

Resident stranger: Sæmundr in the Ashkenaz

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While there is no evidence that the Jews reached Iceland until the seventeenth century, it may be suggested that Sæmundr *inn fróði* (the learned) Sigfússon (1056-1133), priest of Oddi and Iceland's first book-learned historian, lived as a stranger among them in the 1070s.¹ In his later years Sæmundr was respected in Iceland as a pillar of the church and a leading chieftain and law-maker, although later centuries linked his learning with astrology, dark arts and the devil. As a young man he had studied in Europe, but where he studied is still unresolved. This essay will try to tease an answer out of three aspects of Sæmundr's tradition. One is the name *Frakkland* and whether this relates to France or Germany; another, a legend about his education which was copied in the early fourteenth century and which is now known as *Sæmundar þáttr* (Sæmundr's tale); the third aspect of Sæmundr's tradition is a great but now lost, and presumably Latin, work of history which he is thought to have written in the early twelfth century.

Sæmundr's achievements were many. Besides writing a now lost *opus*, he built St Nicholas's church and founded a school in his family seat in Oddi, teaching there from the late eleventh century; helped Bishop Gizurr Ísleifsson of Skálholt (1082-1118) to establish Iceland's tithe laws in 1097, years before this happened in Norway (in 1120-30); joined his family to royalty in 1120 when his son Loptr married Þóra, a daughter of King Magnús Barefoot of Norway (d. 1103); and drafted the Christian section of the Icelandic law code in 1123, with the help of Bishops Þorlákr Rúnólfsson of Skálholt (1118-1133) and Ketill Þorsteinsson of Hólar (1122-1145), from the southern and northern sees of Iceland.²

In particular, Sæmundr helped these bishops inspect the *Íslendingabók* ('book of Icelanders') of Ari Þorgilsson (1067-1148), priest of Snæfellsnes, which they may have

My thanks to Haki Antonsson and John Sabapathy; and for their help with Judaic tradition and with Hebrew and Aramaic quotations, to Stewart Brookes, Israel Sandman and Sacha Stern.

¹ Vilhjálmsón, "Iceland, the Jews, and Anti-Semitism", esp. 132.

² Whaley, "Sæmundr Sigfússon inn fróði"; Halldór, *Sæmundur Sigfússon*, 33; Turville-Petre, *Origins*, 81-87; Foote, "Aachen, Lund, Hólar", esp. 112-115.

commissioned to explain Iceland to the archbishop of Lund.³ This work contains the oldest known reference to Sæmundr. In his preface to the second and only surviving version, Ari reveals that the bishops and Sæmundr had seen his first draft (which, if meant for Lund, was probably written in Icelandic). Since his second gives no record of events after 1118, and since Ketill was ordained in 1122, it seems likely that the bishops and Sæmundr read the first draft serially over a period of years, and that Ari revised it within a few years of 1122.⁴

In his preface, Ari claims to have excised from the first draft of *Íslendingabók* an *áttartala* (genealogy) and *konunga ævi* (lives of kings). Nothing has been proved about the shape or length of either of these items. However, as they correspond to the type of history which Sæmundr is thought to have written, it is possible that they translated parts of his work.⁵ Ari cites him minimally, once for having synchronized the Icelandic conversion with the death of King Óláfr Tryggvason (chap. 7) and again as the enforcer of Iceland's tithe law (chap. 10). His remaining reference to Sæmundr is a note on his homecoming in the days of Sighvatr Surtsson, lawspeaker from 1076 to 1083:

Á þeim dögum kom Sæmundr Sigfússonr sunnan af Frakklandi hingat til lands ok lét síðan vígjask til prests. (chap. 9)⁶

[In those days Sæmundr Sigfússon came here to our country from *Frakkland* in the south, and then had himself ordained as priest.]

Ari's record of this homecoming as an event may show that Sæmundr's family took him for lost. In the fourteenth-century *Lögmannsannáll* (Lawspeaker's annal) this event is plausibly dated to 1078.⁷ As for where Sæmundr came back from, *Frakkland*, there is little agreement about the meaning of this name. 'France' was first suggested in line with an ambitious claim in the sixteenth-century *Oddverjaannáll* (annal of the men of Oddi), site of his ancestral

³ Motive first proposed by Guðbrandur, in Gudbrand Vigfússon and Powell, ed., *Origines Islandicae*, I, 280-86. Seconded in Halldór, ed., *Íslendingabók*, 29.

⁴ Jakob, ed., *Íslendingabók*, ed. xvii-xx, 3.

⁵ Nordal, *Nordisk Kultur*, 88.

⁶ Jakob, ed., *Íslendingabók*, 20-21; cf. 17 (chap. 7), 22 (chap. 10).

⁷ Guðni, ed., *Annálar og Nafnaskrá*, 81. Foote, "Aachen, Lund, Hólar", 114: "more likely [he] meant the earlier part of the period [1176-83] than the later".

chieftaincy, that in 1076 “Sæmundr frodj kom wr schola aff Parijs” (“Sæmundr the Learned came home from school in Paris”).⁸ The early twelfth century saw the transformation of cathedral schools into universities; Sæmundr probably studied in such a school; and for a while scholars were happy to believe that the school of Nôtre Dame, Europe’s most prestigious from the thirteenth century, was where he had learned the liberal arts more than a century earlier.⁹

More lately, however, “Franconia” has been read into *Frakkland* in line with Modern German *Franken*.¹⁰ Although some scholars still put Sæmundr far to the west of there, in Laon, a cathedral town some 80 miles north-east of Paris, or west of there in the Monastery of Bec in Normandy, or even further west in Angers near southern Brittany, the preferred option is now Germany.¹¹ Until 1104 the Scandinavian archdiocese was situated in Hamburg-Bremen and the first two bishops of Skálholt studied south of there: Ísleifr Gizurarson in Herford, Westphalia, in the 1020s; his son Gizurr there or elsewhere in *Saxland* (‘Saxony’) in the 1050s.¹² To some, it is thus appealing to place Sæmundr in the 1070s right the other way, in the monastery of Fulda, some 70 miles east of the Rhine and about twice that distance south-east of Herford.¹³ At any rate, it has been demonstrated that Icelanders did not think of *Frakkland* as France until the mid-thirteenth century.¹⁴ In Ari’s time it seems rather that instances of *Frakkland* and *Frakkar* (by etymology ‘Frank-land’ and ‘Franks’) in contemporary texts, which are Skaldic poems, connoted a mid-section of Lotharingia: from Trier and Aachen in the western North Rhine Palatinate to Fulda in today’s eastern Hesse, and from Cologne south up the Rhine to Speyer.¹⁵

Germany is where Sæmundr was placed by the annalist Björn Jónsson of Skarðsá (1574-1655), who calls him a scholar

⁸ Storm, ed., *Islandske Annaler*, 471.

⁹ Halldór, *Sæmundur Sigfússon*, 5. Turville-Petre, *Origins*, 82. On Paris: Pedersen, *The First Universities*, 128-34, esp. 130.

¹⁰ Magnús Már Lárusson, “Gizur Ísleifsson”. On Sæmundr’s syllabus: Marenbon, “Skólar, nám og lærdómur í lok elleftu aldar”.

¹¹ Helgi, *Um haf innan*, 332 (Angers); Garðar Gíslason, “Hugleiðingar um Frakkland”, esp. 130-31 (Laon or Bec).

¹² Foote, “Aachen, Lund, Hólar”, 104-106.

¹³ Booth, “Sæmundur: ‘uppi í Þýskalandi?’”, esp. 74, 80-83. Endorsed in Marenbon, “Skólar, nám og lærdómur í lok elleftu aldar”, 13.

¹⁴ Helgi Skúli, “Þegar Frakkland var í Þýskalandi”, esp. 107-108.

¹⁵ Foote, “Aachen, Lund, Hólar”, 115-19. Helgi Skúli, “Þegar Frakkland var í Þýskalandi”, 96-98.

hver ungur framsigldi og lengi var í skóla uppi í Þýzkalandi og nálíga týnt hafði sínu móðurmáli, þegar Jón Ögmundsson, sem biskup varð síðar á Hólum, frændi hans ok leikbróðir í lýzku, honum þaðan kom með stórum atburðum.¹⁶

[who shipped out young, and for a long time was in a school deep in Germany and had nearly lost his mother tongue, when Jón Ögmundarson, who later became bishop in Hólar, his cousin and spiritual playmate, brought him out of there with great incident.]

Björn's word *uppi* (literally 'up') appears to denote highland Germany to the south. His leading source here is a story about Sæmundr from *Jóns saga ins helga* [saga of Jón the Saint].

This saga, about Jón Ögmundarson (1054-1121), first bishop of Hólar (1106-1121), was first written in Latin within a decade of 1200, by Gunnlaugr Leifsson (d. 1218/1219), a monk of Þingeyrar, to enhance Jón's canonisation in that year. The Latin text is lost, but the saga survives in ten mostly incomplete manuscripts which fall into two Icelandic versions from the thirteenth century (S and H) and one from the early fourteenth (L).¹⁷ Whereas the two older versions allude to an established story of Jón's rescue of his cousin in a line or two, the youngest, from ca. 1320 or later, gives a complete story which is now edited separately as *Sæmundar þáttr. Jón*, according to *Jóns saga*, was Sæmundr's third-cousin with a home not far from Oddi in Breiðabólstaðr, in the south of Iceland.¹⁸ His family was well-connected.¹⁹ His parents took him to the Danish royal court as a child and he went there again and to Europe as a young man. In his early fifties, Jón left Iceland a third time to be ordained bishop

¹⁶ Bjarni, *Munnmælasögur*, civ-cv (Reykjavík, Arnarnagnaean Library MS [= AM] 731 4to, s. xvii¹). For a theory that Gellir Þorkelsson, Ari's grandfather, who died in Roskilde (in 1073) having been *mjök lengi* [an awfully long time], *Laxdæla saga*, chap. 78, on the road to Rome, left the young Sæmundr in Europe on his outward or return journey, see Helgi, *Um haf innan*, 81.

¹⁷ Foote, ed., *Jóns saga: Formáli*, ccxiv-xxxvii, esp. ccxix-xx (group S: linked to Skálholt), ccxxxiii (group L: Latin style, linked to Helgafell or perhaps Þykkvabær) and ccxxxvii (group H: linked to Hólar).

¹⁸ Foote, ed., *Jóns saga: Formáli*, table XXVI. Turville-Petre, *Origins*, 109-10.

¹⁹ Orri Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland*, 146-47.

of Hólar in the new archdiocese of Lund, in what was then eastern Denmark. Having arrived, he was sent to Rome and ordained back in Lund in 1106. Jón's journey to Rome was, then, probably like his earlier one. Some decades earlier, if the story is true, he would have found Sæmundr on the return leg of a journey from Rome which he had started likewise from Jutland, south over northern Germany, via Paderborn or Hanover, to embark at Mainz on the Rhine.²⁰ This heading, traditional for pilgrims from Denmark, strengthens the likelihood that "from Franconia in the south" is right for "sunnan af Frakklandi", Ari's phrase for Sæmundr's return journey. By this token, the younger Jón is most likely to have found his cousin studying to the east of such towns as Liège, Aachen, and Trier, which a pilgrim would have approached by the lower Rhine, from Utrecht out of the North Sea. Three towns on the middle Rhine that had archbishops, thus well-endowed chapter schools, in the 1070s were Cologne, Mainz and Speyer.²¹

In the saga, Jón is briefly praised for helping Icelanders abroad, of whom Sæmundr is the second of two named. Gunnlaugr's translator calls Sæmundr a man more useful than any other to Christianity in Iceland, "ok hafði lengi verit í útlöndum svá at ekki spurðisk til hans" [and he had been so long in foreign lands that nothing was heard of him].²² In the L-version, which has *Sæmundar þáttr*, Jón discovers that Sæmundr

var með nokkurum ágætum meistara, nemandi þar ókunniga frœði, svá at hann týndi allri þeiri er hann hafði á æskualdri numit ok jafnvel skírnarnafni sínu.²³

[was living with a certain excellent master, studying the mysterious arts there in such a way that he lost all those he had studied in his youthful age and even his baptismal name.]

The word *meistari*, from Latin *magister*, implies that the place is a school. Each man asks the other his name and when Sæmundr calls himself 'Kollr', Jón reminds him of his and his father's names as well as his home. Sæmundr starts to remember, recalling a place in Oddi

²⁰ Peabody Magoun, Jr., "Nikulas of Munkathvera".

²¹ Reuter, *Germany in the Early Middle Ages*, 237.

²² Foote, ed., *Jóns saga: Texti*, 188 (S, chap. 4; H, chap. 11; L, chaps. 16-17).

²³ Foote, ed., *Jóns saga: Texti*, 339-43, esp. 339.

where he played as a child. When Jón asks him what he thinks of escaping, he says that he would like to, but sees no means, “því at meistari minn vill með engu móti gefa mik liðugan” [‘because my master will in no way release me’]. Jón suggests that Sæmundr and he stay so long together there that any suspicion of flight is diverted and they run off when their master’s guard is down. Sæmundr agrees, but adds that the master will be clever enough to see their journey

‘þegar hann hyggr at himintunglum í heiðríku veðri, því at hann kann svá algerla astronomiam – þat er stjörnuíþrótt – at hann kennir hvers manns stjörnu þess er hann sér ok hyggr at um sinn.’

[‘as soon as he studies the heavenly bodies in clear weather, because he can do *astronomia* – star-craft, that is – so perfectly that he knows the star of any man whom he sees and studies for a time.’]

One cloudy night they escape; after a day, the master notes their absence. On the second night, all heavenly bodies are out and the master, seeing their heading, goes after them. Sæmundr, seeing this from the stars, confuses him by getting Jón to take a shoe off Sæmundr’s foot, fill it with water, and put it on Sæmundr’s head. To *spekinginum* [the sage], looking up into the night sky, the water now around Sæmundr’s star shows that “Jón inn útlenzki hefir drekkt Koll fóstra mínum” [‘Foreign Jón has drowned my pupil Kollr’]. He goes back home but one night later sees from Sæmundr’s star that Sæmundr is alive. This time the prize pupil, wise to his master’s renewed pursuit, makes Jón cut Sæmundr’s calf, pour the blood into Sæmundr’s (other) shoe and put this on Sæmundr’s head. The master, seeing blood around Sæmundr’s star, takes it for granted “at þessi útlendingr hefir fyrirfarit honum” [‘that this foreigner has done for him’]. Although the two Icelanders continue, the master, when he comes home and tries his art out yet again, sees that “Kollr lærisveinn minn” [‘Kollr my disciple’] is still alive. This time, however, he stays at home, rejoicing that Sæmundr has learned enough “stjörnuíþrótt ok bragðvísi” [‘star-craft and trickery’] to overcome him, and prophesying that Jón will benefit mankind.

It has been observed that, if Sæmundr truly recalled his playground in order to know who he was, he would have left Iceland as a child, spending his formative years in

Frakkland.²⁴ So it is plausible that he lost the use of Icelandic. Among many other puzzles in the tale is ‘Kollr’, Sæmundr’s new name, highlighted twice in the words of the teacher. No clear picture of the meaning of *Kollr* has emerged, whether ‘Nick’ (from *Nikulás*), ‘devil’ (as in his folktale name *kölski*), ‘mocker’ (cognate with MnIce *kölsugur*), or ‘crophead’ (as in *kollóttir*), apparently the pet name for an urchin.²⁵

The tale itself is the literary version of an older story which was then passed back into folktale. Its oral derivatives in Iceland share motifs with tales told not only in Scandinavia but also in Scotland.²⁶ In both regions the tale encompasses a pupil sly enough to escape from a master of dark arts, or even from the devil, by leaving him with just his gown in hand. In Iceland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the tale also tells of Sæmundur’s sea-journey home.²⁷ In these stories Sæmundur is a magician, riding back to Iceland over the water on the back of the devil now transformed into a seal. The devil’s terms are that Sæmundur will lose his soul if he wets his gown, but Sæmundur whacks the seal with his psalter when they see Iceland, swims to shore and takes up his Oddi priesthood, for which the devil’s speed was essential if the king (of Denmark) was not to give it to one of two rivals.²⁸

These tales are entertaining in themselves, and although they were recorded too late to tell us much about Sæmundr on their own account, they do have something to offer in conjunction with a likely source of *Sæmundar þáttir*: the tale of Gerbert, later Pope Silvester II (999-1003), and his escape from a Muslim astrologer in William of Malmesbury’s ca. 1125 *Gesta regum Anglorum* [deeds of the kings of England].²⁹ The existence of parallels in other stories makes it hard to prove that William’s tale influenced a nascent *Sæmundar þáttir* in the thirteenth century, but a comparison makes this look more likely.³⁰ William, digressing from a list of popes, reveals an illicit background for Silvester when he says that Gerbert, as he was then known, fled his monastery in Gaul in order to learn astrology in Spain. After a note on

²⁴ Jón Hnefill, “Master of Magic”, esp. 122.

²⁵ For a summary, see *Jóns saga: Texti*, ed. Foote, 339, n. 7. Helgi, *Um haf innan*, 332 (from *Nikulás*).

²⁶ Jón Hnefill, “Master of Magic”, 121, 126-29.

²⁷ Gunnell, “Return of Sæmundur”, esp. 92-102.

²⁸ Jón Hnefill, “Master of Magic”, 128. Gunnell, “Return of Sæmundur”, 98.

²⁹ Mynors, ed., William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, II, 277-82 (chaps. 167-68).

³⁰ *Pro*: Halldór, *Sæmundur Sigfússon*, 50; Bjarni, *Munnmælasögur*, civ; Jón Hnefill, “Master of Magic”, 122-25; Gunnell, “Return of Sæmundur”, 88. *Contra*: Foote, ed., *Jóns saga: Formáli*, ccxxxiii and cclxvii-lxxi, esp. cclxix-xx (treats Latin *astronomiam* as a didactic addition, not as the relic of a source). Undecided, though with a useful quotation of both texts: Taylor, “The Academic and the Devil”, 10.

Spanish history and Toledo, the Christians' capital, William says that Gerbert goes to Seville instead to learn magic from the Saracens: "Ibi uicit scientia Ptholomeum in astrolabio, Alhandreum in astrorum interstitio, Iulium Firmicum in fato" [There he surpassed Ptolemy in knowledge of the astrolabe, Alhandreus in that of the relative positions of the stars, and Julius Firmicus in judicial astrology].³¹ Learning augury also, as well as the art of summoning spirits from hell, Gerbert makes unparalleled progress in calculus and in "licitis artibus, arithmetica musica et astronomia et geometria" [the permitted arts, arithmetic, music, astronomy and geometry], subjects which he later revives in Gaul. In Seville, for the time being, Gerbert is in clover:

Hospitabatur apud quendam sectae illius philosophum, cum multis primo expensis, post etiam promissis demerebatur. Nec deerat Saracenus quin scientiam uenditaret; assidere frequenter, nunc de seriis nunc de nugis colloqui, libros ad scribendum prebere.

[He lodged in the home of a philosopher who was of their religion, whose esteem he earned first by lavish spending and also by promises. And the Saracen played his part; he sold his knowledge, often sat with him discussing topics sometimes serious sometimes trivial, and provided him with books to copy.]

Soon, however, Gerbert covets a volume forbidden to him, plies the Saracen with wine and uses the man's daughter, whom he seduced earlier, to help him steal the book and escape. The Saracen wakes up and pursues the fugitive "iudicio stellarum, qua peritus erat arte" [guided by the stars, in which art he was skilled].³² Gerbert, looking back and discovering the danger "eademque Scientia" [by means of the same art], hides under a bridge, hanging from the battens without touching earth or water. The pursuer goes home and Gerbert hurries to the coast, where he calls up the devil, consenting to be his forever if he defends him from the Saracen "qui denuo insequabatur" [who was again pursuing], and so "ultra pelagus eueheret" [convey him overseas]. The devil complies and Gerbert lives to become pope. In all, such a

³¹ Mynors, ed., William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, II, 279-80.

³² Mynors, ed., William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, II, 281-82.

likeness emerges in the *astronomia*, renewed chases, and subject's fear of the 'philosopher' in both tales that it was plausibly William's account which shaped an earlier version of *Sæmundar þáttr*: one which was closer than the *þáttr* to the modern folktales about Sæmundur, and which could later have been added to *Jóns saga*, minus the ending in which the devil carries Sæmundr to Iceland.³³ If so, it is important to ask why Gerbert was needed in the first place. Later Icelandic folktales gave priests magical powers, but this tale is early. What made Sæmundr's learning suspect in the thirteenth century?

Clues to this may be sought in references to his work, parts of which appear to have been known to Björn of Skarðsá, who claims that "margar menjar" [many remnants] survive from the "sagna skrif og dýrligar diktanir" [historical writings and splendid compositions] which Sæmundr wrote.³⁴ The work from which these derive appears to be one, built on chronology, which was either a history of northern kings or a universal history. Indicating the former is a reference to Sæmundr in *Nóregskonungatal* [tally of Norway's kings], which is a eulogy for his powerful grandson, the chieftain Jón Loptsson (1124-1197).³⁵ Though preserved late, in *Flateyjarbók* of ca. 1390, this poem was probably performed in Jón's honor in Oddi two hundred years earlier. The poet reels off a list of Norwegian kings complete with reign-lengths for each. Having followed them from the father of Haraldr Finehair down to Sverrir, contemporary king of Norway (1184-1202), he traces his patron back to Haraldr through his mother Þóra and her father Magnús Barefoot. Jón's skald ends by hailing him as the royalty of Iceland. Pausing in the first part, however, after Magnús the Good, he names Sæmundr:

Nú hefk talt tíu landreka,
þás hverr vas frá Haraldi,
inntak svá ævi þeira,
sem Sæmundr sagði enn fróði. (stanza 40)³⁶

³³ Jón Hnefill, "Master of Magic", 125.

³⁴ Bjarni, *Munnmælasögur*, cv.

³⁵ Turville-Petre, *Origins*, 84.

³⁶ Finnur Jónsson, ed., *Skjaldedigtning*, B I, 575-90, esp. 582.

[Now I have counted ten land-rulers
Each of whom was from Haraldr,
Likewise the essentials of their lives
As Sæmundr the Learned said.]

Sæmundr's work, more likely to have been written than orally transmitted over 60 years, was probably in Latin, for Snorri says that Ari "ritaði fyrst manna hér á landi at norrœnu máli frœði, bæði forna ok nýja" [was the first person in this country to write learned texts, both old and new, in northern language].³⁷ Also in ca. 1190, Sæmundr's work informed Oddr Snorrason, monk of Þingeyrar, who cited him in his own Latin saga of Óláfr Tryggvason; perhaps through Ari's *konunga ævi*, it may also have been the source of *Fagrskinna* in ca. 1220.³⁸ Oddr's work, though lost, had three fragmentary vernacular adaptations, of which two cite a passage by Sæmundr on King Óláfr, echoing Ari's own reference to his chronology for this king; one has the words "Svá hefir Sæmundr ritat um Ólaf konung í sinni bók" [Thus has Sæmundr written about King Óláfr in his book].³⁹ These three allusions to Sæmundr as a source, one in the poem and two in texts derived from Oddr's biography of Tryggvason, have helped scholars characterize (part of) his lost work as a Norwegian regnal chronology in spare Latin narrative form, which ended with Magnús's death in 1047.⁴⁰ And yet, although Sæmundr may have dropped Ari's *konunga ævi* partly because it repeated his Latin chronology in Icelandic, it is not clear that Norway was all his book was about.

Other allusions to Sæmundr point to his work having a wider scope. One of these, which may go back to Ari, though in a manuscript from the seventeenth century, gives Sæmundr as the source for a synchronisation used by later writers. According to the history in AM 186 III 4to, it is said that

[A]gustus keisare Fridadi, ad fyrer setning Gudz. um allan heim þä er christus var borinn. Enn vér hyggium, ad i þann tíð væri Fridfrödi konungur ä Dan(ork)u Enn

³⁷ Bjarni, ed., *Heimskringla I*, 5.

³⁸ Bjarni, ed., *Fagrskinna*, lxx-xxv, esp. lxxi. Ólafur, ed., *Óláfs saga eptir Odd*, lxxxiii-iv.

³⁹ Ólafur, ed., *Óláfs saga eptir Odd*, 232 (chap. 38, in Reykjavík, Arnarnaganaean Library MS 310 4to).

⁴⁰ Turville-Petre, *Origins*, 85. Helgi, *Um haf innan*, 328. Whaley, "Sæmundr Sigfússon", 637.

Fjölner í Svíþjóðu sem Sæmundur prestur ætladi. þá teliast Längfedgar nær hundradi xjlrædu frá Ädäm til þeirra manna er nú lifa. So sem sannlega ero ä Bökum dæmi til : Enn nü er M.C.XXX og vij är geinginn frá Burd christs ad almennatali, er þetta var (first) skrifad.⁴¹

[Emperor Augustus governed by God's decree across the whole world when Christ was born, and we think that at that time Peace-Fróði was king in Denmark while Fjölner was in Sweden, as Sæmundr the Priest figured. In this case the forefathers are counted in nearly a duodecimal hundred from Adam to the men who live now, as truly as there are stories for them in books. And now it is gone 1137 years since Christ's birth by the common reckoning when this was (first) written.]

This chronology of Sæmundr's correlates the bible with Scandinavian history, for which his sources, Skaldic poems, were probably oral.⁴² Here he appears to have used a stanza on Fróði and the death of Fjölner from *Ynglingatal* [tally of the Ynglings], a parodic necrology probably composed for King Haraldr Finehair by Þjóðólfr of Hvinir in ca. 890.⁴³ Minus Fjölner, Sæmundr's synchronisation entered *Skjöldunga saga*, which may have been written in the early 1190s by his great-grandson Bishop Páll Jónsson of Skálholt (1195-1211); it is also in the thirteenth-century fragment *Upphaf allra frásagna* [beginning of all tales], which is descended from the lost opening to *Skjöldunga saga*.⁴⁴ Saxo used it in his *Gesta Danorum* in ca. 1200; and Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241), whom Jón brought up in Oddi, in his *Skáldskaparmál* [poetics] of ca. 1225.⁴⁵

The words purporting to be inherited from Sæmundr in AM 186 III 4to appear to be embedded in a younger quotation from an otherwise lost work of 1137, which is thought to be Ari's.⁴⁶ The genealogy cited is one which Sæmundr probably made, the *Oddaverjatal* [tally of the men of Oddi], which traces him and his offspring back to Skjöldr, founder of

⁴¹ Stefán, "Fróðleiksgreinar", esp. 333 and 344-45 (MS *xjlrædu*).

⁴² Else, "Ulike teknikkar og ulike krav", esp. 10-13.

⁴³ Sverrir, "Hvað skrifaði Sæmundur?", esp. 53. North, "Kurzweilige Wahrheiten", esp. 178-88.

⁴⁴ Bjarni, ed., *Danakonunga Sögur*, 6 (chap. 3), 39 (*Upphaf*).

⁴⁵ Friis-Jensen, ed., *Saxo Grammaticus: Gesta Danorum*, I, 352-53 (V.15.3). Faulkes, ed., *Skáldskaparmál*, 51 (chap. 43: GKS 2367 4to).

⁴⁶ Stefán, "Fróðleiksgreinar", 347.

Danish kings, and beyond him to Adam, the first man.⁴⁷ Snorri himself was descended from the Oddaverjar and most of the genealogy from Adam to Sæmundr may be seen in his Sturlung line which was copied into DG 11 4to, a manuscript of Snorri's *Edda*, in the first third of the fourteenth century.⁴⁸ If this lineage enabled his son to marry Þóra, Sæmundr would have made it before 1120. If he wrote it in stages within an *aldartala* [tally of ages, or chronology], his work is better defined as a universal history.⁴⁹

Two more allusions to Sæmundr's writing are couched in the language of astronomy and medicine. Firstly, AM 624 4to, a priest's encyclopaedic handbook from ca. 1500, contains a section on the sun's motion in which Sæmundr is quoted concerning the first day of Creation: "I upphafi heims sagdi Sæmundur prestur at sol nyskopud rynne upp i austri midiu, en tungl fullt aa aptne" [Sæmundr the Priest said that in the beginning of the world the newly created sun rose up in mid east and the moon was full in the evening].⁵⁰ His luni-solar model seems derived from Anatolius of Alexandria, an early Christian authority for dating the world's first day to the spring equinox with a full moon at sunset. Bede, who argues against this in Chapter 6 of his ca. 725 *De temporum ratione* [on the reckoning of time], was probably not the source for Sæmundr here. Nonetheless, the 'World Chronicle' in Chapter 66 of Bede's book, with its annalistic history of the Six Ages, helps us see how Sæmundr might have organized his work, if he wrote it to be a universal rather than purely Norwegian history.⁵¹

Secondly, AM 764 4to, which is a miscellany copied 1360-70 in the convent at Reynistaðr, contains on its third page, within a *veraldarsaga* [universal history], an account of the sixth day of Creation:

Á hinum sétta degi formeraði hann fyrsta mann af fjórum höfuðskepnum: lopti, eldi, jörðu, vatni. Þann mann kallaði hann Adam, svá sem takandi sérhvern staf í hans nafni af fjórum höfuðættum. Hann var skapaðr í Ebron. Þessi maðr inn fyrsti var lx at hæð eptir sōgn Sæmundar. Hann var skapaðr eptir líkneskju sjálfs Guðs at líkams

⁴⁷ Nordal, *Nordisk Kultur*, 191. Bjarni Guðnason, *Skjöldungasögu*, 155-59. Stefán, "Fróðleiksgreinar", 335-36.

⁴⁸ Heimir, ed., *Uppsala Edda*, 118-119 (fol. 25 verso).

⁴⁹ Stefán, "Fróðleiksgreinar", 349.

⁵⁰ Beckman and Kålund, ed., *II Rímtöl*, 91.

⁵¹ Stefán, "Fróðleiksgreinar", 333. Wallis, *Reckoning of Time*, 24-28 (chap. 6), esp. 25, n. 32, and 274; 156-237 (chap. 66). Sverrir, "Hvað skrifaði Sæmundur?", 55-59.

formi, hafandi cc xl ok viij bein en ccc ok lx æða. Svá segizk at af hjartanu gangi út vizka en mál af lunga, reiði af galli, hlátr af milti, en líkams fýsn af lifrinni. (fol. 2 recto, lines 23-28)⁵²

[On the sixth day He formed the first man out of the four elements: air, fire, earth, water. That man He called Adam, as if taking for Himself one letter in his name for each of the four directions. Adam was made in Hebron. This, the first, man was 60 [ells] in height according to what Sæmundr said. He was shaped in the likeness of God Himself in the form of his body, having 248 bones and 360 veins. Likewise it is said that from the heart proceeds intelligence and speech from the lungs, wrath from the gall-bladder, laughter from the spleen, and bodily desire from the liver.]

The frame for this material is Genesis 1:27: “Et creavit Deus hominem ad imaginem suam: ad imaginem Dei creavit illum, masculinum et feminam creavit eos” [And God made man according to His Own image: according to the image of God did He make him, male and female He made them].⁵³

This passage contains the most vexed of all references to Sæmundr. The first point to note is the lack of a qualifier such as *prestr*, *inn fróði*, or patronymic. This simplicity speaks against his name being used merely as a token for learning in this part of AM 764.⁵⁴ On the contrary, the bare words “eptir sǫgn Sæmundar” have been seen to date the original of the immediate text to a time, such as Oddr’s in the twelfth century, when Sæmundr’s name spoke for itself.⁵⁵ Moreover, the claim here that Sæmundr wrote on Adam fits with the interest in Creation which is alleged for him in AM 624, as well as with his genealogy. Adam’s height is a Rabbinic (100 (reduced by God from 200) cubits), Coptic (80 cubits) and Hadithic (60 cubits) commonplace, all representing God’s reduction of his prelapsarian height, which is in Deuteronomy 4:32 (from earth to heaven).⁵⁶ The allusion to (Greek) cardinal points in the

⁵² Svanhildur, “AM 764 4to”, 90; Svanhildur, “Arctic Garden of Delights”.

⁵³ Colunga and Turrado, ed., *Biblia Sacra*, 2.

⁵⁴ Pace Whaley, “Sæmundr Sigfússon”, 637.

⁵⁵ Jónas, *Um Fóstbræðrasögu*, 242, n. 6.

⁵⁶ Freedman and Simon, ed. and trans., *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, I, 91 (Genesis (Bereshith) XII.6). For Adam in a Coptic hymn of the fifth or sixth century CE, see Elliott, ed., *Book of the Resurrection*, 653 (Eve is merely 50 cubits high). Kister, “Ādam”, esp. 137-40.

letters of Adam’s name (*anatolē* [south], *dysis* [west], *arktos* [north], *mesembria* [east]) has an early analogue in St Augustine’s ninth homily on the Gospel of John.⁵⁷ The reference to Hebron as the site of Adam’s provenance is paralleled in the *Imago mundi* [image of the world], which was written by Honorius of Autun (d. ca. 1140; probably of Regensburg) in the first third of the twelfth century.⁵⁸ A longer statement on the translation of Adam’s body back to Hebron, on the following page (AM 764, fol. 2 verso, lines 11-12), is probably adapted directly from the now lost Icelandic translation of Honorius’ work.⁵⁹

There are analogues of the medical text surrounding Sæmundr’s name here in Icelandic, as well as one in Latin, in at least four later manuscripts which are probably related to AM 764, as well as in *Fóstbræðra saga*.⁶⁰ An essay attributed to Bede, *De nativitate infantium* [on the birth of children], which gives man 241 bones and 32 teeth, is unlikely to be the source for the Icelandic material, which bears closer resemblance to the *Regimen sanitatis* [health regimen], a popular Latin poem on ailments.⁶¹

Ossibus ex denis bis centenisque novenis

Constat homo; denis bis dentibus et duodenis,

Ex tricenteni decies sex quinque venis. (lines 1153-55)

[Of bones ten, twice one hundred and nine 228 or 219

A man consists; with teeth twice ten and twelve, 32

Of three hundred, six tens, five veins.] 365

⁵⁷ Hill and Fitzgerald, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 194 (9.14).

⁵⁸ Migne, ed., *Honorii Augustodunensis*, 165 (*De imagine mundi*, III.1).

⁵⁹ Svanhildur, “AM 764 4to”, 91. On the translation, Sverrir, *Við og veröldin*, 50-51.

⁶⁰ Jónas, *Um Fóstbræðrasögu*, 242-3 (Reykjavík, Arnarnaganaean Library MS 194 8vo, fol. 35r, of ca. 1387 (in Latin); Reykjavík, Arnarnaganaean Library MS 434 12mo; London, British Library, Additional MS 11242, fol. 50r, of 1544; Reykjavík, Arnarnaganaean Library MS 189 8to, fol. 18r, of 1700).

⁶¹ Migne, ed., *Bedaee Venerabilis*, 659-60. Jónas, *Um Fóstbræðrasögu*, 241-46 (my translation). For the older text, see also Gherli, ed., *Regola Sanitaria Salernitana*, 72 (LXXXVIII).

Two later additions to the poem come yet closer to the number of Adam's bones in AM 764:

Adde quaterdenis, bis centum, senaque habebis

Quam sis multiplici conditus osse semel.

[Add four tens, twice hundred, and six, you'll have 246

How much in manifold bone you once were made.]

Ossa ducentena atque quarter sunt et duodena.

Sunt hominis dentes triginta duo comedentes.

[Bones two hundred as well as four by twelve. 248

Of man's devouring teeth there are thirty-two.] 32

Even clearer is the resemblance with the account of bodily organs in AM 764:

Cor sapit, pulmo loquitur, fel commovet iram,

Splen ridere facit, cogit amare jecor. (lines 1242-43)

[Heart knows, lungs talk, gall moves wrath,

Spleen makes laughter, liver drives lust.]

Known also as *Flos medicinae* [flower of medicine], and associated with the Salerno medical school, the *Regimen* was a burgeoning thirteenth-century amalgam of verses from various earlier texts, which was translated all over Europe many times over into the Renaissance. In

the fourteenth century it was quoted in Norway as well as Iceland and is not out of place in AM 764.⁶²

Nonetheless, for all that a version of the *Regimen* probably reconfirmed the scribe of AM 764 in her veins and bones of Adam, it seems unlikely that this poem was the primary source either of this passage or of its analogues in the later manuscripts. To start with, the *Regimen* does not associate man's physiology with Adam, even though notions of 'man' and 'Adam' (the first man) are interchangeable. Then all the other Icelandic manuscripts number a man's bones, teeth (a standard 32), and veins, whereas AM 764 numbers only Adam's bones and veins. The scribe moreover puts these before the *svá* of the sentence on bodily organs, in such a way that Adam's bones and veins are better grouped with the sentence they follow, on Sæmundr and the height of Adam. And why would Sæmundr be cited as a source for Adam's height alone? There is finally a widespread discrepancy in numbers between the *Regimen* and AM 764.⁶³ In short, the medical and other esoteric material in this part of AM 764 serves Adam in a way which is alien to the *Regimen*.

The primary source for the Icelandic must be a commentary on Genesis. So far, if we look for an analogue here, it emerges that the only Genesis-derived texts in which Adam's parts are numbered, outside AM 794 and its relative AM 194, belong to Rabbinic commentary.⁶⁴ Two types of source are relevant, datable from antiquity to the early Middle Ages: the Mishna (the six orders of Law, or Oral Torah); and Talmudic commentaries on the Pentateuch. To start with the Mishna: tractate *Oholot* [Tents] identifies Adam with 'man' (Hebrew *adam*) when it says of his bones that מאתים וארבעים ושמנה אברים באדם. [There are 248 limbs (אברים) in a man].⁶⁵ This statement matches half the physiology for Adam in AM 764. The second analogue has more. The orally based 'Targum Pseudo-Jonathan' (of the eighth century CE) renders Genesis 1:27 as follows:

וּבְרָא יי ית אדם בדיוקניה בצלמא יי ברא יתיה במאתן וארבעין ותמני איברין בתלת מאה ושיתין וחמשא גידין ורקם עלוי מושכא ומלי יתיה בסרא ואידמא דכר ונוקבא בגוהון ברא יתהון.

⁶² Garrison, *A Note on the Prehistory*, 57. Svanhildur, "AM 764 4to", 92.

⁶³ For a comparative table, see Jónas, *Um Fóstbræðrasögu*, 244.

⁶⁴ St. Jerome did not borrow this from his reading of Jewish scripture, in Hayward, trans., *Jerome on Genesis*.

⁶⁵ Blackman, ed., *Mishnayoth*, VI 205.

[And the Lord created man in His Likeness: In the image of the Lord He created him, with 248 members (איברין), with 365 nerves (גידין), and overlaid them with skin, and filled it with flesh and blood. Male and female in their bodies He created them]⁶⁶

As for these modern translations, ‘members’ denote bones whereas ‘nerves’ and ‘veins’ both count as soft tissue. The Targum’s numbers 248 and 365 reappear in the Midrash (Rabbinic commentary from ca. 300 to ca. 500 CE) as respectively positive and negative parts of the 613 commandments of the Torah, issued to Adam’s descendants.⁶⁷ It is this tradition, contained (before the thirteenth century CE) in the Midrash and in the above Targum, rather than the *Regimen*, which better fits with the bones and veins of Adam in AM 764. Insofar as the interest in Adam there is given as Sæmundr’s, it seems that this text on Adam’s body derives from an account of his concerning Adam which was later, after his death and before it reached AM 764 or its exemplars, influenced by a version of the *Regimen*. The affinity which attracted this influence would have been due to the Hebrew origin of Adam’s numbers within the numbers of ‘man’ in the physiology of the *Regimen*, for Salerno and the southern French medical schools drew on Jewish besides Christian and Islamic traditions.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, the detail for Adam’s body on this page of AM 764 is older, in that, despite its ‘360’ veins for ‘365’ nerves, this text appears to stem from a biblical, and so far only Jewish biblical, commentary.

So, if we have but a trace of Sæmundr’s lost work in the bones and veins, this appears to come with a connection to the Rabbinic tradition in which it still counts as commonplace knowledge. Nor is the idea that Sæmundr might have studied Adam through Jewish biblical commentary in the Rhineland in the 1070s in any way extraordinary. Until the ideology of the First Crusade led to pogroms up and down the Rhine (in Speyer and Worms in late 1095, in Mainz in May 1096 and thereafter in Cologne), the Jews there lived in relative peace with their Christian neighbors. At the outset the Jews had been courted as settlers by town mayors who prized their initiative as an economic stimulus. Living in what they called the Ashkenaz, the Jews wrote commentary on the Talmud in Aramaic and Hebrew, but taught it often in the

⁶⁶ Maher, trans., *The Targums*, 19-20 (Babylonian text; in translation, the Jerusalem text says for the first part: “And the Word of the Lord created man in His likeness, in the likeness of the presence of the Lord He created him, the male and his yoke-fellow He created them”).

⁶⁷ Freedman and Simon, ed. and trans., *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, 202 (XXIV.5).

⁶⁸ Garrison, *A Note on the Prehistory*, 53-63, esp. 62. Pedersen, *The First Universities*, 123-24.

Franconian and other dialects from which Yiddish derived.⁶⁹ The Jews of France studied in their Romance vernaculars, in such a way that St. Andrew of Victor, a disciple of Hugh, sought teaching on the Hebrew Bible from the Rabbis of Paris in the mid-twelfth century.⁷⁰ In the thirteenth century, however, the church rolled back the rights which Jews had enjoyed, forcing them into usury and stigmatising Judaic religion in ways which kindled Christian ignorance and fear.⁷¹

It was during this more reactionary century that the story about Sæmundr's learning took shape in Iceland. Long before, Sæmundr had won fame by building Iceland's church and institutions. Consistent with this authority is the evidence for his writing, which, if we put it together, suggests that he wrote a work of universal history: starting with Adam in the first year of the world; and continuing in such a way that he also traced his own line there, from Adam, through Skjöldr to chieftains in Norway and finally to his father in Oddi. But perhaps Sæmundr had been too clever by half. The loss of his work supports the view that he both wrote and kept it in Latin, for none but the clergy could read Latin in Iceland in the early twelfth century. At the same time, it seems that the vernacular works of Ari, source of much local history in the *Landnámabók* [book of settlements], got a wider circulation and began to replace his. Some tension of this kind may underlie what appears to be Sæmundr's rejection of Ari's first draft of *Íslendingabók*.⁷² By the early thirteenth century it seems that only Ari was read, for Snorri writes about him without mentioning Sæmundr in the preface to his history of the kings of Norway (c. 1235).⁷³

To sum up, Sæmundr was a stranger in Europe and became one to Icelandic memory, for his book disappeared. And although it may also be said that, as a pupil lodger in Germany, he went native for a decade, becoming one with the language and losing his Christian name, native is not how he would have appeared to his hosts there either if they were Jews of the Ashkenaz. My deduction from AM 764 is that he lived among them as a *גר* [stranger], a gentile residing in Israel (Exodus 22:21 and 23:9 and Leviticus 19:33-34), although possibly in Mainz or another cathedral town on the Rhine.⁷⁴ In this way we might

⁶⁹ Chazan, *Jews of Medieval Western Christendom*, 169-85, esp. 171-75, esp. 175: "the vanguard of Jewish learning at that time".

⁷⁰ Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 126, 154-56. Chazan, "Philosemitic Tendencies", esp. 43-47.

⁷¹ Chazan, *Jews of Medieval Western Christendom*, 175-86.

⁷² North, "Kurzweilige Wahrheiten", 204-11. Witness King Alfred's point about untranslated Latin in his letter on the state of learning in ca. 890.

⁷³ Nordal, *Nordisk Kultur*, 188-90. Bjarni, ed., *Heimskringla I*, 5-7.

⁷⁴ Krauss, "The Word 'Ger'", esp. 264-66.

see traces of a Rabbi and yeshiva in the story for which the author of *Sæmundar þáttr* appears to use Gerbert's escape from Islam as a filter. Could *Kollr*, Sæmundr's new name which is open to so many interpretations, be derived from Hebrew כּל *kol* [all], for the student of the bible who wanted to know everything? The rest is universal history.