

Viking Travellers of the Sagas

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In accordance with the Icelandic sagas' tendency to show rather than tell, it is rare for saga characters to say explicitly what motivates them to travel from their homes in Scandinavia and Iceland to distant lands. One character who proves an exception to this rule is Bolli Bollason, who in Chapter 72 of *Laxdæla saga* says, '*þat hefi ek lengi haft í hug mér, at ganga suðr um sinns sakar; þykkir maðr við þat fávíss verða, ef hann kannar ekki víðara en hér Ísland*' (p. 211) – 'I have long had it in mind to one day travel to the south; a man is thought to grow foolish if he never explores more widely than just here in Iceland.'

(Translations throughout this paper are my own.) Later, when Bolli has travelled to Norway and spent some time there, he replies to a query about whether he intends to return to Iceland or stay in Norway: '*Ek ætla mér hvárki, ok er þat satt at segja, at ek hafða þat ætlat, þá er ek fór af Íslandi, at eigi skyldi at spyrja til mín í öðru húsi*' (p. 213) – 'I mean to do neither, and it is fair to say that when I set out from Iceland I did not intend that any should hear of me being just next-door.' Bolli's words reveal a key aspect of medieval Scandinavians' imaginative geography of the world: a distinction between lands that are near and familiar and those that are far and exotic. The distant, exotic place to which Bolli ultimately travels is the great, southern city of *Miklagarðr*, Byzantium (Constantinople). There he finds the experience and general self-advancement he left Iceland seeking. Bolli wins renown with great military deeds in the service of the Byzantine emperor, and when he returns north he and his men wear the most resplendent southern finery, carry gold-edged weapons and bring an air of exotic, southern chivalry to the homely, familiar landscape of Iceland (Ch. 77). All three main sub-genres of saga-literature – sagas of Icelanders, kings' sagas and sagas of ancient times – feature episodes in which Scandinavian characters travel from their homelands across the boundary between lands of Norse familiarity to these lands distinctly 'outside.' These saga-characters merit the name of far-travellers.

Concepts of distance

It is clear that the Byzantine Empire is conceptually 'distant' from Iceland in a way that Norway is 'next-door.' The fact that Byzantium was also geographically far from Scandinavian lands is less important to the city's characterisation as 'distant.' Conversely, Finnmörk (Lapland), which is part of mainland Scandinavia, serves in the sagas as a 'distant' location by virtue of its many monstrous and magical inhabitants – giants, trolls and semi-human Lapps.¹ To saga-writers and -readers, Finnmörk and the lands beyond it are clearly exotic locations in which fantastic episodes may be expected to occur, and frequently do. Indications that the Greenland and Vínland (Newfoundland) of the sagas are conceptually distant from Scandinavia and Iceland include the initial ambiguity of their locations (and even their existence) and accounts the hazardous and difficult passages there (*Eiríks saga rauða*, hereafter *Eir.*, Chs. 2, 5; *Grœnlendinga saga*, hereafter *Grœ.*, Chs. 1-2; *Flóamanna saga* Chs. 21-22). The Russia of the sagas, *Garðaríki*, often serves as the eastern gateway to the southern court of *Miklagarðr*, and indeed saga-characters interact with Russian monarchs much as they do with the Byzantine emperor (cf. *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* Chs. 2-3). Other indications of Russia's conceptual distance from Scandinavia include various expressions of homesickness by saga characters exiled to Russia, and journeys to and from Russia progressing in stages due to specific geographical features of the region, such as ice-blocked ports (*Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar* Ch. 24; *Óláfs saga helga* Chs. 1, 186; *Knýtlinga saga* Ch. 70).

West

The motivations that impel travel to the distant west are primarily pragmatic in a commercial sense, and the far-travellers to Greenland and Vínland seek profit above all else. Though outlawry is the direct cause of the initial voyage of Eiríkr rauði (red) from Iceland to

¹ I translate the saga-writers' Old Norse exonyms for the Sami people, *Finnar* and *Finnsku*, using the modern English exonyms 'Lapp' and 'Lappish.'

(then unexplored) Greenland, he immediately exploits the new country for its most abundant natural resource, land. He becomes a kind of real-estate broker for the new-found land, and his second journey to Greenland and the journeys of scores of other named saga-characters are journeys of settlement (*Græ.* Ch. 1; *Eir.* Chs. 2-3).

Eiríkr's son Leifr occupies a similar role in the attempted settlement of Vínland, and his attitude to the buildings he constructs there is one of a businessman who knows the value of good real-estate. When later explorers wish to use Leifr's Vínlandic houses, he does not give them away but lends them on a temporary basis (*Græ.* Chs. 7-8). The natural resources of Greenland and Vínland are also profitable to the saga-characters who travel there, either as supplies for consumption or as trading goods. According to the saga-writers, Vínland is named after its most distinctive natural resource, *vínberjar* – 'wine-berries', or wine-producing grapes (cf. *Græ.* Ch. 4). Other resources that serve as cargo (*farmr*) to fill the ships that sail west of Greenland are wild-growing wheat and hardwood from the vast forests (*Eir.* Ch. 5; *Græ.* Ch. 7). Even barren Greenland is not devoid of moveable goods valued by Scandinavians. Many of the saga-characters who travel there, such as the Vínland-explorer Þorfinnr karlsefni, are introduced as merchants (*kaupmenn*), and they routinely return to Scandinavia with such valuable products as walrus ivory, walrus hide (for rope-making), and prized white falcons (as in *Króka-Refs saga* Chs. 10-11, 14, 18). Polar bears from Greenland are sometimes portrayed as suitable gifts for Scandinavian royalty (*Auðunar þáttr*; *Króka-Refs saga* Ch. 11). Saga journeys to Greenland and Vínland are more often business ventures than adventures.

The other major motivating factor for far-travel westward is violence. As noted above, Eiríkr rauði's initial voyage to Greenland results from his outlawry after he is twice involved in acts of feud-violence in different regions in Iceland (*Eir.* Ch. 2; *Græ.* Ch. 1). Sometimes saga-characters flee to Greenland not to escape the consequences of past acts of violence but to commit new ones. Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld, for example, chases his foster-brother's killer from Iceland to Greenland and ultimately succeeds in killing him there (*Fóstbræðra*

saga Ch. 20-24). In the collection of kings' sagas *Morkinskinna*, a landed farmer named Þrándr who incurs the wrath of one Norwegian king by seeking favour with another, narrowly escapes assassination and is sent by his royal ally to safety, out of Norway and all the way to Greenland (pp. 103-07). These journeys westward are pragmatic in their own way: the far-travellers do not garner monetary profits or tracts of land, but gain instead their own safety or (what is equally crucial to many saga-characters' peace-of-mind) the death of enemies.

South

Destinations in the distant south fall naturally into two categories corresponding to the primary motivations for travelling there: Jerusalem and Rome are 'spiritual' destinations, and Constantinople is 'secular'. Journeys to Jerusalem and Rome are overwhelmingly pilgrimages – of which a significant number involve absolution from sins – and, in the case of the Holy Land, crusades (see below). The primary incentive for travel to Constantinople is, as for travels westward, financial. The nature of the Byzantine Empire as a civilised, long-inhabited land necessitates that the commercial activity the Norse far-travellers engage in is imperial mercenary service, not settlement or acquisition of natural products. All these motivations for saga far-travel are literary reflections of historical reality: many medieval Scandinavians did indeed travel to Rome on pilgrimages, a few royal and noble personages like King Sigurðr Jórsalafari (Jerusalem-traveller) did travel to Palestine as crusaders, and at least one important Scandinavian mercenary, King Haraldr harðráði (hard-counsel), is attested in a medieval Byzantine source (Blöndal 1978:57-58, 136).

Saga accounts of pilgrimage are rarely extensive. The brief references to the southern pilgrimages (*suðferðar*) of several women who play important roles in *Gísla saga* and *Grænlandinga saga* are typical. The writer of the former saga simply observes that after the conflicts constituting the main action of the saga, Auðr Vésteinsdóttir and her sister-in-law Gunnhildr convert to Christianity, make a pilgrimage south to Rome and do not return (Ch.

38). The writer of the latter specifies the direction of Guðríðr Þorbjarnardóttir's pious journey but not the destination and goes on to relate that upon her return to Iceland, she becomes a nun and an anchoress (Ch. 8). Rather fuller is the account at the end of *Grettis saga*. After Þorsteinn drómundr avenges the murder of his kinsman Grettir in Constantinople, he falls in love with a married woman, Spes, and returns with her to the north. Regretting the deceptions that enabled them to free Spes from her husband, the two decide to make amends. Spes's words to Þorsteinn explicitly designate their journey south to Rome as a quest for absolution:

Vit gerumsk nú gömul bæði ok af æskuskeiði, en okkr hefir gengit meir eptir ástundun en kristiligum kenningum eða röksemðum réttenda. Nú veit ek, at þessa okkra skuld megu hvárki leysa okkrir frændr né fémunir, útan vit sjálf gjöldum skyld fyrir. Nú vil ek breyta ráðahag okkrum ok fara ór landi ok á páfagarð, því at ek trúi, at svá má mitt mál leysask. (*Grettis saga*, p. 287)

Both of us are now growing old and are beyond our prime, and we have pursued our desires more than Christian teachings or what is right and just. I now know that neither our friends nor our wealth will be able to free us from this: rather, we must repay it ourselves. I wish now to alter our lives, leave this land and go to the place where the pope dwells, for I believe that so may I free myself of my debt.

Þorsteinn and Spes travel to the south, confess their sins to a priest and pay penance. Absolved of sin, the two withdraw themselves from the world by building a pair of stone huts and living the rest of their lives in isolation (Ch. 92). In other sagas, it is the Pope himself who provides absolution in Rome (e.g. *Brennu-Njáls saga* Ch. 158).

Absolution in the Holy Land is achieved not at the hands of a religious authority but by washing in the holy River Jordan. Some accounts explain that this is because Jordan's waters were consecrated by Jesus Christ (e.g. *Morkinskinna*, hereafter *Mork.*, p. 408). Among the pilgrims who are said to wash in the Jordan and visit the holy sites of Jerusalem are Earl Rögnvaldr Kali of Orkney, the legendary hero Örvar-Oddr, and the famous

Norwegian crusader-king Sigurðr Jórsalafari (*Orkneyinga saga*, hereafter *Ork.*, Chs. 87-88; *Örvar-Odds saga*, hereafter *Örv.*, Ch. 17; *Magnússona saga*, hereafter *Mag.*, Ch. 10).

Rome and Jerusalem differ further: the numbers and types of people making pilgrimages to the two locations powerfully suggest that Rome is the 'common' or even 'second-class' pious destination, while Jerusalem is the more noble, royal site. Of twenty-three saga-pilgrims to Rome, sixteen are neither nobility nor royalty, and five are women. Five of the seven noblemen and monarchs who do visit Rome ultimately progress to Jerusalem, which also suggests the spiritual hierarchy between the two cities: while common people like Þorsteinn and the Icelandic women may conduct pilgrimages as far as Rome, royalty and noble rulers like Rögnvaldr Kali and Sigurðr Jórsalafari go all the way to the source of Christianity itself. This perceived hierarchy between the two holy cities reflects the relationship between their two spiritual 'fathers', St Peter and Jesus Christ. As St Peter was the servant and even subject of Christ, so the spiritual centre of which Peter is the original head and progenitor is the proper destination for those who are servants and subjects in the temporal world. Jerusalem, naturally, is a destination proper for kings. The Jerusalem-traveller Örvar-Oddr, who is neither noble nor royal, is a notable exception to this trend. Oddr is, however, unique for other reasons, not least of which is his 300-year lifespan.

Crusade, or 'violent piety', also distinguishes the Holy Land from Rome as a destination for piously-motivated far-travel. Though the Crusades do not correspond to the time periods during which the historical medieval Scandinavians journeyed to Jerusalem, the saga-accounts relate that some Norsemen assist the Christian rulers there in their battles against the surrounding non-Christians. Sigurðr Jórsalafari, for example, is said to help King Baldwin capture the Syrian town of Sæt, the Biblical city Sidon (*Mag.* Ch. 11). This is not a mere opportunistic venture of spiritual militancy: battles against heathens characterise Sigurðr's entire journey south from Norway and across the Mediterranean to Jerusalem, and the saga-writers ascribe no less than eight successful engagements to him (*Mork.* pp. 340-48; *Mag.* Chs. 4-7). Having defeated several heathen hosts on the path to Palestine, Sigurðr finally

engages the infidels there and wins back a city in the Holy Land for God. There is therefore no sense of spiritual spontaneity or haphazardness to Sigurðr's battle for Sidon, but rather completeness and fulfilment.

One motivation Rome and Jerusalem do share, however, is best called 'tourism.' Though the modern concept of tourism did not exist in the early Middle Ages, some aspects of the behaviour of travellers to these two destinations is similar to that of modern-day tourists. Saga-travellers to both cities almost invariably visit certain 'must-see' sites: the churches of St Peter and St Paul in Rome, for example, and the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Bathing in the River Jordan is several times said to be customary (*siðr, hátttr*) among pilgrims there (*Ork.* Ch. 52; *Mork.* p. 78). Most tellingly, some of the Norse travellers' activities suggest they are there as much to have fun as to gain spiritual kudos. Thus Earl Rögnvaldr's men get drunk and rowdy in several Palestinian towns, and he himself regards swimming across the River Jordan as a sporting challenge (*Ork.* Ch. 88).

Saga-literature tells of numerous Norse mercenaries in the Byzantine Empire, calling them *Væringjar*, 'Varangians', and the stories sagas tell of them are literary reflections of an earlier historical reality (Blöndal 1978 throughout, esp. Chs. 1 and 9). Some of the most well-known literary Varangians include the future king of Norway Haraldr harðráði, the Norwegian nobleman Eindriði ungi (young), and the Icelander Bolli Bollason. Some saga-characters initially travel south with the explicit motivation of joining the Varangian regiment, for example, the Norwegians who convince Sigurðr Jórsalafari to travel south after hearing of the abundant possibilities for wealth and glory in the service of the Byzantine emperor (*Mag.* Ch. 1). Others turn to mercenary service once they have already travelled south for a different primary purpose. Several southern far-travellers, for example, are motivated by feud-violence. Þorsteinn drómundr, whose journey to Rome has already been mentioned, initially travels to Byzantium to wreak vengeance on an Icelander named Þorbjörn öngull, the murderer of Þorsteinn's kinsman Grettir (*Grettis saga* Ch. 86). Þorbjörn joins the Varangian regiment for employment during his self-imposed exile, and Þorsteinn, it

seems, joins the regiment to get closer to Þorbjörn. Bolli Bollason, as was noted above, initiates his journey south to Byzantium out of a desire for education, a reason unique to him, but he too becomes an imperial mercenary (*Laxdæla saga* Chs. 72-73). Rome is the city of St Peter and the Popes, and Jerusalem is the city of Jesus Christ. Similarly, Constantinople is the city of the Byzantine emperor, whose servants are not pilgrims or absolution-seekers but soldiers.

East

The most prominent motivation for journeys to Russia is violence, but in contrast to travels westward, the feuds that motivate travels eastward are not between families and farmers but between kingdoms and kings. On several occasions Scandinavian monarchs or rulers are compelled to flee their native land to escape the violence of usurpers and other enemies who threaten them there. This far-travel is best designated 'exile.'

The most famous of these eastern exiles is Óláfr Tryggvason, whose pregnant mother Ástriðr flees east to escape the danger threatening her in Norway after her husband is murdered by political rivals (Oddr's *Óláfs saga*, hereafter Oddr, Chs. 1-2). Some details of Óláfr's birth and subsequent flight east to Russia are reminiscent of Christ's nativity. The building in which he is born, for example, is not a human habitation but a boat-house, and his mother wraps him in swaddling clothes (*sveipt klæða*, Oddr p. 131). The flight itself parallels Jesus's flight from Judea to Egypt to escape the tyranny of King Herod. Not only do various seers and soothsayers in Russia see portents in the sky of the young prince's birth and his imminent arrival in Russia (cf. again the birth of Christ), but one text explicitly refers to God's agency when telling of Óláfr's deliverance from slavery to be fostered in Russia by his uncle: '*En guð, er þetta barn hafði kosit til stórra hluta, stillti hónum til lausnar með þeim hætti*' (Ágrip p. 20) – 'But God, who had chosen this child for great things, arranged for him to be set free in this way'. It is clear that Óláfr's eastern exile is not a matter of mere human fear of death or violence but a plan ordained by God, which is appropriate for

the king who is characterised by saga-writers as the great Christianiser of northern lands. This does not erase violence as a motivating factor of Óláfr's far-travel eastward: it is simply God, the supreme saga-writer, rather than any human agent who is motivated to move His protégé a great distance to protect him from violence.

Óláfr's later namesake St Óláfr also flees eastward because of escalating tensions and danger in Norway, but as an adult rather than as a child (Snorri's *Óláfs saga* Chs. 180-81). Some of St Óláfr's allies in his final battle for control of Norway, including his half-brother Haraldr (later to be a Byzantine mercenary) and friend Earl Rögnvaldr Brúsason of Orkney, are compelled to flee Norway for the distant east after the battle is lost (*Ork.* Ch. 21). During their sojourns in Russia, Óláfr, Haraldr and Rögnvaldr all serve time in the Russian king's army, illustrating the saga-writers' association of the great Christian kingdom of the distant east with the great Christian kingdom of the distant south.

The Russia of the sagas, though, is characterised as Christian only after Óláfr Tryggvason has converted it, and in general Christian proselytising is another characteristic activity of Norsemen both in Russia and further east. Óláfr's missionary activities in Russia are related in his sagas, and they are also referred to in one of the versions of *Þorvalds þáttr víðförli*. Þorvaldr himself (whose nickname translates as 'far-' or 'widely-travelled') travels to the distant east for Christian missions, having been sent there by the Byzantine emperor to assume spiritual authority over that region (*Þorvalds þáttr* Ch. 10). Another Scandinavian far-traveller, Yngvarr víðförli, becomes a Christian missionary when he sets out from Russia to explore the lands further east, though he is not sent there for this purpose by any spiritual leader. Yngvarr's characterisation is nevertheless telling: in his saga he is likened in accomplishments to Óláfr Tryggvason. This comparison to the great Christianiser of the north suggests that Yngvarr occupies a similar proselytising role in the east. Indeed, it is likely that Oddr Snorrason, whose *Óláfs saga* is a prototype for later sagas' treatment of the Christianisation of eastern lands, is also the author of *Yngvars saga* (Sverrir 2006:936).

Yngvarr's son Sveinn also proves prepared for missionary activities: like his father, he brings along a bishop and specially-consecrated equipment on his eastern voyage (Ch. 9).

More exceptional is *Yngvars saga's* uniquely explicit reference to exploration as the initial reason for Yngvarr's journey east beyond Russia. Yngvarr has been in Russia three years when curiosity gets the better of him:

Hann heyrði umræðu á því, at þrjár ár fellu austan um Garðaríki ok var sú mest, sem í miðit var. Þá fór Yngvarr víða um Austrríki ok frétti, ef nokkurr maðr vissi, hvaðan sú á felli, en engi kunni þat at segja. Þá bjó Yngvarr ferð sína ór Garðaríki ok ætlaði at reyna ok kanna lengd ár þessarar. (*Yngvars saga*, pp. 434-35)

He heard talk that three rivers flowed from the east through Russia, the middle one being the biggest. Then Yngvarr travelled widely throughout the eastern realms and enquired if any man knew where that river flowed from, but no one could say. Then Yngvarr prepared for a journey out of Russia, intending to try and explore the length of this river.

Here exploration is cited explicitly and connected directly to the geographical feature most characteristic of the distant east and best-known to saga-writers, Russia's mighty rivers. In *Eiríks saga* and *Grœnlendinga saga*, by contrast, the exploratory impulse is only implied or referred to indirectly – both Bjarni Herjólfsson and Leifr Eiríksson are, for example, criticised for lack of curiosity after their brief sightings or visits to the New World. Yngvarr's eastern voyage is well-attested in twenty to thirty eleventh-century Swedish runic inscriptions that commemorate those who died on Yngvarr's expedition (Jansson 1987:63-69).

North

The distant north is quite distinct from the other cardinal directions in saga-literature in that its inhabitants are not recognisably 'civilised' like the Greeks of the south, the Russians of the east, or even the Norse Greenland colonists of the west. Its characteristic inhabitants are instead literary relics of older Scandinavian myth and folk belief – giants, trolls and other magical or monstrous creatures. Even human beings native to the far north are typically

presented as magicians or clairvoyants of some kind (e.g. *Vatnsdæla saga* Ch. 12). The far north thus figures most often in the generally fantastic sagas of ancient times, rather than in the more historiographical sagas of Icelanders or kings' sagas, and it often serves as a destination for heroic adventures and quests. This has often been noted by scholars, and some have uncovered the connections between certain story-patterns of northern adventures and older, folkloric story-patterns, elucidating what their original meanings may have been (see Simpson 1966; Power 1984; and McKinnell 2005:Chs. 10-12). In an episode in *Bárðar saga* reminiscent of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, the Icelander Gestr is sent out to combat a monstrous, foul-smelling character who has burst into the Yule feast of Óláfr Tryggvason and challenged anyone who dares to come to his barrow and take its treasures. Gestr and his men sail north past Finnmörk and Dumbshaf (the Arctic Sea) to reach the monster's barrow, and they defeat him and 500 revenants in his ship buried there (Chs. 19-20). The title characters of *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* are sent north by an irate king on what seems an impossible task, retrieving a precious vulture's egg from a heathen temple in the distant country of *Bjarmaland*, Permia (Ch. 5). The twelfth-century Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus tells stories related to the body of legendary material from which many sagas of ancient times are assembled; in one such tale some Danes travel to the most distant north and find adventures among various giants (*Gesta Danorum*, Book VIII:Chs. xiv-xv).

There are, however, some instances in which far-travels to the north, like those to the west and Byzantium in the south, are motivated primarily by the pragmatic, commercial desire for profit. The tribute paid by the Lapps to the Norwegian king (*Finnskattr*) figures in several sagas, and many saga-characters travel north to Finnmörk to collect this tribute, usually in fine furs. The first quarter of *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* centres around the conflict between Egill's uncle Þórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson and King Haraldr hárfagri, caused by Þórólfr's collection of the Lappish tribute and rumoured withholding of some of it for himself (Chs. 6-22). The plot of *Odds þáttr Ófeigssonar* is driven by the title character's efforts to

hide from the king's agent some goods his men have acquired in Finnmörk. Some Scandinavian saga-characters travel north to Finnmörk of their own volition to trade with the Lapps. At the beginning of *Helga þáttur Þórissonar*, Helgi and his brother Þorsteinn trade with Lapps, giving them butter and pork (Ch. 1), products portrayed in other saga-accounts as desirable to the Lapps (e.g. *Flateyjarbók* p. 66). This suggests that the Lapps in Finnmörk keep neither swine nor cattle. Their lack of pigs decisively differentiates Lapps from Norsemen, for whom swine were both important as a meat-source and mythically significant (as the god Freyr's steed, the Æsir-gods' food).

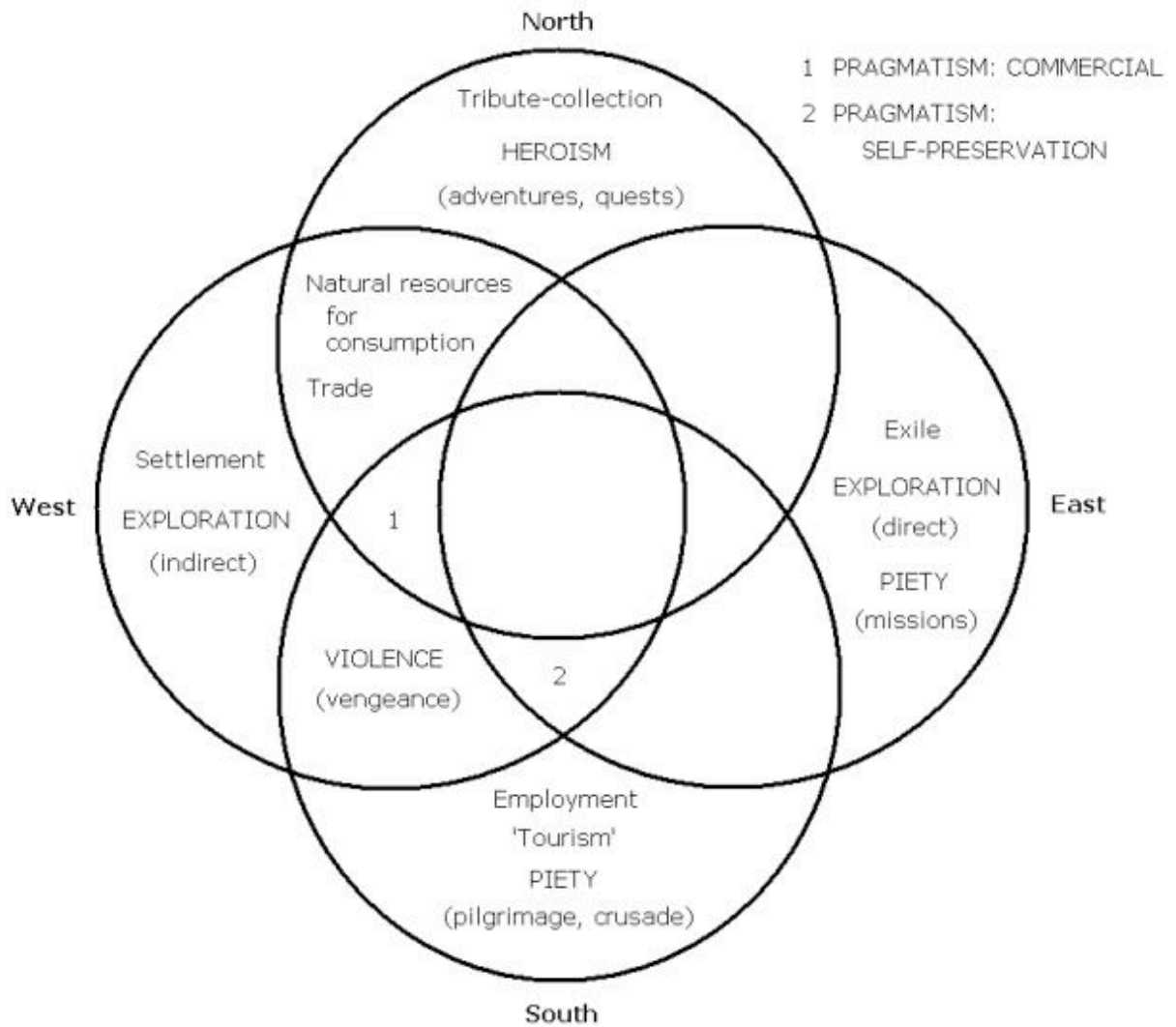
Finally, in some saga-episodes Norsemen journey north to acquire natural resources not for profit but for survival, a recurrent saga motif Vésteinn Ólason connects to the historical Hálogalanders' struggle to maintain the welfare of their society (1994:107-11). Several times the title characters of *Ketils saga hængs* and *Gríms saga loðinkinna* row their fishing-boats north to hunt or fish when game proves scarce around their Norwegian homestead, Hrafnista. The passage introducing Grímr's far-travel is explicit:

Þat bar þá til sem oftár, at hallærri mikit kom á Hálogaland. Grímr loðinkinni bjóst þá heiman ok fór á ferju sinni við þriðja mann. Hann helt norðr fyrir Finnmörk ok svá austr til Gandvíkr. Ok er hann kom í víkina, sá hann, at þar var nógr veiðifangi. (*Gríms saga*, p. 186)

Then it happened, as so often before, that a great famine came to Hálogaland. Then Grímr loðinkinni prepared to leave and set out in his boat with two other men. He steered north for Finnmörk and so east to Gandvík (Sorcery Bay). And when he entered the bay, he saw that there were plenty of fish to catch there.

It is indicative of the literary function of the distant north that even in saga-accounts describing as harsh, realistic and familiar a Scandinavian circumstance as famine, far-travel to the north results in fantastic adventures. Ketill kills a flying dragon and encounters a succession of giants on his fishing-trips in Finnmörk (*Ketils saga* Chs. 1-2, 5), and Grímr frees an enchanted princess from a spell (*Gríms saga* Ch. 2).

This survey of far-travel in saga-literature has shown that the motivations for journeys in each of the four cardinal directions are primarily pragmatic, though the sorts of pragmatism exhibited in the individual accounts differ. Travels westward to Greenland and Vínland and southward to Byzantium are often commercially-motivated: real-estate and tradable goods characterise the west, mercenary opportunities the south. Finnmörk in the north is frequently a site of tribute-collection and trade. Some journeys to the west, south and east are motivated by the pragmatic principle of self-preservation. Such violence-motivated far-travellers to the west and south are most often common people involved in family or personal feuds, while far-travellers who flee east to escape violence are typically kings or earls. Quests for absolution and Christian missions may be seen as 'spiritually pragmatic.' Many of the journeys to the west, south and east described in saga-accounts are literary representations of earlier, historical journeys to distant lands by Viking Age and medieval Scandinavians. The focus of northern far-travel, by contrast, is not pragmatism but heroism, and the journeys take from Scandinavia to the northern wilderness represent less often the historical journeys known to the saga-writers and more often legendary journeys passed down to them by oral or textual tradition or new tales springing from their imaginations. Thus northern settings (more than locations in other directions) often seem selected by saga-writers primarily for their suitability as unexplored, fantastic or exotic lands in which adventurous, marvellous tales can take place. The simple diagram below indicates the relationships between the different motivations and directions.



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