

Module: HPHI7009

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Word Count: 4696 Words (Excluding footnotes and bibliography)

Otherness in the Medieval *Heimskringla* or The Chronicle of the Kings of Norway: A study in Medieval Historiography

The following essay seeks to examine depictions of otherness within the Medieval Norse *Heimskringla* saga or 'The Chronicle of the Kings of Norway' written by Snorri Sturluson around the year 1225 CE.¹ By investigating the various forms of otherness depicted in the *Heimskringla*, it is hoped that this work will be able to discuss what is meant by otherness, how the King's saga has been viewed within scholarly tradition, how the elements of otherness depicted within the saga compare with those described by Anglo-Norman authors such as William of Newburgh and Ralph of Coggeshall, how the King's saga utilises the same techniques that have been used by 12th and 13th century Anglo-Norman historiographers and whether this means that the saga can be viewed as a historiographical work. Comparison will be made between this uniquely Scandinavian text with western-European historiography, which has been more thoroughly studied by English scholars and therefore will provide an analytical tool through which to analyse the *Heimskringla*. Finally, it is the aim of this essay to suggest future directions for research based on the findings elicited within this writing. Primary sources in the form of the *Heimskringla* as well as the *Chronicon Anglicanum* by Ralph of Coggeshall and the *Historia rerum Anglicarum* by William of Newburgh will be utilised to investigate the key themes set out in this work, while secondary sources analysing otherness, politics and identity within Medieval Scandinavia, works looking at the life and politics of Snorri Sturluson and comparisons to other sagas from Medieval Scandinavia will all be used to answer the main question of this essay: whether through the lens of otherness and with comparisons to other Medieval sources one can view the historiographical nature of the *Heimskringla*. The word saga translates to 'story,' 'history,' and 'account'² which suggests that those who wrote down the sagas believed what they were writing to be a historical account encapsulated through the stories they had inherited.

Before analysing the depictions of otherness found in the King's Saga it is prudent to discuss the authorship of the saga and whether this influences the nature of

¹ Sturluson, Snorri. "Heimskringla: The Chronicle of the Kings of Norway." Pub. Forgotten Books (1978): 504. electronic edition was edited, proofed, and prepared by Douglas B. Killings, (April 1996). <https://www.sapili.org/subir-depois/en/gu000598.pdf> [accessed 21/12/2021 @ 17:38pm]

² Mitchell, Stephen A. "Narrating Magic, Sorcery, and Witchcraft." *Witchcraft and Magic in the Nordic Middle Ages*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011: 83

otherness found within. Sturluson, was born sometime in 1178/9 and died around 1241.³ He may have written the *Heimskringla* around 1230.⁴ Snorri Sturluson first visited Norway around 1218 – 1220 CE.⁵ This suggests that the *Heimskringla* was influenced by his visit to Norway if the date of 1225-1230 CE for the completion of the saga is understood as being accurate. During the period of 1215 – 1220 Iceland and Norway were engaged in a trade war, which would have provided an environment of tension during Snorri's composition of the saga.⁶ Snorri, like his contemporaries in western-Europe was a member of the intellectual elite, having held the position of law speaker twice in his lifetime; once between 1215-18 and again in 1222-31.⁷ This would potentially have given him access to earlier sources that may have inspired or informed the *Heimskringla*. Andersson concludes his study of Snorri's politics, which analysed the *Heimskringla* and an earlier, anonymous work the *Morkinskinna* written around 1215 CE, that Snorri kept to a politically neutral tone in the *Heimskringla* when compared with his later *Egils Saga*.⁸ This highlights that the sagas and their interaction together can demonstrate the political attitudes which informed writers such as Snorri Sturluson.⁹

The *Heimskringla* is a collection of several sagas including those of famous Norwegian kings such as Harald Hadrada, Halfdan the Black and Olaf Tryggvason, and Olaf Haroldson otherwise known as St Olaf.¹⁰ The *Ynglinga Saga* which tells the family history of the Yngling family, tracing their lineage from Odin to Halfdan the Black.¹¹ This saga does not appear in every translation having been first translated in 1844 whereas the majority of the *Heimskringla* was translated in 1907.¹² The entire collection covers the history of Norway from a mythical starting point, through a variety of biographical entries for famous rulers until the year 1177.¹³ This format places the *Heimskringla* in the same genre as western-European historiography such as the *Chronicon Anglicanum*, *Gesta Numanorum* among others. However, the

³ Snorri Sturluson: *Heimskringla*, volume 1: The Beginnings to Óláfr Tryggvason, trans. by Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (London, University College London, 2011): xvii

⁴ Aalto, S "Encountering Otherness in Heimskringla." *Ennen ja nyt: Historian tietosanomat* 4.4 (2004): 1

⁵ Andersson, Theodore M. "The Politics of Snorri Sturluson." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 93.1 (1994): 56

⁶ Andersson, Theodore M. (1994): 56

⁷ The Beginnings to Óláfr Tryggvason, trans. by Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (London, University College London, 2011): ix

⁸ Andersson, Theodore M. (2014): 78

⁹ Andersson, Theodore M. (2014): 78

¹⁰ Project Gutenberg #598, '*Heimskringla* or the Chronicle of the Kings of Norway' Released Nov 27th, 2009, last updated Feb 6th, 2013. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/598/598-h/598-h.htm> [Accessed 03/01/2022 @ 18:26pm]

¹¹ <https://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/heim/02ynglga.htm> [Accessed 03/01/2022 @ 18:35pm]

¹² OMACL (2016) '*Heimskringla*' <http://mcllibrary.org/Heimskringla/> [Accessed 01/03/2022 @ 18:45pm]

¹³ Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (London, University College London, 2011): vii

authorship of the *Heimskringla* has been recently put into question by Cormack (1999) and Boulhosa (2005).¹⁴

The aim of this essay is to identify how otherness is demonstrated within the King's saga, what this can tell historians about the outward view of the Medieval Norse world and how the author of the *Heimskringla*, Snorri Sturluson reflects contemporary Anglo-Norman historiographical techniques within his writing. To begin, this essay seeks to analyse how the saga has been viewed in historiographical scholarship. The most accomplished author writing on otherness within the King's Saga is Sirpa Aalto who has produced three works addressing otherness and Medieval Norse sagas. Two of the works by Aalto focus exclusively on otherness in the King's Saga; the first seeks to define otherness¹⁵ with the second aiming to categorise otherness as it appears in the saga.¹⁶ The third work addresses whether the contemporary Jónsvíkinga Saga, written in c. 1200 can be identified as a work of historiography or not.¹⁷ A further scholarly work used to investigate the historiographical nature of The King's Saga was written by Svarre Bagge who compared elements of the Old Norse King's Sagas and Latin Historiography.¹⁸ A particularly useful source for this essay is the translation of the *Heimskringla* produced in 2011 by the Viking Society for Northern Research at University College London which includes an introduction to the chronology and authorship of Snorri Sturluson, a review of the sources which were potentially used to inform the *Heimskringla* and an extremely useful extended bibliography that is particularly beneficial for scholars researching Norse period historiography.

As well as historiographical scholarship analysing the *Heimskringla* it is also the aim of this essay to use modern scholarship that has sought to address ideas of Medieval identity and otherness across the wide scope of historiographical texts. Two scholars, Henriette-Rika Benveniste, and Costas Gaganakis sought to reposition the debate on identities and otherness through the lens of Heterodoxies: analysing the relationship between diverse groups and the stories of their coexistence.¹⁹ Further texts analysing otherness will also be examined. These will cover a wide gamut of regions including the analyses of other contemporary sagas including those which investigate depictions of Muslims and other sources of otherness in the sagas,²⁰ depictions of 'Viking' otherness in Anglo-Norman

¹⁴ Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (2011): vii

¹⁵ Aalto, Sirpa. "Encountering Otherness in Heimskringla." *Ennen ja nyt: Historian tietosanomat* 4.4 (2004).

¹⁶ Aalto, Sirpa. "Categorizing Otherness in the King's Sagas." *Itä-Suomen yliopisto*, 2010.

¹⁷ Aalto, Sirpa. "Jónsvíkinga Saga as a Part of Old Norse Historiography." *Scripta Islandica: Isländska Sällskapetets Årsbok* 65 (2014): 33

¹⁸ Bagge, Sverre. "The Old Norse Kings' Sagas and European Latin Historiography." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 115.1 (2016): 1-38.

¹⁹ Benveniste, Henriette-Rika, and Costas Gaganakis. "Heterodoxies: Construction of identities and otherness in medieval and early Modern Europe." *Historein* 2 (2000): 7

²⁰ Jakobsson, Sverrir. "Saracen sensibilities: Muslims and otherness in medieval saga literature." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 115.2 (2016): 213-238.

sources,²¹ the depiction of bodies in Late Medieval writing and how this can represent otherness,²² and the politics of Snorri Sturluson as this may have influenced the depictions of otherness present in the *Heimskringla*.²³

The format of the *Heimskringla* has also been analysed and its freeverse structure suggests that they are based on a strong oral tradition, becoming memorised through each repetition, and fixed. The fixed form was understood to convey from one generation to another highly accurate historical information.²⁴ Use of oral tradition is a key characteristic found in several historiographical sources which will be addressed later in this essay.

It is hoped that, through analysis of modern scholarship this essay can answer whether the King's Saga is a useful source for students of historiography revealing how the Medieval Norse viewed their contemporaries and whether the techniques found in Anglo-Norman historiography are also found in the Norse corpus.

As discussed above Medieval narratives provide an important source for understanding how people saw themselves, their actions, and their society.²⁵ This also means that these narratives are a valuable tool for understanding how Medieval people viewed those outside their society; the 'others.' In this essay three forms of otherness will be examined in the *Heimskringla* as well as Anglo-Norman sources; supernatural otherness including prodigy or omens, other peoples and behaviour which is seen as other. Identity is a social and cultural construct which does not in itself refer to 'the past but are fluid representations linked to the invention of tradition.'²⁶ This suggests that the formation of otherness is also a social and cultural construct, developed from how a community or individual sees themselves and sees those around them. For example, the use of magic as an attribute of otherness was a convenient way, according to Mitchell, for authors to indicate to their readership a text's remoteness and connection to the past.²⁷

According to social psychology otherness can be defined by its comparison to the positive identity formulated by every individual.²⁸ The greater the difference between the positive identity and the other, the more positive an individual or community feels about themselves and their behaviour. Degrees of otherness can be found across the three categories this essay seeks to investigate. According to Aalto otherness, particularly between people can vary between the similar and the extreme other.²⁹ Within the *Heimskringla* Aalto viewed otherness via a few lenses including

²¹ Store, Paul. Viking 'otherness' in Anglo-Norman Chronicles. Diss. University of Winchester, 2018.

²² Fuller, Blum, and F. Martín. Body politics: otherness and the representation of bodies in late medieval writings. Diss. University of British Columbia, 1997.

²³ Andersson, Theodore M. (1994): 55-78.

²⁴ Mitchell, Stephen A (2011): 80

²⁵ Aalto, Sirpa (2004): 1

²⁶ Benveniste, H, and Costas Gaganakis. (2000): 8-9

²⁷ Mitchell, Stephen A (2011): 85

²⁸ Aalto, S (2004): 2

²⁹ Aalto, S (2004): 3

nationhood, gender, and social contacts.³⁰ For example, investigating a passage of the *Ynglinga Saga* it is noted that the magic of the *Finnar* resulted in the death of King Vanlandi at the hands of a *Mara*; a vengeful, magical spirit.³¹ This portion of the saga highlights how depictions of otherness can be intermingled with depictions of gender as well supernatural beliefs about the world.

Otherness has also been investigated regarding common depictions of Christians against Pagans, whether they were Muslims or followers of the Norse pantheon.³² Jakobsson analysed how depictions of otherness, particular in how Muslims were depicted by Western Christian sources changed as further contact was developed between the two religious' groups during the crusades of the 12th and 13th centuries. However, it has been argued that Nordic sources were dependent on second hand sources³³. Norse saga literature contains the written recollection of 'old stories written down'³⁴ further suggesting that as much as Anglo-Norman sources are gathering places for earlier, oral traditions then Norse sources are similarly inspired.

20th century historiography portrays much of history as the victory of one group of peoples over another.³⁵ However, it has been debated whether the people of Scandinavia would have considered themselves of one ethnicity i.e., Dane, Swede or Norwegian. By including comparisons with others within the written sagas, it is suggested that perceptions of community identity can be gleaned in that others are presented in direct opposition to the people of the authors. Often groups were given labels based on the geographic region they originated from, their attributes or their behaviour. For example, Rus meaning 'Rower,' Varangian meaning 'bodyguard,' and Pirate deriving from *Piratus* in Latin.³⁶ Otherness can be found in how each group labels those it comes across whether it is through geography, physical appearance, or behaviour and the sagas, including the *Heimskringla* contain multiple examples of othering those the king's come across.

Alongside geographical or physical otherness, Medieval sources have also described episodes of supernatural otherness. Norse literature encapsulates a strong fascination with magic and the supernatural.³⁷ Magic in Norse Medieval writing includes witchcraft, incantations, sacrifices, and charms.³⁸ Through the medium of sagas, magic becomes a way for Medieval Norse historians to present and refer to a way of thinking distinctly different to their own.³⁹ Attribution of magical powers to others would be a strong criticism from Christian authors, particularly if

³⁰ Aalto, S 'Categorizing Otherness in the King's Sagas' (2010): 9-10

³¹ Aalto, S 'Categorizing Otherness in the King's Sagas' (2010): 166

³² Jakobsson, S (2016): 214

³³ Jakobsson, S (2016): 213

³⁴ Sturluson, S 'Heimskringla'. Trans Killings B. Douglas (1978, 1996): *Preface*

³⁵ Downham, Clare. "Viking ethnicities: a historiographic overview." *History Compass* 10.1 (2012): 2

³⁶ Downham, C (2012): 4

³⁷ Mitchell, Stephen A (2011): 74

³⁸ Mitchell, Stephen A (2011): 77

³⁹ Mitchell, Stephen A (2011): 92

those peoples were on the face of it Christian. There are many examples of this form of magical criticism spread through the corpus of Nordic sagas.⁴⁰

Otherness, particularly in the form of strange behaviour or supernatural abilities was used by Medieval historiographers to either explain or deride particular people. For example, Saxo Grammaticus a thirteenth century Danish historian who produced the *Gesta Danorum* or Deeds of the Danes⁴¹, used magic as an explanation for the Norse pantheon and how false gods can come to be worshipped as well as a convenient explanation for practices that appear alien.⁴² This use of magic to explain pantheons who would have been anathema to Christianity can also be seen in the *Ynglinga Saga* contained in the *Heimskringla* where Odin is presented as the chief of the city of Asgard found in Asaheim in Asia.⁴³ Changing the divine status of the chief of the Aesir to one of a sorcerous human, who fools his worshipers.

As discussed above otherness has a multiplicity of meanings and depictions in Medieval sagas. This essay argues that the depictions of otherness found within the *Heimskringla* can be effectively compared with western-European sources such as those of William of Newburgh and Ralph of Coggeshall. The three types of otherness introduced earlier; supernatural otherness, other people, and other behaviours can all be found in multiple examples spread throughout the *Heimskringla* as well as within other contemporary Norse works such as the *Gesta Danorum* and within Anglo-Norman sources such as the *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* by William of Newburgh and the *Chronicon Anglicanum* by Ralph of Coggeshall.

The *Ynglinga Saga* is especially filled with examples of otherness, especially the magical and supernatural. The reason for this saturation of 'the other' is that this saga is set in the mythical past establishing the beginning of the Norwegian nation. This means that as it is set in the mists of time it was more appropriate for otherness to be present. The author of *Heimskringla* was Christian and therefore wanted his audience, who would also have been Christian to understand that 'witchcraft in earlier eras, or in distant places was rife.'⁴⁴ For example, in the first chapter of the *Ynglinga Saga* where a geographic description of the world is given it is stated that giants, dwarves, blue men⁴⁵ and many kinds of strange creatures exist in the region of 'Swithiod' or Sweden.⁴⁶ This opening sentence sets the scene after which

⁴⁰ *Ibid* (2011): 86

⁴¹ The Gutenberg Project #1150, 'The Danish History Book I-IX' Released Feb 11th, 2006, last updated Feb 6th, 2013. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1150/1150-h/1150-h.htm> [Accessed 03/01/2022 @ 19:47pm]

⁴² Mitchell, Stephen A (2011): 106

⁴³ 2. The people of Asia. <https://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/heim/02ynglga.htm> [Accessed 03/01/2022 @ 19:56pm]

⁴⁴ Mitchell, Stephen A (2011): 102.

⁴⁵ For discussion of the meaning of 'Blue Men' who may represent Muslims see Magerøy, Hallvard. "Blåmann." *Store Norske Leksikon*, 2007 and Friedman, Yvonne. "10. Christian Hatred of the Other: Theological Rhetoric vs. Political Reality." *Fear and Loathing in the North*. De Gruyter, 2015. 187-202.

⁴⁶ <https://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/heim/02ynglga.htm> [Accessed 04/01/2022 @ 20:23]

characters such as Odin 'a great warrior and very widely travelled'⁴⁷ can be introduced. Odin is presented as a warrior with 'magical and prophetic powers.'⁴⁸ Rather than being presented as a god, he is treated as a mortal who, as described by Saxo Grammaticus in the *Gesta Danorum*, is a 'false god' who has arisen through his supernatural abilities.⁴⁹ An Anglo-Norman example of assigning a particular person prophetic power, to which their followers adhere, or worship is found in William of Newburgh's description of the Old Man of the Mountain found in book four, paragraph twenty-four; 'a certain race of men in the East...enticed by this man, whom they regard in the light of a prophet.'⁵⁰ Christian authors often presented their enemies in a light that helped their audience vilify their behaviour. This was particularly key during the period of both the *Heimskringla* and the *Historia*, when the author's respective nations were at war with a foreign power; Sturlason's Iceland with Norway and William of Newburgh's England with Saladin and the Muslims in the Holy Land.

Odin is ascribed multiple supernatural abilities in the *Heimskringla* especially within the *Ynglinga Saga*. It is stated that in battle he could blind, deafen or panic his enemies, make his enemies weapons as useless as sticks as well as him having the ability to shapeshift.⁵¹ These varied abilities fall into one of three categories, each with their own name within the Medieval Norse world: *Galdrar*, *Seidr* and *fjolkeyngir*.⁵² Similarly, Anglo-Norman sources also describe supernatural abilities however unlike in the *Heimskringla* where magic was an inherent ability of Odin's people, magical abilities such as prophesising were held to be the sole responsibility of evil spirits. William of Newburgh describes two accounts of men in high positions of government being fooled by 'evil spirits' in their attempts to understand the future. The governor of Anjou, Stephen, and Gerbert the pseudo-pope, were both described in book five, chapter six of William of Newburgh's *Historia* as conversing with severed heads to discover their futures.⁵³ William uses both these anecdotes to criticise the foolishness of attempting to divine the future. A parallel can be found in the *Heimskringla* with the description of Mimir's head whom 'Odin kept near him, and it told him news from other worlds.'⁵⁴ Given that the *Historia* was written in the late 12th century⁵⁵, it is interesting to consider whether the story of Mimir may have influenced William of Newburgh's anecdotes.

Otherness is often presented within the *Heimskringla* as a tool for describing the people neighbouring Norway. Freya for example is described as belonging to the

⁴⁷ Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (2011): 6

⁴⁸ Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (2011): 8

⁴⁹ Mitchell, Stephen A (2011): 106

⁵⁰ <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/williamofnewburgh-four.asp#24> [Accessed 04/01/2022 @ 20:48pm]

⁵¹ Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (2011): 10

⁵² Mitchell, Stephen A (2011): 80

⁵³ <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/williamofnewburgh-five.asp#6> [Accessed 04/01/2022 @ 21:37]

⁵⁴ Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (2011): 10.

⁵⁵ <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/staff/haywardp/hist424/seminars/Newburgh.htm> [Accessed 04/01/2022 @ 22:07pm]

people of the Vanir and having taught the Aesir, Odin's people, *Seidr* or black magic, 'as it was custom among her people.'⁵⁶ Further examples are shown in chapter nine where the *Svíar*, the Swedes, and their customs are described.⁵⁷ In chapter eleven one leader of the *Svíar* is the victim of another element of otherness, falling foul of a dwarf who tricks him into disappearing:

"The dwarf stood in the doorway and called to Sveigðir, telling him to go in there if he wanted to meet Óðinn. Sveigðir ran in, and the stone immediately closed behind him, and Sveigðir never came out."⁵⁸

Sturluson gives no further explanation to this episode as it is used to progress his narrative further by introducing Sveigðir's son Vanlandi.⁵⁹ The following chapter, focused on Vanlandi also introduces the neighbouring people of Lapland. However, they are ascribed with attributes of the other as Vanlandi is compelled to want to return to Lapland, his friends claiming 'his enthusiasm must be caused by Lappish magic.'⁶⁰ This suggests that Snorri assumed the Laplanders were magically empowered, due to their remoteness. The gender of those practising magic is also an important aspect of the otherness presented by the supernatural. Out of the sixty-two sorcerers identified in Snorri's work, more than half are women.⁶¹

Other historiographical sources describe the behaviours of their neighbours to present them as inferior to themselves. Saxo Grammaticus in his *Gesta Danorum* describes the German people saying 'the manners of Teutonia [as] unmanly wantonness [with] no slight incentives to debauchery [having] flowed down our country's throat from that sink of a land.'⁶² On the other hand, it has been argued that within Scandinavian myth and saga literature can be found a 'stranger-king' motif; the idea that kings could have an origin foreign in cultural, geographical, or ethnic terms to their kingdoms.⁶³ A motif which applies a positive aspect to the idea of otherness, providing legitimacy to rulers and dynastic founders. Foreign power is often insinuated within the *Heimskringla*, as demonstrated in the saga of St Olaf wherein the following of King Cnut is made up of a sizeable proportion of foreign soldiers.⁶⁴ Within *óláfs saga tryggvasonar*, Snorri Sturluson suggests that jealousy can arise when foreign men 'rise to power and such great fame that they surpass native men.'⁶⁵ This further suggests the author is wary of foreignness and in turn,

⁵⁶ Mitchell, Stephen A (2011): 80

⁵⁷ Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (2011): 13-14

⁵⁸ Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (2011): 16

⁵⁹ Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (2011): 16

⁶⁰ Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (2011): 17

⁶¹ *Ibid* (2011): 191

⁶² <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1150/1150-h/1150-h.htm> [Accessed 04/01/2022 @ 22:45pm, words in brackets included by author.]

⁶³ Dobat, Andres Siegfried. "Viking stranger-kings: the foreign as a source of power in Viking Age Scandinavia, or, why there was a peacock in the Gokstad ship burial?" *Early Medieval Europe* 23.2 (2015): 162

⁶⁴ Dobat, A (2015): 186

⁶⁵ Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (2011): 155

otherness but foreignness can also be a source of prestige for a ruler in so much as it demonstrates access to a 'social sphere beyond the local.'⁶⁶

Otherness within the *Heimskringla* is also presented through the lens of distant places that the king's being studied raided and conquered. For example, descriptions given within the *Ynglinga Saga* present Odin as travelling 'west into Garðaríki (Russia) and then south to Saxland (Germany)'.⁶⁷ Sturluson also introduces the 'Rúmverjar (Romans)' who 'travelled widely around the world and conquered all nations, and many rulers fled their lands because of this aggression'.⁶⁸ However, the Saxons, those who dwelt in Saxland are not described within the lens of otherness being that they belonged to the same Christian denomination and therefore are similar, while at the same time different.⁶⁹ The Norwegians formulated their group identity by establishing cultural and behavioural boundaries between themselves and their neighbours.⁷⁰ This same boundary establishment is seen in Anglo-Norman sources such as William of Newburgh's *Historia* when he describes the former Roman Empire as:

'[that] which formerly extended from the British ocean as far as the confines of Persia, was so wasted by the commotions of tyrants and by civil wars, that it was hardly sufficient for its own defense against foreign nations'⁷¹

Historiography is the study of both how history is and has been written. It has been described as concerning works which were considered to record past events as well as modern, 'scientific history-writing'.⁷² As such, the *Heimskringla*, as a chronicle of the careers of famous Norwegian kings⁷³ can be placed within the genre of historiography, comparable with Anglo-Norman sources. As described in the introduction to this essay saga translates to story, history, or account. In his introduction to the translation of *Íslendinga sögur*, a collection of mostly anonymous sagas and tales from the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Robert Kellogg argues that they 'blur the distinction between saga as event and saga as story'.⁷⁴ This melding of narrative explanation and historical truth is comparative to the techniques employed by western-European sources. Both Snorri Sturluson, the author of the *Heimskringla* and his western-European contemporaries utilised similar methodologies to achieve the aims of their work whether the work is a saga, a chronicle, or a history.

An aspect of Medieval historiography that can be found across any number of sources is that of the preface or prologue. Authors would include for their readership reasoning as to why they are writing their work. William of Newburgh in his

⁶⁶ Dobat, A (2015): 187.

⁶⁷ Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (2011): 8

⁶⁸ Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (2011): 8

⁶⁹ Aalto, S 'Categorizing Otherness in the King's Sagas' (2010): 106

⁷⁰ Aalto, S 'Categorizing Otherness in the King's Sagas' (2010): 107

⁷¹ Chapter 14, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/williamofnewburgh-five.asp#14> [Accessed 05/01/2022 @ 21:30pm]

⁷² Aalto, S 'Jómsvíkinga Saga as a Part of Old Norse Historiography' (2014): 34

⁷³ Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (2011): vii

⁷⁴ Kellogg, Robert. *The Sagas of the Icelanders*. Penguin UK, 2001: xxvi

introductory preface begins by disparaging his predecessor Geoffrey of Monmouth 'a writer in our times has started up and invented the most ridiculous fictions... let this fabler, with his fictions, be instantly rejected by all.'⁷⁵ One reason often given by Medieval sources is that previous editions or the absence of a suitable history was justifiable for them producing their own work. Snorri Sturluson in his prologue does not disparage a predecessor but instead identifies the accuracy of the discourse which is to follow. He does this by stating where he found the information he has used:

'I have heard them told by learned men, and some of their genealogies according to what I have been taught, some of which is found in the records of paternal descent in which kings and other men of high rank have traced their ancestry, and some is written according to old poems or narrative songs which people used to use for their entertainment.'⁷⁶

In Medieval sources the older the eyewitness was the more informed and therefore trustworthy they were. For example, Sturluson in his preface sets out the prestige of Ari the learned 'Ari inn fróði (the Learned), son of Þorgils, son of Gellir, was the first person in this country to write down history, both ancient and recent, in the Norse language.'⁷⁷ The age of an eyewitness was also important to western-European, Anglo-Norman historiographers. William of Newburgh in relating a story of Henry II seeking divine aid against his son's states 'On the following night, in a dream, it was said to a certain venerable old monk of that church.'⁷⁸ The monk is not named but by being described as venerable and old, William is confirming his trustworthiness for his audience much as Snorri does in the *Heimskringla*. Sturluson in his preface further supports the idea that the age of witnesses was important, 'we know of cases where learned men of old have taken such things to be true.'⁷⁹ It did not matter to Snorri whether he believed a saga to be true, just as it did not matter to Ralph of Coggeshall whether the stories of 'Green Children' or 'Mermen' in the *Chronicon Anglicanum* were true. It only matter whether learned, old men believed them to be true.

A second aspect found in historiographical sources is that of invented speech. These speeches and conversations are inserted by the authors of both Scandinavian and Anglo-Norman sources. For example, in chapter thirteen of the saga of Harald Finehair, Harald's saga ins hárfagra, Snorri relates a conversation between King Eiríkr and a farmer Áki.⁸⁰ Similar speeches are presented in Anglo-Norman sources, including in William of Newburgh's History of the English People,⁸¹ the Chronicle of

⁷⁵ <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/williamofnewburgh-one.asp#epistle> [Accessed 06/01/2022 @ 18:57pm]

⁷⁶ Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (2011): 3

⁷⁷ Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (2011): 4

⁷⁸ <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/williamnewburgh-becket1.asp> [Accessed 06/01/2022 @ 20:15pm]

⁷⁹ Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (2011): 3

⁸⁰ Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (2011): 64

⁸¹ <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/williamnewburgh-becket1.asp> [Accessed 06/01/2022 @ 20:47pm]

the Abbey of St Edmund's by Jocelin of Brakelond,⁸² and in the Chronicle of John of Worcester, especially when he relates a speech made by Canute, King of England.⁸³ This technique was used by authors to introduce their opinions, their thoughts on kingship and good behaviour through the prestige of famous persons.

The *Heimskringla* saga, being produced by an Icelandic author when his country and Norway, the subject of his study, were in dispute highlights the idea that while the sagas may be influenced or biased by the authors' individual opinions and views, they are still an important source of historical information.⁸⁴ This argument is further strengthened through comparisons with western-European sources with both mediums utilising identical techniques such as invented speech, introductory prefaces and, most importantly using examples of otherness to instruct their readership and in turn modern scholars about their worldview; what is good, what is bad, and those whose example should be followed. The world of the sagas was an unsettled one, Snorri Sturluson himself had his life ended through assassination.⁸⁵ Therefore, by relating the biographies of famous kings Sturluson is highlighting for his audience the behaviours he deems morally good, the same didactic aim found in Anglo-Norman sources.⁸⁶ According to Jakobsson historiography differs from fiction in three distinct ways; it has an interest in peoples and places, it treats its writing with 'an historical and critical attitude,' and the events covered must be plausible to their audience.⁸⁷ All three of Jakobsson's characteristics can be found within the *Heimskringla*; it provides details on both people and places, particularly those who interact with the people of Norway; Sturluson treats the sagas with a cautious attitude caveating that his information is that which he has 'heard them told by learned men'⁸⁸ and finally, the events covered would have been deemed plausible to his audience through his use of genealogical sources that could have been corroborated if required.

As discussed earlier, the age of those giving eyewitness accounts was important to Medieval audiences, the older the eyewitness the more verifiable their account. However, it was up to the audience to decide whether they believed the story or not.⁸⁹ A further important aspect of Medieval historiography is that the authors, while including fantastical episodes and otherness, had to ensure that the level of otherness did not exceed the level at which the audience would disbelieve its truthfulness.⁹⁰ This sentiment is highlighted by Snorri in his introduction to the *Heimskringla* in relation to his use of skaldic poetry as a source, 'no one would dare to tell him to his face about deeds of his which all who listened, as well as the man

⁸² <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/jocelin.asp> [Accessed 06/01/2022 @ 20:50pm]

⁸³ https://www.bsswebsite.me.uk/History/JohnofWorcester/Chronicle_John2.html [Accessed 06/01/2022 @ 20:57pm]

⁸⁴ Aalto, S 'Jómsvíkinga Saga as a Part of Old Norse Historiography' (2014): 34.

⁸⁵ Smiley, J 'Preface' in Robert Kellogg, *The Sagas of the Icelanders*. Penguin UK, 2001: xiv

⁸⁶ Aalto, S 'Jómsvíkinga Saga as a Part of Old Norse Historiography' (2014): 35

⁸⁷ Aalto, S (2014) 'Jómsvíkinga Saga': 36

⁸⁸ Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (2011): 3

⁸⁹ Aalto, S 'Jómsvíkinga Saga as a Part of Old Norse Historiography' (2014): 40

⁹⁰ Aalto, S 'Jómsvíkinga Saga as a Part of Old Norse Historiography' (2014): 37

himself, knew were falsehoods and fictions. That would be mockery and not praise.⁹¹

In conclusion, this essay has sought to investigate the content within and methodology behind the *Heimskringla*. This essay compared the *Heimskringla* with contemporary Scandinavian and western-European, Anglo-Norman sources to identify the historiographical techniques utilised within the saga that have been used to present aspects of otherness. Otherness was seen to have been applied in three formats throughout the sagas: supernatural, peoples, and behaviours were also utilised often in conjunction with one another. This is especially the case in the way Odin is presented in the *Ynglinga Saga* as a foreign 'stranger-king' who, through his magical abilities is presented as a positive other, linked to the distant past in the foundation of Norway.

Among the sagas, which are based on a strong oral tradition, eyewitnesses are reliable sources of information. This reliance on eyewitness accounts is also a key characteristic of Anglo-Norman historiography such as William of Newburgh, Jocelin Brakelond, Ralph of Coggeshall, and John of Worcester. The *Heimskringla* can tell scholars much about the Medieval Norse period, particularly through how the saga treats the otherness that its subjects encounter be that the Sami of Lapland, the dwarves, giants, and spirits who occupy the wild places of Norway, or the foreign nations of Denmark, England, or Sweden.

There is much scholarship on the treatment of otherness, foreignness and the historiographical nature found in the sagas. Sirpa Aalto among others provide a strong scholarly basis through which to analyse the *Heimskringla* and comparison between Anglo-Norman and Norse sources are an important endeavour for future students of historiography. The sagas should be further studied as both the content and the techniques used by their authors, where these authors are known, can provide multiple insights into the perception of the other in the Medieval mind, the role of history, and the importance of oral tradition in recording that history for future generations to learn from.

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⁹¹ Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (2011): 3-4

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