

**Gísli Sigurðsson**

**The Last Viking Down:**

**Magnús *berfættr* and his legacy among the great-grandchildren in Iceland**

There are numerous sources about Magnús *berfættr*, the last King of Norway (1093-1103) to fall in battle on foreign soil (and believed to be buried beside St. Patrick in Downpatrick in Co. Down, Ireland) – and in that sense the last Viking. These sources have been assembled well by Rosemary Power (*The Scottish Historical Review* 1986 and 1994) and evaluated from the point of view of their historical content. One especially noteworthy path to take through them is the Old Norse/Icelandic tradition as reflected in *Ágrip* (late 12th c.) through *Fagurskinna* (c. 1220) to Snorri Sturluson's (1178/9-1241) version in *Heimskringla* (1220s). Most recently Tommy Danielsson (*Sagorna om Norges kungar*, 2002) has scrutinised and compared the content of these texts and how it develops in even later works, *Morkinskinna* (late 13th c.), *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* (c. 1300) and *Flateyjarbók* (late 14th c.). His argument is that the growth of these texts cannot be explained unless they were continually fed by current oral material. It is generally accepted (Diana Whaley, *Heimskringla: An Introduction*, 1991; Paul A. White, *Non-Native Sources for the Scandinavian Kings' Sagas*, 2005) that when it comes to the saga of King Magnús *berfættr* in particular, the additions made by Snorri to what we can read in *Ágrip* and *Fagurskinna* (and even *Orkneyinga saga* and the sagas about St. Olaf), are likely derived from what Snorri could have heard when growing up in Oddi in the late 12th century as King Magnús's great-grandson through the fosterage of Jón Loftsson (1124-1197) and his wife Halldóra Skegg-Brandsdóttir (d. 1190). In my paper I shall analyse these additions in order to discuss: a) Snorri's working method, b) the status of the oral tradition vs established written sagas about King Magnús in Snorri's time, and c) how seemingly personal observations from Magnús's immediate family and inner circle can be detected in Snorri's version of the saga. Overall this approach could help us to understand how the memory of the Viking past lived on in oral traditions, both on the formal courtly level and among individual families who would all have shaped their notions about the past according to their storytelling abilities, interests and personal preferences in the ever changing present. Ultimately the conclusions should increase awareness of the nature of our written sources as reflections of both earlier written texts and current oral traditions and notions about the past at the time of writing – and finally make us better equipped to discuss the sagas in the same breath as the Viking age even though we all know that they are literary constructions from a Christian era.