

MEDIEVAL ROMANCES
ACROSS EUROPEAN BORDERS

MEDIEVAL NARRATIVES IN TRANSMISSION
CULTURAL AND MEDIAL TRANSLATION OF
VERNACULAR TRADITIONS

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Edited by

Miriam Edlich-Muth



BREPOLS

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THE PHANTOM OF A ROMANCE: TRACES OF ROMANCE TRANSMISSION AND THE QUESTION OF ORIGINALITY

Sif Rikhardsdottir

This chapter will consider the Old Norse romance *Clári saga*, purportedly translated in the mid-fourteenth century from a Latin source that is now lost. The story is situated in the larger context of European romance transmission and, more specifically, within the Latin tradition, thereby infusing it with authority through its presumed Latin origin. The intertextual connections between *Clári saga* and other translated and indigenous romances in Iceland provide a fascinating insight into the establishment of a new subgenre, specifically aimed at interrogating the status of women and female independence, i.e. the maiden king romance. *Clári saga* is one of the earliest known works to feature the thematic narrative structure that later became the hallmark of the maiden king romances, making the question of the romance's origin of particular importance. The chapter makes use of the presumably Latinate romance to address the question of origin and originality as it pertains to medieval translation and writing practices.

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Medieval Romances Across European Borders, ed. by Miriam Edlich-Muth, *Medieval Narratives in Transmission*, 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), pp. 133–152.

Clári saga and the Latin Source

Clári saga tells the story of Clárus, the son of the Emperor of Saxony and his bridal quest to win the hand of Serena, the king's daughter in France.¹ Refusing to accept his suit, she plays him for a fool several times over and then sends him home. He eventually manages to subdue her with the assistance of Master Pérus from Arabia, who utilizes magic tricks to subjugate the haughty bride-to-be. It is significant here that Clárus is, indeed, unable to beat her at her own game without external guidance and the use of sorcery. She is vanquished sexually and humiliated before he eventually takes her as his wife and later as Empress of Saxony.

It has generally been assumed that Jón Halldórsson (d. 1339), Bishop in Skálholt from 1322 to 1339, carried the story with him to Iceland, either in oral or written form. Jón Halldórsson was most probably Norwegian and studied in Paris and Bologna before he became Bishop in Iceland.² The authorial identification and the statement regarding the derivation of the romance can be found in the prologue of the story:

Þar byrjum vér upp þessa frásögn, sem sagði virðulegur herra Jón biskup Halldórsson, ágætrar minningar, — en hann fann hana skrifaða með latínu í Franz í það form er þeir kalla rithmos, en vér köllum hendingum.

(We begin this story, as told by the honourable reverend Bishop Jón Halldórsson, blessed be his memory, — which he found written in Latin in France in the form that they call 'verse' [L. *rhythmus*] and we call 'verse lines').³

¹ See also Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, 'Meykóngahéðin í riddarasögum: Hugmyndafræðileg átök um kynhlutverk og þjóðfélagsstöðu', pp. 410–33, which elaborates on some of the debates raised here within the context of the maiden king tradition and societal gender roles.

² For information on Jón Halldórsson see Gunnar Kristjánsson, and Óskar Guðmundsson, eds., *Saga biskupsstólanna: Skálholt 950 ára – 2006 – Hólar 900 ára*, pp. 36–37, 505; Hughes, 'Clári saga as an Indigenous Romance', pp. 135–63; and Kalinke, 'Clári saga: A Case of Low German Infiltration', pp. 7–8. I would like to extend my gratitude to Shaun F. D. Hughes, who gave me access to his as yet unpublished English translation of *Clári saga*, where he notes that there is evidence that Jón Halldórsson may indeed have been Icelandic (*Clarus' saga*, trans. by Hughes, unpublished manuscript, p. 2 in MS).

³ *Clari saga*, ed. by Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, p. 3, my translation. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson's modernized version is based on Gustav Cederschiöld's normalized edition, *Clári saga*. Shaun Hughes kindly discussed with me the various options for translation here. Hughes noted in our correspondence that the Latin word 'ritmos' could have the meaning of a 'light' verse and wondered whether it might be a learned joke on behalf of the compiler. Given the remaining context, the ambiguity is certainly interesting, regardless of whether the author intended the Latin word as an underhanded reference to a disreputable story or not.

If the preamble is accurate, it is still quite uncertain whether Jón Halldórsson merely recited the story and it was later written down (possibly following his death, given the reference to his memory), or whether we have here the words of a later scribe dutifully transcribing a manuscript copy containing the late Jón Halldórsson's written text (or a scribal copy of it). If one assumes the text is based on a written copy, it is, moreover, uncertain, whether Jón Halldórsson brought the presumed Latin text with him to Iceland, or whether he translated it during his years abroad and only carried the translation with him (if one assumes it is, indeed, a translation).

Clári saga has been preserved in twenty-four manuscripts, four of which dating to the fourteenth or fifteenth century, along with numerous younger manuscripts.⁴ The vellum manuscript AM 657 a–b, 4to in the Arnamagnæan Institute in Copenhagen, which contains the oldest preserved (although incomplete) version of the story, dates to the latter part of the fourteenth century and so must have been copied between two to five decades after Jón Halldórsson's death. The romance is written in the elaborate romance style frequently termed 'translative prose' to distinguish it from the more austere or unadorned style of the Icelandic sagas. The prose shows signs of Latin influence in syntax and word order as well as some indication of a specifically Norwegian linguistic influence. Both Shaun Hughes and Marianne E. Kalinke have additionally noted the influence from Middle Low German.⁵ Hughes has argued that the story is, as a matter of fact, not a translation at all as it purports to be, but rather an indigenous story composed by Jón Halldórsson.⁶ He considers the prologue to function as a stylistic device intended to place the

⁴ For further information on the extant manuscripts see *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romances*, comp. by Kalinke and Mitchell, pp. 72–75.

⁵ Hughes, 'Klári saga as an Indigenous Romance', p. 136 and Kalinke, 'Clári saga: A Case of Low German Infiltration'. For a discussion of the linguistic particularities of the text see also Jakobsen, *Studier i Clarus saga*, pp. xx–xxiv.

⁶ Hughes, 'Klári saga as an Indigenous Romance', pp. 146–49. Both Geraldine Barnes and Matthew Driscoll have, by the same token, expressed doubts as to the origin of the story as a translation (Barnes, 'Romance in Iceland', p. 271 and Driscoll, 'Late Prose Fiction (lygisögur)', p. 192. Friðriksdóttir similarly considers it 'very likely that *Clári saga* is an original text composed in Old Norse, although considerably inflected with foreign material' ('From Heroic Legend to "Medieval Screwball Comedy"', p. 236. Daniel Sävborg remains noncommittal, although he approaches the story as a translation (*Sagan om kärleken*, p. 578. Gustaf Cederschiöld, who edited the saga in the early twentieth century, remained on the other hand convinced that the story was translated from Latin and that the uncertainty was related to the form of transmission, i.e. the location of the translation activity and the identity of the translator, rather than the transmission itself, which he never questioned (*Clári saga*, pp. xxvii–xxviii.).

story within the Latin tradition and to imbue it with a sense of authority and value as part of the larger import of Latin and French sources into Norse. He argues that the text abounds in Icelandic proverbs and that the evident Latinized syntax can be ascribed to the influence of the Latin stylistic tradition and rhetorical conventions on Jón Halldórsson's prose.⁷

Kalinke similarly assumes that the tale is the work of Jón Halldórsson, although, unlike Hughes, she assumes the story to be a translation, or at the very least an adaptation. She points to the 'pervasive impact' of Middle Low German on the saga's language, which she ascribes to the influence of German speaking Hansa merchants in Bergen, where Jón resided prior to becoming Bishop in Skálholt.⁸ She assumes that the storyline and the figure of Master Pérús are derived indirectly from stories that he heard during his studies in Paris and Bologna: 'Presumably there is also an Arabic connection; the rejected suitor in disguise and the appeal to the wooed woman's avarice are known, for example, from the *Thousand and One Nights*, which circulated in Italy in the fourteenth century'.⁹ Kalinke, moreover, notes that some of the *exempla* in the *Disciplina clericalis* are to be found in the same manuscript as the oldest preserved version of *Clári saga*, AM 657, 'including three stories about a Master Pérús', and yet Master Pérús is critical to winning the hand of Serena in *Clári saga*.¹⁰

There are at least two Icelandic folklore tales that relate stories of Master Pero, indicating that the material — or at the very least stories relating the adventures or ingenuity of Master Perus or Pero — were possibly known and may have circulated in a folklore form, although the connection to *Clári saga* remains uncertain.¹¹ Bjarni Vilhjálmsson notes in the introduction to his edition that Jón Halldórsson was indeed reputed to have known many *exempla* and folktales and to have entertained people by telling stories or by weaving them into his sermons.¹² This habit of telling stories that he had heard or read while abroad is emphasized in 'Þátrr Jóns

⁷ Hughes, 'Klári saga as an Indigenous Romance', pp. 136–44.

⁸ Kalinke, 'Clári saga: A Case of Low German Infiltration', p. 10. It should be noted here that she does voice some reservations regarding the status of the romance as a translation (see pp. 23 (n. 39) and 24).

⁹ Kalinke, 'Clári saga: A Case of Low German Infiltration', p. 24; see also Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland*, pp. 106–08.

¹⁰ Kalinke, 'Clári saga: A Case of Low German Infiltration', p. 24.

¹¹ See *Af meistara Pero og hans leikum*, ed. by Gering, pp. 217–31; and *Þátrr af meistara Pero*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, pp. 66–72. Shaun Hughes similarly points out various intertextual connections to fairy tales and folklore ('Klári saga as an Indigenous Romance', pp. 152–56).

¹² *Clári saga*, ed. by Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, p. viii.

byskups Halldórssonar' (The Short Story of Bishop Jón Halldórsson) and indicates that he was — at the very least — known as a mediator of foreign *exempla*:

En hverr mun greina mega, hverr hans góðvili var að gleðja nærverandismenn meðr fáheyrdum dæmisögum, er hann hafði tekið í útlöndum, bæði með lettrum og eiginni raun, og til vitnis þar um munum vér harðla smátt og lítið setja í þennan bækling af því stóra efni, því að sumir menn á Íslandi samsettu hans frásagnir sér til gleði og öðrum; munum vér í fyrstu setja sinn ævintýr af hvorum skóla, París og Bolonia, er gjörðust í hans náveru.¹³

(Anyone can observe how he liked to cheer his companions with rare and unusual anecdotes that he had learned abroad, both from written texts and from his own experience. As evidence thereof we will put just a few examples of the large amount of material in this booklet, because some men in Iceland put his stories together for the enjoyment of themselves and others. We will begin by listing here a single tale of adventure (*ævintýr*) that took place in his presence from each individual school, Paris and Bologna.)

Karl G. Johansson, on the other hand, rejects any connection to the Bishop and argues that manuscript AM 657 a–b, 4to was produced by a professional scribe, who can, furthermore, be connected to the scriptorium at the monastery of Þingeyrar in Húnavatnssýsla.¹⁴ Such scriptoria produced manuscripts that were intended for the Norwegian book market and so any potential Norwegianism is, according to Johansson, a proof neither of the Norwegian origin of the author nor of its translator.¹⁵ He does assume, however, that the story was translated from Latin.

The debate over the origin of the romance, its linguistic derivation and potential transmission thus remains as yet unresolved. Taking a closer look at the text,

¹³ *Þáttur Jóns byskups Halldórssonar*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, p. 3.

¹⁴ Johansson, 'A Scriptorium in Northern Iceland', p. 323.

¹⁵ Whereas Alfred Jakobsen presumes that evidence of the influence of Norwegian linguistic conventions indicates that the story was translated by a Norwegian (*Studier i Clarus saga*, p. 111), Hughes points out that the "Norwegianisms" are neither more nor less than in other Skálholt texts' (*Clarus' saga*, p. 2 in MS). Peter Hallberg concludes that the linguistic features in *Clári saga* are common in *ævintýri* (folk tales) and *exempla* and need therefore not be related to authorial derivation (*Stilsignalement och författarskap i norrön sagalitteratur*). According to Stefán Karlsson, Icelanders compiled books for Norwegian patrons or potential buyers up until around 1400 and so scribes must have adjusted their spelling and language to Norwegian linguistic conventions, although he does note that there is very little evidence of such scribal language adjustments after 1400, by when it appears that books were being produced for a local readership rather than export ('Íslandsk bogekspert til Norge i middelalderen', pp. 1–17).

it is apparent from the initial lines of manuscript AM 657 that the written document postdates (or claims to postdate) its original composition. The scribe indicates, moreover, by reference to the late Reverend, that the text he ascribes to Jón Halldórsson (whether by convention, assumption or as a rhetorical device) is being copied (or written down) posthumously. Yet Daniel Sävborg has pointed out that references to source materials or patronage are well-established topoi within the indigenous romance tradition and so are not necessarily indicators of authentic transmission patterns.¹⁶ *Victors saga ok Blávus*, another maiden king romance, begins, for instance, with a comparable preface, contextualizing the story within the larger framework of romance transmission at the Norwegian court:

<M>ARga merkiliga hlute heyrdum wer sagda af heiðarligum herRa Hakoni Magnussyni Norigs kongi. einkannliga ad hann hielt mikít gaman at fogrum fra sogum. ok hann liet venda morgum Riddara sogum j norrænu uR girzku ok franzeisku mali. ok þui weit ek ad goder gamler menn uilia likia sig ok sina skemtan epter hans fogrum hatum.¹⁷

(We have heard many remarkable things told of the honourable Lord Hákon Magnússon, King of Norway, especially that he very much enjoyed delightful tales and that he had many romances translated into Norse from Greek and French. And so I know that good old men want to emulate his admirable ways in their custom and entertainment.)

While the prologue of *Clári saga* apparently seeks to authenticate its tale, this prologue seems, on the other hand, to do the opposite by jestingly referring to King Hákon Magnússon (r. 1299–1319), the grandson of King Hákon Hákonarson (r. 1217–1263), as the grand importer of tales from Greek and French. While there is certainly evidence of the influx of French material through Norway — although somewhat earlier than King Hákon Magnússon's reign — the reference to Greek romances may be intended as parodic rather than as an endorsement or validation of the romance's authenticity. The reference to King Hákon Magnússon, who was married to Eufemia of Rügen (1270–1312), may also be intended as a quip for the *literati* in his audience, as Eufemia was responsible for the translation of several romances into Swedish, the so-called *Eufemiavisor*, and it was thus she, rather than King Hákon Magnússon, who continued the transmission of chivalric material into the Nordic languages. Regardless of whether the aforementioned prologue is intended to parody an established convention or not, such provenance patterns are well known beyond the Icelandic romance convention and both the lack of

¹⁶ Sävborg, *Sagan om kärleken*, p. 559 (see particularly n. 9).

¹⁷ *Victors saga ok Blávus*, ed. by Loth, p. 3, my translation.

references to actual sources and false attributions are common enough, with Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* providing an excellent example.

More significant, perhaps, is the minor notation in the prologue of *Clári saga* discussed above, claiming that the supposed source was written 'í það form er þeir kalla rithmos, en vér köllum hendingum' (in the form that they call 'poem' [L. *rhythmus*] and we call 'verse lines') (3). The reference to the poetic form of the presumed original as 'verse' is noteworthy as the detail is quite specific — explaining the different poetic format and its Icelandic equivalent — and so the detailed explanation and the respective Latin and Norse names gives credence to a translative choice of prose over the presumed original metric form. The prose format of *Clári saga* moreover complies with the translation practices at the court of King Hákon Hákonarson, where the various metric forms of the *lais*, the courtly romances and the *chansons de geste* were transmitted indiscriminately in prose form. It may thus be an attestation of the process of adaptation from a rhymed or versified original into the conventional Norse prose format. Alternatively, it may merely act as an authentication of the presumed source, signalling an awareness of the convention and an effort to integrate the text into the existing corpus of translated source materials. If the presumption is accurate that the 'corpus of translations may also have assumed an authoritative status as a *corpus* in Iceland, possibly due to King Hákon's patronage, thus heralding the generic form of romance as an authoritative mode of literary representation', then the effort to integrate the story into the larger context of the transmission of French material, with the added authentication of the Latin provenance, would make perfect sense.¹⁸

Whether or not the story was originally translated from Latin or whether it was composed by Jón Halldórsson in Iceland, the fact remains that no Latin source text has been preserved — if it ever existed — and that *Clári saga* is the only version of the story that has come down to us, which raises the question of origin and its significance in the context of literary production in the Middle Ages. What I would like to focus on in the remainder of this chapter is the question of the relevance of the existence of the romance's Latin source and the underlying implications of the frequently convoluted or vanishing traces of romance transmission.

The Maiden King Romances

As noted above, the potential intertextual connections between *Clári saga* and the continental romance tradition provide a fascinating insight into the establish-

¹⁸ Sif Rikhardsdóttir, 'Empire of Emotion'.

ment of a new subgenre in Iceland, i.e. the maiden king romance. The maiden king romances are a corpus of romances ostensibly written in Iceland in the fourteenth century and all sharing a common focus on women in power. What sets the so-called maiden king romances apart from other romances or bridal-quest stories is that they focus on women and their positions of power as opposed to men and their adventures.¹⁹ The female protagonists all refuse to accept their conventional gendered roles by appropriating positions of power normally reserved for male characters. They, moreover, seek to maintain their status by rejecting (and humiliating) suitors. The main focal point of the romances is the battle between the maiden king and her suitor for sovereignty and the subsequent rectification of the apparent imbalance resulting from the female rulers' appropriations of male positions within the narrative social structures.

The following stories are generally considered to belong to the maiden king sub-genre: *Dínus saga drambláta*, *Clári saga*, *Nitida saga*, *Sigrgarðs saga frækna*, *Sigurðar saga þøgla*, *Victors saga ok Blávus*, and *Partalopa saga*. *Gibbons saga*, a peculiar hybrid romance that is probably derived — at least partially — from *Partalopa saga*, should be included as well although the maiden king motif is only a part of a larger narrative scheme. Kalinke and Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir additionally count the legendary sagas, *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* and *Hrólfs saga kraka*, as part of the maiden king tradition.²⁰ The maiden king romances appear to have been tremendously popular — if manuscript production and dissemination can be said to indicate popularity or persistence of a literary trope or genre — and their popularity seems, moreover, to have persisted in the post-medieval period. *Nitida saga* and *Sigurðar saga þøgla* are, for instance, preserved in over sixty manuscripts each, although the number includes manuscripts ranging in age from the fourteenth through the early twentieth century.²¹ As a comparison, the translated version of Thomas de Bretagne's well-known *Tristran*, *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, has been preserved in fewer than ten manuscripts, with only two fragments from the fifteenth century.²²

¹⁹ See also Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, 'Meykóngahefðin í riddarasögum'.

²⁰ Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance* and Friðriksdóttir, 'From Heroic Legend to "Medieval Screwball Comedy"?'.

²¹ For further information on the extant manuscripts of *Nitida saga* and *Sigurðar saga þøgla* see *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romances*, pp. 85–86 and pp. 102–05 respectively. The number given above does not distinguish between different redactions, but some of the romances undergo extensive transformations in their post-medieval transmission.

²² This may, of course, indicate that the story of Tristan was very popular and that the medieval manuscripts containing the Norse version suffered damage and degeneration due to their

The origin of the maiden king motif is unclear and scholars are not in agreement as to its potential derivation and development. Both Carol Clover and Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir surmise that the motif is derived from a proto-Germanic or Nordic legendary tradition and is thus directly connected to Icelandic literary and cultural heritage.²³ Clover draws on the Germanic legendary material of the shield-maiden as a potential source material, pointing out that Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* depicts female warriors who assume male attire and imitate male behaviour.²⁴ Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir similarly traces the origin of the motif to the narrative conventions of the shield-maidens, although she emphasizes the specifically Nordic derivation of the motif through the Germanic Brynhildr-figure in *Völsunga saga*.²⁵ According to her, the first fully developed appearance of the maiden king as an established motif is in the legendary saga *Hrólf's saga Gautrekssonar*.

Kalinke, on the other hand, traces the motif's origin to a pan-European narrative trope of the bridal-quest.²⁶ Unlike Clover and Friðriksdóttir, she assumes that the origin of the motif is to be found in the transmission of narrative materials containing bridal-quest stories and their impact on native literary conventions. She does concede that as 'a fully developed subgenre of bridal-quest romance, the maiden-king narratives are unique to Iceland', although, according to her, their origin is nevertheless to be found in such miscellaneous materials as the folk tale of *König Drosselbart* (King Thrushbeard), the Germanic shield-maidens and Arabic tales.²⁷

being handled frequently. The existence of an indigenous version or a redaction of the story, *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, along with a ballad, *Tristrams ljóð*, and folklore material, indicates that the material did indeed prosper in Icelandic reading communities in the later centuries, although its medium or form may have changed. For further information about the manuscripts of *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* see *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, ed. and trans. by Jorgensen, pp. 25–26.

²³ Clover, 'Maiden Warriors and Other Sons', pp. 35–49 and Friðriksdóttir, 'From Heroic Legend to "Medieval Screwball Comedy"?'. See also her *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words, and Power*, particularly pp. 271–80.

²⁴ Clover, 'Maiden Warriors and Other Sons'. See also Saxo Grammaticus, *The History of the Danes*, ed. by Davidson, trans. by Fisher, p. 212.

²⁵ Friðriksdóttir, 'From Heroic Legend to "Medieval Screwball Comedy"?', p. 231.

²⁶ Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*. Claudia Bornholdt has attested that the bridal-quest (G. *Brautwerbung*) motif is a German narrative trope that stems from the West Frankish territory with textual witnesses dating back to the sixth century (*Engaging Moments*).

²⁷ Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, pp. 103 and 104–08. She notes that Arabic narratives were known beyond the Arabic world, with the *Disciplina clericalis* – Petrus Alphonsi's early twelfth-century collection of *exempla* – demonstrating that Latin translations of Arabic *exempla* reached as far as Iceland.

In a recent essay she modifies her earlier stance somewhat, suggesting that it was the combination of ‘foreign motifs of the haughty woman who rejects and abuses all suitors’, found in *Clári saga*, and the ‘indigenous motif of the maiden king’, found in the legendary saga *Hrólf’s saga Gautrekssonar*, that produced the maiden king romances.²⁸ *Clári saga* is thus posited as the precursor of the maiden king romance, making it critical to the development of a subgenre of romance that was to prove popular in Iceland well beyond the highpoint of the continental romance.

The fact remains that the earliest fully fledged romances featuring self-defined maiden kings seem to appear in the latter half of the fourteenth century. The motif of the haughty maiden can, of course, be found in earlier Germanic mythological material — including the figure of the shield-maiden — and in at least two Icelandic legendary sagas, *Hrólf’s saga Gautrekssonar* and *Hrólf’s saga kraka*, both probably from the thirteenth century. However, the term ‘meykongr’ (maiden king) seemingly appears first in the previously mentioned maiden king romances. Yet, what differentiates the maiden king romances from these earlier stories is that in the maiden king romances the attention is neither on the bridal quest itself, nor on the male protagonist’s adventure, but rather on the status of the woman. While the earlier stories featured perhaps an incipient motif of the haughty maiden or bride, this change in emphasis indicates a certain shift in the representation of women as well as in the interest of both authors and audiences. The focus is no longer on the adventures of a male protagonist and the bridal quest as a means to an end for the hero, but rather on the societal conflict between men and powerful women.²⁹ This subgenre of the romance appears to be a unique Icelandic phenomenon, which, while related to the Germanic tradition of the bridal quest stories and the shield-maidens, nevertheless diverges from these in its emphasis on the maiden king’s refusal to wed as a means of maintaining the prerogative right of sovereignty and the authority of the male position of kingship.

While the maiden king romances differ quite radically from each other, both in form and style, it is apparent that in the latter indigenous sagas, such as *Sigurðar saga þoggla* and *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, the generic parameters are nevertheless established (although they are certainly not very rigid). By this point, the figure of the maiden king has also materialized as a recognizable and definable character, although it remains unclear what purpose these figures may have served. There are both subtle and more obvious differences between the female figures in each of the



²⁸ Kalinke, ‘*Clári saga, Hrólf’s saga Gautrekssonar*, and the Evolution of Icelandic Romance’, pp. 281–82.

²⁹ Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, ‘Meykóngahefðin í riddarasögum’, p. 415.

maiden king romance, from Serena's submissive, Griselda-like behaviour to the burlesque comportment of Fulgida in *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, that leave ambiguous the questions of what function they may have served among their reading communities and whether there are particular and possibly intentional intertextual connections between the romances, suggesting authors emulating, parodying or responding to each other's works. Geraldine Barnes has proposed as much in her recent volume on the indigenous romances:

The authorship of this group of *riddarasögur* is suggestive of a coterie of writers, familiar with each other's work and likely to be writing as much for their peers as for their anonymous patrons in a literary milieu in which mutual borrowing and reference were customary. From that viewpoint, the recurrence of similar motifs, operating in different contexts from one *riddarasaga* to another, and occasional instances of what appear to be audience-directed private jokes give the impression of narratives, authors and scribes in lively dialogue with each other.³⁰

Given *Clári saga*'s position as presumably one of the earliest of the maiden king romances (a dating that rests on Jón Halldórsson's presumed authorship as well as the dating of the earliest manuscript), Kalinke's recent postulations regarding the development of the sub-genre through a combination of an imported story featuring a haughty maiden and an indigenous motif are thus persuasive.

While Serena, the female protagonist of *Clári saga*, is never identified as a maiden king (unlike in the other romances) the narrative pattern nevertheless follows that of the other maiden king romances, i.e. the rejection of the suit, the humiliation of the suitor, the conquering of the maiden king via magic or deception, the sexual (or physical) humiliation of the maiden king and finally the institution of the maiden king in her new submissive role as wife or mother. If the story is indeed a translation from a Latin source, can one assume that the maiden king topos was introduced to Iceland via a lost Latin tradition, potentially featuring the theme of an unruly maiden king that for some reason or another must have resonated with the Icelandic audience? The existence of a second translated maiden king romance, *Partalopa saga* — an Old Norse translation of the French twelfth-century romance of *Partonopeu de Blois* — is relevant here. While the remainder of the maiden king romances are indigenous, *Partalopa saga* is, like *Clári saga* presumes to be, a translation. More significantly, the French source of the story has been preserved, unlike

³⁰ Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur: Writing Romance in Late Medieval Iceland*, p. 183. Barnes is referring to a miscellaneous group of *riddarasögur* (indigenous romances), not maiden king romances specifically, and in fact extrapolates her argument across the genre.

the potential Latin source of *Clári saga*. The transmission pattern of *Partalopa saga* can therefore provide vital input as to the placement of the translated romances vis-à-vis the other indigenous maiden king romances in terms of the development of the maiden king topos or figure.

Partalopa saga and the *Phantom of a Romance*

The French twelfth-century romance tells the story of Partonopeu, nephew of the French king, who becomes lost in the woods during a hunt and is brought by a magical ship to a magical kingdom where the citizens are invisible. In the night, he is joined by a mysterious creature, whom we later discover to be the Empress of Constantinople. She has chosen him as her future husband, but due to his young age, they will have to wait two and a half years before they can be united publicly in marriage. In the Old Norse version of the romance the narrative order has been changed (or the version the Icelandic text is based on had an alternative narrative order) and the romance therefore begins with Melior, the empress, who, as in the French story, has Partonopeu transported to her kingdom to share her bed at night. The main difference between the source and translation is, however, that in the Icelandic version the empress has no intention of marrying the French prince at all as

hon villdi óngvann mann lata vera sier rikara ef hon mætti rada ok sa hon þat sem var at sa mvndi keisari verda yfir allri Grecia er hennar feingi ok sa mvndi rikari verda en hon ok þotti henni þat mikil minkan at heita sidan keis<ar>ina þar er advr het hon meykongvr yfir P(artalopa) ok morgvym ódrvm hófðingvm.³¹

(she did not want any man to be more powerful than her if she had her way and she realized that whoever received her hand in marriage would become Emperor over all of Greece and would become more powerful than she and she thought it would be a great disgrace to be entitled ‘Empress’ when before she was entitled ‘maiden king’ over Partonope and many other chieftains.)

³¹ *Partalopa saga*, ed. by Andersen, p. 8, my translation. The quotation is taken from AM 533 4to from the Arnamagnæan Institute in Copenhagen. The two other relevant text witnesses, JS 27 fol., in the National and University Library of Iceland, and Papp. fol. nr. 46, in the Royal Library in Stockholm, agree more or less here. JS 27 fol. does not mention ‘meykongr’ specifically here, although it does mention it elsewhere, and Stockh. papp. fol. nr. 46 uses ‘drottningh’ (queen) instead of Empress.

This statement indicates a radical departure from the source text, where it is only a question of waiting until Partonopeu has reached a marriageable age. Furthermore, her appropriation of the title 'king', a term usually reserved for the male ruler, indicates an awareness of the inherent social and hierarchical implications of the terms 'king' and 'queen' (or emperor and empress), despite their semantic and functional proximity.³² By marrying she will have to give up her position of 'king' to her husband and assume the secondary position of 'queen'. By assuming the title 'maiden king' she is able to enter a gender role usually reserved for men, without having to reject or negate her gender or sexuality as a woman.

It is uncertain whether this shift occurred in the original translation of the French romance or in later scribal rewritings. The earliest preserved manuscript, Papp. fol. nr. 46 in the Royal Library in Stockholm, is dated to the second half of the fourteenth century, although there is substantial evidence that the romance may have been contained in Ormsbók, an Icelandic vellum manuscript from the mid-fourteenth century that is now lost, which would then be the earliest evidence of the romance's existence.³³ Given the late dating of its manuscript attestations it is, of course, conceivable that the term 'maiden king' is a later introduction. Due to the consistency in all preserved manuscript variants of the narrative order and representation of Melior it is, however, likely that the shift toward representing Melior in the manner of the maiden kings (whether or not she was originally identified as one or not) reflects a translative decision or a pre-existing shift in the manuscript transmission.

While it has hitherto been assumed that the romance was translated with other French material in Norway in the mid-thirteenth century, it has more recently been suggested that the romance may have been translated in Iceland around the mid-fourteenth century.³⁴ If this is so, its translation period coincides with the timeframe of the composition of *Clári saga*. As mentioned above, in light of the ambiguity surrounding the origin of *Clári saga* and its status as potentially one of the earliest maiden king romances, the relationship between these two romances

³² Sif Rikhardsdóttir, *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse*, pp. 121–23. For information on gender relations and female sovereignty in the story in general, see pp. 113–51.

³³ *Partalopa saga*, ed. by Præstgaard Andersen, pp. lxi–lxv.

³⁴ Andersen, the editor of the saga, notes that there is no 'internal evidence' that supports the notion that *Partalopa saga* was translated along with the other romances during King Hákon Hákonarson's reign (p. xx). According to Andersen there is no 'surviving Norwegian fragment' and nothing in the 'language and style of Partal. that particularly suggests a 13th-century Norwegian source', and she thus tentatively places the translation – based on its presence in the lost Ormsbók manuscript – in the first half of the fourteenth century (pp. xx and xxi). See also Sif Rikhardsdóttir, *Medieval Translations*, pp. 116–20, which agrees with Anderson's suggested dating.

is critical. In fact, none of the maiden king romances is preserved in a manuscript dated before the fourteenth century. Admittedly there are fewer manuscripts preserved from the thirteenth century in Iceland and only a handful of those contain romance material; the most notable being the Uppsala De la Gardie 4–7, the fragment MS NRA 61 in the National Archives in Oslo, and AM 519^a, 4to in the Arnamagnæan Institute in Copenhagen.³⁵ The earliest manuscripts containing the maiden king romances are the two manuscripts featuring *Clári saga*, AM 657^{a–b} and Stockholm perg. 4to nr 6, as well as a manuscript containing a fragment of *Sigurðar saga þögla*, AM 596 1 4to in the Arnamagnæan Collection, dated c. 1350–1400. It thus appears that the earliest extant fully fledged maiden king romances may have come into existence as early as 1350 and at the very least before 1400. The oldest fragment containing *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, AM 567 XIV b, 4to is presumed to be from around 1300, confirming the existence of the motif of the haughty bride at the turn of the century.³⁶

As stated above, Kalinke presents a convincing argument that *Clári saga* introduced and instigated the maiden king sub-genre.³⁷ There are certainly persuasive intertextual connections between *Clári saga* and some of the (presumably) later maiden king romances. *Sigrarðs saga frækna* echoes the scene in *Clári saga* where Serena pours a soft-boiled egg down his tunic as a response to his marriage proposal by having Sigrarður (in disguise) throw an egg at Ingigerðr's (the haughty bride) face, thereby dissolving the spell that had made her assume a masculine name (Ingi) and refuse all suitors, ending with the marriage of the couple and their siblings.³⁸

³⁵ The De la Gardie manuscript contains amongst other texts *Strengleikar*, the Norse translation of Marie de France's *lais*. MS NRA 61 preserves a portion of the Norse compilation of the translated *chansons de geste*, *Karlamagnús saga* and AM 519^a, 4to preserves the Norse version of *Alexandreis*, *Alexanders saga*.

³⁶ *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, ed. by Detter, pp. v–vi. Torfi Tulinius has suggested that the story may even have been in circulation for decades prior to it being written down in AM 567 and so the motif may have existed in some form already in the thirteenth century (*The Matter of the North*, trans. by Randi C. Eldevik, p. 173).

³⁷ Kalinke, 'Clári saga, Hrólf's saga Gautrekssonar'. See also her discussion of *Partalopa saga* in connection with *Clári saga*, pp. 285–92.

³⁸ *Sigrarðs saga frækna*, ed. by Loth, pp. 99–100; and *Clári saga*, pp. 17–19. Kalinke has argued that Serena's rejection – exhibited in the form of the egg yolk on Clárus's tunic – is an ironic form of criticism for his lack of decorum and manners ('Table Decorum and the Quest for a Bride in *Clári saga*', pp. 51–72). Whereas the egg in *Clári saga* thus serves as a metaphor for Serena's presumed superiority and the degradation of Clárus, the egg in *Sigrarðs saga frækna* is, on the contrary, used to demolish Ingigerðr's mistaken sense of superiority, bringing her to her rightful place as his submissive wife.

Both *Sigrgrarðs saga frækna* and *Victors saga ok Blávus* recycle the motif of the sleeping potion, used to subdue and then humiliate the eager suitors, and both make use of whipping as the chosen method of humiliation.

The utilization of rape as a means of punishing the maiden king for previous humiliations, which is such a startling feature of *Clári saga*, reappears in *Sigurðar saga þögla* and *Gibbons saga*. In *Clári saga*, the rape is framed in a comic manner, emphasizing masculine prowess; when Clárus wakes up in the middle of the night after being whipped

og þótt hann væri nokkuð stírður, man hann þó fullvel, hvert hann á hvíldina að vitja, stígur nú upp í sængina konungsdóttur og hefir þar blíða nátt allt til morgins.

(and even though he was a bit stiff, he still remembers where he should seek his rest, so he steps into the bed with the king's daughter and enjoys a pleasurable night all the way until morning).³⁹

The text skirts Serena's reaction to the presumably surprising (and bloody) guest in her bed and the focalization remains firmly with the male partner as the ensuing lovemaking is simply described as enjoyable. The beastly figure Serena is then made to follow in the subsequent year (intriguingly Master Pétur in disguise) serves to firmly establish her submissive behaviour once her virginity has been taken.

In *Sigurðar saga þögla*, the sexual violence lingering under the surface in *Clári saga* materializes fully in the rape of Sedentiana, the maiden king, by Sigurður in the form of a swineherd, a dwarf, and a giant. While Sedentiana finds herself alone, she encounters 'einn liotann og ljittinn duerg' (a small and ugly dwarf) and offers him gold to help her, at which he answers that he wants to enjoy her fair body.⁴⁰ Sedentiana's response is unequivocal: "Helldur uil eg deyja" s(egir) hun "enn þessu jata" ('I'd rather die,' she says, 'than to accept that'), upon which the text states: 'Tekur hann þegar til hennar með miklu afle suo at hun matti enngva motstöðu ueita. Og hann med henne alla skemt看 heuir' (He grabs her with so much force that she could offer no resistance and he has his entertainment with her).⁴¹

In *Gibbons saga*, Gibbon enters the chambers of the sleeping Florentia, the maiden king of the story, casts a spell so that 'þat dregr allt afl ur drotningunni suo

³⁹ *Clari saga*, p. 42.

⁴⁰ *Sigurðar saga þögla*, ed. by Loth, p. 205. See also Sif Rikhardsdóttir, 'Meykóngahéðin í riddarasögum', pp. 422–24, which offers a comparison of the scenes in *Clári saga* and *Sigurðar saga þögla*.

⁴¹ *Sigurðar saga þögla*, ed. by Loth, pp. 205–06.

at hun matti sig huergi hræra ne nockur teiknn gera' (she loses all her capacities so she could neither move nor make any gestures) and then climbs into bed with her and promptly deflowers the incapacitated maiden king.⁴² The story of Gibbon is a peculiar tale that seems to stem at least partially from *Partalopa saga*. It has been preserved in several manuscripts, two of which date from around or before 1400, confirming the assumption that both *Clári saga* and *Paralopa saga* were in circulation in Iceland in the fourteenth century and that there was an active community of authors and scribes engaging with the narrative format and motifs offered by both.⁴³ Given the transmission pattern of *Partalopa saga*, a romance where we can indeed trace the patterns of its adaptations from the source, the question of *Clári saga*'s origin becomes perhaps more of a question of *originality*.

If the conventional topic of romance featured in the French romance *Partonopeu* involves the adventure of a male protagonist that results in the attainment of sovereignty, prestige and power through the marriage to an eligible female heir, then it is apparent that there has been a shift in the translation process. In the Icelandic version the focus is, as in the other maiden king romances, on a powerful unmarried woman and her refusal to submit to her gendered social position. This translative or scribal shift possibly indicates that the story of Partonopeu may have been translated into a pre-existing tradition or a generic framework of literary motifs that may have had a particular appeal for Icelandic audiences. The existence of the thirteenth-century legendary sagas featuring the motif (although they are not fully developed maiden king romances) supports the theory that around the mid-fourteenth century such motifs may have been recognized and have provided a narrative framework that seems to have been quite popular judging by the number of manuscripts preserved. The story of Partonopeu (and potentially Clárus) may therefore have provided the ideal narrative material — stories of women in positions of power and the bridal quests of their potential suitors — to adapt them to the framework of the maiden king thematic pattern.

Given the medieval conventions of literary transmission and creation, where writing is simply another form of translation and translation is in its essence merely a form of composition, based — as most other writing was — to a greater or lesser extent on one or more pre-existing sources, such questions of origin have perhaps today become a moot point. The phantom Latin source of *Clári saga* is evidence of



⁴² *Gibbons saga*, ed. by Page, p. 75.

⁴³ AM 335 4to is from around 1400 and AM 567 4to, XVI is from the end of the fourteenth century. Both are preserved in the Arnamagnæan Institute in Copenhagen. For further information see *Gibbons saga*, pp. x–xv, xvii–xxi.

the tendency to seek to trace material to its source so as to locate the value of the material as originary. Yet, the transmission patterns of the only other translated maiden king romance, *Partalopa saga*, suggests that *Clári saga* may exhibit similar signs of cultural adaptation as *Partalopa saga*, revealing that such questions of origin become secondary to the larger scope of audience expectations, narrative adaptation, and the underlying intent of literary translation, and shifting the focus from questions of origin to those of originality and its function within the diffusion of the romance as a genre across Europe.

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