

Born of snow: The development of Snær *inn gamli* and his family in Scandinavian sources

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Snær *inn gamli*, or “Snow the Old”, is a figure who evades easy categorisation. This aged king of the Arctic North cuts across many traditional saga genres, surfacing in the *Íslendingasögur*, *fornaldarsögur* and *konungasögur*. He also appears with a different face in Danish historiographical tradition. Snær’s appearances in the literary record are always brief, but their frequency indicates a sustained interest in this figure that runs through centuries of Scandinavian tradition. Perhaps as a consequence of his scattered attestation, relevant scholarship to date treats Snær in an incidental fashion and he has not been the subject of a dedicated study.¹

The present paper addresses the need for a more thorough consideration of Snær *inn gamli*. His appearances across Scandinavian sources are considered, first in Danish records and then in the Icelandic saga corpus. Reflections can then be offered on the possible origins of “King Snow” and the relationship between these two traditions. This paper closes by considering the growth of Snær and his family in light of a progressively increasing interest in the *Finnar* and their territory on the part of Icelandic authors.

The Danish tradition

The earliest references in Scandinavian sources to a “King Snow” are found in Danish records. A certain Snyo, whose name is probably a Latinisation of *Snjó*, appears as the fifth king in the *Catalogus Regum Danie* (Gertz 1917: 159), and Sven Aggesen gives a Snio as the son of Kanutus and father of Clacharaldus in his *Brevis Historia Regum Dacie* (Gertz 1917, 107–8; see also Christiansen 1992: 116, n. 59). The first full description of a figure by this name is found in the *Chronicon Lethrense*, a late twelfth-century Danish chronicle.² The fifth and sixth chapters of the *Chronicon* present a narrative concerning a King Snyo. This figure is first met as a shepherd of a *gygas* (“giant”) named Læ, who inhabits an island called Leshø:

Erat autem gygas quidam, nomine Læ, in insula, que uocatur Leshø, pastorem quendam habens, nomine Snyo. (Gertz 1917: 48–9).

There was a certain giant by the name of Læ, on an island called Leshø. He had a certain shepherd named Snyo.³

Læ corresponds to the *jötunn* Hlér, or Ægir, of Icelandic sources, who lives on Hlésey (modern-day Læsø).⁴ Snyo is sent by Læ to King Athisl of Sweden. He is told to procure the kingship of Denmark following the death of the former king, Raka, and does so. Snyo’s rule is characterised by tyranny. A man named Røth visits Læ on Læsø and asks for a prophecy concerning Snyo’s death. Læ consents provided that Røth tell him three truths, which he does. After this Røth is

¹ John McKinnell (2005: 70–1; 2021: 421–3) discusses Snær *inn gamli* and his family in the context of the “Summer King” narrative pattern. Most references to Snær relate to his association with Fornjótr (Clunies Ross 1983: 55; Lindow 2001: 119; Hermann Pálsson 1999: 51–2; Motz 1996: 78, 85; Allport forthcoming 2022b). The Danish reflexes of this figure are usually mentioned in the context of Danish historiography (Blode 2017; Hybel 2018: 95–6; though cf. Ciklamini 1965: 132–3; McKinnell 2021: 421–2).

² The most widely accepted date for the *Chronicon* is c. 1170, following Gertz 1917: 35–6, though for an earlier dating, see Lindow 2016. A useful summary of the arguments to date is provided in Andersen 2012. The *Chronicon Lethrense* has long been of interest to the study of Danish legendary history and related fields, such as *Beowulf* studies (see, e.g., Fulk, Björk and Niles 2008, 301–2; Garmonsway and Simpson 1968, *passim*; Niles 2007), but has less often been used in the study of Icelandic literature.

³ Translations in this paper are my own.

⁴ The island of Hlésey is mentioned in Old Icelandic mythological sources. It is the site of one of Þórr’s feats in stanza 37 of the eddic poem *Hárbarðsljóð*, and also constitutes the opening scene of Snorri Sturluson’s *Skáldskaparmál*. Its inhabitant and namesake Hlér/Ægir is a sea god and husband of Rán who plays an important function as the host of the gods in *Hymiskviða* and *Lokasenna*. On Ægir in mythological sources see Clunies Ross 1983: 47 and Allport forthcoming 2022b.

informed that Snyo will be bitten to death by lice. As soon as Snyo is told of this, it comes to pass. He is succeeded by the Skjöldungr king, Hrólfr *kraki*.

The next source to mention this figure is Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*, completed around the end of the twelfth century. Saxo's Snio is, like his counterpart in the *Chronicon Lethrense*, a king who presides over a ruinous period in Danish history, but he differs in all other respects. Læ is absent from this account, and the king's death is not described. Snio is also not inserted into Skjöldungr history, as in the *Chronicon*. It is unclear why the *Gesta Danorum* should preserve such a different portrait of this figure—if indeed it is assumed that they are one and the same—especially considering that Saxo may have drawn upon the *Chronicon*.⁵ It is possible that Saxo borrowed the name for his King Snio from Sven Aggesen's *Historia* and fleshed out his character portrait. This contention might be supported by the spelling of the name, “Snio”, which is consistent across both works.

Snyo later appears in the *Annales Ryenses*, a collection of Danish annals from the end of the thirteenth century. Although the early section of the *Annales* constitutes a paraphrase of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, the narrative concerning Snio pertains to the same tradition preserved in the *Chronicon Lethrense* (Blode 2017: 163–4). In the *Annales* he is again a shepherd, is eaten by lice, and is succeeded by Hrólfr *kraki*. Læ is absent from this narrative, but this may be because the text presents only a brief synopsis of Snyo's career when compared with the *Chronicon*. A version of the story containing both Snyo and Læ reappears in the Old Danish *Gesta Danorum*—not to be confused with Saxo's work—likely written only a decade or two after the *Annales* (Blode 2017: 164–5; Niles and Newlands 2007: 311). Snio continues to appear in Swedish historiographical sources in connection with Læ and Læsø throughout the later Middle Ages.⁶

The Danish tradition concerning “King Snow”, then, consists of two branches. The first, represented earliest by the late-twelfth century *Chronicon Lethrense* and continued in later Danish and Swedish works, connects Snyo with Læ, has him eaten by lice and succeeded by Hrólfr *kraki*. The second, in which Snio is a more conventional Danish king, is only preserved at any length in the *Gesta Danorum*. It cannot be ascertained whether this Snio is the same figure as the one listed in the *Catalogus* or in Sven Aggesen's *Historia*. It is also unclear what the nature of the connection is between Saxo's king and the more widespread tradition concerning Snyo from Læsø, if such a connection existed at all.

The Icelandic tradition

Icelandic sources present a very different figure than that contained in Danish historiographical evidence. The earliest appearance of a “King Snow” in Icelandic material is in *Fundinn Nóregr* (hereafter *FN*). This is a genealogical preface to *Orkneyinga saga*, an early *konungasaga* which has been dated to the late twelfth century (Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1965: x–xi; Allport 2021: 46). *FN* may have been composed later than *Orkneyinga saga* itself—perhaps by Snorri Sturluson—but recent scholarship favours the view that the material it contains was in circulation at an earlier date (Allport forthcoming 2022b and the references there). *FN* traces the ancestors of Fornjótr, a euhemerised king of Finnland and Kvenland:

Fornjótr átti þrjá syni. Hét einn Hlér, er vér köllum Ægi, annarr Logi, þriðji Kári. Hann var faðir Frosta, föður Snæs ins gamla. Hans sonr hét Porri. (Guðni Jónsson 1950, II: 88).

Fornjótr had three sons. The first was called Hlér, whom we call Ægir, the second Logi, and the third Kári. He was the father of Frosti, the father of Snær the Old. His son was called Porri.

⁵ Saxo's use of the motif of the three true facts perhaps indicates that he drew this from the Snyo episode itself in the *Chronicon* (Davidson and Fisher 1996: 146). See also Friis-Jensen 2015: xxxiv and Andersen 2012 under “Transmission”.

⁶ Relevant texts include the late-fifteenth century *Prosaíska Krönikan*, *Lilla Rimkrönikan* and the *Chronica* of Ericus Olai, as well as the sixteenth-century chronicles of Olaus Petri and Laurentius Petri; see Blode 2017: 165–8 and Colbert 1992: 30–1.

Fornjótr appears elsewhere as a mythological *jötunn* whose sons are personifications of elemental forces. Stanza 21 of Þjóðólfr ór Hvini’s ninth-century *Ynglingatal* gives “glóðfjalgr sonr Fornjóts” (Marold 2012: 46; “ember-hot son of Fornjótr”) as a kenning for fire. Fornjótr’s sons Logi and Kári are not otherwise attested in earlier sources. However, the association between Fornjótr and Ægir/Hlér is at least as old as the fragmentary poem *Norðrsetudrápa*, which juxtaposes these figures as progenitors of stormy weather (Clunies Ross 1983: 48; Allport forthcoming 2022b). This poem is conventionally dated to the eleventh century (Clunies Ross 2017: 397).

Snær *inn gamli* appears shortly after Fornjótr and his three sons. *FN* presents details which are repeated in many subsequent Icelandic sources containing Snær. He is already characterised as old in this early material and is the only dynast in the first section of *FN* with an epithet. The names of his immediate family members also relate to ice and cold: his father is Frosti (“frosty”), and his son is Þorri, a back-formation from the midwinter month of the same name.⁷ *FN* locates Snær in the Finnic-speaking areas to the north and east of the Scandinavian peninsula. This broad region constituted a frequent setting in the Icelandic corpus. In saga literature it is a source of material wealth, dynastic marriages and adventure (Hermann Pálsson 1999; Mundal 1996), but its inhabitants, the *Finnar* or Sámi, are demonised for their apparent “lack of civilization, oppositional intent, and magical ability” (DeAngelo 2010: 258). As a consequence, the far north and east are also regarded as alien and dangerous. This has implications for the many of the appearances of Snær in subsequent sources.

Snær is next mentioned in *Ynglinga saga*, one of a collection of *konungasögur* preserved in Snorri Sturluson’s early-thirteenth century *Heimskringla*. In this text he bears the name Snjór, a regular variant of the simple noun *snær*.⁸ The Ynglingr king Vanlandi remains with Snjór in Finnland over the winter, and receives his daughter Drífa (“snow-drift”) in marriage. After Vanlandi breaks his promise to return to Drífa, she pays a sorceress, Hulð, to draw him to Finnland, or, failing that, to bring about his death. Vanlandi is struck with a desire to travel north, but he is advised against it. He is accordingly killed violently in his sleep. The narrative outline of this episode was likely conceived by Snorri to contextualise the more ancient account preserved in stanza 3 of Þjóðólfr ór Hvini’s poem *Ynglingatal* which has Vanlandi die at the hands of a supernatural *mara*.⁹ It is impossible to ascertain whether Snjór or Drífa appeared in an earlier version of this narrative, but their absence in older poetry makes this unlikely.

The next extant source which mentions Snær *inn gamli* is *Hversu Noregr byggðist* (hereafter *HNB*). This text is first attested in the late fourteenth-century *Flateyjarbók* but existed in some form as early as the late thirteenth century (Allport forthcoming 2022a). It offers an expanded version of the genealogy present in *FN*. The most significant elaboration applies to the descendants of Snær’s grandson Nórr (Allport 2021: 47), but his immediate family is also expanded. Hlér—here given without his byname Ægir—is still Snær’s great uncle, but Snær’s father is given as Jökull (“glacier”) rather than Frosti. Snær retains his son Þorri, but also accrues three daughters, all named for snow: Fönn (“snow”), Mjöll (“powder snow”) and Drífa, who appeared as Vanlandi’s bride in *Ynglinga saga*. Further down the genealogy *HNB* also suggests that Snær is reputed to have had a supernaturally long lifespan of three hundred years, which makes it the only text to qualify his epithet.

It is after Snær’s appearance in *HNB* that he and his family begin to move away from historical and genealogical sources. These figures next surface in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, an

⁷ *FN* explains that Þorri, a great *blótmaðr*, initiated the Þorrablót, a pre-Christian sacrifice that took place at midwinter. This event is doubtless named for the month of Þorri, however, which itself is perhaps derived from the same root as *þurr* “dry” (De Vries 2000: 618).

⁸ The original nominative singular form is *snjór* < **snæur*, with a genitive singular in *snævar*. The form *snær* may have arisen through analogy with forms in *snæ-* or through syncope of the *u* in *snæur* (on this sound change see Gordon 1927: 255). A further alternative nominative singular form was *snjár*.

⁹ On this figure see Batten 2021: 370–3.

Íslendingasaga conventionally dated to the fourteenth century (Þorhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991: v–vii; lxix–lxxiv). This saga centres around Bárðr Dumbsson, who migrates to Iceland from his ancestral home at the northern extreme of the Scandinavian peninsula. *Bárðar saga* opens with an account of the marriage between the protagonist’s father, Dumbr, and Mjöll, the beautiful daughter of Snær: “Hann nam í burtu af Kvænlandi Mjöll, dóttur Snæs ins gamla, ok gekk at eiga hana” (Þorhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991: 102; “He took Mjöll, the daughter of Snær the Old, from Kvænland, and married her”). The genealogical introduction of *Bárðar saga* is consistent with the historical bent of the work (Ármann Jakobsson 1998), even if the dynasty begun by Dumbr and Mjöll proves to be populated by supernatural characters—a natural consequence of a union between a *rísi* and a Sámi bride.¹⁰

The final text to feature Snær and his family in any detail is the *fornaldarsaga* known as *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, which dates from the fourteenth century (Zitzelsberger 1969: 6; 1993). In chapter 22 of this text, the hero Sturlaugr dispatches a man named Frosti to deliver an inscribed stick to Mjöll, the daughter of Snær *inn gamli*. He travels to Snær in Finnmörk and remains with him through the winter. After many attempts he manages to meet with Mjöll, and, as in *Bárðar saga*, she is characterised by otherworldly beauty. He delivers the message to her, and with much delight she agrees to become Sturlaugr’s mistress. Mjöll travels with superhuman speed back to Sweden with Frosti. The plan turns out to be a ruse, however: Sturlaugr wished only to discover the origin of a magical wild ox horn which he had been seeking for much of the saga narrative. Once Mjöll delivers this information, Sturlaugr has her and Frosti burned to death, as she is suspected to be a dangerous sorceress. The characterisation of Mjöll in this account displays certain similarities with the depiction of Snær’s daughter Drífa in *Ynglinga saga*. Both are the objects of bridal quests which are not fulfilled, and both are associated with subversive magic.

Snær is mentioned once more in the medieval Icelandic corpus. He makes a brief appearance in *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, a *fornaldarsaga* dating from the fourteenth century (Lagerholm 1927: xli–xlii; Simek 1993). In chapter 13 of this narrative, the giantess Arinnejfa describes her quest into the underworld to procure a magical horn:¹¹

Nú fór ek í undirheima, ok fann ek Snjár konung, ok gaf ek honum sex tigi hafra ok pund gulls ok keypta ek svá hornit, en drottningu hans var búinn eitrdrykk í tólf tunna bikar, ok drakk ek þat fyrir hennar skyld, ok hefi ek síðan haft nokkurn lítinn brjóstsviða. (Guðni Jónsson, 1950, III: 351).

I went into the underworld and found King Snjár. I gave him sixty goats and a pound of gold and in this way bought the horn. A poisonous drink had been prepared for his queen in a goblet with the capacity of twelve kegs. I drank that for her sake and have since always had a little heartburn.

In this farcical account, Snjár—another variant form of *snær*—lacks the consistent characteristics exhibited in other Icelandic accounts, such as the epithet *inn gamli* and relatives with icy names. Arinnejfa’s adventures are reminiscent of Christian vision literature and include demonised versions of mythological figures such as Óðinn and Þórr. If it was the author’s intention to create a hellish account populated by well-known characters from the ancient pre-Christian past, then this Snjár *konungr* can hardly be other than the Snær *inn gamli* who surfaces in a range of other Icelandic sources. In such a case, *Egils saga ok Ásmundar* would be the only text to give Snær a queen, and would constitute a uniquely negative representation of this figure

¹⁰ On human-*rísi* marriage, see Grant 2019: 94–5.

¹¹ This horn is presumably unrelated to the one which Snær’s daughter Mjöll speaks of in *Sturlaugs saga*.

in the vernacular tradition. It is unclear whether this Snjár is related to the character of the same name who appears in post-medieval Icelandic sources.¹²

The evolution of King Snow

The evidence adduced above raises two related questions: how did the separate Danish and Icelandic traditions concerning “King Snow” develop, and were these traditions related? The Snyo preserved in the *Chronicon Lethrense* is a shepherd and unlikely king who dies an ignoble death, and he appears in this basic form in all subsequent East Scandinavian sources apart from Saxo’s *Gesta Danorum*. In the Icelandic tradition Snær is an aged descendant of Fornjótr and a progenitor in his own right who, with the exception of *Egils saga ok Ásmundar*, always resides around the Gulf of Bothnia. There is little in the character portraits of these figures which would suggest any link between them.

The one salient connection between the Danish and Icelandic traditions is that the earliest witnesses to both associate Snyo/Snær with the mythological giant Hlér and his island, Hlésey. This link is clearest in the *Chronicon*, where the future king lives on Læsø and is in Læ’s employ. Læ and Læsø are also revisited during the narrative of Snyo’s reign. In *FN*, Snær’s connection with Hlér is less direct, but is still discernible. In this text Hlér is Snær’s great-uncle, being the son of Fornjótr and the brother of his grandfather Kári. Both appear at the head of the genealogy before the narrative of *FN* begins proper and are named in adjoining sentences. Specific reference is also made to Hlésey in the narrative immediately following the opening genealogy in *FN*. Snær’s grandson Górr travels among the islands of Denmark and locates the descendants of Hlér: “Hann fann þar frændr sína, þá er komnir váru af Hlé inum gamla ór Hlésey” (Guðni Jónsson 1950, II: 89; “he found his kinsmen there, who were descended from Hlér the Old from Hlésey”).

It is difficult to account for the association between Snyo/Snær and Læ/Hlér across the *Chronicon* and *FN*, but three possibilities present themselves. First, the author of *FN* could have lifted Snær and Hlér together from Danish historiographical tradition, either from the *Chronicon Lethrense* or a related source. Second, the connections drawn between Snyo/Snær and Læ/Hlér could have a shared basis in earlier mythological or legendary tradition. Third, the link could have arisen by coincidence. The first possibility—of a direct relationship between the Danish and Icelandic traditions—is difficult to reconcile with the divergent inventory of characters across the *Chronicon* and *FN*. The links identified between the two texts to date (Allport forthcoming 2022b) would seem to indicate that the *Chronicon* and *FN* drew on common models and traditions, but were not directly related. This picture is consistent with the second explanation offered here. The independent derivation of Snyo/Snær and Læ/Hlér from earlier tradition is also compatible with their divergent character portraits across the *Chronicon* and *FN*.

If there existed an earlier legendary or mythological tradition in which Snyo/Snær was connected with Læ/Hlér and his island, it is impossible to say more about it. However, this association may have lent itself to the specific purposes of the authors of the *Chronicon* and *FN*. It has long been acknowledged that *Chronicon*’s characterisation of Snyo is not original, but is lifted from the earlier *Chronicon Roskildense*.¹³ The author of the *Chronicon* may similarly have relied on a mythological link between a certain Snjór and the *jötunn* Hlér to furnish the name and associations of his king.¹⁴ Such reworkings of Scandinavian mythological tradition in medieval

¹² A Snjár *kóngur* appears as a king of Hálogaland in the *sagnakvæði* known as *Snjáskvæði*, attested in manuscripts from the seventeenth century but composed at an earlier date (Colwill 2018: 25–8). This figure reappears in Steinunn Finnsdóttir’s seventeenth-century *Snækóngrs rímur* (Hughes 2014). These depictions seem to have little in common with the earlier Icelandic tradition of Snær *inn gamli*.

¹³ Snyo’s characteristics are drawn from those of Erik Emune (Olrik 1900–1: 4, n. 2; Gertz 1917, 36–7; Lindow 2016: 26).

¹⁴ Olrik (1900–1: 16–17, n. 4) supposes that Snyo was originally a *frostjätte* (“frost giant”) and adduces Snær’s descent from Fornjótr in Icelandic sources in support. This is a tempting possibility but is impossible to substantiate.

Danish historiography were not uncommon.¹⁵ The unusual fact of this putative myth's location in Denmark itself may have made it a particularly attractive candidate for its insertion into the legendary history of the *Chronicon*.

An early mythological association between Hlér and Snær may also have motivated their inclusion together at the beginning of the genealogy in *FN*. Hlér's presence at this point of the genealogy is not surprising. References to Fornjótr as a progenitor of elemental beings have a long pedigree in the Old Norse corpus, and Ægir/Hlér was already associated with Fornjótr when *Norðrsetudrápa* was composed. If the genealogist behind *FN* knew of a tradition linking the sea god Hlér with a figure named for snow, then the inclusion of the latter among the elemental descendants of Fornjótr would be quite natural. The switch of Hlér and Snær from Denmark to the Arctic northeast was effected in Icelandic tradition through the association of these figures with Fornjótr, who in *FN* is made king of Finnland and Kvenland.¹⁶

A further question arises from the foregoing discussion: how might one account for the evolution of Snær in Icelandic tradition from an elemental descendant of Fornjótr to a father of Sámi brides? The narrative pattern of Finnic kings giving their daughters away to Norse rulers was not without precedent in the Icelandic corpus. A model already existed in the marriage between Haraldr *hárfagri* and Snæfríðr, the daughter of Svási *Finnkonungr*. This account, first narrated in the late-twelfth century synoptic history *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum*, constitutes the earliest appearance in Icelandic sources of what might be termed the "Sámi bride" type. A more ancient reflex of this pattern may also be found in the marriage between Njörðr and the ski-goddess Skaði, which is the subject of a fragmentary eddic poem preserved in Snorri's *Gylfaginning*.¹⁷ The "Sámi bride" figure came to be widespread in the Icelandic sagas. Later examples include Hvít, the daughter of the king of the *Finnar*, who is the bride of Hringr in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, and Grímhildr, the daughter of a certain Jösurr from Finnland who appears in *Gríms saga loðinkinna*.¹⁸ Across all these texts, the "Sámi bride" type is generally consistent: she is taken from among the *Finnar*, either by force or with the permission of her father, and is often supernaturally beautiful. The bride almost always exhibits malign characteristics, such as an association with sorcery—a fact closely tied with the prejudicial view of the far north in Icelandic literature.¹⁹

Snær's role as the father of Sámi brides *par excellence* is first witnessed in *Ynglinga saga*, where his daughter Drífa is married off to Vanlandi. As a figure already established in *konungasaga* tradition as an ancient king of the Finnic northeast, and with a family bearing icy names, it is not surprising that Snorri made Snær the father of Drífa.²⁰ His function in this text appears to have provided a model to other Icelandic authors who employed the "Sámi bride" type in their narratives. That Snær assumes the role of the archetypal Finnic father-in-law in the Icelandic corpus, and his daughters become the archetypal Sámi brides, is indicated by the fact that saga writers inserted them into a wide variety of different texts and contexts. As discussed above, Snær and his daughters provided a means by which Snorri could account for the death of Vanlandi in *Ynglinga saga*. They were used by the author of *Bárðar saga* to construct an otherworldly origin story for the eponymous hero. They were also used as a way of accessing the physical space and esoteric knowledge of the maligned north in *Sturlaugs saga*. Snær's

¹⁵ Consider the adaptation of the myth of Þórr's visit to Geirrðr in the eighth book of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* (Grant and Hui 2020: 73–4, 87–9).

¹⁶ It is possible that the association of Fornjótr and Ægir/Hlér with the icy north had already been encouraged by *Norðrsetudrápa*, which links these figures with the harsh climate of Greenland.

¹⁷ It has been suggested that the marriage of Snæfríðr and Haraldr *hárfagri* also had mythological roots; see Steinsland 2011: 46–7 and the references there.

¹⁸ On these figures see Hermann Pálsson 1999: 38–40.

¹⁹ See DeAngelo 2010: 259 and the references there.

²⁰ As a Sámi bride named for snow, Drífa may have been modelled on Snæfríðr ("snow-fair"). There are other traces in *Ynglinga saga* of Snorri's possible use of *FN*. He also makes Agni's Sámi bride, Skjölf, the daughter of a certain chief of the *Finnar* named Frosti. This is also the name of Snær's father in *FN*.

reputation was such that he was even employed as a representative of the pre-Christian past alongside Þórr and Óðinn in *Egils saga ok Ásmundar*.

Why did the ancient Snær *konungr* and his descendants lend themselves to this role more than other highborn *Finnar*? This may be because he and his family came to be regarded as personifications of Scandinavia's geographical extremes. This much would seem to be implied by *Bárðar saga*, where Snær's daughter Mjöll lends her name to the snow itself:

...hon var svá fögr ok hvít á skinnslit, at sá snjór tók þar nafn af henni, er hvítastr er ok í logni fellr ok mjöll er kallaðr (Þorhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991: 102).

She was so fair and white in complexion that the snow called *mjöll*, which is whitest and falls in calm weather, took its name from her.

The link between Snær's descendants and the elements is a common thread which runs from *FN*, where he is a descendant of Fornjótr, to *Bárðar saga* and beyond, where his children name the very snow. Meeting Snær and marrying his icy children was perhaps tantamount to contact and union with the Scandinavian periphery itself—a dangerous prospect in the Icelandic corpus, but one which was evidently a rich source of narrative possibility.

Conclusion

The development of King Snow in Scandinavian sources is complex and can only be traced speculatively. This figure's putative prehistory in Scandinavian myth is all but lost in extant sources, but may have inspired both the shepherd from Læsø familiar from Danish records and the icy king of Icelandic saga material.

With the exception of Saxo's account, Snær's character in East Scandinavian sources remains roughly consistent with his portrait in the *Chronicon Lethrense*. In Icelandic sources, by contrast, Snær's character was subject to continuous development. Between his appearances in *FN* and *Egils saga ok Ásmundar* Snær's inventory of territories, descendants and sons-in-law grew with each new source. His evolution from an aged mythological dynast linked with Hlér into a consistent father of the "Sámi bride" type can be understood as an expression of the increasing interest in the Finnic northeast as a narrative arena in the Icelandic sagas, and as an indication of the increasing need to access this space. As a perennial king of the icy north with a slew of eligible daughters, Snær developed into the ideal intermediary between Scandinavian kings and heroes and the world beyond.

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