

The Formation of an Old Norse Skaldic School Canon in the Early Thirteenth Century

Abstract

The academicization of the skaldic art in the twelfth century led to the production of model verses illustrating various meters and variations in the highly formalized poetic imagery, and, later, to skaldic treatises laying out the rules of the art form. In the following it will be argued that it also led to the formation of a clearly demarcated school canon of exemplary skalds. *Skáldskaparmál* is the text that gives us the clearest picture of the school canon of skalds that emerged in the early thirteenth century. By counting the number of times individual skalds were cited as well as the number of their lines that were cited, this article identifies the *höfuðskáld* (chief poets) of the school canon.

1. According to the list of poets and patrons, *Skáldatal* (Enumeration of skalds) Einarr Skúlason composed in honor of no less than seven different rulers of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden (*Uppsala Edda* 100–17). A few years after Einarr's Danish sojourn, King Eysteinn of Norway commissioned from him a poem in honor of St. Óláfr. Einarr performed the resulting poem, the magnificent *Óláfsdrápa* (Drápa about St. Óláfr) or *Geisli* ([Sun]beam), in Christ Church in Þrándheimr in the presence of an elite audience that included all three kings of Norway as well as the archbishop of the newly established archbishopric of Niðaróss.

2. It is occasional stanza 3 in Einarr's oeuvre (*Lausavísur* 570).

3. Saxo Grammaticus reflects a similar tradition when he recounts how Sven discarded traditional Scandinavian usage in favor of practices imported from Saxony (XIV.9.1–2).

If one's ability to appreciate skaldic poetry were considered as a test of cultivation and refined taste, the Danish king Sveinn sviðandi (Sven Grathe, r. 1146–57) would probably have failed. Around 1150, Einarr Skúlason, arguably the foremost skaldic poet of the twelfth century, visited the Danish court wishing to salute the Danish king with an encomium he had composed in his honor. At this point in time, Einarr had already established himself as an encomiast of great repute.¹ Yet Einarr was met with indifference at the Danish court. If the Danish king listened to the poem at all, he did not deem Einarr's efforts worthy of reward. Einarr's encomium to the Danish king has not survived. Neither has any other skaldic poem about Sveinn, with the exception of a single stanza in which Einarr lampoons the conspicuous lack of taste at the Danish court where the king prefers the light entertainment of jugglers and jesters to the noble traditional art form of the skalds.² The Danish king Sveinn fell in battle a few years later, but Einarr's stanza has survived, and thus the king's preference for easily digestible entertainment has been immortalized.³ This anecdote, which illustrates the durability and longevity of the skaldic word, is reported by *Knýtlinga saga* (*Danakonunga sögur* 275). The

4. An overview of the fortunes of skaldic court poetry focusing on Norway and Iceland is provided by Gade, “Poetry and its Changing Importance” 76–86.

5. One example is found in *Sneglu-Halla þáttr* (The Tale of Sarcastic Halli) (*Eyfirðinga sögur* 261–95). Occasionally, as in *Þáttr Þórmóðar* (*Vestfirðinga sögur* 279–84), anecdotes focus on the unwillingness of the kings to reward the skalds.

6. On the status of jugglers in Scandinavia in general, see Lindow 118–23. If the evidence of Þorbjörn hornklofi’s *Hrafnsmál* st. 22–23 is accepted (115–117), jesters and jugglers were already present in the retinue of the Norwegian king in the days of king Haraldr hárfagri (d. c. 930).

7. Two examples are Gísl Illugason’s *Erfikvæði* about Magnús berfóttir and Ívarr Ingimundarson’s *Sigurðarbálkr* about Sigurðr Slembidjagn.

8. Guðrún Nordal, “Samhengið,” interestingly links this new kind of poetry with the emergence of historical writing in Iceland. See Wellendorf, “No Need for Mead,” for a study of *Jómsvíkingadrápa*, one of the great *sagnakvæði* of the turn of the thirteenth century.

9. Early in the twelfth century, the Orcadian earl Rögnvaldr Kali Kolsson and an otherwise unknown Icelandic poet by the name of Hallr Þórarinnsson composed *Háttalykill*, a long poem illustrating different meters (41 in the present form, but the poem is only fragmentarily preserved). On the background and inspiration for *Háttalykill*, see Helgason and Holtsmark 121–34. Einarr Skúlason’s *Øxarflokkr* (more on this poem below), and the many versified lists of synonyms, transmitted along with *Skáldskaparmál*, might also belong to the same period.

accompanying stanza is the last skaldic stanza quoted in *Knyttlinga saga* and it may be considered indicative of the diminishing appreciation for skaldic poetry in the southernmost part of Scandinavia.⁴

Competition for the attention and goodwill of kings is a recurring theme in anecdotes about the experiences of court poets.⁵ In the early period, poets mainly competed with one another. However, in the twelfth century their status at court became increasingly precarious as they faced competition from at least two quarters. Broadly speaking, the skalds appear to have fulfilled two different functions at court: they were encomiasts and entertainers. As encomiasts, they fixed accounts of the deeds and munificence of kings and their ancestors in skaldic verse. As entertainers, they amused the king and his retinue. In both these areas of expertise, the skalds encountered increasing competition as the twelfth century wore on. Their importance as preservers of the knowledge of the deeds of kings of old as well as the reputation of their lord began to be threatened by the increasingly widespread historiographical use of Latin and vernacular parchment literacy at the royal courts, while their role as entertainers at court came up against serious competition from jesters and jugglers.⁶

One skaldic reaction to these challenges was to attempt to increase the prestige of their craft through academicization. Although some twelfth-century court poets began to compose encomia in a more simplified and readily understandable style,⁷ the general trend in the development of skaldic poetry is towards an increased complexity as well as verbal and formal acrobatics that demand much more of the practitioner and their audience. Thus *formal* skaldic poetry became an art form cultivated by men who had received schooling and perhaps a clerical ordination. This in turn must have alienated the primary audience of the court poets further, so the skalds directed their efforts away from the praise of kings of the present or the near past, towards subjects of the more distant past in the new genre of the *sagnakvæði* (historical poems) as well as to religious themes, as can be seen in the twelfth century *drápur*.⁸ The foremost twelfth-century practitioner of this new learned style was the priest Einarr Skúlason.

The academicization of the skaldic art led to the production, first, of model verses illustrating various meters and variations in the highly formalized poetic imagery,⁹ and, later, to skaldic treatises laying out the rules of the art form, separating the artful application of stylistic devices from the unartful. As I argue in the following, it also led

10. On the new (learned) form of skaldic poetry in the twelfth century, see Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy* 19–40 and *Skaldic Versifying*. The latter contribution focuses on Einarr Skúlason.

11. *Skáldskaparmál* is generally considered to be a part of *The Prose Edda* (from the 1220s?). However, it is also transmitted independently of *The Prose Edda*, and the organization of the text varies considerably from manuscript to manuscript. See the survey of the manuscripts provided by Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy* 41–72 and, with reference to *Skm*, 213–232. Given the instability of the text *Skm*, I avoid referring to it as a work of Snorri Sturluson. This textual instability also makes it difficult to generalize about the work *Skm*. The observations in the following are therefore, unless otherwise specified, based on the version of *Skm* that is found in *Codex Regius* (R = Reykjavík, GKS 2367 4to, c. 1300–1325) of the *Prose Edda*, the manuscript on which most modern editions of the text, including that of Faulkes (in three volumes 1988, 1998, 2007) used here, are based. R is generally felt to reflect Snorri's original arrangement of the work most accurately (*Skm* I li), but see Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy* 49–50.

12. “ungum skáldum þeim er girnask at nema mál skáldskapar ok heyja sér orðfjölða með fornum heitum” (*Skm* I 5).

13. The Latin *auctores* included, among others, Virgil, Lucan, and Statius, and Christian authors such as Juvenecus and Prudentius.

14. More generally on the performance of skaldic poetry, see Würth, who also argues that the main purpose of *Skm* is hermeneutic and that it is concerned with comprehension rather than production of skaldic poetry.

to the formation of a clearly demarcated school canon of exemplary skalds.¹⁰ Most prominent among these treatises was *Skáldskaparmál* (*Skm*) (The language of poetry) commonly attributed to Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241).¹¹ The main body of *Skm* is taken up by a rather systematic illustration of the elaborate traditional system of *kenningar* (noun paraphrases) and lists of poetic synonyms (known as *heiti*), and the work is addressed to “those young poets who wish to learn the language of poetry and expand their vocabulary with ancient poetic synonyms.”¹² The work consists of authoritative (if occasionally confusing) statements about formal aspects of the system, some mythological background information, and exemplary quotations of specimens of poetry. Most of these examples are drawn from the work of named poets. Because the examples given are not chosen casually or at random but have been singled out, this selection and the poets who composed them can be said to make up a school canon of Norse poetry. Upon these select skalds was thus conferred a status somewhat akin to that of the canonized Latin *auctores* studied in medieval schools by those students who had progressed beyond functional literacy and the study of elementary texts.¹³

If *Skm* was indeed put together in the 1220s, much skaldic poetry probably still primarily existed in the form of a vast poetic archive stored in the minds of the practicing skalds. The skalds knew the classics of their trade and must have been able to recite some of them when called for. This is the only way to account for the centuries-long oral transmission of their poetry.¹⁴ But, like so many other quotidian practices, the recitation of older skaldic poetry goes largely unmentioned in the sagas, and it is only a single anecdote found in one manuscript of *Sverris saga* that allows us to glimpse what was once an everyday occurrence at royal courts.¹⁵

15. This anecdote involves the twelfth century skald Máni who performs Halldórr skvaldri's poem about the journey of Sigurðr Jorsalafari (*Útfarardrápa*) for Magnús Erlingsson (r. 1161–1184). The anecdote is only found in København, AM 327 4to, c. 1300. It should be noted though that there is information about travelers who bring memorized poems from Iceland to Scandinavia. One such traveler was Steinn Skaptason who was himself a notable skald. *Óláfs saga helga* tells how “Skapti, faðir hans, hafði or

drápu um Ólaf konung ok hafði kennt Steini. Var svá ætlat, at hann skyldi færa kvæðit konungi” (“Skapti, [Steinn's] father, had composed a *drápa* about King Óláfr and had taught it to Steinn. The plan was that Steinn should bring the poem to the king”) (*Heimskringla* II 243). The famous episode where Þormóðr performs the *Bjarkamál* the night before the battle of Stiklastaðir does not count in this connection, since *Bjarkamál* is anonymous and not a skaldic poem in the traditional sense.

16. This is partly suggested by those instances in which sagas quote only the beginning of longer poems. Earlier sagas also include stanzas, but it is a far cry from the 18 skaldic citations included in the edition of *Sverris saga* (2007) to the 328 stanzas of the recent edition of *Morkinskinna* (2011). *Egils saga* includes 60 stanzas in addition to the text of the three longer poems (*Höfuðlausn* (20 sts), *Sonatorrek* (25 sts), and *Arinbjarnarkviða* (25 sts)) that might not have been included in the main text of earliest written version of the saga. On the poetry of *Egils saga* as well as the possible functions of first-stanza quotations, see Quinn.

17. Faulkes (60) also emphasizes the importance of memorized stanzas.

18. Simek's estimate in "Snorri Sturluson statistisch" that Snorri had somewhere between 2000 and 4000 stanzas at his disposal nevertheless seems too high.

19. With reference to Fidjestøl, "On a New Edition" 323, Guðrún Nordal has recently written: "There is virtually no overlap between the skaldic corpus in the kings' sagas and *Snorra Edda* on the one hand, and that incorporated into the Sagas of Icelanders on the other [...]. Even though we find verses by the same poets, they are not typically drawn from the same poetic corpus (Guðrún Nordal, "Ars metrica" 41).

Skm was first composed at a point in time when vernacular writers had begun to cite stanzas in their historiographical prose works (examples include the kings' saga *Morkinskinna* and *Egils saga*, both conventionally dated to the 1220s), although the lion's share of the corpus probably still resided primarily in the memory of trained skalds.¹⁶ The process of selecting examples for inclusion in *Skm* must therefore have entailed both an examination of written sources as well as a mental scrutiny of the poetic corpus memorized by the author or his fellow tradition carriers.¹⁷ Such trained skalds would have known hundreds of stanzas by heart and, given the relatively restricted thematic breadth of the main body of the preserved poetry, will often have known many stanzas illustrating a particular feature.¹⁸ The selection of appropriate illustrative examples must therefore have entailed a de-selection of other stanzas and must be taken to demonstrate the author's – and his peers' – view of what constituted the most exemplary poetry.

It has frequently been observed that the poetry contained in *Skm* belongs to a corpus that is distinct from that of the sagas of Icelanders (see e.g. Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy* 78).¹⁹ At the same time, the skaldic corpora of the kings' sagas and *Skm* are often treated as a single corpus, as when Guðrún Nordal writes about "the established skaldic canon of historical saga writing in the kings' saga and *Sturlunga saga*, and in *Snorra Edda*" (*Tools of Literacy* 84). But, as I will show below, not all skaldic poetry of the historical genres enjoyed canonical status. A canon must necessarily be the outcome of a process of demarcation, of selection and deselection, and the collection of examples in *Skm* is a result of such a process. Its purpose was to illustrate how the canonical skalds have composed and how one, by imitation of these, ought to compose. Since court poetry was considered the most prestigious branch of skaldic poetry, it is only natural that parts of the material of *Skm* coincide with the corpus of poetry found in the kings' sagas. But, in fact, the corpora of *Skm* and the kings' sagas diverge considerably from one another. This difference is most easily explained by the dissimilar functions of the skaldic poetry in *Skm* and the kings' sagas. While the author of *Skm* has selected the stanzas that best illustrate what the author considered exemplary usage of the linguistic devices characteristic of skaldic poetry, the poetry of the kings' sagas is to a large extent, but not exclusively, included in order to testify to the historical accuracy of the accounts of events related in the sagas. This usage of skaldic poetry in the kings' sagas is well known and the saga author's/authors' reliance

on such poetry is also stated outright in the medieval prefaces to the *Separate Saga of St. Óláfr* and *Heimskringla* (*Heimskringla* vol. I 7 and vol. II 422). This, however, does not make all the skalds cited in the kings' sagas canonical. With Aleida Assmann's useful distinction between canon and archive, we might characterize the corpus of the kings' sagas as a written instance of the courtly skaldic archive, while a canon is delimited and identified in *Skm. Skáldskaparmál*, for example, does not appear to have had any patience with the compositions of Björn krepphendí and does not include a single line of poetry by this early twelfth-century court poet. Nevertheless, Björn krepphendí's poetry appears to have survived at least one hundred years of oral transmission, and the early thirteenth century authors of the kings' sagas *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla* readily included eleven (half-)stanzas of his poetry. The same can be said about Gísl Illugasón and Ívarr Ingimundarson, who are both quoted at length in *Morkinskinna* (20 and 46 citations respectively) but who are not quoted a single time in *Skm.* The stanzas of Björn, Gísl and Ingi are not cited at such length in the kings' sagas because of their canonical status or high quality but because of the historical facts they contain.

Chief Poets and the Poets of Old in the Grammatical/Rhetorical Corpus

In *Skm* and elsewhere, the most highly regarded skalds are designated *höfuðskáld* (chief poets). Scholars often equate this term with the Latin *auctores* (see e.g. Nordal, *Tools of Literacy* 23 and Clunies Ross, *A History* 162). This section and the following will show that 'auctores' must be considered a special technical sense of the term *höfuðskáld*. In the Old Norse grammatical/rhetorical tradition, as it is represented by *Skm* and *Háttatal*, this term refers exclusively to the exemplary poets whose poetry was considered worthy of imitation by the compilers of Old Norse treatises on poetics. Furthermore, in this body of writings, the *höfuðskáld* are contrasted with the *fornskáld* (poets of old) whose compositions were considered classics as well, although they were not considered worthy of imitation. The term *höfuðskáld* is also found outside of the grammatical/rhetorical tradition, in historiographical works. Here it is used to designate poets who were important in their day, although their poetry is not held up for imitation in the grammatical/rhetorical literature.

The exemplary nature of the poetry of the *höfuðskáld*, in the tech-

20. “Þessi nöfn himins eru rituð, en eigi höfum vér fundit í kvæðum öll þessi heiti. En þessi skáldskaparheiti sem önnur þykki mér óskýlt at hafa í skáldskap nema áðr finni hann í verka höfuðskálda þvílík heiti: Himinn, hlýrnir, heiðþornir, hregg-Mímir, Andlangr, ljósafari, drífandi, skatyrnir, víðfeðmir, vet-Mímir, leiptr, hrjóðr, víðbláinn” (ed. Faulkes 1988, I, 85). The main source of this list appears to be a versified list of synonyms for sky that is cited later on in *Skm* (st. 516, *Skáldskaparmál* I, 133; see also p. xv of the introduction to this edition). Three of the synonyms (*ljósafari*, *drífandi*, and *leiptr*) are found in the following versified list of synonyms (st. 517), listing synonyms for the sun.

21. One suspects that the reason for this might be found in the fact that these terms were not much used in the poetry before c. 1220; perusal of Finnur Jónsson’s *Lexicon poeticum* reveals that the majority of them are in fact not attested outside the versified lists of synonyms. The unmarked term *himinn* is quite frequently used, and so is *leiptr* (which is used to designate something shining, i.e. ‘sun’ rather than ‘sky’). In later poetry, one finds a few instances of *andlangr*, but the numbers are not impressive.

22. “[T]aka ór skáldskapinum fornar kenningar þær er höfuðskáld hafa látit sér líka” (*Skáldskaparmál* I 5).

23. On *Háttatal*’s attitude to the skaldic tradition, see Myrvoll.

24. “Sú er ein tala hversu margir hættir hafa fundizk í kveðskap höfuðskálda. önnur tala er þat, hversu mörg vísuorð standa í einu eyrindi í hverjum hætti. In þriðja tala er sú, hversu margar samstöfur eru settar í hvert vísuorð í hverjum hætti” (*Háttatal* 3).

25. “Viða er þat í fornskálda verka er í einni vísu eru ymsir hættir eða háttaföll, ok má eigi yrkja eptir því þó at þat þykki eigi spilla í fornkvaðum” (*Háttatal* 26).

nical sense, is clearly illustrated when *Skm* lists thirteen poetical synonyms for the sky and states that one, when composing poetry, should only use those which have already been used by the *höfuðskáld*:

These [following] names for the sky are written, but we have not found all these terms in poetry. Concerning these poetical synonyms, as well as others, it seems to me to be unfitting to use them in poetry unless one can already find such terms in the works of the chief poets [*höfuðskáld*]: [the terms are listed].²⁰

Skm could have been more helpful if it had singled out those synonyms of the thirteen that were in fact used by the *höfuðskáld* and were thus approved for the use of the aspiring poets of the thirteenth century. However, such a list is not given.²¹ Elsewhere in *Skm*, it is stated that one should not “exclude those kennings from poetry which the chief poets (*höfuðskáld*) have been happy to use.”²² Finally, a number of examples are said to illustrate how the chief poets have found it fitting to use certain synonyms and kennings (*Skáldskaparmál* I 6). *Háttatal* (The enumeration of meters), the last part of *The Prose Edda*, also includes a normative statement in which the *höfuðskáld* are held up for imitation.²³ The treatise explains that there are three kinds of numbers in the rules concerning verse forms: the number of lines in a stanza (normally eight), the number of syllables in a line (normally six), and the number of verse forms (or meters) that have been found in the poetry of the chief poets (*höfuðskáld*).²⁴ Both *Skm* and *Háttatal* thus make it clear that the standards of the *höfuðskáld* should be adhered to in three respects, namely in relation to the poetic vocabulary, the poetic imagery, and the poetic meters; arguably the three most distinctive features of skaldic poetry.

That the *höfuðskáld* constitute a particular group in the grammatical/rhetorical literature is clarified by the use of the related term *fornskáld* (poets of old) in the same body of works. The poetry of poets of old is, like that of the chief poets, an important part of the skaldic corpus. It has been transmitted orally for centuries and some of it might be included in the kings’ sagas and other saga genres, but it is not exemplary. It should not be forgotten, but, as *Háttatal* explains, neither should it be imitated:

Differing rhyming patterns or metrical errors are widely found in the works of the poets of old (*fornskáld*), and one

should not imitate²⁵ that even though it is not held to blemish the poetry of old.

A comparable statement is made in *Háttatal*'s treatment of kennings, where it is said that even though the poets of old (*fornskáld*) used a particular complicated form of kenning, it is “now [considered] unacceptable” (*nú ónýtt, Háttatal* 8) to do so.

The “Chief Poets” Outside of the Grammatical/Rhetorical Corpus

Outside the grammatical/rhetorical corpus, the term *höfuðskáld* is used in a more general sense. It is first attested in the poetry of Einarr Skúlason (see Nordal, *Skaldic Versifying* 11–12), the poet cited most often in *Skm* (see the following section), and of Oddi inn litli Glúmsson, a minor skald who figures in *Orkneyinga saga*.

Einarr Skúlason begins his *Geisli* composed in 1153 in honor of St. Óláfr, by praising God, and by asking his audience, the three kings Eysteinn, Sigurðr, and Ingi, the newly appointed archbishop Jón of the archdiocese of Nidaros, and all men to listen to the poem. He then situates his poem in relation to the tradition of skaldic encomia by invoking two of his most prolific skaldic predecessors, each of whom had also celebrated Óláfr, while simultaneously distancing himself from them. Since the two earlier poets have already praised king Óláfr's martial deeds, Einarr will focus on Óláfr's saintly aspects:

12. Sigvatr, frák, at segði
sónbráðs konungs dáðir;
spurt hefr öld, at orti
Óttarr um gram dróttar.
Þeir hafa þengils Mœra
– þvís sýst – frama lýstan,
(helgum lýtk) es hétu
höfuðskáld (fira jöfri)
(Einarr Skúlason, ‘*Geisli*’ 17).

(I have heard that Sighvatr recounted the deeds of the battle-swift king. People have heard that Óttarr composed about the lord of the retinue. They, who were called chief poets [*höfuðskáld*], have described the prowess of the king of the people of Mœrr [*i.e.* Óláfr]. That is done. I kneel for the holy prince of men [*i.e.* Óláfr].)

26. The two skalds were related in that Óttarr's mother was Sighvatr's sister. Both skalds also praised other dignitaries in poetic form.

27. The figures here and in the following for *Óláfs saga helga* are based on the useful database of [The Skaldic Project](#), edited by Tarrin Wills. Figures for *Skm* are based on my own count.

28. “En bók þessa hefi ek látit rita eptir því, sem segir í kvæðum þeira Sigvats ok Óttars svarta, er jafnan váru með Óláfi konungi ok sá ok heyrðu þessi tíðendi [...]”. The prologue goes on to mention other sources: “sögn Ara prests ok annarra frœðimanna” (*Heimskringla* II 421) (“the utterances of Ari the priest and other learned men.”) This (shorter) version of the prologue to the independent saga about Óláfr Haraldsson is only found in two mss: København, Den Arnamagnæske Samling, AM 325 V 4to, c. 1300–1320 and Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket, Isl. Perg. Fol. 1, c. 1400–1425.

29. Seventeen stanzas by Þórarinn loftunga are cited as well, although his poetry is mainly presented in two longer unbroken sequences of verse. As for the other skálds cited in *Óláfr saga helga*, they are only represented by a few stanzas each.

30. Both are illustrations of a *heiti* for lord, *sinnjór* (a loanword from Old French *seignor*). Stanza 411 is identical to the first two lines of st. 386.

31. This stanza, st. 42, is in *Óláfs saga helga* given to corroborate the statement that Óláfr along with his men boarded the ship of Earl Sveinn Hákonarson (*Heimskringla* II 63). In *Skm* the second half of this stanza is cited as st. 286 as an illustration of a *heiti* for ‘retainer,’ namely *heiðþegi* (salary-receiver).

Sighvatr and Óttarr, the two poets mentioned to by Einarr Skúlason, were Sighvatr Þórðarson and Óttarr svartí. Both were court poets of Óláfr Haraldsson and both are cited on multiple occasions in the corpus of king's sagas, in particular but not exclusively, in relation to Óláfr Haraldsson.²⁶ Eighteen stanzas or half-stanzas by Óttarr svartí and no fewer than 106 stanzas or half-stanzas by Sighvatr are cited in *Óláfs saga helga* as it is printed in *Heimskringla* vol. II.²⁷ For every stanza of Óttarr, there are thus almost six stanzas by Sighvatr. The same two skalds are singled out in the prologue to the independent saga of Óláfr Haraldsson, where the author writes: “I have let this book make according to that which is said in the poems of Sighvatr and Óttarr the black, who invariably were with the king and saw and heard these events [...]”.²⁸ The saga writer, Einarr Skúlason, and their audiences, then, must have considered these two skalds the foremost skalds of Óláfr and so important that they should be singled out above the other skalds who are cited in the saga.²⁹ Einarr Skúlason and the authors of the kings' sagas then must have considered Sighvatr and Óttarr the foremost among Óláfr's skálds, his *höfuðskáld* or ‘chief poets.’

Four observations about the use of Sighvatr's and Óttarr's poetry in *Óláfs saga helga* and *Skm* should be made at this point. First, although Sighvatr's poetry is very well represented in the king's sagas, he is rarely cited in *Skm*. In fact, he is only cited on five occasions in *Skm*, and the fifth citation (st. 411) is a duplicate of the fourth (st. 386).³⁰ Second, *Skm* and *Óláfs saga helga* draw on different parts of Sighvatr's oeuvre: only a half stanza of Sighvatr's poetry is cited in both *Skm* and *Heimskringla*.³¹ Third, Óttarr svartí's is cited four times as often as Sighvatr in *Skm* (12 citations), although there are two duplicates.³² This is enough to place him as the ninth most cited skald in *Skm*. Finally, only two of Óttarr's stanzas are cited by both *Skm* and *Óláfs saga helga*.³³ All this shows that the two works draw on dif-

32. Although *Skm* sts 196 is identical to 287 (albeit with variant readings), and 217 is identical to 314, they illustrate different features of the poetry. Stanza 196 illustrate the kenning *brjótr gullsins* (breaker of gold) for man, in st. 287 the same lines illustrate the *heiti inndrótt* (inner retinue) for retainers. Stanza 217 illustrate that the noun *stafr* (stave) can be used as a base word in kennings for warrior *ógnar stafr* (stave of threat/battle,) and in st. 314 the same lines illustrate the use of the *heiti láð* (meadow(?) land) for land (*láð* is cognate with OE *læð* and the second element of Danish *fælled* “village green,” see De Vries).

33. The second half of st. 82 in *Óláfs saga helga* (*Heimskringla* II 172–173) is identical to *Skm* st. 408, and the second half of st. 100 in *Óláfs saga helga* (*Heimskringla* II 280–281) is identical to st. 217 (= 314) in *Skm*.

34. This difference between the historiographical corpus and the grammatical/rhetorical one becomes even more conspicuous if one considers the fact that *Heimskringla* and *Skm* traditionally are assigned to the same author: namely, Snorri Sturluson.

35. The second half-stanza says: “Trað hlunnbjörn | und höfuðskaldi | Áta jörð | Akrsborgar til” (“The roller-bear [SHIP] trod the ground of Áti <sea-king> [SEA] to Acre beneath the chief skald”) (Oddr inn litli, “*Lausavísur*” 618).

36. See the material made available online by the *Old Norse Prose Dictionary*.

37. The second part of the same anecdote is also found in the fragmentarily preserved (and probably misnamed) *Oldest saga about King Óláfr* (*Otte brudstykker* 4–6) in Oslo NRA 52, c. 1225.

38. “Herra [...] til þess em ek eigi foerr at setjask í rúm höfuðskálda þeirra sem hér hafa verit. Fyrir því at ek em ekki reyndr at því at yrkja um þvílíka höfðingja [sem þér eruð]” (*Legendary saga* 53); the bracketed words are from the same anecdote as it is told in *Þáttur Þormóðar* (*Vestfirðinga sögur* 279) in *Flateyjarbók* (1387–1394).

39. Another, later, version of the same anecdote mentions Þórarinn loftunga, Hallvarðr [Háreksblesi], Óttarr [svarti], and Sighvatr [Þorðarson] (*Saga Óláfs konungs* 803). Óttarr and Sighvatr have already been mentioned in connection with Óláfr Haraldsson. Hallvarðr is more obscure, although *Skm* includes six citations of his poetry, and two of his stanzas are quoted in the kings’ sagas.

40. “Ekki var þess líkligt um hrið at Þórarinn myndi heðan brott, enda man mér ok at því reynask fyrir því at ek em eigi jafngótt skáld” (*Legendary saga* 53).

ferent corpora and that the most important skalds, the *höfuðskáld*, of *Geisli* and *Óláfs saga helga* are not necessarily the same as the *höfuðskáld* of *Skm*.³⁴

The other early skaldic attestation of the term *höfuðskáld* is, as mentioned, found in the poetry of Oddi inn litli. Only five stanzas of this poet are preserved. Not much is known about Oddi, but he accompanied Earl Rögnvaldr Kali Kolsson of Orkney on his crusade to the Holy Land in 1151–53. While they stayed in Acre, many men, including a certain skald named Þorbjörn svartí, died of an unspecified disease. At this point *Orkneyinga saga* (230–31) cites two stanzas in which Oddi laments the dead Þorbjörn. In the first, he relates how ships carried the *höfuðskáld*, i.e. Þorbjörn, to Acre;³⁵ in the second, he relates how he was buried in the *höfuðkirkja* (chief church) there. There is, as Jesch points out in her commentary to Oddi litli’s poetry, nothing that indicates that Þorbjörn svartí was a particularly important skald, and the use of the designation *höfuðskáld* might therefore primarily have been motivated by the use of the term *höfuðkirkja* elsewhere in the sequence. At any rate, the parallel between the two compounds with ‘chief’ is conspicuous (618).

Outside the grammatical/rhetorical corpus, the term *höfuðskáld* is also attested a few times in prose.³⁶ The oldest attestation is found in the beginning of an anecdote related in *The Legendary Saga about St. Óláfr*, preserved in Uppsala, Universitetsbiblioteket, De la Gardie 8, c. 1225–1250.³⁷ Here King Knútr inn ríki, Cnut the Great of Denmark and England (d. 1035), offers the Icelandic skald Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld entry into his retinue. Þormóðr, however, has other plans and he seeks to excuse himself by saying that he is no match for the skalds who have composed about Knútr earlier: “Lord [...] I am not suited to occupy the seat of great poets (*höfuðskáld*) such as those who have been here, because I have no experience composing about chiefs such as [you].”³⁸ The context makes clear that the *höfuðskáld* of King Knútr to whom Þormóðr refers are Þórarinn loftunga and Steinn Skaptason.³⁹ Since Þormóðr is seeking to avoid entering into the service of Knútr by belittling his own abilities and by flattering the king, his words as given in the saga cannot be taken entirely at face value. On the other hand, both Þórarinn and Skapti are included among the skalds of King Knútr listed in *Skáldatal* (*Uppsala Edda* 112) so it is likely that they were indeed considered among the chief poets of the Danish king. Þormóðr also reminds the king that Þórarinn barely survived his first meeting with the king, and that Þórarinn is a much better skald than he is.⁴⁰ Þórarinn here alludes to

41. “Knútr verr grund sem gætir | Griklands himinríki” (*Heimskringla* II 307).

42. Steinn’s sad end is only recorded in the saga of St. Óláfr as it is told in the manuscript *Tömasskinna* (København, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Gammel Kongelige Samling 1008 fol., c. 1450–1500): “Hann braut skip sitt við Jotlandssiðu ok komsk einn á land. Hann var þá enn skrautliga búinn ok hafði mikit fé á sér ok var dasaðr mjök. Kona nökkur fann hann er fór með klæði til þvátta. Hon hafði vífl í hendi. Hann var máttlitill ok lá í brúki. Hon sá at hann hafði mikit fé á sér. Síðan fór hon til ok barði hann í hel með víflunni ok myrði hann til fjár at [*<af*] því er menn segja eða hyggja. Nú gafsk honum svá af ofmetnaði ok óhlyðni við Óláf konung” (“He wrecked his ship on the coast of Jutland and was the sole survivor. At that point, he was still lavishly dressed. He and had many valuables on his person and was almost senseless. A woman who was on her way to wash some clothes found him. She had a bat in her hand. He lay exhausted among the seaweed. She walked up to him and beat him to death with the bat and, according to what people say or think, killed him for gain. This was what he got for his pride and disobedience of King Óláfr.” (*Saga Óláfs konungs* 810).

43. Additional attestations in prose of the term *höfuðskáld* outside the grammatical/rhetorical tradition are found in the anecdotal material concerning Þjóðólfr Arnórsson, a prolific, and – if the tales told about him are to be believed – somewhat pompous court poet primarily associated with Magnús góði (r. 1035–1047) and Haraldr harðráði (r. 1046–1066) (*Eyfirðinga sögur* 264 and 267).

44. Clear examples include *þjóðá* (great river), *þjóðlygi* (great lie), *þjóðsmiðr* (great smith).

a well-known episode recounted in *Óláfs saga helga* where an insulted King Knútr threatens to hang Þórarinn from the highest tree because he had dared to compose a *flokkr* in his honor instead of using the more prestigious form of the *drápa*. Þórarinn only saves his life by turning his *flokkr* into a *drápa* overnight, thereby adding the refrain “Knútr protects the land, as the protector of Greece [protects] the kingdom of heaven.”⁴¹ Since then the resulting poem was known as *höfuðlausn* (head-ransom). The other poet of king Knútr with which Þormóðr compared himself unfavorably was Steinn Skaptason. This skald is primarily known from a long episode in *Óláfs saga helga* in which he has a falling out with king Óláfr. The outcome of this is that Steinn leaves for England, where he joins the retinue of the Danish King Knútr (*Heimskringla* II 243–49). At Knútr’s court, Steinn’s vanity and covetousness again brings him into trouble, and he is forced to vacate Knútr’s court (as told in *The Legendary Saga* 58–59).⁴² Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld probably had many reasons for not wanting to join the retinue of King Knútr, but when he is shown as referring to Þórarinn loftunga and Steinn Skaptason with the term *höfuðskáld*, he is clearly intended to designate the famous poets of Knútr rather than the canonical ones.⁴³

Related to the term *höfuðskáld* is *þjóðskáld* (master poet). This second term, which has acquired the meaning “national poet” in Modern Icelandic, is attested three times in the material of the Old Norse prose dictionary. The core meaning of the noun *þjóð* is “people, nation”, but as a prefix it might also mean “great, big.”⁴⁴ This meaning is most clearly seen in *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskáld* (*Eyfirðinga sögur* 228). More interesting is the oldest attestation of *þjóðskáld*, which is found in the context of another anecdote about Þjóðólfr Arnórsson. In this tale, King Haraldr harðráði has challenged Þjóðólfr to improvise a stanza with a particular rhyming scheme. The resulting stanza contains a formal error, and upon hearing this, the king exclaims: “Listen to the master poet (*þjóðskáld*), you rhymed *gröm* with *skömm*.”⁴⁵ When the king addresses Þjóðólfr as *þjóðskáld*, he is clearly ironical, and he is probably also making a pun on Þjóðólfr’s name, which might be taken to mean Great wolf (< *þjóð-úlfr*).

This section has shown how the term *höfuðskáld*, when used outside of the grammatical/rhetorical tradition, should generally be understood to refer to a chief poet or an important poet of some king.

45. “Heyr, þjóðskáld, kvattu svá: Gröm, skömm” (*Morkinskinna* I 286 [the editors take the king’s words to be a question rather than a statement of fact]). On the different variants of this anecdote see Fidjestøl, “Tätten om Harald.” See also *Morkinskinna* I 286 n.1. The assonance is erroneous because of the unequal length of the final consonants in *gröm* and *skömm*.

46. The most extensive list of poets is *Skáldatal* which organizes court poets chronologically by patron. This means that skalds who composed about more than one king may be listed more than once. *Skáldatal* is found in two versions, one in the Uppsala manuscript of the *Prose Edda* (DG 11) where it follows immediately upon *Gylfaginning* and is followed by two additional lists (*Ættartala Sturlunga* and *Lögsögumannatal*). These three lists are followed by *Skm*. The other version of *Skáldatal* appears to have followed *Heimskringla* in the now lost *Kringla* manuscript and is only extant in later copies (see Nordal, *Tools of Literacy* 220–30). Guðrún Nordal suggests that *Skáldatal* originated in conjunction with the writing of *Heimskringla* (223). Its function in the *U* manuscript of the *Prose Edda* may be to provide a chronological framework for the citations that follow in *Skm* as well as to highlight the international importance and historical achievements of the skalds (Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy* 126). See also Pálsson's discussion in *Uppsala Edda* lxxv–lxxvii.

Table 1

47. The oldest poetry preserved in *Skm* is arguably the stanzas of Bragi Boddason, Ölvir hnúfa, and Þjóðólfr inn hvínverski. The only poet of the early thirteenth century cited in *Skm* is Máni. Máni's dates are unknown but he is reported to have performed for Magnús Erlingsson in 1184, and *Sturlunga saga* cites a stanza by him about gifts sent from Earl Hákon galinn (d. 1214) to Snorri Sturluson. In the poem, which Finnur Jónsson dates to c. 1213, Máni refers to Snorri in laudatory terms as *afreksmaðr* (valiant man) and *göfugr gæðingr* (honorable nobleman) (*Skj* B I 520).

48. The majority of these stanzas can be considered skaldic stanzas, but there are also a significant number of Eddic stanzas and versified lists.

The Skalds of the Old Norse School Canon

Who, then, are the *höfuðskáld*, or vernacular *auctores*, of the learned grammatical and rhetorical tradition? The texts do not tell us, as no lists of such exemplary poets are given in *Skm* or elsewhere in the learned grammatical/rhetorical treatises.⁴⁶ The *höfuðskáld* can perhaps most easily be identified by examining attribution of the poetical examples given in *Skm*. By my count, seventy named skalds (and an unknown number of unnamed skalds) are cited in the first part of the *Skm* (cps 1–64), these skalds span the entirety of the known skaldic tradition from the oldest preserved poetry of the ninth century (assuming that the traditional dates assigned to these poems are reliable) to poetry roughly contemporary with the composition of *Skm*.⁴⁷ The (editorial) numbering of stanzas in this part of *Skm* runs to 411 stanzas.⁴⁸ In the second, remaining, part of the text (cps 65–75), 106 versified lists are cited as well. These lists are anonymous and generally held in a simple meter.

Despite these impressive numbers, the reader of *Skm* soon notices that the author has some favorites and that a select group of poets are cited more often than others. Since it is reasonable to assume that the number of citations of a given poet correlates with the perceived exemplarity of the same poet in such a way that the most exemplary poets are also the ones that are most cited in the text, one can get a clear sense of who the *höfuðskáld* were perceived to be by identifying the poets cited most frequently in the text. A listing of the twelve most cited poets along with the number of citations of these poets is found in Table 1 below.

	Poet	Number of Citations
1	Einarr Skúlason	35
2	Arnórr jarlaskald	21
3	Bragi Boddason	16
4	Einarr skálaglamm	15
5	Eyvindr skáldaspillir	15
6	Hofgarða-Refr	14
7	Þjóðólfr Arnórsson	13
8	Úlfr Uggason	12
9	Óttarr svarti	12
10	Hallfrøðr Óttarsson vandræðaskáld	11
11	Egill Skallagrímsson	8
12	Markús Skeggjason	8

49. The attribution of the last stanza (nr. 9) to Þjóðólfr is contested (see *Skáldskaparmál* I 157).

Table 2

50. These extended quotations from *Þórsdrápa* and *Haustlög* are not found in the oldest manuscript of the *Prose Edda* (Uppsala, Universitetsbiblioteket, De la Gardie II, c. 1300), and neither are two extended quotations from Bragi Boddason in *Skm* (sts 154–158 and 250–254 of 36 lines each). This has been taken by some to mean that these passages are later additions to *Skm* (see *Skáldskaparmál* I xli), but the textual relationship between the Uppsala manuscript and the mainstream tradition is still an unresolved issue. See most recently Sävborg, who has argued that the text of the Uppsala manuscript has been shortened.

The poetic citations in *Skm* are of varying length. Most examples are half-stanzas (*i.e.* four lines), but occasionally citations contain long sequences of stanzas. The table above, which is exclusively based on the number of *citations*, therefore gives a slightly skewed picture and needs to be counterbalanced by the information in Table 2 below, which shows the number of lines cited by the different poets.

	Poet	Number of Lines Cited
1	Eilífr Guðrúnarson	168
2	Þjóðólfr ór Hvini	164
3	Einarr Skúlason	144
4	Bragi Boddason	132
5	Arnórr jarlaskáld	74
6	Eyvindr skáldaspillir	65
7	Einarr skálaglamm	60
8	Þjóðólfr Arnórsson	58
9	Hofgarða-Refr	52
10	Úlfr Uggason	44
11	Óttarr svartí	40
12	Hallfrøðr Óttarsson vandræðaskáld	40

Table 2 differs from Table 1 in that the two lowest ranked skalds in the first table, Egill Skallagrímsson (10th cent.) and Markús Skeggjason (11th cent.), have had to give way for two skalds composing on pagan subjects who have entered at the very top of the table: Eilífr Guðrúnarson and Þjóðólfr ór Hvini. The first of these is only cited on four occasions in *Skm*, but one of the citations is the long narrative mythological poem *Þórsdrápa* (152 lines = 19 stanzas). Þjóðólfr is cited on six occasions, but two of these are extended sequences from his long ekphrastic mythological poem *Haustlög* (160 lines, or rather 159 as one line appears to be lost = 20 stanzas) and four of the total of six citations repeat stanzas also cited in *Haustlög*.⁴⁹ The length of these single citations from Eilífr and Þjóðólfr shows that the primary purpose for citing these stanzas is unlikely to have been to illustrate a particular poetic device. Rather, they were probably included in *Skm* because of the story they tell or the mythological information they contain.⁵⁰

In order to identify the *höfuðskáld* of the grammatical/rhetorical tradition more securely than merely by the counting numbers of citations or the number of lines quoted, one might combine the information found on these two lists and leave out poets who do not fig-

ure on both lists. In doing so, one ends up with the following ranked list of ten *höfuðskáld*:⁵¹

Table 3

51. I arrived at this ranking by giving the highest ranked poets in the two preceding tables the score 12. The second highest ranked received the score 11 and so on. For all poets found on both lists I added the two scores. Einarr Skúlason thus ended up with the accumulated score 22 (12 + 10), Arnórr jarlaskáld ended up with the score 19 (11 + 8) and so on. After these calculations, some skalds ended up with the same score: Arnórr jarlaskáld and Bragi Boddason both scored 19, Einarr skálaglamm and Eyvindr skáldaspillir both scored 15 and Hofgarða-Refr and Þjóðólfr Arnórsson both scored 11. In these cases, I have given more weight to the number of citations than the number of lines and ranked the skald with the most citations the higher.

52. The dates in this table are derived from Faulkes' index of names in *Skm* II 443–528.

53. Hallfróðr vandræðaskáld is also the protagonist of one of the sagas of Icelanders (*Hallfredar saga*).

54. In the sagas, he is occasionally called Einarr priest, and his name also figures on the list of Icelandic priests from 1143, where he is listed among priests in Western Iceland (DII, 186) (Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske* II: 62).

1	Einarr Skúlason	12th cent. ⁵²
2	Arnórr jarlaskáld	d. c. 1075
3	Bragi Boddason	9th cent.
4	Eyvindr skáldaspillir	d. c. 990
5	Einarr skálaglamm	10th cent
6	Þjóðólfr Arnórsson	11th cent.
7	Hofgarða-Refr	11th cent.
8	Úlfr Uggason	fl. c. 1000
9	Óttarr svarti	11th cent.
10	Hallfróðr vandræðaskáld	d. c. 1007

This calibrated list looks quite a lot like Table 1, but some names have been shuffled around in the middle tier. Most of the names on the list are well known to readers of Old Norse literature today, since they or their poetry figure prominently in Kings' sagas.⁵³ Bragi Boddason and Úlfr Uggason do not figure in the Kings' sagas, but they are well known today because of the cultural-historical importance of their compositions, which count among the major sources for Old Norse mythology.

It is also noteworthy that, while the majority of the poets on the list are of the eleventh century, the highest-ranking poet is the only representative of the twelfth century. This is Einarr Skúlason, the poet with whom this paper began, the *höfuðskáld par excellence*, and the only one who can be confidently said to have had a clerical ordination.⁵⁴ Einarr is the main representative of the new learned skaldic poetry, and among the many quotations of Einarr's poetry in *Skm* one finds a number of stanzas that have been characterized as "instructional verse" by Guðrún Nordal (*Skaldic Versifying* 11).

In *Skm*, no fewer than ten (half-)stanzas by Einarr (sts 145, 146/232, 147–149, 183, 193–194, 244–245) describe an axe inlaid with gold said to be given to Einarr by a king. This set of stanzas is now conventionally referred to by the editorial title *Øxarflokkr* (Poem about an axe). In *Øxarflokkr*, the king is referred to by complex, but also standard, kennings such as "well-doer of the swan of strife" (*gæðandi svans gunnar*), the conventional image of the warrior who feeds scavengers (ravens) with the bodies of his slain enemies, but he is never actually named. In this set of stanzas, Einarr repeatedly uses kennings that refer in various ways to the Norse goddess

Freyja. Of the ten stanzas on this subject matter, st. 149 may serve as an example:

Gaf sá er erring ofrar
 ógnprúðr Vanabrúðar
 þing- Váfaðar -þrøngvir
 þróttöflu<g>a mér dóttur.
 Ríkr leiddi mey mækis
 mótvaldr á beð skaldi
 Gefnar glóðum drifna
 Gautreks svana brautar (Snorri Sturluson, *Skáldskaparmál* I
 44).

(The threat-brave compeller of Váfuðr’s assembly, he who displays valor, gave me the strength-mighty daughter of the Vanir-bride; the powerful controller of the meeting of the sword led the maiden of Gefn, covered with the embers of the paths of Gautrekr’s swan, to the bed of the skald.)

In this example Einarr Skúlason gives, in the typically convoluted manner of the skalds, expression to the idea that the warring ruler gave him a precious object. The audience needs to possess a certain amount of mythological knowledge in order to be able to appreciate the stanza, although the burden of decoding the meaning is alleviated by the fact that Einarr Skúlason gives expression to the same idea twice, once in each half-stanza. In both half-stanzas, the ruler is referred to by stylized warrior-kennings based on the model “governor of battle,” while the precious object is referred to through a complex kind of wordplay known as *ofljóst* (lit. ‘too clear’) as “the daughter of Freyja” = Hnoss = hnoss, which denotes a precious object.⁵⁵

Abram labels *Øxarflokkr* as “a backward looking exercise in traditional compositional techniques” (*Myths* 197, see also “Einarr Skúlason, Snorri Sturluson”). This might well be a fitting characterization, but, by virtue of their inclusion in *Skm*, the stanzas might also be intended to perform an exemplary function as model verses for future poets. The sheer number, the thematic monotony, and the unspecific nature of the stanzas ascribed to *Øxarflokkr* also points to their origin as rhetorical set pieces (variations on a theme) rather than from a praise poem on a particular axe given to Einarr Skúlason by a particular king.⁵⁶ In general, the very number of stanzas attributed to Einarr Skúlason in *Skm* shows that the author of this text pos-

55. Freyja was the Vanir bride of the stanza and another name of Freyja is Gefn. *Gylfaginning*, the first major part of *The Prose Edda*, explains that Freyja’s daughter was named Hnoss, and that her name came to signify any precious object: “[Freyja] giptisk þeim manni er Óðr heitir. Dóttur þeira heitir Hnoss. Hon er svá fögr at af hennar nafni eru hnossir kallaðar þat er fagrt er ok gersemlikt” (Prologue and *Gylfaginning* 29) (“Freyja married that man which is called Óðr. Their daughter is called Hnoss. She is so beautiful that all objects that are beautiful and precious are called *hnossir* (pl. of *hnoss*) after her name.”)

56. Although the two different origins are not necessarily mutually exclusive of one another.

57. Hofgarða-Refr is also one of the few poets cited in *Háttatal* (8).

58. It is perhaps interesting to note that these genealogies are traced to him but not further than him. This implies that he was a towering figure whose fame outshone that of his descendants (if any).

59. *Heimskringla* mentions Gizurr among Óláfr Haraldsson's poets (*Heimskringla* II 358 and 381–382) as does the version of *Skáldatal* which is believed to have been associated with *Heimskringla* (see fn. 46 above) (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* III 253), while the version of *Skáldatal* found in DG 11 lists Gizurr among Óláfr Tryggvason's poets (*Uppsala Edda* 104).

60. “Þér eigu vér veigar [...] Fals [...] gjalda” (ed. Faulkes 1998, I, 9–10) and “Opt kom[...] at helgu fulli hrafn-Ásar mér” (*Skáldskaparmál* I 9–10).

61. More conventional is Hofgarða-Refr's praise of the martial prowess of Gizurr in a stanza cited in *Heimskringla* (*Heimskringla* II 382).

62. The only exception is an intercalary statement in which the poet gives vent to his expectation that land will soon come into view before the prow of the ship (in st. 124).

63. *Skm* cites this stanza twice, first in the section on kennings for the sea and second in the section on heiti for the sea.

sessed a deep knowledge of the poetic corpus of this particular skald, knowledge he might have acquired through formal training in skaldic poetry.

Returning to the list of the *höfuðskáld* compiled above, it should also be noted that the only real surprise on the list is the relatively obscure Hofgarða-Refr Gestsson.⁵⁷ The stanzas of this eleventh-century skald can, just like those of Einarr Skúlason, be linked to a setting in whose background schooling or at least a kind of formalized training looms. No anecdotes about Hofgarða-Refr have survived, and not much is known about him although *Skáldatal* lists him among the poets of Óláfr Haraldsson. His line of descent is nevertheless fairly well established, thanks to a few genealogies that are traced to him in *Landnámabók*, *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Kristni saga* and elsewhere.⁵⁸ Besides these genealogies, Hofgarða-Refr is also said to have been the foster-son of the Gizurr Gullbráskáld, one of the skalds attached to the retinue of Óláfr Haraldsson.⁵⁹ Two of Refr's half-stanzas are probably unique in that they refer to his training as a skald, a theme never touched upon in other preserved skaldic stanzas. In these somewhat obscure but precious testimonies, Refr praises his foster-father as the one whom he has to thank for the “drink of Falr” (*Skm* st. 17) and the one who “often brought me to the holy cup of the raven-god” (*Skm* st. 4).⁶⁰ The “drink of Falr” and “the holy cup of the raven-god” are both conventional variations on the kenning types ‘mead of dwarfs,’ Falr being the name of a dwarf, and ‘Óðinn's cup’ (see e.g. Kreutzer, *Dichtungslehre* 100–101 and 107–109). In other words, Refr pays tribute to his teacher of skaldic poetry.⁶¹

If Hofgarða-Refr pays tribute to his own teacher in these two stanzas, five stanzas cited elsewhere in *Skm* might reflect some of Hofgarða-Refr's own instructional or pedagogical efforts. In *Skm* sts 124, 126/347, 127, 354, and 363, we have a set of stanzas that describe a voyage across a stormy sea in impressive but also slightly generic terms. These five stanzas are almost completely devoid of human agents.⁶² Instead, inanimate entities (the sea, the ship, or its components) have been given life. *Skm* sts 126/347⁶³ and 354 provide two examples:

Foerir björn, þar er bára
brestr, undinna festa
opt í Ægis kjapta,
úrsvöl Gymis völvu (Snorri Sturluson, *Skáldskaparmál* I 93).

(The moist-cold witch of Gymir brings the bear of the wound ropes into the jaws of the sea where the bore breaks.)

Barðristinn nemr brjósti
 borðheim drasill skorðu
 — nauð þolir viðr—en víði
 verpr inn of þröm stinnan (Snorri Sturluson, *Skáldskaparmál* I 94).

(The steed of the prop takes the stem-carved plank-land with its breast, the wide sea is thrown over the stiff gunwale. The timber suffers need.)

The first of these half-stanzas describes how waves break over the ship and engulf it, while the second describes how the bow of the ship lands after being tossed by the waves and the splashing water. Just like Einarr Skúlason's ten deft but rather unspecific verses about an axe supposedly given to him, Hofgarða-Refr's evocative stanzas on a journey across a stormy sea can be seen as model-verses on a particular topic. This impression becomes even stronger when all five half-stanzas are read as a set and one clearly sees how the skald repeatedly presents images of an animated ship that traverses a stormy sea and of the personified sea that grabs hold of the ship.

The preserved skaldic poetry shows how skalds often had occasion to praise a valuable object given to them (as well as the magnanimous leader who gave the object). Seafaring is also a recurrent theme in the preserved corpus.⁶⁴ Although Hofgarða-Refr appears to have been active a full century before Einarr spearheaded the new learned skaldic poetry, it is not difficult to imagine his stanzas on the ship that crosses the sea being transmitted in a pedagogical context as model-verses showing how one can compose such stanzas. In any case, although their pedagogical purpose cannot be ascertained with absolute certainty, their pedagogical use is amply witnessed by the text that has preserved them to the present time, namely *Skm*.

Skm is then the text that gives us the clearest picture of a school canon of skalds as it emerged in the early thirteenth century. By counting the number of times individual skalds were cited as well as the number of their lines that were cited, a list of ten *höfuðskáld* was established. This canon was by no means a stable and fixed one. By studying different manuscripts of *Skm* and the later *Third Grammatical Treatise*, one will be able to see how the canon was adjusted over

64. Examples of other stanzas on the same theme can be found in *Skm* sts 260, 346, 356, 358, 361, 365 and elsewhere. Outside the grammatical-rhetorical literature, one of the most notable examples is found in *Egils saga* 172.

65. So e.g. the short introduction by Whaley and the anthologies by Frank and Turville-Petre.

66. Frank includes the two half-stanzas from *Skm* in which Refr commemorates his teacher (*Old Norse Court Poetry* 97) while Turville-Petre has a wider selection consisting of four half-stanzas from *Skm* and a stanza from *Heimskringla* (*Scaldic Poetry* 91–93).

67. He stresses Refr's "udviklede sans for en i teknisk henseende skön og harmonisk form" (*Den oldnorske og oldislandske* I: 600) and mentions that "Einars stærkeste side [er] hans fuldkomne teknik og strænge systematik" (*Den oldnorske og oldislandske* II: 72).

68. The author of *Skm* might have found a poet such as Egill Skalla-Grímsson to be too idiosyncratic to be exemplary. At the other end of the scale, a skald such as Sighvatr, who looms large in the material about St. Óláfr, might have been perceived to stray too far in the other direction endeavoring for *claritas*.

the course of time. In a sense, this gradual fine-tuning of the canon continues until the present day although its purpose has changed. Today, most would agree that Egill Skallagrímsson numbers among the most important skalds, but he did not make it into the canon of *Skm* as it was construed above. While the importance of Einarr Skúlason for the development of skaldic poetry is generally recognized among scholars, his presence in the canon is much diminished today. Shorter introductions to skaldic poetry occasionally pass over Einarr in silence, and two of the most important anthologies of skaldic verse do not include samples from Einarr's works.⁶⁵ Hofgarða-Refr fares better, although he does not get much press either.⁶⁶ In his colossal literary history, Finnur Jónsson treats of more or less all known skalds, discussing among other things their merits (or, in his view, lack thereof). His comments on these two skalds show how highly he regarded them and that he fully recognized Einarr's importance for the development of skaldic poetry. Finnur Jónsson paid particular attention to their technical abilities, writing that Refr possessed "a well-developed sense for a, in technical terms, beautiful and harmonious form," and that "Einarr's strongest side [is] his perfect technique and his strict systematism."⁶⁷ *Skm* and *Háttatal* are both preoccupied with systematizing the traditional skaldic poetry by imposing strict rules by which right can be separated from wrong and the artful from the inferior. From this perspective, the particular slant of the skaldic canon as it is presented in *Skm* becomes perfectly understandable. The young skalds are encouraged to imitate their predecessors but not to do so indiscriminately. The poets held up as models follow strict rhyming patterns and use the traditional poetic vocabulary and traditional kennings.⁶⁸

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