

# Old Norse Nicknames

A Dissertation  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF  
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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[April 2015]



## Acknowledgements

This dissertation owes a great debt to several entities and individuals without whom it could never have been written. First and foremost is my PhD advisor at the University of Minnesota, Anatoly Liberman, who originally suggested that I research the topic of Old Norse nicknames and whose steadfast support from start to finish has been the greatest boon to my research and scholarly development. Similar thanks are due to my co-advisor, Kaaren Grimstad, whose courses on the sagas and Old Norse led me into this direction in the first place, and whose thoughtful criticism of the parts of this dissertation pertaining to the literature has proven indispensable. It is with special thanks to the financial support of the Leifur Eiríksson Scholarship Foundation that I was able to spend a year studying at the University of Iceland in 2011-12, where I began research on nicknames and laid the groundwork of this dissertation. Immense gratitude is likewise due to the institutional support of Árnastofnun and the MIS program coordinators Torfi Tulinius and Haraldur Bernharðsson, whose program provided a thorough background in all aspects of Old Norse scholarship. A special mention is due personally to Haraldur Bernharðsson, the advisor to my MA thesis and an outstanding instructor of Old Icelandic. In terms of scholarship, great thanks are owed to Kendra Willson, whose dissertation (2007) on Modern Icelandic nicknames and personal correspondences provided a great background to this field of study. Last but not least, all of those who have in some capacity served as a mentor, teacher, colleague, or friend, this dissertation would have been impossible to write without you.

## Abstract

Nicknames, which occur in all cultures and time periods, play an important role in highlighting identity and provide a window into popular culture. The function of nicknames in the Middle Ages is peculiar, however, when men (as in medieval Iceland) would kill for a carelessly dropped word if it was considered to be detrimental to their honor, yet often tolerated the most demeaning nicknames. The quantity of nicknames in Old Norse literature is incomparably rich, and recurring nicknames provide a tool for understanding saga transmission, cultural history, slang, and etymology. The pool of first names was limited in Old Norse society; thus, many people were identified by not only their first names but also their nicknames. Narrative explanations of nicknames in the literature are numerous, and, although most come in the form of a brief anecdote, several examples expand on a character's biography and play a role in the shaping the plot. Such explanations of nickname origins are often also found in other sagas and medieval Scandinavian literature. Several categories of nicknames are found in Old Norse literature, such as those describing physical features, mental characteristics, and one's deeds or habits (good or bad). An alphabetic list of the nicknames from the compendium of settlers in Iceland called *Landnámabók* (*The Book of Settlements*) provides examples of the many types of nicknames and describes them in light of their linguistic origin.

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## List of Abbreviations

adj.	adjective
<i>CV</i>	Cleasby/Vigfusson (1874)
Dan.	Danish
<i>DV</i>	de Vries (1962)
Engl.	English
f.	feminine
Far.	Faroese
<i>FJ</i>	Finnur Jónsson (1907)
Ger.	German
Gmc.	Germanic
Go.	Gothic
<i>HPE</i>	Hermann Pálsson and Edwards (1972)
Icel.	Modern Icelandic
IE	Indo-European
<i>ÍO</i>	Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon (1989)
Lat.	Latin
<i>Lind</i>	Lind (1920-21)
Lith.	Lithuanian
m.	masculine
ME	Middle English
MLG	Middle Low German
n.	neuter
NNorw.	New Norwegian (nynorsk)
Norw.	Norwegian (bokmål)
OE	Old English
OHG	Old High German
OI	Old Icelandic
OIr	Old Irish
ON	Old Norse
OS	Old Saxon
PN	Proto-Norse
Swed.	Swedish

## Chapter 1 – Introduction, Prior Scholarship, and the Old Norse Literary Corpus

Kärt barn har många namn.  
(A dear child has many names.)  
- Scandinavian proverb

### I. Introduction

One of the richest sources of linguistic and cultural data past and present lies in the field of onomastics, the study of names. This field owes its roots to traditional philology, which sought to explain the connections of language families by historical comparison of texts and attested linguistic data. The investigation is far from complete, and philology has branched out into numerous subfields, several of which could be considered fields of their own (such as historical linguistics and material philology). Philology remains particularly strong in its ability to interpret the linguistic data of languages both ancient and modern, as well as to provide a better understanding of literature from which the linguistic data are drawn. By philology, neither material philology nor new philology is meant, rather the traditional discipline which seeks to use all available evidence to understand literature of a given period. Senses of the word *philology* vary from country to country and university to university, but the American definition tends to follow more closely that of the Germans and Dutch (and not necessarily that of the Nordic countries, where it is usually connected to manuscript studies and material philology). It would be wrong to claim that onomastics, a sub-field primarily of linguistics and philology, has not seen its share of attention since its inception in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but much of the work remains undone. After all, names play an integral part in language as a means to identify persons and places and how they are connected to and differentiated from one another.



Similarly, names can also be used as evidence of linguistic forms not attested otherwise, all the while enriching and preserving a language's stock of words.

Nicknames, which occur in all cultures and across all time periods, play an important role in understanding and highlighting identity. They also provide unparalleled access into slang and popular culture less accessible through first names alone. Their study encompasses wide-ranging interdisciplinary scholarship, including onomastics, historical linguistics, history, and literary studies. Old Norse nicknames represent diverse forms of cultural expression from the lower levels of discourse, history, religion, and popular entertainment. Their popularity continues to this day; the nickname of the Danish king Harold *Bluetooth*, for example, has become a household term as the name of a popular form of wireless technology. They have left remnants across Northern Europe in place names, runic inscriptions, and the names of individuals in the saga corpus and elsewhere.

Bynames are extremely common in Old Norse literature, especially since surnames or family names were practically non-existent among the medieval Scandinavians. Most often they are found in apposition to a name, although nicknames, unlike other bynames, frequently occur as hyphenated nouns or adjectives (prefixes) to a proper name (cf. the variation Atli *grautr* 'porridge' ~ *Graut-Atli* 'Porridge-' Atli). Due to the practice in Norse society of naming children after deceased relatives (cf. the discussion of the practice in Janzén 1947, 35-6), the stock of first names seems to have shrunk, and bynames were necessary to differentiate those bearing the same first name. Patronymic (and, more rarely, metronymic names) were common to describe an

individual's genealogy and blood relation to other members of society, and similarly, titles were used to mark out one's social position, which was almost always inherited. Nicknames make up a special category of bynames, one which describes its bearer in relation to some quality about him individually. Unlike patronymics, titles, and geographic bynames, nicknames reveal a more interesting story about the origin of the name, its bearer, and the society that chose to mark out its members individually using descriptive nouns, adjectives, or short phrases. It is these descriptive nicknames that constitute the focus of this study.

One cannot read a saga without encountering dozens of nicknames, and recurring nicknames from saga to saga are common and thus provide a hitherto unexplored tool for studying saga transmission and intertextuality in Old Icelandic literature – topics which have received only mild attention in the saga scholarship of the last century. The largest word bank of medieval Scandinavian nicknames lies in the realm of medieval Icelandic literature. Steblin-Kamenskij in *The Saga Mind* (1973, 65-66) pointed to the reason for the huge quantity of names in the sagas: “The abundance of names in family sagas is also due to the inability to portray the human personality by itself, outside its relationships with other people, outside a feud...but there is still another reason for the abundance of names in the family sagas – proper names were not then what they seem to us now.” What seems, at least to us, excessive name-dropping in the sagas is no accident, because the medieval Icelandic mind conceived of individuals primarily in relation to others. The inclusion of names in the sagas was, in general, to represent someone's identity in terms of his relationship to others. Regarding the prominence of names, he noted that: “The

family sagas mention in all more than seven thousand persons; single sagas mention hundreds, long sagas many hundreds” (1973, 65). Many of these over seven thousand names overlap, of course, and they are often repetitive (there are fifteen men named Porkell, for example, in *Njáls saga*). Considering that a majority of individuals mentioned in the sagas also have nicknames, which are more diverse in quality than the stock of first names, it is not difficult to grasp that there is an overwhelming quantity of onomastic data in these sources.

The function of nicknames in the Middle Ages is peculiar, when kings could be called such derogatory names as Charles the Fat (*Carolus Pinguis*, 839-888), Charles the Bald (*Carolus Caluus*, 823-877), Louis the Stammerer (*Ludovicus Balbus*, 846-879), Pepin the Short (*Pepinus Brevis*, died 768), Ivailo *Bardokva* ‘radish, lettuce’ or *Lakhanas* ‘cabbage’ (Bulgarian, died 1280), Æthelræd *Unræd* ‘ill-advised’ (died 1016), William the Bastard (more commonly called “The Conqueror” in English, ca. 1028-1087), Constantine *Kopronymos* ‘name of shit’ (Byzantine Emperor from 741-775), and the like. The survival of these names is even more astonishing when members of a society (as is the case in medieval Iceland) would kill for a carelessly dropped word if it was supposed to be detrimental to one's honor, yet seem to have tolerated the most demeaning nicknames. Since nicknames are so often insulting, they seem to conflict with codes of honor in medieval society on the surface. The overall picture is clearer, however, when considering the nicknames in terms of their original humor and cutting wit, and with the original function and meaning of them in mind, it becomes a little easier for them to resonate with us today.

The primary focus of this investigation will be limited to nicknames in the Icelandic literary corpus, and a diachronic analysis of earlier attestations of nicknames in other Germanic languages and runic inscriptions is lacking here. Further research is also needed to describe the developments of nicknames in Scandinavia prior to the arrival of settlers in Iceland in the late ninth century. It should be admitted that there are only limited references in this study to the smaller body of nicknames found in runic inscriptions, Old Swedish, Old Danish, and Old Norwegian if for no other reason than a relative lack of richness and variety in comparison to the large body of nicknames in Old Icelandic sources. A literary and linguistic analysis of nicknames has proven more fruitful in texts from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onward concerning the families of Icelanders, Norwegians, Swedes, Danes, and others who make their way into the literature. The occurrences of nicknames in saga literature are numerous, and their features are equally many. Describing some of them will show that nicknames in the corpus can be used for detailed investigation of many of the critical issues in the literature. The modern reader cannot always grasp the motivations for the dubbing of nicknames, but occasionally saga narratives comment on nicknames and provide their own explanation of them. It is these explanations to which particular attention will be paid in my study. A comprehensive study of Old Norse nicknames has never been done in English; similarly, analysis of nickname origins and development or research into their prominent appearances in the literature remains largely neglected. To accomplish this task, I have used methods current in onomastics, historical linguistics, history, and literary studies.

Regarding the organization of my dissertation, it is divided into four chapters, plus a short conclusion and a register of nicknames. Chapter 1 discusses the scholarly material on which my project is based, as well as the available avenues of research on nicknames and how they should be approached. The scope and extent of the literary corpus used in my analysis is summarized to detail how the literature should be understood as a body of cultural memory and a source for linguistic data. Chapter 2 investigates the many cultural and linguistic features of the body of Old Norse nicknames, including the problems in available terminology for describing nicknames and their historical development into first names and surnames. A special section on sexual nicknames is included to show evidence of slang and the levels of vulgarity present in a society that otherwise prohibits insults of this type. Chapter 3 approaches the literary uses of nicknames, discussing the role of nicknames explanations in the composition of sagas and the functions they fulfill across saga genres. Chapter 4 provides an alphabetical list of nicknames in *Landnámabók* (*The Book of Settlements*), the largest single source of medieval Icelandic names, and glosses as many of them as possible in English. A feature of the nickname list is its description of the meanings and origins of nicknames from the perspective of etymology. The primary goal is to provide a large enough collection of nicknames typical to Old Icelandic literature, as well as to find solutions to the meaning of these nicknames, especially those which are obscure or rare words. Concluding thoughts from each chapter are reserved for the conclusion at the end, which is a short summary of the previous chapters and describes the remaining avenues

into which Old Norse nickname research has yet to advance. Finally, a register of nicknames in this work is provided following the bibliography with English translations.

## **II. Prior Scholarship**

A diachronic and frequently also an etymological analysis of Old Norse nicknames is necessary because they have never been compared with nicknames found in other Old Germanic languages, for which a fairly large pool is to be found in runic inscriptions, Gothic (naturally, outside of Wulfila's translation of the Bible), Old/Middle High German, and Old/Middle English. Of particular interest for the topic of runic bynames, see Brylla (1993), Peterson's articles and dictionaries (2002a, 2002b, 2004, and 2007, respectively), and Jacobsson (2013). A collection of names in Vandalic and East Gothic is provided in two works by Wrede (1886 and 1891). On the topic of Middle High German nicknames see Socin's *Mittelhochdeutsches Namenbuch* (1903), particularly chapter 19 which discusses *Übernamen* (407-462) and the *Anmerkungen* (457-462), which deal briefly with the history of nicknames in Old Germanic societies. For a rich collection of Old English bynames see Tengvik (1938), and for Middle English nicknames there are two book-length works by Seltén (1969 and 1975), one book by Jönsjö (1979), and one book by Hjertstedt (1987).

The spread of Norse culture across Europe left its traces in areas of settlement, particularly in the form of place names but also in personal names. Several scholarly works in this regard are worth noting: O. Rygh's collection of Old Norse names in Norwegian place names (1901), des Gautries' collection of Norse names in Normandy

(1954), and, perhaps most appropriate to this topic, the article by Halvorsen (1975) on place names used as bynames in medieval Norway and Iceland. Several works on first names in the British Isles have, almost as an unintended result, large collections of bynames, including Björkman's collection of Norse names in England (1910) and a book by Fellows-Jensen (1968). In her book Fellows-Jensen (1968) analyzed the stock of personal names in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, many of which derive ultimately from bynames (which in large part are nicknames). Furthermore, a large number of the names of all classes in her collection are reconstructed from place names. Lastly, there is an article worth mentioning by Fellows-Jensen (1995) on the personal and place name evidence left by the Vikings in England.

The number of nicknames in the Old Icelandic corpus is enormous and it is for this reason that I have chosen to neglect a proper study of pet names and hypocoristic forms, occupational bynames (that is, titles, such as *konungr*, *jarl*, *skáld*, and *smiðr*), geographic bynames, and bynames of relationship. If, however, there is an additional epithet attached to them, they are treated as nicknames, for example, Hallfreðr *vandræðaskáld* 'troublesome poet', Þórólfr *Mostrarskeggi* 'beard (= man) from Mostr (Norway)', and Helgi *Ingjaldsfífl* 'the fool (= son) of Ingjaldr'. In Icelandic the terms for a hypocoristic name are *stuttnefni* 'short name' and *gælunafn* 'pet name', the latter which corresponds to Dan. *kælenavn* ~ Norw. *kjælenavn* 'pet name'; both Icelandic terms correspond in meaning to Swed. *smeknamn* 'pet name, sobriquet' as well as Ger. *Kosename* 'pet name'. For hypocoristic and short Icelandic names, the topic is best deferred to studies made by Stark (1868), Finnur Jónsson (1920), Guðmundur

Finnbogason (1926), Hannes J. Magnússon (1956), Hale (1981), Villarsen Meldgaard (1983), Höskuldur Þráinsson (1997-1998), Aðalheiður Þorsteinsdóttir (1998), Helgi Skúli Kjartansson (2000), Bragi Jóseppsson (2004), and Willson (2008).

A vast amount of scholarship on European surnames exists, but for the sake of manageability they will be left out of this study. Concerning literature on titles and family names, there are several articles in *Binamn och släktnamn (NORNA-rapporter 8*, Thorsten Andersson, ed. 1975), a study by Svavar Sigmundsson (2004) on Icelandic middle and family names, and a chapter on the development of personal names in late medieval Scandinavia by Wiktorsson (2005, 1171-1187, family names in subsection 2.9 [1177-79]). Birger Sundqvist's dissertation (1957) is a rich source for German and Dutch bynames and family names in medieval Sweden, and it describes bynames of geographic origin and place of dwelling. Occupational titles and bynames of place are those which frequently started as formal titles and gradually became inherited as family names. Studies of medieval titles are of primary interest to a specialist in surnames or family names, because the medieval period was when bynames began to become inheritable, ultimately developing into modern surnames.

Dictionaries and collections of medieval first names and bynames from every Scandinavian country are to be found. The standard reference work for medieval Icelandic and Norwegian names is still Lind's *Norsk-isländska dopnamn ock fingerade namn från medeltiden, samlade och utgivna med förklaringar* (1905-1915, supplement 1931). There are two standard reference works of Medieval Swedish names: *Svenska personnamn från medeltiden* (Lundgren, Lind, and Brate 1892-1934) and the 16 volume



set of *Sveriges medeltida personnamn* (Wiktorsson 1967-2011). The latter work is built upon the former, but it is currently complete only up to *Iordan*. It includes bynames, in addition to first names, but its major drawback is that they are not organized separately and appear alongside first names in alphabetical order (making them difficult to track down). Medieval names from Denmark and the modern provinces of Skåne, Blekinge, and Halland (not included in *Sveriges medeltida personnamn*) are found in the comprehensive two volume *Danmarks gamle personnavne* (Knudsen, Kristensen, and Hornby 1936-1964). Volume I contains first names (*fornavne*), and Volume II contains a comprehensive collection of nicknames, titles, bynames, and surnames (*tilnavne*). Lena Peterson has contributed much to the field with her two dictionaries of names, one on Proto-Norse and early runic names entitled *Lexikon över urnordiska personnamn* (2004, also available online as a PDF), and another on Viking Age and medieval Nordic runic names called *Nordiskt runnamnslexikon* (2007). The latter work is derived from the searchable database *Samnordisk runtextdatabas* and includes bynames and nicknames. A rather large number of bynames are found in runic inscriptions, amounting to 976 bynames in total (cf. Jacobsson, 2013). Wimmer (1903-08) wrote a concise summary of the types of Old Norse names, including nicknames, in the introduction to the name glossary of his four-volume collection of Danish runic inscriptions. The intent behind it seems to have been to explain the types of names encountered in runic inscriptions from Denmark, but it is general enough for describing the naming practices of the entire Old Norse world. First names are covered on pages XXVII-XXXVI, and the description of bynames (nicknames, titles, patronymics and metronymics) takes up the majority of the

summary on pages XXX-XXXV. His description of nicknames is short, but every important term used to describe them is present and the examples he cites are easily the best available (all of them have made their way into this work).

Bynames, including official titles, nicknames, patronymics, and metonymics, also have their fair share of reference works. The standard comprehensive work on Icelandic and Norwegian bynames is Lind's dictionary *Norsk-isländska personbinamn från medeltiden* (1920-21). One notable problem with Lind's dictionary is its age, because many of the textual editions he used are either outdated or unreliable. Despite this, his collection is the finest and most complete available. Lind's dictionary is exceptional for those who can read Swedish (and, naturally, also Old Norse), and most of the bynames are provided with a gloss of likely or possible meanings, as well as a literary citation of the individuals bearing them. Old Norse scholarship could benefit greatly from a second edition of his dictionary, ideally expanded and enlarged, with updated etymologies and literary references, and perhaps also in English.

Lind's dictionary, however, was not without predecessors. A 19<sup>th</sup> century collection of West Norse bynames was published by Karl Rygh, entitled *Norske og islandske tilnavne fra oldtiden og middelalderen* (1871). Later, Finnur Jónsson produced a long list (221 pages) of bynames, based mainly on Rygh's collection (1871), entitled *Tilnavne i den islandske oldlitteratur* (1907, reprinted in 1908). His list includes a brief note explaining its purpose, and concludes with an alphabetical index. It is difficult to navigate his list even with the alphabetical index, and the classification system does not serve the large quantity of data well. Many nicknames could easily overlap into two or

more of the invented categories, though they are only listed in one place each. The long list of nicknames is organized according to the following systematic classes:

Table 1.1 *Systematic Classes of Nicknames and Bynames*

( <b>First section</b> A. descent and kinship, B. age and relationship to age, C. nicknames which depend on home or territorial origin)
( <b>Second section</b> nicknames which stand in connection to the body and its individual parts, as well as bodily features)
( <b>Third section</b> nicknames derived from armor, clothing, and adornments)
( <b>Fourth section</b> nicknames which represent spiritual qualities, knowledge, belief, and the like)
( <b>Fifth section</b> nicknames connected to social position, occupation, individual events, and private life)
( <b>Sixth section</b> common laudatory nicknames)
( <b>Seventh section</b> common derogatory nicknames)
( <b>Eighth section</b> mythological nicknames; pet names, short names and the like)
( <b>Ninth section</b> nicknames which are derived from the realm of nature)
( <b>Tenth section</b> various nicknames which cannot or can only doubtfully be put into any of the first 9 divisions, or such nicknames that are difficult to interpret)

Bernhard Kahle (1910) produced a sixty-page supplement (in German) to Finnur's nickname list, also with an alphabetical index. Finnur later published a short byname supplement (1926, 226-244), based on his earlier list with only minor corrections, to a list of Viking Age names from historical figures before 900 A.D. For Old Swedish bynames, there is Hellquist's dictionary (1912) of Old Swedish *tillnamn* ('secondary names'); his work has in large part been subsumed by the dictionary *Sveriges medeltida personnamn* (Wiktorsson 1967-2011). A small collection of Old Norse (primarily Swedish) bynames of Slavic-Baltic origin is presented in a book by Axnäs (1937). Lennart Ryman's article (2012) on Nordic byname collections and dictionaries was instrumental in compiling this summary.

The standard handbook on personal names in ancient and medieval Scandinavia is Assar Janzén's edited volume *Personnavne* (1947). The handbook consists of five chapters by three authors (four chapters in Swedish, one in Danish). The first chapter is a short overview of Proto-Norse first names found in runic inscriptions and foreign sources by Ivar Lindquist. The second is a comprehensive summary of Old West Norse first names by Janzén, one which makes up the largest section of the book. Of highest importance here is the subchapter on first names which arose out of original bynames (Janzén 1947b, 49-57). The third chapter by Rikard Hornby is a brief overview of personal names in medieval Denmark; unfortunately, nicknames are not mentioned in it. The fourth chapter by Janzén (1947a, 235-268) briefly handles Old Swedish names. The final chapter by Sven Ekbo (1947, 269-284), most relevant to the present, covers Old Norse personal bynames during the Viking Age and early Middle Ages.

Ekbo (1947, 271-78) lays out the formal types of bynames in the following manner:

Table 1.2 *Types of Bynames*

1. Adjectives, with a strong or weak inflection (ex. Ari <i>inn fróði</i> 'the learned')
2. Nouns: common nouns, and nouns produced specifically to function as bynames, usually with the suffix <i>-i</i> (ex. <i>skeggi</i> 'beard, man with a beard' and <i>skapti</i> 'shaft, handle')
3. Short names (hypocorisms) built from first names (ex. Þórdís <i>todda</i> and Álfr <i>elfsi</i> )
4. Hyphenated nouns (ex. <i>Hafr-Björn</i> 'Billy Goat-' Björn and <i>Skalla-Grímr</i> 'Bald Head-' Grímr)
5. Various other compounds (ex. <i>öngt í brjósti</i> 'narrow in the chest' [= 'the asthmatic'] and <i>ormr í auga</i> 'snake in the eye')
6. Geographic bynames (ex. Arnbjörn <i>austmaðr</i> 'the Norwegian' and Björn <i>brezki</i> 'the British')

The final section of Ekbo's chapter (1947, 279-284) covers the motivational processes by which bynames are given:

Table 1.3 *Motivational Processes behind Giving Bynames*

1. Bynames of relationship
2. Bynames derived from physical characteristics of the individual
3. Bynames referring to clothes and appearance
4. Bynames derived from internal characteristics (that is, psychological or mental)
5. Bynames derived from occupation, activities, or social status
6. Bynames which bear either praising or condescending characteristics

Examples of variation within the bynames of relationship are: Ormr *konungsbróðir* 'brother of the king', Gunnhildr *konungamóðir* 'mother of kings', Surtr *Skaptastjúpr* 'Skapti's stepson', and Hákon *Aðalsteinsfóstri* 'foster son of Aðalsteinn'. Among this type is the large quantity of patronymic and metronymic names, which ought not to be counted among nicknames, with only a few exceptions (for example, *Krækuneflingar* 'the descendants of Þórðr *krækunef* ['crow nose']', and possibly also the epithet leveled against Njáll's sons *Taðskegglingar* 'Dung beardlings').

Among a slew of chapters and articles about nicknames collectively and individually, one in particular is worthy of mention which bears more direct relevance to the topic of Old Norse nicknames as a whole. Diana Whaley (1993) addresses one of the primary topics of this investigation: Old Norse nicknames and their literary narratives. Her article is dense with examples and descriptions. It is organized into three sections, beginning with an introduction describing nickname types and features (similar to the summary provided by Ekbo 1947, and a conflation of the nickname types in *FJ*). This is followed by a section on nickname narratives, divided into four sections: nicknames without direct comment, anecdotes of nickname origins, character-describing nickname

narratives, and derogatory nicknames in action. She finishes the article with a conclusion about the high value of nicknames in the study of saga literature. Particularly valuable is the section on nickname narratives, where she describes a vast range of uses of nicknames in saga narratives with varying ends, from the simple anecdotal narratives to more dynamic examples of word play and insults with nicknames in mind. Several of the examples of nickname narratives present here have been drawn from Whaley's article (1993).

Because of the high-frequency of citations, I have abbreviated the nickname collections of Finnur Jónsson (1907) to *FJ* and Lind (1920-21) to *Lind*. Similarly, I have abbreviated the Old Icelandic-English dictionary of Cleasby/Vigfusson (1874) to *CV*, de Vries' etymological dictionary of Old Norse (1962) to *DV*, and Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon's etymological dictionary of Icelandic (1989) to *ÍO* (for *Íslensk orðsifjabók*). Although these are the only scholarly works which have necessitated abbreviations, see the list of abbreviations above for a complete list of all abbreviations used.

### **III. The Corpus of Old Norse Literature – Origin of the Sagas**

The search for the origins of Old Icelandic literature is one of the most difficult problems in the field. At once modern scholars are faced with contradictions and thorny issues for which the answers remain elusive. Yet some of the developments of the past 200 years of Old Icelandic scholarship can provide clues as to the general state of the field in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where some of these issues have at least been solved with a limited degree of success. Among these are the particular roles orality and oral tradition played in the

formation of the sagas, issues which have been interpreted in widely different manners and continue to vary from scholar to scholar (or school to school). Similarly, investigations into the role of written sources and the role of a scribal author (or authors) have only confounded our ability to answer questions of the origins and developments of this literature.

This fundamental problem lies behind every scholarly analysis of a saga, and, even though it is nearly always unintentional and inexplicit, a scholar's interpretations of a saga reflect the stand that he/she has taken on the issue of the origins of sagas in either oral tradition or written literature. The process by which sagas were formed and composed is especially difficult to answer, and scholars have still not come to any consensus regarding it. This is indeed one of the most problematic questions in the entire field of Old Norse scholarship, because, even if it seems immediately obvious that among the various sources for sagas, particularly the sagas of Icelanders (or, family sagas), oral tradition must be a primary source, the extent to which these texts were the products of literary creation through the process of writing and authorial invention is nearly impossible to gauge without inviting controversy. The developments of the study of oral tradition via Lord and Parry have provided a few answers, but these answers hardly account for the entire body of Old Icelandic literature, and in several regards many of the problems that they may have solved upon first application have created even more problems.

Among these is the fact that literature is written, and even if formulaic phrases and suggestions in the texts that narratives are said to be "known by all" or "as many

have heard” on occasion, the texts are almost entirely prose. Furthermore, defining the exact formulaic nature of medieval texts goes practically nowhere, because all medieval texts are, at least in part, formulaic. The use of formulaic language and stock phrases, especially those which appeal to the public or common knowledge, is standard in all medieval texts, even if the texts are authorial invention.

Regarding the presence of oral tradition in the sagas, there is frequently skaldic poetry interspersed in the sagas, but the inclusion of verses only proves that poetry was passed down primarily in oral tradition. Skaldic poetry could be used as one of the many sources on which a saga teller’s narrative was built, though the oral nature of the poetry is limited only to itself, not the resulting prose narratives. Onomastic material like first names, place names, and nicknames, derived from oral tradition (even if it is possible that names came to a saga author/compiler through written material like *Landnámabók*), could be used in the same manner as skaldic poetry to construct a saga. Those telling the sagas had at their disposal oral material like poetry, names, and well-known events to use as “kernels” from which they could build a narrative that may or may not have existed in oral tradition. Pulling the exact details of compositional elements out of a saga is, however, rarely mechanical. In order to explain why so many names have survived in the material, Steblin-Kamenskij (1973, 65-66) argued: “To a considerable degree, this abundance of names is due to the fact that the family sagas comprise syncretic truth, not artistic truth, and consequently these names are not an artistic device: they are not form, but content...” While his idea of syncretic truth may not be easy to explain, nor is it universally accepted by scholars, what he means is that the sagas were composed by



means of unconscious authorship. Thus, the sagas reflect neither a pure form of historical truth (as we define it) nor artistic truth (invention for artistic effect), but instead a bit of both. When he says that the onomastic material is not included in the sagas as an artistic device, it means that names in the sagas are not *artistic* form: they are content reflecting *truth* (not to be confused with modern conceptions of historical truth). This kind of *truth* is what a medieval Icelander would have recognized as history, and it would also explain the excessive name-dropping in the sagas as yet another means for those telling the sagas to give historical information from the known body of oral tradition (or its known written counterparts). Including names of all sorts would only increase the credibility of his work, just like citing skaldic poetry or referring to a well-known historical event.<sup>1</sup>

Another huge problem remains: sagas are usually long and written in prose, and the length of some of the masterpieces of the family saga genre in particular (*Laxdæla saga*, *Egils saga*, and *Njáls saga* are the best-known examples of highest artistic quality in the genre) is far beyond what could be accounted for by oral tradition alone. Even if episodes of family sagas were split up into numerous individual oral tales, it is unwise to give too much (or too little) credit to a saga compiler for reworking the sagas of Icelanders from material found only in short oral narratives. As the family saga genre developed, the length of sagas, and even the narrative and literary complexity approaching the intricacy of novels (only by comparison; these are not novels), increased to the point where oral tradition as the primary source is out of the question. How

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<sup>1</sup> A thorough discussion of the types of knowledge conveyed in the sagas, defined as *fræði* ‘knowledge of the past and history’, is provided by Meulengracht Sørensen (1993, 107-8).

possible is it that those telling the sagas relied on various tales found in contemporary oral tradition for composing a saga? It is unlikely that sagas were composed using written sources as the sole exemplar, and the bulk of information, which is not to say necessarily in narrative form, must be *derived* from oral tradition to large extent. An approach stressing that sagas are derived from oral tradition is not quite able to avoid addressing the possibility of authorial invention, even though it is certain that the compilers of the sagas relied heavily on oral narratives or oral tradition generally for knowledge of key figures and events. The exact degree of reliance on the shape and style of oral narratives, however, is an unsolvable riddle.

The main pursuit of most 20<sup>th</sup> century saga scholars, in no small part as a reaction against the views of 19<sup>th</sup> century scholars on the sagas as reliable history reflecting a common Germanic past, was to find evidence of learned literature and written sources of the sagas. Plenty of evidence has been gained to show that the Icelanders, particularly in the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when the written saga style developed from short, historical narratives of kings and saints into native Icelandic histories of perhaps the highest quality of all medieval narratives, also meant to show to mainland Scandinavian and Europe in general that they were on par with the same state of learning and knowledge as that of their contemporaries. A literate medieval Icelander had as much access to learned tradition, clerical education, and written literature (including entertainment) available in the 13<sup>th</sup> century as Northern Europeans in general. Icelanders consumed foreign literature on a level equal to their Scandinavian contemporaries, and they translated or reworked far more of it than their mainland counterparts. Among the

most popular genres in Iceland, if the large number of manuscripts and literary borrowings into “native” literature are taken into account, was romance adapted into chivalric sagas, sometimes even nativized into a syncretic romance-like *fornaldarsaga* (for example, *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* and *Bósa saga ok Herraudþs*). The exact degree to which religious literature and works of antiquity were present to Icelanders at home is known very poorly, and how much learned literature directly influenced saga composition is impossible to gauge without overreaching one way or the other. A trend of the mid- to late 20<sup>th</sup> century scholarship was the attempt to show precisely which learned works were known and influential in medieval Iceland, almost always without manuscript evidence or other examples of direct influence (such as conclusive thematic borrowings in the surviving texts). While no one can deny the presence of learned material in twelfth century Iceland like the translations of *Physiologus*, *Elucidarius*, and *Veraldar saga*, scholars have had to take a step back to see the whole picture as one not so simply described as native adaptation of foreign literature, but one instead formed through several processes and various motivations over time.

Oral tradition did play a prominent role in Icelandic society, as the continuity of oral tradition demonstrates in Iceland to a greater degree than other Northern European societies. It has lasted throughout the Middle Ages and until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the form of *rímur*, native chivalric sagas and *fornaldarsögur*, and folklore in general, and it is unreasonable to dismiss later Icelandic literature, also derived from oral tradition, as inferior degradations of the classical 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries Old Icelandic literary corpus. Nevertheless, the production of vernacular writing in Iceland appeared already in the

early twelfth century when, if we can trust *Ari fróði*, the laws were recorded in 1117-18. Other early twelfth century native texts, like *Íslendingabók* and later *Landnámabók* (if the dates of either text are reliable, having only survived in manuscripts centuries later), are a far remove from the literary quality of the family sagas, and they tell us little about the later production of sagas except that they seem to have served to some degree as historical sources. The initial introduction of writing in Iceland was not unique in comparison to its Scandinavian neighbors, in particular in Norway, even if much of the literature produced in Iceland later was. Furthermore, the development of “saga style,” of which the family sagas are arguably the finest examples, began already in twelfth century historical chronicles of Norwegian and Scandinavian kings. Synoptic chronicles like *Historia Norwegiae* and *Ágrip* were at first produced in Norway, some even written by Icelanders, and they played a larger role in the later development of Icelandic saga narrative than what can be accounted for by oral tradition alone. Similarly, the influence of the common European stock of saints’ lives and chronicles like Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* provided a model for the production of early historical texts first in Norway, and soon after in Iceland.

It is important to note some of the main texts which preceded the first written sagas of Icelanders beginning in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, and how they directly influenced the narrative composition and style exemplified in the Icelandic sagas. The narrative style of histories progressed rapidly, beginning first with generic chronicle-style summaries of events and the people involved, eventually expanding into long-winded digressions and narrative tales approaching the style of the epic (though in prose). From the beginning,

the use of skaldic poetry as a means to profess historical accuracy was a significant feature of the kings' sagas. The historical narrative style had already begun developing, for example, in the two Latin histories of Norway (*Historia Norwegiae* and Theodoricus Monachus' *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium*), *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum*, *Fagrskinna*, and *Morkinskinna*. From there the historical style continued to develop into more elaborate narratives in the 13<sup>th</sup> century kings' sagas like *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, *Sverris saga*, and the ultimate culmination of the entire genre *Heimskringla*. One can only assume that the well-developed narrative style of the kings' sagas influenced the composition of the sagas of Icelanders first appearing in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, and they offer a great deal of evidence for the refinement of the *written* style of Icelandic literature by the time sagas of Icelanders appeared.

The exact state of oral tradition in 13<sup>th</sup> century Iceland is not known, though the literature as a whole provides some anecdotal evidence of the function of oral storytelling and oral culture in medieval Scandinavia. While it is common knowledge that Icelanders were among the most prominent poets of the 10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries in the courts of Scandinavia, by the 13<sup>th</sup> century the art of poetry had lost favor. This is perhaps one of the primary motivations for the composition of Snorri's *Edda* and the later compilation of the *Poetic Edda*.<sup>2</sup> Besides the Icelandic skalds' prominence as court poets abroad, in the twelfth century Icelanders also had a reputation for having preserved history and

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<sup>2</sup> In Faulkes' introduction to his edition of *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning* (2005, xvi), he described the motivation behind the production of Snorri's *Edda*: "It was love of the traditional poetry of Scandinavia that was the underlying reason for the composition of the *Edda* as a whole. All parts of it are concerned largely with the kinds of poetry that had been cultivated in the north from at least the ninth century; but it was written at a time when both eddic and scaldic verse were declining in popularity."

mythology, a point which was mentioned by Saxo Grammaticus in the preface to his *Gesta Danorum*.<sup>3</sup> Whether they provided him written sources or were simply oral sources, or both, is unclear. Similarly, Icelanders were entrusted by the Norwegian court to compose historical sagas of kings in writing, including possibly *Sverris saga* in the first decade of the 1200's, and with certainty *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* in the 1260's by Snorri's nephew Sturla Þórðarson. Regarding mentions of oral performance, there are three texts that describe genuine oral performances. In the contemporary saga compilation *Sturlunga saga* at a wedding feast in twelfth century Reykjahólar (Iceland), there is a description of an Icelandic farmer reciting oral tales resembling *fornaldarsögur*. Also in the compilation is the description in *Sturlu þáttr* where in 1263 Sturla Þórðarson recited a lost saga called *Huldar saga* about a troll woman on a ship before King Magnús Hákonarson. The third example occurs in a *þáttr* in *Morkinskinna*, where in eleventh century Norway an Icelander tells tales to the court of King Haraldr *harðráði* ('hard-rule') Sigurðsson near the time of Yule. When he runs out of tales, the king asks him to tell his own saga over the whole course of Yule, and though terrified of offending the king, he does so accurately and to the king's satisfaction, citing an Icelandic chieftain (who was with the king for many years) who told him the stories every year at the Alþing. This *þáttr* is propaganda stressing the reliability of Icelanders for telling accurate history. Yet even taking into account these descriptions, one can hardly rely on their accuracy to describe the conditions in which sagas were put to writing. Were the sagas

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<sup>3</sup> The attribution made by Saxo which refers to Icelanders as a source is discussed and quoted in the chapter on Saxo's Icelandic sources by Bjarni Guðnason (1981, 81) in the volume *Saxo Grammaticus: A Medieval Author Between Norse and Latin Culture* (Ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen, 1981).

performed for a scribe by an oral narrator? Without a doubt, the answer is no. So how did Icelandic scribes gather their material that did come from oral tradition?

The debate regarding the composition of the sagas has vacillated between the two extremes, one where the sagas are more or less verbatim recordings of orally-performed (i.e. dictated) tales to a scribe, and the other where the sagas were entirely invented by creative scribes like the novel. The major scholarly debates in the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries seeking to describe the basis for the composition of sagas have revolved around the concepts of *Buchprosa* (book prose) or *Freiprosa* (free prose), coined by Andreas Heusler (1914), though both approaches had already been underway for almost a century. Book prose theory is the position that the sagas were written by authors and derived from written sources with direct influence from learned, Latin exemplars. Free prose theory supposed that the sagas preserved accurate historical information in oral tradition, and the written sagas were true renditions of orally-performed narratives. Almost every scholar of either faction, however, acknowledged the role of *both* oral and written tradition in the production of sagas, but the degree to which one or the other influenced the production determined to which camp a scholar belonged.

There was an integrated bias of political influence on who accepted either theory. For example, the free prose theory advocates were primarily Scandinavian philologists, and especially folklorists (later formalists), who saw Eddic poetry and the sagas as preserved descendants of a common oral tradition in Scandinavia, a view which put the primacy of saga origins in mainland Scandinavia and excluded notions of original composition in Iceland. Icelanders, making up the larger faction of proponents of the

book prose theory, were motivated to find in the sagas original Icelandic literary fiction (derived from learned culture, showing both the originality of the Icelanders and their high-level of learning), because they were seeking independence in the 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century and used the sagas as a means to distance themselves from their Scandinavian overlords (since ~1262-64 when the Norwegians took over Iceland). On the opposite side, Icelanders could use free prose theory to argue for the special historical reliability of their medieval ancestors, a traditional view among Icelanders that still has a stronghold on the national sentiment (even if most Icelandic scholars today find problems with such a position). German and British scholars have tended to fall in one camp or the other, but more have tended to fall in the same camp as (mainland) Scandinavians.

The polarity between these two extremes left scholars at an impasse, and the approach in either direction fell out of fashion in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, when the originality of oral formulaic theory began to enter into the debate. Still today scholars tend to make their analyses from the biases of one side or another, almost always without being explicit. At the same time as the freshness of oral formulaic theory from the 1960's onward renewed the free prose supporters, book prose advocates searched even more zealously for learned exemplars everywhere they could be found, a search that only began to abate in the 1980's. Some ground was gained using the renewed book prose approach, but not nearly as large a quantity of useful information was gained as scholars produced.

Among recent attempts to explain the role of oral tradition in the production of sagas, Carol Clover's idea in the late 80's of an "immanent saga" (1986), later boosted



and refined in Old Norse scholarship by Gísli Sigurðsson's research (2002 and 2005) mostly on the Eastfjords sagas and the Vinland sagas, has found some general favor. Tommy Danielsson's books (2002a and 2002b) on *Hrafnkels saga* and several kings' sagas have followed, more or less, the same lines as those of Gísli. Even Ted Andersson (2006) has modified some of his earlier positions on the oral foundations of the sagas after having closely followed the contributions of Gísli and Tommy Danielsson. The recent scholarly developments made by these individuals take as their central key to decoding oral tradition the evidence provided by the sagas for information known outside the narratives. That is, often the lack of an explanation in a saga of particular events and relations of characters found in other sources can tell us the body of information which might have been known in contemporary oral tradition. This is a condition which reflects an "immanent saga," or sagas, particularly bits and pieces, based on commonly known events which could have been told but were not. The absence of data, upon comparison with other sagas or material containing it (and therefore confirming public knowledge of certain events), seems vital to understanding the plot and gives clues as to the body and nature of the circulating oral tradition. Such oral tradition was there, according to this view, and thus, written sagas often derived from oral tradition floating around as the immanent material from which narratives could develop (but did not necessarily need to, hence the term "immanent"). Applying this approach is best taken on a case by case basis, naturally, but it seems that especially those sagas which are further removed from a longer-standing written tradition describing events and characters of that region provide more evidence to support this approach. The Eastfjords sagas in particular (like *Hrafnkels*

*saga*, *Fljótsdæla saga*, *Droplaugarsona saga*, *Porsteins saga hvíta*, and so on) provide solid evidence for this approach, most strongly demonstrated by Gísli Sigurðsson's research (2002 and 2005). In large part, the material related to these sagas is lacking in other written sources outside this group of sagas, except the random mention of prominent chieftains from the Eastfjords and their involvement in cases at the Alþing in the sagas of other regions.

With such an explanation it has become possible at last to define the sagas as orally derived written literature, though the approach has a few weaknesses. Without careful application, using the notion that sagas of Icelanders were built at least in large part from oral traditions can be misleading when dealing with, among other genres, translated and reworked literature matching to some extent the artistic mastery found in the family sagas (for example, historical texts like *Breta sögur* and *Trojumanna saga*). Although the approach frees us in many ways from the two schools (free or book), it perhaps plays up the role of orally-transmitted narratives in the composition of sagas too greatly (which remains an unknowable fact in the majority of cases). Not surprisingly, most Icelandic scholars have budged very little in regards to this new approach and remain, perhaps not as strictly as before, proponents of book prose. Even so, the current consensus seems to be that the material in the sagas was derived from oral tradition, a fact which ought to have been obvious all along. Yet this problem has confounded scholars for two centuries who have mistakenly read the sagas as either oral tradition or written tradition exclusively (with most admitting some influence of one or the other on both sides of the debate). It has taken until now for scholars to begin cracking the

multifaceted code which lies behind the origin of the sagas, and to acknowledge honestly that no single approach can explain their compositional origins. Oral traditions inspired the composition of the sagas of Icelanders, but so did written literature both imported and domestic, and the role of those telling the sagas in compiling their material, whatever its origin, played a significant role in shaping the artistic narrative quality. Therefore, only an approach which takes all the facts into account will be able to provide a framework capable of quelling the endless debate.

## Chapter 2 – Terminology, Origins, Meanings, and Some Features of Nicknames

Var þat þá átrúnaðr manna, at þeir menn myndi lengr lifa, sem tvau nöfn hefði.  
 (Back then it was people's belief that those who had two names would live longer.)  
 - *Þorsteins saga hvíta*

### Introduction

The number and variety of Old Norse nicknames is richer than any other medieval culture, even other Old Germanic societies. Janzén (1947a, 242) notes the high volume of Old Norse bynames, “Binamnen kom i Norden i bruk i en omfattning som är ojämförligt större än i andra delar av den germanska världen.”<sup>4</sup> That Old Norse bynames outnumber those in other Old Germanic societies is confirmed by Tengvik's (1938) collection of Old English bynames. I will discuss several features of Old Norse nicknames, including: terms used to describe them, medieval explanations of them, the process by which they become first names, and overtly sexual nicknames. The overall focus is therefore on the development of nicknames and how this information aids in describing medieval Nordic society through its naming customs.

### I. Terminology

The vocabulary that surrounds the classification of nicknames is enormous and varies from language to language. Therefore, defining clear-cut examples within such classifications is challenging. In English, the all-inclusive term *nickname* causes confusion where it is often used by both specialists and non-specialists to describe hypocoristic pet names that do not accurately represent nicknames but rather one type of

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<sup>4</sup> “Bynames came into use in the Nordic world to an extent which is incomparably larger than in other parts of the Germanic world.” This translation and all others are mine, unless specifically noted.

bynames (ex. Johnny, Bob, Teddy, etc.). Other terms used for nicknames in English like *moniker*, *sobriquet*, the antiquated form *to-name* (cf. Ger. *Zuname* ‘surname’), and *byname*, all pose their own problems. *Moniker* is a recent coinage, *sobriquet* is not widely understood by English speakers, *to-name* is a dead form found on paper only, and *byname* describes secondary names of several sorts, including nicknames but also surnames, titles, and patronymics/metronymics.

The same issue of loose terminology occurs practically everywhere across linguistic boundaries, in part due to conflation of the separate traditions of giving nicknames and giving pet names. Yet the medieval evidence, as best as we can tell, made a stronger distinction between nicknames and hypocorisms. Pet names are far less represented in medieval Scandinavia, though they were more common in other Old Germanic societies. Among all Old Germanic societies, one practice consisted of giving a shortened byname; that is, a diminutive, familiar pet form used to replace a first name with a form derived from it (such as *Óli* for *Óláfr*, *Tósti* for *Þorsteinn*, and *Kalli* for *Karl*). Hypocorisms in particular are often derived from the language of children or mimic the language of children unable to articulate and pronounce words. The majority of such pet names became genuine first names through frequent use. The other practice consisted of adding a secondary name or *agnomen* as a supplement to a given name; by definition, these are nicknames. A good reason not to count pet names as nicknames is that a pet name cannot stand side by side with a first name, for example, *John Johnny* does not work together and one or the other must be used. A nickname like *John Chatterbox*, however, works fine together and neither has to be used exclusively.

Although using the Latin term *agnomen* (plural *agnomina*) is as problematic as using the term nickname, in part due to the historical developments of naming traditions and the uses of *agnomina* in the Roman world, it corresponds best to the meaning of nickname as I will use it throughout this study. Originally the Latin term *cognomen*, not the modern English borrowing which does indeed mean “nickname,” would have been the most appropriate to describe nicknames, because *cognomina* (the plural of *cognomen*) were originally Roman nicknames (cf. Kajanto’s discussion of *cognomina* which originated as nicknames 1965, 20, and 1966, 16-23). After *cognomina* became inherited as supplements to clan names that identified sub-families within the clans, however, the use of the term for describing nicknames became no longer apt. Garland (1994, 76), who described the defamation of disabled and deformed individuals in the Greco-Roman world, noted that many of the derogatory *cognomina* from the Republican era had become family names, and he provides several *cognomina* which began as nicknames: “Examples include Capito (Big head), Ovid’s *cognomen* Naso (Big nose), Brocchus (Large, projecting teeth), Caecus (Blind), Hirsutus (Hairy), Horace’s *cognomen* Flaccus (Big ears), Balbus (Stammerer), Valgus (Bow-legged), Minutus (Tiny), Crassus (Fat), Macer (Thin), Peditus (Farter) and Putentinus (Little smelly).” Moreover, Garland notes (1994, 76) that the descendants of the original bearers lost any stigma these names must have had as nicknames: “Whatever opprobrium may have attached to the first family member to be identified in this way, the stigma does not seem to have carried over into succeeding generations. There is no evidence to suggest that any Roman was ever mocked because of his name, still less that a Roman ever sought to change his name

because it had proved a social handicap or embarrassment.” Thus, after the term *cognomen* could no longer be accurately applied to identify nicknames, the Romans developed the term *agnomen* to describe a person’s nickname (and not how one is related to others).

Several Roman writers described the intricate naming customs of Roman society. Pseudo-Probus wrote in his fourth century *Instituta artium* (in the section on nouns, entitled *de nomine*) about the full name of the Second Punic War hero Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus:

Propria hominum nomina in quattuor species dividuntur, praenomen nomen cognomen agnomen: praenomen, ut puta Publius, nomen Cornelius, cognomen Scipio, agnomen Africanus.<sup>5</sup>

[People’s personal names are divided into four types: *praenomen*, *nomen*, *cognomen*, *agnomen*; *praenomen*, for example, Publius, *nomen* Cornelius, *cognomen* Scipio, *agnomen* Africanus.]

In the case of this man, his name is divided into four categories: the first, *Publius*, being the only equivalent of a given name; the second, *Cornelius*, is a clan name; the third, *Scipio*, was originally a nickname meaning ‘staff, scepter’ (as a sign of authority), but lost its nickname quality when it became inherited as a means to identify a sub-branch within the larger Cornelius clan; the last, *Africanus*, marked his success in defeating Hannibal in the Second Punic War and is the only equivalent of a nickname.

More pertinent to the discussion at hand, the *agnomen*, which is truly the closest technical term for a descriptive nickname, is defined by the fourth century African-

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<sup>5</sup> In *Grammatici latini*, Vol. IV (Keil 1864, 119, 31-33).

Roman writer Marius Victorinus in his commentary *Explanationum in rhetoricam* on Cicero's *De inventione*:

Iam agnomen extrinsecus venit, et venit tribus modis, aut ex animo aut ex corpore aut ex fortuna: ex animo, sicut Superbus et Pius, ex corpore, sicut Crassus et Pulcher, ex fortuna, sicut Africanus et Creticus.<sup>6</sup>

[Moreover, the *agnomen* comes from without, and comes in three ways, either from character or from the body or from circumstance: from character, like *Superbus* ('the arrogant') and *Pius* ('the loyal'), from the body, like *Crassus* ('the fat') and *Pulcher* ('the beautiful'), from achievements, like *Africanus* ('the victorious in Africa') and *Creticus* ('the victorious on Crete').]

Considering that the bulk of Old Norse nicknames fit into the three categories of the Roman *agnomina* quoted here, this term may be used accurately to describe these types of nicknames. To avoid further confusion, however, I will stick with the less well-defined English term *nickname*, or the Old Icelandic equivalents, to describe what could also be called *agnomina*. Note, however, that the Roman *agnomina* with a geographic title (*Africanus* and *Creticus*), which appear at first glance to be topographical or ethnic descriptions, are in fact neither in a literal sense. Such geographic *agnomina* are given in recognition of someone's accomplishments in warfare against these regions, not their geographic origin or current area of inhabitation (which, by contrast, are rather common types in Old Norse).

The English word *nickname* implies a connection with a secondary name, or more precisely, a name which is added to an individual's first name. The term developed from ME *ekename*, whose first component *eke-* 'increase' (< OE *ēaca* 'increase') developed into *nickname* by metanalysis from *an ekename*, just like *newt* 'a small lizard-like animal,

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<sup>6</sup> In *Rhetores latini minores* (Halm 1863, 215, ll. 2-5).



salamander' was formed from *an ewt*. In other words, the misdivision of the syllables in *an ekename* was reanalyzed as *nekename*. OE *ēaca* developed from a root with cognates across Germanic and Indo-European, for example Go. *aukan* and ON *auka* 'to increase', Lat. *augere* 'to enlarge, increase', and Lith. *áugu, áugti* 'to grow'. Early on it seems that *nickname* became wrongly associated with the verb *nick* 'to make a shallow cut, a notch' (cf. also Ger. *necken* 'to banter, tease'), as the earliest known example suggests in John Higgin's 1585 translation of the Dutch physician Hadrianus Junius' *Nomenclator*: "Sussuro, a priuye whisperer, or secret carrytale that slaundereth, backebiteth, and nicketh ones name." (Palmer 1882, 255) The next example occurs just a few years later in a manual on poetry from 1589, where the author (assumed to have been George Puttenham) describes prosonomasia (that is, nicknaming), or more accurately in the context of poetry, paronomasia (that is, puns): "Ye haue a figure by which ye play with a couple of words or names much refembling, and because the one seemes to anfwere th'other by manner of illufion, and doth, as it were, nick him, I call him the *Nicknamer*" (Arber 1869, 212). The use of *nick* to mean 'to give an insulting nickname' is also found in the first edition of Camden's *Remaines of a Greater Work, concerning Britaine*: "GOODITH, *Sax*: Contracted from Goodwife, as we now ufe Goody: by which name king *Henry* the firft was nicked in contempt, as *William of Malmesbury* noteth" (1605, 80) and also, "The Greekes (to omit infinite others,) nicked *Antiochus Epiphanes*, that is, the famous, with *Epimanes*, that is, the furious" (1605, 140-41). The meaning of *nick* used in the above examples, though un-etymological, is reflected in the German term for a nickname *Spitzname*, which is related to the adjective *spitz* 'pointed, spikey, sharp' and

the verb *spitzen* ‘to sharpen’ (cf. also Ger. *Schimpfname* ‘insulting nickname’ and *Spotname* ‘derisive nickname’).

Returning to the North, in numerous cases a nickname, most often in the form of a weak adjective, could also function as a replacement for the given name, showing that nicknames were only one of several components of an individual’s name. This is not entirely unlike the situation in Roman society, but a naming system as complex as that of Rome never developed in Scandinavia. Surnames in the medieval period were extremely rare in the North, just as they still are in Iceland, and nicknames were often the closest equivalent. Nicknames were often permanently attached to and indistinguishable from a given name, and it is in this way that they began to develop into surnames in the medieval period.

In an attempt to avoid confusion among the numerous onomastic terms found in various languages and historical traditions, I will use primarily Icelandic terminology and corresponding English terms (where available) which best reflect the subtle nuances of terms as they come up in the discussion. Preference will also be given to Old Norse-Icelandic terminology over terms which only occur in modern Icelandic. Several terms in Old Norse are used, almost interchangeably, for nicknames. The most common one in Old Norse is *viðrnefni* (Icel. *viðurnefni* ~ *viðurnafn*, Swed. *tillnamn* [less commonly *vedernamn*]), which signifies in the most obvious manner an “added name.” Lindquist (1947, 14) proposed the archaic, but perhaps more appropriate technical Swedish term *vedernamn* for nicknames which are used: “...antingen för att skilja honom från andra

personer med samma namn eller för att hedra eller nedsätta honom.”<sup>7</sup> His attempt to restore this word in academic literature has been unsuccessful. Also in Swedish and Scandinavian scholarship there are the frequently used terms *tillnamn* ‘additional name’ (Dan./Norw. *tilnavn* [occasionally NNorw. *tilnamn*]), which is the most suitable to describe nicknames in these languages, and the closest corresponding term to match up with *viðrnefni*. *Binamn* ‘secondary name’ is in several regards more problematic, because it includes titles, occupational and otherwise, and secondary names of geographical origin. The English term *byname* can also mean a hypocoristic name, which makes it among the least suitable terms specifically for describing a nickname. There is also the Old Icelandic term *kenningarnafn*, which means something like ‘an alternate name by which someone is known, a name of recognition’; the term is used interchangeably in medieval literature to mean either ‘title’ or ‘nickname’. These terms, *viðrnefni* and *kenningarnafn*, are by their nature neutral, though *kenningarnafn* is often used to describe a title given as an honor.

The cognate of *nickname* in Old Icelandic called *auknefni* ‘increased name, nickname’ (cf. Swed. *öknamn*, Dan. *øgenavn*, and North Ger. *Ökelname*, all with the same meaning) can either be neutral or, in most cases, derogatory. The term in Icelandic (and the Scandinavian languages) seems to have developed from its simple meaning of an “increased, additional name” into having a negative connotation, if only as a result of the high frequency of abusive *auknefni*. A near parallel term to *auknefni* is *aukanafn*, with a similar meaning ‘extra title, byname’ (cf. *auka nafn* ‘add a name’ and *auknefna* ‘to give a

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<sup>7</sup> “...either to distinguish him from other people with the same name or to praise or insult him.”

nickname’). *Aukanafn* may have been coined in order to differentiate titles from nicknames. The terms *auknefni* and *aukanafn* are not entirely synonymous, but the two are related and occurred already in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

*Auknefni*, perhaps by their very nature as nicknames, are so frequently negative that *CV* (34) mention the term as having two separate senses of the meaning: “‘eke-name, nickname’: first, a defamatory name, punishable by lesser outlawry; second, in a less strong sense” (that is, as a regular nickname). Dividing the meaning into two senses is misleading, however, because the basis for a negative connotation is contextual. Even so, this opinion is not unfounded considering that a large percentage of *auknefni* are indeed derogatory. There is in fact a stipulation in the large section covering fighting and homicide called *vígslóði* (‘battle slot’) in *Grágás* (as found in *Staðarhólsbók*, AM 334 fol., from ca. 1260-1281) against giving *auknefni* if they are intended as derogatory:

Ef maðr gefr manne nafn annat en hann eigi. oc varðar þat fiör Baugs Garð ef hin vill reiðaz við. sva er oc ef maðr reiðir avknefni til haðungar honom oc varðar þat fiör Baugs Garð oc scal þat hvartuegia søkia við xii. quið.<sup>8</sup>

[If someone gives a person a different name than the one he already has, it is punishable by lesser outlawry (three years’ exile) if the other one is angered by it. As such it is also the case if someone spreads around a nickname to degrade him, it is punishable by lesser outlawry, and it shall in both cases be decided by the verdict of twelve men.]

This stipulation reflects the social power of “calling people names” and using nicknames as terms of abuse, and it is little shock that such a harsh penalty existed in a society where a slight against one’s honor was often considered grounds for violent revenge. While the

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<sup>8</sup> Diplomatic text from *Grágás efter det Arnamagnaenske Haandskrift Nr. 334 fol.*, *Staðarhólsbók* (Vilhjálmur Finsen 1879, 391-392).

legal punishment for “name calling” was three years of exile, more often than not blood feuds were spurred on by insults exactly like these.

Not particularly different in meaning and use, but current only in modern Icelandic, is the term *uppnefni* ‘a dubbed name, nickname’ (cf. also *nefna upp* ‘to rename’). This term is, however, more commonly applied to nicknames given in teasing than the other nickname terms. Guðrún Kvaran clarified this distinction in her foreword to Bragi Jónsson’s book (2004) on modern Icelandic nicknames in *Stykkishólmur*:

Með orðinu *viðurnafni* er átt við viðbót við eiginlegt nafn karls eða konu. Annað heiti á því sama er *auknefni*. Oft getur verið skammt á milli *viðurnefnis* og *uppnefnis*. *Uppnefni* eru þó oft meira niðrandi en *viðurnefnin* og gefin af stríðni eða vegna einhvers atviks, spaugilegs eða neyðarlegs.<sup>9</sup>

[With the word *viðurnafn*, an addition to the proper name of a man or woman is meant. Another name for the same is *auknefni*. Often there can be little difference between a *viðurnefni* and an *uppnefni*. *Uppnefni* are, however, more often even more derogatory than the *viðurnefni* and given in teasing or because of some event, funny or embarrassing.]

The modern distinctions presented here, though they are much better defined, cannot be applied to the more fluid situation of terminology in Old Icelandic. While it is a massive challenge to apply definitive terminology to the study of medieval nicknames, *uppnefni*, a term not used by any medieval sources, will be excluded from appropriate terminology for describing medieval nicknames.

The verbal constructions most commonly found where a name, often but not always including a nickname, is introduced include *heita* ‘to be called’ plus the nominative form of the name, or *kalla* ‘to call’ plus the accusative form of a name. It was as common to use the verb actively as it was for *kalla* to appear as a past participle, as in

<sup>9</sup> From the introduction to *Uppnefni og önnur auknefni* (Bragi Jónsson 2004, 7).

*hann var kallaðr/hon var kolluð* ‘he was called/she was called’. Less common, though far from rare, was the introduction of a name with the constructions *vera nefndr* ‘to be named’. The medio-passive *nefnask* ‘to be named’ was rare, and likewise, the phrases *eiga nafn* ‘to possess or have a name’ and *hafa nafn* ‘have a name’. Two seldomly-used terms use to describe the bestowing of titles are *nafngipta* ‘to give a title’ and *nafnkenna* ‘to give a recognizable name or title’. There are four common expressions used to give nicknames or titles at the introduction of a new name, either at birth or later in life, including: *nefna* ‘to name’, *gefa nafn* ‘to give a name’, *auka nafn* ‘to add a name’, and *lengja nafn* ‘to lengthen a name’.

## II. Terminological Patterns in Nickname Narratives

The origin of the nickname of Haraldr *hárfagri* ‘fair hair’ is given in chapter 23 of his saga in *Heimskringla*, where Earl Rognvaldr Eysteinnsson gave him the new nickname after washing and cutting his hair, replacing his former nickname *lúfa* ‘(thick) matted hair’ (= ‘shock-head’):

Haraldr konungr var á veizlu á Mœri at Rognvalds jarls. Hafði hann þá eignazk land allt. Þá tók konungr þar laugar, ok þá lét Haraldr konungr greiða hár sitt, ok þá skar Rognvaldr jarl hár hans, en áðr hafði verit óskorit ok ókembt tíu vetr. Þá kolluðu þeir hann Harald lúfu, en síðan gaf Rognvaldr honum kenningarnafn ok kallaði hann Harald inn hárfagra, ok sǫgðu allir, er sá, at þat var it mesta sannnefni, því at hann hafði hár bæði mikit ok fagrt.<sup>10</sup>

[King Haraldr was at Earl Rognvaldr’s in Mœrr for a feast. He had then possession of the entire country. Then the king took a bath there, and then King Haraldr had his hair combed, and then Earl Rognvaldr cut his hair, and before it had been uncut and uncombed for ten years. Before then they called him Haraldr *lúfa* (‘shock-head’), and afterwards Rognvaldr gave him a nickname and called him Haraldr *inn hárfagri* (‘the fair

<sup>10</sup> In *Heimskringla I*. (ÍF XXVI, 122).

haired’), and everyone said who saw him that it was the truest name of all, because he had hair both plentiful and fair.]

The use of the term *kenningarnafn* for “title” does not seem entirely fitting, especially when *hárfagri* looks a lot more like a nickname and the label *viðrnefni* ‘additional name’ would have been expected. One terminological variant here is followed by yet another naming term, *sannnefni* ‘true, accurate name’, used to verify the accuracy of the byname in terms of public opinion. Earlier in the same saga (chapter 10), Røgnvaldr *Mærajarl* (a title meaning ‘Earl of Mœrr [modern day Møre, a county in Norway]’) is called by two nicknames, *inn ríki* ‘the mighty, powerful’ and *inn ráðsvinni* ‘the wise in counsel, shrewd’:

Hann var kallaðr Røgnvaldr inn ríki eða inn ráðsvinni, ok kalla menn, at hvárt tveggja væri sannnefni.<sup>11</sup>

[He was called Røgnvaldr *inn ríki* or *inn ráðsvinni*, and people say that both were accurate names.]

The description of positive nicknames such as these with the term *sannnefni* is relatively commonplace.

In a fragment of the so-called *miðsaga* of *Guðmundar biskups saga* (in AM 657c 4<sup>10</sup>, from ca. 1340-1390), Guðmundr gives his friend Einarr the title *klerkr* ‘cleric’ (not a nickname), which is described in a similar fashion as the re-dubbing of Haraldr *hárfagri*:

...en hann [Guðmundr] vígði hann þá er hann var tvítugr, ok gaf honum þat kenningar nafn at hann skyldi heita Einarr klerkr, ok kvað honum þat sannnefni en eigi auknefni.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> In *Heimskringla I. (ÍF XXVI, 104)*.

<sup>12</sup> From *Brot úr miðsögu Guðmundar in Biskupa sögur Vol. I* (Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1858, 589).

[...and he (Guðmundr) consecrated him then when he was twenty, and gave him the nickname (title) that he should be called Einarr *klerkr*, and said that to be a true name for him and not a nickname.]

This is another example where medieval Icelanders shuffled around terminology and applied *kenningarnafn* to a person's title. Even more interesting in this regard is that his title is said not to be an *auknefni*, which should only be applied to a nickname (and this is obviously not one), but it is instead a *sannnefni*. The terms *kenningarnafn* and *auknefni* are not entirely synonymous, so it is important that a distinction is made between the two.

To differentiate between a *kenningarnafn*, which is either neutral or given as an honorific title, and an *auknefni*, which can often be derogatory (as the previous example shows), in *Fóstbræðra saga* it differentiates between the two established senses of nicknames:

Helgi átti kenningarnafn ok var kallaðr hvítr, ok var honum þat eigi auknefni, því at hann var vænn maðr ok vel hærðr, hvítr á hár.<sup>13</sup>

[Helgi had a nickname and was called *hvítr* ('white'), and for him it was not a derogatory nickname, because he was a handsome man and had fine, white hair.]

This strong inflection variant *hvítr* is found only in *Flateyjarbók*; other manuscripts repeat more or less the same explanation, but have the nickname as the more usual, weakly inflected form *inn hvíti*:

Hann átti þat kenningarnafn, at hann var kallaðr Helgi inn hvíti, því at hann var vænn maðr ok vel hærðr, hvítr á hárslit.<sup>14</sup>

[He had this nickname that he was called Helgi *inn hvíti* ('the white'), because he was a promising man and had fine hair, white in color.]

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<sup>13</sup> In *Flateyjarbók* Vol. II (Sigurður Nordal 1945, 243).

<sup>14</sup> From *Fóstbræðra saga* in *Vestfirðinga sǫgur*. (*ÍF* VI, 181).



It is apparent from the text in *Flateyjarbók* that a distinction was made between *kenningarnöfn*, which were more apt for describing a positive feature or a title (and could even be considered *sannnefni*), and the often negative *auknefni*, echoing the description of Einar *klerkr*'s title.

There is one instance in a short tale from *Ólafs saga ins helga* where the term *sannnefni* is used to verify a name which is derogatory. The title character of *Hróa þáttr heimiska* is named *Hrói inn heimski* 'the stupid, foolish', though the entire tale disproves the accuracy of the nickname (it may have been a joke). In this passage, he does his best not to deny the nickname in what can only be described as tongue-in-cheek modesty:

hann kom þar at sem kona iung gek til uatz. óngua þottizst hann set hafa konu fridari en þessa ok er hann kom at henni leit hon uit honum ok mællti. huer ertu. Ek heiti Hroi segir hann. Ertu Hroi hinn heimski segir hon. Hann suarar. ek ætla þat nu vera ærit mikit sannnefnne en att hefui ek ædri nöfnen fyrr. edr huert er þitt nafnn segir hann. Hon segir. ek heiti Sigrbjorg ok er ek dottir Þorgnyrs lögmantz.<sup>15</sup>

[He came there just as a young woman was going to the water. He thought that he had seen no woman more beautiful than this one, and he went to her. She looked at him and said: "Who are you?" "My name is Hrói," he says. "Are you Hrói *inn heimski* ('the foolish')," she says. He answers: "Well, I consider that name to be quite true enough, but I have had more dignified names before. And what is your name?" he says. She says: "I'm called Sigrbjörg and I am the daughter of Þorgnýr the Lawspeaker.]

Hrói is showing great humility and telling the truth, which ultimately leads to his rise in the Swedish court as his legal and business successes compound. Earlier in the tale, the narrator mentions that he was called by two other nicknames, *inn auðgi* 'the wealthy' and *inn prúði* 'the magnificent, elegant', both of which are positive:

uar hann þa kalladr Hroi hinn audge edr Hroi hinn prude ok for hann med þessu konungs tillagi huert sumar til ymisra landa.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> In *Flateyjarbók. II.* (Guðbrandr Vigfusson and Unger 1862, 76-7).

<sup>16</sup> In *Flateyjarbók. II.* (Guðbrandr Vigfusson and Unger 1862, 74).

[Back then he was called *Hrói inn auðgi* ('the wealthy') or *Hrói inn prúði* ('the splendid'), and he traveled with the king's contribution each summer to various countries.]

The use of *sannnefni* in the case of *Hrói inn heimski*, where the nickname does not fit and is definitely not a "true, accurate name," is an instructive example of irony, though this is the only such case of it with *sannnefni* in the entire literary corpus.

The verbal expressions used to give nicknames are not numerous. An example of the phrase *auka nafn* 'add a name' is found in Chapter 1 in *Ketils saga hængs*, which gives a typically legendary account of Ketill's nickname *hængr* '(male) salmon', reflecting an overlay of medieval etymology. After killing a dragon, which Ketill believed to be a mere salmon, Ketill has a dialogue exchange with his father Hallbjörn. In commemoration of Ketill's "fishing trip," Hallbjörn replaces Ketill's former nickname *Hrafnistufífl* 'fool of Hrafnista' (given by the now-murdered neighbor Björn *bóndi* 'farmer') with an ironic nickname for his ability to slay a dragon and still consider it a small task:

Ketill svarar: "Ekki kann ek at færa í frásagnir, hvar ek sé fiska renna, en satt var þat, at sundr hjó ek einn hæng í miðju, hvern sem hrygnuna veiðir frá." Hallbjörn svarar: "Lítils mun þér síðar vert þykkja um smáhluti, er þú telr slík kvikvendi með smáfiskum. Mun ek nú auka nafn þitt ok kalla þik Ketil hæng."<sup>17</sup>

[Ketill replies: "I can't bring anything to the accounts, where I see fish swimming, but it was true that I cut apart a salmon in the middle, whoever fishes the spawner from it." Hallbjörn replies: "You will be thought of little worth later regarding small things, when you count such a creature among small fish. I will now add to your name and call you Ketill *hængr*."]

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<sup>17</sup> In *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*. Vol. I (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943, 247).

Ketill *hængr*'s (< \**hæingr*) nickname is probably related to *hór* 'hook' and seems to have originally meant something like "the hooked one," but it may have meant "(male) salmon" just like the explanation given here in his saga (cf. NNorw. *hyngn* 'male sea trout, salmon'). The male salmon *hængr* seems to have received its name from the bent up hook on its lower jaw (cf. *ÍO*, 408 s.v. *hængur*). *Hængr* (> *Hængur*) is also found as a first name, a familiar pattern in name inheritance.

### III. Ancient and Medieval Thoughts on Nicknames

Rarely are the naming customs of any past society, let alone their practice of nicknaming, stated explicitly by members of that society. Therefore, the few examples which turn up are precious for understanding the real motivations behind them. A single passage in Old Icelandic literature reveals how medieval Icelanders may have thought regarding the significance of nicknames. In chapter 8 of *Þorsteins saga hvíta*, Þorsteinn's foster son *Brodd-Helgi* ('Spike-' Helgi) is given a nickname to commemorate his trickery for attaching a spike to a young bull's forehead to level a fight with an older, larger bull, ending with disastrous results for the latter animal. His nickname is given and explained in relation to the pre-Christian custom of giving nicknames:

Fekk hann af þessu þat viðnefni, at hann var kallaðr Brodd-Helgi, en þá þótti monnum þat miklu heillavænligra at hafa tvau nöfn. Var þat þá átrúnaðr manna, at þeir menn myndi lengr lifa, sem tvau nöfn hefði.<sup>18</sup>

[He received the nickname from this event that he was called *Brodd-Helgi*, and back then it seemed to people greatly promising to have two names. At that time, it was people's belief that the people who had two names would live longer.]

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<sup>18</sup> In *Austfirðinga sǫgur*. (*ÍF* XI, 19).

This passage illustrates the value of having a nickname, and it also appears to have the ring of superstition or religious quality about it. The narrative here with a bull and a spike attached to his head for bettering his chances in the fight is also found as the explanation of *Brodd-Helgi*'s nickname in the first chapter of *Vápnfirðinga saga* (ÍF XI, 24), but the explanation for the importance of having two names is left out. The bull fighting event with the attached spike also seems to have inspired the compiler of the *Hauksbók* version of *Trójumanna saga* to imitate it (cf. Jón Helgason 1976, 192-4; and Gísli Sigurðsson 2002, 142).<sup>19</sup>

A similar mention of Old Norse-Icelandic naming practice occurs in an isolated short paragraph from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century AM 281 fol. (103r),<sup>20</sup> where the compounding of names of heathen gods to given names is described in theophoric constructions such as *Grímr + Þórr > Þorgrímr*:

Hier biriar gømul Annal og ættartølur.

Það er fróðra manna søgn að það være sidur í firndinne, að draga af nöfnum Gudanna nöfn sona sinna, so sem af Þórs nafne Þorolf, edur Þorstein edur Þorgrim, eda sa er Oddur hiet, first skillde heita af hans nafne Þóroddur sem Þormóður qvad vm Snorra goda og Odd son hans er kalladi Þorodd edur Þorbergur, Þorálfur, Þorleifur, Þorgeir. Enn eru fleire nofn dreiginn af þeim gudum og Ásum, þo að af Þór sie flest, menn höfdu þa og mioc ij nofn, þotti það líklegt til langljífis og heilla, þott nockrir fyrimællti þeim við Gudinn, þa mundi þa ecki skada ef þeir ætti annat nafn.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> The added spike to the forehead of a bull motif is found only in chapter 7 of the *Hauksbók* version of the saga, where the trials of young Paris (called *Alexandr* in the saga) are described while in the wilderness around Mount Ida (Eiríkur Jónsson and Finnur Jónsson 1892-1896, 199). In the scene, a bull owned by the god Jupiter (alternatively, called *Þórr* here) is defeated by Alexandr's due to his having attached a spike to win the bull fight. That it only occurs in the 14<sup>th</sup> century version of the saga makes the thematic borrowing from the *Brodd-Helgi* nickname explanation more certain.

<sup>20</sup> From ca. 1674-1675 A.D. This text also occurs in AM 115 8<sup>vo</sup> (ca. 1600-1649 A.D.) written by Björn Jónsson from Skarðsá, there with the heading "Annal. Eptir Hauksbók" and other minor textual variants.

<sup>21</sup> From *Tillæg X* in *Hauksbók* (Eiríkur Jónsson and Finnur Jónsson 1892-1896, 503-4). A normalized version of this text is found in Guðbrandr Vigfússon's edition of *Eyrbyggja saga* (1864, 126) in a short appendix (Anhang 2).

[Here begin old annals and genealogies. It is a saying among wise men that this was the custom in ancient times, to draw their sons' names from the names of the gods, such as Þórólfr from Þórr's name, or Þorsteinn or Þorgrímr, or the one who was first called Oddr decided to be called by his name Þóroddr, just as Þormóðr said about Snorri goði and his son Oddr, whom he called Þóroddr, or Þorbergr, Þórálfr, Þorleifr, and Þorgeirr. Yet there are more names drawn from the gods and the Æsir, although Þórr is the most used, at that time people very often had two names, it seemed promising to a long life and well-being, though some people would swear themselves to the gods, then nothing would harm them if they had a second name.]

The important line for the purposes of understanding Icelandic name traditions, normalized into Old Icelandic, would read: Menn höfðu þá ok mjök tvau nöfn. Þótti þat líkligt til langlífis ok heilla, þótt nokkurir fyrirmælti þeim við goðin, þá mundi þá eigi skaða, ef þeir ætti annat nafn (People had very often had then two names. It seemed promising to a long life and well-being, though some people would swear themselves to the gods, then nothing would harm them if they had a second name). Although this passage is explaining the theophoric compounding of first names, it echoes the logic used to explain *Brodd-Helgi's* nickname in *Þorsteins saga hvíta*, that having a nickname, or in this case a name with two components (one of mythological origin), was considered a promising (*heillavænlig*) feature and would promote a long, healthy life. This passage contains an overlay of medieval etymology; yet it is another matter whether we can believe such explanations of medieval naming practices (especially one from such an late manuscript). The occurrence of the idea that having two names is lucky might account to a limited degree for reality. Doubt on those explanations ought not be cast too strongly, however, considering the continuity of naming traditions in Iceland, even though there is not enough evidence to accept them as historically verifiable.

Roughly the same idea regarding the importance of having two (or more) names was also found in medieval England. That is, having more than one name, especially an official name, reflected one's social status and signified high rank. In the discussion of surnames in Camden's *Remaines concerning Britaine* (1605), after noting that men of the lowest rank are always last in the *Domesday Book*, he provides reasoning for the adoption of surnames among those with a higher rank in medieval England by comparing them to the Romans:

But shortly after, as the Romans of better forte had three names according to that of *Iuvenal*, *Tamquam habeas tria nomina*, & that of *Aufonius*, *tria nomina nobiliorum*. So it seemed a disgrace for a Gentleman to have but one single name, as the meaner forte and bastards had. For the daughter and heire of *Fitz-Hamon* a great Lord, as *Robert of Gloucester* in the Librarie of the industrious Antiquary maister *Iohn Stowe* writeth, when King *Henry* the first would have married hir to his base sonne *Robert*, she first refusing answered;

*It were to me a great shame,  
To have a Lord without 'n his twa name.*

whereupon the king his father gave him the name of *Fitz-Roy*, who after was earle of *Gloucester*, and the onely Worthy of his age.<sup>22</sup>

The quotes from Juvenal and Ausonius have to do with the idea that, in Roman society, having three names (*praenomen*, *nomen*, and *cognomen*) was a sign of high social status. Camden's explanation for the motivation behind European nobility adopting surnames in the Middle Ages is clever, but it is doubtful that the Roman name custom influenced the practice (though it is generally assumed that the adoption of surnames in the Middle Ages originated in France). Regarding the cutting distich in reply to the marriage proposal by King Henry I on behalf of his illegitimate son Robert, it is presumably by the Anglo-Norman noblewoman and Countess of Gloucester Mabel FitzRobert (1090-1157). It

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<sup>22</sup> Camden 1605, 94-95.

comes as little surprise that as a result of her initial refusal to marry Robert, King Henry I surnamed his son *Fitzroy* ('son of the king'; *fitz* < Norman *filz* < Lat. *filius* 'son'), which looks like a regular Anglo-Norman patronymic but may have been given here as a kind of patronymic title. It should also be noted that the bastard son Robert married up in this situation. In any case, it seems that already in twelfth century England, if the account given here is reliable, the adoption of a second name was beneficial to one's status in society.

The ancient world provides a suitable analogue to the naming customs of medieval Europe. Greco-Roman society, for example, considered having several names a symbol of one's high status. The Greek historian Plutarch described naming customs of the Romans and the Greeks in his *vita* of Gaius Marius from *Parallel Lives*:

[Of a third name for Caius Marius we are ignorant, as we are in the case of Quintus Sertorius the subduer of Spain, and of Lucius Mummius the captor of Corinth; for Mummius received the surname of Achaicus from his great exploit, as Scipio received that of Africanus, and Metellus that of Macedonicus. From this circumstance particularly Poseidonius thinks to confute those who hold that the third name is the Roman proper name, as, for instance, Camillus, Marcellus, or Cato; for if that were so, he says, then those with only two names would have had no proper name at all. But it escapes his notice that his own line of reasoning, if extended to women, robs them of their proper names; for no woman is given the first name, which Poseidonius thinks was the proper name among the Romans. Moreover, of the other two names, one was common to the whole family, as in the case of the Pompeii, the Manlii, or the Cornelii (just as a Greek might speak of the Heracleidae or the Pelopidae), and the other was a cognomen or epithet, given with reference to their natures or their actions, or to their bodily appearances or defects, Macrinus, for example, or Torquatus, or Sulla (like the Greek Mnemon, Grypus, or Callinicus). However, in these matters the irregularity of custom furnishes many topics for discussion.]<sup>23</sup>

Plutarch notes a discrepancy among Roman authors regarding the need for three names among nobility, and he mentions it because the subject of this *vita* is only known to have

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<sup>23</sup> In Vol. IX of Perrin's edition and translation of *The Parallel Lives* (Plutarch [Perrin] 1920, 465).

had two names, a situation similar to women who were always denied a *praenomen* (cf. the description of the four types of Roman names, above). He also explains the origin of *cognomina* as the original nicknames of the Romans, later turned inheritable clan names. The *cognomina* he mentions are, in fact, all nicknames in origin: *Macrinus* < *macer* ‘thin, meager’, *Torquatus* ‘wearing a twisted collar or necklace’, *Sulla/Sylla* < *syl* ‘burned red rock’, *Mnemon* ‘mindful’, *Grypus* ‘hook nose’, and *Callinicus* ‘beautiful victor’. A list of Roman *cognomina* such as these could go on to almost no end.

If it is true that in Old Norse society nicknames were thought to increase one’s luck, it is hardly surprisingly that the number of nicknames an individual could have or be given was not limited to one. Many prominent people, primarily (but not only) those of the ruling class, are found with multiple nicknames. *FJ* (361-362) provided a thorough summary of individuals possessing more than one byname, and it will be useful to copy the names from his list to show how many such individuals there were. Those with two nicknames joined by *ok* ‘and’ include:

Helga *en hárprúða ok en siðláta* ‘the splendid hair and the well-mannered’

Steinbjörn *enn sterki ok stórhoggvi* ‘the strong and big blow dealer’

Rognvaldr *enn ríki ok enn ráðsvinni* ‘the powerful and the shrewd’

Hálfdan *enn mildi ok enn matarilli* ‘the generous and the stingy with food’ (note that the last three men’s nicknames alliterate)

A few individuals have two bynames without *ok* between them:

Arnórr *enn góði Rauðæingr* ‘the good’ and ‘dweller on Rauðá (Red-River)’

Porkell *leifr enn hávi* ‘descendant, heir’ and ‘the tall’



Porfinnr *sviðbrandr lúðrsveinn* ‘firebrand’ and ‘trumpeter’

There are also those with two or more bynames that changed during different periods of their life:

Surtr *enn hvíti* ‘the white’ – *Skaptastjúpr* ‘Skapti’s stepson’

Arnórr *enn mærski* ‘the man from Møre (Norway)’ – *Mæra Karl* ‘man from Møre’

Úlfr *enn vǫrski* ‘man from Voss (Norway)’ – *Vǫrsa-Úlfr* ‘Voss’-Úlfr

Hávarðr *enn halti* ‘the lame’ – *Ísfirðingr* ‘man from Ísafjörður’

Þórarinn *svarti* ‘the black’ – *máhlíðingr* ‘man from Mávahlíð’

Haraldr *hárfagri* ‘fair hair’ – *lúfa* ‘shock head’

Qzurr *lafskegg* ‘dangling beard’ – *tóti* ‘protuberance, nub?’

Helga *væna* ‘the fine’ – *fagra* ‘the fair’

*Sneglu-Halli* ‘Sarcasm-’ Halli; ‘Slender Body-’ Halli; ‘Weaver’s Shuttle-’ Halli?  
– *Grautar-Halli* ‘Porridge-’ Halli – *Hreðu-Halli* ‘Disturbance-’ Halli – *Eyglu-Halli* ‘Little Eyed-’ Halli?’

Refr *Rennisfífl* ‘Rennir’s fool (= son)’ – *Gjafa-Refr* ‘Gifts-’ Refr

Pétr *steypir* ‘caster, moldmaker’ – *Svína-Pétr* ‘Pigs-’ Pétr

Eyvindr *hani* ‘cock, rooster’ – *tínhani* ‘field rooster’

Sigurðr *ullstrengr* ‘wool string’ – *ullband* ‘wool yarn’

A few individuals have three nicknames:

*Hólmǫngu-Bersi* ‘Duel-’ Bersi – *Eyglu-Bersi* ‘Little Eyed-’ Bersi? – *Raza-Bersi* ‘Ass-Bersi’

Björn *kaupmaðr* ‘merchant’ – *farmaðr* ‘traveler’ – *buna* ‘ungartered; bone shaft?’

Aðalsteinn *enn trúfasti* ‘the faithful’ – *sigrsæli* ‘the victorious’ – *góði* ‘the good’

Guðrøðr *veiðikonungr* ‘hunting king’ – *göfugláti* ‘the generous’ – *mikilláti* ‘the proud, grand’

There are a couple individuals who have four nicknames:

Hálfðan *hvítbeinn* ‘white-legged’ – *háleggr* ‘high-legged’ – *háfæta* ‘high feet’ – *heikilnef* ‘crooked nose’

Eysteinn *illi* ‘the bad’ – *illráði* ‘the wicked’ – *harðráði* ‘hard-rule’ – *ríki* ‘the powerful’

Lastly, there are a couple of individuals with five nicknames:

Hrói *auðgi* ‘the wealthy’ – *heimski* ‘the foolish’ – *prúði* ‘the elegant’ – *spaki* ‘the wise’ – *Slysa-Hrói* ‘Mishap-’ Hrói

Magnús *berfættr* ‘barefoot’ – *berbeinn* ‘barelegged’ – *berleggr* ‘barelegged’ – *enn hávi* ‘the tall’ – *Styrjaldar-Magnús* ‘Age of Unrest-’ Magnús

As is apparent from this list of individuals with multiple nicknames, the diversity of the names and the circumstances from which they gained them varied greatly. Similarly, the fact that people could have several nicknames reflects different origins and social functions of them – after all, to call a person (and this is an extreme but instructive example) Hrói *auðgi* ‘the wealthy’, Hrói *heimski* ‘the foolish’, Hrói *prúði* ‘the elegant’, Hrói *spaki* ‘the wise’, or *Slysa-Hrói* ‘Mishap-’ Hrói could only have come about as the result of different events or actions in that individual’s life as well as in different social settings.

#### **IV. Nicknames Turned First Names**

Since the medieval distinction between nicknames and first names was more fluid, they could be substituted for first names, but they may also have become better known than the first name at some point in their oral transmission. Likewise, the stock of names was

increased significantly by adapting nicknames into first names, a process which seems to have begun far earlier than recorded history. Janzén (1947a, 242) says: “Binamnen kunde användas enbart, utan nämnande av det verkliga namnet. De fick karaktären av dopnamn och kunde sedan gå i arv genom uppkallelse.”<sup>24</sup>

Distinguishing between nicknames turned first names and names that resemble nicknames is compounded by the fact that nicknames could and often did become first names when they left their original habitat as regular words and became proper nouns. As a result, it is often difficult to draw the line between nicknames and names which only appear to have originally been nicknames because they resemble words still current in a language’s register. For example, names like *Helgi* (cf. *inn helgi* ‘the holy, saint’), *Ófeigr* (cf. the adj. *ófeigr* ‘not fated to die’), *Ljótr* (cf. the adj. *ljótr* ‘ugly’), and the like all resemble adjectives that could just as easily be nicknames; yet none of these is without a doubt the result of a nickname turned first name. In many cases there is nowhere to draw the line concretely. In addition, the proper names of medieval Iceland were much closer to their roots both culturally and linguistically than modern Scandinavian names are. Iceland remains a wonderful exception.

Proper names in modern Scandinavia and to a lesser extent in Iceland have become more disconnected from the qualities of an individual bearing them than they were in the past, when, at least in pre-Christian times, names were frequently recycled within a family group, potentially for a spiritual purpose. That is, in order to carry on the

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<sup>24</sup> “Bynames could be used alone, without making mention of the actual name. They got the characteristic of first names and could later be handed down by being inherited as a first name.”

legacy of a deceased ancestor, names were often given to grandchildren with some belief that the spirit of that ancestor would be transferred to the child. Janzén (1947, 35-6) suggests that the belief in transferring the soul of a deceased relative to a child originated as early in Scandinavia as the 7<sup>th</sup> century, lasting well into the Viking Age. Whether there existed a religious dimension to passing down names is ultimately unknown, but alternative explanations for the practice are lacking. Since first names had in a majority of cases already lost their descriptive value, nicknames became increasingly popular as a means to describe someone in relation to his personal qualities or actions. Several prominent Old Norse first names were originally nicknames, such as Snorri and Grettir, and there are many examples in *Íslendingasögur* showing how the first bearer of a given name inherited it from a deceased relative's nickname. Whaley (1993, 124) notes that the well-known names *Skapti*, *Gellir*, and *Sturla* seem to have come about in a similar fashion as *Snorri* and *Grettir*. They arose as nicknames, but when they were passed down to their descendants, as was the common practice of name giving in Old Norse society, they would have become more familiar than the first name. Thus, the original nicknames became the inheritable first names.

Ekbo (1947, 270-71) states that nicknames were prone to being passed down at an early stage: “Redan tidigt möter man exempel på en tendens att låta binamnen gå i arv.”<sup>25</sup> He provides one example, where a son of the Icelandic poet Hallfreðr *vandræðaskáld* ‘troublesome poet’ (literally, ‘poet of difficulties’) in his eponymous saga is named Hallfreðr *vandræðaskáld* after his father. If a nickname can pass from one generation to

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<sup>25</sup> “Already at an early time one finds examples of a tendency for bynames to be handed down.”

the next either as the same nickname or as a newly created first name from the nickname, it makes little sense to dismiss the likelihood that the same could just as easily happen two generations later. An example like this father to son nickname transfer reflects one of the many difficulties when trying to distinguish the exact classification standards separating bynames, first names, and family names (more appropriately for the Viking Age, inheritable names or surnames).

Janzén (1947a, 242) describes the process by which several Old Norse first names were formed using a hyphenated noun in compound nicknames, like *Auðbjörn* (< \**Auð-Björn* ‘Wealth-’ *Björn* < *Björn inn auðgi* ‘the wealthy’) and an older formation of the type *Sverkir/Sørkvir* (< \**Svart-Geirr* ‘Black-’ *Geirr*). He says of the process (1947, 242): “I Norden blev denna art av namnbildning av stor betydelse, och därigenom skapades massor av nya namn.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, almost all of the oldest Germanic names are compounds, and it is impossible to determine the precise origin of each of them. While it is impossible to prove that all compounded names originated as nicknames, there is at least some textual evidence showing how the process by which several first names were formed from nicknames.

Ekbo (1947, 269) argues that it is difficult to differentiate between first names and bynames, but that it is possible to define several attributes: “Personbinamnet skall för det första ej vara personens egentliga namn (dopnamn).”<sup>27</sup> It is often difficult to determine whether we are dealing with a first name or a nickname. This is especially so in cases in

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<sup>26</sup> “In the Nordic world this type of name formation became of great importance, and through this process a huge amount of new names were created.”

<sup>27</sup> “The byname of a person first of all should not be the person’s real name (given name).”

which servants or slaves are involved. For example, there is a slave mentioned in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* by the name *Karkr*, a man who betrayed and beheaded his master Earl Hákon. Incidentally, almost as though by accident, the slave *Karkr*'s real name Þormóðr is mentioned right after he is introduced:

Fór jarl þá ok þræll hans með honum, er Karkr er nefndr. Íss var á Gaul, ok hratt jarl þar í hesti sínum, ok þar lét hann eptir mottul sinn, en þeir fóru í helli þann, er síðan er kallaðr Jarlshellir. Þá sofnuðu þeir, en er Karkr vaknaði, þá segir hann draum sinn, at maðr svartr ok illiligr fór hjá hellinum ok hræddisk hann þat, at hann myndi inn ganga, en sá maðr sagði honum, at Ulli var dauðr. Jarl segir, at Erlendr myndi drepinn. Enn sofnar Þormóðr karkr öðru sinni ok lætr illa í svefni. En er hann vaknar, segir hann draum sinn, at hann sá þá inn sama mann fara ofan aprt ok bað þá segja jarli, at þá vǫru lokin sund ǫll. Karkr segir jarli drauminn.<sup>28</sup>

[Then the earl went with his slave, who was named *Karkr*. There was ice on the Gaula river, and the earl stumbled into the ice there with his horse, and he left behind his mantle there, but they went into the cave, which afterwards is called *Jarlshellir* (Earl's Cave). Then they fell asleep, and when *Karkr* woke up, he tells his dream that a man, black and hideous, went past the cave, and he became afraid that he would come in, and the man told him that *Ulli* was dead. The earl says that *Erlendr* would have been killed. Þormóðr *karkr* ('thick bark, thick skin; tightly bound; cackler?') falls asleep yet another time and is restless in his sleep. And when he wakes up, he tells his dream that he saw the same man coming back down and told him to tell the earl that the entire sound was closed. *Karkr* tells the dream to the earl.]

The narrator quickly shifts back to calling him by his nickname, used as a first name *Karkr*. It is also worth noting the use of the hypocoristic form *Ulli* for *Erlendr*. In *Fagrskinna* (*ÍF* XXIX, 139), *Karkr* is mentioned only once as Earl Hákon's killer and is called there *Skopti karkr* (also in *Jómsvíkinga saga* 1969, 185 and 194). The story that *Karkr* kills Earl Hákon is nearly identical in *Ágrip* (2008, 22-25), but without the slip of the slave's real name and the slaying of the earl is ordered and not on *Karkr*'s own account. The meaning of the nickname *karkr* is uncertain, but it probably has something

<sup>28</sup> In *Heimskringla I*. (*ÍF* XXVI, 295).

to do with bark (cf. NNorw. *kark* ‘thick bark’) or tying/binding (cf. NNorw. *karka* ‘to bind tightly’). Another possibility raised in *Lind* (189) is a connection with NNorw. *karkla* ‘to cackle’, which could alter the meaning of the nickname to ‘the cackler’. In any case, Karkr’s example shows how difficult it is to know for certain whether a name may have been invented, and similarly, how challenging it can be to determine if a name is definitively a nickname or a first name.

The use of nicknames as supplements to given names in the Norse world must also have been used occasionally to differentiate individuals with the same name in the same family or geographic area, and also as a means of highlighting the characteristics or deeds of a particular person. The pair of Án brothers, Án *inn hvíti* ‘the white’ and Án *inn svarti* ‘the black’, from chapter 24 in *Laxdæla saga* provide a suitable example to show the use of nicknames to differentiate people with the same name:

Þeir váru bræðr tveir með Óláfi, er hvárrtveggi hét Án: var annarr kallaðr Án inn hvíti, en annarr Án svarti.<sup>29</sup>

[Two brothers were with Óláfr, who were both called Án: one was called Án *inn hvíti* (‘the white’), and the other Án *svarti* (‘the black’).]

To make clear that nicknames were not given only as a means of differentiating people, Janzén (1947a, 242) argues: “Naturligtvis kunde ett sådant namn ges åt en person även då det inte var nödvändigt för att undvika missförstånd.”<sup>30</sup> Since nicknames were more characteristic of an individual than a first name alone, they were often more

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<sup>29</sup> From *Laxdæla saga* (ÍF V, 66).

<sup>30</sup> “Naturally such a name could be given to a person even when it was not necessary to avoid confusion.”

appropriate in the formation of place names derived from the nickname instead of the first name.

Ekbo (1947, 282-84) summarizes the process by which bynames become either first names or family names in Norse society, noting that (283): “I det forntida Norden var det nämligen vanligt, att barn uppkallades efter (döda) förfäder (ofta far- eller morföräldrarna) eller avlägsnare släktingar. Om någon nu uppkallades med sin döde farfaderns förnamn, så fick han ofta övertaga också dennes binamn.”<sup>31</sup> This in particular is one of the more significant processes which led to the formation of family names in Scandinavia, and Ekbo finishes his chapter by briefly commenting on the high frequency of family names from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onward derived from occupations, especially those in areas of German settlement. Thus, the modern surname practice of giving occupational family names in Scandinavia developed in large part from German influence. Nicknames, with their individualized, descriptive nature, frequently contained the appropriate material necessary to dub new first names, but could also be passed down as family names in the later medieval period.

Ekbo (1947, 282) notes that the use of nicknames as a replacement for a given name shows the ability of nicknames to become first names: “Dock är detta förhållande icke genomgående, utan binamn, som nu tyckas vara föga tilltalande, kunna även användas av bäraren själv eller genom uppkallelse övergå till dopnamn.”<sup>32</sup> Another

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<sup>31</sup> “In the ancient Nordic world it was quite common that a child was named after (deceased) ancestors (often paternal or maternal grandparents) or distant relatives. If someone were to be called by his deceased paternal grandfather’s given name, then he often could inherit his byname.”

<sup>32</sup> “This situation, however, is not consistent, but bynames, which now seem to be hardly attractive, can even be used by the bearer of the name himself, or by being inherited as a name, become a given name.”



scholar who relates the same process is Sayers (1996, 51-52). He describes the transition of a nickname to a first name using original nicknames like *snerrir* ('troublesome', later *Snorri*) and *styrr* 'battle' (later *Víga-Styrr* 'Killer-' Styrr, a nickname added to a nickname turned first name), and in an endnote he explains (1996, 68) what it meant once the nicknames had superceded the men's given names: "A formal distinction is doubtless to be made here between a byname added to a given name and a complete replacement. In the former case we seem to have a commentary on the person, while in the second the identifying, rather than describing, function seems dominant." The argument leaves much room to debate exactly how much of the semantic value was preserved in nicknames once they had turned into first names, and similarly how much a first name (formed from a nickname or not) faded away from its originally descriptive function.

Ekbo (1947, 283) argues: "Ofta är det emellertid så, att dopnamnet genom sin relativa vanlighet är mindre karakteristiskt för sin bärare än binamnet."<sup>33</sup> It is impossible to make a case that a nickname turned first name, later functioning as a given name, will lose all of its descriptive abilities after it becomes the regular way to refer to an individual as his name replacement. It may, I would suggest, have strengthened the relationship between the bearer and the nickname's meaning as a constant reminder of the appropriateness of the nickname in describing the individual (rather than weakened the descriptive function of a first name).

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<sup>33</sup> "It is, however, often the case that a given name, through its relative plainness, is less characteristic of its bearer than the byname."

In the case of inherited nicknames where they have turned from nickname to first name, it may not have been such an empty transfer, but instead an inherited, genetic disposition and ascribed feature carried over from the ancestor after whom one was named to the descendant. Such genetically inherited features as physical appearance, mental qualities, particularly bad ones, and skills were a commonplace feature of generations of related people in the *Íslendingasögur*. Perhaps the situation for a person's nickname turning first name is a special, rarer case, but it is still not such a large gap between the function of a first name to identify an individual uniquely and the function of a name to describe his qualities (as long as the name retains semantic value if taken as a regular noun or adjective).

The nickname turned first name *Snorri* is at least as old as the settlement of Iceland, and it is found already as a first name of the son of a late settler of Iceland Snorri Eyvindarson *Hlíðarmannagoði* ('chieftain of the people of Hlíð'). He is mentioned briefly in *Landnámabók* (*ÍF* I, 259) and in *Ljósvetninga saga* (*ÍF* X, 15). The name seems to have achieved much greater popularity, however, from the prominent chieftain in western Iceland named Snorri goði (963-1031). Snorri goði was born Þorgrímr Þorgrímsson, but only later referred to by his nickname alone, as mentioned in chapter 12 of *Eyrbyggja saga*:

Þá fór Þorgrímr, sonr hennar, í Álptafjörð ok var þar at fóstri með Þorbrandi; hann var heldr ósvífr í æskunni, ok var hann af því Snerrir kallaðr ok eptir þat Snorri.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> From *Eyrbyggja saga* (*ÍF* IV, 20).

[Then her son Þorgrímr went to Álptafjörðr and was there to be fostered by Þorbrandr; he was rather overbearing<sup>35</sup> in his youth, and for this reason he was called *Snerrir* and after that *Snorri*.]

This is an example of medieval etymology, connecting two nicknames which may not be related or interchangeable. It is from this chieftain Þorgrímr *snerrir* ~ *snorri* that Snorri Sturluson inherited his name.

The name *Snorri* is likely derived from the class VII strong verb *snúa* ‘turn, twist’ with the reduplicated suffix (here rhotacized) in the preterite *snøri* ~ *sneri* (‘he/she/it turned’), or a derivative verb related to *snúa*. Less probable, but possible, is a connection with MLG *snorren* ~ *snurren* ‘buzz, hum, grumble’ (cf. Swed. *snurra* ‘twist, twirl’, though no certain cognate is attested in Icelandic; cf. *Lind*, 934). *DV* (522, 525) connects Snorri to OI *snarfla* ‘röcheln’ (breathe heavily, snore; cf. Icel. *snörla* ‘snore, rattle’). In *CV* (574) *snerrir* ~ *snerir* is given as ‘a smart, sharp-witted person’, a gloss which makes little sense considering the etymology and context in which the nickname occurs. Perhaps a connection was assumed to have existed with *snarr* ‘swift, quick; smart, keen’; if so, this is probably wrong. There is also a possible, but doubtful relation to the noun *snerra* ‘a hard fight’, which is a poetic word. The adj. *snerinn* ‘vigorous, keen’, a poetic term, is also a possibility given by *DV* (524) in relation to the unattested verb *\*snerra* ‘attack’, reconstructed from the noun *hjaldrsnergandi* ‘attacker’ (literally, “one who dins in battle”). This *-snerrandi* must be derived from a verb *\*snerra*, because the *-s-* is not the genitive attached to the substantive *hjaldr* ‘din’, hence ‘fight, battle’ (poetic), even where

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. the first name *Ósvífr*, which like so many other Old Norse first names derived originally from a nickname.

-r is part of the root (cf. the other compounds with *hjaldr* such as *hjaldrtrani* ‘warrior’, *hjaldríss* ‘sword’, *hjaldrél* ‘battle’, *hjaldrský* ‘raven’, and so forth where no -s- exists between the two components; cf. *CV*, 265). Snorri’s name is connected to *snerra* ‘harður bardagi’ (hard battle) in *ÍO* (920) and the nickname *snerrir* ‘óstýrilátur maður’ (unruly person; 1989, 914), which makes the most sense given the context in which the nickname is mentioned. The *ÍF* editors of *Eyrbyggja saga* connected *snerrir* with *snerra* ‘battle’, *hjaldrsnerrandi* ‘attacker’, and *ffjolsnerrinn* ‘exceedingly valiant’ (*ÍF* IV, 20). The relation of *snerrir* to *Snorri* is still unclear, and the etymology of *Snorri* is debatable. Among the possible meanings of the nickname *Snorri* (and thence the name), it ought to be at least one among the meanings ‘grumbling, grumpy one; the buzzing one; the vigorous’.

The inherited nickname turned first name *Grettir* (< the verb *gretta* ‘smirk, frown, grimace’) in *Grettis saga* follows a similar story as that of the name *Snorri*. There is an early settler of Iceland named Ófeigr *grettir* ‘grimacer, frowner’ mentioned in *Grettis saga* (*ÍF* VII, 7), from which the inherited first name is derived. From Ófeigr *grettir*, there are several place names derived in the area he settled beginning with *Grettis-*, and kernels of narrative regarding this man may have been formed from the prominence of his nickname in such place names. After this initial *Grettir*, whose nickname was probably more popular or well-known than his given name (a common pattern), the nickname was passed down through the generations as a first name. Yet it is not necessarily related to a semantic loss of a nickname in this case, and the process of a nickname turning into a first name is unpredictable and not always dependent on the

word having become archaic or desemanticized. Desemanticized nicknames, at least if they have not become first names (and from there potentially taking on a new life), tend to lose popularity much more rapidly than first names lacking a clear meaning.

Nicknames could also be passed down in patronymics, which, like the system still active in Iceland today, are not surnames but rather names based on an individual's relation to his/her father. Egill's patronymic, *Skalla-Grímsson*, is a famous example where the father's hyphenated nickname – *Skalla-Grímr* 'Bald Head-' Grímr – is passed down to his son as a patronymic. The patronymic of Gísli *Súrsson* and his sister Þórdís *Súrsdóttir* is also an example where individuals were identified by their father's nickname turned first name *Súrr* 'sour drink, whey', not his full name Þorbjörn *súrr*. An instance such as this commemorates an important event in the family's history, whereby the father avoided being burned alive in his home in Norway by his quick thinking and ingenuity; this feature resurfaces most apparently in his son's inherited cleverness and talent for escaping pursuers over many years as an outlaw in Iceland.

Two related men with the name Ketill *þrymr* 'quiet, silent' (*FJ*, 256) appear in sagas of Icelanders from the East-Fjords, one who settled in Iceland from Norway, and the younger, his Icelandic grandson with the same nickname. Beginning with the elder, there is some confusion between *Þrum-Ketill* vs. Ketill *þrymr* in *Fljótsdæla saga*:

Hann var manna hægast hversdagliga, en hann var þögull ok fálátr snemma ok var kallaðr Þrum-Ketill.<sup>36</sup>

[He was the gentlest of men every day, but he was silent and reserved early in the day and was called *Þrum-Ketill*.]

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<sup>36</sup> From *Fljótsdæla saga* in *Austfirðinga sögur*. (*ÍF* XI, 219-20).

In a footnote, the *Íslenzk fornrit* editor says that he was mentioned once in *Brennu-Njáls saga* (in *ÍF* XII, 403) with this *Prum*- variant of the nickname. The same man is introduced as Ketill *þrymr* (or *Þrym-Ketill*) in *Droplaugarsona saga*:

Ketill hét maðr, er kallaðr var þrymr.<sup>37</sup>

[There was a man named Ketill, who was called *þrymr*.]

The editor's note glosses *þrymr* as 'hávaði' (noise), 'brak' (creaking noise). It is uncertain whether this is the actual meaning of his nickname, since it can also be assumed *þrymr* to be a variant of *þrumr* 'silent' (< *þruma* 'be silent').

The Norwegian *Þiðrandi*, who was the father of Ketill *þrymr* (the elder) and his brother Atli *grautr* 'porridge' (or *Graut-Atli*), is mentioned in *Landnámabók* as Þórir *þiðrandi* '(male) partridge' (*CV*, 735), or 'peering, gazing one' (*Lind*, 407).<sup>38</sup> The *Íslenzk fornrit* editor notes of the name and nickname that, "Viðurnefnið *þiðrandi* varð síðar sérnafn. Merking þess er óvís" (*ÍF* I, 295).<sup>39</sup> Why the nickname eventually became better remembered than the first name with it will remain a mystery. Yet it was not at all uncommon that original nicknames became first names through inheritance and a weakening of meaning (cf. *Snorri*, *Grettir*, *Kolbrún*, and dozens of the like). It was typical to adopt nicknames, especially those which were inherited, as first names since time immemorial in Scandinavia (cf. Janzén 1947b, 49-57).

<sup>37</sup> From *Droplaugarsona saga* in *Austfirðinga sögur*. (*ÍF* XI, 137).

<sup>38</sup> In *Landnámabók*. (*ÍF* I, 295): Ketill ok Graut-Atli, synir Þóris þiðranda, fóru ór Veradal til Íslands ok námu land í Fljótsdal, fyrr en Brynjólfr kom út. (Ketill and *Graut-Atli*, sons of Þórir *þiðrandi*, went from Veradal [Verdal, in Nord-Trøndelag] to Iceland and settled in Fljótsdalr, before Brynjólfr came to Iceland.)

<sup>39</sup> "The nickname *þiðrandi* later became a proper name. Its meaning is uncertain."

Perhaps there is some confusion in the sources, if one excludes the formulaic nature of saga narrative introductions, because a near identical passage introduces Ketill *brymr* (the younger, an Icelander) in the first line of *Gunnars þáttr Þiðrandabana*:

Ketill hét maðr ok var kallaðr þrymr.<sup>40</sup>

[There was a man named Ketill, and he was called *brymr*.]

The *Íslensk fornrit* editor mentions in a note that he has corrected the spelling “þrumr,” a spelling which is found in both manuscripts this *þáttr* was recorded in. The emendation is suspect, and it masks the confusion that the scribes must have had about the nickname.

A different, legendary Ketill *brymr* (and son of a man named Þrymr) occurs in the legendary *Frá Fornjóti ok hans ættmönnum* in *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, though in this case the nickname seems to be a topographical adjective of origin *brymr* ‘person from Þruma’:

Þrymr átti Agðir. Hans sonr var Agði ok Agnarr, faðir Ketils þryms, er bú átti í Þrumu.<sup>41</sup>

[Þrymr possessed Agder. His son was Agði as well as Agnarr, the father of Ketill *brymr*, who lived in Þruma.]

It is difficult to know whether this Ketill *brymr* is indeed the Norwegian familiar from the sagas of the East-Fjords, or if this is accidental. It could even be his distant relative, or an unrelated legendary figure. *Þruma* ‘rim, edge, border’, because of a mistaken association with the other *brymr* through medieval etymology, may bear no relation to the name and nickname *Þrymr*. The place called *Þruma* is probably the same as the largest island in southwest Norway, which today is called Tromøy (cf. also *Þrymsey* = Tromsø).

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<sup>40</sup> From *Gunnars þáttr Þiðrandabana* in *Austfirðinga sögur*. (ÍF XI, 195).

<sup>41</sup> In *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* Vol. II (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1944, 139).

### V. Slang – Nicknames Referring to Private Parts

Negative nicknames are rather common, ranging from sexually-charged insults to unflattering physical characteristics, and several nicknames referring to private parts, perhaps the most sensitive areas in terms of insults (and otherwise), are found in the corpus. Slang of this type is perhaps the most obvious at face value. Analogues of this type of slang used as nicknames are found in the ancient world, and several Roman nicknames are comparable to those in Old Norse: Mamurra, nicknamed *Mentula* ‘cock’ in Catullus’ 29th poem; *Penis* ‘tail, penis’; *Verpatus* ‘dick’ (< *verpa* ‘dick, prick’); *Capulus* ‘handle, hilt, penis?’; *Sesquiculus* ‘man with an anus (or butt) one and a half times the usual size’; Saturn’s nickname *Sterquilinus* ‘manure’ (< *stercus* ‘dung, manure’), which occurs elsewhere as *Sterceius* with the same meaning; *Peditus* ‘farther’; and Faustinus *Cunus* ‘vagina, cunt’. *Capulus*, *Cunus*, *Penis*, *Peditus*, *Sterceius* and *Verpatus* are mentioned in Kajanto’s collection of *cognomina* (1965, 226 and 246). Such a repertoire of vulgar nicknames is not hard to believe, but that some of these became official *cognomina* as Roman family names is astounding.

*FJ* (218-219) provided a list of such Old Norse nicknames in the second section of his nickname list under the categories “penis, cunus” and “anus.” There are two compounds in his list formed with *-reðr* ‘penis’: *Árni skaðareðr* ‘harm penis’ and *Kolbeinn smjörreðr* ‘butter penis’. Three more “male members” of this group may be mentioned: *Herjólfur hrokkineista* ‘shriveled testicle’, *Brunda-Bjálfi* ‘Sperm-’ *Bjálfi*, and *Strað-Bjarni* ‘Butt-fuck-’ *Bjarni* (< *streða* = *serða* ‘butt fuck [fuck from behind]’). Not found in *FJ* but found in *Lind* (306) is *Helgi selseista* ‘seal’s testicle’. The name *Óttarr*



*bøllr*, which may mean either ‘ball, globe’ in an innocent sense, or ‘glans penis, head of the penis’ in another, can also be added here. In this same list there is also Qnundr *tréfótr*’s (‘peg leg’) paternal grandfather Ívarr *beytill*, the meaning of which is debatable and ranges from ‘horsetail (plant)’ (cf. *CV*, 62, where it is connected to *góibeytill* ‘*equisetum hyemale*, horsetail’), ‘thruster, beater’, to ‘horse penis’. *Lind* (21) connected it to the verb *bauta* ‘beat, pound’, but raised the possibility that it could mean something like Swed. *skrävlarer* ‘swaggerer, show-off, big talker’ because of the meaning of NNorw. *bøytel* ‘swagger’. *DV* (35) translated *beytill* as ‘Zeugungsglied des Pferdes’ (horse phallus), and connected it to *bauta* ‘beat’. In *ÍO* (53) it is also glossed as ‘hestreður, getnaðarlimur’ (horse phallus, procreation member). *Beytill* may very well have referred to a horse pizzle, or a whip made from a horse phallus, if its use was not meant metaphorically. Last but not least among penis-related nicknames, *FJ* seems to have missed perhaps the most obvious of all: Áslákr *kúkr* ‘cock’, translated by *Lind* (224) as ‘manslem’ (male member). In *CV* (360), however, *kúkr* is glossed as Lat. *merda* ‘shit’, beside the related verb *kúka*, which he politely translated as Lat. *cacare* (‘to shit’).

Nicknames referring to female genitalia are also found. There is a Rognvaldr *kunta* ‘cunt’, and a few other examples found in compounds built with *fuð-* ‘cunt’ (cf. its probable cognate Lat. *putere* ‘to stink, be rotten’). A mid-13<sup>th</sup> century runic inscription on a stick from Bergen contains a string of just such insulting nicknames (here normalized):

Jón Silkifuð á mik, en Guðþormr Fuðsleikir reist mik, en Jón Fuðkúla ræðr mik.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Text from *Sammordisk runtextdatabas*, online at: <http://skaldic.arts.usyd.edu.au/db.php?table=mss&id=15084&if=db>

[Jón Silk-Cunt is married to me, and Guðþormr Cunt-Licker grabs me, but Jón Cunt-Ball enjoys me.]<sup>43</sup>

Such a long string of nickname compounds is unusual, and it is unclear whether this is intended solely as an insult, curse, or if it in fact represents a form of graffiti. It is also not difficult to imagine a bored young person carving the inscription as joke, playing on the names of people he knew or knew of. In any case, the names of the Norwegians Jón *silki*, Guðþormr *sleikir*, and Jón *kúla* are attested in different 12<sup>th</sup> century and 13<sup>th</sup> century sources, but all three are of course without the addition of *fuð* (cf. Barnes 2012, 113-14, Nedrelið 2012, 152-53, and Spurkland 2005, 191-92). It is difficult to say for certain how overtly sexual the verbs in the inscription are meant. They may be as innocuous as their literal meanings (*á* ‘has’, *reist[i]* ‘carved’, *ræðr* ‘interprets; controls’), but considering the sexual nature of the nicknames with the addition of *fuð*, I have adopted an alternative reading. While the meanings of the first two nicknames do not leave much to the imagination, the meaning of the third is less clear. It is possible that *fuðkúla* means “cunt-knob” instead of “cunt-bump” (the precise meaning of which escapes me), although it is possibly a slang term for “clitoris,” or the nickname is crude for its own sake (like a piece of graffiti, or an immature joke). At least one Old Icelandic nickname contains a compound with *fuð*, that of Þorgils *fuðhundr* ‘dog cunt, cunt-dog’ (*FJ*, 299); the survival of this nickname shows at the very least that compounds of the sort found in the runic inscription are not entirely alone.

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<sup>43</sup> My translation is at odds with the one presented in *Sammordisk runtextdatabas*, which reads: “Jón Silky-cunt owns me, and Guðthormr Cunt-licker carved me, and Jón Ball-cunt interprets me.”

There are also nicknames referring to female breasts, in that they are more overtly sexual than those of males. There are the two women bearing the same nickname, Þorbjörg *knarrarbringa* and Ásný *knarrarbringa* (*FJ*, 214-15). I might suggest that the nickname *knarrarbringa* ‘ship-chest’ may refer not to a wide or high body in the chest region as *FJ* suggests, but perhaps a particularly large bosom (with a benign meaning like “the busty”, or even a vulgar meaning like “big tits”). Þorbjörg *knarrarbringa* seems to have inherited her nickname, at least thematically as a pair in the realm of ship allusions, from her father Gils *skeiðarnef* ‘longship nose’ (cf. the mention of the inheritable nickname pair in Ekbo 1947, 271). *Lind* (207) also noticed the connection of the father’s and daughter’s nicknames, “Faderns ock dotterns bin[amn] ha vël något sammanhang inbördes.”<sup>44</sup> In the case of both father and daughter, the first part of the compound is a genitive singular term for a “ship” and the second a body part; thus, the father’s nickname means something like “big nose” and the daughter’s “big tits,” neither of which could have been flattering.

Last but not least among private part nicknames, there are those which refer to the butt, anus, and its functions (cf. *FJ*, 218-19). I will call these nicknames “potty humor nicknames,” because it is likely that these arose in off-color humor. The Old Norse word *raz* ‘ass’ (Icel. *rass*, cognate to Engl. *arse*, formed by metathesis) figures most prominently among these nicknames. There are two men with the genitive plural prefix *Raza-*, *Raza-Bárðr* ‘Ass-’ Bárðr and *Raza-Bersi* ‘Ass-’ Bersi. Three other men have compound nicknames formed with *raz*: Hergils *hnappraz* ‘button ass’, Herjólfur *holkinrazi*

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<sup>44</sup> “The father’s and daughter’s bynames likely have some common link.”

‘squatted ass, crouched ass’, and Ásmundr *kastandrazi* ‘throwing ass, throw ass’ (= ‘hip-thruster’?). Furthermore, two independent butt nicknames not related to *raz* or *fretr* are found in the corpus: Erlendr *bakrauf* ‘back-hole’ (= ‘anus’) and Þórir *hafrsþjó* ‘billy goat’s thigh’. Five nicknames occur which refer to farting: the legendary king Eysteinn *fretr* ‘fart’ Hálfðanarson (which occurs as *Eustein Bumbus* ‘fart’ in *Historia Norwegiae*), the settler Eysteinn *meinfretr* ‘harm-fart’, Gunni *físs* ‘fart’, Andrés *dritljóð* ‘dung sound’ (= ‘fart’), and Þórir *hvínantorði* ‘whining turd’ (= ‘fart’; *hvínan(d)* < the present participle of *hvína* ‘whiz, whirl, whine’; cf. Engl. *whine*). Several scatological nicknames are found in the corpus. There are four nicknames which include the term *skít* ‘shit’: Andrés *kelduskíttr* ‘snipe [bird]’ (literally, ‘well/spring shit’), Sveinn *sveitarskíttr* ‘country shit’ or ‘troop shit’, Þorgils *þúfuskíttr* ‘mound shit’, and Skagi *skítráðr* ‘shit adviser, ruler of shit’. Three others include the term *drit* ‘dung, bird shit’ in their nicknames: Þórir *dritloki* ‘shit end, shit loop’ (a character in a dream), Þuríðr *dritkinn* ‘shit cheek’, and *Drafdrítr* ‘waste/garbage shit’ (an Irish slave’s name whose real name was apparently forgotten). There is also one Þrándr *lyrta* ‘turd’ in *Sverris saga* (Lind, 249). It is reasonably certain that the taunt applied to Njáll’s sons, *taðskegglingar* ‘dung beardlings’, can either be labeled a collective nickname or reconstructed as a possible nickname for Njáll *\*taðskegg* ‘dung beard’ (cf. Njáll’s nickname *karl inn skegglaus* ‘the beardless old man’ [“Old Beardless”]).

The examples I have just mentioned provide ample evidence for the existence of a developed system of off-color slang in medieval Scandinavia. Many of them are prime representatives of insults, which is an issue that will be explored further in the section on

insulting nicknames in the next chapter of this dissertation. That so few existing nicknames were recorded in comparison to the number of first names means that an even larger number of them must have been in use during the medieval period than there is evidence for. Old Norse society is well-known for its foul jokes, sarcasm, and crass humor, but it needs to be taken with a grain of salt in a literary context. The literature is the only way to investigate the culture of humor and insults in medieval Scandinavia, since the preserved writings provide the only available evidence, but it must also be stressed that insults carried more weight with them than modern comedy and potty humor.<sup>45</sup> Insults, and nicknames comprised one of the most deeply cutting forms of them, were intentional and meant to damage another person's honor and reputation. Nicknames used as insults cut even deeper than a taunt or even a wooden effigy of a man being bent over by another man (cf. the scene in chapter 2 of *Gísla saga*), because they lasted for one's lifetime and beyond, permanently attaching themselves to one's name and reputation. With this in mind, it is extraordinary that so many nicknames of a sexually insulting type were preserved.

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<sup>45</sup> In *Skáldskaparmál* (edited by Faulkes 1998, 106), Snorri provided a list of several such insults, primarily adjectives, used as *heiti* for men: blauðan, veykan, þjarfan, þirfing, blotamann, skauð, skreyju, skrjáð, vák, vám, leyra, sleyma, teyða, dugga, dási, dirokkr, dusilmenni, qlmusi, auvirð, vílmogr (the unmanly, the weak, the dull, the insipid, the effeminate, coward, the sickly, skulker, weakling, the ailing, the sneaky, scamp, the vile, the useless, layabout, the menial, the paltry, imbecile, the worthless, wretch).

### Chapter 3 – Nicknames in the Literature

“Eigi er ek bastardr nema at auknefni.”  
 (“I am not a bastard except by nickname.”)  
 - William the Conqueror in *Saga ins heilaga Edvardar*

#### Introduction

The primary goal of this chapter is to elucidate the narratives surrounding nicknames and how they can be used to further our interpretation of Old Norse literature in its own context. Since the pool of first names was (and is) limited, most people were further identified by their recurring nicknames, a circumstance that created a “trace” in the interweaving saga plots. Nickname “traces” occur across the manuscript tradition, where a large number of them recur across the Old Norse literary corpus. When nicknames turn up in the sagas, they may be ancient, formed in the popular imagination earlier in time, or fanciful interpretations invented by those who told the sagas, but they all have a story to tell and one which is not always decipherable. In most cases the texts provide the only window we have into nickname origins, and as such, they contain the only facts available to determine their origin (even if one can imagine other explanations). The corpus of Old Icelandic literature is large, but the language is stylized and the composition is informed intertextually by contemporary oral and written culture. Thus, nicknames provide a tool for the modern reader to break open aspects of the formulaic mold of these medieval texts.

Many nicknames mentioned in the sagas are unexplained, because most characters are merely introduced by their names (often including their nicknames), but dozens of passages in the sagas comment on them and explain them, if even only briefly.

The majority of explanations of a nickname's origin are of an anecdotal type, that is, a brief narrative comment on a particular feature, event, or other basis from which an individual received a nickname. Most passages describing nicknames are brief and formulaic, but they provide a way to decipher the narrative "kernels" and other material from which sagas were created. While the following discussion of nickname explanations in saga narratives is extensive, it is by no means complete, if for no other reason than the sake of manageability. Another shortcoming of this chapter is that it has been difficult to answer some of the most important questions related to the study of Old Norse literature, and as such it is intended to serve more as a sample of the types of nickname explanations rather than their overall function in the literature. A few general points about the function of nicknames in the literature are made that are best illustrated by the examples presented here, but by no means are they intended to describe Old Norse culture and literature as a whole. Dozens of other nickname explanations have been left out, particularly those that only make a short, self-explanatory comment on the origin of the nickname in question.

It is worthwhile to note that narrative explanations of nicknames, although rather common in Old Norse literature, have ancient analogues. For example, Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* contain several examples of nickname narratives that closely resemble those found in Old Norse. In the *vita* of Lucius Cornelius Sulla (< *syl* 'burned red rock'), the cognomen is explained as follows:

His personal appearance, in general, is given by his statues; but the gleam of his gray eyes, which was terribly sharp and powerful, was rendered even more fearful by the complexion of his face. This was covered with coarse blotches of red, interspersed with

white. For this reason, they say, his surname was given him because of his complexion, and it was in allusion to this that a scurrilous jester at Athens made the verse:  
 “Sulla is a mulberry sprinkled o'er with meal.”<sup>46</sup>

Nickname explanations typically derive from the imagination of the author/story teller or the public, in many cases from both. That Sulla's nickname was remembered in the popular imagination with an accompanying taunt, here a verse, is the same kind of thing one expects from children on the schoolyard and playground.

Similarly, several nicknames of Fabius Maximus are explained in a typical anecdotal manner in his *vita*:

He had the surname of *Verrucosus* from a physical peculiarity, namely, a small wart growing above his lip: and that of *Ovicula*, which signifies Lambkin, was given him because of the gentleness and gravity of his nature when he was yet a child. Indeed, the calmness and silence of his demeanour, the great caution with which he indulged in childish pleasures, the slowness and difficulty with which he learned his lessons, and his contented submissiveness in dealing with his comrades, led those who knew him superficially to suspect him of something like foolishness and stupidity.<sup>47</sup>

The cognomen *verrucosus* ‘warty’ could hardly have been a compliment, but descriptive nicknames for a famous child almost always preclude their accuracy; needless to say, Fabius Maximus became a great man. As will be demonstrated later in the Old Norse material, the insulting cognomen here seems to have been adopted by its bearer and passed down among his descendants as a badge of honor, due to humility and also familiarity among those marking him out for a uniquely identifiable feature.

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<sup>46</sup> In Vol. IV of Perrin's edition and translation of *The Parallel Lives* (Plutarch [Perrin] 1916, 327).

<sup>47</sup> In Vol. III of Perrin's edition and translation of *The Parallel Lives* (Plutarch [Perrin] 1916, 119-121).



Another suitable example of this type is in the *vita* of Cicero, where the nickname of Publius Cornelius Lentulus (one of Cataline's fellow conspirators) is given to him from a notorious wisecrack he made in the senate:

It is said too that he got his surname of Sura for the following reason. In Sulla's time he was quaestor and lost and wasted large amounts of the public moneys. Sulla was angry at this and demanded an accounting from him in the senate, whereupon Lentulus came forward with a very careless and contemptuous air and said that he would not give an account, but would offer his leg, as boys were accustomed to do when they were playing ball and made a miss. On this account he was surnamed Sura, for "sura" is the Roman word for leg.<sup>48</sup>

Such nickname explanations are numerous among Greco-Roman authors. While there is a classical model for nickname explanations, there is no reason to assume that Old Norse storytellers borrowed theirs from the style of classical authors, at least not directly. Instead, the classical nickname narrative model and its medieval counterparts are common to the functions of narrative, representing an ancient and time-honored narrative device. Anecdotes are the easiest way to tell the origin of personal characteristics of real people in terms of popular imagination and cultural memory by recalling a perceived feature branded on them with a cognomen or a nickname.

Certain nicknames may have even provided the basis of an entire saga character's biography and could be used by saga compilers, or the oral history from which a saga was derived, to enrich a narrative. Nicknames are used to describe legendary figures of all social classes, but they are also important in providing motivation for actions or behavior, believed by those who told the sagas to be inspired by reality. As nicknames were passed down through oral tradition, especially those which are descriptive, the

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<sup>48</sup> In Vol. VII of Perrin's edition and translation of *The Parallel Lives* (Plutarch [Perrin] 1919, 123).

stories around the nicknamed individual could be focused on identifiable features retained in the meaning of the nickname. Nickname explanations often are circular, but as a common feature of narrative technique, the audience expected anecdotes to explain them. Frequently, nicknames were used as formulaic narrative devices by in the sagas to play a role in the plot, especially since nicknames were considered accurate reflections on the characteristics of those bearing them.

### **I. Nicknames of Kings**

The nicknames of kings both legendary and contemporary are prevalent in the saga corpus. Whaley (1993, 137) says of the importance of kings' nicknames: "But where a reign is drawn more fully, the king's nickname and any explanation attached to it can, by giving public recognition to a salient characteristic, provide a measure against which his whole career can be judged." This is a key point. It is precisely because the reign of kings was often remembered by particular events, accomplishments, or individual characteristics of the king in question that most kings have descriptive nicknames, and in many cases more than one. The nickname was a way to reinforce cultural memory as it would have developed in oral tradition, though it is usually unclear whether a king received his nickname while still living or posthumously. Even outside of the *konungasögur*, the Old Norse literary corpus is filled with material describing the lives of kings, not least in part due to the prominence of royal genealogies and connections of regular people to important historical people and events. Therefore, it is hardly a surprise

that such prominent members of society past and present received ample biographical treatment, and as a result a large stock exists of kings' full names.

Among the multitude of legendary Swedish monarchs mentioned in the Old Norse literary corpus, the nickname of Óttarr *vendilkráka* 'Vendel crow' (*Ohthere* in *Beowulf*) is explained in chapter 27 of *Ynglinga saga*, where he is killed in battle in Vendill, Denmark (modern Vendsyssel). After Óttarr is slain in battle, his body is left on a mound to be eaten by crows, and a wooden crow is sent to Sweden to announce his death and to mock him:

Lýkr svá orrostu, at þar fell Óttarr konungr ok mestr hluti liðs hans. Danir tóku lík hans ok fluttu til lands ok lögðu upp á haug einn, létu þar rífa dýr ok fugla hræin. Þeir gera trékráku eina ok senda til Svíþjóðar ok segja, at eigi var meira verðr Óttarr konungr þeira. Þeir kōlluðu síðan Óttarr vendilkráku.<sup>49</sup>

[The battle ends in such a way King Óttarr and most of his army fell. Danes took his body and moved it to land and put it up on a mound, and they let animals and birds tear at the corpse. They make a wooden crow and send it to Sweden and say that their King Óttarr was not worth more than it. Afterwards they called Óttarr *vendilkráka*.]

It is difficult to know which Vendill is being referred to with the nickname, because there are two places called Vendill: one in the northernmost area of Jutland (Denmark) where Óttarr met his death, the other the ancestral residence of the Swedish nobility in Uppland. It is possible that his nickname was given with the play of words on his origin in mind, but in legendary accounts passed down through oral tradition it is possible that the nickname explanation was created in order to suit the inherited "truth" of the account.

The anecdotal nickname origin of *Braut-Qnundr* 'Road-' Qnundr, a seventh century Swedish king, appears in chapter 33 of *Ynglinga saga*:

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<sup>49</sup> In *Heimskringla I*. (ÍF XXVI, 54).

Qnundr konungr lét brjóta vegu um alla Svíþjóð, bæði um markir ok mýrar ok fjallvegu. Fyrir því var hann Braut-Qnundr kallaðr. Qnundr konungr setti bú sín í hvert stórhérað á Svíþjóð ok fór um allt landit at veizlum.<sup>50</sup>

[Qnundr had roads cleared through all of Sweden, both around forests and swamps and mountain passes. For this reason he was called *Braut-Qnundr*. King Qnundr placed his dwellings in every major district in Sweden and he went around the whole country to feasts.]

It does not particularly matter just how far back into prehistory one searches, such anecdotal explanations are bound to occur. In this case, it is plausible that the nickname refers to a real historical king named Qnundr who cleared forests to make roads, and it was certainly believed to be historic truth by those telling the story in the usual self-referential manner of medieval storytelling.

Ingjaldr *illráði* ‘ill-counsel, the wicked’ is said in chapter 34 of *Ynglinga saga* to have gotten his bad temperament, which ultimately leads to his nickname, at the age of six. Ingjaldr was playing with another chieftain’s son and, because he was not any stronger than the other boy and only equally matched, he got upset and cried. His foster brother took him to another Swedish ruler named Svipdagr, who fed him a wolf’s heart to increase his strength:

Ok er þeir lékusk viðr, var Ingjaldr ósterkari en Álfr, ok þótti honum þat svá illt, at hann grét mjök. Ok þá kom til Gautviðr, fóstbróðir hans, ok leiddi hann í brot til Svipdags blinda, fóstfrøður hans, ok sagði honum, at illa hafði at farit ok hann var ósterkari ok óþróttkari í leiknum en Álfr, sonr Yngvars konungs. Þá svaraði Svipdagr, at þat væri mikil skömm. Annan dag eptir lét Svipdagr taka hjarta ór vargi ok steikja á teini ok gaf síðan Ingjaldi konungssyni at eta, ok þaðan af varð hann allra manna grimmastr ok verst skaplundaðr.<sup>51</sup>

[And when they played against each other, Ingjaldr was weaker than Álfr, and this seemed so terrible to him that he cried a lot. And then his foster brother Gautviðr came

<sup>50</sup> In *Heimskringla I*. (ÍF XXVI, 63).

<sup>51</sup> In *Heimskringla I*. (ÍF XXVI, 63-4).

and led him away to his foster father Svipdagr *blindi* ('the blind'), and told him that things had gone badly and he was weaker and feebler in the game than Álfr, King Yngvarr's son. Then Svipdagr answered that it was a great shame. The next day Svipdagr had the heart taken out of a wolf and roasted on a stick, and then he gave it to the king's son Ingjaldr to eat. And from that point on he became the fiercest and worst tempered of all men. ]

This is a familiar magical power through consumption motif found in other legendary material in Old Norse literature, including Sigurðr's consumption of the dragon Fáfnir's heart in *Völsunga saga* (later, also his wife Guðrún), Sigurðr's slayer Guttormr and his consumption of a wolf heart in *Brot af Sigurðarkviðu* (stanza 4), and Þoðvarr *bjarki*'s companion Hotttr/Hjalti and his consumption of the dragon heart and blood in *Hrólfs saga kraka*. Even though the nickname is not explained to have come about as a direct result of eating the heart of a wolf, the origin of it surely lies in this story about his childhood.

The Swedish king Óláfr *trételgja* 'wood cutter' gets his nickname in chapter 42 of *Ynglinga saga* from clearing woods in Värmland:

Fór hann þá vestr markleiði til ár þeirar, er norðan fellr í Væni ok Elfr heitir. Þar dveljask þeir, taka þar at ryðja mörkina ok brenna ok byggva síðan. Urðu þar brátt stór heruð. Kolluðu þeir þat Vermaland. Þar vátu góðir landskostir. En er spurðisk til Óláfs í Svíþjóð, at hann ryðr markir, kolluðu þeir hann trételgju, ok þótti hæðiligt hans ráð.<sup>52</sup>

[Then he went westwards on the forest paths to this river, which falls from the north into Vænir (Lake Vänern) and is called Elfr (Klarälven). They stay there and start clearing and burning the forest and settle there afterwards. There it soon became a big settlement. They called it Vermaland (Värmland). The quality of the land was good there. And when they heard about Óláfr in Sweden that he is clearing forests, they called him Óláfr *trételgja* ('wood cutter'), and his activities were thought to be ludicrous.]

At least following the logic of the narrative, Óláfr's nickname is given to him by his enemies in mockery, and the nickname stuck even though Óláfr successfully attracted a large number of Swedes to join him in settling the region. Success often breeds contempt,

<sup>52</sup> In *Heimskringla I. (ÍF XXVI, 73)*.

which would explain why a large number of nicknames not appearing to be insults at first glance may, in fact, originate in such a circumstance. Eventually, the population the king brought with him grew too large and a famine broke out, so a large number of the population blamed the king for neglecting to make religious sacrifices. Thus, an elderly Óláfr was burned inside his home as a sacrifice to Óðinn, and yet another legendary Yngling king rose and fell in a violent manner (cf. the king's ancestors Fjǫlnir, who drowned in a vat of mead, and his son Sveigðir, who followed a dwarf into a stone and disappeared inside of it, among several others).

Later down the same royal line come the Norwegian kings, and in chapter 47 of *Ynglinga saga* there is a legendary king named Hálfðan *inn mildi ok inn matarilli* ('the generous and the stingy with food'). The contradictory nicknames are a peculiar combination, even after considering the narrative trying to explain them:

Hálfðan hét son Eysteins konungs, er konungdóm tók eptir hann. Hann var kallaðr Hálfðan inn mildi ok inn matarilli. Svá er sagt, at hann gaf þar í mála mǫnnum sínum jafnmarga gullpeninga sem aðrir konungar silfrpeninga, en hann svelti menn at mat.<sup>53</sup>

[Hálfðan was the name of the son of king Eysteinn, who received the kingdom after him. He was called Hálfðan *inn mildi ok inn matarilli*. Thus, it is told that he gave to his men as many gold coins in wages as other kings gave silver coins, but he starved them of food.]

It is no coincidence that the nickname pair alliterates, a trait which, most likely, owes its origin to a commonplace technique used by oral tradition (cf. also Steinbjörn *inn sterki ok inn stórhoggvi* 'the strong and big blow dealer' and Rǫgnvaldr *inn ríki ok inn ráðsvinni* 'the powerful and the shrewd'). In *Historia Norwegiae*, the translated nickname and its explanation are essentially the same:

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<sup>53</sup> In *Heimskringla I. (ÍF XXVI, 78)*

Huic successit in regnum filius suus Halfdan Auri Prodigus Cibique Tenacissimus: stipendarios namque suos auro donauit eosdemque fame maceravit.<sup>54</sup>

[His son Halfdan the Lavish of Gold and the Stingiest of Food succeeded him in rule: for he gave gold to his retainers and tormented the same men with hunger.]

It is fascinating to see how the medieval mind rationalized nicknames passed down in oral tradition and either preserved (or provided) them with a narrative explanation.

Although technically not a king but a count, it is appropriate to include the narrative explanation of Earl Rognvaldr's son *Göngu-Hrólf*'s nickname (*Göngu-* 'Walking-', from the verb *ganga* 'to walk'). The reason for the nickname is given in chapter 24 of *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* in *Heimskringla*, just after the narrative explaining Haraldr *hárfagri*'s nickname:

Hrólfur var vikingur mikill. Hann var svá mikill maður vexti, at engi hestr mátti bera hann, ok gekk hann, hvargi sem hann fór. Hann var kallaður Göngu-Hrólfur.<sup>55</sup>

[Hrólfur was a great Viking. He was such a large man in size, that no horse could carry him, and he walked everywhere he went. He was called *Göngu-Hrólfur* ('Walking-' Hrólfur).]

This legendary figure is also known as *Rollo* (and the variants *Rodulfus* ~ *Radulfus*), the Viking who took control over Normandy and led the first major Norse settlement there. A nearly identical nickname explanation occurs in *Historia Norwegiae*:

De quorum collegio quidam Rodulfus – a sociis Gongurolfur cognominatus quia ob enormem corporis quantitatem equitare nequens semper incessit – Rodam ciuitatem Normandie cum paucis mirabili ingenio deuicit.<sup>56</sup>

[A certain man from the band, Rodulfus – surnamed by his companions as *Göngu-Hrólfur*, because he was unable to ride on horseback owing to the enormous size of his body, he

<sup>54</sup> In chapter 10 of *Historia Norwegie* (Ekrem and Mortensen 2003, 78).

<sup>55</sup> In *Heimskringla I. (ÍF XXVI, 123)*.

<sup>56</sup> In chapter 6 of *Historia Norwegie* (Ekrem and Mortensen 2003, 66).

always walked – captured the city of Rouen in Normandy with a few followers by means of his marvelous intelligence.]

The historical role Rollo played in history is massive, considering that his Norman descendants ultimately conquered England (William the Conqueror was his great-grandson). That two identical nickname explanations exist is not surprising, especially considering that the material present in *Historia Norwegiae*, or one of its vernacular reworkings like *Fagrskinna*, was used in some form in compiling *Heimskringla*. Similarly, a common and shared oral tradition surrounding such an important figure could account for the same explanation, but the state of it can only be drawn from the surviving textual evidence (so much is lost to us).

Haraldr *gráfeldr* ‘gray cloak’ Eiríksson receives the nickname in chapter 7 of his own saga in *Heimskringla*, where he asks for a sheepskin cloak as a gift from Icelandic merchants to help boost their sales:

Haraldr konungr sat optast á Hǫrðalandi ok Rogalandi, ok svá þeir fleiri bræðr. Þeir sátu optliga í Harðangri. Þat var á einu sumri, at hafskip kom af Íslandi, er áttu íslenzkir menn. Þat var hlaðit af vararfeldum, ok heldu þeir skipinu til Harðangrs, því at þeir spurðu, at þar var fjölmenni mest fyrir. En er menn kómu til kaupa við þá, þá vildi engi kaupa vararfeldina. Þá ferr stýrimaðr á fund Haralds konungs, því at honum var hann áðr málkunnigr, ok segir honum til þessa vandræða. Konungr segir, at hann mun koma til þeira, ok hann gerir svá. Haraldr konungr var maðr lítillátr ok gleðimaðr mikill. Hann var þar kominn með skútu alskipaða. Hann leit á varning þeira ok mælti við stýrimann: “Viltu gefa mér einn gráfeldinn?” “Gjarna,” segir stýrimaðr, “þótt fleiri sé.” Þá tók konungr einn feldinn ok skikkði. Síðan gekk hann ofan í skútuna. En áðr þeir røri í brot, hafði hverr hans manna feld keyptan. Fám dögum síðar kom þar svá mart manna, þeira er hverr vildi feld kaupa, at eigi fengu hálfir, þeir er hafa vildu. Síðan var hann kallaðr Haraldr gráfeldr.<sup>57</sup>

[King Haraldr stayed most often in Hǫrðaland and Rogaland, and so did more of the brothers. They frequently stayed in Harðangr. It happened one summer that a sea-going ship, which Icelanders owned, came from Iceland. It was loaded with sheepskins, and they steered the ship to Harðangr, because they heard that largest group of people was

<sup>57</sup> In *Heimskringla I*. (ÍF XXVI, 212).



there. And when people came to buy goods from them, no one wanted to buy the sheepskins. Then the steersman goes to meet King Haraldr, because he was on speaking terms with him from before, and he tells him about these difficulties. The king says that he will come to them, and he does so. King Haraldr was a humble and very cheerful man. He had come there with a fully-manned boat. He looked at their wares and said to the steersman: “Will you give me a gray sheepskin?” “Gladly,” says the steersman, “although there are even more.” Then the king took a sheepskin and put it on as cloak. Then he went down into the boat. And before they rowed away, each of his men had bought a sheepskin. A few days later, so many people who wanted to buy a sheepskin came there that not even half of those who wanted to have one got one. Afterwards he was called *gráfeldr* (‘gray cloak’).]

According to this narrative, Haraldr’s nickname is derived from his men desiring the same sheepskin cloaks only after he asked for one from the Icelandic merchants. He accepted the gift of a cloak as a favor to them, because the king’s fashion was a model to be emulated and he must have been aware of it. The nickname *gráfeldr* is also found in the Norwegian sources *Historia Norwegiae*, Theodoricus’ history, and *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum*, but there without any explanation of its origin.

Haraldr *harðráði*’s grandson King Magnús *berfættr* ‘barefoot’ or *berbeinn* ‘barelegged’ was named as such, according to his saga in *Heimskringla*, because he and his men adopted the kilt during their time in the British Isles. As a result of his bare legs, he later suffered a halberd-thrust through them in his last battle, wounds which ultimately led to a death blow (at his neck). Not surprisingly for such a well-known historical figure, Magnús *berfættr* had the other nicknames *hávi* ‘the tall’ and *Styrjaldar-Magnús* ‘Age of Unrest (= War)-’ Magnús. The nicknames are all mentioned after describing his marriage to Margrét and their offspring:

Svá segja menn, at þá er Magnús konungr kom ór vestrvíkingu, at hann hafði mjök þá síðu ok klæðabúnað, sem títt var í Vestrlöndum, ok margir hans men. Gengu þeir berleggjaðir um stræti ok hófðu kyrtla stutta ok svá yfirhafnir. Þá kolluðu menn hann

Magnús berfœtt eða berbein. Sumir kǫlluðu hann Magnús háva, en sumir Styrjaldar-Magnús. Hann var manna hæstr.<sup>58</sup>

[So men say that when King Magnús came from his Viking journeys in the west, that he, as well as many of his men, had then much of the habits and apparel as was customary in the British Isles. They went barelegged in the street and had short tunics and overcoats. Then people called him Magnús *berfættr* or *berbeinn*. Some called him Magnús *hávi*, and some *Styrjaldar-Magnús*. He was the tallest of men.]

For such famous and legendary kings, it is hardly surprising that a large number of epithetical nicknames had developed to refer to several of their well-known features and characteristics. Whaley (1993, 138) notes that nicknames of this type carry an authority in describing the natures of such kings as kings: “Further, throughout *Heimskringla* the nicknames of kings highlight different temperaments and different styles of kingship, contributing much to Snorri’s continuous and penetrating examination of the nature of kingship.” Magnús’ nickname is also explained in Book XIII of Saxo, where he received the nickname *calciamentis vacuus* (‘without footwear’) after he was forced to flee an attack by men from Halland (then part of Danish Skåne) back to his ships shoeless:

Qui quum sedulo Sueones adortus in Hallandenses etiam arma proferret, inopinata eorum irruptione percussus, ut erat calciamentis uacuuus, probrosum ad naues recursum habuit eiusque fugę deformitatem etiam cognomine usurpauit.<sup>59</sup>

[Time after time Magnús had attacked the Swedes, but when he went to attack the men of Halland, he was surprised by a sudden counterattack which forced him to an ignominious retreat to the ships when he was without shoes, and the shameful flight also gave him his nickname.]

Such examples show that nicknames, even with different narratives for how they came about, had currency across the Scandinavian world. In either case, the nickname denotes

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<sup>58</sup> In *Heimskringla III*. (ÍF XXVIII, 229-30).

<sup>59</sup> Latin text from *Gesta Danorum* Book XIII, 1,2 (Friis-Jensen 2005, Vol. II, 86).

his unusual attire (whether a Scottish kilt or no shoes) and the misfortune caused as a result, and the explanations provided evidence for the truthfulness of different exploits.

The reason for the Norwegian king Eiríkr *blóðøx*'s nickname is explained in chapter 5 of *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum* to have come about as a result of committing fratricide and following his wife's counsel:

Gunnhildr kona hans var allra kvenna fegrst, lítil kona sýnum en mikil rjóðum. Hón gørðisk svá illrjóðug, en hann svá áhlýðinn til grimmeiks ok til allskyns áþjánar við lýðinn, at þungt var at bera. Hann réð [af dögum] Ólaf digrbein, bróður sinn, ok Björn ok fleiri bræðr sína. Því var hann kallaðr blóðøx, at maðrinn var ofstopamaðr ok greypr, ok allra mest af rjóðum hennar.<sup>60</sup>

[Gunnhildr, his wife, was of all women the most beautiful; a woman small of stature yet great of counsel. She became so wicked in her counsel, and he so easily led to acts cruel and oppressive to the people, that it was hard to bear. He had killed his brother Óláfr *digrbeinn* ('thick-legged') and Björn and other brothers of his. He was called *blóðøx*, because he was a cruel and ruthless man, and mostly as a result of her counsel.]<sup>61</sup>

It is noteworthy from a literary point of view that, even in such a Norwegian setting as this text, Gunnhildr is represented in the same negative light as one expects in Icelandic sagas; she is used as a formulaic evil woman across both traditions. Eiríkr's nickname is also explained in chapter 8 of *Fagrskinna*, where it is said to have come about from his raiding adventures. In chapter 2 of Theodoricus' history, the nickname is changed to *fratrum interfector* ('killer of brothers'), suggesting that he and his audience believed that he killed his brothers to secure power (which may very well be true). In *Historia Norwegiae*, however, his nickname is translated literally as *sanguinea securis* ('bloody ax'). The presence of so many explanations proves that the nickname was common

<sup>60</sup> Old Norse text from *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum* (Driscoll 2008, 8).

<sup>61</sup> Text from Matthew Driscoll's translation in *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum* (2008, 9).

knowledge, whether they varied in the exact detail of reasoning behind it, and oral tradition provided several different and equally valid stories to explain it.

The nickname of the legendary Danish king Haraldr *hilditönn* ‘war tooth’ is found across the literary corpus with several explanations. At least according to *Sögubrot af nokkurum fornkönungum í Dana- ok Svíaveldi*, it seems to have originated at a young age as a result of his large yellow teeth:

Þat var mark á honum: at tenn í öndverðu höfði, ok váru miklar ok gullslitr á. Hann var mikill ok fríðr sýnum. Ok er hann var þrétvetr, var hann svá mikill sem tíu vetra gamlir sveinar.<sup>62</sup>

[It was a noticeable feature on him: that he had teeth on the front of his face, and they were large and gold-colored. He was large and handsome by sight. And when he was three years old, he was as big as boys ten years old.]

Later, however, the narrator seems to have forgotten the previous explanation of his having unsightly teeth, and explains his nickname as a result of his prowess in battle:

Haraldr var þá fimmtán vetra, er hann var til ríkis tekinn. Ok með því at vinir hans vissu, at hann mundi eiga mjök herskátt at verja ríkit, er hann var ungr at aldri, þá var það ráð gert, at aflat var at seið miklum, ok var seiðat at Haraldi konungi, at hann skyldi eigi bíta járn, ok svá var síðan, at hann hafði aldregi hlíf í orrostu, ok festi þó ekki vápn á honum. Hann gerðist brátt hermaðr mikill ok átti svá margar orrostur, at engi maðr var sá í ætt hans, at þvílíkan herskap hafi haft með ríki sem hann, ok þá var hann kallaðr Haraldr hilditönn.<sup>63</sup>

[Haraldr was then fifteen years old, when he came to power. And because his friends knew that he would have to defend the kingdom in a state of war, when he was young in age, then this plan was adopted that a big spell was worked, and the spell was worked onto King Haraldr so that iron weapons would not hurt him. And so it was afterwards that he never had a shield in battle, and yet no weapon cut onto him. He soon became a great warrior and fought many battles, so that no one even in his family was like him who would have had such warfare with power like he had, and then he was called Haraldr *hilditönn* (‘war tooth’).]

<sup>62</sup> In *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* Vol. II (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1944, 115).

<sup>63</sup> In *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* Vol. II (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1944, 122).

Haraldr's nickname, written *Hyldetan*, occurs with more or less the same explanation as the former in Book VII of Saxo:

Post hæc, quum Wesetum apud Scanium nuptias acturum audiret easque sub egentis specie petuisset, finito noctu conuiuio omnibusque mero ac somno sopitis nuptialem thalamum trabe pertudit. Cuius buccam Wesetus ita absque uulneris inflictione fuste quassauit, ut binis eam dentibus uacuefaceret. Quorum iacturam postmodum insperata molarium eruptio sarciebat. Hic euentus Hyldetan ei cognomen imposuit, quod eum quidam ob eminentem dentium ordinem assecutum affirmant.<sup>64</sup>

[When he (Haraldr) heard that Wesetus (= ON *Véseti*) was to be married in Skåne, he went there dressed as a beggar, when the night's celebrations had come to a close and all were down from wine and sleep, he broke through the bridal chamber with a beam of wood. Wesetus smashed a club into his cheek, but merely knocked out two of his teeth without inflicting a wound. Later two molars burst forth unexpectedly to repair the loss. This occurrence earned him the nickname *Hyldetan*, which some say he received from his prominent row of teeth.]

Immediately following this, Haraldr kills his enemy and takes control of Skåne. The narrative process of explaining a nickname's origin from a well-known physical feature of the individual is common. The explanation in Saxo shows that his nickname is probably compounded from an original nickname *tōnn* 'tooth' with the addition of a later badge from his success in war (*hildir*). This type of nickname currency reflects a fluid tradition of storytelling that was able to develop from the remembrance of a name, not unlike the use of skaldic poetry and place names as "seeds" or "kernels" from which a story could be cultivated.

The names of British kings are also found in Old Norse sources with unique nickname explanations. Although *Æþelræd Unræd* 'bad-counsel, ill-advised' (cf. the legendary Swedish king Ingjaldr *inn illráði* 'ill-counsel, the wicked') is not mentioned by his nickname in any Old Norse sources, the nickname of William the Conqueror, almost

<sup>64</sup> Latin text from *Gesta Danorum* Book VII, 10,4 (Friis-Jensen 2005, Vol. I, 494).

always called William the Bastard in non-Norman sources, is explained in *Saga ins*

*heilaga Eduardar* in *Flateyjarbók*:

Eptir Rodbert modurbrodur hins heilaga Eduardar er sikh hafdi skilit fra ríkinu tok hertugadom Vilhjalmr son hans er kalladr var bastardr. enn hann var þu eiginkonu sun ok het Gunnhildr modir hans. hon var systir Adalraads konungs. enn allir hertugar i Nordmandi fyrir honum voru frillusynir ok var han þui bastardr kalladr sem hans foreldrar allir.<sup>65</sup>

[After Robert, the maternal uncle of Saint Edward who had separated himself from the kingdom, his son Vilhjálmr who was called *bastardr* took over the dukedom. But he was the son of a legitimate wife, however, and his mother was called Gunnhildr. She was the sister of King Æthelred. But all the dukes in Normandy before him were bastards, and for this reason he was called *bastardr* just like all his forefathers.]

The saga narrative defends William against the charge of being a bastard, and describes his nickname as one inherited from the previous leaders who were illegitimate offspring.

This departs from all other medieval sources which emphasize that he was, in fact, illegitimate. Soon after in the same saga, Williams defends himself against his nickname as he pursues his future bride.

Ok er hertuginn kom til greifans at sia iumfruna. hann taladi til hennar blidliga ok kalladi hana vnnastu sina. þa suarar jumfruin. er ertu vallari þinn er þu hyggr þar sem ek er komin af konungligri ætt mune vilia giptaz einum bastardi. Þa reiddiz hertuginn ok tok i haar henne ok felldi hana til iardar ok trad hana vndir fotum ok mællti sua. eigi er ek bastardr nema at auknefni.<sup>66</sup>

[And when the duke came to the count to see the maiden, he spoke to her kindly and called her his sweetheart. Then the maiden answers: “Are you such a scoundrel that you think that I, someone descended from noble lineage, would want to marry a bastard?” Then the duke got angry and took her by the hair and tossed her to the ground and stomped on her under his feet and said thus: “I am not a bastard except by nickname.”]

From start to finish this scene has the making of an excellent chivalric tale, and quite unexpectedly, William wins his bride despite their first encounter ending in violence (this

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<sup>65</sup> Text from *Flateyjarbók. III*. (Guðbrandr Vigfusson and Unger 1868, 463).

<sup>66</sup> Text from *Flateyjarbók. III*. (Guðbrandr Vigfusson and Unger 1868, 463-4).

is likely an abbreviated “taming of the shrew” motif). With his succinct rebuttal – *eigi er ek bastardr nema at auknefni* – and asserting his physical dominance, William has made his case and won a bride.

The nickname explanations in the kings’ sagas represent, to a large extent, the prototype for those found in the other literary genres. Due to their earlier appearance than, for example, family sagas or legendary sagas, the development of kings’ saga from historical chronicles to stylized saga narratives shows that nickname explanations both long and short had already existed in the earliest literature. The explanations found in other genres followed the same style of those already present during the earliest stages of Old Norse-Icelandic literature and are also representative of a common technique used in oral storytelling, from the ancient world on, to explain a nickname with an anecdote.

## **II. Nickname Explanations in *Landnámabók***

The few narrative explanations of nicknames in *Landnámabók* are generally shorter in comparison than those found in the sagas, but it is apparent that the same anecdotal style was carried over by those who put the family sagas into writing. The most typical formula for the explanations are those which say, “He is called *x*, because *y*,” though a few exceptions are found in *Landnámabók* which resemble the more detailed explanations found in the sagas. Whaley (1993, 134) describes the limitations of the explanations in the text: “In *Landnámabók*, with its encyclopædic though summary coverage of the settlement, the brief tales which explain nickname origins are very much like the numerous anecdotes accounting for place-names in the work: they are

entertaining, but their effect is rather remote and static.” The shorter explanations tell more about the limitations in the style of the work, while still reflecting the same desire to explain nicknames in relation to historical people as the information had been passed down in oral tradition. There is also a predictable variation of the nickname explanations, either some minor syntactic differences between different versions or some manuscripts that have left out the explanations entirely; in most cases, it is the former, and only a few of them vary enough to suggest a meaningful difference.

An early Norwegian voyager to Iceland received the name Þórólfr *smjǫr* ‘butter’ as a result of his overly generous account of the island as a place where butter drips from every blade of grass:

Ok er menn spurði af landinu, þá lét Flóki illa yfir, en Herjólfur sagði kost ok lǫst af landinu, en Þórólfr kvað drjúpa smjǫr af hverju strái á landinu, því er þeir höfðu fundit; því var hann kallaðr Þórólfr smjǫr.<sup>67</sup>

[And when men asked about the land, then Flóki expressed disapproval over it, and Herjólfur told the good and the bad things about the land, but Þórólfr said that it dripped butter from every piece of straw in the land that they had discovered; for this reason he was called Þórólfr *smjǫr* (‘butter’).]

The nickname must have been meant in mockery, perhaps to taunt him over how serious his account could possibly have been. The “butter” in this context describes an exaggerated or overly embellished tale (cf. English *butter up* ‘give excessive praise and flattery’).

In the *Melabók* version, the twin brothers Geirmundr *heljarskinn* ‘skin of Hel, dark skin’ and Hámundr *heljarskinn* are given their shared nickname in Norway by their father King Hjǫrr:

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<sup>67</sup> In *Landnámabók*. (ÍF I, 38).



Þá er konungr kom heim, sagði drottning honum þetta ok sýndi honum sveinana; hann lézk eigi slík heljarskinn sét hafa. Því váru þeir svá síðan kallaðir báðir bræðr.<sup>68</sup>

[When the king came home, the queen told him this and showed him the boys; he said to have not seen such dark skin before. Because of this both brothers were called thus afterward.]

The same explanation as found in *Melabók* appears, in slightly more drawn out form, in *Þáttur af Geirmundi heljarskinni* in *Sturlunga saga* (Vol. I 1878, 2), and it seems to have inherited the explanation. The *Sturlubók* and *Hauksbók* versions of *Landnámabók* do not explain the nickname directly, but the boys' dark appearance is still described:

...þá ól hon sonu tvá; hét annarr Geirmundr, en annarr Hámundr; þeir váru svartir mjök.<sup>69</sup>

[...then she gave birth to two sons; the one was called Geirmundr, and the other Hámundr; they were very black.]

Since their shared nickname and unusual skin color was common knowledge, it was likely deemed unnecessary to explain that it is the origin of the nickname in the other versions of the text.

The nickname of *Hafr-Björn* 'Billy Goat-' Björn is explained as the result of an agreement to befriend a *bergbúi* 'rock dweller, giant' in a dream. *Hafr-Björn* receives a goat soon after the dream, even though he had no livestock before, which ultimately leads to him becoming wealthy:

Björn dreymði um nótt, at bergbúi kæmi at honum ok bauð at gera félag við hann, en hann þóttisk játa því. Eptir þat kom hafr til geita hans, ok tímgaðisk þá svá skjótt fé hans, at hann varð skjótt vellauðigr; síðan var hann Hafr-Björn kallaðr.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> In *Landnámabók* (*ÍF* I, 152).

<sup>69</sup> In *Landnámabók* (*ÍF* I, 150).

<sup>70</sup> In *Landnámabók* (*ÍF* I, 330).

[During the night Björn dreamed that a rock-dweller came to him and invited him to join into a partnership with him, and he thought himself to have agreed to it. After that a male goat came to his goats, and then his livestock multiplied so quickly that he rapidly became rather wealthy; afterwards he was called *Hafr-Björn* ('Billy Goat-' Björn).]

Although the text presents a rather typical anecdotal explanation, the supernatural origin of the nickname is unique and may represent an echo of folklore (a magic helper).

Two nicknames are explained only in the *Skarðsárþók* version of the text. The first nickname belongs to Bjarni *húslangr* 'tall man with a house', which is given a familiar anecdotal explanation:

Bjarni Skegg-Broddason sótti eldhúsvið til Nóregs ok gerði eldhús í Krossavík hálfertøgt fōðmum, en fjórtán álna hátt ok fjórtán álna breitt. Hann var því kallaðr Bjarni húslangr.<sup>71</sup>

[Bjarni Skegg-Broddason fetched hall-building timber in Norway and built a hall in Krossavík 35 fathoms long, and 14 eels high and 14 eels wide. From this he was called Bjarni *húslangr* ('tall man with a house').]

The second is that of *Øxna-Þórir* 'Oxen-' Þórir (alternatively, *Yxna-Þórir* with the same meaning), whose gift of oxen to King Haraldr *hárfagri* is commemorated by the name:

Yxna-Þórir hét maðr ágætr á Oðum ok auðigr. Hann átti þar þær þrjár eyjar, er átta tigr yxna var í hverri. En er Haraldr konungr hárfagri bað hann strandhöggs, þá gaf hann honum eina eyna ok alla yxnina með. Af því var hann kallaðr Yxna-Þórir, ok er frá honum komit margt stórmenni á Íslandi ok Nóregi.<sup>72</sup>

[There was an excellent and wealthy man called *Yxna-Þórir* ('Oxen-' Þórir) in Agðir (Agder). He had these three islands there, where 70 oxen were on each one. And when King Haraldr *hárfagri* raided his beaches, he gave him one island and all the oxen with it. From this event he was called *Yxna-Þórir*, and many important people in Iceland and Norway are descended from him.]

It is not particularly uncommon for nickname explanations to be left out in various manuscripts, though it is worth investigating the age of the explanation in relation to a

<sup>71</sup> In *Austfirðinga sögur*. (ÍF XI, 350).

<sup>72</sup> In *Austfirðinga sögur*. (ÍF XI, 350).

saga's manuscript stemma to see whether nickname explanations occur in the earliest copies or were added later during a saga's written (or oral) transmission. A can of worms such as this is far beyond the scope of this investigation.

An early ninth century Norwegian named Qlvir *barnakarl* 'children's man, friend of children', the ancestor of several prominent Icelandic settlers (including Ófeigr *grettir*), is said to have gained his nickname from his merciful behavior towards children:

Qlvir barnakarl hét maðr ágætr í Nóregi; hann var víkingr mikill. Hann lét eigi henda börn á spjótaoddum, sem þá var víkingum títt; því var hann barnakarl kallaðr.<sup>73</sup>

[Qlvir *barnakarl* ('childrens' friend') was a renowned man in Norway; he was a great Viking. He did not allow himself to catch children on spears, as was then customary among Vikings; for this reason he was called *barnakarl*.]

While the oral tradition behind *Landnámabók* was held to represent true history in its own time, *Lind* (15) doubted the explanation and said, "Rätta betydelse är utan tvivel 'den barnrike'."<sup>74</sup> *FJ* (258) found no such reason to doubt the reliability of the narrative, "Denne oplysning er der ingen grund til at betvivle."<sup>75</sup> *Lind* may be correct about the historical origin of the nickname, and a few other less fanciful explanations for the nickname than the one in *Landnámabók* are easy to conceive. It may have come from his having produced children while out raiding (and possibly raping women), or from bedding many women at home in Norway and producing several bastards, or perhaps from having many children at home in a legitimate marriage (cf. Johann II *der Kindermacher* 'the Childmaker', Duke of Cleves 1419-1481).

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<sup>73</sup> In *Landnámabók* (*ÍF* I, 261).

<sup>74</sup> "The correct meaning is undoubtedly 'the child-rich (man with many children)'."

<sup>75</sup> "There is no reason to doubt this explanation."

The nickname of *Sel-Þórir* ‘Seal-’ Þórir is explained in the *Sturlubók* version, where his father Grímr takes him out fishing as a small child stuffed inside a seal skin, and his father catches a prophetic merman:

Grímr røri til fiska um haustit með húskarla sína, en sveinninn Þórir lá í stafni ok var í selbelg, ok dreginn at hálsinum. Grímr dró marmennil, ok er hann kom upp, spurði Grímr: “Hvat spár þú oss um forlög vár, eða hvar skulu vér byggja á Íslandi?” Marmennill svarar: “Ekki þarf ek at spá yðr, en sveinninn, er liggr í selbelginum, hann skal byggja ok land nema, er Skálm merr yður leggsk undir klyfjum.” Ekki fengu þeir fleiri orð af honum. En síðar um vetrinn røru þeir Grímr svá, at sveinninn var á landi; þá týndusk þeir allir.<sup>76</sup>

[Grímr rowed out to fish during the autumn with his servants, and his son Þórir lay in the prow and was in a seal skin, which was pulled up to his neck. Grímr pulled up a merman, and when he came up Grímr asked: “What do you prophesy regarding our fate, and where should we settle in Iceland?” The merman answers: “I needn’t prophesy anything for you, but the boy who is lying in the seal skin, he shall settle and take land where your mare Skálm lies under her saddle bags.” They received no more words from him. And later during the winter Grímr rowed so that the boy was on land; then they all drowned.]

The version in *Hauksbók* has essentially the same story verbatim. Similar to the practice of other heathen settlers who cast high seat pillars and settled where they washed to shore, his father’s mare lasts an entire year before resting where *Sel-Þórir* ultimately settled in ytri Rauðamelr (in the Borgarfjörður area in eastern Snæfellsnes).

A settler received his nickname *Skjalda-Björn* ‘Shield-’ Björn as a result of his arrival in Iceland in a warship:

Hella-Björn son Herfinns ok Høllu var víkingr mikill; hann var jafnan óvinr Haralds konungs. Hann fór til Íslands ok kom í Bjarnarfjörð með alskjölduðu skipi; síðan var hann Skjalda-Björn kallaðr.<sup>77</sup>

[*Hella-Björn* (‘Caves-’ Björn, or ‘Björn from Hellar’), the son of Herfinnr and Halla, was a great Viking. He was always an enemy of King Haraldr. He went to Iceland and came

<sup>76</sup> In *Landnámabók* (ÍF I, 96).

<sup>77</sup> In *Landnámabók* (ÍF I, 197).

into Bjarnarfjörðr with a ship completely lined with shields; afterwards he was called *Skjalda-Björn* ('Shield-' Björn).]

Björn's first byname *Hella-* seems to have represented his place of origin, presumably a place in Norway called *Hellar* (masculine plural of *hellir* 'cave'). The variant *Hollu-Björn* 'Halla's-' Björn' in *Melabók* may originate in a mistaken association of the geographic byname with the name of his mother Halla. His second nickname is likely one gained after his arrival in Iceland in the ornamented warship, since ships of the sort described here were relatively common in Norway but less so in Iceland. Descriptions of ships with shields hung from the railings are common in battle scenes from the kings' sagas and *fornaldarsögur*, and the famous ninth century Gokstad ship (among others) contains slots along the railings where it is likely shields would have been temporarily fastened and removed. Without diving too deeply into material culture, it cannot have been very common during the Settlement period to sail to Iceland in warships, which were more expensive than merchant ships and other longships.

The nickname of Þórir *leðrháls* 'leather neck' is explained briefly as a result of his attempt to make cheap armor:

Annarr son Bárðar var Þorsteinn, faðir Þóris, er var í Fitjum með Hákonu konungi ok skar rauf á oxahúð ok hafði þá hlíf; því var hann leðrháls kallaðr.<sup>78</sup>

[Bárðr's second son was Þorsteinn, the father of Þórir who was in Fitjar with King Hákon and cut a hole in an oxhide and then had protection; from this event he was called *leðrháls* ('leather neck').]

It seems that some of Þórir's companions, or perhaps his superiors, found the attempt to construct a quick set of armor from an oxhide with the head poking out of a cut derisive.

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<sup>78</sup> In *Landnámabók* (*ÍF* I, 274).

While the nickname is probably intended to mock him, it is uncertain exactly whether the name commemorates his lack of proper armor (thus, a low status) or is an underhanded compliment for his quick wits in finding something to use for armor in a pinch (some protection in battle is always better than none).

The nickname of Helgi *enn magri* ‘the lean’, the first settler of the area that is now Akureyri and a Christian raised mainly in Ireland, is explained as the result of his poor fosterage in the Hebrides:

Þau Rafǫrta áttu son þann, er Helgi hét; hann seldu þau til fósturs í Suðreyjar. En er þau kómu þar út tveim vetrum síðar, þá var hann sveltr, svá at þau kenndu hann eigi; þau höfðu hann bruttu með sér ok kǫlluðu hann Helga enn magra.<sup>79</sup>

[Rafǫrta and her husband (Eyvindr) had a son who was called Helgi; they gave him up for fosterage in the Hebrides. And when they traveled out there two years later, he was starving in such a way that they did not recognize him; they took him away with them and called him Helgi *enn magri* (‘the lean’).]

The reasoning behind his nickname is not abnormal, and it goes to show that it takes only one event during a short period of time for a nickname to last for life.

The nickname of Þorsteinn *tjaldstæðingr* ‘tent pitcher’ is explained in the *Sturlubók* version as commemorating his generosity in caring for sickly new arrivals in Iceland:

Um hans daga kom skip út í Rangárós; þar var á sótt mikil, en menn vildu eigi hjálpa þeim. Þá fór Þorsteinn til þeira ok færði þá þangat, er nú heita Tjaldastaðir, ok gerði þeim þar tjald ok þjónaði þeim sjálfr, meðan þeir lifðu, en þeir dó allir. En sá, er lengst lifði, gróf niðr fé mikit, ok hefir þat ekki fundizk síðan. Af þessum atburðum varð Þorsteinn tjaldstæðingr kallaðr.<sup>80</sup>

[During his time a ship arrived in Rangárós (‘Mouth of Crooked River’, in southwest Iceland); on it there was a great pestilence, and people did not want to help them. Then

<sup>79</sup> In *Landnámabók* (*ÍF* I, 248).

<sup>80</sup> In *Landnámabók* (*ÍF* I, 362).

Þorsteinn went to them and brought them to where it is now called Tjaldastaðir ('Place of Tents') and he built them a tent there and attended to them himself while they lived, but they all died. And the man who lived the longest buried a great treasure, and it has not been found afterwards. From this event Þorsteinn was called *tjaldstæðingr* ('tent pitcher').]

The version of the events giving rise to his nickname in *Hauksbók* is nearly identical, and so is the brief account in *Þorsteins þáttur tjaldstæðings* in *Flateyjarbók*.

Ingólfr Arnarson's foster-brother Leifr, who came with him to settle Iceland after losing their property in Norway, receives the compounded first name *Hjorleifr* ~ *Hjor-Leifr* ('Sword-' Leifr) to commemorate killing a man to take his sword. The explanation closely resembles one so often found with nicknames:

Hann herjaði á Írland ok fann þar jarðhús mikit. Þar gekk hann í, ok var myrkt, þar til er lýsti af sverði því, er maðr helt á. Leifr drap þann mann ok tók sverðit ok mikit fé af honum; síðan var hann kallaðr Hjorleifr.<sup>81</sup>

[He raided in Ireland and found a large underground passage there. He went into it, and it was dark, to where there was a shining sword that a man was wielding. Leifr killed the man and took the sword and a lot of property; afterwards he was called *Hjorleifr* ('Sword-' Leifr)]

It is not surprising that the compound first name originated as a nickname, and a huge number of Old Norse first names must have begun approximately the same way (see above in chapter 2, section IV). Another compounded first name that originated as a hyphenated nickname is found in the explanation of the name *Végeirr* ~ *Vé-Geirr* 'Holy-' Geirr:

Geirr hét maðr ágætr í Sogni; hann var kallaðr Végeirr, því at hann var blótmaðr mikill; hann átti mörg barn.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>81</sup> In *Landnámabók* (*ÍF* I, 41).

<sup>82</sup> In *Landnámabók* (*ÍF* I, 188).

[A fine man in Sogn was named Geirr; he was called *Vé-Geirr* ('Holy-' Geirr) because he was a great heathen worshipper; he had many children.]

The first name closely resembles compounded theomorphic names like Þórr + Oddr > Þóroddr and the like, a common custom in Old Norse naming. It is difficult to know whether a compounded name with an explanation of the first component is to be treated as a prefixed nickname or a compound name, but where an anecdote exists to explain the first part it seems more like a nickname. The Old Norse term *vé* carried the meanings 'temple, holy place; holy' (cf. Go. *weihs* 'holy'), which is a common element in Scandinavian place names (cf. *Viborg*, *Visby*, *Odense* [*< Óðins-vé*]) and first names (cf. *Végestr*, *Vébrandr*, but also *Véþ-ormr*, *Véþ-orn*, and the Old Saxon name *Widu-kind*; cf. CV, 687). The compounding of the name with a hyphenated nickname, later turned entirely into a first name, is reminiscent of Skarpheðinn's explanation of his name in chapter 118 of *Njáls saga* (*ÍF* XII, 299), where he explains that his real name is *Heðinn*, but people refer to him by his full name *Skarpheðinn* (*skarp-* 'sharp'). No anecdote is found to explain the first part of *Skarpheðinn*'s name, and the fact that his mother is named Bergþóra *Skarpheðinsdóttir* makes it almost certain that his name was inherited from his grandfather.

The number of nicknames in *Landnámabók* is much larger than in any single saga, but this is reflective of the text's nature as a compendium of settlers rather than a narrative tale of a smaller group of them (as family sagas are, for example). Yet even here, several of the explanations reveal the types of situations in which a nickname could originate. Even those which are not clear windows into the culture of Old Norse society provide a means to compare what kind of material (both oral and written) the



compilers of sagas had inherited, and they demonstrate common features of storytelling that pervade the entire saga corpus.

### III. Miscellaneous Nickname Explanations

In this section, I have included a large portion of the saga corpus. The material of this section is therefore drawn from a far greater amount of the corpus than would be possible for providing an extensive list of nickname explanations. Instead, I have attempted to select from the more engaging examples in *fornaldarsögur*, *Íslendingasögur*, and remaining material from *konungasögur* not discussing kings directly. *Íslendingasögur* in particular provide a gold mine of nickname narratives, and as a result I have deliberately chosen those which serve to illustrate the nature of narrative explanations of nickname origins. Naturally, the majority of nickname explanations across every genre are of the same anecdotal type, but the amount of detail from one explanation to another across all genres varies considerably.

A variable nickname explanation is found in chapter 4 of the namesake saga of Þórðr *hreða* ‘disturbance’ (= *hræða* ‘disturbance, terror’). Þórðr finds himself in a petty dispute with a farmer named Jón over a cloak that Þórðr’s sister and Jón’s wife insist of, and Þórðr ends up killing the farmer and his companions. In order to reach a settlement for the killings, he relies on the assistance of the chieftain Skeggi, who offers his help on the condition that his nephew Ásbjörn be given Þórðr’s sister Sigríðr in marriage:

Þá mælti Skeggi: “Nú hefir þér vel farit, Þórðr, en hagskipti var þat, er systir þín fekk skikkjuna heldr en kona Jóns; þykki mér ok meiri ván, at Borgfirðingar megi minni til reka, hverr yðarr fundr varð; mun ek lengja nafn þitt ok kalla þik Þórð hreðu.” Þórðr sagði: “Vel líkar mér þat, þó at þeir hafi nökkurar mínar menjar, ok svá þykki mér ok

engi forþokki á nafni þessu; en svá segir mér hugr um, at sjaldan muni hreðulaust í þessu heraði.”<sup>83</sup>

[Then Skeggi said: “Now it has gone well for you, Þórðr, and that was a fair bargain, when your sister got the cloak rather than Jón’s wife; it seems to me even more than likely, that the men of Borgarfjörður may remember how your meeting went; I will lengthen your name and call you Þórðr *hreða* (‘disturbance’).” Þórðr said: “I like it, even though they have some of my treasure, and so it also seems to me no dislike towards this name; and thus I forebode that it will seldom be free from disturbance in this district.”]

A fragment of the saga in a later manuscript (AM 486 4<sup>10</sup>), however, has a completely different explanation of his nickname. In chapter 2 of *Brot af Þórðar sögu hreðu*, Þórðr’s nickname is said to be inherited from his father, who has the same full name. The death of his father, Þórðr *hreða* Hqrða-Kárason, is described in this fragment as having come about from a minor wound inflicted on his left arm by a poison sword, not sickness (as in the more complete saga):

Síðan fæddi Helga sveinbarn; þat var vatni ausit ok nafn gefit ok skyldi heita Þórðr eptir feðr sínum. Þat var merki á sveininum, at hann hafði ör á vinstra armlegg, þar sem faðir hans hafði særðr verit; tók hann þá þegar auknefni föður síns, þat er hann hafði fyrri, ok var kallaðr Þórðr hreða.<sup>84</sup>

[Next Helga gave birth to a boy; he was sprinkled with water and given a name and should be called Þórðr after his father. This was a distinguishing feature on the boy, that he had a scar on his left arm where his father had been wounded; then he immediately received his father’s nickname, the one which he had formerly, and he was called Þórðr *hreða* ‘disturbance’.]

This is a perfect example of the kinds of variant stories that can be associated in oral tradition with characters and their nicknames. Þórðr’s nickname may have been inherited from his father (and thus also his father’s proclivity for trouble), or the nickname is original to the son and given to commemorate his own manner of attracting trouble and

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<sup>83</sup> In *Þórðar saga hreðu*. (ÍF XIV, 183-84).

<sup>84</sup> In *Brot af Þórðar sögu hreðu*. (ÍF XIV, 235).

fights. Naturally, oral tradition can contain variations such as these without drastically changing the overall story of an individual's life.

The nickname of Sturlaugr *inn starfsami* 'the laborious, troublesome' is explained briefly in chapter 14 of his saga, where the king gives him the name in reply to a vicious (but deserved) insult given to him by Sturlaugr. The king was upset after losing his intended bride Ása *in fagra* 'the fair' to Sturlaugr, who fought a duel on the king's behalf in exchange for her hand in marriage. In response to losing his intended bride to Sturlaugr, the king attempted to burn Ása and her father alive. A stereotypical hero, Sturlaugr came to his father-in-law's home just in time to catch the king in the act (his wife and father-in-law had already made their way out through an escape tunnel), and declares the king to be "huglauss ok lymskr" (cowardly and sneaky). In reply, the king threatens his life, as well as his sworn brothers, and gives him a nearly impossible task:

Konungr svarar: "Eigi hirði ek um illmæli þín, en þat er þér at segja, Sturlaugr, at þú skalt aldri óhræddr vera hér í landi, nema þú færir mér úrarhorn þat, er ek týnda forðum. En nafn mun ek gefa þér með sendiförinni. Skaltu heita Sturlaugr inn starfsami. Þat mun við þik festast, því at hér ofan á mun yðr starfs auðit fóstbræðrum verða, á meðan þér lifið, ef þér komið aprt ór þessari för, sem eigi skyldi vera."<sup>85</sup>

[The king replies: "I don't care about your slander, but this is to tell you, Sturlaugr, that you shall never stay here in the country unafraid, unless you bring me the aurochs horn which I lost before. And I will give you a name with the mission. You shall be called Sturlaugr *inn starfsami* ('the laborious'). This will stick to you, because henceforth, it will be your lot that among you foster-brothers there will be toil while you live, if you come back from this journey, as you should not."]

Following with the pattern of kings giving nicknames in other *fornaldarsögur* and legendary material found in *konungasögur*, this nickname is given by a king to commemorate a moment in the character's relationship, here a negative one, to authority.

<sup>85</sup> In *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* Vol. II (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1944, 330).

After several adventures in the east, Sturlaugr managed to retrieve the aurochs horn and returned it to the king. The king was furious that Sturlaugr survived and accomplished the impossible task, and neither spoke nor reached out his hand to receive the horn. In reply, Sturlaugr tossed the horn at the king's nose, drawing blood and knocking out several teeth. Sturlaugr eventually became a lesser king in Sweden, surviving into old age after an adventurous and successful life.

The nickname of *Torf-Einarr* 'Turf-' Einarr Rognvaldason (earl of the Orkneys 890s-920s, a skaldic poet, and founder of the dynasty ruling the Orkneys for centuries to come), is explained in chapter 27 of *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* in *Heimskringla*. His nickname is said to have been given as a result of introducing the practice of burning turf and peat in the Orkneys because of the lack of firewood:

Hann var fyrir því kallaðr Torf-Einarr, at hann lét skera torf ok hafði þat fyrir eldivið, því at engi var skógr í Orkneyjum. Síðan gerðist Einarr jarl yfir eyjunum, ok var hann ríkr maðr. Hann var ljótr maðr ok einsýnn ok þó manna skyggstr.<sup>86</sup>

[He was called *Torf-Einarr* because he had turf cut and used it for fire-wood, because there were no woods in the Orkneys. Afterwards Einarr became earl over the islands, and he was a powerful man. He was an ugly man and one-eyed and yet the most sharp-sighted of men.]

Likewise, in *Orkneyinga saga* his nickname is explained in the same formulaic manner and repeats the character description of Einarr:

Hann fann fyrstr manna at skera torf ór jorðu til eldiviðar á Torfnesi á Skotlandi, því at illt var til viðar í eyjunum. Einarr var mikill maðr ok ljótr, einsýnn ok þó manna skyggstr.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> In *Heimskringla I*. (ÍF XXVI, 129).

<sup>87</sup> In *Orkneyinga saga*. (ÍF XXXVI, 11).

[He was the first man to cut turf from the earth for firewood on Torfsnes in Scotland, because there was hardly any wood on the islands. Einarr was a big man and ugly, one-eyed and yet the most sharp-sighted of men.]

This second explanation of his being the first person to burn turf seems to refer to his having been the first *Norseman* to cut and burn peat in the area. Since the custom of cutting and burning peat existed well before his time, the nickname was probably given to him by other Norsemen to whom he explained the process (perhaps they were unfamiliar with the practice). Our knowledge of the circumstances behind this nickname, like so many others, at best provides a window into the possible environment in which this type of nickname could have arisen. The nickname may have been dubbed in Norway when his adoption of the local custom became known there (cf. the narratives about Magnús *berfættr* adopting the kilt, above). In this second example, it is possible that the nickname may have been derived from the place name and used in a manner similar to other saga “kernels,” like skaldic poetry, and the anecdotal explanation would have developed later in oral histories drawn from this information.

Nicknames could be used in place of a given name in skaldic poetry, functioning similarly to *heiti* (an Old Norse poetic synonym). The use of nicknames as a substitute for a first name in skaldic poetry may have been in part because nicknames could be used for the purposes of alliteration, though this is probably not the only reason they are used instead of first names. Nicknames were, after all, still a more active part of the registers of spoken language than first names. While the majority of given names had been desemantized or fossilized, nicknames were still a part of the current language. Perhaps using the nickname added a poetic reference to language that many first names could not.

A telling example of a nickname used in place of a first name occurs in the celebratory verse in chapter 59 of *Egils saga* about killing the son of King Eiríkr *blóðøx* ‘blood-ax’, one of Egill’s most bitter enemies. In the poem, Egill refers to the king simply as *blóðøxar* (a genitive singular with two words depending on it):

Bǫrðumsk vér, ne virðak,  
 vígleiptr sonar, heiptir  
 Blóðøxar, rauð ek blóði  
 bǫðmildir, ok Gunnhildar.  
 Þar fellu nú þollar  
 þrettán lagar mána,  
 stendr af styrjarskyndi  
 starf, á einum karfa.<sup>88</sup>

[We fought and I did not mind the wrath of *blóðøx*; I, warlike, made my sword red with the blood of the son of *blóðøx* and Gunnhildr. There thirteen men were killed on one ship. Deeds are done by the warrior.]<sup>89</sup>

The use of the nickname by a poet for alliterative purposes is clearly demonstrated here, and Egill’s referencing the nickname to commemorate killing a son of the man nicknamed *blóðøx* may have been to add insult to injury (can it be a taunt on his ability to live up to the nickname?).

In *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* in *Heimskringla*, Haraldr’s son Hálfðan *hálegg* ‘high-legged’ is referred to in a poem as *Háfæta* ‘high-footed’, an alternative version of his nickname, after *Torf-Einarr* (‘Turf-’ Einarr) had killed him with the brutal blood-eagle:

Þá gekk Einarr jarl til Hálfðanar. Hann reist orn á baki honum við þeima hætti, at hann lagði sverði á hol við hrygginn ok reist rifin qll ofan alt á lendar, dró þar út lungun. Var þat bani Hálfðanar. Þá kvað Einarr:

<sup>88</sup> Normalized text from Bjarni Einarsson’s edition of *Egils saga* (2003, 59).

<sup>89</sup> This translation, following an interpretation of the stanza in prose word order, is provided in Bjarni Einarsson’s edition of *Egils saga* (2003, 98).

54. Rekit hefi ek Rognvalds dauða,  
 rétt skiptu því nornir,  
 nú's folkstuðill fallinn,  
 at fjórðungi mínum.  
 Verpið, snarpir sveinar,  
 þvít sigri vér rjóðum,  
 skatt velk hönnum harðan,  
 at Háfætu grjóti.<sup>90</sup>

[Then Earl Einarr went to Hálfðan. He carved an eagle on his back in this way, that he put the sword in deep through the back and cut all the ribs all the way down onto the loins, pulled out the lungs from there. That was the death of Hálfðan. Then Einarr recited:  
 I have taken revenge for Rognvaldr's death, Norns have arranged this justly, now the people's support (= leader) has fallen, in my district. Brave fellows, for we have victory, I pay him a hard tax, throw stones over *Háfæta*.]

Here, the substitution of his nickname for his first name must be for the purposes of alliteration in the poem as in the previous example, although *FJ* (220) suggests that the nickname seems to be used “med ironisk biklang” (with an ironic connotation) by Torf-Einarr. It is unclear what about its use in the poem is ironic, since his nickname and the alternate form both refer to his long legs, a physical description which plays no role in his violent death. The same description of his brutal death and the poem (preceded by two verses not in *Haralds saga ins hárfagra*) also occur in a near identical passage in chapter 8 of *Orkneyinga saga* (*ÍF* XXXIV, 13-15).

The legendary viking ruler Ragnarr *loðbrók* ‘hairy breeches, fur pants’ referred to himself by his nickname in the first stanza of his death poem *Krákumál* (named after his second wife, Áslaug *kráka* ‘crow’ Sigurðardóttir):

Hjoggum vér með hjörvi.  
 Hitt vas æ fyr lǫngu,  
 es á Gautlandi gingum  
 at grafvitnis morði.  
 Þá fingum vér Þóru,

<sup>90</sup> In *Heimskringla I*. (*ÍF* XXVI, 132).

þaðan hétu mik fyrðar,  
 es lyngölun lagðak,  
 Loðbrók at því vígi;  
 stakk á storðar lykkju  
 stáli bjartra mála.<sup>91</sup>

[We cut with swords.<sup>92</sup> It was ever so long ago, when we went in Gautland to the murder of the digging wolf (serpent). Then we received Þóra, and from then on warriors called me *Loðbrók*, when I killed the ling-eel (serpent) at the battle; I stabbed the steel of bright inlays (spear) into the loop of earth (serpent).]

As in dozens of similar cases, the nickname may have replaced the first name in part for the purposes of alliteration. It is also noteworthy that Ragnarr's nickname origin is alluded to in this verse, which is known from the other sources telling his legend.

*Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, *Þáttur af Ragnars sonum*, *Gesta Danorum*, and *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* mention how Ragnarr slew a serpent to win Þóra while wearing his furry-pants.

#### IV. Explanations of Women's Nicknames

Very few of the nicknames of women are explained in the sagas even when they are mentioned by them. Indeed, the dearth of women nicknames is apparent in all medieval Scandinavian texts as far back as runic inscriptions, where only a single female nicknames is found. Jacobsson (2013, 54) counted the exact figures in Lind's collection of personal names and bynames (1905-15 and 1920-21, respectively), and out of 3,616 total bynames, 3,505 belong to men (97%) and only 116 belong to women (3%).<sup>93</sup> As a

<sup>91</sup> From Finnur Jónsson's *Carmina Scaldica* (1913, 62).

<sup>92</sup> "We" in this poem is honorific: it means "I."

<sup>93</sup> 3505 + 116 = 3621, not 3616. I assume this is because some bynames could belong to males and females.



result of fewer nicknames coming down to us, this section includes nickname explanations from all literary genres where it has been possible to find them.

One example explaining a woman's nickname is that of the Swedish queen Sigríðr *in stórráða* 'the ambitious'. Sigríðr was made into a lofty woman by her marriages to Eiríkr *inn sigrsæli* 'the victory-blessed' and Sveinn *tjúguskegg* 'fork beard', and also by her sons Óláfr *sænski* ('the Swede') by Eiríkr and Knútr *inn ríki* (Cnut the Great) by Sveinn. Her nickname is explained in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* to have come about from her decision to kill two suitor kings in her home, Haraldr *grenski* 'the Grenlander' (father of the future king of Norway Óláfr *helgi* [Saint Olaf]) and an obscure Russian king Vissavaldr (Vsevolod):

Þá lét Sigríðr dróttning um nóttina veita þeim atgöngu bæði með eldi ok vápnum. Brann þar stofan ok þeir menn, sem inni váru, en þeir váru drepnir, er út kómusk. Sigríðr sagði þat, at svá skyldi hon leiða smákonungum at fara af öðrum löndum til þess at biðja hennar. Síðan var hon kölluð Sigríðr in stórráða.<sup>94</sup>

[Then during the night Queen Sigríðr had them attacked with both fire and weapons. The sitting room and the people who were inside were burned there, and those who came out were killed. Sigríðr said that she would make petty kings loathe to travel from other lands in order to ask for her in marriage. Afterwards she was called Sigríðr *in stórráða* ('the ambitious').]

A woman with a stature as high as Sigríðr means that she is among the few women who receive an narrative explanation of their nickname, which does not come as a great surprise considering the small number of womens' preserved nicknames. While it is obvious that women bore nicknames like men, they are less likely to appear in the literature with a nickname and even less likely to have the name explained.

<sup>94</sup> In *Heimskringla I*. (ÍF XXVI, 288-89).

A rare instance of a potentially double nickname occurs in which a woman's nickname looks suspiciously identical with the hypocoristic form of the proper name. Brodd-Helgi's daughter named Þórdís *todda* (cf. *toddi* 'piece, bit, small gift') is introduced in *Fljótsdæla saga* (the sequel to *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*) as Bjarni Brodd-Helgason's sister, and the saga suggests that her nickname came about as a result of her generosity:

Hann átti sér systur, er Þórdís hét. Hun var fríð kona ok vel mennt. Viðrnefni átti hun sér ok var kölluð Þórdís *todda*. Því var hun svó kölluð, at hun gaf aldri minna en stóra *todda*, þá er hun skyldi fátækum gefa, svó var hun örlát.<sup>95</sup>

[He had a sister who was called Þórdís. She was a beautiful woman and well-bred. She had herself a nickname and was called Þórdís *todda*. She was called this because she never gave less than a big piece, when she gave to the poor, as she was generous.]

It is likely that this explanation of her nickname is a misunderstanding of her pet name by the storyteller, and possibly also the saga's audience. In fact, it is far more plausible that *todda* is a hypocoristic doublet (that is, Icel. *stuttnefni* 'short name' or *gælunafn* 'pet name') of Þórdís' first name, rather than a nickname derived from this woman's behavior as suggested by the saga. The *Íslenzk fornrit* editor believed that this explanation in the saga is misguided, "Þessi skýring á viðrnefni Þórdísar er eflaust röng" (Jón Jóhannesson 1950, 239).<sup>96</sup> The hypocoristic doublet *todda* could be used to distinguish her from another *Þórdís* (perhaps as the equivalent of Þórdís "the older" or "the younger"), though this is only a guess. *Todda*, more likely, goes back to a child's pronunciation (or childlike pronunciation) of the name *Þórdís*. Despite having become far more popular in Iceland in

<sup>95</sup> From *Fljótsdæla saga* in *Austfirðinga sögur*. (ÍF XI, 239).

<sup>96</sup> "This explanation of Þórdís' nickname is undoubtedly wrong."

the modern era, at least seven such hypocoristic doublet nicknames are known from the Middle Ages: Arnbjörn *ambi*, Álfr *elfsi*, Magnús *mangi*, Magnús *skrautmangi* (*skraut-* ‘finery, ornament’), Þórdís *todda*, Úlfr *ubbi*, and Erlendr *ulli* (cf. *FJ* 301). Hypocorisms of this type show that doublet nicknames, although less common, were not unknown in the medieval period. Regardless of the mistaken interpretation, which may be quite old, the storyteller has provided a familiar anecdotal explanation of her name by giving its origin in her behavior (a common feature of such accounts).

Several women’s nicknames are given in reference to their beauty, a typical sign of nobility and good lineage, though the narrative explanations are rare. The nickname of Ragnarr *loðbrók*’s wife Þóra *borgarhjörtr* ‘hart of the castle’ is explained briefly in chapter 2 of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*:

Þat var hennar kenningarnafn, at hún var kölluð borgarhjörtr, fyrir því at svá bar hún af öllum konum at fegrð sem hjörtr af öðrum dýrum.<sup>97</sup>

[It was her nickname that she was called *borgarhjörtr* (‘hart of the castle’) because she stood out from all women in beauty as the hart from other animals.]

Another woman who is nicknamed from her beauty is Ólof *geisli* ‘ray, beam of light’ (usually translated as *Sunbeam*), as explained in chapter 2 of *Víglundar saga*:

Jarl ól við konu sinni eina dóttur barna, er Ólof hét; hon var þegar á unga aldri furðu kurteis. Hon var allra kvenna fríðust sköpuð, þeira er þá váru í Nóregi, ok því var lengt nafn hennar, ok var hon kölluð Ólof geisli.<sup>98</sup>

[Earl (Þórir) begot with his wife a daughter who was called Ólof. She was already at a young age wonderfully elegant. She was fashioned the most beautiful of all women who were in Norway, and for this reason her name was lengthened and she was called Ólof *geisli* (‘sunbeam’).]

<sup>97</sup> In *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*. Vol. I (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943, 99).

<sup>98</sup> From *Víglundar saga* in *Kjalnesinga saga* (*ÍF* XIV, 64).

While several women's nicknames of this type occur elsewhere in the corpus, narrative explanations for them are uncommon compared to those of men. This is due to the fact that fewer women are present in the sagas; thus, fewer names have come down to us. Examples of these include: Helga *in væna* 'the fair' or *in fagra* 'the fair', Oddný *eykindill* 'island flame', Þorbjörg *hólmasól* 'sun of the islands', Þórdís *landaljómi* 'light of the land', Tófa *hlíðarsól* 'sun of a mountain side', Gauthildr *mjoll* 'fresh snow', Hildir *stjarna* 'star'. The nicknames *geisli*, *eykindill*, and *landaljómi* are recognizable kennings for the sun; cf. the eleventh stanza of the *Norwegian Rune Poem*: *sól er landa ljóme* 'the sun is the light of the land' (Dickins 1915, 26).

Women are also subject to the same forms of verbal abuse inflicted upon men, often suggesting something unusual about their physical appearance or behavior. The nickname of Þorbjörg *kolbrún* 'coal brow', who is more famous for having had poetry composed about her by the well-known poet Þormóðr *Kolbrúnarskáld* 'Kolbrún's poet', is given a short explanation in chapter 11 of *Fóstbræðra saga*:

Þorbjörg var kurteis kona ok eigi einkar væn, svart hár ok brýnn – því var hon kǫlluð Kolbrún, – vitrlig í ásjánu ok vel litkuð, limuð vel ok grannvaxin ok útfætt, en eigi alllág.<sup>99</sup>

[Þorbjörg was an elegant woman and not very pretty, (she had) black hair and eyebrows – for this reason she was called *Kolbrún* ('Coal brow') – wise in appearance and of a fine hue and fine limbs, slender and splay-footed, and not very short.]

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<sup>99</sup> In *Fóstbræðra saga* (*ÍF* VI, 170).

Incidentally, Þormóðr falls for this unattractive woman and composes a poem about her in the same chapter, where he is rewarded for the poem by Þorbjörg's widowed mother with a gold ring and the nickname *Kolbrúnarskáld*.<sup>100</sup>

The nickname of the infamous wife of the hero Gunnarr in *Njáls saga*, Hallgerðr *langbrók* 'long pants' (called *snúinbrók* 'twisted pants' in *Landnámabók*), is explained as coming about from her excessive height in chapter 9:

... Hallgerðr vex upp, dóttir Høskulds, ok er kvenna fríðust sýnum ok mikil vexti, ok því var hon langbrók kǫlluð. Hon var fagrhar ok svá mikit hárit at hon mátti hylja sik með. Hon var orlynd ok skaphorð.<sup>101</sup>

[...Hallgerðr grows up, Høskuld's daughter, and is the most beautiful of women by sight and had a great stature, and for this reason she was called *langbrók* ('long pants'). She had beautiful hair and so much hair that she could cover herself with it. She was headstrong and had a severe temperament.]

An introduction such as this seems to forebode the challenge that Hallgerðr's character will present for her marriage partners and their friends (Gunnarr *af Hlíðarenda*, in particular, and his friend Njáll), that despite her attractive appearance, she is strong-willed and hard to deal with. Her nickname, one which identified her with a physical peculiarity (excessive height), would not necessarily have directly influenced her treatment in the saga, but remarkable characters more often bore nicknames than those playing minor roles. The key point is that there was something unusual about her and was considered important enough to mention.

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<sup>100</sup> “Þetta fingurgull vil ek gefa þér, Þormóðr, at kvæðislaunum ok nafnfesti, því at ek gef þér þat nafn, at þú skalt heita Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld.” (“I wish to give you this gold ring, Þormóðr, as a reward for the poem and attach a name, for this reason I will give you this name that you shall be called Þormóðr Kolbrún's Poet.” *ÍF* VI, 171-2).

<sup>101</sup> In *Brennu-Njáls saga* (*ÍF* XII, 29).

In chapter 35 of *Laxdæla saga*, a woman is insulted for her supposed wearing of manly-fastened pants (instead of open ones) and is called *Bróka-Auðr* ‘Breeches-’ Auðr by Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir. The original taunt, directed at Auðr’s husband Þórðr, is as follows:

...þá mælti Guðrún: “Hvárt er þat satt, Þórðr, at Auðr, kona þín, er jafnan í brókum, ok setgeiri í, en vafit spjörum mjök í skúa niðr?” Hann kvazt ekki hafa til þess fundit. “Lítit bragð mun þá at,” segir Guðrún, “ef þú finnr eigi, ok fyrir hvat skal hon þá heita Bróka-Auðr?” Þórðr mælti: “Vér ætlum hana litla hríð svá hafa verit kallaða.” Guðrún svarar: “Hitt skiptir hana enn meira, at hon eigi þetta nafn lengi síðan.”<sup>102</sup>

[...then Guðrún said: “Is it true, Þórðr, at your wife Auðr is always in pants, and with a codpiece in them, woven with leg-bands most of the way down to the shoes?” He said not to have noticed it. “It must be very slight,” says Guðrún, “if you don’t notice, but for what other reason should she then be called *Bróka-Auðr* (‘Breeches-’ Auðr)?” Þórðr spoke: “I think that she has been called so for only a little while.” Guðrún replies: “It is of even greater importance for her that she will have this name for a long time afterwards.”]

Guðrún’s motives for accusing Auðr of wearing masculine clothing were to steal Auðr’s husband, Þórðr, and she was successful in her endeavor. In revenge for the double insult of the name and the seduction of her husband, the following summer Auðr takes on a man’s role as well as his clothes. She wears her manly pants while bearing a sword, and delivers Þórðr a serious wound in his bed at Laugar while Guðrún is away from the farm. A libel as serious as this was grounds for legal action, just as it was grounds for divorce if a woman wore men’s pants, and it is perhaps poetic justice that Þórðr is severely wounded by his ex-wife after she assumed the role of a man.

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<sup>102</sup> In *Laxdæla saga* (ÍF V, 95).

## **V. Insulting and Ironic Nicknames in the Literature**

In this final section of nickname explanations, the focus will be on nicknames that have either an ironic meaning or an insulting one. To a large extent, these two types of nicknames overlap in that they both originate in medieval humor, broadly defined. Only a few examples of nickname explanations serve the purpose of illustrating irony, but many more examples of those which are insults are found in the saga corpus, as has already been demonstrated. Earlier in chapter 2, in particular in the section on private part and potty humor nicknames, it was shown that the quantity of nicknames of an insulting type is large in the literature and the society that fostered it. The insults behind such nicknames could also play a role in the nickname explanations, although far fewer of these explanations are recorded than must have existed when the names first arose. Considering the stipulation in *Grágás* (also mentioned in the previous chapter) explicitly prohibited “calling people names” and included a severe punishment for doing so (3 years exile), it is surprising that so many of them survived at all, let alone with explanations. In general, I have still been unable to explain fully why so many are preserved, but a few general points will be demonstrated below in an attempt to find some answers as to why so many are preserved.

The number of ironic nicknames must have been great in Old Norse society, but explanations of them as ironic in the literature are rare. Two illustrative examples will serve to demonstrate how such nicknames originated in medieval humor, a circumstance that must also lie behind a large number of nicknames, despite the lack of explanations. The first example occurs in chapter 135 of *Ólafs saga helga* where there is an example of

a nickname given ironically; in other words, a nickname of the *Little John* type (a man who was supposed to be very large):

Þórðr átti kenningarnafn, var hann kallaðr Þórðr inn lági. Hann var þó manna hæstr, ok var hit þó meirr, at hann var þrekligr ok ramr at afli.<sup>103</sup>

[Þórðr had a nickname, and he was called Þórðr *inn lági* ('the short'). He was, however, the tallest of men, and furthermore he was sturdy and powerful in strength.]

The explanation makes clear that the nickname originates in knowledge of the man being tall, and stating the exact opposite in the nickname must reflect a joke behind it. Indeed, nicknames of this type are common today, just like calling an overweight friend "Skinny" or a tall friend "Shorty," and if that is any indication of the circumstances in which such nicknames originate, it most likely has to do with a degree of familiarity. Thus, a nickname of this type could be given by one's closest associations (friends, relatives), but one's enemies could have also applied the tag as mockery. In the case of Þórðr, it seems more likely that it would have originated in familiarity, although the evidence is lacking.

The second example of nickname narrative explaining an ironic nickname of the *Little John* type is described in a passage from *Sigurðar saga jórsalafara* in *Morkinskinna*. In this example there is a swarthy servant named Óttarr *birtingr* ('white colored) sea trout', where the play on *birting* 'brightness' is evident:

Sá maðr stóð fyrir konunginum, er hét Óttarr birtingr, bóndason ok kertisveinn, skyldi þá þjóna, svartr á hárlit, lítill ok vaskligr ok kurteiss, dökkklitaðr ok þó vel um sik. Því var hann kallaðr birtingr, at hann var dökkkr ok svartr.<sup>104</sup>

[This man stood before the king who was called Óttarr *birtingr*, the son of a farmer and a candle boy, who was to serve them, black in hair color, small and brave and elegant, dark

<sup>103</sup> In *Heimskringla II*. (ÍF XXVII, 236).

<sup>104</sup> Normalization mine. In *Morkinskinna* (Finnur Jónsson 1932, 388-9).



colored and yet carried himself well. He was called *birtingr* because he was dark and black.]

An explanation such as this can only signify that his nickname was given as a joke or in teasing, but it may also play around with his role as a candle boy (one who brings light). This passage, like the preceding one, shows that irony was a component of the cultural repertoire of the North, though such nickname narrative examples are far more uncommon than the stock of existing nicknames which must have originally been ironic.

Moving along to insults, which make up a huge portion of the body of Old Norse nicknames, a larger number of nickname explanations are available from which to draw some general conclusions about the culture in which they originate. It is amazing that they could be called names like Sigurðr *sýr* ‘sow’, Eysteinn *fretr* ‘fart’, or Hákon *galinn* ‘the crazy’, and one can only wonder whether such nicknames could have been uttered in their presence. As a primary example of an insulting nickname with an explanation in kings’ sagas, there is the nickname of the legendary Danish king Hrólfr *kraki* (**Hroðulf** in *Beowulf*), which has a disputed meaning, ranging from ‘person resembling a thin pole’ to ‘thin face’ to sexual innuendo as ‘thin pole (penis pun)’. In both his own saga (derived perhaps from Snorri’s *Skáldskaparmál*) and in Saxo his nickname is presented with a narrative origin. Hrólfr *kraki* is given his nickname, while on an expedition in Sweden, in chapter 42 of his saga by a servant named Vöggr who accidentally insults him:

Ok sem þessi maðr kom fyrir Hrólfr konung, þá mælti hann: “Þunnleitr er þessi maðr ok nokkurr kraki í andlitinu, eða er þetta konungr yðarr?” Hrólfr konungr mælti: “Nafn hefir þú gefit mér, þat sem við mik mun festast, eða hvat gefr þú mér at nafnfesti?” Vöggr svaraði: “Alls ekki hefi ek til, því at ek em félauss.”<sup>105</sup>

<sup>105</sup> In *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* Vol. II (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1944, 74).

[And when this man came before King Hrólfr, then he said: “This man is thin-faced and a bit of a pole in the face, or is this your king?” King Hrólfr replied: “You have given me a name, one which will stick to me, and what will you give me for the name?” Vǫggr answered: “I have nothing at all for this, because I am penniless.”]

The king then proceeds to give him one of his gold rings as a reward, which demonstrates the king’s magnanimity and humility, especially since the servant delivers an insult and is unable to pay compensation for it.

In *fornaldarsögur* such instances of the *nafnfestr* (‘name-fastening’) are numerous. The *nafnfestr* is a well-known custom where a byname, either a nickname or title, is given in a formulaic and ceremonial manner. The new name is “fastened” or attached by the namer to the one being named and compensated with some sort of gift, usually in the form of money or a precious object. The exact reason for the compensation varies, since some instances of the *nafnfestr* involve the naming of children, but more often than not it is to compensate for an insulting byname (cf. Willson 2007, 329). It is possible that the compensation has to do with the legal requirement to repay an insulting nickname (cf. the stipulation in *Grágás*), but not all cases of *nafnfestr* reflect reparation for a negative nickname. In the case of Hrólfr *kraki*, it is unlikely that the king takes deep offense at the name, since he seems to enjoy the mockery, and his asking for a gift follows the usual tradition after a name has been given. Even so, Hrólfr’s acceptance of the nickname goes contrary to societal expectation, where one would have expected punishment for the uncompensated insult (especially violence). Instead, he assumes the name with pride and shares his wealth; it is exactly the kind of act that an exceptional king, as opposed to a common man, would do to prove it.

In Book II of Saxo, an almost identical narrative occurs, where a youth named Wiggo taunts the king's unusual stature and receives a reward despite the insult:

Adolescens quidam, Wiggo nomine, corpoream Rolvonis magnitudinem attentiori contemplatione scrutatus ingentique eiusdem admiratione captus percontari per ludibrium coepit, quisnam esset iste Krake, quem tanto staturae fastigio prodiga rerum natura ditasset, faceto cavillationis genere inusitatum proceritatis habitum prosecutus. Dicitur enim lingua Danica Krake truncus, cuius semicaesis ramis fastigia conscenduntur, ita ut pes praecisorum stipitum obsequio perinde ac scalae beneficio nixus sensimque ad superiora provectus petitae celsitudinis compendium assequatur. Quem vocis iactum Rolvo perinde ac inclitum sibi cognomen amplexus urbanitatem dicti ingentis armillae dono prosequitur.<sup>106</sup>

[A particular youth by the name of Wiggo examined in attentive surveying the physical size of Rolvo, and seized by great wonder, he began to inquire in mockery, "Who is this Krake, whom lavish Nature had enriched with such a great gable end in terms of stature?" he cut away, with a gentle scoffing about his extraordinary height. For the Danish language calls *Krake* a tree trunk, whose branches are pollarded, and whose gables are climbed in such a way that the foot uses the shortened trunks as supports, stepped on like a ladder, and, having gradually advanced to the higher parts, finds the shortest way to the top. Rolvo embraced the nickname in the same manner as though it were a name of honor for him, and rewards the wit of the remark with a large arm ring.]

CV (354) believed that the nickname meant 'a looped and branched stem' and that it was used to describe the king's height and slenderness. In Arngrímur Jónsson's Latin paraphrase of the lost *Skjöldunga saga*, the nickname *Krake* is described parenthetically by Arngrímur to be the equivalent of Dan. *Krag*, translated as *cornicem marem*, the accusative of *cornix mas*, 'male crow' (cf. the translation of the text by Miller 2007, 17); this interpretation is suspect. Whether we suppose that *kraki* is a reference to his face or height (or some other part of the body), both narratives suggest that the nickname was given to mark out a feature of his appearance resembling a pole or a post. Although one must be careful when examining the presence of a dirty play on words and the association

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<sup>106</sup> Latin text from Book II, 6,12 (Olrik & Ræder 1931, 51,33 ).

of any vertical object with a phallos, such a tongue-in-cheek joke is possible. That the king could have tolerated such a nickname demonstrates his greatness; similarly, handing out money to reward cleverness, demonstrates his wealth and generosity with it.

The famous Norwegian king Ólafr Tryggvason, like so many other Scandinavian kings, has more than one nickname. According to an account of the Christianization of Scandinavia in *Ór Hamborgar historíu*, Danes, who were enemies wishing to divide up his kingdom, called him either *krakaleggr* ‘thin-legged’ or *krakabeinn* ‘pole-legged’:

Eftir Eirek konung tók ríki í Svíþjóð Ólafr, son hans. Sveinn fór þá aftr í Danmörk. Hann skildi þá, at guð var honum reiðr, ok hét að snúast til kristni ok boða rétta trú. Eftir þat sættust þeir Ólafr konungr ok Sveinn konungr svá, at Sveinn konungr skyldi hafa ríki sitt ok fá Sigríðar hinnar stórráðu, móður Ólafs konungs. Síðan skyldu þeir báðir láta kristna lönd sín. Síðan eggjaði Sigríðr hin stórráða, at þeir skyldi ráða frá löndum Ólaf Tryggvason, er Danir kölluðu krakalegg eðr krakabein, sem þeir gerðu síðan. Skiptu þeir þá Noregi með sér þrír höfðingjar, Ólafr sænski, Sveinn konungr ok Eirekr jarl Hákonarson.<sup>107</sup>

[After King Eirekr his son Ólafr took the kingdom in Sweden. Then Sveinn went back to Denmark. He determined then that God was angry with him, and he promised to return to Christianity and preach the right faith. After this King Ólafr and King Sveinn agreed that King Sveinn should possess his kingdom and take in marriage Sigríðr *in stórráða* (‘the ambitious’), King Ólafr’s mother. Afterwards they should have their countries Christianized. Then Sigríðr *in stórráða* urged that they should take the lands of Ólafr Tryggvason, whom the Danes called *krakaleggr* (‘pole-leg’) or *krakabeinn* (‘pole-leg’), which they did afterwards. Then they divided Norway among the three chieftains, Ólafr *sænski* (‘the Swede’), King Sveinn, and Earl Eirekr Hákonarson.]

It is not unusual for kings to have alternate nicknames in geographic areas outside their own, especially ones that express disdain or mockery (cf. Óttarr *Vendilkráka* ‘Vendel crow’, explained above). While *krakaleggr* and *krakabeinn* may appear to be innocuous, they are cleverly descriptive insults. Labelling a political rival something along the lines

<sup>107</sup> In *Flatayjarbók* Vol. I (Sigurður Nordal 1944, 18-19).

of “chicken legs” suggests a lanky stature and unusual physique. Such traits mark Ólafr out as appearing abnormal and strange, which is never a good thing, especially for a king.

The Norwegian king Haraldr Sigurðsson *harðráði* (‘hard-rule’) is touchy about his father’s nickname Sigurðr *sýr* ‘sow’, probably because of the degrading sexual implications.<sup>108</sup> In *Hreiðars þáttr heimska* in *Morkinskinna*, the eponymous hero (a bumbling fool who may have been mentally handicapped), presented the king with a finely made boar figure, which at first surprised the king for its unexpectedly fine craftsmanship from a man everyone had considered a fool. However, once the king realized that the boar figure that Hreiðarr had presented him is a sow with teats, he flies into a rage:

“Hér er nú gripr er ek vil gefa þér.” Setr á borðit fyri hann, en þat var svín gort af silfri ok gyllt. Þá mælti konungr er hann leit á svínit: “Þú ert hagr svá at trautt hefi ek sét jafn vel smíðat, með því móti sem er.” Nú ferr þat með manna höndum. Segir konungr at hann mun taka sættir af honum – “ok er gott at senda þik til stórvirkja; þú ert maðr sterkr ok ófælinn, at því er ek hygg.” Nú kœmr svínit aptr fyr konung. Tekr hann þá upp ok hyggir at smíðinni enn vandligar ok sér þá at spenar eru á, ok þat var gyltr. Fleygir þegar í brot ok sér at til háðs var gort ok mælir: “Hafi þik allan troll! Standi menn upp ok drepi hann!”<sup>109</sup>

[“Now here is a precious item which I want to give you.” He places it on the table before him, and it was a gilded pig made of silver. Then the king spoke as he looked upon the pig: “You are skilled in such a way that scarcely have I seen something equally well produced, in such a style as this is.” Now it goes among the hands of the men. The king says that he will take reconciliation from him – “and it is a good thing to send you to great enterprises; you are a strong man and unafraid, at least this is what I think.” Now the pig comes back before the king. He picks it up then and looks at the work still more carefully and sees then that there are teats on it, and it was a sow. He flings it away at once and sees that it was made for mockery and says: “May trolls take you! Stand up men and kill him!”]

<sup>108</sup> For a discussion of the etymology of the nickname, see Schrodt (1979, 114-119).

<sup>109</sup> In *Morkinskinna I*. (*ÍF* XXIII, 162-63).

Hreiðarr narrowly escapes with his life, and such situations in the literature with episodes involving Icelanders in Norway are numerous (especially in *þættir*). Whaley (1993, 138) notes that the theme of the king's sensitivity to his father's nickname *sýr* is also found earlier in *Morkinskinna*. King Magnús' half-brother Þórir is deeply offended by a short poem in which Haraldr calls his father a thief (*hvinngestr*). King Magnús provides Þórir with a retaliatory poem containing one of the most memorable insults of the entire compilation:

Gerði eigi sá  
garð um hestreðr  
sem Sigurðr sýr  
sá var þinn faðir.<sup>110</sup>

[He (Þórir's father) never built a fence around horse penises like Sigurðr *sýr*, who was your father.]

The implication of a sow enclosing penises, like a shrine (or perhaps a metaphor is meant which escapes me), is an obvious insult against his father's masculinity, and it suggests that he treated phalli in a homosexual way; the species to which the penises belong may be irrelevant. Haraldr is naturally enraged by the insult in the poem and means to kill Þórir the following morning, but Magnús quickly saves Þórir and the episode ends.

It is a marvel that so many kings bore nicknames of an insulting type, often passed down through the centuries by not only enemies but also their descendants. The examples above demonstrate that such nicknames can play a role in tagging an individual's qualities, ones which he used to demonstrate his humility in tolerating clever insults. In a society that placed a high value on clever insults and sophisticated word play,

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<sup>110</sup> Normalization mine. In *Morkinskinna* (Finnur Jónsson 1932, 110).

it is not surprising that so many survived and explanations regarding their origin were retained in oral tradition. Descendants of legendary kings may have believed that their forefathers would have borne derogatory nicknames as a badge of honor, just as they did in their own time. Furthermore, the prevalence of such nicknames suggests that they could be used as terms of affection from within one's inner circle, but seen as slander from the outside. These cases provide evidence for a nuanced situation, and one which is far from simple.

Naturally, kings were not the only members of society to receive insulting nicknames and to bear them with some degree of pride. In chapter 48 of *Laxdæla saga*, a relatively minor character with prophetic dreams named Án *svarti* 'black' receives a second nickname in mockery for his dream foreboding bad things to come. Indeed, Án's premonitory dream presages Kjartan's death at the hands of his foster-brother Bolli in the following chapter (49), and his gory dream is commemorated with the addition of the derogatory nickname *hrísmagi* 'brushwood-belly':

Kjartan sitr inn fjórða dag páska á Hóli; var þar in mesta skemmtan ok gleði. Um nóttina eptir lét Án illa í svefni, ok var hann vakiðr. Þeir spurðu, hvat hann hefði dreymt. Hann svarar: "Kona kom at mér, óþekkilig, ok kippði mér á stökk fram. Hon hafði í hendi skálm ok trog í annarri; hon setti fyrir brjóst mér skálmína ok reist á mér kviðinn allan ok tók á brott innyflin ok lét koma í staðinn hrís; eptir þat gekk hon út," segir Án. Þeir Kjartan hlógu mjök at drauminum ok kváðu hann heita skyldu Án hrísmagi; þrifu þeir til hans ok kváðusk leita skyldu, hvárt hrís væri í maganum.<sup>111</sup>

[Kjartan spends the fourth day of Easter at Hóll; there was the greatest amusement and joy. During the following night Án had a hard time sleeping, and he was awake. They asked what he had dreamt. He answers, "A woman came to me, repulsive, and pulled me onto the footboard. She had a small sword in her hand and a trough in the other; she put the short sword to my chest and cut open my entire belly and took away my entrails and put brushwood in its place; after that she went out," says Án. Kjartan and company

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<sup>111</sup> The Icelandic text is from *Laxdæla saga*. (*ÍF* V, 149).

laughed a lot at the dream and said that he should be called *Án hrísmagi*; they grabbed him and said they should look to see whether there was brushwood in his stomach.]

Whereas the first explanation of the nickname suggests that it was given in teasing, the anecdote explaining *hrísmagi* is reinforced in chapter 49 following Kjartan's death, when his loyal defender *Án svarti* has yet another dream after a miraculous return from death. This time his dream is used to provide a positive sense of physical recovery in *Án*'s case after having been wounded in the fight against the sons of Ósvífr, and a predicts his death in a retributive attack against Bolli later in the saga.<sup>112</sup> The text reads:

Þat varð til tíðenda í Sælingsdalstungu þá nótt, er vígit hafði orðit um daginn, at *Án* settisk upp, er allir hugðu, at dauðr væri. Urðu þeir hræddir, er vökðu yfir líkunum, ok þótti þetta undr mikit. Þá mælti *Án* til þeira: “Ek bið yðr í guðs nafni, at þér hræðizk mik eigi, því at ek hefi lifat ok haft vit mitt allt til þeirar stundar, at rann á mik ómeginshöfgi; þá dreymði mik in sama kona ok fyrr, ok þótti mér hon nú taka hrísit ór maganum, en lét koma innyflin í staðinn, ok varð mér gott við þat skipti.” Síðan váru bundin sár þau, er *Án* hafði, ok varð hann heill ok var síðan kallaðr *Án hrísmagi*.<sup>113</sup>

[There were these tidings in Sælingsdalstunga on the night when the fight had taken place during the day, that *Án* sat up when everyone thought that he was dead. They became afraid, those who kept watch over the bodies, and this seemed a great miracle. Then *Án* said to them: “I ask you in God's name that you don't fear me, because I have been alive and had my senses the whole time until a heavy swoon came upon me; then I dreamed about the same woman as before, and it seemed to me now that she took the brushwood out of my stomach, and put the intestines in its place, and I got better from this exchange.” Then those wounds which *Án* had were bound, and he was healed and was afterwards called *Án hrísmagi*.]

Having had such a harsh tag applied to him at first in mockery, *Án* redeems himself only to receive the nickname for a second time. It is unlikely that the narrator had forgotten the previous anecdotal narrative for his nickname. The nickname must have stuck after the

<sup>112</sup> For a recent discussion of the dream-woman who removes entrails as a folklore and literary motif and how it relates to *Án hrísmagi*, see the article “Perchta the Belly Slitter and *Án hrísmagi*” (Hill 2007, 516-523).

<sup>113</sup> From chapter 49 of *Laxdæla saga* (*ÍF* V, 155).



first dream, and there it signified Kjartan and company's mocking of Án's dream. After the second dream, however, the situation had become far more serious and the dream giving rise to the nickname serves as evidence of a very serious and tragic event in the saga. The narrator may also be reinforcing the literary trope of a minor, but memorable character aiding in moving along the plot as if by fate, and having marked the progression with a miracle, he elevates Án's role in the saga.

## Chapter 4 – Nicknames in *Landnámabók*

Deus creavit, Linnæus disposuit.  
 (God created, Linné organized.)  
 - The motto of Carl von Linné (1707-1778)<sup>114</sup>

### Introduction

In this chapter I will provide a list of nicknames in *Landnámabók*, which is the most fruitful onomastic text of the Scandinavian Middle Ages for names of all types. The list will show a large quantity of the various types of nicknames and provide their meanings in English, many of which have not been translated into English and are rare or obscure words. The material from *Landnámabók* could later be used to draw a comparison of nicknames between individual texts or genres (this is beyond the scope of this investigation). Furthermore, an alphabetic list of nicknames will prove useful for scholars in the field, particularly translators who are at a loss for suitable meanings of many nicknames. In my opinion, an ideal translation from Old Norse-Icelandic does not translate nicknames, leaving only an English word or hyphenated compound in its place. Instead, a parenthetical gloss should be provided upon the first encounter, because nicknames are, like proper names, untranslatable in many cases. An exception to this is when a nickname is better known in English, such as Leif the Lucky or Eric the Red; then and only then may English forms be used. Even worse is to leave a nickname unglossed in the original (minus nominative endings), especially when the meaning is well-known or relatively easy to translate.

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<sup>114</sup> This motto was first attributed to Linné under his portrait on the frontispiece of D.H. Stöver's posthumous biography *Leben des Ritters Carl von Linné* (1792).

Whether the list could ultimately result in a nickname dictionary that could stand on equal (or higher) footing than that of *Lind* is wishful thinking at this stage. Such a list does not stop at giving glosses and citations of the nicknames in the literary corpus, since *Lind* already managed this with great success (albeit using now outdated editions of sagas); it will, when possible, provide etymological references and seek to reconnect archaic and rare words to other Germanic languages, especially when their meaning is unclear. In any case, the process of determining the meaning of a nickname often reveals the motivations behind giving them.

### **I. The Nicknames in *Landnámabók***

In compiling the 709 total individuals with 517 different nicknames found in

*Landnámabók*, I have deliberately ignored titles and occupations (such as *ábóti* [‘abbot’], *goði* [‘chieftain’], *hersir* [‘local leader’], *jarl* [‘earl’], *kanoki* [‘canon’], *konungr* [‘king’], *læknir* [‘doctor’], *munkr* [‘monk’], *prestr* [‘priest’], *spákona* [‘prophetess’], and *víkingr* [‘viking’]) but have chosen to keep *kappi* (‘champion’) since it is always earned by recognition of some event or actions. I have also left out geographic bynames, which are found in the form of adjectives (as in *inn austræni* ‘the Norwegian’), prepositional phrases (as in *frá Kambr* ‘from Kambr’ or *í Skagafirði* ‘in Skagafjörður’), or hyphenated nouns derived directly from a place name (for example, *Gnúpa-Bárðr* [Bárðr from Gnúpar], *Holta-Þórir* [Þórir from Holt], or *Mýra-Knjúkr* [Knjúkr from Mýrar]). Since geographic bynames are treated the same way as nicknames in Old Icelandic in terms of form and grammar, the distinction made between them and nicknames is more my own

than a medieval one. Similarly, bynames of relationship, such as *Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri* ‘foster son of King Æthelstan’, *Völu-Steinn* ‘*Völva*’s- (prophetess’-)’Steinn, Steinn the son of the *völva*, *Þuriðr sundafyllir* ‘inlet filler’, and *Þorgils ørrabeinsstjúpr* ‘ørrabeinn’s (scar-legged’s) stepson’, do not seem appropriate to count among nicknames and have been excluded from the list.

The nicknames are taken from the index of names (*nafnaskrá*) in the *Íslensk fornrit* edition of *Íslendingabók* (*ÍF* I 1986, 441-525). In compiling the list I have filtered out those found only in *Íslendingabók*, in no small part due to the brevity of that text (only 25 printed pages) and the more representative onomastic material found in abundance in *Landnámabók*. I have retained the *Íslensk fornrit* editors’ deliberately archaicized spelling of the definite article *enn/en/et* ‘the’ preceding weak adjectives, but the manuscripts usually have either *inn/in/it* or the younger forms *hinn/hin/hit*. The majority of those mentioned in the list are Icelanders, although there are several Norwegians and a few Englishmen who have also made their way in. In parentheses I have given the page numbers of where the individuals are found in the *Íslensk fornrit* edition, and I have also used the editors’ abbreviations of the manuscripts *Sturlubók* (S), *Hauksbók* (H), *Melabók* (M), *Skarðsárbók* (Sk), and *Þórðarbók* (Þ) when citing manuscript variants of the names. In many cases the variants are incorrect, but where I was able to determine a translation (regardless of whether it is the original nickname), I have provided one.

Among the original settlers of Iceland with nicknames there are 175 male settlers and five females, marked here by the abbreviation *lnm* (*landnámsmaðr* ‘male settler’) or

*Ink* (*landnámskona* ‘female settler’). Only 41 of the 709 individuals with nicknames are female (~ 5.8%), comprising a total of 38 nicknames. I have attempted to give the opinions of other scholars in glossing the names, especially when a nickname’s meaning is unclear or controversial. Those nicknames which are obscure from an etymological point of view, controversial, or difficult to decipher have been marked with an asterisk (\*).

In translating the nicknames, the glosses of *FJ* and *Lind* (in Danish or Swedish, respectively) have been included when it helps clarify the meaning, and on many occasions their glosses are given in English when the meaning is obvious. If there was more to be learned by referring to *CV*, the glosses or comments given there have been included. In many cases, more information was needed regarding the origins of the words, and the etymological dictionaries of *DV* and *ÍO* were occasionally useful and have been included in the annotations. In addition, the English translation of the *Sturlubók* version of *Landnámabók* (the oldest extant manuscript) by Hermann Pálsson and Edwards (1972) was consulted to see how the nicknames are translated there, and the citation of their translation as has been abbreviated *HPE*. A large number of nicknames remain untranslated in the Pálsson/Edwards translation (120 to be exact), many of which are not obscure from an etymological point of view or otherwise. As such, an updated translation of the nicknames in *Landnámabók* in English is lacking.

## List of Nicknames in *Landnámabók*

### A

1. **allrasystir** ‘sister of all’: Yngvildr allrasystir Hámundardóttir (257, 266). *FJ* (166) considers the nickname to be ironic and likely given as a result of Yngvildr calling everyone sister or brother. Another possibility is that the nickname is given to mark her out as someone with many siblings. *HPE*: All-Men’s-Sister.
2. **\*alskik** meaning unknown (possibly Gaelic): Ásólfr alskik Konálsson (*lnm* 61, 62, 63, 64, 65). *FJ* (315) doubts that it is Norse and suggests a possible Celtic origin. *Lind* (3) wonders whether it is Celtic. The assumption of a Gaelic name is surely from the patronymic *Konáls-son* (cf. Irish *Conáall*). Its meaning and etymology remains unknown.
3. **Alviðrukappi** ‘champion of Alviðra’: Þorkell Alviðrukappi Þórðarson (180, 181). *Alviðra* is the name of a farm in Dýrafjörðr (Westfjords).
4. **ánauðgi** ‘the enslaved’: Ormr ánauðgi Bárðarson (*lnm* 356; = Ormr auðgi Herjólfsson, 345 Þ: aurgi ‘the muddy’). *FJ* (267) connects the name to a current or former position as a slave. *Lind* (4) suggests that the variant *auðgi* ‘wealthy’ is correct. Weak form of the adjective *á-nauðigr* ‘enslaved, oppressed’, which is attested but rare. *HPE*: the Unfree.
5. **árbót** ‘improvement of the season’: Álqf árbót Haraldsdóttir (314). *FJ* (293) glosses it as ‘en, der ved sin lykke bevirker åringens godhet’ (one who with his/her good luck affects the quality of the season). *Lind* (5) glosses it as ‘årsvækstföbättring’ (improvement of the year’s growth [harvest]). Cf. *bekkjarbót* ‘pride of the bench, bride’. *HPE*: the Fecund.
6. **arnkatla** (x2) ‘eagle kettle’: Þuríðr arnkatla Helgadóttir (178, 179); Þuríðr arnkatla Hergilsdóttir (178). Mother and daughter pair; *Arnkatla* is a proper name (the feminine equivalent of *Arnkell*) used to identify the daughter in *Hauksbók*, and its use as a nickname in *Sturlubók* is probably a mistake.

**7. askasmiðr** ‘ship builder’: Oddbjörn askasmiðr (348). *FJ* (268) suggests that the byname refers to a maker of tubs or troughs from wood, not ships. *Lind* (6) glosses it as ‘skeppsbyggare’ (ship builder). *CV* (25) glosses it as ‘ship-wright’. It is unclear whether this represents an occupational byname or a nickname. *HPE*: the Ship-Wright.

**8. en auðga** (x2) ‘the wealthy’: Arndís en auðga Steinólfsdóttir (*lnk* 158, 201): ‘the wealthy’; Þórunn en auðga Ketilsdóttir (365, 366). Weak feminine of the adj. *auðigr* ‘wealthy’.

**9. auðgi** ‘(the) wealthy’: Eilífr auðgi Qnundarson (*lnm* 354, 355, 386). Weak form of adj. *auðigr* ‘wealthy’, but missing the definite article before it.

**10. enn auðgi** (x10) ‘the wealthy’: Ásbjörn enn auðgi Harðarson (*lnm* 84, 140, 212, 213); Björn enn auðgi Geirleifsson (256); Finnur enn auðgi Halldórsson (*lnm* 64, 65, 68, 69, 85, 372); Geirr enn auðgi Ketilsson (73); Guðlaugr enn auðgi Þormóðarson (*lnm* 72, 100, 101 Þ: fjöluauðgi); Hrólfur enn auðgi Úlfsson ór Geitlandi (70, 71, 77, 79, 82); Ketill enn auðgi Ásbjarnarson (346); Kjetvi enn auðgi (152, 390); Ormr enn auðgi Úlfsson (*lnm* 364 S: Grímr, Þ: hinn orðigi, ánuauðgi); Þorlákur enn auðgi Ormsson (92, 93, 94, 220 Þorleikr). Weak form of the adj. *auðigr* ‘wealthy’.

**11. auðkúla** ‘wealth hump, bump of wealth’: Eyvindr auðkúla (*lnm* 223). *FJ* (282) suggests that he has a bump or growth on his head. *Lind* (8) suggests that it means ‘den kutryggige’ (the hunchbacked) and *auðr* ‘wealth’. The name may also imply a multitude of such bumps or deformities, or more likely, that he was wealthy and had a visible hump somewhere on his body. Cf. the nickname *kúla* ‘bump, growth, hump’.

**12. auga** ‘eye’: Þorgils auga Grímsson (76). A nickname like this is surely derived from a distinguishing feature of the individual, in particular a deformity or disability (an injured eye, blind in one or both eyes, missing an eye, etc.) that marks the individual out from

others. Cf. other single body part nicknames *brún* ‘brow’, *háls* ‘neck’, *hofði* ‘head’, *kjálki* ‘jaw’, *kné* ‘knee’, *leggr* ‘leg’, and *muðr* ‘mouth’. *HPE*: Knee.

**13. \*aurriði** ‘(brown) trout’: Ketill aurriði (*lnm* 359 Kjallakr, 364). *FJ* (312) suggests that it means ‘one who moves in the mud’. *CV* (35) connects it to either *qrr* ‘swift’ or *aurr* ‘mud, clay’ and *-riði* (‘mover’). *ÍO* (32-33) connects *-riði* with the verb *riða* ‘to move around in the same place and to spawn’.

**14. austmannaskelfir** ‘terror of the Eastmen (Norwegians)’: Ásgeirr austmannaskelfir (376). *Skelfir* is connected to *skelfa* ‘to make shake’. The nickname is explained briefly in *Landnámabók* (376): ...er drap skipshöfn austmanna í Grímsárósi (who killed a crew of Norwegians in Grímsárós). Cf. the nickname *Skáneyjarskelmir* ‘terror of Skåne’. *HPE*: the Easterners’-Terror.

## B

**15. Barna-** ‘Children-’: Barna-Þóroddr Ormsson (256). *Lind* (15) suggests that it is a scribal error for the proper name *Bjarni* and quotes the *Hauksbók* version (Ormr föður Bjarna föður Þórodds [Ormr, father of Bjarni, father of Þóroddr]). If the nickname is genuine, it likely implies that he had many children. *HPE*: Children-Thorodd.

**16. barnakarl** ‘children’s man, friend of children’: Qlvir barnakarl Einarsson (37, 124, 145, 152, 157, 253, 379, 382, 389). *Lind* (15) glosses it as ‘den barnrike’ (the wealthy with children). Often the term *karl* means the equivalent of *bóndi* ‘farmer’, and would make perfect sense here as well (thus, ‘a farmer with many children’). *HPE*: the Child-Sparer.

**17. bast** ‘bast, inner tree fiber’: Guðmundr bast (373). *Bast* has cognates across Germanic and means in English (as in German and the Scandinavian languages) the fibers inside of trees from which ropes or cords are made. The reference of the nickname is unknown, but it may refer to time spent on a ship or metaphorically to imply a “firm” character.



**18. \*beigaldi** ‘the fearsome; the weak, injured, sickly; the coward’: Þórðr beigaldi á Beigalda (*lnm* 90, 91 Þórir). *FJ* (316) connects it with either *beigr* ‘fear’ or Norw. *beig* ‘weakness, injury’, thus either ‘den frygtsomme’ (the fearsome) or ‘den svagelige’ (the infirm, weak). *Lind* (17) suggests the adjective *\*beigaldr* corresponding to NNorw. *beigall* ‘ailing (health)’. *DV* (76) under *Digraldi*, he suggests that the suffix *-aldi* may be a contracted form of *-valdi* (a weak form of the suffix *-valdr* ‘ruler, one who wields power’). The suffix *-aldi* is relatively rare and most often carries a negative connotation, thus, the suggestion made by *DV* is unlikely. It means ‘a person (or thing) of poor quality’ (cf. *kumbaldi* ‘hovel, small cairn’, *glópalði* ‘idiot’, *þumbaldi* ‘a dull moper’, and the nicknames *beiskaldi* ‘the bitter’, *hímalði* ‘laggard’, and *leggjalði* ‘one with misshapen legs, leggy’). With the suffix in mind, I would suggest the possible meaning ‘coward’. The farm name *Beigaldi* still exists (about nine kilometers north of Borgarnes [West Iceland] on the Ring Road), and it is probable that the place name was derived from the man’s nickname and not the other way around.

**19. beiskaldi** ‘the harsh, bitter’: Þorleifr beiskaldi Þorláksson (95, 147, 220 Þorleiksson, 382). It is derived from *beiskr* ‘bitter, sour’ and the negative suffix *-aldi* (cf. the nicknames *beigaldi* ‘coward’, *hím-aldi* ‘laggard’, and *leggj-aldi* ‘one with misshapen legs’).

**20. bekkjarbót** ‘pride of the bench; bride’: Þorbjörg bekkjarbót Ásgeirsdóttir (216 H: bæjarbót ‘pride of the town’, 220). Cf. the nickname *árbót* ‘improvement of the season’ and the epithet *bekkskrautuðr* ‘pride of the bench, one who adorns the bench’ attributed to Bragi in *Lokasenna*.

**21. bekk** ‘bench; brook’: Óláfr bekk Karlsson (*lnm* 244, 245, 246). The first meaning, ‘bench’, is probably the correct one. *HPE*: Brook.

**22. belgr** ‘(animal) skin; skin bag’: Óláfr belgr í Óláfsdal (*lnm* 112, 113, 159). *Lind* (19)

suggests that it means ‘*buk*’ (belly), which is based on a probable connection with *belja* ‘to swell’ and other etymologically related words like *bólginn* ‘swollen, angry’ (from IE *\*bhel* ‘to swell, blow up’).

**23. berbeinn** ‘barelegged, barefoot’: Magnús berbeinn Ólafsson Noregskonungr (51, 341). The second part of the compound is the strong form of the adj. *beinn* ‘legged’, not to be confused with the noun *bein* ‘leg’. Nicknames that are strong adjectives are rarer (cf. Seim 1987). Cf. the nicknames *hvítbeinn* ‘white-legged’, *mjóbeinn* ‘thin-legged’, *þjokkubeyn* ‘thick-legged’, and *ørrabeinn* ‘scar-legged’.

**24. berserkjabani** ‘slayer of berserks’: Gunnsteinn berserkjabani Bólverksson (366). Like nicknames ending in *-kappi* ‘champion’, it was bestowed honorifically to commemorate a famous deed. *HPE*: Berserks’-Killer.

**25. berserkr** ‘berserk’: Þrǫstr berserkr (328, 329). *FJ* (253) questions whether it is a nickname or something else (title, occupation?). *Lind* (21) also has difficulty considering it a nickname and not merely a “benämning” (appellation) for something else. It is hard to decide whether it is a nickname or more of a title.

**26. \*beytill** ‘horsetail (plant); horse cock; show-off’: Ívarr beytill (198). *DV* (35) and *ÍO* (53) suggest ‘horse penis’, and I am inclined to agree since most scholars have been prudish when it comes to vulgarity. *HPE*: Prick.

**27. birtingr** ‘(bright colored) sea trout’: Steinólfr birtingr Einarsson (170, 171). *CV* (63) glosses it as ‘*trutta albicolor*’ (white-colored trout). It is probably connected to physical appearance and related to OI *birting* ‘brightness’. Cf. the ironic explanation of the nickname of Óttarr *birtingr* in *Sigurðar saga jórsalafara* in *Morkinskinna*.

**28. bitra** ‘bitterness’: Þorbjörn bitra (*lnm* 200). *FJ* (297) glosses it as ‘bitterhed’ (bitterness). *Lind* (27) suggests that it is a noun formed from the adj. *bitr* ‘sharp, biting’; *CV* (64) defines it as ‘bitterness’.

**29. \*bíldr** (x2) ‘bolt; bleeding instrument’: Þorgrímr bíldr Úlfsson (*lnm* 388, 389); Qnundr bíldr Hróarsson (*lnm* 333, 350, 353, 356, 374, 375, 386, 388, 389). *FJ* (235) suggests that it is a type of arrow, originally *\*bildqr* (a blunted, wedged arrow, a bolt). *Lind* (23-24) suggests that it is related to Swed. *bill*, as in *plogbill* ‘plowshare’, but also notes that it is conceivable that the name of the two men received their nicknames from a place name containing *Bíldz-*. *CV* (64) glosses it as ‘an instrument for bleeding’. Similarly, *DV* (36) defines it as ‘Aderlassmesser’ (bleeding instrument). *ÍO* (55) also glosses it as ‘blóðtökuverkfæri’ (bleeding tool), and notes the many Germanic and Indo-European cognates (cf. OE *bill* ‘sword’, Greek *phitros* ‘wooden club’ < IE *\*bhei-* ‘strike, cleave’).

**30. bjarki** ‘little bear’: Þoðvarr bjarki (213). *Lind* (22) describes it as a diminutive formation from *\*bjari* (f. *bera*) ‘bear’. The diminutive suffix *-ki* is rare in Old Norse, and as a name *DV* (39) notes that it goes back to a very early Germanic name *\*Berikan*, which is also found as OHG *Bericho*. In the context of *Landnámabók*, this legendary figure is only mentioned as one whose ghost attacked a grave robber in his shared grave mound with Hrólfr *kraki* and his companion Hjalti.

**31. bjarnylr** ‘warmth of a bear’: Óláfr bjarnylr Hávarðsson (187, 189, 190, 191). *CV* (65) mentions a folk belief that a child born on the hide of a polar bear would receive an immunity from the cold. It is probable that it refers to the man having inherited the spirit or powers of a bear he had killed (such themes are found in *Fornaldarsögur*).

**32. \*bjálfi** ‘pelt’: Þorkell bjálfi (*lnm* 368 HSk: þjálfi ‘delver, digger’). *CV* (65) mentions that the etymology is uncertain and suggests a Slavic origin. *DV* (38) suggests that it is related to Russian *beljok*, *belok* ‘seal cub’ (< *bel* ‘white’).

**33. bjálki** ‘beam, balk’: Þórðr bjálki (269). It is akin to *bálkr* ‘beam, partition’ and as a nickname it seems to refer to a lanky physique.

**34. \*bjóðaskalli** (x2) ‘baldy of Bjóðar; round table baldy; bowl baldy’: Eiríkr bjóðaskalli Víkinga-Kárason (215); Sigurðr bjóðaskalli Eiríksson (214, 215). *FJ* (197) glosses it as ‘bord-skalle’ (table-bald head). *Lind* (24) suggests that the first component is an unattested Norwegian place name \**Bjóðar* (in Hordaland?) and *-skalli* and rejects the idea that the first component means ‘round table’ or ‘round bowl’. *Lind* is probably wrong not to connect *bjóð* ‘small round table; small round bowl’ with a physical description, since the connection with a bald, rounded head is not difficult to make.

**35. \*bjóla** (x2) ‘small mouth’ (Gaelic): Helgi bjóla Ketilsson (*lnm* 46, 50, 51, 54, 55, 139, 396, 397); Hróaldr bjóla (*lnm* 290). *FJ* (317) argues that it probably from Celtic *béollán*. *Lind* (24-25) also suggests a Celtic origin. The nickname *bjóla* is probably a mistaken form of *bjólan* (the form found in *Laxdæla saga*), where the *-n* may have been wrongly considered a definitive suffix. OIr *beólán* is the diminutive form of *bél* ‘mouth, lips’ (cf. the family name *Camp-bell* (< Gaelic *cam-bél* ‘crooked mouth’). Cf. the Norse nicknames of Gaelic origin: *feilan* ‘little wolf’, *gagarr* ‘dog’, *hnokkan* ‘hillock’, *kamban* ‘little cripple’, *kváran* ‘sandal, shoe’, *lunan* ‘little blackbird’, and *meldún* ‘Máel Dúin (proper name)’.

**36. bláfauskr** ‘black firewood’: Helgi bláfauskr Hrafnsson (340, 341). *FJ* (315) glosses it as ‘sort frönnet stamme’ (type of rotten log). *Lind* (27) says it means ‘murket trä’ (rotten wood). *Fauskr* is a rotten, dried log used for firewood, and the adj. *blár* refers to a dark blue (midnight blue) or black color. *HPE*: Blue-Faggot.

**37. blákinn** ‘blue cheek’: Þórunn blákinn Nafar-Helgadóttir (244). *FJ* (203) suggests that she was named *blákinn* because she had *lungeslag* (vascular discoloration on the face). It might be a bit excessive to suggest a real medical condition and not something more benign like an episode of wearing some kind of makeup (*blár* also means ‘black’, and could have come from coal or the like) or smashed berries on her face. Alternatively, she may have gotten the nickname from almost drowning or choking. An even more probable explanation is that she was struck on the face and it left her “black and blue.” Cf. the

nicknames *höggvinkinni* ‘man with a cut cheek’, *loðinkinni* ‘man with hairy cheeks’, *rauðkinn* ‘red cheek’, and *skeiðarkinn* ‘longship cheek’. *HPE*: Blue-Cheek.

**38. bláskeggr** ‘blue beard’: Þórkr bláskeggr Þorkelsson (350, 351, 352 [blátannarskegg, *HPE*: Bluetooth-Beard], 357). *Skeggr* ‘bearded’ functions as an adjective or an agentivized form of the common noun, and the nickname is thus not identical with the noun n. *skegg* ‘beard’ or the usual nickname form m. *skeggi* ‘man with a beard’; even so, it is probably used synecdochically as a *pars pro toto*. The first component is the adj. *blár* ‘(dark) blue, black’ and either refers to his complexion or his hair color. Cf. the nicknames *breiðskeggr* ‘broad beard’, *gullskeggr* ‘gold beard’, *kolskeggr* ‘coal beard’, *rauðskeggr* ‘red beard’, and *þunnskeggr* ‘thin beard’.

**39. blátönn** ‘blue tooth’: Björn blátönn (314). He is probably named after the legendary Danish king Haraldr *blátönn*, but the possibility of him having his own rotten teeth cannot be ruled out. *HPE*: Blue-Tooth.

**40. blesi** ‘blaze’: Þorbjörn blesi á Blesastöðum (*Inm* 87). *FJ* (198) explains it to mean a long white strip of hair on a horse’s forehead, perhaps used to describe a man’s white nose. *Lind* (30) glosses it as ‘bläs’ (blaze, white spot on a horse’s forehead). *CV* (68) states that it refers to a white star on a horse’s forehead. Cf. the nickname *skerjablesi* ‘skerry blaze’. *HPE*: Blaze.

**41. enn blindi** ‘the blind’: Þórarinn enn blindi Þorvarðsson (71). Weak form of the adj. *blindr* ‘blind’.

**42. \*blindingatrjóna** ‘horse-fly snout; peg snout’: Þólverkr blindingatrjóna (127, 366). *FJ* (318) glosses it as ‘gedehamskæbe’ (wasp jaw). *Lind* (31) defines it as a type of horse-fly plus the noun *trjóna* ‘snout’. *CV* (69, s.v. *blindigr*) says that it refers to a blind or hidden peg (used to piece planks together like tongue and groove). The nickname, most likely, refers to the physical appearance of the man’s face, in particular his nose or nose and mouth area. *HPE*: Blind-Snout.

**43. blígr** ‘gazer, starrer’: Þórðr blígr Þorláksson (118, 119 Þorleiksson, 128 Blígr, 129). *FJ* (318) glosses it as ‘stirrende’ (gazing, staring). *Lind* (30) derives it from the verb *blígja* ‘to gaze, stare’. *CV* (69) glosses it as ‘staring, gazing’. It is a substantivized form of the verb. Cf. the nickname *stikublígr* ‘gazing stick’.

**44. Blót-** ‘Sacrifice-, Offering-’: Blót-Már at Móbergi (244). *FJ* (249) states that it signifies people who are ardent worshippers and sacrificers.

**45. Blund-** ‘Slumber-’: Blund-Ketill Geirsson (74, 75, 84, 85, 146). One of Ketill *blundr*’s three grandsons. It is also used to refer to the grandfather (the original Ketill), who is usually called Ketill *blundr* ‘slumber, snooze’. See *blundr*. *HPE*: Wake.

**46. blundr** (x2) ‘slumber, snooze’: Ketill blundr (*lnm* 73, 84); Þorgeirr blundr Geirsson (74). *FJ* (201) glosses it as ‘den blinkende’ (the blinking). Þorgeirr inherited the nickname from his paternal grandfather Ketill *blundr*. *Blundr* is a cognate of ME *blondre* (> Engl. *blunder*; cf. *DV*, 45 and *ÍO*, 67). Cf. one of Ketill’s grandsons nicknamed *hrísablundr* ‘slumber from Hrísar’. *HPE*: Wake.

**47. bløðruskali** (x2) ‘blister baldy, bladder baldy’: Bøðvarr bløðruskali (52, 53, 175); Þórólfr bløðruskali (118, 119). *FJ* (197) derives it from a bladder or bladder-like growth. *Lind* (33) states that it is from *blaðra* ‘blister’ and *-skalli* ‘bald head’. *HPE*: Bladder-Bald; Bladder-Pate.

**48. blönduhorn** ‘sour whey horn’: Bárðr blönduhorn (342). *Lind* (33) states that it is from *blanda* ‘mixed drink (of milk and water) and *horn*. *CV* (67) says that it refers to a cup of *blanda*. *Blanda* can mean any mixed drink, but usually refers to a mixture of sour whey and water. *HPE*: Whey-Horn.

**49. bogsveigir** ‘bow bender’: Án bogsveigir (176, 177, 217). *Lind* (34) suggests that it is

composed of *bogi* ‘bow’ and *sveigir* < *sveigja* ‘to bend, draw (a bow)’. *CV* (72) glosses it as ‘bow-swayer’. *HPE*: Bow-Bender.

**50. Brand-** ‘Firebrand-; Sword Blade-’: Brand-Ǫnundr (*Inm* 310). The nickname probably refers to the most common meaning of *brandr*, either ‘a firebrand’ or ‘the blade of sword’. It is also commonly found as a first name *Brandr*.

**51. breiðr** ‘(the) broad’: Óleifr breiðr Einarsson (380). It is the strong adjectival form of the adj. *breiðr* ‘broad’.

**52. breiðskeggr** ‘broad beard’: Ǫnundr breiðskeggr Úlfarsson (*Inm* 74, 396, 397). The first component is the adj. *breiðr* ‘broad, wide’ and refers to either his beard or his entire body. See the nickname *bláskeggr* ‘blue beard’. *HPE*: Broad-Beard.

**53. Brennu-** ‘Burning-’: Kári Sǫlmundarson (382 S: Sviðu-Kári ‘Singed-’, H: Brennu-Kári). *FJ* (276) mentions that he was given the nickname because he was almost burned. It was probably given posthumously as the infamy of the burning grew, like *Brennu-Njáll*, even though he survived the burning and it could have just as easily been given while Kári lived. *Brennu-* is an oblique case form of a substantivized form of the verb *brenna* ‘to burn, burning’. *HPE*: Kari the Singed.

**54. brimill** ‘(male) seal’: Ketill brimill Ǫrnólfsson (270, 271). Perhaps the nickname refers to Ketill resembling a seal or an incident involving the capture of one, but a metaphorical interpretation cannot be ruled out (as virile as a seal?). *HPE*: Seal.

**55. Brodd-** ‘Spike-’: Brodd-Helgi Þorgilsson (231, 285, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292). *FJ* (276) suggests that it refers to a spike used for crampons (ice-shoes). The nickname is explained in *Þorsteins saga hvíta* where it is said to come from attaching a spike to a bull before having it fight another bull, a tricky move that ensures the bull with a spike wins.

**56. Brunda-** ‘Sperm-’: Brunda-Bjálfi (68). *FJ* (218) says that it is from *brundr* ‘(human)

sperm'. *Lind* (45) suggests that it is from *brundr* 'heat (of an animal)'. *CV* (82, s.v. *brundr*) glosses it as 'semen animalium' (animal semen). The circumstances behind the name are unknown, but it may be related to the man's real or supposed virility.

**57. brúðr** 'bride': Einarr brúðr Bjarnason (292, 293). *FJ* (318) considers it more likely to be *brúðr* 'bride' than *bruðr* (= *brunnr*) 'well, spring'. *Lind* (45) is uncertain whether it is *brúðr* or *bruðr*, and considers the first alternative hard to believe for men. The nickname is probably an insult on Einarr's masculinity, but if not, it could refer to an important event in his life (bride-exchange, marriage, etc.). *HPE*: Bride.

**58. brún** 'brow': Þórunn brún Þorgilsdóttir (326, 327 Brynjólfsdóttir, 328, 329). *FJ* (198-99) suggests that it signifies a particular feature of one eyebrow or both. See the nickname *auga* 'eye'. *HPE*: Brow.

**59. \*brækir** (x2) 'bleater; troublemaker; skin braker': Þorgrímur brækir (86); Þórólfr brækir (*lrm* 178, 187). *FJ* (291) suggests that it is an agentive noun derived from the verb *\*brækja* < the noun *brák* 'brake (tanner's tool)'. *Lind* (46) derives it from *brák*, like NNorw. *bråk* 'ruckus, clamor', or from a verb corresponding to NNorw. *bræka* 'to bleat'. *CV* (85) suggests it is related to the noun *brækja* 'brackish, bad taste'. *DV* (62) connects it to Icel. *brák* 'difficult work' or Old Norw. *brækja* 'flax breaking, rolling'. *ÍO* (88) connects it to either *brák* 'toil', *brák* 'tanning tool', or that it is related to NNorw. *brækja* 'to bleat'. *HPE*: the Bleater.

**60. \*buna** 'bone shaft; clumsy foot; the ungartered': Björn buna Veðrar-Grímsson (46, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 312, 319, 320, 369). *FJ* (222) argues that has something to do with a bone or bones, or means something like 'bump foot'. *Lind* (49) says that it is same as NNorw. *buna* 'bone shaft' or Far. *buna* meaning 'something big and lumpy'. *CV* (86) glosses it as 'one with the stocking hanging down his leg, ungartered'. *ÍO* (92) connects it to the meaning 'klunnalegur fótur, langur skór' (clumsy foot, long shoe), ultimately from a word for animal bones.



**61. bundinfóti** ‘man with a bound foot’: Porkell bundinfóti (*lnm* 350, 351, 357). *Lind* (49) says that the nickname is explained in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, where his femur was broken in a fight and then bound up. The second component is *fótr* ‘foot’ with the nickname suffix *-i*, a commonly used suffix to create nicknames from common nouns, making it mean ‘man with a bound foot’. Cf. other nicknames referring to a foot such as *burlufótr* ‘clumsy foot’, *bægifótr* ‘burden foot, lame foot’, and *tréfótr* ‘tree foot, wooden leg’. *HPE*: Bound-Foot.

**62. bunhauss** ‘toil skull’: Helgi bunhauss Þórólfsson (294). *FJ* (193) notes that *bun-* is a shortened form of *bunu-* and related to the Norw. verb *buna* ‘toil, work hard’. *Lind* (49) connects it to NNorw. *bun* ‘a hard-working person’, and suggests that *hauss* ‘skull’ is used as a *pars pro toto*. *HPE*: Toil-Head.

**63. \*burlufótr** ‘clumsy foot’: Ófeigr burlufótr Ívarsson (198). *FJ* (219) glosses it as ‘med tyk (opsvulmet) fod (ben)?’ (with a thick [swollen] foot [leg]) or ‘stolprende ben’ (stumbling leg). *Lind* (50) derives it from NNorw. *burla* ‘walk noisily and clumsily’. *ÍO* (94) suggests that it may also mean ‘kleppfótur’ (lump foot) and connects it with English *burly* in its original sense ‘stout, big’. Cf. other nicknames referring to a foot such as *bundinfóti* ‘man with a bound foot’, *bægifótr* ‘burden foot, lame foot’, and *tréfótr* ‘tree foot, wooden leg’. *HPE*: Club-Foot.

**64. byrðusmjör** ‘butter box, butter crate, butter trough’: Björn byrðusmjör Hróaldsson (241). The reference of the nickname is lost to us. *HPE*: Butter-Box.

**65. \*bægifótr** ‘burden foot, lame foot’: Þórólfr bægifótr Bjarnarson (112 Bægifótr, 127, 128). *FJ* (219-20) suggests that it means ‘skadefod’ (injured foot) and derives *bægi-* from the noun *bágr* ‘contest, strife, struggle’, related to the verb *bægja* ‘hinder’. *Lind* (52) argues that the first component is from a feminine noun *\*bægi* < the adj. *bágr* ‘uneasy, awkward, difficult’. *ÍO* (99) glosses it as ‘vanskapaður fótur, skakklöpp’ (disfigured foot, crooked foot). Cf. other nicknames referring to a foot such as *bundinfóti* ‘man with a

bound foot’, *burlufótr* ‘clumsy foot’, and *tréfótr* ‘tree foot, wooden leg’. *HPE*: Twist-Foot.

**66. \*bøggvir** ‘injurer, damager’: Klaufi bøggvir Hafþórsson (252, 253 Þ: boggnir, 254 Bøggvir). *FJ* (298) suggests that it means ‘fortræd-volder’ (causer of injury, one who does harm) and connects it to the noun *boggr* ‘calamity, loss’. *Lind* (52-53) connects it to *boggr* ‘bag, pouch’ and notes a connection with NNorw. *bagge* ‘fat and clumsy person, pack, bundle’, but this explanation is less likely. *ÍO* (101) glosses it as ‘sá sem veldur skaða, er til meins’ (he who causes injury, does damage) and connects it to the noun *boggr* ‘harm, injury’, which has an uncertain origin.

**67. \*bøllr** ‘ball, globe; glans penis (penis head)’: Óttarr bøllr (356, 357). *FJ* (319) gives the innocent definition ‘kugle, bold’ (sphere, ball). *CV* (92) defines the noun as ‘ball, globe; glans penis’. *DV* (70) glosses it as ‘kugel, testiculus’ (ball, sphere, testicle). *ÍO* (101) glosses it as ‘getnaðarlimur; pungur; klakkur; hnöttur’ (procreation limb; scrotum; peg; globe, ball [for games]). The word was rarely used in the medieval period to describe a ball used in games (the usual term is *knotttr* ‘ball [used in sports]’). The nickname is more likely connected to the body part, either a penis head or testicle, than to the generic meaning ‘ball’. *HPE*: Globe.

## D

**68. dettiáss** ‘fall beam’: Ásbjörn dettiáss Eyvindarson (273). *FJ* (286) hypothesizes that the name may refer to an incident where a beam fell on the man. *Lind* (59) suggests that the first component is n. *\*detti*, a side form of m. *dettr* ‘heavy fall’. *Dettr* seems to have more to do with the sound of something falling, and thus, the nickname may refer to an incident where Ásbjörn heard a large beam about to fall or in the process of falling, not necessarily landing on him; more likely, however, is a connection to an event where he was injured. *HPE*: Falling-Beam.

**69. Digr-** ‘Stout-, Fat-’: Digr-Ormr Þorgilsson (223, 226). It is less common to use a

hyphenated adjective for a nickname, but in this case (as others) it means the equivalent of the definitive article and weak adjectival form *inn digri* ‘the stout’. Although it has the appearance of a nominative masculine form, *-r* is part of the root.

**70. en digra** ‘the stout’: Þorbjörg en digra Ólafsdóttir (143). Weak feminine of the adj. *digr* ‘stout, fat’ (cf. Engl. *thick*, Ger. *dick*).

**71. enn digri** (x5) ‘the stout’: Borkr enn digri Þorsteinsson (112, 113, 115, 126, 146, 153, 180); Eysteinn enn digri í Geirlandi (*lmm* 324); Hrólfr enn digri Eyvindarson (*lmm* 104, 105); Þorbjörn enn digri (111, 112, 113, 114); Þorbjörn enn digri Ormsson (113, 115, 180). Weak form of the adj. *digr* ‘stout, fat’.

**72. en djúpauðga** (-úgða) ‘the deep minded’: Auðr en djúpauðga Ketilsdóttir (*lnk* 50, 51, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140-42, 144-45, 146, 209, 396, 397). *FJ* (243) notes that an adj. *\*djúpauðigr* (‘the deeply wealthy’) never existed and glosses the name as ‘den dybsindige’ (the deep thinking). *Lind* (62) suggests that it is a weak form of *\*djúpúðigr* ‘deep minded’, analogous to *ástúðigr* ‘friendly, loving’. The etymology of the second component is uncertain, except that it is not related to *auðigr* ‘wealthy’, and thus the conventional spelling with *auð-* is a mistake.

**73. enn dofni** ‘the dead-legged, paralyzed (in the legs)’: Þórðr enn dofni Atlason (372, 373, 375, 376). Weak form of the adj. *dofinn* ‘dead (in limbs)’.

**74. drápustúfr** ‘piece of a *drápa* (poem)’: Þóroddr drápustúfr Arnórsson (211, 213). *FJ* (247) suggests that he may have gotten the nickname because he composed a poem (*Ófeigsvísur*) that was not a *drápa* (with refrains), but instead a *flokkr* (shorter, without refrains). *HPE*: Poem-Piece.

**75. enn draumspaki** ‘the wise of dreams, the dream interpreter’: Finni enn draumspaki

Porgeirsson (275). The second component is the weak form of the adj. *spakr* ‘wise’, which carries the connotation of prophetic vision. Thus, this nickname refers to his ability to interpret dreams but also to have premonitory dreams. *HPE*: the Dream-Interpreter.

**76. drífa** ‘snowdrift, falling snow, sleet’: Þórir drífa Óláfsson (377). It is the same as the feminine noun *drífa* ‘snowdrift, falling snow’, also a *heiti* for ‘arrow’. In Modern Icelandic, it means ‘heavy snowfall’. It is related to Norw. *drive* ‘mound of blown snow’. It is also used as a female first name.

**77. Drumb-** ‘Oaf-’: Drumb-Oddr (384). *FJ* (228) argues that it means ‘the heavy’ or ‘the sluggish’. *Lind* (66) suggests that it is related to NNorw. *drumb* ‘stout and clumsy person’. *CV* (107) glosses *drumbr* as ‘a log of rotten or dry wood’. *DV* (85) glosses it as ‘Klotz’ (block). The nickname, most likely, has to do with having a large body and slow mind (cf. the expression *dumb as a brick*). *Drumbr* is one of the names given to the slave’s children in the Eddic poem *Rígsþula*. Cf. the nickname *smiðjudrumbr* ‘smithy drum; oaf of the smithy’.

**78. dúfunef** ‘dove nose, pigeon nose’: Þórir dúfunef (235 H: Þórðr). The circumstances behind the nickname are unknown, but one may assume that the name was given literally to insult its bearer’s nose or is used synecdochically as a *pars pro toto*. However, the opposite might be the case and the name may have been given out of affection (*dúfa* is attested in medieval texts as a pet name with the meaning ‘my little dove’). Cf. the nicknames *flatnefr* ‘flat nose’, *hauknefr* ‘hawk nose’, *hýnefr* ‘fuzz nose’, *kerlingarnef* ‘hag’s nose’, *krákunef* ‘crow nose’, *nefja* ‘nose’, *rauðnefr* ‘red nose’, *skeiðarnef* ‘longship nose’, *skógarnef* ‘nose of the woods; nose of Skógar’, and *váganef* ‘nose of the bay; nose from Vágar’. *HPE*: Dove-Nose.

**79. \*dylla** ‘field sow thistle, *sonchus arvensis*’: Þuríðr dylla Gunnlaugsdóttir (54, 55, 83, 85). *FJ* (321) suggests that it is identical with Norw. *dylla* (field sow thistle) and that it could be related to Icel. *dylla* (thick and moist dirt). *Lind* (67-68) supposes that it is the

same as NNorw. *dylla* (field sow thistle). *DV* (89) and *ÍO* (140) say the same. Heizman (2004, 537) gave the Latin plant name for the plant as *sonchus arvensis* (field sow thistle) following *FJ*, and dismissed an etymological connection to *dill* and its pan-Germanic cognates (Ger. *Dill*, Swed. *dill*, etc.). The flower on the plant is a bright, golden yellow, so it is not impossible that the nickname refers to Þuríðr's appearance. Another possibility is that the nickname is connected to the medicinal use of the plant to reduce inflammatory swelling. *HPE*: Sow-Thistle.

**80. dýr** 'animal; deer': Helgi dýr Skefilsson (378). It is uncertain whether the meaning is 'animal', or more specifically 'deer' (which is a common usage when describing animals for hunting). *HPE*: Deer.

## E

**81. \*eikikrókr** 'oak hook; oak ship hook; hook from Oakwood': Eyvindr eikikrókr (104 S: eikkikropr, Þ: digri, 105, 319). *FJ* (291) suggests that it might mean 'a hooked land filled with oak trees'. *Lind* (70) puts forth the meaning 'a hook of oak' and supposes that the first component probably represents a place name (something like 'the hook from \*Eiki [Oakwood]'). *ÍO* (146) glosses the neuter noun *eiki* as 'forest of oak; oak trees; ship (made from oak)'. The noun *eiki* 'oak timber; ship (poetic)' occurs as the first part of several compounds in Old Icelandic (for example, *eikiáss* 'oak beam', *eikikylfa* 'oak club', and *eikistokkr* 'oak log'), but with the addition of *krókr* 'hook' perhaps the connection is between a boat made from oak (cf. also f. *eikja* 'small ferry boat') and a some sort of fishing hook. *Krókr* has several meanings in Old Icelandic; one is a 'crooked box' (presumably made of wood) used to carry turf, and yet another meaning of *krókr* is 'peg', in particular a piece that holds rope on a ship; thus, the nickname could mean 'ship peg' and come from some event that took place on a boat. Furthermore, the possibility of *krókr* meaning 'coil on the stern of a ship (like a dragon's tail, opposite to the head)' would fit easily with *eiki* 'ship'. There is a small town named *Eike* in southwest Norway, which may lend credibility to *Lind*'s proposal. *HPE*: Oak-Hook, Ship-Hook.

**82. enn einhendi** ‘the one-handed’: Ketill enn einhendi Auðunarson (*lnm* 146, 364, 365, 366, 380). Weak form of the adj. *einhendr* ‘one-handed’. *HPE*: One-Hand.

**83. eldr** ‘fire’: Eyvindr eldr (144). The reference of the nickname is obscure, but it most likely refers to an event where he set a fire (or put one out). *HPE*: Fire.

**84. \*Elliða-** ‘Ship-’: Elliða-Grímr Ásgrímsson (59, 264, 267, 357). *FJ* (284) suggests that the origin is either Slavic or Norse *\*él-liði* ‘storm traveler’. *Lind* (72) derives the word from *\*ein-liði* ‘(ship) moving alone; fast sailer’ and suggests that Grímr probably owned such a ship. *DV* (100) argues that it is either from Old Slavic *\*aludija* ‘barge, pontoon’ (cf. Lithuanian *eldija* ~ *aldija* and Russian *ladja* with the same meaning), or from Proto-Norse *\*ein-liði* ‘the fast sailing’.

**85. elliðaskjöldr** ‘ship’s shield’: Álqf elliðaskjöldr Ófeigsdóttir (77, 212, 343, 344). *FJ* (233) suggests that the name means the shields which line the rails of a ship. Possibly, it means ‘shield of *Elliði* (proper name of a ship, a farm, or a man’s name)’. *HPE*: Ellida-Shield.

**86. erra** ‘pugnacity’: Þórðr erra (87). *FJ* (252) defines it as ‘den raske, dygtige’ (the vigorous, the capable). *DV* (105) glosses it as ‘Kampflust’ (pugnacity, combativeness). *ÍO* (156) glosses it as ‘vígahugur’ (fighting spirit, pugnacity). Cf. OE *eorre* ‘wrath, anger’ and OS *irri* ‘anger’. *HPE*: Strife.

**87. eyrarleggr** ‘leg from Eyrr; gravel bank leg’: Grímr eyrarleggr Gunnsteinsson (259). *FJ* (322) suggests that it could be a description of stone, or that it might refer to an episode where Grímr found a bone on an *eyrr* ‘gravel bank (either on a river or a small tongue of land running into the sea)’. *Lind* (75) notes that the first component refers to his home (a place name), but he uses this explanation here and elsewhere whether it is truly a generic noun or a proper place name. *Eyrr* is the name a farm in Snæfellsnes, but it could conceivably represent several other farms or other places in Iceland (exactly where

remains unknown, but the family settled in the north around Hørgárdalr). If *eyrar-* represents Grímr's place of origin, then *-leggr* may be either used synecdochically as a *pars pro toto*, or it may be used to distinguish some feature or deformity of his leg(s). *HPE*: Sand-Leg.

## F

**88. enn fagri** (x3) 'the fair, handsome': Freysteinn enn fagri á Barðsnesi (*lnm* 306); Ingólfr enn fagri Þorsteinsson (220, 223); Þorsteinn enn fagri Þorfinnsson (292). Weak form of the adj. *fagr* 'fair, handsome'.

**89. farmaðr** 'traveler, merchant': Þórir farmaðr Skeggjason (280, 281, 283). It is unclear if this is truly an occupational byname or a nickname. *HPE*: the Sea-Farer.

**90. farserkr** 'travel shirt': Þorkell farserkr (*lnm* á Grænlandi 134, 135). *FJ* (237) glosses it either as 'a shirt which is used on a journey' or 'a man (in a shirt) who frequently travels'. The type of *serkr* (an animal skin, a cloth shirt, or a tunic?) meant remains uncertain.

**91. fasthaldi** '(the) tenacious; (the) steadfast': Þórólfr fasthaldi á Snæfjöllum (*lnm* 196, 211). Weak form of the adj. *fasthaldr* 'tenacious, saving; steadfast, constant'. *HPE*: Hard-Grip.

**92. feilan** 'little wolf' (Gaelic): Óláfr feilan Þorsteinsson (73, 126, 136, 145, 146, 380 Óleifr). *Lind* (78) and *DV* (115) derive it from OIr *faelán*, a diminutive of OIr *fael* 'wolf'. See the nickname *bjóla* 'small mouth'.

**93. enn fíflski** 'the foolish, stupid': Ketill enn fíflski (*lnm* 322-25, 326, 336, 396, 397). *Lind* (80) mentions that the nickname was given to Ketill by heathens because he was Christian. It is the weak form of the adj. *fíflskr* 'foolish' (< the noun *fífl* 'fool').

**94. fiskreki** 'fish driver; fish driver (type of whale)': Qrnólfr fiskreki (124). *FJ* (310)

defines it as ‘fiskeforfølger’ (pursuer of fish) or a kind of whale. *CV* (155) glosses it as ‘‘fish driver,’ a kind of whale’. It is uncertain whether the generic sense of ‘fisherman’ is meant or the whale (the exact species is unknown). If it is the type of whale that is meant by the nickname, then, most likely, Qrnólfr gained the name from a (successful?) whale hunt. *HPE*: the Fish Driver.

**95. Fitjumskeggi** ‘beard on Fitjar’: Úlfr Fitjumskeggi Þórisson (74). The unusual dative plural ending *-um* is probably from a missing *á* ‘on’, so that the nickname is ungrammatical. Úlfr *skeggi á Fitjum* ‘the beard (= man) on Fitjar’ would have made more sense. The second component *-skeggi* is a *pars pro toto* and had already been lexicalized (*skeggi* ‘man with a beard, male’); the nickname is formed with the suffix *-i*. Cf. the nicknames *Mostrarskeggi* ‘beard of Mostr’, *skeggi* ‘beard’, and *qrðigskeggi* ‘man with a harsh beard’. *HPE*: Fitjar-Beard.

**96. Fjarska-** ‘Far Distance-’: Fjarska-Fiðr (182). *FJ* (323) suggests that it may have the meaning ‘en, som bruger meget stærke udtryk’ (one who uses very strong expressions). If so, the nickname may have come from his ability to communicate even when far away from his companions (such a scenario is imaginable). More likely, however, the nickname refers to the long distance between other people and where Fiðr ~ Finnur lived. From the noun *fjarski* ‘far distance, far away’.

**97. flatnefr** ‘flat nose’: Ketill flatnefr Bjarnarson (46, 49, 50, 51, 102, 122, 136, 250, 251, 322, 323). *CV* (159) equates it to Lat. *simus* (snub nosed). *Nefr* is a form of *nef* used for nicknames and makes the common noun agentive. It is, most likely, a description of Ketill’s nose, but it could be used synecdochically as a *pars pro toto* and refer to his entire body shape. See the nickname *dúfunef* ‘dove nose’. *HPE*: Flat-Nose.

**98. \*flosi** ‘fop, dandy, womanizer; careless, loose mouthed person’: Ásólfr flosi Vémundarson (145, 272, 274, 290). Etymology uncertain. It also occurs as a first name.

**99. Flugu-** ‘Fly- (insect); Bait-; Bandit-’: Flugu-Grímr Snorrason (182). It is from the



noun *fluga* ‘fly; lure, bait’. It is probably related to his occupation working around animals, but it could be similar to the other sense of the word, which is negative and represented by its use in the compound *flugumaðr* ‘bandit, assassin, scoundrel’. *HPE*: Fly-Grim.

**100. fløskubak** ‘(leather) flask back’: Þorgeirr fløskubak Qnundarson (199). Explained in chapter 11 of *Grettis saga* where the leather flask (a type of bladder for holding liquids), worn or slung over on his back, saves his life from an axe-blow. Cf. the other nicknames whose second component is *-bak*, *lǫngubak* ‘ling back’ and *tǫskubak* ‘pouch back’. *HPE*: Flask-Back.

**101. fløskuskegg** ‘flask beard’: Þorsteinn fløskuskegg Ófeigsson (343). *FJ* (207) suggests that the first component (= *flaska*) means a wooden vat or tub with a large bottom and short supports and that Þorsteinn’s beard may have resembled it. *Lind* (87) wonders whether it could be related to the verb *flaska* ‘cleave, split’ (thus, like the nickname *tjúguskegg* ‘fork beard’). The interpretation offered by *FJ* is incorrect. The second component *-skegg* may be used synecdochically as a *pars pro toto* (like *skeggi* ‘man [with a beard]’), and *flaska* would describe the man’s overall appearance as though he resembles a flask or some kind of drink container. Cf. the nicknames *lafskegg* ‘dangling beard’ and *refskegg* ‘fox beard’. *HPE*: Flask-Beard.

**102. enn fróði** (x7) ‘the learned, knowledgeable’: Ari enn fróði Þorgilsson (133, 318, 374, 395); Brandr príor enn fróði Halldórsson (137); Finnbogi enn fróði Geirsson (108, S: rammi); Kolskeggr enn fróði Ásbjarnarson (295, 302, 303, 317, 395 hinn vitri); Styrmir prestr hinn fróði (Kárason 397); Sæmundr enn fróði Sigfússon (34, 59, 229, 318, 341, 363, 364); Þórólfr enn fróði (278, 279). Weak form of the adj. *fróðr* ‘learned, knowledgeable’.

**103. fullspakr** ‘(the) fully wise’: Þorkell fullspakr í Njarðvík (*lmm* 302). Composed of

the adj. *fullr* ‘full’ and *spakr* ‘wise’; *spakr* is connected to prophetic abilities. Adjectival nicknames with the strong form are much rarer than weak ones.

**104. fylsenni** ‘forehead of a foal’: Þórarinn fylsenni Þórðarson (158). *FJ* (198) suggests that the nickname may have nothing to do with Þórarinn’s forehead. It is difficult to see what else it could refer to if not the forehead. It is composed of *fyl* ‘foal’ and *enni* ‘forehead, brow’.

## G

**105. \*gagarr** ‘dog’ (Gaelic): Þorgrímr gagarr Ljótsson (184, 185). *FJ* (305) suggests either a Celtic borrowing (Gaelic *gadhar* ‘dog’) or a relation to ON *gagr* ‘bowed back’. *DV* (152) argues that it is derived from Celtic and cites OIr *gagar*, *gadar*, and suggests that if the word is related to the dog’s bark it may be akin to the verb *gaga* ‘scorn, mock’ (cf. Middle High Ger. *gâgen* ‘gaggle [like a goose], cackle’). *ÍO* (224) glosses it as ‘sá sem gapir eða geltir’ (one who gapes or barks). *Gagarr* only occurs elsewhere as a word for ‘dog’ in poetry. See the nickname *bjóla* ‘small mouth’.

**106. galti** ‘boar’: Snæbjörn galti Hólmsteinsson (190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195). *Lind* (97) says that it is a side form of *gǫltr* ‘boar, hog’. Most likely, the nickname carries a positive connotation, since the boar was a symbol of nobility across the Germanic world (and cf. the god Freyr’s boar, Gullinbursti).

**107. en gamla** ‘the old’: Steinunn (-uðr) en gamla (*Ink* 66, 392, 393, 394). Weak form of the feminine adj. *gamall* ‘old’. The nickname is, most likely, used to differentiate an older relative from a younger one with the same name.

**108. enn gamli** (x33) ‘the old’: Ármóðr enn gamli Þorgrímsson (144); Bragi skáld enn gamli (82, 150, 151); Brýnjólfr enn gamli Þorgeirsson (*Inm* 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 306, 397); Eyfrøðr enn gamli (*Inm* 384); Gormr enn gamli (32, 33); Gunnlaugr ormstunga enn gamli Hrómundarson (54, 55, 83, 85); Gunnólfr enn gamli Þorbjarnarson (*Inm* 246, 247);

Hlenni enn gamli Ormsson (270, 271 Þ: Helgi); Ingimundr enn gamli Þorsteinsson (*Inm* 70, 216, 217-20, 221, 224, 226, 228, 242, 286, 396, 397); Ketilbjörn enn gamli Ketilsson (*Inm* 48, 49, 191, 192, 231, 312, 355, 383, 384-86, 388, 396, 397); Kjallakr enn gamli Bjarnarson (*Inm* 100, 101, 118, 119, 122-24, 147, 148, 149, 155, 156, 157, 359); Kleppjárn enn gamli Þórólfsson (57, 109); Kolgrímr enn gamli Hrólfsón (*Inm* 58, 65, 72, 374, 396, 397); Loðmundr enn gamli (*Inm* 302-04, 304-05, 306, 324, 334-35, 338); Loptr enn gamli Ormsson (*Inm* 46, 47 Fróðason, 100, 103, 365, 368, 369, 370); Nereiðr jarl enn gamli (390, 391 hinn sínki); Ormr enn gamli Eyvindarson (*Inm* 390 S: Grímr, 391); Ormr hinn gamli Ormsson (391 Sk: Qrn); Refr enn gamli Þorsteinsson í Brynjudal (56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 65, 174); Starkaðr enn gamli (247); Sturla enn gamli Þórðarson (Hvamm-Sturla 100, 103, 144, 166, 182, 264, 267, 268, 269, 292, 293); Véleifr enn gamli Þorgeirsson (72, 88, 89, 143, 201); Vémundr enn gamli Víkingsson (49, 295, 297, 369, 387); Þiðrandi enn gamli Ketilsson (296, 297, 302, 310, 311, 318); Þormóðr enn gamli Bresason (*Inm* 55, 59, 60, 61, 77, 79); Þórhaddr enn gamli hofgoði (*Inm* 307); Þrándr enn gamli Haraldsson (340); Ævarr enn gamli Ketilsson (*Inm* 224, 225, 231, 286, 397); Ævarr enn gamli Þorgeirsson (*Inm* 296, 298, 302, 307); Qlmóðr enn gamli Hqrða-Kárasón (40, 41); Qrlygr enn gamli Hrapsson (*Inm* 46 Erlygr, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 74, 78, 79, 83, 85 Þ: Erlygr, 168, 169, 170, 175 M: Erlygr, 176, 177, 396, 397); Qrn enn gamli á Háreksstöðum (*Inm* 87). Weak form of the adj. *gamall* ‘old’. In most cases the nickname is used to differentiate an older relative from a younger one with the same name (father and son, grandfather and son, etc.). It is one of the most common Old Norse nicknames.

**109. gandr** ‘wand, magic staff’: Gunnbjörn gandr (87). Disputed etymology. Also occurs in poetry as a *heiti* for ‘wolf’. *HPE*: Wand.

**110. \*gasi** ‘fool, one who gazes?’: Guðmundr gasi Þorsteinsson (228, 229). *Lind* (104) suggests that it is related to the NNorw. adj. *gas* ‘strutting about with one’s nose in the air’. *ÍO* (232) suggests that it is related to NNorw. *gase* ‘fool’ and the verb *gasa* ‘to rush, barge into’; the modern adj. *gasalegur* ‘terrible, awful’ is derived from it. The word may

be related to Engl. *gaze* (cf. dialectal Swedish and Norwegian *gasa* ‘to gape’), but it is rare and its etymology uncertain.

**111. geit** ‘(female) goat; coward’: Auðun geit (260, 262, 263). *FJ* (255) states that *geit* is still used in Iceland with the meaning ‘coward’ and synonymous with *rag-geit* ‘coward’ because of the incident described in *Landnámabók* (where Earl Auðun pays an expensive compensation at the point of a spear). *HPE*: Nanny-Goat.

**112. \*geitskǫr ~ geitskór** ‘goat hair; willowherb, fireweed’: Grímr geitskǫr (-skor, -skór 7). *FJ* (195) glosses *geitskǫr* as ‘gede-hoved’ (goat-head), which would describe someone who has hair colored like that of a goat, but notes that it can also be read as *geitskór* ‘epilobium’. *ÍO* (239) is also uncertain if it should be read *geitskör* ‘goat hair’ or *geitskór* ‘fireweed’ (‘goat shoe’ = *epilobium*). The manuscript evidence is no help, for there it is spelled either “geitscor” or “geitskor.” It seems more likely that the nickname refers to the color of his hair than to a plant (though the plant is rather common in Iceland, Scandinavia, and the British Isles).

**113. gellir** ‘bellower’: Þórðr gellir Óleifsson (Óláfsson 84, 126, 130, 131, 140, 145, 146, 212, 213, 240, 241, 315, 396). *FJ* (303) glosses it as ‘tyr’ (bull), truly ‘bøleren’ (the bellow, howler). *Lind* (107) states that it is from the verb *gjalla* ‘to scream, shout’. The nickname seems to refer to someone who shouted or screamed, perhaps metaphorically (as in a *blabbermouth*). Cf. the Engl verb *yell*.

**114. \*gerpir** ‘bold warrior; loud mouth, braggart’: Bǫðmóðr gerpir Grímsson (198, 255, 278, 279). *FJ* (325-26) states that it related to the noun *garpr* ‘bold, warlike man, hero’. *ÍO* (242) suggests that it might be related to NNorw. *garpa* ‘to brag, be contentious in speech, be loud’ and Swedish dialectal *garpa* ‘babble, brag; shriek (of ducks)’.

**115. gígja** ‘fiddle’: Mǫrðr gígja Sigmundarson (349, 350, 351, 353, 354, 396). *FJ* (244)

supposes that the nickname refers to his ability to play the instrument. *CV* (201) suggests that the nickname may have something to do with his eloquent pleading (as a lawyer) or clear voice. *HPE*: Fiddle.

**116. gjallandi** (x2) ‘one who shouts, yeller, man with a resounding voice’: Þorgils gjallandi (*lnm* 214, 223); Þórarinn gjallandi (159, 150). Present participle of the verb *gjalla* ‘to scream, shriek, bellow’ (cf. the mythological horn of Heimdallr, *Gjallarhorn* ‘resounding horn’). Cf. the nicknames *hlammandi* ‘the clanging’, *hoggvandi* ‘striker’, *lútandi* ‘one who stoops’, *mjöksiglandi* ‘one who sails often’, *skattkaupandi* ‘tribute exchanger’, *slítandi* ‘tearer’, *súgandi* ‘one who sucks air’, *þegjandi* ‘(the) silent’, and *þiðrandi* ‘one who gazes’. Also cf. other sound-related nicknames *glumra* ‘rattler’, *glømmuðr* ‘(the) crasher’, *hrungnir* ‘the resounder’, *skálaglamm* ‘scale tinkling’, *snæþrima* ‘snow thunder; snow crashing, din’, and *þrymr* ‘quiet; slow; loud noise, crashing’.

**117. glaði** ‘(the) glad’: Gizurr glaði Kjallaksson í Skoravík (147). Weak form of adj. *gláðr* ‘happy, glad, cheerful’, but missing the definite article before it. *HPE*: the Gleeful.

**118. gleðill** ‘cheerful man’: Gríss gleðill (252 Þ: Gísl). It is derived from the adj. *gláðr* ‘happy, glad, cheerful’ and *-ill* ‘given, prone to something’, thus ‘a man prone to being happy’.

**119. Glíru-** ‘Blink-’: Glíru-Halli Sigurðarson (285, 288). It is a hyphenated form of a substantivized verb *glira* ‘to blink; blinking’, which is related to Swedish dialectal and NNorw. *glira* ‘to blink, peer’.

**120. glóra** ‘glimmer (of light)’: Þorbjörn glóra (*lnm* í Siglufirði á Grænlandi 134, 135). It is related to the verb *glóra* ‘gleam, glare (like a cat’s eyes)’.

**121. glumra** ‘rattler’: Eysteinn glumra Ívarsson (136, 269, 314). It is substantivized form

of the verb *glumra* ‘to rattle, resound, boom’ and, most likely, refers to the effects of his large physical size. It is also used as a *heiti* for ‘(female) troll, ogress’. Cf. other sound-related nicknames *gjallandi* ‘man with a resounding voice’, *glømmuðr* ‘(the) crasher’, *hlammandi* ‘the clanging’, *hrungnir* ‘the resounder’, *skálaglamm* ‘scale tinkling’, *snæþrima* ‘snow thunder; snow crashing, din’, and *þrymr* ‘quiet; slow; loud noise, crashing’. *HPE*: the Clatterer.

**122. glømmuðr** ‘(the) crasher’: Grímr glømmuðr Þorgilsson (373, 393). It is an adjective derived from the noun *glam* ~ *glamm* ‘noise, din, clash, tinkle (sound of weapons crashing)’. See the nickname *gjallandi* ‘man with a resounding voice’ and *glumra* ‘rattler’.

**123. gneisti** ‘spark’: Þorleifr gneisti (354, 355). Perhaps the nickname is a metaphor for battle and the clashing of iron, otherwise it could refer to a radiant appearance. *HPE*: Spark.

**124. gnúpa** ‘drooper; mountain peak’: Þórðr gnúpa Oddsson (*Inm* 98, 99, 100, 101). *FJ* (327) states that it is either a feminine form of the noun *gnúpr* ‘mountain top’ or connected to the verb *gnúpa* ‘to droop, stoop’. *Lind* (113) says that it is a side form of *gnípa* ‘peak’. *HPE*: Peak.

**125. enn góði** ‘the good’: Arnórr enn góði Rauðæingr Steinólfsson (269, Þ: rauðkinnr ‘red cheeks’). It is a weak form of the adj. *góðr* ‘good’. Arnórr’s second byname *Rauðæingr* is a geographic byname meaning ‘dweller on Rauðá (Red River)’.

**126. goðlauss** (x4) ‘godless’: Bersi goðlauss Bálkason (*Inm* 88, 89, 200); Hallr goðlauss Helgason (*Inm* 48, 49 Þórisson, 50); Helgi goðlauss (48); Þórir goðlauss Ormarsson (Úlfarsson 49). The nickname implies that its bearer did not sacrifice to or worship the gods, in some cases probably to suggest that they were awaiting “the true God.” About Helgi and Hallr it says in *Landnámabók*: *Þeir feðgar vildu ekki blóta ok trúðu á mátt sinn* (The father and son did not want to make sacrifices and they believed in their own

might). The second component, the adjectival suffix *-lauss* ‘-less’, is strong. *HPE*: the Godless.

**127. \*gollnir** ‘the ransomed’: Þorgeirr gollnir Ófeigsson (77, 212, 343, 344 goldnir, 346 Gollnir). *FJ* (327) connects it to the verb *gjalda* ‘repay’ and the past participle *goldinn*, and glosses it as ‘den løskøbte’ (the ransomed). *ÍO* (267) glosses it as either ‘sá sem hefur keypt sér frelsi’ (one who bought his freedom) or ‘sá sem hefur verið keyptur úr ánauð; leysingi’ (one who was bought from bondage; freedman). The uncertainty is whether the form should be *goldnir* (from *goldinn* ‘payed, purchased’). The form may be agentive, that is ‘the ransomer’, but there is no literary source to describe the real origin.

**128. Graut-** ‘Porridge-’: Graut-Atli Þórisson (*lnm* 290, 291, 292, 295-97, 298, 336, 397). Elsewhere in the corpus he is called *Atli grautr* ‘porridge’, but here it is the prefix form of the noun (cf. the Icelandic poet *Grautar-Halli* ‘Porridge-’ Halli, where the noun is genitive). *HPE*: Gruel-Atli.

**129. gráfeldarmúli** ‘snout in a gray cloak’: Grímr gráfeldarmúli (275). The second component *múli* ‘snout, muzzle’, which is the term usually used to describe the snout of an animal and in reference to a person is at least mildly insulting. *Múli* is likely used synecdochically as a *pars pro toto*, thus, ‘the man wearing a gray cloak’. Cf. the nicknames *keilismúli* ‘snout from Keilir’, *kornamúli* ‘snout of grain; Korni’s snout (his son)’, and *vámúli* ‘snout of calamity’. *HPE*: Greycloak-Mull.

**130. gráfeldr** ‘gray cloak’: Haraldr gráfeldr Eiríksson, Noregskonungr (66, 284). The king’s nickname is explained in his own saga in *Heimskringla*, where he receives a gray cloak as a gift from some Icelandic merchants, and thereafter it becomes a symbol of high fashion. Cf. the nickname *rauðfeldr* ‘red cloak’.

**131. enn grái** (x2) ‘the gray; the malicious’: Eyjólfur enn grái Þórðarson (142, 173, 174, 186); Kollr enn grái Þorsteinsson (309). *FJ* (259) suggests that the adj. *grár* ‘gray’

rarely is used to describe hair color or appearance, but instead to mark out an individual's mental qualities resembling those of a fierce wolf. *Lind* (116-17) suggests that it carries the connotation of the adj. *grályndr* 'spiteful'. It is the weak form of the adj. *grár* 'gray'.

**132. grettir** 'grimacer, frowner': Ófeigr grettir Einarson (*lnm* 348, 380, 381). *FJ* (313) translates it simply as 'slange' (snake) and derives it from the verb *gretta* 'to frown, make a wry face, grin'. *Grettir* is also used in poetry as a *heiti* for 'snake, serpent'.

**133. gríss** 'pig': Guðmundr gríss Ámundason (178, 179). While *gríss* is a rather common noun that means either 'a young pig' or a more generic word for 'pig', the uncertainty lies in whether the name is meant as a compliment or an insult. If it is a compliment, perhaps it is meant in the same way as adj. *grís-efldr* 'strong as a pig, prodigiously strong'. Cf. the nickname *galti* 'boar'.

**134. grœningarrjúpa** 'young ptarmigan (bird); ptarmigan of Grœning': Þórunn grœningarrjúpa (49, 369). The meaning of \**grœning* is not certain. It is probably related to something newborn or foolish and the modern noun *grœningi* 'novice, fool' (cf. American Engl. *greenhorn* 'inexperienced person, newcomer to a job'), but may also refer to a place name in Norway \**Grœning* (several places called *Grøning* or *Grøningen* exist in Norway). The second component *rjúpa* is a common noun meaning 'ptarmigan' and is probably used positively about Þórunn to describe her appearance. Cf. other nicknames referring to birds: *hegri* 'heron', *Hrafna-* 'Ravens-', *korpr* 'raven', *kráka* ~ *krákr* 'crow', *pái* 'peacock', *skarfr* 'cormorant', *sporr* 'sparrow', *tittlingr* 'tit, sparrow', and *orn* 'eagle'. *HPE*: the Ptarmigan.

**135. \*gufa** 'steam, vapor; laggard; imposing man': Ketill gufa Ørlygsson (*lnm* 68, 69, 72, 92, 93, 157, 165, 166-69, 197). *FJ* (328) suggests that it probably means 'a sluggish person', and, although this meaning is modern, it may have existed long ago. The nickname is either from the plain meaning of the noun *gufa* 'mist, steam' or from the metaphorical meaning 'a slow person, one who moves like a mist', thus a 'laggard'.



Another possibility, though less likely, is a connection to NNorw. *guve* ‘tough, powerful-looking man’. Hermann Pálsson (1952, 198) states that in all likelihood it comes from OIr *Gubha* (untranslated, but it means ‘mourning’), although such a connection is unlikely when a native root exists.

**136. Gull-** ‘Gold-’: Gull-Þórir Oddsson (154). The nickname signifies Þórir’s wealth and means ‘the one with a lot of gold’.

**137. gullberi** ‘gold bearer’: Björn gullberi (*lnm* 55, 72, 100, 101, 396, 397). It is composed of *gull* ‘gold’ and the substantivized form *beri* ‘bearer’ < *bera* ‘to bear, carry’. *HPE*: Gold-Bearer.

**138. gullkárr** ‘golden haired; gold curl’: Þorkell gullkárr Þórisson (377). It is composed of the nouns *gull* ‘gold’ and *kárr* ‘curl, lock of hair; curly hair’. Cf. the nickname *þunnkárr* ‘thin curl’. *HPE*: Gold-Lock.

**139. gullskeggr** ‘gold beard, gold bearded’: Haraldr gullskeggr (224, 370). The first component *gull* ‘gold’ may either refer to his appearance (particularly hair color), or, if *skeggr* is used as a *pars pro toto* it would refer to his wealth and mean ‘the beard (= man) with a lot of gold’. See the nickname *bláskeggr* ‘blue beard’. *HPE*: Gold-Beard.

**140. gylðir** ‘wolf’: Úlfr gylðir hersir (358, 359 Þ: guldír). The noun is used only in poetry as a *heiti* for ‘wolf’. The etymology is uncertain, but it may be connected to the verb *gaula* ‘to low, bellow’. The name is tautological: *Úlfr* ‘Wolf’ and *gylðir* ‘wolf’.

**141. Gøngu-** ‘Walking-’: Gøngu-Hrólfur Røgnvaldsson (123, 314, 316). It is the substantivized form of *ganga* ‘walking’ from *ganga* ‘to go, walk’. The nickname is explained in *Historia Norwegiae* and *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* where it says that he was too large to ride on horses and therefore had to walk everywhere he went. *HPE*: Ganger-Hrólf.

## H

**142. \*Há-** ‘Tall-; Thole-; Shark-?’: Há-Snorri Oddsson (199). It is probably the adj. *hár* ‘high, tall’, but it may be from the nouns *hár* ‘thole (for rowing)’ or *hár* ‘shark’. Less probable but possible is that it is f. *há* ‘(horse) hide’. The meaning of the nickname remains uncertain, but the adj. *hár* ‘tall’ sticks out as a prime candidate (cf. the hyphenated adjectival nicknames *Digr-Ormr* ‘Stout-’ Ormr and *Spak-Böðvarr* ‘Wise-’ Böðvarr).

**143. enn háðsami** ‘the ridiculer, the mocking one’: Tjörvi enn háðsami (Hróarsson 301, 303). It is the weak form of the adj. *háðsamr* ‘scoffing, mocking’. *HPE*: the Mocker.

**144. hafnarlykill** ‘key of the harbor; key of Høfn’: Hrafn hafnarlykill í Dynskógum (*lnm* 328). It is composed of the noun *høfn* ‘harbor; Høfn (place name)’ and *lykill* ‘key’. The meaning behind the nickname is unknown, but it may have to do with Hrafn’s activities as a viking, perhaps for having blocked entrance into certain harbors or serving as a sort of sheriff of one (*Hrafn hafnarlykill var víkingr mikill* [Hrafn hafnarlykill was a great viking]). *HPE*: Haven-Key.

**145. Hafr-** ‘Billy Goat-’: Hafr-Björn Molda-Gnúpsson (75, 330, 331). Björn’s nickname is explained in *Landnámabók* as coming about from an event where a billy goat of supernatural origin joins his livestock, and as a result his livestock multiply and he becomes wealthy. Cf. the nicknames *Hross-* ‘Horse-’ and *Sel-* ‘Seal-’.

**146. hafrsþjó** ‘billy goat’s thigh’: Þórir hafrsþjó Ingimundarson (218, 219, 223). The nickname resembles calling someone “Rump Roast,” and it is probably intended as a sexual insult, since *þjó* usually refers to the anal region of the animal. *HPE*: Buck-Bottom.

**147. haklangr** ‘long chin’: Þórir haklangr (217). The nickname is, most likely,

synonymous with *hokulangr* ‘long chin’, and could mean either ‘long chin’ or ‘tall man with a peculiar chin’. It also occurs as the first name of one of Hrólfr *kraki*’s champions in his saga. *HPE*: Long-Chin.

**148. hákr** ‘brazen, cheeky, violent man’: Þorkell hákr Þorgeirsson (275). The nickname is explained indirectly in *Njáls saga*: Hann eirði hvártki í orðum né verkum við hvern sem hann átti (He spared neither in words nor in deeds with whomever he had them). The etymology, however, is unknown and the meaning has been deduced by the explanation of the man’s character. *HPE*: Braggart.

**149. hálftröll** ‘half troll’: Hallbjörn hálftröll ór Hrafnistu (346). Most likely, it refers to having Sami lineage on one side (paternal or maternal), a particularly common feature of those from northern Norway. Cf. *Jötun-Björn* ‘Giant-’ Björn, whose ancestry is similar, and other nicknames referring to giants *svartipurs* ‘black giant’, *purs* ‘giant’, and *pursasprengir* ‘destroyer of giants’.

**150. hálmi** (x3) ‘straw’: Þórðr hálmi (292); Þórólfr hálmi (294); Þórólfr hálmi Þórðarson (294, grandson of the earlier Þórólfr *hálmi*). It is a nickname form with the suffix *-i* of the noun *hálmr* ‘straw’, possibly carrying the meaning ‘man with straw’. *HPE*: Straw.

**151. háls** ‘neck’: Jörundr háls Þórisson (*Inm* 218, 219, 228). It is unclear which physical feature of the neck is referred to by the nickname, but it is likely that it has something to do with an injury. See the nicknames *langháls* ‘long neck’, *leðrháls* ‘leather neck’, and *mosháls* ‘moss neck’. *HPE*: Neck.

**152. enn halti** (x4) ‘the lame’: Eyjólfur enn halti Guðmundarson (216, 228, 229, 282); Hámundr enn halti Hróarsson (301, 326); Hávarðr enn halti (159, 186, 187, 189, 190, 191); Hrómundr enn halti Eyvindarson (201-05, 219, 224). It is the weak form of the adj. *haltr* ‘lame, limping’.

**153. enn hamrammi** ‘the shape-shifting; the very strong’: Vékelldr enn hamrammi at

Mælifelli (*Inm* 231 H: Áskell, S: Ketill). It is the weak form of the adj. *hamrammr* ‘shape-shifting’. Evidently, the nickname refers to a man known for his abilities to shape-shift and become more powerful in battle (like a stereotypical *berserkr* in the sagas). *HPE*: the Shape-Shifter.

**154. harðfari** ‘hard traveler’: Hallvarðr harðfari (68, 346). It is composed of the adj. *harðr* ‘hard, severe’ and *fari* ‘traveler’, an agentive noun formed from the verb *fara* ‘travel, go’. The nickname refers to traveling fast and arduously. Both Hallvarðr and his brother, Sigtryggr *snarfari* ‘swift traveler’, ran frequent errands for King Haraldr *hárfagri*. Cf. also *Hlymreksfari* ‘traveler to Limerick (Ireland)’ and *kjölfari* ‘keel traveler’. *HPE*: the Hard Sailing.

**155. enn hárfagri** ‘fair hair’: Haraldr enn hárfagri Hálfðanarson, Noregskonungr (32, 33, 42, 50, 51, 68, 89, 95, 102, 103, 122, 124, 152, 161, 176, 177, 180, 181, 186, 196, 197, 198, 200, 217, 218, 219, 260, 263, 264, 265, 289, 297, 299, 314, 316, 317, 337, 343, 346, 358, 361, 362, 363, 370, 371, 379, 387, 390, 391). It is the weak form of the adj. *hárfagr* ‘fair hair’. The nickname is explained in his saga in *Heimskringla*. *HPE*: Fine-Hair.

**156. haugabryótr** ‘breaker of (grave) mounds’: Þorsteinn haugabryótr (340, 341). It is composed of *haugr* ‘grave mound, cairn’ and *bryótr* ‘breaker’, an agentive noun derived from the verb *bryóta* ‘to break’. The nickname implies that he was a grave robber and probably commemorates a famous find or an encounter with a revenant in one. Cf. the nicknames *hornabryótr* ‘breaker of horns’ and *völubryótr* ‘*völva* (prophetess) destroyer’. *HPE*: Mound-Breaker.

**157. hauknefr** ‘hawk nose’: Þórir hauknefr hersir (288). *Nef* ~ *nefr* ‘beak, nose’ is, most likely, used synecdochically as a *pars pro toto*, but it cannot be ruled out that the literal meaning is meant; *nefr* is a form of *nef* used for nicknames and makes the common noun agentive. See the nickname *dúfunef* ‘dove nose’. *HPE*: Hawk-Nose.

**158. hausakljúfr** ‘splitter of skulls’: Þorfinnr hausakljúfr Torf-Einarsson (138, 162).

It is composed of *hauss* ‘skull’ and *kljúfr* ‘splitter’, an agentive noun derived from the verb *kljúfa* ‘to split, cleave’. The nickname must have referred to his prowess in battle. *HPE*: the Skull-Splitter.

**159. haustmyrkr** ‘autumn darkness’: Þórir haustmyrkr Vígbjórðsson (*Inm* 129 H: bróðir Vígbjórðs, 392, 393). The second component is the noun *myrkr* ‘darkness’ and not the adjective *myrkr* ‘dark’, as the genitive singular form *haustmyrkr*s (where *-r* is part of the root of the noun, but not of the adjective). It is unknown what the nickname refers to, but it may be connected to his temperament or moodiness. *HPE*: Autumn-Dusk.

**160. enn hávi** (x5) ‘the tall’: Björn enn hávi (309); Þorgrímr enn hávi (291 H: hári, 292); Þorkell enn hávi at Grœnavatni (*Inm* 237, 282); Þorkell leifr enn hávi Þorfinnsson (274, 275 Þórisson); Þórir enn hávi í Krossavík (*Inm* 307). It is a weak form of the adj. *hár* ‘high, tall’. The nickname is also used as a *heiti* for the god Óðinn, where it is more likely to mean ‘the high (status)’ as opposed to ‘the tall’ (cf. *Hávamál* ‘Sayings of the High One’).

**161. hegri** ‘heron (bird)’: Hávarðr hegri (*Inm?* 233). *Lind* (139) connects it to NNorw. *hegre* ‘man with a long neck’. Herons are known for their long legs and long necks, so it is conceivable that the nickname refers to his lankiness in terms of height and stature. See the nickname *græningarrjúpa* ‘young ptarmigan’. *HPE*: Heron.

**162. heiðarekkja** ‘widow of the heath’: Þorgerðr heiðarekkja Þorfinnsdóttir (87). *FJ* (164) suggests that she got this nickname because she lived on a farm under a heath (in Mýrasýsla, western Iceland). It is composed of *heiðr* ‘heath, moor’ and *ekkja* ‘widow; young woman (poetic)’. No further details of her life are known, but it is possible that *ekkja* is used in the poetic meaning ‘young woman, lass’. *HPE*: Moor-Widow.

**163. \*heiðmenningr** ‘paid soldier; man on the heath?’: Þorsteinn heiðmenningr Eysteinnsson (227). *FJ* (329) doubts that it is synonymous with *heiðmaðr* ‘one who holds land in fee for the king and receives a stipend for military service’ and suggests that the

first component refers to a place, the adj. *heiðr* ‘clear’, or even the noun *heiðr* ‘honor’. *Lind* (140) says that it is derived from *heiðmaðr* ‘paid soldier’. *CV* (247) glosses *heiðmaðr* as ‘a king’s man, who holds land in fee’. The meaning of both the first and the second component is not obvious. The first could be f. *heið* ‘fee, payment’ or the adj. *heiðr* ‘bright, clear (sky)’, but hardly the noun *heiðr* ‘honor’, where *-r* belongs to the root (cf. *heiðrs-maðr* ‘man of honor’). The second is clearly connected to the meaning ‘man, human being’ (cf. *almennigr* ‘public land; people [public]; levy, conscription’ and *tvímenningr* ‘drinking together in pairs’), but a suitable meaning in this compound is unclear.

**164. enn heimski** ‘the stupid’: Hrafn enn heimski Valgarðsson (*Inm* 340, 341, 350, 351, 396, 397). It is the weak form of the adj. *heimskr* ‘stupid, foolish’. The original meaning of *heimskr* was ‘one who stays at home’ and used to describe those who did not travel from home and, as a result, were unaware of things outside their home (therefore, stupid).

**165. enn helgi** (x6) ‘the holy, saintly’: Játmundr (Eadmundr) enn helgi Englakonungr (49, 312); Jón (Jóan) biskup enn helgi Qgmundarson (51, 52, 318, 340, 341, 342, 367, 374); Óláfr enn helgi Haraldsson, Noregskonungr (199, 214, 223); Ósvaldr enn helgi konungr (49, 312); Patrekr enn helgi, biskup (52, 53); Þorlákr biskup enn helgi Þórhallsson (216, 322, 323, 333, 334, 341, 342, 364, 365, 368, 369). It is a weak form of the adj. *heilagr* ‘holy, sacred, saintly’ with a contracted root vowel (as usual, when there is a vowel following *-g*). In the Christian context, as here, the byname suggests the status of a saint. *Helgi* also occurs as a first name, but the heathen sense of the word must be meant there.

**166. heljarskinn** (x2) ‘Hel’s skin, dark black skin’: Geirmundr heljarskinn Hjørsson (*Inm* 150, 151, 152-56, 166, 167, 176, 188, 189, 196, 197, 209, 397); Hámundr heljarskinn Hjørsson (150, 151, 176, 177, 250, 251, 254, 255, 256, 264, 266, 286, 397). The two brothers’ nickname is explained in *Landnámabók* and their *þáttr* as being given to them because their father said he had never seen people with such dark skin before.

Hel, the goddess of the underworld in Norse mythology, is black on one side of her head, and one can only wonder whether a birthmark could have been meant. *HPE*: Hell-Skin.

**167. \*helluflagi** ‘stone slate; slab flake; stone slab cutter?’: Ketill helluflagi (224, 370). The first component *hella* ‘stone slab, slate’ is clear, but the meaning of the second part, *flagi*, is uncertain. The nickname may be a masculine equivalent of *helluflaga* ‘a thin slate’, and *flagi* would be related to f. *flaga* ‘slab of stone; flake’ or n. *flag* ‘spot where turf has been cut out’ (cf. Engl. *flaw*) with the nickname suffix *-i*. If the first meaning of *flaga* is meant, then the nickname is a tautological compound ‘slab slab’. *Flagi* is probably related to the verb *flá* ‘flay’ (< Gmc. *\*flahan* < IE *\*plēk* ~ *\*plāk* ‘tear, strip’), whose past participle *fleginn* ‘flayed’ has *-g-* in the root by Verner’s law. *Flagi* may be the agentive of a lost verb *\*flaga*, meaning approximately the same as *flagna* ‘flake off, scale off’, thus, the nickname could mean ‘stone slab cutter’. *HPE*: Slab-Flake.

**168. enn heppni** ‘the lucky’: Leifr enn heppni Eiríksson (134, 135, 163). It is the weak form of the adj. *heppinn* ‘lucky’ (cf. Engl. *happy* and *happen*). Leifr received his nickname from an event where he found a shipwreck and saved the men and goods.

**169. \*herkja** ‘scraper, one who scraps along noisily?’: Skúli herkja Gunnólfsson (288). *FJ* (329-30) holds that the nickname is derived from *harka* meaning ‘trouble, difficulty’ or that it might mean ‘obstructing stiffness’. *ÍO* (322) suggests that it is from the noun *hark* ‘noise’ and related to the verb *herkja* ‘to drag oneself along with difficulty, scrape or press together’. The term is also used a *heiti* for ‘(female) troll, ogress’ and ‘(female) slave’, and it would then make more sense for it to mean ‘one who scrapes along noisily’. *HPE*: Slouch.

**170. Hesta-** ‘Horses-’: Hesta-Gellir prestr (201). Most likely, it refers to the man having owned many horses. Cf. the nickname *Svína-* ‘Pigs-’. *HPE*: Horse-Gellir.

**171. hestageldir** ‘castrator of horses’: Hlíf hestageldir (102, 103). The second component

is an agentive formed from the verb *gelda* ‘to geld, castrate’. It is unclear whether it was meant positively or negatively. *HPE*: Horse-Gelder.

**172. hesthǫfði** ‘horse head’: Þórðr hesthǫfði Snorrason (240, 241). Like other compounds with *-hǫfði*, the nickname refers to the shape or appearance of the head and usually in an insulting way (cf. the nicknames *loðinhǫfði* ‘hairy head’ and *svínhǫfði* ‘pig head’). See the nickname *hǫfði* ‘head; headland’.

**173. hestr** (x2) ‘horse’: Hallsteinn hestr í Súrnadal (262, 263, 264, 265); Helgi hestr (278, 279). The nickname may refer to his physical appearance or size, or perhaps his speed; one can only wonder what is meant by it, but it is not impossible that it could refer to his penis. *HPE*: Horse.

**174. hilditǫnn** ‘battle tooth’: Haraldr hilditǫnn, Danakonungr (340, 341). It is composed of *hildir* ‘battle’ and *tǫnn* ‘tooth’. His nickname is explained as a result of his prowess in battle in *Sögubrot af nokkurum fornkonungum í Dana- ok Svíaveldi*, but it is conceivable that the name refers to his protruding yellow teeth, then the first component would represent a generic epithet for ‘warrior’. *HPE*: War-Tooth.

**175. híma** ‘laggard, dawdler’: Þórir híma (240, 241). *Lind* (147) suggests that it is the same as the verb *híma* ‘to mope around, brood, lag, saunter’ and means ‘drönare’ (sluggard). It is unclear whether it is a verb or a substantivized form of it. *HPE*: Slouch.

**176. hímaldi** ‘laggard, loafer’: Erlendr hímaldi Jónsson (123). It seems to mean the same as the nickname *híma* ‘laggard’ with the addition of the negative suffix *-aldi*. Cf. the nicknames *beigaldi* ‘coward’, *beiskaldi* ‘the bitter’, and *leggjaldi* ‘one with misshapen legs, leggy’.

**177. Hítðelakappi** ‘champion of the people of Hítardalr’: Björn Hítðelakappi Arngeirsson (88, 89, 90, 91, 201). *Hítardalr* is the name of the valley and a farm in the valley in Mýrar (western Iceland).



**178. hjalti** (x2) ‘man with a boss of a sword’: Eyvindr hjalti Helgason (51); Óleifr hjalti at Varmalæk (*Inm* 73). It is from the neuter noun *hjalt* ‘boss or knob at the end of a sword’ with the nickname suffix *-i*, producing the meaning ‘man with a sword boss’. *Hjalt(i)* is a cognate of Engl. *hilt*, which refers to the entire handle of a sword.

**179. hjálmr** ‘helmet’: Þóroddr hjálmr (229, 240, 259, 266). The nickname is almost certain to involve martial activity, but the reference is lost. *HPE*: Helmet.

**180. Hjálmun-** ‘Rudder-’: Hjálmun-Gautr (270, 271). Gautr supposedly received the nickname because he successfully used the *hjálmunvölr* ‘tiller of a helm (lever attached to the rudder)’ as a weapon to ward off a viking attack. *HPE*: Rudder-Gaut.

**181. hjörtr** ‘hart, stag’: Sigurðr hjörtr konungr (68, 370). The nickname carries a positive connotation, since the hart was a symbol of virility and nobility across the Germanic world (cf. the great hall *Heorot* in *Beowulf*). It is also a common first name.

**182. hlammandi** ‘the clanging, one who makes heavy sounds’: Þórir hlammandi (74). It is the present participle of the verb *hlamma* ‘give a dull heavy sound’ (cf. OS and OHG *hlamon* ‘to roar’), a verb used to describe the sounds of massive, heavy objects and giants. See the nicknames *gjallandi* ‘one who shouts’ and *glumra* ‘rattler’. *HPE*: the Clanger.

**183. Hlymreksfari** ‘traveler to Limerick’: Hrafn Hlymreksfari Oddsson (158, 162). The second component is *fari* ‘traveler’, an agentive noun formed from the verb *fara* ‘travel, go’. See the nickname *harðfari* ‘hard traveler’.

**184. \*hnappraz** ‘button ass’: Hergils hnappraz Þrándarson (153, 161, 162, 176). *FJ* (218) suggests that the first component *hnappr* means ‘cup, bowl’ (= Ger. *Napf* ‘bowl, small dish’) and that it means something along the lines of ‘man with a round ass’. *Lind* (150) suggests that the first component is from an older *knappr* ‘button, knob’ and could

be derived from a place name starting with *Knapps-* or *Knappa-* (of which there are several in Iceland). Thus, the nickname may mean ‘the ass from Knob- (valley, heath, etc.)’. Another possibility is that the first component is used metaphorically for the head and the second component synecdochically as a *pars pro toto* to mean ‘ass head’ (= ‘man with an unusual ass’). Still possible, but less likely, is that ‘ass head’ is meant literally (which would represent a clear insult, just like Engl. *butthead*). *HPE*: Knob-Buttocks.

**185. hnokkan** ‘hillock’ (Gaelic): Áskell hnokkan Dufþaksson (*lnm* 326, 327, 367, *SSk*: hnokan). The nickname is from OIr *cnocán* ‘hillock’. Considering Áskell’s Irish origins, any relation to either *hnokki* ‘metal hooks holding the thread (in a distaff)’ or *hnokinn* ‘curved, bent’ (< *hnúka*) is implausible. See the nickname *bjóla* ‘small mouth’.

**186. \*hokinn** ‘(the) bent’: Hermundr hokinn (201 H: holkinn ~ holknir). *FJ* (231) dismisses the variants *holkinn* ~ *holknir* and translates the nickname as ‘foroverböjet’ (bent forward). *Lind* (172, s.v. *Hølnir*) derives the nickname from the noun *høln* ‘rough, stony field’. In this case, *Lind* is mistaken. *Hokinn* is most probably the past participle from a lost strong verb (*\*hjúka?*; cf. the weak verb *húka* ‘to crouch, squat’); the variants with *-l-* are probably due to interference from the nickname *holkinrazi* ‘crouched ass’. *HPE*: the Bent.

**187. holbarki** (x2) ‘hollow throat’: Þorvaldr holbarki Ásrþóðarson (298); Þorvaldr holbarki Høfða-Þórðarson (240, 241). *Lind* (152) states that the first component could be either *hol* ‘hole’ or *hól* ‘boasting, flattery’, but *Lind* is wrong to make the connection. The first component is more likely the adj. *holr* ‘hollow’ than the noun, and the existing adj. *hol-gómr* ‘one with hollow gums, mumbling’ seems to suggest that the nickname refers to a speech impediment or difficult speaking or breathing (an injury or a birth defect). Cf. the nickname *holmuðr* ‘hollow mouth’. *HPE*: Hollow-Throat.

**188. \*holkinrazi** ‘man with a crouched ass; ass from the stony field’: Herjólfur holkinrazi

Sigurðarson (*Inm* 116, 117 H: hokin-; M: hrokkineista ‘shriveled testicle’). *FJ* (218-19) suggests that the first component is the past participle *hokinn* ‘bent forward’, from a lost strong verb *\*húka* ‘to bend forward, crouch’. *Lind* (172) maintains that the first component is the noun *høln* ‘rough, stony field’ and that it may represent Herjólfur’s home. In this connection *Lind*’s proposal is more plausible, and *razi* may be used synecdochically as a *pars pro toto*, thus, ‘the ass (= man) from the stony field’. It is probable that the form *holkin-* is a scribal mistake for *hokin-* (= past participle *hokinn* ‘bent forward, crouched’), which would make more sense, but ignores the manuscript spelling. The second component is *raz* ~ *rass* ‘ass’ with the nickname suffix *-i*, making it mean ‘man with a crouched ass’. Cf. the nickname *hokinn* ‘the bent’.

**189. \*holmuðr** (x2) ‘hollow mouth’: Þorsteinn holmuðr Skaptason (325, 335, 381); Þorsteinn holmuðr Sumarliðason í Mörk (305, 334, 335). *FJ* (204) suggests that the name refers to one who has a cleft upper palate and is synonymous with the adj. *hol-gómr* ‘one with hollow gums, mumbling’. *Lind* (153) states that the first component could be *hól* ‘boasting, flattery’ as in his incorrect analysis of the nickname *holbarki* ‘hollow throat’. The nickname seems to have referred to a speech impediment. *HPE*: Hollow-Mouth.

**190. holtaskalli** ‘baldy from Holtar’: Grímr holtaskalli Þorsteinsson (356). It is composed of the place name *Holtar* (unknown exactly where in Iceland) and *skalli* ‘bald head’.

**191. horn** ‘horn’: Hróarr horn Brúnason (333, 374). It probably refers to an incident with a drinking horn, but the origin of the nickname is unknown.

**192. hornabryótr** ‘breaker of horns’: Herjólfur hornabryótr, konungr (338 S: Þórólfr hornabryótr, 339). It is composed of the genitive plural of *horn* ‘horn’ and *bryótr* ‘breaker’, an agentive noun derived from the verb *bryóta* ‘to break’. The reference of the nickname is uncertain. Cf. the nicknames *haugabryótr* ‘breaker of mounds’ and *völubryótr* ‘*völva* (prophetess) destroyer’. *HPE*: the Horn-Breaker.

**193. hólmasól** ‘sun of the islands’: Þorbjörg hólmasól Helgadóttir (252, 253, 265, 278, 281). It is derived from her birth on the small island Þórunnarey in the river Eyjafjarðará (in northern Iceland), and the name refers to her beauty and radiant physical appearance (cf. *Hildir stjarna* ‘star’). *HPE*: Island-Sun.

**194. Hólmgöngu-** (x4) ‘Duel-’: Hólmgöngu-Bersi Véleifsson (89); Hólmgöngu-Hrafn (130); Hólmgöngu-Máni (*lnm* 227); Hólmgöngu-Starri Eiríksson (226, 231). The name literally means ‘holm-going’ (*hólm* ‘islet’ and the noun *ganga* ‘walking, going’ [< the verb *ganga* ‘to go, walk’]) and comes from the ancient custom of fighting a duel on small islets. The nickname signifies that its bearers fought many duels and won them.

**195. Hrafna-** ‘Ravens-’: Hrafna-Flóki (*lnm* 36, 37, 37, 39, 41, 242, 243). Genitive plural of the masculine noun *hrafn* ‘raven’. This Flóki was one of the original discoverers of Iceland who took ravens with him on sea voyages (Flóki hafði hrafna þrjá með sér í haf [Flóki had three ravens with him at sea]). See the nickname *græningarrjúpa* ‘young ptarmigan’. *HPE*: Raven-Floki.

**196. hringja** ‘buckle, clasp’: Þorkatla hringja (359, 361). *Lind* (157) suggests that it is the feminine form of *hringr* ‘person from Ringerike (Norway)’, but his proposition is unlikely. *Hringja* is the feminine form of the masculine noun *hringr* ‘ring’, and the nickname seems to suggest that Þorkatla would have possessed such a buckle of high value.

**197. hringr** ‘ring’: Haraldr hringr á Hringstöðum (*lnm* 214, 215). *FJ* (241) claims that it denotes a costly ring, but that it can also mean ‘sword’. *Lind* (157) proposes that it could mean ‘someone from Ringerike’ (cf. *Lind*’s evidently faulty explanation of *hringja* ‘buckle’). The nickname probably refers to a specific ring of high value, but could also be used generally to denote Haraldr’s wealth (though *hringr* is not quite identical with *baugr* ‘ring, armllet’, which could be used as currency). *HPE*: Ring.

**198. hrísablundr** ‘slumber from Hrísar’: Þóroddr hrísablundr (74). Þóroddr is a grandson of the settler Ketill *blundr* ‘slumber, snooze’, and he inherited his grandfather’s nickname and lived at the farm *Hrísar* (‘Sticks, Brushwoods’) in Flókadalr (western Iceland). Cf. the nickname *blundr*.

**199. \*hrísi** ‘brushwood; son begotten in the woods, bastard’: Sigurðr hrísi Haraldsson (374 S: risi ‘giant’). *FJ* (331) connects it to *hrís* ‘brushwood’, but adds the possibility that it is equivalent to *hrísungr* (bastard, one begotten in the woods). The nickname is discussed in greater depth in Mundal (2003, 5-13), where she argues that the original nickname was not *hrísi* (brushwood; bastard) but *risi* (giant), and that the Icelanders misinterpreted it as a Norwegian spelling \**rísi* for *hrísi* in the early kings’ sagas. Her argument (2003, 8) rests heavily upon the Latinized name given in *Historia Norvegiæ*, *Siwardus cognomento Gigas* (Sigurðr with the nickname Giant). Sigurðr was the first son of King Haraldr *hárfagri* by the Sami woman Snæfríðr, so perhaps the connection to *hrísungr* is plausible. By the same token, having a Sami mother may also lend credibility to Mundal’s argument that the name refers to his mother’s origin (cf. Hallbjörn *hálftröll* ‘half troll’ from *Egils saga*, *Ketils saga hængs*, and *Landnámabók*). If it is *hrís*, then it is with the nickname suffix *-i*.

**200. hrogn** ‘roe (fish eggs)’: Helgi hrogn Ketilsson (147 Kjallaksson, 359, 364). The nickname probably refers to Helgi’s predilection for eating roe (a favorite food?), but could also refer to his ability to catch fish containing them. Cf. other nicknames referring to fish *lǫngubak* ‘ling back’, *reyðr* ‘rorqual (whale); Arctic char’, and *upsi* ‘pollock, cod’. *HPE*: Roe.

**201. Hross-** ‘Horse-’: Hross-Björn Raumsson (216). The nickname probably means that Björn owned many horses, but it could also mean that he had a favorite horse (like Hrafnkell and his horse Freyfaxi). Cf. the nicknames *Hafr-* ‘Billy Goat-’ and *Sel-* ‘Seal-’.

**202. hrungnir** ‘the resounder’: Þorsteinn hrungnir Molda-Gnúpsson (330, 331). The

nickname may be connected to the name of the giant *Hrungnir* (who stole Þórr's hammer in *Skáldskaparmál*). Typical of giant names, it refers to someone who makes loud noises, and is related to the noun *hrang* 'noise, din' and the verb *hringja* 'to ring, chime'; it is probably also related to an older verb which survives in Swed. *runga* ~ Dan. *runge* 'to resound'. See the nicknames *gjallandi* 'man with a resounding voice' and *glumra* 'rattler'.

**203. hrúga** 'heap, pile': Eyjólfur hrúga Ingjaldsson (253, 268). *FJ* (228) suggests that the nickname refers to one who resembles a heap. *Hrúga* is also a *heiti* for 'giantess'.

**204. hryggr** 'back; backbone, spine': Hróaldr hryggr Bjarnarson (239 Þ: Hróarr, 241 Ásleiksson). The nickname more likely refers to the back generally, in which case it would mean that he had a large back (a positive trait?). If it refers specifically to the spine, then it could signify an injury or deformity. It is unlikely that it has the meaning 'bravery' (the reverse of Engl. *have no spine* ['be a coward']). *HPE*: Spine.

**205. enn hugprúði** 'the stout-hearted, courageous': Hjalti enn hugprúði (212, 213). It is the weak form of the adj. *hugprúðr* 'stout-hearted'. In the context of *Landnámabók*, this legendary companion of Bǫðvarr *bjarki* is only mentioned as one whose ax was robbed out of a grave mound shared with Hrólfur *kraki*.

**206. Hunda-** 'Dogs-': Hunda-Steinarr, jarl á Englandi (214). The nickname probably refers to Steinarr having possessed many dogs (cf. the nicknames *Hafr-* 'Billy Goat-', *Hesta-* 'Horses-', and *Svína-* 'Pigs-'). Less likely is that it could be a patronym representing Steinarr's father and would mean 'Hundi's son'. The name *Hundi* is rare and is probably a calque of OIr *culann* 'dog' (cf. *ÍO*, 390, s.v. *Hundi*).

**207. húslangr** 'tall man with a house': Bjarni húslangr Skegg-Broddason (291, 292). His nickname is explained in the *Skarðsárbók* version of *Landnámabók* only as coming from his building a very large house in Iceland. It could also mean 'man who is as tall as a

house' (an exaggeration?), especially when *langr* 'tall' (m.) is taken grammatically. *HPE*: House-Long.

**208. hvalaskúfr** 'whale tassel': Þorleifr hvalaskúfr Ánsson (310, 311). *Lind* (161) connects the second component to *skúfr* 'Great Skua (an aggressive sea-bird)', but it is difficult to see what connection it could have to whales other than that they both live in or on the sea. *CV* (561) glosses it as 'tassel; hip tendon; a sea bird'. Most likely, the first meaning 'tassel' is intended here. Perhaps he wore a piece of whale leather or decorated his home with pieces of a whale. Whatever it meant, the reference is lost. *HPE*: Whale-Fringe.

**209. hvalmagi** 'whale belly': Björn hvalmagi Kjallaksson (123, 147, 148, 149). *FJ* (215) suggests that it could either mean his belly was as large as a whale metaphorically, or that he liked eating whale meat. It could also mean that he had a voracious appetite and could eat "as much as a whale." *HPE*: Whale-Belly.

**210. hvalró** 'whale rivet, whale clinch (piece used in a tool or a nail)': Óttarr hvalró Hróaldsson (318 S: Hvalró Óttarsson). It is unclear which meaning *ró* has in the nickname, but it is not *ró* 'peace, calm'. The second component, most likely, refers to *ró* 'clinch of a nail', a technique used to fasten wood together where the pointed end of a nail is flattened down after being driven through. The tool referred to here for whaling is unknown. *HPE*: Whale-Clinch.

**211. enn hvassi** 'the sharp, keen': Arngeirr enn hvassi Þormóðarson (246, 247, Þ: Arngrímr). It is the weak form of the adj. *hvass* 'sharp, keen'. The nickname symbolizes either a strong ability in fighting or perhaps a high degree of intelligence.

**212. hvítaský** 'white clouds': Herrøðr hvítaský (*lnm* 197 H: hvikatimbr 'wavering timber'). *FJ* (331) suggests that it may be used metaphorically to represent a person with white, wool-like hair. The connection to Herrøðr's hair is almost certain, but it cannot be

ruled out that the name refers to some event on a cloudy day (or something else having to do with the sky or weather). *HPE*: White-Cloud.

**213. hvítbeinn** ‘white-legged’: Hálfðan hvítbeinn Ólafsson Upplendingakonungr (136).

The second part of the compound is the strong form of the adj. *beinn* ‘legged’. In this case the adj. *hvítr* ‘white’ may refer to his skin color, thus, meaning something like ‘pasty leg’. See the nickname *berbeinn* ‘barelegged, barefoot’.

**214. enn hvíti** (x15) ‘the white’: Þoðvarr enn hvíti Þorleifsson (*lnm* 309, 310, 311, 336, 397); Brúni enn hvíti Háreksson (*lnm* 244); Gizurr enn hvíti Teitsson (77, 79, 215, 357, 386); Halli enn hvíti (266); Högni enn hvíti Óblauðsson (150, 161, 166, 167, 172, 173, 196); Hróðgeirr enn hvíti Hrappsson (*lnm* 289, 290, 291); Ingjaldr enn hvíti (158); Óleifr enn hvíti Ingjaldsson, konungr (136); Óleifr enn hvíti Skæringsson (340, 341); Surtr enn hvíti Skaptastjúpr Sumarliðason (334, 335); Þorsteinn enn hvíti Steinsson (*lnm* 164); Þorsteinn enn hvíti Qlvisson (289, 290, 291, 336, 396, 397); Þorvaldr enn hvíti Þórðarson (170, 182, 183); Qlvir enn hvíti Ósvaldsson (290, 291 Qlvisson); Qzurr enn hvíti Þorleifsson (*lnm* 368, 374, 375, 376). *Lind* (165-67) suggests that it means light hair or skin color (or both). It is the weak form of the adj. *hvítr* ‘white’, and it is among the most common nicknames.

**215. hyrna** (x2) ‘horned animal (ewe?)’: Qrn hyrna konungr Þórisson (310, 311, 312, 313); Þórunn hyrna Ketilsdóttir (50, 51, 248, 251, 252, 253). *FJ* (331-32) notes that it is derived from *horn* ‘horn’ and may be connected to an animal horn or horn-like feature of its bearer, possibly a piece of headware (just as the modern usage implies a three-pronged headscarf or shawl). It is unlikely that the nickname refers to the poetic meaning of *hyrna* ‘point of an ax-head’, and from there a possible metaphorical meaning ‘the sharp’. Instead, it may refer to some physical feature, either a decorative headpiece or a hairstyle. The origin of the nickname is unknown.

**216. hýnefr** ‘fuzz nose’: Arnórr hýnefr Þóroddsson (211, 213). *FJ* (202) glosses it as



‘dunnæse’ (down, fuzz nose). It is composed of *hý* ‘down, fuzz’ and *nefr*, a form of *nef* used for nicknames that makes the common noun agentive. It is, most likely, a description of the man’s nose, but it could conceivably be used synecdochically as a *pars pro toto* and refer to his entire body or at least his head. See the nickname *dúfunef* ‘dove nose’. *HPE*: Hairy-Nose.

**217. hærukollr** ‘gray hair head’: Þorgrímr hærukollr Qnundarson (199). It is composed of the nouns *hæra* ‘gray hair’ and *kollr* ‘crown of the head, head’. The second component can refer to the crown of the head, but it also can reference the entire head. Þorgrímr is the grandfather of the famous saga hero Grettir Ásmundarson, in whose saga the nickname is explained to have come about from starting to go gray by age 25. The genetic feature of going gray early was inherited by Þorgrímr’s son, Ásmundr, who was similarly nicknamed both *hærukollr* ‘gray head’ and *hærulegr* ‘tall man with gray hair’. Cf. the nicknames *jafnakollr* ‘clubmoss head’, *skotakollr* ‘Scots’ head’, *slagakollr* ‘strike head’, and *æðikollr* ‘hot-head’. *HPE*: Hoary-Head.

**218. hqfði** ‘head; headland’: Þorsteinn hqfði, hersir á Hqrðalandi (276, 277, 286, 397). The nickname, most likely, denotes a peculiar feature of Þorsteinn’s head, probably size or shape (‘big head’ or ‘round head?’). The noun *hqfði* can also mean ‘a carved head, ship’s beak’ and is therefore not identical with the more common term *hqfuð* ‘head’ (though the two are akin). Another possibility, though less likely, is that the nickname could refer to a place with *-hqfði* in the name (for example, *Karlshqfði*; cf. the nickname *skagi* ‘low headland’). Cf. the similarly plain nicknames *kollr* ‘crown of the head, head’ and *skalli* ‘bald head, baldy’, as well as nicknames with *-hqfði* such as *hesthqfði* ‘horse head’, *karlshqfði* ‘carved man’s head; man’s head’, *klakkhqfði* ‘saddle-peg head, pointed head; lumpy head?’, *langhqfði* ‘long head’, *loðinhqfði* ‘hairy head’, and *svínhqfði* ‘pig head’. See the nickname *auga* ‘eye’.

**219. hqggvandi** ‘striker’: Hrólfir hqggvandi á Norðmæri (328, 329). It is the present

participle of the verb *hoggva* ‘to strike, hew’. See the nickname *gjallandi* ‘man with a resounding voice’. *HPE*: the Striker.

**220. hoggvinkinni** (x2) ‘man with a cut cheek’: Þorbergr hoggvinkinni (284 HP: Þorgeirr); Þorgeirr hoggvinkinni Hafnar-Ormsson (66, 69, 140; Þorbergr hoggvinkinni). It is composed of the past participle of the verb *hoggva* ‘to strike, hew’ and *kinn-i*, where *kinn* has the nickname suffix *-i*, producing a meaning ‘man with a cut cheek’. See the nickname *blákinn* ‘blue cheek’. *HPE*: Cheek-Wound.

**221. hængr** (x2) ‘(male) salmon’: Ketill hængr (Hængr) Þorkelsson (*Inm* 9, 346, 347-48, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 355, 360, 363, 368, 396, 397); Ketill hængr Hallbjarnarson (346). *DV* (278) suggests that the word is from Gmc. *\*hanhu* and connected to *hár* ‘shark’. *ÍO* (408) argues that the original meaning of the word is ‘hak eða krókur’ (a little barbed hook or [simply] a hook), and conclude that it is composed of *hór* ‘pot-hook’ (the same as Go. *hoha* ‘plowshare’, also from Gmc. *\*hanhu*) plus the suffix *-ing*. If *ÍO* is right, it would have then originally meant something like ‘the hooked one’ and may have become associated early with ‘salmon’ because of the shape of its lower lip which hooks upward. Cf. NNorw. *hyngn* ‘male sea trout, salmon’. *Hængr* (> *Hængur*) is also found as a first name. *HPE*: Trout.

**222. Hǫrðakappi** ‘champion of the people of Hordaland (Norway)’: Hallbjörn Hǫrðakappi (370). *Hǫrðar* is an ethnic term used to describe people from *Hǫrðaland* (Hordaland, Norway; cf. the first name *Hǫrðr*).

## I

**223. ilbreiðr** ‘man who has a broad sole, flat footed’: Ketill ilbreiðr Þorbjarnarson (*Inm* 153, 161, 176). It is composed of the noun *il* ‘sole’ and the strong form of the adj. *breiðr* ‘broad, wide’. *HPE*: Broad-Sole.

**224. enn illi** (x2) ‘the bad, wicked’: Þórarinn enn illi (78, 79); Þórarinn enn illi

Steinólfsson (269). It is the weak form of the adj. *illr* ‘bad, evil’.

**225. illingr** ‘bad man, scoundrel’: Atli illingr (252, 253). *ÍO* (419) glosses *illing(u)r* as ‘illmenni’ (scoundrel, villain). The nickname is related to the adj. *illr* ‘bad, evil’, from where the noun is derived.

**226. illugi** (x2) ‘evil minded’: Þórðr illugi Eyvindarson (*lnm* 105 Illugi Fellsgoði, 317, 319, 320); Þórðr illugi Þórisson (320). *FJ* (260), *Lind* (179), *DV* (285), and *ÍO* (419) all derive the nickname and the first name *Illugi* from Proto-Norse \**ill-hugi* ‘evil minded’. *Illugi* also occurs as a personal name.

## J

**227. jafnakollr** ‘clubmoss head; dye head’: Óláfr jafnakollr (*lnm* 178, 196). *FJ* (194) connects the first component with the plant *jafni* ‘Lycopodium alpinum’ (alpine clubmoss) and suggests that the nickname refers to its bearer’s head resembling the plant. *Lind* (174) equates the first component with *jafn* ‘even’ and glosses it as ‘den jämnmodige’ (the even-spirited) or ‘den rättsinnige’ (the upright, honest), but the existence of the noun *jafni* makes the connection unlikely. *CV* (322) glosses it as ‘lycopodium clavatum’ (wolf’s-foot clubmoss, stag’s-horn clubmoss, ground pine), a short plant which has small branches whose needles resemble those on pine trees. The nickname is composed of the nouns *jafni* ‘clubmoss’ and *kollr* ‘crown of the head, head’, and the first component is from the plant *jafni*, a clubmoss commonly used to make dye. As such, *jafni* could refer to the hair color if not to a resemblance of the hair to the plant. See the nickname *hærukollr* ‘gray hair head’.

**228. jarðlangr** ‘tall man with a farm’: Þorgeirr jarðlangr á Jarðlangsstöðum (90, 91). *FJ* (284) suggests the name implies that Þorgeirr owned a rather long strip of land. *Lind* (174) suggests that the first element is from a Norwegian place name (of which there are many such with *jørð*) and the second part describes his stature. *Lind* is correct about the

second part of the compound referring to the man's height, but it is questionable whether *jarð-* refers to a specific place in Norway or to a farm owned by him. *HPE*: Land-Long.

**229. jarlakappi** 'champion of earls': Þorbjörn jarlakappi (*lnm* 381, 382). Þorbjörn came to Iceland from the Orkney Islands, so it is assumed that the nickname was earned while in services to the rulers there.

**230. járnsíða** 'iron side': Björn járnsíða Ragnarsson loðbrókar (239, 241). *FJ* (217) suggests that it refers to him wearing iron armor on his sides. The legendary figure's nickname implies a resistance to damage in battle thanks to iron-like armor on his sides (can it be a supernatural defense?), and it also refers to battle prowess more generally. Cf. the Anglo-Saxon king Eadmund *Irensid* (Ironsides) and the Norse nickname *reyðarsíða* 'rorqual side'.

**231. Jötun-** 'Giant-': Jötun-Björn (217). *FJ* (170) says that it refers to a Sami origin in northern Norway. The nickname is mythologically-based, but it more likely implies that Björn comes from a place outside the familiar Norse world, in particular where "Finns" live. See the nickname *hálftröll* 'half troll'.

## K

**232. kaldmunnr** 'cold mouth': Oddr kaldmunnr (345). *FJ* (204) wonders if it could mean 'hostile mouth' (one with a hostile tongue). The possible ranges of metaphorical meaning are great for *kald-* in describing one's mouth or, more specifically, one's use of it to speak. Most likely, the nickname refers to a negative way of speaking, even evil speech. Cf. the compounds *kalda-hlátr* 'sardonic laughter', *köld rödd* 'evil voice', *kald-ráðr* 'cunning' (literally, 'cold counseled'), and *kald-yrði* 'sarcasm'. It is possible, but much less probable, that it refers to an incident involving a physically cold mouth (eating snow, cold kiss, death?).

**233. \*kamban** 'little cripple' (Gaelic): Grímr kamban (59, 266). *FJ* (332) doubts that the

nickname is Celtic because of its early age (early ninth century) and suggests that it could be derived from ON *kambr* ‘comb; crest, ridge (of hills)’ with the unexplained suffix *-ann*. *Lind* (185) gives the origin as OIr *cammán* derived from *camm* ‘lame, stunted, crippled’. *DV* (299) and *ÍO* (443) put into question the derivation that it is from ON *kambr*. Whether the name is Gaelic or Norse is questionable, as Grímr was the first settler of the Faroe Islands (and also a great-grandfather of an Icelandic settler), and the myth of Faroese national origin is on the line. More likely, however, is that the nickname is from OIr *cammán*, a diminutive of *camm* ‘bent, crooked’. The nickname would then mean ‘the little bent one, little cripple’ (cf. the Norse nickname of Gaelic origin, *feilan* ‘little wolf’). The same *camm* is found in the family name *Camp-bell*, which originates in Gaelic *camm-bél* ‘crooked mouth’. As a personal name, *Cammán* appears in the *Annals of Ulster* under the year 960 as the name of a Celtic-Norse Viking. See the nickname *bjóla* ‘small mouth’.

**234. Kampa-** ‘Whiskers-’: Kampa-Grímr (145, 274). *Lind* (185) states that it is the genitive plural of *kampr* ‘moustache’. It may be, however, the genitive singular of the weak form *kampi* ‘beard, whiskers, moustache’, which existed alongside *kampr* ‘whiskers, beard, moustache’, a word used to describe whiskers on not only humans but also seals, cats, and other animals.

**235. kampi** ‘man with whiskers, man with a moustache’: Þorgrímr kampi Qzurarson (368, 374, 375, 376). *FJ* (208) suggests that *kampi* refers to the hair around the lips, in particular a moustache. *Lind* (185-86) notes that it is derived from *kampr* ‘beard, moustache’ like the name and nickname *Skeggi* ~ *skeggi* (‘man with a beard’), from *skegg* ‘beard’. The strong form *kampr* is a cognate of OE *cenep* ‘moustache’. *Kampi* is, most likely, a nickname form of *kampr* ‘moustache’ with the suffix *-i*, meaning ‘man with whiskers’.

**236. kappi** (x2) ‘champion’: Ketill kappi Þorbjarnarson (112, 114, 115); Úlfarr kappi at

Úlfarsfelli (*Inm* 126, 127, 128). *Kappi* is a generic byname, and it is connected to prowess in fighting.

**237. karlhöfði** ‘carved man’s head; man’s head’: Þórólfr karlhöfði Nafar-Helgason (244). *CV* (332) glosses the noun *karl-höfði* as ‘a carved man’s head, figure head’. Thus, the nickname may refer to a wooden effigy of Þórólfr’s head, or just as likely one made by him or used by him on his ship. *Karlhöfði* is also the name of a ship with a man’s head carved on the prow in *Landnámabók*. Alternatively, *-höfði* may be used synecdochically as a *pars pro toto* here and would be tautological (‘man-man’), thus, synonymous with the first component *karl* ‘man; old man’. See the nickname *höfði* ‘head; headland’.

**238. karlsefni** ‘a real man, one made of the material of a (capable) man’: Þorfinnr karlsefni Þórðarson (141, 241 Karlsefni). It is composed of the nouns *karl* ‘man’ and *efni* ‘stuff, material’ and surely meant in a metaphorical sense ‘the stuff out of which a (capable) man is made’. Þorfinnr was one of those who led an expedition into North America for the purpose of settling there, trailing in the tracks of his brother-in-law Leifr Eiríksson. On the second appearance of Þorfinnr and throughout several of the *Landnámabók* manuscripts he is referred to simply by the first name *Karlsefni*.

**239. karpi** ‘braggart, boaster’: Eyvindr karpi at Forsi (*Inm* 322 Þ: karfi, 323, 326, 328, 329). It is a nickname form of n. *karp* ‘boasting, hubris’ with the suffix *-i*, or, more likely, an agentive form of the verb *karpa* ‘to boast, brag’. In either case the meaning is ‘one who boasts, braggart’.

**240. katla** ‘kettle, cauldron’: Þorbjörg katla Helgadóttir (58, 59, 174). *Katla* is the female equivalent of the common noun *ketill* ‘kettle, cauldron’ and the first name *Ketill*. It is also found as a personal name on its own, as the name of an Icelandic volcano, and in compound names like *Þor-katla*, *Áskatla*, and *Hall-katla*. One can only wonder whether a sexual meaning may have existed (hot pot = hot vagina?). Cf. the curious nickname *arnkatla* ‘female kettle’, which is, most likely, a first name used erroneously.

**241. \*keiliselgr** ‘elk from Keilir’: Qzurr keiliselgr Hrollaugsson (310, 311, 317, 320). *FJ* (333) is uncertain about its meaning but suggests that the first part of the compound is either *keilir* ‘wedge’ or *Keilir*, the name of a conical mountain on the Reykjanes peninsula in Iceland or another place that once bore the name, with the second component being *elgr* ‘elk’. *Lind* (193) gives the possibility that the first part could be n. *keili* ‘a particular part of a merchant vessel’ or approximately the same as f. *keila* ‘fissure, cleft, narrow bay or cove’, though *keila* in any of these meanings does not exist. *CV* (335) glosses *keilir* as ‘wedge’ (as used on a ship to hold up a piece of the sail on the mast) and suggests that the nicknames *keili-selgr* (a typo for *keilis-elgr*) and *keilis-múli* are related to the cone-shaped mountain in southwestern Iceland. The most probable meaning is ‘elk from *Keilir*’, but the difficulty lies in determining if the known mountain *Keilir* is meant (since it was likely never inhabited), or if it refers to another place that once bore the same name.

**242. \*keilismúli** ‘wedge mouth; mouth from Keilir’: Þórir keilismúli Bøðólfsson (265, 267). *FJ* (205) states that it is composed of n. *keili* or m. *keilir* ‘part of a ship’ with *múli* ‘mouth’, thus ‘with a mouth like a *keili*’ (prominent mouth?). *Lind* (193) suggests that the first part is likely a place name. In any case, the second part *múli* means ‘snout, muzzle’ and refers to the mouth of a human in a negative way. *Múli* could easily be used synecdochically as a *pars pro toto* here, and the nickname would then mean ‘the snout (= man) from Keilir’. Just as with the previous nickname *keiliselgr* ‘elk from Keilir?’, the place name *Keilir* is obscure, unless it refers to the known mountain, which seems unlikely. See the nickname *gráfeldarmúli* ‘snout in a gray cloak’.

**243. kengr** ‘metal hook, clamp’: Þorgeirr kengr Geirrðarson (126, 128). *FJ* (291) states that it refers to an iron hook resembling a clamp. *Lind* (194-95) glosses it as ‘bukt, krök, krampa’ (curve, twist, clamp). *CV* (335) glosses *kengr* as ‘a horseshoe-formed crook of metal’. The use of this hook is unknown. *Kengr* is probably the same as NNorw. *kjeng* ‘staple, clamp (in a lock)’ and related to Dutch *kink* ‘twist in a rope’ (whence the

English borrowing via nautical terminology). It remains unclear whether the nickname refers to the man's physique (a more likely possibility) or to an incident involving a metal hook or clamp. Cf. the nickname *smjörkengr* 'butter hook'. *HPE*: the Bent.

**244. kerlingarnef** 'hag's nose': Arnórr kerlingarnef Bjarnarson (240, 241, 242, 244). *FJ* (201) is unsure whether it means a big, ugly nose. *Lind* (195) suggests that the real nickname is *nef* 'nose' and the first part refers to some relationship to an old woman. *Nef* 'beak, nose' may be used synecdochically as a *pars pro toto*, and would mean 'the hag's man (= husband?)', or perhaps 'the son of a hag'. Just as probable is *FJ*'s assumption that it could be meant as an insult to describe his nose looking like that of *kerling* 'old woman, hag'. Considering other compounds like *kerlingar-eldr* 'a kind of mushroom' and in particular *kerlingar-tönn* 'lotus flower', the nickname could potentially refer to an unknown plant resembling the nose of an old woman (however, no specific plants come to mind). See the nickname *dúfunef* 'dove nose'. *HPE*: Hag-Nose.

**245. \*kimbi** meaning unknown (either Norse or Gaelic): Þorleifr kimbi Þorbrandsson (127, 128). *FJ* (334) glosses it as 'spotter' (mock, ridiculer), but suggests that it could be related to dialectal Swed. *kimb*, *kimbe* 'thin rod' and Dan. *kimme* 'frame on a tub outside the bottom'. *Lind* (1905-15, 689) believes that the personal name, originally a nickname, is related to the verb *kimbla* 'to bundle together' and the noun *kimbull* 'bundle'. *DV* (209) says that it is synonymous with Icel. *kimbi* 'bundle, sheaf; mocking bird' and related to OE *cimb(e)* 'connection, joint'. Sayers (1996) wrote an article on the nickname in which he presented a possible literary interpretation of the nickname in the context of Þorleifr's role as a supporting character in *Eyrbyggja saga*. While he doubts the old interpretation of the nickname as a Gaelic name *Cimbe* or *Cimbil*, he posits a potential borrowing from OIr *cimbid* 'captive, unransomed criminal' (1996, 55, 63), towards which he argues the saga may steer. Whether or not the origin is *cimbid*, he suggests that it could be understood in light of Þorleifr's story within the saga, one which makes the relation of the nickname with *kumbl* 'mark, sign' more probable. Þorleifr receives an insulting burn on his neck from a ladle while visiting Norway, a kind of



badge of dishonor that he never manages to avenge (1996, 64-5). From an etymological point of view, the origin and meaning of the nickname remains unsolved.

**246. kjálki** ‘jaw, jaw bone’: Geirsteinn kjálki (*Inm* 172,173 alternatively Eysteinn). The meaning of the nickname is obvious, but its original reference is lost. Most likely, it refers to an injury to the jaw, perhaps suffered during a fight or battle.

**247. kjölfari** ‘keel traveler, sailor’: Ketill kjölfari (68, 84, 391). *FJ* (279) assumes that the first part refers to the mountain chain running between Norway and Sweden \**Kjǫlr* (or plural \**Kilir?*), so named because they resemble the keel of a ship; they are now known as *Kölen* ~ *Kjølen*. *Lind* (201) glosses it as ‘kölfarande, i.e. sjöfarande’ (keel-traveler, that is, sea-traveler). The first part of the compound is *kjǫlr* ‘keel’, which is more likely used to represent an entire ship, and the second part is *fari* ‘traveler’, an agentive noun formed from the verb *fara* ‘travel, go’. The explanation for the first part given in *FJ* is plausible because Ketill lived in an era earlier than the settlement of Iceland, but it is less likely than the most obvious reference to sea travel generally. See the nickname *harðfari* ‘hard traveler’. *HPE*: the Keeler.

**248. \*klaka** ‘chirper, chatterer’: Þorkell klaka (306 HSk: blaka). *FJ* (317) takes it to be *blaka* ‘curtain, covering’. *Lind* (28) also says it is *blaka*, a side form derived from n. *blak* meaning ‘loose chatter’. *CV* (341) does not mention the nickname but glosses the verb *klaka* as ‘to twitter, chatter’. *DV* (313) has the verb *klaka* ‘tweet, chirp, cackle’, which he notes is a cognate of OE *clacu* ‘battle din’, MHG *klac* ‘applause, bang’, and Lat. *glōciō* ‘cluck’, Greek *glázō* ‘sing’, and OIr *glagán* ‘clatter of a mill grinder’. Whether the cognates are genuine, it is onomatopoeic. Both the *Hauksbók* and *Skarðsárþók* manuscripts have the oblique form *bløku* as well as *Bløkuætt* ‘the family of *Blaka*’. Whether it is *klaka* or *blaka*, although it seems more probable that *klaka* is the correct form, the meaning is more or less the same and suggests that he was overly talkative. *HPE*: the Clatterer.

**249. \*klakkhöfði** ‘saddle-peg head, pointed head; lumpy head?’: Kolbeinn klakkhöfði Atlason (*Inm* 99). *FJ* (193) suggests that the first component is, most likely, *klakkr* ‘peg on a saddle (on which packs are hung)’, which also has the meaning ‘a pointed rock, cliff’; another possibility he gives is that it is related to Norw. *klakk* ‘lump’. It is possible, though unlikely, that the nickname refers to a carved head on his boat. See the nickname *höfði* ‘head; headland’.

**250. klaufi** ‘clumsy person, klutz’: Þorgeirr klaufi (284). *FJ* (296) argues that it is derived from *klauf* ‘cloven foot’ and that it is likely identical with Icel. *klaufi* ‘bumbler, clumsy person’, a word which is probably from *klauf* in the sense that it described someone whose hands were like the cloven feet of animals. *Lind* (203-04) says that it is formed from f. *klauf* ‘something cleft, hoof’ derived from the verb *kljúfa* ‘to cleave, split in two’. *CV* (342) glosses it as ‘an awkward, clumsy boor’. The noun and nickname was likely formed with the common suffix *-i*, and originally it would have meant ‘man with cloven feet’ who would have resembled hobbling animals, and from there it came to mean ‘man prone to tripping about, exhibiting clumsy behavior’. *Klaufi* is also found as a first name. *HPE*: the Clumsy.

**251. kleggi** ‘horsefly’: Þorsteinn kleggi í Húsavík (*Inm* 302). The noun *kleggi* is a loan word in northern Engl. *cleg* ‘horsefly, gadfly’ (< ON *kleggi*). The reference of the nickname is unclear, but it may have the metaphorical meaning ‘the annoying’, since the horsefly (or gadfly) is an insect prone to biting and annoying livestock. *HPE*: Horse-Fly.

**252. \*kleykir** ‘the pincher; man caught in a pinch?’: Sigmundur Þundarson (*Inm* 330, 331, 333, 354, 355). *FJ* (334) is unsure of the meaning and suggests a possible relation to f. *klúka* ‘small pile’ or Swed. *klökas* ‘to be near throwing up, want to throw up’. *Lind* (204) and *CV* (343) do not gloss it. *DV* (316) does not gloss it either but suggests a relation to the modern adverb *kleykiliga* ‘in deep trouble’, NNorw. *klykkja* ‘tie together’, and OE *clyccan* ‘hug, embrace, hold’. *ÍO* (475) notes a relation to *kleykilega* ‘risky, dangerous, in a fix’ and the late verb *klúka* ‘crouch, sit crouched, sit on the edge of

a seat'. *ÍO* (478, s.v. *klúka*) says that the verb *klúka* is related to *kleykja* 'stack loosely, scrape up' from Gmc. *\*kleu-k-* 'pile up, bend, fasten together', and that it may be a cognate of Swed. *klyka* '(hay) pitchfork', OE *clyccan* 'grab tightly, surround' (cf. Engl. *clutch*). The suffix *-ir* seems to denote an agentive form, thus, 'one who pinches, pincher'. While the etymology and meaning are uncertain, it is feasible that the nickname meant something along the lines of 'one in trouble, in a pinch', as 'someone being pressed tightly, squeezed, pinched' would be.

**253. \*knappi** 'knob; button': Þorgils knappi (*Inm* 94, 95). *FJ* (335) suggests that it is either a weak form of *knappr* 'knob; button' or a weak form of the adj. *knappr* 'scanty, scare' (a late word borrowed into Icelandic from Dan. *knap* 'scarce'). *Lind* (206) gives the same two alternatives but suggests that the adj. *knappr* is found in NNorw. *knapp* 'sparse; fast; agile', meanings which are appropriate for use as a nickname. Far. *knappur* 'agile, fast' has the same meaning as NNorw. *knapp* and may be related, but their origin and age are unknown; both forms are probably from Dan. *knap*, which was borrowed into Danish from Low Ger. *knapp* 'narrow; scarce; stinted' (and the same in High Ger. *knapp*). It is, most likely, a nickname form of *knappr* 'knob; button' with the suffix *-i* meaning 'man with a button'. *HPE*: Knob.

**254. knappr** 'knob; button': Þórðr knappr Bjarnarson (*Inm* 243). *FJ* (241) argues that it refers to an especially magnificent button, and that it is not the adj. *knappr* 'narrow, tight'. The adj. *knappr* 'scanty' is a late borrowing from Dan. *knap* 'scanty, scarce', and thus, it must be the noun *knappr* 'knob, head (of a pole)'. Thus, it could be used to describe his head in a jocular way or even be used a sexual pun and refer to his penis (or penis-like appearance?).

**255. knarrarbringa** 'ship chest, big tits': Þorbjörg knarrarbringa Gilsdóttir (130, 161, 163). It is composed of the noun *knorr* 'merchant ship' and *bringa* 'chest'. The nickname implies either a large build, or, more likely, large breasts. The ship metaphor was inherited from her father, Gils *skeiðarnef* 'longship nose'. *HPE*: Ship-Breast.

**256. kneif** ‘nippers, pincers, tongs’: Ásgeirr kneif Óleifsson (*lnm* 51, 340, 341, 342). *FJ* (335) suggests that it may be related to *knífr* ‘knife’, but this ablaut connection is unlikely from an etymological point of view. *Lind* (207-08) suggests that it is either a type of hook or pincers. *CV* (346) glosses it as ‘a kind of *nippers* or *pincers*’. *Kneif* describes a tool used primarily in fishing, although it is unclear how the tool was used (pulling a fish off the hook?).

**257. kné** ‘knee’: Eyvindr kné (*lnm* 178, 187, 189). While the background is lacking, the nickname, most likely, refers to a defective knee (injured or deformed). See the nickname *auga* ‘eye’. *HPE*: Knee.

**258. \*knýtir** ‘one who ties knots; crippled; one who makes crippled’: Erlingr knýtir (249). *FJ* (335) glosses it as ‘en der knyttter’ (one who makes knots) or ‘en der er knyttet, puklet?’ (one who is knotted, humped?). *Lind* (208) says that it is derived from *knútr* ‘knot; bump, protuberance’. *CV* (347) glosses it as ‘knitter’. The nickname is, most likely, an agentive form of the weak verb *knýta* ‘to knot, bind together’. It is possible, however, to connect it to the second meaning of the verb ‘become crooked’ (only used impersonally) and the past participle *knýttr* ‘knotted, crippled’, thus, ‘one who makes crooked, crippler’.

**259. kolbrún** ‘coal brow’: Þorbjörg kolbrún Glúmsdóttir (170, 171). Her nickname is explained in *Fóstbræðra saga* as coming from her ugly appearance and her black hair and eyebrows. Cf. the nicknames *brún* ‘brow’ and *tvennumbrúni* ‘double brows’. *HPE*: Coal-Brow.

**260. Kolbrúnarskáld** ‘Kolbrún’s poet’: Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld Bersason (170, 171, 190, 191). He was named after composing poetry about Þorbjörg *kolbrún* ‘coal brow’. *HPE*: Coal-Brow-Poet.

**261. \*kólka** meaning unknown: Þorbjörgn kólka (*lnm* 223 S: kolkr, HSkP: kolkan). *FJ*

(335) notes that the place name, *Kolkumýrr*, reflects the original form *kolka* and that it may be related to Norw. *kolka* ‘mess around, work poorly’. *Lind* (209-10) suggests a relation to the verb NNorw. *kolka* ‘scamp, cheat’ and the noun *kulk* ‘botcher, cheater’. *DV* (324-25) connects it to Icel. *kolk* ‘exhaustion from dampness and cold’, but says that it has an unclear etymology. *DV* also suggests that it may be connected to *kolga* ‘wave’, which would be related to *kala* ‘suffer frostbite’, a connection which could then show a development from ‘exhausted and frozen stiff from cold’ to ‘stiff’ to ‘bad work’. *ÍO* (491) says that the origin is unknown and that it could either be derived from the first name OIr *Colcu* or connected to NNorw. *kolka* ‘dabble, mix around’. *ÍO* doubts that it is connected to Icel. *kolk* and is uncertain whether the place names are connected directly to the nickname. It is unlikely that OIr *Colcu* (genitive *Colgan*) is represented here, but if it is, the name is probably related to OIr *colg* ‘short sword’. The origin and meaning of the nickname remain uncertain.

**262. kollr** ‘crown of the head, head’: Þorbjörn kollr Valþjófsson (57). It, most likely, refers to a physical feature that made his head stand out, perhaps from having a large head or a bald one (cf. the specific meaning of *kollr* ‘crown, pate’). *Kollr* also occurs as a first name. See the similarly plain nickname *hofði* ‘head’ as well as *hærukollr* ‘gray hair head’.

**263. kolskeggr** ‘coal beard’: Þorsteinn kolskeggr Herjólfsson (116, 117 M: Kolskeggr). The first component *kol* ‘coal’ is always neuter plural and refers to hair color. *Kolskeggr* is also a common first name. See the nickname *bláskeggr* ‘blue beard’. *HPE*: Coal-Beard.

**264. kornamúli** (x2) ‘snout of grain; Korn’s snout (son)’: Þorbergr kornamúli Þorkelsson (*Inm* 77, 212, 343); Þorkell kornamúli (*Inm* 77). *FJ* (205) glosses it as ‘korn-mund’ (grain-mouth) from n. *korn* ‘grain’ and wonders if the nickname is due to feeding animals grain. *Lind* (215) suggests that *múli* is the real nickname and that Þorkell was the son of a man with the nickname *korni* ‘grain’ (formed with the nickname suffix -i). *Lind* may be onto something, since compounds with the genitive plural of *korn* do not

occur. *Múli* means ‘snout, muzzle’ and refers to the mouth of a human in a negative way and could easily be used synecdochically as a *pars pro toto* here to mean ‘the snout (= man) of grain’ or ‘Korni’s snout (= son)’. It is tempting to draw a connection between the nickname and an allusion to the behavior of pigs, whose snout is prone to constantly eating slop from a trough, but such a connection is a loose one. In any case, Porkell is Þorbergr’s father, and the nickname almost acts like a real family name. Cf. Þórarinn *korni* ‘grain’ (who is unrelated to the two men here). See the nickname *gráfeldarmúli* ‘snout in a gray cloak’.

**265. korni** ‘grain; man with grain’: Þórarinn korni Grímkelsson (110). It is formed from the common noun n. *korn* ‘grain’ with the nickname suffix *-i*, most likely giving it the meaning ‘man with grain’. While it probably refers to farming, it could be used metaphorically to suggest small size and resembling a small piece of grain.

**266. korpr** ‘raven’: Jón korpr Hrafnsson (79). The reference of the nickname is unknown, but it could allude to a dark appearance, having a voice or call that resembled the bird, or even from the man having a warlike nature, as suggested by the association of carrion birds and battle in Old Germanic culture. It is also possible that the name was inherited from a connection to his father’s name *Hrafn*. See the nickname *græningarrjúpa* ‘young ptarmigan’.

**267. krafla** ‘paw, scratch’: Þorkell krafla Þorgrímsson (174 Krafla, 220, 223). *FJ* (277) cites the explanation of the nickname in *Vatnsdæla saga*, which explains that Þorkell was found as an infant with a cloth blocking his nose and causing him to suffocate, and that he “kraflaði fyrir nǫsunum” (pawed at his nose). *Lind* (216-17) says that it is the verb *krafla* ‘scrape, paw’. It goes to show that a nickname can be earned at the earliest stage of life and last in perpetuity thereafter. The nickname is a substantivized form of the verb *krafla* ‘to paw, scrabble, scratch’.

**268. kraki** ‘thin pole’: Hrólfr kraki, konungr (212, 213). *FJ* (226) states that it means ‘a long, thin branch or pole’ and cites the explanation of the nickname in Saxo, which explains the name to mean ‘a tree with pollarded branches’. *CV* (354) defines it as ‘a looped and branched stem (as used in a staircase)’ and claims it was used metaphorically to describe the legendary king tall and thin stature. *DV* (328) glosses it as ‘Stange mit einem Haken’ (pole with a hook) and notes the cognates OHG *crācho* ~ *cracco* ‘instrument with a hook’ and OE *crycc*, OS *krukka*, and OHG *krucka* ‘crutch, staff’. The nickname is explained as being given to the king by a man named Vöggr (Wiggo) in Snorri’s *Skáldskaparmál*, the king’s eponymous saga, and Saxo’s *Gesta Danorum*. The use of the nickname to describe a lanky physical stature is easy to imagine. Cf. the nicknames *stafr* ‘staff, stick’, *stikublígr* ‘stick who gazes, gazing lanky person’, and *stong* ‘pole’.

**269. kráka** (x2) ‘crow’: Úlfr kráka Hreiðarsson (110 S: son Kráku-Hreiðars, 131, 190, 191); Qndóttir kráka Erlingsson (248, 249, 251, 260, 261, 263, 265, 267, 280, 281). The nickname may have a connection to the dark appearance of crows, but it may have also referred to the dark nature of crows as carrion birds (like ravens) associated with death and battle. Regarding Úlfr, it is possible that he inherited the nickname from his father *Kráku-Hreiðarr* ‘Crow-’ Hreiðarr (an original settler of Iceland), if the variant in *Sturlubók* is not a mistake. See the nickname *græningarrjúpa* ‘young ptarmigan’.

**270. krákr** ‘crow’: Þorleifr krákr Holta-Þórisson (342). *Krákr* is an uncommon masculine variant of f. *kráka* ‘crow’. It also occurs as a first name.

**271. Kráku-** ‘Crow-’: Kráku-Hreiðarr Ófeigsson (*Inm* 232, 233). It is the hyphenated form of the noun *kráka* ‘crow’. He may have received the nickname from prowess in battle, suggesting that he would have “fed the crows” with bodies of the slain, but such a connection is unknown. *HPE*: Crow-Hreidar.

**272. krákunef** ‘crow nose’: Þórðr krákunef (173, 174). *Nef* ‘beak, nose’ is possibly used

synecdochically as a *pars pro toto* meaning ‘crow man’, but just as likely it could be referring to a pointed nose resembling a crow’s beak. The family name derived from Þórðr and his nickname is *Krákneflingar* ‘descendants of Krákunef’. See the nickname *dúfunef* ‘dove nose’. *HPE*: Crow-Beak.

**273. en kristna** ‘the Christian’: Gróa en kristna Geirleifsdóttir (173). *FJ* (249) suggests that the nickname was probably given to insult those who had converted while the majority were still heathen. It is the weak feminine form of the adj. *kristinn* ‘Christian’. In most cases, the nickname was originally used to mock early Christian converts, but after Christianization it became a celebrated nickname for one’s Christian ancestors.

**274. enn kristni** ‘the Christian’: Jörundr enn kristni Ketilsson í Gørðum (60, 61, 62, 64, 396). Cf. *en kristna* ‘the Christian’, above. It is the weak form of the adj. *kristinn* ‘Christian’.

**275. \*kroppa** ‘scratch, pick; bump?’: Gunnólfr kroppa Þórisson í Fagravík (*Inm* 288). *FJ* (336) notes that the nickname can mean several things and could be connected with *kreppa* (‘to cripple’) and *kroppinn* ‘with a bent hand, crippled’ or derived from *kroppr* (‘hump, bump’), though it is, most likely, connected to the verb *kroppa* ‘to pick, scratch’. *Lind* (221) suggests it is the same as the verb *kroppa* ‘to scratch, pick, crop’. It is uncertain whether it is a substantived form of the verb *kroppa* meaning ‘scratch, pick’ or a feminine side form of m. *kroppr* ‘hump, bump’, though both meanings would be suitable as a nickname. A connection to *kroppinn* ‘crippled’ would also function well as a nickname, but it is unclear how it could be related from an etymological point of view. *HPE*: Crop.

**276. krókr** (x2) ‘hook’: Þorvaldr krókr Þórisson á Grund (255, 264); Þórarinn krókr (*Inm* 160). *Lind* (220-21) notes that as a nickname it probably refers in general to stooping posture, but can also refer to insidiousness, deceitfulness, or a tendency to take windy paths. The nickname probably refers to a lost event involving a hook, in particular one



used for fishing. *Lind* is likely reading too deeply into it in search of a suitable mental or physical meaning when the most basic sense of the word works just as well. *HPE*: Hook.

**277. krumr** (x2) ‘(the) curved, crooked’: Þorbjörn krumr Gnúpa-Bárðarson (322, 323); Þorbjörn krumr í Hólum (90, 91). *FJ* (336) says that it is identical with Dan. *krum* ‘curved, crooked’ (which is not otherwise found in Old Icelandic), the word probably behind *kruma* ‘curved, crooked hand’. *Lind* (222) equates it to NNorw. *krum* ‘stiff and crooked in the fingers from wetness and cold’. *CV* (357) wonders if it is a form of *krummi* ‘pet name of a raven, perhaps *Crook-beak*’. *DV* (332) notes that *krummr* ‘curved, crooked’ is a borrowing from MLG *krumm* ‘curved, crooked’. *ÍO* (510) suggests the same as *Lind* and also note that the Danish form is a borrowing from MLG *krum* ‘curved, bent’ (< OS *krumb*). While the meaning is clear, the origin of the word is unknown, although it may represent a remnant in Old Norse-Icelandic of the adjective preserved only in West Germanic. From the nickname comes the name of his descendants, *Krymlingar*. *HPE*: the Bent.

**278. Krømu-** ‘Squeeze-’: Krømu-Oddr (*Inm* 74). *FJ* (336) says that it comes from an unattested *\*krama*, which may be a female name or nickname (from *krøm* ‘a long lasting, but not serious sickness’), or from a lost verb meaning ‘to paw at, grab’. *Lind* (223) states that it is a genitive of a feminine noun *\*krama*, perhaps related to NNorw. *krama* ‘to squish, squeeze’ or the noun Swed. *kramning* ‘squeeze’ in the sense of *gastkramning* ‘ghost squeeze’, a folk belief used to explain an unexpected sickness. The Swedish verb *krama* ‘hug, embrace’ goes back to its original meaning ‘to squeeze’ (as in Old Swedish), and it is surprising that *Lind* ignored it. While the verb *\*krama* is unattested in Old Icelandic, there is a reflexive form *kramask* ‘to pine and waste’, which is related to *kremja* ‘to squeeze, press, bruise’ and the noun *krøm* ‘a pining, wasting sickness’. It is probably also related to OE *crammian* ‘to cram, stuff’ (cf. Engl. *cram*).

**279. kuggi** (x2) ‘cog (type of ship)’: Þorgrímr kuggi Hjálmólfsson (234); Þorkell kuggi

Þórðarson (117 *Kuggi*, 199). *FJ* (280) defines it as ‘cog, a type of merchant ship’; *Lind* (224) glosses it as ‘a type of merchant ship’. *CV* (357) glosses *kuggr* as ‘a cog, a kind of ship, but originally (as is probable) a foreign ship, Saxon, Hanseatic, or the like’. *Kuggr* ~ *kuggi* ‘cog’ is indeed a type of ship foreign to Scandinavia used primarily in the Baltic from the tenth century on (later, it was most commonly used by the Hansa). *Kuggi* may represent a secondary formation of *kuggr*, although both *kuggr* and *kuggi* were borrowed from Low Germ. *kogge*.

**280. kúla** ‘bump, growth, hump’: Guðbrandr *kúla* (198, 215). *FJ* (233) defines it as ‘kugle’ (sphere) and suggests that it can mean both ‘growth on the body’ and ‘a rising after a strike’ or ‘bump, hump’. *Lind* (224-25) glosses it as ‘knöl, kut, puckel’ (bump, stoop, hunch). *CV* (360) glosses the common noun as ‘ball, knob’. It must refer to a physical deformity, but it is unclear whether it refers to a hump on his back in particular. Cf. the nickname *auðkúla* ‘wealth bump’. *HPE*: Globe.

**281. kváran** ‘sandal, shoe’ (Gaelic): Óláfr *kváran*, konungr á Írlandi (71). *FJ* (239) glosses it simply as ‘sko’ (shoe) and says that it is Irish. *Lind* (228-29) defers his explanation to Marstrander (1915, 52), where under the word *Inscoa* it explains that OIr *cuarán* represents a type of leather wrapped around the foot and held in place with straps. The name of the tenth century Norse king of Dublin and Northumbria is also found in Irish sources with a Norse calque of his Irish nickname as OIr *Amlaib Inscoa* ‘Ólafr insole’ < ON \**inn-skóar* ‘insoles’. See the nickname *bjóla* ‘small mouth’.

**282. Kveld-** ‘Evening-’: *Kveld-Úlfr Brunda-Bjálfa*son (68 *Úlfr*, 70, 71, 346, 348). *FJ* (337) relies on the explanation of his nickname in *Egils saga*, where it explains *Úlfr* becoming irritable when the evening approached because of his early bedtime and tendency to wake up very early. The saga goes further than *FJ* explains, and notes that people talked about *Úlfr* and said he was *mjök hamrammr* ‘very strong (as a result of shape-shifting)’. The origin of his nickname may recall his grumpy behavior in the evenings, but the connection to shape-shifting in his family cannot be ignored. It could

then imply that his behavior in the evening was connected to shape-shifting in the manner of a werewolf, and such a connection would not be unfounded considering that his first name *Úlfr* means ‘wolf’.

**283. enn kvensami** ‘the amorous’: Hjørleifr enn kvensami Hjørsson Hjørðakonungr (150, 151). *FJ* (260) glosses it as ‘den kvindekære’ (the one dear to women). *CV* (362) defines it as ‘given to women’. It is the weak form of the adj. *kvensamr* ‘amorous’. It must refer to his success with women, and it is tempting to translate it as ‘ladies’ man’, to do justice to the sense in which the word should be understood.

**284. enn kyrri** ‘the quiet’: Þorbjörn enn kyrri Ófeigsson (343, 344). It is the weak form of the adj. *kyrr* ‘still, quiet, peaceful’.

**285. kǫgurr** (x2) ‘bedspread, blanket’: Grímr kǫgurr á Brekku (184, 185); Vémundur kǫgurr Þórisson (257, 274, 277). *FJ* (240) glosses it as ‘tæppe’ (cloth covering, blanket). *CV* (368) glosses it as ‘quilt with a fringe, counterpane, bed-cover’. If the nickname refers to a specific quilt or blanket, it likely means that Grímr had a very fine one. *HPE*: Fringe.

**286. kǫrtr** ‘small; short horn’: Steinbjörn kǫrtr Refsson (*Inm* 289, 290 S: kǫtr ‘cat’, 291). *FJ* (227) glosses it as ‘the small’ and assumes that it is masculine variant of f. *karta* ‘a tree bud’ (one of the meanings in the modern language), and from there a small growth or a small object. *CV* (368) states that it is a masculine variant of f. *karta* (‘a short horn’) and questions whether it means the same. *DV* (342) equates it to NNorw. *kort* ~ *kart* ‘unripe fruit, uneven tree bark’ and Swed. *kart* ‘unripe fruit’. *ÍO* (539) suggests that it is likely related to *karta* ‘small bump or growth, small bud’ and *kurt* ‘small, short horn’. From an etymological point of view, the meaning ‘small horn’ must have developed after the original one used to describe something small and still developing, but that makes it no easier to determine which meaning is implied here. *HPE*: Cart (this is an unacceptable translation).

**287. kotttr** ‘cat’: Þórðr kotttr Þórðarson (123, 142). The reference of the nickname is unknown, but it may refer to Þórðr having been fond of a pet cat, or perhaps he resembled a cat in appearance (small and slender?) or personality (strong hunting instinct, slyness?). Domesticated cats were brought with the early settlers to Iceland and were used, as they still are in rural areas and many other places in the world, for rodent and pest control. *HPE*: Cat.

## L

**288. lafskegg** ‘dangling beard’: Ófeigr lafskegg Øxna-Þórisson (232, 233). *FJ* (207) glosses it as ‘med nedhængende skæg’ (with a drooping beard). *Lind* (233) suggests a connection with ON *lafa* ~ NNorw. *lava* ‘dangle, hang down’, as well as NNorw. *lav* ‘hanging moss’ and Swed. *lav* ‘lichen’. *CV* (369) glosses it as ‘wag-beard’. The nickname probably implies a long, bushy beard, perhaps one that resembles moss hanging from trees as found in thick, damp woods and forests (Ófeigr lived in Norway, and such places there are not uncommon). Cf. the nicknames *flöskuskegg* ‘flask beard’ and *refskegg* ‘fox beard’. *HPE*: Dangle-Beard.

**289. enn lági** (x2) ‘the low, short’: Steinólfr enn lági Hrólffson (*lnm* 152, 153, 156, 157, 160, 161, 162, 201); Steinólfr enn lági Qlvisson (253, 268, 379). *Lind* (234) glosses it as ‘den lågvækste’ (the short, low-grown). It is the weak form of the adj. *lágr* ‘low, short’.

**290. lambi** (x3) ‘lamb; man with a lamb’: Eyvindr lambi Berðlu-Kárason (348, 349); Þorgeirr lambi á Lambastöðum (92, 93, 168, 169); Þórðr lambi (57). The nickname is a form of n. *lamb* ‘lamb’ with the suffix *-i*, a commonly used suffix to create nicknames from common nouns. In this case it is probably identical in meaning with the common noun *lamb*, but it could also mean ‘man with a lamb’. The meaning of it when applied to a human is not entirely clear, although the association of young sheep with gentleness may have existed in Old Norse society. *Lambi* is also found as a first name.

**291. langháls** ‘long neck’: Óláfr langháls Bjarnarson (86 Óleifr, 302). It is composed of the adj. *langr* ‘long’ and the noun *háls* ‘neck’. The meaning of it is probably literal, but the second part could be used as a *pars pro toto* (‘neck’ = ‘man’), in which case the meaning of *langr* would mean ‘tall’ (thus, ‘tall man’). See the nickname *háls* ‘neck’.

*HPE*: Long-Neck.

**292. langhøfði** ‘long head’: Þorgeirr langhøfði Þorfinnsson (172, 173, 174). Composed of the adj. *langr* ‘long, tall’ and *høfði* ‘head’. It is possible, though unlikely, that the nickname refers to the head on his boat. It is also possible that it is used as a *pars pro toto* to mean ‘a head (= man) who is tall’. See the nickname *høfði* ‘head; headland’. *HPE*:

Long-Head.

**293. laxakarl** ‘man who fishes for salmon’: Þorbjörn laxakarl (*Inm* 380, 381). The nickname almost looks like a designator of his occupation and seems to mean ‘a man who fishes for salmon’, but it could also refer to ‘a man who sells salmon’. *HPE*: the Salmoner (this is a good translation, but the term is forced).

**294. leðrháls** ‘leather neck’: Þórir leðrháls Þorsteinsson (274, 277, 283). The nickname is explained in *Landnámabók* where it says he cut a hole in an oxhide to make a cheap piece of armor before a battle in Fitjar, Norway. It is, most likely, meant to ridicule his poverty, but it could denote his quick-wittedness and ability to make the best out of a bad situation. (While unrelated in any direct way, the term *leatherneck* is slang for a U.S. Marine, a term which originated in military fashion of the 18th and 19th centuries. The use of a leather collar by Marines was probably not for protection but instead to give soldiers better aim by keeping the neck firmly in place.) See the nickname *háls* ‘neck’.

*HPE*: Leather-Neck.

**295. \*leggjaldi** ‘the leggy, one with strange legs; builder?’: Þórðr leggjaldi Molda-Gnúpsson (330, 331). *FJ* (337-38) suggests that the name is from the verb *leggja* (‘to lay, place; to build’) and has to do with stacking pieces of earth. *Lind* (241) derives the

nickname from the noun *leggr* ‘leg’ and wonders whether it refers to being equipped with good legs or from some flaw about them. *DV* (350) derives it from *leggj-valdi* under the heading *leggr* ‘leg’. *ÍO* (551) glosses it as ‘sá sem hefur ólögulega fætur eða fótleggi’ (one who has misshapen feet or legs). The difficulty in knowing its meaning is compounded by the fact that the noun *leggr* ‘leg’ is a *ja*-stem. The suffix *-aldi* is negative and implies something wrong with the individual (cf. the nicknames *beig-aldi* ‘coward’, *beisk-aldi* ‘the bitter’, and *hím-aldi* ‘laggard’). It also occurs in *Rígsþula* as the name of one of Þræl’s sons (like another of his sons, *Digr-aldi* ‘the fatty’), where *Leggjaldi* builds fences.

**296. leggr** ‘leg’: Þorsteinn leggr Bjarnarson (*Inm* 314). Most likely, it refers to a flaw of some kind on his leg such as a wound, a scar, a deformity, or something similar. Later, it was adopted as a first name. See the nickname *auga* ‘eye’. *HPE*: Leg.

**297. leifr** ‘heir, descendant’: Þorkell leifr enn hávi Þorfinnsson (274, 275 Þórisson). Most likely it refers to a son who was a “remnant” after his father’s death. It is probably closely related to the noun f. *leif* ‘inheritance, patrimony’ and could be synonymous with it. Also occurs as a first name *Leifr* (cf. *Leifr inn heppni* ‘the lucky’) known in compounds across the Germanic world (cf. OE *Wig-laf* and the Latinized Germanic name *Daga-laifus*).

**298. lína** ‘line (cord or rope)’: Þórir lína í Breiðvík (*Inm* 302). *FJ* (270) derives it from *lín* ‘flax’ but says that the meaning is uncertain. *Lind* (243) suggests that it is the same as the noun *lína* ‘line, rope’ or the Eddic meaning of *lína* ‘veil’ (from *lín* ‘linen’), but that if the vowel is short it would mean ‘alleviation, easing’. While its origin is obscure, it is not difficult to imagine a circumstance involving a rope giving rise to the nickname, like climbing, traveling by boat, leading an animal, etc. *HPE*: Line.

**299. enn litli** ‘the small’: Oddi enn litli á Rangárvöllum (356). *FJ* (226) suggests that in many cases it refers to one’s size in a positive way, that is one is more likely to be swifter and braver, the smaller one’s stature is. It is the weak form of the adj. *lítill* ‘little, small’.

**300. en ljósa** ‘the bright, fair’: *Æsa en ljósa* (150). It is the weak feminine form of adj. *ljóss* ‘bright, light; light-colored, fair’ and must have been a positive description of her appearance.

**301. loðbrók** ‘hairy breeches, fur pants’: Ragnarr loðbrók Sigurðarson (214, 239, 241). The nickname of the legendary Danish king is composed of *loð* ‘shag, rough fur’ and *brók* ‘breech, one leg of a pair of pants’. It is explained in Ragnarr’s eponymous saga as coming from his strange clothing made cleverly with tar and pitch to protect him in a battle against a serpent. Whether he wore such a pair of furry pants just once or often is unknown. Cf. the nickname *snúinbrók* ‘twisted breeches’.

**302. loðinhofði** ‘hairy head’: Ásbjörn loðinhofði (298). It is composed of the adj. *loðinn* ‘hairy, shaggy’ and *hofði* ‘head’. See the nickname *hofði* ‘head; headland’. *HPE*: Shaggy-Head.

**303. loðinkinni** ‘man with hairy cheeks’: Grímr loðinkinni ór Hrafnistu (176, 177, 271). It is composed of the adj. *loðinn* ‘hairy, shaggy’ and *kinn-i*, where f. *kinn* has the frequently used nickname suffix *-i* to alter its meaning to ‘man with a hairy cheek’. See the nickname *blákinn* ‘blue cheek’. *HPE*: Hairy-Cheek.

**304. \*loki** ‘lock; one who locks; the sluggish’: Þorbjörn loki Bøðmóðsson (*Inm* 165). *FJ* (260) suggests that it is the god Loki’s name here and is used to denote someone deceitful or crafty. Such a link is possible but unlikely. *Lind* (247) gives the vowel as long (*lóki*) and suggests a possible relation to NNorw. *loke* ‘fist, broad hand’ or NNorw. *lok*, *lokkje* ‘heavy and slow person’. *CV* (397) glosses the noun *loki* as ‘a loop on a thread’, but this is a late form (17<sup>th</sup> century) and can hardly be the nickname. *ÍO* (575) says that the nickname (*lóki*, as in *Lind*) is the same as NNorw. *lok*, *lokk(j)e* ‘slow and sluggish person’ and related to NNorw. *loken* ‘exhausted, weak’ (the past participle *loken* goes back to ON *lóka* ‘let fall, hang down’). Several other possibilities exist, none of which bring the meaning any closer. It could be an agentive form of the verb *loka* ‘to lock,

shut’, thus, ‘one who locks or shuts’, or masculine side-form of the related noun *loka* ‘lock, latch’. It could also be a nickname form of the noun *lok* ‘cover, lid; end; weed’ with the suffix *-i*, thus, ‘the man with a lid; the man at the end; the man with weeds’.

**305. lunan** ‘little blackbird’ (Gaelic): Þorsteinn lunan (*lnm* 366 H: launan, S: luna). *FJ* (338) defers the meaning to Craigie (1897, 448), where it is said to be derived from either *lonán* (‘little blackbird’) or *lommán* (‘little bare one’). *ÍO* (583) says that the origin is uncertain, but that it is probably from OIr *Lonán*. *Lonán* is more probable and is the diminutive of OIr *lon* ‘blackbird’. The manuscript variants “launan” and “luna” are not helpful. There is no information about Þorsteinn spending time in the British Isles, who is only described briefly in *Landnámabók*: Þorsteinn lunan hét maðr norrænn ok farmaðr mikill (There was a Norse man and great trader named Þorsteinn *lunan*). *Lunan* also appears in the Icelandic place name *Lunansholt* (named after the settler) and the compound female name *Lunan-ey* from a 15<sup>th</sup> century runic inscription found in Bergen (B238). See the nickname *bjóla* ‘small mouth’.

**306. lútandi** ‘(the) stooping, bending down’: Erpr lútandi (82). *FJ* (231) glosses it as ‘den ludende’ (the slouching, bending down). Present participle of the verb *lúta* ‘to bow down, slouch, stoop’. See the nickname *gjallandi* ‘man with a resounding voice’. *HPE*: the Stooping.

**307. Lög-** ‘Law-’: Lög-Skapti Þóroddsson (381). *Lög* ‘law, laws’ is always neuter plural, and the hyphenated nickname is nominative or accusative (a less common occurrence than the usual genitives; *Laga-* would be expected). Skapti was lawspeaker of Iceland from 1004-1030 and creator of the fifth court (an appeals court), and he was well-known in this role in many of the *Íslendingasögur*. The nickname here almost looks like an occupational description.

**308. lǫngubak** ‘ling (fish) back’: Ljótr lǫngubak (378). *FJ* (216) and *Lind* (250) gloss it ‘ling back’. The first component is an oblique form of *langa* ‘ling (fish)’, and the second



part *bak* ‘back’. Although the meaning of the compound is clear, the reference of the nickname is unknown. Cf. other nicknames whose second component is also *-bak*, *flǫskubak* ‘flask back’ and *tǫskubak* ‘pouch back’, and also other nicknames referring to fish *hrogn* ‘roe (fish eggs)’, *reyðr* ‘rorqual (whale); Arctic char’, and *upsi* ‘pollock, cod’.

## M

**309. enn magri** ‘the lean’: Helgi enn magri Eyvindarson (*lnm* 136, 161, 162 Magr-Helgi, 170 Magr-Helgi, 171, 180, 181, 190, 191, 248, 249, 250-53, 255, 256, 259, 264, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 272, 276, 278 Magr-Helgi, 281, 286, 379, 396, 397). It is the weak form of the adj. *magr* ‘lean’; *-r* is part of the root (cf. Engl. *meager*). Helgi’s nickname is explained in *Landnámabók* to have been given to him because his parents found him nearly starved to death after leaving him with bad foster parents in the Hebrides.

**310. máni** (x2) ‘moon’: Þorfiðr máni Áskelsson (*lnm* 274 Þ: Þróndr); Þorkell máni Þorsteinsson (46, 47, 228, 358). The background of the nickname is unknown, and one can only speculate on its meaning as a nickname. Perhaps it is a reference to mythology (where *Máni* [Moon] and his sister *Sól* [Sun] are chased around the heavens by wolves), to an appearance resembling the moon (bright or round?), or to an important event that happened at night. *Máni* also appears as a first name. *HPE*: Moon.

**311. \*manvitsbrekka** (x2) ‘slope of understanding; paragon of intelligence; breaker of people’s wits’: Ástríðr manvitsbrekka Móðólfsdóttir (301, 301, 322, 323); Jórunn manvitsbrekka Ketilsdóttir (322, 323). *FJ* (243) glosses it as ‘mandevits (menneskesforstands) brink’ (brink of human understanding) and says that *brekka* is used here to allude to an ample bosom (like the nickname *knarrarbringa* ‘ship chest’). Any connection of the second part with a woman’s breast appears to be fanciful. *Lind* (252) says only “betydelsen dunkel” (the meaning [is] obscure). *CV* (411) does not gloss the nickname but glosses the noun *mann-vit* as “‘man-wit,’ understanding with the notion of ‘mother’s wit,’ good sense, as opp. to *bók-vit* (‘book-wit’)”. The most common meaning

of the second part, *brekka*, is ‘slope (as on a hillside)’, but when compounded as *manvitsbrekka* ‘slope of understanding’, the reference is unclear. Tveitane (1977, 254ff) argues against the conventional interpretation of the second part of the nickname *brekka* as ‘steep slope’ and instead suggests that it means ‘breaker’, citing K. Maurer’s gloss (1855, 96, note 18) ‘Männerwitzbrecherin’ ([female] breaker of men’s wits). He supposes that it is a feminine form of an archaic noun *breki* ‘breaker’, found only in the Eddic poems *Reginismál* and *Sigrdrífumál*; thus, the nickname is to be understood as ‘breaker of wisdom’. He does note that the geminate poses an etymological problem for this interpretation (1977, 260), and a solution to it is lacking. I would suggest that if the interpretation ‘breaker of wit, understanding’ is correct, the form *brekka* with a geminate (that is, not *\*breka*) could be based on a scribal misunderstanding of the nickname because of the fact that the word was no longer current in the language and only *brekka* ‘steep slope’ was familiar. Mundal (1991, 127ff) gives a different interpretation of the nickname, suggesting that the first part means not ‘man’s wit’ but ‘wit of the mind’ (*man-*, a variant of *mun(r)* ‘mind’), and the second part *brekka* is used to allude to a ‘woman’ in a poetic way; thus, the nickname would mean ‘woman of intelligence’. She draws this conclusion primarily from the fact that Jórunn’s sisters and her son seem to have nicknames related to mental qualities: Auðr in *djúpúðga* ‘the deep minded’, Þórunn *hyrna* ‘horned animal; point of an ax head (metaphorically, ‘the sharp one’), and Ketill *inn fíflski* ‘the foolish’. Mundal’s interpretation is a stretch on both accounts, and what remains viable are the usual interpretations ‘slope of understanding’ (metaphorically, ‘paragon of intelligence’), or Maurer’s ‘breaker of men’s wits’; to avoid misunderstanding of ‘men’s wits’ as belonging solely to men (as though she were a *femme fatale*), ‘breaker of people’s wits or understanding, one who confounds’ is better to avoid a discussion of gender. *HPE*: Wisdom-Slope.

**312. meinfretr** ‘harm-fart’: Eysteinn meinfretr Álfsson (*Inm* 144, 145, 211, 213). It is composed of the nouns *mein* ‘harm, hurt’ and *fretr* ‘fart’. Like the legendary Norse king Eysteinn *fretr* ‘fart’ (Lat. *Bumbus* ‘fart’), the nickname commemorates either a

particularly embarrassing event involving passing gas or a general habit of it (in this case, it must have been especially noxious or loud). *HPE*: Foul-Fart.

**313. meldún** ‘Máel Dúin’ (Gaelic personal name): Þorgeirr meldún í Tungufelli (*Inm* 72, 88, 89). *FJ* (340) says that it is the Celtic name *Mæl-Dúin*. *ÍO* (613-14) describes the name as composed of OIr *máel* ‘servant’, as found in the names *Melpatrekr* and *Melkólfr*, and *Dúin* ‘fortress’, meaning ‘Dúin’s servant’. *ÍO*’s interpretation is probably mistaken, since the second part is OIr *dúin* ‘fortress’, thus it would mean ‘servant of the fortress’. *Mæl Dúin* is the name of a seventh century Scottish king (of Irish extraction), as well as the protagonist of the tenth century Old Irish tale *The Voyage of Máel Dúin*. See the nickname *bjóla* ‘small mouth’.

**314. miðlungr** ‘middle child; (the) mediocre, average’: Þorleifr miðlungr Bøðvarsson (310, 311). *FJ* (340) suggests that it is from either *meðal* (‘middle, average’) or *miðr* (‘mid-’) and suggests that it means ‘in the middle, middling’ and is well-known to have a negative connotation (less than good) like the adverb *miðlung* (‘middlingly, indifferently, poorly’). *Lind* (256) derives it from the noun *mið* ‘middle’ and suggests that it may refer to him being the middle child of three siblings. *ÍO* (620-21) glosses it as ‘sá sem er í miðið (t.d. að aldri)’ (he who is in the middle [for example, in age]) and suggests that it is the same as NNorw. *melung*, *meling*, *midling* ‘one in the middle, for example, the middle brother’. It is unknown whether Þorleifr was a middle child, and it is also uncertain whether it was meant as an insult or a description of his position in the family. It is also unclear whether the nickname was meant in the other way, that is, as an adjective used to insult his size, character, performance (in battle?), or something else.

**315. mikill** ‘(the) great (size/height)’: Þórðr mikill Ævarsson á Mikilsstöðum (*Inm* 224, 225). Strong adjectival nicknames are less common than weak ones.

**316. en mikla** ‘the great (in size and height)’: Þórdís en mikla Þorgeirsdóttir (365, 366). It is the weak feminine form of the adj. *mikill* ‘great, big (in size)’.

**317. enn mikli** (x3) ‘the great (size and height)’: Hrolleifr enn mikli Arnaldsson (*lnm* 220, 221, 222, 242); Refr enn mikli (100, 101); Þorgrímr enn mikli Þorgeirsson (342 M: Þorgeirr). It is the weak form of the adj. *mikill* ‘great, big (in size)’.

**318. enn mildi** ‘the generous’: Heðinn enn mildi Þorbjarnarson (269). It is the weak form of the adj. *mildr* ‘gentle; generous, munificent’.

**319. mjóbeinn** ‘thin-legged’: Þrándr mjóbeinn (*lnm* 152, 153, 154, 161, 268). It is composed of the adj. *mjór* ‘thin, slender’ and the adj. *beinn* ‘legged’. See the nickname *berbeinn* ‘barelegged, barefoot’. *HPE*: Slender-Legged.

**320. en mjóva** ‘the slim, slender’: Hildr en mjóva Høgnadóttir (150). It is the weak feminine form of the adj. *mjór* ‘slim, slender, narrow’.

**321. enn mjóvi** ‘the slim, slender’ (x4): Atli jarl enn mjóvi Hundólfsson (40, 41, 370, 371, 396, 397); Oddr enn mjóvi Helgason frá Mjósyndi (356, 358, 364); Ormr enn mjóvi at Fróðá (*lnm* 112, 113, 159); Vermundr enn mjóvi Þorgrímsson (114, 116, 117, 124, 129, 180, 183). It is the weak form of the adj. *mjór* ‘slim, slender, narrow’, with the preserved -v- from its antique root containing \*-w- (< Gmc. \**maiwaR*).

**322. mjòksiglandi** (x3) ‘one who sails much (or often)’: Steinn mjòksiglandi Vígbjóðsson (*lnm* 92, 93, 129, 164); Þengill mjòksiglandi (*lnm* 272); Þrándr (Þróndr) mjòksiglandi Bjarnarson (*lnm* 248, 249, 251, 261, 267, 379). *Lind* (259) glosses it as ‘den snabbseglande’ (the fast sailing), which is an easy way out to avoid an awkward translation. The first part of the compound is *mjòk* ‘much’ and is here with the present participle of the verb *sigla* ‘to sail’. See the nickname *gjallandi* ‘man with a resounding voice’. *HPE*: the Hard-Sailing, the Fast-Sailing (it is impossible to translate *mjòk* smoothly into English in this context, so *HPE* can hardly be blamed for two different translations of the same nickname).

**323. mosháls** ‘moss neck’: Þóra mosháls Auðunardóttir (214). *FJ* (214) wonders whether it could have referred to hair on her neck or to having used moss to heal a neck wound. *Lind* (260) suggests that the first part, *mos-*, may be a mistaken form of the genitive of *már* ‘seagull’, whose genitive is often written “moos” or “mos” in manuscripts, thus, it would mean ‘seagull neck’. The explanation given by *Lind* is wrong. However, the reference is unclear, but it is possible that the first part alludes to a specific place (cf. the place name *Mosfell* ‘moss mountain’), since the noun *mosi* ‘moss’ can also refer to a mossy area or moorland. See the nickname *háls* ‘neck’. *HPE*: Moss-Neck.

**324. Mostrarskeggi** ‘man with a beard from Mostr (Norway)’: Þórólfr Mostrarskeggi (-skegg) Qrnólfsson (*lnm* 124-25, 126, 163, 164, 209, 397). This is a clear case for a *pars pro toto*, where *skeggi* (< *skegg* ‘beard’) means ‘man with a beard’, or simply ‘man’. The second component has the common nickname suffix *-i*. See the nickname *Fitjumskeggi* ‘beard on Fitjar’.

**325. muðr** ‘mouth’: Qlvir muðr Vilbaldsson (326, 327). *Muðr* is an older variant of *munnr* ‘mouth’ (cf. Go. *munþs* ‘mouth’; cf. also ON *maðr* ‘man, person’ from \**mann-R*). Most likely, a physical feature of the mouth is meant, something which distinguishes it from others (a big mouth, a small mouth, an injured mouth, etc.). It is also possible that a metaphorical interpretation is meant, where his mouth is likened to that of something negative, like Engl. *loudmouth*, *blabbermouth*, or the like. See the nickname *auga* ‘eye’. *HPE*: Mouth.

**326. Músa-** ‘Mice-’: Músa-Bolverkr Þórarinnsson (78, 79, 83). *Músa-* is the genitive plural of f. *mús* ‘mouse’. Its original reference is lost, but it may have alluded to him having mice as pets or as unwanted houseguests, or perhaps he was known for hunting them. *HPE*: Mice-Bolverk.

## N

**327. Nafar-** ‘Gimlet- (tool)’: Nafar-Helgi á Grindli (*lnm* 243). *FJ* (270) suggests that it

more likely represents *nafarr* ‘gimlet (boring tool)’ than the genitive of *nqf* ‘nave’ (*nave* can represent either the wheel hub or welded rings holding beams together in the corners of buildings). *Lind* (265) glosses it as ‘navare’ (large bore). One can only wonder what event gave rise to the name. *HPE*: Gimlet-Helgi.

**328. nefja** (x2) ‘nose’: Hrólfr nefja (314); Þrándr nefja (82). *FJ* (202) and *Lind* (267) suggest that it is derived from *nef* ‘nose’ and means the same. The noun *nef* is a neuter *ja*-stem (cf. gen. pl. *nefja* ‘of noses’ and the adj. *nefjaðr* ‘nebbed, beaked [of birds]’), thus, the *-ja* suffix of the feminine variant here is expected. The nickname must signify something peculiar about its bearer, probably a big nose. See the nickname *dúfunef* ‘dove nose’. *HPE*: Nose.

## Q

**329. enn óði** ‘the frantic’: Þorgeirr enn óði Ljótólfsson (244). It is the weak form of the adj. *óðr* ‘mad, frantic’. Cf. the name of the god *Óðinn*. *HPE*: the Frenzied.

**330. enn óargi** (x2) ‘the fierce’: Úlfr enn óargi ór Hrafnistu (68); Þorbjörn enn óargi (383). It is the weak form of the adj. *ó-argr* ‘wild, savage, fierce’. Without the negative prefix, *argr* ‘unmanly, effeminate’ is related to the *ergi* ‘unmanliness’ (with the connotation of passive homosexuality). The nickname means something like ‘the not unmanly (= the brave)’ and seems to be connected with battle prowess. *HPE*: the Fearless.

**331. en óborna** ‘the unborn, illegitimate’: Úlfrún en óborna Játmundardóttir (49, 312). *FJ* (341) suggests that it means ‘en, der er skåren ud af moders liv’ (one who is cut out from its mother). It is the weak feminine of the adj. *ó-borinn* ‘unborn, illegitimate’ (= ‘bastard’ in law codes).

**332. ofláti** ‘gaudy person, show-off’: Þorgeirr ofláti Arnórsson (244). *FJ* (256) glosses it as ‘den overmodige og flotte’ (the arrogant and flashy). *Lind* (270-71) says that it means

‘vain person’. *CV* (464) glosses it as ‘a gaudy person’. It is a noun formed with the prefix *of-* ‘overly’ and the noun *láti*, which refers to behavior and is derived from the verb *láta* ‘let, allow’ and is akin to the adjectival suffix *-látr* ‘mannered, minded’. *HPE*: the Swaggerer.

**333. ógæfa** ‘bad luck, misfortune’: Þorsteinn ógæfa Helgason (187). It is composed of the negative prefix *ó-* ‘un-’ and the noun *gæfa* ‘luck, fortune’. The circumstances behind the nickname are described in *Landnámabók*, where it says that Þorsteinn killed a Norwegian earl’s retainer, and the man who took him in, Vébjörn *Sygnatrausti* (‘champion of the people of Sogn’), had to sell his possessions and flee to Iceland. It is interesting that the bad luck behind the man’s nickname affected others more than himself. *HPE*: Ill-Luck.

**334. enn ómálgi** ‘the mute, untalkative’: Askr enn ómálgi (342, 343). It is the weak form of the adj. *ó-máligr* ‘untalkative, silent, mute’.

**335. ór búlkarúmi** ‘from the cargo hold’: Bøðmóðr ór búlkarúmi (92, 93). *Lind* (273) suggests that this is the same man as Bøðmóðr *ór skut* ‘from the stern’. It is likely that *Lind* is correct and that it is the same man with the two nickname variants, but in *Landnámabók* this Bøðmóðr is the grandfather of the settlers Steinn *mjoksiglandi* (‘one who sails often’) and Þórir *haustmyrkr* (‘autumn darkness’) and father of Vígbjóðr. The other Bøðmóðr is described in *Landnámabók* to be the father of the settler Þorbjörn *loki* (‘lock; one who locks; the sluggish’), but only *Gull-Þóris saga* lumps these individuals together. The use of a preposition phrase is unusual for nicknames, although it is not uncommon with geographic bynames (for example, *ór Hrafnistu* ‘from Hrafnista’ and *ór Geitlandi* ‘from Götaland’). The preposition *ór*, meaning ‘out of, from’, takes the dative and the second part is the compound *búlkarúm* (*búlki* ‘cargo’ and *rúm* ‘space, room’), referring to the cargo hold on a merchant vessel. The reference of the nickname is lost, but it is not inconceivable that it could allude to Bøðmóðr concealing himself in the cargo

in order to avoid capture (he was, after all, a great Viking and very unruly, according to the first chapter of *Gull-Þóris saga*). *HPE*: of the Cargo-Hold.

**336. ór skut** ‘from the stern’: Bøðmóðr ór skut (165). Cf. the discussion of the previous nickname *ór búlkarúmi* (‘from the cargo hold’).

**337. orðlokarr** (x2) ‘word plane (tool)’: Vémundr orðlokarr Þórólfsson (340 M: váganef ‘nose of the bay, nose from *Vágar* [common place name]’ Þórólfsson orðlokars, 341); Þórólfr orðlokarr Þrándarson (340). *FJ* (212) glosses it as ‘ordhövl’ (word plane [tool]) and says that it refers to an eloquent man. Each part of the compound is obvious on its own, *orð* ‘word’ and *lokarr* ‘plane (tool for shaping wood)’, but as a compound it is not easily interpreted. *FJ* may be right to assume that it refers to speaking well, as though he “shaves” and “smooths” his words in a refined way as a craftsman does wood. Another possibility, however, is that it could refer to his speech being used to insult others (“cutting words”). The poetic compounds *óðar-lokarr* ‘mind’s plane’ and *ömun-lokarr* ‘voice’s plane’ are both used to refer to ‘the tongue’ (cf. *CV* 397), so that connecting both parts of the compound for use as a nickname was not a stretch for whoever coined it. *HPE*: Word-Master.

**338. ormstunga** (x2) ‘serpent tongue’: Gunnlaugr ormstunga enn gamli Hrómundarson (54, 55, 83, 85); Gunnlaugr ormstunga Illugason (214). *FJ* (259) notes that the nickname implies a biting, poisonous tongue, and that the second Gunnlaugr is the grandson who inherited his name and nickname. The name denotes someone who speaks in a brash manner, spewing harsh words. In the younger Gunnlaugr’s eponymous saga, he is introduced as a difficult and ruthless individual who was also a poet. *HPE*: Adder-Tongue.

**339. orraskáld** ‘Orri’s poet’: Þorgils orraskáld Þorvarðsson (71). *FJ* (245) is uncertain and wonders whether the first part refers to a man for whom he composed poetry named *Orri* or a man with the nickname *orri* ‘heathcock (male black grouse)’. *Lind* (273)



suggests only that it referred to Þorgils having composed poetry for a man with the nickname *orri* ‘heathcock’. Eysteinn *orri* was the name of a Norwegian chieftain who died leading an unsuccessful charge at the Battle of Stamford Bridge in 1066. A connection to Eysteinn *orri* is implausible, however, since *Landnámabók* says that Þorgils *orraskáld* was with Óláfr *kváran* (possibly bearing the nickname *orri*), a mid-tenth century king of Dublin (945-947 and 952-980) and Northumbria (941-944 and 949-952).

**340. órækja** ‘(the) neglectful, reckless’: Mǫrðr *órækja* (333). *FJ* (296) glosses it as ‘skødesløshed’ (recklessness, carelessness) and suggests that it refers to someone who is indifferent and careless. *Lind* (273-74) says that it is derived from the verb *órækja* ‘neglect, not care about’. It is a substantivized form of the verb *ó-rækja* ‘to pay no heed, neglect’, composed of the negative prefix *ó-* ‘un-’ and *rækja* ‘to pay heed to, take care of’ (cf. Engl. *reckless* and archaic Engl. *reck* ‘give heed to’).

**341. óþveginn** ‘unwashed’: Ljótr *óþveginn* (*lnm* 282). Most likely, the nickname is meant as a literal description, but its reference is lost. *Þveginn* ‘washed’ is the strong form of the past participle of *þvá* ‘to wash’, here with the negative prefix *ó-*.

## P

**342. pái** ‘peacock’: Óláfr pái Hǫskuldsson (123, 143, 199). *CV* (475) states that the nickname was probably given to him by his Irish mother. The nickname refers to a handsome, flashy man (as the colorful tail feathers of the bird suggest), but whether it carries a negative undertone is not clear (excessively ornate or flashy?). At the end of chapter 16 of *Laxdæla saga*, Óláfr receives the nickname from his admiring father Hǫskuldr. The narrative explanation does not rule out the possibility that the name was given to him as a tongue-in-cheek insult. See the nickname *græningarrjúpa* ‘young ptarmigan’.

**343. \*parrak** meaning unknown: Hildir *parrak* (324). *FJ* (342) suggests that it is Celtic

and denotes an iron strap used to pen up cattle and related to the verb *parraka* as in *að parraka inni* ‘to keep children strictly inside’. *Lind* (275) says that it could be related to NNorw. *parak*, *parrak* ‘lamb and kid’. *CV* (475) gives the probable origin as Scots Gaelic *parrack*, which he does not gloss (it means ‘a small pen or enclosure’, but it comes from Old English). *DV* (423) glosses it as ‘Not, Beklemmung’ (distress, apprehension) and derives it from OE *parrak*, *pearroc* ‘enclosure, fence’ < Late Lat. *parricus* ‘enclosure, park’. *ÍO* (702) suggests that the nickname is the same as NNorw. *parak* ‘lamb and kid’ and gives the same etymology as *DV*. Considering that Hildir is the grandfather of an Icelandic settler who lived in the late eighth or early ninth century, it is not certain whether the nickname could be from Irish or a borrowing from Old English. In any case, the Anglo-Saxon word *pearroc* is a cognate of OHG *pfarrih* ~ *pferrih* ‘enclosure, pen’ (Ger. *Pferch* ‘pen, corral’), but the etymology of both is circular (from medieval Latin or to medieval Latin?) and remains disputed. A connection to the Sami word *parrak* ‘squirrel’s nest (drey), magpie’s nest’ is possible, since *Parrak* is found as a Sami nickname in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the meaning ‘bushy, messy hair’ (Læstadius 1831, 153; cf. Frändén 2010, 64). If so, this may be the only Old Norse nickname with a Sami origin. Any connection to French *perruque*, Italian *perrucca* ~ *parrucca* ‘wig’ (of disputed etymology) is highly unlikely.

**344. enn prúði** (x2) ‘the magnificent, splendid’: Eilífr enn prúði Kjallaksson (147, 148 ígrár, 149); Sólvi enn prúði Ásbrandsson (214, 215). It is the weak form of the adj. *prúðr* ‘fine, magnificent, stately’.

## R

**345. enn rakki** ‘the straight, upright; slender’: Oddr enn rakki Þorviðarson (98, 99).

It is the weak form the adj. *rakkr* ‘straight, slender’. *HPE*: the Erect.

**346. enn rammi** (x7) ‘the strong, mighty’: Án enn rammi 306 (P: Ønn); Atli enn rammi

Eilífsson (228, 242); Finnbogi enn rammi Ásbjarnarson (273); Illugi enn rammi Ásláksson (129, 131); Kollsveinn enn rammi á Kollsveinsstöðum (*lnm* 236); Steinrøðr enn rammi Þórisson (257, 258); Þormóðr enn rammi Haraldsson (*lnm* 244, 245). It is the weak form of adj. *rammr* ‘strong, mighty’.

**347. ranglátr** ‘(the) unrighteous, unjust’: Þorsteinn ranglátr Einarsson (241, 253, 255, 269). The adjective is strong, a feature which is rarer in nicknames. It is composed of *rangr* ‘crooked; wrong’ and *-látr* ‘mannered, minded’.

**348. Rauða-** ‘Iron Ore-’: Rauða-Björn (*lnm* 87, 88, 89). *FJ* (269) states that it is from *rauði* ‘bog iron ore’. *FJ* (269), *Lind* (287), and *CV* (483) all give the brief explanation of the nickname in the *Melabók* version of *Landnámabók*: Hann blés fyrstr manna rauða á Íslandi, ok var hann af því kallaðr Rauða-Björn (He was the first man to cast iron in Iceland and from this was called *Rauða-Björn*). *HPE*: Ore-Bjorn.

**349. rauðfeldr** (x2) ‘red cloak’: Ánn rauðfeldr Grímsson (*lnm* 176, 177, 178, 179); Ásgeirr rauðfeldr Herjólfsson (252, 254, 255). The nickname, most likely, refers to wearing such cloaks, but it could just as easily imply trading them. The red color may have been from a dye, from red-colored sheep skins, deer pelts, or even fox pelts. Cf. the nickname *gráfeldr* ‘gray cloak’. *HPE*: Red-Cloak.

**350. enn rauði** (x8) ‘the red’: Ármóðr enn rauði Þorbjarnarson (*lnm* 172, 174); Atli enn rauði Úlfsson (130, 161, 162, 163, 165); Auðun enn rauði í Hofsfelli (*lnm* 319); Egill enn rauði í Norðfirði (*lnm* 306); Illugi enn rauði Hrólfsson (63, 78, 79, 157); Karl enn rauði Þorsteinsson (244, 252, 253); Refr enn rauði Þorsteinsson (289 Þ: Úlfr); Sighvatr enn rauði (*lnm* 348, 349, 350, 351, 352, 396, 397). It is the weak form of the adj. *rauðr* ‘red’ and refers to hair color, but it could also suggest a ruddy complexion.

**351. rauði** ‘(the) red’: Eiríkr rauði Þorvaldsson (130-32, 133, 134, 135, 141, 163, 197). It is the same as *enn rauði* ‘the red’, but without the definite article.

**352. rauðkinn** ‘red cheek’: Yngvildr rauðkinn Ásgeirsdóttir (252 Þ: ráðkinn ‘counsel cheek, advice cheek?’). It probably refers to her complexion in a positive way and may be connected to blushing. See the nickname *blákinn* ‘blue cheek’. *HPE*: Fair-Cheek.

**353. rauðnefr** ‘red nose’: Þorsteinn rauðnefr Hrólffson (358, 365). It is composed of the adj. *rauðr* ‘red’ and *nef-r* ‘nose, beak’ with the nickname suffix *-r*, used to make the common noun agentive. It is, most likely, used synecdochically as a *pars pro toto* with the meaning ‘nose (= man) with red hair’, but could be taken literally to describe the appearance of a man with a ruddy nose. See the nickname *dúfunef* ‘dove nose’. *HPE*: Red-Nose.

**354. rauðr** (x2) ‘(the) red’: Þorgeirr rauðr Einarsson (194, 195 Rauðr); Rauðsynir (= synir Þorgeirs rauðs, 195); Þorsteinn rauðr Óleifsson (126, 136, 143, 144, 145, 164, 211, 213). The strong form of the adjective is much rarer in nicknames than the weak. It more likely refers to hair color, but it could also suggest a ruddy complexion.

**355. rauðskeggr** ‘red beard’: Hrólfr rauðskeggr (*lnm* 274, 358, 364). The first component is the adj. *rauðr*, which refers to the hair color of the second component *skeggr* ‘beard’. See the nickname *bláskeggr* ‘blue beard’. *HPE*: Red-Beard.

**356. \*raumr** ‘big, ugly, clownish person; giant (mythological); a person from Romsdal (Norway)’: Ketill raumr Ormsson (216 S: þrymr, 217). *FJ* (343) says that it means ‘person from Romsdal’, but that in general it is used to describe a big, difficult, and clumsy person. *Lind* (291) suggests that it may be a singular form of the ethnic name *Raumar*, which is found in the places *Raumsdalr* and *Raumaríki*. *CV* (484) glosses it as ‘a giant, Titan; a big, clownish person’. *DV* (435) says that the first meaning ‘inhabitant of Raumaríki’ comes from the name of the land and people *Raumar*, taken originally from the river *Raumelfr*. *DV* (435) also suggests that the second meaning is ‘grosser, hässlicher Kerl’ (big, ugly guy) is related to ON *rymr* ‘roaring, noise’ and NNorw. *rumla* ‘rattle, crash about’, but the origin of the Norwegian verb seems to be West Germanic (cf. Engl.

*rumble* and Ger. *rumpeln*). *ÍO* (745) glosses it as ‘stórvaxinn maður, hriki’ (large man, huge fellow) and says that it did not come from the ethnic name *Raumur* but from \**rumr*, as found in the compounds *galdra-r(a)umr* ‘great sorcerer’ and *stærðar-r(a)umur* ‘man of great size’. *ÍO* (745) also suggests that the original meaning was ‘a boisterous, rowdy person’ and that it is related to the verbs *ruma* ‘to chatter’, *raumska* ‘to begin to wake’, and *rymja* ‘to roar, scream’. It may be too convenient that *Landnámabók* describes Ketill as *ágætr hersir í Raumsdal í Noregi* (‘famous chieftain in Romsdal in Norway’), and one can only wonder whether his place of origin is derived from the nickname. However, if the meaning here is ‘big, clumsy person’ or ‘giant’ (the latter must be derived from the first), then it originally seems to have had something to do with producing loud sounds by “rumbling” and “rattling” about (like other sound-related nicknames that could just as well describe giants: *glumra* ‘rattler’, *glømmuðr* ‘(the) crasher’, *hrungnir* ‘the resounder’, and *þrymr* ‘loud noise, alarm’). The same root must have given rise to the river name *Raumelfr*. *Raumr* also occurs as a first name.

**357. refr** ‘fox’: Þórólfr refr Eysteinnsson (145, 211, 213). As a nickname it could refer to his physical appearance (red hair) or be meant metaphorically in reference to having the characteristic trickiness and slyness of a fox. *Refr* also occurs as a first name. *HPE*: Fox.

**358. refskegg** ‘fox beard’: Þórir refskegg (218). *FJ* (207) suggests that it, most likely, refers to the red color of his beard. Cf. the nicknames *flöskuskegg* ‘flask beard’ and *lafskegg* ‘dangling beard’. *HPE*: Fox-Beard.

**359. reyðarsíða** ‘rorqual side’: Björn reyðarsíða (302, 303). It is composed of the nouns *reyðr* ‘rorqual’ and *síða* ‘side’. Like the nickname *járnsíða* ‘iron side’, it may imply immunity to damage in battle, as though he has the thick, tough hide of a whale. The reference of the nickname, however, is unknown. *HPE*: Whale-Side.

**360. reyðr** ‘rorqual (whale); Arctic char’: Þorgeirr reyðr Rauða-Bjarnarson (90). *FJ*

(310) says that it is a type of whale called *balænoptera arctica* ‘rorqual’, but that it could also mean ‘trout’. *CV* (495) glosses the noun *reyðr* as ‘a kind of whale, from its reddish colour’, but also gives a second meaning of the word as ‘a kind of trout, *salmo alpinus*’ (‘Arctic char’). *ÍO* (756) notes that the noun comes from the adj. *rauðr* ‘red’, used to describe the color of the animals. Arctic char are also found with red coloring, so the connection with red color explains the origin of its use for whales and the fish. Whether the nickname refers to an event involving a whale or an Arctic char is unknown. It is found as the first part of a few place names in Iceland where it refers to the fish: *Reyðarvatn* ‘Char Lake’ and *Reyðarmúli* ‘Char Peak’, but *Reyðarfjörður* could mean either ‘Rorqual Fjord’ or ‘Char Fjord’ (more likely the whale than the fish). Cf. other nicknames referring to fish *hrogn* ‘roe (fish eggs)’, *lǫngubak* ‘ling back’, and *upsi* ‘pollock, cod’.

**361. enn ríki** (x5) ‘the powerful’: Elfráðr enn ríki (king of England 32, 33; Alfred the Great); Guðmundr enn ríki Eyjólfsson (216, 228, 229, 266, 283); Hákon jarl enn ríki Sigurðarson (188, 189, 314); Sigurðr enn ríki (280, 281); Sigurðr enn ríki Eysteinnsson, jarl í Orkneyjum (32, 33, 136, 138). It is the weak form of the adj. *ríkr* ‘powerful, mighty’.

**362. \*rosti** ‘violent, boisterous person; walrus; brawler; the noisy; rusty, reddish color’: Þórarinn rosti Há-Snorrason (199 S: tosti [pet name form of *Þorsteinn*]). *FJ* (255) glosses it as ‘overmod og frækhed’ (arrogance and insolence/audacity). *Lind* (297) cites only *FJ*’s gloss. *CV* (501) wonders whether the nickname is *rostungr* ‘walrus’; the noun *rosti* is glossed as ‘(metaphorically) a rough person, a brawler’, which is said to be synonymous with Icel. *rusti* ‘a clown’. *DV* (452) glosses it as ‘übermütiger Mensch’ (wanton, boisterous person) and says that it may come from Old French *ruste* ‘violent, rough’ (from Lat. *rusticus* ‘rural, plain, boorish’). *ÍO* (774) doubts a connection to Old French or Latin and suggests that it is related to Icel. *raust* (‘voice’), *rausa* (‘chatter, babble’), and *rosi* (‘rainy, windy climate; violence and loudness; boisterous person; violent rolling of the sea’), and also NNorw. *rusta* ‘to be noisy’ and Swed. *rusta* ‘to be

loud, roister'. Another possibility is that it is a remnant of a weak noun *\*rosti* 'rust (reddish color)', as found in *rost-ungr* 'walrus', where the first part is related to Engl. *rust* ~ Ger. *Rost* 'rust'. If it is indeed a preserved form of *\*rost* 'rusty thing, reddish color', it would then allude to reddish color and may mean something like 'the rusty, the red'.

**363. rotinn** 'rotten': Auðun rotinn Þórólfsson (*lhm* 266). It is the past participle of a lost verb *\*rjóta* 'to rot', akin to the surviving verb *rotna* 'to rot'. The nickname may have to do with an infected injury that had become putrid, but a metaphorical meaning is possible (rotten mind, rotten behavior?). *HPE*: the Rotten.

**364. rugga** 'rocking cradle; the rocking': Rauðr rugga í Naumudal (237, 252). *FJ* (344) glosses it as 'den rokkende, vraltende' (the rocking, swaying) and connects it to the verb *rugga* 'to rock, especially with the head and upper body' and the noun *rugga* 'cradle'. *Lind* (298) connects it to NNorw. *rugga* 'huge and powerful person' or 'careless and unruly fellow'; the connection is mistaken since *rugga* is the feminine form corresponding to *rugge* (meaning the same). There is no reason not to take the nickname to be synonymous with the common Old Norse verb *rugga* 'to rock (a cradle)' or noun *rugga* 'rocking cradle'. If it is a substantivized form of the verb, it may well go back to a more general meaning 'to rock', but if it is the noun, it may allude to an incident involving a cradle (perhaps an unfortunate incident involving bumping his child out of the cradle?). In addition, the nickname *ruggi*, a masculine form derived from the verb, is found in the corpus and seems to be synonymous with the nickname *rugga*.

**365. rúmgylta** 'bed sow, sow sleeping in a bed; grunting sow': Þuríðr rúmgylta (178 rymgylta 'roaring, grunting sow', 187, 189). *FJ* (305) glosses it as 'bed sow' and suggests that it refers to sleeping a long time; regarding the variant *rym-gylta*, he says that it probably means 'grunting sow' and is an incorrect variant. *Lind* (298) connects *rúm-* to the city of *Rome*, and suggests that her real nickname is *gylta* 'sow', while *rúm-* refers to a pilgrimage. *CV* (504) glosses it as 'a sleeping sow?'. *Lind*'s proposal is probably erroneous, if only because Þuríðr was a Norwegian born in the late ninth century, who,

according to *Landnámabók*, came with her husband from Agder, Norway to settle in the Westfjords with no mention of any time spent in a Christian land. The likelihood of her having been a Christian, let alone one taking part in a pilgrimage, is extremely small. The second part of the compound is a feminine form of *gǫltr* ‘boar’, an animal often found representing nobility, but the meaning of *rúm-* ‘room, space; room, seat, place; bed’ in the compound is difficult to see. *Rúm-* can hardly be the adj. *rúmr* ‘roomy, spacious’, since it is never used to describe living things. If *rym-* is the original form, it is probably the same as *rymr* ‘roaring (loud sound)’ (cf. the verb *rymja* ‘to roar, scream’); the gloss *FJ* gives (‘Grunting-’) is contextual. *HPE*: Grunt-Sow.

## S

**366. saurr** ‘mud, filth’: Eyjólfur saurr (130). *FJ* (299) glosses it as ‘smuds, skarn’ (dirt, waste, dung). *CV* (515) glosses it as ‘mud; dirt, excrements’. As a nickname it is clearly insulting and likely implies that this individual lived in squalor; it could also refer to an unfortunate event like a fall into the mud, but its reference is unknown.

**367. Sel-** ‘Seal-’: Sel-Þórir Grímsson (*Inm* 75, 96, 97, 98, 99, 127, 209, 397). It is a hyphenated form of m. *selr* ‘seal’, but it is not in the genitive as one would expect. According to *Landnámabók*, Þórir’s nickname comes from an incident while a young child at sea where he was put inside a seal skin to stay warm and received the blessing of a merman (a supernatural encounter).

**368. Sela-** ‘Seals-’: Sela-Kálfr Oddsson (234). *FJ* (311) suggests that it refers to seal hunting. It is the genitive plural of m. *selr* ‘seal’. It seems to allude to successful seal hunting, though it could refer to wearing seal pelts. A connection to *selkies* and seals of the folklore variety is possible, but an explanation of the nickname is lacking. Cf. other genitive plural nicknames referring to animals like *Hesta-* ‘Horses-’ and *Svína-* ‘Pigs-’.

**369. sjóni** ‘person with good sight’: Qnundur sjóni Ánason (90, 91, 112). *FJ* (200) wonders if it means ‘one with good sight’ and notes that it derived from *sjón* ‘sight,



eyesight'. *FJ*'s suggestion is reasonable. *Sjóni* appears to be a nickname form with the suffix *-i* added to the feminine noun *sjón* 'sight, the ability to see'. It is not connected to an ability to see the future like the adj. *spakr* 'wise, with the gift of prophetic sight'.

**370. skagi** 'low headland': Þorbjörn skagi (278). The noun *skagi* refers to a low cape or headland (a ness), in apposition to *høfði*, which represents a high headland. It could just as easily allude to a specific place (cf. the Icelandic place names *Skaga-fjörðr* and *Skaga-strönd*), but where exactly remains a mystery. Cf. the nickname *høfði* 'head; headland', where the same difficulty in interpretation is met.

**371. Skalla-** 'Bald Head-, Baldy-': Skalla-Grímr Kveld-Úlfsson (*lnm* 68, 70, 71, 73, 88 Grímr, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 143, 168, 209, 392, 393, 396, 397). It is the hyphenated form of *skalli* 'bald head', a term which is synonymous with the nickname *kollr* 'crown of the head'. Grímr's went bald at a younger age than others, and it is easy to imagine that the nickname refers to this unusual feature.

**372. skalli** 'bald head, baldy': Þormóðr skalli Høfða-Þórðarson (240). As a nickname, *skalli* is used to denote baldness, but the original reference of it is unknown (cf. *Skalla-Grímr*, whose premature baldness was strange enough for others to coin the nickname). See the similarly simple nicknames referring to the head like *høfði* 'head' and *kollr* 'crown of the head, head' and compounds with *-skalli* like *bjóðaskalli* 'baldy of Bjóðar', *bløðruskalli* 'blister baldy, bladder baldy', and *holtaskalli* 'baldy from Holtar'.

**373. skammhøndungr** 'short-handed, man with short arms': Skeggi skammhøndungr Gamlason (211, 212 Þ: skammhendingr, 213). *FJ* (217) glosses it as 'den kortarmede' (the short-armed), *Lind* (315) as 'den korthänte' (the short-handed), and *CV* (537) as 'short-hand'. It is composed of the adj. *skammr* 'short, stunted' and the noun *høndungr* 'hand', a form which must be derived from the common noun *hønd* 'hand'. It probably refers to a physical defect, perhaps a stunted arm, a deformed hand, or an injury. It could

also be used metaphorically to describe the inability of its bearer to reach his intended target in battle. *HPE*: Short-Hand.

**374. skapti** ‘man with a shaft’: Þormóðr skapti Óleifsson (*lnm* 379, 380). It is a nickname form of n. *skapt* ‘missile, shaft, handle’ with the suffix *-i*, giving it a human meaning ‘man with a shaft’. *Skapti* is also a common first name.

**375. skarfr** ‘cormorant (bird)’: Helgi skarfr Geirleifsson (58, 59, 172, 173, 174). *Lind* (316-17) notes that it may be the bird, but it could also be related to NNorw. *skarv* ‘bad person, wretch; waster, heavy eater’. *CV* (539) glosses the noun as ‘properly the green cormorant, pelicanus graculus’ (shag). Both the cormorant and the shag are larger birds that resemble pelicans in that they have long necks and long beaks. As a nickname, it alludes to the man resembling the bird either in appearance or voice. See the nickname *grœningarrjúpa* ‘young ptarmigan’. *HPE*: Cormorant.

**376. enn skarpi** ‘the sharp, keen’: Hrói enn skarpi (285). It is the weak form of the adj. *skarpr* ‘sharp, bitter, keen’.

**377. skattkaupandi** ‘tribute exchanger, tax collector’: Þóroddr skattkaupandi (180). *FJ* (277) notes that the nickname is probably sarcastic and cites the explanation of the nickname in *Eyrbyggja saga*. It says there that Þóroddr sold his ship to shipwrecked tax collectors from the Orkney Islands, desperately stranded on an uninhabited island north of Ireland after collecting tribute in Ireland, but in the sale of the boat he took an unfair share of their tax collections in exchange for the boat and a ride back to the Orkneys. The nickname is composed of *skattr* ‘tax, tribute’ and the present participle of the verb *kaupa* ‘to exchange’. See the nickname *gjallandi* ‘man with a resounding voice’. *HPE*: Tribute-Trader.

**378. skál** ‘bowl’: Þórhaddr skál Hafþjótsson (298 Þ: Þórðr). *Lind* (310) suggests the possibility that it refers to a place. *CV* (541) glosses it as ‘bowl; hollow (as in a place name); scales (only in the plural)’. The meaning ‘bowl’ is the most probable one, and

such a bowl was used for consuming liquids (for example, mead, water, or sour whey). The reference of the nickname is unknown, but it, most likely, commemorates an incident at table (breaking a bowl, excessive drinking?). *HPE*: Scales.

**379. skálaglamm** ‘scale tinkling’: Einarr skálaglamm Helgason (123). *FJ* (284) states the Einarr received the name because Earl Hákon once presented him with scale-weights, one side laden with gold and the other with silver, giving off a clanging, tinkling sound (the explanation occurs in *Jómsvíkinga saga*). It could refer to his affairs as a merchant and trader generally, perhaps one making such a large amount of money that his scales were always clinking and clanging. The nickname is composed of the genitive plural of *skál* ‘scales’ (always in the plural with this meaning) and *glam(m)* ‘tinkling sound (of metal)’. See the nicknames *gjallandi* ‘man with a resounding voice’ and *glumra* ‘rattler’. *HPE*: Scales-Clatterer.

**380. Skáld-** (x3) ‘Poet-’: Skáld-Helgi Þórðarson (86, 212, 213); Skáld-Hrafn Qnundarson (108, 367); Skáld-Refr Gestsson (100, 101, 104, 105). *Lind* (311) notes that in general it is more of a title or occupational byname but that in some cases it seems to be used as a nickname. *CV* (541) mentions that the nicknames may be ‘names given to those who composed libellous love songs’. It is unclear whether *Skáld-* is a nickname or an occupational byname.

**381. skáldaspillir** ‘poet spoiler, plagiarist’: Eyvindr skáldaspillir Finnsson (349). *FJ* (247) mentions that the name is from Eyvindr’s lifting of poetic forms and expressions from older poets and that the name was given to him by his opponents. *CV* (541) explains the nickname in detail, noting that it was given to him for having modeled two major poems on earlier exemplars (*Háleygjatal* after *Ynglingatal* and *Hákonarmál* after *Eiríksmál*) and that the word is synonymous with *ill-skælda* ‘poetaster’. It is composed of the genitive plural of *skáld* ‘poet’ and *spillir* ‘spoiler’, an agentive noun formed from the verb *spilla* ‘to spoil, destroy’.

**382. skálpr** ‘scabbard’: Þórðr skálpr (237 Skálpr, 238 S: skaf, H: skapl). *FJ* (234) glosses it as ‘sværdskede’ (sword sheath). *Lind* (314-15) glosses it as ‘svärdsslida’ (sword sheath). *CV* (542) defines it as ‘a leather sheath’. *HPE*: Scalp (this is an unacceptable translation).

**383. Skáneyjarskelmir** ‘terror of Skåne’: Víkingr Skáneyjarskelmir (369 Þ:-skilmir). *FJ* (273) suggests that the nickname refers to the man’s having raided in Skåne. *Skelmir* is a regular phonological variant of *skelfir* ‘shaker’ and is connected to *skelfa* ‘to make shake’. *Skáney* is modern *Skåne*, a region which had belonged to Denmark until it was ceded to Sweden in 1658 in the Treaty of Roskilde. Cf. the nickname *austmannaskelfir* ‘terror of the Norwegians’.

**384. Skegg-** ‘Beard-’: Skegg-Broddi Víga-Bjarnarson (290, 291, 292, 363). It is less likely to be used as a *pars pro toto* than other nicknames involving *skegg* ~ *skeggi* ~ *skeggr*, and therefore it must refer to his beard (which probably had something peculiar about it). *HPE*: Beard-Broddi.

**385. skeggi** ‘beard; man with a beard’: Þórðr skeggi Hrappsson (*lnm* 48, 49, 231, 311, 312, 313, 384, 385). *Skeggi* ‘man with a beard, man’ is from the common noun *skegg* ‘beard’ with the suffix *-i*, which could either agentivize the noun or be a nickname form. It is also found as a first name. See the nicknames *kampi* ‘whiskers, moustache; man with whiskers, man with a moustache’ and *Fitjumskeggi* ‘beard on Fitjar’.

**386. skegglauß** ‘beardless’: Ásmundr skegglauß Ófeigsson (348). It is, most likely, an insult, just as *karl inn skegglauði* ‘old beardless man’ is leveled at Njáll in his saga. The strong form of the adjective is much less common for nicknames.

**387. skeiðarkinn** ‘longship cheek’: Þorgríma skeiðarkinn Høfða-Þórðardóttir (242). *FJ* (203) glosses it as ‘skekind’ (spoon cheek) and is unsure why she received the nickname. *Lind* (320) suggests that her original nickname is only *kinn* ‘cheek’, but that for an unknown reason it was combined with *skeið* ‘swift longship’. *CV* (542) states that the

nicknames with *skeiðar-* refer to the beaks of swift ships (cf. *skeiðarnef* ‘longship nose’). See the nickname *blákinn* ‘blue cheek’. *HPE*: Ship-Cheek.

**388. skeiðarnef** ‘longship nose’: Gils skeiðarnef (*lnm* 153, 154, 160, 161, 200). *FJ* (202) seems to think that the first component is the same as Dan. *ske* ‘spoon’ when he glosses it as ‘skenæse’ (spoon nose), but *CV* (542) notes that *skeið* ‘spoon’ is a Danish borrowing and did not occur until the 15th century. *Lind* (320) suggests that it may refer to its bearer being the owner of or the helmsman on a *skeið* ‘swift longship’. *CV* (542) states that the nickname refers to the beaks of swift ships. *Nef* ‘beak, nose’ is most likely used synecdochically as a *pars pro toto*, and the nickname would then mean ‘man as large as a longship’. His daughter Þorbjörg *knarrarbringa* ‘ship chest’ seems to have inherited the theme of the nickname (ship and a body part). See the nickname *dúfunef* ‘dove nose’. *HPE*: Ship-Nose.

**389. skeifr** ‘askew, crooked’: Þorkell skeifr Gufuson (67). It is the strong form of the adj. *skeifr* ‘askew, oblique, lopsided’. As a nickname, it likely refers to his physical appearance, perhaps a crooked mouth, nose, or other body part. *Skeifr* also occurs as a first name.

**390. skeljamoli** ‘shard of a shell, broken shell, piece of a shell’: Ormr skeljamoli Hross-Bjarnarson (216). *FJ* (312) glosses it as ‘(musling)skalstykke’ (piece of a [clam] shell). *Lind* (321) suggests that he may have gotten the first part *skelja* (from n. *skel* ‘shell’) added to the original nickname *moli* ‘piece, bit’ from an occupation of catching clams. It also occurs as a regular compound and is composed of the nouns *skel* ‘shell’ and *moli* ‘small piece, particle, bit’. *HPE*: Shell-Piece.

**391. skerjablesi** ‘skerry blaze’: Ásbjörn jarl skerjablesi (295, 297, 387). *FJ* (191) says that it means ‘the man with a blaze from the Skerries’ and says that he is uncertain which *sker* ‘skerry’ could be meant. *Lind* (322) suggests that it may be that his nickname was *blesi* ‘blaze’, while *sker* was added to refer to his Viking hangout. It is composed of

the genitive singular of *sker* ‘skerry’ and *blesi* ‘blaze, white spot on a horse’s forehead’, but it is unclear what the first part of the compound means in relation to the second. Cf. the nickname *blesi* ‘blaze’. *HPE*: Skerry-Blaze.

**392. Skinna-** ‘Furs-, Hides-’: Skinna-Björn Skútaðar-Skeggjason (*lnm* 212, 213).

According to *Þórðs saga hreðu*, Björn was a trader in the east and brought back animal hides. *HPE*: Fur-Bjorn.

**393. Skjalda-** ‘Shields-’: Skjalda-Björn Herfinnsson (= Hella-Björn, *lnm* 159, 197).

*Landnámabók* says that Björn first settled in Iceland in a warship with shields lining the rails. It is the genitive plural of *skjöldr* ‘shield’. *HPE*: Shield-Bjorn.

**394. enn skjálgi** (x4) ‘the squinting’: Arnmóðr enn skjálgi Þorkelsson (230); Finnur enn skjálgi Eyvindarson (348); Úlfr enn skjálgi Hognason (*lnm* 150, 152, 153, 160, 161, 163, 164, 178, 179, 209, 397); Þorsteinn enn skjálgi (*lnm* 319). It is the weak form of the adj. *skjálgr* ‘wry, oblique; squinting’. *HPE*: the Squint-Eyed.

**395. Skorar-** ‘Gorge-’: Skorar-Geirr Holta-Þórisson (342). *CV* (554) glosses the noun *skor* as ‘rift in a rock or precipice’. He is called Þorgeirr *skorargeirr* ‘gorge-spear’ in *Njáls saga*, which is most likely a play on words with his real name *Þor-geirr* (hence the name variant here, *Skorar-Geirr*). The episode behind his nickname is referred to late in the saga (ch. 146), where it says that Þorgeirr killed seven men after rapeling alone into a gorge (ON *skor*).

**396. \*skotakollr** ‘Scots’ head’: Þorkell skotakollr Brúndólfsson (383). *FJ* (195) notes that the nickname’s true meaning is questionable but that it may refer to a shaking head or a head at which one tends to strike. *Lind* (330) mentions that there is an English *Scotcol* and suggests that the first component could be the genitive plural of *skotar* ‘Scots’ or *skot* ‘(monetary) contribution’. No other compounds formed from the common noun *skot* ‘shot’ and its derivatives use the genitive plural form, so the meaning *skot* ‘compensation’ is rather improbable. Most likely, it is composed of the nouns *skoti* ‘Scot,

Scottish person' and *kollr* 'crown of the head, head'. Þorkell was a third generation Icelander with no known connection to Scotland or Scottish people either in his ancestry or lifetime, so the reference is obscure; perhaps he visited Scotland or had the appearance of a typical Scot. It is unclear how a typical Scot looked, but the nickname may refer to some kind of Celtic hairstyle. See the nickname *hærukollr* 'gray hair head'. *HPE*: Scot-Pate.

**397. skógarnef** 'nose of the woods; nose of Skógar': Ormr skógarnef Hámundarson (353, 354). *Lind* (328) suggests that the first part is a place name, perhaps *Skógar* just south of Eyjafjallajökull (in southern Iceland). If *nef* 'beak, nose' is used as a *pars pro toto*, the nickname would mean 'nose (= man) from the woods, nose from Skógar'. See the nickname *dúfunef* 'dove nose'.

**398. \*skólm** 'gap, open mouth; cross-eyed; thick shell; one with long, hanging eyebrows; short sword': Þorgeirr skólm (257, only in H). *FJ* (347-48) notes that he is often called only by the first name *Skólmr*, and that among the possible meanings it may be 'gap, opening (as in a mouth); to gouge; shy (as a sheep)' and that it may be related to the root of the verb *skylmask* 'to fence (with a weapon)' and Dan. *skolm* 'cross-eyed'. *Lind* (329) suggests that it is related to NNorw. *skolm* (m.) 'thick shell' and *skolm* (f.) 'cleft, jaw'. *CV* (556) questions whether it is truly *skólpr*, which he does not translate (it means 'a turner's chisel'). *ÍO* (854) suggests that it is connected to NNorw. *skolm* 'hard shell, eggshell', related to *skel* 'shell' and *skálm* 'short sword; one part of a cloven thing', but that it may otherwise be related to NNorw. *skulm* 'long, hanging eyebrows' or Dan. *skule* 'look sideways at someone'. *FJ* may be onto something with the verb *skylmask* 'to fight with a short sword', derived from the noun *skálm* 'short sword; one part of a cloven thing (a part of a fork)'; the most likely candidate then is an archaic form of the noun *skálm*, which had the variant form *skólmm* ~ *skólmm* in Old Norse and whose etymon is Gmc. *\*skalmo*, from IE *\*skel* 'cleave, split in two'. As a masculine form *Skólmr* ~ *skólmr* occurs elsewhere only in the patronymic of Þórálfr *Skólms-son*, which would have been

\**Skólmar*- if it were feminine; still, it may be a masculine name derived from the feminine noun *skálm* ~ *skólm* ~ *skølm*. The meaning of the nickname remains disputed.

**399. skrauti** ‘fine garment, ornament; the showy’: Oddr skrauti (*lnm* 154). *FJ* (240) says that it is derived from *skraut* (‘ornament, finery’) and means the same. It is a nickname form of the common noun *skraut* with the suffix *-i* meaning ‘man with fine clothes’, metaphorically even to mean ‘the showy’. Just like the nickname of Óláfr pái ‘peacock’, whether it is used negatively is uncertain and a compliment is possible in both cases.  
*HPE*: the Showy.

**400. \*skrofi** ‘chatterer, loudmouth’: Þorsteinn skrofi Grímsson (59, 266). *FJ* (232) says that it may mean ‘*spedalsk*’ (leprous) and notes a possible connection to NNorw. *skroven* ‘perforated, fungous, porous’. *Lind* (333) connects it to NNorw. *skrove* ‘loudmouth, chatterer’. *CV* (558) connects both *skrofi* and *skrofuðr* to *skrof* ‘snow-ice, full of holes and bubbles’. *DV* (504) is unsure of the origin and gives a possible connection to the reflexive verb *skrofast* ‘to stand up, gather oneself’ (which is a hapax legomenon), but says that Far. *skróva* ‘to rattle, crackle, creak’ makes the original meaning of the ON verb \**skrofa* ‘speak loudly, be noisy’ more likely. *ÍO* (865) says that the original meaning behind both *skrofi* and *skrofuð(u)r* is ‘braggart, loudmouth’ and connects it to NNorw. *skrove* ‘loudmouth’, *skrova* ‘to cough; to brag’, *skryvja* ~ *skrøyva* ‘cough loudly’. The propositions by *FJ* and *CV* are unlikely, but the origin of the nickname remains uncertain.

**401. \*skrofuðr** ‘chatterer, loudmouth’: Þorbjörn skrofuðr Kjallaksson (123 M: skroðuðr, 147). *FJ* (232, s.v. *skrofuðr*) says that it is unlikely to be *skrofuðr* (from *skrafa* [‘to chatter, prate’]) and probably means the same as *skrofi*, which may mean ‘*spedalsk*’ (leprous). *Lind* (333) also gives the medial vowel as *-o-*, connecting it to *skrofi*, and suggests that it is an adjective formed from the same root, but the entry for *skrofi* (333) assumes a relation to NNorw. *skrove* ‘loudmouth, chatterer’. *CV* (558) connects both *skrofi* and *skrofuðr* to *skrof* ‘snow-ice full of holes and bubbles’, but this is a rather late word in Icelandic. While it is possibly synonymous with the nickname *skrofi* in meaning,



the etymon of this adjective seems to be the verb *FJ* denies – *skrafa* ‘to chatter, talk foolishly’, which is also the option the *ÍF* editors have chosen by giving the form with *-ϕ-* (*a* to *ϕ* by *u*-umlaut). *HPE*: the Chatterer.

**402. \*skúma** (x2) ‘squint, cross-eyed; shifty-eyed, sneaky-eyed; the dark; one who behaves strangely at dusk’: Þorbjörn skúma Þoðvarsson (*lnm* 52, 53, 175); Þorbjörn skúma Þorgrímsson (183). *FJ* (200) glosses it as ‘den, der ser til siden’ (one who looks to the side’ and connects it to Norw. *skumla* ‘to glower, look down’. *Lind* (335) says that it is from the poetic verb *skúma* ‘to squint, be cross-eyed’. *CV* (561) is unsure of its meaning and lists it unglossed under *skúmi* ‘shade, dusk’ and *skúmr* ‘skua or brown gull, (metaphorically) a chatterer, gossip’ (a variant of *skúfr*). *DV* (507) glosses the weak verb *skúma* as ‘to get dark’ and derives it from the noun *skúmi* ‘dusk, twilight’. *ÍO* (873) connects the nickname to the nouns *skúm* ‘dust; dusk, twilight’, *skúmi* ‘dusk, twilight; dust; foam’, and *skúmur* ‘scua’ (so named because of its dark color), and to the verb *skúma* ‘get dark, grow dark; (archaic) glance sneakily with the eyes’. If the nickname is derived from the verb *skúma* ‘to get dark’, then it may refer to a change of mood or behavior around dusk (like the nickname *Kveld-Úlfr* ‘Evening-’ *Úlfr*). However, it may have nothing to do with darkness or dusk at all, and, if so, it implies that there is something defective about his eyes (cross-eyed, squinting) or at least his behavior with them (looking down, around, or looking around with shifting, sneaky eyes). Most likely, it is derived from a verb *\*skúma*, but such a verb is unattested in Old Norse. The meaning is uncertain.

**403. \*Skútaðar-** meaning unknown: Skútaðar-Skeggi (212, 213 Skautaðar-). *FJ* (349) says that it is difficult to explain, but that the vowel is probably long and connected to *at skúta* ‘to lean or stoop forward, to be stooping’; if the vowel is short, it would be related to *at skuta* ‘to row backwards’. *Lind* (335) says that it is derived from the preceding nickname *skúta* and defers to his name dictionary (1905-15, 929), where he suggests that the byname *skútu-* is related to *skúti* ‘cave formed by jutting rocks’; as a first name and a nickname he argues that it means approximately the same as *gnúpa*, *gnípa* ‘cliff with

rocks leaning over’, and as a first name he equates it to the meaning behind the names *Hallr* (‘leaning to one side, sloping’), *Hallóttá* (< *hallr* ‘sloping’ and *-óttá* ‘-like’), and *Lútaði* (‘stooping, leaning over’). Taken grammatically, it may be the genitive singular of a feminine participle *\*skútað*, which could only be from an older form of the verb *skúta* ‘to jut out, protrude, lean forward, bend over’. The regular forms are weak verb III: *skúta* – *skútti* – *skutt*, but in Icel. it has moved into weak verb I: *skúta* – *skútaði* – *skútaður* (the genitive singular form is *skútaðrar*). It seems rather unlikely that it could mean ‘stooping, bent over woman’s-’ Skeggi, but whatever it could mean remains unclear (a lover [sexual joke?], an old lady [his mother?]). While difficult to prove, it may be a derivation of *skúta* ‘small ship, cutter, skiff’ as f. *\*skútað(r)*, which as a nickname would mean ‘Skiff-’ Skeggi, implying that he had such a boat and captained it.

**404. skǫkull** ‘cart pole; horse penis’: Auðun skǫkull Bjarnarson (*lnm* 214, 216, 223, 286, 397). *FJ* (350) glosses it as ‘skagle’ (rope or something similar that binds a beast of burden and a vehicle), but questions whether it could also mean ‘penis’. *CV* (565) glosses it as ‘the pole of a cart or carriage; horse-yard’. *ÍO* (884) says that the origin of the nickname is uncertain and that it is uncertain which meaning is meant. The more common meaning of the noun ‘pole connecting a cart to a draft animal, towing bar’ is probably correct, but the secondary meaning ‘horse penis’ is possible. In case it is the latter, one can only wonder if it refers to an incident involving a horse or whether it is used metaphorically about the man’s “pole.” *HPE*: the Shaft.

**405. \*slagakollr** ‘strike head’: Qzurr slagakollr (*lnm* 295). *FJ* (195) suggests that the first component is either synonymous with the verb *slá* ‘to strike, beat’ or identical with the noun *slag-á* (= *slagasauðr*) ‘a sheep (or ewe) to be slaughtered’. *CV* (566) glosses the regular noun as ‘brisket’ and equates it to *bringukollr* ‘brisket, cut of meat from the lower chest’. Any connection the nickname has to sheep is a mystery, so it makes more sense to assume the more likely connection to *slá* (cf. the past participle *sleginn* ‘struck, beaten’, akin to Engl. *slain*). The nickname is then composed of *slaga* ‘to strike’, which appears as a substantivized form of an old form of *slá*, functioning here like a present participle

(\**slag-andi* ‘striking’) and *kollr* ‘crown of the head, head’. It is unclear if the nickname refers to Qzurr being a recipient or deliverer of blows to the head, if the meaning is in fact the same as *slá*. See the nickname *hærukollr* ‘gray hair head’. *HPE*: Strike-Pate.

**406. \*Sleitu-** ‘Deceit-, Trick-; Freeloader-; Quarrel-’: Sleitu-Björn Hróarsson (*Inm* 143 S: Sléttu-, 237 SH: Sléttu-, 240 H: Sléttu-); Sleitu-Helgi (201 H: Sléttu-, 202, 204, 205, 208, 209, 224 H: Sléttu-). *FJ* (350) says that it is from the noun *sleita* ‘flight (running away from an obligation)’. *Lind* (339) suggests that Helgi’s nickname refers to his father’s or mother’s nickname *sleita* (‘*Sleita*’s Helgi), identical with NNorw. *sleita* ‘beggar, freeloader’, but that Björn’s nickname (340) is *Sléttu-* and refers to the position of his original home in Sweden on a *slétta* ‘level plain’. *CV* (567) glosses the noun *sleita* as ‘backsliding’, in the sense of trickery or deceit as the expressions *vinna mál með sleitum* ‘to win a case with trickery’ and *drekka við sleitur* ‘to drink unfairly’ suggest. In poetry, *sleita* means ‘conflict, quarrel’ (Finnur Jónsson 1931, 518) and such a meaning works well as a nickname. While both names are probably not *slétta* (despite the manuscript variants), the noun is found as a place name and would make sense as a hyphenated geographical byname. *HPE*: Strife-Bjorn.

**407. slítandi** ‘tearer, one who tears’: Þórðr slítandi í Hørgárdal (*Inm* 257, 258). It is the present participle of the verb *slíta* ‘to tear, rend, rip’. The reference of the nickname is unknown, but it may refer to an event involving the tearing of cloth (a tent) or clothing, or possibly it is a reference to battle and abilities as a warrior. See the nicknames *gjallandi* ‘man with a resounding voice’. *HPE*: the Tearer.

**408. slækidrengr** ‘lanky lass; weak man’: Ástríðr slækidrengr Bragadóttir (82). *FJ* (351) is unsure whether the meaning is ‘tall, lanky chap’ or whether it refers to her being manly. *Lind* (341) equates the first part of the compound to NNorw. *sløkje* ‘big and huge thing; long, narrow, dull thing’. *CV* (750) connects it to the noun *slæki* ‘a slender, tall person’, which he says is related to Ger. *schlank* ‘tall and slim’ and Engl. *lanky*. The first part of the compound may also be related to *slækinn* ‘weak, lazy, soft’, but the connection

is tangential; if so, the meaning of the nickname would be ‘weak man’, perhaps implying that she attempted “manly” activities and failed at them. While the first part of the compound is mostly clear and seems to refer to her tall and thin stature, the second part *drengr* ‘chap, lad, valiant man’ is difficult to translate when applied to a female, because when it is used to refer to men its meaning is positive ‘a (good, valiant, brave, worthy) fellow’. In that regard, *FJ* may be right to assume that *drengr* is used to imply manliness as a negative thing when applied to a woman, but it is also possible that it is intended as a positive epithet (‘lanky lass’).

**409. sløngvandbaugi** ‘ring slinger’: Hrœrekr sløngvandbaugi Haraldsson (340, 341). *FJ* (275) suggests that he received the name from having thrown an expensive ring into the sea. *Lind* (341-42) argues that he received the name to distinguish his generosity from another legendary Danish king (Hrœrekr *hnøggvandbaugi* ‘ring hoarder’). It is composed of the present participle of the verb *sløngva* ‘sling, scatter’ and *baugi* ‘ring (currency)’, a weak form of *baugr* with the same meaning. *HPE*: the Ring-Scatterer.

**410. smiðjudrumbr** ‘smithy drum; oaf of the smithy’: Ketill smiðjudrumbr (129). *FJ* (269) suggests that the second component may refer to the wooden plank onto which the anvil is attached. *Lind* (342) glosses the second part as ‘fat and clumsy person’. *CV* (571) glosses it as ‘a smithy-drum, anvil stock’. *CV* (107) glosses *drumbr* as ‘a log of rotten or dry wood’. The first part of the compound is clear (*smiðja* ‘smithy’), but the difficulty with the second part is whether it means ‘plank of wood’ or ‘fat and clumsy person, oaf’ (the latter is derived from the original meaning). Cf. the nickname *Drumb-* ‘Oaf-’. *HPE*: Smith’s Bellows.

**411. smjor** ‘butter’: Þórólfr smjor Þorsteinsson (36, 37, 38, 39, 59, 266). The nickname of this early explorer is explained in *Landnámabók* as coming from his overly-generous account of the island as a place where butter drips from each blade of grass. It seems to be used metaphorically to imply an exaggerated account, that is one which has been laden

with an excessive amount of something tasty and abundant, not unlike the expression in Engl. *butter up* ‘charm or beguile with lavish praise’.

**412. smjörkengr** ‘butter clamp’: Þorgeirr smjörkengr (257). Only *Lind* (343) has it, but does not gloss or discuss it. The meaning of both words in the compound is relatively clear individually, although the use of the tool *kengr* ‘metal hook, clamp’ is unknown. Likewise, the reference of the nickname is lost, but it is feasible that it refers to an incident involving butter or grease on the tool to make it slippery (a trick?). A metaphorical interpretation is also possible if the name could refer to the man being “slippery” in the sense of a trickster evading punishment, or perhaps to the more obvious connection of butter with chubbiness (‘fat man with a clamp’?). Cf. the nickname *kengr* ‘metal hook, clamp’.

**413. snara** ‘snare, trap’: Eiríkr snara í Trékyllisvík (*lnm* 198). *Lind* (344-45) suggests that it is not the common noun *snara* ‘snare’, but instead a derivative of the verb *snara* ‘turn quickly, twist’. *Lind*’s interpretation is possible but unlikely, since it is easier to connect the nickname to an incident involving a trap (hunting, or capturing a person?) than to an unattested noun from the verb. *HPE*: Snare.

**414. snarfari** ‘quick traveler’: Sigtryggr snarfari (68, 346). It is composed of the adj. *snarr* ‘quick, fast’ and *fari* ‘traveler’, an agentive noun formed from the verb *fara* ‘travel, go’. Sigtryggr’s brother is Hallvarðr *harðfari* ‘hard traveler’, and the two were known for running trips on behalf of Haraldr *hárfagri*. See the nickname *harðfari* ‘hard traveler’. *HPE*: the Fast Sailing.

**415. en snarskyggna** ‘the keen-eyed’: Gróa en snarskyggna (243 SH: skyggna ‘seeing [adj.]’, Þ/M: sygnska ‘from Sogn’). It is the weak feminine form of the adj. *snar-skyggn* ‘keen-eyed, keen-seeing’ (-n is a part of the root); *skygn* denotes second sight in folklore. *HPE*: the Second-Sighted.

**416. snepill** ‘flap’: Þórir snepill Ketilsson (*Inm* 270, 271 Snepill, 273). *FJ* (351) glosses it as ‘en lap (især øresnippen)’ (a flap [particularly the earlobe]). If it refers to the earlobe, it most likely denotes an injury or deformity. Cf. the noun *eyrasnepill* ‘earlobe’. *HPE*: Flap.

**417. \*sneypir** ‘snipper, castrator; one who brings dishonor’: Kolbjörn sneypir (248, 249). *FJ* (352) suggests that it is an agentive form of the verb *sneypta* ‘to bring shame, rebuke, reproach’, and says that it may refer to the act related to *at sneypa konu* ‘to dishonor a woman’. *Lind* (345) asserts that it is related to the NNorw. verb *snøypa* ‘snap at, nip, pinch, squish’ and Swed. *snöpa* ‘to castrate’ (originally from the meaning ‘to snip’). *CV* (575) glosses it as ‘a snipper (gelder?)’; *CV* (575) notes that the original meaning of the verb *sneypta* was ‘to castrate’, and glosses it as ‘to outrage, dishonour, disgrace’. *ÍO* (915) says that the nickname seems to be derived from the verb *sneypta*, connected to NNorw. *snypa* ‘to clip, cut off’, *snopen* ‘narrow/close, disappointed, shamefaced’, dialectal Swed. *snopen* ‘narrow; disappointed’ from Gmc. *\*sneup-* ‘to clip, cut off’. The meaning proposed by *FJ* is a legal one that seems to have had currency outside of purely legal vocabulary and cannot be dismissed out of hand. The connection with Swed. *snöpa* ‘to snip, castrate’ and New Norwegian *snøypa* ‘to nip, pinch’ and *snypa* ‘to clip, cut off’, however, is etymologically sound and makes for another possible candidate. *HPE*: the Slighter.

**418. enn snjalli** ‘the valiant, brave’: Steinn enn snjalli Baugsson í Snjallsteinshöfða (352, 353 Snjallsteinn). It is the weak form of the adj. *snjallr* ‘valiant, doughty’.

**419. snúinbrók** ‘twisted breeches’: Hallgerðr snúinbrók Høskuldsdóttir (143, 192, 193 langbrók ‘long breeches’). *FJ* (239) suggests that the first part refers to her pants having been turned or pulled around. *CV* (576) glosses it as ‘twisted tartan’. The first part is the past participle *snúinn* of the verb *snúa* ‘to turn, twist’, and the second part is the feminine noun *brók* ‘breech, one leg of a pair of pants’. It is unclear how *snúin-* is to be understood in the context of the nickname; perhaps it refers to her pants being worn incorrectly or

wrapped in an unusual manner. A woman wearing such a pair of pants was taboo and it was considered cross-dressing in ch. 35 of *Laxdæla saga* (there about *Bróka-Auðr* ‘Pants-’ Auðr), a libel which fits Hallgerðr’s negative treatment in *Njáls saga* well. The variant in *Landnámabók* and *Njáls saga* is *langbrók* ‘long pants’, and in *Njáls saga* the nickname is explained to refer to her tall stature. Cf. the nickname *loðbrók* ‘hairy breeches’. *HPE*: Twist-Breeks.

**420. snæþrima** ‘snow thunder; snow crashing, din’: Þoðvarr snæþrima Þorleifsson (310, 311). *FJ* (352) glosses it as ‘snetorden’ (snow thunder). *Lind* (347) suggests that the first part may refer to light hair color and the second part is a side form of *þrima* ‘clangour, crashing’. *FJ*, *Lind*, and *CV* all give the form as *snæþrima*. *CV* (747) glosses *þrima* as ‘an alarm, noise (of battle)’ and says that it is the same as *þrima* (‘a clap of thunder’), a cognate of German *Donner* ‘thunder, boom of thunder’. *DV* (622) glosses *þrima* as ‘din; battle’ and (624) *þrima* ‘thunder, din’. *ÍO* (1198) glosses *þrima* as ‘thunder, battle’ and equates it to *þrima* ‘noise; battle; thunder’. The variant form *þrima* is likely the correct one, since the manuscript spelling “þrimu” (oblique case) may represent an unrounded form of -y-. See the nicknames *glumra* ‘rattler’ and *þrimr* ‘loud noise, crashing; quiet, silent’. *HPE*: Snow-Rim (in no way can the second part of the compound mean ‘rim’).

**421. Spak-** ‘Wise-’: Spak-Þoðvarr Qndóttsson (237). It is the hyphenated form of the adj. *spakr* ‘wise’, which is connected to prophetic abilities. Usually such adjectival nicknames are found in apposition to the name (for example, Þorgeirr *rauðr* ‘the red’).

**422. en spaka** ‘the wise’: Þuríðr en spaka Snorradóttir (118, 119). It is the weak feminine form of *spakr* ‘wise’, which is connected to prophetic abilities. Cf. the nicknames *Spak-*, above, and *enn spaki*, below.

**423. enn spaki** (x8) ‘the wise’: Bjarni enn spaki Þorsteinsson (358, 381); Gestr enn spaki Oddleifsson (172, 173 M: fróði, 174, 184, 185, 186, 195, 196, 387); Hallr enn spaki Þórarinsson í Haukadal (383); Hróðgeirr enn spaki í Hraungerði (*lmm* 60, 68, 69, 372,

374); Ljótr enn spaki Þorgrímsson (182, 183 Þorbjarnarson, 184-86); Ósvífr enn spaki Helgason (123, 142, 160, 171, 173, 184, 284); Þorleifr enn spaki Hqrða-Kárason (313); Þórarinn enn spaki Þorvaldsson (226). It is the weak form of the adj. *spakr* ‘wise’, which is connected to prophetic abilities (cf. the two previous nicknames).

**424. spqrr** ‘sparrow’: Þórólfr spqrr (*Inm* 52 S: Þorbjörn, 53, 168, 170, 171, 175). The reference of the nickname is lost to us, but perhaps it is a physical description of the man as small and rotund or a reference to his voice. See the nickname *græningarrjúpa* ‘young ptarmigan’. *HPE*: Sparrow.

**425. Stafn-** ‘Prow-’: Grímr ~ Stafngrímr Hranason (76). *Lind* (354) suggests that he was probably a *stafnbúi* ‘forecastle guard on a ship’. The noun *stafn* refers to the stem of either the front or the back of a ship (*fram-stafn* ‘prow’ and *aptr-stafn* ‘stern’), although in compounds like *stafnbúi* and *stafnsveit* ‘forecastle men’, it is clearer that *stafn* more likely refers to the front of a vessel. The nickname refers to the maritime activities of the man, although it is not certain that it is related to martial activity at sea or escapades as a sailor (a merchant or otherwise). *HPE*: Prow-Grim.

**426. stafr** ‘staff, stick’: Oddleifr stafr Flókason (243). *FJ* (285) suggests that it refers to a wooden column that holds up the roof. ON *stafr* means ‘a wooden column; staff, stick (as used in walking)’, but in the context of a nickname it is likely to refer to the walking stick as a comparison to his physical stature (skinny or lanky, like a post). See the nickname *kraki* ‘thin pole’. *HPE*: Staff.

**427. enn sterki** (x13) ‘the strong’: Björn enn sterki Kjallaksson (122, 147); Erlendr enn sterki Óláfsson (97, 171, 173, 241, 255, 293, 365, 373, 393, 395); Grettir enn sterki Ásmundarson (199, 211, 213, 280, 281); Ingólfr enn sterki Ánason á Hólmslátri (*Inm* 132, 134, 135); Ingólfr enn sterki Þórólfsson (175); Lambi enn sterki Þórðarson (92, 168, 169); Ormr enn sterki Stórólfsson (348, 352, 353); Steinbjörn enn sterki ok enn stórhoggvi Ásgeirsson (86); Váli enn sterki (102, 103, 110, 112, 120, 121); Þorbjörn enn



sterki (196); Þórálfr enn sterki Skólmsson (257 H: Þórólfr); Þórólfr enn sterki Skólmsson at Myrká (257 S: Þórálfr); Orm enn sterki Þórðarson (320). It is the weak form of the adj. *sterkr* ‘strong’.

**428. stikublígr** ‘stick who gazes, gazing lanky person’: Þormóðr stikublígr Steinbjarnarson (290). *FJ* (353) glosses it as ‘den, hvis blik er som en lige stok’ (one whose gaze is like a straight staff). *Lind* (361) glosses *stika* as ‘pole, post, stake’ and suggests that it may represent a place name, perhaps a cliff or rocky peak. *CV* (592) glosses *stika* as ‘stick’ and notes that even in medieval Iceland it referred to a measuring stick, corresponding to Engl. *yard*. The first part is probably used to describe the man’s stature, and would imply that he is tall and thin (lanky). The second part is a substantivized form of the verb *blíga* ‘to stare, gaze’, meaning ‘one who stares, gazes’; cf. the nickname *blígr* ‘gazer’. See the nickname *kraki* ‘thin pole’. *HPE*: the Stick-Gazer.

**429. stjarna** ‘star’: Hildr stjarna Þorvaldsdóttir (86). Most likely, it is used to describe her beauty or “radiant” appearance. Cf. the nickname *hólmasól* ‘sun of the islands’, which is also used to describe a female. *HPE*: Star.

**430. stórhöggvi** ‘(the) heavy blow dealer, great slasher’: Steinbjörn enn sterki ok enn stórhöggvi Ásgeirsson (86). *CV* (596) glosses the adj. *stórhöggr* as ‘dealing heavy blows’. It is composed of the adj. *stór* ‘big’ and the weak form of the *wa*-stem adj. *-höggv* ‘blow dealing’ (without the definite article). *HPE*: the Strong-Striker.

**431. stoti** ‘the stutterer; the stumbler’: Auðun stoti Válasón (*Inm* 102, H: stoði ‘post, prop’, Þ: skotri ‘shover, pusher’). *FJ* (353) says that it probably means ‘the stutterer’ and may be connected to NNorw. *stota* ‘to stutter, stammer’. *Lind* (363) connects it to NNorw. *stota* ‘to walk with short, staggering steps, toddle; stutter’. The origin of the nickname is unknown and whether it refers to one who stumbles in speech or in step is uncertain. *HPE*: the Stutterer.

**432. enn strangi** ‘the strong’: Þorfinnr enn strangi (*Inm* 89, 90, 91). It is the weak form

of the adj. *strangr* ‘strong; hard, rigid, severe’.

**433. strúgr** ‘anger, scorn, animosity’: Þorbjörn strúgr Ævarsson (*Inm* 224, 225). *FJ* (255) glosses it as ‘overmod, hovmod’ (arrogance, haughtiness). *Lind* (365) glosses it as ‘högmod, uppblásthet’ (arrogance, pomposity). *CV* (598) glosses it as ‘(metaphorically) bile, fastidiousness’; the sense of ‘bile’ seems to be ‘irritability, anger’, and the sense of ‘fastidiousness’ seems to be ‘difficulty to please’ or ‘scorn’. *DV* (554) says that it is related to NNorw. *stru* ‘defiant, contentious’, dialectal Swed. *strug* ‘conflict, dispute’, and Engl. *struggle*. *ÍO* (975) connects it to Old Swed. *strugher* ‘hatred, animosity’, dialectal Swed. *stru* ~ *strug* ‘vindictive, vengeful’, NNorw. *strygla* ‘struggle against, oppose’, and Engl. *struggle*. The glosses given by *FJ* and *Lind* make the least sense. It seems to be a noun, not an adjective, and it is probably related most closely to Old Swed. *strugher* ‘hatred, animosity, ill-will, grudge’. *HPE*: Bile.

**434. stöng** ‘pole’: Þorbjörg stöng í Stangarholti (*Ink* 90, 91). Both *FJ* (226) and *Lind* (368) suggests that it means ‘tall and lanky like a pole’ as a nickname. See the nickname *kraki* ‘thin pole’. *HPE*: Pole.

**435. suða** ‘the boiler’: Þorgeirr suða (163, 166). *FJ* (289) glosses it as ‘syden, kogning’ (seething, boiling). *Lind* (368) says that its origin is uncertain and suggests that it may be a scribal mistake. It seems to be a noun related to an older form of the verb *sjóða* ‘to boil, cook’, and it is probably related to the noun *soð* ‘broth (from boiled water)’. The modern form Icel. *suða* ‘boiling’ is derived from the same root *sjóð-* ~ *soð* ‘boiling, seething’, but it is unclear whether the modern word goes back to the nickname or the same common noun from which the nickname was derived. *HPE*: the Boiler.

**436. sundafyllir** ‘inlet filler’: Þuríður sundafyllir (*Ink* 186). *FJ* (275) and *Lind* (369) both cite the explanation of her nickname in *Landnámabók*, where it says that she got the nickname from having filled all the sounds (inlets) with fish using sorcery during a

famine. It is composed of the genitive plural of *sund* ‘sound, inlet, strait’ and an agentive noun formed from the verb *fylla* ‘to fill’. *HPE*: the Sound-Filler.

**437. surtr** ‘the black’: Þorsteinn surtr Hallsteinsson (124, 126, 145, 164, 165). *FJ* (211) states that *surtr* is a substantivized form of the adj. *svartr* ‘black’, and that it is not identical with the name of the fire-giant *Surtr*. *Lind* (369-70) says that it is more common as a first name. It is the fire-giant *Surtr* (‘the black one’) who destroys the world during Ragnarøk. The nickname most likely refers to his hair and complexion, just as other color adjectives used as nicknames. Cf. the Danish form of the adj. *sort* ‘black’, which retains the old variant.

**438. súgandi** ‘one who sucks air’: Hallvarðr súgandi (*Inm* 186, 187). *FJ* (203) suggests that it refers to someone who sucks air through his nose and points to relation to Icel. *sjúga upp í nefið* ‘to sniff, sniffle’. *CV* (605) glosses *súgandi* as ‘a gush of wind’. It is the present participle of the verb *súga* ‘to suck’ and implies that the man was known for blowing out air or breathing it in heavily (perhaps making whistling sounds in his nostrils while breathing through the nose?). See the nickname *gjallandi* ‘man with a resounding voice’.

**439. súrr** ‘sour whey’: Þorbjörn súrr (*Inm* 112 Súrr, 180, 181). *FJ* (354) suggests that it may refer to the incident described in *Gísla saga*, but that it could just as well come from his home area in Norway *Súrnadalr* (modern *Surnadal* in western Norway). *Súrna* is the name of a local river, although the etymology is obscure; it may be connected to the verbs Norw. *surle* ‘to trickle’ and Swed. *sorla* ‘to murmur, babble, hum’. It is explained in *Gísla saga* where Þorbjörn and Gísli successfully avoid being burned alive in their home in Norway by putting out a fire using cloth dipped in *súrr* ‘sour whey, sour drink’. The connection to the place name is less likely than a reference to the drink *súrr*.

**440. enn svartí** (x9) ‘the black’: Bárðr enn svartí Atlason (170, 171, 178, 179); Hálfðan

konungr enn svartí Guðrøðarson (370); Helgi enn svartí (348); Illugi enn svartí Hallkelsson (54, 55, 75, 83, 84, 85, 94, 95, 140, 214, 215); Þorbjörn enn svartí (*lmm* 71); Þorkell enn svartí Þórisson í Hleiðrargarði (268, 270, 271, 274, 275); Þórarinn enn svartí Þórólfsson (112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 129); Þórir enn svartí (244); Qngull enn svartí Þorkelsson (270, 271). It is the weak form of the adj. *svarttr* ‘black’ and refers to a dark hair color or dark complexion.

**441. svartipurs** ‘black giant’: Þráinn svartipurs (252 Þ: Þórarinn). *FJ* (212) suggests that the name refers to him having a frightening appearance, black hair, and a black beard (the same explanation he gives for the nickname *purs* ‘giant’). *CV* (607) mistakenly gives the form *svarta-purs* ‘black giant’ (but correctly gives *svarti-purs*, 750, s.v. *purs*), perhaps because the first part of the compound *svarti-* is found elsewhere as only as *svart-* or *svarta-*. The first part of the compound is a weak masculine form and may go back to an original nickname *purs* ‘giant’ (*inn*) *svarti* ‘the black’, where the weak, definite form is implied in the epithet. See the nickname *hálftröll* ‘half troll’. *HPE*: Black-Troll.

**442. sviðbálki** ‘scorched beam; firebrand, torch’: Hallgrímr sviðbálki Bárðarson (345, 356). *FJ* (285) glosses it as ‘sveden – væg’ (scorched, burned wall) and says that the first part is a noun form of *sviða* ‘to scorch, burn’ and the second part is a weak form of *bálkr* (‘squared timber beam, partition (of a wall)’). *Lind* (375) suggests that the first component may be the same as NNorw. *svid* ‘scorched land, burned clearing’, possibly referring to a place name, and that the second part is related to NNorw. *balk* ‘confusion, turbulence, ruckus’; he glosses the nickname as ‘bråkmakare’ (troublemaker). *FJ*’s interpretation seems to be right, although the event it refers to is unknown. Perhaps it refers to accidental or purposeful burning inside a house, or it could also mean ‘firebrand, torch’ in light of such an event. *HPE*: Singe-Beam.

**443. sviði** ‘the scorcher; burn, pain from a burn’: Þorgrímr sviði (174). *FJ* (355) says that it is related to the verb *sviða* ‘to scorch, burn’ and can be understood actively ‘the scorcher’ or passively ‘the scorched’, but it may be identical with *sviði* ‘a burn,

smarting’. *Lind* (375) connects it to *sviði* ‘burn, smart, sting’. *Sviði* could be an agentive noun derived from the verb meaning ‘the one who scorches, burns’, but the existence of the noun *sviði* ‘burn, pain from a burn’ makes it impossible to determine which one is meant. The passive meaning ‘one with a burn’ is possible if it contains the nickname suffix *-i*, although it is less probable than the other two options. *HPE*: the Scorcher.

**444. sviðinhorni** ‘man with a scorched horn’: Björn sviðinhorni í Álptafirði (*lnm* 309). *FJ* (355) says that it is derived from the past participle *sviðinn* ‘scorched, burnt’ and *horn* ‘horn’, and glosses it as ‘den, der har svedet et horn’ (one who scorched a horn). *Lind* (375) suggests that the first component could mean ‘disappointed, ashamed, embarrassed’ as *sviden* does in NNorw., and that the second component may be synonymous with *hornungr* ‘outcast; bastard son’ or *hyrningr* ‘horned man’ or a masculine form of *hyrna* ‘horned animal’. The explanation offered by *Lind* is a far stretch from the obvious meaning of the nickname. *FJ*’s interpretation seems to be correct; the only adjustment is that the second component contains the nickname suffix *-i*, changing the meaning to ‘man with a horn’. Thus, it means ‘man with a scorched horn’. *HPE*: Singe-Horn.

**445. Svína-** ‘Pigs-’: Svína-Böðvarr Kaunsson (310, 311). It most likely refers to his having owned many pigs. Cf. the nickname *Hesta-* ‘Horses-’.

**446. svínhofði** ‘pig head’: Sigurðr svínhofði (116 M: svíni, 117). It is composed of *svín* ‘pig, hog’ and *hofði* ‘head; headland’. Cf. the nickname *hesthofði* ‘horse head’ and see *hofði* ‘head; headland’. *HPE*: Hog’s-Head.

**447. \*svorfuðr** ‘troublemaker’: Þorsteinn svorfuðr Rauðsson (*lnm* 237, 252 svarfaðr, 268 Svorfuðr). *FJ* (274-75) suggests that it is an agentive form of the verb *svarfa* ‘to bring something out of its proper place or away from the place where it is or should be’, related to *svarfask um* ‘to tumble around violently’; he glosses the nickname as ‘forstyrren’ (the disturber, troublemaker) and says that it originally was connected with a war expedition. *Lind* (377) connects it to the verb *svarfa* ‘to bring into disorder’ and the noun

*svarf* ‘tumult, uproar’. *CV* (606) glosses the nickname ‘a sweeper, desolater?’, which must assume a connection with the original sense of the verb *svarfa* ‘to sweep (of filings)’, later taking on the meaning ‘to upset by sweeping, overturning’. *DV* (572) glosses the nickname as ‘Unruhestifter’ (agitator, disturber) and connects it to *svarfaðr* ‘commotion, ruckus, disturbance’ and *svorfun* ‘commotion, uproar’. *ÍO* (1008) glosses it as ‘óeirðamaður, sá sem fer um með ránum og ofbeldi’ (troublemaker, one who goes around plundering and with overbearing’ and connects it to *svarfa* ‘move out of the way, stir, move, upset; destroy, ruin’ and *svarfað(ur)* ‘crowd, tumult’. It is impossible to know if the original meaning of the verb ‘to sweep (of filings)’ is meant, in which case the nickname would be rather innocent by comparison. More likely, however, the secondary meaning ‘to disturb, agitate’ is meant here, and the context behind such a nickname is easy to imagine (a brazen man prone to causing trouble).

**448. Sygnakappi** ‘champion of the people of Sogn’: Vébjörn Sygnakappi Végeirsson (*Inm* 180, 181, 187 -trausti, 188 S: Svigna-, 189-90, 191, 196, 246, 247). The first part is the genitive of *Sygnir* ‘people of Sogn (Norway)’.

**449. sælingr** ‘fortunate person’: Þórarinn sælingr Þórisson (291 Einarr sælendingr ‘person from Sævarland [Iceland]’, 292, 387). *FJ* (294) glosses it as ‘den lykkelige’ (the fortunate) and notes that it is derived from *sæll* ‘well-off, fortunate’. *Lind* (378) suggests that it refers to the location of the family farm (Tunga) in *Sælingsdalr*. *CV* (617) glosses it as ‘a wealthy man’, noting that it is the antonym of *úgöfgir menn* (‘men of low birth’) in *Homiliubók*, and also suggests that the place name *Sælingsdalr* comes from the nickname. *Lind* has it backwards, since the place name ought to have originated in the nickname of a person who settled there, in this case a father and son (Þórarinn’s father is named Þórir *sælingr* in *Laxdæla saga*). The existence of the common noun *sælingr* makes it obvious that the nickname was not derived from the place name.

**450. \*sørkvir** ‘black spear; dark warrior, dark man; quarrelling warrior’: Eyvindr sørkvir

í Blöndudal (*lnm* 218, 219, 223, 224, 226). *FJ* (355) says that the nickname stands for *sverkvir* from a verb *\*sverkva* (unglossed), which may depend on *svark-* in *svarkr* ‘an arrogant, headstrong woman’. *Lind* (379) says that it is originally from *svark-vér* (unglossed, but he probably would have defined it as ‘arrogant, difficult man’). *CV* (621) equates the name to *Sverkir* and says that it is akin to *svarkr* ‘a proud, haughty woman’. *DV* (568) gives two possible explanations: the first, that it is from *\*svart-geirr* (‘black-spear’) like OE *Sweartgar* and the Norse name variant in OIr *Suartgair*; the second, that it is from a root *\*svarka* (‘to complain, whine, grumble’), as in the Runic name *svarka-vīhaR*, and related to *svarkr* ‘haughty woman’. The verb *svarka* ‘to quarrel, grumble’ is modern and derived from the noun *svarkr*, so the reasoning for it being the root is circular. *ÍO* (999, s.v. *Sverkir*) is unsure if *Sverkir* and its variants are from the same root and whether it comes from *\*Svartgeirr* or *svarka* and *-(v)ir* (from *\*wīhaR* [‘warrior, fighter’]). *ÍO* (1019, s.v. *Sörkvir*) suggests that it may be related to OE *sweorcan* ~ OS *swerkan* ‘get dark’, OE *gesweorc* ‘cloudiness, cloud, mist, smoke, fog, dark weather’, OS *giswerk* ~ MLG *swerk* ~ *swark* ‘darkness, cloudiness’ (all related to *svartr* ~ *sortr* ‘black’); if it is related to the words just mentioned, *ÍO* says that it ought to mean ‘the dark-looking’, or ‘the dark-looking warrior’ if the second part is *vér* ‘warrior’. Jánzén (1947a, 242) says that the name *Sörkvir* ~ *Sverkir* is a compound originating in a hyphenated nickname *\*Svart-Geirr* (‘Black-’ Geirr). It is impossible to know which etymological explanation of the nickname is correct, and its origin remains elusive.

## T

**451. tálkni** ‘whalebone’: Þorbjörn tálkni Bøðvarsson (*lnm* 52, 53, 161, 175, 176 M: Tálkni). *FJ* (312) glosses it as ‘gæller’ (gills [on fish]) and suggests that it is derived from n. *tálkn* ‘gill’. *Lind* (380) suggests that it is related to NNorw. *tokn* ‘gills’, *tokna* ~ *tolkna* ‘mutter, splutter’, and that the meaning of the nickname may be something similar to the meaning of the verb. *CV* (626) notes that it is usually plural and glosses it as ‘the gills of fish, as also of whale-bone’. The meaning ‘whalebone’ is rather common (in *Grágás*: *bein eða tálkn* [bone or whalebone]), and in several compounds it is clear that

‘whalebone’ is meant and not ‘gills’ – *tálknfön* ‘whalebone fringes’, *tálknkefli* ‘piece of whalebone’, *tálknskið* ‘whalebone rod, wand’, *tálknstika* ‘whalebone candlestick’. While it is uncertain whether it refers to fish gills (or a metaphorical meaning derived from them), it still seems more likely that the nickname refers to a whalebone, perhaps an event involving one (as a weapon?).

**452. Tin-** ‘Tin- (metal)’: Tin-Forni, sonr Æsu í Svíney (147). *FJ* (268) suggests that the nickname implies that he was a *tinsmiðr* ‘tin-smith’. It could also refer to trading tin goods or a particular event involving a tin object, but the reference is unknown.

**453. tinteinn** ‘tin rod, tin spit’: Þorvaldr tinteinn Eysteinnsson (227). *FJ* (268) says that it means the same as the hyphenated nickname *Tin-* (implying an occupation as a tin-smith), and notes that in *Kormáks saga* the eponymous poet calls him a *tindrátarmaðr* (‘pewterer’) in a verse. *Lind* (383) says that it means ‘tin rod’. The second part of the compound *teinn* means ‘stake, rod, spit’, and as a compound the meaning is obvious, but the reference of the nickname is unknown. *HPE*: Tin-Bar.

**454. titlingr** ‘little sparrow’: Þorsteinn titlingr (326, 328, 329). *CV* (633) says that it is a diminutive from *tittr* ‘tit, sparrow’, which in the modern language has replaced *spörr* ‘sparrow’ altogether. Incidentally, another meaning of *tittlingr* is ‘penis’, but this is modern slang derived from the original word for the bird (cf. Engl. *bird* and *birdie* which are used in North American English to mean ‘penis’). See the nickname *græningarrjúpa* ‘young ptarmigan’. *HPE*: the Tit.

**455. tjaldstæðingr** ‘tent pitcher’: Þorsteinn Ásgrímsson tjaldstæðingr (*lnm* 357, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363). The nickname is explained in *Landnámabók* and his eponymous *þáttr* as coming from his building tents and trying to help a group of sickly arrivals to Iceland; all of the arrivals died, but Þorsteinn was remembered fondly for taking care of them when no one else would. The nickname is composed of *tjald* ‘tent’ and *stæðingr*



‘one who sets something up in a place’, derived from *stæði* ‘place on which things stand’, ultimately from the verb *standa* ‘to stand’. *HPE*: Tent-Pitcher.

**456. Torf-** ‘Turf-’: Torf-Einarr Rognvaldsson (271, 284, 285, 314 Einarr, 316 Einarr). The nickname is explained in *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* and *Orkneyinga saga*, and both sagas suggest that it comes from Einarr’s adopting the custom of burning turf (peat) on the Orkney Islands because of the lack of firewood there.

**457. torfi** (x2) ‘turf’: Áskell torfi (274, 275, H: tjörvi); Þorsteinn torfi Arnbjarnarson (*lmm* 292 Þ: Ásbjarnarson, 293, 294, 302, 303 Þ: tjörvi). It is a form of n. *torf* ‘turf, sod’ with the nickname suffix *-i*. *Torfi* is also found as a first name.

**458. \*trandill** ‘split-stick; small wheel, ring; one who skips and hops along; one who splits things apart’: Þorkell trandill Þorbjarnarson (381 H: Þorgilsson). *FJ* (357), *Lind* (386), and *DV* (596) connect it to NNorw. *trandle* ‘split stick for the floor in a barn’. *CV* (639) connects it to OE *trendel* ‘an orb, sphere’ and wonders if it means the same as Engl. *trundle* ‘small wheel, circle, ring’. *DV* (596) compares it to OE *trendan* ‘to roll’, *trendel* ‘ball, globe’, Middle Dutch and MLG *trendel(e)* ‘disc’, or alternatively to MHG *trennen* and MLG *ternen* ~ *tarnen* ~ *tornen* ‘unweave, unravel’ from Gmc. *\*der* ‘to split, cleave’. *ÍO* (1056) suggests that it may be connected to NNorw. *trandel* ‘an often frequented place, a trodden path’ or dialectal Swed. *tranta* ‘to tramp, hop or jog along’, but that it just as well may be related to NNorw. *trundle* ‘split stick for the floor’, dialectal Swed. *trind* ~ *trenta* ‘fence post’, Icel. *trana* ‘snout; ball of yarn; timber frames or beams’, and MHG *trennen* ‘to separate, divide, split’. The suffix *-ill*, and its variants *-all* and *-ull*, is added to a root to mean ‘someone or something in the habit of, prone to doing (whatever the root is)’. Thus, if the root *trand-* means ‘tramp along, hopping or skipping’ then the nickname may mean ‘one who hops or skips along’ (perhaps in circles, rolling along?), but if the meaning is ‘split, separate’, then it may mean ‘one who splits things apart’ (perhaps one who chops wood, or a reference to battle?). The meaning of the nickname remains unclear.

**459. trausti** ‘(the) trusty, strong’: Helgi trausti Ólafsson (377, 378). It is the weak form of the adj. *traustr* ‘trusty, strong, firm’ but without the definite article. *Trausti* also occurs as a first name. *HPE*: the Trusty.

**460. trefill** ‘tatter, rag’: Þorkell trefill Rauða-Bjarnarson (90, 91, 164, 165, 195, 196). In Old Norse the word referred to a worn out piece of a cloth, ‘a tatter or rag’ (thus, a highly derogatory nickname), but in the modern language it has lost the negative connotations and means ‘scarf’. The suffix *-ill* here is diminutive, added to the word *trefr* ‘fringe (of cloth)’ to denote its small size; cf. the cognate form Dan. *trævl* ‘shred, rag’. *HPE*: Fringe.

**461. tréfótr** ‘tree foot, wooden leg, peg leg’: Þunndr tréfótr Ófeigsson (*Inm* 198, 199). It is composed of the nouns *tré* ‘tree; (in compounds) wooden’ and *fótr* ‘foot’. The second part also implies the leg itself, and in this case it may have gone up as far as the knee (or slightly above?). *Landnámabók* explains that Þunndr lost his leg in the Battle of Hafrsfjord (Norway) and went on a wooden leg for the rest of his life. Cf. other nicknames referring to a foot such as *bundinfóti* ‘man with a bound foot’, *burlufótr* ‘clumsy foot’, and *bægifótr* ‘burden foot, lame foot’. *HPE*: Tree-Foot.

**462. trumbubein** ‘pipe, tube leg; trumpet leg’: Þorsteinn trumbubein (*Inm* 309). *FJ* (220) suggests that the first part is from *trumba* ‘a hollow tube, pipe’, and that as a nickname it could mean ‘a long, thin leg’. *Lind* (388) suggests that *trumba* can also mean ‘a trumpet’ and that the double nickname could refer to a trumpet or horn blower; otherwise, it may in some way refer to a crippled leg. The reference of the nickname is unknown, but it seems to suggest that there is a peculiar feature the man’s leg (resembling a pipe or tube in some manner). *HPE*: Drum-Leg.

**463. enn tryggvi** ‘the trusty, faithful’: Ingjaldr enn tryggvi Kolbjarnarson í Hvíni (249, 260, 261, 262, 263). It is the weak form of the adj. *tryggr* ‘trusty, faithful, true’. *Tryggvi* also occurs as a first name (cf. Ólafr Tryggvason’s father, Tryggvi Ólafsson).

**464. túnhani** ‘field rooster’: Eyvindr (tún)hani í Hanatúni (*Inm* 259). *FJ* (308) says that he lived at a farm called *Hanatún* and the nickname refers to that. Eyvindr is also called *hani* ‘rooster’, and the farm name *Hanatún* (‘*Hani*’s field’) comes from the nickname, so *túnhani* is a sort of double nickname referring to the farm named after the man’s original nickname. *HPE*: (Field-)Cock.

**465. tvennumbrúni** ‘double brows; unibrow’: Óláfr tvennumbrúni (*Inm* 376, 377). *FJ* (199) says that it seems to go back to a phrase *með tvennum brúnum* ‘with double eyebrows’ (cf. *Fitjumskeggi* ‘man from Fitjar’), where it would imply that the (head) hair looked like it made two sections over each brow. *CV* (645) wonders if it could mean ‘with meeting eyebrows’. Both explanations offered by *FJ* and *CV* are feasible and refer to odd-looking eyebrows, either a strange hair style where his head hair was curled above the eyebrows or a unibrow. One other possibility is that a scar may have split one (or both) of his eyebrows, resulting in the appearance of a double eyebrow. A dative form of *tvennr* ‘twin, two, two pairs’ is unexpected but may betray the dative origin of *brúni* ‘man with an eyebrow’ (masculine, nominative) from f. *brún* ‘eyebrow’. *HPE*: Split-Brow.

**466. tǫskubak** (x2) ‘pouch back’: Ormr tǫskubak Þórisson (270, 271); Qnundr tǫskubak (328, 329). *Lind* (390) suggests that the first part may have been the father’s or mother’s nickname. It is a compound made up of the nouns *taska* ‘pouch, pocket’ (cf. Ger. *Tasche* ‘pouch, pocket, bag’) and *bak(r)* ‘back’. The reason for the nickname is unknown, but it may have referred to a habit of wearing such a pouch on his back, an event involving such a pouch, or from a particular piece of clothing with a pouch or pocket sewn on the back. Cf. the other nicknames whose second component is also *-bak*, *flǫskubak* ‘flask back’ and *lǫngubak* ‘ling back’. *HPE*: Basket-Back.

## U

**467. enn ungi** ‘the young’: Eilífr enn ungi Eilífsson (356, 363, 364). It is the weak form

of the adj. *ungr* ‘young’ and was likely used to distinguish between two people with the same first name (like Engl. *junior*).

**468. ungi** (x2) ‘(the) young’: Haraldr ungi Hálfðanarson ens svarta (370); Kjallakr ungi Bjarnarson (148). It is the weak form of the adj. *ungr* ‘young’ but without the definite article.

**469. upsi** ‘pollock, cod (fish)’: Eiríkr upsi Gnúpsson (56, 57). *FJ* (312) says that it is a type of cod. *Lind* (394) glosses it as ‘takskägg’ (eaves [on a roof]), but that it could also be a geographic byname derived from the farm name *Upsir* in *Eyja fjörður*. *CV* (657) glosses it as ‘a fish, *gadus virens*’ (pollock, a fish of a the cod family). *Lind*’s first suggestion is that it is derivative of the feminine noun *ups* ‘eave (of a roof); (metaphorically) the eaves of a mountain’, which is behind the farm name *Upsir* he mentions. *DV* (632) glosses it as ‘Kohlfisch’ (pollock) and says that it is probably derived from the noun *ofsi* (‘overbearing, vehemence’). *ÍO* (1082) also suggests that it is related to *ofsi*, as well as *of* (‘over-’), *yfir* (‘over, above’), and that it originally meant ‘uppsjávarfiskur’ (pelagic fish, fish who live in areas from near the surface of the sea to almost all the way down to the bottom). It is likely that the name refers to an incident involving such a fish or that he was in the habit of fishing for cod. Cf. other nicknames referring to fish *hrogn* ‘roe (fish eggs)’, *lǫngubak* ‘ling back’, and *reyðr* ‘rorqual (whale); Arctic char’.

## V

**470. vaggagöi** ‘cradle from Agder; rocking person from Agder’: Þórðr vaggagöi (387 Þ: vǫggr ‘infant in a cradle’). *FJ* (358) suggests that the first part may be from the verb *vagga* ‘to rock’ and the second part is a noun meaning ‘one from Agðir (Agder, Norway)’. *Lind* (396) says that the first part is the same as the Swedish verb *vagga* ‘to rock, sway’ and compares it to NNorw. *vagg* ‘stocky person with a swaying, rocking walk’. The first part may instead refer to the noun *vagga* ‘cradle’, since the verb form *\*vagga* ‘to rock’ does not occur in Old Norse.

**471. vandræðaskáld** ‘poet of troubles, troublesome poet’: Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld Óttarsson (224). *FJ* (246-47) glosses it as ‘den vanskelige, umedgørlige skjald’ (the difficult, unwieldy poet) and notes that it is explained in his eponymous saga and in *Ólafssaga Tryggvasonar*, where King Ólafr Tryggvason baptizes Hallfreðr and gives him the nickname from Hallfreðr’s reluctance to be his follower. In Oddr Snorrason’s version of *Ólafssaga Tryggvasonar* it is Hallfreðr’s reluctance to be baptized that earns him the nickname. The first part of the compound is the genitive plural of *vandræði* ‘difficulty, trouble’.

**472. váganef** ‘nose of the bay; nose from Vágar’: Þórólfr váganef Hræreksson (340, 341). The first component *vágr* means ‘bay, creek’, and there are several place names with the plural form *Vágar*. In particular, the town *Vágar* built around the fishing area in Lofoten (northern Norway) comes to mind. The second component *nef* ‘beak, nose’ is most likely used synecdochically as a *pars pro toto* (thus, ‘man’). See the nickname *dúfunef* ‘dove nose’. *HPE*: Creek-Nose.

**473. vāmúli** ‘snout of calamity, harm snout’: Þorgils vāmúli Grenjaðarson (278, 279). The first component is *vá* ‘calamity, harm, danger’ (a cognate of Engl. *woe*) and the second part is *múli* ‘snout (of an animal)’. *Múli* is probably used synecdochically as a *pars pro toto*, in which case the whole nickname would mean ‘snout (= man) of harm’. Just as likely is that the nickname refers to a person whose “snout” (that is, his mouth and the words spoken from it) caused something bad to happen, perhaps from spilling too much information to an enemy or from insulting the wrong person; in either case, violence was likely the result. There is an obvious correlation of *-múli* here to *-mouth* as in Engl. *loudmouth* (one who speaks too much, too loudly, and reveals information one should not). See the nickname *gráfeldarmúli* ‘snout in a gray cloak’.

**474. vápni** ‘weapon; man with a weapon’: Eyvindr vápni Þorsteinsson (*Inm* 289, 290,

291). *FJ* (236) translates it as ‘den med våben’ (man with a weapon). *Lind* (398) notes that his descendants are called *Væpnlingar* after him. The nickname form is from the common neuter noun *vápn* with the suffix *-i*, which alters its meaning to ‘man with a weapon’. *HPE*: Weapon.

**475. Vé-** ‘Temple-’: Vé-Geirr í Sogni (Végeirr, 178, 179, 180, 181, 188-89 Geirr, 246, 247). *FJ* (249) notes that *Vé-Geirr* has seven children mentioned with the same prefix in their names. *Vé-Geirr* is usually spelled as a single name *Végeirr*, but the explanation describing his (heathen) religious devotion in *Landnámabók* (hann var blótmaðr mikill [he was a great heathen worshipper]) suggests that it is a hyphenated nickname like *Skarp-Heðinn* in *Njáls saga* and not a compound first name. ON *vé* means ‘temple, holy place’ (cf. Go. *weihs* ‘holy’), and it is found in Scandinavian place names like *Viborg*, *Visby*, *Odense* (< *Óðins-vé*) and first names like *Végestr*, *Vébrandr*, etc.; cf. *CV* (687).

**476. veðr** ‘wether, ram’: Ketill veðr (50, 51, 122, 251). *FJ* (304) notes that it is the animal and not the homonym *veðr* ‘weather, storm’. As a nickname it may imply a physical likeness to the animal, perhaps in appearance or sound, but it could also refer to the resembling its behavior. *HPE*: Wether.

**477. Veðrar-** ‘Wether-, Ram-’: Veðrar-Grímr, hersir í Sogni (46, 49). It is the genitive singular of the noun *veðr* ‘a castrated ram’ and may refer to having owned many such animals, or perhaps having a favorite one. Cf. the nicknames *Hafr-* ‘Billy Goat-’, *Hesta-* ‘Horses-’, *Hross-* ‘Horse-’, and *Svína-* ‘Pigs-’. *HPE*: Wether-Grim.

**478. veiðikonungr** ‘hunting king’: Guðrøðr veiðikonungr Hálfðanarson (136). *FJ* (271) glosses it as ‘jagtkonge’ (hunting king) and *Lind* (399) as ‘jaktkonung’ (hunting king). The first part is from *veiðr* ‘hunting, catch (of animals and fish)’ and the second part is the generic title of the legendary king. The first part is identical in meaning with the noun *veiðimaðr* ‘hunter’, and with the second part it does not represent a true compound (or

else it would mean ‘king of hunting’, as though he were the lord of the hunt rather than a proper king).

**479. \*viligísl** ‘lust hostage, sex slave; hostage of good-will’: Þórólfr viligísl (57). *FJ* (359) notes that the second part is ‘beam, rod, stick’ and that the first part is probably identical with *vili-* in *vilisess* (‘the heart’s seat, the heart’), meaning ‘sweet, desirable’. *Lind* (403) is unsure and glosses it as ‘önskegisslan’ (desire-hostage). *CV* (706) glosses *vili* as ‘will, wish, desire; good-will, liking, favor; delight, joy, desire; carnal lust’. Although *FJ* equates *gísl* to *geisl* ‘staff, rod’, the second part must be *gísl* ‘hostage’. The meaning of *vili* in this context, however, is difficult to know. The most innocent meaning it could have is ‘a hostage of good-will, favor’ (suggesting that he was a pleasant hostage to have), but it probably implies that the man was ‘a hostage of desire, hostage of lust’, which would represent an insult.

**480. \*vingnir** ‘horse penis; one who swings; killer’: Þorkell vingkinn Skíðason (*Inm* 230 HSK: *Atlason Skíðasonar*). *FJ* (300) connects it to the god Þórr and says that is one of his names, as well as one of Óðinn’s. *DV* (666) glosses it as ‘Thorsname, auch Riese, Ochs’ (name of Thor, also giant, ox) and connects it to either *vingull* ‘horse phallus’ or *Icel. vingla* ‘to confound’ and *vingsla* ‘tangle up, swing around’; if it is related to *vingull*, he says that it either means ‘the well-endowed animal, good for breeding’ or ‘the swaying’. *ÍO* (1141) connects *Vingnir* to the verb *vega* ‘to kill, slay in battle’ and Lat. *vinco* ‘I overcome, defeat’; he also says that it is likely related to *vingsa* (‘to swing around’) and *vingla* (‘to confound’) and that it originally meant ‘sá sem sveiflar, slær’ (one who swings, strikes). The root behind Lat. *vinco* is probably IE *\*uink* ‘to tie, bend’, with cognates across Indo-European. The suffix *-nir* is a common agentive suffix in mythological names, but the origin of *ving-* remains uncertain. In the modern language, *vingull* is an insult meaning ‘simpleton, oaf, idiot’, although a connection with the modern word is unlikely. It is also unlikely to be a mythological reference to the giant *Vingnir*, Þórr’s foster father, or a god, but it is impossible to know for certain. *HPE*: Prick.

**481. víðförli** ‘widely traveled’: Þorvaldr víðförli Koðráns­son (227). *FJ* (278-79) notes that Þorvaldr received the name as a result of traveling as far away as southern Europe and the Middle East. It is said in his eponymous *þáttr* that he made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (traveling around Syria and Greece) and eventually died in a monastery in Constantinople. It is the weak form of the adj. *viðförull* ‘far traveling, widely traveled’, but without the definite article.

**482. vífill** ‘beetle’: Þorsteinn vífill (334, 335 vífl ‘cudgel, bat [used in washing]’). *FJ* (359) assumes that it is the same as the noun *torðvífill* ‘dung beetle’ and the first name *Vífill*. *CV* (714) notes that it is a cognate of Engl. *weevil* ‘a type of beetle’. The reference of the nickname is unknown, but it may have referred to an event involving a beetle (squashing it?). It is unlikely but possible that it is used metaphorically to refer to his appearance. *HPE*: Beetle.

**483. Víga-** (x7) ‘Killings-’: Víga-Barði Guðmundarson (87, 220, 228); Víga-Bjarni Brodd-Helgason (231, 285, 288, 289, 290); Víga-Glúmr Eyjólfsson (215, 237, 253, 259, 266, 268, 269, 272, 282, 283); Víga-Hrappr Helgason (50, 51); Víga-Skúta Áskelsson (277, 278, 320); Víga-Sturla Þjóðreksson (158, 159, 166, 182, 183, 197); Víga-Styrr Þorgrímsson (113, 114, 115, 124, 131, 140, 147). *FJ* (274) glosses it as ‘drab’ (homicide) and notes that it commemorates those men’s many killings. *CV* (715) glosses the noun *víg* as ‘fight, battle’ in the oldest sense and ‘homicide’ when used as a legal term. It is the genitive plural of *víg* ‘fight, battle; homicide’, and as a hyphenated nickname it could just as easily refer to fights in general and not specifically killings of an unlawful type. *HPE*: Killer-.

**484. Víkinga-** ‘Vikings’-’: Víkinga-Kári Sigurðarson (215, 253, 286). *FJ* (274) considers it to imply that he was with other Vikings on an expedition. It is the genitive plural of *víkingr* ‘Viking’ and denotes the man’s activities as a trader and raider.

**485. vís** ‘(the) wise’: Qnundr vís í Eystradal í Skagafirði (*Inm* 233, 234). *FJ* (243)



glosses it as ‘den vidende, kyndige, erfarne’ (the knowing, knowledgeable, experienced). It is the strong form of the adj. *víss* ‘certain; wise’; the second sense of the word must be meant here, although the adj. *vitr* ‘wise’ is more commonly used. *HPE*: the Sage.

**486. enn væni** ‘the handsome’: Hóskuldr enn væni Þorgeirsson (275). It is the weak form of the adj. *vænn* ‘handsome, fair; promising’ and refers to his appearance.

**487. vǫðvi** ‘muscle’: Ásbjörn vǫðvi Kjallaksson (147, 148, 149). *FJ* (228) suggests that the meaning of it is collective: thus, ‘the man with powerful muscles’. *Lind* (404) glosses it as ‘vad, vadmuskel’ (calf [of the leg], calf muscle). *CV* (721) glosses the common noun as ‘a muscle’ and notes that it is a cognate of Ger. *Waden* ‘calves’. The explanation given by *FJ* is probably correct, but another possibility is that the nickname refers to an injury (pulled muscle or tear?). *HPE*: Muscle.

**488. vǫlubrjótr** ‘*vǫlva* destroyer’: Óláfr vǫlubrjótr Ásgeirsson (254). The first component *vǫlva* means ‘prophetess, seeress’, which is not the same as ‘witch’. The second component is *brjótr* ‘breaker’, an agentive noun derived from the verb *brjóta* ‘to break’. Cf. the nicknames *haugabrjótr* ‘breaker of mounds’ and *hornabrjótr* ‘breaker of horns’. *HPE*: the Witch-Breaker.

## **P**

**489. þegjandi** ‘(the) silent’: Þórir jarl þegjandi Rognvaldsson (218, 314). It is the present participle of the verb *þegja* ‘to be silent’ and means ‘one being silent, the silent’. See the nickname *gjallandi* ‘man with a resounding voice’.

**490. \*þiðrandi** ‘(male) partridge; the hoarse voiced; peering, gazing one?’: Þórir þiðrandi (295, 297, 336 Þiðrandi). *FJ* (360) connects it to *þiðurr* ‘wood grouse, western capercaillie (bird)’ and suggests that it may mean ‘one whose voice resembles the wood grouse’; he also notes that Haldorsen (1814, 495) translated it as ‘raucisonus’ (hoarse sounding). *Lind* (407) suggests that it is a present participle of a lost verb *\*þiðra* ‘to gaze,

peer’, a verb which may have survived in Norw. and dialectal Swed. *tira* ‘to peer, gaze’. *CV* (735) is unsure of the meaning but glosses it as ‘he-partridge = *þiðurr?*’. *DV* (610) gives the same suggestion as *Lind* but adds a possible relation to NNorw. *tidrande* ‘agile, nimble’ (from OIr *taralá* ‘quivering, trembling’). *ÍO* (1178) notes a connection of the name to the Modern Icelandic *heiti* for describing difficult, skittish horses. *ÍO* (1178, s.v. *þiðra*) glosses the modern verb as ‘strjúka létt og ótt, fiðra við, stíga í vænginn við’ (stroke lightly and quickly, tickle with a feather, make a pass at) and notes a connection to dialectal Swed. *tedra* ‘to be foolish, pretentious’; *ÍO* also suggests that the verb means the opposite ‘to turn, shift around quickly’ and notes a relation to Ger. *drehen* ‘turn’ (< \**prējan*), OHG *drāti* ‘quick, fast’, and Greek *titrēmi* ‘to bore through’. A reliable etymology is lacking and the origin and meaning remain unclear. See the nickname *gjallandi* ‘man with a resounding voice’. *Þiðrandi* is attested as a first name.

**491. þistill** ‘thistle’: Ketill þistill í Þistilfirði (*Inm* 104, 105, 285, 286, 287). The reference of the nickname is unknown, but it may refer to an event involving the man getting pricked on the plant. A metaphorical interpretation is difficult to imagine, but it could refer to the man appearing in some way like the plant (pointed hair?). *HPE*: Thistle.

**492. þjokkubeynn** ‘thick-legged’: Þorsteinn þjokkubeynn (289). It is composed of the adj. *þjokkr* ‘thick’ (a side form of *þykkur*) and the adj. *beynn* ‘legged’. See the nickname *berbeynn* ‘barelegged, barefoot’. *HPE*: Thick-Leg.

**493. þjóti** ‘the howling, the whistler’: Þorbjörn þjóti ór Sogni (246, 247 þjótr ‘the whistler’). *FJ* (360) glosses it as ‘den tudende’ (the howling). *CV* (740) glosses it as ‘the thunder, whistler’. It is a substantivized form of the verb *þjóta* ‘to emit a whistling sound (as the wind, surf, waves); to howl’. *HPE*: the Rushing of Sogn (another meaning of the verb *þjóta* is ‘to rush, rush in, burst in’, but it is less common).

**494. þorskabítr** ‘cod biter’: Þorsteinn þorskabítr Þórólfsson (115, 124, 125, 126, 181).

The first part is the genitive plural of *þorskr* ‘cod’, and the second component is a substantiated form of the verb *bíta* ‘to bite’. Although the circumstances behind the name are unknown, it is not hard to imagine that it involved an episode involving the man biting into a fish (raw, still living?). Perhaps the nickname is related to fishing, as when a fish *bites* the line and gets caught on the hook. *HPE*: Cod-Biter.

**495. \*þrymr** ‘loud noise, crashing; quiet, silent’: Ketill þrymr Þórisson (*lmm* 295, 297, 336, 397). *FJ* (256) glosses it as ‘den rolige og tavse’ (the quiet and silent). *Lind* (409-10) glosses it as ‘larm, brak’ (noise, crashing). *CV* (747) glosses *þrymr* as ‘an alarm, noise (of battle)’ and *þrumr* (747) ‘a slow person, moper’, and he assumes that the latter is the nickname because of the explanation in *Fljótsdæla saga*: hann var þögull ok fálátr snemma ok var kallaðr Þrum-Ketill (he was silent and reserved early in the day and was called *Þrum*-Ketill [‘Silent-’ Ketill]). The variant *Þrum*-Ketill does not occur elsewhere. If the variant *þrumr* ‘silent, quiet’ is the correct one, the meaning is opposite the other (‘loud noise, crashing’). Another possibility, though less likely, is that it is *þrymr* ‘glorious, famous’, a borrowing from the Old English noun *þrymm* ‘great body of people; power, might; magnificence; grandeur; glorious person or object’. Any connection to the mythological giant *Þrymr* who stole Þórr’s hammer is unlikely, but the same root of that name (meaning ‘loud noise, crashing’) is probably represented here. See the nicknames *gjallandi* ‘man with a resounding voice’ and *glumra* ‘rattler’.

**496. þunnkárr** ‘thin curl’: Auðun þunnkárr (364, 365). It is composed of the adj. *þunnr* ‘thin’ and the noun *kárr* ‘curl (in the hair)’. It may refer to a particular curl in the hair or more generally to the hair as a whole (thus, ‘the thin-haired’ or ‘the thin man with curly hair’). Cf. the nickname *gullkárr* ‘golden-haired; gold curl’. *HPE*: Thin-Hair.

**497. þunnskeggr** ‘thin beard’: Ófeigr þunnskeggr Kráku-Hreiðarsson (233). The first component is the adj. *þunnr* ‘thin’, which makes it difficult to know whether the name refers to his beard or his physique. See the nickname *bláskeggr* ‘blue beard’. *HPE*: Thin-Beard.

**498. þurs** (x2) ‘giant’: Þórir þurs á Þursstöðum (90, 91 Þórðr); Þorsteinn þurs (275). *FJ* (299) suggests that the nickname probably refers to him having a frightening, swarthy appearance (black hair and a black beard). See the nickname *hálftröll* ‘half troll’. *HPE*: Troll.

**499. þursasprengir** ‘destroyer of giants’: Þórir þursasprengir í Øxnadal (*lrm* 257). It is composed of the genitive plural of m. *þurs* ‘giant’ and an agentivized form of the verb *sprengja* ‘to make burst; to kill’, the causative of *springa* ‘to burst, split open; die’. *HPE*: Troll-Burster.

**500. þvari** ‘pole, rod, stick’: Þórðr þvari Þórólfsson (295). *FJ* (290) glosses it as ‘stang, stok’ (pole, stick). *Lind* (410-11) glosses it as ‘stång, käpp’ (pole, rod). *CV* (751) glosses it as ‘cross-stick’ and notes that it is found in the poetic compounds *ben-þvari* and *dólg-þvari* ‘a wound-stick (i.e. a weapon)’. It probably refers to weapon (or a violent act), but the reason behind the nickname is unknown.

**501. \*þyna** ‘ax; thinness; one who makes things thin; withers; abdomen; stretching’: Þorbjörg þyna Hrómundarson (201 H: þynna, 202, 204, 205, 224). *FJ* (228-29) says that if the correct form is *þynna*, it is derived from *þunnr* ‘thin’ and means ‘thinness’, but if it is *þyna*, it represents a word whose meaning is unknown. *Lind* (411) suggests that *þynna* may be from *þunnr* ‘thin’, but it could be *þyna*, whose meaning is unknown. *CV* (754) says that it may mean ‘withers?’ (highest part of a horse’s back) or ‘peritoneum’ (membrane covering the abdominal cavity) and connects it to *þön* ‘platform on stakes’ and *þenja* ‘to stretch, extend’. *ÍO* (1209) says that the nickname *þyna* is connected to the idea of reliability, but that the meaning of the word is unknown. There is also a noun *þynna*, found only in the compound *half-þynna* ‘a kind of axe’. If the variant *þynna* is correct, it could be a substantivized form of the verb *þynna* ‘to make thin’, meaning ‘one who makes things (or people?) thin’. The meaning and origin of the nickname remain unknown.

**502. \*þynning** ‘thin person, scrawny person’: Þorsteinn þynning Kjallaksson (123 þuneyjungur ‘man from *Punney(jar)*’, 147). *FJ* (229) glosses it as ‘den tynde’ (the thin, lean) and connects it to the nickname *þynna*. *Lind* (411) says that it is derived from the adj. *þunnr* ‘thin’. *CV* (754) does not gloss it, but connects it to *þyna* ‘withers (highest part of a horse’s back); membrane covering the abdominal cavity’. *ÍO* (1209) connects the feminine noun *þynning* to Far. *tyunning* ‘dilution, illumination, clearing up’ and NNorw. *tyunning* ‘watery beer’. A connection to *þyna* (variant form *þynna*) is unlikely; the word is rare and of unclear etymology. The nickname seems to be derived from the verb *þynna* ‘to make thin, thin out’, the suffix *-ing* is inexplicably feminine when it ought to be *-ingr*; as such, it may be a noun connected not to the man but to the thinning out or clearing out of something else. It is tempting to connect it to NNorw. *tyunning* ‘watery (thinned out) beer’, but there is no evidence of such a meaning having existed in the Middle Ages.

**503. þongull** ‘branch of seaweed, tangle’: Þorgrímur þongull Kjallaksson (63, 123, 124, 125, 126, 147, 148, 396). *FJ* (361) glosses it as ‘tangstilk’ (seaweed stalk) and notes that in the modern language *þöngull* and *þöngulhöfuð* is used to refer to stupid people. *Lind* (411) glosses it as ‘tångstjälk’ (seaweed stalk). *CV* (756) glosses it as ‘tangle, sea-weed’. Engl. *tangle* owes its origin to the same Norse word. *HPE*: Tangle-Weed.

## Æ

**504. æðikollr** ‘hot-head, impetuous man’: Ásgeirr æðikollr Qnundarson (143, 199, 220). *FJ* (251) glosses it as ‘det rasende hoved’ (the furious head) and explains its meaning as one which refers to a hot-tempered, impetuous person. *Lind* (412) connects it to the noun *æði* ‘rage, fury’. *CV* (348) glosses it as ‘downy head’ and later (757) suggests that m. *æðikollr* means ‘the eider-drake’ and is the male equivalent of f. *æðikolla* ‘eider-duck’; this is a clever explanation but a wrong one. The usual form is *æðar-kolla*, whose first component is the genitive of *æðr* ‘eider’, not *æði*-. The nickname is composed of the nouns *æði* ‘fury, rage’ and *kollr* ‘crown of the head, head’. The second part may be used

as a *pars pro toto* to mean ‘the furious man’. See the nickname *hærukollr* ‘gray hair head’. *HPE*: the Hasty.

### Q/Ø

**505. *ølfúss*** ‘(the) eager for beer’: Eiríkr *ølfúss* í Súrnadal (262, 263, 264, 265, 267). *FJ* (259) glosses it as ‘den alvillige’ (the all-willing, the very eager) and cites *u*-umlaut as the reason for the shift from *al-* to *øl*. The meaning of the nickname is obvious and *FJ* is mistaken. It is the strong form of a compound adjective composed of *øl* ‘beer, ale’ and *fúss* ‘eager’. *HPE*: Ale-Lover.

**506. *øndurr*** ‘snow shoe, ski’: Þorsteinn *øndurr* (127). The circumstances behind the nickname are obscure, but one can imagine that Þorsteinn may have frequently used his skis to travel or that he had an episode where he used skis to escape danger. *HPE*: Snow-Shoe.

**507. *øngt í brjósti*** ‘narrow in the chest (= the asthmatic)’: Ávaldr *øngt í brjósti* (135). *FJ* (215) glosses it as ‘trangt-i-bryst’ (tight in the chest), that is, ‘astmatisk’ (asthmatic). The first part of the phrase is the neuter form of the adj. *øngr* ‘narrow, straight’. Nicknames made up of phrases, as opposed to compounds, are rare (cf. Sigurðr *ormr í auga* ‘snake in the eye’). The connection to asthma is probable but not certain, though the German cognate *engbrüstig* ‘wheezy, asthmatic’ may lend credibility to it.

**508. *øngull*** ‘man from Qngley (modern Engeløy in Hålogaland, Norway)’: Loðinn *øngull* (273). *FJ* (182) notes that, unlike others with the same nickname (meaning ‘fishing hook’), it refers to his origin in *Qngley* (Hook Island) in Hålogaland. The explanation in the *Hauksbók* version may back up the place name origin: svá kallaðr, því at hann var fœddr í eyju þeiri, er Qngull heitir (called so because he was born on the island which is called Qngull). The noun and nickname *øngull* ‘fishing hook’ is related to the adj. *øngr* ‘narrow, straight’ (cf. Ger. *eng* ‘narrow, tight’), and similarly, the place

name must be from the same root (cf. Engl. *angle*, which is a cognate). *HPE*: Fishing-Hook.

**509. *qrðigskeggi*** ‘harsh beard; man with a harsh beard’: Eiríkr *qrðigskeggi* (231). It is composed of the adj. *qrðigr* ‘rising on end, upright; harsh, brisk’ and *skegg-i*, with the usual nickname suffix *-i*. The second part is probably used *pars pro toto*, thus, ‘man with a harsh beard’ (‘a scratchy beard?’) or ‘harsh man’ (= ‘a difficult man to deal with’). See the nickname *Fitjumskeggi* ‘beard on Fitjar’. *HPE*: Bristle-Beard.

**510. *qrn*** ‘eagle’: Eilífr *qrn* Atlason (*lnm* 227). The circumstances behind the nickname are obscure, but nicknames referring to birds are not uncommon. See the nickname *græningarrjúpa* ‘young ptarmigan’. *HPE*: Eagle.

**511. *ørrabeinn*** ‘scar-legged’: Þorgrímr *ørrabeinn* Þormóðarson (376, 377, 378 SH: *erru-*, P: *orra-*). It is composed of the noun n. *ørr* ‘scar’ and the adj. *beinn* ‘legged’. His nickname is explained briefly in *Flóamanna saga*: Hafði hann verit víkingr ok víða af því ørrótt (He had been a viking [traveling] far and wide and for this reason he was covered in scars). See the nickname *berbeinn* ‘barelegged, barefoot’. *HPE*: Scar-Leg.

**512. \**ørrek*** ‘arrow driver; one who drives away’: Þorbrandr *ørrek* á Þorbrandsstöðum (*lnm* 234 H: *otrekur* ‘fear driver?’). *FJ* (361) suggests that it may mean ‘bortdrivelse eller bortdriver’ (driving away or one who drives away) from *ør-* (a negative prefix like *ó-* ‘un-’) and *rek(r)*. *Lind* (414) gives the form *qrrekr* and derives it from *qr* ‘arrow’ and *rekr* from the verb *reka* in the meaning ‘aim, direct’. *ÍO* (1228) glosses it as ‘bogaskeyti’ (bow shooter). While the majority of compounds formed with *qr* ‘arrow’ are found in the genitive (*qrvar-* or *qrva-*), there are the poetic terms *qrdrif* ~ *qrveðr* ‘(literally) arrow storm’ used to mean ‘battle’ and *qrrjóðr* ‘(literally) arrow reddener’ ~ *qrsløngvir* ‘(literally) arrow slinger’ used to mean ‘warrior’. If the variant “otrekur” in *Hauksbók* is not an error, a possible compound *ótt-* ‘fear’ (from *ótti*) and *rekr* ‘driver’ is plausible. Less likely but possible is that the first part is the noun *ørr* ‘scar’ (thus, ‘scar driver, one

who gives scars’) or the adj. *qrr* ‘swift; generous’ (thus, ‘the swift driver’ or ‘the generous driver’); if it is the adjective, the second part could represent *rek* ‘jetsam’ and refer to tossing things overboard while at sea, or it may be the metaphorical meaning ‘prosecution’ and refer to legal activities. Hermann Pálsson (1952, 203) suggests that it is the Old Irish name *Orach* (untranslated, but it seems to mean ‘golden’), similar to the nickname type found in *meinakr* (Þorkell *meinakr* in *Eyrbyggja saga*), which he says is the same as the Irish name *Maenach*. An Irish origin is unlikely. The meaning and origin of the name remain unclear.

**513. enn qrvi** (x3) ‘the generous; the swift’: Brandr enn qrvi Vermundarson (116, 117); Gautrekr enn qrvi (152, 156, 157); Hafliði enn qrvi Hrólfsson (268). *FJ* (258) glossed it as ‘den gavmilde’ (the generous). *Lind* (414) defined it as ‘frikostig’ (the generous, open-handed). It is the weak form of the adj. *qrr* ‘swift; open-handed, generous’.

**514. qrvønd** ‘left hand’: Þórðr qrvønd Þorkelsson (180, 183). *FJ* (217) suggests that the term means ‘left hand’ because it is the one which held the arrow on a bow (thus, *qr* ‘arrow’ and [*h*]ønd ‘hand’).

**515. qrvøndr** ‘left handed’: Þórðr qrvøndr Þorvaldsson (182, 183). While the etymology is not firm, the literal meaning of the adjective is probably *qr* ‘arrow’ and [*h*]øndr ‘handed’ (cf. the previous nickname, *qrvønd*). *HPE*: the Left-Handed.

**516. Øxna-** ‘Oxen-’: Øxna-Þórir (Yxna-, 35, 130, 197, 232 H: Exna-, 235, 259, 290, 291). It is the genitive plural of *oxi* ~ *uxi* ‘ox’. The nickname is explained only in the *Skarðsárbók* version of *Landnámabók* as originating from a generous gift of an island with 70 oxen on it to King Haraldr *hárfagri*. *HPE*: Oxen-Thorir.

**517. øxnabroddr** ‘oxen goad’: Þorsteinn øxnabroddr Oddgeirsson (374). It is composed of the genitive plural of *oxi* ‘ox’ and *broddr* ‘spike’, which was used primarily for ice shoes (crampons). Cf. *Brodd-Helgi* ‘Spike-’ Helgi. *HPE*: Oxen-Goad.



## Conclusion

Chapter 1 accomplished two essential tasks relevant to this study of Old Norse nicknames. First, a detailed summary of existing scholarly literature shows the type of work that has been done on the topic from a variety of angles, and reflects the fact that in a study such as this only a small portion of the available avenues can be explored in one place. Secondly, situating this particular type of philological study of onomastic and linguistic data in the context of the literature is important for showing that such work cannot be accomplished in a vacuum. The nature of medieval literature makes it necessary to discuss its origins in oral tradition, previously written literature, and the interplay of the two with one another.

Chapter 2 covered a broad base of cultural information pertaining to the classification of nicknames. The terminology used by scholars to describe them, as well as the terminology used by medieval people, reflects the imprecise use of labels throughout history. Determining which terms best apply to nicknames is a difficult task, and I have relied primarily on the system of classifications used by other scholars. Similarly, the beliefs held by members of the societies giving nicknames are reflected by the cultural background of those societies. In the case of medieval Scandinavia, it is apparent that nicknames often substituted for first names, not only substituting for them but in many cases also replacing them. A special type of nicknames derived from slang and the lowest registers of the spoken language exemplifies the type of humor and insults tolerated by people of the era. In particular, those nicknames which would have been considered obscene or resemble “potty humor” are of the most insulting types of

nicknames, and such names are contrary to the laws forbidding such libelous speech. The society behind obscene and derogatory names had a sense of rude sense of humor, and these types of names speak for themselves.

Chapter 3 investigated of the use of nicknames in the literature, in particular the way nicknames are used to develop or reinforce narrative descriptions of an individual's biography. Most descriptions are purely anecdotal, that is, the nickname is reflected in some personal characteristic or event purportedly attached to the individual bearing the name. Nickname explanations from all social classes, both legendary and historical, have the same effect on the development of the narrative, one where the nickname is used to supplement the biography of an individual and provide proof of its accuracy, just as skaldic poetry is quoted to show the accuracy of historical events. In many cases, the quality of a storyteller (or scribal "reteller") was reflected in his ability to work from common information in oral tradition, using and manipulating the limited but hard facts of information like names, places, and important events. The society fostering such cultural memory was indeed special, and that such stories were able to survive and find their way into manuscripts is nothing short of a miracle. Even more remarkable is that the art of Icelandic storytelling improved from the sorts of short family histories exemplified by *Landnámabók* into family sagas of the highest quality. Nicknames played a role in composing such stories, however limited in the broader picture, and regardless of their historical truth, they provide a valuable method to dig deeper for the origins of saga literature.

Chapter 4 was intended primarily to provide translations of the nicknames in the largest single source of medieval Scandinavian names, *Landnámabók*, and in doing so it was necessary to revel in the minutiae of individual nicknames as linguistic and etymological data. While the meaning of most nicknames is apparent, a large number of them are resistant to simple translation, and the only possible key to discovering their meaning was through the etymological method. Five nicknames I was unable to solve despite my best efforts, but out of a total of 517 nicknames, it was a better than expected result. 65 nicknames were problematic to provide a definitive solution for and remain disputed or unclear, even if there are in most cases possible translations available from which to choose. The majority of the nicknames were nouns (413), and a sizeable number of them formed as compounds (175). The other major grammatical type were adjectives (104), and the majority of them were weak (70), although a small number of them were strong (34). Surprisingly few of the nicknames were hyphenated prefixes (49), composed of both nouns and adjectives. In any case, compiling such a list has proven to be no small task, and in doing so I have gained greater respect for my predecessors, particularly *FJ* and *Lind*, by working through many of the same difficulties they faced. Continuing with the kind of work required to compile a complete list of all the nicknames in Old Norse literature as an updated version of *Lind* is one that could easily take an entire lifetime, but the need for it remains.

Old Norse nicknames provide a nearly untapped resource for investigating issues in onomastics, lexicology, etymology, narratology, and literary analysis in Old Norse scholarship. I have, naturally, discussed only a handful of the many avenues of available

research on nicknames, and a more thorough investigation into the topic is necessary to discover all the features and cultural information which can be gleaned from the massive body of nicknames. In this study I have accomplished several research goals: defining the appropriate terminology to describe nicknames; giving a summary of resources, research to date; providing a description of some of the central issues and varied features of nicknames; giving several examples of the role nicknames play in Old Norse literature; and providing a detailed list of nicknames and their meanings. This investigation is incomplete, but it is my hope that I have explained the most difficult problems involved in the study of nicknames. In doing so, it gladdens me to know that I have introduced Old Norse nicknames thoroughly enough to provide a scholarly medium where further research into them is possible.

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## Appendix – Register of Nicknames

### Nicknames in Other Languages

- Achaïcus (Conqueror of Achaea [Greece]), 48  
 Africanus (Conqueror of Africa), 32-3, 48  
 Auri Prodigus Cibique Tenacissimus (Lavish of Gold and the Stingiest of Food), 80  
 Balbus (Stammerer), 4, 31  
 Bardokva (Radish, Lettuce), 4  
 Brevis (Short), 4  
 Brocchus (Large Projecting Teeth), 31  
 Bumbus (Fart) 69, 195  
 Caecus (Blind), 31  
 Calciamentis Vacuus (Without Footwear), 83  
 Callinicus (Beautiful Victor), 48-9  
 Caluus (Bald), 4  
 Capito (Big head), 31  
 Capulus (Handle, Hilt, Penis?), 65  
 Crassus (Fat), 31, 33  
 Creticus (Victorious on Crete), 33  
 Cunnus (Vagina, Cunt), 65  
 Epimanes (Furious), 34  
 Epiphanes (Famous), 34  
 Flaccus (Big Ears), 31  
 Fratrum Interfector (Killer of Brothers), 84  
 Grypus (Hook Nose), 48-9  
 Hirsutus (Hairy), 31  
 Insoa (ON *innskóar* ‘insoles’), 187  
 Kindermacher, der (the Childmaker), 92  
 Kopronymos (Name of Shit), 4  
 Lakhanas (Cabbage), 4  
 Macedonicus (Conqueror of Macedonia), 48  
 Macer (Thin), 31  
 Macrinus (Thin), 48-9  
 Mentula (Cock), 65  
 Minutus (Tiny), 31  
 Mnemon (Mindful), 48-9  
 Naso (Big Nose), 31  
 Ovicula (Lambkin), 73  
 Peditus (Farter), 31, 65  
 Penis (Tail, Penis), 65  
 Pinguis (Fat), 4  
 Pius (Loyal), 33  
 Pulcher (Beautiful), 33  
 Putentinus (Little Smelly), 31  
 Sanguinea Securis (Bloody Ax), 84  
 Scipio (Staff, Scepter), 32, 57  
 Sesquiculus (Man with an Anus [or butt] One and a Half Times the Usual Size), 65  
 Sterquilinus (Manure), 65  
 Sulla/Sylla (Burned Red Rock, Red Complexion), 48-9, 72-3  
 Superbus (Arrogant), 33  
 Sura (Leg), 74  
 The Bastard, 4, 87  
 The Conqueror, 4, 86-7  
 Torquatus (Man Wearing a Twisted Collar or Necklace), 47-9  
 Unræd (Ill-Advised), 4, 86  
 Valgus (Bow-Legged), 31  
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### Nicknames in Old Norse-Icelandic

- Aðalsteinsfóstri (foster son of King Æthelstan), 14, 125  
 allrasystir (sister of all), 127  
 alskik (?), 127  
 Alviðrukappi (champion of Alviðra), 127  
 ambi (hypocorism of *Arnbjörn*), 108  
 ánaudgi (the enslaved), 127  
 árbót (improvement of the season), 127  
 arnkatla (eagle kettle), 127  
 askasmiðr (ship builder), 128  
 auðga, en (the wealthy), 128  
 auðgi, enn (the wealthy), 42-3, 51, 54, 128  
 auðkúla (wealth hump, bump of wealth), 128  
 auga (eye), 128-9  
 aurriði (brown trout), 129  
 austmaðr (the Norwegian), 13  
 austmannaskelfir (terror of the Norwegians), 129  
 austrœni (the Norwegian), 124  
 bakrauf (back-hole [= anus]), 69  
 Barna- (Children-), 129  
 barnakarl (children’s man, friend of children, man with many children), 92, 129  
 bast (bast, inner tree fiber), 129  
 bastarðr (bastard), 87-8  
 beigaldi (the fearsome; the weak, injured, sickly; the coward), 130  
 beiskaldi (the harsh, bitter), 130  
 bekkjarbót (pride of the bench; bride), 130

- bekk (bench), 130  
 belgr (skin; skin bag), 130-1  
 berbeinn (barelegged), 51, 82-3, 131  
 berfœttr (barefoot), 51, 82-3; see also  
*Calciamentis Vacuus* (without footwear), 83  
 berlegg (barelegged), 51  
 berserkjabani (slayer of berserks), 131  
 berserkr (berserk), 131  
 beytill (horse penis), 66, 131  
 bíldr (bolt; bleeding instrument), 132  
 birtingr (sea trout), 113-4, 131  
 bitra (bitterness), 131  
 bjálfi (pelt), 132  
 bjálki (beam, balk), 132  
 bjarki (little bear), 132  
 bjarnylr (warmth of a bear), 132  
 bjóðaskalli (baldy of Bjóðar; round table baldy;  
 bowl baldy), 133  
 bjóla(n) (small mouth), 133  
 bláfauskr (black firewood), 133  
 blákinn (blue cheek), 133-4  
 bláskeggr (blue beard), 134  
 blátönn (blue tooth), 134  
 blesi (blaze), 134  
 blígr (gazer, starrer), 135  
 blindi, enn (the blind), 78, 134  
 blindingatrjóna (horse-fly snout; peg snout), 134  
 blóðøx (blood-ax), 84, 103; see also *Sanguinea*  
*Securis* (bloody ax), 84  
 Blót- (Sacrifice-, Offering-), 135  
 Blund- (Slumber-), 135  
 blundr (slumber, snooze), 135  
 bløðruskalli (blister baldy, bladder baldy), 135  
 blönduhorn (sour whey horn), 135  
 bogsveigir (bow bender), 135-6  
 borgarhjörtr (hart of the castle), 108  
 Brand- (Firebrand-; Sword Blade-), 136  
 Braut- (Road-), 76-7  
 breiðr (the broad), 136  
 breiðskeggr (broad beard), 136  
 Brennu- (Burning-), 136  
 brezki (the British), 13  
 brimill (male seal), 136  
 Brodd- (Spike-), 44-5, 136  
 Bróka- (Breeches-), 111  
 brúðr (bride), 137  
 brún (brow), 137  
 Brunda- (Sperm-), 65, 136-7  
 brækir (bleater; troublemaker; skin braker), 137  
 buna (ungartered; bone shaft; clumsy foot?), 50,  
 137  
 bundinfóti (man with a bound foot), 138  
 bunhauss (toil skull), 138  
 burlufótr (clumsy foot), 138  
 byrðusmjör (butter box, butter crate, butter  
 trough), 138  
 bægifótr (burden foot, lame foot), 138-9  
 böggvir (injurer, damager), 139  
 bóllr (ball, globe; glans penis, penis head), 65-6,  
 139  
 dettiáss (fall beam), 139  
 Digr- (Stout-, Fat-), 139-40  
 digra, en (the stout), 140  
 digrbeinn (thick-legged), 84  
 digri, enn (the stout), 140  
 djúpauðga (-úgða), en (the deep minded), 140  
 dofni, enn (the dead-legged, paralyzed in the  
 legs), 140  
 drafdrítr (waste/garbage shit), 69  
 dráputúfr (piece of a drápa [poem]), 140  
 draumspaki, enn (the wise of dreams, the dream  
 interpreter), 140-1  
 drífa (snowdrift, falling snow, sleet), 141  
 dritkinn (shit cheek), 69  
 dritljóð (dung sound [= fart]), 69  
 dritloki (shit end, shit loop), 69  
 Drumb- (Oaf-), 141  
 dúfunef (dove nose, pigeon nose), 141  
 dylla (field sow thistle, *sonchus arvensis*), 141-2  
 dýr (animal; deer), 142  
 eikikrókr (oak hook; oak ship hook; hook from  
 Oakwood), 142  
 einhendi, enn (the one-handed), 151  
 eldr (fire), 143  
 elfsi (hypocorism of *Álfr*), 13, 108  
 Elliða- (Ship-), 143  
 elliðaskjöldr (ship's shield), 143  
 erra (pugnacity), 143  
 Eyglu- (Little Eyed-?), 50  
 eykindill (island flame), 109  
 eyrarleggr (leg from Eyrr; gravel bank leg), 143-  
 4  
 fagra, en (the fair), 50, 100, 109  
 fagri, enn (the fair, handsome), 144  
 farmaðr (traveler, merchant), 50, 144  
 farserkr (travel shirt), 144  
 fasthaldi (the tenacious; the steadfast), 144  
 feilan (little wolf), 144  
 fíflski, enn (the foolish, stupid), 144  
 fiskreki (fish driver; fish driver [type of whale]),  
 144-5  
 físs (fart), 69  
 Fitjumskeggi (beard on Fitjar), 145  
 Fjarska- (Far Distance-), 145

- flatnefr (flat nose), 145  
 flosi (fop, dandy, womanizer; careless, loose mouthed person), 145  
 Flugu- (Fly- [insect]; Bait-; Bandit-), 145-6  
 flöskubak (leather flask back), 146  
 flöskuskegg (flask beard), 146  
 fretr (fart), 69, 114; see also *Bumbus*, 69, 195  
 fróði, enn (the learned), 13, 146  
 fuðhundr (dog cunt, cunt-dog), 67  
 fuðkúla (cunt-ball, clitoris), 66-7  
 fuðsleikir (cunt-licker), 66-7  
 fullspakr (the fully wise), 146-7  
 fylsenni (forehead of a foal), 147  
 gagarr (dog), 147  
 galinn (the crazy), 114  
 galti (boar), 147  
 gamla, en (the old), 147  
 gamli, enn (the old), 147-8  
 gandr (wand, magic staff), 148  
 gasi (fool, one who gazes?), 148-9  
 geisli (ray, beam of light), 109  
 geit (female goat; coward), 149  
 geitskqr ~ geitskór (goat hair; willowherb, fireweed), 149  
 gellir (bellower), 53, 149  
 gerpir (bold warrior; loud mouth, braggart), 149  
 gígja (fiddle), 149-50  
 Gjafa- (Gifts-), 50  
 gjallandi (one who shouts, yeller, man with a resounding voice), 150  
 glaði (the glad), 150  
 gleðill (cheerful man), 150  
 Glíru- (Blink-), 150  
 glóra (glimmer of light), 150  
 glumra (rattler), 150-1  
 glömmuðr (the crasher), 151  
 gneisti (spark), 151  
 gnúpa (drooper; mountain peak), 151  
 góði, enn (the good), 49, 50, 151  
 goðlauss (godless), 151-2  
 goðfuglári (the generous), 51  
 gollnir (the ransomed), 152  
 gráfeldarmúli (snout in a gray cloak), 152  
 gráfeldr (gray cloak), 81-2, 152  
 grái, enn (the gray; the malicious), 152-3  
 Graut- (Porridge-), 2, 63, 152  
 Grautar- (Porridge-), 50, 152  
 grautr (porridge), 2, 63, 152  
 grenski (the Grenlander), 106  
 grettir (grimacer, frowner), 53, 61, 153  
 gríss (pig), 153  
 grœningarrjúpa (young ptarmigan; ptarmigan of Grœning), 163  
 gufa (steam, vapor; laggard; imposing man), 153-4  
 Gull- (Gold-), 154  
 gullberi (gold bearer), 154  
 gullkár (golden haired; gold curl), 154  
 gullskeggr (gold beard, gold bearded), 154  
 gylðir (wolf), 154  
 Göngu- (Walking-), 80, 154  
 Há- (Tall-; Thole-; Shark-?), 155  
 háðsami, enn (the ridiculer, mocking one), 155  
 hafnarlykill (key of the harbor; key of Höfn), 155  
 Hafr- (Billy Goat-), 13, 90-1, 155  
 hafrsþjó (billy goat's thigh), 60, 155  
 háfœta (high feet), 51, 103-4  
 haklangr (long chin), 155-6  
 hákr (brazen, cheeky, violent man), 156  
 hálegggr (high-legged), 51, 103  
 hálftröll (half troll), 156  
 hálmí (straw), 156  
 háls (neck), 156  
 haltí, enn (the lame), 50, 156  
 hamrammi, enn (the shape-shifting; the very strong), 156-7  
 hani (cock, rooster), 50, 236  
 harðfari (hard traveler), 157, 222  
 harðráði (hard rule; Hardrada), 23, 50, 118  
 hárfagri, enn (fair hair), 39, 50, 80, 91, 157  
 hárrúða ok en siðláta, en (the splendid hair and the well-mannered), 49  
 haugabrjótr (breaker of grave mounds), 157  
 hauknefr (hawk nose), 157  
 hausakljúfr (splitter of skulls), 157-8  
 haustmyrkr (autumn darkness), 158, 200  
 hávi, enn (the tall), 49, 51, 82-3, 158  
 hegri (heron), 158  
 heiðarekkja (widow of the heath), 158  
 heiðmenningr (paid soldier; man on the heath?), 158-9  
 heikilnef (crooked nose; pointed nose), 50  
 heimski, enn (the stupid, foolish), 41-2, 51, 159  
 helgi, enn (the holy, saint), 52, 115, 159  
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