

# Was Guðmundr á Glasisvøllum Irish?

FELIX LUMMER

*University of Iceland*

## Abstract

This article tackles the question of a possible Irish origin for the Old Norse literary figure Guðmundr á Glasisvøllum. The images of Guðmundr, his realm Glasisvellir, and the sometimes associated territory of Ódáinsakr fluctuate in various ways in the different saga narratives in which they occur. The variability of the Guðmundr á Glasisvøllum narrative has caused scholars to debate its possible origin for over a century. The more widely supported notion is that a mythological compound around Guðmundr must have originated in Irish mythology and folklore rather than being an indigenous, Nordic construct. The present article aims to follow up on this discussion, comparing the original Old Norse source material and that found in *Gesta Danorum* to Irish accounts that might have influenced them. By highlighting the differences between the Guðmundr á Glasisvøllum complex and the suggested Irish sources, the degree to which it seems likely the motif could actually have originated in Irish thought will be assessed. Norwegian folk tales about the magical island Utrøst will then be considered to highlight the possibility of a more local background for Guðmundr and his realm.

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The narrative complex of Guðmundr á Glasisvøllum found in Old Nordic saga literature consists of three main parts: Guðmundr; his realm Glasisvellir; and, albeit to a lesser degree, another place called Ódáinsakr. Guðmundr á Glasisvøllum is a literary figure in saga literature, where he is said to be the heathen ruler of a realm in the northern parts of Fennoscandia called Glasisvellir ('Shining Fields'). As will be shown below, Guðmundr is often described with a recurring set of attributes such as longevity, wisdom, and a supernatural body size. The composition of his character traits varies from narrative to narrative, with some attributes more prominent than others. At a narrative level Guðmundr appears as a 'Helper' figure in Proppian terms, someone encountered by the narratives' respective protagonists who helps

to further the plot by providing adventures (Propp 1979, 79). The image of the realm which Guðmundr governs, Glasisvellir, also changes, though to a lesser degree. It is usually described as a rough realm on the northern edge of Norway. The main discrepancies in its description are the names and nature of the otherworldly countries that are said to adjoin it. Thus, Glasisvellir occupies a liminal space between the world of humans and that of supernatural powers. Only a few sources mention Ódáinsakr, and only one narrative connects it directly to Glasisvellir. Ódáinsakr is nonetheless depicted as having life-prolonging properties and is therefore understood as providing the explanation for Guðmundr's longevity.

It has long been established that Irish culture profoundly influenced that of Scandinavia. This influence takes many forms: cultural (cf. toponymical evidence); linguistic (cf. the Manx rune stones); literal (cf. Cú Chúlainn and Starkaðr); and religious (Holm 1996, 86–172; Gísli Sigurðsson 2000, 48–85; Ó Corráin 2002, 61–72; Egeler 2013, 123–29). However, can such an influence also be supposed to have affected the Guðmundr complex? Based on the assessment that certain features of Ódáinsakr found in the early Irish accounts formed an integral part of the Guðmundr complex, scholars have argued that the Guðmundr subject matter was crafted into the Norwegian and/or Icelandic oral tradition drawing on Irish sources (see, for example, Einar Pálsson 1985, 255–77; Power 1985, 166–67; Heizmann 1998, 72–99; Gísli Sigurðsson 2000, 57–63 and 118; and Egeler 2015; 2017). Specifically, the potential link has been demonstrated by pointing to Irish stories revolving around otherworldly, magical islands to the west of Ireland, by highlighting the similarities between these islands and Ódáinsakr and, therefore, (because the two are once connected) Glasisvellir. However, in addition to the fact that Glasisvellir is only mentioned once there is another key problem with the suggested Irish-Icelandic connection: namely, what is *missing* in these comparisons.

Before we explore the investigation, we need to introduce both the Old Norse sources and the Irish narratives to which they are compared. Norwegian folk tales revolving around the magical island Utrøst will be considered in addition to these to highlight the possibility that if Glasisvellir is interpreted as an insular otherworld (which seems somewhat tenuous), there is actually a more solid reason to consider the idea that Nordic folk legends may reflect its local background.

The Guðmundr á Glasisvøllum complex is found in eight Old Norse sources,<sup>1</sup> with the early twelfth-century *Gesta Danorum* (*GD*)<sup>2</sup> by Saxo Gram-

1 Throughout the article the abbreviations given for the Old Norse sources will be used to avoid the repetition of long saga titles. For further clarity, the abbreviations are given again in the bibliography in square brackets after the respective edition used as a source in the present investigation.

2 In *GD* Guðmundr is Latinised as Guthmundus.

maticus being the only Latin account (Friis-Jensen & Zeeberg 2005, I, 59). Other narratives, given in chronological order of the extant manuscripts, range from the early thirteenth to the early sixteenth centuries and include *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* (*HsH*), which includes Ódáinsakr (Turville-Petre & Tolkien 1976, xvii), *Norna-Gests þáttur* (*NGþ*) and *Helga þáttur Þórissonar* (*HþÞ*) (Ashman Rowe 2004, 459), both the older and younger variants of *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* (*eBsH* and *yBsH*) (Jiriczek 1893, X–XII and XXXVIII–VIII), followed by *Þorsteins þáttur bæjarmagns* (*Þþb*) (Martin 1990, 69), and, ultimately, *Samsóns saga fagra* (*Ssf*) (Wilson 1953, 1). The account in *Eiríks saga víðförla* (*Esö*), dated to the late fourteenth century, is of somewhat limited use, because it mentions Ódáinsakr as being detached from Guðmundr á Glasisvöllum (Jensen 1983, XIII–XIV, LVI, CLXXXVII and CCXXXIV). Five of the eight investigated sources can be classified as belonging to the *Fornaldarsögur* (namely, *HsH*, *HþÞ*, *NGþ*, *BsH* and *Þþb*), a type of saga literature that favours non-naturalistic adventures outside Scandinavia, including partly mythological realms such as Risaland or Bjarmaland (see further below).

There is a total of four Old Irish texts that scholars suppose have exerted influence on the Old Norse accounts regarding the mythological Guðmundr complex. These Irish stories all contain the idea of otherworldly islands to the west of Ireland, as well as the journey to reach them (Hillers 1993, 66–81; Carey 2000, 113–19). The most prominent of these narratives with regard to possible influences on the Guðmundr matter is the late tenth-/early eleventh-century Hiberno-Latin account *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis* (*Navigatio*), a pilgrimage story in which the narrative's protagonist Brendan seeks propinquity to God (MacMathúna 1985, 282; Wooding 2000, 227, 245; Thrall 2002, 18; Burgess 2002, 6). Over the course of his seven-year maritime quest Brendan encounters numerous islands before he finally manages to return home to Ireland. Another story, called *Immram curaig Máile Dúin* (*ICMD*), follows an analogous narrative progression to that of the *Navigatio* and can be dated to the tenth century at the earliest (Selmer 1989, xxxiii–xlix).<sup>3</sup> The focus of the plot, however, is on a quest for retaliation by the hero Máel Dúin, who wants to avenge the death of his father during a raid by marauders, rather than a quest for proximity to God. During his hunt for revenge Máel Dúin and his men once again encounter various islands off the western coast of Ireland.

3 The similarities between *Navigatio* and the latter part of another frequently investigated narrative, *ICMD*, have been explained by scholars as going back to a shared archetype, the 'proto-Máile Dúin', from which the *Navigatio* and *ICMD* branched off later (Oskamp 1970, 43 and 47; Strijbosch 2000, 19–142 and 163–65).

Another source referred to, the well-known eleventh-century tale *Immram Brain mac Febail* (*IB*), follows the protagonist Bran, who is lured to an otherworldly insular dominion by a female figure (MacMathúna 1985, 1, 11). He gathers a party to accompany him and sets sail. During their journey they encounter the sea deity Manannán mac Lir. After sojourning there for a year the men return home only to discover that centuries have passed in Ireland, and no one remembers them. The fourth and final potentially influential story, *Echtra Chonnlai* (*EC*), is thought to date as far back as the ninth century (McCone 2000, 26 and 29–41). The plot is not dissimilar to that of *IB* and tells of how Connla *ráad* ('the Ruddy') is also summoned to an otherworldly isle by a lady who has fallen in love with him.

The varied Norwegian folklore material that will be considered focuses on the magical island of Utrøst, which is but one example of a number of magical isles that appear in Nordic folk tradition. The earliest recorded tale can be traced to 1591 (Strömbäck 1970, 146; Daae 1888, 129–30). As will be shown, these stories, which seem to reflect a shared, deep-rooted tradition, highlight the possibility that many varying perceptions of magical islands were extant in earlier Scandinavian tradition which are more likely to have served as sources for Glasisvellir.

### Guðmundr á Glasisvøllum

As noted above, Guðmundr á Glasisvøllum is a very erratic figure in the various narratives in which he features. However, there is a recurring set of qualities and attributes which underline the idea that he was part of a recognised oral tradition (see Table 1 in the Appendix).

Although Guðmundr á Glasisvøllum is a complex narrative construct, he almost always occupies a marginal role in the narratives, all of which nonetheless agree that his name is 'Guðmundr á/af Glasisvøllum/Glæsisvøllum'. With the exception of *GD* all narratives also refer to Guðmundr as a king. In his role as monarch Guðmundr is described both as a passive, Arthurian-like sovereign who is encountered within the confines of his own realm (*HsH*; *Hþþ*;) and as actively undertaking military expeditions or travels (*eBsH*; *yBsH*; *Ssf*; *þþb*). Furthermore, Guðmundr is frequently depicted as a heathen character, often in contrast with the Christian protagonists (*Hþþ*; *NGþ*; *þþb*). The Old Norse sources are also very uniform in their information regarding Guðmundr's physiognomy. Guðmundr is repeatedly said to be of supernatural height, a feature that is woven into the narrative of both *GD* and especially *þþb*. The possible exception is *Ssf*, in which the narrative

remains silent about Guðmundr's height. However, some difference in size may be supposed from the close vicinity his realm is said to have to Rísaland and Bjarmaland in the story. In four of the eight investigated narratives he is described as humanoid (even being knocked unconscious in *eBsH*) and explicitly not a *jötunn* (or 'giant'), and while *HsH* and *HþÞ* do not state this directly, they do not contradict it either.

Another interesting quality the sources highlight is Guðmundr's longevity. While his long lifespan is closely connected to Ódáinsakr being located within Glasisvellir in *HsH*, in *Ssf* it can also be inferred from his son Sigurður's age. Sigurður is said to have been around one hundred and fifty when he was killed; but his long lifespan cannot have been inherited from his mother's side, because she is said to have died at fifteen. If one also considers the possibility that Guðmundr is the same person throughout all the narratives, he must be of a similar age to Norna-Gestr or Ǫrvar-Oddr. Both characters were around three hundred years old when they perished, and both encountered figures from the corpus of *Fornaldarsögur*. Guðmundr, who takes part in *Fornaldarsögur*, still appears to be alive during the reign of Óláfr Tryggvason (995–1000) (*NGþ*; *HþÞ*; *Þþb*).

Another feature of Guðmundr is that he is often portrayed as a father of a varying number of children, ranging from a sole child to twelve and even twenty-four offspring. It is noteworthy that his offspring are always described with the same set of features as their father: his sons are promising, either strong or wise, and some are magically skilled; his daughters are all said to be of tremendous beauty.

If we compare this character to those appearing in the Irish sources mentioned above, two otherworldly male rulers are mentioned who could constitute a possible source or model for Guðmundr (see Table 2 in the Appendix).

The more prominent of the two characters appears in *IB* and is the well-known sea deity Manannán mac Lir. In the narrative Manannán is described as a beautiful, luminescent male figure. Bran encounters him when Manannán rides his chariot across the waves, and in a brief monologue he unveils certain mysteries of the ocean to Bran, simultaneously highlighting both his different perception of the world and his supernatural knowledge. The latter is further stressed when Manannán explains that the purpose of his journey is to beget his son Mongán mac Fiachna in Ireland. In her 1991 article about Guðmundr á Glasisvöllum, Ellis Davidson speculated on whether Manannán could have served as a template for Guðmundr (Ellis Davidson 1991, 177f.). Her idea was that the Norwegian reception of the Irish narrative spawned

the creation of an indigenous character (that of Guðmundr). As tempting as this notion may be, there appears to be little support for this idea, despite various shared qualities. Both Guðmundr and Manannán govern a liminal or supernatural realm, are male ruling figures, fathers, and wise. However, the correlation is hampered by numerous differences. Unlike Manannán, Guðmundr is no deity and is somewhat faintly associated with water, an element that is inherent to the Irish god. Additionally, the realm that Manannán is said to govern is subaquatic and thus of a different quality to both Guðmundr's country realm Glasisvellir and the westward islands of the Irish narratives, which are thought to have served as a template for Glasisvellir.

Another figure in the Irish accounts worth mentioning is King Bóadag, who rules over the supernatural island Mag Mell ('The Plain of Delight') and is featured in *EC*. The name Bóadag translates to 'victorious' or 'victory', and his epithet *rí bithsuthain* ('Everlasting King') certainly suggests a prolonged lifespan. Furthermore, Bóadag is said to have established lasting peace, known as 'the peace of Bóadag', on his accession, granting stability to his people. However, hardly any connections can be made to Guðmundr, since he is never directly linked to either peace or victory, though he seems ageless. McCone (2000, 94–95) has considered the possibility of a Christian origin for Bóadag, who is presented in the story as 'the righteous one' who will destroy druidry, evoking imagery of St Patrick. Be that as it may, there appears little basis to assume any connection between Bóadag and Guðmundr, since a supernatural lifespan and authority over an otherworldly realm are too unspecific to establish a fruitful comparison. Indeed, these features could apply to a broad variety of literary figures and thus do not allow us to establish any line of influence. The idea that the possibly Christian Bóadag could have served as a template for the heathen Guðmundr weakens the argument still further.

The investigated folkloristic material features various supernatural species and people, but has only one prominent male ruling figure, namely, the 'Utrøst mannen' in northern Norway (see further below). In many of the Norwegian stories revolving around the disappearing and reappearing island of Utrøst the 'Utrøst mannen' is described as acting as a provost of Utrøst, where he resides. The 'Skarverne fra Utrøst' narrative describes him as a father of three sons who tills wheat fields and tends supernatural cows. In the narratives in which he appears the 'Utrøst mannen' is a humanoid who is usually clad in blue clothing and is sometimes said to have a beard. At a narrative level he is shown to be a liminal figure, and the 'Skarverne fra Utrøst' narrative hints at him being a revenant who lost his life at sea and

therefore tries to save sailors by granting them refuge on his island in the afterlife. However, as with Bóadag above, the few overlapping qualities of the ‘Utrøst mannen’ and Guðmundr – father, male ruler, and supernatural figure – are again too broad and thus can hardly serve as the bedrock for a comparison.

### **Glasisvellir and the Irish islands**

As has been outlined above, the description of Glasisvellir changes throughout the narratives, albeit to a lesser degree than that of Guðmundr himself. An outstanding trait of Glasisvellir is the ‘shining’ aspect of its name, which can be translated as ‘Shining Fields’. Although this attribute is never explained in the Old Norse narratives, it is worth bearing in mind in the comparison with the Irish islands (see Table 3 in the Appendix). It is noteworthy that, besides having a rugged, snowy, or very sylvan terrain Glasisvellir is nowhere described as being insular. Indeed, in *Ppb* it is depicted as a landlocked country. Additionally, as noted above, only the *HsH* versions posit a connection between Glasisvellir and Ódáinsakr.

As can be seen from the descriptions of both Guðmundr and his subjects, Glasisvellir is said to be inhabited by humanoid figures, an interesting fact when one considers its supposed spatial proximity to various supernatural realms. Glasisvellir’s most frequent associations are with other countries thought to be physically located in Fennoscandia in terms of both real topography and geography. These countries are collectively called ‘Norðrlönd’, a descriptive term used in *HsH*. The ‘Norðrlönd’ construct consists of numerous realms and territories, the exact composition of which varies from story to story. There are, however, some that appear more frequently than others: for example, Bjarmaland, Rísaland, and Jötunheimar (*GD*; *eBsH*; *yBsH*; *Ssf*; *Ppb*), although Jötunheimar seems to have rather erratic relations with Glasisvellir. They are described as having difficult relationships not least because Guðmundr is said to have a distaste for *jotnar* (*Ppb*) and to wage war upon them (*Ssf*). *HsH* describes Glasisvellir as actually being a state of Jötunheimar, whereas *yBsH* describes a friendly relationship between the two countries and their leaders. All this underlines the aforementioned liminality of Guðmundr, reigning over a realm which is shown to be located on the threshold between the human world and supernatural territories.

In the following evaluation only the Irish islands which appear to offer the most promising comparison with the markedly non-insular Glasisvellir are considered. Since more than one island tends to be mentioned in the

Irish stories, only one isle per story will be reflected on here (see Table 4 in the Appendix).

As has been outlined above, the *Navigatio* is a pilgrimage story in which its protagonist St Brendan is searching propinquity to God. While the narrative features a variety of islands, Brendan is successful in finding the proximity he wants on an island called Terra Repromissionis Sanctorum. Although labelled as earth or land (cf. Lat. 'terra'), it becomes quickly apparent from the description in the narrative itself that it is thought to be insular. Surrounding the island is a vast and thick fog bank. Finding it is made easier by a guiding light that appears after some time, which, it emerges, is Jesus Christ. His light brings warmth to the island and negates nightfall, and people wandering about the island therefore have no need of garments or sleep. The island itself is described as a grassy, flat, and spacious land with various exotic fruits and gemstones where there is no need for any food or drink. The important aspect of timelessness or the reduced flow of time that is very characteristic of magical Irish otherworlds is also present on Terra Repromissionis Sanctorum: Jesus explains to Brendan that the island is both primordial, since it was fashioned during the creation of the earth, and eternal, because it will exist until Judgement Day.

It is worth weighing various attributes of the Terra Repromissionis Sanctorum against the attributes of Glasisvellir. First and foremost, Terra Repromissionis Sanctorum is a bright otherworld, both in a literal sense, since Jesus himself provides light for the realm, and at a figurative level, for the island is beautiful, pleasant, and without sin. As noted above, it is worth bearing in mind that in spite of its name Glasisvellir is not presented as a bright otherworld. Furthermore, the clear Christian overtones Terra Repromissionis Sanctorum is said to have are omitted from any portrayal of Glasisvellir. The specific timelessness apparent from Jesus's description is also lacking in any account given of Glasisvellir. The only exception is the account in *HsH*, where these features are presented as being inherent in Ódáinsakr specifically and not in Glasisvellir.

The story of *ICMD* is, as has been stated above, quite similar to the *Navigatio*, and it is thus unsurprising that the various islands mentioned in *ICMD* are also akin to those of the *Navigatio*. Both stories feature a total of over forty islands, the most interesting for the current examination being the 'Island of Women'. It is the most prominent in *ICMD* because it is the dwelling place of the travellers for over three years. The island is inhabited by a female ruler and her seventeen daughters. This lady assures peace and stability by judging her people daily. In exchange for their acceptance of

offered hospitality the men are promised everlasting youth. However, the island's paradisiacal veneer begins to crumble when the men's departure is twice prevented by the lady's magic.

At the heart of both the accounts of *IB* and *EC* the respective male protagonist is lured or summoned to an otherworldly insular realm by a supernatural female figure. The focus of the narratives, however, is not on the description of this island, meaning that the descriptive information given is somewhat scarce. The two stories also feature another island, concerning which even less information is provided. Of the one hundred and fifty islands said to lie to the west of Ireland in *IB*, *Tír na mBan* ('The Island of the Women') is the focal point of the narrative. Here, it is the queen of this isle who lures Bran, the tale's protagonist, there in the first place. *Tír na mBan* is described as a joyful place with plentiful food and drink, and its residents, like those in *EC*, are free of grief, sickness, and death. Its colourful quality is repeatedly emphasised by the highlighting of its bright silver, golden, and crystalline appearance. The suggestion that *Tír na mBan* is a bright otherworld is further marked by the decelerated flow of time to which the people who dwell on the island are subject: Bran and his crew are said to sojourn on the island for what they experience as a year, but when they finally part, they discover that they have been gone for centuries, and the people they encounter only remember their names from 'ancient history' (MacMathúna 1985, 44, 57). All *Tír na mBan* and *Glasisvellir* share is their supernatural quality and this, again, is insufficient evidence to establish any fruitful comparison.

The focal island of *EC* to which Connla is lured by a female lover is given two names in the story: *Mag Mell* and *Tír na mBéo* ('The Land of the Living'). It is said to be home to the 'people of peace', who are also referred to as 'people of the sea'. The former phrase underlines the peace instituted by King *Bóadag*, who rules over this island, whereas the latter highlights *Mag Mell*'s maritime qualities. *Mag Mell* is no exception where the characteristics popular with Irish otherworldly islands are concerned: people living on the isle are said to experience neither age nor death, and remain young until Judgement Day. There is also neither sin nor transgression and, as a result, the populace needs not fear any hardship or bereavement. Ultimately, however, there appear to be no obvious parallels with *Guðmundr's* realm *Glasisvellir*. It seems that *Mag Mell's* qualities, like many of the otherworldly islands previously discussed, correlate instead with the characteristics and description of *Ódáinsakr* discussed below, a place which cannot be regarded assynonymous with *Glasisvellir*.

We can now continue with a consideration of the Nordic material.<sup>4</sup> The corpus of the 'Utrøst legend' consists of a total of eleven folk legends that have been recorded and collected in Norway (Christiansen 1992, 75). These folk tales can be roughly categorised into four groups:<sup>5</sup> the first group, comprising the narratives SIN 290 and SIN 301,<sup>6</sup> revolves around the provost of Utrøst, the 'Utrøst mannen', leaving his isle to interact with a human and offering him the choice between various items or events (Hveding 1935, 86; Strompdal 1929, 6f.). The four narratives that constitute the second group (SIN 291–94) describe how a merchant vessel, usually said to sail from Bergen to the Lofoten, is caught in a fierce tempest. When all hope of survival has faded, the crew happens upon the island of Utrøst. The 'Utrøst mannen' offers the men a key to the island, which they vehemently refuse. The sailors then anchor and wait for the storm to abate, and then continue their journey (Hveding 1935, 86–88). The third group is comprised of some of the lengthiest and most detailed narratives of Utrøst, namely 'Skarverne fra Utrøst' (corresponding to SIN 289), as well as SIN 288 and SIN 295. The flagship narrative 'Skraerverne fra Utrøst' tells the story of a poor fisherman who is forced to go fishing in bad weather and is overcome by a storm. After the storm has ceased, he is guided to the island of Utrøst, which is described as having fields and plentiful cattle. There the man is welcomed by the 'Utrøst mannen', who lives in a huge house (Aasen 1923, 58ff.; Strompdal 1929, 143f.; Mo 1935, 158f.; Asbjørnsen 1870, 53–59). After a successful fishing journey the fisherman manages to find his way home.

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4 Other folk legends not covered in this article are those preserved in Swedish, Orcadian, and Faroese folk tales involving magical islands. The most abundant folk tales of magical islands are those found in Orcadian folklore, which revolve around such magical islands as Eynhallow and Hildaland. These stories recount similar events to those concerning Utrøst (Nicolson 1981, 85; Muir 2001, 36–44, 70–3, 136–40; Muir 2014, 79–90). The earliest folk tales in Sweden and on the Faroese islands probably date to the sixteenth century (af Klintberg 1987, 307; af Klintberg 2010, 161). The most prominent group of Swedish folk legends regarding islands are those of af Klintberg's type J63ADE ('Sjömännen och jätten' ['The Sailor and the giant']), but any comparison is hindered by the fact that Guðmundr is no 'giant' and Glasisvellir is no island (af Klintberg 2010, 161–63). Faroese legends tell the story of Svínoy, another magical disappearing island that lies off the coast of Viðoy. The island only appears when a sow from a nearby village goes there to find a mate (Byberg 1970, 154f.; Jakobsen 1984, 172). All things considered, along with the Utrøst accounts these tales highlight the deeply rooted nature of magical isles in the north should it be needed to offer a background to the Glasisvellir concept.

5 For more information regarding this classification see Lummer 2017, 154ff..

6 The SIN number which refers to the various narratives listed in the following is the reference number used by the *Norsk folkeminnesamling*, which offers an online archive containing collected Norwegian folk legends: see <[https://www2.hf.uio.no/eventyr\\_og\\_sagn/index.php](https://www2.hf.uio.no/eventyr_og_sagn/index.php)>, last accessed December 19 2018.

Last but not least, we have the two narratives of the fourth group, SIN 300 and SIN 805, which explain how sailors discover blades of grass or barley attached to the keels of their ships by stating that they have sailed over the fields of Utrøst. This category is particularly interesting, since the legends highlight the submerged quality of Utrøst.<sup>7</sup>

These descriptions suggest that if one is looking for stories of magical island realms that might offer a template for the accounts of Glasisvellir, one does not need to look to Ireland. Ultimately, however, Glasisvellir seems to share only a few and isolated attributes with both the Irish magical islands to the west of Ireland and the Norwegian folk legends regarding Utrøst, which at least has a male ruler. It thus appears that Glasisvellir was from the outset conceptualised as a mainland country to the north, rather than crafted according to an Irish or indigenous pattern.

### Ódáinsakr

Regarding the potential parallels with Ódáinsakr, the only connection made in the Old Norse source material between the Guðmundr subject matter and Ódáinsakr is in *HsH*. Admittedly, two of the three redactions of *HsH* state that Ódáinsakr is within the realm of Glasisvellir, and that it is the source for Guðmundr's prolonged life, protecting him from suffering any disease. In *GD* Saxo certainly mentions a place of refuge called 'Udensakre'. However, Saxo establishes no connection between the 'Udensakre' episode and the story of Guthmundus which he recounts later, something he could easily have done if he deemed it necessary. Meanwhile, *EsV* is an exception in the corpus of Old Norse source material that has been connected to the Guðmundr complex. This saga does not mention either Guðmundr or Glasisvellir, focusing instead on the story of Eiríkr, who seeks Ódáinsakr, which is depicted as a *paradisum terrestris*: a bright, flat country with sweet, fragrant odours (*EsV*). It is described as an Earthly Paradise in *EsV* and as a place of refuge in *GD*, clearly reflecting the various Irish otherworldly islands mentioned above. Indeed, Ódáinsakr seems to resemble the Irish magical islands much more than it does Glasisvellir, as Ódáinsakr's Christian tones starkly contradict Guðmundr's intrinsic paganism. It is possible that Ódáinsakr, like the Irish islands, has a backdrop in Christian learning (Hamer 2002, 265). It cannot be stressed enough that a connection between Ódáinsakr and the Guðmundr complex is only made in *HsH*, and not in *GD*

<sup>7</sup> <[https://www2.hf.uio.no/eventyr\\_og\\_sagn/index.php?asok=1&hkat=0&kat=358&oid=0&sted=0&sperson=0&iperson=0&tid=10379](https://www2.hf.uio.no/eventyr_og_sagn/index.php?asok=1&hkat=0&kat=358&oid=0&sted=0&sperson=0&iperson=0&tid=10379)>, last accessed December 19 2018.

or any of the other seven narratives that mention Guðmundr. This alone makes the assumption that Ódáinsakr might have been an integral part of the Guðmundr á Glasisvöllum subject matter highly tenuous.

Like most accounts of Guðmundr, the Norwegian folk tales of Utrøst provide no image comparable to Ódáinsakr, because Utrøst is never described as granting immunity from death and ailments. Furthermore, the aspect of timelessness cannot be seen here in the sense that it appears for Ódáinsakr or the Irish islands: special conditions are needed for Utrøst to appear, and if these conditions cease, so does Utrøst. Additionally, the time on Utrøst seems to pass at the same pace as it does on mainland Norway. Thus, there appears no good reason to compare Ódáinsakr and the Utrøst legends.

### Conclusion

To briefly recapitulate, it has been stressed here that in the sagas Guðmundr is depicted as an old, pagan, humanoid monarch whose liminal position on the verge of the supernatural is apparent. Although he is occasionally said to possess magical skills, Guðmundr occupies a very specific narrative role: unlike the otherworldly rulers of the Irish narratives who seek out the protagonist, Guðmundr is presented as a helper, usually providing the protagonist with information, items, or aids in the course of the protagonist's quest. While Guðmundr is described as having numerous key qualities, the variety and composition of these attributes suggest that these traits could be modified if the narrative required it. The alleged connections to the ruling Irish figures of the narratives supposed to have influenced the Guðmundr á Glasisvöllum complex, Manannán mac Lir and Bóadag, are clearly difficult to entertain. Apart from being liminal, supernatural figures, there are hardly any other aspects that would lead to a fruitful comparison, and with regard to the female Irish figures the contrast between their different narrative purposes is even greater. The 'Utrøst mannen' has been introduced here to highlight how Norwegian folk legends commonly talk of a supernatural ruler of a magical island, but even Guðmundr and the 'Utrøst mannen' share few overlapping attributes, Guðmundr never being imagined as an insular, maritime sovereign.

That the Guðmundr complex is thought to have its roots in Irish narrative tradition seems largely based on the perception that Ódáinsakr is inherent to this narrative complex, thereby giving Glasisvellir attributes of immortality and timelessness. As noted, this reasoning cannot be supported, because only *HsH* makes this connection, while all the other narratives that feature

either Guðmundr or Glasisvellir remain silent about it. If it were such a paramount part of the Guðmundr subject matter, one would naturally expect more frequent mention of this correlation. Another conflict is seen in the fact that Glasisvellir is never described as an island. Furthermore, unlike in the case of some of the insular Irish counterparts, seeking or reaching Glasisvellir is never the ultimate goal of the protagonists in the Nordic sagas; they happen upon it.

Glasisvellir is an integral part of the Guðmundr subject matter, being regularly represented in Guðmundr's epithet, but it lacks the Christian aura that is so prominent in the Irish isles. This is partly because of its liminal position at the threshold of northern Norway, close to pagan, mythical realms, but also because it is governed by Guðmundr, who is described as a pagan on numerous occasions. The 'shining' feature that appears within Glasisvellir's name cannot be explained by its description as a rugged, sylvan, or mountainous realm, and, indeed, it is never said to be a bright otherworld. Thus, the liminal aspect and the potential 'shining' feature of Glasisvellir alone are ultimately not enough to establish any obvious correlation with the Irish motif of myriads of supernatural islands to the west of Ireland.

The Scandinavian folkloristic material supports the view that the notion of supernatural maritime worlds was not unknown to Norwegian folk belief and did not need to come from abroad. That this idea existed from an early point and was possibly even contemporary with the earliest preserved narratives of Guðmundr á Glasisvöllum can be seen, for example, in the description of Gotland in the Old Swedish account of *Guta saga* (dated to the thirteenth century) or in stanza 59 of the Eddic poem *Völuspá*, which can be interpreted as describing a landscape that rises and sinks back into the sea (Pipping 1905–1907, Neckel & Kuhn 1983, 14).

Regarding Ódáinsakr, there is little question that it shares the most plausible similarities with the examined Irish material. However, within the setting of Christian learning in both Ireland and the Nordic countries the incorporation of the Ódáinsakr motif into narratives with 'pagan' elements would have caused some degree of unease for authors. Whether Ódáinsakr in the Nordic narratives is a motif based on an Irish Christian understanding of the *paradisum terrestris* or on general Christian ideas is a question that is best discussed elsewhere. It nonetheless appears that Ódáinsakr must be regarded as a largely solitary notion, which, outside *HsH*, is disconnected from the Guðmundr á Glasisvöllum complex.

It could be argued that Glasisvellir was just one of the many magical otherworlds that are common to European literature and not least folk leg-

ends, like the wonderful outlaw valleys encountered in Icelandic folk tales or the fairy worlds in both Nordic and Irish tales. It is natural that narratives involving a maritime journey to an otherworld would describe this otherworld as insular. Likewise, stories about overland journeys to supernatural realms would portray them as being inland countries. On the basis of the present discussion there appears little reason to pursue foreign cultures as possible sources for Glasisvellir. If such an investigation is attempted, however, the above comparison of supposed Irish templates suggests that both Guðmundr and Glasisvellir were more Norse than Irish.

\* \* \*

FELIX LUMMER is PhD student, University of Iceland. E-mail: fel2@hi.is

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**Appendix**

In the tables the sections marked with an ‘x’ refer to attributes directly ascribed to Guðmundr in the respective narrative. Fields marked with ‘~’ highlight an attribute that is not directly ascribed to Guðmundr but can be inferred from the text.

**Table 1.** Key qualities of Guðmundr á Glasisvöllum

	Gd	Hsh	Ngþ	Hþþ	Ebsh	Ybsh	Pþþ	Ssf
<i>Ruler</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
<i>Humanoid</i>	x	~			x	x	x	~
<i>Rich</i>	~	x		x	x	x	x	~
<i>Wise</i>	~	x		<i>magical know-ledge</i>				
<i>Pagan</i>	~	~		x	x	~	x	~
<i>Offspring</i>	<i>twelve sons and twelve daughters</i>	Hofundur (son)		Ingibjörg (daughter)			Heiðrekr úlfhamr (son)	Sigurður (son)
<i>Supernatural body height</i>	x	~		~	~	~	x	~
<i>Active monarch</i>	~				x	x	x	x
<i>Passive monarch</i>	~	x		x				

**Table 2.** Attributes of male Irish otherworldly rulers

	Ruler or King	Supernatural	Humanoid	Connected with peace	Long Life	Beautiful	Wise	Christian connotations
<i>Manannán mac Lir</i>	x	x	x		x	x	x	
<i>Bóadag, the Everlasting King</i>	x	x	x	x	x			x

**Table 3.** Key Attributes of Glasísvellir

	GD	HsH	NGp	HpP	eBsH	yBsH	Ppb	SsF
<i>Forest</i>	x			x	x	x	x	x
<i>Humanoid Denizens</i>	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
<i>Incorporating Ódáinsakr</i>		x						
<i>Connection to mainland Scandinavia</i>	x	x		x		x	x	x

**Table 4.** Attributes of magical Irish islands

	Terra Reipromissionis Sanctorum ( <i>Navigatio</i> )	Island of Women (ICMD)	Tír na mBam (IB)	Mag Mell (EC)
<i>Bright</i>	x	x	x	x
<i>Timelessness</i>	x	x	x	x
<i>Christian overtones</i>	x			x
<i>Male ruler</i>	x		x	x
<i>Insular</i>	x	x	x	x
<i>Paradisiacal (no sin, death, suffering, hunger etc.)</i>	x	x	x	x

