The Multiple Facets of Time

Reckoning, Representing, and Understanding Time in Medieval Iceland

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Abstract

This work investigates the multivalent and dynamic portrayal of time in a selection of early Old Icelandic texts from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The main objective is to map out the representations of time in terms of the patterns conveyed, and to examine how the authors configured time through narrative. An extension of this goal is to build up a theoretical understanding of how the people involved in the production of the texts, and possibly their contemporaries as well, reckoned, organized, and understood time.

The primary texts analysed for these purposes are *Íslendingabók* and two *Íslendingasögur*, *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Laxdæla saga*. *Íslendingabók* is a concise history of Iceland from its settlement, ca. 870, to 1118, written by the priest Ari Þorgilsson *inn fróði* ("the Learned," 1067/68–1148) between the years 1122–33. The two *Íslendingasögur*, *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Laxdæla saga*, date from the thirteenth century, but, like *Íslendingabók*, are narratively set in the Settlement Period, although *Íslendingabók* continues further. The treatment of time in each text, especially the sense of the past, along with the explicit and implicit connections that can be established between the texts, allows for a comprehensive comparative analysis of the time patterns they convey. Alongside this analysis, a focus on the historical period of the writing of the texts leads to a deeper understanding of how medieval Icelanders of that time at once measured, managed, and understood time. This in turn allows for a better appreciation of the ideological foundations that influenced the representations of time and the mechanisms involved in reconstructing the past in these texts.

The analysis is conducted by tackling the issue from different theoretical perspectives: narrative, sociological, and philosophical. Such an analytical approach aims to do justice to the multiplicity of times that concurred in medieval Iceland. This approach also attempts to bridge gaps that currently exist within this research area, paving the way for further explorations of the subject of time in medieval Icelandic literature and society, and, more broadly, of time as an existential concern and human experience in the Middle Ages.

ÁGRIP

Þessi doktorsritgerð fjallar um hvernig gerð er grein fyrir margþættum og síkvikum tíma í þremur íslenskum ritum frá miðöldum. Meginmarkmið rannsóknarinnar er að kortleggja hvaða mynstur má lesa út úr framsetningu tímans í textanum og hvernig tímanum er gerð skil í formi frásagnar. Annað markmið, sem leiðir af hinu fyrra, er að byggja upp fræðilegan skilning á því hvernig þau sem stóðu að þessum ritum, og væntanlega samtímamenn þeirra, reiknuðu, skipulögðu og skildu tímann.

Frumheimildarnar sem greindar voru í þessum tilgangi eru *Íslendingabók* og tvær Íslendingasögur, *Eyrbyggja saga* og *Laxdæla saga*. *Íslendingabók* er gagnorð saga Íslands frá landnámi um 870 til ársins 1118. Hún var samin af prestinum Ara Þorgilssyni fróða (1067/68–1148) á árunum 1122–33. *Eyrbyggja saga* og *Laxdæla saga* eru báðar frá 13. öld, en segja frá atburðum frá landnámi fram yfir Kristinitöku, árið 999/1000. Þær eiga þennan tíma sameiginlegan með *Íslendingabók*, þótt frásögn *Íslendingabókar* nái töluvert lengra. Í ritunum þremur má skynja svipaða tilfinningu fyrir fortíðinni, og þau lýsa og sviðsetja tímann þannig að víðtækur samanburður á tímamynstrum er mögulegur. Auk þess eru bæði bein og óbein tengsl milli textanna. Samhliða þessari greiningu, er litið til ritunartíma textanna í leit að dýpri skilningi á því hvernig Íslendingar á miðöldum mældu tímann, stjórnuðu honum og skildu hann. Þetta gerir kleift að meta betur hugmyndafræðilegar forsendur fyrir framsetningu á tímanum í þessum textum og þau ferli sem bjuggu undir þeirri endursköpun á liðnum tíma sem þar átti sér stað.

Í greiningunni er viðfangsefnið nálgast frá ólíkum fræðilegum sjónarhornum, í senn frásagnarfræðilegu, félagslegu og heimspekilegu. Þessi greiningaraðferð miðar að því að gera grein fyrir fjölþættu og samsettu tímahugtaki á Íslandi á miðöldum. Enn fremur leitast hún við að brúa bil milli fræðigreina sem fást við þetta viðfangsefni og leggja grunn að frekari rannsóknum á tíma í íslensku samfélagi og bókmenntum á miðöldum, en jafnframt í reynslu og tilvist miðaldafólks.

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FOREWORD

I wish to express my sincerest gratitude to Professor Torfi Tulinius, my supervisor, for his insightful advice, always suggestive of new perspectives, his sensitive guidance, and enthusiastic encouragement during the completion of this research work. I am also very grateful to Professors Ármann Jakobsson and Massimiliano Bampi for the invaluable insight and guidance they provided as members of my doctoral committee, which contributed significantly to the shape and the expression of the research that follows.

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INTRODUCTION

"What, then, is time? I know well enough what it is, if no one asks me;
but if I am asked what it is and try to explain, I am baffled."

—St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*

The evergreen and undeniable fascination of time lies in its elusive nature. Assuming first that it exists, what *is* time? Any attempt to define it is inevitably partial, as time is multi-faceted and relative: multi-faceted because it has always been a concern of multiple fields of study, notably philosophical, psychological, social, and narrative;[1] relative, not only in the theoretical physical sense, but also because the ways in which it has been conceptualized, perceived, measured, and represented have always been influenced by specific cultural and social circumstances. Time is a socio-cultural phenomenon that has been treated in various ways not only by different cultures and societies, but also in the many cultural environments that exist within every community, "in different sectors of one and the same society, even by different individuals within the same society," and "at different stages of social development."[2]

Recent critical thought has developed a number of approaches that appreciate this socio-cultural multivalence of time. These approaches have arisen in response to a profound conceptual and methodological shift that has

[1] Gasparini 2000 [1994], 13–4, 165.

[2] Gurevich 1985 [1972], 26–7. Clearly, such stages of social development are relative in their turn. Moreover, when we speak of the development of a social system, "do we then speak of a society at different points of time or do we speak of (two) different societies?" Evans-Pritchard 1964, 181; cf. Hastrup 1985, 243. These considerations are not investigated here, but they do not undermine the main idea that time is variable.

taken place within the scholarship on time over the last sixty years.[3] From the conceptual point of view, multi-layered, non-linear, and subjective understandings of time have replaced modernity's view of it as a single, linear, and objective process. The modern view was, in turn, a rupture from previous traditional understandings of time of the Middle Ages and of classical antiquity, which were characterized by a remarkable complexity and dynamism.[4] From the methodological point of view, scholars have come to address the issue from multiple perspectives simultaneously, favouring interdisciplinary dialogues about time that recognize its inherent dynamism.

The adoption of these comprehensive approaches has enhanced research on time in past societies as well. This is based on the premise that the conceptual and social nature of time allows us, in principle at least, to approach time in past societies as we would approach it in contemporary ones.[5] Time as an existential concern or human experience is itself "timeless." In the particular case of medieval time, which was characterized by a multiplicity of both notions of time and reckoning strategies, contemporary scholars, such as Aaron Gurevich and Jacques Le Goff,[6] have been able to appreciate its multivalence and dynamism by investigating the matter from psycho-philosophical and socio-cultural perspectives.

From the psycho-philosophical perspective, scholars have reevaluated earlier assumptions such as that, in the Middle Ages, it was only theologians and philosophers who considered time as an intellectual and problematic concept, while the common people experienced time mainly in the forms of natural, agrarian, and family time.[7] On the one hand, this assumption rings true,

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[3] Within historiography, the turning point was with Fernand Braudel's "Histoire et sciences sociales: la longue durée," *Annales* 1958, where he advanced that long-term historical time (*longue durée*) should be prioritized over medium-term cycles (*conjonctures*) and short-term event-related time (*histoire événementielle*), due to its exceptional value of disclosing "the thousands of levels" of historical time. Le Goff 2013 [2001], 115; 1980, ix–xi.
[4] Spiegel 2016, 22–3. For an analysis of how the Middle Ages inherited part of their temporal multivalence and dynamism from classical antiquity and the ancient Middle East (notably Babylon and Egypt) see, for example, Whitrow 1988; Borst 1993 [1990]; and Sulzgruber 1995.
[5] Hastrup 1985, 19.
[6] Gurevich 1985 [1972]; Le Goff 2004 [1964]; 1980; 2013 [2001].
[7] Gurevich 1985 [1972], 143.

given the fact that medieval societies were by and large agrarian. Thus, it was mainly the rhythms of nature, of labour, and of collective life that determined the experience and understanding of time in such societies.[8] As a consequence, there was no need for precise time-reckoning systems or well-defined concepts of time.[9] On the other hand, medieval societies were more complex than the simple agrarian framework seems to suggest. A variety of rhythms and practices of the Christian Church strongly affected social life throughout the period, as did the significant number of commercial and technical processes that needed to be organized in late medieval towns.[10] Scholars now agree that the Middle Ages "had no single view of time, no systematic philosophy of time, but a number of competing notions of time that were both diverse and more sophisticated than they are commonly assumed to have been."[11] This is true of time-reckoning methods as well.

The addition of the socio-cultural perspective has enabled scholars to further elaborate on this idea. It has been posited that there were probably as many notions of time and time-reckoning strategies in society as there were recognizable groups, such as families, clans, monastic communities, or farmers.[12] The formation of each of these groups was determined by either cultural, economic, or political factors, and it is clear that an individual could be part of multiple groups at once, understanding and appreciating each group's respective notions of time and time-reckoning strategies simultaneously. Family time, for example, which was shaped and tracked according to the rhythmic change of generations and the succession of events that were of significance to a specific kin group, coexisted with ecclesiastical time, which was

[8] West-Pavlov 2013, 13.
[9] Gurevich 1985 [1972], 105, hints at the few instruments that were then available for the relatively accurate measurement of time, notably the sundial, a marked dial on which the sun's shadow was cast by a gnomon, and the water clock (clepsydra), "a receptacle to gather water, with a small hole to regulate the flow of liquid trickling in, and calibrations to measure the rising water level" (West-Pavlov 2013, 4). However, such instruments were either uncommon or not always functional. For example, the sundial was not efficient in dull weather, and the water clock was not of much use when it froze. West-Pavlov 2013, 14.
[10] Le Goff 2013 [2001], 120–6; 2004 [1964], 180–3; West-Pavlov 2013, 16.
[11] Higgins 1989, 228. Cf. Le Goff 2004 [1964], 175.
[12] Le Goff 1980, 38, building on Halbwachs 1996 [1947], 46. Cf. Mostert 2005, 261–2.

conceived of in multiple sophisticated ways and was marked, above all, by the liturgical calendar.[13]

This coexistence of multiple views of time and reckoning strategies in society was not always peaceful, especially when they were meant to regulate the same social spheres. For example, competition ensued in the late Middle Ages over the regulation of labour time. With the development of urban societies in the late fourteenth century, the management of labour time was no longer a prerogative of the Christian Church, but rather it came to be dealt with by secular authorities as well. This is manifest, for example, in the frequent parallel functioning of both church and town bell towers, often resulting in bitter controversy.[14]

This plurality of times needed to be organized within the given social system, or the society in question could not have functioned properly—or perhaps even existed.[15] In any society, the various views of time and reckoning strategies are most often organized hierarchically, where particular ones prevail and dominate the society in question. Throughout the Middle Ages, it was clearly the Christian Church that predominated and exercised tight control over social time, pervading most spheres of social life and dominating most medieval societies. Time-control is, after all, not only an essential component of social functioning, but it is also a key factor in the dominion over public life—an instrument of power.[16]

A particularly fruitful theoretical framework for exploring medieval time is the one adopted by the sociologist Giovanni Gasparini in his study of time in contemporary societies.[17] Gasparini maintains that the contemplation of how a society understands, measures, and manages time is primary among the various ways in which the complexity of time in society can be investigated

[13] Gurevich 1985 [1972], 99–100. For the multiple ways in which time was conceived of and systematized by the medieval Christian Church, see Higgins 1989.
[14] Le Goff 1980, 43–52.
[15] Gurevich 1985 [1972], 144.
[16] Le Goff 2004 [1964], 177; 1980, xiii; 2013 [2001], 121.
[17] Gasparini 2000 [1994], 17–27.

and accounted for.[18] Gasparini's comprehensive approach is highly applicable to the study of the complexity and the dynamism that characterized medieval time, thus also to the exploration of time in medieval Iceland.

This comprehensive approach is adopted in the present study to help expose the complexity of time in medieval Icelandic culture and society, as represented in and communicated by a selection of Old Icelandic texts which date back to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Following Gasparini's method, the investigation starts with an analysis of how time was organized and measured in Early Iceland, when the texts under analysis were composed (ch. 1).[19] Three case studies are presented, with the focus on the portrayals of time in each text (chs. 2 and 3). A discussion of the material presented in these chapters then follows: the texts are put into dialogue with each other, on the basis of the patterns they convey, allowing for speculation on how time was both perceived and conceived of in medieval Iceland (ch. 4). This is outlined below in more detail.

Chapter one opens with an analysis of how literacy came to Iceland, as literacy implies the use of certain time-reckoning strategies and understandings. This contextualizes the physical production of the early Old Icelandic sources and introduces the socio-historical environment that brought them to life. To this end, additional early Old Icelandic sources are considered, namely legal and computistical ones, the latter being "the ecclesiastical arithmetic combined with astronomical calculations on which the Church's

[18] Among these other ways, it is worth mentioning the perspective of gender. See Bryson 2007 for an analysis of feminist thought investigating the gendered nature of time, stressing the importance of resisting the dominant time culture of capitalist societies in favour of the many "other" times, which nevertheless persist. See also Kristeva's famous 1981 [1979] article, contrasting the complexity of "women's time" with the predominantly "masculine" linear time of history, politics, and language.

[19] The term "Early Iceland" designates the period from the establishment of the *Alþingi*, the yearly national assembly, in AD 930 to the Icelanders' submission to the Norwegian king in 1262–64. Alternatively, the terms "Free State" and "Commonwealth" have been used, although they carry more biased connotations: "the expression 'state' is hardly appropriate for the Icelandic society of this period, which was a headless, feuding society. 'Commonwealth' might seem a more accurate description of this island-wide society, even though the term has been thought to have antiquated, romantic associations." Helgi Þorláksson 2007, 136.

calendar and chronology were based."[20] The sources considered in this first part are: *Grágás* (lit., "Grey/Wild Goose"), a collection of laws from Early Iceland, the kernel of which has been dated around 1117–18, although its manuscript transmission is quite complex;[21] *Íslendingabók* ("Book of Icelanders"), a concise history of Iceland from the ninth century to the beginning of the twelfth century, written by the priest Ari Þorgilsson *inn fróði* ("the Learned," 1067–1148) sometime between 1122–33 (this text is also a case study in ch. 2); and *Rím I* or *Rímbegla* (lit., "Rhyme Rumple"), a textbook on calendar computations dating from the second half of the twelfth century.[22] Specific parts of this text are referred to directly, namely *Bócarbót* (lit., "Book-amendment," *Rím* I, 76–80), which preserves calendrical information, and *Stjǫrnu-Odda tala* ("Star-Oddi's Tale," *Rím* I, 48–53), a short text that contains, amongst other things, observations of the course of the sun and the difference in seasonal daylight hours (this text is also treated separately in section 1.3.1). *Rím II*, a compilation from the thirteenth century that repeats much of the material contained in *Rím I* in similar or the same formulations, is considered when necessary. It should be noted that *Rím II* includes an older text as well, *Rímbegla hin gamla* ("The Old Rhyme Rumple"), which has been dated to the first half of the twelfth century (this text is also analysed separately in section 1.5.2.3).

These early texts allow for an introduction to the ways in which time was organized and measured in Early Iceland. Since the information they convey is largely calendrical, the resulting outline is primarily of official views of time. For instance, it is clear that computistical treatises "were probably not much read outside the narrow circle of leaders who were responsible for the daily administration of time (the lawspeaker, the *goðar* [chieftains,] and the clergy)."[23] At the same time, however, these texts convey information alternative and complementary to calendrical time, and which is both of an official and unofficial nature. This includes: correlations between timekeeping, space,

[20] Jónas Kristjánsson 2007, 133. The *computus* is described in detail in section 1.5.2.2.
[21] See Orri Vésteinsson 1996, 31–7.
[22] Janson 2010, 10. *Rím* is the (editorial) abbreviation of *rímtal* (pl. *rímtǫl*), that is, "rhyme-count" (Becman/Kålund 1914-16). In this context, it "originally signified the art of finding seasons, feast days, new moons, etc. by counting on one's fingers." Árni Björnsson 1980, 9.
[23] Hastrup 1985, 44.

and travel; genealogical accounts; and other absolute and relative dating systems. The dating systems are contextualized within a continental European framework, presenting the major dating traditions they derived from or were inspired by, and hinting at the lively discussions of chronology that were renewed during the eleventh century, which partially affected the reckoning of time in Early Iceland as well.

Chapters two and three are dedicated to three case studies, providing a thorough examination of the temporal patterns they convey. These texts are *Íslendingabók* itself and two *Íslendingasögur* that have been dated to the thirteenth century, namely *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Laxdæla saga*. As is typical of the *Íslendingasaga* genre, these two sagas relate events that span the period from the settlement of Iceland around 870 to the beginning of the eleventh century. Each of the three texts has a particular relationship to time.

Íslendingabók is not only the earliest surviving history of Iceland, but is also the earliest extant Icelandic work significant from the perspective of time. It combines diverse temporal patterns and offers an important insight into the organization, measurement, and overall understanding of time in Ari's society. Among these patterns are the absolute and the relative dating of particular events, and the treatment of specific genealogies. These tools, along with others, are considered in how the work reconstructs the past. The two *Íslendingasögur* display a similar attitude to chronological time, although, as is typical of the *Íslendingasögur*, they do not aim to represent events in high chronological detail. Still, they display an internal logic in structuring and reckoning time, especially around the passing of generations and of events relevant to the community of the narrative. The construction of time in these sagas is analysed from both a narrative and a socio-historical point of view. The ability to analyse these texts from a socio-historical point of view follows from the recent reevaluation of the *Íslendingasögur* as potentially valuable ethnographic sources, regardless of the factuality of the events described. These texts had previously been dismissed altogether as fictional writing, especially by historians. This is discussed in chapter three.

The choice of the three case studies, *Íslendingabók*, *Eyrbyggja saga*, and *Laxdæla saga*, arises not only from each one's relevance to time, but also from the possibility of putting them into dialogue with one another, given the remarkable points they share in common. All three texts describe events that are set primarily in Iceland between the settlement of the country and the conversion to Christianity—although *Íslendingabók* continues further—while also granting special significance to these two main points in time. Moreover, the texts overlap in their attention to certain genealogical lines and regional concerns: *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Laxdæla saga* are set in almost the same geographical area, the area of Breiðafjörður, where Ari Þorgilsson was himself from. Interestingly, the two sagas in question display several of the time patterns that Ari employed in his *Íslendingabók*, notably relative dating ones, and at times refer to him directly. It should be noted, though, that the earliest surviving manuscripts that preserve these texts postdate their composition by a few centuries. Whether and how this affects or compromises the analysis of the texts from the perspective of time is clearly significant and has been considered.

The dialogic relation that can be established between the three texts is investigated in chapter four. The discussion starts by considering the ways in which time and narrative typically intertwine, from both a philosophical and a narrative point of view. Subsequently, these considerations are applied to the medieval Icelandic context by considering the significance of the patterns the three texts convey. The examination of the texts in combination allows for speculation on how time was understood in medieval Iceland.

Amongst the conclusions, is that the literature of medieval Iceland displays multiple patterns of measuring, managing, and structuring time, as well as of reconstructing the past. In turn, these various ways of dealing with and configuring time express a complex sense of time, as perceived and conceived of by the people involved in the production of the texts. These results provide a foundation for this complex and little explored, yet crucial and fascinating subject, while hopefully facilitating and encouraging further research on the matter.

1. Time Organization and Measurement in Early Iceland

1.1 The Socio-Historical Basis of Literacy and Text Production

When alphabetic literacy was introduced into Iceland by the Christian Church in the eleventh century, it was soon welcomed as an alternative to the many extant oral and non-oral methods of preserving and transmitting narrative culture, such as the techniques of the spoken word, performances, and rituals.[1] Along with it came clearly specific ways of measuring and organizing time, and thus of understanding it.

At first, literacy was closely connected to Latin script and the establishment of Church institutions ("institutional literacy").[2] This is evidenced by Church writings in the earliest period, which are preoccupied with ecclesiastical matters and have a marked didactic character.[3] However, the clerics and monks working within this context soon devised an alphabet for the vernacular, which enabled the production of the rich and variegated vernacular literature that eventually came to be produced by secular people as well ("lay literacy"), and has partly come down to us.[4] The earliest extant vernacular texts were produced in the twelfth century, and they reflect the fact that, by then, literacy was no longer a prerogative of ecclesiastics, but had started to expand

[1] Hermann 2017, 34; Mundal 2010, 163.
[2] Johansson 2005, 174; Hermann 2017, 35–6.
[3] Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2010, 217; Sverrir Jakobsson 2012, 111.
[4] Johansson 2005, 174; Hermann 2017, 35–6. The *First Grammatical Treatise*, dated to the second half of the 12th century, "is a significant source on twelfth century writing and gives a unique insight into the problems of creating a suitable alphabet and orthography for a new textual culture." Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2010, 217. Hreinn Benediktsson 1972, 206.

to secular environments as well. However, the time frame in which this is supposed to have come about, and the degree to which literacy affected laymen have been the object of some debate, along with what roles these same people played in text production.

Some scholars maintain that the development from institutional literacy to lay literacy was completed during the thirteenth century, creating two distinct literary systems, one ecclesiastical and one secular.[5] According to this view, there was a high degree of literacy among laypeople from the thirteenth century on, evidenced by the fact that texts composed in the thirteenth century, such as the *Íslendingasögur*, were written "by farmers, on farms and for farmers."[6] This view has been criticized, on the grounds that it is in strong contrast to the diffusion pattern of literacy throughout the rest of medieval Europe.[7] Others maintain that the development from institutional to lay literacy in Iceland took place more slowly, and it was not until the fourteenth century that "what was formerly an ecclesiastical activity became available to well-to-do farmers" and there was "a considerable increase in vernacular literary compositions that were not primarily preoccupied with ecclesiastical topics."[8]

These views have been refined by others still, regarding who the laymen in question actually were, how literate they really were, and what their role in text production truly was.[9] According to these scholars, the literate laymen in question were not quite ordinary farmers, but *stórbændur* (sg., *stórbóndi*; lit., "big farmer," also "big man"), that is, more wealthy and influential farmers, or people closely connected to them.[10] It would have been easier for these higher status people to access the knowledge necessary to compose unique texts such as the *Íslendingasögur*, which they would have gained both at Icelandic schools and when travelling abroad. In particular, the detailed knowledge of foreign people and lands, notably of Norway, the ability to compose poetry, and the

[5] E.g., Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1953.
[6] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1953.
[7] E.g., Lönnroth 1990.
[8] Hermann 2017, 36, 44. Cf. Hermann Pálsson 1962, 95–105; Sverrir Jakobsson 2012, 112.
[9] Hastrup 1986; Johansson 2005; Hermann 2017, 39–40.
[10] Hermann Pálsson 1962, 96–8.

profound knowledge of laws and of legal proceedings, all support the hypothesis that these texts were written more by *stórbændur* or by people connected to them, rather than by ordinary farmers, if not by chieftains and lawspeakers.[11] In this regard, two notable cases are the renowned intellectual and politician Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241) and his nephew Sturla Þórðarson, the saga-writer (1214–84), who were at once chieftains, lawspeakers, and fine writers.[12] According to this view, lay literacy in Early Iceland was restricted to a small circle of people, namely the Icelandic secular upper class. However, the role of laymen in text production was generally more indirect than in the cases of Snorri Sturluson and his nephew Sturla Þórðarson. Indeed, it has been maintained that:

> the influence of laymen on text production might not be primarily explained by widespread technological competence, that is, by an exceptionally high degree of literacy among lay people, but rather by the social organization in Iceland, where secular leaders owned churches and therefore could act as agents (i.e. sponsors) of texts produced by clerics.[13]

Laypeople, rather than actively writing, were more likely to sponsor text production in order to promote their status and prestige, and to increase their influence and power.[14] These people, often powerful magnates, acted then as patrons, sponsoring and commissioning works rather than writing them themselves. Besides the patrons, the other actors involved in the process of text-production were the person who dictated the work and the person who wrote it on parchment. In some cases, two or three of these functions, that is, sponsoring, dictating, and writing, would be carried out by one and the same person, as with Snorri and Sturla. However, this was not likely the norm, though the roles are often difficult to determine, as well as the social background of

[11] Hermann Pálsson 1962, 96–8.
[12] Hermann Pálsson 1962, 96–100.
[13] Hermann 2017, 39. Cf. Nedkvitne 2004, 108, 119.
[14] In this regard, it may be useful to consider Torfi Tulinius's application of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's field theory to the study of medieval Icelandic literature and society (2009a, 57–61). This study includes an analysis of the practical and emblematic significance of knowledge of a cultural type (i.e., "cultural capital" in Bourdieusian terms) for medieval Icelandic chieftains. Cf. Hermann 2017, 40.

these people.[15] Indeed, the matter is complicated further by the fact that, at the time, it was often the case that laymen took clerical orders themselves, while clerics were often drawn from chieftainly families.[16] In any case, it should be noted that it is exactly the close collaboration between laymen and clerics in Early Iceland that favoured the vibrant literary production of the period.

Understanding the socio-historical circumstances within which literacy and textual production developed in the earliest centuries of Icelandic history is crucial for an analysis of the time patterns that the first written texts convey, all the more because literacy implies specific ways of measuring, organizing, and understanding time. The socio-historical scenario in question will now be introduced, paying special attention to the connections established between the ecclesiastical and the secular environments since the introduction of literacy.

It took time for Christianity to establish itself after the formal Conversion in AD 999/1000.[17] This is not surprising, given the fact that the change of religion seems to have taken place more for political reasons rather than for religious ones, notably to prevent the imminent outbreak of civil war.[18] In the very first decades following the Conversion, the churches were few, the clergy was scarce, and there was no independent ecclesiastical law code.[19] Contributions towards establishing the new religion were made by a number of foreign priests, mostly English and German, who came over to Iceland and sometimes stayed for relatively long periods, although the evidence for this is minimal.[20] A few missionary bishops also came to Iceland in that period, starting from

[15] Nedkvitne 2004, 119.
[16] Turville-Petre 1967 [1953], v, 233; Hermann 2017, 39–40; Johansson 2005.
[17] The date of Icelanders' conversion to Christianity is a tricky issue, dealt with in more detail in section 2.2.1.
[18] This aspect is discussed in more detail in section 2.4.2.
[19] The first written Canon Law code would be produced only later, between 1122–33. Turville-Petre 1967 [1953], 81. It constitutes the first section of the lawbook *Grágás*. Dennis et al. 1980, 23–50.
[20] See Orri Vésteinsson 1996, 71, 114.

1020.[21] It is probable that these bishops educated and ordained Icelandic men as priests.[22]

In any case, the first autochthonous clerics and bishops stemmed from leading families in Iceland, meaning they were from the higher echelons of society.[23] The earliest and most notable example is Bishop Ísleifr Gizurarson (1056–80), who came from the rich and powerful family of the Haukdælir. His father was Gizurr *hvíti* ("the White") Teitsson, a prominent chieftain who had also played a decisive role in the Christianization of Iceland. Moreover, Ísleifr's maternal uncle was Skafti Þóroddsson, who had been lawspeaker from 1004 to 1030 and had introduced several reforms in both governmental and religious matters.[24] Ísleifr was sent to Germany by his father to study at a nunnery in Herford, Westphalia, where he was taught by a well-known abbess. When he returned to Iceland shortly before 1030, he operated as a priest in Skálholt, his family farm in the south of the country, at the church his father had built.[25] In this way, "with his foreign education Ísleifr could claim to be just as good a churchman as the foreign missionaries, and he had the advantage over them in family connections and an economic base to work from."[26] Then, around the mid-eleventh century, Ísleifr was asked by the chieftains and the rest of parliament to travel abroad again and obtain consecration as bishop. Thus, Ísleifr went to the Pope in Rome, who sent him with letters to Archbishop Aðalbert of Bremen. Aðalbert consecrated him bishop in 1056. Ísleifr returned to Iceland and continued to preach at his church in Skálholt, which therefore became the first Icelandic episcopal see.[27] There,

[21] *Íslendingabók* (ch. 8), where it is also pointed out that five others "called themselves" bishops. Cf. Orri Vésteinsson 1996, 53–4; Clunies Ross 2005, 142–4.
[22] Orri Vésteinsson 1996, 115.
[23] Sveinbjörn Rafnsson 2010, 180.
[24] Orri Vésteinsson 1996, 54.
[25] Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2010, 216; Turville-Petre 1967 [1953], 76–7.
[26] Orri Vésteinsson 1996, 56.
[27] Orri Vésteinsson 1996, 56. Thus, the first Icelandic bishopric (Skálholt, est. 1056) was initially under the jurisdiction of the archdiocese of Hamburg-Bremen (Germany). This lasted until 1104, when Lund (now Sweden, but part of Denmark at the time) became the new archepiscopal seat for Iceland. In 1152/3, then, the seat of Lund was replaced by the archbishopric of Niðarós (now Trondheim, Norway), until King Christian III of

alongside his duties as bishop, Ísleifr established a school for the training of priests, some of whom he personally instructed.[28] Among his pupils was Jón Ogmundarson who, after completing his education in France, was consecrated bishop in Lund, and became the first Bishop of Hólar in the North of the country (1106–21). Thus, Hólar became Iceland's second bishopric, and there Jón had a cathedral built and he also established a school, for which he hired foreign teachers as well.[29]

Ísleifr had three sons, who were all chieftains (*Íslendingabók*, ch. 9), and two of them became priests as well, namely Teitr (d. 1110) and Gizurr (Bishop of Skálholt, 1082–1118). It is not certain, though, whether they had been instructed by their father.[30] Teitr also founded a school in Haukadalr, where Ari Þorgilsson *inn fróði* would later study (see ch. 2). Gizurr followed in his father's footsteps and also went to school in Westphalia, before succeeding him as bishop of Skálholt in 1082. Gizurr had a cathedral built in Skálholt, replacing the church his grandfather had built earlier in that century, and was very much respected not only as an ecclesiastic, but also as an exemplary chieftain and a man of business. In fact, he is mostly remembered for introducing the tithe (*tíund*) in 1096/7, the first general tax to be levied in the country. Collected from almost all self-supporting farmers, it amounted to 10% on income and 1% on property.[31] This revenue was to be paid each year to the Church as an institution, and was then divided equally among the bishop, the churches, the priests, and the poor.[32] However, only relatively well-off farmers paid enough tithe to be divided in four, while those of lesser means paid out only to the poor.[33]

Denmark's reformed church ordinance was introduced in the diocese of Skálholt in 1541, and in the diocese of Hólar in 1551. Gunnar Karlsson 2000, 128–33.

[28] Clunies Ross 2005, 143. See also Turville-Petre 1967 [1953], 78.

[29] Among them were, for example, Gísli Finnsson from Götaland in South Sweden (probably Västergötland), who taught Latin, or *grammatica* as it appears in one of the *Jóns saga* texts; and a Frankish man called Rikini (probably from Alsace-Lorraine), who taught liturgical singing and versification. See Clunies Ross 2005, 143–4; Jónas Kristjánsson 2007, 116.

[30] Orri Vésteinsson 1996, 67.

[31] See Orri Vésteinsson 1996, 106.

[32] See Orri Vésteinsson 1996, 106.

[33] See Orri Vésteinsson 1996, 117.

At that time, many churches were built on secular land. Thus, the tithe would have been significant for those farmers or chieftains who owned churches. In several instances "a church owner [even] decided to assume the function of a priest and thus collected [also that part of] the tithe income for himself. In fact, priestly chieftains were common in twelfth century Iceland."[34] Whether this revenue had a marked impact on the finances of church owners, though, has been questioned, as it seems that no private economic advancement or capitalistic endeavour derived from it.[35] The wealth in question was generally redistributed by activites such as financing book production, in order to increase both the personal power and the prestige of the church owner, especially if he was a chieftain.[36]

In other instances, the prestige of a church owner was increased if he donated part or all of his land to the local church at the farm. The churches which owned more than half of the farm where they stood were called *staðir* (sg., *staðr*). These comprise the majority of major church institutions from the twelfth century, such as the church at Reykholt, one of the first *staðir* to be established, and one of the most important churches in Iceland.[37] However, it was often the case that, even though the Church owned most or all of the land surrounding these major institutions, they were still managed by powerful chieftains as if they were private property.[38] Thus, in the case where land had been donated, it was pure formality, as the donor and his heirs would continue to manage the endowment. This was the case, for example, of Magnús, son of Þórðr Sǫlvason, who "must have been the one who founded the *staðr* at Reykholt […]. Even though he donated the farmland and its various assets to the church, he was in charge of the whole landholdings and all the possessions of the *staðr.*"[39]

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[34] Sverrir Jakobsson 2009, 161. Cf. Orri Vésteinsson 1996, 115.
[35] See Viðar Pálsson 2018, 109.
[36] Sverrir Jakobsson 2013, 279–80; Viðar Pálsson 2018, 115.
[37] Orri Vésteinsson 1996, 327; Helgi Þorláksson 2018, 121, 130. The churches that owned half or less of the farm where they stood, i.e., more humble institutions, were called *bænda-kirkjur*, "farmers' churches," see Orri Vésteinsson 1996, 327; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2013, 60.
[38] Sverrir Jakobsson 2009, 159.
[39] Helgi Þorláksson 2018, 130.

Therefore, on the one hand, the institution of the tithe strengthened the close cooperation that existed between the clergy and leading laymen in Early Iceland. On the other hand, it was not real cooperation, as the leading laymen controlled the management of Church property and affairs, and thus of the tithe as well. At the same time, the tithe can be said to have accelerated the process through which the Church became an independent institution in Iceland. In the twelfth century, Þorlákr Þórhallsson, bishop at Skálholt in 1178–93, made a request that the Church should be freed from any interference by secular authorities and should govern its own affairs. The demand was promoted through the "Peace of God" movement, according to which holy orders could not go hand in hand with the practice of violence, as was the case with priestly chieftains. More precisely, protection began to be granted to unarmed people and members of the clergy who had renounced the use of violence, while chieftains were barred from taking holy orders, because they still made use of force. As a consequence of this proposition, the Archbishop of Niðarós issued a decree in 1190, according to which clerical and secular powers were separated. In the long term, this resulted in the bishops becoming more powerful. At the same time, some families and secular networks also became stronger and more centralized than others, as contestants could be eliminated from the competition for power by being pushed onto the clerical track.[40]

These are the socio-historical circumstances within which the first literary centres were established. These centres were primarily the schools that had been founded at the two episcopal sees at Skálholt and Hólar, and the monasteries that were established from the twelfth century on, the first being established at Þingeyrar (North Iceland) in 1133.[41] Equally important were

[40] Sverrir Jakobsson 2009, 163.

[41] Other monasteries that belonged to the northern bishopric of Hólar were established at Munkaþverá, in 1155, and Möðruvellir, in 1297. Four others were founded in the bishopric of Skálholt: Helgafell (west; est. 1185), Viðey (west; est. 1225/6), Þykkvibær (east; est. 1168), and Skriðuklaustr (east; est. 1493). There were also two nunneries, one in each bishopric, at Kirkjubær (south; est. 1186) and Reynistaður (north; est. 1295). All were either of the Augustinian or Benedictine orders and were all dissolved during the Reformation. See Clunies Ross 2005, 144; Hermann Pálsson 1962, 79; Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir 2008, 208.

the schools that were set up on chieftains' homesteads, as most of the chieftains were also church owners and/or managers, at times also priests, as noted above.[42] In any case, both ecclesiastics and secular leaders were trained there. Therefore, it should be remembered that in the early period of Christianity in Iceland, providing formal Christian education and religious power went hand in hand with high social status and political power.[43]

These circumstances considered, attention can now be paid to the information about time organization and measurement that is preserved in the earliest surviving Icelandic written sources mentioned previously, namely the collection of laws *Grágás* (1117–18), the historical account *Íslendingabók* (1122–33), and the computistical treatises *Rím I* or *Rímbegla* (ca. 1150–1200) and *Rím II* (12th–13th century). It should be noted that the information about time these texts convey is both of an official and of an unofficial nature, and it reflects both Christian and native views. First, the official native time-reckoning strategies and methods that existed in Iceland before Christianity, notably the Old Icelandic calendar, are examined. The official time strategies and structures that came with Christianity around the year 1000, especially the Julian calendar, are introduced subsequently. The fact that the texts in question were written after the introduction of Christianity, and that the manuscripts preserving them are often later reproductions of lost models, will also be considered.

The discussion of these primary tools is followed by a description of alternative methods of organizing and measuring time, both official and unofficial, which originated in the pre-Christian Icelandic past and continued to be used long after the Conversion. These alternative methods include the relationships between time reckoning, space and travel, the genealogical accounts which pervade Old Icelandic narratives, and relative and absolute dating methods. This presentation of dating systems in Early Iceland is accompanied by an analysis of the major European dating traditions from which they derived, or by which they were influenced.

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[42] Hermann 2017, 39.
[43] Clunies Ross 2005, 142; Viðar Pálsson 2018, 114–5.

1.2 Calendars and Time Units in Early Iceland

The investigation into the organization of time and reckoning methods in Early Iceland starts with a description of the characteristics and the history of the Old Icelandic calendar, along with an outline of the main time units by which it was organized. Some of these units did not have a consistent relation with each other (such as the incommensurable solar year and lunar months), and they were clearly also used independently of the calendar. The impact of the Julian calendar on the use of both the Old Icelandic calendar and the time units is also described.

Before delving into this subject in detail, it is helpful to situate the Icelandic time-reckoning methods within a broader pre-Christian Scandinavian framework. Two calendars that are supposed to have existed in pre-Christian Scandinavia are described as tentative origins for those used in Early Iceland. The matter is controversial, however, because the claim of common Scandinavian origins for the calendars in question is based mostly on information found in the Early Icelandic sources themselves, which is scarce and ambiguous in this regard, anyway. Indeed, not all scholars welcome such speculations, and the various standpoints are illustrated.

1.2.1 Calendars and Time Units in pre-Christian Scandinavia

It has been hypothesized that pre-Christian Scandinavians made use of two distinct calendars: a lunisolar calendar and a week calendar.[44] This assumption, however, has been seriously challenged on the grounds that there is lack of direct evidence of the existence of such calendars, while the existing indirect evidence is ambiguous or biased, as it is mediated through Christian lenses. These differing standpoints are briefly illustrated below, starting with that of the scholars who advocate for the existence of the two calendars in question.

According to the hypothesized lunisolar calendar, the year followed the sun's annual course, while the months were reckoned in accordance with the

[44] Nordberg 2006.

moon. However, a lunar month lasts for about 29.5 days, meaning twelve lunar months cover a period of only 354 days. This results in an approximate eleven-day shift of the lunar year in relation to the solar year, which lasts around 365.25 days. Within the calendar, this shift was compensated for by introducing a thirteenth intercalary month once every two or three years.[45] The day of departure for calculating the drift was likely the winter solstice, which therefore might also be the date by which the lunar year was joined to the solar year.[46] The actual insertion of this thirteenth month, however, would have been either at the time of the summer solstice or perhaps later in the summer, as the Old Icelandic—and perhaps Scandinavian—summer month-name *tvímánuðr* (lit., "two-/double month," spanning mid-August to mid-September) seems to suggest. The month's name itself may indicate that it was duplicated when necessary, namely when the solar year saw thirteen lunations instead of twelve.[47] Actually, all the indirect evidence we have of the existence of such a calendar consists in Old Icelandic and possibly Scandinavian lunar month names, and in information preserved in Old Icelandic Eddic poems.

Lunar month names are well-attested in Old Icelandic sources.[48] The best-established ones are the winter month names *ýlir, jólmánuðr, þorri,* and *góa*.[49] This suggests that they are the oldest lunar month names, possibly having a longer history. Indeed, they were most probably used across Scandinavia before the introduction of Christianity, and possibly even earlier.[50] The names *ýlir* and *jólmánuðr*, at least, can be compared to corresponding evidence in the Anglian lunisolar year that the Venerable Bede describes in detail in his *De Temporum Ratione* (8th century, ch. 15). Moreover, as Bede states that the Angles

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[45] Nordberg 2009, 721–2. According to Hastrup (1985, 37), it might be inserted every five or six years instead.

[46] More precisely, according to Nordberg (2009, 721–2), the lunar year was joined to the solar year following an old calendrical rule by which the first of the two Yule-months that were associated with the winter solstice, namely *ýlir* (the second being *jólmánuðr)*, "was always to extend *over* the period of the winter solstice, which means that the second Yule-month always started with the subsequent new moon *after* the winter solstice." Cf. section 1.2.4 below.

[47] Nordberg 2006, 152–3; Hastrup 1985, 37.

[48] This will be analysed in detail below (section 1.2.4).

[49] The form *góa* is a variant of *góa*, although it does not appear in Icelandic sources before the late 17th century. Árni Björnsson 1990b, 5; 1990a, 62.

[50] Nordberg 2006, 152.

used this year when still living on the continent, it is possible to date it back to the fifth century.[51]

Further evidence has been extrapolated from Old Icelandic sources, namely within the Eddic poems *Vǫluspá* (5–6), *Vafþrúðnismál* (22–27), and *Alvíssmál* (14–15), although the dating of such poetry is itself controversial.[52] In any case, *Vǫluspá* (5–6) recounts that the gods gave names to parts of the day and the waning moon, in order to count the years:

5. Sól varp sunnan,	5. The sun from the south,
sinni mána,	the moon's companion,
hendi inni hægri	her right hand cast
um himinjǫður;	about the heavenly horses.
sól þat né vissi	The sun knew not
hvar hon sali átti,	where she a dwelling had,
stjǫrnur þat né vissu	the moon knew not
hvar þær staði áttu,	what power he possessed,
máni þat né vissi	the stars knew not
hvat hann megins átti.	where they had a station.
6. Þá gengu regin ǫll	6. Then went the powers all
á røkstóla,	to their judgement-seats,
ginnheilǫg goð,	the all-holy gods,
ok um þat gættusk;	and thereon held council:
nótt ok niðjum	to night and to the waning moon
nǫfn um gáfu,	gave names;
morgin hétu	morn they named,
ok miðjan dag,	and mid-day,
undorn ok aptan,	afternoon and eve,
árum at telja.[53]	whereby to reckon years.[54]

[51] Nordberg 2006, 57–9; 152–3.
[52] Nordberg 2006, 152. Cf. Sonne 2016, 117–8. *Vǫluspá* and *Vafþrúðnismál*, at least, have been dated back to the Viking-age, more precisely to the 10th century, and *Alvíssmál* to the 11th century. Scardigli 2004, xii.
[53] Ed. Jónas Kristjánsson/Vésteinn Ólason 2014, 292–3.
[54] Trans. Thorpe 2004, 3.

Vafþrúðnismál (22–27) tells about how the daily movements of the sun and the moon allow humans to count the years (23) and how the gods created the waxing and the waning moon to the same end (25):[55]

Óðinn kvað:
22. "Segðu þat annat,
ef þitt æði dugir
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvaðan máni um kom
svá at ferr menn yfir,
eða sól it sama."

Gagnrad
22. Tell me secondly,
if thy wit suffices,
and thou, Vafthrudnir! knowest,
whence came the moon,
which over mankind passes,
and the sun likewise?

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
23. "Mundilfœri heitir,
hann er Mána faðir
ok svá Sólar it sama;
himin hverfa
þau skulu hverjan dag
ǫldum at ártali."

Vafthrudnir
23. Mundilfoeri hight he,
who the moon's father is,
and eke the sun's:
round heaven journey
each day they must,
to count years for men.

Óðinn kvað:
24. "Segðu þat it þriðja,
alls þik svinnan kveða
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvaðan dagr um kom,
sá er ferr drótt yfir,
eða nótt með niðum."

Gagnrad
24. Tell me thirdly,
since thou art called wise,
and if thou, Vafthrudnir! knowest,
whence came the day,
which over people passes,
and night with waning moons?

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
25. "Dellingr heitir,
hann er Dags faðir,
en Nótt var Nǫrvi borin;
ný ok nið
skópu nýt regin
ǫldum at ártali."

Vafthrudnir
25. Delling hight he
who the day's father is,
but night was of Nörvi born;
the new and waning moons
the beneficent powers created,
to count years for men.

[55] See also Ármann Jakobsson 2008 [2006].

Óðinn kvað:

26. "Segðu þat it fjórða,
alls þik fróðan kveða
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvaðan vetr um kom
eða varmt sumar
fyrst með fróð regin."

Vafþrúðnir kvað:

27. "Vindsvalr heitir,
hann er Vetrar faðir,
en Svásuðr Sumars."[56]

Gagnrad

26. Tell me fourthly,
since they pronounce thee sage,
and if thou Vafthrudnir! knowest,
whence winter came,
and warm summer
first among the wise gods?

Vafthrudnir

27. Vindsval hight he,
who winter's father is,
and Svasud summer's;
yearly they both
shall ever journey,
until the powers perish.[57]

Finally, in *Alvíssmál* (14–15) the moon is called *ártali*, or "year-counter":

Vingthor

13. "Segðu mér þat, Alvíss
- ǫll of rǫk fira
vǫrumk, dvergr, at vitir -
hversu máni heitir
sá er menn sjá
heimi hverjum í."

14. Tell me, Alvis!
for all men's concerns
I presume thee, dwarf, to know
how the moon is called,
which men see
in every world.

Alvis

14. "Máni heitir með mǫnnum
en mylinn með goðum,
kalla hverfanda hvél helju í,
skyndi jǫtnar
en skin dvergar,
kalla álfar ártala."[58]

15. Mani 'tis called by men,
but mylinn with the gods,
hverfanda hvel in Hel they call it,
skyndi the Jötuns,
but the dwarfs skin;
the Alfar name it artali.[59]

[56] Ed. Jónas Kristjánsson/Vésteinn Ólason 2014, 359–60.
[57] Trans. Thorpe 2004, 21–2.
[58] Ed. Jónas Kristjánsson/Vésteinn Ólason 2014, 440.
[59] Trans. Thorpe 2004, 107.

The hypothesis that the time-information just described, namely Old Icelandic and possibly Scandinavian lunar month names and information preserved in Eddic poetry, proves the existence of either a lunar or a lunisolar calendar in the pre-Christian North is poorly supported.[60] Scholars advocating for the existence of such a calendar have justified the lack of evidence, saying that "we cannot expect to find such descriptions, [anyway,] because the Nordic evidence is found in contexts in which the listeners were expected to understand the underlying meaning of the expressions without needing additional information."[61] While this is controversial, there can be confidence that the moon, at least, was used as a pacer.[62]

Controversy surrounds the origins and the characteristics of the pre-Christian Scandinavian week calendar as well. Some of the researchers who favour its existence suppose that it may have developed from contact between the Germanic peoples and Roman culture, which allegedly occurred at the end of the Roman Iron Age (around AD 400) or during the Migration Period.[63]

Among the principal time-reckoning systems that the Romans used was the Julian calendar, which had been instituted by Julius Caesar in 45/46 BC and was based entirely on the sun's annual course.[64] After circulating in Europe as an organizational tool of the Roman empire, it continued to be used throughout the Middle Ages in administrative and ecclesiastical circles. The Nordic countries adopted it via Christianity in the mid-twelfth century, but they may have already been acquainted with it long before converting to Christianity.[65] It has been maintained that parts of this calendar had been appropriated by Germanic people at the time of the earliest contacts with the Romans, notably weekday names and the seven-day week, with the seven-day week becoming the basic unit for the development of a Nordic week-year.[66]

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[60] Ginzel 1914, 69; Nordberg 2006, 152.
[61] Nordberg 2006, 152.
[62] Sonne 2016, 118.
[63] See Nordberg 2006, 149; Beckman 1934, 16.
[64] Nordberg 2006, 148. For a historical note on this calendar, see Whitrow 1988, 66–7.
[65] Nordberg 2006, 148.
[66] The seven-day week can be traced further back to at least the Sumerians and the Babylonians. Whitrow 1988, 68.

Others maintain, however, that the seven-day week came to Scandinavia only later with Christianity.[67]

The Scandinavian week-year calendar is supposed to have been divided into four quarters, but this is also surrounded by uncertainty. Two parallel systems allegedly developed to determine the quarters: the first followed the astronomical solstices and equinoxes, and then off-set each quarter by four weeks after the respective solstice or equinox, probably for climatological reasons.[68] The second system for dividing the year into quarters was to fix the beginning of the quarter to important dates and/or periods in the year, namely "the Winter Nights," "Midwinter" (or "Midwinter Night"), "the First Day(s) of Summer," and "Midsummer." The exact dates and/or periods in question vary in the sources, likely because they initially consisted of periods of more than one day.[69] This latter system for dividing the year into quarters was in all probability pre-Christian and unique to the Nordic countries, in that it seems to have developed from the natural and economic conditions in the Nordic region.[70] The period of the Winter Nights, for example, occurring in mid-October, was characterized by a relative abundance of food, resulting from the harvest and slaughter that had taken place over the previous weeks.[71] It is not surprising, then, that great celebrations often take place at this time of year in the sources: an annual festival cycle connected with food supplies and labour for most economic sectors became well established in the Nordic

[67] E.g., Ginzel 1914, 58, 69; Sonne 2016, 117–8; 2014. A five-day and a fourteen-day week have also been hypothesized for the Germanic peoples. Hastrup 1985, 251; Ginzel 1914, 58. Cf. section 1.2.5.

[68] Nordberg 2006, 36. Cf. the displacement of the solstices as they are given in the Old Icelandic text *Stjørnu-Odda tala,* discussed here in section 1.3.1. After the introduction of Christianity, fixed dates for solstices and equinoxes as given in the Julian calendar were followed, which was clearly easier, although such dates were incorrectly calculated in astronomical terms, namely at 25/12, 25/3, 24/6, and 24/9. Nordberg 2006, 149.

[69] Nordberg 2006, 150. Among the sources in question are folktales, sagas, provincial laws, and rune-staffs. As to the runic calendar tradition referred to, it should be noted that it originated from the Roman calendar tradition that was preserved and developed within Christianity. This runic tradition originated in Sweden in the latter part of the 13th century in order to spread the knowledge of the Julian calendar that was used by Christians. See Ginzel 1914, 70–6. Evidence of this runic calendar tradition has been attested throughout Scandinavia, but none has been found in Iceland.

[70] Nordberg 2006, 150.

[71] Langeslag 2015, 21.

region in pre-Christian times.[72] In any case, it is difficult to prove that a week-year calendar which was divided into quarters in the ways described was ever used by pre-Christian Scandinavians.

Thus, an allowance must be made for the fact that there may have been neither a lunisolar nor a week calendar in pre-Christian Scandinavia. Some scholars, such as Sonne, maintain that "no evidence suggests the timing of activities by the equinoxes, the solstices, weeks of varying lengths, or any attempts at constructing a lunisolar year" in pre-Christian Scandinavia.[73] The insufficient evidence to prove the existence of a pre-Christian lunisolar calendar in Scandinavia (aside from some form of lunar tracking), alongside the poor evidence for a week-year, leads Sonne to conclude that:

> social activities were temporally organized in accordance with the lunar phases and seasonal changes relevant for agricultural and pastoral activities. To these we should also add the general influence of the shift between day and night. More localized changes in nature […] may also have marked the time for social activities – such as, perhaps, noticeable differences in sea levels due to strong tides relevant for seafaring.[74]

According to these views, direct observation of astronomical and natural phenomena initially sufficed to reckon time in pre-Christian Scandinavia. Only later were time-tools, such as calendars and time-reckoning instruments, introduced and employed, while direct observation became less practiced. These are of course general and preliminary conclusions, but ones which are sufficient to introduce the reckoning of time in Early Iceland. Both official and unofficial time markers can be found in Early Icelandic sources, meaning both calendars and alternative time-reckoning systems derived from direct observation of astronomical and natural phenomena. Now the investigation turns to a description of the Old Icelandic calendar and the time units that were used specifically in Early Iceland, while an analysis of the alternative time-reckoning systems follows.

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[72] Nordberg 2006, 153; Langeslag 2015, 2. Cf. Gunnell 2000, 121–6.
[73] Sonne 2016, 121.
[74] Sonne 2016, 121.

1.2.2 The Old Icelandic Calendar and the Arrival of the Julian Calendar

The earliest Icelandic legal, historical, and computistical sources (*Grágás*, *Íslendingabók,* and *Rím I* and *II*) preserve information about a civil calendar that originated in Iceland before Christianity was introduced into the country, namely the Old Icelandic calendar. This calendar was likely established in AD 930 along with the *Alþingi*, the yearly national assembly, and was used for both official and administrative purposes and, arguably, by farmers and seamen as well. With subsequent modifications, it continued to be used until as recently as the early twentieth century, at least in rural Iceland.[75]

Among the main characteristics of this calendar is the fact that the year was 364 days, a uniquely Icelandic feature, divided into 52 weeks of seven days each.[76] The weeks were arranged in two *misseri* (both sg. and pl. for "season," deriving from *miss*, "alternation," and only later indicating a "half-year" proper). These *misseri* were *vetr* (winter) and *sumar* (summer), each consisting of 26 weeks, for a yearly total of twelve months of 30 days each with a remainder of four extra days, named the *aukanætur* (lit., "extra nights"), and inserted at midsummer.[77] It should be noted that autumn and spring were probably culturally acknowledged as seasons in these early times, and they were allegedly used for astronomical and for some administrative purposes. However, they did not have any function within the Old Icelandic calendar itself.[78]

The earliest source preserving part of this calendrical information is the collection of laws, *Grágás* (Ia, p. 37), the core of which has been dated to 1117–18. *Íslendingabók*, the historical source from 1122–33 that is examined in detail below (ch. 2), also preserves important information about this calendar and its first reform (ch. 4 of the text itself). Finally, *Rím I* (second half of the 12th century) and *Rím II* (12th and 13th centuries) also convey information about this calendar, although such information is only a minor part of the works,

[75] Janson 2010, 10; Árni Björnsson 1995, 8; 1980, 8.
[76] Janson 2010, 13.
[77] More precisely, they were inserted after the third summer month, *sólmánuðr*, just before midsummer. This information is recorded in *Íslendingabók* (ch. 4). Cf. this text, sections 1.2.3–1.2.5, and 2.2.3.
[78] Janson 2010, 3; Langeslag 2015, 3.

consisting mainly in the adjustments made between the Old Icelandic calendar and the Julian calendar in the mid-twelfth century.[79]

A reform, probably the first, of this calendar is described in detail in *Íslendingabók* (ch. 4) and was made around 955–60 to correct for the fact that the calendar year was more than a day shorter than the solar year (364 vs. 365.25 days). Thus, an extra week, which goes under the name of *sumarauki* ("summer extension") or *lagningarvika* ("extra week") was to be inserted every seven years in the summer, after the *aukanætur*. Following this reform, the average length of a year became 365 days, which is still too short in relation to the sun's annual course of approximately 365.25 days.[80] Subsequent reforms of the intercalation rule were probably made after 960. This was both in order to guarantee that the seasons corresponded to the calendar and because Iceland became Christian around AD 1000, at which point the Julian calendar was introduced, so adjustments were made between the two calendars. However, nothing is known about the functioning of the Old Icelandic calendar during this in-between period.[81]

Additional information about the Old Icelandic calendar is conveyed by *Grágás* (Ia, pp. 83, 112, 209). The text says that it was the duty of the *lǫgsǫgumaðr* ("lawspeaker") in charge to announce, at the closing of the *Alþingi*, the calendar for the year to come, along with relevant information, such as whether it was a year in which the *sumarauki* had to be inserted.[82] Should he have needed help, he could have consulted learned men, notably bishops after Iceland was Christianized. Thereafter, it was the duty of each *goði* ("chieftain") to share the same information at the *leið* ("autumn assembly") that was held in his own district.[83] This testifies to the great importance of the calendar from both a legal and an administrative point of view.

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[79] Janson 2010, 10.
[80] Hastrup 1985, 27. According to Janson (2010, 1), though, the extra week was inserted when needed, whereas Árni Björnsson (1995, 7) maintains that it was added every five or six years. This latter hypothesis, however, probably applies to the calendar at a later stage, i.e., after it was coordinated with the Julian calendar in the 12th century. See also section 2.2.3 below.
[81] Janson 2010, 13.
[82] See Jón Jóhannesson 1952, 79.
[83] Hastrup 1985, 25–7; Janson 2010, 13; see also Jón Jóhannesson 1952, 79.

The conversion to Christianity around the year 1000 was accompanied by the introduction of new traditions and methods to reckon time, which clearly had an impact on existing ones.[84] Among these new methods were not only the Julian calendar, but also the new art of *computus*, "the ecclesiastical arithmetic combined with astronomical calculations on which the Church's calendar and chronology were based."[85] Sometime during the mid-twelfth century, adjustments were made between the Old Icelandic calendar and the Julian calendar, and it is probable that they were not met unfavourably, as the Old Icelandic calendar still had problems despite the reform in AD 955–60. More precisely, the base untis of the week and the *misseri* were preserved in the Old Icelandic calendar,[86] probably for their legal significance, but it

> was linked to the Julian calendar by adopting its mean length of 365¼ days per year; this was effected by the intercalation of 5 leap weeks in 28 years [rather than four weeks, because of the leap years in the Julian calendar], and the calendars were linked so that the First Day of Summer always fell in the week 9–11 April.[87]

Further adjustments were made in regard to festivities. Christian holidays and Saints' days were included in the Old Icelandic calendar, and part of the rules governing this is preserved in both *Rím I* and *Rím II*.[88] In some other instances, pagan feasts were endowed with Christian meaning, or simply replaced by Christian ones, which had already been a tendency since the Conversion.[89] In any case, no drastic changes were made during the coordination

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[84] Sverrir Jakobsson 2005, 87.
[85] Jónas Kristjánsson 2007, 133. The art of *computus* is described in section 1.5.2.2.
[86] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1964, 348–9.
[87] Janson 2010, 14–5.
[88] Janson 2010, 38–41.
[89] Information about such mergers appears, for example, in Snorri Sturluson's *Hákonar saga góða* (ch. 13, in *Heimskringla* I), and in *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sǫgum* (ch. 19), a compendium about the lives of Norwegian kings written in Norway around 1190. In the latter text, it is said that King Óláfr Tryggvason, the Norwegian king who imposed Christianity in the North, *felldi blót ok blótdrykkjur ok lét í stað koma í vild við lýðinn hátíðadrykkjur jól ok páskar, Jóansmessu ok […] Míkjálsmessu* (ed. Bjarni Einarsson 1985, 22) / "removed heathen sacrifices and drinking connected with the sacrifices, and instead got the common people to take up festive drinking at Christmas and Easter, St John's Eve and… Michaelmass." Trans. Gunnell, in Gunnell 2000, 123.

process of the two calendars, and this is probably not only because the Old Icelandic calendar still had problems, but also and notably because

> many of the laws of the Icelandic Republic were linked into the time-frame of the old almanac [i.e. the Old Icelandic calendar], so a changeover would have necessitated revision of laws. […] Nor was there any urgent need, for administrative or religious reasons, to abolish the old almanac at once.[90]

The coordination process was allegedly complete by the year 1200.[91]

The adjusted Old Icelandic calendar remained the main calendar for civil use for centuries, while the Christian Church allegedly continued to use the Julian calendar as it was. More precisely, "the Church used the Julian calendar, [while] the Icelandic calendar, combined with Christian holidays and saints' days (determined by the Julian calendar), continued to be the main calendar for civil use for centuries."[92]

1.2.3 *Misseri*

It is certain that the Old Icelandic unit of time *misseri* was a primary time-indicator in medieval Iceland. It designated either of the two seasons of winter and summer (*vetr* and *sumar*), which corresponded roughly to a half-year each.

This bipartition of the year was an inheritance from the Germanic past.[93] It particularly characterized the Old Norse cultural sphere, as evidenced by the many instances in Old Icelandic sources, especially legal and computistical ones, where the two half-years are used as a unit of time. Furthermore, the popularity of the bipartition of the year in Early Iceland is supported by the fact that significant celebrations were held at the beginning of each *misseri*, that is, *sumarmál* and *vetrnætr*.[94] The *vetrnætr*, for example, were a

[90] Árni Björnsson 1995, 8; 1990a, 99.
[91] Árni Björnsson 1995, 7–8.
[92] Janson 2010, 15.
[93] Tacitus (*Germania*, ch. 26) mentions a tripartition of the year among Germanic tribes, though, including spring. However, the claim is not confirmed by other sources and it has been maintained that "the account is based on a misunderstanding, a misrepresentation, or the customs of an unrepresentative tribe." Langeslag 2015, 6–8. Cf. Ginzel 1914, 56.
[94] Hastrup 1985, 26.

liminal period of three nights that celebrated the end of summer and the beginning of winter in mid-October. This transition from one *misseri* to the next was marked ritually with sacrificial activities, most notably the *dísablót*, a sacrifice held in honour of the *dísir*.[95] But the transition from one *misseri* to the next was marked legally as well. This information is preserved in *Grágás*, where "we find *sumarmál* and *fyrsti vetrar dagur* as terms for the procedure of most legal affairs."[96]

The *misseri* were central to the construction of the Old Icelandic calendar, in which they corresponded to a half-year each, while the summer *misseri* included the four additional days known as *aukanætr*.[97] No evidence appears, however, as to which of the two *misseri* was regarded as coming first in the year. Some scholars support the assumption that the year started on the first day of winter, on the grounds that a man's age was counted not in years, but in winters, a custom which is very much represented in the sagas.[98] Others maintain that it was with summer that the year started, the beginning of summer being equivalent to a "new year," even though there was no numerical New Year as such, but this assumption is not well supported.[99] Other scholars

[95] Instances of this sacrifice appear, for example, in *Egils saga* (ch. 44), *Víga-Glúms saga* (ch. 6), and *Ynglinga saga* (ch. 29). Árni Björnsson 1990b, 8. The *dísir* were female figures or minor goddesses who bore close similarities to the figures of the *fylgjur* and the *valkyrjur*. They could be personal, protective spirits, at times associated with fertility and childbirth, or they could be warriors. However, there is little evidence supporting each of these assumptions, and the nature and functions of these figures remain obscure. See Gunnell 2000, 128–30; Chiesa Isnardi 2008 [1991], 301–3.

[96] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 2006, 5. Significant instances of the importance of the beginning of summer for legal procedures appear in the Inheritance Section, concerning the relinquishing of property (*Grágás* Ia, p. 234), and in the Land-claims Section, concerning the right of pre-emption (*Grágás* Ib, p. 100). As to the beginning of winter, significant instances appear in the Christian Laws Section, regarding the removal of bodies and bones from a Church (*Grágás* Ia, p. 12); in the Assembly Procedure Section, regarding the wages of household men (*Grágás* Ia, p. 129); in the Land-claims Section, regarding the use of woodland owned in someone else's land (*Grágás* Ib, p. 111); and in the Hire of Property Section, concerning the treatment of rams (*Grágás* Ib, p. 153).

[97] The derivative term *misseristal*, "counting of *misseri*," indicating the computation of the seasons, eventually came to designate the calendar itself.

[98] Ginzel 1914, 58. This custom applies to livestock as well, and it is curious that such usage is still common nowadays.

[99] Árni Björnsson 1995, 6, 14; 1990a, 70; Hastrup 1985, 31.

still have advanced the hypothesis that the year started in the middle of summer, at midsummer (*miðsumar*), thus on the first day of the fourth summer month, itself also named *miðsumar* or *heyannir*, "hay-making" (see section 1.2.4 below). The simple and intriguing reason for this is that the *aukanætur* and the *sumarauki* were inserted just before then, which may indicate that the *aukanætur* and the *sumarauki* closed the year.[100] Finally, some other scholars have maintained that the year instead started in autumn, as appears to be the case in *Íslendingabók*. In this work, Ari Þorgilsson starts the year on 1 September, a practice he may have acquired from the work of the Venerable Bede.[101]

On the whole, though, the question concerning which of the two *misseri* came first in the year has been dismissed, as the fact that two half-years composed a year does not seem to have been a primary organizational tool. And while the term *ár* (year) existed on its own, it was "not construed simply as duration, but rather as a plenitude of some concrete content," standing mainly for "harvest," "crop," or "abundance."[102] In *Íslendingabók, ár* is sometimes used as a temporal unit, and *Rím I* (and *Rím II*) explicitly state that "two *misseri* are called a year," but these few instances are not themselves evidence of the fact that such an understanding was common in the early days.[103] Indeed, for the common people at least, the concept of the year as a purely temporal unit was probably lacking. It was likely restricted to the cultural elites, and it is probable that it was derived from Christianity at a later stage.

Finally, it should be noted that Christianity might have also promoted the use of the quadripartition of the year into four seasons, which also appears in the sources, notably in the sagas. It is probable that spring and autumn were not acknowledged much before the Conversion, as their absence within the Old Icelandic calendar suggests, though they seem to have been used for some astronomical and administrative purposes. In any case, they were not precisely

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[100] "Ef árið var reiknað frá miðsumarsdegi myndi það skýra hvers vegna aukanóttum og sumarauka var skotið inn á undan þeim degi, þ.e. í árslók." Þorsteinn Sæmundsson 2010.
[101] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 2006, 5.
[102] Gurevich 1969, 48; 1985 [1972], 95; Hastrup 1985, 26.
[103] Janson 2010, 3.

defined in these early times.[104] An attempt to define them was made only later by Snorri Sturluson in his *Edda* (ca. 1220):

> *Frá jafndægri er haust til þess er sól sezk í eykðarstað. Þá er vetr til jafndægris, þá er vár til fardaga, þá er sumar til jafndægris.*[105]
>
> It is autumn from the equinox till the time when the sun sets three hours and a half after noon; then winter endures till the equinox; then it is spring till the moving-days; then summer till the equinox.[106]

Still, this definition is somewhat technical, and it is unlikely that the common people understood the seasons in such a way.

1.2.4 Months

Sources from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, notably *Rím I* (especially *Bócarbót*), *Rím II*, and *Snorra Edda* provide a variety of month names.[107] These names derive mainly from social and economic activities, from a notion of seasons in general, or they originate from prehistoric times, given in the following table:[108]

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[104] Janson 2010, 3.
[105] *Skáldskaparmál* I, ch. 63, ed. Faulkes 1998, 99.
[106] Brodeur 2006, 224–5.
[107] For example, in Snorra Edda we read that: *Haustmánuðr heitir inn næsti fyrir vetr, fyrstr í vetri heitir gormánuðr, þá er frermánuðr, þá er hrútmánuðr, þá er þorri, þá góa, þá einmánuðr, þá gaukmánuðr ok sáðtíð, þá eggtíð ok stekktíð, þá er sólmánuðr ok selmánuðr, þá eru heyannir, þá er kornskurðarmánuðr* (Skáldskaparmál I, ch. 63, ed. Faulkes 1998, 99) / "The month next before winter is called Harvest-Month; the first in winter is the Month of Cattle-Slaughter; then Freezing Month, then Rain-Month, then the Month of Winter's Wane, then Góa; then Single Month, then Cuckoo-Month and Seed-Time, then Egg-time and Lamb-Weaning-Time; then come Sun-Month and Pasture Month, then Haying-Season; then Reaping Month" (trans. Brodeur 2006, 225).
[108] The table is reproduced, with modifications, from Hastrup (1985, 41). Hastrup in her turn built on Nilsson (1920, 297–8) and Beckman (1934, 32–3). The month names that appear in the table mainly reflect Beckman's study, and the names in bold are the ones he found in more than one source. The month names in brackets are those added by Nilsson.

	Economic Activities	Natural Seasons	Others
Sumar (starting mid-April)			
1	*sáðtíð* "seed/sowing-time" *(harpa)* ?		*gaukmánuðr* "cuckoo/snipe month" (found only in *Snorra Edda*)
2	*eggtíð* "egg-time" *stekktíð* "lamb-/fold-time" *(skerpla)* ?		
3	*selmánuðr* "shieling/upland pasture-month"	*sólmánuðr* "sun-month"	
4	*heyannir* "hay-time"	***miðsumar*** "mid-summer"	
5	(*heyannir*) "hay-time" *kornskurðarmánuðr* "corn-cutting/harvest-month"		***tvímánuðr*** "double month"
6	(*kornskurðarmánuðr*) "corn-cutting month" *haustmánuðr* "harvest-/autumn-month"		
Vetr (starting mid-October)			
1	***gormánuðr*** "slaughtering-month"		
2		***frermánuðr*** "frost-month"	***ýlir*** (cognate of yule)
3	*mörsugr* "fat-/marrow-sucker" *hrútmánuðr* "ram-/mating season-month"		***jólmánuðr*** "yule-month"
4		*miðvetr* "mid-winter"	***þorri*** ?
5			***góa*** ?
6			***einmánuðr*** "one-month"

Table 1. The Variety of Month Names in Early Iceland

The month names given in bold in Table 1, which are mainly winter month names, appear in more than one source. This may reflect the fact that they were used more frequently than the other month names, while also possibly having a longer history. Indeed, they are probably the oldest month names, confirmed by the fact that some of them have parallels throughout Scandinavia, notably *ýlir*, *jólmánuðr*, *þorri,* and *góa*. However, it is a paradox "that the best-established months are the least certain in meaning" or

etymology.[109] It seems probable, though, that they are old lunar month names, at times reflecting old pagan rituals. *Ýlir* may originally have constituted a single or a double month surrounding *jól*, or Yule, which was celebrated in pre-Christian times by several Germanic peoples. This ancient heathen feast or festival eventually merged with Christmas, and the sources preserve information about the merger.[110] On the contrary, very little is known about *jól* prior to the merger, although the sources seem to agree on the fact that it was associated with the winter solstice, and that it lasted for thirteen days.[111] *Jólmánuðr* was clearly the "month of Yule" itself, and was thus also associated with both the feast or festival of Yule and the winter solstice. The terms *jól* and *ýlir* are cognates, and the two month names derived from them constituted an important pair of months.[112] As for *þorri* and *góa*, their meaning is obscure, although the derivative terms *Þorrablót* and *Góiblót* (*blót* meaning "worship" including "sacrifice") suggest that these months may have originally been of some ritual importance.[113] In *Orkneyinga saga* (ch. 1), written around 1200, there is mention of the "mythical king Þorri, who held a sacrificial feast at every Midwinter, and his daughter Góa, for which he held a feast a month later."[114] Finally, *einmánuðr*, the last month of winter, is generally believed to indicate the fact that "one month is left before summer."[115]

Among the summer month names which need some clarification is *tvímánuðr*, the fifth month of summer, lasting from approximately mid-August

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[109] Hastrup 1985, 40.
[110] Nordberg 2006, 147–8. Information about the merger appears in Snorri Sturluson's *Hákonar saga góða* (ch. 13) and in *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sogum* (ch. 19. Cf. n. 89 above).
[111] E.g., *Orkneyinga saga*, ch. 93 (ed. Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1965, 247).
[112] Hastrup 1985, 38–9. Cf. Nordberg 2009, 721–2 and n. 46 above. Examples of the use of *jól* as a month are manifold in Old Icelandic literature. It appears as *iolmanaðr* in ch. 5 of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (AM 310 4to, ca. 1250–75) and as *iolmanadr* in *Rím II* (13th century, ed. Beckman/Kålund 1914–16, 169). *Ýlir* is less attested. It appears in *Bócarbót* (*Rím* I, ca. 1150–1200, ed. Beckman/Kålund 1914–16, 78). See also *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*.
[113] Hastrup 1985, 39–40.
[114] Janson 2010, 9. Examples of *þorri* and *góa* also appear in *Bócarbót* (*Rím* I, ca. 1150–1200, ed. Beckman/Kålund 1914–16, 78) and in ch. 63 of *Snorra Edda* (*Skáldskaparmál* I, ed. Faulkes 1998, 99. See n. 107 above). *Góa* appears further in ch. 77 of *Óláfs saga helga* (*Heimskringla* II) and in some *Íslendingasögur*, such as *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* (ch. 3), *Flóamanna saga* (ch. 22) and *Hænsa-Þóris saga* (ch. 4). Árni Björnsson 1990b, 5; *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*. The form *góa* is also known as a variant of *góa*, but it does not seem to appear in Icelandic literature before the late 17th century. Árni Björnsson 1990b, 5.
[115] Hastrup 1985, 40, building on Nilsson 1920, 297.

to mid-September. Its literal meaning of "two-" or "double-month," has been interpreted in different ways: It has been taken to indicate that it was the second-from-last month of summer, or that two months remained until the beginning of winter.[116] More intriguingly, it has also been thought to have been an old lunar month which could duplicate, notably when the solar year saw thirteen lunations instead of twelve.[117]

The remaining month names, which are mainly names of summer months, are more variable but clearer in meaning, and reflect mostly economic activities and the natural seasons (columns 1 and 2 in Table 1). Interestingly, such "semantic systems" were not static, but were constantly moving in history. Indeed, already for the Germanic people, the months, besides being tied to lunations, bore names which reflected the rhythms of nature and the succession of tasks to be accomplished during the year, notably agricultural ones.[118] Thus, for example, they called July the "month of mowing," September the "month of sowing," and February the "month of branches." Later in the Middle Ages, when attempts were made to combine these "peasants' calendars" with more official ones, such as the Julian calendar, some difficulties were encountered, because months bore different names in different places, or the same name could indicate one month in one place and another month in another place. Thus, for example, June was called both "the sunny month" and "the time for going up to summer pasture," while the "month of tilling" was August in some places and March or April in others.[119] A similar logic was in place in medieval Iceland. For example, the fourth month of summer, corresponding to the period from mid-July to mid-August in the Julian calendar, was called either *miðsumar* or *heyannir*, namely "mid-summer" or "haytime" month.[120] *Heyannir* itself, then, could designate either the fourth or the fifth month of summer. Similarly, *haustmánuðr*, the "harvest-/autumn-month," occurred when crops could be harvested: "if time was not ripe for harvest, *haustmánuðr* had not occurred."[121] Thus, Old Icelandic month names may

[116] Respectively, Beckman 1934, 33 and Nilsson 1920, 298.
[117] Hastrup 1985, 37; Valtýr Guðmundsson 1924, 88.
[118] Gurevich 1969, 47; 1985 [1972], 94.
[119] Gurevich 1985 [1972], 94–5.
[120] Medieval Icelanders relied greatly on animal husbandry. Thus, they primarily cultivated hay, especially as winter fodder for their livestock. Langeslag 2015, 18.
[121] Hastrup 1985, 44.

seem unstable or imprecise, but it seems to be so because of the endeavour to translate the same names, deriving from culture-specific criteria, into the external scale of the Julian months.[122] However, "if we take an internal view, there is nothing inherently imprecise in the Icelandic conception of 'months.'"[123]

It has been maintained that in pre-Christian Iceland it was initially sufficient to measure "the difference in days pertaining to the change of the seasons," with solar movement, and "the progression of [the] economies by the phases of the moon," with lunar months.[124] The lunar months, however, at some point started to be abandoned, because they were variable and impractical in the Icelandic summer due to the bright nights and the fact that the full moon is very low in the sky at high latitudes. For these reasons, reckoning time by using weeks, which will be described below (section 1.2.5), "replaced the lunar months [initially only] during the summer, while the winter months were kept and only later, and not completely, were replaced by the week reckoning. This would explain why the names of the winter months are used much more than the summer months" in the sources.[125] It is likely that this transition was initiated with the establishment of the *Alþingi* in AD 930, when the Old Icelandic calendar was allegedly established. It was probably also at that time that the calendar was "reorganized" and the months were not only defined by week-reckoning instead of the moon, but they also came to be fixed to 30 days each.[126] The earliest evidence for this appears in *Íslendingabók* (ch. 4) and in the Canon Law Section of *Grágás* (Ia, p. 37), both of which have been dated to 1122–33. Neither text preserves lunar month names, while both texts mention the division of the year into twelve months of 30 days each. They do not, however, state explicitly when such a division was first made. According to Guðmundur Björnsson, the text in *Grágás* is a later interpolation to the collection.[127] He concludes that it is unlikely that the twelve-month division was

[122] Hastrup 1985, 44.
[123] Hastrup 1985, 44.
[124] Árni Björnsson 1980, 8.
[125] Janson 2010, 14, building on Þorkell Þorkelsson (1936, 46–70).
[126] Janson 2010, 14, building on Þorkell Þorkelsson (1936, 46–70).
[127] Guðmundur Björnsson 1915, 279.

made before the twelfth century; or it was, regardless, a device of and for learned men of the twelfth century, such as Ari Þorgilsson himself.[128]

Bócarbót (*Rím I*, 76–80), dating from the second half of the twelfth century, also testifies to the translation of month names into the new system of twelve months of 30 days each.[129] Most of the summer months there are numbered, rather than named:[130]

Economic Activities	**Natural Seasons**	**Others**
	Sumar	
1		***sumar*** "summer" ***fyrsti manoðr*** "first month"
2		***annar manoðr*** "second month"
3		***þriþi manoðr*** "third month"
4	*miðsumar* "mid-summer"	***fjorþi manoðr*** "fourth month"
5		*tvímánuðr* "double month"
6		***setti manoðr*** "sixth month"
	Vetr	
1 *gormánuðr* "slaughtering-month"		***vetr*** "winter"
2		*ýlir* (cognate with *yule*)
3 *mörsugr* "fat-/marrow-sucker"		*jólmánuðr* "yule-month"
4	*miðvetr* "mid-winter"	*þorri* ?
5		*góa* ?
6		*einmánuðr* "one-month"

Table 2. Reformed Month Names

[128] Guðmundur Björnsson 1915, 279–80.
[129] Hastrup 1985, 30.
[130] Hastrup 1985, 31; Janson 2010, 7. The month names in bold in Table 2 are those that are newly included in this text. The extra month names that appear in columns 1 and 2 are added from other *Rím*-texts (both *Rím I* and *II*). Hastrup 1985, 31.

Finally, it should be noted that, at least among laymen, the Latin names of months, January to December, did not come to be used until the eighteenth century.[131]

The various month names that have been presented above are evidence that different conceptual systems were in place in Early Iceland for determining the months. However, it has been maintained that, although "months were part of the conceptual time of the Icelanders, […] they never entered popular usage."[132] For example, "although the date of a man's birth would be recorded in the church register by month and day, he himself would know that his birth had taken place on a certain day of a certain week of summer or winter."[133] It is probably true that some of these month names were only "academic accomplishments," learned constructions from the twelfth century which were never really used by the common people. Nevertheless, the popular origins which the majority of the names suggest, indicate that the month as a unit of time must have been widely used, at least as regards lunar months.

1.2.5 Weeks

The seven-day week was a basic unit of time in Early Iceland and was central to the organization of the year in the Old Icelandic calendar, as discussed above. The arrangement of the calendar into weeks allowed not only for dating or referring to specific events, but also for measuring intervals of time.

The Old Icelandic calendar had a whole number of weeks, namely 52, or 53 when the *sumarauki* was inserted. The weeks were arranged in two *misseri* of *sumar* and *vetr*, each consisting of 26 weeks, the *sumarauki* being added in the summer half-year, as its name suggests. The weeks of each half-year, then, were numbered from one to 26, or 27, which served time-reckoning and dating purposes and went under the name of *viknatal*, or the "counting of weeks." Week-reckoning was used most notably to date or make associations with

[131] Árni Björnsson 1990a, 64.
[132] Hastrup 1985, 40, building on Guðmundur Björnsson 1915, 275.
[133] Árni Björnsson 1995, 8; 1990a, 100.

particular events or to determine time spans. In the first half of each *misseri* (the first 13 weeks), the week count would be pegged to the beginning of the season. For instance, *Grágás* (Ia, p. 37) relates that the *Alþingi* was to take place each year "when 10 weeks of summer have passed" (*.x. vikvr scolo vera af svmri er meN koma til alþingis*, i.e., between 18 and 24 June). In the second half of the *misseri*, namely after Midsummer or Midwinter, weeks were counted backwards from the end of the *misseri*, or the number of weeks remaining in the season was given. For example, *Grágás* (Ia, pp. 111–2) informs us that the *leið* ("autumn assembly") should be held no later than "when eight weeks are left of summer" (*...aðr lifa viii. vicor sumars*). In this way, week-numbers were kept small, up to 13 or 14, although there were other possibilities.[134] As the examples above illustrate, week-reckoning was used to date or refer to specific events by using the *misseri* as well, and not other time units, such as the months. At times, names of weekdays were also given, such as in *Grágás* (Ia, p. 37) and the case of the first day of summer, which was to take place on a Thursday (*en fimti dagr vikv scal vera fyrstr i svmri*).[135]

Initially, there was no specific day that began the week. In *Rím II* (128), though, it is specified that: "Sunday is first in the week in day reckoning and in *misseri* reckoning [i.e., the Old Icelandic calendar], but various days in month reckoning" (*Drottins dagr er fystur i viku at daga tali ok misseris tali, en ymser dagar at manadar tali*). This, however, should be attributed to Christian influence, noting that it has been maintained that the seven-day week itself might have been introduced with Christianity (see section 1.2.1).[136] On the contrary, some other scholars maintain that pre-Christian Icelanders might have already been familiar with the seven-day week, as the Old Icelandic calendar suggests.[137] It has also been hypothesized that pre-Christian Icelanders were

[134] For example, Janson (2010, 5) points out that "weeks were sometimes counted from Midsummer or Midwinter, or from some other day."
[135] See also Janson 2010, 5; Hastrup 1985, 24; Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1997, 107.
[136] Indeed, according to Bilfinger (1899–1901, 38), it is unlikely that the seven-day week could have been known by Icelanders before the Conversion.
[137] E.g., Beckman 1934, 16; Árni Björnsson 1990a, 66. Cf. section 1.2.1 above.

familiar with an ancient five-day week—probably the unit of a common Scandinavian calendar—and also with a fourteen-day week, which may have been used by Germanic peoples to determine court deadlines.[138]

1.2.6 Days

The day, *dagr* or *sólarhringr* (lit., "sun-ring/course") was also a basic temporal unit in Early Iceland. Usually, if the solar year was used as a base, the day was thought to begin in the morning, which is attested in both *Grágás* (Ia, p. 37) and *Bócarbót* (*Rím I*, 78). Conversely, the day was thought to begin at sunset if the moon was used as a pacer.[139] As to periods of days, they were often calculated in "nights," as had been customary amongst Germanic peoples.[140]

Customarily, the day was divided "not into hours of equal length, but into hours of day, from sunrise to sunset, and hours of night, from sunset to sunrise. That is to say, in summer, the hours of day were longer than the hours of night; in winter vice versa."[141] Both parts went under the name of *dægr*, and whether this unit refers to day or night in the sources must be determined according to context. In the context of sailing, for instance, the term usually indicates a period of 24 hours, as sailing was done mostly in high summer, when the period between high-latitude sunset and sunrise is minimal.[142] At some point, though, the *dægr* came to measure exactly 12 hours, and this information is preserved in *Bócarbót* (*Rím I*, 76).[143] Thus, people would easily use the expression "two *dægr*" to refer to one twenty-four-hour day.

Besides the *dægr*, there existed other units of time which measured intervals shorter than the day. For example, there were *dagsmǫrk* ("day-marks"),

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[138] Valtýr Guðmundsson 1924, 88, and Ginzel 1914, 58, respectively. Cf. Árni Björnsson 1990a, 66.
[139] Árni Björnsson 1990a, 74–5.
[140] See Tacitus (*Germania*, ch. 11). Whitrow (1988, 15–6) maintains that it was so because "sleeping provides a particularly convenient time-indicator"; the same logic applies to winters, being winter "a season of rest, an undivided whole."
[141] Gurevich 1985 [1972], 105.
[142] See section 1.3.2.
[143] Whitrow (1988, 17, 28) notes that the division of the daylight and night periods into twelve parts each had been used already by the Egyptians.

which corresponded roughly to the hours or to periods of hours of modern time. They marked definite parts of the day and were most probably used to reckon time for practical purposes. The specific and various names under which they appear in the sources are most notably connected with the course of the sun or defined by social practice:[144]

HOUR	*DAGSMǪRK*	TRANSLATION
6 a.m.	*rismál* or *miðr-morgun(n)*	hour of rising, mid-morning
9 a.m.	*dag-mál*	"day mark" or day-"meal"
12 (noon)	*hádegi* or *miðdegi*	high-day, midday
3 p.m.	*undorn/udorn, nón,* or *eykt*	"mid-afternoon meal," nine (from Latin *nona*), octant
6 p.m.	*miðr-aptan(n)*	mid-evening
9 p.m.	*nátt-mál*	"night mark" or night-"meal"
12 (midnight)	*mið-nætti*	midnight
3 a.m.	*ótta*	"the last part of the night"

Table 3. The dagsmǫrk

The fact that the *dagsmǫrk* were approximately three-hour long is clearly reminiscent of the Christian *horæ canonicæ*, of which there were usually seven, signalled by the striking of the church bells.[145] The *dagsmǫrk* can also be paralleled to the more spatial notions of *eyktarmǫrk* and *áttir*, which will be discussed in more detail in section 1.3. Periods of time shorter than the day were also indicated with the words *tíð* and *tími*. *Tíð* derived from the tidal rise and fall (cf. Eng. "tide") and could sometimes be used to indicate hourly divisions. The same applies to *tími*. Both terms, though, were often used to indicate longer periods of time as well. Finally, in his *Edda* (ca. 1220), Snorri Sturluson gives further names for parts of the day, within a broader description of what he calls *stundir* ("time-names"):

[144] The table is reproduced from Hastrup (1985, 21) and Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson (1997, 94).
[145] Gurevich 1985 [1972], 105. Sverrir Jakobsson (2005, 87) points out that at the beginning the *horae canonicae* were three, then five, and only in the end seven. Cf. Sulzgruber 1995, 38–9.

> *Þessi eru nøfn stundanna: øld, forðum, aldr, fyrir løngu, ár, misseri, vetr, sumar, vár, haust, mánuðr, vika, dagr, nótt, morginn, aptann, kveld, árla, snemma, síðla, í sinn, fyrra dag, í næst, í gær, á morgun, stund, mél.*[146]
>
> These are time-names: cycle, days of yore, generation, lang-syne, year, season, winter, summer, spring, autumn, month, week, day, night, morning, eve, twilight, early, soon, late, betimes, day before yesterday, yester eve, yesterday, tomorrow, hour, moment.[147]

Thus, he explains the divisions of time as they then existed, from the largest to the smallest. Interestingly, Bede had done the same centuries earlier in his *De Temporum Ratione*, while following Isidore of Seville in his turn.[148]

A final remark on day-names within the seven-day week: Old Norse-speaking people made use of the typically Germanic weekday names that were associated with specific Teutonic gods. This system was modelled on the planetary week of the classical world, whereby a day's name was derived from the name of the planet ruling its first hours. Such a system, which had been adopted officially by the Roman Emperor Constantine in AD 321, was introduced to the North via the West-Germanic linguistic branch.[149] However, no correspondent for Saturn was given:[150]

NAMES OF THE DAYS OF THE WEEK			
ENGLISH	**OLD NORSE**	**TRANSLATION**	**LATIN**
Sunday	*Sunnudagr*	sun day	*Dies Solis*
Monday	*Mánadagr*	moon day	*Dies Lunae*
Tuesday	*Týsdagr*	Tyr's day	*Dies Martis*
Wednesday	*Óðinsdagr*	Odin's day	*Dies Mercurii*
Thursday	*Þórsdagr*	Thor's day	*Dies Jovis*
Friday	*Frjádagr*	Frey's day	*Dies Veneris*
Saturday	*Laugardagr/þváttdagr*	washing day	*Dies Saturni*

Table 4. Old Norse and Latin Day Names

146 *Skáldskaparmál* I, ch. 63, ed. Faulkes 1998, 99.
147 Brodeur 2006, 224.
148 See Wallis 1999.
149 Whitrow 1988, 69.
150 Hastrup 1985, 25; Ginzel 2014, 67.

These names were used in Early Iceland until they were rejected on religious grounds by Bishop Jón Qgmundarson (the first Bishop of Hólar, from 1106), because they were derived from heathen gods' names. This is attested in *Jóns saga helga*, a biography of Bishop Jón written by Brother Gunnlaugr Leifsson (d. 1218), a monk of the Benedictine monastery of Þingeyrar. In chapter eight of the text, Gunnlaugr highlights the Bishop's austere manner and inclination to asceticism, and relates that he succeeded in replacing the pagan names of the days with more neutral or Christian ones, changes that are also mentioned in *Rím I* (63). The reformed names were the following:

NAMES OF THE DAYS OF THE WEEK						
ENG.	**OLD NORSE**		**BISHOP JÓN'S TERMS**		**ECCL. LATIN**	**MOD. ICELANDIC**
Sun.	*Sunnudagr*	sun day	*Dróttinsdagr*	the Lord's day	*Dies Dominica*	*Sunnudagur*
Mon.	*Mánadagr*	moon day	*Annardagr*	second day	*Feria secunda*	*Mánudagur*
Tues.	*Týsdagr*	Tyr's day	*Þriðjudagr*	third day	*Feria tertia*	*Þriðjudagur*
Wed.	*Óðinsdagr*	Odin's day	*Miðvikudagr*	mid-week day	*Feria quarta*	*Miðvikudagur*
Thurs.	*Þórsdagr*	Thor's day	*Fimmtudagr*	fifth day	*Feria quinta*	*Fimmtudagur*
Fri.	*Frjádagr*	Frey's day	*Fǫstudagr*	fasting day	*Feria sexta*	*Föstudagur*
Sat.	*Laugardagr/ þváttdagr*	washing day	*Laugardagr/ þváttdagr*	washing day	*Dies Sabbati*	*Laugardagur*

Table 5. Reformed Old Icelandic Day Names

Among the new names, *Dróttinsdagr* held particular importance (see, for example, *Grágás Ia*, p. 23 ff. and *Rím II*, 128). However, *sunnudagr* continued to be used alongside it until it eventually won out, from the sixteenth century on.[151] The same applies to *mánadagr*, as it is well attested in the sources, and eventually prevailed over *annardagr*, which does not seem to have been much used.[152] *Týsdagr*, *Óðinsdagr,* and *Þórsdagr* were replaced within the late twelfth century

[151] Árni Björnsson 1990a, 74; Guðmundur Björnsson 1915, 273–5.
[152] See *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*.

by *þriðjudagr*, *miðvikudagr,* and *fimmtudagr*, respectively, although at times they reappear in works which apparently postdate the shift.[153] *Frjádagr* (Frey's day), remained an alternative to *fǫstudagr* up until the sixteenth century, when it disappeared.[154]

1.3 The Intertwining of Time and Space

The Old Icelandic calendar itself was used primarily to reckon time for civil, official, and administrative purposes over relatively extended periods of time. For shorter periods of time, the units by which the calendar was organized were used, alongside a few alternative methods. For daily practical purposes, including time-keeping at farms and navigation, there were two primary alternatives: The first involved the use of rudimentary instruments, which were nevertheless sufficiently accurate. The second consisted of applied mental skills, involving the direct observation of natural and/or astronomical phenomena.

In the first centuries of the Settlement there were no advanced devices of any kind for timekeeping either at farms or when navigating.[155] Very few and rudimentary instruments were used, the characteristics and operation of which remain obscure. According to some scholars, Old Norse navigators made use of primitive sun-compasses to find their direction in the bright nights of the Nordic summers, when they were able to travel.[156] Such instruments allowed for satisfactorily accurate orientation by using the position of the sun's shadow cast on a marked dial.[157] Distinct gnomic lines improved accuracy, as

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[153] They are found, for example, in sagas from around 1200, namely *Orkneyinga saga* (ch. 35, *Óðinsdagr*) and *Þorláks saga* (ch. 16, *Þórsdagr*). Sigurgeir Steingrímsson et al. 2003, 210.
[154] *Frjádagr* appears often in *Sturlunga saga* and in *Hakonar saga*, along with *fǫstudagr*, which appears more occasionally. Árni Björnsson 1990a, 74; Guðmundur Björnsson 1915, 275; *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*. For further information about these changes, see Orri Vésteinsson 1996, 97; Árni Björnsson 1990a, 71–4.
[155] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1990, 271; 1997, 99.
[156] See Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1990, 14; Bernáth et al. 2013, 2. The compass proper was introduced into Europe only around the year 1200, and it appeared in Scandinavia during the following century. Even then, it seems that Old Norse navigators used it only in overcast weather. Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1990, 13–4; 1997, 99.
[157] Bernáth et al. 2013, 2.

the sun's shadow would change both according to the time of day, the seasons, and the latitude of the observer. These instruments could be adjusted when navigating, and therefore they were similar to portable sundials.[158] Scholars believe that the instrument from the Viking Age which was found under the ruins of a Benedictine convent in Uunartoq, Greenland, in 1948 was of this kind.[159] The rough instrument consists of half of a round wooden disk with fairly regular notches on the edge and deliberately formed scratches, the nature of which has been debated. The integrity of the piece has also been questioned, namely whether the piece is a complete instrument itself or is only a fragment of a larger instrument. Recently, scholars have moved away from the view that this was an instrument for navigational orientation or heading, and maintain instead that it was used to determine a current time and position.[160] More precisely, it allowed for determination of latitude and local solar noon. Indeed, this was the simplest way of locating position at high latitudes in the season of continuous light, especially in the open sea.[161] However, some other scholars believe that the instrument would not have added much precision to the determination of time and latitude compared to the methods that already existed, and which provided the same information more easily, such as formulas similar to the one preserved in *Stjǫrnu-Odda tala*, "Star-Oddi's Tale" (see section 1.3.1).[162] Instead, such an instrument was probably used for timekeeping at a farm.[163] A second type of instrument is vaguely mentioned in some Old Icelandic texts, namely a kind of stone called *leiðarsteinn* ("lodestone").[164] It appears, for example, in *Landnámabók* (*Hauksbók*, ca. 1300, ch. 5), where it is stated that the Viking Flóki Vilgerðarson had with him three ravens to show him the way at sea:

[158] Portable sundials were in use already by the Roman Empire. See Talbert 2017.
[159] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1990, 14–5; Bernáth et al. 2013, 2.
[160] Bernáth et al. 2013, 14.
[161] Bernáth et al. 2013, 13.
[162] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1990, 16, 99, 271.
[163] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1990, 14; 1997, 98.
[164] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1990, 12.

> *Því at þá hǫfðu hafsiglingarmenn engir leiðarstein í þann tíma í Norðrlǫndum.*[165]
>
> Because at that time Nordic seafarers knew no lodestone.[166]

This type of stone was probably a naturally-magnetized mineral used to determine north, in which case it constituted another primitive version of the compass. A third type of instrument is also vaguely mentioned in a few texts, namely a so-called *sólarsteinn* ("sunstone"). The clearest reference appears in *Rauðúlfs þáttr*, a short text preserved in an early fourteenth-century manuscript of *Saga Óláfs konungs hins helga*, but which may have been composed one century earlier.[167] This text relates the story of King Óláfr *helgi* ("the Saint") Haraldsson (d. 1030) visiting a wealthy and wise farmer, Rauðúlfr, when he learns that one of the farmer's sons, Sigurðr, has mastered a great skill: reckoning time by directly observing the motion of the celestial bodies, even when they are not visible. The following day, the weather is thick and snowy, and the King takes advantage of it to put Sigurðr to the test. After Sigurðr has given his assertion regarding where the sun was at that time, it is said that:

> *Þá lét konungur taka sólarstein og hélt upp og sá hann hvar geislaði úr steininum og markaði svo beint til sem Sigurður hafði sagt.*[168]
>
> Then the king made them fetch the solar stone and held it up and saw where the light radiated from the stone and thus directly verified Sigurður's prediction.[169]

Such an account is fairly plausible. This stone may have been "one out of several possible minerals now known to be sensitive to the polarization of light," such as a birefringent crystal, allowing a user to determine the position of the sun, thus the time of day, in circumstances such as partly overcast

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165 *Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson 1986 [1968], 37.
166 My translation.
167 Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1997, 98. The other similarly vague references to such a type of instrument appear in *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* (*Sturlunga saga*, ed. Örnólfur Thorsson 1988, I:230 [ch. 172], I:244 [ch. 180]) and in *Guðmundar saga Arasonar* (ed. Guðni Jónsson 1962, 403–4 [ch. 4]). Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1990, 15.
168 *Rauðúlfsþáttr*, ed. Johnsen/Helgason 1941, 670–1.
169 Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1997, 99.

weather.[170] It is unlikely, however, that it would have functioned in especially thick weather, as the text has it, and the statement that light radiated from the stone seems to be an exaggeration.[171] In any case, even if this stone would have been useful to determine the direction of the sun in partly overcast weather, such information alone would not have sufficed to determine the time of day. This is especially true for navigators, who would have needed more information than the direction of the sun to determine their position at sea and which direction to take. Moreover, they could have gained the same information otherwise and even more accurately with some kind of formula, as hinted at above.[172] Conversely, the stone might have been useful to farmers, who could have combined the information from the stone on the direction of the sun with reference points on the horizon, thus succeeding in measuring the passage of time by following the sun's motion along the horizon. This method will be outlined shortly. There is no other evidence of instruments used by the early Icelandic people to measure daytime, such as the kind that were popular in medieval Europe, like the sundial proper and the water clock (or clepsydra).[173]

Given the lack of evidence for the existence or the use of time-reckoning instruments in Early Iceland, it is not misguided to hypothesize that alternative methods for reckoning daytime at farms or navigation predominated. These methods involved either making use of physical features of the landscape or directly observing astronomical phenomena, most notably the sun and the stars, when feasible. Time reckoning at farms was the result of a combination of these two methods. Specific features in the landscape could be used as markers of time in combination with the sun's position on the horizon, which therefore functioned as a sundial, as mentioned above. This was possible because in the North "the celestial pole is high in the sky and the diurnal orbits of the sun and the moon do not rise nearly as steeply as they do in the

[170] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1997, 98.
[171] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1990, 271, 15–6.
[172] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1990, 16, 99, 271.
[173] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1999, 211–2; West-Pavlov 2013, 14.

South. This means, for instance, that they can naturally be referred to the horizon almost all the time."[174] Thus:

> it was customary to divide the horizon into octants [*eyktir*, roughly corresponding to three hours or one eighth of the 24-hour day] and find markers in the landscape corresponding to each of them, as seen from a given farm (*eyktarmörk*). Solar motion relative to these markers would then be taken as a measure of time, indicating the meals and other specific jobs to be done during the day.[175]

In other words, each farm would have specific points in the surrounding horizon (such as mountain peaks or a pass), at which the sun's presence would reliably correspond to the octant times of the day, when viewed relative to a fixed direction, like the front area of the farm (*hlað*).[176] This practice is evident in the use of terms such as *miðmorgunshnjúkr* ("mid-morning peak"), *dagmálahóll* ("day mark hill"), and *hádegisskarð* ("noon pass").[177] Such a way of measuring time naturally depended strongly on the farm or small village in question. Indeed, what was seen as a "mid-morning peak" from one farm would be seen as a "mid-evening peak" from a farm on the opposite side of the peak.[178] Aside from its relativity, the lack of precision in this method, consisting of an uncertainty of about half an hour, was tolerable for the majority of purposes, which mainly concerned farming during the summer.[179]

Time and space converged not only in the notion of the *eykt*, but also in the similar notion of *átt* (pl. *áttir*), which can also be translated as "octant."[180] Indeed, the *átt* indicated any part of the horizon that was crossed by the sun in a three-hour period. We find this information in *Rím II* (94):

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[174] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1997, 93.
[175] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1999, 211. Thus, they were similar to the *dagsmǫrk* mentioned above.
[176] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1999, 213. This practice is clearly not exclusively Old Icelandic. Interestingly, Bloch (1977, 282) informs us that the Malagasy people of Madagascar used to, and sometimes still do, "divide the day in terms of the part of the house reached by the rays of the sun," which works "because of the strict orientation of their houses."
[177] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1997, 93. Cf. Árni Björnsson 1990a, 82.
[178] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1997, 93.
[179] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1997, 5.
[180] Thus, they were also similar to the *dagsmǫrk* mentioned above.

> *Sol gengr nær att um III stunder, enn um VI stunder II atter, en XII um fiorar, en fiorar ok XX um VIII, þat er um hverfis allan heimen.*
>
> The Sun passes through nearly an octant [of direction, i.e. 45 degrees] in three hours, but in six hours two octants, twelve through four, but twenty-four through eight, i.e. around the whole world.

Specific to the *áttir*, though, was the fact that they were named after the cardinal and intercardinal points, such as *suðr átt* for "noon."[181] However, it should be remembered that in Old Norse sources, cardinal directions depend fundamentally on the context, and they cannot always be thought of in terms of compass directions. For example, "'the west' or to 'go west', tends to refer to Ireland and what are now the British Isles, as the point of orientation was the west of Norway."[182] As a matter of fact, the unit of *átt* itself is likely to have originated in Norway.

Concerning navigation, two fundamentally different methods existed for keeping track of daytime and for orientation, beyond the possibility of using measuring instruments. The first method was

> observing and utilising at sea various phenomena of terrestrial origin which could give direct evidence of location and direction even when no land was in sight. The second method made use of astronomical information provided by the stars and sun, the latter being especially useful to sailors at high latitudes travelling in the bright nights of summer.[183]

The invisibility of the fixed stars during the northern summer when Early Icelandic navigators were sailing—roughly May to September—compelled them to base their observations mostly on the sun.[184] More precisely,

> they could observe the culmination of the sun to tell them true South […]. They could also observe or measure roughly the altitude of the sun at noon to tell them the latitude. This would not have been trivial since the noon altitude of the sun not only varies with latitude but also with the time of year. But if you had some kind

[181] See Hastrup 1985, 19–20.
[182] Gísli Sigurðsson 2008, 84–5.
[183] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1990, 271.
[184] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1999, 214; 1997, 104.

> of formula or algorithm to cope with this variation you would be able to obtain a fairly accurate result. From the so-called *Oddi's Tale* […] we have reason to think that the Old Norse people had a good and efficient formula or algorithm for this purpose.[185]

Such evidence of independent observations of the course of the sun in the above-mentioned text, *Stjǫrnu-Odda tala* ("Star-Oddi's Tale"), is worth considering in detail.

1.3.1 *Stjǫrnu-Odda tala*

Rímbegla, or *Rím I* (pp. 48–53), contains the earliest attestation of a short, uniquely Icelandic piece about astronomy and time-reckoning, called *Stjǫrnu-Odda tala*, "Star-Oddi's Tale."[186] The text has been attributed to Stjǫrnu-Oddi Helgason, a twelfth-century farmer who had a reputation as an astronomer and was considered an authority on time-reckoning. Some biographical information about him and about his knowledge and skills as an astronomer appears in *Stjǫrnu-Odda draumr*, a *þáttr* from the late fourteenth century that has traits typical of the *fornaldarsögur*.[187] This *þáttr* presents Stjǫrnu-Oddi as a farmworker from Múli, in Reykjardalr (now Aðaldalur, Suður-Þingeyjarsýsla), who has a reputation for outstanding skills in astronomy and time-reckoning. The text establishes a parallel between Stjǫrnu-Oddi's skills and the occult, by relating a significant dream-vision he has.[188] More precisely, the protagonist of the dream is Stjǫrnu-Oddi's alter-ego *Dagfinnr*, meaning "Day-finder/Calendar-calculator," whom Stjǫrnu-Oddi recalls by waking up in mid-dream and going outside to observe the stars. In the second part of the dream, Stjǫrnu-Oddi's skill at predicting the position of the heavenly bodies "becomes an

[185] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1997, 96.
[186] Additionally, the text is preserved in GKS 1812 4to (ca. 1182–1400), a codex about time-reckoning, among other topics (see Gunnar Harðarson 2015, 1–5). The first two chapters also appear in *Hauksbók* (ca. 1300).
[187] This *þáttr* appears in at least twelve manuscripts from the late 17th to the early 19th centuries, two of which claim to be copies of *Vatnshyrna*, an Icelandic manuscript dated ca. 1391–95 which was burnt in the Copenhagen fire of 1728. O'Connor 2012, 475.
[188] O'Connor 2012, 498. See also Þorkell Þorkelsson 1926.

occult skill for fighting shapeshifters," a trait that is typical of, though not exclusive to, the *fornaldarsögur*.[189]

In any case, *Stjǫrnu-Odda tala* itself contains "remarkabl[y] accurate observations of the sun's course and the difference in daylight hours in the different seasons," across three sections.[190] The first section concerns the dating of the solstices within a solar leap-year cycle, that is, beginning from a leap year and through the subsequent three years, until the cycle repeats itself.[191] These dates precede the corresponding dates of the received Julian calendar, which had just been introduced in Iceland, by roughly one week.[192] For this reason, it has been maintained that Stjǫrnu-Oddi's calculations were based on independent observations of the real solstices, rather than on the received Julian calendar. A refutation of this, though, argues that the text was actually "more likely an exercise in the recently accepted Julian calendar than a report on Oddi's own observations," the discrepancy to be attributed to the accumulated error of the Julian calendar in the twelfth century.[193] Additionally, this section times the solstices within the day by using the *eyktir*, the motion of the sun along the horizon, before the time unit of the hour (as in the familiar twenty-four) came to be used. This supports the idea that Stjǫrnu-Oddi's calculations were independent, since they exploit the specificities of solar motion at his place of living, or are, at least, a translation of solar times to his "local" clock.[194]

The two remaining parts of the text seem to have been useful primarily for navigational purposes across the seas between Norway, Iceland, and Greenland. The second section relates how the course of the sun "increases in sight" from the winter to the summer solstice and then "decreases" to the next winter solstice; it "involves an interesting mathematical method probably European in origin, but which may have reached Iceland through oral

[189] O'Connor 2012, 476–9, 499.
[190] Jónas Kristjánsson 2007, 133.
[191] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1990, 272.
[192] Cf. the displacement of the solstices and equinoxes within within the Old Scandinavian week year (section 1.2.1 above), although the matter is surrounded by uncertainty.
[193] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1990, 28–30, 272; 1991a; 1999, 212.
[194] Þorkell Þorkelsson 1926, 47–9.

channels."[195] The third section conveys information about the direction of sunrise and sunset through the year. Since such information depends entirely on the latitude of the observer, "it is inconceivable that [it] could have been borrowed from lower latitudes."[196]

Thus, the significant knowledge preserved in this short piece, whether it was authored by Stjǫrnu-Oddi or not, was gained primarily "through independent observations, maybe spanning several generations, and perhaps with a little help from oral (e.g., mathematical) information from the continent."[197] With the spread of literacy, then, especially from the twelfth century onwards, it became easier to obtain this kind of information from books, rather than from the direct observation of natural and astronomical phenomena.[198] The same applies to instruments, including calendars, the spread and use of which gradually replaced the necessity of reckoning time through first-hand observations. However, it is probable that such methods continued to be used in parallel.

1.3.2 Time and Travel

While daytime was often measured in terms of spatially defined categories, such as the *eyktir* and the *áttir*, the coordinates of time and space converged in interesting ways especially in the context of travel, both on land and at sea—particularly in the measurement of time intervals and of distances. Time intervals were often determined by a particular distance that had to be traversed and vice versa: distances were measured by means of the time it took to traverse them. The length of a road, for example,

> was measured by the time needed to traverse it, usually on horseback. This is reflected, for example, by the Old Icelandic term *röst* (pl. *rastir*), denoting the distance between two stopping- or baiting-places […]. A *röst* was an absolute measure of space, in terms of time, since the limits to which one could push one's horse were rather narrow.[199]

[195] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1990, 272.
[196] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1990, 272–3.
[197] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1991a.
[198] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1991a; 1999, 92.
[199] Hastrup 1985, 58.

It should be noted, though, that the time in which a certain distance could be covered varied significantly according to topography, among other factors. For this reason, the variation of the *rastir* was at times so great that a distinction was made between a "short" and a "long" *røst*.[200] An interesting parallel between distances covered by horse-riding and travelling at sea is made in *Grágás* (Ib, pp. 66–7), where it is related that:

> *Ef menn taca scip manz at görröþe sino oc fara a þvi vm fiorðo eþa sva vm iii. bøe fyrir land fram at iii. høir ero a aðra hond oc varðar scog gang. scal sva søkia sem vm hrossreið ena meíre.*
>
> If men appropriate someone's boat and go on it across firths or past three farms along the coast so that the three farms are all on the same side of them, then the penalty is full outlawry. It is to be prosecuted like a major horse-ride.[201]

A "major horse ride" consisted in the irregular use of someone's horse by riding past three farms or more in one direction, which would also be punished with full outlawry.[202] If the culprit used another man's horse for a shorter distance, a "minor horse ride," the punishment would be a fine. The same would apply to the use of someone's boat without permission for a distance shorter than "three farms." The measure of three farms was crucial in determining the penalty. Such a space-time unit was clearly relative, as the same distance and the time needed to traverse it might have varied greatly. Still, it was an acceptable standard, probably because of the limited territorial extension of the island.[203]

A further parallel may be established between horse-riding and sea-travelling in terms of the distance traversed. This is in the equivalent of a *røst* at sea, namely the *vika*, or *vika sjávar*, literally a "week" or "week by sea." This unit apparently measured not a week's worth of time, but rather a standard distance in space: a distance of roughly 4–5 nautical miles (7.5–9 km), which corresponded to approximately one hour of sailing.[204] However, this is

[200] Gurevich 1985 [1972], 102.
[201] Dennis et al. 2000, 87.
[202] *Grágás* Ib., p. 61.
[203] See also Hastrup 1985, 56.
[204] Sigurður Líndal 1974, 207.

surrounded by uncertainty, as the unit has also been suggested to be equal to a single nautical mile, or originally as an indication of the distance traversed in between changes of oarsmen.[205] The fact that the distance in question varies so widely suggests that this unit might be understood in other terms, possibly in terms of time. For instance, there is the conjecture that it may have originally indicated the *time* passed in between changes of oarsmen, rather than the *distance* traversed in between the change, being instead a measure of *when* to change oarsmen.[206] It is likely that the uncertainty originates from the fact that the word *vika* itself seems to have two different etymologies, one for *vika* as a temporal unit and one as a spatial unit. *Vika* as a temporal unit is probably linked to the verb *víkja*, in its meaning of "to move, shift" (*að færa til*), originally indicating a shift or sequence, of days or, possibly, of oarsmen; while *vika* as a spatial unit seems to be akin more to *vik* and *vík* in their shared meaning of "opening" (*skarð*), as along a coastline.[207] Such a crisp etymological distinction, however, can hardly be watertight.

For greater distances, the units *tylpt* or *tylft* ("dozen") and the previously mentioned *dægr* or *dægr sigling* were used. There is uncertainty surrounding the measure of the *tylft*, as it has been equated to both 1.5 and 12 *vikur sjávar*. Following the latter interpretation, and supposing the *vika sjávar* corresponded to one hour of sailing, two *tylftir* would make one day of sailing, or a *dægr sigling*. In the context of sailing distances, *dægr* often indicates not 12 but 24 hours, given the fact that sailing "was mostly done during high summer where the night is bright so that the total diurnal period of 24 hours may look like one bright day or one *dægur*."[208] Indeed, the term *dægr sigling* is sometimes alternated with *sólarhringssigling* ("sailing of one day"). In some other cases, though, *dægr sigling* indicates "a sailing of 12 hours," but this most likely implied

[205] "Upphaflega vegalengd sem róin var milli þess að skipt var um ræðara." Mörður Árnason 2007 [2002], 1161.
[206] "Sá tími sem leið á milli þess að ræðara skiptust á" (Ásgeir Blöndal 1989, 1135 [*vika* 2]).
[207] See Árni Björnsson 1990a, 65; Ásgeir Blöndal 1989, 1135; Mörður Árnason 2007 [2002], 1161, 1173–4.
[208] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1997, 110.

travelling at a greater speed.[209] It may also be due, however, to the fact that at some point, the length of the *dægr* came to be fixed to exactly 12 hours (see section 1.2.6).

In addition to these terms, there are a number of other spatial designations that were endowed with temporal meaning, namely the units *tóm*, *míla*, and *verǫld*. *Tóm*, literally a "vacuum," indicated leisure time; *míla*, "mile," was used as an expression of time, meaning "eternity"; and *verǫld*, "world," typically indicated the "age/condition of humanity" (*verr* meaning "man"). The second element of the word, *ǫld*, "age," was a concrete, qualitative measure, the significance of which depended on the word with which it was associated in the given compound.[210]

Finally, it is interesting to consider descriptions of the travelling of news, concerning the speed at which news of significant events were communicated, and thus the time intervening between an event and its telling. *Laxdæla saga* (ch. 65) presents the following example of how people come to "current" knowledge at different times:

> *Eptir þessi tíðendi ríða þeir Þorgils í brott ok yfir hálsinn til Reykjardals ok lýstu þar vígum þessum; riðu síðan ina sǫmu leið vestr, sem þeir hǫfðu vestan riðit; léttu eigi sinni ferð, fyrr en þeir kómu í Hǫrðadal. Þeir segja nú þessi tíðendi, er gǫrzk hǫfðu í fǫr þeira; […]. Skiljask þeir menn nú, er í ferð hǫfðu verit með Þorgísli. Lambi ríðr vestr til Laxárdals ok kemr fyrst í Hjarðarholt ok sagði þeim frændum sínum inniliga frá þessum tíðendum, er orðit hǫfðu í Skorradal. […]. Þorgils Hǫlluson ríðr út til Helgafells, ok með honum synir Guðrúnar […]; þeir kómu síðla um kveldit til Helgafells, svá at allir menn váru í rekkjum. Guðrún ríss upp ok bað menn upp standa ok vinna þeim beina; hon gengr til stofu ok heilsar Þorgísli ok ǫllum þeim ok spurði þá tíðenda.*
>
> After these events Thorgils and his men rode over the ridge into Reykjadal to declare responsibility for the killings. They then took the same route back as they had come, not slowing their pace until they had come to Hordadal. There they related what had happened on their journey. […] The men who had accompanied

[209] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1997, 107–8. It has been maintained that "the average effective speeds of Viking ships in regular ocean traffic were of the order of 3–6 knots," that is, 5.6–11 km/h (Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1997, 110).

[210] Gurevich 1985 [1972], 95–7; Sverrir Jakobsson 2005, 84. In *Vǫluspá* (44, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson/Vésteinn Ólason 2014, 302; 46, trans. Thorpe 2004, 12), for example, we find *skeggǫld*, meaning "axe age," and *skálmǫld*, "sword age."

> Thorgils then went their separate ways. Lambi rode northward to Laxardal, stopping on his way at Hjardarholt, where he told his kinsmen the details of the events which had taken place in Skorradal. […] Thorgils Holluson then rode to Helgafell, accompanied by Gudrun's sons […] When they arrived late in the evening everyone had gone to his bed. Gudrun got up at once and told the servants to get up and wait upon them. She went into the main room to greet Thorgils and all his party and hear the news.

Here Guðrún is the last person to learn the latest news. It is probably so because she lives the farthest from Skorradalr, the place where the events have occurred: the intervening distance requires the longest time to be traversed, and thus also for the news to be communicated. The large physical distance between the places determines the wide temporal gap or delay between the events and their telling. This is a good example of the intertwining of space and time in the text. Moreover, the passage, by highlighting the temporal misalignment that exists between what has happened and what is (un)known—between a fact and its telling—allows for reflection on the simultaneity of differently-perceived realities and hence differently-perceived times.[211] However, it is also likely that the author of the text makes Guðrún the last to apprehend the news in order to heighten the tension for the audience, consciously constructing the narrative delay.

1.4 Genealogical Accounts

Genealogical accounts pervade medieval Icelandic literature, though they vary in degrees of detail and length. The earliest texts preserve significant genealogical discourses, while also suggesting that these may have constituted a genre by themselves. Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók* mentions *ættartǫlur*, "kinship tallies"; the *First Grammatical Treatise* attests to *áttvísi*, probably "a kind of family history incorporating the brief *ættartǫlur* known from earlier sources";[212] and

[211] This is perhaps clearer if one considers, for example, the fact that the "news of the death of Frederick Barbarossa in Asia Minor reached Germany four months later, and it took four weeks for the English to learn that their king Richard the Lion-heart had been taken prisoner in Austria." Gurevich 1985 [1972], 43.
[212] Quinn 2000, 47.

Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* alludes to *kynslóðir*, "kin lines," and *langfeðgatal*, or "ancestral lists." Alongside these is *Landnámabók* itself, the "Book of Settlements," concerned almost entirely with genealogy. Why was there such an extensive and intense interest in genealogical knowledge in Early Icelandic society?

Genealogical knowledge had been necessary and important since the time of the Settlement, when genealogies were memorized and passed on orally for several different reasons. First, the fact that the social formations on the island were new made it necessary to rely on kinship lines for legal reasons. These included the ratification of "legal entitlement to inheritance, as well as the enforcement of legal responsibilities, including guardianship, care of dependants and compensation," which necessitated the establishment of kinship ties to the fifth degree.[213] Kinship was fundamental in legal disputes, as support was primarily sought and expected from one's own family.[214] Political motivations were among the other reasons why genealogies were so important for medieval Icelanders. Genealogies affirmed and extended a family's place in political life, legitimizing the distribution of power among the members of society.[215]

At the same time, genealogies were significant in terms of both reckoning and keeping track of time. In the context of inheritance itself, the period required for certain processes to be concluded might be measured in the variable unit of generations, rather than being calculated using years or other units of time.[216] This also shows how genealogies were an important method for keeping track of time, especially as it passed within one's closest circle. In fact:

> listing and enumerating ancestors clarified not the general chronology of the people, the tribe, or the state, but the successive links within the confines of the kin, the family; and it was by no means customary to try to correlate these with the passage of time outside the limits of the circle of kinship. The significance of this

[213] Quinn 2000, 46.
[214] Callow 2006, 301.
[215] Spiegel 1997, 104.
[216] Mondschein/Casey 2015, 1670.

> form of relationship with time – a form which we might call 'ancestral' or 'family' time – was shaped by the largely introvert character of the family or clan groups, leading isolated lives and only superficially connected among themselves. In each farmstead or community, time passed in subordination to the rhythmic change of generations.[217]

From this perspective, time was understood as "a chain of human generations," infused with human character, and emphasizing both continuity and change.[218]

With genealogical history, the past was not only evoked in the present, but also framed and given significance.[219] Genealogical reconstructions carried social significance. Because of this, they were open to manipulation and change, regardless of whether they were transmitted orally or in written form. This is clear in comparisons of how the same genealogies appear across different texts. Such comparisons reveal differences of both detail and emphasis.[220] For instance, the sources for the genealogy of the chieftain Helgi Ásbjarnarson, especially *Droplaugarsona saga*, *Brand-Krossa þáttr,* and *Fljótsdæla saga*, frequently conflict, and each contains details not found in the others.[221] This is because the past was modelled on the present according to contemporary needs and interests, serving present purposes, especially of a social and political nature. Among these was the establishment of links between important individuals of the present and prestigious people from the past, as happens in *Landnámabók*, thereby increasing the prestige of a particular family in the present.[222] This was, in fact, probably the main purpose of recounting ancestries, more so than providing accurate genealogical records.[223]

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[217] Gurevich 1985 [1972], 99.
[218] Gurevich 1985 [1972], 103; Spiegel 1997, 107.
[219] Callow 2006, 301.
[220] Gísli Sigurðsson 2004, 192.
[221] Gísli Sigurðsson 2004, 192–201. *Droplaugarsona saga*, for example, pays little attention to Helgi and his relations, which is hardly surprising, given the fact that he is the archenemy of the Droplaugarsons, the protagonists of the saga. Gísli Sigurðsson 2004, 195.
[222] Schneidmüller 2002, 170–2, 176, 180; Callow 2006, 303. Clearly, the information preserved in *Landnámabók* had primarily legal significance, for example entitlement to inheritance, as mentioned earlier. Gísli Sigurðsson 2014, 179.
[223] Gísli Sigurðsson 2004, 200.

Genealogical accounts were not only distorted or changed, but also invented when considered necessary. For example, it was common among powerful families, especially in the late Middle Ages, to trace

> their pedigrees back to distant, often legendary or semi-legendary princely ancestors. This way of securing the family's prestige by means of an appeal to the length of its genealogical tree exhibits the ruling class's attitude to time: the powerful, noble, influential man in the Middle Ages is the man with many generations behind him, the man in whom family time – and therefore historical time – has condensed.[224]

Old Icelandic sources display this technique from early on. *Íslendingabók* (ca. 1122–33), for example, displays the genealogy of its author, Ari Þorgilsson, as originating from the Ynglingar, the dynasty of ancient legendary Swedish kings.[225]

The genealogical accounts that emerge from Early Iceland were not simple, objective historical accounts, but were rather of several kinds and served various purposes, notably legal and political ones, while also allowing for the reckoning and the tracking of time, giving it a concrete, human framework.

1.5 Forms of Dating

A number of diverse dating systems were available in Early Iceland to organize and measure time. These varied according to the specific cultural and political circumstances in which they developed, and as well as to the purposes they served within the community or social group. They were of both a popular and a learned nature, and were used both locally and officially. Scholars generally group them into the two main categories of relative and absolute dating: dating in relation to a given point in time or time-period, regardless of any specific, continuous scale; or dating by following a continuous, linear scale, originating from a given point in time, notably a significant event, and pinpointed by fixed time-intervals, such as years. This is, however, effectively an arbitrary distinction.

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[224] Gurevich 1985 [1972], 108–9. Cf. Spiegel 1997, 104; Callow 2006, 300–3; Mitchell 1991, 122–6.
[225] See section 2.3.

The earliest Icelandic sources preserve several combinations of these dating systems, the most common of which are described here.

1.5.1 Relative Dating

Relative dating methods are among the oldest to have ever been employed, having been used in antiquity by the ancient Egyptians and Babylonians.[226] Typically, these methods consist of dating an event by determining whether it is younger or older than another one: a relation is established between the event that is to be dated and another specific event, usually one that has made an impression on the life of the community or relevant group. This method can also be used for determining time intervals. The important events that are used as reference points may be narrowly local, but they may also be relevant on a larger scale, such as remarkable events in the political or religious life of the community or group. These methods are typically culture-specific and are especially characteristic of oral societies, as they are particularly suitable for memorization.

Dating methods of this sort are common in Early Icelandic sources, having probably been employed since before literacy was introduced into the country with Christianity. In these early sources, they are used both to fix the time in which an event occurred, systematizing the past, and to determine time intervals. For example, when fixing the time in which Iceland was declared fully settled (AD 930), Ari Þorgilsson relates in his *Íslendingabók* (ch. 3) that:

> *Þat vas sex tegum vetra eptir dráp Eadmundar konungs, vetri eða tveim áðr Haraldr enn hárfagri yrði dauðr, at tǫlu spakra manna.*[227]
>
> That was sixty [winters] after the killing of Edmund, and one or two [winters] before Harald the Fine-Haired died, according to the reckoning of wise men.[228]

[226] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1964, 350.
[227] All Old Icelandic excerpts of *Íslendingabók* are from Jakob Benediktsson's edition (1986 [1968]).
[228] All translations of the text are taken from Grønlie 2006.

Here, Ari fixes in time the end of the *Landnám* not by giving an exact date for it within the AD scale, a method he employs on a few other occasions, but by relating it to other significant events. It is true that an exact AD date for the end of the *Landnám*, namely AD 930, could be derived from the same relationships: for instance, Ari dates absolutely the killing of Edmund to AD 870. However, this appears to be secondary to Ari's primary concern of situating the given event by establishing a relation with another significant event, while showing that the former is older that the latter, regardless of any fixed scale. Similar examples may be found in some of the *Íslendingasögur*, while some of them are even more relative, not using any fixed years to establish the relation between the events:

> *..ok var þar einn vetr, áðr hann fór at byggja Grœnland; en þat var fjórtán vetrum fyrir kristni lǫgtekna á Íslandi.* (Eyrbyggja saga*, ch. 24)*[229]

> The following year [Eirik the Red] set out to colonize Greenland, fourteen years before Christianity was adopted by law in Iceland.[230]

> *Þat sama sumar, er Þorgils Hǫlluson var veginn, kom skip í Bjarnarhofn... (*Laxdæla saga*, ch. 68)*[231]

> The same summer that Thorgils Holluson was slain a ship owned by Thorkel Eyjolfsson arrived in Bjarnarhofn…[232]

These methods are analysed in more detail below (section 2.2.2 and ch. 3).

At times, the events used as reference points for fixing dates or measuring time intervals come to designate whole years. For example, in *Sturlunga saga*, a collection of sagas from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, there is mention of *Búðdælavetr*, "the winter of Búðardalr," denoting the time during which some men from Búðardalr stayed with Sturla Þórðarson the patriarch (d. 1183) at Hvammr.[233] Such a name is meaningful almost exclusively to the people from the particular farm or locality in question. However, there are

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[229] All Old Icelandic excerpts of *Eyrbyggja saga* are from Einar Ól. Sveinsson's edition (1935).
[230] All translations of this saga are taken from Hermann Pálsson/Edwards 1989 [1972].
[231] All Old Icelandic excerpts of *Laxdæla saga* are from Einar Ól. Sveinsson's edition (1934).
[232] All translations of this saga are taken from Kunz 2008 [1997].
[233] *Sturlu saga* (*Sturlunga saga*, ed. Jón Jóhannesson et al. 1946, I: 88 (ch. 19)).

also cases of year names which were significant on a larger scale. These include *sandvetr* "Sand-Winter," referring to a volcanic ash-fall, causing the death of a hundred heads of Snorri Sturluson's livestock;[234] *býsnavetr*, "Winter of Terror," when eighty people died in avalanches;[235] and *kynjavetr*, "Winter of Marvels," characterized by paranormal events, including the following:

> *Sá vetr var kallaðr kynjavetr, því at þá urðu margir undarligir hlutir. Þá váru sénar sólir tvær senn. Ok þá váru sénir álfar ok aðrir kynjamenn ríða saman í flokki í Skagafirði, – sá Ari Bjarnarson.*[236]
>
> That was called the Winter of Marvels because so many strange things occurred: two suns were seen together in the sky; a troop of elves and other strange beings were seen riding in Skagafjörð by Ari Bjarnarson.[237]

A Continental method for relative dating, popular in the European Middle Ages, and employed since antiquity, consisted in naming and numbering years within a public officer's period of office, using these periods as reference points.[238] During the Roman republican and imperial periods (since around 500 BC) it became common to date specific events in relation to consuls' offices, by giving the name of the consul in question. This made for precise references, as consuls were appointed yearly. However, after the end of the Roman Empire in the West, it became common to name years after any form of authority, including ones whose appointments varied in duration, such as kings and bishops.[239] This also validated the power of the authority by naming time itself after that individual.[240]

In Early Iceland, due to its particular social and political structure, the country being without an actual head, dating in relation to a period of office was more likely to be used according to Icelandic bishops' tenures, or

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[234] *Íslendinga saga* (*Sturlunga saga*, ed. Jón Jóhannesson et al. 1946, I: 314–5 (ch. 60)); trans. McGrew 1970, 212, 472. Cf. Hastrup 1985, 48–9; Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1964, 160–1.
[235] *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða* (*Sturlunga saga*, ed. Jón Jóhannesson et al. 1946, I: 123–4 [ch. 4]); trans. Thomas 1974, 101. Cf. Hastrup 1985, 48–9; Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1964, 160–1.
[236] *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða* (*Sturlunga Saga*, ed. Jón Jóhannesson et al. 1946, I: 123 [ch. 4]).
[237] Thomas 1974, 101.
[238] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1964, 350.
[239] Mauskopf Deliyannis 2001, 6.
[240] Mauskopf Deliyannis 2001, 6–7, 12.

Norwegian kings' reigns, such as in *Íslendingabók*, *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða,* and Sturla Þórðarson's sagas of the Norwegian Kings Hákon Hákonarson and Magnús *lagabœtir* ("Law-Mender") Hákonarson.[241] A linear and arguably continuous scale was used, though less frequently, which was constructed around the offices of lawspeakers (*lǫgsǫgumenn*), the one island-wide elected office. In other words, events were dated and time intervals determined on the basis of the lawspeakers' periods of office. Lawspeakers held office from a certain date in early July, typically for three years, but there was much variability: for example, "Skapti Þóroddsson was law-speaker from 1004 until 1030, while Grímr Svertingsson held the office from 1002 to 1003. Obviously, dating an event to Skapti's office gives less 'precision' than dating an event to the office of Grímr."[242] This form of dating is pioneered in writing by Ari Þorgilsson, who uses it widely in his *Íslendingabók* (see section 2.2.2), though it was not much used elsewhere in Early Iceland.

1.5.2 Absolute Dating

Aside from relative dating methods, other dating techniques were employed in Early Iceland that used numerically continuous time scales, allowing an event to be situated on a continuous timeline starting from a specific origin point.[243] These objective scales allowed for absolute dating, generally serving more official purposes than quotidian ones. Before analysing the absolute dating systems that were adopted in Early Iceland, it is useful to have an overview of their origins, especially of AD dating, or dating according to the birth of Christ. To this end, it is necessary to first give a brief survey of the origins and development of the medieval Easter Controversy, and of the rise of the art of *computus*, or "the ecclesiastical arithmetic combined with astronomical calculations on which the Church's calendar and chronology were based."[244]

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[241] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1964, 350–1.
[242] Hastrup 1985, 47–8.
[243] Hastrup 1985, 47; Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1964, 349.
[244] Jónas Kristjánsson 2007, 133.

1.5.2.1 The Origins and Development of the Easter Controversy

The Middle Ages inherited several dating systems from classical antiquity that were not numerically continuous. Continuous numerical systems did exist, but were used less frequently, such as the reckoning *ab urbe condita*, from the founding of Rome (753 BC). According to this type of reckoning, an event would be dated by numbering the years that had elapsed since that original date. Dating according to Greek Olympiads was also occasionally used. Olympiads began in 776 BC and were numbered as a group of four years. Dating an event using Olympiads consisted in giving both the number of the Olympiad in question and the year within the cycle (1 through 4), the Olympic games themselves being held on year 1. For example, the founding of Rome itself would fall in the third year of the sixth Olympiad (*olympiadis sextae anno tertio*). Similarly, during the second and third centuries AD "both the Jews and the Christians started to count years from the Creation according to the Bible, which is known as *annus mundi*. The *annus mundi*, while useful for theological speculation about the Ages of the World, was subject to varied interpretation, and several scholars recalculated the base date of the Creation."[245]

Continuous numerical systems tended to be used more in historiography rather than for daily purposes. They were effective for systematizing the past for official purposes. However, such systems were also particularly useful in those cases where the future had to be described. Within Christianity, the need to organize the future arose with the controversy over the dating of Easter, which ultimately led to the creation of the AD system (*annus ab incarnatione Domini*).[246]

Direct evidence for the celebration of Easter begins to appear in the second century AD.[247] For quite some time, though, the basic principles and methods used to calculate the date of the feast varied from place to place, often resulting in bitter and prolonged controversy.[248] The first disputes derived

[245] Mauskopf Deliyannis 2001, 6–7.
[246] Mauskopf Deliyannis 2001, 6–7.
[247] Whitrow 1988, 70.
[248] Declercq 2000, 49.

from ambiguity in the biblical account. These ambiguities concerned the link established in the gospels between Christ's death and resurrection and the Jewish feast of Passover, commemorating the Jewish exodus from Egypt. All four gospels state clearly that Christ's resurrection took place on the first day of the week (Sunday), three days after the Crucifixion. However, they also refer to the Last Supper in relation to Passover, beginning on 15 Nisan—Nisan being originally the first month of the year in the Jewish (lunar) calendar, which fell at the beginning of spring, overlapping the months of March and April in the Julian (solar) calendar.[249] The synoptic gospels (Mark, Matthew, and Luke) infer that it was a Passover meal, but John refers to the day before Passover (14 Nisan).

In any case, early Christian communities still had a strong Jewish character and commemorated Jesus's Passion and death on the first day of Passover, determining the date of Easter on that basis. However, by the third century, some Christians started to express their discontent with relying on Jewish practices to determine the date of Easter, and began to experiment with independent calculations. This gradual breaking away from Jewish methods resulted in the major Easter Controversy, between those who proposed the independent computations and those who wished to continue relying on Jewish practices for the determination of Easter.[250] This controversy was partly resolved by the First Council of Nicaea in AD 325, where the independent calculations were favoured, making sure that all Christians would celebrate Easter on the same day. That day had to be a Sunday, in order to commemorate the resurrection.[251] However, it was not specified how the calculations themselves should be carried out, most likely because by then all the major churches had already developed their own traditions to calculate the date.

The solution agreed upon was to devise a rule for determining a Sunday quite close to Passover: according to Exodus, Passover was to be celebrated at the first full moon of "the first month" of the Jewish lunar calendar, namely

[249] Declercq 2000, 50.
[250] Declercq 2000, 50–1.
[251] Wallis 1999, xix–xxi.

Nisan. Patristic writers interpreted this as the first full moon following the spring equinox.[252] Thus, Easter should be celebrated on the Sunday following the first full moon after the spring equinox. However, even after this rule was agreed upon, there were still problems: Which date for the spring equinox should be used, as there were many? Which calendar would be used to track the month of Easter, if the Jewish calendar was to be rejected? How were the three variables that governed the calculation of Easter to be coordinated? This would involve matching lunar dates (the Easter full moon) with elements of the solar calendar (the vernal equinox and Sunday), when the periods of the moon and the sun are actually incommensurable.

The Julian calendar would be used as a base. Being purely solar, the spring equinox had a fixed date each year in this calendar. When the calendar was first established in 46 BC, this date was fixed to 25 March. However, due to inherent problems in the calendar (recalling that the solar year is slightly less than the length of the calendar, at 365.25 days), by the time of the Council of Nicaea in AD 325, the date of the equinox had fallen back to 21 March. Many of the Eastern Churches adopted this earlier date for the equinox to calculate the date of Easter and, given the authority of Alexandrian astronomers, it was eventually canonized as the official equinoctial date.

Determinations of the Easter full moon were based, not on direct astronomical observations of the moon, but on repeated patterns of a calculated full moon, an "ecclesiastical full moon." Lunations, then, were mathematically adjusted to certain numbers of solar years, to guarantee that the lunar phases recurred on the same days of the month in the solar calendar, once the cycle ended. In other words, the lunar cycle was artificially adjusted to the solar period over a certain number of years in the future. Again, this is because the periods of the moon and the sun are incommensurable, in that twelve lunar months is around eleven days shorter than the solar year. Some of these luni-solar cycles were well-constructed and quite accurate, such as the Alexandrian cycle of 19 years, which became popular.[253] Others were less accurate,

[252] Wallis 1999, xviii.
[253] Declercq 2000, 88.

including the 112-year cycle of Hippolytus of Rome and the Roman cycle of 84 years.[254]

Employing different lunisolar cycles resulted in different outcomes, meaning different dates for Easter, so the controversy was prolonged. In the fourth and fifth centuries, the dispute was mainly between the Church of Alexandria, whose system was dominant in the East, and the Church of Rome, whose system was accepted in the West.[255] A crucial point in the controversy originated from the fact that the tables used to calculate the date of Easter were constructed not only by the above-mentioned lunisolar cycles, but also with continuous linear numerical systems of years. Non-linear numerical systems could not be used, because the cycles they were composed of were too short; similarly, years of office, such a king's, could clearly not be used to organize the future, since the duration was unknown in advance. Moreover, in order to use such tables, one would need to know in which year he was living.[256]

In Alexandria, where Easter tables were first devised, the years were counted using a continuous linear numerical system starting with the beginning of the reign of the Emperor Diocletian in AD 284. As Diocletian had been a tyrant and persecutor of Christians, it did not remain popular to name years after him, and tables were devised instead that counted the years according to significant moments in the life of Christ.[257] As a result, different traditions came into being, which considered either the Incarnation, the first year of preaching, or the Passion of Christ as their starting points.[258]

A particularly large influence came from the *Chronicon* of Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339/40), which set the starting point of the scale in the first year of Christ's preaching. Only fragments of this text have survived, but there exists a Latin translation and continuation of the text by Jerome (347–420). At some point in his life, Jerome lived in Aquileia (Northeast Italy) with a certain

[254] Declercq 2000, 54.
[255] Declercq 2000, 53–4.
[256] Declercq 2000, 60.
[257] Mauskopf Deliyannis 2001, 7–8.
[258] Verbist 2010, 6–7; Declercq 2000, 46.

Rufinus, who later on (between 402–10) assembled a chronicle from the work of both Eusebius and Jerome.[259] Interestingly, Rufinus did not count the years from Jesus's preaching, as Eusebius had done, but he devised, at the beginning of the fifth century, "both the principle of counting the years from the beginning of Christ's life and the identification of the particular Julian year that we call AD 1."[260]

Still, instead of using either Christ's first year of preaching or the year of his birth to begin the scale, others used his Passion. Indeed, the first table to be widely used in the Christian West, compiled by Victorius of Aquitaine in AD 457, gave the dates of Easter for the first 532 years following the Crucifixion.[261] This cycle of 532 years, named the Great Easter Cycle, had actually been devised one century earlier, around 412, by the Alexandrian monk Annianos, who had combined the Alexandrian lunar cycle of 19 years with the solar cycle of 28 years (19×28=532).[262] According to these calculations, Easter Day returns to the same date of the Julian year every 532 years.

In 525, Dionysius Exiguus ("the Small," meaning "humble") constructed a table that would become even more popular, building on the previous work of a certain Bishop Cyril from Alexandria (d. after 457), as well as of Rufinus of Aquileia. Dionysius translated Bishop Cyril's 95-year table into Latin and, as it had nearly run its course, he continued it for 95 more years.[263] Cyril's table, as was typical of Alexandrian tables, counted the years from the imperial coronation of Diocletian (AD 284), and Dionysius made the emendation of counting the years from the birth of Christ, just as Rufinus had done before him.[264] The origin of AD counting is often attributed to Dionysius, but

[259] McCarthy 2003, 46.
[260] McCarthy 2003, 46–7.
[261] Mauskopf Deliyannis 2001, 7–8.
[262] Declercq 2000, 30, who points out that "the 19-year cycle guarantees that the lunar phases reoccur on the same days of the month in the solar calendar every 19 years, whereas the solar cycle brings the calendar dates back on the same days of the week after 28 years" (Declercq 2000, 88). The number 28 results from considering the seven-day week and the leap year every fourth year (4x7=28 years). Ólafía Einarsdóttir 2006, 2.
[263] Verbist 2010, 12; Jón Jóhannesson 1952, 79.
[264] McCarthy 2003, 36; Verbist 2010, 13; Mauskopf Deliyannis 2001, 7–8.

it had already been used by Rufinus in Italy and Eusebius over one hundred years earlier.[265]

1.5.2.2 The Art of *Computus*

It has been mentioned before that Easter had to be celebrated uniformly throughout Christendom, and that is why Easter tables were constructed and eventually sent out to the churches of Europe from the Early Middle Ages on. Every major church would have needed an Easter table. However, it was considered advantageous for individuals to be able to reckon the date of Easter by themselves, as well. For this reason, a new type of text, the *computus*, was devised and developed, first by Cassiodorus (AD 485–585), a former student and friend of Dionysius Exiguus. This text "explained how both sorts of calendars [the lunar and the solar] worked, and how to make necessary conversions and calculations between them. In these texts, two types of years are mentioned: the indiction and the Incarnation [AD years], and usually a mathematical way of converting between the two is given."[266]

The *computus* would not fully develop into a "science" (or at least a systematic application of other sciences, such as astronomy and mathematics) that guaranteed the success of Dionysius' system until the work of the renowned Northumbrian monk and scholar Bede the Venerable (ca. 673–735).[267] His *The Reckoning of Time* (*De temporum ratione* or *De temporibus, liber secundus*, AD 725), not to be confused with his shorter *On Times* (*De temporibus*, AD 703), is the earliest comprehensive treatment of the subject of the *computus*. Indeed, even if calendar literature before Bede abounded, it was either fragmented and biased or confusing. Moreover, such information was most often

[265] McCarthy 2003, 46–7, 53.
[266] Mauskopf Deliyannis 2001, 7. Indiction consisted in "a system whereby each block of fifteen years, starting in AD 312, makes up an indiction cycle. A year is identified as part of the current indiction (for example, 'in the tenth year of the indiction'), but the cycles themselves are not numbered." Mauskopf Deliyannis 2001, 6. It was originally used by the Egyptians for taxation purposes, and only subsequently, in the late Roman and Byzantine Empires, as a dating system. Declercq 2000, 103; Ólafía Einarsdóttir 2006, 1–2.
[267] Wallis 1999, lxiii.

conveyed in the form of letters, at times polemical, or commentaries, such as prologues attached to the Easter tables themselves.[268]

The Reckoning of Time is a treatise on measuring time and constructing a Christian calendar. Bede also comments systematically and elaborately on the Easter table that had been constructed by Dionysius Exiguus a few centuries earlier.[269] Indeed, Dionysius's Easter table constitutes "the backbone" of the second half of the work.[270] Among the reasons why he may have wanted to promote Dionysius's system was not only the fact that AD dating gave time a sacred and universal dimension, but also the fact that "with the English heptarchy it became very convenient to have a common chronology for all the seven kingdoms."[271] It has also been maintained that AD dating provided a universal, politically neutral dating method, especially in moments of political fragmentation, or "at times in which one ruler's authority was becoming limited, or was no longer recognized."[272]

By the mid-eleventh century, however, when Bede's 532-year cycle was coming to an end, a considerable debate over the AD chronology reignited. Several alternatives to the system were proposed and adopted, some of which were openly critical of Bede, while others never became popular.[273] The criticism originated from the fact that, by "using the repetitive character of a 532-year Easter cycle, computists found out that the era *ab incarnatione Domini*, AD, conflicted with chronological data contained in the synoptic gospels concerning the year of Christ's Passion," which was itself already controversial.[274] In trying to establish the "real" year of Christ's Passion, critics proposed corrections to Dionysius's AD era.[275] Bede himself may have already been aware of the problem, and the matter might have already been questioned in his day. However, he apparently neglected it because he wished to promote

[268] Wallis 1999, xvi–xvii. Bede himself wrote his second work on time, *The Reckoning of Time*, because he wanted to expand his ideas after having been accused of heresy. Wallis 1999, xxx–xxxi.
[269] Declercq 2000, 156.
[270] Wallis 1999, liv.
[271] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 2006, 6.
[272] Mauskopf Deliyannis 2001, 13.
[273] Wallis 1999, xcvi.
[274] Verbist 2003, 63; 2010, 13–4.
[275] Verbist 2003, 63.

Dionysius's calculations and the Alexandrian system, rather than having to follow alternative *computus* systems.[276] In other words, Bede's ambiguity itself opened the way to the subsequent revisions of the AD era.

The first objection to the Dionysian era was made by a certain Regino of Prüm in the ninth century. However, it was only at the beginning of the tenth century that explicit criticism of Bede's computistical theories emerged, starting with Helperic of Auxerre (d. ca. 900).[277] Alternative corrections were proposed around the year 1000 by Abbo of Fleury (d. 1004) and Heriger of Lobbes (d. 1007), while six others came about in the following century, around 1100, the most popular of which were the ones by the Irish monk Marianus Scotus (lit., "the Scot," d. 1082/3) and Gerlandus Compotista ("the Computist," d. after 1093) from Lorraine.[278] Of these, it was Gerlandus's method that ended up being adopted on the medieval Icelandic scene.

1.5.2.3 Absolute Dating Systems in Early Iceland

Astronomy was particularly developed in Early Iceland. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that Icelanders proved to be experts in the art of *computus* as soon as it was introduced with Christianity. The *computus* combined astronomical calculations with ecclesiastical arithmetic to construct the Church's calendar and chronology. It was soon employed in Iceland to instruct the people on the feasts and services of the Church along with anything else that was connected to its chronology.[279] This was carried out both by following the work of foreign authorities, notably the Venerable Bede, and by attempting to calibrate traditional reckoning systems to the Christian calendar. These endeavours have been preserved in treatises named *rímtǫl* (sg., *rímtal*; lit., "rhyme count," also abbreviated to *rím*, e.g., *Rím I* and *II*), which are about *rímfræði*, or

[276] These included the old Celtic 84-year cycle and the Victorian system of 19 years, modelled by Victorius of Aquitaine in AD 457 on Alexandrian tables. Wallis 1999, lxiii; McCarthy 2003, 35.
[277] McCarthy 2003, 35; Verbist 2010, 14.
[278] The others were by Sigebert of Gembloux (d. 1112), Hezelo of Cluny (d. 1123), by an anonymous author from the abbey of St Martial at Limoges, and Heimo of Bamberg (d. 1139). See Verbist 2010, 1.
[279] Jónas Kristjánsson 2007, 133.

computistics. They are among the earliest extant textbooks on this subject and were probably among the earliest Icelandic texts to be composed.

The term *rímtal*, or *rím*, originally designated "the art of finding seasons, feast days, new moons, etc. by counting on one's fingers."[280] Eventually, it came to indicate the calculation of the date of Easter, while also enabling Icelanders to date absolutely by tying events to the birth of Christ. However, this form of dating did not become popular in Iceland. For the calculation of the date of Easter itself, Icelanders made use of Easter tables from the start, which they called *taflbyrðingar* (sg., *taflbyrðingr*, "board") because of the squares characterizing them. The oldest extant Easter table is preserved in AM 732a VII 4to, which Natanael Beckman has dated to ca. 1121–39 (as it begins with the new lunar cycle of 1121), maintaining that it may also be the oldest extant Icelandic manuscript.[281] Interestingly, this table follows Dionysius's AD counting, which had probably become known in Iceland through the works of Bede. Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók*, which had been partly inspired by Bede's work, also follows Dionysius, as does a work called *Prestaskráin* (from 1143). This latter work is "a document about clergymen of noble kin, ten from each quarter of Iceland," and it may have also been composed by Ari himself (he died in 1148).[282] Ari studied in Haukadalr, and it has been maintained that the *æra vulgaris*, AD, had been known there and in Skálholt from early on, although it had briefly fallen into disuse. Interestingly, in his *Íslendingabók,* Ari says explicitly that he has reckoned time according to "the common method of reckoning" (*at alþýðu tali* and *at almanna tali*, chs. 7 and 10), that is, *secundum æram vulgarem*, or following the Dionysian method. This seems to imply that he was aware of the fact that alternative time-reckoning methods existed and were used in Iceland in his days.[283]

There are Old Icelandic texts from the twelfth century that do not follow Dionysius's computation, but rather that of Gerlandus Compotista ("the Computist," d. after 1093) from Lorraine, who was previously introduced as

[280] Árni Björnsson 1980, 9.
[281] Beckman/Kålund 1914–16, xiii, cxviii; Jón Jóhannesson 1952, 79.
[282] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 2006, 4; Grønlie 2006, xiii.
[283] This will be analysed in more detail in section 2.2 below.

one of the critics of the Dionysian calculations.[284] Gerlandus's critique is preserved in his *De Computo*, presumably from the end of the eleventh century, and it consists, amongst other things, of the fact that Christ was said to be born seven years earlier than Dionysius had counted. Thus Gerlandus's year 1 would correspond to AD 8.[285] Moreover, Gerlandus moved the beginning of the year from 1 September to 25 December.[286] It is not known when and where in Iceland Gerlandus's method began to be used, but it has been hypothesized that it was first in Hólar during the days of Bishop Jón Qgmundarson (1106–21), the first northern bishop. The use of Gerlandus's method, then, would have spread from there, first to Þingeyrar and then to the South. This hypothesis is based on the fact that, on his way back from his consecration in Rome in 1106, Jón brought with him the Frankish priest Rikini (*Richinne*, *Ricvine*). It has been supposed that Rikini was from Alsace-Lorraine itself, like Gerlandus, who may have even been his teacher.[287] Others have maintained that it was probably Sæmundr Sigfússon *inn fróði* ("the Wise," 1054/56–1133) who introduced Icelanders to Gerlandus's method, as he might have turned his attention to the Easter controversy while he was abroad.[288] This is only speculation, but it is true that Gerlandus was popular in Europe at that time.

Among the extant Early Icelandic works that follow Gerlandus are two computistical texts from the twelfth century and a few sagas from the thirteenth century. The oldest computistical text is *Rímbegla hin gamla* ("the old rhyme rumple"), a *rímtal* which the editors of *Alfræði Íslenzk II* have incorporated into the collection *Rím II*.[289] This *rímtal* is believed to have been composed in the first half of the twelfth century, although it is preserved only in later manuscripts, the oldest of which is AM 727 I 4to (1594). One justification for dating this text to the first half of the twelfth century is the fact that it does

[284] Some scholars maintain that Ari had also been acquainted with another among the methods that corrected the Dionysian reckoning, namely the one devised by the Irish monk Marianus Scotus (d. 1082/3). However, there is no evidence that such reckoning system was ever used in Iceland. Beckman/Kålund 1914–16, xxviii, cxxii; cf. Jón Jóhannesson 1952, 81.
[285] See Verbist 2010, 147–71.
[286] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 2006, 4.
[287] Beckman/Kålund 1914–16, xx–xxi; Jón Jóhannesson 1952, 82.
[288] Turville-Petre 1967 [1953], 87.
[289] Jón Jóhannesson 1952, 83.

not mention the *misseristal* and annexes, so it was probably composed before the Old Icelandic calendar and the Church calendar were coordinated, meaning around or just after the middle of the twelfth century. In any case, it cannot have been written before the days of Bishop Jón (1106–21), as the work makes use of Jón's reformed weekday names.[290] It has been hypothesized that this old *rímtal* is the now-lost *rímtal* which, according to a later text (*Rímbegla* or *Rím* I, see below), was composed by a certain priest, Bjarni Bergþórsson *hinn tǫlvísi* ("the Number-wise," d. 1173). Bjarni was an expert of the *computus* and he had studied in Hólar in the days of Bishop Jón (1106–21). However, other scholars have excluded this hypothesis on the basis that Bjarni happened to be involved in the coordination of the Old Icelandic calendar with the Church calendar around the mid-twelfth century.[291] The alternate assumption is that the text was composed by foreign learned men either in Hólar or Þingeyrar sometime between 1121–50, in order to help ordinary priests cope with the difficulties of such calculations.[292]

The second computistical work which follows Gerlandus is *Rímbegla* itself, which the editors of *Alfræði Íslenzk II* have called *Rím I*. This text is preserved in many manuscripts, testifying to its popularity, at least among learned men. The oldest extant manuscript of this text dates to 1200, or shortly before, but it is not the original work, which has been dated to the second half of the twelfth century. It cannot be older, because either the work of Bjarni (d. 1173) was used as a source, or he had been an informant himself, along with Stjǫrnu-Oddi. The author of this work, however, is unknown, as is its place of composition, although Hólar is considered to be the most probable option.[293]

In the first two decades of the thirteenth century, then, four sagas were composed in the north of Iceland, either at Þingeyrar or Hólar, which follow Gerlandus: *Jóns saga biskups*; *Sverris saga*; *Prestssaga Guðmundar Arasonar*; and probably also *Tómas saga erkibiskups*. These texts altogether include five datings

[290] Jón Jóhannesson 1952, 83–5.
[291] Jón Jóhannesson 1952, 84–5.
[292] Jón Jóhannesson 1952, 85.
[293] Jón Jóhannesson 1952, 85–6.

according to Gerlandus, two of which are recalculations from Ari.[294] Already by 1200, Gerlandus's method had become familiar and was used in the south of Iceland as well, in Skálhólt, evident in the following works that were produced there: *Saga Þorláks biskups* (in Latin); *Þorláks saga biskups hin eldri*; *Hungrvaka*; and *Páls saga biskups*. These works include a total of seven datings according to Gerlandus, two of which are recalculations from Ari.[295]

The popularity of this alternative to Dionysian reckoning has been attributed to the fact that it was used by knowledgeable people, especially in the north of Iceland, and because of *Rímbegla* itself, which had become very popular by then, including amongst saga authors. The reputation of this text should be ascribed, at least in part, however, to an equivocation: namely that the text had come to be associated with Bede, even though Bede followed Dionysius. Gerlandus's popularity may have stemmed partly from that mistaken association. Dionysius's chronology was still used in letters in the south, but there was confusion regarding the beginning of the year, which started variously on 1 January, 1 or 25 March, 1 September, 25 December, or on Easter. Gerlandus's counting may have been favoured for this reason as well.

At some point during the thirteenth century, however, Gerlandus's method started to be disregarded. It has been supposed that it was probably in the decades following the Lateran Council in Rome in 1215, at which Gerlandus's method was officially abandoned. This is extrapolated from information preserved in *Maríu saga*, probably composed by priest Kygri-Bjǫrn Hjaltason (d. 1237/8), who may have been at the council himself, or was at least in Rome when the council took place. In his saga, he promoted the use of Dionysius's system once again.[296]

In any case, absolute AD dating was not broadly used in Early Iceland. It is used notably by Ari Þorgilsson in *Íslendingabók*, as will be shown below (section 2.2.1), but not much elsewhere. Snorri Sturluson, for example, never uses AD dating in his *Heimskringla*, but instead builds up a relative internal

[294] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 2006, 4.
[295] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 2006, 4.
[296] Jón Jóhannesson 1952, 89–91.

chronology, as many other saga authors do.[297] According to Ólafía Einarsdóttir, Snorri probably avoided using an absolute dating system because he held Ari Þorgilsson in high regard, and he rejected having to change his numbers according to Gerlandus's chronology, which he had probably known about through acquaintances of his.[298] Snorri's nephew, the politician and writer Sturla Þórðarson (1214–84), likewise never uses any AD dates in his works. For example, in his *Íslendinga saga,* he uses a dating system relative to events of the Church, while in *Hakonar saga,* he dates events according to royal chancery.[299] These dating systems will be considered in the case studies that follow.

1.6 Concluding Remarks

A variety of methods to measure, keep track of, and organize time existed in Early Iceland, which implies an ability to systematize the past and organize the near future. These methods were both official and more localized, and both native and influenced by or inherited from European traditions, primarily Christianity.

The earliest Icelandic texts that have come down to us convey several different practices for reckoning time for official, civil, or administrative purposes, especially concerning the systematization of the past, as in the case of dating methods, and the relatively near future, as in the case of calendars. In some cases, these methods are culturally-bound, as evident in the system of dating according to the periods of office of the lawspeakers, or through family lines. These methods reflect primarily, if not exclusively, the time-views of the social authorities, namely the chieftains, the lawspeakers, and the Church,

[297] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 2006, 5; 1964, 276–92.
[298] Such as, for example, Styrmir *fróði* ("the Wise") Kárason (d. 1245), prior of the monastery of Viðey and later abbot there, who was originally from Þingeyri, but dwelled with Snorri in Reykholt for many years. Styrmir uses Gerlandus's years in his copy of *Sverris saga* which he is thought to have brought with him from Þingeyrar to Reykholt when he became a member of Snorri's scriptorium. Ólafía Einarsdóttir 2006, 5.
[299] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 2006, 5.

highlighting the strong connection between the organization of time and power.

At the same time, these texts convey more localized ways of reckoning time, notably daytime, which vary according to the specific circumstances in which they were developed and according to the functions they played within a specific social group. These methods include direct observation of natural and astronomical phenomena, and the association of these observations with physical features in the landscape, or the measurement of time on the basis of distances traversed. Most of these methods "were related to the natural environment of the subarctic and to the needs of society at this stage of technological development," which is evidence that "the Old Norse society had its own ways of measuring and treating time," before Christianity was introduced along with its own methods for the same purposes.[300]

This evidence testifies to the coexistence of multiple time-reckoning methods in Early Iceland, while constituting a basis for the analysis of time within the case studies that follows.

[300] Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1997, 110.

2. The Representation of Time in *Íslendingabók*

Íslendingabók, the "Book of Icelanders," is a concise history of Iceland from its settlement, in roughly 870, to the year 1118. It was written sometime between 1122–33 by the Icelandic priest Ari Þorgilsson *inn fróði* ("the Wise," 1067/68–1148), who may have also held office as a chieftain. The work is remarkable from the perspective of time for a number of reasons, including the various temporal patterns it includes, which attest to the existence of several ways to organize and measure time in twelfth-century Iceland, and therefore to multiple perceptions and conceptions of time as well. The patterns included are mainly chronological, and their variability is particularly interesting in the context of dating. Genealogical patterns are also employed to systematize the past, and they appear both within the text and as two separate, appended genealogical accounts. An entire chapter dedicated to adjustments made to the Old Icelandic calendar is also included in the work. Before exploring these aspects of the portrayal of time in the text, it is necessary to consider its main characteristics and the environment in which it was produced, as this is critical to understanding its construction of time and subsequent influence.

2.1 Presentation of the Text

Íslendingabók is the earliest piece of extant historiography from and about medieval Iceland, and probably the earliest history of Iceland ever written, at least in Old Icelandic.[1] Ari Þorgilsson, the author of the piece, seems to have

[1] Hermann 2005, 78. It seems that Sæmundr Sigfússon *inn fróði* ("the Wise," 1054/56–1133), the historian and priest from Oddi and Skálholt who was also among Ari

been the first person to transform the Icelandic past into written history and to do so in Old Icelandic. Evidence for this appears in the prologue to *Heimskringla* (ca. 1220–30), a collection of sagas about Norwegian kings attributed to the renowned Icelandic poet, historian, and politician, Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241), who held Ari in high esteem. In the prologue to his work, Snorri advocates that Ari "was the first man in [Iceland] to write in the Norse tongue about lore both ancient and recent" (*ritaði fyrstr manna hér á landi at norrænu máli fræði bæði forna ok nýja*), also describing him as "exceedingly well informed" (*forvitri*), and "eager to learn and endowed with an excellent memory" (*námgjarn ok minnigr*).[2] Although Snorri probably had his own reasons for praising Ari—among them the fact that he needed to establish him as an authority to validate his own work—Ari was generally held in high regard within his community. Further evidence for this appears in the *First Grammatical Treatise* (ca. 1130–40), where the anonymous author also praises Ari, by referring to "that sagacious (historical) lore that Ari Þorgilsson has recorded in books with such reasonable understanding" (*þav hín spaklegv fræði er ari þorgils son hefir a bøkr sett af skynsamlegv viti*).[3]

How certain is it that Ari authored the piece? Ari begins the prologue in the first person, stating, "I first wrote the Book of the Icelanders" (*Íslendingabók gørða ek fyrst*) and ends the book, in the second appended genealogy, by saying, "and I am called Ari" (*en ek heitik Ari*). In this way, he leaves his signature, which is hardly common practice in medieval Icelandic writing, or medieval writing more generally, even when a narrative suggests that there may be a single individual behind a text or manuscript.[4] That said, the earliest

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Þorgilsson's mentors and advisors for *Íslendingabók*, composed a now lost work on historical matters before Ari wrote his account, even though it was probably written in Latin and mostly about Norwegian kings. This is evidenced, for example, in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* by Oddr Snorrason, who lived in the second half of the 12th century, and in *Nóregs konungatal*, a list of Norwegian kings composed in the late 12th century, as both texts refer directly to Sæmundr's work. See Jónas Kristjánsson 2007, 123–4.

[2] *Heimskringla*, trans. Hollander 1964, 4–5; ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941, 5–7.

[3] Hreinn Benediktsson 1972, 208–9.

[4] I thank Professor Fjodor Uspenskij for the detail concerning Ari's signature, which was pointed out to me at the conference "Time, Space and Narrative in Medieval Icelandic Literature," held in Reykjavík in March 2017.

complete manuscripts of *Íslendingabók* are post-medieval. These are two paper manuscripts from the seventeenth century, AM 113a fol. (1651) and AM 113b fol. (1625–1720, the basis for all editions). Both were copied by Rev. Jón Erlendsson of Villingaholt (Árnessýsla, South Iceland, d. 1672) from a now lost codex dating to around 1200, itself a copy of Ari's work. How close that initial manuscript was to Ari's text is impossible to say, since we have copies of only a single, old manuscript, "but it is commonly believed that the two later copies give a good picture of Ari's original work."[5] Thus, scholars believe that there is no reason to suspect that the text was altered or damaged in transmission. There is, however, at least one exception to this. It concerns the following passage from the prologue: *en hvatki es* missagt *es í frœðum þessum, þá es skylt at hafa þat heldr, es sannara reynisk*, which has been translated as "but whatever is *incorrectly* stated in these records, it is one's duty to prefer what proves to be more accurate."[6] Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson points out that "Ari never wrote in *Íslendingabók* that he had *missagt* anything at all," *missagt* being a corruption of Ari's original wording *nú sagt* ("now stated") attributed to Árni Magnússon (1663–1730), who was among the first to research the work thoroughly.[7] Árni's authority allowed for the "unfair distortion" *missagt* to propagate for centuries, so much so that the text still appears as such in the otherwise definitive *Íslenzk fornrit* edition, the *lectio nú sagt* being relegated to the critical apparatus. Even if Ari acknowledged the fact that what he stated could be perfected in case more complete information were found at a later stage, this does not mean he felt he had said anything wrong. Analysis of the text confirms that Ari was well aware of what he wrote. Therefore, in the words of Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson: "it is time that we started showing Ari a little more justice, and began publishing this key statement of policy in the form in which it is found in the manuscripts."[8]

[5] Mundal 2011, 113. Among the scholars sharing this assumption are, for example, Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson (1999, 55), and Björn Sigfússon (1944, 20–37).
[6] Grønlie 2006, 3. Emphasis mine.
[7] Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1999, 182–3; Jakob Benediktsson 1986 [1968], xlvii.
[8] Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1999, 183.

Who was Ari Þorgilsson? Ari was a notable priest and perhaps also a chieftain from Breiðafjörður (West Iceland), who was descended from important families of that area as well as of Southeast Iceland. The information we possess about his life comes mostly from *Íslendingabók*. In chapter 9, Ari himself relates that, at the age of seven, he was sent to Haukadalr to live with Hallr Þórarinsson (b. ca. 995/6), whom he describes as a man whom everyone considered "the most generous layman in [Iceland] and the most eminent in good qualities" (*sá maðr es þat vas almælt, at mildastr væri ok ágæztr at góðu á landi hér ólærðra manna*). Ari remained there for fourteen years, until he was twenty-one years of age (from 1074/75 to 1088/89).[9] Hallr also fostered Teitr Ísleifsson (ca. 1040–1110), one of the sons of Ísleifr Gizurarson, the first Bishop of Iceland (Bishop of Skálholt 1056–80), as was outlined in chapter 1. Teitr was a chieftain and a priest and he ran a small school in Haukadalr, one of only four in Iceland at the time (the others being at Skálholt, Oddi, and Hólar).[10] It is likely that Ari was sent to Haukadalr because his mother was related to Teitr's wife, Jórunn, and he would have been able to study at Teitr's school. Teitr was a few decades older than Ari, and Ari describes him as his foster-father (*fóstri*, probably including the meaning of "tutor"), while praising him as well as "the wisest man I have known" (*þess manns es ek kunna spakastan*, ch. 1).

This personal information is important for understanding the nature of *Íslendingabók*, both for how it constructs time and its relative influence in its society. These aspects are better appreciated by considering the patrons and advisors of the piece as well. In the prologue of the work, Ari explicitly writes that the Bishops Þorlákr Runólfsson (1118–33) and Ketill Þorsteinsson (1122–45), along with Sæmundr Sigfússon *inn fróði* ("the Wise," 1054/56–1133), had been his patrons and advisors for the book:

[9] These dates are derived from Ari's statement that he was present at the funeral of Iceland's first bishop, Ísleifr Gizurarson, and that he was twelve at the time. Since we know Ísleifr died in 1080, it has been deduced that Ari was born in 1067/8, thus he moved to Haukadalr in 1074/5 and stayed there until 1088/9. Grønlie 2006, x–xi.
[10] Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2010, 216–7.

Íslendingabók gørða ek fyrst byskupum órum, Þorláki ok Katli, ok sýndak bæði þeim ok Sæmundi presti.

> I first wrote the Book of the Icelanders for our Bishops Þorlákr and Ketill, and I showed it both to them and to the priest Sæmundr.

Bishop Þorlákr was a great-nephew of Hallr, and succeeded Bishop Gizurr, Teitr's brother. Bishop Ketill was both a chieftain and bishop of Hólar, and married Gizurr's daughter. Sæmundr *inn fróði*, the notable historian, priest, and chieftain from Oddi and Skálholt, was among the close collaborators of Gizurr and was also a cousin of Bishop Ketill. From this, it follows that the content of the book reflects the specific interests of Ari and his patrons, which should be considered when examining or evaluating the work generally, and thus the expression and construction of time in it as well. It is not surprising, for example, that the text emphasizes the coming of Christianity to Iceland and its consolidation in the country, or that it includes a genealogical history of the two patron bishops as well as of Ari's own family. These aspects are analysed in the second part of this chapter (sections 2.3 and 2.4).

The book can be dated to 1122–33 based upon the beginning of office of Bishop Ketill (1122, *terminus post quem*), and the deaths of both Bishop Þorlákr and Sæmundr (1133, *terminus ante quem*). Ari's work on the text likely started at the beginning of that period, while the text as it exists now might be a revised version that he composed sometime before 1133. Near the passage quoted earlier in relation to Ari's patrons, Ari alludes to an earlier version of the text:

> *Íslendingabók gørða ek fyrst byskupum órum, Þorláki ok Katli, ok sýndak bæði þeim ok Sæmundi presti. En með því at þeim líkaði svá at hafa eða þar við auka, þá skrifaða ek þessa of et sama far, fyr útan áttartǫlu ok konunga ævi, ok jókk því es mér varð síðan kunnara ok nú es gerr sagt á þessi en á þeiri.*
>
> I first wrote the Book of the Icelanders for our bishops Þorlákr and Ketill, and I showed it both to them and to the priest Sæmundr. And in so far as it pleased them to keep it as it was or to add to it, I wrote this on the same subject besides the genealogies and regnal years of kings, and I added what has since become better known to me and is now more fully reported in this book than the other.

Ari tells how the alleged earlier version of the text contained the renowned *ættartala ok konunga ævi*, "genealogies and regnal years of kings"—probably notes on kings' names and dates of office rather than full biographies—which he excluded from the second, extant version of the text at the suggestion of his patrons. To accept this statement as true implies that he excluded the information about kings from the second version of the work to accord it a more Icelandic tone. However, the passage is not entirely clear, and doubt has been cast on whether Ari ever wrote those genealogies at all, or whether an earlier version of the text ever even existed.

Some scholars have assumed that Ari's mention of the earlier version might simply be a literary cliché employed to demonstrate modesty and obsequiousness towards higher authorities, which was not an uncommon convention in the Middle Ages.[11] In any case, *Íslendingabók,* as we now have it, is also the only text we have that Ari authored. Scholars agree on the fact that he may have authored a number of other works, as several sources, such as the *First Grammatical Treatise* (ca. 1130–40), refer to his "books" in the plural. However, whatever else he may have written has been debated. It seems possible that Ari took part in the compilation of the first *Landnámabók* ("The Book of Settlements"), now preserved in a number of versions, the oldest being Sturla Þórðarson's *Sturlubók* (Sturla died in 1284).[12] It is also assumed, though not uncontroversially, that Ari wrote more on Norwegian kings than the *konunga ævi* he professes to have omitted from *Íslendingabók*.[13] Similarly, Ari has been considered the author of *Ævi Snorra goða*, a short biography of Snorri *goði* Þorgrímsson, a prominent chieftain who played a decisive role in the acceptance of Christianity, also appearing in several sagas, notably *Eyrbyggja saga*

[11] Grønlie 2006, xii; Sverrir Tómasson 1988, 157.
[12] See, for example, Einar Arnórsson 1942, 31–43. The main basis for this thesis, that Ari authored a first version of *Landnámabók*, is a statement Haukr Erlendsson (d. 1334) made in his edition of the work. According to Ellehøj (1965, 288–9), though, "there is no reason to consider Ari the author of this Proto-Landnáma, only to assume that records by Ari concerning the landnám and genealogy were used as source."
[13] See Einar Arnórsson 1942, 56–62.

(see section 3.3).[14] It has been suggested that a work from 1143 named *Prestaskráin* was also authored by Ari.[15] That text is a list of forty Icelandic priests of noble lineage (*kynbornir*), ten from each quarter, a significant number of whom were most likely also chieftains.

Other works that have been attributed to Ari include *Kristni saga* and a chapter about the *Úlfljótslǫg*.[16] Interestingly, a brief text of world history named *Heimsaldrar* or "The Ages of the World" has also been attributed to Ari.[17] This text is preserved in the fourteenth-century manuscript AM 194 8vo, and consists of a chronological overview of the first five ages of man, following the Augustinian view of the six ages of Christian history.[18] As this view formed a master narrative against which other historical works could be measured, it has been supposed that *Heimsaldrar* provided an outline of *Íslendingabók*, while *Íslendingabók* in turn makes some attempt to place Iceland within the larger context of world history.[19] Whether Ari wanted to place Iceland within a larger world-historical context has itself been contested, though, and is considered below (section 2.4.2).

As for *Íslendingabók* itself, it spans 250 years of history, beginning with the settlement of Iceland and extending to events in the author's own time, specifically the death of Bishop Gizurr Ísleifsson in 1118. The events follow each other chronologically, but in peculiar ways discussed in section 2.2. The contents are condensed into ten brief chapters, listed in the work itself, alongside a prologue and two appended genealogical accounts, one of the bishops and the other of Ari's own ancestors:

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[14] Ellehøj (1965, 54–60, 289–90) hypothesizes that *Ævi Snorra* was included in the earlier version of *Íslendingabók*, assuming that version ever existed.
[15] Einar Arnórsson 1942, 49–51; Ólafía Einarsdóttir 2006, 4; Sverrir Jakobsson 2017, 81.
[16] See Einar Arnórsson 1942, 44–56.
[17] Stefán Karlsson 1969, 347–9; Sverrir Jakobsson 2017, 82–5.
[18] In a number of his works, especially *City of God*, St. Augustine of Hippo divided Christian history into six ages, going from Adam to Christ's expected second coming. This view became influential during the Middle Ages. See Higgins 1989, 244–5.
[19] Sverrir Jakobsson 2017, 84–5.

Prologus (Prologue)

1. *Frá Íslands byggð* (On the settlement of Iceland)
2. *Frá landnámsmǫnnum ok lagasetning* (On the settlers and the establishment of laws)
3. *Frá alþingssetning* (On the establishment of the Althing)
4. *Frá misseristali* (On the calendar)
5. *Frá fjórðungadeild* (On the division into Quarters)
6. *Frá Grœnlands byggð* (On the settlement of Greenland)
7. *Frá því, es kristni kom á Ísland* (On how Christianity came to Iceland)
8. *Frá byskupum útlendum* (On foreign bishops)
9. *Frá Ísleifi byskupi* (On Bishop Ísleifr)
10. *Frá Gizuri byskupi* (On Bishop Gizurr)

Ættartala (Genealogies)

As the list anticipates, the work treats factual and significant events in the history of Iceland, that is, it is referential. For this reason, it is considered historical, along with the fact that the events are narrated chronologically, and that Ari gives the impression of being objective, likewise identifying and ascribing objectivity to his sources. Ari's sources were mainly oral—since he was apparently the first to write on Icelandic history from the Settlement—and allegedly reliable. Indeed, Ari does not only specify several of his informants by name (e.g., "Teitr told us so," *svá sagði Teitr oss*, ch. 2), but he also attests to the reliability of the given information by praising the respective informants as, for example, "wise" (*spakr, margspakr*), "reliably informed" (*óljúgfróðr*), "having a reliable memory" (*minnigr*), or "truthful" (*ólyginn*). This practice, which is attested in Icelandic sagas as well,[20] is in line with the common Continental writers' custom of praising informants and highlighting the trustworthiness of the source information, in order to demonstrate that their own work is

[20] Saga authors often describe their informants as *fróðr* (knowledgeable), *sannfróðr* (truth-loving), *sannreyndr* (verified), *vitr* (wise), or *meirháttr* (superior) in order to prove the reliability of their own work. See Sverrir Tómasson 1988, 222–7, 410.

reliable, as does the Venerable Bede, for instance, in his *Ecclesiastical History* (*Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, ca. 730).[21]

Ari's informants can be divided into three main groups: the people who are connected with his stay in Haukadalr, especially Hallr, Teitr, Bishop Gizurr, and Sæmundr; his relatives in the west, especially his paternal uncle Þorkell and Þuríðr Snorradóttir; and, finally, the lawspeakers Markús Skeggjason (d. 1107) and Úlfhéðinn Gunnarsson (in office 1108–16).[22] Hallr Þórarinsson of Haukadalr seems to have been the oldest of Ari's informants, as he was almost eighty years old when Ari went to live with him; he was probably born in 995/6. Ari describes him as a man "who both had a reliable memory and was truthful, and remembered himself being baptized […] at three years old" (*es bæði vas minnigr ok ólyginn ok munði sjalfr þat es hann vas skírðr […] þrevetran*, ch. 9). Ari also considers Þuríðr Snorradóttir (ca. 1025–1112) to be an authority. She was a daughter of Snorri *goði*, the notable chieftain who played a prominent role in the acceptance of Christianity in Iceland, recounted in *Ævi Snorra goða* (probably written by Ari himself), and a major character in *Eyrbyggja saga*, one of the case studies below (ch. 3). Þuríðr herself was born only twenty-five years after the Conversion, and Ari describes her as "both wise in many things and reliably informed" (*margspǫk ok óljúgfróð*, ch. 1). Ari also often mentions Teitr Ísleifsson himself (ca. 1040–1110) as a source, the foster-father and teacher whom he held in high regard, not least because he was son of the first Bishop of Iceland, Ísleifr, whose father, Gizurr *hvíti* ("the White"), had also played a prominent role in Iceland's acceptance of Christianity. Ari uses Teitr as his source for the account of the Conversion (ch. 7), while clarifying that Teitr got his information from eyewitnesses.[23] Finally, Ari often ascribes what he writes to lawspeakers, such as Úlfhéðinn Gunnarsson, a kinsman of Hafliði Másson, who was lawspeaker from 1108–16, or he simply refers to "wise men"

[21] West-Pavlov (2013, 57) points out that this practice goes further back at least to Thucydides, who, in his *Peloponnesian War* (Book I, 22; trans. Warner 1978, 48) claimed that his "factual reporting" was based on events at which "either I was present myself [or] … I … heard … from eyewitnesses whose reports I have checked with as much thoroughness as possible."
[22] Jakob Benediktsson 1986 [1968], xx.
[23] Grønlie 2006, xv.

more generally. It is not surprising that his narrative is more detailed from the year 1000 on, closer to the life spans of his informants.[24]

By addressing his sources, Ari gives the impression that he is narrating from an objective point of view, and that what he is relating is an impartial and truthful account of Icelandic history. The distance between events around the year 1000 and the time when Ari was writing *Íslendingabók* could be covered by a few generations, and it is possible that his informants related accurate information. This does not entirely seem to be the case, however, not only because the account is demonstrably biased toward Ari and his patrons' interests, but also because its style gives little impression of oral tradition. The text is instead a highly literary work, lacking "stylistic features connected with orality and mnemonic effort such as alliteration, assonance and rhythmic construction."[25] While such features of oral traditions might still form the backbone of the work, they must have been transformed once written, framed within the new context of universal history, rather than within a more local one (although this is debated), and shaped according to the literary demands of narrative.[26] Indeed, the work should be regarded as narrative history.

As anticipated, Ari's practice of regularly citing his informants has been compared to the Venerable Bede's, as he employed it in his *Ecclesiastical History* (*Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, ca. 730). This work has been suggested as a model for *Íslendingabók*, along with Bede's *De Temporum Ratione* (AD 725). Other written sources that Ari may have consulted include Adam of Bremen's Church history (*Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*, "History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen," ca. 1073–76), and Sæmundr's work as well.[27] Ari mentions only one written source explicitly, a certain Edmund's saga. This was probably a Latin life of St. Edmund, although it is not clear whether it was Abbo of Fleury's *Passio Sancti Eadmundi* ("The Martyrdom of St. Edmund,"

[24] Grønlie 2006, xvi–xvii.
[25] Hermann 2005, 78–9.
[26] Hermann 2005, 82–4.
[27] Grønlie 2006, xix; Würth 2005, 158.

ca. 980–90) or *De miraculis Sancti Eadmundi* by Hermannus, or even a composite version of the two.[28]

These written sources were all in Latin. There is evidence in *Íslendingabók* itself that Ari used and imitated Latin sources, especially historiographical ones. This can be found in the style of the work, in the handling of subordinate clauses and the use of paired synonyms, such as *at ætlun ok tǫlu* ("according to the opinion and reckoning"). Moreover, the text contains various Latin words and phrases, such as *rex* ("king") and *obiit* ("he died"), and datings such as *Kalend. Junii*. The use of the title *Libellus islandorum* ("brief document of the Icelanders"), as well as a prologue and the division into titled chapters are also evidence that Ari was indebted to Latin sources.[29] It is remarkable, though, that despite drawing on Latin texts, Ari decided to write his book in Icelandic and not in Latin, the official language of Christian learned men. The text must have been devised for, and restricted to, an Icelandic audience, rather than a more international audience of Latinists.

Whichever the case, it is especially in the realm of chronology that Ari is indebted to European learning, which he probably gained knowledge of through the works of Bede.[30] *Íslendingabók* displays a well-constructed chronological structure, and the various temporal patterns it is organized around will now be considered.

2.2 Chronology

Íslendingabók demonstrates Ari Þorgilsson's great interest and competence in constructing chronology. It displays several different dating patterns, including absolute and relative dating of various kinds, with some of the latter specifically culture-bound, that is, intrinsic to Icelandic medieval culture and society. This seems to indicate not only that different kinds of chronological thinking were in place, but also that Ari's view of signification was more than plainly chronological. In other words, the chronology in Ari's work is more

[28] Grønlie 2006, 16.
[29] Whaley 2000, 170.
[30] Grønlie 2006, xx.

than just a progressive timescale, as it is clearly culture-bound, and therefore imbued with social significance.[31]

2.2.1 Absolute Dating

Among the dating methods Ari uses in *Íslendingabók* is absolute dating. That is, he gives the precise years in which specific events took place, as counted from the birth of Christ in AD 1. He says that he has reckoned years "by the common method of reckoning" (*at alþýðu tali* and *at almanna tali*, chs. 7 and 10), that is *secundum æram vulgarem*, or by Dionysius Exiguus's counting. He most certainly became acquainted with this method through the works of the Venerable Bede, notably through his *Ecclesiastical History* and *De Temporum Ratione*, and through works by other important European authorities, such as Adam of Bremen's *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*.[32]

By maintaining that he calculated years "by the common method of reckoning," Ari implies that he knew there existed less common time-reckoning methods, meaning methods other than Dionysius's reckoning, which were used in Iceland at the time. Had that not been the case, he would have not needed to specify the time-reckoning method he himself employed.[33] There is evidence that at least one alternative to Dionysius was used in Iceland during the days of Ari and beyond, when it had just been developed in Europe as part of a wider critique of the Dionysian method. This method was the one devised in the eleventh century by the chronologist and arithmetician Gerlandus Compotista from Lorraine, who held the conviction that Christ was born seven years before Dionysius had figured, making Gerlandus's year 1 correspond to AD 8, and also moving the beginning of the year from 1 September to 25 December.[34]

In any case, Ari mentions very few absolute dates in *Íslendingabók*. This distinguishes it from annalistic writing. An annal or chronicle is characterized

[31] Hastrup 1985, 46.
[32] See Grønlie 2006, xix–xx.
[33] Jakob Benediktsson 1986 [1968], xxix–xxx.
[34] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 2006, 4. See also ch. 1, n. 284.

as a detailed contemporary record of natural and social events year by year, which *Íslendingabók* is not.[35] Moreover, *Íslendingabók* has a named author who discloses his specific point of view, which is not typical in annals or chronicles either. Among the few absolute dates Ari mentions, three are central to the work. These are the round years AD 870, 1000 and 1120: 870 for the murder of St. Edmund, King of the Angles; the year 1000 for the fall of the Norwegian King Óláfr Tryggvason; and 1120 for the change of a lunar cycle (*aldamót*).[36] None of these events belong to the history of Iceland, which comes as a surprise, given the fact that such is the history that Ari is ostensibly relating, not to mention that he is writing in the vernacular and not in Latin, the official language of historiography in the Middle Ages.[37]

Ólafía Einarsdóttir has maintained that these events were not chosen by chance, but because their dates were special, round figures.[38] That is, they were close, round years to the dates of the three main Icelandic events of the book, none of which could be associated with a round date. These Icelandic events are the first settlement of Iceland (867/68), the introduction of Christianity (999), and Bishop Gizurr Ísleifsson's death (1118). If, as it seems probable, Ari used an Easter table for dating events and calculating time intervals in his work, such as the table preserved in AM 732a VII 4to, using round figures as a reference would have been more practical than using non-round ones.[39] Indeed, there are no datings according to, for example, Ingólfr's arrival.[40] Thus, Ari used the round dates of specific foreign events, which were close to the dates of the central Icelandic events of the book, because the same Icelandic events were not round figures, and therefore they would not have been suitable for calculations using an Easter table. Still, these three events were central to the history of Iceland, and Ari, in order to make his dating

[35] Hermann 2005, 76; Hastrup 1985, 46.
[36] Ari also mentions the non-round year AD 604, as the year of Pope Gregory's death, a piece of information likely from Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, but which is not as significant within the work as the other three dates. Ellehøj 1965, 291.
[37] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1964, 342.
[38] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1964, 345.
[39] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1964, 95–106; Jakob Benediktsson 1986 [1968], xxxi.
[40] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1964, 343–4.

references, selected round dates of specific foreign events that were close in time to these primary Icelandic events. The significance of the parallels that can be established between the Icelandic events and their non-Icelandic counterparts is as follows:

- 867/68 would be the date of the first settlement of Iceland, based on Ari's statement that Ingólfr Arnarson came to Iceland the first time when King Haraldr *hárfagri* ("Fairhair") was 16 winters old.[41] This date, however, is surrounded by uncertainty.[42] In any case, Ari, instead of mentioning the date of the Settlement directly, connects the event to the time when Edmund, King of the East Angles, was killed by Ívarr Ragnarsson in AD 870. According to Grønlie, the connection with King Edmund might have been established because several Icelanders, including some among Ari's informants, had claimed descent from him, "or because of the official recognition of Edmund's sanctity at a Church council in Oxford in 1122."[43] The connection with Ragnarr *loðbrók* ("Shaggy breeches"), Ívarr's father, however, might be more significant, given the fact that some Icelanders, including Ari himself, claimed descent from him as well.[44]
- 999 is the date of the conversion to Christianity, though it has been much debated. Ari places the Conversion in the same summer that King Óláfr Tryggvason died, namely in AD 1000, a date which he probably drew from Adam of Bremen's work on the history of the Church of Hamburg.[45] However, Ólafía Einarsdóttir pointed out that Ari might have "used a calendar which began the year on 1st September, [thus] he would have dated Óláfr Tryggvason's fall on 9/10th

[41] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1964, 342.
[42] Indeed, King Haraldr's age cannot be relied upon here as an indicator of the time of the first settlement, because Ari's dating of his reign seems to fall over a decade too early. Grønlie 2006, 16. However, King Haraldr himself is a problematic historical figure, if not even a mythical figure, as nothing is certain about his person, his reign, or more generally about the dates that have been associated with him. See, for example, Sverrir Jakobsson 2017, 86–7.
[43] Grønlie 2006, 16.
[44] Cf. Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1964, 62–8.
[45] Ellehøj 1965, 291.

September to 1000 and the Conversion to 999 (we would now date both to 999)."[46]

- 1118 was the year in which Bishop Gizurr Ísleifsson died, and a list of several foreign princes who also died that year is given (ch. 10). Ari connects this date instead to the change of a lunar cycle two years later, in 1120, the new lunar cycle beginning in the year 1121, according to the oldest extant Easter table, which is preserved in AM 732a VII 4to.[47]

According to an alternative view, Ari chose the dates of foreign events not for practical reasons, but "to fix national chronology with international chronology of the Church and European historiography," signalling a larger ideological membership.[48] However, this does not entirely seem to be the case. The work is in Icelandic, and not in Latin, the official language of historiography and the Church in the Middle Ages. Moreover, concerning the Church, "Ari is silent about events relevant not just to the international Church but specifically to the Church in Scandinavia," while "there is very little sense in his book of how the Icelandic Church is part of a wider international community."[49] Ari seems instead to be more interested in the Church from an institutional perspective, rather than a religious one, which will be analysed in more detail below (section 2.4.2).

2.2.2 Relative Dating

Besides occasionally using absolute dating in his *Íslendingabók*, Ari employs many kinds of relative dating. In these cases, he dates an event by relating it to another important event occurring either in Iceland or abroad, most commonly Norway, and concerning some authority, such as a bishop, a lawspeaker, or a king. This combines the events with each other without

[46] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1964, 347. Cf. Grønlie 2006, 26; Jakob Benediktsson 1986 [1968], xxxiii–xxxv; Gunnar Karlsson 2007b, 305–9.
[47] Grønlie 2006, 30; Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1964, 93–106.
[48] Jakob Benediktsson 1986 [1968], xxxi; Hermann 2005, 76.
[49] Grønlie 2006, xxii.

considering any continuous timescale of fixed intervals,[50] at least not directly. Rather, the events are dated by determining whether they are younger or older than some other ones. For instance, in chapter 10 we read that:

> *En tveim vetrum síðarr varð aldamót. [...] Þat vas tuttugu vetrum ens annars hundraðs eptir fall Óláfs Tryggvasonar, en fimm tegum ens þriðja hundraðs eptir dráp Eadmundar Englakonungs.*
>
> But two winters thereafter [i.e. after the death of Bishop Gizurr in 1118] there was a turn of the lunar cycle. [...] It was 120 years after the fall of Olaf Tryggvason, 250 after the slaying of Eadmund, king of the English.

Ari also employs relative dating to fix the dates of important moments in the lives of Bishops Ísleifr and Gizurr, by connecting these to other important, notably foreign, events. For example, when dating the death of Bishop Gizurr (ch. 10), he gives a long list of contemporary foreign events which he probably obtained from foreign annals:[51]

> *Gizurr byskup andaðisk þremr tegum nátta síðarr í Skálaholti á enum þriðja degi í viku <V> Kalend. Junii.*
>
> *Á því ári enu sama obiit Paschalis secundus páfi fyrr en Gizurr byskup ok Baldvini Jórsalakonungr ok Arnaldus patriarcha í Hierúsalem ok Philippus Svíakonungr, en síðarr et sama sumar Alexíus Grikkjakonungr; þá hafði hann átta vetr ens fjórða tegar setit at stóli í Miklagarði. En tveim vetrum síðarr varð aldamót. Þá hǫfðu þeir Eysteinn ok Sigurðr verit sjautján vetr konungar í Norvegi eptir Magnús fǫður sinn Óláfsson Haraldssonar. Þat vas tuttugu vetrum ens annars hundraðs eptir fall Óláfs Tryggvasonar, en fimm tegum ens þriðja hundraðs eptir dráp Eadmundar Englakonungs, en sextán vetrum ens sétta hundraðs eptir andlát Gregóríus páfa, þess es kristni kom á England, at því es talit es. En hann andaðisk á ǫðru ári konungdóms Fóku keisara, fjórum vetrum ens sjaunda hundraðs eptir burð Krists at almannatali. Þat verðr allt saman tuttugu ár ens tolfta hundraðs.*
>
> Bishop Gizurr died thirty nights later [after the consecration of Bishop Þorlákr] in Skálaholt on the third day of the week, the fifth [day] before the calends of June.
>
> In the same year Pope Paschal II died before Bishop Gizurr, as did Baldwin king of Jerusalem and Arnulf patriarch in Jerusalem, and Philip king of the Swedes and, later the same summer, Alexius king of the Greeks; he had then sat on the throne in Miklagarðr for thirty-eight years. And two years later a new lunar cycle

[50] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1964, 359.
[51] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1964, 32–3.

> began. Eysteinn and Sigurðr had then been kings in Norway for seventeen years after their father Magnús, son of Óláfr Haraldsson. That was 120 years after the fall of Óláfr Tryggvason, and 250 years after the killing of Edmund, king of the Angles, and 516 years after the death of Pope Gregory, who brought Christianity to England, according to what has been reckoned. And he died in the second year of the reign of the Emperor Phocas, 604 years after the birth of Christ by the common method of reckoning. That makes 1120 years altogether.

However, Ari is less precise when he dates the consecrations of the two bishops, Ísleifr and Gizurr. He states that Bishop Ísleifr's consecration took place "in the days of king Haraldr of Norway…" (*á dǫgum Haralds Norvegskonungs Sigurðarsonar*, ch. 9), and Bishop Gizurr's "in the days of King Óláfr Haraldsson…" (*á dǫgum Óláfs konungs Haraldssonar*, ch. 10). Ari vaguely connects the same events to the offices of the popes that were in charge at the time: "Ísleifr was consecrated bishop when he was fifty; Leo VII was then Pope" (*Ísleifr vas vígðr til byskups, þá es hann var fimmtøgr; þá vas Leó septimus páfi*, ch. 9);[52] "Gizurr was consecrated bishop when he was forty. Gregory VII was then Pope" (*Gizurr vas vígðr til byskups, þá es hann var fertøgr. Þá var Gregórius septimus páfi*, ch. 10). Thus, the degree of precision of relative dating varies in the source, which is confirmed by another pattern of this kind that Ari employs, which will now be described.

Another relative dating pattern Ari uses is the culturally specific pattern of dating in relation to the offices of Icelandic lawspeakers: Ari states during whose office as lawspeaker a certain event took place.[53] For example, in chapter 3 we read that:

> *Svá hafa ok spakir menn sagt, at á sex tegum vetra yrði Ísland albyggt, svá at eigi væri meirr síðan. Því nær tók Hrafn lǫgsǫgu Hængssonr landnámamanns, næstr Ulfljóti, ok hafði tuttugu sumur.*
>
> Wise men have also said that Iceland was fully settled in sixty years, so that no further settlement was made after that [i.e. AD 930]. At about that time Hrafn, son of Hængr the settler, took up the office of lawspeaker after Úlfljótr, and held it for twenty summers.

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[52] Leo VII, however, must be incorrect. *Kristni saga* has Leo IX, although he died two years before Ísleifr was consecrated bishop in 1056, thus in 1054. See Jakob Benediktsson 1986 [1968], 21.
[53] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 2006, 3.

By having traits similar to those of the consuls in the Roman republic, the lawspeakers' terms of office allowed the construction of a very important linear timescale of fixed points. However, such points were clearly not equidistant in time, as the Roman consuls' yearly appointments usually were. Lawspeakers usually held their office for three years, but there was much variability. As was exemplified above, Skapti Þóroddsson was law-speaker for 26 consecutive years (1004–1030), and Grímr Svertingsson for only one (1002–1003). If such offices are used to date other events relatively, the degree of precision will vary: dating an event to Skapti's office would result in a less precise dating than tying the same event to the office of Grímr.[54]

The lawspeakers' names and terms of office that appear in the book cover the period from the establishment of the *Alþingi* in 930 until the 1120s. It has been noted that "there is never a gap or overlap in the sequence of lawspeakers [that Ari gives], such as we often encounter when dealing with lists of kings, archbishops, and even popes."[55] This may arouse suspicion about the reliability of the scale, but according to Jakob Benediktsson, at least, there seems to be no reason to doubt it.[56] Ólafía Einarsdóttir has equated this scale to AD dating, considering both scales as learned and absolute.[57] According to Hastrup, however, the series of lawspeakers does not constitute absolute dating but is more relative, given the various lengths of the lawspeakers' terms of office.[58] Moreover, Hastrup adds that "while the Christian chronology is based on absolute physical time, the series of lawspeakers was a measure of a particular cultural chronology," based on internal criteria for the conceptualization of time.[59]

Ari's usage notwithstanding, dating in relation to a period of office was not common during his time (see section 1.5.1). It seems that "in the literature of the republic after [his] time, the period of office of the lawspeaker [was]

[54] Hastrup 1985, 47–8.
[55] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 2006, 3. See also Jakob Benediktsson 1986 [1968], xxxviii–xxxix.
[56] Jakob Benediktsson 1986 [1968], xxxix.
[57] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1964, 341.
[58] Hastrup 1985, 47–8.
[59] Hastrup 1985, 48.

again often [employed] as a background for the events narrated."[60] Evidence for this does not abound, though, but dating in relation to a period of office other than a lawspeaker's is frequently attested after Ari's time.

Finally, it should be noted that Ari often provides information about a person's age at a certain time in order to situate events.[61] For instance, when mentioning the bishops' consecrations in chapter 10, he also mentions how old they were at the time:

> *Gizurr var vígðr til byskups, þá es hann vas fertøgr. Þá vas Gregórius septimus páfi. En síðan vas hann enn næsta vetr í Danmǫrku ok kom of sumarit eptir hingat til lands. En þá es hann hafði verit fjóra vetr ok tuttugu byskup, svá sem faðir hans, þá vas Jóan Qgmundarsonr vígðr til byskups fyrstr til stóls at Hólum; þá vas hann vetri miðr en halfsextøgr. En tolf vetrum síðarr, þá es Gizurr hafði alls verit byskup sex vetr ens fjórða tegar, þá vas Þorlákr vígðr til byskups; hann lét Gizurr vígja til stóls í Skálaholti at sér lifanda. Þá vas Þorlákr tveim vetrum meir en þrítøgr, en Gizurr byskup andaðisk þremr tegum nátta síðarr í Skálaholti á enum þriðja degi í viku <V> Kalend. Junii.*
>
> Gizurr was consecrated bishop when he was forty. Gregory VII was then pope. And he spent the following winter in Denmark and came to this country the summer after that. And when he had been bishop for twenty-four years, just like his father, Jóan Qgmundarson was consecrated bishop, the first to the see at Hólar; he was then fifty-four. And twelve years later, when Gizurr had been bishop for thirty-six years in all, Þorlákr was consecrated bishop; Gizurr had him consecrated to the see in Skálaholt during his lifetime. Þorlákr was then thirty-two, and Bishop Gizurr died thirty nights later in Skálaholt on the third day of the week, the fifth [day] before the calends of June.

This method is attested in the literature after Ari's time, along with dating in relation to a period of office, although not often a lawspeaker's. These methods will be reconsidered in chapter 3 regarding their use in the *Íslendingasögur*.

[60] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 2006, 3.
[61] Ellehøj 1965, 290.

2.2.3 Calendrical Time Units and Reform of the Old Icelandic Calendar

Aside from employing various absolute and relative dating patterns, Ari also dates events within the year according to calendrical time units and reckoning. He uses week counting in discussing the *Alþingi*: "it had been proclaimed in the laws that people should come to the *Alþingi* when ten weeks of the summer had passed [i.e., between 18 and 24 June]" (*Þá vas þat mælt et næsta sumar áðr í lǫgum, at menn skyldi svá koma til alþingis, es tíu vikur væri af sumri*, ch. 7). He goes on to use "summer" both as a season and in the metonymic sense of "year" in the specific case of lawspeakers' periods of office. For example, he relates that the lawspeaker Hrafn, son of Hængr, held office "for twenty summers" (*ok hafði tuttugu sumur*, ch. 3).[62] This is understandable, given the fact that lawspeakers were elected in the summer, and were most visibly fulfilling their role at the *Alþingi* at that time of year. In most of the other cases, Ari reckons years by using "winters," as when he indicates that Bishop Ísleifr died "eighty years after the fall of Óláfr Tryggvason" (*átta tegum vetra eptir Ólafs fall Tryggvasonar*, ch. 9). In the same line, he also uses days and day names, specifying that Ísleifr died "on a Sunday, six nights after the feast of Peter and Paul" (*Þat vas á dróttins degi sex nóttum eftir hátíð þeira Pétars ok Páls*, ch. 9). Likewise, Ari points out that Gizurr died "on the third day of the week, the fifth [day] before the calends of June," that is Tuesday, 28 May (*Gizurr byskup andaðisk […] á enum þriðja degi í viku <V> Kalend. Junii*, ch. 10).

What may be most remarkable in *Íslendingabók* from a calendrical perspective is that it contains an entire chapter (ch. 4) on the reform of the Old Icelandic calendar in the mid-tenth century.[63] The reform was made to address a particular problem:

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[62] Similar examples can be found in chs. 5, 8, 9, and 10.

[63] This chapter is preserved separately as well. It appears in a codex about time-reckoning, GKS 1812 4to (ca. 1182–1400), and precisely in its oldest part, part IV, which has been dated to ca. 1200. Interestingly, besides the chapter in question, this part also preserves a treatise on computistics in Icelandic. Gunnar Harðarson 2015, 2–4; Grønlie 2006, xiv.

> *Þat vas ok þá es enir spǫkustu menn á landi hér hǫfðu talit í tveim misserum fjóra daga ens fjórða hundraðs, […], þá merkðu þeir at sólargangi, at sumarit munaði aptr til vársins.*
>
> It was also at that time, when the wisest men in this country had reckoned 364 days in the two seasons of the year […], that they noticed from the course of the sun that summer was moving backwards into spring.

The problem arose from the fact that the Icelandic year was approximately one day shorter than the solar year (364 vs. 365.25 days). Not even the wisest men knew how to solve the issue, until a man from Breiðafjörður named Þorsteinn *surtr* ("the Black") Hallsteinsson, had a revelatory dream:

> *Hann dreymði þat, at hann hygðisk vesa at lǫgbergi, þá es þar vas fjǫlmennt, ok vaka, en hann hugði alla menn aðra sofa. En síðan hugðisk hann sofna, en hann hugði þá alla aðra vakna. Þann draum réð Ósýfr Helgasonr, móðurfaðir Gellis Þorkelssonar, svá at allir menn myndi þǫgn varða, meðan hann mælti at lǫgbergi, en síðan es hann þagnaði, at þá myndi allir þat róma es hann hefði mælt. En þeir váru báðir spakir menn mjǫk. En síðan es menn kvómu til þings, þá leitaði hann þess ráðs at lǫgbergi, at et sjaunda hvert sumar skyldi auka viku ok freista, hvé þá hlýddi. En svá sem Ósýfr réð drauminn, þá vǫknuðu allir menn við þat vel, ok vas þá þat þegar í lǫg leitt at ráði Þorkels mána ok annarra spakra manna.*
>
> He dreamed that he seemed to be at the Law-Rock when a crowd was assembled there and he was awake, but all the other people seemed to him to be asleep. And after that it seemed to him that he fell asleep, but all the others then seemed to wake up. Ósvífr Helgason, maternal grandfather of Gellir Þorkelsson, interpreted the dream to mean that everyone would remain silent while he spoke at the Law-Rock, but that when he fell silent, everyone would applaud what he had said. And they were both very wise men.

Though Þorsteinn's dream may be seen as a kind of miracle, it has nothing to do with metaphysical matters, but instead with maintaining the order of daily life and society.[64] Indeed, just after the description of the dream, we are told that Þorsteinn put forward the proposal at the general assembly,

[64] See Crocker, forthcoming, 2021.

at et sjaunda hvert sumar skyldi auka viku ok freista, hvé þá hlýddi. […] þá vǫknuðu allir menn við þat vel, ok vas þá þat þegar í lǫg leitt..

that they should extend every seventh summer by a week [*sumarauki*], and see how that would work. [...] everyone then welcomed the proposal warmly, and it was immediately made law.

It seems likely that Ari is counting inclusively, after the Roman practice, so that "every seventh summer" means actually "every sixth year."[65] Therefore, the introduction of the *sumarauki* would establish the average length of a year to be 365.17 days, which is closer to, though not precisely, the solar year of approximately 365.25 days. Indeed, subsequent adjustments would have to be made.[66]

In any case, such a reform had particular legal significance as well. Ari stresses the fact that the reform was "made law" at the *Alþingi*, that is, it was institutionalized. The *Alþingi* "played a central role in the recurring announcements of times and dates of importance to society," and therefore it may be said that it constituted "the centre of time-reckoning" in Early Iceland.[67] This illustrates, in turn, how the organization of time is not only vital to any social system, but it is also a means of regulation and control of social rhythms—an instrument of power.[68]

The information in this chapter on calendar reform would seemingly have been of interest to the Church as well, as the accuracy of the calendar was crucial for the correct calculation of the dates of Easter and other Christian feasts. It should be remembered that in Ari's days (the 12th century), attempts were made to coordinate the Old Icelandic calendar with the recently introduced Julian calendar used by the Christian Church (evident in *Stjǫrnu-Odda tala*). However, some scholars maintain that the adjusted calendar was used only for civil and administrative purposes, whereas the Church in Iceland continued to use the Julian calendar as it was.[69] Therefore, the information

[65] Grønlie 2006, 21.
[66] See section 1.2.2.
[67] Hastrup 1985, 27–8.
[68] Sverrir Jakobsson 2005, 90.
[69] Janson 2010, 15. Cf. this text, section 1.2.2.

preserved in this chapter may not have been of much interest to the Church itself, all the more because it concerns temporal calculations in Iceland before Christianity and the Julian calendar were introduced. Thus, Ari may have included it in his book when he wrote it in the twelfth century, when the co-ordination between the Old Icelandic calendar and the Julian calendar was being made, to stress the independence of Icelandic calculations prior to the introduction of Christianity and its own time-reckoning views and methods along with it.

2.3 Genealogies

Íslendingabók can be regarded not only as national history, but also as family history, given the "web of family relationships" it describes.[70] Ari traces the genealogies of a small number of leading families from his time, including his own and the one of Iceland's first two bishops, Ísleifr and Gizurr from Skálholt, who belonged to the Haukdælir clan. At the same time, the author stresses his own important relationship with that family, which fostered and educated him. The genealogical information is both disseminated throughout the text (for example in ch. 2, where Ari presents part of his family line) and appended to the text in the form of two independent, seemingly ornamental sections (*ættartǫlur*). These sections are titled as follows:

- *Þetta es kyn byskupa Íslendinga ok ættartala*

  This is the ancestry of the bishops of the Icelanders and their genealogy

- *Þessi eru nǫfn langfeðga Ynglinga ok Breiðfirðinga*

  These are the names of the male ancestors of the Ynglings and the people of Breiðafjörður [Ari's own family line]

The first genealogy is a clear tribute to the family of the Haukdælir, which provided Iceland with its first two bishops, Ísleifr and Gizurr, while fostering and educating Ari himself. At the same time, this section is a tribute to

[70] Grønlie (2006, xiv–xviii), though contested by Hermann (2005, 82).

the bishops who patronized Ari's work, Þorlákr and Ketill. Ari fashions their respective genealogies by connecting the two bishops both with their predecessors—Ísleifr and Gizurr, and Jón Ogmundarson, respectively—and with some of the main settlers of Iceland. In this way, he portrays all the bishops as suitable representatives of the country, also augmenting their prestige.[71] Moreover, as Ari was partly related to Bishop Þorlákr, this section can be regarded as a tribute to his own family line on that side as well.

Ari's own ancestry is given special treatment in the second appended genealogy. In this section, Ari traces his lineage back not only to the first settlers of Breiðafjörður, but further to Norwegian kings, even establishing a link with the Ynglingar, the dynasty of ancient legendary Swedish kings with their mythical progenitors Yngvi Tyrkjakonungr and Njǫrðr Svíakonungr—heathen gods euhemerized as kings of the Turks and Swedes.[72] This shows that heathen cultural traditions were not dismissed or hidden in the text, but were in fact celebrated, in this case securing the prestige of the family line. Moreover, by adding the final words *en ek heitik Ari* ("and I am called Ari"), Ari leaves his signature, which is hardly common practice in medieval Icelandic writing, as outlined above.[73]

Genealogies are a culturally specific way of keeping track of time and perceiving its passing. The genealogies conveyed in *Íslendingabók* confirm this, reflecting a view of the past as "a chain of human generations."[74] At the same time, genealogies act as "important structures through which the past is remembered and revised in terms of the present."[75] This is clear from the two appended genealogies, whereby Ari revisits the past in terms of his present and manipulates it as it best suits him. These genealogies are those of the dominant groups of the time, including Ari's patrons and his own, and the mythical

[71] Grønlie 2006, xxi. More precisely, "he organises his material according to the bishops' order of appointment and uses female links where necessary to trace their ancestry to the main settler in each quarter of the land." Grønlie 2006, 30. Cf. Whaley 2000, 171.
[72] Gurevich 1985 [1972], 104.
[73] See n. 4, this chapter.
[74] Gurevich 1985 [1972], 103; Spiegel 1997, 107.
[75] Callow 2006, 300.

kings who grant his lineage more prestige. This reflects a clear ideological stance, and it may also be interpreted as an expression of power.[76]

2.4 Ari Þorgilsson's Artistry in Reconstructing the Past

Ari's reputation as an authority is not confined to the Middle Ages. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, scholars praised Ari on many occasions, describing him as a "pioneer" (*byrjandi*) in Icelandic historiography, a "guiding star" (*leiðarstjarna*) in the history of the nation and as the "father" of Icelandic history *tout court*.[77] *Íslendingabók* is indeed a unique source for Early Icelandic history, both because of its close proximity to the events it describes, and because of the author's preoccupation with the reliability of his sources. By praising his informants as "wise" (*spakr*), "having a reliable memory" (*minnigr*), and "truthful" (*ólyginn*), Ari demonstrates that his own account is itself reliable, a practice attested in foreign texts of the time as well, as described above.[78] At the same time, however, scholars have perceived a discrepancy between Ari's elevated reputation and the restricted focus of his brief history.[79] Research has been conducted on Ari's extreme selectivity, hypothesizing that, on the one hand, it could be ascribed to his concern for accuracy, but on the other hand, it may also derive from a targeted interest in the traditions of a few prominent families, expressing a particular ideological viewpoint. The latter case would confirm the fact that the information in question was curated and the past portrayed in specific ways, which is significant in terms of the construction of time in the work.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as Iceland struggled for independence from the Kingdom of Denmark, nationalist ambitions merged with ethnic sensibilities, and the growing need for national self-definition inspired a renewed interest in historical and native subjects, though at times an

[76] Grønlie 2006, x, xvii. Cf. Lindow 1997, 460.
[77] Respectively, Einar Arnórsson 1942, 177; Björn Sigfússon 1944, 9; Turville-Petre 1967 [1953], 88.
[78] See Sverrir Tómasson 1988, 222–7.
[79] Such as Einar Arnórsson 1942, 24, 177, 186; Turville-Petre 1967 [1953], 92.

uncritical one.[80] The Middle Ages, the Early Icelandic historical period in particular, came to be regarded as an epoch encompassing distinctly Icelandic qualities, especially from a cultural point of view, but also from a political one, both of which were expressed in medieval Icelanders' self-proclaimed ethnicity in opposition to the Norwegian crown. Some scholars even considered this period to be the golden age of Icelandic society (*gullöld Íslendinga*).[81] It is not surprising that a work such as *Íslendingabók* was particularly treasured in that context, as it well satisfied nationalist criteria. As such, it came to be regarded as a reliable historical source, a tendency that crystallized during the second half of the twentieth century, especially within scholarly discussion of Early Icelandic history. Jón Jóhannesson, for example, relied heavily on *Íslendingabók* in his work on Early Icelandic history. Likewise, Jakob Benediktsson, in the prologue to his influential *Íslenzk fornrit* edition of the *Íslendingabók* text, placed particular emphasis on the alleged reliability of the work as a historical source, focusing on its chronology and on the reliability of the author's sources.[82]

More recent scholars have reconsidered these matters from the literary perspective, maintaining that the subjectivity and bias of historical truths should not be overlooked when studying medieval Icelandic texts, and that the narrative character of history should also be considered in such discussions.[83] With these new perspectives, representations of the past are regarded as more indicative of the circumstances in which they were produced, rather than of the past they purport to relate. When information from the past is mediated, including being altered or fabricated, it is because this mediation means something to the people creating it, rather than expressing the creators' wish to directly report past phenomena. Thus, in any period, contemporary

[80] Gunnar Karlsson (1993, 16) notes that the "first generation of professionally educated Icelandic historians was too anxious to give the Icelandic people a national history to be able to observe the time-honoured principles of source-criticism."
[81] *Gullöld Íslendinga* is in fact the name of a collection of lectures published in 1906 by the historian Jón Jónsson Aðils. According to Gunnar Karlsson (1993, 15), the collection, despite providing a good survey of written sources, is "totally uncritical in its use of the sagas as historical sources, and nationalistic in a way that now sounds naive and, after the age of Fascism, almost blasphemous."
[82] Jón Jóhannesson 1956; Jakob Benediktsson 1986 [1968]. Cf. Gunnar Karlsson 1993, 17–8.
[83] E.g., Ármann Jakobsson 2015, 17–20.

needs and aspirations influence the ways in which and the reasons why the past is investigated.[84] Clearly, the past can take many forms, as there are various ways in which different individuals and groups of people remember or wish to remember or represent their pasts, and every individual can be part of multiple cultural environments that exist within each community. In addition, the past is always open to social reconsideration and manipulation. Representing the past is "a transforming and creative activity," not merely the direct recording of facts.[85] Thus, explorations and reassessments of the past allow not only for heterogeneity but also for malleability, while favouring both continuity and transformation.

In the Middle Ages themselves, the past was constantly being constructed, reshaped, or re-contextualized by each successive generation into a new framework that would give it meaning in the present, most notably to legitimize the current order of things and to orient both contemporary and future generations. In the composition of historical texts, medieval writers selected specific facts or segments of information from the past because of their perceived relevance to the present. The selection process depended on contemporary needs and aspirations, as well as on any pre-existing ideological paradigms. The creative process of shaping or revising the past began long before the written versions of these histories were produced: restructuring the past had also been required by the previous oral transmissions and transformation of the same information.[86]

Accordingly, in *Íslendingabók,* Ari Þorgilsson fashions selected fragments of the past into a coherent whole that would be meaningful in his present (twelfth-century Iceland) and would orient both contemporary and future generations. His patrons' and his own needs and aspirations determined why and how he revisited the past, while narrativizing it, by drawing on standard patterns and expectations. What were those needs and aspirations along with the ideological paradigms that determined his specific reconstruction of the past?

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[84] Schneidmüller 2002, 167; Innes 2000, 5.
[85] Whaley 2000, 175. Cf. Hermann 2013, 343; 2010, 71; Gísli Sigurðsson 2013, 402.
[86] Schneidmüller 2002; Innes 2000; Gísli Sigurðsson 2013, 407; Hermann 2007, 21–2; 2009b, 46; Whaley 2000, 175.

What were the mechanisms through which this was accomplished and how far could they be manipulated by wielders of cultural and political power such as Ari and his patrons? Each chapter of the work is illustrative of certain of these impulses, especially chapter 1, relating the settlement of Iceland, and chapter 7, concerning the conversion to Christianity.

2.4.1 Ari's Account of the Settlement (Ch. 1)

The first chapter of *Íslendingabók* succintly describes the settlement of Iceland. From the text, we understand that a Norwegian called Ingólfr was the first man to settle in Iceland, and that:

> *Í þann tíð vas Ísland viði vaxit á miðli fjalls ok fjoru. Þá váru hér menn kristnir, þeir es Norðmenn kalla papa, en þeir fóru síðan á braut, af því at þeir vildu eigi vesa hér við heiðna menn, ok létu eptir bækr írskar ok bjǫllur ok bagla; af því mátti skilja, at þeir váru menn írskir. En þá varð fǫr manna mikil mjǫk út hingat ýr Norvegi…*
>
> At that time, Iceland was covered with woods between the mountains and the seashore. There were then Christians here, whom the Northmen call papar ["popes/priests"], but they later went away, because they did not wish to stay here with the heathens; and they left behind them Irish books and bells and staffs. From this it could be seen that they were Irish men. And then a great many people began to move out here from Norway…

A certain bias in reconstructing the history of the Settlement can already be detected in these enticing opening lines, since the description has the appearance of an origin myth. Ari's statement that, at the time of settlement, Iceland was covered with trees between the mountains and the shore is still debated and, either way, the manner in which the information is presented is somewhat mythic: Ari creates the impression that the first settlers migrated from Norway over the sea and arrived to a paradise, fertile and entirely wooded, pristine, and therefore also culturally available.[87] At the same time, though, Ari portrays the land as already inhabited, but only by a few people, and not by chance the Christian *papar* (lit., "popes," priests), Irish monks

[87] Hermann 2007, 24.

following the custom of peregrination, whereby they renounced their homeland and wandered in solitude "for the love of God." There is no reason to doubt that Irish hermits lived in Iceland when the Norwegians arrived.[88] Ari's statement that the *papar* left Iceland as soon as the Norwegians arrived also seems plausible, as they could no longer live in solitude once the island was more widely settled.[89] However, Ari prefers to relate that the *papar* left because they did not wish to stay there with the heathens, thus stressing that they were Christians. In this way, he can portray the period following the hermits' departure as latently Christian, during which Christianity is dormant until "it will manifest itself again at the right time."[90] Ari incorporates the pagan past into the twelfth-century Christian present, creating a cultural myth that depicts Iceland's pagan past in the best possible way. The fact that the Irish hermits leave objects behind them as they go away, namely "books, bells and staffs" (*létu eptir bækr írskar ok bjǫllur ok bagla*), materializes the myth, as the land is portrayed not only as already Christian (*terra christiana*) when the first settlers arrive, but also as already consecrated.[91]

Ari's emphasis on the apparently exclusive Norwegian descent of the Icelanders is remarkable when compared to accounts of the origins of the

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[88] The evidence of the literary sources is supported by the presence of many placenames referring to *papar*, especially in the South Iceland. Gísli Sigurðsson 2000 [1988], 24–5. However, there is not much archaeological support. There are nearly two hundred artificial cave sites in South Iceland, and since the early twentieth century, scholars have related some of the sites to settlements of *papar*, largely on the basis of cross sculptures that have been found in some of them. Conversely, "more recent workers are cautious of such ideas, instead stressing that the caves are ripe for research." Kristján Ahronson 2015, 77, 203. In any case, this does not compromise the assumption that Irish hermits lived in Iceland before the Norwegians arrived.

[89] This has been debated, as other sources, such as *Landnámabók* (*Sturlubók*, ch. 323) and *Kristni saga* (ch. 8), relate that "there had been Christians at Kirkjubær in the south continuously from the time of settlement." Grønlie 2006, xxvi. Cf. Jakob Benediktsson 1986 [1968], 324–5; Jónas Kristjánsson et al. 2003, 19–20.

[90] Hermann 2007, 27–8.

[91] It has been assumed that these "books" were biblical texts, probably of the kind mentioned in a passage of *Landnámabók* (*Sturlubók*, ch. 15) which concerns Irish Christian artefacts. Among these artifacts is a book named *plenarium*, containing biblical texts. See Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2010, 216. As to "bells," some have been found in 10th-century graves, "but they tell us little about Irish hermits." Gísli Sigurðsson 2000 [1988], 24. Cf. Kristján Eldjárn 1966, 67–70. The "staffs," given as *baglar* in the text (sg., *bagall*, a loanword from Irish *bachall*, lat., *baculus*), may have indicated Abbots' staffs or walking sticks of mendicant friars. Jakob Benediktsson 1986 [1968], 5.

settlers in other sources, such as *Landnámabók*, which mentions Gaelic settlers as well.[92] It may be that Ari deliberately simplifies the origins of the settlers to provide his people with a distinct geographical origin, Norway. By connecting the Icelanders to Norwegian nobility, he is able to disprove accusations by foreigners that Icelanders descended from slaves, most of whom, within the Icelandic context, would have been Gaelic. This motive is found in the *Þórðarbók* version of *Landnámabók*, written sometime before 1670, although the passage in question may have been taken from Ari's original version of *Landnámabók*, assuming it ever existed:

> *Þat er margra manna mál, at þat sé óskyldr fróðleikr at rita landnám. En vér þykjumsk heldr svara kunna útlendum mǫnnum, þá er þeir bregða oss því, at vér séim komnir af þrælum eða illmennum, ef vér vitum víst várar kynferðir sannar, svá ok þeim mǫnnum, er vita vilja forn fræði eða rekja ættartǫlur, at taka heldr at upphafi til en hǫggvask í mitt mál, enda eru svá allar vitrar þjóðir, at vita vilja upphaf sinna landsbyggða eða hvers<u> hvergi til hefjask eða kynslóðir.*[93]
>
> People often say that writing about the Settlements is irrelevant learning, but we think we can better meet the criticism of foreigners when they accuse us of being descended from slaves or scoundrels, if we know for certain the truth about our ancestry. And for those who want to know ancient lore and how to trace genealogies, it's better to start at the beginning than to come in at the middle. Anyway, all civilized nations want to know about the origins of their own society and the beginnings of their own race.[94]

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[92] Of the names given in *Landnámabók*, only about 2% can be described as Gaelic. However, the work likely names only independent settlers, disregarding other people of Gaelic extraction such as wives of Norwegian settlers and slaves, who may nevertheless have sometimes been given Norse names. Moreover, the work mentions only 5% of the first settlers, who may have been up to 20,000 in total by the end of the settlement period (AD 930). Speculations made on the basis of these data, haphazard as they may be, resulted in a percentage of 30–40% of the first inhabitants in Iceland having been considered to be of Gaelic origin. Gísli Sigurðsson 2000 [1988], 24–40. Recent genetic analyses into the origins of the settlers have refined these estimates, while foregrounding the variable of gender. It seems that around 20% of Icelandic founding males were Gaelic (the other 80% having Scandinavian/Nordic European origins), as opposed to the 60% of female settlers being Gaelic (the other 40% having Scandinavian/Nordic European origins). This corroborates the model proposed by some historians that the majority of founding males had Scandinavian/Nordic European origins, whereas the majority of female settlers had Gaelic origins. Agnar Helgason 2004, 54; Agnar Helgason et al. 2000, 697.

[93] Jakob Benediktsson 1986 [1968], cii, 336.

[94] Hermann Pálsson/Edwards 1972, 6.

By emphasizing the exclusive Norwegian descent of the Icelanders, Ari also reflects contemporary power relationships and Iceland's dependence on a political relationship with Norway. Alternatively, he could be simply unpretentiously restating the dominant cultural myth of his own time.

In Ari's *Íslendingabók*, the Settlement is charged with specific meaning, through the construction of a narrative capable of explaining the origin of Icelandic culture, and of creating an identity for the Icelanders. In other words, Ari devises an origin myth, which is significant from the perspective of time. Indeed, it has been maintained that:

> a traditional myth of origin will tell us how a particular group [usually a dominant one] wishes to conceptualize its own genesis, and in this sense the interpretation of the past that is presented forms an important part of the present identity of that group. It might seek its content from the past, but the message and values transmitted are those of the present.[95]

Accordingly, Ari's account of the origins of the Icelanders is not pure documentation, but a version that he devised by the selection and manipulation of information according to present needs and aspirations. By doing so, he not only established a sense of continuity between past and present, but he also handed down a specific view of the Settlement and the settlers to future generations. *Íslendingabók* can therefore be regarded as a foundation narrative, a "narrative about the past that orientates people in time and space, and which has normative and formative power" in Ari's contemporary, twelfth-century, Iceland, but also into the future.[96] There is ample evidence that subsequent writers, especially the writers of the *Íslendingasögur*, inherited traditions from Ari.[97] These include the frequent accounts of migration to Iceland in association with King Haraldr *hárfagri* ("Fairhair"), as well as the depiction of the conversion to Christianity. Ari's account of the migration of people to Iceland during the reign of King Haraldr *hárfagri* is often exploited in sagas to provide the settlers with a recognizable background, while also setting up a traditional

[95] Wellendorf 2010, 3; Lindow 1997, 454.
[96] Hermann 2010, 70, 73–4.
[97] See, for example, Ellehøj 1965.

scene of the Icelandic settlement. In *Laxdæla saga* (ch. 2), for example, we read that:

> *"Sannspurðan hefi ek fjándskap Haralds konungs til vár; sýnisk mér svá, at vér munim eigi þaðan trausts bíða; lízk mér svá, sem oss sé tveir kostir gørvir, at flýja land eða vera drepnir hverr í sínu rúmi." […]. Bjorn og Helgi vildu til Íslands fara, því at þeir þóttusk þaðan mart fýsiligt fregnt hafa…*
>
> "Of King Harald's animosity towards us there is proof enough; it seems to me we should expect little friendship from that direction. We seem to have two choices before us: to flee the country or to be killed off, one by one." […]. Bjorn and Helgi wanted to go to Iceland, as they claimed they had heard many favourable reports of the country…

As for the depiction of the conversion to Christianity, there are sagas that follow Ari's tendency to portray it more as a legal compromise than a change of faith, notably *Brennu-Njáls saga* (13th century, ch. 105). This particular event and its portrayal are significant in the manner in which they shape time, especially within *Íslendingabók*, which will now be considered.

2.4.2 Ari's Account of the Conversion to Christianity (Ch. 7)

The portrayal of the conversion to Christianity in chapter 7 supports the thesis that *Íslendingabók* is an ideologically-oriented reconstruction of the past, meaning a text with specific, detectable intentions on the part of the author, rather than an objective record of facts. It constitutes the longest and most detailed account within the larger narrative, and scholars have often interpreted it as evidence for Ari's eagerness to construct an Icelandic Christian identity.[98] The chapter is complex and it seems to convey subtle information about the Conversion, which can be detected indirectly. By exploring how Ari either selected, manipulated, or omitted specific information about the Conversion, it becomes evident how his account is anything but a singularly authoritative version of Conversion history.

[98] E.g., Mundal 2011, 114.

In the text, we are told that just before the year 1000, the Norwegian King Óláfr Tryggvason—who played a prominent role in the conversion of the Nordic world to Christianity—orders an expedition to Iceland to convert the Icelanders. The mission fails due to strong opposition from the pagans, but the King's rage at the bad news makes two Icelanders, Gizurr *hvíti* ("the White") Teitsson, father of Ísleifr the first Bishop of Iceland, and Hjalti Skeggjason, a prominent chieftain, promise him that they will carry out his plan. They deliver the King's message at the *Alþingi*, where the tension between the pagans and those who have already converted to Christianity is at its highest. Then Ari relates how the chieftain Hallr Þorsteinsson (of Síða), a convert to Christianity, is asked by the Christians to make a ruling on whether Iceland should officially convert, but he instead instructs the lawspeaker Þorgeirr Þorkelsson of Ljósavatn, still a pagan, to accomplish the mission. Þorgeirr accepts:

> *En síðan es menn kvómu í búðir, þá lagðisk hann niðr Þorgeirr ok breiddi feld sinn á sik ok hvílði þann dag allan ok náttina eptir ok kvað ekki orð. En of morguninn eptir settisk hann upp ok gørði orð, at menn skyldi ganga til lǫgbergis. […] Þá vas þat mælt í lǫgum, at allir menn skyldi kristnir vesa…*
>
> And later, when everyone had returned to their booths, Þorgeirr lay down and spread his cloak over himself, and rested all that day and the following night, and did not speak a word. And the next morning, he got up and sent word that people should go to the Law-Rock […]. It was then proclaimed in the laws that all people should be Christian…

Thus, the decision is made by a pagan, who is pictured as a wise man from a Christian point of view, as is often the case for pagans in the work.[99] This contributes to how the pre-Christian past was rationalized and peacefully incorporated into Ari's present.[100] Moreover, scholars have tried to explain Ari's

[99] Cf. Lönnroth's concept of the "the Noble Heathen," an especially recurrent theme in the sagas. According to Lönnroth, it consists of "a pagan hero [who] is shown in a situation where he appears to be a sort of precursor, or herald, of Christianity, at the same time retaining enough of the pagan ethics to emphasize the difference between the old and new religion." Lönnroth 1969, 2.
[100] Hermann 2007, 27–8.

account of Þorgeirr's behaviour. It has been maintained that Þorgeirr lay awake all night under his cloak, to ponder "over his task, the contents of the law or the promulgation speech."[101] Others have maintained that, with this gesture, Þorgeirr looked for inspiration in isolation as a poet might, or that he sought to gain soothsaying information, an oracle, from distant places.[102] This would make it easier to understand why the convened pagans easily accepted Þorgeirr's decision to convert to Christianity. In any case, this mystic episode allows Ari to portray the Icelanders as choosing to become Christian of their own free will, taking initiative at least in the final step toward embracing the new faith, even though the Conversion was ordered by King Óláfr.[103]

However, the picture changes slightly if we consider the account of the Conversion as it appears in other medieval Icelandic sources, such as *Kristni saga* and *Njáls saga* (13th century). In these texts, Þorgeirr is said to have been paid with sixty ounces of silver (*Kristni saga*, ch. 12), if not outright bribed with three marks of silver (*Njála*, ch. 105), by the Christian Hallr to announce the new faith, a detail that, if at all reliable, Ari may have consciously omitted at the suggestion of the Bishops or simply because he did not wish to compromise Hallr, from whom he was directly descended.[104] Furthermore, despite mentioning the fact that King Óláfr held several Icelanders hostage in Norway and would kill them if the island did not convert, Ari does not specify that those hostages were the sons of prominent Icelanders, as *Kristni saga* (ch. 11), *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* (ch. 218), and *Laxdæla saga* (ch. 41) all do. This extortion may be the true reason why the pagans did not fight against the Conversion at the *Alþingi*.[105]

Ari also omits the first two unsuccessful attempts to convert the Icelanders to Christianity, the one undertaken by Þorvaldr *víðfǫrli* (the "Far-traveller") and the Saxon Bishop Friedrich, who arrived in Iceland in 981 and left after five years (*Kristni saga*, ch. 1), and the other, ordered by King Óláfr Tryggvason

[101] See Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1999, 141–3.
[102] Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1999, 141–3.
[103] Mundal 2011, 111, 118–9.
[104] Gangemi 2011, 22; Jónas Kristjánsson et al. 2003, 33–4; Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, 271.
[105] Gangemi 2011, 52–5; Jónas Kristjánsson et al. 2003, 29; Ólafur Halldórsson 1958–2000, II: 165; Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, 126.

to Stefnir Þorgilsson in 996 (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, ca. 1300, ch. 143), who worsened the situation, antagonizing many people.[106] Ari may have omitted some or all of these details for the sake of concision, but it seems more probable that he left them out not to spoil the image of the Conversion by stressing the years of pagan resistance to Christianity.

Another detail Ari omits in relation to the coming of Christianity to Iceland is the fact that the first Icelandic Bishop, Ísleifr Gizurarsson (1006–80), encountered many problems in his relations with Icelandic chieftains. It is possible that Ari left these details out so as not to blemish the role of the Bishops as leaders in Icelandic society, as he otherwise depicts them in the work.[107] Moreover, Ari may have omitted such details because the bishops who were his patrons and advisors for the book, Þorlákr and Ketill, were connected to Bishop Ísleifr's son Gizurr, not counting the fact that Bishop Ísleifr was also the father of Ari's tutor.

It is difficult to decide how to assess Ari's many apparent omissions. The fact that the information he omitted is preserved in longer and fuller traditions is not in itself sufficient to prove that Ari consciously omitted it: he might simply have not known it, or it may have come to light at a later stage. In any case, *Íslendingabók*, as we now have it, allows us to trace at least some of Ari's bias in his reconstruction of the history of the Conversion, while also enabling us to speculate about the ideologies lying behind his interpretation and depiction of the facts.

Christian ideology must have shaped Ari's view, but his depiction of the Conversion seems to reveal a secular standpoint as well. Some scholars have even maintained that Ari seems to be interested in the Conversion more from a legal and an institutional point of view rather than a religious one.[108] Indeed, Ari emphasizes the threat of civil war over any mention of the spiritual danger of heathenism, of which he tells us very little, anyway. While stressing the fact that Christianity is codified into the laws, then, he depicts the Conversion as

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[106] Gangemi 2011, 33–9; Grønlie 2006, xviii; Jónas Kristjánsson et al. 2003, 3–7; Ólafur Halldórsson, ed., 1958–2000, I: 310. Cf. Orri Vésteinsson 1996, 50.
[107] Mundal 2011, 121.
[108] Grønlie 2006, xxvii; Ólafía Einarsdóttir 2006, 3.

a legal compromise, whereby the law seems to be the only and most significant source of social unity:

> *…hǫfum allir ein lǫg ok einn sið. Þat mon verða satt, es vér slítum í sundr lǫgin, at vér monum slíta ok friðinn.*
>
> …and let us all have the same law and the same religion. It will prove true that if we tear apart the law, we will also tear apart the peace.

These wise words of unity and peace are attributed to the pagan Þorgeirr, and they probably constitute the basis for the common proverb about the importance of law for unity and peace found, for example, in *Kristni saga* (ch. 12) and in *Njáls saga* (ch. 70).

Thus, the view of some scholars that Ari's work reflects his eagerness to portray Iceland as part of the Christian world does not seem entirely airtight, further supported by the fact that the text has little resemblance to Latin European Christian literature.[109] It is notable again, that the work was written in Icelandic and not in Latin, the official language of the Church, and that "miracles, religious rhetoric and moral exempla," which usually abound in conversion stories, such as in *Kristni saga*, are absent from *Íslendingabók*.[110] Moreover, the lack of information about the Church outside of Iceland, specifically the Scandinavian Church, can be seen as evidence that, in *Íslendingabók*, Ari does not "see his own church as a localised component of the Universal Church," or even as an autonomous entity, but more "as a secular institution within Icelandic society."[111] Further supporting this view is the noteworthy fact that the characteristics of the bishops which Ari chooses to highlight are social rather than religious. It should be remembered, though, that at that time, the Icelandic Church was dominated by secular interests, and the first attempts to separate secular and ecclesiastical powers did not take place until later during the episcopates of Þorlákr Þórhallsson (1178–93) and Guðmundr

[109] Hermann 2005, 75–6.
[110] Grønlie 2006, viii.
[111] Grønlie 2006, xxii.

Arason (1203–37).[112] In any case, Ari's depiction of the conversion to Christianity as a legal and political process, more than a religious one, was among the traditions that later saga-writers, such as the writer of *Njáls saga,* inherited. Thus, the overall text is a reconstruction of the past with a clear ideological project behind it, as Ari seems to have selected, manipulated, and omitted information at will.

2.5 Concluding Remarks

The various strategies Ari employs in *Íslendingabók* in order to systematize the Icelandic past are indicative of the existence of different kinds of chronological thinking in his time. These strategies include absolute and relative dating, the relative dates referring to specific authorities such as bishops and popes, lawspeakers, and kings, alongside tracking time through family lines. Ari's main achievement concerning chronology is in having provided a framework, or frameworks, when there was no available official time scale to use, laying the basis for the other chronologies in the history of Iceland that concerned the first decades of the Settlement.[113]

Ari's chronological structure became the model for subsequent writers. Saga-writers from the thirteenth century occasionally imitated Ari's use of AD dating, while others exploited it to recalculate specific events according to Gerlandus's chronology.[114] Relative dating is more common in the sagas, though, using bishops' successive ages to date events, as well as the reigns of kings. This is frequent in many sagas from the thirteenth century, especially in kings' sagas. For instance, in *Hakonar saga*, written in the 1260s, Sturla Þórðarson dates the king's birth "according to the birth of Christ, the reigns of the popes, the emperors, the Swedish king, the Danish king and the Norwegian king."[115] The two *Íslendingasögur* analysed in the next chapter, *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Laxdæla saga*, which also date from the thirteenth century, rely heavily

[112] See section 1.1.
[113] Jakob Benediktsson 1986 [1968], xli; Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1964, 360.
[114] See Ólafía Einarsdóttir 2006, 4–5. Cf. section 1.5.2.3.
[115] Nedkvitne 2004, 30. Cf. also Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1964, 350.

on Ari's dating methods as well, although historical accuracy was not among their authors' aims. Genealogies are likewise prominent in these sagas, as well as more discontinuous time patterns, such as those of the Old Icelandic calendar, which Ari himself employed to situate events in time, most notably the *misseri* and week counting. Similarly, Ari's strategies to systematize time contributed to the establishment of the Icelandic annal tradition from the end of the thirteenth century.[116] The oldest annals, such as *Resensannáll* and *Forni annáll*, which were written between the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth centuries, used *Íslendingabók* as a source, especially regarding dating methods.[117]

Ari's *Íslendingabók* was used as a model by subsequent writers not only in the dating strategies employed, but also in Ari's vision of the past, which these writers continued to spread. Ari demonstrably fashioned selected fragments of the past into a coherent narrative whole, according to his patrons' and his own needs and aspirations. In this way, he used narrative as an instrument to propagate his own vision of the past and deliver it to future generations, shaping and influencing how the past should be remembered.[118] Ari's work is a unique history of Early Iceland, although one with a strongly narrative flavour, or perhaps even more "a literary project concerned with history."[119] In the next chapter, Ari's influence in chronological thinking and in shaping the past will be considered within the analysis of the time patterns characterizing two specific *Íslendingasögur*: *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Laxdæla saga*.

[116] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1964, 362–5; 2006, 6. Cf. Jakob Benediktsson 1993a, 15.
[117] Indeed, they imitate both Ari's absolute and relative dating patterns: for instance, they date foreign events according to the birth of Christ, thus absolutely, and by naming contemporary emperors and popes in office, thus relatively. Jakob Benediktsson 1993a, 15–6.
[118] See Gísli Sigurðsson 2014.
[119] Hermann 2005, 82. Cf. Hermann 2007, 21; 2013, 351.

3. THE REPRESENTATION OF TIME IN THE *ÍSLENDINGASÖGUR*

The term *Íslendingasögur*, "Sagas about Early Icelanders," designates a group of around forty medieval Icelandic prose narratives that center on the lives of Icelandic settlers and their close descendants. They are set primarily in Iceland during the period from the Settlement (ca. 870–930) to the first decades of the eleventh century. At the core of these texts are battles and conflicts, mainly over property, social influence, and relations. Most often, these confrontations develop into full-fledged feuds that affect the characters' honour and status in society, and thus the course of the narratives as well. The majority of these sagas are district- and family-feud sagas, and the central characters are often Icelandic chieftains. Other sagas in the group focus more specifically on remarkable individuals, such as poets and outlaws, and, as such, are more biographical in their nature.

Despite sharing common generic traits such as setting and subject matter, these texts vary considerably both in style and in the treatment of characters and plot. In other words, the texts within the group referred to as *Íslendingasögur* are quite varied. This is partly because their inclusion in the group is arbitrary, the outcome of selections first made in the second half of the seventeenth century, when the genre of the *Íslendingasögur* was invented. Subsequently, and especially up until the mid-nineteenth century, the genre was strongly influenced by how people thought about these texts in specific historical moments. The first printed editions of these texts at the beginning of the nineteenth century were crucial in shaping the genre. The variability of the texts within the group can also be ascribed to the fact that heterogeneity is a characteristic of saga literature as an artistic form, hence the difficulty of considering sagas more generally from the perspective of genre. This

heterogeneity has generated hot debates within saga scholarship over the last two hundred years, centered on the appropriateness of differentiating sagas into distinct genres, as well as on the adequacy of the customary taxonomy (*konungasögur, Íslendingasögur, samtíðarsögur, fornaldarsögur, þýddar riddarasögur, frumsamdar riddarasögur,* and *heilagra manna sögur*) to account for the heterogeneity of these texts. The further identification of saga subgenres, such as "classical" and "post-classical" *Íslendingasögur*, and of the generic markers that characterize these groups and subgroups have also been much discussed. More recently, there has been a fundamental reconsideration of genre itself, as the notion is not used consistently in scholarship, which is clearly a crucial aspect of the debate.[1] Moreover, it has become evident that additional factors, such as the manuscript contexts in which the texts appear, along with the socio-cultural contexts of production, transmission, and reception of these texts, should be considered in saga genre analyses, although these factors are often difficult to describe or ascertain in the first place.

In the specific case of the *Íslendingasögur*, we have incomplete information to make contextual claims. None of these texts has been preserved in an authorial manuscript. The oldest extant manuscripts that preserve these texts are later copies, at times fragmentary. The oldest fragments date from the second half of the thirteenth century, the earliest being AM 162 a θ fol. (ca. 1240–60), which contains a small portion of the renowned *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, followed by AM 162 d II fol. (ca. 1250–1300), containing a text of *Laxdæla saga*.[2] The principal vellum manuscripts that preserve complete or nearly complete *Íslendingasögur* do not reach back further than the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and some of these sagas exist only in paper manuscripts from the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries.[3]

[1] See Bampi 2017, 4–7; Ceolin 2020, 347–50.
[2] Lethbridge 2016, 65.
[3] Vésteinn Ólason 1993a, 39–52; 2005, 102; Sverrir Tómasson 2006, 125–6. Among the sagas whose earliest extant manuscripts date from the 16th century are *Hrafnkels saga* (ca. 1500), *Hænsa-Þóris saga* (ca. 1500), and *Víglundar saga* (ca. 1500); among those whose earliest manuscripts date from the 17th century are, for instance, *Fljótsdæla saga* (ca. 1625), *Valla-Ljóts saga* (ca. 1640), and *Hávarðar saga* (ca. 1650). See Vésteinn Ólason 2005, 114–5.

Regarding the composition of these works, it is suggested that at least two-thirds of the texts in the corpus were written from the beginning of the thirteenth century through the fourteenth. This conclusion is arrived at by considering not only the age of the earliest preserved manuscripts, which is often controversial, but also by considering the presence and the quality within the texts of references to earlier writings, especially to works that can be dated with some certainty.[4] Legal-historical evidence conveyed in the texts has also been used for dating purposes, whether it appears in the form of knowledge of laws and customs of the old Commonwealth society (930 to 1262–64), or of laws in forms preserved in the new lawcodes that were ratified in Iceland in 1271–73 and 1281 (*Járnsíða* and *Jónsbók*, respectively). However, this too can be ambiguous.[5]

The *Íslendingasögur* present themselves as history. This is because they are referential, in that they describe past characters, namely the settlers and their close descendants, and they depict past events seemingly objectively and chronologically, which is characteristic of histories. Many of the persons and events described are also mentioned in historical texts such as *Landnámabók*, the "Book of Settlements," and there is the frequent mention of buildings, landmarks, and place names from the Saga Age (ca. 930–1030) that still stood during the time when the texts were written, or until just before. In this way, the authors also established meaningful connections between the bygone period of the Saga Age and their present day, although some of these connections might come from copyists and not from the authors themselves.[6] In any case, the presence of such elements helps give the stories a sense of "veracity," while also maintaining continuity with the bygone past.[7] Conversely, rupture with the past can be signalled by the use of the contrasting adverbs *þá* and *nú* ("then" and "now"), which suggest that there were some elements of the authorial present that were perceived as qualitatively different from the past.

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[4] See Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1958, 76–95.

[5] For a good introduction to the issues surrounding the dating of the *Íslendingasögur,* see Torfi Tulinius 2013, 115–25.

[6] Torfi Tulinius 2013, 118, 123.

[7] This is Hughes's term, which he alternatively gives as "accuracy" and "verifiability." Hughes, forthcoming.

The historical character of the *Íslendingasögur* was largely unquestioned for centuries. The texts were regarded as historical sources about the Saga Age, or at least as being very close to truthful accounts of the period. It was not until the early twentieth century that historians working within the framework of source criticism, or *Quellenkritik* (e.g., Lauritz and Curt Weibull, and later Knut Helle), an historical approach based on critical evaluation of primary sources, rejected the sagas altogether as sources for the history of the Saga Age. They considered the accounts unreliable, if not pure fiction, also disregarding them because they usually deal with private matters, which they did not consider to be the type of events customarily recorded by historians. The larger rejection of the saga texts as historical sources originated from the fact that they were inconsistent with other sources, such as lawcodes, regarding significant information like political developments during the same time period. These scholars claimed that the laws presented history accurately, while the *Íslendingasögur* were literature and fiction.[8] Therefore, these sagas could not be used as historical documents, and they were disregarded. At the same time, though, there was a strong desire to "positively" identify the sagas as part of Icelandic nationalism.

During the 1970s, saga-scholars further re-evaluated the *Íslendingasögur* from a historical perspective, the inspiration coming from important shifts in the main concerns of saga scholarship. Under the influence of cultural and social history and anthropology, the discussion of the historical reliability of saga texts shifted away from considering them as records of actual events (or the lack of *significant* actual events, according to source-critics) and towards treating them more as proof of past cultural and social norms and practices, especially those of the people living in the time when the texts were composed. In other words, the saga content was now thought to express authentic cultural norms, customs, and social practices of the medieval Icelanders who produced it, regardless of its historical Saga Age factuality. This transformed the *Íslendingasögur* into potentially valuable ethnographic sources. Scholars who supported this view based it on the important premise that "medieval authors

[8] See Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2006, 5–6.

had to consider the common rules and customs governing behavior if they wanted their contemporaries to [understand them and to] believe them."[9]

So while the narratives of the *Íslendingasögur* focus on the period of Icelandic origins, they are told through the lens of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, whether the stories had been passed on in the form of only fairly trustworthy oral narratives or as veracious written sources.[10] That is to say, these texts are reconstructions or interpretations of the past as thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Icelanders saw it or wanted to see it, especially the writers and the patrons of the texts. The *Íslendingasögur* not only recount the origins of the larger Icelandic community, which are often mythicized, but also celebrate specific family lines reaching up to the authors' present day.[11] As was established in the previous chapter with Ari Þorgilsson and *Íslendingabók*, the authors here both selected the information to convey and manipulated its presentation.

It is useful here to consider the distinction between *story* and *discourse* that was first theorized for discourse studies at the beginning of the twentieth century. At that time, the Russian formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky identified the two levels of *fabula* (storyline) and *syuzhet* (narrative discourse or "plot") present in every narrative.[12] These two levels are, respectively, the raw material comprising the tale, or the actions and the events themselves as they happen (storyline), and the shaping of these materials into a narrative form, or the presentation of the actions and events in the act of storytelling (discourse or plot).[13] Each of the two levels has its own temporal order: "story-time" and "discourse-time."[14]

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[9] Althoff 2002, 87. Cf. Gunnar Karlsson 1993, 20–1; Helgi Þorláksson 2012, 1–2; Orning 2008, 10–22.
[10] Hermann Pálsson/Edwards 1989 [1972], 1.
[11] According to Bergljót S. Kristjánsdóttir (2008, x–xi), it is natural that these sentiments, of the cohesion and glory of the origins, even if mythicized, were felt at precisely the time when the Commonwealth was dissolving. Cf. Vésteinn Ólason 1993b, 336.
[12] Shklovsky 1990 [1925], 170.
[13] West-Pavlov 2013, 89.
[14] West-Pavlov 2013, 88.

Story-time can be further divided into two sub-levels: "chronological time" (or "historical/chronicle time") and "episodic time."[15] Chronological time is the linear path along which the events of the story unfold that provides a temporal framework for the story. Within Old Icelandic literature, this type of time is occasionally understood as chronicle time, because, at least in some of the *Íslendingasögur*, notably *Eyrbyggja saga*,[16] *Egils saga,* and *Grettis saga,*[17] references are made to events that are cited in the earliest Icelandic chronicles.[18] However, in most *Íslendingasögur,* temporal information is approximated or confused, though it still provides an historical background for these sagas and confers a sense of "veracity."[19] This is enhanced by the use of "episodic time," the time of the events as they are related to the cyclical patterns of nature and the calendar. This other type of time is less continuous and it emphasizes "process rather than the progressive building of events on one another," while giving the narrative a sense of "verisimilitude."[20]

There are many ways in which story-time may connect or clash with discourse-time, the presentation of the actions and events in the act of storytelling, and literary critics have systematized these operations in varying ways.[21] Gérard Genette's method is useful and influential, identifying two main correlations between the temporal levels: "order" and "duration."[22] Order addresses the fact that events occur chronologically, but may be told in a different sequence. Among the most common techniques of this kind are flashback (*analepsis*), foreshadowing (*prolepsis*), and beginning *in medias res*. Duration is the pace of the narrative or the variation of narrative speeds. According to Genette, the infinite changes of narrative speeds can be delineated and

[15] Van den Toorn 1961, 135–45; Hughes, forthcoming. Cf. Genette 1980 [1972], 33–5; Phelpstead 2017, 189–90.
[16] Röhn 1976, 38, 41, 134.
[17] For an analysis of time in *Grettis saga,* see Hughes, forthcoming.
[18] See Hughes, forthcoming.
[19] Hughes, forthcoming. See n. 7, this chapter.
[20] Like "veracity," "verisimilitude" is also Hughes's term, which he associates to events that are "like the truth." Hughes, forthcoming.
[21] Genette 1980 [1972], 35–6, 40.
[22] Genette 1980 [1972], 35.

organized into four main rhythms: ellipsis, summary, scene, and descriptive pause. Genette maintains that, in theory at least:

> there exists a continuous gradation from the infinite speed of ellipsis, where a non-existent section of narrative corresponds to some duration of story, on up to the absolute slowness of descriptive pause, where some section of narrative discourse corresponds to a non-existent diegetic duration.[23]

In between these two basic forms of narrative movement, ellipsis and descriptive pause, there are the two intermediary ones of summary and scene: the summary is "a form with variable *tempo* […], which with great flexibility of pace covers the entire range included between scene and ellipsis," often marking a transition between two scenes. The scene itself, most often in dialogue, "realizes conventionally the equality of time between narrative and story."[24] The pace of narrative varies according to authors' needs, such as the level of focus and detail desired at a particular moment. The ways in which the authors of the *Íslendingasögur* employ both story-time and discourse-time deserve a closer scrutiny.

3.1 Story-time: Chronological and Episodic Time in the *Íslendingasögur*

The *Íslendingasögur* are essentially chronological narratives, that is, they tend to present events in a linear sequence, and often as chain reactions, with one event triggering several others and so on. The expressions of this unfolding—how events are fixed in the chronology of the sagas and in history—are manifold. Some of the earliest *Íslendingasögur*, such as *Eyrbyggja saga*, tend to follow the methods used by Ari Þorgilsson, dating one event in relation to another significant one. The tendency of these texts to rely on Ari's work is confirmed

[23] Genette 1980 [1972], 93–4. He also notes however, that not every description is necessarily a pause in the narrative. Hence the concern is not description or pause itself, but descriptive pause.
[24] Genette 1980 [1972], 93–4.

by the fact that they mention him directly as a source for certain events (e.g., *Eyrbyggja saga,* ch. 7; *Laxdæla saga,* chs. 4, 78).

Also similar to Ari's work, these early sagas exhibit a lack, if not a total absence, of absolute AD dates.[25] This is not only because AD dating was a recent introduction when these sagas were written, but also because the Christian Era as a time scale would have been of little use to the authors, who were not much concerned with salvation history, at least not overtly so.[26] Moreover, one could note that these texts, while they do depict Icelanders' conversion to Christianity as a significant moment in history, they do so more for political reasons, rather than for religious ones, as Ari himself had done.[27]

More often, and again similar to Ari, the *Íslendingasögur* employ relative dating.[28] As pointed out earlier (sections 1.5.1, 2.2.2), this system consists of counting forwards or backwards from specific points of reference to the given event, measuring the interval between them. In this way, an internal chronology of the story is built.[29] The reference points used in such cases are varied: sometimes they are historical events that can be dated easily, occurring mostly in Iceland and Norway.[30] Interestingly, in some of these cases, Ari's exact same patterns are used. A noticeable example is King Óláfr *helgi*'s fall at the battle of Stiklastaðr in 1030/1, which is one of the most often chosen points of reference in the early *Íslendingasögur*:

> *Snorri goði andaðisk í Sælingsdalstungu einum vetri eptir fall Óláfs konungs ins helga.*
> *(*Eyrbyggja saga*, ch. 65)*
>
> Snorri the priest died at Tongue in Sælingsdale a year after the killing of King Olaf the Saint.

[25] Cochrane 2009, 193; Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1964, 360–1.
[26] Lönnroth (1976), for example, has argued that Salvation is important in the construction of *Njáls saga*, although the references to it are only implied.
[27] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1964, 360–1.
[28] Böldl 2005, 100.
[29] Cochrane 2009, 194.
[30] Sverrir Jakobsson 2005, 89.

*Þorkell hafði átta vetr ins fimmta tigar, þá er hann drukknaði, en þat var fjórum vetrum fyrr en inn heilagi Óláfr konungr fell. (*Laxdæla saga*, ch. 76).*

Thorkel had completed the eighth year of his fifth decade when he died, and it was four years before the fall of King Olaf the Saint.

References are often made to other Norwegian king's offices, but also to other prominent people as well:

*Þá réð Hákon jarl Sigurðarson fyrir Noregi... (*Eyrbyggja saga*, ch. 25)*

The ruler of Norway at the time was Earl Hakon Sigurdarson…

*[Hann] kom heim […] til bús síns it sama sumar, sem Eiríkr rauði fór til Grænlands... (*Eyrbyggja saga*, ch. 25)*

He reached home the same summer that Eirik the Red sailed to Greenland…

More often, though, the reference points are remarkable historical events in the history of Iceland, such as the Settlement or the Conversion. For example, in *Eyrbyggja saga,* we read that a certain event took place

*Þat var tíu vetrum síðar en Ingólfr Arnarson hafði farit at byggja Ísland, ok var sú ferð allfræg orðin... (*Eyrbyggja saga*, ch. 3)*

...ten years after Ingolf Arnarson had sailed off to settle in Iceland, a voyage that was on everyone's lips.

*...var þar einn vetr, áðr hann fór at byggja Grænland; en þat var fjórtán vetrum fyrir kristni lǫgtekna á Íslandi. (*Eyrbyggja saga*, ch. 24)*

The following year [Eirik the Red] set out to colonize Greenland, fourteen years before Christianity was adopted by law in Iceland.

Less grand events in the history of Iceland are also used, as local or personal reference points. These may concern specific family lines or people who have already been mentioned in the text or are otherwise renowned. In particular, someone's age or death is often used as a reference point. For example, we read that:

> *En sumar þat, er Þorsteinn var hálfþrítøgr, fæddi Þóra sveinbarn... (*Eyrbyggja saga, *ch. 11)*
>
> …in the summer when Thorstein was twenty-five years old [i.e. just before he died], Thora gave birth to another son.

> *Þat var tveim vetrum eptir víg Bolla Þorleikssonar, bónda Guðrúnar Ósvífrsdóttur. (*Eyrbyggja saga, *ch. 56)*
>
> [It was] two years after Gudrun's husband Bolli Thorleiksson had been killed.

More generally, family lines are used widely to keep track of time and, as outlined above, they have particular significance in this sense already in Ari's work.

On the one hand, many of the *Íslendingasögur* portray a broad history of the country, focusing on the origins of the Icelandic community. On the other hand, they present the history of specific families and individuals, often the ancestors of remarkable or powerful people contemporary to the writers. Both aspects are used for relative dating, as the examples above demonstrate, though the number of sagas that display a significant number of relative dating patterns using major Icelandic events as reference points are relatively few, such as *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Egils saga,* and *Grettis saga*, as mentioned previously.[31] In any case, it often happens that when such chronological data are given, they are inconsistent or incomplete, making it difficult or impossible to reconstruct coherent chronologies of the stories.[32] For example, in *Grettis saga,* the chronological data are often approximated or confusing, as in chapter 69:

[31] Röhn 1976, 38, 41, 134; Hughes, forthcoming.
[32] Sverrir Jakobsson 2005, 89.

Þá hafði hann fimmtán vetr eða sextán í sekð verit, at því sem Sturla Þórðarson hefir sagt.[33]

By that time, he had been an outlaw for 15 or 16 years according to Sturla Þórðarson.[34]

Likewise, there is some confusion at the *Alþingi* in chapter 77 of the same saga, regarding whether Grettir has been an outlaw for nineteen or twenty winters.[35] According to Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, the beginning of *Laxdæla saga* also presents a chronological confusion, as the chronological information that is provided is scattered, and a continuous and accurate chronology of the story cannot be constructed from it, other than by conjecture.[36]

From a more lenient perspective, this tendency suggests that the authors of the *Íslendingasögur* simply did not aim to reproduce events with high chronological detail and accuracy.[37] The chronology of these sagas is elastic, more in the service of narration, while still providing a suggestion of veracity.[38] The development of historical time is secondary to the temporal structure of the scenes themselves and their internal cohesion, as well as to other aspects, such as the depiction of patterns of social behaviour as performed by different generations in time.

It is also common to structure these narratives around another type of time of a more discontinuous nature: the cyclical patterns of the natural world or the Old Icelandic calendar, in contrast to a linear, chronological time. This is episodic time, and it links the social events of the community primarily to specific seasons. Autumn and winter are usually associated with various festive occasions, which suited the post-harvest agricultural pause and the annual slaughter.[39] Recurrent associations are made between autumn and the *vetrnætr*, the "Winter Nights," the three-night festival celebrating the beginning of the

[33] *Grettis saga*, ed. Guðni Jónsson 1936.
[34] Hughes, forthcoming.
[35] See Hughes, forthcoming.
[36] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, xlviii.
[37] Langeslag 2012, 18.
[38] Le Breton-Filíppusdóttir 1997, 133.
[39] Langeslag 2015, 57.

winter season in mid-October (considering the old alternation of the two *misseri* of winter and summer):[40]

> *Annat haust eptir at vetrnóttum hafði Snorri goði haustboð mikit ok bauð til vinum sínum. (*Eyrbyggja saga*, ch. 37)*
>
> Next autumn, at Winter Eves, Snorri the priest gave a great feast and invited all his friends.

> *Þá rézk þat af, at þar fóru festar fram, ok kveðit á brullaupsstefnu um vetrnátta skeið. (*Laxdæla saga*, ch. 43)*
>
> They were betrothed and the date of the wedding set for the Winter Nights.

The latter example shows that it was also common to associate these celebrations with other types of feasts, such as weddings and games, exploiting the abundance of food and drink available at this time of year. Other activities were associated with this liminal time period, notably ritual ones such as the *dísablót*, a sacrifice held to honour the *dísir*, female figures or minor goddesses who remain for the most part otherwise obscure.[41]

Winter, narrowly speaking, was also a time for celebrations. The most prominent festival was at its heart, namely *jól*, the pagan Yule that eventually merged with Christmas.[42] The sources frequently mention the holding of Yule-feasts, although they provide little specific information about the ways in which they were celebrated, at least prior to the merger with Christmas. As in the case of the Winter Nights, it is often the case that Yule is associated with other festivities like games and weddings.

Taken as a whole, the sagas offer evidence of many different kinds of feasts. These are clearly identifiable in the texts, not only because of the

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[40] Gunnell (2000, 128) notes that "summer usually began on a Thursday, and ended on a Wednesday. Winter began on a Saturday. This left three borderline nights which formed a liminal period belonging to neither season."
[41] See ch. 1, n. 95.
[42] Information about the merger appears in both Snorri Sturluson's *Hákonar saga góða* (ch. 13), and in *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sǫgum* (ch. 19), the latter being a summary of the history of Norwegian kings that dates from the late 12th century. Gunnell 2000, 123–4. Cf. ch. 1, n. 89.

recurrent descriptions of festive elements and patterns, but also because we are often explicitly told when we are present at a feast. The most commonly used term is *veizla*, related to *veita*, meaning to grant or confer. "At its most basic, it descriptively denotes a grant or conferral by one person to another, which is essentially what festively and formally granted hospitality, a feast, is."[43] The term *veizla* encompasses a variety of meanings and typologies of feasting, including both friendly banqueting and compelled hospitality, like that enforced by Norwegian kings, as well as feasting among patrons and clients, or political equals.

Occasionally, the term *veizla* is part of compound words denoting cultic, religious, or calendrical settings, such as *blótveizla*, "sacrificial feast," and *jólaveizla*, "Yule feast." Other times, the term *veizla* is substituted with the more open-ended *boð*, "invitation," meaning to be received or accommodated by invitation, although this does not always entail feasting. Nevertheless, the latter term is commonly associated with feasts such as weddings, or it appears with qualifying prefixes as in *jólaboð*, "Yule reception/invitation," *vinaboð*, "reception/invitation of friends," and *heimboð*, "home reception/invitation."[44]

If the *Íslendingasögur* associate autumn and winter primarily with feasting, they tend to depict spring and summer as seasons for (other) political and economic activities, such as action at the regional and annual assemblies, or trade:

> *Á várþingi um sumarit heimti Snorri fǫðurarf sinn af Berki. (*Eyrbyggja saga*, ch. 14)*
>
> In the spring at the District Assembly Snorri demanded his inheritance from Bork.

> *Reið Snorri goði þaðan suðr yfir heiði ok gerði þat orð á, at hann myndi ríða til skips […]. Þetta var um sumarit um túnannir. (*Eyrbyggja saga*, ch. 47)*
>
> From there Snorri rode across the moor, saying he was on his way to the [trading] ship […]. This was during the haymaking season.

[43] Viðar Pálsson 2016, 65.
[44] Viðar Pálsson 2016, 62–4; Ceolin, forthcoming, 2021.

The latter example reminds us that trade was practiced in the summer when ships arrived in Iceland, as sea travel was only possible from roughly May until September. There are other activities which are often associated with summer, most notably battles and attacks, such as the attempt on Arnbjǫrn Ásbrandsson's life in *Eyrbyggja saga* (ch. 42).

It should be recalled that the structuring of time through calendrical units such as the seasons appears in Ari's work as well. As mentioned previously, Ari uses "summer" and "winter" as two of the four seasons, using them also in the inclusive sense of "year," notably summer in the specific case of a lawspeaker's term of office (ch. 3):

> *Því nær tók Hrafn lǫgsǫgu Hængssonr landnámamanns, næstr Ulfljóti, ok hafði tuttugu sumur.*
>
> At about that time [i.e. when Iceland was declared fully settled in 930] Hrafn, son of Hængr the settler, took up the office of lawspeaker after Úlfljótr, and held it for twenty summers.

This usage is common in the *Íslendingasögur*, where it is mostly winter that is used in the sense of year, following the typical Germanic usage. This will be discussed more in detail below.

Besides using the seasons to place events, the sagas make use of other calendrical units for the same purpose. Weeks, for example, are often used both as a measure of duration and for week counting. For example, in *Laxdæla saga* (ch. 23):

> *Var ákveðin brullaupsstefna á Hǫskuldsstǫðum at sjau vikum sumars.*
>
> It was agreed the wedding should be at Hoskuldsstadir when seven weeks of summer were remaining.

Interestingly, as mentioned earlier, week counting is also used in Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók* (ch. 7):

> *Þá vas þat mælt […] áðr í lǫgum, at menn skyldi svá koma til alþingis, es tíu vikur væri af sumri.*
>
> It had been proclaimed in the laws that people should come to the Althing when ten weeks of the summer had passed [i.e. between 18 and 24 June].

The *Íslendingasögur* naturally make use of other units of time, most notably the day and its subdivisions, though it should be noted that the unit of the month is scarcely used.

To recapitulate, the *Íslendingasögur* structure time essentially chronologically, notably through the use of relative dating and genealogies, although it is often the case that temporal information is approximated or confused from an historical point of view. Indeed, the chronological patterns of these texts function more to confer a background of veracity, rather than accuracy, while also serving the purposes of narrative emplotment. At the same time, these sagas employ a more intermittent episodic time, whereby episodes or events are tied to the cycles of nature and the Old Icelandic calendar, rather than to chronological time itself. This emphasizes process rather than absolute chronological progression, as well as recurrence and discontinuity.[45]

3.2 Narrative Time in the *Íslendingasögur*

It has been maintained that good sagas are those which are "told in such a way that they arouse suspicions, curiosities and expectations."[46] This may seem obvious, but in order to influence listeners and readers in such ways, saga authors used specific narrative devices, many of which have to do with the operation of time.[47] These are among the most powerful rhetorical devices that saga authors employed and are best described using Genette's systematization of the relationship between story-time and discourse-time, and the qualities of order and duration, introduced above.[48]

In terms of order, the *Íslendingasögur* contain narrative anachronies. Although these texts narrate events in ways that correspond closely to chronological time, they occasionally present anticipations and flashbacks, often at the start of a section, or just before a main event takes place. More precisely, references are sometimes made to the future, notably through warnings,

[45] Hughes, forthcoming.
[46] Vésteinn Ólason 1998, 95–6.
[47] Vésteinn Ólason 1998, 95–6.
[48] Genette 1980 [1972], 35.

incitements, prophecies, or dreams, while flashbacks in these texts are usually more of retrospective references than flashbacks proper.[49] These techniques, especially the anticipations, prepare a listening audience or readers for the events to come and generate suspense. However, they usually do not "over-direct or over-inform," but provide only minimal information, while giving "the feeling that the plot is being driven by uncontrollable forces and that the outcome of events is inevitable."[50] It may also be the case that these techniques were employed to help the listeners or readers better memorize the parts of the story, facilitating comprehension.

In terms of duration, or narrative pace, the authors of these texts manipulate the speed of the narrative depending on the desired level of detail or focus they wish to grant the story at various moments, according to specific narrative needs. In other words, these authors, in order to create specific effects, combine story-time and discourse-time in ways that involve the manipulation of the pace of the narrative. They slow down or accelerate, compress, or even cut out time. Such possibilities are granted primarily by the fact that these texts generally cover great periods of time, often following several generations of a family. The length of these time spans, however, varies much within the corpus.

A good example of the slowing down of narrative in these texts is the following passage of *Finnboga saga ramma* ("The Saga of Finnbogi the Mighty," ch. 41), an early fourteenth-century *Íslendingasaga* that is particularly remarkable for its treatment of narrative time:

> *Þar var ekki langt mjök meðal fjalls ok fjöru. Váru þar hjallar þrír upp gegnt bænum, ok mátti þar einum megin at ríða. Vermundr gekk út ok sást um. Hann sá upp á inn efsta hjallann, at annathvárt var hwirfilvindr ella riðu menn mjök margir saman. Hann gekk þá inn […] ok vaknaði Finnbogi ok spurði, hvat hann vildi. Hann sagði, hvat hann hafði sét. Finnbogi bað hann at hyggja ok kvaðst sofa verða enn. Vermundr gekk út ok inn ok sá þá mannareiðina; váru þeir þá komnir á miðhjallann. Hann gekk þá inn ok sagði Finnboga mannareiðina. Hann kvað þat vel*

[49] Vésteinn Ólason (1998, 100) points out that: "though past events are referred to, especially when new characters are introduced into the saga, plots are never developed through flashbacks, not even in the form of a saga character's speech as we find in the Odyssey."
[50] Vésteinn Ólason 2005, 106.

vera mega, – "er hingat jafnan mikil ferð á haustum at skreiðarkaupum, ok er nú ván þeira sem mest, enda má ek ekki annat en sofa sem mik lystir." Vermundr gekk brott ok var úti um stund, kom inn ok sagði Finnboga, at þeir váru þá komnir á inn neðsta hjallann, – "ok ek kennda Brand inn örva Vermundarson með hálfan þriðja tög manna, vel búna at vápnum. [Finnbogi segir:] munum vér áðr hafast orð við, ok mun Brandr þiggja sæmileg boð; en ef hann vill eigi þat, þá er slíkt sjáanda. En ek er nú fullsvefta ok skal eigi liggja lengr," sprettr upp ok tekr vápn sín ok þeir báðir ok ganga út ok upp at brekkunum.[51]

At Finnbogastadir there was not a long distance between the mountains and the shore. The land descended to the farm in three stages, and one could ride to it from one direction only. Vermund went outside and looked around. Up on the highest ledge he saw that there was either a whirlwind or a large group of men riding together. He went inside […] and wakened Finnbogi, who asked what he wanted. He told him what he had seen. Finnbogi told him to keep watch and said he would sleep longer. Vermund went outside and saw the group of horsemen, who had reached the middle ledge. He returned inside and told Finnbogi.

Finnbogi said it could well be. 'A lot of people always come here in autumn to purchase fish, and it is now that the greatest number are to be expected. But I'm incapable of doing anything other than what I want to do – sleep.'

Vermund went away, stayed outside for a while, then came in and told Finnbogi that they had reached the lowest ridge. 'And I recognised Brand Vermundarson the Eager with twenty-five men, all well armed […].'

'We'll talk to [Brand…' said Finnbogi, 'and he] may accept honourable proposals. But if he does not accept we will have to see what should be done. But I have now slept all I want and won't lie down any longer.' He jumped up and took his weapons, and they both went outside and up onto the slope.[52]

This passage exemplifies how time can be slowed down at will, in this case (as in most cases) to prepare for a crucial scene, notably a fierce confrontation between parties.[53] Here, time is slowed by frequently changing perspectives between the interior and exterior of the farm. In other iterations of the technique, attention may be split between the acts of the opposing parties or individuals who are about to confront each other in a crucial scene, or by otherwise enriching the narrative with a particularly detailed description of

[51] *Finnboga saga*, ed. Jóhannes Halldórsson 1959, 333.
[52] Kennedy 1997, 266.
[53] Vésteinn Ólason 1998, 100. Cf. Clover's 1974 discussion of the key function of scenes in saga narrative and their common narrative structure.

events.[54] In both cases, that is, with either frequent perspective-shifting or by providing numerous details, the peaks of action are delayed, heightening tension for the audience and readers and intensifying their experience.

Direct speech also decelerates time, and it is among the slowest paces of narrative, wherein "a one to one relationship between the words of the text and the pace of the events" is established, expressing the time it would take for the events to actually happen.[55] In the *Íslendingasögur,* dialogues are usually brief and combined with action, but there are also speeches of some length. Such speeches have many functions, including conferring an historical dimension on an act by associating it with past events. Speeches and dialogue can also point to the future, raising expectations for the audience or readers.

There are other ways in which the narrative pace of the *Íslendingasögur* is manipulated, as in cases of simultaneity and the suspension of time, which are necessarily combined together. Simultaneity is the chronological intersection of separate strands within a plot, effectively an expansion of the technique of the split scenes described above. The author alters, and must be considerate of, the intrinsic chronology of the story as he manipulates the various strands of the narrative. It is necessary to abandon one strand as it flows in another, meaning some characters come to be suspended in time. Such a suspension can last for a long time, and at times this is made explicit:[56]

> *Nú verðr þar frá at hverfa um stund, en taka til út á Íslandi ok heyra, hvat þar gerisk til tíðenda, meðan Þorkell er útan. (*Laxdæla saga*, ch. 58)*
>
> The scene will now be left for a while, and the thread taken up again once more in Iceland, with news of the events taking place while Thorkel was abroad.

[54] Vésteinn Ólason 1998, 100.
[55] Cochrane 2009, 195. The percentage of direct speech in the *Íslendingasögur* is usually 30% of the total text. This figure is high, if compared to the same figure concerning other saga-prose. For example, dialogues in the Kings' sagas constitute the 19% of the total text. Vésteinn Ólason 1998, 113.
[56] Le Breton-Filíppusdóttir 1997, 130–1.

*Nú er at segja frá ferð þeira Þorkels... (*Laxdæla *saga, ch. 76)*

The story now returns to Thorkel and his journey...

Thus, the authors of the *Íslendingasögur* slow down narrative time at will in several different ways, notably by enriching the narrative with detailed descriptions or with direct speech, by frequently changing perspectives or by intersecting separate narrative strands (simultaneity), necessarily suspending time in one strand as it flows in another.

At the other extreme, time is accelerated: it can be compressed or even cut out at will. Compression is frequently evident in the opening and closing sections of the sagas, in which genealogical delineations and the absence of detailed descriptions of events, make time—even whole generations—pass relatively quickly. These sections also tend to lack direct speech, which would slow the narration, as we have seen.[57]

Time is encapsulated throughout the texts when there are summaries of certain episodes, usually appearing between major scenes, that provide only the information essential for the development of the saga. Contributing to the acceleration of time is the use of stock phrases whereby periods such as the day, the season, and the year might be bypassed in one brief sentence.[58] For example:

*Líðr nú svá vetrinn. / En er af leið vetrinn... (*Eyrbyggja saga*, ch. 20).*

So another winter passed...

*Þrándr stígandi bjó lengi síðan á Ingjaldshváli... (*Eyrbyggja saga*, ch. 62)*

Thrand Stigandi farmed for a long time at Ingjaldshvall.

Similarly, on other occasions, time is explicitly cut out, as when it is stated that during a specific period that is being elided, nothing interesting or worth mentioning happened, such as:

[57] Cochrane 2009, 195.
[58] Cochrane 2009, 194–5.

*...ok liðu svá þau misseri, at eigi varð til tíðenda. (*Eyrbyggja saga*, ch. 36)*

The rest of the year passed without further incident.

Thus, the authors of the *Íslendingasögur* employ several narrative devices that have to do with the operation of time. They are deployed depending on specific narrative needs, and in order to make the narratives more appealing to their audiences and readers. These devices alter the relationship of story-time to discourse-time, manipulating order, introducing anachronies, and compressing or extending duration.

The analysis now moves on to the in-depth ways in which story-time and discourse-time interact in two specific *Íslendingasögur* from the thirteenth century, *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Laxdæla saga*. Both sagas are considered district sagas, narratives that span a specific Icelandic district, although *Laxdæla* is more of a family chronicle. Additionally, they both echo Ari Þorgilsson's work, suggesting that their authors used it as a source or model. Both texts display time patterns that are similar to the ones Ari himself used, at times even the same ones, while also referring to him directly on some occasions, such as when pointing out that "[a certain event] happened according to Ari Þorgilsson" (*Eyrbyggja saga,* ch. 7; *Laxdæla saga,* chs. 4, 78).

3.3 The Representation of Time in *Eyrbyggja saga*

Eyrbyggja saga, "The Saga of the Men of Eyrr," or *Saga Þórsnesinga, Eyrbyggja ok Álptfirðinga*, "The Saga of the Men of Þórsnes, Eyrr, and Álptafjǫrðr," is one of the most well-known *Íslendingasögur*. As the latter version of the title suggests, this saga describes the stories of several families of first settlers of the Snæfellsnes peninsula (West Iceland) and their close descendants, spanning the period that goes from roughly 880 to the beginning of the eleventh century. These stories are typically stories of feuds, and the narrative takes the form of a number of different strands, which the narrator artfully weaves together.

The saga exists in three versions. The version appearing in most scholarly editions of the saga is preserved in two seventeenth-century copies (AM 448 4to and AM 442 4to) of a major vellum from the late fourteenth century, *Vatnshyrna*, which was lost in the Copenhagen fire of 1728. The middle part of a second version of the saga is preserved in a fourteenth-century manuscript in the library of Wolfenbüttel (Guelf. 9.10. 4to) and in fragments of a thirteenth-century manuscript related to it (AM 162 E fol.). Additionally, there are fragments of a third version of the story, the earliest being a section of seven pages preserved within the fourteenth-century *Melabók* (AM 445 b 4to).[59]

The text is believed to have been written in Iceland sometime during the thirteenth century, but the precise timeframe has been a matter of debate, though it is generally agreed that it was composed towards the middle of the century. In any case, it must have been composed before the end of the Commonwealth (1262–64), because of the author's proximity to the society of that period.[60] The saga suggests that certain institutions from the Commonwealth period were still in force when the text was composed, such as the allegiance between liegemen *(þingmenn)* and their chieftain *(goði)*.[61] This points to a date toward the beginning of the thirteenth century, when the role of the *goðar* began to be challenged by increasing royal and ecclesiastical power, although

[59] McCreesh 1993, 174. Cf. Scott's (2003, 1–18) scholarly edition of the vellum manuscript tradition of the saga.
[60] Böldl 2005, 24–6.
[61] McCreesh 1993, 174; Torfi Tulinius 2013, 129.

this tension remained through the middle of that century.[62] An early thirteenth-century dating is supported by the robust presence of archaisms in the vocabulary, especially in the manuscript fragments, and by the lack of courtly influence in the text.[63] The latter, however, is controversial as a dating criterion, as it is hard to sustain that courtly influence in Iceland is more recent than the sagas, considering Icelanders' relationship with the Norwegian court from the earliest years.

Speculations on the dating of the saga have also been based on references in the text to other sagas, notably *Laxdæla saga.*[64] Events in *Laxdæla* concerning Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir, the most exceptional woman in the text—and in Iceland at the time, according to the saga—are alluded to in both chapters 56 and 65 of *Eyrbyggja saga*: in chapter 56, Guðrún moves away from Helgafell;[65] in chapter 65, the final chapter of the saga, a passage about Guðrún makes explicit reference to *Laxdæla*. This direct reference may indicate that *Eyrbyggja* was composed after *Laxdæla* in the mid-thirteenth century, at the earliest. Bjarni Guðnason supports this assumption in his study of *Heiðarvíga saga*, a saga that is also referred to directly in chapter 65 of *Eyrbyggja*.[66] He believes that a comparative analysis of the three sagas reveals that *Laxdæla* was composed first, around 1255, *Heiðarvíga* slightly later, in 1260, and finally *Eyrbyggja*, around 1265.[67] Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, however, who believed in dating *Eyrbyggja* to the beginning of the thirteenth century, maintained that at least the reference to *Laxdæla* in the final chapter of *Eyrbyggja* might be a later addition by a copyist.[68] Einar Ólafur supported his thesis of the early thirteenth-century dating of the saga by maintaining that Styrmir Kárason (ca. 1170–1245) relied on it when writing his version of *Landnámabók*, probably during

[62] See Torfi Tulinius 2013, 128–9.
[63] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1935, li–lii. Cf. Louis-Jensen 2013, 136.
[64] Torfi Tulinius 2013, 125–7; Louis-Jensen 2013, 137.
[65] Hermann Pálsson/Edwards (1989 [1972], 3) note that in ch. 56 of *Laxdæla,* Guðrún moves *to* Helgafell. Thus, "Helgafell becomes the focal place of *Laxdæla* precisely at the point where it ceases to be that of *Eyrbyggja.*"
[66] Bjarni Guðnason 1993.
[67] Bjarni Guðnason 1993, 220–3, 238–53, 268–9.
[68] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1935, xlvii–lii.

the 1220s.[69] Other scholars, such as Jón Jóhannesson and Jakob Benediktsson, have cast doubt on these conclusions, suggesting the opposite, that Styrmir did not rely on the saga, though Sturla Þórðarson the writer (1214–84) may have done so when he wrote his version of *Landnámabók* around 1270.[70] Some scholars have even maintained that Sturla Þórðarson himself might have authored the saga, which will be considered shortly.[71] This would allow the saga to be dated between 1230–70.

Several texts have been hypothesized as the written sources of the work. Firstly, there is *Ævi Snorra goða*, the short life of Snorri *goði* ("the Priest/Chieftain") Þorgrímsson that was probably written by Ari Þorgilsson, as outlined before. The author of *Eyrbyggja* might have used *Ævi Snorra* for information about Snorri *goði* himself, who figures prominently in the saga. Ari's work in general seems to have inspired the author of *Eyrbyggja*, and on one occasion Ari is mentioned directly in the text (ch. 7), to give credibility to a historical fact in the narrative. Other sources for *Eyrbyggja* have been proposed: *Heiðarvíga saga* itself, which is probably the source for the battle of Þorsteinn Gíslason; *Eiríks saga rauða*, which is partly summarized in chapter 24 of *Eyrbyggja*; and *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, which also has a description of the killing of Snorri's father.[72] *Jómsvíkinga saga* and *Orkneyinga saga* have also been suggested as sources for the text, especially on the basis of references that appear in chapter 29 of *Eyrbyggja*.

Who authored the saga? Precise topographical references concerning the area where the events described are set, the northern coast of the Snæfellsnes peninsula, suggest that the text was composed by someone who knew the area very well, and was possibly from there, or lived there. It has been hypothesized that the author was a monk at the Benedictine monastery of Helgafell, founded in 1184, which is also a central place in the story.[73] This is a tempting theory, at least because two of the house principals during the time in which

[69] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1935, xiv–xviii.
[70] See Jón Jóhannesson 1941, 148–9, 212–3; Jakob Benediktsson 1986 [1968], lxiii–lxvi.
[71] Elín Bára Magnúsdóttir 2015, 341–60.
[72] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1935, xviii–xxii; Hermann Pálsson/Edwards 1989 [1972], 13.
[73] Hermann Pálsson/Edwards 1989 [1972], 2–3.

the saga was probably composed, namely Þorfinnr Þorgeirsson (1188–1216) and Ketill Hermundarson (1217–30), were direct descendants of Snorri *goði*, who was from Helgafell himself.[74] Moreover, Snorri *goði* was the ancestor of many of the most powerful chieftain families in the thirteenth century, when the saga was written, especially families from the area where the saga is set and its surroundings. These families are the Sturlungar (West Iceland, Westfjords, and Northeast Iceland), who are prominent in the saga, with accounts of their ancestry in chapter 64,[75] as well as the Ásbirningar (Skagafjörður) and the Vatnsfirðingar (Ísafjörður and surroundings), evident in accounts of ancestry given in chapter 65 of the saga. These families might have inspired the composition of the saga, supported it, or even written it themselves. In particular, it has been supposed that the text was composed in a milieu connected to the Sturlungar. Some scholars have even speculated that the author of the saga was one of its members, namely Sturla Þórðarson the writer (1214–84).[76] Independently of direct authorship, the saga provides a connection between the generations of Snorri *goði*'s descendants and their ancestors, around whom the narrative is constructed. Arguably, through the author, these later generations of Snorri *goði*'s descendants project their own concerns onto the world of their Saga Age ancestors, which will be described shortly.

The saga is set on Snæfellsnes peninsula, and reaches from ca. 880 to the beginning of the eleventh century, specifically 1031, the year of Snorri *goði*'s death, thus spanning approximately 150 years. It recounts the lives of several generations, from the first settlers down to their great-grandchildren. The complexity of the social relationships between these people is woven together in eight separate strands.[77] This multi-stranded narrative, wandering from one plot to another, means that characters are inevitably suspended at

[74] Hermann Pálsson/Edwards 1989 [1972], 2–3.
[75] Torfi Tulinius 2013, 128.
[76] Hallberg 1979 and, more recently, Elín Bára Magnúsdóttir 2015. While building on Hallberg's work, among others', Elín Bára analyses both thematic and linguistic relations between the saga and Sturla's literary works, in order to determine the nature of the textual relations. Her conclusion (2015, 341–60) is that the analysis strongly indicates that Sturla could indeed have authored the saga.
[77] Hermann Pálsson/Edwards 1989 [1972], 4; Hollander 1959.

times, and occasionally for lengthy episodes.[78] It has been maintained that there is no predominant strand or obvious central character in the saga,[79] though some scholars argue that, as the narrative progresses, Snorri *goði* emerges as the main character, the society ordering itself around and under his influence.[80] Thus, Snorri *goði*'s growing influence represents a guiding force within the narrative, an organizing principle which gives the saga an appearance of unity.[81] This has also been disputed, though, on the grounds that the last eighteen years of Snorri *goði*'s life are treated only briefly, as are some significant events in which he plays a primary role.[82]

Others have maintained that the narrative develops according to another organizing principle, the Icelanders' conversion to Christianity, an account of which appears in chapter 49.[83] In the saga, the introduction of Christianity seems to trigger a decrease of internal community conflicts and speeds up the process by which it becomes an organized society. According to this view, the Conversion is portrayed as a gradual process of change and not as a dramatic shift. Nevertheless, the magnitude of the shift is stressed in the saga. This is evident in the fact that many narrative elements appear twice, both before and after the Conversion, and, despite being similar, they indicate that a qualitative change has occurred.

The saga seems to encourage further comparisons, most notably between the earlier times it describes and the political situation in Iceland at the time of composition of the saga, roughly in the mid-thirteenth century. During that century, tension and conflict had escalated into civil war. The motivation behind the strife was no longer, as in times past, the restoration of honour, but was now chieftains' preoccupation with maintaining their power and wealth amidst growing competition from people with equally prestigious ancestry. Hence, their will to ruin competitors, which determined the fact that power progressively consolidated into fewer hands. At the same time, these people

[78] Torfi Tulinius 2014, 196.
[79] Clover 1982, 77–9.
[80] Vésteinn Ólason 1971.
[81] Torfi Tulinius 2014, 198.
[82] Hollander 1959, 222.
[83] Vésteinn Ólason 1971; McCreesh 1978/9.

were somewhat reluctant to accept the strengthening of the Norwegian royal state, as well as of the Church, as institutions.[84] This clashed with the interests of other powerful people, including the king of Norway's nominal representative over the whole country, after the Norwegian Crown had made its first move to annex Iceland in 1220.[85] Such contrast generated further competition and struggle. The text reflects some of these preoccupations, though the author projects them into the past, for instance by addressing the ways in which individuals or groups manage the legacy of power and wealth they have inherited from their fathers, a central issue of the saga.[86] Moreover, as the tensions are resolved in the saga, the author also seems to evoke the past as a time to look up to, to inspire the changes necessary in his present, concerning the fierce competition for power that characterized this age.[87]

There are several other instances in which the past is differentiated from the present of the author. Throughout the text there are stock phrases that mark the past as different from the present, such as "it was the law in those days" (*þat váru þá lǫg,* ch. 22), "as people did in those days" / "according to ancient custom" (*sem þá var síðr til,* chs. 43, 58).[88] In other instances, though, these same phrases are modified to establish a continuity with the authorial present:

Jafnskylt var ǫllum mǫnnum í lǫgum þeira at... sem nú... (Ch. 34)

It was the law in those days, just as it is now, that...

...ok hefir þat haldizk jafnan síðan. (Ch. 38)

...and this has been the law ever since.

[84] Hermann Pálsson/Edwards 1989 [1972], 2.
[85] Gunnar Karlsson 2000, 79-80.
[86] Torfi Tulinius 2014, 200.
[87] Hermann Pálsson/Edwards 1989 [1972], 2.
[88] See Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1935, xxviii.

Continuity is also often indicated by the mention of physical landmarks of the past that still stood during the author's time, such as:

> *Þeir færðu þá þingit inn í nesit, þar sem nú er… (Ch. 10)*
>
> This was when they moved the Assembly to the east side of the headland, where it is still held...

> *Þar sér enn dómhring þann, er men váru dæmðir í til blóts; í þeim hring stendr Þórs steinn, er þeir menn váru brotnir um, er til blóta váru hafðir, ok sér enn blóðslitinn á steininum. (Ch. 10; also chs. 28, 34)*
>
> The circle where the court used to sentence people to be sacrificed can still be seen, with Thor's Stone inside it on which the victims' backs were broken, and you can still see the blood on the stone.

In this way, the past can be pictured as remote, but also as reaching into the present. At the same time, the narrative is set in tangible space, contributing to an overall impression of veracity.

Some scholars have interpreted this information as genuinely factual, among them Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, who maintained that everything in the story points strongly to the fact that the author had both the knowledge and the desire to give a true account—a story that both he himself and his contemporaries believed to be true.[89] Einar Ólafur emphasizes the instances in which the saga author mentions customs and landmarks that existed during the Settlement and that were still present in his time, some of which have been described above. He maintains that these instances are evidence of the fact that the author made an effort to ground his narrative in history, while also marking continuity between the past and the present.

According to Einar Ólafur, the fixing of historical events too is evidence of the author's intention to provide a truthful account. Led by this idea, he constructs a table that marks the main historical points described in the saga

[89] Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1935, xxix.

and the time intervals between them.[90] To construct the chronology, he considers both the information contained in the saga itself (primarily relative dating) alongside accounts of the same information as it appears in other sources. For instance, when analysing Snorri *goði*'s biography as it is given in the saga, he also considers sources such as *Ævi Snorra goða*, the Prologue to *Heimskringla*, *Laxdæla saga*, and *Grettis saga*.[91] Once again, it should be remembered that *Ævi Snorra goða* has been attributed to Ari Þorgilsson, and Einar Ólafur highlights the fact that the saga author probably used Ari's work as a model, especially regarding chronology.[92] In the specific case of Snorri *goði*'s lifespan, Einar Ólafur actually believes that all the sources that provide information about it, notably of Snorri's age, drew from Ari.[93] He notices that all the sources agree that Snorri *goði*'s death took place in 1031, one winter after the death of King Óláfr *helgi* ("the Saint"), just as *Eyrbyggja saga* has it (ch. 65). However, agreement between the sources is not the rule; on the contrary, they are often chronologically inconsistent. One need look no further than the year in which Snorri *goði* was born. It is not given directly in any source, and disagreements among the sources make it difficult to use other events to pinpoint it. Einar Ólafur maintains that the inconsistencies derive from factors such as the variety of authors' sources, mistakes in calculations, or misreadings of Roman numerals.[94] Thus, in constructing his table, he himself acknowledges that the establishment of definitive chronology is difficult, and cannot be relied upon.[95] Nevertheless, he underscores the fact that the author's intention was to provide a reliable account on the basis of the sources he had and the calculations he or others had made.[96]

Einar Ólafur's study, which is somewhat dated, should be contextualized within Icelanders' struggle for independence during the early twentieth century, when nationalist views depicted the Icelandic Commonwealth as a

[90] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1935, xxxiii–xxxiv.
[91] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1935, xxx–xxxi.
[92] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1935, xxvii.
[93] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1935, xxxi.
[94] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1935, xxx–xxxi.
[95] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1935, xxxii.
[96] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1935, xxxii.

golden age, mythicizing the origins of Icelandic society, and viewing the *Íslendingasögur* as historically accurate sources, as mentioned above (ch. 3; cf. section 2.4).[97] However, while *Eyrbyggja saga* displays an interest in establishing a chronology of the events that characterized the region of Snæfellsnes since its first settlement, it seems that this is more to give the story a sense of veracity and a historical ambience in service to the ideological interests of its creators, rather than to provide genuinely factual information. This is true of the *Íslendingasögur* generally, though it does not preclude the texts from expressing authentic cultural norms, customs, and social practices, especially those of the time in which they were produced.

3.3.1 Story-time

3.3.1.1 Chronological Time

Eyrbyggja saga is narrated chronologically from the time of the first settlers of the Snæfellsnes peninsula (ca. 880) to the beginning of the eleventh century. The narrative is constructed in a linear manner using dating patterns, most notably relative ones, and specific genealogies. Some of the dating patterns used are derived directly from Ari Þorgilsson's work (section 2.2.2 above), notably those referring to kings, such as King Óláfr *helgi* ("the Saint"):

> *Þat var ofarliga á dǫgum Óláfs ins Helga, at Guðleifr hafði kaupferð vestr til Dyflinnar. (Ch. 64)*
>
> Towards the end of St Olaf's reign Gudleif set out west to Dublin on a trading voyage.

> *Snorri goði andaðisk í Sælingsdalstungu einum vetri eptir fall Óláfs konungs ins helga. (Ch. 65)*
>
> Snorri the Priest died at Tongue in Sælingsdale a year after the killing of King Olaf the Saint.

[97] See also Ármann Jakobsson 2015, 14–8; Gunnar Karlsson 1993, 15–6.

References to other prominent individuals' years of office are also often used to situate events, as well as are references to particularly meaningful historical events or points in time, for example:

> *Þá réð Hákon jarl Sigurðarson fyrir Noregi. (Ch. 25; also ch. 1)*
>
> The ruler of Norway at the time was Earl Hakon Sigurdarson.

> *Þóroddr hafði siglt kaupferð vestr til Írlands, til Dyflinnar. Í þann tíma hafði Sigurðr jarl Hlǫðvésson í Orkneyjum herjat til Suðreyja ok allt vestr í Mǫn. (Ch. 29; cf.* Orkneyinga saga*, ch. 11)*
>
> Thorodd went on an Irish trading-trip to Dublin, just after Earl Sigurd Hlodvesson of Orkney had been raiding in the Hebrides and the Isle of Man.

> *En er Bjǫrn kom um haf, fór hann suðr til Danmarkar ok þaðan suðr til Jómsborgar; þá var Pálna-Tóki fyrir Jómsvíkingum. (Ch. 29; cf.* Jómsvíkinga saga *and* Heimskringla*)*
>
> Bjorn sailed to Norway, then south to Denmark, and from there he travelled on east to Jomsborg. At that time Palna-Toki was the leader of the Jomsvikings.

Other times, the events that are used to construct relative dating patterns are significant Icelandic events, such as the Settlement or the subsequent conversion to Christianity, in the same manner as in Ari's work:

> *Það var tíu vetrum síðar en Ingólfr Arnarson hafði farit at byggja Ísland, ok var sú ferð allfræg orðin... (Ch. 3)*
>
> This was ten years after Ingolf Arnarson had sailed off to settle in Iceland, a voyage that was on everyone's lips...

> *...ok var þar einn vetr, áðr hann fór at byggja Grœnland; en þat var fjórtán vetrum fyrir kristni lǫgtekna á Íslandi.*[98] *(Ch. 24; also chs. 50, 56)*
>
> The following year [Eirik the Red] set out to colonize Greenland, fourteen years before Christianity was adopted by law in Iceland.

[98] According to Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1935, 60), this piece of information was taken from Ari Þorgilsson.

At other points, references are made directly to people that are prominent in the history of Iceland, or to people that play an important role in the story, such as:

> *[Vermundr] kom heim […] til bús síns it sama sumar sem Eiríkr rauði fór til Grænlands, sem fyrr er ritat. (Ch. 25)*
>
> [Vermund] had a good passage and reached home the same summer that Eirik the Red sailed to Greenland, as we have described.

> *Nǫkkurum vetrum síðar kom út Auðr djúpauðga ok var inn fyrsta vetr með Birni, bróður sínum […]. Á þessum tímum byggðisk allr Breiðafjǫrðr... (Ch. 6)*
>
> Some years later Aud the Deep-Minded came to Iceland, where she spent her first winter with her brother Bjorn. […]. By this time all the districts round Breida Fjord had been fully settled...

This extends to the times when someone's death is used as a reference point:

> *...fóru um haustit til vistar með Snorra goða til Helgafells. […]. Þetta var litlu eptir víg Þorbjarnar digra. (Ch. 29; also ch. 18)*
>
> In the autumn, shortly after the killing of Thorbjorn the Stout, he went to Helgafell to stay with Snorri the Priest.

> *...þat var tveim vetrum eptir víg Bolla Þorleikssonar, bónda Guðrúnar Ósvífrsdóttur. (Ch. 56)*
>
> [It was] two years after Gudrun's husband Bolli Thorleiksson had been killed.

Interestingly, the age or the death of somebody is often connected specifically with the birth of someone else, making a generational pattern:

> *En sumar þat, er Þorsteinn var hálfþrítøgr, fæddi Þóra sveinbarn... (Ch. 11)*
>
> In the summer when Thorstein was twenty-five years old [just before he drowned], Thora gave birth to another son...

...þá drap Gísli, mágr hans, hann at haustboði á Sæbóli. Nǫkkurum nóttum síðar fæddi Þórdís, kona hans, barn, ok var sá sveinn kallaðr Þorgrímr eptir feðr sínum. (Ch. 12)

...Thorgrim's brother in law Gisli killed him at an autumn feast at Sæbol. A few days later Thorgrim's widow Thordis gave birth to a boy, called Thorgrim after his father.

These connections might have also served mnemonic purposes, and the same can be said of the connection of births to the departure of someone:

Bjǫrn var sekr gǫrr útan um þrjá vetr, ok fór hann í brott samsumars. Þat sama sumar fæddi Þuríðr að Fróðá sveinbarn, ok var nefndr Kjartan... (Ch. 29)

Bjorn was outlawed and banished from Iceland for three years. He went abroad the same summer. That was the summer Thurid of Frodriver gave birth to a boy, who was named Kjartan.

Thus, the saga presents chronological patterns of story-time that are structured especially around significant events in the history of Iceland, such as the Settlement and the Conversion, and around the genealogies and the lives of specific people, both historically and narratively important.

3.3.1.2 Episodic Time

Besides using temporal patterns that allow events to be fixed chronologically, the saga also employs the discontinuous patterns of episodic time, where the emphasis is cyclical. That is, time in the saga is also structured around the cycles of nature and the Old Icelandic calendar. The seasons are used prominently, with spring most often associated with court actions:

Þat var eitt vár á Þórsnesþingi, at þeir mágar, Þorgrímr Kjallaksson og Ásgeirr á Eyri, gerðu orð á, at þeir myndi eigi leggja drag undir ofmetnað Þórsnesinga... (Ch. 9; also chs. 16, 23, 27, 31, 35, 56)

One spring at the Thor's Ness Assembly, Thorgrim Kjallaksson and his brother-in-law Asgeir of Eyr declared publicly that they would no longer tolerate the arrogance of the Thorsnessings...

Á várþingi um sumarit heimti Snorri fǫðurarf sinn af Berki. (Ch. 14)

In the spring at the District Assembly, Snorri demanded his inheritance from Bork.

There is at least one instance of a marriage proposal made during one of these assemblies:

Vár þetta it sama á Þórsnesþingi hóf Þorleifr kimbi bónorð sitt ok bað Helgu Þorláksdóttur á Eyri... (Ch. 41)

That spring at the Thor's Ness Assembly, Thorleif Kimbi made an offer of marriage and asked for the hand of Helga, Thorlak's daughter...

Spring is also associated with sailing, although this is not common in the saga:

Um várit fékk Þórólfr Birni langskip gott ok skipat góðum drengjum […] ok heldu þeir vestr um haf... (Ch. 3)

In the spring Thorolf gave Bjorn a fine longship with a good fighting crew... they sailed west across the North Sea...

Sailing and trading are instead set mainly in the summer, when conditions were more favourable:

Um sumarit eptir fóru þeir til Íslands ok urðu síðbúnir... (Ch. 13)

The following summer they were late getting ready to sail back to Iceland...

Þorleifr kimbi tók sér far um sumarit með kaupmǫnnum, þeim er bjuggusk í Straumfirði... (Ch. 39; also ch. 47)

That same summer Thorleif Kimbi arranged for his passage with some traders who were getting their ship ready in Straum Fjord...

Summer travels may also be raids:

> *Þeir váru sumir, er heldu sik á vetrum í Suðreyjum eða Orkneyjum, en um sumrum herjuðu þeir í Nóreg ok gerðu mikinn skaða í ríki Haralds konungs. (Ch. 1. Cf. ch. 59, where the pirate Óspakr appears)*
>
> Others used to winter in the Hebrides or in Orkney, then spend the summers raiding in Harald's kingdom, causing plenty of damage.

Summer is also connected to the meeting of the *Alþingi*, although the instances of this in the saga are scarce, when compared to *Laxdæla saga* (see section 3.4.1.2):

> *Þessi somu mál ónýtti Þorsteinn Gíslason fyrir Snorra goða um sumarit á alþingi. (Ch. 56)*
>
> ...but that summer at the Althing Thorstein Gislason dismissed Snorri's case.

There can also be other gatherings or feasts in summer, although this too is uncommon:

> *Sumar þetta […] bauð Þóroddr skattkaupandi Snorra goða, mági sínum, til heimboðs þangat til Fróðár […]. Þetta var um sumarit um túnannir. (Ch. 47; also ch. 40)*
>
> That same summer […] Thorodd the Tribute-Trader invited his brother-in-law Snorri the Priest to a feast at Frodriver […]. This was during the haymaking season.

Other activities that are also set in the summer are, understandably, agricultural and economic ones, like farming:

> *Þat var um sumarit, at Þóroddr hafði látit raka tǫðu sína alla í stórsæti, at þá kom á regn mikit... (Ch. 63)*
>
> In the summer, after Thorodd's hay from the home meadow had all been gathered into large stacks, heavy rain began to fall...

Fighting, too, is often set in the summer, such as the fight between Snorri and the Þorbrandssynir:

> *Þetta sumar kom skip í Hraunhafnarós, en annat í Dǫgurðarnes. (Ch. 42)*
>
> That summer a ship put in at Hraunhaven Mouth, and another at Dogurdar Ness.

The transition to autumn is often associated with activities that are typically performed during that season, such as the slaughter:

> *Þorbjǫrn digri átti ok stóðhross mǫrg saman, er hann lét standa í fjallhǫgum ok valði af hross um haustum til slátrs. (Ch. 18; also ch. 30)*
>
> ...Thorbjorn the Stout had a herd of stud-horses he left to graze on the mountain pasture, though he used to pick out some of them every autumn for slaughtering.

Along with the slaughter, the autumn harvest made it a time particularly suitable for celebrations:

> *Um haustit hafði Vermundr boð mikit ok bauð Arnkatli goða til sín ok Eyrbyggjum ok Styr, bróður sínum. (Ch. 25)*
>
> In the autumn Vermund held a great feast and invited his brother Styr, Arnkel the Priest, and the Men of Eyr.

> *Þetta haust eptir hafði Arnkell inni haustboð mikit, en þat var vanði hans, at bjóða Úlfari, vin sínum, til allra boða ok leiða hann jafnan með gjǫfum út. (Ch. 32)*
>
> In the autumn Arnkel held a great feast. On such occasions, he would invite his friend Ulfar and always gave him parting gifts when he left.

Often, such autumn feasts coincided with the three-night festival of the *vetrnætr*, "Winter-nights," described above:

> *Annat haust eptir at vetrnóttum hafði Snorri goði haustboð mikit ok bauð til vinum sínum. Þar var ǫldrykkja ok fast drukkit. (Ch. 37)*
>
> Next autumn, at Winter Eves, Snorri the Priest gave a great feast and invited all his friends. The guests were served with ale and there was drinking.

In turn, other festive occasions, such as games and weddings, are often associated with these autumn feasts, though they provided an opportunity for retribution and killings as well:

> *Þat var siðr Breiðvíkinga um haustum, at þeir hǫfðu knattleika um vetrnáttaskeið undir Oxlinni […] ok sóttu menn þangat um alla sveitina; váru þar gǫrvir leikskálar miklir; vistuðusk menn þangat ok sátu þar hálfan mánuð eða lengr. (Ch. 43)*
>
> At Winter Eves it was a custom of the Breidavik people to hold ball games just below Oxl Mountain. […]. People from all over the district would come to these games in crowds, and large shelters were built for them there, as some of them would stay for a fortnight or even longer.

> *....ok tókusk þessi ráð um haustit eptir... (Ch. 28)*
>
> The wedding took place in the autumn...

> *Þorgrímr drap Véstein Vésteinsson at haustboði í Haukadal. En annat haust eptir, þá er Þorgrímr var hálfþrítøgr, sem faðir hans, þá drap Gísli, mágr hans, hann at haustboði á Sæbóli. (Ch. 12)*
>
> Thorgrim killed Vestein Vesteinsson at an autumn feast at Haukadale, and the following autumn when he was twenty-five years old, the very age his father had been when he was drowned, Thorgrim's brother in law Gisli killed him at an autumn feast at Sæbol.

In these examples from the saga which concern feasting, *boð* is the principal term that is used to indicate feasts, especially feasts held in the autumn. The term *haustboð*, "autumn/harvest feast," appears frequently (chs. 12, 25, 32, 37). Conversely, the term *veizla* appears only twice (chs. 4, 54), while *erfi*, with the specific meaning of "funeral feast," appears occasionally (e.g., ch. 54).

Turning to the season of winter, it was also a time for celebrations of various kinds, although the most prominent winter festival was clearly *jól*, the pagan Yule that eventually merged with Christmas:

> *...ok veitti [Snorri] brúðkaup þeira um vetrinn þar at Helgafelli. (Ch. 29)*
>
> Snorri himself held the wedding-feast at Helgafell later that winter.

Þenna vetr um jól hafði Þórólfr drykkju mikla ok veitti kappsamliga þrælum sínum... (Ch. 31)

That winter, about Christmas time, Thorolf held a great feast and gave his slaves plenty to drink.

It is interesting to note that the association of these celebrations, and this time of year generally, with paranormal beings or events is very common in the saga, as in the *Íslendingasögur* more generally, comprising a recurrent literary pattern.[99] In *Eyrbyggja*, winter is associated with sorcery of many kinds:

Í ǫndverðan vetr sendi Þorbjǫrn Odd Kǫtluson suðr um heiði undir Hraun. Þar bjó sá maðr, er Spá-Gils hét; hann var framsýnn ok eptirrýningamaðr mikill um stuldi eða þá hluti aðra, er hann vildi forvitnask. (Ch. 18)

At the beginning of the winter Thorbjorn sent Odd Katlason over to Hraun [...], where a man called Spa-Gils was living at the time. He had second sight and was very clever when it came to investigating thefts or anything else which needed straightening out.

Hann hóf ferð sína um vetrinn yfir heiði norðr að hitta Þuríði. En þó at Þóroddi þætti þat illa […]. Þóroddr keypti um vetrinn at Þorgrímu galdrakinn, at hon skyldi gera hríðviðri at Birni, þá er hann færi um heiðina. (Ch. 40)

That winter [Bjorn] set off north across the moor to see Thurid. Thorodd took it very badly […]. That winter Thorodd gave Thorgrima Witch-Face some money to work a spell and cause a blizzard when Bjorn was crossing the moor.

Paranormal beings appear and strange events, such as portents, occur especially during Christmas:

Þat var um vetrinn litlu fyrir jól, at Þóroddr bóndi fór út á Nes eptir skreið sinni […]. Þat var tíðenda at Fróðá þat sama kveld, er Þóroddr hafði heiman farit, at máleldar váru gorvir, ok er menn kómu fram, sá þeir, at selshǫfuð kom upp ór eldgrófinni. Heimakona ein kom fyrst fram ok sá þessi tíðendi; hon tók lurk einn, er lá í durunum, ok laust í hǫfuð selnum; hann gekk upp við hǫggit... (Ch. 53)

[99] Langeslag 2015, 120.

That winter, shortly before Christmas, Thorodd went out to Ness to get more dried fish for himself […]. In the evening, after Thorodd had gone and the fire had been lit, people came into the living room and saw a seal's head coming up through the floor. One of the servants was the first to notice this as she came in. She grabbed a club in the doorway and hit the seal on the head. Which only made it rise up out of the ground a little more.

Er skammt var til jóla, var þat einn morgun snimma þar á Kársstǫðum, at nautamaðr gekk til fjóss eptir vanða, at hann sá naut fyrir fjósdurum ok kenndi, at þar var þá komin kýrin in fǫtbrotna, er vant hafði verit […]. Þeir kenndu kálf í kúnni, ok þótti þeim þá eigi dræp. (Ch. 63)

Early one morning just before Christmas the cowherd at Karsstad went to the byre as usual. He saw a cow standing outside the door and realized it was the missing one with the broken leg [...], they saw she was with calf [the ghost-bull Glæsir, later in the story], so could not be put down.

The most frequent association of paranormal events with winter or Christmas itself, though, concerns hauntings:

Ok er vetr kom, sýndisk Þórólfr opt heima á bœnum ok sótti mest at húsfreyju. (Ch. 34)

That winter, Thorolf often appeared on the farm, haunting his widow most of all.

Um morguninn, er þeir Þóroddr fóru útan af Nesi með skreiðina, týndusk þeir allir út […]. En er þessi tíðendi spurðusk til Fróðár, buðu þau Kjartan ok Þuríðr nábúum sínum þangat til erfis; var þá tekit jólaǫl þeira ok snúit til erfisins. […] ok svá fór fram um ǫll jólin. (Ch. 54)

Next morning Thorodd and his men put out from Ness with their dried fish, and they were all drowned […]. When the news came to Frodriver, Kjartan and Thurid invited their neighbours to a funeral feast, at which they used the Christmas ale. On the first evening of the feast... Thorodd and his companions came into the room drenched to the skin... […] and so it continued throughout the Christmas season.

Battles are also occasionally set during Christmas, more specifically battles on ice, such as the battle in which Arnkell the Priest is killed (ch. 37), and the battle of Vigrafjǫrdr (ch. 45).

It should be noted that the saga uses winter not only as a season, but also in the typically Germanic sense of a year, especially when indicating time periods:

Snorri goði bjó at Helgafelli átta vetr... (Ch. 56)

Snorri the Priest lived at Helgafell for eight [winters]...

Snorri goði bjó í Tungu tuttugu vetr... (Ch. 65)

Snorri the Priest farmed at Tongue for twenty [winters]...

Similarly, the age of people, as well as animals, is given in winters:

Snorri Þorgrímsson var þá fjórtán vetra, er hann fór útan með fóstbræðrum sínum... (Ch. 13)

Snorri Thorgrimsson was fourteen [winters] old when he went abroad with his blood-brothers...

Er hann var tvévetr, var hann svá mikill sem fimm vetra gamlir yxn... (Ch. 63)

In two [winters, the ghost-bull Glæsir] had grown to the size of a five-year-old ox...

Besides the seasons, other units of time are used to structure the saga, notably other units of the Old Icelandic calendar. The *misseri* appears explicitly on some occasions:

...stóð allt kyrrt þessi misseri. (Ch. 35)

...nothing further happened, and things stayed quiet for the rest of the [half-year].

...ok liðu svá þau misseri, at eigi varð til tíðenda. (Ch. 36)

The rest of the [half-year] passed without further incident.

The month also appears, but rarely, and is used instead as the "half-month":

> *'...ek mun láta bera út ljá í dag ok slá undir sem mest má þessa viku alla, því at ek hygg, at hon muni verða regnsǫm, en ek get, at eptir þat mun verða gott til þerra inn næsta hálfan mánuð.' (Ch. 30; also ch. 43)*
>
> 'I'm having the scythes taken out today and then we'll mow all the hay we can till the end of the week, as I think there's going to be a heavy rainfall. After that there should be a good drying spell for a [half-month].'

This last example mentions the week as well, which is used in the text both in the sense of a seven-day period and in the context of week counting, as Ari Þorgilsson did in his work. However, week counting is not used frequently in this saga when compared to *Laxdæla saga* (see section 3.4.1.2 below):

> *Þessi tíðendi bar þar við viku alla... (Ch. 52)*
>
> It went on like this for a whole week...
>
> *En er liðnar váru af vetri tvær vikur... (Ch. 53)*
>
> When two weeks of winter had passed...

The day is clearly also used, and it is interesting to note that it is indicated as *dægr*:

> *Bjǫrn var úti þrjú dægr í hellinum, áðr upp létti hríðinni... (Ch. 40)*
>
> Bjorn spent three days in the cave before the weather cleared up...

As outlined previously, *dægr* originally designated either the hours of daylight from sunrise to sunset, or the hours of night from sunset to sunrise, varying according to season. In the northern summer, the hours of daylight would make a long *dægr*, which probably triggered the subsequent understanding of *dægr* as a period of 24 hours. This would also apply to the hours of darkness characterizing the northern winter. They too would make a long *dægr*, as the

example above seems to imply: the seasonal context is winter, and after the period of *dægr* spent in the cave Bjǫrn is said to be exhausted (*þrekaðr mjǫk*).[100]

In any case, the typical Germanic practice of counting "nights" instead of days is also used in the text:

> *'Þetta mál skaltu tala við þá menn, er þér likar, innan þriggja nátta...' (Ch. 28; also chs. 33, 47, 53)*
>
> "I give you three [nights] to talk it over with anyone you like..."

The night is usually specified in terms of a character spending the night somewhere, or as the fitting time for secret deeds or crimes, such as clandestine attacks:

> *...riðu þeir heiman […] út til Mávahlíðar ok váru þar um nótt. En um morgininn riðu þeir út í Holt... (Ch. 20)*
>
> ...they rode over to Mavahlid. They spent the night there and in the morning rode over to Holt.

> *Þessa sǫmu nótt sendi Snorri goði mann vestr á Staðarhól ok bað Sturlu Þjóðreksson at koma til móts við sik í Tungu norðr í Bitru um daginn eptir. […] fóru þeir þaðan um daginn eptir norðr um Gaflfellsheiði með fimm tigu manna; kómu í Tungu í Bitru um kveldit. […]; fóru þaðan út á Eyri um nóttina. Ok er þeir kómu þar, gengu þeir Óspakr út á virkit ok spyrja, hverir fyrir flokkinum réði. Þeir sǫgðu til sín ok báðu þá upp gefa virkit… (Ch. 62)*
>
> That same night Snorri the Priest sent another messenger west to Stadarhol to ask Sturla Thjodreksson to come and join him the following day at Tongue north in Bitra. […] next day they set out fifty-strong north across Gafl Fell Moor. They came to Tongue in the evening, […], and that night they went north to Eyr. When they got there, Ospak came out onto the stronghold wall and asked who was their leader. They told him who they were, and ordered the men in the stronghold to surrender.

[100] It should be remembered, though, that at some point the *dægr* came to designate a period of exactly 12 hours. See section 1.2.6.

The night, then, or more precisely, the evening, is commonly tied to paranormal beings or events, just as is the case with winter, generally:

> *Þat var eitt kveld um haustit, at sauðamaðr Þorsteins fór at fé fyrir norðan Helgafell; hann sá, at fjallit lauksk upp norðan; hann sá inn í fjallit elda stóra ok heyrði þangat mikinn glaum og hornaskvǫl; ok er hann hlýddi, ef hann næmi nǫkkur orðaskil, heyrði hann, at þar var heilsat Þorsteini þorskabít ok fǫrunautum hans […]. Um morguninn eptir kómu menn útan ór Hǫskuldsey og sǫgðu þau tíðendi, at Þorsteinn þorskabítr hafði drukknat í fiskiróðri... (Ch. 11; also ch. 43)*
>
> One evening in the autumn as Thorstein's shepherd was tending sheep north of Helga Fell, he saw the whole north side of the mountain opened up, with great fires burning inside it and the noise of feasting and clamour over the ale-horns. As he strained to catch particular words, he was able to make out that Thorstein Cod-Biter and his crew were being welcomed into the mountain […]. In the morning some men brought news […] that Thorstein Cod-Biter had been drowned on a fishing trip.

> *Þat kveld, er líkmenn kómu heim, þá er menn sátu við málelda at Fróðá, þá sá menn á veggþili hússins, at komit var tungl hálft; þat máttu allir menn sjá, þeir er í húsinu váru; þat gekk ofugt um húsit ok andsœlis. Þat hvarf eigi á brott, meðan menn sátu við elda. […]. Þórir kvað þat vera urðarmána; […]. Þessi tíðendi bar þar við viku alla, at urðarmáni kom inn hvert kveld sem annat. (Ch. 52; also ch. 51)*
>
> The evening that the corpse-bearers came back, the people at Frodriver were sitting by the fireside when they saw a halfmoon appear on the paneled wall. Everyone could see it. The moon kept circling round the room, backing from left to right, and stayed in sight as long as people remained at the fire... Thorir said it was a fatal moon... It went on like this for a whole week, every evening the same weird moon appeared in the living-room.

Hauntings of characters, too, tend to be associated with evening, as well as episodes of weather magic:

> *Eptir dauða Þórólfs bægifóts þótti mǫrgum mǫnnum verra úti, þegar er sólina lægði; en er á leið sumarit, urðu menn þess varir, at Þórólfr lá eigi kyrr; máttu menn þá aldri í friði úti vera, þegar er sól settisk. (Ch. 34)*

After Thorolf died, a good many people found it more and more unpleasant to stay out of doors once the sun had begun to go down. As the summer wore on, it became clear that Thorolf wasn't lying quiet, for after sunset no one out of doors was left in peace.

Ok um kveldit, er hann bjósk heim at fara, var þykkt veðr ok regn nǫkkut, ok var hann heldr síðbúinn. En er hann kom upp á heiðina, kólnaði veðrit ok dreif; var þá svá myrkt, at hann sá eigi leiðina fyrir sér. Eptir þat laust á hríð með svá miklu hreggi, at hann fekk varla stýrt sér... (Ch. 40)

In the evening when Bjorn started back, the sky was overcast, and it rained a little. He was late leaving, and by the time he got up to the moor the weather had grown colder, and snow was drifting. It soon grew too dark for him to see the path, and then a blizzard blew up, so violent that he could hardly stay on his feet.

At the same time, evening and night often bring counsel, that is, they can be reflective and contemplative, with verdicts usually declared in the morning. Similarly, concrete plans are made in the morning, or action is taken then:

Síðan gengu þeir á fjallit upp ok sátu þar á tali allt til kvelds. […]. Um morguninn eptir gengu þeir Halli á tal; spyrr Halli Styr, hvern stað eiga skal hans mál. (Ch. 28; also ch. 19)

[Snorri goði and Styr] went to the top of the hill and sat there in conversation till evening [...]. Next morning Styr took Halli aside. Halli asked what he was doing about the proposal.

Um morguninn eptir, þegar er ljóst var, skiptu þeir virkinu með sér til atsóknar. (Ch. 62)

In the morning at daybreak they laid plans for the assault on the stronghold.

Um morguninn eptir reið Vigfúss ofan til Helgafells ok beiddi bóta fyrir vansa þenna. (Ch. 23)

Next morning Vigfus rode down to Helgafell and demanded compensation for the insult.

Evening, night, and morning are also often combined together in association with the deaths of individuals, notably those that will become revenants later on in the story:

> *Þórólfr bægifótr kom heim um kveldit ok mælti við engan mann; hann settisk niðr í ǫndvegi sitt ok mataðisk eigi um kveldit; sat hann þar eptir er menn fóru at sofa. En um morguninn, er menn stóðu upp, sat Þórólfr þar enn ok var dauðr. (Ch. 33; also ch. 53)*

> It was evening when he [Thorolf Twist-Foot] reached home, and he sat down on the high-seat without uttering a word to anybody. He ate nothing all evening and stayed in his seat when the rest of the household went to bed. In the morning, when they got up Thorolf was still sitting there, dead.

> *Þórgunna gekk heim of kveldit ok til rúms síns […]; síðan lagðisk hon niðr í rekkjuna ok andvarpaði mjǫk […]. Þórgunna vildi engum mat bergja um kveldit. En um morguninn kom Þóroddr bóndi til hennar ok spurði at um sótt hennar, hvern enda hon hyggr at eiga myndi. Hon kvazk þat ætla, at hon myndi eigi taka fleiri sóttir. (Ch. 51)*

> Thorgunna went home in the evening straight to bed [... she] lay down on the bed and gave a heavy sigh [...]. She refused food that evening. Next morning Thorodd went to see her about her illness and find out when she thought she might be feeling better. She said she believed this illness would be her last.

There is another singular aspect of *Eyrbyggja saga* that is worth mentioning regarding calendrical time units. After the conversion to Christianity takes place in the story, recurrent Christian feasts are also used as reference points, highlighting the change of custom, although this, like week counting and the centrality of the *Alþingi*, is used less frequently here than in *Laxdæla saga*:

> *Var þá komit at jólafǫstu, en þó var þann tíma eigi fastat á Íslandi. (Ch. 53)*

> This was just about the beginning on Advent, but in those days people in Iceland didn't observe the fast...

> *...ok kómu til Fróðár um kveldit fyrir kyndilmessu í þann tíma, er máleldar váru gǫrvir. (Ch. 55)*

> It was Candlemas Eve when they came to Frodriver, and the fire had just been lit.

Þat var litlu fyrir fǫstu, at Snorri goði sendi út á Nes til Ingjaldshváls... (Ch. 61)

Just before Lent, Snorri the Priest sent a messenger west to Ingjaldshvall in Ness...

Finally, it is worth mentioning the recurrent device of periods of three nights or days, usually necessary for the completion of an action, or for some kind of test, thus for the symbolic maturation of a character:[101]

'Þetta mál skaltu tala við þá men, er þér líkar, innan þriggja nátta...' (Ch. 28; also ch. 53)

"I give you three [nights] to talk it over with anyone you like..."

Bjǫrn var úti þrjú dægr í hellinum, áðr upp létti hríðinni… (Ch. 40, 33)

Bjorn spent three days in the cave before the weather cleared up...

Lesser outlawry should also be considered within this context:

Bjǫrn var sekr gǫrr útan um þrjá vetr... (Ch. 29; also ch. 38)

Bjorn was outlawed and banished from Iceland for three [winters]...

Í þeiri ferð fann Eiríkr rauði Grœnland ok var þar þrjá vetr ok fór síðan til Íslands... (Ch. 24)

It was on this voyage that Eirik the Red discovered Greenland. He stayed there for three [winters,] and then went back to Iceland…

Thus, altogether, the saga presents patterns of story-time that are not only chronological, but also episodic. In other words, the saga often structures time also around the cycles of nature and the Old Icelandic calendar, using the seasons as markers of time, especially by connecting a particular season with specific events or typical activities performed then. Other units of time are also used to set events, such as the alternation of day and night, or periods of days, while the week and the month are employed less for this purpose.

[101] Chiesa Isnardi 2008 [1991], 501.

3.3.2 Narrative Time

In *Eyrbyggja saga,* story-time (chronological and episodic time) interacts in various ways with the narrative time of the story. The order (using Genette's terminology introduced above),[102] is affected by the anticipation created through dialogues, especially in the form of predictions of what is to come:

> *'...ek vil láta færa mik í Skálaholt, ef ek ǫndumk ór þessi sótt, því at mér segir svá hugr um, at sá staðr muni nǫkkura hríð verða mest dýrkaðr á þessu landi.' (Ch. 51)*
>
> Should I die of this illness I want my body taken to Skalholt, because something tells me it will soon be the most venerated place in the land.

> *'...nú skal Glæsir lifa til hausts, en þá skal hann drepa, er hann hefir fengit sumarholdin.' 'Þá mun of seint,' sagði hon. (Ch. 63; also ch. 20)*
>
> 'Glæsir's only to live till autumn. Once he's been fattened over summer we'll kill him.' 'That will be too late,' she said.

At times, anticipation is made more explicit in the narrator's voice, where there are specific references to future parts of the story:

> *...hon var systir Bjarnar Breiðvíkingakappa, er enn kemr síðar við þessa sǫgu... (Ch. 15)*
>
> [...she was the] sister of Bjorn the Breidavik-Champion, who was later to play his part in the story…

Genette's quality of duration is organized and manipulated through many techniques in the saga, including the slowing down and the acceleration of time. The slowing down of time is achieved by detailed descriptions, as in the case of hauntings (chs. 53–55) and battles (e.g., ch. 37). Likewise, there is deceleration of time with direct speech, such as in the notable case of the dialogue between Arngrímr *Víga-Styrr* ("Killer-Styr") Þorgrímsson and the trou-

[102] Genette 1980, 35.

blesome berserkr Halli (ch. 28). Delays slow time down as well, as in the case of delayed vengeance, while also creating suspense for the audience.

The author also creates the effects of simultaneity and suspension of time, which are necessary to develop the various parallel strands that make up the narrative. Simultaneity is usually achieved with the use of the seasons:

Þat sama haust... (Ch. 11)

That same autumn...

...kom heim […] it sama sumar, sem... (Ch. 25; also chs. 18, 42)

He reached home the same summer that...

As to the suspension of time, it is often the case that a central character, or an episode, is suspended for many chapters, to be taken up again only at a later stage:

Nú skal segja frá Snorra goða... (Ch. 22; also ch. 37)

Now we come back to Snorri the Priest...

Þat sumar, áðr bardaginn var í Álptafirði, hafði skip komit í Dǫgurðarnes, sem fyrr var sagt... (Ch. 45; also ch. 23)

As we have said already, the summer before the Battle of Alfta Fjord a ship put in at Dogurdar Ness…

Narrative time is also condensed at points throughout the saga, as evidenced by the genealogical accounts that characterize the beginning and the end, or where there are summaries of specific episodes. Stock phrases achieve this as well, such as:

...þeir váru á Strǫndum um sumarit. (Ch. 59; also chs. 16, 60)

...there they stayed for the rest of the summer.

En er af leið vetrinn... / Líðr nú svo vetrinn... (Chs. 20, 27, 34, 42, 60).

So another winter passed...

These last examples also show that time is sometimes cut out completely, in an ellipsis. This is most noticeable when it is stated that nothing interesting or worth mentioning happened during a specific period:

...ok var atfaralaust með mǫnnum um vetrinn þaðan í frá. (Ch. 46; also chs. 22, 35, 58)

...for the rest of the winter things stayed quiet in the district.

...ok liðu svá þau misseri, at eigi varð til tíðenda. (Ch. 36; also ch. 35)

...the rest of the year passed without further incident.

It is often the case that, when time is cut out, the time-references in question are somewhat vague, or relative:

Nǫkkurum vetrum síðar kom út Auðr djúpauðga... (Ch. 6; also ch. 8)

Some years later Aud the Deep-Minded came to Iceland...

Litlu síðar giptisk Þórdís Berki inum digra... (Ch. 12)

A little later Thordis married her brother-in-law Bork the Stout.

At times, these vague references also indicate periods of time, that is, a particular action may be cut for an indeterminate period:

Snorri vat at heimboðinu nǫkkurar nætr... (Ch. 47)

Snorri was at the feast for several [nights]...

...ok bjó at Fróðá lengi síðan... (Ch. 55; also chs. 47, 62, 63)

[Kjartan] farmed at Frodriver for a long time...

Þótti mǫnnum at vánum, at þeim yrði hjaldrjúgt, svá langt sem í milli funda hafði verit. (Ch. 40)

It seemed only natural that [Bjorn and Thurid] should have plenty to talk about when they had seen nothing of each other for such a long time.

Indeterminate periods of time often concern aging or the age of somebody as well, such as:

...ok var þegar hofgoði, er hann hafði aldr til. (Ch. 12)

As soon as he was old enough, he became a temple priest.

...ok bjó þar til elli. (Ch. 14)

And there [Bork] lived till he was an old man.

ok skilðusk menn sáttir á þinginu, ok helzk sú sætt vel, meðan þeir lifðu báðir, Steinþórr ok Snorri goði. (Ch. 46)

Everyone honoured this settlement as long as Steinthor and Snorri were both alive.

...'en nú er svá komit aldri mínum,' sagði hann, 'at þess er á engri stundu ørvænt, at elli stígi yfir hǫfuð mér.' (Ch. 64)

I lived so many years, I expect old age will get the better of me any moment now.

These various techniques are used by the author to organize and manipulate time for the purposes of storytelling. Anticipation is often achieved through dialogues, notably in the form of prediction, while at times it is made more explicit in the narrator's voice. Narrative speeds are often manipulated to create suspense and heighten the tension for the audience, notably by slowing the narrative down, such as by giving detailed descriptions, by delaying and by using direct speech, the slowest narrative pace, whereby the words of the text and the pace of the events flow equally. Time is also often simultaneous or suspended outright, in order to change the focus of the story, or,

alternatively, is accelerated by the genealogical accounts that are given, especially at the beginning of the saga, or when there are summaries of specific episodes. On other occasions, time is cut out altogether, as when nothing particular has happened or there is nothing relevant to a particular narrative strand, and thus it is necessary to move on with the narration. In these cases, time-references are often vague or relative.

3.4 The Representation of Time in *Laxdæla saga*

Laxdæla saga or "The saga of the Laxdælir," is an *Íslendingasaga* set in the Dalir district of Breiðafjörður (West Iceland) that spans several generations from the period of the settlement of the country, around 870, to the eleventh century. The story centers on the descendants of Ketill *flatnefr* ("Flat-Nose"), a powerful Norwegian landowner who, refusing to submit to the overbearing Norwegian King Haraldr *hárfagri* ("Fairhair"), leaves Norway and emigrates to Scotland. Some of his children emigrate further to Iceland and settle there. Among them are his daughter Unnr and his son Bjǫrn; the saga is about the feuds of their respective descendants. Special attention is dedicated to female characters, some of whom play a primary role in the narrative and its development. Emphasis is placed on these women's qualities of mind, especially on their exceptional intelligence and wisdom. Among them, Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir stands out, almost as a queen, echoing the imperious heroines of Eddic poetry, Brynhildr Buðladóttir and Guðrún Gjúkadóttir.[103] There is a parallel between the triangular love affair of these two Eddic heroines with Sigurðr Sigmundsson, and Guðrún's love triangle in *Laxdæla* with the foster brothers Kjartan Óláfsson and Bolli Þorleiksson. Fundamental themes of love, betrayal, and revenge dominate the narrative. The saga also betrays an influence of courtly literature, especially evident in the detailed descriptions of clothing and weaponry, as well as in the poetic beauty that characterizes the text, and contributes to its "sophisticated understanding of the human psyche."[104]

The saga has enjoyed great popularity since the outset, attested to by the many medieval manuscripts in which it has been preserved, which make it second only to *Brennu-Njáls saga* in terms of known reproductions. It exists in six medieval manuscripts and manuscript fragments. The oldest extant manuscript that preserves it as a fragment is from the last quarter of the thirteenth century (AM 162 d II fol.), while the oldest manuscript that preserves it in full appears in the mid-fourteenth-century codex *Möðruvallabók* (AM 132 fol.), which contains a collection of *Íslendingasögur* and was likely produced at

[103] Bergljót S. Kristjánsdóttir 2008, xxxiii.
[104] Ármann Jakobsson 2008, 37.

Möðruvellir in Eyjafjörður (North Iceland). The saga also exists in a couple of paper manuscripts, which are thought to be copies of now-lost vellum manuscripts. The extant manuscripts are usually divided into two groups, *y* and *z*, the principal difference being that the former group includes *Bolla þáttr*, an additional section of ten chapters, while the latter group does not. The principal representative of the *y*-group is *Möðruvallabók*, while the oldest fragment is the main representative of the *z*-group. The editions of the saga are based on the *y*-group, thus they usually include *Bolla þáttr*.

According to Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, internal evidence shows that the saga was composed sometime during the period 1230–60.[105] Gunnar Karlsson agrees on the *terminus post quem* of 1230, as the last people mentioned in the saga, in long genealogies appearing at the end, are the chieftain Þorvaldr Snorrason (d. 1228) and Abbot Ketill Hermundarson from Helgafell (d. 1220).[106] However, Gunnar Karlsson resets the *terminus ante quem* to 1250, because of customs and legal terms present in the saga. For example, it mentions trials by ordeals (*skírslur*), pointing out that they were still commonly carried out by Christians when the saga was written:

> *Ekki þóttusk heiðnir menn minna eiga í ábyrgð, þá er slíka hluti skyldi fremja, en nú þykkjask eiga kristnir menn, þá er skírslur eru gǫrvar. (Ch. 18)*
>
> Heathen men were no less conscious of their responsibility when they underwent ordeals than are Christian men who perform them nowadays.

As this practice was abolished in 1247–48, Gunnar Karlsson concludes that the saga was composed sometime before then.[107] Bjarni Guðnason also believes that the saga was composed in the middle of the thirteenth century, around 1255 or earlier, as he believes the author of *Heiðarvíga saga* used it when he wrote his saga around 1260.[108]

[105] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, xxv.
[106] Gunnar Karlsson 2010 [1996], 5; Callow 2006, 309.
[107] Gunnar Karlsson 2010 [1996], 5; Torfi Tulinius 2013, 119, 124.
[108] Bjarni Guðnason 1993, 252–3.

As for the author of the saga, it has been supposed that he was from West Iceland, probably from the Dalir area in Breiðafjörður itself, where most of the action of the saga takes place.[109] This assumption is based on the very specific details of that area in the text, both geographical and topographical, as in chapter 62:

> *Þeir ríða leið sína upp til Sópandaskarðs ok yfir Langavatnsdal, ok svá yfir Borgarfjörð þveran. Þeir riðu að Eyjarvaði yfir Norðrá, en at Bakkavaði yfir Hvítá, skammt frá Bæ ofan; riðu þeir Reykjardal ok svá yfir hálsinn til Skorradals ok svá upp eptir skóginum í nánd bænum at Vatnshorni.*
>
> They set out on their way, up the Sopandaskard pass and over Langavatnsdal, then cut straight across the Borgarfjord district. They crossed the river Nordura at Eyjarvad fjord, and the Hvita river at the Bakkavad fjord, just above Baer. They rode through Reykjadal and over the ridge to Skorradal where they followed the woods to the vicinity of the farm at Vatnshorn.

At the time when the saga was composed, this area was controlled by the Sturlungar, and because of the prominence this family has in the saga, it has been proposed that it was written by one of its members, possibly Sturla Þórðarson the writer (d. 1284) or his brother Óláfr Þórðarson *hvítaskáld* ("White-skald," d. 1259), or by someone in the milieu of this family.[110] These are only speculations, however, and other scholars have hypothesized that the author was a descendant of Abbot Ketill Hermundarson from Helgafell (d. 1220), who is also directly mentioned at the end of the saga, although this is no more certain.[111] Others have supposed that the saga was written by a woman, because of the prominence of women in the saga, its empathy with their point of view, and the general emphasis on feminine wisdom and sensibility.[112]

The saga author likely drew from written sources about the Settlement. These include *Landnámabók*, which contains information on Guðrún Ósvífrs-

[109] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, xxiii.
[110] Vésteinn Ólason 1993a, 134.
[111] See Callow 2006, 309–11.
[112] Kress 1980; Vésteinn Ólason 1993a, 134.

dóttir and Kjartan Óláfsson's generation,[113] as well as Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók*, which gives a description of the *sumarauki*, mentioned in chapter 6 of the saga. Ari himself is referred to directly on a couple of occasions (chs. 4 and 78).[114] It is possible that the author also consulted a manuscript of *Grágás*, judging from descriptions of inheritance rules, which are the same in both texts.[115] The author also relied on either one or both of the sagas about Óláfr Tryggvason by the two Þingeyrar monks, Oddr Snorrason, who lived in the second half of the twelfth century, and Gunnlaugr Leifsson (d. 1218/9).[116] *Laxdæla* also contains direct references to other Old Icelandic sagas, notably to *Eyrbyggja saga* itself (ch. 56 of *Laxdæla*), which overlaps both in geography and in characters, notably Snorri *goði*, Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir, and the Sturlungar family. *Laxdæla* also refers directly to two unknown sagas, *Þorgils saga Höllusonar* (ch. 67) and *Njarðvíkinga saga* (ch. 69; perhaps an alternative name for *Gunnars þáttr Þiðrandabana*), as well as to skaldic poetry (*Húsdrápa* by Úlfar Uggason, ch. 29; *Erfidrápa*, ch. 78). It has also been hypothesized that the author knew *Egils saga* intimately, as well as *Færeyinga saga,* and Snorri Sturluson's *Óláfs saga helga*, due to occasional similarities of content and style between *Laxdæla* and these texts.[117] Additional sources have been speculated upon, such as annals and romance literature, especially due to the descriptions of courtly customs and costumes, and the relevant terminology (e.g., *pellsklæði*, ch. 77; *skarlat*, chs. 22, 40), of weapons (*glaðel*, ch. 77), and for its moral undertones and tragic sensibility reminiscent of the story of Tristan and Isolde, although one need look no further than Eddic poetry to find the same.[118] This abundance of influences suggests that the author ascribed to, or took inspiration from, a very long

[113] For example, it indicates that Kjartan married Hrefna Ásgeirsdóttir and Bolli Þorleiksson married Guðrún, and that Guðrún's brothers killed Kjartan. However, it does not mention the love triangle between Guðrún, Kjartan, and Bolli conveyed in the saga (*Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson 1986 [1968], 123, 142–3).
[114] See Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, xxxvi–xl.
[115] Gunnar Karlsson 2010 [1996], 13.
[116] Oddr's work is usually dated ca. 1190, and Gunnlaugr's to just before 1200. Jónas Krjstjánsson 2007, 157–8. For the connections between *Laxdæla saga* and these two works see Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, xxvii, xlii–xliv.
[117] Callow 2006, 308; Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, xxxvi–lx.
[118] Würth 2001, 296. Cf. Bergljót S. Kristjánsdóttir 2008, xxii.

literary tradition, from Eddic and skaldic poetry, well into early Icelandic historical writings and the sagas more broadly.[119]

The action of the story takes place in the Dalir district of Breiðafjörður over a period of about 200 years. At the beginning, under the leadership of the settler Unnr Ketilsdóttir, peace prevails. By the fourth generation, however, disagreements intensify and develop into a feuding war that culminates in the slaying of the beloved Kjartan Óláfsson. The saga critiques the decadence of these later times, comparing it to the models, ideals, and behavior of the first generations.[120] For instance, Unnr the settler is depicted like a dignified queen in all respects, while her descendant Óláfr *pái* ("Peacock") is an ambivalent man, his behaviour not matching his status.[121] He is depicted as a sturdy manager and as courtly and proud in his bearing (hence the nickname *pái*, "Peacock," connoting pride, but also vanity and arrogance).[122] However, he does not behave in that same distinguished manner, as he is often careless, undecided, or confused, now taking a strong line, now a weak one. For instance, when his wife Þorgerðr and his daughter Þúríðr insist that he extort some compensation from Geirmundr, Þúríðr's husband, who abandoned her and their baby daughter, Óláfr is obdurate, as we are told that the two women "got nowhere with him" (*komu þær engu á leið við Óláf*). Here Óláfr acts out of pride, showing his wife Þorgerðr that he was right to have not wanted to consent to the marriage in the first place.[123] On the contrary, Óláfr takes a weak line when he refuses to prevent Bolli's marriage to Guðrún. When Bolli consults him about the matter, he first says that he wants to have no part in it, given the affection he knows to exist between his son Kjartan and Guðrún; however, he immediately promises not to get in Bolli's way, adding that he may do as he likes. Here Óláfr acts out of fear, the fear of losing Kjartan because of his friendship with Guðrún, as he has always had the premonition

[119] Würth 2001, 301.
[120] Conroy/Langen 1988, 119–22, 127, 139; Würth 2001, 297.
[121] Würth 2001, 303.
[122] Würth 2001, 303.
[123] Dronke 1979, 125–7; Cook 1992, 51–2.

that harm will come from that friendship.[124] However, by acting as he does, he ends up triggering exactly the process that will result in Kjartan's death.

The text establishes other juxtapositions, namely between the attitudes and the perceived practices of the people of the saga and those of the thirteenth-century authorial present. This is especially prevalent in the first part of the saga, with the comparisons at times marked, as in *Eyrbyggja saga*, through the use of the adverbs *þá* and *nú* ("then" and "now"), with the difference that they stress continuity here, rather than change:

> *Ekki þóttusk heiðnir menn minna eiga í ábyrgð, þá er slíka hluti skyldi fremja, en nú þykkjask eiga kristnir menn, þá er skírslur eru gorvar. (Ch. 18)*
>
> Heathen men were no less conscious of their responsibility when they underwent ordeals than are Christian men who perform them nowadays.

This sort of continuity is also marked by situating places and placenames both "then and now":

> *...sá bær hét síðan á Hrappsstǫðum; þar er nú auðn. (Ch. 10; also chs. 13, 49)*
>
> His farm, later called Hrappsstadir, is now deserted.
>
> *...þat er nú kallat Trollaskeið; þar er nú þjóðgata. (Ch. 19)*
>
> The site is called Trollaskeid (Troll's path), and is now on the public road.
>
> *Er þat kallaðr Orrostudalr, síðan þeir bǫrðusk þar. (Ch. 19)*
>
> The site has been called Orrustudal (Battle valley) ever since.

[124] Dronke 1979, 127.

At the same time, these juxtapositions emphasize a perceived continuity with that past, evident in other ways throughout the text, such as:

> *...ok gerir þar hróf at, ok sér þar tóptina, sem hann lét gera hrófit. (Ch. 13; also chs. 19, 37, 38)*
>
> There they constructed a boat shed for the ship, the remains of which are still visible.

The emphasis on continuity, or the illusion of unbroken linearity, is strengthened by the articulation of genealogies down to the twelfth or thirteenth century.[125] The Sturlungar, who may have been material in the creation of the saga, are strongly represented in this way, but also by the centrality of Hvammr in the saga. This is the place where Sturla Þórðarson, the patriarch, lived during the twelfth century (d. 1183), and it is associated with the saga's matriarch Unnr the settler, underscoring the prestige of the Sturlungar lineage. The line of Ari Þorgilsson's family and his descendants is also depicted at the end of the saga (ch. 78), highlighting its prestige, and enlisting Ari's reputation as an historical authority. Thus, the past is remote, but it is perceived as close as well, as in the case of *Eyrbyggja saga*. Moreover, ostensibly verifiable genealogies also help the author confer upon the story a sense of veracity, all the more by using the genealogy of Ari himself.

The abundance of temporal information in the saga, in genealogies and otherwise, which will be described shortly, has been interpreted as being genuinely factual, as with *Eyrbyggja saga*. Here too, Einar Ólafur Sveinsson attempted to construct a chronology, maintaining that there are parts in the saga where events can be traced year by year, despite acknowledging many uncertainties, including scattered chronological information at the beginning of the text.[126] In any case, he asserts that time in the saga is structured mainly around two central historical events: Icelanders' conversion to Christianity and the fall of King Óláfr *helgi* ("the Saint") during the battle of Stiklastaðr in 1030, which is clearly reminiscent of Ari Þorgilsson's work. Einar Ólafur constructs two additional chronologies with these data, providing a chronological

[125] Würth 2001, 297–8.
[126] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, lix–lx.

list of events that are tied to the same two central historical events, despite noting that the chronologies clash in regard to certain other events.[127] Still, his conclusion is that it is the saga that must be incorrect:

> *Tímatal sögunnar er þannig sjálfu sér sundurþykkt og hlýtur að vera rangt í fjölmörgum greinum. Til þess að komast nær hinu sanna er nauðsynlegt að leita hjálpar annara heimilda.*[128]
>
> The chronology of the saga, therefore, is not consistent and must be wrong in many ways. In order to get closer to the truth it is necessary to seek help from other sources.[129]

As with *Eyrbyggja saga*, Einar Ólafur attributes the supposed "mistakes" of the saga to the fact that, in some cases, it is the author's alleged sources that disagree on certain information, such as reigns of Norwegian kings, rather than any fault of the author himself. In any case, Einar Ólafur concludes his analysis by proposing a more reliable chronology, which contains the dates he believes to be less dubious.[130]

Einar Ólafur's inquiry may be useful, but he forces the text too much into the grid of historical significance. As in the case of *Eyrbyggja saga*, his efforts should be understood within Icelanders' struggle for independence. As we have seen previously, the authors of these sagas were actually not much interested in the factuality and accuracy of the chronologies themselves, instead using chronological information more to grant the texts an overall sense of veracity. From an historical point of view, *Laxdæla* can be confusing, as in the beginning, where chronological information is scattered and a continuous and accurate chronology cannot be constructed from it, other than by conjecture, as Einar Ólafur Sveinsson himself notes. Moreover, the saga displays several anachronisms.[131] For instance, there is confusion over when some people were born or their ages, so that while ages may be specified in the text, they cannot be trusted for dating. This is the case for Guðrún's brothers when Kjartan

[127] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, xlix.
[128] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, l–li.
[129] My translation.
[130] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, lix.
[131] Würth 2001, 295.

decides to leave for Norway. At that precise time, the historical Ósvífrssynir, Guðrún's brothers, were actually older than the author asserts.[132] The author consciously manipulated their age, making them young enough for Kjartan to tell Guðrún that she could not leave for Norway with him, because she had to take care of her younger brothers.[133] This means that the plot sometimes takes precedence over the plausibility of the chronological structure.

Thus, the author makes an effort to provide the saga with a backdrop of veracity, by mentioning customs and practices that were carried out by the settlers and their descendants, and sometimes up through the author's time. In this way, he also ties the past to the present, which he further connects by mentioning material evidence still visible in his time, by mentioning how places had transformed since the time of the saga, and by the use of genealogical information. Veracity is also granted by the chronological information provided, although this sense of truth does not always reflect fact; at times, there is confusion or conscious manipulation of historical information. The chronological and episodic aspects of story-time in the saga will now be explored in turn.

3.4.1 Story-time

3.4.1.1 Chronological Time

Laxdæla saga is narrated chronologically, using genealogies and relative dating techniques, many of which use the reign of a certain Norwegian king as a reference point:

> *Í þenna tíma réð Nóregi Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri. (Ch. 9; also chs. 2, 11, 40)*
>
> At this time Norway was ruled by King Hakon, foster-son of King Athelstan of England.

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[132] *Laxdæla saga*, ch. 40, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, 115: n. 1; Finlay 1997, 124.
[133] See Conroy/Langen 1988, 133–4. A similar instance of the manipulation of somebody's age appears in *Njáls saga*, where Hǫskuldr Þráinsson's birth, rise to prominence, and coming of age seem to take less time than one would expect, given the passage of time for the other protagonists. The author speeds his growing up so that the feud between the sons of Njáll and those of Sigfúss can continue.

Hrútr er hirðmaðr Haralds konungs Gunnhildarsonar... (Ch. 19; also ch. 29)

Hrut had become one of the followers of King Harald Gunnhildarson.

As in *Eyrbyggja saga*, King Óláfr *helgi* ("the Saint") is given special consideration among Norwegian kings in this saga:[134]

Skip þat kemr til Nóregs; var þá lands hǫfðingi Óláfr konungr inn helgi. (Ch. 70; also chs. 73, 74)

Thorleik sailed abroad that summer and his ship made land in Norway. At that time King Olaf the Saint ruled in Norway...

Þorkell hafði átta vetr ins fimmta tigar, þá er hann drukknaði, en þat var fjórum vetrum fyrr en inn heilagi Óláfr konungr fell. (Ch. 76)

Thorkel had completed the eighth year of his fifth decade when he died, and it was four years before the fall of King Olaf the Saint.

This follows Ari Þorgilsson's practice of timing events according to the offices of kings. Ari Þorgilsson is even mentioned directly in the text:

Svá segir Ari Þorgilsson inn fróði um líflát Þorsteins, at hann felli á Katanesi. (Ch. 4)

He was killed at Caithness, according to Ari Thorgilsson the Learned.

Síðan andaðisk Snorri. Hann hafði þá sjau vetr ins sjaunda tigar. Þat var einum vetri eptir fall Óláfs konungs ins helga; svá sagði Ari prestr inn fróði. (Ch. 78)

Snorri then died, aged threescore years and seven, one year after the fall of King Olaf the Saint, according to the priest Ari the Learned.

Further evidence points to the hypothesis that the author relied on Ari's work, such as a direct mention of the *sumarauki* (itself appearing in ch. 4 of *Íslendingabók*):

[134] See the table constructed by Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, xlix.

Ósk hét in fjórða dóttir Þorsteins rauðs; hon var móðir Þorsteins surts ins spaka, er fann sumarauka. (Ch. 6)

Thorstein the Red had a fourth daughter, Osk, the mother of the wise Thorstein Surt (Black), who devised the 'leap week' in summer.

It has also been supposed that the author of the saga followed Ari Þorgilsson in dating the Conversion to 999, an event that is central to the structure of the text.[135] It is crucial to the development of other events, and the comparisons made before and after it, such as modes of behaviour, suggest a social critique. However, just as Ari and the author of *Eyrbyggja* did, the author of *Laxdæla* does not depict the Conversion as a rupture, but rather as a gradual process of change.[136]

Aside from telling time relative to kings' offices, dating patterns are also constructed in relation to prominent Icelanders or the biographies of people that are otherwise important in the story:

Þat sama vár, er Unnr setti bú saman í Hvammi, fekk Kollr Þorgerðar, dóttur Þorsteins rauðs... (Ch. 5)

The same spring that Unn was building her farm in Hvamm, Dala-Koll married Torgerd, the daughter of Thorstein the Red.

En er Bolli hafði verit einn vetr á Íslandi, þá tók Snorri goði sótt. (Ch. 78; also chs. 7, 22, 36, 72)

After Bolli had been a year in Iceland, Snorri the Godi was taken ill.

Of the meaningful points in a biography, death is often used as a point of reference for other events:

En þat sama kveld, er þeir Þorkell hgfðu drukknat um daginn, varð sá atburðr at Helgafelli, at Guðrún... (Ch. 76)

In the evening of the same day that Thorkel and his men were drowned, Gudrun...

[135] Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1855, 433. Cf. Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, xlix.
[136] Würth 2001, 299–300.

Þat sama sumar, er Þorgils Hǫlluson var veginn, kom skip í Bjarnarhǫfn... (Ch. 68; also chs. 52, 53, 77)

The same summer that Thorgils Holluson was slain, a ship owned by Thorkel Eyjolfsson arrived in Bjarnarhofn...

In some cases, a death is associated with the birth of a child, or the age of a young child is given in connection with somebody's death:

Inn næsta vetr eptir víg Bolla fæddi Guðrún barn; þat var sveinn; sá var Bolli nefndr. (Ch. 56; also ch. 13)

Gudrun gave birth to a child the winter after Bolli's death, a boy, who was named Bolli.

Þorleikr var þá fjǫgurra vetra gamall, er Bolli var veginn, faðir hans. (Ch. 56; also ch. 7)

Thorleik was four years of age when his father Bolli was slain.

The effect of these associations is to fix memorable moments both within the story and in the audience's memory. Tying such significant events together would have probably helped remember them better individually, but also to better remember the thread of the story.

3.4.1.2 Episodic Time

As in *Eyrbyggja saga*, and the *Íslendingasögur* generally, time in *Laxdæla saga* is also often discontinuous and structured around the Old Icelandic calendar and the cycles of nature, notably the seasons. In particular, *Laxdæla* also presents autumn and winter as times for various types of feasting. Summer in this saga is often understood in the wider sense of *misseri*, thus its end coincides with the peak of autumn, with feasts and weddings often described as being toward the end of summer. The main invocations of summer, though, are as a season for action, notably political. Spring is associated mainly with travel, but on the whole, it is not much used as a time reference when compared to its use in *Eyrbyggja saga*, for example:

Snimma um várit bjuggu þeir bræðr skip sitt ok fóru austr með landi. […]. Ok er á leið várit, þá ræða þeir bræðr um ferðir sínar. (Ch. 73)

Early in the spring the brothers made ready their ship and sailed eastward following the coast. […] As the spring advanced the brothers discussed their travelling plans...

The bulk of travel, as in *Eyrbyggja*, is associated with the summer, when it was more safely possible to traverse the ocean:

Þetta sumar eptir tekr Ásgautr sér fari í Dǫgurðarnesi ok lætr skip þat í haf. (Ch. 16; also chs. 12, 29, 40, 51, 70)

The following summer Asgaut took passage on a ship which put out to sea from Dagverdarnes.

Óláfi byrjaði vel um sumarit... (Ch. 22; also ch. 58)

Olaf was favoured by good winds that summer.

Also similar to *Eyrbyggja*, is the depiction of summer as the main season for taking action, or for undertaking specific activities, which often concern farming:

Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir fór heiman þat sumar at tvímánuði ok inn í Dali; […]. Sǫmu nótt sendi [hon] mann Snorra goða, at hon vill finna hann þegar um daginn eptir. […], þá frétti Snorri at ørendum […]. Guðrún mælti: […] "um hefndina Bolla mun ek nǫkkut ræða." (Ch. 59)

At hay-time Gudrun Osvifsdottir left home and rode to the Dalir district. […]. That same night [she] sent word to Snorri the Godi that she wished to meet him straight away the following day. […]. Snorri asked what Gudrun's purpose was […]. Gudrun replied […] "It is Bolli's revenge I intend to discuss."

Þat varð til nýlundu um sumarit í Hundadal, at fé nytjaðisk illa... (Ch. 38)

One summer the number of sheep rounded up in Hundadal was lower than normal.

Overall, the primary identification with summer, and more so than in *Eyrbyggja*, is the yearly *Alþingi* meetings, which is given as a stock phrase at times:

> *Svá segja menn, at Hrútr væri svá á þingi eitt sumar, at fjórtán synir hans væri með honum... (Ch. 19)*
>
> It is said that one summer Hrut attended the Althing accompanied by fourteen of his sons.

> *Nú líðr sjá inn næsti vetr, ok kemr sumar, ok líðr at þingi. (Ch. 26; also chs. 22, 33, 35, 37, 67)*
>
> The winter passed, and summer came and soon it was the time for the Althing.

Weddings are also celebrated in the summer, keeping in mind that summer in the saga is often understood as a half-year *misseri*, thus encompassing autumn:

> *Brúðkaup var í Garpsdal at tvímánuði. (Ch. 34; also ch. 70)*
>
> The wedding was to be held at Garpsdal at hay-time.

> *Var ákveðin brullaupsstefna á Hǫskuldsstǫðum at sjau vikum sumars. (Ch. 23; also ch. 27)*
>
> It was agreed the wedding should be at Hoskuldsstadir when seven weeks of summer were remaining.

> *Unnr mælti: 'Svá hefi ek helzt ætlat, at boð þitt muni vera at áliðnu sumri þessu, því at þá er auðveldast at afla allra tilfanga...' (Ch. 7)*
>
> Unn said, 'It would be best, I think, to hold your wedding feast at the end of this summer, when it is easiest to provide everything we need.'

This last example reveals clearly the understanding of summer as one of two *misseri*. The text points to the abundance of food from harvesting and slaughtering, but associates it not with a harvest season or *haust* (autumn), which existed as a term and concept, but rather simply with the end of summer. This is confirmed on other occasions:

Þat sumar hafði Óláfr heimboð hálfum mánaði fyrir vetr. Ósvífr hafði ok boð stofnat at vetrnóttum... (Ch. 46)

Olaf held a feast [that summer,] two weeks before the beginning of winter, and Osvif had organized a similar feast for the Winter Nights.

Even with the prevailing use of the summer as *misseri* in *Laxdæla,* autumn is not absent as a season and is still mentioned directly at times:

Þeir Óláfr ok Ósvífr héldu inum sama hætti um heimboð; skyldu sitt haust hvárir aðra heim sækja. Þetta haust skyldi vera boð at Laugum, en Óláfr til sækja ok þeir Hjarðhyltingar. (Ch. 44)

Olaf and Osvif continued their usual custom of taking turns inviting each other to feasts in the autumn. This autumn Olaf and his family were to visit Laugar.

This last example emphasizes how this period of the year was typically festive, as *Eyrbyggja saga* also showed. The feasts in question were of various kinds, including the Winter Nights and weddings, which were combined together at times:

...þá rézk þat af, at þar fóru festar fram, ok kveðit á brullaupsstefnu um vetrnátta skeið. (Ch. 43)

...they were betrothed and the date of the wedding set for the Winter Nights.

There are instances of weddings being celebrated during the winter as well, which was also a festive season, especially because of Christmas:

...eptir þat fastnar Geirmundr sér Þuríði, ok skal boð vera at áliðnum vetri í Hjarðarholti. (Ch. 29)

Geirmund was then engaged to Thurid, and their wedding was held later that winter.

Síðan bauð konungr Kjartani í jólaboð sitt ok svá Bolla, frænda hans. (Ch. 40)

Afterwards the king invited Kjartan, along with his kinsman Bolli, to his Christmas feast.

[Þorkell] hafði jóladrykkju at Helgafelli, ok var þar fjǫlmenni mikit. (Ch. 74)

[Thorkel] held a Christmas feast at Helgafell attended by a great number of people.

As in *Eyrbyggja*, winter is used in *Laxdæla* in the Germanic sense of year, most often to point out the age of a person or animal:

> *'Ek var þaðan hertekin fimmtán vetra gomul.' (Ch. 13; also chs. 16, 21, 27, 28, 37, 53)*
>
> I was taken captive there [when I was fifteen winters old]...

> *Síðan tók Þórðr við Óláfi sjau vetra gomlum... (Ch. 16; also ch. 72)*
>
> After this Thord took over the raising of Olaf, who was then seven [winters] old.

> *Þá er Harri var átján vetra gamall, þá fell brunnvaka hans af hǫfði honum... (Ch. 31)*
>
> When [the ox Harri] had reached the age of eighteen [winters] the icebreaker fell from his forehead…

This Germanic sense of winter is used to indicate other time spans as well:

> *Hrútr bjó þrjá vetr á Kambsnesi... (Ch. 19)*
>
> Hrut lived at Kambsnes for three [winters]...

> *Tvá vetr hǫfðu þau ásamt verit. (Ch. 34)*
>
> She had been married to Thorvald for two [winters].

These examples demonstrate the primacy of summer and winter in the narrative, with spring and autumn underrepresented. This seems to indicate that, at the time in which the saga was written, the seasons were mainly understood in the sense of the half-year *misseri*, suggesting that the old unit of the *misseri* was still prevalent at that time. This hypothesis seems to be confirmed by the fact that the *misseri* itself is often used as a term:

> *Líða nú þau missari. (Ch. 39; also chs. 2, 14, 37, 56, 58, 70)*
>
> The year passed.

Supporting the hypothesis that the author was acquainted with and employed older time-reckoning methods, is the fact that week counting appears quite often in the saga, when compared to *Eyrbyggja saga*. In *Laxdæla*, it is used mostly in connection with feasting (chs. 27, 46), notably with weddings or banquets, but also with other meetings of significance:

> *…var ákveðin brullaupsstefna á Hǫskuldsstǫðum at sjau vikum sumars. (Ch. 23; also chs. 35, 45, 68)*
>
> It was agreed the wedding should be at Hoskuldsstadir when seven weeks of summer were remaining.

> *'Þar með vilju vér bjóða bændum ok hverjum, er þiggja vill, […]; skal sækja hálfsmánaðar veizlu á Hǫskuldsstaði, þá er tíu vikur eru til vetrar.' (Ch. 27)*
>
> 'In addition, we invite farmers and any others who care to come, […] to attend this fortnight's feast at Hoskuldsstadir when ten weeks of summer remain.'

> *Sættarfundr skyldi vera at Drǫngum á Skógarstrǫnd, þá er fjórar vikur eru af sumri. (Ch. 71; also ch. 40)*
>
> The settlement was to be decided at Drangar on the Skogarstrond shore when four weeks of the summer had passed.

The week also appears as a unit of time on its own, independent of week counting, and indicating the seven-day time span, even though this is not frequent:

> *Var sú veizla ágæt, því at viku var at boðinu setit. (Ch. 45)*
>
> The feast was a grand one and lasted a week.

Other calendrical units are used in the text: months are mentioned on some occasions, although infrequently, and when they do appear, it is as *tvímánuðr* and *hálfmánuðr*:

> *Brúðkaup var í Garpsdal at tvímánuði. (Ch. 34; also ch. 59)*
>
> The wedding was to be held at Garpsdal at hay-time.

'Þar með vilju vér bjóða bændum ok hverjum, er þiggja vill, […]; skal sækja hálfsmánaðar veizlu á Hǫskuldsstaði, þá er tíu vikur eru til vetrar.' (Ch. 27; also ch. 46)

'In addition, we invite farmers and any others who care to come, […] to attend this fortnight's feast at Hoskuldsstadir when ten weeks of summer remain.'

The day appears in *Laxdæla* as *dagr*, and not as *dægr*, as in *Eyrbyggja*. But when expressing duration, days are nonetheless counted in nights, similarly to *Eyrbyggja*, and following the old Germanic custom:

Um daginn ferr hon at fé sínu... (Ch. 38)

That day she watched over her sheep as usual...

...verðr hvárr þeira bræðra ǫðrum feginn; er Bolli þar svá at nóttum skiptir... (Ch. 70)

The brothers were very glad to see each other, and Bolli spent several nights there.

Also similar to *Eyrbyggja* is the fact that the nights and evenings themselves are often associated with paranormal events. For example, magic rites or spells are cast in the night:

En litlu síðar gera þau heimanferð sína, Kotkell og Gríma ok synir þeira; þat var um nótt. Þau fóru á bæ Hrúts ok gerðu þar seið mikinn. (Ch. 37)

...shortly afterwards Kotkel, Grima and her sons set out at night for Hrut's farm, where they began to practice strong magic rites...

Similarly, revenants do their haunting mostly in the evening:

Eitt kveld kom sá maðr at Óláfi er geldneyta gætti, ok bað hann fá til annan mann at gæta nautanna […]. Spyrr Óláfr, hví hann fœri svá fæltiliga. Hann svarar: "Hrappr stendr í fjósdurunum ok vildi fálma til mín... (Ch. 24; also ch. 38)

One evening the farmhand in charge of the non-milking cattle came to Olaf and asked him to assign the task to someone else […]. When Olaf asked what had frightened him so, the servant answered, [the ghost of] 'Hrapp is standing there in the doorway, reaching out for me...'

En þat sama kveld, er þeir Þorkell høfðu drukknat um daginn, varð sá atburðr at Helgafelli, at Guðrún gekk til kirkju, þá er menn váru farnir í rekkjur, ok er hon gekk í kirkjugarðshliðit, þá sá hon draug standa fyrir sér... (Ch. 76; also ch. 49)

In the evening of the same day that Thorkel and his men were drowned Gudrun went to the church at Helgafell after the household had gone to bed. As she passed through the gate of the churchyard, she saw a ghost standing before her...

Likewise, the evening is also the usual time to perform secret deeds, such as secret attacks:

Þetta sama kveld sendir konungr menn til herbergis Íslendinga ok bað þá verða visa, hvat þeir talaði. (Ch. 40)

That same evening the king sent men to the quarters of the Icelanders to listen in on their conversations.

...ok nøkkuru fyrir sólarfall sté Auðr á bak... […]. Hon reið suðr yfir Sælingsdalsheiði ok nam eigi staðar fyrr en undir túngarði at Laugum. […]. Hon gekk í lokrekkjuna, en Þórðr svaf […]. Hon brá þá saxi ok lagði at Þórði ok veitti honum áverka mikla, ok kom á høndina hægri; varð hann sárr á báðum geirvørtum. (Ch. 35)

...and shortly before sundown Aud mounted her horse, […] rode southward over the Saelingsdal heath, not stopping until she reached the wall of the hayfield at Laugar […]. She entered the bed closet where Thord slept […] drew her short-sword and struck him a great wound on his right arm which cut across both breasts.

On the contrary, and again similar to *Eyrbyggja saga*, the morning is the preferred time of day for discussing business, and for making plans and decisions:

En er Kjartan Óláfsson spyrr þessi tíðendi, ríðr hann þegar við tólfta mann ok kom í Tungu snimma dags. […]. Þórarinn frétti at um ørendi. Kjartan svarar: "Þat er ørendi mitt hingat, at ræða um landkaup þat nøkkut, er þér Bolli hafit stofnat, […] ek mun kaupa þvílíku verði... (Ch. 47; also ch. 45)

When Kjartan Olafsson learned of this he rode off immediately with a party of eleven others and reached Tunga early in the morning. […] Thorarin asked what his business was and Kjartan answered, 'I came here to discuss with you the agreement you made with Bolli […]. I'll buy [the land] for the same price.'

Guðrún var snimma á fótum, þegar er sólu var ofrat. Hon gekk þangat til, er bræðr hennar sváfu. […]. Guðrún kvazk vildu vita, hvat þeir vildu at hafask um daginn. (Ch. 48)

Gudrun had risen early before the sun had come up and went to where her brothers slept. […]. Gudrun said she wanted to know what their plans for the day were...

Um morgininn eptir vill konungr þing hafa; er nú til stefnt ǫllum íslenzkum mǫnnum. […]. Konungr spyrr, ef þeir vildi skírn taka. (Ch. 40)

The next morning the king called a meeting and summoned all the Icelanders. […] he ordered the Icelanders to come before him and asked whether they wished to be baptized.

The morning is also the preferred time of day to attack someone:

Þau ríða inn eptir fjǫrum ok svá til Ljárskóga; þat var ǫndverða nótt; létta eigi, fyrr en þau koma í Sælingsdal, þá er nǫkkut var mornat. (*Ch. 55*, regarding the killing of Bolli Þorleiksson)

They reached Ljarskogar early in the night, but did not slow their pace until they arrived in Saelingsdal shortly after dawn.

'...munu vér hér dveljask náttlangt ok venda ekki fyrr til selsins en á morgin.' (*Ch. 62*, regarding the attack on Helgi Harðbeinsson)

'We'll stay here overnight and wait until morning to make a way to the shieling.'

At times, the parts of the day are defined with more precision, by using the natural play of light and darkness, the moon phase, or the position of the sun in the sky:

Þeir sváfu til þess, er á leið nóttina, ok var stund til dags. (Ch. 14)

They went to sleep until the night was almost at an end and daybreak only a short while off.

Þetta var snimma um morgin, svá at lítt var lýst af degi. (Ch. 15)

It was still early in the morning and not yet fully light.

Þat var eptir dagsetr, en tunglskin var á. (Ch. 38)

It was after nightfall and there was a moon[light] in the sky...

Þat var til tíðenda einn morgun, er Hǫskuldr var genginn út at sjá um bæ sinn; veðr var gott; skein sól ok var lítt á lopt komin. (Ch. 13)

One morning Hoskuld had gone out on some farm business. The weather was good, the sun [shone and was] still low in the sky.

These descriptions suggest more than a simple awareness of natural indicators of time on the part of the author. They allow him to pinpoint the given moments in time with more precision than a general calendrical time unit would concede. Thus, they allow for speculation that the old method of reckoning time through the direct observation of natural and astronomical phenomena—the alternation of night and day, the moon phase, and the position of the sun in the sky—was still practiced when the text was composed, or was at least considered significant by the author of the text.

The saga author was also attentive to the changing conventions of time-reckoning and to their arrangement in the text. Almost exclusively after the conversion to Christianity takes place in the saga, more precise calendrical information is given which testifies to the changes introduced by Bishop Jón Qgmundarson regarding weekday names (see section 1.2.6):

Kjartan svarar: 'Þat er líkast, at ek ríða vestan fimmtadaginn.' (Ch. 47)

Kjartan answered, 'I expect to return on Thursday.'

Inn næsta dróttinsdag var leið... (Ch. 61)

The next Lord's Day the local Autumn Meeting was held...

Other specific calendrical information also appears almost exclusively after the conversion to Christianity has taken place, namely several remarkable

instances of Christian feasts within the liturgical year. This particularly highlights the change of custom:

> *Kjartan fastaði þurrt langaföstu ok gerði þat at engis manns dæmum hér á landi, því at þat er sǫgn manna, at hann hafi fyrstr manna fastat þurrt hér innanlands. […]. Síðan gengu af páskarnir. (Ch. 45; also ch. 47)*
>
> Kjartan fasted on dry foods alone during Lent, the first man known to have done so in Iceland. […]. When Easter had passed...
>
> *Skírdag snimmendis um morgininn býsk Þorkell til ferðar. (Ch. 76)*
>
> Early on the morning of Maundy Thursday Thorkel made preparations to leave.
>
> *Föstudag inn langa sendi Guðrún menn sína at forvitnask um ferðir þeira Þorkels [...]. Þvátt-daginn fyrir páska spurðusk tíðendin... (Ch. 76)*
>
> On Good Friday Gudrun sent men to check on Thorkel's journey [...]. On the Saturday before Easter Sunday the news reached them...

This is a remarkable break in the text, supporting the assumption that behind it is an author with an agenda, making sure to highlight the change of custom by avoiding anachronistic time units. It shows a meaningful difference in how time is told, with more attention paid to Christian feasts and weekday names. In the latter case, the centrality granted to Sunday in Christianity must have played a role, whereas, as we have seen, in the pre-Christian North, no day seems to have been more important than any other.

This hard break is particular to *Laxdæla saga*, but other temporal patterns are present just as they are in *Eyrbyggja saga*, such as cycles of three, usually indicating long time periods:

> *'Þá vil ek fara útan með þér í sumar,' [...]. 'Þat má eigi vera […], ok bíð mín þrjá vetr. (Ch. 40; also ch. 51)*
>
> 'I want to go with you this summer,' […]. 'You can't do that […]. Wait for me instead for three years.'

'En eigi mun ek letja yðr at gera slíkt mein þeim Kotkatli, sem yðr líkar, ef eigi verða aðrir til at elta þau ór héraði eða taka af lífi með ǫllu, um þat er þrír vetr eru liðnir.' (Ch. 36)

'...I won't try and dissuade you from doing whatever you like with Kotkel and his clan if three years pass without anyone driving them out of the district...'

Finally, the saga is attentive to the speed at which the news of significant events is communicated, and thus to the time intervening between an event and its telling. It presents the following examples of how people come to "current" knowledge at different times:[137]

En er sumar kom, þá gengu skip landa í milli. Þá spurðusk þau tíðendi til Nóregs af Íslandi, at þat var alkristit; varð Óláfr konungr við þat allglaðr ok gaf leyfi ǫllum til Íslands þeim mǫnnum, er hann hafði í gíslingum haft, ok fara hvert er þeim líkaði. (Ch. 43; also ch. 68)

When summer came and ships began to sail between the two countries, the news that Iceland was completely Christianized travelled to Norway. The news pleased King Olaf exceedingly and he gave his permission for all the men who had been his hostages to sail to Iceland or anywhere else they pleased.

Eptir þessi tíðendi ríða þeir Þorgils í brott ok yfir hálsinn til Reykjardals ok lýstu þar vígum þessum; riðu síðan ina sǫmu leið vestr, sem þeir hǫfðu vestan riðit; léttu eigi sinni ferð, fyrr en þeir kómu í Hǫrðadal. Þeir segja nú þessi tíðendi, er gorzk hǫfðu í för þeira; […]. Skiljask þeir menn nú, er í ferð hǫfðu verit með Þorgísli. Lambi ríðr vestr til Laxárdals ok kemr fyrst í Hjarðarholt ok sagði þeim frændum sínum inniliga frá þessum tíðendum, er orðit hǫfðu í Skorradal. […]. Þorgils Hǫlluson ríðr út til Helgafells, ok með honum synir Guðrúnar […]; þeir kómu síðla um kveldit til Helgafells, svá at allir menn váru í rekkjum. Guðrún ríss upp ok bað menn upp standa ok vinna þeim beina; hon gengr til stofu ok heilsar Þorgísli ok ǫllum þeim ok spurði þá tíðenda. (Ch. 65; also ch. 56)

After these events Thorgils and his men rode over the ridge into Reykjadal to declare responsibility for the killings. They then took the same route back as they had come, not slowing their pace until they had come to Hordadal. There they related what had happened on their journey. […]. The men who had accompanied Thorgils then went their separate ways. Lambi rode northward to Laxardal, stopping on his way at Hjardarholt, where he told his kinsmen the details of the events which

[137] Cf. section 1.3.2, and Gurevich 1985 [1972], 43.

> had taken place in Skorradal. […]. Thorgils Holluson then rode to Helgafell, accompanied by Gudrun's sons […]. When they arrived late in the evening everyone had gone to his bed. Gudrun got up at once and told the servants to get up and wait upon them. She went into the main room to greet Thorgils and all his party and hear the news.

These examples show how people come to knowledge at different times. Attention is paid to the temporal misalignment that exists between what has happened and what is (un)known, between reality and its telling, also showing an awareness of the simultaneity of differently-perceived realities, thus of differently-perceived times.

Thus, similarly to *Eyrbyggja saga*, and the *Íslendingasögur* generally, *Laxdæla saga* displays patterns of story-time that are both chronological and episodic. The chronological patterns are constructed mainly around significant events in the history of Iceland and around the lives and experiences of specific people, both historically and narratively important. The patterns of episodic time are constructed around cycles of nature and the Old Icelandic calendar, primarily the seasons, where a particular season is connected to specific events or activities typical of that time of year. However, in contrast with *Eyrbyggja*, *Laxdæla* conveys an understanding of the seasons primarily as six-month periods, that is, as the alternating *misseri* of summer and winter also characterizing the Old Icelandic calendar. Therefore, the older understanding of the seasons as *misseri* was still prominent when the text was composed or was preferred at any rate. Week counting is also used more often in *Laxdæla* than in *Eyrbyggja*, and its frequent combination with the *misseri* in the saga, strongly reminiscent of Ari Þorgilsson's work, suggests an older understanding of time in the Icelandic context. Also different from *Eyrbyggja*, is the fact that *Laxdæla* displays at times the old method of reckoning time by directly observing natural and astronomical phenomena, suggesting that this method was also still practiced when the text was composed, or was nevertheless still considered valuable, at least by the author of the text. Finally, *Laxdæla* displays a wider use of Christian time units and recurrences, when compared to *Eyrbyggja*. It frequently structures time using the Christian weekday names introduced by Bishop Jón Ǫgmundarson to replace the ones based on heathen gods' names, and by

exploiting Christian feasts or recurrences when dating some other event in the story. It is striking that these patterns appear almost exclusively after the conversion to Christianity has taken place in the text. This supports the assumption that behind the work is an author with an agenda, who makes sure to stress the change of custom by using the appropriate time units and recurrences, while also showing a meaningful difference in how time is told.

3.4.2 Narrative Time

The ways in which story-time (chronological and episodic time) and narrative time interact in *Laxdæla* constitute the saga's perspective of time.[138] Once again, the use of Genette's systematization of these interactions into the two main qualities of order and duration is illuminating.[139] Anticipation and foreshadowing, a manipulation of order, are elevated to artistry in this saga and are often best expressed in dialogue.[140] They appear, for example in the form of curses:

> *'Ekki happ mun þér í verða at hafa með þér sverðit. […]. Þat læt ek þá um mælt,' segir Geirmundr, 'at þetta sverð verði þeim manni at bana í yðvarri ætt, er mestr er skaði at, ok óskapligast komi við.' (Ch. 30)*
>
> 'That sword [Leg-Biter] will bring you no luck. […]. Then I lay this curse upon it,' Geirmund said, 'that it will be the death of a man in your family who will most be missed and least deserve it.'

> *'Þat mæli ek um,' segir hann, 'at Þorleikr eigi þar fá skemmtanardaga heðan í frá, ok ǫllum verði þungbýlt, þeim sem í hans rúm setjask.' (Ch. 37)*
>
> 'I lay this curse that Thorleik will know little enjoyment here for the rest of his days, and that anyone who takes this place will know but ill fortune.'

[138] Beck 1974–77, 384.
[139] Genette 1980, 35.
[140] See Sverrir Tómasson 2006, 131–2.

Anticipation is also created through predictions and prophecies. Characters predict the spread of Christianity: among them are King Óláfr Tryggvason, who predicts that Kjartan Óláfsson will convert (ch. 40), and Gestr Oddleifsson, who foretells the change of religion when he interprets Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir's dreams (ch. 33). Later in the saga, Gestr also predicts that Helgafell, where Guðrún had a church built, will become a prominent site:

> *'Ek vil mik láta færa til Helgafells, því at sá staðr mun verða mestr hér í sveitum; þangat hefi ek opt ljós sét.' (Ch. 66)*
>
> 'I wish to have my body taken to Helgafell, as it will be the most prominent seat in the district. I have also often seen brightness there.'

The fate of Kjartan, beyond his conversion, is predicted at other points in the saga. For instance, his father Óláfr *pái* predicts his inauspicious fate in chapter 39, as do King Óláfr Tryggvason in chapter 43, and Gestr Oddleifsson in chapter 33, along with his interpretation of the dreams:

> *'En ekki kemr mér at óvǫrum, þótt Bolli standi yfir hǫfuðsvǫrðum Kjartans, ok hann vinni sér þá ok hǫfuðbana... (Ch. 33)*
>
> 'I wouldn't be surprised if Bolli should one day stoop over Kjartan's corpse and in slaying him bring about his own death.'

That said, it is especially in dreams that the future is anticipated, and thus the development of the saga itself. The saga relates ten dreams in total, which are often prophetic. The most notable example is that of chapter 33, where Guðrún describes her dreams in detail to the wise Gestr, who interprets them as revelations of her future marriages.[141] Thus, in terms of Genette's

[141] The dreams in the saga are either literary (e.g., chs. 33 and 74) or are visitations, that is, women, either aggressive or protective, appear to characters in dreams (e.g., chs. 31, 76). See Ármann Jakobsson 2008. See also Crocker's forthcoming (2021) detailed study of dreams as they are described and discussed in medieval Icelandic sagas, especially in the *Íslendingasögur*.

order, the saga displays several narrative anachronies, most notably by anticipating crucial events in the story, especially through curses, predictions, and remarkable dreams.

In terms of duration, narrative speeds are manipulated in several ways, either slowing down, suspending, or accelerating time. Time is expanded by enriching the narrative with particularly detailed descriptions, as in the case of Guðrún's description of her dreams, and in the first part of the saga, where the biographies of Hǫskuldr Dala-Kollsson and Óláfr Hǫskuldsson are given.[142] Often, detailed physical description of the characters contributes to the expansion or slowing down of time:

> *Kjartan Óláfsson vex upp heima í Hjarðarholti. Hann var allra manna fríðastr, þeira er fœzk hafa á Íslandi; hann var mikilleitr ok vel farinn í andliti, manna bezt eygðr ok ljóslitaðr; mikit hár hafði hann ok fagrt sem silki, ok fell með lokkum, mikill maðr ok sterkr, eptir sem verit hafði Egill, móðrfaðir hans, eða Þórólfr. Kjartan var hverjum manni betr á sik kominn, svá at allir undruðusk, þeir er sá hann; betr var hann ok vígr en flestir menn aðrir; vel var hann hagr ok syndr manna bezt; allar íþróttir hafði hann mjǫk umfram aðra menn; hverjum manni var hann lítillátari ok vinsæll, svá at hvert barn unni honum; hann var léttúðigr ok mildr af fé. Ólafr unni mest Kjartani allra barna sinna. (Ch. 28)*
>
> Kjartan Olafsson grew up with his parents at Hjardarholt. No fairer or more handsome man has ever been born in Iceland. He had a broad face and regular features, the most beautiful eyes and a fair complexion. His hair was thick and as shiny as silk, and fell in waves. He was a big, strong man, much like his grandfather Egil, or Thorolf. No man cut a better figure than Kjartan, and people were always struck by his appearance when they saw him. He was a better fighter than most, skilled with his hands, and a top swimmer. He was superior to other men in all skills, and yet he was the humblest of men, and so popular that every child loved him. He also had a generous and cheerful disposition. Of all his children, Kjartan was Olaf's favourite.

[142] Beck 1974–77, 397.

Detailed descriptions of clothing and weaponry are also often given, which likewise slow the narrative down:

> *Óláfr gekk þá fram í stafninn ok var svá búinn, at hann var í brynju ok hafði hjálm á hǫfði gullroðinn; hann var gyrðr sverði, ok váru gullrekin hjǫltin; hann hafði krókaspjót í hendi hǫggtekit ok allgóð mál í; rauðan skjǫld hafði hann fyrir sér, ok var dregit á leó með gulli. (Ch. 21; also chs. 23, 29, 44, 77).*
>
> Olaf took up position in the bow. He wore a coat of mail and on his head a helmet with golden plates. At his waist was a sword, its hilt inlaid with gold, and in his hand he held a spear with a hooked blade, also highly decorated. Before him he held a red shield, with the design of a lion in gold.

The narration is also slowed when details are provided to prepare for a crucial scene, often consisting of a confrontation between parties. In chapter 63, Helgi Harðbeinsson's shepherd boy illustrates to his master in great and exaggerated detail, the appearance, the clothing, and the equipment of the coming attackers, namely Bolli Bollason and his men, who are approaching in order to avenge the killing of Bolli's father Bolli Þorleiksson. In this way, Helgi is able to identify the attackers, before the narrator finally lets them arrive and start the battle.[143] At the same time, this slowing down of time in the scene increases the tension for the audience, delaying the inevitable confrontation, while consistently directing attention toward it.[144] This supports the assumption that behind the text is an author with an agenda. Moreover, the passage in question is in dialogue form, the slowest narrative pace, in that, as mentioned previously, it coincides with the time it would take for the events to actually happen. Here is an extract:

> *Helgi mælti: 'Seg mér nú frá yfirlitum þeira; vil ek vita, ef ek mega nǫkkut ráða at glíkendum, hvat manna þetta sé.' Sveinninn mælti: 'Þar sat maðr í steindum sǫðli ok í blári kápu; sá var mikill ok drengiligr, vikóttr ok nǫkkut tannberr.' Helgi segir: 'Þenna mann kenni ek gorla at frásǫgn þinni; þar hefir þú sét Þorgils Hǫlluson vestan ór Hǫrðadal; eða hvat mun hann vilja oss, kappinn? (Ch. 63)*

[143] Sverrir Tómasson 2006, 133.
[144] Cochrane 2009, 197.

> Helgi said, 'Tell me what they looked like. I want to see if I can guess from their descriptions what men these are.' The boy said, 'One of the men sat on a saddle of coloured leather and wore a black cloak. He was a large man of manly build, balding at the temples and with very prominent teeth.' Helgi said, 'I recognize that man clearly from your words; you have seen Thorgils Holluson from Hordadal. What can that fighter want with us?'

Besides the above example, other notable instances of direct speech being used to decelerate the narrative speed appear in chapter 55, describing the killing of Bolli Þorleiksson, and in chapters 48 and 53, where Guðrún and Þorgerðr goad their respective relatives to revenge.

Time is also slowed through frequent changes of perspective and focus, such as by splitting the narrative attention between the actions of individuals of opposing parties about to confront each other. In the episode concerning the killing of Kjartan (ch. 49), there is an alternation of viewpoints between not only the men of Laxárdalr and the men of Laugar, but also of Þorkell, the farmer who watches the scene from distance. Similar changes of focus appear in relation to the killing of Bolli (ch. 55) and in the attack on Helgi Harðbeinsson described above (chs. 63, 64).

Thus, through enriching the narrative with details and dialogues or by frequently changing perspectives or focus within a specific episode, crucial moments in the saga are delayed, heightening tension. This is especially evident in relation to the slayings of Kjartan and Bolli, which are particularly well-constructed narrative delays, and constitute the two principal climaxes of the saga.[145]

The saga also constructs time using simultaneity and suspension. Parallels are often established between one event and another in the same season:

> *Synir Ketils heldu þat sama sumar til Íslands... (Ch. 3)*
>
> Ketil's sons […] set out for Iceland the same summer.

[145] Dronke 1979, 122–3.

Kjartan dvelsk at Borg um hríð. Þetta sumar... (Ch. 40; also chs. 41, 66)

Kjartan stayed at Borg for some time. That summer...

There are also instances of parallels being established between simultaneous, contrasting events:

Lík Kjartans var fært heim í Tungu. Síðan reið Bolli heim til Lauga. Guðrún gekk í móti honum ok spurði, hversu framorðit væri; Bolli kvað þá vera nær nóni dags þess. Þá mælti Guðrún: 'Misjǫfn verða morginverkin; ek hefi spunnit tólf álna garn, en þú hefir vegit Kjartan.' (Ch. 49)

After Kjartan's body was taken to the farm at Tunga, Bolli rode back to Laugar. Gudrun went out to meet him, and asked how late in the day it was. Bolli replied that it was almost mid-afternoon, and Gudrun said, 'A poor match they make, our morning's work – I have spun twelve ells of yarn while you have slain Kjartan.'

Guðrún gekk út ór selinu. Hon gekk ofan fyrir brekkuna til lækjar þess, er þar fell, ok tók at þvá lérept sín. Bolli var nú einn í selinu; hann tók vápn sín, setti hjálm á hǫfuð sér ok hafði skjǫld fyrir sér, en sverðit Fótbít í hendi... (Ch. 55)

Gudrun left the building. She walked down the slope to a small stream and began to wash some linen. When Bolli was alone in the cabin he collected his weapons, placed his helmet on his head and picked up his shield and sword Leg-biter...

It has been maintained that such contrasts, both involving Guðrún and her lovers, emphasize her exclusion from participating in crucial events by her relegation to a womanly role.[146] In any case, simultaneity here highlights the contrasting experiences of the characters involved.

It is also often the case that, in order to establish a certain parallel, one character has to be suspended in time in favour of another, a suspension that can last for several years. Often, the change of scene is made explicit:[147]

[146] Kress 1993, 142–3.
[147] Le Breton-Filíppusdóttir 1997, 130–1.

Nú verðr þar frá at hverfa um stund, en taka til út á Íslandi ok heyra, hvat þar gerisk til tíðenda, meðan Þorkell er útan. (Ch. 58)

The scene will now be left for a while, and the thread taken up again once more in Iceland, with news of the events taking place while Thorkel was abroad.

Nú er at segja frá ferð þeira Þorkels... (Ch. 76)

The story now returns to Thorkel and his journey...

In a narrative spanning more than a century, time also needs to be accelerated, which is achieved by compression or ellipsis. Compression is evident in the opening and closing chapters of the saga, where time flows swiftly through the condensed genealogical accounts, with hardly any detailed descriptions of events and with almost no direct speech. Many other instances of the acceleration of time appear throughout the text:[148]

[Unnr] var þar um vetrinn […]. Ok um várit... (Ch. 5; also chs. 14, 22)

Unn stayed there over the winter […]. In the spring...

Ríðr Hǫskuldr nú í brott við svá búit ok heim til bús síns, ok er nú heima, til þess er boð þetta skyldi vera. (Ch. 9; also chs. 43, 53)

Hoskuld rode back to his farm, where he remained until the date set for the wedding.

Hǫskuldr sitr nú í búi sínu ok gerisk hniginn á inn efra aldr, en synir hans eru nú þroskaðir. (Ch. 20)

By now Hoskuld was an elderly man and his sons full-grown.

[148] Cochrane 2009, 195.

Stock phrases are also used to bypass units of time such as the day, the season, and the year in one brief sentence.[149] For example:

> *Nú líðr sjá inn næsti vetr, ok kemr sumar... (Ch. 26; also chs. 21, 38, 40, 53, 69)*
>
> The winter passed, and summer came...

> *Líða nú þau missari. (Ch. 39)*
>
> The year passed.

Time is also concentrated by summaries of certain episodes, which usually appear between main scenes and focus on the information that is needed for the development of the saga:

> *Óláfr ok Þorgerðr váru ýmisst þann vetr á Hǫskuldsstǫðum eða með fóstra hans. Um várit tók Óláfr við búi á Goddastǫðum. Þat sumar tók Þórðr goddi sótt þá, er hann leiddi til bana. (Ch. 24)*
>
> Olaf and Thorgerd spent the winter months either at Hoskuldsstadir or with Olaf's foster-father, Thord-Goddi. In the spring Olaf took over the farm at Goddastadir, and that summer Thord was taken ill and died.

> *...rak konungr af sér þann vetr víkinga ok úthlaupsmenn. (Ch. 21)*
>
> [The king] spent the winter warding off both Vikings and other raiders.

Likewise, after each of the two climactic death scenes, the narrator concentrates long time spans into a few lines. After the death of Kjartan, the narrator mentions the fact that Kjartan's father Óláfr *pái* lived only for three more years, condensing that whole period into a single line. And after Bolli's death, the narrator passes quickly through the time period going from his death to the revenge taken for it, namely twelve years, which are condensed into two brief chapters (chs. 57–58).[150]

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[149] Cochrane 2009, 194–5.
[150] See Beck 1974–77, 386.

On certain occasions then, as in *Eyrbyggja*, time is explicitly cut out, and it is stated that during a specific period nothing interesting or worth mentioning happened:

...var kyrrt allan þann vetr. (Ch. 11; also ch. 23, 37, 53, 56)

Nothing of note occurred all that winter.

Allt var þar tíðendalaust, ok fara menn heim. (Ch. 23; also ch. 35, 41, 53)

Everything proceeded without incident and afterwards people all returned to their homes.

Whether time is condensed or cut out in the saga, it is often the case that the temporal references in question are vague, or relative, over both short and long periods of time:

Litlu síðar ríðr Kjartan til Lauga... (Ch. 40)

A short while later Kjartan rode to Laugar...

Nǫkkuru síðar ræðir Bolli við... (Ch. 43)

Some time afterwards, Bolli...

Hǫskuldr ok Jórunn hǫfðu eigi lengi ásamt verit, áðr þeim varð barna auðit. (Ch. 9)

Not long after their marriage Hoskuld and Jorunn had a child...

Fám vetrum síðar tók Þorgerðr banasótt ok andaðisk... (Ch. 8)

A few years later she fell ill and died...

As in *Eyrbyggja saga*, these vague references can express durations of specific activity as well as a lack of activity, indicating an uncertain period of time:

> *...þar dvalðisk hon litla hríð. (Ch. 4; also chs. 3, 13, 50, 62)*
>
> ...where she stayed for a short while.

> *...ok hon var lǫngum horfin, svá at menn vissu eigi, hvar hon var. (Ch. 38; also ch. 7, 35)*
>
> …[she] had often disappeared for hours at a time without anyone knowing of her whereabouts.

> *Sitr Óláfr nú at búi sínu, svá at vetrum skipti eigi allfám. (Ch. 28; also chs. 42, 70, 73)*
>
> Olaf stayed at home on his farm for many years after that.

Vague or relative time references often concern aging as well:

> *Á ofanverðum dǫgum Ketils... (Ch. 2)*
>
> During Ketil's later years...

> *Hann bjó í Hvammi til elli. (Ch. 7; also ch. 17)*
>
> He lived at Hvamm into his old age...

> *'...ok hǫfu vit bræðr nú þann þroska, at menn munu mjǫk á leita við okkr, ef vit hefjum eigi handa.' (Ch. 60)*
>
> 'We brothers are mature enough now that people will begin to count it against us if we fail to take action.'

Thus, the author of *Laxdæla saga*, just as the author of *Eyrbyggja saga*, uses various techniques to organize and manipulate time for the purposes of story-telling, supporting an assumption that there is an authorial agenda behind the text. The saga displays several narrative anachronies, most notably by

anticipating crucial events in the story, especially through curses, predictions, and remarkable dreams. Narrative speeds, then, are manipulated to create suspense and heighten the tension for the audience, slowing the narrative down by giving detailed descriptions of people and events, by using direct speech, or by frequently switching perspectives. Time is often suspended in order to change the narrative focus, or accelerated and condensed, as in the genealogical accounts given at the beginning and end of the saga, or in the summaries of specific episodes. On other occasions, time is cut out altogether, as when nothing particular happens or is worth mentioning, and it is necessary to proceed with the narration.

3.5 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, two early *Íslendingasögur* that share nearly the same setting, concern several of the same people, and were probably produced in the same time period, have been analysed from the perspective of time. The analysis has revealed that the authors of these texts had a specifically narrative intention that led them to employ various methods for structuring time and keeping track of it. The analysis has broken these methods down in terms of story-time, which can be further divided into chronological and episodic time, and in terms of patterns of narrative time.

The chronological patterns of story-time in the texts are not absolute, following a linear timeframe of fixed intervals calculated from a point of origin. Instead, they are primarily relative, mainly tied to significant events in the history of Iceland and the lives and the experiences of specific people, either narratively or historically important. Some of the patterns structured around important historical figures are the same as Ari Þorgilsson used in *Íslendingabók*, suggesting that his work was used as a model. This is confirmed by the fact that in a few cases, Ari is mentioned directly as a source for the information given. It has been noted that *Eyrbyggja saga* employs these historical relative dating patterns more frequently than *Laxdæla saga*, and other *Íslendingasögur* more generally. However, even with the presence of these

historical referents, in both texts—especially in *Laxdæla*—the chronological information conveyed is often imprecise or anachronistic, at times the result of conscious manipulation on the part of the author. This testifies to the fact that chronological accuracy was not of paramount importance to the authors.[151] Rather, the use of historical markers and chronological time (beyond the demands of narrative causality) was intended to give the narratives a sense of veracity, which served to validate these family narratives and to establish a sense of continuity between the bygone past and the present of the author and his contemporaries.

The non-chronological patterns of story-time in the texts are cyclical patterns of episodic time. The two sagas structure time around natural cycles and the Old Icelandic calendar. The seasons become markers of time, both as the familiar three-month periods of the year, and as the alternating six-month periods known as *misseri*. Events are fixed in time by associating them with the season in which they occurred, or by connecting them to other activities that were usually performed during a certain season. These activities are notably cultural, such as feasting, taking place mainly in autumn and winter; political, such as the assemblies, especially the *Alþingi* in the summer; or economic, namely farming during the summer. *Eyrbyggja saga* employs all four seasons to structure time in this way, while in *Laxdæla*, the prevailing understanding of the seasons is as the two *misseri* of summer and winter. The author of *Laxdæla* employs this older understanding of the season alongside a frequent use of week counting, more frequent than the author of *Eyrbyggja saga*. This combination confirms once again the proximity to Ari Þorgilsson's work, where the same combination is found. *Laxdæla saga* employs another old method to keep track of time, which is not found in *Eyrbyggja*, notably the direct observation of natural and astronomical phenomena in order to reckon time, suggesting that this method was still practiced or at least regarded as valuable when the text was composed. This is equally true of the other aforementioned older time-reckoning methods displayed in the text. However, if the author favoured these older methods consciously, as he was writing a narrative about the

[151] Würth 2001, 295.

origins in the thirteenth century, it suggests an author with an agenda. This assumption is especially strengthened by the fact that the older understandings of time exist in the same text that noticeably shifts toward the use of Christian weekday names and recurrences only after the Conversion is related in the text.

The ways in which narrative time is managed in these sagas has also been considered in the present chapter. The authors used various techniques to structure and manipulate time for the purposes of storytelling. As shown, the texts display several narrative anachronies, most notably by anticipating crucial events in the story, especially through curses, predictions, and significant dreams. Narrative speeds are often manipulated in the texts, especially to create suspense and heighten the tension for the audience, notably by slowing the narrative down, such as by describing people and events in great detail, by using dialogues, and by frequently changing perspectives within a certain episode. Time is also often suspended altogether, in order to move the focus, or speeded up, compressing it, as in the genealogical accounts that open and end these narratives, or by summaries of specific episodes. On other occasions, time is completely elided, as when it is said that nothing significant happens or is worth mentioning, and the authors consider it necessary to move on with the narration. These strategies are used with more artistry in *Laxdæla* than in *Eyrbyggja*.

Ultimately, the qualities of the time patterns these two sagas convey, and the ways in which time itself is constructed in the narratives, are similarly varied, at times echoing Ari Þorgilsson's time-reckoning methods and narrative strategies in his *Íslendingabók*. Therefore, to some extent, the ways in which these texts represent and structure time constitute an evolution of Ari's own methods, bringing into question whether these sagas could have been written without the example of Ari's artistry. One can also wonder whether the understanding of time that lies behind the time patterns used in these sagas, which is therefore also, to some extent, an evolution of Ari's own understanding of time, would have been different without Ari's influence.

These sagas convey ways of understanding time that belonged to the people living in the period in which the texts were composed, namely the authors, the patrons, and the audiences or readers of the texts, although it is difficult to shed light on either the precise time in which the texts were composed, or on who exactly these people were. This will be analysed in more detail in the next chapter, starting from a philosophical inquiry into time and its correlations with narrative, which will then be applied to the evidence gathered here of the patterns of official and unofficial, native and imported, linear and cyclical, and anthropocentric and natural expressions of time in the texts, to shed light on how the people involved in their production sensed and balanced multiple conceptions and perceptions of time.

4. Sensing Time in Medieval Iceland

From fair golden daybreak
to deep blue darkness,
long should the day have lasted,
my delight, my despair!
As the day is dying
a drink I'll pledge
to the pain-filled memory
of passing pleasures.

—*Eyrbyggja saga*, ch. 29

Countless thinkers have speculated on time since at least the pre-Socratic Greek philosophers considered the matter.[1] Two main traditions have emerged from these contemplations: a "cosmological" view of time, advocated first by the Greeks themselves, and a "subjective" view, initially promoted by St. Augustine of Hippo, and reworked by modern philosophers into "phenomenological" accounts of time.

The main representative of the cosmological tradition is Aristotle. In his *Physics* (Book IV), he posits that time is inherent to the physical universe and is related to change, though it is not change itself.[2] He conceives of time as something measured by the movement of the heavenly bodies—the sun, the moon, the planets, and the stars—through the sky, and thus as something that exists independently of consciousness. According to this view, "if humans were subtracted from the world, the heavenly bodies would continue to travel their

[1] Such as Parmenides, Heraclitus, and Anaximander. See Ricoeur 1984–88, III:263–4.
[2] Aristotle, *Physics*, 219a; Dinshaw 2012, 8.

celestial grounds."[3] In addition to cosmological or "cosmic" time, this view is also called "time of the world."[4]

The opposing view considers time as dependent on, if not wholly constituted by, human consciousness. According to this perspective, time is not an entity that exists objectively in the universe, but is a subjective factor integral to perception.[5] Thus, "if consciousness were subtracted from the universe, time would vanish along with it, leaving only the blind processes associated with motion."[6] This subjective, experiential view of time was first advocated by St. Augustine of Hippo (*Confessions*, Book XI), and later significantly reworked by philosophers such as Immanuel Kant (*Critique of Pure Reason*) and Martin Heidegger (*Being and Time*) into a phenomenology of time. This subjective or phenomenological time is at times also called the "time of the soul."[7]

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur reconstructs these two main philosophical traditions in his major work *Time and Narrative* (1984–88 [1983–85]), which analyses the reasons why and the ways in which humans structure time through narrative. Ricoeur believes that the two opposing philosophical views lead to a paradox that cannot be solved, an impasse which he calls the "aporia of the dual perspective": both methodological views are equally legitimate, but are also irreducible, and there can therefore be no theoretically unified account of time.[8] Yet, at the same time, the two perspectives seem to imply each other, as attempts to prove that cosmic time is independent of consciousness end up including elements of perception: Aristotle recognized the necessity of measurement or of "one who counts" for any definition of cosmological time. On the other hand, the notion of time existing for a consciousness severed from the external world, or of time being exclusively subjective, is incoherent, since time is a natural condition that "exceeds and precedes all constitutive activity of the self."[9]

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[3] Dowling 2011, 20.
[4] Ricoeur 1984-88, III:12.
[5] West-Pavlov 2013, 42.
[6] Dowling 2011, 20.
[7] Ricoeur 1984-88, III:12.
[8] Osborne 1995, 48.
[9] Osborne 1995, 45; Dowling 2011, 21.

According to Ricoeur, this impasse can be overcome by introducing narrativity. In fact, he believes that narrativity alone can respond to the otherwise irreconcilable speculations on time, as to him, human time is always narrated time.[10] Thus, he maintains that the aporia produced by the two opposing theoretical perspectives, which he calls "aporetics of temporality," can be resolved in a re-figuration of time through narrative. That is, narrative has the ability to reconfigure "our confused, unformed, and at the limit mute temporal experience," because it serves to make comprehensible a diverse mix of purposes, actions, and situations that would be otherwise unintelligible.[11] In this way, narrative provides a temporal alternative to either the "time of the world" or the "time of the soul"; it constitutes a "third-time," the time we inhabit as social beings.

In his analysis of the interrelations that exist between narrative and time, Ricoeur considers both historical and fictional discourses, as both are based on narrativity. This is particularly useful for a study of time in Early Iceland, where Old Icelandic texts that use different combinations of historical and fictional modes are considered, although the nature of those texts is clearly more complex than such a bipartite distinction suggests. Here, Ricoeur's theory will be explored in further depth, and then it will be applied to the medieval Icelandic context, in order to illuminate how medieval Icelanders sensed time, that is, how they may have perceived it and conceived it.

4.1 Paul Ricoeur's Theory of Time

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur begins his major work *Time and Narrative* (1984–88 [1983–85]) by presenting the two principal, opposing philosophical traditions that have characterized the study of time since at least the pre-Socratics considered the matter, namely the "time of the world" and the "time of the soul."

[10] Ricoeur 1984–88, I:6.
[11] Ricoeur 1984–88, I:xi; Dowling 2011, 76.

The first tradition, which considers time to be a cosmological, physical fact, finds its main advocate in Aristotle, with the argument that time is a physical reality external to consciousness, measured by the movement of the heavenly bodies through the sky. While this relates it to change (or "motion," an alternative translation of *kinesis* and *metabole*, which he uses synonymously), time is not change itself.[12] Change is, however, essential for the existence of time, as time exists when and only when there is change: "if the *now* were not different but one and the same, there would be no time."[13] The concept of the "now" or "instant" (*νῦν*) is central to Aristotle's analysis. He maintains that, by differentiating between two interchangeable instants, a progressive timescale is generated, which allows for the conception of a "before" and an "after," and thus the measurement of time.[14] Aristotle sees time as "a number of change in respect of the before and after," that is, he sees it not as change itself, but as the measurement of change.[15] Although he acknowledges the fact that there must be an observer, a subject, to measure the change, he believes that in such cases consciousness is simply engaging with a time that exists external to and independent of itself.[16]

Opposed to this view is the "time of the soul," propagated by St. Augustine of Hippo in the context of an analysis of the relations and the distinctions between time and eternity. The major issue Augustine strives with is the measurement of time, or rather how to account for our ability to measure time. It is in resolving this question that he arrives at his fundamental description of human time, or of time as a subjective factor integral to perception, consisting in a "threefold present." Augustine argues that it is not external things or events that we measure, but rather the impression (*vestigium*) that these leave on the mind while passing through the senses. More precisely, it is the memory and expectation of events that we measure, not the events themselves as past or future. He conceives of time as a "distention" of the soul, or *distentio animi*: a stretching out of consciousness in two opposite directions that

[12] Dinshaw 2012, 8.
[13] Aristotle, *Physics*, 218b–27 (emphasis mine).
[14] Aristotle, *Physics*, 219b–9–18; Osborne 1995, 48.
[15] Aristotle, *Physics*, 219b–1.
[16] Dowling 2011, 21–2.

are called past and future within a fully-constituted temporality.[17] According to Augustine, the structure of temporal perception is the threefold present: a "present of things present" (attention); a "present of things past" (memory); and a "present of things future" (expectation). Such structure is best expressed by Augustine's example of the recitation of a psalm, during which, he notes, a man "has reactions and sensations that are distracted as the psalm passes between anticipation of what is still to come and memory of what has passed" (*neque enim sicut nota cantantis notumve canticum audientis expectatione vocum futurarum et memoria praeteritarum variatur affectus sensusque distenditur*):[18]

> *Dicturus sum canticum, quod novi: antequam incipiam, in totum expectatio mea tenditur; cum autem coepero, quantum ex illa in praeteritum decerpsero, tenditur et memoria mea, atque distenditur vita huius actionis meae in memoriam propter quod dixi et in expectationem propter quod dicturus sum: praesens tamen adest attentio mea, per quam traicitur quod erat futurum, ut fiat praeteritum. Quod quanto magis agitur et agitur, tanto breviata expectatione prolongatur memoria, donec tota expectatio consumatur, cum tota illa actio finita transierit in memoriam. Et quod in toto cantico, hoc in singulis particulis eius fit atque in singulis syllabis eius; hoc in actione longiore, cuius forte particula est illud canticum; hoc in tota vita hominis, cuius partes sunt omnes actiones hominis; hoc in toto saeculo filiorum hominum, cuius partes sunt omnes vitae hominum.*[19]

> Say I am about to recite a psalm I am familiar with. Before I start, my anticipation reaches to include the psalm in its entirety, but as I recite it, my memory reaches to take into the past each thing I shall be cropping from the future; so my soul's life-force reaches in opposite directions – into memory by what I have just said, into anticipation for what I am about to say – while simultaneously perduring in the present through which what was future is being shuttled into what is past. As I recite more and more of the psalm, anticipation is reduced in proportion as memory expands, until anticipation is canceled and the completed psalm deposited in memory. And the transition that happens with this psalm occurs also in each of its verses, even in each of its syllables, and the same occurs in the larger liturgy of which the psalm may be a part, or in the whole of a man's life, whose parts are his separate acts; or in the whole history of 'the sons of men,' whose parts are all the men there are.[20]

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[17] Dowling 2011, 25.
[18] St. Augustine, *Confessions* (11.31.41); Dinshaw 2012, 15.
[19] St. Augustine, *Confessions* (11.28.38).
[20] St. Augustine, *Confessions* (11.28.38). Similarly, the philosopher Edmund Husserl, who also examined time as internal to the flow of consciousness, when providing an account of duration, or "retention," gave the example of a sound: a single musical note that starts, continues, and ends. Ricoeur 1984–88, III:108; Dowling 2011, 25–7.

Augustine's modern-day counterparts are the theorists of subjective temporality, such as eighteenth-century philosopher Immanuel Kant, the forerunner of phenomenology, and twentieth-century Martin Heidegger, who built on Kant's work to formulate his own philosophy of time. Similarly to Augustine, Kant maintains, in his *Critique of Pure Reason,* that time is not an entity that exists objectively in the universe, but is instead subjective and inherent to perception.[21] In other words, time is not itself an object (objects themselves, or *noumena*, being unavailable to human consciousness, anyway), nor does it inhere in objects, but rather it inheres only within the subject who senses the objects. Time is an inner intuition, "an empty grid imposed by the mind on the raw flux of experience."[22] That is to say, time can only be dealt with as a "phenomenon," as the appearance of an object to the senses, or as an object for consciousness, though not as an object in itself.[23] These views were later elaborated and developed within phenomenology proper, which emerged in the early years of the twentieth century in order to bring philosophy back to the basic inquiry of objects as our consciousness perceives them.[24]

Ricoeur draws partly from this tradition for his theory of time, most notably from its re-elaboration by Heidegger in *Being and Time*. In this work, Heidegger situates his inquiry into time inside of an attempt to understand the meaning of Being (*Dasein*, "being there") through an existential analysis.[25] Heidegger posits that time is not some entity present in the world that is then mirrored in the human mind, but is rather something that emerges from the state of human Being and is extended outward into the world.[26] He believes that time is a process inherent to the most intimate structure of Being, namely *Sorge*, or "Care," which Ricoeur identifies as his most important contribution.[27] More precisely, Heidegger argues that Care (*Sorge*) is constituted by the interconnection of three basic features of existence, "Thrownness" (*Gewor-*

[21] Kant 2007 [1781], 74–8; Ricoeur 1984–88, III:251. See also West-Pavlov 2013, 42.
[22] Dowling 2011, 22.
[23] Currie 2007, 81.
[24] West-Pavlov 2013, 42.
[25] Heidegger 1962 [1926], 38–40; Ricoeur 1984–88, III:60.
[26] Cf. Currie 2007, 51–2.
[27] Ricoeur 1984–88, III:254.

fenheit), "Projection" (*Entwerfen*), and "Engagement" or "Concern" (*Besorgen*), which are rooted in "Temporality" (*Zeitlichkeit*), the originary and "authentic" mode of experiencing time, or "being in time"—as opposed to "inauthentic" or undifferentiated modes. This will now be explained.

Thrownness is the condition of being thrown into existence:

> being in time is not something about which we were consulted beforehand, in much the same way as no one asked us whether we wanted to be conceived and born. […]. Even more dramatically, our condition of being thrown into existence is one that is limited from the outset by a use-by date, that of our own death.[28]

Heidegger calls this sense of finitude, the awareness that we are born to die, "being toward death." In *Being and Time*, Thrownness is said to give significance to even the most common human activities, in that death, which belongs to existence, "limits and determines in every case whatever totality is possible for Dasein."[29] Thus, Thrownness does not only describe the limitations of Being, but also its possibilities, the possibilities of choosing ways of existing. Therefore, on the one hand, Being is thrown into existence, or into the "world," understood as "the web of significance which makes it possible for entities to show themselves or be encountered."[30] In this way, Being is always "already in the world." At the same time, Being is also always "ahead of itself," in the sense that it projects itself onto the possibilities of choosing ways of existing, hence the second characteristic of Care, "Projection."[31] In turn, these possibilities are determined by Being's engagement with other entities in the world, the things with which it is concerned. This is the third characteristic of Care, "Engagement" or "Concern," that is, Being's condition of existing "in the world."[32] Behind each of these three features of existence—Thrownness, Projection, and Concern—lie three temporal *ecstases*, which are roughly parallel to the past, present, and future of time as it is ordinarily understood,

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[28] West-Pavlov 2013, 44.
[29] Heidegger 1962 [1926], 277. See also Dowling 2011, 27, 33.
[30] Gorner 2007, 5.
[31] Heidegger 1962 [1926], 184–8. See also Gorner 2007, 5–6; West-Pavlov 2013, 44–5.
[32] Heidegger 1962 [1926], 83–4. See also Gorner 2007, 4–6.

although they are not the same entities.[33] Altogether they constitute "the dialectic of coming to be, having been and making present," namely "ecstatic temporality" or authentic, "original time."[34]

Heidegger further argues that it is from this "original time" that the dominant, ordinary conception of time derives as a beginningless and endless sequence of uniform "nows"—the consideration of which can be traced back at least to Aristotle—but he believes that this conception is flawed and reductive, suggesting an "inauthentic" experience of original time.[35] Such a conception prioritizes the present, ignoring that the present is never an isolated, discreet "now": it arises instead from other moments, namely from the dynamic interplay of future and past. Thus the "inauthentic," ordinary conception of time as a sequence of uniform "nows" misses the ecstatic unity of "a future which makes present in the process of having been," that is "ecstatic temporality" or "original time."[36] To show how the ordinary conception of time "levels off" or corrupts time as we actually experience it, Heidegger considers time as it shows itself in our "reckoning with" and "taking account" of time. Among the features of time that emerge from this are "Significance" (*Bedeutsamkeit*), "Datability" (*Datierbarkeit*), and "Stretchedness" (*Erstrecktheit*).[37] These features all originate in Concern, but are then "levelled off" by the ordinary conception of time.

According to the feature of Significance, time is not a sequence of simple nows, it is always "a time to," or its acknowledgement is "in order to."[38] As Gorner exemplifies it: "I want to know what time it is because I want to know how much time remains till the scheduled end of my lecture. I want to establish that I have enough time *in order to* finish the topic."[39] This feature of experienced time illustrates well how time manifests itself in our Concern. In Ricoeur's words: "the description of our temporality is dependent on the

[33] Heidegger 1962 [1926], 377–80. See also Gorner 2007, 156.
[34] Ricoeur 1984–88, I:61; III:269; Heidegger 1962 [1926], 377, 374.
[35] Heidegger 1962 [1926], 39, 374.
[36] Heidegger 1962 [1926], 377, 374.
[37] Heidegger 1962 [1926], 459–76.
[38] Heidegger 1962 [1926], 467. See also Gorner 2007, 161–2.
[39] Gorner 2007, 162.

description of the things of our Concern. […]. Heidegger calls this trait of Concern 'preoccupation' or 'circumspection.'"[40] Ricoeur concludes that "it is our preoccupation, not the things of our Concern [themselves], that determines the sense of time. It is because there is a *time to do* this, a right time and a wrong time, that we can reckon *with* time."[41] Likewise, it is because of the preoccupation with dating events that calculation and the assignment of dates becomes possible, hence the feature of Datability. With this preoccupation, an event is located in relation to a "now" which therefore comes to be distinguished from the other uniform, interchangeable "nows" of lived experience. As soon as preoccupation gives meaning to a certain "now," both an "earlier" or "no longer," and a "later" or "not yet" spring into existence.[42] This produces an appreciation of time as measurable, as with calendrical units. In turn, this leads to the idea that it is possible to assign a temporal extension to every "now," every "then," and every "before," thus determining an interval, a lapse of time. This is the feature of Stretchedness.

Ricoeur notes that "the first measurements of the time of our preoccupation are borrowed from the natural environment—first of all from the play of light and of the seasons."[43] In the case of the day, for instance, he notes that it does not constitute a plain abstract measure, but "a magnitude which corresponds to our concern and to the world into which we are thrown."[44] But the origins of such measurements in preoccupation are forgotten, "levelled off" by the ordinary conception of time.[45] This begins when time comes to be identified with the objects themselves and the processes that happen around us, such as the heavenly bodies and their movements, by which we start to perceive time as a separate and independent entity, for instance as a celestial clock or calendar.[46] With the refinement of time-reckoning and time-keeping devices, such as the clock, ordinary time became even more impersonal,

[40] Ricoeur 1980, 172; 1984–88, I:62.
[41] Ricoeur 1980, 173; 1984–88, I:63.
[42] Ricoeur 1984–88, III:82; Dowling 2011, 24, 31.
[43] Ricoeur 1980, 173; 1984–88, I:63.
[44] Ricoeur 1980, 173.
[45] Dowling 2011, 31–2.
[46] Dowling 2011, 31–2.

dissociated from human events and from natural processes, "an abstract, atomized quantity."[47] Thus, the creation of uniform time, possible only because of a preoccupation with the passage of time, leads to a perception of time as universal, its origins as a particular preoccupation eventually forgotten. These considerations are very useful for the analysis of the sense of time in medieval Iceland, but first it is necessary to look more closely at how Ricoeur develops them within his study.

Ricoeur believes that the aporia generated by the dual philosophical perspective of time as cosmological and phenomenological can be resolved only in narrative, and that this is the key to comprehending time: there can be no thought about time without narrated time.[48] In fact, time can only be narrated time, because we as human beings mediate all our experiences through language and narrative.[49] In other words, the experience of time can be accessed only through its narration in language: "temporality cannot be spoken of in the direct discourse of phenomenology [i.e. as manifested in the direct experience of things] but rather requires the mediation of the indirect discourse of narration."[50] The reverse is also true: temporality is clearly essential for the construction of narratives, because it allows for narrative causality and is the means through which the specific purpose of narrative, the *telos* of emplotment, can be communicated. In other words, time is essential for emplotment, even though emplotment may deviate from "real," chronological time, as we have seen.[51] For Ricoeur, the relationship that exists between temporality and narrative is a reciprocal one. As he puts it at the beginning of his study: "time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience."[52] This constitutes a "spiralling" movement in which time and narrative continuously influence and modify one another.[53]

[47] West-Pavlov 2013, 17.
[48] Ricoeur 1984–88, III:241.
[49] West-Pavlov 2013, 10, 83.
[50] Ricoeur 1984–88, III:241.
[51] Currie 2007, 94.
[52] Ricoeur 1984–88, I:3, 52.
[53] Currie 2007, 94.

This reciprocal relationship of time and narrative has often been overlooked by philosophers as well as literary critics, but to Ricoeur it is crucial. It allows a solution to the philosophical aporia of time, as it bridges the gap that philosophical speculation constantly opens between cosmological time and phenomenological time. More precisely, it is within the conceptual space of historical and fictional narrative that the philosophical aporia of time can be solved.[54] Before addressing this final point and applying it to the study of time in medieval Iceland, it is necessary to briefly consider Ricoeur's theory of narrative as well.

4.2 Ricoeur's Theory of Narrative

For his theory of narrative, Ricoeur considers Aristotle's discussion of *mythos* ("narrative emplotment") in his *Poetics*. Ricoeur believes that Aristotle's *mythos* is essentially a re-elaboration of what the Greeks more generally called *mimesis*, a term translated as either "imitation" or as "representation," but "always as something having to do with that puzzling intuition that makes us want to say that art imitates life."[55] According to Aristotle, the most sophisticated form of imitation of human action is Attic tragedy. The actions imitated in tragedy, though, are not just the accumulated occurrences in the stream of life, but are instead teleological: the actions that one deliberately chooses to do in order to achieve some purpose, therefore involving volition, motives, and goals. These are the actions that must be sought for by the sensitive mind of the poet. In other words, a creator needs to have a sense for human actions that are worth considering for imitation. Ricoeur builds on these assertions and extends their validity to all forms of emplotment. He maintains that action can be first identified by means of "its meaningful structures, its symbolic resources and its temporal character."[56] So identified, it can be imitated or represented, which is a mimetic activity "inasmuch as it produces something, namely, the

[54] Osborne 1995, 45.
[55] Dowling 2011, 1; Ricoeur 1984–88, I:31–7.
[56] Ricoeur 1984–88, I:54.

organization of events by emplotment."[57] He then outlines three stages of this process of imitating action, which he calls Mimesis One, Two, and Three, and which are reducible to the idea that, in narrative, "a prefigured time becomes a refigured time through the mediation of a configured time."[58]

Mimesis One is a pre-narrative level of understanding of the world of action. That is, narrative structure is "*pre*-figured" within the framework of human action and its day-to-day interpretation, a quality that is allowed for by the concept of cultural symbolism.[59] According to this concept, action is symbolically mediated within culture, articulated by signs, symbols, and norms. These can be deciphered without effort by individuals within the same cultural group by means of shared beliefs and understandings of the rules that allow for their decoding.[60] This means that "symbolism is not in the mind, not a psychological operation destined to guide action, but a meaning incorporated into action and decipherable from it by other actors in the social interplay."[61] Thus, cultural symbolism provides a "descriptive context" for particular actions, which can then be interpreted by shared symbolic conventions, hence also narrated.[62] Human action can be narrated because "it is always already articulated by signs, rules and norms. It is always already symbolically mediated."[63] Moreover, the "symbolic articulations of action are bearers of more precisely temporal elements, from which proceed more directly the very capacity of action to be narrated and perhaps the need to narrate it."[64] This "pre-understanding" of human action, its semantics, its symbolic system, and its temporality, or a prefiguration of narrative structure, is the basis for the actual imitation or representation of action—emplotment—which constitutes the following level.[65]

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[57] Ricoeur 1984–88, I:34.
[58] Ricoeur 1984–88, I:54.
[59] Ricoeur 1984–88, I:52–64. See also Osborne 1995, 53; Dowling 2011, 4.
[60] Ricoeur 1984–88, III:256.
[61] Ricoeur 1984–88, I:57.
[62] Ricoeur 1984–88, I:58; Dowling 2011, 3.
[63] Ricoeur 1984–88, I:57.
[64] Ricoeur 1984–88, I:54.
[65] Ricoeur 1984–88, I:64.

Mimesis Two is the "*con*-figuration" of time through the construction of narratives using emplotment. Every narrative organizes two temporal dimensions, a "chronological" (and "episodic") one, according to which the story is made out of events or "action" ("story-time"), and a "configurational" one, according to which the same events or action are organized into a significant whole, the plot ("discourse-time").[66]

According to Aristotle, good plots always involve causality: one thing happens *because* of another. Events or actions are tied to one another through causality in order to achieve some kind of purpose, or *telos*. Thus, Aristotle sees causality as a measure of quality in emplotment. Ricoeur makes this an absolute, as he considers causality to be inherent to the logic of emplotment.[67] He believes that narrative causality allows the plot to be seen as a series of events unfolding in time, leading up to a conclusion that ultimately reveals the purpose of the whole story, the *telos*, in turn allowing one to grasp the story as a whole.[68] It is the *telos* itself that drives the story toward its conclusion.[69] The conclusion of the story, though, is often anticipated throughout the text already, as the plot continuously hints at it through the unfolding events, reminding the reader that the story has already been grasped as a whole by the narrator (*totum simul*).[70] The time of narration conveys within itself two levels of understanding or awareness:[71] on the part of the audience, there is the cognitive process leading from a state of imperfect knowledge to clarity; but this coexists with the perspective of a narrator who already knows the outcome of the story. Thus, the story moves forward for the audience and backwards from the point of view of the narrator. This has been called the "double temporality" of narrative structure.[72]

Ricoeur believes there are two important aspects of this double temporality in narrative structure. On the one hand, it produces the unity of action

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[66] Ricoeur 1980, 171, 178; 1984–88, I:64–70.
[67] Ricoeur 1984–88, I:65; Dowling 2011, 5.
[68] Ricoeur 1984–88, I:66–7; Dowling 2011, 8, 11.
[69] Ricoeur 1984–88, I:66–7; Dowling 2011, 6. Cf. Brooks 2004 [1984].
[70] Dowling 2011, 11.
[71] Dowling 2011, 48.
[72] Dowling 2011, 83–4.

that Aristotle recognized in *mythos*, once the *telos* has been finally revealed. In turn, when the unfolding of the plot eventually collides with the *totum simul* of the narrator, it generates the "total act of comprehension," which Aristotle called *anagnorisis* or "recognition." However, Aristotle identified *anagnorisis* narrowly within "good" plots, on the level of character's actions, whereas Ricoeur sees it as a larger act embedded in narrative structure.[73] On the other hand, the double temporality of narrative also creates the inevitable feeling that the narrated world is "a moral or ethical whole."[74] In other words, the narrative is not just a bare succession of events motivated by some purpose, but instead gains ethical, moral significance, becoming an ethical medium or a mode of moral experience.

This last point leads to what Ricoeur identifies as the third level of imitation of an action, Mimesis Three, which consists of a "*re*-figuration" of the temporal experience outside of the narrated world.[75] In other words, the "total act of comprehension" leads to "an alteration in consciousness that derives less from a new way of seeing reality than from the impossibility, after reading [a certain work], of *not* seeing it that way."[76] Thus, the plot implicitly or explicitly provokes a new evaluation of the world by the audience.[77] Therefore, the narrative representation of time not only draws from the temporality of lived experience, but it also affects the comprehension and the experience that the readers or audience may have of "real" time.[78] This is the aforementioned "spiralling movement" in which the temporality of life and the temporality of fiction continuously affect each other.[79] According to Ricoeur, this reciprocity of time and narrative is the solution to the aporia of the dual perspective of time. Their interweaving, narrated time, constitutes a "third time," a cultural time, or a time shared between individuals, which bridges the gap that

[73] Dowling 2011, 9–10, 13.
[74] Dowling 2011, 12.
[75] Ricoeur 1984–88, I:70–87; Osborne 1995, 53.
[76] Dowling 2011, 13–5.
[77] Ricoeur 1984–88, III:249.
[78] Ricoeur 1984–88, I:71.
[79] Currie 2007, 94.

philosophical speculation continuously opens between cosmological and phenomenological time.[80]

According to Ricoeur, history and fiction are two versions of this "third time," because both are rooted in narrativity. That is, they both involve emplotment, whereby scattered events are organized into an ordered discourse. History requires occurrences to be causally associated and interpreted before being presented; or rather, the past is re-read and re-thought, before being represented.[81] Narratives are constructed around specific sections of the past, often imitating "the types of emplotment handed down by our literary tradition."[82] Ricoeur calls this the "fictionalization of history."[83] He argues that the creative capacity of history to refigure time is revealed first by means of its invention and use of certain "reflective" instruments, such as the calendar and the sundial, or the idea of the succession of generations.[84] This is because these tools involve the interpretation of signs, such as cosmic intervals, and a certain inventiveness, which both direct the very construction of the devices.[85] These tools, then, function as connectors between universal time and lived time, bridging the gap between the two. The sundial, for example, involves both the movement of the sun and the life of the person who consults the instrument.[86] This mediation is Ricoeur's third time, a response to the aporia of the duality of philosophical perspectives of time.[87]

Fiction, on the other hand, "testifies to a need of story for its own sake, to the human need to impose a narrative order on the buzz and confusion of the world," though it does so in ways that are not always possible in real life experience.[88] The third time of fiction emerges from a discrepancy between story-time (the linear and episodic temporal order of events) and discourse-time (the time of events as they are arranged and represented in the narrative).

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[80] Ricoeur 1984–88, III:244.
[81] Ricoeur 1984–88, III:182, 145–6.
[82] Ricoeur 1984–88, III:185; Dowling 2011, 74–5. Cf. West-Pavlov 2013, 72.
[83] Ricoeur 1984–88, III:181.
[84] Ricoeur 1984–88, III:104.
[85] Ricoeur 1984–88, III:182.
[86] Ricoeur 1984–88, III:182.
[87] Ricoeur 1984–88, III:99, 104, 182.
[88] Dowling 2011, 86; Currie 2007, 85.

In turn, this discrepancy drives the "teleological movement of forward-straining tension" that contributes to generating the third time.[89] That is, temporality is the medium through which the *telos* of emplotment can be established. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the combination of the *telos* with the *totum simul* perspective of the narrator, which constitutes the "double temporality" of narrative and produces the total act of comprehension, transforms narrative into a moral or ethical experience, whereby narrative time becomes a "time of concern," a consideration that owes much to Heidegger.[90] Fictional narrative also imitates historical narrative when structuring time: "recounting something can then be said to be recounting it *as if* it were past"; that is, fiction relates events that are past facts for the narrative voice that addresses itself to the reader.[91] Ricoeur calls this "historicization of fiction."[92]

Thus, history makes use of fiction to refigure time and fiction makes use of history to the same end.[93] Ricoeur believes that the production of third time can be comprehensively attributed to this interweaving of forms.[94] These reflections will now be considered within the analysis of the sense of time in medieval Icelandic narratives and society.

4.3 The "Third Time" of Medieval Icelandic Narratives

Ricoeur's inquiry into the interrelations between time and narrative can be fruitfully applied to the study of time in medieval Icelandic narratives and society. The application of a contemporary framework to the study of time in a past society is legitimate from a methodological point of view, because time as an existential concern and human experience is itself "timeless." The conceptual, experiential, and social nature of time allows us, in principle at least, to approach time in past societies as we would approach it in contemporary ones,

[89] Dowling 2011, 46–7.
[90] Dowling 2011, 48.
[91] Ricoeur 1984–88, III:189–90.
[92] Ricoeur 1984–88, III:189.
[93] Ricoeur 1984–88, III:181.
[94] Ricoeur 1984–88, III:245.

however different and varied its forms of systematization may be.[95] And although it may at first seem limiting that it is only through narrative that we can speculate on and possibly retrieve information about medieval Icelanders' sense of time, Ricoeur insists that it is only through language and narrative that time can be truly understood and accounted for, anyway. Therefore, by focusing on how "third time" is constructed through emplotment in the selected Old Icelandic texts, especially through the interweaving of history and fiction, it is possible to speculate on medieval Icelanders' sense of time, or at least that of the people involved in the production of the texts.

In the previous two chapters, medieval Icelandic texts with different combinations of both historical and fictional narrative modes have been analysed from the temporal perspective, namely, *Íslendingabók* and the two early *Íslendingasögur*, *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Laxdæla saga*. The analysis has demonstrated that these texts preserve multiple time patterns, both in narrative representation and social organization of time. The qualities of these patterns and their uses in the narratives reveal possible perceptions and conceptions of time, originating from preoccupations with time. As Heidegger maintained, and Ricoeur later built on, a society's sense of time is primarily determined by its preoccupations, as they are what give meaning to the otherwise uniform and interchangeable instants of lived experience. Thus, it is necessary to briefly reconsider the qualities and uses of the various time patterns in the Old Icelandic texts, and the specific preoccupations they reflect, in order to speculate on medieval Icelanders' sense of time.

The time patterns in *Íslendingabók* are mainly linear. This is not surprising, given the fact that the text is primarily a historical account, and considering Ari Þorgilsson's marked interest in chronology. Among the linear time patterns that appear in the text are a few instances of AD dating and specific genealogies. Relative dating patterns are also used, such as dating in relation to some authority's period of office, notably a bishop, a lawspeaker, or a king. Rather than reflect an absolute chronology, these patterns are constructed

[95] Hastrup 1985, 19; Gingrich 1994, 126.

around the life and experience of a high-status individual.[96] They express what has been called "anthropocentric time," a time suffused with human content, hence qualitatively defined and perceived.[97] The same is true of genealogies. While genealogies situate lineages in an absolute temporal framework, their relevance comes from the interpretation of the past generations' experience by subsequent generations.[98] They are essentially re-interpretations of past experience in terms of the present, connecting the present to the past.[99]

Similar understandings of time were already common among Germanic people, long before the settlement of Iceland. Germanic culture was heavily influenced by its views of its own past, where significance was predicated on the association of the present with the power of the past.[100] Only present and past years could be named: there was no "prospective era" or a computational aspect for conceiving of the future.[101] Such an understanding of time is evidenced by a characteristic of the verb tense system of Germanic languages, namely that it exhibits only "the binary opposition […] between past and present, or, better, between past and non-past events," indicating, respectively, what has happened and what is in the process of happening.[102] This is particularly evident in Old Icelandic prose, notably in saga writing, which is characterized by abrupt and continuous changes of tenses from past to present. These sudden switches have been interpreted as contrasting completed actions, related in the past tense, to actions in the process of being completed, given in the present tense. This, however, is only a hypothesis, and other interpretations have been proposed.[103] In any case, this highlights the fact that

[96] Kopár 2010, 205.
[97] Gurevich 1985 [1972], 95–100, 148.
[98] Kopár 2010, 206.
[99] Kopár 2010, 206.
[100] Bauschatz 1982, ix–x, 139.
[101] Wallis 1999, lxxi.
[102] Bauschatz 1982, xvii, 139–41.
[103] It has also been hypothesized that these changes served to give immediacy to the narrative, or that they were used to "maintain the stylistic impression of an orally based discourse." Clunies Ross 2010, 27. Other scholars argue that their function was to distinguish, respectively, the action in foreground from the action in background; that the

the Old Icelandic morphological tense system was based upon a past–present distinction, not including the future. Germanic languages characteristically lack future markers, and in order to make reference to futurity, the morphological present is usually employed.[104] According to Bauschatz, this implies that the future is not a predictable or readily-shaped concept, and the conception of time reflected is ultimately a binary one, not a tripartite one.[105] In the specific case of Old Icelandic, although it is true that it exhibits an emphasis on the present and the past, while lacking future markers, it cannot be said that it did not imply a contemplation of a future; there was certainly a conception of it, at least of a near future, as evidenced by the preoccupation with programming events in the upcoming seasons that appears frequently in sagas. The introduction of Christianity, then, must have reoriented time towards a more distant eschatological future, thus promoting the tripartite view of time.[106] The practice of *computus* contributed to the spread of this new view, with the calculation of the date of Easter determined for centuries in advance, anticipating the future by naming years that had not yet been.[107] Icelanders soon proved to be experts in *computus* when Christianity was introduced around the year 1000. However, in the texts that have been investigated here, though they date from after this period, the future is still fairly underrepresented. This is understandable, considering their prevailing interest in Icelandic origins.

Íslendingabók preserves past-oriented patterns other than dating and genealogy, and which are more discontinuous or cyclical in nature, rather than linear. The term *cursus*, rather than "cycle," may better express the notion of recurrence medieval people had.[108] While a cycle indicates a recurrence of

present-tense verbs would have made the spectator participate "directly" in the action, while the past tense would have imparted the events to people's memories. Schmitt 2012, 21. Additionally, it has been pointed out that they might be a "carry-over from medieval Latin translations." Kunz 1998, 76–7. Cf. Ceolin 2018, 123.

[104] Bauschatz 1982, 157–8. Consider for example Modern Icelandic: *hvað gerir þú á morgun?* / "what do you do/are you doing tomorrow?"

[105] Bauschatz 1982, 148, 140–1.

[106] See Vésteinn Ólason 2013.

[107] Wallis 1999, lxxi.

[108] Higgins 1989, 229–30.

events of fixed intervals, such as a cycle of years, a *cursus* denotes rhythm in events instead, "but a rhythm which is not always well defined or regular in interval, though it generally is both well-defined and regular in its content."[109] A *cursus* can be of two main kinds: natural, and liturgical or ritual.[110] A natural *cursus* clearly indicates recurrence in the natural order, such as the planetary orbits, the alternation of the seasons, as well as "the everywhere evident pattern of growth, decay and renewal," notably of living beings.[111] Liturgical *cursus* denotes "repetition which is devised for purposes of religious ritual and practice," such as with the canonical hours, the ringing of bells or the liturgical year itself, which has an essentially commemorative function.[112] More broadly speaking, this type of *cursus* can be said to include recurrent patterns in social life as well, such as community rituals.

Íslendingabók conveys patterns of natural *cursus*, structuring time around natural rhythms, such as the alternation of the seasons, mainly understood as the two *misseri* of summer and winter, although they are also sometimes used metonymically for the year. The text also mentions the observation of astronomical phenomena to reckon time, namely of the course of the sun, in relation to the establishment of the *sumarauki* (ch. 4). The Old Icelandic calendar portrayed in *Íslendingabók* can be considered a tool of ritual *cursus* as well, structuring the recurrence of social practices, thus having a commemorative function, besides bearing legal significance. Another primary pattern of ritual *cursus* that the text presents, is the origin myth Ari constructs around the Settlement: through it, the origins of the Icelandic community are re-figured and revived in the present.[113] The same is true of the Conversion, which is

[109] Higgins 1989, 230.
[110] Higgins (1989, 232–7) also lists a "metaphorical" cursus, which "accounts for recurrent patterns in history, such as the Fortune's wheel, which guarantees change, but that change is entirely unpredictable." However, as this pattern does not seem to be present in the analysed texts, it has not been considered.
[111] Higgins 1989, 232.
[112] Higgins 1989, 233.
[113] Similarly, Eliade (2005, 20), while considering the embodiment of myth in ritual, rather than its recording in texts, notes that, actually, "the time of any ritual coincides with the mythical time of the 'beginning.' Through repetition of the cosmogonic act, concrete time, in which the construction takes place, is projected into mythical time, *in illo tempore*

mythicized by the description of Þorgeirr's act of hiding himself under the cloak, just before revealing his decision that Icelanders should all be Christian, as if performing a soothsaying ritual or a rite of passage.

The time patterns in *Íslendingabók* also reflect specific preoccupations with the passage of time, revealing a medieval Icelandic sense of time. These patterns reflect the central preoccupation of recording the past and making sense of it, in order to preserve it and hand it down to posterity in specific ways. They also mirror a preoccupation of keeping origin stories alive, notably of the Settlement, but also of the Conversion, to strengthen cultural identity, and to establish legitimacy in the present.[114] This explains the strong focus on the past and the present in the text, which in turn reflects a conception of time as past and non-past, supported by the historical nature of the text. Whether time was perceived as linear–continuous, or as discontinuous–cyclical, it seems to have been perceived not only as past-oriented, but also, and especially, as anthropocentric, acquiring significance through the experience of individuals and the community in which they lived, starting from Ari himself and the patrons of his book.

As concerns narrative emplotment and time, or the use of these time patterns and their structuring in the text, Ari constructs a third time by quite clearly interweaving history with fiction. It has been demonstrated how he constructs narratives around the specific portions of the past he relates by selecting, manipulating, or omitting information. Moreover, the information from the past is compressed into ten brief chapters, condensing time, and in doing so, making the information that is related particularly meaningful. These particular views of the Icelandic past, curated by Ari in *Íslendingabók*, then went on to influence subsequent narrative configurations of time, supporting Ricoeur's theory of the reciprocity between time and narrative outlined above. This is the case with the early *Íslendingasögur*.

The early *Íslendingasögur* that have been analysed systematize time in ways similar to Ari's *Íslendingabók*, while also sharing similar time patterns with

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when the foundation of the world occurred." For an analysis of mythical time see: Bauschatz 1982; Clunies Ross 1994–98; Lindow 2001; Vésteinn Ólason 2013.

[114] Ellehøj 1965, 292.

it. These patterns reflect preoccupations that are likewise similar to the ones expressed by Ari's patterns, hence they are also indicative of a similar sense of time. As outlined above, these sagas combine a linear, but flexible, chronology and more discontinuous, cyclical patterns that express recurrences of a natural and social nature. In these early sagas, events are narrated essentially chronologically, following the genealogy and the history of specific families from their settlements in Iceland to the beginning of the eleventh century. However, the chronological data are occasionally conflicting or confusing, or were manipulated by the authors according to their needs, allowing for an "elastic" chronology. These authors did not aim to produce historically accurate accounts, but instead used historical patterns to grant veracity to their stories, and to structure the narratives chronologically as causal chains of events. While AD dating is lacking in these specific texts, as it would have been of little use, relative dating is often employed in connection to important events and people in the history of Iceland or Norway, or at least to those that are important within the stories. This testifies to the fact that time was understood in more anthropocentric ways, a view that is reinforced by the centrality of genealogies in these works—an emphatically human organization of time.

There are clearly also patterns of *cursus* in these sagas. Patterns of natural *cursus,* based on repetition in nature, are most abundant: notably of day and night, but especially the seasons, which are used to account for and to structure social rhythms.[115] At times, there is also evidence of the direct observation of astronomical phenomena, notably in *Laxdæla*, where references are made to the position of the sun and the moon to indicate a particular time of the day. Patterns of ritual *cursus* are also present, such as feasting (e.g., the *vetrnætr*, also closely tied to the natural seasonal patterns of autumn and winter), feud, which develops in predictable ways, and the Old Icelandic calendar itself, which structures the recurrence of social practices. The use of basic elements of this calendar is particularly significant in *Laxdæla*, where time is often structured through the two *misseri*, rather than the four seasons, as well as through week counting. This saga also preserves several patterns based on

[115] Gurevich 1985 [1972], 97–8.

Christian social recurrences, notably feasts within the liturgical year, which are used as time references, almost exclusively after the Conversion has been related in the text. However, the conspicuous use of Christian feasts to structure time does not tend to characterize the *Íslendingasögur* more generally.

Other significant characteristics of the two sagas should be considered before speculating on how they possibly express medieval Icelanders' sense of time. These are connections between time and space, whereby time is made "concrete" by the landscape, and other explicitly subjective views of time. The *Íslendingasögur* occasionally mention the direct observation of natural and astronomical phenomena in the context of time reckoning, and in connection with physical features of the landscape. This is especially true of *Laxdæla*. Physical features of the landscape, however, are more often mentioned in these texts to establish or reinforce connections between the past and the present. This is clear, for instance, when a specific site that is central in the story is mentioned as being still meaningful at the time the author is writing. The landscape is used to highlight the continuity of space in time, and thus the relevance of the story, while making time concrete. The occasional descriptions of time in terms of space that appear in these texts also contribute to this sense, especially in the context of travel. A purely subjective experience of time is also present in these sagas, although such indications are more scarce.[116] One illuminating example, though, appears in *Eyrbyggja saga* (ch. 29), in poetic form (stanza 24), and is worthy of a brief digression.

Poetry in the sagas often has the function of enriching the prose by suggesting emotion and psychological depth, conveying subjective views, including those of time.[117] In the case of skaldic poetry, the type of poetry that is present in the *Íslendingasögur*, this function plays out through the so-called "situational" verses, also called "non-substantiating" or "speech acts." These verses convey subjective views because they are "represented as the utterance of a saga character or poet," particularly in response "to an event, a situation or a verbal cue, and they may themselves affect the course of events or the

[116] And "the application of the terms objective and subjective to the world-view of medieval people is in itself questionable." Gurevich 1985 [1972], 136–7.
[117] O'Donoghue 2005, 78.

ensuing conversation. Thus they potentially form the kernel of an episode, and their removal would damage the plot structure."[118] These verses are distinguished from another type of skaldic verse, namely "authenticating" verses, also called "substantiating" or "evidential," which are meant "to provide authenticating, authoritative information as a source for the prose narrative."[119] Not surprisingly, however, the distinction between the two types is often blurred.[120]

The verses in chapter 29 of *Eyrbyggja saga* are of the former, "situational" type, as they are conncted to the immediate personal situation of the person reciting them, Bjǫrn *Breiðvíkingakappi* ("champion of the people of Breiðavík"). These verses accompany an episode about an illicit love affair between Bjǫrn himself and Þuríðr Barkardóttir of Fróðá, Snorri *goði*'s half-sister, who is married to Þóroddr *skattkaupandi* ("Tax-trader"). The stanza appears in the context of an ambush arranged by Þóroddr and his supporters to kill Bjǫrn, in order to put a stop to his regular visits to his wife. When Þuríðr and Bjǫrn are alone, she warns him of her husband's plans, and Bjǫrn recites the following verse:

Guls mundum vit vilja	From fair golden daybreak
viðar ok blás í miðli,	to deep blue darkness,
grand fæ'k af stoð stundum	long should the day have lasted,
strengs, þenna dag lengstan,	my delight, my despair!
alls í aptan, þella,	As the day is dying
ek tegumk sjalfr at drekka	a drink I'll pledge
opt horfinnar erfi,	to the pain-filled memory
armlinns, gleði minnar.[121]	of passing pleasures.[122]

[118] Clunies Ross 2005, 71; Whaley 1993, 251.
[119] Clunies Ross 2005, 71.
[120] Clunies Ross 2005, 71, 78–9; Whaley 1993, 253–5.
[121] Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1935, 78) disentangles the verses as follows: *Vit mundum vilja þenna dag lengstan í miðli guls viðar ok blás, – fæ'k stundum grand af strengs stoð, – alls ek tegumk sjalfr í aftan, armlinns þella, at drekka erfi opt horfinnar gleði minnar*. He proposes the following paraphrasis: "Við mundum vilja, að þessi dagur væri lengst að líða frá gulum viði í bláan útsæ, – ég hlýt stundum harm (háska) af konunni, – því að í kvöld býst ég kona, til að drekka erfi oft horfinnar gleði minnar."
[122] Hermann Pálsson/Edwards 1989 [1972], 82.

These love verses are appropriate within the prose context in which they appear. However, they are ambiguous in some respects, notably regarding the reasons for Bjǫrn's misery. Scholars have provided different interpretations for this. In this regard, it is useful to consider an alternative translation of the same stanza:

Guls mundum vit vilja	We two would wish this day to be the
viðar ok blás í miðli,	longest between the golden
grand fæ'k af stoð stundum	forest and the dark[?]; I sometimes
strengs, þenna dag lengstan,	get pain from the prop of the ribbon [lady]
alls í aptan, þella,	for this evening, O tree of arm-
ek tegumk sjalfr at drekka	serpent [lady] I shall make myself ready
opt horfinnar erfi,	to drink to the memory of my joy
armlinns, gleði minnar.[123]	which has often passed.[124]

According to some scholars, Bjǫrn's misery is a reaction to the news of the ambush, which would explain why he says he receives harm because of the woman, as the second translation has it. Bjǫrn's apprehension can then be attributed to his realization that he is a doomed man. Thus, the verse expresses a sense of finality, while explaining why Bjǫrn wishes that the day he is sharing with Þuríðr would be exceptionally long.[125] However, this leaves unexplained why the poet says that he "sometimes" (*stundum*) receives pain from the woman, and that joy has "often" (*opt*) left him. A more complete interpretation links the poet's misery, not to the warning of an ambush, but to the fact that joy has often left him when he has had to part from his mistress, and now he realizes that he may have to leave her forever; it builds a distinction between "the regular misery of continual separations and the intimation of a final parting."[126] With this interpretation, the consonance of the verse with the context in which it appears, the imminent ambush, is only apparent. This is reinforced

[123] Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1935, 78.
[124] Turville-Petre 1976, 64.
[125] Frank 1978, 165–6.
[126] O'Donoghue 2005, 115–6.

by the fact that the lines do not refer directly to the ambush, and to portray Bjǫrn as afraid of the ambush would be inconsistent with his otherwise valiant character.[127]

Following the latter interpretation, it is possible to speculate on the poet's subjective temporal experience conveyed by the verse. The poet is love-sick. He realizes that the misery he has felt every time he has parted from his mistress is now going to be even greater with their final parting. Hence his desire that the day be longer than any other, as he is unable to endure time away from his lover, given his passion for her. But the duration in question is exclusive to the poet himself, that is, to his inner state and personal experience. This subjective, poetic experience of time in the saga is reminiscent of an experience that appears in a few other Old Icelandic texts. These texts are, notably, *Skírnismál* (ca. 900, stanza 42) from the Elder Edda and a couple of *Íslendingasögur*, *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa* ("Saga of Bjǫrn, champion of the people of Hítardalr") and *Kormáks saga*, which are both believed to be among the earliest texts of the genre.[128]

Skírnismál tells how the god Freyr falls in love from a distance with a giant-maiden and sends his servant Skírnir to woo her for him. After several failed attempts, Skírnir finally succeeds and goes back to his master with a wedding day set.[129] At the news Freyr, "burning with impatience" to meet his bride-to-be recites the following verse:[130]

Lǫng er nótt,	Long is one night,
langar ro tvær,	yet longer two will be,
hvé um þreyjak þriár?	how shall I three endure.
opt mér mánaðr	Often a month to me
minni þótti	less has seemed
en siá hálf hýnott.[131]	than half a night of longing.[132]

[127] O'Donoghue 2005, 115–6.
[128] See, respectively, Finlay 2002 [1997]; 1994–97; and McTurk 2002 [1997].
[129] Shippey 1982.
[130] Gurevich 1985 [1972], 136–7.
[131] *Skírnismál*, ed. Neckel/Kuhn 1962, 77.
[132] Thorpe 2004 [1866], 131.

Unlike Bjǫrn *Breiðvíkingakappi*, Freyr will see the object of his love again soon, but still, he too reveals his discontent with the passage of the intervening time, which is to him exceptionally "long." In this way, he also reveals an exclusively subjective perception of time.

Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa and *Kormáks saga* also display subjective views of time within the context of adulterous love relationships, whereby the male poets occasionally recite verses lamenting their lovesickness.[133] These elements clearly make them reminiscent of *Eyrbyggja* and its lovesick poet Bjǫrn *Breiðvíkingakappi*. Notable parallels have been established between Bjǫrn *Breiðvíkingakappi* and his namesake Bjǫrn *Hítdœlakappi*, the hero of *Bjarnar saga*, regarding both their illicit relationships and the love poetry they recite.[134] Actually, the two sagas share "three of the same verses in variant forms, probably as a result of confusion between the poets' traditions before either saga was written."[135]

The theme of frustrated and adulterous love in Old Icelandic poetry has invited comparisons to contemporaneous Continental troubadour poetry.[136] Some scholars question the appropriateness of such parallels, though, on the grounds that the "evidence for the theme of love for a married woman in skaldic verse is so sparse that a detailed examination of its use by troubadour poets hardly seems necessary."[137] In any case, establishing parallels between Old Icelandic poetry and troubadour poetry sheds light on the subjective experience of time in Old Icelandic poetry itself.

In troubadour poetry, it is frequently the case that the poet celebrates love, often unfulfilled, for an unattainable, already married lady. The misery felt by the poet, especially when having to part from his mistress, is indicative

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[133] See O'Donoghue 2005, 116–27.
[134] See Singman 1993, 49–50; Finlay 1993, 47.
[135] Finlay 1993, 47.
[136] Bjarni Einarsson 1971. Finlay (1994–97, 117) points out that Icelanders' most recorded contacts with France during that period actually took place in northern rather than southern France. This would suggest that "it would be more realistic to investigate the possible contacts of saga literature not with the troubadours themselves, but with their northern French followers and counterparts, the *trouvères.*"
[137] Finlay 1994–97, 128.

of subjective views of time, just as in Bjǫrn *Breiðvíkingakappi*'s case.[138] Thus, the lovesickness of the troubadour poets, unable to endure time away from their mistresses, reveals subjective experiences and views of time. These are subjective in that they stem from a personal sphere consisting of "a fundamentally closed, interior world which expresses personal reality as opposed to public, objective reality."[139] Within this sphere, events are "ordered according to an 'internal clock' which bears little if any relation to the external clock of the public, conventional time. This 'internal clock' is the time-continuum of [the poet's] personal experience."[140] Thus, subjectivity determines how the poet measures the passage and the duration of time.[141]

At the same time, these poets' subjective experiences of time make them "oblivious" to time.[142] Indeed, subjective time may occasionally be viewed as a kind of "timelessness," where time is crystallized, or suspended, narratively as well.[143] In this regard, it is interesting to briefly consider recent studies on the poetics of trauma, especially on the relationship between the memory of traumatic events and literary production, involving the perception and the representation of time.[144] Memories of traumatic experiences are strictly associated with the specific emotions and sensations that were felt at the moment of trauma, although they come to be encoded as single, dissociated fragments.[145] The disintegration of memory that is determined by trauma affects the perception of time as well, thus its representation. Interestingly, "trauma's relationship to time is […] quite paradoxical as one can say that time disappears in trauma but also that the trauma persists through time, since in any

[138] See Turner Smy 1989, 120–2.
[139] Turner Smy 1989, 93.
[140] Turner Smy 1989, 113–4.
[141] Gurevich (1985 [1972], 135–6) supports this view, noting that Philippe Ménard, studying time in the romances of Chrétien de Troyes (1967), "comes to the conclusion that in them the perception and the experiencing of time are dependent on the characters' way of life. There is no such thing as general time; for each man it passes in specific fashion."
[142] Gurevich 1985 [1972], 136.
[143] Turner Smy 1989, 113.
[144] Torfi Tulinius 2018b.
[145] Torfi Tulinius 2018b, 250–1, 496.

attempt to construct a representation of time, the result of this structuring activity will be affected by the trauma."[146]

Poetry in the sagas typically focuses on emotions and sensations, and it therefore potentially expresses traumatic experiences as well. This is especially true of skaldic poetry, which is characterized by fragmentation and obscurity. In the specific case of Bjǫrn *Breiðvíkingakappi*'s stanza, the verse communicates his distress at the intimation of a final parting from his mistress, or, possibly, at the news of the ambush, depending on the interpretation. His anxiety anticipates the traumatic event. He reconsiders with languishment the pleasant moments of his past, most probably the moments passed with Þuríðr, as if no more will come. However, he may also be lamenting the fugacity of such moments themselves. The verse is unclear in this regard, partly due to the syntactic complexity of the *dróttkvætt* form. The syntactic fragmentation of the form nevertheless has the effect of echoing the poet's struggle to bring together the scattered elements of his experience.[147] At the same time, the poet expresses the desire for time to disappear, or to crystallize as a continuous present, while expressing his passion for his lover, which is confirmed in stanzas he recites later in the saga.

This use of poetry, along with the analysis of the other time patterns that the two *Íslendingasögur* under scrutiny convey, demonstrates that these texts exhibit a mixture of time patterns, at times similar to the ones Ari Þorgilsson uses in his *Íslendingabók*, while also reflecting shared preoccupations with the passing of time. Among these preoccupations are the saga-writers' wishes to record the past and make sense of it, keeping the time of the Icelandic origins alive in memory and handing it down to posterity in specifically curated ways, while strengthening cultural identity and establishing legitimacy in the present. This reflects a conception of time as binary, grounded on the distinction of past and present, or past and non-past, pertaining to the authors, the patrons, and the contemporary audiences of the texts. Alternatively, it has been advanced that these sagas reflect a conception of time as:

[146] Torfi Tulinius 2018b, 251.
[147] Cf. Torfi Tulinius 2018b, 496.

> a spiral continuously growing upwards, the assumption being that history repeats itself, albeit never precisely in the same manner. Within the spiralling form it is possible to look both forwards or backwards along a curve and view the course of events almost horizontally (or as a continuous ring), or follow certain points from one curve to another, vertically.[148]

As a result, the past is remarkably close to the present, allowing for comparisons to be made. A conception of the future, though, is fairly underrepresented in these texts, even though anticipations of events to come in the story are sometimes made through predictions, prophecies or dreams.[149]

The patterns and preoccupations just described express a perception of time as both linear and cyclical, but especially as anthropocentric, being infused with human content. It has been demonstrated how the authors of these texts considered it more important to tie events, not to an abstract chronology, but to the experience of individuals and the community in which they lived. This is evident in the use of relative dating, in the genealogical delineations, and in the rhythms of the lives of the people in question, which determine the flow and the significance of the story told. Thus, time was perceived qualitatively, and at times subjectively as well, evident in the personalized experience of time that certain characters express, especially in poetry.

Regarding the use of these patterns and how they are structured in these sagas, that is, the relationship of narrative emplotment and time, the authors constructed a third time by interweaving history and fiction, exploiting discrepancies between story-time and discourse-time, and by manipulating the presentation of events and narrative speeds. They selected information regarding specific families and individuals and constructed time from their perspectives by considering their genealogies and histories, while tying this time to the rhythms of natural, calendrical, and social life. These manipulations, which reach a high level of artistry in *Laxdæla*, ultimately contribute to making the narratives more appealing to prospective audiences and readers.

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[148] Bergljót S. Kristjánsdóttir 2008, xxv–xxvi.
[149] Böldl 2005, 102–3.

4.4 Concluding Remarks

The three texts that have been explored convey various time patterns that are combined in significant ways. These multiple patterns vary in quality and in how they are used by the authors to structure and characterize their narratives. They provide insight into not only how medieval Icelanders, especially the people involved in the production of the texts, organized and measured time, but also how they sensed time in the first place, namely how they perceived it and conceived it. This is possible by considering the preoccupations expressed in these patterns: preoccupations with the past, origins, and identity. The most prominent conceptualization of time that has emerged from the analysis is a binary one. The texts reflect ways of conceiving of time primarily as past and present or as past and non-past, while conceptualizations of the future are fairly underrepresented. This binary view is expressed in perceptions of time that are both linear and cyclical, but primarily anthropocentric, connected with the experiences of individuals and the community in which they lived, especially the authors, the patrons, and the audiences or readers of the texts.

This sense of time was shaped not only by experience, but also by the literary milieu from which the texts originated. Ari Þorgilsson's work influenced the configuration of time in subsequent narratives, notably in the *Íslendingasögur*, and therefore also the ways in which the authors of these later texts sensed time in the first place. This supports Ricoeur's thesis of the reciprocity between time and narrative. The ways in which the authors of these texts configured time through emplotment, then, determine their specific third time, a cultural time which bridges the gap existing between the subjective time of lived experience and the more objective universal time. This is evident not only in how the authors interweaved history and fiction, but also in how they configured time by exploiting the discrepancies between story-time and discourse-time, and by manipulating events and the narrative speeds, all in order to grant the narratives specific meanings and make them more appealing to their prospective audiences and readers.

CONCLUSION: THE COMPLEXITY OF TIME IN MEDIEVAL ICELAND

"Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in.
I drink at it; but while I drink
I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is.
Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains.
I would drink deeper; fish in the sky,
whose bottom is pebbly with stars."

—Thoreau, *Walden*

This work aimed to map out the representations of time in the earliest extant literature produced in Iceland that has particular significance from the perspective of time. An extension of this goal was to build up a theoretical understanding of how the people involved in the production of these texts, and possibly their contemporaries as well, reckoned, organized, and understood time. To achieve these aims, legal, historical, computistical, and fictional texts from the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries were selected, and attention paid to the characteristics of the time patterns they employ, and to how their authors configured time through narrative. After collecting and mapping these data, they were analysed from different theoretical perspectives, notably the sociological, the narrative, and the philosophical.

The initial hypothesis was that the selected sources, and possibly the earliest texts produced in Iceland more broadly, would convey a diversity of patterns in the reckoning, the organization, and the representation of time, as well as in its perception and conception. In turn, these multiple ways of systematizing and understanding time would be indicative of the complexity of the society that developed and used them. It was expected that the patterns

would largely reflect learned people's time-reckoning strategies and views, thus mostly official ones, at times inherited from or influenced by continental European traditions. However, patterns expressing more common strategies and views, tied more directly to the rhythms of nature, of farming, and of collective life more generally, were also expected. These hypotheses were confirmed, but there were several remarkable finds as well, products of the specificities of the natural environment and the complexity of the society in which these strategies and views originated and developed.

The first texts that were considered were legal, historical, and computistical ones, namely the collection of laws *Grágás* (the kernel of which has been dated to 1117–18), Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók* (1122–33), and the computistical treatises *Rím I* or *Rímbegla* (ca. 1150–1200) and *Rím II* (12th and 13th centuries). It was shown how these sources display several different methods for reckoning and organizing time for official, civil, or administrative purposes, which are primarily calendrical. However, these texts also display methods that are alternative and complementary to the calendrical ones, and which are both of an official and an unofficial nature. These include other absolute and relative dating systems, such as those relative to the terms of office of Icelandic lawspeakers, and genealogical accounts, which allowed for keeping track of time by following the rhythmic change of generations. They also include correlations between timekeeping, space, and travel, such as the direct observation of natural and astronomical phenomena and physical features in the landscape, or the relation of time to distances traversed. Most of these alternative methods were related to the natural environment of the subarctic and to the specific socio-cultural circumstances of Early Iceland. These were the first methods to develop in Iceland, and therefore their origins predate the introduction of Christianity and its time-reckoning strategies, such as the Julian calendar, the liturgical year, and the *computus*. These early methods are preserved in the texts, though the texts were clearly written long after the Conversion. This suggests that the early methods endured and coexisted when the texts were written, a time when adjustments were also being made between native and foreign methods, such as the coordination of the Old Icelandic

calendar with the Julian, completed around 1200, and Bishop Jón Qgmundarson's reform of weekday names in the twelfth century. This explains why the selected texts, which are among the earliest produced in Iceland, convey a particularly marked variety of time patterns, as many different methods of systematizing and understanding time coexisted in society. The combinations of methods in the texts depend on the nature of the texts in question and on the interests of the people involved in their production.

The analysis of these early texts prepared the ground and provided the context for investigating the three case studies of the present work: *Íslendingabók*, treating Icelandic history from the Settlement to 1118, and two *Íslendingasögur* from the thirteenth century, *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Laxdæla saga*, set in the period from the Settlement to the beginning of the eleventh century. These texts are among the earliest extant ones to have particular significance from the perspective of time, and they all focus on Icelandic origins, although *Íslendingabók* continues further. By putting them in dialogue with one another, it became apparent how the two sagas built on Ari Þorgilsson's work regarding chronology and other patterns, notably relative dating and calendrical units, even mentioning him directly at times, as a way of validating certain historical information. The two sagas, then, are not only set almost in the same geographical area, the area of Breiðafjörður—where Ari himself was from—but they also relate similar regional concerns, involving some of the same family lines as well, including Ari's own at times. Additionally, it is likely that these sagas were both sponsored and produced by the same people, probably the Sturlungar or people otherwise connected to them, and possibly with Ari's lineage as well.

It has been shown how *Íslendingabók* combines diverse temporal patterns, such as the absolute and the relative dating of particular events, relative especially to the social authorities of the time—the bishops, the lawspeakers, and the chieftains—while also tracking time through prestigious family lines. These tools, along with others, such as the Old Icelandic calendar, were also considered when assessing how the work reconstructs the past. Ari's main achievement concerning chronology was to create a framework when there

were no available official time scales to use, and in doing so, laying the basis for the other chronologies of Icelandic history that concerned the first decades of the Settlement. The authors of the two *Íslendingasögur*, for example, imitated both his use of learned chronology for dating purposes, as well as his tracking of time through genealogies and the use of the Old Icelandic calendar. Ari's work also became influential in regard to how the past should be viewed, and therefore to how time came to be perceived as well.

The analysis of the portrayal of time in the two sagas has broken these methods down, along with the others present, in terms of story-time (a concept that can be further divided into chronological and episodic time) and narrative time. The chronological patterns of story-time in the two sagas are primarily relative and genealogical, structuring time mainly around significant events in the history of Iceland and around the lives and the experiences of specific people, either historically or narratively important. However, even with the presence of these historical referents—which are more prominent in *Eyrbyggja saga* than in *Laxdæla saga*—it was shown how the chronological information these texts convey is often imprecise or anachronistic, testifying to the fact that chronological accuracy and detail was not of paramount importance to their authors, for whom it sufficed that the provided chronological information infused the narrative with a sense of veracity.

The non-chronological patterns of story-time in the texts are the cyclical or discontinuous patterns of episodic time. The sagas often structure time around natural cycles and the Old Icelandic calendar. The seasons become markers of time, sometimes understood as *misseri*. More precisely, events are fixed in time by associating them to the season in which they occurred, or by connecting them to other activities that were usually performed during a certain season. Units of time other than the season are also used, notably those that were elements of the Old Icelandic calendar, such as the week, and methods such as week counting along with it. In particular, the author of *Laxdæla* employs both the *misseri* and week counting to structure time, revealing an older understanding of time. This is remarkable if one considers that it characterizes the same narrative in which there is a shift toward the use of

Christian time patterns, notably feasts of the liturgical calendar, after the Conversion is related in the text. In doing so, the author marks a distinction between the two customs, highlighting a shift, which is not otherwise portrayed as dramatic. This suggests that the text may have originated in a time when the two customs and the respective time-reckoning and organizing methods coexisted, without having yet been adjusted to one another. However, it may also be the case that the author marked the shift as a narrative tool for its significance within the characters' lives, and the story itself, betraying authorial agency.

The ways in which narrative time is managed in the two sagas was also considered, particularly how the authors used various techniques to structure and manipulate time for the purposes of storytelling. Discrepancies that arise from altered relationships between story-time and narrative time can be categorized by "order," that is, narrative anachronies, and "duration," the variation of narrative speeds, or the pace of the narrative.[1] One of the most common techniques related to order in the sagas is foreshadowing, especially through warnings and incitements, prophecies, or dreams. Retrospective references are also common, although they are not actual flashbacks. All these techniques appear most frequently at the start of a section or just before a main event takes place, but without over-directing or over-informing the reader. In terms of duration, narrative speeds are often manipulated to create suspense and heighten the tension for the audience, notably by slowing the narrative down, by giving detailed descriptions of people and events, or using direct speech and frequently changing perspectives. Time is also often suspended, in order to change the focus of the narrative, or accelerated, as with the genealogical accounts, especially typical of the beginnings of the sagas, or with summaries of specific episodes. On other occasions, time is elided altogether in moments when the authors explicitly state that nothing particular happens or that nothing is worth mentioning about a period of time, and that it is therefore necessary to move on with the narration.

[1] Genette 1980 [1972], 35.

The investigation then shifted from mapping and analysing the qualities and the use of the time patterns conveyed in the three case studies to speculating on what these patterns may reveal about ways of conceiving and perceiving of time. To this end, the specific preoccupations of these patterns were considered, following Heidegger's assertion (and Ricoeur's re-elaboration of the same) that a society's preoccupation with the passage of time is instrumental in determining its sense of time. The main preoccupation reflected by the Icelandic texts is to make sense of the past, especially the time of Icelandic origins, and to revive it in the present. Reviving the origins was important for establishing legitimacy in the present, and for strengthening a sense of cultural identity as it was being questioned in the thirteenth century, when the analysed sagas were written. This is especially true of the sagas. Through these texts, the past was re-presented and handed down to posterity in specifically mediated ways. These results shed light on how medieval Icelanders, at least the people involved in the production of the considered texts, conceived and perceived time.

The texts express time as binary: as a past and a non-past, reflecting such a conceptualization of time in the culture. A conceptualization of the future does not seem to have been prominent, or is at least underrepresented in these texts; when it is expressed, it is essentially in the form of predictions, prophecies or dreams, anticipating important events to come within the story, or simply in the form of planning upcoming events. As to the perception of time itself, it seems to have been both linear and cyclical, but especially anthropocentric, that is, it was qualitative and strongly tied to the lives and the experiences of individuals and the community in which they lived. This extends to the subjective sense that is occasionally expressed through certain characters' personal experiences of time. This anthropocentric and sometimes subjective view of time existed alongside a contrasting, concrete perception of time that is evident in the way it was tied to the specifics of the Icelandic natural environment.

The analysis of the time patterns conveyed by these early texts produced in Iceland demonstrates that, at least during the time in which they were

composed, multiple ways of figuring, measuring, and keeping track of time, of systematizing the past and organizing the near future, and thus also of controlling time, coexisted in Iceland. These methods are expressed through the use of official and unofficial patterns, both native and inherited from, or influenced by, continental European traditions. The patterns also clearly reflect multiple ways of perceiving and conceiving of time. Such variance mirrors the complexity of the society in which these texts were produced. The individuals involved in their production were primarily the social authorities of the time, the chieftains and ecclesiastics, the cooperation between whom was very close in Early Iceland. In particular, the methods and views portrayed in *Íslendingabók* are those of the author's patrons and advisors, thus of bishops, some of whom were also chieftains (as Ari himself probably was), as well as of lawspeakers. In other words, they were the methods and views of people belonging to the upper echelons of society.

As for the sagas, both *Eyrbyggja* and *Laxdæla* have been associated with the powerful Sturlungar, who are strongly represented in both texts. It has been therefore assumed that people from this family were involved in their production, possibly sponsoring or commissioning them, if not authoring them themselves. This highlights once again the significant relation between time, narrative, and power. The organization of time by social authorities, in this case by means of narrative, implies the control of time, which is not only an essential component of social functioning, but is also a key factor in the dominion over public life—an instrument of power.

The creation of narratives allowed for the promotion of particular views of time within the culture, those which the people involved in the production of the texts had imitated or constructed themselves. However, it should be remembered that the texts, especially the sagas, also convey methods and views that are more common, characterizing the farming society and the subarctic natural environment in which they originated and developed. In any case, the range of time patterns the texts display, and the ways in which the authors configured time through narrative constitute a cultural time,

providing a bridge between the time of lived experience and universal time—a third time, as Ricoeur would have it.

The present work has attempted to contribute to the existing scholarly knowledge of the topic of the representation and the understanding of time in medieval Iceland by mapping as thoroughly as possible how time is represented in texts from the earliest period of native text production, and by a detailed analysis of the patterns these texts convey in regard to the measurement, the organization, and the understanding of time. Representation and understanding of time in the Icelandic Middle Ages have been previously addressed from a few different perspectives, but such contributions have been few and have remained isolated. In this study, the use of different analytic perspectives, notably the narrative, the sociological, and the philosophical, results in a dynamic account of the research matter, while doing justice to the multivalence of time as a concept. This work will hopefully pave the way for further research on the topic. Other Old Icelandic texts could be considered in terms of how they represent and understand time, including texts from the later Icelandic Middle Ages, as well as texts that belong to genres not considered in the present investigation. Further research could be conducted on mythic time as well. This would contribute to a better account of how time was systematized and understood in medieval Iceland, and in the Middle Ages more generally, as well as to a better comprehension of the basic nature of the fascinating aspect of human experience that time is: the relentless "stream" we take part in enjoying, if only for a while.

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