

# **Songs for the End of the World**

## The Poetry of Guðmundur Erlendsson of Fell in Sléttuhlíð

Katelin Marit Parsons

Dissertation towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
2020



**UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND**  
**SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES**

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FACULTY OF ICELANDIC AND  
COMPARATIVE CULTURAL STUDIES

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*Songs for the End of the World: The Poetry of Guðmundur Erlendsson of Fell in Sléttuhlíð*

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## Abstract

Guðmundur Erlendsson of Fell in Sléttuhlíð (c. 1595–1670) was one of the leading poets of seventeenth-century Iceland. No man is an island, however, nor are islands populated exclusively by men. The thesis examines how Guðmundur Erlendsson's poetry and scribal practices are deeply integrated into the social life of his family, community and literary circles. He uses poetry as a medium through which to disseminate information on contemporary events outside Iceland and to respond to personal, community and international crisis events: from epidemics, natural disasters and wars to his own exile to the remote island of Grímsey for feuding with another poet. For Guðmundur Erlendsson, the end of the world is a crisis of morality in which literature is a source of consolation, hope and redemption. The thesis ends with a codicological study of major manuscripts of Guðmundur Erlendsson's poetry and their close connection to early modern women's literacy in Iceland.

**Keywords:** Guðmundur Erlendsson of Fell in Sléttuhlíð, seventeenth-century Icelandic literature, early modern literacy, manuscript culture

## Ágrip

„Kveðið við heimsins enda: Skáldið Guðmundur Erlendsson í Felli í Sléttuhlíð“

Guðmundur Erlendsson í Felli í Sléttuhlíð telst meðal höfuðskálda á Íslandi á 17. öld. Enginn maður er þó eyland og ekkert eyland er einungis byggt af karlmönnum. Í ritgerðinni eru könnuð tengsl Guðmundar við nærsamfélagið og hlutverk kveðskapar og handritamenningar í því umhverfi en jafnframt höfð hliðsjón af stöðu Íslands á menningarlegum útjaðri Evrópu á öld mikilla umróta. Þrátt fyrir jaðarsetningu Íslands var landið ekki einangrað frá sjóþjóðum Atlantshafsins og bera kvæði og sálmar Guðmundar vitni um að Ísland hafi verið frjór jarðvegur fyrir aðkomubókmenntir og nýjar fregnir af fjarlægðum atburðum. Kveðskapur Guðmundar er í senn fréttaveita, fræðslumiðill og sálarhjálp. Sálmar og vers festa í bundið mál ævisöguleg augnablik í lífi og fjölskyldu skáldsins, upphafningu valdsmanna og -kvenna og hvatningu til alþjóðunnar til betra lífennis í sátt við Guð og menn.

Lífurni Guðmundar sjálfs einkenndist þó ekki alltaf af sátt og samlyndi í garð náungans. Árið 1631 var hann sendur í eins konar útleið til Grímseyjar eftir illdeilur við Magnús Ólafsson í Laufási og Benedikt son Magnúsar. Á ystu mörkum hins byggilega heims orti Guðmundur sér til huggunar en einnig til að skrásetja samfélagið þar. Í meðförum Guðmundar er bundið mál ekki einungis verkfæri til að lýsa hratt hnignandi veröld og óáran við endalok tímans heldur einnig til að fagna guðdómlegri endurheimt úr ólgusjó heimsins. Í anda húmanismans telur hann sig búa á bjartri gullöld trúar og bókþekkingar.

Í síðasta hluta ritgerðarinnar er varðveisla kvæðabóka Guðmundar til skoðunar. Niðurstaða handritafræðilegrar athugunar er að aðeins ein þeirra hefur varðveist með vissu. Sú heitir Gígja og mun hafa verið upprunalega samsett í tilefni giftingar Margrétar dóttur Guðmundar um 1654. Brot úr eiginhandarriti Guðmundar að Gígju finnst í stærri syrpu sem mun hafa verið í eigu Skúla sonar Guðmundar. Gígjuhandritin eru flest skrifuð fyrir konur eða varðveitast í eigu kvenna og varpa frekara ljósi á þátttöku kvenna í íslenski handritamenningu árnýaldar.

**Lykilorð:** Guðmundur Erlendsson í Felli í Sléttuhlíð, íslenskar bókmenntir 17. aldar, læsi á árnýöld, handritamenning

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The errors in this dissertation are, of course, my own. However, in the spirit of the scribes of early modern Iceland, I hope that wiser readers will come to correct and not to criticize them.

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*Í minningu ofurlítis ljóss:  
brot meginlandsins, hluti veraldar okkar,  
Guðmundur Róbert Guðmundsson,  
fæddur 7. október 2015, dáinn 15. október 2015*

## 1.0 The poet at the end of the world

Aldatal allt  
endast nú senn;  
hvað við tekur  
veit Guð sjálfur.  
Tólf eru eftir  
talin ár þeirra,  
en dauði er dagur  
dóms vor allra.<sup>1</sup>  
(‘The reckoning of ages  
will soon draw to its end;  
God alone knows  
what will come after.  
Twelve years remain  
yet to be counted,  
and death is the day  
of judgement for us all.’)

In 1658, when the Reverend Guðmundur Erlendsson composed the poem *Einvaldsóður*, he earnestly warned his audience that an unhinged world was rapidly nearing its close. Guðmundur was a poet on the edge, living both at the end of time and on the northernmost margin of the inhabited earth. Guðmundur’s childhood home of Fell in Sléttuhlíð is situated on the eastern side of the fjord of Skagafjörður in North Iceland, beyond which lies only the open ocean. Despite the geographical remoteness of the tiny parish of Sléttuhlíð from the cities of early modern Europe, Guðmundur’s apocalyptic view of time was shared by many during the first half of the seventeenth century. In framing history as a catalogue of signs and portents, under the weight of which the earth’s final age was on the brink of collapse, Guðmundur was deeply influenced by many of the same ephemeral tracts, pamphlets and ballads as circulated in other Protestant nations in his day.

Perhaps paradoxically, Guðmundur Erlendsson is among the early modern Icelandic poets whose corpus is best preserved for posterity. Following the earlier models of Einar Sigurðsson of Eydalir and Ólafur Jónsson of Sandar, Guðmundur created at least two carefully curated volumes of his own hymns and songs. As demonstrated in this thesis, the first leaves of one of Guðmundur’s autograph poetry manuscripts have survived intact: the oldest manuscript of its kind in Iceland.

It would be a mistake to suggest that Guðmundur Erlendsson’s project of cultivating his legacy was a case of a minor poet scribbling ditties down for his family’s amusement. In fact, it is difficult to

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<sup>1</sup> *Einvaldsóður*, st. 293. All references to the text of *Einvaldsóður* refer to Robert Cook’s unpublished edition.

overstate the centrality of Guðmundur Erlendsson as a participant in early modern Icelandic literary culture. Far from being a backward country parson, Guðmundur Erlendsson was the most popular and widely disseminated religious poet in North Iceland during his own lifetime. Guðmundur lived most of his life within a day's ride of the bishopric of Hólar in Hjaltadalur, which in the seventeenth century was one of Iceland's main centres of learning and literary production.

If Hallgrímur Pétursson is the undisputed Bach of seventeenth-century Icelandic literature,<sup>2</sup> then Guðmundur Erlendsson is its prolific Telemann. Þórunn Sigurðardóttir has estimated that only Hallgrímur Pétursson surpasses Guðmundur Erlendsson in terms of the sheer number of extant manuscript copies of poems and hymns.<sup>3</sup> However, Hallgrímur Pétursson does not seem to have assembled his poetry into large manuscript collections: the task of doing so has fallen to generations of later scholars.

Unfortunately, the bulk of Guðmundur Erlendsson's poetry remains unedited. To gain a comprehensive picture of his oeuvre would require delving into hundreds of manuscripts and editing thousands upon thousands of lines of verse. This poses an obvious challenge to the study of his practices as a poet and scribe; the material examined within the scope of the present work is only the tip of the iceberg. Despite the enduring popularity of certain of Guðmundur Erlendsson's poems in later centuries, the focus here is on the poet's own activities and the circulation of his poetry within his contemporary social circles: (a) for whom, about whom and under what circumstances Guðmundur initially composed and performed his poetry, and (b) for whom and why he and members of his immediate family created written copies of his work. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate how deeply Guðmundur Erlendsson's poetry and scribal practices are integrated into the social life of his family, his community and the wider literary milieu.

The thesis is divided into three main sections. The first deals more broadly with the seventeenth century in Icelandic literature and history, including conceptions of Iceland's literary and cultural isolation during the early modern period. Drawing on recent research in the fields of literature, manuscript studies and cultural history, it provides historical background to the thesis's second section, which examines Guðmundur Erlendsson's career as a poet and a parson. Building on the prior work of Margrét Eggertsdóttir and Þórunn Sigurðardóttir in particular, it is a loosely chronological study of Guðmundur and his involvement as a poet in his kinship and literary networks.

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<sup>2</sup> Helgi Skúli Kjartansson, "Barokkmeistarar heima og heiman: Hallgrímur og Bach," *Hallgrímsstefna: Fyrirlestrar frá ráðstefnu um Hallgrím Pétursson og verk hans sem haldin var í Hallgrímskirkju 22. mars 1997*, ed. by Margrét Eggertsdóttir & Þórunn Sigurðardóttir (Reykjavík: Listvinafélag Hallgrímskirkju, 1997), 109–17.

<sup>3</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, "'Á Krists ysta jarðar hala': Um séra Guðmund Erlendsson í Felli og verk hans," *Skagfirðingabók* 37 (2016): 171–84, at 172.

Within this section, emphasis is placed on discussion of songs and hymns that Guðmundur himself made an effort to preserve, but the existence of informal compositions that Guðmundur excluded from his poetry anthologies is also discussed. The third and final section is a codicological study of the three most important manuscripts preserving Guðmundur Erlendsson's poetry: Lbs 1529 4to (hereafter 1529), JS 232 4to (232) and Lbs 1055 4to (1055). The structure and age of these three manuscripts are examined in greater detail, together with the fragmentary JS 250 4to (250). For the most part, research on Guðmundur Erlendsson's poetry has focused on individual compositions and genres, rather than the preservation of his corpus as a whole. A better understanding of the construction of these manuscripts brings much-needed insight into the nature of his anthologies, as well as the contemporary transmission of Guðmundur Erlendsson's poetry and his own engagement in the manuscript culture of his day. An unexpected finding of this study was the close connection between the seventeenth-century circulation of Guðmundur Erlendsson's poetry and early modern women's literacy.

A second unexpected finding in carrying out the research project was that 1529 contains an early autograph copy of one of Guðmundur Erlendsson's poetry anthologies, most likely dating from c. 1654–1655. This is the oldest extant manuscript of its kind in Icelandic, since the earlier manuscript models on which Guðmundur based his anthologies, such as the songbook of Ólafur Jónsson of Sandar, have survived only in later copies.

Guðmundur Erlendsson's surviving corpus is of a highly social nature in the sense that he composes largely for the ears of his family, friends, parishioners and patrons. Throughout Guðmundur's long career as a poet and parson, his social relationships are reinforced through the composition and performance of poetry and through the creation and exchange of manuscript copies of his work. He uses poetry as a medium through which to disseminate information on contemporary events outside Iceland and to respond to personal, community and international crisis events: from epidemics, natural disasters and wars to his own exile to Grímsey for feuding with a neighbouring poet.

No man is an island, nor are islands populated exclusively by men. In considering Guðmundur Erlendsson's participation as a poet in his family, community and wider social circles, an effort is made to document the ordinary people for and about whom Guðmundur wrote, whose lives have left few – if any – material traces behind them. These individuals range from an unnamed married daughter of Guðmundur's, whose son Einar commissioned a manuscript of his grandfather's poetry shortly before his marriage, to the maidservant Ólöf Magnúsdóttir of Fell in Sléttuhlíð, executed for infanticide in August of 1663.

For Guðmundur Erlendsson, the end of the world is a crisis of morality in which literature is a source of consolation, hope and redemption. There is an urgency to his poetry: a sense that he is appealing to the audience immediately before him, perhaps due to his conviction of the futile brevity of temporal posterity. To understand Guðmundur Erlendsson as a poet, it is equally important to understand him as a performer. He did not compose “for the drawer” in the manner of the casual Icelandic *skúffuskáld* or the elite reading pleasure of a closed circle of highly literate friends and family. He was a parson as well as an artist, accustomed to public preaching and keenly aware of the spiritual needs of his family, friends, parishioners and patrons. It would be somewhat of a stretch to describe Guðmundur Erlendsson as a people’s poet. He had received a formal education at the Latin school at Hólar, and he continued to interact closely with the elite of North Iceland throughout his life. Nevertheless, he valued the quality of simpleness: a style of poetic composition accessible to the unlearned. He accordingly resisted certain elements of contemporary baroque poetry in Iceland, such as elaborate wordplay and the use of intricate, complex metres.

In a similar vein, his selections in compiling his anthologies seem to have been guided mainly by (a) their intended use within the domestic households of his adult children and (b) their personal significance for the intended recipients. He took care in cultivating his legacy as a poet, but the self-curation of his poetry is intimately connected to personal and social relationships, rather than their aesthetic merit or their relevance to a future beyond that of the here-and-now.

### **Notes on normalization and translation**

Quotations from printed books have not been normalized, even where spelling differs from standard modern Icelandic. Quotations of unedited manuscript texts in Icelandic are normalized to modern Icelandic orthography, except where the text is highly fragmentary or otherwise ambiguous (as in the case of the binding fragments in 5.5.2). However, older word forms (such as *eg* and *hvör*) have been retained. Many important editions of early modern Icelandic texts quoted in this thesis use this principle of normalization, including the modern edition of the 1612 *Vísnaþók*.

Since the objective of this doctoral thesis is not to produce a scholarly edition of the poems and texts under discussion, only short excerpts are at issue. In general, a diplomatic or semi-diplomatic transcription is most useful if the manuscript’s context is clear and the full text is provided. In the case of texts printed in the early modern era, information on the date and place of publication are readily available. While the present thesis does include a detailed description of the major manuscripts preserving Guðmundur Erlendsson’s poetry, this is not the case for secondary

manuscripts such as Lbs 3708 8vo. Normalization also facilitates comparison between the seventeenth-century manuscripts 1529, 232 and 250 and the late eighteenth-century manuscript 1055, which is a copy of a now-lost exemplar from 1692–4.

English translations have been included for quotations in Icelandic but not for incipits and titles of works unless these are clearly relevant to the discussion. Translation of Icelandic alliterative verse is notoriously difficult. While the present author does not aspire to reproduce the metrical complexity, there are also no modern English equivalents for most aspects of the poetic language, including kennings, *heiti* and *blómað mál*. The translations are thus a poor reflection of the literary quality of the original text.



## 2.0 Defining an era

Nú erum komnir  
fyrir náð drottins  
úr myrkri því  
til miskunnar birtu.  
Ljós Guðs orða  
leiftrað hefur  
hér nær sem  
um hundrað ára.<sup>4</sup>

(‘Now we have emerged, by the grace of the Lord, from the darkness to the brightness of mercy. The light of God’s words has flickered here for nearly a hundred years.’)

One of the earliest attempts at compiling a literary history of early modern Iceland, Páll Vídalín’s *Recensus poetarum et scriptorum Islandorum hujus et superioris seculi*, contains an inventory of poets and writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with no systematic distinction between poets of the pre- and post-Reformation era.<sup>5</sup> Virtually all subsequent literary histories draw a line at 1550, the year in which Bishop Jón Arason of Hólar and his adult sons Björn and Ari were executed, following their failed attack on the farm of Sauðafell in West Iceland.

The kingdom of Denmark-Norway officially adopted Lutheranism in 1536. In Iceland, the diocese of Skálholt officially followed suit in 1540, but Jón Arason resisted the implementation of Lutheran teachings in his diocese of Hólar for many years, going so far as to ride to Skálholt and take the incumbent bishop there into custody. The Reformation in Iceland did not come without violence, but conflict was mainly limited to the uppermost echelons of Icelandic society and representatives of the Danish crown. The transition in most local communities was gradual and relatively peaceful: priests retained their livings, while monks and nuns no longer served a role in the Church but were nevertheless not turned out of their religious houses. Celibacy was never the norm in Iceland, even if priests’ partners were not recognized as such by the Church, so admission of clerical marriage simply formalized existing, socially accepted relationships. At the same time, royal control of Iceland tightened. If the Reformation legitimized the status of women who co-habitated with priests, the new morality laws of 1564 – the *Stóridómur* – soon imposed harsh penalties on all those who

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<sup>4</sup> *Einvaldsóður*, st. 275.

<sup>5</sup> Páll Vídalín, *Recensus poetarum et scriptorum Islandorum hujus et superioris seculi*, ed. Jón Samsonarson, Rit Stofnunar Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi 29 (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1985).

conceived a child outside of marriage, mainly in the form of fines to be paid to the Crown. Deviancy and immorality were now matters for the secular courts, with one-size-fits-all punishments for the guilty. Whereas men and women could earlier look to the Church to mediate divine forgiveness for their sins, often expressing their repentance in the form of penance, the *Stóridómur* made no allowance for the offenders' circumstances.

From a literary perspective, however, not much changed in terms of the social milieu in which ordinary Icelandic poets and authors lived and thrived. In Björn K. Þórólfsson's seminal study *Rímur fyrir 1600*, for instance, the Reformation is not a decisive watershed in the development of *rímur* poetry.<sup>6</sup> However, the Reformation did bring with it new influences and new genres, including hymns for communal singing and vernacular religious prose for domestic reading and religious instruction in the home.

Writing in the early twentieth century, scholar Páll Eggert Ólason divided the period from the mid-sixteenth century through to the mid-eighteenth century into three distinct literary periods:

- The *siðskiptaöld* ('Reformation Age'), beginning with the arrival of the printing press in Iceland (c. 1530) and ending with the death of Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson of Hólar in 1627.
- The *galdraöld* ('Age of Magic'), from 1625/1627–1690.
- The *millibilsöld* ('In-between Age'), beginning in 1690 and ending in c. 1750 with the Enlightenment and the writings of Eggert Ólafsson.<sup>7</sup>

The focus of Páll Eggert's research is on the first of these periods, 1530–1627, on which he wrote a four-volume monograph – *Menn og menntir* – that remains a seminal work in the field. His only comment about the *galdraöld* is the terse judgement that “Galdrar og hjátrú einkenna þetta tímabil” ('Magic and superstition characterize the period').<sup>8</sup> The term *lærdómsöld* ('Age of Learning') was later coined by Sigurður Nordal to describe the period 1630–1750 in Icelandic literature, in direct opposition to Páll Eggert's *galdraöld* and other overwhelmingly negative descriptions of the period.<sup>9</sup>

At the time that Sigurður Nordal published his influential essay on the continuity of Icelandic literary history, the literature of the early modern period beyond 1627 was not well known, with the exception of the works of poets Hallgrímur Pétursson and Stefán Ólafsson. Sigurður Nordal himself

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<sup>6</sup> Björn K. Þórólfsson, *Rímur fyrir 1600* (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska fræðafélag, 1934).

<sup>7</sup> Páll Eggert Ólason, *Menn og menntir siðskiptaaldarinnar á Íslandi* (Reykjavík: Bókaverzlun Guðm. Gamalíelssonar, 1919–1926), vol. 1, 2–3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Sigurður Nordal, *Samhengi og samtíð*, ed. Jóhannes Nordal. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1996), vol. 1, 29. The essay “Samhengið í íslenskum bókmenntum” was originally published in 1924.

wrote extensively on the early modern period, and his research on the poetry of the *lærdómsöld* is in many respects a direct continuation of Páll Eggert's *Menn og menntir*. The scope of Páll Eggert Ólason's extensive research on the Icelandic poets of the Reformation period ends with those born in the year 1600.<sup>10</sup> The Rev. Guðmundur Erlendsson (c. 1595–1670) is one of the youngest poets included in Páll Eggert's study, together with the Rev. Jón Jónsson of Melar (c. 1596–1663) and Þorvaldur Rögnvaldsson (c. 1596/1597–1680), whose brother Jón Rögnvaldsson was the first Icelander to be executed by burning for sorcery in 1625. As Páll Eggert himself pointed out, 1600 was an arbitrary cut-off date, and he listed the names of nine poets and writers born in the first years of the seventeenth century whose work he felt should be covered in a later scholar's research.<sup>11</sup>

In connection with his lectures on Icelandic literary history at the University of Iceland, Sigurður Nordal prepared posthumously published biographies of the first six of the nine poets on Páll Eggert's list<sup>12</sup> and detailed biographies of 18 *yngrri skáld* ('younger poets') born in 1614–1680.<sup>13</sup> The organization of poets into the categories of "older" and "younger" on the basis of chronological birthdate makes sense mainly in the context of Páll Eggert's earlier work, as there is no clear-cut distinction between poets born in the 1600s and the 1610s. In addition to this lecture material, Nordal edited Jón Magnússon *þumlungur's Píslarsaga* and wrote a monograph on Hallgrímur Pétursson's Passion Hymns.<sup>14</sup> The full scope of his research into the period is unknown, as he is known to have destroyed some of his manuscripts on Icelandic literary history.<sup>15</sup>

Although Sigurður Nordal's definition of the *lærdómsöld* initially extended from 1630 to 1750, the two centuries following Bishop Jón Arason's execution were soon collapsed into a single literary period, still referred to as the *lærdómsöld*, which continued to serve as an umbrella term for the post-Reformation period into the twenty-first century. Already in 1929, Einar Ólafur Sveinsson was of the opinion that the literature of these two centuries, 1550–1750, was best studied as a single era, in a sweeping overview of the post-Reformation period that extends to Þórbergur Þórðarson and

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<sup>10</sup> Páll Eggert Ólason, *Menn og menntir*, vol. 4, 456.

<sup>11</sup> The Rev. Sigurður Jónsson of Presthólar, the Rev. Jón Magnússon of Laufás, the Rev. Magnús Pétursson of Prestbakki, the Rev. Jón Einarsson of Stærri-Árskógur, the Rev. Jón Arason of Vatnsfjörður, Pétur Einarsson of Ballará, the Rev. Tómas Þórðarson of Snæfjöll, Gísli Jónsson in Melrakkadalur and Finnur Sigurðsson of Akrar. Páll Eggert Ólason, *Menn og menntir*, vol. 4, 774.

<sup>12</sup> Sigurður Nordal, *Samhengi og samtíð*, vol. 1, 397–407.

<sup>13</sup> The Rev. Eiríkur Hallsson of Höfði, Guðmundur Andrússon, the Rev. Jón Þórðarson of Hvammur in Laxárdalur, Kolbeinn Grímsson Jöklaskáld, the Rev. Daði Halldórsson, Steinunn Finnsdóttir, Jón Eggertsson, Vigfús Jónsson (Leirulækjar-Fúsi), Sigurður Gíslason Dalaskáld, Guðmundur Bergþórsson, Bishop Steinn Jónsson of Hólar, Páll Jónsson Vídalín, Þorlákur Guðbrandsson (died in the *stórabóla* epidemic), Jón Einarsson (died in the *stórabóla* epidemic), Benedikt Magnússon Bech, Þormóður Eiríksson of Gvendareyjar, Jón Sigurðsson (son of Sigurður Gíslason Dalaskáld) and Þorvaldur Magnússon. Sigurður Nordal, *Samhengi og samtíð*, vol. 2, 41–111.

<sup>14</sup> Jón Magnússon, *Píslarsaga síra Jóns Magnússonar*, ed. Sigurður Nordal (Reykjavík: Almenna bókafélagið, 1967); Sigurður Nordal, *Hallgrímur Pétursson og Passíusálmarnir* (Reykjavík: Helgafell, 1970).

<sup>15</sup> Jóhannes Nordal, "Formáli," in Sigurður Nordal, *Samhengi og samtíð*, vol. 1, 10.

Halldór Laxness in the present day but examines only three authors writing before 1750, all of whom are clergymen: Jón Magnússon *þumlungur*, Hallgrímur Pétursson and Jón Vídalín.<sup>16</sup>

In recent years, it has become more common to speak of the *árnýöld* or early modern period when examining the period from about 1550–1750 in Icelandic literature. Defining a literary era on the basis of the metric of learning (even auto-learning manifested mainly in self-awareness of one's literary connectedness the past) excludes various forms of literature, including disaster poetry and poetry of calamities at sea, that appear to emerge in Iceland within this time period but fall outside of most definitions of learning or learned poetry. As with all descriptive titles, the term *lærdómsöld* foregrounds certain literary activities and influences while largely ignoring others.

Both Sigurður Nordal and Páll Eggert Ólason approach the literature of early modern Iceland primarily through the lens of literary and social developments within the country, rather than broader trends within those regions with which Icelanders were in closest contact. Some brief comments are made on the relationships between various Icelandic writers, but neither scholar delves deeply into the connections between literature in Iceland and abroad. Where mentioned at all, foreign influences tend to be equated with corruption and cultural and literary decay, imperiling the inner continuity of Icelandic literature. In Nordal's literary criticism in particular, the unbroken dialogue between past and present does not cross linguistic or national boundaries. Biographical research is a means of excavating the personality and emotional life of a long-dead author, as well as the formative lived experiences that directly molded that author's unique, personal voice.<sup>17</sup> In spite of Sigurður Nordal's own appraisal of 1630–1750 as an age of learning, his surviving lecture notes spend surprisingly little time on the proliferation of Neo-Latin works by Icelandic authors and poets in an era when Latin was an international language of higher education and scholarship throughout Europe.

A biographical approach allows for the detailed study of how major events in poets' personal lives shape their own writings, but not the spread of new literary currents or the reception of European and world literature within Iceland. More recent research on the literature of early modern Iceland tends to highlight the ways in which Icelanders engaged with contemporary literary and intellectual currents and innovations originating in mainland Europe. Margrét Eggertsdóttir's *Icelandic Baroque* and Þórunn Sigurðardóttir's *Heiður og huggun* are two major contributions to the study of the Icelandic poetry of the seventeenth century that do not entirely abandon biographical elements but use personal biography as a tool for locating poetry in the literary, cultural and social milieu of early

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<sup>16</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson, "Íslenzkir bókmentir eptir siðskipti," *Tímarit Þjóðræknisfélags Íslendinga* 11 (1929): 128–129.

<sup>17</sup> Vésteinn Ólason, "Bókmenntarýni Sigurðar Nordals," *Tímarit Máls og menningar* (1984): 11–13.

modern Iceland.<sup>18</sup> No less significant is Sigurður Pétursson's extensive research on Neo-Latin and Greek compositions by learned Icelanders and the influence of humanism in early modern Icelandic literature, as well as the patron-client relationships that frequently formed the impetus for literary production.<sup>19</sup> Another important contribution is the late Robert Cook's unpublished manuscript edition of *Einvaldsóður* by Guðmundur Erlendsson, which includes a detailed stemma and a close study of the poet's highly varied use of source material in adapting world history for an Icelandic audience (see 3.12).

The religious turn in early modern European studies has benefitted scholarship in the field of early modern Icelandic literature.<sup>20</sup> Simple binaries between new Lutheran and old Catholic (the latter often vaguely positioned as residual beliefs and practices of the medieval past) and religious and secular are no longer satisfactory classifications.<sup>21</sup> It was possible for Icelanders to cultivate religious identities that incorporated the religious literature of the past in personal devotion without subscribing to Catholic teachings, and it was equally possible for Icelanders to circulate anti-Catholic writings that equate Catholicism with corrupt religious practice outside of Iceland – an active menace seeking entry from abroad, not through the conduit of the past.<sup>22</sup> The cultivation of literacy and religion cannot be easily separated, and this remained the case in Iceland almost to the present day: under the system of education that developed in Iceland, parish ministers were responsible for monitoring reading fluency and religious literacy among their parishioners from early childhood.<sup>23</sup>

In spite of the growing body of research on early modern Icelandic literature, our understanding of the period continues to be seriously hampered by a lack of modern editions of material, which

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<sup>18</sup> Margrét Eggertsdóttir, *Icelandic Baroque: Poetic Art and Erudition in the Works of Hallgrímur Pétursson*, trans. by Andrew Wawn, *Islandica* 56 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014); Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, *Heiður og huggun: Erfiljóð, harmljóð og huggunarkvæði á 17. öld* (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, 2015).

<sup>19</sup> Many of these are collected in Sigurður Pétursson, *Latína er list mæt: Um latneskar menntir á Íslandi*, ed. Gunnar Marel Hinriksson & Hjalti Snær Ægisson (Reykjavík: Stofnun Vigdísar Finnbogadóttur í erlendum tungumálum, 2014). See also Sigurður Pétursson, "Brynjólfur biskup og fólkíð frá Bræðratungu," *Árnesingur* 5 (1998): 179–200.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Ken Jackson & Arthur F. Marotti, "The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies," *Criticism* 46.1 (2004): 167–90.

<sup>21</sup> Hjalti Hugason, "„Allt hafði annan róm [...]: Kvæði Bjarna Borgfirðingaskálds um hrörnun Íslands," *Gripla* 30 (2019): 215–77.

<sup>22</sup> Katelin Parsons, "Text and Context: *Mariúkvæði* in Lbs 399 4to," in *Mirrors of Virtue: Manuscript and Print in Late Pre-modern Iceland*, ed. Margrét Eggertsdóttir & Matthew James Driscoll, *Opuscula* 15 (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2017), 57–86.

<sup>23</sup> See e.g., Loftur Guttormsson, "Socio-demographic patterns and education in the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries: A comparative view of Iceland and Norrland (Sweden)," in *Aspects of Arctic and Sub-Arctic History: Proceedings of the International Congress on the History of the Arctic and Sub-Arctic Region, Reykjavík, 18–21 June 1998*, edited by Ingi Sigurðsson and Jón Skaptason (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2000), 603–10; Ingi Sigurðsson & Loftur Guttormsson (eds.), *Alþýðumenning á Íslandi 1830–1930: Ritað mál, menntun og félagshreyfingar* (Reykjavík: Sagnfræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, 2003).

typically exists only in unedited manuscript form. An encyclopedic work of the magnitude of Páll Eggert Ólafsson's four-volume *Menn og menntir* does not yet exist for the period from c. 1630–1750. As Þórunn Sigurðardóttir recently observed, extremely few works have been published outside a narrow canon of authors, selected by modern literary critics, and modern authors of literary histories tend to hit the canonical “high spots” without providing much information on their broader context.<sup>24</sup>

To date, most literary scholarship on the early modern period continues to focus on the work of an individual writer or a very limited number of writers within the established canon. Even so, the field of early modern Icelandic literature remains obscure enough that this is hardly a case of researchers retreading a overcrowded path around a literary Golden Circle. Margrét Eggertsdóttir's *Icelandic Baroque* and her ongoing work on a scholarly edition of the poems of Hallgrímur Pétursson represent a new approach to one of the most influential figures in Icelandic literary history, in which his entire corpus and its reception are considered in light of contemporary literary currents in Northern Europe and the networks of patronage underlying his activities as a poet. Her conclusion was that, as a poet, Hallgrímur was isolated neither in an Icelandic nor a European context, an important contribution in view of his mythic status as a disembodied “glimmer of light in the darkness” of the seventeenth century.<sup>25</sup>

Although the latest edition of Hallgrímur Pétursson's poetry gives a very complete portrait of a well-studied hymnist, a number of older scholarly editions on the works of other major writers of the period are badly in need of similar revision – if an edition exists at all. On the top of this list is the collected works of Stefán Ólafsson, published in a two-volume scholarly edition in the late nineteenth century that includes poems dubiously attributed to Stefán and even poems that the editor was aware were unlikely to be Stefán's work.<sup>26</sup> Their editor, Jón Þorkelsson, took the pragmatic approach that it is better to publish more material than less, but he likely did not foresee that over 130 years would pass without another complete scholarly edition of Stefán Ólafsson's works in sight. A scholarly edition of the collected works of Stefán's grandfather, Einar Sigurðsson from Eydalir, contains poems more reliably composed by the poet himself and was useful for the present research in examining the literary influence of Einar on Guðmundur Erlendsson.<sup>27</sup> Anthony Faulkes's *Magnúsarkver* is similarly useful in confirming the relatively insubstantial literary influence of

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<sup>24</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, *Heiður og huggun*, 19–21.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Gunnar Karlsson, *Iceland's 1100 Years: The History of a Marginal Society* (London: C. Hurst, 2000), 147.

<sup>26</sup> Jón Þorkelsson, “Formáli,” Stefán Ólafsson, *Kvæði*, ed. Jón Þorkelsson (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska bókmenntafjelag, 1885–1886), vol. 1, iii.

<sup>27</sup> Einar Sigurðsson, *Ljóðmæli*, ed. Jón Samsonarson & Kristján Eiríksson, Rit Stofnunar Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum 68 (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 2007).

Magnús Ólafsson of Laufás on Guðmundur Erlendsson’s poetry, despite the fact that Magnús, the older and more educated poet, lived very near to Guðmundur for many years.<sup>28</sup>

An author-by-author approach to the literature of the period does have its merits, but it can also lead to fairly obvious oversights. The example of Guðmundur Erlendsson’s poems in AM 439 12mo (see 4.10) is a perfect illustration of this: Jón Þorkelsson attributed them to Stefán Ólafsson for the sole reason that AM 439 12mo also contains poetry by Stefán Ólafsson, but an examination of the preservation of the poems on an individual basis leaves absolutely no doubt as to their authorship. In this particular instance, the concept of the codicological unit (see 2.2) would have been helpful, but there are other examples – such as “Í Austurríki eitt furðu frítt” (see 5.3) – that are presented by a reliable source as the work of an author who can be subsequently ruled out through a survey of other manuscript witnesses. Occasionally, there is even a strong case for shared authorship, such as in the examples of the hymn “Hljómi raustin barna best” by Bjarni Gissurarson and Hallgrímur Pétursson and Guðmundur Erlendsson and Ásgrímur Magnússon’s *Grýlukvæði*.<sup>29</sup>

Ironically, an approach too narrowly focused on the singular poet can result in major influences and events deeply impacting that poet being overlooked. The clearest example in this study is the case of an infanticide at Guðmundur Erlendsson’s household in 1663. This and a traumatic incident involving child abuse in a neighbouring parish, in which a boy was beaten to death by his own father, can be identified as the catalyst for one of Guðmundur’s last poems, *Vökubón* or *Vökuvarpa* (see 4.13).

## 2.1 Points of rupture

In the present dissertation, I return to Páll Eggert Ólason’s tripartite division of the early modern period before 1750, at the same time avoiding the use of any one single descriptive label for each period (such as *millibilsöld*). I concur that the final decade of the seventeenth century marks a watershed of sorts in Iceland’s literary history, albeit for very different reasons than those put forward by Páll Eggert.<sup>30</sup> The impact of community and social trauma and its expression through literary and artistic production have attracted increasing attention in early modern Icelandic

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<sup>28</sup> Anthony Faulkes, *Magnúsarkver: The Writings of Magnús Ólafsson of Laufás*, Rit Stofnunar Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum 40 (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1993).

<sup>29</sup> Margrét Eggertsdóttir, “Hljómi raustin barna best: Uppruni, umsköpun og útbreiðsla gamals jólasálms í handritum fyrr á öldum,” in *Pulvis Olympicus: Afmælisrit tileinkað Sigurði Péturssyni*, ed. Jón Ma. Ásgeirsson, Kristinn Ólason & Svavar Hrafn Svavarsson (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2009), 155–78; Katelin Parsons, “Grýla in Sléttuhlíð,” *Gripla* 24 (2013): 211–33.

<sup>30</sup> Keeping in mind Páll Eggert Ólason’s dismissive attitude to a superstitious *galdraöld* ending in 1690, these events included the printing of secular books in Icelandic by Bishop Þórður Þorláksson of Skálholt, more lenient attitudes toward witchcraft and growing internal conflict among the Icelandic elite, cf. Páll Eggert Ólason, *Menn og menntir*, vol. 1, 3.

studies.<sup>31</sup> This includes greater attention to the connections between literary production and natural phenomena – not as symbolic indicators of societal decay inscribed on the landscape, but as active forces in shaping literature and literary transmission, the effects of which can be tangible, measurable and studied.<sup>32</sup>

Literary production in North Iceland during the period 1615–1670 is the focal point of this dissertation, traced through the life of a single poet and his interactions with other members of his family, community and literary circles. Given the nature of the sources, research on the manuscript preservation and transmission of this poetry extends into the 1680s and early 1690s. Literary culture in the early part of this period (the 1610s and 1620s) is dominated by the activities of Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson of Hólar and the rapid expansion of print culture and religious reading into the domestic sphere. Although print production slowed to a trickle as Bishop Guðbrandur's health began to fail, the early 1600s ushered in a golden era of paper manuscript production that sustained a thriving literary culture and scribal networks that engaged enthusiastically in the dissemination of vernacular poetry and prose.

The period 1690–1710 coincides with a prolonged period of severe hardship for the Icelandic nation, which decimated the Icelandic population. These hardships have nothing to do with literature directly: adverse climate events, famine and a devastating smallpox epidemic that struck Iceland at the same time as Denmark was preoccupied with one of its regular wars against Sweden. However, a national population does not drop by a third or more over a period of two decades – what then from over 50,000 to only around 34,000 within the span of a mere five years – without this being an extremely traumatic experience for the survivors.<sup>33</sup> What Páll Eggert Ólason characterizes as a *millibilsöld*, I would position as a period of crisis, social rupture and gradual recovery.

Thanks to the 1703 census of Iceland, it is possible to know more about the ordinary persons who fell victim to smallpox in 1707–1709 than for any previous nationwide disasters in Iceland, but the magnitude of human suffering is difficult to comprehend. Jón Steffensen's analysis of annalistic data implicated a particularly virulent strain of the virus causing smallpox (*variola*), causing often-fatal hemorrhagic smallpox.<sup>34</sup> When examining Europe as a whole, the suggestion has been made that

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<sup>31</sup> Þorsteinn Helgason, *The Corsairs' Longest Voyage: The Turkish Raid in Iceland 1627*, trans. Anna Yates & Jóna Ann Pétursdóttir (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 256–59, 307–34; Hjalti Hugason, „Allt hafði annan róm [...],” 215–77.

<sup>32</sup> Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir & Katelin Parsons, “The Glacier's Long Shadow: Guðmundur Runólfsson and his Manuscripts,” in *Mirrors of Virtue*, ed. Margrét Eggertsdóttir & Matthew James Driscoll, 87–125.

<sup>33</sup> Jón Steffensen, “Bólusótt á Íslandi,” *Menning og meinsemdir: Ritgerðasafn um mótnarsögu íslenzkrar þjóðar og baráttu hennar við hungur og sóttir* (Reykjavík : Sögufélag, 1975), 304; Loftur Guttormsson, “Mannfall í stórubólu 1707,” *Saga* 44.1 (2008): 141–57; Örn Ólafsson, “Stórabóla á Íslandi 1707 til 1709 og manntalið 1703,” *Náttúrufræðingurinn* 76.1–2 (2007): 4–12.

<sup>34</sup> Jón Steffensen, “Bólusótt á Íslandi,” 299.



smallpox became an increasingly prominent and lethal disease over the course of the seventeenth century, possibly due to molecular evolution of the virus.<sup>35</sup> During the second half of the seventeenth century, smallpox outbreaks occurred every 3–4 years on average in London and other large English cities, where it had become endemic, and somewhat less frequently – 5 years on average – in small and medium-sized rural towns.<sup>36</sup> However, in 1707, a full 35 years had passed in Iceland since smallpox had last arrived, and a half-century had passed since the last nationwide epidemic.<sup>37</sup>

One reason that the social impact of the *stórabóla* epidemic in Iceland never approached that of the Black Death (*svartidauði*) is that exposure to the variola virus grants lifelong immunity to all strains of the smallpox disease. Most individuals who had risen to positions of authority within the community were over the age of 35 and thus likely to have immunity after exposure to a far less deadly virus strain. Many clergymen continued to serve their congregations in their sixties and seventies, and young graduates of Iceland's Latin schools who wished to enter the clergy typically had to wait some years for a living of their own, during which period they often served socially important but poorly paid functions as educators and assistants. While community leaders such as well-established farming couples or parish ministers and their wives were less likely to fall victim to the disease, the young adult population was decimated. Historian Árni Daníel Júlíusson's *Á hverju strái* demonstrates that the effects of the *stórabóla* epidemic were long-lasting on Icelandic society, leading to the permanent abandonment of *seljabúskapur* and of any attempt to maintain the turf fences in use from the time of the Middle Ages, an increased emphasis on sheep-raising and a decreased emphasis on labour-intensive farm activities requiring a larger workforce, including cattle-raising and hay production.<sup>38</sup>

Surprisingly few literary works in Icelandic deal with the *stórabóla* epidemic, with the exception of the funeral poems composed for its victims. The repercussions of the smallpox epidemic for Icelandic

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<sup>35</sup> Amy G. Carmichael & Arthur M. Silverstein, "Smallpox in Europe before the seventeenth century: Virulent killer or benign disease?" *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 42.2 (1987): 147–68; Joel O. Wertheim, "Viral Evolution: Mummy Virus Challenges Presumed History of Smallpox," *Current Biology* 27.3 (2017): R119–20; Ana T. Duggan et al., "17th Century Variola Virus Reveals the Recent History of Smallpox," *Current Biology* 26.24 (2016): 3407–12.

<sup>36</sup> C.J. Duncan, S.R. Duncan & Susan Scott, "Oscillatory Dynamics of Smallpox and the Impact of Vaccination," *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 183.4 (1996): 447, 450.

<sup>37</sup> Örn Ólafsson, "Stórabóla á Íslandi 1707 til 1709 og manntalið 1703," 9–10.

<sup>38</sup> Árni Daníel Júlíusson, *Af hverju strái: Saga af byggð, grasi og bændum 1300–1700* (Reykjavík: Sagnfræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, 2018), 250. On the impact of the *stórabóla* epidemic on Icelandic society, see also Helgi Skúli Kjartansson, "Samanburður á svarta dauða og stóru bólu," *Sagnir* 19 (1998): 106–9; Elín Hirst, *Í eyði síðan fólkið útdó í bólunni: Áhrif stórubólu á búsetu og efnahag* (MA thesis, University of Iceland, 2005).

literature are, I would argue, largely invisible, expressed in the absence of voices.<sup>39</sup> Margrét Eggertsdóttir has observed that, in stark contrast to the seventeenth century, “in the first part of the eighteenth century... not much new happened in Icelandic literature.”<sup>40</sup> Concurring fully with this view, I would posit the explanation that famine and smallpox cut short thousands of lives that might otherwise have left their mark on Icelandic literary and scribal culture. The period of famine preceding the *stórabóla* epidemic disproportionately affected the poor, but one’s social standing was no protection from smallpox, and many of the Icelandic writers and poets who died in the epidemic were young, well-to-do men who had started (or recently completed) their formal education but had yet to make their full mark in Icelandic literary history.<sup>41</sup> In this sense, its effects were not unlike those of a war.

The victims included Guðmundur Erlendsson’s grandson Guðmundur Skúlason (1680–1707), a graduate of the Hólar Latin school, who had been ordained a year before his death and had recently married. The younger Guðmundur was a promising clergyman at the very beginning of his career in the Church; no manuscripts in his hand are known to survive.

Compounding this, a number of young influential Icelandic intellectuals in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries settled permanently in Denmark, including Árni Magnússon, Jón Ólafsson from Grunnavík and Jón Þorkelsson Thorkillius. It would be an exaggeration to describe the migration of university-educated Icelanders as a brain drain, but neither should the position of Copenhagen as the capital of Iceland be ignored.<sup>42</sup> The movement of upper-class Icelanders out of the country counters the Hamburger Johann Anderson’s claim that Icelanders were so utterly bound to their native land that they could thrive nowhere else.<sup>43</sup>

The difficulties faced by ordinary Icelanders in eking out a living during a cold period that adversely affected both local fishing and farming did not necessarily result in literacy and scribal practices being neglected. The rise of pietism in Denmark led to the passage of laws in the eighteenth century that attempted to ensure that all youths – irrespective of their gender and social status within the community – would attain at least a basic proficiency in Christian teachings and learn the rudiments

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Jón Ólafsson of Grunnavík’s discussion of the *stórabóla* epidemic, Jón Ólafsson, *Safn til íslenskrar bókmenntasögu*, ed. Guðrún Ingólfssdóttir & Þórunn Sigurðardóttir (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, 2018), 244–46.

<sup>40</sup> Margrét Eggertsdóttir, “From Reformation to Enlightenment,” in *A History of Icelandic Literature*, ed. Daisy Neijmann (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 226.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Sigurður Nordal, *Samhengi og samtíð*, vol. 2, 111.

<sup>42</sup> Sigurður Pétursson, “Þrír lærðir Jónar í Kaupmannahöfn á átjándu öld,” *Bókmenntasögumálþing*, 8 September 2018 (unpublished lecture); Guðjón Friðriksson & Jón Þ. Þór, *Kaupmannahöfn sem höfuðborg Íslands*, vol. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 2013).

<sup>43</sup> Johann Anderson, *Nachrichten von Island, Grönland und der Straße Davis, zum wahren Nutzen der Wissenschaften und der Handlung* (Hamburg: Georg Christian Grund, 1746), 142–44.

of reading in the home. Jón Þorkelsson Þorkillius was a particularly energetic campaigner for education reform, although his plan of opening schools for Icelandic children never fully came to fruition.<sup>44</sup> Households were now required by law to have access to religious books for home devotion and instruction of children, and even individuals who were relatively poor might own several books of their own.<sup>45</sup> It is during the eighteenth century that the word *kvöldvaka* ('evening wake') clearly emerges as a word to describe regular evening gatherings in winter during which readings and other indoor activities took place, including devotional readings or *húslestur*.<sup>46</sup>

Literacy is better documented in eighteenth-century records, but data on eighteenth-century practices should be used with great caution when representing the pre-modern period as a whole. In the absence of extensive literacy studies specific to the period before the *stórabola* epidemic, the present study does not incorporate the growing body of research on the thriving late pre-modern manuscript culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

## 2.2 Dividing the book

It is no longer a truth universally acknowledged that an early modern poet in possession of a good manuscript must be in want of a publisher.<sup>47</sup> In considering the literary career of an individual such as Guðmundur Erlendsson, whose writing activities intersect with the medium of print, it is important to recognize that a manuscript book is not a stand-in for a printed one, nor does its creator necessarily aspire for its transformation into a commercial commodity. Margaret Ezell's concept of social authorship and manuscript culture as a meaningful dimension of early modern literary life, existing alongside print ventures, is particularly useful in providing a framework for the study of non-commercial, non-print works in manuscript circulation – i.e., authors unavailable for the “commodity-consuming” reader, yet not without an audience.<sup>48</sup>

Ezell's study focuses on the literary milieu of early modern England, Scotland and Wales, where profit-oriented networks of printers and booksellers existed alongside other modes of literary transmission. As discussed in Chapter 4, print did not yet have a commercial dimension in early

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<sup>44</sup> Gunnar M. Magnúss, *Jón Skálholtsrektor: Minning um Jón Þorkelsson Þorkillius á 200 ára ártíð hans* (Reykjavík: Menningarsjóður, 1959).

<sup>45</sup> Guðný Hallgrímsdóttir, *A Tale of a Fool? A Microhistory of an 18th-Century Peasant Woman* (London: Routledge, 2019), 136–39; Sólrún Jensdóttir, “Books owned by ordinary people in Iceland 1750–1830,” *Saga-Book* 19 (1974–1977): 264–292.

<sup>46</sup> The word is not attested in medieval sources. A handful of seventeenth-century texts use the word to describe waking during the evening, but I was unable to identify instances of *kvöldvaka* being used in a literary context before the eighteenth century.

<sup>47</sup> Harold Love & Arthur F. Marotti, “Manuscript Transmission and Circulation,” in *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature*, ed. David Loewenstein & Janel Mueller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 55–80.

<sup>48</sup> Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999).

modern Iceland, even if literary production was hardly unaffected by the spread of print technology. Prior to the rise of the study of the book as a material and cultural object, the functions of which are not limited to its role as a carrier of text, scholarship on the activities of the printing press in Iceland tended to be coloured by the expectation that print culture ought to have replaced manuscript culture as the dominant form of literary production in Iceland by the early seventeenth century (see Chapter 4.14). Although no one engaging in the study of early modern Icelandic literature could possibly overlook the manuscript's dominance, it is only within the last several decades that the "post-Gutenberg" manuscript has been treated as a medium among other media, used for other purposes than covert underground circulation or an inability to access print technology. In the case of pre-modern Iceland, manuscripts have become increasingly associated with a culture divergent from, but co-existing with, print production.<sup>49</sup> Instead of representing a stagnant persistence of older literary practices, manuscript production was a highly social pursuit that responded to the needs and aspirations of both individual scribes and the community at large.<sup>50</sup>

Like most recent research in the field of early modern Icelandic literature, manuscripts figure large in this study. Following the methods of new or material philology (also described as artefactual philology),<sup>51</sup> the objective of the manuscript research underpinning this dissertation was not to uncover the "best text" versions of the works of Guðmundur Erlendsson. In fact, the unexpected discovery that some of the extant manuscript leaves in Guðmundur Erlendsson's own hand preserve a part of his *Gígja* anthology also confirms that *Gígja* should not be approached as a single original manuscript from which all later copies descend. As an anthology, *Gígja* continued to be an open and malleable entity.

The scope of material philology extends to all forms of chirographic literacy, but it does originate in the field of medieval European studies. Stephen Nichols's seminal article on the concept of new

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<sup>49</sup> Davíð Ólafsson, "Scribal Communities in Iceland: The Case of Sighvatur Grímsson," in *Black Seeds, White Field: Nordic Literary Practices in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Anna Kuismin & Matthew James Driscoll (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2013), 40–49; Matthew James Driscoll, "Pleasure and pastime: The manuscripts of Guðbrandur á Hvítadal," in *Mirrors of Virtue*, ed. Margrét Eggertsdóttir & Matthew James Driscoll, 225–76; Silvia Hufnagel, "The Farmer, Scribe and Lay Historian Gunnlaugur Jónsson from Skuggabjörg and His Scribal Network," *Gripla* 24 (2013): 235–68; Tereza Lansing, "Manuscript Culture in Nineteenth Century Northern Iceland: The Case of Þorsteinn Þorsteinsson á Heiði," in *Vernacular Literacies: Past, Present and Future*, ed. Ann-Catrine Edlund, Lars-Erik Edlund & Susanne Haugen (Umeå: Umeå University, 2014), 193–211.

<sup>50</sup> Davíð Ólafsson, *Wordmongers: Post-medieval scribal culture and the case of Sighvatur Grímsson* (PhD dissertation, University of St. Andrews, 2008).

<sup>51</sup> See Lena Rohrbach, "Material Philology," in *Handbook of Pre-Modern Nordic Memory Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Jürg Glauser, Pernille Hermann & Stephen A. Mitchell (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), vol. 1, 210–16; Matthew James Driscoll, "The words on the page: Thoughts on philology, old and new," in *Creating the medieval saga: Versions, variability, and editorial interpretations of Old Norse saga literature*, ed. Judy Quinn & Emily Lethbridge, The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilization 18 (Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2010), 85–102.

philology opens with the sentence “In medieval studies, philology is the matrix out of which all else springs.”<sup>52</sup> In examining what he evocatively termed the “manuscript matrix”, Nichols turned his attention in particular to the illuminated vellum manuscript and the complex interactions between poets, scribes, illuminators, rubricators and commentators.<sup>53</sup>

Obviously, the early modern Icelandic manuscript rarely involves interactions between illuminators and rubricators. If a manuscript is illustrated, it is generally the amateur contribution of the scribe or a later user. If red appears on a manuscript page, it is probably because the scribe or user happened to own coloured ink or a red pencil and not because it has passed into the hands of a specialized professional. Nevertheless, treating the manuscript as an artefact that consists not only of a text organized into lines and pages but also layers of materiality and dynamic interaction with producers, users and other adjacent texts is a basic approach that can be applied to all forms of manuscript production. At the same time, manuscript culture is not a static, fixed entity for all time. The act of cultivation involves innovation, growth and change.

For the present study, I follow Beeke Stegmann in using Gumbert’s concept of codicological units to distinguish between the parts of a codex produced as a coherent whole.<sup>54</sup> Gumbert’s definition of the codicological unit is “a discrete number of quires, worked in a single operation (unless it is an enriched, enlarged or extended unit), containing a complete text or set of texts (unless it is an unfinished, defective or dependent unit).”<sup>55</sup> Codicological units are defined by their potential boundaries: the alignment of quire boundaries, hand changes, changes in leaf dimensions, material changes such as shifts in the type of paper and ink and so on. Not all potential boundaries mark a new codicological unit, but the codicological unit is a useful tool for unpicking the relationship between the different parts of a manuscript and identifying potential points of discontinuity, and it is used as such in Chapter 5.

Gumbert’s definition of relations between individual codicological units as either monogenetic (i.e., the product of a single scribe), homogenetic (the product of two or more contemporary participants in the same scribal circle) or allogenetic (products of different scribal circles and/or non-overlapping time periods) is less useful when describing scribal activities in an era when a fairly large pool of potential scribes had at least limited access to the material resources required to produce books but

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<sup>52</sup> Stephen G. Nichols, “Introduction: Philology in a Manuscript Culture,” *Speculum* 65.1 (1990): 1.

<sup>53</sup> Stephen G. Nichols, “Introduction: Philology in a Manuscript Culture,” 7–8.

<sup>54</sup> Beeke Stegmann, *Árni Magnússon’s Rearrangement of Paper Manuscripts* (PhD dissertation, Faculty of Humanities, University of Copenhagen, 2016).

<sup>55</sup> J. Peter Gumbert, “Codicological Units: Towards a Terminology for the Stratigraphy of the Non-Homogeneous Codex,” *Segno e Testa* 2 (2004): 40.

scribal production and training were diffuse and largely domestic in scale.<sup>56</sup> Close palaeographical study of hands in seventeenth-century manuscripts could potentially uncover the existence of scribal schools or regional markers in future, but the absence of a large body of palaeographical research specific to early modern Iceland hinders systematic distinction between homogenetic and allo-genetic relationships. A codex containing both seventeenth- and nineteenth-century material could safely be said to contain allo-genetic codicological units, but this would be a case of using elaborate terminology to state the blatantly obvious. By contrast, determining whether Lbs 1529 4to is composed of allo-genetic or homogenetic codicological units would be a valuable contribution to our knowledge of literary transmission and literacy in early modern Iceland. The manuscript's codicological units are products of approximately the same period, from the mid-seventeenth century to the 1680s, but they could potentially have originated in very different circles.

In spite of the difficulties, it is useful to distinguish as far as possible between contemporary circulation and performance of literature within a poet's own literary circles or networks and the later manuscript transmission of literary works when examining the place of poetry in Icelandic manuscript culture, not least when investigating the material, social and cultural environment in which poets worked. This particular use of the manuscript past was not, however, the goal of subsequent manuscript owners or the academics, collectors, archivists and librarians who collectively ensured the survival of individual manuscripts over the centuries.

The initial research plan for the present study somewhat naively assumed the relative stability of the archived manuscript object: i.e., that a manuscript is essentially identical with a fixed shelfmark, and that once a manuscript lands in a scholar's library it will remain in a more or less unaltered state (with the exception of inserted slips of paper, marginal notes and similar, non-disruptive additions). Beeke Stegmann's recent codicological study of the paper manuscripts owned by the manuscript collector Árni Magnússon reveals that he extensively rearranged his younger manuscripts to suit his scholarly needs.<sup>57</sup>

Although few of the manuscripts in the present study come from Árni Magnússon's collection, a similar process of extensive rearrangement can be observed in historical archives such as that of Jón Sigurðsson (JS). Neither the JS collection nor the collections of the Icelandic Literary Society in Copenhagen and Reykjavík (ÍB and ÍBR) are as systematically documented as Árni Magnússon's, and the same is true of early donations to the National Library of Iceland (Lbs), some of which exhibit signs of significant post-acquisition changes to their materiality. One finding of closer examination of

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<sup>56</sup> J. Peter Gumbert, "Codicological Units," 29.

<sup>57</sup> Beeke Stegmann, *Árni Magnússon's Rearrangement of Paper Manuscripts* (PhD dissertation, Faculty of Humanities, University of Copenhagen, 2016).

the manuscripts of Guðmundur Erlendsson's *Gígja* in Chapter 5 is that at least three have been extensively altered or rearranged in or after the nineteenth century (beyond normal conservation efforts to preserve the text). These are Lbs 271 4to, 250 and 1529, the last of which has been partially reordered on multiple occasions – most recently in connection with its digitization. The objective of reordering is unclear; it has not been fully returned to a reconstructed “original” order, nor does it reflect the state in which it first entered the archive.

Underlying the philology practiced by scholars such as Árni Magnússon and Jón Sigurðsson was the desire to access written texts in as original a state as possible, with minimal interest in the social or material context in which they circulated through time. A manuscript essentially represented an embodied textual witness to one or more literary works.<sup>58</sup> In an era before the technology existed to closely reproduce the image of the manuscript page, grouping together paper witnesses of a given literary work or a defined corpus (such as the writings of a single author) served a practical purpose in facilitating literary studies. The relationship between text and manuscript-as-text-bearer is not fundamentally significant; in dismantling existing manuscripts and constructing new ones, one is simply transferring the contents of one set of Tupperware containers into another.

One manuscript preserving large quantities of Guðmundur Erlendsson's poetry serves as an extreme example of how the archive can transform the manuscript object into an artefact that reveals more about the process of archivization than that of its original production. Lbs 271 4to is a scholarly volume, aggregated and bound post-acquisition by Páll Pálsson (nicknamed *stúdent*) in the nineteenth century, who organized it as *Sálmásafn I* ('Collected hymns, vol. 1'). The manuscript contains mostly – but by no means exclusively – hymns and is mainly in the hand of Hálfðan Einarsson (1732–1785), the rector of the Latin school at Hólar, who was heavily involved in printing and literary activities.<sup>59</sup> The manuscript currently measures 190 leaves (not counting flyleaves and an additional two leaves, unbound, at the back of the manuscript in the hand of Páll Pálsson *stúdent*). However, ff. 1r–87v belong to a separate and originally taller codicological unit (203 mm in height), with f. 87v originally left blank. The first 44 leaves of the second codicological unit appear to be missing. The first page, f. 88r, was originally paginated as 89, but repaginated by Páll Pálsson as 165. Poems from Guðmundur Erlendsson's *Gígja* have been preserved on ff. 88r–105v

From f. 88r, the leaves measure only around 195 x 150 mm. In joining the second codicological unit to the first, Páll Pálsson has taken the unusual step of staggering the bifolia in each individual gathering, positioning each bifolium either slightly higher or slightly lower than the one before it so

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<sup>58</sup> For a discussion, see Driscoll, “The Words on the Page,” 85–102.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Jón Helgason, *Meistari Hálfðan: Æfi- og aldarfarslýsing frá 18. öld* (Reykjavík: E. P. Briem, 1935).

as to achieve a height of 203 mm. To create the illusion of uniformity, he has painstakingly restitched every single gathering in the manuscript. The final product has been trimmed to size (sacrificing some paratext), and a decorative red edge has been painted on the outermost edge.

Páll Pálsson's beautifully bound final product is a testimony to his passion for preserving the literature of the past. From a material philology perspective, these are major transformations. Were the two codicological units entirely separate volumes when Páll Pálsson began his work? Had they previously been bound together? Was any material discarded in the process? What was the relationship between the older leaves and the text in Páll Pálsson's hand on the final two leaves? These questions can never be fully answered, not least because any attempt to pick apart the codicological units would be destructive to the present binding.

For this reason, only a small number of the manuscripts preserving Guðmundur Erlendsson's poetry have been investigated in the present study. As interesting as a quantitative study of the entire known corpus would be, this would arguably reveal more about the final usage phase of the written page as a textual witness on the archive shelf than residual patterns of early circulation.<sup>60</sup>

### 2.3 The poet and the variant

Parent-child imagery abounds in the language of literary creation and dissemination, but when a work is chirographically transmitted, the impossibility of drawing an uncomplicated line between the writing on the page and a single parent-figure is fairly obvious. The author Guðmundur Einarsson from Sandar in Sléttuhlíð (d. after 1688) certainly did not exist before he was produced through manuscript transmission of the poem *Einvaldsóður* (see 5.0), nor did the genius of Stefán Ólafsson chronologically precede the six poems at the end of AM 439 12mo before Jón Þorkelsson's edition interpreted them as doing so (see 2.0 and 4.10).

Traditional philology seeks to weed out variance and material philology embraces it, but the fact of variance remains. To even assign an incipit to a chirographically transmitted poem, one must first decide whether the poet Hallgrímur Pétursson used the opening words "Barnalund blind, hrædd" ('Children's nature: blind, afraid') as in Lbs 1724 8vo, "Barna lund, blind fædd" ('Children's nature, born blind') as in JS 208 8vo or "Barnalund er blíð fædd" ('Children are born sweet by nature') as on a printed paper slip in a chocolate Easter egg once opened by the author of the present research. At a codicological level, the singularity of authorship as a personal creative project by a fixed author-figure is constantly being called into question.

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<sup>60</sup> On usage phases, see E. Kwakkel, "Towards a terminology for the analysis of composite manuscripts," *Gazette du livre médiéval* 41 (2002): 15.



The threatening “otherness” of the variant only exists from the perspective of the scholar seeking the elusive archetype through the purest bloodlines. Early modern Iceland may not have had scriptoria, but Bernard Cerquiglini’s argument that the medieval literary work is a variable and that variance imbues the work with a sense of belonging rather than corruption applies no less to domestic manuscript production – right down to the rubrics casually but dubiously attributing hymns and poems to writers like Guðmundur Einarsson from Sandar, who themselves are variants and hybrids.<sup>61</sup>

The work of Ezell and others outside of Iceland demonstrates that manuscript culture in Iceland is no anachronism in an early modern European context. The sociability of texts – expressed through the circulation of manuscript material between authors, friends, family and like-minded souls – is an important feature of literary culture in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland in the middle of the seventeenth century.<sup>62</sup> Without romanticizing manuscript culture, mass production of a highly uniform, standardized reading experience was neither its objective nor its outcome. Even when producing commercial commodities for sale, standardization is arguably a byproduct rather than a core value of mass production. Variance in popular ballads or romances did not fundamentally threaten the social order, for instance.

In matters of faith, however, standardization of religious knowledge and practice was of the utmost importance, particularly for the simple (cf. 4.9). The possibility remained even for the learned that higher education – producing variance – could pose a direct threat to the bearer. Since salvation rested on Luther’s doctrine of *sola fide*, getting sacred text wrong could have dire consequences for the soul. An unusual feature of Marteinn Einarsson’s ecclesiastical manual and hymnal from 1555, printed in Copenhagen, is a foreword by the Danish bishop Peder Palladius in which he forbids readers from pirating the edition by hand-copying it, on the grounds that manuscript copies produce errors that can cause disagreement and dissent among the common people.<sup>63</sup> Written shortly after the Reformation in Iceland, when most parishes were still being served by priests-turned-parsons, Palladius’s foreword seeks to transplant attitudes towards the role of print in Lutheran religious culture to Icelandic soil.

If Jón Helgason characterized the literature of the Age of Monopoly in Iceland as scrubby and stunted subarctic growth, print technology was not an invasive species in this landscape. Prior to the rise of urbanization in the nineteenth century, vernacular print in Iceland grew mainly in the field in which it

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<sup>61</sup> Bernard Cerquiglini, *In Praise of the Variant: A Critical History of Philology*, trans. Betsy Wing (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

<sup>62</sup> Margaret J. M. Ezell, *The Later Seventeenth Century*, *The Oxford English Literary History* 5: 1645–1714 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 76–89.

<sup>63</sup> Marteinn Einarsson (ed. & trans.), *Ein Kristilig handbog* (Copenhagen: 1555).

was deliberately planted and cultivated: religious literacy. As discussed in 4.14.1, this was a field in which undesirable variance was vigilantly weeded out.

### 3.0 O tempora! O mores!

Járn eru á lofti,  
jöfrar stríða,  
stálhörð hjörtu  
stofna ei iðran;  
drepsótt og dýrtíð  
drottna ranglátir,  
miskunnin minnkar,  
Mammon ræður.<sup>64</sup>

(‘Blades hang in air,  
monarchs clash;  
steel-hard hearts  
hold no remorse.

Plagues and soaring prices,  
the wicked rule,  
mercy wanes,  
Mammon is master.’)

The period from the Reformation in 1541–1550 to around 1800 is rarely depicted as a pleasant time to live in Iceland: a gloomy demonstration of the proverb *lengi getur vont versnað* (‘what is bad can always get much worse’). Icelanders in the seventeenth century were spared from many of the horrors of early modern warfare, including the massacres of the Thirty Years’ War and the Eighty Years’ War, but the fighting that erupted periodically between Denmark and Sweden had serious consequences when it escalated to the point of affecting trade with Iceland. Iceland was not particularly singled out for misfortune in the seventeenth century; periodic famines and outbreaks of disease affected populations throughout Europe. On a global scale, the mean duration of wars in the seventeenth century was longer than in any other period from the fifteenth through to the twentieth century, and many living in mainland Europe around the mid-century mark subscribed to a distinctly

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<sup>64</sup> *Einvaldsóður*, st. 282.

apocalyptic interpretation of world affairs.<sup>65</sup> The experience of a sudden, recent worsening of the world is hardly unique to Guðmundur Erlendsson's poetry (see 4.6 and 4.12).<sup>66</sup>

From the perspective of the present, we know that actual fighting did not spill over into Iceland at any point following the violence of the Reformation years. The known potential – and the island's vulnerability to attack – hung over Iceland like a black cloud. The Icelandic narrative response to the so-called Turkish Raid (*tyrkjarán*) in 1627, when Barbary pirates attacked several coastal settlements, including the Westman Islands, reveals how the trauma experienced by survivors was also mixed with a long-lasting terror of the pirates' return.<sup>67</sup>

The seventeenth century is often characterized as a period of deep global crisis, building on the work of historians Eric Hobsbawm and Hugh Trevor-Roper.<sup>68</sup> Clearly, the outcome was not the same for all nations involved: some regions emerged from this crisis strengthened, while others were lastingly weakened.<sup>69</sup> A global crisis model does not tend to be applied to the case of Iceland, however, where the focus until recently has been on the fraught relationship between Iceland and Denmark – a model of gradual decline rather than immediate crisis.

When examining Iceland in this more global context, Icelandic historians have increasingly questioned the extent to which the seventeenth century was an acute period of crisis for Iceland. In 2018, Árni Daníel Júlíusson and Axel Kristinsson published monographs in which each reached the conclusion that ordinary people in Iceland were not economically or culturally worse off than commoners elsewhere in the world and that the devastating epidemics at the beginning of the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries were the main cause of the long-term population decrease in Iceland from the late Middle Ages.<sup>70</sup> Axel Kristinsson's focus is on the role of participants in the Icelandic independence movement in interpreting events such as the smallpox epidemic for their own purposes; he argues that the "general decline" of 1400–1800 is a political interpretation rather

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<sup>65</sup> Geoffrey Parker, "Crisis and Catastrophe: The Global Crisis of the Seventeenth Century Reconsidered," *The American Historical Review* 113.4 (2008): 1053–79.

<sup>66</sup> For instance, the idea of evil having overtaken the world within the "compass of twelve years" is raised in the writings of James Howell, *Epistolae Ho-Eliauae*, (London: 1650), vol. 3, 1–3. On the dating of these twelve years to c. 1637–1649, see Parker, "Crisis and Catastrophe," 1060–61.

<sup>67</sup> Þorsteinn Helgason, "Historical Narrative as Collective Therapy: "The Case of the Turkish Raid in Iceland," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 22 (1997): 275–89; Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, "Úr Tyrkjaveldi og bréfabókum," *Gripla* 9 (1995): 7–44.

<sup>68</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, "The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century," in *Crisis in Europe 1560–1660*. ed. Trevor Aston (London: Routledge, 1965), 5–58; Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century," *Past and Present* 16 (1959): 31–64.

<sup>69</sup> Christopher Hill, introduction to *Crisis in Europe 1560–1660*. ed. Trevor Aston (London: Routledge, 1965), 3.

<sup>70</sup> Árni Daníel Júlíusson, *Af hverju strái*; Axel Kristinsson, *Hnignun, hvaða hnignun? Goðsögnin um niðurlægingartímabilið í sögu Íslands* (Reykjavík: Sögufélag, 2018).

than a foregone conclusion.<sup>71</sup> These perspectives on the seventeenth century are by no means limited to the last decade or a narrow group of historians.<sup>72</sup> However, the process of re-thinking early modern Iceland as a dark age with a flickering candle and books is a slow but steady project.

### 3.1 The uttermost edge of God's good earth

Ambiguously positioned in the North Atlantic between the Old World and the New, Iceland's Europeanness has never been geographically determined and has depended heavily on acceptance from outside powers. Since early modern Iceland had no merchant fleet, long-range fishing fleet or navy, the nation relied heavily on foreign trade but had minimal control over foreign relations.<sup>73</sup> Had regular sea contact been lost, Icelanders could not have maintained their European identity, even if the population's survival would have been theoretically possible.

In this sense, non-staple goods such as paper from European mills were necessary imports in order to cultivate Icelanders' European and Lutheran identities.<sup>74</sup> In the early seventeenth century, a good number of books were still being written on parchment, which could be produced domestically in Iceland. However, the use of parchment as writing material took on a distinctly antiquarian dimension as it was gradually replaced by imported paper for everyday use.<sup>75</sup> Without large quantities of imported paper, the massive output of the Icelandic printing press under Bishop

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<sup>71</sup> Axel Kristinsson, *Hnignun, hvaða hnignun?* 135.

<sup>72</sup> See e.g., Helgi Þorláksson, "Aldarfarið á sautjándu öld," in *Hallgrímsstefna: Fyrirlestrar frá ráðstefnu um Hallgrím Pétursson og verk hans*, ed. Margrét Eggertsdóttir & Þórunn Sigurðardóttir (Reykjavík: Listvinafélag Hallgrímskirkju, 1997), 15–28; Loftur Guttormsson, "Kunnátta og vald: um menningartogstreitu á 17. og 18. öld," in *Íslenska sögubígingið 28.–31. maí 1997*, ed. Guðmundur J. Guðmundsson & Eiríkur K. Björnsson (Reykjavík: Sagnfræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, 1998), vol. 2, 146–57.

<sup>73</sup> The reasons for this are complex. For the most part, Icelanders did not invest in trading ships or seek an active role in commercial trading activities. Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson's plans to operate a trading ship met with domestic opposition in 1576, and Guðbrandur's ship was lost at sea on its first voyage, cf. Gísli Gunnarsson, *Upp er boðið Ísaland: Einokunarverslun og íslenskt samfélag 1602–1787* (Reykjavík: Örn og Örlygur, 1987), 77–79. Guðbrandur was involved in various power struggles throughout his long career as bishop of Hólar, and it is likely that other powerful Icelanders felt threatened by his experimental foray into the merchant business. Wealthy families benefitted from their direct contacts with the outside world, and the development of a domestic merchant class within Iceland that they themselves did not completely control was clearly not in their best interests.

<sup>74</sup> The history of paper in Iceland is the subject of an ongoing research project led by Þórunn Sigurðardóttir. On the movement of luxury goods to Iceland (such as spices, sugar and later tea and coffee), see Hrefna Róbertsdóttir, "Munaðarvara og matarmening: Pöntunarvara árið 1784," *Saga* 48.2 (2012): 70–111.

<sup>75</sup> . The scribe Bjarni Jónsson (d. after 1658), for example, used parchment to produce at least three copies of the *Jónsbók* law code, the dates of two of which have been deliberately altered in order for the books to appear much older. Gísli Baldur Róbertsson, "Nýtt af Bjarna Jónssyni lögbókarskrifara á Snæfjallaströnd," *Gripla* 21 (2010): 335–87; Peter Springborg, "Nyt og gammelt fra Snæfjallaströnd: Bidrag til beskrivelse af den litterære aktivitet på Vestfjordene i 1. halvdel af det 17 århundrede," in *Afmælisrit Jóns Helgasonar: 30. júní 1969* (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1969), 288–327.

Guðbrandur Þorláksson would have been impossible, and major administrative projects such as the 1703 census of Iceland would have been impractical at best.

Early modern Iceland was a dependency rather than a colony in the narrow sense that the Danes never sought to found a settlement on the island. There was really no need. The Danes had always been there in some sense: Iceland was the place to which the Danes turned for glimpses of their own past, from the memory of the deeds of the ancient Danish kings to the sound of the ancient Danish tongue to the music of Ancient Denmark. This did not mean that Danish-Icelandic relations were characterised by a sense of mutual respect, however. An obvious imbalance of power existed between Danish monarchs and their Icelandic subjects, and trade with Iceland invariably took second priority to the various international conflicts into which the Danish state entered. The royal acquisition of the extensive lands formerly owned by Iceland's religious houses following the Reformation was arguably a factor in shifting the balance of power in relations between Iceland and Copenhagen. It is never healthy for an island nation's territory to be largely the property of non-residents, no matter how this relationship is defined.

The memoir of Jón Ólafsson *Indíafari* (1593–1679), who left Iceland on an English ship in 1615 and entered the Danish military soon thereafter, recounts an incident in a tavern where Jón overhears a local mason noisily slandering the Icelandic people. His Icelandic drinking companion, identified only as Einar, is more nonchalant over the matter, pointing out that one can frequently hear spoken badly of Iceland.<sup>76</sup> Jón is nevertheless incensed to the point where – by his own account – he confronts the mason and defends Iceland's honour with his fists. By Jón's account, however, Iceland was not to have been the only target of the man's derision, as Jón states the mason “ljest kunna að segja hegðan og háttalag fólks í mörgum löndum” (‘made a pretence of knowing how to tell of the ways and behaviour of people in many countries’), to the great amusement of his local audience.<sup>77</sup>

Jón clearly did not see a parallel between the negative characterisation of Iceland as a Danish dependency and the perhaps not unsimilar representation of the native inhabitants of Denmark's newly established colony in Tranquebar. For Jón Ólafsson, those who regarded Icelanders as inferior were simply ignorant of the truth; he did not question the ideologies rationalizing exploitation of non-Europeans, only the positioning of his own country on the wrong side of the boundary between civilization and barbarism. Jón Ólafsson subscribed wholeheartedly to Denmark's colonial project and eventually travelled to Sri Lanka and India as a gunner with the Danish East India Company in 1622–1624.

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<sup>76</sup> Jón Ólafsson, *Æfisaga Jóns Ólafssonar Indíafara, samin af honum sjálfum (1661)*, ed. Sigfús Blöndal (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska bókmenntafjelag, 1908–1909), 69–70.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

In his doctoral dissertation, Reynir Þór Eggertsson touches briefly on how the transmission of chapbook literature through Denmark and the Danish language to Iceland introduces a (post)colonial dimension to his comparative study of the Danish and Icelandic versions of two German *Volksbücher*: *Die geduldige Helena* and *Giletta*.<sup>78</sup> Reynir Þór does not use postcolonial theory in his study, but he points out that the study itself can be interpreted as an act of de-colonization.

When looking back at the early modern past, there is a tendency to focus narrowly on court culture and the experiences of the urban elite, glorifying the impact of various colonial and mercantilist projects in financing the lifestyles of Europe's upper classes. This golden age is utterly disconnected from the vast network of human trafficking and slavery that was cultivated under the pretense that its thousands of victims were not truly human. When compared to the genocide, cultural genocide and systematic denial of personhood experienced in the Americas, Africa and Asia, a crisis of economic and cultural decline seems hardly the worst possible outcome for an island nation without an army or navy of its own.

Nationalist discourse in Iceland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries strongly resisted labelling Iceland as a colony.<sup>79</sup> Until very recently, there has been little willingness on the part of scholars to explore the parallels between Iceland's experience and that of other peripheries of the Danish Empire, or Iceland's place in a much larger colonial and mercantilist network.<sup>80</sup> In fact, many Icelandic intellectuals of the nineteenth century saw colonialism and imperialism in a positive, "civilizing" light, even blaming slavery on Africans involved in the slave trade, at the same time as they resisted Danish control of their own affairs.<sup>81</sup>

To date, the influence of postcolonial theory on early modern Icelandic literary history has been peripheral. In more recent scholarship, terms such as crypto-colonialist have been suggested as more descriptive of the Iceland-Denmark relationship.<sup>82</sup> In the case of the early seventeenth century, "imperialist", "mercantilist" or "proto-colonialist" might be more helpful to explore the increasingly

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<sup>78</sup> Reynir Þór Eggertsson, *Forwards and Backwards: The Transmission of Two 'Volksbücher' into Danish and Icelandic* (PhD dissertation, University College London, Department of Scandinavian Studies, 2009), 42.

<sup>79</sup> For a discussion, see Gavin Lucas & Angelos Parigoris, "Icelandic Archaeology and the Ambiguities of Colonialism," in *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity: Small Time Agents in a Global Arena*, ed. Magdalena Naum & Jonas M. Nordin, Contributions To Global Historical Archaeology 37 (New York: Springer, 2013), 89–104.

<sup>80</sup> An arguably seminal work in this context is Gísli Pálsson, *Hans Jónatan: Maðurinn sem stal sjálfum sér* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2014). See also Kristín Loftsdóttir & Gísli Pálsson, "Black on White: Danish Colonialism, Iceland and the Caribbean," in *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity*, ed. Magdalena Naum & Jonas M. Nordin, 37–52.

<sup>81</sup> Kristín Loftsdóttir, "Shades of Otherness: Representations of Africa in 19th-century Iceland," *Social Anthropology* 16.2 (2008): 172–86; Kristín Loftsdóttir, "Pure manliness: The colonial project and Africa's image in 19th century Iceland," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 16 (2009): 271–93.

<sup>82</sup> Lucas & Parigoris, "Icelandic Archaeology and the Ambiguities of Colonialism," 89–104.

clear imbalance of power in relations between Denmark and Iceland over the course of the period. Although the present dissertation does not deal directly with postcolonial theory, there is no question that an awareness of colonialism and imperialism is relevant to understanding the literature of seventeenth-century Iceland and its reception.

### 3.2 Erotic borealism

Outward-looking portrayals of Iceland for non-Icelandic audiences have long been heavily influenced by what has been referred to as borealism, i.e., ideas of the North as an exotic periphery of perpetual cold, peopled by Northern races who both reflect and resist the harsh environment.<sup>83</sup> Until the late eighteenth century, literature on Iceland penned by non-Icelanders tended to emphasize wondrous aspects of the natural landscape and the monstrous or subhuman qualities of its inhabitants.<sup>84</sup> While acknowledging that the population was nominally Christian, early modern European writers nevertheless tended to conceive of Icelanders as inherently immoral and even diabolical by nature.<sup>85</sup> Where reading activities and literature are mentioned at all, they are highly suspect.

One of the most widely disseminated treatises on Iceland in educated European circles was a Latin work by Dithmar Blefken, who spuriously claimed to have visited in Iceland in 1563 as the chaplain for a crew of Hansa merchants. Blefken published an account of his supposed travels in 1607, which claimed among other things that the Icelanders he met practiced sorcery for personal gain and were wicked pawns of the devil.<sup>86</sup> They would happily prostitute their daughters to the Hanse merchants,<sup>87</sup> and they also urinate at table while feasting – a statement cribbed directly from the Low German poem “Van Ysslandt” by the Hansa merchant-sailor Gories Peerse the Elder, the first edition of which was published in c. 1561.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> On borealism and representations of Iceland as North, see Kristinn Schram, *Borealism: Folkloristic Perspectives on Transnational Performances and the Exoticism of the North* (PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2011); Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson, “Ideas of an Island in the North,” *Scandia* 75.2 (2009): 97–101; Peter Davidson, *The Idea of North* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005).

<sup>84</sup> Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson, “Islands on the Edge: Medieval and Early Modern National Images of Iceland and Greenland,” in *Iceland and Images of the North*, ed. Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson with Daniel Chartier (Sainte-Foy: Presses de l’Université du Québec, 2011), 41–66.

<sup>85</sup> On pre-modern representations of Iceland in travel and scientific literature, see Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson, *Ísland, framandi land* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1996).

<sup>86</sup> Dithmar Blefken, *ISLANDIA, SIVE Populorum & mirabilium quæ in ea Insula reperiuntur ACCVRATOR DESCRIPTIO: Cui de GRONLANDIA sub finem quædam adjecta* (Leiden: 1607).

<sup>87</sup> Blefken, *ISLANDIA*, 32–34.

<sup>88</sup> Gories Peerse, “Um Ísland,” trans. Guðbrandur Jónsson, in *Glöggv er gests augað: Úrval ferðasagna um Ísland*, ed. Sigurður Grímsson (Reykjavík: Menningar- og fræðslusamband alþýðu, 1946), 19–21, 27. No copy of the first edition survives, but it was reprinted in 1594, [Gories Peerse], *Van Ysslandt/ Wat vor Egenschop/ wunder vnd ardt des Volckes/ der Deerte/ Vögel vnd Vische/ darsüluest gefunden werden. Geschreuen dörch einen gebaren Ysslander/ vnd dörch de yennen/ so Jaerlikes yn Ysslandt handeln/ ynden Drück vorferdiget* (n.p.: 1594). Urinating at table is not infrequently framed as a repugnant foreign custom in late medieval and early modern literature, cf. for example “The Libelle of Englyshe Polycye” from c. 1436, which claims that the



That Blefken ever set foot in Iceland is doubtful. His book is a disjointed mishmash of vernacular anecdotes and rumours from merchants and sailors – most notably Peerse’s poem – with existing Latin literature on Iceland.<sup>89</sup> A full 44 years passed between the time that Blefken claimed to have arrived in Iceland and the publication of Blefken’s *Islandia*. Blefken blames the delay on pirates and other unfortunate adventures, but the timing of the book’s publication by a Hansa-affiliated minister five years after the Danish king established a trade monopoly is probably not a coincidence.<sup>90</sup> Arngrímur Jónsson *lærði* pointed out the obvious inconsistencies in Blefken’s timeline in his polemical response, *Anatome Blefkeniana* in 1612, which was reprinted in Hamburg in 1613 and 1618.<sup>91</sup>

Suspiciously, Blefken’s supposed stay in Iceland overlaps neatly with that of Gories Peerse the Elder, who based his satirical poem about Iceland on his own personal experiences. Peerse did indeed travel from Hamburg to Iceland in 1547–1569, and his son Gories Peerse the Younger sailed to Iceland from the 1560s to 1592.<sup>92</sup> It is impossible that Blefken did not have knowledge of the poem when he published *Islandia*. For example, Peerse the Elder’s poem includes a list of Icelandic milk products, from which Blefken cribbed the word *drabbel* (for Icelandic *drafli*, ‘cooked curdled milk’).<sup>93</sup> Blefken had no first-hand knowledge of *drabbel*, as he incorrectly defined it as a mixture of flour and milk for long-term preservation. Blefken’s failure to mention Peerse, in spite of his obvious indebtedness to him, is a classic mark of plagiarism.

Like many contemporary travel memoirs Blefken’s work confirms a worldview whereby continental Europe is positioned at the centre of the world, while the extreme peripheries of North and South are characterized by extreme weather and behaviours. Thus, Blefken contrasts the supposedly promiscuous behaviour of the Icelanders with a graphic description of female genital mutilation in Mozambique taken from Book VI of Pietro Bembo’s *History of Venice*.<sup>94</sup> By comparing the Icelanders’

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Flemings are drunkards and “undre the borde they pissen as they sitte”, Thomas Wright (ed.), *Political Poems and Songs Relating to English History Composed during the Period from the Accession of Edward III to that of Richard III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1861/2012) vol. 2, 170.

<sup>89</sup> See Monique Mund-Dopchie, “A beau mentir qui vient de loin: Défaillances de la mémoire et forgeries dans l’*Islandia* du voyageur Dithmar Blefken (1<sup>re</sup> éd. 1607),” *Neulateinisches Jahrbuch* 6 (2004): 160–72.

<sup>90</sup> Monique Mund-Dopchie, “La vraisemblance au service de la mémoire: Réflexions sur les récits et descriptions «véridiques» de Bernal Diaz del Castillo (1<sup>ère</sup> éd. 1632) et de Dithmar Blefken (1<sup>e</sup> éd. 1607),” *Revue des Lettres et de Traduction* 10 (2004): 89–90.

<sup>91</sup> Arngrímur Jónsson, *ANATOMIE BLEFKENIANA Qua DITMARI BLEFKENII viscera, magis præcipua, in Libello de Islandia* (Hólar: 1612).

<sup>92</sup> Bjarni Þorsteinsson, “Gories Peerse,” *Saga* 3 (1960): 110–13.

<sup>93</sup> Blefken, *Islandia*, 33.

<sup>94</sup> See Pietro Bembo, *History of Venice*, ed. & trans. Robert W. Ulery Jr. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), vol. 2, 100, 102–3. This paragraph was silently omitted from Haraldur Sigurðsson’s Icelandic translation of Blefken’s work, Dithmar Blefken, “*Islandia*,” trans. Haraldur Sigurðsson, in *Glöggv er gests augað: Úrval ferðasagna um Ísland*, ed. Sigurður Grímsson (Reykjavík: Menningar- og fræðslusamband alþýðu, 1946),

utter disregard for virginity – as representatives of the distant North – with the overzealous warriors of the South, both groups are effectively positioned as subhuman.

In keeping with their nature, Blefken’s Icelanders practice a highly suspect form of literacy. Earlier in his treatise, he claims that it is difficult to distinguish between male and female Icelanders, due to the similarities of their dress. Literacy rates are high for men and women, but it is implied that they use their own system of *characteres* – magical signs that, since they cannot be easily transliterated into Latin, are implied to be demonic and used for communicating with the forces of evil.<sup>95</sup>

Parentes liberos masculos statim à pueritia literas ejusque Insulæ jus docent, ita usane perpauci per totam reperiantur Insulam virilis sexus quin literas sciãr, & plæræ que fæminæ nostris utuntur literis, alios quoque characteres, quibus integra illorum quædam verba exprimunt, habent quæ verba nostris literis difficulter scribi possunt.<sup>96</sup>

(‘Parents teach their male children their letters and the laws of the island, starting in boyhood, so that few are to be found of the male sex in the whole of the island who do not know their letters, and most of the women know our letters as well, and other characters, which sometimes express whole words of theirs that can be hardly written in our letters.’)

Salacious accounts of bodily functions and sexual deviance in the guise of ethnography are characteristic of Blefken’s overall style. Shielded by his use of Latin, Blefken constructs a titillating fantasy for an elite, overwhelmingly male European readership that assures them of their superiority at the same time as it promises them an island of nubile, willing women who are admittedly evil but nevertheless happy to sleep with merchants for biscuits, with no negative consequences for anyone.

It was to combat the erotic borealism of Blefken and Peerse that the first works in Latin by an Icelander were published. The polemics of Arngrímur Jónsson *lærði*, in particular *Brevis Commentarius* (1593) and the above-mentioned *Anatome Blefkeniana* (1612), are the intellectual equivalent of Jón Ólafsson’s tavern brawl.<sup>97</sup> Arngrímur, whose work is strongly informed by contemporary humanist currents, wrote about Iceland to educate a learned European readership, a

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29–51. When the translation was reprinted by Sögufélag in 2013, the editors were probably unaware of the deleted passage, but the passage may have been considered too controversial for a general readership in the 1940s and silently censored. The passage as it stands in the original Latin goes a long way in explaining the motivation behind Arngrímur Jónsson’s response in *Anatome Blefkeniana*.

<sup>95</sup> See Benedek Láng, “Characters and Magic Signs in the Picatrix and Other Medieval Magic Texts,” in *Applied Magic in the Antiquity*, ed. Thomas Gesztelyi & Geogius Németh, Acta Classica Universitatis Scientiarum Debreceniensis 47 (Debrecen: 2011), vol. 1, 69–77.

<sup>96</sup> Blefken, *ISLANDIA*, 32.

<sup>97</sup> See Einar Sigmarsson’s introduction to Arngrímur Jónsson, *Brevis Commentarius de Islandia: Stutt greinargerð um Ísland*, ed. Einar Sigmarsson (Reykjavík: Sögufélag, 2008).

project most fully realized in his *Crymogaea* (1609), which he dedicated to King Christian IV of Denmark.<sup>98</sup> Arngrímur was also the first author to systematically employ Old Icelandic literature in the defense of his nation, demonstrating to his readers the ways in which saga literature testifies positively to the early culture of Iceland: proof that European civilization can be successfully transplanted to a hostile northern environment. Just as Arngrímur offers scientific explanations for various natural phenomena in Iceland, he turns to written historical sources to combat the image of Iceland as an isle of sub-human barbarians. The cultivation of vernacular literacy thus becomes an important marker of civilization and culture.

Arngrímur Jónsson was a highly influential author in mainland Scandinavia, sparking the first attempts to collect Icelandic antiquities, including written documents, in the 1590s.<sup>99</sup> Jakob Benediktsson argues that Arngrímur Jónsson was also an instrumental figure in constructing a positive self-image for the Icelandic intelligensia of the seventeenth century, in which Iceland's manuscript culture and medieval literature figured large.<sup>100</sup> Later scholars and upper-class manuscript owners sought to pattern their behaviour on the model provided by Arngrímur Jónsson and – in a sense – to perform the North through their own participation in the transmission and preservation of the old literature.<sup>101</sup>

This focus on the past should not be interpreted as blindness to the literary present. Antiquarian interests were on the rise throughout much of Europe, and the work of individual Icelandic scholars in drawing attention to Iceland's medieval literature garnered them not only admission as full participants in academic circles within Northern Europe but also successful careers in Denmark-Norway, Sweden and beyond.

Given Iceland's precarious position throughout the pre-modern period and even into the first years of the Republic (established under American occupation in 1944), the political importance of Icelandic literature as a marker of civilization cannot be overstated. Today, other markers of Westernness/Europeanness arguably have greater significance in determining Iceland's "cultural"

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<sup>98</sup> For an overview of Arngrímur's publications, see Jakob Benediktsson, *Arngrímur Jónsson and his Works* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1957); on humanism in Iceland, see also Annette Lassen, "Icelandic Humanism," in *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: Research and Reception, Vol. 1: From the Middle Ages to c. 1830*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 219–45.

<sup>99</sup> Jakob Benediktsson, *Arngrímur Jónsson and his Works*, 13–14, 42–45.

<sup>100</sup> Jakob Benediktsson, *Arngrímur Jónsson and His Works*, 78–81.

<sup>101</sup> Jakob Benediktsson, "Den vågnende interesse for sagalitteraturen på Island i 1600-tallet," *Lærdómslist: Afmælisrit 20. júlí 1987* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1987), 227–41.

location.<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, the concept of Iceland as a mythical literary island at the world's edge remains largely intact to the present day.<sup>103</sup>

### 3.3 Escaping Nirvana

Given the almost utter disconnect between the Icelandic *lærdómsöld* and the literary and scholarly activities of humanists, poets and others outside of Iceland, it comes as no surprise that students and scholars alike experienced Iceland during the *lærdómsöld* as a literary island unto itself – a bookish landscape that was as culturally isolated as it was geographically remote. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, who completed his Ph.D. at the University of Iceland in 1933, wrote the following in 1930:

Þegar mjer verður hugsað til bókmenta Íslendinga tvær aldirnar næst eftir siðaskiftin, er fyrsta tilfinningin sú, að þar sje enginn tími til, þær sjeu með einhverjum dularfullum hætti losaðar úr öllum tengslum við tímann. Þegar fyrsti aldarhelmingurinn, sjálfur tími byltingarinnar og nýsköpunarinnar, er liðinn, er engu líkara en þjóðin sje kominn í eitthvert kyrðarástand, sem engin erlend áhrif og engar innlendar hreyfingar ná að rjúfa. Því að þótt einstakir menn sjeu mótaðir af hinum erlenda aldarsvip: Endurreisn húmanisma, barok, klassicisma rokokko, bæði í huga og klæða burði, þá megna þeir þó ekki að setja sinn svip á andlegt líf Íslendinga á þessum tímum.<sup>104</sup>

(‘When I think of the literature of the Icelanders during the two centuries following the Reformation [1550–1750], my first impression is that time does not exist within the period, that these centuries are in some mysterious way detached from all connection with time. When the first half-century has passed, the time of the revolution and of innovation, it is as if the nation has entered a state of stasis, which no foreign influences and no domestic movements succeed in breaking. For even though individuals may be shaped by the foreign zeitgeist – renaissance humanism, baroque, classicism, rococo – both in terms of mind and dress, they are incapable of making their impression on the intellectual life of Icelanders during these times.’)

Einar Ólafur Sveinsson’s words prefigure by many decades the Danish anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup’s theory of *uchronia*, which holds that early modern Icelanders were anchored so firmly to

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<sup>102</sup> Cf., for example, the recent national news report that “Ísland trónir efst á lista Alþjóðæfnahagsráðsins, World Economic Forum, í Genf um kynjajafnrétti, ellefta árið í röð” (‘Iceland reigns at the top of the Global Gender Gap Report of the World Economic Forum in Geneva for the eleventh year in a row’). “Jafnrétti kynjanna mest á Íslandi, ellefta árið í röð” (17 December 2019). Accessed 18 December 2019 at <https://www.ruv.is/frett/jafnretti-kynjanna-mest-a-islendi-ellefta-arid-i-rod>

<sup>103</sup> Anne-Sofie Nielsen Gremaud, “Ísland sem rými annarleikans: Myndir frá bókasýningunni í Frankfurt árið 2011 í ljósi kenninga um dul-lendur og heterótópíur,” trans. Salvör Aradóttir, *Ritið* 12.1 (2012): 7–29.

<sup>104</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson, “Undan og ofan af um íslenzkar bókmenntir síðari alda,” *Heimskringla* (27.08.1930): 3.

the saga-past that they were unable to “produce” new history.<sup>105</sup> Hastrup’s is possibly the most extreme extension of Sigurður Nordal’s theory of continuity, one that unintentionally internalizes imperialist European discourses justifying economic and political control of geographically distant territories by characterizing these territories as sites of stagnant or less advanced state of civilization. The connection between infantilizing discourses and economic ambitions is perhaps best seen in the writings of Hamburg merchants and their affiliates, cf. Johann Anderson’s *Nachrichten von Island, Grönland und der Straße Davis*.<sup>106</sup>

Seven years after the publication of Hastrup’s *Nature and Policy in Iceland 1400–1800*, Matthew Driscoll’s *The Unwashed Children of Eve* provided ample evidence that Icelandic readers were anything but stuck in the saga-past.<sup>107</sup> Driscoll’s study of the consumption of popular literature in Iceland followed a number of earlier works on early modern Icelandic literary tastes that consistently demonstrated an interest in the same types of prose romances and adventures as were circulating widely in Europe at the time. For example, Hubert Seelow surveyed the dissemination and translation of printed *Volksbücher* in post-Reformation Iceland, finding that Icelanders enthusiastically received titles ranging from the *Kalīlah wa Dimnah*, originally compiled by Ibn al-Muqaffa' (d. about 757), to the French *Valentin et Ourson*, which arrived to Iceland only after the Reformation.<sup>108</sup>

Hastrup later defended her argument for the Icelandic uchronia as “circumstantial rather than empirical... but none the less real for that.”<sup>109</sup> However, Hastrup’s theory has been repeatedly criticized by scholars of early modern Icelandic history and literature, most recently by Shaun Hughes, who uses the example of Margrét Eggertsdóttir’s research on Hallgrímur Pétursson as a baroque poet to refute definitively Hastrup’s theory that the Icelandic nation remained transfixed for centuries in a static vision of its own past, stating categorically that “*Icelandic Baroque* makes it impossible for such views to have currency any longer.”<sup>110</sup> However, Hastrup’s impression of early

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<sup>105</sup> Kirsten Hastrup, *Nature and Policy in Iceland 1400–1800: An Anthropological Analysis of History and Mentality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

<sup>106</sup> Johann Anderson, *Nachrichten von Island, Grönland und der Straße Davis, zum wahren Nutzen der Wissenschaften und der Handlung* (Hamburg: Georg Christian Grund, 1746).

<sup>107</sup> Matthew James Driscoll, *The Unwashed Children of Eve: The Production, Dissemination and Reception of Popular Literature in Post-Reformation Iceland* (Enfield Lock Middlesex: Hisarlik Press, 1997).

<sup>108</sup> Hubert Seelow, *Die isländischen Übersetzungen der deutschen Volksbücher: Handschriftenstudien zur Rezeption und Überlieferung ausländischer unterhaltender Literatur in Island in der Zeit zwischen Reformation und Aufklärung*, Rit Stofnunar Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi 35 (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1989).

<sup>109</sup> Kirsten Hastrup, “Getting it right: Knowledge and evidence in anthropology,” *Anthropological Theory* 4.4 (2004): 455–72.

<sup>110</sup> Shaun F. D. Hughes, “Review Essay: Hallgrímur Pétursson and the Icelandic Baroque,” *JEGP* 117.2 (2018): 245–46.

modern Iceland as a uchronia is strikingly similar to Einar Ólafur Sveinsson's much earlier description of the period: seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Iceland is a literary Avalon, a mystic isle cut off from ordinary time, which seeks no contact with the outside world and which the outside world cannot ever truly access.

Einar Ólafur Sveinsson's own term for this proto-uchronic state is "bókmenta-nirvana" ('literary Nirvana').<sup>111</sup> However, his comments apply only to peasant-farmer culture (*bændamening*), and not the so-called *svartkuflungar* ('black cassocks') who controlled the printing press. He argues that whereas in neighbouring countries<sup>112</sup> an increasingly large body of literature is written in Latin for only the educated classes, the majority of writings in early modern Iceland are intended for the population at large and can be considered "eign allra manna jafnt" ('the property of all men equally').<sup>113</sup> Timeless literature is intimately connected to scribal culture, the intensely Icelandic materiality of production and the largely anonymous work of successive generations of copyists:

Í dimmum torfhýsum sitja veðurteknir menn á löngum vetrarkvöldum og rita með hrafnsfjöldur á pappír kvæði, rímur, sögur, annála. Ástin á bókum skín í augunum hlý og óslökkvandi. Natnin við að skrifa er óþrjótandi, ýmist er samið nýtt, ýmist afrituð verk annara. Bókmentirnar, einkum kveðskapurinn, eru svo miklar að undrum sætir, og alt, sem ekki er guðsorð, breiðist frá manni til manns, geymist frá kyni til kyns í handrit- er [sic] um, aðeins sökum ástar þessa fólks á hinu ritaða orði.<sup>114</sup>

(‘In the dim turf huts, weather-beaten men sit on long winter evenings and write with a crow’s quill: poems, *rímur*, sagas, chronicles. Love for books shines in their eyes, warm and unquenchable. The care with which they write is inexhaustible; they either compose new material or copy the work of others. There is such a great deal of literature, and poetry in particular, that it is a wonder, and all that is not the word of God spreads from man to man, is preserved from generation to generation in manuscripts, all for the sheer love of these folk for the written word.’)

This early essay by Einar Ólafur Sveinsson may be the only instance of early modern Icelandic literary culture being equated with nirvana. Nevertheless, the vivid imagery entwining manuscript production with the cultivation of peasant literacy is quintessential of many writings on post-Reformation Icelandic literature from the nineteenth century through to the present day. As correctly pointed out by Einar Ólafur, manuscript culture could potentially enable acts of literary

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<sup>111</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson, "Undan og ofan af um íslenzkar bókmenntir síðari alda," 3.

<sup>112</sup> I.e., Northwestern Europe, not the geographically much closer Greenland.

<sup>113</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson, "Undan og ofan af um íslenzkar bókmenntir síðari alda," 3.

<sup>114</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson, "Undan og ofan af um íslenzkar bókmenntir síðari alda," 3.

resistance to prescriptive cultural and social norms.<sup>115</sup> Yet early modern Icelandic manuscript culture was equally a means of reinforcing the dominant social order and constructing the cultural capital of a tiny and very wealthy elite, as demonstrated by Þórunn Sigurðardóttir.<sup>116</sup>

Closer investigation indicates that many of the most active participants in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literary and manuscript culture (as opposed to the manuscript culture of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) were wealthy and/or socially well-connected individuals. Þórunn Sigurðardóttir's analysis of three genres of seventeenth-century occasional poetry (*erfiljóð*, *harmljóð* and *huggunarkvæði*, forms of funeral, mourning and consolation poetry) shows that virtually all *erfiljóð* or funeral poems were composed by members of the upper classes: either by men who had received formal education or by persons closely connected to such men.<sup>117</sup> It was common for such poems to be transmitted in manuscript form, often in larger collections of hymns and other religious poetry and quite frequently in manuscripts associated with the family or descendants of either the individual about whom the poem is composed or the poet.<sup>118</sup>

Writing on manuscript culture in early modern England, Margaret Ezell points out that manuscript authorship in England has been unfairly characterized as an aristocratic practice despite the fact that the material culture of aristocrats tends to be far better preserved than that of peasants and labourers: a hereditary family home or residence is a more optimal location for a collection of papers than a chest transported from tenancy to tenancy.<sup>119</sup> In other words, it is important to be aware that modern archives are witnesses to manuscript survival, not the full spectrum of historical manuscript production. Studies of manuscript culture in early modern Iceland are arguably faced by the opposite problem: as illustrated in Einar Ólafur Sveinsson's essay, scribal culture is frequently depicted as a national culture, practiced by peasants and driven by an omnivorous love of literature, in resistance to the meagre, religious-oriented offerings of the printing press.

The poems studied by Þórunn Sigurðardóttir were certainly not created and copied merely for the love of the written word, however. In Þórunn Sigurðardóttir's words, they represent "an integral part of the literary production of the post-Reformation learned classes in Europe, who draw on learned texts based on classical literary traditions to construct their own identity and social image... The

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<sup>115</sup> On literary resistance and enforcement of social norms in early modern Icelandic manuscript culture, see Katelin Parsons, "Text and Context," 57–86.

<sup>116</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, "Constructing cultural competence in seventeenth-century Iceland: The case of poetical miscellanies," in *Mirrors of Virtue*, ed. Margrét Eggertsdóttir & Matthew James Driscoll, 277–320.

<sup>117</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, *Heiður og huggun*, 309–12.

<sup>118</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, *Heiður og huggun*, 320–23.

<sup>119</sup> Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print*, 40–41.

poets belonged to a clearly defined social group, as did most of their subjects and addressees.”<sup>120</sup>

While it may be, as in England, that the manuscript poetry of the less well-to-do has simply not survived, the occasional poems in Þórunn Sigurðardóttir’s study fall into the category of learned poetry. Access to the material goods involved in manuscript production and the ability to write were not the only barriers to participation in this type of verse-making; as also discussed in Margrét Eggertsdóttir’s *Icelandic Baroque*, full participation in elite literary circles required exposure to the principles of rhetoric.<sup>121</sup>

### 3.4 Difficult literary heritage

An educational video in a first-year Icelandic history class provided my own first glimpse into life in early modern Iceland. A brief scene shot in grainy sepia showed miserable peasants scurrying in and out of a turf hovel, spliced between somewhat longer scenes of happy, independent Norse settlers in Viking costumes and happy, independent modern Icelanders celebrating the founding of the Republic of Iceland in 1944.

In an article from 2015, Sigurjón Baldur Hafsteinsson and Marta Guðrún Jóhannesdóttir characterize the traditional Icelandic turf house as difficult heritage, contrasting ongoing efforts to preserve turf buildings with nineteenth- and twentieth-century campaigns to eradicate turf-and-stone architecture from the landscape in the name of modernization and public health.<sup>122</sup> Drawing on the work of Sharon Macdonald and Mélanie van der Hoorn, they argue that the paradoxical love-hate attitudes expressed in public discourse and regulatory frameworks on turf architecture are symptomatic of its status as difficult heritage, embodying at the same time squalor and symbiosis with the natural landscape.

At a national level, difficult heritage is material for the past that struggles and strains against a positive national identity, making it “an inheritance that many might wish to disown even while they acknowledge it to be part of their defining history.”<sup>123</sup> Such heritage arouses a plurality of strongly emotional and often dissonant responses. Macdonald’s work focuses on the mediation of the very

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<sup>120</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, *Heiður og huggun*, 427.

<sup>121</sup> Margrét Eggertsdóttir, *Icelandic Baroque*, 77.

<sup>122</sup> Sigurjón Baldur Hafsteinsson & Marta Guðrún Jóhannesdóttir, “Moldargreni og menningararfur: Útrýming og arfleifð íslenska bæjarins,” in *Menningararfur á Íslandi: Gagnrýni og greining*, ed. Ólafur Rastrick & Valdimar Tr. Hafstein (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2015), 193–218; on Danish attitudes to turf houses, see Sigurjón Baldur Hafsteinsson, “‘Icelandic Putridity’: Colonial Thought and Icelandic Architectural Heritage,” *Scandinavian Studies* 91.1/2 (2019): 53–73.

<sup>123</sup> Sharon Macdonald, “Mediating heritage: Tour guides at the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds, Nuremberg,” *Tourist Studies* 6:2 (2006): 127.



recent past (i.e., Nazi sites at Nuremberg after World War Two), but one can easily see a parallel with early modern Icelandic literature.

In contrast to the settlement of Iceland, the Icelandic Commonwealth, Snorri Sturluson, medieval manuscript culture, the classical Icelandic sagas, Jón Sigurðsson *forseti*, the poetry of Jónas Hallgrímsson and the novels of Halldór Laxness, there was very little time spent in my undergraduate classes for Icelandic for foreign students on the period between the execution of Bishop Jón Arason in 1550 and the rise of Icelandic nationalism in the early 1800s. To the extent that it was covered in the curriculum, the early modern period was mainly framed in terms of Iceland's loss of independence and economic, ecological, cultural, literary, moral and even linguistic decay, resulting directly from the unfree condition of its people.

This attitude is by no means limited to introductory undergraduate-level courses. In 1948, Jón Helgason opened the first volume of the series *Íslensk rit síðari alda* by comparing Icelandic literature after 1602 to the stunted subarctic plantlife associated with the physical landscape of post-Reformation Iceland:

Það væri ekki til neins að bera á þessar bókmenntir mikið hól. Þær eru yfirleitt heldur krækilóttur gróður og lágvaxinn, og hríslurnar sem yfir gnæfa færri en skyldi. Samt eru það líklega eins dæmi í heiminum að þjóð sem átti við þvílík kjör að búa sem Íslendingar á einokunaröld, svipt flestöllum þeim skilyrðum sem annars þykja nauðsynleg til menningarlífs, hafi lagt aðra eins alúð við bókagerð. Því munu bókmenntir þessa tímabils í allri sinni smæð einlægt verða taldar einn merkasti þáttur íslenzkrar menningar.<sup>124</sup>

(‘There would be no point in heaping much praise on this literature. It is generally quite gnarled and low-growing vegetation, and the scrubby trees rising above it fewer than they ought to be. Even so, it is likely unique in the world that a nation living in such conditions as the Icelanders during the Age of Danish Monopoly, stripped of nearly all the conditions that are otherwise considered necessary for cultural life, should have taken such pains in book production. Therefore, the literature of this period – in all its insignificance – should earnestly be considered one of the most significant aspects of Icelandic culture.’)

As in the narrative of the educational video, Iceland's status as an underdeveloped, exploited nation on the periphery is a necessary and defining part of the country's history, which must be acknowledged as the ashes from which the phoenix of the independence movement rises again. The

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<sup>124</sup> Jón Helgason, introduction to *Ármanns rímur eftir Jón Guðmundsson lærða (1637) og Ármanns þáttur eftir Jón Þorláksson*, ed. Jón Helgason, *Íslensk rit síðari alda* 1 (Copenhagen: S. L. Möller, 1948), v.

independence struggle in Iceland was an entirely peaceful one, led by the liberal scholar and politician Jón Sigurðsson. Had early modern Icelanders been treated fairly and competently by the Danish administration, had Iceland thrived under Danish control, then the work of Jón Sigurðsson would be meaningless. Even more modern depictions of early modern Iceland, such as Halldór Laxness's three-volume *Íslandsklukkan* (1943–1946), hinge on the understanding of the past as difficult heritage.

*Íslandsklukkan* was completed during the years when Iceland made a full and decisive break from Denmark, becoming an independent republic shortly after a decisive national referendum. The early modern past continues to be confronted as difficult heritage in more recent historical novels, but with a growing focus on the role played by Icelandic authorities in the injustices of the past. The victims of these novels are punished to varying degrees for their refusal to conform to an increasingly controlling, intolerant society that is not entirely the creation of a Danish administration. These include Þórarinn Eldjárn's *Brotahöfuð* (1996), on Guðmundur Andrésson's imprisonment in Copenhagen for penning *Discursus oppositivus*; Njörður P. Njarðvík's *Dauðamenn* (1982), on the burning of Jón Jónsson and his son Jón Jónsson for alleged sorcery against the Rev. Jón Magnússon of Eyri in Skutulsfjörður (see 4.6.2); and Sjón's *Rökkurbýsnir* (2008), based largely on the life of Jón Guðmundsson *lærði* – in particular his outlawry for sorcery, his attempt to seek justice in Copenhagen and his eventual banishment to the tiny, barren island of Bjarnarey in East Iceland. Tapio Koivukari's *Ariasman* (2011) and *Poltetun miehen tytär* (2018) deal with events in the Westfjords in the seventeenth century that hardly show Icelandic society in a flattering light: the massacre of Basque whalers in 1615 and the convoluted, drawn-out prosecution of Margrét Þórðardóttir (d. 1726) for witchcraft in 1656–1662.<sup>125</sup>

Empirical evidence does not necessarily support the argument that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Icelanders experienced a period of more-or-less continual privation and decline. In exploring other ways of understanding poetry and manuscript production in seventeenth-century Iceland than as an ecological system in crisis, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge the status of the period as difficult heritage. This status has had a profound impact on writings on early modern Icelandic culture and literature, and it will likely continue to do so for centuries to come.

The act of engaging with the literature of the past can be difficult. The autobiographical writings of Jón Magnússon *þumlungur* (see 4.6.2) are a prime example of this, since they are composed as an

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<sup>125</sup> Resilience and resistance cannot exist in a vacuum. Even though Margrét Þórðardóttir is a historical example of a woman who successfully resisted attempts during her own lifetime to convict her as a sorceress, she was reduced in later folk legend to the role of the cackling witch Galdra-Manga, supposedly executed in a local waterfall for her crimes.

apologia for the execution of two community members for sorcery (a father and son) and his relentless persecution of a third community member (their daughter/sister, a young woman of around eighteen) on the same grounds. Jón's *Píslarsaga* has been singled out as a literary masterpiece, available in three printed editions (from 1914, 1967 and 2001),<sup>126</sup> yet the circumstances of its composition make it an uneasy candidate for full canonization as a work of genius. Some later Icelandic writers have attempted to resolve this dilemma by acquitting Jón on the grounds of insanity: Sigfús Blöndal, who first edited Jón Magnússon's *Píslarsaga*, gave the scientific explanation of Jón Magnússon's affliction as a combination of *geðveiki* ('insanity') and *neurasthenia, hysteria, globulus hystericus* and *mouches volantes*.<sup>127</sup>

Responding to this and similar characterizations of Jón *þumlungur* as a heavily diseased author (shame and literary genius channeled into a single body), Matthías Viðar Sæmundsson wrote:

Við hlustum ekki lengur á raunverulegt tal hinna dauðu, nemum varla orð þeirra nema sem óvit og hávaða, táknmál um geðveiki og skáldskap, ekki sem skrif um raunverulega reynslu. Slíkt ónæmi á trú og reynslu fyrri alda bendir til að sameiginlegt tungutak sé ekki lengur til staðar, samband okkar við fortíðina takmarkist við almennar sjúkdómsgreiningar síðari tíma.<sup>128</sup>

(‘We no longer listen to the actual words of the dead, hardly perceive their words except as folly and noise, a sign language of madness and fiction, not writing on actual experience. Such insensitivity to the belief and experience of bygone ages suggests that a common speech no longer exists; our connection to the past is limited to the general diagnoses of later times.’)

For modern readers who engage with seventeenth-century texts such as Jón Magnússon's *Píslarsaga*, it can be difficult to contend with a worldview in which the possibility of divine revelations and sorcery fundamentally underly the words on the page. Despite Jón Magnússon's self-proclaimed martyr status and abhorrence of witchcraft, his own use of books and literacy verges on the amuletic: he seeks relief from his torments by laying his head on the Bible at the opening separating the Old and New Testaments, and later by laying his head on his catechism (*kver*) when he finds himself

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<sup>126</sup> There is even a complete English translation, Jón Magnússon, *And though This World with Devils Filled: A Story of Sufferings*, trans. Michael Fell (New York: Peter Lang, 2007).

<sup>127</sup> Sigfús Blöndal, introduction to Jón Magnússon, *Píslarsaga síra Jóns Magnússonar*, ed. Sigfús Blöndal (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska fræðafjelag í Kaupmannahöfn, 1914), iv–v.

<sup>128</sup> Matthías Viðar Sæmundsson, “Galdur og geðveiki: Um píslarsögur og galdrasóttir á sautjándu öld,” Jón Magnússon, *Píslarsaga séra Jóns Magnússonar*, ed. Matthías Viðar Sæmundsson (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2001) 361.

unable to read this book privately outdoors by the church at Eyri.<sup>129</sup> During the witchcraft investigation, a quantity of written material is found (*legendur* and *blöð*) on the chest of the farmer Snæbjörn Pálsson at Kirkjuból as he lies sick in bed, including a leaf of parchment inscribed with large characters and letters.<sup>130</sup> Jón Magnússon is horrified that Snæbjörn is never punished for his use of what seems to the clergyman to be sorcery, but his own treatment of books is influenced by a similar line of thinking: the possibility of transferring the protective power of the divine word through physical contact with the book-object.<sup>131</sup>

Jón Magnússon's and Snæbjörn Pálsson's uses of literacy are not relics of a Northern past. Under Luther's teachings, the Word of God was a sacred medium of great power during times of personal tribulation: words needed to be wielded meaningfully in order to have any effect, but the possibility that they could do so remained a part of daily life. Wearing of protective amulets pre-inscribed with sacred text was derided, but individuals were encouraged to collect (i.e., memorize) prayers, biblical quotations and other spiritual words.<sup>132</sup> These words could be disseminated variously through printed books, manuscripts and oral teachings, but cultivation of true spiritual literacy required penetration into the heart – hence the Rev. Jón Magnússon *þumlungur's* terror at the sensation of his heart being hardened or chilled during a short episode of religious despair as a young man in 1627, while travelling with a companion in Hvalfjörður:

Svo gjörsemlega [var] alt það burt úr mínu minni numið, sem eg hafði nokkur tíma heyrt eða lært af Guðs orði: svo eg vildi fyrir alla veröld eina huggunargrein Guðs orðs minnast, en gat það í öngvan máta, hvernin sem eg vildi bera mig að láta mig þar til ranka, utan alleinasta það heilagasta nafnið Jesús, á hverju eg klifaði; og ekki þóttist eg heldur svo lengi mega bindast á því nafni Lausnarans að klifa, sem eg hefði mátt minn förunaut um að biðja að minna mig á eina Guðs orðs huggunargrein mér til hugfróa, því eg fann, að hefði eg því blessaða nafni

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<sup>129</sup> Jón Magnússon, *Píslarsaga síra Jóns Magnússonar*, ed. Sigfús Blöndal, 29–30, 74.

<sup>130</sup> Jón Magnússon, *Píslarsaga síra Jóns Magnússonar*, ed. Sigfús Blöndal, 18. If one takes Jón Magnússon at his word, the transmission and practice of sorcery in Skutulsfjörður in the popular imagination was strongly linked to literacy and vernacular poetry: borrowing books of magic, cutting magic staves and reciting poetry, cf. Jón Magnússon, *Píslarsaga síra Jóns Magnússonar*, ed. Sigfús Blöndal, 49–52. Witchcraft confessions such as the ones cited by Jón were often made under duress and are clearly unreliable as documents of actual practice. However, the specific practices mentioned must have passed for witchcraft in the Westfjords in order for the father and son to be convicted.

<sup>131</sup> Copies of the Life of St. Margaret, *Margrétar saga*, continued to be used as a birthing aid in the first part of the seventeenth century (and probably later), cf. Jón Steffensen, "Margrétar saga and its history in Iceland," *Saga-Book* 16 (1965): 277–78.

<sup>132</sup> Ulinka Rublack, "Grapho-Relics: Lutheranism and the Materialization of the Word," *Past & Present* 206.suppl\_5 (2010): 149–50.

slept úr mínum munn, munda eg ekki heldur geta það aftur minnst, heldur en annað, sem mjer var áður óhindruðum minnisfast og alkunnugt.<sup>133</sup>

(‘So utterly was all that I had ever heard or learned of God’s Word taken from my mind that I wished for all the world to recall a single passage of solace from God’s Word, but could in no way manage, however I tried, save for the most holy name of Jesus alone, which I repeated again and again; and I did not feel that I could stop repeating the Saviour’s name even to ask my fellow traveller to remind me of one passage of solace from God’s Word, for I sensed that were I to let that blessed name go from my mouth that I would not again be able to remember it, any more than all else that had been previously fixed unhindered in my mind and thoroughly familiar to me.’)

Reflecting on this experience, Jón arrives at the conclusion that his religious training at Skálholt (as Bishop Oddur Einarsson’s foster-son) led him into the sin of pride, referring to the 1627 episode as his first schooling in temptation (i.e., religious doubt and despair) and a divine reprimand for his stupidity and overconfidence in his ability to resist temptation due to having been so thoroughly schooled in the teachings of the Church.<sup>134</sup> Jón *þumlungur*, whose brother, the Rev. Jón Magnússon of Laufás, was Guðmundur Erlendsson’s long-time friend, advocated a stripped-down simplicity in his religious practice, involving largely intuitive intensive repetition. According to Jón, he taught the same technique for repelling temptation to the widow Ólöf Bjarnadóttir at Hóll in Bolungarvík (alive in 1658), who he also believed to be a victim of witchcraft.<sup>135</sup>

Had Jón Magnússon’s contemporaries entirely approved of his actions, he presumably would not have felt compelled to author an apologia, but it is worth emphasizing that the *Píslarsaga* survives in only a single manuscript, NKS 1842 4to, produced in c. 1730–1757 by Jón Snorrason, Jón Magnússon’s grandson, who likely copied it from his grandfather’s autograph manuscript for the Dane Jakob Langebek.<sup>136</sup> Jón Snorrason spent eleven years as the minister for Eyri in Skutulsfjörður (rising to the position of provost) before emigrating to Denmark, where he died in 1757. If Jón Magnússon wrote at least in part to justify his actions, he also kept his words close to home. There is no variance to the *Píslarsaga*, because at its core it is an utterly unsociable work.

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<sup>133</sup> Jón Magnússon, *Píslarsaga síra Jóns Magnússonar*, ed. Sigfús Blöndal, 40.

<sup>134</sup> Jón Magnússon, *Píslarsaga síra Jóns Magnússonar*, 41.

<sup>135</sup> Jón Magnússon, *Píslarsaga síra Jóns Magnússonar*, 41.

<sup>136</sup> Matthías Viðar Sæmundsson, “Ævi séra Jóns Magnússonar,” in Jón Magnússon, *Píslarsaga séra Jóns Magnússonar*, ed. Matthías Viðar Sæmundsson (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2001), 42.

### 3.5 Outlanders

While Iceland was geographically isolated, research on early modern Icelandic manuscript culture consistently demonstrates active, ongoing literary and cultural interaction with mainland Europe, including the development of a strong hymn tradition in the century following the Reformation. Educated Icelanders such as Arngrímur Jónsson travelled abroad for their studies and remained in regular contact with the outside world through correspondence and occasional trips on official or personal business in later life. However, contact was not restricted exclusively to upper-class men, as shown in the memoir of Jón Ólafsson *Indíafari*. Thanks to the presence of rich fishing grounds in Icelandic waters, foreign crews sailed to Iceland on a regular basis. Despite a lack of urban centres in Iceland before the late eighteenth century, most farm households were situated not far from the ocean. Under the 1490 Píningsdómur, foreign merchants were forbidden from establishing a year-round presence in Iceland, and overwintering in Iceland was strongly discouraged. In consequence, interactions with non-Icelanders were mainly seasonal, being limited as a rule to fishing and trading seasons. In a good year, when wars were not ravaging Northern Europe, Icelandic men and women of all stations would have had opportunities for economic and social exchange with foreigners over the summer months.

Most of these encounters were of the mundane type rarely recorded for posterity. In a childhood anecdote in the memoir of Jón Ólafsson *Indíafari*, who grew up in Álftafjörður in the Westfjords, he recounts how he was healed of his childhood ill-health in his fourteenth year by a single Danish apple. According to Jón, a woman named Þórkatla Pálsdóttir, the midwife at Jón's birth, acted as mediator in the transaction, obtaining the apple from a Danish captain named Andrés (Anders).<sup>137</sup> As a young adult in 1615, Jón could obtain passage on an English fishing vessel without much difficulty. Jón's family and community seem to have accepted his decision without much fuss, and a party was held onboard the ship on the evening of his departure that was attended by his brother Halldór and his brother-in-law Skeggi Gunnlaugsson.<sup>138</sup> The only person strongly opposed to Jón accompanying the English crew was a clergyman, the Rev. Guðmundur Skúlason of Laugardalsstaður, who boarded the ship at Tálknafjörður to the great annoyance of the ship's captain.<sup>139</sup> Although Jón is discrete about the Icelanders' purpose in frequenting the English ships, the social nature of these interactions is clear.

A few outlanders came to Iceland for longer stretches of time during the early modern period, including administrative officials and their servants. A handful settled permanently in Iceland. The

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<sup>137</sup> Jón Ólafsson, *Æfisaga*, 8–9.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 12–13.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 13–14.

English merchant and falconer Jason West (d. after 1633) lived in Snæfellsnes in the first part of the seventeenth century, and Lauritz Christensen Gottrup (1649–1721) and Catharina Christiansdatter Peeters (1666–1731) established themselves in style at Þingeyrar. In other cases, family alliances were established between Icelanders and merchants and sailors that resulted in ongoing contact with the outside world. Guðlaug Einarasdóttir and her English husband Robert married in Iceland c. 1520. When Robert and Guðlaug sailed for England, Guðlaug's younger brother Marteinn joined them for a time, eventually returning to Iceland to become bishop of Skálholt in 1548–1556. Foreign ancestry was often highlighted as a mark of distinction in early modern Icelandic geneologies and personal writing. In his memoir, Jón Ólafsson *Indíafari* traced his own ancestry to the printer Jón Matthíasson *svenski* ('the Swede') and Pétur *skytta* ('the Musketeer') of Hamborg.<sup>140</sup>

Icelanders' attitudes toward foreigners could nevertheless be ambiguous. Well-documented massacres of Danes and Basque sailors occurred in 1539 and 1615, yet the military defence of Iceland after the Reformation was seen as a Danish responsibility. If Icelanders were outraged by the satire of the Hansa merchant Gories Peerse the Elder in the early seventeenth century, contemporary depictions of foreign merchants in Iceland are also less than flattering. Stefán Ólafsson's satirical poem "Danskurinn og fjanskurinn á Djúpavog" mocks one Danish merchant as a dishonest rogue who barely knows two words in Icelandic.<sup>141</sup> In the eighteenth century, Eggert Ólafsson blamed close contact between Danish merchants and Icelandic commoners for the bad behaviour exhibited by the peasantry in areas near trading harbours.<sup>142</sup> On the other hand, the seasonal nature of trade opened the possibility for developing long-term cultural connections with foreign ports. The carved oaken baptismal font in the church at Holt in Öfundarfjörður preserves an inscription in Low German from 1594 stating that it was made by the otherwise unknown Rolef Eis at the bidding of his good friend, the Rev. Sveinn Símonarson, who served as pastor for Holt from 1582–1635 and was the father of Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson of Skálholt.<sup>143</sup>

The official trade monopoly established by the Danish king in 1602 prohibited barter between Icelanders and unauthorized merchants. On paper at least, this narrowed Icelanders' access to commercial European book markets to a single, Danish-controlled access point. However, Iceland was less cut off from the rest of the North Atlantic region during this period than Danish merchants might wish. As royal control of the merchant trade tightened over the seventeenth century,

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<sup>140</sup> Jón Ólafsson, *Æfísaga*, 6–7. On Pétur *skytta*, see Appendix I of the same volume, 416–17.

<sup>141</sup> Stefán Ólafsson, *Kvæði*, ed. Jón Þorkelsson (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska bókmenntafjelag, 1885–1886), vol. 2, 62.

<sup>142</sup> Eggert Ólafsson & Bjarni Pálsson, *Vice-Lavmand Eggert Olafsens og Land-Physici Biarne Povelsens Reise igennem Island* (Sorøe: Jonas Lindgrens Enke, 1772), 962.

<sup>143</sup> Þjms 2071/1882-31.

socialization and unauthorized trade do not tend to be discussed openly in written Icelandic sources, including cultural and literary exchange. This does not mean that these activities ceased, but the illicit nature of these transactions makes it difficult to determine to what extent literature arrived to Iceland via this black market. A list of seized goods belonging to Dutch falconer Johan Mom – who had a valid license to travel to Iceland for the purpose of capturing or purchasing Icelandic gyrfalcons – does reveal that in 1636, Mom took with him not only large quantities of cloth and tobacco but also at least “4 bækur grófur pappír” (‘4 books, coarse paper’) valued at 8 Danish shillings each.<sup>144</sup> Although his license officially required him to sail with Danish traders, Mom had travelled to Iceland on an English fishing vessel. Since only Mom’s unsold goods had been confiscated, the full extent of Mom’s dealings in books is unknown.

There is a consensus among historians that unofficial traders from England and other maritime countries continued to visit Iceland for some time after 1602 and that the informal exchange of goods, known as *launverslun*, was tolerated in practice until the 1670s.<sup>145</sup> The Hanseatic League largely controlled trade before 1602 and continued to do so in all but name until 1619.<sup>146</sup> Hanseatic interest in Icelandic goods continued after 1619, and a merchant from the Hanseatic town of Hamburg even privately negotiated with the Danish king Christian IV in 1645 over the possibility of receiving Iceland as security for a large loan.<sup>147</sup>

From 1620, a Copenhagen-based trading company held the official monopoly on trade with Iceland. In the 1650s, the company’s finances worsened to the point where the company went bankrupt and was replaced in 1662 by an alliance of four merchant companies in Copenhagen.<sup>148</sup> The older trading company’s financial difficulties in the 1650s resulted in no small part from Denmark’s participation in military conflicts, in particular the Dano-Swedish War of 1658–1660. In 1658–1659, Copenhagen itself was under siege by Swedish forces, with merchant ships unable to get in or out. The brutal and devastating war waged with Sweden ended in 1660 with a Danish victory that nevertheless left the countryside in a battered state and drained the nation financially, paving the way for the rise of absolute monarchy in Denmark. It was also during approximately the same period that Denmark

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<sup>144</sup> For the full list of goods seized, see Pétur G. Kristjánsson, “Íslandssiglingar Englendinga og launverslun á 17. öld.” *Sagnir* 20 (1999): 22–28.

<sup>145</sup> Helgi Þorláksson, “Undir einveldi,” in *Saga Íslands* VII, ed. Sigurður Línal (Reykjavík: Bókmenntafélagið, 2004), 179; Pétur G. Kristjánsson, “Íslandssiglingar Englendinga og launverslun á 17. öld,” 22–28; Sverrir Jakobsson, “Þá þrengir oss vor áliggjandi nauðsyn annara meðala að leita...’ Siglingar Englendinga til Íslands á 17. öld.” *Sagnir* 15 (1994): 36–47.

<sup>146</sup> Gísli Gunnarsson, *Upp er boðið Ísaland*, 77.

<sup>147</sup> C. F. Bricka, J. A. Fridericia & Johanne Skovgaard (eds.), *Kong Christian den Fjerdtes Egenhændige Breve* (Copenhagen: 1885–1886), vol. 6, 15; Johan Jørgensen, “Denmark’s relations with Lübeck and Hamburg in the seventeenth century,” *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 11.2 (1963): 75.

<sup>148</sup> Gísli Gunnarsson, *Upp er boðið Ísaland*, 78–79.



began its serious involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, transporting slaves from the Gold Coast in Africa to newly formed Danish colonies in the Caribbean, where they worked in horrific conditions on sugar plantations.

The crackdown on illegal trade began in earnest in the 1670s. Increasingly harsh punishments for *launverslun* acted as a deterrent to illegal trade with unofficial parties, to the point where some Icelanders were likely reluctant to engage even in friendly contact with foreigners. In 1675, Guðmundur Erlendsson's son-in-law Jón Illugason recorded that farmer Þorvaldur Gunnlaugsson (1604–1703) of Hrísey in Svarfaðardalur had inquired whether he and his household should flee their farm at the arrival of English, Dutch or other foreign crews. The local authorities' response was that that conversation with other Christians could scarcely be forbidden, and in any event that such a reaction would be utterly impractical given how close Hrísey was situated to the harbour.<sup>149</sup> From 1661, Þorvaldur had permitted Dutch crews to overwinter in buildings on his land in Hrísey, and he was believed to have enriched himself from his dealings.<sup>150</sup> Born only two years after the trade monopoly was established, Þorvaldur belonged to a generation of Icelanders who was accustomed to much freer contact with the outside world, and it is not strange that he should worry over the effects of recent royal decrees enforcing restricted trade, which would make all a household's interactions with foreigners subject to scrutiny.

In 1684 the decision was made to raise the prices on import goods to Iceland significantly and to allow Copenhagen merchants to bid on individual trading posts, with the trading rights going to the highest bidder; Icelanders were forbidden from dealing even with merchants outside of their designated district even if the winning bid went to an incompetent or dishonest trader.<sup>151</sup> Only Icelandic customers were punished for trade-related infractions, and these oppressive restrictions certainly compounded the hardships of the 1690s.<sup>152</sup> This later period is the dystopian setting of *Íslandsklukkan*, in which men are flogged for the most minor of trading infractions and the population starves while the distant monarch in Copenhagen holds parties and considers selling Iceland for his own personal gain.

In the long run, cultivating mutually beneficial local relationships such as that between Rolef Eis and the Rev. Sveinn Símonarson was of little value under a system that sought mainly to maximize the short-term profits of the Danish crown. Absolutism did not favour the most competent office-holders

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<sup>149</sup> JS 360 8vo, 3r–v. Þorvaldur's daughter Guðríður was Jón Illugason's sister-in-law, but he and Jón did not get along well, cf. Stefán Aðalsteinsson, *Svarfdælingar* (Reykjavík: Iðunn, 1976–1978), vol. 2, 379.

<sup>150</sup> Stefán Aðalsteinsson, *Svarfdælingar*, vol. 2, 378–79.

<sup>151</sup> Gísli Gunnarsson, *Upp er boðið Ísaland*, 80–81.

<sup>152</sup> Gísli Gunnarsson, *Upp er boðið Ísaland*, 82.

but those who managed to curry favour and pay up; appointments were not subject to minimum qualifications, and officials could enrich themselves through their dealings so long as they sent the expected royal income to Copenhagen.<sup>153</sup> In 1674, the king chose Jón Vigfússon (1643–1690) as the successor to Bishop Gísli Þorláksson of Hólar (1631–1684). This was no man of the cloth, but a disgraced *sýslumaður* convicted in 1672 of illegally trading tobacco who sailed to Copenhagen and within two years was declared a bishop-in-waiting on the strength of his newly formed Danish connections.<sup>154</sup> One direct consequence of this was that Gísli's brother, Þórður, claimed Hólar's printing press and had it transported to Skálholt, marking the end of an era for literary culture in North Iceland.

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<sup>153</sup> Gunnar Karlsson, *Iceland's 1100 Years*, 155.

<sup>154</sup> On the colourful career of Jón Vigfússon, see Jón Þ. Þór, *Bauka-Jón: Saga frá sautjándu öld*, (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfan Hólar, 2008). Jón Vigfússon became bishop in 1684 and died in 1690 while facing charges of yet again selling tobacco illegally. Jón Þ. Þór's conclusion is that Jón Vigfússon was simply more indiscrete in his illegal trading than most of his contemporaries, but it is difficult to comprehend why Jón continued to sell tobacco at inflated prices to line his own pockets after having been ordained bishop.

## 4.0 Guðmundur Erlendsson of Fell in Sléttuhlíð

Séra Gvendur, sá lagvendur Sónar smiður,  
ei um hendur hann sér ryður  
Herjans kenndum straumi niður.<sup>155</sup>

(‘The Reverend Gvendur, the skilled wordsmith – the poetic mead doesn’t leak away in his hands’).

During his lifetime, the Reverend Guðmundur Erlendsson of Fell in Sléttuhlíð (c. 1595–1670) numbered among the major poets in North Iceland, alongside five other clergymen: Magnús Ólafsson of Laufás (c. 1573–1636), Magnús’s nephew and foster-son Jón Magnússon of Laufás (1601–1675), Jón Bjarnason of Presthólar (d. after 1633), Jón’s son Sigurður Jónsson of Presthólar (d. 1661), and Eiríkur Hallsson of Höfði (1614–1698).

In the ninth *mansöngur* of the *Rímur af Búa Esjufóstra* (quoted above), Eiríkur Hallsson set Guðmundur at the top of the list of the best living poets in North Iceland. The list also includes the Rev. Jón Magnússon, the Rev. Sigurður Jónsson, the self-taught scholar Björn Jónsson of Skarðsá (1574–1655), Guðmundur’s brother-in-law Ásgrímur Magnússon of Höfði (d. 1679) and Þorvaldur Rögnvaldsson of Sauðanes (1596–1679).

Unlike his fellow clergyman-poets Hallgrímur Pétursson and Stefán Ólafsson in the diocese of Skálholt, Guðmundur Erlendsson has largely fallen into obscurity. Most of Guðmundur’s poems and hymns have still not been edited.<sup>156</sup> As Þórunn Sigurðardóttir charts in her research on Guðmundur Erlendsson’s place in Iceland’s literary history, the parson fell into disrepute among the literary critics who shaped the twentieth-century discourse on Icelandic literature: those critics who do not ignore him entirely generally paint him as a rhymester with little or no poetic talent, whose proximity to Hólar led to his elevation to the status of printed author.<sup>157</sup>

The work of Þórunn Sigurðardóttir has been integral in revising this view of Guðmundur and in highlighting Guðmundur’s long-lasting patron-client relationship to the family of Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson of Hólar. Þórunn Sigurðardóttir’s research on cultural capital and the ways in which

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<sup>155</sup> Printed in Finnur Sigmundsson, introduction to Eiríkur Hallsson and Þorvaldur Magnússon, *Hrólfis Rímur Kraka*, ed. Finnur Sigmundsson. Rit Rímnafélagsins 4 (Reykjavík: Rímnafélagið, 1950), xviii–xix. The *mansöngur* is preserved in ÍB 536 8vo, 44r.

<sup>156</sup> For a complete list of printed works by Guðmundur Erlendsson, see Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, “‘Á Krists ysta jarðar hala,’” 183–84.

<sup>157</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, “Hallgrímur með ‘sína Guðmund Erlendsson í Felli í bak og fyrir’: Tveir skáldbræður á 17. öld,” in *Í ljóssins barna selskap*, ed. Margrét Eggertsdóttir & Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, Ritröð Listvinafélags Hallgrímskirkju 2 (Reykjavík: Listvinafélag Hallgrímskirkju, 2007), 49–61; Sigurður Nordal, *Hallgrímur Pétursson og Passíusálmarnir*, 8–9.

occasional poems and even complete manuscripts can function as cultural capital is also extremely useful in understanding Guðmundur's activities as a poet. Building on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital as a phenomenon distinct from a family or individual's financial situation, she examines how men and women at the top of the social hierarchy in Iceland achieved and reinforced their social status through – among other things – conspicuous participation in Iceland's thriving literary culture.<sup>158</sup>

Guðmundur Erlendsson did not belong to Iceland's elite. However, poetry provided Guðmundur with a means of cultivating his ties with powerful individuals and cementing family alliances, and it was likely mainly through his poetry that he was able to escape his exile to the remote living of Grímsey. Guðmundur's career as a poet and hymnist also provides an interesting study of the intersection between print and manuscript culture, since Hólar was a major centre of literary production throughout Guðmundur's lifetime.<sup>159</sup>

In this chapter, the emphasis is mainly on Guðmundur's cultivation of his literary network and evidence of collaboration and participation in literary activities within this extended family network. As pointed out in the introduction, Guðmundur's poetry responds not only to his own immediate situation but also to the perceived needs of performers and audiences, including their spiritual and moral needs. The intended audience of Guðmundur's printed hymns can be characterised as extremely broad: the post-Reformation printing press at Hólar operated with the primary objective of supplying the Icelandic population with material to permit the uniform observance of religious rites and the cultivation of religious and devotional literacy. In contrast to the more abstract audience of society at large, a large body of Guðmundur's poetry is directed at recipients with whom he was in personal contact. These poems circulated exclusively in manuscript form, if they circulated in written form at all. Some are occasional poems commemorating major events in the lives of Guðmundur's family members and patrons, while others respond to calamities and acute crisis situations affecting the community at large, such as major epidemics. Still others address small domestic gatherings, breaking the monotony of daily life with songs and narrative verse.

Reconstructing Guðmundur's literary ties with his patrons and with other poets can be at least partially accomplished through the study of his poems and their manuscript circulation. His literary interactions with less socially and economically privileged individuals are more difficult to trace, due to a lack of surviving written documentation on their lives, but particular effort was made in the research process to uncover as far as possible the identities of members of Guðmundur's extended

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<sup>158</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, "Constructing cultural competence," 277–320.

<sup>159</sup> Margrét Eggertsdóttir, "Script and print in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Iceland: The case of Hólar í Hjaltadal," in *Mirrors of Virtue*, ed. Margrét Eggertsdóttir & Matthew James Driscoll, 127–65.

family, household and local community. Not only did this allow for the inclusion of a fuller spectrum of Icelandic society as compared to earlier literary biographies (which before the later twentieth century tend to focus on upper-class men interacting exclusively with other upper-class men), but tracking and visualising this network (see Appendix), was helpful in tracking the dissemination and preservation of Guðmundur's poetry in the study in Chapter 5.

Páll Eggert Ólason wrote a brief biography of Guðmundur Erlendsson in *Menn og menntir*, using a variety of primary sources, most of which had not been edited at the time of publication.<sup>160</sup> In compiling Guðmundur Erlendsson's biography, one of Páll Eggert's key sources was an unpublished manuscript by Hannes Þorsteinsson, entitled *Ævir lærðra manna* ('The Lives of Learned Men'). As its title suggests, the scope of Hannes Þorsteinsson's research was the biographies of Icelandic men who received a formal education. In his introduction, Hannes explained that he had chosen to base his work exclusively on primary sources, after having observed that earlier works tended to use less reliable secondary sources.<sup>161</sup> Hannes's approach was to scour historical documents and manuscripts for biographical details on his individual subjects, without distinguishing systematically between major and minor events in the historical record. Hannes makes note of all documented transactions in which Guðmundur Erlendsson is involved, however mundane.

An obvious blind spot in *Ævir lærðra manna* is that it focuses exclusively on men with a formal education. This would be a narrow segment of any early modern population. In seventeenth-century Iceland, these men consisted almost exclusively of individuals destined for a career in the clergy. Teaching at Hólar and Skálholt was geared to the needs of future ministers, and secular administrative positions did not require such a background. Of the nineteen students known to have been at Hólar in 1623 (including Guðmundur Erlendsson's brother Skúli), fifteen entered the clergy, but only two obtained a secular office.

#### 4.1 The birth of a poet

Guðmundur Erlendsson was born in c. 1595 at the benefice of Fell in the parish of Sléttuhlíð in Skagafjörður in North Iceland, not far from Hólar in Hjaltadalur.<sup>162</sup> His parents were the local parson, Erlendur Guðmundsson, and his wife Margrét Skúladóttir. According to a poem that Guðmundur composed to commemorate his mother's death in 1638 ("Salómon vísi magtar maður"), she was in her 75th year when she passed away and had eight children, only four of whom lived to adulthood.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Páll Eggert Ólason, *Menn og menntir*, vol. 4, 755–63.

<sup>161</sup> Hannes Þorsteinsson, "Dálítill greinargerð um ritsafn mitt, fyrirkomulag þess, notkun ofl. ásamt leiðbeiningum um nokkrar heimildir," *Ævir lærðra manna*, vol. 1, 2–3.

<sup>162</sup> For secular administrative purposes, the local district was known as Fellshreppur.

<sup>163</sup> JS 232 4to, 550r–552v.

By this calculation, Margrét was born in c. 1563 and was in her early thirties at the time of Guðmundur's birth.

Guðmundur's father, Erlendur (d. 1641), was probably approximately the same age as Margrét. He attended the Latin school at Hólar in the early 1580s. As a young man, shortly prior to his ordination as the parson for Sléttuhlíð in 1585, Erlendur worked as a printer's assistant for the printer Jón Jónsson during the printing of the first complete Icelandic translation of the Bible in 1582–1584, an edition informally known as the *Guðbrandsbiblía*. This was by far the most ambitious work printed in Iceland in the sixteenth century, published in an imposing folio format and divided into three sections, with three illustrated title-pages and 29 other woodcut illustrations.<sup>164</sup> As suggested by its monumental size and lavish decorations, the *Guðbrandsbiblía* was intended mainly for liturgical reading and use within a church setting.<sup>165</sup> All parish churches were required to own a Bible, but only very wealthy Icelanders could afford to purchase a personal copy, and lay reading of the Bible was not the primary objective of this edition. Erlendur received a personal copy from Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson for his work ("merces laboris Typographici"), the only printer's assistant recorded as receiving such a gift.<sup>166</sup>

Nothing is known of Erlendur or Margrét's ancestry. Erlendur might have been a distant cousin of the bishop's, as Guðbrandur often supported young men – such as his cousin Arngrímur Jónsson *lærði* – within his own kinship network. An ancestral connection between Guðbrandur and Guðmundur Erlendsson could explain Guðbrandur's permissive attitude toward Guðmundur's pre-marital relationships as a young minister-to-be (see 4.3). On the other hand, Arngrímur Jónsson states that the printer had seven assistants for the Bible project, who were presumably pupils or recent graduates of Hólar.<sup>167</sup> Whether Guðbrandur singled out his cousin or rewarded the most competent candidate from the available pool of students, a long-lasting relationship existed between the bishop and Guðmundur's immediate family. Guðbrandur was Guðmundur's benefactor even before his birth, and the long-lived bishop of Hólar would have a profound impact on Guðmundur's life and literary practices.

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<sup>164</sup> For a detailed description, see Halldór Hermannsson, *Icelandic Books of the Sixteenth Century (1534–1600)*, *Islandica* 9 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 1916), 30–35.

<sup>165</sup> Sixteenth-century Lutheran editions of the Bible tended to be in this type of a folio format, cf. Jean-François Gilmont, "Protestant Reformations and Reading," in *A History of Reading in the West*, ed. Guglielmo Cavallo & Roger Chartier, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 227–28.

<sup>166</sup> Einar Gunnar Pétursson, "Fáein atriði um biblíuna úr Minnis- og reikningabók Guðbrands biskups," *Árbók Landsbókasafn Íslands*, nýr flokkur 10 (1984): 29. Guðbrandur Þorláksson also gave a Bible to the church at Fell in 1588, in light of its poverty.

<sup>167</sup> Páll Eggert Ólafsson, *Menn og menntir*, vol. 3, 717.

Guðmundur's three siblings who reached adulthood were two sisters and a younger brother: Þóra, Helga and Skúli. The findings of one of the few existing studies on pre-modern kinship ties in Iceland provides some additional insight on the four siblings, indicating that there was a close relationship between naming practices for infants and kinship ties.<sup>168</sup> According to this study, the objective of naming practices among ordinary Icelanders was twofold: to strengthen kinship ties and to preserve forenames strategically linking their family to the past. It was particularly common for a first-born son to be named after his paternal grandfather, but maternal grandparents and paternal grandparents might also be honoured in this way.<sup>169</sup> Necronymic naming was also common, whereby a child might be named after a deceased brother or sister or a close relative who had passed away not long before the birth. Guðmundur bears the name of the siblings' paternal grandfather, suggesting that he was either Erlendur and Margrét's eldest son or named after another brother who died very young. Skúli's name is that of their maternal grandfather. Þóra and Helga may have been named after their grandmothers, whose identities are otherwise unknown.

Guðmundur was familiarly known as Gvöndur or Gvendur, the nickname that Hallgrímur Pétursson uses for him in *Leppalúðakvæði*<sup>170</sup> and Eiríkur Hallsson in his *Rímur af Búa Esjufóstra* (above). Guðmundur frequently refers to himself in his poetry as Gvöndur, possibly for metrical reasons, but Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson's letter also uses his more informal nickname (see 4.3). Only in later correspondence does he make the transition from Gvöndur to Guðmundur.

Guðmundur's early education would presumably have taken place at Fell, as he never mentions having been fostered elsewhere. Jón Ólafsson *Indíafari*, born in West Iceland in 1593, states that he was put to the books in his seventh year, and it is likely that Guðmundur's experience was similar.<sup>171</sup> In addition to memorising the Catechism and learning how to read and write, Guðmundur and his brother Skúli would have learned the rudiments of Latin in preparation for their future education.

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<sup>168</sup> Ólöf Garðarsdóttir, "Naming practices and the importance of kinship networks in early nineteenth-century Iceland," *The History of the Family* 4.3 (1999): 297–314.

<sup>169</sup> Ólöf Garðarsdóttir observes that Edward Tebbenhoff's argument that a patronymic naming system encourages naming patterns that preserve the patrilineage and keep certain forenames within the family. Edward H. Tebbenhoff, "Tacit Rules and Hidden Family Structures: Naming Practices and Godparentage in Schenectady, New York, 1680–1880," *Journal of Social History* 18.4 (1985): 567–85.

<sup>170</sup> Printed in Jón Samsonarson, "Leppalúði Hallgríms Péturssonar," in *Þorlákstíðir: sungnar Ásdísi Egilsdóttur fimmtugri 26. október 1996* (Reykjavík: Menningar- og minningarsjóður Mette Magnussen, 1996), 43–49.

<sup>171</sup> Jón Ólafsson, *Ævisaga*, 8; Loftur Guttormsson, *Bernska, ungdómur og uppeldi á einveldisöld: Tilraun til félagslegrar og lýðfræðilegrar greiningar*, Ritsafn Sagnfræðistofnunar 10 (Reykjavík: Sagnfræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, 1983), 164.

The Latin school at nearby Hólar in Hjaltadalur was not for beginners, and Guðmundur would have left home to begin his formal studies in his early teens.<sup>172</sup>

Guðmundur was likely a pupil at Hólar in the early 1610s, graduating in or before 1614. Another student at Hólar at this time was the future bishop Þorlákur Skúlason (1597–1656), Guðbrandur Þorláksson's foster-son and grandson by his illegitimate daughter Steinunn, who graduated in 1615 and sailed for Copenhagen to continue his studies. The Rev. Jón Gunnarsson (c. 1595–1670), later Guðmundur's brother-in-law, would also have been Guðmundur's fellow student at Hólar. Finally, as Þórunn Sigurðardóttir has emphasised, Hallgrímur Pétursson (1614–1674) was the son of the bell-ringer at Hólar, Pétur Guðmundsson. Guðmundur would probably have known Hallgrímur from a very young age.<sup>173</sup> The schoolmaster at Hólar in 1611–1619 was Bishop Guðbrandur's cousin and foster-son, Ólafur Ólafsson (d. 1666), who had a university education from the University of Copenhagen. Ólafur had an antagonistic relationship with Þorlákur Skúlason, who returned from the University of Copenhagen in 1619 and succeeded Ólafur as schoolmaster.<sup>174</sup>

Skúli Erlendsson was much younger than his brother Guðmundur, although his exact birth year is unknown. Skúli also pursued a career in the clergy, but their years at Hólar did not overlap. Skúli was one of eighteen students at Hólar who signed a document in the spring of 1623 testifying to the good behaviour of fellow student Gunnar Björnsson, who travelled to the University of Copenhagen upon his graduation.<sup>175</sup> Of these nineteen students, two (Jón Ólafsson and Sæmundur) are otherwise unknown and two (Hallgrímur Halldórsson and Guðmundur Arason) chose an administrative career. Gunnar Björnsson and the remaining fourteen students all became clergymen. In addition to Skúli and Gunnar, these were: Guðmundur Lárentíusson (d. 1672), parson for Stafafell; Gottskálk Jónsson (d. 1648), parson for Barð in Fljót; Jón Brandsson (d. 1682), parson for Hítarnes; Gunnlaugur Þorsteinsson (c. 1601–1674), parson for Vallholt; Magnús Björnsson (d. 1635), parson for Miðdalþing; Illugi Björnsson (d. 1673), parson for Húsavík; Gunnlaugur Sigurðsson (d. 1685), parson for Saurbær in Eyjafjörður; Illugi Ingjaldsson (d. 1661), parson for Tjörn in Vatnsnes; Ólafur Hallsson (d. 1681), parson for Grímstunga; Sveinn Jónsson (1603–1687), parson for Barð in Fljót after Gottskálk Jónsson's death; Hallgrímur Jónsson (d. 1680) provost for Glaumbær; Þorvaldur Tómasson

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<sup>172</sup> In general, only sons of very wealthy families started Latin school as pre-teens, cf. Loftur Guttormsson, *Bernska, ungdómur og uppeldi á einveldisöld*, 166–67.

<sup>173</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, "Hallgrímur með 'síra Guðmund Erlendssen í Felli í bak og fyrir,'" 49–61.

<sup>174</sup> Janus Jónsson, "Saga latínuskóla á Íslandi til 1846," *Tímarit Hins íslenska bókmenntafélags* 14 (1893): 70–71.

<sup>175</sup> Hannes Þorsteinsson (ed.), *Skólaraðir frá Skálholtsskóla, Hólaskóla og Hólavallaskóla, skólameistaratal, skólavitnisburður o.fl.*, Sögurit 15 (Reykjavík: Sögufélag, 1916–1925), 225–27.



(d. 1662), parson for Hrafnagil; and Þorvarður Ólafsson (d. 1686), parson for Breiðabólstaður in Vesturhóp.<sup>176</sup>

Skúli was serving as his father's assistant at Fell in 1627 when he drowned in Grafará, a river that runs through Höfðaströnd and into the ocean at Grafarós, south of the harbour at Hofsó. <sup>177</sup>

Gunnlaugur Þorsteinsson, Skúli's fellow pupil at Hólar, described Skúli as "ungur að aldri" ('young') at the time of the tragic accident, which occurred the same year as Bishop Guðbrandur's death.<sup>178</sup>

Although no funeral poetry for Skúli has survived, Guðmundur's son Skúli (c. 1630) was likely named in memory of his lost brother. One of Guðmundur's hymns, consoling those who have lost a loved one in a drowning accident, may also have been composed for his friends and family on this occasion.<sup>179</sup> Of Skúli's schoolmates, Sveinn Jónsson would become a close friend of Guðmundur Erlendsson's family in later life, and eventually part of his extended kinship network.

#### 4.1.1 Sing, learn, print

Guðmundur arrived as a pupil at Hólar during a decade when the printing press was flourishing, largely thanks to Bishop Guðbrandur's patronage. Iceland's only press had been imported to Iceland at the initiative of Iceland's last Catholic bishop, Jón Arason, but it was used by the Lutheran bishops of Hólar after Jón to print religious material in Icelandic.<sup>180</sup> For a young, emerging Icelandic poet in the early 1600s, Hólar's printing press would have been a source of both reading material and inspiration. The idealistic light in which Guðmundur Erlendsson saw Hólar as a seat of learning and knowledge had still not dimmed in 1664, when he sung the praises of Hólar and Skálholt in *Vökuvarpa*:

Hér verkstaðir herrans kæra,  
hér og þjónar drottins eru,  
hér prentverk, og herrar dýrir,  
hér dýrmætir skólar eru.  
Sálmaland eg meina að mundi  
mætti veitast því að heita

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<sup>176</sup> Hannes Þorsteinsson (ed.), *Skólaraðir frá Skálholtsskóla*, 226–27.

<sup>177</sup> Hannes Þorsteinsson (ed.), *Skólaraðir frá Skálholtsskóla*, 226; Sveinn Níelsson, Sveinn Níelsson, *Prestatal og prófasti á Íslandi*, ed. Hannes Þorsteinsson & Björns Magnússon, 2nd ed. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1950), 168.

<sup>178</sup> ÍA 1, 326.

<sup>179</sup> "Söngvísa til huggunar þeim sem í sjó eða vötum missa sína ástmenn" ('Song to console those who lose their loved ones in the sea or waters'), 232, 34r–35r.

<sup>180</sup> On the history of the printing press in Iceland, see Klemens Jónsson, *Fjögur hundruð ára saga prentlistarinnar* (Reykjavík: Félagsprentsmiðjan, 1930); Einar Gunnar Pétursson, "Bókaútgáfa á biskupsstólunum," in *Saga biskupsstólanna: Skálholt 950 ára – 2006 – Hólar 900 ára*, ed. Gunnar Kristjánsson & Óskar Guðmundsson (Akureyri: Hólar, 2006), 569–605.

ef að nafni áður gefnu  
ekki kynni nóg að þekkjast.<sup>181</sup>

(‘Here are the workshops of the dear Lord. Here, too, are the servants of the Lord. Here is the printing press. Here are the glorious bishops. Here are the precious schools. Hymnland, I say, one might venture to call [Iceland], if that older name should not be renowned enough.’)

Singing, learning and printing go hand-in-hand in Guðmundur Erlendsson’s vision of the Reformation. Titles printed during Guðmundur’s Hólar years included Arngrímur Jónsson’s polemical *Anatome Blefkeniana* (1612) and the *Vísnaþók* (1612), a collection of hymns and religious poetry for home use that was a major influence on Guðmundur’s practices as a hymnist and sacred poet.<sup>182</sup> Arngrímur Jónsson was no longer a teacher at Hólar by the time that Guðmundur arrived there, but he was Bishop Guðbrandur’s assistant and was heavily involved in printing activities at Hólar, and he would have been frequently at Hólar while Guðmundur was a student.

Classical rhetoric was among the major subjects that Guðmundur would have learned at Hólar, in addition to Lutheran theology and Latin grammar.<sup>183</sup> For the poetry of the seventeenth century, classical rhetoric can be compared to the supporting canvas, the paints and the brushes: equally fundamental to the composition of all paintings, yet applied with varying degrees of expertise and artistry.<sup>184</sup> While the brushstrokes are the artist’s own, the ability to work with the materials (for example, to hold the brush correctly and mix pigments in order to achieve the desired colours) is not innate: acquiring the required knowledge and skills involves a process of formal training. One can compare Guðmundur’s schooling at Hólar to an apprenticeship at a painter’s workshop.

In an early treatise on Icelandic authors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, scholar Páll Vídalín (1667–1727) ascribes to Guðmundur Erlendsson a kind of poetic lycanthropy, characterizing him as an avid poet by nature who became enraptured with every new and full moon and was driven to compose poetry in this state, being pushed to near-madness if he did not, but without taking sufficient pains with any of his poetry.<sup>185</sup> As Þórunn Sigurðardóttir has pointed out, this unflattering portrait of the lunatic poet is influenced by classical notions of the origins of poetic inspiration, such

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<sup>181</sup> 1529, 31r.

<sup>182</sup> Jón Torfason & Kristján Eiríksson (eds.), *Vísnaþók Guðbrands* (Reykjavík: Bókmenntafræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, 2000).

<sup>183</sup> For a discussion, see Chapter 5 of Margrét Eggertsdóttir’s *Icelandic Baroque* and Chapter 2 of Þórunn Sigurðardóttir’s *Heiður og huggun*; see also Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, “Erfiljóð: Lærð bókmenntagrein á 17. öld,” *Gripla* 11 (2000): 125–80; Sverrir Tómasson, *Formálar íslenskra sagnaritara á miðöldum: Rannsókn bókmenntahefðar*, Rit Stofnunar Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi 33 (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1988), 7–15.

<sup>184</sup> Cf. Margrét Eggertsdóttir, *Icelandic Baroque*, 77–119.

<sup>185</sup> Páll Vídalín, *Recensus*, 39.

as Aristotle's *Ars Poetica*.<sup>186</sup> The term *skáldvingl* ('poetic delirium') is found in a essay in Latin – *De poesi nostra discursus* – by Guðmundur's one-time neighbour and frenemy Magnús Ólafsson, originally published in 1636 in Ole Worm's *Literatura Runica in Poësi usum uberius declarans*.<sup>187</sup> Magnús ostensibly wrote of Norse-Icelandic traditions for a scholarly European readership, but Anthony Faulkes is of the view that Magnús's concept of *skáldvingl* is a product of his humanist education at the University of Copenhagen, being in line with Renaissance images of composition as a frenzied state comparable to madness.<sup>188</sup>

An anonymous Icelandic translation of Magnús Ólafsson's essay survives in AM 148 8vo, the so-called *Kvæðabók frá Vigur* ('song-book from Vigur').<sup>189</sup> Páll Vídalín's father-in-law, Magnús Jónsson from Vigur (1637–1702), copied the essay, and Páll Vídalín later acquired the book and gave it to Árni Magnússon. Páll wrote his biography of Guðmundur Erlendsson in Latin, and he may have had Magnús Ólafsson's description of *skáldvingl* in mind when doing so, with the expectation that a foreign readership would already be familiar with the essay in *Literatura Runica*.<sup>190</sup> Páll Vídalín's criticism exemplifies how discipline and self-control were valued as markers of poetic accomplishment in the seventeenth century, defining the boundary between natural versifiers and well-cultivated poets.

It would be a mistake to conclude from Páll's description that Guðmundur Erlendsson was a less learned poet than other Hólar-educated contemporaries such as the Rev. Jón Magnússon of Laufás. Guðmundur's student years at Hólar were deeply formative in shaping his attitude toward the social function of literature, song and composition.

Guðmundur himself had one of his hymns printed in the 1619 Icelandic hymnal: "Eilífi einvalds herra" ('Eternal Sovereign Lord'). The hymn is a verse rendering of the Prayer of Manasseh, a prose translation of which had earlier appeared in the Icelandic version of the Bible (1584) as "Bæn Manasses konungsins Júda, þá hann var í fjötrum haldinn í Babilon" ('The prayer of Manasseh, king of

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<sup>186</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, "Á Krists ysta jarðar hala," 171.

<sup>187</sup> Magnús Ólafsson, "De poesi nostra discursus," in *Two Versions of Snorra Edda from the 17th Century*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, vol. 1, Rit Stofnunar Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum 13, (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1979), 411.

<sup>188</sup> Anthony Faulkes, *Poetical Inspiration in Old Norse and Old English Poetry* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1997), 4–5.

<sup>189</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, "Tvær ritgerðir um skáldskap í Kvæðabók úr Vigur," *Gripla* 19 (2008): 193–209.

<sup>190</sup> With the exception of Guðmundur Erlendsson's *Grýlukvæði*, Páll was unimpressed by Guðmundur's skill as a poet. Páll's translator into Icelandic, the pietist minister Þorsteinn Pétursson, had a far better opinion of Guðmundur, singling out *Einvaldsóður* and the elegy "Lausnarinn, ljúfur minn" for particular praise, cf. Páll Vídalín, *Recensus*, 40.

Judah, when he was held in fetters in Babylon’).<sup>191</sup> Although it was extremely common for clergymen to turn to the Bible for inspiration in composition, ancient and Old Testament history seem to have strongly appealed to Guðmundur.<sup>192</sup> Through numerous narrative poems set in the ancient Middle East, the poet vividly experienced the rise and fall of great kingdoms in an exotic world of vineyards, wheatfields, bustling cities and battlefields.

#### 4.2.1 Vernacular humanism

Carol Edington uses the term “vernacular humanist” to describe individuals such as the poet Sir David Lindsay of the Mount (c. 1490–c. 1555), the author of *The Monarchie* (see 4.12), who subscribed to or were strongly influenced by humanist tenets, even if they lacked the learning to participate personally in activities such as textual criticism.<sup>193</sup>

Humanism, particularly the insistence on a return *ad fontes*, was important not only to educational ideas but also to religious attitudes. By stressing the need for textual integrity, it provided the means of overcoming ignorance or mistaken teachings, restoring the pristine purity of the early Church and turning men to an active Christian life. In this way it represented the key to a form of human betterment both moral and spiritual. Humanism – particularly as developed in Northern Europe – became inextricably bound up with this idea of *Christianismus renascens*, very frequently being associated with a didactic, moral, often pious and evangelical, programme. Such concerns were enthusiastically taken up by the vernacular humanists who also advocated moral and spiritual rehabilitation and expressed similar humanistic sentiments with regard to the affairs of the Church.<sup>194</sup>

Not surprisingly, scholars of Icelandic literature have focused mainly on humanism as it relates to secular literature, and Old Norse-Icelandic texts in particular. The growth of antiquarianism in Europe had an enormous impact on the preservation of Old Norse-Icelandic literature, with increasing scholarly interest in Denmark and Sweden in acquiring manuscripts that could shed light on the past. However, Sigurður Pétursson has extensively researched the impact of humanism on contemporary poetics and composition,<sup>195</sup> and both Margrét Eggertsdóttir and Þórunn Sigurðardóttir discuss the

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<sup>191</sup> The Prayer of Manasseh is printed at the end of the second of three volumes (*Allar spámannabækurnar útlagðar á norrænu*). *Biblía, það er öll heilög ritning útlögð á norrænu* (Hólar, 1584), vol. 2, cxcii.

<sup>192</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, “Hallgrímur með ‘sira Guðmund Erlendssen í Felli í bak og fyrir,” 49–50.

<sup>193</sup> Carol Edington, *Sir David Lindsay of the Mount: Political and Religious Culture in Renaissance Scotland* (PhD dissertation, University of St Andrews, 1992), 82–84.

<sup>194</sup> Carol Edington, *Sir David Lindsay of the Mount*, 90.

<sup>195</sup> See e.g., Sigurður Pétursson, “Húmanisti á Rauðasandi,” *Ritið* 5 (2003): 95–110; Sigurður Pétursson, “Húmanistinn í Hítardal: Fjórir textar eftir Jón Guðmundsson prófast,” in *Latína er list mæt*, 53–84; Sigurður Pétursson, “Á slóð húmanista á Íslandi,” *Ritið* 1 (2007): 143–58.

importance of classical rhetoric for the Icelandic literature of the post-Reformation era.<sup>196</sup> One legacy was an increased emphasis on producing reliable translations, and another on the emergence of Neo-Latin poets within Iceland.

Both Arngrímur Jónsson *lærði* and Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson belonged to a tiny group of university-educated Icelandic scholars, influenced by humanist currents in Northern Europe. Guðbrandur Þorláksson's concern for the moral reform of the Icelandic people and his use of the printing press to achieve this goal is characteristic for the ethical dimension of humanism described by Edington. The publication of the *Vísnaþók* in 1612 represents a spiritual rehabilitation of the poetry of the pre-Reformation era, even if this rehabilitation sometimes takes the form of what non-humanist critics might term censorship.<sup>197</sup>

As a publisher, one of Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson's priorities was the religious education of the common people. Like many reform-minded clergymen of the sixteenth-century, Guðbrandur particularly valued poetry and music as a tool for learning. Guðbrandur held up Lutheran Denmark and Germany as a model for a spiritual renaissance in Iceland, in which literary-musical reform played a central role. In introducing the 1587 hymnal, Guðbrandur compared the fluency of Lutherans in mainland Europe in singing hymns with Icelanders' fluency in chanting *rímur*, hoping that the new hymnal would usher in a new era of religious literacy.<sup>198</sup>

Guðmundur seems to have taken Guðbrandur's teachings on spiritual poetry to heart, at least in his compositions that he copied down for posterity. As discussed in 4.3, Guðmundur's early career as a poet was not always in line with Guðbrandur's ideals, but hymns and didactic poetry for moral and spiritual betterment form the bulk of Guðmundur's surviving corpus. Guðmundur frequently turned to Danish or German printed sources for inspiration, seeking material that would appeal to the hearts and souls of the broadest possible audience. Even in Guðmundur's darkest visions of human nature, the possibility of repentance, improvement and reform remains present, and his poems never indulge in outright despair over the human condition. For Guðmundur, poetry is an inexhaustible force in educating, encouraging and healing himself and his audience, and in cultivating his own spiritual relationship with God.

Finally, Guðmundur's writings reveal a fascination with the ancient past from a very early stage in his poetic career. Today, Icelandic antiquarianism of the seventeenth century is associated almost exclusively with Old Norse-Icelandic history and literature, but Icelanders were not only interacting

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<sup>196</sup> Margrét Eggertsdóttir, *Icelandic Baroque*, 77–107. Þórunn Sigurðadóttir, *Heiður og huggun*, 52–59.

<sup>197</sup> Jón Torfason & Kristján Eiríksson (eds.), *Vísnaþók Guðbrands*, 475–77; Katelin Parsons, "Text and Context," 62–63, 81.

<sup>198</sup> *Ein ny Psalma Bok* (Hólar: 1589), AA iii v.

seriously with their own past.<sup>199</sup> Research by Margrét Eggertsdóttir, Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, Sigurður Pétursson and others consistently demonstrates creative and critical engagement with classical learning and biblical history within Iceland. In early modern Scandinavia, there was little space for Icelandic scholarly efforts in fields not directly related to Iceland or ancient Denmark/Sweden. Icelandic participation in European scholarly circles seems to have been only welcomed and cultivated where it was *about* Iceland (e.g., the writings of Arngrímur Jónsson and Páll Björnsson’s scientific description of Iceland) or Old Norse-Icelandic historiography and literature (e.g. the work of Magnús Ólafsson for Ole Worm, Stefán Ólafsson for Resen, and so on). When Árni Magnússon was appointed a professorship at the University of Copenhagen and Þormóður Torfason rose to the position of Royal Historian, it was precisely for their scholarship on the inward- and backward-looking past. This proto-colonial legacy has had a massive but often invisible impact within the field of Icelandic literature from Arngrímur Jónsson onward, guiding what type of works within the vast corpus of Icelandic literature have been collected, preserved, copied, edited, published, studied, praised, imitated – even forged.<sup>200</sup>

The backward- but outward-looking past is in the foreground of Guðmundur Erlendsson’s surviving corpus: the shared human heritage of the postdiluvian world and what today would be considered works of world literature, such as the fables of Æsop, which Guðmundur would have studied in learning Latin (see 4.10). Even if Guðmundur lacked the knowledge to engage in scholarly activities such as translations of Greek and Hebrew texts, humanist ideals inform his poetry and the intended functions that his poems serve for his audiences. As discussed in 4.12 and 4.13, he positions his own present day as a new light in the darkness of human history: the bright spiritual renaissance lives on.

## 4.2 Anguished and weary

The earliest dated poems by Guðmundur Erlendsson are a pair of hymns from 1615, when he was in his nineteenth year. The first, “Þjáður og lúinn ligg eg hér,” is a short hymn composed by Guðmundur’s own account in 1615 in his nineteenth year while ill with smallpox at Hafsstaðir (Hafursstaðir) in Skagaströnd.<sup>201</sup> Hafsstaðir was the route to the trading centre at Spákonufellshöfði (Spákonufellshöfðakaupstaður), and it may be that Guðmundur contracted smallpox while travelling

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<sup>199</sup> See e.g., Sigurður Pétursson, “Arngrímur og Ovidus,” *Latína er list mæt*, 85–118; Jakob Benediktsson (ed.), *Persíus rímur eftir Guðmund Andrésson og Bellerofontis rímur*, Rit Rímnafélagsins 2 (Reykjavík: Rímnafélagið, 1949); Ragnar Ingi Aðalsteinsson, “Fáein orð um stuðlasetningu í gömlum rímum,” in *Mannamál: Greinar, frásagnir og ljóð í tilefni af sextugsafmæli Páls Pálssonar frá Aðalbóli 11. maí 2007*, ed. Kristján Jóhann Jónsson & Ragnar Ingi Aðalsteinsson (Reykjavík: Hólar, 2007), 119–28.

<sup>200</sup> Cf. e.g., Katarzyna Kapitan, *Studies in the transmission history of Hrómundar saga Greipssonar* (PhD dissertation, University of Copenhagen, Faculty of Humanities, 2018).

<sup>201</sup> 1529, 63v.

in the region.<sup>202</sup> There were also fishing booths at Hafsstaðir (Hafursstaðavík), which were seasonally occupied by fishing crews.<sup>203</sup> The second hymn, “Minnstu önd mín, þó mannaunir,” was also composed – or *fram talað* (‘declared’) – during the same illness and is a meditation on faith during intense physical suffering.<sup>204</sup>

#### 4.2.1 Smallpox, 1615–1617

Smallpox is primarily an airborne disease, caused by viral infection. Transmission generally required direct exposure to a person already exhibiting acute symptoms, although it could also be transmitted by contact with contaminated items such as infected blankets or clothing. Smallpox attacked the skin, causing a severe rash that typically developed into a mass of hard, fluid-filled pustules. The Icelandic name for the disease, *bólusótt* (‘pox-disease’), commonly shortened to *bóla*, describes the characteristic appearance of the skin as the illness progressed. Guðmundur’s hymn paints a graphic picture of its effects on the body and mind: the body lies immobile, the skin and flesh are gashed, and Guðmundur prays for divine relief or deliverance through death, at the same time acknowledging that the span of his life remains in God’s hands.

In these hymns, Guðmundur speaks as one acutely aware that his earthly existence may be fast drawing to a close.<sup>205</sup> Smallpox was often fatal, having a mortality rate of around 30% depending on the strain, and it could cause serious disfigurement – even blindness – among survivors. However, smallpox survivors did gain lifelong immunity. Outside of Iceland, smallpox had gradually become a much-feared childhood disease after becoming endemic throughout much of early modern Europe, with a lesser effect on adult populations.<sup>206</sup> Smallpox epidemics regularly occurred in areas of high population density, where crowded conditions meant that the sick could potentially come into close contact with large numbers of people.

Outbreaks in Iceland occurred only when infected foreign crews or Icelandic passengers returning from abroad brought the disease with them.<sup>207</sup> The first recorded smallpox outbreak in Iceland

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<sup>202</sup> Árni Magnússon & Páll Vídalín, *Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalíns*, 2nd ed. (Reykjavík: [n.p.], 1980–1990), vol. 8 (Húnavatnssýsla), 442.

<sup>203</sup> Bryndis Zoëga & Guðmundur St. Sigurðarson, *Fornleifaskráning Skagabyggðar: Hafursstaðir, Hafursstaðakot, Kambakot og Kjalarland*, Byggðasafn Skagfirðinga, Rannsóknaskýrslur 2012/124.

<sup>204</sup> 1529, 64r.

<sup>205</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir classifies “Þjáður og lúinn ligg eg hér” as an *andlátssálmur* (‘death hymn’), a genre of hymns composed in anticipation of death. Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, “Hallgrímur með ‘sira Guðmund Erlendssen í Felli í bak og fyrir’,” 53.

<sup>206</sup> William Hardy McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (New York: Anchor, 1976).

<sup>207</sup> The symptoms were fairly easy to recognize, and diseased individuals would not knowingly seek passage on an Iceland-bound ship. However, the incubation period for smallpox was at least a week (and more typically 10–14 days), cf. Zack S. Moore, “Poxviridae,” in *Principles and Practice of Pediatric Infectious Diseases*, ed. Sarah S. Long, Larry K. Pickering, & Charles G. Prober, 4th edition (Edinburgh: Elsevier, 2012), 1020–25.

occurred in 1240, but in the absence of urban centres to harbour the disease, smallpox never became endemic.<sup>208</sup> In consequence, a larger spectrum of the national population was affected in each successive outbreak.<sup>209</sup> Virtually nothing is known about the smallpox outbreak in 1615. Jón Steffensen's research on smallpox indicated that an English ship harbouring at Sandur in Snæfellsnes brought smallpox to Iceland in 1616, resulting in an epidemic in 1616–1617 that affected the entire island. The accuracy of the annalistic data on which Jón bases his conclusions is uncertain, however. There are no official accounts of seventeenth-century epidemics in Iceland, and locally compiled chronicles rely on a combination of unofficial reports, existing chronicle sources, word of mouth and the compiler's own memory.

Guðmundur Erlendsson's hymns are evidence that an outbreak may have started a year earlier in North Iceland (possibly at a trading post or fishing station in Skagafjörður) but did not immediately reach other parts of the island. It is also possible that two separate outbreaks occurred within a year of each other, with a more virulent strain coming from England in 1616. The time of year during which a smallpox outbreak occurred had an impact on the rate of its spread, as did the location where it began: an outbreak at a major trading centre or fishing centre in spring or early summer would spread quickly, not least due to the effects of the Althingi assembly in July, which attracted attendees from throughout the country and brought administrative officials and others from otherwise isolated regions into close proximity with each other.<sup>210</sup>

“Þjáður og lúinn ligg eg hér” and “Minnstu önd mín, þó mannaunir” are personal in the sense that Guðmundur composed them on the occasion of his own illness, but this information is only known from the rubric. The former hymn was published as *bænarsálmur í þungri sótt* ('a hymn of supplication in severe illness') in the 1757 *Litla vísnabók* and the 1839 second edition, omitting the eighth of nine stanzas in which the speaker identifies himself as the hymnist.<sup>211</sup> With no information on the original circumstances in which the hymn was composed, they are presented for the use of any person seeking spiritual comfort in a time of difficult illness.

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Previously healthy individuals could thus develop symptoms while on the voyage to Iceland, and personal effects such as the victim's bedding could also be a source of infection.

<sup>208</sup> Jón Steffensen, “Bólusótt á Íslandi,” 275, 314–15.

<sup>209</sup> Jón Steffensen observed that the frequency of smallpox outbreaks in Iceland increased somewhat after 1555, with English and Dutch fishing vessels were most often indicated as the source of the outbreak: in 3 of 4 smallpox epidemics in the seventeenth century, an English source was indicated, cf. Jón Steffensen, “Bólusótt á Íslandi,” 316.

<sup>210</sup> Jón Steffensen, “Bólusótt á Íslandi,” 301, 316–17.

<sup>211</sup> The rubric is the same in both editions: “Bænar Psalmur / J þungre Soott, Sr. Gudmundar Erlendssonar” (‘Hymn of prayer in difficult illness by the Rev. Guðmundur Erlendsson’) *Ein Ljtil Psalma og Visna Book* (Hólar: 1757), [214] [http://baekur.is/bok/000246167/Ein\\_Ljtil\\_Psalma\\_og\\_Visna](http://baekur.is/bok/000246167/Ein_Ljtil_Psalma_og_Visna); “Bænar Sálmur, J þungri sótt, Sr. Gudmundar Erlendssonar” *Sú Litla Sálma og Visna Bók, í tveimur þörtum, Samantekin Kristinn dómi lands þessa til Heilla Eblingar og Sidbóta* (Viðey: 1839), 156. [https://baekur.is/bok/000246169/Su\\_litla\\_salma\\_og](https://baekur.is/bok/000246169/Su_litla_salma_og)



Guðmundur Erlendsson's *Nauðhjálp*, composed in 1653, is constructed around a series of personal vignettes describing Guðmundur's deliverance from pestilence, drowning and perishing at sea and in fire. It revisits the memory of the smallpox epidemic in a more autobiographical context, as the first of five major life-events in which God mercifully saves Guðmundur at the point of death or extreme danger:

Bólusóttin sára  
svo mig þjáði næsta mjeg,  
að máttur og myndin klára,  
mín var orðin hörmuleg.  
Alsteyptur eg allur var í kaunum,  
vits- og raunulaus eg lá,  
en lítið sá,  
veikur og vafinn í raunum.

Mitt í miðjan dauða,  
mér var þá svo niður sökkt,  
kenndi næmra nauða,  
nætur og daga hjartað klökkt,  
en þú drottinn einka trúr og góður,  
föðurlega minntist mín,  
af miskunn þín,  
hún á því að mér hróður.<sup>212</sup>

(‘The cruel smallpox so tormented me that my strength and my bright image had become deplorable. I was entirely covered in boils. I lay senseless, but saw little, diseased and swathed in distress. ‘I was sunk in the midst of death. Night and day, my tearful heart felt acute distress, but you, my Lord, supremely faithful and good, remembered me as a father, by your mercy, which I therefore praise.’)

While the focus of all three compositions is on the pain and anguish of the victim, an epidemic such as that in 1615–1617 should also be understood as a shared experience, affecting the entire community at once. In the second half of the seventeenth century, smallpox outbreaks occurred every 3–4 years on average in London and other large English cities, where it had become endemic,

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<sup>212</sup> 232, 86v; the poem is also preserved in 1055, 166v–169r. *Nauðhjálp* conceals part of Guðmundur Erlendsson's own name in the final two stanzas, with *ellinn* (‘old age’) for Erlends-. The poem was composed shortly after a fire destroyed much of the farm at Fell, causing part of it to collapse. Help seems to have arrived just in time to save the *baðstofa*, and there were no fatalities according to Guðmundur.

and somewhat less frequently – 5 years on average – in small and medium-sized rural towns.<sup>213</sup> The average age at which Londoners caught the disease was 7–12, and continued to fall to only 3 by the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>214</sup> Many survivors would thus have only a memory of a childhood disease. When smallpox swept Iceland in 1615, the last known outbreak had occurred in c. 1590. Bishop Gísli Oddsson (1593–1638) wrote that all Icelanders younger than thirty were at risk, with many dying or suffering from serious complications. Words, said the bishop, could not describe the suffering the epidemic caused.<sup>215</sup> Virtually all households would have been impacted by this nationwide calamity.

#### 4.2.2 Epidemics as scourge

Major outbreaks of disease continue to form the subject of a number of Guðmundur Erlendsson's later hymns. In these hymns, social aspects of the disease take on increasing importance and the distinction between hymn and occasional poem is blurred. Guðmundur composed "Minn Guð og mildi faðir" following the 1635–1636 smallpox epidemic, when his children would have been those to contract the disease. The hymn's rubric states that it is a song of thanksgiving by the youths to whom God mercifully restored to life and health in 1636.<sup>216</sup> While the voice is still that of a single first-person singer, Guðmundur's rubric demonstrates that the hymn is composed with collective performance in mind, in a domestic or even a formal church setting.

In "Minn Guð og mildi faðir," the survivors thank God for being spared from any serious complications.<sup>217</sup> The hymn addresses God as a father disciplining his child lightly, with the disease compared to a birch rod lashing the body in punishment:

Með vægð lést vönd þinn snerta  
vesala holdið mitt.  
Alla limi óskerta  
eg hef, svo mér <er> fritt,  
fyrir væ<g>ðarverkið þitt.  
Fjöldi fáum að heyra,  
fengið hefur nú verra hrís  
í hlutskipti sitt.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Duncan, Duncan & Scott, "Oscillatory Dynamics of Smallpox and the Impact of Vaccination," 447, 450–53.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 450–53.

<sup>215</sup> Cited in Jón Steffensson, "Bólusótt á Íslandi," 286. Bishop Gísli Oddsson responded to news of the 1635–1636 smallpox epidemic by citing Chapter 2 of the Book of Job and other biblical texts, stating that its message was to repent and prepare for the end of days, AM 244 4to, 88r–v.

<sup>216</sup> 1529, 64v. The hymn is defective in 1529, but preserved in 232, 23r–24r.

<sup>217</sup> "Eg þakka þér / að banvæna bólusóttin / bærilæg gjörðist mér" ('I thank Thee, that the deadly smallpox was made bearable for me') 1529, 64v.

(‘With leniency did your scourge touch my poor flesh. I have all my limbs intact: I have been preserved by your act of mercy. We have heard that many have received a worse whipping as their lot’).

The singer vocally praises God for deliverance from sickness, having been “úr kransi kauna / kallaðir uppá fót” (‘called up to my feet, from a wreath of sores’).<sup>219</sup> Eight years later, in 1644, Guðmundur composed another hymn of thanksgiving (“Almáttugi og mildi Guð”) after a measles epidemic.<sup>220</sup> Measles is an extremely contagious airborne disease, which like smallpox was not endemic to Iceland but could be spread by sailors and their passengers. There was – and is – no treatment for measles, which can be fatal or lead to potentially fatal complications. Survivors may be left blind or with permanent brain damage. Unlike smallpox, measles is infectious even before the characteristic rash appears, so containing the disease after the initial outbreak would have been virtually impossible. Even with much higher standards of hygiene, the most recent outbreak of measles in Iceland was only contained through a rapidly implemented vaccination program, during which thousands of vulnerable individuals were vaccinated within the space of 6 days.<sup>221</sup>

Guðmundur singles out the disease as *fáheyrð* (‘ferocious’), with the hymn’s singer being a survivor who thanks God for his or her recovery. Like the 1636 smallpox hymn, “Almáttugi og mildi Guð” appears to have been composed with collective performance in mind. However, unlike the 1636 smallpox hymn, the hymn is not specifically composed for performance by a young singer. Whereas the only adults affected by the 1635–1636 smallpox epidemic were those few who had escaped the epidemic two decades earlier, outbreaks of measles were rare in early modern Iceland. Virtually the entire population of Iceland – including Guðmundur – would have been vulnerable, and hundreds died. The hymn voices the experiences of many across the entire country in 1644.

The hymn’s language echoes that of Guðmundur’s earlier hymns on the experience of disease:

Þá miklu sótt sem mikið tjón  
mörgum veitti, og skildi hjón  
víða á voru landi  
léstu mér hægán verða vönd,  
þín vægðarsamleg náðarhönd

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<sup>218</sup> 1529, 64v.

<sup>219</sup> 1529, 64v.

<sup>220</sup> 232, 26r.

<sup>221</sup> Sigríður Dóra Magnúsdóttir, “Mislingar á Íslandi árið 2019, viðbrögð og lærdómur,” *Læknablaðið* 105.4 (2019): n.pag. DOI: 10.17992/lbl.2019.04.224. Electronic edition, <https://www.laeknabladid.is/tolublod/2019/04/nr/7018>

mig snart þó miskunnandi.<sup>222</sup>

(‘Your lenient hand of grace touched me only mercifully with your scourge – the terrible disease that caused great damage to many, and separated husband from wife widely in our country.’)

The representation of disease (or other misfortune) as a divine tool of discipline is extremely common in early modern hymns, and Hallgrímur Pétursson’s “Segðu lof drottni, sál mín, nú” from 1663 is another instance where the singer acknowledges himself or herself to be under the authority of a divine parent, whose purpose in disciplining the stubbornly unrepentant child with the (*hrís*)*vöndur* (‘bundle of twigs for whipping’) is just and loving.<sup>223</sup>

A parent-child relationship between God and human is likewise common in the imagery of early modern Icelandic hymns.<sup>224</sup> In the rubric of Guðmundur Erlendsson’s “Syndgaðu ekki sæta barn,” a hymn calling for repentance, the parson-poet states directly that adults are like good children in their fear and love of their heavenly Father.<sup>225</sup>

Although the disciplinarian God in the Lutheran hymn tradition is generally a father, Guðmundur Erlendsson frequently compares God in his thanksgiving hymns to a mother as well. “Almáttugi og mildi Guð” begins with the image of God as a loving mother responding to and comforting her child, before shifting to the disciplinarian father whipping his child and finally to the intense image of a earthly father anguished by his helplessness over his child’s suffering. The 1636 smallpox hymn thanks God for turning “þín móður eyrun mildu” (‘your gentle mother’s ears’) to the weeping child.<sup>226</sup> A much later composition, “Ó minn Jesús, himnesk hæna,” which has a female speaker (st. 5) and seems to have been written for Guðmundur’s wife Guðrún, addresses Jesus as a mother hen and a male shepherd by turns.<sup>227</sup> God in Guðmundur Erlendsson’s hymns is thus simultaneously a matriarch and patriarch, a comparatively rare feature in Lutheran hymns.<sup>228</sup>

Mixed male-female parental imagery crops up so frequently in Guðmundur’s family hymns that it speaks to a somewhat less rigid view of the divine than found in the printed hymnals of the day. Two hymns by Guðmundur’s contemporary Hallgrímur Pétursson (“Guð komi sjálfur nú með náð” and “Nú

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<sup>222</sup> 232, 26r.

<sup>223</sup> Hallgrímur Pétursson, *Ljóðmæli 3*, ed. Margrét Eggertsdóttir, Kristján Eiríksson & Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 2005), 181–187.

<sup>224</sup> Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson, “Myndmál sálma: Tilraun til túlkunar með hliðsjón af sálgreiningu Jacques Lacan,” *Textar og túlkun: Greinar um íslensk fræði* (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2011), 41–68.

<sup>225</sup> 1529, 57v.

<sup>226</sup> 1529, 64v.

<sup>227</sup> 232, 60r–61v. The imagery is biblical, but the technique of alternating male-female language to describe Jesus in successive stanzas of the hymn is unusual.

<sup>228</sup> Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson, “Myndmál sálma,” 41.

hef eg mig í hvílu mín”) even compare Jesus to a midwife.<sup>229</sup> The use of maternal imagery for God and Jesus is not unique to early modern Lutheran poets, however. The image of God as mother emerges in the writings of Cistercian and Benedictine monks in the twelfth century, most notably in the letters and sermons of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who also compared himself personally to a mother, and continued to be popular in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>230</sup> Guðmundur Erlendsson was influenced by Bernard of Clairvaux’s writings at least to the extent that he composed a short hymn (“Ó Jesú minn eðla góði”), which he credited as the prayer of St. Bernard.<sup>231</sup>

“Almáttugi og mildi Guð” ends on a darker note than the earlier “Minn Guð og mildi faðir”, however. Rather than following a trajectory from suffering to grace and redemption, the hymn transitions into a prayer in which the speaker shifts from the personal first-person singular *ég* to the communal *vér*. In this final section, a wider audience is reminded of the looming possibility of another and potentially even more devastating punishment: *hernaðarhrísið* (‘the scourge of warfare’).

Heilagi faðir, hlíf oss nú,  
hirting þeirri í burtu snú  
frá voru fátæka landi,  
kóng vorn og ríkið vernda og ver,  
vora einn landsherra hér,  
spara og geym frá grandí.<sup>232</sup>

(Holy Father, spare us now, turn away this chastisement from our impoverished land. Protect our king and kingdom, and preserve and keep from harm our governor.”)

In December 1643, as the Thirty Years' War continued to rage in Central Europe, Swedish forces invaded Denmark, supported by the Dutch navy. Iceland’s *hirðstjóri*, Pros Mund, was one of Denmark’s naval leaders in this war. The war went badly for the Danish defenders, and Mund was killed in action on 13 October 1644 in what proved to be a decisive defeat for the Danish naval fleet. News of Mund’s death had not yet reached Iceland as the measles epidemic drew to a close, and the anxiety in Guðmundur’s hymn is palpable. In “Almáttugi og mildi Guð”, the individually experienced

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<sup>229</sup> Hallgrímur Pétursson, *Ljóðmæli 1*, ed. Margrét Eggertsdóttir (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, 2000), 85–97; Hallgrímur Pétursson, *Ljóðmæli 4*, ed. Margrét Eggertsdóttir, Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir & Þórunn Sigurðardóttir (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, 2010), 114–23. The former was first printed in 1755 and the latter in 1773.

<sup>230</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 112, 115–19.

<sup>231</sup> 1529, 57r–v. Johann Gerhard’s fortieth Sacred Meditation (originally published in German in 1606) also combines the image of Jesus as divine mother with that of Jesus as doctor-healer, Eric Lund (ed.), *Seventeenth-century Lutheran Meditations and Hymns* (New York: Paulist Press, 2011), 147–49.

<sup>232</sup> 232, 26v–27r.

corruption of the body is directly aligned with communally experienced social calamities. While the hymn functions to thank God at the close of a deadly epidemic, it also draws attention to the precarious thread by which Iceland's future hangs.

As Margrét Eggertsdóttir discusses in *Icelandic Baroque*, sickness, disaster, death and bodily decay were all common subjects for baroque poets.<sup>233</sup> For poets such as Guðmundur Erlendsson and Hallgrímur Pétursson, the body ravaged by disease is a physical manifestation of the transience of all mortal life.

### 4.3 The deacon's wild oats

Prior to receiving a living of his own, Guðmundur Erlendsson seems to have been briefly in the bishop's service. He also held the position of deacon at Þingeyrar in the household of Bishop Guðbrandur's son, Páll Guðbrandsson, in 1614–1617.<sup>234</sup>

Being the client of the bishop and his family was not simply a matter of reciting poetry at weddings and funerals. Bishop Guðbrandur, despite his role as a spiritual leader and literary patron, was not above using his position in order to enrich himself and his family, and he made use of Guðmundur's loyalty in secular matters. This could make powerful enemies, since Bishop Guðbrandur was frequently at odds with some of the most influential men and women in Iceland, particularly in connection with a number of farms that his grandfather had been strongarmed into relinquishing. The result was a nasty, prolonged legal fight in a convoluted matter known as the *Morðbréfamál* ('Murder-letter Incident'), lasting from around 1590 to 1624, the year in which Bishop Guðbrandur had a debilitating stroke. In 1618, Bishop Guðbrandur formally entrusted Guðmundur with the task of delivering a legal summons to the *sýslumaður* Steindór Gíslason, who had married the widow of Guðbrandur's main opponent in the case.<sup>235</sup> Steindór was, in fact, the nephew of the bishop's deceased wife, Halldóra Árnadóttir (1547–1585), but Steindór and Guðbrandur were now clashing over control of various properties. Steindór was presumably not pleased to receive this visit from Guðmundur, not even bothering to show up at the appointed time at Akrar in Blönduhlíð to argue his case.<sup>236</sup>

In return for Guðmundur's loyalty, Guðbrandur kept the young graduate in his good graces as his client. In c. 1617, Guðmundur fathered an illegitimate son named Bjarni, who lived to adulthood but

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<sup>233</sup> Margrét Eggertsdóttir, *Icelandic Baroque*, 229, 384. Leila Akslen, *Norsk Barokk* (Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag, 1997), 89.

<sup>234</sup> Páll Eggert Ólason, *Menn og menntir*, vol. 4, 757.

<sup>235</sup> AM Dipl. Isl. Fasc. LXXIV 17. The scribe who copied the original document initially wrote the name Árni Geirmundsson, but this has been crossed out in a different hand and corrected to "Gvendur Ellends".

<sup>236</sup> Guðbrandur Þorláksson, *Bréfabók Guðbrands byskups Þorlákssonar*, ed. Jón Þorkelsson & Páll Eggert Ólason (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1919–1942), 629–30.

is otherwise a shadowy figure in the historical record (see 4.9). A copy of an extraordinary private letter survives from Guðbrandur Þorláksson to his son Páll, written on 13 December 1617, when Guðmundur was a deacon in Páll's household at Þingeyrar.<sup>237</sup> Guðbrandur begins by apologizing to Páll for being unable to find a place in the Latin school for an unnamed boy (identified only as Oddur's son), since the school building is full to bursting. After responding to various other queries from his son, Guðbrandur writes:

Um Gvönd Erlendsson skrifa eg síra Halldóri til. Ekki vil eg vera með þeim, sem slétta yfir hans illa breytni, en það ráðlegg eg, honum sé ekki þyngt í móti lögum. Hingað til hafa valdsmenn ekki sektir haft né fengið af einföldu legorði, þó maður grípi til stelpu. Nóg er Stóridómur þungur þó hann standi, og þó danskir vilji hafa sekt fyrir hvort tilgrip, þá eru það ekki lög. En þó giftingarmaður vilji hafa rétt sinn, þá er þar ekki í móti mælandi. *Sacramenta* eiga ekki að vera fépressa né ágirndarskjóða. Er mér sagt, að eftir þær báðar stelpur þá hafi Gvöndur tekið aflausn í einu. Því er það ekki rétt að þrengja honum nú til opinberrar aflausnar, og vilji síra Halldór mér hlýða, þá vil eg hann veiti honum *privatam absolutionem*, en sé hér annað í en eg hef heyrt, þá finni Gvöndur mig sjálfur með það, en í öngvan máta vil eg þú heimtir kóngssekt, þá barneign verður ekki af, og berlega er það rangt hvör sem því fylgir, nema nýr dómur gangi þar á.<sup>238</sup>

(‘Regarding Gvöndur [Guðmundur] Erlendsson, I shall write to the Rev. Halldór. I do not wish to be among those who smooth over his bad conduct, but I do advise that he not be burdened against the law. Hitherto, men in authority have not been fined for simple fornication [i.e., out of wedlock but not with a partner forbidden under the law] if one fools around with a girl. The *Stóridómur* is burdensome enough on its own, and though the Danes want a fine for each of the two flings, it is not the law, and though the [woman’s] guardian wants to claim his right, there is nothing to argue against that.’<sup>239</sup> Sacraments ought not be a money-press, nor a pouch for avarice. I am told that Gvöndur has received absolution for both girls at once. Therefore, it is not correct to force him now to receive public absolution,

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<sup>237</sup> AM Dipl. Isl. Fasc. LXX 13.

<sup>238</sup> AM Dipl. Isl. Fasc. LXX 13, 1v–2r. An earlier transcription is printed in Páll Eggert Ólason, *Menn og menntir*, vol. 4, 756–57. The present normalized transcription retains “hvort”, “mælandi” and “gangi á”, whereas Páll Eggert Ólason has “hvert”, “mælanda” and “gangi til”. The digitized original documents are available in the online collection of Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, [digitalesamlinger.hum.ku.dk/Home/Details/239014/](http://digitalesamlinger.hum.ku.dk/Home/Details/239014/) and [digitalesamlinger.hum.ku.dk/Home/Details/239016/](http://digitalesamlinger.hum.ku.dk/Home/Details/239016/)

<sup>239</sup> Since Páll's letter to Guðbrandur has not survived, it is difficult to interpret this sentence. Based on the next sentence, it seems that at least one party wanted to prevent Guðmundur from receiving sacraments until he had paid restitution or an additional fine. A *giftingarmaður* is the legal guardian of an unmarried woman, who manages her marriage. The task would normally fall to the woman's father, but a close male relative would become her *giftingarmaður* in the event of the father's death, indicating that the woman in question was fatherless.

and should the Rev. Halldór obey me, then I wish him to offer him private absolution. But should there be more to this than I have heard, then Gvöndur himself ought to seek me out over this matter. But in no case do I want you to levy a royal fine if a child is not conceived, and whoever does this is plainly in the wrong, unless a new judgement thereupon should be passed.

The letter provides no details, since Páll had presumably already informed Guðbrandur of the matter. Since Páll was the *sýslumaður* for the region, his task was to collect fines for violations of the *Stóridómur*, but he deferred to his father in Guðmundur's case, as Guðmundur was Guðbrandur's protégé and had an unusually complicated love life as a young deacon. From Guðbrandur's response, the bishop was not particularly shocked by the news, not least in light of the fact that Guðbrandur had an illegitimate daughter by a maidservant at Hólar prior to his own marriage.

In his letter, Guðbrandur positions casual relationships with those below one's station in life as entirely normal for a young unmarried *valdsmaður* ('elite man') such as Guðmundur or Guðbrandur, using distinctly male-centred language (i.e., *að grípa til stelpu* and *tilgrip*). His partners are characterized only as *stelpur* ('girls'): unmarried maidservants or other women of non-elite social status. In the bishop's eyes, premarital sex and matrimony are wholly separate issues: sex is a transgression that may tempt young upper-class men before a suitable marriage can be arranged, whereas marriage is an alliance before God and the entire community that begins with legal and financial negotiations and culminates in the marriage ceremony. The *brúðkaup* ('bride-fastening') was not a private matter between a man and woman: a woman could refuse consent, but only widows could initiate their own marriages – and their ability to do so without the family's consent could cause serious consternation in society. In 1636, *sýslumaður* Ari Magnússon of Ögur (1571–1652) wrote to his widowed sister-in-law Helga (1599–1646), daughter of Arngrímur Jónsson *lærði*, cajoling and threatening her by turns not to enter into a second marriage with a social inferior purely for lust's sake.<sup>240</sup> As a marriage alliances had major social and financial implications, Helga's theologically and legally permissible behaviour was far more transgressive and disconcerting than Guðmundur's.

Importantly for the poet's career, Guðbrandur saw no reason to ban Guðmundur from the clergy on the grounds of his sexual behaviour, since he had openly confessed his sins and paid his fine.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Preserved in ÍB 231 4to. See also Gunnar Örn Hannesson, *Bréfabók Eggerts Björnssonar sýslumanns á Skarði á Skarðsströnd: Um efni hennar, feril og skjalfærði* (MA thesis, University of Iceland, 2011).

<sup>241</sup> The strictness of attitudes to premarital liaisons varied over the seventeenth century. A few decades later, a married minister whose wife gave birth to a premature baby within nine months of the marriage was at risk of



However, Guðbrandur's letter lends credence to Páll Vídalín's claim that Guðmundur not only fathered a child but composed a slanderous, pornographic poem about the child's mother, and that Bishop Guðbrandur was the one to pressure Guðmundur into amending the offending verses under threat of being barred from the clergy. This now-lost poem was presumably the early modern equivalent of public slut-shaming. The performance and dissemination of such material crossed a line that consensual relationships between partners of unequal social status did not. While post-Reformation Icelandic society is often depicted as exceptionally strict and repressive, there is an obvious parallel between Guðbrandur's actions and modern responses to online harassment and shaming of women by ex-partners.

This is a radically different poet than the pious young hymnist presented in *Gígja*. Páll Vídalín's account is reminiscent of descriptions of the poet Stefán Ólafsson as a young man, who had a reputation as a joker and composed scatological poems mocking his social inferiors – grotesque scenes from everyday life, emphasising the absurdity and fallibility of the human condition.<sup>242</sup> Not surprisingly, Guðmundur's self-presentation in an anthology intended for posterity does not reflect this aspect of his corpus. The deacon Guðmundur's mocking poetry is lost, and the parson Guðmundur may have had an active hand in the process of losing it. At least one other early modern Icelandic parson followed a similar trajectory as a poet: Einar Sigurðsson of Eydalir states in an autobiographical *dróttkvætt* stanza that he composed worthless verses as a young man but had a revelation at the age of 30 that he ought to compose for God instead, in response to which he composed *Hugbót*.<sup>243</sup> Einar alludes in several poems to his misspent poetic youth.<sup>244</sup> One may even speculate that Guðbrandur Þorláksson's motive for printing one of Guðmundur's early hymns in the 1619 hymnal was to encourage the poet to follow Einar of Eydalir's example and use his poetic gifts for good rather than for evil.

Not all of Guðmundur's humorous poems have been lost, and it is clear that Guðmundur did not abandon comic verse altogether. Guðmundur Erlendsson and Ásgrímur Magnússon's *Grýlukvæði* from c. 1640 is one example.<sup>245</sup> Guðmundur and Ásgrímur based *Grýlukvæði* on much older traditions associated with the menacing figure of Grýla, who according to *Grýlukvæði* appears at Christmastide to beg for alms – in the form of naughty children. The poem is the first to place Grýla in a specific local landscape, and it was quickly followed by similar poems set elsewhere in Iceland, including one

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losing his living. Brynjólfur Sveinsson, *Guðs dýrð og sálnanna velferð: Prestastefnudómar Brynjólfs biskups Sveinssonar*, ed. Már Jónsson, *Sýnisbók íslenskrar alþýðumenningar* 10 (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2005), 266.

<sup>242</sup> Cf. Margrét Eggertsdóttir, *Icelandic Baroque*, 154–55, 173–83.

<sup>243</sup> Einar Sigurðsson, *Ljóðmæli*, 4.

<sup>244</sup> Einar Sigurðsson, *Ljóðmæli*, 184–87.

<sup>245</sup> Katelin Parsons, "Grýla in Sléttuhlíð," 211–33.

by Hallgrímur Pétursson, featuring Grýla's husband Leppalúði, and a *Grýlukvæði* set in East Iceland that has been attributed to Stefán Ólafsson. Like certain other comic poems from the period, however, *Grýlukvæði* is poorly preserved and seems to have circulated mainly in oral form until the nineteenth century.

#### 4.3.1 *Bríetarkvæði*

The poem *Bríetarkvæði* survives only in JS 472 8vo, a poetic miscellany formerly belonging to the librarian Jón Árnason, where it is attributed to the Rev. Guðmundur Erlendsson. Jón Ólafsson from Grunnavík quoted from *Bríetarkvæði* in his dictionary, variously crediting Guðmundur Erlendsson and Stefán Ólafsson, and on the basis of this, Jón Þorkelsson published the poem in his edition of Stefán Ólafsson's poems, writing that "Kvæðið er svo nauðalíkt S' Stefáni, að það getur varla verið eptir annan en hann" ('The poem is so markedly similar to the Rev. Stefán's that it can hardly be by anyone other than him').<sup>246</sup>

*Bríetarkvæði* takes place at an unnamed Icelandic farmhouse, where the vagrant Bríet attempts to steal Bjarni's suet – hung on a hook high up in the *baðstofa* – by climbing naked up onto the rafters while the household sleeps.<sup>247</sup> Grabbing the suet by her nails, she accidentally tears the reticulum bag in which it is stored, and both Bríet and the suet plummet to the ground. Bríet still lays naked and groaning on the floor the next morning, while the suet has scattered every which way. The poem ends with the image of Bjarni, who is plainly an ordinary farmer, kneeling whimpering on the *baðstofa* floor, gathering up suet lumps from the dirt.

The poem is only eight stanzas long, centred mainly on the ridiculous image of a naked woman heaving herself up with some difficulty onto a crossbeam and attempting to manoeuvre herself over to a suet-bag hanging tantalisingly just out of arm's reach. The suet-bag itself is playfully glorified as an intensely desirable object, using absurd terms such as *fagur feitikjarni* ('beautiful core of fat') and *mörva kyllir Bjarna* ('Bjarni's pouch of suet') that border on parodies of kennings.<sup>248</sup> A much older work, Þórður Magnússon of Strjúgur's *Fjósaríma*, uses a similar poetic technique in using increasingly silly poetic metaphors for barn – including *hús flórs* ('the house of the dung channel') and *baulu salur* ('the hall of mooing') – to describe a fistfight in a cowshed over an unpaid debt.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Stefán Ólafsson, *Kvæði*, vol. 1, 150.

<sup>247</sup> The narrative makes most sense if the household sleeps in a separate *skáli*, rather than the *baðstofa* of a typical nineteenth-century farmhouse, as the noises described in the poem would be likely to wake anyone in the same room immediately.

<sup>248</sup> Stefán Ólafsson, *Kvæði*, vol. 1, 151.

<sup>249</sup> Finnur Sigmundsson (ed.), *Stakar rímur frá 16., 17., 18., og 19. öld*, Rit Rímnafélagsins 9 (Reykjavík: Rímnafélagið, 1960), 1–10.

Snorri's Edda does not cover the rules on how to construct kennings for sheep fat, being focused on more aristocratic objects of desire such as gold and swords. Through its use of language, *Bríetarkvæði* allows the audience to experience through Bríet's eyes (and insatiable stomach) what is revealed at the end of the poem to be suet intended for candlemaking. Bríet's hapless host, Bjarni, is hardly depicted as Bríet's moral superior; his only thought on discovering the accident is for his candlefat, even though Bríet has been unsuccessful in her original plan of stealing and consuming it.

*Bríetarkvæði* is certainly a piece in the style of Stefán Ólafsson, as Jón Þorkelsson states, but it is important to avoid a definition of Stefán Ólafsson's poems whereby all carnivalesque poems of the seventeenth century are automatically attributed to the parson from Vallanes. For Jón Ólafsson from Grunnavík, both Stefán Ólafsson and Guðmundur Erlendsson were plausible candidates as its author. The authorship of *Bríetarkvæði* may be uncertain, but the poem shares not a little in common with *Grýlukvæði* in its representation of female beggars. In *Grýlukvæði*, Grýla is an insatiable vagrant like Bríet, but one who is quite literally a social parasite, with her eye on badly behaved children rather than sheep-suet.

#### 4.3.2 With love from Skeggi

An anonymous poem in AM 441 12mo from the late seventeenth century, entitled "Skeggi til Laugu skrifar og segir" ('Skeggi writes to Lauga and says'), is a parody of a love-letter that appears to be part of a playful exchange between seventeenth-century poets. With no evidence as to its authorship, Jón Þorkelsson printed it in his anthology of Stefán Ólafsson's poems on the grounds that Stefán Ólafsson composed a comic poem about a character named Skeggi.<sup>250</sup>

The poem's male speaker (Skeggi, according to the poem's rubric) writes clumsily to his beloved Lauga to express the passion with which he has been inflamed upon receiving her loving words, delivered by a certain Rev. Gvöndur. Skeggi, admittedly, has not seen or met Lauga, but he is convinced that she is the only woman for him. He praises himself as being extraordinarily good at various manual activities (such as fishing and collecting eggs from cliffs), having no known faults except snoring. He would very much like to marry Lauga, but they live very far from each other. He reveals that he has a cunning plan: he intends to find himself a new master in Ólafsfjörður, where he will be closer to Lauga. "Skeggi til Laugu skrifar og segir" is a very funny poem, mocking the pastoral idylls – in vogue in Europe at the time – that describe the wooing of a fair shepherdess by her faithful shepherd.<sup>251</sup> Much of the humour comes from Skeggi's inability to use various elements of baroque poetry in a tasteful manner: a metre too complex for Skeggi's level of eloquence, the flagrant misuse

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<sup>250</sup> Stefán Ólafsson, *Kvæði*, vol. 1, 160.

<sup>251</sup> Cf. Margrét Eggertsdóttir, *Icelandic Baroque*, 169–72.

of *blómað mál* ('florid language') to cobble together rhymes,<sup>252</sup> his boastful self-praise over mundane accomplishments and the clumsily worded language of love that inadvertently slips into double entendre.

The Reverend Gvöndur can only be Guðmundur Erlendsson. Ásgrímur Magnússon/Guðmundur Erlendsson and Hallgrímur Pétursson mention a Skeggi in their *Grýlukvæði* and *Leppalúðakvæði*, in both of which poems Skeggi is Guðmundur's manservant.<sup>253</sup> Since Skeggi also states in closing that leaving his current household for Ólafsfjörður in Eyjafjörður will bring him closer to Lauga (suggesting a recipient somewhere in the parish of Kvíabekkjarsókn),<sup>254</sup> Guðmundur Erlendsson is most likely the poem's author, adopting the persona of Skeggi for the amusement of an unknown recipient who is also in on the joke.

Margrét Eggertsdóttir interprets the carnivalesque in Stefán Ólafsson's poetry as having a similar function to contemporary Danish poems in the same vulgar style, building on the earlier work of Storstein and Sørensen. Like Stefán Ólafsson and Guðmundur Erlendsson, many Danish theologians composed works that circulated exclusively in manuscript form and bring normally hidden body parts, bodily functions and urges into the spotlight, mocking rather than praising their subjects.<sup>255</sup> Margrét concludes that comic poems were "underground verse" but nevertheless reinforced a worldview whereby acceptance of one's place in the social hierarchy was normal and necessary.<sup>256</sup> The message is thus essentially the same as in a "printable" poem on morality such as Jón Bjarnason's *Sírastrímur*, which advises against the types of behaviour exhibited by the vagabond Bríet and the emperors of the ancient world in much less colourful language. Margrét concludes:

Comic verse can expose a fallen world in which the corrupt and vain rule the roost while poets delight in artfully highlighting their many follies. Ultimately both humor and seriousness can involve the alteration and inversion of perspectives, for nothing is what it seems and everything is unstable and transient. The comic poetry of Stefán and his contemporaries tests the limit of respectability... but it was nevertheless a crucial element in

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<sup>252</sup> E.g., *vildar rót* ('the root of my wish') for wish. On *blómað mál*, see Davíð Erlingsson, "Blómað mál í rímum," *Studia Islandica* 33 (1974): 7–98.

<sup>253</sup> Katelin Parsons, "Grýla in Sléttuhlíð," 228.

<sup>254</sup> There is a Skeggjabrekka ('Skeggi's slope') in Ólafsfjörður, but this may be a coincidence. Unfortunately, the identity of the local parson at Kvíabekkur from c. 1623–1658 is unknown. Sveinn Níelsson, *Prestatal og prófesta á Íslandi*, 267.

<sup>255</sup> Eira Storstein & Peer E. Sørensen, *Den Barokke Tekst* (N.p.: Dansk lærerforeningen, 1999), 182.

<sup>256</sup> Margrét Eggertsdóttir, *Icelandic Baroque*, 182–83.

seventeenth-century Icelandic verse. Failure to recognize its significance would lead to an unbalanced understanding of the period.<sup>257</sup>

The comic figures of Grýla, Bjarni and Skeggi surface in various seventeenth-century poems falling into the category of underground verse. Their authorship is poorly documented, and the poems themselves tend to be poorly preserved. The protagonists of these poems are vagrants (Grýla, Leppalúði, Bríet), servants (Skeggi, Lauga) or uneducated tenant farmers (Bjarni), but the poets with which they are associated in surviving manuscripts are mainly well-known individuals within the clergy: Guðmundur Erlendsson, Hallgrímur Pétursson and Stefán Ólafsson. This points to the existence of informal literary networks within Iceland for the circulation of underground verse among learned poets, who amused themselves in inventing the misadventures of various exaggerated “types” in society.

#### 4.4 Friends in high places

Guðmundur Erlendsson’s first living was the parish of Bólstaðarhlíðarsókn, where he spent only a year after leaving Þingeyrar. He spent another year at Viðvík in Skagafjörður, near Hólar, before moving to Eyjafjörður to become the parson for Möðruvellir in Hörgárdalur in 1619. The wealthy master and mistress of Möðruvellir were Ólafur Jónsson (d. 1621) and Þórunn Benediksdóttir (d. 1628). Þórunn was the daughter of *sýslumaður* Benedikt Halldórsson (1534–1604), whose epithet had been *ríki* (‘the rich’). Ólafur and Þórunn’s son Halldór Ólafsson (d. 1638), who in 1619 was chosen for the position of *lögmaður* for North and West Iceland, held Möðruvellir after his elderly father’s death.

Guðmundur seems to have sought the patronage of Ólafur and Þórunn’s powerful family even prior to his posting to Möðruvellir, as some of Guðmundur’s oldest extant occasional poems were composed for them. The first was probably a commemorative poem on Björn Benediktsson *sýslumaður* (1561–1617), Þórunn’s brother.<sup>258</sup> Ólafur died in 1621, and Guðmundur composed a long commemorative poem (*erfiljóð*) of 39 stanzas, possibly in connection with the funeral.<sup>259</sup> Þórunn died in 1628, some years after Guðmundur had moved to the nearby living of Glæsibær, but he constructed a large handwritten memorial plaque for the church at Möðruvellir with a commemorative poem praising Þórunn and her piety.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Margrét Eggertsdóttir, *Icelandic Baroque*, 182–83.

<sup>258</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, *Heiður og huggun*, 359.

<sup>259</sup> Published in Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, “Erfiljóð: Lærð bókmenntagein á 17. öld,” 166–71. See Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, *Heiður og huggun*, 322–33.

<sup>260</sup> The memorial is now in the collection of the National Museum, Þjms 10963. A full-colour image is printed in Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, “Á Krists ysta jarðar hala,” 176.

An undated poem, *Hamingjuspá Valgerðar Halldórsdóttur* ('A prediction of good fortune for Valgerður Halldórsdóttir'), is addressed to Valgerður Halldórsdóttir (1619–1702), the daughter of Halldór Ólafsson and his wife Halldóra Jónsdóttir.<sup>261</sup> Guðmundur presumably presided over Valgerður's christening, but it is unclear whether the "göfug gullhlaðs tróða" ('noble stick of the golden headband,' i.e., woman) who requested the poem for the tiny Valgerður is Valgerður's grandmother Þórunn or Valgerður's mother Halldóra.<sup>262</sup> This could be an occasional piece performed in connection with Valgerður's christening ceremony, but it may also be a more general wish for the young girl's future that is not connected to any specific event, such as the poems that Einar Sigurðsson of Eydalir composed for at least three of his young grandchildren.<sup>263</sup>

#### 4.4.1 Rising to the occasion

The fashion for occasional poetry commemorating important events in the life of an individual and/or the history of a community spread to Iceland at the beginning of the early modern era.<sup>264</sup> As with Guðmundur's poems on Björn, Ólafur and Þórunn, they are not only event-specific but also socially oriented. They are typically composed with the objective of performance before an audience and/or the presentation of a written version. Occasional poems are rarely as spectacularly displayed as on Þórunn Benediktsdóttir's memorial, which uses brightly coloured pigments for the first letter of each stanza, but even more humble representatives of this class of poems are composed for the purpose of sharing with others.

Although occasional poetry was composed widely in early modern Europe, its popularity in Iceland is unsurprising. The events being commemorated were major social gatherings, often attended by large audiences receptive to poetry. On happier occasions, such as the wedding of Bishop Gísli Þorláksson of Hólar and Gróa Þorleifsdóttir in 1658 (where both Guðmundur Erlendsson and his youngest son Jón were among the invited guests), entertainments might be held over several days; one well-documented highlight of Gísli and Gróa's wedding was the music played by Gísli's brother, Þórður, who had brought musical instruments with him from abroad.<sup>265</sup> Guðmundur and/or his son Jón might have recited a poem on this occasion, too, although this is uncertain. Unlike his contemporaries Hallgrímur Pétursson and Stefán Ólafsson, Guðmundur does not seem to have composed epithalamia, but given that Guðmundur Erlendsson's self-compiled anthology *Gígja* is the main

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<sup>261</sup> 232, 394v–395v.

<sup>262</sup> 232, 394v.

<sup>263</sup> Einar Sigurðsson, *Ljóðmæli*, 154–162, 255–60.

<sup>264</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, "Erfiljóð: Lærð bókmenntagrein á 17. öld," 125.

<sup>265</sup> Cf. the eyewitness description in Gunnlaugur Þorsteinsson's *Vallholtsannáll*, see ÍA 1, 351–52. Gróa died in 1660, and in 1664 Bishop Gísli married Ingibjörg Benediktsdóttir (d. 1673), daughter of Benedikt Halldórsson *sýslumaður* (son of Halldór Ólafsson and Halldóra Jónsdóttir, and the older brother of the above-mentioned Valgerður Halldórsdóttir) and his wife Jórunn Hinriksdóttir. Gísli's third wife was Ragnheiður Jónsdóttir (1646–1715).

source for his occasional poetry, he may have felt it more important to preserve his funeral poems. Guðmundur Erlendsson's commemorative poem "Diktur lofkvæði Davíðs son" was composed on the occasion of the death of Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson, his early patron. According to the rubric in 1529, no less a person than Bishop Oddur Einarsson of Skálholt oversaw the preparation of a good manuscript copy of the poem.<sup>266</sup>

Þórunn Sigurðardóttir has written extensively on the subject of Guðmundur Erlendsson's occasional poetry, and his commemorative poems in particular. Þórunn observes that Guðmundur is a good example of a poet who composed commemorative poems for persons of high social standing within the community in Skagafjörður and Eyjafjörður.<sup>267</sup> These compositions fall within the learned tradition of occasional verse, which Guðmundur would have encountered at Hólar during his studies in the early 1610s.

Three of the first poets in Iceland known to have composed occasional verse are the Rev. Einar Sigurðsson of Eydalir in Breiðdalur (1539–1626), the Rev. Ólafur Jónsson of Sandar (1560–1627) and the Rev. Magnús Ólafsson of Laufás (c. 1573–1636).<sup>268</sup> The highly educated scholar Magnús deliberately sought to emulate older models, including the performance of skaldic praise poetry in the courts of kings and chieftains,<sup>269</sup> whereas Einar and Ólafur tended to use more accessible language and metres for their occasional poems.<sup>270</sup> The latter type of occasional poems appeal to a broader audience, including individuals who lack the formal education to unpick complex metaphors and allusions to classical and Old Norse-Icelandic literature. This more transparent style is preferred by Guðmundur Erlendsson, speaking to how Guðmundur conceived of his role as a poet whose compositions ought to speak to a broad spectrum of listeners. Unlike older skaldic praise poems on powerful leaders, which focus on the glory of the individual, the subject of a commemorative poem in the early modern Icelandic tradition provides his or her entire community with a model from which to learn virtuous and Christian behaviour.<sup>271</sup> This emphasis on the social and religious function

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<sup>266</sup> 1529, 66r. It is not impossible that the poem was also printed in a small print run in 1628 (either at Hólar or abroad), but printing activities at Hólar seem to have halted for a time in 1623–1629, see 4.14.

<sup>267</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, *Heiður og huggun*, 315–16.

<sup>268</sup> Others include Bishop Oddur Einarsson of Skálholt (1559–1630) and Ólafur Einarsson (c. 1673–1651) of Kirkjubær in Hróarstunga.

<sup>269</sup> Margrét Eggertsdóttir, *Icelandic Baroque*, 124–25; Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, "Undanvillingur rekinn heim: Um „lausavísu“ Magnúsar Ólafssonar í Laufási," *Gripla* 29 (2018): 272–73.

<sup>270</sup> Óskar Halldórsson, *Bókmenntir á lærdómsöld: 1550–1770*, ed. Sigurður Línal (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1996), 26.

<sup>271</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, "Erfiljóð: Lærð bókmenntagrein á 17. öld," 163–64.

of literature is fundamental to our understanding of seventeenth-century Icelandic poetry, argues Þórunn Sigurðardóttir.<sup>272</sup>

Some tension may have arisen between Magnús Ólafsson and the much younger Guðmundur Erlendsson due to competition over local patronage, since they composed occasional poems for the same powerful families. In particular, the family at Möðruvellir in Hörgárdalur had been Magnús's benefactors prior to Guðmundur's arrival. Magnús himself was of humble origins but had enjoyed the patronage of Benedikt Halldórsson, the father of Guðmundur's patroness Þórunn Benediksdóttir.<sup>273</sup> Benedikt had generously provided the young and talented Magnús with the best possible education: a place at Hólar and then the opportunity to continue his education at the University of Copenhagen. However, after marrying Agnes Eiríksdóttir and receiving a living (probably either Möðruvellir in Hörgárdalur or Vellir in Svarfaðardalur),<sup>274</sup> Magnús was convicted of adultery in 1607–1608 and defrocked.<sup>275</sup> Páll Vídalín states that this cost Magnús his benefactors.<sup>276</sup>

Magnús spent several years in Copenhagen before receiving a royal pardon. On returning to Iceland, he did some teaching at Hólar before receiving the living of Laufás in Eyjafjörður in 1622. Magnús's wife's family and church authorities continued to support him, actively encouraging his scholarly pursuits even after his extramarital affair disqualified him from a position within the clergy,<sup>277</sup> so Páll Vídalín's comment may apply more specifically to the dynasty at Möðruvellir. Ólafur and Þórunn do not seem to have solicited or received occasional poetry from Magnús despite his close connection to her family and the proximity of Laufás to Möðruvellir. Ólafur had at least two illegitimate children of his own and was not in a position to cast stones. The embarrassment of the adultery scandal could nevertheless have resulted in a permanent break with the poet fostered by Þórunn's father, not least if the couple had initially believed and defended Magnús's original protestations of innocence.

Returning to Eyjafjörður in 1622, Magnús likely did not appreciate Guðmundur's position as the new favourite poet for Möðruvellir. While Guðmundur Erlendsson and Magnús's foster-son and successor Jón Magnússon of Laufás (Magnús's wife's nephew) were evidently on good terms and shared an enthusiasm for *rímur* based on narratives from the Bible, Magnús Ólafsson and Guðmundur

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<sup>272</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, *Heiður og huggun*, 49.

<sup>273</sup> According to Páll Vídalín, Magnús's father had passed away before Magnús's birth and his mother was reduced to begging. His mother died of exposure travelling between farms when Magnús was a baby, but managed to shelter Magnús with her body. Benedikt Halldórsson, the monastery keeper at Möðruvellir in Hörgárdalur, found Magnús still alive and decided to take in the tiny orphan and raise him. Páll Vídalín, *Recensus*, 92.

<sup>274</sup> Anthony Faulkes, *Two Versions of Snorra Edda*, vol. 1, 15.

<sup>275</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, "Undanvillingur rekinn heim, 261–91.

<sup>276</sup> Páll Vídalín, *Recensus*, 93.

<sup>277</sup> Anthony Faulkes, *Two Versions of Snorra Edda*, vol. 1, 15–17.



Erlendsson shared virtually no common ground as poets. Lbs 1698 4to, the oldest copy of the poem *Kvennadans* (attributed to Magnús Ólafsson in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century manuscripts)<sup>278</sup> is in the same hand as the main hand of 250 (see 5.4). The manuscript catalogue of the National Library identifies the hand as Guðmundur Erlendsson's, but it is more likely that of an unknown scribe in North Iceland active in the mid-to-late seventeenth century.<sup>279</sup>

#### 4.4.2 Seats of power and patronage

Guðmundur's close relationship with the magnates of Möðruvellir lasted his entire lifetime. One of Guðmundur's last occasional poems, dated 23 January 1665, commemorates Benedikt Pálsson (1608–1664) of Möðruvellir in Hörgárdalur.<sup>280</sup> Benedikt was the son of Páll Guðbrandsson and the maternal grandson of Björn Benediktsson, and Guðmundur would have known Benedikt as a boy at Þingeyrar. Benedikt was captured and enslaved by Barbary pirates in 1633 but ransomed three years later by his wealthy family, as Guðmundur relates.

As Benedikt's case illustrates, the descendants of Guðbrandur Þorláksson and Benedikt Halldórsson entered into strategic marriage alliances that closely united the interests of the bishop of Hólar, the monastery-holder (*klausturhaldari*) at Möðruvellir and the monastery-holder at Þingeyrar. Prior to the Reformation, all three locations had been important centres of learning and literacy. Möðruvellir had been an Augustinian monastery, while Þingeyrar was a Benedictine monastery. With the Reformation, religious houses ceased to hold the status of official institutions, and the properties and lands of Iceland's monasteries and convents fell under the control of the Danish king. Officially, monastery-holder was a non-hereditary, secular position. In practice, the same families were able to maintain control of Möðruvellir and Þingeyrar for generations during the seventeenth century. Similarly, the position of Bishop of Hólar remained in the family of Bishop Guðbrandur for three consecutive generations. This ensured a degree of sociocultural continuity that would have been lost had these centres and their libraries been utterly obliterated.

Locations such as Möðruvellir and Þingeyrar continued to function as sites of literary production and cultural patronage in the seventeenth century. With changing attitudes towards Iceland's place in the Danish empire in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the power of quasi-aristocratic Icelandic families to retain a continuous hold on large estates was disrupted. Economic decisions were made in Copenhagen, without regard for their effect on Icelandic literary culture. For Bishop

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<sup>278</sup> Anthony Faulkes, *Magnúsarkver*, 61.

<sup>279</sup> Páll Eggert Ólason, *Skrá um handritasöfn Landsbókasafnsins* (Reykjavík: Landsbókasafn Íslands, 1918–1996), vol. 1, 583. Lbs 1698 4to contains by far the oldest surviving copy of *Kvennadans*, cf. Anthony Faulkes, *Magnúsarkver*, 62.

<sup>280</sup> Preserved in ÍB 584 8vo and printed in Jón Þorkelsson (ed.), *Tyrkjaránið á Íslandi 1627* (Reykjavík: Sögufélag, 1906–1909), 455–63.

Gísli Þorláksson's successor, the Danish king – now an absolute monarch – favoured a tobacco-trading ex-administrator with no ecclesiastical experience (see 3.5).

#### 4.5 My true heart

In about 1620, while still at Möðruvellir, Guðmundur married Guðrún Gunnarsdóttir (1590–1668), the daughter of the farming couple Gunnar Ormsson of Tunga in Fljót (also known as Tunga in Stífla) and Ingibjörg Ólafsdóttir from Hraun in Fljót. Gunnar Ormsson rented Tunga directly from Halldóra Guðbrandsdóttir, the bishop's daughter, to which a surviving rental contract from 1609–1611 attests.<sup>281</sup> Gunnar and Ingibjörg must have been fairly prosperous farmers, since Gunnar was not only literate but owned his own personal seal.<sup>282</sup>

Guðrún was an older sister of Guðmundur's former schoolmate Jón Gunnarsson (see above), who married Guðmundur's sister Helga at approximately the same time. It may even have been a double wedding ceremony. Helga and Jón had at least two children: Pétur (c. 1621–1708), who entered the clergy like his father, and Ingibjörg (d. after 1687), who was named after her paternal grandmother and married the Rev. Árni Jónsson (d. about 1681).<sup>283</sup> Ingibjörg's husband was accused of sorcery in 1678 and escaped the country for England in 1680, possibly hoping to join a brother who had emigrated some years earlier, and Ingibjörg herself left Skagafjörður for Loðmundurfjörður in East Iceland, where she swore an oath in 1687 to clear her own name of witchcraft.<sup>284</sup>

Guðmundur's sister Þóra (d. before 1636) had also married by the early 1620s. Her husband, Ásgrímur Magnússon (d. 1679), was a farmer, a poet and a good friend of Guðmundur's. Ásgrímur farmed at Höfði in Höfðaströnd, which borders on Sléttuhlíð. Þóra and Ásgrímur had at least one daughter together, Sigríður (c. 1626–after 1703), who in the 1640s married Guðmundur Jónsson (d. 1664), the Rev. Sveinn Jónsson of Barð's brother. Þóra died at an unknown date between 1626 and 1636, possibly in childbirth. Ásgrímur's second wife was Þuríður Jónsdóttir, who was the Rev. Sveinn Jónsson of Barð's sister, and they had at least three children: Valgerður (1636–1706), Herdís (1638–after 1709) and Erlendur (c. 1644–after 1705). Þuríður was thus Sigríður's stepmother but also her sister-in-law.

##### 4.5.1 Kinship networks

Kinship is not a fixed attribute determined by birth but rather a complex network of social relationships that continues to develop throughout an individual's life – and even beyond. As the

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<sup>281</sup> Guðbrandur Þorláksson, *Bréfabók Guðbrands byskups Þorlákssonar*, 601.

<sup>282</sup> Teresa D. Njarðvík, "Stutt yfirlit um innsigli á Íslandi ásamt ritgerðum Jóns Sigurðssonar um innsigli og búmörk," *Árbók hins íslenska fornleifafélags* 15 (2016): 152.

<sup>283</sup> Páll Eggert Ólason, *Íslenskar æviskrár frá landnámstímum til ársloka 1940* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1948–1976), vol. 3, 137.

<sup>284</sup> Indriði Helgason, "Galdra-Imba," *Saga* 2.1 (1954): 46–58.

example of Guðmundur Erlendsson's niece Sigríður demonstrates, the boundaries of kinship can shift over time, as can cultural and legal definitions of what constitutes transgressions of kinship on the one hand and desirable reinforcement of kinship ties on the other.

In modern Icelandic society, a step-parent/stepchild relationship from early childhood would normally culturally preclude a subsequent marriage between the stepchild and one of the step-parent's siblings. In early modern Iceland, the parents, children and siblings of a person's spouse were considered legally equivalent to one's own birth family in matters of morality, but no terms equivalent to step-uncle or step-aunt existed. Incest (*blóðskömm*) extended to ties established through matrimony: the sister of one's wife or the brother of one's husband were forbidden partners, just as one's own sister or brother, and from 1564 the penalty for violating this taboo was death. On the other hand, marriage just outside the circle of the forbidden provided valuable opportunities for the reinforcement of the kinship network and the cementing of alliances. A widow or widower could not re-marry into the same immediate family unit (e.g., a widow could not marry her brother-in-law), nor could one marry one's own first, second or third cousin without special royal dispensation, but alliance-reinforcing marriages between pairs of siblings (e.g., Guðmundur/Guðrún and Helga/Jón) or different generations of two families (Ásgrímur Magnússon/Puríður Jónsdóttir and Sigríður Ásgrímsdóttir/Guðmundur Jónsson) were not uncommon.<sup>285</sup> Fostering children could also build alliances between families of similar status. The young Solveig at Fell named in *Grýlukvæði* (c. 1640) was probably a foster-daughter of Guðmundur and Guðrún's.<sup>286</sup>

No studies currently exist on kinship networks specific to seventeenth-century Iceland, but they are widely regarded as important both for manuscript distribution and literary production.<sup>287</sup> The concept of *ætt* ('family, clan') as dynasty certainly existed in seventeenth-century Iceland. While there was no systematic distinction between the rights of commoners and the elite that would have formally divided the population into a peasantry and a hereditary aristocracy, seventeenth-century

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<sup>285</sup> For instance, Solveig Björnsdóttir and her sister Sigríður were daughters of the Rev. Björn Jónsson (1615–1681), the parson for Hvanneyri in Siglufjörður from 1641 to his death, and his first wife Guðrún Björnsdóttir (d. before 1667). Solveig married Magnús Sigurðsson (c. 1633–after 1703), the *hreppstjóri* for Fellshreppur (and son of Sigurður Magnússon of Tjarnir in Sléttuhlíð), while Sigríður married Magnús's brother Þorsteinn.

<sup>286</sup> A close study of the poem and the identities, ages and birth order of Guðmundur Erlendsson's children rules out the possibility that Solveig could be one of his daughters, nor does the name Solveig surface in naming patterns among his close relatives.

<sup>287</sup> E.g., Sigurður Pétursson, "Brynjólfur biskup og fólkíð frá Bræðratungu," 179–200; Susanne Miriam Arthur, "The Importance of Marital and Maternal Ties in the Distribution of Icelandic Manuscripts from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century," *Gripla* 23 (2012): 202.

Icelandic society was deeply hierarchical, with limited social mobility in practice – Gunnar Karlsson calls it a feudal society in the non-military sense of the term.<sup>288</sup>

According to an essay written in Latin in 1647 by Gísli Magnússon of Hlíðarendi (1621–1696), who held the office of *sýslumaður* from 1649, there were three ancient noble families in Iceland in the middle of the seventeenth century. All were descended from men who had been knighted by the king in former times: the Svalbarð family in North Iceland (*Svalbarðsætt*), the Skarð family (*Skarðsætt*) and the Klofi family in South Iceland (*Klofaætt*).<sup>289</sup> Gísli's argument was that members of these three powerful families were already respected by their countrymen as men of rank, but that they did not enjoy the hereditary privileges that would strengthen them as a ruling class. His essay's main purpose seems to have been to petition the Danish king to grant Gísli and his immediate family extensive rights, but there is no evidence that Gísli submitted a petition to the king requesting such privileges.<sup>290</sup> It may also have been a response to a royal decree of 10 December 1646 stating that privately owned landed property could be sold to anyone, provided that it had been previously offered for sale to the family of the seller.<sup>291</sup> In Iceland, wealth mainly took the form of land. Little money was in circulation, and Icelanders did not systematically invest in development of domestic industries or Denmark's colonial projects in Tranquebar, the Danish West Indies or West Africa. Small wonder that upper-class Icelanders perceived the open sale of private land as a threat.

The alliance between the families of Guðmundur Erlendsson and Guðrún Gunnarsdóttir united far less wealth and power than a match such as that between Bishop Gísli Þorláksson of Hólar and Gróa Þorleifsdóttir (see 4.4.1). Gróa's sister Þrúður Þorleifsdóttir married Gísli Magnússon *sýslumaður* in 1649, and the sisters' parentage was a good fit with Gísli Magnússon's conception of an aristocratic Icelandic woman – he was their second cousin. Lesser ministers such as Guðmundur and his brother-in-law Jón would typically support their families through farming and fishing activities at the church farm in their own local parish.

Provided that he did not make powerful enemies or break the morality laws, a good living provided a parson with social security for the duration of his lifetime. The same cannot be said for his wife and

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<sup>288</sup> Gunnar Karlsson, *Iceland's 1100 Years*, 155.

<sup>289</sup> Gísli Magnússon, *Gísli Magnússon (Vísí-Gísli): Ævisaga, ritgerðir, bréf*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, Safn Fræðafélagsins um Ísland og Íslendinga 11 (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska fræðafélag, 1939), 48–85.

<sup>290</sup> He had recently returned to Iceland from a grand tour of Europe, having spent time in Copenhagen in Denmark, Leyden in the Netherlands and Oxford in England. See Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, "'A Sojourner for Breeding Sake': Um Þorleif Gíslason frá Hlíðarenda og Skálholtsakademíuna á tíunda áratugi 17. aldar," *Menntun og menning í Skálholtsstifti 1620–1730: Skálholt 17.–19. 2008*, ed. Kristinn Ólason (Reykjavík: Glíman, 2010), 183–210.

<sup>291</sup> Oddgeir Stephensen & Jón Sigurðsson (eds.), *Lovsamling for Island* (Copenhagen: Høst, 1853–1889) vol. 1, 233–34.

children. As in Lutheran Germany and Scandinavia, an incumbent minister's wife and their children were guaranteed a *annus gratiae* or *náðarár* in the event of the minister's death: they would continue to receive the income and rent due to their husband for the next *fardagaár* (a year from the annual "moving days" in the seventh week of summer), and they could remain at the benefice during this period.<sup>292</sup> After this time, they needed to find a new home.

A parson's early death could be a devastating event for his family, potentially leading to great financial hardship for widows and young children. The poet Jónas Hallgrímsson's loss of his clergyman-father in an accident in 1816 is a well-known example of the type of circumstances that could rapidly lead to a family falling into poverty. In such an event, a family unit relied on the support of kin: Jónas Hallgrímsson's maternal aunt Guðrún, for instance, fostered the young boy after her brother-in-law's death.

Seen in this light, the marriages of Guðmundur Erlendsson and his close kin were aimed largely at strengthening social relationships that would provide help in difficult times. The density of these connections makes describing and illustrating them a complicated undertaking, but the unrooted family tree (see Appendix) is an attempt to represent visually what is known of the kinship ties between Guðmundur's family and others in North Iceland. Through a complicated web of marriages, Guðmundur's wider kinship network can be considered as connecting to his fellow poet and clergyman Sveinn Jónsson, the poet Ásgrímur Magnússon and Ásgrímur's brother Sigurður, who farmed at Tjörn in Sléttuhlíð and also numbered among Guðmundur Erlendsson's friends in later life.

This network is no less important than Guðmundur's connections with his rich and powerful patrons. Not all of Guðmundur's occasional poems and hymns seek the ear of the high and mighty. Many serve to cultivate his relationships with other members of his kinship network and local community (such as *Grýlukvæði*) or were composed in direct response to events within his own family. Þórunn Sigurðardóttir identified "Adam sakna Abels hlaut" as an elegy for one of Guðmundur's siblings,<sup>293</sup> and Guðmundur's hymn "Söng minn, sorgandi maður," consoling those who have lost a loved one to drowning, could have been composed in connection with his brother Skúli's death or a similar tragedy in his community.<sup>294</sup>

#### 4.5.2 Ministers' wives

Even though celibacy was never widely practiced among Icelandic priests prior to the Reformation, it was only after the Reformation that marriages between clergymen and their partners were legalized.

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<sup>292</sup> *Ein Kyrkiu Ordinantia... a Islensku vtløgd af... H. Odde Einarssyne ...* (Hólar: 1635), G, Vv.

<sup>293</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, "Jakobs angur eitt var mest / eftir Jósep góða ...": Harmatölur í kveðskap frá 17. öld," *Vefnir* 4 (2004): n.pag. Electronic edition, <http://hdl.handle.net/10802/711>

<sup>294</sup> 232, 23r–24r.

In practice, it was very difficult for priests in rural Iceland to manage a benefice without the support of a family, but their partners and children – and their labour – were not officially recognized by the Church. Following the Reformation, priests' partners gained an acknowledged, permanent status within their community and legal protection for themselves and their children as their husbands' heirs. Couples such as Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson's parents formalized their long-time unions in the 1550s. Guðmundur's parents, Erlendur and Margrét, belonged to the first generation to grow up under this new system, whereby the *fylgikona* ('mistress') disappeared and the *prestskona* ('minister's wife') took her place.

Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir's research on the role of ministers' wives in early modern Icelandic society demonstrates that a pattern emerged in the early modern period. Single ministers typically sought to marry women of their own social standing who had a good reputation in the community and would be capable of raising children and running the household – sometimes even assisting the minister in tutoring pupils in preparation for Latin school.<sup>295</sup> The title of *prestskona* may have defined women in terms of their husbands' occupation, but they were socially expected to perform important functions within their communities, independent of their husbands. Far from being a private home, a benefice such as Fell in Sléttuhlíð acted as a social hub within the community and a refuge in times of need. A minister's many duties within the parish meant that day-to-day management of the household and farming activities fell largely on his spouse.

In practice, not all marriages fulfilled these criteria. Þórunn Sigurðardóttir relates the case of the Rev. Gísli Einarsson (1571–1660) and Þórný Narfadóttir (b. 1575), which according to the Rev. Jón Halldórsson of Hítardalur (1665–1736) were essentially united in a shotgun marriage: Gísli seduced Þórný at a shepherd's hut while travelling, and her angry father showed up in the morning and browbeat Gísli into becoming engaged to her.<sup>296</sup> Jón Halldórsson's characterization of Þórný as a *bóndadóttir* ('farmer's daughter') in his micronarrative is misleading, since Þórný's father held the position of *sýslumaður*, and many of Þórný's ancestors had held similar positions of secular authority.<sup>297</sup> If Jón Halldórsson's tale has any truth to it, it is that Þórný's father had enough influence to ensure that she was not discarded as a casual partner. In analysing the case of Gísli and Þórný, Þórunn Sigurðardóttir emphasizes the end of Jón's narrative: following her engagement, Þórný was supposedly sent to Skálholt for education in good behaviour and needlework but achieved

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<sup>295</sup> Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, "Um íslensku prestskonuna á fyrri öldum," in *Konur og kristmenn: Þættir úr kristnisögu Íslands*, ed. Inga Huld Hákonardóttir (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 1996), 217–47.

<sup>296</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, "Constructing cultural competence," 278–88.

<sup>297</sup> Hannes Þorsteinsson (ed.), *Skólameistarar í Skálholti eptir séra Jón prófast Halldórsson í Hítardal og Skólameistarar á Hólum eptir Vigfús prófast Jónsson í Hítardal*, Sögurit 15 (Reykjavík: Sögufélag, 1916–1925), 85.

proficiency in neither.<sup>298</sup> As Þórunn points out, Jón Halldórsson's judgement that Gísli "fékk lítilmótlega giftingu" ('married beneath him') speaks volumes to the writer's finely tuned sense of social hierarchy but also illustrates the cultural and social demands placed on ministers' spouses.<sup>299</sup>

In financial terms, Gísli and Þórný were probably on an equal footing. Gísli's father – the poet Einar Sigurðsson of Eydalir (1539–1626) – had been the son of one of the poorest priests in Eyjafjörður, who accepted the posting of Grímsey in exchange for his son's education and eventually died there of scurvy. Gísli's mother was the daughter of a *lögréttumaður*, as was Þórný's. However, Gísli's older brother Oddur had been appointed bishop of Skálholt in 1589, and Einar Sigurðsson's reputation as a poet was rapidly on the rise. Through his family connections, Gísli obtained the living of Vatnsfjörður in the Westfjords, but he then lost the living in 1636 to an ecclesiastical power couple: Jón Arason and his brother's stepdaughter Hólmfríður Sigurðardóttir, closely associated with cultural activities and literary patronage in the Westfjords.

Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir compares the literary portrayal of upper-class minister's wives in early modern Icelandic literature to virgin saints in medieval hagiography.<sup>300</sup> Like virgin saints, minister's wives distinguish themselves by their exemplary purity<sup>301</sup> and their virtue while still very young.<sup>302</sup> They remain steadfast and unblemished throughout their lives, and they are patient and godly in their suffering.<sup>303</sup> Rather than being venerated as intercessors, however, their examples are held up publicly as an ideal to which others may aspire. In some cases, visual representation of devout upper-class Lutheran women even took the place of icons of saints within the sacred space of the church. In the late seventeenth century, Jón Guðmundsson, Guðmundur Erlendsson's youngest son, painted two memorial portraits for the church at Laufás in Eyjafjörður – one of Hólmfríður Sigurðardóttir, and the other of Hólmfríður's daughter Helga Jónsdóttir alongside her husband, the Rev. Þorsteinn

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<sup>298</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, "Constructing cultural competence," 278.

<sup>299</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, "Constructing cultural competence," 282.

<sup>300</sup> Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, "Um íslensku prestskonuna á fyrri öldum," 230–31. See also Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, "Helga Aradóttir in Ögur: A Lutheran Saint?" in *Sainthood, Scriptoria, and Secular Erudition of Medieval and Modern Scandinavia: Essays in Honor of Kirsten Wolf*, ed. Dario Bullitta & Natalie M. Van Deusen (forthcoming).

<sup>301</sup> Sveinn Jónsson: "Drottinn þjónandi dyggðug, fróm, / dável geymdi sitt meydóms blóm, / allt til þrjátíu ára" ('Serving the Lord, virtuous, upright, [she] kept well the flower of her virginity to the age of thirty.'). 1529, 9r.

<sup>302</sup> Jón Guðmundsson: "Drottins og á dögnum ungu, / dró hún allra fyrst í Tungu, / Kristi orð sem kenndu og sungu" ('It was in her early days at Tunga [in Fljót] that she first pronounced the words of Christ, which taught and sung' or 'Her tongue first pronounced the words of Christ, which taught and sung, when she was young'), 1529, 13v. The double meaning is intentional.

<sup>303</sup> Sveinn Jónsson: "Guð náð henni þá gáfu gaf, / guðlegri bæn lét aldrei af, / þolinmæði þraut aldrei. / Sífellt andvarpan eyddi nauð, / þó æti sitt með krossi brauð, / samt þakkargjörð margfalldri" ('God gave her the mercy-gift that she never ceased her devout prayer, and her patience was never exhausted. Her perpetual sighing relieved her distress – though she did eat her bread with a cross [i.e., experienced suffering] – together with great thanksgiving.'). 1529, 9v. Guðmundur Erlendsson: "Stöðug í stríði þessu, / stóðstu vel fyrir drottins náð. / Þungri þjáningar pressu / þolinmæðinnar eyddi dáð" ('Continually in this struggle, you held your own by the grace of the Lord. The feat of patience broke the heavy press of suffering.'). 1529, 11v.

Geirsson of Laufás.<sup>304</sup> The inscriptions on these portraits are in Latin, directed at a very narrow educated readership, but the portraits themselves formed objects of contemplation for the entire community.

Public opinion and self-presentation might differ considerably. Hólmfríður Sigurðardóttir and her kinsfolk are singled out as exceptionally haughty and prideful by Jón Ólafsson from Grunnavík, an attitude perhaps influenced by Jón Ólafsson's foster-father, Páll Vídalín, who was the bitterly estranged husband of Hólmfríður's granddaughter Þorbjörg. Jón Ólafsson's characterization of Hólmfríður is of a vain woman who ordered hair dye from abroad, kept a lady's maid, was squeamish over childbirth and disliked touching anything dirty.<sup>305</sup>

The commemorative poem that Guðmundur Erlendsson composed in memory of his mother, Margrét Skúladóttir, in 1638 was created – according to the poem's final stanza – to be hung on the right wall of the church at Fell. Guðmundur ends the poem with a request to the future minister at Fell that the plaque be permitted to remain there for all posterity.<sup>306</sup> The memorial plaque for Margrét presumably had a similar presentation as that for Þórunn Benediksdóttir: a framed portrait in words. To what extent these words were intended for silent reading by ordinary parishioners during church service is uncertain. Hanging the poem on the right wall would effectively place it on the men's side of the church, but it would be prominently visible to anyone entering the small church. Þórunn Sigurðardóttir identified no other instances of commemorative poems in which their physical location as a material object is so specifically stated within the text itself, but she did find instances of commemorative poetry being fixed to the door of the Hólar cathedral and of written epitaphs being hung on church walls.<sup>307</sup>

Guðmundur's actions could be interpreted as inflated family pride, but such an interpretation ignores that Margrét had been the matriarch of Fell for over a half-century at the time of her death. I would argue that Guðmundur's memorial plaque speaks to a consensus within the local community over the importance of the *prestskona* at Fell.

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<sup>304</sup> Þjms Mms 2, Þjms Mms 1257. Unfortunately, amateur restoration work (probably in c. 1916 under the auspices of the National Museum of Iceland) has largely covered the original image of Hólmfríður Sigurðardóttir under a thick layer of twentieth-century paint.

<sup>305</sup> Jón Ólafsson, "Um þá lærðu Vídalína," in *Merkir Íslendingar 4*, ed. Þorkell Jóhannesson (Reykjavík: Bókafélagið, 1950), 147.

<sup>306</sup> 232, 552v. The positioning of the poem at the very end of 232 is also consistent with its having been copied directly from the memorial plaque at Fell. It is not found in other anthology copies of Guðmundur Erlendsson's poetry (see Chapter 5).

<sup>307</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, *Heiður og huggun*, 322–23.



### 4.5.3 Remembering Guðrún

Three poems composed on Guðrún Gunnarsdóttir's death survive, which are our main source of knowledge on her life. Þórunn Sigurðardóttir defines two as commemorative funeral poems or *erfiljóð*: one by Guðrún's youngest son Jón, and the other (an acrostic poem) by the Rev. Sveinn Jónsson of Barð. The third, by Guðmundur Erlendsson, falls into the genre of funeral elegy or *harmljóð*.<sup>308</sup> As both Margrét Eggertsdóttir and Þórunn Sigurðardóttir emphasise, early modern compositions are not "personal" poems in a modern sense. Þórunn argues that one can nevertheless find what Stephen Greenblatt terms "the touch of the real" – the link between language and that to which language points outside the boundaries of the text<sup>309</sup> – in poems like these.<sup>310</sup>

The opening of Sveinn Jónsson of Barð's poem on Guðrún Gunnarsdóttir's life and death suggests that it was composed for performance at her funeral, to the melody of the hymn "Einn tíma var sá auðugur mann". The large audience described in the poem testifies to her status as a public figure within her community:

Guðhræddrar kvinna Guðrúnar,  
Gunnars hvor kærast dóttir var,  
maklega minnast megum,  
niðjar hennar og nánust börn,  
nágrannar, frændur, í ættlið hvörn,  
samsyngja allir eigum.<sup>311</sup>

('Let us fittingly remember the devout woman Guðrún, the most beloved daughter of Gunnar. We should all sing together – her descendants and nearest children, neighbours, close and distant relations.')

Guðrún's son Jón's poem addresses only his grieving father, sisters and brothers.<sup>312</sup> Like Sveinn, Jón describes Guðrún's virtues rather than his emotional response to her loss, drawing attention to how Guð-rún and Guð-mundur have a symbolic bond through their name, comforting his father with the assurance that they will be reunited in God's kingdom.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, *Heiður og huggun*, 311.

<sup>309</sup> "The implied link (or distance) between the word and whatever it is – the real, the material, the realm of practice, pain, bodily pleasure, silence, or death – to which the text gestures as that which lies beyond the written word, outside its textual mode of being," Stephen Greenblatt, "The Touch of the Real," *Representations* 59 (1997): 16.

<sup>310</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, *Heiður og huggun*, 179.

<sup>311</sup> 1529, 9r.

<sup>312</sup> 1529, 15v.

<sup>313</sup> 1529, 14r.

Guðmundur's funeral elegy on his wife's death is more private, taking the form of a dialogue in monologue spoken by the bereaved soul to his true heart.<sup>314</sup> At the core of the early modern Icelandic elegy is the speaker's grief, tempered by the speaker's hope of being reunited with the loved one in heaven; it is typical of the genre for the speaker to depict himself or herself as utterly unworthy of the loved one, at the same time acknowledging the deceased as having made the speaker a better person.<sup>315</sup> In foregrounding Guðrún's loyalty, unflagging patience, her even temper and her ability to calm him down, Guðmundur expresses himself within an established tradition.<sup>316</sup> Even so, one can argue that Guðmundur sincerely meant his words and wished to acknowledge a debt of gratitude to his wife, who arguably bore the brunt of his exile to Grímsey (see 4.7). In early modern Icelandic society, separation was not forbidden, but minister's wives had few options but to remain with their husbands, even if their husbands did not always behave as models of Lutheran virtue.<sup>317</sup>

Read together, collections of occasional poems can provide a detailed microportrait of an individual family, keeping in mind that a portrait is an artistic representation within a specific tradition, using a finite spectrum of colours and techniques. From the well-preserved poems commemorating Guðrún's deaths, it can be seen that Guðmundur and Guðrún had eight children. Their oldest son, Jón, was born in 1621. Around this time, Guðmundur received the living of Glæsibær in Kræklingahlíð (below). Six more children followed at Glæsibær. A daughter, Þóra, died in infancy.<sup>318</sup> Four boys and two girls reached adulthood: Margrét (c. 1625), another unnamed daughter who was alive and married in 1668,<sup>319</sup> Hallur, Skúli (late 1630 or early 1631) and an unnamed son still living in 1668.<sup>320</sup> Their youngest son, Jón, was born late in 1631, after the family's move to Grímsey.

Guðrún's role as household manager is in the foreground of all three poems. At the age of 30, Guðrún brought more practical farming knowledge and experience to her marriage than her 25-year-

<sup>314</sup> "Samtal (í eintali) eftirþreyandi sálar við sitt minnstæða (og í drottni sofnaða) ektahjarta" ('The dialogue (in monologue) of a pining soul with its true heart, well-remembered (and sleeping in the Lord)'), 1529, 10v.

<sup>315</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, *Heiður og huggun*, 124–25.

<sup>316</sup> 1529, 10v–11r.

<sup>317</sup> Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, "Um íslensku prestskonuna á fyrri öldum," 236–37.

<sup>318</sup> 1529, 15v. Jón Guðmundsson's poem portrays his mother as reunited in heaven with her children Jón the elder and Þóra. Guðmundur Erlendsson's elegy – addressed to Guðrún herself – describes Guðrún as having born eight children and raised seven. It is possible that Guðmundur and Guðrún's third daughter was named Þóra in memory of her older sister, see 4.15.3.

<sup>319</sup> Lbs 1529 4to, 9v.

<sup>320</sup> Lbs 1529 4to, 9v. Páll Eggert Ólason and Jón Espólín believed that Guðmundur and Guðrún had a childless son named Þorlákur, cf. Páll Eggert Ólason, *Íslenzkar æviskrár frá landnámstímum til ársloka 1940*, vol. 2, 142; Jón Espólín, *Ættatölubækur Jóns Espólíns Sýsslumanns samanskrafadar eptir ímsum ættabókum Íslendinga, og sérílagi Ættatölubókum Ólafs Snógdalíns Factors í Straumfyrði, samt egin eptirgøtvan í ímsum Støðum* (Reykjavík: Samskipti, 1981–1983), vol. VIII, col. 6620.

old husband. Sveinn Jónsson compares Guðrún to the biblical Rebecca and Martha and praises her as an exemplary *hússól* ('sun of the house'), displaying virtues such as charity and resourcefulness in running her household.<sup>321</sup> Guðrún's son Jón states that those who knew her as a young woman described her as *þrifin* ('tidy') and *hlýðin* ('obedient').<sup>322</sup> Guðmundur's praise of his wife includes the quality of *sparneytni* ('frugality'), and he compares her to the good woman in Proverbs.<sup>323</sup>

All three poems place less emphasis on Guðrún's book literacy than her broader religious literacy. Guðmundur states that "*sálma og sætar greinir, / sífellega stundaðir*" ('you constantly practiced hymns and sweet articles').<sup>324</sup> Here, *greinir* evidently refers to catechetical articles, such as those in the printed Icelandic translation of Luther's Small Catechism.<sup>325</sup> Describing her devotional activities as practice speaks to a fluency beyond basic reading and repetition – *lesa* ('read') in the context of religious texts describes the act of "plucking" them from memory or the written page.

Within the household at Fell, Guðrún initiated reading and singing activities, states Guðmundur. In later life, she would have others on the farm read for her, but she had little stamina and poor hearing, and she would gently signal the reader to stop when she grew tired.<sup>326</sup> Since this image is of Guðrún in her seventies, it is unclear whether Guðrún was illiterate or had developed poor eyesight. It demonstrates how control of literacy should not be equated with the basic ability to read and write, and how domestic religious reading at the parsonage should not be understood as a male-centred activity, with the man as reader and the woman as passive audience.

This being said, Guðrún was plainly not among the minister's wives who engaged in teaching the rudiments of Latin to her children and/or her husband's pupils.<sup>327</sup> Having grown up in an ordinary farm household, she would not have encountered Latin in her everyday life except peripherally through her brother Jón, who presumably left the family's home as a boy to be tutored elsewhere in Latin (perhaps at Fell in Sléttuhlíð) before admittance to Hólar.

By comparing Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir's study with the three surviving poems on Guðrún Gunnarsdóttir, one can see that Guðmundur married a woman whose qualities were valued as a minister's wife: a social status equivalent to Guðmundur's own, a good reputation and practical experience in farming and household management. Guðrún Gunnarsdóttir was also a woman who

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<sup>321</sup> 1529, 9v–10r.

<sup>322</sup> 1529, 13v.

<sup>323</sup> 1529, 11r.

<sup>324</sup> 1529, 11v.

<sup>325</sup> Martin Luther, *CATECHISMVS. Edur. Christelegur Lærdómur / fyrer einfallda Presta og Predikara / Hwsbændur og Vngmenne* (Hólar: 1617).

<sup>326</sup> 1529, 11v.

<sup>327</sup> Cf. Jón Ólafsson, *Safn til íslenskrar bókmenntasögu*, 229–32.

enjoyed respect within her local community on her own terms, to which Sveinn Jónsson of Barð's commemorative poem bears witness. Þórunn Sigurðardóttir's study found that no other woman in seventeenth-century Iceland is the subject of more than one surviving commemorative poem.<sup>328</sup>

#### 4.6 Divine warnings, not heeded

In 1621, Guðmundur received the living of Glæsibær in Kræklingahlíð in 1621, situated not far from Möðruvellir in Eyjafjörður. A new category of poems emerges in the late 1620s, chronicling current affairs inside Iceland and abroad. These poems, while not belonging to a single literary genre, share in common that they depict brutal atrocities and natural disasters. They present lurid, apocalyptic spectacles in rhymed verse, reminiscent of the sensationalist ballads that proliferated throughout Europe during the period, spreading news of calamity.<sup>329</sup> For Guðmundur, a catalyst may have been the pirate raid on the Westman Islands in 1627, occurring the same year as the deaths of Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson of Hólar and his own younger brother Skúli.

Guðmundur's *Ræningjarímur* ('*Rímur* of the Raiders') were composed shortly after the pirate raid, during which most of the inhabitants of the Westman Islands were either murdered or enslaved.<sup>330</sup> Guðmundur composed the *rímur* "eins fyrir menn og kvendi" ('equally for men and women') after gaining access to the second-hand reports of Guðmundur Hákonarson and Arngrímur Jónsson *lærði*, which would have been the first clear written descriptions of the events to reach Guðmundur Erlendsson in Eyjafjörður.<sup>331</sup> His primary purpose was to remind his audience to give thanks for the divine mercy shown to all those not taken captive and to repent to avoid the spectre of a worse scourge (cf. 4.2.2); there was great concern that the raid would not be the last attack on Iceland (see 3.0). His narrative emphasizes that God did not single out the wicked for punishment, and the death of the Rev. Jón Þorsteinsson – a poet-parson murdered by the raiders in front of his family and household – is in the foreground as a martyrdom.<sup>332</sup>

The fashion for apocalyptic poetry in Iceland was not a recent one. A sizeable body of sixteenth-century and early seventeenth-century Icelandic poetry deals with the sorry state of the world, in which moral decline and a worsening climate go hand-in-hand. For example, Ólafur Einarsson of Kirkjubær's "Þá hugsa gjör eg um heimsins art" ('When I reflect on the nature of the world') in the

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<sup>328</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, *Heiður og huggun*, 311–12. Þórunn Sigurðardóttir found evidence of two poems having been composed in memory of the matriarch Hólmfríður Sigurðardóttir, but no known copies of one survive, cf. *Heiður og huggun*, 378.

<sup>329</sup> See Una McLivenna, "Ballads of Death and Disaster: The Role of Song in Early Modern News Transmission," in *Disaster, Death and the Emotions in the Shadow of the Apocalypse, 1400–1700*, ed. Jennifer Spinks & Charles Zika (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 275–94.

<sup>330</sup> *Ræningjarímur* is printed in *Tyrkjaránið á Íslandi 1627*, 465–96.

<sup>331</sup> Guðmundur Erlendsson, "Ræningjarímur," *Tyrkjaránið á Íslandi 1627*, 465.

<sup>332</sup> Guðmundur Erlendsson, "Ræningjarímur," *Tyrkjaránið á Íslandi 1627*, 475–46.

1612 *Vísnaþók* contrasts a bygone era of harmony and plenty with the harsh, cruel modern world.<sup>333</sup> The apocalypse was not necessarily a bad thing from an early modern perspective: Einar Sigurðsson of Eydalir's *Kvæði um þann síðasta dag*, on doomsday, has the cheerful refrain "Dagur fagur prýðir veröld alla" ('A beautiful day adorns all the world'), and he describes his hope that this will be a day of reunion and rejoicing.<sup>334</sup> Neither Einar nor Ólafur doubted that the end of the temporal world was fast approaching, potentially even within their own lifetime; Margrét Eggertsdóttir discusses the possible influence of early German baroque poets (and their belief in the imminence of the end of days) on Icelandic poets in *Icelandic Baroque*.<sup>335</sup>

Within an Icelandic literary context, Guðrún Nordal has identified five surviving late medieval poems on the vices of the world (*heimsósómar*), which she connects to skaldic *drápur* on salvation history from the Creation and the Fall of Man through to the Last Judgement (*Rósa*, *Milka* and *Blómarós*).<sup>336</sup> Like poems on old age (*ellikvæði*), two of which are preserved from the late medieval period, poems on the vices of the world are microcosmic, with the poet observing a personal or social trajectory mirroring on a smaller scale the inevitable progress and fate of the entire universe.<sup>337</sup> Both late medieval Icelandic genres are among the pre-Reformation poems represented in the 1612 *Vísnaþók*.

Guðmundur Erlendsson's apocalyptic verses stand out for the tangibility of impending doom, with a tone that occasionally verges on the prophetic. If Hallgrímur Pétursson filled his poems with images of transience, exposing the world as an illusion,<sup>338</sup> Guðmundur Erlendsson provided concrete examples of why the world was going to end and what kind of warnings God was providing to the world in response to wicked human behaviour.

#### 4.6.1 Gargano, Magdeburg, London

At least one of Guðmundur Erlendsson's apocalyptic poems is a direct translation from German: "Ein ný söngvísa úr þýsku um þann hræðilega jarðskjalfta sem skeði í Vallandi 1627 með öðrum fleirum stórteiknum sem þar sáust og heyrðust, svo þar umturnuðust 5 borgir, sem svo nefndust, S. Paulo, S. Severo, Cassel Maiore, Cassel Minóre, og Corporino." ('A New Song-Verse from the German on the Dreadful Earthquake in Valland [i.e., Italy] in 1627 and Other Great Omens Seen and Heard There, During Which 5 Cities Were Turned Upside-Down, Namely S. Paulo, S. Severo, Cassel Maiore, Cassel

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<sup>333</sup> Jón Torfason & Kristján Eiríksson (eds.), *Vísnaþók Guðbrands*, 346–48.

<sup>334</sup> Einar Sigurðsson, *Ljóðmæli*, 28.

<sup>335</sup> Margrét Eggertsdóttir, *Icelandic Baroque*, 260–61.

<sup>336</sup> Guðrún Nordal, "Handrit, prentaðar bækur og pápísk kvæði á siðskiptaöld," in *Til heiðurs og hugbótar: Greinar um trúarkveðskap fyrri alda*, ed. Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir & Anna Guðmundsdóttir (Reykholt: Snorrastofa, 2003), 133–34.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>338</sup> Margrét Eggertsdóttir, *Icelandic Baroque*, 241–49.

Minore and Corporino.’).<sup>339</sup> Guðmundur has adapted the poem for an Icelandic audience, exhorting the nation to pay attention and remember the fatal catastrophe.

At least four short accounts of the disaster in Italy were published in Nürnberg and Augsburg within a year of the event, which claimed over 5,000 lives and was widely interpreted as a sign of the Apocalypse.<sup>340</sup> Guðmundur’s unknown German ballad source was a less than reliable source of information, as Corporino was not among the destroyed towns and villages: Apricena, Lesina, San Paolo di Civitate, San Severo, Serracapriola and Torremaggiore.<sup>341</sup> The 1627 earthquake and tsunami on the Gargano peninsula was a human tragedy of vast scale, but Guðmundur Erlendsson is mainly interested in the signs and portents that his source text associated with the disaster, including a vision of a war-tent, with two bloody crossed swords hanging above it and a heavenly voice proclaiming “Ira Die, Guðs reiði þýðist þetta” (‘Ira Die, meaning the wrath of God’).<sup>342</sup> The timing of the earthquake during the year of the pirate raid (and his patron Guðbrandur Þorláksson’s death) must have resonated strongly with Guðmundur and his audience.

A second disaster poem is “Um þá hörmulegu foreyðing Magdeborgar sem skeði 1631 í maíó mánuði” (‘On the Deplorable Destruction of Magdeburg in May 1631’).<sup>343</sup> Guðmundur’s unnamed source for his verse account of the destruction of Magdeburg and the massacre of 20,000 of its inhabitants during the Thirty Years’ War was presumably a German broadside or pamphlet. Countless short tracts were published in 1631 on the subject of the Sack of Magdeburg, including multiple printings of *Ein Klag und Traur Lied, uber die verbrannte und verheerte Stadt Magdeburg* and *Elegia de obsidione Magdeburgensi*. Like the poem describing the earthquake and its aftermath, it emphasizes a listening audience, opening with the words “Heyrið þá mikla harmasorg” (‘Hear the great and mournful sorrow’).<sup>344</sup> In both 232 and 1055, its melody is indicated to be the same as another poem that appears to have been translated from German, “Ein megtug frú að minni sjón,” which describes the speaker’s abuse at the hands of the cunning Lady Sin. In 232 the two poems are

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<sup>339</sup> 1055, 121r; 232, 52v. The word *ný* is omitted from the title in 232, presumably because the poem was no longer new. The melody according to 232 is the hymn “Hvör hjálpast vill í heimsins kvöl,” printed in the 1619 hymnal. In 1055, this has changed to “Hvor hjálpast vill í heimsins byggð.”

<sup>340</sup> Cf. Matteo Vocale, *Apocalisse in Capitanata: il terremoto del 30 luglio 1627* (2009). Electronic version, [www.argod.it/pdf/terremoto\\_santanna.pdf](http://www.argod.it/pdf/terremoto_santanna.pdf)

<sup>341</sup> Cf. E. Guidoboni & S. Tinti, “A review of the historical 1627 tsunamic in the Southern Adriatic,” *Science of Tsunami Hazards* 6 (1988): 11–16; E. Patacca & P. Scandone, “The 1627 Gargano earthquake (Southern Italy): Identification and characterization of the causative fault,” *Journal of Seismology* 8 (2004): 259–73.

<sup>342</sup> 1055, 121v.

<sup>343</sup> 232, 90v–92r; 1055, 122r–123v. See Þórunn Sigurðardóttir & Þorsteinn Helgason, “Hvaða sögum fór af eyðingu Magdeborgar í Skagafirði?” in *Nýtt Helgakver: Rit til heiðurs Helga Skúla Kjartanssyni sjötugum 1. febrúar 2019* (Reykjavík: Sögufélag, 2019), 103–18.

<sup>344</sup> 232, 90v.

copied back-to-back, and in 1055 musical notation is provided for “Ein megtug frú að minni sjón”.<sup>345</sup> Although this is speculation, the poems on Magdeburg and Lady Sin may have originally been printed back-to-back in Guðmundur Erlendsson’s source text.

A short hymn by Guðmundur from 1631 (“Ó þú hæsti himneski Guð”) is a communal prayer, sung in first person plural, for the safety and wellbeing of the king (Christian IV) and the authorities. In the poem, “vér fátæk börnin” (‘we, the poor children’) collectively beg forgiveness, asking that God not be angered by their bloody transgressions.<sup>346</sup> The Thirty Years’ War continued to rage in Europe, and Guðmundur’s hymn may be another response to news of the horrifying civilian massacre at Magdeburg.

In the context of Guðmundur’s long poem *Einvaldsóður* (see 4.12), the most interesting of Guðmundur’s shorter works dealing with events that take place elsewhere in Europe is a cycle of three poems on the execution of King Charles I. According to Icelandic annals, English sailors were the Icelanders’ first source of the news of King Charles’s execution in January 1649; historian Helgi Þorláksson has suggested that the news arrived in Iceland even before reaching Copenhagen’s printing presses.<sup>347</sup> Among those to learn of Charles’s fate was none other than the Rev. Guðmundur Erlendsson, who was sufficiently moved to compose an epitaph for the English king, a farewell lament and a somewhat longer narrative piece detailing the events leading up to the execution.<sup>348</sup> Guðmundur’s position is clear throughout: England’s king has been murdered in an act of regicide by wicked and ungodly men, and he prays fervently for the safety of his own king in Denmark.

Guðmundur states that his information comes not via word of mouth but from a written source:

Nýr minnis annáll einn er hér  
inni landið fenginn  
hvor í Lúndún letraður er,  
lettraður er,  
líka þar fyrst útgenginn.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> 232, 88r–90v; 1055, 157v–160r.

<sup>346</sup> 232, 36v–37r.

<sup>347</sup> Helgi Þorláksson, *Sjórán og siglingar: Ensk-íslensk samskipti 1580–1630*, (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1999), 273.

<sup>348</sup> See Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, “Kóngurinn og klerkurinn: Konungsaftaka á Englandi með augum 17. aldar Íslendinga,” in *Wawnarstræti (alla leið til Íslands): Lagt Andrew Wawn 65 ára 27. október 2009* (Reykjavík: Menningar- og minningarsjóður Mette Magnussen, 2009), 100–3.

<sup>349</sup> 232, 92r. The entire cycle is copied in 232, 92r–95r and 1055, 123v–126v. “Nýr minnis annáll einn er hér” is also copied in 1529, 36r–37bisr (see 5.5.1), AM 148 8vo, 5v–9v, and a number of other manuscripts.

(‘A new commemorative chronicle has been obtained here in this country that is lettered in London, and likewise first published there’).

Jón Samsonarson named as a possible inspiration Rev. Einar Guðmundsson’s *Engelskt memóriáll* (‘English Memorial’), a 1651 translation of a book originally written in English, then translated into Dutch and from Dutch into High German.<sup>350</sup> Like Guðmundur’s cycle of poems, Einar’s work deals with the death of King Charles from a Royalist perspective. However, *Engelskt memóriáll* is a much more detailed account of the current political situation in England than in Guðmundur’s poems, which focus largely on Charles’s trial and execution. While the translator’s preface to *Engelskt memóriáll* indicates that Einar’s sympathies are with King Charles, he does not dwell on the pathos of Charles’s final moments, nor does the order of events during the beheading scene correspond to that in Guðmundur’s narrative. Guðmundur’s attitude towards King Charles and his enemies and his remarkably emotional outpouring of grief do not seem to be shaped by the terse *Engelskt memóriáll* alone. A far more probable source for Guðmundur’s poetry is the 1649 Danish translation of Eikon Basilike’s *The pourtraicture of His Sacred Maiestie in his solitudes and sufferings*. In this text, the pseudonymous Eikon Basilike (‘King’s Portrait’) assumes the identity of King Charles himself as he describes the monarch’s martyr-like death in intimate, moving language. Unlike the *Engelskt memóriáll*, the Danish translation of *The pourtraicture of His Sacred Maiestie* also includes the specific information that the original was “first printed in London”.

#### 4.6.2 Lay prophecy in Lutheran Iceland

Jürgen Beyer’s recent transnational study of the literature of lay prophecy in Lutheran Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries provides a useful framework for examining Guðmundur Erlendsson’s disaster poems. Beyer argues that Lutheran communities in the seventeenth century continued to engage collectively with the miraculous, and that divine revelations and prophecies still informed mainstream lay belief.<sup>351</sup> These revelations were frequently revealed through divine apparitions (i.e., angels or angelic spirits), but they could also take other forms, including dreams, visions and auditions. The recipients of these messages were for the most part ordinary people: Beyer demonstrates that men, women and even children raised as Lutherans but with no formal clerical training might experience private revelations that they understood as being of divine

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<sup>350</sup> Jón Samsonarson, “Engelskt memóriáll um Karl Stúart I og fylgismenn hans sem voru teknir af lífi 1641–1649. Á íslensku útlagt af Einari Guðmundssyni Anno 1651,” in *Pétursskip búið Peter Foote sextugum 26. maí 1984* (Reykjavík: [Stofnun Árna Magnússonar], 1984), 42–43.

<sup>351</sup> Jürgen Beyer, *Lay Prophets in Lutheran Europe (c. 1550–1700)*, Brill’s Series in Church History and Religious Culture 74 (Leiden: Brill, 2017).



origin.<sup>352</sup> The message transmitted from God was consistently one of repentance, i.e., inwardly acknowledging one's sins and outwardly living by the tenets of Christianity.

Immediately following the 1627 earthquake on the Gargano peninsula, Guðmundur's German source recounts that four young girls dressed in white and holding olive branches appeared in Germany, informing the people that they were sent by God, admonishing the populace and calling for repentance.<sup>353</sup> They then began to sing sweetly for the crowd, praising God and telling how God's anger had been provoked by human vices and the end was rapidly approaching; as they fell silent, a fog of pestilence fell that killed 300 individuals.<sup>354</sup>

The conceptual world underlying Guðmundur Erlendsson's writings is one in which social unrest, epidemics and natural disasters all had the same root as events ordained by God as a direct response to human wickedness. Distinct from – yet foreshadowing – the end of the world, major community-wide calamities could function as divine tools for disciplining a wayward flock. In this way, the scourge of a measles epidemic could transmutate into the conceptually equivalent scourge of a Dano-Swedish war in “Almáttugi og mildi Guð” (see 4.2.2). A crucial feature of Lutheran repentance was the necessity of universal action. Only the sinner could atone for sin, yet only by taking collective responsibility on an individual level could a community hope to escape the forewarned divine punishment – sometimes broadly apocalyptic, sometimes specific in scope and nature.<sup>355</sup> In eliciting repentance, clerical sermons in the pulpit were an insufficient stimulus.<sup>356</sup>

For heavenly messages to be effective in averting calamity, it was necessary for them to be publicized more widely than inside churches. This could be done locally through lay preaching, but cheaply printed pamphlets functioned to spread urgent messages of broader relevance to Christendom over much wider distances. Such material was not strongly promoted by the upper clergy in Iceland (i.e., the bishops and other university-educated theologians), who as elsewhere in Lutheran Europe had an ambivalent attitude toward lay prophecy but in Iceland held much tighter control of the printing press. Informally circulated hand-copied translations were thus key to the spread of revelations.<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Beyer, *Lay Prophets in Lutheran Europe*, 24–25.

<sup>353</sup> 1055, 121v.

<sup>354</sup> 1055, 121v–122r.

<sup>355</sup> Beyer, *Lay Prophets in Lutheran Europe*, 15.

<sup>356</sup> Beyer, *Lay Prophets in Lutheran Europe*, 231, 235–37; Morten Fink-Jensen, “Printing and Preaching after the Reformation: A Danish Pastor and His Audiences,” in *Religious Reading in the Lutheran North: Studies in Early Modern Scandinavian Book Culture*, ed. Charlotte Appel & Morten Fink-Jensen (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011), 15–47.

<sup>357</sup> Beyer, *Lay Prophets in Lutheran Europe*, 68–84.

A manuscript closely associated with Guðmundur Erlendsson's family, 1529 (see 5.5), contains a tattered bifolium in an unknown seventeenth-century hand describing an angelic apparition at a vineyard in Stuttgart on 21 February 1648, translated into Icelandic from a printed pamphlet issued soon after the event.<sup>358</sup> Even material mocking the tradition seems to have been translated into Icelandic. ÍB 777 8vo contains an Icelandic translation of a letter sent from heaven – personally authored by Jesus Christ and marked with the signet of the Archangel Micheal – that was supposedly found hanging in Mikelborg (Mecklenburg?) in Germany in 1677.<sup>359</sup> “Jesus's” letter threatens that anyone who has the letter and does not share it will be eternally damned, but those who copy it and keep it on their person or in the house will be protected from storms, thunderbolts, fire and water. Although the rubric is straight-faced, it is either a parody or an early example of a chain letter – created as a joke that emotionally manipulates credulous scribes.

Not all Lutheran prophecies circulating in early modern Iceland were translations. A handful of lay prophets of the type studied by Beyer surfaced in seventeenth-century Iceland, although their lives and messages are poorly documented. The Rev. Jón Magnússon *þumlungur* (c. 1610–1696), convinced that he was the victim of sorcery in the 1650s, copied out accounts of the mystical visions and dreams of one Sigurður Jónsson, a poor but extremely devout man whom Jón had known from his childhood, and he read them aloud from the pulpit for the benefit of his parishioners. Jón Magnússon interpreted the visions as divine revelations and connected them with the supernatural attacks supposedly plaguing his household at Eyri in Skutulsfjörður, but no extant copies are known.<sup>360</sup> Jón Magnússon was also strongly influenced by a second lay prophet, Erlendur Ormsson, who arrived at Skutulsfjörður (soon after the burning of the Jón Jónssons) and publically accused Þuríður Jónsdóttir of witchcraft. Ruth Ellison's detailed study of Erlendur Ormsson demonstrates that Erlendur was a literate but poor son of a clergyman who believed himself to have the divine gift of prophecy. Jón Magnússon treated Erlendur Ormsson's revelations as serious evidence, but the majority of clerics in the diocese of Skálholt did not share this view. Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson did not endorse Erlendur Ormsson as a prophet, even if he did not cast doubt on his sincerity.<sup>361</sup>

Like Erlendur Ormsson, a lay prophet might set out on a long journey in order to preach his or her message. It was also common for Lutheran prophets who experienced a private revelation to approach a local pastor, who mediated their messages, authored many of the surviving prose reports

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<sup>358</sup> 1529, 78r–79v. On the probable source text, see Beyer, *Lay Prophets in Lutheran Europe*, 307. Beyer was not aware of the Icelandic translation, which has never been edited.

<sup>359</sup> ÍB 777 8vo, 7v–9r.

<sup>360</sup> Jón Magnússon, *Píslarsaga síra Jóns Magnússonar*, ed. Sigfús Blöndal, 44. On the *Píslarsaga*, see also 2.4.

<sup>361</sup> Ruth Christine Ellison, “A prophet without honour: The brief career of Erlendur Ormsson,” *Saga-Book* 24.5 (1997): 293–310.

on these lay prophets, and even preached about these prophets in the pulpit – though pastors’ endorsements did not always please their bishops.<sup>362</sup> The latter pattern fits well with the example of Sigurður Jónsson, although it is impossible to determine at what point Sigurður’s revelations occurred and whether Sigurður had also chosen to preach about his dreams and visions in a public venue, independent of Jón. Like their counterparts elsewhere in Lutheran Europe, Sigurður and Erlendur were otherwise ordinary people who transmitted a verbal message of repentance that emphasized the need for the participation of the entire community, as well as the danger to the community at large if individuals within that community failed to practice inward-looking repentance.<sup>363</sup>

Elsewhere in his account of his sufferings, Jón Magnússon demonstrates the importance of mystic visions and angelic apparitions to the cultivation of his own personal faith and the great emphasis that he placed on mystic experiences: a girl at his household in Eyri in Skutulsfjörður sees an angelic being silently leaning over the bedridden Jón Magnússon in the *baðstofa* on a sunny day during the period of his illness in 1655–1656, and Jón Magnússon describes a visitation from a similar angelic being in the *baðstofa* at night during this same period, as his wife and her maidservants sit or lie on the *pallur* or bench, surrounding him.<sup>364</sup>

Sigurður Nordal, who admittedly thought that Jón Magnússon’s experiences were brought on by severe mental illness, was the first to position Jón Magnússon’s writings as a product of Lutheran orthodox culture.<sup>365</sup> Beyer’s research further demonstrates that for a local parish minister born in c. 1610 with only a Latin school education, Jón’s behaviour is squarely within the mainstream of religious expression in Lutheran Europe in the first half of the seventeenth century.

Beyer attributes the decline of the miraculous and private revelations in Lutheran devotional practice to the growing influence of pietism and later the Enlightenment and secularization, arguing that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Lutheran beliefs and practices in c. 1550–1700 form an intermediary stage between late medieval and eighteenth-century Lutheranism.<sup>366</sup> Beyer avoids the term popular religion, but his research reveals that a gap might emerge between learned theologians (the elite minority) and the lower clergy (the majority of ordained men).<sup>367</sup> Within a Europe-wide

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<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, 87–88.

<sup>363</sup> Beyer, *Lay Prophets in Lutheran Europe*, 7–15.

<sup>364</sup> Jón Magnússon, *Píslarsaga síra Jóns Magnússonar*, ed. Sigfús Blöndal, 42–43.

<sup>365</sup> Sigurður Nordal, “Trúarlíf síra Jóns Magnússonar,” in Jón Magnússon, *Píslarsaga síra Jóns Magnússonar*, ed. Sigurður Nordal (Reykjavík: Almenna bókafélagið, 1967), 21–46.

<sup>366</sup> Beyer, *Lay Prophets in Lutheran Europe*, 27–31, 235–37.

<sup>367</sup> For Denmark-Norway, Gina Dahl defines “clergy” as comprising a broad range of persons within the community: from bishops, deans (or provosts) and their wives to pastors, pastors’ wives, local parish assistants and grammar-school teachers. The educational background of the clergy was thus extremely diverse, and Dahl

context, Jón's behaviour in using literacy as a tool to disseminate divinely inspired messages within the community (and possibly to a wider audience) is entirely characteristic for a member of the lower clergy.<sup>368</sup> Although there is no evidence that Guðmundur Erlendsson was as deeply influenced by local lay prophecy as Jón *pumlungur*, who used such prophecy to justify his persecution of his own parishioners, there is no doubt that Guðmundur was among the members of the lower clergy who took material of this type seriously. In one New Year's hymn, Guðmundur reminded his audience that the disastrous winter experienced by the community was not entirely without warning:

Það teikn sem fyrr á tungli sást  
téði oss hirting slíka,  
þó mátti ei af mönnum fást  
misgjörðum frá að víkja.  
Þar líðum vér það, fullforskuldað,  
fram sem nú koma gjörði.<sup>369</sup>

(‘The omen that was earlier seen on the moon fortold us of such a punishment, yet men could not turn from their misdeeds, so we suffer for this; we fully deserve what happened.’)

In an Icelandic pamphlet that circulated very widely in manuscript form into the nineteenth century, the Rev. Magnús Pétursson of Hörgsland (c. 1600–1686) testifies to witnessing an apparition in the sky and subsequently receiving a dream revelation on December 19 of 1628 or 1629,<sup>370</sup> in which a young angelic figure equipped with a strange hinged tablet warns Magnús that divine punishment is imminent if the community does not repent and specifically instructs Magnús that it is his duty to tell others of his dream. According to Magnús,

Hann hélt á tveimur töflum eða spjöldum, hver sundur og saman mátti lykkja, og gullleg krít stóð við borðið hjá rúminu, með hverri þessi maður var í ákafa að reikna, hvað ég meinti með mér að vera mundi heimsins aldur, uppkastaði síðan summuna, hverja ég man vel og girnist ekki að greina, og sem hann var búinn að reikna, rétti hann spjöldin upp að rúminu til mín og

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reaches a similar conclusion concerning the gap between upper and lower strata. Gina Dahl, “Much More than Luther: Religious Reading among the Norwegian Clergy 1650–1800,” in *Religious Reading in the Lutheran North: Studies in Early Modern Scandinavian Book Culture*, ed. Charlotte Appel & Morten Fink-Jensen (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 89–90, 93.

<sup>368</sup> Beyer, *Lay Prophets in Lutheran Europe*, 227.

<sup>369</sup> 232, 20v. Guðmundur Erlendsson was by no means the only poet to lay responsibility for a hard winter directly at the feet of an unrepentant community, cf. for example Björn Jónsson of Skárðsá's “Margur biður maðurinn nú” on the winter of 1625, cf. e.g., Björn Jónsson, “Kvæði Björn Jónssonar á Skárðsá um harða veturinn 1625, sem kallaður er Svellavetur,” *Andvari* 38 (1913): 104–10.

<sup>370</sup> The date varies considerably between manuscripts.

fram fyrir mig, svo eg mætti summuna glögglega sjá, og sagði til mín: ‘Rís upp þú sjáandi, sjá hversu tæpt stendur og langt komið er, það er aðeins lítið skref betur’.<sup>371</sup>

(He held two tablets or boards, which could be folded together and apart, and a golden piece of chalk sat on the table by the bed, with which this man was busily occupied in calculating what I sensed internally was the age of the world, and he then wrote the sum – which I remember well and do not desire to divulge – that he had calculated, then he brought the boards up to the bed where I was and up in front of me, so I might clearly see the sum, and said to me: “Rise up, you seer, see how precariously and far advanced things stand – there is but a short pace to go.”)

Despite Iceland’s location on the periphery of the Lutheran world, clergymen and literate laypeople engaged actively with Lutheran prophesy. Portents and signs could occur at an international, national or local level. In framing adverse natural events and catastrophes as prognostications of still more terrible calamities soon to come, Guðmundur Erlendsson’s writings are very close to those of his clerical contemporaries in Protestant Europe, who interpreted disasters as “visible sermons” sent by God to warn and to teach.<sup>372</sup> Like Magnús Pétursson, Guðmundur’s purpose is to warn his community of a specific divine message of global relevance, in words that would (a) accurately transmit the message to a lay audience, (b) elicit the necessary collective change in audience behaviour and (c) lend themselves to dissemination and performance outside of a clerical setting. Without doubt, he did so in the belief that it was his duty as a clergyman to transmit these God-sent messages in time for his audience to repent, using songs as a medium to disseminate news of horrors, signs and omens in a way that could be easily understood by a broad audience. While the modern discourse on global climate change tends to invoke the language of science rather than of the miraculous, Guðmundur’s belief that the natural landscape can bear witness to the moral state of the world and warn of the future to come is strongly echoed in contemporary literature of the twenty-first century.

In 1629, Guðmundur got a personal warning of his own after landing in a dispute with one of his neighbours – a farmer named Jón – over the ownership of a lamb. Jón was also literate, and the matter was brought to the attention of the recently consecrated Bishop Þorlákur Skúlason. While Þorlákur did not consider the matter of the lamb to be particularly serious, he criticized Guðmundur’s treatment of Jón as tempestuous and aggressive. Bishop Þorlákur states frankly that Guðmundur quarrels more than befits a man of the cloth, and that Þorlákur has previously spoken to Guðmundur’s father in an effort to enlist his support in curbing these outbursts of temper.

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<sup>371</sup> Lbs 3708 8vo, 33r–v. No scholarly edition of Magnús Pétursson’s dream and vision exists; the manuscript chosen here is a late but legible copy.

<sup>372</sup> Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 116.

Addressing his former schoolmate as “mi domine frater” (‘my brother in the Lord’), Þorlákur reminds Guðmundur that a clergyman ought to be humble and slow to anger.<sup>373</sup>

Two years later, in 1631, Guðmundur was quietly transferred out of the Glæsibær parish to Grímsey.

#### 4.7 Exile to Grímsey

The island of Grímsey, 41 kilometres north of the mainland, is Iceland’s northernmost settlement. Today, Grímsey is a popular tourist destination, famous for its chess players and its location on the Arctic Circle. In the seventeenth century, Grímsey was an isolated rock in the middle of the North Atlantic – the very edge of the edge of the world. Inhabited, but just barely habitable. Fishing was the mainstay of the tiny community on Grímsey, supplying islanders with a monotonous diet, high in protein but vitamin C-deficient. Scurvy was endemic. With only open rowboats to make the ocean crossing, travel between Grímsey and the mainland was dangerous. In the mid-nineteenth century, islanders made only two trips a year to the mainland, both in summer,<sup>374</sup> but there is evidence that the fishermen of Grímsey in the early seventeenth century made exceptionally hazardous crossings in deep winter (see 4.8). There were no landowners in Grímsey; virtually every farm save for the benefice at which the minister’s family lived was a tenancy paying rent to Möðruvellir. When Guðmundur Erlendsson was made minister for Grímsey in 1631, it was not a promotion.

Grímsey’s only church was at Miðgarðir, located toward the southern end of the island. Bishop Jón Ögmundsson consecrated the church in c. 1110–20. Prior to the Reformation, the church had been dedicated to St. Ólafur Haraldsson – an appropriate choice of patron given that, as king of Norway a century earlier, Ólafur had requested that the island be given to him. Although the king was not granted control of Grímsey during his lifetime, the bishop clearly thought it fitting that the island be entrusted to the saint’s care. In those early days, Grímsey’s church had been richly furnished and boasted one of the better collections of ecclesiastical books in North Iceland. The lavish trappings described in the church’s medieval charter were long gone by Guðmundur Erlendsson’s day. They were removed not by sixteenth-century Protestant reformers but by fifteenth-century English pirates.<sup>375</sup>

Grímsey’s first Lutheran minister, Sigurður Þorsteinsson, accepted the living only on the condition that his son Einar be sent to the Latin school at Hólar. Some years later, the Reverend Sigurður succumbed to scurvy, but Sigurður’s son Einar Sigurðsson became a prolific and influential poet and

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<sup>373</sup> Þorlákur Skúlason, *Bréfabók Þorláks biskups Skúlasonar* (Reykjavík: Þjóðskjalasafn Íslands, 1979), 4.

<sup>374</sup> Jón Norðmann, *Grímseyjarlýsing*, ed. Finnur Sigmundsson, *Menn og minjar 3* (Reykjavík: Leiftur, 1946).

<sup>375</sup> *ÍF* 6, 328.

the eventual father of a bishop, Oddur Einarsson. In 1575, Grímsey was officially designated a parish in the diocese of Hólar. Maintaining a minister for the church on Grímsey proved an often difficult task, as the living was poor and the prospect of travelling to a remote island to die of scurvy hardly alluring. To Grímsey went the newly ordained with promises of a better living after a stint at Miðgarðar. To Grímsey also went disgraced ministers who had been offered the position as an alternative to defrocking.

Nowhere in his poetry does Guðmundur directly explain the reasons for his departure from Glæsibær, but he composed a farewell poem dedicated to his parishioners in Kræklingahlíð, “Tími til alls án efa er,” in which he hints that he is being sent “yst á Krists jarðarhala” (‘to the uttermost edge of God’s good earth’) after twelve years in Eyjafjörður because of “brek mín stórmörg og bráðlyndi” (‘my many transgressions and hotheadedness’).<sup>376</sup> It is with great contrition, mixed perhaps with a sense of trepidation, that Guðmundur bids farewell to Glæsibær:

Um eilíf ár  
yður með tár  
eg nú Guði befala.<sup>377</sup>

(‘For all eternity I, with tears, commend you now to God.’)

An examination of the personal papers of Bishop Þorlákur Skúlason of Hólar reveals the catalyst for Guðmundur’s exile to have been the *ölyrði* (‘drunken words’) exchanged between Guðmundur and Magnús Ólafsson (c. 1573–1636), the minister for the nearby parish of Laufás, and Magnús’s son Benedikt. Why Guðmundur, Benedikt and Magnús quarrelled is not stated, but it was serious enough that the bishop’s personal intervention and a formal reconciliation was required. On 23 August 1631, Guðmundur Erlendsson, Benedikt Magnússon and Magnús Ólafsson met at Akureyri and agreed in the presence of the bishop and six other ministers to forgive and forget.<sup>378</sup>

In 1631, Magnús was attempting to secure his son Benedikt the position of his successor in Laufás. In doing so, he sought the support of powerful Danish contacts: Ole Worm and the Danish Chancellor, Christen Friis, for both of whom he composed poetry.<sup>379</sup> Benedikt was a problematic candidate for

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<sup>376</sup> 232, 53v–54v.

<sup>377</sup> 232, 53v.

<sup>378</sup> They were Ólafur Erlendsson, Einar Magnússon, Þorbergur Ásmundsson, Guðmundur Lárentíusson, Sveinn Jónsson and Hjalti Jónsson. Þorlákur Skúlason, *Bréfabók Þorláks biskups Skúlasonar*, 48. This type of reconciliation ritual at which the bishop was present was a community-initiated alternative to formal legal proceedings. In 1652, for example, the Rev. Jón Daðason of Arnarbæli in Ölfes, Álfur Gíslason and Halldór Jónsson *lögréttumaður* jointly requested the intervention of Bishop Brynjólfur Skúlason in a local feud, cf. Brynjólfur Sveinsson, *Guðs dýrð og sálnanna velferð*, 420–21.

<sup>379</sup> Anthony Faulkes, *Two Versions of Snorra Edda*, vol. 1, 20–23; Anthony Faulkes, *Magnúsarkver*, 107–9.

the clergy. In 1626, after completing Latin school, Benedikt sailed to Copenhagen to study at the university, but he returned abruptly to Iceland in 1629 without informing his tutor, Ole Worm, or paying his debts to Worm. In Worm's correspondence with Magnús Ólafsson, it emerges that in addition to getting himself into debt, Benedikt behaved badly as a student and was prone to excessive drinking. Despite this, Worm managed to obtain a royal letter for Benedikt in 1630, under which terms Benedikt would have become his father's chaplain. This letter arrived in Iceland in 1631. Bishop Þorlákur did not comply. Instead, Magnús's foster-son, Jón Magnússon, was made parson for Möðruvellir in Hörgárdalur in 1632 and eventually became Magnús's successor at Laufás in 1637. Faulkes has suggested that Bishop Þorlákur's refusal to ordain Benedikt was motivated by ill will towards Magnús and possibly even scholarly rivalry.<sup>380</sup> Faulkes seems not to have known of the alcohol-fuelled dispute with Guðmundur in the summer of 1631.

Alcoholism appears to have been an increasingly common social problem among early modern Icelanders. The commerce of alcohol was lucrative and essentially unregulated. Strong distilled spirits were among the goods brought to Iceland by merchants and sailors from abroad, and binge drinking during trips to trading centres and other social gatherings was common. Sigurjón Jónsson included *drykkjuskapur* ('drunkenness') in his monograph on disease and morbidity in early modern Iceland, commenting that widespread drunkenness characterized the entirety of the seventeenth century, with alcohol abuse among the upper classes appears to have risen around the turn of the eighteenth century.<sup>381</sup> Hallgrímur Pétursson composed several poems on the pleasures of moderate drinking and tobacco smoking, and a folk legend tells of a meeting at the Alþingi between Hallgrímur Pétursson and Stefán Ólafsson where their poems were so powerful as to cause the shot glasses on the table to dance.<sup>382</sup> Magnús Ólafsson's *Flateyjarríma*, analysed by Margrét Eggertsdóttir in *Icelandic Baroque*, also describes heavy drinking in comical terms.<sup>383</sup> None of Guðmundur Erlendsson's surviving poetry extols the pleasures of alcohol; he seems to have learned a lesson at Akureyri in 1631, and his *Vökuvarpa* (see below) speaks emphatically against drunkenness.

#### 4.8 Grímsey verses

In the summer of 1631, when Guðmundur was sent to Grímsey, Guðrún Gunnarsdóttir was pregnant. She and Guðmundur would have made the long journey in an open boat, loaded with their worldly goods and six children ranging in age from ten years to a tiny infant. The couple's youngest son was

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<sup>380</sup> Anthony Faulkes, *Two Versions of Snorra Edda*, vol. 1, 23.

<sup>381</sup> Sigurjón Jónsson, *Sóttarfar og sjúkdómar á Íslandi 1400–1800* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1944), 143–50.

<sup>382</sup> Margrét Eggertsdóttir, *Icelandic Baroque*, 151, 326.

<sup>383</sup> Margrét Eggertsdóttir, *Icelandic Baroque*, 141–48.



born after their arrival. He was christened Jón, like his eldest brother, and grew up to be a well-known poet and a self-educated artist (see 4.15.5).

Jón the Younger seems to have thrived on Grímsey, against all odds. However, Guðmundur's daughter Margrét fell seriously ill and was bedridden for a time. To celebrate her recovery in 1633, Guðmundur composed a hymn of thanksgiving on her behalf, "Ég þakka Guði eilífum," concealing her name in the text of the poem.<sup>384</sup> This was a technique that Guðmundur had used earlier in composing a lament for Halldóra Guðbrandsdóttir on the occasion of her father Guðbrandur Þorláksson's death in 1627, in which Halldóra is the poem's speaker.<sup>385</sup>

Guðmundur had at least one brush with death during his three years on Grímsey, as he relates in his exceptionally popular "Almáttugur Guð himna hæða," a poem that in manuscripts of his anthology *Gígja* is labelled *Sjóreisuvísur* but is more generally known under the name of *Grímseyjarvísur* (see 5.4).<sup>386</sup> The poem's dramatic incipit – "Almáttugur Guð himna hæða / hátt sitjandi yfir kerúbín" ('Almighty God of heaven's heights / seated high above the cherubs') – closely echoes that of the medieval *Lilja*, which begins with the lines "Almáttugur Guð allra stétta / yfirbjóðandi engla og þjóða" ('Almighty God of all stations / ruler of angels and nations'). Metrically, Guðmundur's poem is more closely affiliated with the poetry of Einar Sigurðsson of Eydalir: rather than composing a *drápa* in the style of *Lilja*, Guðmundur uses six-line stanzas with a simple AbAbAb rhyme scheme, identical to that in Einar of Eydalir's "Vaki þér upp sem viljið heita," which was printed in the 1612 *Vísnaþók*.

Guðmundur's poem is composed in six-line stanzas and focuses almost entirely on the eventful journey itself, introduced by a prologue of only four stanzas. The narrative is fast-paced from the outset, and there is a minimal amount of moralizing by the standards of the day. On the Feast Day of St. Paul (*Pálsmessu*, January 25), Guðmundur and nine other islanders set out in an open boat with a full cargo of stockfish, but they reached land only with great difficulty. The return crossing from the Icelandic mainland over the stormy ocean back to Grímsey was still more dangerous, and the entire crew was nearly lost at sea after being driven off course. Guðmundur Erlendsson experienced their survival as nothing short of miraculous: the boat is caught in a swirling blizzard, but just as the entire crew has given up all hope of finding their way home again, Guðmundur turns his eyes up to the heavens in preparation for death and catches a glimpse of Venus between the clouds. In an instant, Guðmundur and the others realize that they have miscalculated their bearings and are able – after

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<sup>384</sup> 1529, 70r–v.

<sup>385</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, "'Jakobs angur eitt var mest / eftir Jósep góða ...'" 1–25.

<sup>386</sup> 232, 97r–101r; 250, 47v–52v (424v–429v); 1055, 161v–166v. Other copies include ÍB 105 4to ÍB 67 8vo, ÍB 633 8vo, JS 26 8vo, JS 120 8vo, JS 479 8vo, JS 471 8vo, JS 487 8vo, JS 492 8vo, JS 503 8vo, JS 504 8vo, JS 510 8vo, Lbs 1756 4to, Lbs 1262 8vo and Lbs 1764 8vo. The poem has not been edited.

hours of intense rowing – to make land near Dalabær in Skagafjörður. They were farther than ever from Grímsey, but they were alive and able after six nights' rest to complete their journey home. When looking at the distance between Grímsey and Dalabær on a map of Iceland while a January storm rages outside the window, the sense of the miraculous remains undiminished.

Guðmundur Erlendsson likely composed “Almáttugur Guð himna hæða” shortly after returning safely to Grímsey, as he characterizes the voyage in poem’s fifth stanza to have occurred very recently. A notable feature of the poem is its attention to the role of the community: Guðmundur voices not only thanks for the crew’s salvation but also his deep gratitude for the hospitality of the farmers who provided food and shelter for the ten exhausted men. While rowing to the mainland in a raging storm is no small feat, Guðmundur downplays human strength and physical endurance as factors in their survival. The climactic stanzas in which Guðmundur and the other men of Grímsey are freezing and lost somewhere in the vastness of the North Atlantic focus on the emotions of the boat’s occupants at the point at which all hope seems to be lost. Guðmundur expresses candidly that he was in the process of tying himself to the boat so that his body might perhaps be eventually recovered and given a Christian burial. The brief sight of the Evening Star on the horizon is the poem’s emotional turning point, as it is a sign that they may yet be saved. Guðmundur makes little of his own part, although he does state that he was the first to stagger to the farm at Dalabær for help, “rígfreðinn og rennvindandi” (‘frozen stiff and drenched’).

As an account of adversity at sea, “Almáttugur Guð himna hæða” is one of the earliest preserved poems of its kind in Icelandic, despite the importance of ocean travel and fishing. Magnús Ólafsson’s somewhat earlier *Flateyjarríma* describes a difficult voyage to an offshore island, but it is a comic-fantastical journey, in which the bottle is frequently at hand and peril is never truly near. Given that “Almáttugur Guð himna hæða” describes the very real dangers faced at sea by ordinary Icelandic crews, it is unsurprising that the poem continued to circulate in manuscripts for centuries, but there seem to have been surprisingly few precedents for composing such a narrative poem.

The intense emotions expressed by the poet, in combination with the poem’s simple but melodramatic language and painstaking attention to places, names and dates, affiliates “Almáttugur Guð himna hæða” with the early modern disaster ballads circulating throughout much of Europe through printed copies and oral transmission. Guðmundur’s own interest in such material can be seen in his works on contemporary affairs (see 4.6), and he adopts the same tone in describing his own experience on attempting the return voyage to Grímsey:

Þá var Pétursmessa að morgni,  
minnist eg þann harma dag,

fram úr dimmu hyggju horni  
hreyta mun eg tvistum brag,  
satt og rétt er skammturinn skorni,  
skrökva eg ei við rauna slag.<sup>387</sup>

(‘It was St. Peter’s Mass [February 22] in the morning, I recall that sorrowful day, from the dim corner of thoughts [the mind] I shall launch my rueful song. The portion is cut truly and fairly: I lie not of our woes.’)

A second narrative poem by Guðmundur Erlendsson (the *dróttkvætt* “Skorðu för úr Fjörðum”), deals with the same traumatic voyage in a more traditional skaldic metre.<sup>388</sup> A four-stanza *dróttkvætt* poem, *Skipskaðavísur*, is preserved in AM 149 8vo from the seventeenth century and commemorates a fatal accident at sea in Southwest Iceland. The poem is anonymous in AM 149 8vo, but later manuscripts attribute the poem to Hallgrímur Pétursson, which – if correct – means that the poem is composed in 1637 at the earliest.<sup>389</sup>

Guðmundur’s *dróttkvætt* poem is a possible model for *Skipskaðavísur*, but “Almáttugur Guð himna hæða” is certainly the immediate inspiration for a 1665 verse narrative of a sea voyage to the island of Kolbeinsey: the Rev. Jón Einarsson’s *Kolbeinseyjarvísur*.<sup>390</sup> Jón Einarsson (d. 1674) served at Glæsibær in Kræklingahlíð after Guðmundur Erlendsson’s departure but later – following a destructive fire at Glæsibær in 1636 – moved to the living of Stærri-Árskógur in Eyjafjörður. Not only has Jón Einarsson borrowed the metrical structure of “Almáttugur Guð himna hæða,” but the narrative structure of *Kolbeinseyjarvísur* is also very similar: it begins with a first-person introduction by the poet and a short explanation of the circumstances of the voyage, but its focus is on the adversity experienced by the crew. The narrative takes place nearly a half-century before the poem’s composition date: in 1616, Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson commissioned three young fishermen from the remote farm of Hvannadalir (Bjarni, Jón and Einar Tómasson) to make an expedition to the uninhabited island of Kolbeinsey to the north of Grímsey, which nearly ended in tragedy when waves pulled the boat back into the sea as the men ventured ashore to explore. After two failed attempts by Bjarni to swim to the drifting boat, the three men fell to their knees in prayer. Miraculously, the boat changed course and returned to shore. Einar, who was still alive in 1665, seems to have directly

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<sup>387</sup> 232, 98v.

<sup>388</sup> 232, 101r–v; 250, 52v–53r (orig. 429v–430r); 1055, 166r–v. Printed in Guðmundur Finnbogason (ed.), *Hafræna: Sjávarljóð og siglinga* (Reykjavík: Bókaverzlun Sigfúsar Eymundssonar, 1923), 35–38.

<sup>389</sup> An edition of the poem is forthcoming in the fifth volume of the works of Hallgrímur Pétursson, edited by Margrét Eggertsdóttir.

<sup>390</sup> On Jón Einarsson, see Jón Samsonarson, “Sorgarljóð og gleðikvæði prestsins á Árskógsströnd,” *Gripla* 5 (1982): 7–34.

commissioned the poem, providing Jón Einarsson with a written account of the voyage that was the poet's source material. Jón Einarsson's poem, like Guðmundur's, mixes suspense with reflections on salvation, comparing the Hvannadalir brothers to the biblical figures of Daniel and Jonas. In the last six stanzas, the poet addresses Einar as his dear friend, wishing him a safe final journey to heaven.

Even if Guðmundur's poetry from his Grímsey years speaks to a strong sense of solidarity within the small fishing community and Guðmundur's own ability to cope with the harsh conditions on Grímsey, the parson-poet must have wished to reinstate himself into the bishop's good graces following his scandalous feud. Guðmundur plainly did manage to leave the island to attend a synod that convened on April 20, 1632, in Flugumýri in Skagafjörður.<sup>391</sup> The synod discussed relatively mundane issues: the Rev. Magnús Jónsson of Mælifell (1580–1662) and farmer Gunnlaugur Grímsson disagreed over whether Gunnlaugur had paid his tithe, and Jón Brandsson (d. after 1642) sought to be granted a living, 13 years after he was defrocked for having a child out of wedlock with his first cousin. Mainland gatherings such as the synod were an opportunity for Guðmundur to share his experiences – and his poems – with fellow clergymen and other influential members of society in the region, including *lögmaður* Halldór Ólafsson, Valgerður Halldórsdóttir's father (see 4.4), who was present to advise Bishop Þorlákur in the matter of the missing tithe.<sup>392</sup>

As Jón Brandsson's case illustrates, time was an important dimension in demonstrating genuine repentance, in some sense supplanting formal acts of penance atoning for sin in post-Reformation Iceland. Since repentance is a mental state, it can only be observed over the course of weeks, days and years. While Jón's earlier behaviour was considered reprehensible, Bishop Þorlákur and the others present supported Jón's petition in light of thirteen years of irreproachable conduct. In a surviving letter to Guðmundur Erlendsson from 1648 on the case of an unmarried woman who became pregnant before undergoing public absolution for an earlier pregnancy, Bishop Þorlákur advised him to allow more time than usual before allowing her to rejoin the congregation.<sup>393</sup>

Guðmundur Erlendsson follows a similar pattern: after demonstrating true repentance through several years of good behaviour on Grímsey, he was chosen to replace his father, Erlendur, as minister for Fell in Sléttuhlíð in 1634. His aging father may have interceded with the bishop on Guðmundur's behalf. By 1634, Erlendur had served as minister at Fell for well over forty years, and his only other surviving son – Skúli – had drowned in a tragic accident. In his farewell to his

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<sup>391</sup> Þorlákur Skúlason, *Bréfabók Þorláks biskups Skúlasonar*, 58–60.

<sup>392</sup> Þorlákur Skúlason, *Bréfabók Þorláks biskups Skúlasonar*, 59.

<sup>393</sup> Þorlákur Skúlason, *Bréfabók Þorláks biskups Skúlasonar*, 146.

parishioners in Grímsey (*Grímseyjarkveðja*),<sup>394</sup> Guðmundur does not mention any tears, though the poem is certainly heartfelt and touching.

Guðmundur's time in Grímsey was a productive period for him as a poet. Other poems composed during Guðmundur's Grímsey years include two New Year's hymns ("Upp lít mín sál úr sorgum þeim" and "Hvað mun vor auma ævi hér"), dated 1632 and 1634 respectively.<sup>395</sup> It was in Grímsey that Guðmundur composed his longest *rímur*, *Rímur af Sál og Davíð* ('*Rímur* of Saul and David'). In this *rímur*, which is a full 22 cantos long, Guðmundur recounts the biblical stories of King Saul and King David. Tucked away into the broader narrative are the poet's personal reflections on his own life: the idleness of winter weighs heavily on him, there is not much for him to do on the island in winter except compose poetry, he is getting older and he hopes that his poetry will continue to live on after his death. Most remarkably, Guðmundur begins the eighteenth *ríma* with a long description of Grímsey and its inhabitants in verse.<sup>396</sup>

This portrait of Grímsey in verse takes the form of a *mansöngur* (see below), 25 stanzas long. In many respects, this is not so much a *mansöngur* as an independent poem embedded within the frame of the broader narrative. While Guðmundur's description of Grímsey is largely self-contained (and one stanza would ultimately detach itself from the *rímur* entirely),<sup>397</sup> the poet draws more heavily here on conventional expectations of the *mansöngur* than elsewhere in his works.

#### 4.8.1 Rímur and mansöngur

*Rímur* (sing. *ríma*) are a difficult literary phenomenon to describe, as *rímur* have been composed in Iceland from the late medieval period to the present day and one can find exceptions to virtually every rule in the book. *Rímur* are rhymed verse compositions, and they virtually always involve a single continuous narrative of some sort.<sup>398</sup> *Rímur* are divided into fits (a single fit is known as a *ríma*). Individual stanzas within a single fit are metrically identical and retain the same rhyme scheme throughout, but the metrical form may shift between fit divisions.<sup>399</sup> The most common form is the *ferskeytt* quatrain (2-line and 3-line forms also exist).<sup>400</sup> A single *ríma* is the minimum length for such

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<sup>394</sup> 232, 54v–55r.

<sup>395</sup> These were later printed at Hólar, see 4.14.1.

<sup>396</sup> Printed in Katelin Parsons, "Gagn, gæði og gömul vísa um Grímsey," *Són* 10 (2012): 41–60.

<sup>397</sup> Katelin Parsons, "Gagn, gæði og gömul vísa um Grímsey," 41.

<sup>398</sup> See the discussion of Jón Bjarnason's *Síraksrímur* for an exception to this rule.

<sup>399</sup> As with virtually all pre-modern Icelandic poetry, regular alliteration is also a feature, cf. Ragnar Ingi Aðalsteinsson, *Traditions and Continuities: Alliteration in Old and Modern Icelandic Verse* (Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2014).

<sup>400</sup> On *ferskeytt* and the early history of *rímur*, see Vésteinn Ólason, "Old Icelandic Poetry," in *A History of Icelandic Literature*, ed. Daisy Neijmann (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 55–58; Shaun F. D. Hughes, "Report on 'Rímur' 1980," *JEGP* 79.4 (1980): 477–98; Björn K. Þórólfsson, *Rímur fyrir 1600*.

a composition, but single-*ríma* compositions often behave anomalously.<sup>401</sup> More typically, a *rímur* work consists of a cycle of multiple fits, breaking up the narrative into separate units. Fourteen complete *rímur* cycles by Guðmundur Erlendsson survive in 232. An additional *rímur* cycle (*Samviskurímur*) is preserved only in Lbs 2346 8vo and another (*Patríarka eða tólf foreldra rímur* or *Forfeðrarímur*) only in ÍB 508 4to.<sup>402</sup> The median length for a *rímur* cycle within Guðmundur's corpus is 7–8 cantos.

Usually, the narrative told in the epic section exists in some form outside the *rímur*: either an existing prose narrative of some sort (e.g., the lives of King Saul and King David in the Old Testament) or – less commonly – an event known within a local community, such as the fight between two farmers immortalized in Þórður Magnússon of Strjúgur's *Fjósaríma*. Again, there are exceptions, and this is particularly true of *rímur* of only one canto. For instance, the popular *Tímaríma* by Jón Sigurðsson (1685–1720) is a vicious satire on a prominent Icelandic family, their identities just thinly concealed enough that the *ríma* does not constitute outright libel.<sup>403</sup>

*Rímur* are closely associated with musical performance, even if a *rímur* performance of the fourteenth century may have been radically different from *rímur* performances today. At the beginning of each canto is a lyric section traditionally known as the *mansöngur* (pl. *mansöngvar*), taking the same general poetic form as used throughout the canto but sometimes making a flashy display of poetic virtuosity. A typical *mansöngur* is audience-facing: the poet-performer shows an awareness of the imagined listeners and may even address them directly. The *mansöngur* varies enormously in its elaborateness; the simplest *mansöngur* is only a stanza or two, while the *mansöngur* in Guðmundur Erlendsson's hands becomes quite lengthy. Where a *ríma* begins with a *mansöngur* (or the *mansöngur* has been preserved), the distinction between the *mansöngur* and *ríma* is generally clear-cut and occurs at a stanza boundary.<sup>404</sup>

The *mansöngur* does not contain plot information not found in the main body of the narrative, although it may comment on the narrative. Sometimes, particularly in longer *rímur* cycles, the

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<sup>401</sup> For example, *Guðný Árnadóttir's Músar- og hreindýsríma* tells two unrelated stories but structures them as a single narrative.

<sup>402</sup> The *Rímur af krosstrénu* ('*Rímur of the Cross-Tree*'), a set of very popular sacred *rímur* based on the legend of the cross-tree, is also sometimes attributed to Guðmundur Erlendsson – Páll Vídalín, for one, believed Guðmundur to be its author, cf. Páll Vídalín, *Recensus*, 39. Extant manuscripts of the *Rímur af krosstrénu* are virtually unanimous in attributing the work to the Rev. Sigurður Jónsson, however, and as Mariane Overgaard points out, the author of the *rímur* explicitly identifies himself in the text itself as "Sigurður prestur". Mariane Overgaard, *The History of the Cross-Tree down to Christ's Passion: Icelandic Legend Versions*, Editiones Arnamagnæanæ Series B 26 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1968), cxlvi.

<sup>403</sup> Finnur Sigmundsson (ed.), *Stakar rímur frá 16., 17., 18., og 19. öld*, xviii–xx.

<sup>404</sup> An exception to this rule is Jón Bjarnason's *Rímur af Jósef*. Finnur Sigmundsson, *Rímnatal* (Reykjavík: Rímnafélagið, 1966), vol. 1, 295.

*mansöngur* can function to recap the story.<sup>405</sup> A *rímur* of 8 cantos could be performed at a single sitting, but a work such as Guðmundur Erlendsson's *Rímur af Sál og Davíð* would be unfeasible as a continuous performance. Breaks between cantos allow the performer to pause and rest the voice, but at some point the performer would need to break off the narrative. A brief recap guides the audience back into the narrative, ensuring that listeners are up-to-date on the twists and turns of a convoluted plot with many characters.<sup>406</sup>

One of the quirkiest aspects of the *mansöngur* is its detachability from the *ríma* in performance. In this respect, they are somewhat different from a framing narrative (see 4.12). The fourteenth (and final) stanza of the *mansöngur* of the tenth *ríma* of Guðmundur Erlendsson's *Vilbaldsrímur* playfully acknowledges that not everyone enjoys an endless *mansöngur*.<sup>407</sup> Scribes sometimes did not even bother to copy the *mansöngvar* associated with a given *rímur* cycle. Conversely, verses from a *mansöngvar* can circulate independently from the *rímur* that they originally prefaced, as in the case of the fifth stanza of Guðmundur's *mansöngur* describing Grímsey.<sup>408</sup>

The origins of the *mansöngur* are obscure. The word is also used in Old Norse-Icelandic for a form or forms of poetry not directly associated with *rímur*: obscene and/or amorous verses composed for and/or about women, but possibly also verses composed by women. The legal code *Grágás* states that a man may be prosecuted for composing a *mansöngur* about a woman but does not specify whether the *mansöngur* must be defamatory in nature (like the intentionally libellous *níðvísa*) or only inappropriate in context – an amorous verse about a woman not married or engaged to the poet.<sup>409</sup> A number of scholars have proposed that *mansöngur* originally referred to a specific genre of oral or subliterate poetry, although there is no consensus as to the nature of this hypothetical genre. Jochens argued that the *mansöngur* was initially a form of erotic libel, in which the (male) poet insinuated that he had enjoyed sexual relations with a woman in order to insult the man who controlled or was responsible for her,<sup>410</sup> while Helga Kress linked the *mansöngur* to female song

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<sup>405</sup> E.g., the sixteenth *ríma* in Guðmundur Bergþórsson's *Rímur af Olgeir danska*. Guðmundur Bergþórsson, *Olgeirs rímur danska*, ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson & Finnur Sigmundsson (Reykjavík: Landsbókasafn Íslands, 1947), vol. 1, 173–75.

<sup>406</sup> The seventeenth *mansöngur* of the *Rímur af Sál og Davíð* contains a quick synopsis of King David's life up to his son Absalom's rebellion, which is the point at which the narrative resumes. Guðmundur Erlendsson tends to combine recapitulation of the plot in the *mansöngur* with moral commentary on various themes connected to the material of either the *ríma* itself or that immediately before it. He thus guides the audience's attention to aspects of the story that will be important to keep in mind in the narrative ahead and encourages them to reflect on the deeds retold in verse.

<sup>407</sup> 232, 447r.

<sup>408</sup> Katelin Parsons, "Gagn, gæði og gömul vísa um Grímsey," 42–44.

<sup>409</sup> Vilhjálmur Finsen (ed.), *Grágás: Elzta lögbók Íslendinga* (Copenhagen: Nordiske Literatur-Samfund, 1852), 184.

<sup>410</sup> Jenny Jochens, "From libel to lament: male manifestations of love in Old Norse," in *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*, ed. Gísli Pálsson (Middlesex: Hisarlik Press, 1992), 252–55.

traditions and the songs of female slaves.<sup>411</sup> Marold suggested that *mansöngur* may be a calque for Latin *cantus puellarum* ('maiden song'), potentially originating among learned Icelandic clerics as a general term for popular dance songs performed by both men and women.<sup>412</sup> All three hypotheses require a distinct shift in meaning, as verses described as *mansöngur* in Old Norse literature are love poems composed by male poets in praise of the female objects of their affections. There is no direct textual evidence of a lost *mansöngur* genre in Old Norse literature, and Bjarni Einarsson points out that where a *mansöngur* becomes a bone of contention, it is typically addressed to a forbidden lover, provoking the rage of the woman's husband or guardian.<sup>413</sup> He proposed that the *mansöngur* tradition was inspired by the love poems of the continental troubadours; both Bjarni and Helga Kress also note a possible link between the Icelandic *mansöngur* and the German *Minnesang*.

When not simply commenting on the plot, the *mansöngvar* within a *rímur* cycle may indeed take the opportunity to shout out to the beautiful ladies in the audience, but a male *rímur*-poet is more likely to say something to the effect that the ladies spurn him, he is a worthless rhymester and he is getting old. As Hans Kuhn points out, the *mansöngur* can be a platform for social commentary, but a short *mansöngur* may state nothing more complicated than the poet is composing poetry.<sup>414</sup>

A *rímur*-poet may use the *mansöngur* to dedicate the *rímur* cycle to a given recipient, although this should be considered in connection with literary patronage rather than amorous intent.<sup>415</sup> The Rev. Ólafur Halldórsson of Staður in Steingrímsfjörður (c. 1570–1614) contributed two *rímur* fits to *Pontus rímur* sometime between 1591 and 1605.<sup>416</sup> The *mansöngur* of the first fit is 85 stanzas and the second 25 stanzas, and they praise and memorialize the late Magnús Jónsson and his widow, Ragnheiður Eggertsdóttir. Lists are also quite popular in early modern *mansöngvar*, for example of ancient heroes, other *rímur*-poets or a poet's previous compositions.

#### 4.8.2 Sacred *rímur*

In the preface to the 1589 hymnal, Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson of Hólar acknowledged the ubiquity of *rímur* in Iceland but hoped this would change once the commoners and young people had access to hymns. When this did not happen, he seems to have changed tactic and encouraged poets

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<sup>411</sup> Helga Kress, *Máttugar meyjar: íslensk fornþekkingarsaga* (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 1993), 18–22.

<sup>412</sup> Edith Marold, "Mansöngur – a phantom genre?" in *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, ed. Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop & Tarrin Willis, Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe 18 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 239–62.

<sup>413</sup> Bjarni Einarsson, "'Mansöngur' revisited," *Opuscula* 11 (2003): 307–15.

<sup>414</sup> Hans Kuhn, "The Rímur-Poet and his Audience," *Saga-Book* 23.6 (1993): 455–68.

<sup>415</sup> Cf. Björn K. Þórólfsson, *Rímur fyrir 1600*, 276–77.

<sup>416</sup> Magnús Jónsson, Pétur Einarsson & Ólafur Halldórsson, *Pontus rímur*, ed. Grímur M. Helgason, Rit Rímnafélagsins 10 (Reykjavík: Rímnafélagið, 1961), xxxvii.



in his circles to compose *rímur* on biblical subjects.<sup>417</sup> Many of these *bibliúrímur* ('Bible-*rímur*') have gorier and more violent plots than the narratives they were supposed to supplant, but they familiarized their audiences with the content of the Bible and carefully avoided morally corrupting amorous undertones.

Guðmundur Erlendsson and the Rev. Jón Magnússon of Laufás were among a group of clergymen born around or shortly after 1600 – most in North Iceland – who continued to compose *rímur* in this tradition. Others were Eiríkur Hallsson of Höfði and Jón Bjarnason's son and successor Sigurður Jónsson of Presthólar. Like the story of King Saul and King David, Guðmundur's material frequently originated in the Old Testament – ten of Guðmundur's fourteen *rímur* cycles in all.<sup>418</sup> Guðmundur made less use of the New Testament. Guðmundur's *Rímur af Pílatus* and *Rímur af Heródes* deal with figures from the New Testament but use other main sources: a Danish *folkebog* on the life of Pontius Pilate and an unidentified work on Herod. Guðmundur could have had access to a number of popular editions of the life of Pilate, not all of which are still extant. An edition from 1614 is known to have existed, of which no copies are known to survive.<sup>419</sup>

The most widely circulated of Guðmundur's *rímur* are the *Rímur af barndómi Krists* ('*Rímur* of the Infancy of Christ'), the source for which is *Jesu Barndoms Bog* (1508), a Danish *folkebog* largely based on the apocryphal Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew.<sup>420</sup> Despite its popularity, *Jesu Barndoms Bog* met with considerable resistance from Danish theologians following the Reformation; the book was not banned outright, but its republication was effectively suppressed for over a century.<sup>421</sup> In the absence of printed copies, it circulated primarily in manuscript form until the eighteenth century, and it is unlikely that Guðmundur had access to a printed copy of the 1508 edition. At least one Icelandic prose translation existed by the seventeenth century, the oldest manuscript being AM 83 8vo.<sup>422</sup>

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<sup>417</sup> Cf. Jón Torfason & Kristján Eiríksson (eds.), *Vísnaþók Guðbrands*, 3. For a discussion of *rímur* in the post-Reformation literary milieu and the response of the church, see Matthew Driscoll, *The Unwashed Children of Eve*, 10–16.

<sup>418</sup> *Rímur af Elí spámanni, Rímur af Eliseus spámanni, Patriárka eða tólf foreldra rímur, Rímur af Gedeon, Rímur af Jónasi spámanni, Rímur af Móses, Rímur af Sál og Davíð, Rímur af Samson sterka, Sjö sona ríma and Samviskurímur.*

<sup>419</sup> Cf. J.P. Jacobsen, "Indledning," *Danske Folkebøger*, vol. 1 ([Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1915]), lxii. The version of the *folkebog* printed in *Danske Folkebøger* is from 1663.

<sup>420</sup> For a discussion of the sources, reception and dissemination of *Jesu Barndoms Bog*, see Elise Kleivane & Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, "The Infant Jesus and his Mother in Late Mediaeval and Early Modern Scandinavian Book Culture," in *Languages of the Lutheran Reformation: Textual Networks and the Spread of Ideas*, ed. M. Kauko, M. Norro, K.M. Nummila, T. Toropainen & T. Fonsén (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 151–72.

<sup>421</sup> Richard Paulli, "Bidrag til de danske folkebøgers historie," *Danske Folkebøger*, vol. 13 (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1936), 210–28.

<sup>422</sup> Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, "Barndómssaga Kristí á Íslandi," in *Deutsch-isländische Beziehungen: Festschrift für Hubert Seelow zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Lena Rohrbach & Sebastian Kürschner, Berliner Beiträge zur Skandinavistik 24 (Berlin: Nordeuropa-Institut der Humboldt-Universität, 2018), 135–43.

Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir is in the process of editing the translation and has discovered that it frequently circulated with an translation of an anti-Semitic text on the supposed curses visited on the Jews, the source text for Guðmundur Erlendsson's *Gyðingaraunir* (see 4.13).<sup>423</sup>

Like *Jesu Barndoms Bog*, the *Rímur af barndómi Krists* continued to be well received throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and at least 50 manuscript copies are extant. It thus ranks not only as the most popular and widely distributed of Guðmundur's *rímur* but also, arguably, the most popular set of *rímur* where the subject matter is sacred rather than profane. Jón Espólín (1769–1836), in his massive geneology of the Icelanders, wrote of the poet that “það er slæmt um síra Guðmund að hann hefir kveðið margt hjátrúarkennt sem Barndómsrímur og annað er ei skyldi æfa” (‘the bad of the Rev. Guðmundur is that he has composed many superstitious poems, such as the *Barndómsrímur* and others that ought not be rehearsed.’).<sup>424</sup> Jón Espólín may have disapproved of the *rímur*, but the cycle still circulated widely enough for him to single it out for his criticism.

Guðmundur dedicated the *Rímur af barndómi Krists* to “Böðvar prestur” (‘Böðvar the minister’) in the tenth and final *mansöngur*.<sup>425</sup> At the end of the final *ríma*, Guðmundur again affectionately refers to the dedicatee as “ljúfan Böðvar prest, bróður í drottni” (‘sweet Böðvar the minister, brother in the Lord’).<sup>426</sup> This Böðvar could be one of two men. The older was Böðvar Jónsson, a poet living in the diocese of Skálholt, who was born around the time of the Reformation in Iceland, rose to the position of provost by 1588 and died in 1626. The younger was Böðvar Gíslason, who lived in North Iceland and died in 1676. Böðvar Gíslason is first mentioned as attending a synod meeting in May of 1637, although it is not entirely clear where he served at the time.<sup>427</sup> By 1641, the younger Böðvar was the minister for Reynistaður; he wrote to ask Bishop Þorlákur Skúlason for permission to mow the churchyard grass to feed his livestock.<sup>428</sup> Böðvar and Guðmundur attended synod meetings in April of 1648 and 1649 held at Flugumýri in Blönduhlíð and synod meetings in April of 1652 and 1654 at Viðvík.<sup>429</sup>

### 4.8.3 The cruel mother

The first generation of post-Reformation poets to compose *biblírímur* – the *rímur*-poets Einar Sigurðsson and Jón Bjarnason, featured in the 1612 *Vísnaþók* – used the *mansöngur* as a platform for their manifesto of spiritual edification. Jón Bjarnason used *mansöngvar* of to up to 16 stanzas in

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<sup>423</sup> AM 83 8vo, 57v–61v.

<sup>424</sup> Jón Espólín, *Ættatölubækur*, vol. VIII, col. 6620.

<sup>425</sup> 232, 391v

<sup>426</sup> 232, 394v.

<sup>427</sup> Þorlákur Skúlason, *Bréfabók Þorláks biskups Skúlasonar*, 86, 88.

<sup>428</sup> Þorlákur Skúlason, *Bréfabók Þorláks biskups Skúlasonar*, 106.

<sup>429</sup> Þorlákur Skúlason, *Bréfabók Þorláks biskups Skúlasonar*, 148, 158, 218, 250.

order to expound on the morals taught in the narrative (including the virtues of a good wife in the third *ríma* of the *Rímur af Tobías*). Use of the long *mansöngur* as a tool for the audience's moral education predates the publication of the *Vísnaþók*, however. *Pontus rímur* include a *mansöngur* of 34 stanzas by Magnús Jónsson *prúði* (d. 1591), who similarly advises his audience on the qualities in women that make them good wives.<sup>430</sup>

Guðmundur, while not ignorant of the convention of addressing a woman (or womankind) in the *mansöngur*, did not feel compelled to point out the obvious: as objects of lustful desire, women have no place in the *mansöngur*. A *mansöngur* might still praise a woman for her virtues, so long as the poet's intentions were not amorous. Guðmundur follows in the footsteps of Magnús Jónsson *prúði* and Jón Bjarnason in the eighth *mansöngur* in the *Rímur af Sál og Davíð*, the subject of which is the ideal woman described in Proverbs.

In the eighteenth *mansöngur*, the place of the “woman” has been taken by Grímsey – a toponym that is, appropriately enough, feminine in Icelandic. In winter, Grímur's island is clad in a frozen robe, crushed by the sharp blows of the waves' struggle (st. 3).<sup>431</sup> Earlier, in summer, she had been the most beautiful of islands. Now she resembles only a cold skerry in the sea, eighteen-hundred fathoms long (st. 4–5). Unlike the ideal woman of Proverbs, Grímsey provides little nourishment for her community. Obtaining food involves a measure of danger (st. 6). There is little hay for the cows, and little milk in consequence. The wells, too, freeze over and cease to “milk” almost entirely (st. 7). Often in winter, the island is surrounded by sea ice, yet there is no fresh water (st. 8). Crazy with thirst, the inhabitants of Grímsey melt snow to survive, but this is unhealthy, and those with no other water source perish (st. 9). Many newcomers to Grímsey, healthy on arrival, break out in sores and swellings of the flesh that only worsen with time (st. 10–11). Day after day, meal after meal, fish is on the menu, except when boiled scurvy-grass<sup>432</sup> is served (st. 12). Gathering scurvy-grass is risky, as it only grows wild on Grímsey's sheer, towering sea cliffs – locations not easily accessible for its human population (st. 13).

Despite Grímsey's cruel privations, Guðmundur continues his *mansöngur* by examining how the islanders' experiences demonstrate divine providence – God's preservation of the faithful (st. 16). The healing effect of scurvy-grass is one example of this: it takes away aches and pains, and

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<sup>430</sup> Magnús Jónsson, Pétur Einarsson & Ólafur Halldórsson, *Pontus rímur*, 48–53. See also Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, “Dyggðafull kona er ein eðla gáfa’: Menningarleg mótun kyngervís á 17. öld,” in *Áhrif Lúthers: Siðaskipti, samfélag og menning í 500 ár*, ed. Hjalti Hugason, Loftur Guttormsson & Margrét Eggertsdóttir (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 2017), 337–66.

<sup>431</sup> The complete text is in Katelin Parsons, “Gagn, gæði og gömul vísa um Grímsey,” 45–48.

<sup>432</sup> *Cochlearia officinalis* (or common scurvy-grass). The plant's leaves are high in vitamin C. Based on Guðmundur's description, they were a known treatment in Grímsey for swollen gums and other symptoms of scurvy.

Grímsey's inhabitants prefer the scurvy-grass drink to sour whey<sup>433</sup> (st. 14–15). Guðmundur also recounts a local legend of how a female polar bear (*birna*) arrives one winter when all the wells have frozen over and smashes a rock on the ground with her paw, creating a spring of pure water (st. 17–18). In the nineteenth century, this same tale was recorded by a later minister, the Rev. Jón Jónsson Norðmann, whose report on life in Grímsey included a folk legend associated with a site known as *Bjarnarbrunnur* ('the bear's well').<sup>434</sup> Guðmundur also describes how God has protected the islanders from harm from outsiders – despite the presence of fleets of as many as eight ships together, the crews of which sometimes go ashore (st. 21–23). Nor, Guðmundur states, do the polar bears sometimes sighted on the island do more damage than cattle (st. 24).

When Guðmundur's *mansöngur* shifts its attention to the people of Grímsey, his praise is unstinting: the islanders put their trust in God, and their faith is unshakeable (st. 19). Even in bad weather, Grímsey's inhabitants continue to gather together at the church to sing in the evenings on holy evenings (st. 20). Here, Guðmundur seems to be referring to a local practice known as *kvöldsöngvar* ('evening singings'), which Jón Norðmann's older informants in the nineteenth century still recalled.<sup>435</sup> According to Jón Norðmann, the congregation would gather in the church on evenings before holy days, where the minister would read aloud from the Bible. The island was frequently without a minister, in which case the community on Grímsey would hold informal services during these *kvöldsöngvar*, with readings from the Bible and communal singing.

Compared to life in mainland Skagafjörður or Eyjafjörður, two unusual aspects of life on Grímsey were the relatively high population density and the reliance on fishing rather than animal husbandry for survival. Research on the historical settlement on Grímsey indicates that farms were often spaced no more than 2–3 minutes' walk from each other, with one consequence being that local households were in close contact on a daily basis.<sup>436</sup> Isolated from the outside world, the tiny community was more like a fishing village than a typical rural parish. Life on Grímsey was precarious, but the local way of life facilitated regular social gatherings, and the island's church seems to have functioned as a meeting place regardless of whether there was a minister to lead the services or not. The *kvöldsöngvar* are not a practice attested in Iceland outside of Grímsey.

Guðmundur's description of the natural environment of Grímsey is striking for its realism and attention to detail. As a *mansöngur* and a document of nature and life on Grímsey, it is utterly unique

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<sup>433</sup> Sour whey (*sýra*) was a more familiar drink in farming regions such as Sléttuhlíð.

<sup>434</sup> Jón Norðmann, *Grímseyjarlýsing*, 56.

<sup>435</sup> Jón Norðmann, *Grímseyjarlýsing*, 37.

<sup>436</sup> Orri Vésteinsson, "Fornleifar í Grímsey: Aðalskráning 2007," Skýrsla Fornleifastofnunar Íslands FS372-06401 (Reykjavík: Fornleifastofnun Íslands, 2008), 129.

for its time. Guðmundur reaches the level of scientific observation in depicting a locality within Iceland that was barely known even to Icelanders. The oldest comparable prose description of Grímsey was compiled in 1638 by Bishop Gísli Oddsson of Skálholt (1593–1638), shortly before his death, based on the account of an anonymous inhabitant of Grímsey.<sup>437</sup> Early modern *rímur*-poets seldom wrote anything the natural environment; Björn K. Þórólfsson observed the absence of descriptions of nature in surviving *mansöngvar* of the sixteenth century, despite the popularity of descriptions of spring in amorous poetry composed by German and French poets, who in turn influenced Danish and Swedish poets.<sup>438</sup> It is perhaps typical for an Icelandic poet to set a description of nature in a *mansöngur* in the middle of winter, but Guðmundur's *mansöngur* is innovative in dealing with the environment, history and customs of a specific locality. Here, Guðmundur seems to be experimenting with the poetic genre of *landlýsingarkvæði* (German *topographisch-historische Dichtung*), perhaps inspired by an earlier poem by Einar Sigurðsson of Eydalir.<sup>439</sup>

Baroque and humanist influences can be seen clearly in the *mansöngur*, not least the spirit of *Crymogeia*, but Guðmundur's words do not directly target a learned audience. As in Guðmundur's disaster poems, the natural landscape (and human interactions with the landscape) bear a message of relevance for a very broad audience. Grímsey may be a rock buffeted by storms, but she is watched over by divine providence, and God has not forsaken her people. What begins as a self-pitying *mansöngur* in which the poet laments his treatment at the hands of Grímsey, the cruel mother, develops into an unsparing ode to the inhabitants of Grímsey.

In his works describing his experiences in Grímsey, Guðmundur does not assume the role of the unjustly punished martyr. Instead, he transforms his experiences into a spiritual journey, in which he is the penitent chronicler and pilgrim. At the world's end, Guðmundur discovers a model Christian community: a reversal of the Iceland depicted in European travel writing (or pseudo-travelogues) by the likes of Dithmar Blefken or Gories Peerse (see 3.2). In *Grímseyjurvísur*, Grímsey becomes an almost allegorical destination on a voyage that tests the travellers' faith and spiritual endurance to the limit.

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<sup>437</sup> Gísli Oddsson, *Íslenzk annálabrot [Annalium in Islandia farrago] og Undur Íslands [De mirabilibus Islandiæ]*, trans. Jónas Rafnar (Akureyri: Þorsteinn M. Jónsson, 1942), 105–7; Gísli Oddsson, "Annalium in Islandia farrago and De mirabilibus Islandiae," *Islandica* 10 (1917): 1–84.

<sup>438</sup> Björn K. Þórólfsson, *Rímur fyrir 1600*, 276.

<sup>439</sup> Margrét Eggertsdóttir, "Topographisch-historische Dichtung in Island im 17. Jahrhundert," *Skandinavische Literaturen der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Jürg Glauser & Barbara Sabel (Tübingen: Francke, 2002), 183–99; Margrét Eggertsdóttir, "Um landsins gagn og gróða: íslensk landlýsingarkvæði," *Skírnir* 176.2 (2002): 269–91.

## 4.9 Words for the simple

In the *Rímur af Sál og Davíð*, Guðmundur Erlendsson remarks that “ekki hvorn mann elli bíður” (‘old age does not await every man’).<sup>440</sup> He has chanted over fifty *rímur* over his lifetime (although he does not list them for posterity), but observing those around him has taught him how quickly lives are sapped in the temporal world:

Nú eru flestir þrotnir þá  
þegar fimmtíu árum ná,  
miklu færri sextíu sjá,  
svo er nú fyrir mér liðið á.<sup>441</sup>

(‘Most are already exhausted by the time they reach fifty. Far fewer see sixty, so the time is getting late for me’)

On his return to his childhood home of Fell in Sléttuhlíð, Guðmundur Erlendsson’s household included his parents, his wife and seven surviving children (Jón the Elder and Jón the Younger, Hallur, Skúli, Margrét and another son and daughter). He was now much closer to Hólar and the merchant harbour of Hofsós, as well as to other poets and clergymen in Skagafjörður, but his own parishioners were more scattered than they had been in Grímsey. The move from Grímsey thus brought a change of audience. However, Guðmundur’s poetic style remained essentially unchanged.

As a poet, Guðmundur Erlendsson does not make heavy use of kennings rooted in Old Norse mythology, nor is he known to have composed opaque verses that could only have appealed to a highly learned audience with a firm grasp of the Old Norse literary past. It would be a mistake, however, to think that Guðmundur was uncomfortable with kennings because of his status as a Lutheran minister. Given that one of his verse fables is an Icelandic adaptation of a feast for the birds on Mt. Olympus at which the hostess is the goddess Freyja rather than Juno, the heathen aspects of kennings involving Norse mythology clearly did not bother him.<sup>442</sup> In Guðmundur’s *Ræningjarímur*, the martyr Jón Þorsteinsson in the Westman Islands is even described by the rather unique kenning *hökla Freyr* (‘the Freyr of chasubles’, i.e., Lutheran minister).<sup>443</sup>

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<sup>440</sup> 232, 236v.

<sup>441</sup> 232, 236v.

<sup>442</sup> 250, 54r–55v. The birds, too, are from the Icelandic landscape: the *kría* (Arctic tern) and the not-yet-extinct *geirfugl* (great auk).

<sup>443</sup> Guðmundur Erlendsson, “Ræningjarímur,” *Tyrkjaránið á Íslandi 1627*, 483. At first glance, this kenning presents an utterly contradictory image. In the context of Freyr’s prevalence in seventeenth-century (and older) kennings for warrior (such as *víga Freyr*, ‘the Freyr of battles’), the kenning serves to heighten Jón’s characterization within the *rímur* as a fearless spiritual warrior in his own local community.

Guðmundur largely rejected aspects of contemporary learned literature that distanced it from the language of ordinary people: elaborate metres, obscure literary allusions and complex metaphors. The *ríma* analysed in the section above demonstrates that Guðmundur was well aware of literary trends outside Iceland and actively experimented with elements of baroque poetry, but Guðmundur deliberately cultivates a poetic aesthetic in which clarity reigns paramount, and he states so himself in *Móses rímur*:

Ég vil heldur einföld ljóð  
eftir mig skuli liggja,  
en að missist meining góð,  
mærð sem á kann skyggja.<sup>444</sup>

(‘I prefer that simple poems survive me than the good message be lost, which poetic ornament may overshadow’)

In *rímur*, this style of composition is sometimes referred to as *að yrkja ljóst* (‘to compose transparently’), in contrast with *að yrkja myrkt* (‘to compose darkly’). Magnús Ólafsson’s *Flateyjarríma* is an excellent example of the latter style,<sup>445</sup> but Guðmundur Erlendsson was not the only contemporary poet in seventeenth-century Iceland to argue for transparency in his *rímur*. *Ármanns rímur* by Jón Guðmundsson *lærði* from c. 1637, which uses very few and quite simple kennings, is one such example.<sup>446</sup> Jón Guðmundsson *lærði*’s stated purpose in composing *Ármanns rímur* is simply to entertain the common people, but the work also contains a deeper social message on loyalty in patron-client relationships. In *Móses rímur*, Guðmundur Erlendsson’s attitude is that it is his ethical duty to compose for the people to enable them to cultivate their own spiritual literacy.

Jón Magnússon *þumlungur*’s case for cultivating a religious literacy grounded in intensive repetition has been discussed previously (see 2.4). While there is no evidence that Guðmundur Erlendsson subscribed to a view that less is more, he and Jón shared the view that extensive language and learning could be a hindrance to the individual. To be *einfaldur* is not to be ignorant or stupid (as in modern Icelandic usage): it is a positive quality that implies freedom from artifice, rather than a fundamental lack of intelligence or understanding. Guðmundur praises his own wife Guðrún’s *einfaldleiki* (‘simplicity’), a compliment not recommended for modern Icelandic spouses.<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> *Móses rímur*, 232, 263v-264r.

<sup>445</sup> Margrét Eggertsdóttir, *Icelandic Baroque*, 141–48.

<sup>446</sup> Jón Helgason (ed.), *Ármanns rímur eftir Jón Guðmundsson lærða (1637) og Ármanns þáttur eftir Jón Þorláksson*, Íslensk rit síðari alda 1 (Copenhagen: S. L. Möller, 1948), 47, 143.

<sup>447</sup> 1529, 11r.

Guðmundur's poem for the *lögmaður's* daughter Valgerður Halldórsdóttir likewise wishes that she remain as simple (*einföld*) as a dove, without being naive.<sup>448</sup>

Oral recitation from memory was a cornerstone of moral and religious education in early modern Iceland. Making the transition to a full participant in society required memorization of basic religious knowledge: the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed and the Ten Commandments. Luther's Small Catechism was first translated into Icelandic by Oddur Gottskálksson, who also translated and published the first Icelandic edition of the New Testament. Oddur's translation of the Small Catechism was among the first books to be printed in Iceland, at Breiðabólstaður í Vesturhópi in 1562. The Small Catechism was designed for pastoral and household instruction of lay persons, through word-for-word repetition. The importance of uniformity and standardization for the simple was a core message of the book; Luther's foreword emphasizes that the minister of a congregation should read uniformly from the book and seek a uniform, word-for-word response from young listeners especially, reserving erudition and eloquence for learned audiences.<sup>449</sup>

The Small Catechism is written in prose. In attempting to touch the hearts of parishioners in their everyday lives, however, the medium of rhyming verse was believed to have particular effectiveness. In the hymnal printed by Guðbrandur Þorláksson in 1589, the bishop states that poetry is more quickly learned and more solidly retained than prose.<sup>450</sup> In keeping with this, a sizeable body of early modern Icelandic religious poetry has the primary function of organizing Lutheran doctrine and moral teachings into easily memorized segments for educational purposes. Guðbrandur Þorláksson's *Vísnaþók* from 1612 contains numerous didactic poems intended to supplement the prayers and prose texts of the Small Catechism, including one by an anonymous poet ("Elska Guð, ei skaltu sverja") that summarizes the entirety of the Small Catechism in seven six-line stanzas, to be sung to a hymn tune.<sup>451</sup> Guðmundur Erlendsson composed an abundance of such poems that have survived in manuscript form, including *Lögmálsbókin*<sup>452</sup> and *Guðs borðsvísur*, the latter of which opens by addressing its audience as simple: "Heyrið til og líka lærið / ljóðakorn með huga góðum / einfaldir því

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<sup>448</sup> 232, 395r.

<sup>449</sup> Martin Luther, *Der Kleine Catechismus / für die gemeyne Pfarherr vnd Prediger* (Marburg: 1529), .  
<http://diglib.hab.de/drucke/1164-60-theol-3s/start.htm?image=00006>

<sup>450</sup> *Ein ny Psalma Bok*, AA vv.

<sup>451</sup> Jón Torfason & Kristján Eiríksson (eds.), *Vísnaþók Guðbrands*, 334. The poem as printed in the *Vísnaþók* may be a composite work: in Lbs 524 4to, copied shortly before 1600, the first stanza of the poem is copied on f. 68v as "Óttast Guð, ei skaltu sverja" ('Fear God, do not swear'), with musical notation, and Lbs 847 4to from 1693 preserves all but the first stanza, cf. Ingibjörg Eyþórsdóttir, "Tvær sálmabækur úr hvelfingu Bókhlöðunnar – Lbs 524 4to og Lbs 1927 4to eða Hymnodia Sacra," lecture 6 April 2016.

<sup>452</sup> 232, 78r–80v; 1055, 151v–154v.



að eg vildi / yður kenna Guðs borðssiði” (‘You – the simple – listen and learn this wee poem with a good mind, for I wish to teach you God’s table manners’).<sup>453</sup>

Certainly, Guðmundur composed much of his poetry with the ears and mouths of ordinary people in mind. The question remains, however, to what extent he did so by popular demand (i.e., because ordinary men and women actually wanted this kind of material and were actively involved in Guðmundur’s literary circles) and to what extent Guðmundur took a top-down approach to his compositions, looking to his colleagues and superiors within the Church for acceptance, approval and assistance in dissemination. In the case of *Rímur af barndómi Krists* (see 4.8.2), Guðmundur seems to have undertaken the project of creating a verse narrative version of *Jesu Barndoms Bog* for a fellow clergyman, the Reverend Böðvar. In most cases, however, the circumstances of composition are left undocumented.

One major challenge to the study of Guðmundur Erlendsson as a participant in literary activities within his own local community is the invisibility of ordinary Icelanders before the 1703 national census. In Iceland, the oldest surviving church registers (*sóknarmannatöl*, *húsvitjunarbækur* or *sálmaregistur*) date only from the mid-eighteenth century. Around this time, written records of christenings, confirmations, weddings and funerals (*prestsþjónustubækur*) began to be kept in many parishes, but not until the early 1780s were such records systematically maintained by virtually all clergymen in all parishes. As a result, early modern hymnists and *rímur* poets alike compose their hymns for an ethereal audience.

Throughout the seventeenth century, the shadowy presence of ordinary men and women as participants in literary and manuscript culture can be discerned through unknown names on flyleaves and in margins – sometimes even in headings and scribal colophons. Detailed written documentation still tends to be limited to members of the upper classes and social deviants, such as Guðmundur Andrússon, who are publicly accused of using literacy for inappropriate purposes.

In contrast to the detailed family portraits in verse left by Guðmundur Erlendsson, almost nothing is recorded of the lives of his parishioners, except when they engaged in (or witnessed) sinful and deviant behaviour. Even their names are rarely known. For instance, we know that the tenant at Hraun in Sléttuhlíð in 1677 was a man named Diðrik Jónsson only because he wished to move

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<sup>453</sup> 232, 76v–78r; 1055, 156v–157v. The poem is also found in Lbs 399 4to, which is approximately contemporary to 232.

elsewhere and happened to be renting land that was partly owned by Guðmundur's granddaughter Guðrún Jónsdóttir (see 4.15.1).<sup>454</sup>

Guðmundur Erlendsson's illegitimate son Bjarni is acknowledged only in a single record from 27 April 1649, when a synod at Flugumýri in Blönduhlíð dealt with an accusation on Guðmundur's part that the Rev. Gottskálk Jónsson of Fagranes had attempted to steal 2 *rigsdaler* that Bjarni had left behind in the merchant's booth at Hofsóss while trading.<sup>455</sup> The money was discovered by the merchant Hermann Willer, who gave it to an unknown Einar Jónsson, who then handed it to the Rev. Gottskálk. Scandalously, the ship's captain, Christian Pétursson (Pedersen), claimed – according to sworn witnesses – that Gottskálk had attempted to use the *rigsdaler* to buy alcohol before Guðmundur Erlendsson reclaimed the money on his son's behalf. Bishop Þorlákur Skúlason countered that a single witness (i.e., the ship's captain) was not enough to sully the reputation of a clergyman or an elder in the community; the matter concluded with the Rev. Gottskálk swearing on the Bible that the whole thing had been a misunderstanding. Confirming his oath were five *dánnumenn* ('worthy men'): the Rev. Hallgrímur Jónsson, the Rev. Sveinn Jónsson, Eggert Jónsson *lögréttumaður*, Hallgrímur Halldórsson *lögréttumaður* and Bessi Björnsson, the illegitimate son of Björn Jónsson of Skarðsá.<sup>456</sup>

One important document that does survive is a record of local farmers present at a community gathering of Hofshreppur (Höfðaströnd) and Sléttuhlíðarhreppur on 26 May 1649. The occasion was the swearing of an oath of allegiance to the newly crowned King Frederik of Denmark, formalized through a handshake with the *sýslumaður* for the region, Benedikt Halldórsson. Nine farmers' names are on the document, eight of which are personal signatures. Ásgrímur Magnússon of Höfði in Höfðaströnd and his brother Sigurður Magnússon of Tjarnir in Sléttuhlíð have both signed the document, and Sigurður has added the name Jón Gunnarsson immediately below his own, in his particularly elegant hand. Two other farmers, Hallgrímur Guðmundsson and Sveinn Gunnarsson, have written their names with some difficulty. The remaining four farmers are Einar Sturlason, Egill Þorkelsson, Höskuldur Sigurðsson and Jón Sigurðsson.<sup>457</sup>

The date of the oath places it within a decade of the composition of Guðmundur Erlendsson and Ásgrímur Magnússon's *Grýlukvæði* (c. 1638–1644).<sup>458</sup> In the longer version of this poem, a farmer named Egill is named as living at the farm of Skálá, while Nikulás is the farmer at Bræðraá and Eiríkur

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<sup>454</sup> JS 360 8vo, 4r–v.

<sup>455</sup> Þorlákur Skúlason, *Bréfabók Þorláks biskups Skúlasonar*, 158–59.

<sup>456</sup> Þorlákur Skúlason, *Bréfabók Þorláks biskups Skúlasonar*, 159.

<sup>457</sup> Jón Þorkelsson (ed.), *Skjöl um hylling Íslendinga 1649 við Friðrik konung þriðja með viðbæti um Kópavogssærin 1662* (Reykjavík: Sögufélag, 1914), 53. The digitized original document is available in the online collection of Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, <http://digitalesamlingur.hum.ku.dk/Home/Details/532018/>

<sup>458</sup> On this poem and its dating, see Katelin Parsons, "Grýla in Sléttuhlíð," 226–27.

is at Róðhóll. All three names are quite uncommon (based on the 1703 census), and the Egill of the poem can safely be identified as Egill Þorkelsson.

A farmer named Nikulás Jónsson signed the oath at Viðvíkurhreppur the previous day, 28 May 1649. He is a possible candidate for the earlier tenant at Bræðraá, but Nikulás's identity is complicated by the fact that at least two Nikulás Jónssons lived in Skagafjörður in the mid-seventeenth century, both of whom were literate: one held the position of *lögréttumaður* (a member of the law council that met annually at the Alþingi) from 1650 and one was Bishop Þorlákur Skúlason's *umboðsmaður* or representative at Urðir in Svarfaðardalur from 1633 (and was still living there in 1650) but from about 1654 lived at Neðri-Ás in Hjaltadalur.<sup>459</sup> Nikulás *lögréttumaður* farmed for at least some years at Ósland in Höfðaströnd, making him Ásgrímur Magnússon's close neighbour, and he continued to attend the *lögrétta* to at least 1668, meaning that he is probably the younger of the two men.<sup>460</sup> Nikulás *lögréttumaður* may have been the tenant at Bræðraá in the late 1630s and early 1640s, moving from farm to farm as his circumstances improved, but it is difficult to distinguish in surviving records between traces of the *lögréttumaður* and the *umboðsmaður*.<sup>461</sup>

Some additional parish documents survive for Sléttuhlíð in 1673–1680, thanks to the record-keeping of the *sýslumaður* Benedikt Halldórsson (1607–1688), brother of Valgerður Halldórsdóttir (see above and 4.4).<sup>462</sup> In 1673, the members of the local *hreppstjórn* for Sléttuhlíð were Magnús Sigurðsson (son of Sigurður Magnússon of Tjarnir), Hallur Guðmundsson (Guðmundur Erlendsson's son), Þorsteinn Sigurðsson (probably son of Sigurður Magnússon), Steingrímur Nikulásson (possibly the son of Nikulás Jónsson *lögréttumaður*) and Guðmundur Ingimundarson.<sup>463</sup> Hallur was still in the *hreppstjórn* in 1678, with Magnús Sigurðsson, Erlendur Ásgrímsson (son of Ásgrímur Magnússon), Guðmundur Ingimundarson and Jón Einarsson.<sup>464</sup> All five members of the local *hreppstjórn* in 1678 signed their names confidently in their own hand, indicating that they were not only literate but competent scribes.

At the bottom of the social ladder were invalid female paupers, who did not enjoy social or financial security and would have been completely illiterate. Their names and life experiences are recorded only when farmers argued over responsibility for their care. In 1675, an invalid woman named Arnleif

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<sup>459</sup> Þorlákur Skúlason, *Bréfabók Þorláks biskups Skúlasonar*, 54–55, 173.

<sup>460</sup> Einar Bjarnason, *Lögréttumannatal* (Reykjavík: Sögufélag, 1952–1955), 393; Þorlákur Skúlason, *Bréfabók Þorláks biskups Skúlasonar*, 170.

<sup>461</sup> Þorlákur Skúlason, *Bréfabók Þorláks biskups Skúlasonar*, 328.

<sup>462</sup> Dóma- og þingbók Benedikts Halldórssonar sýslumanns 1673–1680. Þí. Sýslumaðurinn í Skagafjarðarsýslu og bæjarfógetinn á Sauðárkróki 0000 GA/1-1-1.

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>464</sup> *Ibid.*, 204. Benedikt Halldórsson, the *sýslumaður*, was also present, as was Halldór Þorbergsson, who was probably Benedikt's assistant.

Kolbeinsdóttir lived in Sléttuhlíðarhreppur, spending the winter with her brother Halldór at Fell, who was presumably the Rev. Jón Guðmundsson's servant and may have been in service with Guðmundur Erlendsson's family for some years.<sup>465</sup> In 1678, the farmer at the tenant farm of Mýrar was Brandur Guðmundsson, and the invalid Vilborg Brandsdóttir – who was bedridden and barely capable of speech – had lived in his household the previous winter.<sup>466</sup> Neither Arnleif nor Vilborg had a strong kinship network; Brandur testified that no one in Vilborg's mother's or father's family could support her.<sup>467</sup>

Not infrequently, young Icelandic clergymen were assigned a living in a region where they had minimal connections with the local population. This was certainly the case with Guðmundur Erlendsson when he was sent to Grímsey, although he quickly formed strong social bonds in the local community. When Guðmundur Erlendsson returned to Fell, he found himself in the very same parish in which he had grown up. In Sléttuhlíð, Guðmundur had a home-field advantage, so to speak. The farmers Sigurður Magnússon and Ásgrímur Magnússon numbered among his good friends,<sup>468</sup> and the *Grýlukvæði* seems to address – and incorporate into the narrative – a local audience.

Stefán Karlsson's research on literacy indicates that around 20–25% of household heads of larger farms in Iceland (excluding crofters and poorer householders) at the time of the 1649 oath were able to write.<sup>469</sup> When compared with data on Sléttuhlíð from the 1709 land register, which includes information on abandoned farms and crofts that had been occupied prior to the hardships of the late seventeenth century, this figure seems to be approximately correct. According to the testimony of locals, there were 13 tenant farms and 1 croft in Sléttuhlíð in 1709, but 17 tenant farms and up to 9 crofts in Sléttuhlíð in the mid-seventeenth century. Of the eight personal signatures, two can be identified with near-certainty as belonging to farmers from Sléttuhlíðarhreppur (Egill and Sigurður), rather than the larger Hofshreppur. Both are in the right-hand column of signatures (5 names), whereas Sigurður's brother Ásgrímur's name is in the left-hand column (4 names), tentatively suggesting that the document was first signed by the *hreppstjórn* for Hofshreppur and then by the *hreppstjórn* for Sléttuhlíð. If this is the case, then Jón Gunnarsson, Sveinn Gunnarsson and Einar Sturluson also lived in Sléttuhlíð, but only the latter two signed in their own hand. This indicates a minimum active literacy rate of around 23.5% for household heads on tenancies. By the 1670s, this

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<sup>465</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid., 203–4.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>468</sup> Cf. Hallur Guðmundsson, "Ó þú fallvalta veraldarvist," ed. Kristján Eiríksson & Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, st. 92. Electronic edition, *Bragi Óðfræðivefur*, <http://bragi.arnastofnun.is/ljod.php?ID=21167/>; 1529, 4r.

<sup>469</sup> Stefán Karlsson, "Skrifandi bændur 1649," *Gripla* 19 (2008): 31–50.

may well have risen; the 5-person *hreppstjórn* in 1673/1676 accounts for just over 29% of tenant farm householders.

What is not least noteworthy about these documents is the close relationship between kinship and scribal competency. Four of five men on the 1673 *hreppstjórn* were sons of a father who could write well, highlighting both the importance of intergenerational literacy in a country without primary school institutions and the highly uneven distribution of active literacy within local communities. On a much smaller scale, one can observe the same processes of constructing cultural competences within local farm households in Sléttuhlíð as Þórunn Sigurðardóttir has examined in connection with the manuscript culture of elite families. At the same time, the transfer of scribal culture relied heavily on the ability of older members of individual households to pass on skills to the next generation. During an extended period of hardship, such as that affecting all of Iceland at the end of the seventeenth century (see 2.1), families lacked the necessary resources to educate their children in the home. Children of parents experiencing hardship were often raised as paupers in only marginally more food-secure households.<sup>470</sup> Surviving men and women left starving home parishes to become migrants, often labelled as vagrants since they no longer contributed their labour to a fixed household. At least one of Guðmundur Erlendsson's grandsons died of exposure while wandering between farms, not long after being punished for attacking a woman who refused to give him food (see 4.15.2).<sup>471</sup>

Following the period of great hardship in the last years of the seventeenth and first years of the eighteenth century, the population of Sléttuhlíð in 1703 was only 100 (including paupers), living on 16 farms and two crofts. Eight lived at the church farm of Fell, 80 on tenant farms and 5 in the crofts. The average number of occupants for tenancies in Sléttuhlíð was 5, but 2.5 for the crofts.<sup>472</sup> Seven women and children were enumerated as *sveitarómagar* or paupers (7% of the population): three children and one elderly woman listed as *til niðursetu* (i.e., placed within local households) and three women *til umferðar* ('in circulation,' i.e., *flutningsómagar*).<sup>473</sup> Strikingly, the male-to-female ratio is 1:2 for the age group 20–29, and 5:9 for the age group 30–39. Although the population of Sléttuhlíð is not large, one finds disproportionately few adult males born in the period 1663–1683, who might

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<sup>470</sup> Loftur Guttormsson & Ólöf Garðarsdóttir, "Þurfamenn í manntalinu 1703," in *Manntalið 1703 þrjú hundruð ára: Greinar í tilefni afmælis*, ed. Ólöf Garðarsdóttir & Eiríkur G. Guðmundsson (Reykjavík: Hagstofa Íslands, 2005), 102–3.

<sup>471</sup> On the relationship between poverty, labour and vagrancy, see Jón Jónsson, *Á Mörkum menskunnar: Viðhorf til föruþólks í sögnum og samfélagi*, Sýnisbók íslenskrar alþýðumenningar 23 (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2018), 45–83.

<sup>472</sup> Some tenancies had more than one household, as was common in Iceland. In calculating the average number of occupants per tenancy, the farm (*jörð*) is treated as a single entity.

<sup>473</sup> Árni Magnússon & Páll Vídalín, *Manntal á Íslandi árið 1703, tekið að tilhlutun Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalíns, ásamt manntali 1729 í þrem sýslum* (Reykjavík: Hagstofa Íslands, 1924–1947), 305–6.

otherwise be expected to be an important labour force within the community. Disease, famine and dangerous working conditions have all clearly taken their toll, but out-migration to other regions of Iceland almost certainly plays a role here. The population of Sléttuhlíð continued to decrease rapidly between 1703 and 1709. According to the chronicle *Sjávarborgarannáll*, the death toll for Fellssókn in the *stórabóla* epidemic was 17 in 1707–1708.<sup>474</sup> As discussed earlier, the most vulnerable were young adults, as the survivors of the 1655–58 and 1670–72 epidemics had gained immunity, and the strain did not appear to be quite as fatal for very young children as for older persons.<sup>475</sup> The epidemic, compounded with the poor fishing season in North Iceland the following year,<sup>476</sup> led to a rapid drop in the number of households in the parish from 18 to 15 by October 1709. Only one croft was still occupied. If the number of occupants per tenancy and croft remained approximately the same as in 1703, fewer than 80 parishioners may have lived on these struggling farms.

The 1709 land register for Sléttuhlíð ends with the general comment that sea ice frequently plagues the community, sometimes even well into the summer, causing cold weather and poor farming and fishing years. Livestock die and fish cannot be caught until late summer, and the poor die of the resulting hardship.<sup>477</sup> Although the overall picture is one of a struggling community, in which the poorest are at great risk of starvation, inability to cope with extended periods of famine is characteristic for the early modern period.<sup>478</sup>

In 2.1, I discuss evidence that the hardships of 1690–1710 had a profound but largely hidden impact on Icelandic literature, manifesting as a lack of innovation and activity rather than a flowering of writing in response to the crisis. At a community level, one can argue that the local cluster of literacy observed in Sléttuhlíð in the mid-to-late seventeenth century was all but obliterated, with a scattering impact on the preservation of Guðmundur Erlendsson's poetry. Surviving poetry manuscripts belong to owners outside of Sléttuhlíð (see 4.15 and 5).

It is difficult to reconstruct the popular literary culture of Sléttuhlíð in the mid-seventeenth century, but a examination of the surviving sources suggests that many local tenant farmers actively cultivated literacy through writing activities, and that householders with the resources to pass on reading and writing skills to their sons did so. It is not improbable that the social life of a poet here

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<sup>474</sup> ÍA 4, 322. The chronicle contains very exact death tolls by parish and evidently draws on documentary evidence.

<sup>475</sup> Jón Steffensen, "Bólusótt á Íslandi," 296–97, 301–8.

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid.*, 323.

<sup>477</sup> Local farmers Snjólfur Magnússon and Tómas Gíslason signed the document at Fell on 15 October 1709. Árni Magnússon & Páll Vídalín, *Jarðabók*, vol. 9 (Skagafjörður), 282–83.

<sup>478</sup> Gísli Ágúst Gunnlaugsson, "Um fátækramál á 18. öld og stjórn fátækramála á 18. öld," 67.

would have been quite lively before the hardships of the 1690s reduced Sléttuhlíð to a shadow of its former self.

Guðmundur Erlendsson's insistence on writing for ordinary people does reflect his duty as a clergyman to cultivate religious literacy, but his enthusiasm for addressing the audience immediately before him stems at least in part from his close relationship with his own immediate community as co-participants in this literary culture. Guðmundur's educated peers in the clergy, such as the Reverend Böðvar, were potential sources of new material and poetry commissions, as were his powerful patrons. On the other hand, a poem such as *Búraunakvæði* ("Kærir bræður kann eg ei") from c. 1644–1645, which opens by addressing an audience of "dear brothers" and chronicles the everyday woes of a farmer, belongs squarely to Sléttuhlíð.<sup>479</sup> The minor troubles of *Búraunakvæði* include chronic shortages of farming and fishing equipment, poor haying seasons and badly behaved horses trampling on meadows and escaping over to the Skálá farm. The poem presents these shared adversities in a comic light, affecting the parson and other householders equally.

#### 4.10 Fathers and sons

Many of Guðmundur Erlendsson's poems that survive in his own hand are specifically intended for a young audience. These include *Barnarós* ('The Children's Rose')<sup>480</sup> *Heilræði barnagafræðing meistara Antoní Múreti* ('The Advice of the Master of Child Discipline, Antonius Muretus'), an abundance of poetry based on Æsopic fables (see below) and a complete *rímur* based on the life of Æsop.<sup>481</sup> Even in poems not intended for children's ears only, parent-child relationships are a recurring theme in Guðmundur's works.

Guðmundur Erlendsson's attitudes to parenting are informed by humanist teachings that emphasised physical discipline and prayer as important tools for raising well-behaved, obedient children. *Heilræði barnagafræðing meistara Antoní Mureti* contains Guðmundur Erlendsson's translations of the tenets of the so-called *barnagafræðingur* ('child-discipline expert') Marcus Antonius Muretus or Marc-Antoine de Muret (1526–1585), a well-known humanist who was born in France but fled to Italy in 1554, where he spent the last decades of his life in Rome.<sup>482</sup>

If the punishments recommended by parenting experts of the day were harsh, it was also an era in which those convicted of a crime could be sentenced to disfigurement, impairment or death for

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<sup>479</sup> 232, 147r–148r.

<sup>480</sup> The date 1625 is written at the end of *Barnarós* in the bottom margin of 76r in 232, evidently the date of composition. At the time, Guðmundur's eldest son Jón would have been in his fourth year.

<sup>481</sup> The *rímur* cycle is based on Maximus Planudes's *Æsopi Vita*, which was included in most Latin editions of Æsop's fables.

<sup>482</sup> 232, 114r–116r.

everything from premeditated murder to witchcraft, theft and incest. Given the strictness of the law, it is unsurprising that it was considered to be in children's own best interests to prevent them from growing up to commit acts of violence that might lead to their execution.

On 26 February 1676, for instance, members of the district assembly for Hegranes (*Hegranesþing*) convened at Fell in Sléttuhlíð to discuss the case of Guðmundur Halldórsson, who on 12 February of the same year stabbed two brothers with a knife at the farm of Skálá in Sléttuhlíð, which was Guðmundur's legal residence at the time.<sup>483</sup> The brothers, Einar and Ingimundur Halldórsson, were the sons of Halldór Ingimundarson, who had their injuries officially examined. According to the record of the case, all parties involved were very poor, but Einar and Ingimundur did not have a local reputation as troublemakers and the cause of the attack was unclear. The brothers must have been young men, since their father acted on their behalf throughout. Guðmundur was presumably also fairly young. Guðmundur ran away after the stabbing but was captured and sentenced at the Alþingi to be stabbed twice (once for each brother) and beaten harshly.<sup>484</sup> Had either of the brothers died from an infected wound, Guðmundur would certainly have been executed.

Steering young people away from a life of crime is a central theme in Guðmundur Erlendsson's *Vilbaldsrímur* (see below). However, Guðmundur Erlendsson's objective in singling out youths as an audience demographic, distinct from adults and with somewhat different literary tastes and educational needs, also relates to the lack of an intermediary stage in the Icelandic schooling system between the catechism (mandatory for all) and the Latin schools at Hólar and Skálholt (open to only a select group of males). In the absence of public grammar schools for young pupils of the type common in urban areas of Denmark, tutoring and fosterage at benefices such as Fell in Sléttuhlíð played an important role in the education system.

Fables attributed to (or composed in the tradition of) the fabulist Æsop were a popular way of introducing early modern European children to Latin, even if Æsop was a storyteller associated with Ancient Greece. One of the few major works in Guðmundur Erlendsson's corpus that has been published to date is a collection of short poems based on Æsop's fables: 56 poems printed in a 1967 popular edition by Grímur M. Helgason, who based the text on 232.<sup>485</sup> It seems probable, as Grímur M. Helgason suggests, that Guðmundur's first acquaintance with these fables would have been as a pupil at Hólar,<sup>486</sup> unless Guðmundur's parents had already introduced him to Æsop at home in Fell.

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<sup>483</sup> Þí Sýslumaðurinn í Skagafjarðarsýslu og bæjarfógetinn á Sauðárkróki 0000 GA/1-1-1, 110–14. It is unclear whether Guðmundur was the brother's relative.

<sup>484</sup> ÍA 4, 305.

<sup>485</sup> Guðmundur Erlendsson, *Dæmisögur Esóps í ljóðum*, ed. Grímur M. Helgason (Reykjavík: Æskan, 1967), xiii.

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.



According to Guðmundur Erlendsson, his sources for his Æsop poems are Latin translations by Guiliemus Gaudanus (Willem Hermans of Gouda, c. 1469–1510) and Hadrianus Barlandus (Adrianus Cornelius Barlandus, 1486–1538).<sup>487</sup> Hermans’s and Barlandus’s Latin adaptations of fables by Æsop and Avianus were specifically geared towards students of Latin and appeared in print together as early as 1513.<sup>488</sup>

Guðmundur’s copy of Æsop was likely one of the many dozens of Latin editions printed in Germany in the sixteenth century. The order of Guðmundur’s verse-fables in 232 matches the exact order in which their prose equivalents appear in the Hermans-Barlandus editions. A Latin version of Æsop’s fables for use in schools was published in Copenhagen in 1626, but by this time Guðmundur was already an ordained minister. A Danish translation of Æsop also existed, Christiern Pedersen’s *Esopi leffnit oc nogle hans fabel* (Malmø, 1554), but it is doubtful that Guðmundur made use of a vernacular translation.

In bringing Æsop to a young Icelandic audience, Guðmundur followed the example of Einar Sigurðsson of Eydalir, who composed extensively for his own children. Einar’s verses based on Æsop’s fables number only 22, in a metre known from late medieval Christian poetry (*helgikvæði*) and secular poetry of the seventeenth century.<sup>489</sup> Each fable is condensed into four lines, with the fifth line containing the moral. Einar’s verses were not printed, and it is impossible to know whether Guðmundur was directly inspired by Einar. Guðmundur’s fable-poems, like Einar’s, have five-line stanzas with the moral in the fifth line, but each fable is told over the course of many stanzas. It thus becomes easier to follow the narrative, while the moral forms a regular refrain that becomes imprinted through repetition on the speaker/listener over the course of the poem’s performance.

As an example of Guðmundur’s approach, the following are stanzas 4–5 from Guðmundur’s verse translation of “De Hædo et Lupo” (‘The Kid and the Wolf’):<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>487</sup> 232, 518r. Hermans’s Latin prose adaption of Avianus’s fables was first printed in 1502/1503, cf. C.G. Van Leijenhorst, “William Hermans of Gouda,” in *Contemporaries of Erasmus: A Biographical Register of the Renaissance and Reformation, Vols. 1–3*, eds. Peter G. Bietenholz & Thomas Brian Deutscher (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), vol. 2, 184–85.

<sup>488</sup> Paola Cifarelli, “Fables: Aesop and Babrius,” in *The Classical Heritage in France*, ed. Gerald Sandy (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 444–45.

<sup>489</sup> Einar Sigurðsson, *Ljóðmæli*, 229.

<sup>490</sup> The Latin text (taken from a printed sixteenth-century Goudanus-Barlandus edition) reads: “Capra cum esset pastum itura, hædum domi concludit monens aperire nemini, dum redeat ipsa. Lupus, qui id procul audierat, post matris discessum pulsat fores, voce caprisat, iubens recludi. Hædus dolos præsentiens. Non aperio, inquit. Nam et si vox caprisat, tamen equidem per rimulas lupum video. Morale: Obaudire parenti filios, ipsis est utile, et iuvenem seni decet auscultare” Martinus Dorpius, (ed). *Fabvlarum qvæ hoc libro continentur interpretes, atque authores Sunt hi. Guilielmus Goudanus, Hadrianus Barlandus, Erasmus Roterodamus, Aulus Gellius, Angelus Politianus, Petrus Crinitus, Ioannes Antonius Campanus, Plinius Secundus Nouocomensis,*

Kiða fór og kvistinn skar, en kiddi hinn litli eftir var; úlfurinn grái því kom þar með þekka rödd og blíða; farsæl börn foreldrunum hlýða.	The she-goat left to gnaw the grass, the kid remained behind; along then came the grey wolf with a tender voice and kind; prudent children obey their parents.
Gjörði hann í sér geitarhljóð og grátlegana á þeim stóð; honum ansar höðnu jóð: Hér er ei neins að bíða; farsæl börn foreldrunum hlýða. <sup>491</sup>	From his throat came goaty sounds, a plaintive bleating clear; to which the nanny's kid responds: There's no use waiting here; prudent children obey their parents.

Obedience is an important virtue for any early modern child to learn, but Guðmundur's fable-poems also give future pupils of Latin schools a head start on the material on the curriculum. This preparatory function must have had a wide appeal for parents in cultural households, and the circulation of Guðmundur Erlendsson's narrative and fable poems for youths quickly spread beyond North Iceland. Six are preserved in AM 439 12mo, ff. 33r–53v: *Ferðaknútskvæði* ("Fáein ljóð um Ferðaknútt"),<sup>492</sup> *Kvæði um einn skrumara* ("Herramaður út réð einn"),<sup>493</sup> *Kvæði um tóu og hafurinn* ("Á heitu sumri hafurinn fann"),<sup>494</sup> *Dæmisagan af hananum og refnum* ("Haninn sat í hárrí eik"),<sup>495</sup> *Kvæði um ljónið, úlfinn og refinn* ("Eftirdæmið eina")<sup>496</sup> and *Parísarkvæði* ("Með gulllegt epli guðinn Þór").<sup>497</sup> Unfortunately, Jón Þorkelsson interpreted their presence in a manuscript owned and partly (or completely) written by the poet Stefán Ólafsson of Vallanes as sufficient evidence that Stefán had composed them, even though Jón observed that AM 439 12mo was plainly a poor re-copying of an existing exemplar.<sup>498</sup> As a result of their publication in Stefán Ólafsson's corpus, presented as an

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*Nicolaus Gerbellius Phorcensis, Laurentius Abstemijs, Laurentius Valla, Aesopi Vita ex Max. Planude excerpta & aucta* (n.p.: [1520]), Vr–v.

<sup>491</sup> Guðmundur Erlendsson, *Dæmisögur Esóps í ljóðum*, 110–12. Einar's version of the same tale is: "Úlfurinn gjörir sér geitarhljóð, / girnist frekt í kiðlings blóð, / Andar kiddi inni kyr: / Ei var geitin skegglaus fyr. / Móðurráð eru barni best, hún byrgir dyr." ('The wolf makes goat-sounds, thirsts for the kid's blood. The kid answers, staying inside: "The goat wasn't beardless before." A mother's advice is best for her child: it secures the door.'). Einar Sigurðsson, *Ljóðmæli*, 111.

<sup>492</sup> 232, 148r–149r.

<sup>493</sup> 232, 150v–151v.

<sup>494</sup> 232, 154r–155r.

<sup>495</sup> 232, 161v–162v.

<sup>496</sup> 232, 155v–157r.

<sup>497</sup> 232, 144r–145r.

<sup>498</sup> Stefán Ólafsson, *Kvæði*, vol. 2, 252–94, esp. 252. The manuscript consists of two main codicological units, the first of which is in Stefán Ólafsson's hand and contains a large number of Stefán Ólafsson's own poems (identified as such by the poet). The second is a copy of these six poems only.

autograph copy, there is particular reason to emphasize the certainty of Guðmundur Erlendsson's authorship.

The hand that copied Guðmundur Erlendsson's poems in AM 439 12mo is somewhat clumsy and occasionally even careless in following the exemplar.<sup>499</sup> If the hand is Stefán Ólafsson's, then it may date from his own youth in the late 1620s or early 1630s. Stefán was only two years younger than Guðmundur Erlendsson's eldest son, Jón the Elder, even if the two went to different Latin schools (Stefán was educated at Skálholt, Jón at Hólar). It is not inconceivable that Stefán's parents, the Rev. Ólafur Einarsson and Kristín Stefánsdóttir, tasked their son with copying Guðmundur Erlendsson's didactic fables while still at home at Kirkjubær as part of his home education, in preparation for formal schooling. Stefán seems to have been the manuscript's owner, as the leaves are bound together with material in Stefán's own hand that he composed in 1636. The slim duodecimo format is noteworthy, contrasting with the thick quarto format in which the same poems are copied in 232 and suggesting personal rather than household ownership and use.

#### 4.10.1 *Vilbaldsrímur*

Guðmundur is similar to Icelandic authors of the Enlightenment in that he turned to writers and scholars in mainland Europe for literary models in composing children's literature. In *Vilbaldsrímur* ('*Rímur* of Vilbald'), Guðmundur intertwines a verse translation of Jörg Wickram's *Der Jungen Knaben Spiegel* with a running commentary on education, the behaviour of young men and the ethics of child discipline. Like Wickram's source text, Guðmundur's commentary is unequivocal on the importance of physical punishment from a young age,<sup>500</sup> but Guðmundur cautions parents against beating their children violently or in anger.<sup>501</sup>

*Vilbaldsrímur* is a rare case of a *rímur* specifically addressing a young audience, opening with the lines: "Ævintýrið eitt eg vil, / ungu fólki kynna. / Að hlýða vel og hlusta til, / hagur er þess og svinna" ('I wish to present an adventure for the young people. It would be prudent and beneficial for them to listen well and pay close attention.').<sup>502</sup> Other examples of child-oriented *rímur* do exist, such as

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<sup>499</sup> Stefán Ólafsson, *Kvæði*, vol. 2, 287.

<sup>500</sup> E.g., "Næsta þegar nýr er sveigur, / nú er hann hægt að beygja. / Líka meðan ljár [er] deigur, / lofar hún sig að sveigja. / Svo er hið besta börnin smá, / me[ð] bæn og vendi að aga, / ef menn vilja ei af þeim fá, / angur og sorgardaga" ('Wood is most easily bent while new, and the scythe-head allows itself to curve while soft. So it is best to discipline young children with prayer and the rod if one does not wish them to bring grief and days of sorrow.')

<sup>501</sup> "Ekki má þó bukka börn, / né berja þau sem þræla. / Það er þeim engin vamma vörn, / verður af heldur kæla" ('But one should not thrash children, nor beat them like slaves. It gives them no protection from disgrace, leading rather to animosity.')

<sup>502</sup> 232, 423r. This opening loosely mirrors that of Einar Sigurðsson of Eydalir's "Af efni sönnu yngismönnum ævintýr," a short poem expounding the Fable of the Belly and the Members, which is presented in its first lines

Guðný Árnadóttir's *Músar- og hreindýrsríma*, a nineteenth-century *ríma* composed "fyrir börn og bríkur auðs" ('for children and women') and dedicated to the poet's sister Þóra.<sup>503</sup> The Rev. Jón Bjarnason's *Jesú Síraksbók snúin í rímur* ('The Book of Jesus Sirach rendered into *rímur*') in the 1612 *Vísnaþók*, better known as *Síraksrímur*, also makes constant reference to a parent-child relationship between the speaker-performer and a passive listening audience.<sup>504</sup>

*Síraksrímur* are unusual in that they are based on a non-narrative source text, the apocryphal Book of Ecclesiasticus. Not only is Ecclesiasticus a non-narrative work, it is a very loosely structured collection of maxims, so Jón Bjarnason's choice to adapt it into a *rímur* form is surprising.<sup>505</sup> They are extremely long (17 *rímur* in all), yet cover only the first 43 chapters of Ecclesiasticus; chapters 44–51, which contain a chronologically ordered recitation praising prominent figures from Enoch to Simon the son of Onias, are omitted entirely. The utter lack of any clear narrative structure makes it difficult to envision them being intended for linear performance as a complete work. If interpreted as a work for evening performance in a domestic setting, *Síraksrímur* are a strong candidate for the most tedious *rímur* ever composed – more likely to send the audience to sleep over a period of hours than to fortify their morals. However, Jón Bjarnason succeeds in combining plain, naturally flowing language with a variety of fairly complex metres throughout the work, sometimes with regular in-rhyme as well as end-rhyme. A single maxim can be confined to a memorable short 3-line or 4-line stanza, making it easier for a very young listener to comprehend, memorize and repeat individual teachings. In this sense, they function as a pedagogical tool more than an orthodox substitute for evening entertainment. Further evidence that they were intended for pedagogic use can be found in the division of the *rímur* cycle into 43 sub-sections or chapters (*kapítular*), reflecting the exact chapter divisions of the Icelandic prose translation of Ecclesiasticus. These divisions in the *rímur* serve as a reference aid, linking the *rímur* text to the text of the prose translation and thus simplifying the task of locating stanzas on specific subjects.

Unlike *Síraksrímur*, *Vilbaldsrímur* has a plot quite similar to that of a prose romance, telling the entertaining narrative about two young foster-brothers: the commoner Friðbert and the aristocrat

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as an adventure for the benefit of youth. Einar Sigurðsson, *Ljóðmæli*, 109. Einar's poem is intended for a mixed male and female audience, cf. Einar Sigurðsson í Eydöllum, *Ljóðmæli*, 111.

<sup>503</sup> Guðný Árnadóttir, "Músar- og hreindýrsríma," in *Huldumál: Hugverk austfirskra kvenna*, ed. Guðbjörg Jónsdóttir (Garðabær: Þjasi, 2003), 88–92.

<sup>504</sup> E.g., "Kæru synir, kristin börn / kenning heyrið mína" ('Dear sons, Christian children / hear my teaching') *Síraksrímur*, *ríma* 1, st. 48, ll. 1–2; "Heyrðu sonur, heilög boð / sem hef eg í ræðu minni" ('Hear, son, the holy commandments of which I speak'), *Síraksrímur*, 1 *ríma*, st. 60, ll. 1–2; "Son minn lát þér lynda best / í lágri stétt að standa." ('My son, be content to remain in a low station') *Síraksrímur*, 1 *ríma*, st. 65, ll. 1–2. Jón Torfason & Kristján Eiríksson (eds.), *Vísnaþók Guðbrands*, 363–64.

<sup>505</sup> Bishop Gissur Einarsson of Skálholt's translation of Ecclesiasticus does include very loose thematic section headings, cf. Christian Westergård-Nielsen (ed.), *Gissur Einarssons islandske oversættelse af Ecclesiasticus og Prouerbia Salomonis*, Bibliotheca Arnarnagana 15 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 195).

Vilbald. Unlike the medieval *Konráðs saga keisarasonar*, in which the criminal lowborn foster-brother Roðbert betrays the more talented highborn foster-brother Konráð, Friðbert is the well-behaved boy and Vilbald is a juvenile delinquent, whose too-lenient mother is strongly opposed to physical discipline. Friðbert and his tutor Felix rise to great honour. Vilbald spends his time drinking in the bad company of Loddari (who is eventually executed) rather than studying and is eventually reduced to the lowly status of a *spilmaður* or street musician, who styles himself Hintsí and intensely regrets his misspent youth.<sup>506</sup> In a semi-inversion of a bridal quest, his still loyal foster-brother and tutor locate him, recognize and hire him (but do not reveal their own identities), then lead him back home and cleverly reconcile him with his father – the anti-disciplinarian mother has since died. The prodigal Vilbald turns over a new leaf and all ends well.

The first *mansöngur* of *Vilbaldsrímur* states that the work is based on a printed adventure. This is presumably the Danish chapbook translation, the Rev. Rasmus Hansen Reravius's *Unge Karles og Drenges Spejl* (also known as *Vilbaldus*).<sup>507</sup> Reravius framed Wickram's novel as a pedagogical tool, suggesting that it provided enjoyable reading material for young schoolboys at the same time as it taught a powerful lesson about discipline and obedience.<sup>508</sup> Reravius worried that young people had a tendency to be attracted to the wrong sort of books, morally corrupting novels "saa som Vgelspegels Historie / Jtem Eurioli oc Lucretiæ / oc andre saadanne." ('such as the story of Eulenspiegel, and also of Eurialus and Lucretia and the like.').<sup>509</sup> Reravius's translation was republished in 1626, which is the edition that Guðmundur Erlendsson may have used.<sup>510</sup>

Moral corruption of youths and commoners by the wrong sort of reading material is an anxiety that book historian Henrik Horstbøll observed repeatedly in early modern Danish writings on popular reading practices.<sup>511</sup> Concern with the effect of amorous and worldly literature on children's spiritual health had been expressed by Martin Luther himself, whose caution was translated in turn into Icelandic in the 1598 hymnal printed at Hólar.<sup>512</sup> This sentiment is repeated by Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson in his foreword to the *Vísnaþók* in 1612, in which he complains not of widespread

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<sup>506</sup> Vilbald roams on foot "með sekkpípu.. og sitrið" ('with a sackpipe.. and a zither'), cf. 232, 445v. Guðmundur seems to have understood a sackpipe as a pipe carried in a sack, relating that when Vilbald plays he does not keep the pipe in the sack: "Aldrei stakk hann pípu í sekkinn" ('he never put the pipe into the sack'), 232, 447v.

<sup>507</sup> [Jörg Wickram], *Vnge Karlis oc Drengis Speiel*, trans. Rasmus Hansen Reravius (Copenhagen: 1571). For a detailed study of Reravius's work in Denmark, see Morten Fink-Jensen, "Printing and Preaching after the Reformation," 15–47.

<sup>508</sup> Cf. Rasmus Hansen Reravius's preface to *Vnge Karlis oc Drengis Speiel*, A3v–A4r.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid*, A4 r.

<sup>510</sup> Rasmus Nyerup, *Dansk og norsk Litteraturlæxicon* (Copenhagen: 1819) vol. 2, 420.

<sup>511</sup> Henrik Horstbøll, *Menig mands medie: Det folkelige bogtryk i Danmark 1500–1840* (Copenhagen: Det kongelige bibliotek, 1999), 25.

<sup>512</sup> *Ein ny Psalma Bok*, AA ii r–v.

illiteracy but of the common people's preference for trashy and morally dubious literature.<sup>513</sup>

Whereas Reravius's preface attacks comic novels and prose romances, Guðbrandur attacks poetry, and his inclusion of biblically themed *rímur* in the *Vísnaþók* has been interpreted as an unsuccessful attempt to supplant secular *rímur*. How interesting children actually found *rímur* is uncertain, since many secular *rímur* described scenes of warfare in terms virtually incomprehensible to those without at least some understanding of how to interpret kennings for battles, swords and so on. In *Vilbaldsrímur*, Guðmundur Erlendsson is clearly targeting the same adolescent demographic as Reravius, with bromance taking the place of battles and brides.

As argued above, one of Guðmundur Erlendsson's characteristic features as a *rímur* poet is his experimentation with various poetic genres and expectations in the *mansöngur*. What is somewhat unusual about *Vilbaldsrímur* is that the *mansöngvar* convey the pedagogical message of the translator's preface in the printed Danish edition, rather than the Icelandic poet's own personal complaint. This is not a conventional use of the *mansöngur*, even if the *rímur* form does allow poets to engage in social commentary and moralizing through the platform of the *mansöngur*. In this sense, *Vilbaldsrímur* can be compared to Sigurður Breiðfjörð's celebrated *Númarímur*, in which several of the *mansöngvar* express the anti-war message of Sigurður Breiðfjörð's source text, Jean-Pierre Claris de Florian's *Numa Pompilius, Second Roi De Rome* from 1786.

The moralizing *mansöngur* is most effective in live performance before an audience, since it motivates the listener to pay close attention to the performer's message in order not to miss the action. A casual or impatient reader can easily skip over the *mansöngur*, since it typically forms a distinct section of the *ríma* separate from the main narrative, and it is common for manuscript copies of *rímur* to mark the beginning of the main narrative with an enlarged initial that makes it particularly simple to identify the division. In this sense, a *mansöngur* can exist visually in a manuscript without making its way into performance.

#### 4.11 The mountain of sorrow

Guðmundur's oldest son, Jón the Elder, died in a drowning accident in the Eyjafjarðará river on August 16th, 1649, three months after being ordained as the parson for Munkaþverá. He was about 28 years old and unmarried. The impact of his early death on his entire family cannot be overstated. Both his parents were devastated and continued to mourn their lost son for the rest of their lives. Hallur's account of his father's reaction to his brother's death in "Ó þú fallvalta veraldarvist" (st. 69–70) is that the poet fell silent, pale and unresponsive, and his hair turned grey from the shock. In a poem dating from c. 1657 ("Tímanum hef eg illa eytt"), Guðmundur describes his mortal life as sixty-

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<sup>513</sup> Jón Torfason & Kristján Eiríksson (eds.), *Vísnaþók Guðbrands*, 3.

two years of misery in the valley of tears, stating that he has not taken pleasure in anything save for Jesus “síðan eg var á síðu ber / og sútir fékk mín kvinna” (‘since I became bare-sided and my wife was filled with mourning’).<sup>514</sup> In a rare personal glimpse of Guðrún Gunnarsdóttir in Guðmundur’s poetry while she was still alive, he states that “við erum bæði á bátnum þeim / sem bylgjur yfir um stefnir heim” (‘we are both on the boat that is heading home over the waves’) and then alludes cryptically to a ominous dream in which she has foreseen – according to 232 – that their path would converge “Eyjafjarðar yfir um á” (‘crossing over the Eyjafjarðará river’?).<sup>515</sup>

One poem preserved in 232 is *Vísur um barnkind* (“Setja vil eg samtals korn”), Guðmundur Erlendsson’s verse-prayer on behalf of his infant son Jón during what must have been a life-threatening bout of childhood illness at Glæsibær in 1622.<sup>516</sup> In it, Guðmundur refers affectionately to the baby as *barnsfugl minn* (‘my birdie’), “ljúfur af mildu sinni” (‘sweet with his mild disposition’), describing his own anguish and helplessness over his son’s illness. Although the poem could be classified as occasional poetry, it also contains a specific vow. Guðmundur petitions God to spare his child from extended suffering, asking that God either take Jón immediately or heal the child. If Jón lives, then Guðmundur vows to bring up Jón to be God’s faithful servant – similar to the biblical prayer of Hannah, who asks that she be granted a son, who she will give up to God’s service.<sup>517</sup> Guðmundur emphasizes his desire that God’s will be done, and his verses are careful not to stray into the territory of charms or healing magic: “særing öngva set eg hér, / sá er ei bænar vegur” (‘I put no incantation here: that is not the road of prayer’), but he asks Jesus to bless the child and to remember that “þú varst hér ungabarn / áður fyrr í heimi” (‘You were once an infant, here in this world’).<sup>518</sup> That Jón should drown – like his uncle Skúli – as a newly ordained minister must have been an almost unbearable tragedy.

The Rev. Jón Magnússon of Laufás in Eyjafjörður sent Guðmundur and Guðrún a consolatory poem in a gesture of friendship, describing their son’s burial and assuring the mourning parents that they would be reunited with Jón in heaven, who had been taken to foster by God.<sup>519</sup> Jón Magnússon, too, was a bereaved parent, and he used a similar comparison to fosterage when describing the loss of his

<sup>514</sup> 232, 365r–v. The poem (which begins on 364v, immediately after Guðmundur’s *Vísur um barnkind*). A defective copy is also preserved in 1529 in Skúli’s hand, 77r–v.

<sup>515</sup> 232, 365v.

<sup>516</sup> 232, 363r–364v. The final lines are: “Gjörð voru ljóð í Glæsibær/ þá galaði Jón minn litli” (‘The verses were made in Glæsibær, when my little Jón bawled.’), 364v.

<sup>517</sup> 232, 363v.

<sup>518</sup> 232, 364r.

<sup>519</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, *Heiður og huggun*, 197–212.

own children; he commemorated the lives of Guðrún (d. 1638), Magnús (d. 1639) and Steinvör (d. 1640) in a series of three poems that have recently been edited by Þórunn Sigurðardóttir.<sup>520</sup>

Guðmundur Erlendsson's *Rímur af Elía spámanni* ('*Rímur* of the prophet Elijah,' 1651) begin with a powerful expression of his sorrow for his lost son in the first *mansöngur*, while the subsequent *mansöngvar* continue to deal with themes of loss and consolation, and the poet's own inner struggle between hope and despair.<sup>521</sup> The opening lines are conventional enough for a *rímur*, but they are the words of a poet who anticipates and even welcomes his own death: the poet-narrator's objective is to complete a final poem before his final sleep.<sup>522</sup> The *mansöngur* continues by contrasting the consolation of the Word of God with the corporeal pleasures and balms of the world, which grow from a shrivelled root.

Bæinn minn af bölinu kell,  
bæði fornu og ungu,  
héðan af má það Harmafell  
heita á mína tungu.

Því má Guðs hið góða mál  
grátið hjartað að seðja  
mun ei annað mædda sál  
í mínu brjósti gleðja.

Hef eg eftir son að sjá,  
sannar hjartað þetta:  
enginn huggun mannleg má  
mínum hörmum létta.

Treður hjartað treginn sár,  
trosnar gjörðin ljóða.  
Fást mun aftur fagnaðarár,  
þá finn eg barnið góða.<sup>523</sup>

('Ruin has gripped my farm – the ancient and the young. Henceforth, it shall be called the Mountain of Sorrows in my tongue. Therefore, the good language of God must satiate a weeping heart. For a

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<sup>520</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, *Heiður og huggun*, 285–307.

<sup>521</sup> 232, 294r–310r.

<sup>522</sup> "Út af helgu letri ljóð / lystir mig að stofna / og við bæta einum óð / áður en fer eg að sofna" ('I wish to compose a poem from the Holy Scriptures and to add yet another ode, before I go to sleep') 232, 294r.

<sup>523</sup> 232, 294r.



troubled soul, nothing else will bring happiness to my breast. I mourn the loss of a son. The heart proves this: that no mortal comfort will lighten my grief. Bitter mourning treads the heart; the poetry unravels. A time of rejoicing will come again, when I find the dear child.’)

Guðmundur Erlendsson’s innovative use of the *mansöngur* as a platform for giving voice to intense grief builds directly on the established genre of the *harmkvæði* or lament, which typically begins with the mourner expressing his or her sorrow in having lost a loved one – and personal feelings of loss, loneliness and helplessness – and gradually moving towards consolation and a sense of reconciliation through the act of speaking of the loss.<sup>524</sup> As in other areas of life, biblical examples were sought as models. Þórunn Sigurðardóttir’s study of the poems of the Rev. Jón Magnússon of Laufás commemorating his three eldest children – Guðrún (d. 1638), Magnús (d. 1639) and Steinvör (1639–1640) – demonstrates how King David’s response to his infant child’s illness and death was used as one such model: David weeps and fasts for his sick child, praying that it may be healed, but on the child’s death he ends his fasting and mourning.<sup>525</sup> Jón Magnússon’s poems emphasize that in heaven his children are at peace and no longer suffering; perhaps drawing on his own experience as a boy raised by foster-parents, he envisions them as being fostered by God.<sup>526</sup> In addressing Guðrún and Guðmundur, Jón Magnússon’s advice is to cease weeping and “Í drottni hafið nú Davíðs geð” (‘In the Lord, put on David’s temper’).<sup>527</sup>

The fundamental struggle depicted in the first *mansöngur* of *Rímur af Elía spámanni* – and “Ó þú fallvalta veraldarvist” – is arguably between speech and silence. Guðmundur Erlendsson pointedly ignores his friend’s advice about taking David as a model and is unusually frank about the depths of his grief, two years after his son’s death. His poetry expresses an anguish so deep as to extinguish all pleasure in the physical world surrounding him; the poet’s difficulty is in breaking his silence to name the cause of his grief. In the second *mansöngur*, Guðmundur returns to the healing power of speaking – and the act of composing poetry – as a powerful weapon in one’s personal battle against despair:

Þeim er best sem berst við þrá  
bragsmið eitthvört stunda á  
svo að ei sorg né synda gjall  
setjast nái á hyggju pall.<sup>528</sup>

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<sup>524</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, *Heiður og huggun*, 123–5.

<sup>525</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, *Heiður og huggun*, 305–7.

<sup>526</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, *Heiður og huggun*, 307.

<sup>527</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, *Heiður og huggun*, 209.

<sup>528</sup> 232, 296r.

(‘It is best for those who battle with longing to compose poetry, so that neither sorrow nor the dross of sin manage to settle on the bench of the mind.’)

Guðmundur contrasts the effects of poetry with bloodletting – a common solution to a range of medical problems according to humoral theory, which was practiced throughout early modern Europe. So adamant against bloodletting is Guðmundur that he compares it to the work of sorcerers and false priests who bloody themselves in the service of Baal in the story of the prophet Elijah. Guðmundur’s refusal to treat himself or his household members with bloodletting may have been a contributing factor to his own family’s generally good health, as the practice served mainly to weaken already sick patients and introduce the risk of infection, but this negative view of bloodletting was not widespread in the seventeenth century. It may even have been considered idiosyncratic. A manual published at Hólar in 1671 recommended bloodletting as a highly effective cure for young and old alike.<sup>529</sup> A modern reader might expect a rural minister of the mid-seventeenth century to be more concerned with healing magic in the form of incantations and runes, but the importance of poetry for healing is in fact a central message of the *rímur*.<sup>530</sup>

Continuing to examine his grief in the third *mansöngur*, Guðmundur contrasts the effects of happiness and sorrow on himself as a poet and performer: the wounded mind disengages from the world and composes stilted poetry, while the happy spirit takes pleasure in verse. As if the *rímur* itself is strengthening the poet as he progresses deeper into the narrative, he begins to make depreciatingly humorous remarks on his own failings as a composer of verse – a more traditional subject for a *mansöngur*.

The mourning poetry of the baroque era is not a venue for full personal expression. In the words of Margrét Eggertsdóttir, early modern Icelandic poets composed works that “provided a way for painful emotions and experiences to find structured expression and must have been a source of release and comfort for many a reader or listener.”<sup>531</sup> Although the *rímur* form is subject to conventions of its own, the *mansöngur* can function as an outlet for the poet’s private emotional expression, which Guðmundur exploits to its fullest in the first *mansöngur*. Through the *rímur* form, Guðmundur can invert the more common model of comparing one’s own losses to the experiences of individuals in the Bible – the pattern used by Jón Magnússon. The voice of the grieving poet on his farm is interwoven through a sweeping account of a kingdom in crisis, without these narratives directly touching each other.

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<sup>529</sup> *ENCHIRIDION Það er Handbookarkorn* (Hólar: 1671), [120]–[23].

<sup>530</sup> In the seventh and final *mansöngur*, Guðmundur clarifies that he does not see non-magical forms of medicine as wicked: his focus is mainly on the melancholy and anguish caused by grief. 232, 307v.

<sup>531</sup> Margrét Eggertsdóttir, *Icelandic Baroque*, 386.

## 4.12 All the world's tyrants

In Guðmundur Erlendsson's poetry, the past is mainly a source of wisdom and consolation. One work in particular, *Einvaldsóður*, deals with human history as difficult heritage. In many respects, *Einvaldsóður* is Guðmundur Erlendsson's magnum opus, and one of his most widely disseminated poems in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century manuscript culture. According to rubrics of extant copies, it dates to 1658, near the apex of Guðmundur's career as a clergyman and poet and about four years after his daughter Margrét's extremely favourable marriage to one of Bishop Þorlákur Skúlason's nephews, Jón Illugason (see 4.15.1). However, no seventeenth-century copies exist.<sup>532</sup>

The subject of *Einvaldsóður* is the history of the world – from beginning to end – in 307 unrhymed stanzas in the *fornyrðislag* metre. It is a translation of an extremely long poem of 6338 lines by a well-known Scottish poet, Sir David Lyndsay of the Mount. Lyndsay's poem was first published in Scotland in c. 1554 as *Ane Dialog betuix Experience and ane Courteour, off the Miserabyll Estait of the World, or The Monarche*, possibly with the support of John MacAlpine at the University of Copenhagen.<sup>533</sup> The poem takes the form of a dialogue between the character of Experience (envisioned as an ancient man) and an aging courtier, whose career closely mirrors that of Lyndsay's own. Over the course of the poem, the courtier goes from an initial state of anxiety and despair over contemporary affairs to a deeper understanding of the human condition.

In 1591, a Danish translation was published – obviously capitalizing on the recent marriage of Princess Anne of Denmark to King James VI of Scotland. The translation project was a joint effort by a Danish clergyman, Jakob Mattsøn, and a young theology student at the University of Copenhagen, Andrew Robertson, who was a native of Aberdeen. The printed Danish translation was Guðmundur Erlendsson's source for *Einvaldsóður*. The printed book was nearly fifty years old at the time Guðmundur transformed it into *Einvaldsóður*, and stanza 5 of the poem depicts it as old and tattered. Guðmundur expanded several of Sir David Lyndsay's descriptions of the ancient world with the help of the *Chronica Carionis* and other sources.<sup>534</sup>

Lyndsay is better known in Scotland as the playwright of *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*, a morality play performed in 1552 and 1554 that was most recently staged as part of the research project *Staging and Representing the Scottish Renaissance Court* (2012–2014), led by Dr. Greg Walker of

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<sup>532</sup> In Robert Cook's unpublished stemma, he also identified rubrics dating *Einvaldsóður* to 1688. These seem to derive from a scribal error. Internal evidence in the poem conclusively rules out such a late date.

<sup>533</sup> Janet Hadley Williams, "Shady Publishing in Sixteenth-Century Scotland: The Case of David Lyndsay's Poems," *Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand Bulletin* 16.3 (1992): 97–105; Janey Hadley Williams, "Lyndsay and Europe: Politics, Patronage, Printing," in *The European Sun: Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference on Medieval and Renaissance Scottish Language and Literature*, ed. Graham Caie, Roderick J. Lyall, Sally Mapstone & Kenneth Simpson (Strathclyde: Tuckwell Press, 2001), 333–46.

<sup>534</sup> Robert Cook, "The *Chronica Carionis* in Iceland," *Opuscula* 8 (1985): 226–63.

Edinburgh University. *Staging and Representing the Scottish Renaissance Court* involved staging two productions of Sir David Lyndsay's play *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* in three performance settings: a full-length outdoor performance at Linlithgow and performances of a reconstructed earlier version of the play at Stirling Castle and the ruins of the Great Hall of Linlithgow Palace.<sup>535</sup>

*Einvaldsóður* differs fundamentally from *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* in that the latter is written as public theatre, with parts for male and female speakers. As adapted for an Icelandic setting, *Einvaldsóður* is a dramatic monologue, set within the outermost framing narrative of a farmhouse interior in evening during the autumn. Framing narratives (or framing fictions) were extremely common in Middle English (and Scottish Renaissance) poetry. Judith Davidoff defines this type of opening as "a brief narrative that introduces the remainder of the work and provides a context within which the remaining core of the poem is understood," adding that the most common manifestation is a brief first-person venture into a natural setting at a given time for a certain reason, leading to an experience that unfolds as the poem's core.<sup>536</sup> *The Monarche* has just such a framing narrative: the depressed poet-narrator cannot sleep and goes out into a park, where he encounters the figure of Experience. The core of the poem is a long dialogue (mainly spoken by Experience) on human history. At the close of their dialogue, the narrator returns home and commits the experience to paper. Characteristic of framing narratives of this kind is that they remain at a distance from the core: the poet does not refer constantly back to the framing narrative once it has been established in the opening, and there is often no closing sequence that returns to the opening setting, except in cases of dreams or visions.<sup>537</sup> More complex framing narrative sequences, such as that found in *Einvaldsóður*, in which one framing narrative is embedded within another, are also found in the corpus analyzed by Davidoff.

In some structural respects, framing narratives bear some resemblance to the *mansöngur* (see 4.8.1), which is typically in the first-person and is an "open" frame to the *ríma* that follows. However, the *mansöngur* is typically a lyric, non-narrative opening to a narrative core, whereas framing narratives are better described as micro-plots that introduce a potentially non-narrative core. Possibly due to the popularity of *rímur* in Iceland, framing narratives such as that found in *The Monarche* – and *Einvaldsóður* – are comparatively rare in Icelandic poetry, and the pattern of going out into a natural setting, as in *The Monarche* and repeated in *Einvaldsóður*, is still more unusual for an early modern Icelandic poem. *Einvaldsóður*'s complex nested structure is arguably a technique to bridge this

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<sup>535</sup> See Greg Walker, "Reflections on Staging Sir David Lyndsay's *Satire of the Three Estates* at Linlithgow Palace, June 2013," *Scottish Literary Review* 5.2 (2013): 1–22.

<sup>536</sup> Judith M. Davidoff, *Beginning Well: Framing Fictions in Late Middle English Poetry* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1988), 17.

<sup>537</sup> Judith M. Davidoff, *Beginning Well*, 18.

distance for an audience not familiar with narrative conventions such as going out on a May morning for a leisurely walk.<sup>538</sup> The second and third framing narratives of *Einvaldsóður* expand on the framing narrative of *The Monarche*: the poet-narrator jumps from the Icelandic domestic interior to the fantasy setting of the grove, and from there directly to Experience’s dialogue (although this is simplified to the speech of an old man instructing a young man, their identities are not revealed). Within this innermost framing narrative, the arc of temporal history is represented as a corrupted body: the poem’s core (like that of *The Monarche*) is structured upon the human figure in the Dream of Nebuchadnezzar, a statue whose lower body is constructed from increasingly less precious materials, representing a series of great empires. The statue is ultimately smashed to pieces in a scene of apocalyptic destruction from above. In *The Monarche*, the last section of the poem is a lengthy account of the Last Judgement, but *Einvaldsóður* substitutes this with a vision of world history in which Martin Luther ushers in a new dawn of religious freedom from the oppression of the Church of Rome.

This triple framing narrative can be broken down thus:

<i>Framing Narrative 1</i>		<i>Framing Narrative 2</i>		<i>Framing Narrative 3</i>	
<b>Time/setting</b>	<b>Speaker</b>	<b>Time/setting</b>	<b>Speaker</b>	<b>Time/setting</b>	<b>Speaker</b>
Evening at a farmhouse, from dusk to nightfall  (present, closed)	The poet-narrator	A grove, for the duration of Framing Narrative 3  (past, open)	The poet-narrator	A tree, for a day and a morning  tree  An old man and a young man talk together, sitting in a tree  (past, closed)	An old man (Experience)

The closure of the third and innermost narrative frame brings the audience back to the poem’s outermost frame, by which point it is time the listeners to go to bed – reflecting the actual passage of time of a real-time performance of *Einvaldsóður*. The second framing narrative is left open: the poet-narrator does not “exit” the grove to return to the farmhouse. Instead, he reveals that both the grove (*lundur*) and the tree (*eik*) are riddles: the grove is the mind (*lund*), and the second narrative

<sup>538</sup> Cf. Judith M. Davidoff, *Beginning Well*, 38–40.

frame describes the act of reading – in the mind’s eye – the third and innermost narrative frame, which in turn are the leaves of the Danish book in which the conversation has taken place.

The riddles of the book-tree and the grove-mind are examples of the type of word game popular in Baroque poetry, in Iceland as elsewhere.<sup>539</sup> However, Guðmundur provides the answers to his own riddles, so the audience is not left to puzzle out his meaning. The poem’s 307th and final stanza reiterates that Guðmundur composed *Einvaldsóður* for the simple, and not the harsh literary critic Zoilus, a sentiment echoed in much of his poetry (see 4.9).

As in *The Monarche*, *Einvaldsóður* presents human history as a series of exemplars on the corrupting effects of power from antiquity to modern times, culminating in a polemical exposure of the abuses of the Church and the misery inflicted on the common people by corrupt clerics. Experience, personified as an ancient man in angelic garb, is the keeper of the collective experience of all humanity: past, present and future. Experience uses his knowledge for didactic purposes, using examples from the past to illustrate the pressing need for moral improvement in the present day. The vices of the kings and queens of antiquity are held up as a mirror for the courtier (and the poem’s audience) from which to learn and better themselves at a personal level in their own individual lives.

This aspect of *The Monarche* is amplified in *Einvaldsóður*, so that the poem’s second to fifth sections are essentially structured around the biographies of six absolute monarchs of the ancient world (Ninus, Semiramis, Sardanapalus, Cyrus, Alexander and Julius Caesar), with an emphasis on their moral behaviour. The first five monarchs are all characterized as morally corrupt, but Julius Caesar embodies Christ-like qualities and is identified as a virtuous and just ruler of his people. Although these biographical episodes in *Einvaldsóður* are in strictly chronological order (differing in this respect from *The Monarche*, which periodically recapitulates past events), the pattern of history is continually repeating itself. Great empires rise and collapse again into the dust due to human folly, a cycle that is extended into the present day in the sixth and final section on the history of the Roman Catholic Church, which – like previous empires – becomes steadily more corrupt with the passage of time as it becomes a more powerful entity. This closing section has a corporate target, giving very little attention to the biographies of individuals within the Church. The pseudo-historical Pope Joan narrative, for example, is told in a mere twelve lines (st. 259/1–260/4), playing gleefully on the language of pregnancy and birth in Icelandic, which can be characterized both as an illness – *jóðsótt* (‘child-disease’) – and a process of weighting down and lightening the body: “Það var eitt sinn / þar í Rómaborg / að páfinn sýktist / í prósessiunni; / varð þá léttari / verðugur faðir” (‘Once it so happened

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<sup>539</sup> Margrét Eggertsdóttir, *Icelandic Baroque*, 26.

there in Rome that the Pope sickened in the procession and became lighter – a worthy father’).<sup>540</sup> The overall effect is to foreground the collective sins of a corrupted body in the present day, which history demonstrates is destined to fall. It is therefore imperative to turn away from the world, to love one’s neighbour, to heed one’s conscience and finally to die well – a departure that offers the only hope of release from the world’s sufferings.

The concept of human history as a potential source of moral edification for present-day audiences is a very old one, but positioning ancient secular and political history as a tool for present-day personal and social reform is a common feature of humanist publications. The Danish translator and scholar Anders Sjøffrinssøn Vedel’s thus interpreted Saxo’s *Gesta Danorum* as beneficial reading for a contemporary, non-scholastic readership: “Thi saadanne Scrifft / ere icke at ansee eller at læse / for Tidkaart eller Vellyst aleniste / som mange letfærdige Menniske meene / men føre langt større Nytte oc Fordeel met sig / naar som de ellers læsis met flid oc grandgiffuelighed” (“For such writings are not to be considered or read for pastime or pleasure alone, as many frivolous persons believe, but for a far greater benefit and advantage, when they are read with diligence and gratitude.”).<sup>541</sup> In the case of Saxo, the thirteenth-century writer could provide a modern Danish reader with the gift of insight into the history of Christianity in his own country, but *Gesta Danorum* could also act as a mirror when read properly, showing examples of God’s goodness and wrath.<sup>542</sup> Vedel, in his preface, compares social concord between the farmers, the bourgeoisie, the clergy and the aristocracy to a sweet and pleasing harmony.<sup>543</sup> If any one of these four strings goes out of tune, the result will be a cacophony to which God – or the heart of Christ – does not want to listen.

Unusually for Guðmundur Erlendsson’s poetry, the emphasis is almost exclusively on secular history. Most biblical material from *The Monarchie* has been cut in *Einvaldsóður*, with the important exception of the Deluge and the Tower of Babel (st. 10–37). Later in the poem (st. 192–97), Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and its interpretation are also introduced, but the connection to the prophet Daniel is not mentioned. Jesus and the apostles are mentioned as living during the time of the Roman Empire only in a single stanza (189), and Jesus and Peter are named near the beginning of the poem’s sixth and final section (st. 201–2), explaining the origins of the Pope in Rome.

Stanza 275 of *Einvaldsóður* (quoted at the beginning of Chapter 2), suggests that the poem – or a first draft thereof – was started shortly before 1650, since the statement that almost a hundred years

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<sup>540</sup> *Einvaldsóður*, st. 259, ll.1–6.

<sup>541</sup> Saxo Grammaticus, *Den Danske Krønike som SAXO GRAMMATICVS screff*, trans. Anders Sjøffrinssøn Vedel (Copenhagen: 1575), [1].

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid.*, [2].

<sup>543</sup> *Ibid.*, [14].

have passed since the Reformation in Iceland does not tally easily with the date of 1658. For a poet affiliated with Hólar, the year 1550 would presumably mark Year One of the new era. Stanza 276 confirms this, stating that just over 30 years in addition to this had passed since Luther had cleansed the Christian teachings, presumably referring to Luther's 1517 publication of the *Ninety-five Theses*. There is no reason to believe that early modern Icelandic poets never revisited an earlier composition, and the tragic death of Guðmundur's son Jón on August 16th of 1649 (see 5.11) is sufficient explanation as to why he might have put aside *Einvaldsóður* for several years.

If Guðmundur began work on *Einvaldsóður* at the end of the 1640s, this would align closely with the period of turmoil surrounding the Second English Civil War and the execution of King Charles I in January 1649. As discussed in 4.6.1, news of the execution spread rapidly to Iceland, and it is entirely plausible that Guðmundur composed his short cycle on the regicide based on printed material newly arrived on merchant ships or fishing vessels in the early summer. *Einvaldsóður* is the product of the same decade as Hobbes's *Leviathan*, and Hobbes's definition of the state of war as "the known disposition thereto" rather than the sum of localized acts of physical fighting sums up powerfully how Iceland could not fully be a nation at peace in an era of prolonged international conflict.<sup>544</sup> Religion was a major point of contention in many of these conflicts, and it is notable that adapting *The Monarche* for a seventeenth-century Icelandic audience, Guðmundur Erlendsson expanded heavily on anti-clerical themes in *The Monarche*, adding pseudohistorical material not found in Lyndsay's poem, such as the legend of Pope Joan.<sup>545</sup> For a cleric in seventeenth-century Iceland, there could not be a safer target on which to heap one's scorn than the Pope in Rome. In contrast to *The Monarche*, however, *Einvaldsóður* carefully avoids criticism of present-day practice.<sup>546</sup>

Glimpses of Guðmundur Erlendsson's engagement with the carnivalesque surface throughout *Einvaldsóður*, which gleefully presents a string of immoral tyrants and their follies. In contrast to the revenge poem targeting his own ex-lover (see 4.3), *Einvaldsóður* serves to expose the insatiability of worldly power in the absence of a strong moral compass. One of its most absurd scenes describes a ritual supposedly practiced in Rome as part of the process of electing a new pope, in which a great crowd gathers to witness the spectacle of the unfastening of the pope's pants, with the appointed

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<sup>544</sup> "For as the nature of Foul weather, lyeth not in a shower or two of rain; but in an inclination thereto of many days together: So the nature of War, consisteth not in actual fighting; but in the known disposition thereto, during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. All other time is PEACE." Thomas Hobbes, *LEVIATHAN, OR, The Matter, Form, and Power OF A COMMON-WEALTH ECCLESIASTICALL AND CIVIL* (London: 1651), 62.

<sup>545</sup> Robert Cook, "'Habet, habet,'" in *Margarítur: Hristar Margréti Eggertsdóttur fimmtugri 25. nóvember 2010* (Reykjavík: Menningar- og minningarsjóður Mette Magnussen, 2010), 72–73.

<sup>546</sup> Carol Edington, "'To speik of Preistis be sure it is na bourds': Discussing the priesthood in pre-Reformation Scotland," in *The Reformation of the Parishes: The Ministry and the Reformation in Town and Country*, ed. Andrew Pettegree (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 22–42.



examiners lifting their hands to heaven and joyfully proclaiming the news: “Hallelujah! He has balls!”<sup>547</sup> The bizarre ritual is the fruit of a corrupt institution’s obsession with the corporal body, inventing elaborate and crowd-pleasing but spiritually empty performances – men exposing themselves in public to ensure that women passing as male cannot accidentally rise to power. Playing to a gullible audience, priests knowingly represent worthless props as mystical objects imbued with great spiritual power (e.g., peacock feathers as angel feathers) in order to enrich themselves. The hierarchy of the “spiritual monarchy” is nothing but a giant pyramid scheme.

#### 4.13 Bitter fruit

In the winter of 1663–1664, Guðmundur Erlendsson composed a skaldic *drápa* that he initially titled *Vökubón* (‘A supplication for vigil’) but later changed to *Vökuvarpa* (‘Net of vigil’).<sup>548</sup> In the context of Guðmundur Erlendsson’s manuscripts of *Gígja*, *Vökuvarpa* is an important poem for dating purposes. It is one of Guðmundur’s last compositions, and the poem contains strong internal evidence of its date. Unusually for Guðmundur’s manuscripts, the rubric indicates the poem’s metre rather than its melody: “með Bragarhätt so sem Lilia” (‘with the same metre as *Lilja*,’ i.e., a *hrynhend drápa*).<sup>549</sup> *Lilja* was associated with a living song tradition in the seventeenth century, and the metrical affiliation suggests that Guðmundur intended his poem for performance. Similar to *Lilja*, *Vökuvarpa* deals with Lutheran salvation history as Guðmundur Erlendsson understands it, essentially calculated from the Reformation rather than the birth of Christ.

*Vökuvarpa* opens with a dramatic call for “heilagur andi í heiminn sendur / að hindra og straffa villu og syndir” (‘The Holy Spirit, sent into the world to hinder and punish error and sin’) to wake the poet and to grant him eloquence, that he might warn his audience and not hide God’s will.<sup>550</sup> The poet repeatedly calls for the audience to wake, listen and obey the Lord. The poem seeks to arouse strong emotions, and its language is strong, straightforward and unequivocal.

The poem is a warning for vigilance in times of violence and crime. Guðmundur’s targets include *ofdrykkjur* (‘excessive drinking’), *frillulífi* (‘premarital sex’), *hórdómur* (‘adultery’), *galdrar* (‘sorcery’) and *morð* (‘murder’).<sup>551</sup> Buried in the poem is also a single line that could easily be mistaken as a clergyman’s generalization on the wicked state of the world: “mæður sínum börnum bana” (‘mothers

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<sup>547</sup> *Einvaldsóður*, st. 263.

<sup>548</sup> 1529, ff. 29r–34r. To date, the poem has not been edited.

<sup>549</sup> 1529, 29r.

<sup>550</sup> 1529, 29r.

<sup>551</sup> 1529, 32r.

slay their children’).<sup>552</sup> In fact, the entire poem is arguably a response to a traumatic event at Guðmundur Erlendsson’s own farm.

In 1663, an unmarried maidservant at Fell in Sléttuhlíð, Ólöf Magnúsdóttir, concealed her pregnancy and gave birth secretly in the cowshed. Ólöf was convicted of slitting the infant’s throat immediately after birth and was executed by drowning in the river Hofsá on August 24th of 1663, two days after her trial.<sup>553</sup> According to the *Fitjaannáll* chronicle, the unnamed father of her child was also unmarried,<sup>554</sup> meaning that the pregnancy would normally have resulted only in a fine for both parents, whereas the penalty for deliberate infanticide was death.

Historian Már Jónsson concluded in his study of secret births in post-Reformation Iceland that pregnancy outside of marriage was a taboo subject; it may even have been socially expected for unmarried women to remain silent over their condition until the time had come for them to give birth.<sup>555</sup> Based on his own research and a similar study of secret births in rural Finland, Már argued that it would have been virtually impossible for a woman to conceal for long that she had given birth.<sup>556</sup> In virtually all instances examined by Már Jónsson, Icelandic women who either abandoned their newborn children or committed deliberate infanticide were unmarried, impoverished young maidservants. Due to the evident code of silence surrounding the pregnant body and pregnancy out of wedlock, such women may not have fully realized the futility of concealment. By contrast, fathers were most likely to commit infanticide (or to coerce women into doing so) in cases of extramarital affairs or incest, which were punished much more harshly under the morality laws.<sup>557</sup>

Although she was at Fell in the capacity of a servant, Ólöf was neither destitute nor without family connections. If the genealogical information on Ólöf in the Íslendingabók database is correct, her parents were a farming couple at Vargá in Svalbarðsströnd, with close connections to the elite of North Iceland: Ólöf’s second cousins included both *sýslumaður* Benedikt Halldórsson (c. 1608–1688) and Benedikt’s wife Jórunn Hinriksdóttir (c. 1614–1693).<sup>558</sup> Most young adults did spend some years in service before starting a household of their own, and it was common practice for well-off farming couples to seek employment for their unmarried daughters at benefices, where they would gain valuable moral and cultural training in addition to practical work experience that would equip them

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<sup>552</sup> 1529, 32r.

<sup>553</sup> ÍA 1, 197 (*Vallholtsannáll*).

<sup>554</sup> ÍA 1, 498.

<sup>555</sup> Már Jónsson, *Dulsmál 1600–1900: Fjórtán dómar og skrá* (Reykjavík: Sagnfræðistofnun, 2000), 36.

<sup>556</sup> Már Jónsson, *Dulsmál 1600–1900*, 28.

<sup>557</sup> Már Jónsson, *Dulsmál 1600–1900*, 51.

<sup>558</sup> Jórunn copied NKS 56d 8vo for her cousin Ragnheiður Jónsdóttir. This is the only known seventeenth-century Icelandic manuscript by a female scribe who identifies herself. Guðrún Ingólfsdóttir, „Í hverri bók er mannsandi,” 311.

for running a large household.<sup>559</sup> Ólöf already had a strong kinship network and at least some financial assets to her name, and working for a parson's family would have increased her eligibility for a marriage of social and economic benefit to her entire family.

Ólöf's parents could easily have paid the small fine and arranged for the infant to be fostered, hence the surprise expressed in the *Fitjaannáll* that Ólöf would murder her newborn child. She may have feared her own family's reaction to the news more than the official provisions of the law – Blefken's claim that Icelanders cared little if their daughters became pregnant outside marriage is utterly unfounded (see 3.2). As discussed in 4.5, a woman's good reputation was framed as a no less valuable asset for marriage than proficiency in household management. A couple of a similar social standing might be discretely joined in matrimony following an unplanned birth, but a woman with close connections to one of North Iceland's most powerful couples who admitted to a consensual relationship with her social inferior would have brought shame on herself and all her kin.

The public disgrace of Ragnheiður Brynjólfsdóttir, the daughter of Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson of Skálholt, who gave birth to a son by her private tutor on February 15th of 1662, nine months after swearing a public oath to her virginity, is one of the best-known events in seventeenth-century Iceland, thanks in no small part to the historical novels of Torfhildur Hólm (1882) and Guðmundur Kamban (1930–1932), the latter of which inspired the narrative of the tragic opera *Ragnheiður* (2013). The historical Ragnheiður Brynjólfsdóttir had the support of at least one powerful kinswoman, Helga Magnúsdóttir of Bræðratunga, but Brynjólfur was furious with his daughter and her lover, and according to Jón Ólafsson of Grunnavík he sent away the infant to its father's family and treated Ragnheiður poorly after her pregnancy, often beating her.<sup>560</sup> Ragnheiður died barely a year after the scandal became known, on March 23rd of 1663.

Ólöf Magnúsdóttir confessed immediately to her act and did not appeal to the Alþingi for clemency. The court records do not survive, but Benedikt Halldórsson's presence would have been required due to his position as the local *sýslumaður*, and it would have been Benedikt who was responsible for investigating the case and condemning his own cousin to death. While death was no stranger to Sléttuhlíð, murders were rare, and the event must have been traumatic for the entire community. In alluding to this event, the poet-narrator's personal distance from his subject evaporates:

Í sumar höfum soddan dæmi  
séð með hryggð í vorum byggðum,  
uppvakinn er eg með slíku

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<sup>559</sup> Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, "Um íslensku prestkonuna á fyrri öldum," 227–28.

<sup>560</sup> Jón Ólafsson, *Safn til íslenskrar bókmenntasögu*, 247–48.

ólíðindaverki stríðu.<sup>561</sup>

(‘This summer, we have seen such a grievous example in our community. I have been awakened by such a harsh misdeed.’).

After barely alluding to the infanticide at Fell, the poem immediately turns to a second recent case of a child killed by a parent as additional evidence of Iceland’s dangerous moral decay:

Faðir einn á fyrra ári  
flengdi barnið svo til lengdar  
að í sömu svifum deyði,  
samsinnandi móðurinni.  
Vildi ekki hún því heldur  
hjálpa í nauð og forða dauða,  
gleymin sonar sárrar pínu,  
súr ávöxtur mannsnáttúru.<sup>562</sup>

(‘A certain father last year beat his child so excessively that he killed him with this act, with the mother’s consent. She had no wish to help in distress and prevent death, oblivious to her son’s tormented pain: the bitter fruit of man’s nature.’)

Although Guðmundur again refers to the event only in the most general of terms, the beating death he describes had occurred close to home. In the autumn of 1662, Sigurður Bergsson of Minni-Grindill in the neighbouring parish of Fljót beat his twelve-year-old son to death after the boy was caught sneaking food.<sup>563</sup> In this case, the father had been advised to discipline his son physically for stealing, but Sigurður’s excessive violence shocked the community, and news of the case spread widely. According to the *Vallholtsannáll* chronicle, the regional court could not reach a decision on punishment and requested the *lögmaður*’s assistance.<sup>564</sup> Sigurður was imprisoned in the household of the *sýslumaður* during the winter of 1662–1663, where he may have died prior to sentencing. Nothing is known of Sigurður’s fate.

A contemporary audience anywhere in North Iceland would have understood Guðmundur Erlendsson’s references perfectly well, and public performance of *Vökuvarpa* within the local

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<sup>561</sup> 1529, 32r.

<sup>562</sup> 1529, 32r–v.

<sup>563</sup> ÍA 1, 360 (*Vallholtsannáll*). Guðmundur may also have had in mind a separate case where a child was beaten to death in Eyjafjörður, cf. Sæmundur Eyjólfsson, “Um þann hugsunarhátt og þau einkenni Íslendinga á liðnum öldum, er mestu hafa ráðið um meðferð þeirra á landinu,” *Búnaðarrit* 10 (1896): 106.

<sup>564</sup> ÍA 1, 360 (*Vallholtsannáll*).

communities of Sléttuhlíð, Höfðaströnd and Fljót would speak directly to the witnesses to these deaths and their aftermath – potentially even its participants. The mother of the child killed in 1662 was presumably still alive when Guðmundur composed the poem in 1664. She was not tried together with her husband, but *Vökuvarpa* shows that she was considered morally culpable within the community for aiding her husband and making no attempt to stop the beating.

*Vökuvarpa* is a rare instance where a direct response to violence against children has been preserved in early modern Icelandic literature. In stark contrast to Guðmundur's disaster poems from earlier in his poetic career (see 4.6 and 4.8), however, *Vökuvarpa* is not composed for the purpose of spreading information about recent events. It was not uncommon for early modern European poets to compose gruesome execution ballads in which a cautionary narrative of a criminal's public punishment is sung for the benefit of shocked audiences and their souls.<sup>565</sup> No Icelandic equivalent seems to have existed, despite the legality of capital punishment, and *Vökuvarpa* does not address the consequences of violence for perpetrators. Possibly, Icelandic farming and fishing communities were too small for this type of ballad-writing on condemned criminals to have any appeal: despite their highly emotive language, execution ballads depict men and women who live and die at a distance from their audiences, not individuals with whom audiences have pre-existing emotional connections.

Guðmundur's *Gyðingaraunir* (dated to 1625 in 232), which lists the various divine punishments or curses supposedly meted out to the twelve tribes of the Jews for condemning Jesus Christ to death, is an example of how Guðmundur did not shy away from graphic depictions of the torments of the condemned in encouraging an Icelandic audience to repent.<sup>566</sup> Guðmundur's anti-Semitic source material reached Iceland with astounding speed: the polemical tract on which he based his poem seems to have originated in c. 1619 in Rome.<sup>567</sup> The year of *Gyðingaraunir*'s composition, 1625, is also that in which a prominent Jewish convert to Christianity – whose baptism by Bishop Resen in Vor Frue Kirke in Copenhagen in 1620 is the first on record for a Jew in Denmark – received a grant from

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<sup>565</sup> Una McLivenna, "Ballads of Death and Disaster," 278–82.

<sup>566</sup> *Gyðingaraunir* has never been edited. Mörður Árnason seems to have been unaware of its existence in his recent essay on anti-Semitism in the poetry of Hallgrímur Pétursson, but *Gyðingaraunir* is the single most anti-Semitic poem in the early modern Icelandic corpus and the work of a poet closely associated with Hallgrímur Pétursson. Mörður Árnason, "Um gyðingaandúð í Passíusálmunum," *Skírnir* 193.2 (2019): 223–82.

<sup>567</sup> Renata Segre, "Neophytes during the Italian Counter-Reformation: Identities and Biographies," in *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies, held at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 13–19 August, 1973, under the auspices of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1977), 138. Cited by François Soyer, *Popularizing Anti-Semitism in Early Modern Spain and its Empire: Francisco de Torrejoncillo and the Centinela contra Judíos (1674)*, *The Medieval and Early Modern Iberian World* 54 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 242. The source text's author was a Jewish-Italian convert to Christianity.

the University of Copenhagen to travel to Iceland.<sup>568</sup> Why the newly christened Johannes Salomon wished to make a voyage to Iceland is unknown, but the contemporary *Skarðsárannáll* chronicle confirms that Salomon arrived at the merchant harbour of Hofsós in the summer of 1625.<sup>569</sup> In light of the university's financial involvement, it is not improbable that Salomon's destination in Iceland was Hólar, since this was one of the country's main seats of learning. Hofsós is the harbour closest to Hólar, and the purpose of Salomon's visit may have been to provide linguistic assistance to Icelandic scholars in the Hebrew language, not least in light of interest among Icelandic humanists in learning the language.<sup>570</sup> Unfortunately, Guðbrandur Þorláksson's 1624 stroke left him bedridden, and it is uncertain who else within Iceland might have initiated and coordinated the visit. Guðmundur Erlendsson was in Eyjafjörður in 1625, but he would have known of Salomon's high-profile presence in Skagafjörður.

*Gyðingaraunir* does not exactly give the impression of a warm welcome, though a single stanza near its end suggests that righteous and good Jews can – and do – exist.<sup>571</sup> With the possible exception of Johannes Salomon, the Jews described in *Gyðingaraunir* are a people utterly unknown to Guðmundur and his local audiences. As in popular execution ballads of the day, the punishments supposedly inflicted on Jewish populations give bodily evidence of the condemned state of their unrepentant souls.<sup>572</sup> Rather than mobilizing persecution, however, the poet-performer solicits his listeners' disgust and horror for the purpose of awakening his audience to the serious consequences of their own failure to repent.

In the case of *Vökuvarpa*, Ólöf Magnúsdóttir's fate is not held up as a public example from which audiences can learn. *Vökuvarpa* interprets violence against children in the context of sin and apocalypse – a reminder of the “unnatural” tendencies of all human nature and the constant need for vigilance in the spiritual garden at the world's end. By placing two recent deaths of local children at the hands of their own parents alongside sins of which he himself had been found guilty (i.e.,

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<sup>568</sup> Martin Schwarz Lausten, *Jews and Christians in Denmark: From the Middle Ages to Recent Times, ca. 1100–1948* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 43–44. Sources differ as to whether his name before conversion was David or Daniel.

<sup>569</sup> *ÍÁ* 1, 221–22.

<sup>570</sup> Páll Eggert Ólason, *Menn og menntir*, vol. 3, 701–2. A few years after the printing of the Icelandic Bible was complete (in 1584, see 4.1), Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson of Hólar acquired a copy of the Old Testament in Hebrew, printed in Hamburg in 1587.

<sup>571</sup> “Enn þó megi fáein finnast, / friðarins börn með heldri siðum, / eru þó hinir hálfu fleiri, / er hafna þeim, / hvað Guð mun hafna” (‘A few of the Saviour's children may still be found with better ways, but the others who reject them far outnumber these, which God shall reject’) 232, 76r.

<sup>572</sup> The bizarre punishments are positioned as divine retribution for various sins against God that seem to have been entirely invented by the tract's author himself, such as manufacturing the nails for the cross on which Jesus was crucified. A woman named Beatrix is said to have proposed that the nails be made blunt, for which crime all Jewish women over the age of 30 are cursed to wake up with maggots in their mouths. 232, 75v.

premarital promiscuity and drunken quarrelling, cf. 4.3 and 4.7), he encourages his audience to waken inwardly to the bitter fruit of their own behaviour, not to cast stones at others.

#### 4.14 The perils of print

Guðmundur Erlendsson's early encounters with print have been discussed above (see 4.1.1). The relationship between manuscript and print was somewhat different in early modern Iceland than in more densely populated, urbanized areas of Europe, where networks of printers and commercial booksellers existed. The power of the Icelandic printers themselves to control the activities of the press during the early modern period is generally assumed to have been quite minimal, given the extent to which the incumbent bishop financed and managed its operations. Setting labour and maintenance issues aside, simply importing enough paper and ink for a print run of several hundred copies of a given title made print publication an expensive endeavour. Furthermore, in the absence of commercial centres, there are not known to have been well-developed channels for the sale of printed literature in Icelandic. Trading between Icelanders and foreign merchants took place at designated harbours in summer, but these merchants are not known to have participated in the Icelandic-language book trade.

That the place of printing was a bishop's seat had its advantages. Hólar was an established cultural and religious site at which the dissemination of learning took place. As in the case of Guðmundur's father, Erlendur Guðmundsson, the young men studying at Hólar provided a convenient supply of labour. These young men may also have been useful in the distribution of copies of new publications from the production site to more distant parishes in Iceland.

In publishing books required by local pastors for conducting services in Icelandic, the printing press not only encouraged uniform religious practice but took advantage of a ready-made market. Printing titles that each and every church in Iceland was obligated to own made the project of maintaining an operational printing press a marginally less risky business. However, Bishop Guðbrandur's account-book makes abundantly clear the difficulties involved in distributing printed Bibles.<sup>573</sup> Within the diocese of Hólar, the larger parish churches could be used as distribution centres, but individual ministers could often only make partial payments upfront (often in goods such as horses, butter and homespun cloth), and outright donations of Bibles had to be made to the poorer churches. In 1586, Bishop Guðbrandur personally brought 14 copies of the Bible to the national Alþingi assembly, all of which he was able to sell – Magnús Jónsson *prúði*, for example, bought three copies.<sup>574</sup> Otherwise,

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<sup>573</sup> See Einar Gunnar Pétursson (ed.), "Fáein atriði um biblíuna úr Minnis- og reikningabók Guðbrands biskups," 27–36.

<sup>574</sup> Einar Gunnar Pétursson (ed.), "Fáein atriði um biblíuna úr Minnis- og reikningabók Guðbrands biskups," 31.

organizing the distribution of books outside of the Hólar diocese seems to have been tricky; there is no evidence that the bishop of Skálholt was an active partner in the project of selling Hólar's books.

Attitudes toward the accomplishments of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Icelandic printers and editors still tend to be divided along disciplinary lines. From a linguistic perspective, the existence of an Icelandic printing press, the availability of a complete translation of the Bible and the consistent use of Icelandic in churches is often connected with the preservation of the Icelandic language.<sup>575</sup> In a literary context, by contrast, Icelandic scholars have a tendency to treat print in the early modern era as if it ought to have been the dominant medium of literary expression and exchange, reacting with disappointment to what is felt to be the underrepresentation of non-religious genres.<sup>576</sup>

Perhaps what ought to be more surprising is the existence of printed books in Icelandic not directly aimed at serving the needs of the Church. The late sixteenth century and the first two decades of the seventeenth century were a time of great ambitions for the Icelandic printing press, enabled largely through the patronage of Guðbrandur Þorláksson, who was appointed Bishop of Hólar in 1571. In 1578, for instance, the printing press issued an edition of the *Jónsbók* law code, edited by *lögmaður* Jón Jónsson (1536–1606), which was republished in 1580. Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson used print mainly to advance his humanist program of education and spiritual and moral reform,<sup>577</sup> but he also used printing as a means to attack his enemies, cf. the publication of *Anatome Blefkeniana* in 1612. Very early in the history of the printing press in Iceland, Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson also used the press to print a series of incendiary pamphlets that became collectively known as the *Morðbréfabæklingar* ('Murder-letter pamphlets').<sup>578</sup>

In an Icelandic context, the *Morðbréfabæklingar* (published in 1592, 1595 and 1608) are precisely the kind of text that one might expect to circulate via scribal publication: not many copies were likely to be needed, they made very direct accusations and they caused great controversy, since the pamphlets promote the bishop's cause in connection with a bitter property dispute between

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<sup>575</sup> Trygve Skomedal & Stefán Karlsson, "Fjórar aldir frá útkomu Guðbrandsbiblíu," *Saga* 22 (1984): 41–56.

<sup>576</sup> Jón Helgason, introduction to *Ármanns rímur eftir Jón Guðmundsson lærða (1637) og Ármanns þáttur eftir Jón Þorláksson*, v.

<sup>577</sup> At least 40 of the 100+ books printed at Hólar were translations by Bishop Guðbrandur himself, mainly of works by German authors. Margrét Eggertsdóttir, "'Frómum og guðhræddum, leikum og lærðum': um Guðbrand biskup Þorláksson og þýðingar hans," in *Áhrif Lúthers: siðaskipti, samfélag og menning í 500 ár*, ed. Hjalti Hugason, Loftur Guttormsson & Margrét Eggertsdóttir (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 2017), 145–74.

<sup>578</sup> Jón Þorkelsson (ed.), *Morðbréfabæklingar Guðbrands biskups Þorlákssonar, 1592, 1595 og 1608, með fylgiskjölum* (Reykjavík: Sögufélag, 1902–1906).



aristocratic families (see 4.3).<sup>579</sup> Spreading propaganda via ephemeral printed pamphlets was a common tactic in political disputes elsewhere in Europe (albeit on a much larger scale), targeting both the general reading public and specific audience groups whose support (or at least non-opposition) was vital.<sup>580</sup> In such cases, however, both parties were armed with presses and effective networks of distribution and circulation. In creating a one-sided pamphlet war, Bishop Guðbrandur was closely emulating the pamphleteers of Germany and France in a literary milieu where the infrastructure for such warfare did not exist. His foray into this type of printing demonstrates how he treated the press as his own personal property, and as a political tool as much as a means of circulating religious texts.

From the mid-1590s onward, increasing emphasis was placed on production of books for domestic and personal devotional reading for ordinary Icelanders. In 1596, for example, Arngrímur Jónsson *lærði's Biblíá Parva* was printed at Hólar in a duodecimo format.<sup>581</sup> What the title refers to as a “small Bible” is a tiny, unillustrated catechism, clearly designed to maximize its affordability and produced with the spiritual needs of the individual reader or pupil in mind. Not even a preface has been included. This was followed in 1597 by a duodecimo prayerbook translated from Andreas Musculus’s German original and a house postil in octavo format, marketed “fyrir ungdóminn og almúgafólkið” (‘for youth and the common people’).<sup>582</sup>

An anonymous 1610 printed translation of the Large Catechism is evidently the work of either Guðbrandur Þorláksson (who clearly authored the preface) or Arngrímur Jónsson *lærði* (1568–1648), who composed the poem presenting the translation to its readers. It contains what Margrét Eggertsdóttir characterizes as Guðbrandur’s manifesto in publishing matters.<sup>583</sup> According to its title-page, it was translated from a Danish edition, although no specific author, translator or editor is mentioned. Halldór Hermansson identified its source as a 1605 Danish translation of Johann Spangenberg’s popular adaptation of Luther’s work, but this is somewhat doubtful.<sup>584</sup> The book is

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<sup>579</sup> An 1596 pamphlet in octavo format on the sin of bearing false witness may also relate to this dispute, although Bishop Guðbrandur does not present it thus in his preface, cf. Halldór Hermansson, *Icelandic Books of the Sixteenth Century (1534–1600)*, 51–52.

<sup>580</sup> Jeffrey K. Sawyer, *Printed Poison: Pamphlet Propaganda, Faction Politics, and the Public Sphere in Early Seventeenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 38.

<sup>581</sup> Although evidently a translation, the source text has not been identified. See Halldór Hermansson, *Icelandic Books of the Sixteenth Century (1534–1600)*, 48.

<sup>582</sup> See Halldór Hermansson, *Icelandic Books of the Sixteenth Century (1534–1600)*, 53, 55.

<sup>583</sup> Margrét Eggertsdóttir, “Frómu og guðhræddum, leikum og lærðum’,” 166.

<sup>584</sup> Martin Luther, *Den store D. MARTINI LUTHERI Catechismus eller Børnelærdom, vdi Spørmaal forfattede ved JO. SPANGENBERGIUM, vdsat paa Danske aff JENS NIELSSØN, CLOSTERGAARD. Oc her hoss den christelige Husstaffel M. CYRIACI SPANGENBERGII, fordansket ved JACOB HENRICKSØN* (N.p.: 1605), cf. Halldór Hermansson, *Icelandic Books of the Seventeenth Century, 1601–1700*, *Islandica 14* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 1922), 98–99. See C. Bruun, *Bibliotheca danica. Systematisk fortegnelse over den danske literatur fra 1482 til 1830 efter samlingerne i det Store kongelige bibliotek i Kjøbenhavn. Med supplementer fra*

small but thick: 320 leaves in an octavo format. The book's preface states that it is intended to benefit the simple and little educated, but the preface is directed at the clergy and others of higher social standing.<sup>585</sup> Guðbrandur explains that he has printed neither sagas nor other material for worldly amusement (although he suspects that these might be more easy to sell), but only books of merit that aid the reader in learning true knowledge of God and awakening to repentance and fear of the Lord, sharing God's word in a poor land at the outermost edge of the world: it is the duty of God's servants to teach, preach, admonish and warn.<sup>586</sup> Guðbrandur comments that it often happens that the rich, the powerful and those who are *ættstór* ('descended from a great family') do not care for God's word, but the poor and the simple accept it and receive it with thanks. He continues, however, by singling out the Westfjords as the best book-market in Iceland.<sup>587</sup>

Explaining his reasons for publishing the Large Catechism, Guðbrandur explains that in spite of the clergy's best efforts, ministers typically serve two to three churches. Rural parishes in Iceland are so sparsely populated that parish services are often attended by only a single man from a farm, or a scant few more, unlike the situation in cities and towns abroad.<sup>588</sup> The common people have generally learned Luther's Small Catechism well, but the theological explanations of the Small Catechism are not detailed enough on their own. Therefore, Guðbrandur urges farm-masters and farmers across Iceland – and anyone else educated enough to be able to read, or to have the book read to them – to purchase a copy and let it be read in their homes for the benefit of children and other subservient members of the household, so that the simple might develop their knowledge and understanding of God's word.<sup>589</sup>

Over Guðbrandur Þorláksson's lifetime, communal reading and singing of religious material from printed books became a pillar of household piety. During Guðmundur's years as a student at Hólar in the 1610s, no one would have predicted the Icelandic printing press's rapid decline in the following decade – publication dwindled after 1622 and ceased altogether for a time after Bishop

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*Universitetsbibliotheket i Kjobenhavn og Karen Brahes bibliothek i Odense* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1877–1931), vol. 1., col. 258. Spangenberg's *Large Catechism* uses a question-and-answer format to explain the Lord's Prayer, which is not done in the 1610 Icelandic version. The Icelandic translation could potentially have been based on a slightly earlier Danish edition, such as Bishop Jacob Madsen's *Catechismus, eller vor Christelig Børne-Lærdom udi Spørsmal forfattet* (1603), of which no copies survive, cf. Charlotte Appel, *Læsning og bogmarked i 1600-tallets Danmark* (Copenhagen: Det Konglige Bibliotek/Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 2001), vol. 1, 141.

<sup>585</sup> *CATECHISMVS Sónn / Einfold og lios Vtskyring Christelegra Fræda / sem er Grundvøllur Truar vorrar og Sæluhjalpar Lærdoms / Af þeim hellstu Greinum Heilagrar Bibliu / hennar Historium og Bevijsingum samanteken / Gude Almattugum til Lofs og Dyrdar / enn Almwganum til Gagns og goda. Vr Dønsku vtløgd* (Hólar: 1610), A, Iv.

<sup>586</sup> *CATECHISMVS Sónn*, A IIr.

<sup>587</sup> *CATECHISMVS Sónn*, A IIv.

<sup>588</sup> *CATECHISMVS Sónn*, A IIIv.

<sup>589</sup> *CATECHISMVS Sónn*, A IIIv–A IVr.

Guðbrandur's stroke in 1624. As bishop after Guðbrandur, Þorlákur Skúlason was a less passionate publisher than his grandfather, and he concentrated mainly on reprinting older material, although he did publish a revised translation of the Bible in 1644.<sup>590</sup>

The second of Guðmundur's hymns to appear in print, "Eilífi Guð minn ég vil þér", was appended at the end of a translation of Johannes Förster's *Die Güldene Beicht und Bußkunst* in 1641 under the heading "Ein kristileg þakkargjörð fyrir allt Guðs lán og velgjörninga, andlega og líkamlega" ('A Christian thanksgiving for all God's blessings and benefactions, spiritual and physical').<sup>591</sup> Like Guðmundur's "Eilífi einvaldsherra," Förster's collection of sermons on confession and repentance (two of which were omitted in the Icelandic translation) all focus on the Prayer of Manasseh. However, there is no indication that Bishop Þorlákur Skúlason, the book's translator and publisher, chose to include a hymn by Guðmundur Erlendsson for thematic reasons.

The hymn serves a practical purpose as filler for the book's last five pages. The date of composition is unknown, and thus it is impossible to know whether Þorlákur Skúlason commissioned it or chose it from Guðmundur Erlendsson's existing hymns. After Guðmundur's return from Grímsey, it seems that he developed a close relationship with Bishop Þorlákur Skúlason. In c. 1654, Guðmundur's daughter Margrét married Bishop Þorlákur's nephew, Jón Illugason (see 4.15.1). Two years later, in 1656, Guðmundur personally served as one of the pallbearers at the bishop's funeral.<sup>592</sup> Guðmundur Erlendsson's commemorative poem for Bishop Þorlákur, "Aví, aví vort auma land," was according to its rubric in 232 "í ferskum sorgar anda samantekinn, anno 1656, nokkrum dögum eftir hans signaða andlát" ('compiled in the spirit of fresh grief, anno 1656, several days after his blessed passing').<sup>593</sup>

In *Vökuvarpa* (see 4.13), Guðmundur Erlendsson emphasises the importance of the printing press in spreading the Word of God, aligning the arrival of the printing press closely with the Reformation. He states of Bishop Guðbrandur that he spread "boðskap Guðs og bækur góðar" ('God's message and good books') throughout the land.<sup>594</sup> Guðmundur's highest praise is reserved for the late Bishop Þorlákur: "Bauð oss fyrir bækur góðar, / bestu mennt hann lét prenta, / mátti og þessi mæti drottins / maður heita landsins faðir" ('He let the best learning be printed, offering good books for us; this worthy man of God might be called the father of the country').<sup>595</sup> Of Bishop Gísli, Þorlákur's son and the incumbent bishop at Hólar at the time that Guðmundur composed *Vökuvarpa*, Guðmundur adds:

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<sup>590</sup> Einar G. Pétursson, "Bókaútgáfa á biskupsstólunum," 587–89.

<sup>591</sup> Johannes Förster, *Sa Gyllene Skriptargangur og Ydrunar Konst / vt dreigenn af Bæn Manasses Kongs* (Hólar: 1641), [204].

<sup>592</sup> ÍA 1, 343.

<sup>593</sup> 232, 56v.

<sup>594</sup> 1529, 31r.

<sup>595</sup> 1529, 31r.

“Bækur einninn, málamjúkar, / til menntar oss hann lætur prenta, / enginn þurrð því enn er orðinn / á orði Guðs sem dult var forðum” (‘He, too, has books of tender speech printed, and therefore there is no drought of God’s Word, which was previously hidden’).<sup>596</sup> It is truly the best and worst of times: a spiritual renaissance – “gullleg öld á Ísalandi” (‘a golden age in Iceland’) – at the end of days.<sup>597</sup>

#### 4.14.1 Hymns on the Passion of Christ

The only major work by Guðmundur to be printed during his lifetime was a cycle of seven hymns published in 1666 on the Passion (incipit: “Þegar sætabrauðs hátíð helg að höndum kom”).<sup>598</sup> The cycle is a functional work suitable for home devotion or use in church during the Holy Week, retelling the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and the events leading up to Easter. Rather than ending with a triumphant resurrection hymn as might be expected, the cycle ends just before it has been revealed in the narrative that Jesus has risen. Like most titles published by the Hólar printing press during the course of the seventeenth century, Guðmundur’s Passion hymns would likely have fallen into obscurity if they had not been printed alongside Hallgrímur Pétursson’s *magnum opus*, his *Passíusálmur*.<sup>599</sup>

The juxtaposition of Hallgrímur’s masterpiece and Guðmundur’s complementary piece on the same subject has inspired a number of literary critics to use the flaws of the latter work as the literary yardstick against which to measure the greatness of the former. Arne Møller described the *Hymns on the Passion of Christ* as a sorry sibling to the *Passion Hymns* in his influential study of Hallgrímur Pétursson’s hymns, while Sigurður Nordal expressed a sense of outrage that Hallgrímur’s masterpiece should be sandwiched between Guðmundur Erlendsson’s doggerels, insinuating that Guðmundur’s physical proximity to the bishop’s seat at Hólar was the main reason that his work had appeared in print in the first place.<sup>600</sup>

While the Passion hymns printed at Hólar were by no means the high point of Guðmundur’s career, they were never selected for their poetic brilliance and were even amended prior to publication for theological content (i.e., censored); the printed version differs somewhat from the author’s (lost) original text. In a letter dated 21 April 1666, Bishop Gísli Þorláksson responded to a complaint from Guðmundur over an unnamed hymn that had been pulled from the book during the typesetting

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<sup>596</sup> 1529, 31r–v.

<sup>597</sup> 1529, 31v.

<sup>598</sup> Guðmundur Erlendsson & Hallgrímur Pétursson, *Historia. Þijnunnar og Daudans Drottins vors Jesu Christi. Epter Textans einfalldre Hliodan / i sið Psalmum yferfaren*, (Hólar: 1666).

<sup>599</sup> On the negative reception of the *Hymns on the Passion of Christ* by twentieth-century literary critics, see Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, “Hallgrímur með ‘sína Guðmund Erlendssen í Felli í bak og fyrir,’” 49–50.

<sup>600</sup> Arne Møller, *Hallgrímur Péturssons Passionsalmer: En studie over islandsk salmedigtning fra det 16. og 17. aarhundrede* (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1922), 172–74; Sigurður Nordal, *Hallgrímur Pétursson og Passíusálmarnir*, 8–9.

stage. Although Guðmundur's own letter is no longer extant, it may be gathered from Gísli's words that the poet got wind of the decision via some third party and dashed off an irate letter to Hólar, demanding to know the names of the parties responsible.

In his response, the bishop apologises for having given Guðmundur's hymn to the typesetter without having read it over himself first. He gently assures Guðmundur that he does not believe the hymnist's intentions to be theologically unsound and diplomatically explains that he has simply set the hymn aside for closer scrutiny because of concerns that the unwashed masses might misunderstand the "correct" sense of Guðmundur's words:

[M]ier vurdtest psalmurenn nockud öskiljanlegur fyrer fätækann almuga, einkanlega þá vppa hann dregur, og talad verður vm krossen Christi, nidurtóku hannss aff krossenum lýnlök edur lýffblæju. It(em) steinþröna sem hann var i lagduret reliqvas res inanimatas. Þá visse eg ecke vtan einhuórier nasutuli mundu meiga finnast, sem i þetta og annad þuilijkt villde hnýsa. Enn huorki þier nie adrer geta allstadar vered til explicera edur ogso exprimera mentem, quo sensu hoc, vel illud acceptum velimus.<sup>601</sup>

(‘...I felt the hymn to be somewhat difficult for the impoverished commoners to understand, in particular as it draws on and speaks of Christ’s cross, His being taken down from the cross, linen sheets or a shroud. *Item*, the stone coffin into which He was lain *et reliquas res inanimatas* [and other inanimate objects]. I didn’t know then but that some *nasutuli* [scoffers] mightn’t be found who in this as in other like matters might wish to pry. But neither you nor anyone else can be everywhere to explain or express *mentem, quo sensu hoc, vel illud acceptum velimus* [the intention, or in what sense we would wish for this or that to be understood].’)

Bishop Gísli's description fits with Guðmundur's seventh hymn, which begins with the earthquake following Jesus's death and ends with the sealing of the tomb (*steinþró*). In his letter, Gísli seems to be referring the presence of various inanimate objects in the hymn, such as Jesus's cross and shroud. There is only a fleeting mention of the cross in the first verse in the 1666 printed edition, however, and Jesus's body is merely implied to have been taken down from the cross: the narrative shifts immediately in the last two lines of the fifth verse to Joseph of Arimathea.<sup>602</sup> No *líflæja* or *línök* is mentioned, although Joseph is said at one point in the hymn to purchase fine linen. If Gísli is indeed referring to this seventh hymn in his letter, then it was clearly emended before its publication: all objectionable points mentioned in his letter have silently disappeared from the printed version.

<sup>601</sup> Gísli Þorláksson, *Prestastefnudómar og bréfabók Gísla biskups Þorlákssonar*, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson & Júníus Kristinsson (Reykjavík: Þjóðskjalasafn Íslands, 1983), 125.

<sup>602</sup> There is also a corresponding irregularity in the rhyme scheme in these last two lines (ABABCD~~DD~~), but this may be a coincidence.

Unfortunately, the printer's copy of these hymns has not survived. All the same, the bishop's letter is an important reminder that the Church monitored Iceland's sole printing press closely. Not even hymns were exempt from this scrutiny. In seventeenth-century Iceland, words did not find their way onto the printed page on the basis of literary merit alone. Just as Guðbrandur Þorláksson had published the *Vísnaþók* for the express purpose of providing a spiritual alternative to profane entertainments, Gísli Þorláksson was more concerned with producing a spiritually unambiguous and theologically correct volume of hymns on the Passion than with offering Guðmundur Erlendsson's best or most popular verses to the general public.<sup>603</sup> If the printing press's activities encouraged collective and personal devotional reading and singing in the home, it was a highly controlled form of interaction with the Word of God, where nothing should be left to the imagination.

This was not the first or the last instance of censorship at Hólar. The treatment of the medieval *Lilja* in Guðbrandur Þorláksson's *Vísnaþók* has already been mentioned. In 1704, the reading (and singing) public reacted furiously to the attempt of Bishop Björn Þorleifsson of Hólar to amend some lines in Hallgrímur Pétursson's *Passíusálmur*.<sup>604</sup> These controversial changes, like the changes made by Gísli Þorláksson to Guðmundur Erlendsson's Passion hymns, were not made to improve the language of the hymns but rather to bring the work in line with the theology of the day, in a form easily digestible by the unlearned.

As an editor, Gísli's comments to Guðmundur deal only with the intelligibility of his account of the Passion, not its quality. It may be that Gísli had even specifically commissioned Guðmundur to produce a short hymn-cycle on the Passion to be sung during Holy Week – as such, the seven hymns would functionally complement the *Passíusálmur*, which are fifty in number and serve as religious meditations to be sung during Lent. By 1666, Hallgrímur had already presented manuscript copies of his *Passíusálmur* to no fewer than four influential women in Iceland: Ragnhildur Árnadóttir (1660), Helga Árnadóttir (1660), Kristín Jónsdóttir (1660) and Ragnheiður Brynjólfsdóttir (1661).<sup>605</sup> No evidence survives that Guðmundur's seven hymns circulated in manuscript form prior to publication at Hólar, although two much older hymns by Guðmundur (“Hvað mun vor auma ævi hér” and “Upp lít, mín sál, úr sorgum þeim”) were printed as filler at the end of the volume.

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<sup>603</sup> The most (in)famous example of ecclesiastical politics taking precedence over literary style is probably bishop Gísli Jónsson's hymnal from 1558, cf. Kristján Valur Ingólfsson, “Sálmakver Herra Gísla 1558: Kveðskapur eða kirkjupólitik?” in *Til heiðurs og hugbótar: Greinar um trúarkveðskap fyrri alda*, ed. Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir & Anna Guðmundsdóttir (Reykholt: Snorrastofa, 2003), 145–60.

<sup>604</sup> Margrét Eggertsdóttir, “Script and print in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Iceland,” 138–40.

<sup>605</sup> Margrét Eggertsdóttir, *Icelandic Baroque*, 209–10.

The printed works of Guðmundur Erlendsson have disproportionately coloured his later reception, and none more so than his 1666 Passion hymns. Páll Vídalín knew (and disliked) these hymns.<sup>606</sup> Sigurður Nordal is doubtless correct that patronage played its role in the decision to print Guðmundur Erlendsson's poetry. Even so, it should be kept in mind that in 1666, Guðmundur was not only an extremely popular poet but also one of the grand old men of the Icelandic literary scene. In his seventies, Guðmundur was approaching the end of a long and successful literary career.

Guðmundur Erlendsson was a poet who wrote mainly for manuscript circulation, whose awkward relationship with print is emblematic of the restrictions of the medium under Church control. This is somewhat contradictory: Guðmundur was a clergyman and a hymnist, who benefitted more than most contemporary Icelandic writers from the existence of a printing press at Hólar. Yet the emphasis of the Church was on producing hymns that conveyed a uniform orthodoxy, with no room for ambiguity or reflection.

#### 4.15 The next generation

Guðrún Gunnarsdóttir reached the age of 78, passing away on 8 February 1668 at Fell in Sléttuhlíð. Two years later, on 21 March 1670, Guðmundur Erlendsson died at the age of 75. According to Hallur Guðmundsson's "Ó þú fallvalta veraldarvist", commemorating his father, Guðmundur collapsed suddenly after his customary morning prayers in the church at Fell.<sup>607</sup> Touchingly, Guðmundur's last known poem is his elegy for Guðrún, his partner for nearly a half-century. Hallur states that after Guðrún's death, Guðmundur was increasingly lonely and longed to be reunited with her in heaven.<sup>608</sup> Hallur Guðmundsson's poem describes the men and women in attendance at Guðmundur's funeral as weeping so bitterly that they had to be calmed down in order for the eulogy to be read.<sup>609</sup> The minister, the Rev. Gunnar Björnsson of nearby Hof in Höfðaströnd (d. 1672), consoled the mourners with the image of Guðmundur and Guðrún, together again before the heavenly throne.

These memories of Guðmundur Erlendsson and Guðrún Gunnarsdóttir are preserved through the medium of handwritten verse. While those who commemorated Guðmundur and Guðrún were members of their closest circles, it is important to recognize the extent to which scribal and other related activities specifically aimed at preserving writings by and about Guðmundur were also sponsored and carried out by Guðmundur's own children and grandchildren. At the time of Guðmundur's death, no literary institutions or organizations existed for the preservation of contemporary Icelandic literature. Whether based in Iceland or living abroad, scholars were still

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<sup>606</sup> Páll Vídalín, *Recensus*, 39.

<sup>607</sup> Hallur Guðmundsson, "Ó þú fallvalta veraldarvist," st. 104–107.

<sup>608</sup> Hallur Guðmundsson, "Ó þú fallvalta veraldarvist," st. 80–82.

<sup>609</sup> Hallur Guðmundsson, "Ó þú fallvalta veraldarvist," st. 118–119.

mainly interested in the writings of the distant past, and not until some years later would the first attempts be made at charting the literary landscape of early modern Iceland.

Without the work of Guðmundur Erlendsson's descendants in preserving his legacy, our knowledge of Guðmundur as a poet would be fundamentally different, and certainly less nuanced. Guðmundur enjoyed unquestionable popularity as a poet, and large quantities of his poetry have survived without the mediation of his children. However, manuscripts preserving large collections of Guðmundur Erlendsson's poetry seem to have been originally curated for, copied by and preserved by his sons and daughters' families.

Findings of the present research include Skúli Guðmundsson's centrality to the preservation of his father's poetry and the important role played by Guðmundur's married daughters' families (see 5.3, 5.5 and 5.6). The chapter on Guðmundur Erlendsson's life would not be complete without a discussion of the next generation: the women and men whose activities following Guðmundur and Guðrún's deaths proved formative in shaping our understanding of the parson-poet.

#### 4.15.1 Margrét Guðmundsdóttir and Jón Illugason

Margrét Guðmundsdóttir (1625–after 1703) married the farmer and *lögréttumaður* Jón Illugason (c. 1620–1685/1686) around 1654, which is the date when Guðmundur Erlendsson presented Jón with a volume of his own poetry, christened *Gígja*. In Chapter 5, I argue that *Gígja* was likely a form of wedding gift from Guðmundur.

For the family at Fell, there was reason to celebrate Margrét's marriage. On his mother's side, Jón Illugason was the great-grandson of Guðbrandur Þorláksson and the nephew of Þorlákur Skúlason. He was thus also the first cousin of Gísli Þorláksson of Hólar and Þórður Þorláksson of Skálholt, and his father belonged to the *Svalbarðsætt* family (cf. 4.5.1). Although nothing is known of Guðmundur Erlendsson's or Guðrún Gunnarsdóttir's ancestry, the match between Jón and Margrét seems to have been an extremely advantageous one for the parson's family. Jón was a *lögréttumaður* from about 1658 to 1683 and the *hreppstjóri* for his local district. He rose to the position of regional *lögsagnari* (representative of the regional *sýslumaður*) in 1684 but died not long after this. He also briefly served as *ráðsmaður* or steward for Hólar in 1666–1668, during the episcopacy of his cousin Gísli Þorláksson. This likely places Jón Illugason and Margrét Guðmundsdóttir at Hólar at around the same time as Guðmundur Erlendsson's hymns were printed. In Bishop Gísli's letter to Guðmundur Erlendsson in April 1666 (4.14.1), the bishop states that he received the poet's letter from Jón Illugason.<sup>610</sup>

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<sup>610</sup> Gísli Þorláksson. *Prestastefnudómar og bréfabók Gísla biskups Þorlákssonar*, 124.



Jón's administrative offices required him to engage extensively in scribal activities, though he may have had assistants. A fragmentary record-book associated with Jón Illugason, JS 360 8vo, contains texts in multiple hands, including Jón Illugason's 1664 letter to the people of Svarfaðardalur on bad behaviour, most notably the holding of social gatherings known as *vökunætur* ('waking nights'), which had resulted in property damage to local tenant farms.<sup>611</sup>

Six of Margrét and Jón's children were alive at the time of the 1703 census:

- Jón Jónsson (1656–1744)
- Illugi Jónsson (1660–after 1705)
- Erlendur Jónsson (1661–1741)
- Eggert Jónsson (1662–after 1741)
- Guðrún Jónsdóttir the Elder (1665–c. 1741)
- Benedikt Jónsson (1665–1744)
- Guðrún Jónsdóttir the Younger (1668–1732)

Jón Espólín names a seventh daughter, Halldóra, who was childless and unmarried.<sup>612</sup> Of the siblings, only Jón, Illugi and Guðrún the Elder are known with certainty to have had children, but Jón Espólín reports that Eggert fathered a child who died in infancy.<sup>613</sup> Jón Illugason may also have fathered an illegitimate daughter, Jórunn (1666–1722).<sup>614</sup>

Two of their sons, Jón and Benedikt, received a formal education and entered the clergy. Jón's career was marked by scandal: he shifted from parish to parish and was twice temporarily defrocked for adultery.<sup>615</sup> Jón was first ordained in 1681 as the parson at Hvanneyri in Siglufjörður, following the Rev. Björn Jónsson's death.<sup>616</sup> The Rev. Björn had made a late second marriage to a woman nearly three decades his junior, Þórey Bjarnadóttir (1642–after 1703). Jón became Þórey's second husband, and their daughter Margrét was born in 1686. Jón, however, kept a much younger mistress named Þóra Gísladóttir (1675–after 1706) from at least 1696, despite the synod's disapproval, and Þórey left him shortly after the time of the 1703 census; Þóra and Jón's daughter Guðrún was born in c. 1706. Benedikt had a much less colourful career, moving to Bjarnanes in the region of Austur-

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<sup>611</sup> Hannes Þorsteinsson (ed.), "Vökunætur," *Blanda 4* (1928–1931): 223.

<sup>612</sup> Jón Espólín, *Ættatölubækur*, vol. VI, col. 4969.

<sup>613</sup> Jón Espólín, *Ættatölubækur*, vol. VI, col. 4967.

<sup>614</sup> Jón Espólín, *Ættatölubækur*, vol. VI, col. 4969.

<sup>615</sup> For a biography of Jón Jónsson, see Oscar Clausen, "Síra Jón með mörgu viðurnefnin," *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins* (11.09.1966): 4, 13–14.

<sup>616</sup> In 4.5.1, it is hypothesized that Guðmundur Erlendsson and Guðrún Gunnarsdóttir's foster-daughter Solveig is Björn Jónsson's son by his first wife, Guðrún Björnsdóttir.

Skaftafellssýsla (Southeast Iceland), where he was ordained in 1691. He married Rannveig Sigurðardóttir (1665–after 1749), but they are not known to have had children.

Illugi, Erlendur and Eggert pursued careers outside the clergy. Illugi Jónsson was the *hreppstjóri* of Grýtubakkahreppur in 1703, a farmer and a carpenter (*snikkari*). He married Þorgerður Sigurðardóttir (b. 1660) and became the father of a large family. Eggert, nicknamed Hlaupa-Eggert, worked at Hólar as a horse-team driver or handler (*lestamaður*). Erlendur Jónsson farmed at Urðir after his father's death. His inheritance included landed property (although the hardships of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries meant that he received little income from his tenants),<sup>617</sup> but in 1707–1708 purchased half of the farm of Sakka in Svarfaðardalur and moved there soon thereafter.<sup>618</sup> In addition to being a successful farmer, he served as a *lögréttumaður* from 1708 to 1715 and briefly also the local *hreppstjóri* in 1695–1700. In 1703, Erlendur had lived at Urðir in Svarfaðardalur with his nephew Jón Illugason (b. 1696), a housekeeper, Kristín Hallsdóttir (b. 1653), and seven other servants. The younger Jón Illugason, identified in the census as his brother's son, must have been the son of Erlendur's brother Illugi, but he is not listed in the Íslendingabók database. This Jón may have travelled to Denmark and settled on the island of Falster. Erlendur made a very late marriage to Hildur Jónsdóttir (1683?–1740),<sup>619</sup> a granddaughter of Sveinn Jónsson of Barð. Hildur was Erlendur's first cousin once removed. She was much younger than Erlendur, and the marriage was childless, but the couple had at least one other foster son.

Jón and Margrét were wealthy enough that their sons were not the only ones to inherit property. A note made by Jón Illugason in 1677 states that his daughter Guðrún (he does not specify which Guðrún) owns 10 *hundreds* in Hraun in Sléttuhlíð.<sup>620</sup> Guðrún the Elder married a prominent clergyman, the Rev. Jón Þorvaldsson (1664–1731), who served at Miklibær in Skagafjörður from 1692 to his death and was provost for Skagafjörður in 1724–1729. The couple had at least seven children. After Guðrún the Elder's marriage, Margrét lived with her daughter-in-law at Miklibær, where she was still alive at the age of 78 in 1703. Guðrún the Younger married twice and was widowed twice, both times to a steward (*ráðsmaður*) of Skálholt – Sigfús Þórðarson (d. 1702) and Arngrímur Bjarnason (d. 1724) – but is not known to have had children.

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<sup>617</sup> Árni Magnússon & Páll Vídalín, *Jarðabók*, vol. 13 (Fylgiskjöl), 371

<sup>618</sup> For a brief biography of Erlendur Jónsson, see Stefán Aðalsteinsson, *Svarfdælingar* (Reykjavík: Iðunn, 1976–1978), 61–62.

<sup>619</sup> In the Íslendingabók database, Hildur is identified as a daughter of Jón Sveinsson the Younger, born in 1699. However, Stefán Aðalsteinsson's identification of Hildur as the 19-year-old paternal niece of the Rev. Jón Sveinsson of Barð (Jón the Elder), living in the minister's household in Barð, is far more plausible than that she is the 4-year-old foster daughter of Krákur Sveinsson at Holt in Fljót. Stefán Aðalsteinsson, *Svarfdælingar*, 62.

<sup>620</sup> JS 360 8vo, 4r–v.

The following chapter discusses the preservation of *Gígja* in greater detail, but at least one of Margrét's children, Erlendur, is known to have owned *Gígja* in the early eighteenth century. In 1739, the Rev. Þorsteinn Ketilsson of Hrafnagil (1688–1754) reported to the Copenhagen-based scholar Jón Ólafsson from Grunnavík that he had once seen a copy of *Gígja* belonging to Erlendur Jónsson (1661–1741).<sup>621</sup> It is unknown whether the copy in question was the manuscript presented to Jón Illugason in 1654 or a later copy, and its whereabouts after Erlendur's death are unknown.

#### 4.15.2 Hallur Guðmundsson

Hallur was born some time between 1622 and 1630. Most of what can be learned of Hallur's life is contained in his poem "Ó þú fallvalta veraldarvist" from 1670, which survives in Skúli's copy in 1529 and was composed to commemorate his father but also describes the loss of other loved ones: his brother, mother and wife.

Hallur does not name his wife in his poem, but he describes his sorrow and loneliness following her death and his worries for his children as a single father (stanzas 22–27). According to stanza 88, Guðmundur fostered two of Hallur's children at Fell: Ólafur and Sigga (Sigríður). Ólafur (1651–after 1703) farmed at Ingveldarstaðir in Hólahreppur at the time of the 1703 census; he was married to Una Einarsdóttir (b. 1654), and they had a young son, Einar. Hallur names a daughter Sigga in his letter to Skúli of 1679 (1529, binding fragment I, see 5.5.2.1), when Hallur's sister-in-law Ólöf assisted in completing Sigga's hat, but no Sigríður is listed among Hallur's children in the Íslendingabók database. She is likely the Sigríður Hallsdóttir (b. 1659) who was the second wife of Guðmundur Ásgrímsson (1646–after 1709). The couple and their children lived at Á in Unadalur in Höfðastrandarhreppur at the time of the 1703 census.

Hallur and his wife also had two sons named Jón. One seems to have been reduced to extreme poverty and was a vagrant by 1699. He died of exposure that winter but had earlier stabbed a woman for refusing him food.<sup>622</sup> The other Jón (b. 1652) lived at Hólar in Hjaltadalur at the time of the 1703 census, where he worked as the chief steward but is not known to have married.

Hallur's characterization of himself in "Ó þú fallvalta veraldarvist" as the black sheep of the family (stanzas 72–75) likely had a grain of truth, although his behaviour was hardly more shocking than his father's as a young man (see 4.3). In 1666, the widowed Hallur required public absolution for fathering a child with an unnamed woman in the local community. This child was probably Hallur's daughter Ingibjörg (1666–after 1703), who at the time of the 1703 census was married to the farmer Hallur Bjarnason (1653–after 1742) of Syðsti-Hóll in Sléttuhlíð. For a unmarried mother to announce

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<sup>621</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, "Á Krists ysta jarðar hala," 180.

<sup>622</sup> ÍA 1, 591.

that the father was an unmarried local man was a fairly common occurrence in early modern Iceland, but this minor breach of the morality law caused serious consternation within Hallur's family, as Hallur's own father and brother were normally responsible for absolving their parishioners as part of their pastoral care. Guðmundur wrote a letter to Bishop Gísli of Hólar inquiring whether the minister of a different parish might be given charge of public absolution, to which Bishop Gísli responded on 7 December that he gave his permission for such an arrangement, with the stipulation that absolution had to take place in the church in the parish in which the offence occurred.<sup>623</sup>

By the 1670s, Hallur Guðmundsson was solidly established as a respectable farmer in Sléttuhlíð, farming at Tjarnir. He was in the *hreppstjórn* for Sléttuhlíðarhreppur by 1673 at the latest, and in 1678 he was one of the local men entrusted with the case of an invalid pauper at Mýrar.<sup>624</sup> In the Íslendingabók database, Guðmundur Hallsson (1681–after 1746) and Guðrún Hallsdóttir (1683–after 1703) are listed among Hallur's children. In 1703, Guðrún was a servant at Fell in Sléttuhlíð, and Guðmundur was a servant in the household of his cousin Guðrún Jónsdóttir and her husband, the Rev. Jón Þorvaldsson, at Miklibær (see below). It is entirely possible that Hallur had married again by this point, as he was still alive and well in 1688.

Despite enjoying respect within his community as a participant in the *hreppstjórn*, Hallur was an ordinary tenant farmer. Neither he nor any of his children received formal education, and at least one of his sons ended his life in extreme poverty. Hallur passed away some time before the 1703 census was taken. His poetry is poorly preserved, surviving largely thanks to Skúli's efforts: Skúli copied "Ó þú fallvalta veraldarvist" (ff. 1r–7v) and Hallur's hymn "Jesús frægstur frelsari minn" (f. 35v) in 1529, and 232 contains a poem addressed to Einar Jónsson, "Yður bróður, Einar minn" (currently on ff. 11r–v), for whom Skúli copied *Gígja*.

#### 4.15.3 Þóra(?) Guðmundsdóttir and Jón (?)Nikulásson

According to "Ó þú fallvalta veraldarvist," Guðmundur Erlendsson was survived by a second married daughter. Based on the evidence of 232 (see 5.3), she had a son named Einar Jónsson. Einar is not known to have been one of Margrét's sons, nor can it be easily explained why one of her children would seek out Skúli's assistance in obtaining a copy of *Gígja*. Guðmundur and Guðrún had a daughter named Þóra who died at a very young age and may have been named after Guðmundur's sister, who passed away as a young woman. Just as it was common for newborns in Iceland to be given the name of a close relative who had recently passed away, parents often named their children

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<sup>623</sup> Gísli Þorláksson, *Prestastefnudómar og bréfabók Gísla biskups Þorlákssonar*, 141–42.

<sup>624</sup> Þí. Sýslumaðurinn í Skagafjarðarsýslu og bæjarfógetinn á Sauðárkróki 0000 GA/1-1-1, 6–7, 203–4.

after a son or daughter who had died in infancy.<sup>625</sup> Jón Espólín believed that one of Guðmundur and Guðrún's daughters was named Þóra, which is more likely to refer to a woman who reached adulthood than an infant.<sup>626</sup>

It is unknown whether Einar Jónsson's mother was still alive in 1703. There were only two women between the ages of 73 and 83 with the patronymic Guðmundsdóttir in Skagafjörður at the time of the census.<sup>627</sup> One is Guðmundur's 78-year-old daughter Margrét at Miklibær (see above). The other is a 73-year-old Þóra Guðmundsdóttir, a widow living with her 45-year-old daughter Ingibjörg Jónsdóttir at Reykir in Sauðárhreppur in Skagafjörður, whose parentage is unknown. Ingibjörg was married to the local *hreppstjóri*, Illugi Jónsson. Þóra at Reykir had plainly been married to a man named Jón, and her daughter's name is that of Guðrún Gunnarsdóttir's mother. Hallur also had a daughter named Ingibjörg. Finally, the *hreppstjóri* Illugi Jónsson was a nephew of Margrét's husband Jón Illugason. If this woman was indeed Guðmundur Erlendsson's daughter, Þóra was the third-youngest of her sibling group, born around a year before her brother Skúli. Ultimately, it is impossible to be sure that this is Guðmundur Erlendsson's daughter, but it is not unlikely given that Guðmundur's daughter was almost certainly alive in 1688.

As discussed in 5.3, Jón the Younger's funeral poem for Jón Nikulásson of Skriðuland in Kolbeinsdalur in Skagafjörður (c. 1624–1688) seems to commemorate his unnamed sister's husband. In this case, she must have married by 1654 at the latest, as Einar was born the following year. She and Jón had 15 children, 10 of whom (including Einar) were alive in 1688 and 8 of whom lived in Iceland. According to Jón Guðmundsson, Jón Nikulásson was a member of the *hreppstjórn* in his community of Hólahreppur (Viðvíkursveit). Jón could both read and write, as his competently written signature is found in Benedikt Halldórsson's records in connection with his administrative activities.<sup>628</sup>

As discussed in 4.9, at least two farmers by the name of Nikulás Jónsson lived in Skagafjörður, one an *umboðsmaður* by 1633 and the other a *lögréttumaður* by 1650. Nikulás was not a common name (there were only 4 men by this name in Skagafjörður at the time of the 1703 census). A clergyman's daughter would typically marry a man of good status in the local community, so it is a reasonable assumption that Jón Nikulásson is likely the son of one of these two men and named after a paternal grandfather. Einar Jónsson, Jón Nikulásson and Nikulás Jónsson thus form a transgenerational cluster (or chain) of literacy closely connected to that of Guðmundur Erlendsson's family.

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<sup>625</sup> Ólöf Garðarsdóttir, "Naming practices and the importance of kinship networks," 297–314.

<sup>626</sup> Jón Espólín, *Ættatölubækur*, vol. VIII, 6622. Jón Espólín names three daughters: Margrét, Þóra and Ingibjörg, but the Ingibjörg he names (the wife of Hallur Bjarnason) is clearly Hallur's daughter and not the mother of Einar Jónsson, see 4.15.2.

<sup>627</sup> No woman of this age range with the patronymic Guðmundsdóttir lived in Eyjafjörður.

<sup>628</sup> Þí. Sýslumaðurinn í Skagafjarðarsýslu og bæjarfógetinn á Sauðárkróki 0000 GA/1-1-1, 18.

Einar Jónsson (1659–after 1709) and Guðný Hjálmarsdóttir (1660–after 1703) were one of three farming couples at Nefsstaðir in Fljót at the time of the 1703 census. In the census, he is singled out as a capable blacksmith. Einar and Guðný had a 10-year-old daughter Svanhildur and a 7-year-old daughter Margrét, as well as two maidservants – Þuríður Grímsdóttir (36) and Guðrún Guðmundardóttir (30) – about whom nothing is known. Also farming at Nefsstaðir was Hjálmar Erlendsson (77), who is identified in the census as *medicus et artifex* ('doctor and artisan') and is clearly Guðný's father. Hjálmar's daughter Aðalbjörg (39) acted as his household manager.

#### 4.15.4 Skúli Guðmundsson and Ólöf Jónsdóttir

Guðmundur's second-youngest child, Skúli, was a tenant farmer, and a quite successful one. Unlike Hallur, it is uncertain whether Skúli participated in the local *hreppstjórn*. Skúli did not have a formal education, but he was an excellent scribe and took great interest in his father's legacy.

Skúli married Ólöf Jónsdóttir (1646–after 1703) in 1668 or shortly thereafter. Unusually, Bishop Gísli Þorláksson intervened directly on Skúli's behalf in the marriage arrangements. Ólöf's father, Jón Jónsson, had died before 1668, and her eldest brother, Illugi (1638–1706), was reluctant to take the initiative as Ólöf's legal *giftingarmaður* to permit the marriage. Apparently, Illugi wished first to consult with their brother Ólafur, but there was some difficulty in contacting Ólafur and getting a response, since he lived far away in the Eastfjords and does not seem to have been in regular contact with his siblings. Gísli encouraged Illugi, as the eldest brother, to take the initiative and stop dragging his feet, characterizing Skúli as an honourable man who needed to get married promptly as he had already started farming and was *einhentur* ('one-handed') without a wife.<sup>629</sup>

Since Illugi was pursuing a clerical career (he was ordained as minister for Grímsey in 1670), what the bishop presents as friendly advice may be read as a direct order to Illugi to consent to the match. Here, Skúli's position at the fringes of Bishop Gísli's own kinship network (Skúli's brother-in-law, Jón Illugason, was Gísli's first cousin) proved expedient; Gísli did not write this sort of letter every day on behalf of the bachelor farmers of Skagafjörður. Skúli's marriage would have brought him not only a "hand" (to use Bishop Gísli's metaphor) but also advantageous family connections. By birth, Ólöf was a descendant of Bishop Jón Arason and a member of the *Svalbarðsætt* family.

Hallur's letter to Skúli in 1679 (see 5.5.2.1) sends greetings to Ólöf and the couple's sons. By this time, Skúli was plainly no longer living in Sléttuhlíð. In 1688, Skúli and Ólöf farmed at Bjarnastaðir in Unadalur, but they were at Reyninesstaður in Reynistaðarhreppur at the time of the 1703 census. Only one of their sons is known to have been alive at this time: 23-year-old Guðmundur, who lived at

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<sup>629</sup> Gísli Þorláksson, *Prestastefnudómar og bréfabók Gísla biskups Þorlákssonar*, 201.

his parents' household at Reyninesstaður. He had recently graduated from Hólar, and in 1706 he became the minister for Vesturhópshólar.

Sadly, Guðmundur was one of the many young men to die in the *stórabóla* epidemic the following year. Shortly before his death, Guðmundur had married Þórunn Egilsdóttir (b. 1683). Þórunn belonged to the *Skarðverjaætt* and *Svalbarðsætt* families on both sides of her family and was likewise a descendant of Bishop Jón Arason through both her mother and father. Þórunn's mother, Ingibjörg, was the illegitimate daughter of Páll Þorláksson, who was Guðbrandur Þorláksson's great-grandson. After Guðmundur's death, Þórunn married the farmer and *lögréttumaður* Teitur Eiríksson (1664–1728) of Efri-Núpur in Húnavatnssýsla, whose first wife passed away after the time of the 1703 census. Þórunn and Teitur had at least five children, including a son Guðmundur (d. 1747), but it is unknown who inherited Skúli's library after his death, or even in what year Skúli died.

Skúli had a reputation as a talented and popular poet in the early 1700s: in Páll Vídalín's appraisal, Skúli was a better poet than his father and composed both poetry and *rímur*, although Páll states that he did not recall any titles.<sup>630</sup> Skúli is not mentioned in Finnur Sigmundsson's *Rímnatal*, and his work is probably lost. Surviving examples of Skúli Guðmundsson's poetry in his own hand can be found in 232, addressed to Einar as the recipient of his manuscript. From this, it can be seen that he was a practiced poet who expressed himself fluently in verse, even if he was not a learned writer.

The amorphism poem *Klasbarði*, which is a collection of traditional proverbs in verse composed in 1704, is plausibly attributed to Skúli Guðmundsson in some manuscripts.<sup>631</sup> *Klasbarði* is attributed to Skúli Þorbergsson (1785–1843) in Páll Eggert Ólason's bibliography,<sup>632</sup> but this is highly improbable in light of the fact that the oldest manuscripts (in which Skúli Guðmundsson is named as the author) date from about the mid-eighteenth century, long before the younger Skúli's birth.

From the glimpses of Guðmundur Erlendsson's sons Skúli and Hallur offered by 232 and 1529, both men were unmistakably experienced, skilful poets. This is unsurprising considering that they grew up in a household where they were exposed to music and poetry from birth, but their own work surfaces on the manuscript page only where it serves a clear social function. In Hallur's case, it is easy to argue that his work has not been preserved due to his family's difficult circumstances; he had many children and had to provide for them single-handedly after his wife's death. In the 1680s, Hallur again had a young family, meaning that his time and his financial resources were in shorter

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<sup>630</sup> Páll Vídalín, *Recensus*, 40.

<sup>631</sup> Rask 88 a, 19r–33v; the poem is also attributed to Skúli Guðmundsson in Lbs 1608 8vo and Lbs 1999 4to.

<sup>632</sup> Páll Eggert Ólason, *Íslenskar æviskrár frá landnámstímum til ársloka 1940*, vol. 4, 297.

supply than for his brother Skúli. In Skúli's case, the son who might have preserved Skúli's legacy died in the epidemic in 1707.

#### 4.15.5 Jón Guðmundsson and Guðrún Þórðardóttir

Guðmundur and Guðrún's youngest son, Jón (1631–1702), seems to have assumed his older brother's identity as Guðmundur's successor following the tragic death of Jón the Elder. In 1649, the year of Jón the Elder's death, Jón the Younger would have turned 18. It is impossible to know whether he had already enrolled at Hólar at the time. He was a clergyman by 1658, when he attended Bishop Gísli's wedding to Gróa Þorleifsdóttir with his father (see 4.4.1). Jón succeeded his father as parson for Fell in 1668, and he remained there until his sudden death on 12 July 1702.

Like his sister Margrét, Jón made a match that reinforced his ties with the elite of North Iceland. His wife, Guðrún Þórðardóttir (1643–after 1703), was Jón Illugason's first cousin and a great-granddaughter of Guðbrandur Þorláksson's. The date of their marriage is unknown, and they are not known to have had any children. According to Jón Espólín's unnamed and not always reliable sources, “var hún ei til samfara og stirt með þeim” (‘there was no intercourse with her and the marriage was strained’), which Páll Eggert Ólason expands as “talið, að hún hefði eigi eðli til þess að ala börn, enda fór stirðlega á meðal þeim” (‘the marriage was strained because Guðrún was not believed to have the nature to bear children’).<sup>633</sup> Jón Espólín and Páll Eggert Ólason probably had limited insight into how (un)happy Jón and Guðrún's marriage was, and it is impossible to know whether there was any biological basis for their claims, particularly in light of the treatment of more than a few better-educated Icelandic women in later folklore.<sup>634</sup> The transformation of seventeenth-century individuals such as Ingibjörg Jónsdóttir and Margrét Þórðardóttir into various forms of un-women (by the narrow standards of the time) did not necessarily have a strong connection to their own lived experiences.

Jón the Younger was talented, being an artist as well as a poet and scribe. Guðmundur Erlendsson's surviving memorial plaque for Þórunn Benediktsdóttir (see 4.4) demonstrates that Guðmundur was an artist as well as a poet. Like his father, Jón had a strong artistic impulse, and he was an amateur painter in addition to a poet (see 4.5.2). He wrote in a hand similar to his brother Skúli, but slightly more angular and evenly spaced, with an eye to visual impact.

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<sup>633</sup> Espólín, *Ættatölubækur*, vol. VIII, 6620; Páll Eggert Ólason, *Íslenzkar æviskrár frá landnámstímum til ársloka 1940*, vol. 3, 129. Jón Espólín's genealogy of Guðmundur Erlendsson and his family contains obvious errors, and it should be noted that he confuses Jón Guðmundsson the Elder and Jón Guðmundsson the Younger.

<sup>634</sup> See also Soffía Auður Birgisdóttir, “Hið „sanna kyn“ eða veruleiki líkamans? Hugleiðingar spunnar um frásögn af Guðrúnu Sveinbjarnardóttur,” *Ritið* 17.2 (2017): 39–77.



Jón continued the family tradition of composing occasional poetry for the elite of North Iceland. Jón's commemorative poem on the death of Bishop Gísli Þorláksson in 1684 was printed at Hólar in 1685. For the bishop's widow, Ragnheiður Jónsdóttir of Gröf (1646–1715), he created a beautiful copy of the poems of Ólafur Jónsson of Sandar (Lbs 1205 4to), ending with a dedicatory poem of his own. Whereas Guðmundur could cultivate literary connections with successive generations of patrons at Hólar and the large manors of North Iceland (see 4.4), Jón had more limited opportunities in the last two decades of the seventeenth century. There is material evidence indicating that Jón enjoyed the patronage of two powerful sisters: the aforementioned Ragnheiður Jónsdóttir, who made a brief second marriage to Bishop Einar Þorsteinsson of Hólar (1633–1696), and Helga Jónsdóttir of Laufás (c. 1639–1718), who married Teitur Torfason (d. 1668) and later the Rev. Þorsteinn Geirsson of Laufás (1638–1689).<sup>635</sup>

Jón's poetry has been better preserved than that of his brothers, but less is written here about Jón for the simple reason that I have been unable to identify any direct, material evidence of Jón's participation in copying and preserving his father's poetry. There is no indication of whether or not Jón engaged in such activities; Jón's manuscripts may simply not have been preserved after his death. The same is true for Guðmundur and Guðrún's fourth son, who seems not to have married but whose hand might be preserved anonymously in 1529 or another contemporary manuscript.

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<sup>635</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, "Handrit Ragnheiðar Jónsdóttur í Gröf," in *Margarítur hristar Margréti Eggertsdóttur fimmtugri 25. nóvember 2010* (Reykjavík: Menningar- og minningarsjóður Mette Magnussen, 2010), 101–3.

## 5.0 The preservation and transmission of Guðmundur Erlendsson's poetry

Þá öld sé spurt að eg sé burt  
óska eg vara megi  
stökur og vers sem verð eru þess  
en verri bögunar eigi.<sup>636</sup>

(‘When the people hear that I am gone, I wish that what endures will be the worthwhile ditties and verses, and not the worse doggerels.’)

Works by Guðmundur Erlendsson are frequently found in handwritten poetic miscellanies of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Such privately produced miscellanies were generally assembled for the benefit of their owners and other associated users. They tend to present material in a manner that is primarily meaningful for the individual, often treating original authorship as a matter of secondary importance. If information on authorship is provided at all, it may be wildly unreliable – as in the case of the various copies of *Einvaldsóður* circulating under the name of the non-existent parson Guðmundur Einarsson from Sandar in Sléttuhlíð, supposedly composed in 1688.

In the case of Guðmundur Erlendsson and a number of other major early modern Icelandic poets, such as the Rev. Ólafur Jónsson of Sandar, large collections of their poems exist in the form of *kvæðabækur* (‘songbooks’). Although the term *kvæðabók* can be meaningfully applied to any single poetry manuscript forming a more or less coherent whole (cf. the *Kvæðabók úr Vigur*, AM 148 8vo, collected by Magnús Jónsson of Vigur, which in its current state contains poems in twelve hands, including Guðmundur Erlendsson’s “Nýr minnis annáll einn er hér” on the execution of King Charles I), the *kvæðabók* of a particular early modern poet generally refers to a self-compiled anthology that circulates in manuscript form. There is only one AM 148 8vo, but there are at least 25 copies of Ólafur Jónsson’s *kvæðabók*, none the the poet’s own hand.<sup>637</sup>

In studying the preservation and transmission of an early modern Icelandic poet’s work, it is helpful to start with the manuscripts closest to that poet. Guðmundur Erlendsson is somewhat unusual in

<sup>636</sup> 232, 207v. The quotation is from the fourteenth *mansöngur* of the *Rímur af Sál og Davíð*.

<sup>637</sup> On the *kvæðabók* of the Rev. Ólafur Jónsson, see Árni Heimir Ingólfsson, *Tónlist liðinna alda: Íslensk handrit 1100–1800* (Reykjavík: Crymogea, 2019), 135–51.

that he appears to have created more than one self-curated anthology of his own work in later life. The best-documented of these anthologies are *Gígja* and *Fagriskógur*, which Hallur Guðmundsson names in “Ó þú fallvalta veraldarvist” (see 4.15). Páll Eggert Ólason believed both books to be extant, arguing that: (a) JS 232 4to (232) is a copy of both *Gígja* and *Fagriskógur*, (b) Lbs 1055 4to (1055) is a copy of *Gígja* only, (c) Lbs 271 4to contains part of *Gígja*<sup>638</sup> and (d) JS 250 4to (250) preserves part of *Fagriskógur* in what appears to be Guðmundur Erlendsson’s own hand.<sup>639</sup> Páll Eggert did not cite any direct evidence for 232 and 250 containing *Fagriskógur*, but he evidently believed *Gígja* and *Fagriskógur* to be two parts of a complete anthology of all of Guðmundur’s sacred poetry.<sup>640</sup>

This conception of *Gígja* and *Fagriskógur* as a two-part anthology of sacred poetry is almost certainly a misunderstanding. In “Ó, þú fallvalta veraldarvist,” Hallur Guðmundsson explains that his father gave *Fagriskógur* to his most famous son – presumably the educated parson-poet Jón the Younger – and *Gígja* to his son-in-law Jón Illugason.<sup>641</sup> Stanza 143 confirms that Guðmundur included only a selection of poems in the two books, which according to stanza 144 were specifically intended for his children and their families. Stanza 145 references a now-lost preface to *Fagriskógur*, separate from the surviving verse preface to *Gígja* (see 5.1). Based on this, *Gígja* and *Fagriskógur* do not form a single collection. What Hallur describes in 1670 are two fully completed and bound volumes that circulated independently of each other from the outset, curated for different recipients living in geographically distant regions: Jón Illugason in Svarfaðardalur in Eyjafjörður and Jón Guðmundsson in Fell in Sléttuhlíð in Skagafjörður.

Following Páll Eggert Ólason, scholarship on Guðmundur Erlendsson tends to treat *Gígja* as the equivalent of a printed poetry anthology. Böðvar Guðmundsson’s article on post-Reformation Icelandic literature cites the number of pages in 232 as if this were a measure of *Gígja*’s original length.<sup>642</sup> However, even a brief survey of 232 shows that it contains well-marked additions by

<sup>638</sup> These are 27 hymns from *Gígja* on ff. 88r–105v in Hálfðan’s hand. According to Hálfðan’s rubric at the top of f. 88r, the hymns are copied from “authographo fra G. W.” (‘the author’s manuscript, from G. V.’), which Hálfðan had evidently borrowed. In the absence of an edition of these 27 hymns, however, it is difficult to see the relationship between Lbs 271 4to and other copies of *Gígja*. For a description of the construction of this manuscript, see Chapter 2.2.

<sup>639</sup> Páll Eggert Ólason, *Menn og menntir*, vol. 4, 760.

<sup>640</sup> Páll Eggert Ólason, *Menn og menntir*, vol. 4, 760. The original suggestion that 250 contains *Fagriskógur* originates from Hannes Þorsteinsson. Observing that 250 was a fragmentary manuscript from the second half of the seventeenth century, written in a hand similar to *Gígja* in 232 (and in places possibly Guðmundur’s own hand), he commented “Skyldi þetta ekki vera brot úr „Fagraskógi“ annarri höfuðljóðasyrpu séra Guðmundar?” (‘Mightn’t this be a fragment of *Fagriskógur*, the second of the Rev. Guðmundur’s main poetry anthologies?’) Hannes Þorsteinsson, “Guðmundur Erlendsson prestur Felli,” *Ævir lærðra manna*, vol. 21, 13.

<sup>641</sup> Hallur Guðmundsson, “Ó, þú fallvalta veraldarvist,” st. 146–147.

<sup>642</sup> “Þennan kveðskap skrifaði hann inn í mikla doðranta, og eru heimildir um tvö handrit, sem hann kallaði *Gígju* og *Fagraskóg*. Hið fyrrnefnda er varðveitt, en einungis er nú til hluti af *Fagraskógi*. Það má hafa til marks um magn kvæða Guðmundar að *Gígja* er rúmar 1100 blaðsíður, en hætt er við að þeim sem legði á sig að lesa

Guðmundur Erlendsson's sons. As argued below in greater detail, no one surviving manuscript copy in its current state preserves Guðmundur Erlendsson's complete vision of *Gígja*, nor should one consider *Gígja* to be a single, fixed collection analogous to a print anthology.

Harold Love's concepts of scribal publication and scribal communities have frequently been applied to nineteenth-century scribal culture in Iceland, and with good reason.<sup>643</sup> While Love's treatment of post-Gutenberg manuscript culture has been criticized for framing scribal practices largely in terms of their relationship to commercial print texts,<sup>644</sup> it is a useful model for dealing with scribal activities in Iceland from the mid-eighteenth through to the early twentieth centuries.<sup>645</sup> Hand-copied texts closely patterned on printed volumes were produced for profit and exchange by entrepreneurial Icelandic authors, editors and scribes.<sup>646</sup> Given Iceland's small, diffuse population, one could argue that scribal publication was a response to the small market for Icelandic-language publications, which made mass production of all but the most popular titles financially unviable. Scribal publication offered an opportunity for authors and copyists to earn a profit with their pens but also for individuals to disseminate material within their own private circles.

A consumption-oriented scribal publication model does not fit neatly with *Gígja*. Rarely for an Icelandic poet of his day, Guðmundur Erlendsson does fall into the category of "published author" in the most traditional, print-oriented sense of the term. A large body of his writings is squarely aimed at the general public, and he deliberately tailors his style to the needs of an unlearned audience. As with Einar Sigurðsson of Eydalir, Ólafur Jónsson of Sandar and other early Lutheran poets represented in the 1612 *Vísnaþók*, Guðmundur's verses tend to be transparent enough in meaning to make them accessible even for children. However, there is no actual evidence that Guðmundur (a) compiled *Gígja* in the hope of its eventual print publication, (b) used a scribal medium for *Gígja* as a stand-in for print because print publication was not a viable option or (c) created *Gígja* because he wished to exercise control over the transmission of his poetry.

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þær þætti meira til um magn en gæði." Böðvar Guðmundsson, "Nýir siðir og nýir lærdómar: Bókmenntir 1550–1750," in *Íslensk bókmenntasaga*, vol. 2, ed. Vésteinn Ólason, 2nd edition (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2006), 463.

<sup>643</sup> See e.g., Davíð Ólafsson, "Vernacular Literacy Practices in Nineteenth-Century Icelandic Scribal Culture," in *Att läsa och att skriva: Två vågor av vardagligt skriftbruk i Norden 1800–2000*, ed. Ann-Catrine Edlund (Umeå: Umeå University, 2012), 65–85; Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

<sup>644</sup> Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print*, 22–23.

<sup>645</sup> Davíð Ólafsson, "Post-medieval manuscript culture and the historiography of texts," in *Mirrors of Virtue*, ed. Margrét Eggertsdóttir & Matthew James Driscoll, 28–29.

<sup>646</sup> Matthew James Driscoll, *The Unwashed Children of Eve: The Production, Dissemination and Reception of Popular Literature in Post-Reformation Iceland* (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1997).

For reaching his audiences, Guðmundur's preferred medium was arguably song. Guðmundur's concern with touching hearts and minds through the medium of song is strongly influenced by the teachings of Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson, as discussed earlier. Eight hymns in the version of *Gígja* preserved in 1055 include musical notation, and four in 1529. Many headings for non-notated pieces contain information on the melody, while poems for which no explicit musical information is provided tend to be associated with a lively performance culture in the seventeenth century (including *vikivaki* and *rimur*).<sup>647</sup> Guðmundur makes frequent reference to the physical presence of a performer and a listening audience in his poetry, particularly in opening lines such as “Yngisfólki eg vil hér / eina vísu róma,” (‘I wish to voice a verse for the young people here’).<sup>648</sup>

It should not be surprising that a Lutheran minister valued the voice as an important tool for the transmission of literature. Accustomed to sermonizing from the pulpit on holy days for nearly a half-century, Haaberg's concept of “earways to heaven” resonates closely with Guðmundur Erlendsson's project as a poet for the common people.<sup>649</sup> As discussed in Chapter 4, many of Guðmundur's surviving compositions deal with topical subjects and are structured for performance within the community. They speak to a vibrant and social literary culture in seventeenth-century Iceland, in which the spoken (or chanted) word held tremendous weight.

There is no evidence that Guðmundur Erlendsson deliberately circulated works via scribal publication to which he wished to restrict access, nor would such an approach have been particularly effective. Love's interpretation of scribal culture is somewhat idealistic when he argues that “the printed text was, with a few high-risk exceptions, a censored and controlled text; the scribal text, a free one.”<sup>650</sup> Using a scribal text to criticize the legislation on the morality laws (*Stóridómur*) for a small, handpicked readership in 1647–1648 nearly cost Guðmundur Andrússon his life in 1649; he lived the rest of his life in exile in Denmark.<sup>651</sup> Limiting physical access to a scribal text in Icelandic was an insufficient means of controlling its circulation within a small population with a high vernacular literacy rate.

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<sup>647</sup> On *vikivaki* performance culture, see Jón Samsonarson, *Kvæði og dansleikir*, vol. 1 (Reykjavík: Almenna bókafélagið, 1964).

<sup>648</sup> 232, 145v; 250, 19r.

<sup>649</sup> Jon Haarberg, “Earways to Heaven: Singing the Catechism in Denmark-Norway, 1569–1756,” in *Religious Reading in the Lutheran North: Studies in Early Modern Scandinavian Book Culture*, ed. Charlotte Appel & Morten Fink-Jensen (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011), 48–69.

<sup>650</sup> Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England*, 184.

<sup>651</sup> Guðmundur Andrússon, *Deilurit*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, Íslenzk rit síðari alda 2 (Copenhagen: Hið íslenzka fræðafélag, 1948). On the boundary between controversial texts and dangerous manuscripts, see Parsons, “Text and Context,” 65–68.

That scribal texts were “free” texts may have been more true in major population centres than in rural communities, but one’s social status arguably played a key role in one’s ability to express oneself freely in written form. More elite members of society – particularly office-holders with a formal education – had not only better access to manuscript culture but also less rigorously controlled access to printed and handwritten material than poorer individuals from less prominent families. Had Guðmundur Erlendsson wished his poems to remain private (unlikely given that their first stanzas usually reference some form of listening and/or vocal performance), then he could have followed the example of Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson of Skálholt, who discretely composed verses in Latin addressed to the Virgin Mary (*Ad beatam virginem*).<sup>652</sup> There were boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable texts irrespective of their medium, but boundaries could shift depending on the identity and social status of the scribe, recipient and owner.<sup>653</sup>

Oral transmission may still have been the norm for comic poetry. Guðmundur Erlendsson and Ásgrímur Magnússon’s *Grýlukvæði* first appears in a ballad collection that is the work of Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson’s brother Gissur Sveinsson, in which much of the material evidently derives from oral performances.<sup>654</sup> While seventeenth-century manuscripts such as AM 441 12mo that preserve contemporary comic and popular poetry have not yet been studied comprehensively, comic poems and ditties by seventeenth-century Icelandic poets often survive thanks to their oral transmission and eventual transcription by later generations.<sup>655</sup> The modern distinction between orally performed and written literature does not strongly apply to early modern Icelandic poetry. Just as we have moved past the idea that literature is something found in a printed book, it may be useful to re-examine the role of a physical carrier as a defining feature of literary texts.

Use of paper for recording and sharing poetry is tied to social function. The desire to share literature across long distances is one obvious reason for the creation of written copies of poems. Early modern

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<sup>652</sup> See Einar Sigurbjörnsson, “Ad beatam virginem,” in *Brynjólfur biskup – kirkjuhöfðingi, fræðimaður og skáld: Safn ritgerða í tilefni af 400 ára afmæli Brynjólfs Sveinssonar 14. september 2005*, ed. Jón Pálsson, Sigurður Pétursson & Torfi H. Tulinius (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2006), 64–77.

<sup>653</sup> At Mýrar in Dýrafjörður on 28 April 1727, a young man who had recently sent some offensive handwritten verses in a letter to a neighbour (probably intended as a joke) was fined when the neighbour (Eiríkur Guðmundsson) complained. The young man (Jón Ketilsson) had not composed the verses himself, but he copied them out somewhat illegibly and sent them in a signed letter to Eiríkur. Mitigating factors in his case included his youth: Jón was only 17 years old “og þó enn fávísari að viti en aldri, sem sýni sig að hann hafi sitt nafn sett undir soddan” (‘and even more ignorant for his age than usual, which can be seen from how he has signed his name under this sort of thing’) and the uncertainty among those present over whether Jón had intended to offend by sending them to Eiríkur Guðmundsson. However, there was a general consensus that copying a *níðvísa* (‘defamatory poem’) about someone named Eiríkur and sending it to someone also named Eiríkur was a punishable act, even if it was sent privately. Már Jónsson (ed.), *Til merkis mitt nafn: Dómabækur Markúsar Bergssonar sýslumanns Ísafjarðarsýslu 1711–1729*, Sýnisbók íslenskrar alþýðu 6 (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2002), 296–99.

<sup>654</sup> Parsons, “Grýla in Sléttuhlíð,” 216–19.

<sup>655</sup> Cf. Jón Samsonarson, “Leppalúði Hallgríms Péturssonar,” 43–49.

Iceland had no permanent urban settlements, and poets belonging to the clergy would often be granted parsonages far from family members and former schoolmates with whom they wished to remain in contact. Verse epistles (*ljóðabréf*) became increasingly popular in the seventeenth century, and they remained a common means of sharing family and community news in the nineteenth century. Bjarni Gissurarson in East Iceland was an extremely prolific writer of *ljóðabréf* to friends and family.<sup>656</sup> “Skeggi til Laugu skrifar og segir” (see 4.3.2) is a parody of a private love-letter in verse to a distant recipient, but the only example associated with the *ljóðabréf* tradition in the *Gígja* manuscripts is Guðmundur Erlendsson’s poem to Þorlákur Skúlason from 1641 (“Höfum liðsmenn, ljúfa”) on the death of his father Erlendur and three other clergymen in North Iceland the same year (Egill Ólafsson at Tjörn in Svarfaðardalur, Jón Guðmundsson at Hvanneyri in Eyjafjörður and Ólafur [Magnússon] at Stærri-Árskógur).<sup>657</sup>

Unbound single-sheet manuscript texts and small pamphlets were probably a common means of circulating poetry across regional boundaries, even if few of these survive. Rare examples may be found in 1529, which contains a translation of a German prophesy from 1648 on a single bifolium in an unknown hand and a copy of Guðmundur Erlendsson’s poetry on the death of King Charles I of England on a bifolium and a half-leaf (see 5.5.1).

In order to understand Guðmundur Erlendsson as a poet, it is helpful to understand him as a social author in a cultural milieu that supported many different modes of sharing one’s work, rather than as a poet who was forced to hand-copy his material in the absence of a commercial printing press. As Guðmundur Erlendsson’s own verse preface makes clear, *Gígja* was never a public-oriented anthology, despite the fact – importantly – that many of the individual works contained in *Gígja* engage with a public audience. In all probability, *Gígja* was initially created in direct connection with the wedding of Margrét Guðmundsdóttir and Jón Illugason in c. 1654. Jón was Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson’s great-grandson, and the nephew of Bishop Þorlákur Skúlason. Guðmundur Erlendsson had long cultivated the patronage of Bishop Guðbrandur’s family, and the alliance must have been a source of enormous pride for Guðmundur and his wife, Guðrún Gunnardóttir. Guðmundur and Guðrún did not belong to Iceland’s ruling class, and their financial means were modest compared to the family of Þorlákur Skúlason. However, in terms of cultural upbringing, one can argue that Margrét and Jón were on an equal footing.<sup>658</sup>

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<sup>656</sup> Jón Samsonarson, “Eftirmáli,” in Bjarni Gissurarson, *Sólarsýn: Kvæði*, ed. Jón M. Samsonarson (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfa Menningarsjóðs, 1960), 111; Harpa Hreinsdóttir, *Ljóðabréf Bjarna Gissurarsonar í Lbs 838, 4to* (MA thesis, University of Iceland, 2007).

<sup>657</sup> 232, 101v–102r; 1055, 133r–134r.

<sup>658</sup> Cf. Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, “Constructing cultural competence,” 277–320.

Epithalamia were sometimes composed to celebrate upper-class marriages in early modern Iceland, but the bride's father seems to have gone an extra step for this union: creating a massive volume of poetry dedicated to his new son-in-law, welcoming Jón into the family and reinforcing the social bond between Jón and the parson's household in Sléttuhlíð. *Fagriskógur*, given to Jón the Younger, may have been a similar wedding gift on the occasion of Jón's marriage to Guðrún Þórðardóttir, who was closely related to Jón Illugason and the elite of North Iceland (see 4.15.5). It is unknown what happened to the manuscript after Jón's death in 1702.

## 5.1 *Gígja*, a spiritual fiddle.

Guðmundur Erlendsson's verse preface to *Gígja*, which is addressed to the book's reader, makes clear that the poet conceived of *Gígja* as a two-part whole, with each part forming a musical "string" for the reader-singer on which to perform.<sup>659</sup> It begins with a description of the construction of his volume and the concept informing its structure:

Gíjju strengi tjái eg tvo,  
tals úr girni snúna,  
minnar eins eg segi svo,  
úr samstæðum tilbúna.

Fyrri partur hennar hefur  
heilög vers og kvæði.  
Annar, sjáðu, af sér gefur  
ypparleg heilræði.<sup>660</sup>

(‘I express the two strings of my *gígja*, twisted from the guts of speech, created from a complementary pair: the first part has holy verses and poems. The second – see – gives excellent advice’)

According to Guðmundur's organising principle, the two parts of his manuscript form its strings, each of which has a distinct sound or tuning, and which together produce a pleasing balance or harmony. He expands this metaphor, whereby the book's reader is the player or performer who interacts bodily with the *gígja*. By the time Guðmundur compiled *Gígja*, his children were adults, and he states that *Gígja* is a book he has created for their spiritual comfort in times of adversity. This does not necessarily mean that Guðmundur was near death at the time he created *Gígja*, as by the time he

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<sup>659</sup> 232, 2r–3r. A second copy is in 1055, 2r–v.

<sup>660</sup> 232, 2r–3r.



composed the *Rímur af Sál og Davíð* on Grímsey he was already contemplating himself as a man advanced in years. For the second part, he states that he has included poetry for times when the mind is joyful, including *ævintýri* ('adventures, exempla') of the behaviour of birds and animals.

*Gígja* is constructed as a spiritual fiddle, but one that had a close relationship to the material and performance culture of seventeenth-century Skagafjörður. Probably, Guðmundur's most direct inspiration was the folk-instrument known as the *gígja* (cognate to 'gigue') in various Icelandic sources.<sup>661</sup>

The bipartite structure described in Guðmundur's preface appears to have been popular for Icelandic songbooks in the early 1600s, with hymns in the first section and more varied pieces in the second. Guðbrandur Þorláksson's printed *Vísnaþók* takes this form, as does Ólafur Jónsson of Sandar's *kvæðabók*.<sup>662</sup> Ólafur Jónsson's *kvæðabók* circulated only in manuscript form, but Guðmundur's son Jón the Younger made a copy of Ólafur Jónsson's poetry anthology (*kvæðabók*) in 1687 for Ragnheiður Jónsdóttir, and there is every reason to believe that Guðmundur was familiar with both models.<sup>663</sup> The form was not limited to poetry manuscripts: Guðrún Ingólfssdóttir observed a bipartite structure in an eighteenth-century miscellany belonging to Pórey Björnsdóttir (1676–1745), from Hvassafell in Saurbæjarhreppur in Eyjafjörður, which her husband Guðmundur Ólafsson copied for her some time between their marriage in c. 1700 and Guðmundur's death in the *stórabóla* epidemic in 1707.<sup>664</sup>

There is no mention of *Fagriskógur* by name in the preface to *Gígja*, though Guðmundur does compare himself to an aging tree and mentions that he is on the road to completing another book (*kver*), containing *rímur* and hymns. *Fagriskógur*'s title ('Fair Forest') might point to an affiliation with Guðmundur's riddle of the book-as-tree in *Einvaldsóður* (see 4.12), but read together with Hallur's funeral poem, Guðmundur's comparison between himself and a tree at the point of falling suggests that he also interpreted *fagriskógur* as a metaphor for his expanding family and kinship network: the old tree's little saplings had grown into a beautiful forest.

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<sup>661</sup> See Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir, "Holur kassi og grófur strengur: Heimildir um alþýðuhljóðfæri á ýmsum tímum fram til ársins 1900," *Saga* 54.2 (2016): 108–41.

<sup>662</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, *Heiður og huggun*, 49; Kári Bjarnason, Pétur Pétursson & Sigurður Sigurðarson, "Formálsorð," in *Í höndum þínum minn herra Guð hefur þú teiknað mig: Brot úr sálmum og kvæðum séra Ólafs Jónssonar á Söndum í Dýrafirði (1560–1627)*, ed. Kári Bjarnason & Matthías Johannessen (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2006), 9.

<sup>663</sup> Lbs 1205 4to. According to the poem dedicating the manuscript to Ragnheiður on f. 28v, it was presented on the occasion of the first day of summer, a traditional day for giving gifts. Þórunn Sigurðardóttir suggests that the manuscript was Jón's gift to Ragnheiður. Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, "Handrit Ragnheiðar Jónsdóttur í Gröf," 101–3.

<sup>664</sup> Guðrún Ingólfssdóttir, „Í hverri bók er mannsandi“: *Handritasýrpur – bókmenning, þekking og sjálfsmynd karla og kvenna á 18. öld*, *Studia Islandica* 62 (Reykjavík: Bókmennta- og listfræðastofnun Háskóla Íslands, 2011), 208, 256–57.

## 5.2 *Gígja* in 1055

Lbs 1055 4to is a copy of *Gígja* made by the Rev. Markús Eyjólfsson in 1787–88, at which time he served as parson for Mýrar in Dýrafjörður. Markús Eyjólfsson is a scribe of particular interest, since he also copied *Einvaldsóður* (see 4.12) in Lbs 655 8vo. According to Markús's meticulous scribal documentation on f. 1r, the exemplar for 1055 is a copy of the original *Gígja* made at Lambavatn in Rauðasandur in 1692–4 by Jón Ólafsson, i.e., the Rev. Jón Ólafsson of Lambavatn (1640/1641–1703):

Andleg  
gígja  
eður  
hljóðfæri.  
Af  
sálmum, vísum, rímum, kvæðum og dæmisögum  
samantekin  
börnum mínum og náungum til fróðleiks í Guðs  
orði, og annarrar nauðsynlegrar undirvísunar,  
af föðurlegri ástsemi uppskrifuð og til ævi-  
minningar eftirlátin  
af  
séra Guðmundi Erlendssyni kirkjupresti  
að Felli í Sléttuhlíð í Hegraness þingi  
Anno 1654.  
Sálm. 104. Eg vil syngja drottni mína lífdaga, og minn Guð lofa  
svo lengi sem eg er.  
Að nýju uppskrifað eftir authoris eigin bók af mér undir-  
skrifðuðum  
skrifðuðum að Lambavatni á Rauðasandi  
1692 – 3 – og 4. Jonas Olavius MS.  
En ég byrjaði í Decembri 1787. Marcus Eyjólfsson.

(‘A spiritual *gígja* or musical instrument of hymns, verses, *rímur*, poems and exempla. Compiled for my children and neighbours, for knowledge of God’s word and other necessary teachings, copied with fatherly love and left in memory of [my] life by the Rev. Guðmundur Erlendsson, minister for Fell in Sléttuhlíð in Hegranessþing, Anno 1654.

Psalm 104. I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being.

Recopied from the author's own book by me, the undersigned, at Lambavatn in Rauðisandur [in] 1692 –3 – and 4. Jonas Olavius MS.

But I started in December 1787. Markús Eyjólfsson.')

As in 232, the manuscript begins with Guðmundur Erlendsson's introduction to the manuscript (2r–v), followed by the list of all the books of the Bible in rhymed verse (3r). On 3v are written a series of short verses by Guðmundur Erlendsson not found in 232 (described in 5.2.1). The recto side of the following leaf, f. 4r, was originally left blank by the scribe, probably so that a dedication could be added at the time of the book's presentation to its intended recipient. It now contains a statement in a plain hand, dated 10 December 1789, declaring that Helga Þorvaldsdóttir has given the book to her son Guðmundur Pálsson of Höfði (1773–1848), making Helga Þorvaldsdóttir (1731–1803) the probable commissioner of the volume and Guðmundur Pálsson the intended recipient. Surprisingly enough, Markús Eyjólfsson copied Jón Ólafsson's dedication on the verso side, from which it can be seen that this now-lost exemplar, hereafter \*JÓG, was produced as a wedding gift for Jón's daughter Halla (1676–after 1703), who married farmer Jón Pálsson (1670–after 1703) and lived at Breiðavík. Markús Eyjólfsson left blank spaces on ff. 59v and 61r to indicate missing text, suggesting that \*JÓG was in a worn state by the late eighteenth century.

Jón Ólafsson does not clarify on the title-page what he means by the author's autograph manuscript, but it seems, based on the poems discussed in 5.2.1, that this was the *Gígja* manuscript produced in 1654 for Jón Illugason, hereafter \*JIG. As with 232, 1055 is not a copy of *Gígja* alone. The first poems after the dedication in 1055 are the Exodus Hymns (*Exodi sálmar*), a cycle of 76 hymns based on the Book of Exodus (ff. 5r–48v), accompanied by several verses addressed to the reader that explain in more detail the plan of the Tabernacle (49r–v) and a final poem addressed to the Book of Exodus itself (50r). This work is not present in 232 and is not an easy fit with Guðmundur Erlendsson's own description of *Gígja*'s content. The Exodus Hymns, if they are indeed by Guðmundur Erlendsson, form a book in their own right, with a postscript that binds the cycle into a self-contained unit. In 232, a heading indicates the beginning of the first and second strings. To place the Exodus Hymns at the beginning of *Gígja* would be to weaken its concept structurally, and it is more likely that the Exodus Hymns were joined with *Gígja* at a later date than 1654.

*Gígja* in 1055 arguably begins only on f. 51r, with the hymn "Eilífi einvaldsherra" (ff. 51r–v) as in 232. The heading introducing the first section of the book (found in 232 and 1529) has not been copied. However, the page header for the section from f. 51r ("Eilífi einvaldsherra") to f. 87v ("Þolinmæðinnar dæmið dýrt") is "Aðskiljanlegar sálmvísur" ('Various different hymns'), a collective title echoing Guðmundur Erlendsson's description of the first part of his *Gígja* as containing songs and hymns "eftir aðskiljanlegum tímum og tilfellum" ('for different times and occasions') in 232 and

1529 (see 5.3 and 5.5). After this point in 1055, page headers give the name of the poem or cycle rather than a content description.

Worryingly for a manuscript supposedly descending from a manuscript from 1654, there is a short hymn on ff. 82v–83r (“Friðar musterið fagra”) that is dated in the rubric to 1676 – six years after Guðmundur Erlendsson’s death.<sup>665</sup> Fortunately, the same hymn is also in 232 (ff. 45v–46r), with no date of composition specified.

On ff. 88r–96v are Guðmundur Erlendsson’s seven Passion Hymns, printed in 1666. Guðmundur Erlendsson’s irate exchange with Bishop Gísli Þorláksson proves conclusively that the copy of the Passion Hymns in 1055 derives from the printed version rather than a manuscript copy predating 1666, as one hymn was censored (see 4.14.4). Like the Exodus Hymns, these would not have formed part of the original *Gígja*, but Markús Eyjólfsson’s manuscript locates them in *Gígja*’s first string in 1055. This is further evidence for reorganization of the manuscript after 1654. It is impossible to see whether the Exodus Hymns and Passion Hymns were inserted into \*JIG or \*JÓG at a later date or whether Markús Eyjólfsson himself added them into his version of *Gígja*, given that he had access to other poems by Guðmundur Erlendsson, including *Einvaldsóður*.

Guðmundur’s commemorative poem on Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson (“Diktur lofkvæði Davíðs son”) on ff. 127v–129r, dated 1628, and an elegy composed on the same occasion for Halldóra Guðbrandsdóttir (“Lausnarinn, ljúfur minn”) on ff. 129r–130v are immediately followed by Guðmundur’s commemorative poem on Guðbrandur’s successor at Hólar, Þorlákur Skúlason (“Aví, aví vort auma land”) on ff. 130r–131v. Since Bishop Þorlákur died in 1656, *Gígja* from 1654 could not have originally contained this poem. However, it is impossible to ascertain whether the poem was inserted in \*JIG after its initial presentation to Jón Illugason.

On f. 136v is a rubric that does not originate from Guðmundur Erlendsson himself: “Þrjár stökur séra Guðmundar” (“Three stanzas by the Rev. Guðmundur”). The three eight-line *dróttkvætt* stanzas clearly belong to a single poem, “Auðugir gái að Guði”. Markús Eyjólfsson uses a two-column format, without marking the beginning and ending of each stanza. The poem is also found in 232 on f. 102r under the rubric of “Þrjár stökur með sama brag” (“Three stanzas with the same metre [as the previous poems]’), where the verses are not laid out in columns.

The division between the first and second part of *Gígja* is not as clearly marked in 1055 as in 232, but f. 137r begins with *Barnarós*, a proverb-poem that gives excellent advice as promised by the preface.

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<sup>665</sup> ÍB 196 4to contains a copy of “Friðar musterið fagra” with the date 1676 on f. 34r and several other hymns by Guðmundur Erlendsson. These appear to derive from \*JÓG.

There is a change in ink here, and comparison with 232 shows that this is the point at which *Gígja*'s second "string" likely began in \*JIG. *Barnarós* occupies just over 17 pages in 1055 (ff. 137r–145v), followed by *Gyðingaraunir* on ff. 145v–149r, *Postulavísur* on ff. 149r–151v and *Lögmálsbókin* on ff. 151v–154v. After this come mainly narrative and fable poems on the adventures of humans, birds and animals, including a short section (ff. 174r–175) in a contemporary but less practiced hand, containing Guðmundur Erlendsson's *Kvæði af fuglinum Fönix* ("Um Fönix vil eg fuglinn tjá") on the Phoenix. The page headers at the end of this section (ff. 182r–186v) read simply "Kvæði" ('poems').

The last section of 1055 contains four *rímur* cycles by Guðmundur Erlendsson: *Rímur af Móses* (187r–218v), *Rímur af Gedeon* (ff. 219r–230v), *Rímur af Samson sterka* (ff. 231r–240v) and *Rímur af Sál og Davíð* (ff. 241–308v). These *rímur* are not written continuously: each new *rímur* cycle begins on a new leaf, and blank space is left at the end of the final *ríma* in each cycle, filled with a small vignette on f. 230v and a squiggle imitating a vignette on f. 218v and 240v. The final leaves of the *Rímur af Sál og Davíð* are tattered, and no index has been preserved.

### 5.2.1 Five poems

On f. 3v of 1055 are five short poems that all evidently originate in \*JIG or \*JÓG but are not by a single author and would not have had the same neat layout as in 1055. These include both dedicatory poems and poems that may have originated as marginalia.

The first is a simple 8-line *dróttkvætt* stanza ("Jesús um heilt hús"), an evening prayer for the protection of the farm (*býli*) and the sleeping quarters (*svefnsalur*) from the power of darkness, which is attributed to Guðmundur Erlendsson in the heading. Below this is a two-stanza poem addressed to the scribe's daughter ("Skoða hvað hér skrifað stár"), reminding her to take good care of *Gígja*. Given that \*JÓG was copied for Halla Jónsdóttir, she is likely the daughter being addressed in these particular stanzas rather than Margrét Guðmundsdóttir, especially since the poem deliberately copies the wording of the fifth and final poem on the page, which appears to be Guðmundur Erlendsson's original manuscript dedication to Jón Illugason, Margrét's groom.

The third poem is a two-stanza address to the reader. In the first stanza, an unidentified first-person speaker (the poet, the scribe or an owner) asks the reader to treat "my" *Gígja* well and not *makúlera* ('stain, dishonour,' from Lat. *maculō*) the book; in the second stanza, *Gígja* herself speaks in the first person and repeats the request not to stain or treat her badly, as she has come to educate the reader and needs to travel widely after this. The poem is a reminder that manuscript volumes such as *Gígja* were created primarily for circulation and use, rather than the long-term preservation of a collection

of poems.<sup>666</sup> Since the book was intended for sharing, it was important for those handling the book to do so carefully. It is also a reminder of the book's didactic function for seventeenth-century users. The poem is anonymous; one indication that Guðmundur Erlendsson is possibly not the author is found in the final line, "meðferðina að vanda" ('to take care in handling [the book]'). This is identical to the last line of the fifth poem on 3v (see below), which was original to \*JIG. It would be unusual for a poet such as Guðmundur to repeat the same line of poetry twice on the same page.

The fourth poem is the most bizarre in its context: a Latin distich and its Icelandic translation.<sup>667</sup> This well-known distich alludes to a gruesome legend whereby a boy playing butcher kills his brother (copying his father who has just killed a pig), typically leading to a chain of deaths. William Hansen observes that variations of this particular folktale (AT 2401, *The Children Play at Hog-Killing*) tend to be told as a recent true event at a given location, but that the story itself was known in antiquity, medieval Arabic literature and in German literature from at least the sixteenth century.<sup>668</sup> The Latin distich in 1055 is identical to the one printed by Hansen from a German source from 1600,<sup>669</sup> in which the husband kills the pig, the oldest boy kills the middle brother with the butcher's knife, the wife stabs the oldest boy, the youngest boy drowns in the bathwater, the wife hangs herself and the husband dies of grief:

Sus, pueri bini, puer unus, nupta, maritus,  
cultello, lympha, fune, dolore cadunt.

('A pig, two boys, one boy, a wife, a husband, perish by knife, water, rope, grief.')

Hansen's observation that the folktale has a tendency to mutate into a local legend is certainly true of Skagafjörður in the seventeenth century. A localized version of the legend can be found in the *Skarðsárannáll* chronicle compiled by Björn Jónsson of Skarðsá (1574–1655), who set the tragedy in the eastern part of Iceland in the year 1553, around two decades before his own birth. Perhaps because neither pig farming nor the bathing of small children were widely practiced in early modern Iceland, Björn Jónsson's cautionary tale has the wife threaten the older boy with the knife, the older boy threaten and attack his younger brother (mimicking the adult's observed behaviour, as in other versions of the legend), the wife stab the older boy and the husband beat the wife to death. The most notable variation to the story is its conclusion: for killing his wife, the husband (Björn names him Bjarni) is given the penance of walking around Iceland barefoot. He supposedly walks three

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<sup>666</sup> Margrét Eggertsdóttir, "Inngangur," Hallgrímur Pétursson, *Ljóðmæli* 1, xv.

<sup>667</sup> 1055, 3v.

<sup>668</sup> William F. Hansen, *Ariadne's Thread: A Guide to International Tales Found in Classical Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 79.

<sup>669</sup> William F. Hansen, *Ariadne's Thread*, 80.

times around Iceland before settling at Efranes in Skagaströnd in Skagafjörður, where he marries a woman named Árnís and has a son Jón who dies in mysterious circumstances. The entry ends with the statement that Bjarni was “sífelldlega berfættur, og hann gekk svo hart um grjót, sem hver inn skófataður” (‘always barefoot, and he walked on stone as firmly as anyone might in shoes’), as if Bjarni’s barefootedness somehow supported the claim that he had indeed walked three times around Iceland.<sup>670</sup>

Although its presence in *Skarðsárannáll* shows that the legend circulated in the vernacular, the Latin distich and its translation are the contribution of someone schooled in Latin. Its position as the fourth of five items is a strong indication that the Rev. Markús Eyjólfsson copied the material from his exemplar. Its translator is unknown, but it cannot have been part of Guðmundur Erlendsson’s own original layout for the dedicatory page of \*JIG. It probably numbers among later additions to either \*JIG or \*JÓG, possibly scribbled in a margin or other originally blank space.

The fifth poem has the name Guðmundur Erlendsson written immediately below it and is clearly Guðmundur’s original dedicatory poem for the lost \*JIG:

Börnin mín þar viti á von  
með vísukorni nýju,  
að öll hefur Jón minn Illugason  
eignarráð á Gígju.

En að láni um má sjá,  
að þeim komi til handa,  
þau eg bið, sem mest að má,  
meðferðina að vanda.

(‘With this new little verse, my children may know that my Jón Illugason has complete possession of *Gígja*. But so that they might have access, [he] will see to its loaning, so I ask them to be as careful as possible in its handling.’)

This poem was clearly added to *Gígja* by Guðmundur Erlendsson himself at the time of its presentation to Jón Illugason, and it mainly repeats the sentiments of Guðmundur’s prologue: *Gígja* belongs to Jón Illugason, but he is expected to share. Margrét and Jón’s eldest surviving child, Jón, was born in 1656. The date of 1654 on the title-page of 1055 is thus in keeping with the approximate

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<sup>670</sup> ÍA 1, 132–34.

date of their marriage. The verses addressed to Jón Illugason on f. 3v, absent from 232, suggest that 1055 descends from an autograph copy of *Gígja* specifically dedicated to Jón, whereas 232 does not.

### 5.2.2 JS 207 8vo

JS 207 8vo (207) derives partially from a copy of *Gígja* (probably \*JÓG). Other religious poetry is also included in the manuscript and *Gígja*'s structure is not retained. The manuscript is undated, and the main hand is unknown. Páll Eggert Ólason suggested an approximate date of 1720, but it could easily have been written a decade or two later.<sup>671</sup> However, 207 is at least 40 years older than 1055, and it thus provides some clues as to the circulation of *Gígja* in West Iceland after Jón Ólafsson gave a copy to his daughter Halla.

Halla Jónsdóttir, the owner of \*JÓG, lived in Breiðavík in Rauðasandshreppur in Barðastrandasýsla at the time of the 1703 census. An owner's statement on f. 183v of 207 names the book's owner in 1747 as Sigríður Gunnlaugsdóttir (1693–after 1762), who grew up on the island of Svefneyjar in Breiðafjörður, part of Reykhólahreppur in Barðastrandarsýsla. Both Sigríður and her older brother Ólafur Gunnlaugsson were poets.<sup>672</sup> Sigríður married the Rev. Sigurður Þórðarson (c. 1689–1767), who served as parson at Brjánslækur in Barðaströnd from 1723. The date of their marriage is uncertain, but their oldest surviving child was born in 1733. Páll Eggert Ólason suggested that the main scribe could be Sigríður's husband, but this also is uncertain.<sup>673</sup> The four final leaves (ff. 232r–235v) have been more conclusively identified as the work of Pétur Jónsson (1701–before 1788), who moved to Svefneyjar and was a prolific scribe.

According to an undated inscription on the inside cover, the volume's owner is the unmarried Guðríður Hjaltadóttir. Although the inscription is in a conservative hand, the paper probably dates from the nineteenth century. Only one single women in the Íslendingabók database by the name of Guðríður Hjaltadóttir who was alive in the first half of the nineteenth century survived early childhood. Her parents, Hjalti Sigurðsson (b. 1662) and Steinunn Álfadóttir (1659–1718) were a property-owning couple who farmed at Brekka in Strandarhreppur in Borgarfjörður.<sup>674</sup> Her older sister had also been christened Guðríður in May of 1797 but died as a tiny infant. The younger Guðríður (1800–1876) was unmarried and lived most of her adult life at Kálfanes in Strandarsýsla. Even if the manuscript's provenance is unclear, it clearly originated and circulated in West Iceland and was clearly – like \*JÓG – a manuscript owned by women.

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<sup>671</sup> Páll Eggert Ólason, *Skrá um handritasöfn Landsbókasafnsins*, vol. 2, 655.

<sup>672</sup> Poetry by Sigríður is preserved in JS 254 4to and JS 475 8vo.

<sup>673</sup> Páll Eggert Ólason, *Skrá um handritasöfn Landsbókasafnsins*, vol. 2, 655.

<sup>674</sup> Gunnar F. Guðmundsson, *Jarðabréf frá 16. og 17. öld* (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska fræðafélag, 1993), 56.



### 5.3 *Gígja* in 232

In 1688–1689, Guðmundur's son Skúli compiled a massive tome, now 232, at the request of Einar, a close relative whom Skúli addresses as his brother, using the honorific *þér*. On f. 11v, Skúli's brother Hallur refers to Einar first as his brother (using the honorific *þér*) but then more specifically as his sister's son. From this, can be deduced that Einar was Skúli's biological nephew and almost certainly one and the same man as the Einar Jónsson of Lundur in Fljót (1659–after 1703) who presented the manuscript to his wife, Guðný Hjálmarsdóttir, according to the full-page inscription on f. 4r of 232.

Einar's original request was probably to create a copy of *Gígja*, but the resulting codex is more complex and should not be viewed as a direct copy of *Gígja* or any other one single manuscript. As currently bound, 232 begins on 1r with Skúli's elaborate title-page, which has an ornate and colourful border depicting flowers and urns. The first part of the title is virtually identical to that of 1055, although it is written in the third person, and the quotation is the same:

Andleg  
*gígja* eður hljóðfæri  
af  
sálmum, vísnum, rímum, kvæðum og dæmi-  
sögum, samantekin börnum sínum og náungum  
til fróðleiks í Guðs orði, og annarrar na-  
uðsynlegrar undirvísunar. Af fö-  
ðurlegri ástsemi uppskrifuð og til  
æviminningar eftirlátin,  
af  
séra Guðmundur Erlendssyni, fyrr-  
um staðhaldara að Felli í Sléttu-  
hlíð.  
Ψ. 104. Eg vil lofsyngja drottni mína lífdaga,  
og minn Guð lofa æ svo lengi sem eg er.  
Endurskrifuð á Bjarnarstöðum í Unadal af Skúla  
Guðmundssyni, Anno 1688.

(‘A spiritual *gígja* or musical instrument of hymns, verses, *rímur*, poems and exempla. Compiled for his children and neighbours, for knowledge of God's word and other necessary teachings, copied with fatherly love and left in memory of [his] life by the Rev. Guðmundur Erlendsson, the former benefice-holder for Fell in Sléttuhlíð.

Psalm 104. I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being.

Recopied at Bjarnastaðir in Unadalur by Skúli Guðmundsson, Anno 1688.')

This title-page is followed immediately by Skúli's copy of Guðmundur Erlendsson's verse preface to *Gígja* (2r–3r). After the preface and a list of all the books of the Bible in rhymed verse (3v), in Skúli's hand. This is probably simply filler for a blank leaf, but it is also found in 1055. On f. 4r is an elaborate full-page dedication in an unidentified hand:

Þessa andlegu	This spiritual
<i>gígju</i> eður hljóðfæri	<i>gígja</i> or instrument
á æruverðug heiðurs-	belongs to the honourable
kvinna	lady
Guðný Hjálmars-	Guðny Hjálmars-
dóttir	dóttir
hvörja henni hefur gefið hennar Guð	Who has been given it by her God-
elskandi og dyggðum prýddi	Fearing and virtuous
ektamaður	husband
Einar Jonsson á Lundi í	Einar Jónsson of Lundur in
Fljótum	Fljót

The date of Einar and Guðný's marriage is unknown, but it was presumably some time before 1693, when their daughter Svanhildur was born. Given that Skúli completed 232 at Einar's urging in 1689, the book may well have been produced in connection with Einar's upcoming marriage to Guðný, as part of economic and cultural arrangements surrounding the match. In the seventeenth century, a manuscript was still considered an appropriate wedding gift from a groom to a bride, i.e., the *tilgjöf*,<sup>675</sup> and the prominent notice in 232 that Einar has personally given the book to his wife Guðný is a strong indication that it formed part of Guðný's *tilgjöf*.

At over 550 leaves, the manuscript had indisputable economic value, but the book was also a material expression of Einar's cultural background. The poems in 232 attest not only to Guðmundur Erlendsson's virtuosity as a poet but also Einar's valuable family connections. This included

<sup>675</sup> Arthur, "The Importance of Marital and Maternal Ties," 202.

occasional poetry composed for his grandfather's patrons – a catalogue of the powerful families to whom Guðný and Einar might turn for support should the need arise. Given that her father Hjálmar was also a poet, albeit not quite as prolific as Guðmundur, Guðný would have shared in common with Einar that poetry and its performance formed a major part of her household life.

Following the dedication on f. 4r are two indices created by Skúli.<sup>676</sup> The first is a list of hymns by first line (5r–6v), covering ff. 1–52, while the second is a list of verses and poems (7r–9r), covering mainly ff. 53–156 but also a handful of poems that Skúli has copied between *rímur*, discussed below. On f. 9v is a list of the 14 *rímur* cycles included in 232. Skúli notes below this that there are also 124 short poems based on Aesop's fables, but these are not individually listed in the index.

After the indices come two dedications in verse to Einar, one by Skúli (f. 10r–v) and one by Hallur (f. 11r–v), in Hallur's own hand. In its original state, these formed the very final leaves of 232 (as stated by Hallur himself),<sup>677</sup> being placed after the indices. The original foliation of the manuscript is written in Skúli's hand in the top-right corner of each recto leaf, from which it can be seen that although the indices and dedicatory leaves have been moved to the front of 232, no additional reorganization of the manuscript's leaves has occurred.

Headings on f. 12r and f. 64r mark the beginning of *Gígja's* first and second strings. The heading on f. 12, the first line of which is damaged due to trimming, reads:

Fyrsti partur kversins [inniheldur]  
nökkur söngvísur og sálma, hvörja  
eg hefi eftir aðskiljanlegum tímum og  
tilfellum, hér og þár, sungið og saman  
skrifað

(‘The first part of the volume [contains] a number of songs and hymns, which I have for different times and occasions, here and there, sung and compiled.’)

The second heading, on f. 64r, reads:

Annar partur þessarar bókar hefur inni að halda  
andlegar vísur, og heilög kvæði, af  
ýmsum efnum gjörð og sam-  
sett

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<sup>676</sup> These were originally bound after f. 541v.

<sup>677</sup> Cf. “Þessar stökur, það er mín von, / þó eg teiknað hafi, / minn ágæti systurson, / á síðasta Gígju lafi” (‘These verses, I hope, though I wrote them, my dear sister's son, on *Gígja's* last stub...’) 232, 11v.

(‘The second part of this book contains spiritual verses and holy poems, composed and compiled from diverse matter.’)

The first poem in the first section is the hymn “Eilífi einvaldsherra” on f. 12r–v, as in 1055. The first poem in the second section is *Barnarós* (ff. 64r–72v), followed by *Gyðingaraunir* (ff. 72v–76r), *Guðs borðsvísur* (ff. 76v–78r) and *Lögmálsbókin* (ff. 78r–80v). At least one poem has been added to the second string that is not Guðmundur’s own: “Í Austurríki eitt furðu frítt”, the Rev. Ólafur Jónsson of Sandar’s translation of the folk-ballad “Schloss in Österreich” (‘The castle in Austria’).<sup>678</sup> An unpublished examination of the preservation of this poem by the present author and Johnny Lindholm confirms Ólafur Jónsson’s authorship. New stanzas in 232 have been added that may have been Guðmundur Erlendsson’s, and Skúli may have believed his father to be the author.

In 232, “Diktur lofkvæði Davíðs son” from 1628 (ff. 55r–56v) and “Aví, aví vort auma land” from 1656 (ff. 56v–58r) are copied back-to-back, as in 1055. Other poems and cycles in 232 composed after 1654 (according to dates in rubrics, margins and colophons) include the following:

- *Vísnaflokkur út af nokkrum historíum úr gjörningabók postulanna* (“Undir auðum huga”), a cycle of poems based on the Book of Acts, ff. 116r–134v (1659)
- “Eg var fyrst í Jeríkó,” ff. 140r–141r (1661)
- “Ó Jesú himnesk hæna,” ff. 60r–61v (1663)
- *Vökuvarpa*, ff. 288r–293v (1663–1664)<sup>679</sup>

A note on f. 167v marks the division between the narrative poems in *Gígja*’s second string and the beginning of the *rímur* section on the facing page, f. 168r, which Skúli classifies as the book’s third part:

Þriðji partur þessarar bókar hefur  
inni að halda nökkra rímna flokka, í  
fyrstu Rímur af Sál og Davíð

(‘The third part of this book contains several *rímur* cycles, starting with the *Rímur af Sál og Davíð*’)

The *rímur* cycles in 232 are, in order:

- *Rímur af Sál og Davíð*
- *Rímur af Móses*
- *Rímur af Jónas spámanni*

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<sup>678</sup> 232, 95r–96r.

<sup>679</sup> Skúli’s heading gives the title as *Vökubón*.

- *Ríma af sjö sönnum*
- *Rímur af Elí spámanni*
- *Rímur af Eliseus spámanni*
- *Rímur af Gedeon*
- *Rímur af Samson sterka*
- *Ræningjarímur*
- *Rímur af barndómi Krists*
- *Rímur af Heródes*
- *Rímur af Pílatus*
- *Vilbaldsrímur*
- *Æsopsrímur*

From *Gígja's* title-page in 232 and 1055, it would seem that *rímur* formed part of *Gígja* from the outset, but it is difficult to know whether Skúli has added *rímur* not initially include in *Gígja* at this point in 232. It is also noteworthy that the *rímur* section contains shorter non-*rímur* poems between *rímur* cycles, including Guðmundur's prayer for his son Jón from 1622 (see 4.11), *Vökuvarpa* (see 4.13) and occasional poems for the family of Þórunn Benediktsdóttir and Ólafur Jónsson of Möðruvellir from 1619 and 1628 (see 4.4).<sup>680</sup> This indicates that Skúli completed the first and second parts of 232 before beginning work on the third part but obtained a small number of poems from other sources as he worked on his manuscript project and inserted these where space allowed, rather than collecting them in a separate gathering.

Verses by Skúli on the progress of his scribal project at the end of *Vökuvarpa* on f. 293v, dated 22 May 1688, describe how its completion has been delayed by the hard winter. Skúli makes a direct connection between the harsh, snowy conditions and his inability to work on *Gígja*. By 22 May, Skúli states that he has completed only 60 quires (*örk*), and still has much of *Gígja* left to copy. God only knows whether Skúli will live to complete the job; thrice nineteen years of his life have passed away (i.e., he is 57), and his eyesight is getting poor. This is a fairly good indication that Skúli had an exemplar of *Gígja* before him with additional material.

The last of the *rímur* in 232 are *Æsopsrímur* (ff. 455v–492r), which end with a note in Skúli's hand that the third section of the manuscript is complete and a single stanza (also in Skúli's hand) stating that he has been unable to obtain more *rímur* and other material will now follow. This begins with Guðmundur's commemorative poem from 1621 on Ólafur Jónsson of Möðruvellir (see 4.4), but at

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<sup>680</sup> 232, 394v–397v and 492v–494v.

the poem's end on f. 494v come the words "Endir vísanna" ('the end of the verses') and the remainder of the page is blank. On the facing page (f. 495r) is a new heading:

Fjórði partur þessarar bókar hefur inni að  
halda dæmisögur Æsopi og hans spakmæli,  
í nokkur kvæði saman tekin, þeim til  
gagns og gamans sem hlýða og  
skilja kunna

('The fourth part of this book contains Æsop's fables and his adages, compiled into several poems for the benefit and amusement of those who may listen and understand.')

There are 63 short narrative poems based on Æsopic fables, the last of which ends on f. 538v.

Following this on f. 538v is a note by Skúli: "Hér endast Æsopi dæmisögur, en eftir fylgja fáeinir annars staðar aðdregnar" ('Here end Aesop's fables. After this come a few obtained elsewhere').

These additional poems number only four in total, listed here by incipit:

- "Kóngurinn fugla kalla réð" (refrain: "Marglátum munni, mistrúað er")<sup>681</sup>
- "Fjöllin stóru stóðu sér" (refrain: "Í megnum þerrir þornar upp")<sup>682</sup>
- "Krákan forðum blökk á brún" (refrain: "Hagnaðarsemi heitir konst")<sup>683</sup>
- "Sumir hafa þá sinnis grein" (refrain: "Heift og öfund halda eitt")<sup>684</sup>

On f. 541r is another note by Skúli: "[F]yrst þetta blað gengur af þá set eg hér kvöldvísur séra Jóns Guðmundssonar, við kvöldvísna tón" ('Since this leaf is left over, I shall set the Rev. Jón Guðmundsson's evening verses here, to the evening verse melody.'). These verses reach only midway down the verso side, at the end of which Skúli has written a verse of his own: "Skrifað um síðir, er nú út, / innihaldið Gígju. / Eg henni valdi endahnút / sem upphafið að nýju" ('Finally written, now the content of *Gígja* has come to a close. I chose it an end-knot as the new beginning').<sup>685</sup>

Comprehensible only through the interaction between the poet-scribe's words and the visual layout of the page, an *endahnútur* would normally signify a printer's ornament or knot-like scribal decoration at the end of a book. Skúli has indeed placed his verse where one might normally expect an intertwining ornament.

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<sup>681</sup> 232, 538v–539r; 250, 538v–539r.

<sup>682</sup> 232, 539r–v; 250, 107r–v.

<sup>683</sup> 232, 539v–540r; 250, 107v–108r.

<sup>684</sup> 232, 540r–v; 250, 108r–v.

<sup>685</sup> 232, 541r.

Much as in a printed book, the final poem at what was originally the end of 232 is filler of sorts, since an empty leaf remained after Skúli completed the task of copying his father's poetry book for his nephew. Skúli's choice to end his father's anthology with his brother's poem is a indication of how Skúli sees his brother Jón as his father's successor as a religious poet as well as the parson for Fell. The reference to *Gígja* at the book's end is also a fairly strong indication that Skúli's exemplar for virtually all of the material copied before f. 538v was indeed *Gígja* rather than *Fagriskógur*. The catchword at the bottom of f. 541v is "Registur yfir" ('The index of'); 5r in 232 was originally the next page after this.

On ff. 542r–44v is a funeral poem for Bishop Gísli Þorláksson by the Rev. Jón Guðmundsson of Fell in an unknown hand, being neither Skúli's nor Hallur's but contemporary and quite similar.<sup>686</sup> This hand is characterized by subtle but whimsical details, such as what appears to be a miniscule bird in the N-initial beginning the poem and a tiny face in a large O-initial near the top of f. 543v. This poem was copied as a single codicological unit and ends with a book-knot in the style of a printer's ornament.

The final 8-leaf gathering in 232 does not belong to *Gígja* proper but is in Skúli's hand. The first item is a long funeral poem by the Rev. Jón Guðmundsson on the death of a certain Jón Nikulásson in September 1688 (ff. 545r–548v), ending with a small decorative cluster of pen flourishes. No such individual is found in the Íslendingabók database, but according to the poem, Jón Nikulásson was at Skriðuland in Kolbeinsdalur in Skagafjörður at the time of his death and was 64 years old; his wife of 34 years survived him, as did 10 of their 15 children, of whom two sons – both named Jón – had left the country and held administrative posts of some sort (*embættismenn*).<sup>687</sup> The poem states that Jón Nikulásson had been a member of the *hrepptjórn* ('local administration') for his community, and a man named Jón Nikulásson was indeed listed in the *hrepptjórn* of Hólahreppur in the 1670s. This is almost certainly one and the same individual. Jón Nikulásson did not belong to the uppermost echelons of Icelandic society, but he was influential within his local community. That two of Jón's sons had emigrated by 1688 and were now working abroad is a particularly interesting detail: the ordinary people who left Iceland in the seventeenth century are not typically well documented.

On f. 548r, Jón Guðmundsson addresses the widow as his sister, using the familiar *þú* (in contrast to Hallur's use of *þér* for their brother Skúli, see 5.5.2.1). This may be simply a gesture of warmth on the poet's part, but the widow might also quite literally be his own sister, and hence the mother of Einar

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<sup>686</sup> The poem ("Nú biðjum Guð að náða oss") is composed on the death of Bishop Gísli Þorláksson of Hólar in 1684 and was later printed at Hólar in 1685, see Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, *Heiður og huggun*, 377–78. The commemorative volume in which it was published was the first of its kind in Iceland, cf. Halldór Hermannsson, *Icelandic Books of the Seventeenth Century, 1601–1700*, 38–39. Jón Guðmundsson himself did not copy the poem in 232, based on comparison with Lbs 1205 4to.

<sup>687</sup> 232, 546r.

Jónsson. Such a connection would explain three puzzles: why Jón Guðmundsson composed a lengthy poem about an otherwise unknown farmer in Kolbeinsdalur (longer even than his funeral poem on the death of Bishop Gísli Þorláksson), why Skúli copied the poem for Einar Jónsson and why it was inserted at the end of *Gígja*.

On ff. 548v–549r, Skúli copied a hymn, “Letrað svo finnst um liljurnar,” by an unnamed poet who might also be Jón Guðmundsson. Its rubric states that it is based on the proverb “Þeir sem liljurnar lesa eður plokka, stingast af þyrninum” (‘They who gather or pluck the lilies will be stung by the thorns’). This is followed by a second hymn on patience in times of trial (“Lát þér, sál mín, ei lynda verr”) by the Rev. Jón Guðmundsson on ff. 549r–550r; Skúli has written Jón’s name in the outer margin at the end of the second hymn.<sup>688</sup> If Jón Nikulásson was indeed Jón Guðmundsson’s brother-in-law, then these hymns may have been intended as encouragement for his grieving widow and children, although they do not directly fall into the category of funeral poems.

The final item in 232 is also copied by Skúli (ff. 550r–552v): Guðmundur Erlendsson’s poem commemorating his mother, Margrét Skúladóttir. The final verse of this poem states that it is to be hung on the right side of the church at Fell, suggesting that it was probably framed in a similar manner as Þórunn Benediktsdóttir’s memorial. Possibly, Skúli copied the poem directly from his grandmother’s memorial. In 1703, Einar and Guðný had a young daughter Margrét of their own; the name continued to have significance for the family as a living connection with their kinship network and with the past.

Whether Skúli himself inserted these later additions into Einar’s copy of *Gígja* (ff. 545r–552v) is unknown, but if Einar’s father had died in September 1688, when Skúli was in the process of completing *Gígja*, then Skúli may have decided to include an additional section after he had completed the indices.

## 5.4 *Gígja* in 250

When 250, 232 and 1055 are examined together, 250 seems to be a defective seventeenth-century copy of *Gígja* later taken apart and rebound in a different order, with later additions by Hallgrímur Hannesson Scheving (1781–1861). Although Páll Eggert Ólason proposed that it is in Guðmundur Erlendsson’s own hand, Grímur M. Helgason strongly doubted that this was the case, based on his own editing work on Guðmundur’s verse adaptations of Æsop’s fables.<sup>689</sup> Páll Eggert Ólason’s

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<sup>688</sup> The hymn, later printed in the 1772 hymnal, is also included in Lbs 271 4to (114v–115v).

<sup>689</sup> Guðmundur Erlendsson, *Dæmisögur Esóps í ljóðum*, ed. Grímur M. Helgason (Reykjavík: Æskan, 1967), xiii–xiv.



observation that the hand of 250 is very similar to that of Lbs 1698 4to still stands.<sup>690</sup> A close palaeographical investigation of seventeenth-century manuscript hands would be required to sort out the scribe’s identity with any certainty. The manuscript is foliated in the main scribe’s hand, from which it can be seen that hundreds of leaves are now missing: ff. 1–200, 221–293 and 296–315. In its complete state, 250 would have rivalled 232 in thickness: 486 foliated leaves and at least 12 unfoliated leaves that may have originally formed a separate codicological unit (see below).

The manuscript was completely disassembled in the first half of the nineteenth century, most likely in an effort to salvage what remained of a badly damaged volume. Unfortunately, the amateur conservator (here assumed to be Hallgrímur Scheving, whose hand is on the paper pasted on top of 7v) did not have the objective of saving all intact material in the manuscript. In early 2012, the present author observed that six leaves in 250 had been partially or fully pasted over with younger paper. Conservator Rannver Hannesson of the Manuscript Department of the National Library of Iceland kindly removed the adhesive, revealing Guðmundur Erlendsson’s original text underneath. From this, it was possible to see that a complete religious poem on ff. 111r–112v (“Á einn Guð eg æðstan trúí”) has been crossed out and pasted over. It cannot be ruled out that other intact material from the original manuscript was deliberately discarded due to a lack of interest on a later owner’s part.

The first three leaves in the main scribe’s hand in 250, ff. 5r–7v (originally ff. 293r–295v), preserve the end of *Vinavísur* (“Einn mann áður í heimi”) on ff. 5r–7r and the beginning of *Kvæði um þolinmæði* (“Hvað skal margt að mæla”), on f. 7v (pasted over to 2012). These poems are not copied back-to-back in 232 or 1055 but are present in each manuscript.<sup>691</sup> Following these two poems in 250 are two poems on ff. 8r–17v that were originally located much earlier in the manuscript: the original folio number on f. 8r is 201. These are *Barnarós* and *Gyðingaraunir* (see Table 1), both now defective. Hallgrímur Scheving copied the rubric and first three stanzas of *Barnarós* on a scrap of paper that he pasted over the beginning of *Kvæði um þolinmæði* (originally f. 295v). The entirety of what survives of *Gyðingaraunir* on f. 17v (originally f. 220v) was also covered until 2012.

Title	Rubric (250)	Ff.	Rubric (232)	Ff.
<i>Barnarós</i>	[Barnarós. Það eru almagir	8r–17r (201r–220r)	Annar partur þessarar	64r–72v

<sup>690</sup> Páll Eggert Ólason, *Skrá um handritasöfn Landsbókasafnsins*, vol. 1, 583. Lbs 1698 4to contains the oldest surviving copy of *Kvennadans*, cf. Anthony Faulkes, *Magnúsarkver*, 62.

<sup>691</sup> In 232, the former is on 107r–109r and the latter on 137r–v. In 1055, *Vinavísur* is on 172r–174r and *Kvæði um þolinmæði* on 180r–181r.

	Salómons orðskviðir ungdóminum til gagns] <sup>692</sup>		bókar hefur inni að halda andlegar vísur og heilög kvæði af ýmsum efnum gjörð og samansett.  Barna rós  Það eru almargir Salómons orðskviðir, ungdóminum til gagns og guðrækni, saman í ljóð settir með Lilju lag	
<i>Gyðingaraunir</i>	Gyðinga raunir, fáar af mörgum, með Lilju lag  Gidinga Rauner Fáar af Mórgum  Med Liliu lag:	17v (220v)	Gyðinga raunir, fáar af mörgum, með sama lag	72v–76r

**Table 1. Barnarós and Gyðingaraunir in 250 and 232**

Initially, the present author was intensely disappointed when the removal of the nineteenth-century leaves revealed poetry already known from 232 and 1055. As exciting as it would have been to discover a new long-lost work by Guðmundur Erlendsson, 250 is more closely related to 232 and 1055 than was obvious before 2012. Páll Eggert Ólason’s explanation for the obvious similarities between 250 and 232 was that Skúli had copied *Fagriskógur* (i.e., 250) into 232. However, *Barnarós* and *Gyðingaraunir* are among the core poems of the *Gígja* anthology in both 232 and 1055 (see 5.2 and 5.3). In 232, the didactic poem *Barnarós* is identified in the heading as the first in *Gígja*’s second “string” or section, immediately followed by *Gyðingaraunir*. The original rubric of 250 is lost, but the short title copied by Scheving must have been copied from a very similar heading as in 232. It would also be unusual for Skúli to copy *Fagriskógur* while still repeatedly referring to the volume as *Gígja*.

<sup>692</sup> Defective, copied by Hallgrímur Scheving on f. 7v.

Due to a large lacuna, it is impossible to know what originally came after *Gyðingaraunir* in 250. In 232, *Gyðingaraunir* is followed by *Guðs borðsvísur* (“Horfið til og líka lærið”), which is identified as having the same tune (*Liljulag*). In 1055 the next poem is *Lögmálsbókin* (ending on f. 154v), and *Guðs borðsvísur* comes slightly later, on ff. 156v–157v.

*Ferðaknútskvæði* currently follows after *Gyðingaraunir* in 250 on 18r–19r. This poem was originally located much later in 250, the first leaf of *Ferðaknútskvæði* being foliated as 316. This poem is in 232 on ff. 148r–149r. Although the order of poems following *Ferðaknútskvæði* in 250 is not identical to that in 232, the material itself plainly belongs to *Gígja*’s second string: moral poems for children, *ævintýr* (‘adventures’) and *dæmisögur* (‘fables’). Two autobiographical poems in this section of 250, as well as *Gígja*’s second string in 232 and 1055, are “Almáttugur Guð himna hæða” and “Skorðu fór úr fjörðum” (see 4.8), narrate the tale of a dramatic and suspenseful sea crossing.<sup>693</sup>

The last of the miscellaneous adventure poems in 250 is on f. 56v (originally 433v), with the bottom two-thirds of the page originally left blank. Guðmundur Erlendsson’s verse adaptation of Æsop’s fables begins on f. 57r (originally f. 434r) of 250 and on f. 495r of 232. According to Skúli, the fable-poems are the fourth section of his copy of *Gígja* (see 2.3). There is no lacuna in 250 between 56v and 57r, but the rubric on 57r in 250 is very close to that in 232, with the exception that it does not identify the poems as a distinct section of the book:

Dæmisögur Æsopi, og hans spakmæli, í nokk-  
ur kvæði saman tekinn, þeim til gagns og gam-  
ans sem hlýða kunna.

(‘Æsop’s fables and his adages, compiled into several poems for the benefit and amusement of those  
who may listen.’)

There are 63 verse fables, ending on f. 106v (originally f. 484v) in 250 and f. 538v in 232. Both 232 and 250 end with an additional four fable-poems not belonging to Aesop’s collection (listed in 5.3).

The remaining leaves in 250 (ff. 109–120) are not foliated. These may have belonged to a separate and extremely fragmentary codicological unit, originally somewhat taller than the first part of the manuscript. The hand on 109r–118v is not identical to that in the earlier part of the manuscript but is close enough that the main scribe should not be ruled out entirely. There is a rise from 22–23 to 25–27 lines per page, and the upper margin of f. 114 shows clear evidence of trimming.

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<sup>693</sup> Copies of “Almáttugur Guð himna hæða” are in 232, 97r–101r; 250, 47v–52v (orig. 424v–429v); and 1055, 161v–166r. “Skorðu fór úr fjörðum” follows immediately after this poem in all three manuscripts (232, ff. 101r–v; 250, ff. 52v–53r (orig. 429v–430r); 1055, 166r–v) but is written in a two-column format in 1055.

The content of this final section has an uncertain relationship to *Gígja*. It begins on f. 109 with a single leaf preserving *Kvæði um skammvinnan blóma fallvaltrar ævi* and the beginning of *Náttúru spegill*, the latter of which has been pasted over with a scrap of paper as part of the nineteenth-century reorganisation of the manuscript. Following this on f. 110–113 are a series of poems:

- The last two stanzas of a defective hymn or religious poem, crossed out in a later hand, f. 110r
- A complete fable-poem, *Um ráðgjafann og apynjurnar* ('On the counsellor and the monkeys'), ff. 110r–v
- A narrative poem ("Einn hjá öldum bóndi bjó"), ff. 110v–111r
- A religious poem ("Á einn Guð eg æðstan trúí"), crossed out in a later hand and pasted over, ff. 111r–112v
- A complete narrative poem on the life of Gennadius, *Genadíus vísur*, 112v–113v

Guðmundur Erlendsson's *Vökuvarpa* is in a two-column format on 114r–120v, the last two leaves of which poem are in a less practiced and probably younger hand (replacing lost leaves?). A simple ink border has been drawn around these two columns. Since *Vökuvarpa* reliably dates from 1663–1664, it cannot have been part of any manuscript produced before this date.

Comparison with Skúli Guðmundsson's copy of *Gígja* indicates that the first string of *Gígja* would not have filled all of the first 200 missing leaves in 250. However, Guðmundur Erlendsson's verse prologue to *Gígja* specifically mentions the presence of *rimur*,<sup>694</sup> of which there are currently none in 250. Although 250 could not have contained all of Guðmundur's *rimur* cycles, the manuscript may have included a selection. Were the Exodus Hymns included in 250 as in 1055, this would also account for a large number of leaves at the front of the manuscript. Given that the first "string" of *Gígja* contains hymns and religious poetry, it is unlikely to have interested a nineteenth-century owner who systematically crossed out and obscured what little non-narrative religious material now remains in the book.

## 5.5 *Gígja* in 1529

1529 is an unbound manuscript of 86 leaves, including single leaves and loose quires. The leaves currently measure approximately 193 x 160 mm,<sup>695</sup> but some trimming may have occurred at the

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<sup>694</sup> 232, 2v.

<sup>695</sup> Based on a measurement of *Gígja*'s first leaf in 1529, f. 55.

point at which it was bound, since the leaves in the manuscript are quite uniform despite being the assembled work of many different scribes. The material is not currently in its original order, and at no point in time did it form a single continuous whole. When Páll Eggert catalogued the manuscript as part of his work for the National Library of Iceland, he identified it as the work of two main hands: Guðmundur Erlendsson's son Hallur and Guðmundur Erlendsson himself.<sup>696</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir proposed either Hallur or Skúli Guðmundsson as being the first main hand and Guðmundur Erlendsson the second.<sup>697</sup> Karl Ólafsson, who created a more detailed description of 1529 for the online catalogue, tentatively identified 1529 as the work of 8 hands, again with two main hands (not identified by name in the catalogue). I concur with Karl Ólafsson's analysis of the division of hands in the manuscript, which is as follows:<sup>698</sup>

Scribe	Ff.
Hand A	1r–35v  38r–46v  76v–77v
Hand B	50r–53v  55r–74v3
Hand C	36r–37(bis)r
Hand D	47r–49v  54r–v
Hand E	74v4–76r
Hand F	78r–79v
Hand G	80r–v

<sup>696</sup> "Að mestu m.h. Halls Guðmundssonar og (bl. 39–73) m.h. síra Guðmundar Erlendssonar sjálfs, föður hans (frá efri árum hans)." Páll Eggert Ólason, *Skrá um handritasöfn Landsbókasafnsins*, vol. 1, 542.

<sup>697</sup> Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, *Heiður og huggun*, 198, 323, 399.

<sup>698</sup> To avoid confusion, scribes are referred to in this chapter by alphabetical letter rather than by Roman numerals as in the online catalogue. Note that Hand B is currently on ff. 50r–53v rather than 50r–51v and 53r–54v and Hand D is currently 54r–v rather than 52r–v as stated in the online catalogue. This is not Karl Ólafsson's error; the manuscript was reorganized in connection with digitization without the catalogue being updated. Accessed 1 October 2019, <https://handrit.is/en/manuscript/view/is/Lbs04-1529>

Hand H	81r–85v
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**Table 2. Hands in 1529 (based on current manuscript order)**

Hand A is unmistakably Skúli Guðmundsson’s, based on comparison with Hallur’s and Skúli’s hands in 232.<sup>699</sup> Hallur Guðmundsson’s poem “Ó þú fallvalta veraldarvist” in Hand A on ff. 1r–7v, which commemorates his recently deceased father, ends with the words “Hans eftirþreyjandi sonur Hallur Guðmundsson hefur þetta sorgandi sungið” (‘His mournful son Hallur Guðmundsson has sorrowfully sung this’).<sup>700</sup> Presumably, Páll Eggert Ólason identified Hand A as Hallur’s on the basis of this clause. The statement is one of authorship rather than a scribal colophon, however. The expression may be copied directly from Hallur’s original, but the hand is clearly not Hallur’s.

Hand B, plausibly identified in earlier scholarship as Guðmundur Erlendsson’s hand, is on ff. 50r–53v and 55r–74v, ll. 1–3. The earlier leaves preserve part of *Móses rímur* and are one of several fragments of the poem in different hands (see 5.5.1). On f. 55r is the beginning of “Eilífi einvaldsherra”, which is also the first poem in *Gígja* in 1055 and 232. The leaf is severely damaged, with staining and wear consistent with having been located at the front of a volume for some time. If this volume was in a bound state, there was probably no flyleaf protecting the text. Further evidence that 55r was once the first leaf in a poetry volume are: (a) the many pen trials in different inks and hands, a strikingly different pattern of use than for other leaves of the manuscript,<sup>701</sup> and (b) the presence of a small letter ‘a’ at centre in the bottom margin in a dark ink, a feature borrowed from printed books. *Gígja* in 232 has a capital letter ‘A’ in Skúli’s hand on f. 12r in a similar position.

The text on the top of the page is barely legible, with the first line of text unreadable without imaging technology. However, a semi-diplomatic transcription of f. 55r, ll. 2–3 reads:

výsum og psalma huoria eg hefe Eptir adskil[.....]

týmumm og tilfellum, hier og þar, sungid og samanskrifa[d]

As far as it can be read, the heading on f. 55r in 1529 is identical to that on f. 12r of 232 (see 5.3).

Based on this, 1529 preserves an original autograph manuscript of Guðmundur Erlendsson’s *Gígja*

<sup>699</sup> For variations in Skúli’s hand, see e.g., 232, 25r and 44r–v.

<sup>700</sup> Lbs 1529 4to, f. 7v.

<sup>701</sup> E.g., “penne göðu” is jotted inconspicuously in the bottom margin in a seventeenth-century hand, possibly Skúli Guðmundsson’s. “Penni góður” (‘A good pen’) is a typical pen trial. Another pen trial is written directly over the text; it includes the clearly written word “partur” (‘part’), a word that would still presumably have been visible in the rubric at the top of the page.

that cannot be Jón Illugason's copy from 1654, based on both internal and external evidence.<sup>702</sup>

Table 3 illustrates the ordering of the poems in this section, based on the current organization of the manuscript:

No.	Incipit	Ff.
1	"Eilífi einvaldsherra"	55r–v
2	"Þolinmæðinnar dæmi dýrt"	55v–57r
3	"Ó Jesú minn eðla góði"	57r–v
4	"Syndgaðu ekki sæta barn"	57v, 68r
5	<i>End of "Sjá minn fulltrúi og frómur þjónn"</i>	<i>(See no. 23)</i>
6	"Dýrðlegur er og drottni kær"	58r–v
7	"Þegar að minnkar mátturinn"	58v–59r
8	"Ég þrey af öllu hjarta"	59r–v
9	"Vert herra Jesú minn hjá mér"	59v
10	"Hvað mun vor auma æfi hér"	60r–v
11	"Upp lít mín sál úr sorgum þeim"	60v, 63r
12	<i>End of "Herrans hér postula"</i>	<i>(See no. 19)</i>
13	"Þjáður og lúinn ligg ég hér"	63v–64r
14	"Minnstu önd mín þó mannaunir"	64r–v
15	"Minn Guð og mildi faðir"	64v, 70r
16	<i>End of "Tími til alls án efa er"</i>	<i>(See no. 29)</i>
17	"Þessum söfnuði fer ég frá"	65r–v
18	"Diktar lofkvæði Davíðs son"	66r–67v
19	"Herrans hér postula"	67v, 61r–62v
20	<i>End of "Syndgaðu ekki sæta barn"</i>	<i>(See no. 4)</i>

<sup>702</sup> The evidence of 1055 shows that the 1654 copy had at least one dedicatory leaf, with poetry by Guðmundur Erlendsson presenting the work to Jón, which would have shielded the leaf containing "Eilífi einvaldsherra" better than in 1529. The manuscripts align more poorly in Table 4 than 232 and 1529. Furthermore, there is overwhelming evidence that Jón Illugason's manuscript remained in his children's possession and was bound with additional manuscript material not present in 1529.

21	“Guð er mín huggun, hjálp og traust”	68r–v
22	“Völt og harðbýl er vistin sú”	68v–69r
23	“Sjá, minn fulltrúr og frómur þjón”	69v, 58r
24	<i>End of “Minn Guð og mildi faðir”</i>	<i>(See no. 15)</i>
25	“Ég þakka Guði eilífum”	70r–v
26	“Hvenær mun koma minn herrann sá”	70v–71r
27	“Rís mér hugur við heimi”	71r–72r
28	“Þann ágætasta aldingarð”	72r–73r
29	“Tími til alls án efa er”	73r–v, 65r

**Table 3. Gígja in 1529 (order as currently organized)**

As can be seen from the table, the order in which the leaves in this section are currently organized is somewhat arbitrary. Surprisingly, when reordered with the help of 1055 and 232, what survives of *Gígja* in 1529 is a fully intact section containing 24 poems. The reconstructed order is as follows, with ‘M’ indicating the presence of musical notation:

No.	Incipit	1529	232	1055
1	“Eilífi einvaldsherra” ( <i>Bæn Manasses</i> )	55r–v	12r–v	51r–v
2	“Þolinmæðinnar dæmi dýrt” ( <i>Jobs raunir</i> )	55v–57r	12v–14v	86v–87v
3	“Ó Jesú minn eðla góði” ( <i>Bæn hins heilaga Bernharði</i> )	57r–v	47v–48r	51v–52r
4	“Syndgaðu ekki, sæta barn” ( <i>Nokkur vers börnunum og hinum eldri til viðvörunar</i> )	57v, 68r, <b>M</b>	48r	83r–v
5	“Guð er mín huggun, hjálp og traust” ( <i>Útvalin kjörgrein frúr Sophiæ</i> )	68r–v	14v–15r	82v–83r
6	“Völt og harðbýl er vistin sú” ( <i>Um vora hégómlega ævi</i> )	68v–69r	15r–16r	52r–v



7	“Sjá, minn fulltrúi og frómur þjón” ( <i>Út af 53. kapítula Esaja spámanns</i> ) <sup>703</sup>	69v, 58r	48v–49r	54v–55r
8	“Dýrðlegur er og drottni kær” ( <i>Um góða og guðlega burtför</i> )	58r–v	49r–v	55r–v
9	“Þegar að minnkar mátturinn” ( <i>Versakorn</i> )	58v–59r	16v	84v–85r
10	“Ég þrey af öllu hjarta” ( <i>Söngvísa með hvörri vonandi manneskja í drottni segir sinn dauða velkominn</i> ) <sup>704</sup>	59r–v	16v–17r	55v–56v
11	“Vert herra Jesú minn hjá mér” ( <i>Andlátsorð doktor Baldvini</i> )	59v	20r	83r
12	“Hvað mun vor auma ævi hér” ( <i>Nýársvísa 1634</i> )	60r–v	20v–21r	85r–v
13	“Upp lít mín sál úr sorgum þeim” ( <i>Nýársvísa 1632</i> )	60v, 63r	21r–22v	85v–86v
14	“Þjáður og lúinn ligg ég hér” ( <i>Sálmur í bólunni 1615</i> )	63v–64r	22r–v	60v–61r
15	“Minnstu önd mín þó mannaunir” ( <i>Hugvekjukorn í bólunni 1615</i> )	64r–v	22v–23r	61r–v
16	“Minn Guð og mildi faðir” ( <i>Þakklætisvísa 1636</i> )	64v, 70r	23r–24r	61v–62r
17	“Ég þakka Guði eilífum” ( <i>Þakklætisvers Margrétar Guðmundsdóttur 1633</i> )	70r–v	27r–v	67r
18	“Hvenær mun koma minn herrann sá” ( <i>Nokkur orð þreyjandi sálar</i> )	70v–71r, <b>M</b>	50r–51r	67v–68r, <b>M</b>
19	“Rís mér hugur við heimi” ( <i>Viðvörunarvísa 1628</i> )	71r–72r, <b>M</b>	51r–v	135v–136v, <b>M</b>
20	“Þann ágætasta aldingarð”	72r–73r	27v–28v	68r–69r

<sup>703</sup> Here, *þjón* rhymes with *mun* (“Siä: Minn fulltrür og frómur þjön, / Forsiäligana breÿta mun”).

<sup>704</sup> According to 1529, this is a translation from German.

	<i>(Andleg paradís, eður Salómons háfur)</i>			
21	“Tími til alls án efa er” <i>(Sóknarkveðja 1631)</i>	73r–v, 65r	53v–54v	160r–161r <i>(Second string)</i>
22	“Þessum söfnuði fer ég frá” <i>(Grímseyjarkveðja 1634)</i>	65r–v	54v–55r	161r–161v <i>(Second string)</i>
23	“Diktar lofkvæði Davíðs son” <i>(Erfiljóð um Guðbrand Þorláksson 1628)</i>	66r–67v, <b>M</b>	55r–56v	127v–129r
24	“Herrans hér postula” <i>(Postulavísur 1629)</i>	67v, 61r–62v	83v–86r <i>(Second string)</i>	149r–151v <i>(Second string)</i>

**Table 4. Reconstructed order of *Gígja* in 1529, compared with 232 and 1055 (N = notation)**

For reasons of space and scope, the vast project of examining *Gígja* and its structure on a poem-by-poem has not been attempted here. However, it is clear from this section of 24 poems that 232 and 1055 both originate in a manuscript very similar to *Gígja* in 1529. In all three manuscripts, there is an effort to group poems by subject and/or function. For instance, the poems 8–11 in 1529 all relate to preparation for death, whereas 14–17 deal with disease and recovery from illness.

When compared to 250, which Páll Eggert Ólason believed to be in Guðmundur Erlendsson’s hand, the difference in the quality of the script is striking. 1529 is a fair copy, but nevertheless not a presentation copy of the same calibre. Unfortunately, it is not possible to compare 250 and 1529 directly, as there is no overlap in content in their current state of preservation.

### 5.5.1 Other content and hands

The second main hand in 1529 belongs to Skúli Guðmundsson. In light of this, together with the evidence of Binding fragment I (see 5.5.2.1), Skúli is a plausible candidate for the manuscript’s owner following his father Guðmundur’s death, particularly since Skúli’s contributions to the manuscript were not made at a single time. This could also explain how Skúli was able to supply Einar Jónsson with a copy, but it is difficult to make generalizations on the relationship of 1529, 1055 and 232 in the absence of a critical edition of the 24 poems in Table 4.

Table 5 below summarizes briefly the structure of 1529 and the contributions of individual scribes. Where there is evidence of gatherings forming a single continuous whole (such as a catchword aligning with the first word of the next gathering), these gatherings are grouped together. In general,

however, with the exception of the *Gíjja* section, the manuscript is constructed mainly from smaller codicological units.

Skúli appears to have added hymns to originally blank space at several points in 1529 (see Table 5), strengthening the hypothesis that he was its owner. An ambiguous codicological boundary occurs between ff. 20v–21r, where Skúli has added five lines and a catchword to the end of 20v in a lighter ink. As currently preserved, 20v and 21r align seamlessly, but an unknown period of time elapsed between the completion of gathering III and Skúli's additions.

The current order of leaves in 1529 is a poor reflection of its original state, and a non-wholistic attempt to paginate and restructure the manuscript in connection with its digitization has unintentionally added to the confusion. According to a note on the online catalogue, the order of ff. 49–54 was changed at the time when the manuscript was digitized but after the manuscript was paginated.<sup>705</sup> At the same time, f. 61 was moved in the physical manuscript copy, although not in the digitized version available online.<sup>706</sup>

While documentation of the most recent changes has been excellent, changes to the ordering of 1529 have been unsystematic, and the intended level of preservation is unclear. If the objective is to conserve 1529 in the order in which it has been preserved, then ff. 49–54 and 61 should not have been reordered. Assuming, however, that the objective is to restore individual codicological units within 1529 to a more original state, then ff. 55r–73v should be reorganized as shown in Table 4 and refoliated, and ff. 47–54 must likewise be reorganized (see below). Finally, should the objective be to restore the structure of 1529 to a state closer to its original order, it is fairly clear that ff. 55r–73v were originally at the front of the manuscript and that the quire ff. 1r–7v was moved to the front at a much later date. Since this decision was likely made to protect the badly damaged leaves written by Guðmundur Erlendsson, there is valid reason to keep ff. 55r–73v in its current position in the middle of the manuscript.

The most recent reorganization of ff. 49–54 is a mistaken interpretation of the relationship between the copy in Hand B (Guðmundur Erlendsson) and Hand D. The end of f. 49v and the beginning of f. 50r do line up in terms of the text; an unknown hand has added the catchwords “tuttugu skulu” to the bottom of f. 49v in a different ink than on either 49v or 50r, and “tuttugu skulu” are indeed the first two words on f. 50r. However, the copy on ff. 50r–53v (two bifolia) in Hand B ends in the middle of the thirteenth *ríma*, whereas Hand D on f. 54r begins on the ninth *ríma*. The bifolium 49/54, positioned as the outermost in gathering XII (see Table 5), is currently backwards and should be the

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<sup>705</sup> “Lbs 1529 4to,” *Handrit.is*, accessed 1 October 2019, <https://handrit.is/en/manuscript/view/is/Lbs04-1529>

<sup>706</sup> “Lbs 1529 4to,” *Handrit.is*, accessed 1 October 2019, <https://handrit.is/en/manuscript/view/is/Lbs04-1529>

outermost bifolium of gathering XI. Supporting this, the original catchword (“hann”) at the bottom of f. 54v lines up with the beginning of f. 47r. Following this change, Gathering XII has only four leaves (two bifolia) in a single hand. In the absence of a critical edition of *Móses rímur*, it is difficult to reach any secure conclusions on the relationship between the *Móses rímur*: Hand D may have copied only a short section of the text in order to bridge a gap in Guðmundur Erlendsson’s original. There is, however, a clear codicological boundary between the end of *Móses rímur* and the beginning of *Gígja*, and another clear boundary between the end of the *Gígja* section and *Elías ævi*.

*Elías ævi* (“Elías ævi hreina”) is a cycle of three poems by Guðmundur Erlendsson, currently found on ff. 74r–76r. There is a hand change on f. 74v: Karl Ólafsson identified a probable shift between scribes at f. 74r, l. 4, from Hand B (Guðmundur Erlendsson) to Hand E, beginning with the rubric of the second poem in the three-poem cycle.<sup>707</sup> The hand is extremely close to Skúli’s. Guðmundur Erlendsson’s collaborator in copying *Elías ævi* may in fact be a younger Skúli: ff. 73r–76r in 1529 were probably copied at least twenty years before 232. Skúli’s characteristic hand returns on ff. 76v–77v in dark ink, adding two hymns to an originally blank half-leaf and leaf at the end of the gathering.

Hands C–E are unknown, and I do not speculate on their identities here. A good number of individuals in Guðmundur Erlendsson’s social circles and his local community were excellent scribes, as discussed in 4.9. There seems to have been a high standard of literacy in Sléttuhlíð: an examination of Benedikt Halldórsson’s surviving record-book from 1673–1680 shows that all five members of the local *hreppsnefnd* for Sléttuhlíð in 1678 could write well.<sup>708</sup> Hallur Guðmundsson was one of these five men, but the other four were farmers not known to have grown up in a clerical household.

Scribe	Gatherings	Content
Hand A (Skúli Guðmundsson)	I: 1r–8v	(a) “Ó þú fallvalta veraldarvist” (Hallur Guðmundsson), (b) morning and evening hymns by the Rev. Jón Magnússon of Laufás
	II: 9r–16v	(a) “Guðhræddrar kvinna Guðrúnar” (Sveinn Jónsson of Barð), “Vil eg í Guði glaður (Guðmundur Erlendsson), “Jesú sjálfur og Jóhannes líka” (Jón Guðmundsson); (b)
	III: 17r–20v	hymns by Guðmundur Erlendsson and

<sup>707</sup> *Elías ævi* is found in both 232 (ff. 102r–105r) and 1055 (ff. 97r–99v).

<sup>708</sup> Þí. Sýslumaðurinn í Skagafjarðarsýslu og bæjarfógetinn á Sauðárkróki 0000 GA/1-1-1, 203. Although the ability to write one’s name is not equivalent to active scribal participation, the men’s handwriting is excellent.

	IV: 21r–24v V: 25r–28v VI: 29r–35v	Hallgrímur Pétursson, (c) anonymous hymns <sup>709</sup>  (a) <i>Vökuvarpa</i> , (b) “Allt eins og blómstrið eina (Hallgrímur Pétursson), (c) Jesús frægasti frelsari minn (Hallur Guðmundsson)
Hand C (unknown, 17th c.)	VII: 36r–37b <sup>isr</sup>	“Nýr minnis annáll einn er hér” (Verse account of the death of Charles I of England, translated by Guðmundur Erlendsson)
Hand A (Skúli Guðmundsson)	VIII: 38r–v IX: 38v–44v X: 45r–46v	<i>Móses rímur</i> (no. 1 (defective), no. 2–7, no. 8 (defective))
Hand D (unknown, 17th c.)	XI: 47r–48v XII(a): 49r–v <sup>710</sup>	<i>Móses rímur</i> (no. 9 (defective), no. 10, no. 11 (defective))
Hand B? (Guðmundur Erlendsson)	XII(b): 50r–53v	<i>Móses rímur</i> (no. 11 (defective), no. 12, no. 13 (defective))
Hand D (unknown, 17th c.)	XII(a): 54r–v	<i>Móses rímur</i> (no. 9 (defective))
Hand B (Guðmundur Erlendsson)	XIII–XVIII: 55r–73v	<i>Gígja</i> (24 poems, see Tables 4 and 5)
Hand B (Guðmundur Erlendsson) and Hand E (unknown, 17th c.)	XIX: 74r–76r	<i>Elías ævi</i>
Hand A (Skúli Guðmundsson)	XIX: 76v–77v	“Maður, maður, minnst þinn sið” (Jón Þorsteinsson), “Tímanum hef eg illa eytt” (Guðmundur Erlendsson, defective)

<sup>709</sup> The last of these hymns in Skúli’s hand, “Ó Jesús, Jesús, Jesús kær” on f. 28v, has been added in a dark brown ink and appears to be a slightly later addition. Another hand has added the name Árni Pétursson to the rubric. Árni Pétursson (1652–after 1731) was a farmer-poet and *lögréttumaður* in North Iceland.

<sup>710</sup> This bifolium (49/54) was recently moved to a wrong position in the manuscript, see discussion above.

Hand F (unknown, 17th c.)	XX: 78r–79v	Icelandic prose translation of an account of a vision of an angel in Stuttgart on 21 February 1648
Hand G (unknown, 17th c.)	XXI: 80r–v	Legal notes based on <i>Jónsbók</i> , unknown legal sources
Hand H (unknown, 17th c.)	XXII: 81r–85v	<i>Konunga spegill</i> (defective)

**Table 5. Scribes and content of 1529 (based on current order of leaves)**

Table 5 demonstrates that 1529 is a complex composite manuscript that contains material of a type that does not typically survive in manuscripts of this age, namely two pamphlets that are currently located at ff. 36r–37b<sup>isr</sup> (Hand C) and 78r–79v (Hand F). On ff. 78r–79v in particular, which is a single bifolium, there are clear signs of folding to a size suitable for sending in a letter or packet.

Hand G and Hand H, identified by Karl Ólafsson, are clearly distinct from other hands in the manuscript. Both contain fragments of prose writing with no clear connection to the remainder of the manuscript. Both contain fragments of prose writing with no clear connection to the remainder of the manuscript. Hand G is characterised by long, sweeping strokes. Macrons above the line frequently exceed the length of the word itself and are sometimes curved or looped. The hand is highly polished; the impression is that of a well-trained scribe who is experienced in producing material of this type. The text on ff. 80r–v is probably not a copy of any one single work but rather a collection of legal notes. The first (“Handran og Kvenna legord,” 80r, l. 1) is from *Þjólfabálkur* in the *Jónsbók* law code.<sup>711</sup> The catchwords at the bottom of each page indicate that this section was originally longer than the single leaf now preserved.

The text copied by Hand H, previously unidentified, is a copy of the Old Norse *Konungs skuggsjá*. The scribe’s exemplar may have been defective, as the fragment ends on a description of the philosopher Craton (f. 85r, ll. 9–13), with the word “fines” (‘end’) at the end of l. 13. The remainder of the leaf is blank except for a second enlarged “fines” immediately below this in the scribe’s hand. In *Konungs skuggsjá*, the description of Craton is immediately followed by a description of another pagan philosopher, Zenophilus.<sup>712</sup> Despite this not being an obvious spot in the text to break off, it was clear to the scribe that this was the end: the final three lines are arranged in a slightly tapering layout. It is

<sup>711</sup> Cf. Már Jónsson (ed.), *Jónsbók: Lögbók Íslendinga hver samþykkt var á alþingi árið 1281 og endurnýjuð um miðja 14. öld en fyrst prentuð árið 1578*, *Sýnisbók íslenskrar alþýðumenningar* 8 (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2004), 247.

<sup>712</sup> The material derives from the *Actus Sylvestri*, cf. Arnold Ehrhardt, “Constantine, Rome And The Rabbis,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 42.2 (1960): 296–97.

also tightly spaced, even where the end of the exemplar is rapidly approaching – the text is the work of a scribe accustomed to parsimonious use of paper.

There is extensive marginalia in 1529, except from f. 80r to the end of the manuscript. Several names are written on the verso side of f. 37bis. One is the signature of Jón Skúlason, whose identity is unknown (there were 10 men by this name at the time of the 1703 census). A 58-year-old Jón Skúlason lived with his sister Guðrún Skúladóttir and three servants at Dúkur in Reynistaðarhreppur, not far from Skúli (but too old to be Skúli's son), but the hand more likely belongs to a somewhat later reader or owner. The name Gottskálf Þorvaldsson is written twice on f. 37vbis and evidently belongs to the *lögréttumaður* who farmed at Möðrufell in Eyjafjörður, Hreiðarsstaðir in Svarfaðardalur and Þorleifsstaðir in Blönduhlíð. Gottskálf (1685–1767) and Skúli's daughter-in-law Þórunn Egilsdóttir were second cousins. Gottskálf was a fairly active scribe in the first half of the eighteenth century, and his scribal interests were diverse.<sup>713</sup> The name Gottskálf also appears on f. 34r and 108v, and Gottskálf is a plausible later owner of the miscellany, as it would likely have been material of interest for him. A third name is that of a woman, Þuríður Guðmundsdóttir *m.e.h.* ('with her own hand'). This could be the eldest daughter of the Rev. Guðmundur Jónsson (1669–1748) and Sigríður Þorkelsdóttir (b. 1675); this Þuríður (1695–1771) was the paternal granddaughter of Herdís Ásgrímsdóttir (see 5.4).

## 5.5.2 Binding fragments in 1529

Two binding fragments are preserved in an envelope accompanying 1529. Both are long, narrow strips probably used for reinforcing the binding at the spine. The paper is in a deteriorated state, but there appear to be tiny sewing holes along the midline of both.

It is uncertain whether the both fragments were fully visible in the manuscript at the time that Páll Eggert Ólason created his catalogue. According to the online catalogue of the National Library of Iceland, 1529 underwent unspecified conservation work in 1977.<sup>714</sup> Conservator Kristjana Kristjánsdóttir may have placed the two binding fragments in an envelope at this time.

### 5.5.2.1 Binding fragment I

The first binding fragment preserves a strip of letter from Hallur to his brother Skúli, thanking Skúli's wife Ólöf Jónsdóttir for her assistance in completing his daughter Sigga's hat (see 4.15.2). It captures an otherwise mundane exchange between the brothers' families. The surviving fragment is only 165 mm wide by 28 mm high and has been cut at the bottom. The top of the letter, the date (19 March

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<sup>713</sup> Two manuscripts in his hand are JS 79 4to and Lbs 1186 8vo, containing theology, prayers and hymns. According to the notes of Halldór Hjálmarsson in Lbs 3712 4to, Gottskálf also copied a number of sagas, including *Laxdæla saga*, *Svarfdæla saga* and *Reykðæla saga*.

<sup>714</sup> "Lbs 1529 4to," *Handrit.is*, accessed 1 October 2019, <https://handrit.is/en/manuscript/view/is/Lbs04-1529/>

1679) and the signature on the back have all been preserved, as have 9 lines of text. Since private letters between seventeenth-century Icelandic farmers rarely survive, the text has been included below in a semi-diplomatic transcription. The language presumably reflects the conventions of the day. The letter addresses Skúli formally by his full name, using the honorific pronoun *þér*, but Hallur expresses warmth and gratitude for Ólöf and Skúli's support.

From a codicological perspective, the fact that Skúli is the letter's recipient strongly indicates that (a) he was personally involved in gathering and binding the diverse contents of 1529 into a single volume (although some leaves have since been lost) and (b) the original binding dates from Skúli's own lifetime (as early as the 1680s). It is unlikely that a later owner of 1529 in the early eighteenth century happened to come across an old letter of Skúli's by coincidence.

Eg heilsa *yður* ástsamlega, j drottni jesu nú sem jafnan med filgiannði öskumm allra | velferda Sálar og lýf vegna minn allra kiærsti og gödi brödir Sküle minn Gudmunnds | son, f[irer a]lla elskusemi [m]ier audsýnda til orda vtláte og atvika þacka eg *yður* audmiukl- | ega, það nú einkumm þo, sem nýast er, Sem er ömakjd fullnadar adgiördinn á hatti | Siggu litlu m: gud bid eg ad blessa ölüfu mýna göda firer þa þionústú, mier þiki | [..... ....] þann málshátt Riettilega, ad öefni auaxstest i l[ag]s manns h[öndumm] etc || audmiukt, og af allri alüd, öskumm vær (hier a bæ) huört med ödrü yckur ölüfú | minni jons dottur gödrar heilsu og hagsemi firer Sal og lýf, asamt yckar vnngu og astkiæü | son[..... ....] umm alld[.] eilýfar amen ydar af h[.....]. | 19 Martý 79: Hall[.] Gúdmunds Son E.H:

### 5.5.2.2 Binding fragment II

The second binding fragment belongs to an administrative document in an unidentified hand, quite similar to Skúli's, with 26 lines of text. The fragment measures 163 mm high by 28 mm wide.

On the recto side is a list of farms and crofts in the administrative district of Svarfaðardalshreppur. The order of the twenty farms is identical to that of the 1703 census, even though the farms are in three different church parishes in Svarfaðardalur.<sup>715</sup> The list also originally included personal names (most likely those of household heads), almost always written after the farm name. Six lines begin with a personal name rather than a farm name; this may indicate multiple households or farm names may have been cut. Two crofts listed in the 1703 census (Karlsárkot and Hólskot) are not present in

<sup>715</sup> Árne Magnússon & Páll Vídalín, *Manntal*, 322–23. Sauðárkot, Sauðanes, Sauðaneskot, Karlsá, Karlsárkot, Hóll, Hólskot, Upsir, Upsakot neðra, Upsakot efri, Brimnes, Beggustaðir, Árgerði, Hrafnaðir and Hrafnaðakot are all in Upsaströnd (Upsasókn). Hámundarstaðir, Litlu-Hámundarstaðir, Hella, Birnunes, Selá and Selárbakki are in Árskógsströnd. One farm, Hrásar, is in Vallnasókn. At the time of the land register (taken in 1712), Erlendur Jónsson of Sakka (see 4.15.1) rented the Hrásar farm in addition to Sakka (in which he owned 22 hundreds). Árne Magnússon and Páll Vídalín, *Jarðabók*, vol. 10 (Eyjafjarðarsýsla), 92–96.



this list, but lines 7 and 13 (below Karlsá and Hóll) may have contained information on the occupants of these crofts. On the verso side are numerical values (taxes or tithes?), suggesting that the list of farms continued on the verso side, which would also be consistent with the district's size – Svarfaðardalshreppur was quite populous and had 669 inhabitants in 1703. Since some of the farms were privately owned, the figure plainly does not indicate rents paid.

The presence of crofts on the list is useful for dating the fragment, because crofts were more frequently established or abandoned than farm households. Two crofts on the list (Hrafstaðakot and Upsakot neðra) were not occupied at the time of the 1703 census, so a document relating to the census may immediately be ruled out. According to the land register made in 1712, the occupant of Upsakot neðra and Upsakot efri was the same, but there were clearly two separate households on the Upsakot crofts at the time the list was drawn up; a third croft had been established 40 or 50 years earlier but abandoned in c. 1692.<sup>716</sup>

Sauðárkot (l. 10) was abandoned in the *stórabóla* epidemic and had not been continuously occupied; the farmer Steingrímur Ólafsson of Sauðanesskot (b. 1653) rented the land for haying in 1712, and he may be the Steingrímur listed in l. 11.<sup>717</sup> Karlsárkot (uncertain, l. 7?) was also abandoned in the *stórabóla* epidemic but had only been established around 1682.<sup>718</sup> Hólskot (uncertain, l. 13?) was established around 1672 and occupied continuously until being abandoned in 1712.<sup>719</sup> A croft known as Brimneskot (not listed) was established at Brimnes before 1682 that was occupied for several years by a poor fisherman, but it had not been lived in since.<sup>720</sup> No Hrafstaðakot is listed in the 1712 land register, but it is probably identical with Aragerði, a croft belonging to the Hrafstaðir land, established around four decades previously (i.e., in the late 1660s or early 1670s) and abandoned in 1695.<sup>721</sup> Based on this, the document's terminus ante quem is 1695. It is impossible to identify any of the individuals named on the fragment based on the 1703 census, supporting that it dates from the second half of the seventeenth century, but it is unclear whether it is old enough to relate directly to Jón Illugason's administrative work (cf. 4.15.1). A semi-diplomatic transcription is provided in the table below:

Line	Text	Farm	Household head, 1703
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<sup>716</sup> Árni Magnússon and Páll Vídalín, *Jarðabók*, vol. 10 (Eyjafjarðarsýsla), 46–47.

<sup>717</sup> Árni Magnússon and Páll Vídalín, *Jarðabók*, vol. 10 (Eyjafjarðarsýsla), 41.

<sup>718</sup> Árni Magnússon and Páll Vídalín, *Jarðabók*, vol. 10 (Eyjafjarðarsýsla), 43.

<sup>719</sup> Árni Magnússon and Páll Vídalín, *Jarðabók*, vol. 10 (Eyjafjarðarsýsla), 44.

<sup>720</sup> Árni Magnússon and Páll Vídalín, *Jarðabók*, vol. 10 (Eyjafjarðarsýsla), 48.

<sup>721</sup> Árni Magnússon and Páll Vídalín, *Jarðabók*, vol. 10 (Eyjafjarðarsýsla), 50.

1	Hrafnstadak[ot]	Hrafnstaðakot	--
2	Hrafnstadir	Hrafnstaðir	Sigurður Þorbjörnsson
3	Vpsir: <i>Sera</i>	Upsir ( <i>beneficium</i> )	Séra Sæmundur Hrólfsón
4	Vpsakot, G	Upsakot	Þorkell Jónsson
5	Vpsakot ned[ra]	Upsakot neðra	--
6	Kallsä, þorv <sup>722</sup>	Karlsá	Jón Bjarnason
7	Sigfús kiar <sup>723</sup>	--	
8	Saudanes	Sauðanes	Sigurður Einarsson
9	Saudanesk[ot]	Sauðaneskot	Steingrímur Ólafsson
10	Saudakot	Sauðáarkot	Björn Einarsson
11	Steingrímur <sup>724</sup>	--	--
12	Höll: Gud	Hóll	Jón Jónsson
13	Gudmund <sup>725</sup>	--	
14	Brimnes: G	Brimnes	Ingimundur Jónsson
15	Bøggustadir	Bøggustaðir <sup>726</sup>	Gunnar Þorleifsson

<sup>722</sup> Þorvaldur or Þorvarður.

<sup>723</sup> Sigfús Kjartansson(?) In 1703, a 86-year-old Tómas Kjartansson (1617–1714) was among the paupers in the *hreppur*. His brother Sigfús is named as a witness to a property dispute in Jón Illugason's *bréfabók*, JS 360 8vo, 63v–64r. Tómas was probably the farmer at Ingvarir at the time, cf. Stefán Aðalsteinsson, *Svarfdælingar* (Reykjavík: Iðunn, 1976–1978), vol. 2, 242.

<sup>724</sup> The only Steingrímur in Svarfaðardalshreppur in 1703 is the 50-year-old farmer at Sauðaneskot.

<sup>725</sup> Guðmundur. The name was extremely common in Iceland; there are 17 Guðmundurs in Svarfaðardalshreppur in the 1703 census, between the ages of 3 and 73.

<sup>726</sup> Other variants: Beggustaðir/Bøggvisstaðir. Árni Magnússon and Páll Vídalín, *Jarðabók*, vol. 10 (Eyjafjarðarsýsla), 48.

16	Ärgerdi, H	Árgerði	Magnús Jónsson
17	Hrysir, Sig	Hrísar	Oddur Guðmundsson
18	Hámundar	Hámundarstaðir <sup>727</sup>	(a) Sigurður Bjarnason
19	Vigdýs þar <sup>728</sup>	--	(b) Jón Björnsson
20	Hella, Tom <sup>729</sup>	Hella	Þórður Sigfússon
21	Jön tumäs <sup>730</sup>	--	
22	B[ir]nunes,	Birnunes	Jón Jónsson
23	Selä, Ar	Selá	Séra Guðmundur Þorláksson
24	Selärbacki	Selárbakki	Ingibjörg Þórarinsdóttir
25	Kalfskinn,	Kálfskinn	Þorkell Guðmundsson
26	vm benedi[kt] <sup>731</sup>		

**Table 6. Binding fragment II.**

## 5.6 Women, literacy and *Gígja*

*Gígja* and its transmission are more intimately connected to women's literacy in early modern Iceland than has previously been recognized. While Guðmundur Erlendsson dedicated *Gígja* to his prestigious new son-in-law, Jón Illugason, it was no less intended for the use of Margrét in her new role as wife and mother in a well-to-do farm household.<sup>732</sup>

In compiling *Gígja*, Guðmundur included at least two poems specifically composed for his daughter Margrét, which both conceal her name. These are “Ég þakki Guði eilífum” from 1633, a hymn of thanksgiving composed for her to sing after recovery from a long period of illness,<sup>733</sup> and “Mín sál þig

<sup>727</sup> There is a Stóru-Hámundarstaðir and a Litlu-Hámundarstaðir in the 1703 census; the two lines in the binding fragment may have listed each on a separate line.

<sup>728</sup> Vigdís. There were eight women named Vigdís in Svarfaðardalshreppur at the time of the 1703 census, including two at Árgerði (2 and 66 years old), one at Kálfskinn (7) and Hrafnstaðir (51).

<sup>729</sup> Tómas. Five men by this name lived in Svarfaðardalur in the 1703 census: the farmers Tómas Jónsson of Búrfell (51), Tómas Bjarnason of Hamar (58) and Tómas Einarsson of Hof (48); the labourer Tómas Guðmundsson (46); and the aforementioned pauper Tómas Kjartansson (86).

<sup>730</sup> Jón Tómasson. There are two adult men by this name in Svarfaðardalur in the 1703 census: a 34-year-old pauper and the 58-year-old farmer at Ingvarir.

<sup>731</sup> Benedikt. No Benedikts lived in Svarfaðardalur at the time of the 1703 census.

<sup>732</sup> Guðrún Ingólfsdóttir, „Í hverri bók er mannsandi,” 256–57. See also Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, “Constructing cultural competence,” 277–320.

<sup>733</sup> 1055, 67r.

biður sæti Guð,” a hymn in which the first letters of the first seven stanzas spell M-A-R-G-R-E-T and the first words of the remaining four stanzas reveal the message GUÐ MUNDAR DÓTTIR Á: (‘Margrét Guðmundardóttir owns [this]’).<sup>734</sup>

*Gígja* unites poems composed for major life events within Guðmundur’s close family with occasional poetry by Guðmundur praising Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson and his relatives – the kinship networks to which Margrét belonged by birth and by marriage. The anthology also contains a large body of moral and didactic poetry specifically targeted at young children and their parents, suggesting that Guðmundur conceived of *Gígja* as being used within the household by the young parents-to-be, and Margrét in particular. Although the official guardian of *Gígja* may have been Jón, it is clear that Guðmundur had his daughter Margrét in mind as a primary user of the manuscript within their household. The visual message left for Margrét in “Mín sál þig biður sæti Guð” is a strong indication that Margrét was literate. The absence of poems for Guðmundur’s other married daughter (Þóra?) is not an indication of favouritism, but rather the specific functions and intended recipients of *Gígja*.

As argued above, Margrét’s nephew, Einar Jónsson, sought to have a copy made in anticipation of his marriage to Guðný Hjálmaradóttir (232), who grew up in a cultural and literary household and may also be presumed to have been a literate woman. Einar likely gifted 232 to Guðný in connection with their wedding, as gifts from groom to bride were common in early modern Iceland (see above).

When, in 1692–1694, Jón Ólafsson of Lambavatn copied the autograph manuscript of *Gígja* given to Jón Illugason and Margrét Guðmundsdóttir, he did so with the objective of giving it to his daughter Halla as a wedding gift, which he states directly in his poem to her (see 5.2). It is less likely that Helga Þorvaldsdóttir commissioned her copy of *Gígja* (1055) in the late eighteenth century with the specific purpose of a wedding. Still, *Gígja* was plainly considered an appropriate gift from a parent to a grown child. In Helga’s case, the woman’s role is the book’s commissioner rather than its recipient.

The role of women in vernacular manuscript culture in early modern Iceland has received increasing attention in the last two decades. To date, the single largest study is Guðrún Ingólfadóttir’s *Á hverju liggja ekki vorar göfugu kellíngar*, which examines the period from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century.<sup>735</sup> Margrét Eggertsdóttir, Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, Natalie Van Deusen and Susanne Miriam Arthur are also among those to have researched women’s participation in manuscript culture. As a result, a much more nuanced picture of women’s literacy is emerging, in which the focus has shifted

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<sup>734</sup> 1055, 77v–78r.

<sup>735</sup> Guðrún Ingólfadóttir, *Á hverju liggja ekki vorar göfugu kellíngar: Bókmenning íslenskra kvenna frá miðöldum fram á 18. öld* (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2016).

from representation in printed literature to the many ways in which women used writing and books in their everyday lives.

In Iceland, most surviving early modern manuscripts belonging to women are associated with owners of very high social status, such as the daughters, wives and widows of bishops. Jón Guðmundsson's *Lbs 1205 4to* is a typical example of this, being created for Ragnheiður Jónsdóttir, the wealthy and well-educated widow of Bishop Gísli Þorláksson of Hólar. *Gígja*'s owners were not quite of this social class, although Margrét Guðmundsdóttir and Jón Illugason were a well-to-do property-owning couple whose daughter Guðrún the Younger lived at Skálholt during the episcopacy of her cousin Þórður Þorláksson. However, Guðný Hjálmarsdóttir and Halla Jónsdóttir shared in common with Margrét that they came from cultural households and entered into a marriage that elevated them to the position of mistress of a farm household. All three had well-educated fathers: Jón Ólafsson and Guðmundur Erlendsson were clergymen who had both been educated at Hólar, while Guðný's father Hjálmar was considered a doctor and artisan within his local community according to the 1703 census. Hjálmar was not trained as a physician at a formal institution (none existed in Iceland at the time), but his learning exceeded that of most other men in his community. Like Guðmundur, Hjálmar was a poet.

Guðmundur Erlendsson did not compile *Gígja* for a very young bride. If Margrét and Jón were indeed married in 1654, then she would have been around 29 at the time. Guðný was also around 29 when *Lbs 232* was completed in 1689, and her marriage to Einar Jónsson must have occurred before the birth of their daughter Svanhildur four years later. In 1694, when Jón Ólafsson completed *\*JÓG*, Halla Jónsdóttir was only 18, a young age for a woman to marry by Icelandic standards.

Outside the elite (such as Helga Magnúsdóttir of Bræðratunga in South Iceland, born in 1623 and married in 1639), women in early modern Iceland rarely married before their twenties at the earliest, often working as unmarried servants into their thirties or beyond.<sup>736</sup> Árni Daníel Júlíusson has recently suggested that ordinary women benefitted from the growing importance of woolworking in early modern Icelandic society. Even if their economically valuable labour was by no means rewarded by equal pay or social status, single women were able to enter a contract of bonded service with a farmer for a wage, and to acquire goods and property of their own.<sup>737</sup> Adolescent girls were not routinely pressured into early marriages with much older men, nor were adolescent pregnancies normalized in an era when medical assistance in the event of complications was non-existent.

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<sup>736</sup> Loftur Guttormsson, *Bernska, ungdómur og uppeldi á einveldisöld*, 105–6, 114–15, 124.

<sup>737</sup> Árni Daníel Júlíusson, *Af hverju strái*, 228–30.

In addition to this, I would also argue that women had opportunities to develop their own identities, apart from those of wife and mother. From a single woman to a wife and parent was a major transition in a woman's life, particularly if the full responsibility of managing a large household fell on the new bride's shoulders.<sup>738</sup> These responsibilities included the religious education and discipline of all children and youths in the household, including young paupers who lacked a fixed household. While confirmation did not exist as a formal rite of passage before the eighteenth century, the Church nevertheless expected farming couples to instill children with a deeper understanding of Christianity than the basic ability to repeat the catechism.<sup>739</sup> For already an literate woman, a book such as *Gígja* could assist in the project of locating suitable material to improve children's and servants' comprehension of necessary virtues for those in their station, including obedience and patience, and for offering spiritual comfort to individuals in times of difficulty. Unlike a book of prose sagas or *rímur*, which might be read voraciously cover-to-cover and then loaned to another household, *Gígja* functions as a reference work for the entire household.

As elsewhere in Europe, a married woman's labour in her husband's household did not entitle her to joint ownership of the family's assets, which could be disastrous for the woman's financial security.<sup>740</sup> Even if the hymn "Mín sál þig biður sæti Guð" belonged to Margrét Guðmundsdóttir according to the text itself, she had no direct claim to *Gígja*: it was her husband's property, and the manuscript stated as much. Later seventeenth-century copies of *Gígja* (232 and \*JÓG) take care to establish the woman's rights to the book: elaborate dedicatory material also served as documents of ownership.

## 5.7 Conclusion

Based on examination of the manuscript evidence, I argue that 232, 1055, 250 and 1529 all preserve an anthology of Guðmundur Erlendsson's poetry that circulated under the title of *Gígja*. Excitingly, 1529 appears to contain the oldest known autograph copy of an Icelandic poet's own anthology (*kvæðabók*),<sup>741</sup> although only a small part of the volume still survives. The evidence of 1055 dates

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<sup>738</sup> See Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, "Voices from the past: Occasional poetry as a historical source," in *Gender, History, Futures: Report from the XI Nordic Women's and Gender History Conference, Stockholm, Sweden, August 19–21, 2015*, ed. Daniel Nyström & Johanna Overud (Umeå: Sveriges kvinno- och genushistoriker, 2018), 121–30.

<sup>739</sup> Cf. e.g., Brynjólfur Sveinsson, *Guðs dýrð og sálnanna velferð*, 60.

<sup>740</sup> Guðný Hallgrímsdóttir, *A Tale of a Fool?* 60–61, 102–14.

<sup>741</sup> Although older autograph copies of individual poems do exist, a manuscript such as AM 439 12mo (partly in Stefán Ólafsson's hand from 1636) does not have the objective of gathering Stefán Ólafsson's own poetry into a single, curated anthology; the section known with certainty to be in Stefán Ólafsson's hand is a collection of

1529 to c. 1654, assuming that 1529 is the fair copy on which \*JIG was based. A date of c. 1654 is further supported by the absence of Guðmundur's poem "Aví, aví vort auma land" on Bishop Þorlákur's death in 1656. In 1055 and 232, the poem is copied back-to-back with "Diktur lofkvæði Davíðs son" on Bishop Guðbrandur (1628), but in 1529 the older poem is followed by "Herrans hér postula" from 1629.

This is at least three decades older than Bjarni Gissurarson's MS Boreal 78 and up to a half-century older than Bjarni Gissurarson's Thott 473 4to: the terminus post quem of the former is 1683–1684, and that of the latter is 1691–1692.<sup>742</sup> An important next step will be to edit the poems in 1529 to examine their textual relationship to other early modern manuscripts of *Gígja*. Closer palaeographical analysis of the hands in 1529 and 250 would also be valuable.

None of the manuscripts examined provided evidence for the survival of *Fagriskógur*. At the same time, a deeper examination of the circumstances of *Gígja*'s production reveals the close relationship between manuscript production and social function in early modern Iceland.

This raises the question: what is *Gígja*? Based on the available manuscript evidence, I argue that *Gígja* and *Fagriskógur* were not conceived of as poetry anthologies in a modern sense. They do not necessarily contain Guðmundur Erlendsson's best poems, but instead those he felt were most appropriate for circulation and use within the homes of his children and their partners. Although he may have been inspired by models such as Guðbrandur Þorláksson's *Vísnaþók*, Guðmundur created his poetry manuscripts with specific occasions, functions and recipients in mind.

*Gígja* brings together poems composed at various stages of Guðmundur Erlendsson's career as a poet and clergyman, and for various occasions. In general, Guðmundur Erlendsson seems to have chosen pieces from his existing corpus of poems, rather than composing new material for theoretical situations that might befall his family in future. The dedicatory poems in 1055 and *Gígja*'s preface in 1055/232 are exceptions; Guðmundur created them expressly for his anthology.

The manuscript created in 1654, \*JIG, can be characterized as an occasional manuscript, analogous to an occasional poem. Given the differences in content between manuscripts of *Gígja*, it also seems evident that more than one version of *Gígja* existed in the seventeenth century under the same title.

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poetic exchanges between the poet and various other writers within his social circles. The second part, possibly also in Stefán Ólafsson's hand, comprises six poems by Guðmundur Erlendsson.

<sup>742</sup> Jón M. Samsonarson, *Séra Bjarni Gissurarson í Þingmúla, ævi hans og kveðskapur* (Cand.mag. thesis, University of Iceland, 1960), 105–17. Jón Samsonarson believed that Bjarni wrote his manuscripts soon after completing the last dated poem in each respective manuscript, but a more recent study pointed out the presence of the date 1704 in Bjarni's scribal colophon on f. 30v. Katherina Baier, Eevastiina Korri, Ulrike Michalczyk, Friederike Richter, Werner Schäfke & Sofie Vanherpen, "An Icelandic Christmas Hymn: *Hljómi raustin barna best*," *Gripla* 25 (2014): 242.

One explanation is that Guðmundur continued to compose poetry after 1654. Guðmundur himself may have personally reworked and reorganized *Gígja* accordingly. Subsequent scribes and owners also reworked, reorganized, rearranged, subtracted from and added to *Gígja*, as shown in this chapter.

*Gígja*'s bipartite structure is a fundamental aspect of the book, present already in 1529. *Gígja*'s first section attends to the spiritual health of the family, providing texts through which the household (or its individual members) can respond to adversities such as insomnia, illness, loss and despair by raising their voices in song. As such, it contains mostly hymns. The second section is focused on the moral, educational and cultural needs of the family. Didactic poems and verse narratives with explicitly moral teachings are in the foreground, but a diverse range of texts are presented, including hymns, knowledge poems, narrative *kvæði* on historical subjects, *rímur* and *vikivakakvæði* with regular refrains. The inclusion of *vikivaki* poetry demonstrates that *Gígja* was not exclusively a book to which one sat and listened: in the seventeenth century, *vikivaki* is associated with dance lyrics and social gatherings.<sup>743</sup>

Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson has studied the development of the book of poetry as an artistic whole in Icelandic literature, pointing out that the thirteenth-century Eddic manuscript GKS 2365 4to (the Codex Regius) displays a desire for internal structure on the part of the scribe (or, possibly, the exemplar).<sup>744</sup> In the case of *Gígja*, the concept behind its structure – the metaphor of the poetry book as a stringed “instrument” for the reader-performer-audience to pluck – comes directly from the poet himself. Examining the preservation of *Gígja*, each manuscript copy is an artistic whole in its own right; as with all legendary instruments, successive generations of musicians have been their custodians and kept them in functional order.

The format of *Gígja* in 232, 1055, 250 and 1529 appears to have been approximately the same: a single quarto volume, which as reconstructed would have been quite thick. As such, it was not a conveniently portable book, which must have ultimately contributed to its survival. By contrast, the leaves of the eighteenth-century poetry volume JS 207 8vo measure only 150 x 100 mm. Although thick (43 mm, not counting the binding), the smaller volume suggests a private reading function – an individual can easily tuck the book away in a pocket or pouch to carry on the person, and the outer corners of the front cover have been worn smooth by constant rubbing against something soft such as fabric. For 232 to survive in such excellent condition, it must have been handled with particularly

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<sup>743</sup> Jón Samsonarson, *Kvæði og dansleikir*, (Reykjavík: Almenna bókafélagið, 1964).

<sup>744</sup> Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson, “Að yrkja bók: Ljóðabókin sem „listræn heild“,” *Textar og túlkun*, 13–40.



great care throughout its lifetime in the community. Hallur Guðmundsson's advice to Einar that he not loan the book out to readers all over Iceland was clearly heeded.<sup>745</sup>

Skúli's expectations of 232 were similar: that they would remain within Einar's household. In dedicating 232 to Einar on the evening of April 30, 1689, Skúli Guðmundsson acknowledged a plurality of manuscripts of *Gígja*, modestly hoping that this *Gígja* would serve and entertain Einar as well as a more elegantly written copy:

Yndi og skemmtun yður að því  
ætið verða megi  
hvört sinn þegar horfið í  
hana, á nótt eður degi.

(‘May it always bring you pleasure and enjoyment, each time you look in it, whether day or night.’)

In the case of \*JIG from 1654, Guðmundur Erlendsson seems to have expected that the book would be shared and copied extensively in future. The poems at the beginning of \*JIG/\*JÓG/1055 (see 5.2.1) state as much: *Gígja* is intended for use and circulation, and \*JIG travelled as at least as far as the desk of Jón Ólafsson of Lambavatn in the late seventeenth century. The version found in 1529 was probably bound in a more permanent binding (requiring the use of scrap paper) only after it came into Skúli Guðmundsson's possession. It seems to be only a fair copy of *Gígja*, not a presentation copy such as 232 and 1055. However, all surviving copies of *Gígja* save for 1055 were bound together with at least one other codicological unit, and even 1055 provides evidence of later additions to \*JIG/\*JÓG. This cumulative approach was arguably pragmatic, aiding the survival of otherwise ephemeral texts: for paper, there is safety in numbers.

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<sup>745</sup> 232, 11r.

## 6.0 Conclusion

In an irony of history, the oldest extant autograph poetry anthology in Iceland belongs to a poet who believed himself to be poised at the teetering edge of temporal time. The transience of all human life is a common theme in baroque poetry, in Iceland as elsewhere in Europe. For Guðmundur Erlendsson, as for many of his contemporaries, there is a sense of immediacy and concreteness to the end of the world that is increasingly less hard for modern readers to comprehend. The idea that human behaviour can directly and adversely impact the natural environment, and that isolated disasters on a local scale can function as warnings and omens of worse to come, is hardly alien to anyone engaging with world news today. The possibility of staving off the world's impending end through true repentance is the core message: act now, and there is still hope.

As presented in *Gígja*, the chronology of Guðmundur Erlendsson's poetic career begins just over 400 years ago, as a young graduate of the Latin school in 1615, during a smallpox epidemic that nearly claimed his life. A hundred years on, a still more deadly strain of the same disease ended the life of his grandson Guðmundur Skúlason at around the same early point in his career. The older Guðmundur lived to become one of Iceland's most prolific poets, and the focus of this dissertation.

Earlier criticism of the aesthetics of Guðmundur Erlendsson's poetry largely overlooked the important function of verse and manuscripts as media for memorializing events and disseminating information in early modern Icelandic communities. We may be more culturally familiar with prose for scientific and journalistic communication, but it is not an inherently more reliable medium. The Latin distich and its translation in 1055 (5.2.1) reveals that the entry for 1553 in the *Skarðsárannáll* is not only a fiction but one based on a much older legend, which also circulated in its written form in Iceland. The translated poem is difficult to take seriously as a genuine historical record, but scholarly research on sixteenth-century Iceland has included the prose version in *Skarðsárannáll* as an accurate account of an actual legal case. By contrast, Guðmundur's eighteenth *mansöngur* in the *Rímur af Sál og Davíð* is a unique first-hand account of the nature and local culture of Grímsey in the early 1630s. In spite of its importance for early modern Icelandic audiences, poetry continues to be undercredited in favour of what to modern readers appear to be more factual modes of writing, to everyone's loss.

Today, the year 1615 in Icelandic history is remembered as the year of the last massacre in Iceland's history: the killing of shipwrecked Basque whalers in the Westfjords. It was also the year in which the future bishop Þorlákur Skúlason and the young adventurer Jón Ólafsson boarded two very different ships – one Danish, one English – on voyages that took very different trajectories. The hypothesis that unedited poems by Guðmundur Erlendsson provide evidence for a poorly documented outbreak

of smallpox that same year, perhaps largely localized to the vicinity of a crowded fishing station or trading centre in Skagafjörður, followed by the better-documented epidemic of 1616–1617, is worth taking notice of. That Guðmundur Erlendsson's own hand has recorded that he was at Hafsstaðir in his nineteenth year when he battled smallpox in 1615 makes "Þjáður og lúinn ligg eg hér" a more reliable manuscript witness than most historical chronicles. The first draft of this dissertation was submitted in December of 2019; its title predates the name COVID-19 by a hair's breadth. It is no longer possible to wrap up with the observation from an earlier draft of the conclusion that plagues devastating entire communities, such as those experienced by Guðmundur Erlendsson, are "thankfully strange and remote" for modern Icelandic audiences. Since Chapter 4.2.1 was written, discussions of more deadly second waves of epidemics and the impact of large mass gatherings (such as the Alþingi) in spreading contagious disease have become extremely relevant.

Epidemiologically speaking, present-day Iceland is not so different from early modern Iceland: as an island, it is theoretically possible to cut off the country from the rest of the world, if at a very high social and economic cost, but isolation alone provides no long-term protection from outbreaks. Just as the Black Death eventually reached Iceland, a half-century after sweeping through Norway, it was only the development of a smallpox vaccine that halted epidemics from reaching Iceland via contact with countries where smallpox remained endemic.

Guðmundur Erlendsson's poems provide devastating evidence of the personal and social impacts of contagious diseases and the utter unviability of herd immunity by infection, sometimes touted in recent months as a solution to COVID-19 in spite of a lack of any evidence that survivors gain lifelong immunity. In early modern Iceland, herd immunity through direct infection with smallpox or the measles was achieved – in theory – at the cost of incalculable human suffering, high death tolls and similarly high rates of permanent disfigurement and lifelong disability (including blindness). A few decades on, the same disease would surface to tear through the community and attack the next generation. Guðmundur Erlendsson's songs for the survivors are framed as acts of thanksgiving for God's mercy, but they are not happy ones. The imagery is bleak, particularly in "Almáttugi og mildi Guð," where the end of the 1644 measles epidemic segues darkly into the turmoil of the Thirty Years' War (see 4.2.2).

The organization of all manuscript versions of Guðmundur Erlendsson's *Gígja* anthology underscores the importance of songs and music in combatting adversity and despair at the individual, household and community level. In some instances, such as Guðmundur's *Rímur af Elía spámanni* (4.11), intense personal despair is voiced by the poet-narrator, which emotion transitions to a state of consolation through acknowledgement and prayer. A large body of poetry included in *Gígja* is more lighthearted

entertainment, and Guðmundur's verse preface to *Gígja* (see 5.1) speaks to the need for balance and harmony. For the most part, however, Guðmundur Erlendsson seems to have deliberately excluded the carnivalesque from his legacy as a poet.

Guðmundur was a learned poet, but he was not a bookish poet. His playful statement in *Einvaldsóður* that he writes for the simple and not Zoilus (see 4.12) is aimed directly at educated listeners who would recognize Zoilus as the nitpicking and unreasonably harsh critic of Homer. Unlike many of his contemporaries, including Magnús Ólafsson of Laufás, there is no evidence that Guðmundur ever wrote poetry with the objective of seeking the patronage of Danish officials and scholars. While he enjoyed the patronage of elite members of society in North Iceland and used poetry as a means of advancing his career, much of his poetry is intended to be comprehensible for ordinary men, woman and children (see 4.9). His poems avoid opacity, obscure allusions and antiquarian expeditions to the Old Norse-Icelandic past. His fascination with the ancient past manifests itself not in close emulation of skaldic models but rather in works such as *Einvaldsóður* and his *rímur* on the life of Æsop.

Although sixteenth-century humanism is often associated with philology and classical learning, it also stressed the need for moral improvement. While it would be a stretch to argue that Guðmundur Erlendsson is a humanist poet, his poetry is closely aligned with Guðbrandur Þorláksson's vision of the reformed poetic landscape, cleansed of vices and spiritual error. The term of vernacular humanist (see 4.2.1) describes Guðmundur well.

Guðmundur Erlendsson's access to the literature and knowledge of the outside world came largely through the written word, including ephemeral material such as printed pamphlets. The routes by which he acquired this material are largely undocumented, but in some cases he likely obtained manuscript translations (such as that of *Jesu Barndoms Bog*, see 4.8.2), while in others (such as *Einvaldsóður*, see 4.12) he worked directly from a printed book. Although he was heavily influenced by the work of the older generation of poet-clergymen, most notably Einar Sigurðsson of Eydalir and Ólafur Jónsson of Sandar, he also looked outside Iceland for inspiration and new material.

In many cases, it is difficult to pinpoint Guðmundur's exact sources. However, the speed at which Guðmundur Erlendsson could obtain new material circulating elsewhere in Europe, particularly in the case of the anti-Semitic material presented in versified form in *Gyðingaraunir* (see 4.13), suggests that his poems were frequently composed in response to very recent events in Europe. From what is known of the anti-Semitic tract's history, it journeyed from Rome to Iceland in the space of only about six years, crossing national, religious and language borders in the process. If any additional proof was needed that Icelanders were not living in an isolated bubble during the early modern period (cf. 3.3), this is surely it. *Gyðingaraunir* belongs to an all too large corpus of early modern

European writing directly targeting Jewish communities, legitimizing persecution as divinely ordained. As a body of literature, works such as these collectively represent some of Europe's most difficult literary heritage (cf. 3.4). Just as it is important to acknowledge the positive outcomes of cultural and literary contact in early modern Iceland (see 3.5), *Gyðingaraunir* is a timely reminder of just how rapidly hateful ideas and stereotypes can spread.

The remarkably strong manuscript preservation of Guðmundur Erlendsson's religious and didactic poetry can be largely attributed to the activities of his children and their descendants. Evidence of direct collaboration between Guðmundur and other members of his kinship network includes co-authorship of poems, but members of Guðmundur Erlendsson's extended kinship network also continued to be major players in the active promotion and dissemination of Guðmundur's poetry after the poet's death. In particular, his son Skúli Guðmundsson took a leading role in the project to promote his father's memory. Skúli and two of his brothers were poets like their father, but Skúli and his older brother Hallur seem to have placed minimal emphasis on the preservation of their own poetry in written form, instead focussing on the cultivation of their father's legacy and the poetic reputation of their youngest brother, Jón, who succeeded Guðmundur as the parson for Sléttuhlíð. That their own poetry is not better preserved may be an indirect consequence of the calamities of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

Throughout his career as a poet, Guðmundur wrote extensively for and about women. These range from poorly preserved mocking poems in which the woman is the target of satire (see 4.3) to large framed memorial poems intended for public display in church (see 4.4 and 4.5.2). The poems identified in the present research as having a named female recipient or subject include:

- two hymns for his daughter Margrét
- one hymn for his wife Guðrún (or possibly another woman by this name)
- an elegy for his wife Guðrún, probably his last composition
- an elegy composed for Halldóra Guðbrandsdóttir, daughter of Guðbrandur Þorláksson, on the death of her father
- one poem for Valgerður Halldórsdóttir, commissioned by a woman in her powerful family
- a memorial plaque for Þórunn Benediktsdóttir, his early patroness
- a memorial plaque for Margrét Erlendsdóttir, his mother

Many of the oldest extant manuscripts of Guðmundur Erlendsson's poetry are closely connected with early modern women's literacy. In addition to the *Gígja* manuscripts (discussed in 5.6), two manuscripts not otherwise falling under the scope of the present research are AM 608 4to and AM 104 8vo. The former preserves fragments of *Móses rímur* and *Rímur af Sál og Davíð* and was given to Árni Magnússon by Þórdís Jónsdóttir in 1707 and contains the signature of Þórdís's sister-in-law Elín Hákonardóttir, one of the wealthiest women in Iceland in her day. The latter contains a copy of *Rímur af barndómi Krists* made in 1677 for Kristín Árnadóttir.

Guðmundur Erlendsson subscribed enthusiastically to the humanist values espoused by his patron Guðbrandur Þorláksson of Hólar, manifested in the plethora of verse compositions aimed at improving the religious literacy of his audiences. Guðmundur's insistence on composing vernacular poetry that educated and fortified the audience – without requiring a priori knowledge transmitted almost exclusively from men to other men in the pre-modern period – may have increased his appeal among women who enjoyed a relatively higher social status in their community but were not granted access to book-learning comparable to that of their male siblings.

Guðmundur Erlendsson was a highly influential poet in the literary milieu of seventeenth-century Iceland, but one whose most important works circulated in manuscript copies. By contrast, many of the writings today considered to form a central part of the early modern literary canon were virtually unknown and unread before they were edited by textual scholars and disseminated through the medium of mass print. A case in point is the *Píslarsaga* of Jón Magnússon *þumlungur*, discussed in Chapter 3, which before 1914 was accessible to the world only in a single eighteenth-century copy made by the author's grandson for a Danish administrative official and later housed in the Royal Danish Library in Copenhagen. Today, the *Píslarsaga* is available in three separate print editions and multiple translations.

Since manuscript culture was the main vehicle for the transmission of literature and learning in early modern Iceland, a paradox has arisen: many writings that were well known and widely shared are only available to the most determined of readers today. When Jón Helgason wrote of early modern Icelandic literature as stunted and low-growing vegetation (see 3.4), it was an implicit comparison to the tall, thriving forests covering Iceland in myths of the early settlement period. The towering legacy of the classical Icelandic sagas, which take place during and after the settlement of Iceland, is unmentioned but ever-present in Jón's ambivalent acknowledgement of the existence of a post-Reformation literary landscape.

As preserved today, Guðmundur Erlendsson's poetry does not give the impression of an author who quakes in the shadow of a lofty literary past. Bathed in the rosy glow of a new spiritual renaissance,

his golden age is found in the here and now, in which poetry and singing permeate virtually every aspect of life from cradle to grave. Guðmundur's poetry serves many purposes: to comfort and console; to celebrate and encourage; to praise and commemorate; to mock and ridicule; to heal; to warn; to educate.

In the introduction, I suggest that a label of people's poet does not strongly apply to Guðmundur Erlendsson. He received formal schooling and had a long career as a cleric and poet in the service of three consecutive bishops of Hólar. Many of his poems openly cultivate the patronage of the rich and powerful within Iceland. His poems addressed to the simple should be seen in the light of his responsibilities as a parson. However, a parson's day-to-day life was not always much different from that of a farmer. In poems such as *Búraunakvæði*, which poke fun at the everyday annoyances of a farmer's life, Guðmundur speaks as a member of his local community.

In "Almáttugur Guð himna hæða," Guðmundur elevates the experiences of the common people to the realm of the heroic. The poem, on one crew's struggle for survival after being blown off course during a winter storm, resonated deeply with generations to come. Unlike the more sensational calamities chronicled by Guðmundur Erlendsson, such as the spectacular fall of kings and empires in *Einvaldsóður*, the dangers described in "Almáttugur Guð himna hæða" were an ever-present threat to the crews of the small open boats that set out every fishing season for centuries. Although never printed, manuscript copies of the poem were widely disseminated, and it was no less important as a literary model for future compositions on the same subject. For inhabitants of coastal and island communities, it became increasingly popular to preserve the memory of experiences at sea through narrative verse. Over 20 *rímur* on hardship at sea have survived, all post-dating Guðmundur's poem.

Isolated and adrift in the North Atlantic Ocean, ten men at the end of the world returned home – in spite of all odds.

## Útdráttur

Í doktorsritgerðinni „*Kveðið við heimsins enda*“ eru höfundarverk og ævi Guðmundar Erlendssonar (um 1595–21. mars 1670) rannsökuð sem hluti af stærri heild. Æviferill Guðmundar er rakinn með tilliti til samfélagsþátttöku skáldsins og hlutverks kveðskapar og handrita. Í fyrstu þremur köflunum er leitast við að staðsetja skáldið í tíma og rúmi. Guðmundur var þjónn Guðs og virkt skáld í meira en hálföld eða frá 1615 til 1668. Það rann mikið vatn – og blóð – til sjávar í Evrópu á þeim tíma en færð eru rök fyrir því að íslenskt samfélag hafi orðið fyrir stærra höggi á áratugunum eftir dauða Guðmundar. Hörmungarnar höfðu áhrif á bókmenntaþátttöku Íslendinga og ollu kynslóðarofi. Ekkert barnabarn Guðmundar gerðist arftaki hans sem prestur og skáld. Umfjöllunin tekur mið af nýjum rannsóknum í bókmenntum, sagnfræði og handritafræði en jafnframt er hugað að áhrifum eldri rannsókna á viðhorf nýrra rannsækenda og aðgang okkar að verkum úr og um samtíma skáldsins. Þetta eru forsendur hinnar víðtæku athugunar sem gerð er á skáldinu Guðmundi Erlendssyni, bókmenntaumhverfi hans og nærsamfélagi í 4. kaflanum og varðveislu og dreifingu handrita í 5. kaflanum.

Guðmundur var sonur séra Erlends Guðmundssonar prests í Felli í Sléttuhlíð (d. 1641) og Margrétar Skúladóttur (um 1563–1638). Hann var einn átta systkina en aðeins fjögur þeirra lifðu til fullorðinsára: Guðmundur, Þóra (d. fyrir 1636), Helga (d. eftir 1638) og Skúli (d. 1627). Guðmundur og Skúli lærðu báðir til prests á Hólum í Hjaltadal en Skúli drukknaði í Grafará við Hofsós skömmu eftir að hafa vígst til aðstoðarprestis í Felli hjá föður sínum.

Á námsárum Guðmundar á 2. áratug 17. aldar kynntist hann Guðbrandi Þorlákssyni Hólabiskupi (um 1542–1627) sem og fóstursyni og eftirmanni Guðbrands, Þorláki Skúlasyni (1597–1656), sem var samnemandi Guðmundar við skólann. Sem skáld varð Guðmundur skjólstæðingur biskupsfjölskyldunnar og hélt tryggð við hana til æviloka. Á sama máta hélt hann tryggð við viðhorf Guðbrands gagnvart hlutverki bundins máls í að rækta trúarlæsi almúgans. Guðmundur útskrifaðist um 1614 og mun hafa verið í þjónustu Guðbrands fyrst um sinn en fékk síðan djáknastöðu hjá Páli syni Guðbrands (1573–1621) sem var sýslumaður og klausturhaldari á Þingeyrum. Um 1617 eignaðist Guðmundur barn með ógiftri konu og mun barnið hafa heitið Bjarni (d. eftir 1649). Um svipað leyti varð Guðmundur uppvís að því að vera í tygjum við enn aðra konu en hann hlaut ekki sérstaka refsingu fyrir þetta enda varð barneign ekki af. Um málið hefur varðveist bréf frá Guðbrandi til Páls, dagsett 13. desember 1617.

Elstu varðveittu verk Guðmundar eru sálmur og hugvekjukorn sem hann mun hafa ort árið 1615, þá farsjúkur af bólusótt á Hafsstöðum á Skagaströnd. Annar sálmur eftir Guðmund birtist í sálmabókinni 1619 sem Guðbrandur gaf út. Guðmundur þjónaði eitt ár í Bólstaðarhlíðarsókn og annað ár í Viðvík. Árið 1619 fékk hann Möðruvallaklaustur í Hörgárdal. Þar bjuggu voldug hjón, Ólafur Jónsson klausturhaldari (d. 1621) og Þórunn Benediktsdóttir (d. 1628). Guðmundur naut hylli þeirra sem skáld og orti hann ýmis tækifæriskvæði til fjölskyldunnar, m.a. hamingjuósk til Valgerðar Halldórsdóttur (1619–1702), nýfædds barnabarns Ólafs og Þórunnar. Við andlát Þórunnar smíðaði Guðmundur minningartöflu sem hefur varðveist í Þjóðminjasafninu. Hann bjó til svipaða minningartöflu í minningu Margrétar móður sinnar sem var í Fellskirkju en mun vera glötuð.



Guðmundur giftist árið 1620. Kona hans var Guðrún Gunnarsdóttir (1590–8. febrúar 1668) en Jón bróðir hennar (c. 1595–1670) giftist Helgu systur Guðmundar um sama leyti. Þau voru börn Gunnars Ormssonar og Ingibjargar Ólafsdóttur í Tungu í Fljótum. Jón var prestur eins og Guðmundur og mun hafa verið skólabróðir Guðmundar á Hólum. Í lifanda lífi bregður Guðrúnu örsjaldan fyrir í kvæðum Guðmundar en hann orti að líkindum a.m.k. eitt kvæði til hennar árið 1663 og harmljóð eftir hana árið 1668 sem er jafnframt síðasta verk Guðmundar sem vitað er um. Þótt upphafning hinnar látnu tilheyrir ákveðinni bókmenntahefð eru hér færð rök fyrir því að Guðrún hafi ekki síður verið mikilvæg í sínu nærsamfélagi en eiginmaður hennar. Varðveisla tveggja erfiljóða, auk harmkvæðisins, eru til vitnis um að hún hafi verið mikils metin af sínum samtíðarmönnum og -konum.

Árið 1621 fékk Guðmundur veitingu fyrir Glæsibæ í Kræklingahlíð og þjónaði þar í tíu ár. Í Glæsibæ fæddust þeim hjónum fjórir synir og þrjár dætur en Jón, yngsti sonurinn, var fæddur í Grímsey. Nafni hans, elsti sonur hjónanna (1620–1649), fæddist ekki löngu eftir komuna til Glæsibæjar en var hætt kominn sem ungabarn eftir að veikjast af óþekktri sótt. Guðmundur orti bænarsálm árið 1621 sem lýsir djúpri væntumþykju og örvæntingu um heilsu barnsins. Barnadauði var mikill á 17. öld og þótt Jón eldri hafi náð aftur heilsu misstu Guðrún og Guðmundur kornunga dóttur, Þóru, á Glæsibæjarárum sínum. Erfiljóð Jóns Guðmundssonar yngri eftir Guðrúnu ber vott um að dóttirin hafi aldrei gleymst og að himneskur endurfundur við barnið hafi verið tilhlökkunarefni fyrir foreldrana. Auk Þóru, Jóns eldra og Jóns yngra hétu systkinin Hallur, Skúli og Margrét en óvíst er um nöfn hinna barnanna tveggja sem lifðu þó foreldra sína.

Árið 1631 lenti Guðmundur í alvarlegum „ölyrðum“ við skáldið og fræðimanninn séra Magnús Ólafsson í Laufási (um 1573–1636) og Benedikt son Magnúsar. Sáttargjörð milli þeirra fór fram á Akureyri að biskupnum viðstöddum. Missti Guðmundur Glæsibæ og var hann sendur til Grímseyjar í hálfgerða útleð í kjölfarið þar sem hann bjó við þröng kjör til ársins 1634 þegar hann fékk stöðu föður síns sem sóknarpresturinn í Sléttuhlíð. Hann tók þó út refsingu sína með þolinmæði og virðist hafa lagast vel að nýjum aðstæðum.

Grímseyjarár Guðmundar voru frjótt tímabil fyrir hann sem skáld og hann orti bæði rímur og kvæði sem eru til vitnis um hvernig eyjan kom honum fyrir sjónir. Lífshættir Grímseyinga voru bersýnilega framandi fyrir prestinn en lýsingar Guðmundar á náttúru og samfélagi eyjunnar sýna að skáldagáfan fékk að njóta sín þar. Það var á þessum árum þegar Guðmundur orti eitt vinsælasta og áhrifamesta kvæði sitt, „Almáttugur Guð himna hæða“ (Grímseyjarvísur), sem fjallar um sjóhrakningu tíu manna áhafnar. Þetta virðist vera elsta frásagnarkvæðið á íslensku sem lýsir reynslu venjulegra Íslendinga af þeim hættum sem steðjuðu að öllum þeim sem fóru á sjó. Kvæðið dreifðist víða í handritum en varð einnig að innblæstri fyrir aðrar svipaðar frásagnir í bundnu máli, m.a. Kolbeinseyjarvísur séra Jóns Einarssonar (1665).

Í lýsingunni á sögulegum hrakningum Grímseyinga er líklegt að Guðmundur hafi verið undir áhrifum frá erlendum hörmungakvæðum. Sjálfur þýddi og frumorti Guðmundur allnokkur kvæði sem segja frá nýliðnum atburðum á Íslandi og víðar í Evrópu og vara gjarnan við því að heimsendir sé í nánd. Uppsprettu þeirra er ekki endilega að finna í straumum hábókmennta eða í háskólum heldur í hrakspám leikmanna og viðvörnum minna menntaðra presta innan klerkastéttarinnar sem ómuðu víða á götum hins lúterska heims á 17. öld.

Í slíkum verkum er sóst eftir því að framkalla iðrun áheyrenda á aðeins annan hátt en íhugunarrit eða lærdómskver. Þar er varað sterklega við hræðilegum afleiðingum óhlýðni við Guð sem birtist gjarnan í

sálmakveðskap þess tíma sem refsandi faðir sem lætur hrísið dynja á óþekku börnunum sínum. Í þessu rétttrúnaðarumhverfi gætu einstaklingar innan samfélagsins stefnt öllum heiminum í háska með því að vekja reiði Guðs. Í verkefni samfélagslegrar iðrunar mátti enginn vera útundan og því þurfti kveðskapur að taka tillit til allra í samfélaginu en ekki einblína of mikið á áheyrn lærðra manna. Í mörgum verkum eftir lærðra klerka 17. aldar birtist almúginn fyrst og fremst sem skotmark háðs og spotts en ekki viðfangsefni upphefðar.

Þótt benda megi á önnur kvæði eftir Guðmund sem sýna ófegri mynd af lægra settum í samfélaginu er augljóst að hann lagði mesta rækt við að skrifa upp kvæði og sálma eftir sig sem teljast vera uppbyggilegur kveðskapur. Einfaldleiki í trúarrækt og lífverni birtast sem dyggð og í lýsingum Guðmundar af Grímsey birtist eyjan sem fyrirmyndarsamfélag á hjara veraldar.

Eftir að Guðmundur sneri aftur til Fells var hann á heimavelli og virðist hafa notið sín vel í samfélaginu. Heimildir um sóknarbörn Guðmundar eru brotakenndar en með því að tína saman allar glefsurnar má ráða í að í Sléttuhlíð hafi verið sterkur læsisklasi sem tvístraðist þó að mörgu leyti í harðindaárunum undir lok 17. aldar og í stórubólunni árið 1707. Þannig var Sléttuhlíð frjór jarðvegur fyrir handritamenningu á dögum Guðmundar Erlendssonar og skrifarakunnáttu var miðlað áfram til nýrra kynslóða sem fengu tækifæri til að ná góðri færni í skrift og ekki bókalestri eingöngu.

Þótt ekki sé hægt að skilgreina Guðmund Erlendsson sem eiginlegan húmanista er hann undir sterkum áhrifum frá lærdómsmönnum sem leituðu til fortíðarinnar í von um endurnýjun eða endurreisn í trúarþekkingu og -iðkun. Í leit að hreinni og upprunalegri trú ráfar Guðmundur um víðan völl í mannkynssögu og ljóst er að hann aðhyllist lauslegri stefnu sem mætti kalla alþýðuhúmanisma. Áheyrendur sem Guðmundur ávarpar eru oft börn og ungmenni og hann færir þeim þýðingar eða aðlaganir á efni á borð við heilráð barnagafræðings, ævintýri um skólastráka og dæmisögur Esóps (sem var jafnframt kennsluefni í latínuskólum Íslands á þeim tíma).

Áberandi er í verkum Guðmundar að hann leitar ekki að viðfangsefnum í íslenskum fornþekkingum en hann sýnir ekki heldur andúð í garð Freyju eða Freys. Hann er mun uppteknari af pápisma sem ljóst er að hann skynjar sem verulega samfélagsógn. Eitt meistaraverk Guðmundar er Einvaldsóður sem er aðlögun á mun lengra kvæði um aldir og endalok heimsins eftir skoska hirðskáldið David Lyndsay (um 1490–um 1555). Í meðförum Guðmundar eru aldir heimsins taldar í 307 erindum undir fornryðislagi þar sem gerðir og misgerðir einvaldsstjóra fornalda eru tíundaðar. Ólíkt Lyndsay einblínir Guðmundur í Einvaldsóði nánast eingöngu á veraldlega leiðtoga heimsins fyrir fæðingu Krists en síðasti bálkurinn er afhjúpun á píramídasvindli páfans. Vart er hægt að hugsa sér öruggara skotmark fyrir íslenskt skáld á 17. öld en páfann í Róm og vekur það áleitnar spurningar um afstöðu Guðmundar til valds í eigin samtíð og samfélagslegt frelsi skáldsins til að tjá sig.

Árið 1663 gerðist sá skelfilegi atburður að ógift vinnukona í Felli myrta nýfætt barn sitt og skildi það eftir í fjósi á bænum þar sem ónefndur heimilismaður fann það skömmu síðar. Henni var drekkt það sumar í samræmi við þágildandi lög. Samanburður við önnur dulsmál sýnir að þetta var að mörgu leyti ódæmigerð harmsaga allra í málinu þar sem konan var ekki allslaus eða af bláfátækri fjölskyldu heldur náskyld sýslumanninum sem átti að staðfesta dóminn yfir ungri frænku sinni. Konan gekkst við morðinu og biðlaði ekki til Alþingis um náð. Vel er hugsanlegt að skömm og hræðsla við viðbrögð fjölskyldu hennar væru sterkari öfl en jafnvel óttinn við dauðarefsingu. Ungir karlmenn sem gátu börn við ógiftar konur af lægri stéttum hafi oft verið meðhöndluð af vægð og skilningi yfirvalda á þörfum karlkynsins til að „grípa til stelpu“ (til að nota orðalag Guðbrands Þorlákssonar). Sé dæmi

vinnukonunnar Ólafar Magnúsdóttur (d. 1663) skoðað með hliðsjón af reynslu Ragnheiðar Brynjólfsdóttur (1641–1664) má sjá að öðru máli gegndi um einhleypar konur sem eignuðust börn með ógiftum mönnum fyrir neðan virðingarstig fjölskyldunnar. Þeirra beið fátt annað en heift, niðurlæging og útskúfun.

Í kjölfar harmleiksins á Felli og annars nýlegs atviks í Fljótum þar sem faðir barði son sinn til dauða fyrir matarhnúpl orti Guðmundur kvæði í anda Lilju. Kvæðið heitir Vökuvarpa eða Vökubók og í textanum kemur skýrt í ljós að þessir atburðir eru kveikjan að kvæðinu sem fer þó um víðan völl. Guðmundur rýfur ekki þögnina um barnsmorðin til þess að afhjúpa synd og skömm Ólafar í anda aftökuballaða heldur hvetur hann áheyrendur sínar til að horfa í eigin barm. Trú hans á að hann lifi á „gulllegri öld“ er enn óbilandi á síðustu æviárum skáldsins. Illska óheftrar mannsnáttúru er staðreynd í kvæðum Guðmundar en hann dregur aldrei í efa getu einstaklings til að menntast í sönnum orðum Guðs og yfirstíga gjána milli hnattar og himingeims.

Jón eldri lærði til prests á Hólum en drukknaði nývígður í Eyjafjarðará árið 1649. Dauði hans var gífurlegt áfall fyrir alla fjölskylduna og Guðmundur og Guðrún syrgðu hann til æviloka. Ekki er þó vitað til þess að Guðmundur hafi ort hefðbundið harmljóð í minningu Jóns. Harmurinn birtist þess í staðinn í formi rímna um Elía spámann (1651). Guðmundur var afkastamikið rímnaskáld og sótti viðfangsefnið oftast í Gamla testamentið. Rímurnar um Elía spámann sýna þó hvernig Guðmundur notaði rímnaformið til sjálfstjáníngar enda var sorg skáldsins svo djúpstæð að hann átti erfitt að eigin sögn með að rjúfa þögnina. Í stað þess að yrkja beint um sonarmissinn tjáir Guðmundur sig í gegnum form sem leyfir skáldinu að skipta milli þess að fjalla um eigið hugarástand og frásögnina um Elía.

Yngsta barn Guðrúnar og Guðmundar sem hét einnig Jón (1631–1702) var ungur maður þegar elsti bróðir hans dó og svo virðist vera að Jón yngri hafi reynt að ganga foreldrum sínum í stað Jóns eldra. Ekki er ljóst hvort Jón hafi þegar byrjað nám sitt á Hólum áður en hann missti bróður sinn eða hvort hann hafi þegar verið nemandi við skólann á þeim tíma. Hann varð aðstoðarprestur Guðmundar eftir útskriftina og hélt því embætti í fjöldamörg ár eða alls til ársins 1668 þegar Guðrún lést og Jón varð prestur í Felli. Jón yngri var ekki aðeins skáld heldur einnig listamaður en hann og kona hans Guðrún Þórðardóttir voru barnlaus og handrit Jóns virðast ekki vera vel varðveitt.

Ein dóttir Guðmundar og Guðrúnar hét Margrét (1625–eftir 1703). Margrét giftist valdsmanni á Norðurlandi, Jóni Illugasyni (c. 1620–1685/1686). Í ritgerðinni eru færð rök fyrir því að gifting þeirra um 1654 hafi verið tilefni þess að Guðmundur setti fyrst saman kvæðabók. Guðmundur skýrði kvæðabókina Gígju og mun brot úr einu Gígjuhandriti Guðmundar hafa varðveist í eiginhandarriti í Lbs 1529 4to. Þetta er ekki sama handritið og Margrét og Jón eignuðust en mun að líkindum hafa verið skrifað fyrir andlát Þorláks biskups Skúlasonar árið 1656. Þorlákur var náfrændi Jóns Illugasonar og í öðrum varðveittum eintökum af Gígju er erfiljóð Guðmundar eftir biskupinn sett aftan við erfiljóð Guðbrands Þorlákssonar, afa og fyrirrennara Þorláks á Hólum.

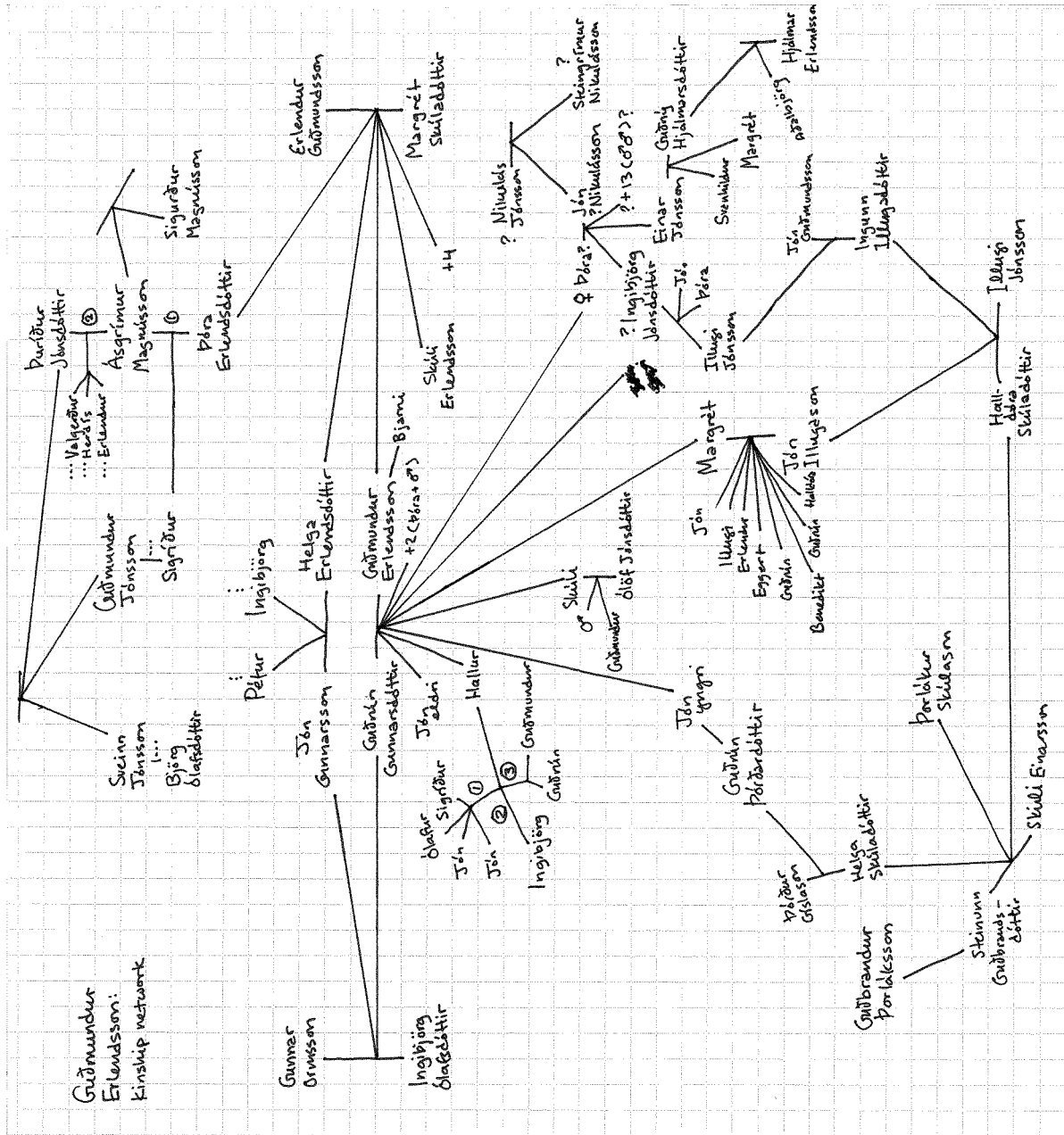
Gígjuhandrit Jóns og Margrétar var ennþá til undir lok 17. aldar og hefur afrit af afriti af þessu handriti varðveist í Lbs 1055 4to. Þótt handritið sé bersýnilega ekki nákvæmleg eftirrit af Gígju eins og Guðmundur skildi við hana má sjá að það inniheldur tækifæriskveðskap tengdan fjölskyldu Margrétar og voldugum ættingjum Jóns en einnig verk sem nýtast menningarheimili á borð við bú Margrétar og Jóns. Í Gígju eru m.a. tvö verk þar sem skáldið felur nafn Margrétar í textanum og handritið hefur greinlega verið vandlega sérsniðið að brúðhjónunum og andlegum og samfélagslegum þörfum þeirra.

Minna er vitað um aðra dóttur Guðrúnar og Guðmundar. Hún birtist í ýmsum kvæðum en þar sem kvæðin eru persónuleg er hennar aldrei getið í þeim. Hún var þó gift kona árið 1668. Í ritgerðinni eru færð rök fyrir að hún hafi verið Þóra, kona Jóns Nikulássonar (d. 1688), en þó að það sé ekki vitað með vissu er fullljóst að hún átti son að nafni Einar (Jónsson) sem leitaðist við að fá eintak af Gígju sem hann gaf síðan konunni sinni Guðnýju Hjálmarsdóttur.

Skrifarinn sem Einar leitaði til var næstýngsti sonur Guðmundar, Skúli (um 1630/1631–eftir 1703). Skúli leitaði liðsinnis hjá Halli bróður sínum (d. eftir 1689) sem bjó enn í Sléttuhlið. Afraksturinn var handritið JS 232 4to. Skúli var nánast örugglega eigandi Lbs 1529 4to á þeim tíma og vel er hugsanlegt að sú útgáfa kvæðabókarinnar hafi orðið að grundvelli uppskriftarinnar í JS 232 4to. Athygli vekur þó að ekkert þeirra kvæða sem er að finna í eiginhandarriti í Lbs 1529 4to hafa verið gefin út. Nauðsynlegt skref í rannsóknum á kveðskap og handritum Guðmundar Erlendssonar er útgáfa á kvæðunum í Lbs 1529 4to. Aðeins þá verður hægt að fullyrða með vissu um sambandið milli Gígjuhandritanna.







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