VIKING AND MEDIEVAL SCANDINAVIA

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BRYNJA ÞORGEIRSDÓTTIR, STEFANIE GROPPER, JUDY QUINN, TARRIN WILLS, AND ALEXANDER WILSON

Investigating the *Íslendingasögur* as Prosimetrum: A New Methodology

▼ **ABSTRACT** This article lays out methods of analysing the combination of prose and verse in the *Íslendingasögur* (Sagas of Icelanders) using a database that categorizes the prosimetric features of the corpus. The article gives an overview of the design of the database and explains how it achieves two major research goals. The first is to facilitate quantitative analysis of patterns observed across the prosimetric sagas. The second is to provide a foundation for qualitative investigation of the corpus as a whole by enabling the classification and possible correlation of prosimetric aspects in the *Íslendingasögur*.

▼ **KEYWORDS** Old Norse, Icelandic sagas, *Íslendingasögur*, skaldic poetry, prosimetrum, digital humanities, web database, social network analysis

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Introduction

Verse quotation is intrinsic to the literary style of the medieval Icelandic corpus of *Íslendingasögur* (Sagas of Icelanders), one of the most important vernacular literary genres of the European Middle Ages. Yet there is a striking degree of variation in the number of verses quoted across the different sagas in the corpus and, in some cases, significant variation within the content of a verse quoted across different manuscript witnesses of the same saga. While the quotation of stanzas has long been recognized as an important aspect of the medieval Icelandic saga, there has been relatively little research into the nature of the literary works as prosimetrum and the significance of verse to the aesthetic of the narratives. To redress this, we are analysing the combination of prose and verse in the *Íslendingasögur*, using a digital catalogue of features in order to collect information about the entire prosimetric corpus.[1] The critical research questions we are investigating have so far generally been asked separately for prose narrative and skaldic verse. In order to examine prosimetrum as an integrated form, the database we have developed facilitates a comprehensive investigation into the literary style of the sagas, enabling both quantitative and qualitative analysis. This, in turn, enables the exploration of the generic qualities of saga prosimetrum in this corpus and potentially other corpora. In this article, we lay out our analytical methods, provide an overview of the design of the database, and demonstrate its usefulness through case studies.

To date, scholarship on Icelandic saga literature has been principally concerned with various aspects of the prose narrative of each work, while the integral role played by verse has often been discounted as a distraction. Quoted verse has either been regarded as redundant to the course of the narrative, or seen as awkward because it contradicts the prose narrative or impedes its flow. In addition, other complications in the tradition have tended to be ignored. It is well established that many medieval traditions display considerable textual variance in manuscript transmission,[2] and in the context of saga literature, a number of case studies have demonstrated the consequences that such variability can have for the meaning of prose

1 The project 'The *Íslendingasögur* as Prosimetrum', hosted at the Universities of Tübingen and Cambridge, is supported by a bilateral grant funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council [AH/T012757/1] and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft [GR 3613/5–1].

2 Paul Zumthor in particular has emphasized the instability of medieval textual transmission, which he terms *mouvance* and which he characterizes as an 'interplay between variant readings and reworkings' (Zumthor 1992, 44). Bernard Cerquiglini suggests that the impact of such variance means literary analysis of medieval texts should be undertaken on a 'comparative, not archaeological' basis, in the sense that 'archaeology reduces something that derives its meaning from difference into something that is just one' (1999, 44). For an account of how technological advancements in the digital humanities may be used to represent the *mouvance* of medieval texts more accurately, see Jänicke and Wrisely 2017.



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narrative.[3] The stanzas quoted in the sagas, however, have often been studied in the context of establishing their authenticity or postulating the date of their composition.[4]

While study of the prosimetrum of the *Íslendingasögur* has rarely been central to saga scholarship, some case studies have been produced that provide points of reference for a holistic investigation. One of the most frequently discussed questions has been the function of verse quotation in sagas. In contrast to the relation of verse to prose in the *konungasögur* (Sagas of Kings), where verses are generally regarded as providing historical evidence for the account of events (Whaley 1993), stanzas in the *Íslendingasögur* have been characterized as more ornamental or aesthetic in their use (Bjarni Einarsson 1974; 1987). This distinction is sometimes described using the terms 'authenticating' (or documentary) and 'situational' (or dialogue) verses (Whaley 1993; O'Donoghue 2005, 10–77; Males 2020b, 212–18), although the usefulness of the dichotomy has been challenged (Clunies Ross 2005; 2010; O'Donoghue 2005). Occasional studies have shown how verses may deepen the meaning of the story told in the prose (Magerøy 1977; Guðrún Ingólfsdóttir 1990), while other scholars have focused on whether or not saga prosimetrum might have originated in oral tradition, where poems or single stanzas may have been accompanied by prose that provided context (Wolf 1965; von See 1977; Harris 1997; Marold 2001; Gísli Sigurðsson 2004; Males 2020b).

In recent years, however, interest in the prosimetric form of saga literature has been steadily growing (Harris 1997; Poole 2001; Meulengracht Sørensen 2001; Torfi Tulinius 2001; O'Donoghue 2005; Clunies Ross forthcoming). A number of studies have demonstrated how the quotation of verse within prose leads to competition between voices, that is, between the narrator and the saga characters speaking stanzas (Quinn 1997; Glauser 2007; Heslop 2008; 2022; Wilson 2021). The extent to which the combination of prose and verse may reflect the performance context of preceding oral traditions has also been explored (Quinn 1997; Gropper 2007), with attention increasingly trained on the very nature of authorship in relation to prosimetric saga literature (Gropper 2021; Quinn 2021). Many of the case studies of individual sagas carried out to date offer valuable insights, and some of the broad surveys of the prosimetrum of different types of saga establish a basic foundation for analysis. While the profile of the prosimetric *Íslendingasögur* as a corpus has not yet been

3 In this regard, investigations into saga variation in recent years have generally focused on the prose sections of these texts (Quinn and Lethbridge 2010), with detailed work having been undertaken on the highly complicated manuscript transmission of *Njáls saga* (Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir and Lethbridge 2018). See, however, Guðrún Nordal (2008) for a discussion of poetic variation across the saga's manuscripts.

4 For some recent examples, see Gade 2001; Guðrún Nordal 2013; Myrvoll 2020.

analysed and described in detail, recognition has slowly been growing of the role that verse plays as a constituent generic element of saga form (Guðrún Nordal 2007; 2015). We are pursuing some of the leads set out in existing case studies — such as the relationship between the complexity of the prose narrative and that of the verses (O'Donoghue 1991; 2005; Torfi Tulinius 2001), as well as the characteristic features of Icelandic prosimetrum in relation to other European traditions (Friis-Jensen 1987) — in order to produce a comprehensive assessment of the literary form of the *Íslendingasögur* as prosimetrum.

While Icelandic saga narratives may have arisen out of Germanic storytelling traditions, which may have included a mixture of verse and prose (Harris 1997), this does not preclude literary fashioning by Icelandic authors, possibly influenced by foreign models. Many of the features of poetic quotation in the *Íslendingasögur* correspond to Bernhard Pabst's definition of prosimetrum as a literary technique, consciously chosen by the authors of medieval texts (1994, 12). It is accordingly our principal objective to demonstrate both the complexity and sophistication of the prosimetric *Íslendingasögur* as a corpus, acknowledging the variety of styles and forms with which the anonymous authors of the sagas experimented and the subtle ways in which poetic quotation inflected the narrative of individual sagas.

Designing the Database as the Foundation for a New Methodology

The database is designed to document information about each of the *Íslendingasögur* that includes poetic quotation, and is primarily focused on representing the structures and relationships observed in the texts.[5] It has two objectives: to provide the foundation for a quantitative analysis of features that have been observed in the prosimetrum of the *Íslendingasögur*; and to provide a foundation for identification of features and possible correlations of features for further qualitative investigation. It draws upon a number of datasets. The Skaldic Project, having now re-edited the majority of the corpus of skaldic poetry, by century, poet, and/or prose work in Finnur Jónsson's *Skjaldedigtning* (*Skj*); the metre; the position in the saga; and, as a means of identifying the stanza, the text of the stanza from *Skjaldedigtning* (B-volumes).[6] In addition, the Skaldic Project includes information on manuscript transmission, supplemented with data from

5 The database was designed by Tarrin Wills with a view to eventual compatibility with related projects, such as the Kenning Lexicon Project (University of Kiel) and the international Skaldic Project.

6 For more information on the Skaldic Project, see <www.skaldic.org>. The *Skjaldedigtning* text is derived from a website created by Eysteinn Björnsson, who gave permission to use his typed-in editions. The site is no longer available but is archived



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other datasets (especially Sagnanet and Handrit.is). Saga by saga, data has been collected for each stanza, treating each instance or sequence of quotation as the nucleus of a prosimetric episode within the saga corpus. Relevant persons in such episodes, such as the speaker, addressee(s), and audience members, have also been linked through a networked 'table of persons' that facilitates social network analysis. For each of these people, we have noted their gender, age, social rank, marital status, and religion (if known) — with due allowance for the considerable number of paranormal speakers in the corpus. In addition, the database documents the manuscript evidence for each text and the distribution of stanza quotation across each saga, with any variation between manuscript versions noted.

The prose text of the sagas used in the editing interface derives from the 1987 Svart á hvítu edition of the sagas (accessed via the Snerpa.is interface). These saga texts are organized according to chapter number on the project database and supplemented by links between stanzas and the prose context in which they are quoted. The list of poetic headwords, derived from Finnur Jónsson's *Lexicon Poeticum*, is supplemented by material from the online *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* (ONP), in addition to metadata from the Skaldic Project database. This ensures that the analysis can be connected with other projects, particularly the new Lexicon Poeticum Project and the Kenning Lexicon Project.[7] These datasets provide a common point of reference that ensures that our data is compatible with other related digital projects in order to facilitate research. These common reference points also enable the analysis of prosimetric features across the entire corpus of *Íslendingasögur*, and can be expanded to incorporate other saga genres as well.

The underlying 'table of persons' maps connections between sagas that enables network analysis. As there is no existing index of saga characters (the Skaldic Project only includes speakers or composers of stanzas), a digital index has been created listing all identifiable speakers, audience members, addressees, key figures, and people named in stanzas throughout the *Íslendingasögur*. The key additional reference sets are the attributes applied to the stanzas and persons. The attributes are applied either to the persons (where the attribute applies in most instances) or to the prose context of a specific stanza (where the attribute applies to the context, and which in the case of persons may override the default categorization). The structure can be represented as a relational model (see below, Fig. 4, which presents a simplified version). The entities are encoded as data tables with the lines representing one-to-many relationships; for example,

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at: <http://web.archive.org/web/20120910235223/https://notendur.hi.is/eybjorn/ugm/skindex/skindex.html> [accessed 25 April 2022].

7 At the time of writing, these projects are accessible at <https://lexiconpoeticum.org/> [accessed 25 April 2022].

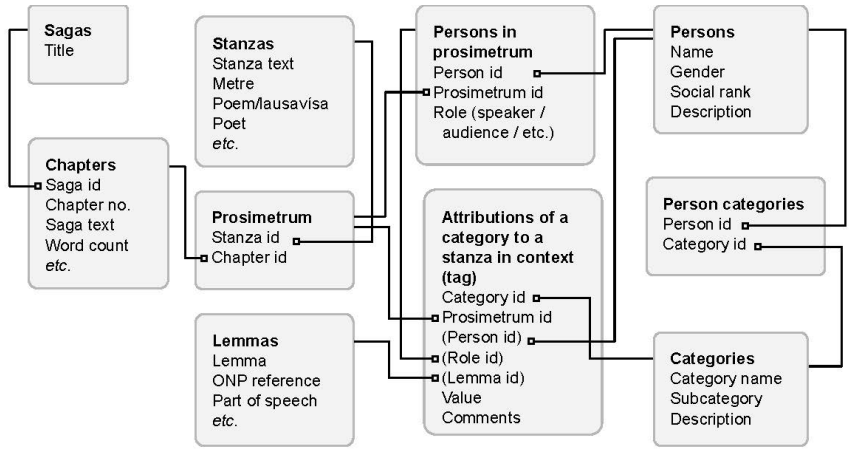


Figure 4. Relational structure of the ÍSP database (simplified).

one attribute can be applied to many stanzas. The box at the end of each line represents the entity, which can be one or many in number. Links are elaborated in the database by refinements, such as whether or not the identification is 'implicit' or whether or not it is 'uncertain'.

The main input categories were arrived at fairly quickly, supplementing the underlying notation in the 'table of persons' of all the figures involved in each prosimetric episode. The categories include the prose transition into and out of each stanza — since most quotations are of only one stanza — including the wording of the prose introduction to the stanza (*inquit*), whether the stanza is offered as a response to a question or is part of an ongoing conversation, and whether the stanza is attributed to an intradiegetic figure or to the narrator. The significance of the stanza to the development of the plot is tracked by noting whether the utterance of the stanza is staged as a response to events described in the preceding prose and whether or not it triggers a reaction by others. The setting of the recitation of each stanza is a highly variable feature of saga prosimetrum and yields a wide range of different profiles, including whether the stanza is described as being spoken indoors or outdoors, in public or in private, at a named location, at a particular time of day, or during a particular season — although not all these details are mentioned in every instance of quotation.

We also wanted to gather information about each quoted stanza in order to study commonalities across the corpus of poetry, and for this purpose we noted the metre and the syntactic profile of each stanza (including the degree of syntactic linking between clauses), the use of apostrophes, and — although they are rare — instances of direct and indirect speech. The relatively common features of comparative and conditional structures

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are documented, as are impersonal and passive modes of expression and the use of verbs of cognition and speech. Narrative patterns relevant to plot function, such as whether or not a quoted stanza ends an episode or scene in the narrative, are also noted, along with instances when a stanza is spoken by a figure who delivers a verse or who speaks while entering or exiting a scene.

More general semantic patterns, such as the mention of violence in a stanza, either through kennings or otherwise, provide rich material for analysis. This is also the case for the collection of the rhetorical features deployed by poets across the corpus, including the use of understatement, riddling expression, and proverbial statements, as well as the explicit mention of poetic performance, composition, and transmission. Wherever there is significant variation in the text of a stanza or in the *inquit* across medieval manuscript witnesses of the saga, these features are recorded. While it was a necessarily heuristic process to devise the main categories and subcategories and to test the design of the database, its principal structure was established early on. Each new saga brought with it some refinement of the guidelines that we were developing to document our observations, along with the occasional new category for a feature we had not encountered before — evidence of the fundamental heterogeneity of the saga corpus and its variety of prosimetric episodes. In this regard, it is an advantage of the database's design that categories and subcategories can be added or refined flexibly as needed. The relational database design means that only a reference (foreign key) is stored in the table linking the category to the stanza, meaning that all other features of the category (name, description, etc.) can be modified without removing the link to the stanza.

The next stage of our process was to work through the corpus to input the data for all stanzas and their surrounding prose. In addition to data which, to varying degrees, is amenable to statistical analysis, we collected information about the range of poetry in each saga, noting the distribution of stanzas across chapters and patterns of clustering. Thanks to the database's capacity to generate graphic representations of connections, as inputting progressed an interesting network came into view, involving the speakers of stanzas, their addressees, any audience members present when the verse was spoken, and other figures relevant to the stanza. An example of the social network with Snorri goði at its centre is provided later in this article, in one of our case studies (see Fig. 5).

An important methodological refinement was necessitated when, in seeking to document whenever a stanza included an illocutionary act (an insult, a prophecy, a vindication of the skald's actions, etc.), we found that the complexity of skaldic syntax — especially the proliferation of intercalary clauses — correlated with multiple and sometimes clashing

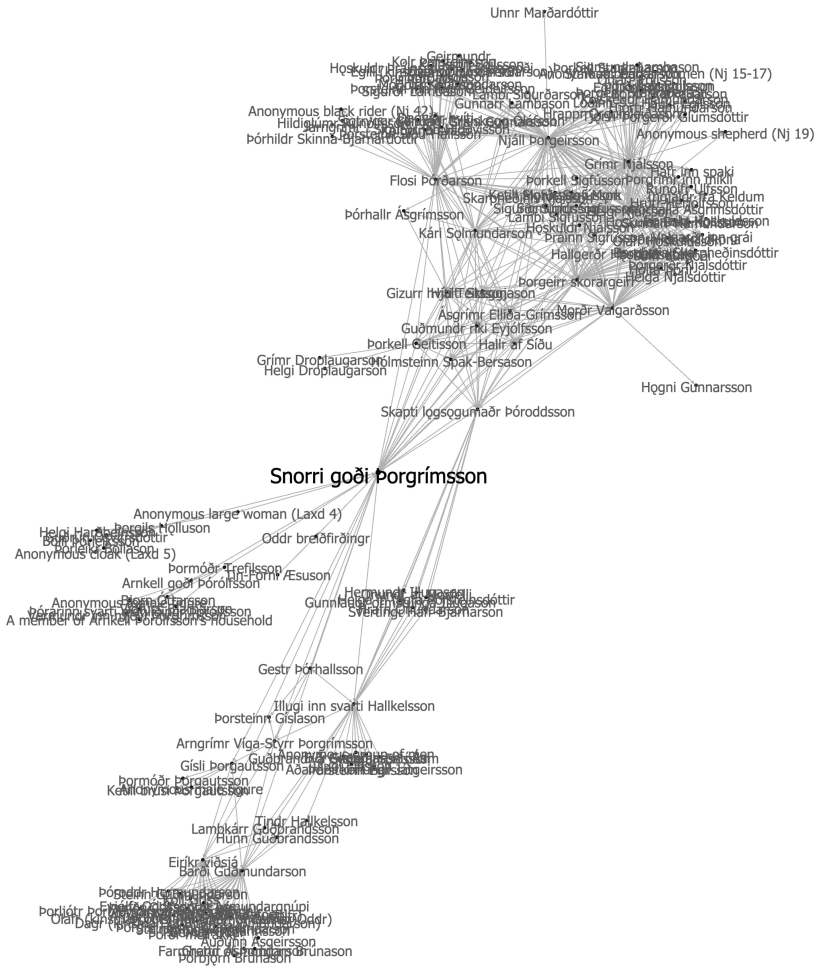


Figure 5. Snorri goði's network as defined by persons associated with the same stanzas, to two degrees of separation.

illocutionary acts and shifts in tone.[8] Over half the stanzas quoted in the corpus of *Íslendingasögur* include an intercalary clause, with nearly a third including two or more of these syntactic 'interruptions', which enable the poet to make penetrating asides. For example, in *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, after Egill has evaded capture by King Eiríkr blóðøx by killing

8 For a fuller discussion of the implications of skaldic syntax for the interpretation of saga prosimetrum, see Quinn 2022.

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three of his men, the poet reports the news to his brother Þórólfr by reciting a stanza, observing in an intercalary clause that he does not cultivate great delusion ('né fágak dul drjúgan') (*Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* in Sigurður Nordal 1933, 113). The clause may be read as both a boast about his killings and a wry understatement of how serious his predicament is. As such, it cuts through the sequence of bold illocutionary acts in the rest of the stanza, in which Egill self-aggrandizingly comments on his escape, declares his killing, and insults the king with the ironic use of a kenning of praise. The stanza's syntax accordingly complicates the prose discussion in which the stanza is embedded; his friend Arinbjǫrn reacts to it by soliciting his father's assistance in a bid to reconcile Egill with the king.

Often intercalary clauses reach beyond the prosimetric context of a stanza to create a discursive cross-current to the main flow of the stanza and, accordingly, to the saga. Such is the case in the first stanza quoted in *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa*, where Bjǫrn, wounded in battle and reposing in a tent, imagines the reaction of the woman he desires were she to hear he was close by, consoling himself with the thought that she would surely want to join him there as his lover. In his asides, however, Bjǫrn's focus is otherwise — 'hœft skiljum brag' (I compose poetry correctly), 'gerðumk frægr' (I made myself famous) — martial success intertwined in the syntax of the stanza with speculation about erotic conquest (*Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa* in Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938, 121–22). Here as elsewhere in the poetry of this corpus, a number of diverse illocutionary acts are brought together in a single stanza (praise for his beloved, the expression of his desire, boasting about his growing reputation and his skill as a poet), only some of which are directly linked to the prose in which the stanza is embedded, but all of which contribute to the development of the characterization of the eponymous hero of the saga. Accordingly, the analysis of the complexity of each stanza resulted in our annotation of illocutionary acts becoming primarily descriptive rather than summative. Analysis of the syntactic profile of each stanza revealed that it is a salient characteristic of skaldic composition, especially in *dróttkvætt*, for the speaker to dart between different rhetorical attitudes, perhaps predicting in a threatening kind of way or insulting in a boastful kind of way. As a result, we opted for maximizing mark-up, which entailed listing all the significant features of each stanza, rather than wrestling each stanza down to a single defining feature.

In cases where categories are able to provide more stable data for statistical analysis, the mark-up includes numerical values and/or consistent keywords. These mostly relate to the metrical and other formal aspects of the stanzas, but also include speaker attributes, the number and complexity of kennings, syntactical features like grammatical person, certain aspects of the setting and audience, and some features of stanza content. Alongside the data collection, substantial commentary is integrated into

the database itself, which provides the basis for qualitative research at the level of each instance of verse quotation, at the level of the saga, and at the level of the corpus. To nuance the documentation, frequent use is made of notation to indicate whether the feature observed is 'implicit', such as an emotion implied by word choice, or 'uncertain' in cases where the feature is open to interpretation.

The design of the database is specifically directed towards the analysis of the relationship between the content of a verse and the surrounding prose in each instance, whether it is one of dependence, consonance, elaboration, or contradiction. It facilitates the investigation of themes and events described in the prose narrative, which may be emphasized or downplayed in the verse, and differences in register existing between the poetry and the prose, such as in the depiction of emotions. Particular compositional interests or poetic characteristics may accordingly be identified in the selection of stanzas in a particular saga or group of sagas. While it is difficult to predict all the possible correlations that future users of the database might be curious about, in inputting features and providing commentary within each subcategory, we have generally cast our net wide in order to make available rich information about all prosimetric instances in every saga. We are also cross-referencing entries, where appropriate, to facilitate navigation across the database, as well as including searchable key terms in our commentary. In an effort to be as exhaustive as possible, and with others' research interests in mind, we have tracked many semantic fields in the category, including any reference to landscape features, battle-gear, mythology, colours, sounds, liquids, food, clothing, animals, florae, and body parts.

As the work of refining the database progressed, our objectives became slanted towards qualitative analysis arising out of patterns that can be deduced from the quantitative analysis, rather than expecting statistics to be a viable end in themselves, other than in a limited number of straightforward categories. In other words, the crudely quantifiable has often had to be sacrificed for data that will require more nuanced interpretation. To facilitate this we have, where possible, opted for keywords, as well as making our commentary searchable.

In the course of the project, more than two hundred categories and subcategories have been created, with detailed guidelines ensuring consistency of mark-up.[9] The database facilitates statistical profiling, correlation

9 The overarching categories in the project database cover the following areas: CONTENT, EMOTIONS, KENNINGS / METAPHOR, MANUSCRIPT VARIATION, METRE / FORM, PERSONS (attributes of persons associated with quoted stanzas, e.g. 'Gender', 'Age', 'Social rank'), PLOT FUNCTION, PROSE TRANSITION (how the poetry is embedded in the prose account), ROLE-SPECIFIC (context-specific roles for each stanza, e.g. 'Relation to speaker', 'Size of audience'), SETTING, SYNTAX / GRAMMAR, and TONE. Some categories (CONTENT,



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checks, and analysis on different levels, for instance, within a grouping of stanzas, within one saga, or within a selection of sagas. The detailed categorization of the features of each stanza enables the generation of a prosimetric profile of each saga, as well as providing the basis for exploration of the way each prosimetric episode contributes to the literary style of the saga. Geographical locations mentioned in stanzas or identified in the setting of the stanza have also been documented with the potential for generating map-based graphics, showing the wide geographical area to which stanzas in the *Íslendingasögur* relate, as well as clustered patterns within Iceland itself.

The Prosimetric Corpus

From the outset, our project has been formulated with an awareness of the artificial nature of categorical boundaries between subgenres of the Icelandic saga. We believe the methodology behind the database can serve as a model for a broader and more comprehensive study of saga prosimetrum, eventually taking in the large corpora of prosimetric *þættir*, *konungasögur*, *fornaldarsögur*, and *samtíðarsögur*. We have begun with the corpus of the twenty-six *Íslendingasögur* that include verse quotation, listed below in Table 3.[10] These sagas vary considerably in the number of stanzas they contain, as well as in their ratio of stanzas to prose word count, what we term the 'prosimetric ratio'. In the table are listed the number of stanzas that have been preserved within a saga, although not all versions of the saga may feature every stanza. The table is designed to give a first impression of the quantity and distribution of data being examined in our project. The prose word count is derived from the digitized editions of the sagas, based on the Svart á hvítu editions, and does not take into consideration the textual variation across all manuscript witnesses of the prosimetrum. Therefore, the 'prosimetric ratio' is only indicative of relative proportions across the corpus and the percentage of words in verse is

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EMOTIONS, KENNINGS / METAPHOR, METRE / FORM, SYNTAX / GRAMMAR, TONE) gather data exclusively from the quoted stanza, while others collect data primarily from the prose account or give weighting to both poetry and prose. To date, with data finalized for 80 per cent of the corpus, nearly 42,000 individual data-points have been added to the database. This high number indicates the richness of the prosimetric corpus as a literary resource.

10 The table combines metrics sourced from different critical editions. The prose word count is derived from the digitized version of the Svart á hvítu editions available on the website <Snerpa.is>, using the Fornritin dataset currently accessible via the repository CLARIN-IS (Sigrún Helgadóttir and Starkaður Barkarson 2018). The number of stanzas is taken from the Skaldic Poetry website. The ordering of sagas in the table is determined by the prosimetric ratio. The percentage of words in verse is affected by preservation (some sagas are not preserved in full), by the quotation of half-stanzas, and by differences in metre.

provided simply to give a broad-brush indication of variability across the corpus.

The high degree of variation in the corpus evidenced by this table shows the challenges involved in undertaking statistical analysis of prosimetric patterning. It is also important to reiterate that the figures necessarily suppress the textual differences resulting from complex manuscript transmission, though this is to some extent an inherent aspect of the categorization process.

The variability across manuscript witnesses of sagas posed another significant challenge in the establishment of our textual base, given that most available editions conflate or omit certain manuscript readings in their presentation of the texts. Virtually all print editions of the skaldic corpus and many of the *Íslendingasögur*, such as the Íslenzk fornrit (ÍF) series, attempt to present a coherent representation of an assumed written archetype, whether of a single stanza, a body of poetry, or a complete saga. Where there is substantial variation across extant manuscript witnesses, this leads to some readings being prioritized over others. The justification behind the choice of a saga or stanza's 'best' base text varies between editions, as do editorial approaches to emendation. Some editors incorporate readings from other witnesses on the basis that those versions are stemmatically closer to the 'original' text, while others adopt more eclectic forms of editing, either silently or explicitly (Haugen 2003; 2010).

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11 Seventy-one of the stanzas in *Egils saga* belong to its three long poems — *Hǫfuðlausn* (twenty-one stanzas), *Sonatorrek* (twenty-five stanzas), and *Arinbjarnarkviða* (twenty-five stanzas) — which affects its total number of stanzas and its prosimetric ratio considerably. The long poems are preserved in different redactions of the saga.

12 The statistics for *Heiðarvíga saga* reflect the saga's current state of preservation rather than its medieval form, as they are impacted by the loss of the earlier part of its manuscript in the Copenhagen Fire of 1728 and Jón Ólafsson's subsequent attempt to recreate the prose of the lost section from memory (Shortt Butler 2020). The prose word count includes explanatory comments by Jón, and it is unclear how closely the wording of his recreation is to the lost medieval version. Jón does not attempt to recreate the poetry in this section, but notes where he remembers a verse having been quoted. Three of the stanzas in this section appear to match stanzas also preserved in other texts (st. 1 in *Eyrbyggja saga*, sts 2–3 in *Laufás Edda*) and have been edited into the saga from those other versions. According to Jón's commentary, around fifteen further stanzas were once quoted in this section, but these do not appear to be preserved in any other context.

13 The prosimetric ratio of *Fóstbræðra saga* is affected by the fact that the Svart á hvítu edition, like the Íslenzk fornrit edition, expands the number of prose words by printing the divergent endings to the saga found in Hauksbók and Flateyjarbók. With only the ending in Hauksbók taken into consideration, the prosimetric ratio is 1:695; with only the Flateyjarbók ending, it is 1:731.

14 *Njáls saga* includes one long poem, *Darraðarljóð* (eleven stanzas), which is included in the total count of stanzas in the saga.



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Table 3. List of prosimetric *Íslendingasögur* ordered by prosimetric ratio (stanzas: prose word count).

	Sagas containing poetry	No. of stanzas	Prosimetric ratio	% of words in verse
1.	*Kormáks saga*	85	1:121	20.1%
2.	*Hallfreðar saga*	34	1:285	9.1%
3.	*Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*	25	1:384	6.9%
4.	*Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*[11]	131	1:475	5.0%
5.	*Víglundar saga*	24	1:493	6.3%
6.	*Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa*	39	1:495	5.8%
7.	*Heiðarvíga saga*[12]	18	1:721	4.2%
8.	*Fóstbrœðra saga*[13]	42	1:751	4.2%
9.	*Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*	73	1:838	3.3%
10.	*Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*	15	1:1027	2.9%
11.	*Eyrbyggja saga*	37	1:1038	2.8%
12.	*Harðar saga*	19	1:1045	2.8%
13.	*Gísla saga Súrssonar*	40	1:1061	2.6%
14.	*Svarfdœla saga*	17	1:1130	2.2%
15.	*Þórðar saga hreðu*	12	1:1296	2.7%
16.	*Bandamanna saga*	6	1:1333	1.8%
17.	*Víga-Glúms saga*	13	1:1471	2.0%
18.	*Njáls saga*[14]	64	1:1546	1.8%
19.	*Droplaugarsona saga*	6	1:1569	2.0%
20.	*Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*	6	1:2192	1.3%
21.	*Eiríks saga rauða*	3	1:2609	1.1%
22.	*Króka-Refs saga*	3	1:3695	0.9%
23.	*Flóamanna saga*	3	1:7475	0.3%
24.	*Laxdœla saga*	5	1:12490	0.2%
25.	*Reykdœla saga*	1	1:23683	0.07%
26.	*Vatnsdœla saga*	1	1:29291	0.1%
	Total	**722**	—	—
	Average	—	1:3729	3.6%

As re-editing the prosimetric corpus was beyond the scope of our objectives, our analysis is dependent on existing editions of the *Íslendingasögur* and the poetry quoted within them. There are relatively few recent critical editions of prosimetric *Íslendingasögur*, so in most cases we had to use two kinds of editions to cover both the poetry and the prose. For the saga prose, the project uses, wherever possible, single-manuscript editions or editions of specific recensions of a saga, such as the recent editions of two redactions of *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* (Bjarni Einarsson 2001; Chestnutt 2006) along with a new edition of MS WolfAug 9 10 4to (Schwabe 2019). Where no such editions are available, our analysis relies on the variety of approaches taken in the ÍF editions produced over the last hundred years. The edition of poetry from the *Íslendingasögur*, being published as part of the Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages project (SkP), forms the basis of our analysis of the quoted stanzas. A key advantage to using the ÍF and SkP editions is that their standardization of the poetic and prose corpora enables the systematic and efficient analysis of the corpus as prosimetrum. SkP, in particular, has the advantage of being the most sophisticated edition of the corpus to date, and its editors have also taken notable steps to ensure that their decisions are transparent, as well as acknowledging the limitations of textual reconstruction (Whaley 2012, xxx–xxxv). The continued development of digital editions of saga manuscripts, such as those that have been published in the Medieval Nordic Text Archive (Menota), could contribute to refining these aspects of our project in the future, as digital environments are arguably better suited than print editions to represent variability within a corpus (Johansson 2010; Goeres 2013, 195–97; Jänicke and Wrisely 2017). Because most editions aim to recreate a putative 'original' version of a poem or saga, making use of various sources to construe a singular, cohesive text, the variability of the medieval textual tradition is downplayed, and this is a particular concern for the analysis of skaldic poetry.[11] We counter this to some degree by documenting in the database significant variation across manuscripts, especially as it relates to the text of a stanza, its *inquit*, and any extant prose versions of the episode in which the stanza is quoted.

The challenges of using available editions are evident on both the macro-level of the saga's prosimetrical profile and the micro-level of each

11 Russell Poole (1993) argues that a substantial degree of variability was permitted by the form of skaldic poetry. Building on Poole's analysis, Erin Goeres (2013, 195) suggests that modern editions can give the impression that skaldic poetry is more stable or fixed in form than is actually the case: 'The idea of a single "best text" is suspect because skaldic verse is a form in which variation and mutability is inherent. Each rendition of the poem depends upon the performance context and thus, one might extrapolate, such variability will also affect its later incorporation into the written text of a prosimetric saga. The idea of a "flexibly fixed" skaldic verse challenges the notion that there is a single true or original version of any given skaldic stanza.'



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prosimetric instance. Regarding the former, a saga's patterning of verses can differ substantially across its versions. Stanzas may appear in varying order; a particular stanza may be quoted in one version of a saga, but not another. The problem is thornier on the level of each prosimetric instance, where attempts to produce a cohesive text may result in composite editions being constructed from readings that exist in different manuscript traditions, thus presenting an eclectic edition of a text that does not exist in any single medieval witness. An edition can account for such differences in its critical apparatus, as SkP does through critical introductions and detailed notes, but it is generally committed to prioritizing a single prosimetrical profile for a saga and a singular construal for a prosimetric instance.

An example of a saga prominently affected by these issues is *Hallfreðar saga*, which is preserved as a stand-alone text in Möðruvallabók and as part of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* in several manuscripts. A third distinct version, apparently derived from the other two, exists in Flateyjarbók as part of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*. Thirty-four stanzas are associated with the saga, yet almost no manuscripts quote all of these, an incongruity that affects the narrative interpretation of different witnesses. The four verses spoken by Hallfreðr to Kolfinna while the two share a bed (sts 18–21) are not quoted in the manuscripts of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (apart from the version in Flateyjarbók), while Möðruvallabók does not have the final stanza (st. 34) transmitted in the other versions (*Hallfreðar saga* in Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1939, 181–84, 199). Flateyjarbók alone contains all the stanzas, but also preserves distinct versions of certain verses. For instance, the wording of the first *helmingr* in st. 4 differs considerably between Möðruvallabók (e.g. 'ossu áfǫll drepi stáli', heavy seas strike us on the prow) and Flateyjarbók (e.g. 'ósa aflvǫll drepi stalli', the perch strikes the violent-field of estuaries [> sea]) (*Hallfreðar saga* in Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1939, 150). Similar complications arise in the cases of other prosimetric sagas preserved in multiple redactions, such as *Fóstbrœðra saga* and *Njáls saga*.[12] The variability of their prosimetrum, among other things, means that these sagas resist being presented as singular texts.

12 *Njáls saga* exists in three redactions, typically referred to as the X-, Y-, and Z-branches. Each branch contains multiple manuscripts and paper copies; Konráð Gíslason and Eiríkur Jónsson's critical edition of all three redactions takes as its basis the manuscripts Reykjabók (X), Möðruvallabók (Y), and Gráskinna (Z) (Konráð Gíslason and Eiríkr Jónsson 1875–1889). *Fóstbrœðra saga* is preserved in four redactions, consisting of the versions of the saga found in Möðruvallabók and its copies (M), in Hauksbók (H), in Flateyjarbók (F), and in a now-lost parchment from the Royal Library in Copenhagen, preserved in the paper copies AM 142 fol. and AM 566 a 4to (R). Apart from the versions in Flateyjarbók and AM 142 fol., all witnesses to the saga are fragmentary. In both sagas, as in *Hallfreðar saga*, there is considerable variation across the redactions regarding the number of stanzas preserved and the specific wording of the poetry. The variation within the manuscript transmission of

Such challenges demonstrate the importance of the database's critical apparatus in including reference to variability in the corpus of prosimetric *Íslendingasögur*. The most useful first step in this regard was the development of specific categories that could be used to highlight variation within the manuscript texts of a stanza and across versions of a saga in terms of the transitions between verse and prose. Furthermore, the database's system of linking stanzas to specific categories offers a means of recording variation in a more granular way, as textual variants within stanzas and accompanying notes can likewise be highlighted in relation to relevant categories. This approach enables in-depth contextualization of textual variation both within stanzas and in their surrounding prose. Categories that apply only to variants in the stanza can be linked through the database structure to the variants in SkP so that the analysis can take into consideration any variation in the manuscript tradition.

Case Studies

In the following case studies, we outline some initial results that demonstrate the advantage of the database as a tool for quantitative and qualitative analysis, and for the exploration of research questions relating to the whole corpus.

Correlation Analysis of Metre and the Gender of a Speaker

The database facilitates different kinds of critical investigations by enabling queries that can reveal correlations between distinct subcategories. All these correlations are highly significant (p <0.01) when a Chi-square test is applied. Categories relating to persons connected to stanzas (speakers, addressees, audience members, etc.) can be used for socio-historical analysis or for literary analysis, where characteristics of the person can be correlated with aspects of form (such as metre), of grammatical expression (such as the use of first- or third-person narration), and of narration (such as setting). In this way, quantitative data can serve as a foundation for further qualitative analysis of more complex features of saga prosimetrum, and prevailing assumptions can be tested. A straightforward example is the patterning of the gender of a speaker and the metre of their verse. As might be expected, the vast majority of stanzas in the corpus of the *Íslendingasögur* are composed in *dróttkvætt*. The next most common

Fóstbræðra saga is pronounced in the latter parts of the Flateyjarbók version, where the saga's conclusion is interwoven in a complex manner into the account of the Battle of Stiklastaðir.



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metre is *fornyrðislag*, although it accounts for less than 10 per cent of stanzas.

Dróttkvætt is often associated with the masculine sphere, since it is the metre of the court and of the praise poetry composed by professional poets, who are predominantly male.[13] Of the stanzas in the *Íslendingasögur* attributed to men, nearly 80 per cent are in this metre, but of those attributed to women, 58 per cent are in *dróttkvætt*, or twenty-two stanzas out of thirty-eight, since the stanzas by women are few in the corpus. Interestingly, in almost half of the instances of stanzas quoted by a female speaker, the speaker is from beyond the usual society of poets. Indeed, many of these female speakers belong to the category of the paranormal, ranging from large rock-dwelling figures and evil troll-women to weaving valkyries and women with prophetic powers.

The data show that paranormal characters, male and female, are proportionally less likely than other persons to compose in *dróttkvætt* and more likely to use *fornyrðislag* or *kviðuháttr*.[14] Only nine stanzas by paranormal speakers are composed in *dróttkvætt*, and four of those are spoken by a female paranormal figure.[15] Indeed, when non-paranormal female characters speak poetry in the *Íslendingasögur*, they most often use *dróttkvætt*, and do so in slightly higher proportion than male speakers using this metre (around 90 per cent compared to roughly 80 per cent). The absolute number of stanzas spoken by females is dramatically lower than that spoken by men, so the small size of the data makes generalizations precarious, but it may indicate that the application of a metre other than *dróttkvætt* correlates less in the corpus of *Íslendingasögur* with the speaker's gender than with their paranormality. This example shows that searching for correlations between categories in the database can yield surprising results, which may run counter to general assumptions. Our analysis suggests that gender is not, in fact, a key determining factor in the use of *dróttkvætt* in the *Íslendingasögur*, which has encouraged us to explore other potential correlating variables, including social rank, marginality, age, or the character's narrative function.

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13 Only one female poet, Steinvǫr Sighvatsdóttir, is listed in *Skáldatal* (Snorri Sturluson in Heimir Pálsson and Faulkes 2012, 100–17), which lists poets of the Scandinavian courts from the ninth to the late thirteenth centuries.

14 It is important to note that a single speaker can dramatically affect such statistics. For example, one figure, Hallmundr in *Grettis saga*, accounts for all of the stanzas in *kviðuháttr* spoken by a paranormal figure.

15 In the corpus of *Íslendingasögur*, poetry is spoken by five female paranormal figures, four male, and three with uncertain gender (if we count the twelve weaving women speaking *Darraðarljóð* as one poetic voice). The paranormal figures whose gender is ambiguous are a severed head in *Eyrbyggja saga*, an invisible voice that emerges from a stone in *Harðar saga*, and a cloak in *Laxdæla saga*.

Diegetic Staging of Stanza Quotation

As mentioned earlier, scholars have distinguished between so-called 'authenticating' and 'situational' verses in saga literature. In this model, authenticating stanzas are quoted by the narrator from other sources — whether an external poetic voice or a character within the world of the saga, as with *Fóstbrœðra saga*'s quotation of stanzas from Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld's *Þorgeirsdrápa* — on the extradiegetic level of the text as evidence for the events depicted in the prose. Verses staged as being spoken by figures within the world of the saga, on the other hand, are termed situational verses and are usually seen as having a primarily aesthetic function. Authenticating stanzas are associated principally with the genre of *konungasögur* and situational verses with the *Íslendingasögur*, although each genre makes use of both types of verse. Yet our research has thrown up a surprisingly high number of stanzas that appear to be quoted by the narrators of the *Íslendingasögur*. Furthermore, many of these stanzas do not seem obviously 'authenticating', even though analysis of extradiegetic quotations of poetry in the *Íslendingasögur* has focused on verses seen to have a documentary function, such as the quotation of *Illugadrápa* and *Hrafnsmál* in *Eyrbyggja saga* (O'Donoghue 2005, 78–134) or of *Þorgeirsdrápa* in *Fóstbrœðra saga* (Males 2020a, 93–94).

One aspect that has been considered useful for determining diegesis in relation to stanza quotation is the verb of the *inquit* clause directly preceding the poetry embedded in the prose. Typical examples given in articles supporting the dichotomy of authenticating and situational verses are that authenticating (i.e. extradiegetic) stanzas are introduced with a present-tense formulation like *sem segir N. N.* (as N. N. says), while situational stanzas are more often highlighted with a past-tense construction like *þá kvað N. N. vísu* (then N. N. recited a stanza). To some extent, this division is accurate. The data bear out that when a stanza is staged as being spoken by a character, the *inquit* verb is predominantly in the past tense, with the verb used in the great majority of these cases indeed being *kveða* (to recite).[16] Likewise, in cases where the stanza is quoted extradiegetically by the narrator, the *inquit* verb is generally in the present tense, although the verb *segja* (to say) is in fact used much less frequently than *vera* (to be), as in the example *en þetta er stefit í* (and this is the refrain in it) used to introduce a selected stanza from a *drápa*.[17] One exception to this pattern,

16 Wherever possible, the tense of the *inquit* is ascertained from the manuscript witnesses. It is often the case, however, that the *inquit* verb is abbreviated in a given manuscript context. As a result of the ambiguities that abbreviation can create, editorial interpretations are thus also taken into account.

17 In some cases, there is considerable instability in the application of the *inquit* verb across redactions. For instance, the verb used in the *inquit* to st. 2 of *Fóstbrœðra saga* reads 'orti'



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however, is when reference is made not to the performance of a poem, but to its composition. Whether the stanza is quoted intradiegetically or extradiegetically — a classification not always easy to make in such cases, as discussed below — references to stanza composition almost invariably use the verb *yrkja* (to compose) in the past tense (*orti*).

Interestingly, many stanzas introduced using this kind of phrasing do not easily fit an exclusively authenticating or situational function. They are framed as being quoted by the narrator, yet they are also staged as having a specific performance context. A good example of this occurs in *Gunnlaugs saga*, when Gunnlaugr performs a poem for King Aðalráðr, but the saga quotes only the refrain: 'Gunnlaugr flutti fram kvæðit vel ok skǫruliga; en þetta er stefit í' (Gunnlaugr performed the poem well and in a fine way, and this is the refrain in it; *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* in Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938, 71).[18] The prosimetrical framing of the stanza highlights qualities of Gunnlaugr's performance, yet also distances its quotation within the saga itself from his specific context. In this regard, the fact that only a certain verse is quoted, rather than the full poem, implicitly foregrounds the narrator's role in editing down the poem and creates tension between the voice of the poet and the prose narrator's curating of events. Rather than being solely authenticating or situational in its function, this form of verse quotation, with its mingling of intradiegetic and extradiegetic elements, is meant both to authenticate and to dramatize.

As mentioned above, other sagas stage poetry as having been composed by an intradiegetic figure at a particular time or place, but do not necessarily depict it as having been performed in that setting. There are several examples of this form of quotation in *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa*, the first instance being when Bjǫrn is said to compose a stanza while on board his ship: 'Þann vetr fór Bjǫrn til hirðar Eiríks jarls ok var með honum; ok er þeir lágu við Hamarseyri, orti Bjǫrn vísu' (That winter Bjǫrn travelled to the court of Eiríkr jarl and stayed with him; and when they were lying at anchor off Hamarseyrr, Bjǫrn composed a verse; *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa* in Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938, 123).[19] In such cases, it is ambiguous whether it is the intradiegetic figure or the narrator who is meant to be understood as 'speaking' the verse. The reference to composition, rather than to poetic performance, elides the

(composed) in the F-redaction, 'kvað' (recited) in the M-redaction, and 'segir' (says) in the R-redaction (Björn K. Þórólfsson 1925–1927, 14).

18 For similar examples, see Gunnlaugr's performance of *Sigtryggsdrápa* (*Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* in Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938, 75–76) and Egill Skallagrímsson's performance of *Aðalsteinsdrápa* (Bjarni Einarsson 2001, 87–88; Chestnut 2006, 79; Schwabe 2019, fol. 43^{v}).

19 For further examples in the saga where the *inquit* refers principally to composition, yet the stanza's composition is associated with a specific intradiegetic context, see *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa* in Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938, 161, 193, and 204.

staging of the stanza in a particular performance context, which more typically would involve direct speech. This form of *inquit* thus points to a more ambiguous encoding of diegesis, where it is unclear whether the voice of the intradiegetic poet or that of the extradiegetic narrator has primacy. While a reader may infer that the stanza is spoken by the figure within the narrative, the form of quotation does not strictly specify that situation, and thus allows for other interpretative possibilities.

The two examples highlighted above suggest that saga writers used extradiegetic verse quotation in more complex ways than simply to authenticate prose events. Extradiegetic quotation could also be used to contain strong poetic voices or to curate the degree to which their poetic output was present in the saga narrative, which could reflect a textual strategy for ensuring that intradiegetic voices did not undermine the authority of the prose narrator (Quinn 1997). Furthermore, extradiegetic quotation is also often combined with the intradiegetic staging of a stanza's performance, which further complicates matters. Even if the quotation of such a verse has an authenticating function for the performance context itself, it also implicitly carries situational significance as regards the progression of the saga's plot and the characterization of the poet framed as having spoken it in a particular place. Rather than supporting the dichotomy of authenticating and situational functions for stanza quotation, the above examples indicate a more fluid form of polyphony, in which saga writers used diegetic levels creatively to shape a complex interplay between poetic and narrating voices in their works.

Network Analysis of Associated Persons

Each speaker, audience member, addressee, and key figure in the poetry has been marked with their name or other unique identification. The database contains links between all these persons and the relevant stanzas and sagas. Additionally, the database contains information on each of the persons' gender, age, social status, and their relation to other people involved. This information can be used for various types of network analysis. The model of the relational structure of the database, shown above in Figure 4, illustrates how prosimetrum and the persons associated with it can be linked together in complex ways. These connections build a network of relationships between the persons associated with the poetry in the sagas. These relationships are extremely complex, as are all social networks, but can be visualized using a force-directed layout algorithm, where the connections (edges) between persons (nodes) in the network 'pull' the nodes together, while the edges themselves repel each other. The



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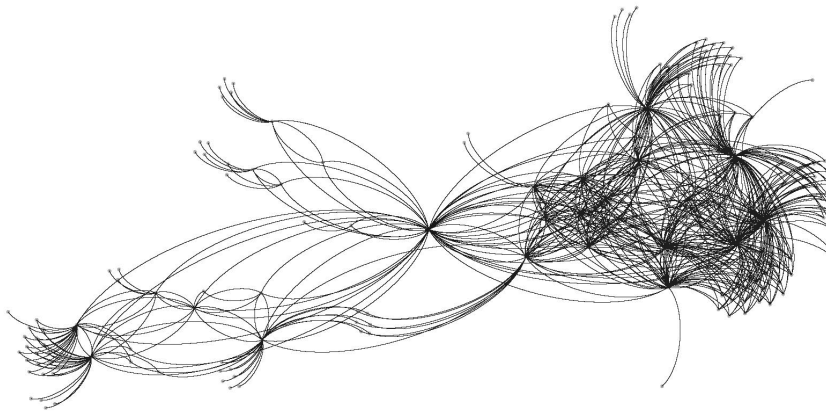


Figure 6. Snorri goði's network (alternative graphic).

database uses libraries for visualizing networks,[20] as well as stand-alone software such as Gephi, to generate these networks.

Figures 5 and 6 show an example of such a network. The query generating this network uses the saga character Snorri goði Þorgrímsson as its starting point, chosen because he is such an influential figure across a great many sagas, even though he himself speaks hardly any poetry. The query uses the links between stanzas and persons to connect everyone who is associated with the same stanzas as Snorri. It then continues this network to a second degree of separation. (The connections can be continued recursively, but this is likely beyond any meaningful association with the character himself.)

The pattern of connections between individuals can also be displayed in different ways to highlight the complex and dynamic relations between persons and text(s), as in Figure 6.

The figures show all persons within two degrees of separation of Snorri as connected by stanzas with which they are associated, with the lines representing the stanzas that connect them. The data have been processed in Gephi using the Force Atlas 2 (force-directed) algorithm (Jacomy and others 2014). Users of the project's web interface will be able to view and interact with these diagrams for all persons associated with the stanzas in these sagas, which will allow them to explore the social networks of the prosimetrum in detail.

20 For sample networks generated in this way, see <https://gefin.ku.dk/q.php?p=isp/networks> [accessed 25 April 2022].

Snorri appears in several stanzas as an audience member, a key figure, or is named in the verse. The visualizations illustrate how Snorri goði is connected to 153 different characters in seven different sagas through the poetry.[21] Snorri goði's network is clustered around these narratives, and few other people connect different sagas in the same way through the poetry.[22] This highlights the manner in which persons who are not immediately associated with skaldic poetry may nevertheless be central figures in the stanzas. Only one stanza is attributed to Snorri goði in the whole skaldic corpus, a four-line humorous verse he smilingly utters at the *alþingi* (*Njáls saga* in Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, 411). Yet Snorri's relationship to poetry is in some sense comparable to that of many Scandinavian and English kings depicted in the sagas. While he rarely speaks poetry himself, he is a locus around which poetry clusters, a reflection of his impressive social and political standing.

Stanzas as a Structural Element of Saga Composition

The database contains information on the distribution of the stanzas in each saga and automatically generates a visual overview, which produces a basic indication of the saga's prosimetric profile. As an example of such automatic generation, the histogram in Figure 7 shows the distribution of stanzas in *Eyrbyggja saga* by chapter numbers.[23]

Notable features are the clustering of fourteen stanzas in ch. 19 of the saga, in which most of Þórarinn svarti's *Máhlíðingavísur* are spoken, and the relatively even spacing across chapters of the five stanzas of Þormóðr Trefilsson's *Hrafnsmál* (chs 26, 37, 44, 56, 62), which appear to provide a skeletal framework for the saga's prose narrative (Quinn 2018).

Analysing distribution in relation to chapter numbers is a useful starting point, but finer-grained analysis is necessary to address more complex questions about prosimetric structure. This is especially true as regards specific scenes, episodes, or chains of poetry, which may not line up with chapter numbers in modern editions. Our analysis has also revealed several instances where stanzas cluster around dramatic highpoints in the narrative, as happens in *Njáls saga* around Gunnarr's death (sts 26–30) and

21 These are *Njáls saga*, *Laxdœla saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Heiðarvíga saga*, *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, *Droplaugarsona saga*, and *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*.

22 Several characters connect two sagas through poetry, among them are Skapti Þóroddsson (*Njáls saga* and *Gunnlaugs saga*), Hólmgǫngu-Bersi Véleifsson (*Laxdœla saga* and *Kormáks saga*), and Arngrímr Víga-Styrr Þorgrímsson (*Eyrbyggja saga* and *Heiðarvíga saga*).

23 The prose text of the saga and chapter numbers are derived from the 1987 Svart á hvítu edition of the saga, accessed via the *Fornrit* dataset (Sigrún Helgadóttir and Starkaður Barkarson 2018).



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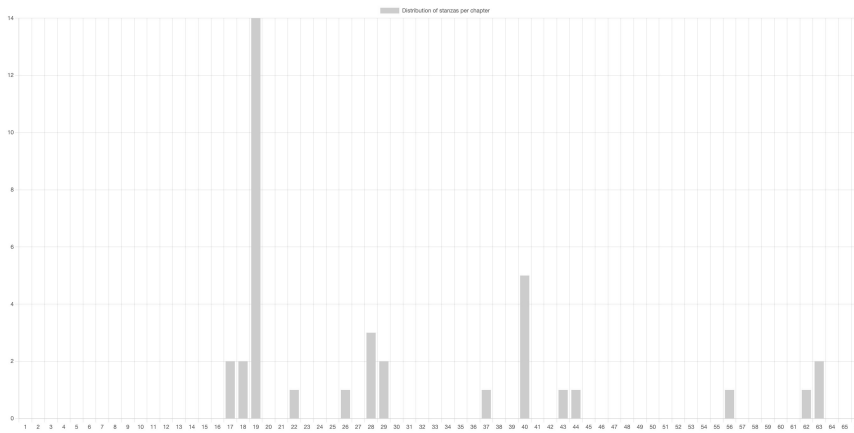


Figure 7. Distribution of stanzas in *Eyrbyggja saga* by chapter numbers.

the burning of Bergþórshváll (sts 42–47).[24] In roughly a third of instances where a stanza is quoted in the corpus, the verse formally ends a scene or an episode. This indicates that a deeper narratological analysis of the placement of poetry in the sagas is fruitful and can cover aspects such as the pace and rhythm of prose narrative in relation to poetic quotation, narrative arcs and character development, and the specific content of scenes where stanzas cluster or mark the end of a scene.

To this end, we have developed database categories that focus on key elements of stanza patterning, both in terms of the wider text and of its distinct scenes and sections. As mentioned above, we track where the quotation of a verse ends a scene (indicated by reference to a change of location or the passing of time) or an episode (defined by a sustained narrative focus on a particular series of events). The contiguity of individual stanzas is also categorized, enabling swift identification of stanzas that are directly contiguous (or separated only by a formulaic *inquit*) and sequences of poetry that are more indirectly connected — for instance, an exchange of related verses in which the quoted stanzas are separated by lengthier prose sections.

24 It is worth noting in this regard that there is significant variation across the redactions of *Njáls saga* as to the number of stanzas quoted. All the stanzas mentioned here are attested across all three branches of the saga's manuscript transmission except sts 26, 28, and 39, preserved only in the so-called X-branch.

Concluding Remarks

In this article we have described how the underlying framework of the database facilitates complex literary analysis as well as generating numerical results for the frequency of particular prosimetric features. As our examples have shown, the data collected enables the exploration of a number of critical research questions which have not previously been the focus of scholarship about the prosimetrum of the *Íslendingasögur*. Of course, a comprehensive account of all the research strands associated with the database has been beyond the scope of this article; consequently, we will use these concluding remarks to outline the other major areas of research in which we are engaged.

While the sagas themselves are anonymous, the stanzas are generally attributed to named characters. In other words, the poetry is authored while the prose is not. The database enables exploration of the implications of this for the genre and for our understanding of medieval Icelandic concepts of authorship through the examination of speakers' roles and the phrasing of the *inquit*. Across each saga text, we can also capture the density and distribution of verse quotation relative to the prose and how numerous the poetic voices are. In some sagas, or sections of them, the poetry can constitute a duel between two poets, as for instance in *Bjarnar saga Hítdælakappa*. In some sagas, such as *Njáls saga*, there is a broad range of poetic voices, the highest number being in the so-called X-branch of the manuscripts of the saga, which features twenty different speakers of stanzas.[25] The performance of narration is thus distributed between the anonymous narrator, as the representative of authorial agency, and the characters within the story. Each speaker may present their own perspective on events, so that the narratorial voice is supplemented, and sometimes even contradicted, by the voices of the characters. To evidence this distribution, we can use data analysis to provide a deeper insight into the types of authorship characteristic of the *Íslendingasögur*.

Comprehensive data from the overall corpus also allow us to draw new conclusions about the function and the effects of verse quotation within the prose. Building on the work of other scholars, the database supplements these findings by 'drilling down' into the various roles played by stanza quotation, in order to go beyond the conventional dichotomy of authenticating and situational verses. More in-depth investigation will broaden our understanding of the possible functions of prosimetrum, with some of the most promising overarching categories in this regard being PLOT FUNCTION, PROSE TRANSITION, and SETTING, especially the

25 The twelve weaving women speaking *Darraðarljóð* are counted as one poetic voice. The speakers range from those uttering a single two-line *kviðlingr* (Þórhildr skáldkona, Þráinn Sigfússon) to those speaking fourteen stanzas in the saga (Gunnarr Hámundarson).



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associated categories 'Triggered by prose events', 'Triggers reaction by others', 'Anticipated by prose', 'Conversational context', and 'Spoken on entering' or 'Spoken on leaving'. For a substantial number of stanzas, however, it is difficult to determine exactly where the speaker is located; though the prose context might imply a particular setting, it is often unclear whether such spatio-temporal markers necessarily apply to the stanza. The data also reveal that a large number of stanzas are spoken in a liminal place, such as at the border of a farm, in a doorway, at a crossroads, or on some kind of journey. Furthermore, many stanzas are spoken on entering or leaving a house or at the moment of transition between different scenes. These patterns suggest that stanzas have been inserted at critical and structurally important moments, perhaps turning points, in the narrative.

Versions of some sagas also contain so-called 'additional stanzas' — sometimes *lausavísur*, sometimes longer poems — which necessarily have implications for how the narrative and literary qualities of the work are interpreted. For this purpose, significant manuscript variants are recorded in the database, ranging from the text of the stanza, variations in its *inquit*, and the stanza's presence in different narrative contexts. This enables users to track how the role played by stanza quotation changes during the transmission process. A good example in this regard is the varying number of stanzas in manuscripts of *Njáls saga*: the text preserved in Möðruvallabók includes thirty-four stanzas whereas a total of sixty-four stanzas are quoted in manuscripts of the X-branch of *Njáls saga* manuscripts (although not all manuscripts in this branch record every one of these stanzas). Most of the so-called additional stanzas are spoken by Skarpheðinn and Gunnarr, with their presence changing the interpretation of these characters within the story, as well as affecting the pace and the narrative's emphasis on certain scenes and episodes.

Finally, the database's capability to sift through large amounts of data facilitates the swift identification of compositional interests manifested in the distribution and combination of stanzas not only in a saga, but also potentially across groups of sagas. Identifying such groupings can allow us to test the boundaries of recognized subgenres of the *Íslendingasögur*, such as the *skáldasögur*, and also to establish new connections between texts within the corpus. The database has been built to allow for the incorporation of other prosimetric corpora which will also make it possible to analyse whether different genres of saga literature are characterized by their own forms of prosimetric patterning.

The '*Íslendingasögur* as Prosimetrum' database (ÍSP) will be made available on a web platform for open use by all scholars interested in

this material.[26] Our aim is for the critical research questions we have posed here to stimulate a broader discussion about prosimetrum in Old Norse-Icelandic saga literature — not only within the *Íslendingasögur*, but also in related narrative genres.

26 <https://uni-tuebingen.de/fakultaeten/philosophische-fakultaet/fachbereiche/neuphilologie/deutsches-seminar/abteilungen/skandinavistik/forschung/the-islendingasoegur-as-prosimetrum/> [accessed 25 April 2022].



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