THE VERSES IN *ERIC THE RED'S SAGA*

AND AGAIN: NORSE VISITS TO AMERICA

By
RICHARD PERKINS

EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF NORSE STUDIES
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

The Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture
in Northern Studies
delivered at University College London
5 March 2009

PUBLISHED FOR THE COLLEGE BY THE
VIKING SOCIETY FOR NORTHERN RESEARCH
LONDON

ISBN: 978 0903521 87 1

PRINTED BY SHORT RUN PRESS LIMITED EXETER

THE VERSES IN ERIC THE RED'S SAGA; AND AGAIN: NORSE VISITS TO AMERICA

As is well known, *ERIC THE RED'S SAGA – EIRÍKS SAGA RAUÐA* in Icelandic (*Eir* hereafter) – is one of the two so-called 'Vínland Sagas'.[1] The other is *The Greenlanders' saga – Grœnlendinga saga* (*Gr*). I give some basic information on both works in the Appendix [1]. Both sagas tell of Norse visits to a place called *Vínland* which is reasonably thought to be part of the North American continent or Newfoundland. Those visits that actually took place can be indirectly dated to around the year AD 1000. *Eir* is now normally thought to have been written between about 1260 and 1300 although some think it rather older. *Gr*, as far as I can see, cannot be reliably dated more closely than to between about 1200 and 1380, and it is not impossible that it provided a source for *Eir*.[2] There are

[1] The present contribution is an adapted and amplified version of the Dorothea Coke Memorial lecture given on 5th March, 2009. The handout for the lecture, again somewhat adapted, appears here as an appendix. Various supplementary points have been added in footnotes. I am most grateful to Alison Finlay, Carl Phelpstead and Ian McDougall who have given me great help in the preparation of the lecture for publication.

[2] There is no evidence (as far as I know) to demonstrate unequivocally that *Gr* was written before *Eir* or *Eir* before *Gr*. If, however, it is accepted (as seems reasonable) that *The Greenlanders' saga could* have been written before *Eric the Red's saga*, it would be dangerous to preclude the possibility that the author of the latter had read *Gr* at some time before (and perhaps quite shortly before) writing his own saga and was influenced by it. (For a somewhat different view, see e.g. *ÍF* IV, 377–90 and refs.) Indeed, I am inclined to think it quite possible that four elements in the account of Þorfinnr karlsefni's expedition in *Eir* (chs 8–12) relevant to the present discussion may be secondary to passages in *Gr*, as follows: (a) White sandy beaches are mentioned in two places in *Gr*. *Gr* (250) (Markland): *Þat land var slétt ok skógi vaxit, ok sandar hvítir víða, þar sem þeir fóru, ok ósæbratt*; *Gr* (255) (Vínland): *Þeim sýndisk landit fagrt ok skógótt ok skammt milli skógar ok sjávar ok hvítir sandar*; these could, at least to some extent, have given the author of *Eir* the idea for the *strandir langar ok sandar* subsequently given the fictitious name of *Furðustrandir* in *Eir* (286, 288). (b) *Gr* (261) tells us that when Karlsefni's expedition arrives in Vínland (at Leifsbúðir), *þeim bar brátt í hendr mikil fǫng ok góð, því at reyðr var þar upp rekin, bæði*

substantial similarities in the content of the two sagas: they share several of the same main characters, for example, Eric the Red (*Eiríkr rauði*), his sons Leifr, Þorsteinn and Þorvaldr, and his daughter Freydís. In both sagas, the Norse encounter a native population in Vínland and call them *Skrælingar*. In both sagas they discover vines and grapes growing in Vínland. And in both sagas, attempts to settle in Vínland are eventually abandoned. But there are also substantial differences: one character might play quite a major part in one saga but be absent from the other. While *Eir* tells of only one expedition which reached Vínland, *Gr* tells of four. The names said to have been given to places in Vínland are rather different in the two works. While there are three verses in *Eir*, there were probably none in *Gr* in its original form.[3] And the element of the fantastic seems rather greater in *Eir* than in *Gr*. The two Vínland sagas used to be regarded as relatively trustworthy sources for a medieval Norse presence in North America. In the course of the twentieth century, however, their value as such became the object of ever-increasing doubt and criticism. This was part of a general trend towards marking down thirteenth-century Icelandic writings as reliable sources for events meant to have taken place often some centuries before they were written. I will be coming back to this later.

---

mikil ok góð; fóru til síðan ok skáru hvalinn; skorti þá eigi mat. This quite ordinary whale (*reyðr*) in *Gr* is more likely to be the model for *Eir*'s (311–15) noxious cetacean drawn ashore through Þórhallr the Hunter's pagan practice, than vice versa. Cf. *FE*, 84. (c) Both sagas have accounts of the death of Þorvaldr Eiríksson by an arrow in a skirmish with the Skrælingar somewhere in the vicinity of Vínland and these may well reflect a historical reality (*Gr*, 256; *Eir*, 381–84). But the episode in *Eir* is considerably more fantastic (with the arrow shot by a uniped) and appears to contain literary borrowings (cf. *MS*, 47; *FE*, 86–87). It is more likely to be secondary to *Gr*'s more sober account than the other way around. (d) There are distinct similarities between the story told of Tyrkir the Southerner (*suðrmaðr*) in *Gr* and that of Þórhallr the Hunter in *Eir*. If there is a direct connection, then, it seems most likely that *Eir* has borrowed from *Gr* rather than *Gr* from *Eir* (cf. *FE*, 55, 65–66, 67–68, 84).

[3] When the refrain (*stef*) of *Hafgerðingadrápa* (*Skj*, A I, 177; *ÍF* IV, 245; *GÍM*, 81) is found near the beginning of *Gr* as it appears incorporated into Flateyjarbók, this is probably part of an interpolation by the scribe of the relevant section of the manuscript (Jón Þórðarson) or an earlier copyist. The matter of the interpolation is apparently taken from ch. 91 of the Sturlubók-redaction of *Landnámabók* (*ÍF* I, 132, 134). Cf. *GÍM*, 328–32; *ÍF* IV, 369–74.

That, then, is the background. I turn now to the verses of *Eric the Red's saga*. There are, as noted, three of these, two in chapter 9, one in chapter 12. Item [2] of the Appendix gives details of their locations and contexts within the prose of the saga. I have designated them 'Verse A', 'Verse B' and 'Verse C'. All three of them relate to the story of Þorfinnr karlsefni's abortive expedition to Vínland. I shall discuss them in reverse order to that in which they appear in the saga and begin with Verse C. Here I refer you to item [3] in the Appendix.

The prose context for Verse C as given in the saga is as follows: Þorfinnr karlsefni has given up his attempt to settle Vínland and is sailing in search of the person called Þórhallr the Hunter, to whom I shall return shortly. They put in at the mouth of a river and the narrative may be paraphrased as follows (cf. MMHP, 101–02):

> One morning Þorfinnr and his men saw something glittering on the far side of the clearing and shouted at it. It stirred and turned out to be a uniped (*einfœtingr*). It came bounding down to where the ship lay. Þorvaldr, the son of Eric the Red, was sitting at the helm. The creature shot an arrow into Þorvaldr's groin and shortly afterwards Þorvaldr died of the wound. The uniped ran off and Þorfinnr and his men gave chase, catching occasional glimpses of it as it fled. Then it disappeared into a creek and its pursuers turned back. Then one of them declaimed a stanza (Verse C):
>
> Eltu seggir,
> allsatt var þat,
> einn einfœting
> ofan til strandar;
> en kynligr maðr
> kostaði rásar
> hart of stopir.
> Heyrðu, Karlsefni.
>
> Men chased a uniped down to the shore. That was quite true. But the strange man raced as fast as he could, rapidly over the rough terrain. Hear that, Karlsefni.

The saga concludes the episode by telling how Þorfinnr and his men sailed off northwards and thought they had seen the Land of the Unipeds (*Einfœtingaland*). At the end of the chapter, they return to Greenland.

One wonders what to make of this strange story. In *The Greenlanders' saga*, Þorvaldr is also killed by an arrow but one apparently shot by a member of the indigenous population, the Skrælingar. This, of course, is far more reasonable and may even have some

basis in historical reality. What, then, of the uniped in *Eric the Red's saga*? Attempts have been made to rationalise it in terms of the indigenous inhabitants of North America. For example, Professor Howley of the Newfoundland Geological Survey (quoted by Munn n.d., 24) suggested that

> this Uniped was undoubtedly an Eskimo woman of short stature, and dressed in the conventional Eskimo woman's attire with a long-tail coat, she would certainly look to the men who chased her as if she only had one leg.

Now, I do not think this sort of speculation is entirely unjustified. On the other hand there is a more probable explanation which might at first sight seem a bit far-fetched but which I think has now received a fair measure of acceptance.[4] This is as follows:

– There was in medieval Iceland a learned tradition that Vínland extended as far south as Africa and was even connected to it. This idea is reflected in at least one medieval geographical treatise.

– It was also part of medieval learning, going back at least to Isidore of Seville, that unipeds lived in Africa.

– To conform to such ideas, the author of *Eric the Red's saga* has invented not only an *Einfœtingaland*, a 'Land of the Unipeds', but also a real live uniped, a creature he has kill as relatively important a figure as Þorvaldr, son of Eric the Red.

But what is Verse C, and where did it come from? Now, it is a well-known fact that the saga-authors of the thirteenth century liked to introduce into their narratives stanzas which they intended to serve as some sort of authentication for what they said in their prose about events which are often represented as having taken place centuries before they were writing. Sometimes such verses can be regarded as 'genuine',[5] that is, it can be supposed that they were indeed composed at a time and under the circumstances indicated by the

[4] For this explanation of the *einfœtingr* of *Eir*, see Jón Jóhannesson 1956, 130–31; MMHP, 39, 101, note 3; Hermann Pálsson 1969, 35–36; *FE*, 86–87; *ÍF* IV, 213, 362–63; and (primary sources) *Alfræði íslenzk* 1908, 12; *GÍM*, 38; *Hauksbók* 1892–96, 166.

[5] I use the word 'genuine' tentatively. Like Danish *ægte*, it is, of course, used extensively in the discussion of skaldic poetry but often perhaps with imprecise or uncertain meaning. As suggested in *FE* (62) the whole question of the 'genuineness' of skaldic poetry is a matter which might very well lend itself to a methodological essay.

prose text they are contained in. But modern research is increasingly showing that the verses quoted in the sagas were often falsified or composed in entirely different contexts from those described in the prose in which they are embedded. Sometimes a saga-author might blatantly misconstrue an existing verse or consciously pervert its sense to fit the context he wanted to use it in. Sometimes he might compose a verse himself. In this particular case in *Eric the Red's saga*, we are left wondering under which circumstances a verse about a fantastic creature, a uniped, could originally have been composed. And here I accept practically unreservedly an idea put forward by the Canadian scholar Dr Ian McDougall, whose article on the subject appeared in 1997. McDougall argues that Verse C in *Eir* about the uniped is based on a riddle for a pen. Riddles were, of course, as common in medieval Iceland as elsewhere and some twelve hundred items are collected in Jón Árnason's edition of 1887 (= JÁ). And riddles for pens are widely known, not least in monkish circles or in the scriptorium, an environment in which *Eric the Red's saga* might well have been written. Further, a pen is one of a number of everyday items that might be thought of as some kind of uniped. It is true that McDougall is not able to refer to any Icelandic riddle for a pen where the word *einfœtingr* is actually used. But he is able to point to two riddles where the object in question is referred to as one-legged, the first for the particular type of tall headdress worn by Icelandic women, the *skautafaldur* (see Appendix [4(a)]), the second for a gimlet (see Appendix [4(b)]). And the description in Verse C of a uniped running over a stretch of ground is paralleled by an Icelandic riddle for a pen which is represented as moving across a page in like terms (see Appendix [4(c)]). This may be tentatively translated:

> A man ran over the ground on his toes, he left the tracks of a cat's nails. He was drinking beer frequently and in small quantities and straight afterwards, as a result, began to make water.

Again, the members of the expedition, pursuing the uniped, would be the fingers of the hand holding the pen and chasing it, as it were, down over the page: McDougall notes that there is a whole category of riddles where an object is described in

terms of men pursuing other men (see Appendix [4(d)]) although admittedly none of these appears to have a pen as its solution. McDougall also observes that the description in Verse C of the uniped as a 'strange man' (*kynligr maðr*) has parallels in the Old English riddles of the Exeter Book where mundane objects are sometimes represented as curious or marvellous beings (see Appendix [4(e)]). It might lastly be noted that McDougall's arguments are reinforced by a parallel he does not mention (McDougall, 1997, 130–31): An Icelandic riddle said by Jón Árnason to be for 'the body' (*líkaminn*) is introduced by the words *Heyrðu maður*; we may compare the last line of Verse C, 'Heyrðu, Karlsefni' (cf. Appendix [4(f)]).

As I say, then, I am largely convinced by McDougall's arguments and cannot really think of any better explanation for Verse C than the one he suggests. After two centuries or so of Vínland scholarship, McDougall has, in my view, come up with the right solution to an otherwise unsolved problem. Now I have given such attention to Verse C because it tells us a lot about the approach of the saga-author. He did not, of course, compose the verse himself, but more or less pilfered it from the store of riddles he must have known from oral sources, and forced it into an entirely foreign context. For reasons I have mentioned, he wanted a verse about a uniped in his saga and got one by consciously misconstruing the sense of a riddle for a pen. He need not have thought he was fooling his audience in any way; they might have had a pretty good idea of what he was up to. But this shows how our author operated to achieve his ends. So we must bear these things in mind in discussing the other two verses of the saga. And in considering their origins we may allow our imaginations fairly free rein.

As regards the second verse in *Eir* (Verse B; cf. Appendix [5]), I have already given my imagination fairly free rein in a paper published in 1976, entitled 'The Furðustrandir of *Eiríks saga rauða*' (*FE*). Because I discuss the verse in considerable detail in that article, I will deal with it fairly briskly and unreservedly in the present context, although I assure you I was very tentative about various of the ideas I put forward there and continue to be so.

The prose narrative surrounding Verse B is as follows: At the beginning of chapter 8 of *Eir*, Þorfinnr karlsefni sets out from Greenland on his expedition to Vínland. One of the members of the expedition is the Þórhallr the Hunter mentioned already, an unpleasant old heathen who, however, has wide experience of uninhabited areas. The three ships sail southwards, passing, among other places (including Helluland and Markland), some long, sandy beaches (*Eir*, 286: *strandir langar ok sandar*) which they name *Furðustrandir*. They put two scouts ashore who reappear after three days bearing wild wheat and, more significantly, grapes. The expedition establishes a winter base at a place called Straum(s)fjǫrðr but runs short of provisions. A whale of unknown species drifts ashore. This is flensed and cooked but those who eat its meat immediately fall ill. They discover that it is Þórhallr the Hunter's pagan practices (involving the composition of a poem in honour of Thor) that have brought the whale to land; they then immediately discard the meat and commend themselves to the mercy of God. After this their circumstances quickly change for the better and they soon get ample provisions from local sources. In the spring, Þórhallr the Hunter, disappointed, it appears, at not having yet found Vínland, plans to sail back northwards in search of it in one of the expedition's three ships. As he is carrying water on board apparently in preparation for the voyage, he declaims a verse (Verse A), to which I shall return shortly. And, just before he finally departs he declaims a second verse (Verse B), which I shall consider now.

Fǫrum aptr, þar es órir
eru sandhimins landar;
lǫtum kenni-Val kanna
knarrar skeið in breiðu;
meðan bilstyggvir byggva
bellendr ok hval vella
Laufa veðrs, **þeirs leyfa**
lǫnd, á Furðustrǫndum.

The conventional modern interpretation of Verse B is that it expresses Þórhallr's intention to return to Greenland, the place where his compatriots (line 2: *landar*) are to be found (although this is already at odds with the saga prose which says he intends to go in search of

Vínland).[6] The men boiling whales in the second half of the verse are seen as members of the expedition cooking the meat of the whale that Þórhallr himself has caused to come to land by means of the poem he has composed in honour of Thor. According to this interpretation, the words *þeirs leyfa lǫnd* (printed here in bold) would mean 'those who praise this land' or 'those who praise these lands' and would refer to the satisfaction of those members of the expedition whom Þórhallr is now leaving with the country or countries the expedition has discovered or where they are now have their base.

In my contribution of 1976 (*FE*) I argue that it is virtually out of the question that Verse B could really have been composed under the circumstances described in the saga. Indeed, the person to whom Verses A and B are ascribed in *Eir* (i.e. Þórhallr the Hunter) is highly unlikely to have existed in reality and the stories told about him in the saga are almost certainly pure fiction. My tentative suggestion for the original context for the composition of Verse B is entirely different. I suggest that it was a verse that had its origins amongst Norse whalers carrying out their trade along the coasts of Iceland or Greenland and perhaps elsewhere. Such men appear often to have operated in groups within which there would have been some division of labour: there were those who rowed out to sea in search of quarry to harpoon, and those who remained ashore to flense the whales and process the blubber by boiling it. According to my interpretation, the first half of the verse describes the seamen searching for whales, the second half the blubber-boilers busy at their work (flensing; trying out blubber). I suggest (*FE*, 73–76) that the words *órir sandhimins landar*, 'our compatriots of the sea', might be taken as a kenning for 'whales' (paralleled perhaps by an Old English circumlocution for the same animal, *fyrnstreama geflota* in *EB*, 171). I would argue that 'those who praise land' (*þeirs leyfa lǫnd*) refers to 'land' as opposed to 'sea' and that this is the jibe of the seamen at their landlubberly workmates who prefer to stay ashore – they 'praise' or 'love' the land (*FE*, 73; cf. further on this point, pp. 21–23 below) – , and (still

[6] Another inconsistency is that while in Verse B itself a whale is being boiled on *furðustrandir* (or *Furðustrandir*), in the prose of *Eir* it is at the apparently substantially distant *Straum(s)fjǫrðr* that Þorfinnr's *matsveinar* cook the whale sent ashore through Þórhallr's agency (cf. *Eir*, 286–313).

cautiously) that the verse may have been chanted to the rhythm of the whalers' rowing (*FE*, 78–79). Quite what the last word of Verse B, *furðustrǫndum* (nominative: *furðustrandir*) originally alluded to is far from certain (see *FE*, 79–81). (It should be noted, by the way, that the element *furðu-* carries no alliteration or *skothending* or *aðalhending*, and it is not impossible that it has been inserted into the stanza's last line in place of a more original word or element; cf. *FE*, 82.) My very tentative suggestion is that it was a perhaps somewhat whimsical expression ('(ill) omen strands') for some beach used by whale-hunters as a base and a place for processing their catch. With the remains of dead whales lying around, with flensing in progress and with the blubber-cauldrons in operation, this would have been a squalid and malodorous place.[7] It may

[7] In suggesting that the word *furðustrandir* refers to some place used by Norse whalers as a base for their activities, I found it interesting to note the following word-picture of a whalers' shore station in nineteenth-century New Zealand painted by L. S. Rickard (1965, 72–73): 'Not that the appearance of the shore station was exactly impressive, unless it were from the sea at night when the glare of the try-works furnaces through the darkness might strike a watcher as exciting. The scenery around might be imposing in its grandeur, but once the eye (and nose) descended from wild nature to the works of man, the impression left was rather less magnificent. Beyond the beach lay the houses of the whalers, and on and all around the beach was evidence of the purpose of the station. At the water's edge there might be the massive bodies of whales, recently killed and waiting to be stripped of their blubber. Everywhere were strewn the remains left by past operations: the huge skulls, vertebrae and shoulder blades of whales whose blubber had since gone to cast a light from burning lamps or lubricate the looms of Manchester and Bradford. Piles of blubber, a foot or two square, lay round, waiting to go to the try-works, at which toiled well-muscled men, unshaven and unkempt, their clothing covered with oil and soot. Over everything, like a great odoriferous blanket, there was the smell of oil; the very sands of the beach were soaked with oil. Scraps of whale flesh and the remains of carcasses contributed their quota to the atmosphere, and the reek pervaded every corner of the station. Wakefield [an actual observer] found that it was "intolerable".' Similar conditions may well have prevailed at bases for whalers in the Norse world. Rickard (1965, 20–21) also reproduces a photograph of a whalers' boat rowing out after a whale. Its caption is: 'A scene such as [this] must often have been witnessed in early New Zealand as a boat from a shore station sets out after a whale. This photograph was taken in 1933 at Te Kaha in the Bay of Plenty, where a party of Maoris were whaling, using traditional methods.' Similar scenes may also have been witnessed at Norse whalers' bases. And it is to such situations, whalers rowing out in pursuit of quarry, that I have argued the first *helmingr* of Verse B could well refer.

have had a remote and northerly location, like the legendary Dutch whaling-station of Smeerenburg in Svalbard of the seventeenth century. But what I am much more convinced of is that the word *furðustrandir* was never used as a genuine place-name for any locality on the coasts of the North American mainland (or Newfoundland). As various scholars have indicated, the first part of the word, *furðu-*, is highly suspect as a place-name element and practically unparalleled in Scandinavian toponomy (*FE*, 57–59). Nor is the explanation given for the name *Furðustrandir* in *Eir* itself satisfactory.[8] And I am not the only commentator to have expressed doubts about the authenticity of the name. For example, Hermann Pálsson thinks that it 'belongs to imaginary places in oral tales rather than to reality' (2000, 36, note 17). So what, we may ask, has happened here? My explanation, again tentative, is akin to that offered already for the uniped in chapter 12. The author of the saga, in accordance with his idea of the geography of the Atlantic, wanted to get Vínland as close to Africa as possible. For this reason he invented the long beaches of chapter 8 simply to increase the distance between Greenland and Vínland. And for these beaches he hit upon the name *Furðustrandir* in rather the same way as he invented the place-name *Einfœtingaland* 'the land of the unipeds'. The first element of this phoney place-name he might have intended to be illogically understood (as it has been by some modern critics) as having some such sense as 'wondrously long' (and the word *furða* can have the sense 'a strange, wonderful thing' (so C-V, 178)). Be that as it may, what was important to him in this connection was that he knew a skaldic verse containing the word *furðustrandir* (or a verse that he could easily adapt to contain that word). This he could incorporate into his saga by way of documentation.

[8] *Eir*, 288, reads in 577: *Þeir gáfu ok nafn strǫndunum ok kǫlluðu Furðustrandir þvíat langt var með at sigla*; and in 544: *Þeir kǫlluðu ok strandirnar Furðustrandir, því at langt var með at sigla*. The reasoning here scarcely bears the scrutiny of logic (cf. *FE*, 57–58, especially note 5). And when Jónas Kristjánsson (2005, 24) presents the following rendering of *Eir*, 288, he is offering a palpable mistranslation of either of the two texts: 'They also gave the beaches the name *Furdustrandir* (Wonder Beaches) for their surprising length.' A more reasonable translation is that of MMHP (94–95): 'They called this stretch of coast *Furdustrands* because it took so long to sail past it.'

But this meant that he also needed to invent a vehicle for the declamation of Verse B and this he accordingly did in the person of Þórhallr the Hunter. Þórhallr is, then, as suggested, quite fictitious, modelled perhaps partly on the Tyrkir of *Gr* but primarily on the stereotyped figure of the recalcitrant heathen of medieval Icelandic literature who eventually comes to a sticky end (cf. Note 2; *FE*, 65–66). And it is the quite unhistorical story about this Þórhallr which to no small extent shapes the narrative of chapters 8 and 9 of *Eir*.

I have given, then, some explanation of Verses C and B and it would be nice, of course, to pull off the hat trick and offer some explanation for Verse A as well. This is what I shall attempt in the main part of this paper. The verse (also cited in Appendix [6], with my supporting arguments in Appendix [7] – [10]) is as follows:

> Hafa kvǫ́ðu mik meiðar
> malmþings es komk hingat,
> mér samir l*áð* fyr lýðum
> lasta, drykk inn bazta.
> Bílds hattar verðr byttu
> beiði-Týr at stýra;
> heldrs svát krýpk at keldu,
> komat vín á grǫn mína.

As I have indicated, the prose context for Verse A has it declaimed by Þórhallr the Hunter as he is carrying fresh water aboard his ship before departing from Straum(s)fjǫrðr in search of Vínland. But as I have argued, these are very unlikely to have been the circumstances under which the verse was originally composed. It needs some other interpretation or context. The solution I have to offer relates to the idea I have been pushing for some years now, the notion that not a little Norse skaldic poetry is related to maritime work chants. I have already suggested that Verse B may have been used as a rowing chant. And my more specific contention with regard to Verse A is that it is related to, or perhaps even acted as, a chant which was used to accompany bailing on medieval Norse ships. Now, at first sight the idea of a bailing chant may appear rather an abstruse one and one might even ask whether such things really exist. Well, I can assure you that bailing chants do exist, and I give an example – a Maori bailing chant – under [7] in the Appendix.

And we might remember what an important activity bailing would have been on Norse ships of the medieval period and what a cold, unpleasant and exhausting business it often was. Ships had to be bailed very frequently, not only, of course, while they were at sea (*siglingaraustr*), but also while they were berthed (*hafnaraustr*). Bailing duties would have fallen to most male adults on board. And failure to bail meant that you sank.

We may, then, consider evidence for bailing chants in the medieval Norse world (see Appendix [8]). While I am unable to point to anything that is irrefutably a Norse bailing chant there is certainly much that is suggestive.

– If we consider [8(a)], we see that the frame of reference for Einarr skálaglamm's poem *Vellekla* is couched in terms relating to bailing:

> Hljóta munk, né hlítik,
> Hertýs, of þat frýju,
> fyr ǫrþeysi at ausa
> austr víngnóðar flausta.

I shall have to bail (nor do I need to be urged to it) the brine of the wine-ship of the War-god for the urgent driver of ships. (Trans. Foote and Wilson 1970, 366)

– The following half-stanza attributed in Snorri's *Edda* to no less a figure than the Njáll of *Brennu-Njáls saga* (Appendix [8(b)]) talks about bailing, although admittedly not in the present tense (cf. *ÍF* XII, 57, note 4). We note, by the way, the preoccupation this has with numbers:

Hver ró sævar heiti?. . . Húmr, sem Brennu-Njáll kvað:

> Senn jósu vér, svanni,
> sextán en brim vexti
> – dreif á hafskips húfa
> húm – í fjórum rúmum.
> (*SnE*, 92, 94)

What terms for **sea** are there?. . . The dark, as Brennu-Nial said: Together sixteen of us baled out, lady, in four stations, and the surf rose. The dark was driven on to the main-ship's strakes. (Trans. Faulkes 1987, 139–41)

– On the other hand, in the first of two verses from *Friðþjófs saga* (in Appendix [8(c)]), we do find the present tense, and in both verses we find the same concern with numbers as in the half-stanza attributed to Njáll:

Menn sé 'k ausa
í meginveðri
sex á Elliða
en sjau róa.
Þat er gunnhvǫtum
glíkt í stafni
Friðþjófi, er fram
fellr við árar.

I see six men bail on Elliði in stormy weather and seven are rowing. The one in the stem who strains at the oars resembles battle-doughty Friðþjófr.

Jusu vér, meðan
yfir gekk svǫlúr,
bragnar teitir,
á bæði borð
tíu dœgr ok átta.

We, cheerful fellows, bailed for eighteen days while cold spray (from waves) came over both gunwales. (*Friðþjófs saga ins frœkna* 1901, 29, 32)

This attention to numbers could well suggest formulaic composition, which in turn would suggest the existence of further verses with the same theme.

– A particularly interesting item is a fairly simple *dróttkvætt* stanza attributed in *Morkinskinna* to an Icelandic poet called Eldjárn (*Eldj*) (Appendix [8(d)]):

Hví samir hitt at dúsa
hirðmanni geðstirðum
vest nú (þótt kjǫl kosti)
knár riddari enn hári:
þats satt at býðk byttu
(breiðhúfuðum) reiða
(austrs til hár í hesti
hvaljarðar) Giffarði.

Why is it fitting for an unbending retainer to lie there and rest? Be active now, old knight, although the keel [ship] is sorely tried. It's true that I tell Giffarðr to swing the bucket: the bilge water is too high in the broad-bellied horse of the whale land [sea, ship]. (Text and translation as in *Morkinskinna* 2000, 304)

The surrounding prose tells of bailing in progress as Eldjárn declaims this. It has some of the same vocabulary as Verse A (the words *samir*, *reiða* (so 557) and *bytta*).

– Finally, in ch. 17 of *Grettis saga*, three *dróttkvætt* stanzas and a couplet are (if we are to believe the surrounding prose) declaimed

in close connection with the bailing of a leaky ocean-going ship on its way from Iceland to Norway.

Now it could be argued that the fact that a verse describes some work process like bailing does not necessarily mean that it is a work chant or a bailing chant. But bailing was, as I say, a cold and uncomfortable activity and not one which one would compose poetry about just for fun. There is something deeper here that makes it seem probable that verses in *dróttkvætt* could be recited to accompany bailing or were composed while bailing was going on. In what follows, I elaborate a little further on this idea. In doing so, by the way, I allow myself to adduce parallels from all sorts of places around the world, not just from the Norse area. To begin with a couple of general points about Verse A:

First, it represents a *complaint* made by the person who declaims it. The element of complaint is practically ubiquitous in work songs of all nations, so much so that I will not give specific examples here. People very often grumble when they have to carry out some labour, particularly a menial or unpleasant task such as bailing is and was.

Second, one specific complaint in Verse A is of lack of drink, in this case wine. Complaints of this kind – about poor food or drink or complete lack of both – are common in all sorts of work songs, not least the shanties. Often workers might be thinking of their *pourboire* or their *Trinkgeld* and have in mind the person most likely to give it to them (or alternatively to deny them it). I give a very few examples under Appendix [9].

In a Swedish shanty, the seamen complain that their work is hard and that they have to drink brackish water and eat stale provisions (Appendix [9(a)]).

In Appendix [9(b)], we have a work song heard by a Swiss missionary in southern Africa around the year 1900. In it, the African singer grumbles that his white masters treat him badly, drink their coffee but give him none.[9]

[9] In the present context, I call the *content* of this ditty recorded by Junod in aid of my argument that Verse A is some sort of work song. In Perkins 1984–85, 166–67, I use its *metrical form* to argue that the *dróttkvætt* metre had its origins in work chants.

Appendix [9(c)] represents lines from a work song usually associated with Dunkerque (Dunkirk) in France. Here the workers complain about some sort of boss figure called Maschero (a sea-captain in some versions). This Maschero drinks his wine while his workers have to content themselves with water.[10]

These, then, are some parallels to Verse A which might suggest it is a bailing chant (or related in some way to a bailing chant). This idea needs, however, some buttressing and to give it this, I now propose new interpretations of two phrases in it, the first of which is particularly important for the argument (cf. Appendix [10]).

First, the expression *krýpk at keldu* (line 7). Here *krýpk* is the first person singular present indicative of the verb *krjúpa* with the pronoun *ek*, 'I', cliticised as *-k*. *Krjúpa* is a direct etymological equivalent to English *creep* and has such basic senses as 'crouch', 'stoop', 'crawl', 'kneel' and, of course, 'creep'. The usual modern interpretation takes the words *krýpk at keldu* as alluding to the speaker stooping or kneeling to fill a bucket from a fresh-water spring (*kelda*) ashore. It would presumably be this bucket that Þórhallr is represented as drinking from in the saga's prose introduction to Verse A.[11] By my understanding, the words *krýpk at keldu* would refer to bailing sea-water from a vessel at sea. There are three different ways they might do this, presented here in increasing order of probability:

(i) It is conceivable that the word *kelda* was some sort of expression (perhaps nautical or colloquial) for a 'bailing-well', the place on a boat or ship where one filled one's bailing-bucket (cf.

[10] If the shanties are anything to go by, the situation with respect to drink was not always bleak in maritime work chants. Thus it is said of *Les marins de Groix*, that they *Gagnent quarante-cinq francs par mois; / Et du vin à tous les repas*; and the singers of a Norwegian shanty boast: '*naar vi kommer til fremmende land, / vi drikke rom og vin*' (see Villner 1980, 8). Otherwise the English shanties were much concerned with alcohol, as witness the titles of two of them: *The sailor likes his bottle O*; *Whisky for my Johnny*.

[11] See Appendix [2] (under Verse A). In *LP*, 348 and C-V, 335, the expression *at krjúpa at keldu* in Verse A is accorded some such sense as 'to lie on the ground in order to drink from a freshwater spring or stream' and a comparison is made with the modern Icelandic expression *að vatna lömbum*. But if this is what was meant by the original poet of the verse (and I have no doubt that it is not), one wonders what part the bucket (*bytta*) of line 5 would have played.

the use of this expression in the description of the Maori bailing chant cited in Appendix [7].) The words *krýpk at keldu* might then mean: 'I stoop at the bailing-well'.

(ii) As is well known, at the end of Snorri Sturluson's *Skáldskaparmál* there are a large number of *þulur,* lists of poetical terms for a wide variety of phenomena (*SnE*, 109–133; ch. 75, vv. 412–517). Four of these verses (vv. 475–78; *SnE*, 123–24, 151) consist of lists of *heiti* for the sea (and indeed have the heading *Sjóvarheiti* in some manuscripts). In verse 477 we find (line 7) the word *kelda*, in its sense 'freshwater spring', presented as a term for the sea, apparently by virtue of the simple fact that it, like *sjór*, is a word for a body of water (cf. the immediately preceding freshwater *bruðr* with very much the same meaning). Taking then the word *kelda* in Verse A as a *heiti* for 'sea-water', we may interpret *krýpk at keldu* as 'I stoop to sea-water', in other words, as referring to bailing.[12]

(iii) There is ample evidence that the waves of the sea were personified and, as persons, were accorded names. They were usually represented as women, frequently as daughters of the sea-god Ægir or his wife Rán. When seen as women, they were apparently thought of as offering seamen their embraces (cf. *Fóstbrœðra saga*, ch. 3 (*ÍF* VI, 135)): *reyndu Ránar dœtr drengina ok buðu þeim sín faðmlǫg*). And yielding to such temptations on the seamen's part would imply drowning. But otherwise they were probably thought of as rather unattractive women (cf. Arnórr Þórðarson's reference to *in ljóta bára*, 'the ugly wave', at *Skj*, A I, 333). Now, in the verse in the *þulur* of *SnE* immediately following that just referred to in (ii) above we find the following list of what may be taken as sixteen names for personified waves (v. 478), presented here in normalised form from GKS 2367 quarto (43 verso, lines 4–5):

[12] A verse attributed to Ármóðr in ch. 88 of *Orkneyinga saga* (*Eigum vér, þars vági*, etc.), taken at face value, certainly appears to have been composed while bailing was in progress and refers to the water to be bailed as *vágr* (*ÍF* XXXIV, 229). And the word *vágr* is found, alongside *kelda* and *Kelda*, as one of the terms for sea or sea-water (*sjóvarheiti*) in the four verses in *SnE* referred to here (in verse 475, line 4; *SnE*, 123). Further, a verse attributed to Þjóðólfr Arnórsson in *Heimskringla* (*ÍF* XXVIII, 61–62: *Ek hef ekki at drekka*, etc.) could also be related to bailing and contains the word *sær* (*sjór*) apparently used of bilge-water which also appears in verse 475 of *SnE* (line 1).

Hefring, Alda,
Hvítingr ok Lá,
Hrǫnn, Rán, Kelda
ok Himinglæva;
Drǫfn, Unnr ok Sólmr,
Dúfa, Bylgja,
Boði ok Bára,
Blóðughadda.[13]

Here *Kelda*, alongside the other persons named (both male and female), may be taken as a representation of the wave and, by extension, of the sea and sea-water (*sjór*). Its sense is not 'freshwater spring' but rather a quite possibly more original one, 'the Cold One, Thing' (cf. the adjective *kaldr* and *GO*, xlii–xliii). In this connection, we might remember it was to a great extent the coldness involved in bailing that afflicted those engaged in the task. (Note how some bailers in ch. 17 of *Grettis saga* complain: '. . . *oss kólnar á klónum*' (*ÍF* VII, 51).) As for the verb *krjúpa*, I have already noted its more basic, concrete sense (cf. the interpetations offered under (i) and (ii)). This sense would partly apply here. But *at krjúpa at einhverjum* could, of course, also have a transferred sense and mean 'to act obsequiously towards a person', or in more colloquial English,

[13] In connection with the reading *Kelda* in verse 478 of *SnE*, the following should be noted: (a) In GKS 2367 quarto, there is no space between *Kelda* (spelt 'kell | da') and the preceding *Rán* (spelt 'ran') (cf. *SnE*, 151). But this is probably a mere aberration in this single manuscript and the other four relevant manuscripts have a clear interval between *Rán* and the following word. There is, then, perhaps scarcely reason to entertain ideas of a form *Ránkelda* (as is done in *SnE*, 499, cf. 334). (b) Some editions (e.g. *SnE*, 124; cf. 334) take *Kelda* here as a common noun and do not capitalise its first letter. But in fact all sixteen nouns in the verse are probably to be regarded as proper names for personifications of waves (not least e.g. the feminine *Alda* in the first line; cf. *SnE*, 233; and the masculine *Boði* (l. 7), personified in verse 364 in *SnE,* 96). (c) *Kelda* is not found in the lists of the daughters of Rán and Ægir in *SnE* (36, 95). But these lists are not quite the same nor are they to be regarded as exhaustive. And whether or not *Kelda* was thought of as a daughter of the two deities is immaterial to the present discussion. (d) There is a variant reading to *Kelda* (i.e. *Kólga*), in two (out of five) relevant manuscripts (see again *SnE*, 151) and some editors (e.g. Finnur Jónsson in *Skj*, B, I, 666) have preferred this. But *Kólga* is more widely known as a wave-name (cf. *SnE*, 487) and *Kelda* is probably to be preferred as *lectio difficilior*. At all events and quite irrespective of textual considerations, both forms (*Kelda* and *Kólga*) probably existed side by side in oral tradition as names for waves and had very similar meanings ('The Cold One').

simply 'to creep to a person'. The dictionaries offer examples (e.g. C-V, 356), and I would argue that it is in this sense that the verb could very possibly be used here also. By truckling to the female Kelda the bailer is of course demeaning himself; we may compare what is said of Þorgeirr Hávarsson in ch. 3 of *Fóstbræðra saga*: *Svá er sagt, at Þorgeirr væri lítill kvennamaðr; sagði hann þat vera svívirðing síns krapts, at hokra at konum* 'It is said that Þorgeirr was not a great ladies' man; he said that it was an insult to his strength to grovel to women' (*ÍF* VI, 128). (In their transferred senses *at hokra at* and *at krjúpa at* would have had very similar meanings.) But the bailer of a vessel also had every reason to ingratiate himself with Kelda. She could doubtless have been as merciless to him as her 'sister' Alda (see Note 13) would have been to Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld (just come from a turn at bailing) in ch. 11 of *Hallfreðar saga*: *Muna úrþvegin eira / Alda sínu skaldi* 'Spray-washed Alda will show no mercy to her skald' (*ÍF* VIII, 197). Or, in less poetic terms, failure to deal with 'the drenching weight of the wave breaking over the ship' by 'the labour of bailing' would, of course, have had serious if not fatal consequences (cf. Appendix [8(a)]). By this interpretation, then, Kelda would be a personification of the wave or of sea-water and *at krjúpa at Keldu* 'to truckle to Kelda' or perhaps 'to pay court to Kelda' would be a metaphorical expression for 'to bail'.[14] These, then, are

[14] That the task of bailing might be presented in mildly sexualised terms need not surprise us. Work chants frequently present the instruments of the task in hand in sexualised terms (note e.g. the phallic form of the handles of Maori bailers mentioned in Appendix [7]). The motion of work is often likened to the sex act. And expressions for unpleasant work or punishments are sometimes ironically sexualised, not least in the language of seamen. For example, with axes (like waves) normally thought of as having feminine gender (cf. *KL*, XX, column 283), *at kyssa munn øxar*, literally 'to kiss the mouth of the axe', was an expression for 'to be killed'. And an English expression *to kiss* (or *marry*) *the gunner's daughter* referred to a form of corporal punishment meted out on board ships of the British navy at least as early as the eighteenth century. Here the recipient was lashed in a bending position along the barrel of a cannon with wrists tied underneath so that he 'embraced' it. With lowered trousers he was then beaten on his bottom ('Newjack' and Farrell, http://www.corpun.com). The sexual connotations are obvious enough. Marrying the offender off to the gunner's daughter was, alongside making him bail the longboat, one of the solutions to the problem posed by the well-known shanty *What shall we do with the drunken sailor?*

three different ways in which the words *krýpk at keldu* in Verse A may be construed as referring to bailing. As indicated, the one given under (iii) seems to me the most likely (although there may have been some combination of (ii) and (iii)). We may also note here that the speaker of the verse might well be thought of as carrying on the activity of *at krjúpa at keldu* in its second *helmingr* more or less simultaneously with that of *at reiða byttu* (so 557); and that the phrase *at reiða byttu* in *Eldj* in *Morkinskinna* (see Appendix [8(d)]) can scarcely be used of any other activity than bailing.

The second new interpretation I submit is of the words *mér samir láð . . . lasta* in lines 3–4. (I accept, as most modern scholars have done, the emendation of *lítt* (557) and *land* (544) to *láð*.) The conventional understanding of the verse takes these words in some such sense as 'it is fitting that I speak ill of this land', where 'land' would refer to the country in which the speaker is located as opposed to some other country or countries (cf. the citation from MMHP in Appendix [6]); in this country, so the interpretation goes, he gets no wine. This would be consistent with the prose of the saga in which Þorfinnr's expedition apparently has encountered no vines, let alone wine, at Straum(s)fjǫrðr where Þórhallr the Hunter declaims the verse, but only at the more southerly Hóp to which it subsequently sails but without Þórhallr. My interpretation is akin to that I give of the words *þeirs leyfa lǫnd* in Verse B. Just as I take *lǫnd* in Verse B in the sense 'land' as opposed to 'sea' (cf. pp. 10–11 above), so I accord the same sense to *láð* in Verse A. And when the poet says it behoves (*samir*) him to disparage the land (*lasta láð*) he is stressing that he is a seaman, not a landlubber, and leads the seaman's life. There would, I suggest, have been two alliterative formulae applied to the contrary attitudes of the landsman and the seaman to the land: *at leyfa* (or *lofa*) *lǫnd* (or *land* or *láð*), 'to praise the land' (as the landlubber does; cf. Verse B); and *at lasta lǫnd* (or *land* or *láð*), 'to disparage the land' (as the seaman would). These formulae would be based on these two attested alliterative pairs expressing antithesis: (a) *láð*, 'land' ~ *lǫgr*, 'sea' (e.g. in the set phrase *um láð og lög*, 'on land and at sea'; cf. C-V, 376); (b) and *at leyfa* (*lofa*), 'to praise' ~ *at lasta*, 'to speak ill of' (cf. e.g. *ÍF* XII, 290). (A parallel might be the antithesis expressed in the

somewhat alliterative and possibly formulaic lines of the English sea-song *We be three poor mariners* (16th century or older): *We care not for those martial men / That do our states disdain, / But we care for the merchant men / Who do our states maintain*. And antithetical expressions with alliteration on *l* are also paralleled in English: *You either* l*ike Marmite or you* l*oathe it*; L*ove me or* l*eave me;* L*ook before you* l*eap*.) The sailor's attitude of scorn, emulation and antagonism towards the landlubber (or just someone of another profession) is, of course, a common theme in sea-songs (for Scandinavian examples, see Villner 1980). It finds expression not least in maritime work songs such as the shanties. (That such jibes are less often reciprocated is understandable.) Nor would it be surprising to find the same attitudes transferred from the landsman to the land itself (cf. the Greek 'Sailors song' mentioned in *FE* (79) inviting ocean-going sailors and Nile-sailors to compete with each other in song, comparing (or rather contrasting) the ocean and the Nile). Nor need the relative strength of such verbs as *lofa* 'praise' and *lasta* 'vituperate' surprise us: polarisation often engenders exaggeration, and hyperbole is part of the rhetoric of satire. We may compare such hyperbolical jibes in English as *nigger-lover* (for a person tolerantly disposed towards blacks), *hoodie-hugger* (for somebody concerned with the problems of teenage offenders) or *tree-hugger* (for an environmentalist). It has been noted that the word *samir* (together with *reiða* (so 557) and *bytta*) also appears in *Eldj* which is definitely connected with bailing; and this might give some minor support to the proposition that Verse A itself has to do with bailing.[15] But as also noted, my interpretation of the words *mér samir láð . . . lasta* is of less importance in arguing that

[15] In ch. 20 of *Fóstbræðra saga* the captain of a vessel bound for Greenland intervenes in a quarrel between two men over bailing with these words: *'Þat er eigi sami* [NB]*, at menn sé ósáttir á kaupskipum í hafi, því at þar fylgir mart til meins, ok sjaldan mun þeim skipum vel farask, er menn eru ósáttir innan borðs. Nú viljum vér beiða ykkr, at þit setið grið meðal ykkar, meðan þit eruð í hafi á skipi'* (*ÍF* VI, 222–23). This suggests perhaps that the noun *sami* and the verb *sama* were used especially in connection with a code of conduct on ocean-going ships and not least perhaps with reference to the proper performance of ship-board duties. Certainly the *Trygðamál* of *Grágás* indirectly implies that quarrels might break out between men involved in bailing (*Grg*, I 206, line 27).

Verse A is a bailing chant. And in Note 17 I offer an alternative (although in my view less probable) interpretation of the Verse A's first *helmingr* based on the conventional interpretation of it which would not preclude it being connected with bailing.

There are some further, more tentative points to make in connection with Verse A. First, if, as just suggested, the seawater the poet has to grovel to in the second half-stanza is personified as a woman, so might the land (*láð*) he speaks ill of in the first half also be. *Láð* is a not infrequent base-word in kennings for 'woman' in the post-classical Icelandic *rímur*, where, by the way, it sometimes assumes feminine gender (see Finnur Jónsson 1926–28, 232–33). And incomplete kennings are quite often used for women in skaldic diction itself. If I am on the right track here, the verse would be about two women: the *Láð* of the first *helmingr* who personifies the land and for whom the poet, as a seaman, appropriately expresses disdain; and the *Kelda* of the second, who represents the sea in general and seawater in particular, and to whom he reluctantly has to truckle in the performance of his shipboard duties.

And a related point: In Verse A, the poet says that it is fitting that he 'speaks ill of' (*lasta*) the land (or possibly, as just suggested, a woman personifying land). The verb used here, *lasta*, and indeed the contrasting *lofa* found in Verse B, perhaps reflect the vocabulary of *níð* and the *níðvísur*, the satirical or insulting verses of the Norse poetical repertoire. Here we may note, for example, from *Grágás*: *Hvárki á maðr at yrkja um mann lǫst né lof* 'A man may not compose defamation or praise about anyone' (*Grg*, II 183; see further Almqvist 1965, 51–60, 258 and refs). And composing scurrilous verses about women was regarded as a special form of insult (*Grg*, II 184). Now it is of interest that there seems to have been a possible connection between *níðvísur* and bailing. The first stanza attributed to Eldjárn in *Morkinskinna* (see Appendix [8(d)]), which, as argued, has clear links with bailing, is regarded as a *níðvísa* (Almqvist 1965, 70–73). And in chapter 17 of *Grettis saga* we are told how, in close association with bailing, Grettir himself declaims various *níðvísur* and the texts of one stanza and a couplet are cited (*ÍF* VII, 51–53; cf. Almqvist 1965, 67–70; Poole 2003). As indicated, bailing was on the whole an

unpleasant job. As these two sources suggest, quarrels would often have broken out in connection with it (see also the passage in ch. 20 of *Fóstbrœðra saga* referred to in Note 15). It seems probable, then, that those engaged in bailing were prepared to give vent to their feelings and frustrations by lampooning others, perhaps the captain of their ship, perhaps other members of the crew they were working with. I should stress that I am not suggesting that Verse A itself is a *níðvísa*. It is not directed against any real person or persons. But if *níðvísur* were declaimed in connection with bailing, it would not be surprising if the verse contained echoes, however faint, of *níð*-poetry.

Last, the variant readings *stýra* (544 (Hauksbók)) and *reiða* (557) in line 6 of Verse A need attention. While both alternatives are metrically possible, I am inclined to think that 544's *stýra* was to be found in the original manuscript of *Eir*. While it has been shown that 557 on the whole gives a more faithful text of the original of the saga, this is often garbled, and the substantially older 544 appears to preserve the saga's three verses rather better. And *stýra* would appear to give more pith to the complaint of the poet, who as an ordinary *háseti*, may be contrasting himself by the use of the verb with the *stýrimaðr* (or *stýrimenn*) of the ship. All he himself has to command (*stýra*) is a bailing-bucket; the *stýrimaðr*, on the other hand, has the whole ship under his sway (*ræðr skipi*) and might even be its owner or part-owner. And the *stýrimaðr* may have been one of the *meiðar malmþings* who promised the poet 'the best of beverages' which he has not received. But while this reading may be more original in *Eir* than 557's *reiða*, this latter is probably not the result of mere scribal error. It is clear from *Eldj* that *at reiða byttu* was a set phrase used of bailing. And this phrase could well have been known to the scribe of 557 (or a precursor) who substituted it for a perhaps less well established (*at*) *stýra byttu*. Indeed, the fact that the word *reiða* fits the metre of the verse perhaps even suggests that a version of Verse A containing it was known to the scribe, quite possibly in oral form. If so, that would have interesting implications.

To sum up on the verses in *Eric the Red's saga*, I hope not too repetitively: in broad terms this is what I think happened. The

author was writing about an expedition to Vínland and wanted to cite verses to authenticate certain elements of his narrative. These verses he did not compose himself, but borrowed existing ones, with some adaptation, from entirely different contexts. So, to back up his fantastic tale of a uniped, he presses into service a riddle for a pen. For the beaches of great length which he has invented (perhaps to some extent under the influence of *Gr*; see Note 2 above), he chooses the name *Furðustrandir*, a word he found in (or incorporated into) a verse originally composed amongst whalers; this he puts into the mouth of the fictitious Þórhallr the Hunter. And since he was writing about Vínland, he wanted a verse mentioning wine, although the one he chooses – a verse, I suggest, originally connected with bailing – in fact only mentions *absence* of wine.[16] The integration of this poetry into his saga must to no small extent have dictated the course of his prose narrative, and the whole story of Þórhallr the Hunter was largely made up to accommodate Verses A and B. And while Þorvaldr Eiríksson's death in Vínland may have been a historical fact, the details of the tale of his killing at the hands of a uniped were invented largely as a frame for Verse C. These things suggest in turn that large parts of the relevant chapters of *Eric the Red's saga* are also fictitious, considerably reducing its value as any sort of historical source. I shall return to this below. Now I cannot, of course, claim to have discovered with complete certainty what Verses A and B originally were nor that all my interpretations on points of detail are valid. On

[16] The following rather obscure statement by Finnur Jónsson on the two verses attributed to Þórhallr the Hunter in *Eir* might suggest that he was thinking of some of the same interpretations of Verse A as are here presented: 'At versene er ret gamle, viser formen *baztr, órir* [in respectively Verse A, line 4 and Verse B, line 1]; i øvrigt er der ikke beviser for ægtheden – men den levende følte modsætning mellem strabaserne ved skibets øsning og drikken vand på den ene og forvæntningen om vin på den anden side taler afgjort for ægtheden (jfr. også *kelda* her i sin oprindelige betydning)' (1912, 40). Further, the glosses Finnur gives for the variants in lines 5 and 6 of Verse A, *reiða byttu* and *stýra byttu*, respectively 'række bøtten op' and 'lange bøtten op', also suggest that he may have been thinking of bailing (*LP*, 461, 543). Finnur equates *reiða byttu* in Verse A with the same phrase in *Eldj* where of, course, only bailing can be referred to. But any proposition that the two verses in question are in any way 'genuine' must, of course, be treated with considerable reservations.

the other hand, I think that Ian McDougall's explanation of Verse C as closely based on a riddle for a pen is virtually indisputable. With respect to Verse A and particularly to Verse B, however, there could well be doubt about some of my interpretations. But I stress again that I present them tentatively and would certainly not insist on all of them.[17] But I would also make the following points: None of the three verses can originally have been composed under the circumstances stated in the saga. It is therefore incumbent on scholars to attempt to discover what circumstances they were originally composed under. My arguments may not be found wholly acceptable or convincing. But if they are not, I hope that others will be able to come up with more probable solutions. From a scholarly point of view, these verses in *Eric the Red's saga* cannot simply be left in limbo. And I repeat that the explanation Ian McDougall has offered for Verse C and those I have offered for Verses A and B seem to me to be the most probable.[18]

Before finishing I should like to make some general points about research concerning medieval Norse visits to America. Of course

[17] In *FE* (81–82), I offer various alternative interpretations for Verse B which will not be rehearsed here. As far as Verse A is concerned, I can only suggest one possible significant alternative interpretation to that set out above: That the words *mér samir láð . . . lasta* are to be accorded an interpretation similar to the conventional one and indeed refer to some foreign country, as opposed to the poet's Norse or Icelandic homeland, rather than to the land as opposed to the sea (as suggested above, pp. 21–23). The land in question might, however, not be Vínland but some European country (for example, Germany) where wine was produced or was relatively plentiful and where the crew of a ship might expect to be provided with that drink (cf. *KL*, XV, column 553 (*Skipskost*); XX, columns 120–31 (*Vinhandel*)). This would not be inconsistent with my interpretation of the second half-stanza, on which I would still insist, as referring to bailing. One might imagine, then, that Verse A was originally composed amongst Norse or Icelandic seamen engaged in bailing out a ship berthed in some such place as (to give very random examples) Bremen or Bergen.

[18] With the conclusions reached in the present contribution we may contrast a view of Þórhallr veiðimaðr's verses expressed by Vigfusson and York Powell that they are 'doubtless genuine, and are the first recorded American poetry, the song to Thor [cf. p. 9], which no one ever heard, excepted' (1879, 382). Various more recent scholars have expressed similar opinions. Such views I regard, of course, as entirely erroneous, and an indication of the necessity of a more rigorous approach to the Vínland Sagas in their use as sources for the study of Norse visits to America.

the study of this matter was revolutionised by the discovery in 1960 by Helge and Anne Stine Ingstad of a Viking-Age site at L'Anse aux Meadows on the northern tip of Newfoundland. After all the frauds and forgeries, here was the real thing: a collection of Norse artefacts at a place not, it is true, on the North American mainland itself, but less than forty miles from it. The finds at L'Anse aux Meadows open up the possibility that other Norse sites or artefacts may come to light in North America, most probably in Labrador, but possibly also further south, even south of the St Lawrence River. Indeed a fashionable view that the Norse reached the north-facing coast of New Brunswick (and came across wild grapes there) is an attractive one. But there remains the study of the written sources, which, by the way, confirmed beyond any reasonable doubt long before the discoveries at L'Anse aux Meadows that the Norse visited North America in the medieval period. What further work is to be done on them?

For various reasons (and not all of them strictly scholarly), the year 2000 was taken as a millennial anniversary of the first Norse visits to America, generating a flurry of activity in the form of conferences, exhibitions and publications. I contributed a piece myself, published by the Viking Society for Northern Research in *Saga-Book* 2004 (=*MS*). In this article I mentioned various unsatisfactory circumstances which have attended the study of the topic. These have included sensationalism, hoaxes such as the Vinland Map, amateurism, and, paradoxically, the very size of the body of literature on the subject. This last factor has meant that one scholar has often overlooked a relevant contribution by another, and I should stress that I have doubtless been as much at fault as others on this score. This state of affairs has often, it seems to me, led to an uncoordinated and desultory approach with little or no synthesis in solid results. And there are two factors which I think have particularly worsened the situation. The first is the unwarrantably uncritical assessment of the Vínland Sagas as sources of history. What I have said so far in this talk will, I hope, show how misguided this approach is. As I have suggested, much of *Eric the Red's saga* can be dismissed as pure fantasy, and various characters in the two sagas, notably Þórhallr the Hunter, can be regarded as

entirely fictional. Belief in the historical veracity of the Icelandic sagas took a severe knock during the twentieth century and the Vínland Sagas are no exception. And another unfortunate approach has been the enormous effort expended in attempts to localise precisely in North America the places named or described in the Vínland Sagas. Scholars have indulged pet theories, sometimes based on their own travels, and the results, often dogmatically presented, have been highly uncertain and divergent. Maps have been produced by serious scholars with *Einfœtingaland* 'Land of the Unipeds' confidently marked at various places on the coasts of North America. Well, I pointed all these things out in my article of 2004 and fondly hoped it might make some difference. No such luck, I am afraid, and I have found the approach I urged in my article at distinct variance with that of at least two scholars who have published within the last five years (see Appendix [11]). In 2005, the University of Iceland Press published a book by the saga scholar Jónas Kristjánsson entitled *The first settler of the New World*. In this, Jónas expresses the belief that he has discovered more or less the precise location of the Furðustrandir of *Eric the Red's saga*, offers an aerial photograph (p. 23) and marks them on a map (p. 21). For my part, as I have said, I do not believe the Furðustrandir of *Eir* ever existed (and I am, by the way, not alone in this). Then there is Dick Harrison who is professor of history at the University of Lund. In a joint book that came out in 2007, Harrison discussed the main women figures of the Vínland Sagas, Guðríðr, wife of Þorfinnr karlsefni, and Freydís, said to be daughter of Eric the Red. He comes up with an ambitious theory that it was really Guðríðr who lay behind attempts to settle in America – his chapter heading is *Gudrid koloniserar Amerika* 'Guðríðr colonises America' – but that she has been overlooked by history because of her gender. In my view there is only the flimsiest evidence for this, and that only in a source (*Gr*) written at least two centuries after the events described were meant to have taken place.[19]

[19] Harrison (2007, 154) writes: 'Enligt Grönlänningasagan var Gudrid en av de drivande krafterna bakom färden. Hon var en av de personer som starkast uppmanade Torfinn att bryta upp mot väster.' The only statement by *Gr* on this matter, as

Harrison also appears to take seriously the figure of Freydís, portrayed as a formidable woman in *Eir* and very much the villain of *Gr* where she personally executes five women members of an expedition to Vínland. Harrison regards Freydís as historical to the extent that he thinks it may perhaps have been she who lost, and thus presumably originally owned, the ring-headed pin subsequently discovered at the site at L'Anse aux Meadows (2007, 160). By my assessment, Freydís is entirely the literary invention of saga-authors, intended to act as a foil to the virtuous and Christian Guðríðr. Her very name is for me far too pagan-sounding to be taken seriously. As you can see then, there are considerable differences of opinion between me and these two scholars. Jónas is, of course, entirely entitled to his Furðustrandir and Harrison to his Freydís. But I am inclined to think that in forming their views on such matters, these two scholars have read the Vínland Sagas far too credulously. We all know, of course, that 'geography's about maps and history's about chaps'. But before setting out to write history, we should, I think, first establish with reasonable certainty that the chaps (and the women) we are concerning ourselves with actually existed. And if we are intending to make maps of Norse America, we should, I think, first make very sure that the features we mark on them also had some basis in reality. Otherwise, we might end up with charts of a 'here-be-dragons' type.

In conclusion, then, I would make the following three points in connection with further research on our topic.

First, we must not forget, of course, that there are other, shorter written sources for Norse in America; I have noted these in all brevity under [12] in the Appendix. At least two of these, Adam of Bremen's *Gesta* and Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók*, are older than the Vínland Sagas and thus potentially more reliable.

---

far as I can see, is: *In sama var umrœða á Vínlandsfǫr sem fyrr, ok fýstu menn Karlsefni mjǫk þeirar ferðar, bæði Guðríðr ok aðrir menn* (*Gr*, 261). This, of course, is a pretty tenuous basis for assuming that the historical Guðríðr was a driving force behind any expedition to Vínland, let alone for any idea that she had any special role in settling America.

Second, we must, as I have suggested, address the subject in a less disjointed, more coherent manner. Too often, we seem to have been working with a blithe disregard for what our predecessors have said.

Third, in using the two Vínland Sagas as historical sources, we must constantly bear in mind their status as such. They have, of course, their own unique information to offer: The names they give for the major figures involved in the first Norse landings in North America could well be historically correct; their account of dealings with the indigenous peoples are highly interesting and seem almost certainly based on reports of actual encounters; and when both sagas tell of the discovery of grapes in Vínland, this, I think, also reflects historical reality. But as I have suggested, mixed in with these kernels of historical truth, there is much chaff of apocryphal matter, literary motif, folklore and traditional medieval learning. We must attempt to separate the one from the other. This is a difficult task often with uncertain and meagre results. But it is one that cannot be sidestepped. There is no reason why the sources for medieval Norse visits to America should not be subjected to the same serious and rigorous scrutiny as those for any other historical topic.

APPENDIX

[1] The two **'Vínland Sagas'** deal with Norse visits to the North American mainland (with Newfoundland) inferred to have taken place around AD 1000 (cf. MMHP for English translation and introduction). They are:

(i) ***Eric the Red's saga*** (*Eiríks saga rauða*; = *Eir*): *Preservation*: AM 544, quarto (Hauksbók; *c*.1302–10) (a heavily edited version); AM 557 quarto (Skálholtsbók; *c*. 1420–50) (a very careless copy but in many ways closer to the original than 544's text). (*Eir* is best edited in Jansson, 1945.) *Date*: probably written between about 1260 and 1302 but earlier date possible.

(ii) ***The Greenlanders' saga*** (*Grœnlendinga saga*; = *Gr*): *Preservation*: only in GKS 1005 folio (Flateyjarbók; dated to c. 1387–95) where it is incorporated in two parts into *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta*. (*Gr* is edited in e.g. *ÍF* IV, 244–69.) *Date*: difficult to date more closely than to about 1200-1380 but could well be older than *Eric the Red's saga* (and may even have been a source for it; cf. Note 2).

A. *Likenesses*: Both sagas tell of Norse visits to, *inter alia*, a place called *Vínland*. In both sagas, the Norse encounter Vínland's native population (called *Skrælingar*) and find vines and grapes there. Both have the same main characters, e.g. Eric the Red, his sons Leifr, Þorsteinn and Þorvaldr and his daughter Freydís; Þorfinnr karlsefni Þórðarson and his wife, Guðríðr Þorbjarnardóttir.

B. *Differences*: Whereas *Eir* tells of only one planned expedition to Vínland (i.e. Þorfinnr karlsefni's), *Gr* tells of four (one of which is Þorfinnr's). There are some different characters in the two sagas: e.g. Þórhallr the Hunter (*veiðimaðr*) appears only in *Eir*, Tyrkir the Southerner (*suðrmaðr*) only in *Gr*. The names said to have been given to places in the newly discovered lands are different: for example, in *Gr* the Norse winter at a base called *Leifsbúðir* and the long beaches called *Furðustrandir* in *Eir* (ch. 8) are not mentioned; in *Eir*, they winter at *Straum*(*s*)*fjǫrðr* (two winters) and *Hóp* (one winter). The element of the fantastic is, for the most part, greater in *Eir* than in *Gr*: e.g. it is an arrow shot by a member of the native population that kills Þorvaldr (son of Eric) in *Gr* (ch. 4), one shot by a uniped in *Eir* (ch. 12). While there are three verses in *Eir*, there were probably none in *Gr* in its original form.

Content of Eir: Its 14 chapters tell, among other things, of Eric the Red's settlement of Greenland, of his son Leifr's discovery of a land where grape-vines grow, of the ancestry and events in the life of Guðríðr Þorbjarnardóttir and (chs 8–12) of the expedition that Guðríðr's husband, Þorfinnr karlsefni, makes to the country discovered by Leifr, now called Vínland. This involves three ships. They sail south from Greenland and eventually winter at a place they call Straum(s)fjǫrðr. The following spring part of the expedition, led by Þórhallr the Hunter, breaks away and sails back northwards in search of Vínland but is storm-driven to Ireland where Þórhallr dies. The others continue southwards and winter at a place to which they give the name Hóp. Here they find grape-vines growing. They encounter the Skrælingar and initially have amicable dealings with them. The following spring, however, the Skrælingar attack them but are frightened off by the actions of Freydís, daughter of Eric the Red. The Norse realise they will not be able to settle peacefully in the new country and return to Straum(s)fjǫrðr. From there, Þorfinnr goes in search of Þórhallr the Hunter. Þorvaldr, son of Eric, who is with Þorfinnr, is killed by a uniped. The expedition spends a third winter at Straum(s)fjǫrðr and then sails for

Greenland. One of its ships is lost at sea (ch. 13) but Þorfinnr, Guðríðr and their son Snorri (born at Straum(s)fjǫrðr) safely reach their destination (ch. 12) and in ch. 14 settle down in Iceland.

[2] Locations and contexts for the three verses of Eric the Red's saga (*Eir*).

Verse A: (in ch. 9) attributed to Þórhallr the Hunter: *Hafa kvǫ́ðu mik meiðar*, etc. (Manuscript locations: 544: fol. 99v, l. 27 – fol. 99v, l. 29; 557: fol. 33v, l. 13 – fol. 33v, l. 17.) See further Appendix [6].

[Context in prose of saga: (Ch. 5) Sailing to Greenland, Leifr, a son of Eric the Red, has come across a hitherto unknown country where wild wheat and vines grow. (Ch. 8) Þorfinnr Þórðarson (nicknamed *karlsefni*) mounts an expedition from Greenland to settle the country discovered by Leifr (now referred to as Vínland). He has with him, among others, his wife, Guðríðr Þorbjarnardóttir, Þorvaldr, another son of Eric the Red, Freydís, Eric's daughter, and an uncouth and elderly heathen called Þórhallr (nicknamed *veiðimaðr* 'the Hunter' or perhaps 'the Whaler'). The expedition sails through unexplored areas (with landfalls in Helluland and Markland) and passes some long and sandy beaches which they name *Furðustrandir*. They put two scouts ashore who reappear after three days bearing grapes and wild wheat. They winter at a place they call Straum(s)fjǫrðr and run short of food. A whale of unknown species drifts ashore. This is flensed and the meat cooked but those who eat it fall ill. When they discover that the whale has been drawn ashore by means of Þórhallr's pagan devices, its meat is discarded and they commend themselves to God's mercy. Their circumstances then change for the better. (Ch. 9) Þórhallr the Hunter, apparently believing that Vínland has not yet been found, intends to sail in search of it north of Furðustrandir. Preparing to set sail, he is carrying fresh water aboard his ship, takes a drink, and declaims Verse A (see [6] below).]

Verse B: (in ch. 9) also attributed to Þórhallr the Hunter follows almost immediately after Verse A in ch. 9: *Fǫrum aptr, þars órir*, etc. (Manuscript locations: 544: fol. 99v, l. 30 – fol. 99v, l. 32; 557: fol. 33v, l. 18 – fol. 33v, l. 21.) See further Appendix [5].

[*Context in prose of saga*: After declaiming Verse A, Þórhallr puts out to sea and (in 557) Þorfinnr karlsefni accompanies him as far as an offshore island. Before hoisting sail, Þórhallr declaims Verse B (see [5] below). He sails north past Furðustrandir but is then storm-driven to Ireland. There he is enslaved and dies. (Ch. 10) Þorfinnr karlsefni continues southwards without Þórhallr and winters at a place they call *Hóp* and where they find vines for the first time.]

Verse C: (in ch. 12) attributed to an unnamed member of Þorfinnr karlefni's band: *Eltu seggir*, etc. (Manuscript locations: 544: fol. 101r, l. 22 – fol. 101r, l. 24; 557: fol. 34v, l. 34 – fol. 34v, l. 36.) See further Appendix [3].

[Context in prose of saga: (Ch. 12) Þorfinnr karlsefni has given up his attempt to settle in Vínland and is sailing in search of Þórhallr the Hunter. While his ship is lying at the mouth of a river a uniped (*einfœtingr*) appears and shoots an arrow that kills Þorvaldr, son of Eric the Red. It then runs off and Þorfinnr and his men give chase. The uniped eventually jumps into a creek and its pursuers turn back. One of them declaims Verse C (see [3] below). After this, they sail off northwards and think they can see Einfœtingaland, 'The Land of the Unipeds'. At the end of ch. 12, Þorfinnr returns to Greenland.]

[3] Verse C (*Eir*, ch. 12; attributed to an unnamed member of Þorfinnr karlsefni's band) (For further discussion, see McDougall 1997.)

[*Context in prose of saga*: see [2] above]

Eltu seggir,
allsatt var þat,
einn einfœting
ofan til strandar;
en kynligr maðr
kostaði rásar
hart of stopir.
Heyrðu, Karlsefni.

Men chased a uniped down to the shore. That was quite true. But the strange man raced as fast as he could, rapidly over the rough terrain. Hear that, Karlsefni (or possibly more originally, 'Hear the nature of this fellow' (cf. McDougall 1997, 130–31)).

[4] Verse C and riddles

(a) In a riddle for a *skautafaldur* (the tall festive headdress worn by Icelandic women), the object is referred to as an *einfætlingr* (noun), 'one-legged person' (JÁ, 63, 147 (no. 500)).

(b) In a riddle for a *gimlet*, the object is referred to as *einfættur* (adjective), 'one-legged' (JÁ, 133, 156 (no. 1150)).

(c) A riddle for a *pen* is:

Hljóp um velli halur á tám,
hafði kisu nagla klór,
öl var að drekka opt og smám,
aptur strax því míga fór. (JÁ, 53–54, 146 (no. 374))

A man ran over the ground on his toes, he left behind the scrawl of a cat's nails [cf. C-V, 344]. He was drinking beer frequently and in small quantities and because of that straight afterwards began to make water.

(d) Archer Taylor (1951, 350–53) records a category of riddles where the object referred to is described in terms of men pursuing other men or each other.

(e) With Verse C's *kynligr maðr*, 'strange man', McDougall (1997, 130, 131 note 4) compares e.g. *seldlicu/wrætlicu/wunderlicu wiht* 'curious being', in Old English riddles (cf. e.g. *EB*, 189, 190, 196, 231, 239).

(f) An Icelandic riddle (JÁ, 53 (no. 363) for *the body* (so according to JÁ, 145) is introduced by an imperative *Heyrðu maðr*; cf. *Heyrðu, Karlsefni* at the end of Verse C. (Most of the riddles of Gestumblindi in *Heiðr* end with a vocative and an imperative: *Heiðrekr konungr, / hyggðu at gátu*; cf. *Heiðr*, 57–82, 130–33.)

[5] Verse B (*Eir*, ch. 9; attributed to Þórhallr the Hunter (*veiðimaðr*)) (For further discussion, see *FE*; *ÍF* IV, 225–26, 361–62, 427.)

[*Context in prose of saga*: see [2] above]

Fǫrum aptr, þar es órir
eru sandhimins landar;
lǫtum kenni-Val kanna
knarrar skeið in breiðu;

meðan bilstyggvir byggva
bellendr ok hval vella
Laufa veðrs, þeirs leyfa
lǫnd, á Furðustrǫndum.

Conventional interpretation, represented here by this translation in MMHP (97) (cf. Jones 1986, 225–26): 'Let us head back / To our countrymen at home; / Let our ocean-striding ship / Explore the broad tracts of the sea / While these eager swordsmen / Who laud these lands [i.e. the countries which Þorfinnr's expedition has discovered] / Settle in Furdustrands / And boil up whales.'

Prose order of stanza (following RP's interpretation): Fǫrum aptr þar es {órir landar {sandhimins}} eru; lǫtum kenni-Val kanna {in breiðu skeið knarrar}; meðan {bilstyggvir bellendr {veðrs Laufa}}, þeirs leyfa lǫnd, byggva á Furðustrǫndum ok vella hval.

Translation (following RP's interpretation): Let us return to where {our compatriots of {the sand-heaven}} [OCEAN > WHALES] are; let us have searching-Valr <ship, boat [cf. *FE*, 76–78] explore {the broad running-grounds of ships} [SEA] [i.e. in pursuit of whales]; while {the delay-shy dealers in {the storm of Laufi <a famous sword>}} [BATTLE > WARRIORS], those who praise land [as opposed to 'sea'], sojourn on Furðustrandir and boil whale [i.e. process blubber for whale-oil].

[6] Verse A (*Eir*, ch. 9; attributed Þórhallr the Hunter (*veiðimaðr*))

[*Context in prose of saga*: see [2] above]

Hafa kvǫ́ðu mik meiðar
malmþings es komk hingat,
mér samir l*áð* fyr lýðum
lasta, drykk inn bazta.
Bílds hattar verðr byttu
beiði-Týr at stýra;
heldrs svát krýpk at keldu,
komat vín á grǫn mína.

(Some variants, etc.: Line 3: l*áð* is an emendation widely accepted; land 544, lítt 557. Line 6: stýra 544, reiða 557).

Conventional interpretation, represented here by this translation in MMHP (97) (cf. Jones 1986, 225): These oak-hearted warriors / Lured me to this land / With promise of choice drinks; / Now I could curse this country! / For I, the helmet-wearer, / Must now grovel at a spring / And wield a water-pail; / No wine has touched my lips.

Prose order of stanza: {Meiðar {malmþings}} kvǫ́ðu mik hafa drykk inn bazta es komk hingat. Mér samir lasta l*áð* fyr lýðum. {Beiði-Týr {hattar Bílds}} verðr at stýra (v.l.: reiða) byttu. Vín komat á grǫn mína. Heldrs svát krýpk at keldu.

Translation (following RP's interpretation): {Poles of {the metal-assembly}} [BATTLE > WARRIORS, MEN] said that I would have the best of drink when I came here. It is fitting that I speak ill of land [i.e. as opposed to 'sea'] before the company. {The demanding-Týr <god> of {the hat of Bíldr <= Odin>}} [HELMET > WARRIOR, MAN] has to wield a bucket. Wine has not touched my whiskers. It is rather so that I grovel to/stoop to Kelda <personification of sea-water>.

[7] A Maori bailing chant.

Elsdon Best 1925, 248, 250: 'The *karakia tataa*, or bailing-charms were recited while the process of bailing was going on, but apparently not on all occasions. The following is said to be a charm repeated when bailing a canoe:

Mimiti pakora te tai tapu ki Hawaiki
Ararawa E! Kawea au ki uta
Te Kohu-tirikawa E! Kawea au ki uta
Ki te ahuru i uta, ki te tota i uta
Ki te moenga i uta
E au ai taku moe.

In this effusion the reciter calls upon two beings, either sea-monsters or ancestral spirits (and one being can represent both), to convey him to shore – that is, to his destination, to the sheltered home where sleep is sound. . .

In rough weather, when a canoe was shipping much water, two men were employed at each *puna wai*, or bailing-well. They were stationed on opposite sides of the hole in the floor, and filled their bailers alternately. As one man filled his bailer with a scooping motion, the other was emptying the contents of his over the side . . .

[The] handle in some Maori bailers has been fashioned into phallic form.'

[8] Bailing and Old Norse poetry.

(On the bailing out of vessels in the Norse world, cf. Falk 1912, 5ff.; Jesch 2001, 176; on regulations governing bailing duties, see *KL*, s.v. *Sjörätt* and references.)

(a) Einarr skálaglamm Helgason's Vellekla, stanza 5:

Hljóta munk, né hlítik,
Hertýs, of þat frýju,
fyr ǫrþeysi at ausa
austr víngnóðar flausta.

I shall have to bail (nor do I need to be urged to it) the brine of the wine-ship of the War-god for the urgent driver of ships. (Trans. Foote and Wilson 1970, 366)

(Foote and Wilson remark in this connection: 'The men in Hákon's following who first heard this poem [i.e. *Vellekla*] were Norwegian warriors and yeomen, but they were also born seamen. With great skill Einar makes his demand for silence an evocation of the Viking's way of life, a coast of fjords and skerries, stormy weather, dangerous sailing, the drenching weight of the wave breaking over the ship, the labour of bailing.')

(b) Snorri Sturluson, Edda (SnE, 92, 94):

Hver ró sævar heiti? . . . Húmr, sem Brennu-Njáll kvað:

Senn jósu vér, svanni,
sextán en brim vexti
– dreif á hafskips húfa
húm – í fjórum rúmum.

What terms for **sea** are there?. . . The dark, as Brennu-Nial said: Together sixteen of us baled out, lady, in four stations, and the surf rose. The dark was driven on to the main-ship's strakes. (Trans. Faulkes 1987, 139–41)

(c) Verses from Friðþjófs saga ins frœkna 1901, 29, 32:

Menn sé 'k ausa
í meginveðri
sex á Elliða
en sjau róa
Þat er gunnhvǫtum
glíkt í stafni
Friðþjófi, er fram
fellr við árar.

I see six men bail on Elliði in stormy weather and seven are rowing. The one in the stem who strains at the oars resembles battle-doughty Friðþjófr.

Jusu vér, meðan
yfir gekk svǫlúr,
bragnar teitir,
á bæði borð
tíu dœgr ok átta.

We, cheerful fellows, bailed for eighteen days while cold spray (from waves) came over both gunwales.

(d) Stanza attributed in Morkinskinna to an Icelandic poet called Eldjárn (Eldj):

Hví samir hitt geðstirðum hirðmanni at dúsa? Vest nú knár, riddari enn hári, þótt kjǫl kosti. Þats satt, at býðk Giffarði reiða byttu: austrs til hár í breiðhúfuðum hesti hvaljarðar.

Why is it fitting for an unbending retainer to lie there and rest? Be active now, old knight, although the keel [ship] is sorely tried. It's true that I tell Giffarðr to swing the bucket: the bilge water is too high in the broad-bellied horse of the whale land [sea, ship]. (Prose order and translation as in *Morkinskinna* 2000, 304)

(This stanza is probably to be regarded as a *níðvísa*; cf. Almqvist 1965, 70–73.)

(e) In chapter 17 of *Grettis saga* (*ÍF* VII, 48–56) there are four items of *dróttkvætt*-poetry (a couplet (v. 13) and three full stanzas (vv. 14, 15, 16)) said by the surrounding prose to have been declaimed in connection with bailing. (Two of these (vv. 13 and 14) are, like the verse attributed to Eldjárn (see (d) above), to be taken as *níðvísur*; cf. Almqvist 1965, 67–70; Poole 2003.)

[9] Complaint in work songs about lack of drink, poor drink, etc.

(a) Swedish sailors' song (see Villner 1980, 22):

En sjöman han får slita långt mera ondt än godt, ja, ja,
Salt vatten får han dricka och äta gammal kost.

(b) Work chant from southern Africa (Nkuna clan of the Thonga tribe) (see Junod 1927, II 189, 284):

Ba hi shani sa! Ehe!
Ba ku hi hlupha! Ehe!
Ba nwa makhofi! Ehe!
Ba nga hi nyiki! Ehe!

They treat us badly! Ehe! They are hard on us! Ehe! They drink their coffee! Ehe! And they give us none! Ehe!

(c) Sailors' and dock labourers' work song, usually associated with Dunkerque (see Coussemaker 1856, 271):

Ali, alo, pour Maschero!
Il boit le vin et nous donn' de l'eau.
Ali, ali, alo!

[10] Two reinterpretations in Verse A

(a) *krýpk at keldu* (line 7):

The conventional modern interpretation assumes that the words in question refer to stooping to fill the bucket (*bytta*) mentioned in l. 5 from some freshwater spring (*kelda*) ashore, or possibly stretching oneself out on the ground to drink from such a freshwater spring (cf. *LP*, 348). (Such an interpretation would follow, at least to some extent, from the prose of *Eir* (321) which tells how Þórhallr the Hunter carried (presumably) fresh water aboard his ship and drank some of it before declaiming Verse A. Cf. Note 11.

RP's interpretation: The expression originally referred to bailing. There are three ways in which it might do this (presented here in increasing order of probability):

(i) It is not impossible that *kelda* refers to the place where bailing was carried out (cf. the expression 'bailing-well' in the quotation in Appendix [7] above). (The words *kelda* and *austrrúm* (see Falk, 1912, 83–84) would, by this interpretation, be more or less synonymous.) Translation: 'I crouch at the bailing-well'.

(ii) In *SnE* (124; cf. 151) we find this verse (v. 477) in a group headed in some manuscripts '*Sjóvarheiti*' which gives a list of terms (*heiti*) for sea or seawater:

Gnat vǫrr vika
vǫzt hóp ok mið
vatn djúp ok kaf
vík tjǫrn ok sík
stormr díki hylr
straumr lœkr ok bekkr
áll bruðr kelda
iða fors ok kíll.

> Crashing, wake, league, fishing-ground, inlet and fishing-bank, water, deep and submersion, cove, tarn and canal, storm, ditch, pool, current, stream and brook, channel, spring, fount, eddy, waterfall and firth. (Trans. Faulkes 1987, 161)

This shows that *kelda* in its sense '(freshwater) spring' acted as a *heiti* for 'sea' or 'seawater' apparently simply by virtue of denoting a (type of) body of water (cf. the preceding *bruðr*, 'spring, well'). *Translation*: 'I stoop to seawater.'

(iii) In *SnE* (124; cf. Note 13), *Kelda* is found in a list of what appear to be names for personified waves and must be thought of as a woman. *At krjúpa at* had a metaphorical sense of 'to creep to', 'to grovel to'; and *at krjúpa at Keldu*, literally 'to grovel to Kelda', where Kelda represents the wave or the bilge-water, would be a mildly sexualised expression for the unpleasant task of bailing. *Translation*: 'I grovel to Kelda.'

(There may have been some combination of (ii) and (iii). The activity of *at krjúpa at Keldu* seems in Verse A to be going on more or less simultaneously with that of *at reiða byttu* (so 557); and the phrase *at reiða byttu* as it appears in the stanza attributed to Eldjárn in *Morkinskinna* (see Appendix [8(d)]) can scarcely refer to any other activity than bailing.)

(b) *mér samir l*áð . . . *lasta* (lines 3-4; the emendation to *láð* is widely accepted.)

The conventional modern interpretation takes these words as meaning 'it is fitting that I disparage this land', where 'land' refers to the country or place where the poet finds himself: he expresses his disappointment at the lack of wine there. This would agree with the prose of Eir in which Þorfinnr's expedition has not found grape-vines growing at Straum(s) fjǫrðr but only does so at the more southerly Hóp, after Þórhallr has broken away from it.

RP's interpretation takes *láð* in the sense of 'land' as opposed to 'sea' and the whole phrase as expressing the sentiment that he scorns the land and (by implication) landlubbers. Cf. the sneering reference to *þeirs leyfa lǫnd* in Verse B. Such jibes are common in seamen's songs in which rivalry with, or antagonism towards, landsmen is often voiced. There would (it is suggested) have been two alliterative formulae applied to the contrary attitudes of the landsman and the seaman to the land: *at leyfa* (or *lofa*) *lǫnd* (or *land* or *láð*), 'to praise the land' (as the landlubber does; cf. Verse B); and *at lasta lǫnd* (or *land* or *láð*), 'to disparage the land' (as the seaman would). These formulae would be based on these two attested alliterative pairs expressing antithesis: (a) *láð*, 'land' ~ *lǫgr*, 'sea' (e.g. in the set phrase *um láð og lög*, 'on land and at sea'; cf. C-V, 376); (b) and *at leyfa* (*lofa*), 'to praise' ~ *at lasta*, 'to speak ill of' (cf. e.g. *ÍF*, XII, 290). *Translation*: 'It is fitting that I speak ill of land.'

Further points in connection with Verse A:

(i) Personification of *láð*: *láð* (neuter), 'land', is sometimes a base-word in kennings for 'woman' in the Icelandic *rímur* where it sometimes assumes feminine gender (see Finnur Jónsson 1926–28, 232–33). And incomplete kennings in which women are the referents appear not infrequently in skaldic diction itself. A woman *Láð* personifying the land may, then, in Verse A be contraposed to a woman *Kelda* representing the sea (or a wave or seawater or bilgewater).

(ii) There are possible affinities with *níðvísur* ('satiric verses', on which cf. *KL*, *s.v. Nid* and refs): see Appendix [8(d)] (i.e. *Eldj*) and [8(e)] above for *níðvísur* connected to accounts of bailing. The verbs *lasta* (in Verse A) and *lofa* (in Verse B) may be echoes of the vocabulary of *níð* (cf. *lǫstr*, 'defamation' ~ *lof*, 'praise' in *Grg*, II 183: *Hvárki á maðr at yrkja um mann lǫst né lof*, 'A man may not compose defamation or praise about anyone.' See further Almqvist 1965, 51-60, 258 and refs.

(iii) Although the interpretation of the words *mér samir lasta láð* proposed here (cf. Appendix [10(b)] above) is considered the most probable, an interpretation of them closer to the conventional one would not necessarily preclude the idea that the verse was connected with bailing; cf. Note 17.

(iv) In line 6, 544's *stýra* is probably more original in text of *Eir* than 557's *reiða*. But the reading *reiða* is equally possible and suggests quite possibly the existence of stanzas similar to Verse A in oral tradition.

[11] Recent contributions by Jónas Kristjánsson and Dick Harrison

(A) Jónas Kristjánsson (2005): **(i)** Suggests that the Furðustrandir of *Eric the Red's saga* actually existed and considers himself able to locate them on the eastern side of Newfoundland's northern peninsula (map, p. 21; aerial photograph, p. 23). **(ii)** Also considers himself able to trace with some accuracy the route of Þorfinnr karlsefni Þórðarson's expedition to Vínland and e.g. to pinpoint the place in Newfoundland where Þorvaldr, son of Eric the Red was killed (map, p. 21).

Richard Perkins: **(i)** Thinks it more probable than not that the Furðustrandir of *Eric the Red's saga* never existed (*FE*; *MS*, 56). **(ii)** Thinks it unwise to attempt to localise the places in Vínland mentioned in *Gr* and *Eir* or events said to have taken place there in these sources (*MS*, 31–32).

(B) Dick Harrison (2007, ch. 5: 'Gudrid koloniserar Amerika' (with reference to Guðríðr Þorbjarnardóttir)): **(i)** Appears to take seriously as historical fact the existence of not only Þórhallr the Hunter (p. 153) but also of Freydís, daughter of Eric the Red (to such an extent that he thinks it may have been she who lost the ring-headed cloak-pin discovered in the 1960s at L'Anse aux Meadows (p. 160)). (Freydís is the villain of *Gr* (chs 7–8) perpetrating various evils, including personally executing five women members of an expedition to Vínland. In ch. 11 of *Eir*, pregnant and single-handed, she puts to flight a band of pursuing Skrælingar by slapping her exposed breast with a sword.) **(ii)** Argues that Guðríðr was the moving force behind Þorfinnr's attempt to settle in North America but that her role as such has been overlooked largely because she was a woman.

Richard Perkins: **(i)** Thinks it more likely than not that neither Þórhallr nor Freydís ever existed in reality but were rather invented by saga-authors, Þórhallr by the author of *Eir* largely to act as a mouthpiece for Verses A and B, Freydís (with a name perhaps too pagan-sounding to be real) possibly as a foil to the virtuous and Christian Guðríðr Þorbjarnardóttir who doubtless did exist (see *MS*, 47-48, 49, 50, 53). **(ii)** Finds Harrison's theory that Guðríðr was the moving force behind a venture to establish a colony in North America to be based on an over-interpretation of minimal evidence in sources at any rate which must be treated with considerable circumspection (cf. Note 19).

[12] Sources for medieval Norse visits to America other than *Gr* and *Eir*:

Archaeological: the Viking-Age site at L'Anse aux Meadows, northern Newfoundland, discovered in 1960 by Helge and Anne Stine Ingstad (see Ingstad 1985).

Written: Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* (completed *c*. 1073); Ari Þorgilsson, *Íslendingabók* (written 1122–33); minor written sources include the Icelandic annals and geographical treatises.

Bibliography and abbreviations

544 = (the text of *Eir* in) AM 544 quarto (part of Hauksbók)

557 = (the text of *Eir* in) AM 557 quarto (Skálholtsbók)

Alfræði íslenzk. Islandsk encyklopædisk litteratur. I. *Cod. mbr. AM. 194, 8vo*. 1908. Ed. Kr. Kålund.

Almqvist, Bo 1965. *Norrön niddiktning* 1. *Nid mot furstar*.

Best, Elsdon 1925. *The Maori canoe*.

Coussemaker, E. de 1856. *Chants populaires des Flamands de France*.

C-V = Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson 1957. *An Icelandic-English dictionary*. 2nd ed. by William A. Craigie.

EB = *The Exeter Book* 1936. Ed. George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie.

Eir = *Eiríks saga rauða* [*Eric the Red's saga*]. In Jansson 1945, 26–81. (References are to the numbered sections into which Jansson divides the texts.)

Eldj = the verse *Hví samir hitt at dúsa*, etc. attributed to Eldjárn. In *Morkinskinna* 2000, 304.

Falk, Hjalmar 1912. 'Altnordisches Seewesen'. *Wörter und Sachen* 4, 1–122.

Faulkes 1987 = Snorri Sturluson. *Edda* 1987. Trans. Anthony Faulkes.

FE = Richard Perkins 1976. 'The Furðustrandir of *Eiríks saga rauða*'. *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 9, 51–98.

Finnur Jónsson 1912. 'Sagaernes lausavísur'. *Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie*, 1–57.

Finnur Jónsson 1926–28. *Ordbog til de af Samfund til Udg. af gml. Nord. Litteratur udgivne rímur samt til de af Dr. O. Jiriczek udgivne Bósarímur*.

Foote, Peter and David M. Wilson 1970. *The Viking achievement*.

Friðþjófs saga ins frækna 1901. Ed. Ludvig Larsson.

GÍM = Ólafur Halldórsson 1978. *Grænland í miðaldaritum*.

GO = Marius Hægstad and Alf Torp 1909. *Gamalnorsk ordbok med nynorsk tyding*.

Gr = *Grœnlendinga saga*. In *Eyrbyggja saga* 1935. Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson. Íslenzk fornrit IV, 239–69. [*The Greenlanders' saga*]

Grg = *Grágás. Islændernes Lovbog i Fristatens Tid udgivet efter Det kongelige Bibliotheks Haandskrift* 1852. Ed. Vilhjálmur Finsen.

Harrison, Dick 2007. 'Gudrid koloniserar Amerika'. In Dick Harrison and Kristina Svensson. *Vikingaliv*, 147–75.

Hauksbók 1892–96. Ed. Eiríkur Jónsson and Finnur Jónsson.

Heiðr = *Heiðreks saga. Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs* 1924. Ed. Jón Helgason.

Hermann Pálsson 1969. 'Íslenzkar fornsögur og Isidor frá Seville'. *Tímarit Þjóðræknisfélags Íslendinga. Fimmtugasti árgangur 1968*, 35–38.

Hermann Pálsson 2000. 'Vínland revisited'. *Northern studies* 35, 11–38.

ÍF = *Íslenzk fornrit* 1933–. (All references to vol. IV are to the edition of 1985).

Ingstad, Anne Stine 1985. *The Norse discovery of America*. I: *Excavations of a Norse settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland 1961–1968*.

Jansson, Sven B. F. 1945. *Sagorna om Vinland*. I. *Handskrifterna till Erik den rödes saga*.

JÁ = Jón Árnason 1887. *Íslenzkar gátur*.

Jesch, Judith 2001. *Ships and men in the late Viking Age*.

Jones, Gwyn 1986. *The Norse Atlantic saga*. 2nd ed.

Jónas Kristjánsson 2005. *The first settler of the New World. The Vinland expedition of Thorfinn Karlsefni*.
Jón Jóhannesson 1956. *Íslendinga saga*. I. *Þjóðveldisöld*.
Junod, Henri A. 1927. *The life of a South African tribe*. 2nd ed.
KL = *Kulturhistoriskt lexikon för nordisk medeltid* 1956–78.
LP = Finnur Jónsson 1931. *Lexicon poeticum antiquæ linguæ septentrionalis. Ordbog over det norsk-islandske skjaldesprog oprindelig forfattet af Sveinbjörn Egilsson*.
McDougall, Ian 1997. 'The enigmatic *einfœtingr* of *Eiríks saga rauða*'. In *Frejas psalter. En psalter i 40 afdelinger til brug for Jonna Louis-Jensen*. Ed. Bergljót S. Kristjánsdóttir and Peter Springborg, 128–32.
MMHP = *The Vinland sagas. The Norse discovery of America. Grænlendinga saga and Eirik's saga* 1965. Trans. Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson.
Morkinskinna 2000 = *Morkinskinna. The earliest Icelandic chronicle of the Norwegian kings (1030–1157)*, 2000. Trans. Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade.
MS = Richard Perkins 2004. 'Medieval Norse visits to America: millennial stocktaking'. *Saga-Book* 28, 29–69.
Munn, W. A. n. d. *Wineland voyages. Location of Helluland, Markland and Vinland*.
'Newjack' and C. Farrell. 'Kissing the gunner's daughter'. United Kingdom – Naval discipline for boys. Part 1: 1780–1860. http://www.corpun.com/kiss1.htm.
Perkins, Richard 1984–85. 'Rowing chants and the origins of *dróttkvæðr háttr*'. *Saga-Book* 21, 155–221.
Poole, Russell 2003. '*Lof en eigi háð*? The riddle of *Grettis saga* verse 14'. *Saga-Book* 27, 25–47.
RP = Richard Perkins.
Skj = Finnur Jónsson, ed., 1912–15. *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*.
Snorri Sturluson. *Edda* 1987. Trans. Anthony Faulkes.
SnE = Snorri Sturluson. *Edda. Skáldskaparmál* 1998. Ed. Anthony Faulkes.
Taylor, Archer 1951. *English riddles from oral tradition*.
Vigfusson, Gudbrand and F. York Powell 1879. *An Icelandic prose reader*, 1879.
Villner, Katarina 1980. '*När lantman trygg på landet står, en sjöman emot böljan flår.' Antagonism mellan sjöman och bönder belyst av folkliga sjömansvisor*. (Unpublished Uppsats för fortsättningskurs i etnologi, Institutet för Folklivsforskning, Stockholms Universitet).