In commenting on Daniel Sävborg’s very interesting paper, I will reverse the order of the two topics he has presented us with: dealing first with that which relates more directly to Jómsvíkinga saga, the parallel between Búi turning into a dragon at the end of that saga, and the similar epilogue to Þorðinga saga; and second, with the conclusion he draws from this for the generic classification of the sagas in general and the so-called “post-classical” sagas in particular.

At first sight the parallel between Búi and Gull-Þórir is striking, and I should emphasize that I would like to refine Sävborg’s proposition rather than dismiss it. The verbal parallel is clear: people say that Búi “hafi að ormi orðið ok lagizt á gullkistur sínar” (“has turned into a serpent and lain down on his chests of gold”) (Jómsvíkinga saga 1969, 205); Þórir “hafi at dreka orðit ok hafi lagizt á gullkistur sínar” (“has turned into a dragon and has lain down on his chests of gold”) (Þorðinga saga 1991, 226). But are they really so similar? Búi turns into an ormr, which may not be identical to the flying dreki of Þorðinga saga — the saga goes on to give the evidence of sightings of the dragon flying around Þórisstaðir and Gullfors. Búi as dragon seems to be more earthbound, since the emphasis is on his lying on the money — or perhaps sea-bound, since the dragon demolished by Bishop Guðmundr in the fourteenth-century hagiographical text cited by Sävborg is covering Hjǫrungavágr and constituting an obstruction to sea-traffic.

The word dreki derives, of course, from Latin, which may be significant to Sävborg’s argument that fantastic or non-realistic elements in sagas do not necessarily derive from late influence. I will return to this later, just noting it for the present as a difference between the two texts. To extend this difference, Búi as dragon is located in the sea because Búi and his treasure had disappeared into the sea. This is not all that similar to
Þórir’s mysterious disappearance, and the equally mysterious but separate disappearance of his chests of treasure a chapter earlier.

How unusual are dragons in sagas anyway? In his famous lecture “Beowulf, the Monsters and the Critics”, J. R. R. Tolkien took exception to the slighting reference by R. W. Chambers to “A wilderness of dragons”, which implied they were two a penny in northern mythology and folklore. Tolkien retorted that

dragons, real dragons, essential both to the machinery and the ideas of a poem or tale, are actually rare. In northern literature there are only two that are significant. If we omit from consideration the vast and vague Æncircler of the World, Miðgarðsormr ... we have but the dragon of the Volsungs: Fafnir, and Beowulf’s bane. (Tolkien 1936, 4)

If Tolkien is right about the rarity of significant dragons in northern literature, then we need to take seriously their appearance in both Jómsvíkinga saga and Þorskfirðinga saga. In fact, however, Boberg’s Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature includes nearly two pages of examples, largely drawn from the fornaldrarsögur and the riddarasögur (Boberg 1966, 38–39). This gives some support to Chambers’s assertion of the ubiquity of the species, though Tolkien would no doubt have dismissed most of these examples as inessential to their literary contexts. Nevertheless, the fact that there are dragons in both texts is not significant in itself, nor does it disprove the possibility that Þorskfirðinga saga drew its inspiration from the fornaldrarsögur. We need to make a more specific examination of the nature of the dragons in the two sources. I have already mentioned one dissimilarity, the distinction between ormr (Jómsvíkinga saga) and dreki (Þorskfirðinga saga). It is true, though, that the two sagas share the much rarer conception of a man who is transformed into a dragon in order to guard his treasure. The most famous analogue is, of course, Fáfnir, the dwarf in the Poetic Edda who kills his father Hreiðmarr to get possession of his treasure and then turns into a dragon to guard it. It is also true that the accounts of Búi’s and Þórir’s transformation into dragons come at the very ends of their respective sagas, a device that allows the saga authors to make a link between the heroic events of the distant past and the present day, when the dragons, it is said, can still be seen.

Similar though these circumstances are, we need to take account of the origin of Þórir’s fabulous treasure, which is recounted in the early part of Þorskfirðinga saga dealing with Þórir’s adventures abroad. He wins his treasure in Finnmark, in a fight against a viking called Valr, “er átti gull
mikit; hann bar féit undir helli einn norðr við Dumbshaf ok lagðist á síðan
ok synir hans með honum ok urðu allír at flugdrekum. Þeir hafa hjálma á
höfðum ok sverð undir bægslum” (“who had a lot of gold. He carried it
into a cave up north at the Giant’s sea and afterwards lay down on it with
his sons, and they all turned into dragons. They wear helmets on their
heads and swords under their wings”) (Þorskfirðinga saga 1991, 185).
The fight takes place in a cave behind a waterfall, which has led critics to
speculate on a link with the story of the troll fight in Grettis saga, itself
often thought to be related to the story of Beowulf’s underwater fight
with Grendel’s mother. Such a link in itself, of course, would support the
supposition that this dragon-fight story is an old rather than a young one.
But if we take the story of Þórir turning into a dragon at the end of the
saga to be a direct borrowing from Jómsvíkinga saga, we have also to
account for this story of transformation into dragons (flugdrekar ‘flying
dragons’, apparently rather unlike the ormr that Búi turned into) earlier in
the same saga. The fact that the story of Þórir’s dragon fight conformed
to a taste typical of the fornaldarsögur is shown by its being told also
in Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar, though the consensus is that this was
borrowed from Porskfirðinga saga rather than the other way round.

Another difference in detail is that although, as Sävborg has pointed
out, Búi and Þórir are both represented quite positively as characters, in
fact the kind of avarice suggested by transformation into a dragon is high-
lighted throughout the saga in Þórir’s character, but not in Búi’s. When
Þórir wins the treasure he divides it among his companions so that his
share is far larger than theirs, and is said to be very happy when they
agree to this. And just before his mysterious disappearance at the end
of the saga, it is said that “tók Þórir skapskipti; gerðist hann þá mjök
illr viðfangs ... Hann gerðist illr ok ódæll viðskiptis æ því meir, er hann
eldist meir” (“Þórir’s mood changed. He became very hard to deal
with ... He became meaner and harder to deal with the older he grew”)
(Þorskfirðinga saga 1991, 223; 226). Búi’s jumping overboard with his
two chests of treasure in Jómsvíkinga saga is not motivated in this way.
It could be compared with the avariciousness of Egill Skalla-Grímsson
which ends in his making his own jealously hoarded treasure disappear
in an equally mysterious way, so that people are left speculating as to its
whereabouts, but if this is a motif that is meant to suggest a certain kind of
individualism proper to the heroic character the reader is left to deduce it.

Supposing we do accept a direct influence from Jómsvíkinga saga
on Porskfirðinga saga, is it safe to assume that the dragon motif was
Alison Finlay

in the earliest version of the saga? Its position at the very end of the saga means that it is easily detachable, rather than integral to the text. As Sävborg has pointed out, the motif is assumed to have appeared in the longest and earliest version, AM 291 4to (late thirteenth century), although that manuscript is fragmentary at this point and is represented by the closely related Flateyjarbók text in Ólafur Halldórsson’s edition. It is also found in the shorter Codex Holmiensis 7 text. This confirms that it must have been in the intermediary version from which both these texts are descended. But that could still have been considerably later than the original saga composed, it is supposed, around 1200. It does not exist in the AM 510 4to version. Sävborg argues that it must have been original since it is also found in Jómsvíkingadrápa, probably composed about the same time as the original saga (Jómsvíkingadrápa 37; Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning B 2, 8):

Nam eldbroti Yggjar
ýgr fyr borð at stíga;
út bar hann af húfum,
hraustr Gullbúi, kistur;
ok optliga eptir
óblauðir þar síðan
kneigu lýðir líta
langan orm á hringum.

[The fierce (breaker of Óðinn’s fire (swords)) warrior climbed overboard; bold Gold-Búi carried his chests out from the ship’s sides. And often since then fearless men have been able to see a long serpent on the rings.]

It is quite likely that the idea of Búi becoming a dragon lying on his treasure originated in poetic form. Numerous skaldic kennings represent gold or treasure as “the serpent’s bed” or “the land of the snake”, which would encourage this connection. It is possible that this element in the story was introduced by Jómsvíkingadrápa and transposed from there into the intermediary version of the saga, without necessarily having been in the original.

Moving on to the issue of the generic classification of sagas, I quite agree that many distinctions made between “classical” and “post-classical” sagas, and between historical and fictional texts, are tendentious, and need urgent revision. I would point out, though, that this revision is currently under way, notably in three volumes based on recent conferences on the fornaldarsögur (Ney, Ármann Jakobsson and Lassen, eds, 2003, 2009 and
The difficulty goes back, I think, to assumptions made by some of the older critics cited by Sävborg, writing at a time when the historicity of the so-called “classical” sagas of Icelanders was more confidently asserted, who saw the writing of the *fornaldarsögur* as a process of continuation and indeed decline from the high point of the writing of the classical saga (the so-called Verfall theory; see Gottskálk Jansson 2009, 80). From this point of view the taste for the fantastic and for exotic locations evidenced in the *fornaldarsögur* represented a kind of decadence. Moreover, those sagas set in Iceland in the saga age that introduced such elements were thereby classified as “post-classical” and therefore late. This view is now outmoded, and most literary historians would be willing to concede that both kinds of texts were likely to have been written concurrently throughout the thirteenth century, and though few “classical” sagas were written after that point they continued to be copied, and therefore read, alongside the more newly fashionable *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur*. The problem has been compounded by the fact that this general devaluing of the *fornaldarsögur* has led to a critical neglect of these texts: the existing editions have little critical commentary and we are still a long way from a proper typology of a genre that includes quite a range of different types: *Völsunga saga* and *Hervarar saga*, for example, which are made up of undeniably ancient material, alongside many more fantastic and frivolous works; and presumably works of varying ages as well.

The case of *Yngvars saga víðförla* is indeed very important. It has long been an embarrassment to the stereotypical view of the *fornaldarsögur*, since it is unequivocally attributed to the authorship of Ódr Snorrason, who wrote a Latin life of Óláfr Tryggvason at the end of the twelfth century. It includes a wealth of fantastical materials, including — since we are focusing here on dragons — a poisonous flying dragon and another dragon guarding a hoard of gold, but is not set in the distant past as the *fornaldarsögur* are said to be. It could profitably be compared to *Jómsvíkinga saga*, another text that is difficult to classify generically, and it may be that its location in Russia might be comparable to that of the Baltic in *Jómsvíkinga saga* — just exotic enough to make the inclusion of fantastic material more allowable than for stories set in Iceland or mainland Scandinavia. Dietrich Hofmann’s defence of the attribution of *Yngvars saga* to Ódr, and his suggestion that the work, like Ódr’s saga of Óláfr Tryggvason, was originally written in Latin, though received sceptically at first, is now given much more credence (Hofmann 1981). Thus we have something very like a *fornaldarsaga* written considerably
before the Íslendingasögur or their decadent descendants, proving that fantastic elements were available to saga writers long before they became the prevailing fashion.

But of course we already knew that. If Yngvars saga was originally in Latin it can be set alongside the works of Saxo Grammaticus, also in Latin and also relying heavily on fantastic and legendary elements. Saxo’s major sources were poetic, and this of course was also a conduit in its own right for legendary and fantastic material into the writing of saga texts, as I have suggested may have been the case with Búi the dragon and Jómsvíkingadrápa.

Bibliography
Publicerad med stöd från Vetenskapsrådet.
Contents

Preface ................................................. 5

Workshop Articles
SIRPA AALTO, Jómsvíkinga Saga as a Part of Old Norse Historiography ................................................ 33
LESZEK P. SLUPECKI, Comments on Sirpa Aalto’s Paper .............. 59
ALISON FINLAY, Jómsvíkinga Saga and Genre ......................... 63
JUDITH JESCH, Jómsvíkinga Sögur and Jómsvíkinga Drápur: Texts, Contexts and Intertexts .................................. 81
DANIEL SÄVBORG, Búi the Dragon: Some Intertexs of Jómsvíkinga Saga ...................................................... 101
ALISON FINLAY, Comments on Daniel Sävborg’s Paper ............. 119
JAKUB MORAWIEC, Danish Kings and the Foundation of Jómsborg ... 125
VLADYSLAW DUCZKO, Viking-Age Wolin (Wollin) in the Norse Context of the Southern Coast of the Baltic Sea .......... 143
MICHAEL LERCHE NIELSEN, Runic Inscriptions Reflecting Linguistic Contacts between West Slav Lands and Southern Scandinavia . 153
HENRIK WILLIAMS, Comments on Michael Lerche Nielsen’s Paper . 173
JÜRGEN UDOLPH, On the Etymology of Jómsborg ..................... 183
ALEXANDRA PETRULEVICH, Comments on Jürgen Udolph’s Paper .... 211
MARIE NOVOTNÁ & JIRÍ STARY, Rendering Old Norse Nouns and Names in Translation into West-Slavic Languages. ............... 213

Islandská sällskapet
AGNETA NEY & MARCO BIANCHI, Berättelse om verksamheten under 2013 ......................................................... 237