with the figure of Harpin de la Montaigne discussed below, does not see use in combat but is rather used for the punishment of prisoners. Oddly enough, these two *jaiants* are capable of horseback–riding, a rather untypical skill for beings that in Old French are commonly thought to be too large and heavy to be able to ride horses (see above). One more mention of Erec’s exploits against the *jaiants* occurs later in the narrative when Erec and Enide return to King Arthur at Tintanguel (l. 6433), but this section contains no further description of these beings.

This same episode appears in *Erex saga*, which like *Bevens saga*, keeps closely to the Old French text (with a few embellishments). Here, Erex sets off to rescue the knight Kalviel of Karinlisborg, who has been abducted by two

³³ The following information is based on the information contained in the lines mentioned above: see Roques 1968, 130–38.

jötnar not far away.³⁴ He sees the two *jötnar*, one of them riding ahead with a horse carrying the spoils, while the other one, straggling behind, leads a horse with the abducted husband thrown sideways over the horse’s back. Like in *Erec*, despite the banter and intimidation from the *jötunn* leading the captive, Erex kills him with ease, at which point the other *jötunn* joins the fray. This specific *jötunn* again proves to be more challenging, utilising his iron club, even striking and injuring Erex. This *jötunn* is nonetheless eventually overcome by the knight, who then returns the captive Kalviel to his waiting wife. Unfortunately, despite the fact that these two figures had managed to fight off 20 knights in Kalviel’s following (a detail lacking in *Erec*) hardly any information about their nature or appearance is given in this passage in which Erex disposes of them considerably easily, something that reduces the overall length of the passage. What is nonetheless evident, as is the case in *Beveris saga*, is that these *jötnar*, while large, are evidently more human than godlike.

Moving on to Chrétien de Troyes’ *Yvain*, this work tells how, after his befriending of a lion, Yvain stumbles across a distressed lord and hears his plight (ll. 3770–4304).³⁵ A *jaiant* by the name of Harpin de la Montaigne has threatened to have the lord’s sons killed if he does not to get the lord’s daughter. The sons and daughter in question turn out to be the nephews and niece of Gauvain, a beloved friend of Yvain, and Yvain naturally offers his help. Prior to Yvain’s arrival, Harpin, in acts described as “felon jeu” (l. 3898; “wicked games”) and abuse (l. 4152), is said to have laid waste to the lands of the nobleman and already killed two of his sons. By noon the next day, after Yvain’s arrival, the *jaiant* appears in front of the portcullis of the castle as promised. He, once again, demands the handing over of the lord’s daughter, threatening to have the captive sons executed and, if he receives the daughter in exchange for the men’s lives, to have her raped by his lowest ranking servants. Yvain and Harpin then meet in single combat, the former ultimately overcoming and killing the latter after Yvain has received crucial aid from his tame lion.

It is worth noting that here Harpin is often simply described as a *jaiant*, the author relying on the connotations of this word alone to give a sense of his appearance and temperament. Elsewhere, however, Harpin is said to be “domagié” (l. 3852; “harmful, damaging”), a “fel jaianz, cui Deu confonde” (l. 3856; “an evil *jaiant*, which God may destroy”), as well as “felon” (ll. 4150 and 6474; “evil, wicked”), “cruël” (l. 4150; “cruel”), a “maufez” (l. 4173; “demon, evil spirit”), and an “anemis” (l. 4173; “enemy”). Like the two *jaiants* of *Erec*

³⁴ The following description is based on the events described in Kalinke 1999, II, 244 and 246.

³⁵ The following information is taken from the lines mentioned above: see Nolting–Hauff 1962, 191–216.

discussed above, he is said to wield “un pel [...] grant et quarré” (ll. 4092–93; “huge, squared club”) which he not only uses to drive the captive sons in front of him (ll. 4090–4) but also utilises as a weapon in the struggle against Yvain (ll. 4194–247).

The unavoidable fight that takes place between the two is very detailed and provides interesting information about the way the character is seen: like the two *jaiants* in *Erec*, Harpin, solely relying on his strength, is said to not care for armour, only sporting a bearskin for protection (ll. 4197 and 4224), something which underlines his bestial qualities, suggesting that (like in the other accounts) a translation as a *berserkr* might have worked better (see below). The same idea is seen when Harpin is attacked by Yvain’s lion: his skin is said to be very hairy (l. 4223), and he screams “come tors” (l. 4228; “like an ox”). Harpin nonetheless does not utilise his whip in the fight against Yvain, only using his staff (“pel”) in combat (for example, ll. 4198–99 and 4230). When Yvain finally decapitates and kills his opponent, the *jaiant* falls dead to the ground with such intensity that the narrator comments that he thinks that no oak could have fallen with a greater force, thereby further underlining Harpin’s size (ll. 4244–47). Unfortunately, no additional information is given about Harpin when information is passed on to Gauvain about Yvain’s victory. Here, once again, Harpin is only referred to as *jaiant* (l. 6480) and as a “felon” (l. 6474).

Ívens saga generally follows the Old French template with regard to this adventure, albeit describing things in a less elaborate fashion than the Old French romance.³⁶ For example, much of the pre-combat banter between Yvain and Harpin does not survive the process of translation into Old Norse. Here, like in *Yvain*, Íven encounters the lord of a castle who then explains how his lands have been ravaged by a *jötunn* called Fjallsharfir, who has already killed two of the six of the lord’s sons and captured the others, demanding the lord’s daughter in exchange. When Fjallsharfir comes to the castle he is described as wielding a large iron staff and a whip. When Íven hears of the *jötunn*’s arrival as well as his provocation, he prepares himself to fight Fjallsharfir. Seeing Íven ride against the *jötunn*, the general public bids God to help him fight this *tröll*. In the ensuing battle, the *jötunn* proves a formidable opponent and it is only after the intervention of his lion that Íven manages to overcome his opponent.

As noted above, Fjallsharfir is almost always described as being a *jötunn*, but one notes how when the common populace transform him into a *tröll* when they call upon God’s help, a more degenerate titulation which underlines that the translator (like that of *Boeve*) sees both words as meaning the same thing. It is also interesting to note that in the corresponding passage in the Old French

³⁶ The following information is based on the events described in Kalinke 1999, II, 76, 78 and 80.

Yvain, Harpin is described as a “maufez” and “anemis”, rather than as “jaiant”, words which also paint him in a religiously antagonistic light. One is thus brought to wonder whether the Old Norse translator understood a *tröll* to be a more fiendish personification of a *jötunn*.

Be that as it may, however, there are further similarities and differences between Harpin and Fjallsharfir that are worth considering. Interestingly enough, no information is given with regard to Fjallsharfir’s clothes or the nature of his skin, and while he certainly wields an iron club, he does not scream like an ox (or any other animal for that matter) when he is ravaged by the lion. All the same, his size as well as his heavy physique are clearly underlined when, upon his death, Fjallsharfir, similar to Harpin, crashes down so hard that the earth shakes. In short, it is interesting to note that while this episode appears to have been subjected to a fairly accurate translation process, the Old Norse *jötunn* Fjallsharfir, in contrast to the Old French *jaiant* Harpin, seems to have lost his animalistic wild features, while simultaneously retaining other shared features of folkloric “giants” in both cultures, such as size and weaponry. Indeed, once again, one is drawn to wonder whether the Old Norse translator saw the word *jötunn* (like *jaiant*) as relating to something fiendish in Christian terms. It should nonetheless be noted that the Chrétienian *jaiants* investigated here all seem to be “terrorising giants” rather than “Saracen champions”, meaning they subsequently lack a certain demonic aspect found elsewhere.

“Giants” in the Old French and Old Norse *Tristan*–legends

Interestingly enough, the presence of the *jaiants* and *jötunnar* also extends to one of the greatest love dramas of the Middle Ages: the *Tristan* subject matter. The version of *Tristan* accredited to Thomas d’Angleterre (active in the twelfth century), features a *jaiant* who goes by the name of Orguillus and hails from Africa. Orguillus’ peculiar quirk is that he crafts a cloak made from the beards of vanquished lords and kings. This *jaiant* is reincarnated in the Old Norse translation of the *Tristan* matter, *Tristrams saga*, in the form of a nameless *jötunn*. Both characters are vanquished by King Arthur (Artus/ Artús) in their respective narratives. Furthermore, both works insert a small parenthesis describing how Tristran/ Tristram killed Orguillus’/ the *jötunn*’s nephew, who terrorised the King of Spain.³⁷ The key problem with this account is that it provides little information about the characteristics of the *jaiants*/ *jötunnar* in

³⁷ Indeed, *Tristrams saga* mentions two further *jötunnar*, namely Urgan and Moldogg, figures which cannot be considered here because the surviving fragments of Thomas’ *Tristan* do not feature corresponding accounts allowing us to see what these beings might have been called in the original.

question that might help us understand the reasons for using *jotunn* as a translation.

The Orguillus–episode in Thomas’ *Tristan* stretches over roughly 130 lines (ll. 702–838, esp. 715–805). Yseult is wondering about Tristan’s whereabouts and her thoughts and longing for him are described. The segment then begins with a statement that Tristan no longer dwells in Spain where he has killed a *jaiant* (the nephew of Orguillus) as Yseult had assumed, but that he is already dwelling in Brittany. The segment then introduces Orguillus, describing him as “grant” (l. 717, “mighty”), “hardi” (l. 720, “bold”) and “pruz” (l. 720, “valiant”). Orguillus is said to travel from country to country, challenging the lords and kings there and demanding their beards out of which he fashions a cloak that he wears. At one point, Orguillus is said to have heard of King Arthur’s renown and wants to grant him the special honour of placing his beard on the fringes and border of his cloak. Arthur naturally refuses Orguillus’ request and the two fight in single combat, a fight that Orguillus is destined to lose (ll. 773–781):

Ensemble vindrent puis andui
 E la barbë e les pels mistrent.
 Par grant irur puis se requistrent.
 Dure bataille, fort estur
 Demenerent trestuit le jor.
 Al demain Artur le ve[n]cui,
 Les pels, la teste lui toli.
 Par proeise, par hardement
 Le conquest issi faitement.³⁸

However, despite the three adjectives mentioned earlier, there is little useful information left in this passage. Admittedly, Orguillus rushes eagerly to fight with King Arthur (l. 770, “Molt forment le vint [il] require”)³⁹ and proves to be an equal match for the king, making it possible to hazard a guess about his physical strength, stamina, and endurance as well as his intrepidity or even recklessness. These features, however, are not explicitly stated and thus remain bound in the realm of speculation.

The Old Norse *Tristrams saga* includes this account (ch. 71), albeit with minor alterations. As has been stated above, the *jotunn* is nameless and is

³⁸ Gregory 1998, 46. Translation: “The two of them then came together,/ named the beard and cloak as wagers,/ and, in great fury, attacked each other./ All day long they fought/ a hard fight, a fierce combat,/ but by next morning Arthur had overcome him/ and taken his cloak, and his head./ Thus, through feats of bravery and courage,/ he vanquished him”: see Gregory 1998, 47.

³⁹ Gregory 1998, 46. Translation: “he [that is Orguillus] came hot-foot to seek him [that is King Artus] out”: see Gregory 1998, 47.

described as being “digr, mikill ok drambsamr” (“big, and strong and arrogant”).⁴⁰ Like Orguillus, he comes from “Afríkalandi” (that is Africa), moving from country to country collecting the beards of his foes for his cloak. As in *Tristan*, this *jötunn* hears about the deeds of King Artús and wants to give his beard a special place on his coat. Unlike the original Orguillus who inquires politely, the *jötunn* sends a messenger to King Artús. The outcome is nonetheless the same, with King Artús denying the *jötunn*’s request, instead agreeing to a single combat:

Sem jötunninn frá þessi tíðindi, at kóngr vill berjaz við hann, þá skundaði hann þegar með æði mikilli ok í landmæri ríkis Artús kóngrs, at berjaz við hann. Sýndi jötunninn honum skinn þau, er hann hafði gert af kóngra skeggjunum. Síðan genguz þeir at með stórum höggum ok harðri atsókn allan dag frá morgni til kvelds. Ok um síðir sigraðiz kóngrinn á honum ok tók af honum höfuðit ok skinnin. Svá sótti kóngrinn hann með vaskleik ok frelsaði fyrir honum kóngra ríki ok jarla ok hefndi á honum metnað<ar> hans ok illgirndar.⁴¹

This above–quoted passage shows slight alterations taking place between the Old French and the Old Norse versions, the Old Norse saga adding the last sentence about how through this victory, King Artús avenged the *jötunn*’s former victims and freed many a country from his grasp. However, since the *jötunn* is only ever addressed as such, hardly any fruitful information can be deduced from this passage, leaving some room for similar assumptions as the correlating Old French passage. What is certain, however, is that the *jötunn* seems to be slightly more negatively portrayed as arrogant and malevolent, attributes that are arguably absent from the Old French *Tristan*.

Unfortunately, even less information can be gained from the description of Tristan’s fight against Orguillus’s nephew. The brief segment of only twenty–three lines (ll. 782–805) tells of how the nephew of Orguillus terrorises the king of Spain again demanding his beard. No one wants to save the king, leaving it up to Tristan to defend his host. Once again, only after a hard struggle that leaves Tristan severely wounded is the *jaiant* overcome (ll. 798–805):

E Tristrans l’emprist pur s’amur

⁴⁰ Jorgensen 1999, 170–1.

⁴¹ Jorgensen 1999, 172. Translation: “When the [*jötunn*] learned of this response, that the king wanted to do battle with him, he became enraged and immediately hurried to the border of King Arthur’s realm to do combat with him. The [*jötunn*] showed him the cloak that he had made from the beards of kings, and then they fought with courageous charges and mighty blows from morning until evening. Finally the king gained victory over the [*jötunn*] and took from him both his cloak and his head. The king had fought with great valor, saving the countries of kings and noblemen and taking revenge on the [*jötunn*] for his arrogance and malevolence”: see Jorgensen 1999, 173.

Si lui rendi molt dur estur
 E bataille molt anguissuse:
 Vers am[be]duis fu deluruse.
 Tristrans i fu forment naufré
 E el cors blecé e grevé—
 Dolent em furent si amis—
 Mais li jaianz i fu ocis.⁴²

As with his uncle Orguillus, this nameless *jaiant* is only referred to as a “jaiant”, no further information being given about his character or features. One can nonetheless assume that he relies on brute force to achieve his goal (the collection of beards), and, since he manages to cause severe wounds on Tristran, he proves to be a skilled opponent for an Arthurian knight. These qualities, however, are never explicitly described in the narrative, and are thus somewhat hypothetical.

As has been stated above, *Tristrans saga* also preserves this passage relatively intact. Here again, the *jötunn* is nameless but said to be the nephew of the *jötunn* that King Artús killed (the equivalent of Orguillus). A minor difference is that the family relationship between the two *jötunar* is more precisely denoted in the mention that the second *jötunn* is the sororal nephew (“systursonur”) of the first.⁴³ The storyline is the same as in *Tristan*, ending with Tristran killing the *jötunn*: “Ok varð þá hit harðasta einvígi hvárratveggju, svá at Tristran fekk þar mörg sár ok mikil, svá at allir hrædduz, <at> hann mundi ekki lífi eða heilsu ná, en þó drap hann jötuninn.”⁴⁴

All in all, as this comparison shows, and has been noted above, it is difficult to draw any firm conclusion about why the Old French “*jaiants*” should have come to be translated as “*jötunar*” over and above the fact that the words were seen as meaning the same thing by this time. Firm conclusions are muddied still further by the roughly 500-year difference in time that exists between the time when *Tristrans saga* is thought to have been translated in 1226 and the earliest surviving manuscript that preserves *Tristrans saga* in its entirety.

⁴² Gregory 1998, 46. Translation: “So Tristran undertook the combat for his sake/ and gave the [*jaiant*] a hard/ and violent fight;/ it was full of pain for both of them./ Tristran was badly wounded in the fight,/ his body injured and sorely harmed—/ a source of grief for his friends—/ but the [*jaiant*] was slain”: see Gregory 1998, 47.

⁴³ Jorgensen 1999, 172.

⁴⁴ Jorgensen 1999, 172. Translation: “There then took place the fiercest duel between the two of them, with Tristran sustaining many serious wounds such that everyone feared he wouldn’t survive or regain his health, even though he had slain the [*jötunn*]”: see Jorgensen 1999, 173.

Conclusion: How “jaiantique” are the jötnar?

The present study has considered all the instances in which the Old French *jaiant* is translated with the word *jötunn* in the Old Norse renditions of Old French chivalric romances. All in all, it can be said that the translations in question are all carefully and accurately crafted involving almost all aspects of each individual *jaiant* (relevant to the plot or otherwise descriptive) being effectively passed on into the Old Norse saga. While some aspects have admittedly been lost or added during the process of translation, these instances are isolated, usually involving the dropping of an aspect that might have appeared strange to an Old Norse translator/ audience as with the dropping of the initial mention of Escopart’s fingernail in *Beveris saga* for example. While the discussion of such interesting deviations falls outside the scope of this article, they may, nonetheless, prove relevant when considered in a broader study which investigates, for instance, the relationship between the source and target cultures involved in the translation process. All the same, the beings in question are shown to be essentially enormous human outsiders with an evil nature, figures that live in our world and interact with humans.

Slight adjustments of the Old French narrative (*malfé* becoming *tröll*, and *Lucifer* becoming *fjandinn* – if the text of the original was the same as – or similar to – the extant version) may nonetheless indicate various things: 1) that the *jötnar* themselves were not (yet?) being seen as the evil/ devilish beings they would become in later saga material (such as the *fornaldarsögur* or indigenous *riddarasögur*); 2) that *tröll* (used instead of the term *jötunn* for translating the devilish qualities) were at this point in time perceived as more diabolical beings that possessed harmful magical skills (a development in itself); and/ or 3) that during the translation process of *jaiant* to *jötunn*, the aspect of size was a more pivotal feature than of any other quality. Indeed, it is significant that the term *risi* is never encountered in the investigated material, even though it is frequently used to describe larger-than-human beings in other translated sagas of (mostly) Germanic background, such as *Þiðreks saga af Bern* or *Karlamagnús saga*.⁴⁵

Be that as it may, it should be remembered that the translated *riddarasögur* were composed in Norway at a time where the earlier-discussed process of merging of various supernatural beings into one, near indistinguishable mass was already ongoing (see above). One can therefore conclude that the *jaiants*–image of the *jötnar* that appears in the translated *riddarasögur* would have both

⁴⁵ With regard to *Karlamagnús saga*, see, for example, the *risi* Ferakut in the *þáttr Af Agulando konungi*: see Unger 1860, 277–83. A prominent *risi* in *Þiðreks saga af Bern* is Vaði *risi*, the father of Velentr in *Velents þáttr smiðs*: see Bertelsen 1905–11, I, 73–81.

potentially impacted upon the said amalgamation of concepts as well as simultaneously being influenced by it within both the written and oral tradition of Norway and Iceland. As shown at the start, the Old French *jaiants* (in these works and others) clearly lacked the mythical components inherent in the original idea of the *jötnar* and certain key traditional aspects of the Nordic *jötnar* as they were originally understood (features still known in this period in the Eddic poems and *Snorra Edda*) such as knowledge, age, culture and ancient ancestry. It seems that the new features may very well have contributed to the growing malleability of the concept of the *jötnar* in the later saga material, and not least in the indigenous *riddarasögur*. A good example of this development can be seen in the (presumably) fourteenth-century indigenous *riddarasaga Ectors saga* which describes a *jötunn* as a *tröll*, a *níðingur* (“scoundrel”), a *þurs* as well as a *rísi*, all during one encounter (Loth 1962–65, I, 124). From depictions such as this, it becomes apparent that the *jötnar*, having amalgamated with other, similar concepts, have now clearly become of larger-than-human size and started interacting with human beings.⁴⁶

There is little question that some aspects of the *jaiants* and their Old Norse counterparts in the *riddarasögur* that would have been heard alongside the more local Nordic accounts would probably have appeared odd to many in an Old Norse audience, as is the case with the ideas of their wearing pelts or hides and making animal sounds (as in the case of the threatening Escopart and Harpin de la Montagne and Fjallshafir: see above and their limited range of weapons). Considering these specific aspects, one wonders why such individuals were not translated as *berserkir*, some of whom are also said in other times to be large in size and knowledgeable of (harmful) magic as, for instance, the description of Eirekr’s entourage of *berserkir* from the early-fourteenth century *fornaldarsaga Gøngu-Hrólfss saga* shows (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44, II, 362–63).⁴⁷

Ultimately, it appears as though the translation of *jaiant* as *jötunn* was clearly connected essentially to a “giant’s” size.⁴⁸ This observation appears to

⁴⁶ See, for example, Surtr in *Ketils saga hængs* who is *mikill* (“big”), like Hildir frá Risalandi in *Qrvar–Odds saga*; a nameless *jötunn* in a *helli* in *Sorla saga sterka* who is so large that Sqrli has never before seen a man of this size; Kolr *kroppinbaki* in *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* who is said to be “stórr sem jötunn” (“large as a *jötunn*”); and another nameless *jötunn* in *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis* who is simply described as *stórr* (“large”): see Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44, I, 249 and 338–39; II, 190; as well as III, 196 and 246. See furthermore Schulz 2004, 141–46. On the development of the *tröll*, see, for example, Lindow 2014, 33; Simek 2018, 27–92.

⁴⁷ Regarding the *jötnar* in the indigenous *riddarasögur*, see, for instance, Lambertus 2013, 111–17.

⁴⁸ The notion of a homophone translation may have been more profound in the translations of translated sagas with predominately Germanic source material, as the

be congruent with the inner–Scandinavian development of the image of the *jötnar* away from their mythological origins as they started to blend with other large supernatural motifs. As noted above, this particular change seems to have been already ongoing by the time the Old Norse translations were undertaken but it might equally have been propelled by them. Indeed, sagas such as *Beyvers saga* discussed above certainly seem to have aided in enforcing the correlation of the concepts of *jötunn* and *tröll*. The portrayal of the *jötnar* in the translated *riddarasögur*, if nothing else, can thus be said to clearly represent another effective steppingstone in the “downfall” of the *jötnar* in the development away from being wise, culturally acclaimed, social ancestors in Old Norse myth to taking on the role of the mere dumb, devilish, large and brutish trolls that would come to dominate the later *märchen* and folk legend tradition (Uther 2004, II, 7–71).⁴⁹

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Middle High German *rise* (“giant”) generally used to denote larger–than–human beings got translated with the term *rísi* in the Old Norse sagas. Indeed, here, the understanding appears to predominately rely on size. This question, however, warrants further investigation.

⁴⁹ For an overview of legends dealing with trolls in Scandinavia, see, for instance, Kvideland and Sehmsdorf 1988, 301–17.

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Abstract: This paper is part of a project which examines the translation of supernatural concepts in the Old French and Anglo-Norman chivalric literature into Old Norse in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the difficulties involved and the potential consequences. This article focuses specifically on the usage of the term *jötunn* as a translation for the Old French *jaiant*, considering both the narrative purposes involved in the choice of this word as a translation as well as the possible effects it may have had on later Icelandic literature and folk belief, especially when these works were read aloud alongside other works that formed part of the Icelandic oral tradition.

Keywords: Old Nordic Religion, *jötnar*, translated *riddarasögur*, Folklore, Translation Studies, chivalric literature

Case Study 4

The Translation of Magic in the translated *riddarasögur*

FELIX LUMMER

Introduction

The English writer and composer Anthony Burgess (1917–1993) once famously wrote that “[t]ranslation is not a matter of word only: it is a matter of making intelligible a whole culture” (1984, 4). This quotation may have special currency with regard to the translation of concepts such as ‘magic,’ which comprises a myriad of different terms and ideas which not only shift in meaning over the course of epochs – having certain features ascribed to them at one time while being stripped of them at another – but also have a range of different implications in different cultures (and even within the same culture). As I have argued elsewhere and with regard to the concepts of the *álfar* and *jötnar* (Lummer forthcoming 2021a; 2021b), for instance, it seems apparent that the notions of what constituted Old Norse ‘magic’ is dependent on both cultural and historical changes. It is the aim of this article to investigate whether this development goes back to the emergence of the translated *riddarasögur* and the influence exerted on the Old Norse culture via the influx of Continental and courtly ideas in the Scandinavian sphere. To that end, the material considered in this investigation are Old French courtly *romances*, *lais* and *fabliaux* composed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as well as the Old Norse translations, redactions and reworkings thereof which were crafted in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries respectively. Logically, only those narratives that contain descriptions of magical acts and actors will be studied. As Mitchell states (albeit focussing on all saga types):

[T]he sagas portray the acquisition of magical knowledge in such a way as to demonstrate the influence of both Continental and apparent native thinking about witchcraft and sorcery; they are neither wholly dependent on foreign ideas and configurations of witchcraft, nor are they wholly independent of such constructions either (2003, 146–7).

There is little question that the legendary *fornaldarsögur* present us with the most extensive depictions of the Old Norse forms of ‘magic’ as we understand it nowadays (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2014, 41). While these have been examined in some detail, the types of magic encountered in the translated *riddarasögur* have, so far, been neglected.¹ The present paper aims to heed Stephen Mitchell’s call to “exploit *all* sources of information” (2003, 136) available in order to try to attain the most complete picture of Old Norse ‘magic’ possible by giving consideration to the potential influence of the corpus of the translated *riddarasögur*, material that was a conduit for foreign ideas and understandings, enabling them to influence those existing in Scandinavia. The article will conclude with a short case study of how magic users in Old French were dealt with in translation, once again considering the potential influence of such translations.

Admittedly, there was no single term in Old Norse of what might today be seen as constituting the wide field of ‘magic.’ Rather, a myriad of different, if related notions and ideas co-existed simultaneously, expanding and building upon one another while also being mutually exclusive and contradictory as the ideas of what ‘magic’ entails is highly contingent on cultural, historical and contextual circumstances. Indeed, it is evident that no single Old Norse expression (such as *trölldómr*, *galdr* or *seiðr*) was ever used to denote ‘magic’ as a whole in the modern sense (Korecká 2019, 5).²

The Old Norse literary corpus is permeated with descriptions of various forms of ‘magic’ and magical activities as well as descriptions of figures both utilising as well as wielding such forces. When thinking of Eddic references, Loki’s taunting of Óðinn acting like a *vølva* in *Lokasenna* st. 24 and the description of Heiðr in *Vøluspá* st. 22 come immediately to mind (Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason 2014, I, 296, 312 and 413). In terms of saga literature, one is immediately drawn to Snorri’s description of Óðinn’s various skills in the beginning of *Ynglinga saga*, the vivid scene of Þorbjörg *lítillvølva*’s performance in *Eiríks saga rauða*, and the acts of Þórgrímr *nef* against Gísli in *Gísla saga Súrssonar* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935, 206–9; Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943, 37, 56, 60, 69 and 84). When it comes to the later folk legends surrounding figures such as Sæmundur *fróði* Sigfússon (1056–1133) and Eiríkur Magnússon á Vogsósum (1638–1716) (Jón

¹ The translated *riddarasögur* are, perhaps because of their foreign origin, omitted from the investigations of Raudvere (2002) and Dillmann (2006). They also receive little mention in Mitchell’s *Witchcraft and Magic in the Nordic Middle Ages* (2011).

² This difficulty in translation was noted by the editors of the five-volume translation of the Icelandic sagas who deliberately avoided translating the word *seiðr* with the word ‘magic’ as many other translators had done, choosing instead to keep to the original term accompanied by a precise definition (Viðar Hreinsson et. al. 1997, V, 405–17).

Árnason 1954–1961, I, 469–86 and 565; III, 490–4 and 499–527), one notes a certain change in the nature of these accounts as magical performances and any paraphernalia associated with them seemingly gave way to the use of so-called “black books” (something that can also be seen in the Nordic countries) (see, for example, Gunnell 1998, 89–90; Ohrvik 2018, 253–61). It would appear that a shift in the understanding of ‘magic’ seems to have taken place away from the Old Norse understanding of magical knowledge being (mostly) inherent in people (taught ‘magic’ is mentioned less frequently) to the notion of figures ‘learning’ magical arts, the power of which seems to come from written texts.³

The present investigation of ‘magic’ will cast aside the Frazerian triplicity of magic–religion–science⁴ and emphasise a more emic focus on the way in which the Old French and Old Norse cultures seem to have understood the nature of ‘magic’, based on the extant evidence. Naturally, to do this one needs to cope with the noticeable variations in terminology that were present in the two cultures with regard to the various phenomena understood to be entailed in ‘magic’ during the centuries under investigation in this study. Careful consideration needs to be given to the various literary accounts of ‘magic’ as well as descriptions of magical rituals (Graf 1997, 18–9).⁵ Since this study concerns two dissimilar societies, each having its own distinct comprehension of magic and magic men, it is important to bear in mind that each culture might have understood different things as being ‘magical’. In order to bridge such potential differences for the sake of comparison, this study will employ Kieckhefer’s more general dichotomy of ‘magic’ as an action that “uses demonic aid or occult powers in nature” (1990, 14), a magic wielder, logically, being an actor who uses such powers, and the knowledge behind the action’s

³ Several of the few instances of taught ‘magic’ can admittedly be found in *Ynglinga saga*, Óðinn apparently teaching his kinsfolk magical arts, while Freyja is said to have taught the Æsir in the art of *seiðr* (Bjarni Aðalbjarnason 1941–51, I, 13 and 19). Meanwhile, Óðinn is said to teach both *galdralistir* and medical knowledge (*lækningar*) in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, an account which illustrates well how closely related the two fields were seen as being (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–4, II, 359). A further example includes *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, where the protagonist Bósi is given the opportunity to learn ‘*galdrar*’ but rejects this offer (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–4, II, 467). In *Eiríks saga rauða*, the *varðlok(k)r* chant also appears to have been taught, but here it is only the song and *not* the ‘magic’ itself (Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935, 206–9). Naturally, none of these cases involves book learning of any kind.

⁴ In his work *The Golden Bough*, Frazer proposed an evolutionary progression of human belief that advanced through three phases, starting at the lowest level of ‘primitive magic’, which he saw as being replaced by religion, which, ultimately, is succeeded by science (Frazer 1957, 63–79).

⁵ On the validity of the use of the term ‘magic’ in modern scholarship, see, for instance, Sørensen 2013.

efficacy being something that is either learned/ taught or inherent. In taking such an approach, this study underlines the fact that ideas relating to medieval ‘magic’ found in literature needed to be comprehensible not only for educated clerics and other learned individuals but also laymen and the common populace (Boudet 2019, 126–32).

Certainly, while both cultures have types of gender-orientated magic, one can observe evident divergences relating to the ways in which magical knowledge was said to be acquired, ranging from it being inborn, for example, to it being something that was handed down within the maternal line. While the Old Norse written evidence suggests that magical knowledge was innate and only acquired through learning in isolated instances, the Old French literature investigated in this article suggests that both forms of procurement of magic were equally popular (see below). Another difference seems to relate to the social prestige that was granted to an individual capable of wielding magic. As will be seen below, in the Old French romances, various upper-class women are presented as utilising magic, whereas in the Old Norse societies, there seems to have been a social stigma associated with magical activities, something which varies in degree in accordance with the form of magic used.

This naturally leads us back to consider the origins of the word and/ or the concept of ‘magic’. The etymology of the word goes back to the Old Persian appellative *maguš*, which potentially stems from the Proto-Indo-European **magh-* (“to be able, to help”) (Pokorny 1948–69, I, 695; Otto and Stausberg 2013, 3). The original meaning of *maguš* is nonetheless uncertain as it is only known from the so-called ‘Behistun Inscription’ commissioned by Darius the Great (r. 522–486 BC), in which the word may refer to either the title or the role of a particular person (Amiri Parian 2017, 3–5). The term seems to have first gained prominence in fifth-century BC Greece, where the term μάγος (*mágos*, pl. μάγοι, *mágoi*; “magician” or “Zoroastrian priest”) was adopted as a result of contact with the main political adversary of Greece at that time, namely Persia (Kieckhefer 1990, 10; Otto and Stausberg 2013, 3). It comes to no surprise that the concept had negative connotations for the Ancient Greeks. What is clear, however, is that by this time the Ancient Greeks had already come to associate various different yet related activities with ‘magic’, including φάρμακεία (*pharmakeía*: “pharmacy, sorcery”), κατάδεσμος (*katádesmos*: “curse, magic spell”) and ἐπαοιδή (*epaoidē*: “charm, incantation”) (Otto and Stausberg 2013, 3; Watson 2019, 99–126 [especially 120–1]; Edmonds III 2019, 14).⁶ All the

⁶ The ambiguity of what ‘magic’ entailed was apparently continued by the Romans, Latin concepts such as *veneficium* (“the preparation of magic potions, sorcery”), *maleficium* (“crime, fraud, sorcery”) and *carmen* (“formula, prayer, charm, spell”) all potentially coming under the heading of ‘magic’ at different times (Franz 1909, II, 145–8; Otto and Stausberg 2013, 3).

same, as Otto and Stausberg have argued (2013, 3), ‘magic’ can be seen as having attained a firm place within the “[...] conceptual legacy of fifth-century Greece [BC]” via the Latin adaptation of *μάγος* as *magus* (Flint 1991, 9 and 21–2). The concept found its way into the Old French vocabulary in the form of the verb *magique* (“magical”), the noun *magie* being almost completely absent from the Old French language (Boudet 2019, 12).⁷ The preferred Old French term used to denote ‘magic’ in the medieval period seems to have been *sorcellerie*, a word which derives from the Latin *sors* (“lot, fate”), and has etymological roots in the Proto-Indo-European **ser-* (“to put/ bind together”) (Pokorny 1948–69, I, 911). Closely associated with *sorcellerie* was the notion of *merveille* (“marvel, wonder”), a word derived from the Latin *mirabilia* (“wonderful, glorious, miraculous”) which denotes aspects of the supernatural as well as the magical (Poirion 1982, 4–6; Flint 1991, 5).

It goes without saying that the present article cannot deal with every aspect associated with the concept of ‘magic’. The focus will be placed on magical activities (those activities that come under the heading of *sorcerie* and *enchantement*, and *uevre* in the particular case of the *fabliau Le cort mantel*) as well as the portrayal of magic wielders in the Old French source material and their respective Old Norse translations and reworkings.⁸ The various different concepts relating to magical activities and properties will be referred to using their respective Old French and Old Norse emic nomenclatures in order to underline their original use and meaning, unadulterated by any form of modern translation or modern understanding (Murphy forthcoming).

As noted above, it is probable that, as in Greece, Rome and France, the understanding of ‘magic,’ like any other concept, would have varied in the Old Norse world according to period and region, and probably also in line with social standing, background, education, and even gender. As with the Old French material, it is naturally difficult to gain a trustworthy overview of all such differences and nuances, many of which are near imperceptible in the extant literary material. All the same, it is important to bear the existence of such variations in mind when making any general statements about the overall perception of ‘magic’ in Scandinavia (including Iceland), just as in France.

⁷ The word *magie* is only found twice overall in the Old French corpus, in two *pastourelles* dating from the twelfth and thirteenth century respectively (<https://deaf-server.adw.uni-heidelberg.de/lemme/magie> [accessed 12.10.2020]).

⁸ For the purpose of this paper, the areas of prophecy and magical objects, while certainly worth discussion in later articles, have for now been left out of the present investigation mainly due to limitations in space. The same applies to the Holy Grail mentioned in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Perceval ou le Conte du Graal* and its Old Norse translation *Parcevals saga*, largely because a strong case can be made for it to be understood as a religious or metaphysical object rather than a magical one.

This article will now proceed to outline briefly what can be understood about the Old French concept of ‘magic’ based on the various depictions of ‘magic’ and ‘magic’ wielders encountered in the Old French *chansons de gestes*, *lais* and *fabliaux*. It will then go on to outline the understandings of ‘magic’ that existed in the Old Norse world. Bearing the differences between these two concepts in mind, the article will go on to consider how translators bridged the gap between the two in the translated *riddarasögur*, considering the potential influences that these translations might have had on local Old Norse understandings of the term (something that would seem to have applied in particular to the way in which magic users were presented, as noted above).

Old French Magic

As Charles Homer Haskins has argued, in the twelfth century, the period which saw the genesis of the first Old French chivalric romances, *lais* and *fabliaux*, an apparent surge in interest in scientific inquiry and rational explanations was taking place which questioned existing local beliefs in magic and the supernatural (1971, 5–29). This development appears to have gone hand in hand with a rise in literacy which had led to the creation of a new, critically-thinking Christian elite, which was at the helm of attempting to shape the cultural mentality of Europe (Ward 1988, 110–1; Rollo 2000, XI–XV). This elite naturally had less control over the traditions and stories passed on by the illiterate and others which still involved and reflected earlier beliefs of various kinds of magic and not least those relating to divination or astrology. While this was a period of learning, it was also a period in which popular tales and other popular traditions were finding their way into general literature (Russell 1984, 115–6). The popular and the educated, the local and the international were beginning to blend, something which could also be seen in the learned physician and scholar also being sometimes presented as a master of the magical arts. This period, which has come to be called the ‘Twelfth Century Renaissance’, was also the time in which a considerable amount of the Old French Arthuriana was conceived and composed, material which drew in part on oral traditions such as those noted above. As Richard Trachsler has stated: “the medieval period is obviously marked by both orality and literacy, it is an *aural* culture” (2017, 273.)

The Old French written accounts considered in the present study, once again, the chivalric romances, *lais* and *fabliaux* of the twelfth and thirteenth century, mention a broad variety of different magical phenomena, which derive from Latin and ecclesiastical learning. In spite of this one is immediately struck by the large amount of accounts in courtly literature, telling of learned humans who are skilled in the art of herbalism or horticulture and, by extension, that of

alchemy (the brewing of potions and creation of salves). Good examples are: The late-twelfth-century romance *Yvain ou le chevalier au lion* (henceforth *Yvain*), by Chrétien de Troyes (c. 1140–1190), which describes how Yvain’s madness is cured by a salve concocted by Morgue *la sage* (ll. 2952–5), and the late-twelfth-century *Tristan* by Thomas d’Angleterre (fl. c. 1170–1180) which describes Tristan’s lover, Yseult, having a particular skill in healing wounds (for example, ll. 2464–81, 2554–7, or 3086–7) (Nolting–Hauff 1962, 152; Gregory 1998, II, 116, 120, 142). The idea of an invigorating ‘potion’ being made by an aunt of a princess is a vital recurring plot element in the late-twelfth-century *lai Deus Amanz* (see, for instance, ll. 95–109, 127–42, 175–9, 182–201, and 206–19) (Harf–Lancner and Warnke 1990, 172–9).

Another lady who seems to have magical abilities which appears to have come to her by nature is Princess Melior in the late-twelfth-century chivalric romance *Partonopeu de Blois*. The romance tells how she travelled apparently unnoticed to the court of King Clovis of France in order to see Partonopeu (ll. 1355–75), and also that she is capable of influencing his journey through the woods (ll. 1377–84) and even able to make a naval vessel steer itself (ll. 1385–90) (Collet and Joris 2005, 138–40). In the ‘B’ redaction of the same narrative, however, we hear of a helmsman named Maruc who knows a *charme* (“charm”) with which he can tame even the wildest of animals (ll. 5851–4 and 5856–64), and that this is a *maistrerie* (l. 5866: “power”) which is later described to be *enchantements* (ll. 5881 and 5895: “enchantments”) (Collet and Joris 2005, 382–4). The latter word, which, etymologically speaking, derives from Latin *incantare* (“to enchant, bewitch, beguile, charm”), a word which has its roots in the Proto-Indo-European **keh₂n-* (“to sing, sound”) (Pokorny 1948–69, I, 525–6),⁹ is also used in the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman *chanson de geste Boeve de Haumtone* (henceforth *Boeve*). Here, the thief Gebitus is said to use *enchantments* to steal Boeve’s horse (see below) (Stimming 1899, 115–6). Elsewhere, in the *lai Desiré* the word *enfantomer* (“to bewitch”: l. 482) is used to describe the state in which the protagonist finds himself when he cannot find his arrows after having shot them (ll. 481–6) (Burgess and Brook 2007, 62).

In addition to words such as these, which are used to describe the skills of those humans who are born with or somehow attain magical powers, one finds other terms for ‘magic’ and magical activities in the material investigated. One of the more common is the idea of the ability to curse or change the future: The late-twelfth-century *lai Guigemar* sees a white hind curse the hero Guigemar, unveiling to him his *destinee* (“fate”: l. 108) after he has mortally wounded her, the word used for the curse itself being *maldire* (“to vilify, to curse”: l. 322)

⁹ On incantations and the ecclesiastical reactions to them: see Franz 1909, II, 421–41; Flint 1991, 20–1; McVaugh 2003.

(Harf-Lancner and Warnke 1990, 32–3).¹⁰ While this case cannot be directly categorised as a curse, but more a form of bestowed fate, Tydorel, in the twelfth-century *lai* of the same name, is more clearly predicted to suffer from chronic wakefulness by his father prior to his birth (ll. 122–5) (Burgess and Brook 2007, 330). A slightly different form of such predictions are found elsewhere in *Tydorel*, as well as in the twelfth-century *lais Yonec* and *Doon*, both of which describe the impregnation of human women by supernatural men (which also might be referred to as *incubi*), all of whom foresee both the resulting pregnancy of their respective paramours, as well as the sex of the child (a boy in all instances), demanding that it be given a certain name. Evidently what we have here is a blend of intercourse and a curse: While the supernatural man in *Tydorel* – like the supernatural figure in *Yonec* (ll. 331–6) – simply seems to ‘know’ the future of his son (his son’s prowess and the compromising of his affair with Tydorel’s mother: ll. 111–48), *Doon*’s father simply says he thinks (“je croi”: l. 178) that his love will bear him a son thereby toning down the element of the magical prediction (Harf-Lancner and Warnke 1990, 198–9; Burgess and Brook 2007, 266, 330 and 332). Elsewhere, however, Melior in *Partonopeu* seems to have a similar knowledge of the future actions when she foresees events that will take place after Partonopeu has returned home for a second time (ll. 4205–62) (Collet and Joris 2005, 294–6). What is evident here is that the skill of foreseeing the future is not seen as being limited to women, as it was largely in the Old Norse world.

All in all, the implication is that, while certain people acquire magical knowledge by means of learning, magical power is at times portrayed as being innate in certain people (and supernatural beings). It goes without saying that the narratives also feature various magical objects with specific supernatural powers, of particular interest here are rings as well as the powerful gemstones embedded in these objects. These rings are shown to have some innate capability, such as the ring mentioned in *Yonec* which makes the cuckold forget his wife’s adventures with her supernatural lover as well as releasing her from her prison tower (ll. 418–24) (Harf-Lancner and Warnke 1990, 202–3).¹¹ Another such ring is found in the twelfth-century romantic tale *Floire et Blancheflor*, in which Floire’s mother provides him with a ring that makes the wearer immune to iron, fire and failure (ll. 1001–6) (du Ménil 1856, 42). Later

¹⁰ On maledictions, especially in an ecclesiastical setting, as well as the importance of speech acts in magic, (considering the Latin *cantare* [“to sing”] and *dicere* [“to speak”]), see, for instance, Franz 1909; II, 145–8; Little 1993, xiii–xiv, 80 and 113–8.

¹¹ Evidence dating back to Antiquity already suggests the association of gems with magic (Vitelozzi 2018). However, the occult perception of the power ascribed to gems seems to have been a notion that was popularised by people such as the French Abbot Suger of St Denis (c. 1081–1151) (Ward 1988, 100; see also Boudet 2019, 128).

on, this ring (if it is the same ring rather than another hitherto unmentioned one) is said to protect the wearer from death (ll. 2525–6 and 2537–40). In *Yvain*, meanwhile, the gem on Lunete’s ring plays a pivotal role helping Yvain turn invisible (ll. 1019–37) (Nolting–Hauff 1962, 62–4). It is interesting to note that all of the gems in question are only effective if they are placed in the closed palm of the hand, an idea never encountered in native Old Norse works. The cloak in the *fabliau Le mantel mautailé* fills an exceptional position, as it is said to have an *uevre* (“act, [manual] work, function”: ll. 201, 330–1 and 355) woven into it by a *fee* (“fairy”), making it vary in length in accordance with the wearers’ faithfulness to their respective consorts. The quality of the *uevre* is be of particular interest due to the noteworthy Old Norse translation thereof, which will be discussed further below (Collet and Joris 2005, 306 and 310; Burgess and Brook 2013, 68–9 and 74–5; Lummer forthcoming 2021a).

All the same, the actual powers implicit in these people and objects are rarely named. Nonetheless, words like *uevre*, *maistrise*, *charme*, *enchantment*, *maldire* and being *enfantomer* all give the idea that certain individuals (of both genders) have the power to change the lives of others, the qualities of the surroundings or particular objects. Other words found in the corpus of Old French literature relating to ‘magic’ includes the term *nigromance* (“[black] magic”) which in the Chrétien’s romance *Érec et Enide* (dated to c. 1160–70) is used to describe a kind of magic that denies entry to a specific place by causing an impenetrable wall of wind (ll. 5689–95) (Roques 1968, 173).¹² The *dite aristocratique* version of the mid–twelfth century romance *Floire et Blanchefloire* features the same term, where it used to describe two statues representing Floire and Blancheflor, which surround Blancheflor’s mock grave and are placed in such a way that they appear to kiss another and display their devotion to one another (ll. 547–86) (du Ménil 1856, 23–4). Elsewhere in the narrative, the father of Floire, King Felix, is said to suspect Blancheflor of having used *sorcerie* (“sorcery”) to incite love for her in his son in the *dite populaire* version of the story (ll. 393–8) (du Ménil 1856, 17). Both terms imply that the idea of harmful magic potentially associated with the devil was gaining ground. It is nonetheless interesting to note that no mention is made of rituals like those commonly associated with magical activity in Old Norse as will be seen from the discussion of Old Norse perceptions of magic presented in the following.

¹² On the term *nigromance* and its usage by Chrétien: see, for example, Noacco 1999 (especially note 16).

Old Norse Forms of Magic

One of the key issues that all scholars have to face when they consider understandings of pre-Christian ‘magic’ in Scandinavia is that:

almost all Norse records [...] were written down long after the introduction of Christianity, even when they were composed, which not all ostensibly “pagan” poems were, before the conversion. [...] [I]t is relevant here to bear in mind that texts which were themselves ancient were subject to alteration within the Christian milieu that preserved them, and that, given that certain ancient pagan elements did survive in these ancient texts, it was possible for antiquarian-minded Christians to fabricate pseudo-pagan texts. (Tolley 2009, I, 17–18.)

Evidently, a belief in magical power existed, something which is supported by classical sources such as Eddic poetry and saga literature (both of which suggest that both sexes played a fairly equal role in the performance of Old Norse ‘magic’). Apparently, the effects of such activities on both individuals and the community at large could be positive as well as negative, although in the saga literature recorded by Christian writers it tends to be negative. Those persons involved in the magical acts are usually associated with peripheries, either social or spatial or both, a feature that is less clear in the Old French (Raudvere 2002, 79–81, 96 and 142; Tolley 2014, 33–4).

The most renowned manifestation of Old Norse concepts designating some form of ‘magic’ is *seiðr*, referred to in both mythological as well as saga sources and usually translated directly as ‘magic’ in saga literature. Etymologically speaking, the word *seiðr* could apparently have derived from the Indo-European root **sē(i)-* meaning “to bind (by magic)” but also “strap” or “rope”, and a strong oral and ritual connotation seems apparent (Pokorny 1948–69, I, 891–2).¹³ In the mythological record, the goddess Freyja is said to be most knowledgeable in this practice which is said to be first practised amongst the Vanir gods, and it was she who inducted Óðinn into the art of *seiðr* according to *Ynglinga saga* (Finnur Jónsson 1966, 5). The mythological accounts reflect an idea that is echoed in saga literature, namely that, while practitioners of *seiðr* can be found in both sexes, indicated by the words *seiðkona* and *–maðr* respectively, it was essentially seen as a female practice, male practitioners being perceived as engaging in sexually inappropriate

¹³ Scholars have also highlighted the various associations of *seiðr* to the acts of spinning or weaving, not only due to the word’s etymology, but also the effect of drawing people out of their houses as described in *Laxdæla saga* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, 106; Heide 2006a, 238–43; Korecká 2019, 183 and 185–98).

activities (de Vries 1956–7, I, 330; Heide 2006b, 166–7; Price 2019, 71–172).¹⁴ The aims of *seiðr* are manifold and like most forms of magic can have both positive as well as negative effects. When practised by women, *seiðr* tends to be used to gain knowledge of future events while, if performed by a male individual, it is usually harmful (Mitchell 2011, 81), involving the causing of pain, disease or even death, or influencing the weather or environment (see, for instance, *Harðar saga* or *Víglundar saga*) (de Vries 1956–7, I, 331; Jóhannes Halldórsson 1959, 82–4; Raudvere 2002, 111 and 120; Heide 2006b, 166; Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 2009, 65–6; Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2009, 409–33). According to the sagas, *seiðr* seems to have been a performed act at a special event, involving various objects such as a *seiðhjallr* (a platform of sorts) and a special staff as well as more than one participant (all female in *Eiríks saga rauða*) and particular chants (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–4, II, 261).¹⁵ This practice has no obvious parallel in Old French.

Another word in Old Norse directly used for magical activities is *galdr* (pl. *galdrar*). Often applied nowadays to the idea of ‘magic’ as a whole, the suggested etymology is that the word derives from Indo-European **ghel-*, “to shout” or “to scream” (Pokorny 1948–69, I, 428).¹⁶ Cognates can be found in Old Norse in the verbs *að gjalla* (“to sound, to resonate”) or *að gala* (“to chant, to sing”) (Pokorny 1948–69, I, 428). The oral aspect of *galdr* is thus even more obvious than with *seiðr* in that *galdrar* were evidently perceived as powerful songs or utterances perhaps associated with certain ritual activities (Finnur Jónsson 1966, 7–8; Korecká 2019, 184 and 202–9). This is even more apparent if we consider the noun *galdralag* (“magical song”) used by Snorri for a particular Eddic metre (see *Háttatal* st. 101) closely related to *ljóðaháttur*, which is also seemingly connected to a form of spoken magic (Roper 2005, 13–4).¹⁷ In

¹⁴ On the performance of *seiðr*, see Gunnell 1995, 335–40 and 2019, 107–15.

¹⁵ That songs accompanied *seiðr* seems apparent from the *varðlok(k)ur* of *Eiríks saga rauða*, the *seiðleti* mentioned in *Laxdæla saga* and the *mikið riddlið* (“large chorus”) in *Órvar-Odds saga* (Boer 1888, 11; Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, 105; Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935, 206–9). On *seiðr* as a practice, see also Mitchell, 2003, 139 and 141 and 2011, 94–8; Dillmann 2006, 121–2; Gardeta 2008, 55–61; Price 2019, 132–68 and 269–70.

¹⁶ Certainly, as *Laxdæla saga* tells us, the outcome of *seiðr* may also be referred to as *galdrar* which once again directly refers to a song performed as part of *seiðr*, showing the two concepts becoming interconnected (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, 99).

¹⁷ Unless otherwise specified, all references to Eddic poetry are taken from Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason 2014. If not otherwise specified, all references to the *Snorra Edda* are given in accordance with the editions by Faulkes 2005–7. Except where otherwise stated, all references to skaldic poetry are taken from the *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* database (accessed via

a literary context, the idea of *galdr* being spoken or sung is supported by *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* (henceforth *Grettis saga*) which gives the idea of a murmured spell (Guðni Jónsson 1936, 245–51; Simek 2006, 124).

Another concept which is closely connected to *galdr*, and often even named alongside it, are *gørningar* (in the plural: “magic”), a word which seems to derive from Germanic **garwian* (“deed” or “act”), thereby underlining the active part of this practice, which appears to be mostly seen as negative (see below) (Korecká 2019, 49–55).

Closely related to the concepts of *seiðr*, *galdr* and *gørningar* is the idea of the magical curse which is another important aspect of saga literature (and probably also daily life) and has natural parallels among other things in Old French in the term *maldire* (see above). Numerous examples exist: In *Grettis saga*, an old woman called Þuríðr curses the hero Grettir and then also places a curse on a log of wood which is sent to him as firewood and later leads to his death. The terms used to describe these actions are the verb phrase *að mæla um* (“to utter [emphatically spells]”) and the nominal phrase *roðmm ummæli* (“mighty utterances”). Indeed the spoken curse is very unsettling to Grettir (Guðni Jónsson 1936, 245–51; Dillmann 2006, 125). *Eyrbyggja saga*, meanwhile, features *ákvæði* (lit. “something spoken ‘at’ someone”, hence a “spell”) being put on Arnkell *góði* Þórólfsson by the witch Katla (Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935, 54).¹⁸ *Ákvæði* here seemingly corresponds to the Latin *adiuratio* (pl. *adiurationes*, “adjuration”), which entails the idea of a form of magical conjuring and/ or commanding (Kieckhefer 1990, 69–73). Elsewhere, in *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, the Finn Ógautan places a curse on Ingibjörg after her rebuttal of his advances, the wording of which is “legg ek þat á þik” (lit. “I put this on you”) (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–4, II, 224). The key idea is the power of the word, Ógautan’s utterance being said to be an *álög* (lit. something ‘placed on’ someone; a “spell, imprecation”) (Korecká 2019, 185 and 215–21). As can be seen from the above, two of the expressions stress the idea of ‘magic’ being contained essentially in powerful words as is also implied by *seiðr* or *galdr*. It is meanwhile worth noting that in Old Norse, people and objects are rarely cursed by nature.

Alongside the above words, one notes the gradual development of a more general concept for ‘magic,’ that is *trölldómr* (synonymous with the word *tröllskapr*) (Ármann Jakobsson 2008, 39–41; Korecká 2019, 79 and 72–82). Originally connected to the word *tröll*, which was also developing during this time, from its original application to some kind of evil spirit. While being a

<https://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk/db.php>). If not otherwise provided, all datings of Old Norse sagas and related material are taken from Simek/ Hermann Pálsson 2007.

¹⁸ As an illustration of *adiurationes*: see the various examples given by Franz 1909, II.

derogatory term for a specific kind of negative magic (similar to *nigromancie* and *sorcerie*), it is not easy to pinpoint exactly what it meant for Icelanders. Judging from *Gísla saga* and the character of *seiðmaðr Þorgrímr nef*, who it is applied to, it is certainly used for some form of ritual (perhaps a form of *seiðr*) although this is never stated (Finnur Jónsson 1903, 69; Ármann Jakobsson 2008, 49–50 and 63–4). In later narrative traditions and legal codices *trölldómr* seems to be used to denote any form of ‘magic,’ especially that conducted by women (Ármann Jakobsson 2008, 44–5; Mitchell 2011, 154–6).

The aforementioned terms and notions are accompanied in Old Norse by a manifold array of other terms relating to ‘magic’ and magical abilities that are used simultaneously and often interchangeably. Most of them relate to some form of skill. The most prominent term to denote magical knowledge is *ffjqlkynngi* (“magic skill”), predominately appearing in the form of the adjective *ffjqlkunnigr* (“magically skilled”), which has the parallel expression *margkunnigr* (Dillmann 2006, 196–9 and 201).¹⁹

Having given a brief overview of the various different notions and forms of magic in both medieval France and Scandinavia and having noted the intrinsic differences in meaning, it is now time to discuss how translators dealt with translating Old French forms of magic into Old Norse, and what effects this might have had.

The Corpus of Evidence

The material examined in the present study are Old Norse narratives which are usually associated with the heading “translated *riddarasögur*” rendered into Old Norse in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and the Anglo–Norman, Breton and Old French narratives which the sagas are based on and which are comprised of various romances, *chansons de geste*, *lais* and *fabliaux*. Only those texts that display magic or feature magical objects have been considered here. As has been noted above, there were certain areas (prophecy and magical objects in particular) in which similar concepts and parallel vocabulary existed, meaning that in many cases, such translations are pretty straight forward, leaving little in the way of information that can be gained from undertaking a detailed examination into such questions.

The situation is nonetheless somewhat different when it comes to the talk of magical rings in these works, the Old French works placing particular emphasis on the gemstones embedded within the rings which seem to be the main sources of their magical capabilities, protecting their wearer from certain threats

¹⁹ For an exhaustive discussion of these and further words and the concepts behind them: see, for example, Korecká 2019, 19–39.

(poison, captivity or fear, for instance) or helping him in his quest (for example, assisting him with finding whatever it is he is looking for).²⁰ The role of these magical gemstones, which would have been a new idea in the North, was essentially to aid the progress of the narrative and, once again, however, no single word is used to describe their magical power in all instances. The Old Norse translators thus have little problem in translating these accounts of magical gemstones from the source material faithfully.

As noted above, both cultures had ideas of magical healing, and there seems to have been little difficulty in the translation of accounts telling of the healing of wounds by means of herbalism or horticulture or those recounting the brewing of potions that have an “on use” effect, giving the user supernatural strength or invigorating his spirit as in the *lai Deus Amanz* (see above).²¹

Of particular interest is how translators deal with magical power itself on those few occasions in which it is described. While *seiðr* is never mentioned (perhaps because there are no descriptions of magical rites in the Old French accounts), the word *galdr* which appears twice in the thirteenth-century *Mottuls saga* alongside the word *kraptr*, both words being used to translate *uevre* featured in *Le cort mantel*, referring to the power that the mantle of the narrative is said to have been imbued with on both occasions. Here, the word *galdr* is clearly leaving its original meaning. In *Mottuls saga*, one nonetheless notes that it is said to be an *álfkona* (“álfr–woman”) who weaves a *galdr* into the mantle (rather than an *álqg*). As I have noted elsewhere, this idea of spinning elven women would have been innovatory to local beliefs (Lummer forthcoming 2021a). On another occasion, the nature of the same mantle is described

²⁰ Such magical rings can be found in, for example, *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr* as well as in its Old French source *Floire et Blancheflor* (see ll. 1001–6, 2525–6 and 2535–40), *Ívens saga* as well as *Yvain* (ll. 1019–37 and 2776–7), the two *strengleikar* *Desiré* and *Jonet* and the corresponding Old French and Breton *lais Désiré* (ll. 233–41, 332–5 and 507–11) and *Yonec* (of which the latter has been mentioned above) (du Ménil 1856, 42 and 104–5; Köllbing 1896, 30–1; Nolting–Hauff 1962, 62–5 and 144–5; Cook and Tveitane 1979, 116–9, 124–5 and 240–3; Kalinke 1999b, 48–9 and 68–9; Burgess and Brook 2007, 52–3, 56–7 and 64–5). The stone embedded in a ring which Partalopi utilises to make Marmoria visible in *Partalopa saga* is a lantern in the Old French romance (Præstgaard Andersen 1983, 62–3). There is also a ring in either version of *Flóvents saga frakkakonungs* respectively, albeit the information gained from this specific saga is dubious as no Old French source survives (Cederschiöld 1884, 155 and 197). On Old French magical rings, see, for example, Gingras 1997.

²¹ On the ‘everyday use’ of magical herbs/ medicine and magical stones (which were ascribed both a healing as well as an apotropaic function and could be attached to weapons [especially swords], rings and jewellery): see, for instance, Franz 1909, I, 395–6 and II, 435–42; Kieckhefer 1990, 69–73; Watson 2019, 120–1; Lecouteux 2012. Regarding Old Norse material: see, for example, the *lifsteinn* in *Kormáks saga* and the *lyfsteinn* in *Laxdæla saga* respectively (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, 172 and 1939, 234).

differently when it is revealed to the women at King Artús’ court none of them wanted to own the garment: “[...] er þær höfðu allar skilt at fullu með hverri list möttullinn var ofinn ok með hverjum kraptri álfkonan hafði dregit lauf möttulsins ok saumat” (Kalinke 1999a, 16).²² The two words of interest here are *list* (“art, craft”)²³ and *kraptr* (“[physical] might, power” but also “magical power”) used to render the Old French *uevre*. The word *list* here nonetheless seems to refer solely to the intricacy of the craftsmanship of the mantle rather than the spell that the cloak has been imbued with. The use of the word *kraptr* on the other hand is more intriguing, as it seemingly avoids the magical and brings it back to a simple idea of the mantle’s nature. Thus, one might even go so far as to argue in reverse that the earlier use of *galdr* as a translation for *uevre* adds a notion of magic to the mantle rather than *kraptr* taking it away.

This brings us to the earlier-mentioned interesting, yet brief mention of *sorcerie* in the *dite aristocratique* version of the Old French romance *Floire et Blancheflor*. Outraged at his son’s feelings for the Christian Blancheflor, Floire’s father (and staunch pagan) King Felix, suspects Blancheflor of using *sorcerie* to incite Floire’s love (ll. 393–8):

Il en ot doel et ire grande;
Del venir li done congiés.
La roïne apela iriés:
«Certes», fait il, «la damoisele
Mar acointa ceste novele;
Puet–estre que par sorcerie
A de mon fil la druërie.²⁴ (du Ménil 1856, 17)

King Felix in *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*, meanwhile, decries Blankiflúr’s apparent dealings as follows: “Illu heilli urðu þessi tíðindi, er Blankiflúr kom hér, þvíat þetta er ekki gerningalaust, er hún hefir slíka ást sonar míns [...]” (Kölbing 1896, 14).²⁵ As can be seen here, the Old Norse saga, while echoing the king’s outburst of rage, makes use of a slightly different wording in its translation of Old French *sorcerie*, interestingly enough using *gørningar* rather

²² Translation: “[...] they fully understood with what cunning the mantle had been woven and what power the [álfkona] had embroidered and sewn into the leaves on the mantle [...]” (Kalinke 1999a, 17).

²³ For further information on the word *list*: see, for instance, Mitchell 2017; and 2020.

²⁴ Translation: “He [that is King Felix] then had great pain and anger./ Gave him [that is his seneschal] leave, from this/ Enraged he summoned the queen/ ‘Indeed,’ he said, ‘the young lady [that is Blancheflor]/ In an evil hour these tidings were delivered/ Maybe by [means of] sorcery/ She has [gained] the courtly love of my son.” Unless otherwise stated, all translations are those of the author.

²⁵ Translation: “These news became bad luck, when Blankiflúr came here, because it is not without *gørningar* that she receives such love from my son [...]”.

than, for example, *seiðr*, *galdr*, or *trölldómr*, any of which would have been more direct alternative translations for *sorcerie*, although the first two might have been viewed at the time of the translation as referring essentially to *pagan* performative ritual that were associated only with the Old Norse world. Indeed, in its use, *galdr* is often differentiated from *gørningar*, as the commonly-used phrase ‘*galdrar ok gørningar*’ shows (Korecká 2019, 50–2). Indeed, in the investigated corpus, *gørningar* seem to be something exclusively used by Saracens (or pagans) when referring to Christians whom they perceive as being either invincible (as with Elís in *Elís saga ok Rósamundu*) or as having charmed or tricked someone into making a deal or feeling something (as with Blankiflúr mentioned above).²⁶

The noun *trölldómr* is meanwhile employed in the late-twelfth-century *Bevens saga* as a translation for the noun *enchantements* (“enchantment, sorcery”) used in *Boeve* and the verb *enchanter* (“to bewitch, to cast a spell on”) (ll. 3411–35).²⁷ The Saracen king Yvori wants to have Boeve’s horse Arundel, and to this end employs the aid of the thief Gebitus whose magical capabilities (“enchantments”: l. 3416) Yvori has often witnessed before. Once at the stable where Arundel is kept, Gebitus manages to open it without needing a key (l. 3425), and proceeds to enchant Arundel so that he can grab the horse by its feet (l. 3426). *Bevens saga* features an accurate rendition of this passage, albeit with some minor alterations and, most interestingly, includes the description of the type of magic used: Jupiter, as Gebitus is called in the saga, uses exactly the same approach as his Anglo-Norman counterpart to steal Bevens’ horse Arundela. He does not need a key to open up the stable doors and makes use of *trölldómr* to keep Arundela from moving and neighing. Indeed, the Old French *enchantment* appears to have had fewer negative connotations than the Old Norse *trölldómr* which here seems to be taking on its later wider meaning, referring to negative magic in general (Ármann Jakobsson 2008, 54–5). Arguably, the negativity in this segment of the saga stems from the religious backgrounds of the practitioner (Gebitus is a Muslim).²⁸

²⁶ The passage in *Elís saga ok Rósamundu* runs as follows: “þa mælti Salatres hinn gamli: ‘Þat er giorningamadr, er eigi geta so roskuir menn stadizt honum!’” (Kölbing 1881, 32). Translation: “Then Salatres the Old said: ‘This is a *gørningamaðr*, whom so valiant men cannot match’”. In the corresponding passage in *Elye de St. Gilles* (ll. 468–70), Elye is called a rogue (“glous”) that is an enchanter (“enchantere”) (Hartman and Malicote 2011, 30–1).

²⁷ The following information is in accordance with Stimming 1899, 115–6 and Sanders 2001, 307–9.

²⁸ A similar association may be seen in the ecclesiastical connotation of curses and incantations with paganism as early as the seventh century (Little 1993, 91).

As can be seen from the above, both the Old French as well as the Old Norse narratives feature various characters who are said to be capable of utilising other forms of magic. I would like to examine these figures in more detail, and their potential influence on the Old Norse images of magic users. As has been noted, it seems clear that such personages are predominately female, their usual form of magic often relating to some kind of medical knowledge. Of particular interest are figures which are often said to have (or appear to have) acquired their respective knowledge largely by means of books or by teaching, something that is of particular interest in the context of the present study as the notion of book-learned magicians is seemingly absent in the Scandinavian literature of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in which book-learning is usually associated with Christianity (see below).

The Learned Magician

With regard to the question of translating terms for sorcerers/ sorceresses and similar individuals into Old Norse texts, it is worth bearing in mind that, as noted above, certain uniquely Old Norse concepts of ‘magic’ – such as *seiðr* – are never made use of in the Old Norse material. As has been outlined above, in the Old French and Anglo-Norman narratives considered here many (especially female) figures such as Yseult in *Tristan* or the aunt in the *lai Deus Amanz* are presented as being knowledgeable of alchemy and/ or herbalism, both of which are used to heal wounds and to concoct potions to cure other diseases. While the Old Norse has certain male figures who work as healers (such as Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson [c. 1166–1213], for instance),²⁹ these are never presented as magicians, and the *seiðkonur* mentioned above were evidently different in nature to the figures noted above (who are perhaps closer to witches in their later image). It would appear as though the difference lies in the use made of the respective type of ‘magic’. While those *seiðkonur* who use harmful magic and could be seen as a *maleficae*, the ‘magic’ of male sorcerers (which could be identified as both *magi* and *necromanti*) could be both curative and/ or malevolent, harmful ‘magic’ only being used if they were marked as *malefici* (Kieckhefer 1990, 80–5 and 151–71; Flint 1991, 17, 21, 68, 214–6 and 272–3).³⁰ It appears obvious that there is a dichotomy between the magically skilled individuals encountered in the Old French corpus and the Old Norse figures of earlier saga literature and mythology who, for the main part, seem to display an

²⁹ See, for example, *Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* and *Hrafn saga hin sérstaka* (Örnólfur Thórsson et. al. 1988, II, 230–45 and 884–931).

³⁰ On the term *maleficum*, see also note 6 above.

innate magical ability rather than having been trained in a specific craft.³¹ In the following, attention will be paid to the translation of the portrayal of such figures in the Old French works and the vocabulary they or their skills are described with.

One of the prime examples of such a female figure appears in *Tristrams saga*, the Old Norse translation of the late–twelfth–century *Tristan* by Thomas d’Angleterre (fl. 1170–80), which tells us about the medical proficiencies of Queen Ísodd who “[...] ein kann allra grasa náttúru ok þeira kragt ok alls konar lækningar, er sár megu græða” (Jorgensen 1999, 80),³² later stating:

Í öllum heiminum var engi sá lækni, er svá kunni alls konar kunnáttu til lækningar, þvíat hún kunni at hjálpa hvers kyns sóttum ok sárum, er menn kunna fá. Henni var kunnugt um allra þeira grasa kragt, er til nokkurs góðs eru nýt. Hún kunni allar vélar ok öll hjálpraði, er til horfðu lækningar kunnáttu. Hún kunni ok at hjálpa við eitruðum drykk ok græðing gefa eitruðum sárum ok háskaflögru ok alls konar sullum ok verk ór öllum limum at draga, svá at hvergi fannz henni hagarí né at lækningum betri meistari. (Jorgensen 1999, 86.)³³

The italicized words in the quote above, *kunni* (from *að kunna*, “to know”), *kunnáttu* (from *kunnátta*, “knowledge”) and *var kunnugt* (from *að vera kunnugt*, “to be knowledgeable of”), all highlight the idea that the *lækningar kunnátta* (“the knowledge/practice of medicine”) of Queen Ísodd (words close enough to be related to *ffjolkunnugr/ margkunnugr* [see above]) is a craft, honed over years of study (see below). Whether the magical connotations were present in the original is uncertain: Unfortunately, the corresponding segment has been lost in the extant version of *Tristan*, making any potential conclusions hypothetical. In spite of this, however, it seems apparent that the aspect of study is predominant here, something rarely encountered in accounts of magical skills in the Old Norse mythological corpus and saga literature that predates the translated *riddarasögur*. Ísodd’s medical, learned knowledge is then echoed in the skills of

³¹ On the instances of taught and learned ‘magic’ in Old Norse, see note 3 above.

³² Translation: “[...] alone knows the properties and powers of all the herbs and all kinds of treatments capable of healing wounds” (Jorgensen 1999, 81).

³³ Translation: “There wasn’t a doctor in the whole world who knew so many cures for sicknesses, for she could heal all kinds of wounds and diseases that could afflict people. She knew the power of all the herbs that were in any way beneficial. She knew all the methods and helpful information belonging to the practice of medicine. She knew how to aid those who had drunk poison and to cure inflamed wounds, dangerous fevers, and all kinds of boils, and to draw out aches and pains from all the limbs—so that no one could be found who was more skillful nor a more masterful healer” (Jorgensen 1999, 87). Regarding the queen’s botanical knowledge, see, for example, Jorgensen 1999, 102–3.

Queen Ísodd's daughter Ísönd, which directly reflect that of Yseult who is shown as being the only person capable of healing (*guarir* ["to heal, cure, treat": see, for instance, ll. 2821 and 3087]) Tristan's mortal wound. *Tristrams saga* matches its source in the overall description of these scenes (Jorgensen 1999, 106–9 and 212–7). The implication is that Yseult/ Ísönd has learnt from her mother. What is interesting is that in the original, the skills appear to be limited to healing, whereas the implication of the translation (using *kunnátta*) allows the possibility of the skill being magical like that of Old Norse magical healers such as Þórdís *spákona* ("sibylla") in *Kórmáks saga* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1939, 282–5).³⁴

Another medically trained female can be found in both the Breton *lai Deus Amanz* as well as its Old Norse adaptation, the *strengleikr*, *Tveggja elskanda ljóð*.³⁵ Here, the aunt of the nameless princess, who is said to live in Salerno, one of the leading cities in the medieval Occident for physicians (Baader 1978), who is said to have learned her craft of herbalism over the course of 30 years. *Tveggja elskanda ljóð* replicates this idea, albeit increasing the study to 50 years of learning of the curative powers of herbs and roots. In both instances, this woman also provides a magical invigorating potion intended to give the youth the strength he needs to carry his beloved up a mountain.

The romance *Yvain* features another such potion (ll. 2951–5) brewed by another woman (Nolting–Hauff 1962, 152). Here, it said to have been crafted by Morgue *le sage* ("the Wise"; that is Morgan le Fay), although the narrative never describes her actually brewing the ointment. Rather, after Yvain has lost the love of his mistress by being away for too long, he becomes mad and is lost in a forest where he is subsequently found by a noble lady. She recognises his mental breakdown and orders a servant–maiden to fetch her the ointment which she describes as having been concocted by Morgue. The brew itself is to be applied on the head of the patient, curing him of any madness and mental distress that might have befallen him. *Ívens saga* features the same episode and interestingly translates Morgue's (Morgna in Icelandic) sobriquet accordingly as "hin hyggná" ("the Wise") (Kalinke 1999b, 68–71).³⁶

One could argue that the Old French romance *Partonopeu de Blois* is of even greater interest here because it mentions several female figures who are

³⁴ Other examples of healing in Old Norse literature are given by, for example, Reichborn–Kjennerud 1923 and 1928, 46–62.

³⁵ The information regarding *Tveggja elskanda ljóð* is based on that given in Cook and Tveitane 1979, 162–5.

³⁶ In Old French, Morgan was a well–recognised figure (from works like Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* dated to c. 1150). Whether she was as recognisable in Old Norse from other now lost works is of course open to question. Her sobriquet *hin hyggná* might suggest the contrary.

said to perform acts that can loosely be categorised as magical. The centre is nonetheless the earlier-noted Melior and her clearly learned prowess, some of which she reveals to the hero Partonopeu on their first dialogue with one another (ll. 1355–80) (Collet and Joris 2005, 138–41). Here, Melior proclaims that she came to his liege’s court earlier to observe him after having heard remarkable rumours about his beauty and conduct and remained unseen by everyone for the entire duration of her 15–day stay. Interestingly, the Old Norse *Partalopa saga*, suggests that Marmoria (as Melior is called in the saga) obtained these skills via a so-called ‘stjörubók’ (lit. “Book of Stars”; or “astrology book”) which allows her to travel great distances quickly and stay at court in invisible form: “[...] þa tok hon þat til rads at hon for med lærdoms *prettvm* ok *velvm* stiörnv bokar til Fraklandz ok kom svo jkongs höllina at eingi madvr sa hana en hon sa alla men [...]”³⁷ (my italics) (Præstgaard Andersen 1983, 6–7).

In the same discussion in the ‘A’ redaction of *Partonopeu*, when Melior mentions her observation of Partonopeu at his liege’s court, things are slightly different. Here, Melior boasts how it was due to her *engien* (“native wit, skill, cunning”) that she orchestrated the events – including guiding a ship while she remained concealed – which ultimately lead to Partonopeu traveling to her palace and entering her bed chamber (ll. 1381–6) (Collet and Joris 2005, 140). In *Partalopa saga*, Partalopi is saying that these events were accomplished with the help of deceits (“*vélar*”) and trickery (“*prettar*”), which also brought about his delusions (“*ollvm minvm villvm*”) (Præstgaard Andersen 1983, 29). She then simply states that all of this has all been achieved by her plans (“*radum*”) (Præstgaard Andersen 1983, 31). The use of *vélar* and *prettar* here rather than *galdr*, *trölldómr* or *kunnátta* underlines the idea of trickery or deceit rather than ‘magic’. All the same, these both appear to be skills gained from learning.

As noted above, while female witch-like figures exist in Old Norse, they tend to be marginalised and/or lower class. Upper-class powerful learned figures, such as those encountered in the Old French material, are much less common. This fact might indicate a new element which was introduced to the

³⁷ Translation: “Then she adopted the plan, that she went to France by means of tricks of learning and devices of the astrology book. She came into the king’s hall so that no one saw her, but she saw all the people” (Præstgaard Andersen 1983, 132–3). The idea of Marmoria using the said book to travel quickly and become invisible is included in the manuscripts AM 553 4to (“A1”; dated to c. 1450–1500) and Holm papp 46 fol. (“B1”; dated to 1690) but not in JS 27 fol. (“A3”; dated to c. 1670). Interestingly, a similar idea of long-distance travel is ascribed to Óðinn in *Ynglinga saga*, and the Finns in *Vatnsdæla saga*, for example (Finnur Jónsson 1966, 7; Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1939, 27–36 and 40–3). On the rising popularity of books of the occult in the Middle Ages in Scandinavia, see, for example, Ohrvik 2018.

Old Norse society. There is, however, good reason to assume that the idea of upper-class female magic wielders did not have ample time to take up roots and be developed as narrative motifs, due to the sheer plethora of other newly introduced courtly and chivalric ideas. Aspects such as Melior's invisibility, Morgan's apparent innate skill to brew magical potions and Yseult's healing skills are all pivotal elements necessary for the plot to work and therefore required translation. This obviously meant that such features could well have had an impact on the Old Norse perception of both magical women as well as the way magical knowledge was gained. Certainly, the acquisition of magical knowledge via learning finds some representation in the *fornaldarsögur*.³⁸ The depiction of upper-class women wielding magic, however, seemingly does not.³⁹

There is thus good reason to consider the degree to which these skilled figures (the forerunners of figures like Merlin and Simon Magus) might have left their mark on the Old Norse understanding of magic users (Flint, 1991, 338–44; Gunnell 1998, 110).⁴⁰ In the Old Norse literary corpus we have, of course, the image of Óðinn (as described in *Ynglinga saga* and in *Gesta Danorum* by Saxo Grammaticus [c. 1160–c. 1220]) and the intriguing character of Queen Gunnhildr who is near unique in Old Norse historical sagas and appears in such renowned works as *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, *Njáls saga* and Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* collection (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, 11–23 and 75; Finnur Jónsson 1966, 7–8; Bjarni Einarsson 2001, 112–6). Gunnhildr with her North-Norwegian background is, one might argue, seemingly presented as an 'archetypical Morgan le Fay', a figure who is not only capable of some form of magic (the *seiðr* mentioned above), but is also able to shape-shift into the guise of a swallow according to *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* (Bjarni Einarsson 2001, 113 and 116). One wonders whether the underlying Sámi aspects of Gunnhildr's character might have been influenced by such Old Norse versions based on foreign (Continental) works. Such

³⁸ Immediately, two examples come to mind, namely the instance in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* where Gróa *völvu* teaches ("að kenna") Grímr all forms of magic ("alla fljölkyngi") and the description of how Ása in *fagra* is said to be taught by Véfreyja ("nam kunnáttu") in *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, albeit that in this particular instance the skills learned seem to be limited to forms of divination (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–4, II, 212–3 and 362–3).

³⁹ The fact that the type of magically skilled upper-class women was becoming known in the Old Norse world is reflected in the *fornaldarsögur* account of princess Díana in *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis*, who is tersely described as follows: "Hún kunni allar bóklígar listir" (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–4, III, 240). Translation: "She learned all the theoretical arts." This, however, is the only example of its kind in the *fornaldarsögur*.

⁴⁰ On Merlin as a sorcerer, see, for instance, Berthelot 1999.

contemplations become more tempting if one considers that Gunnhildr in this form does not seem to appear in the written record prior to the time of the said Old Norse narratives. Additionally, one might bear in mind how she is sent away to Finnmörk to learn magic as described in *Haralds saga hárfagra* (Finnur Jónsson 1966, 61). One might also bear in mind that magic as a taught and learned bookish craft is rarely encountered in written Old Norse records. It nonetheless appears to be arriving in the fourteenth century if we consider the stories of Sæmundur *fróði* Sigfússon and bishop Jón Ögmundsson.⁴¹ Later folk legends throughout Scandinavia and in Iceland show that it clearly put down deep roots, although predominantly in connection with learned male bishops and other clerics rather than women. This question of the development of the developing image of the learned magician in Scandinavia clearly deserves more research.

Conclusion

The present study has investigated the various mentions of magic, and those supernatural objects and figures capable of wielding some form of magic in the corpus of the translated *riddarasögur* and their respective Old French sources, considering the potential difficulties in translating from one culture to the next and the possible cultural influences such translations might have had. From the above study we may surmise that, while the concepts in the two cultures had many similarities and while the translations are generally carefully crafted, some features evidently got lost in translation or were added or changed as the Old Norse translators tried to render foreign concepts intelligible to their audiences, sometimes altering local understandings of words to a greater or lesser degree. Before summing up the main problems this study suggests a translator might have been faced with when translating those accounts relating to ‘magic’, it is worth underlining those concepts that interestingly enough do not appear in the translated record, the most notable of which is any mention of *seiðr*, a fact that might best be explained as resulting from the lack of any mention of rituals associated with the performance or successful outcome of ‘magic’ in the original narratives. Even more understandable perhaps is the absence of any mention of *Finnar*, a people commonly said to be highly skilled and trained in the magical arts in Old Norse literature. This trope would logically not have fitted into the regional setting of the material at hand in the chivalric romances which focus mostly on Central and Southern Europe, North

⁴¹ On the development of the Sæmundur narrative which, at an early stage, refers to the *teaching* of magic, see, for example, Gunnell 1998, 89–91. For more information on various magical books and their usage, see, Mitchell 2014.

Africa and the Middle East. Indeed, Old French ‘magic’, however, appears to have been mostly linked to learned skills such as astronomy or medical knowledge, the latter apparently being mostly associated with upper-class women rather than the marginalised magic-users most commonly encountered in Old Norse works. Another trope somewhat frequently encountered in Old French texts, regularly relating to negatively connoted ‘magic’ is that of the learned Saracen sorcerer who uses illusion and trickery to reach his goal. Most distinctively, however, Old French ‘magic’ is devoid of any associations with ritual performance and has more to do with learned power or skill.

As can be seen from the above, it seems clear that for the most part that differences and deviations from the Old French accounts of ‘magic’ in the Old Norse sagas in question are minor and/ or largely insignificant. Most of them relate to the descriptions of magical objects. Translation problems are seemingly avoided by the fact that, in the Old French and Anglo-Norman narratives, the power of any given item is rarely described but more implied by its background or the effect it has, making it difficult to estimate the overall cultural impact of the Old Norse translations of these accounts. As illustrated, the idea of magical objects was known in both cultures long before the translations were undertaken. The same applies to the casting of illusions, cursing and shape-changing.

Regarding the various translations of those few words used for ‘magic’ or magical power that do occur, one notes that the translators either alter the nature of the respective Old Norse concept used to translate the words or add support for a change in meaning towards a more general application that was already taking place. A good example is the Old Norse concept of *galdr* as used in *Le cort mantle* and *Mottuls saga* above, when the word which originally had a more specific meaning is now clearly being used in a more general sense. It is also worth noting here that *galdr* is now apparently also being connected to magical weaving, something that might have been more logically connected to *seiðr* (see above). Another example of such a development in meaning is the use of *trölldómr* in *Bervers saga*.

As has been indicated earlier, the main addition to the Old Norse corpus (outside the idea of *álfkönur* creating magical garments and the idea of ‘magic’ being associated with learning and books) is the idea of the magical gemstone, usually found embedded in rings (see above). The earliest extant mention of such a gem with special magical properties in an Old Norse narrative seems to come from *Piðreks saga* (Holm perg 4 fol., dated to c. 1275–1300), another work with a foreign background, in which it is said to incite love. While the

saga's connection to the *riddarasögur* is open to discussion, this supports the idea that this motif has an origin outside the Old Norse world.⁴²

Naturally, both societies, the Old French as well as Old Norse, were well aware of the power of the spoken word and not least the curse, meaning that here too translations should have been no problem. Indeed, Old Norse features a number of expressions that could be used to translate curses or enchantments such as *leggja á*, *mæla um* or *mæla fyrir* which is used to describe the curse uttered by Þorgrímr *nef* in *Gísla saga Súrssonar* that leaves Gísli without support. One can only speculate as to why the respective translators chose not to use such expressions such as these to translate verbs such as *maldire* in the *lai Guigemar*, in other words, not to use those Old Norse concepts known to both the translators as well as their audience.

In future studies, it might be worthwhile to consider in more detail the specific adjectives used for ‘magic’-users or the words used for their acts in translations (as has been done with *prettar* and *vélar* above) rather than those nouns used to describe their profession which are also few and far between. As noted above, while words describing their profession are lacking, it is nonetheless clear that in the Old French source material (reflected in the Old Norse narratives) specific groups of people seem to be commonly associated with specific kinds of ‘magic’ in the translated *riddarasögur*. The pre-Christian Old Norse world with its stress on orality seems to have lacked ideas of learned magicians such as Merlin or Morgan le Fay, figures who could produce magical, invigorating or remedial potions (Óðinn has some similarities but is clearly different; see above). Indeed, as noted above, in thirteenth-century Iceland and Norway learning was still seen as something that was positive, which may explain why the strange arts Sæmundur *fróði* Sigfússon was seen as learning abroad are said to be unknown (Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinnsson 1994, 124). While women were particularly associated with ‘magic’ in both cultures, *seiðr* (and other magical acts such as ‘magical mooning’ and the ‘goatskin twirl’) (Gunnell 2014) differ from what figures such as Merlin would have practiced. Indeed, for the main part, they seem to have been limited to influencing weather or foreknowledge. Thus, one might be tempted to consider whether the image of the first real “sorceress” in Old Norse records, Queen Gunnhildr, might well have been influenced to some degree by Old French ideas (as has been noted

⁴² The segment in *Þiðreks saga* reads as follows (ch. 337 [245]): “i þessu gulli er æinn stein oc þat er nattura steinsens oc hanns umbunaðar at ef karll *maðr* dregr þetta *fingrgull* a *fingr* konu. Þa skal hon sua mikit unna honum at *firir* huet uetna fram vill hon haua hann huart er þat er vili frænða hennar eða *æigi*” (Bertelsen 1905–11, II, 112–3). Translation: “In the ring is a stone and the nature of the stone and its socket is that if a man puts this ring on a woman’s finger then she shall love him so much that she wants to have him in all respects whether that is the will of her relatives or not.”

above). While both she and Freyja are said to have practised *seiðr*, their characters are very different, the originally Northern–Norwegian Gunnhildr having a number of features that one would find in the literary and folkloristic sorceresses of later times.

All in all, in spite of those elements that are shared, it seems clear that one has to be open to the idea of the Old French ideas of ‘magic’ having had some degree of influence on indigenous, Norse concepts by means of the translated *riddarasögur*, as also seems to have occurred with other supernatural concepts like those of the *álfar*, *dvergjar* and *jötunnar*, all of which appear to have sown the seeds for some of these new motifs to put down roots and gain more popularity on the centuries to come, most notably in the Scandinavian folk literature that would come to be recorded in the post–medieval centuries and those that followed.

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6 Conclusion

In his collection of aphorisms entitled “Der Wanderer und sein Schatten”, published in 1880 as a supplement to his philosophic work *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches: Ein Buch für freie Geister* (“*Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*”) which had been issued two years earlier in 1878, the German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche stated that “[a]ls ob nicht alle Worte Taschen wären, in welche bald dies, bald jenes, bald mehreres auf einmal gesteckt worden ist.”⁵⁹¹ This quotation captures the essence of the present study: not only does it highlight the volatile motif registers attached to supernatural concepts which vary from individual to individual, culture to culture and from century to century, but it also shows that certain aspects of a word might have differing degrees of importance throughout the ages and can be altered in meaning centuries after they were initially formed. In short, certain understandings might be championed in one epoch, while a generation later, different aspects of the concept might be found more appealing. Various things can have an effect on this. It certainly seems to apply in particular to cross-cultural translations of supernatural concepts where certain features (or a set of attributes) of a particular notion or the entire concept itself might be unfamiliar or peculiar to the receiving culture. The introductions of these new concepts or understandings into the target culture have the potential to change previous ideas and even world views.

At the outset of this study, the aim was set to examine whether foreign, especially (courtly) continental narratives that were brought into the Scandinavian sphere via translations (in particular the translated *riddarasögur*) during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries exerted influence on the pre-existing Old Nordic supernatural concepts. If such an influence could be suggested or even proven, the intention was to gauge the possible extent of this influence and to examine why some supernatural concepts might be more susceptible to foreign influences than others. By the same token, if such influences could not be shown to have taken place, the objective was to try to explain why the extraneous ideas should have failed to assert any impact on the Old Nordic ideas. Such contemplations naturally lead to the central question of how specific supernatural Old Norse concepts react to and behave under foreign

⁵⁹¹ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches: Ein Buch für freie Geister*, Vol. II: *Der Wanderer und sein Schatten* (Leipzig: C. G. Naumann, 1894), p. 214. Translation: “As if not all words were pockets, into which soon this, soon that or soon several things have been tucked in at once.”

influence, questions that are naturally relevant to how the Old Nordic religions might have been influenced by contacts with Celtic and Roman cultures, as well as the development of any kind of folk belief over time. Here these questions are addressed in four case studies regarding potential influences on the concepts of the *álfar*, *dvergjar* and *jötmar* and the Old Norse concepts relating to magic, the overall results of which will be outlined and discussed in the following.

Before we can delve into the analysis of the respective case studies, however, it is worth revisiting some of the general problems mentioned at the outset which need to be borne in mind when considering the potential conclusions that can be drawn with regard to conceptual translations in this period (see Chapter 2 above). First of all, every task that human beings are involved in ultimately contains some elements of chance. In the case of translations this may include both misunderstandings and deliberate embellishments or omissions of text. Certainly, in the case of misinterpretations at least, they may occur randomly: while one translator may not have had any problems with understanding their source material, another may have slight problems grasping the essence of the original words or those used to translate them – it may suffice here to recall the translation of the Holy Grail as *gangandi greiði* (“walking refreshment”) in *Parcevals saga*.⁵⁹² Manuscripts are similarly randomly preserved or lost, influencing our current perception of exactly which narratives (original texts, translations or copies) were circulating at any given time. The fact is that far more manuscripts existed in the past than present-day scholars are aware of today. Some narrative traditions and the concepts they contained got lost in the turmoil of time. By the same token, however, one should not forget that some stories were certainly more popular than others and therefore had more potential to exert a far greater influence than others. It is thus of utmost importance to remember that the information at hand now does not reflect the extant information in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The first case study examined the implications of the translation of the Old French *fée* to Old Norse *álf* and (more innovatively) *álfkona* and the consequences this appears to have had on the general Old Norse perception of the *álfar*, especially in later saga material and folk legends. To begin with, it is hard to overestimate the impact of the translations of *fée* for the development of the figure of the *álfkona* in later folklore, not least because it represented the introduction of the female sex of what was (judging from their mythological mentions) an initially male concept. As the *fées* were apparently understood as some form of personification of nature or nature spirits, the translation of female *fées* as *álfkonur* may have seemed to be unproblematic, since, by the time the translations were conducted in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, it

⁵⁹² See *Parcevals saga*, p. 148.

is clear that the *álfar* had outwardly started to merge with *landvættir* and other nature spirits. Such a supposition was aided by the notion that *fées* (translated as *álfkonur*) are said to have worked below the earth, as is mentioned in *Elye de St. Gilles*. This, however, in itself was a relatively new idea in Scandinavia since, unlike the *dvergar* the “original” Old Norse *landvættir* and *álfar* are rarely given such places of domicile.

However, in addition to introducing a new category to an already extant supernatural concept, the translations also established new motifs which accompanied the *álfkonur*, the most obvious of which was the weaving and making of garments and other textiles which had previously been associated with the *fées* but was entirely new to the *álfar*. This aspect nonetheless clearly resonated with the Old Norse audience (who had some sense of magical garments made by other powerful figures: see Case Study 1 above) and would live on in Scandinavian folk legends. All in all, such introductions of new Continental ideas would heavily influence the trajectory of the development of the *álfar* and *álfkonur* who would come to blend with the Icelandic *huldufólk* (Norwegian *huldre*) and especially the *huldukonur* from the early sixteenth century onward as figures that were understood as living in stones or below the earth and crafting various textiles (especially altar cloths in Icelandic folk legends).

Another related motif which seems to have been introduced via translations from Old French source material is the idea of the changeling, which appears to have first been introduced into the Scandinavian sphere in *Elís saga*. Case Study 1 discussed the various differences that exist between the extant Old French *Elye de St. Gille* and its Old Norse saga rendition with regard to the fate laid upon the henchman Galopin at birth by several *fées/ álfkonur*. While the idea that fate could be governed by other forces than the *normir* in the Old Norse mindset seems not to have caught on – a connection between granting fate and the *álfkonur* was a very alien idea – the impact of the notion of children being substituted by a changeling can hardly be ignored, as it went on to be a widespread motif in post-medieval folk legends found all across Scandinavia. This development definitely warrants further investigation, not least because it raises the questions of whether the same occurs with the “Midwife to the Fairies”-motif (ML 5070) in the *fornaldarsögur*.⁵⁹³

The second study investigated the Old Norse *dvergar* and their appearance in the translated *riddarasögur* alongside the Old French *nains* (“dwarves”) in

⁵⁹³ See, for example, Bo Almqvist, “Midwife to the Fairies (ML 5070) in Icelandic Tradition”, in Terry Gunnell (ed.), *Legends and Landscape: Plenary Papers from the 5th Celtic-Nordic-Baltic Folklore Symposium, Reykjavík 2005* (Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2008), pp. 273–322.

their respective literature, highlighting the similarities and numerous variances between the two concepts. One major difference between the Old French narratives and the Old Norse sagas is that the *nains* in the originals appear in three categories; some of which are quite different to the Old Norse *dvergar* in their local guise. While the so-called *larrons* (thievery *nains*) are never encountered in the studied Old Norse works, parallels can perhaps be seen in the *petit chevalier* (“little knight”) figure of Erbilis in *Erex saga*. By far the most common narrative position that the Old Norse *dvergar* find themselves in in the translated *riddarasögur* is that of the cruel “ugly-” or “servant-dwarf”, an image that would seem to be somewhat different to that of the independent artisan figures found in Old Norse mythology. Interestingly enough, this image of the low-born, evil serving *dvergar* seemed to have not really caught on in the Nordic countries outside the *riddarasögur*, perhaps because of the conflict with the local understanding of the Old Norse mythological *dvergar*, who, at one point in time, were enumerated alongside the Old Norse divinities. Another potentially problematic intrinsic aspect of the Old French *nains* is their low stature. While it has been argued that the description *dvergr á vøxt* (“*dvergr* in stature”) (see Case Study 2 above) may have some connotations regarding the body height of the Old Norse *dvergar*, no clear indication can be found in the mythological records that they were perceived as being smaller-than-human beings. This idea was nonetheless evidently beginning to change in the Nordic countries, perhaps with the help of works like the translated *riddarasögur*.

However, there are some deeply rooted features of the Germanic and Old Norse *dvergar* which are not found anywhere in the Old French material investigated and evidently survived without being influenced by the arrival of the translated narratives. The most obvious feature is the connection of the *dvergar* with metals, the craft of blacksmithing and the creation of (supernatural) items. Equally evident from later saga and folk literature is the way in which Nordic *dvergar* retain their subterranean homes in rocks and stones – like their mythological antecedents of yore – only occasionally trading them for the halls and castles of chieftains and kings where the French *nains* live (if it is ever mentioned in one of the investigated Old French narratives).

As noted above, it remains open to question whether the characteristic of cruelty commonly associated with some of the figures grouped under the heading of “servant-dwarves” (such as the *dvergar* serving Maliprant in *Erex saga* or Fjallshafir in *Ívens saga*) was something that was introduced or solidified with the introduction of the translated material or whether this feature already existed in the Old Norse understanding of the *dvergar*. Undoubtedly, some mythological *dvergar* depict a potential for violence: Alvíss in *Alvíssmál*, for example, abducts Þórr’s daughter (Þrúðr?) to have her for himself and is not willing to let her leave. Figures such as Mødull in *Göngu-Hrólf’s saga* or Asper

in *Gibbons saga* might be seen as an evolution of such a figure, abandoning their former stony homesteads and living with a ruler. All the same, while some *nains* do violence to women in the chivalric romances, it is noteworthy that they are more bound by chivalric codes of honour.

All in all, the Nordic *dvergar* adopt very few aspects of their Old French relatives and indeed the influx of new (courtly) ideas seems to have failed to contribute to any rejuvenation of the *dvergar*-figures in Nordic literature. While *dvergar* admittedly appear in several *fornaldarsögur* and indigenous *riddarasögur* and a few accounts in Nordic folklore, they were evidently starting to disappear. Where they survive, they also retain subtle links to metals and the art of healing. Summing up the result of the investigation into the *dvergar* and the effect of translation on their local image, it would appear that the Old French *nains* were seen as too alien a construct to make any lasting impressions on the firm concept of the *dvergar*.

The source material investigated in the third study focuses on the concept of the *jǫtnar* as a translation for the figures of the Old French *jaiants* who are portrayed essentially as larger-than-usual humanoid recluses, either large solitary beings living outside of human society (as is the case with the *jaiants* in the *Tristan* narrative cycle or Harpin de la Montagne in *Yvain*, for instance) or pagan antagonists working in the service of a heathen opponent to the Christian protagonist (see, for instance, Eskopart in *Boeve de Haumtone*). Some valuable insights can be gained from this examination of the collation of the *jaiant* with the *jǫtunn*, which reveal several points of conflict: Firstly, the *jǫtnar* of early Old Nordic literature are evidently not portrayed as being as diabolical as some of their Old French counterparts are. One might thus assume that the *jǫtnar* of the translations demonstrate a change in concept. Secondly, one notes another interesting development when the word *tröll* is used alongside *jǫtunn*. The *tröll* had apparently already garnered for themselves a reputation as being fiendish creatures by the thirteenth century, something which can be seen when the word is inserted as a translation for *malfé* (“demon”) rather than *jǫtunn* (see Case Study 3). The two words are nonetheless palpably becoming interchangeable. In spite of this, if the translation of *jaiant* as *jǫtunn* was more than a basic homophone translation, it appears that the element of size rather than nature was the decisive factor for the Old Norse translator. One wonders nonetheless why the word *rísi* (“giant”) is never encountered in the translations. Strangely, the *risar* appear more often translated works whose source material has a (predominately) Germanic background (such as *Piðreks saga* or *Karlamagnús*

saga) or in later redactions of translated *riddarasögur* (see the B-redaction of *Partalopa saga*).⁵⁹⁴

As is evident in *Snorra Edda*, for instance, by the time the Old Norse translations were undertaken in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the concept of the *jötnar* was clearly beginning to blend in with other supernatural notions of the *tröll* and *risar* as part of an ongoing process as can be seen in the blending of *landvættir* and *álfar*. There seems to be some indication that several of the new ideas (such as the focus on the size) in the Old French material would have helped to dilute the image of the *jötnar* even further, something which becomes noticeable in the later saga material (see, for instance, *Ectors saga*).⁵⁹⁵ In spite of this, there were manifestly a number of the Old French *jaiants* which would have certainly struck readers as peculiar. Indeed, features such *jötnar* having animal heads, making grunting noises and wearing of animal pelts as a substitute for armour would probably have seemed a little strange for the Old Norse audience, which might have associated such characteristics more with *berserkir* rather than with *jötnar*. One might thus be so bold as to conjecture that the size aspect (as suggested above) might have had a more profound impact on choosing to translate the Old French *jaiant* as a *jötunn* rather than as some kind of *berserkr*, the latter of which might arguably have made more sense from both a narrative and figurative standpoint (see above). All in all, it could be argued that these translations would have helped the *jötnar* transform into the large, dumb, and aesthetically unpleasant *tröll* known in later folklore.

⁵⁹⁴ If we were to consider basic homophone translations as the most plausible explanation for a translation of *jaiant* as *jötunn*, the lack of utilisation of the word *risi* becomes very easily explainable by its absent in the Old French texts, as the Middle High German word for “giant” is *rise*. Therefore, the *risar* are more commonly found in works displaying Germanic influences, as the then obvious homophone translation for the Middle High German *rise* would have been the *risi*.

⁵⁹⁵ The passage in question in *Ectors saga* runs as follows: “en er hann heyrir þessa sögu. keyrir hann sinn hest sporum ok rijdr upp til fiallzins. getur hann þá ath lijta huar iötunn fer. Tranc(ial) kallar harri röddu og m(ælti) ‘þu hit mesta tröll og nijdingur. lat lausan þann unga mann er þu hefir hertekit. snu helldr ij moti mier ef þu hefir dreingskap til’. en er þussinn heyrir þath snyzt hann æ moti [...]”: see *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances*, Vol. I: *Victors saga ok Blávus, Valdimars saga, Ectors saga*, ed. Agnete Loth, Editiones Arnarnagæanæ Series B, 20 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1962), p. 124. Translation: “and when he heard this story, he put spurs to his horse and rides up to the mountain. He then can see where the *jötunn* goes. Trancival called with a loud voice and said: ‘You, the greatest *tröll* and scoundrel. Let the young man loose that you have captured. Turn after towards me if you have courage.’” And when the *þurs* hears this he turns around [...]” Furthermore, during the ensuing battle, the *jötunn* is also referred to as a *risi* shortly before his death: see *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances*, p. 125.

Following on from this, the fourth and final case study of this investigation concerns the different manifestations of various forms of magic displayed in the extant Old French narratives and the way they are treated in the respective Old Norse versions. In most cases, the alterations in meaning that occur in the process of translation (if they occur at all) can be considered minor or inconsequential, as they relate predominately to the description of magical objects and involve little more than added or dropped adjectives. It is therefore obvious that little information can be gained about the problems of translating concepts (or the potential influences of such) from any investigation into the way magical objects are dealt with. In spite of this one might argue that the idea of magical gemstones embedded in rings, which seem to play an important role in the plot of various Old French works, would have served as a cultural addition to previous understandings of magic in the Old Norse world.⁵⁹⁶

With regard to potential influences on the first main Old Norse term used to describe magic, *galdr* (pl. *galdrar*; “the singing, magical song”), as Case Study 4 shows, it is interesting to look at the Old French *fabliau* *Le cort mantle* and the Old Norse *Mǫttuls saga*. In both works, a magical cloak crafted by a *fée* (translated as *álfkona*) plays the leading role, having a particular magic feature woven into it by its creator that makes it either too long or too short in specific areas, depending on how loyal the lady wearing it had been to her love. The Old French calls this feature *uevre* (“act, [manual] work”), which is translated into Old Norse saga as *galdr*. Naturally, while *seiðr* has some loose connection with notions of weaving in the Old Norse world, it would have been difficult to use this word here without alteration of the text. The same sort of shift in perception of Old Norse ideas regarding the supernatural as a result of translation from Old French can be observed in the interesting usage of the word *trölldómr* in *Bevens saga* for the word *enchantement* (“enchantments”) in the Anglo-Norman *chanson de geste* *Boeve de Haumtone*. This translation seems to be odd to say the least, because the initial Old Norse understanding of *trölldómr* at this time

⁵⁹⁶ In fact, and regarding the Old Norse literary corpus, the earliest extant mention of such a gem with special magical properties that is embedded into a ring and can have an effect on people in an Old Norse narrative is in *Þiðreks saga* (Holm perg 4 fol., dated to c. 1275–1300), where a gem is said to incite love. While *Þiðreks saga*’s position among the translated *riddarasögur* may be questioned, it is nonetheless a work based on translations which supports the idea that his motif came from outside. The segment reads as follows: “[...] i þessu gulli er æinn stein oc þat er nattura steinsens oc hanns umbunaðar at ef karll mǫðr dregr þetta fingrgull a fingr konu. þa skal hon sua mikit unna honum at firir huet uetna fram vill hon hua hann huart er þat er vili frænða hennar eða æigi”: *Þiðreks saga*, II, pp. 112–3. Translation: “In the ring is a stone and the nature of the stone and its socket is that if a man puts this ring on a woman’s finger then she shall love him so much that she wants to have him in all respects whether that is the will of her relatives or not.”

would not have had the same suggestion of bewitching conveyed by the notion of *enchantment*. *Álog* (“spells”) might have been a more natural word to use as it is in later times. One can thus imagine the translation taking the Old Norse concept in a potentially new direction.

One interesting point raised in this discussion which warrants further investigation, more than the study in question had space to provide, relates to the presentation of wielders of magic in these works. There is little question that several of the figures capable of using magic encountered in the Old French source material would have been somewhat alien to the Old Norse audience, not least because many of whom are said to have learned their particular craft (most notably medicine, alchemy and the healing of wounds) in schools or from books, something which never encountered with figures of Óðinn or Egill. It is evident that this type of magician – most renowned of which are certainly Merlin and Morgan le Fay – would have been new to the Old Norse world. (While Óðinn shares some potential similarities, he is very different.) As Case Study 4 notes, considerations of potential influence of the Old French magician/sorceress type on Old Norse folklore and literature lead one to contemplate whether the figure of Queen Gunnhildr (varyingly *konungamóðir*, *Gormsdóttir* or *Özurardóttir*), arguably the first “sorceress” in the Old Norse literary corpus, might have been influenced by such foreign translations, and especially those female figures capable of wielding magic portrayed within them.

The four case studies contained in this thesis demonstrate the strong probability that the translated *riddarasögur* exerted various kinds of influence on local Nordic culture. Indeed, the translated *riddarasögur* introduced not only a number of new stories (such as those discussed in the case studies) and motifs (such as *Minne* or *Ritterfrömmigkeit*) but also a wide range of foreign concepts to the Nordic world (including those related to the supernatural), concepts which logically had to be adapted to fit local, Nordic circumstances. Naturally, and as other studies have shown (see Chapters 3.3 through 3.4), this new material had the potential of changing various indigenous aspects of Nordic life and culture such as the expression of emotions and the representation of women. The influence on folk belief, folk narrative and the understanding of the supernatural, however, has received less attention (as was shown in the overview of previous research in the introductory section, see Chapter 3).

As has been demonstrated, the changes brought about by these influences vary not only in degree but also, and arguably more importantly, in terms of the fields in which they wield influence. As these concepts are mostly introduced via literature, one can expect the influences to be essentially literary. What tends to be considered less, however, is the fact that these stories were also read out aloud and received orally, and not only in the scriptoria of monasteries but also in farmhouses alongside other local materials, which would have brought them

into oral tradition. As the case studies have shown, there is evidence that some supernatural motifs and concepts had more influence on oral narratives and local beliefs than others which were more restricted to the literary sphere. This applies especially to concepts such as the *nains/ dvergar* which clearly have more effect as literary motifs and predominately remain confined to literature rather than the oral tradition (especially that dealing with legends, because there was evidently little living belief in the idea of supernatural *dvergar* in Iceland or Norway). Things were different with the figures of the *álfar* and *álfkönur*, which took root in both the literary and oral tradition. Regarding the *jötnar*, it seems clear that the influence of the translated *riddarasögur* tapped into an ongoing development process instigated by the church (and Snorri Sturluson) whereby they were gradually becoming aligned more with the *tröll*, moving out of the mythological world and into ours.

Considering the question of the translations of “magic” and magic men, the influences, developments and changes seem to be much more complex. Naturally, as with other forms of pagan practice, the living or “communicative memory” of pre-Christian magical rituals had faded in Scandinavia by the time of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and been replaced by the form of “cultural memory” represented by oral tradition and the sagas (making both considerably more prone to outside influence than folk beliefs), allowing the lines between indigenous forms and perceptions of magic and those coming from outside to blur and overlap.⁵⁹⁷ A good example for such a development can perhaps be seen in Snorri’s description of Óðinn in *Ynglinga saga*,⁵⁹⁸ which shows him (in the same period) apparently garnering aspects of shamanism from the Sami cultures of northern Fennoscandia (where magical ritual activities were still taking place).⁵⁹⁹ As has been shown, similar sorts of developments seem to have been taking place in the way Queen Gunnhildr was

⁵⁹⁷ On the idea of communicative and cultural memory: see, for example, Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago/ London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 41–83; and especially Jan Assmann, “Communicative and Cultural Memory”, in Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (eds), *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, Media and Cultural Memory/ Medien und kulturelle Erinnerung 8 (Berlin/ New York: de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 109–18. See also the articles published in Jürg Glauser, Pernille Hermann and Stephen A. Mitchell (eds), *Handbook of Pre-Modern Nordic Memory Studies*, 2 Vols (Berlin/ Boston: de Gruyter, 2019).

⁵⁹⁸ See Case Study 4.

⁵⁹⁹ For an excellent study of this development: see John Lindow, “Cultures in Contact”, in Margaret Clunies Ross (ed.), *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society*, The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilization 14 (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2003), pp. 89–109.

presented, influences in this case potentially coming more from the *riddarasögur*.

Such considerations deserve more research in the future. As with all of the concepts discussed here, they reflect a complex interaction between two kinds of culture, the written and the oral, both of which exist side by side simultaneously, as part of a feedback loop, constantly influencing one another when written narratives were received orally in an environment like the Icelandic *kvöldvaka* (see Chapter 1).

This brings us back to the original meanings of the word “translation” discussed in Chapter 2. As noted there, it involved not only the transportation of information (and/ or physical items) from one place to another, something which could include the movement of various types of literature, culture and various associated motifs and concepts. As can be seen here, this movement always involved a process of adaptation and correlation, as corresponding and/ or similar indigenous concepts were drawn on to help the movement of ideas to take place, something that could have a number of deep implications, as was noted at the start with regard to translations of the Bible. Arguably, one might surmise that this might have been what King Hákon was hoping for, although whether he ever planned to have an influence on the understanding of the supernatural is open to question.

What the thesis does emphasise is the importance of considering the role of translation on ways of thinking, something that is particularly applicable when it comes to the tricky question of the translation of concepts, something which undoubtedly deserves more attention. Naturally, one could follow this work up by applying similar considerations to translations into Old Norse from German and Latin, paying attention not only to the supernatural but also to a wider range of concepts, and their influences not only on language and meaning but also the ways in which we understand the world around us. While some things are lost in translation, other things are gained.

As all four case studies have noted, it seems evident that the introduction of foreign ideas into the Old Norse world view by means of translated *riddarasögur* may well have instigated (or encouraged) a number of key changes in the perception of erstwhile indigenous concepts relating to the supernatural in the North. While Old Norse notions of magic were far from distinct in their nature from those known elsewhere, it seems that the somewhat erratic character which they were taking on by the early thirteenth century (encouraged by the arrival of Christianity) was making them malleable and quite susceptible to influences from foreign ideas (which naturally would not have been limited to those from France and England). As has been shown, the degree of impact of foreign motifs on local Old Norse supernatural concepts evidently varied from concept to concept. This naturally leads to speculations

regarding the different factors and conditions that might have been involved in determining the varying levels of impact, which will be briefly examined in the following. As has been demonstrated, the impact of foreign motifs on the local Old Norse supernatural concepts in question evidently varies from concept to concept. This naturally leads to speculations regarding the factors and conditions involved in the varying effects of foreign influence, which will be contemplated in the following.

There are numerous preconditions that must be met in order for the following sequence of events for a foreign concept to have an effect on local understanding (see Figure 2 below). It goes without saying that a narrative is needed that not only features at least one of the studied supernatural concepts, but it also must be subjected to translation. Obviously, the general considerations regarding translations expressed earlier (see Chapter 2 above) still apply. Thus, starting with the Old French source material, it would appear that, in order to be translated, a supernatural concept needs to be in a plot-relevant position. If this is not the case, as for example with the *fées* that are said to have crafted Galopin's cudgel in *Elye de St. Gilles* (ll. 2370–4) (see, for instance, Case Study 1), the supernatural concept can be avoided. On the other hand, if the supernatural notion was perceived as being pivotal to a narrative, the respective translator felt compelled to incorporate the said concept in some way in their translation. Those translators in question here appear to have done this by looking for corresponding Old Norse notions that might best match the Old French ones. If no exact parallels were to be found (which was often the case) they would have to choose something close to the Old French concept. This gave the potential for the new Old French ideas to affect and potentially reshape the Old Norse supernatural concept that was chosen, as occurred with the introduction of the *álfkonur* to the Old Norse mythological corpus. Elsewhere, as in the cases of the *dvergar* and *jötnar* (see Case Studies 2 and 3) there seem to have been less obvious problems as translators limited themselves to concentrating on one key aspect of the Old Norse concept, such as size (ignoring pre-Christian connotations). If new aspects of existing concepts were seen as totally irreconcilable or unfitting, they could also be dropped, as with the example of Galopin's cudgel given above (this usually being a matter of isolated words being introduced or left out).⁶⁰⁰

Be that as it may, however, the human element in translation is always omnipresent and may be made apparent by authorial (that is the translator's) interference. A translator, for various reasons (be they personal or cultural, for

⁶⁰⁰ An example for this can be seen in redaction "C" of *Bevens saga*, for example, where Eskopart is additionally characterised as *grimmur* ("grim, savage, ugly") – a detail which is not mentioned in any other version (see Case Study 3).

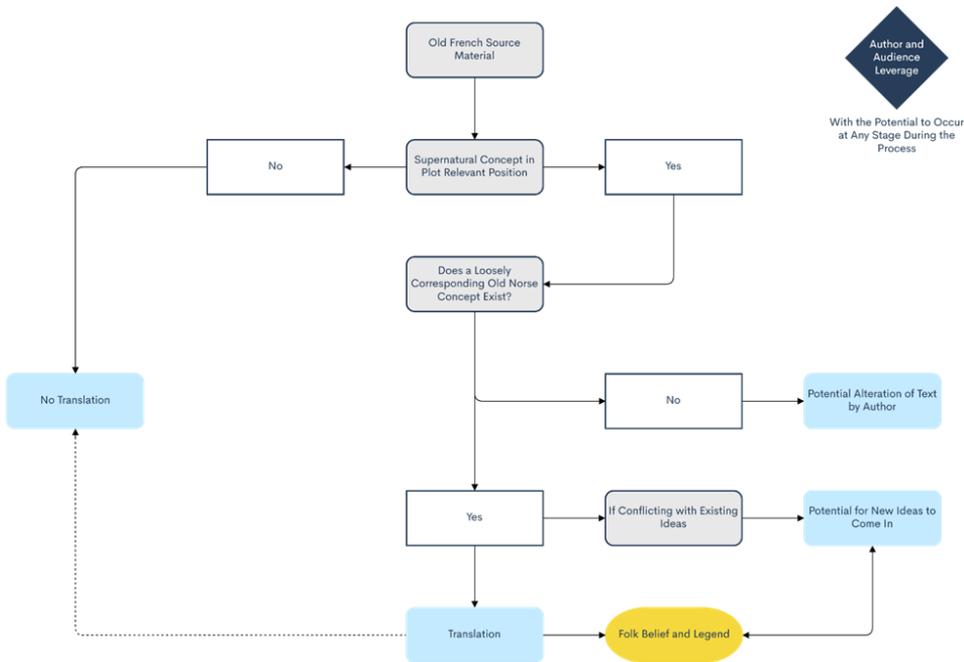


Figure 2. Figure showing the proposed sequence of events in the translation process leading to the omission or translation of foreign supernatural concepts or aspects.

example), can always choose to cut a precise figure from his translation or change it in line with local beliefs going more for an adaptation than an exact translation. However, no instance of either occurrence seems to have taken place in the investigated material. Thus, it may be cautiously affirmed that if there is a plot-relevant supernatural concept in an Old French source text subject to translation, the translator seems to have included it even if it meant the local concept in the target language undergoing alterations and remodelling in line with the translator’s (and their audience’s) feelings about how far a concept could be stretched.⁶⁰¹ The process can be summed up as shown in Figure 2 above (bearing the usual reservations and potential for exceptions in mind).

More studies nonetheless need to be conducted prior to making any conclusive statements about this process. Furthermore, it seems only applicable if we were to assume that the preserved Old French texts represent the respective narrative used by the Old Norse translators, an assumption which is naturally uncertain.

⁶⁰¹ Regarding the importance of the *kvöldvökur*: see Chapter 1 above. Regarding the influence of audience on Old French texts: see R. W. Hanning, “The Audience as Co-Creator of the First Chivalric Romances”, *The Yearbook of English Studies* 11 (1981), pp. 1–28.

The present sequence does not include the possible insertion of new supernatural motifs by the initial translator or later authors and copyists, drawing on an Old Norse mind set, and perceiving any potential addition as following Old Norse literary conventions, as when Bevers in the “C” redaction of *Bevens saga* kills a *jötunn* that is not described any further, a scene lacking in the Anglo-Norman *Boeve de Haumtone*.⁶⁰² One wonders whether the scene was added to further demonstrate the elite nature of the protagonist. A different yet potentially connected development can be seen in *Partalopa saga*, where, in the latest narrative tradition “B”, dated to 1690, the originally *eigi alitill madur* (“not very small”) Gramur (varyingly Garmur and Grimur) becomes a *risi*. This figure who is originally said to be a very skilled Saracen opponent of Partonopeu in *Partonopeu de Blois*, is never said to be of larger-than-human size (see below).

It is the hope of the author that the present study has opened the possibility of various related topics being taken up in further studies relating to the translated *riddarasögur* and the impact of foreign concepts and motifs into saga and folk legend traditions. Future studies might include (but are not limited to) the following:

- A new study regarding the development of the supernatural concept of the *tröll* in sagas and folk tales, considering the potential influence of the translated *riddarasögur*, which might provide insight into the development of their various different diabolical and fiendish aspects, which could have roots in the translated courtly literature (see above).
- Another interesting study which may shed new light on both the reception history of the various sagas examined as well as the supernatural concept(s) included in them would entail considering the changes in the various different manuscript traditions of one particular saga throughout the ages, fruitful potential examples being *Partalopa saga* and *Bevens saga*. Interesting questions might include why Garmur was transformed from a heathen human knight to a *risi*, and why or what propelled the translator(s) to translate the hostage exchange of Partonopeu into Melior shape-changing into a bird and flying Partalopi to safety? Furthermore, the portrayal and development of sorcerer figures might be worthy of study.
- Future studies might also investigate other translations both from Latin as well as other Continental works (especially worthwhile would be studies of *Piðreks saga* and *Karlamagnús saga*), following the lines of the present investigation. Do we find similar developments?
- Further worthwhile studies may also try to grasp the influence of the translated *riddarasögur* on the supernatural motifs displayed in both the *fornaldarsögur* and indigenous *riddarasögur*.

⁶⁰² *Bevens saga*, p. 147.

- Another study might look more closely into the development of the idea of the changeling, which, as noted in Case Study 1, might have been introduced to Iceland initially in translations of *Elís saga*. Other potential folkloristic motifs for discussion might be the figures of the fairies who decide the fate of a certain figure (see also Case Study 1).
- By the same token, a future article might focus on the instances of shape-changing that occur in the corpus of the translated *riddarasögur*. Noteworthy instances that immediately come to mind which might be worth considering are the werewolf in *Bisclaretz ljóð* in the *Strengleikar* and the transformation of Marmoría into a bird in *Partalopa saga* mentioned above.
- A natural follow-up study might also consider looking at East Norse sources such as the *Eufemiavisor*, with *Herra Ivan* and *Flores och Blanzefflor* representing logical starting points.

Ultimately, the hope is that the present investigations have shown that the translated *riddarasögur* are a valuable source for considering the translation of concepts relating to not only courtly and socio-political structures, but also to supernatural concepts in thirteenth and fourteenth century Scandinavia. While it is crucial not to over- or underestimate the potential influences of Old Norse translations on the pan-Scandinavian oral and literary traditions, it does seem evident that these works might help explain certain shared changes in nature in the understanding of Nordic supernatural entities. As has been demonstrated, many of these concepts were evidently undergoing a process of development after the arrival of Christianity, especially during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and therefore may well have been influenced by the translated *riddarasögur*. Through their reception (especially during the readings and storytelling of the Icelandic *kvöldvökur*) in which oral traditions had the potential of blending and changing, it seems palpable that they helped the foundation for the effective re-modelling of later folklore beings.

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As is Icelandic convention, Icelandic scholars have been listed with the given name first.

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