# The Saga of the Jómsvikings

NORTHERN MEDIEVAL WORLD

EDITORIAL BOARD

Carolyne Larrington (Chair)
St. John's College, Oxford

Oren Falk
Cornell University

Dawn Hadley
University of Sheffield

Jana Schulman
Western Michigan University

Jón Viðar Sigurðsson
Universitetet i Oslo

Medieval Institute Publications is a program of
The Medieval Institute, College of Arts and Sciences

Western Michigan University

# The Saga of the Jómsvikings

## A Translation with Full Introduction

by

Alison Finlay

and

Þórdís Edda Jóhannesdóttir

Northern Medieval World

MEDIEVAL INSTITUTE PUBLICATIONS
Western Michigan University
*Kalamazoo*

Copyright © 2018 by the Board of Trustees of Western Michigan University

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**
**are available from the Library of Congress.**

ISBN: 9781580443111

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in, or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the written permission of both the copyright owner and the author of the book.

Every effort has been made to obtain permission to use all copyrighted illustrations reproduced in this book. Nonetheless, whosoever believes to have rights to this material is advised to contact the publisher.

# Contents

Introduction 1

The Saga of the Jómsvikings 67

Bibliography 163

Index of Persons and Places 174

“This page intentionally left blank”

# Introduction

*JÓMSVÍKINGA SAGA* IS AMONG the oldest Icelandic saga texts. It was most likely written early in the thirteenth century, perhaps as early as around 1200. The saga is relatively short, the narrative is brisk, and the tone is amusing. In place of a single hero, the saga features the group of legendary Danish Vikings known as the Jómsvikings (*Jómsvíkingar*). The narrative unfolds against the background of recurrent hostility between the rulers of Denmark and Norway, and the climax of the saga is the battle of Hjǫrungavágr where the Jómsvikings are defeated by Jarl Hákon of Norway. The heroic death of many of the Jómsvikings is followed by a melodramatic scene of execution in which the survivors articulate their creed of extreme courage and fellowship.

Like other early texts, *Jómsvíkinga saga* occupies contested generic ground between history and fiction; it contains material relevant to, and used as a source in, early historical texts, but is full of lively fictional motifs. The first section of the saga is mainly concerned with Danish kings, from their origin to the conversion of Denmark to Christianity. The second section introduces Pálnatóki, founder of the mysterious fortress Jómsborg and the leader of the Jómsvikings; it goes on to detail the forming of the fellowship among the warrior band, their involvement in the conflicts between Danes and Norwegians, and their downfall in the battle.

The saga has been preserved in four different versions from the Middle Ages, in four vellum manuscripts, all discussed in more detail later in this introduction. The saga has twice been translated into English, in a parallel-text version by Norman Blake (Nelson's Icelandic Texts, 1962) and by Lee M. Hollander (University of Texas Press, 1955). Both translations use the shortened text of Holm. Perg. 7 4to (hereafter Perg. 7). The translation in this volume is based on the version of AM 291 4to (hereafter 291), which has not been translated into English before.

## Historical Background

One of the longest-running controversies concerning *Jómsvíkinga saga* is the location of Jómsborg. In the saga, its location is not described precisely enough to be pinpointed exactly. It is said to be located in Jóm, a part of the kingdom of King Búrizláfr of Vindland that he offers to Pálnatóki:

> And there he quickly has built in his domain a fortress by the sea, exceedingly large and strongly built, which was called Jómsborg after that. There he also has built a harbor inside the fortress that three hundred longships could be berthed in at the same time, so that they were all shut within the fortress. It was designed with great ingenuity where the entrance to the harbor was, and it was constructed as if there were a door, with a great stone arch above it. And before the entrance there were iron gates which locked the harbor from within. And up on the stone arch a large tower was built with catapults inside it. Some parts of the fortress stood out over the sea, and structures built like that are called sea-castles, and on account of this the harbor was within the fortress. (p. 110)

The description of the fortress has, understandably, led many to wonder whether it existed in reality and, if so, where it could have been. *Vindland* is the Old Norse term for the western part of the southern coast of the Baltic, often referred to in accounts of Scandinavian activity in Slavic areas. Ongoing archaeological research since the 1930s has led to a general consensus that Wolin (German Wollin) in Poland, situated on an island in the estuary of the river Oder off the Baltic coast, is the location of Jómsborg.

The place name *Jómsborg* is found only in Icelandic sources and the Norwegian *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sǫgum*, but names related to the first part, *Jóm-*, are found in various sources, and *Iuline*, which appears in, for instance, the *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus, seems to refer to the same place. In fact, as Petrulevich has argued in detail, there seem to have been several variations of the name, all apparently associated with the same place, in Scandinavian, German, and Slavic sources (Petrulevich, 2016, pp. 170–73; cf. Petrulevich, 2009, pp. 65–97, and Udolph, pp. 183–210). One such reference is found in Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, which describes the place *Iumne* in some detail. Adam locates it in *Slavia*, a large area in *Germaniae* where the *Wandalis* (Wends) live. The largest river in the area is called the Oder:

> At its mouth, where it feeds the Scythian marshes, Jumne, a most noble city, affords a very widely known trading center for the barbarians and Greeks who live round about. Because great and scarcely credible things are said in praise of this city, I think it of interest to introduce a few facts that are worth relating. It is truly the largest of all the cities in Europe, and there live in it Slavs and many other peoples, Greeks and barbarians. For even alien Saxons also have the right to reside there on equal terms with others, provided only that while they sojourn there they do not openly profess Christianity. In fact, all its inhabitants still blunder about in pagan rites. Otherwise, so far as morals and hospitality are concerned, a more honorable or kindlier folk cannot be found. Rich in the wares of all the northern nations, that city lacks nothing that is either pleasing or rare. (Adam of Bremen, pp. 66–67)

Archaeological research in Wolin has revealed that the medieval town was founded at the end of the eighth century or the beginning of the ninth and was originally a small village, perhaps concerned with fishing, that grew into a commercial and manufacturing town (Duczko, pp. 144–46; Morawiec, pp. 190–95). The location was ideal for exchange between different areas of Western Europe. It seems to have been one of the largest commercial centers in the Baltic area and, in the eleventh century, one of the largest towns (Gardeła, pp. 21–22; see also Morawiec, pp. 190–208, and sources cited there). Archaeological finds include objects of Scandinavian origin; at the same time, Wolin seems to have been a center for export from west to north. Numerous coins of various origins have also been found, indicating the prosperity of the town. Another important clue is a house that was constructed around 960 in a central location and made of oak, a timber rare in the area, indicating the wealth of its environment. An increase in the number and variety of found objects identifies the second half of the tenth century as the heyday of communication between Wolin and Scandinavia (Duczko, pp. 145–46).

Duczko observed that Wolin had a special status among trading places on the southern shore of the Baltic, being the only site to prosper as late as the tenth century, although other sites were well established in the early eighth century (Duczko, pp. 147–49). Burials of Norse families have been found at other sites, but not in Wolin, suggesting that Scandinavians did not settle there as they did elsewhere. Women's jewelry is also more commonly found in sites other than Wolin. Moreover, Wolin, unusually, was protected by a wall. All this does not mean, however, that Wolin was

the Jómsborg described in *Jómsvíkinga saga*, a fortress manned by an army of Vikings. Few weapons have been found there and similarly few warrior burials (Gardeła, pp. 20–22).

The Old Norse sources do not agree on the founding of Jómsborg. In all redactions of *Jómsvíkinga saga*, it is founded by Pálnatóki at Búrizláfr's request, but there are other sources that claim it was King Haraldr Gormsson who established the fortress. According to *Fagrskinna*,

> Haraldr konungr Gormssonr herjaði á Vinðland ok lét þar gøra borg mikla, er heitir at Jómi, ok er sú borg kǫlluð síðan Jómsborg. Þar setti hann yfir hǫfðingja, ok fór sjálfr heim til Danmarkar, ok var þá ófriðr lengi millum Vinða ok Dana, ok herjuðu hvárirtveggju í annarra lǫnd. En á ofanverðum dǫgum Haralds konungs Gormssonar setti hann yfir Jómsborg Sigvalda, son Strút-Haralds jarls, ok gaf Danakonungr Sigvalda jarlsnafn. Þá fóru margir hǫfðingjar af Danmǫrku til Jómsborgar. (*Fagrskinna*, pp. 121–22)
>
> [King Haraldr Gormsson raided in the land of the Wends and had a great stronghold built there at a place called Jóm, and since then that stronghold has been called Jómsborg. He put a commander in charge of it, and himself returned to Denmark, and for a long time then there was hostility between the Wends and the Danes, and each side made raids in the lands of the other. But late in the days of King Haraldr Gormsson he appointed Sigvaldi, son of Jarl Strút-Haraldr, to the command of Jómsborg, and the king of the Danes gave Sigvaldi the title of jarl. Then many chieftains went from Denmark to Jómsborg. (Finlay, 2004, pp. 94–95)]

It is obvious that the archaeological findings in Wolin and the preserved texts that mention Jómsborg are two separate bodies of evidence that are connected in some ways but do not entirely support each other. The Jómsborg depicted in *Jómsvíkinga saga* probably owes more to fiction than history and may be an Icelandic invention.

The second place name in *Jómsvíkinga saga* that has given rise to debate, perhaps even more than Jómsborg, is *Hjǫrungavágr*, the location of the Jómsvikings' final battle. The second element, *-vágr*, means 'bay' or 'creek', but the meaning of the first is less clear. The toponym is not recorded in Norway, and there are no Norwegian sources that explain directly where the place is. At the beginning of the battle, it is described like this in the 291 version:

> But it is said about this that the head of Hjǫrungavágr faces east and the mouth to the west. Also, there stand out in the bay three rocks that are called Hjǫrungar, and one of them is somewhat the largest, and the bay is named after these rocks. But there is a skerry in the middle of the bay, and it is an equal distance to land from every side of the skerry, both in to the head of the bay and in both directions across from it. And there is an island at the north of the bay called Prímsigð, and Harund is at the south of the bay, and beyond it is Harundarfjǫrðr. (p. 140–41)

The version of AM 510 4to (hereafter 510) gives a similar description of Hjǫrungavágr, but adds further detail that contradicts it: "Þeir fara sidann inn med eyne, þar til er þeir koma firer innann Haud og i vikina firer eyiar-endann nordur, þar sem heiter Hiorunga-vogur" (They sail then in along the island until they come within Haud (Hǫð) and into the bay at the northern tip of the island at the place called Hiorunga-vogur (Hjǫrungavágr); *Jómsvíkinga saga* (*efter Cod. Am. 510, 4to*), pp. 68–69). It is impossible for a bay at the northern tip of an island to have a mouth that faces west. The debate on the location of the fjord in which the bay is placed is ongoing, especially in Norway; see, for instance, the recent book by Johan Ottesen, in which all candidates for the location are discussed. Among these are Haugsfjorden, Ulsteinfjorden, Aspevågen, Ørskogvika, and Norangsfjorden. Liavågen in Møre has traditionally been the place named as the likeliest location; in 1986, a monument was erected beside Liavågen to mark the millennium of the battle (Helle, p. 172; cf. Megaard, 1999, pp. 32–33). Nonetheless, no consensus on the location has been reached.

The location of the battle is remembered in another context in an early fourteenth-century version of *Guðmundar saga Arasonar* in which the Icelandic Bishop Guðmundr, on a journey to Norway, is said to defeat a terrible dragon at a place called Hjǫrungavágr by sprinkling it with holy water; the author notes this as the site of the battle: "Miðil Þrándheims ok Björgynjar liggr sá sjár, er heitir Hjörúngavágr, þar barðist forðum Hákon Hlaðajarl við Jómsvíkinga" (Between Trondheim and Bergen lies the sea that is called Hjǫrungavágr; there Jarl Hákon of Hlaðir fought once against the Jómsvikings; *Biskupa sögur* 2, p. 129). This is clearly the same dragon into which Búi is said to be transformed at the end of *Jómsvíkinga saga*, although Búi is not mentioned in *Guðmundar saga*.

The Icelandic writer Halldór Laxness is among those who have pondered where the battle took place, and he concluded that the place was

the creation of an Icelandic author and therefore impossible to locate: “Uvilkårligt får læseren lyst til at valfarte til dette sted og spørger, hvor er Hjørungavåg? Men her er vi på sagaens enemærker. Hjørungavåg er et sted som Svolder, hvor Olaf Tryggvason faldt, og som ikke blev skabt af Gud, men lavet af islændere. Ikke engang filologerne ved hvor disse steder ligger” (Involuntarily, the reader will want to make a pilgrimage to this place and will ask, where is Hjǫrungavágr? But here we are in the realms of the saga. Hjǫrungavágr is a place like Svǫlðr, where Óláfr Tryggvason fell, and which was not created by God, but made by Icelanders. Not even philologists know where these places are; Laxness, p. 179). Furthermore, as Knut Helle pointed out, the name Hjǫrungavágr does not appear in connection with the battle until around 1200, some 200 years after the battle took place. In the skaldic poetry about the battle that was probably composed earlier, this place name is never mentioned; the only reference is to a place in *Mærr* (Møre; Helle, pp. 173–84). *Jómsvíkingadrápa* is the only poem to mention the name Hjǫrungavágr. Helle rightly adds that the first element of the name, *Hjǫrunga-*, probably derives from the Old Norse *hjǫrr* (sword). The name Hjǫrungavágr may have come into existence as a reminiscence of the battle, perhaps a kenning (poetic circumlocution) for the location of the battle, literally meaning “bay of swords.” Icelanders retelling the story could have understood this as an actual place name, the saga’s identification of “Hjǫrungar” as the name of three stones being a later invention. Helle’s conclusion is much in line with that of Halldór Laxness. He points out that none of the suggestions that have been put forward for the possible location of the battle conforms to the description of Hjǫrungavágr in *Jómsvíkinga saga*, and the closest we can come to a conclusion is acknowledging that it was in the region of Møre, somewhere around Hareidlandet and Hjørundfjorden (Helle, pp. 189–90).

Frustrating though it may be to accept that Hjǫrungavágr is probably an Icelandic invention, it is not surprising in view of the general character of *Jómsvíkinga saga*, which is discussed in detail in the following pages. The saga’s use of place names overall shows that the author was probably not very concerned with the accuracy of the setting, and had no great knowledge of local conditions. For example, Limafjǫrðr (Limfjorden) in Denmark is mentioned several times, prompting Ólafur Halldórsson’s comment that it was the only fjord in Denmark that the saga author could name and he made the most of it, making everybody who comes to Denmark stop by there, although he may not have known exactly where it

was (Ólafur Halldórsson, 1969, p. 25). The battle between Jarl Hákon and the Jómsvikings is most likely based on a real event that took place in the tenth century, but exactly where and how it happened remain unknown. It is clear, however, that to the thirteenth-century audience Hjǫrungavágr was a real place, and an important element in the story of the Jómsvikings.

## Kings and Jómsvikings

The characters of *Jómsvíkinga saga* can be roughly divided into two groups: on the one hand kings and those connected to their courts, and on the other men of lower status, mainly chieftains, who are Jómsvikings or related to them. The first group is familiar from other medieval sources, but the second is not. The kings and their retinues, always more likely to feature in historical accounts than those of lower rank, are well attested in Icelandic texts from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries but also in older European sources. The Icelandic sources tend to be more detailed, as they are more discursive than chronicles. Thus, King Haraldr Gormsson, also known by his nickname *blátǫnn* (Bluetooth), appears in several sources, some contemporaneous. He probably became king close to the middle of the tenth century. The inscription on the larger of the two famous rune stones erected in Jelling in Denmark in the tenth century states that Haraldr Gormsson had it erected when his father passed away and claims that Haraldr had won all of Denmark and Norway and Christianized the Danes (Wimmer, pp. 53–56; Christensen, pp. 7–21). In Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis*, written in the eleventh century, Haraldr's role in the Christianization of Denmark is emphasized heavily, and the account in *Jómsvíkinga saga* of the battle with Emperor Ótta is consistent with Adam's story in some ways. On the other hand, the saga's version of Haraldr's death is quite different from that of Adam, in which Haraldr flees from the battle with his son to Iumne where he dies (Adam of Bremen, p. 72). The account of Haraldr's conversion is found in an even older source, *Res gestae saxonicae* by Widukind of Corey. As Widukind was born around 925, his chronicle must have been written quite close to the time of the events related. His account of Haraldr is not detailed, but he claims that Haraldr decided to accept Christianity when he witnessed Bishop Poppa walk over red-hot iron (*Quellen zur Geschichte der Sächsischen Kaiserzeit*, pp. 168–79; on Poppa, see Demidoff, pp. 39–67).

There are elements of Haraldr's story in *Jómsvíkinga saga* that contradict other sources, however. The saga's account of his death, which will

be addressed in more detail below, differs not only from Adam's history but also from an important Norman source written around 1040–42, *Encomium Emmae reginae*, which includes an account similar to Adam's. In this version, Haraldr's son, Sveinn, becomes more popular than his father, whose growing envy ends in a battle after which he dies of his wounds.

The story of Gunnhildr in *Jómsvíkinga saga* also contradicts other sources. In the saga, Haraldr Gormsson and Jarl Hákon Sigurðarson of Hlaðir in Norway deceive King Haraldr gráfeldr (Greycloak) of Norway and lure him to Denmark (chapter 4). A part of the plot is to make his mother, Gunnhildr, believe that she is to marry Haraldr. This lure is successful as Gunnhildr "has long appeared something of a man-eater" (p. 79). Gunnhildr is one of the most famous—or infamous—women in medieval Icelandic literature, and her man-eating qualities are abundantly represented in other texts, such as *Njáls saga* and *Laxdœla saga* (see Jochens, 1996, pp. 180–82). Haraldr's proposal to Gunnhildr is particularly disconcerting in the light of the statement in *Historia Norvegiæ* that Gunnhildr was Haraldr's sister (Þórdís Edda Jóhannesdóttir, 2016b, pp. 155–57). It is hard to say how this discrepancy came about and which source is more accurate. The account in *Jómsvíkinga saga* of Gunnhildr's humiliating end, drowned in a bog while ostensibly being conveyed in splendor to a royal feast, is supported by two other Norwegian sources, the Latin *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium* by the otherwise unknown monk Theodoricus, and the vernacular *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sǫgum*: "var hennar fǫr ger prýðiliga til óprúðrar, því at þegar hón kom til Danmarkar, þá var hón tekin ok søkkt í mýri einni, ok lauk svá hón sínum dǫgum, at því sem margir segja" (but her journey, which began in splendour, ended in disgrace, for when she arrived in Denmark she was taken and sunk in a bog, and, according to many, so ended her days; *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sǫgum*, p. 15; Driscoll, 1995, p. 21).

The second prominent ruler in *Jómsvíkinga saga*, Jarl Hákon Sigurðarson of Norway, is similarly well known from an abundance of sources. He is the most powerful of the jarls of Hlaðir, a dynasty that vied with the descendants of Haraldr hárfagri for rule of Norway from the ninth to the eleventh centuries; Hákon is known, and reviled in those texts foregrounding the conversion of the North to Christianity, as the last great pagan ruler of Norway. Again, the Icelandic texts, especially *Fagrskinna*, *Heimskringla*, and *Egils saga*, are more detailed than other sources. Most sagas are unanimous in their negative treatment of Hákon. He is said to

have participated in treacherous deeds along with Gunnhildr—something that is not alluded to in *Jómsvíkinga saga*. He is explicitly referred to as evil and is infamous for his treatment of women, especially in his later days. According to *Ágrip*, he "sat með ríki miklu ok óvinsælð mikilli ok margfaldri, er á leið upp, ok með einni þeiri, er hann dró til heljar, at hann lét sér konur allar jafnt heimilar, er hann fýsti til, ok var engi kvenna munr í því gǫrr ok engi grein, hvers kona hver væri eða systir eða dóttir" (ruled imperiously, and, as time passed, grew more and more unpopular, particularly because—and this led to his death—he considered all women whom he desired equally available to him, making no distinction as to who was whose wife or sister or daughter; *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sǫgum*, p. 16; Driscoll, 1995, pp. 21–23).

Most of the sagas emphasize Hákon's paganism and agree with *Jómsvíkinga saga* that he was baptized while with King Haraldr in Denmark but then returned to Norway firmly committed to the pagan religion. He is seen practicing heathen rituals in several sources, and Þorgerðr Hǫrðabrúðr, his mysterious patron goddess, sometimes makes an appearance as well (on Þorgerðr, see Røthe; McKinnell, pp. 81–85). Thus *Jómsvíkinga saga* is, by and large, in accord with other sources, although it is the only source to give such a detailed account of his sacrifice of his son to the goddess. There is a sharp contrast, however, between the attitudes shown in saga narratives and the tone of the poetry that mentions Hákon or is dedicated to him. An unusually high number of poets are recorded as serving Hákon, and what survives of their eulogies suggests a sustained ideological exploitation of the potentialities of the pre-Christian religion to elevate his status as ruler. Folke Ström points out that these poems, including the *Vellekla* of Einarr skálaglamm cited in *Jómsvíkinga saga*, represent a drive to build on Hákon's military success at Hjǫrungavágr in order to consolidate his political power (Ström, 1981, pp. 440–58). Although this tendency may have inspired the representation of Hákon as arch-pagan in later prose texts, their demonization of him is a product of a later, Christian, era.

Hákon's last years are not attested in *Jómsvíkinga saga* as he is still alive at the end of its narrative span, and the same applies to Sveinn Haraldsson, who succeeds his father on the throne of Denmark. Known in other texts as Sveinn tjúguskegg (Forkbeard), and famous for conquering England shortly before his death in 1013, Sveinn has a somewhat mixed character in *Jómsvíkinga saga*. He is contrasted with his father and is portrayed in a more positive light than Haraldr. In his youth, the

reader's sympathy is enlisted on his behalf, as his father will not acknowledge him and he is raised and championed by Pálnatóki. *Jómsvíkinga saga* is the only source to claim that Sveinn is Haraldr's illegitimate son. The audience's attitude turns against Sveinn, however, when, however reluctantly, he gives orders for Pálnatóki's killing at Haraldr's funeral feast (chapter 12). The saga dwells on Sveinn's dilemma as he is forced to acknowledge that his duty as a son to avenge Pálnatóki's killing of his father must take precedence over his affection for the man who has been his foster-father and champion. Such conflicts between the imperatives of kinship and the obligations of friendship often arise in the sagas, exacerbated in this case because Sveinn is obliged also to fulfil his duties as a king: it is stated more than once that he will not be "a proper king" (p. 107) until he has held the funeral feast for his father, and until he has avenged his killing. In fact, Sveinn is the only king in the saga who is shown to be fulfilling his obligations as a ruler. Pálnatóki has killed his father, and society demands revenge. Sveinn needs to meet these expectations and therefore he has to have Pálnatóki killed.

Sveinn again embodies the responsibilities of kingship when he arbitrates in the dispute between Jarl Strút-Haraldr and Véseti, whose lands have been plundered by Strút-Haraldr's sons (chapters 18 and 19). The episode is placed just before Strút-Haraldr's sons Sigvaldi and Þorkell inn hávi, and Véseti's sons Búi and Sigurðr kápa, join the Jómsviking fellowship, and their roles on opposite sides of this dispute prefigure latent divisions among members of the fraternity. More immediately, the escalation of the dispute poses a threat to the stability of the Danish kingdom, which Sveinn is able to avert:

> King Sveinn . . . realizes that he will not be able to maintain his dignity if he allows them to fight there at the assembly without intervening between them, since he had placed such weight on their being reconciled there at the assembly, and now the king decides to go between them and not let them come to blows, and now in the end it comes about there through the help and authority of the king that they are both obliged to agree that the king alone should decide between them as he likes. (p. 117)

Torfi H. Tulinius has interpreted this episode as a testimony to the king's importance to society: he is a mediator who intervenes when the peace of his subjects is endangered (Tulinius, 2002, pp. 200–207). Sveinn's role as mediator is in accordance with medieval kingship ideology, reflecting the

image of the *rex iustus*. Kings must be mild and wise, be responsible for their subjects, protect them, and maintain justice and peace in society (see, for example, Bagge, pp. 146–91; Ármann Jakobsson, 2000, pp. 74–80). Sveinn acts to the benefit of his subjects; at the same time, he is conscious of the importance of maintaining his own authority, as is apparent when he realizes at the assembly in Íseyrarþing that "he will not be able to maintain his dignity" (p. 117) unless he keeps their violent tendencies in check. Thus, the representation of Sveinn in *Jómsvíkinga saga* contradicts the common opinion that the saga is hostile towards royal power in general. On the contrary, it underlines the importance of kingship and shows that the saga was not completely untouched by ideas about the nature of royal power and the qualities essential to a true king. On the other hand, it is Sveinn who prompts the Jómsvikings to take on their final, doomed journey, and his deviousness in having them plied with strong drink to make them commit themselves to this casts a negative light on his character.

In contrast to these prominent ruler figures, the Jómsvikings are not well known outside the saga, and most of them are unknown in sources that originate outside Iceland. However, two Danish sources should be mentioned, *Gesta Danorum* by Saxo Grammaticus and *Compendiosa regum Daniæ historia* by Sven Aggesen. In *Gesta Danorum*, a man called *Toko* is a retainer of Haraldr Gormsson, and Haraldr, early in book 10, sends pirates from Iulin, led by Bo and Siualdus, to Norway to fight Jarl Hákon (Haquinus). When Hákon sees the strength of their fleet he sacrifices two sons and is rewarded with a huge storm that ensures his victory. This group from Iulin is never referred to as Jómsvikings or Vikings, and the heavy storm is not connected to the enigmatic goddess Þorgerðr in any way (Saxo Grammaticus, 2015, pp. 690–95). Earlier, Saxo has also stated that Haraldr Gormsson conquered Iulin along with the Swedish Styrbjörn Björnsson (Sturbiornus Biornonis filius) with the help of other warriors, among whom are named Bo, Ulff, Karlshefni, and Siualdus (Saxo Grammaticus, pp. 686–87). It is likely that Saxo based his account on a legend that also lies behind *Jómsvíkinga saga*, but there is hardly any textual resemblance between the two, beyond the names corresponding to those of two of the leading Jómsvikings, Búi and Sigvaldi. In Sven Aggesen's *Historia*, written probably in the early thirteenth century and consequently from about the same period as *Jómsvíkinga saga*, Pálnatóki appears as one of Haraldr's counselors and, in the course of Haraldr's feud with his son Sveinn, Pálnatóki kidnaps Sveinn and takes him to Jómsborg, and the Danes have to pay a ransom to free him (Sven Aggesen, pp. 61–63).

This tale is certainly reminiscent of Sigvaldi's kidnapping of Sveinn in *Jómsvíkinga saga* (chapter 26), but, as is the case with *Gesta Danorum*, this looks like a glimpse of a common legend rather than showing a relationship between the texts themselves.

It should be noted too that Þorkell hávi (Thorkell the Tall) is the only Jómsviking that seems to have been widely known outside of *Jómsvíkinga saga* and was clearly a historical figure, raiding extensively in England after 1010. The *Encomium Emmae* explains that he fought with King Ethelred against King Sveinn tjúguskegg and his son Knútr when they invaded England in 1013, but then became King Knútr's retainer once he had conquered England. Þorkell is mentioned in the anonymous early eleventh-century skaldic poem *Liðsmannaflokkr*, and his activities are detailed in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. He is a much shadowier figure in *Jómsvíkinga saga*, which may suggest that a legendary persona was grafted onto this historical figure in the course of tradition, perhaps to enhance the impression of the historical status of his brother Sigvaldi and the other Jómsvikings.

There are indications in Icelandic literature that the most prominent of the Jómsvikings, Pálnatóki, Búi, Sigvaldi, and Vagn, were well known, as they are mentioned in other sources without much context. In *Eyrbyggja saga*, Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi is said to have stayed with Pálnatóki in Jómsborg, without further explanation, and Sigvaldi is also mentioned in passing (*Eyrbyggja saga*, pp. 80, 176). Sigvaldi also appears briefly in *Kristni saga* and *Egils saga* and participates in the battle of Svǫlðr in *Heimskringla*, where he lives up to his reputation for treachery by luring Óláfr Tryggvason into ambush (*Heimskringla* 1, p. 358). These references add little to our knowledge of Sigvaldi, but indicate that he was familiar enough to be mentioned without any introduction. Búi and Vagn, however, mainly appear in Icelandic sources in contexts relating the same events as *Jómsvíkinga saga*, that is, in *Fagrskinna*, *Heimskringla*, and the sagas of King Óláfr Tryggvason, as well as the skaldic poetry discussed below. *Jómsvíkinga saga* is thus the main source for these legendary Vikings.

The Jómsvikings as they appear in *Jómsvíkinga saga* can consequently be considered a literary creation, probably more fictional than not, and quite a significant one. The depiction of the Jómsvikings as a clearly defined group living together according to their law code is unique among the Icelandic sagas. The brotherhood can be compared with the medieval chivalric conception of the orders of knighthood, strange as it may

seem at first sight to apply chivalric ideology to a band of Norse Vikings (Tulinius, 2002, pp. 209–10). The word "chivalry" has multiple applications, embracing an order of knights, a particular social status, or simply a group of men riding horses (Keen, p. 2). The concept is too complex to be explored in detail here, but a few points are worth further scrutiny in the context of Jómsborg.

Chivalry was a substantial part of medieval European culture, and various medieval sources shed light on the function of knighthood. Chivalric orders could vary from country to country but shared many basic attributes. Maurice Keen examines chivalric ideas and the role of the knight as represented in medieval treatises on chivalry as well as romances. Much of what he describes is not reflected in *Jómsvíkinga saga*. Many orders emphasized Christianity and required daily attendance at mass; the initiation process often included religious practices (Keen, pp. 7–15, 190–95). The love of a woman, whether erotic or idealized, was entwined with chivalric ideology, and there were even some orders that included women. There is no echo of this in the laws of Jómsborg, where women are not allowed, and the men cannot leave the fortress for more than three nights in a row. Granted, some of the Jómsvikings are married, but the saga shows no interest in love or romance between men and women.

Nevertheless, the establishment of Jómsborg and its law code does correspond to some extent to the chivalric orders. A law code was fundamental to every order. Even though the laws could vary between orders, their members must abide by these laws. Some of the laws of the Jómsvikings are similar to those common in orders of knighthood, which usually specify that knights must be loyal to their leaders and comrades. This is stated specifically in the code of the Jómsvikings: "Each man who came there to join the fellowship must promise faithfully that each of them must avenge the other like his messmate or his brother" (p. 111). Cowardice and treason were the ultimate crimes. An initiation process was generally necessary for those who wished to join an order of knights, as is the case when Sigvaldi arrives in Jómsborg, and he and his men are put through a test that results in only half of the group being accepted by Pálnatóki. Keen points out that the aim of a knightly order was usually to protect a certain area for a king or prince (Keen, pp. 190–98). The whole purpose of the establishment of Jómsborg, according to the saga, is to protect land for King Búrizláfr of Vindland.

The narrative function of the laws in *Jómsvíkinga saga* is to act as an index of the success and strength of the fellowship of Jómsvikings. Once