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Arthur, King of Iceland

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“It was in Norway, be it noted, that Arthurian romance was first welcomed into the Scandinavian North in the early thirteenth century” (Schlauch 1934, 10). Thus wrote Margaret Schlauch, whose magisterial *Romance in Iceland*, published eight decades ago, remains the authoritative introduction to the elusive genre of romance. The Arthur of literature first came to Iceland, however, with *Breta sögur*, the translation of the *Historia regum Britanniae*, around the year 1200. The Latin source of the Icelandic translation is unknown, but in many respects, it diverged strikingly from the extant versions of the *Historia*—and precisely in those aspects that were to be popularized by romance.

Geoffrey of Monmouth reports in the *Historia regum Britanniae* that Arthur “classem suam direxit in Islandiam eamque debellato populo subiugavit” [“took his fleet to Iceland, where he defeated the natives and conquered their land” (Reeve and Wright 2007, 204–5)]. In the *Roman de Brut*, its author Wace elaborates on Arthur’s conquest of Iceland. Over the course of twenty verses, Wace reports that there was none like Arthur for military might, and therefore, the kings of Orkney, Gotland, and Wenelande feared that Arthur might attack their islands too. Therefore, they travel to Iceland, bringing him many of their possessions; they give him hostages and become his men (Weiss 2002, 9708–27). Peace is established, and Arthur then returns to England.

Wace’s *Brut*, completed in 1155, was the first vernacular translation of the *Historia regum Britanniae*. The second translation occurred

around 1200 in Iceland and is known as *Breta sögur*. It presumably was preceded, however, by the separate rendering of the *Historia*'s "Prophetiae Merlini" in verse, in the so-called *fornyrðislag* stanzas used in the prophetic Eddic poem *Völuspá*, "The Prophecy of the Seeress." *Merlínússpá*, as the translation is known, was composed around 1200 by Gunnlaugr Leifsson (d. 1218 or 1219), a monk in the Benedictine monastery of Þingeyrar in northern Iceland, a monastery noted for the production of historiography (Turville-Petre 1953, 190–202). To judge by some of the deviations of *Merlínússpá* from the "Prophetiae," Gunnlaugr knew the *Historia*, for his translation contains additions incorporated into the poem from other parts of the *Historia* (Turville-Petre 1953, 202; Eysteinnsson 1953–1955, 98–103). It is not unlikely that Gunnlaugr also translated *Breta sögur*, possibly in tandem with or as a follow-up to *Merlínússpá*. Even if Gunnlaugr himself was not the translator, a monastery like Þingeyrar, which was noted for producing Latin historiography, would have had the expertise to render Geoffrey's *Historia* into Icelandic.¹

Breta sögur is extant in two redactions: the one is transmitted in the manuscript AM 544 4to, the so-called *Hauksbók*, named after its compiler and redactor, Haukr Erlendsson; the other redaction is in AM 573 4to. *Breta sögur* in *Hauksbók* is a heavily redacted and abbreviated version of the translation; it was produced in the period 1302–1310 (Stefán Karlsson 2000, 306–7, 309). The manuscript AM 573 4to was written in the period 1330–1370. This redaction of *Breta sögur* has not suffered the editorial incursions and reduction of text evident in *Hauksbók*. Although the text in AM 573 4to cannot be said to represent the translator's own rendering, it nonetheless approximates that of the original translation. Whereas *Breta sögur* in *Hauksbók* has been edited (Jón Sigurdsson 1849; Finnur Jónsson and Eiríkur Jónsson 1892–1896), the AM 573 4to redaction is accessible only in manuscript. The following study of *Breta sögur* is based on the redaction in AM 573 4to.²

Breta sögur refers twice to *Merlínússpá*. The first time, corresponding to the end of Part IV of the *Historia*, the translator writes that Merlin then began his prophecies about the lives of the kings to come

1. See Turville-Petre (1953, 200–2); Würth (1998, 81–2).

2. Although *Breta sögur* in AM 573 4to has not been edited, variants from the manuscript (in normalized form), albeit incomplete, can be found in Jón Sigurdsson's edition of *Hauksbók* (1849, 3–145).

in the poem “er Merlín's spa heitir er orti Gunnlaugr munkr Leif's son ok kunna margir menn þat kuædi” [that is called *Merlínússpá*, which Gunnlaugr Leifsson composed, and many people know that poem].³ *Breta sögur* in the AM 573 4to redaction continues with the statement:

en er Merlín lavk spa sinne þa lofadi kongr miog frodleik hans ok uísdom Sv spa hefir oft sidan af hinum uitrvtvm monnum aEinglandi rannsokud uerid ok finz æ nockud þess i er myklum raukum þickir sæta. (fol. 45r; Jón Sigurdsson 1849, 13n11)

(And when Merlin finished his prophecy the king praised greatly his learning and wisdom. That prophecy has often been scrutinized by the wisest men in England and there is always something in it which is deemed to arouse great wonder.)

Hauksbók lacks this comment. The translator refers to the poem a second time in the AM 573 4to redaction in support of the statement that after Arthur had conquered the northern part of the world, he sailed south and harried there, “sua sem seger i Merlinus spa” (fol. 52r; Jón Sigurdsson 1849, 95n8) [as is told in *Merlínússpá*]. The cross-reference, which is not found in the *Historia*, occurs just prior to the story of Arthur's encounter with Frolo.

While Geoffrey's *Historia* is a chronicle, Wace's mid-twelfth-century expanded French version paved the way for courtly romance (Le Saux and Damian-Grint 2006, 101); indeed, scholars consider the *Brut* “the starting-point and inspiration for the flowering of Arthurian romance” (Weiss 2002, xi). *Breta sögur* similarly introduced motifs and themes traditionally associated with the Arthurian romances and *lais* that were only translated somewhat later in Norway. Moreover, the alliterative prose style characteristic of the Norwegian translations is already evident in *Breta sögur* (Kalinke 2009, 228–9; 2011, 42–4). As in Wace's *Brut*, the chronicle form of the *Historia* moved into the generic orbit of romance in *Breta sögur*. Like the source of Wace's *Brut*, the source of *Breta sögur* was a variant version of the *Historia regum Britanniae* that had begun the transition from chronicle to romance. The King Arthur of *Breta sögur*, his person, his feats and feasts, prepared Icelanders for

3. The statement occurs in the manuscript AM 573 4to on fol. 45r. If Jón Sigurdsson's edition of *Breta sögur* in *Hauksbók* provides a variant in the notes, I add this (here 1849, 13n11). In *Hauksbók*, the redactor writes: “her eftir hefir Gvðlavgr mvníkr ort kvæði þat er heitir Merlín's spá” (Finnur Jónsson and Eiríkur Jónsson 1892–1896, 271) [Following this, the monk Gunnlaugr has composed the poem called Merlín's spá]. And the poem follows (272:1–283:25).

the importation and reception of the Norwegian translations of courtly romances, which were to constitute the paradigm, with respect to content, structure, and style, for the *riddarasögur*, the chivalric sagas that Icelanders themselves subsequently composed.

Breta sögur, in the manuscript AM 573 4to, is preceded by *Tróju-manna saga* (fol. 1r–23v) and followed by a fragment of *Valvens þáttur* (fol. 63), the translation of the Gawain narrative of Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval*. AM 573 4to is believed to be a sister manuscript or a copy of the fourteenth-century **Ormsbók*, a manuscript that is no longer extant, but which included *Breta sögur* (Gropper 2011, 51).⁴ Of interest is the fact that this manuscript also included the Arthurian *Erex saga*, *Ívens saga*, and *Parcevals saga*, translations of Chrétien de Troyes's *Erec et Enide*, *Yvain*, and *Perceval*, respectively (Sanders 1979, 140; Würth 1998, 154). *Breta sögur* was thus transmitted in the context of the Norse translations of Arthurian romances. The AM 573 4to redaction, the basis of the following discussion, contains evidence that the source of *Breta sögur* deviated substantially from Geoffrey's *Historia*. It was a contaminated variant version of the *Historia*, one that was in some respects related to, albeit not identical with, the source of Wace's *Brut* (Würth 1998, 70). The source of *Breta sögur* contained a version that, like the *Roman de Brut*, shifted the Arthurian narrative generically from chronicle to romance.

Discussion of *Breta sögur* is complicated by the fact that the work so entitled is represented by two quite different redactions. Analyses and assessments of the Icelandic translation of Geoffrey's *Historia* have inevitably been based on the abbreviated redaction in *Hauksbók*. The divergences in the AM 573 4to version of *Breta sögur* from Geoffrey's *Historia* have been attributed by Stefanie Gropper not to the Latin source of the translation but rather to a later Icelandic redactor. She claims that *Breta sögur* is the result of both an interlingual and an intralingual translation: in its earliest form, *Breta sögur* was an interlingual translation, from Latin into Icelandic; it was historiography, like Geoffrey's *Historia*. In the course of transmission in Iceland, however, the work underwent an intralingual translation: the historiographical text became a *riddarasaga*, a chivalric romance (Gropper 2014, 219, 227, 234). According to Gropper, the *Breta sögur* redaction in *Hauksbók* is

4. A copy of *Breta sögur* in **Ormsbók* is preserved in the seventeenth-century manuscript Sth. Papp. fol. no. 58, but the text is fragmentary and breaks off before the Arthurian section (Würth 1998, 58).

characterized by its striving for factual accuracy and credibility, whereas in the AM 573 4to redaction, the entertaining aspects of the account are more important than the historical significance of the events that are depicted. That is to say, Gropper believes that the translator rendered Geoffrey's *Historia* fairly accurately, but under the impact of the Norwegian translations of romances, the fourteenth-century redactor modified *Breta sögur* in both content and style. I do not concur, principally because the *Historia* itself underwent a similar transformation in Wace's vernacular *Brut*, and the AM 573 4to redaction of *Breta sögur* shares a number of deviating and additional details in the Arthurian section with the French work. The conclusion to be drawn is that the substantive additions, including dialogue, and deviations from the *Historia*, as well as changes in structure in *Breta sögur*, were already found in the translator's Latin source, a text that had begun the transition from chronicle to romance, which had expanded and dramatized various scenes and episodes in the *Historia*.⁵ The Icelandic translation thus laid the groundwork for the importation of the Arthurian narratives from Norway, that is, *Möttuls saga*, *Ívens saga*, *Parcevals saga*, and especially *Tristrams saga*.⁶ While these provided the major impetus for the subsequent composition of indigenous romances in Iceland, the courtly themes and motifs generally associated with the Norwegian translations had already been introduced in Iceland through the Arthurian narrative of *Breta sögur*.

The portrayal of Arthur in *Breta sögur* competes with the depiction of Arthur and his knights in the courtly romances. Geoffrey's portrait in the *Historia* is brief: Arthur "was a youth of fifteen, of great promise and generosity, whose innate goodness ensured that he was loved by almost everybody. As newly-crowned king, he displayed his customary open-handedness" (Reeve and Wright 2007, 192). The AM 573 4to redaction of *Breta sögur* unfortunately has a lacuna here, but even the otherwise drastically condensing Haukr preserved a portrait of the king that elaborates, alliteratively, on Arthur's qualities:

5. Despite a number of correspondences between the *Brut* and *Breta sögur*, there is no evidence that the source of the latter was French. *Breta sögur* was translated from a Latin text. Notable is the occurrence of Latin case endings for names in the translation, chiefly for the name *Artus*, *Arthus*, such as *Arthi* (fol. 50r, 52r), *Artho* (fol. 52r, 53v), and *Artum*, *Arthum* (fol. 53v, 54v).

6. Certain evidence that *Erex saga* was also translated in Norway is lacking. On the basis of loans from *Þiðreks saga* in *Erex saga*, however, and the assumption that these are the work of the translator rather than a later Icelandic redactor, Susanne Kramarz-Bein suggests that *Erex saga* was translated after 1250 in Norway (2002, 291–2).

hann var þá .xv. vettra gamall. hann var mikill a voxt venn at aliti spekingr at viti avr af fe sterk harðr ok vapndiarfr glaðr ok goðr vinvm en grimr vvinvm fastnæmr ok forsiall siðlatri ok sigrsæll vidfrægr ok at ollv vel mennt. (Finnur Jónsson and Eiríkur Jónsson 1892–1896, 287:23–6)

(He was then fifteen years old. He was tall, handsome in appearance, wise in his reasoning, generous with wealth, strong, hardy and gallant, cheerful and good to his friends, but harsh toward his enemies, trusty and prudent, well-mannered and blessed with victory, far-renowned and accomplished in every way.)

That this depiction of Arthur, more extensive than Geoffrey's, should not be ascribed to an Icelandic redactor but rather to the source of *Breta sögur* is suggested by a similar portrait in the *Brut*, where Wace writes:

Juvenels esteit de quinze anz, / De sun eage fors e granz. / . . . / Chevaliers fu mult vertuus, / Mult fu preisanz, mult gloriuz; / Cuntre orguillus fu orguillus / E cuntre humles dulz e pituz; / Forz e hardiz e conqueranz, / Large dunere e despendanz; / E se busuinnus le requist, / S'aidier li pout, ne l'escundist. (Weiss 2002, vv. 9013–25)

He was a young man of fifteen, tall and strong for his age. . . . He was a most mighty knight, admirable and renowned, proud to the haughty and gentle and compassionate to the humble. He was strong, bold and invincible, a generous giver and spender, if he could help someone in need, he would not refuse him. (Weiss 2002, 227)

Oddly enough, of the Arthurian narratives translated in Norway, only *Möttuls saga* contains a comparable, albeit longer, portrayal of Arthur, and what is even more curious, this is not found in the French source, that is, in the extant medieval manuscripts of the *Lai du cort mantel*. *Möttuls saga* opens with Arthur's portrait:

Artús kóngr var hinn frægasti höfðingi at hverskonar frækleik ok allskonar drengskap ok kurteisi með fullkomnu huggæði ok vinsælasta mildleik svá at fullkomliga varð eigi frægari ok vinsælli höfðingi um hans daga í heiminum. Var hann hinn vaskasti at vápnum, hinn mildasti at gjöfum, blíðasti í orðum, hagráðasti í ráðagerðum, hinn góðgjarnasti í miskunnsemd, hinn siðugasti í góðum meðferðum, hinn tiguligasti í öllum kóngligum stjórnnum, guðhræddr í verkum, mjúklyndr góðum, harðr illum, miskunnssamr þurftugum, beinisamr bjóðendum, svá fullkominn í öllum höfðingskap at engi illgirnd né öfund var með honum. (Kalinke 1999c, 6)

King Arthur was the most renowned ruler with regard to every aspect of valor and all kinds of manliness and chivalry, combined with perfect

compassion and most appealing mildness, so that in every respect there was no ruler more renowned or blessed with friends in his day in the world. He was the most valiant man at arms, the most generous with gifts, the gentlest in words, the cleverest in his designs, the most benevolent in mercy, the most polished in good manners, the noblest in all kingly craft, god-fearing in his undertakings, gentle to the good, harsh to the wicked, merciful to the needy, hospitable to the companionable, so perfect in his entire authority that neither ill will nor malice was found in him. (Kalinke 1999c, 7)

What is the source of this portrayal? Was it found in the French manuscript used by the translator? Or did the translator compose this himself? Did he borrow Arthur's traits from another translation known in Norway? *Tristrams saga* comes to mind, which opens with the portrayal, not of King Mark, but rather of Tristram's father, the young knight Kanelangres, who was:

kænn til margrar kunnáttu, hinn röskvasti at riddaraskap, hinn öruggasti at alls konar drengskap, vitr ok varr í ráðagerðum, forsjáll ok framsýnn, fullger at öllum atgervum yfir alla menn, er í þann tíma váru í því ríki. . . . Hann var hinn harðasti hörðum ok hinn grimmast grimmum . . . hinn vildasti í gjöfum ok ástsamasti í sínum meðferðum ok hinn harðasti í bardögum. (Jorgensen 1999, 28)

knowledgeable about many things, the most valiant in chivalric pursuits, the most trustworthy whenever courage was necessary, wise and understanding in his judgments, prudent and foresightful, perfect in all areas compared to other men in that kingdom who were living at that time. . . . He was the fiercest to those who were fierce and most merciless to those who showed no mercy . . . [renowned for] his generosity, his sympathy in dealing with others, and his toughness in battle. (Jorgensen 1999, 29)

Whether the portrayal of King Arthur in *Möttuls saga* occurred in the French manuscript, now lost but available to the translator, or whether the Norwegian translator, perhaps even an Icelandic redactor, created it, the fact remains that *Breta sögur* anticipated the virtues ascribed to the king in *Möttuls saga*.

Among the set pieces that were to become staples of the original romances composed by Icelanders a couple of centuries later is the arming of a hero, a prime example of which is the equipping of Arthur in *Breta sögur*:

The king took his coat of mail, made of the hardest steel, and put it on; then he took his helmet Herepandus, gilt all over, harder than any steel, with a golden dragon engraved on it; he took his sword Kaleburnius,

the best of all swords borne at that time, and girds himself with it; he took his lance, called Eron, the best of all spears that were borne in those days. Finally, he took his shield Pridon, which was thick and sturdy and had on it a golden image of the Virgin Mary.

Artus konungr tok þa bryniu sína. gerua afhinu harðazta stali oc steypir a sig. siðan tekr hann hialm sinn Herepandum allan gylldan. hardara hueriu stali. oc grafinn í dreki einn af gulli. oc setr a haufuð ser. þa tekr hann suerð sitt Kaleburnium oc gyrðer sig med allra suerða bezt þeira er þa voro borin iþann tima. hauggspiot sitt tok hann i haund ser þat er Eron hét allra spiota bezt þeira er þa voro borin. hann tekr þa ok skiold sinn Prídon. hann var þyckr oc þolinn þar var laugð a með gulli likneskia Marie drotningar. (fol. 49r; Jón Sigurdsson 1849, 92n1)

The translated romances offer similar descriptions of a hero being armed; to mind comes the equipping of Tristram before his combat with Morhold.⁷ Yet the depiction in *Breta sögur* is the earliest in the North and was most likely known by the authors of original Icelandic romances, who similarly depicted the arming of protagonists in their compositions.⁸

7. “Tristram armed himself in the king’s castle, putting on leg armor while two vassals bound golden spurs to his feet. After that he donned a sturdy coat of mail, large and thick. His uncle, the king, girded him with a fine sword that had been tested in many a battle. . . . Then they placed upon his head a bright, shining helmet, the best that could be found. After that they hung upon his shoulder a sturdy shield, bound with iron and decorated in gold” (Jorgensen 1999, 79).

8. See, for example, the equipping of Konráðr in *Konráðs saga keisarasonar*: “Hann ferr í brynio oc byz freknlíga. hon var harðla ramlíg oc hafði lit ens bezta gyllz. . . . hann gvrdi sic því sverpi er Trani hét. þat var allra vapna bitraz. hialm setti hann ahavftv ser hann var allt gylldr oc settr þeim steinv m er honvm mattv eigi iarn granda. skiold tok hann ser ihond þann er a var skrifat et oarga dýr. . . . Spiót sitt tok hann oc eptir stigr hann abac hesti sinvm er Lætffeti hét” (Zitzelsberger 1987, 53:1–9) [He puts on his coat of mail and valiantly prepares himself for battle. His coat of mail was very strong and had the color of the best gold. . . . He girded himself with his sword which was called Trani; it was the sharpest of all weapons. He set his helmet on his head; it was completely gilt and set with such stones that no iron could harm him. He put his shield on his arm; on it a lion was etched. . . . He took his spear and then mounts his horse which was called Lightfoot]. The portrayal of the armed protagonist even found its way into one of the most celebrated of the Sagas of Icelanders, *Laxdæla saga*, which portrays Bolli, returning from abroad, in a manner reminiscent of King Arthur in *Breta sögur*: “hann var gyrðr Fótbít, ok váru at honum hjólt gullbúin ok meðalkafinn gulli vaðir; hann hafði gyldan hjálm á hofði ok rauðan skjöld á hlið, ok á dreginn riddari með gulli; hann hafði glaðel í hendi, sem títt er í útlöndum” (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, 225) [“He was girt with the sword ‘Leg-Biter,’ its pommel was gold embossed and the hilt bound with gold. He had a gilded helmet on his head and a red shield at his side on which a knight was traced in gold. He carried a lance in his hand, as is the custom in foreign lands” (Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson 1969, 236)].

The Icelandic romances that were composed starting in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries inevitably depicted the lavish feasting that took place at weddings and other courtly celebrations. The earliest such account is found in *Breta sögur*, however, when King Arthur is crowned. In Geoffrey's *Historia*, we read that Kay the steward, assisted by a thousand noblemen, bore in the food, and Bedver the cup-bearer, similarly assisted, passed the drinks in goblets of every conceivable shape to the assemblage—but Geoffrey breaks off the account with the comment: “[I]f I were to describe it all in detail, my history would become too wordy” (Reeve and Wright 2007, 212). The author of *Breta sögur* had no such reservations, however, as he launched into a depiction:

krasadiskar aller voro af rauða gulli geruír eða silfri oc setter gimsteinum. Beduerus byrli byrlar Artho oc með honum fioldi annara gaufugra manna. aull ker oc bollar oc skaler voro af gulli eða brendu silfri. epter slikum hætti var allr buningr ihauil drotningar sua sem konungs eða framar allt var tialldat vefium enum dyrstum eða guðuef oc gengv naliga aller menn i gullofinum klæðum. þa er dryckiu var lokit oc hennar varð i milli þa voro leikar oc taufi oc saugur. þar var allz kyn streingleikar. fiðlur oc gígjur bumbur oc pipur oc simphoniam oc haurpur. (fol. 54v; Jón Sigurdsson 1849, 100–101)

(The dishes for delicacies were all of red gold, or silver, and inlaid with jewels. Bedver the butler served drinks to Arthur, along with a multitude of other noble men. All the vessels, cups, and bowls were of gold or pure silver; of similar appearance were all the trappings in the queen's hall, like the king's, or even better: everything was hung with most precious or velvet tapestries, and nearly everyone was dressed in gold-shot garments. During and after the drinking there were games and dice and stories. There were all kinds of stringed instruments: fiddles and lyres, drums and fifes, hurdy-gurdies and harps.)

The elaborate description of the feasting and activities at Arthur's coronation manifests a decided shift from the narrative art of Geoffrey's chronicle to that of romance. The account in *Breta sögur* is similar to what we read in the *Brut*, where Wace devotes some forty verses to the banquet (Weiss 2002, vv. 10446–90), and another forty to the activities after the meal, including, as in *Breta sögur*, music and games (10521–60).⁹

9. Würth remarks on the parallel passage in Wace and states that this must surely have already been found in the Latin source of *Breta sögur* (Würth 1998, 58).

The resplendent table settings at Arthur's court in *Breta sögur* anticipate the depiction of similar splendor in *Möttuls saga*, where the stewards set Arthur's table with:

a most abundant supply of good provisions and the best beverages to be found in the world to provide for the king's table in every way. They first covered the tables with the whitest of tablecloths and placed on them silver spoons and gold spoons, highly ornamented knives, and silver dishes with salt. (Kalinke 1999c, 9)

To return to Arthur's coronation: on the fourth day of the festivities, Geoffrey tells us, Arthur summoned all who had served him, "and each was rewarded with a city or castle, with archbishoprics, bishoprics, abbeys or some other honour" (Reeve and Wright 2007, 214). Here, too, the author of *Breta sögur*, that is, after its Latin source, elaborates:

hinn fjórða dag veizlunnar skipti Artus konungr gíofum með monnum. oc let þat huern af ser þiggja sem hann var fusaztr til gull eða silfr eða gersemar. Vapn eða klæði dyrlig. borger eða kastala eða iok tign manna er leituðu gaufugra kuanfanga. byskupum oc abotum oc oðrum lærðum monnum veitti hann mikil gæðe. oc naliga gædde hann alla nockuri virðingu þa sem hann hafði þangat boðit. (fol. 54v; Jón Sigurdsson 1849, 101n11)

(On the fourth day of the feast King Arthur distributed gifts to men, and he let everyone have what he most desired; gold or silver, or jewelry, weapons or costly garments, fortifications or castles, while the prestige of men who entered into noble marriages rose. He granted many a boon to bishops and abbots and other learned men and he bestowed on just about all those whom he had invited there some honor.)

The account in the *Brut* is similar, yet even more extensive. Like King Arthur of *Breta sögur*, Wace's king dispenses gifts lavishly to those who have visited his court from foreign lands: he gives jewels, greyhounds, birds, furs, cloth, cups, goblets, brocades, rings, tunics, cloaks, and more. On those who had served him, Arthur bestows towns, castles, bishoprics, and abbeys. The narrator concludes the very long list of Arthur's gifts (10591–616) by saying: "Any man worth anything, who had come to visit him from other lands, was given such a gift from the king that it did him honour" (Weiss 2002, 267).

It is evident that the expansion of Geoffrey's account of Arthurian opulence, entertainment, and munificence in *Breta sögur* and the *Brut* anticipates what was to become formulaic in the romances. One can

recall Chrétien de Troyes's depiction of the protagonists' wedding in *Erec et Enide*, which takes place at Arthur's court:

Quant la corz fu tote asamblee, / n'ot menestrel an la contree / qui rien seüst de nul deduit, / qui a la cort ne fussent tuit. / An la sale molt grant joie ot; / chascuns servi de ce qu'il sot; / cil saut, cil tunbe, cil anchante, / li uns sifle, li autres chante, / cil flaüte, cil chalemele, / cil gigue, li autres viele; / puceles querolent et dancent; / trestuit de joie fere tancent / . . . / Li rois Artus ne fu pas chiches: / bien comanda as penetiers / et as queuz et aus botelliers / qu'il livrassent a grant planté, / chascun selonc sa volanté, / et pain et vin et veneison. (Roques 1966, 1983–2011)

When all the court was assembled, every minstrel in the land who knew any kind of entertainment was present. In the hall there was great merriment; each contributed what he could: one jumped, another tumbled, another performed magic, one told stories, another sang, one whistled, another played, this one the harp, that one the rote, this one the flute, that one the reed pipe, the fiddle or the vielle. Maidens performed rounds and other dances, each trying to outdo the other in showing their joy. . . . King Arthur was not parsimonious; he ordered the bakers, cooks, and wine-stewards to serve bread, wine, and game in great quantity to each person—as much as he wished. (Carroll 1991, 62)

For their part in the entertainment, the minstrels were amply rewarded; “they were given beautiful gifts: clothes of vair and ermine, of rabbit and rich purple cloth, fur-trimmed scarlet or silk. Those who wanted a horse or money each had a gift according to their wishes, as good as they deserved” (Carroll 1991, 63).

As previously noted, *Breta söggur* is extant in two redactions, in the longer version from which I cite, and which I believe reflects the original translation, and in the so-called *Hauksbók*, which contains a starkly reduced text. The nature of Haukr's at times radical editing is strikingly evident in the account of Arthur's coronation, which is summarily dispatched:

hann bavð til sin at hvita svnv ollvm konvngvm hertogvm ok iorlvvm ok ollvm hofpingivm i sinv riki ok var hann þa krvnaðr ok sva drottningin ok er sv veizla viðfrægivz orðin a Norðrlondvm bæði at fornv ok nyiv. (Finnur Jónsson and Eiríkur Jónsson 1892–1896, 290:14–7)

(At Whitsun he invited all the kings, dukes and earls, and all the chief-tains to his kingdom, and then he was crowned as was the queen, and that feast has become far and wide the most famous in the Nordic lands both in old days and modern.)

Haukr's condensation strips the coronation account of all but the facts that it occurred, was widely attended, and was famed.¹⁰ In Haukr's summary, the expansive narrative of the longer redaction of *Breta sögur* reverts to the form of a chronicle.¹¹

The two redactions of *Breta sögur* transmit, on the one hand, a text representative of the original translation and its source, and, on the other, a substantially condensed version of that translation. In the latter case, we know the redactor and can construe his method on the basis of the longer redaction. Like *Breta sögur* in *Hauksbók*, not a few translations undertaken in Norway evince substantial condensation of text vis-à-vis their presumed French sources. Except for the two Arthurian *lais* in the *Strengleikar* anthology, *Januals ljód* and *Geitarlauf*, the translations of the Arthurian narratives are extant solely in Icelandic redactions. Evidence of the state of the original translation is entirely lacking in a work like *Erex saga*, the translation of Chrétien de Troyes's *Erec et Enide*. We know neither the place—Norway or Iceland—nor time of translation. The saga has been preserved solely in seventeenth-century Icelandic manuscripts. The similar depiction of the celebration at Arthur's coronation in the AM 573 4to redaction of *Breta sögur* and at Erec's wedding in Chrétien's *Erec et Enide* manifests the affinity of *Breta sögur* to romance. There is an extraordinary discrepancy, however, between the depiction of the wedding festivities in *Erec et Enide* and in *Erex saga*, where the celebration is summarized in a manner reminiscent of the abstract of Arthur's festivities in the *Hauksbók* version of *Breta sögur*:

Stóð þetta brúðlaup yfir hálfan mánuð með allri blíðu ok allra handa gleði. Ok at veizlunni liðinni váru höfðingjarnir virðuligum gjöfum útleystir, ok engi fór þaðan gjafalauss. (Kalinke 1999a, 236)

This wedding lasted over half a month with every gaiety and all kinds of good cheer. And at the conclusion of the festivities the chieftains were sent off with precious gifts, and no one left there without a gift. (Kalinke 1999a, 237)

10. The comment that *Breta sögur* skipped Geoffrey's descriptions of feasting (Würth 1998, 77; Gropper 2014, 228) applies only to Haukr's summary of the coronation in AM 544 4to. This is not the case in the AM 573 4to redaction, which greatly amplifies what Geoffrey writes.

11. Würth believes that *Breta sögur* was intended less as an entertaining narrative than a historiographic work (Würth 1998, 74; Gropper 2014, 227) because of certain parallels to and similarities with the Norwegian kings' chronicles in the *Hauksbók* redaction. The dramatized and narrativized text in the AM 573 4to redaction of *Breta sögur* suggests most strongly, however, that the author of this version, that is, of the text translated in Iceland, proceeded more as a romancier than a chronicler in the tradition of Geoffrey.

Throughout, *Erex saga* bears evidence of extreme reduction of text vis-à-vis its French source—and indubitably the original translation.

Unlike *Erex saga*, the Icelandic manuscripts of *Möttuls saga* more or less preserve the text of the original Norwegian translation, to judge by the extant French manuscripts. As in *Breta sögur*, the splendors of Arthur's court and the king's munificence are described at length in *Möttuls saga*. King Arthur:

gefa lét hirð sinni ok tilkomnum höfðingjum ok riddurum ríka gangveru ok örugg vápn, prúða búnaði ok beztu vápn ok hesta er honum váru sendir vestan af Spanía, Lumbardía ok Almannía. Ok var þar engi svá fátækr riddari kominn at eigi þá þá ríka gangveru ok örugg vápn ok prúða búnaði ok góðan hest, þvíat þar skorti ekki vatta, þat er hafa þurfti. Ok í engri kóngrs hirð váru svá ríkar gjafir gefnar sem þar váru þegnar né svá gnógliga fengnar. (Kalinke 1999c, 8)

let rich garments and trusty weapons, magnificent apparel, and the best of weapons be given to his court and to the assembled chieftains and knights, and, in addition, horses that had been sent from the West, from Spain, Lombardy, and Alemannia. There had come no knight, no matter how poor, who did not receive rich garments and trusty weapons, magnificent apparel, and a good horse, for there was no lack of things that one might want. And at no king's court were such rich gifts received and bestowed with such abundance as were given there. (Kalinke 1999c, 9)

This is the liberal Arthur who became known in the second quarter of the thirteenth century in Norway, but this very king had already been introduced earlier in Iceland, in *Breta sögur*.

The longer redaction of *Breta sögur* that is the subject of this study is largely unfamiliar. It presumably transmits fairly faithfully the original Icelandic translation, but to date, it has not been edited. The text that is known is Haukr Erlendsson's drastically reduced version in the two nineteenth-century editions, by Jón Sigurdsson (1849) and Finnur Jónsson and Eiríkur Jónsson (1892–1896), and in Jón Helgason's facsimile edition of 1960. While Jón Sigurdsson supplies variants from the AM 573 4to redaction, these are haphazardly incomplete. Haukr's condensed redaction is also the basis of Stefanie Würth's German translation in *Isländische Antikensagas* (1996). The longer original version of *Breta sögur* that was known in medieval Iceland—it was copied and excerpted—is accessible to modern scholars only in manuscript.

The Arthurian section of *Breta sögur* is not an Arthurian romance per se, but in style, content, and the depiction of the emotions, it is,

like Wace's *Brut*, on the cusp of romance. *Breta sögur* introduced themes and motifs in Iceland that would not surface until a couple of decades later in the translations of Arthurian romances in Norway. It is a commonplace that the Arthurian romances depict the peacetime pursuits of Arthur's knights, whereas Geoffrey's *Historia* focuses on Arthur's wartime exploits. Nonetheless, the danger that *recreantise* (a life of leisure, the failing at the heart of *Erec et Enide*) presents for Arthur's court already occurs in the *Historia* as also in *Breta sögur* when, toward the conclusion of the coronation festivities, Arthur receives a letter from Lucius, procurator of the Roman Republic, demanding tribute and threatening invasion. Cadur, king of Cornwall, reacts in *Breta sögur* by remarking that despite having enjoyed all the delights of Arthur's court, he nevertheless fears the consequences,

at ver mundum fyrir sællifis sakar. tyna soknfimi oc sigr sælld. eða auðrum braugðum agætum af því at a þrem vetrum haufum ver engiss gað. nema tefla oc leika oc konur faðma. en firer slika hluti tynir margr maðr veg oc virðingu mundu ver naliga tapa varí frægð. ef sliku gengi fram lengr. (fol. 55v)

(that on account of our life of pleasure we will lose our skill at combat and ability to achieve victory and other exploits, since for three years we have done nothing else but played at dice and engaged in games and embraced women. For this reason many a man will lose his standing and reputation; we shall come close to losing our fame if this goes on any longer.)

Cadur's admonitory speech not only evokes Erec's *recreantise* but also anticipates Gawain's warning to the eponymous protagonist of *Ívens saga* not to ruin his knightly reputation and accomplishments—"fordjarfa svá sinn riddaraskap ok atgervi"—by remaining at home in his castle. He should rather accompany him and King Arthur to participate in tournaments (Kalinke 1999b, 64–6). The motif reappears prominently in a late medieval Icelandic romance, *Ectors saga*, that plundered Arthurian literature for motifs and themes. The plot is based on the need of the eponymous protagonist and his six companions to set out in search of adventure so as not to be criticized for remaining inactive at court. As one of Ector's companions puts it, it would be quite a story if "ver skulum heima liggia athafnarlausir" [we were to lie about idle at home]; he intends to "rijda ij annann stad og freista mijns riddaraskapar ok uita huat til fręgdar kann ath verda ij minni ferd" (Loth 1962, 90:15–21) [set forth to test my chivalry and see what will bring fame on my journey].

Subsequently, when Arthur's troops and those of Lucius meet on the field of battle, the king addresses his men during a lull and responds directly to Cadur's above concerns. He says that even though he and his knights had for a time enjoyed leisure, they have not lost their skill at combat or their ability to achieve victory—*sigrsæli oc sóknfimi* (fol. 60v, Jón Sigurdsson 1849, 115n4), and promises that their renown will rise rather than fall and thus increase their preeminence. If they gain victory over the Romans, “þa skulu þer hafa gnoðgar virðingar oc yfrit gull oc silfr heruð oc þorp. borgir ok kastala oc vapn at huerr eigi kost at kíosa ser tignar nafn þat er hann vill sialfr” (fol. 60v, Jón Sigurdsson 1849, 115n4) [then you will receive plentiful honors and abundant gold and silver, towns and villages, cities and castles and weapons so that each will have a chance to choose for himself whatever high rank he wants]. Arthur's speech as well as the greater part of the battle account is lacking in *Hauksbók*. Geoffrey's Arthur promises his men gold, silver, palaces, towers, castles, cities, “and all the spoils of victory” (Reeve and Wright 2007, 236), but not a noble title. In any case, Arthur's promise of generous rewards for victory in battle echoes his largesse at his coronation.

Romance was introduced in the North with the translation of Thomas de Bretagne's *Tristan* in 1226 in Norway. *Tristrams saga*, as the Norse rendering is called, is traditionally counted among the Arthurian romances, although King Arthur appears only briefly in two episodes, that is, in the accounts of the beard-collecting giant and the giant of Mont-Saint-Michel. These episodes link *Tristrams saga* to *Breta sögur*. Given that the stories of King Arthur's encounters with two giants are told in *Tristrams saga* solely because of Tristram's ties to them, the brevity of the two accounts is not unexpected. Arthur's combat with the beard-collecting giant is swiftly dispatched:

Sýndi jötunninn honum skinn þau, er hann hafði gert af kónaga skeggjunum. Síðan genguz þeir at með stórum höggum ok harðri atsókn allan dag frá morgni til kvelds. Ok um síðir sigraðiz kóngrinn á honum ok tók af honum höfuðit ok skinnin. (Jorgensen 1999, 172)

The giant showed him the cloak that he had made from the beards of kings, and then they fought with courageous charges and mighty blows from morning until evening. Finally the king gained victory over the giant and took from him both his cloak and his head. (Jorgensen 1999, 173)

In the *Historia* and in the *Brut*, the report of Arthur's encounter with the beard-collecting giant follows immediately upon the protracted episode

with the giant of Mont-Saint-Michel, which takes place after Arthur has been crowned king. Arthur's conflict with the beard-collecting giant had happened previously, however, at an indeterminate time in the past. After Arthur had killed the giant of Mont-Saint-Michel, the *Historia* reports that Arthur "said that he had not encountered anyone of such strength since he had killed upon mount Aravius the giant Ritho, who had challenged him to a duel" (Reeve and Wright 2007, 226). Arthur's struggle with this giant is not depicted, merely summarized with the comment: "Arthur won the duel and took Ritho's beard and the trophy." Wace's account is not much longer. It simply reports that "Arthur fought him and defeated him on Mount Arave; he flayed him and stripped off his beard" (Weiss 2002, 291).

Breta sögur, like the *Historia* and the *Brut*, refers to this earlier giant episode with the remark that Arthur "sagði sua at hann þottiz eigi islika raun komit hafa fyr sem þa. nema þa er hann atti við Rikonem kappa" (fol. 58r; Jón Sigurdsson 1849, 111n) [said that he thought he had never before experienced such danger except when he fought with the champion Rikon]. The comment does not generate an account of the incident, however, but serves to recall an episode inserted just prior to Arthur's coronation, when he confronts Rikon, who "var naliga risi at vexti. oc enn mesti berserkr at yfírgangi oc viafnaði oc bitu hann eigi iarn" (fol. 53r) [was virtually a giant in stature and the greatest berserker with regards to terrorism and tyranny, and weapons could not cut him]. Here, the meeting with the giant is not only depicted with a blow-by-blow account of the struggle, but the episode also concludes with an additional detail establishing Arthur's supremacy over other kings. Arthur goes to meet the giant,

oc þegar þeir mættuz hauggr kappinn til Arthum en hann bra við skilldinum oc hio hann skioldinn allt at likneski Marie drotningar en þa beit eigi leingra. en Arthus hio i mot i haufuð risanum oc beit suerðit ecki. þo lamdiz haussinn kappinn kastar þa skilldinum oc rennr a Arthum oc tok hann sua fast at hann stakaði við. oc for vndan oc er þeir haufðu við azt vm stund þa mæddi kappann hausbrotið oc fell hann oc geck Artus þa af honum dauðum. (fol. 53v)

(and as soon as the two meet, the champion strikes at Arthur, who warded off the blow with his shield, but the giant split the shield all the way down to the image of the Virgin Mary, but did not cleave it any farther. And Arthur struck the head of the giant, but the sword did not cut it, yet it severely injured the skull. The champion then throws down the shield and runs at Arthur and grabbed him so hard that he stumbled, but he dodged him. And when they had struggled

for a time, the champion became exhausted because of the broken skull and fell onto the ground. And Arthur then left him dead.)

Unlike the concise flashbacks in the *Historia* and the *Brut*, the episode in *Breta sögur* is dramatically extended and concludes, moreover, with a significant element found neither in Wace nor in the *Historia*, that is, Arthur invites all the kings who had lost their beards to the giant to meet him and “at vitia skeggia sinna at þeir skylldu þau sækia oc vinna þat til at ganga til einuigiss við sialfan hann ella skylldu þeir vera hans vnder menn oc honum skatt gillder” [to retrieve their beards, to fetch them, and to engage in single combat with him, or else they would become his vassals and tributaries]. The narrator adds that “oc engi þeira var sua hraustr at sækia þorði þvíat þeir þottuz ecki þar við sinn maka eiga at skipta” (fol. 53v; Jón Sigurdsson 1849, 98n4) [not one of them was so valiant that he dared fetch his beard, for they did not think they ought to engage in a match with someone like him]. The kings implicitly acknowledge that they cannot vanquish Arthur in combat, and thus they submit to him.

I attribute this expansive episode and its placement in *Breta sögur* to the saga’s source rather than to an Icelandic redactor.¹² Whoever authored this change of narrative sequence by placing the giant episode before Arthur’s coronation, rather than after, as Geoffrey did, intended to establish Arthur’s supremacy over other kings of his time. This change in the structure of Geoffrey’s narrative is, in my opinion, a brilliant move; whoever the author, that person understood the significance of interjecting an episode establishing Arthur’s primacy before he is crowned king.¹³ The interpolation of this episode immediately following Arthur’s single combat with Frollo, governor of Gaul, in Paris, and before his coronation may have been inspired by the giant’s offer to place Arthur’s beard higher on his cloak, “to reflect Arthur’s preeminence over other kings” (Reeve and Wright 2007, 226), as Geoffrey puts it.

The two episodes relating Arthur’s struggle with giants in *Breta sögur* are precursors of similar encounters between knights and giants

12. Hélène Tétrel believes this episode represents an interpolation vis-à-vis Geoffrey’s text, perhaps deriving from another *Brut*, whether Latin or not (Tétrel 2010, 173).

13. I disagree with Tétrel (2010, 173), who considers the conjoining of the episode of the beard-collecting giant to that of Frollo a “jointure maladroit,” a clumsy jointure. She fails to consider the broader significance of the interpolation at this juncture of the plot.

in such Arthurian *riððarasögur* as *Tristrams saga* and *Ívens saga*. In the late medieval Icelandic romances, episodes featuring a knight's combat with a giant became de rigueur, such as in *Ectors saga* (Kalinke 2012). Although Icelandic authors knew both *Tristrams saga* and *Ívens saga*, as borrowings from both translations in some indigenous romances amply attest, the earliest model for such episodes was provided by *Breta sögur*.

It has been pointed out that Wace was far more interested in human emotion and interaction than was Geoffrey of Monmouth. The same can be said of the unknown source of the Arthurian narrative in *Breta sögur*, which transformed a largely passive victim of deception into a grieving and recalcitrant widow in the story of Arthur's conception. Uther's infatuation with Igera is construed as a tale of rivalry and loss in *Breta sögur*. Among the nobility assembled at the Easter banquet were Gorlois and his wife, Igera, who "allra kuenna var vænst oc fegrst. þvi at hennar asion var sua faugr oc biort at aller þeir er sa vndruðuz hennar fegrð. oc lofuðu hennar list" (fol. 47r) [was the most beautiful and fairest of all women, for her appearance was so fair and radiant that all who saw her wondered at her beauty and praised her refinement]. The narrator adds: "hertoginn vnni henni sua mikit at hann matti varla af sia. oc aungum manni trvði hann hennar at gæta at þessi veizlu nema sialfum ser" [the duke loved her so much that he could barely take his eyes off her. And he trusted no other person to attend her at this feast than himself]. And at once, the narrative shifts to Uther who, like Gorlois, fixes his eyes and mind upon Igera—"rendi opt augum til þessarrar konu oc sua hug"—the moment he sees her. Moreover, in direct competition with her husband, who wishes to attend to his wife alone, Uther sends her all the best delicacies from his table and repeatedly engages her in conversation.¹⁴ These might seem but minor additional details in *Breta sögur* vis-à-vis the *Historia*, but the episodes that follow confirm that the author wanted to tell a rather different story of Arthur's conception and its aftermath. Geoffrey reports that upon the death of Gorlois, Uther "returned to the castle of Tintagel,

14. This scene, which is elaborated also in Wace's *Brut* (Weiss 2002, 8574–602), vis-à-vis that in the *Historia*, but merely summarized in the *Hauksbók* redaction (Finnur Jónsson and Eiríkur Jónsson 1892–1896, 286:15–8), accounts for Gropper's statement that the translator of *Breta sögur* reduced the depiction of emotions, for example, the love of Uther for Igera and Gorlois's resulting jealousy, to a bare minimum (Gropper 2014, 228–9). This is in fact not the case in the AM 573 4to redaction.

took it and Igera and fulfilled his desire. They remained together thereafter, united by no little passion” (Reeve and Wright 2007, 188).

Breta sögur departs radically from Geoffrey’s account of the aftermath of Uther’s deception. When, after the death of Gorlois, he returns to Tintagel, the narrator reports that he confesses to Igera “allt et sanna oc með huorium brogðum hann hefer hana fengit” (fol. 48r; Jón Sigurdsson 1849, 86) [the whole truth and with what trickery he had gotten her], and then the narrative shifts into direct address:

oc þo at þu þikiz nu mikinn skaða beðit hafa i drapi bonda þins. þa munu skiott raðaz bætr a því firir þa grein at nu skaltu vera min drotning oc skal ek i ockari samuist allt þat bæta sem ek hefer aðr brotið við þig. (fol. 48r; Jón Sigurdsson 1849, 86n1)

(and although you believe to have now experienced a great loss in the killing of your husband, we shall quickly make amends for this, for you shall now be my queen and in our marriage I shall make up to you for every way I have wronged you.)

But the grief-stricken Igera replies:

Nu em ek sarliga suikin. oc hormuliga gint. ho ho segir hon mikil oskaup ero vorðin. Sua er sem ek se vorðin banamaðr bonda míns. sua agætz. honum vnna ek <sem> likama sialfrar minnar. oc sua sem lifi minu. hann villdi mer allt gott oc þat skal verða alldri at ek gangi lostig i sama sæng þeim manni er minn bonda hefir suikit. oc fyr skal ek lata mitt lif en þat verði. (fol. 48r; Jón Sigurdsson 1849, 86n1)

(“I have now been grievously betrayed and sadly deceived. Alas,” she says, “great misfortune has occurred, for I have become my husband’s slayer, who was so excellent. I loved him as my very self and my very life. He wanted nothing but good for me. And it shall never happen that I willingly share the same bed with the man who has betrayed my husband. I will sooner die than have that happen.”)

The narrator remarks that she cries sorely and is so anguished that no one can console her.

Unlike Geoffrey’s account of the episode, in which Uther does not own up to his deception and Igera is not given a voice, the author of the Icelandic version anticipated a question a reader would surely raise: how Uther could simply have taken Igera without the latter either inquiring what had occurred or resisting her husband’s killer. The Igera of *Breta sögur* loved her husband, mourns his loss, and expresses her unwillingness to marry Uther. Her intransigence forces Uther to seek out Merlin once more to bring about Igera’s submission.

And Merlin fabricates a potion to overcome Igerna's hatred of Uther. The narrator reports that Merlin gives her the potion, and Igerna at once stops all her weeping and grieving—"kastar þegar ollum ecka oc angrí" (fol. 48v; Jón Sigurdsson 1849, 87n1)—and consents to marry the king. Remarkably, Haukr Erlendsson's radical abbreviation of the episode in his redaction of *Breta sögur* returns it full circle to Geoffrey's chronicle. Although the narrator reports that Uther tells Igerna the entire truth, her only reaction is that "hon samþyckir þa við konvng ok feck hann þa hennar (Finnur Jónsson and Eiríkur Jónsson 1892–1896, 286:87–8) [she consents to the king, and he then married her]. Excised in *Hauksbók* are Igerna's plaint and Merlin's love potion.

Igerna's lament anticipates similar scenes in *Tristrams saga*, *Erex saga*, and *Ívens saga*.¹⁵ I am firmly convinced that just as the Icelandic translator or a later redactor did not change the placement of the episode recounting Arthur's struggle with the beard-collecting giant, he also did not augment or modify the story of Uther and Igerna. The divergences from and additions to Geoffrey's *Historia* as we know it today were found in the source of *Breta sögur*, a Latin redaction that not only contained motifs and themes associated with Arthurian romance, but that also dramatized and narrativized certain incidents.

Breta sögur contains another striking speech, this time by Mordred, who had himself crowned king and was engaged in an adulterous relationship with Guinevere while Arthur was abroad fighting the Romans. Although Geoffrey states that he "will not be silent even about this," suggesting he refers to Guinevere's infidelity, he nonetheless refrains from addressing the adultery and instead states that "he will tell, in his poor style, but briefly, of the battles the famous king fought against his nephew" (Reeve and Wright 2007, 248). But the author of the source of *Breta sögur* does not gloss over the issue, for he inserts a speech by Mordred, in which he explains to Guinevere what motivates him:

fru sagði hann. Nu er þinn herra Artus konungr farinn i herfaur vt i Galliam at beriaz við Lucium Romaborgar aulldung. oc þo at hann se mikill kappi oc rauskr i framgaungum. þa er honum þo ofrefli at deila kappi við romuerskan her. er nu þess van at kapp hans oc forsia leysi valldi hans skamlifi. mun hann ecki koma aptr or þessi herferð. Nu er þat mitt rað fru at lata mik taka til konungs yfir allt Bretariki. en þu skalt vera mín drotning. ok skal ek gera til þín alla hluti epter því sem þu kant beiða. oc þo at sua verði at Artus komi aptr. þa hefir

15. See the discussions in Kalinke (2009, 220–1); Gropper (2011, 54–5).

ek gnogan afla til at hallda ríkinu firer þeim. oc munu uið fru sagði hann alla ockra lífdaga mega niotaz firer þeim saukum. (fol. 62r-v; Jón Sigurdsson 1849, 120n1)

“Lady,” he said, “your Lord Arthur is now on a military campaign abroad in Gaul to engage Lucius, the Roman senator, in battle. And although he is a great champion and valiant in battle, he nevertheless confronts an overwhelming force in combat with the Roman army. It is now to be expected that his zeal and lack of foresight will cause his life to be cut short so that he will not return from this campaign. It is now my advice, lady, to let me be taken as king over all of Britain, and you shall be my queen. And I shall do everything you ask of me; and should it be that Arthur does come back, I nonetheless have enough power to withhold the kingdom from him. And we, Lady,” he said, “shall therefore be able to enjoy each other all the days of our lives.”)

Guinevere, unlike Igera, does not respond; the narrator merely states that “drotning hlyðir nu a þeira fortaulur. oc ferr þetta frammat Modreið geck at eiga Guenuere oc gerðiz nu konungr yfir Bretlandi” [the queen now listens to this proposition, and it comes about that Mordred marries Guinevere and now becomes king over Britain].

King Arthur, too, is given a voice at a decisive point in *Breta sögur*, but not in the *Historia*. Before their battle with the Saxons, Archbishop Dubricius had delivered a rousing speech in the *Historia*, exhorting the men to battle, and *Breta sögur* transmits his words in highly alliterative rhythmical prose.¹⁶ Subsequently, in the midst of a fierce battle, the *Historia* relates that Arthur “swiftly hurled himself upon the dense ranks of the enemy. As he called on God, he killed any man he touched with a single blow” (Reeve and Wright 2007, 198). *Breta sögur* similarly reports that Arthur rushes forward, brandishes his sword, and calls upon God—but then the author shifts to direct speech to transmit Arthur’s prayer:

þu guð er aullum hlutum styrer. bæðe storum oc smam oc þu skapaðer Adam oc himin oc iorð oc alla hluti goða. en aungva illa aðr en spilltiz skepnan sialf. þu lez beraz hingat iheiminn til þess at leysa allt mann kynit fra syndum oc eilifum dauða vertu oss nu at trausti almattigr guð. oc þin en helga moðer mār Maria. oc aullum þeim er þin laug vilia nockvt styrkia. efldu oss drottinn at ver megim sigr hafa a varum

16. The speech is found only in the AM 573 4to redaction (fol. 49r; Jón Sigurdsson 1849, 90n7). For the text and a discussion of this speech, see Kalinke (2009, 228–9); Kalinke (2011, 43).

ouinum. þeim er nu beriumz ver imot oc ver megum efla þin heilug
boðorð epter varum vilium. (49v-50r)¹⁷

(You God, who rules all things, both great and small, and you created Adam and heaven and earth and all things good but none evil before creation itself became corrupt; you let yourself be brought into this world to save all mankind from sin and eternal death; be for us now a protection, almighty God, and also your holy mother the Virgin Mary, and for all those who seek to uphold your laws. Strengthen us, Lord, so that we may gain victory over our enemies, against whom we are now fighting, so that we may support with firm resolve your holy commands.)

Arthur's prayer is not found in the extant manuscripts of the *Historia*. Like Igera's lament, it occurred in the source of *Breta sögur*, an expanded and variant version of Geoffrey's *Historia*.

There is one remarkable instance, however, where the pen of an Icelander presumably strayed from the source, and that is the substitution of Norway for Iceland in the account of Arthur's conquests. As noted previously, Geoffrey reports in the *Historia regum Britanniae* that after he had subjugated Ireland, Arthur "took his fleet to Iceland, where he defeated the natives and conquered their land" (Reeve and Wright 2007, 204). *Hauksbók* omits the sentence, but the AM 573 4to redaction has a remarkable variant: "oc eptir vnnit Jrland stefner hann til Noregs oc letter eigi fyr en hann hefer vnnit allan Noreg" (fol. 51v; Jón Sigurdsson 1849, 94n2) [and after he had conquered Ireland he heads to Norway and does not stop until he has conquered all of Norway].¹⁸ While this reading confirms that the original translation

17. In *Hauksbók*, the account of the battle is greatly abbreviated and Arthur's prayer is omitted. In his edition of *Breta sögur* (1849), Jón Sigurdsson fails to give this variant, that is, Arthur's prayer, from AM 573 4to in the notes.

18. *Hauksbók* lacks this variant. Geoffrey mentions Iceland and Icelanders two other times, neither one of which occurs in the AM 573 4to redaction. At Arthur's Easter convocation, Geoffrey has a certain Malvasius, king of Iceland, in attendance (Reeve and Wright 2007, 211). This is lacking in both the AM 573 4to and *Hauksbók* redactions. At a later point, as Arthur musters his troops for combat with the Romans, Geoffrey—but not *Breta sögur*—records men from Iceland among them (Reeve and Wright 2007, 221). Subsequently, however, *Hauksbók* lists the various kings in Arthur's army, among them "Malvasius Tile konvng" (Finnur Jónsson and Eiríkur Jónsson 1892–1896, 291:21–2) [Malvasius, king of Thule], and Haukr adds "þat heitir nv Island" [that is now called Iceland]. The AM 573 4to redaction omits this. The fact that *Hauksbók* retains this reading suggests that the reference to Malvasius, king of Iceland, is original but was expunged in AM 573 4to by a later redactor.

had indeed transmitted Geoffrey's sentence, either the translator or a later redactor changed "Iceland" to "Norway." When *Breta sögur* was translated around 1200, Iceland was a commonwealth; by the time the AM 573 4to redaction was produced, Iceland had become subject to the Norwegian crown. Whether Norway was substituted for Iceland as Arthur's first conquest in Scandinavia when the *Historia* was translated at the beginning of the thirteenth century, or in the middle of the fourteenth century, when the AM 573 4to redaction was produced, it seems safe to interpret this modification as an Icelandic intervention in the text of the Latin source. The Icelanders knew that the Arthur of the Britons did not play a role in Iceland's own beginnings.

Notwithstanding, King Arthur did enter Icelandic literary history. He became known in Iceland before he put in his first appearance in Norway. The story of Arthur's origin and deeds in *Breta sögur*, composed around 1200, is the stuff of romance. While the impact of the Norwegian translations on the composition of a new genre, romance, in Iceland is incontestable, the Arthur of literature was actually introduced before his romances were imported from Norway. *Breta sögur*, like Wace's *Roman de Brut*, became the bridge to the newer world of romance in Iceland.

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