Introduction

Place and Story in the Book of Settlements

The Book of Settlements is a book of tales half-told, un-told, and told wrongly. In a retrospect of several hundred years, it presents an account of the first settlement of Iceland during the last third of the ninth and the early tenth centuries. In doing so, it takes the reader on a journey clockwise once round Iceland and tells of the settlers who took land in the different parts of the country, outlining their land-claims, enumerating their descendants, and in many cases enlivening the resulting lists of names and directions with manifold anecdotal material. In the account thus created, the chronological distance between the scribe's present and the past of the Settlement Period shows itself in many different ways: there are both lacunae and historical 'mistakes', but more importantly, this chronological distance means that the formerly empty spaces and now-settled places of Iceland have, by the time when he Book of Settlements is composed, accrued a caleidoscope of narrative associations built up during of several centuries' worth of storytelling. The way how the Book of Settlements presents a cross-section of these narrative associations accrued by the Icelandic landscape is one of the most remarkable aspect of this text: however dubious its contents may be as history, the Book of Settlements provides us with a glimpse of the first associations that came to the mind of a high medieval Icelander when making a mental circuit of his country.

In many cases, these associations are not spelled out in any detail – and frequently the underlying tales are told in so little detail that it becomes nearly impossible to see through what actually is going on. Thus, when Þormóðr the Mighty and Óláfr Bench start to fight about the small and inaccessible valley system of the Hvanndalir in Northern Iceland and almost twenty people die, neither the Book of Settlements nor the remaining extant medieval literature of Iceland ever reveal what it was that sparked off this fight about land-rights, even though this fight demanded the highest blood-toll reported about any argument about land-rights during the whole, conflict-ridden time of the Settlement Period.[1] This story, as many others, is half-told at best; and yet, overall, it still is one of the more elaborate tales of the Book of Settlements, for most of its stories remain entirely untold: we never hear what the feats of magic were that earned Þorkell Bound-Foot at the foot of the mountain Þríhyrningr, or Óláfr-with-Meeting-Eyebrows at Skeið, their reputations of being men of great magical powers;[2] we never learn why Eyvindr Hrólfsson was called 'Oaken-Hook',[3] why Sigurðr at

[1] Ch. 182. It is only local folklore recorded during the Early Modern Period that suggests a possible explanation for the fierceness of this conflict, telling us that the Hvanndalir were believed to be a valley of immortality in which nobody was able to die: Egeler 2015.

[2] Ch. 306, 332.

[3] Ch. 61.

Kvenvágastrǫnd was called 'Pig-Head',[4] or why Ármóðr Þorbjarnarson was called 'the Red'.[5] Behind every single one of the countless nicknames mentioned in the Book of Settlements there lurks a story, but most of these stories by far are never even alluded to beyond the elusive one-word reflex they have found in the nicknames that memorialise them.

Perhaps the most fascinating of all, however, are the stories told wrongly – and fascinating not only in the spirit in which King Sverrir in *Sturlunga saga* called 'lying-sagas' the most entertaining of all saga narratives.[6] One example of what I mean by 'stories told wrongly' may be provided by the tale of the settler Vilbaldr:[7]

> Vilbaldr was the name of a man, the brother of Áskell-of-the-Thread-Hook. They were the sons of Dofnak. He came from Ireland and had the ship which was called Kúði. He came into Kúðafljótsóss Estuary.

The semi-implicit message of this tale is that *Kúðafljótsóss*, the "Estuary of Kúði's Water", was so named because it was the place where the ship called 'Kúði' reached Iceland. A gloss on this passage in the *Skarðsárbók* recension of the Book of Settlements claims *Kúði* to be an Irish word; yet this recension only stems from the seventeenth century and thus is too late a text to be authoritative. More likely may be Richard Cleasby's and Gudbrand Vigfusson's idea that the place name element *kúði-*, which otherwise is unattested in the Old Norse corpus, is a form of the noun *kóð*, which denotes the fry of trout and salmon. Yet if this is so, then *Kúðafljótsóss* means "Fry-Stream-Eastuary", implying that the story of the ship called 'Kúði' has been developed out of the place name rather than the other way round. A toponym thus seems to have been re-interpreted to provide it with a story – a story which may be 'wrong' in a factual historical sense, but may well have been deeply meaningful for the contemporary local audience that lived at and worked this estuary and that viewed the coming of Vilbaldr in his ship as the arrival of an ancestral founder figure.

In the case of *Kúðafljótsóss*, if the suggestion made by Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigufusson is correct, the story of the ship 'Kúði' may have arisen when a form of the word for 'fry' fell out of use and was re-interpreted as a name, which in turn was interpreted as a foreign word.[8] Such reinterpretations of place name elements may have happened more than once; another instance may be provided by the settlement story of a certain Galmr:[9]

> Galmr was the name of the man who took Galmansstrǫnd Coast between the rivers Þorvaldsdalsá and Reistará. His son was Þorvaldr, the father of Ormr, the father of Bjǫrn, the father of Þóroddr, the father of Þórunn, the mother of Dýrfinna, the mother of Þorsteinn the Smith, son of Skeggi. Hámundr gave land to Þorvaldr between the

[4] Ch. 68.

[5] Ch. 102.

[6] *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða* 10.

[7] Ch. 285.

[8] On the importance of sometimes highly localised language developments especially for toponymy cf. Robinson 1996, pp. 157f.

[9] Ch. 188.

> rivers Reistará and Hǫrgá, but before that he had lived in Þorvaldsdalr, "Þorvaldr's Valley".

The topography here becomes remarkably crowded, as according to the preceding chapter[10] the land between the two rivers Þorvaldsdalsá and Reistará had already been taken by one Hámundr and been sold on to one Þorvaldr. (The compiler of our text is aware of this problem and attempts to adress it by returning to the definition of Þorvaldr's property at the end of the paragraph, and perhaps by ascribing a son by the name of Þorvaldr to Galmr. In doing so, however, he ultimately just increases the problem: why should a son of the original settler have had to buy his father's land from Hámundr?) This over-attribution of one and the same stretch of land to both Hámundr/Þorvaldr and Galmr may be explained by an observation again already made by Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson,[11] who note that the name element *galm* only occurs in place names and may be related to Anglo-Saxon *gealm*, "din", suggesting that *Galmansstrǫnd* (or *Galmastrǫnd*, as the name appears elsewhere[12]) may be "called so from the roaring of the surf". If this is so, then the person Galmr has been extrapolated purely from the place name, which would exlain how his settlement came to be associated with a place already taken by not just one but two settlers. Here, we may be getting a glimpse of a process that may stand behind a number of the early settlers recounted by the Book of Settlements.

If in the two preceding examples a place story is 'wrong' arguably because a place name element was misunderstood after a word had fallen out of use, other instances of place name stories rather are suggestive of a conscious play with place names. Here may belong the tale of how the wetland of Flugumýrr got its name:[13]

> Þórðr Dove's-Beak was a freedman of Þórir-of-the-Oxen. He ... lived at Flugumýrr Moor. At that time, a ship came out [to Iceland] into Kolbeinsáróss Estuary, and it was loaded with livestock, and they lost a foal in the Brimnesskógar Forests, and Þórðr Dove's-Beak bought the chance of finding it and did so. That was the fastest of all horses and was called Fluga: "Mosquito".
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> Qrn, "Eagle", was the name of a man who sailed between the outermost protrusions of the land. He was versed in witchcraft. He waylaid Þórir in Hvinverjadalr Valley, when he was meant to go southwards over Kjǫlr, and he made a bet with Þórir, which of them would own the faster horse; for he had a very good stallion; and each of them staked one hundred pieces of silver. They rode both southwards over Kjǫlr, until they came to the stretch of the road which is now called Dúfunefsskeið, "Dove's-Beak's Stretch of Road"; and the difference in speed between the horses was not smaller than that Þórir came up to meet Qrn in the middle of the stretch of road. Qrn bore the loss of his money so badly that he did not want to live any longer and went up to the foot of Arnarfell, "Eagle's

[10] Ch. 187.

[11] Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson 1874, *s.v.* 'galm'.

[12] Cf. the note on ch. 187.

[13] Ch. 169.

> Mountain", and killed himself there, and Mosquito remained behind there, because she was very exhausted. And when Þórir went home from the Assembly, he found a grey stallion with a remarkable mane by Mosquito. She had conceived from him. Eiðfaxi was born to them, which went abroad and killed seven men at Mjǫrs on a single day, and there he himself died. Mosquito was lost in a quagmire on Flugumýrr, "Mosquito Swamp".

In this vividly recounted story, the name of the moor Flugumýrr is exlplained, a moor which today gives its name to a farm and a large church and may well have been of similar toponymic importance at the time when our story was written down. In this tale, the name Flugumýrr, "Bog of the Flie" or "Bog of the Gnat", is explained as being derived from the name of a horse called "Flie/Gnat" that supposedly drowned there. There is, of course, no way of disproofing this; in support of such a story one might even point to the Modern Icelandic use of *eins og fluga* for "[swift] as a fly",[14] which, if this usage is old, might suggest that *fluga* could indeed have served as a plausible name for a particularly fast horse, as the story claims. Yet this is not the only possibility. A *mýrr* is wetland, and wetland is an ideal breeding ground for flies and gnats; within Icelandic toponymy, the most well-known reflex of this is the name of the "Fly-Lake" Mývatn, which is generally acknowledged to have been named for the masses of flies that breed in its water. Thus one wonders whether the "Flie's Bog" Flugumýrr might not have a similar ecological background.[15] Perhaps this was not the place where a horse named "Fly" was drowned, but rather simply a wetland habitat of such masses of flies and gnats that these insects seemed like the most appropriate element to refer to in the naming of the place. To later generations, however, the naming of their farm from the swarms of gnats that haunt it might have seemed unworthy, or at least a bit banal; and so, narratively, the name-giving insect was turned into a horse with supernatural associations. This would not have rid the local landscape of the insects that were making a nuissance of themselves, but it would at least have made it narratively more interesting.

In accounts such as those of Kúðafljótsóss, Galmansstrǫnd, or Flugumýrr, the place stories told by the Book of Settlements appear to take their starting point from the toponymy of the Icelandic landscape. Yet this is not the only way how place lore can be created: also the materiality of the landscape can become the basis of a narrative. Here may belong the case of Ketill Steam. About him it is told:[16]

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[14] Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson 1874, *s.v.* 'fluga'.

[15] For parallels to the formation of a place name with a genitive singular of a word for an animal forming the first element of the toponym cf. *Hvalshǫfði*, *Hvalsá*, *Hvalsnes*; a formation with the nominal stem without an ending would be more common, however. Today, the name locally is pronounced as *Flúmýri*.

[16] Ch. 97.



The lava field at Gufuskálar on Snæfellsnes.

> A man was called Ketill Steam ... Ketill took Rosmhvalanes Peninsula. There he spent the first winter at Gufuskálar, "Steam's-Houses", and in spring he went further inland on the peninsula and spent the second winter at Gufunes, "Steam's-Peninsula". ... Ketill did not get a residence on the headlands, and he went further into the Borgarfjord to find a residence for himself, and he spent the third winter at Gufuskálar, "Steam's-Houses", with Gufa, "Steam". The fourth winter he spent at Gufuskálar, "Steam's-Houses", on Snæfellsnes.

At the point when Ketill Steam (*gufa*) comes to Gufa ("steam") to spend the winter, Ketill had been the only man called "Steam"/Gufa mentioned so far. This just *might* convey the impression that the play with topographical and personal names is getting so elaborate that the author himself is losing track, making Ketill spend the winter with himself and thereby creating yet another Steam – and at least part of this abundance of Steams may be due to a feature of the materiality of the landscape, since the abundant "steam" is likely originally to have referred to the steam of hot springs rather than to persons.

In the Steams of the story of Ketill Steam, persons seem to have been extrapolated from toponyms which, in all likelihood, originally did not make reference to human beings but to features of the materiality of the landscape: to the steam of hot springs. Thus, here landscape explains toponyms, which are reinterpreted into stories. Another important aspect of the relationship between stories and the materiality of the landscape is aetiology: narratives explaining how a feature of the physical landscape, and its associated place name, came about. Here, at least on the imaginative level of the story's plotline, the thrust of the narrative is inverted in comparison to what seems to have been happening in the example of

Ketill Steam: instead of topography leading to story at the cost of an obscuring of the connection between the two, in aetiological tales a story claims to tell how topography was created. In such narratives, the connection between the story and the land is emphasised rather than veiled. One instance of this is found in the account of the settlement of the Irish magician Dufþakr. The Book of Settlements tells:[17]

> Dufþakr in Dufþaksholt Forest ... had great powers of shape-shifting, and so did Stórólfr, son of [Ketill] Salmon. He lived then at Hváll Hill. They got into an argument about the grazing. One night, a man with second sight saw that a great bear came from Hváll Hill and a bull from Dufþaksholt Forest, and they met at Stórólfsvǫllr Field and, angry, set upon each other, and the bear was stronger. In the morning there was a valley left behind where they had met, as if the earth had been turned over, and that is now called Ǫldugróf, "Wave's Pit". They were both injured and lay in bed.

This story takes its starting point from a pit which in its local topographical context was striking enough to deserve an individual name, being called *Ǫldugróf*, "Wave's Pit": a name suggestive of a hole that was not just deep but also wavy, as if the ground had been churned up by some inexplicable force. The inexplicable force hinted at by this topographical feature was then given shape in a narrative about a fierce fight fought by two magicians in the shape of mighty animals, a narrative capable both of 'explaining' the formation of the landscape as it could be observed by a contemporary and – perhaps more importantly – imbuing this landscape with connotations of something extraordinary. Thus, topography was given an aetiology, and a mere location was turned into a place filled with cultural meaning, a cultural landscape that people could be fascinated by and identify with.

That there was indeed a relationship between narrative, identity, and the physical materiality of the landscape, is perhaps most clearly visible in the case of the farm on Snæfellsnes that once was visited by a water-horse:[18]

> Auðun the Stutterer, son of Váli the Strong, he was married to Mýrún, the daughter of Bjaðmakr, King of the Irish. He took the whole Hraunsfjord above Hraun Lava Field between Lake Svínavatn and the ridge Trǫllaháls; he lived in Hraunsfjord. From there the Hraunfirðingar are descended. One autumn he saw that an apple-grey horse ran down from Lake Hjarðarvatn and to his stud-horses. It subdued the breeding-stallion. Then Auðun went there and took hold of the grey stallion and yoked him before a two-ox sledge, and he pulled together all the hay from his home-field. The stallion was easy to manage through midday. Yet when the hour was advanced, he stomped into the hard ground up to the hoof-tufts; and after sunset he broke the whole harness and ran up to the lake. He has not been seen since.

This story tells of the settler Auðun the Stutterer, who was married to a daughter of the King of the Irish; elsewhere it is stated that Auðun's father had settled on the (Gaelic-speaking)

[17] Ch. 309.

[18] Ch. 71.

Hebrides,[19] so his 'stuttering' may reflect a less-than-perfect command of Norse. This nickname thus may be a condensed version of a motif we also meet in the story of Haraldr *gilli* in *Magnússona saga*:[20] there, a man claims descent from the King of Norway but, having grown up in Ireland, he is laughed at for his weak Norse. Given that Auðun furthermore had an Irish wife, the story seems to suggest that he and his family were largely Hibernicised. Now this Auðun founds a farm on Snæfellsnes, but one day a marvellous creature emerges from the local landscape: a grey, preternaturally strong horse emerges from a mountain lake above his farm, works for Auðun for a while, and ultimately returns to its mountain lake, never to be seen again.

The story of this grey water-horse emerging from a mountain lake ties in beautifully with Auðun's Gaelic family connections: exactly the type of water-horse that visits Auðun is also prominent in contemporary Irish heroic narrative.[21] The most well-known example for such animals in early Irish literature is the Grey of Macha, the horse of the hero Cú Chulainn. Just like Auðun's water-horse, the Grey of Macha is a (1) preternaturally strong, (2) grey (3) stallion that has (4) emerged from and ultimately (5) returns to a (6) mountain lake. This horse played a prominent role in Irish heroic narrative throughout the Middle Ages and would have been well-known to any contemporary who had soaked up something of Gaelic culture, as Auðun seems to have done more than what was good for his Norse. What the account in the Book of Settlements seems to be describing, therefore, is a strongly Hibernicised settler coming to Iceland and filling the new, empty land with Gaelic narrative associations. Here, a Norseman for whom 'home' had become Gaelic turns the Icelandic landscape into the landscape of an Irish heroic fairy tale.

In Auðun's case as well, furthermore, this turning of a new, empty locality into a narrative landscape seems to be tied directly to the physical materiality of this landscape. What is important here is a little detail of the account:

> The stallion was easy to manage through midday. Yet when the hour was advanced, he stomped into the hard ground up to the hoof-tufts.

The mighty stallion stomping into "hard ground" will have left hoof-prints behind, imprinting himself into the physicality of the land and leaving a marker perpetually memorialising the story of his visit to the human world. Such a self-imprinting into the landscape indeed is a behavioural pattern of Irish water-horses that is also known from elsewhere. On the island of Árainn at the mouth of Galyway Bay in the West of Ireland, about a third of a mile south-west of the medieval ruined church of Teampall Bheanáin and some fourthy paces inland from the cliffs framing the bay Poll Dick, there is a series of horseshoe-shaped ripple-marks in a bare sheet of rock. Local folklore identifies these ripple-marks as the hoof prints of a water-horse: they are attributed to a water-horse which, jumping up from the breakers of the Atlantic

[19] Ch. 60.

[20] Ch. 27.

[21] Egeler 2014.

Ocean, somewhat misjudged its leap up to the clifftop, skidded over this rock-sheet, and in doing so left a permanent marker of its visit. A second series of horseshoe-marks, furthermore, was left behind by the foal of this water-horse.[22]



The hoofprints left by a water-horse and its foal on the rocky ground of the south-western coast of Árainn.

[22] This piece of Aran folklore was collected by Tim Robinson in the 1970s or 1980s: Robinson 2008, pp. 45f. For somewhat earlier accounts of water-horses from Aran and Connemara cf. Lady Gregory 1920, pp. 7f., 10, 15, 17, 23-25.



The location of the water-horse hoofprints in relation to the coastal cliffs and the bay Poll Dick.

There certainly is no direct historical connection between these water-horse hoofprints on Árainn and the story of the Snæfellsnes water-horse; rather, what we are observing here are two stories which are closely comparable merely on a typological level. Yet nonetheless a comparison between the two is illuminating. In both cases, a supernatural horse emerges from a local body of water, enters the human world for a short span of time, and while doing so leaves its mark in the materiality of the landscape. For, especially seen against the background of the Árainn tale, this seems to be exactly what is happening in the tale of Auðun's water-horse: by 'stomping into the hard ground up to the hoof-tufts', the Snæfellsnes water-stallion must have created hoof-prints. In fact, this creation of hoof-prints is emphasised by the specific designation of the ground as "hard": the water-horse did not leave a fleeting mark on squashy boggy ground, or on a soft meadow, but it imprited itself into something firm – something like a rock surface. It is impossible to proof, but it seems eminently likely that somewhere within the boundaries of Auðun's farm on the Hraunsfjord there was a rock which showed some kind of strange, horseshoe-shaped marks, which at the time were shown and explained through the story that we today meet in the Book of Settlements.

The Recensions of the Book of Settlements

The tale of Auðun's water-horse brings us into immediate contact with the materiality of the Icelandic landscape, and with a strategy of how 'home' was created through a welding-

together of this materiality with a culturally specific narrative, giving a deeply Gaelic cultural significance to the "hard ground" of Iceland. Yet this tale does not only illustrate how closely narrative and real-world landscape can be intertwined, but also brings us to the problems of textual transmission. There is no single authoritative text of the Book of Settlements; rather, it is extant in three medieval and two early modern recensions. The medieval recensions are the *Sturlubók* recension, probably composed *c.* 1275-1280 and extant in a seventeenth-century copy; the *Hauksbók* recension, compiled by the politician-cum-scholar Haukr Erlendsson at some point between the years 1302 and 1310 and partly extant in his autograph; and the *Melabók* recension from the early fourteenth century, of which only two sheets of a fifteenth-century vellum copy are extant. To this corpus, seventeenth century scholars have added two further versions: the *Þórðárbók* recension written by Þórður Jónsson, who died in 1670, and the *Skarðárbók* recension by Bjǫrn Jónsson, which was composed at some point before the year 1636.

Of these various versions of the Book of Settlements, the *Sturlubók* recension has until now been the only one available in a complete translation. This recension has precedence before the *Hauksbók* recension in two respects: chronologically, as it predates it; and stemmatically, as it was among the versions of the Book of Settlements that Haukr Erlendsson drew on in the composition of his own text, a fact that is clear both from the structure of Haukr's version and from the explicit statement which Haukr makes to this regard in his postscript to his text, where he writes:[23]

> Now a perusal has been made of the land-takings which have there been in Iceland, according to what wise men have written, first Ari the Parson the Learned, son of Þorgils, and Kolskeggr the Wise. And this book I have written, Haukr, son of Erlendr, on the basis of the book which Sir Sturla the Lawspeaker had written, the most learned man, and on the basis of the second book, which Styrmir the Learned had written. And I had that out of each of the two which explained more; and a great part was what they both said in agreement with each other. And therefore it is not something to be surprised about even if this Book of Settlements is longer than any other.

In this postscript, Haukr states explicitly that he has directly drawn on the version written by Sturla the Lawspeaker, which today is extant as the *Sturlubók* recension of the Book of Settlements. In this sense, Haukr's version is secondary. Yet he also states that, drawing on a variety of different sources, he has expanded the Book of Settlements and created the longest and most detailed version in existence at the time. That this can be highly important for the interpretation of the tales contained in it is illustrated not least by the tale of Auðun's water-horse. In Haukr's recension, from which the above quotation has been taken, it is stated that the water-horse stomps "into the hard ground", which implies the creation of permanent marks in the landscape. The text of the *Sturlubók* recension is only slightly, but momentously, different: in the *Sturlubók* recension, it is said merely that the water-horse stomped "into the

[23] Ch. 354.

ground". Here, this ground is not qualified as hard, and through this small divergence, the image created is a significantly different one. For, reading the *Sturlubók* account, the mental image created by the text is not that of hoofs imprinted in rock, but rather merely a stomping into something soft, yielding, and flexible – sods of turf, a waterlogged meadow, marshy ground. There still is a momentary creation of hoofprints, but by omitting to qualify the medium in which these prints are created as a "hard" one, the image loses its permanence. From a shaping of landscape, the act of stomping into the ground is reduced to a display of temper; and thus, I would argue that, ironically, the oldest extant version of the account loses much of the tale's meaning, a meaning which is preserved with much more clarity in Haukr's later but more detailed account.

The story of Auðun's water horse is not the only case in which Haukr's version gives more detail than the *Sturlubók* recension, detail which can be crucial for understanding the material. Another illuminating instance is provided by the settlement account of Ørlygr Hrappsson.[24] This account tells how the Chrisian settler Ørlygr set out from the Hebrides to take land in Iceland. Before his departure, he asked for the advice of his foster-father, the (unhistorical) Bishop Patrick of the Hebrides, and Bishop Patrick gave Ørlygr building material and an iron bell for a church which Ørlygr should build at the place where he would take land in Iceland. When Ørlygr finally came within sight of the land where he was to settle, the church bell he had received from his episcopal foster-father fell over board. It soon turned out, however, that no harm was done: where Ørlygr came ashore and took land, he found that the church bell had been washed up on the beach and was lying in a heap of sea-weed. What in the present context is important about the detail of the church bell is that, while there is also an account of Ørlygr' settlement in the *Sturlubók* recension of the Book of Settlements, the *Sturlubók* recension makes no mention of the strange occurrence of the church bell floating ashore on Ørlygr's destined place of settlement. This occurrence, however, is crucial for contextualising the narrative. The motif that a church bell floats ahead of the ship of a Christian settler and indicates the place where a Christian settlement is to be founded finds a close parallel in the foundation legend of the monastic settlement of Ardmore in Munster in southern Ireland as it is presented in an Irish life of St. Declan; taken together with the Gaelic connection established by the figure of 'Bishop Patrick' of the (Gaelic-speaking) Hebrides, this suggests that the settlement account of Ørlygr Hrappsson has been substantially influenced by Irish hagiographic legend,[25] and perhaps – just as it is the case with Auðun the Stutterer – uses Gaelic hagiographic legend to help a Gaelicised settler to establish 'home' in the emptiness of the new land. Yet this particular context of the narrative becomes visible only in the *Hauksbók* recension, not in the more concise *Sturlubók* recension, where the decisive detail has been omitted. Here, as in other instances, the *Hauksbók* recension gives us a substantially fuller picture than the slightly earlier *Sturlubók* version. This makes it crucial

[24] Ch. 15.

[25] Young 1936, pp. 119f.

to consult the *Hauksbók* recension for every narratological (or other) analysis of the text, since the *Hauksbók* recension not only acts as a testimony to the specific approach and interests of its author Haukr Erlendsson,[26] but also as a potentially independent witness of local narrative lore.

Haukr Erlendsson

The *Hauksbók* recension of the Book of Settlements is one of the comparatively few cases of Old Icelandic literature in which we can grasp the specific person that stood behind the creation of a major literary work: Haukr, son of Erlendr "the Strong", who was born some time in the thirteenth century and died in Norway in 1334. Haukr was a descendant of one of the most prominent Icelandic families of the later Middle Ages and himself deeply involved in the politics of the late thirteenth and early fourtheenth centuries. He makes his first appearance in the historical record in 1294, when he is mentioned as acting as a judge and the highest magistrate in a thing-district in south-eastern Iceland. Later in his life, he held judicial offices both in Oslo and in Bergen, where he acted as the Lawman of the Gulaþing in Western Norway, and even was raised to the rank of a knight; some of his correspondence from this time is extant. Even though he was to hold the office of a judge in Bergen at least as late as 1322, he spent the years 1306 to 1308 in Iceland, apparently on the king's business. As a whole, *Hauksbók*, "Haukr's Book", appears to have been composed between 1302 and 1310, with different sections written by various hands both Norwegian and Icelandic; judging from the prevalence of Icelandic hands in the manuscript, however, it seems that that most of the manuscript was written during this stay in Iceland in 1306-1308. Originally, *Hauksbók* consisted of some 200 sheets of vellum, of which 141 are extant in the original. Much of the lost material survives in early modern copies, but the Book of Settlements is among those parts of the work which are not preserved in their entirey – though not much seems to be missing, and what is extant is in Haukr's own hand. At some point in its history, the manuscript was split into three codices, whose original sequence cannot any more be established beyond doubt. Already in the early 18th century, however, Árni Magnússon noted that the codex begins with "some fragments" from the Book of Settlements.

As a whole, *Hauksbók* was a library of learned works condensed into one large codex, with history and cosmology functioning as leading themes. Its contents ranged from native Icelandic historical works to continental European learned treatises, bringing together Icelandic, Norwegian, and Danish history, early Arthurian literature (in its guise as early British history), natural history, mathematics, and theology. It seems that the Book of Settlements was the first text in *Hauksbók*, forming its opening; this alone tells much about the prestige that this text held for an Icelander of the time, especially given that much of the

[26] It might here be remembered, for instance, that Jakob Benediktsson called Haukr "the first Celtomaniac in Iceland" (Jakob Benediktsson 1966-1969, p. 290), though this much-quoted dictum is rather overstated.

august political career of this particular Icelander was taking place in Norway: even for an Icelander who held high offices in Norway, the beginning of learning, and perhaps the beginning of history itself, was the beginning of the settlement of Iceland as described in the Book of Settlements. At first glance one might wonder whether this is not simply, and perhaps more than anything else, reflective of an expatriate's yearning for home; but in a way the Book of Settlements itself shares this view of history in which history begins with the settlement of Iceland. For given the intense Icelandic interest in all things genealogical, it is striking that for many of the first settlers no patronymics are given:[27] not just the history of Iceland, but even genealogy, and thus human history itself, only begins with the arrival in Iceland. Even considering the encyclopaedic range of *Hauksbók*, it seems that Haukr himself would not have been too averse to subscribing to such a somewhat self-referred view of history, as he also appears to add his own share of self-centredness to the work. For not only does he begin the compilation of world learning that is "Haukr's Book" with the history of his home country, but wherever he has the chance to do so he also describes this history as leading up to his own person: half a dozend times throughout the Book of Settlements he presents genealogies which end with "Sir Erlendr, the father of Haukr", presenting himself and his family as the end-point (and culmination?) of the history of Iceland. (He seems to view it as a rather negligible point that his ancestral charts can only achieve this goal by meandering their way through the male and female lines with considerable arbitrariness.)

In the *Hauksbók* recension of the Book of Settlements we encounter a text which is both self-contained and part of a larger corpus of learning, which builds on a long-established tradition of writing about the Settlement and yet is deeply individualistic, and which is both self-involved and yet broad enough in its scope to encompass the whole of the medieval Northwest Atlantic world. Yet ultimately, being all these things, the Book of Settlements in "Haukr's Book" is first and foremost one thing: an individual's engagement with his place of origin, from its materiality to its people and from its local history to its international entanglements. Thus, it provides us with an invaluable glimpse of how a prominent Icelander in the service of the King of Norway viewed his origins, his history, and thus ultimately himself.

[27] Cf. the 'Table of Chapters' at the end of this book.

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