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Paul Peterson

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
Introduction.....	3
Chapter 1 – Terminology, Collections, Prior Scholarship, and Future Research.....	6
Terminology.....	6
Dictionaries and Collections of Old Norse Nicknames.....	13
Prior Scholarship.....	15
Future Research.....	18
Chapter 2 – Origins, Meanings, and Features of Nicknames.....	19
Skaldic Nicknames.....	19
Nicknames Turned Personal Names.....	23
Inheritable Family Nicknames.....	26
Nicknames Referring to Private Parts.....	29
The British Connection.....	31
Geographic Origin of a Saga.....	35
Chapter 3 – Roles of Nicknames in the Literature.....	35
Medieval Thoughts on Nicknames.....	36
Terminological Patterns in Nickname Narratives.....	38
Narratives Derived from Nicknames.....	41
The Nicknames of Kings.....	43
More Anecdotal Nickname Narratives.....	50
Nickname Explanations in the <i>Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda</i>	54
Conclusion.....	57
Bibliography.....	58
Primary Sources.....	58
Secondary Sources.....	61

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Introduction

One of the richest sources of linguistic and cultural data past and present lies in the field of onomastics, the study of names. This field owes its roots to traditional philology, which sought to explain the connections of language families by historical comparison of texts and attested linguistic data. This investigation is far from complete, and philology has itself branched out into numerous sub-fields, several of which could now be considered fields of their own (such as historical linguistics and material philology). Philology remains particularly strong in its ability to interpret the linguistic data of languages both ancient and modern, as well as to provide a better understanding of literature from which the linguistic data were drawn.¹ I would be remiss to claim that onomastics, a sub-field primarily of linguistics and philology, has not seen its share of attention since its academic inception in the 19th century, but much of the work remains undone. After all, names play an integral part in language itself as a means to identify persons and places and how they are connected to and differentiated from one another. Similarly, names can also be used as evidence of linguistic forms not attested otherwise, all the while enriching and preserving a language's stock of words.

Nicknames, which occur in all cultures and across all time periods, play a vital role in understanding and highlighting identity. They also provide a unique window into slang and popular culture less accessible through personal names alone. Their study encompasses wide-ranging interdisciplinary scholarship, including onomastics (name studies), historical linguistics, anthropology, history, and narratology. Old Norse nicknames themselves represent diverse forms of cultural expression from the lower levels of discourse, history, religion, and popular entertainment. They have left remnants across Northern Europe in place names, runic inscriptions, and the names of individuals in the saga corpus.

One simply cannot read a saga without encountering dozens of nicknames throughout the text, and recurring nicknames from saga to saga are common and thus

¹ By philology, I do not mean material philology or new philology specifically, rather the traditional discipline which seeks to use all available evidence to understand literature of a given period. Senses of the word vary from country to country and university to university, but the American definition tends to follow more closely that of the Germans and Dutch, but not necessarily that of the Nordic countries (which, in general, tend to connect it more exclusively to manuscript studies and material philology).

provide a hitherto unexplored tool for studying saga transmission and intertextuality in Old Icelandic literature – topics which have received only mild attention in saga scholarship of the last century. The largest word bank of medieval Scandinavian nicknames lies in the realm of medieval Icelandic literature, and the overall approach of my thesis will be to describe the use of nicknames across the Icelandic literary corpus in light of their Germanic origins, etymology, and role in the literature and its production. I will investigate the uses of nicknames in the family sagas within a cultural, anthropological, and narratological framework. I will seek to answer the questions: What role do nicknames play in expressing cultural sensitivities and ambiguities in medieval Icelandic and Scandinavian society? How did they develop and become so common especially during the medieval period? What role do they play in the literature and what do they tell about the culture?

The function of nicknames in the Middle Ages is peculiar, when kings could be called Charles the Fat (Carolus Pinguis, 839-888 A.D.), Charles the Bald (Carolus Caluus, 823-877 A.D.), Louis the Stammerer (Ludovicus Balbus, Louis le Bègue, 846-879), Pepin the Short (Pepinus Brevis, died 768), Ivailo Bardokva ‘radish, lettuce’ or Lakhanas ‘cabbage’ (Bulgarian, died 1280), and the like, and when members of a society (as is the case in medieval Iceland) would kill for a carelessly dropped word if it was supposed to be detrimental to one's honor, yet tolerated the most demeaning nicknames. The nicknames of the Scandinavian royal houses (ancient and contemporary) from Old Icelandic and, to a lesser degree, Old Norwegian literature will figure prominently in this investigation, because of the high frequency of nicknames among the royals. It is primarily for this reason that I began developing this project investigating nicknames, and I have since gathered a large body of literature on onomastics and nicknames themselves.

A diachronic and frequently also an etymological analysis of Old Norse nicknames is necessary because they have never been compared with nicknames found in other Old Germanic languages, for which a fairly large pool exists in runic inscriptions, Gothic (naturally, outside of Wulfila's translation of the Bible), Old/Middle High German, and Old/Middle English. Of particular interest for the topic of runic bynames, see Brylla (1993), Jacobsson (2010), and Peterson's articles and dictionaries (2002, 2002, 2004, and 2007, respectively). A collection of names in

Vandalic and East Gothic is provided by two works by Wrede (1886 and 1891, respectively). On the topic of Middle High German nicknames, see Socin's *Mittelhochdeutsches Namenbuch* (1903), and particularly chapter 19 which discusses *Übernamen* (407-462), and especially the *Anmerkungen* (457-462), which deal briefly with the history of nicknames in Old Germanic societies. For a fantastic collection of Old English bynames, see Tengvik (1938), and for two collections of Middle English nicknames, see Seltén (1969 and 1975, respectively). The spread of Norse culture across Europe left its traces in areas of settlement, particular in the form of place names but also personal names. Several scholarly works in this regard are worth noting: O. Rygh's collection of Old Norse names in Norwegian place names (1901), des Gautries' collection of Norse names in Normandy (1954), and, perhaps most appropriate to this topic, the article by Halvorsen (1975) on place names used as bynames in medieval Norway and Iceland. Several works on personal names in the British Isles have, almost as an unintended result, large collections of bynames, including: Björkman's collection of Norse names in England (1910), Fellows-Jensen's book (1968) analyzing the stock of personal names in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire (the bulk of which derive ultimately from bynames, which in large part are nicknames), where a large number of these names (of all classes) are reconstructed from place-names, and lastly, another article by Fellows-Jensen (1995) on the personal and place name evidence left by the Vikings in England is worthy of mention.

The sheer number and frequency of Old Norse nicknames by comparison to other medieval cultures and even other Old Germanic societies is, however, uniquely rich. Janzén (1947, 242) notes of the high volume of Old Norse bynames, "Binamnen kom i Norden i bruk i en omfattning som är ojämförligt större än i andra delar av den germanska världen."² The primary focus of this investigation will thus be limited to nicknames in the Icelandic literary corpus, but a diachronic analysis of earlier attestations of nicknames in other old Germanic languages and runic inscriptions from Scandinavia is necessary in further research to describe the developments of nicknames prior to the arrival of settlers in Iceland in the late 9th century. It should also be admitted that I will only make limited references in this study to the smaller body of nicknames

² "Bynames came into use in the Nordic world to an extent which is incomparably larger than in other parts of the Germanic world." This translation and all others are mine, unless specifically noted.

that occur in runic inscriptions, Old Swedish, and Old Danish if for no other reason than a relative lack of richness and variety in comparison to large body of nicknames in medieval West Norse sources. From there, a literary and linguistic analysis of nicknames will be more fruitful in texts from the 13th century onward concerning the families of Icelanders, Norwegians, Swedes, Danes, and others who make their way into the literature. To date there has been no comprehensive analysis of nickname origins and development or research into their prominent appearances in the literature. My overall focus in this thesis is therefore on the development of nicknames in the sagas in order to highlight as many issues relevant to onomastics, narratology, etymology, and, more generally, medieval Nordic society and culture.

Regarding the organization of this investigation, I have divided the content into roughly three chapters with several subchapters in each, followed by a short conclusion. Chapter 1 discusses the terminology for describing nicknames in the scholarly tradition, the scholarly material from which my analysis is based, as well as a brief proposal for further research on nicknames. Chapter 2 uses primarily an anthropological or cultural approach around several miscellaneous topics in order to highlight some of the many features encountered in the study of nicknames. Chapter 3 approaches the literary side of nicknames, discussing the many uses of nicknames in the composition of sagas and the roles they can play in the literature. The conclusion is brief and only intended to summarize the main themes covered in this investigation.

Chapter 1 – Nicknames: Terminology, Collections, and Prior Scholarship

Terminology

The terminology used to describe nicknames varies among the Scandinavian languages (including Icelandic), German, and English. Particularly confusing in English is where the all inclusive term “nickname” is often used by both specialists and non-specialists alike to describe hypocoristic pet names which, to my mind, do not accurately represent nicknames but instead are one type of byname (ex. Johnny, Bob, Teddy, etc.). The same issue of loose terminology occurs practically everywhere across linguistic boundaries, in part due to conflation of the separate traditions of giving nicknames and giving pet

names or bynames. Hence the well-known and common Scandinavian expression (here in Swedish): *kärt barn har många namn* ‘a dear child has many names’. Yet the medieval evidence, as best as we can tell, made a stronger distinction between nicknames and hypocorisms (the latter being far less represented in medieval Scandinavia, though perhaps more common in other Old Germanic societies). One of these traditions consisted of the giving a shortened byname, that is truncated, familiar pet forms (such as Óli for Óláfr and Tósti for Þorsteinn), many of which through frequent use became personal names proper, and the other of giving a secondary name or *agnomen* to supplement a given personal name as an addition to it. It is the latter that I intend to give a full description throughout this work.

Although using the term *agnomen* (pl. *agnomina*) is equally problematic as using the term nickname, in part because the historical developments of naming traditions and the uses of *agnomina* in the Roman world, it corresponds best to the meaning of nickname as I will use it throughout this study. Originally the Latin term *cognomen* (not the modern English borrowing which does indeed mean more generally “nickname”) would have been the most appropriate to describe nicknames, for these were originally Roman nicknames, but as these became inherited as enhancements to clan names by identifying sub-families within these clans, the usage of this term for nicknames became no longer apt. Thus, the ever-descriptive Romans developed the term *agnomen* for a nickname which describes an individual after the term *cognomen* could no longer be accurately applied. Several Roman writers themselves described the intricate naming customs of Roman society, among them Pseudo-Probus who wrote in his 4th century *Instituta artium* (in the section about nouns entitled *de nomine*) about the full name of the Punic War hero Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus:

propria hominum nomina in quattuor species dividuntur, praenomen nomen cognomen agnomen: praenomen, ut puta Publius, nomen Cornelius, cognomen Scipio, agnomen Africanus.³

[People’s personal names are divided into four types: *praenomen*, *nomen*, *cognomen*, *agnomen*; *praenomen*, for example, Publius, *nomen* Cornelius, *cognomen* Scipio, *agnomen* Africanus.]

³ In *Grammatici latini*, Vol. IV (Keil 1864, 119, 31-33).

In this case, the name of this man is divided into four categories: the first, Publius, being the only equivalent of a given name; the second, Cornelius, is a clan name; the third, Scipio, was originally a nickname meaning ‘staff, scepter’ (as a sign of authority), but lost its nickname quality when it became inherited as a means to identify a sub-branch within the larger Cornelius clan; the last, Africanus, is the only equivalent of a nickname.

More pertinent to the discussion at hand, the *agnomen*, which is truly the closest technical term for a descriptive nickname, is defined by the 4th century African-Roman writer Marius Victorinus in his commentary *Explanationum in rhetoricam* on Cicero’s *De inventione*:

Iam agnomen extrinsecus venit, et venit tribus modis, aut ex animo aut ex corpore aut ex fortuna: ex animo, sicut Superbus et Pius, ex corpore, sicut Crassus et Pulcher, ex fortuna, sicut Africanus et Creticus.⁴

[The *agnomen* comes from without, and comes in three ways, either from character or from the body or from circumstance: from character, so Superbus (‘the arrogant’) and Pius (‘the loyal’), from the body, so Crassus (‘the fat’) and Pulcher (‘the beautiful’), from achievements, so Africanus (‘the victorious in Africa’) and Creticus (‘the victorious on Crete’).]

Considering that the bulk of Old Norse nicknames fit into these three defined categories of the Roman *agnomina*, this term may be used accurately to describe these types of nicknames. To avoid further confusion, however, I will stick with the less well-defined term “nickname” to describe what could also be appropriately called *agnomina*. Note, however, that the Roman *agnomina* with a geographic title (Africanus and Creticus), which appear at first glance to be topographical or ethnic, are in fact nothing of the sort. Such geographic *agnomina* are given in recognition of an individual’s accomplishments in warfare against these regions, not their geographic origin or area of inhabitation (which, by contrast, are rather common types in Old Norse).

Returning to the North, in numerous cases this attached name, most often in the form of a weak adjective, could also function as a replacement for the given name (but could not actually be the personal name), showing that these nicknames were really just one of several components of an individual’s given name (not unlike the situation in

⁴ In *Rhetores latini minores* (Halm 1863, 215, ll. 2-5).

Rome, but certainly less sophisticated in the North). One must also bear in mind that proper surnames in the medieval period were extremely rare in the North, and nicknames were often the closest equivalent in that they were often permanently attached to and indistinguishable from a personal name. In an attempt to avoid confusion among the numerous onomastic terms mentioned in several languages and historical traditions, I will use primarily the Icelandic terminology and corresponding English terms (where available) which best reflect these nuances as they come up in the discussion.

The vocabulary that surrounds the classification of nicknames is enormous and varies from language to language. Therefore, defining clear-cut examples within such classifications is extremely difficult. The English word *nickname* itself implies a connection with a secondary name, or more precisely, a name which is added to an individual's personal name. The term developed from ME *ekename*, whose first component *eke-* 'increase' (< OE *ēaca* 'increase') developed into *nickname* (< an *ekename*) by metanalysis. OE *ēaca* developed from the root which is found in the Germanic verb **aukanan* 'increase, augment', with cognates across Germanic and Indo-European, for example ON *auka* 'to increase', Lat. *augere* 'to enlarge, increase', and Lith. *áugu, áugti* 'to grow' (Orel 2003, 29).

The terminology used in Old Icelandic is, as befits a study of primarily Old Icelandic literature, is still the best for the purposes of this study, so when possible I will use these terms. Several terms are used, almost interchangeably, for nicknames. The most common term for nickname in Old Norse is *viðrnefni* (Mod. Icel. *viðurnefni* ~ *viðurnafn*, Swed. *tillnamn* [less commonly *vedernamn*]), which signifies in the most obvious manner an "added name." Lindquist (1947, 14) proposed using the archaic, but perhaps more appropriate technical Swedish term *vedernamn* for nicknames which are used: "...antingen för att skilja honom från andra personer med samma namn eller för att hedra eller nedsätta honom;"⁵ his attempt to restore this word even in academic literature has been almost entirely unsuccessful. Also in Swedish and Scandinavian scholarship there are the frequently used terms *tillnamn* 'additional name' (Dan./Norw. *tilnavn* [occasionally NNorw. *tilnamn*]), which is the most suitable to describe

⁵ "...either to distinguish him from other people with the same name or to praise or insult him."

nicknames in these languages, and the closest corresponding term to match up with *viðrnefni*. *Binamn* ‘secondary name’ is in several regards is more problematic, not least because it includes titles, occupational and otherwise, and secondary names of geographical origin. There is additionally the frequently used Old Norse nickname term *kennigarnafn*, meaning something like “an alternate name by which an individual is known” (cf. the discussion of the nickname of Haraldr hárfagri [‘Fair Hair’] below). These terms, *viðrnefni* and *kennigarnafn*, are by their nature neutral.

The cognate of *nickname* in Old Icelandic called *auknefni* ‘increased name, nickname’ (cf. Swed. *öknamn*, Dan. *øgenavn*, and North Ger. *Ökelname*, all with the same meaning) can either be neutral or, in many cases, condescending. The term in Icelandic (and the Scandinavian languages) seems to have developed from its simple meaning of an “increased, additional name” into having a subtly negative connotation, if only as a result of the high frequency of abusive *auknefni* (cf. the discussion below). As a near parallel term to *auknefni*, there is *aukanafn* with a similar, but not identical meaning ‘extra title, byname’ (cf. also the verbal form *auka nafn* ‘to increase a name, add a title’). The terms *auknefni* and *aukanafn* are not synonymous, but the two are clearly related and occur already in the 13th century. It is possible that *aukanafn* was coined as means to differentiate bynames that are titles from those which are nickname, but there is little evidence to advance this notion.

Auknefni, perhaps by their very nature as nicknames, are so frequently negative that Cleasby/Vigfusson (1874, 34) mention the term as having two separate senses of the meaning ‘eke-name, nickname’: first, a defamatory name, punishable by lesser outlawry; second, in a less strong sense (that is, as a regular nickname). Dividing the meaning into two senses is misleading, however, because the basis for a negative connotation is purely contextual. Even so, this opinion is not entirely unfounded considering that a large percentage of *auknefni* are indeed derogatory. There is in fact a stipulation in the large section covering battle and homicide called *vígslóði* (‘battle slot’) in *Grágás* (as found in *Staðarhólsbók*, AM 334 fol., from ~1260-1281) against giving *auknefni* if they are intended as derogatory:

Ef maðr gefr manne nafn annat en hann eigi. oc varðar þat fiör Baugs Garð ef hiN vill reiðaz við. sva er oc ef maðr reiðir avknefni til haðungar honom oc varðar þat fiör baugs Garð oc scal þat hvartuegia søkia við xii. quið.⁶

[If someone gives a person a different name than the one he already has, it is punishable by lesser outlawry (three years exile) if the other one is angered by it. As such it is also the case if someone spreads around a nickname to degrade him, it is punishable by lesser outlawry, and it shall in both cases be decided by the verdict of twelve men.]

This stipulation reflects the social power of “calling people names” (precisely as the modern expression still maintains) and using nicknames as terms of abuse, and it is little shock that such a harsh penalty could be awarded when honor and reputation were on the line.

Not particularly different in meaning and use, but used only in the modern period, is the term *uppnefni* meaning ‘a dubbed name, nickname’ (cf. also *nefna upp* ‘to rename’). This term is, however, more commonly applied to nicknames given in teasing than the other nickname terms. Guðrún Kvaran mentions this distinction in her foreword to Bragi Jóseppsson’s book (2004) on modern Icelandic nicknames in Stykkishólmur:

Með orðinu *viðurnafni* er átt við viðbót við eiginlegt nafn karls eða konu. Annað heiti á því sama er *auknefni*. Oft getur verið skammt á milli *viðurnefnis* og *uppnefnis*. *Uppnefni* eru þó oftar meira niðrandi en *viðurnefnin* og gefin af stríðni eða vegna einhvers atviks, spaugilegs eða neyðarlegs.⁷

[With the word *viðurnafn* it is meant an addition to the personal name of a man or woman. Another name for the same thing is *auknefni*. Often there can be little difference between a *viðurnefni* and an *uppnefni*. *Uppnefni* are, however, more often more derogatory than the *viðurnefni* and given in teasing or because of some event, funny or embarrassing.]

Even with the linguistic purism for which Icelandic is famous, it is not possible to say without a doubt that the modern distinctions, themselves loosely defined, can be perfectly applied to the more fluid situation of terminological distinctions in Old Icelandic. These guidelines, however, are ones which can be found in the terminological distinctions used by the medieval sources themselves (except *uppnefni*, which does not appear in Old Icelandic). While it is certainly a huge challenge to apply definitive

⁶ Diplomatic text from *Grágás eftir det Arnamagnæanske Haandskrift Nr. 334 fol., Staðarhólsbók* (Vilhjálmur Finsen 1879, 391-392).

⁷ From the introduction to *Uppnefni og önnur auknefni* (Bragi Jóseppsson 2004, 7).

terminology to the study of nicknames, the most appropriate terms for describing several of the main types of nicknames are indeed those found in Old Norse sources themselves.

The number of nicknames in the Old Icelandic corpus is enormous, and it is for this reason that I have chosen to neglect a proper study of pet names and hypocoristic forms, as well as titles. In Icelandic the terms for a hypocoristic name are *gælunafn* ‘pet name’, corresponding to Dan. *kælenavn* ‘pet name’ and Norw. *kjælenavn*, and *stuttnefni* ‘short name’; both Icelandic terms correspond in meaning to Swed. *smeknamn* ‘pet name, sobriquet’ as well as Germ. *Kosename* ‘pet name’. I will instead refer the reader to those studies made in hypocoristic and short Icelandic names by Stark (1868), Finnur Jónsson (1920), Guðmundur Finnbogason (1926), Hannes J. Magnússon (1956), Hale (1981), Villarsen Meldgaard (1983), Höskuldur Þráinsson (1997-1998), Aðalheiður Þorsteinsdóttir (1998), Helgi Skúli Kjartansson (2000), Bragi Jósefsson (2004), and Willson (2008). I will neglect the study of bynames which represent medieval family names and occupational bynames (that is, titles) such as *konungr*, *jarl*, *skáld*, *smiðr*, and the like in so much as they do not concern nicknames directly, unless there is some distinct reason to discuss occupation bynames. If, however, there is an additional epithet attached to such bynames (for example, Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld ‘troublesome poet’), I will treat them as nicknames. Likewise, bynames which merely reflect geographical origin will not be treated as nicknames unless they suggest that this component of a name contained an epithet as more precise identification of an individual.

I will defer the topic of titles and family names to Birger Sundqvist’s dissertation (1957) on Swedish bynames of German and Dutch origin, the articles in *Binamn och släktnamn (NORNA-rapporter 8)*, Thorsten Andersson, ed. 1975), a study by Svavar Sigmundsson (2004) on Icelandic middle and family names, and a chapter on the development of personal names in late medieval Scandinavia by Wiktorsson (2005, 1171-1187, covering family names in subsection 2.9 [1177-79]). Countless literature on surnames exists and collections of various European surnames are many, but for the same reason noted above for titles, they will be left out of this study. These topics would be of primary interest to a specialist in Northern European surnames and family names, since this material deals with the late medieval/early modern period, when bynames began to become permanently attached to individual members of a particular family.

Dictionaries and Collections of Old Norse Nicknames

Dictionaries and collections of medieval personal names and bynames from every Scandinavian country exist. The standard reference work for medieval Icelandic and Norwegian names is still E.H. Lind's *Norsk-isländska dopnamn ock fingerade namn från medeltiden, samlade och utgivna med förklaringar*. (1905-1915, supplement 1931). Medieval Swedish names have two standard reference works: *Svenska personnamn från medeltiden* (M. Lundgren, E.H. Lind, and Erik Brate 1892-1934) and *Sveriges medeltida personnamn* (Wiktorsson 1967-2006). The latter work is built upon the former, but is to date only complete in 15 volumes up to *Iogærdh*. To its credit this work includes, in addition to personal names, bynames, but a major drawback is that these are not organized separately and appear alongside personal names in alphabetical order (making them difficult to track down). Medieval names from Denmark and the modern provinces of Skåne, Blekinge, and Halland (not included in *Sveriges medeltida personnamn*) are found in the comprehensive two volume *Danmarks gamle personnavne* (Knudsen, Kristensen, and Hornby 1936-1964). Volume I contains personal names (*fornavne*), and Volume II contains a comprehensive collection of nicknames, titles, bynames, and surnames (*tilnavne*). Lena Peterson has contributed to the field immensely in her two dictionaries of names, one on Proto-Norse and early Runic names entitled *Lexikon över urnordiska personnamn* (2004, also available online as a PDF), and another in Viking Age and medieval Nordic runic names called *Nordiskt runnamnslexikon* (5th ed. 2007). The latter work is derived from the searchable database *Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, and it does include bynames and nicknames, although these are few (72 certain bynames in total, cf. Stefan Jacobsson's NORNA conference preprint, 2010). All of these works are instrumental today in Nordic onomastic research.

Bynames, including official titles, nicknames, patronymics, and matronymics, also have their fair share of reference works. The standard comprehensive work on Icelandic and Norwegian bynames is E.H. Lind's dictionary *Norsk-isländska personbinamn från medeltiden* (1920-21). One notable problem with Lind's dictionary is its age, because many of the textual editions he used are either outdated or unreliable. Despite this, his collection is the finest available. Lind's dictionary is remarkably user-friendly for those who can read Swedish (and naturally, also Old Norse), and most of the bynames are provided with a gloss of likely or possible meanings, as well as a

literary citation of the individuals bearing them. Old Norse scholarship could benefit greatly from a second edition of his dictionary, ideally expanded and enlarged, with updated etymologies and literary references, and perhaps also in English.

Lind's dictionary, however, was not without predecessors. A 19th century collection of West Norse bynames was published by Karl Rygh entitled *Norske og islandske tilnavne fra oldtiden og middelalderen* (1871). Later, Finnur Jónsson produced a long list (221 pages) of bynames, based mainly on Rygh's collection, entitled *Tilnavne i den islandske oldlitteratur* (1907, reprinted in 1908). Finnur's list is organized according to the following invented classes (with frequent overlap of the same nicknames throughout):

Invented Classes of Nicknames and Bynames

<p>Første afdeling A. herkomst og slægtskab, B. alder og aldersforhold, C. tilnavne, der beror på hjemstavn eller territorial oprindelse (First section A. descent and kinship, B. age and relationship to age, C. nicknames which depend on home or territorial origin)</p>
<p>Anden afdeling tilnavne, der står i forbindelse med legemet og dets enkelte dele, samt med legemlige egenskaber (Second section nicknames which stand in connection to the body and its individual parts, as well as bodily features)</p>
<p>Tredje afdeling tilnavne hættede fra rustning, klædedragt og prydelser (Third section nicknames pulled from armor, clothing, and adornments)</p>
<p>Fjerde afdeling tilnavne, der står i forbindelse med åndelige egenskaber, kundskaber, tro og lign. (Fourth section nicknames which stand in connection to spiritual qualities, knowledge, belief, and the like)</p>
<p>Femte afdeling tilnavne, knyttede til social stilling, virksomhed, enkelte begivenheder og privatlivet (Fifth section nicknames connected to social position, occupation, individual events, and private life)</p>
<p>Sjette afdeling almindelig rosende tilnavne (Sixth section common laudatory nicknames)</p>
<p>Syvende afdeling almindelig nedsættende tilnavne (Seventh section common derogatory nicknames)</p>
<p>Ottende afdeling mytologiske tilnavne; kælenavne, kortnavne og lign. (Eighth section mythological nicknames; pet names, short names and the like)</p>
<p>Niende afdeling tilnavne som er hættede fra naturens rige (Ninth section nicknames which are pulled from the realm of nature)</p>
<p>Tiende afdeling spredte tilnavne, som ikke eller tvivlsomt kan henføres til nogen af de 9 første afdelinger, eller sådanne, som er vanskelig forståelige (Tenth section various nicknames which cannot or can only doubtfully be put into any of the first 9 divisions, or such nicknames which are difficult to interpret)</p>

His list includes a brief note explaining the purpose of his list, and he also provided an alphabetical index. His list is difficult to navigate and not very user-friendly, and the invented classes do not actually seem to serve a great function other than providing somewhat arbitrary classifications for the massive bulk of nickname data.

Bernhard Kahle (1910) produced a sixty-page supplement (in German) to Finnur's list (1907), also with an alphabetical index. Finnur also produced a short byname supplement (1926, 226-244), based on his earlier work (1907), to a list he compiled of Viking Age names from historical figures before 900 A.D. For Old Swedish bynames, there is Hellquist's dictionary (1912) of Old Swedish *tillnamn* 'secondary names', although this work has in part been subsumed by the Swedish dictionary *Sveriges medeltida personnamn* (Wiktorsson 1967-2006). A small collection of Old Norse (primarily Swedish) bynames of Slavic-Baltic origin are presented in Axnäs (1937). Lennart Ryman's conference preprint from NORNA's 40th symposium, titled *Nordiska binamnsordböcker och binamnsamlingar – i går och i morgon*, was instrumental in compiling this summary (2010).

Prior Scholarship

The standard handbook on personal names, including bynames, in ancient and medieval Scandinavia is Assar Janzén's edited volume *Personnavne* (1947). The handbook consists of five chapters by three authors (four chapters in Swedish, one in Danish). The first chapter is a short overview of Proto-Norse personal names found in runic inscriptions and foreign sources by Ivar Lindquist. The second chapter is a comprehensive summary of Old West Norse personal names by Janzén, one which makes up the largest section of the book. Of highest importance in this discussion is the sub-chapter on personal names which arose out of original bynames (Janzén 1947, 49-57). The third chapter by Rikard Hornby is a brief overview of personal names in medieval Denmark. Unfortunately, nicknames are not mentioned at all in this chapter. The fourth chapter by Janzén briefly handles Old Swedish personal names. The final chapter by Sven Ekbo (1947, 269-284), most relevant to this study, covers Old Norse personal bynames during the Viking Age and early Middle Ages.

Ekbo's chapter in *Personnavne* (1947, 269-284) on Old Norse bynames is worth summarizing at this point. Ekbo (1947, 269) immediately argues that it is difficult to

differentiate between personal names and bynames, but that it is indeed still possible to define several attributes: “Personbinamnet skall för det första ej vara personens egentliga namn (dopnamn).”⁸ After providing a few examples of the difficulties encountered when trying to determine whether a name is a personal name or a nickname, such as the names of servants like Karkr (who killed Hákon jarl), he notes (1947, 270-71) another prominent feature of nicknames: “Redan tidigt möter man exempel på en tendens att låta binamnen gå i arv.”⁹ One of the examples he provides shows this early tendency, which much later developed into the tradition of family names, is that of the famous skald Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld (‘troublesome poet’) Óttarsson, whose son had the same byname, showing one of the many difficulties encountered when trying to distinguish between bynames, personal names, and even family names (more accurately for this time period, inheritable names). Ekbo (1947, 271-78) lays out the formal types of bynames in the following manner:

Types of Bynames

1. Adjectives, with a strong or weak inflection (ex. Ari inn fróði ‘the learned’)
2. Substantives: common substantives, and substantives produced specifically to function as bynames, usually with the suffix <i>-i</i> (for example <i>skeggi</i> ‘beard’ and <i>skapti</i> ‘shaft, handle’)
3. Short names (hypocorisms) built from personal names (ex. Þórdís todda and Álfr elfsi)
4. Prefixed substantives (ex. Mána-Ljótr ‘Moon-Ljótr’ and Hafr-Björn ‘Billy goat-Björn’)
5. Various other compounds (ex. ɔngt í brjósti ‘narrow in the chest [= “the asthmatic”])
6. Geographic bynames (ex. Arnbjörn austmaðr ‘the Norwegian’ and Björn brezki ‘the British’)

Certainly within such broad categories, there remains a large amount of gray area, and many bynames are resistant to simple classification.

The final section of Ekbo’s chapter (1947, 279-284) covers the actual motivational process by which bynames are given:

⁸ “The byname of a person first of all should not be the person’s proper name (birth name).”

⁹ “Already at an early time one finds examples of a tendency for bynames to be handed down.”

Motivational Processes behind Giving Bynames

1. Bynames of relationship ¹⁰
2. Bynames derived from physical characteristics of the individual
3. Bynames referring to clothes and appearance
4. Bynames derived from internal characteristics (that is, psychological or mental)
5. Bynames derived from occupation, activities, or social status
6. Bynames which bear either praising or condescending characteristics

Ekbo (1947, 282-84) then summarizes the process by which bynames become either personal names or family names in Norse society, noting that (283): “I det forntida Norden var det nämligen vanligt, att barn uppkallades efter (döda) förfäder (ofta far- eller morföräldrarna) eller avlägsnare släktingar. Om någon nu uppkallades med sin döde farfaderns förnamn, så fick han ofta övertaga också dennes binamn.”¹¹ This is particularly one of the more significant processes which led to the formation of family names in Scandinavia, and Ekbo finishes his article by briefly commenting on the high frequency of family names from the 14th century onward derived from occupations, especially those in areas of German settlement. Thus, the modern surname practice of giving occupational family names in Scandinavia developed in large part from German influence.

Among a slew of articles about nicknames collectively and individually, one in particular is worthy of mention which bears more direct relevance to the topic of Old Norse nicknames. Whaley’s article (1993) directly addresses the primary topic of this investigation: Old Norse nickname narratives. Her twenty-one page article is very well-written and dense with examples and descriptions. The article is organized into three sections, beginning with a thorough introduction describing nickname types and features (similar to the summary provided by Ekbo 1947, and a conflation of the nickname types provided by Finnur Jónsson 1907). This is followed by a section on nickname narratives divided into four sections covering: nicknames used without direct

¹⁰ Examples of variation within this type are: Ormr konungsbróðir ‘brother of the king’, Gunnhildr konungamóðir ‘mother of kings’, and Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri ‘foster-son of Aðalsteinn’. Among this type is the large quantity of patronymic and matronymic names, which ought not to be counted among particularly meaningful bynames, with only a few exceptions (ex. Völu-Steinn ‘Steinn, the son of a *völva* [‘prophetess’]).

¹¹ “In the ancient Norse world it was namely common that a child was named after (dead) ancestors (often paternal or maternal grandparents) or distant relatives. If someone is now called by his dead paternal grandfather’s given name, as such he often could inherit his byname.”

comment, anecdotes of nickname origins, character-describing nickname narratives, and derogatory nicknames in action. Lastly, she finishes the article with a short conclusion about the high value of nicknames in the study of saga literature. Particularly rich and valuable is the section on nickname narratives, where she elucidates a vast range of uses of nicknames in saga narratives with varying ends, from the simple anecdotal narratives to more dynamic examples of word play and insults with nicknames in mind. Whaley's article is truly exceptional, and it must be admitted that several of her examples of nickname features and narratives which I have included in my study have been drawn from it.

Future Research

Further research on this topic ought to include several neglected areas of study beyond the scope of this investigation. An analysis of the frequency of nickname types following primarily those of Finnur Jónsson (1907) would be useful to show the quantities of particular types of nicknames in the Old Norse corpus. This could be done within only one text, particularly fruitful if done with the material in *Landnámabók*, or within one of the several genres of Old Norse literature, from which a comparison could be drawn between individual texts or individual genres. Furthermore, a systematized catalogue of nicknames would be useful for scholars in the field, particularly translators who are at a loss for suitable meanings of many nicknames.¹² This work would eventually result in a nickname dictionary that could stand on equal (or higher) footing than that of Lind (1920-21). The envisioning of such a dictionary should not stop merely at giving glosses and citations of the nicknames in the literary corpus, since Lind already managed this with great success; it should, where available and necessary, provide etymological references and seek to reconnect especially archaic and rare words to other (Old) Germanic languages and Indo-European when possible. After all, the Norse settlers of Iceland who brought with their language did not arise out of nowhere. In any case, several avenues of further research are available and would prove useful to the Old Norse scholarly community.

¹² In my opinion, an ideal translation from Old Norse-Icelandic does not translate nicknames and instead provides a gloss upon first encounter, because nicknames are, like proper names, untranslatable.

Chapter 2 – Origins, Meanings, and Features of Nicknames

The occurrences of nicknames in saga literature are numerous, and their features are equally manifold. Describing some of these nickname features will show that the multitude of nicknames in the corpus can be used for detailed investigation of many of the critical issues in the literature. It is of particular interest in this chapter to describe some of the roles nicknames played in society and in the cultural expressions of medieval Norsemen. In this chapter, I will discuss a grab bag of the various issues and features that one inevitably encounters in the study of Old Norse nicknames, including: how nicknames are used in skaldic poetry, the process by which nicknames become personal names, the process by which nicknames become personal names, inheritable nicknames, sexual nicknames, the connections several Old Norse nicknames have with the British Isles, and, lastly, the geographic origin of a saga.

Skaldic Nicknames

Nicknames could be used in place of a given name in skaldic poetry, here functioning similarly to *heiti*. One such example is in the celebratory verse in chapter 59 of *Egils saga* about killing the son of King Eiríkr blóðøx (‘blood-axe’), in which the king is referred to simply as *blóðøxar* (gen. sg. with two words depending on it):

Bǫrðumsk vér, ne virðak,
 vígleiptr sonar, heiptir
 Blóðøxar, rauð ek blóði
 bǫðmildir, ok Gunnhildar.
 Þar fellu nú þollar
 þrettán lagar mána,
 stendr af styrjarskyndi
 starf, á einum karfa.¹³

[We fought and I did not mind the wrath of blóðøx; I, warlike, made my sword red with the blood of the son of blóðøx and Gunnhildr. There thirteen men were killed on one ship. Deeds are done by the warrior.]¹⁴

¹³ Normalized text from Bjarni Einarsson’s edition of *Egils saga* (2003, 59).

¹⁴ This translation, following an interpretation of the stanza in prose word order, is provided in Bjarni’s edition of *Egils saga* (2003, 98).

The reason for Eiríkr blóðøx's nickname is explained in chapter 5 of *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum* as coming about as a result of committing fratricide and following his wife's counsel:

Gunnhildr kona hans var allra kvenna fegrst, lítil kona sýnum en mikil rjóðum. Hón gørðisk svá illrjóðug, en hann svá áhlyðinn til grimmleiks ok til allskyns áþjábanar við lýðinn, at þungt var at bera. Hann réð Óláf digrbein, bróður sinn, ok Björn ok fleiri bræðr sína. Því var hann kallaðr blóðøx, at maðrinn var ofstopamaðr ok greypr, ok allra mest af rjóðum hennar.¹⁵

[Gunnhildr, his wife, was of all women the most beautiful; a woman small of stature yet great of counsel. She became so wicked in her counsel, and he so easily led to acts cruel and oppressive to the people, that it was hard to bear. He had killed his brother Óláfr digrbeinn ('thick-legged') and Björn and others of his brothers. Thus he was called blóðøx, because he was a cruel and ruthless man, and mostly as a result of her counsel.]¹⁶

It is noteworthy from a literary point of view that, even in such a Norwegian setting as this text, Gunnhildr is represented in the same negative light as one expects in Icelandic sagas.

In *Haralds saga hins hárfagra*, Hálfðan háleggr ('high-legged') is referred to in a poem as Háfœta ('high-footed'), an alternative version of his nickname, after Torf-Einarr killed him with the brutal blood-eagle:

Þá gekk Einarr jarl til Hálfðanar. Hann reist orñ á baki honum við þeima hætti, at hann lagði sverði á hol við hrygginn ok reist rifin qll ofan alt á lendar, dró þar út lungun. Var þat bani Hálfðanar. Þá kvað Einarr:

54. Rekit hefi ek Røgnvalds dauða,
rétt skiptu því nornir,
nú's folkstuðill fallinn,
at fjórðungi mínum.
Verpið, snarpir sveinar,
þvít sigri vér rjóðum,
skatt velk hönnum harðan,
at Háfœtu grjóti.¹⁷

[Then Einarr Jarl went to Hálfðan. He carved an eagle on his back in this way, that he put the sword in deep through the back and cut all the ribs all the way down onto the

¹⁵ Old Norse text from *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum* (Driscoll 2008, 8).

¹⁶ Text from Matthew Driscoll's translation in *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum* (2008, 9).

¹⁷ In *Heimskringla I. ÍF XXVI* (Bjarni Aðalbarnarson 2002, 132).

loins, pulled out the lungs from there. That was the death of Hálfðan. Then Einarr recited:

I have taken revenge for Rognvaldr's death, norms have arranged this justly, now the people's support (= leader) has fallen, in my district. Throw, brave fellows, for we have victory, I pay him a hard tax, stones over Háfœta.]

The same description of his brutal death and the poem (preceded by two verses not in *Haralds saga hins hárfagra*) occur in a near identical passage in chapter 8 of *Orkneyinga saga* (ÍF XXXIV, Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1965, 13-15). Compare also another legendary figure with the name Þórir háleggr, whose nickname is given to him in chapter 7 of *Áns saga bogsveigis*:

Hún sagði: “Þat ætla ek, at ek muna kalla þik hálegg, því at ek hefi engum sét hæra til knés.” Hann sagði: “Þetta nafn líkar mér, ok muntu gefa mér nokkut í nafnfesti, at menn kalli mik svá.” Hún sagði þat skyldu satt ok gaf honum gull mikit.¹⁸

[She (Jórunn) said: “I intend to call you hálegg, because I have seen no one with higher knees.” He said: “This name pleases me, and you should give me something in the name-fastening, so that people call me as such.” She said that would be true and gave him much gold.]

Such instances in *Fornaldarsögur* are numerous in which a nickname is given in a particularly formulaic and ceremonial manner, one in which the nickname is fastened to an individual and secured with a gift of some sort.

The legendary viking Ragnarr loðbrók (‘fur pants’ more literally, normally called “Hairy-Breeches” in English) referred to himself by his nickname *loðbrók*, assuming these verses can be accurately ascribed to him, in the first stanza of his death poem *Krákumál*:

Hjoggum vér með hjörvi.
Hitt vas æ fyr lǫngu,
es á Gautlandi gingum
at grafvitnis morði.
Þá fingum vér Þóru,
þaðan hétu mik fyrðar,
es lynglun lagðak,
Loðbrók at því vígi;
stakk á storðar lykkju
stáli bjartra mála.¹⁹

¹⁸ From *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*. Vol. I (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943, 430).

¹⁹ Bold emphasis mine. From Finnur Jónsson's *Carmina Scaldica* (1913, 62).

[We cut with swords. It was ever so long ago, when we went in Gautland to the murder of the digging wolf (serpent). Then we received Þóra, and from then on warriors called me Loðbrók, when I killed the ling-eel (serpent) at the battle; I stabbed the steel of bright inlays (spear) into the loop of earth (serpent).]

Here, as in dozens of similar cases, the nickname may have been substituted for the personal name in part for the purposes of alliteration. It is also noteworthy that Ragnarr's nickname is given a narrative origin, although it is difficult to see the direct connection of his nickname with this event. As a slight aside regarding the nickname itself, further interpretational issues surrounding the nickname *loðbrók* have surfaced because of the appearance of the nickname in a runic inscription at Maeshowe, Orkney (Br Barnes23), there referring to a woman (here normalized):

Sá haugr var fyrr hlaðinn heldr Loðbrókar. Synir hennar, þeir váru hvatir, slíkt váru menn, sem þeir váru fyrir sér.

[This mound was constructed before Loðbrók's. Her sons, they were daring; such were men as they were of themselves (=they were the sort of people you would really call men).]²⁰

Regardless of this nickname referring to female, the multitude of entertaining, sometimes fantastic narratives surrounding this legendary character (if we assume this is indeed the same Loðbrók, which it most likely is not) reflect historical legends in precisely the manner for which Icelandic story tellers were most famed. It is still fairly safe to assume that this nickname had enough currency to be applied to several individuals, at least one male and one female, and we need not be troubled whether this means that the genuine, historic Loðbrók could have been a woman. Certainly nicknames had enough currency to be applied to several individuals, and that is the most likely explanation for a woman bearing the same nickname as Ragnarr.

The use of nicknames as a substitute for a personal name in skaldic poetry is common. This may have been in part because nicknames could be used for the purposes of alliteration (cf. the first stanza of the poem *Krákumál* quoted above). Ekbo (1947, 282) notes that the use of nicknames as a replacement for a given name in skaldic poetry shows the ability of these nicknames to become personal names: “Dock är detta

²⁰ All text taken from *Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, online at: <http://skaldic.arts.usyd.edu.au/db.php?if=default&table=mss&id=21430>

förhållande icke genomgående, utan binamn, som nu tyckas vara föga tilltalande, kunna även användas av bäraren själv eller genom uppkallelse övergå till dopnamn.”²¹ Perhaps it might also be the case that the nicknames were substituted for personal names in poetry because they carry semantic meaning and register. After all, nicknames were to a larger degree than personal names still a more active part of the registers of contemporary spoken language, possibly adding a meaningful poetic effect.

Nicknames Turned Personal Names

Not only in skaldic poetry are nicknames substituted for personal names, but also nicknames may have at some point in oral transmission become better known than the personal name. Likewise, the stock of names was increased significantly by adapting nicknames into personal names, a process which seems to have begun far earlier than recorded history, and it is often difficult to draw the line between nicknames and names which appear to have originally been nicknames because they are descriptive. This is compounded by the fact that nicknames could become personal names, as Janzén mentions: “Binamnen kunde användas enbart, utan nämnande av det verkliga namnet. De fick karaktären av dopnamn och kunde sedan gå i arv genom uppkallelse.”²² Several prominent Old Norse personal names were originally nicknames, such as Snorri (for the possible meanings, see below) and Grettir (< the verb *gretta* ‘grin, smirk, growl’). Additionally, the names Skapti, Gellir, and Sturla seem to have come about in a similar fashion (Whaley 1993, 124). These names began as nicknames, but when the names were passed down to their descendants, as was the common practice of name-giving in Old Norse society, the nickname had become more familiar and well-known than the personal name, so these became the inheritable name. Janzén (1947, 242) describes the process by which several Old Norse personal names were formed by use of a prefixed noun that originated as a compounded nickname such as Auðbjörn (< Auð-Björn < Björn inn auði ‘the wealthy’) and an even older formation of this type Sverkir/Sørkvir

²¹ “This relationship, however, is not consistent, but bynames, which now seem to be hardly an address, can even be used by the name’s bearer himself, or, through the process of being called by a name, become a given name.”

²² “Bynames could be used alone, without making mention of the actual name. They got the characteristic of personal names and could later be handed down by being given as a personal name.”

(< Svart-Geirr ‘Black-Geirr’), and says of the process: “I Norden blev denna art av namnbildning av stor betydelse, och därigenom skapades massor av nya namn.”²³ This is not to say that all compounded names originated as nicknames, but that several personal names of this type likely were formed by this process.

The use of nicknames as supplements to given names in the Norse world must also have been used occasionally as a means to differentiate individuals with the same name in the same family or geographic area, but also as a means of highlighting the characteristics or deeds of a particular person. To make clear that nicknames were not given only as a means of differentiating individuals, Janzén (1947, 242) argues: “Naturligtvis kunde ett sådant namn ges åt en person även då det inte var nödvändigt för att undvika missförstånd.”²⁴ Since nicknames were particularly more characteristic of an individual than a personal name alone, therefore often more appropriate in the formation of place names that were derived from the nickname instead of the personal name, Ekbo (1947, 283) noted: “Ofta är det emellertid så, att dopnamnet genom sin relativa vanlighet är mindre karakteristiskt för sin bärare än binamnet.”²⁵ It is indeed important to consider that nicknames, with their inherently individualized, descriptive nature, frequently contained the appropriate, inheritable material necessary to dub new personal names. Likewise, the number of nicknames an individual could have or be given was not limited to only one, and several prominent individuals are found with multiple nicknames, primarily those of the ruling class (cf. the discussion of kings’ nicknames, below).

The nickname Snorri turned personal name is at least as old as the settlement of Iceland, and it is found already as a personal name of the son of a late settler of Iceland Snorri Eyvindarson Hlíðarmannagoði. He is mentioned briefly in *Landnámabók* (*ÍF* I, Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1968, 259) and in *Ljósvetninga saga* (*ÍF* X, Björn Sigfússon 1940, 15). The name seems to have achieved much greater popularity, however, from the prominent late 10th-early 11th century chieftain in western Iceland

²³ “In the Nordic world this type of name formation became of great importance, and through this process a huge amount of new names were created.”

²⁴ “Naturally such a name could be given to a person even when it was not necessary to avoid confusion.”

²⁵ “It is, however, often the case that a given name, through its relative ordinariness, is less characteristic for its bearer than the byname.”

named Snorri goði. Snorri goði was actually born Þorgrímr Þorgrímsson, but only later referred to by his nickname alone, as mentioned in chapter 12 of *Eyrbyggja saga*:

Þá fór Þorgrímr, sonr hennar, í Álptafjörð ok var þar at fóstri með Þorbrandi; hann var heldr ósvífr í æskunni, ok var hann af því Snerrir kallaðr ok eptir þat Snorri.²⁶

[Then her son Þorgrímr went to Álptafjörðr and was there to be fostered by Þorbrandr; he was rather overbearing²⁷ in his youth, and for this reason he was called Snerrir and after that Snorri.]

This is stunning example of folk etymology, connecting the two nicknames which may, in fact, not be related or interchangeable. The nickname turned personal name Snorri is likely derived from the class VII strong verb *snúa* ‘turn, twist’ with the reduplicated suffix (here rhotacized) in the preterite *snøri ~ sneri* (“he/she/it turned”), or a derivative verb related to *snúa*. Less likely, but possible, is a connection with MLG *snorren ~ snurren* ‘buzz, hum, grumble’ (cf. Swed. *snurra* ‘twist, twirl’, although no certain cognate is attested in Icelandic; cf. Lind 1920-21, 934). De Vries (1962, 522, 525) connects Snorri to OI *snarfla* ‘röcheln’ (“breathe heavily, snore”; cf. Mod. Icel. *snörla* ‘snore, rattle’). In Cleasby/Vigfusson (1874, 574) *snerrir ~ snerir* is given as ‘a smart, sharp-witted person’, a gloss which makes little sense considering the etymology and context in which the nickname occurs. Perhaps a connection was assumed to have existed with *snarr* ‘swift, quick; smart, keen’; if so, this is probably wrong. There is also a probable, but doubtful relation to the noun *snerra* ‘a hard fight’, which is a poetic word. The adj. *snerinn* ‘vigorous, keen’, a poetic term, is also a possibility given by de Vries (1962, 524) in relation to the unattested verb **snerra* ‘attack’, reconstructed from the noun *hjaldrsnerrandi* ‘attacker’ (literally, “one who dins in battle”). This *-snerrandi* must be derived from a verb **snerra*, because the *-s-* is not the genitive attached to the substantive *hjaldr* ‘din’, hence ‘fight, battle’ (poetic), even where *-r* is part of the root (cf. the other compounds with *hjaldr* such as *hjaldrtrani* ‘warrior’, *hjaldríss* ‘sword’, *hjaldrél* ‘battle’, *hjaldrský* ‘raven’, and so forth where no *-s-* exists between the two components; cf. Cleasby/Vigfusson 1874, 265). In *Íslensk orðsifjabók*, Snorri’s name is

²⁶ From *Eyrbyggja saga* in *ÍF IV* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935, 20).

²⁷ Cf. the personal name Ósvífr, which was, like so many other Old Norse personal names, derived originally from a nickname.

connected to *snerra* ‘harður bardagi’ (“hard battle”; 1989, 920) and the nickname *snerrir* ‘óstýrilátur maður’ (“unruly person”; 1989, 914), which makes the most sense given the context in which Snorri goði’s nickname is mentioned. The *ÍF* editors of *Eyrbyggja saga* connected *snerrir* with *snerra* ‘battle’, *hjaldrsnerandi* ‘attacker’ and *fjolsnerrinn* ‘exceedingly valiant’ (*ÍF* IV, Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935, 20). The actual relation of *snerrir* to Snorri is still unclear, and the etymology of Snorri is debatable. Among the possible meanings of the nickname Snorri (and thence the name), it ought to be at least one among the meanings “grumbling/grumpy one,” “the buzzing one,” or “the vigorous.”

The inherited nickname turned personal name Grettir in *Grettis saga* follows a similar story as that of the name Snorri. There is an early settler of Iceland named Ófeigr grettir (‘grimacer, grinner’) Einarsson mentioned in *Grettis saga* (*ÍF* VII, Guðni Jónsson 1936, 7), from which the inherited personal name is derived. It is also worth noting that *grettir* is a *heiti* for ‘snake’ in skaldic poetry, as well as a part of the kenning *grettis sóttir* ‘winters’ (literally “diseases of the snake;” cf. Finnur Jónsson 1931, 203), although the skaldic meaning was likely adapted from the common noun. From the settler Ófeigr grettir, there are several place names derived in the area he settled beginning with Grettis-, and kernels of narrative regarding this settler may have been formed from the prominence of his nickname in such place names. After this initial Grettir, whose nickname was probably more popular or well-known than his given name (a common pattern), the nickname turned personal name was passed down through the generations. Yet it is not necessarily related to a semantic loss of this nickname, and, in this case and many others, the process of a nickname turning into a personal name is unpredictable and not always dependent on the word having become archaic or desemanticized. Desemanticized nicknames, at least if they have not become personal names (and from there potentially taking on a new life), tend lose popularity much more quickly than personal names lacking a clear meaning to members of the society in which they are distributed.

Inheritable Family Nicknames

Nicknames could also be passed down in patronymics, which, like the system still active in Iceland today, are not surnames but rather names attached to an individual

based on relation to their father. Take Egill's patronymic, Skalla-Grímsson for example, where the father's compounded nickname is passed down to his son. Also consider Gísli Súrsson and his sister Þórdís Súrsdóttir, whose father's full name was really Þorbjörn súrr ('sour [adj.]; sour drink [noun]') Þorkelsson.

Two related men with the name Ketill þrymr 'quiet, silent' (Finnur Jónsson 1907, 256) appear in sagas of Icelanders from the East-Fjords, one who settled Iceland from Norway, and the younger his Icelandic grandson with the same nickname. Beginning with the elder, there is some confusion between Þrum-Ketill vs. Ketill þrymr in *Fljótsdæla saga*:

Hann var manna hægast hversdagliga, en hann var þögull ok fálátr snemma ok var kallaðr Þrum-Ketill.²⁸

[He was the gentlest of men every day, but he was of silent and reserved early in the day and was called Þrum-Ketill.]

In a footnote, the *Íslensk fornrit* editor says that he was mentioned once in *Brennu-Njáls saga* (in *ÍF* XII, Jón Jóhannesson 1954, 403) with this Þrum- variant of the nickname. The same man is introduced as Ketill þrymr (or Þrym-Ketill) in *Droplaugarsona saga*:

Ketill hét maðr, er kallaðr var þrymr.²⁹

[There was a man named Ketill, who was called þrymr.]

The editor's note glosses *þrymr* as *hávaði* ('noise'), *brak* ('creaking noise'). It is uncertain whether this is actually the meaning of his nickname, and most scholars have assumed *þrymr* to have been a variant of *þrumr* (< þruma 'be silent'; cf. Jón prófastur Jónsson í Bjarnanesi 1884, 233). This is again Ketill þrymr Þiðrandason (the elder) from Norway, but suspiciously his grandson also has the same patronym Þiðrandason.

The Norwegian Þiðrandi, who was the father of Ketill þrymr (the elder) and his brother Atli grautr ('porridge'; or Graut-Atli), is mentioned in *Landnámabók* as Þórir þiðrandi '(male) partridge' (Cleasby/Vigfusson 1874, 735) or 'peering, gazing one'

²⁸ From *Fljótsdæla saga* in *Austfirðinga sögur*. *ÍF* XI (Jón Jóhannesson 1950, 219-20).

²⁹ From *Droplaugarsona saga* in *Austfirðinga sögur*. *ÍF* XI (Jón Jóhannesson 1950, 137).

(Lind 1920-21, 407).³⁰ The *Íslenzk fornrit* editor notes of the name and nickname that, “Viðurnefnið *þiðrandi* varð síðar sérnafn. Merking þess er óvís” (*ÍF* I, Jakob Benediktsson 1968, 295).³¹ Why the nickname eventually became better remembered than the personal name with it will remain a mystery. Yet it was not at all uncommon that original nicknames became personal names through inheritance and a weakening of semantic meaning (cf. Snorri, Grettir, Kolbrún, and dozens of the like). In fact, it was very typical to adapt nicknames, especially those which were inherited, as personal names since time immemorial in Scandinavia (cf. Janzén 1947, 49-57).

Perhaps there is some confusion in the sources, if one excludes the formulaicity of saga narrative introductions, because a near identical passage introduces Ketill þrymr (the younger, an Icelander) in the first line of *Gunnars þátr Þiðrandabana*:

Ketill hét maðr ok var kallaðr þrymr.³²

[There was a man named Ketill, and he was called þrymr.]

Curiously, the *Íslenzk fornrit* editor mentions in a note that he has corrected the spelling “þrumr,” a spelling which is found in both manuscripts in which this *þátr* was recorded.

A different, more legendary Ketill þrymr (and son of a man named Þrymr) occurs in the legendary *Frá Fornjóti ok hans ættmönnum* in *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, although in this case the nickname seems to be a topographical adjective of origin *þrymr* ‘person from Þruma’:

Þrymr átti Agðir. Hans sonr var Agði ok Agnarr, faðir Ketils þryms, er bú átti í Þrumu.³³

[Þrymr possessed Agder. His son was Agði as well as Agnarr, the father of Ketill þrymr, who lived in Þruma.]

³⁰ From *Landnámabók. ÍF* I (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1968, 295): Ketill ok Graut-Atli, synir Þóris þiðranda, fóru ór Veradal til Íslands ok námu land í Fljótsdal, fyrr en Brynjólfr kom út. (Ketill and Graut-Atli, sons of Þórir þiðrandi, went from Veradalr [Verdal, in Nord-Trøndelag, Norway] to Iceland and settled in Fljótsdalr, before Brynjólfr came to Iceland.)

³¹ “The nickname *þiðrandi* later became a personal name. Its meaning is uncertain.”

³² From *Gunnars þátr Þiðrandabana* in *Austfirðinga sögur. ÍF* XI (Jón Jóhannesson 1950, 195).

³³ From *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* Vol. II (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1944, 139).

It is difficult to know whether this Ketill þrymr is indeed the Norwegian familiar from the sagas of the East-Fjords, or if this is pure chance. It could possibly even be his distant relative, or possibly a completely unrelated legendary figure. *Þruma* ‘rim, edge, border’, because of a mistaken association to the other *þrymr* through folk etymology, may in fact bear no direct relation to the name and nickname *Þrymr*. In any case, this *Þruma* place-name is probably the same place as the largest island in southwest Norway, which today is called Tromøy (cf. also Þrymsey = Tromsø).

Nicknames Referring to Private Parts

Negative nicknames are rather common, ranging from sexually-charged insults to unflattering physical characteristics, and several nicknames referring to private parts, perhaps the most sensitive areas in terms of insults and otherwise, are found in the corpus. Finnur Jónsson (1907, 218-219) provides a list of these in the second section of his nickname list under the categories “penis, cunnus” and “anus.” There are two compounds in his list formed with *-reðr* ‘penis’: *Árni skaðareðr* ‘harm-penis’ and *Kolbeinn smjörreðr* ‘butter penis’; both nicknames are akin to compounds like *hestreðr* ‘horse phallus’, which does not appear as a nickname but as an insult (cf. Gade 1989, 64). Three more “male members” of this group may be mentioned: *Herjólfur hrokkineista* ‘shrivelled testicle’, *Brunða-Bjálfi* ‘Sperm-Bjálfi’, and *Strað-Bjarni* ‘Butt-fuck-Bjarni’ (< *streða* = *serða* ‘butt fuck [fuck from behind]’). Not found in Finnur’s list, but found in Lind’s dictionary (1920-21, 306) is *Helgi selseista* ‘seal’s testicle’. In this short “penis” list there is also *Qunndr tréfótr*’s paternal grandfather *Ívarr beytill*, the meaning of which is debatable and ranges from ‘horsetail (plant)’ (cf. Cleasby/Vigfusson 1874, 62, where it is connected to *góibeytill* ‘equisetum hyemale, horsetail’), ‘thruster/beater’, and ‘(horse) penis’?. Lind (1920-21, 21) connected it to the verb *bauta* ‘beat, pound’, but raised the possibility that it could mean something like Swed. *skrävlar* (“swaggerer, show-off, big talker”) because of the meaning of Nyn. *bøytel* ‘swagger’. De Vries (1962, 35) translated *beytill* as “zeugungsglied des pferdes” (“horse phallus”), but still connected it to *bauta* ‘beat’. Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon (1989, 53) glossed it more or less the same as “hestreður, getnaðarlimur” (“horse phallus, procreation member”).

Nicknames referring to female genitalia are also found. There is a Rognvaldr kunta ‘cunt’, and a few other examples found in compounds built with the component *fuð*- ‘cunt’. A mid-13th century runic inscription from Bergen contains a string of just such insulting nicknames (here, normalized):

Jón Silkifuð á mik, en Guðþormr Fuðsleikir reist mik, en Jón Fuðkúla ræðr mik.

[Jón Silky-cunt owns me, and Guðþormr Cunt-licker carved me, and Jón Cunt-ball interprets me.]³⁴

Such a long string of such compounds is rather unusual, and it is unclear whether this is intended solely as an insult, curse, or if it in fact represents pure graffiti. While the first two nicknames’ meanings seem more apparent, the meaning of the third is much less clear. It is possible that *fuðkúla* means ‘cunt-knob’ instead of ‘cunt-ball’ (the precise meaning of which escapes me), although this is possibly a slang term for “clitoris,” or this nickname is purely imaginative or crude without a real purpose. An Old Icelandic nickname also exists built with *fuð*, Þorgils fuðhundr ‘dog cunt, cunt-dog’ (cf. Finnur Jónsson 1907, 299).

There are also nicknames referring to breasts. In the realm of female breasts, in that they are more sexual than those of males, there are Þorbjörg knarrarbringa and Ásný knarrarbringa (Finnur Jónsson 1907, 214-15). I might suggest that the nickname *knarrarbringa* ‘ship-chest’ may refer not to a wide or high body in the chest region as Finnur suggests, but perhaps a particularly large bosom (with a vulgar meaning like “big tits”). Notably in the case of Þorbjörg knarrarbringa, her nickname seems to have been partially inherited, at least thematically as a pair in the realm of ship allusions, from her father Gils skeiðarnef ‘longship beak’ (cf. the mention of the inheritable nickname pair in Ekbo 1947, 271).

Last but not least among private part nicknames, there are those which refer to the butt, anus, and its functions (cf. Finnur Jónsson 1907, 218-19). I will call these nicknames “potty humor nicknames,” because it is likely that these arose in typically off-color humor. The Old Norse word *raz* ‘ass’ (Mod. Icel. *rass*, cognate to Engl. *arse*, formed by metathesis) figures most prominently among these nicknames. There are two

³⁴ All text taken from *Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, online at: <http://skaldic.arts.usyd.edu.au/db.php?table=mss&id=15084&if=db>

men with the prefixed genitive plural *Raza-*, *Raza-Bárðr* (Ass-Bárðr) and *Raza-Bersi* (Ass-Bersi). Three other men have compound nicknames formed with *raz*: Hergils hnappraz ‘button ass’, Herjólfur hokinrazi ‘squatted, crouched ass’, and Ásmundur kastandrazi ‘throwing ass, throw ass’ (= “hip-thruster”). Four nicknames occur which refer to farting: the legendary king Eysteinn fretr ‘fart’ Hálfðanarson (which occurs as Eustein bumbus ‘fart’ in *Historia Norwegiæ*), the settler Eysteinn meinfretr ‘harm-fart’, Gunnir fiss ‘fart’, and Andrés dritljóð ‘dung sound’ (= “fart”). Furthermore, two independent butt nicknames not related to *raz* or *fretr* are found in the corpus: Erlendur bakrauf ‘back-hole’ (= “anus”) and Þórir hafsrþjó ‘buck’s thigh’.

The British Connection

The nickname *krakabein*, most famously held by King Ólafur Tryggvason, appears to have had some currency among earlier Scandinavians who raided and settled the British Isles where it is found in Old English as *Cracabam* (cf. Tengvik 1938, 308), and it also appears in a 15th century Irish source called *The Annals of Ulster* (sub anno 918.4) as *Graggabai*. It is unlikely that the nickname refers to Ólafur Tryggvason, and certainly the chronology does not match, nor does the description of the event:

Gaill Locha Da Caech do dergiu Erenn, .i. Ragnall rí Dubgall, & na da iarla, .i. Ottir & Graggabai & sagaith dóib iar sin co firu Alban. Fir Alban dono ara cenn-somh co comairnechtar for bru Tine la Saxanu Tuaiscirt. Do-gensat in genti cethrai catha dibh, .i. cath la Gothbrith ua n-Imair; cath lasna da iarla; cath lasna h-óc-tigerna. Cath dano la Ragnall i n-eroloch nad-acadur fir Alban. Roinis re feraibh Alban forsna tri catha ad-conncadur co rolsat ár n-dimar dina genntibh im Ottir & im Graggabai. Ragnall dono do-fuabairt iar suidhiu i l-lorg fer n-Alban coro la ar dibh *acht* nad-farcbath ri na mor-móer di suidibh. Nox *prelium* dirimit.³⁵

[The foreigners of Loch dá Chaeach, i.e. Ragnall, king of the dark foreigners, and the two jarls, Oitir and Graggabai, forsook Ireland and proceeded afterwards against the men of Scotland. The men of Scotland, moreover, moved against them and they met on the bank of the Tyne in northern Saxonland. The heathens formed themselves into four battalions: a battalion with Gothfrith grandson of Ímar, a battalion with the two jarls, and a battalion with the young lords. There was also a battalion in ambush with Ragnall, which the men of Scotland did not see. The Scotsmen routed the three battalions which they saw, and made a very great slaughter of the heathens, including Oitir and Graggabai. Ragnall, however, then attacked in the rear of the Scotsmen, and made a slaughter of them, although none of their kings or earls was cut off. Nightfall caused the battle to be broken off.]³⁶

³⁵ Original Irish text from *The Annals of Ulster (to AD 1131)* (Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill 1983, 368).

³⁶ Translation from *The Annals of Ulster (to AD 1131)* (Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill 1983, 369).

This nickname is not the only Norse nickname which made its way to and from the Gaelic cultural sphere in the British Isles. Faraday (1899-1900, 20) says regarding the nicknames given to some of the Norse settlers in Ireland before the Battle of Clontarf in 1014 A.D.:

We find the sons of Norse fathers bearing Gaelic names forty or fifty years before Clontarf, but these names are of the character of nicknames, such as Gluniaraind (Iron-Knee), Cuallaid (Wild Dog), Dubcend (Black-head), and would have been given to them by their Irish opponents. They are, of course, only found in Irish sources.

The influence of Celtic inhabitants in the British Isles upon the Viking settlers shows itself even in the Danelaw area where there appears recorded a Glunier, which has been explained as an adaptation of Glúniarn ‘Iron-knee’ (cf. later Glún Iercne [“Knee, Iron-knee”], with “knee” doubled like a tautological compound), derived from a plausible but unattested Scandinavian nickname **járkné* ‘iron-knee’ (cf. Fellows-Jensen 1995, 29). Glúniarn is one among a few Norse settlers who appear more often in Old Irish sources referred to only by their nickname. Likewise, his son is called Glúntradhna ‘crane-knee’ < ON *trana* ‘crane’ (Marstrander 1915, 45-46; cf. also OI *Trǫnubeina* [‘crane-leg’] *þræls dóttir* in the thirteenth stanza of the Eddic poem *Rígsþula*).

A Viking settler in Ireland with a Gaelic first name and an Old Norse nickname appears in an Irish runic inscription on a sword denoting its owner: “Norse runic inscription on a sword-mount found at Greenmount, Co. Louth, **tomnal selshofop a soerþ [p]eta**, shows that a man with the Gaelic name Dufnall bore a Norse by-name **selshqfuð* ‘seal’s head’” (Fellows-Jensen 1995, 30). Thus, in English, “Dufnall Seal’s Head owned this sword,” shows that a Norse speaking Viking had been given a Celtic first name, perhaps through mixed Norse-Celtic generational naming traditions, presumably via at least one Celtic parent and one Norse parent. The 10th century Norse king of Northumbria and Dublin is named Ólafr kváran (‘a type of footwear, sandal’), with a Norse personal name and an Irish nickname (cf. Lind 1921, 228-29). His name also appears in Old Irish as Amlaibh Cuarán, but, more interestingly, he also appears with a Norse calque of his Irish nickname in OIr Amlaibh Insoa ‘insole’ < PN **inn-skóar* ‘insoles’ (cf. Marstrander 1915, 52). So strong were the Norse naming traditions that, even in settled and conquered areas of the British Isles, nicknames and the

transference of Norse naming traditions lasted until at least the Norman Conquest in the mid-11th century, and their impact is still felt today in British family names and place names.

Several nicknames appear in Icelandic literature, primarily genealogies, all likely to have been directly brought into the Old Norse-Icelandic language via a Celtic-Old Norse language interchange either somewhere in the areas of Norse settlement in the British Isles, or in Iceland or mainland Scandinavia. One nickname of a settler of Iceland that is likely Celtic is Helgi bjólan (< OIr *Beólán*, possibly related to OIr *bél* ‘lips, mouth’) or with its variant form Helgi bjóla, the son of Ketill flatnefr (Lind 1920-21, 24-25, s.v. *bióla*). There are also two men in *Landnámabók* with the personal name Bjólan, one a king in Scotland named Bjólan Írakonung, and the other Bjólan was a son of an English settler Vilbaldr (< OE Wilbeald). Vilbaldr’s brother Áskell Dufþaksson has the Celtic nickname *hnokkan*, which is possibly related to OIr *cnocán* ‘hillock’, or is actually a variant of ON *hnokinn* ‘curved, bent’ (cf. McDougall 1986-89, 222). *Bjóla* is which also found as a place name Bjólaþorp, the Icelandic equivalent of the Danish place name Bylderup. There is also Óláfr feilan ‘little wolf’, the diminutive of OIr *fael* ‘wolf’ (Lind 1920-21, 78), whose father Þorsteinn rauði (‘the red’) Ólafsson was a jarl of Caithness in the late 9th century. A few others among the early settlers of Iceland who also have Celtic nicknames, including: Þorgeirr meldun (Lind 1920-21, 255), derived from the famous Irish name Máel Dúin (máel ‘prince, chief’, dúin ‘fortress’), and Þorsteinn lunan ‘little black bird’ (Lind 1920-21, 248), mentioned in *Landnámabók* and also known from the Icelandic place name *Lunansholt*. Lunan may have had some currency in Norway as well, since it appears in an early 15th century runic inscription found at Bergen (N649, B238; here, normalized):

Lunaneyju, húsfreyju sinni, send[ir]...

[he sends to Lunaney, his wife...]³⁷

A nickname of obscure origin and etymology is the name Andres biuza, a Scot fighting Hákon during one of his many battles in Scotland who is mentioned in Sturla

³⁷ All text taken from *Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, online at:
<http://skaldic.arts.usyd.edu.au/db.php?if=srdb&table=mss&id=20371>

Pórðarson's *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*. The line in which the name occurs does little to help determine what nickname this is, if it is indeed a nickname:

Sa atburður varþ vm daginn at .ix. menn af skipi Andres bivza foro a land a bati.³⁸

[This event took place during the day that nine men from Andres biuza's ship went ashore on a boat.]

Jacob Grimm (*Kleinere Schriften* III, 1866, 396) described the nickname *biuza* in his short list of Old Norse feminine nicknames as “mir unverständlich” (“incomprehensible to me”). It is not certain, however, if this is indeed feminine; the editors of *Codex Frisianus* (1871, 585) cite in the name index *Andres buzi*, which would disqualify a feminine *buza* or *biuza*. Curiously, the nickname is not found in Lind's byname dictionary (unless it is a variant of either *bussi* or *butsi*, both of which are unlikely candidates), whereas the rest of Grimm's list are found there (and in all cases with several citations and the meanings clarified). Possibly, though unlikely, this is an Anglo-Saxon word for late OE *butsa* ‘sea-boat’ (< **bāt-sæ*), in which case this nickname is borrowed. It is also a possibility that this is a variant of a surname of French origin, today found in family names like *Bussey*, *Bucy*, *Buza*, *Busa*. If this is not a scribal error in the manuscript altogether, then it is more likely that the manuscript form “bivza” is an error for OI *buza* (Mod. Icel. *bússa*) ‘a sort of merchant ship’ (< Med. Lat. *bussa* ‘(Hanseatic) merchant ship’, of uncertain etymology), which occurs as “bvza” earlier in the saga, where the meaning of *buza* as a merchant ship is more obvious.³⁹

The likely solution to this otherwise undecipherable *bjúzi* comes from the variant in *Flateyjarbók*, where the nickname following *Andrés* is written *kuzla* (gen. of *kuzli*), a variant of *kussi* ‘calf, bullock’ (cf. *kussa* ‘cow’ in Cleasby/Vigfusson 1874, 359). Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon (1989, 520) connects *kusli* with *kuslungur* ‘calf’, and notes that it is a pet (hypocoristic) form of the noun. Finnur Jónsson (1907, 304) says that the name is Andrés *kuzsi* ‘calf’, and Lind (1920-21, 228) says the same and that

³⁸ From *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* in *Codex Frisianus* (Unger 1871, 579).

³⁹ “Pa er Hacon kongr sigldi fyrir Jaðar kom þar bvza ein af Englandi er a var Jon stal.” (When King Hákon sailed along Jaðar a merchant ship came there from England, upon which was Jón stál [‘steel’].) From *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* in *Codex Frisianus* (Unger 1871, 456).

bivza is, in fact, *felaktigt* (“incorrect”). It is no small wonder that Grimm and other scholars had no clear idea what to make of the nickname.

Geographic Origin of a Saga

Nicknames have been used by scholars to identify the probable geographical origin of the composition of sagas. One such example is *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum* (Outline of Norwegian Kings’ Sagas), which provides a few nicknames of prominent historical figures that occasionally differ from more widely-used Icelandic conventions and reveal the “Norwegianisms” of its tradition. For example, the nicknames Hálfðan hvítbein (‘white-leg’) the son of Haraldr hárfagri, Qzurr lafskegg (‘dangling beard’) the father of Gunnhildr konungamóðir, and Magnús Ólafsson berleggr (‘bare-leg’) beside the traditional Icelandic Hálfðan háfæta (‘high-leg’) or háleggr (‘high-leg’), Qzurr toti (‘protuberance, teat’), Magnús berfœttr or berbeinn (king of Norway and Haraldr harðráði’s grandson with differing accounts in *Heimskringla* and Saxo’s *Gesta Danorum*; see below). Some nicknames in this text are attested elsewhere but have an uncertain meaning. Eyvindr Qzurarson skreygja (written in the manuscript as “scraygia”) appears elsewhere in *Fagrskinna*, *Heimskringla*, and *Egils saga* as Eyvindr skreyja ‘sickly-looking; beggar; coward’ or alternatively, ‘bragger, brayer [?]’ (cf. Cleasby/Vigfusson 1874, 557); none of these glosses seem to fit the character unless his nickname is intended to be ironic (cf. the note in Driscoll 2008, 90). The nickname of Hálfðan Sigurðsson heikilnefr (‘hook-nose’ or ‘pointy-nose’ or ‘thin nose’?) in this text is a hapax legomenon, the first component of which is not certain. In much the same way one easily sees variation in nickname explanations between sagas produced in Iceland and the histories of Saxo Grammaticus, it is also possible to determine the more probable origin of a saga in Norway based on name variations like those found in *Ágrip*.

Chapter 3 – Roles of Nicknames in the Literature

It is the primary goal of this chapter to elucidate the narratives surrounding nicknames and how they can be used to further our interpretation of Old Norse literature. Since the pool of personal names was (and is) limited, most people were

further identified by their recurring nicknames, a circumstance that created a “trace” in the interweaving saga plots. Nickname “traces” occur across the manuscript tradition, where a large number of nicknames recur across the Old Norse literary corpus. When nicknames occur in the sagas, they may be ancient, formed in the popular imagination earlier in time, or fanciful interpretations invented by saga authors, but they all have a story to tell and certainly one which is not always decipherable. The corpus of Old Icelandic literature is large, but the language is stylized and the composition is informed intertextually by contemporary oral and written culture. Thus, the frequent use of nicknames allows the modern reader to break through the formulaic mold of these medieval texts and increase our understanding of them.

Most nicknames mentioned in the sagas are unexplained, since most characters are merely introduced by their names, often including their nicknames, but dozens of passages in the sagas comment on them and explain them, if even only briefly. The majority of explanations of a nickname’s origin are of an anecdotal type, that is, a brief narrative comment on a particular feature, event, or other basis from which an individual received a nickname. Albeit in most cases these passages are brief and not particularly rich narrative, but it is part of the way scholars can decipher the narrative “kernels” and other material from which sagas were created. Many nicknames and the narrative describing them do not occur across manuscripts representing the same saga, even though in modern collections of nicknames, themselves largely a product of the standardized textual editions of *Íslensk fornrit* and other similar series, they are presented as such. Nevertheless, until more readable diplomatic editions of the multitude of manuscripts containing major Icelandic sagas appear, there is little choice but to rely on these types of normalized editions.

Medieval Thoughts on Nicknames

A single passage in Old Icelandic literature reveals how medieval Icelanders themselves may have thought regarding the significance of nicknames. In chapter 8 of *Þorsteins saga hvíta*, Þorsteinn’s foster son Brodd-Helgi (‘Spike-’Helgi) is given a nickname to commemorate his trickery for attaching a spike to a young bull’s forehead to level a fight with an older, larger bull, ending with disastrous results for the latter animal. His

nickname is given and explained in relation to the pre-Christian custom of giving nicknames:

Fekk hann af þessu þat viðrnefni, at hann var kallaðr Brodd-Helgi, en þá þótti mönnum þat miklu heillavænligra at hafa tvau nöfn. Var þat þá átrúnaðr manna, at þeir menn myndi lengr lifa, sem tvau nöfn hefði.⁴⁰

[He received the nickname from this event that he was called Brodd ('Spike-')-Helgi, and back then it seemed to people greatly promising to have two names. At that time it was people's belief that those people who had two names would live longer.]

This illuminating passage illustrates the value of having a nickname, and it also appears to have the ring of superstition or religious quality about it.

A similar mention of name customs occurs in a rather isolated short paragraph from the late-17th century *AM 281 fol.* (103r)⁴¹ describing the compounding of names of heathen gods to given names in theophoric constructions such as Grímr + Þórr > Þorgrímr:

Hier biriar gömul Annal og ættartölur.

Það er fróðra manna sögn að það være sidur í firndinne, að draga af nöfnum Gudanna nöfn sona sinna, so sem af Þórs nafne Þorólf, edur Þorstein edur Þorgrim, eda sa er Oddur hiet, first skillde heita af hans nafne Þóroddur sem Þormóður qvad vm Snorra goda og Odd son hans er kalladi Þorodd edur Þorbergur, Þorálfr, Þorleifr, Þorgeir. Enn eru fleire nöfn dreiginn af þeim gudum og Ásum, þo að af Þór sie flest, menn höfðu þa og mioc ij nöfn, þotti það líklegt til langljífis og heilla, þott nockrir fyrimællti þeim vid Gudinn, þa mundi þa ecki skada ef þeir ætti annat nafn.⁴²

[Here begin old annals and genealogies. It is a saying among wise men that this was the custom in ancient times, to draw their sons' names from the names of the gods, such as Þórólfr from Þórr's name, or Þorsteinn or Þorgrímr, or the one who was first called Oddr decided to be called by his name Þóroddr, just as Þormóðr said about Snorri goði and his son Oddr whom he called Þóroddr or Þorbergr, Þorálfr, Þorleifr, and Þorgeirr. Moreover there are more names drawn from the gods and the Æsir, although Þórr is the most used, at that time people often had two names, it seemed promising to a long life and well-being, although some people would swear themselves to the gods, then nothing would harm them if they had a second name.]

⁴⁰ In *Austfirðinga sögur*. ÍF XI (Jón Jóhannesson 1950, 19).

⁴¹ From ~1674-1675 A.D. This text also occurs in *AM 115 8vo* (1600-1649 A.D.) written by Björn Jónsson from Skarðsá, there with the heading "Annal. Eptir Hauksbók" and other minor textual variations.

⁴² From *Tillæg X* in *Hauksbók* (Eiríkur Jónsson and Finnur Jónsson 1892-1896, 503-04). A normalized version of this text is found in Guðbrandr Vigfússon's edition of *Eyrbyggja saga* (1864, 126) in a short appendix (Anhang 2).

The important line for the purposes of understanding Icelandic name traditions, normalized into Old Icelandic, would read: Menn höfðu þá ok mjök tvau nöfn. Þótti þat líkligt til langlífis ok heilla, þótt nokkurir fyrirmælti þeim við goðin, þá mundi þá eigi skaða, ef þeir ætti annat nafn. Although this passage is actually explaining the particularly theophoric compounding of personal names, it echoes the logic given to explain the attachment of Brodd-Helgi's nickname in *Þorsteins saga hvíta*, that having a nickname, or in this case a name with two components (one of mythological origin), was considered a promising (*heillavænigr*) feature and would promote a long, healthy life. Especially in this passage about compounding names there is an obvious overlay of folk etymology, yet it is another matter entirely whether we can believe such explanations of medieval naming customs. The occurrence of this idea that two names is lucky might account to a limited degree for reality, however, and we ought not to cast such doubt on these two explanations, especially considering the unique continuity of naming traditions in Iceland. We simply do not have enough evidence to cast too much doubt on the reality of these traditions and also not enough to accept them as historically accurate.

Terminological Patterns in Nickname Narratives

The origin of the nickname of Haraldr hárfagri ('fair hair') Hálfðanarson is given in chapter 23 of *Haralds saga hins hárfagra* in *Heimskringla*, where Earl Rognvaldr Eysteinnsson gave him the new nickname after washing and cutting his hair, replacing his former nickname *lúfa* '(thick) matted hair' (= "shock-head"):

Haraldr konungr var á veizlu á Mœri at Rognvalds jarls. Hafði hann þá eignazk land allt. Þá tók konungr þar laugar, ok þá lét Haraldr konungr greiða hár sitt, ok þá skar Rognvaldr jarl hár hans, en áðr hafði verit óskorit ok ókembt tíu vetr. Þá kǫlluðu þeir hann Harald lúfu, en síðan gaf Rognvaldr honum kenningarnafn ok kallaði hann Harald inn hárfagra, ok sǫgðu allir, er sá, at þat var it mesta sannnefni, því at hann hafði hár bæði mikit ok fagrt.⁴³

[King Haraldr was at Earl Rognvaldr's in Mœrr for a feast. He had then possession of the entire country. Then the king took a bath there, and then King Haraldr had his hair combed, and then Earl Rognvaldr cut his hair, and before it had been uncut and uncombed for ten years. Before then they called him Haraldr lúfa ('shock-head'), and

⁴³ In *Heimskringla I. ÍF XXVI* (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 2002, 122).

afterwards Rognvaldr gave him a nickname and called him Haraldr Fairhair, and everyone said who saw him that it was the truest name of all, because he had hair both plentiful and fair.]

It is interesting to note here the use of the term *kenningarnafn* for “nickname,” meaning something like “a name by which a person is alternately known by” (cf. the discussion of terminology above). One terminological variant here is followed by yet another naming term, *sannnefni* ‘true, accurate name’, instead of the usual and expected word *viðrnefni* (‘additional name’).

In a fragment of the so-called *miðsaga* of *Guðmundar biskups saga* (in AM 657 c 4^o, from ~1340-1390) Guðmundr gives his friend Einarr klerkr (‘cleric’) his title (not a nickname), which is described in a similar fashion as the re-dubbing of Haraldr hárfagri:

...en hann [Guðmundr] vígði hann þá er hann var tvítugr, ok gaf honum þat kenningar nafn at hann skyldi heita Einarr klerkr, ok kvað honum þat sannnefni en eigi auknefni.⁴⁴

[...and he (Guðmundr) consecrated him then when he was twenty, and gave him the nickname (title) that he should be called Einarr klerkr, and said that to be a true name for him and not a derogatory name.]

This is one of the few examples where medieval Icelanders confused terminology and applied *kenningarnafn* to a person’s title, perhaps showing some further versatility of the term or possibly a mistaken use of the term. Even more interesting in this regard is that his title is said not to be an *auknefni*, which should only be applied to a nickname, but instead a *sannnefni*. In theory at least, the terms *kenningarnafn* and *auknefni* ought to be synonymous, so it is important to note that a distinction is made between the two. Perhaps this also gives some credibility to the notion that an *auknefni* tends to have a negative charge (despite the literal meaning), and therefore the terms are not synonyms.

To differentiate between a *kenningarnafn*, which is either neutral or positive, and an *auknefni*, which can often be derogatory (as the previous example shows), in *Fóstbræðra saga* it differentiates between the two established senses of nicknames:

Helgi átti kenningarnafn ok var kallaðr hvítr, ok var honum þat eigi auknefni, því at hann var vænn maðr ok vel hærðr, hvítr á hár.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ From *Brot úr miðsögu Guðmundar* in *Biskupa sögur* Vol. I (Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1858, 589).

[Helgi had a nickname and was called hvítr ('white'), and for him it was not a derogatory nickname, because he was a promising man and had fine, white hair.]

This strong inflection variant *hvítr* is found only in *Flateyjarbók*; other manuscripts repeat more or less the same explanation, but have the nickname as the weak-inflected form *hvíti*:

Hann átti þat kenningarnafn, at hann var kallaðr Helgi inn hvíti, því at hann var vænn maðr ok vel hærðr, hvítr á hárslit.⁴⁶

[He had this nickname that he was called Helgi inn hvíti ('the white'), because he was a promising man and had fine hair, white in color.]

It is apparent from the text in *Flateyjarbók* that a strong distinction was made between *kenningarnöfn*, which were more versatile in use and could even be considered *sannnefni*, and often negative *auknefni*, just like the description of Einarr klerkr's title from *Guðmundar biskups saga*.

Although the nicknames of women figure much less prominently in medieval Icelandic literature than those of men (indeed in all medieval Scandinavian texts as far back as runic inscriptions, where only a handful of female bynames are found), a rare instance of a potentially double nickname occurs in which a woman's nickname looks suspiciously identical to the hypocoristic form of the proper name. Brodd-Helgi's daughter named Þórdís todda (cf. *toddi* 'piece, bit, small gift') is introduced in *Fljótsdæla saga* (the sequel to *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*) as Bjarni Brodd-Helgason's sister, and the saga suggests that her nickname came about as a result of her generosity:

Hann átti sér systur, er Þórdís hét. Hun var fríð kona ok vel mennt. Viðrnefni átti hun sér ok var kölluð Þórdís todda. Því var hun svó kölluð, at hun gaf aldri minna en stóra todda, þá er hun skyldi fátækum gefa, svó var hun örlát.⁴⁷

[He had a sister who was called Þórdís. She was a beautiful woman and

⁴⁵ From *Flateyjarbók* Vol. II (Sigurður Nordal 1945, 243).

⁴⁶ From *Fóstbræðra saga* in *Vestfirðinga sögur. ÍF VI* (Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943, 181).

⁴⁷ From *Fljótsdæla saga* in *Austfirðinga sögur. ÍF XI* (Jón Jóhannesson 1950, 239).

well-bred. She had herself a nickname and was called Þórdís todda. She was called this because she never gave less than a big piece, when she gave to the poor, as she was generous.]

It is not unlikely that this explanation for her nickname as presented is typical folk etymology, where the nickname is explained as having come about in reference to the meaning of the word independently. In fact, it seems far more likely in this case that it is a hypocoristic doublet, particularly a *stuttnefni*, of the personal name, rather than a nickname derived from this woman's behavior as the saga narrative suggests. The *Íslenzk fornrit* editor also thinks this explanation in the saga is misguided, “Þessi skýring á viðurnefni Þórdísar er eflaust röng” (Jón Jóhannesson 1950, 239).⁴⁸ Her hypocoristic doublet could be used here to distinguish her from another Þórdís (perhaps as the equivalent of Þórdís “the younger”), although there is no evidence that this is the case. Finnur Jónsson (1907, 301) provided a short list of seven such hypocoristic doublet nicknames, showing that this doublet nickname type was not unknown in the medieval period, despite having become far more popular in the modern era: Arnbjörn ambi, Álfr elfsi, Magnús mangi, Magnús skrautmangi (skraut- ‘finery, ornament’), Þórdís todda, Úlfr ubbi, and Erlendr ulli.

Narratives Derived from Nicknames

Certain nicknames may have even provided the basis of an entire saga character's biography, and could be used by saga authors, or the oral history from which a saga was derived, to construct a narrative. In the opening of *Qlkofra þáttr* (found in *Möðruvallabók* AM 132 fol., from ~1330-1370), the star of the *þáttr* is introduced in terms of his nickname, likely by means of folk etymology or by the saga author himself:

Þórhallr hét maðr. Hann bjó í Bláskógum á Þórhallsstöðum. Hann var vel fjáreigandi ok heldr við aldr, er saga sjá gerðisk. Lítill var hann ok ljótr. Engi var hann íþróttamaðr, en þó var hann hagr við járn ok tré. Hann hafði þá iðju at gera ql á þingum til fjár sér, en af þessi iðn varð hann brátt málkunnigr qlu stórmenni, því at þeir keyptu mest mungát. Var þá sem opt kann verða, at mungátin eru misjafnt vinsæl ok svá þeir, er seldu. Engi var Þórhallr veifisskati kallaðr ok heldr sínkr. Honum váru augu þung. Optliga var þat siðr hans at hafa kofra á hofði ok jafnan á þingum, en af því at hann var maðr ekki nafnfrægr, þá gáfu þingmenn honum þat nafn, er við hann festisk, at þeir kqlluðu hann Qlkofra.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ “This explanation of Þórdís' nickname is undoubtedly wrong.”

⁴⁹ In *Austfirðinga sǫgur*. ÍF XI (Jón Jóhannesson 1950, 83-84).

[There was a man called Þórhallr. He lived at Bláskógar in Þórhallsstaðir. He was wealthy and old when this saga took place. He was small and ugly. He was not skilled in anything except he was skillful with iron and wood. He had the business of making ale to sell at the assemblies, and from this business he quickly became acquainted with the important men, because they bought the most ale. It was then as it can often be, that ales are unequally liked and just as those who sold it. Þórhallr was called no big spender and rather stingy. He was heavy-eyed. It was often his custom to have a hood on his head and always at the assemblies, but because he was not a famous person, the assembly men gave him the name, which stuck to him, that they called him Qlkofri (Ale-Hood).]

Thenceforth, he is exclusively called Qlkofri throughout the saga, and his name, Þórhallr, is not mentioned again. His nickname likely developed because his real name was not particularly well-known among the crowds of people at the Alþing, and this lack of a name led to him being referred to by his nickname alone. That his nickname is also intended by the crowd of important people to ridicule him is symbolic of his low social status and that he is of a flawed saga character type. I would further suggest that the story's composition is more than likely anecdotal, that he is called Ale-Hood, therefore he must have sold beer and been famous for doing so.

Nicknames are used to describe legendary figures of all social classes, but they are also important in providing motivation for actions or behavior, imagined by the saga compiler or otherwise, which can even play a role in the plot. In *Landnámabók*, for example, an early Norwegian voyager to Iceland received the name Þórólfr smjör ('butter') as a result of his overly generous account of the island as a place where butter drips from every blade of grass:

Ok er menn spurði af landinu, þá lét Flóki illa yfir, en Herjólfur sagði kost ok lqst af landinu, en Þórólfr kvað drjúpa smjör af hverju strái á landinu, því er þeir hqfðu fundit; því var hann kallaðr Þórólfr smjör.⁵⁰

[And when men asked about the land, then Flóki expressed disapproval over it, and Herjólfur told the good and the bad things about the land, but Þórólfr said that it dripped butter from every piece of straw in the land that they had discovered; for this reason he was called Þórólfr smjör.]

⁵⁰ In *Íslendingabók. Landnámabók. ÍF I* (Jakob Benediktsson 1986, 38).

It is difficult to know whether this explanation of his nickname is genuine, but it certainly has the familiar anecdotal explanation evident in most other nickname explanations.

In chapter 135 of *Ólafs saga helga* there is an example of a nickname given in reverse by means of irony; in other words, a nickname which was given to someone for which the opposite is true:

Þórðr átti kenningarnafn, var hann kallaðr Þórðr inn lági. Hann var þó manna hæstr, ok var hit þó meirr, at hann var þrekligr ok ramr at afli.⁵¹

[Þórðr had a nickname, and he was called Þórðr inn lági ('the low'). He was, however, the tallest of men, and furthermore he was sturdy and powerful in strength.]

While it is clear that irony was a component of the cultural repertoire of the North, such nickname narrative examples are less common than the stock of existing nicknames that must have originally been intended as ironic (cf. the circumstances under which Hrólfr kraki's nickname is given, described below).

The Nicknames of Kings

The nicknames of kings both legendary and contemporary are extremely common in the corpus. Whaley (1993, 137) says of the importance of king's nicknames in narrative explanations: "But where a reign is drawn more fully, the king's nickname and any explanation attached to it can, by giving public recognition to a salient characteristic, provide a measure against which his whole career can be judged." This is a key point, that it is the public who remembered the reign of a king, and the nickname was often a means by which a king's life was measured and evaluated. It is precisely because the reign of kings was often remembered by particular events and accomplishments of the king in question that most kings have descriptive nicknames, and in many cases more than one. Thus, the nickname was a way to reinforce historical reality (or at least saga narrative, exaggerated or otherwise), although it is usually unclear whether a king received his nickname while still living or posthumously. Even outside of the *Konungasögur*, the Old Norse literary corpus is filled with material describing the lives of kings, not least in part due to the prominence of royal genealogies and connections to

⁵¹ In *Heimskringla II. ÍF XXVII* (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 2002, 236).

important historical individuals and events. Therefore, it is hardly a surprise that such prominent members of society past and present received ample biographical treatment, and as a result there exists a large stock of the full names, both personal and secondary, of individual kings.

Haraldr harðráði's grandson King Magnús berfœtr ('barefoot') or berbeinn ('bare-legged') was named as such, according to *Magnúss saga berfœtts* in *Heimskringla*, because he and his men adopted the kilt during their time in the British Isles. As a result of his bare legs, he later suffered a halberd-thrust through them in his last battle, wounds which ultimately led to him receiving a death blow (at his neck). Not surprisingly for such a well-known historical figure, Magnús berfœtr also had the nicknames Magnús hávi ('the tall') and Styrjaldar-Magnús ('Age of Unrest [=war]-Magnús') mentioned in his saga, after describing his marriage to Margrét and their offspring:

Svá segja menn, at þá er Magnús konungr kom ór vestrvíkingu, at hann hafði mjök þá siðu ok klæðabúnað, sem títt var í Vestrlöndum, ok margir hans men. Gengu þeir berleggjaðir um stræti ok höfðu kyrtla stutta ok svá yfirhafnir. Þá kǫlluðu menn hann Magnús berfœtt eða berbein. Sumir kǫlluðu hann Magnús háva, en sumir Styrjaldar-Magnús. Hann var manna hæstr.⁵²

[So men say that when King Magnús came from his Viking journeys in the west, that he had then much of the customs and apparel as was customary in the British Isles, as well as many of his men. They went barelegged in the street and had short tunics and overcoats. Then people called him Magnús berfœtr or berbeinn. Some called him Magnús hávi, and some Styrjaldar-Magnús. He was the tallest of men.]

For such famous and legendary kings, it is hardly surprising that a large quantity of epithetical nicknames developed referring to several well-known features and characteristics of the individual.

According to Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*, Magnús received his nickname *calciamentis vacuus* ('without footwear') after he was forced to flee an attack by men from Halland (then part of Danish Skåne, now in modern Sweden) back to his ships shoeless:

Qui quum sedulo Sueones adortus in Hallandenses etiam arma proferret, inopinata eorum irruptione percussus, ut erat calciamentis uacuum, probrosum ad naues recursum

⁵² In *Heimskringla III. ÍF XXVIII* (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 229-30).

habuit eiusque fugę deformitatem etiam cognomine usurpavit.⁵³

[Time after time Magnús had attacked the Swedes, but when he went to attack the men of Halland, he was surprised by a sudden counterattack which forced him to an ignominious retreat to the ships when he was without shoes, and the shameful flight also gave him his nickname.]

Such examples show that nicknames, even with different narratives for how they came about, had currency across the Scandinavian world.

King Haraldr Sigurðsson harðráði ('hard-rule'), for example, is touchy about his father's nickname Sigurðr sýr ('sow'), probably because of the degrading sexual implications.⁵⁴ In *Hreiðars þátrr heimska* in *Morkinskinna*, the king flies into a rage after realizing that the beautifully wrought boar figure that Hreiðarr presents him is a sow:

“Hér er nú gripr er ek vil gefa þér.” Setr á borðit fyri hann, en þat var svín gort af silfri ok gyllt. Þá mælti konungr er hann leit á svínit: “Þú ert hagr svá at trautt hefi ek sét jafn vel smíðat, með því móti sem er.” Nú ferr þat með manna höndum. Segir konungr at hann mun taka sættir af honum – “ok er gott at senda þik til stórvirkja; þú ert maðr sterkr ok ófælinn, at því er ek hygg.” Nú kœmr svínit aptr fyr konung. Tekr hann þá upp ok hyggir at smíðinni enn vandligar ok sér þá at spenar eru á, ok þat var gyltr. Fleygir þegar í brot ok sér at til háðs var gort ok mælr: “Hafi þik allan troll! Standi menn upp ok drepi hann!”⁵⁵

[Now here is a precious item which I want to give you.” He places it on the table before him, and it was a gilded pig made of silver. Then the king spoke as he looked upon the pig: “You are skilled in such a way that scarcely have I seen something equally well produced, in such a style as this is.” Now it goes among the hands of the men. The king says that he will take reconciliation from him – “and it is a good thing to send you to great enterprises; you are a strong man and unafraid, at least this is what I think.” Now the pig comes back before the king. He picks it up then and looks at the work still more carefully and sees then that there are teats on it, and it was a sow. He flings it away at once and sees that it was made for mockery and says: “May trolls have you completely! Stand up men and kill him!”]

Hreiðarr narrowly escapes with his life, and such situations in the literature with episodes involving Icelanders in Norway are numerous.

⁵³ Latin text from *Gesta Danorum* Book XIII, 1,2 (Friis-Jensen 2005, Vol. II, 86).

⁵⁴ For a discussion of the etymology of the nickname, see Schrodtt (1979, 114-119).

⁵⁵ In *Morkinskinna I. ÍF XXIII* (Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson 2011, 162-63).

Among the multitude of legendary Scandinavian monarchs there is Olof Skötkonung (Modern Swedish name) or Óláfr skattkonungr (‘tributary-king’ as in Snorri’s *Skáldskaparmál*) or skautkonungr (‘sheet-king’ as in *Heiðreks saga* in C. Tolkien’s edition ‘Cloak-king’ pp. 60-1; cf. *skautkonungr* in Cleasby/Vigfusson 1874, 540). In the list of kings following the 13th century Swedish law code *Äldre Västgötalagen*, he was called Olawær skotkonongær. This list, dated to ~1325, occurs in an addendum to the manuscript by a priest named Laurentius, and the text describes the role of Olawær in the conversion of Sweden:

Olawær skotkonongær war fyrsti konongær sum cristin war i swerike. Han war döptær i kyældu þerræ wið hosæby liggær oc heter Byrghittæ af Sighfriði biscupp, oc han skötte þagær allæn byn till staffs oc stols.⁵⁶

[Olawær Skotkonongær was the first king who was Christian in Sweden. He was baptized by Bishop Sighfriðær in the spring which is at Husaby and is called Byrghittæ, and he soon gave over (literally, “shot” in the sense of “sent”) the entire property to the bishop’s staff and bishop’s seat.]

This may be an alternate explanation for his nickname than the one found in Old Icelandic texts, where he is called most commonly Óláfr sænski (‘Swede’) Eiríksson. If it is Óláfr skattkonungr and not skautkonungr, we may compare the description of kings in the Mediterranean in *Skáldskaparmál*:

Þar næst eru þeir menn, er jarlar heita eða skattkonungar, ok eru þeir jafnir í kenningum við konung, nema eigi má þá kalla þjóðkonunga, er skattkonungar eru...⁵⁷

[Next there are those men who are called jarls or tributary-kings, and they are equal in kennings as the king, except they may not be called sovereign kings, those who are tributary kings...]

In *Skáldskaparmál*, Óláfr (alternatively, Óleifr) sænski Eiríksson appears in a the quoted verse fragments of *Óláfsdrápa sænska* by Óttarr svarti, verse quotations 310, 340, 365, 383, 390, 395 (Faulkes 1998, lviii). He is referred to by a variety of *heiti*, such as *jöfurr* ‘prince’, *vísi* ‘leader’, *þengill* ‘ruler’, *Svíá gramr* ‘ruler of the Swedes’, and kennings such as Fólkr-Baldr (“Baldr [heathen god] of the people”) and *aldar allvaldr* ‘ruler of men’. Such positive treatment of kings is commonplace in the literature.

⁵⁶ From *Codex Iuris Vestrogotici: Westgöta-Lagen* (Collin & Schlyter, eds. 1827, 298).

⁵⁷ From *Edda. Skáldskaparmál. 1. Introduction, Text and Notes*. (Faulkes 1998, 79).

The famous Norwegian king Ólafr Tryggvason identifies himself by a truncated, hypocoristic name Óli in *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* (in *Heimskringla*) while in the Syllingar (Isles of Scilly, in the Celtic Sea southwest of Cornwall) which seems to be followed by a epithetic nickname *gerzkr* ('person from Garðar [in Russia]'):

En síðan er hann fór ór Garðaríki, hafði hann eigi meira af nafni sínu en kallaði sik Óla ok kvazk vera gerzkr.⁵⁸

[And after he left Garðaríki, he had nothing more of his name, and called himself Óli and said to be a person from Garðar.]

Alternatively, in *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta*, he appears as Ólafr or Óli gerzski or girzki, with a genuine weak adjectival byname and not merely an epithet denoting his lineage or geographical origin.

Ólafr has a couple other nicknames and is said to be called by Danes *krakaleggr* or *krakabein* ('thin-leg' or 'pole- [picket, stake] leg,'⁵⁹), at least according to an interesting account of the Christianization of Scandinavia found in *Ór Hamborgar historíu*:

Eftir Eirek konung tók ríki í Svíþjóð Ólafr, son hans. Sveinn fór þá aftr í Danmörk. Hann skildi þá, at guð var honum reiðr, ok hét að snúast til kristni ok boða rétta trú. Eftir þat sættust þeir Ólafr konungr ok Sveinn konungr svá, at Sveinn konungr skyldi hafa ríki sitt ok fá Sigríðar hinnar stórráðu, móður Ólafs konungs. Síðan skyldu þeir báðir láta kristna lönd sín. Síðan eggjaði Sigríðr hin stórráða, at þeir skyldi ráða frá löndum Ólaf Tryggvason, er Danir kölluðu krakalegg eðr krakabein, sem þeir gerðu síðan. Skiptu þeir þá Noregi með sér þrír höfðingjar, Ólafr sænski, Sveinn konungr ok Eirekr jarl Hákonarson.⁶⁰

[After King Eirekr his son Ólafr took the kingdom in Sweden. Then Sveinn went back to Denmark. He determined then that God was angry with him, and he promised to return to Christianity and preach the right faith. After this King Ólafr and King Sveinn agreed that King Sveinn should possess his kingdom and take in marriage Sigríðr hin stórráða ('the ambitious'), King Ólafr's mother. Afterwards they should have their lands be Christian. Then Sigríðr hin stórráða urged that they should take the lands of Ólafr Tryggvason, who the Danes called *krakaleggr* ('pole-leg') or *krakabein* ('pole-leg'), which they did afterwards. Then they divided Norway among the three chieftains, Ólafr sænski ('Swede'), King Sveinn, and Jarl Eirekr Hákonarson.]

⁵⁸ In *Heimskringla I. ÍF XXVI* (Bjarni Aðalbarnarson 2002, 266).

⁵⁹ Cf. the legendary Danish king Hrólfr kraki discussed below.

⁶⁰ In *Flateyjarbók* Vol. I (Sigurður Nordal 1944, 18-19).

Compare the legendary Danish king Hrólfr kraki, whose nickname has a disputed meaning, ranging from “thin one, pole (person]” to “thin face” to sexual innuendo as “thin pole (penis pun).” Hrólfr kraki is given his nickname in chapter 42 of *Hrólfs saga kraka ok kappá hans* by a servant named Vöggr who accidentally insults the king:

Ok sem þessi maðr kom fyrir Hrólfr konung, þá mælti hann: “Þunnleitr er þessi maðr ok nokkurr kraki í andlitinu, eða er þetta konungr yðarr?” Hrólfr konungr mælti: “Nafn hefir þú gefit mér, þat sem við mik mun festast, eða hvat gefr þú mér at nafnfesti?” Vöggr svaraði: “Alls ekki hefi ek til, því at ek em félauss.”⁶¹

[And when this man came before King Hrólfr, then he said: “This man is thin-faced and a bit of a thin pole in the face, or is this your king?” King Hrólfr replied: “You have given me a name, one which will stick to me, and what will you give me for the name-fastening?” Vöggr answered: “I have nothing at all for this, because I am penniless.”]

That the king then proceeds to give him one of his gold rings as a reward makes this a situation which can only be described as humorous, since the servant insults the king and still receives a reward. Possibly this is for his honesty, but the actual circumstances are atypical. Typical of nickname narratives, this description does not likely match with the true, but unknown, origin of nicknames.

The anecdotal nickname origin of Braut-Önundr (‘Road-Önundr’), a legendary 7th century Swedish king, appears in chapter 33 of *Ynglinga saga*:

Önundr konungr lét brjóta vegu um alla Svíþjóð, bæði um markir ok mýrar ok fjallvegu. Fyrir því var hann Braut-Önundr kallaðr. Önundr konungr setti bú sín í hvert stórherað á Svíþjóð ok fór um allt landit at veizlum.⁶²

[Önundr had roads cleared through all of Sweden, both around forests and swamps and mountain passes. For this reason he was called Braut-Önundr. King Önundr placed his dwellings in every major district in Sweden and he went around the whole country to feasts.]

It does not particularly matter just how far back into pre-history one searches, such anecdotal explanations are bound to occur just as prominently in legendary material as contemporary.

⁶¹ From *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* Vol. II (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1944, 74).

⁶² In *Heimskringla I. ÍF XXVI* (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 2002, 63).

The nickname of the legendary Danish king Haraldr hilditönn ('war-tooth') is found across the literary corpus with several explanations. It seems in *Sögubrot af nokkurum fornkonungum í Dana- ok Svíaveldi* to have come about as a result of his large yellow teeth:

Þat var mark á honum: at tenn í öndverðu höfði, ok váru miklar ok gullslitr á. Hann var mikill ok fríðr sýnum. Ok er hann var þrjúvetr, var hann svá mikill sem tíu vetra gamlir sveinar.⁶³

[It was a noticeable feature on him: that he had teeth on the front of his face, and they were large and gold-colored. He was large and handsome by sight. And when he was three years old, he was as big as boys ten years old.]

Later, however, the narrator seems to have forgotten the previous explanation, and explains his nickname as a result of his prowess in battle:

Haraldr var þá fimmtán vetra, er hann var til ríkis tekinn. Ok með því at vinir hans vissu, at hann mundi eiga mjök herskátt at verja ríkit, er hann var ungr at aldri, þá var það ráð gert, at aflat var at seið miklum, ok var seiðat at Haraldri konungi, at hann skyldi eigi bíta járn, ok svá var síðan, at hann hafði aldregi hlíf í orrostu, ok festi þó ekki vápn á honum. Hann gerðist brátt hermaðr mikill ok átti svá margar orrostur, at engi maðr var sá í ætt hans, at þvílíkan herskap hafi haft með ríki sem hann, ok þá var hann kallaðr Haraldr hilditönn.⁶⁴

[Haraldr was then fifteen years old, when he came to power. And because his friends knew that he would have to defend the kingdom in a state of war, when he was young in age, then this plan was adopted that a big spell was worked, and the spell was worked onto King Haraldr so that iron weapons would not bite him. And so it was afterwards that he never had a shield in battle, and yet no weapon cut onto him. He soon became a great warrior and had as such many battles, so that no one even in his family was like him who would have had such warfare with power like him, and then he was called Haraldr hilditönn.]

Haraldr's nickname also occurs with more or less the same explanation in Saxo (7, 10,4) as Hyldetan (cf. the discussion in Karker 1974, 89-97):

Post hæc, quum Wesetum apud Scaniam nuptias acturum audiret easque sub egentis specie petiuisset, finito noctu conuiuio omnibusque mero ac somno sopitis nuptialem thalamum trabe pertudit. Cuius buccam Wesetus ita absque uulneris inflictione fuste quassauit, ut binis eam dentibus uacuefaceret. Quorum iacturam postmodum insperata

⁶³ From *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* Vol. II (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1944, 115).

⁶⁴ From *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* Vol. II (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1944, 122).

molarium eruptio sarciebat. Hic euentus Hyldetan ei cognomen imposuit, quod eum quidam ob eminentem dentium ordinem assecutum affirmant.⁶⁵

[When he (Haraldr) heard that Wesetus (= ON Véseti) was to be married in Skåne, he went there dressed as a beggar, when the night's celebrations had come to a close and all were down from wine and sleep, he broke through the bridal chamber with a beam of wood. Wesetus smashed a club into his cheek, but merely knocked out two of his teeth without inflicting a wound. Later two molars burst forth unexpectedly to repair the loss. This occurrence earned him the nickname Hyldetan, which some say he received from his prominent row of teeth.]

Immediately following this, Haraldr kills his enemy and takes control of Skåne. Here as elsewhere, we can see the process of explaining a nickname as having derived from a well-known physical feature of the individual in question. What is most important to note about this type of nickname currency is that a fluid tradition of story-telling was able to develop from the remembrance of a name, not unlike the use of skaldic poetry and place names as “seeds” or “kernels” from which a story could be cultivated.

More Anecdotal Nickname Narratives

Among the numerous nickname narratives of an anecdotal type there is Einarr skálaglamm (‘scale-tinkling’ [sound]) Helgason, the skald who chats about poetry with Egill Skallagrímsson in his booth at the Alþing (cf. Sigurður Nordal’s edition of *Egils saga*. *ÍF* II, 1933, 268). Alas, to our great misfortune in terms of understanding the nature of skaldic training, he does so privately in the saga. The anecdotal narrative of his nickname occurs in chapter 33 of *Jómsvíkinga saga*, where he gets the name from Hákon jarl:

Ok fylgði sú náttúra at þá er jarl lagði þá í skálirnir ok kvað á hvárt skyldi merkja ok, ef sá kom upp er hann vildi, þá breytti sá í skálinni svá at glamm varð af. Jarl gaf Einari skálirnir ok varð hann glaðr við; ok síðan kallaðr Einarr skálaglamm.

[The peculiarities of the weights was this that when the earl put them on the scales and said what they were to signify, if that one came up which he wanted, then it trembled in the bowl so that it gave off a tinkling sound. The earl gave scales to Einarr who was delighted with the gift. He was afterwards called Einarr skálaglamm.]⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Latin text from *Gesta Danorum* Book VII, 10,4 (Friis-Jensen 2005, Vol. I, 494).

⁶⁶ The Icelandic text is according to Sigurður Nordal and Petre-Turville (1962, 33v), and the translation is that of Blake (1962, 33r).

He is also called another nickname in *Jómsvíkinga saga*, Skjaldmeyjar-Einarr, which goes unexplained. In Blake's note (1962, 33b, note 4), he describes the name as difficult to interpret. It is possible, even likely that Skjaldmeyjar- means "Shield-maiden" (gen. sg.), therefore "Valkyrie-"Einarr, but it is impossible to be certain.

In chapter 48 of *Laxdæla saga* a relatively minor character with prophetic dreams named Án svartí ('black') receives a second nickname in mockery and derision for his dream foreboding bad things to come. Indeed, Án's premonitory dream forebodes Kjartan's death at the hands of his foster-brother Bolli in the following chapter (49), and his gory dream is commemorated with the addition of his *auknefni* hrísmagi 'brushwood-belly':

Kjartan sitr inn fjórða dag páska á Hóli; var þar in mesta skemmtan ok gleði. Um nóttina eptir lét Án illa í svefni, ok var hann vakiðr. Þeir spurðu, hvat hann hefði dreynt. Hann svarar: "Kona kom at mér, óþekkilig, ok kippði mér á stökk fram. Hon hafði í hendi skálm ok trog í annarri; hon setti fyrir brjóst mér skálmna ok reist á mér kviðinn allan ok tók á brott innyflin ok lét koma í staðinn hrís; eptir þat gekk hon út," segir Án. Þeir Kjartan hlógu mjök at drauminum ok kváðu hann heita skyldu Án hrísmagi; þrifu þeir til hans ok kváðusk leita skyldu, hvárt hrís væri í maganum.⁶⁷

[Kjartan sits the fourth day of Easter at Hóll; there was the greatest amusement and joy. During the following night Án had a hard time sleeping, and he was awake. They asked what he had dreamt. He answers, "A woman came to me, repulsive, and pulled me onto the footboard. She had a small sword in her hand and a trough in the other; she put the short sword to my chest and cut open my entire belly and took away my entrails and put brushwood in its place; after that she went out," says Án. Kjartan and company laughed a lot at the dream and said that he should be called Án hrísmagi; they grabbed him and said they should look to see whether there was brushwood in his stomach.]

Any theory used to explain the real origin of this nickname would be insufficient, but as is usually the case with nickname narratives, an anecdote provides all the description of origin that will ever be known to have existed.

The anecdote for the origin of *hrísmagi* is curiously reinforced in chapter 49 in the same manner following Kjartan's death, when his loyal defender Án svartí has yet another dream after a miraculous return from death. This time his dream is used to provide a positive sense of physical recovery in Án's case after having been wounded in

⁶⁷ The Icelandic text is from *Laxdæla saga*. ÍF V (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, 149).

the fight against the sons of Ósvífr, and a foreboding of his death in a retributive attack against Bolli later in the saga.⁶⁸ The text reads:

Þat varð til tíðenda í Sælingsdalstungu þá nótt, er vígit hafði orðit um daginn, at Án settisk upp, er allir hugðu, at dauðr væri. Urðu þeir hræddir, er vökdou yfir líkunum, ok þótti þetta undr mikit. Þá mælti Án til þeira: “Ek bið yðr í guðs nafni, at þér hræðizk mik eigi, því at ek hefi lifat ok haft vit mitt allt til þeirar stundar, at rann á mik ómeginshöfgi; þá dreymði mik in sama kona ok fyrr, ok þótti mér hon nú taka hrísit ór maganum, en lét koma innyflin í staðinn, ok varð mér gott við þat skipti.” Síðan váru bundin sár þau, er Án hafði, ok varð hann heill ok var síðan kallaðr Án hrísmagi.⁶⁹

[There were these tidings in Sælingsdalstunga on the night when the fight had taken place during the day, that Án sat up when everyone thought that he was dead. They became afraid, those who kept watch over the bodies, and this seemed a great miracle. Then Án said to them: “I ask you in God’s name that you don’t fear me, because I have been alive and had my senses the whole time until a heavy swooning sleep came upon me; then I dreamed about the same woman as before, and it seemed to me now that she took the brushwood out of my stomach, and put the intestines in its place, and I got better from this exchange.” Then those wounds which Án had were bound, and he was healed and was afterwards called Án hrísmagi.]

Is it possible that the narrator has forgotten the previous anecdotal narrative for his nickname? Perhaps the nickname did not stick after the first dream because of Kjartan and company’s mocking of Án’s dream. Alternatively, the narrator may merely be reinforcing the literary trope that a minor character is aiding in moving the plot along (as if by fate) by having marked the progression with a miracle, and in a sort of narrative excitement he has simply mentioned the anecdote again. These are all possibilities, although the narrative significance of this event leads me to admit that the latter is likely the case.

The nickname of Torf-Einarr jarl Rognvaldarson, earl of the Orkneys (890s-920s), a skaldic poet and founder of the dynasty ruling the Orkneys for centuries to come, is mentioned in chapter 27 of *Haralds saga hins hárfagra* in *Heimskringla*, and also in *Orkneyinga saga*. His nickname is said to have been given as a result of introducing the practice of burning turf and peat in the Orkneys because of the lack of firewood:

⁶⁸ For a recent discussion of the dream-woman who removes entrails as a folklore and literary motif and how it relates to Án hrísmagi, see the article “Perchta the Belly Slitter and Án hrísmagi” (Hill 2007, 516-523).

⁶⁹ From chapter 49 of *Laxdæla saga*. *ÍF* V (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, 155).

Hann var fyrir því kallaðr Torf-Einarr, at hann lét skera torf ok hafði þat fyrir eldivið, því at engi var skógr í Orkneyjum. Síðan gerðist Einarr jarl yfir eyjunum, ok var hann ríkr maðr. Hann var ljótr maðr ok einsýnn ok þó manna skyggstr.⁷⁰

[He was called Torf-Einarr because he had turf cut and used it for fire-wood, because there were no woods in the Orkneys. Afterwards Einarr became jarl over the islands, and he was a powerful man. He was an ugly man and one-eyed and yet the most sharp-sighted of men.]

This is a rather anecdotal explanation for his nickname and very likely fictitious, but it is again difficult to know whether this can be trusted. Certainly this custom existed before his time, but the nickname was possibly given to him by other Norsemen, either in Norway or the British Isles, to whom he explained the process of cutting and burning peat. Likewise, in *Orkneyinga saga* his nickname is explained in the same formulaic manner, even repeating the description of Einarr as a person:

Hann fann fyrstr manna at skera torf ór jörðu til eldiviðar á Torfnesi á Skotlandi, því at illt var til viðar í eyjunum. Einarr var mikill maðr ok ljótr, einsýnn ok þó manna skyggstr.⁷¹

[He was the first man to cut turf from the earth for firewood on Torfsnes in Scotland, because there was hardly any wood on the islands. Einarr was a big man and ugly, one-eyed and yet the most sharp-sighted of men.]

Our knowledge of the actual circumstances behind this nickname, like so many others, at best provides a window into the possible environment in which this type of nickname could arise and be dubbed. In Torf-Einarr's case, it is likely that his nickname arose not in the area where he ruled in Scotland, but rather somewhere in the North (presumably Norway). Perhaps the nickname was dubbed in Norway when his adoption of the local custom became known there (cf. the narratives about Magnús berfœttr, above). Here in this second example, we can also glimpse the possibility that his nickname may have been derived from the place name and used in a manner similar to other saga "kernels" (like skaldic poetry), and that the anecdotal explanation developed later in oral histories concerning his life and drawn from this remembered material.

⁷⁰ In *Heimskringla I. ÍF XXVI* (Bjarni Aðalbarnarson 2002, 129).

⁷¹ In *Orkneyinga saga. ÍF XXXVI* (Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1965, 11).

Nickname Explanations in the *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*

In the beginning of *Orvar-Odds saga*, Grímr loðinkinni (‘hairy cheek’) is introduced with a humorous explanation of his nickname:

Grímr hét maðr ok var kallaðr loðinkinni. Því var hann svá kallaðr, at hann var með því alinn, en þat kom svá til, at þá þau Ketill hængr, faðir Gríms, ok Hrafnhildr Brúnadóttir gengu í eina sæng, sem fyrr er skrifat, at Brúni breiddi á þau húð eina, er hann hafði boðit til sín Finnum mörgum, ok um nóttina leit Hrafnhildr út undan húðinni ok sá á kinn einum Finninum, en sá var allr loðinn. Ok því hafði Grímr þetta merki síðan, at menn ætla, at hann muni á þeiri stundu getinn hafa verit.⁷²

[There was a man called Grímr and he was called loðinkinni. He was called as such because he was born with this. And it came about that when Ketill hængr, the father of Grímr, and Hrafnhildr Brúnadóttir went into the bed, as was written before, that Brúni spread on them a skin-blanket, when he had invited over many Finns, and during the night Hrafnhildr looked out from under the blanket and looked at a Finn’s cheek, and he was completely hairy. And for this reason Grímr had this distinguishing feature afterwards, so that people think that he would have been conceived at this moment.]

The origin of Grímr’s nickname is here given in a rather typical narrative style reminiscent of folklore. It is difficult, however, to say exactly the symbolic nature of gazing upon a hairy-cheeked (heavily-bearded?) Finn while copulating, but it seems clear that the saga wants to tell us that the supposed magic powers of the Finns (whoever they actually are) can affect one’s future offspring.

In the explanation at the beginning of *Gríms saga loðinkinna*, the same nickname is explained as having been derived from his hairy cheek, which, incidentally, has the magic quality of resisting iron in battle:

Svá er sagt af Grími loðinkinna, at hann var bæði mikill ok sterkr ok inn mesti garpr. Því var hann loðinkinni kallaðr, at kinn hans önnur var vaxin með dökkt hár, ok með því var hann alinn. Ekki beit þar járn á.⁷³

[So it is told concerning Grímr loðinkinni, that he was both big and strong and the boldest man. He was called loðinkinni because one of his cheeks was covered with dark hair, and he was born with this. Iron weapons did not bite on there.]

With two narratives to choose from, it is impossible to know which is accurate, if either is even true at all. Implausibility hardly matters, of course, since there is no way to

⁷² From *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*. Vol. I (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943, 283).

⁷³ From *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*. Vol. I (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943, 269).

confirm any such account, and one can only appreciate the narrative quality of such explanations at face value.

Chapter 1 in *Ketils saga hængs* gives a typically legendary account of Ketill's nickname *hængr* '(male) salmon', one which reflects an overlay of folk etymology (cf. the narrative of Þórdís todda's nickname, above). After killing a dragon, which Ketill believed to be a mere salmon, Ketill has a dialogue exchange with his father Hallbjörn. In commemoration of Ketill's "fishing trip," Hallbjörn replaces Ketill's former nickname *Hrafnistufífl* ('fool of Hrafnista', given by the now-murdered neighbor Björn bóndi) with an ironic nickname for his ability to slay a dragon and still consider it a small task:

Ketill svarar: "Ekki kann ek at færa í frásagnir, hvar ek sé fiska renna, en satt var þat, at sundr hjó ek einn hæng í miðju, hverr sem hrygnuna veiðir frá." Hallbjörn svarar: "Lítills mun þér síðar vert þykkja um smáhluti, er þú telr slík kvikvendi með smáfiskum. Mun ek nú auka nafn þitt ok kalla þik Ketil hæng."⁷⁴

[Ketill replies: "I can't bring anything to the accounts, where I see fish swimming, but it was true, that I cut apart a salmon in the middle, whoever fishes the spawner from it." Hallbjörn replies: "You will be thought of little worth later regarding small things, when you count such a creature among small fish. I will now increase your name and call you Ketill hængr."]

Note the use of the expression *auka nafn* 'increase a name' here (cf. the terminological discussion, above). Ketill *hængr*'s (< **hæingr*) nickname is probably related to *hór* 'hook', and seems to have originally meant something like "the hooked one," but alternatively it may have meant "(male) salmon," just like the explanation given here in his saga (cf. Nno. *hyngn* 'male sea trout, salmon'). The male salmon *hængr* likely received its name from the bent-up hook on its lower jaw (cf. Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon 1989, 408 s.v. *hængur*). *Hængr* (> *Hængur*) is also found as a personal name, a familiar pattern in name inheritance (cf. the discussion of nicknames turned personal names, above).

The nickname of Orvar-Oddr ('Arrow-Oddr') is explained very briefly in chapter 6 of *Örvar-Odds saga*, where his name is given to him by a troll:

"Þat sé ek ok, at Oddr hefir örvar þær, er Gusisnautar eru kallaðar, ok því mun

⁷⁴ From *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*. Vol. I (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943, 247).

ek gefa honum nafn ok kalla hann Örvar-Odd.”⁷⁵

[“I also see that Oddr has those arrows which are called Gusisnautar (“Gusi’s gifts”), and therefore I will give him a name and call him Örvar-Oddr.”]

Here is but one of the many examples of a nickname that seems to have been derived from a particular weapon, in this case a set of dwarf-smithed, magically self-returning, always accurate arrows which Oddr’s father said to have received from a Gusi Finnakonungr (“King of the Finns”). Regardless of the (in)accuracy of this account, it is again evident that the nickname provided a basis from which the narrative could be constructed in the vital interplay of history and legend.

The nickname of Hjalti inn hugprúðr (‘the stout-hearted, courageous’), formerly Hǫttr (whose personal name was changed in the previous chapter after having “slain” the monster), is mentioned in chapter 37 of *Hrólfs saga kraka ok kappa hans*:

Allir gerðu góðan róm á máli konungs, ok sættust svá allir heilum sáttum, ok var svá skipat mönnum í höllinni, at Bøðvarr var mest metinn ok haldinn, ok sat hann upp á hægri hönd konunginum ok honum næst, þá Hjalti inn hugprúði, ok gaf konungr honum þat nafn. Því mátti hann hugprúðr heita, at hann gekk hvern dag með hirðmönnum konungs, sem hann léku svá út sem fyrr var frá sagt, ok gerði þeim ekkert grand, en var nú orðinn miklu meiri maðr en þeir, en konungi þótti várkunn, þótt hann hefði gert þeim nokkura minning eða drepit einhvern þeira.⁷⁶

[Everyone made good amount of applause at the king’s speech, and everyone reconciled themselves with good agreements. And the men were thus arranged in the hall, so that Bøðvarr was valued and held in the highest regard, and he sat up at the right side of the king and next to him Hjalti inn hugprúði (‘the courageous’), and the king gave him this name. He could be called courageous because he went every day among the king’s retainers, when they mistreated him as was previously mentioned, and he did them no harm, but he had become a much greater man than they, and it would have seemed excusable to the king, even if he would have taken some revenge on them or killed some of them.]

It is particularly noteworthy that this character receives two name changes after his heroic transformation, due in no small part to Bøðvarr’s having forced him to consume the dragon’s heart and blood to bolster his heroic qualities.

Sturlaugr inn starfsami (‘the troublesome, laborious’) receives his nickname from the king after insulting him in chapter 14 of *Sturlaug’s saga starfsama*:

⁷⁵ From *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*. Vol. I (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943, 302).

⁷⁶ From *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* Vol. II (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1944, 65).

Konungr svarar: “Eigi hirði ek um illmæli þín, en þat er þér at segja, Sturlaugr, at þú skalt aldri óhræddr vera hér í landi, nema þú færir mér úrarhorn þat, er ek týnda forðum. En nafn mun ek gefa þér með sendiförinni. Skaltu heita Sturlaugr inn starfsami. Þat mun við þik festast, því at hér ofan á mun yðr starfs auðit fóstbræðrum verða, á meðan þér lifið, er þér komið aptr ór þessari för, sem eigi skyldi vera.”⁷⁷

[The king replies: “I don’t care about your slander, but this is to tell you, Sturlaugr, that you shall never stay here in the country unafraid, unless you bring me the aurochs horn which I lost before. And I will give you a name with the mission. You shall be called Sturlaugr inn starfsami (‘the troublesome’). This will be attached to you, because here on it will be fated to be toil among you foster-brothers, while you live, when you come back from this journey, just as it should not be.”]

Following with the pattern of kings giving nicknames in other *Fornaldarsögur* and legendary material frequently found in *Konungasögur*, this is again given by a king to commemorate a moment in the character’s relationship, here a negative one, to authority.

Conclusion

Old Norse nicknames provide a nearly untapped resource for investigating issues in onomastics, lexicology, etymology, narratology, and literary analysis in Old Norse scholarship. I have, naturally, tapped into but a handful of the many avenues of available research on nicknames, and certainly a more thorough investigation into this topic is necessary to divulge all the features and cultural information which can be gleaned from the uniquely massive body of nicknames in the Old Norse corpus. In this study I have accomplished several research goals: defining the appropriate terminology to describe nicknames; giving a summary of resources, research to date, and future research opportunities; providing a description of some of the central issues and varied features of nicknames; and, lastly, giving several examples of the unique role of nicknames in Old Norse literature. This investigation is incomplete, but it is my hope that I have divulged several prominent issues involved in the study of nicknames, and that in doing so I have successfully introduced the topic in terms of providing a scholarly medium through which further research into Old Norse nicknames is possible.

⁷⁷ From *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* Vol. II (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1944, 330).

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