H. Damico

THE VOYAGE TO BYZANTIUM: THE EVIDENCE OF THE SAGAS

I

In Chapter Two of Haraldar saga Sigurðarsonar, *Bǫlverkr Arnórsson*, is moved by the sight spread out before him as he and King Haraldr's men sail through the mist and rain toward Constantinople. He chants praise for the city that was to render them gold and glory:[1]

Hart kníði svǫl svartanǫ	Cool showers strike against the black prow
snekkju brand fyr landi	of the swift sailing ship.
skúr, en skrautla bǫru	They pressed forward, hard along the coast,
skeiðr brynjaðar reiði.	The magnificently rigged war-ship
Mætr hilmir sá malma	Covered with coats of mail.
Miklagarðs fyr barði.	The worthy prince saw before him
Mǫrg skriðu beit at borgar	The metal of Byzantium:
barmfǫgr hǫ́um armi.	His fair-brimmed ships glided
	Towards the high tower of the stronghold.

Malma Miklagarðs literally means "the metal of the great stronghold", and it is an apt phrase for Constantinople, with its great towering walls and the golden chain that protected its harbor[2]. The metal that *Bǫlverk'r* refers to in this strophe has a layered meaning. The primary referent, of course, is the copper roofs of the city's houses and the gilded onion towers of its edifices[3]. But the term has a subtextual referent as well. It suggests the

[1] Quotations from and references to *Haraldar saga Sigurðarsonar* rely on the text which appears in: Heimskringla / Ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk Fornrit. Reykjavík, 1941—1951). III. P. 26—28, quotation from p. 71 (hereafter cited as: Hkr). Spellings of personal and place names have been modernized in the text, but retain their original form in quotations. The translations from the Old Icelandic are mine. For a translation of the entire saga, the reader may consult the Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson transl.: King Harald's Saga. Harmondsworth, 1966. For a complete translation of *Heimskringla*, see: *Hollander L.M.* Heimskringla, by Snorri Sturluson. Austin, 1964 (the latest of several renderings). The poetry of *HSS* (on which Snorri Sturluson largely based his narrative) may be found in *Jónsson Finnur.* Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning. Copenhagen, 1967—1973. 4 Vols. (hereafter cited as: Skjaldedigtning).

[2] Most translators render Miklagardr as Constantinople or Byzantium. I follow this accepted practice and use the terms synonymously. For a description and map of Constantinople, see: *Blöndal Sigfús.* The Varangians of Byzantium / Trans. from Væringjasaga Benedikt S. Benedikz. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978. 98 and 178 resp. See also: Hkr III: 85. The *Blöndal-Benedikz* text is the most complete examination in English of the Northmen in Byzantium.

[3] This is Frank's reading; see: *Frank R.* Old Norse Court Poetry: The Dróttkvætt Stanza // Islandica. Ithaca, 42. 1978. S. 155.

eagerness with which King Harald'r and his men anticipate the immense amount of treasure and gold — the metal — that they expect to carry away with them from the city of the gods.

Haraldr's expectation to acquire a fortune (apparently so that he may possess the Kievan princess Ellisif) was fulfilled. The saga relates that, in addition to the booty he gained from his campaigns in Sicily and elsewhere in the Mediterranean, he (and the Varangians he commanded[4]) participated in three palace-plunders as was the custom after the death of Byzantine emperors[5]. Thus, after his years of service with the Emperors, Haraldr escaped from Constantinople with *svá mikit fé, at engi maðr norðr í lǫnd hafði sét slíkt í eins manns eigu* — 'so much wealth that no one in the northern lands had seen the like of it in one man's possession' (Hkr III: 89; chap. 16).

Haraldr's journey to Byzantium is typical of other voyages to the East that appear in the family and kings' sagas. There are so many similarities in the voyages, that the narrative sequence itself becomes formulaic. For the major characters, the motivation for the journey is either to attain fame or to seek sanctuary. The journey itself is marked by either a narrative movement in two parts or a prolonged elaborate scene, subdivided into smaller units that cumulatively are meant to intensify the anticipation of the journey's end and to elevate the status of the hero (as, for example, in the *Sigurðar Saga Jórsalafara and Orkneyinga Saga* passages discussed below)[6]. While in the East, the hero gains renown, i. e., the recognition and respect of the Emperor, and fortune, i. e., silk and gold, and returns from the East to the North with the aura of a personality that has been touched by the sublime.

Such is the case with Haraldr. The Prince's journey is accomplished in two stages, each with its own motivation. The first stage of the journey brings the Norwegian fugitive to Yaroslav's court (1031—1034). After the defeat and slaughter of St. Óláfr at Stiklarstaðir, Harald'r, wounded and destitute, escapes from the battlefield where his brother lies dead. He chants as he seeks a route that would lead him to safety, far from those who have slain the king (Hkr III: 69; chap. 1):

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[4] The term *væringjar* 'varangians' commonly refers to Northmen—Swedes, Norwegians, Icelanders, and Englishmen—who made up a select unit of the Byzantine army during the tenth to twelfth centuries. But this is the narrowest of its meanings since the term was used by Greeks and Russians (as well as by Northerners) in other contexts. For a discussion of the term's etymology and meanings (one of which is 'men who plight each other troth, who enter a fellowship'), see: *Blöndal-Benedikz.* P. 1—14, transl. from p. 4. The *væringjar* were in no sense *vikingar* 'Vikings', a term that in its most general meaning refers to the plunderers and warriors that ransacked the Anglo-Saxon, Irish, and Frankish lands between the late eighth and eleventh centuries. The term "Vikings" as used in the title of this essay might be interpreted more precisely as "Northerners".

[5] For a discussion on Haraldr's pillagings of the palace and his possible misappropriation of funds, see: *Blöndal-Benedikz.* P. 80—86; for a discussion of the Byzantine aversion to promoting foreigners to the top ranks, see: *Dawkins R.M.* Greeks and Northmen // Custom Is King: Essays Presented to R. R. Marett / Ed. L.H. Dudley Buxton, 1936. P. 35—47.

[6] The story of Sigurdr's jorney to Byzantium appears in: *Sigurdar saga Jórsalafara (Morkinskinna)*; and in: *Magnússona saga* (Hkr III: 238—77). Quotations from and references to Sigurdr's journey are to: Morkinskinna / Ed. Finnur Jónsson // SUGNL. Copenhagen, 1928—1932. 53. The source of the Sigurd'r story appears in: *Theodoricus.* Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium [a work dating from around 1180] // Monumenta Historica Norvegiae. Latinske Kildeskrifter til Norges historie i middelalderen / Ed. G. Storm. Oslo, 1880; *Ágrip af Nóregs.* Konunga Sǫgum [dating round 1190] / Ed. Finnur Jónsson // Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek. Halle, 1929. 18. *Finnbogi Guðmundsson.* The text for Orkneyinga Saga is that edited by: Íslenzk Fornrit. Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1965. 34 (hereafter cited as: *Orkney*). For a complete translation of Sigurdr's story, the reader may consult Hollander's rendering of *Magnússona Saga* in Heimskringla (see above not. 1), although the Heimskringla version is plainer and condensed.

For a study of *Sigurðar saga* as an aesthetically constructed work, see: *Kalinke M.E.* Sigurðar saga Jórsalafara: The Fictionalization of Facts in Morkinskinna / Scandinavian Studies. 1984. 56, 2. P. 152—167. Of the four complete translations of Orkney, the reader may care to consult the H. Pálsson and P. Edwards rendering: Orkneyinga Saga. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978; or: Taylor A.B. The Orkneyinga Saga. Edinburg, 1938 which contains notes and background material.

Nú lætk skóg af skógi	I steal from wood to wood now,
skreiðask lítils heiðar.	I crawl with little honor;
Hverr veit, nema ek verða	Except— who knows— later
víða frægr of síðir?	I may become famous in many lands.

After four-years of service with Yaroslav, during which time the fugitive prince makes his mark as a man of determination and acumen, he sets out on the second stage of the journey to Byzantium; and, although the saga does not explicitly describe Haraldr's motivation, the implication is that the prince sought gold and fame in order to win Ellisif. In some of the verses that he composed after his campaign in Sicily, for example, there is a bitter refrain about the aloofness of "the ringed-goddess in Garðar" who will not be impressed by his deeds: *þó lætr Gerðr i Gǫrðum / gollhrings við mér skolla* 'nevertheless, the goddess of golden rings in Garðar keeps herself aloof from me' (Hkr III: 89; chap. 15).

Haraldr's exploits in Constantinople and throughout the Byzantine empire serve as a blueprint for other Northern adventurers, as will be evident from the discussion below. But the prince's fates of valor were not limited to making secure the reign of Emperor Michael IV from enemy attack; he won glory in defense of the heavenly king as well, by purging the road to Jerusalem of bandits. He secured the passageway to the Jordan for himself and his men, swam the width of the holy stream, and returned triumphant first to Byzantium and then to his native land (Hkr III: 83—4; chap. 12). This will be activity repeated by Sigurðr and Rǫgnvaldr. Six poets, in addition to Haraldr himself, composed panegyrics on the King's eastern campaigns. Snorri describes the King at the close of the saga:

Haraldr konungr var fríðr maðr ok tíguligr, bleikhárr ok bleikt skegg ok langa kanpa, nǫkkuru brúnin ǫnnur ofar en ǫnnur, miklar hendr ok foetr ok vel vaxit hvárt tveggia. Fimm alna er hátt mál hans. Hann var grimmr óvinum ok refsingasamr um allar mótgørðir... Haraldr konungr var inn ágjarnasti til ríkis ok til allra farsælligra eigna. Hann var stórgjǫfull við vini sina, þá er honum líkaði vel við ... Haraldr konungr flýði aldrigi ór orrostu .... Allir menn sǫgðu þat, þeir er honum fylgðu forrostu ok hernaði, at þá er hann varð staddr fmiklum háska ok bar skjótt at hǫndum, at þat ráð mundi hann upp taka, sem allir sá eptir, at vænst hafði íverit, at hlýða myndi (Hkr III: 198—200; chap. 99).	Haraldr the king was a handsome man, quite grand, fair haired, with a full fair beard and long mustache, and one eyebrow somewhat higher than the other. His hands and feet were large, and both well-shaped. He was five elles in height. He was severe to his foes and punished all offenses harshly... King Haraldr was most ambitious for power and for all prosperous possessions. He was munificent to his friends, those who pleased him.... King Haraldr never fled from battle ...All the men said, those who followed him in battle or on a raid, that when he was in great peril and suddenly overcome, he would decide on a plan of action which later everyone realized had been most promising, and would succeed.

Clever, disciplined, relentless in winning plunder for himself and his men, and ever ready to display his superiority as a Northern prince over the easterners, Haraldr remains the prototype Varangian in saga literature[7].

The Icelandic saga corpus is divided into three or — depending on one's taxoconomical bent — four types[8]. The kings' sagas, the group to which *Haraldr Saga Sigurðarsonar*

[7] King Haraldr's exploits are treated in other medieval Icelandic texts (in: *Morkinskinna, Fagrskinna,* and in *Flateyjarbók*). The King is mentioned in: *Theodoricus.* Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium; *Adam of Bremen.* Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesia Pontificum (ca. 1072). Written evidence on Haraldr's Byzantine enterprises may be found in Danish, Norwegian, Old and Middle English, and Medieval Greek sources. See, the Blöndal-Benedikz discussion on Haraldr's campaigns and on the evidence of the sources (chap. 4, 54—102).

[8] A usefull and, indeed, the only comprehensive critical discussion and guide to the saga corpus in English is found in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide / Ed. C.J. Clover and J. Lindow // Islandica. Cornell, 1985. XLV. See, in particular, the chapters by *Andersson T.M.* Kings' Sagas (Konungasögur). P. 197—238;

belongs, have been arranged by Theodore Andersson into four historical periods: "the earliest lost kings' lives by Sæmundr and Ari from the early twelfth century, the so-called Norwegian synoptics (ca. 1175—1190?), the formative period of the Icelandic kings' saga proper (1150—1200) [*Orkneyinga Saga* (1189) belongs to this group], and the major compendia (*Morkinskinna, Fagrskinna, Heimskringla*) from 1200—1230[9]. The sagas from the two latter periods — that is, from the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries — contain material on Byzantium.

The kings' sagas are works with heroes who are pan-Scandinavian—Norwegian, Orkneyan, Faroese, Swedish. On occasion, an Icelander creeps into the plot, but only as a subordinate, usually a minor, character. The *Íslendingasögur* 'the sagas of the Icelanders', on the other hand, deal exclusively with matters Icelandic, and, although they are compositions of the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, they treat events that too place between the ninth and twelfth. Both the kings' sagas and the family sagas (as the *Íslendingasögur* sometimes are called) have a historical foundation for their plots. In contrast, the *riddarasögur* 'the sagas of knights and courtly matters', sometimes called *lygisögur* 'lying sagas', are fictional works. Composed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, they are somewhat fondly or — depending on one's point of view — pejoratively known, in Frederic Amory's words, as "the escape literature of the Icelandic middle ages"[10]. The *riddarasögur* are derivative works: they are either thirteenth-century Norwegian translations of Old French (and some Latin) romances or fourteenth-century indigenous Icelandic imitations of these translations[11]. An interest in Byzantium is found in all three saga-groups.

The *riddarasögur,* in addition, contain some narrative details that resemble motifs in medieval Greek romances, although Amory cautions against attributing direct influence[12]. In Amory's view, these motifs were introduced into the *riddarasögur* through French romance. After the fourth crusade, France became the literary "clearing house" for "romantic and exotic stuff" in Byzantine, Norwegian, and Icelandic romance[13].

The concerns of this paper are not taxonomical — should the *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* be one classification or two, for example — nor do they pertain to source

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Clover C.J. Icelandic Family Sagas (Íslendingasögur). P. 239—315; *Kalinke M.* Norse Romance (Riddarasögur). P. 316—63. On the generic issues concerning the subdivision of the Romances into *Riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur,* see *Kalinke M.* Norse Romance. esp. P. 320—328. My short survey of saga literature in the text is largely based on these chapters.

[9] *Andersson Th.M.* Op. cit. // Old Norse-Icelandic Literature. P. 198.

[10] Although other scholars have made use of this descriptive term, the phrase comes from: *Amory F.* Things Greek and the Riddarasögur // Speculum.1984. 59. P. 509—523, quotation from 509.

[11] *Amory Fr.* Op. cit. P. 509; Kalinke in: Old Norse-Icelandic Literature. P. 317. Kalinke tallies about 50 extant bona-fide medieval *riddarasögur,* excluding the *strengleikar* 'the lays', *Karlamagnús Saga,* and later *þættir* (316—317, 316, nr. 3).

[12] *Amory Fr.* (509, 514—516) categorizes the common Byzantine features in the medieval Greek and Icelandic romances, some of which are: physical settings in Byzantium; elaborate descriptions of the city, of its edifices and statuary; weddings and musical extravaganzas; the maiden-king character (exemplified by Marmoria, the Byzantine princess of *Partalopa Saga*); and authorial intrusion as a means of authenticating the narrative, as, for example, in the closure of *Konráds saga Keisarsonar* where the author confides in the reader that the saga reached him via the good graces of a clerk who stumbled onto it in Constantinople (see transl. *Zitzelsberger O.* // Seminar for Germanic Philology: Yearbook [1980]. S. 38—67).

The standard critical works on the romances in English are: *Leach H. Goddard.* Angevin Britain and Scandinavia // Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921. 6) (where the relationships between Byzantine and Icelandic romance were first note); *Schlauch M.* Romance in Iceland. Princeton: Princeton University Press; N. Y.: American Scandinavian Foundation, 1934 (which elaborates on Leach's observations and suggests Byzantine sources for the *riddarasögur*). Schlauch's thesis, now over fifty-years' old, is rigorously refuted by Fr. Amory in his 1984 Speculum article.

[13] *Amory Fr.* Op. cit. P. 514.

study. The objective is of a plainer sort: to examine why the Northerners of the sagas made the voyage to Byzantium. In its widest scope, this is not a new question, as a perusal of the bibliographies dealing with the subject quickly reveal. Blöndal and Ellis Davidson, for example, touch upon the topic in their comprehensive surveys of the Northmen's expansion into Russia and the East[14], as have literary scholars — Leach, Schlauch, and Amory, for instance — in their inquiries into the correspondences between Byzantine and Old Icelandic romances[15]. That interest in the question — of why the Northerners expanded to the East — has not waned, but is on the increase is substantiated by O. Pritsak's 1981 edition of all Nordic and Anglo-Saxon literary works (excluding the sagas) that deal with the Nordic movement to Russia and the East[16]. One of Pritsak's purposes in collecting and analyzing the excerpted skaldic poetry, runic inscriptions, and travelogues — to give but a sampling of the different genres the edition contains — is to promote the thesis that Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon literature is adequate source material for historical study.

This paper cautions against taking such a stance. There is potential danger of using saga literature as hard evidence to prove true a historical thesis, for the "evidence" of literature is of a different order from what brought forth by my colleagues in history, archaeology, and numismatics. The source for literary testimony is the human imagination as manifested in a type of literature that is characterized by a highly traditional, and singularly complex, formalized structure. There is not only a recurring plot from one saga to another — the macrostructure as it is called by Clover — but there is repetition in microstructures as well, as will be evident from discussion which follows[17]. Formalized structures occur both in the fictional works and in those sagas that are anchored in history, i. e., the family and kings' sagas. It is with this qualification in mind — that saga literature fondly elaborates upon and reshapes reality — that the "evidence" should be considered.

Instead of using the sagas as hard evidence to validate historical hypotheses, then, we might fare better to investigate the texts as a source for interpreting and understanding common cultural experience, in this instance the medieval Icelander's communal experience of migration[18]. To illustrate this point, I will examine a narrow literary topos in the saga which I call the voyage to Byzantium topos. There are about nineteen sagas that contain the matter of Byzantium. Although, I will be referring to most of these, I will be concentrating on only four sagas — *King Harald's Saga, Laxdoela Saga, Sigurdar saga Jórsalafara,* and *Orkneyinga Saga* — and the exodus portion of the Prose *Edda.* I am interested in discovering not only why the Northerners moved to the East, but what significant meaning the journey might have had in the cultural consciousness. The sagas reveal that the Northerners voyaged to the East for a variety of reasons: for the warrior, to gain fame and fortune; for the pilgrim, to attain salvation and a state of penitence; for the fugitive, to seek sanctuary. But in the construct of the journey to Byzantium topos, the East has symbolic meaning as well. The West represents the beginning and end of a hero's

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[14] For Blöndal, see not. 2 above; *Davidson H.R.E.* The Viking Road to Byzantium. L. 1976.

[15] For bibliogr. information, see notes 11 and 13.

[16] *Pritsak Omeljan.* The Origin of Rus', Old Scandinavian Sources Other Than the Sagas. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, for the Harvard Ukranian Institute Monograph Series, 1981. Vol. I.

[17] Clover (Old Norse-Icelandic Literature. P. 274, 275) uses these terms in her summary discussion of: *Andersson Th.M.* The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytical Reading. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967; which she rightly describes as the "first systematic piece of saga analysis in the formalist-traditionist mode" (p. 274). Clover discusses formalist and structuralist studies on the family sagas from the mid-1960's to the present (272—294). See also: *Clover C.J.* The Medieval Saga. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982); Eadem. Scene in Saga Composition // Arkiv för nordisk filologi 89 (1974). P. 57—83.

[18] For an examination of migration as a determinant of cultural identity in Anglo-Saxon England, see: *Howe N.* Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England. New Haven; L.: Yale University Press, 1989.

voyage. The journey East is for the hero a regressive movement — to the past, to that which was ancestral, to a lost paradise.

III

A major motivation which impelled the peripatetic Northerners to attempt the voyage to the East was that at journey's end they would be in Byzantium. "Whatever was rich and strange, whatever was fantastic, opulent and colorful, found a fitting home in the Byzantium of the Icelander's imagination"[19]. Schlauch's statement is an apt description of the hold the city had on the imagination of the Northerner struck with *wanderlust.* At the beginning of *Dámusta Saga,* a "bridalquest" romance and one of the riddarasögur whose setting is the East, there is an elaborate description of Constantinople which reflects the Icelander's perception of the city[20]. The emperor of this tale — whose plot contains a thwarted demonic lover, a repentant knight, and a princess resurrected from the dead — resides in a stronghold within which there is the great minster, called Aegisif, the Icelandic name for Hagia Sophia. The narrator describes city walls that rise to such heights that only birds might pass over them, and talks about the iron pillars that stand guard at the entrance to the sound. The imperial palace is august; and the narrow strait through which ships enter into the sound is spanned by iron chains that serve to make the city impregnable[21]. It is a landscape artist's paradise.

Descriptions of the imperial palace are no less impressive. Accounts of the Palace of Hugon at Constantinople frequently decorate the riddarasögur. In her 1932 Speculum article, and later in *Romance in Iceland,* Margaret Schlauch illustrated how the authors of the *riddarasögur* popularized and adapted the Hugon set-piece from the French chanson de geste, *the Pélerinage de Charlemagne,* where it first appeared[22]. In one form or another, the Hugon set-piece is found in the *Karlamagnús saga ok kappa hans,* in the *þáttr af Sögu Keisara Magnúsar Karls,* and in *Raudulfs þáttr* (in *Flateyjarbók*), where Charlemagne is replaced with St. Óláfr[23]. In the scenic description there was always a circular center hall with a vaulted roof, illuminated by a fiery luminous carbuncle suspended from the center of the roof, and adorned with images of two smiling youths, each holding an ivory horn, who apparently acted as weathervanes. There were representations of planets on the roof, and in the center of the hall was a luxurious bed, adorned with every imaginable precious gem[24]. Opulence, luxury, and the marvelous characterized Constantinople, whether the descriptions came from firsthand accounts of visitors, travel books, or French romances.

But it is not only the *riddarasögur* that present the East as the place from where all that is marvelous and luxurious derives. The kings' sagas, too, contain descriptions of architectural marvels that astound the visitor to Byzantium. In *Morkinskinna,* which

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[19] *Schlauch M.* Romance in Iceland. P. 67.

[20] The classification is Kalinke's (Op. cit. P. 329); but see also her discussion of more precise classifications for the *riddarasögur* (P. 326—332). þjalar Jóns Saga [and] Damústa Saga / Ed. L. F. Tan-Havarhorst. Haarlem, 1939, S. 48—108.

[21] EllisDavidson (Op. cit. P. 274—275) speculates that the source of such descriptions may be guide books for pilgrims to the holy city.

[22] *Schlauch M.* The Palace of Hugon of Constantinople // Speculum. 1932. 7; *Eadem.* Romance in Iceland. P. 157—161.

[23] *Schlauch M.* Romance in Iceland. P. 158—159. See also: Karlamagnús saga ok kappa hans / Ed. Bjarni Vilhjámsson. Reykjavík, 1950. (Íslendingasagnaútgafan, Haukadalsútgáfan, 1954). For a translation of *Karlamagnús Saga* see: Karlamagnús Saga: The Saga of Charlemagne and His Heroes. 3 Vols. / transl. C.B. Hieatt. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1975—1980.

[24] For a comparative examination of the Old Icelandic, Old French, and Medieval Greek versions, see: *Schlauch M.* Romance in Iceland. P. 160—164; *Eadem.* The Palace of Hugon. P. 500 et. passim.

contains an extended narrative on Sigurdr's voyage to Byzantium, the narrator describes the hippodrome that Sigurdr is to visit as a special guest of Alexius:

þat segia þeir menn er verit hafa i Miclagarþi. at paðreimr se þa leiþ gør. at vegr har er settr vm ein voll at iafna til viþs tvns cringlotz. oc gradvr vmhverfiz meþ steinvegnom. oc sitia menn þará. en leicr er avellinom. ero þar scrifot margsconar forn tiþindi. Esir oc Volsvngar. oc vi Givkvngar. gort af copar oc malmi. meþ sva miclom hagleic. at þat þiccir qvict vera... syniz sem menn riþi i lopti. oc viþ er oc scotelldr hafþr. oc svmt af fornescio. þar vi ero hofþ allzconar songføri. psalterium oc organ. horpor. gigior oc fiþlor. oc allz konar strengleicr (*Morkinskinna*. Chap. 47).

They say (those that have been to Miklagardr) that the hippodrome is made in this fashion: that a high wall is set around a plain, something like a circular wooden enclosure, and set about with a stone wall, on which men sit. The games are held in the plain. Sculpted on the wall are many kinds of events of ages past, about the Æsirs, the Volsungs, and the Gjukungs. Made of copper and other metal, these figures are so skillfully crafted that they seem to be alive... and they seem at times to be riding in the air... There is also shooting fire... all kinds of musical instruments, psalters and an organ, harps, fiddles and all kinds of stringed instruments[25].

The magnificence of the city reflected in its pageantry, its technological marvels, and its life-like, gilded statuary must have seemed to the Northerners like an earthly paradise.

The East is treated as a paradise by Snorri Sturluson. In the Prologue to the Prose *Edda,* Snorri identifies the East as the seat of the old gods, and it is paradisiacal[26]. Near the center of the earth is Troy, in which were built the *hús ok herbergi, er ágætast hefir verit* 'most excellent of edifices and lodgings' (PE. Chap. 1). He describes the city as one that *var miklu meiri görr en aðrir ok með meira hagleik... með kostnaði ok föngum, er þar váru til* 'was more gloriously constructed than any other, and fashioned with more skill of handicraft... both in entertainment and in expense, which was there much of' (PE. Chap. 3). Both the Prose *Edda* and the opening chapters of *Ynglingasaga,* the first saga of *Heimskringla,* identify the East as the home of Ódinn. It is from the East that Ódinn must go into forced exile. Snorri relates that Ódinn, along with his wife Frigga began

ferð sina af Tyrklandi ok hafði með sér mikinn fjölða liðs, unga menn ok gamla, karla ok konur, ok höfðu með sér marga gersemliga hluti. En hvar sem þeir föru yfir lönd, þá var ágæti mikit frá þeim sagt, svá at þeir þóttu likari goðum en mönnum (PE. Chap. 4).

...their journey out of Turkland and had with them a great band of people, young and old, men and women, and they carried with them much goods of great price. And wherever they went throughout the land, many glorious tales were told about them, so that they were thought to be more like gods than men.

This attribution of human origins for the Nordic gods is fourth-century Greek euhemerism in the thirteenth-century Iceland. Later in *Ynglingasaga* (chap. 12), the search for the god of poetry was undertaken by a certain Sveigdir (curiously, one of the names of Ódinn) who sets out for Tyrkland 'the land of the Turks' to seek out Ódinn and the home of the gods. Apparently, other Northerners had had the same intention, for during his five-year visit in the East, Sveigdir meets many kinsmen searching for Ódinn.

The East appears as the seat of Ódinn and a place of veneration in Danish literature as well. Saxo, translating Ásgardr as Byzantium, relates a tale of the Northern kings' sending to Ódinn a ring-bedecked, golden statue, which he caused to speak when a mortal touched

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[25] On the symbolic significance of the games, see: *Davidson E.* Op. cit. P. 197—200. Ellis Davidson surmises that the sculpted figures were probably mythological and classical heroes which the Northerners mistook for their own.

[26] Edda Snorra Sturlusonar / Ed Finnur Jónsson. Reykjavík: Sigurður Kristjánsson, 1907 (hereafter cited as: PE). For a complete translation of Snorri's work see: The Prose Edda, by Snorri Sturluson / Transl. Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur. 1923; N. Y.: American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1916).

it[27]. Unfortunately, Frigga, greedy for the gold, and wanting to surpass the statue in beauty, stripped the image, stole the bracelets, and then had lover shatter the idol. Saxo cites Frigga's action as one cause for Ódinn's wanderings, although Ódinn's exile from Byzantium was caused by the god's own infamous actions (Bk. III. 98). For Snorri and Saxo, Ódinn was the old god (even though Saxo treats him with disapprobation), the pagan god who was ousted from the East and made to travel to seek a new home in the North. Ódinn's journey to the North — through Gardariki, Saxland, and Denmark — is a duplicate of one of the routes traveled by the peripatetic Northerners during the tenth and twelfth centuries.

Ódinn's journey out of Turkland to the West has biblical moorings. It is a reflex of the expulsion from Paradise and of the forty-year wanderings of the Israelites before they reach the promised land. In the cultural contexts of the medieval Icelander, Ódinn's expulsion out of Turkland to the West is a paradigm of the central communal experience undertaken by those who would later be called the Icelandic migrating tribes. Expelled from Norway, they were destined to wander across the wilderness of the North Sea, to the West, to Iceland.

Snorri's and Saxo's euhemeristic representations of the Nordic pantheon harmonize with the Christian myth of the East. In the sagas — of the kings', family, and courtly variety — Constantinople with all its marvels and allurements is not the terminal point for the pilgrim anxious to pay homage to the Lord. The end of the pilgrim's journey is Jerusalem. Constantinople is the final port of call for the warrior-adventurer. The city functions as bait for the peripatetic Northerners where they can satisfy their lust for wealth and glory, serve in the imperial guard, and return home laden with gold from the Emperor's coffers, after *rjóðum gylðis góma* 'we redden the wolf's palate', as Rognvaldr put it as he traveled the Aegean to Byzantium (Orkney. Chap. 88). A desire for wealth and glory is by far the most prevalent motivation for the journey to the East. But there were other motivations. The pilgrimages to the holy land and to Byzantium by King Eirík, Sigurdr, Rǫgnvaldr, and countless others were undertaken to pay homage to the Christian God. In the closing episode of *þorvalds þáttr ens Viðförla,* the hero, at the height of his renown, decides to journey to Jerusalem[28]. *Kristni Saga* and *Stefnis þáttr þorgilssonar* inform us that þorvaldr was not alone on the journey, but was accompanied by the poet, Stefnir of Kjarlarness[29]. *þorvalðr* travelled throughout the Grecian realm, and finally arrived in Miklagard where the Emperor received him with honor (ca. 990). *þorvalðr* was a type of evangelist for he preached the faith, and he was duly honored by the bishops of Greece and Syria. His renown was no less in Gardariki, where, on a mission from the Emperor and with ecclesiastical authority over the princes of Russia, he spread the Gospel (*þorvalds þáttr.* Chap. 9). Byzantium, then, because it was Byzantium — the seat of all that was marvelous and divine in pagan and Christian belief — provided sufficient reason for an adventuresome Northerner to make the voyage to the East.

IV

In *Laxdoela Saga,* a migration and conversion saga, the journey to Byzantium is motivated by the desire to meet one's promised destiny in another land. Supposedly the first Icelander to make the journey to join the Varangian guard and return home victorious was

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[27] *Saxo Grammaticus.* The First Nine Books of the Danish History of Saxo Grammaticus / Trans. O. Elton (Norroena Society; rpt. Nendeln/Liechnetstein: Kraus Reprint, 1967) lx, lxi; Bk. I. 30—31.

[28] *Þorvalds þáttr viðförla* Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1946. Vol. 7. Chap. 9 and epilogue (459—63) (the series is hereafter cited as: *Íslendinga Sögur*).

[29] *Kristni saga // Íslendinga Sögur.* Vol. 1. Chap. 12 (273—274); see also: *Stefnis þáttr þorgilssonar //* Íslendinga Sögur. Vol. 12. Chaps. 1—2 (3 05—3 08).

Bolli Bollason, the proud and open-handed son of Guðrún Osvifsdóttir in *Laxdoela Saga*[30]. Bolli's journey to the East — like King Haraldr's described above — was in two stages. The first took him to Norway where he spent some time with St. Óláfr, and the second, through Denmark to Miklagard where he entered the service of the Byzantine emperor, and — the sags reports:

þótti inn hraustasti maðr i öllum mannraunum ok gekk jafnan næst inum fremstum. þótti Væringjum mikils vert um Bolli, meðan hann var í Miklagarði (LS. Chap. 73).	He was thought the most valiant man in every peril and fought always in the front-line. Bolli was thought to be of great worth by the Varangians while he was in Miklagard.

Bolli's motivation for crossing the European continent was not *wanderlust* or, for that matter, the desire for gold, although he took it when it happened to come his way. Rather, the impetus came from his desire for renown: at the outset of his journey, he confided to his father-in-law, Snorri the priest: *þykkir maðr við þat fáviss verða, ef hann kannar ekki víðara en hér Íslandæ* 'A man [he said] is thought to become foolish if he doesn't explore the wider world beyond this land of Iceland' (chap. 72). His reason for leaving St. Óláfr's court was similar, if more intense: *ek hafða þat ætlat.., at eigi skyldi at spyrja til mín í oðru húsi* 'I had that in mind [he said] that not only people from just next door would be curious to ask about my affairs' (Chap. 73). Bolli was successful in achieving his objective.

Upon his return to Iceland, Bolli received the epithet of *Bolli inn prúði* 'Bolli the proud', for he had developed a taste for the "ornate" and *hann vildi engi klæði bera nema skarlatsklæði ok pellsklæði, ok öll vápn hafði hann gullbúin* 'he would not wear any clothes except those made of gold-lined costly silk and scarlet cloth, and all the weapons he owned were inlaid with gold' (Chap. 77). The sagaman describes his courtly progress from the ship to his home, and the description brings the opulence of Byzantium to the stark, rocky island in the north:

Bolli ríðr frá skipi við tólfta menn... í skarlatsklæðum ... riðu í gyldum söðlum; allir váru þeir listuligir menn, en þó bar Bolli af. Hann var í pellsklæðum, er Garðskonungr hafði gefit honum; hann hafði yzta skarlatskápu rauða; hann var gyrðr Fótbít, ok váru at honum hjölt gullbúin ok meðalkaflinn gulli vafiðr; hann hafði gyldan hjálm á höfði ok rauðan skjöld á hlið, ok á dreginn riddari með gulli. Hann hafði glaðel í hendi, sem títt er í útlöndum, ok hvar sem þeir tóku gistingar, þá gáðu konur engis annars en horfa á Bolla ok skart hans ok þeira félaga (LS. Chap. 77).	Bolli rode from the ship with a dozen companions ... in a scarlet outfit ... [They] rode on gilded saddles. They were all handsome men, but Bolli outshone them. He wore an outfit of gold-lined costly silk which the King of Byzantium had given him. As an outer garment, he wore a costly scarlet cape. He was girt with Leg-Biter, its hilt bound with gold and the haft gold-embossed. He wore a gilded helmet on his head and a red shield at his side on which was drawn a knight in gold. He carried a sword in his hand, as is usual in foreign lands. And wherever they took lodgings for the night, the women heeded to none other but to turn and behold Bolli and his finery, and his comrades.

The adulation of Bolli and his men is akin to the adoration that one might render to Ódinn on his journey West, or to a statue of a pagan god.

In the narrative structure of *Laxdoela Saga*, this scene is one of several on the motif of "the parading of the hero and his troops" and occurs twice before. The first episode describes Óláfr Pá (the hero of the first third of the saga) and his seamen in battle-array anchored off the shore of Ireland (LS. Chap. 21). The second describes the progress of

[30] *Laxdoela saga* / Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Íslenzk Fornrit, 5 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1934). The date of the voyage is uncertain.

Kjartan (the real hero of the saga) and his men from Hjararðholt to Laugar (LS. Chap. 44). The descriptive language of these episodes is almost identical, with changes occurring in the type of weapon the hero carries in his hand — a barbed spear (Óláfr); a spear with an inlaid gold-socket (Kjartan); and a sword for Bolli. There is a difference also in the image embossed on their shields (a lion for Óláfr, the Holy Cross for Kjartan, and — calling up the image of a crusader — a knight drawn in gold for Bolli) and in the clothes they wear. It is only Bolli who wears the precious gold-embroidered silk of Byzantium. The scene is meant to elevate the status of Bolli, first, by associating him with Kjartan and, second, by illustrating that he has earned that comparison because of the renown he won in Byzantium. Bolli is described as possessing the "two most desired material objects" that a traveler might bring back from Byzantium: money and silk. And if the Emperor himself had given the precious cloth to him as a gift, then it was obviously not silk of an inferior kind — not of the commercial variety that other travelers might smuggle out of the holy city[31]. The fact that they were gifts from the Emperor establishes Bolli as a hero comparable to King Haraldr, with whom he served in the Varangian guard; and perhaps as a person who may surpass even Kjartan in renown.

Because of the formulaic handling of Bolli's return, the initial response of the reader is to doubt the historicity of the event itself. The expedition — the hero's voyage out and return — appears several times before this scene, with the two instances cited above — Óláfr's and Kjartan's journeys to foreign lands — having an identical structure. The author of *Laxdoela Saga* handles the passage of Bolli in Byzantium with very broad strokes. Unlike the Byzantine episodes in other sagas, Bolli is not presented in conversation with the Emperor; neither does the author inform the reader in what capacity Bolli served the Emperor nor of his status in the Varangian guard. In addition, there is some uncertainty about the dates of Bolli's trip to Byzantium. If it took place before Snorri's death and after Bolli's marriage to *þórdís* (*as per Eyrbyggja Saga* and *Laxdoela Saga*), then the voyage occurred sometime around 1026 or 1027. If, however, one accepts the evidence of *Sneglu-Halla þáttr* (chap. 10), which states that Bolli was one of King Haraldr's Varangians (1035—1044), then the voyage to Byzantium would have taken place after Snorri's death (1031). But despite these uncertainties, Bolli did make a voyage to the East, for as Blöndal argues, there is much external corroborative evidence to support the historicity of Bolli's journey: Haraldr's comments in *Sneglu-Halla þáttr* are one piece of evidence, and the simultaneous service of two of his kinsmen, Úlfr Óspaksson and Halldor Snorrason, in the Varangian guard is another[32]. In any event, Bolli hardly could have been the first Icelander to serve in the Imperial guard or to return from the golden city with treasure and fame as the author of *Laxdoela saga* states (chap. 77).

What is reflected in the treatment of the Byzantine topos in *Laxdoela Saga* is the rhetorical embellishment of a historical event, an appropriate story-telling device for saga literature. What the significance of the journey sequence, what its symbolic meaning might be is another matter. As noted above, in the narrative structure of *Laxdoela Saga,* Bolli's journey to Byzantium and back is the culmination of two other major journey sequences: the journey of Óláfr Pá (East to Norway, to Ireland, and East to Norway again) and the journey of Kjartan (East to Norway). In each of the sequences, the East represents

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[31] *Davidson E.* Op. cit. P. 94, 106, 282. See also: *Dodwell C.R.* Anglo-Saxon Art: A New Perspective. Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982. P. 149—69, 178—79, 181—84. Dowell notes the use of Byzantine silk by Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics in the context of the political and ecclesiastical relationships between Byzantium and Anglo-Saxon England.

[32] *Davidson E.* Op. cit. P. 231; *Blöndal-Benedikz* (Op. cit. P. 205—209) discuss the chronological inconsistencies as presented in the saga and argue for the historical reliability of the passage: *Sneglu-Halla þáttr // Íslendinga Sögur.* Vol. 8.

magnificence, prestige, power, and wealth. The hero sets out to the East to find his destined identity — Óláfr discovers he is the grandson of a King; Kjartan, a Christian missionary; and Bolli, a man of renown. On the return to Iceland, each assumes his proper status in society. In this regard, the heroes' journeys exemplify their participation in the communal activity of their forefathers who, through the act of migration from Norway to Iceland, were able to found a nation. As cultural heroes, Óláfr Pá, Kjartan, and Bolli are compelled to experience the condition of exile. Bolli's journey to and from Byzantium encompasses all the past journeys made by his people — Unnr, Ketill and all his ancestors — and exemplifies the psychic condition of the Icelanders as a migrating tribe.

(Окончание следует)