



**UNIVERSITY OF  
ILLINOIS PRESS**

---

Óláfr Ormsson's *Leiðarvísir* and its Context: The Fourteenth-Century Text of a Supposed Twelfth-Century Itinerary

Author(s): Arngrímur Vídalín

Source: *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 117, No. 2 (April 2018), pp. 212-234

Published by: University of Illinois Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/jenglgermphil.117.2.0212>

Accessed: 11-04-2018 20:02 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

*University of Illinois Press* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*

# Óláfr Ormsson's *Leiðarvísir* and its Context: The Fourteenth-Century Text of a Supposed Twelfth-Century Itinerary

*Arngrímur Vídalín, University of Iceland*

## INTRODUCTION

This article explores the authorship of the text known by scholars as *Leiðarvísir*, its preservation and context in manuscript, and argues for a reading of it as part of a fourteenth-century geographical treatise rather than as a twelfth-century itinerary. While the arguments presented do not preclude twelfth-century authorship of an *urtext* of *Leiðarvísir* by Nikulás Bergsson, available information concerning Nikulás is vague and unreliable. The text itself bears several anachronistic marks for a twelfth-century dating, and its context as it is preserved in manuscript bears witness to its relationship with fourteenth-century learning. The central argument of this article is that the manuscript AM 194 8vo should be read and interpreted as a whole and not by its individual parts. The second argument of the article is that there is no internal indication of Nikulás's authorship of the text, of whom we know little if anything.

## THE MANUSCRIPT

The manuscript AM 194 8vo was written in 1387 by the priest Óláfr Ormsson of Geirrðareyri (now Narfeyri) in Snæfellsnes, Iceland, and in small part on folios 34v–36v by Brynjólfur Steinráðarson. We know this because the manuscript explicitly lists its scribes, location, and year of composition, and there is no reason to suspect error or dishonesty in this case. For this reason, AM 194 8vo is one of the manuscripts used as waymarks to date other manuscripts. We can thus state, unlike with most manuscripts, that both the compiler of its texts is known and that the time and place of writing of the manuscript is known.

This article was written in part with a great view of Narfeyri from my window, and in part at the Arnamagnæan manuscript collection in Copenhagen, where I had the privilege studying the manuscript itself, for which I am grateful.

Journal of English and Germanic Philology—April  
© 2018 by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois

The manuscript contains diverse material, but it is written as a whole rather than as an assortment of tangentially connected anecdotes and curiosities. As such, it is very different from modern encyclopedias, which are based on an external arrangement of content such as the alphabetical order rather than context, even though we still use the term “encyclopedic” for medieval tomes containing diverse knowledge such as the manuscript in question, AM 194 8vo. The difference lies in the fact that Óláfr Ormsson and his collaborator wrote a coherent text in which all matters are put into context with one another. The manuscript contains a geographical treatise, a short introduction to the many peoples of the world, Augustine’s *aetates mundi* (“ages of the world”),<sup>1</sup> a medicinal treatise, and many other matters. In spite of its eclectic material, the manuscript appears to exhibit an interest in purposeful design.

Aside from being published by Kristian Kålund as *Alfræði íslenzk I*, AM 194 8vo is mostly known for the fact that it features in a description of an itinerary from Scandinavia to Rome and Jerusalem. It is commonly known among scholars as *Leiðarvísir*, although this word never appears in the manuscript as a title of the work but rather as a description of it in a postscript. The word *leiðarvísir* simply means “itinerary.”

## THE AUTHOR

This itinerary is believed to have been authored by Nikulás Bergsson, abbot of the Benedictine abbey of Munkaþverá, established in 1155 by Bishop Björn Gilsson (ca. 1100–1162). Nikulás supposedly dictated *Leiðarvísir* to his scribes sometime between his arrival in Iceland in 1154 and his death in 1159. About his authorship there is only a single indication, which is an attribution at the end of the itinerary: “Leiðarvísir sea ok borga-skipan ok allr þessi frodleikr er ritinn ath fyrir-sogn Nikolas abota, er bæði var vitr ok vídfreggr, minnigr ok margfroðr, ráðvis ok rettordr, ok lykr þar þessi frasogn” (This itinerary and city guide and all this knowledge is written down in accordance with the diction of the abbot Nikulás, who was both wise and renowned, of great memory and much knowledge, gave good counsel and spoke truthfully, and here concludes this narrative).<sup>2</sup>

From this we may extract two factoids: First, the text preceding this announcement was written at the behest of someone named Nikulás. Secondly, he was an abbot. While there are other, albeit few, sources that

1. See Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, “Um aldir alda: Veraldarsögur miðalda og íslenskar aldartölur,” *Ritið*, 5.3 (2005), 111–33.

2. *Alfræði íslenzk: Íslandsk encyklopædisk litteratur*, ed. Kristian Kålund, Samfund til Udgivelse af Gammel Nordisk Litteratur, 37 (Copenhagen: Møller, 1908), I, 23.

might reveal more about this wise Abbot Nikulás, they are confusing at best and do little service to his legacy.

Aside from a brief statement in *Rímbeгла* from ca. 1600–1650, which mentions that a man named Nikulás was the first abbot of Munkaþverá,<sup>3</sup> the Old Icelandic annals have been used to complete what picture is available of Nikulás, though they do not provide much additional information (in fact, none of them mention any works attributed to him). *Konungsannáll* (GKS 2087 4to, ca. 1300) and *Gottskálksannáll* (Holm. perg. 5 8vo, 1550–1600), for example, give us the time for Nikulás's arrival in Iceland as 1154—“Vtkváma Nicholas abbóta” (the arrival [to Iceland] of Abbot Nikulás) / “vtkoma Nicholasar,” respectively; Nikulás's death is given as 1159—“Nicholas abbóti” (Thanatos [deceased] Abbot Nikulás) / “Nicholas abbota,” respectively.<sup>4</sup> *Gottskálksannáll* is not as clear as *Konungsannáll* as to which Nikulás is referred to, since it first mentions that a Cardinal *Niculas* came to Norway and then states that an unspecified *Nicholas* came to Iceland, before announcing the death of an Abbot Nicholas in 1159. *Lögmannsannáll* (AM 420 B 4to, 1362–90) only mentions his death in 1159.<sup>5</sup> More suspiciously, *Oddverjaannáll* (AM 417 4to, 1550–1600) mentions that in the year 1154 an abbey was founded at Munkaþverá in Eyjafjörður, Iceland. Directly following is this: “Anastasius paue andadist: sijdan \*war Nichulaus kiorinn: og nefndur Adrian” (Pope Anastasius died: after this Nichulaus was elected and named Adrian). This is correct: In 1154 Pope Anastasius IV passed away and the Englishman Nicholas Breakspear was elected pope in his stead. It so happens that he died in the year 1159. The annal neglects this latter fact, but it does say that in the year 1159 “andadist Nichulaus abotj” (Abbot Nichulaus passed away).<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Breakspear was also instrumental in founding the archdiocese of Niðarós in 1151, and this is duly noted in the annals.

*Resensannáll*, usually considered the oldest Icelandic annal (dated to 1299–1319 by Gustav Storm, whereas Stefán Karlsson has argued that the oldest part can be dated to 1250–83/84),<sup>7</sup> even though it is only preserved in AM 424 4to from ca. 1690–1710, only mentions that in 1153 “Erki stoll com i Noreg” (an archdiocese was founded in Norway), and that in 1154 “Adrianus [papa] iiii. Ar” (Adrian [was selected] pope [and he served

3. See *Alfræði íslensk*, ed. Kålund, III, 3.

4. *Íslandske annaler indtil 1578*, ed. Gustav Storm (Christiania [Oslo]: Grøndahl & Søn, 1888), pp. 115–16 and 322, respectively.

5. *Íslandske annaler*, ed. Storm, p. 253.

6. *Oddaannálar og Oddverjaannáll*, ed. Eiríkur Þormóðsson et al. (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 2003), pp. 131–32.

7. Stefán Karlsson, “Alfræði Sturlu Þórðarsonar,” in *Sturlustefna: Ráðstefna haldin á sjö alda ártið Sturlu Þórðarsonar sagnaritara*, ed. Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir et al. (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1988), pp. 37–60, esp. pp. 46–47.

for] four years). For the year 1158 it is stated that Alexander was elected pope and that he served for twenty-three years, meaning that this is the year pope Adrian IV was thought to have died. *Henrik Høyers annáll* (AM 22 fol., 1600–1615) only mentions that in 1153 “Ærkistoll kom i Noreg” (archdiocese founded in Norway) and that in 1154 “Adrianus papa an. 4” (Adrian [elected] pope, [served] four years).<sup>8</sup>

If we revisit *Konungsannáll* and *Lögmannsannáll*, it is noteworthy that they mention both men. The former explains that *Nicholaus Albanensis episcopus chardinali* came to Norway, and that at this time an archdiocese was founded there. Then Pope Anastacius died and Nicholas Albanensis was elected pope in his stead and was henceforth known as Adrian IV. Shortly after, an Abbot Nicholas came to Iceland, and, we are told, in that same year Pope Adrian had died. At the back of the same entry, it is said that Abbot Nicholas had died. *Lögmannsannáll* differs. It claims that an archdiocese was founded at Niðaróss (1153) and mentions that shortly thereafter an abbey was founded at Munkaþverá (1155). We are then told that Pope Adrian served for four years (1157) and that Abbot Nicholas had passed away (1159), without a similar entry explaining the death of Pope Adrian, who certainly did die that year, even though his successor, Pope Alexander, got his *obitus* (1160).<sup>9</sup> The remaining annals do not contain information about either of these men in their extant form.

There is reason to be suspicious of Nikulás. It seems far too coincidental that a man of this name should travel to Iceland in the same year that a man of the same name is elected pope, and that both these men should also happen to pass away in the same year. We know little of Abbot Nikulás that has not already been mentioned here: He may have been Bergsson (or Bergþórsson, according to *Guðmundar saga byskups*,<sup>10</sup> or even Hallbjarnarson in a list of abbots in AM 415 4to, ca. 1310).<sup>11</sup> He may have been abbot of the Benedictine abbey at Munkaþverá, though

8. *Islandske annaler*, ed. Storm, p. 60.

9. *Islandske annaler*, ed. Storm, p. 253. There is further confusion here, since Pope Alexander III did not die until 1181, of which *Lögmannsannáll* is seemingly unaware, since no pope is mentioned passing in that year or the years preceding or succeeding 1181.

10. *honum samtíða var kostuligr höfðingi Nicholaus Bergþórsson, er fyrstr hélt Þverá í Eyjafirði, hverr margar ástgjafir hafði þegit af Guði* (his [Abbot Þorlákr's of Ver] contemporary was the most excellent chieftain Nicholas Bergþórsson, who first presided over Þverá in Eyjafjörður, who had received many wonderful gifts from God). *Biskupa sögur*, ed. Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon, 2 vols. (Copenhagen: Møller, 1858–78), I, 407, n. 2.

11. *Diplomatarium Islandicum: Íslenzkt fornbréfasafn*, 11 vols. (Copenhagen: S. L. Möller and Hid íslenzka bókmentafélag, 1857–1915), III, 28. The confusion surrounding Nikulás's patronym is evident in Janus Jónsson, “Um klaustrin á Íslandi,” *Tímarit hins íslenzka bókmenntafélags*, 8 (1887), pp. 174–265, esp. pp. 200–201. See Tommaso Marani, *Leiðarvísir: Its Genre and Sources, with Particular Reference to the Description of Rome* (Durham, UK: Durham Univ., 2012), pp. 9–17, esp. pp. 9–11.

for a long time scholars conversely believed that his name was Nikulás Sæmundarson and that he had been the second abbot at Þingeyrar.<sup>12</sup> He may have died in 1159, as his namesake Nicholas Breakspear and the alternately fathered Nikulás Hallbjarnarson. He may have authored two skaldic verses, *Jónsdrápa postula*, preserved in the so-called *Litla Jóns saga postula* (in AM 649 a 4to, ca. 1350–99), and *Kristsdrápa*, preserved in the *Third Grammatical Treatise* (in Codex Wormianus, ca. 1350).<sup>13</sup> Last but not least, he may have dictated an *urtext* of *Leiðarvísir*. It is less obvious why it hardly matters whether he did so or not.

The reader may have noticed that all of these sources are written in the fourteenth century, and AM 194 8vo is unambiguously a late fourteenth-century manuscript. It took the passage of 228 years from the death of the two Nicks before the extant itinerary was put to parchment. Nikulás is implicated with the text by way of authorial attribution, as was customary in medieval writing, i.e., to claim that someone of knowledge and wisdom oversaw the writing of the text in question and that this proves that the text is both truthful and of high quality.<sup>14</sup> Attributions were often used as a means to avoid criticism or to project responsibility of the information given upon someone else,<sup>15</sup> and it goes without saying that such attributions do not necessarily mean that the attributed authority actually had anything to do with the writing of the text. In fact such attributions should not be trusted if there is no internal evidence that may verify the involvement of the cited authority,<sup>16</sup> as is the case with *Leiðarvísir*.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, when we hardly have any external information on the authority, save for his arrival in Iceland a certain year and the year of his death, there is even less to go on when attributing the text to that person. Additionally, when Nikulás is conflated with a pope of the same name reigning in exactly the same timespan as our authority supposedly ran an abbey—disregarding

12. Marani, *Leiðarvísir*, pp. 9, 12–16.

13. See notes 19 and 20, below.

14. The most famous example of this in Old Norse is Ari fróði's *Íslendingabók*, in which it is stated that Ari wrote the book for the bishops Þorlákr and Ketill and showed it to them and to Sæmundr the priest, and that they greatly improved the work by correcting that which was wrong. Jakob Benediktsson, *Íslendingabók—Landnámabók*, Íslensk fornrit, 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1936), p. 3.

15. Sverrir Tómasson, *Formálar íslenskra sagnaritara á miðöldum* (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1988), p. 22.

16. Sverrir Tómasson, "Hvenær var Tristrams sögu snúið?" *Gripla*, 2 (1977), 47–78, esp. p. 62.

17. As Marani notes, scholars such as Werlauff and Kálund used the attribution to Nikulás as an argument in itself that the internal datable evidence in the text hails from the twelfth century rather than the other way around: "[I]t is used to evaluate those elements from which it should have been initially derived and confirmed" (*Leiðarvísir*, p. 44). E.g., Kálund's argument that "Annalerne nævner hans hjemkomst fra en udenlandsrejse 1154 og hans død 1159. Tiden for de i itinerariet indeholdte angivelser kan således med et rundt tal sættes til c. 1150." *Alfræði íslenszk*, I, xix.

the overall confusion as to what his name really was—we might believe that the person never even existed and that Nicholas Breakspear and Nikulás Bergsson are the same person, or, at the very least, that his legacy became conflated with that of the pope. Evidence certainly seems to point in this direction. Both were abbots, both founded monasteries, they have more or less the same name, and they both held office between 1154 and 1159. This is assuming that the Nikulás mentioned in *Leiðarvísir* is the same one as in the annals, of which there is no way of being certain.<sup>18</sup> His patronym has in all cases been omitted, so it is by way of educated guess that scholars have arrived at the conclusion that Abbot Nikulás (or simply Nikulás) always refers to the same person, as evidence of people of that name in medieval Iceland is scant in general.

With the exception of two other fourteenth-century manuscripts each attributing a skaldic poem to Nikuláss ábóti<sup>19</sup> and “Nicholas fyrsta ok fremsta Þverar munklifis abota i Eyjafirði, er þeði var gæddr nattuugiofum ok völdum mannkostum” (Nicholas the first and foremost abbot of the abbey of monks at Þverá in Eyjafjörður, who both had bestowed upon him gifts of nature and exemplary character), respectively,<sup>20</sup> there is precious little to know about Nikulás Bergsson. Ironically, the first abbot of the abbey at Munkaþverá, according to the *byskupa sögur* (the bishops' sagas), was a certain Hǫskuldr, of whom nothing is otherwise known and whose existence has been severely disputed by most scholars. Alas, the sources are not only scant but also in dispute. At the least it does not seem there is much in the way of knowing the truth about either of these men, although a more detailed inquiry into that particular mystery might reveal something as yet undiscovered.

Interestingly, a later abbot at Munkaþverá, Bergr Sökkason (d. 1350), wrote his own redaction of *Nikulás saga* (its extant form in Holm. 16 4to, written ca. 1375–1400), the hagiography of Saint Nicholas archbishop of Myra, who, as his namesake of Munkaþverá was thought to have done,<sup>21</sup> in-

18. The annals, as an example, have frequently been read as telling of the *return* of Nikulás from the Holy Land, whereas in actuality they only say that he *came* to Iceland without saying whence. The difference is significant. E.g., *Sturlunga saga*, ed. Órnólfur Thorsson, 3 vols. (Reykjavík: Svart á hvítu, 1988), III, lxxxviii.

19. This is the introduction to *Kristsdrápa*, extant only in the *Third Grammatical Treatise*, which is thought to have been originally written by Óláfr Þórðarson Hvítaskáld (1210–59), now preserved in its oldest extant form in the Wormianus manuscript of Snorra-Edda, written ca. 1360. See *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, ed. Jón Sigurðsson, 3 vols. (Osnabrück: Otto Zeller, 1848–87/1966), II, 186.

20. This is the introduction to *Jónsdrápa*, extant only in AM 649 a 4to, a manuscript written ca. 1300–1400 containing the so-called *lilla Jóns saga postula*, or *Jóns saga postula IV* as designated by Unger. See *Postola sögur: Legendariske fortællinger om apostlernes liv, deres kamp for kristendommens udbredelse samt deres martyrdød*, ed. Carl Richard Unger (Christiania [Oslo]: B. M. Bentzen, 1874), p. 509.

21. I.e., until Marani showed that *Leiðarvísir* is not a travel account. Marani, *Leiðarvísir*, pp. 78–83. If the author of *Leiðarvísir* truly was a Benedictine abbot, it should be noted

deed traveled to Jerusalem and whose saga happens to follow the fourteenth-century tradition of including a detailed description of the world,<sup>22</sup> such as the ones discussed below and, of course, the one preceding, as it were, the *Leiðarvísir* of AM 194 8vo. Simek mentions the correlation between the geographical description of *Nikulás saga* and *Leiðarvísir* in that both texts are very interested in places associated with Saint Nicholas, while arguing that his veneration in equal part to traditional descriptions of the world was of great importance to the monks at Munkaþverá.<sup>23</sup> The fact that *Leiðarvísir* is extant as part of a geographical treatise and attributed to a mysterious Nikulás who has been implicated with the abbey at Munkaþverá is made even more interesting by Simek's observation.

It may also be noted that yet another Nikulás existed, now best known as Niels Jensen (or Jonsen) Bild, who was Archbishop of Lund from 1361 until his death in 1379, eight years prior to the writing of AM 194 8vo. He was consecrated in Avignon, but there is nothing to indicate that he ever traveled to Rome or Jerusalem<sup>24</sup> (in fact, there is no evidence that any Nordic man of the name Nikulás ever did), and there is no evidence that might implicate him with the writing of *Leiðarvísir*. The only works attributed to him are the *Skånske kirkelov* in the manuscript AM 37 4to and his deathbed confessions. He bears mentioning, however, as this Nikulás was a renowned church authority during the lifetime of Óláfr Ormsson and, thus, he must have been known to Óláfr. A second Nikulás was also known to him, and he is indeed mentioned in AM 194 8vo, namely, the Archbishop of Niðarós, Nicolaus Rusare, to whom Óláfr attributes a curious tale of *fiolkynngi* (black magic) in Finnmörk:

En þessa iarteignn skrifvadi Nikolaus Olafs son klerkur af Nidar-osi til brædra aa Módru-vøllum Biarnar ok Snorra i latinu, en sira Æinar Hafliða son Hóla kirkiu officialis snere i norænu mál eptir bæn fyr sagdra brædra. En þat var, þa ær lidith var fra higatburd vors herra Iesu Christi M.CCC. LXXX ok eitt ár.

that itinerant monks were frowned upon by the order. See *The Rule of St. Benedict*, ed. Bruce L. Venarde, *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library*, 6 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2011), pp. 16–19; except on official errand from the monastery (pp. 166–69). It was not considered beneficial for the souls of the monks should they roam outside the monastery (pp. 214–15), and monks who did leave the monastery could only do so with permission from the abbot and were not to “Nec praesumat quisquam referre alio quaecumque foris monasterium viderit aut audierit, quia plurima destructio est” (presume to relate to another anything he saw or heard outside the monastery because it causes very great harm), pp. 216–17.

22. *Heilagra manna sögur: Fortællinger og legender om hellige mænd og kvinder*, ed. Carl Richard Unger (Christiania [Oslo]: B. M. Bentzen, 1877), II, 55–56.

23. Rudolf Simek, *Altnordische Kosmographie: Studien und Quellen zu Weltbild und Weltbeschreibung in Norwegen und Island vom 12. bis zum 14. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990), p. 340.

24. His successor, Magnus Nielsen, however, travelled to Rome to be consecrated.



(This miraculous tale was written in Latin by Nikolaus son of Óláfr clergyman of Niðarós to the friars Björn and Snorri at Möðruvellir, translated to Norse by reverend Einar son of Hafliði of Hólakirkja at the request of the aforementioned friars. At this time from the advent of our lord Jesus Christ had passed 1381 years.)<sup>25</sup>

This Nikulás passed away in 1386, a year before AM 194 8vo was written. His death is mentioned in *Lögmannsannáll* and in *Gottskálksannáll*, which also mentions his coming *j land* (to shore), presumably in Iceland, after several ships have been moored there. *Flateyjarbókarannáll* does not mention him in its passage concerning the moored ships, but his death is mentioned as in the other annals.<sup>26</sup>

It is possible that this is the Nikulás to whom *Leiðarvísir* is attributed on 15r rather than a vague figure in the twelfth century, but, even if that were so, it would still not be of much use to us. Even though *Leiðarvísir* is not a text evidently written by someone who travelled to Rome and Jerusalem,<sup>27</sup> there is still the matter of the Nikulás who travelled to Iceland according to some of the annals—who, it bears mentioning, is not in any of the annals said to have been to Jerusalem, nor indeed is it at all mentioned where he came from. There were two fourteenth-century clergymen named Nikulás, one of whom is definitely cited on 36r, and both of whom were great authorities at the time of writing of AM 194 8vo. Hence, to whom *Leiðarvísir* is attributed on 15r is not at all as certain as it first might seem since no “original” version of the text exists. There is the curious incident of Nicholas Breakspeer being ordained as pope in 1154 and passing on in 1159, the exact same years Nikulás Bergsson is supposed to have travelled to Iceland and died in office. The fact that one of two hagiographies of Saint Nicholas was in fact written at Munkaþverá in the fourteenth century is yet another curiosity. As Sverrir Tómasson has drawn attention to, there were many churches in the vicinity of Munkaþverá that were dedicated to Saint Nicholas,<sup>28</sup> so the place of the writing of this saga and its connection to the name Nikulás is hardly surprising, but then again the church at Geirrøðareyri where Óláfr Ormsson served and wrote our extant *Leiðarvísir* was also dedicated to Saint Nicholas.

Whatever is to be made of this, the possibility of a conflation of two or more people sharing the uncommon name Nikulás is a possibility, and at the very least this seems to have partially been the case with Nikulás Bergsson and Nicholas Breakspeer. While it may be deemed likely that our Nikulás in question is the very same person who by some accounts was abbot of Munkaþverá, and even if an attribution to his authorship

25. See *Alfræði íslenszk*, ed. Kálund, I, 57–59.

26. *Íslandske annaler*, ed. Storm, pp. 283, 365, and 414–15 respectively.

27. See Marani, *Leiðarvísir*, pp. 79–83.

28. Sverrir Tómasson, *Formálar íslenskra sagnaritara á miðöldum*, p. 90.

228 years after his death is a bit suspect as his authority would be long forgotten at that point (however assuredly one might believe it to have been copied from an older copy of the work), there exists still the problem of manuscript preservation and the dating of the text. For even if some conclusive evidence concerning the life of Abbot Nikulás were to be unearthed all of a sudden, verifying his twelfth-century authorship of our fourteenth-century *Leiðarvísir* and thus solving the little problem detailed above, Tommaso Marani has in contrast shown that the text could not be of twelfth-century origin unless we subscribe to the idea that a twelfth-century *urtext* of *Leiðarvísir* existed. That argument “relies on a *petitio principii*, because the attribution to Abbot Nikulás is assumed in order to confirm it. If one only considers the internal evidence present in *Leiðarvísir*, the text cannot be dated to the twelfth century, and it cannot therefore be attributed to Nikulás of Munkaþverá. . . . The historical elements incompatible with a twelfth-century dating of the text are too relevant and disseminated throughout the whole itinerary to be considered ‘occasional misstatements or confused statements which may well not be due to the author.’”<sup>29</sup>

There are indeed many details in the text that show that the extant text could not have been written in the twelfth century. This leaves two options: either we assume that a twelfth-century *urtext* accurately attributed to Nikulás existed and was then radically transformed before being copied into AM 194 8vo, or the attribution is wrong and *Leiðarvísir* is a fourteenth-century text.<sup>30</sup> Nikulás, barring his fourteenth-century namesakes, can thus safely be written off altogether as the authority behind *Leiðarvísir* as we know it.<sup>31</sup> Just as the manuscript dates itself to 1387, there are elements in the text of *Leiðarvísir* that could only have been written in the fourteenth century. Certainly there are other parts of the text that might possibly have been written in the twelfth century and others that could belong to the thirteenth century. This is part and parcel of medieval learning, which gathered information from various sources; finding older pieces of information in a text does not mean that the text must be older than its writing time. Only the youngest historical minutiae may be used to date a text’s *terminus post quem*.

29. Marani, *Leiðarvísir*, p. 44; quoting Francis Peabody Magoun Jr., “The Rome of Two Northern Pilgrims: Archbishop Sigeric of Canterbury and Abbot Nikulás of Munkaþverá,” *Harvard Theological Review*, 33 (1940), 278; and Francis Peabody Magoun Jr., “The Pilgrim-Diary of Nikulas of Munkaþvera: The Road to Rome,” *Medieval Studies*, 6 (1944), 315.

30. Marani, *Leiðarvísir*, pp. 42–45. The most anachronistic example to a twelfth-century dating is provided on p. 43: “In the description of St Peter’s there is a probable reference to a plenary indulgence for pilgrims visiting the Basilica. The indulgentia plenaria for pilgrims coming to Rome was granted for the first time in 1300 by Pope Boniface VIII.”

31. For further problematics of his attribution, see Marani, *Leiðarvísir*, pp. 44–47.

Long-lost texts do not easily present themselves, and, since a hypothetical *urtext* does not exist any longer, I would argue that there is no fundamental reason to suppose in analysis of the present text that there ever was one. We cannot read this *urtext*, and, as we cannot access that which does not exist any longer (or perhaps, by some stretch of imagination, never existed at all), we cannot analyze it. We cannot fathom how this text looked like without reconstructing or fabricating it. What we do have is a fourteenth-century text written by Óláfr Ormsson, priest of Geir-røðareyri. It so happens that *Leiðarvísir*, an amazing text in and of itself, is even more interesting in its extant form than as a singular twelfth-century text that happened to be preserved in a much younger manuscript. It is the fourteenth-century *Leiðarvísir* by Óláfr Ormsson and its context that will be the focus of discussion in this article.

## THE TEXT

Scholars have generally agreed that *Leiðarvísir* starts on folio 11r with the sentence “Sva er sagt at umhverfis Island se vii dægra sigling” (It is said that it takes seven days to sail around Iceland) and ends on folio 16r with the attribution to Nikulás. It is hard not to agree with this assessment as we know that the text immediately preceding *Leiðarvísir* and the text immediately following it are direct borrowings from AM 736 I 4to and the Hauksbók manuscript AM 544 4to, respectively.<sup>32</sup> The text in between, *Leiðarvísir*, is either itself a borrowing from an older manuscript, as is invariably postulated, or authored by Óláfr Ormsson.

There is, however, nothing to indicate the beginning of *Leiðarvísir*. There is no rubric or heading or “any clear textual or orthographic signal” showing that a new section of the book has started.<sup>33</sup> Thus it seems fair to assume that, in its extant form, it does not start there, but that it includes the whole geographical treatise preceding the Nordic countries as they are clearly meant to be read together, at least from 9v onwards where a new paragraph is indicated by a capital S: “Sva er kallat sem iordin se prideild ath nôfnum” (It is said that the earth is split into three named regions).<sup>34</sup> The text of *Leiðarvísir* in AM 194 8vo thus seems to describe not only Europe but also Asia and Africa. It may be noted that the explicit naming of Nikulás as the authority of the text says that he dictated not

32. Noted also by Kålund, in *Alfræði íslenzk*, I, xx–xxi.

33. Marani, *Leiðarvísir*, p. 6. On the arguments for the designation of *Leiðarvísir* as an autonomous text within AM 194 8vo, see Marani, *Leiðarvísir*, pp. 6–9.

34. *Alfræði íslenzk*, ed. Kålund, I, 8.

only the *Leiðarvísir og borgaskipan* but also *allr þessi frodleikr*, which might be understood to include the parts preceding the perceived beginning of *Leiðarvísir*.

Yet this part of the text normally not deemed to be part of *Leiðarvísir* is supposed to be read in context to the preceding chapter starting with Moses, a description of the earthly Paradise, of the rivers flowing thence to the other continents, and how the progeny of Noah spread over the world. The text reads as a single entity, not as copied and pasted bits of information. This is well illustrated in Kålund's edition of *Alfræði íslensk I* where he designates the whole first part of the manuscript—including *Leiðarvísir*, what precedes it, and the description of Rome, Constantinople, and Jerusalem following from it—as a single chapter that he simply calls *Landafræði* (Geography). Other editors have followed suit.<sup>35</sup> Following this part of the manuscript are smaller subchapters on the five church councils and where they were held; on how Rogation Days originated in Vienna; the commandments of Moses; monstrous peoples; lakes and ponds; serpents; a chapter on the meaning of gemstones ultimately derived from Pliny through intermediary sources such as Marbodius's *Liber lapidum*,<sup>36</sup> another on great rivers; and a curious little itinerary from Norway to Rome, Constantinople and Jerusalem, not by any means as detailed as the one presently under scrutiny. To my knowledge, this second itinerary has received no scholarly attention. It has no explicit naming of its author, though despite its simplistic form there is indication that it is based in the same tradition as *Leiðarvísir*. It might also be said that the second itinerary is an excessively short version of the former one, for some reason repeated within the same manuscript.

All of this material on folios 1r–27v, excluding the Ten Commandments, is very geographically oriented. So in fact are folios 28r–33v, although they do not seem to be part of the same text. In the small chapter on 28r

35. *Alfræði íslensk*, ed. Kålund, I, 3–31. Accompanying a recent edition of *Sturlunga saga* is a third volume, *Skýringar og fræði*, which serves as a glossary and scholarly overview of the text and includes as well editions of other, smaller texts that were likely known by those who wrote *Sturlunga saga* and that have also been deemed relevant to the modern reader. The editors, while following Kålund's assessment of the beginning in manuscript and authorship of *Leiðarvísir*, have, much like Kålund, opted to also include both the preceding geographical treatise and the following part on the resting places of holy men, under the general heading *Leiðarvísir*—the fourth passage in which has received the more clearly designated title *Leiðarvísir Nikuláss Bergssonar ábóta á Þverá*. Even though this fourteenth-century context of *Leiðarvísir* could not have been known to any author of *Sturlunga saga* in the thirteenth century, this editorial decision proves how inextricable *Leiðarvísir* is in its present form from its context in AM 194 8vo. See *Sturlunga saga*, ed. Órnólfur Thorsson et al., III, lxxxvi–xc, 49–65.

36. As is the case in Hauksbók and *Stjórn*. See Rowe, "Literary, Codicological, and Political Perspectives on Hauksbók," *Gripla*, 19 (2008), 51–76, esp. p. 58.

(which Kålund named *Smávegis fróðleikr* [bits of knowledge]), the information that the world is tripartite is repeated, and the number of lands in each continent as well as the number of languages in the world is stated,<sup>37</sup> among other things. Following this, on 28v is a detailed description of the *sex aetates mundi*, or six ages of the world, also named *heimsaldrar* in Old Norse, first conceived in the fourth century by St. Augustine in his *De civitate dei* (City of God) and his other writings. Such *heimsaldrar* invariably contained a wealth of historical and geographical information, and such is indeed the case here. From here on, the manuscript becomes somewhat less cohesive, while still focusing on knowledge derived from Christian authorities such as Isidore of Seville and others.

Óláfr Ormsson's *Leiðarvísir* is far from being an autonomous text. It only exists as part of a greater whole, for which reason one might argue that *Leiðarvísir* as such does not really exist, at least not anymore. Not only does the context of the itinerary within the manuscript provide an interesting window into the worldview of the author, such as the fact that anyone taking this road to Jerusalem would do so in a world fraught with monsters, but what it owes in this greater sense to other fourteenth-century geographical treatises turns out, when put under scrutiny, to be a great deal.

#### THE FOURTEENTH-CENTURY CONTEXT

At the turn of the fourteenth century, between 1290 and 1310, a noticeable shift occurs in Icelandic geographical thought with the manuscript fragment AM 736 I 4to. It contains a geographical treatise unlike any other known before that time, but which crops up repeatedly in later fourteenth-century manuscripts. It starts with familiar words: "Sva er kallat sem þrideild se iorð at nofnum." We recognize this from *Snorra-Edda* as well, extant from 1300 onwards: "Veröldin var greind í þrjár hálfur. Frá suðri í vestr ok inn at Miðjarðarsjá" (the world was split into three regions, from the South to the West and in towards the Mediterranean).<sup>38</sup> This description is in line with the popular medieval T-O maps, which depict a tripartite world—a design known in Iceland as is evidenced by the T-O map extant in the manuscript fragment GKS 1812 4to, 5v–6r, dated by Kålund to ca. 1250. The description in AM 736 I 4to is, among other things, also remarkable for its geographical connection of Vínland to

37. For the curious the manuscript states that there exist 27 languages in Asia, 22 in Africa, and 23 in Europe; a total of 72 languages in the world.

38. *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2005), p. 4.

Africa by land-bridge, presumably off the west coast, as well as the inclusion of a hemispherical world map.<sup>39</sup>

Soon after this description was written, the Hauksbók manuscript AM 544 4to came into being, commissioned and in large part written by the lawspeaker Haukr Erlendsson (d. 1334) in 1302–10. Its geographical treatise has been dated to between 1290–1334 by Jón Helgason, who further notes that “Norwegian influence on the orthography can be confirmed even in the first part of the manuscript, so it was probably written after Haukr had settled in Norway,” indicating that it was written after 1302,<sup>40</sup> while Simek places its writing between 1306–8. Gunnar Harðarson dates it to between 1302–10, basing his observations on Stefán Karlsson’s research, and this dating is also preferred by Elizabeth Ashman Rowe.<sup>41</sup> An early fourteenth-century dating thus seems to be rather safe. Hauksbók contains a wealth of knowledge, including one of three versions of *Landnámabók*, a longer redaction of *Trójumanna saga* based on the *Daretis Phrygii de excidio Trojae historia*, the older redaction of *Breta sögur* based on Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum Britanniae*, *Völuspá* (added after Haukr’s death), and many other texts. Hauksbók also contains a detailed description of the world, and curiously it starts in a fashion similar to its younger fourteenth-century cousin AM 194 8vo, although it is markedly a different text. First it describes the well of the earthly Paradise from which the four great rivers spring, and then other rivers and great lakes are described, with examples such as the Danube and a certain waterbed in Bláland that sickens those who drink from it, reminiscent of a similar passage in Alexander’s letter to Aristotle, translated in ca. 1350–70 in the *Stjórn* manuscript AM 226 fol.<sup>42</sup> Following this aquatic treatise is a compact prologue on Moses and his advent in the universal history, Dares Phrygius and his account of the siege of Troy, and the historians Herodotus and Pherecydes. A description of Paradise follows, after which the geographical treatise begins, “her segir frá þui huersu lond liggia i veroldenni” (here

39. This text (as many others of a similar kind) has been edited by Rudolf Simek. See his *Altnordische Kosmographie*, pp. 429–32.

40. See Rowe, “Literary, Codicological, and Political Perspectives on Hauksbók,” p. 53.

41. See Stefán Karlsson, “Aldur Hauksbókar,” in *Stafkrókar: Rítgerðir eftir Stefán Karlsson gefnar út í tilefni af sjötugsafmæli hans 2. desember 1998* (Reykjavík: Stofnun Arna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 2000), pp. 303–9; Jón Helgason, ed., *Hauksbók: the Arna-Magnæan manuscripts*, 371, 4to, 544, 4to, and 675, 4to, Manuscripta Islandica, 5 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1960), p. xx; Simek, *Altnordische Kosmographie*, p. 29; Gunnar Harðarson, *Litteraturé et spiritualité en Scandinavie médiévale: La traduction norroise du “De arria animae” de Hugues de Saint-Victor. Étude historique et édition critique*, Bibliotheca Victorina, 5 (Paris: Brepols, 1995), p. 42; and Rowe, “Literary, Codicological, and Political Perspectives on Hauksbók,” p. 64.

42. See *Hauksbók: udgivet efter de Arnemagnæanske håndskrifter no. 371, 544 og 675, 4 samt forskellige papirhåndskrifter*, ed. Finnur Jónsson et al. (Copenhagen: Kongelige nordiske oldskrift-selskab, 1892–96), p. 151; Alexander’s letter in Old Norse has been edited in *Alexanders saga: Islands oversættelse ved Brandt Jónsson*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske boghandel | Nordisk forlag, 1925), pp. 156–66.

is told of the lay of the lands in the world), interjected with an explanation of whence *otru* (heresy) sprang, concluding with a description of *marghattadar þiodir* (manifold peoples) who by and large turn out to be the monsters of Pliny's *Naturalis historia*.<sup>43</sup>

The geographical treatise of Hauksbók is a lot longer than the small description of AM 736 I 4to, exhibiting a development in geographical interests in the relatively few years between the writing of the two manuscripts, unless they were written at about the same time, which is also a possibility. Geographical interests would continue to develop throughout the fourteenth century.

What is characteristic of the geographical description of Hauksbók and all subsequent fourteenth-century texts of the same kind, unlike AM 736 I 4to, is their preoccupation with the exotic, the alien. Thus the relevant part of Hauksbók starts by describing Indíaland, where “þar ero storer anmarkar a lande. beði firir dyrum illum oc þioðum mann skœðum. oc ormum oc eitr kyucendum” (there are great shortcomings of the land, both because of evil animals and dangerous peoples and serpents and poisonous beasts). Furthermore it is inhabited by

drekar storer. oc dyr þau er grifes heita. oc þioðer þer er .xij. alnar ero langer oc ero þeir mann skœðir. En dyr þau er grifes heita ero fram sem ernir en afr sem hit o arga dyr. oc sua skiot oc sterc sem þau . oc vengir ero a þeim oc ero floeyg sem ernir. Mantikoera heitir dyr. þar er a manz anlít oc þrefaldar tenn i hofðe. bolr sem híns varga dyrs. sporðr sem a dreka. gull augu i. rodd sem hogg orms. oc rennr harðare en fugll flúugí. oc er þat mann æta. a þetta India land for Bartholomeus postole.<sup>44</sup>

(large dragons and those animals who are called griffons and the people who are 12 ells long [576 cm] and dangerous to men. Those animals called griffons are as eagles up front but in the rear they are like lions and they are so fast and strong as they are. They have wings as well and can fly as eagles. Manticore is the animal called which has a human face and three sets of teeth in its head, the body of a lion, a tail as a dragon's, golden eyes, the voice of a snake, and it runs faster than a bird can fly and it eats people. This is the India which the apostle Bartholomeus travelled to.)

The landscape is mythical and Biblical all at once. Between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, the latter of which originates in Paradise, is the land called Mesopotamia, where the giant Nimrod and other giants with him made

43. See *Hauksbók*, ed. Finnur Jónsson et al., pp. 150–67.

44. *Hauksbók*, ed. Finnur Jónsson et al., p. 153. *Bartholomeus saga* is referenced here as well. There are two surviving redactions of this translated hagiography in Old Norse in which he banishes the demon Astaroth from an idol. Both are translated from Latin, and where in the original text the demon is called *aethiopem nigrum*, one redaction translates it as *blámaðr biki svartari* (blacker than coal), whereas the other translates it as *skuggi* (shadow). The relationship between Africa in the medieval mind, *blámen*, and the demonic will be explored in a forthcoming publication.

the Babel Tower. When God collapsed the tower he “let þar vaxa orma fiolda til þess er menn matto þar eigi byggja. oc ero ormar þeir þar iafnan siðan” (put a great number of snakes there so that people could not live there, and these snakes are there ever since).<sup>45</sup> There is the Quenland, where only women are born, great dogs that kill oxen and lions, and, as has been mentioned, several of Pliny’s monsters make an appearance: the Albanians who are white as snow, changing to black when they grow old; the Panfagi, who eat literally everything they can sink their teeth into; Troglodites; Anthropofagi; Sciopods; and more.<sup>46</sup>

A few pages after the conclusion of the geographical treatise there is a chapter only preserved in a fragmented state, “Vm borga skipan oc legstaðe heilagra manna” (A city guide and on the resting places of holy men), which is virtually exactly like the text immediately following *Leiðarvísir og borgaskipan* in AM 194 8vo, starting with Rome and then Constantinople. It is clear that the text in AM 194 8vo is based on the text in Hauksbók, which is fuller, since wording is precisely copied with the exception of a few shortcuts made by Óláfr Ormsson while transcribing. Óláfr must have had the complete text of Hauksbók, as the relevant chapter in AM 194 8vo goes on after the lacuna in Hauksbók,<sup>47</sup> notwithstanding that both works also draw independently on similar sources such as Isidore’s *Etymologiae* and Pliny’s *Naturalis historia*.<sup>48</sup> There is another borrowing from Hauksbók in AM 194 8vo, starting on 8v, “Sidan skipti Noe heime med sonum sinum i þria hluti” (Then Noah split the world in three parts and gave one to each son), and ending on 9v where the aforementioned part “Sva er kallat sem iordin se þrideild ath nôfnum” begins, which itself is a direct but abbreviated borrowing of AM 736 I 4to. The part of AM 194 8vo designated as *Leiðarvísir* is thus buttressed between parts of two unashamedly fourteenth-century geographical treatises, as briefly touched upon above, both of which included a map of Jerusalem as well as a description of it.

*Stjórn* has by far the most elaborate geographical treatise and professes to base it on Vincent of Beauvais’s *Speculum Historiale* but seems to be based on an intermediate treatise that also included information from Isidore’s *Etymologiae*.<sup>49</sup> Peter Hallberg noted some stylistic similarities be-

45. *Hauksbók*, ed. Finnur Jónsson et al., p. 153.

46. See especially, *Hauksbók*, ed. Finnur Jónsson et al., pp. 165–67.

47. See *Hauksbók*, ed. Finnur Jónsson et al., pp. 176–77; and *Alfræði íslenzk*, ed. Kálund, I, 23–31 (also noted by Kálund on pp. xix–xxi). While direct borrowings between medieval manuscripts are both rare and hard to prove, the reader will find that this borrowing of Óláfr from Haukr is so exact that it may be considered to be an indisputable fact.

48. Kálund (in *Alfræði íslenzk*, I, xx) prefers the title *Origines*, which refers to the same work as the more common title *Etymologiae*. Simek (in *Altnordische Kosmographie*, pp. 377–83) discusses some possible Latin sources of *Hauksbók*, the kind of which *Stjórn* and AM 194 8vo also draw on.

49. Jakob Benediktsson, “*Stjórn* og Nikulás saga,” *Gripla*, 6 (1984), 7–11.



tween *Stjórn I* and the aforementioned *Nikulás saga*, and argued for the possible authorship of Bergr Sökkason of Þverá over this part of *Stjórn*,<sup>50</sup> although the geographical treatises in each work have been shown to be translations independent of each other.<sup>51</sup> The world is still tripartite, and, as is customary, the description of the world starts in Paradise, noting that neither man nor spirit might enter there. The terrestrial existence of Paradise and its fiery enclosure is used as a plot point in *Eiríks saga víðförla*, extant in *Flateyjarbók* (ca. 1387–94), which was partly written by the same man as the *Stjórn* manuscript AM 226 fol. (ca. 1350–60), the priest Magnús Þórhallsson.<sup>52</sup> This manuscript of *Stjórn* is especially interesting as it also includes *Rómverja saga*, *Alexanders saga*, and *Gyðinga saga*, indicating that the book was thought of as a whole universal history of an unprecedented size.<sup>53</sup> It is further worth noting that the eponymous hero of *Eiríks saga* has a discussion with the emperor of Constantinople that is modeled after the *Elucidarium* by Honorius Augustodunensis, in which he, among other things, asks his mentor about the terrestrial Paradise, as finding Paradise is his mission.

Hann spurði ok at yfirbragði þjóða ok grein landa, frá höfum ok útlöndum ok frá allri austrálfu heimsins ok suðrálfu, frá konungum stórum ok frá ýmissum eyjum, frá auðn landa ok frá þeim stöðum, er þeir áttu ferð yfir, frá mönnum undarligum ok búningi þeira ok síðum margra þjóða, frá höggormum ok flugdrekkum ok alls kyns dýrum ok fuglum, frá gnótt gulls ok gimsteina. Þessar spurningar ok margar aðrar leysti konungr vel ok fróðliga. Eptir þetta váru þeir skírðir Eirekr ok hans menn.<sup>54</sup>

(He asked as well about the appearance of peoples and division of lands, about oceans and distant lands and about all of the eastern part of the world and the southern part, about great kings and various islands, about barren lands and those places they sought to travel through, about strange people and their clothing and the habits of many nations, about serpents and flying dragons and all kinds of animals and birds, about wealths of gold and gemstones. These questions and many others the king answered readily and with great wisdom. After this, Eiríkr and his men were baptized.)

Not surprisingly this sequence of curiosities discussed in *Eiríks saga* mirrors the descriptions of monstrous people and strange creatures in *Stjórn* and

50. Peter Hallberg, "Some Observations on the Language of Dunstanus Saga, with an Appendix on the Bible Compilation *Stjórn*," *Saga-Book*, 18 (1970–73), 324–53.

51. Jakob Benediktsson, "Stjórn og Nikulás saga," pp. 7–11.

52. Although his writing ceases on 4r whereas *Eiríks saga víðförla* starts on 4v, meaning that Magnús did not himself write any part of *Eiríks saga*, he most certainly collaborated on the book. *Stjórn* and other theological writings may also have been independently known to other scribes working on *Flateyjarbók*. *Elucidarius* most certainly was known to the author of *Eiríks saga*.

53. See Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, "Um aldir alda," *passim*.

54. *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*, ed. Guðni Jónsson et al., 4 vols. (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfan Forni, 1954), III, 449–50.

other learned writings of the fourteenth century in general. Directly following the description of Paradise in *Stjórn* is a description of Indíaland:

India hefir i seer margar þjódir ok fiolda storstada. þar fæðaz Cenocephali, þeir menn sem fyrir þann skylld heita sua. at þeir hafa hundz höfuf. huerra gaud er þa synir litlu sidr hunda uera enn menn. eru þeir ok eigi sidr i suma stadi taldir meðr skynlausum kuikendum enn meðr monnum sem apynjur. þiat þeim eru þeir utan at höfdunum eigi ulikir. þar fæðaz ok Cipodes. þeir eru sua uordnir sik. at þeir hafa eitt augat i midiu enninu. eptir þi sem segiz. þeir heita öðru nafni Agriophagite. fyrir þa grein at þeir eta ecki uætta nema dyra kiöt.<sup>55</sup>

(India is inhabited by many nations and has many great towns. There are born the Cenocephali, men who have this name for the reason that they have a head like a dog's, whose howling reveals them to be no less part dogs than men. In some ways they are also considered among non sapient beasts rather than men, much like female apes, for they are alike them excluding the heads. There are also born the Cipodes. They are so fashioned that they have one eye in the middle of the forehead, according to some accounts. They are also called Agriophagite, for the reason that they eat naught but animal meat.)

The description goes on for quite a while, and the entire geographical treatise is fifty-two pages in Reidar Astås's edition and thirty-four pages in Unger's edition.<sup>56</sup> Pliny's monsters once again are the basis for the author's understanding of exotic cultures; indeed, no other known Old Norse text is as extensive in describing them, nor is there any other text that includes more of them.<sup>57</sup> And yet the text admits that "India er hardla gott land ok heilsamlikt af þi skiera lopti sem þar uerdr af heilsamligum uestanuindi" (India is a very fertile land and healthy due to the clean air thence brought by the healthy western wind). Mild or harsh climates were frequently used in the Middle Ages to argue for the good or ill nature of the people of the various lands,<sup>58</sup> as is also represented by the aforementioned hemispherical world map found in the manuscript AM 736 I 4to, the text of which is also extant in context with our present version of *Leiðarvísir*, as was previously mentioned. So, the fact that India has a healthy climate seems to be incongruous to the very idea that monsters could originate there. And yet the sources agree that there certainly are dragons and the like: "þar ero fioll gullig þau sem sakir drepsamligra dreka ok grimmligra griffona ok undarligra ok storra skrimsla. þeirra sem mannz mynd hafa. er umattuligt er mannum til at fara" (there are golden mountains which,

55. *Stjórn: gammelnorsk Bibelhistorie fra Verdens Skabelse til det babyloniske Fangenskab*, ed. Carl Richard Unger (Christiania [Oslo]: Feilberg & Landmark, 1862), p. 68.

56. *Stjórn*, ed. Reidar Astås, 2 vols. (Oslo: Riksarkivet, 2009) I, 100–153; *Stjórn*, ed. Unger, pp. 67–100.

57. Most of them are to be found in the chapter *af skjýsiligum skrímslum* (on horrible monsters) as designated in Astås's edition (*Stjórn*, pp. 116–20, 141–46).

58. See John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse Univ. Press, 2000), pp. 42–47.

due to killer dragons and cruel griffons and strange and big monsters of human shape, are impossible for humans to reach),<sup>59</sup> as would also be attested by *The Book of John Mandeville*, written a short while later in the fourteenth century.<sup>60</sup> This is different from the subsequent chapter in *Stjórn* on Africa, where monstrous figures are put in direct context with the harsh climate. It must be kept in mind that discrepancies of this sort are quite common in medieval literature.

In *Stjórn I* the Plinian tradition is further blended with that of the *Physiologus*, much like in its source material. It could be argued that the descriptions of animals found in *Stjórn* are not as allegorical as would be expected of the *Physiologus*, but this need not be the case since medieval bestiaries derived of this stock were not all so allegorical themselves. A comparison between the chapter on the elephant in the Icelandic *Physiologus B* and the one in *Stjórn I* should suffice to show the roots of some core qualities associated with this animal: their immense size, their usefulness in battle, and their capability of carrying fortresses on their backs.<sup>61</sup> The part regarding the bathing habits of the elephant and its clashes with serpents and dragons, lacking in the Icelandic *Physiologus*, may conversely be found in the Latin *Physiologus* accompanied by an allegorical meaning of the elephant and his wife as representing Adam and Eve.<sup>62</sup> The author of *Stjórn I*, however, does not seem to be interested in such allegories, no more than his source, Isidore.<sup>63</sup> Isidore, influenced as he was from *Physiologus*, in turn influenced younger bestiaries such as the thirteenth-century MS Bodley 764 English bestiary, which has a chapter on the elephant that is a direct translation of Isidore, with the addition of the original allegory from the *Physiologus*.<sup>64</sup> The elephant is but one example of many.

One might perceive a marked contrast between the rather sober *Leiðarvísir* and the emphasis of these texts on exotic and alien landscapes and creatures, but, when it comes to Europe, there is not much cause for wonder in any of the texts, and thus it should not come as a surprise that

59. *Stjórn*, ed. Unger, p. 71.

60. And already translated into Old Danish in the middle of the fifteenth century. See M. Lorenzen, ed., *Mandevilles rejse i gammeldansk oversættelse* (Copenhagen: S. L. Møllers Bogtrykkeri, 1882), pp. xlii–lxiv.

61. See *The Icelandic Physiologus*, ed. Halldór Hermannsson (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Library, 1938), pp. 21, 40–41; *Stjórn*, ed. Unger, p. 70.

62. *Physiologus: A Medieval Book of Nature Lore*, ed. Michael J. Curley (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 29–32.

63. *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, ed. Stephen A. Barney et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006), p. 252. Some of this text is then repeated in the chapter on Africa, claiming that elephants are all but extinct now in Africa due to dragons, so that they primarily are to be found in India.

64. See *Bestiary, Being an English Translation of the Bodleian Library, Oxford m.s. Bodley 764 with All the Original Miniatures Reproduced in Facsimile*, ed. Richard Barber (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1993), pp. 39–43.

the mostly Eurocentric *Leiðarvísir* does not allude in itself to such phenomena—such landscapes and creatures appear only when the treatise containing *Leiðarvísir* pans out to include Asia and Africa.<sup>65</sup> Surely enough there were centaurs roaming about in Europe according to *Stjórn*, but an explanation for that is immediately at hand via *Speculum historiale*.

Enn þo segir Ysidorus. at centaurus er sua uordinn sem madr aa hesti sitiandi edr honum samtengðr. enn sumir menn segia. at þeir uæri riddarar i fyrr nefndri Thesalia. Enn fyrir þann skyldd at þeir synduz einn likam manz ok hestz hafa samtengdan huart uioðr annat. sua sem þeir foru rennandi ok reikandi i bardaganum. þa segiz at þaðan af uæri þeir centauri kallaðir. Minocentaurum segia þeir nafn hafa tekit af manni ok gridungi. fyrir þa sauk at hann se sua uorðinn sem allt saman graðungr ok madr. huilikt dyr er hinir fyrri menn sògdu i sinum skròksògum inni byrgt i laborintho. Onocentaurus segiz at af þi se sua kallaðr. at hann se halfr uorðinn sem madr enn halfr sem asni. Enn Ypocentaurus af þi at hans nattura er haalfblandin af monnum ok hestum.<sup>66</sup>

(But Isidore says that the *centaurus* is shaped as a man riding a horse or conjoined with it. But some say that they are the knights of the aforementioned Thesalia, but for the reason that they seemed to be of one conjoined body of horse and man as they rode in battle, it is said that for this reason they were called the centauri. Minocentaurum is said to be a name derived from man and bull, for the sake that he has the appearance of a bull and man all in the same body, an animal of the sort that previous generations said was trapped inside the labyrinth in their tall tales. Onocentaurus is said to be called this as he is half-man and half-ass, but the Hippocentaurus for his nature as half-man and half-horse.)

The author is thus seemingly able to believe in all sorts of horrible monsters in Asia and Africa, whereas the legends of alleged human-animal hybrids in Europe must be based on a somewhat sensible misunderstanding.

*Stjórn* also includes information on rocks and gemstones interspersed in the descriptions of the relevant parts of the world, whereas *Hauksbók* and AM 194 8vo dedicate special chapters to these.<sup>67</sup> With all this in mind, let us take a second gander at AM 194 8vo to conclude this study.

65. Notwithstanding the exhibited interest of *Leiðarvísir* in Germanic mythological locations such as its placing of Gnitaeiðr as a waymark and Gunnarr Gjúkason's snake-pit. Just as Biblical landscape is made mythological in medieval geographical treatises by speaking matter of factly about the location of the Babel Tower built by Nimrod, it requires no stretch of imagination to see why Germanic myths should be utilized in the same purpose when describing Europe. It is a way of making foreign landscapes familiar to whomever the text was intended for. On these locations in particular and their use in *Leiðarvísir*, see Lars Lönnroth, "A Road Paved with Legends," in *Two Norse-Icelandic Studies: Sponsors, Writers and Readers of Early Norse Literature and A Road Paved With Legends* (Gothenburg, Sweden: Göteborgs Universitet | Litteraturvetenskapliga Institutionen, 1990), passim.

66. *Stjórn*, ed. Unger, pp. 84–85.

67. *Hauksbók*, ed. Finnur Jónsson et al., pp. 227–28; *Alfræði íslensk*, ed. Kálund, I, 41–43, 77–83, respectively. The latter chapter on stones in AM 194 8vo is a direct borrowing from *Hauksbók*.

THE FOURTEENTH-CENTURY *LEIÐARVÍSIR*

As Óláfr Ormsson frequently borrows text from known manuscripts, such as *Hauksbók* and AM 736 I 4to, there is ample reason to believe that the text known as *Leiðarvísir* is also a borrowing. Due to Óláfr being very accurate in his transcriptions of known texts, we may also come to the conclusion that *Leiðarvísir* was copied from a close to identical source.

This does not, however, solve any problem. The fact remains that there is no conclusive proof that Abbot Nikulás, whoever he was, was responsible for the original, though there is nothing to preclude that possibility either. There however seems to be some confusion regarding him in the annals on which we base our assumption, where the dates concerning his arrival in Iceland and his time of death coincide with that of the papacy of Pope Adrian IV, frequently referred to in the annals by his baptismal name Nichulaus. This would not be the first time such a mix-up is detected in the annals, as in the case of the missing *Katrín*, mother superior of *Þverá* (where else?), to whose disappearance a possible solution has been offered: her baptismal name was *Hallbera*, while she took the name *Katrín* upon being officiated,<sup>68</sup> not unlike the good Pope Adrian.

Secondly, there is the problem that we do not have the text of *Leiðarvísir* that Óláfr Ormsson copied into AM 194 8vo, if he indeed did not author it himself. At this point it can only be said to be likely, not certain, that he copied the text. Hence we do not know whether the prototext, if there was one, also had an explicit naming Nikulás as its authority. Conjecture might deem it likely, but it would still be conjecture. If there was a prototext, and if Óláfr copied it as thoroughly as he did the borrowings from *Hauksbók* and AM 736 I 4to, then it cannot have been older than the first half of the fourteenth century.<sup>69</sup> We would have to assume, then, for the prototext to be an accurate representation of the supposed twelfth-century original text by Abbot Nikulás, that Óláfr added extensively to the prototext. This is not impossible, but it would be peculiar, to say the least, as he does not add material to other known borrowings. Either *Leiðarvísir* is an exception to this rule, or he copied it from another fourteenth-century manuscript, as the text of our current *Leiðarvísir* is clearly written in the fourteenth century. In the latter case, that manuscript may itself have been based on an older version of *Leiðarvísir* and expanded upon that, but this territory must be trodden upon carefully as we would then be making assumptions about several lost manuscripts rather than just a

68. Ármann Jakobsson and Ásdís Egilsdóttir, "Abbadísinn sem hvarf," in *Þúsund og eitt orð sagt Sigurgeiri Steingrímssyni fimmtugum 2. október 1993*, ed. Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson et al. (Reykjavík: Menningar- og minjasjóður Mette Magnussen, 1993), pp. 7–9.

69. See. Marani, *Leiðarvísir*, p. 234.

single one, and it is problematic enough to make any judgments about the contents of even just the one. It can, however, be comfortably argued that the *Leiðarvísir* in AM 194 8vo was copied from an older manuscript as there exists a variant fragment of the same text in AM 736 II 4to from ca. 1400, which starts where the borrowing from AM 736 I 4to in AM 194 8vo ends, not excluding the possibility of scribal error in the possible case that AM 194 8vo is the prototext of the variant fragment.

In any case this leads us to a much more interesting scenario in which AM 194 8vo and all its parts, *Leiðarvísir* included, can be read in its fourteenth-century context. Much like any respectable scholar of his time, Óláfr Ormsson quotes extensively from other learned sources. Haukr Erlendsson, Bergr Sökkason, and whoever authored *Stjórn I* (i.e., if Hallberg was wrong about Bergr's contribution to it) all quote Isidore, Pliny, Vincent of Beauvais, Augustine, Honorius Augustodunensis, and other great Christian scholars, whereas Óláfr bases his book on Pliny, Isidore, and others while also being content with quoting from Haukr Erlendsson and other Icelandic writers. This might indicate that Icelanders had by the end of the fourteenth century already built up such a wealth of scholarship that it was not necessary anymore to consult books in Latin, for the same material was now widely available in the vernacular.

Where *Leiðarvísir* is derived from originally will still remain a mystery, and, whether or not it was originally composed in the twelfth century, it unquestionably was part of the wide dissemination of geographical knowledge undertaken by Icelandic scholars in the fourteenth century. There is not much in the way of geographical descriptions before the one in AM 736 I 4to, dating from the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century. Óláfr Ormsson knew this text and copied it. He also copied a description of the resting places of holy men from Hauksbók, and in between these two texts he copied *Leiðarvísir*, it seems fair to me to assume, from another fourteenth century manuscript. It is furthermore apparent from the context of the manuscript that Óláfr has intended for these parts to be read in context to each other, as a unified body of knowledge rather than as separate parts—much as the AM 226 fol. manuscript of *Stjórn* includes separate historical narratives to be read in its context as a universal history.

The whole geographical treatise of AM 194 8vo thus constitutes a unified work just as the ones in Hauksbók and *Stjórn*, while deriving from many learned sources. It contains information from *Veraldar saga*; a description of Paradise and the four great rivers; Noah's division of the world into three continents unto each of his sons and thus whence the earth's nations are derived; the description of each continent, which concludes in Ireland (derived from AM 736 I 4to); and the description of the route

from Iceland to Norway and then to Rome and to the Holy Land (more famously known as *Leiðarvísir*), after which the reader is returned to Rome to inspect the resting places of holy men there before traveling even farther out to the resting place of St. Bartholomew in India (in sources other than Hauksbók called *Bláland*) before returning to Constantinople and Jerusalem (this part in turn is derived from Hauksbók). The next short chapters are again derived from *Veraldar saga*, and then we are treated to a Plinian description of the monstrous inhabitants of the world,<sup>70</sup> about lakes and ponds, worms, and the meaning of stones, just as in Hauksbók and in *Stjórn*. It is in this context that Óláfr Ormsson's *Leiðarvísir* should be read, not as a singular twelfth-century itinerary, but as part of one of the three greatest geographical treatises ever written in Old Norse, all of which were written in the fourteenth century.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

There is no indication in the annals that Abbot Nikulás returned from the Holy Land in the twelfth century. The annals only say that he *came* to Iceland in this time, yet his *return*, as it has been interpreted, has been used as proof that this is the same person to which a single part of a geographical treatise in AM 194 8vo is attributed. There is no firm basis for such an inevitably circular argument.

Attributions to certain authors in medieval texts are often used to excuse the real author, to shield him from criticism, and to offer a sense of scholarly authority to the text. Excluding the explicit, there is no internal evidence in AM 194 8vo to suggest that Nikulás Bergsson authored *Leiðarvísir* or that it was written in the twelfth century. This is sufficient reason to question his authorship and the twelfth-century dating of the text.

External sources that provide information on Nikulás Bergsson's life, scant as they are, seem to conflate this person with that of his contemporary Nicholas Breakspear, who was in office the exact same years as Nikulás purportedly served as abbot at the Benedictine abbey at Munkaþverá. There are so many uncertainties surrounding the identity of Nikulás that it can hardly be said that attributing *Leiðarvísir* to him will add to our understanding of the text.

70. Some parts of this description seem to be derived from Hauksbók, though AM 194 8vo is the only source besides *Stjórn* to my knowledge to use the word *lammies*, or *lemnies* in the case of *Stjórn*, to describe Blemmyes. The description of the seventeenth-century manuscript AM 731 4to designated as *Rímbeigla* stems both from the descriptions of Hauksbók and AM 194 8vo.

Whether Nikulás Bergsson wrote *Leiðarvísir* cannot be known with certainty. It is, however, known who wrote the extant fourteenth-century text of *Leiðarvísir* as part of a greater geographical treatise in AM 194 8vo: the priest Óláfr Ormsson of Geirrøðareyri, Iceland. We also know the exact year in which he wrote the text: 1387. Why he chose to write this text in the context of his own time is more important than the text's possible yet unclear origin around 230 or so years earlier.

It stands to reason that future studies of *Leiðarvísir* should account for its writing time in the late fourteenth century and that it is ineffably a product of that century. Comparison with other learned texts of the fourteenth century shows that AM 194 8vo is part of a very strong tradition that started 90–100 years earlier in late medieval Iceland. Its part in this tradition is beyond questioning, and much would be gained by reviewing *Leiðarvísir* in light of this rather than as the twelfth-century itinerary it cannot possibly ever have been in the form in which it is now preserved.