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Women and ships in the Viking world

Perhaps the most splendid, and certainly one of the best-known, burials of the Viking Age is that of the two women who were put to rest in the Oseberg ship.¹ And one of the most recent discoveries of a Viking Age boat-burial, found at Scar on Sanday, in Orkney, in 1991, was of a high-status, elderly woman buried along with a younger man and a child.² This symbolic association, in death, of women and ships, though common enough in the Viking Age,³ deserves notice, for it is not easily paralleled in the evidence of poetry and sagas, in which ships are more commonly associated with the men who captained and crewed them in life. In this paper, I examine more closely some linguistic and literary evidence to see what, if any, associations there were between living women and ships in the Viking Age and after.

While poets of the Viking Age were more likely to have composed about ships and sailing than about women, one Icelandic poet managed to combine both of his poetic passions in one stanza. Hallfreðr Óttarsson, famed as a convert to Christianity, and court poet of Óláfr Tryggvason, king of Norway, compared his beloved, Kolfinna, to a ship in full sail:⁴

Þykki mér, es ek þekki
þunnísunga Gunni,
sem fleybrautir fljóti
fley meðal tveggja eyja,
en þás sér á Sögu
saums í kvinna flaumi,
sem skrautbúin skríði
skeið með gyldum reiða.

It seems to me, when I catch sight of the Gunnr [valkyrie] of fine headdresses [woman], as if a *fley* were floating on the *fley*-roads [sea] between two islands, and looking at the Sága [goddess] of the seam [woman] in the stream of women, is like (looking at) the gliding of a splendidly-prepared *skeið*, with gilded equipment.

The poet makes an explicit comparison using two words meaning 'ship', *fley* and *skeið*, but it is possible to find further implicit comparisons. Kolfinna is the 'valkyrie of fine headdresses', with her white linen headdress also suggesting the sail of the ship. She is the 'goddess of the seam', suggesting her carefully-made clothes, but the word *saumr* is regularly also used of the rows of nails and rivets of a ship. The ship's equipment is 'gilded', clearly suggesting her jewellery, since *reiði* usually means 'tackle', including both ropes and various devices for securing and controlling them, none of which would normally be gilded. The seascape in which this lady-ship is sailing is also significant. Although it is usual to interpret *fley* as a small ferry, shuttling between two islands,⁵ this distorts the semantics of *meðal*, which means 'positioned between' rather than 'moving between'.⁶ A small and humble ferry would also provide too much of a contrast with the other ship-word used of Kolfinna, *skeið*, normally a splendid warship.⁷ The image in Hallfreðr's stanza is rather of a ship sailing through a strait or sound, past islands on either side. These islands have a double meaning too: a common type of base word used in kennings for 'woman' means 'ground', and *ey* 'island' comes into this category.⁸ The islands between which the ship is sailing are thus the flock of women among whom Kolfinna finds herself, also called, with a watery metaphor, the *vinna flaumr* 'stream of women'. Overall, the stanza suggests beauty and grace, and the poet's use of the word *skeið*, normally used of the long and narrow warships of the type of Skuldelev 2 or Haithabu 1, suggests that his beloved was slender as well as graceful.⁹

Hallfreðr's poetic comparison of woman and ship is paralleled in the everyday poetry of nicknames. However,

knarrarbringa, 'with a chest like a *knorr*', conjures up quite a different kind of woman from Kolfinna, as a *knorr* was a much beamier ship than a *skeið*. Nowadays, someone who is 'broad in the beam' has an extensive backside, but the Norse nickname refers to a lady with an ample bosom, a bit like the front view of a *knorr*. That, at any rate, is the usual interpretation.¹⁰ In a recent article William Sayers launched a new etymology for *knorr*, proposing that it was a 'ship whose hull was prominently marked by nail heads'.¹¹ This is unconvincing for a number of reasons which are not relevant here, but also because it makes it more difficult to interpret the nickname *knarrarbringa*: one of Sayers' admittedly tentative suggestions is that it refers to a woman with 'prominent nipples, if the studded appearance of the hulls is being imagined'.¹² Whatever the etymology of *knorr*, it is most likely that, in the nickname *knarrarbringa*, the comparison of a woman to a ship has to do with some perceived similarity in their shape. The nickname is given to two women in Icelandic sources, one Ásný in *Sturlunga saga* and one Þorbjörg who appears in a number of sources, including *Landnámabók*.¹³ Both women had a father with a ship-related nickname. Þorbjörg's was called Gils *skeiðarnef*, presumably because his nose (*nef*) was long and thin like a *skeið*, while Ásný's father was *Knarrar-Leifr* '*knorr*-Leifr'. It is quite likely that both women's nicknames were as much a pun on their fathers' nicknames as a comment on their own appearance. *Skeið* also occurs in the nickname of a certain Þorgríma, also mentioned in *Landnámabók*, called *skeiðarkinn* '*skeið*-cheek'. Since nicknames in *skeið*- tend to be compounded with body parts (as well as Þorgríma *skeiðarkinn* and Gils *skeiðarnef* there is an Oddr *skeiðkollr* '*skeið*-head'),¹⁴ I take it that these nicknames refer to the shape, in this case the length and slenderness, of the body-part concerned.

Thus a woman could be like a ship, but the Viking imagination did not conversely figure ships as women. There is no Viking Age evidence for the more recent feminization of ships, which often bear the names of women, from the *Mary Rose* to the *QEII*, or the countless boats called *Mary-Jane* or *Belinda* which can still be seen in fishing harbours. Such ship-

names as are preserved from the Viking Age tend to be of animals (real or imaginary), and are mainly masculine in gender.¹⁵ On the one occasion when a Viking Age ship-name alludes to a human being, it is to a man: the Icelandic poet Sigvatr once mentions a ship called *Karlhofði* 'Man-headed', owned by King Óláfr Haraldsson of Norway. From this, Snorri concocts an unlikely story that it had this name from the king's head on its prow, carved by the king himself.¹⁶ Feminine ship-names start to appear in the twelfth century, often religious ones, like the Norwegian king Sverrir's *Mariásúð*.¹⁷ Earl Rognvaldr of Orkney had two ships with grammatically feminine names, *Hjólþ* 'Help' and *Fífa* 'Arrow', and in one stanza he calls them *víf* 'women', since *víf* usefully rhymes with *Fífa*.¹⁸ But the comparison is not developed poetically in any way.

There is thus little linguistic evidence for a close symbolic association between women and ships in or even after the Viking Age. The extended poetic comparison of Hallfreðr's stanza is unique, and neither nicknames nor ship-names suggest that ships were regularly or particularly identified with women. The relationship was much more likely to be that of woman as onlooker, as landlubbing admirer of both nautical technology and masculine prowess at sea. This idea is developed at some length in three stanzas by Þjóðólfr Arnórsson, describing the departure of Haraldr harðráði's royal fleet from Trondheim, possibly in 1062:¹⁹

Skeið sák framm at flœði,
fagrt sprund, ór ǫ hrundit.
Kenndu, hvar liggr fyr landi
lǫng súð dreka ens príða.
Orms glóar fax of farmi
fráns, síz ýtt vas hǫnum,
bǫru búnir svírar
brunnit gull, af hlunni.

Fair lady, I saw a *skeið* launched from the river into the sea. See where the long hull of the splendid *dreki* lies off the shore. The mane of the bright dragon shines above the

JUDITH JESCH

cargo, since it was launched from rollers, its decorated neck was burnished with gold.

Slyngr laugardag longu
lið-Baldr af sér tjaldi,
út þars ekkjur líta
orms súð ór bœ prúðar.
Vestr réð ór Nið næsta
nýri skeið at stýra
ungr, en árar drengja,
allvaldr, í sjá falla.

The troop-lord casts off the long tarpaulin on Saturday,
where splendid widows from the city see the dragon's hull.
The young king steered the brand-new ship westwards out
of the Nið, while the oars of the warriors fall into the sea.

Rétt kann rœði slíta
ræsis herr ór verri.
Ekkjan stendr ok undrask
ára burð sem furðu.
Ært mun, snót, áðr sortuð
sæfong í tvau ganga.
Þoll leggr við frið fullan,
ferkleyf, á þat leyfi.

The prince's band can pull their oars straight out of the sea. The widow looks and admires the wondrous flight of the oars. Madam, there will be rowing before the tarred sea-tools [oars] fall apart. The four-edged pine [oar] allows that while there is still full peace.

In these stanzas the poet manages both to describe the scene from the point of view of spectators on the shore, which include women, and to instruct a watching woman in how she is to admire it. There are various things worthy of admiration: the ship itself, including its size and decoration, the heroic leadership of its captain, the king, and the rowing skills of

his men which are both efficient and aesthetic. Roberta Frank has studied such stanzas in which 'skalds address women' and finds that these stanzas and some other poems anticipate the courtly love motif of ladies watching heroic male deeds by a century or more.²⁰ But on the whole, Þjóðólfr's stanzas are more interesting for their fascinating collection of words to do with ships in general and rowing in particular, than they are for any real insight into women's relationship with them.²¹

Moreover, Þjóðólfr's stanzas imply that, when men went off on Viking expeditions, their women stayed behind. Yet there is evidence from the early Viking Age onwards that women did accompany military expeditions, which in the Scandinavian context usually had at least some seafaring element. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entries for 892-5 describe the arrival in and raids on England of a viking army that had previously been active on the continent, led by Hæsten who is said to have come to England with eighty ships.²² There are several references in the Chronicle to the women and children who accompany this army, and who are alternately kidnapped by the pursuing English or placed in safety in a fortification in East Anglia. Two decades earlier, according to the chronicler Regino of Prüm, a band of Norsemen active in the Loire valley established themselves in the deserted city of Angers *cum mulieribus et parvulis* 'with women and children', though it is not possible to tell how many of these women and children were acquired en route, and how many came by ship from Norway.²³

At a later date, the kings' sagas provide a number of examples of queens and highborn ladies who accompanied their husbands on sea-voyages. The sources generally agree that, in the tenth century, Gunnhildr, wife of Eiríkr Bloodaxe, accompanied her husband to England and, after his death there, accompanied her sons, the Gunnhildarsynir, from England to Orkney to Denmark and Norway.²⁴ King Óláfr Haraldsson's wife Ástriðr and daughter Úlfhildr accompanied him when he was exiled from Norway in 1028, though they went no further than to Ástriðr's native Sweden, while the king went on to Russia, taking his son Magnús with him.²⁵ Similarly, when King Haraldr harðráði attacked

England in 1066, his wife Ellisíf and daughters accompanied him part of the way, but waited in Orkney while he headed south from there to land in Yorkshire.²⁶ Ellisíf was a well-travelled queen, as she had been born in Russia, and Haraldr had brought her back with him from there. But Haraldr had another wife, the Norwegian Þóra Þorbergsdóttir, who is said to have been present at the sea-battle of Nissa (off the coast of Halland in 1062) between Haraldr and Sveinn, king of Denmark. In this battle, Haraldr captures Þóra's uncle Finn Árnason who had been on Sveinn's side, and offers him a truce through Þóra. Finn is surprised to hear that his niece is present, and makes a crudely infamous comparison of Haraldr to a fighting stallion: *Eigi er nú undarligt, at þú hafir vel bitizk, er merrin hefir fylgt þér* 'It is not surprising you fought so well, if the mare was with you'.²⁷ There is perhaps a reminiscence of this when, a few chapters later, Snorri notes that Haraldr left Þóra behind when he went to England, meaning the reader to understand that this expedition would be less successful.²⁸ But these references are all in the prose of Snorri and the other saga-writers, and may have been invented, or at least developed, by them to embellish the story. If war-leaders did take their wives on sea-borne military expeditions in the Viking Age, it was not a fact that was considered worthy of mention in a single one of the many skaldic stanzas that are our contemporary records of those expeditions.

Orkneyinga saga has a more detailed account of a woman's participation in war and politics, including a naval expedition, in the story of Frakökk, the daughter of a wealthy man of Caithness in the early twelfth century. Frakökk gets involved in the conflicts between the earls Páll and Haraldr Hákonarson, siding with the latter, but accidentally killing him with a poisoned shirt. She later agrees to support Rognvaldr Kali Kolsson in his bid to rule Orkney, promising to gather support from the Scottish mainland and from the Hebrides. With her grandson Qlvir, she gets twelve small and poorly-equipped ships from the Hebrides. Although Qlvir is the commander, the saga explicitly says *þar var Frakökk í ferð ok mart hennar*

skuldalið 'Frakökk was there as a member of the expedition along with much of her household'.²⁹ She gets her comeuppance in the end when she is burned inside her farm by Sveinn Ásleifarson in revenge for the burning of his father. Frakökk is very much the literary cliché of the evil, interfering woman, and the idea of Qlvir being accompanied by his grandmother on a naval expedition with twelve small ships is more than a little ludicrous, probably intended as much as anything to ridicule him.

But we cannot get away from the fact that women did sail west from Scandinavia. If they had not, then Iceland would still be unpopulated today. Whether any special provision was made for women on such long-distance voyages in the Viking Age is doubtful, though this may have been difficult for earlier scholars to accept. Thus, Mary Wilhelmine Williams' comment that 'Women were always given quarters below decks, but they probably never traveled by ship unless in the company of a man' reflects the amateur author's own early twentieth-century and still very Victorian attitudes rather than any reality in the Viking Age.³⁰ The simple truth is that there was not enough room on Viking ships for anyone to go 'below decks'. Most of our evidence for ocean-going vessels comes from the eleventh-century wrecks found at Skuldelev in Denmark, but earlier ships would not have been any bigger. Wreck 1 from Skuldelev was built in Norway around 1030-1050, and is one of the highest-sided Viking ships currently known. Amidships this is all of 2.1 m., but this was in the cargo hold, which would be packed full of wares or, as the reconstruction drawings show, animals.³¹ Passengers occupied the decks at either end, but there was certainly not enough room to shelter under these from the weather, especially not out at sea. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen has identified Skuldelev 1 as the type of ship in which 'Eirik the Red sailed to Greenland and his son Leif the Lucky to the North American coast in about the year 1000.' He points out that the journeys 'lasted for many weeks on one of the stormiest seas in the world' and that the ship, like 'all other Viking ships, left its passengers totally at the mercy of the elements with no form of protection from wind and weather.'³² Even the Haithabu 3

wreck (not fully recovered from the sea-bed), which is very similar to Skuldelev 1 but considerably larger, has been estimated to have had a total height of 2.52 m., and is unlikely to have had living quarters, for women or for anyone else, below decks.³³ Viking Age warships, much longer and narrower than these ocean-going traders, were even less likely to have luxurious women's quarters, since the provision of oarports right the way down both sides of such ships clearly indicates that they were meant to be jam-packed with rowing warriors. They were also much shallower, with no room for much of anything below deck.

It is probably after the Viking Age that we have to look for evidence of special provision for women on ships. In a recent article, Donald Meek discusses an extended poetic description of Eóin mac Suibhne's fleet as it is about to set out from Ireland on an expedition to regain Castle Sween in Argyll, early in the fourteenth century.³⁴ Exploring some of the Norse vocabulary in the poem, Meek finds 'Viking, rather than Gaelic, parallels' for the description of the ships and the fleet.³⁵ He also draws attention to the rather unusual (on an expeditionary fleet!) depiction of the luxury of the women's quarters, with their beds and cushions, and again finds a parallel in Norse culture, especially the Oseberg ship-burial.³⁶ This is clearly problematic given that Oseberg was nearly five centuries before the MacSween expedition.³⁷ So where can we find Scandinavian parallels for the kind of luxurious craft with beds and cushions for women passengers conjured up by the MacSween poem? The expedition this poem is concerned with took place in the early fourteenth century, and there is some evidence for the development of Scandinavian ships in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, though still in the 'Viking ship' tradition.

The ships of this period are not as well-known as the earlier, Viking period, ships, and the fragmentary finds from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries have generally been interpreted as belonging to the cargo-ship, rather than warship, tradition, though some of the 'large cargo ships' of this period, such as that found in Bergen, may actually have been royal ships.³⁸ In general, these ships are larger, and

have lower floor-timbers and higher cross-beams, than the Viking-period ships, giving a larger space below the deck, and hence presumably more storage space for cargo, but possibly also room for passenger accommodation. There is now a whole new body of evidence to consider since the discovery in 1996-7 of no less than nine wrecks at the doorstep of the Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde.³⁹ Four of these have provisionally been dated to after 1100, two before, and three remain undated for the moment. Soon we should have some much better information on the construction of ships from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, although since these nine new ships are underwater wrecks, it is probably too much to expect that we would find any ladies' cushions.

There are also some texts from the thirteenth century which shed some further light on women and ships in this, post-Viking, period. In studying the nautical vocabulary of the Viking Age, especially the tenth and eleventh centuries, I have tended to rely on skaldic stanzas, rather than on the thirteenth-century saga texts in which those stanzas are preserved, since the stanzas are arguably a contemporary (i.e. Viking Age) source, while the sagas can be suspected of being influenced by the time in which they were written, rather than the time they purport to be describing.⁴⁰ Sagas written in the thirteenth century about events that took place shortly before they were written can, however, be taken as more reliable evidence for the events they describe. Somewhat in between these two are accounts of events in the twelfth century.

The compilation of kings' sagas known as *Morkinskinna* incorporates a large number of anecdotes about poets and poetry, mainly featuring the Icelandic court poets of the various kings of Norway. Einarr Skúlason, most famous for composing the religious poem *Geisli*, about St Óláfr, was a favourite of king Eysteinn Haraldsson in the mid-twelfth century. The story mentions a noble woman called Ragnhildr who came to Bergen and who, it is said, *helt einu langskipi* 'kept a longship'.⁴¹ She is said to have gone about 'as splendidly as noblemen' (*fór svá vegliga sem lendir menn*) and, after a time in Bergen, gets ready to leave. When the king sees

that she is preparing to go, he goes on a frantic search for a skald, and eventually tracks down Einarr Skúlason, from whom he had recently been estranged. The king instructs the poet to admire Ragnhildr's ship, and challenges him to compose a stanza about it before the ship passes out of the bay at Hólmr: *Sé nú hversu vegliga ferð konu þessar er búinn. Yrk nú vísu ok haf lokit áðr skipit gengr út fyr Hólm* 'Look at how splendidly this woman's journey has been prepared. Compose a stanza now and have it finished before the ship passes Hólmr'. Einarr accepts the challenge but issues one of his own in return, striking a bargain that the king and seven of his courtiers should each learn one line of the stanza. If they are unable to remember the lines, the king should give him as many containers of honey as there were lines they were unable to recite. Einarr then composes this stanza about Ragnhildr's journey:⁴²

Hola báru rístr hlýrum
 hreystisprund at sundi
 (blæss élreki of ási)
 Útsteins (vefi þrútna):
 varla heldr und vildra
 víkmarr á jarðríki
 (breiðr viðr brimsgang súðum
 barmr) lyptingar farmi.

The woman of valour carves the hollow wave with the prow towards Útsteinn's sound, the storm-driver [wind] blows the swollen sail over the yard; hardly any bay-horse [ship] on earth carries a more pleasing poop-cargo; the broad rim [= ship] conquers the surf with strakes.

This male admiration of a sailing female neatly inverts the perspective of Þjóðólfr's stanzas, discussed above, in which female onlookers admired a male departure. In the rest of the anecdote, the king is indeed unable to remember more than the first and last lines of the stanza, and Einarr presumably got six jars of honey. The story is really about how the estranged poet

and king are reconciled, but incidentally it gives us a picture of a woman active in trade in Bergen. Her ship is described as 'broad', as befits a cargo-ship, and although the 'cargo' referred to in the stanza is the woman, this use of the word *farmr* reinforces the image of a merchant ship.

We know that women engaged in trade to and from Bergen from some of the rune-inscribed merchants' labels found in the Bryggen excavations.⁴³ Thus, N 713 (Nordre Engelgården, before 1248) is inscribed *lucia grims toter* a 'Lucia Grímsdóttir owns', while from Gullskoen we have N 729 inscribed *sigriþa* 'Sigríðr owns', and N 735 with a longer text (the ownership inscription apparently supplemented by a price): *souækapræþrþisa / hof fímtamork* 'Sölveig owns these threads / four and a half marks'. Both of these are also dated to before 1248, while with a date of after 1170 there is N 738, a label simply with the feminine name *tona* 'Tonna'. From Nordre Søstergården, dated to before or around 1198, is N 743, inscribed *þuraamik* 'Þóra owns me'. Women are also mentioned in at least two of the 'business letters' in runes found in Bergen, which can be interpreted as showing that they worked with their husbands in a business partnership (N 648-9). Ragnhildr was presumably involved in this incipient female trading activity in twelfth-century Bergen, but that it was fairly unusual is indicated both by the king's wonder and by the poet's use of *hreystisprund* 'woman of valour', ascribing to her a characteristic more commonly associated with males.

Two sagas give particularly frequent and detailed accounts of royal and other movements by ship in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, *Sverris saga* and *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*. Both of these are a rich source of vocabulary for the types and parts of ships, and of ship-names, and were used as such by Hjalmar Falk in his classic study 'Altnordisches Seewesen'. While his reliance on these later prose sources makes his work unreliable for the study of earlier (i.e. Viking Age) ship-terminology, for which he also uses other sagas uncritically, for the ships of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, sagas such as *Sverris saga* and *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* are invaluable and full of information. Historians have long recognised the value of these sagas as

sources for political history, once allowance has been made for the authors' propagandistic purposes, because they were written so soon after the events described and, especially in the case of *Hákonar saga*, because of their detailed and annalistic approach to the recording of events.⁴⁴ However, they have not yet been fully plumbed as sources for the material culture of the period.⁴⁵ Both sagas record a seemingly endless series of skirmishes, battles and all-out wars, both on land and at sea, although *Hákonar saga* alleviates the relentless bloodshed with scenes of the splendours of Norway's thirteenth-century royal court. Women are a bit thin on the ground in such sagas of manly achievement, but there are a few illuminating anecdotes that are of relevance to my topic.

A brief anecdote in chapter 75 of *Sverris saga* demonstrates how women could be caught up in fights at sea.⁴⁶ Viðkunnr is a young and handsome north Norwegian nobleman who is on the side of Sverrir's opponent, King Magnús Erlingsson. He has two beautiful sisters, and we are told that King Magnús's sister Ragnhildr is also unmarried at this time, with the implication that some kind of marriage deal might be in the offing. Viðkunnr has killed one of Sverrir's bailiffs, and chapter 75 describes his death at the hands of King Sverrir's men in revenge for this in 1183. Coming from the north of Norway, and on his way to King Magnús in Bergen with a well-equipped warship called Gullbringan, Viðkunnr clearly needed a lot of provisions, hence he had a *vistabyrðing* 'provision-ship', but there is no suggestion that the women travelled separately on this. They were on his main warship and, because of the suddenness of the attack, were caught up in the fighting, although the saga describes an attempt to get them away by launching the ship's boat (*Þeir Viðkunnr vildu skjóta bátinum ok flytja af konurnar*). Whether the women were among those killed, or whether they were kidnapped, the saga does not say. The women were on the ship because Viðkunnr did not expect to be attacked, as indicated by the placement of the shields and the mail-coats (*höfðu skjöldu sína alla við stafna en brynjur váru í kistum undir þiljum niðri* 'they had all their shields on the stems and their mail-

coats were in chests below under the deck-planks'). In more organised sea-battles, non-combatants would be on separate ships that kept away from the fighting, as illustrated in chapter 159 of *Sverris saga*. At the battle of Strindsjøen against the Baglar in 1199, the saga-writer tells us that a ship called Rauðsíða, which carried the bishop and the young son of the king (*konungsefni*), keeps back from the fighting, coming only close enough to see who wins.⁴⁷

In *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, we meet mostly queens and find them behaving much as their predecessors in the sagas of earlier kings did – they followed their husbands on naval expeditions as far as it was practicable, but seem to have avoided sea-battles. Thus, when Hákon, starting from Bergen, calls together a great fleet to sail against Denmark in the spring of 1253 (ch. 277), we are told that his queen Margrét sails with him as far as Tønsberg, but stays behind there while the fleet heads south.⁴⁸ In 1262 (ch. 312), Hákon and his son Magnús plan a diplomatic mission to Birgir Jarl in Sweden, but their respective queens, Margrét and Ingibjörg, stay behind in Bergen, we are told, because the younger queen was pregnant with her first child. This time, the queens do not even go as far as Tønsberg.

Hákonar saga has a strong courtly flavour, and much emphasis on court ceremonials, and therefore also a certain interest in princesses and queens, and marriages. The saga presents us with three vignettes of princesses travelling by ship. A tragic one is the death in a shipwreck of the newlywed Cecilia, Hákon's daughter, on her way to her new home in the Hebrides in 1248 (ch. 261). The Hebridean king Harald had come to Norway and married her, but they were all lost in a shipwreck off Shetland on their way home, as the whole party was travelling on just one large ship.

Hákon's other daughter, Kristín, had a more successful bridal voyage abroad. The saga gives a long account of the negotiations and of Kristín's journey to Spain where she was to choose and marry one of the Spanish princes (1257; chs. 290-4). The party sailed first to Yarmouth, in England, and then over the Channel to Normandy, and from there the journey continued overland. The young princess was clearly both

healthy and happy, for the saga tells us that *jungfrú hafðisk vel við ferðinni, ok var æ því betr sem þau fóru lengra fram* 'the lady bore the journey well, and it was ever better the further they went'. But the first part of the journey was by ship, and the saga gives a detailed account of their departure from Norway, embellished by its author, Sturla Þórðarson, with one of his own stanzas.⁴⁹ The ship was large enough to provide private spaces (*herbergi*) for both the princess and the sea-sick Spanish ambassador: *Hákon konungr lét búa þeim eina snekkju mikla, ok vóru þar gör í herbergi, á annat borð jung-frúnni, en á annat borð sira Ferant; því at hann mátti ekki vera fyrir sjó-verk uppi* 'King Hákon had one large *snekkja* prepared for them, and berths were made in it, for the princess on one side and for Lord Ferant on the other, because he could not stay on deck for sea-sickness'.

A third travelling princess in *Hákonar saga* is the aforementioned Ingibjörg, fetched from Denmark to marry Hákon's son Magnús in 1261. Again, the wooing story is told at some length, as the princess has to be got out of Denmark with some subterfuge, though not against her will. The expedition to bring her back is said to have consisted of seven ships, most of them large (ch. 306). It was led by Bishop Hákon, who captained a twenty-bencher, while two of the noblemen accompanying him each led a *dreki*, a 'dragon' ship. Why such a large fleet to bring back one princess? Part of the reason was that the Danish queen, the sister-in-law of Ingibjörg's late father, had no interest in strengthening a Norwegian-Danish alliance that would create a rival to her own son. Although not actually opposed to Ingibjörg's marriage, she was not willing to make preparations for sending off the potential bride. Eventually Ingibjörg's party had to leave with just the clothes they stood in, although the princess herself was provided for. The size of the expedition to bring her to Norway is explained by the Norwegians' anticipation of this problem: when Ingibjörg complains to the Norwegians that she hasn't a thing to wear, they say that they have already brought everything she might need.

Ingibjörg's followers may have rued not having a change of clothes, as the party spent three weeks at sea, awaiting

favourable winds. Spending three weeks on a ship with a bishop was probably not much fun for the young princess either, but given the attention lavished on her otherwise, we can assume that the journey was made as comfortable for her as possible. Perhaps both she and the bishop had some kind of berth or small cabin, like that provided for her sister-in-law Kristín on her bridal voyage to Spain. By the mid-thirteenth century, we can assume that kings of the wealth and power of Hákon and Magnús would have been able to provide the largest and best possible ship to transport such precious cargo. But exactly what such a ship might have looked like, we are not able to say, until further archaeological discoveries are made.

Both the nautical terminology of Old Norse and ship finds of the last hundred years or so confirm what we might expect: that the seafaring Scandinavians had many different kinds of ships which fulfilled a variety of functions.⁵⁰ Linguistic studies, such as Falk's 'Altnordisches Seewesen', published in 1912 when only a few ships were known archaeologically, bring out these differences but have obscured the chronological aspect to this variation. Ships from the early Viking Age (e.g. Gokstad) have a tendency to be all-purpose vessels of a medium size. The mainly eleventh-century finds from Skuldelev and Haithabu show an increasing specialisation, with a greater differentiation between long and sleek warships and fat-bellied ocean-going cargo ships. This contrast may be illusory, in that our early Viking Age finds are mainly Norwegian, while our late Viking Age finds are mainly Danish – the variation may have been regional rather than chronological. But the evidence does tend to suggest that ships got both bigger and more specialised from the eleventh century onwards, and this is not contradicted by the literary evidence. While the pioneering females who went to Iceland had to rough it along with the men on the open decks of the settlers' small ships, in the thirteenth century, Norwegian princesses at any rate could travel in a little more comfort, if not exactly luxury.

Notes

1. See the summary in my *Women in the Viking Age*, Woodbridge, 1991, pp. 31-5.
2. Described in detail in Olwyn Owen and Magnar Dalland, *Scar. A Viking Boat Burial on Sanday, Orkney*, East Linton, 1999.
3. For a survey of Viking Age boat- and ship-burials, see *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde* III (1978), 265-9, 277-8. For a recent interpretation of their significance, see Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, 'Boat-burials at Slusegaard and the interpretation of the boat-grave custom', in *The Ship as Symbol in Prehistoric and Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen and Birgitte Munch Thye, Copenhagen, 1995, pp. 87-99.
4. The stanza is cited from *Vatnsdæla saga. Hallfredar saga. Kormáks saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Reykjavík, 1939, p. 191. See also Roberta Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry. The Dróttkvætt Stanza*, Ithaca, N.Y., 1978, pp. 163-4.
5. E.g. Hjalmar Falk, 'Altnordisches Seewesen', *Wörter und Sachen* 4 (1912), 1-122, at p. 93.
6. See the examples s.v. *meðal* in Finnur Jónsson, *Lexicon poeticum antiquæ linguæ septentrionalis. Ordbog over det norsk-islandske skjaldesprog oprindelig forfattet af Sveinbjörn Egilsson*, Copenhagen, 1931, and Johan Fritzner, *Ordbog over det gamle norske sprog*, Kristiania, 1883-96.
7. I discuss this and other Old Norse ship-words in more detail in *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age*, Woodbridge, 2001, pp. 120-36.
8. Rudolf Meissner, *Die Kenningar der Skalden*, Bonn and Leipzig, 1921, p. 409.
9. See the illustrations in Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, 'Ship types and sizes AD 800-1400', in *Aspects of Maritime Scandinavia AD 200-1200*, ed. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, Roskilde, 1991, pp. 69-82, at p. 74; and Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, *Viking-Age Ships and Shipbuilding in Hedeby/Haithabu and Schleswig*, Schleswig and Roskilde, 1997, p. 93.

10. See Olaf Olsen and Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, *Five Viking Ships from Roskilde Fjord*, Roskilde, 1990, p. 118 and the illustration on p. 120.
11. William Sayers, 'The etymology and semantics of Old Norse *knorr* "cargo ship"'. The Irish and English evidence', *Scandinavian Studies* 68 (1996), 279-90, at p. 285.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 287n. I discuss Sayers' suggestions in more detail in *Ships and Men*, pp. 131-2.
13. E.H. Lind, *Norsk-isländska personbinamn från medeltiden*, Uppsala, 1920-21, col. 207.
14. *Ibid.*, cols 320-21.
15. Discussed in my *Ships and Men*, pp. 136-7.
16. Snorri Sturluson. *Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Reykjavík, 1979, II, 59.
17. *Sverris saga*, ed. Gustav Indrebø, Kristiania, 1920, *passim*. See also Falk, 'Altnordisches Seewesen', p. 32.
18. *Orkneyinga saga*, ed. Finnbogi Guðmundsson, Reykjavík, 1965, p. 196.
19. Cited from Snorri Sturluson. *Heimskringla*, III, 141-3.
20. 'Why skalds address women', in *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages*, ed. Teresa Pàroli, Spoleto, 1990, pp. 67-83.
21. See my *Ships and Men*, esp. pp. 118-97, *passim*.
22. *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, ed. Charles Plummer on the basis of an edition by John Earle, Oxford, 1892-9 (reprinted 1952 with additional material by Dorothy Whitelock), I, 84-9.
23. *Quellen zur karolingischen Reichsgeschichte*, ed. Reinhold Rau, Darmstadt, 1968-9, III, 238.
24. Snorri Sturluson. *Heimskringla*, I, 152-5, 162, 198; Ágrip af Nóreghskonunga sögum. *Fagrskinna – Nóreghs konunga tal*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, Reykjavík, 1985, pp. 12, 15, 76-80, 110.
25. Snorri Sturluson. *Heimskringla*, II, 327-8.
26. Snorri Sturluson. *Heimskringla*, III, 178-9, 197; Ágrip af Nóreghskonunga sögum. *Fagrskinna – Nóreghs konunga tal*, p. 278.
27. Snorri Sturluson. *Heimskringla*, III, 155; Ágrip af Nóreghskonunga sögum. *Fagrskinna – Nóreghs konunga*

- tal, p. 269.
28. Snorri Sturluson. *Heimskringla*, III, 178. However, Þóra is the wife said to have accompanied Haraldr as far as Orkney in *Morkinskinna*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen, 1932, p. 266.
29. *Orkneyinga saga*, p. 144.
30. *Social Scandinavia in the Viking Age*, New York, 1920, p. 210.
31. Olsen and Crumlin-Pedersen, *Five Viking Ships*, p. 121.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 118-19.
33. Crumlin-Pedersen, *Viking-Age Ships and Shipbuilding in Hedeby/Haithabu and Schleswig*, pp. 102-3.
34. Donald Meek, "'Norsemen and noble stewards': The MacSween poem in the Book of the Dean of Lismore', *Cambrian* (formerly *Cambridge*) *Medieval Celtic Studies* 34 (1997), 1-49. I am grateful to Donald Meek for drawing my attention to his article, and for a conversation which stimulated me to look more closely at women and ships in the Viking world.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.
37. On the dating of the Oseberg burial to 834, see Niels Bonde & Arne Emil Christensen, 'Dendrochronological dating of the Viking Age ship burials at Oseberg, Gokstad and Tune, Norway', *Antiquity* 67 (1993), 575-83, esp. p. 581.
38. Arne Emil Christensen, 'Boat finds from Bryggen', in *The Bryggen Papers*, ed. Anders Hagen, Knut Helle, Asbjørn Herteig (Main Series, 1), Bergen, 1985, pp. 47-278, at p. 208.
39. Jan Bill, Morten Gøthche and Hanne Marie Myrhøj, 'Nordeuropas største skibsfund. Ni vrage fra vikingetid og middelalder under museumsøen i Roskilde', *Nationalmuseets arbejdsmark* 1998 (1998), 136-59.
40. See my *Ships and Men*, pp. 15-32.
41. *Morkinskinna*, pp. 447-8 (quotations in normalised orthography). See also *Morkinskinna. The Earliest Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030-1157)*, trans. Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade, Ithaca N.Y., 2000, p. 394.

42. Stanza cited from *ibid.*, p. 394, but with my own translation.
43. All the inscriptions below, and the information on their dating, are taken from *Norges innskrifter med de yngre runer*, vol. 6, part 2, ed. Ingrid Sanness Johnsen, Oslo, 1990.
44. E.g. Sverre Bagge, *From Gang Leader to the Lord's Anointed. Kingship in Sverris Saga and Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, Odense, 1996.
45. I consider some of their evidence for the ships of the period in *Ships and Men*, pp. 270-75.
46. *Sverris saga*, pp. 80-81 (quotations in normalised orthography).
47. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
48. All references are to *Hakonar Saga, and a fragment of Magnus Saga, with Appendices*, ed. Gudbrand Vigfusson (Rolls Series, 88/2), London, 1887, by chapter number. The textual history of this saga is complex and still not fully understood, and there is no modern critical edition.
49. Unlike earlier kings' sagas, which use skaldic stanzas as source quotations to confirm their accounts, here both the prose and the verse are by Sturla and the poetry therefore is not an independent source.
50. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, 'Ship types and sizes AD 800-1400', in *Aspects of Maritime Scandinavia AD 200-1200*, ed. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, Roskilde, 1991, pp. 69-82.