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THE PRINCIPAL ICELANDIC VERSIONS OF THE
STORY OF RAGNARR LOÐBRÓK

In a stimulating contribution to Einarsbók, published in 1969, Bjarni Guðnason discussed the interrelationship of the surviving Icelandic versions of the story of Ragnarr loðbrók, and the relationship of Ragnars saga to Völsunga saga.¹⁾ While his view of these two subjects may not be entirely acceptable in every respect, as I shall hope to show in this paper, it nevertheless provides a wholly satisfactory framework for further discussion. In this paper I shall discuss Bjarni's arguments, criticizing some of them and developing others, and will tentatively present a view of the textual background to Ragnars saga differing somewhat from his, but also profiting from it in several ways. In this way I shall hope to provide the basis for a discussion at the conference of Bjarni's approach to his subject in the light of some criticisms made of it recently by Lars Lönnroth in a review of Einarsbók published in Medieval Scandinavia (1971).²⁾ In this discussion, as I hope will be clear from the paper which now follows, I shall advance the view that, whatever the limitations of Bjarni's approach, it is clearly preferable, at least as far as Ragnars saga is concerned, to the one recommended by Lönnroth in his review.

The saga of Ragnarr loðbrók, as Bjarni points out, is preserved in two somewhat different manuscript versions, contained in Ny kgl. saml. 1824 b, 4to on the one hand, and in AM 147 4to

1) Bjarni Guðnason, "Gerðir og ritþróun Ragnars sögu loðbrókar", in Einarsbók (1969), 28-37.

2) See Medieval Scandinavia, 4 (1971), 175-81.

on the other. ³⁾ The differences between these two versions will be discussed in detail later in this paper. Chapters dealing with Ragnarr loðbrók and his sons, and more specifically, perhaps, with the latter, are also to be found in Arngrímur Jónsson's sixteenth-century Latin work Rerum Danicarum Fragmenta, based on the lost Skjöldunga saga, ⁴⁾ and in the so-called Ragnarssona þáttur, which is contained in Hauksbók. ⁵⁾ According to Bjarni, both Skjöldunga saga and a version of Ragnars saga were among the þáttur's sources. In addition to Ragnars saga, Ny kgl. saml. 1824 b contains Völsunga saga, which immediately precedes Ragnars saga in the manuscript, and a number of stanzas from Krákumál, which immediately follow it. The story of Ragnars saga is linked to that of Völsunga saga, and is made to form a reasonably logical sequel to it, through the person of Ragnarr's second wife, Áslaug, the daughter of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani and Brynhildr Buðladóttir. It is not clear from the state in which AM 147 4to has been preserved whether Völsunga saga preceded Ragnars saga in that manuscript as well as in 1824 b, but it does seem likely that the Ragnars saga which is reflected in 147 was preceded by a Völsunga saga, if not in that very manuscript, then in its original, since reference is made in the course of it, in a manner which seems to assume an awareness on the reader's part of the events in question, to the meeting of Sigurðr and Brynhildr, and the birth of Áslaug. ⁶⁾ Bjarni Guðnason sets out to answer the following

³⁾ The two versions have been edited, together with Völsunga saga, in Magnus Olsen, ed., Völsunga saga ok Ragnars saga loðbrókar, STUAGNL, 1906-8. A number of paper manuscripts which ultimately derive from 1824 b have also been preserved, as Olsen, pp VII-XI, and Bjarni, p. 29, point out.

⁴⁾ See Jakob Benediktsson, ed., Arngrimi Jonae opera latine conscripta, I, Bibliotheca Arnarnagana IX (1950), 358-59, 464-66. On the extent of the indebtedness of this work to Skjöldunga saga, see Benediktsson, ed., Arngrimi ... opera ..., IV, Bibliotheca Arnarnagana XII (1957), 107-17; Bjarni Guðnason, Um Skjöldungasögu, 1963; and Jakob Benediktsson's review of the latter work in Íslensk tunga, 4 (1963), 136-51.

⁵⁾ See Finnur Jónsson, ed., Hauksbók (1892-96), 458-67.

⁶⁾ See Olsen, p. LXXXVI, and 180.

questions: Did Völsunga saga and Ragnars saga exist independently of each other, before being joined together in the manner reflected in the two manuscript versions? Which of them is the older, and which the younger? In short, what is the precise nature of their relationship? Since Völsunga saga has been preserved only in connection with Ragnars saga, as is shown by the two manuscript versions of the latter, and as the Völsungsrímur also indicate,⁷⁾ there is no textual evidence to suggest that Völsunga saga ever existed independently of Ragnars saga. This leads Bjarni to a discussion of the question of whether Ragnars saga ever existed independently of Völsunga saga; and this is the starting-point for the central part of his paper, in which he seeks to establish the exact nature of the ríttengsl, as he calls them, or literary connections, between the existing written versions of the story of Ragnarr, his wife Áslaug (also called Kráka or Randalín) and his sons. Leaving aside until the conference Lars Lönnroth's objection that "the task would appear hopeless considering the fact that Ragnarr was one of the most popular legendary heroes in Old Norse tradition",⁸⁾ I shall now go on to examine in some detail, and hopefully to develop in some respects, the way in which Bjarni sets about his allegedly hopeless task.

His first move is to compare and contrast the Ragnars saga preserved in 1824 b with Ragnarssona þáttr. This latter, after relating in a form much briefer than what is found in 1824 b the story of Ragnarr's slaying of a serpent in Gautland, goes on to refer to a saga of Ragnarr in the following words:

... ok fór þat svá, sem segir i sögu Ragnars konungs,
at hann fekk síðan Þóru borgarhjört, ok síðan lagðisk
hann í hernað ok frelsti allt sitt ríki. (9)

Which Ragnars saga is the one so referred to? After a cursory reading, it might be thought that Haukur Erlendsson, who in all probability compiled the Ragnarssona þáttr,¹⁰⁾ had before him a

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7) See Guðnason, p. 30, and the reference there given.

8) See MScan (1971), p. 178

9) See Hauksbók, p. 458.

10) See Hauksbók, XCI-XCIII

text of Ragnars saga similar or identical to the one preserved in 1824 b, and simply made an abstract of it for the relevant parts of the þáttur. According to Bjarni, however, this cannot be the case, in view, partly, of certain differences between the story of Ragnarr's slaying of the serpent as it is told in the þáttur, and the same story as it is told in 1824 b, and partly also in view of other differences between the þáttur and 1824 b in later sections of the two works. Since the differences between the two versions of the serpent-story are not listed by Bjarni, the most important of them may be noted here. In 1824 b, Herruðr is simply a powerful jarl in Gautland; in the þáttur he is said to be a jarl in the service of Ragnarr. In 1824 b his daughter, Þóra, receives the serpent as one of her father's daily presents to her; in the þáttur she receives it as a morgingjöf. In 1824 b the serpent is made to lie on gold, the amount of which increases underneath it as the serpent itself grows in size and ferocity; in the þáttur, on the other hand, while the serpent grows large and fierce much as in 1824 b, no mention is made of gold. An important difference, which has recently been brought into focus by Marina Mundt's article on the dragon-fight in Ragnars saga,¹¹⁾ is the fact that we have no account in the þáttur, as we do in 1824 b, of Ragnarr being identified as the slayer of the serpent through the discovery of his spear-point in the serpent's body. Mention is made of a spear in the þáttur, to be sure, but there is no story there, as there is in 1824 b, of the spear-point becoming disconnected from the spear-shaft in the course of Ragnarr's fight with the serpent, and being later identified as belonging to him. It may also be pointed out, for what it is worth, that the serpent rises up and breathes poison onto Ragnarr in the þáttur, but does not do either of these things in 1824 b.

The more important of the remaining differences between the two works have been listed by Bjarni, and are very briefly

11) Marina Mundt, "Omkring dragekampen i Ragnars saga loðbrókar", in Arv, 27, (1971), 121-40

as follows: in the páttir Eysteinn, king of the Swedes, is called Eysteinn beli and is a tributary king of Ragnarr's, whereas in 1824 b he has no nickname, is a friend of Ragnarr's, and rules independently. In the páttir the two sons of Ragnarr by Þóra borgarhjörtr, Eirekr and Agnarr, the former of whom desires Eysteinn's daughter Borghildr, are defeated in battle by Eysteinn after unsuccessfully trying to make him tributary to themselves, rather than to Ragnarr. In 1824 b, on the other hand, they invade Sweden after the friendship between Eysteinn and Ragnarr has broken up as a result of Ragnarr's abandoning his idea of marrying Eysteinn's daughter, who is here called Ingibjörg. In the páttir, Ivarr beinlausir, one of Ragnarr's sons by Áslaug, founds the city of York, and wins the loyalty of the English chieftains without apparently making them any material offer, whereas in 1824 b he founds London, and wins the support of the strongest men in England by giving them large amounts of gold and silver. From differences of this kind, and from the fact that the versions of Ragnars saga reflected in 1824 b and 147 both seem to differ from Ragnarssona páttir in showing the influence, in style and subject-matter, of Völsunga saga and Þiðreks saga,¹²⁾ Bjarni concludes that the Ragnars saga which underlay the páttir was considerably different from either of the versions of Ragnars saga reflected in 1824 b and 147.

Bjarni's next step is to compare and contrast with each other the versions of Ragnars saga reflected in these two

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12) See Guðnason, p. 31. This is a somewhat simplified version of a view advanced by A. Edzardi in his preface to the second revised edition of von der Hagen's translation of Völsunga saga and Ragnars saga, Völsunga- und Ragnars-Saga ..., 2. Auflage (1880), XXVI-XXXIX, and XLIII-IV (footnote). Edzardi pointed out striking parallels in wording between Völsunga saga and Ragnars saga, and also drew attention to parallels between these two sagas and Þiðrekssaga. It should nevertheless be pointed out that even Edzardi admitted (p. XXX) that Völsunga saga and Ragnars saga differed markedly from each other in style; and his examples of the influence of Þiðrekssaga on Ragnars saga (as opposed to Völsunga saga) were neither plentiful nor particularly striking. See Edzardi, XXXVI-IX.

manuscripts. It is at this point that his treatment of his subject becomes rather disappointingly unspecific, though the general outlines which he offers show the way to a specific conclusion. As Bjarni points out, the text of Ragnars saga in 147 has been exceedingly poorly preserved. Magnus Olsen, who edited it and printed it together with 1824 b text of Völsunga saga and Ragnars saga in his edition of 1906-8, was only able to read scattered portions of the text. The printed portions, since he was only able to read the manuscript fragmentarily, are seldom extensive and often do not even run to whole sentences. Much may nevertheless be learnt from a close study of the 147 text of Ragnars saga, as Magnus Olsen and Bjarni Guðnason both realized. The version of Ragnars saga reflected in 147 seems to begin, as Olsen has shown, with what corresponds to chapter II in the 1824 b version of Ragnars saga - that is, with Ragnarr's slaying of the serpent and the winning of Þóra, rather than with the chapter dealing with Heimir and Áslaug.¹³⁾ This latter seems to form the opening chapter of Ragnars saga according to 1824 b,^{13a)} but was treated by early editors of Völsunga saga as the final chapter of Völsunga saga.¹⁴⁾ According to Olsen at least, the Ragnars saga reflected in 147 comes to an end on the recto of the leaf numbered by Olsen for editorial purposes as 19. This side, 19 recto, which is evidently the one which Olsen found easiest to read, contains, among other things, a quotation from Sigvatr Þórðarson's Knútsdrápa about Ívarr having the blood-eagle cut on Ella's back, a statement about Ívarr becoming king over part of England, a mention of his being reputedly responsible for the death of King Edmund, and finally, the following statement: Loðbrókar synir fóru víða með hernaði um England vestur ok svo víða annarsstaðar. Olsen's view that this is the point at which the saga comes to an end is presumably based partly on a consideration of the 147 version of Ragnars saga in relation to the accounts of Ragnarr and his sons

13) See Olsen, p. LXXXVI

13a) See Olsen p. LXXIX.

14) See, for instance, the editions of Rafn (Fornaldarsögur Norðrlanda I, 1829) and Bugge (Norrøne Skrifter af sagnhistorisk Indhold, II, 1865).

in the páttir and in Skjöldunga saga, and partly on the fact that the sentence just quoted brings the writing on 19 recto to an end very slightly higher up the leaf than is the case with the other leaves in this gathering.¹⁵⁾

A comparison of the versions of Ragnars saga reflected in 1824 b on the one hand and 147 on the other — taking into account, of course, the fragmentary state of the latter text — very soon reveals that the two versions resemble each other closely; in parts, as Olsen pointed out, they are virtually word for word the same. It is grossly misleading, at least as far as these two versions are concerned, to speak of "the glaring differences between the written versions", as Lönnroth does in his review of Einarsbók.¹⁶⁾ Nevertheless, as Bjarni quite rightly points out, there are certain important differences between these two versions, and his list of these differences can, I think, be developed in several ways. In the first place, while it is quite true, as Bjarni suggests, that both these versions of Ragnars saga are linked to Völsunga saga through the person of Aslaug in the manner described earlier, there is no evidence that the Ragnars saga reflected in 147 was linked to Völsunga saga in precisely the same way as the one reflected in 1824 b, i.e. by means of a separate chapter dealing with Heimir and Aslaug. The only clear-cut evidence of a link with Völsunga saga that we have in 147 is a fragmentary passage seeming to correspond almost word for word to the one in 1824 b in which Aslaug refers to the meeting of Sigurðr and Brynhildr on Hindarfjall, and her resultant birth.¹⁷⁾ Another point made by Bjarni which requires some development is that the 147 version of Ragnars saga is, in comparison with the 1824 b version, kjarnyrtari og styttri, that is, pithier, shorter, less wordy. Since Bjarni gives no examples in support of this view, a list of passages corresponding to each other in the two versions,

15) See Olsen, p. LXXXVI, and 194 (footnote).

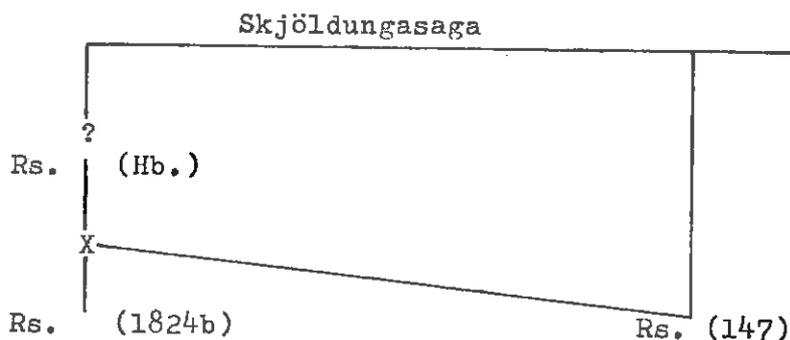
16) See MScan (1971), p. 178.

17) See Olsen, 180-81.

and illustrating the generally pithier nature of the 147 version, will be obtainable from me at the conference. This list will serve a twofold purpose: it will illustrate and confirm Bjarni's rather sweepingly made point that the 147 version is the more economically worded of the two versions, and it will also show, by virtue of the close similarities to each other of the corresponding passages, how closely these two versions of Ragnars saga resemble each other — at least in the parts from which the quotations in the list are drawn.

Certain other important differences between these two versions — most of which have been pointed out by Magnus Olsen and Bjarni Guðnason — may also be noted here. The chaptering of the 147 version of Ragnars saga differs considerably from that of the 1824 b version, and there are fewer lausavísur in the 147 version than there are in the one reflected in 1824 b. It is altogether likely that the last three chapters of the 1824 b version, which contain, among other things, a somewhat awkward rounding off the story of Ragnarr's sons, an exchange of verses between two warriors, and some verses spoken by a trémaðr, were not present in the 147 version. On the other hand, certain stanzas of Krákumál, part of which, as I pointed out earlier, immediately follows the 1824 b version of the saga in that manuscript, are made in the 147 version to form a part of the saga; they would seem to be placed there in the mouth of Ragnarr — not altogether inappropriately, though their subject-matter is for the most part extraneous to that of the saga — as he dies in the serpent-pit. As regards the lausavísur of Ragnars saga, the text of 147 often yields readings which seem closer to the original form of the verses than the readings found in the text of 1824 b, which latter, as far as the verses are concerned, is at times exceedingly corrupt. Furthermore, the differences between the two versions become markedly greater towards the end of the saga, where the 147 version shows greater similarities, in Bjarni's opinion, to the account of Ragnarr and his sons in Skjöldunga saga — as this is reflected in Ragnarssona þáttur on the one hand, and Arngrímur's Latin version of the story on the other — than to the 1824 b version of Ragnars saga. It is certainly true that the verbal similarities at this stage of the narrative between the 147 version and

the pátrr, the most important of which have been listed by Olsen in the preface to his edition,¹⁸⁾ become so striking at one point that the phrase "the glaring differences between the written sagas" hardly seems to have very much validity even in the larger context of the three versions of Ragnars saga reflected respectively in 147, 1824 b, and Ragnarssona pátrr. Nevertheless, the fact that there are differences between these various versions, even if the differences in question are not exactly glaring ones, should, of course, at all times be remembered. Bjarni summarizes his view of the textual tradition of Ragnars saga in the following stemma:



In this stemma, which Bjarni sees as conjectural, no mention is made, rather surprisingly, of Arngrímur's accounts of Ragnarr and his sons in Rerum Danicarum Fragmenta, which Bjarni must surely regard as an important extant manifestation of the part of Skjöldunga saga relevant to his stemma.¹⁹⁾ The chief reason for the question mark at the end of the line leading from Skjöldunga saga to the version of Ragnars saga lying behind Ragnarssona pátrr in Hauksbók seems to be that the nature of the relationship between Skjöldunga saga and the oldest Ragnars saga, as Bjarni calls this version, is in his view uncertain.²⁰⁾ Since neither Ragnarssona pátrr nor the relevant part of Arngrímur's text reproduces Skjöldunga saga without alteration, however, as Jakob Benediktsson has shown,²¹⁾ and since it is

18) See Olsen, XCI-III.

19) See Guðnason. (1969), p. 31, footnote 14. Bjarni regards Arngrímur's accounts of Ragnarr as derived from Skjöldunga saga and from a version of Ragnars saga somewhat like the one preserved in 1824 b; see p. 19 below.

20) Guðnason (1969), p. 32: "Erfitt er að gera sér grein fyrir tengslum Skjöldungas og Rs. elztu."

21) See Benediktsson (1957), 113, 260-62.

chiefly in outlines rather than in details of the story that the pátrr and Arngrímur are in agreement,²²⁾ it is doubtful how far Skjöldunga saga ought to be given a definite place in the stemma at all. Since Bjarni expresses in his remarks on the stemma the view that the 147 version of Ragnars saga contained narrative material descending from Skjöldunga saga, "hvort sem um millilið er að ræða eða ekki",²³⁾ "whether or not an intermediate link is in question", another purpose of his question mark, we may assume, is to allow for the possibility of the material from Skjöldunga saga reaching the 147 version of Ragnars saga if not directly, or through an intermediate link on the direct line, then by way of Ragnarssona pátrr and X. Nevertheless, one feels that the right-hand downward line ought to be rather more tentatively drawn — not least in view of the close verbal similarities, pointed out by Olsen (see p.9, above, footnote 18), between the pátrr and 147.

Bjarni's stated reason for introducing X into the stemma is that the two versions of Ragnars saga reflected respectively in 1824 b and 147 "geta naumast haft been rittengsl".²⁴⁾ By this Bjarni presumably means that, in view of the differences between them, and in spite of their similarities, neither one of them can have directly influenced the other, and that a common source, X, must therefore be assumed for them both. Now since, in Bjarni's expressed opinion, 147 had a "more original" (upprunalegri) text than 1824 b, in addition to the material inherited from Skjöldunga saga,²⁵⁾ it would seem to be obvious that, unless he is using the adjective upprunalegur in a sense not exclusively textual, Bjarni regards X as more faithfully represented in 147 — for all its fragmentary state — than in 1824 b. This impression

22) See Axel Olrik, "Skjöldunga saga i Arngrim Jonssons udtog", in Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie II, 9 (1894), 83-164, pp. 147-49.

23) See Guðnason (1969), p. 32.

24) Guðnason (1969), 32.

25) Guðnason (1969), 32.

is somewhat upset, however, by a sentence following on soon afterwards from the ones already quoted, in which Bjarni writes as follows: "Gert er ráð fyrir litlum muni á X og 1824 b, eins og 147 ber vitni um".²⁶⁾ The first half of this very unclear sentence momentarily gives the impression that in Bjarni's opinion 1824 b and X are virtually identical; and if this were the case it would mean, of course, that the shorter, pithier text of 147 would have to be explained by the view that abridgement took place at some point on the line leading from X to 147. The second half of Bjarni's sentence, however, "eins og 147 ber vitni um" suggests the meaning that 1824 b is similar to X only in virtue of the features which it shares with 147. Is Bjarni now trying to say that he regards the two versions as textually equidistant from X? In other words, is 147 supposed to differ as much in its own way from X as 1824 b does in its? It is only fair to say that this seems unlikely, partly in view of the remark referred to earlier about 147 having a "more original" text than 1824 b, and partly in view of some remarks made by Bjarni later in his paper, where he describes the 1824 b version as the one which has "undergone most development" ("tekið ... út mestan þroska"), and fits Ragnars saga into a pattern represented by certain other foraldarsögur which have survived in more than one version, and which show that, where two versions are in question, the older version tends to be shorter, less "late" in style, and less bulky than the younger one.²⁷⁾

It is unfortunate that Bjarni does not commit himself to a more clearly-defined conjecture as to the nature and form of X, since he gives it a particularly important place in the textual history of Ragnars saga. It was most probably in X, he claims, that the episode of Kráka was first introduced into the written tradition of the saga, and it was also in connection with X that Völsunga saga was composed. Völsunga saga, according to Bjarni, was composed as an introduction to X by the author or redactor of that version of Ragnars saga, who linked the two

26) Guðnason (1969), 32.

27) Guðnason (1969), 37.

sagas together through the person of Áslaug, and made of them what is in effect one long saga of the Völsungar, culminating in the story of Áslaug, who is arguably more the heroine of what we now call Ragnars saga than Ragnarr is its hero.²⁸⁾ It may be mentioned in passing that Bjarni hardly allows here, as de Vries does in his long article on the West Norse tradition of the Ragnarr-legend, for the possibility that the Kráka-episode may have existed in the version of Ragnars saga reflected in Hauksbók, though in a form less developed than what we find in 1824 b and 147.²⁹⁾ It should at all events be made clear that Ragnarssona þátr, while it does not mention the name Kráka, knows of Áslaug, "er sumir kalla Randalín, dóttur Sigurðar Fáfnisbana ok Brynhildar Buðladóttur".³⁰⁾ This need not mean, of course — in spite of what Edzardi³¹⁾ and Marina Mundt³²⁾ seem to think — that the compiler of Ragnarssona þátr knew of a linking of Völsunga saga with Ragnars saga; it only shows that he knew of the idea that Ragnarr became the son-in-law, through marrying Áslaug, of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, and since he refers to a Ragnars saga in the þátr, as we have seen,³³⁾ it is possible that his source for this notion may have been that Ragnars saga. More immediately relevant to Bjarni's views on the relationship of Ragnars saga to Völsunga saga is de Vries's doctoral thesis on the Faroese ballads, published in 1915. De Vries devotes a special section of his long chapter on the

28) Guðnason (1969), 33ff.

29) Jan de Vries, "Die westnordische Tradition der Sage von Ragnar Lodbrok", in Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie, LIII (1928), 257-302; see pp. 293-94. See also p. 167 of Jan ... de Vries, Studien over Færösche Balladen (1915).

30) See Hauksbók, p. 459.

31) See Edzardi, XLIII-IV.

32) See Mundt, p. 123. De Vries (1928), 285-90, argues convincingly — if I read him correctly — that the genealogical linking of the family of Ragnarr with that of Sigurðr could well have pre-dated the linking of Völsunga saga with Ragnars saga, and was assisted (a) by the fact that Ragnarr, like Sigurðr, was regarded as a serpent-slayer, and (b) by the name of Ragnarr's son by Áslaug, Sigurðr ormr-f-auga.

33) See p. 3 above.

Faroese Ragnars tǫttur, or ballad of Ragnarr, to a discussion of the relationship between Völsunga saga and Ragnars saga, and reaches conclusions quite different from those of Bjarni.³⁴⁾ His starting-point is the view expressed by Mogk in his literary history of 1904 that Völsunga saga was in all probability written as an introduction to Ragnars saga.³⁵⁾ Against this, de Vries argued principally that if Völsunga saga had been written as an introduction to Ragnars saga, the author of Völsunga saga would not have included in it, as he does, material which is quite unrelated to Ragnarr loðbrók, such as the stories about Helgi hundingsbani and Jörmunrekr.³⁶⁾ Even if Aslaug is regarded as the true protagonist of Ragnars saga, and the two sagas together are regarded as a single long Völsunga saga, as Bjarni would have it, it has to be admitted that, in its use of material not directly related to the dynastic theme, Völsunga saga differs somewhat from Ynglinga saga and Skjöldunga saga, both of which Bjarni sees as possible models for the long Völsunga saga he posits.³⁷⁾ De Vries goes on to develop quite convincingly a view which takes as its starting-point a consideration with which Bjarni agrees, namely that Ragnars saga originally existed independently of Völsunga saga. If this is accepted, says de Vries, then it has to be admitted that Chapter II of the 1824 b version of Ragnars saga shows every indication of marking the original beginning of the saga. This chapter, which deals with Ragnarr's slaying of the serpent in Gautland, begins in true saga-fashion with the following sentences: "Herruðr hét jarl ríkr ok ágætr á Gautlandi. Hann var kvángaðr. Dóttir hans hét Þóra".³⁸⁾ etc. Chapter I of this same version, on the other hand, begins in a manner which

34) See de Vries (1915), 188-206.

35) See Eugen Mogk, Geschichte der Norwegische-Isländischen Literatur, 2. Auflage (1904), 843.

36) See de Vries (1915), 188-89.

37) Guðnason (1969), p. 35.

38) See Olsen, p. 116.

presupposes a knowledge on the reader's part of certain of the characters and events of Völsunga saga, and does not tie up logically with events dealt with in subsequent chapters of Ragnars saga. The content of this first chapter may be briefly summarized as follows: Heimir of Hlymdalir, grief-stricken at the news of Sigurðr's and Brynhildr's death, resolves to save their daughter, Áslaug, from all possible future harm. He hides her with some treasure in a skilfully made harp, sets out with her on a long journey, and eventually arrives in Norway, where he lodges at the farm of Spangarheiðr, the home of Áki and his wife Gríma. These two kill Heimir for his riches, and finding the child Áslaug proceed to rear her in great poverty as their own daughter, giving her the name of Kráka. There is, of course, little direct connection between these events and those of the next three chapters, in which Ragnarr kills the serpent in Gautland, marries Þóra and has two sons by her, and resumes the life of a warrior after Þóra's death. In chapter V, however, where Ragnarr meets Kráka and where we should expect to find some explicit relation to the events of Chapter I, the narrative style suggests that the whole set-up at Spangarheiðr, including Kráka, is being introduced to the reader for the first time. This may be illustrated by such sentences as the following: "Hann kemr skipum sínum ... í höfn eina litla, en þar var bær skammt þaðan, er hét á Spangarheiði..."; "þá hitta þeir einn mann at máli, ok er þat kerling..."; "... ok á ek mér dóttur þá, er ... heitir Kráka."³⁹⁾ The 147 version of Ragnars saga seems to share at least one of these sentences with the 1824 b version.⁴⁰⁾ It is hardly too much to say that this chapter, and the subsequent parts of Ragnars saga dealing with Ragnarr and Áslaug up to the point at which she convinces Ragnarr of her true identity, may be quite comfortably read in the 1824 b text without reference to the events of Chapter I. Hardly too much, because there is a brief reference to Heimir at one point in this part of the saga,^{40a)} and also because, if Chapter I is left out of

39) See Olsen, p. 122.

40) See Olsen, p. 177.

40a) See Olsen, p. 128.

account, the reader's natural question as to how Áslaug got to Spangarheiðr in the first place is left unanswered. On the other hand, if these latter considerations, and Chapter I, are disregarded, a greater effect of suspense is achieved from the point in the saga at which Kráka's beauty is contrasted with the ugliness of her supposed mother, Gríma, up to the point at which she reveals her true identity to Ragnarr. Two interesting facts, one of which was briefly mentioned earlier, may be noted at this stage. One is that, as far as can be gathered from the poor state of 147, the version of Ragnars saga reflected in that manuscript began with what corresponds to Chapter II in the 1824 b version;⁴¹⁾ and the other is that, in the Ragnars tǫttur, which de Vries regards as derived from a version of Ragnars saga older than either of the 1824 b and 147 versions,⁴²⁾ we find a version of the Kráka-story in which Kráka, who is supposedly the daughter of an old man called Haki, reveals herself to Ragnarr as the daughter of Sigurðr and Brynhildr without any explanation being given, at any stage of the ballad, of how she came to be living with Haki.⁴³⁾ The Ragnars tǫttur, it may also be noted, begins with the story of Ragnarr's serpent-fight — with events, in fact, which correspond to those of Chapters 2-4

41) See p. 6 above and Olsen, p. LXXXVI.

42) See de Vries (1915), 148 and 179. De Vries (1928), p. 296, regards the 147 version of Ragnars saga as a combination of the one reflected in 1824b and of Ragnarssona þáttur — see p. 19 below.

43) See V.U. Hammershaimb, ed., Færöiske Kvæder, I-II, (1851-55), I, 59-67, and the versions of Ragnars tǫttur printed in N. Djurhuus and Chr. Matras, eds., Føroya Kvæði ... (1951-63), 215-43. It must not be thought that the early history of Áslaug was unknown to Faroese tradition. On the contrary, it is told briefly in the Faroese ballad of Brynhild (Djurhuus/Matras, 201-203) how she was set afloat on the sea shortly after her birth, and there is evidence for the existence of a lengthier account of her life-story in a Faroese song now lost, see de Vries (1928), 287-88, for documentation. Furthermore, the Faroese Gests ríma or Ásla ríma, which in content closely resembles chapter I of the 1824 b version of Ragnars saga, is very likely based on that version of the saga. See de Vries (1915), 182-88.

in the 1824 b version of Ragnars saga. I am not concerned here to examine de Vries's view that Ragnars tǫttur goes back to an older Ragnars saga, but simply to point out that, provided the Ragnars tǫttur has been reasonably accurately preserved, we may assume that its singer and its hearers were not disturbed by the absence of an explanation of how Áslaug came to be living under the name of Kráka in the humble company of Haki. They were presumably satisfied, as the audience of an Icelandic saga could possibly also be, with the dramatic effect of suspense leading up to Kráka's eventual revelation of her true identity.

In the Ragnars tǫttur, Áslaug reveals her identity to Ragnarr when he expresses his disbelief, after seeing her in the fine clothing he offers her, that Kráka can be a mere farmer's daughter.⁴⁴⁾ In 1824 b, on the other hand, as is well-known, she declares herself to him after learning by magic of Ragnarr's secret plan to leave her, since he believes her to be of low birth, and to marry Ingibjörg, the daughter of King Eysteinn of Sweden.⁴⁵⁾ The reasons for this difference have been carefully analysed by de Vries, who believes that the Ragnars tǫttur preserves the older form of the Kráka-story, and who agrees with Bjarni in regarding Ragnarssona þáttur as representative of a Ragnars saga older than the one preserved in 1824 b. According to de Vries, this older Ragnars saga was more concerned, as the þáttur indicates, with the sons of Ragnarr than with Ragnarr himself. In the younger Ragnars saga — which for the moment we may regard as the one reflected, in different ways, in 1824 b and 147 — the author or redactor evidently wished to bring Ragnarr more into the foreground than in the older version. One way of doing this was by presenting Ragnarr as being on better terms with his sons Eirekr and Agnarr, who in the þáttur, it will be remembered, tried unsuccessfully to oppose their father by making Eysteinn tributary to themselves rather than to Ragnarr.⁴⁶⁾ In 1824 b, on the

44) See Hammershaimb, I, 66-7.

45) See Olsen, 132-37.

46) See p. 5 above, and Hauksbók, 459-60.

other hand, Eysteinn and Ragnarr fall out as a result of Ragnarr's abandoning his idea of marrying Eysteinn's daughter, and Eirekr and Agnarr are then made to invade Sweden for reasons which are not made at all clear in the text, but which would seem to be connected, like Ragnarr's estrangement from Eysteinn, with the latter's daughter. In the pátttr, of course, Eirekr had wished to marry Eysteinn's daughter, and had been offered her hand in marriage by Eysteinn after being defeated by him in battle. Since now, in "the younger Ragnars saga", the two brothers are being presented as allied with their father rather than opposed to him, a reason must be found for Ragnarr's friendship with Eysteinn breaking up. This cannot be that Eysteinn refused him the hand of his daughter, however, since the pátttr — and presumably the older Ragnars saga from which it draws — is clear that Eysteinn was willing to offer her in marriage. Hence arises the notion of Ragnarr's plan to leave Kráka for the seemingly more nobly-born daughter of Eysteinn, and of the insult done to Eysteinn and his daughter when he abandons this plan as a result of finding out Kráka's true identity. De Vries also speaks of the skill with which the author of Ragnars saga adapts the Kráka-story to its new environment in Chapters 5 and 6 of the 1824 b text, and raises the question of whether the person responsible for these various changes, most of which, it may be added, seem to be common to the 147 and 1824 b versions of the saga,⁴⁷⁾ was the same person as the one who linked Völsunga saga to Ragnars saga. I hope to give a "yes-and-no" answer to this question in my concluding remarks, to which I must now turn.

The conclusions of this paper must be regarded as highly tentative, not least because of the poorly preserved state of 147, which I have yet to examine more thoroughly than when I inspected it in Copenhagen in 1969. This manuscript may be regarded as reflecting a version of Ragnars saga older than

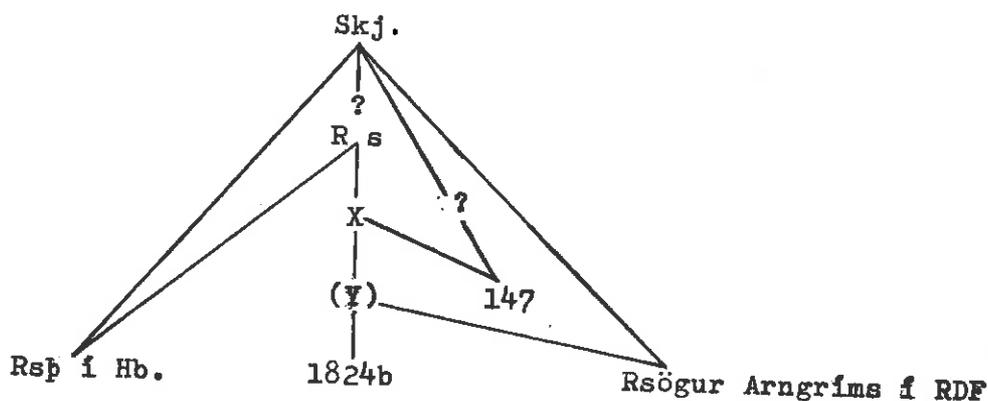
⁴⁷⁾ See Olsen, 177-82, and the footnotes pointing out the corresponding passages in the 1824 b text. For the argument outlined in this paragraph, see de Vries (1915), esp. 193ff.

the one preserved in 1824 b, as Bjarni rightly suggests; this version may be called X. The X-version was linked to Völsunga saga, as we must surely conclude from Áslaug's reference to the meeting of Sigurðr and Brynhildr in connection with her birth, but not necessarily by means of an introductory chapter about Heimir and Áslaug; at the X-stage of the tradition, we may suggest, Völsunga saga was brought to an end, as it is in 1824 b and in recent editions of Völsunga saga, with the story of Hamðir and Sörli, and Ragnars saga was made to follow it as a sequel, beginning, as we may gather from the text of 147, with the story of Ragnarr's serpent-fight in Gautland. There was an element of inconsistency in this arrangement in that no explanation was given as to how Áslaug came to be living at Spangarheiðr as the supposed daughter of Aki and Gríma, but this was hardly more serious than the inconsistency involved in allowing Ragnarr to recite in the serpent-pit certain stanzas from Krákumál dealing with events not mentioned elsewhere in either Ragnars saga or Völsunga saga,⁴⁸⁾ and it had the great advantage of providing an effect of suspense from the point in the saga at which the reader, like Ragnarr's matsveinar, begins to wonder whether the fair Kráka really can be the daughter of the hideous Gríma. 1824 b, on the other hand, represents a later stage of the tradition, and reflects the work of a redactor with authorial pretensions who felt that Völsunga saga and Ragnars saga needed to be more firmly cemented together, and therefore composed the chapter about Heimir and Áslaug. His version of the saga may be called Y. This redactor, or compiler as de Vries calls him, will have added to Völsunga saga the references to Áslaug in that saga, and the brief reference to Heimir, already referred to, in the part of Ragnars saga dealing with Ragnarr's wooing of Kráka; he will have regarded Krákumál as an independent work, and removed it from the text of the saga; and will have made the end of Ragnars saga less chronicle-like and more

⁴⁸⁾ As the 147 version of the saga does, see p. 8 above. For texts of Krákumál, see Finnur Jónsson, Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning, A I (1912), 641-49, and B I (1912), 649-56.

romantic, removing the quotation from Sigvatr Þórðarson's Knútsdrápa, and generally blurring the political outlines of this part of the story. The last three chapters of Y, and the 28th and 29th lausavísur, with the few lines of prose introducing them, must methodologically be regarded as the work of this compiler.⁴⁹⁾ The advantages of this view are that it allows for the possibility of Völsunga saga and Ragnars saga having originally been independent works, and it does fuller justice than Bjarni does himself to his fine distinction between what may now be called the X and Y versions of the saga. It will be evident by now that this view of the tradition owes a great deal to Bjarni's and de Vries's contributions; it differs from Bjarni's, however, in leaving open the possibility that Völsunga saga may originally have been independent of Ragnars saga, and from de Vries's in that it sees the X-version of Ragnars saga as older than the Y-version, whereas de Vries regarded 147 as reflecting a combination of the Y version of Ragnars saga, as it may now be called, and the Ragnarssona þáttr.

Bjarni's stemma may thus be tentatively rewritten as follows:



⁴⁹⁾ On the possibility that certain material in 1824 b was added by an interpolator after Völsunga saga and Ragnars saga had been joined together by means of the linking chapter, see Per Wieselgren, Quellenstudien zur Völsungasaga (1935-6), III, 351-52. Wieselgren does not allow, however, as this paper does, for the possibility that the two sagas were joined together otherwise than by means of this chapter.

Since this paper raises the question of whether similarities and differences between versions of an Icelandic saga are to be explained by reference to rittengsl or to oral tradition, and since this question in turn gives rise to speculation on the nature of the relationship between saga-writers and oral story-tellers in medieval Icelandic society, I hope my remarks here will provide the starting-point for a discussion which will be fully in line with the theme of the conference — "The Sagas and Medieval Icelandic Society".