

I. INTRODUCTION

fé er fóstri líkt....

- Old Icelandic proverb

This thesis is the extension of a paper of the same name written for Dr. Craig Melchert's Indo-European Society and Culture course taught at the University of North Carolina in the fall of 1997. After a brief introduction in which the argument of the paper is outlined there is a brief overview of familial structure in Indo-European society with special attention to the privileged role of the maternal uncle. Examples of fosterage, usually in the house of the maternal uncle, in other Indo-European societies are cited. Then there follows a discussion of the Icelandic tradition, in which fosterage is extended beyond the mother's family and assumes a primary function unlike anywhere else in the Indo-European *Sprachraum*. The etymology of the Old Icelandic word *fóstr* and related terms are discussed, followed by citations of examples of fosterage in the primary texts – Eddic poetry, sagas, and contemporary law codes. Analysis of this information in light of the unique societal influences present in medieval Iceland answers why fosterage played the crucial role it did in that society and why this tradition has been preserved there to the present day.

II. THE INDO-EUROPEAN *GROSSFAMILIE* AND FOSTERAGE

The extended family was the oldest form of the Indo-European household. Even after marriage the sons of the *pater familias* would remain in his home rather than breaking off to form their own nuclear family units. The *pater familias* had absolute power over those in his household; even as late as Roman times, fathers had the right to take the lives of their children if they so chose. Given the nature of this power structure, relationships with the head of the household were necessarily stern, even for his own children. This environment could be particularly hostile to outsiders such as a woman who married into a different family than the one in which she was raised and whose members were not necessarily inclined to look after her best interests. After the girl left her father's family to move into her husband's *Großfamilie*, her ties to her own family took on special importance; in particular, her relationship with her brother was often critical to her well-being. In the event of trouble her brother had the responsibility to stand up for her and make sure she was not mistreated, and he took a special role – complementary to that of the father – in the raising of her sons. In cultures where the father was expected to rule his sons with a firm hand, the maternal uncle indulged the boys and *vice versa* (Benveniste 1973:189). In many cases the sons would often be taken in and fostered by the uncle and his mother's *Großfamilie*, which would not only broaden the child's experience but would help cement the kinship ties between the two groups that had first been joined by marriage. This institution left its mark on the vocabulary of the Indo-European

languages, particularly in the Germanic branch. Yet nowhere does fosterage appear so prominently and in such a highly developed form as in the Icelandic culture of the Middle Ages.

Fadar, from the IE root *pater*, was known in Gothic, appearing in Galatians 4:6 (Feist 1939:133) and belonging to the same -r declension noun class as other terms denoting kinship: *broþar*, *dauhtar*, *swistar*. Yet the Lord's Prayer in Gothic (Matthew 6:9) begins: "atta unsar þu in himinam, weihnai namo þein," substituting *atta* for the *fadar* one would expect (Braune 1956:148). *Atta* seems to have carried over throughout Gothic, supplanting *fadar* in most places, but the distinction between the two is an important one. Benveniste argues against the idea that *atta* is a child's attempt to say *fadar* (1973:370). He argues instead that the *atta* word for father, common throughout Indo-European – Latin *atta*, Greek *átta*, Sanskrit *atti* (familiar for the elder sister), Irish *aite* (the foster father), and Hittite *attas* (no *pater* equivalent is attested; Puhval calls this the product of "infantile language" (1984:224-226)) – is a parallel term denoting not the biological father but a foster-father, generally the maternal grandfather, who was given the child to raise. There is evidence for such a semantic distinction. Ebbinghaus argues that Wulfila's use of *fadar* as a *hapax legomenon* in Galatians 4:6 derives from a restriction of the meaning of *fadar* in Gothic to one roughly corresponding to the Aramaic *abba* in Christ's exclamation on the cross; *atta*, he asserts, is the general word in Gothic for father (1974:100-101). Over two hundred occurrences of *atta* in the extant Gothic Bible (as opposed to the one example of *fadar*) would seem to support this view (Köbler 1989:64-65). *Atta* and its cognates certainly have a wide distribution: in addition to examples cited above, we also have Old Icelandic *atte*, Old Frisian *aththa*, Turkish *ata*, Hungarian *atya*, and in German the Old High German *atto* survives into Middle High German as *atte* (Lehmann 1986:46). Many make an uncertain case for the name of the Hun leader Attila as "little father" (Feist 1923:45, *contra* Ebbinghaus 1974:98), but the historical name Atatürk is certainly analyzable as "father of the Turks."

This leads us back to the issue at hand. It is common to have both a formal title for each parent alongside a more familiar variant. Some would argue that these originate as "nursery words," that is to say, as a child's approximation of the more standard lexical items. Whether or not that is the case, the *fadar-atta* distinction brings up an interesting point in Old Irish. Kelly asserts that the familiar terminology for the parents – corresponding to *atta* – is the one applied in Old Irish to the foster-parents, asserting both the closeness and importance of the foster relationship (1988:86-87). Interestingly, the associated verb, Greek *atítallo*, "to rear, to feed a child," is never applied to one's own biological child. This relationship, "often stronger than the blood tie," was generally limited to families of noble lineage in Indo-European – thus the German *edel* (Germanic **atalos-*) associates those of noble birth implicitly with those who have their children fostered (Benveniste 1973:368-370).

The maternal grandfather's role in this is connected to the *avus-avunculus* question, i.e., why the "uncle" word is so often derived from the word for "grandfather." Some anthropologists have used these arguments to propose the idea that Indo-European society was matrilineal, an idea disputed vigorously by Jan Bremmer, who maintains that fosterage was simply a means by which the child could be educated outside the confines of the extended family structure (1976:71). More to our benefit, however, Bremmer cites a litany of examples of relationships with the maternal grandfather and maternal uncle – alongside explicit examples of fosterage – that lend credence to the privileged status of these relationships. The Vedic noble Bharata was fostered at the palaces of his maternal grandfather and maternal uncle; the Persians and Afghans called the maternal uncle "the upbringer"; the Indo-Iranian Ossetes gave the maternal uncle the right of blood vengeance, as well as part of the bride-price, and the Ossetan word for fosterage, *atalytsestvo*, ties in nicely with the etymologies cited above (Bremmer 1976:66-67). Slavic examples of the prominent role given to the mother's brother in church ceremonies abound, and those special relationships between Arthur and Gawain and Conchobar and Cuchulain in the epics of England and Ireland are both of a mother's brother to his sister's son. Bremmer also cites a Hittite example and many such relationships from Greek antiquity; in Greece the maternal uncle is the favorite to this very day (1976:67). "He [the maternal uncle] is everywhere," Bremmer says, "the godfather *par excellence*" (1976:69).

Bremmer does raise an interesting question about this relationship with the maternal uncle. This relationship is special in other parts of the world, not just in Indo-European regions; in Africa it is especially prevalent. In Africa, Bremmer says,

the relationship has also an ambivalent aspect which finds its expression in a joking relationship and ritual stealing that cannot (anymore?) be found among the Indo-Europeans, even though there, as in Africa, the mother's brother plays a role too in ritual situations.... (1976:71)

The ritual stealing might perhaps be the root of some Indo-European traditions in which property is transmitted from the maternal uncle to his sister's son. Bremmer rejects, however, the idea that this role implies a matrilineal scheme of descent. Rather, it seems, the mother's brother, not burdened by the responsibility of being the stern head of the extended household that falls to the *pater familias*, is free to indulge the child and develop an affectionate relationship with him (1976:72). This explains the apparent interchangeability of the roles maternal grandfather and the maternal uncle; in an age of less-than-lengthy life expectancies, the mother's father was often deceased or unable to take an active role in the child's upbringing, a responsibility that in his absence would fall to his son.

While Bremmer can cite an impressive litany of specific cases in the literature of privileged nurturing relationships with the maternal uncle or grandfather, it seems that the practice of fosterage had all but died out by the classical period. In her examination of childhood in the classical world Valerie French only mentions that as the population centers of Greece and Rome gained in power and parents became subject to the distractions of imperial wealth, the task of childrearing was turned over more and more to nurses and *paidagogoi*. Children were, however, invariably raised (whether by the parents or by paid surrogates) within the

paternal household (1988:1361). Classical Latin still retained the vocabulary of fosterage; the word for foster-child, *alumnus* (*alumna*), is attested very early on in Plautus, but the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* goes on to say that it does not appear with the meaning of "foster-child" in Terence, Cato, Catullus, Lucretius, Caesar, or most of the other classical authors of note (1900:1793). The exhaustive *Oxford Latin Dictionary* gives only three citations of *alumna* as "foster-daughter," and but twelve examples of *alumnus* as "foster-son," "nursling," or as a term of endearment (1968:111). The paternal counterpart, *nutricius* – derived from *nutrico* "to suckle, nourish" – appears in only five citations, the first of which is the legendary (and atypical) case of Romulus and Remus being suckled by the wolf. The female *nutrix* is simply applied to the child's nurse or something providing nutriment or support (1968:1208-1209).

Schrader notes under "Erziehung" in the *Reallexikon der indogermanischen Altertumskunde* that while fosterage was in decline in classical times, there was a later renewal of the practice:

Eine spätere, namentlich in Irland und bei den Nordgermanen übliche Erziehungsart ist es dann, Kinder zu diesem Zweck [der Erziehung] in fremde Häuser...zu geben (1923:270).

Obviously this revival of fosterage is a later development because it had already fallen into disuse in Roman times. As examples Schrader cites the Irish *dalta* "Zögling" as well as Old English *fōstor-cild* "Pflegekind" and *fedan* "nähren." Schrader's mention of the Irish example as a counterpart to the Scandinavian institution that will form the bulk of this discussion is quite significant. In his examination of Old Irish law codes Kelly notes that

it seems to have been common for children to be sent away from home to be fostered while still very young (1988:86).

In Old Irish tradition there were two types of fosterage: one was "fosterage for affection," for which no fee was paid to the foster-parent, and the details of the other practice were set down in *Cáin Íarraith* "The Law of the Fosterage-Fee" (1988:87). We choose not to digress too far here into the legal details of the Irish practice, which paralleled those of the Icelandic tradition to a great extent. The important point to be made is that in lands where the population was concentrated in urban centers and a centralized authority existed, fosterage essentially died out early on. Only in places like medieval Ireland and Scandinavia, where power was decentralized in the hands of local chieftains and the population was greatly dispersed over a countryside full of difficult terrain, did the practice continued to thrive.

We find the fosterage phenomenon in the most notable of all cases of upbringing in the Old Norse tradition; Óðinn himself was raised by his mother's brother. *Hávamál* gives us this evidence as Óðinn himself relates the sources of the wisdom that is his distinguishing characteristic as well as the source of his power:

Fimbulliód nío nam ec af inom frægja syni, Bölþors, Bestlo
föður,

oc ec drycc of gat ins dýra miaðar, ausinn Óðreri (140).

Powerful spells nine I took from that learned son of Bölþorr,
the father of Bestla,

And I got a drink of the dear mead, poured from Óðrerir.

The nine "gewaltige Zaubersprüche" (Neckel's rendering of *fimbulliód*, literally "great songs") he gets from the son of Bölþorr, but he tells us that this Bölþorr is the father of Bestla, his mother; thus he learned (or took) at least half of his

wisdom from this unnamed uncle. Nine is a powerful number in Norse tradition, associated with great power. Óðinn hangs nine nights on the world-tree Yggdrasill to gain the secret of the runes, and the ancient heathen ritual at Uppsala met once every nine years for nine days, accompanied by the sacrifice of victims – both human and animal – in groups of nine. In the final strophes of *Hávamál* Óðinn enumerates the effects of eighteen (obviously nine times two) such spells that form the basis of his power. The other source he mentions, the precious poet's mead from the ladle Óðrerir, he wins by deceit from the giant Suttungr and by seducing Suttungr's daughter Gunnlöd (*Hávamál* 104-110). But here it is important to note two things: first, although fostering is not explicitly mentioned, one does not gain wisdom from another without the benefit of close proximity. Secondly, the relationship with the uncle – and the poet is sure to make it clear that it was the uncle, even if he does not pass along the uncle's name – is the one that shapes Óðinn and is deemed worthy of mention. Óðinn is a sorcerer by nature, and it cannot be mere coincidence that the greatest of Norse gods learned his most crucial skills not from his own father but from a surrogate father figure.

III. FÓSTR

Above we have discussed the terminology of fosterage in Indo-European, in particular *atta* and its derivatives. While Óðinn does not refer to his surrogate parent by title in *Hávamál*, we find in other examples of Eddic poetry several explicit references to the practice. Eddic poetry, with its difficult metrical demands, required the use of bynames and *kennings* to refer to persons or things in an oblique manner; in *Grípisspá* Brynhildr is thrice called "fóstra Heimis" (29, 31, 39), and she refers to Heimir as "fóstri minn" (*Helreið Brynhildar* 11). But there are more than poetic reasons for the use of the word. Fostering is clearly a well-respected institution in the society which produced the poets of the *Edda*; there are several Eddic examples of foster relationships and the deep feeling that often accompanies them. According to the *Grímnismál* prologue, the corrupt usurper of the throne Geirroðr is Óðinn's "fóstri," and Agnarr, whom his brother abandoned in the wild, is the "fóstri" of Frigg. This explains the special interest Óðinn takes in the case and the authority with which he punishes Geirroðr's treachery. The relationship is also a tender one for the great Germanic hero Sigurðr and the king who fostered him: Reginn til Hiálprecs "veitti Sigurði fóstr".... "oc elscaði hann miðc" (*Reginismál* prologue). These Eddic examples of *fóstr* and its derivatives are, however, but the tip of the iceberg. When we proceed to an examination of the saga tradition, in which many more lesser-known figures play a role and the author(s) felt the need to explicate interpersonal relationships – knowledge that Eddic poets would assume of their audiences, given the nature of their chosen subjects – we shall find a wealth of references to the practice.

The important role that fosterage plays in the Scandinavian tradition is indicated by the extremely conspicuous use of the word *fóstr* "the fostering of a child" – from which English gets the corresponding *foster* – to describe a relationship that takes on particular importance here. The word is not found in Gothic or Old Saxon. It derives from the Indo-European root **pa-* (**peH-*) "Vieh weiden, hüten; füttern, nähren" plus the agentive suffix *-tro*. Other derivatives from the **pa-* root include Latin *pasco* "weiden lassen, füttern," *pastor* "shepherd," *pabulum* "food," and *panis* "Brot," Hittite *pahsi* "protect," Greek *pateomai* "esse und trinke" and *apaotos* "ohne Speise und Trank." Related derivations from the same root in Old Icelandic include *fœða* "aufziehen, ernähren, zur Welt bringen," *fœða* "Essen, Nahrung," and *fóðr* "Futter, Nahrung." English *feed* (from Old English *fodor*), *food* (Old English *foda*), and *fodder* (cf. Middle Dutch *voeder*, Middle Low German *voder*, Old High German *fuoter*, and modern German *Futter*), as well as German *füttern* (Old Saxon *fodian*, Old High German *fuottan*) are modern derivatives (Jóhannesson 1956:563, Lehmann 1986:119-120). This association of fosterage with the act of feeding is not surprising given the Latin etymology cited above, particularly *nutricius* (from *nutrico* "to suckle"). In Icelandic *fóstr* was just the first of many related derivations: *fóstri* "foster father" or "foster son" or "foster brother," *fóstra* "foster mother," *fóstrfaðir*, *fóstrmóðir*, *fóstrsonr*, *fóstrdóttir* and *fóstrmæðir* "foster daughter," *fóstrsystir*, *fóstrsystkin* "foster siblings", and *fóstrforeldrar* and *fóstrmeyti* "foster parents," we have *fóstrjörð* and *fóstrland* "native country," *fóstrlaun* "reward for fostering someone," *fóstrman* "nurse," and *fóstrmeistari* "tutor" (Cleasby 1957:168). Modern Icelandic records many of the kinship-oriented terms along with the modern innovations *fóstur* "fetus" and *fóstureyði* "abortion" (Hólmarsson *et al.* 1989:139); in contrast, the Scandinavian languages have only kept this newer, specialized meaning of "fetus." It is clear, however, that *fóstr* was associated with a concept both well-established and widespread, given the many secondary semantic derivations.

It is the argument of this paper that the original meaning of *fóstr* was restricted to the context of intergroup relations – a child was given over to be raised outside the household of its parents and became a member of the other household, with rights and duties pertaining thereto, strengthening the bond between the two groups. When a child grows up within a family unit, however, certain affections develop naturally, and the affectionate nature of foster relationships was generalized and the monikers associated with the practice extended to those one holds dear. Hence the odd behavior of Hrafnkell in *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða* as he speaks to his dear horse Freyfaxi:

Siðan gekk hann út ok mælti við hann [Freyfaxa]: "Ílla þykkir mér, at þú ert þann veg til görr, fóstri minn, en heima hafðir þú vit þitt, er þú sagðir mér til, ok skal þessa hefnt verða. Far þú til liðs þíns."

Later he went out and spoke with Freyfaxi: "It seems ill to me that you are treated that way, my [fóstri], but you had your wits about you as you told me and that shall be avenged. Go to your herd."

First of all, talking to horses is not generally considered a sign of particularly stable behavior. Secondly, though, it is interesting to note Hrafnkell's use of *fóstri minn* to address his horse. Certainly he cannot mean that Freyfaxi's father has given him over into Hrafnkell's care to strengthen the ties between the herd and

Hrafnkell's homestead community. The use of *fóstri minn* is a result of the extreme fondness Hrafnkell feels for his dearest horse. This and other extensions of the terminology of fosterage will be discussed at length over the course of this work.

IV. FOSTERAGE IN THE ICELANDIC SAGA

Anyone familiar with the Icelandic saga tradition is well aware of the prominent role that fosterage played in that culture. *Fóstbrœðra saga* – a tale in which one foster-brother avenges the death of the other – is the only saga to have fosterage in the title, but the conflicts between allegiances forged by fosterage drive much of the action in the literary tradition. Fosterage is also a fact of Icelandic history; Snorri Sturluson, the greatest figure of medieval Icelandic letters, was educated in fosterage at Oddi, the great Icelandic center of learning (Njardvik 1978:76). Not just the vocabulary of fosterage – as cited above – but also the practice itself remains alive in Iceland up to the present day; it is not unusual to meet an Icelander and hear him speak of a foster brother in whose home he was raised for a year or two. The unique nature of this tradition begs certain questions: Why did fosterage flourish in Iceland when it had become obsolete early in historical times elsewhere in the Indo-European world, establishing itself so firmly that it exists up to the present day? What adaptations were made in the course of implementing the original Indo-European tradition of fosterage in Iceland? These questions are worth examining more closely, and that is the intent of this investigation.

Let us examine first the case of the aforementioned *Fóstbrœðra saga* more closely. The two foster-brothers in question, Þorgeirr Hávarsson and Þormóðr Bersason, are troublemakers in the community with all the quarrels they get into – so much so, in fact, that their chieftain banishes Þorgeirr's entire family just in order to get the two of them away from each other. After avenging the murder of his father Hávarr, Þorgeirr rejoins his friend and they end up killing several people over quarrels of minimal interest – or at the behest of third parties. As a result, Þorgeirr ends up outlawed but still manages to murder his way to the top, achieving a position of trust at the court of the Norwegian king Óláfr inn helgi after carrying out an act of vengeance on his behalf. After returning to Iceland, another quarrel with a certain Gautr escalates into murder – Þorgeirr kills Gautr, whose kinsmen ultimately avenge him by killing Þorgeirr. At this point, presumably to highlight the foster-brother/vengeance theme, a seer foretells the story of two foster brothers who slay each other. Þormóðr goes to Greenland and slays the surviving kinsman who killed his foster-brother as well as three of his sons before surviving a harrowing trip back to Norway to the court of king Óláfr, where he becomes a well-respected skald.

This story has the elements of allegiance and revenge – hallmarks of the Icelandic family saga – aplenty. One important subtlety, however, makes it necessary to make clear that there are two related but separate ideas both

described by the terminology of fosterage and, in so doing, to clear up some semantic confusion. These two concepts, both traveling under the name *fóstbræðralag* in medieval Iceland, are to be distinguished as follows. The first is the practice of foster-brotherhood that traces its lineage directly back to Indo-European times. Here a child is given over into the care of another household in a legally recognized practice that binds two households. The other competing practice called *fóstbræðralag* is initiated by a blood oath of allegiance, one man to another, which is non-binding on their respective family groups. Cleasby recognizes both meanings. He cites *fóstbróðir* as one of a group of men brought up together or of brothers in arms, "and the like," citing numerous examples in the sagas for both meanings. Then he gives the meaning "a sworn brother = *eiðbróðir*, pledged by the rite of blending blood together" (1957:168). *Eiðbróðir* he renders as "an oath brother, confederate," but he also notes an extended meaning of general allegiance where the raven is called the *eiðbróðir* of the eagle in verse (1957:117). Given these etymological details and the evidence to follow, it seems prudent to argue for the semantic division of *fóstr* and its related terms as follows:

1) *fóstr* and related terms. Concerned with the fostering of a child by another household. This is the primary usage.

2) *fóstbræðralag*.

a) foster-brotherhood. This is the primary meaning and a result of the traditional fostering relationship.

b) swear-brotherhood. This is secondary and an institution consecrated by the ceremony first accompanying foster-brotherhood involving pledging of blood revenge extended to others who make a similar oath (*eiðbróðir*).

c) brothers in arms "and the like." Here there is no sacred oath by participants to assume the legal rights of a brother on each other's behalf, but rather just a general expression of loyalty between men. This is apparently a simple semantic generalization of the usage in b).

3) *fóstri*. In addition to use as a kinship term in fosterage situations, this is extended to a general expression of affection, probably as a result of the tenderness that one naturally feels for the members of a household in which one grows up. Thus the general Icelandic greeting among intimate acquaintances *fóstri minn!* or *fóstra mín!* and the even further extended affectionate use to address a dear pet, as in *Hrafnkels saga* or *Sturlunga saga* i. 40 (cited Cleasby 1957:168). Generally what Merrill calls a "primary term" of kinship, *i.e.* a term that denotes a specific relationship but cannot be used reciprocally (1964:868), as usage of *fóstri* to denote "foster-brother" is notably rare (Cleasby 1957:168).

It is unfortunate that *fóstri* is used in all these ways, as it would tend to help with the confusion created by using *fóstbróðir* to denote relationships both inside and outside the framework of traditional fosterage, but this distinction between primary (*faðir*, *sonr*, etc.) and secondary (*bróðir* et al.) terminology is one Icelandic makes consistently, even to this day. It is what we consider the primary usage that interests us most here.

It is perhaps useful to consider here in some detail both the intergroup fosterage institution and this second competing practice of *fóstbræðralag* that is peripheral but not unrelated to our interest here. Weinhold recognizes in his 1856

Altnordisches Leben the traditional fosterage relationship elucidated above:

Häufig wurde, namentlich in reicheren Häusern, das Kind zur Erziehung anderen übergeben....Dieses Verhältnis verband die beiden Häuser sehr innig, und Freunde erwiesen sich gegenseitig diesen Dienst zur Stärkung alter und zur Befestigung gelockerter Verbindung. Auch das uralte Band zwischen Neffen und Oheim zeigt sich hier.... (285)

Here he cites the passage in Tacitus's *Germania* that Bremmer also mentions in his article, where it is said that the sister's children are as dear to the uncle as to the father: "Sororum filiis idem apud avunculum qui apud patrem honor" (20). The allegiance between boys in fosterage relationships was, Weinhold argues on the basis of *Gísla saga* and *Fóstbræðra saga*, sealed by a ceremonial pact he details quite romantically:

Waren es Knaben, so schlossen sie einen förmlichen Ziehbrüderbund (*bundu fóstbræðralag*), der für das ganze Leben galt. Sie ritzten ihre flache Hand, ließen das Blut in ein Grübchen im Boden zusammenrinnen und rührten es ineinander; dann reichten sie sich die Hand unter dem Gelöbnis der vollen Brüderschaft. Am feierlichsten geschah dieser Schwur unter dem Rasenstreifen (*iarðarmen*). Ein Streifen Rasen, zuweilen ihrer drei, wurde von dem Boden abgelöst, aber an den Enden nicht losgetrennt; darauf hob man sie empor und stützte sie mit zwei Geren, die so hoch waren, daß ein Mann mit der Hand bis an die Spießnägeln reichte. Unter diesem Erdbande knieten die Blutbrüder nieder und legten mit Anrufung der Götter als Zeugen den Eid ab, daß sie einander fortan wie geborene Brüder ansehen wollten. Das Zusammenrühren ihres Blutes war das äußere Zeichen ihres Einswerden im Blute; darum war auch das Hauptziel des Bundes die Blutrache, die jeder dem anderen gelobte, oder die Pflicht zur Klage gegen den Mörder, wenn auf die Rache verzichtet wurde (1856:287-288).

This practice of swearing blood-brotherhood also has well-established roots in the Eddic tradition. In *Lokasenna* Loki uses a reminder of it to prompt Óðinn to get their host to fill his glass:

Mantu þat, Óðinn, er við í árdaga blendom blóði saman;
ólvi bergia léztu eigi mundo, nema ocr væri báðom borit (9).

Remember, Óðinn, how we in the early days mixed our blood together;

both. Ale you would never accept, but that it were brought to us

Here there is certainly no question of the two gods having been raised together; the oath Loki alludes to here was not a result of any common fosterage experience. Thus we see *fóstbræðralag* here extended beyond the original bounds of the ancient practice of fosterage.

Weinhold notes this natural extension of *fóstbræðralag* beyond the original fosterage framework, seemingly relating its popularity to the mystic power of the ceremony associated with the oath:

Das *fóstbræðralag* banden aber dann alle, welche sich durch Liebe und Achtung aneinander gefesselt fühlten, oder die aus äußeren Rücksichten sich als eins darstellen wollten (1856:288).

Certainly the idea of blood-brothers has a psychic resonance (note the prevalence of tales of blood-brother pacts sworn among American Indians, at least in the popular mind), and the oft-evident desire of Germanists, especially in the nineteenth century, to see in Old Icelandic tradition the remnants of the "Kultur der Urgermanen," with its presumably proud and testosterone-laden traditions. In our century the Germanist Hans Kuhn, who devoted his career to careful study of the Icelandic saga tradition, also renders *fóstbræðralag* into German as "Schwurbruderschaft" (1971:99). Also on the evidence of *Gísla saga* Kuhn sees *fóstbræðralag* as a sort of Native American blood-brother pact resting on a mystic ceremony, a swearing of allegiance made by two or more men to each other that has nothing to do with other familial relationships (1971:99). This is very much the sort of bond that ties Þorgeirr and Þormóðr together, and was certainly a large part of Old Icelandic culture in medieval times; the description in *Gísla saga* where Gísli and his three friends swear the oath is quite vivid:

Peir skildu þar fjórir undir ganga, Þorgrímr, Gísli, Þorkell ok Vésteinn; ok nú vekja þeir sér blóð ok láta renna saman dreyra sinn í þeiri moldu, er upp var skorin undan jarðarmeininu, ok hræra saman moldina ok blóðið; enn síðan fellu þeir allir á kné, ok sverja þann eið, at hværr skal annars hefna sem bróður síns, ok nefna öll goðin í vitni (6).

They four went then under [the spear that Weinhold speaks of], Þorgrímr, Gísli, Þorkell and Vésteinn; and now they draw blood of themselves and let it run together in the earth, which had been cut open under the strip of earth, and mix together the earth and the blood; then they all fell to their knees and swear that oath that each shall avenge the other like his brother, and name all the gods as witnesses.

These gods have, of course, nothing to do with the Christian God; heathen associations were a strong part of the tradition. Weinhold claims with justification that it was the introduction of Christianity to Iceland that led to the end of the blood oath:

Nach Einführung des Christentums wurde gegen die Blutbruderschaft geeifert; das Blutmischen erschien gar zu heidnisch und teuflisch...Überdies war die Blutrache, der eigentliche Zweck dieser Bruderschaft, dem christlichen Geiste zuwider (1856:289).

Yet the original fosterage tradition (as will be discussed further) continued to thrive, even without its former ceremonial trappings.

Here Jesse Byock makes the helpful distinction – unfortunately not made by the contemporary Old Icelandic lexicon – between *fóstbróðir* and what he calls *svaribróðir* "sworn brothers" as two distinct kinds of "fictive kinship bonds" (1988:127). The tie between "foster-brothers" who swear each other allegiance called *fóstbræðralag* would for our purposes better be called *svarabræðralag*. The coinage is not entirely novel but rather a careful appropriation by Byock of a lesser-used word also referring to the practice in question. Cleasby records *svaribróðir* "sworn brother, confederate" (alternately *svarabróðir*) as an equivalent to *fóstbróðir* – notably in the case of *Gísla saga* – but only with five citations as compared to the multiple entries under *fóstbróðir* and related terms (1957:606). Cleasby does not recognize any such word as *svarabræðralag* in the Icelandic lexicon, and the only other entries there besides *svaribróðir* under *svar-* are unrelated to oaths or the verb *að sverja* "to swear." Thus, unfortunately, in the parlance of medieval Iceland, *fóstbróðir* could be either "men brought up together" or, by a logical extension of the bonds of friendship felt between such men, "swear brothers" or "brothers in arms" (Cleasby 1957:168). In *Ögmundar þáttur dytts*, for instance, Vigfús declares his emotional allegiance to his comrades

with the epithet *fóstbræðr*: "Vigfús fór út til skips jarls ok sagði honum at þeir menn voru hans fóstbræðr ok sumir frændr" (Wyatt and Cook 1993:2). This connotation is clearly secondary – both historically and in terms of the kinship relationship we intend to discuss here.

Both kinds of relationships certainly did play a large role in medieval Icelandic culture, where interpersonal and intergroup ties were at a premium:

Iceland was a highly individualistic society in which blood and fictive kinship served principally to form networks of preestablished relationships that could be mobilized according to the talents and resources of the individual (Byock 1988:127).

Yet the distinction is important; the institution of "swear-brotherhood" is entered into freely by two individuals – with no implications for other family members not directly participating in the pact – to establish what Byock calls a "fictive kinship" relationship. "Foster-brotherhood," on the other hand, while in many ways serving the same purpose as "swear-brotherhood," is a social construct that links not just individuals but also the families to which they belong. Both types of *fóstbræðralag* are to be found in *Gísla saga*, although Kuhn cites the saga as a prototypical case of *Schwurbruderschaft*: Gísli's brother Ari is fostered at the home of his uncle Styrkar (2, cited Bremmer 1976:68). The pairing *frændr ok fóstbræðr* "kinsman and foster-brother" indicates the proximate connection between and complementary nature of the systems of genetic kinship (*frændr*) and proper fosterage. It is this institution that Iceland adapts and expands from its Indo-European cultural inheritance and which will be examined in depth here.

V. THE SOURCES

To shed light on the practice of fosterage in the Icelandic saga period, we look to two sources: the sagas themselves and the law codes known as *Grágás* "gray goose" in effect in the Commonwealth of Iceland before the contract of submission to Norwegian rule in 1262-64 (Dennis *et al.* 1980:9). It would be erroneous to assume that what has come down to us was a unified body of law codes; rather, what we have is a large number of individual laws preserved in manuscript form that were each in effect in Iceland at some point during the first period of Icelandic independence. The codification of the laws began in 1117 in the shape of a code written down in book form by a certain Hafliði (Dennis *et al.* 1980:190-191), but anachronistic laws dealing with slavery remained as holdovers, and some Norwegian laws from the early settlement period still remained on the books. The two extant manuscripts containing *Grágás* codes – the Codex Regius (cited hereafter as K followed by the paragraph number) and *Staðarhólsbók* – date back to the second half of the thirteenth century, perhaps as an effort by Icelanders to save what they could of their own legal tradition as they entered into Norwegian control.

These Icelandic law codes recognize the legal status of foster relationships. In *Grágás* we find a definition of legal fostering (K 89): Legal fostering is when a man takes a child of eight winters or younger and brings him up until he is sixteen, the age of majority. This makes him for legal purposes part of his foster family unit, establishing a group allegiance with all the duties and rights

pertaining thereto. In the event of legal fostering, a foster son has the right to represent an incapacitated foster-father at the *Alþingi* in the absence of a son, stepson, or son-in-law. When the codes enumerate the women that men have a right to kill for, foster-daughters and foster-mothers are listed right alongside mother, daughter, sister, and wife (K 90). Children younger than twelve winters who strike at another should be warded off by the latter "as if he were his foster-father or father [emphasis mine], and he is not to do him any lasting injury" (K 91). Again here biological and foster families are seen to have a parallel legal standing.

Now we turn to the evidence of the sagas. *Laxdæla saga*, like most of the Icelandic family sagas, depicts a long series of interfamilial conflicts, and twice in the course of the action fosterage serves to resolve a conflict and establish intergroup alliances. After his grandfather Ketill flatnefr emigrates to Iceland to escape the tyranny of Haraldr inn Hárfagri, the first king to unify Norway under one crown, Höskuldr takes over his family homestead in Laxárdalr. When the farmer Þórólfr murders his colleague Hallr over a catch of fish, the killer is harbored by his distant relative Vigdís. Vigdís seems a stronger character than her husband Þórðr; "Vigdís var meiri skörungr í skapi en Þórðr" (14), but Þórðr feared the wrath of Hallr's brother Ingjaldr and accepts payment of three silver marks in exchange for turning him over for vengeance. Vigdís, outraged at this, helps her kinsman get away, taunts Ingjaldr with his blood-money, and declares herself divorced from Þórðr; her kinsmen let it be known that they intend to claim half the communal property from her husband, as they have no children. Childless, generally inept, and without many friends, Þórðr was in no position to protect his interests against a group of challengers. He rides to Höskuldr and tries to win – and then buy – his support. Höskuldr points out that Þórðr has always been stingy when not in need, and then Þórðr makes a better offer – he offers to join into a fosterage relationship:

"Eigi skal nú þat þó, því at ek vil gjarna, at þú takir handsölum á öllu fœnu. Síðan vil ek bjóða Óláfi, syni þínum, til föstrs ok gefa honum allt fê eptir minn dag, því at ek á engan erfingja hér á land, ok hygg ek, at þá sé betr komit fêt, heldr en frændr Vigdísar skelli hrömmum yfir" (16).

"But it shall not now be so, for I wish very much that you take into your hands all [my] property. Additionally I want to foster Ólafr, your son, and give him all the property after my day, since I have no heirs here in the country and I think that my property would be better off so than if Vigdís's kinsmen should get hold of it."

Óláfr – Höskuldr's seven-year-old son by the slave Melkorka – is illegitimate and thus not a legal heir to his father's estate (although his father would very much like him to be one), so this arrangement suits Höskuldr's needs quite well. If Óláfr were not illegitimate, the match would be almost unthinkable, given Þórðr's lowly status – Melkorka voices her objections to the match – but with Þórðr's additional offer to make Óláfr his heir, it is a deal Höskuldr cannot turn down. It is also a great match for Þórðr; since Höskuldr's son would now be living with him, any move against him would amount to a move against the more powerful Höskuldr. Vigdís's kinsmen soon learn of the fosterage arrangement, and the recovery of

the money seems as a result to have become more difficult than before: "ok þótti nú fjárheimtan komin fastligar en áðr" (16). To keep the peace, Höskuldr makes overtures to buy off the head of Vigdís's clan, Þórðr gellir, and Þórðr gellir let himself be appeased, although the friendship between Höskuldr and Þórðr gellir is now somewhat cooler than before.

One good turn deserves another, and at Höskuldr's death, fosterage again plays a role in events. Óláfr, although illegitimate by law, is clearly the foremost of his brothers; his mother Melkorka, first thought a slave, was revealed to be an Irish princess, which explains his claim to greatness (he is fondly given the byname *pá* "peacock" by his father on account of his flash and flair). After some adventures in Norway at the court of King Haraldr – which was apparently *de rigeur* for saga heroes – Óláfr becomes a well-respected chieftain upon the death of his foster father while his brothers have success as seafaring traders. When Höskuldr takes sick in his old age, he calls his sons and kinsmen to him and gives to his favorite, Óláfr, a gold ring and a sword that had been gifts from King Hákon. Höskuldr's legitimate heirs, Þorleikr and Bárðr, divide the remainder of the estate between themselves, but Þorleikr feels that he has been treated unfairly and when Óláfr refuses to give up the ring and the sword, there is bad blood between them. When Óláfr throws a grand funeral feast for nine hundred guests, the second-largest ever to be held in Iceland, to honor their departed father, Þorleikr is still stewing, and to appease him, Óláfr seeks to keep the peace:

"Svá er, frændi, sem þér er kunnigt, at með okkr hefir verit ekki mart; nú vilda ek til þess mæla, at vit betraðim frændsemi okkra; veit ek, at þér mislíkar, er ek tók við gripum þeim, er faðir minn gaf mér á deyjanda degi; nú ef þú þykkisk af þessu vanhaldinn, þá vil ek þat vinna til heils hugar þíns, at fóstura son þinn, ok er sá kallaðr æ minni maðr, er öðrum fóstura barn" (27).

"So it is, kinsman, as is known to you, that there has been no fondness between us; now I would like to speak to this, so that we might improve in our kinship; I know that it did not please you when I took those gifts which my father gave me on [his] dying day; now if you seem slighted by this, I want to do this for your peace of mind – to foster your son – and that one is called the lesser man who fosters the child of another."

By this gesture Óláfr defers to the legitimate heir Þorleikr, at least *pro forma*; by accepting Þorleikr's son and admitting to a lower social standing, he firms up the strained ties between their two households, although in actuality, he is the leader among the brothers, and it is he who leads them when they go to the assembly together.

Þorleikr's son Bolli is in a somewhat different situation in Óláfr's home, however; Óláfr, unlike Þórðr, had a son Kjartan of almost the same age as Bolli, as well as many other children. Thus here the foster son is in a household full of legitimate heirs. Yet all appears well as both Kjartan and Bolli grow up strong and handsome: "þeir unnusk mikit fóstbræðr. Sitr Óláfr nú at búi sínu, svá at vetrum skipti eigi allfám" (28). Unfortunately things would not go so well for very long. Geirmundr marries Óláfr's daughter Þuríðr and then abandons her, returning to Norway, but Þuríðr steals his beloved sword Fótþítr, which she gives to Bolli;

Geirmundr curses his lost sword, and thereupon bad omens begin to appear. Óláfr slaughters an ox and has a dream in which a woman appears to tell him that he shall have to see his own favorite son drenched in blood; the seer Gest sees Kjartan and Bolli together and weeps:

"Þarfleysa er at segja þat, en eigi nenni ek at þegja yfir því, er á þínum dögum mun fram koma; en ekki kemr mér at óvörum, þótt Bolli standi yfir höfuðsvörðum Kjartans, ok hann vinni sér þá ok höfuðbana, ok er þetta illt at vita um svá mikla ágætismenn" (33).

"It is of little use to say it, but I cannot help but say that which will come to pass in your day; that it would not be a surprise to me if Bolli were to stand over the head of Kjartan and he gain thereby his own death, and it is an ill thing to know such about such excellent men."

Guðrún, the fairest and most intelligent of Icelandic women, is wooed by both foster brothers, and while Kjartan is away in Norway, Bolli lies to her and tells her he is rumored to be about to marry the King's sister and then enlists her kinsmen in an attempt – ultimately successful – to win her hand. This destroys the trust that had existed between the brothers; when Kjartan returns, he refuses a gift of four horses from Bolli, and various thefts at feasts where both foster brothers are present serve to escalate the distrust. Guðrún is at the root of the conflict and goads her brothers – and a reluctant Bolli – into attacking Kjartan. Kjartan is certain of Bolli's allegiance: "Eigi mun Bolli, frændi minn, slá banaráðum við mik" (48). When Guðrún's kinsmen prove no match for Kjartan, they egg Bolli on to get into the fray; he draws the sword Fótþítr and turns on Kjartan, who, though hardly wounded, has no desire to take up arms against his foster brother:

"Víst ætlar þú nú, frændi, níðingsverk at gera, en miklu þykki mér betra at þiggja banaorð af þér, frændi, en veita þér þat" (49).

"Certainly you intend now, kinsman, to do a dastardly deed, but it would seem to be much better, kinsman, to receive the death blow from you, than to give it to you."

The double invocation of the title of kinsman – *frændi* – emphasizes both the importance of the foster relationship within the kinship system and also serves to emphasize the betrayal of that system that Bolli's death blow represents. Even after the murder of his dear and splendid son Kjartan, Óláfr cannot bear to take vengeance on his foster son:

"Þeir synir hans vildu þegar fara at Bolla ok drepa hann. Óláfr segir: "Þat skal fjarri fara; er mér ekki sonr minn at bættri, þó at Bolli sé drepinn, ok una ek Kjartani um alla menn fram, en eigi máttu ek vita mein Bolla" (49).

To them [Óláfr's sons] it seems he would want to go thence to Bolli and slay him. Óláfr says: "That [thought] should be banished far away; my son is no better to me if Bolli be slain, and I loved Kjartan above all men, but I would not want to know Bolli harmed."

He is more than willing, however, to let his sons take vengeance against others who had roles in the murder of Kjartan, both actively and by passive complicity. Kjartan's mother considered herself sorely repaid for her fostering, and after Óláfr's death three years later she prods her son Halldór into slaying Bolli in his home. The events of *Laxdæla saga* thus serve to illustrate several points about fosterage. First, Óláfr's unwillingness to take vengeance for his dearest son indicates the strength of the emotional ties that often accompany fosterage. The reader also comes to understand the awful nature of Bolli's slaying of his foster

brother Kjartan through the many uncanny elements which bode ill for the two foster brothers – for instance, the curse on the sword and the many dream prophecies. The reader has no choice but to view with horror the terrible pride of Guðrún, which demands Bolli's willingness to slay his *fóstbróðir*, to violate this most sacred bond, as the ultimate proof of his devotion.

If we wish to consider the legal standing of fosterage, the most obvious source is *Njáls saga*; as Heusler says,

Sie ist die wahre Juristensaga – und gleichzeitig in manchem Sinne die trübste Quelle für altisländisches Recht! Das Besondere der *Njála* ist einmal ihre Leidenschaft für das Rechtsgeschäft... Sodann aber – und hier ist der Unterschied von den Schwestern nicht nur ein gradmäßiger – sind ihr die Formen des Gerichtsverfahrens Selbstzweck. Während sämtliche andern Sagas die Vorträge des Klägers auf dem Ding übergehen oder nur mit einem Worte den Inhalt melden, füllt die *Njála* Abschnitte, ganze Kapitel mit dem feierlichen, pompösen Wortlaute der Klageformeln (13).

Again here fosterage plays a prominent role in the action. A feud between Gunnarr's wife Hallgerðr and Njáll's wife Bergþóra escalates into an almost comic *quid pro quo* as each in her turn has servants of the other murdered. The situation becomes more serious when Hallgerðr has the foster father of Njáll's sons slain; for this, Gunnar must pay a double penalty, and still the sons of Njáll avenge their foster father. There is also the figure of Höskuldr, the son of Þráinn, whom Njáll's irascible son Skarpheðinn killed in an ambush. Þráinn's brother Ketill offers to foster the boy, but then Njáll goes to Ketill's homestead and, although compensation has already been paid for his father, offers the boy a gift of a gold ring and then offers to foster him himself, an offer which the boy readily accepts. This arrangement made by the peace-loving Njáll is extremely successful. The boy grows up strong and wise as a result of Njáll's tender care: "Hann [Njáll] lét sveininum ekki í mein ok unni honum mikit," while at the same time this serves to keep the peace: "Aldri skilði [hann] þá sonu Njáls á um neinn hlut" (94).

If the example of Höskuldr shows how such relations keep Icelandic society operating harmoniously, the emotional importance of foster relationships in Icelandic culture comes into much stronger relief in the figure of Njáll's foster son Þórhallr Ásgrímsson. He learned his law at the feet of his beloved and wise foster father, and after a short while, "hann var inn þriðji mestr lögmaðr á Íslandi" (109). When he hears of the death of Njáll, he is literally beside himself:

Þórhalli Ásgrímssyni brá svá við, er honum var sagt, at Njáll, fóstri hans, var dauðr ok hann hafði inni brunnit, at hann þrútnaði allr ok blóðbogi stóð ór hvárritveggju hlustinni, ok varð eigi stöðvat, ok fell hann í óvit, ok þá stöðvaðisk. Eptir þat stóð hann upp ok kvað sér lítilmannliga verða – "ok þat munda ek vilja, at ek hefnda þessa á þeim, er hann brenndu inni, er nú hefir mik hent" (132).

Þórhallr Ásgrímsson was so shocked when he was told that Njáll, his foster-father, was dead and had burned inside, that all of him swelled up and a stream of blood ran from both his ears and would not be stanching, and he fell unconscious and then the bleeding ceased. After that he stood up and said himself to be of little manliness – "and I want to know that I shall revenge myself on those who burned him in his house for that which has [just] happened to me."

His role is the most central in the avenging of the burning. In this most legalistic of Icelandic sagas, Þórhallr is the lawyer *par excellence*. A swelling in his leg incapacitates him before the crucial legal proceedings at the *Alþingi*, and the delay in relaying information to and from him is such a handicap that

despite his expert legal advice Njáll's supporters are not only about to lose their case, they are also about to be outlawed for their trouble. When he hears of this,

brá honum svá við, at hann mátti ekki orð mæla. Hann spratt upp ór rúminu ok greip spjótit Skarpheðinsnaut tveim höndum ok rak í gegnum fótinn á sér. Var þar á holdit ok kveisunaglinn á spjótinu, því at hann skar út ór fætinum, en blódfossinn fellr ok vágföllin, svá at lækr fell eptir gólfinu. Hann gekk þá út ór búðinni óhaltr ok fór svá hart, at sendimaðrinn fekk eigi fylgt honum; hann ferr þar til, er hann kom til fimmtardómsins (145).

he was so shocked that he could not say a word. He sprang up out of the room and seized Skarpheðinn's spear with both hands and drove it into his own leg. The core of the boil that he cut out of his foot clung to the spear and a fountain of blood and gore fell like a stream onto the floor. Then he went out of the booth without limping and went so quickly that the messenger could not follow him; so he goes until he came to the Fifth Court.

Obviously the time for words has passed. He encounters Grímr inn raudi, one of Flosi's kinsmen, at the court and promptly drives a spear through him, striking him dead. Kári, the lone survivor of the burning, turns to Þórhallr's father Ásgrímr and says:

"Hér er kominn Þórhallr, son þinn, ok hefir vegit víg nú þegar, ok er þetta skömm mikil, ef hann einn skal hug til hafa at hefna brennunnar" (145).

"Your son Þórhallr has come and has now already slain one, and it would be a great shame if he alone should have the courage to avenge the Burning."

A brutal melee ensues in which the prosecution side, being on the side of justice, gains the upper hand; several powerful chieftains intervene to stop the bloodshed, and a settlement is reached for compensation (although Þorgeirr skorargeirr and Kári exclude themselves from this agreement, and the feud continues for a while thereafter). While Njáll's son Kári gets his own satisfaction in blood, it is Njáll's foster son Þórhallr, to whom he imparted his legal expertise, who plays the most vital role in the avenging of the Burning. Njáll is every bit as dear to his foster son as he is to his one surviving son.

We find another instance of the social value of fostering and the importance of ties formed thereby in *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*. Egill's father Skalla-Grímr takes in a fellow named Björn who arrives from Shetland with his wife Þóra and a shipload of men. Skalla-Grímr knows Björn's prominent Norwegian father Brynjólfr but is delighted to hear that Þóra is the sister of his foster brother Þórir and offers them his hospitality:

Skalla-Grímr varð við þat allglaðr ok sagði svá, at þat var skylt ok heimult um systur Þóris, fóstbróður sins, at hann gerði slíkan forbeina, sem þurfti eða hann hefði fōng til, ok bauð þeim Birni báðum til sín með alla skipverja sína (33).

Skalla-Grímr was delighted by this and said how right and correct for the sister of Þórir, his foster-brother, that he should give her all the help she needed and he had access to, and invited Björn and his wife both to stay with him in his home along with all the crew.

Björn, however, forgot to mention that he had absconded with his wife and married her without the blessing of her family – and that of her brother Þórir whom Skalla-Grímr is so eager to assist. When Skalla-Grímr learns of this deception, he asks Björn how he dared come here to his homestead at Borg, and Björn acknowledges the strength of the fosterage bond: "‘Vissa ek’, segir hann, ‘at með ykkur var föstbræðralag og vinátta kær’" (34). The juxtaposition of *föstbræðralag* "foster-brotherhood" and *vinátta kær* "dear friendship" indicates again that foster-brotherhood exists as an institution independently of (though often accompanied by) any emotional ties; the close emotional bond between Skalla-Grímr and his foster-brother Þórir is an additional reason for Björn to have stayed away – above and beyond the mere fact that they were raised in the same household. After Skalla-Grímr and Björn’s father intervene on his behalf, Björn is reconciled with his wife’s family and his outlaw status in Norway is rescinded. As Björn and his party depart after three years, however, Skalla-Grímr’s wife Bera has grown so fond of Ásgerðr, Björn and Þóra’s young daughter, whom the author calls "fóstra hennar [Beru]", that she asks that the girl might stay behind and be raised "med þeim Skalla-Grími" (35). So, as Þórólfr leaves Borg with Björn, Ásgerðr stays behind to be fostered there, further cementing the ties between the two clans first established by a fosterage arrangement a generation previous.

VI. ANALYSIS

To understand the importance of the Icelandic institution of fosterage it is first necessary to put it in its cultural context. Where Indo-European society is presumed to have been based upon a mixed system of agriculture and animal husbandry, "Iceland lends itself best to animal husbandry, which was the dominant occupation in the Middle Ages (and until very recent times)" (Sørensen 1993:17). Agriculture and fishing were limited pursuits that might supplement a household’s wealth, but these were incidental to the primary business of animal husbandry, generally sheep herding. Farms demanded large areas to accommodate the free-ranging sheep that made up the bulk of the Icelandic livelihood, and each could only support a small number of people; as a result the population was too poor and widely dispersed to support either a merchant class or larger population centers (Sørensen 1993:18). So while the *Großfamilie* unit characteristic of Indo-European society was part of the heritage of settlers to Iceland (Kuhn 1971:88), in practice the nuclear family was the local kinship unit (Sørensen 1993:28). Each family was isolated on a farm about as far apart as villages tended to be on the European mainland (Kuhn 1971:50). The next higher level of societal organization – the clan or tribe – could not be supported in such a situation. As a result, the ancestor-centered kinship system of Indo-European society was supplanted by an ego-centered system. Sørensen argues that this increased both the need for and potential flexibility of intergroup relations:

Property and social functions must be expressed in relation to the individual rather than the group and must pass to other individuals when the previous possessor dies....Whereas ancestor-centered groups are always sharply divided from each other and must therefore be potential enemies, family groups are potential allies because marriage between them always leads to integration, which makes it in the individual’s interest to preserve peace (1993:22).

Thus the vicissitudes of Icelandic geography necessitated the breakdown of previous societal structures into smaller units – creating a situation uniquely fluid and flexible among Indo-European societies.

The absence of any central authority in medieval Iceland made the need to establish personal allegiances all the more urgent. The Icelanders are rightfully proud of their laws and their parliamentary system, claiming – if rather dubiously,

given the centuries of rule by Norway and then by Denmark – the world's oldest continuous parliament, the *Alþingi*, which dates back to the tenth century and has a distinguished history. Notables such as Snorri Sturluson served as the "lawspeaker," whose responsibility it was to commit to memory the laws of the nation. Many of the conflicts in the sagas are pled before the three-tiered court system of the *Alþingi*, and case law had reached such enormous complexity and breadth that it took the lawspeaker, who was responsible for committing it to memory, three consecutive summers to recite it in its entirety. Sigurður Nordal boasts "the Icelandic judicial system...had reached a degree of perfection unique for its time" (1990:81). Still there were large failings in the system that made legal recourse hard to come by. First of all, the legal decisions reached by the courts were not, Byock argues, based on principles of justice:

The goal of legal resolution was to return the community to a workable arrangement and not to determine who committed a crime, or how it was done. The purpose of court verdicts was to find a compromise that could be lived with even if men grumbled; harmony within the community was more important than justice to the individual (1982:102).

Even after a decision was reached, there was no provision for its enforcement; a party who had won a judgment had to assemble a party of allies together to go and enforce it themselves. In practice, despite the laws and arbitration systems that were in place, ultimately the rule was "might makes right."

Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða is a textbook example of the flaws in the Icelandic justice system and the problems of getting recourse from the law. Hrafnkell, the aforementioned *goði* "chieftain" accused (justly) of improperly slaying a bondsman, loses the complaint brought before the *Alþingi* not on its merits, but rather because the advocate for the slain man's father knows a shortcut and gets to the assembly first, allowing him to gain an advantage in wooing the support of other *þingmenn*. When the *goði* loses his case, he goes home and acts as if nothing has happened until the advocate gets some allies together, sneaks in under cover of night and tortures Hrafnkell and his men. The advocate then seizes Hrafnkell's farm and sends him into exile. The *goði* gets his revenge by getting some thugs of his own together and killing the advocate's noble brother recently returned from abroad (who had played no part in the proceedings and did not know why he was being attacked) and retaking his land and chieftaincy (Gordon 1956:58-86). This indicates why it was necessary (unfortunately) for Icelanders to have as many allies in reserve as possible. To have one's case heard before the *Alþingi* one needed the ear of a *goði* who would plead the case; to win the case one needed to round up more "witnesses" than the other fellow; to enforce the verdict one needed enough muscle to seize the judgment personally. In such an environment it is no surprise that loyal allies were a man's dearest possession.

This explains why in such a society, in which the law was not enforced by a central authority but rather by the citizens themselves, the right of revenge was so extensively codified in the laws. Heusler notes with more than a bit of Urgermanic pride that revenge forms the great majority of the conflict resolutions in the sizable selection of sagas he considers; by his count, conflicts in the saga material break down by their resolution as follows (1911:40).

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| Rachetat | 297 |
| Reiner Vergleichsweg | 104 |
| Prozeß zum Vergleich umgebogen | 60 |
| Prozeß rechtsförmlich durchgeführt | 50 |
| Prozeß außerrechtlich abgebrochen | 9 |

It seems, however, that one can safely assume that these figures overstate the actual emphasis on revenge in society at large; revenge makes for much more interesting reading than most court transcripts, and even in the relatively legalistic *Njáls saga* the Fifth Court is not always a place of decorum and restraint (cf. Þórhallr's outburst as the tide turns against Njáll's avengers in court). For Heusler, however, the matter at hand is the honor of the offended party:

In der Rache liegt die edelste Vergütung für den Schmerz des Gekränkten, zugleich die beste Ehrung für den Toten. Ihr kommt am nächsten die gerichtliche Ächtung oder dem Schiedsspruch in seiner dem Kläger ehrenvollsten Form, das Selbsturteil [*sjálfðæmi*]. Geringer ist der Vergleich, den man mit dem Schuldigen zusammen beredet oder den man von Dritten abwägen läßt (1911:42).

In this sort of thinking the blood-oath sworn in ceremonial *föstbræðralag* takes on an extremely important role. This individual bond was independent of other allegiances – the old king Njörfi and Viking Vifilsson swear the pact, and when a bloody feud between their respective clans breaks out, Njörfi's only remaining son swears revenge against Viking. Njörfi then says that he would carry out the vengeance against the killer of his foster-brother, even if that meant killing his own son (*Thorsteins saga Vikingson*, cited Weinhold 1856:289-290). Yet such individual oaths are secondary in scope and number to the intergroup allegiances that are formed by traditional fosterage relationships.

In a situation where allies are so dear it is necessary to find innovative ways to forge new alliances. Marriage, since time immemorial a method of creating bonds between kinship units, was – as in other Indo-European societies – the primary means of securing links between different familial groups. As elsewhere in the Indo-European *Sprachraum*, it is a reciprocal bond, a business contract between two families; after a *mundr* "dowry" is agreed to by both parties, the woman is given into marriage by her guardian with the *mundr* to seal the contract. Breaking off the engagement was viewed as a breach of contract and, as such, a serious offense (Hastrup 1985:93-94). This reflects that marriage – in keeping with the Indo-European tradition – was a serious business doubly necessary for the survival of the kinship unit in the larger society:

For the kin group, marriage provided a means of continuing the *ætt* [kin group] (in the lineal sense), and was a means of creating alliances. The affinal relationships extended one's political allies (Hastrup 1985:90).

Since in Iceland, however, there were more groups for each family to deal with and fewer women per group of marrying age to establish allegiances, marriages were no longer enough to secure a family's position. Faced with this dilemma, the Icelanders adapted the old tradition of fosterage to the needs of their situation.

In its original form, fosterage was restricted to the household of the boy's maternal uncle. In the updated Icelandic version, this somewhat limited institution was expanded and promoted to a status equal to marriage in forming alliances between kin groups (Hastrup 1985:89). The practice was clearly very widespread given the extensive literary and historical evidence mentioned above. Despite the

unfortunate confusion introduced by the semantic extension of *fóstbrœðralag*, however, fosterage in its original sense was not a free swearing of loyalties between two or more men, but rather a deal struck between family groups. Fosterage created relationships recognized under the law code and legally binding on the families involved. While fosterage was predicated on a social exchange relationship, however, it was often accompanied by strong emotional ties. It is natural that such ties would form between a fostered child and the family that brought him up; these loyalties, often spoken of in the saga tradition, prompt the confusion in the use of *fóstbróðir* between the original meaning of "foster-brother" and related derivations meaning "swear-brother" or simply denoting a strong interpersonal affection (or, in the case of Hrafnkell and Freyfaxi, person-horse affection). Such emotional ties are secondary phenomena in a system that is predicated not on personal but rather on group ties.

On a par with marriage in the Icelandic tradition, fosterage parallels the marriage tradition in many notable ways, as Hastrup astutely notes. Like the bride's dowry, the fostered child was transferred to the foster-father either with wealth or in return for services or support rendered (1985:99). The boy was generally given over at the age of four with the agreement that he would be kept until sixteen, the Icelandic age of majority. This was certainly a business contract: there were laws specifying how much of the foster-money was to be returned if the child did not reach sixteen years of age (the practice was to prorate the foster-money over the fraction of the period of fosterage survived by the child). The giver of the child (like the wife-giver) ranked above the child-taker; Hastrup finds evidence for this in *Haralds saga inns hárfagra* to parallel that mentioned above from *Laxdæla saga*: "Því at þat er mál manna, at sá væri ótignari, er oðrum fóstraði barn" (1985:99). The relationships formed in both systems were thus both symmetrical and, predicated on the notion of social exchange, reciprocal, although the wife- and child-givers generally had the upper hand in the deal (1985:100). This is an indication of how the old practice of fosterage was expanded in medieval Iceland on the established model of marriage; since marriage alone could not satisfy the need for links between different kinship groups, fosterage stepped in to help fill the void.

Examples in literature illustrate the importance of fostering in the context of Icelandic culture and its Byzantine political machinations. *Hen-Þórir's saga*, for instance, makes clear to the reader the value of social relationships in Icelandic society. Hen-Þórir is a merchant without family ties; his wealth comes exclusively from trade, and he does not bother to establish the reciprocal relationships necessary to maintain his status in society. Without any central authority or allies to turn to, he cannot collect from his debtors, and his situation becomes desperate. He offers to foster the son of the local *goði*, Arngrímur, in return for the latter's support; Arngrímur declines, and Hen-Þórir offers him half his wealth instead, an offer the chieftain quickly accepts to the satisfaction of both parties. In this story Durrenberger sees market-based and societal social values in conflict (1992:72); the lesson, however, is that the merchant's wealth is nothing without societal protection. Fosterage is one means of obtaining that protection. As we

saw above in the case of *Laxdæla saga* it is not being right but having the most powerful friends that matters. Consider the conflict between the farmer Þórðr and his wife Vigdís. She runs to her *goði* kinsman to help her seize half the estate; the farmer, who has no children or friends to protect him, needs an ally and offers to foster his own *goði*'s son and make him his heir in return for assistance. Striking a deal for their mutual advantage, Höskuldr agrees and buys off the opposing chieftain. Whether Þórðr is morally in the right as regards his divorce case is irrelevant. The issue is ensuring support for his cause by means of mutually beneficial agreements, and fosterage is one means – among others – by which that can be done.

The swearing of allegiances that the lexicon allows Kuhn *et al.* to call somewhat confusingly *fóstbræðralag* is also an allegiance-forming phenomenon in Icelandic that Byock refers to under the name of *vinfengi* (literally "friend-getting"), although these relationships were also more practical than romantic matters. Like foster relationships, these bonds played a role in the feud tradition that Byock speaks of, since blood ties were few and geographically disperse:

Kinship bonds complemented political ties but in time of feud were not dependable sources of aid....Although Icelanders knew their genealogies, the individual could normally count only on a few close blood relatives such as parents, siblings, and uncles and near cousins... (1982:87)

Like fosterage and marriage, the *vinfengi* is a reciprocal relationship (Byock 1988:131). In return for invitations to feasts, lavish gifts, and other recompense, the *vinfengi* obliged the other party to offer support in time of need. Such contracts could be (and often were) kept secret and were not necessarily unconditional vows of support; they could just as well be set up with complex stipulations to ensure the most desirable outcome for both parties. Byock cites the *vinfengi* between Ásgrímr Elliða-Grímsson and Snorri *goði* (not Sturluson) in *Njáls saga* as an example of the calculations involved in such agreements. For the sake of clarity we omit the more complicated details. Suffice it to say that Snorri sets up a pact allowing his new ally to conduct limited vengeance and withdraw, so that Snorri "might assume the role of a man of goodwill intent on intervening between the feuding parties in order to terminate the violence" (Byock 1988:133). Thus Ásgrímr gets Snorri's support in his act of revenge – no one will know Snorri is a party to the violence – and Snorri gets to break up the fight after a considerable bit of mayhem and gain political prestige for having done so. As in the case of fosterage, such "fictive" allegiances are chosen with cold calculation in order to gain political advantage.

Thus the old tradition of fosterage flourished on Icelandic soil as one means among many to satisfy the pressing need for intergroup ties. A new settler to Iceland in *Grettis saga*, Önuendr tréfuotr, makes the mournful lament upon arriving in the country that he has had to leave his land and all his relatives; as Sørensen relates,

This was the common situation for immigrants; even when they had family among other groups of settlers, they often settled so far from them that it was not possible to maintain regular communications (1993:27).

Settlers new to Iceland were very conscious of their forced estrangement from the social order they had lived with all their lives; the realities of life on the island made the clan organization a relic of the past. In the absence of the stability formerly provided by the *Großfamilie*, new relationships had to be struck up to replace the ones within the clan that had been lost. The *hjón* – the farmstead community consisting of a smaller family unit and the servants – was the only form of social organization with any relevance to daily life (Sørensen 28), and the small and isolated nature of these groups made secondary relationships of

crucial practical importance for Icelanders. In this context the ancient tradition of fosterage acquired a legal and societal status on a par with marriage as a way to forge more bonds between kinship groups.

Much has changed in the intervening centuries since the high water mark of Icelandic culture in the Middle Ages. The most important determining factor in the idiosyncratic structure of the medieval Icelandic kinship system was the absence of a central enforcing power. This was at best a mixed blessing for the nation. The feuds and conflicts that were the very source of the golden age of Icelandic literature spiraled out of control and, in events recounted in *Sturlunga saga*, the nation devolved into an inextricable and violent civil war. The murder of Iceland's greatest poet Snorri Sturluson at the behest of his political enemies is an all-too-apt metaphor for the abrupt end of Iceland's greatest literary epoch. Finally all parties to the conflict agreed that the only solution to the bloodshed was to give the nation over into Norwegian rule. The claim Icelanders make to tourists of a thousand years of a continuous parliamentary government generally omits the fact that the body met sporadically during the centuries of foregone independence and during that time did not have more than an advisory authority over its own people. When Norway came under the rule of Denmark, so did Iceland, and it was not until 1944, when Denmark was occupied by the forces of Nazi Germany, that Iceland gained full independence.

Still today the importance of these relationships leaves its mark on the Icelanders. The people of Iceland are well known for their national pride and conservative attitudes that have preserved their country's cultural heritage almost unchanged for well over a millennium. This linguistic conservatism is obvious in the way the language has been carefully preserved there since the literary flowering of Iceland in the high Middle Ages and protected by committee against outside influences that are seen as destructive. Significantly, the great Icelandic philologist and literary historian Sigurður Nordal was also a member of the committee responsible for new linguistic coinages to describe modern inventions, preserving a conscious link to the past even in the most modern of times. Thus the Old Icelandic word *sími*, having fallen out of common usage since medieval times, was rehabilitated to mean "telephone" in order to avoid the use of a borrowing from another tongue. In modern Iceland, where crimes are few and far between, there are no missing children whose pictures can be put on milk cartons, so the Icelanders take the opportunity to provide some helpful grammar tips to their citizens along with their breakfast. For instance, one carton depicts a girl coming home to her father with mussed hair and torn clothing. The natural question is, of course, "What happened?" – "Hvað gerðist?" is the very appropriate caption. The accompanying text explains how it is becoming current among young people to use the verb *að ske* (cf. German *geschehen*) to mean "to happen," and "since this verb is of Danish extraction and its use entirely improper in Icelandic," it suggests various alternatives, including the venerable old middle voice verb *að gerast*, which can trace its etymology back to medieval times.

Among linguistic phenomena kinship terms tend – along with place names – to be among the most consistently conservative. Here the Icelanders are at their conservative best. In discussing the historical development of various kinship

terminology systems in different parts of the world, Edmonson notes (in terms that greatly understate the Icelanders' natural love for their traditions, both linguistic and cultural) that

Modern Icelandic, often described as 'conservative,' preserves a similar continuity...with the 'classical' Icelandic of the twelfth century (1957:403).

Edmonson considers the correlation over time between the kinship terminology in sixteen modern languages with the "parental language" that preceded it to determine the historical continuity of kinship terms. By this standard Icelandic manages an eighty-two percent correlation index over the course of nine centuries from the twelfth century to the present. Only one language, Dutch, has a higher index, which is a full one hundred percent but is only measured against the much more recent terminology of eighteenth-century Flemish. In comparison over like time periods, English maintains only a thirty-percent correlation in kinship terms over the last millennium and only Persian (fifty-two percent over the last seventeen centuries) and Hindi (twenty-six percent over the last two and a half millennia) can compare with Icelandic traditionalism (1957:404).

The ties medieval Icelanders utilized to supplement their blood ties and secure their position within the larger fabric of society were those of marriage and fosterage, and evidence of this is easily found in contemporary Icelandic society. Certainly there have been some changes. No longer is a foster relationship the result of a bartered agreement between groups with legal standing as a contract, and the standing of the foster-father is no longer considered lesser because of the fostering. As there is now a well-established central authority to keep order and settle disputes, such trappings have long been obsolete, and only the happy results of fostering remain – the broadening of the child's experience, the resultant affection between the child and the foster family, and the strengthening of intergroup ties. Tomasson notes (after Merrill 1964:871) that the three most important relationship systems for modern Icelanders are still blood relationships, in-laws, and foster relationships (1980:113). After acquiring equal footage with marriage in the context of Icelandic society, fosterage has stubbornly held its ground for a millennium in which no term describing any part of the institution has been lost from the Icelandic vocabulary, although there have been some minor modifications. Merrill does note that while the titles *fóstri* (male) and *fóstra* (female) served to subsume most such foster relationships in the medieval period, in modern Icelandic the prefix *fóstra-* is simply added to the appropriate blood kinship term. He also mentions the "swear-brother" relationship, but only in passing, recognizing that it is a distinct historical phenomenon in its own right:

Another type of relationship was that of the "fóstbróðir," the sworn-brother; this association was personal to the individuals taking the sworn-brother oath and did not enter into the regular kinship system (1964:870).

Traditional fosterage, however, remains a significant part of an extended kinship system that has withstood many of the influences of time.

While the Icelandic population is remarkable for its consistency, there are some signs that that may be beginning to change. Although the Icelandic population has remained generally constant in size in recent years, there has been a notable shift of the population from the dispersed towns and farmsteads scattered across the countryside to the metropolitan area of Reykjavík, where

now approximately two-thirds of the population resides. It is perhaps thus not coincidental that, as Merrill notes,

the very common modern term for a married couple is "hjón"; formerly the word was little used and had the looser sense of household or servants [as mentioned above] (1964:870).

Does this reflect a basic shift in Icelandic demographics? As the population begins to become less rural and more cosmopolitan – and thus necessarily more like other European populations – the central unit of kinship may be beginning to shift from the extended kinship group to the nuclear family, as this semantic shift of *hjón* seems to indicate. Also it is important to note that the bulk of this shift of the population toward the urban center of Reykjavík (and to a lesser extent to the other notable population center, Akureyri on the northern coast of the island) has taken place after Merrill's study. It would be interesting to examine what (if any) shifts in current kinship terminology have taken place since. That is, however, unfortunately beyond the scope of this project. Icelandic culture, however, has stood the test of changing times before; Rasmus Rask predicted the insular language would be made obsolete by the omnipresent influence of Danish by 1900, and he was (very happily) mistaken. Thus it would be unwise to predict any abrupt changes in the kinship system, for as Merrill observes,

Icelandic kinship, while interesting in itself, is important primarily because it has been recorded continuously for at least seven centuries, and may reasonably be projected another three centuries into the past, while at the same time foreign influences (on kinship) have been small and the culture itself has been quite homogenous. In Icelandic kinship terminology and usage a historical perspective is present that is usually lacking elsewhere (1964:871-872).

As a result of the Icelanders' long-standing need for kinship ties, nowhere else are people so acutely conscious of the ties that bind them together. In medieval times the *Grágás* law code specified blood relationships out to fifth cousins, as well as dictating the conditions of marriage and fosterage bonds. Even today a feature article in the Reykjavík daily *Morgunblað* about a successful Icelander is likely to spend well over half its length on an exhaustive genealogy of the subject. Magnússon compares the daily papers with their meticulous recording of the apparently trivial minutiae of daily life to "extensive family diaries," and says that the Icelanders "live like one large but not very harmonious family" (1977:163). In the absence of the stability of the *Großfamilie* the Icelanders have stitched together a patchwork quilt of kinship alliances, both blood-based and "fictive," with roots reaching far beyond the bucolic island nation's 1100-year history back to its Indo-European heritage. Although the fosterage tradition still resonates today, it reached its greatest height in the Middle Ages and contributed to Iceland's great cultural legacy. In an age when conflicting loyalties were the source of great literature (cf. Rüdiger and his tragically conflicted loyalties in the *Nibelungenlied*), no nation had a system of loyalties more flexible and subject to deft manipulation than the one established in Iceland. Societal adaptations like the expanded role of fosterage underpinned the foundations of this system and formed the basis of a literary tradition unmatched in its richness by any other before or since.

VII. WORKS CITED

Ásmundarson, Vald, ed. *Saga Gísla Súrssonar*. Reykjavík: Sigurður Kristjánsson, 1899.

Benveniste, Émile. *Vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*. Trans. Elizabeth

Palmer. Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1973.

- Braune, Wilhelm and Karl Helm. *Gotische Grammatik*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1956.
- Bremmer, Jan. "Avunculate and Fosterage." *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 4: 1976, 65-78.
- Byock, Jesse L. *Feud in the Icelandic Saga*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.
- . *Medieval Iceland*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- Cleasby, Richard and Gudbrand Vigfússon. *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*. 2nd Ed. Rev. William A. Craige. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957.
- Dennis, Andrew, Peter Foote, and Richard Perkins (Trans.) *Grágás*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980.
- Durrenberger, E. Paul. *The Dynamics of Medieval Iceland: Political Economy and Literature*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992.
- Ebbinghaus, Ernst A. "Gotica IX." *General Linguistics* 14:1974, 97-101.
- Edmonson, Munroe S. "Kinship terms and kinship concepts." *American Anthropologist* 59: 1957, 393-433.
- Feist, Sigmund. *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der gotischen Sprache*. Halle: Niemeyer, 1923.
- . *Vergleichendes Wörterbuch der gotischen Sprache*. Leiden: Brill, 1939.
- French, Valerie. "Birth Control, Childbirth and Early Childhood." In *Civilization of the Ancient Mediterranean*. Vol. 3. Eds. Michael Grand and Rachel Kitzinger. New York: Scribners, 1988.
- Gordon, E. V. *An Introduction to Old Norse*. 2nd Ed. Rev. A. R. Taylor. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956.
- Hastrup, Kirsten. *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985.

- Heusler, Andreas. *Das Strafrecht der Isländersagas*. Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1911.
- Hólmarrsson, Sverrir, Christopher Sanders, and John Tucker. *Íslensk-ensk orðabók*. Reykjavík: Iðunn, 1989.
- Jóhannesson, Alexander. *Isländisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Bern: Francke, 1956.
- Kelly, Fergus. *A Guide to Early Irish Law*. Dublin: Mount Salus Press, 1988.
- Köbler, Gerhard. *Gotisches Wörterbuch*. Leiden: Brill, 1989.
- Kuhn, Hans. *Das alte Island*. Köln: Diederichs, 1971.
- Lehmann, Winfred P. *A Gothic Etymological Dictionary*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986.
- Magnússon, Sigurður. *Northern Sphinx*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1977.
- Merrill, Robert T. "Notes on Icelandic Kinship Terminology." *American Anthropologist* 66: 1964, 867-872.
- Neckel, Gustav. *Edda*. 4th ed. Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1962.
- Njardvík, Njörður. *Birth of a Nation*. Trans. John Porter. Reykjavík: Iceland Review, 1978.
- Nordal, Sigurður (ed.) *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1933.
- . *Icelandic Culture*. Trans. Vilhjálmur T. Bjarnar. Ithaca: Cornell University Library, 1990.
- Oxford Latin Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968.
- Puhval, Jan. *Hittite Etymological Dictionary*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1984.
- Schrader, Otto. *Reallexikon der indogermanischen Altertumskunde*. 2nd Ed. Rev. A. Nehring. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1923.
- Sørensen, Preben Meulengracht. *Saga and Society*. Trans. John Tucker. Odense: Odense University Press, 1993.

Sveinsson, Einar Ól. (ed.) *Brennu-Njáls saga*. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1954.

---. *Laxdœla saga*. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1934.

Tacitus. "Germania." *Tacitus*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958.

Thesaurus Linguae Latinae. Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1900.

Tomasson, Richard F. *Iceland: The First New Society*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980.

Weinhold, Karl. *Altnordisches Leben*. Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1856.

Wyatt, Ian and Jessie Cook (eds.) *Two Tales of Icelanders*. Durham: Durham Medieval Texts, 1993.