

NO MAN IS AN ISLAND: MATTHEW PARIS ON MUNKHOLMEN

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In this paper I should like to suggest that Matthew Paris's visit to Norway in 1248 may have contributed to the development of Scandinavian traditions about Ívarr, son of Ragnarr loðbrók, and that Ívarr's byname (*inn*) *beinlaus(i)* 'the Boneless' may be partly explained by reference to this visit. In this context I should also like to make use of a Faroese folktale recorded by Johan Henrik Schrøter (1771-1851) in arguing that Ívarr's byname refers to the wind, and may originally have signified his skill as a navigator, his capacity for battling with the winds at sea.

I am grateful to Richard Perkins for first bringing to my attention Svale Solheim's observation (in *Nemningsfordomar ved fiske* (1940), pp. 104-06) that the terms *beinlaus*, *Eivind beinlaus* and *Ivar beinlaus* have been used in modern times by Norwegian fishermen as 'noa' terms for the wind, that is, as roundabout, euphemistic terms chosen in preference to words that are tabooed, as the Norwegian word for 'wind' seems to have been in this case, among sailors at least. Strangely enough, Solheim makes no reference in this context to the major Icelandic traditions of Ragnarr loðbrók (i.e. the two surviving versions of *Ragnars saga*, dating in all likelihood from the middle and second half of the 13th c. respectively, and the early 14th-c. *Ragnarssona þáttur*), in which Ívarr and his bonelessness are highly prominent. It is true that the Icelandic traditions make no explicit connection of Ívarr with the wind; but it is noteworthy that Saxo, in Book IX of his *Gesta Danorum* (written most probably in the early 13th c.), applies the byname 'Ventosi pillei' ('wind-hat') to Ívarr's half-brother Ericus, son of Regnerus Lothbrog. This byname has been linked by Dag Strömbäck (in *Namn och bygd* 23 (1935), pp. 135-44) to that of the Swedish king Erik Wäderhatt ('weather-hat'), about whom there was a tradition that he could control the weather, in that the wind was believed to blow from whichever direction in which he turned his hat. In Modern Faroese, moreover, the expression *Ívar beinlaus* may be used to refer to the wind, or to a draught (for references, see my article in *Skírnis* 165 (1991), 343-59, p. 357).

The connection of Ívarr with the wind also seems clear in the Faroese folktale to which I have already referred. This was recorded from a woman on the island of Suðuroy by Schrøter (see above), and was included by Svend Grundtvig and Jørgen Bloch in the second volume of their 16-volume manuscript collection *Corpus carminum Færoensium*, compiled 1872-1905 (see M. Chesnutt in *MScan* 3 (1970), p. 125). The folktale is printed as part of an article by Jan de Vries in *Neophilologus* 7 (1922), 23-35, see pp. 24-25, and it is de Vries's text -- which, as Michael Barnes has kindly confirmed for me, 'does not conform entirely to Faroese as most of us know it' -- that is reproduced below, together with an English translation, in preparing which I have benefited greatly from the help of both Michael Barnes and Bo Almqvist, who must not, however, be held responsible for any errors that remain. I should emphasise here that de Vries's use of this folktale is different from mine in that in his article he is *not* arguing for a connection of Ívarr's byname with the wind.

Ívar hin beinleysi

Mær er sagt um Ívar hin beinleysa, at hann átti triggjar brøður: Björn jamsíðu, Hvítung, Kváða og Sjúrd orneyga. Teir fingur boðini, at faðir var deyður; ein helt á spjótinum og hann kroysti hann so fast, at tað stóð brúnt í hondini; men Ívar hin beinleysi gjordi einki uttan sat og stardi í eldin og talaði einki, men fekk ymsar litir, so hann var bæði grønur og gulur, reyður og bláur [allir sögdu nakað, sum eg ikki minnst uttan tað, at alt var um at hevna faðir]. Boðini fóru aftur við tí svari, teir fingur. Nú spurdi Kongur Ella teir eftir, hvat hinir segja; so sögdu teir, hvat ið hvør svaraði, men Ívarin hann talaði ikki, uttan stardi í eldin og fekk ymsar lítir. “Já”, segði Kongur Ella, at tað var tað einasta hann ræddist fyri: honum óttaðist hann fyri, men ikki teim hinum. Brøðurnir foru nú at gera seg til. Nú teir voru lidnir, segði Ívar hin beinleysi við teir, at hann vildi sleppa við teim: teir sögdu hann kundi einki gera; hann segði: jú, hann skuldi við teimum fara kortini.

Tvey hendilsir møttu teimum, sum eg ikki minnst, men tó af sjógv og ovegri, sum alt var útsendingar, so teir hildu sær ikki til nakað lív; men Ívarin segði tá, at teir doyðu ikki enn: at teir fingur verra at møta enn so; bað teir hyggja væl eftir, tá ið land kom í eygsjón. Teir hugdu. Nú sögdu teir, teir sögu landið, men tað kom af landinum, sögdu teir, eftir sjógnum kom tað, so tað sást hvorki himmal ella jörð. Já, segði Ívar hin beinleysi, og nú máttu teir væl óttast, og tað var blótkúgvinn, ið nú kom:

[continued on next page]

Ívar the Boneless

They tell me about Ívar the Boneless that he had three brothers: Björn Ironside, Hvítungur, Kváði and Sjúrdur Snake-eye. They got the news that their father was dead; one of them was holding onto his spear and he pressed so hard that it left a brown mark in his hand; but Ívar the Boneless did nothing, but sat and stared into the fire and spoke not a word, but took on various colours, so that he was both green and yellow, red and blue [they all said something which I don't remember, except that it was all about avenging their father]. The messengers returned with the answer they received. King Ella now asked them what the brothers said: then they told him what each of them answered—'but Ívar, he didn't speak, he just stared into the fire and took on various colours.' 'Yes', said King Ella, that was the one thing he was afraid of; he feared him, but not the others. The brothers now started to prepare themselves, and when they were ready, Ívar the Boneless told them that he wanted to go with them; they said he could do nothing; but he said yes, he would go with them, even so.

Two things happened to them, which I don't remember, except that they arose from the sea and bad weather, and which were all due to witchcraft, so that they hardly thought they would survive; but then Ívar said they wouldn't die yet: that they would have worse things to deal with than that. He asked them to pay careful heed when land came in sight. They looked. Now they said they could see the land, but something was coming from the land, they said, across the sea it was coming, so that neither heaven nor earth could be seen. Yes, said Ívar the Boneless, now might they well be afraid; that was the sacrificial cow that was coming:

har í voru bein síni, og tá ið hon legði at skipunum, áðrenn hon nærti við tað, skuldu teir taka seg og blaka seg millum hornana á henni og síggja til, at teir blakaðu beint, tí blakaðu teir ikki beint, var teirra lív burtur. So nærkaðist hon til teirra, so teir hildu seg blaka tá til hennara; so tóku teir Ívarin beinleysa og teir blakaðu hann millum hornana á henni; tá drógust tey bæði á sjónum; tá var hann so tungur á henni, at hövdið snaraðist af hálsvölini, og tá fekk hann öll síni bein aftur, sum hann skuldi hava; so fóru teir til lands, og so flettu teir blótkunna; so fór Ívarin hin beinleysi til kongin, og hann segði, hann vildi ongar bøtur hava fyri faðir, tar-sum hann vildi geva sær so mikið af landørum, sum ein neytshúð kundi rökka út yvir; tað lovaði kongurin, at hann skuldi fáa og so risti hann húðina sundur í halar, so klenar, sum hann kundi fáa teir, og tað rak um alla Lundina í Onglandi; Lundina fekk hann ikki, men bleiv við eitt annað petti, sum húðin rak um, og har bygði hann: men eftir tað drupu teir kong Ella kortini og hevndu so pápan.

inside the cow were his bones, and when she attacked the ships, before she touched the ship, they were to take him and throw him between her horns and see to it that they threw straight, for if they didn't throw straight, their lives were lost. Then she approached them, and then they felt able to throw him at her; then they took Ívar the Boneless and they threw him between her horns; they both struggled there on the sea; then he was so heavy on her that her head was wrenched from her neck, and then he got back all his bones, which he was supposed to have. Then they went ashore, and then they skinned the sacrificial cow. Then Ívar the Boneless went to the king, and he said he wanted no compensation for his father, provided he would give him as much land as a bull's hide could extend over. The king promised that he would have that, and so he cut the hide up into strips as fine as he could make them, and it extended across the whole of London in England. He did not get London, but settled for another small area, which the hide extended over, and there he settled. But after that they killed King Ella even so, and thus avenged their father.

J. de Vries believes that this account derives almost exclusively (by way of oral retellings) from the first printed edition (i.e. Erik Julius Björner's *Nordiska kämpadater*, vol. XII (1737)) of the later of the two surviving versions of *Ragnars saga*, referred to above; this version could indeed have been known in the Faroes by the time Schrøter recorded the story, and there is no doubt that much of what happens in the latter is strongly reminiscent of *Ragnars saga*: the reaction and response of the sons to the news of their father's death, for example, and Ívar's fight with the cow. It should however be noted that in the saga, where the cow is called Sþylja and Ívarr finally defeats her as a result of being thrown by his brothers onto her back—where he becomes as heavy as a rock after being as light as a child to throw, thus breaking every bone in her body—the fight takes place on land (in Sweden) rather than at sea, and before rather than after the death of Ívarr's father, Ragnarr. According to de Vries, such differences as there are between the folktale and the saga are for the most

part due to a reshaping by Faroese oral storytellers of the saga in its printed form, rather than to the influence of any independent tradition. It may be noted that the folktale differs from the Icelandic traditions in making a specific connection, albeit rather an awkward one, between the hide used by Ívar to trick Ella and the cow killed by Ívar earlier; in the saga and in *Ragnarssona þáttur* no such connection is made, and in *Ragnarssona þáttur* indeed, though it mentions a bull's hide in the context of the ruse, no mention at all is made of a cow in connection with Ívarr. The one feature of the Faroese folktale that de Vries believes might derive ultimately from a source other than *Ragnars saga* is in fact its statement that Ívar did not in the end acquire London by his ruse with the hide; this, as de Vries notes, may show the influence of *Ragnarssona þáttur*, where it is York rather than London that Ívarr acquires by this means. He might have added that the first printed edition of *Ragnarssona þáttur*, in Jacobus Langebek's *Scriptores rerum Danicarum mediæ ævi*, vol. II (1773), pp. 270-86, could also have been known in the Faroes at the relevant time.

There can surely be little doubt that the cow in the Faroese folktale represents the wind or a storm at sea, and the fact that Ívarr recovers his bones from the cow as a result of being thrown at her seems to suggest that, in the background of the folktale, Ívarr and the cow were thought of as to some extent sharing the same nature; it is as if Ívarr, in defeating a cow that represents an adverse wind, comes to personify an even more powerful wind than the one he and his brothers were up against. It may be noted that, in an earlier version of the tale than the one quoted, the laws of threes and of progression (see Axel Olnik, *Principles for oral narrative research* (1992), pp. 52, 44-45) appear to have operated in the part of the story dealing with the sea-voyage: just before telling us about the cow, the storyteller says that two things happened which she doesn't remember, 'except that they arose from the sea and bad weather', and it is implied that the appearance of the cow forms a climax in a series of three events, about the first two of which Ívarr says 'they would have worse things to deal with than that'. In *Ragnars saga* (though not in *Ragnarssona þáttur*, where, as I have said, no cow is mentioned in connection with Ívarr) Ívarr fights and defeats two cows at Hvítabær before his encounter with Síbylja. He thus fights, in the saga, a total of three cows, and, whereas he despatches the ones at Hvítabær with little difficulty, Síbylja gives him (and others) a relatively hard time; her hostile activities are reported in three separate instances before the complex process whereby Ívarr kills her (already referred to) is finally described. The same two laws of oral narrative thus occur in the saga, as they do in the folktale, in the part of the story dealing with Ívarr's anti-cow activities.

Síbylja is a loudly lowing cow, which might imply that the original form of her name was **Síbelja* 'constantly lowing'. The fact that the name's second syllable is consistently spelt with a *y* or an *i* in the manuscripts of both surviving versions of *Ragnars saga* strongly suggests, however, that *Síbylja* is the original form (in Old Norse, at least; see further below), and that the meaning of the name was originally 'constantly booming', as E. Lidén maintained (in *Festskrift til Finnur Jónsson* (1928), pp. 358-64). In other words, it is likely that the second element in the name derives from the verb *bylja* 'to boom', 'roar', 'echo', which can be used of the noise of the wind, and which is, indeed, cognate with the word *bylr* 'squall', 'gust of wind' (as well as with *belja* 'to low', 'bellow'; see

Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon, *Íslensk orðsifjabók* (1989), pp. 49, 97, 809). On the face of it, at least, as I have indicated, *Ragnars saga* makes no connection of Ívarr with the wind; but it may be that SÍbylja's name reflects an earlier version of the story in which Ívarr, in fighting with SÍbylja, was fighting a personified or animalised form of the wind, as in the Faroese folktale. If one is looking for reasons why the wind came to be represented in the form of a cow, one could point to the suggestion made long ago by G. Hüsing (*Beiträge zur Kyros-Sage* (1906), pp. 143-44) that the name *SÍbylja* derives ultimately from Sanskrit *Savala* 'piebald', the name of a frequently lowing cow of plenty in Hindu mythology, and that this name reached the Germanic peoples in a form that corresponded closely to *SÍbylja*, which to medieval Scandinavian ears would have suggested, as we have seen, the noise of the wind.

I would argue that the Faroese folktale preserves a tradition according to which Ívarr was a successful battler with the winds at sea, and that this tradition is dimly reflected in *Ragnars saga* in the name *SÍbylja* and in the accounts of Ívarr's cow-slayings, though the connection with the wind was probably misunderstood by the redactors of the surviving versions of *Ragnars saga*, since they do not explicitly connect either Ívarr or SÍbylja with the wind (nor indeed does *Ragnarssona þáttur*, which as I have indicated does not in any case mention SÍbylja, or indeed any other cow, in connection with Ívarr at least). It may however be noted that in *Ragnars saga* (as opposed to *Ragnarssona þáttur*) it is bitter winds which cause Ragnarr's ships to be wrecked on the English coast when he goes to England on the mission which leads to his death and hence to Ívarr's vengeance; the significance of this will be indicated below.

The historical prototype for Ívarr, son of Ragnarr loðbrók, is generally thought to be the ninth-century Viking leader Inwære, who invaded England in 865, very possibly with (among others) a brother of his named Ubba (see my *Studies in Ragnars saga loðbrókar* (1991), p. 45). Is there any evidence for this Inwære having been associated with the wind in history or legend? The earliest clear evidence I have found for such an association is in the *Flores historiarum*, written by Roger of Wendover, a monk of St Albans, probably in 1219-35 (cf. McTurk, *Studies in Ragnars saga*, pp. 231-33). The relevant account by Roger shows the law of threes in connection with figures named Lothbrocus (cf. loðbrók) and Hinguar (cf. Inwære, Ívarr), and with winds at sea. Lothbrocus, sailing off the coast of Denmark, is driven by a storm to England (cf. Ragnarr loðbrók's arrival in England in *Ragnars saga*, noted above), where he becomes friendly with Edmund, king of the East Angles. The king's jealous huntsman murders him, however, and when the murder is discovered the murderer, Bernus, is punished by being set adrift on the sea without means of navigation. He is cast ashore in Denmark, where the sons of Lothbrocus, Hinguar and Hubba (cf. *Ubba*), question him, and he lies that King Edmund was responsible for their father's death. The brothers swear vengeance on the innocent Edmund and set sail for East Anglia, where they eventually arrive after being driven off course by adverse winds and forced to land near Berwick-on-Tweed. The story of Edmund's slaying at Hinguar's instigation then follows. This account, then, involves three sea-voyages in each of which the wind plays a significant part, and in the third of which the Ívarr-figure, Hinguar, features as a battler with

the winds at sea. Is it this account, or something like it, that lies behind the Faroese folktale and the accounts of Ívarr's cow-slayings in *Ragnars saga*?

I have repeatedly emphasised above that *Ragnarssona þáttur* differs from *Ragnars saga* in making no mention of cows in connection with Ívarr, and I would emphasise here another point at which I have also already hinted: that *Ragnarssona þáttur* makes even less connection than *Ragnars saga* does between either Ívarr or Ragnarr loðbrók and the wind; in *Ragnarssona þáttur* the wrecking of Ragnarr's ships is caused by the sea-current and the shallow water rather than by winds, as it is in the saga. As I have shown elsewhere (see my *Studies in Ragnars saga*, p. 179), there are reasons for thinking that *Ragnarssona þáttur*, though written later than either of the two surviving versions of *Ragnars saga*, reflects a lost version of *Ragnars saga* older than either of them, and written before 1230. All this would suggest that the motifs of the cows and the wind, which appear to have been similarly handled in both the surviving versions of the saga, were first introduced into the latter in the earlier of these two versions, which, as I have indicated above, dates from the middle of the 13th c. This version, it may be noted, is known as the X version; the later surviving version, which is evidently an expansion of X dating from the second half of the 13th c., is known as the Y version.

It was towards the middle of the 13th c., in 1248, that Matthew Paris made his visit to Norway. As is well known, his brief was to reform the Benedictine monastery on the island of Niðarholm (now known as Munkholmen) off Trondheim (see R. Vaughan, *Matthew Paris* (1979), pp. 4-7). Matthew Paris was himself a monk of St Albans, and, among other things, a copier and continuator of the work of Roger of Wendover; in two of his major writings, the *Chronica majora* and the *Flores historiarum* (the latter not to be confused with Roger's work of that name) he reproduces Roger's account of Lothbrocus, Hinguar and Hubba practically word for word (see my *Studies in Ragnars saga*, p. 231). The relevant part of the *Chronica majora*, if not also that of Matthew's *Flores historiarum*, appears to have been written before Matthew's visit to Norway, though not very long before, i.e. between 1240 and 1248 (see R. Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, pp. 59-60, 108). Roger of Wendover's story of Lothbrocus, Hinguar and Hubba would thus have been fresh in Matthew's mind at the time of the visit. So would winds and storms, as there is every indication that Matthew's visit to Norway was a stormy one. In the *Chronica majora* he himself describes how the mast of his ship was struck by lightning and dashed to pieces in the port of Bergen in a thunderstorm that took place shortly after his arrival in Norway; at the time he was on shore in a nearby church, giving thanks to God for his safe passage through the perils of the sea (*pericula pontica*), which implies that his crossing had been a rough one. The same storm, and the breaking of the ship's mast, are also described in Sturla Þórðarson's *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (for references, see R. Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, p. 6). Against this background, which it may be imagined included a readiness on Matthew's part to discuss with his Norwegian hosts not only the stormy circumstances of his arrival in Norway but also what he had read of his own country's earlier relations with Scandinavia, it may be suggested that Matthew brought to Norway the story of Hinguar's struggle with the winds at sea, very much as told by Roger of Wendover.

It should be emphasised that Ívarr's byname (*inn*) *beinlaus(i)* and the idea of his bonelessness were known to Scandinavian tradition well before Matthew Paris's visit to Norway. *Ragnarssona þáttur*, which though written in the early 14th c. probably reflects, as we have seen, a lost version of *Ragnars saga* written before 1230, mentions it, and seems to explain it in terms of Ívarr's impotence. The earliest occurrence of the byname seems to be in *Háttalykill*, a poem attributed to the Orcadian jarl Rognvaldr Kali and the Icelander Hallr Þórarinnsson and dating from the mid-twelfth century; although the name *Ívarr* does not appear in the poem in its surviving form, it is almost certainly Ívarr who is here referred to. Still earlier (probably) is a reference to Ívarr's bonelessness in the anonymous *Chronicon Roskildense* of c. 1140, which mentions 'Ywar, filius Lothpardi, quem ferunt ossibus caruisse', i.e. 'who is said to have lacked bones.' These references to Ívarr, taken together with the later ones dealt with earlier in this paper, and others not mentioned here, suggest that there was doubt and difference of opinion as to how the byname should be interpreted. My own view involves what I admit is a bold assumption, i.e. that the term *beinlaus*, meaning originally 'boneless' or just possibly 'legless', and used in modern times by sailors as a 'noa' expression for the wind, as Svalheim has shown, could be so used in Viking times, and that the byname was originally such an expression. I would further suggest, against the background of this assumption, that Wendover's 13th-c. account and the 12th-c. Scandinavian ones just mentioned, with their references to Hinguar's association with the wind and to Ívarr's bonelessness respectively, point back to an early association of Inwære/Ívarr with the wind, no doubt arising from his skill as a navigator, and to a similarly early application to him of the byname -- possibly as early as in his own lifetime, i.e. in the 9th c. Because of its indirect, roundabout character as a 'noa' term, the byname was not always correctly understood, however, even though Saxo, writing in the early 13th c., seems to have had an inkling of its meaning, in associating another son of Regnerus Lothbrog, Ericus, with the wind. The contribution of Matthew Paris, I suggest, was to introduce Roger of Wendover's account, with its clear association of Hinguar with the wind, to Norway, and hence to revive there not only interest in this association, but also, in some quarters at least, understanding of the byname's original meaning. This renewed interest will have led to an increased understanding of Ívarr as a wind-figure, i.e. as one who, in battling with the wind, to some extent partook of its nature, and hence to the ideas of his being first light and then heavy in assailing Sifylja in *Ragnars saga*, and recovering all his bones from the cow in the Faroese folktale. The idea of representing the wind in the form of a cow will have arisen from a combination of the idea of Ívarr's wind-relatedness -- revived in Norway as a result of Roger of Wendover's influence, transmitted by Matthew Paris -- with ancient traditions, orally current in Scandinavia, of a cow called Sifylja, whose name suggested the sound of the wind; and the three-part structure of Wendover's account, itself no doubt inherited from oral tradition, will have contributed to the proliferation in Norway of oral tales about Ívarr's fight with the wind-personifying cow, and to the three-part structure of the relevant parts of *Ragnars saga* and the Faroese folktale. These Norwegian oral tales, which will doubtless have varied in the extent of their understanding of the original meaning of Ívarr's byname, will

have spread to Iceland and the Faroes and there influenced in different ways *Ragnars saga* and the Faroese folktale respectively. To accommodate this argument, it may be necessary to suggest that the X version of *Ragnars saga* was written rather later than the date I have given it here, i.e. 'the middle of the 13th c.', or at any rate to interpret that phrase rather loosely.

This paper, which has taken Matthew Paris's visit to Norway in 1248 as a pivot for its argument, offers an explanation, not only of Ívarr's byname, but also of why the X and Y versions of *Ragnars saga* differ from *Ragnarssona þáttr* in mentioning winds as the cause of Ragnarr's shipwreck in England and in including accounts of Ívarr's fights against cows. Its argument also implies that de Vries was wrong to suggest that the Faroese folktale 'Ívar hin beinleysi' ultimately goes back no further than to printed or written versions of *Ragnars saga* and *Ragnarssona þáttr*. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it suggests that this folktale from the Faroes gives a more accurate idea of the original meaning of Ívarr's byname (*inn*) *beinlaus(i)* than do any of the other surviving traditions of Ragnarr loðbrók and his sons.