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Skúli Þórðarson Thorlacius on Historical Nordic Wrestling: Translation and  
Commentary of a Passage in *Borealiū veterum matrimonia* (1785)

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# Skúli Þórðarson Thorlacius on Historical Nordic Wrestling: Translation and Commentary of a Passage in *Borealiū veterum matrimonia* (1785)

ANTTI IJÄS

Skúli Þórðarson (Skulius Theodori) Thorlacius's (1741–1815) monograph on the marriage rites of the ancient Northerners (*Borealiū veterum matrimonia*, Copenhagen 1785) includes an excursus into spectacles with a section on wrestling (*glíma*). Thorlacius discusses the topic with references to contemporary traditions, saga literature, and comparisons with ancient athletics. Thorlacius's treatise is one of the earliest scholarly treatments of historical Nordic wrestling, predating the Viking revival of the nineteenth century. Acknowledging the recent surge in interest in the study of historical martial cultures, this article makes Thorlacius's text accessible in its Latin original with an English translation and a commentary focusing on his sources. The edition and translation are followed by a critical appraisal of Thorlacius's conclusions, with additional notes on the history and meaning of *lausá-tök*, a wrestling term attested from the early eighteenth century onwards.

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## Introduction

In 1785, Skúli Þórðarson (Skulius Theodori) Thorlacius published a monograph in which he “elucidated the marriages of the ancient Northerners, compared with Roman institutions, from mostly unpublished historical monuments”.<sup>1</sup> Section 30 incorporates an excursus into spectacles (*spectacula*), which Thorlacius divides into games (*ludi*), military exercises (*exercitia militaria*), and fights (*pugnæ*).<sup>2</sup> Under games, Thorlacius provides an exposition of wrestling (*glíma*), the different kinds of which are discussed with references to surviving traditions, saga literature, and comparisons with ancient athletics.

Thorlacius's treatise is one of the earliest scholarly treatments of historical Nordic wrestling,<sup>3</sup> and, as such, an important early example of many features and discourses associated with

<sup>1</sup> Skulius Theodori Thorlacius, *Borealiū veterum matrimonia, cum Romanorum institutis collata, ex monumentis historicis, magnam partem ineditis illustrata* (Antiquitatum Borealiū observationes miscellanæ 4), typis Augusti Friderici Steinii: Hafniæ 1785, <https://baekur.is/bok/571e3490-013f-417b-8c51-691b8fba923b> (accessed 13 Jan 2025).

<sup>2</sup> Thorlacius 1785, 211.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Þorsteinn Einarsson, *Þróun glímu í íslensku þjóðlífi*, Rannsóknarstofnun Kennaraháskóla Íslands í samvinnu við Glímusamband Íslands: Reykjavík 2006, 107–112.

Icelandic wrestling, usually simply known as *glíma*. The practice and popularity of *glíma* has experienced something of a renaissance in the twentieth century mainly due to the efforts of Þorsteinn (Thorsteinn) Einarsson, who authored a booklet published in English under the title *Glima: The Icelandic Wrestling*, “a brief history presented to the Olympic Committee by the Olympic Committee of Iceland”, originally published in 1984.<sup>4</sup> Due to the growing interest in European historical martial arts, there is now a considerable body of non-scholarly writing on the history of *glíma*.<sup>5</sup> The allure of linking modern practices to the Viking age has created a tendency to conflate the modern sport with the passages related to wrestling and fighting that occur in medieval saga literature. Only barely predating the Viking revival of the nineteenth century, Thorlacius’s way of using and interpreting his sources provides an illustrative example of earlier scholarship that may be compared with both modern academic scholarship and the more popular reception of the past. The primary aim of this article is to make Thorlacius’s writings about the history of Nordic wrestling more accessible by making the original text available in a readable format, accompanied by an English translation and a commentary in the form of footnotes, followed by concluding remarks evaluating the text’s contribution to the study of historical martial arts.

As mentioned above, wrestling (*lucta*) is the fourth of a total of thirteen topics discussed under games. The section on wrestling (pp. 218–224) is translated and commented below. In addition, wrestling is mentioned in the section on fights (pp. 246–263), the relevant passages of which are discussed in the notes to the text. To summarize, fights are divided into duels between men (*andromachia*) and fights involving animals (*theriomachia*). Thorlacius recognizes the two-fold nature of wrestling by distinguishing wrestling as a sport (*lucta ludicra*) from serious wrestling (*lucta seria*), which he also identifies as the fourth, unarmed kind of duelling.<sup>6</sup> In addition, he notes that it is also relevant for penal fights in which men are pitted against animals. Among animals Thorlacius counts *Typhoei* (‘monsters’) such as *blamanni* (*blámenn*) or *Æthiopes* (‘Ethiopians’) of the sagas, whom he identifies as wild men imported from inner or northern Scythia, arguing for their treatment under *theriomachia* due to them not being considered *menskir menn* but *tröll* or *qvikindi* (‘trolls’, ‘beasts’).<sup>7</sup>

The Latin text provided below is a faithful reproduction of the original printed edition except for the layout and that the long *f* is replaced with the short *s*. The text is divided into two subsections marked a–b, which are, in turn, divided into subsections marked  $\alpha$ – $\beta$  and  $\alpha$ – $\gamma$ , respectively. Paragraph divisions not present in the original but justified by the content have been introduced in the final section (b. $\gamma$ .) to facilitate the juxtaposition of the original text and the translation. The printing error *ipsement* (b. $\beta$ .) has been silently corrected into *ipsemet* as per the *emendenda* on p. 304. The Old Norse and Icelandic words and phrases are cited in the translation and elsewhere in the same form as in the texts being discussed.

The printed editions used by Thorlacius have been identified from his chapter and page references. Bibliographic information is provided in the footnotes, accompanied by citations from

<sup>4</sup> Thorsteinn Einarsson, *Glima: The Icelandic Wrestling*, Glímusamband Íslands: Reykjavík 1988 (revised edition, new English translation).

<sup>5</sup> It seems advisable not to refer to any specific present-day examples of Thorlacius’s more dubious legacy. Entering a few relevant terms to a search engine should be more than enough to satisfy the curious reader.

<sup>6</sup> Thorlacius 1785, 218 & 251. See note 16 below.

<sup>7</sup> Thorlacius 1785, 252–55.

the sources and references to the corresponding passages in modern editions (EA = *Editiones Arnarnagæanæ*, FAS = *Fornaldarsögur*, ÍF = *Íslensk fornrit*). The titles of the sagas are given in standardized forms. Thorlacius indicates that the following three sagas were available to him only in manuscript (Mst.) form: *Vatnsdæla saga*, *Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfífls*, and *Vilmundar saga víðutan*. Though not marked as such, the same applies to *Finnboga saga*, the *editio princeps* of which (and of *Vatnsdæla saga*) appeared in print in 1812,<sup>8</sup> and *Gaungu-Hrólfss saga*, which was not printed in the original language until 1830.<sup>9</sup> *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* is an unclear case: the *editio princeps* was published in 1782<sup>10</sup> and could have been available to him, but the chapter number he provides does not match this edition; moreover, Thorlacius provides no page number, which is typical of his references to manuscripts. Since Thorlacius indeed provides no folio numbers or other information on his manuscript sources, no educated guess has been ventured to identify the exact manuscripts he might have used, but references to modern editions are provided in these cases as well.

Thorlacius's references to wrestling in classical antiquity are relatively few, and they are all drawn from Samuel Pitiscus's *Lexicon antiquitatum Romanarum* (1713),<sup>11</sup> which, in turn, quotes practically verbatim Hieronymus Mercurialis's *De arte gymnastica* first published in 1569,<sup>12</sup> as illustrated in the notes.

<sup>8</sup> E. C. Werlauff, *Vatnsdæla saga ok saga af Finnboga hinum rama. Vatnsdølernes Historie og Finnboge hiin Stærkes Levnet*, C. F. Schubart: Kjøbenhavn 1812, <https://baekur.is/bok/1d06d3fa-fa69-4755-b24d-9241059df7a3> (accessed 13 Jan 2025).

<sup>9</sup> C. C. Rafn, *Fornaldar Sögur Norðrlanda eptir gömlum Handritum. Þridja Bindi*, Popp: Kaupmannahöfn 1830, 235–364, <https://baekur.is/bok/93d3d9d4-ec07-4715-9710-c0442d30a859/3> (accessed 13 Jan 2025).

<sup>10</sup> *Sagan af Egle Skallagrims Syne*, M. Moberg: Hrappsey 1782, <https://baekur.is/bok/c8a04f76-5fba-4112-9502-9cf7d341bd32> (accessed 13 Jan 2025).

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Pitiscus, *Lexicon antiquitatum Romanarum in quo ritus et antiquitates cum Graecis ac Romanis communes, tum Romanis peculiaries, sacrae et profanae, publicae et privatae, civiles ac militares exponuntur. Tomus II*, Franciscus Halma: Leovardiae 1713, [http://primo.getty.edu/GRI:GETTY\\_ALMA51160291500001551](http://primo.getty.edu/GRI:GETTY_ALMA51160291500001551) (accessed 13 Jan 2025).

<sup>12</sup> For the purposes of this article, citations have been drawn from the fourth edition: Hieronymus Mercurialis, *De arte gymnastica*, apud Iuntas: Venetiis 1601, <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.27070> (accessed 13 Jan 2025).

## Text and translation

[p. 218] 4) *Glíma* sive *fáng*, *lucta*, *παλη*. *Lucta Borealis* fuit vel *ludicra*, vel *seria*.<sup>13</sup> Hæc certaminis singularis species, quæ *monomachia inermis* dici meretur, luctantium alterutrius morte finiebatur. Interdum spectaculi publici loco edebatur; & tum in arena luctatoria petra superne acuta erigi solebat, cui uterve luctantium alterum vel pronum vel supinum illidere, illisoque vel pectus vel dorsum perstringere satagebant. Ejusmodi petram, quæ ab usu, *fánga-hella*, i.e. *petra luctatoria*, dici consuevit,<sup>14</sup> domi suæ sæpius habuere latrones, cujus ope hospites viatores obtruncare solebant. Nonnunquam inter luctandum unus alterum medium complexus, brachiis adeo stringebat, ut spinam dorsi infringeret; quod, *at gánga* v. *brióta á bak aptr*, vocabatur. Interdum adversarium humi prostratum victor superincumbens elisis faucibus suffocabat, quod, *at snara úr hals-lidom*, dicebant;

[p. 218] 4) *Glíma* or *fáng*, *lucta*, *παλη*. The Northerners wrestled either for sport or in earnest.<sup>13</sup> The latter, a kind of single combat that merits being called “unarmed duelling”, would end with the death of either combatant. Sometimes it was performed as a public spectacle, in which case a stone sharp at the top would be erected in the wrestling ground, on which both contestants would try to strike the other, either bending him forward or backward, and thus crush his chest or back. Because of its use, they called this kind of stone *fánga-hella*, i.e., “wrestling stone”.<sup>14</sup> Robbers would often have such stones at their habitats, with the aid of which they would kill travelling foreigners. Sometimes during wrestling, one would grasp the other around the middle so tightly that he would break the backbone. This was called *at gánga* or *brióta á bak aptr*. Occasionally, the winner, pressing upon his opponent lying on the ground, would suffocate him by crushing his throat, which they called *at snara úr hals-lidom*;

<sup>13</sup> Cf. “Ea [exercitia publica] sunt vel seria, vel ludicra.” (Arngrimus Jonas, *Crymogæa sive rerum Islandicarum libri III*, typis Philippi ab Ohr: Hamburgi 1609, 56, <https://baekur.is/bok/6bd63e40-d507-4abd-98b3-92d7b4642647>, accessed 13 Jan 2025.) However, Arngrímur Jónsson’s division is different from that of Thorlacius: for him, serious or agonistic exercises (“in quibus victoriæ contentione animi incalebant: extra tamen furorem & excandescientiam”) include wrestling, practice with projectile weapons, and horsemanship, whereas exercises for sport or play (“in quibus animi relaxatio magis spectabatur, quàm roboris experimentum”) cover music and dancing.

<sup>14</sup> For the wrestling slab, see notes 48 and 49 below.

vel, si ferri copia non esset, sibiqve ab hoste robustiore, etiam prostrato, superior metueret, dentium morsu gulam frangebatur; quod, *at bíta einn á barka*, vocabatur; vid. *Eigla*, *Cap. LXV*.<sup>15</sup> Hoc pugnae genere hospites suffocare solitum Antaeum, eundemqve ab Hercule luctando vicissim obtritum poetæ referunt. Id genus monomachiae exemplis abundat historia Borealis, quorum unum alterumve, ubi de pugnis agetur, inferius dabimus.<sup>16</sup> *Lucta ludicra* fuit certamen gymnasticum, in quo luctantium alius alium in terram prosternere sibiqve supponere nitebatur. Eratqve *duplex*, altera *erecta*, qua certantes sese in- **[p. 219]** vicem dejicere studebant, rectiqve manebant; altera *super pavimento*.

or, if no weapon was available and the one on top feared for himself from a stronger enemy, even when thrown to the ground, he would crush his throat with his teeth, which was called *at bíta einn á barka*, see *Egils saga* ch. 65.<sup>15</sup> The poets relate that Antaeus would suffocate strangers in this kind of fighting and that he himself was, in turn, crushed by Hercules in wrestling. Nordic history abounds with examples of that kind of duelling, of which we will give a few below, where fighting is discussed.<sup>16</sup> Sportive wrestling was a gymnastic contest, in which one wrestler struggled to make the other fall to the ground and submit to himself. This was of two kinds: one kind was practiced upright, in which the contestants **[p. 219]** attempted to throw each other to the ground while remaining standing, while the other kind was practiced on the floor.

<sup>15</sup> *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* 65 (ÍF 2, 209–10) describes armed single combat between Egil and Atli. The fight begins with the hurling of spears and proceeds through sword and shield to wrestling, which ends when Egil overpowers Atli and bites him in his throat (“beit í sundr í honum barkann”, 210). Thorlacius does not mention a page number or that he had used a manuscript source; in the *editio princeps* published in 1782, the relevant chapter is numbered 86 (“beit i sundur i hönnum barkann”, *Sagan af Egle Skallagrims Syne* 1782, 132). Though Thorlacius does not explicitly mention it, all three phrases cited here are found in *Jökuls þátrr Búasonar* in a passage which Thorlacius later quotes as a source of a few other wrestling terms (see notes below). In the story, Jökull first takes down the troll Surt with a “heel crook” and breaks his neck; he then finds his friend Ulf about to get bitten in the throat by Surt’s wife Syrpa and proceeds to break her neck as well. The passage is cited here from the printed edition Thorlacius was using (with my emphasis): “Þess neitti Jökull, og braa Surt Hælkrook, svo ad hañ fell. *Snaradi* Jökull hañ svo *wr Haalslidum*, stood sijdañ upp, og leitar Ulfs. Hañ kemur nu þar ad sem þau Ulfur og Syrpa eigast vid: Og hefur hun komid hönnum under, grwfir ofañ ad hönnum, og ætlar *ad bijta hañ aa Barkañ*. Jökull tekur þa baadum Høndum under Kiaalkana aa Kerlingu, eñ setti Knen i Bakid. Hun mællti: Skal svo graatt eiga nu ad leika? Jökull mællti: Ad því skal þier verda, og *braut* hana so *wr Haals Lidum aa Bak aptur*: Var hun þa daud.” Biørn Marcusson, *Nockrer Marg-Frooder Sögu-Þættir Islendinga Til Leifelegrar Skemtunar Og Dægra-Stittingar Pessa Lands Innbyggjurum*, af Halldore Eriks Syne: a Hoolum i Hialltadal 1756, 184, <https://baekur.is/bok/fec87bb5-7f9d-4b70-a826-b439efdd8bc9> (accessed 13 Jan 2025). Cf. *Jökuls þátrr Búasonar* 2 (ÍF 14, 52, ll. 13–3 from the bottom). See also note 42 on *Finnboga saga* further below.

<sup>16</sup> This is a reference to the section on fights that discusses duels between men (pp. 246–51) and fights involving animals (pp. 252–5). Thorlacius describes four kinds of duels (*pugnae singulares*): *hólmganga* (*monomachia legalis rigida*), *einvígi* (*monomachia exlex s. libera*), *kerhganga* (*pugna labri s. doliaris*), and *lucta seria s. monomachia inermis*. In the paragraph on serious wrestling, he simply refers to the earlier discussion in the section on games, but the topic is brought up again in the following section, in which he discusses men fighting against animals, among which he counts the *blamanni* (see introduction).

a) Nec uno modo *stantes* certabant. Aut enim consertis brachiis manu apprehensis, aut mutuo complexu alter alterum medium stringebat, manuque vel utraque balteum, vel, si viri luctarentur, dextra balteum, sinistra braccas, ambo prehendebant. Illa *lucta brachialis*, Borealibus *lausa-tauk* audiebat;<sup>17</sup> hæc *lucta* in specie<sup>18</sup> sive *ordinaria*, (*rett glíma* sive *fáng*), vocabatur.

α) Illa plus virium quam artis requirebat, & ut simplicior, sic antiquior fuisse videtur.<sup>19</sup> Hæc tamen plerumque singularis fuit. Interdum tamen unus cum pluribus impellendo raptandoque, (*sviptingar* veteres dixere), luctabantur. Hæc pancrati species, a *lucta ordinaria* prorsus diversa, & ne *lucta* quidem *brachialis* dici satis digna, ad hanc tamen, quam ad *ordinariam* propius accedit. Istiusmodi luctatione cum duobus simul, qui corporis viribus maxime præstabant, viris certabat Grettus Robustus; vid. *Vit. Grett. Rob. Cap. LXXVII. pag. 147*.<sup>20</sup>

a) And they did not fight in only one way while standing. For they would either grab each other by the arms with their hands, or with mutual embrace grasp each other in the middle and with one hand, or both, grasp the belt or, if grown men were wrestling, the belt with the right hand and the breeches with the left. The former was called “arm wrestling”, *lausa-tauk* by the Northerners,<sup>17</sup> the latter simply “wrestling”<sup>18</sup> or “regular wrestling” (*rett glíma* or *fáng*).

α) The former required more strength than skill and, being simpler, seems to have been more ancient.<sup>19</sup> This kind was mostly practiced singly, yet occasionally one would wrestle against several by snatching and tossing them (the ancients called it *sviptingar*). This kind of free fighting, utterly contrary to regular wrestling, and not even deserving to be called arm wrestling, is nevertheless closer to the latter than to regular wrestling. Grettir the Strong fought simultaneously against two men, who were outstanding in bodily strength, see *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* ch. 72, p. 147.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> The Latin designation *lucta brachialis* ‘arm wrestling’ (not to be confused with the sport in which competitors attempt to pin each other’s hands on the table) refers to starting the wrestling match by gripping the opponent’s arms rather than his body, both types being attested in medieval German wrestling practices as well. Though given here as a synonym of arm wrestling (but note Thorlacius’s reservation in a.α below), the designation *lausa-tauk* ‘loose grips’ appears to refer to there being no set grip that the contestants must maintain. See concluding remarks for further discussion.

<sup>18</sup> This interpretation of the phrase *in specie* is supported by a parallel found in an older work: “Palæstricæ in specie, sive Gladiatoria [...], partes duæ, videlicet cæsa & puncta.” Rosella Glitzofavorin, *Discursus Defensivus Jurifacitivus*, [apud Iohannem Beithman: Jenæ,] sig. C7r, <http://data.onb.ac.at/rep/10B0CD5B> (accessed 13 Jan 2025). Briefly put, fencing (without a qualifier) is divided into two kinds, cut and thrust. In the present text, the idea is that the bare noun *lucta* (or rather its vernacular equivalent) had the default sense of ‘regular wrestling’ as practiced by the Northerners.

<sup>19</sup> Thorlacius echoes Eggert Olafsen’s observation that “[d]enne, som den mindst kunstige, er vel den ældste: den kommer ikke saa meget an paa Føddernes Sving eller Legemets Smidighed, som paa Styrke, og paa at fordreie hinanden med Hovedet.” Eggert Olafsen, *Vice-Lavmand Eggert Olafsens og Land-Physici Biarne Povelsens Reise igiennem Island. Første Deel*, Videnskabernes Sælskab i Kiøbenhavn: Sorøe 1772, 46, <https://baekur.is/bok/6e57ad14-3f1c-4875-8b3c-7a7a4d9d9d69/1> (accessed 13 Jan 2025).

<sup>20</sup> The reference is to Biørn Marcusson 1756, 147; cf. *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* 72 (ÍF 7, 233–6). In the chapter referred to, Grettir is asked to take part in convivial wrestling and ends up pitted against the two Thord brothers simultaneously. Grettir grabs one of them and tosses him over his head (“seildist aptur fyrri Bak Þordi, og took i Brækur hañs, kipti upp Footunum, og kastadi aptur fyrri Høfud sier”), which seems to be what Thorlacius is referring to with the words *raptare* and *impellere*. What follows is described as a brawl (“og urdu Svitpingar [sic] miklar”), accounting for the *sviptingar* mentioned by Thorlacius, though the word does not seem to be used in a technical sense. Similar wording is used in *Jökuls þáttur Búasonar*, which Thorlacius quotes later (“voru þa all-miklar Svitpingar”, Biørn Marcusson 1756, 184; cf. *Jökuls þáttur Búasonar* 2, ÍF 14, 51, l. 5 from the bottom).

β) In *lucta ordinaria* ars & exercitatio plurimum pollebat, ita ut ejus peritus longe robustiorem prosternere, nec ipse ullo pacto dejici posset. Utrumque luctæ genus Romanis & Græcis olim in usu & deliciis fuisse, qvi horum gymnasticen, qvinqvertium, & ludos de industria tractarunt, auctores ubertim docebunt. Utraque, & maxime quidem ordinaria lucta, mutua corporis contorsione, tractu, pressione, impulsu, aliisque variis supplantandi artibus constabat. Non tamen pugnis se mutuo cædebant luctatores; unde famosus ille, & Anglis hodieque satis usitatus *conflictus luctatorius*, sive *lucta pugillaris*,<sup>21</sup> [p. 220] certamen ex lucta & pugilatu commixtum, & pancratiæ genus habendum, magis antiquo Borealiū *áflog*,<sup>22</sup> (vid. *Niala, Cap. XXXVII. p. 56.*),<sup>23</sup> quam luctæ ordinariæ respondet. Qvemadmodum autem Græci Romaniqve luctatores suas *embolas, parembolas*,

β) In regular wrestling, art and practice would usually prevail so that an experienced practitioner could take down a far stronger opponent and not be thrown himself by any means. That both kinds of wrestling were formerly practiced and favoured by the Romans and the Greeks is indicated in abundance by the authors who have diligently treated their gymnastics, pentathlon, and games. Both and especially regular wrestling consisted of twisting, pulling, pressing, and pushing each other's bodies, and various other tricks for tripping. Wrestlers, however, did not strike each other with their fists, which is why that infamous "wrestling fight" or "strike-wrestling" still very much customary in England,<sup>21</sup> [p. 220] a contest of wrestling mixed with boxing, which should be seen as a kind of free fighting, corresponds more to the ancient *áflog* of the Northerners<sup>22</sup> (see *Brennu-Njáls saga* ch. 37, p. 56)<sup>23</sup> than to regular wrestling. Just as the Greek and Roman wrestlers had their *embolæ, parembolæ*,

<sup>21</sup> Eggert Olafsen also mentions the English, but he equates *lausa-tøk* with Cornish wrestling: "den [Lausa-Tøk] kommer ikke saa meget an paa Føddernes Sving eller Legemet Smidighed, som paa Styrke, og paa at fordreie hinanden med Hovedet. Engellændernes Bryden, hvori Indbyggerne i Cornwall skal være de fornemste, er næsten den samme." Eggert Olafsen 1772, 46. Both Eggert Olafsen and Thorlacius (if independent) must have been thinking of the kind of Cornish wrestling described in Sir Thomas Parkyns, *Προγυμνάσματα. The Inn-Play: Or, Cornish-Hugg Wrestler*, Will. Ayscough: Nottingham 1714 (second edition), 59, which contains advice such as: "By all means have the first Blow with your Head or Fist at his Breast, rather than at his Face, which is half the Battle, by reason it strikes the Wind out of his Body".

<sup>22</sup> Referring to different kinds of sports as opposed to different types of fighting actions is not always a simple matter. Boxing is usually reserved for a specific kind of combat sport with its peculiar rules (distinct from kickboxing, Thai boxing, and taekwondo), but *wrestling* or rather *grappling* can be freely used to refer to the activity itself. The combination of striking and grappling lacks a suitable designation; I have opted to translate the Latin *pancratium* as "free fighting". The same problem was recognized by Jacob Happel, who, writing in 1865, decided to use the dialect word *Rutzen*, alongside *Boxen* and *Ringen*, due to the lack of a suitable word in Standard German (Jacob Happel, *Das Freifechten*, J. J. Weber: Leipzig 1865, 147); cf. F. J. Stalder, *Fragmente über Entlebuch. Nebst einigen Beylagen allgemein schweizerschen Inhalts. Zweyter Theil*, Orell, Geßner, Füßli und Comp.: Zürich 1798, 48–58, in which a folk wrestling tradition of Entlebuch known under this name is described, and *Schweizerisches Idiotikon*, vol. VI, col. 1934, s.v. 'rutze', <https://digital.idiotikon.ch/p/lem/178838> (accessed 13 Jan 2025). The word *áflog* (see also the note below) should not be taken as a technical term for this kind of fighting: what Thorlacius means is that it would have been called simply "fighting" instead of wrestling, which was associated with rules and regulations.

<sup>23</sup> The chapter and page numbers match the *editio princeps* of *Brennu-Njáls saga* (Olaus Olavius, *Sagan af Niáli Þorgeirssyni ok Sonum Hans etc.*, Johann Rüdolph Thiele: Kaupmannahafn 1772, 56), but the word *áflog* does not occur there and neither is there anything similar to the mode of fighting discussed here: Atli thrusts his spear to Kol's midsection, Kol misses with his axe, falls from his horse, and dies: "Sídan lagði Atli spíoti til hans. ok kom á hann midian. Kolr svefladi til hans exi ok misti hans ok fell af baki. ok dó þegar." Cf. *Brennu-Njáls saga* 37 (ÍF 12, 96–99).



*paratheses, systases* &c.<sup>24</sup> ita multas etiam supplantandi artes Boreales habebant, quæ omnes generali nomine olim vocabantur *braugd*, dan. *Sving* v. *Sned*; vid. *E. Olavsens og B. Poulsens Reise igiennem Island, T. I. §. 67. p. 46.*<sup>25</sup> Obiter moneo, a vocula *Sned* (*snid*), unde *snedig* (*snidugr*) *solers*, antiqvam vel luctæ speciem, vel technam luctatoriam, *snid-glíma*, compositam videri;<sup>26</sup> vid. *Vit. Jökulli Buji. f. Cap. II. pag. 183.*<sup>27</sup> Reliqvis etiam technis luctatoriis peculiaribus fuerunt nomina, quorum quædam in scriptis antiqvis occurrunt; ex. gr. *sveifla*, vid. *Grett. Rob. Cap. LXIIX. p. 141.*<sup>28</sup> *laúsa-miödm*, *Vit. Joculli Buji f. Cap. II. pag. 183.*<sup>29</sup> *Hæl-krókr*, *loc. cit. Cap. III. pag. 184.*<sup>30</sup> Quædam etiam nunc in usu; ex. gr. *leggia-bragd*, *kne-bragd*, *klof-bragd*,

*paratheses, systases* etc.,<sup>24</sup> so did also the Northerners have tricks of tripping, which were formerly all known under the general name of *braugd*, in Danish *Sving* or *Sned*; see *Eggert Olafsens og Biarne Povelsens Reise igiennem Island, vol. 1, § 67, p. 46.*<sup>25</sup> Incidentally, I note that *snid-glíma*, an ancient kind of wrestling or wrestling technique, appears to have been composed of the word *Sned* (*snid*), whence *snedig* (*snidugr*) ‘skilled’;<sup>26</sup> see *Jökuls þátrr Búasonar* ch. 2, p. 183.<sup>27</sup> Other wrestling techniques also had their peculiar names, some of which occur in ancient writings, e.g., *sveifla*, see *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* ch. 79, p. 141;<sup>28</sup> *laúsa-miödm*, see *Jökuls þátrr Búasonar* ch. 2, p. 183;<sup>29</sup> *Hæl-krókr*, *loc. cit.* ch. 3, p. 184.<sup>30</sup> Some are still in use, e.g., *leggia-bragd*, *kne-bragd*, *klof-bragd*,

<sup>24</sup> For the Greek wrestling terms, see Michael Baron Poliakoff, *Studies in the Terminology of the Greek Combat Sports* (Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie 146), Anton Hain: Frankfurt am Main 1986 (second edition).

<sup>25</sup> Eggert Olafsen refers to the art of wrestling (*ars luctatoria*) as *Gliimu-List* in Icelandic, individual moves being *Sned* or *Sving* in Danish and *Bragd* in Icelandic (Eggert Olafsen 1772, 45–46). His examples of technical terms that survive from the older times, *Miadmar-Bragd*, *Hæl-Krokur*, and *Sveifla*, are essentially the same that Thorlacius provides below, though he supplies the synonymous *laúsa-miödm* for *Miadmar-Bragd* (both occur in the manuscripts of *Jökuls þátrr Búasonar*, see ÍF 14, 49 note 4).

<sup>26</sup> The sense is perhaps more properly ‘diagonal’ or ‘sideways’, cf. Björn Bjarnason, *Nordboernes legemlige Uddannelse i Oldtiden*, Vilhelm Priors Hofboghandel: København 1905, 109, [https://soeg.kb.dk/permalink/45KBDK\\_KGL/1pioq0f/alma99125500359905763](https://soeg.kb.dk/permalink/45KBDK_KGL/1pioq0f/alma99125500359905763) (accessed 13 Jan 2025) and *ONP: Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* s.v. ‘snið’ 3, <https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o73469> (accessed 13 Jan 2025), but besides that there is no compelling reason to question this etymology, cf. Jan De Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, E. J. Brill: Leiden 1962, 524, s.v. ‘snið’. Interestingly, there is a semantic connection between *snið*, the literal meaning of which is ‘cut’ (either the action or the resulting piece) and the German word *Stück* ‘piece’, which is used in the sense of ‘technique’ or ‘trick’ in medieval and early modern fencing and wrestling literature (e.g., *Ringstück* ‘wrestling trick’). In Old Danish, *snid* or *sned* has the sense of ‘ruse, trick’.

<sup>27</sup> See note 29 below.

<sup>28</sup> The reference is to Biörn Marcusson 1756, 141. Grettir is wrestling against a troll woman and frees his right arm with a swing (“...braa hañ Flagd-Konuñi til Sveiflu, og þvi vard hønnum laus Høndiñ Hægri”), cf. *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* 65 (ÍF 7, 212, ll. 5–4 from the bottom).

<sup>29</sup> The reference is to Biörn Marcusson 1756, 183. Having cut off the head of a troll woman named Geit with his sword, Jökull engages in wrestling with her sister Gnipa and ends up throwing her headfirst on the ground with a hip throw: “Sloo hañ þa til Snid-Glijmu vid Gnijpu. Og er hana varde minst, braa hañ heñi Lausa-Miödm, kom þa fyrst nidur Høfudid, og sijdañ Bwkuriñ: Vard þetta all-mikid Fall.” Cf. *Jökuls þátrr Búasonar* 1 (ÍF 14, 49–50).

<sup>30</sup> After the altercation mentioned in the previous note, Jökull chops off the arm of Geit and Gnipa’s father Surt and takes advantage of his disoriented state to throw him down with a “heel crook”: “Þess neitti Jökull, og braa Surt Hælkrook, svo ad hañ fell.” Biörn Marcusson 1756, 184. Cf. *Jökuls þátrr Búasonar* 2 (ÍF 14, 52, ll. 13–12 from the bottom). Jökull then proceeds to twist his neck until it breaks, after which he goes to help his friend who is about to get bitten in the throat by the mother Syrpa; Jökull puts his knee on her back, grasps her chin and breaks her neck (see note 15 above).

*rass-bragd* &c.<sup>31</sup> Ejusmodi *strophis luctatoriis* semet mutuo circumvenire & subvertere conati sunt. Palam igitur est, Borealium luctam poposcisse, cum vires & vigorem, tum agilitatem & artem exercitio qvæsitam, uti totius corporis ac artuum, ita maxime pedum, qvi in hoc certamine, cujus finis erat supplantatio, artis fallaciis primum & præcipue tentabantur. Idem quoque Romanis Græcisque luctatoribus moris fuisse, testatur lepidus ille Plauti de vino jocus: *Pseudol. Act. V. Sc. 1. v. 6. Pedes captat primum, luctator dolosu' st.*<sup>32</sup> Hinc illum, cui pedes ad luctandum arguti & agiles, [p. 221] *fót-miúkr*; eum autem, qvi torpentes minusque vegetos pedes haberet, *fót-fúinn*, Boreales vocabant.<sup>33</sup>

*rass-bragd*, etc.<sup>31</sup> With such wrestling tricks they tried to beguile and throw each other down. It is therefore clear that Nordic wrestling demanded not only strength and vigour, but also agility and art acquired through practice of the whole body and limbs, especially of the feet, which in this contest, the goal of which was tripping, were primarily and particularly put to the test with the trickery of the art. That this was also the habit of Roman and Greek wrestlers is testified by that witty joke of Plautus about wine in *Pseudologus*, act 5, scene 1, line 6: “He goes for the feet first; he is a cunning wrestler”.<sup>32</sup> This is why the Northerners would call a person whose feet were subtle and agile for wrestling [p. 221] *fót-miúkr*, but him, who had slow and less vigorous feet, *fót-fúinn*.<sup>33</sup>

b) *Lucta super pavimento* Græcis & Romanis usitata, teste Antyllo apud Pitiscum, fuit *pancratium volutatorium*, in quo certantes humi prosternebantur, atque ibi invicem complicati, seque mutuo convolventes, alter alterum sibi supponere nitebantur.<sup>34</sup> Hoc quidem ludicri genus Borealibus etiam usitatum fuit. Ejus triplex genus mihi notum: nempe, *lucta sedentaria*, *anaclinopale*,<sup>35</sup> & *reluctatio prostrati s. subjacentis*,

b) Wrestling on the floor customary to the Greeks and Romans was, as indicated by Antyllus in Pitiscus, “rolling free fighting, in which the contestants would lie on the ground and, held by each other and rolling around with one another, attempt to make the other submit to him.”<sup>34</sup> This kind of sport was also known to the Northerners. I know of three kinds, namely: sedentary wrestling, *anaclinopale*,<sup>35</sup> and fighting while lying on the ground,

<sup>31</sup> Although Thorlacius’s wording is somewhat ambiguous, he does not directly claim that the terms he gives as examples of contemporary usage are inherited from ancient times.

<sup>32</sup> Plautus, *Pseudologus*, 1251.

<sup>33</sup> *Fót-miúkr* and *fót-fúinn* mean ‘nimble-footed’ and ‘rotten-footed’, respectively.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. “Pro *lucta super pavimento* Antyllus nihil aliud intelligebat nisi *pancratium volutatorium*, in quo certantes humi prosternebantur; atque ibi invicem complicati, seque mutuo convolventes, alter alterum sibi supponere nitebantur.” (Pitiscus 1713, 107.) Pitiscus draws from Mercurialis: “De eodem item loquebatur Antyllus apud Oribasium [6. collect. cap. 27.], dum duplicem luctam effecit, alteram erectam, alteram super pavimento; pro *lucta super pavimento* nil aliud intelligens, nisi *Pancratium uolutatorium*, quod tamen ualde diuersum erat ab altera uoluatione, ab Hippocrate ἀλινθήσιος nomine significata [li. de. diaeta.], qua homines in palaestra humi prostrati uel soli, uel cum alijs circumuoluebantur, & de qua Coelius Aurelianus uerba fecit [6. de diaet.], ubi uoluationem in palaestra pro diminuenda carne laudauit; siquidem in ea nec certabant, neque complicabantur, sed solum celeriter supra pavementum nitidum, aut puluere conspersum sese rotabant, unde Galenus eam inter celeres motus non sine ratione posuit. [2. de tue. val.]” (Mercurialis 1601, 107.) Antyllus was a Greek surgeon active in the second century, whose works are partially known through the writings of Oribasius (c. 325–403).

<sup>35</sup> *Anaclinopale* (ἀνακλινοπάλη, from ἀνακλίνειν ‘lie down’ and πάλη ‘wrestling’), despite being defined by Johan Jacob Hofmann as ground-fighting (Johann Jacob Hofmann, *Lexicon Universale, tomus primus*, Jacob Hackius, Cornel. Boutesteyn, Petr. Vander Aa, & Jord. Luchtmans: Lugduni Batavorum 1698, 193), occurs only in a bawdy sense in Martial (see note 39 below), apparently equivalent to Domitian’s *clinopale* (κλινοπάλη, ‘bed-wrestling’) mentioned in Suetonius, ‘Domitianus’, R. A. Kaster ed. (Scriptorum classicorum bibliotheca Oxoniensis) Clarendon Press: Oxford 2016, ch. 22, 420.

quam veteres *umbrot* vocarunt.<sup>36</sup>

α) Inter Erii Boni D. R. artes & exercitia *luctam sedentariam* numerat Saxo, *Hist. Dan. Libr. XII. p. 224. Hastæ aut lapidis jactu sedens stantes vincebat: neque illi situs, quominus fortitudinis suæ experientiam ederet, officere potuit. Eodem corporis situ ex robustissimis duos lucta aggrediebatur; dumque alterum atrectaret, alterum genibus compressum urgebat; nec ante destitit, quam primum hunc, deinde illum pedibus subjiciendo, amborum manus post terga vinciret.*<sup>37</sup> Cum hac Erii R. lucta sedentaria conferri potest illa Græcorum, Aristoteli memorata, (ap. Pitiscum ad voc. *lucta*), qua *palæstritæ in genua subsidentes per pulverem procurrere & luctari solebant.*<sup>38</sup>

β) *Luctæ etiam brachialis speciem* quendam ipsemet puer vidi, quo alter erecte colluctantium se resupinum repente in tergum dejiciens adversarium simul ad lapsum secum detraxit, detractumque & superincumbentem genibus brachiisque subito involvit, & sic implicatum circumplexus in latus detorsit, sibi que supposit. In *felinam* hanc *luctam* nescio ecquid magis apposite quadret, sensum [p. 222] enim subobsænum non moror, quam illud *Mart. Libr. XIV. Epigr. 201.*

which the ancients called *umbrot*.<sup>36</sup>

α) Among the arts and exercises of Eric the Good, King of Denmark, Saxo mentions sedentary wrestling in *Historia Danorum*, book 12, p. 224: “In throwing javelins or stones, he would win while sitting against those who were standing, for this posture could not prevent him from proving his might. From the same posture he would engage two of the strongest men in wrestling; while he was handling one, he would press down the other with his knees, and he did not stop before he had put first one, then the other under his feet with their hands bound behind their backs.”<sup>37</sup> With this sedentary wrestling of King Eric may be compared the one of the Greeks mentioned by Aristotle (Pitiscus under the word *lucta*) in which “wrestlers sitting on their knees used to run through the dust and wrestle”.<sup>38</sup>

β) As a boy, I witnessed a kind of arm wrestling, in which one of the standing contestants suddenly threw himself on his back, pulled the opponent with him, quickly bound him up with his knees and arms, and having clasped around him so wrenched him to the side and made him submit to himself. I do not know what would more suitably correspond to this feline wrestling [p. 222] (for I do not object to the somewhat obscene sense) than Martial’s book 14, epigram 201:

<sup>36</sup> The word *umbrot* ‘struggle’ occurs in the passage from *Finnboga saga* cited below, see note 42.

<sup>37</sup> The quote is from Stephanus Iohannis Stephanius, *Saxonis Grammatici Historiæ Danicæ libri XVI*, Joachimus Moltkenius: Soræ 1644, 224, ll. 19–24, <https://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/details:bsb11691176> (accessed 13 Jan 2025). Cf. Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, Karsten Friis-Jensen ed. (Oxford Medieval Texts), Clarendon Press: Oxford 2015, xii.3.2, 873.

<sup>38</sup> “De hac exercitatione verisimile mihi fit, Aristotelem verba fecisse, ubi nullum erectum, & stantem continenter, & tuto incedere posse demonstrat, quia perinde se moveret, ut palæstritæ, qui per pulverem in genua subsidentes procurrunt.” (Pitiscus 1713, 107.) This is a direct quote of “De hac exercitatione uerisimile mihi fit, Aristotelem verba fecisse [Lib. de communi animalium gressu], ubi nullum erectum, & stantem continenter, & tuto incedere posse demonstrat, quia perinde se moueret, ut palaestritæ, qui per puluerem in genua subsidentes procurrunt.” (Mercurialis 1601, 107.) Aristotle notes that it is not possible to walk erect with no bend in the knees and compares such locomotion to a wrestling exercise performed on the knees; see Aristoteles, *Περὶ πορείας ζώων*, Pierre Louis ed. (Collection des universités de France), Les Belles Lettres: Paris 1973, 709a, 25.

*Non amo, qvi vincit, sed qvi succumbere novit,*

*Et didicit melius την ανακλινοπαλην.*<sup>39</sup>

Cæterum ludicram hanc anaclinopalen, si ex antiquiorum exemplorum defectu, Borealibus rarius usitatam fuisse concludas, non admodum repugnabo.

γ) Serio porro & de vita in loco declivi luctantes ambo subinde collapsi in terram sunt, prostratique semet mutuo convolvebant, donec alter alterum, sive nisu fortiore, sive casu sibi subjectum tenere posset; qvemadmodum Halfredus poëta & Thorleifus Sapiens, vid. *Hist. Ol. Trygv. ed. Scalh. P. II. Cap. XXIX. p. 114.*<sup>40</sup> Jökullus & Hrolleifus, vid. *Vatnsdæla, Mst.*<sup>41</sup> Interdum etiam prostratus tam violenter reluctabatur, ut superiorem fere excuteret;

“I do not love the one who wins but who knows to lie down

and is more skilled in the *anaclinopale*.”<sup>39</sup>

Still, I will not be wholly against it if one should conclude from the lack of ancient examples that this sportive *anaclinopale* was rarely practiced by the Northerners.

γ) Further, those who wrestled seriously for their lives on a sloping ground immediately fell to the ground and, lying there, rolled with each other until one could make the other submit to him, either through more vigorous effort or by accident, as for instance Hallfreðr the poet and Thorleif the Wise, see *Olafs saga Tryggvarsonar*, the Skálholt edition, volume 2, ch. 28, p. 114;<sup>40</sup> or Jökull and Hrolleifr, see *Vatnsdæla saga* (MS).<sup>41</sup> Sometimes even the one lying on the ground would fight back so violently that he could almost repulse the one on top;

<sup>39</sup> Cf. “De hoc item alicui probabile videretur locutum esse Mart. XIV. 201. *Non amo qui vincit, sed qui succumbere novit, / Et dicit melius την ανακλινοπαλην.*” (Pitiscus 1713, 107.) As before, this is a direct quote from Mercurialis. Thorlacius corrects Mercurialis’s reading *dicit* into *didicit*. Pitiscus ignores the *double entendre* of Martial’s verse, though it is pointed out by Mercurialis. Cf. “Non amo quod vincat, sed quod succumbere novit / Et didicit melius την επικλινοπαλην.” Martialis, *Epigrammaton libri*, Iacobus Borovskij ed. (Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana), Teubner: Leipzig 1976, xiv.cci, 341.

<sup>40</sup> The reference is to *Saga þess Haloflega Herra K. Olafs Tryggvasonar Noregs Kongs. Sei[nr]je Partur*, af Jone Snorrasyne: i Skallholte 1690, 114, <https://baekur.is/bok/80091b65-37b2-4dd3-8525-81071a022123/2> (accessed 13 Jan 2025). This version of *Olafs saga Tryggvarsonar* contains *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds*. In the story, king Olaf sends Hallfreðr the poet to either kill or blind Thorleif the Wise, who refuses to accept Christianity. Thorleif realizes on what business his guest is and tries to stand up, but Hallfreðr, being stronger, pushes him down, and they roll on the ground until Hallfreðr ends up on top and pops Thorleif’s eye out with his heel: “ætladi hañ þa up at standa / eñ Hallfredur þreif til hans / oc færði under sik / þt hñ var miklu sterkari / þr ulltu ofan fyrer Haugiñ / oc vard Hallfredur efri / han setti þegar Hæl a Auga Þorl. och hleypti ut or Høfþino.” Cf. *Flateyjarbok. En Samling af norske Konge-Sagaer*. Første Bind, P. T. Malling: Christiania 1860, 330–31, <https://baekur.is/bok/4fc93f5d-b3bf-4c75-b62f-3243911eddfc/1> (accessed 13 Jan 2025).

<sup>41</sup> Thorlacius is referring to a manuscript source. In the story, Both Jökull and Hrolleifr are equally matched and roll down a slope together; *Vatnsdæla saga* 26 (ÍF 8, 69, ll. 6–4 from the bottom): “Engi var þeira aflamunr, ok ultu báðir ofan fyrir brekkuna, ok lágu ýmsir undir”.

qvemadmodum fecit Thorbiörnus Sleggin, idqve tanto conatu & viribus, ut Fimbogium jam victorem, si surgeret adversarius, sibi metuentem, ad gulam sibi dentibus frangendam adigeret, qvod alias giganteum & belluinum habebatur, vid. *Vit. Fimb. Rob. Cap. XL*<sup>42</sup>. Prostratus etiam repugnabat Grimus Ægiri; vid. *Vit. Hrolfi Ped. Cap. XXIII*<sup>43</sup>. Verum *jacentium hæc luctatio*, cum necessitatis & virium magis, qvam artis fuerit certamen, haud scio, an, qvæ lucta super pavimentum vocetur, satis sit digna.

Luctatorium autem certamen, adeo familiare & proprium Borealibus fuit, ut vel antiqvis Græcorum qvinqvortionibus hac in parte pares & palmam dubiam reddituros<sup>44</sup> fuisse, non dubitem. De Starcathero narrat Saxo, *Hist. Dan. Libr. VI. p. 105. Deinde apud Byzantium invictæ opinionis [p. 223] gigantem Tannam nomine, corporis viribus fretus colluctando devicit, ignotasqve terrarum partes proscripti titulo petere coëgit*.<sup>45</sup>

Ungventis ad luctam se præparasse Boreales, non comperio. Luctam ludicram pube tenus vel nudi, vel leviter vestiti obibant. Vestes enim, qvæ media corporis texere, ad luctam se componens exuit Grettterus, teste ejus *Vita, Cap. & p. supra cit. Grettir kastadi kublinóm oc þvínæst öllum bolklædom; ɔ*:

as, for instance, did Thorbjörn the Sledgehammer with such effort and strength that he drove Finnbogi, who feared that his adversary would get up and be victorious, to bite his throat, which was otherwise considered more appropriate of giants and beasts, see *Finnboga saga ramma*, ch. 40.<sup>42</sup> Grímr Ægir, too, fought on the ground, see *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*, ch. 23.<sup>43</sup> But I am not sure if this wrestling when lying down, being more a competition of necessity and strength than art, is worthy of being called wrestling on the floor.

In any case, competition in wrestling was so familiar to the Northerners that I would not doubt that they would have been able to challenge the supremacy<sup>44</sup> of the ancient Greek pentathletes in this respect. Saxo tells of Starkad, *Historia Danorum*, book 6, p. 105: **[p. 223]** “Starkad, confident in his bodily strength, wrestled victoriously against a giant named Tanne at Byzantium, reputed to be invincible, and drove him to flee as an outlaw to unknown lands”.<sup>45</sup>

I have not found out with certainty that the Northerners would have prepared themselves for wrestling with grease. They wrestled for sport either nude up to the private parts or in light clothing. Grettir indeed readied himself for wrestling by stripping himself of clothes that covered the middle of his body, as testified by his *Saga*, chapter and page as cited above: *Grettir kastadi kublinóm oc þvínæst öllum bolklædom*, i.e.,

<sup>42</sup> Thorlacius is referring to a manuscript source. In the story, after biting his opponent in the throat, Finnbogi proceeds to break his neck; *Finnboga saga ramma* 40 (ÍF 14, 330): “Hann tekr þá ok veitir umbrot svá mikil, at Finnbogi hugði þat, at hann mundi upp komast undir honum, en ekki var vápn til reiðu. Finnboga var ekki um at láta hann upp, bregðr feldarblaði sínu at barka honum ok bítr í sundr, snarar síðan höfuð hans ok brýtr á bak aptr, ok linast hann heldr við slíkar byxingar. Síðan leitar Finnbogi at tygilknífi, er hann hafi á hálsi sér, ok getr veitt honum þar með bana.”

<sup>43</sup> Thorlacius is referring to a manuscript source. In the story, Grímr tries to put up a fight even after the tendons of his legs have been cut and he has fallen to the ground, but Hrólfur manages to pin him down: “getr hann þá dregit sverðit aptan at kálfunum á Grími, svâ sundr tóku sinarnan á fótunum, þá fèll Grímr. ... Grímr brauzt um fast, ok sótti í jörð niðr, en Hrólfur hèlt honum eptir megni” (Rafn 1830, 344).

<sup>44</sup> *Palmam dubiam reddere* is a variation of *palmam dubiam facere*, lit. ‘make the palm (of victory) uncertain’, cf. Iuvenalis, *Saturae*, Iacobus Willis ed. (Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana), Teubner: Leipzig 1997, xi.181, 160.

<sup>45</sup> The quote is from Stephanius 1644, 105, ll. 35–38. Cf. Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum* vi.5.15, 388.

*Gretterus amiculum, moxqve omnia medii corporis indumenta abjecit. Et paulo inferius de se ipso Gretterus: ecki sit ec her lengi klædlaus, ɔ: haud diu hic deuestitus hærebo.*<sup>46</sup> Ad hunc certe locum respexisse videtur Arngrimus Jonæ, de lucta veterum agens; vid. *Crumog. Libr. I. Cap. VI. p. 56. In palæstra viri ac juvenes, experiendi roboris gratia, etiam nudi colluctantur, qvæ consvetudo Spartanorum fuit, nisi qvod nostri pube tenus tantum se denudarent. Illud scilicet ex Olympiacis certaminibus mutuati, ne subligacula exuerent.*<sup>47</sup> Raro tamen proxima corporis velamina aut indusia palam exuisse, sed leviter vestitos luctas ludicras obiisse, & genius populi, & omnia fere, qvæ de luctis agunt, auctorum loca fidem faciunt. In seria autem, si vacaret, crassiore qvodam vestis genere, qvam *fánga-stackr*, i. e. *amiculum luctatorium*, appellabant, adversus violentas colluctantis manus, nonnumqvam se præmuniebant, vid. *Hist. Kjalnes. Cap. XV. p. 27.*<sup>48</sup>

“Grettir threw away his mantle and all garments from the middle of his body”, and, a little further, Grettir says of himself: *ecki sit ec her lengi klædlaus*, i.e., “I will not linger here for long without clothes”.<sup>46</sup> Arngrímr Jonsson certainly appears to have referred to this passage when discussing the wrestling of the ancients, see *Crymogæa*, book 1, ch. 6, p. 56: “In the wrestling hall, the men and the youth, for the sake of measuring strength, wrestled naked, which was the custom of the Spartans, only that our people would bare themselves only up to their private parts. This was, of course, borrowed from the Olympic games that they would not take off their waistbands.”<sup>47</sup> They would, however, rarely have fully removed the garments closest to their bodies, or their underwear, but instead wrestle for sport in light clothing, as attested to by the inclination of the people and nearly all passages of the authors who deal with wrestling. But for serious wrestling, if possible, they would sometimes furnish themselves with a kind of thicker garment against the violent hands of their opponent, called *fánga-stackr*, i.e., wrestling jacket; see *Kjalnesinga saga*, ch. 15, p. 27;<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> The reference is to Biörn Marcusson 1756, 147, as before, but the text appears to be cited from another source or standardized by Thorlacius, cf. “Giestur [i.e., Grettir] ... kastadi Kuflinum, og þvi nærst øllum Bol Klædum”, “ecki sit eg hier leingi Klædlaus”. Cf. also *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* 72 (ÍF 7, 233, ll. 8–7 from the bottom & 234, l. 2).

<sup>47</sup> Thorlacius’s quote has some minor differences from the original, most notably the change of tense from past to present: “In palæstrâ viri, ac juvenes, experiendi roboris gratiâ, etiam nudi colluctabantur: Quæ consuetudo Spartanorum fuit: nisi quod nostri pubetenus tantum sese nudarint; illud scilicet, ex olympiacis certaminibus mutuati, ne subligacula exuerent.” (Arngrimus Jonas 1609, 56.) In any case, this is a peculiar thing to say, since Greeks were famous for wrestling nude in their Olympics, whereas it was a Roman (and Homeric) custom to wear a loin cloth, see Michael B. Poliakoff, *Combat Sports in the Ancient World: Competition, Violence, and Culture* (Sport and history series), Yale University Press: New Haven 1987, 11.

<sup>48</sup> The reference is to a wrestling match between Búi Andriðsson and a *blámaðr* known for breaking the bones of those he does not kill. Thorlacius discusses this again in the section on fighting against animals (pp. 252–53). In the story, Búi manages to crush his opponent’s ribcage against the wrestling slab, having been protected by a magical shirt his foster-mother gave him and a protective wrestling jacket (*fangastakkr*) given to him by a farmer named Rauðr. The word *fangastakkr* occurs three times in the chapter, though Thorlacius only refers to its occurrence on p. 27: “Sijdañ steipti hañ yfir sig Faanga-Stacki, er Raud ur gaf hønnum, og foor þa til Leikmootsins.” (Biörn Marcusson, *Agiætar Fornmanna Sögur*, af Halldore Eriks-Syne: a Hoolum i Hialltadal 1756b, 27.) Cf. *Kjalnesinga saga* 15 (ÍF 14, 35–37); according to the associated footnote, there are no other sources for this type of garment (35 note 1). See, however, note 50 on *Vilmundar saga viðutan* below.

conf. *Vit. Gunn. Keldugnups-fífl*, *Mst.*<sup>49</sup> nec non *Vit. Vilmundi Vidutan. Cap. XIV. Mst.*<sup>50</sup>

cf. *Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfífls* (MS)<sup>49</sup> and *Vilmundar saga viðutan*, ch. 14 (MS).<sup>50</sup>

Cæterum tantus apud Boreales luctatorii certaminis olim fuit honor & usus, non ad artus solum & membra exercitio [p. 224] roboranda, sed in conflictibus etiam singularibus, si res armis non succederet, vel in solitariis per eremos & sylvas, qvæ latronibus tum scatebant, itineribus, ubi, ne repente & inermes opprimerentur, ars hæc gymnastica multis fuit saluti, ut nihil nimium dixisse existimandus mihi videar, si poëtæ latini de venatione Romanorum verba ad luctam Borealium convertero:

For the rest, the esteem and skill in wrestling was so great among the Northerners that this gymnastic art was not only practiced for strengthening limbs and the body through exercise, [p. 224] but it was also useful for many in single combat, in case the matter could not be resolved with arms, or when travelling alone through the wilderness and woods, so that they would not be suddenly overwhelmed without weapons, teeming with robbers as they were at the time. Therefore, I do not see myself as going too far, when I change the words of the poet from the hunting of the Romans to the wrestling of the Northerners:

*Arctois solenne viris opus, utile famæ,  
Vitæqve & membris; juvenes cum lucta docebat,  
Et flexu felem superare, & viribus ursum.*<sup>51</sup>

*A solemn art for the Nordic men, useful for fame,  
life, and limbs, when wrestling taught the young  
to outdo the cat in flexibility and the bear in  
strength.*<sup>51</sup>

## Concluding remarks

Thorlacius's unquestionably learned discussion of wrestling covers classical antiquity, examples found in the sagas, and the practices surviving to his time. He appears to treat the latter two as essentially the same phenomenon, though he is clearly aware of changes in wrestling culture. What should be borne in mind is that what Thorlacius says of wrestling as practiced in his time does not directly apply to the practices described in the sagas, not to mention the actual historical practices of the times the sagas are set in. Not every occurrence of *glíma* refers to what is today known as *glíma*, just as the occurrences of the words *fencing* and *fence* in early modern literature do not refer to the present-day sports of foil, épée, or sabre fencing. This is particularly important for the appreciation of the two different kinds of *glíma*, the free-form *lausá-tök* and the more formulaic kind that involves maintaining a specific grip.

<sup>49</sup> In *Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfífls* 7 (ÍF 14, 367), there is a scene in which Gunnar, like Búi (see previous note), must wrestle against a *blámaðr*, whom he defeats with the same trick of backing towards the wrestling slab, jumping over it, and pulling his opponent into it. There is no mention of a wrestling jacket, but it is noted that Gunnar does not take off his clothes (“Jarl spurði þá, hví Gunnar færi ekki af fötum”). Thorlacius mentions this fight also in the section on animal fighting (p. 254). Interestingly, *Finnbogi* appears to use the same trick defending himself against an attempted homicide, though the stone in question is not a designated wrestling slab, and a variation thereof in a wrestling match against a *blámaðr*, crushing the latter's spine instead of his chest; see *Finnboga saga ramma* 13 & 16 (ÍF 14, 279 & 283).

<sup>50</sup> In *Vilmundar saga viðutan* 12 (EA B 23, 165–166), Vilmundr must wrestle against Ruddi, who is wearing a wrestling jacket (“uar j fanga stakkj”).

<sup>51</sup> The words in italics are from Horace, the rest are Thorlacius's alterations; cf. “Romanis sollemne viris opus, utile famæ / vitæque et membris, praesertim cum valeas et / vel cursu superare canem vel viribus aprum / possis.” Horatius, ‘Epistulae’, Fridericus Klingner ed. (Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana), Teubner: Leipzig 1970, i.18.49–52, 271.

Thorlacius’s idea of the antiquity of *lausa-tauk* is borrowed from Eggert Olafsen, the argument being that it is less regulated and refined than *rett-glíma*. If we take *lausa-tauk* as a designation for “free wrestling”, covering, among others, Eggert and Thorlacius’s ideas of what contemporary Cornish wrestling was, then the idea of free practice predating more regulated practice certainly appears to be a sensible hypothesis. If, on the other hand, we take *lausa-tauk* as the historical name of a specific kind of practice, the issue becomes more complicated. Whatever the antiquity of “free wrestling” as such is, there is a distinct danger in the ambiguity of the designation for confusing matters regarding the origins and age of modern, both inherited and recreated, practices.

Curiously enough, Jón Ólafsson’s manuscript dictionary of Icelandic, produced between c. 1736 and 1772, gives *lausa tøk* three slightly different definitions within the same entry.<sup>52</sup> First, *Lausa Tök* is listed as the first of ten wrestling techniques (*Bragdaña, Glýmu Bragdaña*, on which more below) and defined as “quando unus alterius axillas apprehendit” [‘when one grasps the other’s shoulders’], with “sive prensationibus inferioribus” [‘or with grips from below’] added later. Secondly, *Lausa tøk* is added between the last two items of the same list: “adde *Lausa tøk*, prensationes solutas” [‘add *Lausa tøk*, free grips’], with the curious addition “nisi per axillas” [‘except in the shoulders’] inserted above. Thirdly, *lausa tøk* is defined outside of this list as “prehensiones solutæ vel minus fixæ” [‘free or less fixed grips’]. Free fighting proper, however, is called *al-gýfurs glýma*, “þa öll Bragd af öllum Kröptum eru i frañi höfd” [‘in which all techniques with full power are in use’] and which “Pancratium dici potest” [‘may be called *pankration* (free fighting)’].

Before Eggert and Jón Ólafsson, the word *lausa-tøk* occurs in the second part of George Hickes’s *Linguarum veterum septentrionalium thesaurus grammatico-criticus et archæologicus* (1703), under the entry *attaccare* of his glossary of French and Italian words borrowed from Nordic languages. Hickes derives the Italian verb *attaccare* from the Latin preposition (preverb) *ad* and the Germanic verb *tacan*,<sup>53</sup> the earlier form of the Old Norse verb *taka*. Further, he mentions the noun *tak* and its plural *tøk* used in the sense ‘wrestling grips’ (*luctantium prensationes & arreptationes*), of which he provides the examples *efre tøk*, *nedre tøk*,<sup>54</sup> and *lausa tøk* as modes of wrestling (“pro modo luctæ”).<sup>55</sup> It is worth noting that *lausa-tøk* does not occur in *Lexicon Islandicum* (1638) nor

<sup>52</sup> Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, AM 433 1 fol. A copy of the relevant pages (vol. 4, pp. 74–75) was kindly supplied by the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies.

<sup>53</sup> The English word *take* is of this origin. Hickes’s etymology of the Italian *attaccare* (the ultimate source of the English *attack*) is not mentioned in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which notes for *attack* that “[beyond Italian] further etymology [is] uncertain and disputed”, providing *tacca* ‘stain, spot, blotch’ as a possible etymon. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. ‘attack (v.)’, December 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4812200573> (Accessed 13 Jan 2025).

<sup>54</sup> Björn Bjarnason describes *neðri tøk* with both hands as the most advantageous grip in wrestling, noting that its opposite *efri tøk* or *yfirtøk* does not occur; Björn Bjarnason 1905, 103. For the sole example of *neðri tøk*, see *Hjálmbés saga ok Qlvis* 16 (FAS 3, 502). Semantically, *neðritøk* corresponds to the *prensationes inferiores* supplied by Jón Ólafsson as an alternative to gripping the shoulders in *Lausa Tök* (see above).

<sup>55</sup> George Hickes, *Linguarum veterum septentrionalium thesaurus grammatico-criticus et archæologicus. Pars secunda*, e Theatro Sheldoniano: Oxoniae 1703, 92. Hickes attributes the form *takan* to *vetus Borealis* ‘Old Nordic’ and what would now be called Old Norse forms to *Cimbrica* ‘Cimbric’, which he also refers to as Old Danish. For Hickes’s ideas regarding languages and dialects, see Christopher M. Cain, ‘George Hickes and the “Invention” of the Old English Dialects’, *The Review of English Studies, New Series* 61 (2010), 729–48.



under the entries *luctor* and *pancratium* of *Nucleus Latinitatis* (1738).<sup>56</sup> If Hicckes's examples accurately represent the wrestling culture of his own time, it appears to have been slightly different from what was later reflected in the testimonies of Jón, Eggert, and Thorlacius in juxtaposing "loose" grips with "upper" and "lower" grips.<sup>57</sup>

Later, Laurids Engelstoft summarized Thorlacius's description of the different kinds of *glíma* in his essay (not a study, as the author explicitly states) written for the invitation to the public examination held at Det Schouboeske Institut in 1801.<sup>58</sup> Johan Gustaf Liljegren, in turn, drew from Engelstoft and Thorlacius in his description of the various Nordic sports in the commentary section of his Swedish translation of *Gaungu-Hrólfs saga*.<sup>59</sup> In addition to *lausau-tauk* and *retta glíma*, Liljegren goes as far as listing *sviptingar*, *aflog*, and *umbrot* as different kinds of wrestling. His description of *lausau-tauk* is essentially a translation of Engelstoft's text, and as such retains the latter's muddling of Thorlacius's text that associates the grips mentioned in the passage with *lausau-tauk* instead of *rett glíma*. Interestingly, Liljegren provides Swedish names for these grips, namely *armtag*, *lifttag*, and *ryggtag*, the equivalents of which are not found in Thorlacius, Engelstoft, or even Jón Ólafsson.<sup>60</sup> Since Liljegren also translates Engelstoft's observation that regular *glíma* is reportedly still practiced in certain parts of Iceland, it does not appear that either had any personal acquaintance with the topic.<sup>61</sup>

In matters regarding wrestling terminology, Thorlacius is not entirely dependent on Eggert Olafsen. Eggert mentions *Miadmar-Bragd*, *Hæl-Krokur*, and *Sveifla* as examples of inherited terms, which, incidentally, are all found in Jón's dictionary; Thorlacius relates all three (though he substitutes *lausau-miödm* for *Miadmar-Bragd*) and appears to add *snid-glíma* to the list (a.β.). According

<sup>56</sup> Gudmundus Andreae, *Lexicon Islandicum sive Gothicæ runæ vel Lingvæ Septentrionalis Dictionarium*, Sumptibus Christier. Gerhardi Bibliop.: Havniæ 1638, <https://baekur.is/bok/3148b5ee-063f-4672-bd84-a5c33d981d5d> (accessed 13 Jan 2025). *Nucleus Latinitatis*, Ex Reg. Majest. & Universit. Typographéo: Hafniæ 1738, <https://baekur.is/bok/b985e77f-f717-4d3e-9f8c-908ce96898d7> (accessed 13 Jan 2025). Björn Bjarnason explicitly marks *lausatök* as Modern Icelandic (Björn Bjarnason 1905, 102).

<sup>57</sup> To illustrate even later developments, the related term *lausabrögð* 'loose tricks', synonymous with *léttbrögð* 'light tricks', came to be used to refer to one of the three classes of wrestling tricks alongside with *aðalbrögð* 'main tricks' or *þungubrögð* 'heavy tricks' and *aukabrögð* 'additional tricks' or *smábrögð* 'little tricks'; in this terminology, *lausabrögð* covers *leggjarbrögð* 'leg tricks', *sveiflur* 'swings', and related little tricks. Stefán Sigfússon, 'Íslenzka glíman', *Tímarit Hins íslenzka bókmentafélags* 21 (1900), 136–58, at 139–40, <https://timarit.is/page/2320946> (accessed 13 Jan 2025).

<sup>58</sup> Laurids Engelstoft, *Om den Priis, Oldtidens Skandinaver satte paa Legemsøvelser, meest med hensyn til Nationalopdragelsen*, Niels Christensen: Kiöbenhavn 1801, 14–15.

<sup>59</sup> Joh. G. Liljegren, *Rolfs Sturlögssons eller Gånge Rolfs Saga* (Skandinaviska Fornålderns Hjeltesagor; Till Läsning för Sveriges Ungdom 1), Zacharias Haeggström: Stockholm 1818, 312–18, <https://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/details:bsb10036812> (Accessed 13 Jan 2025).

<sup>60</sup> Of course, nothing would prevent one from using such grips in *lausau-tauk*, but this is not what Thorlacius meant at the beginning of section a; cf. Engelstoft 1801, 14: "Man havde mere end een Maade at brydes paa. Den simpleste var *lausau-tauk*, hvor den eene tog fat paa den anden med Hænderne, eller greb ham om Livet, som han best kunde, og søgte ved Armenes Kraft og enhvert Middel at bringe ham ud af Ligevægten. Denne naturlige og ukonstlede Maade var uden Tvivl den ældste. Seieren beroede her mere paa Kræfter end paa Smidighed og Behændighed. Konstigere var den saa kaldte rette Bryden, *rett glíma* eller *fång*" etc. and Liljegren 1818, 313–14: "Man hade mer än ett sätt att brottas: 1. Det enklaste var *lausau-tauk*, hvardvid de med händerna fattade uti hvarandra (*armtag*), eller grepo hvarandra om lifvet (*lifttag*, *ryggtag*), det bästa de kunde, och med armarnes kraft sökte få hvarandra ur jemvigten. 2. Konstigare var den så kallade *retta glíma* eller *fång*" etc.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Engelstoft 1801, 15: "Denne Övelse skal endnu være i Brug paa visse Steder i Island" and Liljegren 1818, 314: "Denna öfning skall ännu vara i bruk på vissa ställen på Island."

to Thorlacius, the latter word refers to either a kind of wrestling (*species luctæ*) or a specific wrestling technique or “trick” (*techna luctatoria*): the source he quotes, Jökull’s fight with Gnipa the troll, is not explicit about this. It is thus somewhat unclear if Thorlacius is relating contemporary use or simply discussing the literature he is quoting, though the latter seems to be the more probable alternative. Jón Ólafsson does not include *snid-glýma* in his list of techniques, but defines it as “lucta lateralis, cum latus pectori opponitur adversarii” [‘lateral wrestling, when the side is put against the chest of the opponent’], which has the outward appearance of a kind of wrestling but should certainly refer to a move or the first phase of a move. Later, Björn Bjarnason indeed interpreted *snidglíma* as a preparatory action to the actual hip throw,<sup>62</sup> whereas Þorsteinn Einarsson, interpreting the writings of Páll Melsteð (1819–1910), Guðmundur Einarsson (1816–1882), Jón Sigurðsson (1828–1889), and Þorsteinn Pálsson (1816–1874), listed *snidglíma* ‘cross-buttock’ as one of the main tricks of *glíma* alongside *lausamjöðm* ‘cross-buttock aloft’.<sup>63</sup> The tradition related by Þorsteinn would seem to represent not exclusively inherited but also recreated usage.

A few notes regarding the numbered list of techniques in Jón’s dictionary should be added. Before corrections and additions, the list had ten items: 1. *Lausa Tök*, 2. *Sveifla*, 3. *Hrygg-spenna*, 4. *Handar bragd*, 5. *Klof-bragd*, 6. *Mjadmar bragd*, 7. *Klof-bragd*, 8. *Drauga bragd*, 9. *Leggiar bragd*, and 10. *Mwsa bragd*. Because *Klof-bragd* occurs twice, its second occurrence, no. 7, has been crossed out, and the numbers 8–10 corrected into 7–9. As mentioned above, there is a note added after *Mwsa bragd*: “adde *Lausa tök*, prensationes solutas, et *aa-floga Brögd*, prænsationes malignæ” [‘add *Lausa tök*, free grips, and *aa-floga Brögd*, malicious grips’].<sup>64</sup> This is followed by yet another, numbered item: “10. *Hæl-Krookr* (qui triplex est) supplantatio per calcem” [‘Heel crook (of which there are three kinds), tripping with the heel’]. The duplication of *Klof-bragd* must have been present in the material Jón was using, since he appears to have finished the list before noticing the error. In addition, the Latin definitions are different: the first one has “prensatio intra femora, vel pedes” [‘a grip between the thighs or legs’], whereas the second has “vel genua” [‘or knees’]. Interestingly, *Mjadmar bragd*, replaced with *lausamiödm* by Thorlacius, only occurs in the sagas on two occasions, both times as an alternate reading found in later paper manuscripts.<sup>65</sup> Thus, the attestation of *mjaðmarbragð* should be dated to the late seventeenth century at the earliest.

In addition to confusing historical and contemporary matters, Thorlacius appears rather uncritical in his interpretations. For example, Jökull’s fight against the family of trolls is indiscriminately used as a source of examples for ancient wrestling practices, though it would seem apparent that the occurrences that take place in this episode of the story should not be considered as evidence of typical wrestling or duelling. In addition to the troll in *Jökuls þátrr Búasonar* 2, Egil (*Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* 65) and Finnbogi (*Finnboga saga ramma* 40) also bite their opponents’ throats, but in these cases, it would be justified to take it as a literary device drawing from animalistic *berserkr*

<sup>62</sup> Björn Bjarnason 1905, 109.

<sup>63</sup> Þorsteinn Einarsson 1988; Þorsteinn Einarsson 2006, 129–30.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. *aflog* interpreted as a kind of wrestling by Liljegren, as discussed above. *Aa-floga Brögd* seems sensible as a term covering illegal grips used with malicious intent.

<sup>65</sup> I.e. in Reykjavík, Landsbókasafn Íslands – Háskólabókasafn, AM JS 28 fol. (1660) of *Jökuls þátrr Búasonar* 1 and Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, AM 173 fol. (1686–1707) of *Gríms saga loðinkinna* 1. See ONP s.v. *mjaðmarbragð* <https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o54841> (Accessed 13 Jan 2025).

imagery<sup>66</sup> rather than an actual occurrence of any considerable frequency. Same should probably be said of the wrestling slab, which is used by Búi against a *blámaðr* in *Kjalnesinga saga* 15,<sup>67</sup> twice (on the second occasion against a *blámaðr*) by Finnbogi in *Finnboga saga ramma* 13 & 16, and once by Vilmundr in *Vilmundar saga Viðutan* 12, followed later by its appearance in *Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfífls* 7, against a *blámaðr* as part of a ruse that appears to be directly inspired by the example of Búi.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, a distinct literary development may be seen in the way the sharpness of the stone is discussed: Búi brings his opponent's ribcage on its "sharpest part", and the top of the stone used by Finnbogi for self-defence is "sharp as a cutting edge", but Vilmundr defeats his opponent by splitting him in half on a stone that apparently incorporates a literal "sword's edge".<sup>69</sup>

All things considered, Thorlacius's contribution is certainly of historical interest, but his conclusions should only be cited as examples of history of scholarship of historical martial arts. This point is particularly important when dealing with objects of study that find more appreciation in communities of aficionados than in academia. In such fields, there may be a tendency to compensate for the perceived lack of modern scholarship by (re)discovering historical literature and sources, which are then analysed using methodologically questionable and, particularly in the case of *glíma*, anachronistic approaches. Hopefully, the present article will not only provide a useful dissection of Thorlacius's writings on historical wrestling but also contribute to further discussions of medievalism and the reception and interpretation of historical sources and scholarship.

<sup>66</sup> See Jenny Wade, 'Going Berserk: Battle Trance and Ecstatic Holy Warriors in the European War Magic Tradition', *International journal of transpersonal studies* 35/1 (2016), 21–38.

<sup>67</sup> Introduced there as something unfamiliar: "Á vellinum stóð ein hella mikil ok uppþunn niðr í völlinn; þat kölluðu þeir fanghelli." *Kjalnesinga saga* 15 (ÍF 14, 36, ll. 13–15). See also note 48 above.

<sup>68</sup> The exploits of Búi and Gunnarr are the only instances of *fangahella* recorded in the ONP; in *Finnboga saga ramma* and *Vilmundar saga Viðutan* (see the following note), the stone used for identical purposes is not referred to as such.

<sup>69</sup> "...þar, sem hvössust var." *Kjalnesinga saga* 15 (ÍF 14, 37, l. 14); "hann var hvass ofan sem egg", *Finnboga saga* 13 (ÍF 14, 279, ll. 7–8); "þeir baruzt uida um uóllen. þar til at þeir kuomu at þeim steine. sem suerdzegg uar j greypt." ... "V(ilmundr) tok hann þa upp á bringu ser. og geck med hann at steinum. og keyrer hann njdr á suerdz eggina. suo fast at Rudda tok j sundr j midiu." *Vilmundar saga Viðutan* 12 (EA B 23, 166, ll. 18–20; 166, l. 26–167, ll. 1–2).