

Faroese Oral Tradition and Icelandic Saga: The Case of the Ásmund Cycle

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Abstract

The character Ásmund – Faroese Ásmundur – appears at least in six Faroese heroic ballads: *Gríms ríma* (CCF nr. 52), *Heljars kvæði* (CCF nr. 63), *Frúgvín Olrína* (CCF nr. 81), *Sniolv's kvæði* (CCF nr. 91), *Tíðriks kongs ríma* (CCF nr. 97) and *Torbjörn Bekil* (CCF nr. 98). In addition, Ásmund, the Champion-Killer, is also mentioned in the so-called *Dvørgamoy* ballads (CCF 6, 7, 8, 9), a large group of texts dealing with all the three thematic cores which, in Faroese oral tradition, are connected to the character Sigurd of the Nibelung tradition, the Dietrich epic and the Ásmund tradition itself.

A systematic study of the Ásmund matter in the Faroese oral tradition and its relation to the Icelandic *Ásmundar saga kappabana* has never been conducted. The present study aims, therefore, to analyse the reception of the Ásmund narrative in the Faroes, in the basis of all the texts recorded. The image we get from this analysis shows the complexity of the development of this narrative's material, which, far from being linear, is repeatedly altered and contaminated with other heroic traditions.

Keywords: Faroe Islands, Oral tradition, Heroic poetry, Icelandic saga

Fazit

Ásmund *kappabani* ist allem Anschein nach eine besonders beliebte Figur in den färöischen Heldenliedern zu sein. Man begegnet ihr in wenigstens sechs Liedern: *Gríms ríma* (CCF Nr. 52), *Heljars kvæði* (CCF Nr. 63), *Frúgvín Olrína* (CCF Nr. 81), *Sniolv's kvæði* (CCF Nr. 91), *Tíðriks kongs ríma* (CCF Nr. 97) und *Torbjörn Bekil* (CCF Nr. 98). Außerdem wird ein gewisser Ásmundur auch in den so genannten *Dvørgamoy* Liedern (CCF Nr. 6, 7, 8, 9) erwähnt. Diese umfangreiche Textgruppe umfasst alle drei Themenkreise, die in der färöischen Dichtung zu Sigurd in Beziehung gesetzt werden: den Nibelungenkreis, die Dietrichepik und die Ásmundsage.

Eine systematische Studie der Ásmundsage in der färöischen mündlichen Überlieferung und ihrer Beziehung zur isländischen *Ásmundar saga kappabana* ist bisher noch nicht durchgeführt worden. Die vorliegende Arbeit setzt sich zum Ziel, die Rezeption der Ásmundsage auf den Färöer auf der Basis aller überlieferten Texte zu untersuchen. Das Bild der färöischen Ásmundsage, das sich auf der Basis dieser systematischen Untersuchung abzeichnet, zeigt die Komplexität und Nicht-Linearität der Entwicklung dieses Erzählstoffes, der wiederholt verändert und mit anderen heldnischen Traditionen kontaminiert wird.

Schlüsselwörter: Färöer, Mündliche Überlieferung, Heldendichtung, Isländische Sage

1. The Faroese Oral Tradition: *Føroya kvæðir*

The Faroes – a group of 18 islands situated in the North Atlantic between Scotland, Norway and Iceland – have preserved a rich oral tradition including four main genres: two in prose, folktales (*ævintýr*) and legends (*sagnir*); and two in verse, satiric (*tættir*) and heroic ballads (*kvæðir*).

Ævintýr are usually set in a far away or indefinite country and constitute the Faroese version of Scandinavian and European fairy tales such as, for example, *Beauty and the Beast*. Legends (*sagnir*), on the contrary, appear to be strongly rooted in Faroese society and environment: they tell in full details the stories of local characters moving in specific local settings.

The verse genres are both composed to be sung and danced. The *Tættir* satirize episodes of local interest. The more famous heroic ballads deal with a wide range of events and characters of a remote past: from Germanic mythology (*Lokka tåttur*, CCF 13) to the Faroes' conversion to Christianity (*Sigmundarkvæðir*, CCF 22, 216), to the Charlemagne and Sigurd cycles (*Rólantskvæði*, CCF 106 and *Sjúðarkvæði*, CCF 1). Most of them were composed, on the basis of written sources, already in the late Middle Ages, even though their present form was not written down before the 18th or the 19th century (Wylie 1987: 43).

These genres survived for centuries in purely oral form mainly thanks to the tradition of the *kvøldseta* (literally “evening sitting”). *Kvøldsetur* were the evening assemblies the Faroese families used to have in the long, dark and cold winter nights. During these gatherings, women span or knitted and men played cards, while stories were told and ballads sung in turn. In this way, this common historical and literary inheritance became and remained an important part of the Faroese's everyday life up to the end of the 19th century when economic changes rendered the *kvøldsetur* obsolete as productive occasions.

On the other hand, oral tradition and ballads in particular played a fundamental role in marking festivities and special occasions for the Faroese society. They were performed every Sunday between Christmas and Shrove Monday, on July 29th – Faroes' national day (*Ólavssøka*) – and also in occasions such as marriages, banquets and to celebrate the killing of a whale. Ballads might originally have been performed in various ways and, of those, only one has survived: it is the traditional “chain dance” (German *Kettentanz*) danced in circle by people holding hands and moving their feet two paces to a side and one pace in the direction chosen by the *skipar* (the person intoning the strophe and leading the dance). In this form, in a unity of text, music and dance (Müller 1985: 175-178), without any accompanying musical instruments, heroic ballads were – and on certain occasions still are – performed for hours.

Heroic ballads first drew attention to the Faroese language which is often believed to have survived only thanks to them. It was, in fact, the desire of studying, writing down and, therefore, preserving this huge oral tradition to awake for the first time the interest of scholars and linguists such as Jens Christian Svabo (1746-1824) and Venceslaus Ulricus Hammershaimb (1819-1909) for this language and for its “grammaticalization” (Linn 1998). The most immediate consequence of this interest for Faroese heroic ballads and the other oral genres was the establishing of a set of rules allowing scholars and literature historians to write down texts composed in a language which, for centuries, had survived exclusively in oral form (see, for example, Svabo's and Hammershaimb's proposals for a Faroese orthography).

2. The *Ásmundarsaga kappabana*

The *Ásmundarsaga kappabana* is one of the *fornaldarsögur* which mostly arose interest among scholars and medievalists because it contains one of the Old Norse versions of the Hildebrand legend. The saga, which was probably written down at the end of the 13th century, has come down to us in two manuscripts: Stockholm, Royal Library 7, 4^o (first half of the 14th century) and Copenhagen, AM 586, 4^o (15th century).

As pointed out by Ciklamini (1993: 22), “the saga revolves around the notion that fate shapes events”. I will, here, present a short account of the events narrated in the Icelandic *Ásmundarsaga kappabana*, which will be useful in order to compare them with those contained or hinted at in the Faroese *Ásmund*¹ cycle.

In the first chapter, two men, Alíus and Olíus, arrive at king Buðli’s court in Sweden and ask for *vetrvist* (“winder quarter”). Seeing a ring made by the king’s smith, they say it’s faulty and they can certainly do better. They start working and produce a knife and a ring. Then Buðli asks them to forge one sword each: Olíus’ first sword is not good, he makes another which – he foretells – will cause the death of Buðli’s grandson. Hearing this prophecy, the king has the fatal sword thrown into the Mälaren waters. In the following chapters, king Buðli’s daughter, Hildir, marries Helgi, son of king Hildibrandr of Húnaland and gives birth to a child – named Hildibrandr as well – who is sent to Húnaland and brought up there. While Helgi is abroad, king Álfr of Denmark and his friend Áki make war onto Sweden: king Buðli is killed and Hildir has to marry Áki. From this marriage Ásmundr is born. Helgi is killed in war. His son Hildibrandr is married to the daughter of the king of Húnaland (Laszinus or Átli, according to the manuscript). He conquers Saxland, submitting the local dukes and, then, moves to Denmark: king Álfr is killed. In the fifth chapter both Ásmundr and Eyvindr want to marry the deceased king’s daughter, Æsa the beautiful (*in fagra*), who tells them she will marry the one who, returning from the autumn raids, will show her the most beautiful hands. Ásmundr doesn’t spare his hands, but in the end is able to defeat Eyvindr. However, Æsa won’t marry him before her father’s death has been avenged: she sends him to the very spot where king Buðli had the sword sunk into the Mälaren. Ásmundr finds it and leaves to Saxland with it. His arrival is announced there by the dukes’ sister. He is well received and, since every year the dukes have to send a warrior against Hildibrandr and his berserks or to pay a ransom to him, he promises to free them from this obligation. Seeing Ásmundr, Hildibrandr’s messenger cannot avoid noticing his resemblance to his master. While in the woods, Ásmundr kills a berserk and all the warriors Hildibrandr sends against him afterwards. In the eighth and final chapter, Hildibrandr, in his berserk fury, kills his own son and moves against Ásmundr. His sword is broken, he pronounces his last words – reported, in poetic form, in the so-called “death song” – and dies. Having killed his own brother and avenged Æsa’s father, Ásmundr can return home to his mother and his bride-to-be. There he discovers she has a new suitor and he blames her for her faithlessness, kills the suitor and finally marries Æsa.

3. The Faroese Ballads on Ásmund

The story of *Ásmund kappabani* seems to have been quite successful in the Faroe Islands. The character of Ásmund – Faroese *Ásmundur*– appears in at least six Faroese heroic ballads: *Gríms ríma* (CCF nr. 52), *Heljars kvæði* (CCF nr. 63), *Frúgvín Olrína* (CCF nr. 81), *Sniolv’s kvæði* (CCF nr. 91), *Tíðriks kongs ríma* (CCF nr. 97) and

Torbjörn Bekil (CCF nr. 98), four of which – *Gríms ríma*, *Heljars kvæði*, *Snjólvs kvæði* and *Torbjörn Bekil* – are preserved in more than one version. In addition to these, Ásmundur the Champion-Killer is also mentioned in the so-called *Dvørgamoy* ballads (CCF nr. 6, 7, 8, 9), a large group of texts dealing with all the three thematic cores which, in Faroese oral tradition, are connected to the character of Sigurd: the Nibelung cycle, the Dietrich epic and the Ásmund tradition itself.

3.1 *Gríms ríma*

This ballad, preserved in the CCF in two different versions – A and B –, narrates the adventure of Grímur, son of Hildibrandur, against Ásmundur, a family of giants and, finally, Sjúrdur. At the beginning of the text, Grímur expresses his wish to sail in search of adventure; he has a new ship built and eventually leaves. His voyage leads him to a quiet beach where he finds the terrible (*illur*) Ásmundur, who challenges him:

Ásmundur við sín skjöldin fríða:
»Grímur, eg bjóði tær út at stríða!«

Fyrsta sting, ið Grímur legði,
Ásmund burt úr saðli hevði.

Annan stingin legði tá,
svorðið hinum av hondum brá.

»So kannst tú tín hestin venda,
sláa annans svørð av hendi.« (CCF 52A: st. 8-11)

They start dwelling: with the first blow Grímur makes Ásmund fall from his horse and, with the second one makes him lose his sword as well. In version A, Ásmundur's last action in the ballad is represented by the words he addresses to his opponent: "You can turn your horse and knock someone else's sword from their hand!" (CCF 52A: st. 11). In B, Ásmundur is described while, after the duel, he is carving evil (*ramar*) runes in a grassy garden:

Ásmundur gongur í grasgarð,
ramar ristir hann rúnir har. (CCF 52: st. 17)

After having met Ásmundur, Grímur continues his voyage in search of adventure. A storm pushes his ship towards the shore of a land where he finds a giant. Grímur goes ashore and, taking the sword in his hand, enters the cave where the giant lives with his family, beheads the old giant and, after stealing gold and wealth, sails home. In the meantime the giant's son comes home and discovers his father's corpse. Once he finds out who the murderer is, he takes an iron bar on his shoulder and starts looking for Grímur who, by that time, has reached the hall of his residence. While he is there drinking both mead and wine, the young giant enters the hall claiming revenge for his father's death. The two start fighting and Grímur cuts his opponent in two pieces (*í lutir tvá*).

On a sunny day, early in the morning, Grímur rides towards Hildarfjall (B: Lindarfjall), where he meets Sjúrdur Sigmundarson. The two knights fight and Sjúrdur has the better of his opponent. According to Grímur, this could happen only with the help of magic and runes. While A ends with this comment, B narrates the feast celebrating their reconciliation.

3.2. *Heljars kvæði*

Heljars kvæði narrates Ásmundur's quest for Heljar's beautiful daughter, Silri. In the CCF the text is preserved in two versions, A and B. As soon as he hears about the existence of this maiden, Ásmundur has his horse saddled to ride to Heljar's. He reaches the palace gate, which is protected by some white bears, kills the animals with his sword and pronounces some magic words (*rúnir*) to put to sleep the snake further protecting the threshold. In this way, he is able to enter the hall. He immediately declares his wish to marry Heljar's daughter. The landlord wants Silri herself to decide about her future, since she's not easy to rule. After three days in the hall, Ásmund hasn't been able to see the girl yet. He, therefore, decides to change strategy and asks the help of other warriors. Hildibrandur, his son Grímur and Virgar the Strong accept to come to the palace, but none of them succeeds in seeing the maiden. Then Ásmund invites Sjúrdur who, following Nornagestur's advice, brings along his good sword and helmet. On his way towards Heljar's, Sjúrdur meets an old man, who offers him a new sword able to cut the hardest stone. He also tells him how to face both the white bears at the gate and the snake. In this way, he reaches the hall where the other warriors are sitting around a table. After five days, Silri finally appears in the room. Ásmund makes his marriage proposal, but she strongly refuses. He then suggests organizing a tournament: Virgar fights against Grímur and Sjúrdur against Ásmundur. Being in trouble against Sjúrdur and fearing Virgar and Grímur might attack him as well, Ásmundur finds a diversion heading towards the house of a dwarf living in the neighborhood. They attack, defeat him and steal his gold. When the warriors are satisfied with the battle, they all come back home:

Árla um morgunin, sólin skin,
tá fóru kempur hvør til sín.

Onga jomfrú Ásmundur vann,
hann helt so aftur á Suðurland. (CCF 63A: st. 103-104)

And Ásmundur returns home alone, without any maiden.

3.3. Frúgvín Olrina

In this ballad the quest for a beautiful girl is narrated as well. In a castle on a mountain live two maidens, Ingibjörg and Olrina. Once Grímur hears this, he rides towards the castle, where Ingibjörg yields to him. In the meantime, Virgar Valintsson sends a messenger to Olrina. The messenger reaches the castle and delivers the letter containing Virgar's marriage proposal. Olrina refuses, saying that Virgar has already hundreds of maidens in his castle to have fun with and does not need her. In the following fight Geyti, Virgar's messenger, confronts the maidens' father and defeats him and two of his men. Geyti, then, takes all the gold and silver he can find and leaves the castle, where the two girls sit alone. Hearing that, Sniolvur decides to follow and kill him. Once Geyti is defeated, Sniolvur rides to the castle.

Thinking the castle and the girls are unprotected, Ásmundur wants to take advantage of the situation and find a new mistress there:

Ásmundur kom so síðla á degi
við sitt búgvið svørð:
»Nú skal eg mær frillu kjósa,
deyður er hövuðleysur herur.« (CCF 81: st. 49)

Actually, the castle is not unprotected, but rather full of spells and magical ties, which Sniolvur uses to bind Ásmundur:

Borgin var innan við mentir full,
leinkjur, línur og garn,
Sniolvur spenti streingir upp,
Ásmund fastan í jarn. (CCF 81: st. 50)

Bound to an iron bar, Ásmundur asks Sniolvur for mercy, is set free and may return to Selgjaland.

In the meantime Geyti, wounded, reaches his master Virgar and reports his mission to Olrina and his fight against Sniolvur. Virgar decides, therefore, to go himself to the castle. Olrina meets him in front of the door and challenges him saying nobody in the world dares to fight against Sniolvur. Hearing these words, Virgar invites Sniolvur to duel. Sniolvur is defeated; Virgar escorts the sad Olrina to the castle and proclaims peace for both farmers and criminals. The ballad ends by saying that Olrina finally entered a nunnery and that she and Virgar are both saints in Heaven.

3.4. *Torbjörn Bekil*

This ballad, preserved in six different versions, narrates the adventure of Ásmundur against the troll Torbjörn Bekil to avenge the damage he has caused to Halga's farm². Unable to kill the troll by herself, Halga goes to Ásmundur and offers to marry him:

»Eg havi farið um Ísland alt
kristið lið at kannu,
viða man mitt lýti fara,
sjálv biði eg mæð mann.« (CCF 98A: st. 47)

She has travelled all over Ísland to meet Christian people and is looking for a husband, but she won't sleep with Ásmundur before he crosses his sword with Bekil:

» [...] Hvar er Ásmundur, sonur tín,
eg geri tað ei at loyna?
Hann kemur ei í song við mæð
fyrr enn odd við Bekil royna.« (CCF 98A: st. 50)

Ásmund's mother gives him a coat, the sword and the armor. Equipped he is ready for the fight and goes to Halga to accept her proposal. In the meantime, Torbjörn sends a messenger to Halga. When he comes back, he reports having seen a tall man kneeling in front of her. Wondering who this mysterious man could be, Torbjörn suggests he could be an "ashman" (*øskudólgur*)³ and asks fifteen of his men to go against him. They attack Ásmundur without success and are all killed. Seeing that his warriors do not come back, Torbjörn gathers his family to ask for help and advice. The giant Rani, his relative (*frændi*), offers to fight against Ásmundur with his right hand bound. They duel bitterly until Ásmund is able to cut Rani's stomach down to the navel. The same destiny is shared by Gyrðilin and Atli, who wanted to avenge the death of their relative. Finally Torbjörn himself challenges Ásmundur: He is killed and, after him, his mother and his sisters as well.

Tired and wounded Ásmundur goes back to Halga:

Tað var Ásmundur kellingarson,

fellur upp á síni knæ,
meðan hann tað væna vív
til ektar festi sær. (CCF 98A: st. 183)

They get married and live happily ever after:

Drukkið varð teirra brúðleyp,
kátt var teirra lív,
fóru so bæði í eina song,
Ásmundur og hans vív. (CCF 98A: st. 184)

3.5. *Tíðriks kongs ríma*

This ballad, preserved in one single version, represents a *unicum*, since it narrates an episode which is not elsewhere attested in Scandinavian Medieval ballad poetry (Jonsson-Solheim-Danielson 1978: 243).⁴ It tells the story of the unhappy love and jealousy drama between Ásmundur, one of Tíðrik's warriors, and Halga.

After the first stanza, where the narrator speaks in the first person, saying he knows a rhyme and wants to tell it quickly, the ballad begins with the king (probably Tíðrik) sitting on his throne and ordering his men to ride to the wood to collect gold for their country. Hearing that, the young Ásmundur is so happy that he breaks his mead goblet on the table. The warriors saddle their horses, but, at night, before leaving Ásmundur goes to Halga to tell her he is riding to the wood. She wishes him good luck and looks forward to the day he will come back.

At dawn the warriors ride to Brattingsborg and then to the wood. When it gets night, they made a tent to rest. Ásmundur wakes up early that morning and immediately tells his companion the dream he had, in order to have it interpreted. He even offers a reward to the man who will be able to interpret his dream. He does not want to ride any further before telling everybody what he has dreamt. He has dreamt that he was on a green meadow with the sword in the hand when an arrow entered his mouth and ended in his heart, at the same time the sword he was holding fell out from his hand and wanted to cut his feet.

The dream is interpreted on a page as follows:

»Tað ið tú droymdi um brandin tann,
tú var vanur at bera,
tað verður fyri sjálvum tær,
tú letur hann brynjur skera.

Tað ið tú droymdi um ørvina,
ið vildi títt hjarta meina,
tað er fyri tínum vívi,
spælir í borgum heima.« (CCF 97, st. 19-20)

The behavior of the sword which Ásmundur always carries represents something which happens in front of him, when he lets it cut armors, while the arrow hurting his heart stands for his fiancée at home. The page goes on telling Ásmundur that he will lose Halga to another by deceit. In anger Ásmund kills the page by cutting him into two pieces.

The king stands at the window and watches the warriors returning home at night.

In the meantime, at home when everybody sleeps, jarl Einfinn goes to find Halga. He enters the hall, with a knife in his hand and tells Halga that Ásmundur is being unfaithful to her: he is not riding to the woods; he has come back together with

his companions. Halga doesn't want to hear that and sends him away, but she is tormented by suspicion.

Then a letter from the king of Iceland arrives: he wants to impose taxes on Brattingsborg. Tíðrik (named here for the first time in the ballad) goes to his men and asks them if they want to fight or if they prefer the country to be taxed. All his warriors answer they would rather travel to Iceland and put their swords to the test. One of them, Sjúrdur the Strong suggests that Ásmundur should ride first and carry the insignia. Ásmundur accepts, but he wants to speak with Halga first.

She offers him a goblet of mead which has been mixed with poison. Ásmundur drinks and immediately loses colour. On the way to Iceland, Ásmundur falls down dead from his saddle. The king comments on this saying that the loss of one man out of 112 shouldn't damage the army. They ride further and reach the castle of the king of Ísland. Once in the garden, they disguise themselves under some skins and enter the palace where the king is sitting with 500 men.

Sjúrdur stendur for breiða borði,
við búnum svørð í hendi:
»Her skalt tú síggja skattin tann,
ið Tíðrikur kongur sendi.« (CCF 97, st. 47)

Sjúrdur stands in front of the king with the sword ready in his hand. “The king of Ísland will now see which taxes Tíðrik sends him”, he says. Then he lifts his sword and kills the enemy by cutting him into two pieces. After him he also kills fifteen warriors who now lie by their king.

Suddenly a dark giantess comes into the hall and kills many warriors before Virgar hits her with Mimaring and cuts her into two pieces. After having killed the entire army of Ísland, Tíðrik's men ride back home with a rich spoil of gold and silver.

3.6. *Sniolvs kvæði*

According to de Boor (1920: 214), this text represents the oldest and possibly the original Faroese version of Ásmundur's story. Certainly this ballad and, in particular, one of the thirteen versions preserved in the CCF, B (447 stanzas divided in seven *tættir*) – which I will take as basis for presenting the ballad's content – constitutes the longest and most complete witness of the reception of the Ásmundur matter in the Faroe Islands.

The first part of version B – *Rana táttur* – tells the story of Hildibrandur's *Brautwerbung*. Sitting in armour on his golden chair, Hildibrandur asks his men if any of them knows a maiden deserving to become his wife:

Hildibrand setst í gyltan stól,
klæddur í brynju blá:
»Hvar vita tit so væna jomfrú,
mær er sámi at fá?« (CCF 91B: st. 4)

One of his men – his messenger – starts speaking of the daughter of Ólav of Uppland, the beautiful Silkieik, whose face shines like the brightest spring sun:

»[...] Hun ber ikki bleika brá
undir sínum gula hári,
heldur enn tann fagraða summersól,

ið fagurt skín um várið.« (CCF 91B: st. 8)

After hearing these words, Hildibrandur leaves immediately for Uppland. In the meantime Rani is heading to Ólav's to conquer Silkieik. Once there, Rani asks the girl to follow him to Ísansland. Silkieik replies that she is already betrothed to another man, whose name she refuses to tell. Instead of naming him, she calls for her brother, Sniolvur, who challenges Rani to a duel.

Before the fight takes place, another knight in blue armour is seen riding towards the castle: Hildibrandur. He enters the hall, goes to Silkieik and asks her to follow him to Selgjaland. Her answer is positive: this is the knight she is betrothed to and whom she loves. In the duel which follows Hildibrandur defeats and kills Rani. Without knowing which of the two opponents has died, Silkieik sends her brother Sniolvur to the battlefield to check it out. Hildibrandur does not know he is his future brother-in-law and attacks him. Sniolvur is quick enough to find a shelter, so that Hildibrandur gives up the fight and reaches Silkieik. They get officially engaged and move to Brandavík.

At Christmas Hildibrandur and Silkieik invite some nuns who predict that their son – a brave warrior who will hardly find his equal – will fall under his father's sword. Hearing this prophecy, both Hildibrandur and his wife are deeply shaken: while Silkieik wants Hildibrandur to destroy his sword, he prefers to sink it in the sea, so that nobody can find it:

Hildibrand sigldi for Heljar norður,
tað var mest av sút,
hann tók sín gylta, bitra brand
og varpar í havið út. (CCF 91B: st. 86)

In *Sniolvs táttur* Sniolvur's *Brautwerbung* is narrated. Wishing to find a girl deserving to marry him, Sniolvur asks his mother for advice. When she suggests he should take a maiden from Uppland, he answers that none of them can sleep in his arms and that he wants to conquer the daughter of the duke of Brunsvík. He has a new ship built and sails towards the duke's land. Seeing him coming, the duke sends Sjúrdur to the beach to kill him. As soon as he sets foot on land, Sniolvur expresses his wish to conquer the duke's daughter, Adalløs. The girl enters the hall and falls immediately in love with Sniolvur. She, therefore, accepts to follow him to Uppland to marry him. After their wedding has been sumptuously celebrated, one night Adalløs wakes up from a strange dream: her husband was fighting against a knight who eventually cuts off his head. His name was Ásmund.

The third part of the ballad, *Golmars táttur*, focuses on Ásmundur's search for Hildibrandur's sword sunk into the sea. Having been told about the existence of this extraordinary weapon, Ásmund leaves for Gantarvík. There he meets duke Golmar who asks him the reason for his journey. Ásmundur replies that he wants to seduce the beautiful Ingibjörg. Golmar tries to resist, but is taken away by force, while Ásmund obtains the object of his desire. One day after, he forces Golmar to accompany him and show him the very spot where Hildibrandur sank his weapon. He dives repeatedly and finally finds it. With his new sword in hand Ásmundur kills Golmar and returns home together with Ingibjörg.

Hildibrands táttur echoes the description of the fight between Ásmund and Hildibrand at the end of the *Ásmundar saga kappabana*. The duel's outcome is, however, different, since the battle doesn't end with Hildibrandur's death, but with Ásmundur returning home naked after Hildibrandur has cut in two pieces his armour:

Hildibrand gav so stórt eitt hogg
av so miklum móði,
klývur brynju av Ásmundi,
hann nakin eftir stóð.

[...] Ásmundur snúðist haðan burt
bæði við sít og sorg,
glaður snúðist Hildibrandur
aftur í sína borg. (CCF 91B: st. 267, 270)

In *Virgars táttur*, Ásmundur fights against Virgar Valintsson. After forging a new silver armour, Ásmundur sends a messenger to Virgar challenging him to a duel. Before answering, Virgar listens to the girls living in his castle who foresees his defeat on that very day. Sure that no one can – fairly – hurt him while on Skemming, Virgar leaves the hall and reaches the battlefield. He is definitely stronger, but Ásmund knows magic and, in this way, is able to hit his opponent between the ribs and the shoulders. It takes a while before he's healed and may return to his golden castle, where he probably still is.

The same narrative's scheme of the challenge (German *Herausforderungsschema*) is present in the sixth part of the ballad, *Ásmundar táttur*, where Ásmundur encounters Sniolvur. This time the challenge to the strong warrior is determined by Ásmundur's wish to seduce his wife, Adalløs. Sniolvur is killed in the duel and Ásmundur rides with his victim's head to the latter's castle. Seeing him riding towards her, Adalløs understands immediately that this knight is not her beloved husband. When Ásmundur tells her he wants to seduce her, she repulses him, saying she won't have any other man after Sniolvur and adds that Ásmundur could defeat him only by employing magic. He, then, shows her Sniolvur's head, her belt goes into pieces and her heart is broken.

Gríms táttur begins with Ásmundur out at the sea asking if any warrior is still alive. From that moment on his name is changed into *kappabani*.⁵ Hearing about the existence of Grímur, a warrior against whom nobody dares fight, he sends him a messenger inviting him to fight. The news that Ásmundur has already killed Sniolvur scares Grímur, who doesn't want to encounter a warrior using witchcraft. He, therefore, offers him the armour of fifty warriors, but refuses to duel with him. Ásmundur goes, then, to Oddur the Strong and tells him that one particular warrior in the wood doesn't want to encounter him. Both Oddur himself and his relative Ívint offer to go and fight against Grímur, who eventually defeats and kills them. Since Grímur still refuses to duel with him, Ásmundur goes to Hildibrandur, where Silkieik is telling her husband what she had dreamt: he was fighting with his own son, unseated him and cut off his head. Hildibrandur reassures her saying that his sword is lying in the deep of the sea. When Ásmundur enters his house and explains to him that he cannot defeat a dangerous warrior because he refuses to encounter him personally, Hildibrandur offers to fight against him if he can borrow Ásmundur's sword. Grímur and Hildibrandur meet on the battlefield and duel until the unsuspecting father cuts his son in two pieces. Wishing to know who this valiant opponent is, Hildibrandur asks for his name and discovers that he is his own son. He throws away the sword cursing the stomach and bones that have picked it up from the sea. The ballad ends with this remark:

Satt er tað, ið talað er,
so er greint ífrá,
eingin ger at fortvinast,
hvát nornur leggja á. (CCF 91B: st. 447)

No one can change what the Norns have devised.

All other versions preserved in the CCF present a different arrangement of this narrative material. The version A begins with *Golmars táttur* (the third *táttur* in B), then *Sniolvs táttur*, *Ásmundar táttur* and, finally, *Gríms táttur* are inserted.

Version C contains two additional *tættir*, *Hildardalsstríð* and *Risin á Blálandi*, which are not present in B. In *Hildardalsstríð* (C₁) the antecedent to *Gríms táttur* is narrated. On a sunny day, early in the morning, Grímur goes to his father, Hildibrandur, and tells him he wants to ride away:

Grímur stendur for breiða borði,
smílist undir lín:
»Ég vil ríða upp á land,
sæli faðir mín.«

Grímur stendur for breiða borði
eina morgonstund:
»Ég vil ríða upp á land,
sum liggur for vestan lund.« (CCF 91C₁: st. 4-5)

Hearing her son is going to leave, Silkieik tells him to go to Ingibjörg. Grímur immediately jumps on his horse and rides away. Hearing that a knight in blue armour is approaching the castle, Ingibjörg goes out to meet him. She welcomes and invites him to her table, offering him mead. After three days, Ingibjörg finally starts telling Grímur her story: her father and her two brothers had been killed by Geyti, who had also stolen all the gold; she had, therefore, armed five knights, the best in the country, but none of them could defeat Geyti who killed them all. Hearing that, Grímur stands up and commits himself to riding into the pagan people's wood the following morning. And so he does. After reaching the very spot where Ingibjörg's father is buried, he finds Geyti, a warrior who was so strong to be able to kill five men with one single hand. Grímur puts him to flight and then returns to the castle bringing back Ingibjörg's gold. The princess welcomes him, saying that nobody but him will be allowed to stand in front of her castle. In the meantime, Geyti plots revenge against Grímur. Knowing that Virgar Valintsson is in his golden castle, he rides towards it. Virgar greets Geyti and invites him to drink both mead and wine. But the guest scarcely cares for the baquet, he has come to ask Virgar's help against Grímur:

Geyti so til orða tekur,
mælir av tungum vanda:
»Vilt tú koma í Hildartal
í stríð við mær at standa?«

Svaraði Virgar Valintsson,
væl kann tungu týða:
»Hvussu er kempan á navni nevnd,
vit skulu móti stríða?«

»Grím læt kempan kalla seg,
ið eg kundi ikki vinna,
eg svørji tann eið við mína trúgv,
móðir er Hildan svinna.« (CCF, 91C₁: st. 42-44)

Hearing the name of the warrior – and in particular that of his mother, Hild – Geyti wants to attack, Virgar accepts to go with him to Hildardal and to fight at his side there. The two ride together to Hólmgarð, where Sjúrdur Sigmundarson lives. They find

him and Geyti asks him if he wants to accompany them to Hildardal to fight against Grímur. Interestingly, this time Grímur is not introduced as Hild's son, but, consistently with the first stanzas of the ballad, as Hildibrandur and Silkieik's offspring:

»Grím læt kempan kalla seg,
man meg rætt um minna,
Hildibrandur faðir hans
og móðir Silkieik svinna.« (CCF, 91C₁: st. 53)

Sjúrdur takes his shield and sword and binds his helmet. Once he is ready, they – Geyti, Virgar, Sjúrdur and Nornagestur – ride away. While they are on their way, Sjúrdur suggests sending Tírirant to bring their deathly message (*feigðarbrøv*) to Grímur. Tírirant meets Grímur and throws down the gautlet: after a short fight, Grímur promises to ride to the wood the following morning, as soon as the sun rises. Then he sends a messenger home to his father to asks for help in the battle against Geyti and his companions. Hildibrandur immediately leaves. Once he has reached his son, he instructs him in this way:

»Tú skalt ríða mót Virgari
og øllum hansara heri,
síðan aftur mót Geyta í Loft
og geva honum sár of svørði.

Sjálvur skal eg mót Sjúrði ríða
og øllum hansara liði,
honum fylgir Nornagestur
merkismaður við.« (CCF, 91C₁: st. 85-86)

Grímur will ride against Virgar and his men and then try to inflict a wound with a sword to Geyti, while Hildibrandur will fight against Sjúrdur, Nornagestur and their companions. The following morning, Grímur and Virgar start duelling: Grímur is stronger, he even manages to cut into pieces the horse Geyti is riding. For this reason, both Virgar and Geyti run away, while Hildibrandur turn to fight against Sjúrdur and Nornagestur. Hildibrandur is about to kill Nornagestur, but he manages to escape and Sjúrdur is hit so strongly that his armour is cut into pieces. Then Hildibrandur hits a dwarf (not better specified) killing him together with all other warriors who are there. This *táttur* ends with a comment on Hildibrandur's tragic destiny and on Virgar riding back to his castle:

Hetta var tað síðsta stríð,
satt at siga frá,
uttan har á grønum vølli,
hann sín sonin vá.

Uttan hann á grønum vølli
hann sín sonin vá,
eg svørji tann eið við mína trúgv,
tá lá hann sjálvur hjá.

Síðla var um aftanin,
ent var hetta stríðið,
tað er Virgar Valintsson,
hann aftur í borgir ríður. (CCF 91C₁: st. 108-110)

According to this version, this is the last battle of Hildibrandur, who will kill his

own son and, therefore, lie dead at his side.⁶ Late at night, after the battle has ended, Virgar Valintsson rides back to his castle.

The second *táttur* included in C, *Risin á Blálandi* (C₂), begins with Virgar riding to his golden castle with both gold and precious fabric. Once he is there, he has some letters written to Ásmundur the *kempubani* who reads them quickly and expresses his wish to kill Grímur. He, therefore, sails off to look for him. In the meantime Grímur decides to sail in search for adventure. He has a new ship built of red gold. Going to the beach, Grímur meets Ásmundur who challenges him. They duel until Ásmundur falls from his horse. Grímur weighs anchor and sails away. His voyage will be dangerous because of the bad weather evoked by the perfidious Ásmundur, who knows magic:

So var veður á sjónum hart,
aldan reis frá grunni,
voldi tað illi Ásmundur,
hann illgeringar kundi. (CCF 91C₂: st. 24)

The boat is finally driven northwards, to Trøllabotn, where the sun never shines. Grímur goes ashore, enters a giant's cave and cuts the giant in two pieces with his sword. He takes everything he can find and leaves. While returning to the shore, he meets a mighty warrior against whom he fights. After the duel, Grímur asks his opponent what is name is: he's Sjúrdur Sigmundarson. Hearing this name, Grímur says he doesn't want to fight against him, he prefers riding home, since Ásmundur is in Brandarvík and he expects him soon.

This *táttur* clearly parallels the events narrated in *Gríms ríma*. This correspondence can be explained in two ways: On the one hand, this episode of Grímur sailing in search of adventure and then fighting against Ásmundur, a giant (or a family of giants) and finally Sjúrdur could have existed separately in a form not dissimilar from the two versions of *Gríms ríma* and have, later, been incorporated in *Sniolv's kvæði* as a continuation of the *Hildardalsstrið* story. On the other hand, *Gríms ríma* could have been developed from pre-existing narrative material as a sort of spin-off of *Sniolv's kvæði*, as its late recording (not before 1822) could suggest.

Version D consists of *Golmars táttur*, *Ásmundar táttur*, *Annar Sniolv's táttur*⁷ and *Gríms táttur*.

Versions E and F are fully centered on Sniolvur, since they narrate both his *Brautwerbung* (*Sniolv's táttur*) and his tragic end at the hand of Ásmundur (*Ásmundar táttur*).

Both G and H contain only the stanzas referring to the *Stríðið í Hildardal*.⁸

Under the letter I in CCF is preserved – with the title *Ásmunds kvæði* – the version of the cycle's tragic epilogue registered by Alexander Weyhe.

K – the version of the ballad recorded in the so-called Koltursbók – consists of two parts: *Hildar táttur*, roughly covering the events described in *Hildardalsstrið*, and *Gríms táttur* narrating it and, thus, concluding the ballad.

Version L includes *Rana táttur*, *Hildibrands táttur* og *Virgars táttur* together, *Hildar táttur* and *Golmars táttur*.

Finally, versions M and N only consist of one *táttur* each, both noted down by Jakob Jakobsen in Suðuroy: *Rana táttur* and *Annar Sniolv's táttur*.

This large variety testifies a high degree of stratification of the Ásmund matter in the Faroe Islands and has been employed by Patricia Conroy (1978) to argue the full vitality of Faroese heroic ballad tradition long after it was first recorded by Jens Christian Svabo. Comparing versions A (recorded by Svabo in 1781-1782), B (recorded by Johannes Clemensen on behalf of P. Hentze in Sand in 1819) and C (recorded by

Clemensen in Skálavík in 1821), Conroy (1978: 37 and following) tries to demonstrate that the narrative known as *Sniolvs kvæði* had been expanded, on Sandoy, with the insertion of new material in the years between Svabo's and Clemensen's recordings. This expansion can be divided in two layers: the first is represented by the three *tættir* – *Rana táttur*, *Hildibrands táttur* and *Virgars táttur* – which are present in B, but not in A, while the second is constituted by the two additional *tættir* – *Hildardalsstrið* and *Risin á Blálandi* – contained in C. A further, third, layer of expansion of the Faroese Ásmund cycle is, according to Conroy (1978: 46), to be found in *Gríms ríma*, *Tíðriks kongs ríma*, *Frúgvín Olrína* and *Heljars kvæði*, which should all be considered spin-offs of *Sniolvs kvæði*, the main Faroese witness of the Ásmund matter.

4. Icelandic Ásmundr and Faroese Ásmundur

As appears from the account given above, the Faroese ballads on Ásmund preserve a version of Ásmund's story diverging in many respects from the Icelandic *Ásmundar saga kappabana*. These divergences concern both the plot and the characterization of the protagonist Ásmund.

In the first chapter of the Icelandic saga the genealogy of the two protagonists, Hildebrandr and Ásmundr, is presented together with the story of the two swords forged by king Buðli's guests Olíus and Alíus, one of which will be fatal to Hildebrandr in the dramatic climax of the narrative. None of the Faroese ballads reports this antecedent: in *Sniolvs kvæði* the first time we meet the sword it is already in Hildibrandur's possession and we only discover it has some peculiarity when the three nuns – who were probably originally the three Norns – foresee it will cause Grímur's death.

This is, in fact, another striking difference between the saga and *Sniolvs kvæði*: in the Faroese ballad the dramatic climax is not represented by a fratricide, but by a paternal filicide, with an unaware Hildibrandur killing his own son, Grímur. The family drama of a father fighting against his offspring and finally killing him is reminiscent of the Old High German *Hildebrandslied* and is hinted at in both the stanzas inserted at the end of the saga and known as *Hildibrand's Death Song*:

Stendr mér at höfði hlíf in brotna,
eru þar taldir tígir ins átta
manna þeirra, er ek at morði varð.
Liggr þar inn svási sonr at höfði,
eptirerfingi, er ek eiga gat,
óviljandi aldrs synjaðak (Detter 1981: 99).

And in the passage of the saga, where Hildebrand's fury is described: “En í vanstilli þessu er á hönunum var – þa sá hann son sinn ok drap hann þegar” (Detter 1891: 98). According to Halvorsen (1951: 15), the author of the written version of the saga derived this piece of information from the death song, without properly understanding to which episode it was alluded.

The tragic epilogue of the saga is announced in the first chapter by Olíus, the sword maker, who curses king Buðli saying this will cause the death of his grandson: “Hann segir: járn gott er sverð, enda munu nú nöckur forföll áliggja til hamingjubrotz, þvíat þat mun verða at bana inum göfgustum bræðrum, dóttursonum þínum” (Detter 1891: 82). In the Faroese ballad Grímur's death is first prophesied by the three nuns invited by Hildibrandur at Christmas and then recalled by Silkieik's premonitory dream.⁹

Another fundamental difference between the two texts is represented by the

connotation of the protagonist. In fact, if in the *Ásmundar saga* all actions and military enterprises carried out by Ásmundr find their explanation both in the political logic of territorial expansion and in the wish to protect and avenge his own or his allies' sovereignty, in the *Sniolv's kvæði* Ásmundur is depicted as a robber and rapist who chooses his victims arbitrarily, following a sort of animal instinct. Even his repeated successes on the battlefield cannot be fully ascribed to his skill and valour, but rather to the use of sorcery he had probably learnt with his mother, a notorious witch, as it is frequently hinted at:

»Sniolvur var mín móðurbróðir,
hans líki kann ikki finnast,
tað var alt við illgeringar,
hann mundi sigur vinna.

Hann hevur átt sær móður ta,
ein er verst í land,
hon hevur manga raska kempur
lagt for eiturgrand.« (CCF 91B: st. 354-355)

Ásmundur's familiarity with magic is also attested in other Faroese ballads, such as *Gríms ríma B*, where he is depicted while carving some runes or *Heljars kvæði*, where he pronounces some magic words to put to sleep the snake protecting the threshold of Heljar's palace. Arbitrariness of military action and brutal attitude towards women are distinctive features of Ásmundur in all Faroese ballads, except *Torbjörn Bekil*. Here he has the positive connotation of the hero fighting to protect Halga who has been attacked by the terrible troll. The scene of Halga going to Ásmundur's and asking him to avenge her father's death parallels – in the saga – the sister of the dukes of Saxony complaining about Hildibrandr's tyranny, so that Ásmundr moves against him to protect her and her country.

Similarly, the stanzas narrating how Torbjörn Bekil sends his warriors to fight against Ásmundur – who reproaches him for having instigated other warriors to fight instead of encountering him personally – echoes in this passage of the saga: “Þá mælti Ásmundr: fyrir hví hleypir Hildibrandr út mönnum sínum, en sitr heima sjálfr ok etr á mik smámenni?” (Detter 1891: 97).

Another possible correspondence between the Icelandic saga and the Faroese Ásmund ballads could be identified in *Tíðriks kongs ríma*, where the scene of the jealous Halga poisoning Ásmundur could be interpreted as an expansion of this passage in the saga:

“Hann hitti þá ekki hertugana, ok fór þá á þann bæ, er móðir hans átti ok Æsa en fagra konungs dóttir, þá ætlar maðr at biðja hennar [...] Konungsdóttir bað hann af sér reiði, þótt hún hefði verit í tilstilli um þetta, ok lét vârkunn við sik, en lét mikit atkvæði fylgt hafa vâpnunum, en þótt hann hefði reiðzt henni, þá minntist hann ástar hennar við sik, ok gerði brúðlaup sitt, ok gekk at eiga Æsu hina fögru, en drap þann, er hennar hafði beðit, ok er sá eigi nefndr.” (Detter 1891: 100).

Even though the motive of unfaithfulness and jealousy is present in both cases, the Faroese ballad reverses the situation: Ásmund himself is suspected to be unfaithful, not his wife (or wife-to-be) and is, therefore, killed by his jealous partner. If we accept that *Tíðriks kongs ríma* finds its root in the Icelandic saga, we must assume that this role reversal has been suggested by the negative connotation assumed by the character

Ásmund in the Faroese heroic tradition: as a womanizer and rapist more likely to betray rather than to be betrayed and deserves punishment.

However, only part of the narrative material employed in the Faroese Ásmund ballads finds a correspondence within the *Ásmundar saga kappabana*. Apart from the above-mentioned parallels between the saga and *Torbjörn Bekil* or *Tíðriks kongs ríma*, *Gríms ríma*, *Heljars kvæði*, *Frúgvín Olrína* and *Torbjörn Bekil* itself narrate a series of adventures involving Ásmundur – as well as other famous warriors, such as Sjúrdur or Virgar Valintsson – and having no connection with the events portrayed in the Icelandic saga. The same can be said about the *Dvørgamoy* ballads. Even in *Sniolvs kvæði* only three *tættir* (*Rana táttur*, *Golmars táttur* and *Gríms táttur*) correspond to the saga, while all other parts are nothing but the obsessive and formulaic repetition of the same narrative scheme resulting from the combination of the *Brautwerbungs-* and the *Herausforderungsschema*: wishing to seduce beautiful girls, Ásmundur challenges their guardians who are usually stronger than he, but are humiliated when not put to the sword. Only once, against Hildibrandur, is he defeated and left naked with his armour cut into pieces, but this humiliation simply represents one of the motivating forces of Ásmundur's later military enterprises. On the whole, *Sniolvs kvæði* moves from the antecedent constituted by Hildibrandur's successful quest for Silkieik and the prophecy about their son's destiny and, in a sort of spiral movement determined by the incremental repetition of the duel sequences, culminates in the filicide committed by Hildibrandur. The continuous repetition of both narrative sequences (not only attempted to seduction, challenges and fights, but also premonitory dreams) and poetic formulae helps giving unity and cohesion to the ballad which, despite various ellipses and inconsistencies, appears quite well-structured in comparison to other Faroese *kvæðir*.

5. Concluding remarks

In this study I have analyzed the reception of the Ásmund's story in the Faroe Islands in order to get the most accurate image of the development of the characters and plot of the Icelandic *Ásmundar saga kappabana* on its way east.

On the basis of the results of this analysis, it is possible to agree with de Boor (1920: 214) and exclude that *Sniolvs kvæði* derives from the saga in the form we know it. On the other hand, the remark on the unavoidability of the fate devised by the Norns in the last stanza of the ballad and its correspondence with some of the Latin lines inserted by Saxo in his account of Hildigerus' death¹⁰ don't seem to be sufficient for assuming *Sniolvs kvæði* derives directly from Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, since allusions to the Norns are not infrequent in Faroese oral poetry (Halvorsen 1951: 17). In addition, the confusion between two phonetically similar terms such as *nornir* (norns) and *nunnur* (nuns), which has evidently taken place in *Rana táttur*, indicates, in my opinion, that the final reference to the Norns is perceived as purely formulaic and is in no way put into relation with the events previously narrated.

As suggested by Halvorsen (1951: 50), *Sniolvs kvæði* could be derived from another form of Ásmund's narrative material. In this version the character Ásmund has a strongly negative connotation: he's a robber and a rapist, who doesn't fight fairly, but achieves his victories with the help of witchcraft. The transformation of his mother into a witch or female troll (*kelling*) must have taken place once Faroese oral tradition had lost the consciousness of Hildibrand and Ásmund being half-brothers. After this detail had been lost, there was no more motivation for the dramatic climax, since the death of either opponent wouldn't have constituted a family tragedy. At this point, *Sniolvs kvæði*

was probably newly contaminated with the oldest epic nucleus on Hildibrand and family tragedy was reintroduced in the tradition in the form of paternal filicide.

Over the centuries in which the ballad survived in a purely oral dimension, this narrative core was expanded through the insertion of new adventures, roughly corresponding to the various *tættir* composing the ballad. These were concluded in themselves and could probably be sung and danced separately. Such complex narrative was very likely to entertain Faroese people for several *kvöldsetur* (Wylie 1987: 43) in a row, not too dissimilarly from today's TV-dramas and soap operas. These expansions, some of which appear to be quite late – such as *Hildardalsstrið* and *Risin á Blálandi* –, are often originated by Ásmundur's sexual desire and contribute to increase, especially in a serialized performance, the tension towards the dramatic epilogue of the story. Some of these additions are completely new compositions, while some are the result of the incorporation of characters and events from originally separate traditions into this particularly successful cycle.

Ásmundur's attraction for women plays a fundamental role in the other Faroese ballads where he appears and which, apart from the case of *Torbjörn Bekil*, don't show any correspondence with the Icelandic saga. In the majority of these texts, Ásmundur is simply a warrior (usually on the quest for a beautiful girl), who often shares his adventures with other famous heroes, such as Sigurd, Virgar Valintsson or Dietrich of Bern.

Since both the Icelandic saga and the Faroese ballads had been transmitted orally for centuries before being fixed in the form which has come down to us, it is impossible to reconstruct the exact course followed by the Ásmund story on its way east, towards the Faroes. However, I have tried to demonstrate that once it had reached the Islands, the Ásmund story, far from having a linear development, was repeatedly altered as a result of the loss of original details, of the insertion of new narrative material or of the contamination with other heroic traditions.

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NOTES

¹ In this study I'll use the Icelandic nominative form of the names, when speaking of the Icelandic saga, the Faroese nominative form for the characters mentioned in the Faroese ballads and the English form when mentioning a character in general, e.g. Ásmund, Hildibrand, Sigurd, Dietrich, etc.

² As pointed out by Conroy (1978: 41), the original protagonist of this ballad couldn't possibly be the same Ásmund we meet in the Icelandic saga and in the saga-related Faroese ballads of the Ásmund cycle. Assuming the existence of two different characters named Ásmund – Ásmund *illi* or *ungi* and Ásmund *kellingarson* – it is possible to explain how a robber and rapist like Ásmund *illi* could be asked for help against a troll by a maiden. The nickname *kellingarson*, “son of a witch, or of a female troll” (Poulsen & al. 1998: 576), with which Ásmund is usually referred to, originally indicated only the positively connotated Ásmund we find in *Torbjörn Bekil*, but after the confusion of the two characters it became common in the ballads dealing with Ásmund *illi*'s adventures as well.

³ In modern Faroese this term refers to a “person sitting inside near the fireplace (and raking the ashes)”, but also “idler, useless creature” (Poulsen et al. 1998: 1423).

⁴ de Boor (1920: 226) brings in connection this ballad with the Danish *vise Kong Diderik i Birtingsland*, even though this relationship seems to be represented exclusively by the allusion to the expedition to Bertagaland (no reference to the series of duels is present), “as if some Faroese ballad man grafted an Ásmund story onto the beginning of the Danish ballad.” (Conroy 1978: 48). As a result of this operation – despite the title –, the character of Tiðrik plays only a marginal role in the text which is rather centered on Ásmundur.

⁵ This nickname only occurs in another Faroese ballad, *Dvørgamoyggjin fagra* or *Dvørgamoy II* (CCF nr. 7), where stanza 53 of version B and C says: “Tað er Sjurður Sigmundarson, / hann situr á baki Grana: / »Ásmundur ber eitt heiðursnavn, / teir kalla hann kappabana.«” Elsewhere, Ásmundur is usually referred to as *kellingarson*.

⁶ This comment on Hildibrandur's destiny is a narrative device to foreshadow the ballad's dramatic climax. As pointed out by Conroy (1978: 42), the form assumed by anticipation of the future episodes within the cycle can be used as a criterion to “date” the one or the other *táttur*. In fact, if, older texts tended to anticipate the story's future development “by means of an extended dramatic scene containing some element of the supernatural – a prophecy, a dream, or curse”, younger *tættir*, on the other hand, usually avoid taking recourse to supernatural elements and prefer to make an aside to the audience (as here), or provide a character with foreknowledge (see for example Grímur – at the close of *Risin á Blálandi* – telling Sjurður that he expects Ásmundur to arrive soon).

⁷ The events narrated in this *táttur* roughly correspond to those contained – in B – in *Ásmundar táttur*: Ásmundur rides to Uppland in search for adventure and kills one hundred men of Sniolvur's. When Sniolvur himself confronts him asking the reason of his violent behavior, Ásmundur tells him he wants to seduce Adalús (in st. 9: Ingibjörg). This won't happen until Sniolvur is alive: the two start fighting. Ásmundur cuts his opponent in two pieces and rides towards the castle. Seeing Sniolvur's head, lady Adalús dies of grief. The denomination *annar* (“second”) can be only understood in the basis of the

entire cycle of ballads, where Sniolvur had already been the protagonist of another *táttur* – *Sniolvys táttur* (in a form similar to those in B) – narrating Sniolvur’s *Brautwerbung* and, as such, constituting the antecedent to this, second, *Sniolvys táttur*.

⁸ In H – corresponding to the text noted down by Alexander Weyhe and preserved in Lbs 1458 of the Landsbókasafn Íslands in Reykjavík – the first 36 stanzas are missing.

⁹ In version A of *Sniolvys kvæði* only the premonitory dream is present and Hildibrandur himself has it: “Hildibrand vaknar á miðjari nátt, / hann sigur sín dreym so brátt: / »Undarligt hefur fyri meg borist / alla hesa nátt.« // Hildibrand so til orða tók, / í læt sær víkja: / »Mær tókti, sum mitt góða svørð / var komið frá havsins dýpi. // Mær tókti, eg reið á grønum vølli / við so lítið trá, / har kom Grímur, sonur mín, / eg hogg hans høvur frá.« (CCF 91A: st. 158-160).

¹⁰ “Sed quaecunque ligat Parcarum praescius ordo, / Quaecunque arcanum superae rationis adumbrat, / Seu quae fatorum serie praevisa tenentur, / Nulla caducarum rerum conversion tollet.” (Olrík & Ræder 1931: 204).