

**THREE NORTHERN
LOVE STORIES; AND
OTHER TALES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649721535

Three Northern Love Stories; And Other Tales by Eirikr Magnússon & William Morris

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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EIRÍKR MAGNÚSSON & WILLIAM MORRIS

**THREE NORTHERN
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LOVE STORIES
AND OTHER TALES

TRANSLATED FROM THE ICELANDIC
BY EIRÍKR MAGNÚSSON AND
WILLIAM MORRIS

NEW EDITION

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.
39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON
NEW YORK AND BOMBAY
1901

MS. A. 1. 10
1653

PREFACE

THE three excellent Icelandic stories that are printed first in this book were, in their present form at least, written respectively in the thirteenth, the fourteenth, and the fifteenth centuries: the earliest of them, the *Gunnlaug*, has even been assigned by tradition to Ari the Learned, the father of Icelandic history: the names of people and the genealogies given in it, as well as the names given to their habitations, are found to agree with what we learn about them from other early records; and, in short, it must be called an historical tale, in spite of anything marvellous or mythological that is to be found in it.

The *Frithiof*, on the other hand, is an example of the large class of romantic stories that took their present form in the fourteenth century, though it can scarcely be questioned that something of them must have existed in some guise

at a much earlier date. Though the Frithiof Saga is not mentioned in any earlier work, it bears in one part signs of its having had an earlier form: for some of the (apparent) prose of it is really verse; and it is remarkable that this happens in the typical part of the tale, viz. where Frithiof comes disguised to King Ring.

The *Viglund*, again, in spite of its story being localised definitely enough, is confessedly nothing but a pure fiction, and in more than one place the tale-teller has borrowed from earlier stories: e.g. the incident at p. 192 from the Frithiof; and the fight in which the sons of Holmkell are slain from the story of Helgi and Grim, the sons of Droplaug. It should be mentioned that the melody given in it is an old traditional one in Iceland, and may be taken as an example of the sort of tune to which the staves of verse in the Sagas were sung.

The story of *Hogni and Hedinn* is a late and amplified version of the mythological tale given in the *Skáldskaparmál* (or Treatise on Poetic Diction), a translation of which we add in a note.

Roi the Fool, in spite of its very characteristic Northern colouring, is a version of an Eastern

story, and is probably adapted directly from some Latin translation of the mediæval Greek Syntipas, the earliest European version of the "Seven Wise Masters," which is also found in the *Thousand and One Nights* under the title of "The King, his Son, and the Seven Wezeers:" at p. 163 of the 3rd vol. of Mr. Lane's translation the reader will find the Arabian version of Roi the Fool.¹

The short tale of *Thorstein Staff-smitten* is a kind of hanger-on to the more important story of "the Weapon-firth Men," the people of a district in the North-east of Iceland. Biarni of Hof is the hero of the second generation in this tale: at the fight at Bodvarsdale, mentioned more than once in our story, he met and defeated his cousin, whom he afterwards treated with a generosity and forbearance much of a piece with his dealings with Thorstein Staff-smitten.

¹ We must note here, in illustration of the wanderings of this story, that it is found only in the ancient Icelandic MS. commonly called the *Flateyjarbók*, and in that part of it which was written before 1380: from the manner of its adaptation it would seem that the tale came to Iceland from Denmark. It is to be added, that the *Flateyjarbók* was certainly written at Viðfaldstunga (in Iceland) by two clerks, Jón Þorbjallson and Magnús Þorbjarnson, probably chaplains (*heimilisprestur*) of the lord of the manor, and belonged apparently from the beginning to Jón Hákonarson, who by a charter (*máldagi*) for the church of Viðfaldstunga, dated 1394, is proved to have been master of that stead about the time when the MS. was being written.

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CHRONOLOGY

IN THE STORY OF GUNNLAUG THE WORM-TONGUE

Helga the Fair born	<i>circa</i> 985
Gunnlaug Worm-tongue born	983
Gunnlaug attempts to run away	998
Gunnlaug resides alternately at Burg and Gils- bank for three years	998-1001
Gunnlaug goes to Earl Eric of Hladir	1001
Gunnlaug goes to King Sigtrygg in Ireland, Earl Sigurd in Orkney, and Earl Sigurd of Skarir in Sweden	1002
Gunnlaug goes to King Olaf of Sweden	1003
Raven goes to Iceland	1003
Gunnlaug goes to King Ethelred of England, and remains with him	1004-5

OSARVÆ.—On p. 42 it is stated that in those days Knut the Great ruled in Denmark, &c. This is a mistake on the part of the writer of the Saga, as King Swein lived until A.D. 1014, when Knut succeeded to his throne; but it affects the chronology of the Saga in nowise.

Gunnlaug sails to Iceland in the autumn	1005
Gunnlaug fights a duel with Raven	1006
Duels forbidden by law	1006
Gunnlaug and Raven go abroad	1006
Gunnlaug remains in Orkney	1007
Raven sojourns in Throndheim	1007
Gunnlaug spends the winter with Earl Eric	1008
Gunnlaug falls, 23 years of age	1008

