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OF SAGAS AND SHEEP:
TOWARD A HISTORICAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF SOCIAL CHANGE
AND PRODUCTION FOR MARKET, SUBSISTENCE AND TRIBUTE
IN EARLY ICELAND (10TH TO THE 13TH CENTURY)

by

Jon Haukur Ingimundarson

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In the Graduate College

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
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As members of the Final Examination Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Jon Haukur Ingimundarson entitled Of Sagas and Sheep: Toward a Historical Anthropology of Social Change and Production for Market, Subsistence and Tribute in Early Iceland (10th to the 13th Century)

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SIGNED: Jan Haukur Ingimundarson

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This dissertation is dedicated to
the loving memory of my mentor Bob Netting,
an extraordinary teacher
and a sorely missed friend

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ABSTRACT

Research on medieval Iceland--focusing on the period of the Commonwealth, from the establishment of the National parliament of 36 chiefdoms in 930 to submission to the Norwegian King in 1264--generally assumes a perennial subsistence economy, neglects the significance of trade, and lacks focus on changes in farming systems and tributary relations. This dissertation deals with the formation of chiefdoms, communities, ecclesiastical institutions and state, and with production for market, subsistence and tribute in early Iceland in the context of climatic change and ecological succession. Based on the integrative use of narrative, legal and economic documents, and archaeological and ethnographically derived data, it is argued that foreign markets and domestic credit exchanges were key to productive relations and land tenure and farming systems prior to 1200.

The dissertation describes 1) chiefdom formation in terms of the economic rule of merchant-farmers, 2) the integration of a broad-based subsistence economy supporting specialized sheep production and yielding surplus wool for export, 3) freeholder production intensification in the context of mercantile activity, 4) disintensification and a change to a farming system emphasizing sheep reared for efficient milk and meat production, 5) the rise of rent tenure, communal property rights, and tributary systems in

contexts of developing ecclesiastic institutions and colonial relations with Norway.

The sagas are examined to show how trade enterprises were facilitated through class, transmission of property, a cognatic ego-centered kinship system, marriage, fostering, and household networks. An extensive analysis of Bjarnar saga Hítðlakappa reveals changes in the modes and means of production and shows the saga employing symbolism relating to marriage and kinship that reflects successive formation of different institutions and professional careers, as well as historically transforming links between Iceland and Norway, secular and ecclesiastical authority, and wealth accumulation and succession.

A new model is proposed for looking at the 'secondary exploitation' of livestock and for characterizing levels and means of intensification and specialization in Northern farming. This model is applied to evidence from England pertaining to the period from Iron Age to the 15th century.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Early Iceland confronts social scientists, due to its extensive narrative and normative literature, with a unique opportunity to study frontier colonization, the formations of chiefdoms and state, and economic intensification and disintensification--on an island where no indigenous people previously existed and where climatic and environmental changes were crucial. Practical and cultural ties to Norway and Norse colonies on British isles, where most of the early settlers originated, remained strong yet transformed in critical ways.

My dissertation deals with social-cultural change and systems of production and exchange in medieval Iceland in the context of foreign and domestic exchange, climatic change and ecological succession--focusing primarily on the period of the Commonwealth or Freestate (Þjóðveldið), from the establishment of the National parliament of 36 chiefdoms in 930 to submission to the Norwegian King in 1264. Furthermore, it contributes to the broad study of Medieval settlement and its impact on landscape resources on the islands of the North Atlantic.

Scholarly research on early Iceland--from Settlement in the late 9th century to the late 13th century, when Iceland became part of the Norwegian kingdom--is marked especially

by interest in modes of consciousness and of political power, not least with respect to feud, conflict management, legal categories and moral codes. It lacks the focus on subsistence, market, and tribute production, and it generally assumes a perennial type of "natural subsistence economy". It is therefore underestimates the significance of domestic and foreign trade, involving the export of wool products, and lacks the systematic analysis of tributary and tenure relations, as they developed in conjunction with changes in farming methods and other economic procurement.

Attempting to remove a relative blind spot, I conducted ethnographic and library research on farming systems in Iceland and employed an historical-comparative method for examining medieval economic documents, previously overlooked, or for analyzing them in new ways, informed by interpretive approaches of cultural ecology, political economy and symbolic anthropology. For interpreting medieval documents and zooarchaeological assemblages, as well as developing hypotheses on changing farming systems, I interviewed and shared my documents with farmers and agricultural scientists in three farming communities, conducted workshops, and employed a careful understanding of intensified livestock production in the 19th and 20th centuries.

With my dissertation I hope to contribute methodologically in the development of a historical

anthropology (including archaeology), by employing ethnographic method and research on farming systems in the analysis of Medieval documents and procurement systems.

Notes on my field ethnography and farmer informants

I conducted ethnographic, historical, and ethnoarchaeological research in Svalbarðshreppur, a sparsely populated commune in Northeast Iceland, during the summer of 1988 as part of the "Icelandic Paleoeconomy Project" led by Thomas H. McGovern and Thomas Amorosi (CUNY) and co-sponsored by Gísli Pálsson, University of Iceland and Guðmundur Ólafsson, National Museum of Iceland. I worked with a survey team that accompanied a zooarchaeological research group excavating a midden at Svalbarð in Þistilfjörður. We investigated ruins, landmarks, and procurement sites, and I elicited from farmers their thoughts on different configurations of resource exploitation since the late 19th century, after which market and household incentives radically changed. Farmers were shown or given copies from the detailed early 18th century land register, or Jarðabók 1703-1712 (Magnússon and Vídalín 1913-43), Eiríkur Þormóðsson's (1970) work on the Svalbarðshreppur settlement history, Þróun Byggðar í Svalbarðshreppi í Þistilfirði, and various other historical

readings and documents.

As the survey team's ethnographer, I took walks with farmers on their land, interviewed them over coffee, and recorded their memories of and analytical reflections on past and present economies--settlement patterns, land use, and production, including the problematic integration of various incentives, opportunities, and restraints, relating factors of ecology, labor, and market. Diverse topics of economy were discussed, frequently concerning the works and lives of informants' parents and grandparents, and their neighbors. I recorded narratives as well as descriptions and analysis concerning the structure, function, location, and historical moments in ruins; strategies and units of production, ecological parameters, and resource variables; changes in the uses of land and sea; the uniqueness of production strategies for each farm; inter-regional cooperation, conflict, and exchange; interdependence, and relations with regions outside the study area; the treatment, new and old, of resources consumed and discarded.

My fieldwork experiences in 1988 molded in critical ways my approach for looking at the medieval documents, and my discussion with the farmers provided me with crucial answers, both leading up to, and supporting my hypotheses on medieval social and economic change. I hope that my dissertation will show how fruitful it is to integrate ethnographic, historical, and archaeological information

through access, not only to indigenous farmers' memories, but also their critical analysis and dialogic inferences.

I feel an obligation to identify my informants in Svalbarðshreppur and my relationship to them, define the historical and geographical areas of my research, and discuss my informants different modes of reflecting on past economies and settlement.

Svalbarðshreppur is perceived as inhospitable in terms of its climate in the Icelandic context. Its history is marked by expanding settlement after 1830, when the heiðarbíli (interior settlement sites; ancient mountain dairies) were re-occupied, and then by emigration to Canada of about one third (113 individuals) of the municipal population in the period 1874-1893, when the heiðarbíli were already being abandoned.

The coastal region that we surveyed for ruins comprises the northern part of Svalbarðshreppur between Svalbarð and Ormarslón. The farmers at Hóll in Presthólahreppur, the first farm to the west of Svalbarðshreppur, and Gunnarsstaðir were also interviewed along with the farmers in our survey area. The region between the two rivers, Svalbarðsá and Ormarsá, represents a single leitarsvæði (an area in which a single group of men search for and round up their sheep in fall). Although emphasis was placed on surveying sites along the coast, transhumance and exploitation of the interior, as well as relationships

between main-farms on the coast and dependent-farms further inland, were discussed.

My chief informants in Svalbarðshreppur are mostly male and older, and most of them having lived throughout their life at the farm where they presently reside. These farmers are:

Sigtryggur Þorláksson (b. 1928), Svalbarð
 Þorlákur Sigtryggsson (b. 1955), Svalbarð
 Guðjón Kristdórsson (b. 1917), Sævarland
 Þórarinn Þorvaldsson (b. 1909), Vellir
 Eiríkur Kristjánsson (b. 1945), Borgir
 Vigdís Sigurðardóttir (b. 1954), Borgir
 Karolína A. Jakobsdóttir (b. 1918), Kollavík
 Kétill Björgvinsson (b. 1909), Kollavík, Borgir (earlier)
 Karl S. Björgvinsson (b. 1921), Krossavík I
 Jóhann Óskar Jósepsson (b. 1911), Ormarslón
 Þorsteinn Steingrímsson (b. 1911), Hóll
 Sigríður Jóhannesdóttir (b. 1926), Gunnarsstaðir I
 Sigfús A. Jóhannsson (b. 1926), Gunnarsstaðir I

Farmers at Hóll, Svalbarð, and Gunnarsstaðir knew me briefly by name before I visited them during the summer of 1988, but none of the other farmers did. However, some of my informants discovered that they were related to me, however distantly, while all of them were able to place me in a genealogical line from my great grandparents who had been farmers at Hóll. Some also knew of my grandparents and

many were able to tell me stories about my distant relatives. It may be important to note that I felt as if my informants were teaching me about people and practices of the past while perceiving me as someone who shared many of their highlighted interests. Many young people who were brought up in Svalbarðshreppur have been leaving it in recent decades, to live elsewhere, perhaps visiting occasionally. I was not one of these people, while my grandparents had been among the young people who left in the 1920's. But it was as if I had been reinvited, because of the intense interest that I showed, to learn about my past--the lifeways to which I had, in a sense, owed my existence. I was here showing interest in the work and lives which most of the young people appeared to be leaving behind entirely. It now looks like three or four of the eight farms that I regularly visited will be entirely abandoned within the next ten years.

Repeatedly, the interviewing process evolved in such a way as to invoke different discursive "voices" of communicating about the past. Each farmer expressed a couple of distinctive modes of thinking, thinking off, and thinking about history, and for reflecting on past and present practices, while the ethnographer's suggestions, driven by his interests, affected the elaboration of, and the articulations between, these modes. Guðmundur Ólafsson, archaeologist at the National Museum of Iceland, had pointed

out to me that generally when people are asked to report on the ruins (rústir) on their farm they will only think of those that may be many centuries old, from the distant "old" Fornöld ("ancient time") or "Saga Age."

I also noted among my informants a tendency to report structural remains that they consider "old", i.e. that which predates present oral histories or life stories and about which people have no knowledge, or know about from literary sources only. Structures which were used in the 19th century, during the lives of grandparents, are usually not expected to be seen as important by historians and archaeologists. I encountered these views in Þistilfjörður upon my initial visits with farmers, as I introduced myself and the crew. Several farmers asked if we had come to follow up on the few references that are made to the Þistilfjörður region in Landnáma and Íslendingasögur. [In another vein, we were asked jokingly if the crew was going to bring Svalbarðsmóri (a ghost buried on the fringes of the midden at Svalbarð) back from the dead.]

Upon my first visits, farmers took me on a walk around their land to show me "important ruins" (merkilegar rústir) and often portrayed to me (with important exceptions though) a glorified past in an ancient mythical time, also appearing as an atemporal state, and a reified Other world, referred to as Fornöld or Söguöld. Old (gamalt) didn't necessarily mean "important" (merkilegt), however: Some structures that

we looked at could be considered old because of the fact that they dated back to unknown ancestors, or farm-occupants, but they were easy to explain and strongly resembled recently build or "known" structures.

Upon my initial visit with Jóhann Jósepsson at Ormarslón, he commented enthusiastically at the extensive cluster of ruins and man-made depressions in Húsavík, saying that, while he knew nothing about them, "this must have been a real hamlet, back in antiquity" (Hér hefur bara verið heilt þorp í fornöld). Þorsteinn Steingrímsson at Hóll referred to the Húsavík remains by saying that "many more people must have lived around here in 'Saga Age' than there are now." He showed me Þorsteins saga hvíta which tells about events happening on a shielling (sel) which was located on the heath to the southeast of Hóll. He claims to know exactly where the ruins from this mountain dairy are located and thinks that by the extent of them, there may have been a "real farm" at one time. It appears that in Iceland, settlement was more dense during the Commonwealth Period than it turned out to be in Early Modern Times, up until the 19th century. But I am here concerned with describing my informants' objectified notions of Otherness in antiquity.

Once it had been suggested that the ruins located next to each other had been built and used during separated moments in history, my informants made a shift over to a

different and analytical mode of thinking about the "old" structural remains. When looked at apart from being clusters, most of the individual structural remains seemed less likely to have been inhabited by people, while several other functional possibilities came to our minds. As farmers helped me infer as to the functions of structural remains, they described the effective environment, recounted changes in ecological conditions and reflected on their childhood memories, including what their parents and grandparents had told them. They reconstructed common practices and particular events of the past and framed it within present landscape, which to a degree had been transformed by erosion and construction of hayfields, walls, and ditches. The ancient had been demystified and could be explained, in part, by the familiar and by envisioning an imaginary historical moment as well as the lives of significant ancestors who have passed away.

When an unusually wet, windy and cold summer had ended, I had some 250 pages of edited notes, the result of many long evenings spent editing and rewriting my fieldnotes from the days spent on the farms, and into which I incorporated historical document material. I used my fieldwork data--integrated with information from other historical, ecological-settlement, archaeological and population studies--in order to reconstruct economic activities in the 19th and early-20th centuries (Ingimundarson 1989). But my

ethnographic interviews and field-research also offered me the opportunity to build an understanding of modern and historical farming systems in Iceland, and to formulate a problem-oriented approach for analyzing modes and means of production during the Commonwealth era.

When I revisited these same farmers in the summer of 1990, we were able to discuss my attempts to reconstruct 18th and 19th century procurement systems and land use patterns in their region, as well as my hypotheses concerning the characteristics and transformations in farming systems during the Commonwealth period and into early modern times. Then, in 1992 and 1993, over a total period of three months, I stayed at Iceland's Agricultural College Hvanneyri in Andakilshreppur, Southwest quarter, where I did research in the most complete library on Icelandic farming, and interviewed agricultural scientist and farmers on the matters of my historical research.

At three meetings--held by The Scientific Society of the Agricultural College Hvanneyri, Borgarfjörður Rotrary Society, and Borgarfjörður Kiwanis Society--I gave a presentation and organized discussions on the topic "Subsistence production, market production, tribute production: Changing modes of exchange and strategies of rearing livestock in medieval Iceland." Furthermore, at three Icelandic centers for agricultural research, including Hvanneyrir Agricultural College, I collect and analyzed

historical documents and scientific reports concerning sheep and cattle production, thus augmenting the results from my earlier ethnographic research--necessary for interpreting the changes in Medieval configurations of livestock, tenure, and land use.

The Icelandic Commonwealth

A brief account of history and documentary sources

Medieval Icelandic society was fairly literate since approximately 1100 when people began writing down laws, genealogies, religious works, and historical works in the Icelandic vernacular. Among the important historical works are Íslendingabók ("Book of Icelanders") written by Ari Þorgilsson about 1130, and Landnámabók ("Book of Settlements"), perhaps also originating from the early 12th century, but written as we know it in the mid-13th century. Among other critical historical works is Heimskringla, the history of the kings of Norway, which was written in the early 13th century by the author and chieftain Snorri Sturluson.

The oldest sections in Grágás, the collection of law and proclamations from the Commonwealth period, date to the early 12th century in terms of their writing. Grágás contains among all sorts of stipulations valuable

information on production units and administrative cells, annual scheduling of economic activities, regulations for transmitting property, rights and obligations of ecclesiastical institutions, management of communal property, and the terms of land tenure and land use. Jónsbók, is the lawbook introduced in 1281, but this collection also contains the modified land reform laws of 1294, 1305, and 1314. Járnsiða is the name of the law code which served from 1271 to 1281, after annexation by Norway. Otherwise, most of the medieval economic and normative documents which this dissertation uses are compiled in Diplomatarium Islandicum--the collection of Icelandic and foreign documents such as written deeds, letters, commercial agreements, judgments, separate proclamations, and lists of legal currencies, prices and wages.

Turning to the primary narrative documents, the Icelandic family sagas (Íslendinga sögur) and the Sturlunga sagas were largely written in the 13th century. The former comprise about one hundred sagas, including over forty major sagas (sögur) as well as shorter stories called þættir. The family sagas recall or construe 9th-11th century events, people and circumstances. Sturlunga sagas, also called the "contemporary sagas" (samtímasögur) are a collection of stories and historical accounts which concentrate on events from 1230 to 1262).

Early Icelandic society has been called "The First New Society" (with respect to historical Europe) and has been seen as a "fragment society" and a "new nation" (Tomasson 1980). There were other chiefly societies with mixed maritime and farming economies established by Norse people during the Medieval Warm Period from 800 to 1000 on the islands of the North Atlantic, but those islands thus colonized were already occupied by people. Irish monks or hermits (papar) had sailed to Iceland perhaps as early as the 8th century, but the history of permanent settlement seems to have begun in the 870's. Most of the settlers were Vikings from Norway and the Norse colonies on the British Isles who brought with them cattle, sheep, horses, pigs, geese and seeds of grain and grasses, as well as slaves of Celtic origin.

Icelandic climate and environment is and has historically been relatively unstable. Severe winds and cold, heavy snow, drift ice, volcanic ash and gas, and earthquakes posed a major threat, as did epidemics in livestock (S. Þórarinnsson 1974). The climate was, however, relatively hospitable during the first 3-4 centuries of settlement, which saw the end of the "Medieval Warm Period." We might say that the very severe last two decades of the 13th century mark the beginning of the so-called "Little Ice Age," the period of irregular cooling in the North Atlantic which lasted into the 19th century. Still, there were years

and decades of severe weather and sea ice before the end of the 13th century which, according to annals, had catastrophic effects on landscape, people, animals and vegetation. The first strong indication of harsh climate come in the 1180's and through the first decade of the 13th century, then severe seasons occurred sporadically in the third, fifth, sixth and seventh decade of the 13th century (Ogilvie 1991, 1984).

When the first human settlers arrived, land was widely forested with birchwood and scrubs, uplands were covered with brushwood and heather and some lowlands were covered with grass. It is estimated that about half of the island's area, or 40,000 square km, was covered with vegetation, whereas today half of this area has been deprived of vegetation and soil (Friðriksson 1988, 1972). Ecological succession is much marked by over-exploitation of the environment due to human habitation: A positive feedback process is evident where wood cutting, forest fires and grazing of domesticated animals together with worsening climatic conditions and periodic volcanic eruptions lead to vegetation decline and soil erosion (Bergþórsson et al. 1987; S. Þórarinnsson 1974; Þ. Þórarinnsson 1974; H. Bjarnason 1974).

The Icelandic population is frequently estimated to have been around 60,000 in 965, as high as 104,000 in 1100, around 40,000 in 1404, and 40,623 in 1785 (see Tomasson

1980:58). Reduction in the population size after the Commonwealth period may significantly reveal the deterioration of economic and climatic conditions. It also reflects the consequences of epidemics--such as the plague in 1402-1403--which frequently occurred with natural disasters, such as the Lakagígar eruption in the 1780s. Anthropometric studies suggest that mean body height decreased overall following the 12th century, but according to Jón Steffensen's research changes in body height show curious strong positive correlations with changes in temperature (1975:426-433).

Scholars do not agree on how to characterize the Icelandic Commonwealth in term of looking at social stratification and mode of production, but they do concur with respect to the periods which immediately precede and follow it, that is, periods which my dissertation does not specifically deal with: On the one hand during "the Age of Settlement" (Landnámstíminn; 874-930), there was a large scale domestic production among large households based on extended kinship relations and slavery. On the other hand, in the late 13th century a peculiar kind of tenant system had developed, which, I will discuss later, showed characteristics of both feudal and prebendal characteristics.

Society during the Commonwealth period (930-1264) is often described as affluent and as having included many

freeholders, of which 4560 were thingtax-payers in 1095, but 3812 in 1311. Excavations reveal that houses were on the average bigger than in other Norse settlements, and bigger than they became in the late 13th century (Magnússon 1980:194)

For many the Commonwealth period is the Golden Age of Icelandic history, the period of the "Freestate" (Þjóðveldið, literally "the Nation power/reign") prior to submission to the King of Norway. The settlers and their descendants formed several regional assemblies (þing, thing) as was common in Norway, but by the year 930 they had established a national parliament, called alþing, which held its meetings at the site of Alþing in southwestern Iceland. All free male farmers could attend alþing with their relations for two weeks in June if they owned a certain minimum amount of property, that is, one cow per adult member in their household. Those farmers paid special "thing-assembly tax" (þingfararkaup) for those among them who attended as their representatives.

Alþing was the center of legislature and jurisdiction, but "executive powers" and actual administration of the law were left with the various courts, which the chieftains (goðar) were responsible for. Courts were held at "spring assemblies" (vorþing) in twelve places around the country, and again in the fall at "autumn assemblies" (haustþing, or leið). In 965 "quarter assemblies" (fjórðungsþing) were

established, one in each quarter of the country. Much attention has been given to the elaborate legal procedures as the different assemblies concerning various feuds and reconciliations. But the assemblies were also the locus where economic activities were organized and prices and economic transactions were negotiated and authorized.

Thirty-six chieftains constituted lögrétta, the legislative body at alþing, the national parliament. Nine of them ruled each quarter assembly and three each spring and autumn assembly. Each chieftain took with him two representatives (þingmenn) from among freeholders to alþing each year. A supreme court (fimmtardómur) was established in 1004, as well as an office of a law speaker (lögsögumaður), who was the chairman of lögrétta and was officiated for three year periods. The chieftain's residencies were somewhat evenly distributed over the country. Each held an office called goðorð, a chiefdom or chieftaincy which was a mixture of private property and public office. It could be sold, transferred through kinship, inherited through kinship or circumstances, or acquired by force. It could also be shared. Grágás, the law book of the Commonwealth, states that the goðorð is "authority and not wealth." All thing-assembly tax payers had to be associated with a particular chieftain, but they could according to the law choose and change their affiliation.

Goðorð seem to have been associated with heathen-temples of the Old Norse religion Ásatrú and some ancient manuscripts make mention of a temple tax, but the authority of the chieftains rested on strong kinship and alliance networks. The political and economic function/authority of chieftains and prominent, wealthy farmers--both referred to as höfðingjar ("aristocracy," "noblemen") in the sagas--was not shaken when alþing decided to make Christianity an official religion in the year 1000, at a time when most of Norway had been Christianized but not solidly unified. Prominent farmers built their own churches for the surrounding community and the priests appear as their servants. Tithe (tíund) was introduced in 1097 as universal tax amounting to a yearly payment of one percent of all dept-free property, except church property of course. This revenue was to be distributed in equal parts for the maintenance of the bishop, the needy/poor (þurfamenn), priests and churches. This meant in effect that churchwardens received, or were in administrative control of half of the total tithe revenue. "State-religion" centered around the two bishop's sees--in Skálholt in the south, and Hólar in the north--but these institutions did not rival the authority of, or attempt to exert autonomous influence on höfðingjar, including chieftains and churchwardens, until by the end of the 12th century, after which they also became wealthy establishments.

The subsistence base was broad during the Commonwealth period compared to the subsequent feudal "Dark Ages" under Norwegian rule, after 1264, then Danish rule after 1388. Some grain (barley and oats) was grown during the first centuries but this practice gradually decreased. Cattle and sheep rearing and horse raising was supplemented with some rearing of pigs, goat and geese. Fishing in the sea, rivers, and lakes was always practiced, along with seal and fox hunting, fowling, egg- and down-taking and some gathering of plants. Whale could be hunted at times, especially in the years when drift-ice visited the shores, and the meat and the bones from a drifted whale constituted a significant source. Evident, however, is the high emphasis on the exploitation of terrestrial resources; in contrast, the 14th century saw a significant growth in commercial fisheries. Grágás, the Old Icelandic Law code, provides detailed descriptions concerning a multitude of economic and social activities, including procedures of claiming land, mandatory building and maintaining of walls, fences and bridges, and the annual scheduling of various subsistence activities.

Juridical farm units held private yet sometimes shared property rights with regard to land use for hay making, grazing, rivers, lakes, beaches, and forests, as well as land around shiellings. Excavations, inventories, sagas, and other documents suggest that cattle provided a most

substantial subsistence base during the Commonwealth period, whereas livestock proportions were in favor of sheep during late medieval and early modern times. Larger farms, in particular, put a strong emphasis on cattle raising and cattle were used as the basic unit of value in domestic trade or credit exchange, involving land, livestock and their products, and various means of production. This is interesting if we keep in mind that sheep-wool products provided the basic exportable surplus on which mercantile farmers, including chieftains, based their affluence and lifestyle.

Most remarkable sections of the Old Icelandic law code refer to the division of the entire country into ca. 165 municipalities or communes called hreppur (plural hreppar). These communal units still exist as formal organizations, but it has been suggested that they originated as definite geographical units where cooperation existed for the gathering of sheep on mountain pastures (B. Lárusson 1967:40). The administration of the hreppar were formally independent of the authority of the chieftains. The hreppar were, however, under the provision of national law. they had to count a minimum of twenty residencies of freeholders who had sufficient property to pay the thing-assembly tax. These freeholders chose five prosecutors (sóknarmenn) and one administrator (hreppsstjóri).

The essential function of the hreppur was, according to

normative documents, to provide relief for the poor as well as to prevent people from reaching the stage of such poverty. Otherwise, relatives were required to provide prescribed assistance to their kin, depending on the degree of closeness of kin. Tithe for the needy (burfamannatíund) was collected and distributed by the hreppur administration. In addition to donations of food and housing, the residents of each hreppur were to maintain an insurance system: A farmer was entitled to compensation if he lost one-fourth of his herd of cattle from disease. Also, insurance would be paid collectively to a man who lost his hall, kitchen, larder or a church from fire.

The most important exports during the Commonwealth period were homespun cloth made of sheep wool, called vaðmál, tufted wool cloaks (vararfeldir, also described as cloaks of shaggy homespun lined with fur), wetherskins and lambskins, but luxury goods were also exported like foxskin, catskin, sealskin, falcons and horses. It is not known if raw wool was exported until around 1200. Butter and cheese from cattle were exported, at least by the 13th century. It is not known if fish was exported in the Commonwealth period, but dried cod became the most significant export item by far in the 14th and 15th centuries. Norway, where wool products were in demand, was the most important commercial contact, since during the first two centuries of Iceland's settlement, at least, many Icelanders had kin,

alliance and property there, and vis-a-versa. Icelanders also traded with people on the British isles, especially Orkney, and with the Norse Greenlanders. Icelandic woolens and skins were exported to England, but more in the latter part of the Commonwealth period, then most often by Norwegian merchants. Icelanders were in desperate need of sizeable timber, tar, wax, ready-made ships, and grain. Among other things they imported were tools, fine clothes, weapons, and articles for religious services.

Icelanders based their monetary value upon silver, and basic units of weight were eyrir ("ounce", plural aurar) and mörk (plural merkur), but the relationship between eyrir and mörk was always 1:8. This monetary value of silver was to a large extent theoretical, because a great deal of trade, domestic and foreign, consisted of exchange by barter, or by way of particular credit systems: Vaðmál (homespun) and milch-cows were important monetary standards and the former was expressed in legal eyrir (lögeyrir), which represented the length and width of the homespun cloth, measured in álnir (ells). The value for a standard cow (kúgildi), in terms of ells of homespun, was set at local assemblies, or was variably negotiated, because of its importance in local economic transactions. Then, the prices of other livestock and domestic products were set in terms of kúgildi during the Commonwealth period. It appears that six fertile ewes were consistently valued equal to a standard cow, but the

prices on other livestock and products varied.

The value of land was expressed in terms of hundrað, meaning "long-hundred" (120) ells of homespun. From the late 13th century and into the 19th century the values on landed property were variably expressed in terms of hundrað ells or kúgildi, but the value of a standard cow stayed at 120 ells throughout this period. It is generally assumed that a standard cow was valued at 120 ells during most of the Commonwealth era, but it is known to have been valued less, as low as 72 ells, in the decades around 1200.

Bruce Gelsinger (1981:33-34) has suggested that vaðmál gradually declined in value because manufacture became more common, and because silver rose in value due to inadequate supply and increasing need for the metal in trade. Around 1200, 8:1 ratio was the correspondence between the number of legal eyrir, in terms of vaðmál, to one eyrir ('ounce') of pure silver. Many have speculated that during the settlement period one legal eyrir was equal to one eyrir of impure silver (half the value of eyrir of pure silver).

Grágás includes numerous stipulations pertaining to the shared ownership of trading vessels, as well as to the way freeholders were allotted a share of a ship's cargo space if a crewman was provided. (Some of these legal articles are in the Canon law chapter for reasons unidentified, but then, the old Icelandic Kristinna laga þáttur appears to include as many references to economic activity as it contains

references to religious practice.)

After the middle of the 12th century civil unrest and warfare become increasingly common, and the period from 1236 to 1264 was a period of civil war, called Sturlungaöld ("The age of Sturlungs," Sturlungar being the name of one of the most powerful "families" in Iceland since the late 12th century). Beginning in the mid-12th century the country was becoming divided into governing regions, called riki (the modern Icelandic word for a state), ruled over by seven prominent "families" and their followers, the Haukdælir, Ásbirningar, Oddverjar, Sturlungar, Svínfellingar, Seldælir and Vatnsfirðingar. The goðorð ("chiefdoms") came into the hands of fewer and fewer chieftains. In the period 1264-1264 these chieftains, holding several goðorð each, submitted, one by one, to annexation by Norway, ending the long and bloody power struggle within Iceland. Icelandic höfðingjar (prominent farmers and chieftains) agreed that Icelanders should pay tax to the crown, and King Hákon of Norway promised to ensure that no less than six Norwegian ships would sail to and from Iceland with goods each year. This settlement is called Gamli sáttmáli, or "Old agreement." At this time, ever since the economic hardship of the 1180, foreign markets were less able to provide Icelanders with necessities and to absorb the island's products. Icelanders had become totally dependent on Norwegian merchants, who were now buying woolens from

England and Europe's eastern seaboard, where the wool industry was thriving at new heights, aided by new technological advances.

Dissertation objectives and outline

First, my dissertation presents hypotheses, arguments and findings from my effort to use field ethnography and other Icelandic Research on Agriculture, as well as concepts in anthropology, to do a problem-oriented reading of Medieval Icelandic economic and normative (legal) documents and narrative literature. From a perspective which looks at trade, specialization, complexity and environmental change, I analyze documentary evidence and propose a theory of a productive farmer economic system--which developed in conjunction with an elaborate sociopolitical structure and supported a relatively large population (compared to subsequent periods)--and its forms of mercantile exchange, production intensification, surplus appropriation and distribution.

I describe 1) chiefdom formation in terms of the economic rule of merchant-farmers and the articulation of different modes of production, 2) the integration of a broad-based subsistence economy supporting specialized sheep production and yielding surplus wool for export, 3)

interlinked processes of freeholder economic intensification in the context of slave emancipation, mercantile activity and rural credit systems, 4) subsequent disintensification and a change to a farming system emphasizing sheep reared for efficient milk and meat production, 5) and the rise of rent tenure, communal property rights, and tributary systems in the context of the development of ecclesiastic institutions and colonial relations with Norway. Taking into view the variable impacts of, and responses to changes in climate, vegetation, population and foreign markets, my project suggests the coordinate transformation in the relations and means of production, as the outcome of conflicting incentives, acted upon by freeholders, tenants, cottagers, landless laborers, and contending landowners (secular, churchly, monasterial, episcopal). I argue that domestic credit exchanges and the foreign markets were key to land tenure and productive relations and farming systems prior to 1200. Furthermore, chieftaincies, together with ecclesiastical institutions deriving tributary income, gradually gained independence from the hegemonic block that merchant-farmers comprised, while becoming dependent on (instead) and exploiting Norwegian merchants' activities, thereby articulating interests of stronger forces in Norway.

My analysis of Icelandic family sagas reveals the character and changes in strategies of accumulation, devolution and succession, and shows how trade enterprises

were facilitated through class, transmission of property, a cognatic ego-centered kinship system, marriage, fostering, and household networks. My interpretation of Bjarnar saga Hitdælakappa reveals changes in the modes and means of production, as well as the successive formation of different institutions in the context of individuals' indigenous socioeconomic roles and careers abroad. It shows the saga employing symbolism relating to marriage and kinship that reflects the historically transforming links between Iceland and Norway; secular and ecclesiastical authority; mercantile and inherited wealth; accumulation, alliance networks and succession; nation-state, chiefdoms and municipal-community formation; colonial-state and parish-community formation; and private, dependent and communal land tenure.

Secondly, as for broader objectives for looking at Iceland in regional context, and considering the limited valuable documentation of the uses of terrestrial and marine resources, my research contributes to the multidisciplinary, comparative studies of social and ecological change, climate impact, and adaptation in the Medieval North Atlantic (see McGovern 1990; McGovern et al. 1988; Bigelow 1991; Morris and Rackham 1992).

The broad, eclectic scope of my dissertation work required extensive communication and collaboration with scholars and scientists in different fields of research. My research complements ongoing zooarchaeological research in

Iceland--analyses of zooarchaeological assemblages that show significant changes occurring in the relative importance of different wild species, percentages of domesticated animals and their mortality structures during Medieval and Early Modern time-phases (Amorosi and McGovern 1989a,b; Amorosi 1992)--and other archaeological as well as paleoecological (see McGovern 1990; Bigelow 1991; Morris and Rackham 1992; Buckland et al. 1992) and paleoclimates research (Ogilvie 1984, 1991; Bergþórsson et al. 1987), sharpening the focus on changing land use, the causes and consequences of floral degradation, and responses to the impacts of irregular cooling of the Northern Hemisphere. I share these broad research-objectives with researchers who attended the first The North Atlantic Biocultural Workshop at Hunter College, January 23-26, 1992, when (NABO) was established, and future meetings planned to promote cooperative research efforts and the pooling of information.

Thirdly, my work proposes several suggestions for the development of an extensive methodological and analytical approach in historical anthropology: My overall dissertation project demonstrates the integrative use of narrative, economic and normative (legal) historical documents, and archaeological and ethnographically derived data, combining ecological-subsistence, socio-economic and humanistic-interpretive perspectives. It applies a method of historical comparison, and it shows how historical evidence

for socioeconomic processes articulates with the evidence for particular farming systems and ecological change, and with the facts of a procurement problematic, which dialogue with farmers and other agricultural experts helps to restore. Furthermore, it shows how an analysis of social drama and diachronic profiles in the Sagas, such as Victor Turner's (1971, 1985), can be extended. I use an approach of direct and symbolic analysis, further informed by a reading of non-narrative documents--to sort out the multiple temporalities or historical moments which figured in the form, content, and production of one particular family saga.

This dissertation proposes a new operational model characterizing levels and means of intensification and specialization in Northern farming for the analysis of zooarchaeological assemblages and historical livestock records. Perceiving a need for such a model--which describes intensification in sheep-rearing, within a broader context of production, showing points of articulation with cattle/caprine, pasture/cereal production, as well as exploitation of marine resources--and for the sake of comparison and testing, I apply my operational model for interpreting zooarchaeological assemblages and historical documents from England as they have been presented in the secondary literature.

I discuss critically current views on, or models for looking at the so-called "secondary products," or the

"secondary exploitation" of livestock. My research suggests further and different analysis (disaggregation of) zooarchaeological assemblages and documentary evidence for management on Medieval Icelandic as well as British estates, i.e. in light of northern factors of ecology, housing, grazing and fodder production, which preclude any single strategy for maximizing both milk and wool production (and creating efficient meat production).

The Nordic (Scandinavian) countries have long "remained a blank spot on the anthropological map in comparative discussions of peasantries" (Löfgren 1980:187). Finally, I hope that my research will contribute theoretically to such topical interests as chiefdoms, state formation, the circumstances of private, communal and dependent land tenure, secondary exploitation/products of livestock, and to various debates on peasant economies (e.g see Netting 1993; Cancian 1989; Roseberry 1989; Orlove 1986). In the future, I further anticipate placing production of social forms and economic forces in Iceland in the context of social, cultural and economic processes in Europe, while engaging in the discourse among historians and anthropologists studying Medieval and Early Modern Europe, on issues such as inheritance/devolution practices, household and family forms, marriage, rural credit, petty commodity production, agrarian systems, internal colonization.

CHAPTER 2
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND CURRENT PERSPECTIVES
ON PRODUCTION AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

On procurement strategies
and ecological and climatic change

In the first part of this century a few extensive attempts were made to reconstruct the dynamics of subsistence or means of production in medieval Iceland. Most notable among these were Þorvaldur Thoróðsen's comprehensive "A Description of Iceland" (1919-1935), which includes one long volume on historical farming; Þ. Jóhannesson's "On work and pecuniary circumstances in the 14th and 15th centuries" (1928); S. Steindórsson's "Grain cultivation in medieval and early modern Iceland" (1948-49); S. Guðjónsson's "Human Food and Health in Early Iceland" (1949). These publications were soon followed by the inclusive works of Jón Jóhannesson, A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth (1974 [1956]), which includes a chapter on foreign and domestic trade, and Arnór Sigurjónsson's "Accounts of Icelandic Agricultural History" (1970). The above scholarship is generally descriptive, for it gives a picture of medieval economy without the context of socioeconomic theory. While the above historians and

scholars make frequent references to medieval documents, and interpret them, they rely heavily on extensive 18th and 19th century essays and travellers' accounts on early modern farming and procurement--which they utilize directly (in their search for 'the most traditional way of farming'), as opposed to for purposes of historical comparison and elicitation of changes in medieval and early modern farming systems.

In recent decades other, multidisciplinary research has emerged which focuses more broadly on changes in, and the relationships between paleoecology, paleoclimate, historical population, and paleoeconomy. I refer to works which address, while attempting to reconstruct the short term changes and fluctuations in the weather and the presence of drift-ice (Bergþórsson 1969, 1985, Ogilvie 1991, 1984, 1981); the effects of climatic change on vegetation and farming productivity (Bergþórsson et al. 1987); socioeconomic responses to the long term as well as abrupt cooling of the climate (Amorosi 1989:214-218; McGovern et al. 1988; Gunnarsson 1980); the mechanisms of pasture degradation and deforestation and soil erosion (S. Þórarinnsson 1974:49-56; H. Bjarnason 1974; Þ. Þórarinnsson 1974; Aðalsteinsson 1981:58-77; McGovern et al. 1988; Friðriksson 1972, 1987, 1988; Eggertsson 1991; Ó. Arnalds 1992; A. Arnalds 1987); the impact of volcanic activity (S. Þórarinnsson 1979, 1974); the causes and consequences of

population change (Gelsinger 1981:27-28, 159-169; McGovern et al. 1988).

Adding to Icelandic Archaeology, which has primarily focused on structural remains, artifacts and settlement patterns, Amorosi and McGovern have analyzed zooarchaeological assemblages from several Icelandic excavation sites, including the one they excavated, that show significant changes occurring in the relative importance of different wild species, percentages of domesticated animals and their mortality structures during Medieval and Early Modern time-phases (Amorosi and McGovern 1989a, 1989b; Amorosi 1989, 1992). Many of the above mentioned authors engage in cooperative research and view their research projects as part of comparative studies of social and ecological change, climate impact, and adaptation in the medieval to early modern North Atlantic (see McGovern 1990).

The class systems and modes of production

Scholars do not agree on how to characterize the Icelandic Commonwealth in term of looking at social stratification and mode of production, but they do concur with respect to the periods which immediately precede and follow it, that is, periods which my dissertation does not

specifically deal with: On the one hand during "the Age of Settlement" (Landnámstíminn; 874-930), there was a large scale domestic production among large households based on extended kinship relations and slavery. On the other hand, in the late 13th century a peculiar kind of tenant system had developed.

In the Settlement Period (874-930) the most prominent settlers, including over 36 chieftains (J. V. Sigurðsson 1989) controlled extensive landholdings on which there was a large farm, smaller seasonal dwellings, and dependent satellite farms, some of them occupied by freedmen, or the free descendants of former slaves. Most scholars agree that the use of slave labor had decreased significantly already in the early 10th century (see Durrenberger 1988a; Agnarsdóttir and Árnason 1983; Gelsing 1981; J. Jóhannesson 1974:149-154; Þorsteinsson 1953; Á. Pálsson 1932).

It was common practice to free slaves in the Age of Settlement, at the time when plenty of land was available and unexploited. Slaves had rights to property, to earn it, and to buy their freedom. Manumissions involved a ritual process at district assemblies, where former slaves were incorporated into the law/society of free men. It seems that chieftains and other leading farmers had the incentives to establish these laws when considerable land was underused.

The Old Commonwealth law states that a free farmer was to ensure the livelihood of the slaves that he released, called leysingjar (freedmen), but these provisions also constituted the continuation of a relationship of dependency and exploitation between the former slave owner and former slave, since the latter might be occupying outlying small farms on the former's land. Many sagas tell about farmers who had claimed large lands and gave slaves land and livestock to manage for them, but most often to own eventually (Á. Pálsson 1932). By freeing his slaves this way, farmers enhanced their political and economic position, there by gaining free followers, who exploited the various resources in outlying areas, providing the main farmer with various subsistence products through credit exchange, thing-tax, and dependent tenure agreements.

Manumissions of slaves increased further towards its ultimate abolishment as more part-time free labor became available around the year 1000, adding to a sizeable population of permanent domestic servants (see Durrenberger 1988a; Gelsing 1981:28). There was cost involved in reproducing the slave population by caring for their children, and slaves ceased to be brought into the country as the Viking raids ended and Norse people had formed permanent colonies on the British isles. Grágás states in great detail what sort of work free-males should be hired for and what amount of wages should be paid (see J.

Jóhannesson 1974:355-356). Wages constituted room and board and some fixed fees for specific work such as herding cattle, wethers and lambs in certain seasons. Laborers, both male and female had to declare a legal domicile of their own choosing, boys when they were sixteen years old, maids aged twenty years or more. There is no mention of wages with respect to female domestic servants, and there is no mention of casual female labor.

In the late 13th century a peculiar kind of tenant system had developed into a predominant mode of production. It was based on a very limited corvée and on around 10% rent on land and livestock, which was in one year contracts (see Þorsteinsson and Grímsdóttir 1989:89-106; Hastrup 1985; M. Stefánsson 1975:60-91; Karlsson 1975:23; Benediktsson 1974; J. Jóhannesson 1974:347-49).

The time of "Removal Days" (Fardagar), in late May, commenced and ended the year to year terms of tenancy. The lawful rent was 12 ells per 'long hundred', i.e. ten percent interest, but inventories show that the rents on both land and livestock varied. The rent on livestock appears to have been below 10 percent around 1200, but rose as high as 16.66 percent by 1300. Land rents, on the other hand, had declined below the 10 lawful percent by 1300 when numbers of farm occupants who were tenants had dramatically risen. Grágás, the Law Code of the Commonwealth, includes few laws concerning tenants, unlike Jónsbók, the lawbook instituted

by the Norwegian King in 1881 which contains many chapters on the landlord tenant relationship. During the Commonwealth period freeholders alone were permitted to take part in the administration of the hreppur municipalities, but this had changed by the late 13th century.

Rent systems seem to have developed at first around the use of property which was earmarked as ecclesiastical land and livestock (church, episcopal, monasterial), that is, the (usury) usage of property which was accumulated as a result of tithe payments and gifts to the church, and remained exempted from the tithe tax. There is evidence to show that there were tenancies on the lands of the Bishop at Skálholt by the end of the 11th century, but there were legal restrictions of his participation in foreign trade (Benediktsson 1974). Furthermore, I point out, the charter for Stafholt, Southwest, dated 1140--which is the earliest surviving ecclesiastical inventory--shows that the church at Stafholt owned several dependent farms in addition to the entire home-estate, but the warden of this church was also its consecrated priest (Diplomatarium Islandicum 1:178-180).

Gelsing (1981) has emphasized that usable land became increasingly scarce in the late 11th century during which the population increased considerably and investment in land became increasingly desirable. Land investment became safer than trade, and Norwegian merchants were active in bringing necessities to the island and buying goods of wool and skin.

A class of tenants was created as indebted smallholders sold their land to wealthy landowners. Using their proceeds, the seller was able to lease back from the buyer the same parcel of land and more land as well. This stage was not reached for many households until in the early 13th century (Gelsinger 1981:26-29).

Scholarship on the Commonwealth period (930-1264) is marked especially by interest in modes of consciousness and of political power, and by recent major works concerned with power concentrations and geo-political aspects (Sigurðsson 1989; Þorláksson 1989; Ingvarsson 1986-87); conflict management, social institutions and cultural values (Miller 1990); exchanges and accumulation of resources by sociopolitical means (Byock 1988); symbolic structures and social change (Hastrup 1985); political power and conflict among chieftains and their followers in a stratified society without a state and without a market economy (Durrenberger 1992).

A recent book edited by anthropologist Gísli Pálsson (1992), From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland, reflects a radical turn, perhaps, in Icelandic saga studies. As Pálsson (1992:1) says in his introduction, "Text, life, and saga," a number of anthropologists, archaeologists, literary scholars, and social historians have been exploring the value of "an approach which reverses the priority of text over life" and

views the sagas as "potentially valuable ethnographic documents with various kinds of information on early Iceland and medieval Scandinavia."

Most recent works portray Commonwealth society, prior to the civil war period of 1236-1264, as neither uniquely equalitarian, nor extremely stratified, repressive and violent. Still, Júlíusson, Kjartansson and Ísberg (see Íslenskur Söguatlas 1989:58-59) have discovered in the secondary literature of recent decades contrasting models for looking at Commonwealth society which have guided the conceptions of many: Some authors, most notably Jesse Byock, emphasize egalitarian order and focuses on the negotiated dealings among freeholders and chieftain. At the other end of the spectrum of perspectives are those, notably Björn Þorsteinsson and Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, who subscribe to the view that a slave-holding mode of production was dominant until the mid-11th century, at which point rent tenure and tributary relationships gradually developed and became the chief organizing principle of the economy. Both extreme views most clearly neglect to look at relations of class among the freeholders themselves, as I will be discussing.

Otherwise, scholarship on the Commonwealth period has variously portrayed the existence of classes as chieftains, freeholder-farmers (and their wives and daughters), churchwarden-farmers, landless laborers and, to a less an extent, slaves, freedmen, tenants and cottagers and

ecclesiastics. It emphasizes a freeholder-chieftain dichotomy and notes the transformation towards a greater confrontation between powerful freeholders and churchwardens, on the one hand, and chieftains, on the other, after 1100 (Karlsson 1972, 1980; Þorláksson 1982; Hastrup 1985; Byock 1988; Miller 1990; Samson 1992).

Anthropologists Pálsson (1991b) and Durrenberger (1990), in their respective comparison of the family sagas to the Sturlunga sagas, concur on interpreted differences between earlier and later periods. Durrenberger (1990:89), focusing on the kind and frequency of economic transactions and of dispute settlements that appear in the sagas, suggests that "trials by violence and law [were] replaced by asymmetrical threats of violence, [and] equality of force [was] replaced by asymmetrical force." Pálsson discovers a decrease in the frequency of witchcraft accusations then, as an indicator of increasingly asymmetrical power relations, competition among chieftains, and inducement to wrong openly. Pálsson concludes that "the institution of chieftaincy became exaggerated," that *goðorð* became increasingly territorial units as power came to reside in these offices unlike the personal authority of chieftains in an earlier period. Quite compatibly, Sigurðsson's (1989) thesis on power concentration suggests the successive formation in different parts of Iceland of "lordship consisting of a territorial unit called a *riki*." Such

concentration, he argues, was the first step in the formation of a state.

The question of production and trade:

Until the 1960's the opinion dominated that foreign trade had been crucial for Commonwealth Icelanders and a important aspect of their economy (Þorláksson 1991:5). Current views, on the other hand, overwhelmingly emphasize subsistence production (see Þorsteinsson 1964, 1966; Miller 1990:77-110; Eggertsson 1991; G. Pálsson 1991a; Aðalsteinsson 1992; Durrenberger 1992, 1991; Samson 1992), implying some type of 'natural economy' or a 'domestic mode of production'.

Several scholars have recently attempted to describe production in medieval Iceland within the context of socioeconomic or economic theories which downplay the significance of markets and commercial mentality: Eggertsson (1991) analyzes, in both empirical and theoretical terms, the structure and consequences of property rights in the communal mountain pastures, while emphasizing the perennial existence of "traditional agriculture" focused on needs for direct subsistence. Durrenberger describes production factors within a Chayanovian framework, bringing also fresh perspectives on

the internal contradictions of a stratified society without a state (1992, 1991, 1990, 1988a). Þorláksson (1991, 1992), on the other hand, promotes the substantivist branch of economic anthropology which stems from the work of Karl Polanyi.

In strongest terms Durrenberger has expressed the view that there was no market economy in Commonwealth Iceland-- adding that "householders gained access to land by supporting a class of chieftains who guaranteed their access by force" (1988:239, emphasis mine), that households had to produce their own provisions, and that it was not possible to intensify production. Durrenberger explains: "Woolen goods, livestock, and precious metals were means of exchange by which people computed the magnitude of transactions. The major transactions were social ones" (1992:35). Furthermore, "When Icelanders went to Norway, they took woolen goods with them to give to their hosts. They received other gifts of timber and grain in return. This is the logic of reciprocity and hospitality rather than the market. Within Iceland, exchanges were in terms of marriages, compensations for killings and other faults, gifts, and hospitality" (1991:17).

In his research Þorláksson has focused on production for foreign markets, which he calls just that (útlendur markaður). But, following Polanyi's distinction, he emphasizes that the Icelanders who engaged in trade before

1200 were so-called 'factors', noblemen who traded in order to improve their social status and who would look down on 'mercators', who traded solely for the profit motive (1992, 1991). Works by Helgi Þorláksson have sharpened the focus on the geopolitical and organizational aspects of trade and settlement (1979), as well as the production and exchange of wool products (1988, 1991). In one of his earlier publications (1979) he showed through comprehensive study of medieval documents that there were many trading harbors in operation all around Iceland before 1100, and that in the period from 1100 to 1250 trade vessels were sailing to fewer and fewer harbors, controlled increasingly by fewer chieftains. Documentary sources, most notably the family sagas, name 41 harbors where overseas vessels landed before 1100! Sources name only ten or eleven harbors in use during the 12th century. Four of those had ceased operations by 1200, and two more by 1250 (Þorláksson 1979:127-128).

With his book Icelandic Enterprise economic historian Bruce Gelsinger (1981) added to early works by Melsteð (1907-15) and Jón Jóhannesson (1974) which describe and emphasize the Commonwealth trade relations with Norway and Britain, but his contributions remain overlooked. He describes phases in commercial activity of Icelanders, particularly the trading of homespun, cloaks, skins, and dairy products for grain, timber, and ships.

Gelsinger identified the following characteristic

trends. Commercial prosperity was attained from 930-1022 when trade was almost exclusively in the hands of Icelanders, that is, chieftains and other prominent farmers who owned cargo-ships. Icelanders became somewhat less active after 1022 even though foreign markets for export expanded, but supply of imports remained adequate until late in the 12th century. In 1022 Icelandic chieftains and the Norwegian King Ólafur Haraldsson made an agreement, which entailed, among other stipulations, that the King would allow the Icelanders to leave his country if they paid a fixed toll upon entry and if Norway was not at war. The same rights and obligations concerned Norwegian merchants who went to Iceland. A powerful merchant class developed in Norway in the 11th century, but as Icelandic chieftains controlled relative prices in Iceland, value and distribution of goods brought in by foreigners was subject to their authority.

In analyzing subsequent decline of the 'Icelandic enterprise', Gelsinger links the rise of a Norwegian merchant class and the declining value of homespun to the move within Iceland towards land investments and rent tenure, when the church became a major landowner (having been prevented from participating in commercial trade).

Gelsinger, however, emphasizes along with others the absence of a full time professional merchant class, and de-emphasizes domestic markets--stating, for example, that "not

all Icelanders had the need to get rid of woolens" (1981:153).

In all, the social and economic significance of trade involving the export of wool products has been neglected. It has yet to be noticed that the early Icelandic sociopolitical institutions, devolution practices, class divisions and farming system reflect mercantile conditions of exchange and market production incentives. My dissertation attempts to show that domestic credit exchanges at fairs and market places--overseen for some time by 3 chieftains at each of 12 "spring assemblies" (vorþing) and price-districts (J. Jóhannesson 1974:320)--and the foreign markets were key to land tenure and productive relations and farming systems prior to 1200. I will argue that the dynamic mode of production during the Commonwealth period, the "Golden Age" of Icelandic history, is still a significant blindspot, for recent works on political relationships, social organization, and production lack a persistent focus on subsistence, market and tribute production, as well as a problem-oriented, comparative approach for looking at farming systems.

CHAPTER 3
INTENSIFICATION AND DISINTENSIFICATION
IN MEDIEVAL ICELANDIC FARMING

Sigurður Björnsson, a farmer and respected amateur scientist at Kvísker, Southwest Iceland, wrote an article in a newspaper (1989) which is frequently delivered to farmers' homes where he criticizes historians for reviewing agricultural history without necessary knowledge of conflicting procurement factors in past and present farming, and without presenting disaggregate data on production units and variables. Björnsson's article, called "Pillars of the Old Icelandic Community," was written primarily in response to historian Gísli Gunnarsson's book, Upp er boðið Ísaland ("Iceland put up to auction"). Björnsson criticizes Gunnarsson for telling "just-so-stories" about "the stagnant farming" in medieval and early modern Iceland which he thinks are based on misconceptions about how livestock producers could, might, and would have adapted or responded to uncertain climatic conditions and different production incentives.

Björnsson's article reminded me of the many disparities of knowledge and perspectives on historical farming, between farmers and academic scholars, that I became aware of during my fieldwork, when I elicited from farmers the different configurations of resource exploitation since the end of the

19th century, after which market and household incentives radically changed, and discussed with them medieval documents as well as my hypotheses concerning preindustrial transformations in strategies of farming. I found knowledge which older and experienced farmers possessed very critical for gaining an understanding of the problems, options, limitations and risks which farmers of earlier centuries faced. Björnsson's article and my fieldwork experiences showed me that academic scholars are heading down an imaginary road when they hold onto the assumption that in order to comprehend livestock production in a Commonwealth Iceland, when the production of surplus wool was imperative, we must erase "modern perspectives" of the economic incentives and farming system changes of the 19th and 20th centuries. In other words, it is a curious fact that those who are concerned with farming in Iceland before 1200, so strongly marked by commercial wool production and trade, look back towards the many centuries of subsistence and tribute oriented production, which preceded the more intensive sheep rearing practices in the 19th century, when wool products returned as critical surplus/export items.

In general, I followed the assumption that we need to analyze farmers' and other agricultural experts' reflections on past and present problematic integration of various incentives, opportunities, and restraints, relating factors of ecology, climate, labor and market: first, a mere showing

of descriptive integration in production strategies aids the analysis of the procurement problematic under different historical circumstances. Second, a dialogue (with arguments) with farmers and agricultural scientists over 'obscure' or fragmented documentary evidence can help restore our understanding of medieval farming systems, and show how this evidence articulates with the much more highlighted evidence for social formation and political processes. Third, and more specifically, the analysis of the farming systems during the Commonwealth period as well as a particular transformation in overall resource exploitation and land tenure arrangements in the 12th and 13th centuries is assisted by a careful understanding of the changing socioeconomic circumstances and livestock production methods in the 19th century and earlier this century.

Current assumptions, old contradictions, new questions

I collected from farmers (Ingimundarson 1989), agricultural scientists and farming documents information on past changes in herd size, age and sex structure, growth patterns, disease, age-specific fertility, culling, replacement and natural mortality rates. These variables were shown to be related to differential yields in meat,

milk and wool, to quality, kind and quantity of fodder and pasture land, and to the factors of climate, marketing, and household composition. I noticed that the production and processing of commercial wool causes direct reduction in milk yield and meat production efficiency (Ingimundarson 1989:23-26). This particular finding, to be described in further detail and essential for the hypotheses presented below--allows me to define different means and levels of intensification, especially contingencies involving specialization in sheep-herding.

Based on my ethnographic findings and reading of documents on farming, I challenge prevalent explicit or implicit assumptions about wool production in studies on the Commonwealth because they overlook critical factors of ecology and procurement, considerations of labor deployment and economic exchange, and important documentary evidence. One assumption considers the surplus of wool and skin from sheep as a result of direct subsistence surplus, as by-product (see especially Durrenberger 1992:36); another is the straightforward notion that those who owned much land and many sheep exchanged their surplus abroad (e.g. see Gelsinger 1981:153; Þorláksson 1991:270-279).

A problem-oriented approach to the farming systems and mode of production during the mercantile Commonwealth period makes us look at deployment of labor in wool processing, trade, and management, at specialized sheep-rearing as it

was contingent upon a broad subsistence base and numerous cattle (diversification and intensification in other areas), conservation methods, and privatization in strategic ownership, and at a subsequent transformation, beginning in the 12th century, into a tributary and communal mode along with disintensification--when livestock proportions in fact shifted away from cattle in favor of sheep (J. Jóhannesson 1974:288-291; Amorosi and McGovern 1989b:4) as a source of direct subsistence, and butter, cheese and fish became the chief export products.

Insights learned from Icelandic farmers made clear to me why Commonwealth farmers would not have been able to implement a sheep-rearing strategy emphasizing milk and meat production while looking forward to a substantial wool yield at the same time. Commonwealth farmers confronted conflicting farm-ecological and procurement factors. If they were to intensify wool production, then the exploitation of a broad subsistence base, emphasizing cattle (and seal, fish etc., depending on the region), had to be part of that strategy. I therefore propose a 'dual economy' working model (hypothesis) for looking at the Icelandic Commonwealth period that demonstrates regional integration of broad-based subsistence economies with wool production for export [1].

Means and levels of intensification in livestock production
Towards a model of a 'dual farming economy'

The following sections of this chapter present documentary and archaeological evidence that suggests highly intensive farming strategies in the Commonwealth period and subsequent disintensification in herding systems in the late medieval and early modern periods. My interpretive model for looking at Northern farming derives from my ethnographic research, as well as certain facts and inferences drawn from 19th and 20th century writings on farming, including publications in modern experimental-agriculture science. Furthermore, I will discuss the medieval evidence on farming systems in the light of comparison with livestock production in the early 19th to the early 20th centuries, which entails identifying the different steps taken by farmers in this recent period towards more intensive economic strategies.

These recent steps towards (modern) intensive livestock production include the processes by which fodder production and the production of wethers and cattle were increased in different parts of the country, when land, once again owned by freeholders, was intensively cultivated and enclosed to protect added hay-fields, and when farmers ceased to take milk from their ewes and began culling summer-old lambs, instead of newborn and winterold lambs. My suggestion is that, in view of these specific changes, this recent process

reversed the outcome of an earlier process, that is, a major transformation in herding systems and overall resource exploitation, which began with the collapse of 'the Commonwealth trade enterprise' and development of dependent land tenure and continued with interruptions throughout the "Little Ice Age" into Early Modern Times.

A notion of a 'dual-economy' first occurred to me when I read Jón Jóhannesson's (1974) book where he recounts inventories from the Commonwealth which show that during that time, but not since (i.e. not until the 19th and 20th centuries), the cattle to sheep ratio was high, the farming economy diversified (including grain cultivation), and older wethers were strongly emphasized in sheep herds, indicating to me that sheep had been reared with particular emphasis on wool surplus. In fact, a number of authors have remarked on the particular farming system characteristics and changes which J. Jóhannesson observed, and explained them, as he does, in terms of looking at the conditions and change in climate and ecological succession, impacted by human habitation (Sigurjónsson 1970:51-78; Þorsteinsson 1953:129; Steindórsson 1948-1949; Thoroddsen 1919:213-222, 281; Guðjónsson 1949:84-89, 91; J. Sigurðsson 1861:16)

The zooarchaeological findings by Amorosi and McGovern, their analysis of bone material from a number of midden sites around Iceland, show evidence for major changes that took place with respect to proportions of animals culled and

procured from the Commonwealth period and into the Early Modern Period. I will discuss below some of their findings, which tend to support what the above historians have noted, as well as the results of my own spreadsheet-analysis of ecclesiastical livestock records, which is currently underway.

Margir geldingar gamlir ("many old wethers"):
Intensification-step one, for increasing wool yield

In the warm, fertile and mercantile Commonwealth period--in contrast to the subsequent late 13th to early-19th century--older wethers were relatively numerous in relations to ewes. Ewes are an unreliable source of wool, and yield significantly less than wethers and barren sheep, which also fend better for themselves by grazing, accounting for the high proportion of wethers in Commonwealth economy. Nineteenth century guide books on the rearing of livestock and farming improvements (Stephensen 1808:164; G. Einarsson 1879:47, 59-62) tell us that the annual yield of washed wool from fertile ewes is 1-1.25 kg, compared to a 1.75-2.5 kg. annual clip from wethers, two years and older. Furthermore, as farmers in Svalbarðshreppur informed me, wethers provide high wool yield until they are 6-7 year old, whereas the annual wool yield from fertile ewes goes down drastically

after their third or fourth year. Wethers were shorn or plucked before they would be driven onto pasture around mid-May, but the ewes not until early June if they had lambs. Second shearing might take place in late summer or early fall.

We are lucky that two price lists dated to the 12th century have survived the ages--the contents of which will be discussed in some detail in chapter 5. One of these price tables is handed down to us in Grágás (Diplomatarium Islandicum I: 164-167), and was issued by alþingi, the National Assembly, around 1150 (see Þorláksson 1991:98-101), but perhaps earlier, or to around 1100, see Diplomatarium Islandicum 1:162-164). The other was issued by the Árnes district "spring-assembly" and dates to 1186 or to around 1190 (Diplomatarium Islandicum 1:315-317; with respect to the dating of the documents, see Gelsinger 1981:39-42; Þorláksson 1991:98-101). The price table of the National Assembly highlights exportable products and at the top of the list are, processed wool, cloaks and skins. It first states that 6 ells (álnir) of new and unused homespun (vaðmál) shall be worth one legal eyrir. Then, tufted wool cloaks (vararfeldir) are characterized in terms of length, width and quality, and their value is determined at two aurar (plural for eyrir). Six fleeced lambskins (with the wool) and six shorn wetherskins are of equal value, and worth one legal eyrir. Eweskins are not mentioned. The

price of unprocessed wool is stipulated only at the very bottom of the list, and not in terms of eyrir or ells, rather, by saying that "three centners (vættir) of wool from older sheep equals the value of a cow."

A sheep herding strategy which entails high proportion of wethers has low meat and milk production efficiency: Keeping many wethers (i.e. castrated rams, two years and older) competes with the opportunity for sustaining many milch-sheep; culling the wethers when they are old (as old as seven to eight years) is a costly way of producing meat, for they reach their maximum size, or carcass weight, roughly after their third summer (Jóakimsson 1889). Hence, the keeping of many wethers and letting them grow to be old (geldingar gamlir) is a strong sign that the economy was led by incentives to produce a surplus of wool and skins, much of which would be exported as finished products. [Wethers may continue to accumulate fat until they are ten (Halldórsson 1983:153), but this factor is relatively minor and does not amount to the imperative to let many wethers grow very old.]

Studies of livestock records, export records, and improvements in sheep rearing and wool processing reveal the ways in which farmers in Northeast Iceland, especially in Norður-Múlasýsla county, managed to radically increase wool production and maintain it at high levels, before, during, and after the climatically hospitable second quarter of the

19th century.

In their article "Social and economic development in Iceland during the first part of the 19th century," Aðalgeir Kristjánsson and Gisli Á. Gunnlaugsson show that the ratio of sheep to cattle increased from 12:1 (264723 over 22247) in 1801, to 27:1 (692601 over 25566) in 1851 (1990:30-32). The East and the North quarter had by far the highest numbers of sheep, and the authors are able to show that a six-fold increase in the population of wethers, two years and older, is greatly responsible for the expansion of the sheep herds in these quarters (1990:35-37). They attribute this increase in heads of wethers only to the fact that settlement expanded into the northeast interior during the warm period of the 19th century, and that the north and the northeast is particularly suitable for grazing by sheep.

But there are other factors to be considered as well. Danish monopoly on trade had been lifted in 1787 (Gunnarsson 1983, 1987), and the export of wool products from Iceland, especially from the Northeast and the North quarter, dramatically increased after 1800 and throughout the first half of the 19th century--at first in the form of raw wool, then fleeced skins, homespun, yarn and knitted wares (S. Andr sson 1988:238-253; H. Stef nsson 1952:21-30). New efficient types of looms were imported to Iceland by the end of the 18th century, and weaving and textile work became an increasingly common occupation. At the same time, the

number of harbors involved in the export trade increased, and mercantile farmers' associations were formed. Furthermore, farmers, in Norður-Múlasýsla county at first, began the selective breeding of sheep with focus on obtaining higher wool yield of better quality, and to increase drastically the numbers of older wethers in their sheep flocks (H. Stefánsson 1952:28-47, 56-74).

The period 1858-1869 saw many losses of livestock all over Iceland, due to severe weather, and because of diseases in sheep and cattle. The 1880s and 1890s were particularly severe, and many Icelanders migrated to Canada in the period from the 1870's to the end of the century. After 1866 Icelanders began selling live wethers to Britain where they would be slaughtered, but this export practice went on until 1896. There were as many as 80000 animals exported in one year, in 1890. Sveinbjörn Blöndal (1982) in his book Sauðasalan til Bretlands ("The sale of wethers to Britain") does not identify the age of the live weathers which were exported, but my older farmer-informants told me, based on what their parents and grandparents had told them, that prominent farmers sold live old wethers onto the British market, hence, they were able to maintain high wool yield from their flock. Poorer farmers on the other hand--who had less land, fewer livestock, and were in constant position of debt to the merchant--saw a reduction in the wool yield, as they were forced to give up their two and three year old

wethers, which they had sustained by grazing for the most part.

Ær loðnar, lembdar og órotnar

("ewes in fleece, with lambs, and well sustained"):

Intensification-step two, for increasing wool yield

In order to increase wool production from their ewes Commonwealth farmers had to replace their sheep stock rapidly. A ten-year-old ewe can give birth to a lamb but it yields little wool. In fact, lambing ewes yield most wool in their third and fourth year.

There are few restrains on letting the wether graze during winter. The ewe, on the other hand, after a lean winter especially, during which it has been fed little, will rarely produce enough milk to sustain both of its lambs given that it had two (sometimes three). Experienced farmers earlier this century, I was told, were particularly good at figuring out which newborn lambs should be killed and which lamb from a relatively "dry" ewe should be placed under which of the other better-milking, one-lamb ewes or ewes which had lost their lamb(s).

Commonwealth farmers would also have provided their ewes with quality housing and much winter fodder of good quality. As my farmer-informants told me (see also

Thorsteinsson and Þorgeirsson 1989; G. Einarsson 1879; Þorbergsson 1915:108-109), good housing and substantial good hay have critical effects on fleece weight and on how many lambs will be born and survive. These intensive maintenance factors make the "new wool" grow more rapidly in spring, so that the "old wool" (gamla ullin, reyfið) can be plucked without impinging on the quantities of milk provided for the lambs. Low maintenance strategies, on the other hand, have the effect that, as my informant Jóhann in Ormarslón said, "the ewes become dry [with respect to milk), because they are cold, and loose their old wool on the hummocks when the new wool finally begins to emerge in May and June."

The above labor-intensive provisions with respect to the ewes compete with the opportunity for sustaining many lambs through their first winter; furthermore, these lambs do not produce the amount of wool that is worth plucking in spring unless they have been fed substantially as well.

Scientists from different disciplines have noted that certain farming activities and labor products are quite unique to the Commonwealth (i.e. with respect to Icelandic history before this century), and they generally attribute this to the affluence of a relatively large population, which included numerous freeholders, commanding a considerable labor force. These farming activities and labor products are outlined below, and I will look at them as parts of an over-all intensive livestock production

strategy, marked by private property ownership and mercantile incentives.

The Old Commonwealth Law Code includes numerous stipulations which dictate that farmers shall erect sizeable fences of sod and/or stone around their hayfields, grainfields, haystorages, outlying meadows, marshy meadows, as well as certain grazing areas that are called afrétt (plural afréttir) (see especially Grágás 1992:321-324; also Þorsteinsson and Grímsdóttir 1989:84-87). Surveys by archaeologists, geographers, and geologists have revealed the structural remains of those fences around extensive hayfields and outlying meadows, as well as long walls (as long as 4 km) which seem to mark boundaries between adjacent grazing areas (see Róbertsdóttir and Jóhannesson 1986; S. Þórarinsson 1981; Eldjárn 1977).

The lawbook which was introduced in 1281 (under Norwegian rulership), on the other hand, where it refers particularly to tenants' obligations, stipulates only that each occupant must make a fence (löggarður: "lawful fence") around his hayfield, called töðuvöllur (Jónsbók 1970:159-161). Furthermore, this particular legal article was subsequently removed by a special order from King Eiríkur Magnússon, in his law reform (réttarbót) of 1294 (Diplomatarium Islandicum 2:282-288). The law reform of 1294 also removed from Jónsbók an article which states that dispossessed men shall not be allowed to occupy a farm;

instead, they should be bound to have a legal domicile with a farmer/householder (Þorsteinsson and Grímsdóttir 1989:93-94).

As I indicated earlier, Grágás includes very few articles which specifically pertain to tenants, whereas Jónsbók includes an entire chapter on the leasing of land called Landsleigubálkur. J. Jóhannesson (1974:293) noted that Grágás has the following stipulation: "He who takes lease on land must hire a large enough number of farm hands so that he will be able to work all the meadows." This stipulation is omitted in Jónsbók, whereas it was reintroduced as part of the law reform of 1294.

As I will reflect on in chapter ten, a complicated class struggle was going on in the latter part of the 13th century between various types of property owners and tenants (who by then had become quite numerous). Below I simply want to emphasize the evidence for enclosure, private ownership, shared access through private contracts, and the intensive cultivation of land during the Commonwealth period.

Several authors have noted numerous passages in Grágás and other documents dated to the Commonwealth period which refer to the application of dung as natural fertilizer on homefields and outlying meadows (see Thoroddsen 1919:118-124; J. Jóhannesson 1974:293-294, 348; Þorsteinsson and Grímsdóttir 1989:84-87; Óskarsson 1992). In fact, one

medieval word for a hayfield was töðuvöllur (hayfodder-field), and the word taða (accusative case töðu) derives from the word tað, which means dung or manure. Dung from livestock, as well as peat, was an important source of fuel in early modern times, and it seems quite obvious that this particular utility of the dung became increasingly important as fewer farmers had access to brushwood and drift-wood, and as the climate became less hospitable.

The modern term for mountain pasture as communal property is afréttur (plural afréttir). Today each hreppur, or commune, has its own afréttur. Thus, today afréttur is communal property, that is, commons without implying universal access. Interior grazing areas with universal access, on the other hand, are called almenningar, or "commons."

Most scholars have looked upon afréttur, which literally means "rights to the off-fields/outlying areas," as "commons" in some limited sense, and they assume that afréttir and almenningar existed as institutions stipulating access to grazing land since the dawn of Iceland's settlement history, when hreppur residents cooperated in the collecting of sheep during fall (Eggertsson 1991; J. Jóhannesson 1974:293-295; B. Lárusson 1967, Þ. Thoroddsen 1919:181-197).

I note, however, that the word afréttur does not even occur in documents dated from the Commonwealth period;

instead, the word which one encounters in Grágás, inventories and ecclesiastical charters is afrétt, which literally means "enclosure!" I also note that the editors of Grágás (1992) use the word afréttur in their Index where it refers to the numerous occurrences of the word afrétt in different sections of the law book.

In his essay "Analyzing institutional success and failures: a millennium of common mountain pastures in Iceland," Þráinn Eggertsson (1991) expounds the view that the dramatic decline of pasture vegetation and soil erosion in the history of Icelandic settlement might be called "the tragedy of the commons," given the added impacts of climatic deterioration and natural disasters. I agree with Eggertsson's assessment to an extent, but I would emphasize that universal and communal grazing-access arrangements as we know them from more recent history did not exist during the first centuries of settlement. In fact Eggertsson (1991:2) contends that "... some mountain pastures always have remained exclusive private property, but generally the ownership of afréttir evolved into communal property."

Grágás (1992:342) defines afrétt as grazing land which two or more men own together. I have discovered from reading the medieval inventories that many of these grazing areas are located near the coast--e.g. the afrétt owned by Garðar in 1220 (Diplomatarium Islandicum 1:417-418)--or in fertile valleys, as opposed to in the interior mountain

areas, e.g. afrétt owned by Stafholt in 1140 (Diplomatarium Islandicum 1:178-180).

I note that the earliest documented description of shared grazing arrangements which evoke notions of communal access to land use appear in the 1220 charter/inventory for the Church of Gaulverjabær, near the bishop's see at Skálholt (Diplomatarium Islandicum 1:403-404). This charter includes a stipulation which says that the farmers at Gaulverjabær (i.e. the churchwardens) shall administer the arrangements of sambeit, or "shared grazing," á Völlum (an afrétt nearby, bordering the estate of Skálholt) in cooperation with a number of occupants on nearby farms. Another stipulation in the charter says that those occupants who hold shared grazing rights at Vellir must drive all their sheep, except the lambs, out of this grazing area by Ólafur's Mass (July 29th or August 3rd). The charter announces at the end that the above agreements had at one time been stipulations by a former churchwarden at Gaulverjabær, but were subsequently reaffirmed by the late bishop Þorlákur the Saint, and the priest Gunnar. The Gaulverjabær charter suggests that many of the men who owned grazing rights at Vellir were the occupants of the two tenancies which Gaulverjabær owned and of tenancies owned by the Bishopric, but they were many.

As for almenningar, the common property which today implies universal access, we do not know how extensive these

areas were during the Commonwealth period, nor exactly when the stipulation in Grágás which pertains to almenningar was first instituted. Grágás (1992:369) defines almenningar as land and water where anyone within a particular Quarter (referring to the division of the country into four quarters) can procure fish, fowl, whale and wood, and graze their animals during certain seasons of the year. It is stated that the person who lives next to a certain almenningur must have exclusive access to its use during five months out of the year. The oldest surviving special charter which uses the term almenningur, and describes what it entails, dates to 1245. This document constitutes a special order from the höfðingi (prominent person) and churchwarden Sæmundur Jónsson, whose church owned many farms and much beach area around Hornafjörður fjord, Southeast Iceland (Diplomatarium Islandicum 1:403-404). This document designates certain stretches of shoreline (valuable for grazing on seaweed beaches, driftwood, drifted whales, fishing) as almenningur, which all household heads in Hornafjörður, whether they are freeholders or tenants, should have certain regulated rights to use.

I infer that dependent land tenure, on the one hand, and communal access to grazing on formerly private-owned land (afrétt, as opposed to remote and less productive almenningar), on the other, developed simultaneously. Furthermore, these developments--from the mercantile

ownership rights of freeholders to feudal-prebendal mode of production--were led by ecclesiastical institutions in their direct involvements in the country's economy.

In 1800 Icelanders numbered around 50,000, and a majority of household heads were tenants and cotters, many of them living on land owned by the church, the Norwegian state (i.e. land appropriated from the monasteries after the reformation in 1552) or by secular landlords (patrimonially owned and inherited). In the decades around 1900, when most farms had become freeholds (again), farming households gradually began to adopt increasingly intensive strategies for rearing livestock. Several essays (including T. Bjarnason 1884; Ásmundsson 1888:3-9; Sveinsson 1882) were published urging farmers to utilize dung more extensively for fertilizing their fields, as formmenn had done (formmenn meaning "ancient men", i.e. the early Icelanders). Around 1900 farmers in Svalbarðshreppur, as well as other parts of the country, began systematically to fertilize their fields (Óskarsson 1992), erect walls around their home-field (tún), and to cultivate, flatten and dry up new land for making more hay (Þórólfsson 1899)--which they also enclosed. Fodder production was significantly increased. These were critical steps taken towards (modern) intensive livestock production in Iceland, which entailed increasing the number of milch-cows, as farmers ceased to take milk from their ewes and to cull newborn and winter-old lambs.

Many cows and finished suckling lambs (dilkar):
Intensification-step three for increasing wool yield

As I showed earlier, many scholars have noted that during the relatively warm Commonwealth period, in contrast to the period from late-13th century to 19th century, ewes were relatively few in relation to dairy cows and dry cattle. Given the hospitable conditions during the Medieval Warm Period, before vegetation decline and soil erosion had a critical impact, land was frequently available for wintergrazing. Willow and birch were quite abundant still, available for browsing by cattle and sheep, and must have been critical sources at times in early spring. Browsing by sheep, which eat the new buds of the birch, was among the factors responsible for the drastic reduction of forests (Pröstur Eysteinnsson, personal communication). The seasons for growing grass and making hay were on the average longer than they were following the advent of the so-called Little Ice Age in the late 1200s.

Zooarchaeological findings by Amorosi and McGovern (1989b; Amorosi 1989, 1992) in their analysis of zooarchaeological assemblages from several Icelandic excavation sites show evidence for economic and ecological changes and trends--reflected in proportions of animals culled and procured as well as age-specific mortality--which took place in a period which they divide into the phases

Settlement (874-930), Commonwealth (930-1264), late medieval (1264-1500), and early modern (1500-1800). I will present and discuss certain of their findings and inferences as they pertain to my critical questions. First of all, many of their findings, or their "proxy data sets" as they like to call them, agree with what historians have noted with respect to changes in the ratio of sheep to cattle, and concerning an early Icelandic broad subsistence base. They show also, however, that extreme inland sites in the north and east, like Hrafnkellsdalur and Granastaðir, show a consistently high ratio of sheep to cattle (Amorosi 1989).

Amorosi's and McGovern's analysis of zooarchaeological assemblages from around Iceland shows that during from Settlement and into the Commonwealth period the subsistence base was broad, in spite of the fact that percentages of fish (especially the Atlantic Cod) does not noticeably increase at these sites until the medieval/early modern transition. (As they point out, Icelanders become increasingly involved in the European stock fish trade in the 14th century (see also historical works by Þ. Jóhannesson 1928; Þorsteinsson and Grímsdóttir 1989).) Bone assemblages dated to the Settlement period and throughout most of the Commonwealth period show significant percentages for seals, birds, and pigs, while the percentages for these species go down by the end of the Commonwealth period. (Early modern assemblages from the Svalbarð midden show high

representation of Common seal and whale, as well Harp seal, which would have been carried to Iceland during extreme ice years (Amorosi 1992).)

Looking at assemblages from around Iceland, Amorosi and McGovern conclude that the ratio of caprines (mostly sheep) to cattle increased between the early (1050-1150) and later Commonwealth phases (1150-1250), and towards the Late Medieval phase (1250-1400). In commenting on these trends, Amorosi (1992:123) infers that "[this] intensification of sheep raising (goats are very rare in Icelandic collections) may be related to increased emphasis on wool production, and it may also reflect declining prime pasture areas and a move towards less fodder dependent animals." Given my definition of different sheep rearing practices in Northern farming, I would support Amorosi's latter explanation for the shift in the caprine to cattle ratio.

The changes in the sheep/cattle ratio do not tell us that farmers were keeping increasingly large flocks of sheep, in absolute terms, nor an increasing number of sheep of any age. My attempt is to show that, towards the end of the Commonwealth period, sheep become an increasingly important source of subsistence, as opposed to a source of wool surplus. Analysis of caprine age-specific mortality in the Icelandic assemblages is not yet completed, except with respect to changes in the percentage of neonatals, which I will discuss below.

Icelanders experienced and responded to the impacts of irregular cooling of the Northern Hemisphere called the Little Ice Age, as did other people inhabiting the islands of the North Atlantic (for an overview of the literature see McGovern 1990). From my perspective, radical changes in livestock production in Iceland, some of which occurred before "the advent of Little Ice Age," reflect the cooling of the climate, vegetation decline, and population pressure, but also the collapse of the wool-export economy, and the development of a tributary mode of production.

In the Commonwealth period, I argue, a broad-base subsistence economy and large herds of dairy cows and dry cattle necessarily supplemented a sheep-rearing strategy which had the objective results of providing surplus wool, rather than significant milk and meat supply. Intensification with emphasis on wool yield meant more wethers, fewer, younger, and better fed ewes that were not milked for human consumption, and many lambs culled at five to six months--a sheep rearing strategy which is fodder costly, and has low meat and milk production efficiency, and is especially contingent on large-scale cattle production.

Given necessary favorable climatic and environmental conditions during the first three centuries of settlement, Icelandic farmers raised many cattle for the meat, and relied on their many dairy cows for their own milk consumption, allowing the culling of many of the lambs at

five to six months. It has been assumed that, just like farmers in Early Modern Times, Commonwealth farmers significantly relied on sheep for dairy products (Aðalsteinsson 1991:289-290, 1981; J. Jóhannesson 1974:290-291; Sigurjónsson 1970; Guðjónsson 1949:92; Thoroddsen 1919:281-282; Ásmundsson 1888:17), in spite of a lack of evidence for this from quite extensive documentation of subsistence activities, and in spite of obvious (as well as relatively obscure) evidence to the contrary.

Fleeced lambskins were an important export item. The price table issued by alþing (Diplomatarium Islandicum I: 162-167) lists fleeced lambskin on the top of the list, along with homespun, tufted wool cloaks and foxskin. Fleeced lambskin and shorn wetherskin were of equal value, that is, six of each were worth one legal eyrir. This clearly tells us that, to some extent at least, Commonwealth farmers would cull lambs at five to six months. But this also means that they did not exploit ewes for their milk (for human consumption), because lambs need much mother's milk if they are to have a first summer growth spurt.

Since vaðmál (homespun) was also an important export item, we can assume that substantial yields in fleece's (wool) from year-old sheep was an imperative. I therefore must note, on the basis of what I learned from farmers, that only if lambs are given most of their mother's milk and are fed considerably during the following winter, will the

surviving lambs yield significant wool.

It is also revealing to look at the Tithe Law of 1097-- assuming that the version in Codex Regius is a copy of an early record (Diplomatarium Islandicum 1: 77-85; Jóhannesson 1974:170). These first and oldest tithe laws (Diplomatarium Islandicum 1:70-162) stipulate what constitutes acceptable tithe currencies, that is, what products should be rendered as tithe payments. Homespun (vaðmál), tufted wool cloaks (vararfeldir) and fleeced lambskins (lambaqærur) are highlighted among acceptable forms of payment, showing us that the tithe laws stimulated the production of exportable products among lesser and larger farmers--which the churchwardens, leading freeholders and chieftains, and the bishops appropriated.

The Tithe laws of 1097 stipulate that the bishop should receive payments only in the forms of homespun, tufted wool cloaks, fleeced lambskin, gold and burnt silver. The quarter tithe meant for sustaining the priests should be paid in the same currency as the bishop's quarter. The quarter for the maintenance of churches should be rendered in the forms of wax, wood, incense, tar, or new linens for decorating the church "which could be bought with vaðmál in the home district," but payments only as homespun would be acceptable. The tithe quarter for the needy/dispossessed (purfamannatíund), which was collected and distributed by the administrations of the hreppur, should be paid in

homespun, tufted wool cloaks, wool, fleeced skins, food, or any type of livestock, except horses.

Now, it is critical to add that the tithe laws which were instituted in 1097, and preserved in a Grágás manuscript, were not necessarily adhered to during the 13th century and there-after, as one notices by reading the different ecclesiastical charters. Individual charters stipulate what is acceptable tithe currency in such and such a parish, and in such and such a district. I have noticed, as have other authors (see Þorsteinsson and Grímsdóttir 1989:103-106), that butter, cheese, hay, blubber and the winterfeeding of livestock had become dominant forms of tithe payment in the 13th century, whereas fish is increasingly mentioned after 1300. The economic ruling classes were only able to siphon from farmers and fishing peasants surpluses which were in accordance with peasants' economic survival strategies, which were changing.

Before I analyze the medieval documentary evidence on lamb production in the Commonwealth period, and its transformation when farmers began keeping fewer cattle and to relying on ewes for dairy products, we need to take one last look at the changes towards intensive livestock production around 1900.

Whereas the proportions of wethers increased dramatically in the early 19th century, figures for dairy cows did not rise significantly until the first decades of

the 20th century (Íslenskur Söguatlas 2:18-19), when the production of fodder was greatly increased, and farmers ceased to take milk from their ewes and to cull newborn and winterold lambs--culling summer-old, finished suckling lambs (dilkar) instead.

My informants in Svalbarðshreppur discussed the farming systems during the late-19th and early 20th centuries, when farmers in the inhospitable northeast were still milking their ewes, hence, having to sustain lambs through one winter and through a critical second summer growth spurt before they would reproduce their own or yielded meat, wool, and fleeces. This is to say that farmers did, as a rule, cull a number of so-called "winterolds" (veturgamlir, veturgamalt fé, gemlingar: sheep in their second spring, summer or fall); however, in bad years when little fodder was available for the winter, the poorer farmers were forced to cull a number of the meager summer lambs (lömb, haustlömb: "autumn lambs").

After the ewes would yean (give birth) in early May, the lambs would go with their mothers and be milked for one or two weeks. After that, the lambs would be partially separated from their mothers until mid-summer. During this period (stekkjatími) the lambs were called stekkjalömb ("penned-lambs"), because they were penned separately overnight. They were also separated from their mothers during part of the day. The ewes would be milked (mjalta)

by women in the morning and in the evening.

The lambs were abruptly and totally weaned sometime after mid-June, at a moment called fráfærutími ("removal time"). This meant that they would be absolutely separated (fráfærur) from their mothers, or they would be gagged (kefluð) (Jónasson 1945:166-170). Following this, the lambs would be called fráfærungar, or weaning lambs.

Icelandic farmers ceased to take milk from their ewes and to cull newborn and winterold lambs in the first decades of the 20th century, concurrent with the increases in the production and exchange of fodder and with a dramatic increase in the heads of dairy cows. These changes had the effect that farmers would and could cull numerous summer-old, suckling lambs, called dilkar, yielding substantial meat, fleeces and fleeced skins, which could be sold on the market, especially in the rapidly growing towns. Today summer grazing in Iceland is on open upland pastures and the lambs are slaughtered in September or October, then 4 to 5 months old, either directly off the wild pastures or after fattening on cultivated lowland fields (see Þorgeirsson et al. 1990). Agricultural scientist Ólafur Guðmundsson (1988:59) tells us that "the current Icelandic system of lamb production requires very rapid growth rates throughout the short growing season if an acceptable carcass is to be produced. This rate of growth is commonly achieved in the highlands or mountain ranges, where average live weight

gains are often above 300g per day." I add that this growth rate required also that humans gave up their dependence on ewe's milk.

Around 1890 farmers and other agricultural experts hotly debated the pros and cons of rearing suckling lambs, on the one hand, and continuing fráfærur, the weaning of lambs, on the other (see Þórólfsson 1902; T. Bjarnason 1908; H. Þórarinnsson 1912; Þorbergsson 1915:111-118). Farmer Jón Jóakimsson at Þverá in Northeast Iceland (my great-great-great-grandfather, as it happened) reared both weaning lambs (fráfærungrar) and suckling lambs (dilkar), and kept records of the carcass meat-weight of his various livestock (all culled in fall), which he then published for the period 1865-1887, contributing to the soon-to-be heated discourse on fráfærur (Jóakimsson 1889).

In my calculation, the average weight of meat from his weaning lambs (fjallalömb, "mountain lambs," as he calls them) which he culled in the 22 years period of his record keeping is 20.4 pounds, while the average suet-weight is 3.5 pounds. The average weights of meat and suet from Jóakimsson's suckling lambs (dilkar), on the other hand, are 27.2 pounds and 5.8 pounds, respectively. Jóakimsson does not include weight figures for fleeced skin. We should keep in mind that his suckling lambs were not "finishing lambs," that is, they were not grazed intensively on cultivated land in September and October before slaughter. This practice is

common today, and it may have been common in the Commonwealth period when weather was hospitable and good grazing land in abundance. Labor laws in Grágás, concerned with free hired laborers, stipulate that a laborer shall be paid specially amounts for herding thirty full-grown wethers as well as for herding forty lambs in autumn, until early November (see J. Jóhannesson 1974:357).

Now, it is a critical fact that fráfæringur (weaning lambs) and stekkjälömb (penned lambs) are not mentioned in Grágás, the sagas, or inventories dating to the Commonwealth period. Furthermore, there is no reference to these lamb categories in the two 12th century price tables which I referred to earlier and were issued for spring--one by alþing, the other by Árnes district "spring-assembly." On the other hand, the earliest dated manuscript fragments of the so-called Búalög, or "Farming-laws," dated around 1400 (see Búalög 1966; Þorláksson 1991:103-115) include the prices on stekkjárlamb, at half eyrir (3 ells), and fráfæringur, at four ells (Búalög 1966:18). A complete manuscript of "Farming-laws" dated 1775 confirms these same prices for the penned lambs and weaning lambs, and they are included in the list for prices in spring and summer (Búalög 1966:27). The price list for autumn (haustlag) includes the prices on winterold sheep (15 ells), as well as "autumn lamb," or haustlamb (5 ells), which are definitely not finished sucking lambs. In fact, the late medieval and

early modern "Farming laws" do not include the category or term dálkur (suckling lamb).

We could say that the term and category of dálkur, or finished suckling lamb, was reinvented or brought back into common use by the end of the 19th century. Documents dated to the Commonwealth period--sagas, inventories and Grágás especially--include numerous references to dálkur, and the words dálkur and lamb appear interchangeably. Grágás (1992:168) stipulates, for example, that "when a dálkur which goes with its mother is unmarked, the one who will keep it is the one who owns the ewe."

I am not assuming that all Commonwealth farmers, large and small, reared finishing suckling lambs at all times. I am suggesting (and will explore further in chapters 5 and 10) that farmers, especially the smallholders and tenants, increasingly exploited ewes for the milk after around 1200, and that their production and processing of wool decreased. Hence the surplus forms which were extracted from farming households through tithe payments change from being primarily exportable wool products (by 1097), to dairy products, other subsistence items, and the winter-rearing of lambs and calves (by the 13th century).

I note that in 1200, according to the oldest surviving document on laws regarding leased livestock, i.e. Alþingis lög um leigufé (Diplomatarium Islandicum 1:313), the lawful annual rent on 20 leased ewes was one centner (vætt: 34-35

kg.) of wool (not processed!), while the rent on a milch-cow was 9 and 10 ells, or one calf which has been reared through winter. From 1281, article 15 in the rent section of Jónsbók (1970:224-225) stipulates that the lawful annual rent on one dairy cow or six fertile ewes should be no higher than two quarters (fjórðungur: 4.3 kg.) butter or four lambs reared through winter--or 12 ells worth of some other product, in case the leaseholder does not own hay or butter.

Interestingly enough, the above article of Jónsbók also states "En enginn skal með dilkum fleiri láta ganga en hina tiunda hvera á. En ef fleira hefur dilkfé, sekist eyri við konung fyrir á hverja á tólf mánuðum." This text tells us that a livestock owner can demand from the one who leases his livestock that he rear suckling lambs born only to one-tenth of the ewes which were leased. If more suckling lambs are reared, then the owner must pay one eyrir per year to the king for each additional ewe feeding milk to her lamb(s). I infer that this stipulation shows evidence for the incentive to secure the viability of tenant households, by promoting their procurement of milk, as well as their making of dairy products. Let us then remember that a dairy product surplus was extracted from these households through the tithe-taxing system, by ruling classes associated with ecclesiastic institutions which together constituted a powerful hegemonic block.

The price list in Jónsbók has been viewed by scholars as a copy of the one found in Grágás. There are, however, some subtle differences between them which are very revealing. For example, the Grágás price list says that a standard cow is equal to the value of 6 fertile ewes which are in wool and feed their lambs, while the more recent price lists of Árnes district-assembly (late 12th century) and in Jónsbók (1381) delete the word referring to the lambs being fed by their mothers.

I need to bring up one more obscure type of documentary evidence which supports my contentions that Commonwealth farmers did not procure milk from their ewes, and that their numerous dairy cows were critical for the wool producing economy. This particular evidence is circumstantial: Texts dating to the Commonwealth period refer to year old ewes (gimbrar: ewes in their second summer, sometimes called ewe lambs in English, but never referred to as lambs in Icelandic) which have yeaned and lead and milk-feed their lambs. It is a crucial fact, farmers pointed out to me, that only if Icelandic lambs are given most of their mother's milk and are fed considerably during the following winter, will the surviving lambs be able to reproduce for the first time when they are one year old. This fact has been studied and verified through a number of experiments (see Dýrmundsson 1975, 1978a, 1978b, 1979; Dýrmundsson and Ólafsson 1989).

The price table issued by alþing (Diplomatarium Islandicum I: 164-167), dated 1150 or earlier, states that eight gimbrar which have yeaned and feed their lambs are equal to the value of a standard cow. The price table issued by the Árnes district "spring-assembly" states that ten of these lambed gimbrar are of equal value to a standard cow. Furthermore, the most meticulous and detailed of livestock records dating to the Commonwealth period, the 1218 inventory of Þykkvabæjarklaustur, records sixty gimbrar as having yeaned (as having lambs), in a flock which also included 200 adult ewes (two years and older) at home, and 160 ewes leased by tenants on monasterial land. The inventory of Þykkvabæjarklaustur from 1340 is also detailed, but it does not mention gimbrar with lambs.

Concluding remarks: Caprine neonatals,
and changes of climate, ecology and market

Amorosi and McGovern present data, based on their analysis of the bone assemblages from the Svalbarð midden, showing two jumps in lamb mortality, that is, deaths due to still-births, early weakness/illness or the culling of newborns (1989b; Amorosi 1992). One rise in neonatal deaths is between the earlier (1050-1150) and later (1150-1250) Commonwealth phases; the other is a rise that continues

after 1400 and into Early Modern times. Amorosi and McGovern say (1989b:5), "The apparent jump in lamb mortality between early and later Commonwealth times may reflect a decision to limit herd expansion and maximize milk production, but the second jump in early modern times is more difficult to explain as wholly the result of planned management strategy. It is tempting to correlate increased lamb mortality with the worsened spring weather and declining pastures of the Little Ice Age." Subsequently, Amorosi (1992:125-127) has concluded: "The apparent jump in mortality between early and later Commonwealth periods may reflect random taphonomic noise or small scale or shorter term weather events. Cold weather during lambing has been recorded as causing mass lamb mortality since the 16th century (Ogilvie 1981,250). The second jump in the early modern period is more difficult to explain as a result of sampling error, and would appear to reflect a more severe and prolonged period of uncontrolled stock loss."

The above findings from zooarchaeology--leaving aside the possible problems of taphonomic noise and sampling error--are extremely valuable, I think, and in agreement with my suggestion of a marked increase in people's consumption of sheep's milk by the end of the Commonwealth period. As for the second jump in neonatal lamb mortality, information which I retrieved from the farmers in Svalbarðshreppur might help to explain it.

I take the opportunity to reiterate points from my earlier discussion on grazing and fodder provisions, and to bring out some additional ethnographic information on factors which affect mortality rate or decisions to cull newborn lambs. The ewe after a lean winter especially, during which it has been fed little, will rarely produce enough milk to sustain both of its lambs given that it had two. Farmers had to figure out which newborn lambs should be killed and which lamb from a relatively "dry" ewe should be placed under which of the other better-milking one-lamb ewes, or ewes which had lost their lamb(s). Farmers expressed their knowledge of factors which do explain why and how an increase in mortality rate among newborn lambs at coastal farms like Svalbarð reflects a decline in pasture and provisions of fodder and an increase in the consumption of seaweed by ewes.

First I must note that the beach which Svalbarð farm owns is particularly rich in seaweed, which was and still is an important grazing source, but particularly in lean winters, when neighboring farmers would be permitted to use the Svalbarð beach for grazing their sheep. When the ewes have eaten a lot of seaweed and were given very little fodder in the period from March to May, when seaweed is generally in abundance, many of their lambs will die of a disease called þaraskjögur, or fjöruskjögur ("seaweed stagger" or "beach stagger"). From this disease lambs

either die when they are several days old or they become unfit, hence will be slaughtered. paraskjögur is caused by a nutritional imbalance, copper deficiency in particular. The circumstances that lead to this disease are frequently inevitable say farmers. Occasionally some lambs suffer from this disease today, but lamb mortality rate was often high because of it earlier in this century. Sigtryggur Þorláksson at Svalbarð tells me, that following the exceptionally lean winter of 1928-1929--because his father was then an inexperienced farmer who let his ewes eat too much seaweed--seventy of Svalbarð's two hundred newborn lambs died of paraskjögur.

As climatic conditions worsened and the floral environment was deteriorating; as farmers were keeping fewer cattle and rearing sheep with emphasis on milk production, farmers began to kill many newborn lambs, and more newborn lambs were dying from paraskjögur (i.e. at coastal farms) or from other conditions of illness, malnutrition, and miserable weather. The two jumps in the mortality of newborn lambs, which Amorosi and McGovern discovered for Svalbarð in particular, can be explained by showing the combined factors leading to decisions of culling, on the one hand, or causing "beach stagger" especially on the other. These factors are, an increase in the human need/demand for ewe's milk--overall, the collapse of the Commonwealth's intensive, diversified economy--and, with respect to the

second "jump" in particular, cooling of the climate which caused, all over the country, a reduction in fodder produced, made pasture-grazing in winter frequently impossible, and made seaweed an increasingly important provision for ewes on coastal farms.

In conclusion: We are looking at an intensive sheep rearing strategy which in the Commonwealth period generated reproductive rates that were higher than they were in subsequent ages when this strategy was not used. It should be argued that during most of the Commonwealth period farmers did not as a rule cull newborn lambs but limited their herds instead by slaughtering numerous summer old lambs, relatively many of them female, since it was imperative to keep many wethers. Around and after 1200, farmers, the new tenants and other smallholders at first, abandoned an overall, intensive strategy sustaining numerous cattle and wethers, and fewer and better fed ewes. Sheep became an increasingly important subsistence source, of meat but also milk, not surplus wool. What definitely must have happened following the "collapse" of the Commonwealth mercantile economy and due to the cooling of the climate and vegetation decline is that sheep flocks counted increasing number of winterold and older female sheep, but relatively lower numbers for summer-lambs than before: As people were relying more on keeping ewes in order to have milk for themselves, lambs had to be sustained through a second

summer, before they would become effectively reproductive or yielded significantly in meats and fleeces. The land register of 1702-1712 (Magnússon and Vídalín 1913-43) shows that many occupants of dependent farms were to pay rent in butter while retaining the rest of the milk product. During that long period in Icelandic history when people competed with lambs, so to speak, for the ewe's milk, culling of newborn lambs was a standard practice. But it must have been an imperative not to kill so many female neonatals since it would lead to a reduction in the size of the flock, and milk production in the future. The sturdier male lambs, all of which may have been made to do without milk, acquired a strong ability to graze, which made them less fodder-costly animals. They were small, as are the lambs today that have lost their mother and are called undanvillingar, the "lost from-under."

Notes

[1]. I am especially grateful to my advisor Professor Robert Netting for our inspiring discussions about different sheep-rearing strategies and conflicting farm-ecological and procurement factors in historical Iceland.

CHAPTER 4

**'SECONDARY EXPLOITATION' OF LIVESTOCK IN NORTHERN FARMING,
AND THE QUESTION OF ENGLAND AS A COMPARATIVE CASE**

In light of my research on historical and modern livestock production in Iceland, this chapter critically addresses current interpretive models focusing on the "secondary exploitation" of livestock, or the "secondary products" of livestock. Furthermore, I will apply my own operational model to evidence from England, as zooarchaeologists and economic historians have presented it, pertaining to the period from the Iron Age to the 15th century [1]. I find it important to apply my particular operational model to a well investigated Northern area outside Iceland, for the purpose of comparison, and in order to test or illustrate the analytical utility of my methods and findings before I go on to discuss relations of production and reproduction in Commonwealth Iceland and elaborate on my 'dual economy' hypothesis. I should also like to point out that the export wool industry in Iceland was collapsing in a period when another, a larger one, was taking off in England, one with which Norwegian merchants established strong trading ties.

In the case of England we will be focusing on the areas which became colonized by Romans, then Anglo-Saxons and Normans. Historians and archaeologists have dealt

extensively with the economy and society of this region for the period from Iron Age to the Age of intensive sheep farming and wool industry marked by the enclosure movement. While my method for examining the secondary literature, including several data sets, is primarily based on my above presented ethnographic and historical research into production strategies and changes in farming systems in Iceland, I will also be discussing the evidence for long-term changes in social stratification implied by differential use of sheep, cattle and cereals. A problem-oriented approach tries to forge the missing links between the distinctive stories written by archaeology, history and ethnography--from an historical- and regional-comparative perspectives as well.

I will be looking both at broadly different strategies of production i.e., their points of socioeconomic articulations with cereals and cattle production, and more closely at different types of shepherding in that context, i.e. at zooarchaeological assemblages and livestock records. Production levels and the means of intensification are reflected in age specific mortality and culling rates, or alternatively, in estate records on livestock possessions, yield or use.

A flow of recent articles on agrarian intensification and specialization in farming--focusing particularly on "secondary exploitation/products"--reveal few bones of

contention among archaeologists. These zooarchaeologists (as being most engaged with this topic) as well as economic historians concur on the interpretation of mortality profiles and livestock records, i.e what they tell us about the relative importance of, and efficiency in meat, milk and wool production. Sherratt (1983), Greenfield (1988), Maltby (1982, 1984), Grant (1982, 1984), Noddle (1984), Crabtree (1989) and Galvin (1987) all seem to agree on the following assumptions (which are derived from Payne's (1973) work in Anatolia): High frequency of juvenile sheep indicates slaughter for prime meat, whereas high percentages in the adult category suggests emphasis on milk and/or wool production. In following other prevalent assumptions, Cribb's (1985) simulation model takes into account the notion that milk production for consumption by people is enhanced when many young livestock are killed off, but he assumes for sake of his model that all adults are female.

Some problems are immediately apparent. First it is the mortality rate of infants and neonates, not the percentage of lambs, that directly suggests heavy emphasis on milk production. Second, we have to find ways to infer sex ratios ("sexing" individual bones is now impossible without having near complete skeletons), and I will show that we should be able to do this by careful scrutiny of mortality profiles, with an eye on possible reproductive rates. The use of simulation models and Gini coefficients for deriving

age categories and to measure specialization (different productivity indices of meat, milk and wool) may so far have made us only less sensitive to critical issues. This problem is compounded by careless use of the terms infant, lamb, juvenile, adult, immature and young. For instance, one rarely encounters the primary figures for mandible wear stages (e.g. see histogram in Grant 1982:104) in widely distributed journals; whereas comparative discussion should take place after a closer reading of those. The point is that age is variable in relation to reproductive maturity and weight when we compare different herding systems.

A widely accepted notion of secondary exploitation emphasizing milk and wool production is misleading because it recognizes neither conflicting, nor complementary procurement factors. As I hope this dissertation will show, no single strategy can be said to maximize both milk and wool production; and, intensified wool production is tied to other changes in subsistence economy (with respect to cattle, cereals, goat..) as well as to trade, population, and the deployment of labor (these latter factors are the ones generally highlighted). Cribb (1985:98; see his Figure 3.9) finds mortality profiles for sheep from Late Saxon England improbable (not representative) since far too many adults, as high as 85% in mortality profiles, were killed off for the flock to reproduce itself. He suggests an alternative hypothesis though, that only adult males were

being deliberately culled, but this he doesn't see as being oriented towards any particular commodity. However, a unique study by Kathleen Biddick of the sheep flocks on the estate of Peterborough Abbey from the beginning of the 14th century throws another light on this suggestion. As I see it, her study describes specialization in wool production taken to an extreme. I noticed that the strategy, which I reconstruct from her descriptions, poses milk production (for human consumption) as insignificant, and provides for a very low efficiency rate for meat.

Biddick (1989) shows what may have been a prominent feature in sheep rearing on all Medieval English signeuria estates; namely, the rearing of wethers to outnumber ewes (This suggests of course that some animals are bought on a market--the herding system is not closed). In her Table 29 (1989:101)--summary statistics for the demesne sheep flock at Peterborough Abbey Estate--she shows that in 1300-01 the estate total for subgroups were: 1,395 wethers, 1,207 ewes, 735 yearlings, and 1,143 lambs. The proportions of these subgroups are similar for the years 1307-08 and 1309-10.

Let me briefly elaborate on Biddick's valuable findings, characterizing a particularly high degree specialization, by applying my understanding of the problematic in Northern sheep rearing (see Chapter 3). Biddick describes how the seigneurial estate did business and cared for different subgroups of sheep. Among the 4-9

thousand sheep the natural death rate was low for all age categories, except in exceptional catastrophic years, so most deaths are attributed to culling. Old and debilitated ewes were fattened, then sold to be slaughtered, whereas wethers were sold not quite so old, typically before they began losing weight or rendering smaller fleeces. The sheep were fed much--ewes grazing on productive land in spring, to ensure effective reproduction and yield in wool. Lambs consumed all of their mother's milk. Additionally, they were fed more than half of the cow's milk reserved from cheese making in the Abbey's dairies, as well as extra milk that had to be purchased. These purchases consumed between one-quarter and one third of the expenses of maintaining the sheep flock! (Biddick 1989:114).

Notice then the intensification of wool production. Here wool is the primary cash-crop, requires considerable production of cow's milk, both to meet human consumption needs (since ewes are not producing milk for human consumption) and, as in the Abbey's case, for feeding the lambs extra milk. Furthermore, the Abbey (which commanded a huge labor force) consumed four to eight times more in the value of grain it produced than it earned from its sale of wool. This is a comment on the facts that only 3% of the wethers were consumed as mutton at Peterborough, that most of the meat was sold on the market in exchange for younger adult sheep, and that this particular herding strategy

doesn't yield much meat (yields meat expensively, not efficiently).

Now it is time to consider the Iron Age faunal assemblages, which are quite uniform. These indicate to me a considerably intensive sheeprearing strategy that maximized yields of both wool and meat. This is suggested by mortality profiles and by the high proportions of milking cows relative to other periods. (If the efficiency index for sheep meat is high then a strategy does not in itself imply intensification in cereal production/imports.) Among the primary domesticated mammals species (cattle, sheep/goat, horses) cattle are always numerous and tend to predominate (i.e. MNI wise, Crabtree 1989, Noddle 1982). Grigson (1982) and others have shown that these were mostly dairy cows; all bulls presented are young.

What distinguishes Iron age assemblages, from Roman ones (see Cribb 1985:Figure 3.9; Grant 1982:104, looking at assemblages from Potchester Castle, Hampshire) is high mortality in lambs less than year old but not in the infants (first molar is not fully erupted or is only in an early stage of wear) (Hamilton 1982, Grant 1982, Maltby 1981). Representation of 'immature' is low and one assumes that animals were generally not killed between the ages one and three. Maltby (1981), along with those who quote him on this, assumes that the high lamb mortality rate is natural rather than due to culling, and is caused, in part, by

shortage of winter fodder. He thinks that the Iron Age profiles show signs of inefficient meat production. My interpretation is different. I think it more probable that when lambs are provided with all the milk from ewes, then they will have a first summer growth spurt and will yield considerably in meat, wool and skins if culled at 5 to 8 months before real winter sets and animals must be provided with fodder and housing.

Clearly, we can not use models derived from observations on herds in the Middle East--herds owned by farmers or nomads who take milk from their ewes and obtain meat from two and three year olds which were sustained mostly by grazing. In England (where there was below average cold through most of Iron Age) sheep have to be provided with housing and considerable winter fodder. By limiting herd size this other way--culling 5-8 month old lambs for meat--farmers could provide ewes with all the more fodder of good quality than if they were also supporting many first year lambs, which absolutely require good quality fodder. Substantial feeding in winter and good grazing in spring are important if ewes are to reproduce effectively, to produce the amount of wool that is similar to the amount from wethers and barren sheep. Well nourished ewes can be sheared or plucked in early spring without loss of milk production because the new "spring wool" will have grown to protect them from cold (which makes them "dry").

Furthermore, when people rely on cow's milk rather than sheep's milk for their own consumption, lambs will grow bigger. Those lambs that are not culled do yield considerable fleece before one year old.

I also propose that lambs in Iron Age Britain were capable of yeanning for the first time when they were only one year old, but this requires intensive winter-feeding. If this was the case, then fertility rate may have been higher in Iron Age than has been assumed, and higher than in the Romano-British herds, which I will discuss in a moment. (It was not custom to fertilize 1st year lambs at Peterborough Abbey, but in 1300-01 two year old sheep were registered as having given birth to lambs (Biddick 1989:107).)

Northwestern Europe in Iron Age, pre-Roman or non-Roman, shows a strong animal-based subsistence, marked in pollen diagrams by high values for ribwort plantain and low values for cereals (Randsborg 1985). A range of crops, including oats, emmer, spelt and others which are now virtually unknown, were grown in fields that were tilled with a light ard. I don't see that the uses of domestic animals and cereals give us many hints about social stratification within or between tribes in Pre-Roman England. As I see it, the production strategy that I have described does not in itself imply social stratification; instead, it may imply the absence of class relation. The

population may not have been subdivided, either in terms of differential diet, or in terms of the production of cereals vs sheep. Different groups were either largely self-sufficient or independent specialists (see Barker and Gamble 1985) who participated in exchange systems which were not between crop and animal growers. Archaeobotanical studies suggest that people at "pastoral sites" were receiving cereal harvest in semi-processed state (Jones 1985). This suggests that "pastoralists" were in fact growing cereals themselves.

The Roman period colonization clearly marks the beginning of intensive crop cultivation with the use of heavy wheeled ploughs and oxen or horses for draught power (Jones 1981; Green 1981). We begin to see modest values for plantain and substantial values for cereals like rye, wheat and millet--the last one in particular may have supplied the poor peoples bread (Parain 1966:162).

The Roman invasion established particular social stratification: relations of production by which slaves were exploited for their labor directly, and peasantry supplying urban, military, and mining centers with agricultural products. These two groups may have been largely confined to an inferior diet in which cereals predominated, of less meat, but some milk, perhaps from sheep mostly. Besides noticing intensified cereal production we see extensive evidence for mining and leather production (for the

military). Exports included metals, cattle and cattle products; imports included various food plants and woolens for the urban and military population. Roman villas and "native" sites provided the urban and military population with agricultural products through taxation and/or exchange. The latter "consumer sites" show higher cattle to sheep/goat ratios (Noddle 1984) than the former "producer sites". Furthermore, the consumer sites show higher proportions (within sheep assemblages) of sheep in second and third year, suggesting the importation of meat from the country side (Maltby 1984, and I agree). Finally, peasant villages show higher percentages for oxen. This implies ploughing; whereas urban sites show higher proportions for milking cows and mass graves of cattle carcass. All of this suggests that the upper social strata appropriated much of the cattle-produce.

Rather than to celebrate what many historians have described as an elaborate Roman market system, I will try to show how social stratification, means of appropriation, and the exploitation of the peasantry is implied in evidence for a sheep rearing strategy which was coping with the lack cow's milk. I argue that the peasantry was alternately surviving on, and dying, in part because of a mostly cereal diet. Milk from ewes became crucial for survival (of children). As has been suggested, sheep mortality profiles from Classic Roman times (1st to 3rd centuries) and Iron Age

material are easily distinguished, the former showing higher rates in the 2nd and 3rd year category. Archaeologists widely agree on this distinctive difference (see Maltby 1981) because it holds whichever type of Roman site we are looking at. A study by Noddle (1984), comparing material from Iron Age and Roman "consumer" and "producer" sites, exemplifies the problems intrinsic to these sorts of comparisons. Noddle (1984) lumps together all sheep that are considered to be between the ages of 6 and 24 months into one category of juvenile, making it impossible to distinguish between those lambs that were slaughtered before winter set in, and those who were not culled out until subsequent fall, following a second summer growth spurt.

Let us consider Roman period mortality profiles. Apparent high levels of second year killing (see Grant 1982) can be seen "as the result of a fulfillment of a demand for meat", of course (Grant 1984, quoting Maltby 1979), but it does not point to a strategy that (exclusively) maximizes meat. High neonatal mortality and culling of newborns (see Grant 1982), as a planned management strategy, suggests that people consumed ewe's milk and points to low intensity feeding. This is suggested where high levels of 2nd year killings show that lambs had to be kept through winter and a second summer growth spurt before they yielded significantly. (Third year killing takes place since a number of ewes always turn out to be barren--but, where wool

production is a strong imperative in the management strategy they may not be culled out.)

A sheep rearing strategy emphasizing the provision of milk for human consumption should be reflected in less intensive feeding of the animals generally. Although it is important that the ewes have access to good grazing land in early summer when they are milking, it is not as critical to feed them much in late winter in order to ensure a particularly high survival rate for lambs. Also, the lambs that didn't get milk are small, but acquire a strong ability to graze--both factors make them less fodder-costly animals. Hence, another perspective: the climate was considerably warmer and drier in the period 150-400 AD (Lamb 1981). This made the strategy all the more possible. In earlier, less hospitable centuries there was a stronger imperative for limiting the herd by killing 5-8 month old lambs.

Now, some historians have suggested that the later Roman period saw a breakdown of the monopolistic control of the major towns. They see this control apparatus replaced by a market system involving a development of independent villages. Former major markets were by-passed, and towns suffered a major decline (Maltby 1984). New ruling and dominant classes emerged. We can say that the country side was recovering and controlling more effectively their own means of production. In fact, the faunal evidence shows a marked increase in the % of cattle in assemblages from

"native" as well as villa settlements, and a concomitant rise in numbers for mature animals (Noddle 1984; Maltby 1981). Furthermore, villa sites show a major jump in the percentages of mature sheep by the 4th century, and again by the 5th century (+19% for Frocester court from 3rd to the 5th centuries; +9% for Barnsley Park from 4th to the 5th centuries--Noddle 1984). For one thing, this suggests an increase in wool production. Thus, it should be noted that the once flourishing industry in Gallic cloaks and wool went down with the collapse of Roman rule and its trading connections. On the other hand, it is also in the 4th century that we hear first of British production of cloth for export (Carus-Wilson 1952).

For the peasantry, the decline of the Roman empire meant the decline of an appropriation system which had exploited them severely. The system had exported their cows, supported the military, enslaved the peasantry for mining, and supported a "native" administrative class. In the Roman period, means of production had evolved and expanded. It wasn't until near the end of this period that the expanded means of production this became a basis for a sheep herding strategy that was more intensive even than the strategy characteristic of Iron Age. We see a return to first year killing, but now also very high percentages of mature animals, which perhaps included wethers. This reveals less efficient meat production than in Iron Age, but

now there were pigs, intensive cereal production, and foreign trade.

Grant (1982:104) shows a mortality profile for sheep from the middle-late Saxon levels at Portchester Castle, a pattern which is repeated in assemblages from late 6th and 7th century sites (Maltby 1981). Furthermore, Crabtree (1989) remarks on the resemblance between her West Stove samples and Iron Age samples. Particularly intriguing from my perspective are the low percentages for infants (neonatal) and the high percentages for lambs under one year. Both these facts indicate that sheep were reared with emphasis on wool, not milk, and that the effective reproductive rate as well as the efficiency index for meat were high. Carus-Wilson notes that there is considerable evidence for woolen industry in 7th century Anglo-Saxon England, but not before that. By the 8th century this industry catered for export (Carus-Wilson 1952:363-64).

We are in the dark still as to the goals and strategies of sheeprearing in the late 5th to 6th centuries. Zooarchaeologists haven't discovered significant assemblages from this period. I can only hypothesize that, after the Anglo-Saxon invasion, the native population experienced an erosion of their subsistence base which led to changes in sheep rearing strategy. The invasion brought a proportional increase in the segment of the population that had to be fed but were not directly involved in production. The invaders

appropriated animals (taking cows, demanding the meat of sheep), and exploited the native labor force, many as slaves who survived on inferior cereal diets, produced by the peasants.

If we are to use the evidence for sheep and cereal production, to come to another understanding of paramount changes in social stratification/relations of production that took place in Medieval England after the Norman invasion, we must plough through many works on topics like, open-field versus common field, the enclosure movement, internal colonization, "the Seigneurial offensive", "the crisis of feudalism", the peasant land market, inheritance, and the decline of serfdom. I will use information, presented by several historians, to relate an argument supporting the following hypotheses. First, the twelfth century, "the Golden age of the Peasantry", brought intensification in sheep rearing through increases in wool and meat production. This process happened, so to speak, in the hands and minds of the peasantry, and was especially based on their direct access to the products of cattle. This change imposed lower returns in cereal production, led to increases in the price of grain, but caused a dramatic increase in the peasant population.

Second, following the seigneurial offensive (which brought much land under the plough) a further step was taken in intensification, this time under the direct control of

demesne owner and the town-based entrepreneurial patricians. This later process, which took place in the mid thirteenth century to the early 14th century, reduced the efficiency index for meat and led to a rise in prices for animals. This extreme specialization in wool production was dependent on (or followed) internal colonization, intensification in cereal production, and the liquidation of domestic animals, which were sold and bought on the market. Most peasants in the 13th century saw the dwindling of their animal herds. Overall, intensification in cereal and wool production supported more and more artisans and casual laborers, confining lesser peasants to a cereal diet mostly.

As Levine (1987:12) puts it, the mass of the population in England lost their right to the land at the time of the Norman conquest, and had little option but to give up control over a large portion of their labor power in exchange for regaining access to the land. The population in England was increasing quite dramatically until about 1110 (Bolton 1980). We can easily attribute this rise to reproduction among Norman's who controlled production. Appropriation of livestock directly satisfied their subsistence needs. The English wool industry did in fact "lag behind" following the conquest says Carus-Wilson.

The population increase tapers down between ca. 1110 and 1160, then it accelerated greatly, keeping a steady pace until "Black Death" in the mid 14th century. It has been

argued that "common field" farming was the product of the rising population in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (in Bolton 1980). I think we should/can relate the origins of this farming system (in this case) to the disintegration of demesnes by the 12th century; the leasing out of land and stock to tenants (many of them former villains, manorial officials, and monks) who freed themselves from labor service in favor of money rent (Hilton 1983:17). Then we can say that the "common field" system, which produced results similar to convertible husbandry in the less Normanized Western Highland Zone, improved the conditions of the peasants generally and led to rapid population growth. Extension of free tenure was taking place in the same period, beginning in the earlier 12th century, on the frontier lands (wood, waste, marsh). But the internal colonization process began slowly, becoming more rapid in the 13th century.

We need to characterize the particular open-field system that emerged after the conquest by saying that each property, so to speak, was divided into arable and non-arable, with the former separated into scattered strips (Dahlman 1980). An important characteristics of the "common-field" system, on the other hand, was that post harvest stubble, damaged grain, and whatever grain grew on the ridges was given over to animals. Furthermore, we see here more extended periods of fallow than in the open-field

system. Now, there hardly was an incentive towards this sort of land use unless the peasant had acquired livestock, or direct access to its products. When he did, then we expect to see intensification in sheep rearing, accompanied by an increase in the proportion of cows to oxen. In fact, the number of plough teams declined by 40% from the beginning of the 12th century to 1180.

Furthermore, as archaeologists have discovered (Grant 1988), in 12th century assemblages there are high percentages of older sheep at rural sites and high percentages of lambs, less than year old, at town sites (where they had been sold on the market). Grant (1988:156-157) thinks that milk was an important although relatively minor, by-product of cattle raising. She is saying here that there is very little evidence to show that cows milk was sold on the market--but that shows how important cows milk was to the peasantry. Dyer thinks that in the 12th and the 13th centuries, dairy produce was more important component in the lower-class than upper-class diet, and that a large proportion may have been consumed at home, rather than traded.

Intensification in sheep rearing took place in the 12th century, showing in an increase in wool and production, and was contingent upon direct access to cattle and the ability to convert parts of the crop harvest into animal produce. The woolen industry went forward rapidly in the 12th

century, but certain qualifications must be made. Peasants were selling wool on the market, to the cities where there were building up large congregations of weavers and other cloth workers. As Carus-Wilson put it (1952), much of the wool went either to the production of cheap cloths, as russets and burls, and was distributed at the home market among the poorer classes, or, it was sold to the Fleming traders, who took it to the flourishing industrial cities along the continental seaboard. England had become the primary supplier of wool to Flanders. Then, by the late 13th century, the old industrial cities in Flanders went into depression. This was when (because?) the English wool industry transformed with another step taken in the intensification of sheep rearing, this time on demesne land of the sort that I described at the beginning of this essay.

I will end this chapter with a discussion of changes that lead to the sort of intensive sheep farming that I described for Peterborough Abbey--by calling it an industrial revolution. First some background. The pedal loom and the spinning wheel came into widespread use (invented around 1200) and the completion of broadcloth involved many craftsmen with specialized skills, a labor force that was dictated by entrepreneurs in the cities, who also controlled the supply of the local and imported materials that were required for the finishing of the product.

In late 12th century and early 13th century prices on grain and livestock rose frequently as more and more land (even former grazing land) was taken under the plough. Landlords resumed the active cultivation of the demesne and demanded high labor service. Grain prices became stable around the mid 13th century until they rose again, along with the prices on livestock after 1260, but it was in the late 13th century that we see the major leap in reclamation of forest, fens, marches and coastland. In this period most of the new land became pastureland for the demesnes.

In an important essay, "The charters of the villains", Postan (1973) describes an active land market in the 13th century--where the rich peasants merely predominated among the buyers. In another essay he describes "the dwindling of the herds"--where in the course of the century more and more peasants had fewer and fewer cattle and sheep. This was happening in both primarily-pastoral and primarily-arable regions.

After reviewing Zvi Razi's valuable work on reconstructing peasant families in the 1280-1340--which revealed the high fertility of the richer peasants and sadly, the high death rate among the poor--Levine (1987) suggests, while noting partible inheritance, that children of richer peasants were those who colonized the woodlands, taking with them their flocks. I have noticed that we have hardly any records which show the buying and selling of

animals. Also, I find few inquiries into the origins of the monies that were used for buying land. It seems to me that devolution practices involved the selling and buying of animals. The richer peasants were accumulating the livestock and some of it was taken away by sons who migrated.

Now, in the latter 13th century and beyond, demesnes like Peterborough abbey were buying as many breeding ewes as they were selling nonproductive sheep for slaughter (Biddick 1989). Prices of both grain and livestock were on the rise again and demesnes--especially ecclesiastical ones, established on the new pasturelands--were accumulating most of the cattle and sheep, for the purpose of milk and wool production respectively. Records from the bishop of Winchester's 32 demesnes in 1275 show that only 19% of the 23,425 sheep flock were lambs (Postan 1973).

It is apparent that the demesnes were not making themselves self-sufficient in terms of maintaining their flocks. They were often buying as many productive wethers and reproductive ewes as the number for old livestock which they sold as mutton to the towns people. Meanwhile, the villains had to fight even to maintain their possession in oxen--their prices rose 120% between 1210 and 1310--or to acquire much needed manure for their fields. With five sheep and one cow, which were common figures per household (Postan 1973), the villains could hardly provide ewes milk

to their children. Along with serfs and those who joined the wage-labor force, English peasants were (once again, perhaps for the last time) confined to eating coarse maislin bread, pease porridge and second-class legumen proteins. Legumes, which were introduced in the 13th century, became a substitute for animals, as fertilizer and as food.

Notes

[1]. The first draft of this chapter was conceived as my response to the following thought-provoking question, which my advisors Professor Thomas Park and Professor John Olsen posed to me as part of my preliminary examination: "For Western Europe (or some logical sub-set thereof, excluding Iceland) and the period from Iron Age to the Industrial Revolution, discuss the evidence for long-term changes in social stratification implied by differential use of sheep or goat versus cereal."

CHAPTER 5
RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION AND REPRODUCTION
IN THE EARLY ICELANDIC COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY

In chapter three I proposed a 'dual economy' working model (hypothesis) that demonstrates regional integration of broad-based subsistence economies with wool production for export in the Commonwealth period, whereas in chapter four I attempted to apply my Northern farming-systems model for the interpretation of historical and zooarchaeological data from England, while also discussing current views on the so-called "secondary exploitation of livestock." I arrived at my hypothesis by focusing on agroecological factors and using concepts of economic intensification and extensification that are both applied to and derive from my ethnographic data on herding systems. My notion of a dual or divided economy was inspired by Witold Kula's (1976) book, An Economic Theory of the Feudal System. Kula discerns in this study of Poland's feudal economy from 1500-1800 the principle of a broad-based subsistence economy sustaining a single-crop export economy, but in the case of my study we are dealing with a mercantile farming system of freeholders primarily.

In the section below I will develop my "dual economy" hypothesis further through the reading of primary non-narrative documents towards explaining the elaborate

political structures in the Commonwealth period and showing how trade enterprises were facilitated through class, domestic markets and municipal institutions. I am primarily concerned here with the period from the 10th century, when deployment of slave labor diminished (see chapter one), until in the late-12th century when rent tenure systems (see Karlsson 1975:23; J. Jóhannesson 1974:344-358) and other tributary forms of surplus extraction (i.e. various taxes) were becoming increasingly prevalent. My thesis anticipates further research on the transformation and articulation of different modes of production, and I intend to engage rather than take precise issue with the different positions and arguments concerned with labor deployed on large landholdings (see J. Jóhannesson 1974:349-358; Agnarsdóttir and Árnason 1983; Durrenberger 1988a; Miller 1990:111-178).

Then, in the last section of this chapter I will elaborate my hypothesis by looking at the evidence from narrative documents and show how trade enterprises were facilitated through household networks, kin-ordered transmission of property, marriage arrangements and fostering practices.

The chiefdoms of the merchant-farmers: a theory

The salient issue that concerns me here is how surplus

production was stimulated and realized, exchanged and appropriated in society as a whole--in that time when chieftains acted as influential administrators and negotiators, for the most part, and on authority that was formally based on their representation of pingmenn and contingent on a powerful economic ruling class of the wealthy farmers, which I will be calling merchant-farmers, or mercantile farmers. Instead of being the economic ruling class, chieftains were political leaders who articulated trade enterprise incentives with intensified production, surplus extraction, interdependence and relations of class among freeholders, large and small. I therefore lay the groundwork for examining the rise, change and fall of chiefdoms in terms of the variations and changes in recruitment mechanisms and degrees of authority, as Eric Wolf proposes (1982:96); interlinked processes of freeholder intensification and specialization in the context of slave emancipation and mercantile activity; subsequent disintensification and the rise of rent systems and ecclesiastical power in the context of state formation and colonial relations.

I consider it useful to view the political and social institutional development of the Commonwealth as means by which domestic production was intensified throughout the country, for example, the way to generate surplus wool that sustained the authority and lifestyle of chieftains and

influential mercantile farmers, and thereby reproduce the system of social stratification; to produce a subsistence surplus which did secure the reproduction of the domestic units in general, since household viability was periodically threatened by bad weather and procurement accidents; to have those farmers who were not directly partners in trade share the risk of trading overseas; to adjust to worsening terms of trade by the end of 10th century, when silver availability had decreased, favorable insider contacts in Norway had decreased, and competition as well as cooperation with Norwegian merchants had increased.

I am here approaching the problem and question of productive forces during the Commonwealth of 36 chiefdoms, the Free-state era until the late 12th century, on the basis of premises that Sahlins (1972) has established as a way of defining the "domestic mode of production," as well as economic intensification. The domestic mode of production itself could lead to (or would pose) underpopulation as well as underproduction, since it periodically fails to provision itself. It emphasizes "basic definite needs," while labor-power is underused, and natural resources and technical means are not fully exploited. Accordingly, the questions concerning the Icelandic trade enterprise and its elaborate political system center around the way in which mercantile farmers--as well as the very existence of domestic and foreign markets--were able to undermine the autonomy, curb

the anarchy, and unleash the productivity of the domestic economy of common farmers, as well as their own.

An extended kinship-alliance structure polarized people's relations to production. Surplus production, which mercantile farmers control/realize/distribute, is created in society as a whole. Necessarily, dependency relationships in local economic transactions are established through free associations as well as "legitimate" coercion of cooperation, based on kin- and communal-ordered networks. As much as the mercantile farmer's authority rested on compatibility of interests with his associates, it involved certain control over reproduction, asserted through the collective ruling of chieftains' offices as well as hreppur administrations.

I thus introduce the notion, "The Chiefdoms of the merchant-farmers," and define merchant-farmers as a dominant economic ruling class of shipowners and other leaders of powerful kingroups, some of whom were chieftains, who participated in trade and held extensive rights to property. [The term merchant-farmers, or mercantile farmers, was on one level inspired by the indigenous word siglingabændur, meaning navigating or world traveling farmers. The word siglingabændur has popular connotations which distinguish the farmers of the "Golden Age" from the peasantry of subsequent "Dark Ages" of colonial rule.]

Merchant-farmers were the freeholders who, as leaders

in powerful kingroups, controlled a broad subsistence base-- on extensive, private, yet kin- or family-based landholdings--partly through dependent-farms. Cottagers (many of them former slaves) who lived on dependent farms in larger estates ensured freeholders access, defense, and exploitation of outlying meadows, upland pasture, woods, landing sites, fishing locations, seal skerries, rivers and so forth. A strong cattle component in herds supported a sheep-rearing strategy with emphasis on wool yield on these large landholdings; a considerable cattle component characterized herds on many smallholdings as well. On the one hand, we have a pattern of sheep-rearing which had the objective results of providing surplus wool for export. On the other hand, we have a broad-base subsistence economy, mostly for domestic use and exchange, supplementing this sheep-rearing strategy which provided minimum milk and meat supply.

Under the auspices of merchant-farmers, freeholders large and small generated wool product surplus and at the same time secured the reproduction of household units by favoring a multi-crop, broad-based subsistence economy sustaining a single-crop export economy. Sizeable, sustainable cattle-rearing required better land, substantial hay and construction; without that, many groups of commoners (smallhold-yeomanry with joint rights to mountain pasture), participated in credit exchange, specializing in commercial

wool products. In other words, not only did merchant-farmers exploit a broad subsistence base as a way of supporting a wool-yielding, sheep-rearing strategy of their own; they plugged into surplus labor-power and generated or realized surplus wool products from commoners, whose participation in credit exchange would have been their way of coping but constituted also the exploitation of class. Foreign trade encouraged population growth and labor intensity.

The earlier mentioned price tables, issued by the Árnes "spring-assembly" and by the National Assembly at Alþingi (Diplomatarium Islandicum I: 315-317, 162-167), are in need of analysis informed by the notion that members of the ruling and "governing" classes (the merchant-farmers and the chieftains), the main (conspicuous) consumers of imported goods, acquired significant amounts of exportable products from numerous lesser households in exchange for livestock and subsistence items of indigenous origin. Albeit dated early- to the late-12th century--when most goods were exported/imported via Norwegian merchants--these price lists should aid our inferences about the farming systems and organization of domestic trade when Icelanders were more active as merchants abroad.

An important function of each "spring assembly", ruled over early on by three chieftains (Þorláksson 1979: 140-42), was to organize economic transactions and to authorize or

negotiate prices, in particular, setting the value for a standard cow (kúgildi) in terms of ells of homespun cloth and þinglagsaurar (J. Jóhannesson 1974: 333, Diplomatarium Islandicum I: 316). This is shown on the list issued by the Árnes Thing which also presents the relative values for different domestic animals and agricultural products, fish, wax, linens as well as silver and gold. The register issued by Alþing includes a similar yet longer list of livestock and goods (excluding fish); however, prices are set only in terms of the value of a cow. Then, in addition, a separate list shows in terms of eyrir the prices on homespun, tufted wool cloaks (vararfeldir), foxskins, fleeced lambskins, shorn wetherskins, catskins, striped russet, as well as gold, silver, iron, iron tools, linen and wax. Finally, several items are described as "things of special value" (metfé), on which prices were not fixed by law.

Included but not highlighted in the above-mentioned monetary registers, sheep's wool (unprocessed) does not appear to have been an important trade item. It is interesting to note also that according to the Tithe Law of 1097 (Diplomatarium Islandicum I:77-85; J. Jóhannesson 1974:170), wool, food and livestock were not acceptable tithe currencies except as relief for the poor. The processing of wool required a considerable amount of labor. Merchant-farmers acquired wool products made by women in lesser households during the long winters, whereas they

hired male laborers during the summer, working with cattle, construction, hay-making and so on.

We can say that commoners' indirect participation in the export economy by way of local credit systems constituted their dependency on subsistence sources (other than sheep) which merchant-farmers owned and controlled. Perhaps, in the course of the 12th century fewer and fewer juridical farm units held (increasingly extensive) private property rights with regard to enclosed land, for hay-making and grazing, as well as rivers, lakes, beaches, and forests, as well as land around mountain dairies. It is suggestive that only significant "milk producers" were allowed to engage in off-shore fishing. The formation of a fishermen's class would have taken labor-power from the farmers and would have disrupted the relations of power and dependency among them.

The often celebrated autonomy of the hreppar (municipal) administrations, as independent of the authority of chieftaincies (see Benediktsson 1974:185-186; Stein-Wilkeshuis 1982:347), must be seen in light of a class-, community-, and state-formation, variable at different historical moments. Documented functions of these communal units, aside from their origins as "free-associations," were to compensate farmers for the loss of cattle and housing (but not for the loss of sheep) and to provide tithe relief for the poor, while relatives were also required to provide

proscribed assistance to their poorer kin.

The disjuncture of responsibility or solidarity which separated chiefdoms and municipalities indicates to me that chieftains were not primary agents of redistribution as much as it underscores merchant-farmers' interests. During the heyday of Icelandic trade enterprise these municipalities, as well as the kin-based support system, helped neighboring household units collectively to ensure each other's reproduction in face of severe subsistence risks without cost to wealthy farmers; maintained semi-proletarianized labor-power through winters; profited these merchant-farmers from whom communal funds purchased replacement cattle; preserved the incentives for wool products in sheep rearing among commoners. With respect to last item mentioned, it constituted a constant risk that bad years would kill livestock, and by killing the cows in particular there would be a tendency for relying on sheep as the primary means of livelihood. This would lead to a subsistence mode of which wool surplus would not be an outcome (this was to happen gradually though). Cow's value was the most important standard in domestic exchange; loans were acquired on the basis of cattle as collateral; cattle ownership was one hallmark of merchant-farmer hegemony.

Social memory in the family sagas
of mercantile relations of production and reproduction

As is often reiterated, the family sagas, most of which were written or recorded in the 13th century, recall 9th to 11th century events and settings, building on oral tradition and historiography, but they also reflect on the turmoil, changing sociopolitical circumstances and, perhaps less clearly, competing ideologies of the 12th and 13th centuries, i.e. issues some of which are in a way directly represented in the 'contemporary' Sturlunga Saga (see G. Pálsson 1992; Meulengracht Sørensen 1992; Durrenberger 1989; Clover 1985; Anderson 1964). This section is primarily concerned with finding further keys to the dynamics of human subsistence, trade, property accumulation and transmission, and relations of production during the historical times that the family sagas claim to portray, and up until the early 12th century. But it also inaugurates an articulation of my approach to the family sagas, eliciting their testimonies of historical conditions and change--an approach which chapters 7, 8 and 9 on Bjarnar saga Hítðlakappa illustrates. Furthermore, in these chapters I address the issue of sorting out the multiple temporalities or historical moments which must have figured variably in the forms, content, and production of different family sagas.

Rather than attempt comprehensively to resolve the

debates on historicity and sociological credibility (see Miller 1990:43-77; Durrenberger 1990), I will add to the extended discourse further suggestions as to what the sagas bear testimony to, and argue for new ways of pursuing socioeconomic analyses. I will go on to show how my analysis of the family sagas extends to reveal the character and changes in strategies and relations of and production and reproduction in Commonwealth Iceland in the context of mercantile foreign exchange, that is, how trade enterprises were facilitated through class, transmission of property, a cognatic ego-centered kinship system, marriage, fostering, and household networks.

Family Sagas amply and explicitly describe exchanges and accumulation of resources, goods and services that took place by socio-political and kin-ordered means (see recent discussions by Byock 1988:77-102; Durrenberger 1990, 1988b, 1992). I agree that, as Durrenberger suggests (1990:89), the family sagas show considerable "self-conscious analysis of social conditions" without being "simply transpositions of contemporary events onto past locale and people." However, it can be argued that--in spite of the numerous examples on mercantile exchanges--the sagas are conspicuously mute with respect to crucial economic activities that centered around domestic credit exchanges and foreign trade, and that economic-class analysis figures subliminally in the texts. Rather than assume that the

narratives are, when taken together, complete with certain elements that allow for a direct reading, I point out that, to the detriment of the analyst who insists on a literal reading, this literature is whispering on the combined subject of credit or loan markets and production for foreign exchange, not to mention municipal administration. I refer to Miller's discussion on this issue:

Between larger and smaller farms there must have existed a fairly permanent series of exchanges regularized in creditor-debtor or landlord-tenant relationships. The amount of attention Grágás gives to loans, especially of livestock, and the proper procedures for their repayment and the recovery of delinquent debts, suggests the frequency of these kinds of transactions and the likelihood that they were a frequent source of conflict as well... But our direct evidence of these exchanges is thin indeed and incapable of supporting thick description... The sagas, however, confirm the existence of internal trade and specialized employments, although we have little way of recovering the levels of activity or how regularized such mercantile-like exchanges were. All in all, evidence of systematic local trade involving goods of local origin is sparse (1990:78-79).

What can be perceived as a problem may stem, in part, from storytellers' (perhaps even saga writers') failure to explicate the significance of mercantile exchanges, their disinclination to show how overtly political phenomena and events were contingent upon mercantile conditions of production; this problem also exists by virtue of the fact that when the sagas were written the domestic market had collapsed and foreign trade was no longer in the hands of mercantile farmers. I seek, however, to approach within the family sagas storytellers' sensitive testimonies of social experiences, reflecting on the economic and political relations, which we as analysts have multiple means to study as well.

I take a strong lead from Miller (Miller 1990:77-139, 1988), who has analyzed the sagas as well as Grágás to show the complexity and flexibility of household composition during the Commonwealth. He describes for us complex households, i.e. extended and multiple, and shows us that even though everyone was legally attached to an identifiable residence, residence practices were complicated by pastoral transhumance, shared headship in an uncompartimentalized farmhouse (which need not have been based on kinship connections), and the fact that persons were frequently attached to more than one household. Miller is concerned with showing us flexibility, mobility, and unclear boundaries and he makes no clear distinction between a

household and the bú or the juridical unit (in conjunction with private property rights), but considers these all as the unit of residence, production, and reproduction.

Miller calls attention to an 'economic enterprise', the juridical unit with fluid membership and individuals often attached to more than one household. In my view, taking commerce into account, inter-household networks were the building blocks in merchant-farmers' economic enterprises; complex and flexible householding was a function of these enterprises' dynamic relations. The multiple tasks performed in farms which were directly or indirectly involved in foreign trade account for large household units and variable membership. People residing in these households were engaged in different subsistence activities, depending on the season of the year, as well as trading and administrative and political activities. In strong contrast to complex households were, as Miller points out, the households of einirki, or "lone farmer" which were defined in law as those that did not hire male servants and did not have twice the value of a cow for each household member.

Family sagas help to suggest that kin-ordered relations of production, devolution and alliance delivered a fundamental potential for, and restraints on, expropriation of resources, and consolidated and actualized trade enterprises--while dividing the population with respect to means of production. A cognatic ego-centered kinship system

(Hastrup 1985:70-104; Turner 1971; Rich 1976), with what Hastrup defines as lateral emphasis, worked as a primary principle stimulating and realizing surplus production, securing reproduction of household units, and operating economic enterprises.

In the primary literature cognatic kinship and lateral emphasis is most highlighted in the rules of partible inheritance, duties for legal support and revenge, payments and acceptance of blood money, and provisions concerning guardianship. Individuals could invoke and act, often to create conflict, upon the multiplicity of consanguineal, affinal, and fictive-kin relations, and I infer this reveals the broad, fluid, and unstable outlines of economic enterprises through which the resources of various households complemented each other. However, the decisive origins of strong lateral and cognatic principles organizing the kinship system--by virtue of which complex and fluid householding and residential mobility were made possible--can certainly be traced, as can be the early emancipation of slaves, in terms of adaptation during the settlement period, in a country with multiple sources of subsistence and plenty of land.

We need to examine cases in the sagas where marriage arrangements are described in terms of showing how ownership and access to property like ships, sheep, cattle and land are brought together. An illuminating example would be the

marriage between Hrútur and Unnur in Njáls saga (Íslendinga sögur 1987:I,124-128): At alþing Hrútur's brother (by the same mother), who owned substantial land and other property on the west coast, negotiated with Unnur's father, who was particularly wealthy and lived farther inland. Unnur's father was not impressed or was unfamiliar with Hrútur's property but offered a dowry of 300 sheep against the fact that Hrútur owned a ship and would acquire two pieces of land from his kin in case he got married.

The status of women during the Commonwealth period has interested many scholars (Tomasson 1980). The sagas frequently portray women as independent, energetic, and strong-willed. This particular character development has led literary scholars to consider the female perspective pervasive in several of the family sagas, including Laxdæla saga (Damsholt 1984:76; Kress 1980). Devolution in Commonwealth Iceland--i.e. transmission between holder and heir whether or not it takes place at death (Goody 1976:10-11)--show characteristics of what Jack Goody calls diverging devolution, where property is passed down to women as dowry or by bilateral inheritance (1976:7). In the case of Icelandic marriages, heads of families (including a prospective wife's legal guardian who was her father, brother, brother-in-law, or father's brother) negotiated the transfer of bridewealth (mundur) and of dowry (heimanfylgja, heimanmundur) (Hastrup 1985:90-96). Unlike being a direct

transfer between kingroups, bridewealth became, just as did dowry, the personal property of the wife, even if the household property was to be administered by the husband/head. The woman would always keep the dowry in case of divorce, and the bridewealth also if divorce was occasioned by her husband. Thus, (although I will continue to use the terms bridewealth and bride-price for mundur), bridewealth appears, as part of the "woman's property complex," as "indirect dowry" (Goody 1976:11,136).

Following Goody's conceptual framework, I will further discuss diverging devolution and rules of inheritance according to Grágás, the Old Icelandic Law Code, in the context of my later analysis of Bjarnar saga Hitdælakappa.

To reiterate, bridewealth and dowry were legally the personal property of the wife and she might keep both in case of divorce. These provisions suggest to us that by marrying a woman her guardian and her kin group were able to invest animal stock, land, other property or resources with other kingroups, with the objective consequences of maintaining a broad base for subsistence and market production and operationalizing trade enterprises. I would therefore in one way analyze the literary figure of the household mistress, who is often depicted as strong-willed and independent, with considerable rights to property (Einarssdóttir 1984; Damsholt 1984; see also Karlsson 1986) and as an overseer of the production of homespun cloth

(Damsholt 1984), in terms of a woman's negotiation power and relative autonomy, for articulating the interests of her husband, in-laws, children, and other kin.

The widespread practice of fostering has recently been explained as a means for wealthy farmers to accumulate property, impose on the poor, to heal breaches or maintain poor kin (Miller 1988), or create alliances (Hastrup 1985:98), friendship and protection (Byock 1988:131,247-248). Its role in the dynamics of production where trade was a leading sector, however, has not received sufficient attention.

The family sagas tell of young men who were fostered--in households, prominent or not, away from natal parents--and made heroic adventure trips to foreign lands. Fostering practices should be examined in terms of the problem of recruiting dependable crewmen (as well as legal experts, negotiators, and goðar, or chieftains, for that matter); there was a need for a group of mobile males whose options (apparently glorified) were unlike those of some of their fosterbrothers, the 'natural sons' who were to marry young, claim inheritance, or settle down as heads of households. Then, mercantile wealth may have afforded many males the opportunity to marry and buy property at a more advanced age, while others were (in period of population growth) forced into domestic service, casual labor, or farming through rent tenure or sharecropping arrangements.

Fostering could also be an option against partible inheritance, and it may have allowed lesser farmers to participate in the trading activities of their wealthier kin, or others for whom they provided a son. Sons could become important agents in foster-parents households or offices, given that those sons acted on obligations towards their natural close kin. But we also read about cases where fostering arrangements led to conflicts over influence or inheritance and offered contested ways to wealthy farmers and chieftains to accumulate property.

Laxdæla saga testifies, for instance, to the experience of a woman (or Woman) in double-bind situations, as well as for related experiences of unequal shares, disparate opportunities, and competitions among fosterbrothers, who are bound by affection for each other. In Laxdæla saga, Kjartan and his beloved foster brother, Bolli, travel together to Norway, where they become rich and acquire fame and prestige. Bolli then returns to Iceland to marry Guðrún, who had wanted Kjartan but resented his travelling without her and had not promised when he asked her to wait for him for three years. The foster son, Bolli, would not inherit a farmland, but had acquired the economic means to buy one, while Guðrún's father had much property in animals. Bolli attempts to buy land, but Kjartan comes home and intervenes in the transaction by threatening the prospective seller and invoking his alliance with neighboring farmers.

Everyone finds her/himself in an untenable position, and Bolli's killing of his foster-brother leads only to a further chain of tragic events.

Guðrún says to Bolli, "Morning tasks differ. I have spun yarn for twelve ells of cloth, whereas you have killed Kjartan." (Íslendinga sögur 1987:III,1614). In saga narratives we notice the symbolic (metaphoric and metonymic) use of spinning (and its marketable products), predicating certain, dramatic fate on complicated conditions that are otherwise barely discernable, implicit in, or absent from the text. Then, in the frequent description of seafaring, the exported homespun and imported grain sometimes go without mention (or have been forgotten?), while the prospects of honor, status, and exploits from traveling to Norway are underscored. Laxdæla saga--which dates to the period 1230-1270 in terms of its writing (Íslenskur Sögu-atlas 1 1989:106), tells us a story about foster brothers both of whom attempted to live the other one's life, or proscribed career, that is, each of them attempted to appropriate for himself the two distinct success opportunities which were meant to separate and divide them. Therefore the saga predicates on the observation--perhaps as a result of population pressure, shortage of land, environmental deterioration and declining mercantile economy--that neither natural nor adopted sons were in positions which in and of themselves constituted a complete,

certain, and viable option towards social, economic, and reproductive success.

The women and men of different standing in the sagas are made to personify different productive forces; they represent different and conflicting tendencies--towards household autonomy, descent/succession, or alliances, formed on the basis of kin, marriage, fictive kin and marriage, political friendship, as well as commercial, tributary, chiefdom, municipal and parish agreements. Next chapter introduces, and includes my translated summary of Bjarnar saga Hitdælakappa, which is then extensively interpreted and analyzed closely in chapters 7 through 9. This particular saga in my view reveals changes in the forms of economic production--historically relating, and distinguishing between the social conditions marked by market, tribute, and subsistence production--and clearly employs the symbolism relating to marriage and kinship that reflect the dynamic, paradoxical, and historically transforming links (unity/borders, dependency/separation) between Iceland and Norway, secular and ecclesiastical authority, mercantile and inherited wealth, interior and coastal regions.

A reader can often predict a saga character's tragic fate from the odds that are presented, but a subtext often traces an individual's fate ultimately to the perennial suspicion that every initial premise, order, and promise are inherently paradoxical or unpredictable from the beginning.

To a variable extent, but as my following interpretation of Bjarnar saga will illustrate, family sagas reveal contextual analysis and awareness that exceed meanings which they portray as essential (perhaps by the use of allegory). They portray ideologies and dominant cultural codes within broader (narrative, structural) contexts of practice and deconstruction, showing the paradoxical consequences of hegemonic practice, for example, the double-binding role relations resulting from the conflicts/contradictions inherent in the concurrent practices of patrimonial accumulation (including alliance building, fosterage), devolution (inheritance, dowry and bridewealth transactions) and succession ("inheritance", fosterage).

The scope of my narrative-text analysis will be broader than to view Bjarnar saga Hitdælakappa as either the product of mystifying consciousness or as critical commentaries. Family sagas express sensitivity to social experiences and communicate about particular historical moments and possibilities, which the historian has multiple means to study. We can think of them with the notion of creative art as "next to experience" by the way it communicates about it. This notion derives in some ways from Lévi-Strauss's (1966) comprehension of artistic creation as that which lies half-way between scientific knowledge and mythical or magical thought. Art unites the structural order and order of events or "being" and "becoming" by way of synthesizing

analytical and dialectical modes of thinking, not alternatively reducing the products of one to those of the other.

The family sagas are complex testimonies of art, and as far as being products of people's analytic sensitivity, they provides us with suggestions and facts, help us construct our explanations and critical perspectives, to figure hegemony out--to see values, roles and assumptions in their contingency (not as necessarily so), and to locate sources of power and powerlessness. But if a conceptual language for social analysis is featured in the sagas, the distance that analytical reason and predialectical awareness can cover is fixed by internalization (of which transference is only an instance/part), at that moment of absence/lack which threatens without a meaningful assertion--which is also the moment of the imagination, regressive desire, and absolute dependency. This very moment becomes an additional focus in our further analysis of hegemony, hegemonized experience of the past--analysis informed by our other historical research and conceptual language [1].

Notes

[1]. I feel especially indebted to my advisor Professor Hermann Rebel for his teaching which has strongly informed my examination of the roles and circumstances of fostering

and adoption practices, as well as my articulation of an approach for sorting out the multiple temporalities, peasant classes, hegemonized experiences and testimonies which figure in Bjarnar saga Hítðlakappa (see also Rebel 1983, 1989).

CHAPTER 6

THE SAGA OF BJÖRN CHAMPION OF HÍTARDALE

Bjarnar saga Hítðalækappa is a medium size Icelandic saga of 50 pages, or ca. 23000 words. The two oldest surviving vellum transcripts of this saga date to the 14th century. (Íslendinga sögur 1987:xiv). It is widely considered to have been written in the period 1200-1230 (Íslenskur Söguatlas:106), but the narrative has its stage in the late-10th and early-11th centuries (Nordal 1938). In subsequent chapters I will attempt to show that the saga reflects on contested socioeconomic issues in the period around 1200, as much as it informs us about earlier historical moments and expounds long-term historical processes.

Bjarnar saga is particularly rich in its description of natural and domesticated resources, procurement strategies, and competition and cooperation among characters, secular as well as ecclesiastic, of different social status; furthermore, the narrative depicts the above in the context of foreign exchanges, changes in the modes and means of production, as well as the establishment and transformation of ecclesiastical institutions. During my last stay of fieldwork and archival research, I travelled with Magnús Óskarsson, scientist at Hvanneyri Agricultural College, throughout the Mýrar district in Borgarfjörður, West

Iceland, where we see the landscape and farmsteads that provide the background for most of the saga. These small farming communities around Hítarnes farm on the coast and in nearby Hítardalur valley constitute the smaller of two worlds where the main saga characters lived. The other, larger world of action in the saga is across the ocean, where Earls, Kings and Church institutions reigned, not without impact on the farming communities in the Mýrar district.

I visited farmsteads and other locations which are of importance in the saga, and studied the landscape and its resources. I talked to farmers about the saga, especially its descriptions of farming practices and natural resources, but also about the possible relationship between the saga's creation and the Hítardalur monastery (1166-1201)--its establishment, operations and closing. Furthermore, Magnús Óskarsson and I analyzed with farmers the 1181 ecclesiastical charter and inventory for Hítarnes estate, since many of the saga's events center around this churchfarm. As subsequent chapters will show, this particular document, together with the fact that a monastery was once located in the valley where Björn Hítðalakappi is born and where he dies, contributed greatly to my determination to do a detailed analysis of Bjarnar saga. My interpretation of this saga has become a part of my dissertation because it lends itself to critical questions

concerning the cultural ecology and political economy of Early Iceland.

We now turn to my English summary of Bjarnar saga, which is my retelling of the saga based on the Icelandic text published in the saga collection Íslendinga sögur (1987). The saga has been translated into English by W. Bryant Bachman, Jr., who published his translation in his book, Four Icelandic sagas and other tales (1985). As I wrote my English summary of the saga, I relied on the Icelandic text, rather than on Bachman's translation. My summary adheres strictly to the narrative sequence; furthermore, my choice of English words reflects translation of Icelandic words which appear in the saga, and the unusual sentence structure, at times, is due to my attempt to translate or show the saga's writing style.

Icelandic manuscript editors divide the saga into thirty-four chapters, but those breaks are (necessarily) invisible in my summary translation. Instead, I have divided the saga into three episodes plus an epilogue for my own analytical purposes, which I hope will become clear. In dissertation chapters 7, 8 and 9 I give titles to each of these episodes. The saga includes thirty-nine poems, which are numbered because I refer to them in my analytical chapters. My translation of these poems is loose in that it does not adhere to their formal structures. In translating the meanings of these poems, I rely on the Íslendinga sögur

editor's explanations of their elaborate symbolic imagery and figurative expressions. The saga contains countless eloquent and interesting quotations of what characters say. Some of those are directly translated. My summary is otherwise a careful attempt to highlight the structure and critical events in the narrative. My own special comments and explanations appear within brackets.

Bjarnar saga Hitdælakappa

Episode one

The saga begins by introducing its main characters, Björn Arngeirsson [who acquires the nick-name Hitdælakappi, "champion of Hitardale"], Þórður Kolbeinsson [son of Kolbeinn], and Oddný Þorkelsdóttir [daughter of Þorkell]. Þórður lived in Hitarnes [a coastal farm on the northwest edge of Mýrar district]. He was well educated and a great master of poetry (skáld). This accomplishment earned him respect abroad, especially in Earl Eirík's court in Norway, but little popularity among the common people, because he often treated them mockingly and malignantly.

Björn and Oddný are not mentioned until after his uncle, Skúli Þorsteinsson at Borg [Mýrar district's "first farm"], and her father, Þorkell Dufgusarson, in Hjörsey have been introduced. Skúli was a very wealthy man with strong

influences. Björn was Þórður's junior by fifteen years. In order to avoid Þórður's malice, Björn was raised at Borg until he was eighteen. He grew big, strong, and handsome. Björn's parents, Arngeir and Þórdís, occupied Hólmur in Hitardalur [a minor interior farm located in the northern opening of the dale, not far from Hitarnes]. Oddný lived in Hjörsey [an island off the coast between Hitarnes and Borg], with her father, who was an efficient farmer and owned many livestock. She was a promising (væn) and magnanimous young woman with the nick-name eykyndill ("island torch"). Björn frequently went to see Oddný, and they were very attracted to each other.

Norwegian traders arrived at Gufárós [near Borg] and stayed at Borg while doing their business. Björn said to Skúli that he wanted to join their voyage back to Norway. Skúli and Arngeir both agreed to equip him with considerable money for the voyage (farareyrir). Björn did not want to leave without a promise of marriage from Oddný. Oddný agreed to the marriage, and the betrothal arrangements were made between Björn and Skúli and Oddný and her father, with the stipulation that Oddný would wait in affiance (í festum) for three winters, or four, in case Björn would not be able to return earlier. Skúli promised to provide Björn with as much wealth for the marriage as Oddný's dowry and her father's possessions put together. He then gave Björn a golden ring to bring to his friend Earl Eirík, as proof of

his commitment to the Earl.

The ring and the greetings from Skúli led to a warm reception for Björn in Earl Eirík's court. Later in the fall Þórður sailed to Norway in a ship in that he owned in partnership with others. He performed drápa, a heroic laudatory poem for Earl Eirík, receiving for it a sword, a precious object, and an invitation to stay in the court over the following winter. The Earl gave Björn the gold-ring jarlsnaut [meaning both "Jarl's bull" or "Jarl's relish/enjoyed offering"] while invoking Björn's valiancy and his good uncle's name. This gift-giving, however, took place only after the Earl had questioned Þórður about Björn. Þórður described Björn as Skúli's most valorous young kinsman.

Þórður asked Björn one time when they were both drunk whether he would be going Iceland the following summer. Björn answered that he would rather be a warrior and go to war, where he could acquire wealth and honor. Þórður warned against disappearing into the world of adventures and reminded him about his responsibilities at home and all the wealth he had been entrusted with already. He then talked him into giving him the ring, jarlsnaut, to bring to Oddný, who would see this as a sign of Björn's complete commitment to her. Sober the next day Björn felt that he had said too much to Þórður, and that he should not have trusted him with the ring. In fact, Þórður returned the ring with the right

message to Oddný, but he also told her that Björn wished him to become heir to the betrothal were Björn to die or not return.

Björn got permission from Earl Eirík to travel with merchants east to Garðaríki (Russia). He took service with King Valdimar, at the time when his throne was under threat from his kinsman Kaldimar, the great warrior. Björn offered to fight Kaldimar, announcing that he left his country for the sake of seeking fame for himself. So, instead of the two armies fighting, Björn took the King's place in a duel against Kaldimar.

Björn saved King Valdimar's throne by killing Kaldimar, but the fight left him in critical condition, unconscious and severely wounded. A tent was erected over Björn where he fell on the battlefield. As his wounds healed, he woke up and pronounced his first poem (#1): "Here would the physically beautiful woman, Eykyndill, want to take rest with me as my lover--I know the art of poetry--if she heard that I was lying next to four men in a tent. I have become famous."

Björn stayed in Garðaríki one more year, after which his wounds healed completely. King Valdimar gave him the sword Mæringur. From there on Björn carried with him the nick-name "champion of Hitardale," or Hítðalækappi, which means more literally, "the champion of the people of Hitardale."

It was late summer when Björn finally arrived in Norway, and all the ships bound for Iceland had left. He had been away for three years. Merchants informed Þórður that Björn had been critically injured. Þórður paid them to announce to everyone that Björn had died. After that Þórður and Oddný were married and soon truly loved each other. Þórður sold his trading ship to Norwegian merchants, and the couple settled in Hitarnes, where they become economically prosperous and had eight children together.

Björn had been preparing for his voyage to Iceland when the ship arrived. He went towards the ship in a row-boat and heard from the crew about Oddný's marriage in Iceland. He immediately decided not to return and made the following verse (#2): "The man has bestowed physical pleasure upon the woman. The round muscles of Eykyndill push tightly on the under feather-bed; meanwhile, we force the nicely stiff oar to bend on the ship's rail. Something is making this happen. I must propel the ship forward."

Björn went to England, where he spent two years with Knútur riki (Canute the Great) and killed a dragon who was flying over the king's army. He then travelled east of Sweden with Auðunn, an outlaw from Norway. They owned two ships together and spent three years on viking expeditions.

Episode two

A series of rulership changes took place in Norway.

Norway was united under Ólafur Haraldsson after Earls Eirik and Hákon had fled the country. [King Ólafur is often called hinn helgi in the saga, i.e. Saint King Ólaf, but his apotheosis took place after he had been killed in 1029]

Hróar, Þórður's maternal uncle, died in Hróarskelda (Roskilde). Þórður bought a ship in order to go to Denmark and get a portion of the inheritance. He stopped on his way to meet the new Norwegian King and brought him a heroic laudatory poem. In return, King Ólafur gave Þórður a recommendation letter for the Danish, a gold ring, a sword, and a silkcloth garment. Þórður sailed his small vessel to Denmark with thirty men on board, merchants among them. After leaving Denmark with much inheritance wealth, he landed at Brenneyjar [a small wooded island] in order to do repairs on his ship. Björn happened to be there as well with a large fleet and two hundred men.

On the island Björn met Þórður wearing a cowl, attempting to hide his true identity by claiming to be Þórar viðförli ("one who widely travels"). The two men discussed Þórður's guilt or innocence. Þórður informed Björn about King Ólafur and told him that his uncle Skúli at Borg has died. Björn spared Þórður's life out of respect for the new Norwegian king, since Þórður had already been made an honorable guest in his court. After confiscating the ship and all the goods, Björn told Þórður to go to the Orkney islands, instead of Norway, because Björn intended to

present himself before the new king.

But both men appeared before King Ólafur, who had already heard first reports on the robbery attack on Þórður and his merchant companions. As Björn tried to explain his actions, the King had him arrested and said: "Vikings are quick to find something to blame merchants for when they want the merchants' goods." Later, King Ólafur came to believe Björn's version of events, including Björn's claim that he had spared Þórður's life out of respect for the King himself.

King Ólafur offered to mediate in Björn's and Þórður's quarrel and to deliver judgment on the matter. The two men agreed to this and to keep peace with each other. In the King's judgment the two major dishonorable deeds, stealing Oddný and stealing Þórður's wealth, were comparable. The woman was to go to Þórður, with all her wealth, but to Björn went an equal amount in the form of what he had already taken from Þórður. The inheritance Oddný received as heir to her father was included in this reckoning. So, Björn kept the wealth he had taken from Þórður, minus the ship, but he had to give back to the merchants all the goods that he had taken from them.

King Ólafur gave Björn a priestly robe [guðvefjakyrtil; a christian cloak, under-garment] and a ring to replace the one that Þórður had taken from Björn and now signified the marriage between Oddný and Þórður. He

then made Björn promise to give up his warrior lifestyle; after all, Björn's great talent for fighting was an offense in the eyes of God, the king said. Þórður, on the other hand, received from the king a sword, as well as wood to bring back to Iceland.

Þórður went to Iceland, but Björn stayed with the king for awhile. "In those days," the saga says, "it was common for men of dignity and high rank to wear leg-thongs, which looked like ribbons [lindi, also means snake or worm], and were wrapped around the calf from the shoe to the knee." During one lavish feast, Björn and the king took a bath together in a tub. Afterwards, as it happened, Björn inadvertently put on one of the king's two laces [reim-- refers to the leg-thong; reimir means worm or snake]. Realizing his mistake, Björn wanted to return the leg-thong, but the king said that it would serve him no worse than the one he had before. Björn wore this lace as long as he lived, and it would be buried with him. Much later, when Björn's bones were retrieved and moved to a second church, the lace was still around his leg bone and had not yet rotted. The lace is now kept among other mass vestments at Garðar on Akranes.

Björn sailed to Iceland with many goods and landed in Borðeyri harbor [a major trading center in the Northwest]. When Björn arrived at Hólmur his father gave him a Hvítungur, a white horse with two colts. He received a dog

from his fosterer from childhood [an unnamed person, mentioned once, suggesting he is a domestic servant]. King Ólafur had sent men with the message to Þórður that he should form good relations with Björn. When Oddný learned that Björn was still alive, she spoke harshly to Þórður, saying that she was not as well married as she had earlier thought. Þórður invites Björn to come to Hitarnes and spend a winter there as his guest. Björn accepted the offer against his mother's warnings, but his father agreed. Þórður claimed to Oddný that he had invited Björn for her sake, that is, in order to make amends to her, but she didn't believe him.

Björn left his wealth at Hólmur and arrived in Hitarnes with two horses and his dog. Þórður gave Björn the seat next to his and ordered household members to treat him generously. People thought that the arrangement of Björn's stay was odd.

It is early winter and all the regular labor force, male and female, was engaged in harvesting grain on the Hítará island, where there was also hay, seal and eggs to be procured. Þórður asked Oddný to milk the ewes, which were being driven home to the farm on the last day of the round-up season. Oddný answered, "In that case I see before me the appropriate man for digging out the shit in the pen." Þórður slapped her on the cheek, and neither did their work. Björn made a poem (#3) about the incident, portraying Þórður

as lazy, and Oddný as a wise woman who had better things to do, namely, attending to Björn. Þórður made a verse (#4) which told Björn to leave because he hadn't found anything better to do than seducing and being entertained by lowly female servants. Björn replied with a poem (#5) suggesting that it was Oddný who was being entertained the most by his poetic performance--hence he intended to stay. The two men continued to trade verses (#6-11), drawing on earlier experiences. In his poems Þórður claimed that Oddný was his woman. Björn, on the other hand, boasted about his heroic deeds and true manhood, contrasting them with images of Þórður as the one who ran away from his wealth like a coward and had grown too old to satisfy a passionate woman. Björn silenced Þórður with poem #12, by suggesting that Oddný was about to give birth to a son who would take after Björn.

Björn ordered the household servants around, and they complained about being treated with less respect than his dog. Björn's dog was fed human food, and his horses were fed the best of the hay. Þórður grumbled about this situation with Oddný, claiming that Björn had paid their male workers to ruin his hay. He made a poem (#13) for her, reminiscing about how good things had been, how well the sixteen member household did before their arrogant, ungrateful guest arrived. Oddný refused to believe that Björn would do malicious things, and she repeatedly reminded Þórður of his promise to be generous with Björn.

But Þórður felt, as people noticed, that he had been more than sufficiently generous to an ungrateful Björn; Björn felt that the invitation had been nothing but a claptrap (hypocritical) and that he was being treated with penury and stinginess. One time while sitting together, Þórður and Björn addressed each other through verse (#14,15). Þórður claimed that Björn had promised him rye but brought him something instead which turned into ash once it had been blended with water. Björn said that he intended to stay, because he had already paid in full for the old suet Þórður was feeding him, and because Þórður had already given him a fur cloak for the winter, which was, however, worn and full of holes.

That winter Þórður and Oddný spent their nights in a storage out-house accompanied by a female servant. One evening Þórður refused Oddný a place in their bed. He then made a verse (#16) saying that he felt sorry for the amiable woman who lay nearly frozen in the corner of the bed because 'the man who conceals ugliness' is spread out on her bed.

Oddný asked both men to stop making poems about her (or make things up around her), since none of those words were actually hers. She said to Björn that one of her daughters should take the role with him which she herself did not take, in spite of what was originally intended. With two young girls on his lap, Björn sang to them about their mother (#17): "Her stories, which I still believe, do more

than satisfy my need otherwise for a woman; I praise her at times, but I shouldn't be blamed." Before Björn left Hítarnes Oddný gave him the robe, Þórðarnaut ("Þórður's bull" or Þórður's relish").

N. B. Manuscript experts and editors agree (Bjarnar saga Hítðalakappa 1987:94) that there is a gap in the saga at this point, a portion which can not be found in any of the surviving manuscripts.

Episode three

Björn and his parents moved to Vellir in Hítardalur [a medium size farm, now abandoned, located in the center of the dale west of Hítará river, opposite from the site where Hítardalur the beneficium farm and monastery were later erected]. Þórður searched his beach for food one day when a seal bit his leg. Björn made an insulting verse about the incident (#18). Then a laborer at Vellir spread a rumor that Björn had saved a newborn calf in his byre by digging it out of the dung with his bare hands. This inspired Þórður to make a poem (#19) about Björn acting tyrannically at home, being deep into excrement (saurindi; also means impurities and fornication), and grabbing a calf in reverse (rangur; also means perverse and erroneous) from under the dirty tail of a cow (kolla). On account of this particular poem, Björn rode to Hítarnes with sixty men and summoned

Þórður, saying that it violated a law [which the saga does not specify]. At alþing, Þórður had to pay a fine of hundred silver ounces, and Björn stipulated that whoever recited the poem in question could be killed justifiably and without retribution, and "would meet his death unshriven/unholy" (skyldi óheilgaður falla). Later Björn had to pay Þórður twenty-four silver ounces for erecting a pole on his land with a libelous ditty (#20).

Two merchants from Oslo fjord lodged with Þórður. They were brothers and Þórður's paternal relatives. Björn took a trip to Snæfellsnes peninsula to buy fish from his brother-in-law, Arnór [his sister's husband]. He stayed for three nights. His father's sister, Þórhildur, dreamed that Þórður was waiting to kill Björn. She offered Björn the escort of twelve men on his return home. Björn refused to take more than two men with him. Þórður and twelve of his friends had planned an ambush on Björn, but when they learned that he was only accompanied by two men, the Norwegian brothers insisted on killing Björn by themselves. But after Björn left, Þórhildur called on nine men to catch up with him. Both Norwegians were killed. Under attack Björn killed the older brother, Eyvindur, by striking Eyvindur with his shield. The dead brothers were buried in a lavafield and proclaimed "dis-inviolable" (óhelgír) for reasons of their unlawful ambush. Björn and Þórður exchanged four verses about the incident (#21-24). In poem #24 Björn referred to

himself as both a warrior and a seafaring man. Þórður obtained the dead bodies and brought them to church.

Björn had a church built at Vellir and dedicated it to the apostle Thomas, about whom he had made a laudatory poem, according to Runólfur Dálksson. [It is unusual to see a reference to an informant in family saga. Runólfur was a learned priest in west Iceland in the mid-12th century, according to ecclesiastic documents, and appears to have been one of the instigators for the establishment of a monastery in Hítardale in 1169 (Nordal and Jónsson 1938:84-85)].

Björn took over the farm at Hólmur after his parents moved in with him at Vellir, but subsequently found it too difficult to run two farms (bú). Therefore he leased Hólmur out to Kálfur illviti ("evil wit" or "mean-witted"), Þórður's ally. [The farm which is next to Hítarnes today is called Kálfur and means Calf. There is no other farm in Iceland with that name.] Björn's livestock increased quickly, so he moved to Hólmur with his wife [the first time she is mentioned, though not by name] while his parents stayed at Vellir. Therefore, Kálfur was forced to move and buy a farm in nearby Selárdalur. However, Björn and Kálfur maintained certain earlier rent-agreements concerning livestock and land use (áttu þeir fjárreiður saman).

Kálfur's son, Þorsteinn, went to Hítarnes to buy seal. Þórður told him that Björn was going to force a case against

him and his father at alþing, accusing them of having stolen some livestock. Þórður also told Þorsteinn that Björn intended to take their cultivated land, and to extend his access to grazing land, which already included land in three directions from his farm. Following suggestions from Þórður, Þorsteinn went directly to Hólmur and told Björn that he would come later to fetch the wethers which belonged to him and his father. Although Björn did not quarrel with him, Þorsteinn later returned and tried to kill him. After strangling Þorsteinn, Björn made a poem (#25) about how he took the life of Kálfur's son without using the warrior's weapon, adding that the man died on his own or by himself. In the presence of a lawful number of witnesses, Þorsteinn's body was buried in a cairn and proclaimed unprotected by law. Björn had by then killed three of Þórður's men, all with certain legal justification. On Þórður's advice, Kálfur refused to accept the compensation which Björn offered him for the loss of his son. Instead, Þórður attempted to prosecute Björn on Kálfur's behalf, but he lost.

Björn was driving his wethers through Hitardalur--down towards south on the east side of the river--when he heard Þorkell, the son of Dálkur [a friend of Þórður's] and a domestic laborer debating about the conflict between Björn and Þórður. While Björn eavesdropped, the laborer recited Grámagaflin, Björn's three poems (#26,27,28) about a woman

[Þórður's mother] who became pregnant with a grotesque son after eating the carcass of a lumpfish that had washed on shore. Þorkell, reluctant at first, recited Þórður's Kolluvisur (#19), which he said was the greatest of all satires. Then Björn emerged from hiding and reminded the two about the legal stipulation forbidding the recitation of this poem. Þorkell said to Björn that he didn't think Björn was such a king over other men that they couldn't do what they pleased in front of him. Björn replied that he was such a king, over him at least, and then killed him with his sword. Subsequently, Björn agreed to pay a compensation to Dálkur, but Þórður prosecuted him before a legal assembly where he lost the case. In his defense Björn invoked the stipulation that he himself had created at an earlier alþing.

At the following district fall-assembly, Björn noticed a promisingly beautiful little boy running around. Having been told that the boy was Þórður's son, Kolli, Björn made a poem (#29): "I see the boy run by the me, a warrior. With his dire gaze, he looks a bit like me. But people think that this child does not recognize the traveller of the sea, his own father." Björn made many poems where he expressed his opinion concerning Kolli, but the boy's paternity was not changed.

One winter it was said that Björn had several outlaws with him (skógarmenn: útlagar,) and made them build a

fortress (virki) around his farm in Hitardalur. Þórður prosecuted Björn for aiding and harboring these outlaws. Even though the prosecution's case defaulted, Björn admitted before alþing that Þórður had been right in his allegations, and Björn paid a fine. Soon afterwards Þórður harbored two outlaws and tried to smuggle them out of the country along with some wealth. Björn learned about this from a neighboring tenant-farmer, Eiríkur, whom he gave a knife and a belt for the information. He killed both outlaws and took their goods, but returned their horses to Hitarnes.

Björn and Þórður exchanged verses about each other's wives at a horse-match. Þórður called his poem Daggeisli ["Light of the day"] and referred to Þórdís [Björn's wife, whose name appears here for the first time] as Landaljómi ("Glow of the lands"). Björn recited verses he called Eykindilsvísur. During the contest, Þórður and Björn got into a fight on their horses, but they were separated before either one was seriously hurt.

Þórður had offered two brothers from Hornstrandir [the distant northwest] one hundred in silver for bringing him Björn's head. Having been forewarned of this conspiracy, Björn waited for the two men in his sheep shed, where he overcame them, tied their hands, took their silver, and returned them to Þórður.

Björn stayed for three nights with a woman named Þorbjörg, for they were friends. He dreamed of being

attacked by six men, and his restlessness in his sleep woke up Þorbjörg, who then interpreted his dream. She got him to agree to take the longer road home when he left. On his way, Björn decided to walk the shorter trail, on which he encountered Þórður and five other men hiding near a sheep shed. Björn was wearing a blue coat and had a spear in his hand. When the men were in the range of a spear's throw, Björn dispatched his spear in the trail's direction. A man named Steinn Guðbrandsson stood in the way of the spear, which went right through him so he died instantly. In the short battle which followed, Björn injured two other men, including Þórður slightly. The battle ended there.

Björn stayed for three nights at his sister's home in Knarrarnes [a small island near Hjörsey, where Oddný was from]. He reported his dreams with a poem (#30): "Woman, I now had a dream. I, the poet, will experience further unrest. My hands floated in blood; the famous sword Mæringur was red in my hands. Swords were smashed." On his way home Björn saw Þórður with nine men waiting for him by Hitará, the river. He chose to approach them even before they had noticed him. After some hard fighting, Björn swam injured across the river. Kolbeinn Þórðarson threw a spear into his thigh. Björn returned the spear, which went right through one man, and also killed Kolbeinn, because he was standing behind the man. Þórður was devastated by the loss of his son. Björn's wife was shocked to see him come home

dripping with blood.

Þórður and Dálkur talked Þorsteinn Kuggason into aiding them against Björn. Þorsteinn was rich and widely considered an unjust man. His wife, Þorfinna, was a cousin of Björn's wife, Þórdís. On their way to a Yule feast which Dálkur was giving, Þorsteinn and company got caught in a snow storm and were forced to seek refuge at Hólmur that evening. Björn, who was at home with thirty armed men, received the exhausted party cheerlessly. Fires were not lit, no dry clothes were offered to the men, and there was nothing to eat but cheese and skyr [peasant fat-free yogurt]. However, the women gave Þorfinna a warm reception. Next morning, the weather was still bad, and Björn offered his most prodigal hospitality to Þorsteinn's party if they would agree to stay in his house for the next four nights instead of trying to go on to Húsafell, Dálkur's farm. Þorfinna incited Þorsteinn to agree to these terms. A mass was said on the second day of Christmas, and relations become cordial.

Þorsteinn offered to mediate the dispute between Björn and Þórður and to help Björn pay damages for the men he had killed. Björn reluctantly accepted his offer and gave him four horses before they took leave of each other. Þorsteinn stayed with Dálkur and Þórður for the remainder of the Christmas season. With difficulty he succeeded in getting them to agree to an arbitrated settlement with Björn.

A special reconciliation meeting was set at Hraun [midway between Hítarnes and Hítardalur; became a prominent Beneficium church-farm called Staðarhraun]. Björn was there with many men. The mediation appeared to be going well, until Þórður demanded that all the verses relating to the dispute be recited in order to determine who had composed most. As it turned out, Björn had made one more stanza. This fact prompted Þórður to compose one more satire (#31), evening the score. But Björn responded with another verse (#32) and the negotiations broke down.

After this Þorsteinn and Björn developed closer ties, as full brothers. They swore a solemn oath together: in the event that one of them was killed, the survivor would avenge him or prosecute and collect compensation from his slayers. Björn had suggested that they commit only to blood vengeance, but Þorsteinn thought that a legal approach would suit them better as Christians. Björn gave Þorfinna the gold ring and the religious robe that he had received from King Ólaf. Shortly afterwards, a pain developed in Björn's eyes. It subsided, but Björn became less clear-sighted.

There was relative quiet for a year. During the fall, fifteen of Björn's men went to Snæfellsnes and took the sword, Mæringur, with them. Most of Björn's laborers were away for the sheep-gathering. Þórður and Kálfur, who were gathered with many men in Hítarnes, had planned to burn Björn in his house. Björn's father, Arngeir karl, left home

to look for someone and took with him the last remaining weapon on their farms. He took a wrong path, got lost, and was spotted near the Hítarnes byre by Þórður's female servants, who sent him away. The women informed Þórður, who then made a poem (#33) in which he enlisted the aid of all supernatural warrior beings. Subsequently, Þórður's men learned from a female servant at Hólmur that Björn was home alone, but on his way out to do some work. Twenty four men, Kolli among them, laid an ambush on the four directions to Hólmur.

Björn told his wife Þórdís that he was going out to cut the manes of some horses. She asked him what dreams he had the night before. He answered with a poem (#34):

"Strangely, prophetic women/goddesses are warning me. I have been informed of the hatred of men. I stay awake longer because the helmed woman (valkyrie) bids the poet home in each dream." Þórdís told Björn that his enemies were all around him and tried to dissuade him for the third time from leaving the house. "I don't let dreams determine my journeys," Björn answered her. He then left with his shears, a shield, and a poor sword. Björn had wrapped the silk lace around his leg, the one he took from Saint King Ólafur. A fifteen year old boy goes with him. Björn made two dramatic poems (#35,"36) which describe his anticipation of a battle between a small troop and a huge army. The boy reported seeing the horses which Björn wanted him to find,

but also six men who were coming fast towards them. Björn said that this would make it easier for them to catch the horses. Björn sent the boy away, in order to save him, after he had elicited an accurate description of all twenty four men who were about to circle him in.

Björn defended himself next to a big rock and killed several of Þórður's men as they attacked and wounded him. First he grasped their spears in the air and returned them. Then he killed with his sword and shield, and finally with his shears, when he had dropped to his knees.

Kolli attacked Björn often and hard and by himself, "even though," the saga says, "we have no accounts of how he wounded him." Björn said, "You are pursuing me hard today Kolli."

"I don't know why I should be given to mercy," Kolli answered him.

"That's the way it is," said Björn. "Your mother has charged you with attacking me the hardest. I see that your talents lie elsewhere than in knowledge of where you come from [ættvísing, 'understanding of pedigree']." After blaming Björn for not having told him earlier, Kolli went off and stopped attacking.

Björn fell after a heroic defense. First Þórður cut off his buttocks, then his head. Þórður made one poem (#37) in which he justified his acts, another poem (#38) remarking on the hungry ravens flying towards the site of Björn's dead

body. Kálfur brought Björn's necklace to his wife Þórdís in Hólmur. She threw it to Þórður and told him to bring it to his wife Oddný as remembrance. Þórður went to Vellir where Arngeir was. Þórdís was there washing a young boy's head. Þórður throws her Björn's head and asked if she recognized it, adding that there was no less need to wash it than the one she had been washing.

"I know this head," Þórdís said, "and so should you, because you often trembled before this same head with fear when it was on its body. Now go and bring it to Oddný; she will like it better than that miserably inadequate little thing which dangles from your neck." Þórður was not pleased by her comments; he left the head behind and brought Oddný the pendant which Björn had owned.

Oddný fainted when she saw the pendant. She was ailing and irksome after that, but Þórður tried in every way to please and comfort her. It soothed her most to sit on horseback with Þórður leading the animal. Þórður made a poem about this (#39): "Many a day I must sadly lead my horse with the woman on its back. The sick one's journey is not a soft one. We didn't go fast because the woman was never free of chest pain. That caused me, the soldier, much sorrow."

It was said that Þórður grieved so much over his wife's illness that, if possible, he would choose to live as Björn to regain the love of his wife. Oddný continued to grieve

and wither away; she lived a long time without joy. Björn was buried with his face by the church at Vellir, which he had built.

Epilogue

Björn's brother, Ásgrímur, who lived at Rangárvellir in South Iceland, went to see Þorsteinn Kuggason. They went together to alþing to prosecute the case of Björn's slaying. Þórður tried to settle the case with Ásgrímur privately, but Þorsteinn was able to intervene, having elicited the aid of his first cousin, Þorkell Eyjólfsson, who was a popular and influential man. Þorkell had earlier been friendly with Þórður and did not want to see him become an outlaw. Þorsteinn informed Þorkell of his earlier vow with Björn, and furthermore, that he was willing to risk his life over the matter. Þórður ended up paying a huge settlement to Björn's kinsmen, and in this way he and Kálfur escaped outlawry. Ásgrímur became the primary beneficiary. Twelve of the men who participated in Björn's slaying were outlawed and left the country. Arngeir stayed with Þorsteinn with much property; Þórdís moved to her relations on Barðarströnd with her bride-price and dowry. "And here, now," the saga says, "this account (frásögn, narrative) is brought to an end."

CHAPTER 7

**THE ENTANGLED, SERIAL PROMISE OF A FIRST MARRIAGE:
ON EPISODE ONE OF BJARNAR SAGA HÍTDELAKAPPA**

The "family sagas" offer us an important and unusual view of the early establishment of medieval Icelandic institutions. A structural symbolic analysis of Bjarnar saga Hítðalakappa, informed by my earlier study from the perspectives of political economy and cultural ecology, helps us to conceive of the successive formation of different institutions, including ecclesiastical ones, in the context of individuals' indigenous socioeconomic roles and careers abroad. Furthermore, it provides a valuable insight into the historical consciousness of Medieval Icelandic storytellers and writers that gave rise to the saga literature.

In my examination of Bjarnar saga, I am particularly interested in the experiences and perception of socioeconomic conditions--marked by transformation yet perennial in an important sense--which existed throughout the Commonwealth period and determined the life-cycle options of the class and cohorts of males who were non-marriageable, married late, or married in (the) figurative sense only. These conditions were associated with the practices of fosterage, of devolution of property by ways other than patrimonial inheritance. Juniors are identified

with their mercantile foster-fathers or adopted ecclesiastical fathers or other model progenitors, who are all depicted metaphorically, as they replace each other through a sequential history. As I hope to demonstrate, Bjarnar saga tells a "compressed history" of particular circumstances and changes in a period of over two hundred years, as much as it reflects on problematized, politicized issues from around 1200, when the tales were recorded and the saga written. In fact, the narrative can be read as multiple allegories, but without relying on projection of meaning from spheres of experience and organization metonymically unrelated to the underlying subjects, i.e. the history of socioeconomic relationships, instituted and contested ideas and practices, and individual life-cycle experiences.

The primary focus of many of the family sagas is on the transforming circumstances experienced by successive sets of class-specific cohorts (generations) of males, all of whom are depicted as "the other, transferable sons." The sons might stay dispossessed and unmarried, either because they do not stand to inherit their prominent fathers' patrimony, status or profession, or because their fathers were simply too poor to help them directly to achieve prominent positions. Bjarnar saga, in particular, portrays as prime movers of history the competition and cooperation among males, within and between generations, and the conflict

inherent to material social role-systems. The saga emphasizes how indigenous practices and events are affected by what takes place on foreign ground, by what goes in and out of the island.

In the first episode, Þórður's actions and career seem to illustrate the accomplishments of an individual who has been successful in the role of the "other son." He seems to be an orphan, for it is unusual to have a major "saga character" without a description of his or her extended genealogy. He manages to "settle down" at the age of thirty seven by marrying a younger woman who not only has dowry, but is an heiress, with whom he enjoys extraordinary reproductive success. We are forced to assume that Þórður's success was to a great extent based on the accumulation of mercantile wealth from the trade between Iceland and Norway. Not contradictory, his success is also attributed to his ability to exploit an individual of the younger generation of mobile, seafaring males (Björn). Þórður appropriates the products of Björn's services/labor: the Goods invested in him by his mercantile foster-father and biological father, as well as the "Promised Woman" of his generation along with her dowry and inheritance.

We get the sense that Þórður and Björn are able to identify with each other. During the scene of their drunkenness, the senior male is advising the junior male, but their conversation leads to an arrangement which allows

the senior to appropriate the productive and reproductive opportunities which had been promised to the junior. Þórður might have begun his professional career in ways similar to Björn's, but since his career took off under earlier conditions it is likely that the merchant vessel he originally sailed on was owned by Icelanders. The audience/reader is at least expected to realize when the saga begins that Þórður is a landed seafarer, ready to retire as merchant, and that he owns a prominent estate, which gives him an edge over Björn. The saga does not tell us when and how Þórður acquired the farm where he lived and practiced farming (bjó). To acquire material social success in Iceland a combination of disparate means were necessary. As I brought up in chapter five, certain family sagas portray young men who take over a farm that they inherited after a short-lived mercantile career, which seemed to have strengthened their competitive position. Bjarnar saga makes clear that Þórður owned a trade vessel that he sold when he married Oddný and settled as a farmer head of household at Hitarnes.

Björn's humble origins are not particularly highlighted but discernable all the same. Björn's father is a man of low status and few means. No statement is made of his genealogy; instead, he is referred to as Arngeir karl, but the noun karl usually referred to a domestic servant, an old man, or someone who was both. Björn's mother's ancestry on

the other hand, is traced to Skallagrímur at Borg, Skúli's great grandfather. Therefore, Björn is related to Skúli through his mother. Björn grew up at Borg, a coastal farm, with his uncle from the time he was fourteen. Borg is, according to Landnámabók (the "Book of settlement") and Egils saga, the site of the first farm located in Mýrar district. Borg still controls a good harbor and has remained a prominent estate. Hitarnes, where Þórður lived, has a harbor as well but sufficient only for landing row-boats.

Björn's seafaring career does not end the way Þórður's does. As explanation for the difference in the life-cycle experiences of the two men the narrative offers elaborate descriptions of a series of sweeping changes in over-all material social circumstances in Iceland and abroad. The saga shows this series of major transformations to take place during Björn's lifetime, as turning points in his life-history, but they also turn out to be known "markers" in the long-term history of the Commonwealth, spanning more than ten generations (exceeding the combined life-span of Skúli, Þórður, Björn and Kolli).

Björn begins his career by going abroad with Norwegian merchants, reflecting on the development by which Norwegians came to own most of the vessels sailing to and from Iceland-which meant that more and more of the exchanges of goods and currency between Norwegian and Icelandic hands was

taking place on Icelandic shore. Skúli and Arngeir invest Björn with certain, undescribed goods after he decides to travel to Norway with the merchants.

The effective conditions for and links between the marital, pecuniary, and travel arrangements centered around Björn do not jump out for a reader locked into the sequence of events: Björn suddenly gets an opportunity to go abroad, which is an option glorified in itself, but because he has already established a love relationship with a young Icelandic woman he is in a dilemma. Björn's dilemma appears to be solved when Oddný agrees to wait in affiance, and when Oddný's father agrees to provide dowry, and Björn's adopted father (Skúli) agrees to provide bridewealth (i.e. indirect dowry, mundur). Structural analysis of the first episode (as well as "circumstantial evidence") brings another perspective on contingencies, causation, purposes, constants and dependent variables involved. Such analysis brings out that Björn needs to go abroad in order to become suitable for marriage, and to make himself useful to Skúli, whose transferring of property to his adopted son is an investment in the domestic economy as well as in foreign exchange. Consider the ways the gold rings "travel" and are exchanged, for example: the ring which Skúli gave Björn to bring to Jarl Eirík signifies three interdependent "marriages," or serial engagements contingent on each other. Skúli calls the gold ring a jartegn and says that it will

facilitate Björn's dealings with Jarl Eirík. Jartegn means a token, or a precious object which holds the evidence for some type of commitment or miracle. Clearly the ring which Björn carries with him abroad serves to affirm an important union between Skúli and Jarl Eirík, hence, it authenticates Björn as their liaison. But it also makes us think of Björn's promised, deferred marriage union with Oddný. In fact, Jarl Eirík reciprocates by giving Björn a gold ring which Þórður later takes to Iceland and gives to Oddný. So, the ring which Skúli hands over to Björn is symbolically linked to the initial marriage agreement (betrothal arrangement), and does secure Oddný's promise for marriage.

We can now begin to draw a picture of the material social circumstances and symbolic connections as the storytellers and their involved audiences analyzed or perceived them. For dispossessed and disinherited but well connected young males the risky and dangerous seafaring career--exchanging goods, maintaining political alliances and collecting mercantile profit--could be key to the acquisition of prestige and status in Iceland. The foster-son's (or "other son's") chances to acquire property in Iceland, unite with a woman in matrimony, and be "socially fertile" are possible rewards for his services as a trader, accumulating mercantile wealth while maintaining political ties between economic enterprises in Iceland and Norway. The rings are a symbol for multiple "marriages," linking

unions such as between Björn (or Þórður) and Oddný, Skúli and Þorkell, Skúli and Jarl Eirík, Iceland and Norway. The gold ring is synecdochic because these different unions are not only metaphorically identified with each other but metonymically associated as well: each union functions as dynamic part of an overall interactive socioeconomic system, a particular order of procurement as storytellers understood it.

The first episode lights up important yet disguised issues as we pursue the complicated questions of why Björn missed his original targets (chances), sacrificed his early goals--whether to Þórður, himself, destiny--and grew up to become a warrior. These issues concern competition over limited resources and opportunities for advancing to a viable prominent position in Iceland, and they lead us into a discussion of Björn's warriorhood. Firstly, the story turns on its predication of essentially linked unions and ultimate goals: the first episode shows us that the relationships between the different types of unions which the ring symbolizes are perennially problematic. This has to do with an inherent conflict between pursued/necessary means and original/stated ends. Secondly, Björn's first career turn seems to reflect on the harsh realities of mounting population pressure in Iceland and the disappearance of old viable opportunities; at the same time, it anticipates radical historical changes with new

opportunities, which the saga's second episode portrays.

Foreign exchange depended on the services of mobile young men, a role which to many, ideally or otherwise, constituted the only means to grow up to become a married householder (húsbóndi: "housefather-farmer"). But this hazardous career--with a range of status positions--led many survivors into different mobile professions, or it turned out to be a "dead end," thus was perceived as the means which became ends in themselves. While the life of the seafarer was glorified in and of itself, it fostered or reproduced a particular social-sexual development in and among males which was deemed antithetical to settled reproductive life (in heterosexual marriage with family of procreation). At the same time, we can picture the life style among cohorts of seafarers in terms of a particular subculture, characterized by certain discourses which were to a great extent responsible for the creation of the oral tradition on which the family sagas are based.

The island economy, with mercantile production and exchange as leading sector, forced young men into paradoxical competitive situations. As I have argued, the symbolism of the gold ring, by associating and identifying the different "unions," predicts the main junior character's (Björn's) return through a reasoning of circular displacements. But it is the senior main character (Þórður) who returns to take the junior's place in marrying Oddný.

The symbolism of the rings also serves to explain the resolutions to the junior's paradox, this time by way of absolute, linear displacements, or serial replacements: Poem #2 predicates similarities between as well as mutual exclusiveness of the voyager-warrior path, on the one hand, and the path of the married householder on the other. In this poem Björn acknowledges that while Þórður has had intercourse with Oddný on their soft wedding bed he and his comrades are now wedded to their boat on the "soft" sea. In searching his destiny, Björn must now propel the ship forward equipped with an oar as stiff as (and a lot larger than) Þórður's erect penis. As the saga unfolds Björn's glory becomes greater than Þórður's but not by way of biological reproduction. In poem #2 the early promises of a householder status in marriage are declared broken, while the lifestyle of the voyager becomes glorified in itself, and, as means, is directed towards a series of new careers.

During the early history of its settlement Iceland may have been perceived by Norse people as a wild world of brave, conquering ambitious young men. Early in Bjarnar saga Norway is female-identified in the sense that it mirrors and represents the opportunities and dreams of a certain class of Icelandic young males for a heterosexual marriage and settled life inside Iceland. The Norwegian Jarl Eirík is female-identified in a sense, as shown by the symbolism of the rings, but also in that Þórður performs for

him a laudatory poem reminding us of the verses which the chief rivals make for and about each other's wives later in the saga.

The story of Hrútur in the beginning of Brennu-Njáls saga (Íslendinga sögur I:124-135) is perhaps more explicit than the story of Björn Hítðlakappi in its use of sexual-marriage symbolism showing Iceland's masculine relations to feminine Norway as a way of portraying the paradoxical situation of the seafaring "other brother." Hrútur, whose father plays no role in the story, owns a ship, brings goods to and from Iceland, has performed numerous heroic deeds abroad and is at the point of settling down when the saga begins. Meanwhile, Höskuldur, his business partner and half-brother by the same mother, is settled on his own estate. Hrútur is a frequent guest in the court of the Norwegian king's mother, Gunnhildur, and the two of them develop a close sexual relationship. When Hrútur decides to go to Iceland to settle down finally, Gunnhildur gives him a gold ring with the enchantment that he will never be able to please an Icelandic woman whom he intends to marry. Hrútur was betrothed to Unnur, and she had waited in affiance for him for three years. After a short marriage, Unnur divorces Hrútur on the grounds that he is not able to please her sexually: Regardless of his good intentions, he is simply too big for her. Clearly there was not enough room for the heroic Hrútur in Iceland, given how much he had grown

through his mobile career away from his small community.

In poem #2 Björn speaks for himself and his comrade(s). We notice a subtle contingent of homoeroticism associated with Björn's "intercourse" on sea. After all, Björn's career and betrothal to Oddný had been founded on the bonds established between men (between Arnkell and Skúli, Björn and Skúli, Þorkell and Skúli, and, ultimately, Skúli and the Jarl Eirík). A homoerotic contingent is more clearly defined or revealing in Björn's first poem: Just as Björn begins to heal and is reborn a hero he rediscovers Oddný's desire for him and links it to his own attachment to other warrior-males who are present in his tent, as well as to his mature knowledge and transcending talent for figurative expression. Leaving suggestions of overt and latent homosexuality aside, the homoeroticism in poem #1 reveals itself as a vehicle for the symbolic displacement of the object of desire. The males' mutual identification with each other through rituals of manhood create renewed (reborn) forms of masculinity--warrior/voyager character, as opposed to what it meant to be marriageable in an Icelandic farming community--which is deemed attractive to a woman. Björn's new attractiveness and eligibility is the non-marriageable male's ability to displace the object of desire. It represents Björn's ability to transfer himself into a new role, recreate the figures of women, and in particular, to invent a new image of Oddný for himself. We

see later in the saga that ecclesiastical institutions are female identified, when non-marriageable Björn becomes wedded to a particular church for which Oddný is a figure.

Björn's first poem gives us a picture of a tent with heroic transforming Björn, miraculously healing in the company of four men. The poem may have evoked within the minds of medieval audience an image of a cohort of courageous men in a sailing ship on the dangerous ocean. Isolated from their origins, faced with uncertainty, but enjoying each other's comfort, these seafarers were licking the wounds of separation under the canvas which shielded them from the natural elements (the homespun cloth used for covering merchandise on trading ships). In several of his subsequent poems Björn alternatively refers to himself as a heroic sailor and a warrior soldier by using elevating similes or associative expressions.

Björn's poems are not necessarily indicative of a misogynic discourse, but many verses in the Eddukvæði (Poetic Edda) and Snorra Edda ("Snorri's Edda," or the Prose Edda) are. Some of these Eddic verses portray heroic men fighting against giant females who attack their ships in terrible weather. They follow these female trolls onto sea-islands, where they kill them and cut up their bodies. Helga Kress (1991) has interpreted the Eddic verses directly as reflecting on physical sexual violence against women in Medieval Icelandic society. Instead of situating the

formation of the Eddic verses solely within domestic society, and associating them with facts of violence against women, we should first of all see the Eddic verses as indicative of a particular misogynic discourse among ship's crews, among young men who associate their dangerous seafaring missions with their doubtful marriage prospects, or with the volatile purpose to unite with a woman.

Those dispossessed sons who took on mercantile careers might also join pirates or become mercenaries. This is what Björn does, but before elaborating on his transformations, I want briefly to introduce Kolskeggur who is a character in Brennu-Njáls saga. Kolskeggur goes as a crusader-mercenary as far as Constantinople after he leaves Iceland, where he had lived and worked on the farm of his famous brother Gunnar Hámundarson. Before he left Iceland Kolskeggur had dreamt that a man, dressed in white, offered him a match/wife (kvonfang) and ordered him to become his knight in God's cavalry. He later undergoes a ceremony of christening in Denmark, then travels to Constantinople (Mikligarður) where he marries and becomes a leader of a Varangian army. That is how Kolskeggur's story ends in Brennu-Njáls saga (Íslendinga sögur I:217).

Like most family sagas, Bjarnar saga portrays a heroic main character who at some point goes into battle service for an important Norse king on the British isles or in Russia (Austurvegur: "Eastway") where Norse people traded,

raided, settled, and formed regional polities. These heroic characters are frequently depicted as chief organizers and leaders in the so-called viking raids. The memory of the viking raids (vikinga ferðir: "viking travels") were "good to think" without being significant in the experiences of most Icelanders after the tenth century. The incentives behind these practices (and Norse colonizing, Iceland included) may have been "remembered" as similar to the plight which had forced Icelandic young men to venture into "foreign services."

As part of his dangerous rite of passage, Björn takes on the identity of a King on the edge of the Norse World (as Icelanders would have conceived of it). He takes King Valdimar's place in a dual against Kaldimar, the king's relative and strong contender for the crown. Ambiguously, Björn saves a kingdom and takes it over, but the ambiguity of this is highlighted by the names Valdimar and Kaldimar being so similar. The paradox of serving and ruling remains characteristic of Björn's situations and actions throughout the saga. Björn's emergent kingship and his reincarnation under the tent signify a new autogenous status. Curiously enough, by surviving and passing tests which were designed away from and foreign to his home community, Björn earns the title Hítðalakappi, the "champion of Hítardale," making him an autochthonous ruler (in two meanings of that expression). Björn is ambiguously invested with authority of absolutism

by sources of power which are located above and beyond his original farming community. As we will see, Björn's return to Iceland underlines a formation of asymmetrical, hierarchical links between an Icelandic farming community and the wider world; furthermore, it introduces into his small Mýrar district community thus received and contested absolutist rulership, which becomes a new type of force in the struggle for power and resources.

Björn is invested by the end of the first episode with the sort of absolute authority which is associated with foreign Kings and defended by physical coercion. Before he returns home in the beginning of the second episode Björn is apparently re-invested with the absolutism of spiritual authority. However, this conversion of a kingly soldier of fortune into a soldier of God is ordered by a Saintly King; therefore, the unclear relationships between and the definitions of secular and spiritual authorities remain a prominent paradoxical issue associated with Björn throughout his life.

It is revealing that chieftains are never mentioned in Bjarnar saga. Skúli, the most prominent district leader early in the saga, is instead representative of the ruling class in Iceland which I have termed merchant-farmers. But the saga shows history on a fast pace as we get to the second episode: Skúli almost outlives the domination of his class. With the news of his death dies a mode of

production, along with its ethics/ideology/religion, while new conditions bring novel opportunities for the dispossessed, well-connected young males. The relationship between Björn and Skúli has great influence on the fate of the former, although things do not turn out as promised. Björn is a time-traveller with many lives, a hero who continually reinvents himself through a process of paradoxical identifications. He repeatedly rediscovers himself in such radically different circumstances that his transformations can only be contextualized with an analytical focus of the "long-term dynamic/duration."

Björn's radical twists and turns highlight epoch-making trends in the analysis by storytellers of Iceland's history. As our first indication, the Björn who left--the person vested with the original stated ambitions, expectations and agreements--has no promised life to return to on the island where he came from. I have discussed earlier at some length the fundamental institutional changes which took place in Iceland before 1200 and happened gradually but not necessarily contemporaneously. I would briefly describe the context for the changes which clearly figure into the formation of the saga's first episode in the following way. In Iceland the population pressure mounted at variable rate, linked to absolute population increases and changes in climate and vegetation. Overall deteriorating economic and ecological conditions registered in a declining marriage

rate, fewer successions based on the transmission of significant dowry plus bridewealth, and greater shortage of productive land for farming and other procurement. The population may have increased under conditions of inhospitable climate and vegetation and economic decline at different historical moments, especially when certain new land tenure and procurement strategies were taking hold. I will shortly discuss important socioeconomic changes which appear to be assumed to have been taking place during the saga's first episode--changes which allow Björn to return to Iceland where he begins a new life which bears a curious transcending resemblance to the life which he had been promised in the beginning of the saga.

There was less and less return on Icelandic investment in trade via the direct involvement of young Icelanders who go abroad; in turn, there was higher return from investment in land and livestock, as products from tribute and rent which can be sold to Norwegian merchants. Young Icelandic males had fewer opportunities and less to gain from joining a crew on a trading vessel. Norwegians come to own more of the ships on the Iceland-Norway route. More profit from trade went to the Norwegians who owned the vessels, to those who controlled the decreasing number of harbors and trading booths in Iceland and Norway and leveled taxes on the import trade, as Norway became unified under one King and Icelandic chieftains became more powerful.

Bjarnar saga forms episodic spiraling narrative based on a method of comparative history. It focuses especially on the contradictory experiences of the unmarried, disinherited male, and the institutions which he helps to invent and maintain. While these new roles and institutions empower him in some sense, they demand sacrifices of the sort which had characterized the lifestyle of the seafarers. By concentrating on a particular person going through his life the saga postulates a theory of origin, development and function for historical changes with respect to male-centered class systems, the figures of woman, forms and means of production, and socioeconomic institutions with ties to religion. As we will see, Björn's conflicted character moves between being depicted in the role of a crewmember on a merchant ship, a mercenary, junior priest, a senior parish priest (tribute collector) and farmer, a farmer landlord (rent collector) and beneficium-church owner, and, implicitly towards the end, a corrupted monastic figure, or convent steward, whose fall promises true monastic life for his adopted and spiritually conceived successor.

CHAPTER 8

A BILATERAL MARRIAGE OF TWO MEN AND A WOMAN:
 ON EPISODE TWO OF BJARNAR SAGA HÍTDELAKAPPA

Ólafur Haraldsson's emergence as king and chief enforcer of christianity in Norway in 1015, and his dealings with Björn and Þórður soon after that (in 1017 to 1019 according to Sigurður Nordal 1938:87), mark a turning point in Bjarnar saga Hítðelakappa. Ólafur's significance and role in the narrative shows him already as the king who came to be remembered for signing the first trade-related agreement between unified Norway and Iceland's alping in 1022, and for being consecrated as a holy person after his death in the battle at Stikklastaðir, Norway in 1030. Ólafs saga Helga ("Saint Ólafur's saga") is the longest chapter in Snorri Sturluson's (1179-1241) literary work Heimskringla, on the history of the kings of Norway. Bjarnar saga adds to our understanding of what Saint King Ólafur represented in Icelanders' memory in terms of legacy and influence; in turn, his paradoxical signification in historical memory clearly predicates on the dealings and identity transformation of the main adversaries in the saga.

Þórður's success in fetching a portion of his maternal uncle's inheritance in Denmark because of the letter he brought from King Ólafur testifies to Ólafur's proclaimed influences with the christianized Danes, the merchants in

particular (Heimskringla 1964:296). It also recalls the existing document, "On the rights of Icelanders in Norway," from the Icelandic Bishopric's office in Skálholt, which is dated 1083 but presumed to be a reinstatement or copy of a treaty signed by Saint King Ólafur in 1022 (Diplomatarium Islandicum 1:64-67). Item two of this document states that Icelanders' right to an inheritance in Norway is guaranteed and extends to third cousin relations for both men and women. [The Icelandic alping stipulation that is the complement to this agreement is located in a manuscript of Grágás (see Diplomatarium Islandicum 1:54).]

King Ólafur's treaty of 1022 is largely concerned with the rights and obligations of Icelandic merchants, and scholars have described it as foremost a trade-agreement (Gelsinger 1981:158). It states among other things that Icelanders are not liable to pay customs on their imports at Norwegian trading booths; instead, they must pay a flat tax upon landing or anchoring their ships and are allowed to fetch and consume water and wood on the king's land (Diplomatarium Islandicum 1:65-66). Saint King Ólafur is frequently portrayed by historians as the first in the line of Norwegian kings who strongly supported national trade, while he also stands out as the king who favored the Church's engagement in mercantile activities (Jóhannesson 1974: 327-328; Gelsinger 1981:61-83, 65-66). His policies facilitated the emergence of a strong Norwegian merchant

class, which became increasingly visible in the 11th century, and was associated with the rise of powerful ecclesiastical institutions which participated in trade. By the latter half of the 12th century the Archiepiscopal See of Niðarós had attained the second most powerful position in trade administration.

King Ólafur appears in Bjarnar saga as the Christian force protecting traders and legitimizing and facilitating their activities. Þórður was in the company of many traders when Björn and his men robbed them, and the king is initially shown as most upset over Björn's raiding on a merchant vessel. Þórður's claim to inheritance property in christianized Denmark was facilitated by trade links; similarly, the above mentioned trade treaty carried within it assurance for Icelanders' claims to inheritance property in Norway.

Þórður's defensive reactions against Björn on the island are revealing as well. Þórður wants Björn to think that he is someone named Þórar viðförli ("the widely-travelled"), which resembles the name of Þorvaldur viðförli, a missionary who tried to christianize the people of Northwest of Iceland in the late 10th century according to a number of 13th century documents. Þorvaldur viðföli probably never existed, as Sveinbjörn Rafnsson (1977) has convincingly argued. But Þórar viðförli was only Þórður's fictional screen character, as Björn had to discover before

he could decide to make the raid.

Bjarnar saga frequently describes the usage or giving of garments as a way of defining a particular role or public identity. At the same, these references to garments point to a personal identity which is disguised, ambiguous, incoherent, not yet manifested, or merely anticipated, promised or imposed. At Brenneyjar Þórður had put on a cowl (kufli), which suggests to the reader that his identity was cloaked (undir kufli, "under cowl"), but also that he was posing as a person of religious status, since kufli usually referred to the cowl of an ecclesiastic. While Björn was still a man of the old regime associated with the Old Norse religion, Þórður was already disguising himself as a man who embraced the new order associated with Christendom. The individual who posed as Þórar "the widely-travelled" and operated with traders under the protection of the Saintly King turned out to be--as Björn exposed him to the king--a settled, married, senior farmer seeking his maternal inheritance from his deceased uncle's estate in christianized Denmark.

Saint King Ólafur had given Þórður a gold ring, a sword and a silkcloth garment (pellskyrtil hlaðbúinn), but this happened before he discovers who Þórður 'truly' was in terms of understanding his relationship history with Björn and Oddný. Unlike the dress which King Ólafur later gives Björn, Þórður's cowl is only latently or ambiguously

depicted as a Christian garment: pell is some sort of silkcloth, while the word is often used in female addressed metaphors; kyrtill is a particular garment, usually with a belt and worn under a coat; hlaðbúinn simply means "with golden ribbon."

At the stage in the saga which I am now discussing it is becoming subtly clear that Þórður has twice disguised himself in order to appropriate something which rightfully belongs to Björn. He met success when he posed in Björn's role as Oddný's groom, but he failed in his attempts to keep and obtain female identified wealth while posing as the Church's groom. I will later discuss how Oddný comes to signify the Church, which in turn embodies the clergyman's career.

Saint King Ólafur's verdict and gift assignments bring an apparent resolution to Björn's and Þórður's dispute. However, as my close analysis will show, his adjudication only leads to a redefinition of their perennial contest; after all, the one who imposes the sentence on the two rivals is an omnipotent leader who is a synecdoche for an omnipresent, everlasting paradox. Caught in a web of an inevitable, spiraling historical process the two adversaries play out their new role assignments without making a total break from their antecedent indigenous characters.

In Bjarnar saga the Saintly King appears as omnipotent, just and all-knowledgeable, and his existence embodies a

groundbreaking historical force. He is informed about Þórður's and Björn's lives and speaks the essential true, but, as the narrative subsequently tells us, he predicates historical truth with his legacy, or entire existence according to historical memory, which exceeds or transcends his explicitly stated verdict: He appears to stipulate people's fate, but fate itself, his own in particular, decrees beyond his explicit judgement. The saga events which take place after Þórður and Björn have returned to Iceland reflect on particular developments in Icelandic history which Saint King Ólafur apparently became a designator for in the memory of Icelanders. I will show that Ólafur Haraldsson's role in the saga highlights the longstanding debate (and sometimes violent struggle) among worldly and secular leaders in Europe--between popes and emperors, catholic bishops and princes, churchwardens and priests--often called the medieval "crisis of church and state" (see Tierney 1988).

By itself King Ólafur's adjudication pronounces a clear separation of worldly vs. spiritual domains of authority and practice. But Ólafur Haraldsson--who had pronounced himself a king and leader of the church in Norway--became "good to think" designator for Björn's ultimate fate in Iceland, and for embodying the paradox, in proposition and praxis, in the joining vs. separation of secular and spiritual concerns. Ólafur Haraldsson was remembered as a saint as well as a

king; he rose to the crown over unified Norway by virtue of the fact that he was effective both as a warrior and a christian missionary. In Iceland the paradoxical unity and disjuncture of secular and spiritual domains manifested most notably in the relationship between the church warden and the clergymen on private-church farms. I will argue that, in an encoded way, Bjarnar saga's second episode reflects on the general dualistic character of Icelandic church operations during the 11th and 12th centuries and it points to the strife between ecclesiastical and secular persons, which is recorded in Biskupasögur and several Bishops' annals.

Björn was afraid of Saint King Ólafur's anger and therefore spares Þórður's life. His friendship with and respect for the King subsequently leads to his pledge and conversion to Christianity, which is indirectly stated. Saint King Ólafur gives Björn a Christian vestment dress, which clearly suggests that Björn should serve or rule in the capacity of a clergyman. Björn promises to give up fighting for the sake of God, for clergymen were not to carry weapons. Þórður, on the other hand, receives a sword which seems to serve only as a metaphor for secular authority. There is no evoking of warriorhood; instead, the sword is metonymically associated with a shipload of timber, the other gift which Þórður receives from the king.

Clearly all of Saint King Ólafur's gifts imply that he

is imposing certain tasks on those who receive them. I suggest that the gift of timber (a shipload of wood, as it says in the saga) means that Þórður is ordered to sail to Iceland and build a church on his farm. If so, then Þórður's new sword signifies the role of the church warden, whose secular leadership is legitimized by his function as the worldly protector of christianity and the church. Chapter 74 in Laxdæla saga supports my suggestion (Íslendinga sögur III:1647-1648). It tells about the famous Þorkell Eyjólfsson who travels to Norway in order to meet King Ólafur Haraldsson and acquire timber for the building of a church on his farm in Iceland. King Ólafur gives him the timber, and Þorkell vows to duplicate a large church which he sees in Norway. Interestingly enough, this same Þorkell Eyjólfsson is mentioned on three occasions in Bjarnar saga: first in the very beginning of the saga where he is named as Ólafur Haraldsson's most prominent friend in the period during which the saga takes place. Second, at the beginning of the second episode it is briefly stated that he sailed to Norway to see Ólafur Haraldsson after he had become king over unified Norway. Third, in the epilogue he plays for the first time an interactive role in the narrative. In the conclusion of my analysis of Bjarnar saga I will further discuss Þorkell Eyjólfsson's significance for the narrative, but his name comes up in several Icelandic family sagas, besides Laxdæla where he is a leading

character.

Björn receives a ring to replace the one that had come to symbolize Þórður's earthly marriage to Oddný. Björn's new ring and religious dress signify that he now has given up his claim to an earthly marriage and that he has entered into a spiritual marriage instead. So, justice is done and rectification takes place when Björn, the unmarried male, joins the Church in holy matrimony. A particular church, in fact, will take the place of the woman he was promised. The details of the king's verdict, which I will discuss below, throw further light on this particular displacement, by showing that the wealth and sustenance for those who served the church was understood in terms of bride-price, dowry and inheritance through women.

The gifts which Björn and Þórður separately receive from the Saintly King are distinct yet complementary sets, hence, referring to their complementary role assignments. In other words, the gift items are contingent on each other. When brought together, these gifts stipulate the formation of a working relationship between two former adversaries. Saint King Ólafur reiterates this when he sends the message to Þórður in Iceland that he shall form good agreements with Björn when he returns. Björn then goes to live with the earthly married couple at Hítarnes as their guest.

The scenes at Hítarnes are a parody on hospitality, honor and reciprocity--the way Durrenberger and Wilcox

(1992) have analyzed much of Bandamanna saga, for its humorous take on these issues as well on the law. More specifically though, they are a parody of the socioeconomic situation at the so-called private churchfarms--at Hítarnes in particular, as its inventory from 1181 helps to show us. The burlesque episode when Björn stays with the couple includes a number of explicit references to ordinary arrangements on private church farms. It does not directly mention a church or a priest, but notice that Björn and Þórður see the other as a disguised person. Björn does not treat Þórður as a host and a housefather, and Þórður thinks that Björn receives more respect from Oddný than he deserves. The playful artistic composition informs us about people's symbolic and comparative-historical conceptualizations of (novel) dynamic conflicts at private church farms, and augments scholarly understanding of the history of the Icelandic church, which is currently for the most part based on direct reading of official-ecclesiastic and normative documents.

At Hítarnes an ambiguous guest stays in the house of a conspicuous host. While hostility escalates between the two men, the guest maintains relations of sentimental purity, warship and praise towards the wife. The "subtext", I suggest, is that Björn has come to serve, officiate, praise, and say mass at the church which Þórður was warden for and had built with the timber the saintly king gave or imposed

on him. Such a symbolic reading of Björn's stay at Hitarnes and of the king's orders and gifts would have been quite obvious to and shared by the medieval audience. Artfully disguised references function here to point out the historical links between the peculiar priest-churchwarden relationship and other (earlier established or antecedent) types of indigenous status relationships. As will be discussed below, they reflect on public discourse, including a debate over the roles and relative status of churchwardens and clergymen.

The Saintly King, through his decree and gifts, presided over a bilateral marriage ceremony. He (re)marries both men to Oddný, Þórður in a material sense where Oddný figures as his worldly wife, Björn in a spiritual sense where Oddný is as the Virgin Wife/Mary/Mother, the symbolic figure of the church. This enables Björn to return to Oddný and continue to praise her. In poem #17 he recalls what he terms Oddný's virgin history/innocent story, which he says he still believes in. In turn, Oddný returns to Björn in spirit, as the virgin which she used to be, as his innocent praise. When she extends her virgin daughter to Björn she is herself posing in the figure of the perpetual virgin, his eternal complement/compliment. So, the triangle formed by Oddný, Björn and Þórður, their bilateral marriage, is based on a split figure of the Woman, that is, Oddný's signifying of a spiritual match, on the one hand, and a material match,

on the other. However, the union between the two men is highlighted on its own as well, because the ceremony which Saint King Ólafur presides over takes place in the men's presence and Oddný's absence.

Björn is able to enter into bilateral union with the couple at Hítarnes because the Saintly King divorces Þórður from Oddný's spiritual identity or because he imposes on her a new spiritual Christian representation. Þórður and Oddný come implicitly to represent the two disparate worlds of which the peculiar Icelandic private church farm was made, that is, the part that is the churchwarden's private property (male) and the part that is the church's property (female). In accordance, Björn does not treat Þórður in the respectful manner which, for example, Þórður displayed towards Jarl Eirik and King Ólafur when he was in their courts. Instead of performing laudatory poems for Þórður, Björn uses his poetic skills to insult him and to praise his wife, claiming in poems #3 and #5 that he has Oddný's attention and that she is entertained by his presence. In other words, Björn accepts Þórður's invitation to stay at Hítarnes because it means that he can serve/rule within the spiritual domain for which Oddný is a figure. In this role of authority he empowers himself through performing (divine) service, praising Oddný as his virgin bride. Þórður formally invited Björn to Hítarnes (in order to make amendment to his wife, he says; in accordance with the

saintly king's order, I add), but Oddný is portrayed as Björn's generous true host, and it is she who faithfully defends his behavior throughout.

The particular strife between Þórður and Björn at Hítarnes has the earmarks of otherwise known historical conflict between the private church-wardens and clergy, and enlightens us about certain trends in the development of ecclesiastical institutions in Iceland. The second episode of Bjarnar saga throws an historical opinion on the live-in circumstances at and the downfall of the earliest private churches in Iceland, which are portrayed as having impoverished the churchwarden. The third episode, as we will see, portrays the ensuing head-church (höfuðkirkja), as the type of establishment which was capable of forming rent-income systems and sizable parishes, and building the basis for substantial tribute accumulation, which escalated after the tithe laws were enacted in 1097.

Like the early canon law from the 1130's does (Grágás:13-18), Bjarnar saga depicts at the private-church farm a senior (older) person who has secular authority, and a junior (younger) person with spiritual authority. But unlike most normative sources, Bjarnar saga shows this relationship to be paradoxical and points a finger to the fact that the spheres of influence which each person is supposed to be concerned with overlap in praxis: The clergyman was not unconcerned with church property or his

own material well-being; the church-warden had invested interest in the speeches and service which the clergyman rendered. Björn, who ridicules Þórður for his attempts to exploit Oddný, reveals the perspective of a junior clergyman who expressed or pursued his own interest--the interest of his class, as well as the bishop's, the autonomy seeking Church functionaries. Priests of different status might have sought their empowerment through "church services," which did not necessarily correspond with the church warden's private interests and opinions. The crux of the bishops' and other clergy's criticism of church wardens, as we can learn from late 12th century documents, was that they put church property, as well as the parts of the tithe which were earmarked for the church and priest, bishop, and as poor relief, to private use (M. Stefánsson 1978:11-130). Church wardens were probably being accused of exploiting the church for their own personal benefit much earlier than surviving normative sources document.

Before analyzing the scenes from *Hítarnes* in detail we need to take a closer look at the Saintly King's verdict in the saga. This brief yet complicated decree lends critical support for my symbolic reading of what goes on at *Hítarnes*. In itself, it shows us how certain storytellers conceptualized, or rationalized, the christian clerical profession, by linking it to both antecedent and complementary roles and establishments in the farming

community, while highlighting practices of devolution and transmission of property.

By itself Saint King Ólafur's verdict can hardly be read as an accurate prediction of Björn's and Þórður's respective fates in Iceland; instead it reads like Justice based on Truth informed by Knowledge. It sentences the two protagonists to take part in transforming worldly and spiritual practices in their small community at home by playing novel roles, according to the new order in christianized Iceland. Because the saga expresses nothing but high reverence for King Ólafur, the reader is forced to think that Þórður and Björn both get from the verdict what they deserve. The verdict assumes the possibility that each man is able to live by (and essentially possesses) clear and unambiguous motives and desires. But the text, both before and after the verdict, paints an unclear, moving picture of each individual's intentions and desires. As it turns out, the dealings between the two men become ever more complicated and conflict ridden.

The transmission of property which the verdict stipulates is revealing. Each person keeps or obtains what he has earned and deserves and is responsible for, and builds on the path he has already taken. As insults, the two acts of stealing, the woman taking and the wealth taking, are judged as equal. But the verdict is not built on the straightforward assumption that Þórður simply took

Oddný away from Björn. Instead, the two "thefts," disparate as they may seem, cancel out as far as they can be counted as property thefts: Saint King Ólafur's adjudication, as far as it concerns the thefts, redefines Björn robbing of Þórður's wealth as his collecting of the wealth which he had been promised in the original betrothal agreement and sealed by Skúli and Oddný's father. Þórður is to stay married to Oddný and remain the warden of her property back in Iceland; still, Björn retrieves wealth from Þórður which equals the value of Oddný's matrimonial possessions (seen as her dowry, perhaps bride-price from Þórður as well, but this is left unclear) plus her inheritance from her father.

Þorkell's (Oddný's father) obligation to Björn stands and is fulfilled, and it is an authority in Norway which ensures that Björn contributes from Oddný's dowry and inheritance. Skúli's financial obligation to provide bride-wealth is not evoked again, but Skúli contributed to Björn's and Oddný's future marriage by investing great wealth plus a ring with Björn before he left for Norway, thereby creating a career for him through which he could increase his wealth. I discussed earlier that merchant-farmer's investment in trade and political alliances in Norway via their adopted sons--an investment which was to result in mercantile profit/wealth--is portrayed as bride-price by way of the symbolism of the gold-ring exchanges. Skúli's original investment in Björn represents the bride-price for Oddný.

As it turns out, this incipient bride-price leads Björn on the road to a series of transformations, which finally make him into a man of such (spiritual) means that he becomes worthy of being Oddný's guest, or is capable of marrying her in an elevated spiritual sense. Within the new christian order, that which is invested in young non-marriageable men in order for them to become ecclesiastical servants/persons is portrayed as the bride-price which is paid to the early Icelandic church (for which Oddný stands as the virgin wife who becomes Mother Church).

We notice in Bjarnar saga an understanding of the early Icelandic church as an institution which can be likened to a marriageable heiress, the way she acquires and passes on property. The property of a bridal church--which is joined by a young man rendering his bride-price, most notably in the form of service based on his learning--is viewed as a devolution fund of a father (Þorkell) who only has one child (Oddný). Interestingly, the wealth Björn receives comes in the form of an inheritance which a sister (Þórður's mother) acquired from her brother. In certain less apparent sense then, Björn takes the place of Oddný's brother, the son which Þorkell never had, based on the king's verdict. It is as if Björn and Oddný have been redefined as brother and sister, because wealth equal to the value of her father's patrimony ends up in his hands.

The inheritance section (Erfðabáttur) in Grágás

(1992:47) states that if there are alive a woman and a man who are equally related to the deceased, then the man inherits. This rule applied for full siblings, but inheritance was to be portioned out among brothers, and among sisters who did not have a brother. Jónsbók, the lawbook enacted in 1281, following Iceland's annexation by Norway, introduces certain changes (p. 78-79): in the direction of primogeniture, since the oldest brother was to inherit the main estate while his younger brothers should inherit outlying properties; in the direction of partible bilateral inheritance, since a daughter was to inherit from her father or mother half the amount her brother was to receive. But Grágás concerns us more in the context of interpreting Bjarnar saga. It also states (1992:48) that a daughter shall not be given more dowry than the amount of property which her brother(s) stand to inherit. It seems that Bjarnar saga suggests that the sister-brother relationship with regard to devolution of property was an important metonym, even if less so than a marriage, for defining the union of non-marriageable men to the Church and for rationalizing the new types of property transmission which were introduced with Christianization.

As we have seen, the Saintly King's verdict is a window to an elaborate symbolism. We can infer that the verdict undermines, displaces and argues against the transference of property to women. Instead, it says that non-marriageable,

disinherited males should be the receivers of property from devolution funds. A man's holy matrimony to the church is analogous to marrying a woman. A change in devolution customs, in the direction of disinheriting descendible women and reducing the inheritance received by descendible men, in order to provide "bride-price" for and "dowry" to non-descendible men, is rationalized on the premise that the church takes the place of a woman as medium for the transmission and exchange of property between males.

In short, the wealth which Björn receives (takes and keeps) from Þórður establishes the notion that an unmarried ecclesiastical person should rightfully benefit from the property on which marriages are founded, that is, from the transference of wealth which takes place when a woman marries or inherits. The saga adds emphasis to this notion by showing us that the concrete wealth which actually Björn receives takes the form of Þórður's inheritance after his maternal uncle, that is, property which had been owned by Þórður's mother's brother. Björn becomes heir to Þórður's maternal inheritance, that is, he appropriates Þórður's mother's inheritance from her brother. Björn appears in this instance as the heir to Þórður's mother's property. As we will notice, the institution which supports Björn and becomes his match is signified by a triangular figure of a Wife, Mother, and Sister.

I am tempted to think that Bjarnar saga testifies to

some extent to debates and opinions predating 12th century arguments over the role of the church in Icelandic society. It appears, however, that Bjarnar saga's creative conceptualization of the above issues is to great extent a manifestation of late 12th century perspectives on the status and function of church institutions and clerics (kirkjubjónar: "church servants"), which view them as problematic. The divine verdict spoken by the Sainly King mirrors rationalization, conceptualizations and practices which can be read from documents from the 12th and early 13th centuries. These articles and special agreements pertain to the foundation of church institutions in Iceland, and constitute means towards the accumulation of property and power following the enactment of the tithe laws and during the advent of the libertas ecclesiae movement, along with the establishment of several monasteries.

As Magnús Stefánsson has reviewed (1975:74), as early as the 12th century (in earliest letters and deeds) the church's share of the property on private church farms--called kirkjueignir (in latin dos) and consisting of land, animals, rights to particular procurement sources, buildings, vestments and other items--were often referred to as heimanfylgja or dowry. Subsequently the term föðurleifð, patrimony, became more common. As elsewhere in Europe, the church was often referred to as the bride of Christ. I discovered that the four oldest surviving ecclesiastical

farm inventories refer to the churches as the "Christ household" (Kristbú) on such and such a farm (from 1150 at Dalbær, Uppsálar, Keldugnúpur, Breiðabólstaður; see Diplomatarium Islandicum 1:194-203). Most of the other inventories which date to the late 12th century refer to these types of churches either as Mariukirkja, "a church of Mary" (e.g. the church at Hítarnes in 1181), or "the church at such and such a farm"--with few exceptions where they are named after particular foreign saints. Mariukirkja becomes rarer as title after 1220, when the Icelandic Church becomes more autonomous, which is to say that individual churches become more subjugated to the bishop offices at Skálholt and at Hólar (the latter overseeing the Northern Quarter only). Individual churches are increasingly referred to in charters and inventories by the name of a male saint, but what becomes most common is the appending of the words kirkja or staður (beneficium) to the name of a particular farm.

Gifts to the church were frequently referred to as mundur, which usually meant bridewealth (indirect dowry), but could also mean direct dowry when the noun was used as an abbreviation for heimanmundur, synonymous with heimanfylgja. Many of the gifts to the church were conceived of as death-duties, clearly coming out of what I have been calling devolution funds. Grágás stipulates that the amounts of these gifts can not be greater than ten percent of the heirloom. Gifts to churches often exceeded

this lawful share of an inheritance, but in these cases they were given to ensure advantages and profitability for descendants of the deceased (M. Stefánsson 1975:88).

Marital-duties were a contested idea for a long time following Iceland's christianization dated at the year 1000. They were finally enacted into law during Bishop Magnús Gissurarson's reign (1216-1237), as a heavy tax on marriages between a man and a woman who were as distantly related as fifth cousins (Grágás 1992:34-35). This was a hefty tax: ten percent on the combined property of a couple who were fourth cousins; 60 ells from each spouse if they were fifth cousins. One would assume, given the small size of Iceland's population and the relative isolation of districts, that this tax was imposed on a majority of marriage formations and that it prevented many "couples" from marrying.

Bjarnar saga, written as we know it, dates to a period when marital-duties and death-duties were argued for, contested and enacted into law. This fact may figure somehow into the saga. My observations on this based on interpreting the narrative and the reading of normative documents are of general nature at this point. I note first that, according to the Saintly King's verdict, Björn's role at Hitarnes and the dues he receives are described in terms of marriage-related economic transactions, which are linked to his stated ambition concerning Oddný by the beginning of

the saga. Second, Christian institutional practices concerning material accumulation came to be described based on the borrowing the terms used for secular matrimonial devolution practices. The early (virgin) church in Iceland, its particular form of ecclesia propria or ecclesia propriae hereditatis, brought with it new occupations for the non-marriageable and disinherited, for those who would receive neither patrimony nor matrimony (in the secularistic sense). The lowly profession of the junior clergy was understood by storytellers as a "foreign invented," uncertain career for the would-be-dispossessed. This spiritual, social and economic role is explained, rationalized and justified in Bjarnar saga, which shows it to be maintained by wealth which comes out of devolution funds, that is, established on the basis of material sources taken from the men and women who receive inheritance, dowry and bride-price.

Icelandic historians concur that the resident priests serving at the early private churches were an economic and social underclass (M. Lárusson 1967; M. Stefánsson 1975:80-81; Jóhannesson 1974; Þorsteinsson and Jónsson 1991): In many cases clerics were dispossessed boys whom churchwardens had provided books and vestments. In Þorsteinsson's and Jónsson's assessment, most resident clerics before the 12th century were in bondage, having agreed to serve at a particular church for life. These authors have stated (1991:74-76) that "if a cleric left the church then would be

fetched back by the churchwarden as if he was a runaway slave." Articles 14-17 in the canon law chapter of Grágás (1992:13-18) support the above. And article 16 says that churchwardens were to make yearly contracts with the priest where the former agreed to provide the latter with sustenance for a year, after which the priest could be removed from service.

Björn's mother Þórdís had urged him not to accept Þórður's invitation to Hitarnes. Björn did not heed her warnings, and the storytellers save him from a bonded servile position at Hitarnes. To them Björn is in some sense an agent and personification of a historical process ambiguously connected with libertas ecclesiae in Iceland. In episode three, the storytellers transport him into the next chapter in their linear church history, a chapter when one and the same person (Björn) becomes both church warden and consecrated priest. This ecclesiastic figure is more effective than his predecessors in controlling the use of church property and establishing sources of income.

Church historians have written on a gradual process of empowerment of church and consecrated men, and explained it in terms of the struggle of the two Icelandic bishoprics for controlling the use of church property and tithe income, and having jurisdiction in matters of the priests and church. The dual ecclesiastical estates gave way to the more powerful parish-churches--especially after the tithe laws

had been enacted--where the church warden had significant control over the use of church property, which in some cases encompassed all the properties and benefits of the estate, then called staður (not considered beneficium until after 1297). As churches became more wealthy and influential, churchwardens and chieftains would send their sons to theology learning centers, such as at Oddi in Southern Iceland or to cathedral schools at one of the two bishoprics. I agree with Miller (1990:35-36) who states that by the beginning of the 12th century "[The] leading families supplied the leading churchmen and the leading churchmen still lived like the chieftains and leading farmers they were, marrying, procreating, and litigating." We could add that many upperclass priests were the sons of wealthy persons and "inherited" control over church property and income instead of patrimony in the secular sense.

During the 13th century church wardens (consecrated or not) and upper-class priests around the country formed various alliances for resisting centralized ecclesiastical power and episcopal attempts to have control over the use of church property and tithe income. It wasn't until 1297 that a compromise agreement was reached at Ögvaldsnes, Norway, by which some estates became beneficia (staðir) under the bishops' control, while others remained private, the so-called "farmer churches" (bændakirkjur). An ecclesiastical estate became a beneficium if its church had been in

possession of half or more of the homeland at the time of the settlement in Ögvaldsnes. King Eiríkur of Norway and Iceland preceded over this settlement, but his nickname was prestahatari, or the "hater of priests".

Before turning to the scenes at Hítarnes I need to reiterate some earlier points I have made concerning the king's verdict in light of the above. Þórður loses more than the total commitment and love of his wife (admiration lost after Oddný finds out that Björn is still alive). Their marriage is redefined, and it is reduced in terms of its material foundation by the extent of Björn's demands, as approved or defined by the king. Björn's consumption and appropriations from the time when the King grants Þórður's maternal inheritance to the end of his stay at Hítarnes signify in some sense the growth of the treasury of the early Icelandic church and the impact that it has on farming households. Björn's performances at Hítarnes, his particular demands, and the disruption he causes--all of which is perceived as strange or foreign by Hítarnes' permanent residents, except Oddný--point to the various social, cultural and economic consequences of the introduction of Christian churches into Icelandic farming communities. Þórður, the married secularistic man, needs to pay respect and tribute to a new type of authority figure.

The foundation of Þórður's marriage transforms to make way for the Christian order which brings new institutions

populated by the very class of individuals who would otherwise be excluded from the kin-ordered system of social and economic security. It is the Christian order stipulated by the Saintly King--including the agreement between Þórður and Björn--which finally legitimizes Þórður's marriage while reducing his terms with Oddný at the same time. Björn appropriates the value of Oddný's father's devolution fund by way of replacing Þórður as the heir to his mother's inheritance property in Christian Denmark. The saga puts emphasis on these two amounts as equal, and Þórður does remain warden of Oddný's concrete property in Iceland. However, the financial transaction which took place on the basis of the King's verdict in Norway appears to be reenacted or repeated at Hítarnes, because Björn arrives there dispossessed of material (non-symbolic) wealth, and becomes an incredible consumer, threatening the viability of the Hítarnes household. Björn takes refuge in the newly built church at Hítarnes, as is indirectly suggested by way of elaborate symbolism. This institution is built out of Christian Norwegian wood and maintained with Oddný's dowry and inheritance.

A number of both direct and symbolic references indicate Björn's clerical status while he is staying at Hítarnes. First, Björn brings two horses and a dog with him to Hítarnes. The issues around feeding these animals are curious. Article 14 of the Canon law section in Grágás

(1992:14) states that the church warden was obligated to pay the priest a standard salary, and to feed one of his horses and provide sustenance for his male helper, who could be considered a deacon (djákn, a dean). Variations of this stipulation occurs in several medieval church inventories, but the helper(s) is usually referred to by the name djákn or deacon. In some cases ecclesiastical charters will say that the priest should have aid from deacon and/or dispossessed domestic servant(s) (ómagi).

I interpret that Björn's personal dog (besti vinur mannsins: "man's best friend") because he eats human food and is alleged to be better treated than Þórður's servants, represents Björn's special servant--an interesting and revealing figuration of a deacon. The priest's helper, the deacon, must have been perceived as an unusual, different type of domestic servant. As part of the status rivalry between Þórður and Björn, the latter insists that his private helper be treated with greater respect than the regular domestic servants who performed ordinary labor. It supports my interpretation that Björn's servile fosterer had given him the dog.

Björn has two fosterfathers. One fosterer is the unnamed domestic servant who gave him the dog; the other is Skúli, a major district ruler, mercantile farmer, and a former traveller. Along with Björn's father those two men are in a sense Björn's progenitors. Björn takes after these

three men. His lowly fosterer represents Björn's humble and servile qualities, whereas Skúli instigates his leadership qualities. Björn's father and his servile fosterer appear to represent one and the same character: it is as if the saga "confuses" the two. While Björn's servile fosterer's is not named, his father Arngeir will be called Arngeir karl, but karl usually refers to a male domestic servant in the family sagas.

By referring to a deacon as a dog, the storyteller is perhaps reconstructing a simile, creatively borrowed from the Bible and especially relevant in Iceland for its sheep-farming. In the Icelandic context a dog is critical aid for rounding up sheep and keeping the flock together, and a horse is the farmer's transportation/companion during round-up time. Björn, the ecclesiastic, is like the horse-riding shepherd who, with the help of his dog, tries to keep track of his flock, representing the wandering souls of mankind. Notice that this simile-construction builds on strong metonymic relationships between two domains, being a shepherd vs. being a spiritual ruler/servant. In an Icelandic farming community the two spheres of activity and meaning are contiguously related in a complicated, informative ways. They are related through displacement, since the lowly priest comes from the ranks of the disinherited, and therefore might have become an ordinary shepherd; they are related by historical continuity,

understood in terms of the process which created clergymen from the subordinate class which also fills the ranks of ordinary shepherds. [It can be suggested that one of the two horses which Björn brought was Hvítungur ("The Whitish"), the horse with two colts which his father had given him upon his return to Iceland. In any case, the horse Hvítungur, whose name may have suggested purity, would be a manifestation of Björn's new-found spiritual mission, which he continues after he leaves Hítarnes.]

As soon as Björn is given the high seat next to Þórður in Hítarnes the household begins to experience economic difficulties, which lead to alterations in labor deployment and procurement strategies. Þórður and Oddný become more and more destitute, and some household members, including Þórður, put the blame on Björn's excessive demands and needs. At the same time, social encounters become increasingly vested with conflict, leaving Þórður increasingly frustrated, while Björn becomes more daring. Björn and Þórður engage each other in a contest of poetry, making insulting verses (fourteen in all) about each other which portray current situations and reflect on past events.

The various events and changes which take place at Hítarnes point mockingly at the contentious circumstances on private church farms, the conflicts between church wardens and ecclesiastics which resulted in mutual disempowerment,

and ultimately to the demise of the private church as a dual estate. I would further argue that the scenes at Hítarnes portray the humble status of the churchwarden before the tithe-laws were enacted which gave them control over substantial income. If, as I am suggesting, Þórður allegorically represents a churchwarden, he would not have had unlimited control over the part of Hítarnes which was under church title, that is, belonged to the church of Mary, as the Hítarnes church was called. Under the bishop's directions, priests were expected to watch over church property (M. Stefánsson 1975:92-96).

Björn's stay at Hítarnes scornfully points out the expenses associated with operating an early ecclesia propria. The history of each church farm is unique, and the earliest dated surviving inventory for Hítarnes church is unusual in several respects. Below is my translation of this relatively short deed (Diplomatarium Islandicum 1:275-276), which is dated 1181, and which I will be referring to throughout my analysis.

Hítarnes

Mary's church at Hítarnes owns Hítarnes land with all scot and lot (benefits). She (the church) owns 10 cows and one hundred ("long-hundred": 120) sheep of standard ewe-value, one hundred ells value in farming tools, household

appliances and furniture, 20 centners (vætt:35 kg) of food, discrete from seals and fish.

This property (fé: possessions, wealth) accounts for the following expenses. There shall be a priest in residence, saying ("singing") all household prayers (heimilis tíbir) every other day, saying two masses during Lent, every day during Advent, and all adventitious masses, if he is at home; vigils each evening during Lent and three lections. Light shall be burning [i.e. in the church] every night from latter Mary's mass [September 8th] till the end of Easter week.

Two female paupers (or "paupers valued as women," kvenqildir ómagar) shall service the priest in full. They shall belong to the kin of Þorhallur or Steinunn [probably the church wardens' parents].

Jörundur shall protect (varðveita) this property, and his heirs, depending on who among the kin of Þorhallur or Steinunn the bishop finds fit.

The church owns three altar cloths, two candle holders, two bells, two wash basins, curtains around inside of church, ten marks [80 ounces] wax.

A priest shall be hired for four marks [192

ells] of vaðmál (homespun).

There [by the church] burial is permitted.

This deed helps us to clarify and to interpret the part of Bjarnar saga where Björn stays with the couple at Hitarnes. The document is attributed to Bishop Þorlákur Þórhallsson's visit to Hitarnes in 1181. Much of what it says, however, is probably based on earlier written agreements or arrangements, but the deed does not call itself a "consecration charter/inventory" (Víxlumáldagi). The church could therefore have been established and operating long before the year 1181.

The 1181 charter dates to the period of the debate between senior ecclesiastics and churchwardens called staðamál fyrri, "the first/former beneficia contest" during the 1170 and 80's. It is interesting to note from the charter that Þorlákur Þórhallsson had been able to secure a clause stating that the bishop of Skálholt shall be a judge over the matter of who among the current churchwarden's maternal or paternal descendants would be fit to become warden's over the church in the future. This clause amounts to an unusually strong authority reserved for the head over Iceland's ecclesiastical institutions. In fact, I find it to be the earliest dated statement of this sort in an Icelandic church inventory. Þorlákur Þórhallson has been looked upon as the first effective reform activist within

the Icelandic church, and he is the first and only Icelander to become named a saint (hinn helgi). He was consecrated as saint in 1198, five years after his death, and numerous miracles attributed to him were reported from all over Iceland. Eight centuries later, in 1984, pope Paul the second declared Þorlákur the patron saint of Iceland.

The Hitarnes charter of 1181 may have been perceived as unusual, testifying to peculiar circumstances (before 1181 perhaps) which Bjarnar saga takes after. Besides the stated limitations on the churchwarden's authority, the charter is unusual in that the church holds title to the entire Hitarnes estate proper with scot and lot (með öllum gæðum). (Unfortunately for us, ecclesiastic inventories do not directly report on churchwardens' private property and rights, but Bjarnar saga is certainly suggestive in that regard.) The charter of Stafholt church in Borgarfjörður from 1140 represents the earliest deed which shows a church holding title to the entire estate on which it was built (Diplomatarium Islandicum I: 178-180). Unlike Hitarnes, in this case the entire estate was donated to the church by a man, Steini Þorvarðsson, who was the church's warden but also its headpriest. As my interpretation below will show, the 1181 Hitarnes inventory helps make sense out of Björn's economic impact on the household, including the particular procurement strategies which its members engage in after he arrives. My interpretation also points to the specific

economic changes which I have attributed earlier to the development of church institutions.

Björn doesn't do ordinary farm labor at Hítarnes, after all, he is a guest. Instead, as Þórður complains, he disrupts ordinary work by entertaining female servants and by ordering people to do things which are bad for the household economy and undermine Þórður's authority. As if they belonged to a King, Björn's horses, which are definitely not workhorses, do not graze. Instead, they are fed an extraordinary amount of the best hay. While they feed, the horses tramp on and destroy much of this good hay, which presumably was meant for feeding the cows and the lambs (quality hay now called kúgæft hey and lambhey). The consumption habits of Björn's horses and the disturbance they create seriously undermine the economic foundation and viability of the Hítarnes farm. Regarding the disruption of social status relationships, the servants complain that they are seated below Björn's dog (læggra settir en hundur hans), but "he" (i.e. the dog, referred to by the masculine pronoun in Icelandic) eats only human food.

By doing a simple literal reading of the guest's stay at Hítarnes, we find it hard to understand how Björn, his dog and two horses manage to consume and disturb labor and resources to such an extent that the Hítarnes household is brought to the brink of economic collapse. A close, suspicionist reading of the Hítarnes scenes--including what

the domestic servants are saying--shows that Björn brings to the household a new sphere of activity and consumption together with a new type of authority structure. He and the animal beings he brings turn out to be something other and more foreign than an ordinary guest with three animals. Björn is not what he seems; neither is his cohort. Instead of being an ordinary dog, serving ordinary functions, Björn's private companion turns out to be "human." Þórður does not have absolute control over property and labor force at Hítarnes. Björn's disruptive commands are subversive. They are reported to Þórður by male servants, but Oddný treats these reports on Björn as well as his horses and dog as false rumors or insignificant. Oddný watches over Björn's well-being and is faithful to his pure/spiritual image--the way the church watches over the interests of her kirkjubjónar, "the servants of the church."

Þórður and Björn exchange insults and contradict each other's orders before an audience that is the household and the surrounding community. Allegorically this exchange suggests that the churchwarden and his clergyman contradict and strive against each other, preaching from the same platform where they sit in the high seats next to each other. Þórður remains for the most part in control of economic activity at Hítarnes--although disrupted by the consumption needs of Björn and his strange entourage. But, in a sense, Björn's voice prevails in the Household.

Formerly a man of the sword, he now threatens Þórður by his poetry and knowledge. He is a kennimaður ("a learned man who informs, or preaches"), but this term was commonly used in referring to Iceland's early priests. According to Björn, Oddný's role on the estate should not be to perform lowly labor. Instead, the wise woman, as he calls her in poem #3, should be allowed to pay attention to his performance. Björn's authoritative and entertaining voice can not be silenced. He has Oddný's attention which defines her as a figure of the Church. He has Þórður's reluctant support, because he must make good on his promise to the Saintly King and as the warden of the church is Oddný's guardian.

Björn is shown in the position of a resident priest who is hired to speak and perform in the name of the church or, the way Björn portrays his own role, in order to entertain the mistress of the house. The secular housefather's servants are also the priest's captive audience, even if his speech contradicts the words and undermines the authority of the housefather-farmer. Christian sermons are viewed as the poetry which ignores the concerns and powers of the male-identified mundane world, while it glorifies the female-identified spiritual order. Still, this "poetry" is spoken within the context of a contest between two males who are both power-hungry and equally concerned with words and material things. At the Icelandic church farm the spiritual

and secular worlds, which the Saintly King had attempted to keep separate, merge in praxis. In this life at least, the narrative tells us, everyone must live in two worlds under the reign of two distinct yet overlapping kinds of authority. The ecclesiastic domain has materialistic qualities and concerns; the worldly domain is also concerned with poetry or the power of the word.

Þórður's inability to be in control of fodder- and food-consumption, and the deployment of labor on the farm, and his concentrated effort to exploit the wild and domesticated sources on an island of Hítará river, bring to our mind the 1181 deed which says that Mary's church at Hitarnes owns the entire home estate along with benefits. According to the inventory, access to marine resources and the use of islands were clearly in the churchwarden's private hands, and fish and seal are excluded from the type of food which counts as church possessions. Curiously enough, Þórður and his worker's are depicted in an oddly intensive use of marine- and island-resources. Þórður's desperate need for marine resources is humorously illustrated by the event where he goes searching for food on his beach and is bitten by a seal. Björn's poetic series Grámagaflím (poems #26,27,28) is Björn's most grotesque reflection on Þórður's predicament. Here he tells the story of how Þórður came into this world as the son of a fish which had drifted ashore and his mother had consumed. The

search for dead fish washed up on beaches was a procurement attempt of last resort, according to a farmer-informant in Svalbarðshreppur who had experienced such hardship early in this century.

According to my informants in Borgarfjörður, the live resources of the sea and beaches were critical for the people of Mýrar county until recently. These resources (mostly seal, fish, birds and eggs), which were exchanged inland for agricultural goods, have been called plógur by the people of this district. To the people who live there now plógur means "the benefits of the sea, shores and islands," as opposed to procurement from the land. (I did not encounter this term nor this particular resource distinction among the farmers and fishing peasants in Svalbarðshreppur, Northeast, or in Árneshreppur, Northwest.)

My informants in Mýrar county agreed that Hítarhólmur is Hítará island which the saga refers to. It lies just off the coast where Hítará river meets the sea. The saga states that this island has sites where birds lay eggs and seals litter. This is true today, I discovered. But if there were hayfields and cornfield on the island, which the saga also claims, then those would have been small and not very productive. (If instead of Hítarhólmur the saga is referring to any number of tiny islands in the Hítará river, then the description of Þórður's exploits is all the more ironic.)

One day in early winter (öndverður vetur) Þórður tells Oddný that he needs the labor force that remains at the house for stacking grain (skrýfa korn) on the island, where others are busy taking seal and eggs and making hay. It is the last day of the round-up season, so several of Þórður's male laborers are driving the sheep home. Here the saga is describing a bottle-neck labor period on an Icelandic farm, but the mention of taking eggs and seal at this time must serve as a burlesque anticipation of a particularly lean winter. The eggs which can be collected in September or October are rotten eggs which did not hatch. Seals, on skerries and islands, are easier to hunt in spring than in fall. The mention of hay on the island suggests that Þórður is collecting less nutritious hay from a second or third harvest, or from unproductive out-lying fields. In sum, we are shown that Björn brings with him economic hardship for Þórður's household, and that his presence upsets ordinary procurement schedules.

The ten cows and hundred and twenty ewe-values in sheep in the 1181 inventory, which were earmarked as church property, amounted to a considerable flock. We must still assume that the churchwarden at Hitarnes owned private livestock as well. Because Mary's church owned all of Hitarnes land proper (the homeland), the churchwarden would have used the land of the church as well as outlying fields of his own to fodder and graze the entire livestock on the

estate. A particularly revealing incident in Bjarnar saga is when Þórður tells Oddný that she must milk the sheep which were being driven from the pasture that day at the end of the round-up season. Oddný replies that she will milk the ewes if Þórður first removes the dung from the sheep pen. We can not infer for sure what the ordinary purpose of this sheep fold would have been, but the saga makes clear that the ewes and their lambs had been driven away from the farm earlier in the summer or spring, either to a mountain dairy, or simply to pasture, in which case the ewe's milk was not being utilized for human consumption. It is suggested here that milking ewes was a new idea or a minor practice at Hítranes, or that, because of Björn, there was a desperate need for more ewe's milk, for the amounts of milk which can be procured from the ewes in September is rather insignificant.

Perhaps Þórður did not empty the pen and Oddný did not milk the ewes because both saw these jobs as the labor of servants and children. But I think that the narrative also tells us that the practice of milking sheep, so intensively at least, was 1) looked down upon by prominent farmers who practiced intensive rearing of sheep with the primary purpose of acquiring high wool yield, 2) perceived as a sign of hardship and lowly peasant status and, 3) attributed in some way to the influence of the church. It is common to see in deeds that churches were to donate milk to the

dispossessed on certain days. More important perhaps, the church played a major role in the development of dependent land-tenure, which, as I am attempting to establish, had led to greater reliance on ewe's milk for human consumption. As I will be discussing further, Björn's stay at Hitarnes causes Þórður to appear more and more as a dependent farmer, making a living and sleeping on the periphery of Hitarnes estate.

Making room for Björn as Oddný's guest resulted in more intensive use of marine resources, the (extra) need for ewe's milk, and the disruption of ordinary economic scheduling. According to my semi-allegorical reading, this scenario reflects on the historical opinion that the establishment and accumulation practices of the Church and the support for Christian services added economic stress to certain farms, the earliest church farms in particular, forcing them to alter their labor and procurement practices and to intensify as well as extensify in new economic areas. Twelfth century charters show that at most private church farms the church held title to less than half of the homeland, and/or to certain out-lying landed possessions (islands, dependent farms, lakes, rivers, stretches of shoreline etc. The church in Hitarnes is unusual in that it holds title to the entire Hitarnes land proper (the center property), while certain outlying areas seem clearly to be the churchwarden's private domain.

I have already shown that Þórður is humorously depicted as being desperately dependent on outlying procurement areas. With respect to this issue it is furthermore revealing that Björn is shown as having taken control over the farmhouse, where most household members are staying with him. Sometime during the winter Þórður and Oddný begin to spend their nights in a storage out-house accompanied only by one female servant. Þórður refuses to give Oddný space next to him under the covers in their bed. In poem #16 Þórður likens his own behavior to that of Björn's, because the latter had forced the couple to leave their main living quarters where their marriage bed used to be.

The above scene also recalls Björn's poem (#12) where he predicts that Oddný will give birth to a son who will take after him. The storage out-house scene, poem #12, and the curious conception of Kolli appear to be inspired by a notion of a triangle between Mary, Joseph and Holy Spirit resulting in the birth of a spiritual-messenger son. Kolli is created implicitly by way of virgin birth. Þórður's participation in his procreation is either denied, or limited in some way, whereas Björn is shown to be his spiritual father-progenitor.

The name Kolli is derived from the root-word kollur (kollr in the medieval form) which has several curiously related meanings. It clearly gives the boy a religious identity and ecclesiastic status and suggests that Björn is

his spiritual progenitor. Johann Fritzner's Ordbog (1954:314-315) tells us that Kolli and kollur served as nicknames for kollsbróðir (also called kórsbróðir and munkur), meaning a canon or a monk. Kollsbróðir could mean the same as kanúki, a clergyman belonging to the chapter of a cathedral or collegiate church (höfuðkirkja), or a priest among cathedralpriests (dómkirkjuprestar). These uses of the root kollur stem from the monks' special headdress, called kollhúfa or simply kollur, as well as their sometimes shaven headtops; furthermore, a cowl or a coat with a hood, a common monk's dress, was called kollótt kápa. The word kollur was otherwise most often used in reference to the top of the head or to a head-shaped mountain. The word was also used as a name of endearment for a small child, a fair/blond boy in particular.

The above brings to the fore the issue of procreation with respect to the non-marriageable clergy, an issue to which I will return after we encounter more references to Oddný's son Kolli. Through an elaborate construction of direct and symbolic references the narrative tries to explain how senior ecclesiastics become progenitors of or acquire male descendants, and how the means by which they passed on their image become vehicles for social historical change. It is by virtue of the storytellers' analytical intelligence that the procreative ways of the clergy, on the one hand, and their sexual practices, on the other, are

treated as separate issues with a vague overlap. The distinctions between the practices of sexual procreation on the one hand, and spiritual/fictive procreation, on the other, are depicted unclearly. Storytellers knew that many clergymen were not celibate; after all, most of them were the children of ordinary people brought up on ordinary farms. But, as we will further see, an issue which is deemed more interesting in Bjarnar saga centers around the understanding that the act of joining the church in holy matrimony is an act of displacement. The cleric's particular fictive means of procreating resembles those of the mercantile farmer, who adopted a boy for his own gain by placing him in "foreign service" and providing for his "marriage," as one type of enduring union or another. Furthermore, fictive procreation (different types of adoption) parallel the ways in which the married householder passes his image, profession and property to his biological inheritor son.

It is well established that even during the 12th and early 13th centuries many Icelandic priests and bishops were socially sexually active and that many of them married and had concubines (Miller 1990; Magnúsdóttir 1988; Jochens 1980). Quoting from Grágás, Miller points out that there were few special restrictions on clerical marriage: A priest could not marry a woman if he had baptized her children; otherwise, regulations fell within the ban on marriages

between sponsorial kin (1990:37). But Bjarnar saga dates after the 1st Lateran Council in 1123, when celibacy was mandated, and after the episcopate of Þorlákur Þórhallsson hinn helgi, who had raised the voice of ecclesiastical strictures against marriages, sexual practices and concubinage. Even though Björn's practical attempts were limited and unsuccessful for the most part, I find it possible that a number of revelations about his sexual behavior contribute to the fact that the saga includes no direct references to clergy, given that the narrative so clearly addresses, however allegorically, the establishment of the Icelandic church and priesthood. Curiously enough, however, in the third episode of the saga humorous allusions to Björn's sexual practices indicate ecclesiastic status.

Several early church inventories state that there should either be a deacon at the church, or one or two dispossessed female servants (kvenkyns ómaðar) related to the churchwarden. The Hitarnes covenant of 1181 includes references to two dispossessed females or paupers, who shall serve the priest, and to whom the church of Mary must render support. The saga may be alluding to this category of servants (sometimes called kirkjukollur--see next chapter) when Þórður criticizes Björn for finding nothing better to do than to be entertained by servants, and also when Björn is talking to two of Oddný's daughters who sit on his knees. In poem #4 Þórður sardonically criticizes Björn for instead

of doing something useful he spends his time seducing and being entertained by female servants (griðkonur: an noun most often used for female servants who service male laborers, who wash and fix their clothes, make their food etc.). Björn replies by saying that it is in fact Oddný who is being entertained by Björn's performance: According to Björn, Oddný is his spiritual complement, the figure of Mary's church, which he is there to praise and serve.

Before Björn leaves Hítarnes Oddný gives him the coat Þórðarnaut or Þórður's relish. This is both odd and interesting. What may be suggested here is that Björn is fit to wear Þórður's coat, in addition to (or over) the religious dress which he was wearing from the saintly king. The guest can go on to become a host to himself, a warden over a church where he would serve as the priest. In fact, as we are told in the third episode, Björn goes on to build his own church at Vellir.

The sagas have not been used as a source for studying the transformation of hegemonic blocks associated with church institutions, composed of disparate parties which gained from ecclesiastic operations through shifting alliances. Bjarnar saga explores and portrays in a sequence various activities linked to church establishment, accumulation and political empowerment in the context of over-all changes in political economy and subsistence practice in Iceland. The means for accumulating property,

income and power emerge in stages according to the medieval storytellers, through distinct episodes which in many ways correspond to modern Icelandic church historians' accounts, based on their studies of ecclesiastical writings. The second episode begins by telling us that the Christian churches were introduced initially into an Icelandic farming community by a foreign absolutist power, the first king over unified Norway who protected Icelanders' ability to trade and inherit abroad. In fact, the opinion seems to be highlighted that Icelanders became Christianized because of their need for trading and their kinship relations with people who lived in Norway, as well as other territories where the Norwegian crown and merchants had influences. The early churches were built with Norwegian wood (figuratively and literally) and with the labor invested a woman's dowry and inheritance and in a man's price for his bride.

Bjarnar saga as we know it was put together after 1200, when ecclesiastics had a strong voice and considerable authority over church institutions, which included four monasteries, one nunnery and two bishoprics, most of which were significant centers of writing and learning. Consequently perhaps, the saga's narrative sequence speaks loudly on linear history from a perspective which sees the Church and Christianity as essentially separable from an otherwise profane world. The saga seems to undermine the role which secular (unconsecrated) church wardens played in

the establishment of parish-churches as well as in the development of a tributary mode of production. On the other hand, much of the text, because of the style in which it is written, conceals from us Björn's vulnerable disposition. However, close reading of the narrative shows him repeatedly to represent a perennial class of disadvantaged males: in the end, Björn's dispossession, exclusion from community, and poor physical and mental condition leads to his slaying. The poems which Björn makes after he returns to Iceland repeatedly invoke his glorifying travels abroad, but clearly, his rites of passage abroad and in Iceland eventually returned back to his peasant community. In the final analysis, the spirited goals and heroic deeds bring the subject back to the ground where he was conceived of in the first place--which is a statement of the observation that the inequalities of class is an essential and perennial fact.

In next chapter I continue to weave into my interpretation of Bjarnar saga "information" as it pertains from other sources concerning "church history" and devolution practices. The sagas present contemplations about an evolving ecclesiastic "welfare system," while depicting the emergence of different ecclesiastic institutions in a particular sequence, and the formation of parishes and head churches as cause for new types of labor deployment and the political mobilization of smallholders

and the would be dispossessed.

What ensues in the third episode of Bjarnar saga reflects on a host of socioeconomic transformations and conflicts associated with the formation of churches owned by farmers who were also ecclesiastic figures. In some early cases where such ecclesiastical head-churches were established, a churchwarden's son who was a priest had inherited his father's property (M. Stefánsson 1975:98-104). Ecclesiastic estates of this sort remained categorized as ecclesia propriae hereditatis until 1297, when they would become beneficia. It varied how strong the bishops' influence was on the management of income and property at these estates. Their influences were most consistent and strong in the immediate areas surrounding the two Bishops sees. With alþing's passing of the tithe laws by the end of the 11th century, ecclesiastics and church wardens acquired a significant new source of income. The stage for Bjarnar saga is set for the period from the late 10th and early 11th century, but I believe that the various developments which took place with respect to the church until after 1200 figure into the making of the narrative.

CHAPTER 9

A GOLD RING ON A BLOODY HAND:

ON EPISODE THREE AND EPILOGUE OF BJARNAR SAGA HÍTÐÉLAKAPPA

Where episode three begins, according to my portioning of the narrative, a part is missing from the saga as it was written. Nordal (1938:69) wrote that the missing part amounts to no more than one vellum page, and suggested that it contained sections on how Björn built and began farming at Vellir and on Þórdís's genealogy and her marriage to Björn. First we see a mention of Björn's wife, then later find out that her name is Þórdís, which is also the name of Björn's mother.

Björn is now living at Vellir with his parents. Vellir was a small-to-medium size farm (17 long-hundred ells tax value) belonging to Hitardalur Beneficium according to the land register of 1686 (B. Lárusson 1967:159), located in the center of Hitardale west of Hitará river, opposite from the site where Hitardalur beneficium farm was erected and a monastery operated from 1166-1201.

Björn launches a career independent of Þórður's and somehow acquires the farmstead Vellir. Björn operated both Hólmur and Vellir, but Hólmur was a minor estate as far as we can tell. Both farms are now abandoned farmsteads but were occupied in 1686, according to the "Old Icelandic Land register" (Lárusson 1967).

Björn has his own church built at Vellir and can therefore be seen in the context of my interpretive framework as having created for himself the powerful double position of an ecclesiastic and secular authority. He is both the warden and the senior priest at his church. It is worth repeating that a clergy man is never mentioned in the saga; one isn't even brought up in the scene during second day of Christmas when a mass is held at Hólmur. (That this mass should be held at Hólmur instead of Vellir is a curious "saga fact" [sögu staðreynd, a revealing old Icelandic expression] which I will later address.) But the medieval listener or reader must have realized that there was a priest in Björn's company, and they would have had the implicit sense that this preacher was none other than Björn himself. The absence of references to a priest, in fact, supports my reading of Björn's complicated signification in the saga.

It is well documented that, early on, the Church had a strong impact on the biocultural landscape of the upper Mýrar district, where it established a particularly strong presence in Hítardalur. Hítardalur monastery (1166-1201) is one indicator of this, but after it ceased to operate, Hítardalur (the churchfarm across Hítará river and opposite from Vellir) and Staðarhraun to the south remained particularly prosperous and influential ecclesiastical institutions, both becoming beneficium establishments in

1297. The Hitardalur ecclesiastic estate owned 15 farms in 1354, including Vellir (Diplomatarium Islandicum 3:84). Firmly resisting the interference of the bishopric at Skálholt, Hitardalur churchfarm was heavily involved in the contest over the management of church property and revenues in the 1270's and 1280's (M. Stefánsson 1978:127-130). In the autumn of 1143 the living quarters of Hitardalur farm burned down, resulting in the loss of 72 lives, including bishop Magnús Einarsson who was visiting. The churchwarden, Þorleifur beiskaldi Þorláksson, survived this fire which is the costliest in terms of loss of life in Iceland's history. He donated property for the establishment of a monastery in the name of the tragic fire, but documents are unclear on this as well as other aspects of monastic life in Hitardalur (Nordal 1938:91)

It is stated in the biography of bishop Árni of Skálholt (M. Stefánsson 1975:130) that Hitardalur estate had been handed over to the church on the condition that a monastery would be established there. Presumably, landowners, most notably the churchwarden at Hitardalur farm itself, were willing to hand over titles, whereas the wealthy bishopric obligated itself to provide some of the resources necessary for the building and operation of the monastery. It can only be speculated that authorities at Hitardalur cloister operated that institution without regard to orders given by the bishop in Skálholt. Nordal writes

(1938:92): "...it can not been doubted that there was cloister living in Hitardalur for a time, even though this [establishment] never became an ordinary cloister and, in the end, did not acquire the home-estate." As I hope to demonstrate, the tragic fire and the irregular (unusual) aspects of monastic living in Hitardalur--accounting for the mystique surrounding it--may have partially inspired the making and content of Bjarnar saga, with its multiple meaning structures.

Where it says that Björn had his own church built at Vellir, the saga quotes the memory of Runólfur Dálksson. This man was a prominent priest in the late-11th and early 12th century, one of the instigators for the Hitardalur monastery, and may have written an account about Björn Arngeirsson Hítðalakappi, as Nordal thinks (1938:83-85,92). The saga is hereby telling us that a church was built at Vellir, but that it is out of existence at the time when the saga is written. Although I have not been able to find any trace of a church at Vellir in documents (nor does Nordal mention it), it is my contention that in historical memory, Björn's church at Vellir occupies a position of Hitardalur's "primordial church", and the fortress which Björn builds with his "outlaws" around Hólmur occupies a position of Hitardalur's "primordial monastery." A detailed symbolic and direct analysis of Bjarnar saga provides us with a window into historical memory and reconstruction of the ways

in which the clergy and ecclesiastic institutions evolved and rose to dominant positions (through intermittent falls or changes) in the upper Mýrar district. The saga reflects on "remembered" contentious issues surrounding the establishment of churchly institutions in Hitardalur, as well as on circumstances and conflicts which date to different historical moments--those preceding, concurrent and following the period during which the Hitardalur monastery operated. As we will see, some of what is portrayed in Bjarnar saga takes after late 11th and 12th century material social developments, which may not have been anticipated in the early 11th century, where the narrative's stage is located.

Björn fares well economically and accumulates wealth through various means. Þórður appears to have enough wealth to pay the hefty fines imposed on him, for hiring men to kill Björn, and to send abroad with outlaws. However, in contrast to Björn, Þórður continues to be portrayed in dire circumstances through burlesque descriptions of desperate attempts to reap the benefits from his access to beach and marine resources. He is bit by a seal on his beach during one icy winter, as he appears to be scavenging for food, looking for dead fish or pursuing a dying seal. Björn makes an insulting verse (#18) about Þórður's accident in which he refers to Þórður as mörhákur, "the gluttonous eater of intestinal fat." Later, in poem #21 he calls Þórður a

"cowardly big eater."

Björn's Grámagaflim, the three verse "Lumpfish-satire" (#26, 27, 28), elaborates Þórður's attachments to the borders of land and sea, and the periphery of Hítarnes estate. Grámagaflim pokes fun at Þórður's bequest, origins and legacy, and sets up a comparison between the conception-endowment of a churchwarden, on the one hand, and a spiritual person or ecclesiastic on the other. These verses--which suggest that Þórður is the progeny or reincarnation of a dead lumpfish which made his mother pregnant after she ate it--present an absurd and negative take on the sacred Virgin birth. Björn grossly portrays Þórður's profane, mortal status by emphasizing his earthly origin, associated with carnal consumption of a dying fish, as opposed to receiving tokens of the Holy Spirit or the Eucharistic elements through Holy Communion. Grámagaflim provides a strong contrast to Kolli's elevated, spiritual origins depicted earlier. Kolli miraculously takes after Björn (whom Oddný prefers above Þórður according to one of Björn's poems), instead of Þórður, his lowly father. Neither the procreation of Kolli nor Þórður is directly associated with an act of sexual intercourse; instead, one is likened to the birth of Christ; the other is an absurd, negative take on the logic of the Virgin birth. The grotesqueness of the father signifier and the fact that "he" (fish is masculine gender in Icelandic) is consumed creates

images of Þórður's mother and the birth of her son which are antithetical to Virgin Mary and the birth of Christ. It occurs to me also, although I am not going to elaborate at this point, that the dead fish-father in Grámaqaflím makes reference to a symbol which was perceived as belonging to "primitive Christians."

Verse #26 begins with the expression fiskur gekk á land, meaning "fish drifted ashore." Literally this means "fish walked up on land," but certain human qualities are clearly attributed to the ugly fish. Verse #26 refers to "him" (i.e. the fish) as hrognkelsi, the common neuter noun lumpfish (cyclopterus lumpus), which inhabits the shallow seawater near the Icelandic beaches. But the verses refer to this creature as grámagi as well, so does the title of the satire. In Iceland today, grámagi, literally "graystomach," refers to immature lumpfish, because of its appearance before it can be easily identified as either male or female. According to Fritzner's Ordbog over det gamle norske sprog (1954:I,629) grámagi used to mean simply lumpfish, but among the medieval literature the word only appears in Bjarnar saga. In recent usage it refers to an immature lumpfish. Quite clearly, grámagi is composed from the words for female and male lumpfish, grásleppa and rauðmagi. Therefore we might say that the being from which Þórður descends is portrayed as hermaphroditical fish which lives and dies on the borders of land and sea. (Þórður's

dead, washed up fish father-figure may also suggest that Þórður is the descendant of a line of bygone seagoers.)

For medieval Icelanders Grámagi may have called up the noun grámunkur, meaning a monk dressed in gray cloak. Grámunkur was the Icelandic word for gray friar, the Franciscan friars of the mendicant order, who were named after the color of their habit and lived on alms or by begging. The Icelandic monasteries were either Benedictine or Augustinian orders, and Icelandic ecclesiastics may have looked down on the gray friars. Hitardale monastery, in operation from 1166-1201, was populated with Benedictine monks who opposed extreme asceticism and beggary (M. Stefánsson 1975:82-83). The Hítarnes churchwarden appears akin to ascetic gray friars given their conceptualization as fake ecclesiastics who went on begging and exploiting others in the name of the good church.

Overall, in terms of my interpretation, Bjarnar saga expresses degrading opinions about the first Icelandic churchwardens, who were secular persons. Þórður is presented as a fishing peasant, essentially the dependent occupant of Hítarnes who makes a living like a scavenger. In Grámagaflim Björn describes Þórður's (the private-churchwarden's) profane, dependent status and dire circumstances in term of his grotesque asexual begetting in order to create a stark contrast to the genesis and endowment of true ecclesiastics. On another semantic level,

Björn's description of Þórður as someone who owes his image to a dead, gray fish could mean that he has a bit in common with the dispossessed gray friars.

Björn had to pay Þórður 24 ounces silver for having erected a pole inscribed with poem #20 on the latter's estate. But this fine equals the amount of briggja marka útleigð ("three half-pounds payment") which one is liable to pay for having made a poem about someone which does not contain personal insult, or háðung (Grágás 1992:273). In contrast, Þórður had to pay tremendously high damages to Björn for one libellous ditty. Þórður's poem #19 is clearly one of the otherwise undocumented kolluvisur poems, the satirical verses which Þorkell Dálksson recited, upon which he was subsequently and justifiably killed by Björn. I will argue that Kolluvisur is particularly offensive and profane poetry: it suggests that there is a hidden side to the elevated lifestyle and matrimony of the clergy; namely, non-marital, sexual activities looked upon as both inappropriate and perverse. These sexual practices include intercourse with animals and female church-servants, as well as with junior monastics, assuming that the use of the term kolla makes a vague reference to kolli. The argument below concerning kolluvisur anticipates my subsequent discussion of Björn's depiction as primogenitor of the Hitardalur monastery, which was an order of kolli's (monks) so to speak, and closed down after 35 years of operation for

reasons that have little documentation. For now, we set aside what has been said about Kolli, the figure of a pure monastic, who purifies Björn's tarnished legacy, and signs on to a hopeful future, without the sins which his two imperfect fathers paid for with their lives.

Þórður's fine and the stipulation which Björn ordered against the reciting of kolluvisur shows poem #19 to be the only cause for a serious invoking of sections 114-116 of the Vígaslóði section of Grágás (1992:273-274). These legal articles include discussion of defamatory speech, poetry and behavior and of the legal proceedings and punishments against these acts. Article 115 (p.274) states that a man who kills another can bring up in his defense a libelous ditty which the slain person had made about the slayer. The harshest possible punishments mentioned in these articles are "greater outlawry" (full outlawry, skóggangur, which one might escape from by paying an extremely high fine), and where it says that the guilty person "would fall (die) unholy" (skyldi óheilaqur falla). Article 114 names three words each of which amounts to the most serious offense when used in poetry about another man, and it is here where the uncommon expression skyldi óheilaqur falla is used, instead of the common expression óhelqur að löqum ("dis-inviolate by law") or the less common vera óheilaqur ("to be considered unholy").

The three most abominable words are raqur, meaning a

homosexually oriented male, a male sexually oriented towards someone other than a woman, or cowardly; stroðinn, or "having fucked"; and sorðinn, or "been fucked." Below I will argue that poem #19 contains suggestions about Björn's sexual behavior which would have amounted to a serious offense; later I will argue that the recitation of Kolluvisur and the use of the big three profane words were conceived of as profanation or blasphemous offense against the order of God, in addition to being an offense against a particular individual.

Poem #19 may be only one of a number of kolluvisur verses which existed, and the vanished poems may have been too graphically blasphemous to survive past the pen of the saga writers or transcribers, who may in fact have been ecclesiastics. However, the one surviving poem plus the title of the series are extremely revealing and useful for my analysis of this saga. Þórður construes several vivid references to multiple types of sexual behavior and orientation out of a scene which, as far as we can see and the saga tells us, shows Björn performing uncomfortable, demeaning labor in his byre. The saga tells us that his laborer, who later rumored the story, had refused to pick the newborn calf out of the dung channel.

In poem #19 Þórður calls Björn coercive and dominating at home (heimaríkur). One quite obvious hint about Björn's sexual practices is the use of the word rangur. The poem

uses the expression rangur kálfur, literally "reverse calf," in saying that Björn picked up the young calf by grabbing for its rear. Significantly, rangur also meant erroneous, sinful, or perverse (same as rangsnúinn: wrongly oriented). Rangur was the Icelandic term for the latin word perversitas. As for a more subliminal suggestion, the word rangur strongly resembles the word ragur, i.e. one of the profane words which meant homosexually oriented, obviously with an extremely negative connotation. The poem also states that Björn performed his work of saving the calf "under the dirty tail of a cow." Björn's sexual intercourse with animals seems to be suggested in Þórður's poem.

But kálfur (calf) could also mean "young dolt," and Kálfur was a rare masculine name (Kálfur is Þórður's ally in the saga, who became Björn's tenants, whom he later evicted before killing his son). The use of the word kolla for a cow in the poem and the title kolluvisur is more revealing, however, for the purpose of my overall analysis of the saga. As I will show, the use of this word in the context in which it is used, implicates figure of Björn in multiple types of sexual practices (heterosexual, homosexual and bestial); furthermore, it links indiscriminate sexual practice to the world of ecclesiastics. My discussion below is seen as part of my efforts to establish Björn's rather occulted clerical identity, and that Bjarnar saga should be analyzed on one level as an allegorical reflection on the history of

ecclesiastical institutions and practice, especially with respect to the monastery in Hitardalur.

The common medieval Icelandic words for a cow were kýr and kú, as they are still today. The word kolla in poem #19 obviously refers to a cow, but this neither reflects the usual reference to a cow, nor the common use of the word kolla. Today, kolla is the common word for a dehorned ewe (and a female eiderduck), and, although less often used, for a dehorned cow. In medieval Norse, unlike modern Icelandic, kolla occurs commonly as a female identifier in compound words (Fritzner 1954:II,287,314), most notably in kirkjukolla, a woman who grew up while serving the church, but also in selkolla, "shielling woman." I infer that the kolla in kolluvisur implied kirkjukolla. This category of a bonded servant, who served a particular priest and received material support from the church, was also called kirkjukerling or "church-crone," according to Fritzner (1954:II,287). It should be mentioned here that in Björn's poem #18, which provoked Þórður to make the poem I am discussing (#19), the seal that bit Þórður is called ljót kerling, or "ugly crone."

Like kolli, kolla derives from the root kollr, the meaning of which I discussed earlier. The adjective Kollóttur, common in Old and Modern Icelandic, reflects further on the meaning and use of these two derivatives. Kollóttur (kollótt for feminine gender) could mean dehorned

or without horns, in reference to sheep or cattle usually; bold, shaven or without hair (in references to people); or dispossessed or poor. In addition to these meanings, kollóttur could mean headshaped, and, as I brought up earlier, kollótt kápa always referred to a monk's hood, a cowl or a hooded coat. This brings us back to kolli in the meaning of monk which I discussed earlier, where I explained the storyteller's choice of the name Kolli for Björn's "adopted," spiritually conceived son. It appears that Kolluvisur, poem #19 and the title itself, include an profane reference to monastics. I should add here that the word kolla was also used to mean a chamber pot. This fact may have contributed to the abominable insult of kolluvisur. By using the word kolla for a cow, in the context of Björn's behavior in the byre (according to Þórður's poem), the word kolli is implicated. To feminize monastic figures this way, by suggesting their homosexual orientation, may have been characteristic of medieval Icelandic farming society. Notice that Þórður's son Kolli does not appear in the narrative until after events concerning kolluvisur have transpired.

The slander between the archrivals goes back and forth, and their dealings become ever more violent. Their friends in the home district (vinir þeirra heima í héraði) advise them to settle their disputes without bringing them up at the spring or autumn district-assemblies (the vorþing and

haustþing). Þórður appears to be the one who holds the most grudges, initiates the violence, and recruits armed supporters. Þórður quite clearly needs to hire outsiders, who lodge with him, for his attempts to kill Björn--first Þórður's paternal relatives from Oslo fjord, then two men from the distant Northwest, also brothers. He also needs to be manipulative and secretive, for example, when he gets young Þorsteinn Kálfurson to confront Björn without Kálfur's knowledge, setting Þorsteinn up to be killed, as it appears, in order to have a legal case against Björn.

Saga writers, recorders or transcribers may have subscribed to the persistent appearance of Þórður as the aggressor. Nordal (1938:84,92) suggests that "the author" (höfundur) of the saga, who wrote it based on assimilating oral tales and poetry and ecclesiastics' written accounts, made sure that Björn would be depicted as the "saga-hero of the dale" (söguhetja dalsins), as well as a devout Christian, because of his relationship with the Holy king Ólafur. I find Nordal's insights valuable, but I would add that if "the author" assimilated and edited circulating oral tales and written accounts about Björn Hítðalækappi in order to write the saga, then he did so without "weeding out" narrative material and depictions which contradict this semblance, the picture of Björn as benign essentially and subject to fateful circumstance.

Björn is repeatedly offered assistance, physical

support and knowledge, necessary for him to stay safe and out of trouble. Still, the text reveals repeatedly in subtle ways that Björn goes looking for his enemies, and instead of avoiding his enemies when he knows where they are, he chooses to fight them, most preferably on his own. I will be turning to the latent signs of The King in Björn, his identification with Saint King Ólafur, and his return to his original position of vulnerability, sacrifice, dispossession and exclusion: I will discuss the circumstances which had forced Björn to take on a series of double-binding socioeconomic roles, the fatal one being played out on orders from a saintly king who was the ultimate figure of a destructive paradox, which manifested itself in the small community upon the home-return of the saga's hero.

We must take an extensive look at how Björn becomes empowered by the gifts, assistance and tribute he receives from his community, and at the way he perceives himself and positions others in the contexts of smaller and larger worlds. The ways in which Björn empowers and enriches himself are revealed to us in a matter of fact fashion, but a close reading identifies several means by which he accumulates property and income, exerts his influence, builds alliance inside his district, and engages in economic exchange with people in an adjacent district. Björn acquires marine products from his relations on the

Snæfellsnes peninsula, at 60 to 100 km distance from Hítardalur. Meanwhile, Þórður has these very same products to sell, and it is to Hítarnes which Þorsteinn Kálfurson, Björn's neighbor and dependent farmer, goes to buy seal.

Björn sees himself as the man of the wider world from which he acquired the title "champion of Hítardale," and elevated position of religious-oratorical authority. In contrast, Björn's poetry shows Þórður to be of lowly, profane origins, and as homebound, cowardly eater and beach-scavenger. Poem #18 depicts him lazy in his bed, gulping down animalbowel fat; also on his seal-beach, swarming in the mud after an "ugly crone," referring to the seal which bit him. Björn refers to himself by using elevated terms for a seafarer, the poetical circumlocutions hafviggi, for the merchant seaman (poem #24), and humar brautar hlunnur, for the champion of the sea (poem #29).

While Björn announces his own foreign connections, he satirizes on Þórður's. Furthermore, with violence and the appropriation of Þórður's silver currency, Björn undermines Þórður's economic and social ties to foreign ground. Aided by his own relatives and in-laws, Björn kills the two Norwegian merchants who were Þórður's paternal relatives and had come to lodge with him. Þórður harbors two "outlaws," then attempts to smuggle them out of the country with some goods. Björn locates both men, kills them, and appropriates their goods and money. He also takes fifty ounces of silver

from the two brother's from Hornstrandir, but Þórður had paid them in advance half the amount which he promised to pay them for bringing him Björn's head.

I analyze below with the use of examples that Björn empowers himself while contributing to Þórður's disempowerment in three major ways, or for three major reasons, reflecting specific trends in the history of Iceland's political economy: first, ecclesiastics become increasingly engaged with foreign trade, soon after 1022, when king Ólafur Haraldsson signed a trade agreement with Icelanders. Second, the formation of congregations and parishes around headchurches (parish-churches) introduced a series of new tribute forms, including the tithe, and service charges, transforming the social, cultural, political, ideological landscapes, and setting the stage for the rapid development of dependent land-tenure and other property lease. Third, farming communities made up of freeholder-households for the most part, gradually developed into communities where there were numerous dependent farmers, living on land and livestock which had been leased to them by ecclesiastic estates, which also offered them access to "communal" grazing areas.

As mentioned earlier, by the mid-11th century the Norwegian Church had become a powerful participant in mercantile exchanges. The influence and role of Icelandic clergy in foreign trade before the 13th century has been

minimized or overlooked by historians, while the need to acquire materials necessary for church buildings and services has been emphasized (Jóhannesson 1974:317-335; Lindal 1974:268-275). Verses #14 and #15, which Björn and Þórður trade at Hitarnes, allude to Björn's connections with foreign trade, and Þórður's dependence on him in that respect. Here Þórður insists that Björn had promised him rye but brought him something instead which turned into ash once it had been blended with water. (Clearly, Þórður is also saying that Björn promised to offer something to the household which sustains life immortal but brings death and destruction instead.) I note also that the gifts, a belt and a knife, which Björn extends to Eiríkur, the dependent-farmer who became his spy, appear to be imported objects (see Jóhannesson 1974:308-309).

As I discussed earlier, Björn kills Þórður's merchant relatives from Norway, and he appropriates goods which Þórður had been attempting to export--or, as the saga portrays it, smuggle out--from the country. Overall, and I include what has been said about Saint King Ólafur's role in enhancing as well as regulating trade in and out of Norway, Bjarnar saga reflects on a historical process towards trade oligopoly and institutionalization, and links this to the breakdown of small-scale mercantile exchanges based on kinship, and given Björn's retirement from seafaring, fictive kinship, domestic marriage arrangements, as well as

personal friendships (e.g. between Skúli and Jarl Eirík), accompanied by the exchanges of gifts and feast.

Þórður does not become a landlord like Björn, and his supporters are shown to be freeholders, their sons and laborers. Dálkur, Björn's neighbor at Húsafell (just to the north on the opposite east side of Hítará river), and Kálfur, who ends up buying land in Selárdalur (a valley adjacent to Hitárdalur), are among Þórður's allies. In my analysis, Björn signifies a terminating force against an historical class of yeomen which included churchwardens and independent smallholders. I am generalizing from the observation that Björn kills three freeholders' primary heirs, the first sons of Þórður, Kálfur and Dálkur. Clearly, those three killings are responsible for the escalation of the hostilities and violence.

Kálfur and Dálkur are relatives. I note that both their names were exceedingly rare. Kálfur is the common noun for calf. Dálkur is a noun which specifically referred to an autumn-lamb which had been fed milk throughout the summer (i.e. a suckling lamb in the fall, suitable for culling). As Þórhallur Vilmundarson (1991) has shown in his study of Harðar saga and several shorter sagas, many saga characters' names derive from or are created using terms for landscape, farms and natural resources. Instead of reflecting on the possible significance of the names Kálfur and Dálkur, I just want to point out that there is a farm

near Hítarnes, just across the Hítará river called Stóri-Kálfalækur meaning "Big-calfsbrook." In 1686 the farmstead Litli-Kálfalækur ("Small-calfsbrook") was next to it (B. Lárusson: 1967). In some cases, saga characters' names may have been chosen on the basis of the name of farm where they are said to have lived, making it seem like the farm was named after them or after a namesake ancestor. Examples of this from Brennu-Njáls saga would be Höskuldur and Höskuldsstaðir, Hrutur and Hrutstaðir, Bergþóra/Bergþór and Bergþórshvoll. I find it likely that the Kálfur, who is nicknamed "illvit" but has no genealogy, owes his name to Kálfalækur, as to indicate to us that he had been Þórður's neighbor before Björn lured him away. The man's name, Dálkur, may indicate that this person is someone who practices the intensive rearing of lambs and emphasizes wool production.

There is nothing in the saga which suggests to us that Björn extracts tithe income from his neighbors. After all, the tithe tax was not instituted until around 1100. But we can assume that the people among whom the tales of Björn originated and circulated understood his growing influence and material accumulation in the context of the formation of a parish and congregation around his church at Vellir. Björn's social circle, where he dominates, is indicated with obscurity, but elements of religious practices and influence, as well as landlordism, are evident. Þorsteinn

Kuggason from Ljárskógar (a farm located 60 km to the north of Hitardalur) and his wife Þorfinna, who is a first cousin of Björn's wife Þórdís, become Björn's foremost advocates after being his accidental guests and attending a mass at Vellir. The episode which culminates with Björn's Christmas feast for his guests I would interpret by saying that Björn forcefully saves Þorsteinn and his company, who were lost and dying of cold exposure, by luring them into his congregation on Christmas. (There is no mention of a church at Húsafell, where Dálkur was giving a Yule party.)

Björn has an unnamed sister who lives on Knarrarnes, a small island close to Hjörsey (where Oddný is from), and he has relatives and in-laws who live farther away on the Snæfellsnes peninsula. Many of Björn's allies, supporters and co-residents are obscure or obscurely presented to us, especially the outlaws who reside with him and the female "friend" with whom he overnights and appears to sleep. When Þorsteinn's party stays with him, there are present in his household thirty men who carry weapons. When Björn is fighting his last battle, presumably fifteen of his men are attending to business on Snæfellsnes (with Þorfinnur Þvarason, the saga says), while others, called domestic male-servants (húskarlar), are rounding up sheep in Langavatnsdalur or have gone some other way. As it turns out (and I discuss later in this chapter), those who abandon, betray, and expose him, inadvertently or not, are

intimates--his male workers, his female servant, and his father.

The saga gives us some sense for alliances--coercive and exploitative, as well as voluntary and reciprocal--between Björn the ecclesiastic landlord, on the one hand, and the lower peasantry and various women, on the other. Among those who aid or favor Björn are a dependent farmer, Eiríkur in Grjótárdalur, and a domestic servant of Dálkur's, who debates with Þorsteinn and talks him into reciting kolluvisur. Björn also appears to have spies everywhere, and women take on the role of warning him about where his enemies are, based on their interpretations of his dreams.

Björn leased Hólmur out to Kálfur and his son Þorsteinn. We are clearly told that Kálfur pays land rent to Björn and that at least some of the yielding and reproducing livestock which Kálfur kept at Hólmur was on lease from Björn. The conversations between Þorsteinn and Björn suggest that Kálfur and Þorsteinn paid land rent (or land rent plus livestock hire) in the form of taking care of and increasing Björn's livestock. A mix of arrangements came to exist, although, as far as we can find out for sure from normative documents, formal, elaborate, and regulated rent agreements concerning land, livestock, and other property, based on one year contracts, were not widespread until in the late 12th century. Kálfur and Þorsteinn are forced to leave Hólmur because Björn had accumulated so much livestock

that he needed both his farms to keep and rear his animals. Certain unspecified aspects of the rent agreement between the two parties is said to hold after Kálfur and Þorsteinn have left, but they buy two farms in Selárdalur, to the west of Hitardale. As it turns out, this leftover agreement concerns a number of wethers, which had been raised by Kálfur and Þorsteinn at the time they occupied Hólmur, and continued to graze on the land owned or managed by Björn. The reader is left uncertain as to whom these wethers belong.

Björn himself refers to his original agreement with Kálfur and son as sameiginlegar fjárreiður, which directly translates as "cooperative farming and pecuniary arrangements," and is clearly a euphemistic description of a landlord-tenant relationship. Björn describes dependent land-tenure and centralized management of "communal" grazing (on afrétt: land of shared grazing rights) with an expression that is frequently seen in Icelandic family sagas in reference to the cooperative economic arrangements between relatives, in-laws, and close friends. He calls Kálfur his friend as he offers to pay damages for his slain son. The new landlord and parish ruler uses expressions which invoke social relations within a kin-ordered and communal mode of production in reference to novel relationships within an emerging tributary mode of production--relations of production which are ambiguously

portrayed although Þórður sees them as extremely exploitative on Björn's part.

Kálfur is frequently portrayed as Þórður's supporter and companion, at first, during the viking raid at Brenneyjar. The saga tells us that for three years immediately before moving to Hólmur, Kálfur owned and occupied a farm in Hraundalur, where Þórður's ally, Steinólfur, also owned a farm. It therefore looks like Björn managed to attract a freeholder away from Þórður's group of allies, temporarily reducing this person's status to the position of a dependent farmer. But Kálfur and his son remain dependent on Þórður in terms of their need for marine resources (the plógur discussed earlier). When Þorsteinn Kálfurson goes to buy seal from Þórður, the latter paints for the former an illuminating picture of Björn and his so-called "cooperative farming arrangements." Þórður wants Þorsteinn to see that Björn profits from exploitative temporary lease-agreements using his land and livestock. Dependent smallholders were being thrown into a position of an ever increasing debt to Björn. The lease agreements which Björn invented amounts to lawful theft according to Þórður, who predicts that Björn would win his case against Kálfur and Þorsteinn at alþing.

Expansionist Björn, according to Þórður, accumulates wealth through short-term rent-tenure agreements, because they enable him to expand his land holdings and grazing

rights. Þórður tells us that Björn already owns, or "uses to own" (nýta að eiga) grazing land which extends all the way to the south and east of Hítardalsheiði (the heath/ridge to the northeast of Hítardale), and that he intends to appropriate the grazing rights to the west of the Hítardalsheiði as well. Björn's procurement area is depicted as considerable. I can infer (from what Þórður says, other parts of the saga, and by using a geographical map) that Langavatnsdalur, a shallow dale where Björn's laborers are rounding up sheep by the end of the saga, marks the eastern frontier of the grazing land which Björn owns the right to use, or regulates the access to; Hraundalur, where Eiríkur his spy lives, marks the southern frontier of Björn's territory in this respect.

Björn is called "the champion of Hítardale." By saying that Björn controls grazing around Hítardalsheiði, the upland heath to the east of the Hítará river, the saga implies also that his estate includes some area in the Hítardalur valley to the east of the river. The site of Hítardalur farm and church, and presumably the site of the monastery, is on the east side of the river, just across from Vellir. The saga does not mention the farmstead Hítardalur, which indicates that the erection of this farm and its church postdates the historical period for the narrative. Situated to the east of Hítará river as well are Hólmur, at the northern opening of the dale, and Dálkur's

farmstead, Húsafell (now abandoned), located midway between Hólmur and the present farmstead Hitardalur. When he eavesdrops on Þorkell Dálkurson and the laborer, Björn is said to be driving his flock from Vellir and up (towards north) the side of the valley where Dálkur's farmstead Húsafell is located (namely, the east side).

For the purpose of creating the framework for later arguments, my main point here is that the saga leads us to think that the Vellir farming area included land across the river where Hitardalur ecclesiastical farm and Hitardalur monastery were later built. We do not know what the domain of Hitardalur ecclesiastical estate was in the 12th century, that is, in terms of farmsteads and fields, grazing land controlled and managed, and area for tribute collection. We can tell that at some point in history the lands around Vellir and Hitardalur farmstead became tied to the same landowner. The Hitardalur ecclesiastical inventory, dated 1354, tells us (Diplomatarium Islandicum III:84) that the church owned Vellir farmstead across the river. It owned several more farmsteads in and around Hitardalur, and furthermore, three farms in Álftaneshreppur, a commune in south Mýrar district, among those Knarrarnes, the island where Björn's unnamed sister is said live in the saga. (There were 23 farms in Álftaneshreppur in 1686--see B. Lárusson 1967.)

Björn's neighbor Þorkell, the son of Dálkur, meets an

unholy death (féll óheilagur: "fell/departed unholy") after he recited Kolluvisur in Björn's presence. Before Björn kills Þorkell the two men had argued over the definition of Björn's status and his rights to rulership. Being confronted about his reciting act, Þorkell questions Björn's right to impose restrictions on the behavior of the people who are around him, because after all, he is not such a king over men (sá konungur yfir mönnum). Þorkell is not refuting that Björn has kingly rulership status per se. In his reply Björn appears to be claiming that he is the absolute ruler over certain persons in certain matters: Björn says that he is at least a king over Þorkell now, in that he possesses the right to execute him for having recited kolluvisur. These poems appear to represent Þórður's attempts to defame Björn's character and to delegitimize the license which declares him to be an absolute ruler in matters concerning his community's Christendom. Saying Kolluvisur seems to count as a crime which was greater or different from most defamatory speech punishable according to the secular law articles 114, 115 and 116 of Vígaslóði in Grágás. Björn uses the expression skyldi óheilagur falla, which translates directly as "would depart/fall (die) unholy," and refers us directly to the section in article 114 which discusses stipulations against the use of the three most abominable words.

Björn's choice of the word óheilagur over the

expression óhelgur að lögum ("legal inviolate status revoked") is an indication, I think, that the verses were considered a blasphemous offense directed at Björn, as well as at God's order, for which Björn stood. Björn uses the word óheilagur at alping, when he proclaims a death sentence on anyone who would recite Kolluvisur--a condition which Þorkell and the laborer discuss--then later when he defends and justifies his killing of Þorkell. Björn's choice of the expression skyldi óheilagur falla refers us directly to the particular section in article 114 which forbids the use of the big three abominable words ragur, stroðinn and sorðinn. The adjective heilagur (holy) and its derivative opposite óheilagur (unholy) occurs frequently in medieval Icelandic religious writings (Fritzner 1954:vol.1, 755-756). The word óheilagur occurs occasionally by itself in Grágás, when it mean the same as óhelgur að lögum ("legal inviolate status revoked"). The adjective helgur (the noun being helgi) was the common legal term for inviolability or protection by law, but it could also mean sacred (Fritzner 1954:vol.1,784-785). With the latter (spiritual) meaning attached to it, helgur appears interchangeable with heilagur, e.g. saints were said to be either heilagur or helgur. But when the adjective óhelgur occurs in Grágás, which is frequently, it always means "one whose legal protection or inviolability has been revoked" or "one without rights."

Björn uses the expression "dis-inviolate by law"

(óhelgir að lögum) to describe the two Norwegians as well as Þorsteinn after he had killed them. In both cases he had killed in self-defence, which was lawful according to a number of statutes in Vígslóði section of Grágás which speak on the issues of unlawful ambushes (fyrirsát) and violent assaults. The editors of Grágás (1992) say in their explanatory notes and glossary that óhelgur and óheilaður mean the same thing, i.e. "without rights," "disinviolative" or "someone who can be killed or injured justifiably". In my reading, however, I find that Grágás uses skyldi óheilaður falla in a circumscribed and specific manner. Likewise, Bjarnar saga uses the expression óhelgur að lögum vs. skyldi óheilaður falla distinctly: Þorsteinn and the Norwegian brothers, óhelgir að lögum, were killed justifiably with respect to secular law, whereas Þorkell was killed with the added justification that he was guilty of sinful speech, hence skyldi óheilaður falla.

Kristinna laga þáttur, the Canon law section of Grágás, does not contain provisions of harsh punishment separate from the secular law code. Björn's ability to defend his violent actions, and the hefty fines he is able to impose on people, refer directly to the provision within chapters of Grágás which regard civil laws. But many of Björn's actions, violent or not, are portrayed dubiously. A close analysis of them indicates the message that, in praxis, powerful ecclesiastics got away with behavior which

transgressed legal norms. Several authors have discussed cases in family sagas which show that during the Commonwealth period powerful secular leaders, aided by their kin- and friendship-based networks, had the law in their own hands (Durrenberger 1992:52-64; Miller 1990:220-257). In my next section I want to show how Bjarnar saga throws light on the extralegal privileges and worldly authority which the wealthy, influential senior clergy held, as if they existed in part outside the confines of the law and ordinary society. They were clearly conceptualized by some as outlaws of sorts.

In contrast to storytellers or saga writers avoiding making direct references to Björn's clerical identity, Björn hides his kinglike and profane identity aspect, associated with coercive, worldly authority, the use of the warrior sword, and abominable behavior. As I have already suggested, the absence of direct references to Björn's first priestly, then monastic status concerns the saga's richness in speaking the unspeakable about illicit behaviors and profane roles of the earthly-minded clergy--most prominently signified in the saga by the Saintly Kings' leg-thong, the "snake" around Björn's leg, which slowly poisons him until he dies.

Saint King Ólafur handed out only one sword, which Þórður acquired, but Björn developed tendencies which characterized the Saintly King, equipped with a sword and

wearing religious vestments--which somehow translates into one person holding two swords. We should say that an idea that God had handed out only one sword which was to be carried by worldly leaders predominated in 12th century Iceland. The idea that God had handed out two swords, one to secular authorities, the other to the bishop, was introduced in the late 12th century along with the contested notion that the church was set above secular rulers (M. Stefánsson 1975:155-159). The Old Icelandic law code makes the church and bishops subservient to the secular authorities in matters other than those which directly concerned religious service. These power-relationships were contested by the Bishop Þorlákur in the 1180's and '90's, but it was not until after Iceland's annexation by Norway, during Árni Þorláksson's reign as bishop at Skálholt (1269-1298), that the bishops acquired considerable authority over church property, and were made judges in matters concerning the rights of priests, as well as their transgressions of blasphemous behavior, illegitimate marriages, concubinage and so forth.

Björn clearly tries to avoid the appearance of being a man of the warrior's sword, but it becomes increasingly difficult for him to keep his promise to the Saintly King, or, in the context of a subtext analysis, to comply with a legal stipulation which says that priest should not carry or use weapons. At the urging of Þorlákur bishop in Skálholt,

Eysteinn the archbishop in Norway, whose authority extended over Iceland as well, sent in 1180 a letter to the most prominent district leaders in Iceland (Diplomatarium Islandicum 1:260-264). In this letter he scolds Icelanders for their sinful ways, concerning sexual practices, begetting out of wedlock, and concubinage. But he also "reminds" ecclesiastics (kennimenn, the learned men) that they were not to engage in emulation/rivalry (kappsemd) or carry weapons (vopnaburður). Eysteinn reiterates this message in another letter to Icelandic clergy in 1189 (Diplomatarium Islandicum 1:284-289). I have already brought up several studies which show that Icelandic ecclesiastics were engaged in what was deemed by some as sinful communion or intercourse with women. We might assume, given the archbishop's letters, that clergymen were known for carrying weapons. Notice that the archbishop uses the word kappsemd, meaning emulation or rivalry, in describing characteristics which ecclesiastics were not to display. Kappi, meaning a battling or ambitious champion, is part of Björn's nick-name Hítðlakappi, and Þórður calls Björn kappi to his face for having killed the two outlaws which he had been harboring. Bjarnar saga tells us in elaborate ways that Björn's use of the sword and, more subtly, having a wife and a concubine are among the crimes and misdemeanors which bring him down.

"Fall varð manni að fjörtjóni," says Björn in poem #25,

which means that a man has died on account of his own falling. He is referring to the death of Þorsteinn, who was strangled. Björn offers to pay damages to Kálfur for the loss of his son because he wants their friendship and "cooperative economic arrangements" to continue. The dead bodies of Þórður's men, whom he had sent to kill Björn, are of no value to him because the men all died without inviolability. Björn announces in the poem (#25) about Þorsteinn's death, that he had taken the life of Kálfur's son without using "warrior-weapons" (hervopn)--implying as well that some other type of "weapons" are legitimate for him to use. [Different kinds of warrior-weapons are named in the Old Icelandic Canon law (Grágás 1992:43), as those weapons which men were not allowed to bring with them to church. These weapons are axe, sword, pike, spear, and heavy double-sided axe.] Even if Björn had used a sword, or any other type of warrior-weapon, his killing would have been justified under the secular law, because Þorsteinn made the initial assault; furthermore, the unlawful strangling of a person was just as serious a form of slaying as any other (Grágás: 210, 213, 266). It seems therefore that Björn is announcing in poem #25 that he still keeps his promise to the Saintly King based on the literal reading of that promise which says that Björn shall not act as a warrior by using hervopn.

Björn kills the others among Þórður's friends,

relatives and hitmen in unusual, peculiar ways which clearly serve to deflect his violent actions (making him look like he stays with his promise to the saintly king), rather than a need to stay within the laws in Grágás. Kolbeinn the son of Þórður dies by his own spear, which Björn returns to him, by throwing it through the body of the man who stood in front of Kolbeinn. Björn uses his shield instead of sword to kill Eyvindur, the older Norwegian brother, who was already lying on the ground when Björn smashed him. He also kills by grasping enemy spears from the air and simply returning them. In the case of Steinn's slaying, Björn is said to throw his own spear in the direction where he was going, but an enemy happened to be standing in the spear's way. Only gradually, as he is having a series of demented dreams--while staying with his sister, female friend (concubine?) and wife--, and after he has given away his ring and religious vestment, Björn's willfulness for fighting and tendency towards self-destruction become evident.

On three occasions Björn's close involvement with certain women gives him access to prophecies of violent battles against his enemies, but these foresights are presented as warnings to him, as to where his enemies are located and what they are up to. Most readers of Biarnar saga may find that Björn does not heed the women's advises, or the forewarnings which the dreams seem to constitute.

After all, Björn says to Þórdís, "I don't let dreams determine my journeys." In my analysis, however, Björn heeds these foresights in the sense that they allow him to make the decision to fight his enemies, now that he knows where they are and what they are up to. From this perspective, the previsions, warnings and dissuasions represent temptations, which Björn confronts and always gives in to. The warnings or temptations come in three times three. There are three women who listen to Björn's dreams and three dreams or overnightings, and Björn's wife asks him three times not to leave their house after he tells her his dream. Such numerical events evoke scenes from the Bible.

Björn's inherent willingness to fight, to kill or be killed, is disguised and highlighted at the same time. It is highlighted in that Björn is always said to spot his enemies before they notice him, then he decides to confront them. Björn's dreams are fatalistic previsions of his own fall, associated with the competing willpowers of prophetic goddesses and a warrior valkyrie. In his ambiguous dreams, the blood on his hands and sword is both his own and that of others. It is the blood of others on his sword that leads to the spilling of his own blood, which also signifies his own sins. Unlike the final battle, which ends by Þórður killing Björn, the first two of the three ambushes which follow Björn's dreamseeings show Þórður as unaggressive.

Þórður is depicted in the passive-aggressive position of inviting Björn to fall before his own temptation to be the warrior who has blood on his hands.

Björn's eye pain and gradual loss of sight begin directly afterwards, and can be seen as the result of his giving away the gold-ring and spiritual cloak, and having sworn to blood vengeance, considered a "heathen custom" (heiðinn siður, more specifically Ásatrúar siður, i.e. custom of the Old Norse religion). To the medieval storyteller and audience Björn's eye problems may have called up the Biblical story of Paul who lost his sight and subsequently regained it, signifying his ability to recognize God and observe his will. Björn's eye-pain and subsequent dim-sightedness signify that he was on the road of losing sight of Christian principles and betraying his promise to the Saintly King. But it is left ambiguous whether Björn has simply lost his faith in and observance of God, or if he was willed to sacrifice himself like Jesus for the betterment of his community, notably his spiritual successor, Kolli.

Ambiguity surrounding Björn's identity and legacy is expressed through the paradoxical representation of the women of/in his dreams, but also the women in his waking life who play fatalistic roles in his demise: Björn hands over to Þorfinna (Þorsteinn Kuggason's wife and a cousin of Björn's wife Þórdís) the gifts he had received from Saint

King Ólafur which were tokens of Christendom. Her name begins with Þor, which is the name of the warrior god (Ás) in the Old Norse religion Ásatrú. [This warrior god was called both Þór and Þor.] Also beginning with the name of the warrior god are the names of Björn's wife and mother, Þórdís, and Björn's friend, Þorbjörg, whom he spends three nights with and who interprets his dreams. Björn's dream series takes place when he is with his sister, female friend, and wife (in that order). Björn's liaison with Þorbjörg in particular may have been understood as having contributed to his sinfulness, because of her appearance as his concubine. His wife's role in the saga is doubtful and complicated to analyze. Her character is vague, as I will explore in a moment. She is not presented as a "believable" person; rather, she appears to represent an extension of his mother, whose name is also Þórdís. The male names, Þórður and Þorsteinn, also begin with Þor, but I choose not to pursue the possible significance at this point.

The women in Bjarnar saga are elusive figures. They are underdeveloped characters which means that we are given few insight into their material social circumstances and experience. Instead of being visible as concrete individuals, they appear as mediums of male interaction and exchange. Thus I would argue that Bjarnar saga, unlike some other family sagas (see Kress 1980) testifies predominately for male centered views and to the social experiences of

males. As I have shown throughout my discussion of the saga, Oddný "acts" as a mirror for the conception of the leading male characters, and signifies the role transformations which they go through.

Whereas male nick-names (e.g. Hitdælakappi, illviti, karl) have a very concrete reference to social status, position, or character, Oddný's added title, "island-torch" (Eykyndill), has a strongly figurative and religious meaning. The noun kyndill (from latin candela) was normally used in referring to a church-candle, or a light in a church (Fritzner 1954:II,379). In the medieval Icelandic literature Kyndill occurs most frequently in the compound word kyndilmessa, or Candlemas. Candlemas, observed on February 2nd, was also called "the purification mass of Mary" (hreinsunarhátið Mariu, purifictio sanctæ Mariæ). Oddný's nick-name thus suggests her identification with Virgin Mary, and it emphasizes purification, spiritual guidance and protection, as I will show below.

A charter document dated to ca. 1200 (Diplomatarium Islandicum 1: 303-304) tells us that there stands a private, non-parish church on the island of Hjörsey, where Oddný is from, according to the saga. We do not know when this isolated church was first erected on the island, but it may have figured as an inspiration for Oddný's character and her nick-name in the saga. The charter says that "the farmer is obligated to keep the church lit from later Mary's mass

[September 8] and through the week of Easter." This particular stipulation is included in several ecclesiastical charters from the late 12th century, including the charter for Hitarnes from 1181. I would argue that the candle burning associated with Virgin Mary calls up the circumstances of (and was invoked by) medieval seafarers who faced numerous risks on the ocean and stayed away from Iceland through the winter. Some were betrothed to a woman, and some would be praying to Virgin Mary.

Icelanders often sailed to Norway in the fall, then returned home the next spring. They left as the candles of Mary were lit, and sometimes returned before her candles were extinguished. Lights on islands meant protection to seafarers; the specific light-house on Hjörsey, Eykyndill, must have spelled spiritual guidance, protection and purification as well. In Bjarnar saga, this island torch is the church which Oddný signifies. This interesting symbolic association and condensation reflects on Björn's move from being a seafarer to being an ecclesiastic, and it emphasizes the similarities and historical relationship between his two distinct careers.

I have discussed in considerable detail the saga's references to Björn's sexual behavior, but I have yet to analyze the saga's few mentions of his wife, Þórdís. It is revealing, first of all, that the saga's references to Björn's wife and earthly marriage are elusive, veiled, or

understated. I am tempted to think that the absence of a genealogical identification of her --except for the mention of her kinship with the mythical/archetypal figure Þórfinna-- is not due to a missing manuscript fragment. It might also be that these few references to Björn's wife were incorporated late into the saga by a writer, as a way of making better sense out of the collection of tales about Björn, perhaps in order to undermine an interpretation of Bjarnar saga which shows Björn associated with the church. In the context of my overall interpretation of the saga however, the references to Björn's wife acquire significance for their very vagueness and inconsistencies. Björn's marriage to Þórdís fits into the structural logic of the narrative when we see her as a part of a composite female figure, and the way Þórður identifies her in his poem "Beam/light-emanation of the day" (Daggeisli) by calling her the "Glow/illumination of the lands" (Landaljómi) .

At a horse-match Björn is said to be reciting Eykyndilsvisur ("the poems of island-torch"). His consistent naming of Oddný as "island-torch" in his poetry tells us what she means to him, that is, she is Björn's spiritual match. The two poems alluded to, Daggeisli and Eykyndilsvisur, are not included in the saga. But, as indicated by its title and female address, Þórður's poem, first refuses the suggestion that Björn's partner is Oddný, second, predicates and reiterates that Björn is married in

the spirit only. Daggeisli is clearly a title of a sacred poem. One of the most celebrated sacred poem made by an Icelander is called Geisli, performed by the cleric Einar Skúlason in 1153 (Íslenskur Söguatlas 1989:80-81).

Landaljómi (Þórður's name for Björn's wife) is a sacred feminine circumlocutive expression similar to Eykyndill. When we compare the two composite expressions Eykyndill and Landaljómi, we notice that they include words which are synonymous as well as words of opposite meaning. Like kyndill, ljómi ("glow" or "illumination") occurs frequently in medieval religious writing, for example, in "the illumination of heavenly rays" or the "the glowing from the abbots dress which the morning sun shone on" (Fritzner 1954: II,544). In creating the name Landaljómi, Þórður replaces the ey (from Eykyndill), the word for a sea-island, with land, the word meaning land. Þórður's coining of the word Landaljómi insist that Björn is "divorced" from Oddný, and that he is spiritually married where he lives away from the ocean up in Hítardalur valley.

Björn does not have any children with his wife Þórdís. Björn's wife is clearly one of two or three women who come together in one composite female representation. While Oddný represents two, separated figures of a woman--a split condition which allows us to imagine Kolli as a pure monastic--Björn's wife and mother, and perhaps his grandmother as well, together compose one ambiguous female

figure. The saga calls Björn's wife and mother by the same name, Þórdís. The saga makes no mention of Björn's grandmother. But Sigurður Nordal (1938:67-68) has convincingly suggested that the "author" of Bjarnar saga must have considered Arngeir (Björn's father) to be the son of Þórdís, the daughter of Þórhaddur Steinsson who first settled and occupied a farm in Hítardalur according to Landnámabók ("The Book of Settlement"). Both manuscripts of Landnáma, Hauksbók and Sturlubók, trace Þórhaddur's line of descendants as far as to name his grandchildren which include Arngeir. Björn himself is not mentioned in the medieval literature outside Bjarnar saga. He appears as an entirely fictive character placed on a stage along with a number of characters who take after persons who did exist according to historiographic documents and accounts. These characters include Skúli, King Ólafur and Þorkell Eyjólfsson, and perhaps Arngeir as well, but little would have documented about his life.

Therefore, rather than to discuss the possibility that references to Björn's wife were a matter of certain confusion on the part of a saga writer from around 1200, I want to suggest that storytellers gave Björn a wife without credible genealogy and named her after his mother for an artful reason. This name-giving was perhaps inspired by the fact that Arngeir married, according to Landnáma and Bjarnar saga, a woman who was his mother's namesake, that is,

Björn's mother, Þórdís. Another critical inspiration behind the saga's creation of a wife for Björn called Þórdís has to do with the very meaning of her name. Þórdís means "the goddess of Þór," "Þór's female fetch," warrior woman, or valkyrie. The name-based condensation or identification between the three Þórdís's distracts from their respective representations as Björn's earthly wife, mother, and grandmother. Instead, it underscores that these three women, belonging to three generations, together signify Björn's ambiguous path through life, from his heathen roots, to his tarnished Christianizing and his sinful yet tragic death.

In the third episode Björn's identity ceases to be indicated by an elevated relationship with the pure spiritual figure of Oddný, as she represents the early Church, Mary's church at Hitarnes in particular. As if the saga were expressing the storytellers' "historical opinion" of change towards ecclesiastics' corruption. Björn character is increasingly depicted through dealings with and visions of ambiguous female figures, representing what is benign vs. harmful, spiritual vs. material, peaceful and Christian vs. violent and prechristian. Leading up to his final social isolation, death and demise, Björn had taken off his protective tokens of clerical/spiritual identity, and committed himself to prechristian blood-vengeance and brotherhood, which are, as Þorsteinn Kuggason points out

him, antichristian practices. The couple who receive Björn's gifts and commitment are liminal figures, representing his final transition in life (Þorfinna's role) as well a certain resolution following his death (Þorsteinn's role). Þorfinna receives the spiritual vestment and ring, but her name means "Þór's battle" or "valkyrie of Þór." Þorsteinn pledges to an ambiguous brotherhood of double-sided principles or antithetical constituents. He represents the Christian side of his and Björn's oath, and paradoxically, by the end of the saga, when he represents the late Björn in some way, his readiness to risk his life leads to a nonviolent settlement. The final settlement following Björn's death includes harsh punishments, however,--hefty fines on the senior men who were involved with Björn's slaying, forced expulsion from the country on their lesser supporters.

My analysis so far has not dealt with the question of how the saga traces and constructs ultimate and original causes for Björn's demise. Björn had taken a bath with the Saintly King. This event makes sublime reference to Björn's Christianizing, the baptism he receives directly from the Saintly King. Following their bath, Björn mistakes the King's lace for his own, and the King humorously tells him to keep it, since "it would serve him no worse than the ones he had on before." This interactions between the two men indicates their mutual identification. I mention here that

Björn dies in 1025 according to Nordal's calculations and reading of the saga (1938:87). This would have been five years before King Ólafur Haraldsson met his violent death at Stiklastaðir in 1030 (then carrying the leg-thong which matched Björn's reim, in view of certain symbolic logic within Bjarnar saga--see below).

Björn had obtained more from the Saintly King than a religious vestment and a golden ring, the tokens which displaced the promise of an earthly marriage by a promise of a spiritual marriage with the Church. To Iceland he also carried Saint King Ólafur's leg-thong. By writing leg-thong I am following Bachman's (1985) translation of a thing which the saga calls reim (or ræma, both feminine gender nouns), which could mean a lace for footgear but also a band around a vellum book. Björn's reim signifies his lingering aspirations for absolutist kingly rulership, because a king had owned it and let him keep it after Björn had accidentally put it on. Furthermore, on account of its linguistic and semantic resemblance and association with the word reimir, the mistaken reim also signifies and explains Björn's return to engagement in worldly matters, as much as his desire for the "forbidden fruits" of the earth: A lace is shaped like a worm, and reimir (masculine gender; synonymous with the word (ormur) was a term used for a worm and a snake. In support of my symbolic analysis I must note that bvenqur is the Old Icelandic word which was generally

used in referring to a leg-thong; in fact, the English word thong derives from the Old Norse þvengur.

We can therefore infer that the storytellers made use of symbolism found in the Old testament, and that the kingly lace around Björn's leg alludes to "weakness of the flesh," his yearnings for secular power and authority, as well as profane sexual and other material desires and temptations. Equipped with a penis which does not afford him biological children, Björn carries within his character the figurative meanings of the snake.

Björn goes into his final battle and meets his death with Saint King Ólafur leg-thong wrapped around his leg, the reim which, like a worm, was slowly poisoning him to death immortal. Curiously enough, the saga man tells us that the ræma is kept among other mass vestments at Garðar church on Akranes (a peninsula on the other side of Borgarfjörður, opposite from Mýrar district). As if constituting an everlasting spiritual essence, deriving from a saintly king, the lace does not rot, we are told. A paradoxical subtext adds that the lace outlasted Björn's flesh, having haunted (reimt) him like the everlasting weakness of the flesh.

We are now in place to summarize and draw some conclusion from what has been said about the relationship between Björn and Þórður, and Saint King Ólafur's role in it. The Saintly King mediates in the conflict between Þórður and Björn, and he appears to assign them clear-cut, complementary material

social and spiritual social roles. This judgement, however, is part-cause for a new type of conflict; after all, Þórður possessed the churchwood, and Björn's ring was merely a replacement for the ring that had promised him earthly marriage and the fulfillment of his material ambitions. In addition, Björn was wearing the King's leg-thongs. The conflicts between Þórður and Björn at Hitarnes and the conditions which Björn creates for himself after that, which ultimately destroy him, are traced back to Saint King Ólafur's legacy. Ólafur Haraldsson was a (coercive) king who became known as saint. He paradoxically signifies synecdochically both notions, God's Kingdom on earth, and the King's absolute authority over worldly matters. In Iceland, the saga shows us, this perennial paradox manifested in the form of a conflict-ridden relationship between the ambiguous roles of church wardens, on the one hand, and clergymen on the other, as well as in the contested unity of spiritual and worldly authority invested in one person, namely, the consecrated churchwarden.

Björn's and Þórður's respective fates are ultimately traced to (or explained by) the observation that secular vs. spiritual domains of authority are not separable in praxis. As I later will show, the saga upholds the proposition that the spiritual and material are distinct in essence. Therefore, with the passing of a generation, new hopeful circumstances are created. When prominent characters self-

deconstruct or destroy each other, they are sacrificing themselves for the sake of a future generation.

Bjarnar saga tells a number of different stories. We might define those as multiple separate allegories, except for the fact, perhaps, that different discernable stories, as "histories," are closely linked together, metonymically, metaphorically, and synecdochically. A straightforward allegorical reading would simply edit out "informative" metonymic relationships between domains of meaning. The notion of a text saying one thing and meaning another is reductionist at best. I will, however, address the question of a resolution to Bjarnar saga, as its conclusion, by way of discussing several discernable endings separately.

One way in which Bjarnar saga ends can be viewed as a form of final, unproblematized solution. This ending which is fully contained within the saga's epilogue (in my linear dissecting of the narrative) is ultimately enforced by the influential, peaceful and undoubtedly Christian person, Þorkell Eyjólfsson, who otherwise plays no direct role with respect to events which take place in the saga. It can be strongly argued that this particular character refers to an individual who did exist. He is mentioned in a number of family sagas, in Snorri Sturluson's work Heimskringla (1964:394-398), and is said to be the great grandfather of Ari Þorgilsson hin fróði ("the learned"), who lived in 1068-1148 and wrote Íslendingabók (see Kristjánsson 1970:46).

The creators of Bjarnar saga call up his character clearly in terms of the way in which he is depicted in the popular Laxdæla saga, one of the longest sagas and written (down) as early as 1230 (Íslenskur Söguatlas:106).

Þorkell is not an active character in Bjarnar saga, except when he appears towards the end and presides over the settlement which follows Björn's slaying. He wants to ensure, the saga says, that his cousin Þorsteinn Kuggason is satisfied, but he sets the one condition that Þórður must not be judged an outlaw. We are reminded of Þorkell Eyjólfsson's existence at two earlier occasions. First, the saga briefly mentions him in the very beginning by saying that he was married to Guðrún Ósvífusdóttir (the main heroine character in Laxdæla saga; he was her fourth husband), and that he had been Ólafur Haraldsson's mightiest Icelandic friend and was running a ship in those days. Second, in the saga, just after Norway has become reunited under Ólafur Haraldsson, we are told: "At that time the fine man Þorkell Eyjólfsson was dealing in overseas trading. He was very well respected by King Ólafur. Þorkell was also a friend of Þórður Kolbeinsson" (Íslendinga sögur 1987:I,82).

The saga's repeated mention of Þorkell Eyjólfsson serves to contextualize the narrative, and indirectly explicate certain latent meanings in the text. As I discussed in chapter 8, references to Þorkell Eyjólfsson provides us with critical "circumstantial evidence" which

suggests that storytellers and their audiences understood that the timber which Saint King Ólafur gives Þórður was meant for building a church, making Þórður a churchwarden. Þorkell leads the matter of Björn's death, and the longstanding conflict between Björn and Þórður, towards a nonviolent, orderly solution--by which Þórður escapes outlawry but must pay hefty fines instead. His resolute efforts in the end supports my interpretation of the saga's second and third episode: Björn's and Þórður's separate missions, based on the orders from the Saintly King, come together in the end in the signifier, Þorkell Eyjólfsson, who had voluntarily taken it upon himself to create a church in Iceland, after asking Saint King Ólafur for the wood he needed for its building. In Laxdæla saga Þorkell Eyjólfsson's early christianizing mission is unambiguously stated and briefly discussed. Bjarnar saga, on the other had, problematizes this particular mission, and is more concerned with portraying the social, economic and political aspects of it, in the context of reflecting on the historical development of ecclesiastic institutions and practices.

Þorkell Eyjólfsson's role by the end of the saga either deflects from, or sets up a contrast to more complicated readings of the narrative, specifically, of its other discernable endings. I will give more space to the discussion of other, nonresolute endings to the saga, which

need to be understood in the context of its veiled references to a primordial, ultimately destructive monastic order in Hítardalur. One ending depicts Björn's final disempowerment and demise, when he has returned to his initial vulnerable circumstances, dispossessed and excluded from the community. A second portrays two boys: the homeless orphan, escaping the final battle scene, and the immature, spiritually endowed Kolli, who stops fighting and turns away from his father when he learns who he is. A third late portrait shows Oddný going through an eternal suffering over the loss of Björn and her son(s), and regretful, comforting Þórður observing her pain.

In order to understand the saga's oblique references to Björn's monastic order, as well as to Kolli, we must turn the pages back to where Björn makes outlaws build a fortress in Hítardalur, and then, to Björn's prediction of Kolli's birth, and when he sees him for the first time. The saga reads (Íslendinga sögur I:104), "One winter it was told (var það sagt) that Björn was harboring a number of full outlaws (skógarmenn) and made them build a fortress (virki) around his farm." Hólmur in Hítardalur is the farm which is being referred to here. Harboring a full outlaw (skógarmannsbjörg) was a serious offense in Commonwealth Iceland (Grágás:280, 401, 431, 432). Björn takes advantage of this when he not only kills the two outlaws whom Þórður was hiding but also appropriates the goods Þórður was trying

to smuggle with them out of the country.

The saga tells us about the rumor which says that Björn was harboring and hiring outlaws. We also learn that Björn spoiled Þórður's cause against him with respect to this particular transgression, but the saga provides no detail on this. Subsequently, before alþing, Björn says that Þórður had spoken the truth, and pays a fine. The fine that Björn pays is not specified, which is an indication that it was a small amount, a mere slap on the wrist. Furthermore, it has to do with an issue of slander against Þórður. It appears that Björn pays a fine for having acted earlier as if Þórður was lying about the skógarmenn. Nothing more is made of Björn's aiding and harboring of outlaws, or skógarmannabjörg (literally "forest-men-saving"), which was a serious legal transgression according to Grágás. This entire matter is under a veil, which could be a rhetorical strategy and/or the result of the saga writer's (or transcriber's) deletion of material from particular oral accounts. The legal term skógarmannabjörg, which Grágás uses, appears only this once in Bjarnar saga; furthermore, this word occurs rarely in the family saga literature. The same can be said for the words which are used in Grágás for outlaw, skógarmaður (plural skógarmenn) and skóggangsmáður (plural skóggangsmenn). The most common words for an outlaw in the family sagas are útlagi ("outlaw"; plural útlagar) and útilegumaður ("lying out man"; plural útilegumenn) (Amory 1992). I will discuss

the significance of Bjarnar saga's legalistic term for outlaws in a moment.

The saga clearly associates Björn's spoiling of Þórður's case (regarding the outlaws) with the fortress (virki) which Björn had built for him. The fortress represents Björn's defensive wall against law pertaining to ordinary people. The fortress symbolizes Björn's empowering isolation from civil society at large; conversely but without contradiction, it also means that when Björn is at home, he resides within the innermost protected circle of society. Notice that Björn is never in danger when he stays at his home, Hólmur.

The circular virki erected by outlaws around Björn's farm recalls Hítardalsklaustur, the monastery which operated in Hítardalur from 1166 to 1202. The Old Icelandic word virki did not necessarily mean ravage, or hervirki. Besides hervirki, virki was also a component in the words klausturvirki ("cloister fortress/wall") and kirkjuvirki ("church fortress/wall"); furthermore, cloisters and churches were sometimes referred to as helgivirki, or "holy fortress" (Fritzner 1954: 961). Thus, in Old Icelandic, holy establishments were sometimes signified by the use of a reference to a structure of physical defense. But the actual walls around Icelandic monasteries were called klausturgarður, meaning simply a cloister-fence or a wall around a cloister.

The Icelandic family sagas do not make direct references to Icelandic cloisters and monks, which makes sense since there were no monasteries in Iceland in the so-called "sagatime" (sögutími), the period which is the family stage (9th to the early 11th century). The first cloisters in Iceland were established at Þingeyrar (Southwest) in 1112, Þverá (Northwest) in 1155, and in Hitardalur in 1166--soon followed by the short lived monasteries on Flatey island (1172-1184), about which little is known, and in 1181, the long-lasting, influential and literary-productive Helgafell monastery. The last two mentioned monasteries were situated near Hitardalur to the north.

My idea that Bjarnar saga's evokes the knowledge of cloister-life in Hitardalur is not simply based on the reference to virki. Björn's skógarmenn, who built the virki, calls forth the term útlagi ("outlaw" or "outlying"), with its multiple meaning assignments. It is possible that a saga writer, perhaps a clergyman, replaced útlagar--the term Icelandic oral tales and family sagas use--with the legalistic skógarmenn, when recording or putting together the numerous tales about Björn Hítðlakappi. The use of the word skógarmenn in place of útlagar leads to less direct blasphemous comparison and identification of monastics with outlaws, i.e. a blasphemous portrayal of monastic persons, their peculiar perceived roles in society, humble dispossessory backgrounds, and evasive status with respect

to secular/civil law.

In any case, I am interested in the concept of the "outlaw" as storytellers applied it for their subversive depiction of social categories (perceived as anti-social in some sense) other than skógarmenn, i.e. the men who by a legal judgement at alþing were expelled from the country, or were forced to live in hiding and sometimes as killers for hire--see Amory 1992). I will argue that the outlaw representation of those who built Björn's virki and stayed with him puts the finger on a disguised intelligent analysis of certain facts about the life and status of monastics in an Icelandic farming community.

In her book Culture and History in Medieval Iceland, Kirsten Hastrup notes about conceptual structures an equation between the law (lög) and society, and an opposition between 'the social', or the 'inside', and 'the wild', or the 'outside'. "Outlaws were absorbed into 'the wild', actually and conceptually," she says (1985:142). She points out that lög (the law) derives from leggja (to lay down), so law was what was 'laid down' (1985:11). Therefore, according to Hastrup, útlagar were conceptualized both as 'lying out' in the wild and outside the law or society. In her studies on Commonwealth Iceland, Hastrup (1981, 1984, 1985) puts an overwhelming emphasis on reading Grágás, which Durrenberger (1992:55) has criticized her for seeing as charter for medieval Icelandic thought and

practice. She has not focused on, or considered the Icelandic family sagas to be, a critical resource for historical and anthropological research on Early Iceland. Such an oversight is curious in light of her interest in the concept útlagi, since this word is common in the family sagas but absent from Grágás. Hastrup clearly assumes that the legal term skógarmaður in Grágás was informed by, and evoked the meanings of útlagi discussed above, but this is what I have been contending as well. I will therefore elaborate on Hastrup's analysis of medieval Icелander's "conceptual structures," with regard to 'outside' vs. 'inside', law equals society/community, and the position of útlagi. I will make the argument that creators of Bjarnar saga applied the concepts útlagi (outlaw) and útlægur (outlawed) creatively--in order to convey ironic messages and express their critical social analysis.

First it should be said that storytellers must have been aware of the social fact that influential, affluent or well connected individuals who committed serious transgressions against the law/society might not receive the punishment of becoming full outlaws. On this, Bjarnar saga provides an example: when Þórður and Kálfur escape the punishment of full outlawry, because they were able to pay a hefty fine instead, and because the powerful Þorkell Eyjólfsson's condition before the judgement was that his friend Þórður should be allowed to be able to pay for his crime

by way of "wealth-payment" (fégjald), instead of being forced to leave the country. In agreement with the above observation and social fact was the realization that individuals would become legal outlaws only if they had always been outlaws in another, non-legalistic sense, i.e. individuals who were without substantial alliance support, those who were dispossessed, disinherited or excluded in one way or another from (while living within) community/society.

Now, my main concern is to show that monastic figures, including Björn, are depicted as outlaws in Bjarnar saga. The very existence of ecclesiastics, monks in particular, invited storytellers to apply a cynical understanding of "outlaw" and "outlawry" in order to describe, analyze, and explain their origins, statuses, and peculiar positions within Icelandic farming communities. For one thing, it must have been observed that a number of clergymen and monks rose from the class of the lower peasantry, had been disinherited, or were illegitimate children. In resemblance to the legal útlagi, they were to leave their farm and family of origin, worldly community, and abandon possessions and their former intimates. Of course, as I have pointed out earlier, ecclesiastical establishments must have been quite integrated into, instead of isolated from the surrounding community of farming households. But similarly, in spite of their received sentence, many outlaws would remain in hiding in Iceland, with intimates who aided and

harbored them, or district leaders who used their services as part of fulfilling their political ambitions (Amory 1992).

The use of a figure of "outlaw" to represent monastics in Bjarnar saga is clearly contingent on the observation that "God's servants" (bjónar drottins) did not view themselves as having to answer to secular authority, a living within the framework of civil law/ordinary society. Comparing monastics to outlaws was inspired by the fact that outlaws who did not leave Iceland, survived by acting outside the framework of secular law, and often performed, as Amory suggests, "dirty deeds" (illvirki) on the behalf of politically-powerful families (who had the law in their own hands) in return for material support and protection.

Thus I have built an argument for the analysis that the skógarmenn who, according to rumor, built Björn's fortress refer to monks who performed services which Björn preceded over while he protected them. Björn's obscure men or servants were in fact cloaked in two senses of that word (in cowls and under veil). The making of a fortified circle around Björn's farm at Hólmur, and his dominance within this circle or religious order--where he is portrayed, interestingly enough, with a company thirty armed men over one Christmas celebration--marks the beginning of the end for Björn. Since the mass on second day of Christmas is sung at Hólmur, we can read between the lines that Björn has

abandoned the church at Vellir in favor of another type of holy establishment at Hólmur, a fortified one. Björn has made the transition from being a consecrated churchwarden to an obscure abbot and prior. The use of the legal term for outlaws to describe Björn's obscure resident followers stems from the fact that members of monastic orders--unlike the clergymen on private church farms--in some ways stood protected from the secular law code, outside the borders of ordinary society. At the same time, Björn's "outlaws" reside inside a protective circle, the circular fortress; they are the ultimate insiders who live outside the law and above the society. Inside this circle reigns the champion of Hitardale, the heroic seafarer who brought his mandate for absolute rulership directly from Saint King Ólafur, the first saint observed by Icelanders as well as Norwegians.

In his essay, "The medieval Icelandic outlaw: life-style, saga, and legend," Frederic Amory discusses the numerous outlaws in the family saga literature and their variable depiction. Some outlaws are lone heroes, like Grettir Ásmundarson in Grettis saga, and Gísli in Gísla saga Súrssonar. While these two are main saga characters, many outlaws are depicted in the service of chieftains and other powerful farmers, such as the outlaws Þórður harbors and attempts to send out of the country. I contend that the descriptions of legally sentenced outlaws are generated by storytellers' broad social analysis and experiences. The

intriguing account of the behaviors of the outlaws in Harðar saga og Hólmverja may be an elaborate allegorical take on cloister-life.

Harðar saga og Hólmverja, which has been dated in its written form to the 14th century (Íslenskur Söguatlas 1989:106), tells us about Hörður Grimkelsson and followers called Hólmverjar. It tells the story of a large, hostile community of outlaws on Grimshólmi, a small barren island off the west coast. At first the outlaws are eighteen, then grow into a hord of 180, "ten times the modular eighteen," as Amory says (1992:195). The outlaws, led by Hörður and Óspakur, build a virki (fortress, fortified earthworks) on the small island for themselves and their families. Instead of engaging in subsistence activities, the outlaws raid the farms along the coastline, stealing cattle and sheep and goods. Rivalry between the two outlaw-leaders contributes to the violent demise of this community of outlaws. Amory says (1992:196): "One may well think that the cattle- and sheep-rustling was a perfectly suitable occupation for outlaws, but they were undercutting themselves by their total dependence on the mainland, and finally allowed themselves to be lured to shore by promises of freedom and were put to death in batches by a coalition of farmers who were lying in wait to dispatch them." And he continues, "The colony was eradicated in three years' time without the mainland farmers' even having to assault the impregnable

hall of Hörður on one cliffside of the island."

During the workshop in Reykjavík in June 1991 on the topic 'From sagas to society,' Frederic Amory asked me if I had encountered in Icelandic documents other than the sagas any references to island communities populated by outlaws. I had to reply with a no. Now, after analyzing Bjarnar saga, I would consider the existence of two monastic orders on the islands off the west coast of Iceland, Flatey and Viðey, as an inspirational factor for the making of Harðar saga og Hólmverja. Little is known about the monastery on Flatey island, other than that it was of the Augustinian order, operated for 12 years (1172-1184), and its people and property were moved to Helgafell when a monastery was established there in 1184 (M. Stefánsson 1975:84). Viðeyjarklaustur (the Viðey cloister) was established in 1226. Its consecration charter (Diplomatarium Islandicum I:492-496) begins by saying that the new monastery shall receive tribute from each farm in the communes located near the shoreline all the way south from Reykjanes (the southwest tip of Iceland) to Botnsá river to the north. Botnsá is a river which runs into Hvalfjörður fjord where Geirshólmi island is located. The tribute payment area covers the spring-assembly district which was called Kjalarnesþing.

Space does not allow me to describe the text in Harðar saga og Hólmverja in any detail, hence I will not elaborate

here on my idea that this particular saga predicated on knowledge about one or both monastic island communities to which I have referred. But before I resume my analysis of Bjarnar saga, I make the suggestion that we analyze the Icelandic family sagas from the point of view of seeing if some of their accounts of outlaws are in fact veiled references to ecclesiastics and their "betwixt and between" place in society. Harðar saga og Hólmverja may indeed be able to help us understand controversies in and around monastic communities in Iceland, people's perceptions of them, and their place in relation to other farming households and society as a whole. If we are lucky, this saga may even give us an indication of how certain religious orders were established, and why the short-lived "mysterious" Flateyjarklaustur ceased to exist.

Þorsteinn Kuggason and his cohort are threatened at first, then saved from cold and starvation when they arrive in Björn's stronghold at Hólmur. They first experience a material physical threat, constituted by the 30 armed men and the initial withholding of food, fire, dry clothing, then later, generous material support and offerings, as well as spiritual service on the second day of Christmas. For the suffering travellers, Björn's virki at Hólmur turned into virktahús, meaning (in Old Icelandic) a house, usually a religious establishment, which offers virkt, that is, care, solicitude, affection, and prayer (Fritzner 1954:962).

The word virktahús is not included in the saga; instead, I infer that the narrative evokes it, as well as the word virktavinir, or "intimate friend," which Þorsteinn and Björn became. The words virki and virkt are similar, and both stem from the root meaning of virki (verk in Modern Icelandic), as a general term for some type of doing, action, or accomplishment (cf. góðvirki, "charity"; illvirki, "evil doing" or "evil-doer"; helgt virki, "holy fortress", signifying a cloister or a church). Thus I have attempted to show that Björn's circular structure of defense, his virki, refers to a ravage (hervirki) as well as a "holy establishment" (helgt virki, klausturvirki, kirkjuvirki), embodying the paradoxical legacies of Björn and Saint King Ólafur. Þorsteinn's stay with Björn at this ambiguous site leads to the creation of their peculiar fictive brotherhood which invokes both Christian and "heathen" codes of conduct.

Several of the medieval Icelandic monasteries are known for having been active centers of learning, science and literary production, as well as devotional exercise (M. Stefánsson 1975:81). Also, the monasteries and nunneries were establishments where aging and sickly individuals would go to retire (M.Stefánsson 1975:85); furthermore, as Magnús Már Lárusson's (1967) research on gift-records shows, monasteries were places where parents would send their sons for education, to become priests, deacons, monks, or

ecclesiastic staff members (M. Lárusson 1967). New recruitment of permanent and temporary cloister residents were often contingent to gifts of property and landed access which the cloister received. I infer that, in most cases, those boys adopted into a monastery did not become successors to their father. Furthermore, they did not inherit from their parents, except in terms of the mundur (bride-price) which monasteries received when they adopted them. We may speculate that monasteries also recruited individuals who were guilty of crimes and misdemeanors, that is, when influential kin-groups would "save" their relations who had transgressed against the law.

Considering the recruitment of subordinate cloister residents (junior monastics and staff, workers and "retired" individuals), accompanied by some property and wealth accumulation, cloisters functioned as "conspicuous welfare institutions," as some storytellers may have analyzed. Thus depicted, cloisters show a resemblance to municipal institutions including the farmsteads which received þurfamenn ("needy people") and hreppsómagar ("paupers of the commune/municipality") according to the legal articles in Grágás (p. 38, 44, 180-181) which are concerned with the administration of municipalities (hreppar) and their welfare obligations. Grágás (1992:181) stipulates, in fact, that dispossessed people who do not have the support of kin shall receive sustenance from the hreppur and be placed on farms,

where I infer that their labor was deployed.

Before Björn built and finally settled in his virki at Hólmur, he had appeared as a parish-ruler and an ecclesiastic landlord at Vellir--forming relationships with tenants and cottagers. I discussed this phase in Björn's career earlier in the context of the formation of alliances and relations of economic dominance and dependence between parish-church owners the lower peasantry in particular, pointing to the role of ecclesiastic institutions in an emergent tributary mode of production. In the last phase of his career, Björn becomes associated with outlaws of an obscure kind. His co-residents help to empower him with their labor and through services which include both physical defense and Christian devotional practices. Björn's male residents are vaguely depicted. One is named Þorfinnur Þvarason, but others referred to on different occasions are skóqarmenn, thirty armed men, fifteen men, laborers (húskarlar), and a boy. Thus, it appears that Björn's encircled birthplace at Hólmur harbors numerous dispossessed as well as legally-socially expelled individuals who are often armed but also take part in religious services. Towards the very end of his life Björn himself appears destitute, poorly equipped and excluded. His co-residents also abandon him.

It is because of my over-all interpretation of Bjarnar saga that the above discussed symbolic and direct linkages

become visible, and that it seems that the short existence of Hitardalur monastery was an inspiration in the formation of Bjarnar saga, especially with respect to the saga's third episode. Bjarnar saga, as we know it, does not, of course, represent the entire oral tradition which concerned the legendary figure Björn Hítðalakappi. Writers and vellum book transcribers may also have edited material out of tales assimilated for the saga as we know it today, and chosen certain versions and poems over others. Kolluvisur may have included several verses at one time, whereas today we only know one of them (poem #19). But as the length of my essay testifies to, Bjarnar saga is, to use a quote from Turner (1971:351) where he describes the academic value the Icelandic sagas, "...rich and full of the very materials that anthropologists rejoice in when vouchsafed to them by informants in the field."

My analysis of episode three indicates that Bjarnar saga reflects strongly on the life-experiences of people around 1200. The saga as a whole is based on orally transmitted tales and poems, as well as written accounts, which existed or circulated around 1200 and include memories of and from different moments in history. Björn's fortress, built and populated by "outlaws," both derives and lends significance to the narrative with respect to its overall latent concern with explaining the origins and development of ecclesiastical institutions; tracing the practices,

mandates and attributes of the individuals who served or governed those establishments; describing those establishments' ties to society as a whole, as well as their impact on cultural and economy history. It is possible that Björn's reign and subsequent fall may be telling us about very early attempts, otherwise forgotten, to establish a monastic order in Hítardalur. But it appears more likely that the saga, especially the text following the building of the fortress around Björn's birthplace, informs us about storytellers' and saga writer's contemplations on the foundation and fate of Hítardalur monastery--on its conception, obscurity and decline.

I can not imagine a reason why occupants of the Mýrar and Hítardalur districts in the late-12th and early-13th centuries would not have perceived some sorts of association and identification between Björn virki, "outlaws," and eventual fall on the one hand, and a problematic operation and predicted fate of the Hítardalur cloister on the other. The links which I have been discussing would not have been as hidden from medieval Icelanders' view as they have been to modern saga scholars and historians. In other words, the implicit suggestions and multiple meanings of direct and symbolic references that I have discussed should have been easily comprehended by the medieval audience: The Cloister-life in the small Hítardalur farming community was a rare and ground-breaking cultural, social, and economic

phenomena, while the tragic burning of Hitardalur farmstead must have been a shocking experienced, strange to comprehend. While the monastery must have been viewed as a peculiar establishment, inspiring discussions and creative storytelling and generating considerable controversy, it was integrated into the surrounding farming communities, without which it could not have operated socially and economically for thirty five years. Having said this, it seems most likely (and the saga may reflect on this) that the cloister ceased to operate in the end because it was not economically and socially viable or needed. Its place within and effect on the farming community must have been a controversial issue.

We can be sure that Hitardalur cloister operated without the type of favorable social environment and economic circumstances which made Helgafell monastery (located only 40 km to the northwest of Hitardalur) a prominent and enduring institution. Bjarnar saga, according to my symbolic reading of it, expresses the opinion that Hitardalsklaustur was an enigmatic phenomena and could never have become a "true monastery." The particular forms of disguise which references to Björn's stronghold, his behavior and his co-residents take in the saga suggest that "learned men" (kennimenn), other storytellers or writers thought of a monastic order in Hitardalur as ill-conceived and paradoxical, accounting for its demise. I suggest that

Björn's faulting, paradoxical character, and road to self-destruction in some way mirrors or takes after perceptions regarding the foundation and fall of Hitardalur cloister. Björn lives to be thirty-five years old, as one calculates based on reading the saga (Nordal 1938:87). It is intriguingly coincidental that Hitardalur monastery existed thirty-five years as well.

I now turn to Björn's last scenes in the saga, which constitute a non-resolute ending, because they return and re-focus our attention on the saga's beginning, which has become problematized. Björn fights his final battle alone and poorly equipped. All his men are gone somewhere, for various economic reasons which the saga gives an account of; furthermore, they have taken Björn's weaponry with them. I analyze that the moving picture of Björn's disempowerment and demise is set within the frame of his return to his original circumstances, that is, when he was innocent, dispossessed, socially under-class, and excluded from community (left Hitardalur, then Iceland). This final outcome affirms the perennial inequalities of class. It reinstates the observation-by-analysis that if and when the dispossessed and disinherited rise above their ascribed circumstances/position, it happens in the context of continuing social isolation, and by way of their expulsion, at some point, from the farming community. According to this corollary, the paradox which the Saintly King endowed

Björn with turned out to be the license of return to his initial double-binding condition, essentially non-marriageable and without promise of an inheritance.

The saga of Björn is strongly marked by a comparative social-historical analysis which tells us that the early Icelandic private churches and monasteries recruited into their services young males who were of the same dispossessed class as those who were involved the overseas trade, which began before Icelanders became Christian. Björn's travels through life and the circumstances of his death highlight the conception of this historical perennial underclass; he is dispossessed, deprived of ascribed heritage by birth and essentially non-marriageable (see subsequent discussion of Þórdís). His resident "outlaws" represent young males who are deprived of property and excluded from the "society of landed farmers" like junior monks; they are the skógarmenn sentenced by society to leave the country like the young Icelandic merchants and mercenaries did. Björn travels with Oddný's bride-price through the different phases of his life. It is displaced several times with respect to the different figurations of Oddný, until the end of the saga when it becomes apparent Björn never fully possessed this wealth, or the social and economic means it represents. The "bride-price" turned out to be his own perishable labor-power and services.

Björn's transpositions from Hítarnes to Vellir to

Hólmur represent, on one level of analysis, his transformation from a servile priest, to senior parish-priest and churchwarden, to an armed leader of an ambiguous religious order. I notice also that he gradually moves back towards the place where he is from initially, and builds a fortress around his birthplace. It is here, on the small farm Hólmur, that he reencounters and finally confronts his original disadvantages and infirmity by birth. The noun hólmur (or hólmi) means an islet, in Old as well as Modern Icelandic. I mentioned earlier that two medieval monasteries were located on islands (eyjar) near the coast of Iceland, that is, the island of Viðey near Reykjavík, and Flatey in Breiðarfjörður, the fjord north of Snæfellsnes. Hólmur, a small island (islet), appears to have been used as a metaphor defining a fortified community, perhaps a holy one, certainly existing outside ordinary society. As a metaphor for an ambiguous holy establishment, an islet with cliffs, above and surrounded by water, emphasizes its isolation from the farming community, and its position above secular law and beyond ordinary society. Recall Geirshólmi in Harðar saga, the fortified islet where the outlaws called hólmverjar ("islet defenders") lived. Hólmur could indicate a dangerous liminal place, as we noticed with the expressions að ganga á hólmi, to meet in a duel, and hólmgangi, a duel--such as the duel between Björn and Kaldimar is called in the saga. Literally að ganga á hólmi

means "to walk up to an islet."

The saga not only links Björn's demise to his return to Hólmur but also to the behavior and condition of his blood-related father, Arngeir karl. Interestingly enough, towards the end of the saga, Arngeir karl lives at at Vellir while his son lives at Hólmur; thus father and son "trade places." The saga's depiction of Björn's fall is contingent on its reaffirming his identification with his lowly father. Þórður and his men had planned to burn Björn in his farm, but that was before Arngeir karl showed up, and before Björn left his home. By getting lost and being noticed by Þórður's female servants, Arngeir karl provides the occasion for Þórður's virulent poem and subsequent attack and slaying of Björn: When pathetic Arngeir karl had been noticed, Þórður knew somehow that Björn was alone, vulnerable, and without weapons to defend himself. Thus dim-sighted Björn is identified with his wandering lost father. Arngeir karl affirms and reveals his natural son's weak disposition, and he renders him defenseless by taking with him the last killer-weapons that remained at Hólmur. I therefore read the incidents concerning Arngeir karl as the storytellers' indirect means to convey Björn's lowly status and humble origins, which are deemed essential by the invoking of an ascribed relationship between father and son.

As the narrative develops, Björn's father is described as a person of low status worn by age. In the beginning of

the saga Björn is said to be Arngeirsson, that is, the son of Arngeir. Whereas Björn's maternal ancestors are named, which conveys to us that Skúli is his maternal uncle, Arngeir isn't even identified by his patronym. Arngeir is referred to by his first name only, or as "the father of Björn," until late in the saga, when he acquires the nickname karl. Family saga characters are often referred to by one name which is their given first name. In the number of cases when a person is indicated by two names, the second name is his or her patronymic name, a descriptive nick-name (cf. Kálfur illviti; Björn Hítðalakappi), or a status indicator (cf. Eiríkur jarl; Ólafur konungur). Arngeir is nicknamed karl several times towards the end of the saga, after Björn has moved to Hólmur and is operating two farms. His nickname appears as one of the markers for the advent of Björn's fall. In Old Icelandic karl could mean a male, but it was most often used in references to a domestic laborer (same as húskarl or "household laborer") and an old man with low status. Arngeir's acquired nickname signifies that he is nearing the end of his life, but this calls forth that Björn is his descendant. The nickname's indication of low socioeconomic status invokes Björn's dispossessory birthmark and undermines the different transformations which the narrative shows that he goes through.

Arngeir advances through his son's achievements. But towards the end, Björn takes after his father, who is

essentially karl, a lowly old laborer without a "devolution fund" to pass on. It is suggestive that Björn uses shears, first to attack Þórður, then to defend himself on his knees in the end. For the end of the saga the shears are a key symbol, as is the king's leg-thongs. This equipment/weapon replaces Björn's sword Mæringur, and it constitutes a number of symbolic references. At different occasions leading up to and during the final battle scene it is called skæri, which was the general term for shears (for cutting wool, cloth or hair); manskæri, the shears for cutting the mane of horses; and as söx, the scissors used for shearing wool from sheep. Söx is also the plural form for sax, which referred to a knife as well as to a short, sharp and single-edged sword. In my analysis it is particularly significant that Björn's ultimate, last weapon is also a farming tool, used for wool-processing in particular. The saga both disguises and amplifies this association, linking Björn's hopeless defence and loss of stature to his application of a farming equipment, as an attribute of an ordinary laborer. We are told that Björn intended to use the shears for cutting the mane of some horses; we also learn that these horses are located on Hvítingshjalli, a ledge named after Björn's invaluable white horse and status symbol.

Björn's leg-thong and shears work together as two key symbols for explaining Björn's fall in the end. The weight of the King's lace, figuratively speaking, brings Björn down

to his knees when he is left to defend himself with nothing except his shears. Björn's strife for worldly power and social position in secular society, in contrast to the spiritual goals of a servile ecclesiastic, ultimately brings him down to his original ascribed position of powerlessness, against those he refuses to serve and to be subordinated. Recall from the saga's beginning that Björn left his and Þórður's farming community and was adopted by Skúli in order to avoid Þórður's malice. In the end Björn attacks Þórður with a labor tool in place of a warrior weapon and is unsuccessful. Björn's initial strategy of avoidance leads to his empowerment vis-a-vis Þórður, that is, until Þórður removes two exposed parts from Björn's body, first his buttocks, exposing his profane and secular attributes, then his head, signifying his loss of achieved, elevated spiritual authority.

Before Björn literally loses his head and his buttocks, he is abandoned and left defenseless by his own residents who, during the bottle-neck work period in the fall, are out and about, rounding up sheep, visiting on Snæfellsnes, and engaged in other activities. Þorfinnur Þvarason had gone to Snæfellsnes with fifteen men and taken Björn's private sword, Mæringur, with him. (There is no other mention of Þorfinnur in the saga, but as many incidents suggest, there were tales of Björn circulating which were not assimilated into the saga as we know it.) Björn's domestic servant by

the river betrays Björn when she tells Þórður where he is-- whether she should be seen as coerced into this or not. These descriptions might be read as indicators of Björn's sudden economic and social difficulties--even to reflect on the difficulties and fate of Hítardalur cloister, its lack of outside support, and abandonment of religious devotional services.

In any case, as I have analyzed, Björn himself is depicted as a man without means in the end. He boldly and jokingly dismisses the threat against him, by saying that the men who are coming towards him are rounding up sheep and will help him and the boy capture his horses. At least, this would be my first reading of Björn's humorous responses to the boy's warnings. A second reading tells us that Björn, who has lost his spiritually engaged followers, has retreated into an imaginary world in which the people around him attend to livestock, which is to say that he has returned to his place in the farming community before Skúli adopted him. Within this flash-back world Björn appears excluded and helpless, commanding only the services of one orphan boy. This nameless boy is clearly a pauper "adopted" by Björn; he is ómagi and niðursetningur, meaning, someone who has been "panted down" in an adopted home. The dispossessed boy, whose life Björn saves when he sends him alone into an uncertain world, draws forth a material image of young Björn, that is, a particular image which is barely

visible in the beginning of the saga behind glorified descriptions of his hopes, promises and prospects.

But another, different image of Björn is preserved as well, namely, the one embodied by Kolli, whose characterizations--including his conception, name, and figurative physical description--emphasize pure spiritual endowments. At the district-assembly site one fall, Björn notices a child running before his eyes and finds out that he is Þórður's son with the name Kolli. On this same occasion Kolli is called hinn prúði, meaning "the well mannered" or "gentle," and is said to be hið friðasta mannsefni, which means that he is a most beautiful/good/peaceful (friður), promising young man (mannsefni: literally "man's material"). As I have explained earlier, kolli is the nickname for a monk which the saga turns into the first name of Oddný's youngest son. Unlike Kolbeinn Þórðarson, Kolli is nowhere identified by a patronymic name in the saga.

Unlike his frail and fickle spiritual progenitor, Kolli is characterized as a pure spiritual person, still, who fights like a warrior. The saga informs us that Björn had made many poems about Kolli. Björn never claims that Kolli resembles him physically; instead, he indicates in poem #29 that Kolli's eyes or gaze, so dire/fearsome/awful (ægilegur), disclose his paternity and betray who his father is, namely, Björn the warrior and "traveller of the sea." I

analyze therefore that Kolli's eyes mirror back Björn's visions of himself, while Kolli's gaze expresses the suffering, fear, and dire mission which Björn has experienced in his life. Later in the saga we see how Björn's failing eyesight contributes to his fall, literally, as well as figuratively, by signifying his regression away from faith and departure from the spiritual mission assigned to him by Saint Ólafur. But before he dies, Björn passes onto Kolli a renewed, untarnished vision of himself, that is, the image Kolli receives of himself as he recognizes Björn as his father and gives up fighting. Looking beyond the saga by reading between its lines, we infer that Kolli "belongs" to a religious order in a promised future, with historical/ancestral links to the profanely tainted spiritual order which Björn embodied.

The saga states that Kolli attacked Björn often and hard and on his own, then adds that there are no accounts of how he wounded Björn. Here it seems as if a saga writer/transcriber inserts an extraneous report on Kolli's and Björn's (one-sided) duel and conversation into an otherwise detailed tale-description of Björn's final battle. In any case, we get the sense that the oblique report of Kolli's eagerness to kill Björn serves as prelude to the scene which shows a godfather's revelation resulting in the baptism of his spiritually adopted/conceived son. Kolli does not delude his mother's wishes, if she did in fact, as

Björn suggests, charge him with attacking Björn the hardest. But when he ends his attacking and his attempts to avenge his brother, he turns into a monastic figure, and contributes to Oddný's subsequent lapse into an eternal sorrow and to a replacement of her earlier split figure by a single figure of a suffering woman living in a world of lament as the mature Mother Church.

The murky incident of Kolli's attacks on Björn, then giving up his fighting, is easy to read as being primarily concerned with the taboo against patricide. But the incident is more complicated, because the narrative does not allow us simply to conclude that Björn is Kolli's physical father. Even though Björn is portrayed as morally volatile, Oddný is clearly not. Oddný's relationships with Þórður, on the one hand, and Björn, on the other, were on absolutely separate terms according to her. She claims at one point that the two men's poetic expressions are their words and not hers.

Instead of telling Kolli in a direct way whose son he is, Björn conveys to him that he (Kolli) does not know where he comes from, or who he really is. He says ironically to Kolli that his talents lie elsewhere than in knowledge of where he comes from. Kolli is not ættvísinn, Björn says, which could either mean that Kolli does not possess talents for the "study of pedigrees," or that he is not certain of his ancestry, family, kindred or race (ætt). But ætt and

its compound words were also used in referring to fictive family groups, such as a congregation; whereas the verb að vísa ("to direct" or "to lead"), which has the same root as vísi ("certain" or "certainty"), is synonymous with the verb leiða, used in the expression að attleiða, meaning to adopt. Furthermore, a spiritual relationship was referred to as Guðsifjar ("Godly kinship"), sifjar being interchangeable with the word att.

I infer that Kolli stops his solitary attempts to kill Björn when he learns that Björn is his progenitor in a spiritual sense. The incident reads as Björn's revelation, which results in Kolli's baptism, leading to Björn's redemption. Kolli acquires an ecclesiastic image of himself which forbids his fighting, but we should recall the narrative's emphasis on Björn's defensive use of his weapons. I need to mention once again that ecclesiastics were not permitted to apply weapons. Whereas Icelandic monks of around 1200 probably obeyed this rule in general, their spiritual indigenous ancestry were known not to have done so. After all, like Björn these were both secular and ecclesiastic leaders, which is why Icelandic ecclesiastic institutions quickly became so powerful in the first place. The imperfect, incontinent forefathers of the Icelandic Church, with its first cloisters established in the 12th century, sacrificed themselves tragically as to provide the monastics of the future with safe, well-endowed places to be

and redeem their progenitors.

Björn's spiritual attributes get passed on to Kolli untarnished by profanities. This purifying displacement is, according to the structural logic of the narrative, contingent on Þórður's necessary contribution to Kolli's procreation: In order for Kolli to be perceived as the pure embodiment of Björn's spiritual legacy, he must be born physically and sexually of a different father. In a fictive ascribed way (divine conception) Kolli inherits the spiritual identity and mission which Björn had acquired as an essentially secular person. Kolli is born Christian. Björn, on the other hand, was engaged to be married, and involved in worldly missions, "heathen" practices, and warfare prior to Icelanders' conversion to Christianity.

The conflict between Þórður and Björn--their competition over Oddný, and what she represents for both of them--results in the creation of Kolli. Oddný is the mediator of their conflict; she is their medium, giving birth to a boy whose name means monk. The logic of thus characterized progenitive process in the saga reflects further on social history with regard to the church; specifically, it expounds the emergence of virtuous, true, and indigenous monks in Icelandic monasteries. They grow out of, and away from the contentious operation of private church farms; they historically descend from the clergyman and the churchwarden, their two fathers; they were given

birth to by the double-sided female figure of the early Icelandic church. Icelandic monasteries are female identified as well, but this Woman is older and ailing: Oddný mourns the two sons she lost, her oldest and her youngest, whose names reveal their striking differences. Kolbeinn Þórðarson, whom Björn kills unintentionally it seems, is depicted as Oddný's oldest son and Þórður's primary successor, because he takes his first name after his paternal grandfather.

Given that Kolli is Oddný's youngest child, and because of his name and Björn's role in his creation, he was born to be excluded from property ownership and worldly social position (represented by his mother's material side), and meant to join a secluded order of monastics. Until Björn dies and Kolli recognizes his father Björn, the split figure of Oddný continues: she is the ordinary wife of Þórður and mother of Kolbeinn who charges Kolli with attacking Björn, to avenge Kolbeinn's death and in order to prevent Kolli from abandoning her material world. Oddný mourns Björn and suffers for how he died, and Þórður's desire to replace Björn reflects in part on her wish to bring Kolli back into a material world which she has lost. Meanwhile, Björn is the father who sacrifices himself for the son, who then goes on to suffer for all humanity.

Björn preserves two distinct images of himself, highlighted by two separate incidents in which he sends a

boy off from the site of his final battle: he makes Kolli stop fighting him, and he prevents his adopted orphan from dying with him. Björn's spiritual legacy is purified and passed onto Kolli when he leaves the fight, passing the test of Björn's revelation. The orphan becomes Björn's eyes for direct seeing, and he possesses the clear and innocent vision of the profane and dangerous world which Björn has lost. Björn brushes away the boy's alarms, but he also heeds them, by sending the boy away. By saving this poor boy and abandoning him into the world, Björn breaths life into a young, profane image of himself, that is, into the memory of his original material social condition. But Björn's deed for saving the orphan also counts towards his own spiritual salvation, hence, it is prelude to his revelation to Kolli.

In the first instance this story-ending essentializes Björn's legacy by splitting his memory/the memory of him in two, by separating his mortal image embodied by the orphan and directed towards the past, from a spiritual-eternal image embodied by Kolli and directed towards the future. A clear distinction between the material (perishable) past and spiritual (eternal) future promises that history is linear and directed towards new circumstances for peace and redemption. But the text also allows for the deconstruction of this story-ending, which also problematizes the distinctive notion of the material vs. spiritual, and

subtracts from a notion of linear historical change. The two boys have much in common and their images can not be absolute opposites. Björn's profane image has a perennial component, because Björn's past, the dire condition of his youth, is displaced onto the future of a dispossessed boy who lives on. Then, the new embodiment for Björn's spiritual legacy has a perishable component, because Kolli has a physical father, who is Þórður according to the symbolic logic of narrative.

The last picture of Kolli in the saga is of a mourning young pacifist. Where he goes and what will become of him is left unsaid. But unlike Björn--who did not own an indigenous spiritual father and received his religious vestment and mandate for Christianizing from a foreign Sainly King--Kolli is born in Christianized Iceland. The narrative repeatedly indicates that Kolli is to become a person who lives by the principle which says that the spirit shall precede the body. The saga's strong allusions to divine conception and adoption, virgin birth, and spiritual father's revelation tell us that Kolli is essentially endowed with the qualities of the Holy Spirit. This depiction constitutes an opinionated allegorical construction, that is, interested attempts to reconstruct and explain the historical process by which Icelanders' adopted Christianity, finally emerging as true Christians when the holy spirit adopts them.

But the assembled folktales and storytellers which Bjarnar saga features are many, and the saga provokes the deconstruction and undermining of ideological opinions as much as it invokes them. The narrative builds on analysis of class-specific experiences, and it creatively posits ideological constructs, borrowing from the Bible, in the context of describing social practice and economic forces. We do know from the saga that Kolli is born to farmers, Þórður and Oddný, and we suspect his infirmity and incontinence, that he knows the temptations of power and sexuality. Furthermore, we suspect that he exhibits Björn's essential faults and weakness.

Þórður conquers Björn at last, ending their personal conflict. But there is a twist to Þórður's apparent victory over Björn. As my analysis has shown, the tales of Björn's and Þórður's competition and conflict tell a versatile story which reflects with ironic sense on contested and turbulent changes in social culture, modes of production and devolution practices in a particular farming community where a series of church institutions were established. Þórður pays a hefty fine for Björn's slaying. Furthermore, he is shown a broken husband, forever obsessed with consoling his suffering wife and wishing he were Björn: his marriage continues to be heavily taxed and governed by Christian agency, which is the everlasting third term in a marriage between a secular housefather and his wife.

The freeholders, Þórður, Kálfur, and Dálkur, all lose their sons, who had been depicted as their future successors. In contrast, Björn's successor lives on, but he is also Þórður's "other son," whose name--in contrast to Kolbeinn, the namesake of Þórður's father--links him to dispossession and monastic life. Kolli is Oddný's youngest son, whom Björn anticipated, instead of Þórður: he is adopted away by birth, that is, he is born to receive the legacy of an ecclesiastical figure. Björn was also both disowned and adopted. He was excluded from his small farming community and sent away from his island society in the service of his fosterfather.

Central to the third episode of Bjarnar saga is the symbolic construction of the ecclesiastics' procreative means, that is, their ways of acquiring sons to succeed or replace them. On the complementary side of this issue is the ways in which dispossessed, non-marriageable individuals are adopted or acquire a "fictive" father. The concepts of a fictive spiritual marriage and divine conception/virgin birth are critical and highly elaborated, whereas a vividly expressed suspicion or knowledge about ecclesiastics' sexual behavior is a peripheral concern. According to Bjarnar saga, disinherited and non-marriageable males who acquire descendants do so by adopting young males who are also materially disinherited and non-marriageable. Thus reproductively successful adopted males, of all generations,

are perceived and perceive themselves as being in liminal societal positions. They are partially excluded and temporarily expelled from the farming communities, but, as a justifying proposition, they were meant for (born into) either the glorified role of the seafarer, or the divine role of the ecclesiastic.

Bjarnar saga proclaims that senior ecclesiastics are the progenitors of individuals whose careers they determine and to whom they pass their image. The Church's recruitment of males to become ecclesiastics is a spiritual type of adoption but it takes after the ways in which mercantile farmers, like Skúli, adopted boys by placing them in "foreign services" and providing for their marriages, as one form of union or another. These fictive form of generating descendants are merely shown as analogous to the way married householders pass his image and property onto his male heirs. But male adoption is shown more clearly to be the result of unions formed between males, like between Skúli and Eiríkur jarl, giving rise to Björn's career, and between Björn and Þórður, resulting in Kolli's creation. Skúli, Þórður, Björn and Kolli represent successive generations of fictive ancestry, constituted within storyteller's historiography, as historical memory of males who were in liminal societal roles. It should be brought up here that according to Egils saga (Íslendinga sögur I:517-518), Skúli Þorsteinsson, whom the saga assigns a mercantile role, lived

at Borg (his father's estate) in the latter part of his life and did not have biological children. We encounter Skúli in Snorri Sturluson's historical work Heimskringla, and several family sagas, including Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu (Íslendinga sögur II:1166-1193). He participated in seven major viking raids, and he helped defeat Ólafur Tryggvason, who is credited for Christianizing most parts of Norway and compelled Icelandic chieftains into announcing Christianity as the religion of Icelanders at alþing in the year 1000.

Bjarnar saga is predicated on the analysis that successive forms of church institutions in Icelandic farming communities were, like foreign trade had been, founded on principles of unequal inheritance and relations of class amongst brothers, fosterbrothers, relatives, neighbors, and generations--but is also premised on principles of divergent devolution as well, because of the significance of dowry and bride-price. Overseas trade and ecclesiastical service were founded on the basis of class divisions within the farming communities, and to great extent contingent on de facto impartible inheritance and unequal opportunities for marriage among males. Wealth accumulation through trade and by ecclesiastical establishments sustained rather than demolished these devolution practices and relations of class. But the mercantile and religious professions and institutions preempted the concepts and terms for inheritance and marriage arrangements, arraigned the

principles of consanguinity and nuptiality, challenged the power and influence of socially fertile heirs, and established accumulation-devolution funds which subtracted from as to diminish the kin-ordered funds of the farming households. After all, investment-funds which created careers for the disinherited, non-marriageable young males, and the accumulation which resulted from these careers, constituted leading sectors of the economy: first foreign trade and market production, then tribute production, characterized by dependent farming on land owned by ecclesiastical institutions, which extracted rent, as well as tithe and other kinds of tributary and service payments .

CHAPTER 10

**"THE COLLAPSE OF THE COMMONWEALTH," AND OTHER QUESTIONS
CONCERNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TRIBUTARY MODE OF
PRODUCTION AND COLONIAL-STATE FORMATION**

I hypothesize that chieftaincies, together with ecclesiastical institutions deriving tributary income (through tithes, rent and special taxes), gradually gained independence from the hegemonic block that merchant-farmers comprised, while becoming dependent on (instead) and exploiting Norwegian merchants' activities, thereby articulating interests of stronger forces in Norway. I suggest that attempts made by chieftains to regulate and derive tribute from trade and the development of a land market concurrent with greater concentration of land, and of rent-tenure systems during the 12th century--at first, especially in regions with extensive church holdings--corresponded with the tendency among smallholders of relying on sheep as the primary means of subsistence. This entails a production strategy of which considerable surplus wool would not be an outcome, since an emphasis on efficient meat production together with human consumption of ewe's milk causes reduction in wool yield.

In a period of worsening climatic conditions and vegetation decline, of frequent severe seasons in the early 1180's and through to the first decade of the 13th century

(Ogilvie 1984:141), an increasing number of smallholders had lost both control and direct access to cattle and their products on domestic market, as well as the ability and strong incentives for cultivating hayfields, producing quality hay for cattle and ewes, rearing wethers, and providing milk for their lambs.

Landowners rented out land along with few head of dairy-cattle, expecting payments in animals, dairy products and labor service. Tithe collectors demanded these forms of payment as well. I view a rise in churchly powers (see, Stefánsson 1978; Byock 1985), in terms of developments in the economic roles of different ecclesiastical institutions--variably ruled over or becoming indigeneously autonomous in different parts of the island--and with links to the decline in petty commodity (wool) production by peasants. My reading of inventories already suggests that in early 13th century monasteries were engaged in particularly intensive sheep-rearing, perhaps for the purpose of exporting unprocessed wool. The earliest evidence which shows that raw wool was being exported from the country dates to 1198. This is record which says that an Icelandic ship sold Icelandic wool in Rouen in Normandy (Diplomatarium Islandicum 1:718-719).

The weakening of this indigenous economic ruling class (merchant-farmers) ultimately led to the demise of Chiefdoms (and 'riki') in Iceland. Goðar, stórgoðar, powerful bændur

and attir, church and Crown are major players in the drama which Jóhannesson (1974) had termed, "Death Throes of the Commonwealth." However, the lower and middle peasantry should not be further edited out, depicted as mere passive victims of feudalization, colonial-state formation, or in the political struggles which, as far as Sturlunga sagas tell us, date back to the second quarter of the 12th century. It requires research on farming methods and a particular "suspicionist" reading of primary documents, discovering the evidence for the agrarian struggles or contending land reform movements in which the lower peasants were critical players, by using subsistence strategies and construing concepts of rights to land that were self-preserving and indexical to their class positions. Community formation, and communal mode of political power and land-tenure are still significant blind spots in the search for the reasons behind an activated land market and behind gradual replacement of mercantile family farm systems of land tenure by a curious system which had both prebendal and feudal characteristics, including sharecropping arrangements.

We can contemplate whether the interests of an increasing number of smallholders, semi-proletarianized peasants, and servants--none of whom, according to Grágás, were legally members of municipal administration--came to lie within any land reform that would turn portions of

enclosed land into smaller plots, as well as grazing areas to which access would be controlled through a more democratic and, at the same time, empowered municipal structures, for and against broader regional power base. This would have affected the mechanism of pasture degradation, deforestation and soil erosion. I note a new study by Ólafur Arnalds (1991-1992) which shows that a massive erosion of soil in the interior regions of Ódáðahraun and Sprengisandur suddenly began around 1200. (It used to be thought that these areas were devoid of substantial vegetation before human settlement began.)

The lower peasants' struggle for access to more land, including the formerly privately administered afréttir, and against the ceaseless construction and reconstruction of fences, was relatively resolved by the type of rent-tenure system that could provide more income for the church and Crown in particular. Furthermore, if Iceland's smallholders and dispossessed people in fact identified with and placed their interest on building more autonomous, egalitarian municipalities--which corresponded geographically with parishes in many cases--as local power-bases, then the weight of their numbers may have tilted for the process which would end in the formation of a state under Norwegian and ecclesiastical auspices.

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