12-2013

The Hearts of Ovid's Heroines in Trojumanna Saga

Luke J. Chambers
Western Michigan University, leonendunbarrow@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters_theses
Part of the Medieval Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters_theses/427

This Masters Thesis-Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.
THE HEARTS OF OVID’S HEROINES IN *TRÓJUMANNA SAGA*

by

Luke J. Chambers

A thesis submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
The Medieval Institute
Western Michigan University
December 2013

Thesis Committee:

Jana K. Schulman, Ph.D., Chair
Rand H. Johnson, Ph.D.
Molly Lynde-Recchia, Ph.D.
In western civilization no story has been retold more times than the Trojan War. Homer’s works were known only by repute in western Europe after the fall of Rome. As such, the Middle Ages saw the blossoming of a new Troy tradition based on Dares Phrygius’s *De Excidio Troiae Historia* (*The History of the Destruction of Troy*). Most countries of medieval Europe used this laconic work to retell the Troy story in each country’s particular idiom.

The settlers of Iceland developed a sophisticated literary culture in the thirteenth century. No other people wrote narrative prose works on such a variety of subjects as the Old Icelandic sagas. The Icelanders used the saga form to retell their version of the Troy story: *Trójumanna saga* (*The Saga of the Troy-men*). They expanded on Dares’s spartan account, freely inserting pieces of classical works where possible. Ovid’s *Heroides*, a collection of letters from heroines to their lovers, inspired an author of one version of the saga to include four letters in the saga: one from Medea to Jason, one from Deianira to Hercules, and a pair sent between Paris and Helen. Each letter differs from its Ovidian exemplar in subtle but dramatic ways. The author frees Medea from her famous filicide, Deianira does not kill Hercules, but still kills herself, and Helen wholeheartedly resists Paris’s advances. The author deliberately reinvents his female characters and so reveals the distinctive qualities that are essential to saga heroines.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First of all, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Jana Schulman, my advisor and committee chair. She has taught me most of what I know about medieval Germanic languages and has assiduously read all of the chapters of this thesis, correcting the many mistakes and pointing out the numerous lapses of rigour. Also, Dr. Rand Johnson and Dr. David Kutzko are largely responsible for my knowledge of Latin, and each has advised me in my Latin translations herein. I thank Dr. Molly Lynde-Recchia for her enthusiasm for my project.

Other thanks go to Dr. Richard Utz, who introduced me to the matter of Troy in the Middle Ages, and to Sara Miller-Schulte, who discussed Greek and Roman mythology with me, and who, along with Ben Wright, helped me with some of the Latin. Also, I thank Dr. Luigi Andrea Berto for his help with Italian.

Finally, I thank my mother, who read Beowulf to me at an early age, thus setting me on my current path.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .................................................................................... ii

INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................ 1

CHAPTER ........................................................................................................

I. The Revenge of Medea’s Sons ................................................................. 17
II. A Bloody Shirt .......................................................................................... 57
III. The Boy and the Man, the Woman and the Wanton ............................. 81

CONCLUSION ................................................................................................. 114

BIBLIOGRAPHY .............................................................................................. 122
INTRODUCTION

Stories Told and Retold

The stories a people tell reveal a great deal about them, and the stories a people retell reveal a great deal more. In western civilization no story has been retold more times than that of the Trojan War. Though Homer’s works were known only by repute in western Europe after the fall of Rome, the Middle Ages saw the blossoming of a new Troy tradition. Dares Phrygius’s *De Excidio Troiae Historia* (*The History of the Destruction of Troy*) is the source of the medieval versions of the Troy story we have today from most of the countries of Europe, each one retold in its country’s particular idiom.¹

Iceland, the most extreme western and northern outpost of Europe, was no exception. The Norse settlers of Iceland developed a sophisticated literary culture in the thirteenth century. No other people wrote narrative prose works on such a variety of subjects as the Old Icelandic sagas, the most famous and admired of which are sprawling novel-like stories that deal mostly with the Icelanders and their island (known as *Íslendingasögur* [The Sagas of Icelanders]). Yet the action is not limited to Iceland even in such sagas. The protagonists quite commonly travel abroad to greater Europe where they win renown and fortune. For example, *Njáls saga* tells of Icelanders fighting in the Battle of Clontarf in Ireland, *Egils saga* the battle of Brunanburh in England, and *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* ends with the adventures of Thorstein in Constantinople.

The interest of these Icelandic protagonists in Europe was shared by their authors, for a portion of the Old Norse sagas are translations (more or less) of stories from the continent, most of all from Old French. Many of these particular sagas were composed in Norway, instead of Iceland, at the behest of the Norwegian kings, primarily Håkon the Old (1217-1263). The sagas translated from Old French romances, *lais*, and *chansons de geste*, as well as indigenous sagas imitating these forms, are generally called *riddarasögur* [The Sagas of Knights].

There is a small subset of sagas translated from Latin that are often mentioned alongside the *riddarasögur*, though they do not fit perfectly into that genre. This set deals with the history, either real or mythical, of the classical world: *Alexanders saga* [The Saga of Alexander] a translation of Walter of Châtillon’s *Alexandreis*; *Breta sögur* [The Sagas of the British] a translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum Britanniae*; *Gyðinga saga* [The Saga of the Jews] a history of the Maccabees from various sources; *Rómverja saga* [The Saga of the Romans] a translation of Sallust’s *Bellum Iugurthinum* and *Coniuratio Catilinae*, and Lucan’s *Pharsalia*; and *Veraldar saga* [The Saga of the World] from various sources. Finally, the focus of this thesis is the *Trójumanna saga* [The Saga of the Troy-men], which, though not necessarily a *riddarasögur*, seems to have had a significant influence on those indigenous *riddarasögur* composed in Iceland in the fourteenth century and later.

---

3 Kirsten Wolf, “*Alexanders saga*,” *Medieval Scandinavia*.
4 Jonna Louis-Jensen, “*Breta sögur*,” *Medieval Scandinavia*.
5 Kirsten Wolf, “*Gyðinga saga*,” *Medieval Scandinavia*.
6 Jakob Benediktsson, “*Rómverja saga*,” *Medieval Scandinavia*.
7 Jakob Benediktsson, “*Veraldar saga*,” *Medieval Scandinavia*.
Trójumanna saga is the Icelandic version of De Excidio Troiae Historia, which is a late classical Latin work, probably from the sixth century.\textsuperscript{9} De Excidio is purported by its author (who calls himself Cornelius Nepos, but was certainly not) to be a literal translation of Dares the Phrygian's eyewitness account of the Trojan war (De Excidio 1).\textsuperscript{10} Dares writes without any other literary ambition but to make his account appear as realistic as possible. Each chapter is short and gives only the details necessary to understand the causes and progression of the war. He begins his account with Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece because it is the cause of the first friction between the Trojans and the Greeks. The Greeks make a nuisance of themselves while they are at harbor at Troy on their way to Colchis. Laomedon, king of Troy and father of Priam, forces them to leave, and in so doing offends the Argonauts, especially Hercules. In a quest for vengeance, Hercules sacks Troy, kills Laomedon, and gives Laomedon's daughter, Hesione, to Telemon for his service. The subsequent abduction of Helen is the long delayed retaliation for Hesione's abduction. Of course, Menelaus and Agamemnon then rally all of Greece for the great war against Troy, which ends after ten years in the second, and much more spectacular, destruction of the city.

Any details surrounding the lives of these legendary characters which do not bear directly on the Trojan war Dares tells either in as brief a form as possible or leaves out altogether. For instance, the account of the Argonauts' dealings with Laomedon on their way to Colchis is roughly seven times longer than the account of Jason's actual adventures in Colchis where he captures the Fleece (De Excidio 3-4; ch. 2). Likewise, Hercules's revenge against Laomedon is treated extensively, but nothing is said of his

\textsuperscript{9} Praefatio, Daretis Phrygii De Excidio Troiae Historia, ed. Ferdinandus Meister (Lipsiae: Typis B.G. Teubneri, 1873) xvii.
\textsuperscript{10} This is a fiction, but the author of the account is still generally called Dares.
great labors after the revenge is accomplished (*De Excidio* 4-5; ch. 3). This simplicity and focus of the narrative is exactly the reason why Dares’ work was so appealing to authors throughout the Middle Ages. *De Excidio* served as a rough outline full of wide gaps in the story where new details could be drawn without marring the larger picture.

Every author who translated *De Excidio* added to the spartan account, and the Icelandic saga writers who composed the different redactions of *Trójumanna saga* were no exception. Quite often the saga writers, not sharing Dares’ single-mindedness, used outside sources to expand on the stories Dares told and also inserted stories he did not tell. Although *Trójumanna saga* is at its heart a translation of *De Excidio Troiae Historia*, there are many other sources which have contributed to the saga at different times over the multiple redactions. These lesser sources are as follows: the *Ilias Latina* (also known as *Homerus Latinus*) is a Latin verse paraphrase of the *Iliad* which served as the primary source of knowledge about Homer’s work in medieval western Europe where Greek was generally unknown. Metamorphoses and the *Aeneid* are the great works of Ovid and Virgil respectively and need no description here. Ovid’s *Heroides* is a lesser known work today. It is a collection of elegiac poems written as letters generally from famous classical heroines to men who have abandoned them, though three of the poems are pairs of letters, one from the man and the other the reply of the woman. The pseudo-historical *Alexanders saga*, already mentioned above, is a source as well.

*Trójumanna saga* was most likely composed in Iceland (not Norway as many of the *riddarasǫgur* were) according to Jonna Louis-Jensen, the editor of the most recent

---

editions of the saga.\textsuperscript{13} There are three separate extant redactions of the saga which Louis-Jensen has labeled the alpha redaction (TSα hereafter), the beta redaction (TSβ), and the Hauksbók redaction (TSH). The relationship between these three redactions, as determined by Louis-Jensen, is shown here:\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{Diagram:}

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
  \node (A) at (0,0) {D};
  \node (B) at (0,-1) {Tms1};
  \node (C) at (1,-1) {Tms2};
  \node (D) at (2,-1) {Hb};
  \node (E) at (3,-1) {Tms2};
  \node (F) at (4,-1) {Hb};
  \node (G) at (5,-1) {$\beta$};
  \node (H) at (0,-2) {\textit{Il. Lat.}};
  \node (I) at (0,-3) {$\alpha$};
  \draw (A) -- (B);
  \draw (B) -- (C);
  \draw (C) -- (D);
  \draw (D) -- (E);
  \draw (E) -- (F);
  \draw (F) -- (G);
  \draw (H) -- (I);
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

Thus, TSα is closest to the original Trójumanna saga (Tms1), and TSβ and TSH are closely related to each other as they are descended from Tms2.

Louis-Jensen concludes from her analysis that Tms1 was “a translation of Dares with some minor omissions . . . and possibly a major one (the Catalogue of Ships), and with a number of additions . . . Among the ultimate sources [of the additions] seem to have been the Metamorphoses, the Heroides, and probably the Ilias Latina and the Aeneid” (sic).\textsuperscript{15} TSα is “a fairly faithful copy of Tms1.”\textsuperscript{16} It contains additional material from Heroides and from Alexanders saga, and perhaps from the Ilias Latina and the Aeneid as well. Tms2 (and TSβ and TSH) makes more extensive use of all of these sources. Specifically, the saga writer interpolated a major portion of the Ilias Latina and entire letters from Heroides into it.

\textsuperscript{13} Introduction, Trójumanna saga: The Dares Phrygius Version, li-lii.
\textsuperscript{14} A simplification of the diagram found: Introduction, Trójumanna saga: The Dares Phrygius Version, xviii.
\textsuperscript{15} Introduction, Trójumanna saga: The Dares Phrygius Version, l.
\textsuperscript{16} Introduction, Trójumanna saga: The Dares Phrygius Version, l.
When these redactions were made is a question without an exact answer.

_Hauksbók_ (AM 544 4to), which contains TSH, was written by the Icelander, Haukr Erlendsson, between 1302 and 1310.\(^{17}\) TSB cannot have been composed much later (and may have been written earlier) as the two manuscripts containing TSB have been dated to the mid fourteenth century.\(^{18}\) After an analysis of the language of the extant redactions, Louis-Jensen concludes that Tms1 was likely composed a little before 1250.\(^{19}\) TS\(\alpha\) cannot be dated so precisely because the earliest fragment of it dates from about 1500,\(^{20}\) but it is generally thought to have been composed in the thirteenth century as well.\(^{21}\) Tms2 must have been composed between approximately 1250 and 1310, that is, before TSH and after Tms1.

The date of the composition of Tms2 is particularly important because this thesis is concerned with the incorporation of letters from _Heroides_ in epistolary form into the saga, and thus primarily with the Tms2 branch of the saga. TS\(\alpha\) makes only slight use of _Heroides_ in comparison to the Tms2 branch, though there is one unique scene in TS\(\alpha\) taken from _Her._ XIII, the letter from Laudamia to Protesilaus. Laudamia tells the story of Protesilaus leaving for the Trojan War in _Her._ XIII, but the saga contains the scene in the direct narration (TS\(\alpha\) 25, 1-12).\(^{22}\) This scene is not found in the Tms2 branch, but there are four other letters in TSB presented in epistolary form: from Medea to Jason, from Deianira to Hercules, from Alexander (Paris) to Helen, and from Helen to Alexander. It is disappointing that the Laudamia to Protesilaus letter was not used in TSB as it bears

---


\(^{19}\) Introduction, _Trójumanna saga: The Dares Phrygius Version_, 1-lvi.

\(^{20}\) Introduction, _Trójumanna saga_, xxxiii-iv.

\(^{21}\) Randi Eldevik, “Trójumanna saga,” _Medieval Scandinavia._

\(^{22}\) All citations from TS\(\alpha\) and TSB are given as (page number, line numbers).
directly on the Trojan war. However, Protesilaus is a minor character whose fame comes from being the first man slain in the war. Further, the letter would have been difficult to insert into the saga as a letter because it is written by Laudamia whom there is no way to introduce except at the moment of the lovers’ parting in Greece. But if the parting is told in third person narration (as it is told in TSα) there is no reason to recount it later in a letter from Laudamia to her already dead husband.

Although Laudamia’s letter does not lend itself to insertion in the saga, the letters of Medea, Deianira, Alexander, and Helen do and were incorporated into the story by the saga writer. I have arranged the chapters of this thesis around these four letters, with the first chapter for Medea’s letter, the second for Deianira’s, and the third for both Alexander’s and Helen’s letters. Each chapter also deals with the material the saga writer added preceding each of these letters in order to make them fit more naturally into the saga. This additional material is most significant before the first two letters. As there is nothing said by Dares about either Medea or Deianira, the redactor had to introduce these two heroines and provide all of the context for each of their letters. The saga writer had to make more subtle additions to the saga leading up to Alexander’s and Helen’s letters because Dares tells the tale of Helen’s abduction in some detail, and De Excidio and Ovid’s Heroides do not agree in many of the details of the abduction. The saga writer most often draws this additional material preceding each letter from the exposition of facts found in all of the letters of Heroides, exposition which he generally leaves out of the Old Norse letters. Metamorphoses, the Aeneid, and Alexanders saga are very likely sources for the additional material as well.
How many of these four letters in TSβ existed in Tms2 cannot be known, though likely all four of them did. Only one of them has survived in TSH (the letter from Deianira to Hercules) and in a condensed form. Randi Eldevik says in her essay “Women’s Voices in Old Norse Literature: The Case of Trójumanna saga” that TSH:  

often gives the impression of being a condensation of Beta (or at any rate of some model similar to Beta). This being the case, it is more to be wondered at that the Hauksbók redaction should retain a single one of the epistles found in Beta even in shortened form, than that the other epistles are absent from the Hauksbók redaction.  

Consequently, TSH is of little use to this thesis, and the vast majority of the examination focuses on TSβ.

Because I make almost no use of TSH, throughout most of the thesis I refer to the β redactor as the author of the four letters and much of the story preceding each of them. Most or even all of this material may have been written by a different man, the redactor of Tms2. However, because of the very condensed form of TSH, it cannot be determined how far the β redaction differs from Tms2, or even if the difference between them is significant. For this reason, I have not drawn a distinction between the β redactor and the redactor of Tms2 except in the rare case in the first chapter of this thesis where the dating of a particular passage is important.  

---


24 This is not to say that I believe the β redactor and the author of Tms2 to be necessarily the same person. It is not impossible given the range of dates for the works’ compositions. Yet TSβ may be a more or less faithful copy of Tms2 even if the two writers are different.
However, I do draw a distinction between the author of Tms1 and the β redactor. This distinction is essential for understanding the construction of the scene of Helen’s abduction, for in this scene, TSα and TSβ both contain some of the same story elements taken from Heroides. These elements must have been interpolated by the original author of Tms1. As TSα is relevant then in the third chapter of this thesis, I make use there of the most significant piece of scholarship on Trójumanna saga to date, Eldevik’s dissertation, “The Dares Phrygius Version of Trójumanna saga: A Case Study in the Cross-cultural Mutation of Narrative,” which is concerned exclusively with TSα, the redaction closest to Dares’s account.

The incorporation of personal letters into a saga text seems to be limited in all of saga literature to the Tms2 branch of Trójumanna saga. Eldevik, who writes specifically on the letters of TSβ in the already mentioned “Women’s Voices in Old Norse Literature,” says:

> Though the Icelandic family sagas are regarded as precursors of the modern novel in many ways, the use of embedded epistles is not one of those ways: characters in Icelandic family sagas do not write letters to one another. Among Old Norse sagas, then, letter-writing can be expected to occur only in those sagas set in times and places in which literacy existed. These would include the kings’ sagas, the bishops’ sagas, and chronicles of later medieval Iceland such as Sturlunga saga. Even in these sagas, letters occur rarely . . . the few that exist are brief, impersonal, and
businesslike... Artful epistolary composition, and the private letter as we know it, scarcely seem to exist in medieval Scandinavia.

If the letters of TSB are unique as Eldevik and I think, it is surprising that they have not yet been examined in detail. Eldevik's purpose in this article is not to make an in depth comparison between the Old Norse and Latin texts, but to examine women's voices in general in TSA as well as TSB. Thus, only about a third of the article is concerned with the letters of TSB. Because detailed source analysis is outside the scope of her article, Eldevik does not identify many of the sources for the Old Norse letters beyond their obvious Ovidian counterpart. As such, she is mistaken in some of her statements about the originality of various passages.

As mentioned above, Louis-Jensen has edited the two most recent editions of the saga, which contain the three redactions. The earlier edition, Trójumanna saga (1963), contains the text of TSH and TSB laid out simultaneously with corresponding sections set on the same page where possible. TSA was not recognized as a unique redaction until recently. Louis-Jensen published an edition of it as Trójumanna saga: The Dares Phrygius Version in 1981. Only TSH was published prior to 1963. It was available in two nineteenth century editions of Hauksbók.

---

26 It should be noted that Eldevik’s full translation of TSA ("The Dares Phrygius Version of Trójumanna saga," 205-286) and her translations of the letters in TSB ("Women’s Voices," 58-59, 60-61, 62-63) have been very useful in understanding the saga. I have made my own translations of relevant passages here in this thesis, and in doing so have found some mistakes in Eldevik’s. However, it is always easier to find another’s mistakes than to spot one’s own. My own translations have surely been influenced by Eldevik’s, which I read first.
27 TSA comes down to us in two manuscripts known as “O” and “S,” which are both given in Trójumanna saga. In this thesis all passages of TSB are taken from “S.” “S” is less complete than “O” and does not differ significantly from “O” in any of the relevant passages.
Louis-Jensen lays out the current understanding of the evolution of saga from the original Tms1 to the three redactions we have today in the introduction of Trójumanna saga: The Dares Phrygius Version. It is in this introduction that she makes the case for the influence and incorporation of the various secondary works in Trójumanna saga and the case for the dating of the various redactions (as already mentioned above). Her analysis is extensive, but it is focused only on identifying the sources of the saga. I have focused on the contrast between the sources and the letters section of the saga, and in my analysis, managed to identify some instances of either direct borrowing or influence not noticed by Louis-Jensen.

There has been no in depth analysis done of the letters of TSβ as translations of the letters from Ovid’s Heroides. Besides Eldevik’s essay, the only other article to deal with the letters at any length is Stefanie Würth’s “Intention oder Inkompentenz: Die Bearbeitungen der Trójumanna saga,” which explores the contrasting styles of TSH and TSβ.29 A large part of the essay focuses on the letters section of the saga where the styles of the redactions differ markedly. However, Würth never makes any comparisons to the Heroides or the other Latin sources of the saga.

Though this Old Norse translation of Latin sources has been mostly neglected, there has been much work done by Geraldine Barnes and Marianne Kalinke on the riddarasögur, which are largely translations from Old French.30 Their work provides a

general guide for thinking about Old Norse translations, but it only bears tangentially on this thesis. *Trójumanna saga* was composed in a different milieu than the *riddarasögur*. *Trójumanna saga* was written in Iceland, not Norway, and is a translation of classical, not medieval, works (for the most part).

Neither does *Trójumanna saga* resemble the translated *riddarasögur* in their common literary characteristics. Interestingly, as Barnes says,

[Most] *riddarasögur* largely ignore the inner life of their characters . . .

Love has only minor interest in *Erex saga* and *Ívens saga*, for example, whereas their sources concern the proper role of love and marriage in the chivalric life; large portions of the French text examining the private thoughts of hero and heroine are left out . . . Chivalry in the *riddarasögur* is “feudal” rather than “courtly,” with the emphasis on the virtues of courage, loyalty, piety, and modesty, along with a lack of interest in the ritual and emotion of love.31

In contrast, the letters of TSβ are windows into the inner life of the characters. For several pages the saga is concerned with nothing so much as the love of successive couples. Yet, the ß redactor still emphasizes the virtues mentioned by Barnes in the heroines, Medea, Deianira, and Helen. Barnes says, “These modifications to their sources flatten *riddarasögur* characters, turn heroes into types, and make the tales straightforward accounts of knightly virtue rewarded.”32 This thesis argues that the modifications made to Medea, Deianira, Alexander, and Helen certainly do not flatten their characters, and in fact improve on the characters in an aesthetic sense.

31 Barnes, “*Riddarasögur*,” *Medieval Scandinavia*, 532.
32 Barnes, “*Riddarasögur*,” *Medieval Scandinavia*, 532.
Each of the letters of Medea, Deianira, Alexander, and Helen is based on its Ovidian exemplar. Eldevik is mistaken in saying that Ovid’s letters are “merely a springboard for these Old Norse letters.” The saga’s letters are certainly not word for word translations, but almost everything said in them has some precedent in *Heroides*, as shall be seen in the following chapters. The significant differences between the Latin and Old Norse letters are in the changes made to the motivations and actions of the letter writers. These changes, though subtle, dramatically transform the essential qualities of each of the four letter writers in ways that reveal the saga writer’s new intentions for his heroes and heroines, as well as the depth of the saga writer’s understanding of his source material.

The author frees Medea from her character-defining filicide, probably first invented by Euripides. Instead of murdering her sons for spite of Jason, she promises Jason that the day will come when her sons will avenge her against him. Likewise Medea does not murder her brother, nor does she use poison, or what would today be called voodoo, or any other of the less wholesome magics she uses in Ovid. The redactor changes the tone of her letter to match the change in her character. He takes away the edge of frantic desperation, which Ovid gives her. Medea’s reproaches are still vehement, but she restrains herself and keeps her dignity, never deigning to mention the woman with whom Jason has replaced her (as Ovid’s Medea does).

Classically, Deianira was the famous (though at least half unintentional) murderess of her husband, Hercules, for which deed she killed herself. In the saga she very pointedly does not kill Hercules, but still kills herself for the shame of knowing her

husband has been emasculated by his new mistress. Originally, Deianira murders Hercules by sending him a shirt smeared with the poisoned blood of a centaur, but in the saga she sends him her own shirt smeared with the blood of her suicide. Nowhere in the letters does the β redactor’s skill, understanding, and will to create an original character shine brighter than here.

The β redactor has likewise changed Alexander and Helen, the two most essential characters of the Trojan war, though it was the original author of Tms1 who initiated the changing of Helen. Helen is unwilling to go with Alexander in every version of the saga. The β redactor continues the rehabilitation of her moral character by showing her to be totally loyal to Menelaus in her letter, but he also shows her to be sharp minded and able to spot Alexander’s weakness of character. In TSβ, Alexander is no longer a boy trying to seduce a more experienced and more than willing woman, as Ovid depicts him, but a man aggressively pursuing through flattery, persuasion, coercion, and abduction Helen who wholeheartedly resists his advances.

The β redactor was not content to translate Dares, or even to relate all of the information he had on the Trojan war in one coherent saga, as he might have done by faithfully translating Ovid. He makes a literary effort to create new characters with new, but still recognizably similar, motivations from his classical sources. Still more, the β redactor adapts plot points, speeches, and literary devices from sources unrelated to his subject. He twice takes parts of letters from Heroïdes totally unrelated to Medea and uses them in her story, and it is possible he did the same with parts of Völsunga saga. Likewise, he adapts one of Ovid’s effects (the heroine offering her tear-spattered writing as proof of her grief) and puts it in Deianira’s letter, where Ovid does not employ it. The
The redactor may have learned this borrowing technique from the original author of Tms1, who supplemented Alexander and Helen’s story with a plot device from the unrelated Heroides XX-XXI (Acontius Cydippae, Cydippe Acontio). The redactor himself adds phrases to Alexander’s letter from the Song of Songs and the Gospel of John. Clearly, the redactor’s efforts in translation are of a literary and not literal bent.

At the beginning of this introduction I asserted that more can be learned from the stories a people re-tell than from their original stories. Of course, there are certainly no extant “original” stories in the sense that a story might spring forth from the void without reference either to past tales or events, even if it were possible to imagine such a story originating in the depths of time. What I mean by my assertion is that when an author imports a story from a foreign culture to his own, the contrast between the original and the new piece of literature illuminates aspects of both cultures with a light that cannot arise from a native sprung work.

I have in this thesis examined and determined the sources (mostly Ovid’s Heroides) used by the redactor in his composition of the four letters in order to find this illuminating contrast between the culture of Ovid’s Rome and that of the redactor’s Iceland some thirteen centuries later. Though work has been done on sagas translated from other languages (especially the riddarasögur), Trójamanna saga has received comparatively little attention, and no scholar has yet made an in depth comparison of TSB’s Old Norse letters to their Latin sources. I argue that the changes the redactor made to his heroines left them drastically but subtly altered from Ovid’s. In adapting them to the saga form, he pulls them from the extremes of their rage, pusillanimity (that
is, shrinking spirit), or lust, improving their moral character and making them altogether more human and sympathetic.
CHAPTER I

The Revenge of Medea’s Sons

Throughout, this thesis is concerned with pairs of lovers: Medea and Jason, Deianira and Hercules, and Helen and Alexander. This first chapter deals with Medea and Jason partially because they come first in the saga, but more importantly because of the three couples theirs is the most complete and well-structured story, and because the sources of their story are identifiable. It is impossible to get very far in an analysis of a translation if the source texts are unknown. All these sources for the Medea/Jason episode in TSβ, with one possible but small exception, are letters from Ovid’s Heroides. Yet, of the four letters used by the β redactor, only two have to do with Medea. The saga writer adapts material from the other two letters (unrelated to either Medea or the Trojan war) by supplanting the original woman and man involved with Medea and Jason, a technique also used with the other two couples to be examined in later chapters. Thus, he is not interested in slavishly reproducing what he has found in Ovid, but in creating something new and fitting to his taste. His Medea is recognizable in the broad strokes of her life, but she is a far different woman from Ovid’s Medea.

There is no mention of either Medea or Deianira in Dares Phrygius’ account, De Excidio Troiae Historia, which begins with Jason accepting the quest for the Golden Fleece from his insincere and scheming uncle, King Pelias. Predictably, as Dares is not concerned with anything that does not relate directly to the Trojan war, his treatment of Jason’s adventure in Colchis could almost not be more succinct. He does not spare any time for the voyagers of the Argo, actually instructing that “qui volunt eos cognoscere,
Argonautas legant” [whoever wants to know about them should read Argonautica] (De Excidio 3; ch. 1).35 The Argonauts briefly harbor at Troy on their way to Colchis. After Laomedon insultingly demands the Argo’s departure from Phrygian shores, the Argonauts “navim conscenderunt et a terra recesserunt, Colchos profecti sunt, pellem abstulerunt, domum reversi sunt” [boarded the ship and drew off from the land, proceeded to Colchis, bore off the Fleece, and returned home] (De Excidio 4; ch. 2). Dares moves on to Hercules’ revenge against Laomedon in his next chapter and never mentions Jason again.

The adventure in Colchis begs for enrichment, and the β redactor of Trójumanna saga draws heavily on Ovid’s Heroides for this purpose. The Medea/Jason episode of TSβ takes up approximately 138 lines of prose as laid out by Louis-Jensen (11-21), a significant increase from the three lines in Dares. The great majority of it is based on identifiable passages from Heroides, if not always passages directly related to Medea. The resulting story surpasses the Deianira/Hercules episode in narrative quality; that is, it has a coherent plot which rises to a climax before a slightly unsatisfying resolution. The Deianira/Hercules episode is essentially a list of Hercules’s feats without a unifying thread. Further, the Medea/Jason episode nearly completely relies on Heroides as neither the Deianira/Hercules episode nor the Helen/Alexander episode does.

The β redactor’s first source is, of course, Her. XII, the letter from Medea to Jason, but he also uses elements of several other letters. Next in importance for the Medea/Jason story in TSβ is Her. X, Ariadne’s letter to Theseus. It is not exactly clear how Jason abandons Medea in Her. XII beyond that he commands her to leave (134). The more visually dramatic scene of Theseus’ abandonment of Ariadne on an

---

35 All translations throughout this thesis are my own unless otherwise noted.
uninhabited island replaces this simple command in the saga with Jason and Medea in place of Theseus and Ariadne. Sources used for only small parts of the Medea/Jason episode are *Her.* VI (Hypsipyle Iasoni), which is mined for information about Medea, and *Her.* II (Phyllis Demophoonti), from which an otherwise unrelated passage is borrowed. Also, a clear parallel exists between Sigurd’s slaying of Fafnir in *Völsunga saga* and Jason’s slaying of a dragon in TSβ, though if one influenced the other and which way that influence might have flowed is not clear.

The Medea/Jason episode of TSβ takes place in two parts: first the action of Jason’s adventures in Colchis, and then a letter sent from Medea to Jason after her abandonment. The β redactor composes the larger story of the capture of the Golden Fleece and the abandonment of Medea from the exposition of facts found in *Her.* XII and *Her.* X. For the most part, both the letter writers (Medea and Ariadne respectively) hold these facts about their situations in common knowledge with the letter recipients (Jason and Theseus), and they expound the facts primarily for the edification of the readers. The saga writer relates the facts more naturally in a direct narrative of events, something that Ovid could obviously not do in his epistolary form in *Heroides* (though he could and did do it in *Metamorphoses*). By extracting the simple exposition of facts, the saga writer keeps the letter from Medea to Jason focused on the grievance at hand.

But before the analysis of the Medea/Jason episode goes further, we must determine that *Heroides* is indeed the source, and not Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, which contains much of the same information about Medea and Jason as *Heroides*, as might be expected. There is a very good possibility that *Metamorphoses* was a source for TSβ at
large, but it is my contention that the β redactor did not use *Met.* VII, of which approximately half is concerned with Medea, at this point in the saga. There is nothing in the Medea/Jason episode in TSβ that could not have come from *Heroides* instead of *Metamorphoses* (with the one exception of the hundred-eyed monster, Argus, explained below). Furthermore, there is a great deal in *Met.* VII which was not used by the β redactor.

In the following table the plot of the Medea/Jason episode up to the beginning of Medea’s letter is summarized beside the same plots in *Her.* XII and *Met.* VII. Events are arranged downwards in the order that they happen in their respective works with the exception of the entries in square brackets which are special cases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TSβ</th>
<th>Heroides</th>
<th>Metamorphoses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jason and the Argonauts leave Troy and sail to Colchis. (11, 8-10)</td>
<td>Jason and the Argonauts arrive at Colchis. (XII 7-10)</td>
<td>Jason and the Argonauts encounter Phineus and the Harpies before reaching Colchis. (VII 1-6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King Medius and his daughter, Medea, are introduced. After a promise of peace, Jason and his men are welcomed. (11, 10-12, 9)</td>
<td>King Aeëtes welcomes Jason and his men. (XII 29-30)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason tells the king of the quest for the Golden Fleece. (12, 9-12, 12)</td>
<td></td>
<td>The Argonauts demand the Golden Fleece from King Aeëtes (VII 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The king details the labors Jason will have to achieve to gain the Fleece. All of the labors are actually listed. (12, 9-13, 9)</td>
<td>The king details the labors Jason will have to achieve to gain the Fleece. All of the labors are actually listed. (XII 39-50)</td>
<td>The king describes the labors Jason will have to achieve to gain the Fleece. None of the labors are actually listed. (VII 8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason is dismayed. (13, 10-14, 1)</td>
<td>Jason is dismayed. (XII 51-52)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medea is moved by Jason’s plight. (14, 2-4)</td>
<td>Medea is moved by Jason’s plight. (XII 55-61)</td>
<td>Medea is moved by Jason’s plight and fights against her love, details the labors to come, and foreshadows Jason’s treachery. (VII 9-43)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medea sends her sister to Jason to offer Medea’s aid. (14, 4-9)</td>
<td>Medea's sister asks her to help Jason, and Medea agrees. (XII 62-66)</td>
<td>Medea details her family's situation and the fact that her sister supports her in her love of Jason. But then she succeeds in quashing her love. (VII 43-73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medea's sister visits Jason and offers her sister's aid, which he accepts. (14, 10-15, 9)</td>
<td>Medea and Jason meet in the woods. They consummate their love and Medea promises her aid. (15, 9-16, 2)</td>
<td>Medea and Jason meet in the woods at a statue of Diana (Three-faced like Hecate) and Jason persuades Medea to help by promising to marry her. (XII 66-92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason meets Medea at the temple at night. (16, 2-4)</td>
<td>Medea lulls Argus and the dragon to sleep with song. (16, 4-7)</td>
<td>[Hypsipyle describes Medea's magical practices to Jason. (VI 83-94)]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason goes against Argus and the dragon with his sword and slays them. (16, 7-14)</td>
<td>Jason yokes the oxen. (XII 93-94)</td>
<td>With the people and King Aeetes looking on, Jason yokes the oxen. (VII 100-118)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medea whistles to the oxen and yokes them. (16, 14-17, 1)</td>
<td>They steal the temple's riches including the Fleece. Medea topples the temple with her song. (16, 7-17, 3)</td>
<td>Jason ploughs the ground and sows teeth. Warriors grow from the earth and kill each other. (XII 95-100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The temple grounds are ploughed over by the oxen and the dragon's teeth are sown. Warriors grow from the earth and kill each other. (17, 3-7)</td>
<td>Jason ploughs the ground, removes viper's teeth from a helmet, and sows them. Warriors grow and attack Jason. With an incantation from Medea and a rock thrown by Jason, the warriors turn against each other. (VII 118-142)</td>
<td>Medea puts the dragon to sleep, permitting Jason to steal the Fleece and escape with her. (XII 101-112)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medea carries off riches from her father's palace to Jason's ship, but Jason and his men take up arms, kill King Medius and winter in Colchis where Medea has twin sons. (17, 7-18, 4)</td>
<td>Jason puts the dragon to sleep with Medea's herbs and carries off the Fleece and Medea. (VII 149-158)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On the way back to Greece, Jason abandons Medea on an uninhabited island. (18, 4-19, 5) | Theseus abandons Ariadne on an uninhabited island. (X 1-46) | Medea escapes on her chariot drawn by dragons after killing Pelias. (VII 343-351)
Jason succeeds in taking Greece from Pelias with the help of his new wife's kinsmen. Medea comes to Greece with her two sons. (19, 5-19, 9) | Medea speaks of Jason's new wife in several places comparing her usefulness to her own. (XII 25-26, 53-54, 137-158, 171-180) | [Little is said of Jason and his new wife, both blameless in this case. (VII 394-397)]

All three stories begin the same with Jason’s ship arriving, but *Met.* VII has the extra mention of the harpies told in flashback, of which there is no mention in the saga. Still, if the β redactor planned on using *Met.* VII, he would not have to start until after the Argo had reached Colchis, as that much is told in Dares. The saga proceeds with King Medius’s (Aeëtes in Ovid) greeting of Jason and Jason’s divulgence to the king of his plans. The king gives winter-lodging (vetrvisi) to Jason and thirty of his men and entertains Jason for some time before asking him the purpose of his trip. This kind of “winter-lodging” passage is common in the sagas and is repeated more than once in *Trójumanna saga* itself. It does not need to owe anything to a source.

The king is said to describe the labors ahead of Jason in all three of the sources, but only explicitly does so in TSβ and *Her.* XII. Interestingly, the order of the labors is different in the saga than in *Her.* XII (and *Met.* VII, once Medea gets around to listing them in her monologue). In Ovid the order is always the bulls, the teeth-grown warriors, and then the dragon. The β redactor, however, has rearranged the labors so that they make greater narrative sense: the dragon, the bulls, and then the teeth-grown warriors. By putting the dragon (and Argus) first, Jason can logically draw the teeth which he is to use in the sowing from the dead dragon’s mouth. This does not happen in Ovid because, in the classical legend, the teeth are from the dragon of Ares that Cadmus slays long
before Jason comes to Colchis, not from the dragon guarding the Fleece. This information is found neither in *Metamorphoses* nor *Heroïdes*, so the redactor took the dragon’s teeth from the dragon at hand. The saga writer would have leeway to reinterpret the order of labors as he did if he were using *Her.* XII but not *Met.* VII. In *Her.* XII the three places where Medea mentions all three labors, the labors come in the proper classical order in the text, but her language does not explicitly set the dragon chronologically last in the labors, as we shall see.

The first of the three places comes when Medea recounts Aeëtes’ explanation of the labors:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Dicitur interea tibi lex, ut dura ferorum} \\
\text{Insolito premeres vomere colla bourn.} \\
\text{Semina praeterea populos genitura iuberis} \\
\text{Spargere devota lata per arva manu} \\
\text{Lumina custodis succumbere nescia somno} \\
\text{Ultimus est aliqua decipere arte labor.} \quad (\text{*Her.* XII 39-40, 45-46, 49-50)} \\
\end{align*}
\]

[Meanwhile, the word is given to you for you to press the harsh necks of savage bulls to the unaccustomed plough . . . Thereafter, you are ordered to scatter the cursed seeds by hand, which are going to give birth to people, over the broad, plowed field . . . The final labor is to, by some art, trick the guardian’s eyes, unknown to sleep.]

---

37 March, "Argonuats."
38 The story of Cadmus is contained in *Met.* III. However, it is not explained in *Met.* VII that the teeth are from Cadmus’ dragon.
Obviously, the guardian (*custodis*) of line 49 is the last monster to be overcome in the text, and the word *ultimus* could mean “last” in the chronological order as well, but *ultimus* could have easily been interpreted as “greatest” by the author instead. Indeed, the dragon is the greatest trial by far that Jason faces in TSβ; Argus is an insignificant threat once asleep, Medea takes care of the bulls, and the teeth-grown warriors defeat themselves.

Medea mentions all three labors a second time when she recounts how they kept her awake at night:

\[
\text{Ante oculos taurique meos segetesque nefandae,}
\]

\[
\text{Ante meos oculos pervigil anguis erat; (Her. XII 59-60)}
\]

[Before my eyes were the bulls and the abominable crops; before my eyes was the ever-vigilant dragon]

Again the dragon (*anguis*) comes third in the text, but the chronological order of the appearance of these monsters is hardly certain.

The last instance of the three trials in *Her. XII* comes when Medea gives her account of the labors as they happened:

\[
\text{Sic cito sum verbis capta puella tuis.}
\]

\[
\text{Iungis et aeripedes inadusto corpore tauros}
\]

\[
\text{Et solidam iusso vomere findis humum;}
\]

\[
\text{Arva venenatis pro semine dentibus imples:}
\]

\[
\text{Nascitur et gladios scutaque miles habet;}
\]

\[
\text{.................................}
\]

\[
\text{Insopor ecce vigil squamis creptantibus horrens}
\]
Sibilat et torto pectore verrit humum: *(Her. XII 92-6, 101-2)*

[Thus, I was a girl caught quickly by your words. You also yoke the brazen bulls with an unburnt body and split the solid ground with the ordered ploughshare; you fill the field with poisoned teeth for seed. The soldiery grows and has swords and shields... Behold, the unsleeping guard, bristling with clacking scales, hisses and sweeps the ground with its twisting belly.]

Note first that Medea transitions from the previous scene by comparing Jason's trapping of her to his yoking of the bulls, an artistic touch that leaves doubt as to whether the bulls were actually yoked first in the labors, or whether Ovid was turning a phrase. Again, after the teeth-grown warriors are described and dispatched, Medea brings up the dragon, but by no means says that it came last.

Part of the reason the dragon's place in the order of labors is slightly unclear in *Her. XII* is undoubtedly due to the fact that while classically the oxen and teeth-grown warriors are tasks assigned by Aeëtes for Jason to accomplish, the dragon itself is simply an incidental guardian of the Fleece unconnected with the oxen or warriors. However, as should be obvious from the three examples above, a reader of *Her. XII* could easily interpret the dragon as connected with the oxen and warriors in a set of three. This is precisely what the β reductor has done.

The larger point is not that a reader of *Her. XII* would ever naturally interpret the dragon as the first of the labors, but that there is enough ambiguity in the text that if there were a narrational need to put the dragon first (such as an ignorance of an alternative source of dragon teeth), the β reductor could have interpreted the order of labors in that

---

39 March, "Argonauts."
way. If the β redactor had been using Met. VII, such an interpretation would have been impossible to justify. Because the events of Met. VII are told by an omniscient narrator as they happen, not by a character in the story who is remembering after the fact, they are as solidly set in time as they are in the text. Furthermore, after the teeth-grown warriors are dispatched, the narrator says, “Pervigilem superest herbis sopire draconem” [It remains to make the ever-vigilant dragon sleep with herbs] (Met. VII 149). Clearly the dragon must come after the teeth-grown warriors.

Therefore, while the laying out of labors by the king for Jason, which is lacking in Met. VII, could have been reconstructed by the β redactor using information found in a later part of that poem, it is much more likely that the β redactor was using Her. XII which does contain the scene. The reordering of the labors in the saga, which could not have been justified if Met. VII were the source, supports this theory. Also, the story flows naturally from that scene to the next through a brief description of Jason’s dismay in both TSβ and Her. XII, which is entirely missing in Met. VII. The following scene in TSβ and Her. XII is a brief discussion between Medea and her sister about Jason, again missing in Met. VII. Indeed, at this point in Met. VII, Medea succeeds in quashing her love, a plot point for which there is no hint in TSβ or Her. XII.

Perhaps the β redactor left out Medea’s internal monologue because it would ill fit the saga style, but Medea’s actions in the saga never show the slightest hint that she falls out of love with Jason at this point. Quite the contrary. In a scene unique to the saga, Medea sends her sister to Jason to arrange a meeting between the soon-to-be lovers. Her. XII at this point is rather obscure. After Medea’s sister comes to her room, the sister: “Orat opem Minyis (alter petit, alter habebit); / Aesonio iuveni, quod rogat illa, damus”
[entreats aid for the Minyae. One asks, the other will have it. What she asks for the Aesonian youth, we give] (65-66). The sister asks Medea to help Jason. However, it makes more logical narrational sense, and it makes Medea a more decisive and active character, if she asks for her sister’s help at this point. Whether intentionally or through misunderstanding, the β redactor has done this with his Medea. Indeed, we will see that the Medea of TSβ is more decisive, active, and proud than her Ovidian counterpart throughout.

Medea’s request results in her sister arranging a meeting between Medea and Jason in the woods. How exactly they meet in the woods is not clear in Her. XII, and in Met. VII it seems that Jason ambushes Medea there. One element of their meeting bears further examination. The β redactor strongly implies that Jason and Medea consummate their love in the forest:

Rennr honom nu hugr til hennar oc hitnar med honom astin til konungs dottr. veitir nu hvart odru þacksamligt faþmlag oc sæta kossa ok eigi ganga þau þaþan firr En hann hefir drygt med henne allan sinn villia. (15, 14-17)

[Now his mind settles on her, and love for the king’s daughter grows hot within him. Now each gives the other grateful embraces and sweet kisses and they do not leave from there until he has perpetrated with her everything he wishes.]

Medea of Her. XII says nothing on the matter in her version of their meeting in the woods.

Haec animum (et quota pars haec sunt?) movere puellae
Simplicis et dextrae dextera iuncta meae;
Vidi etiam lacrimas (a! pars est fraudis in illis):
Sic cito sum verbis capta puella tuis. (89-92)

[These words (and what part of them are these?) moved the soul of a
simple girl, and your right hand joined with mine. I even saw tears (can it
be that in these is part of your deceit?) thus, I was a girl caught quickly by
your words.]

It is a touching scene tainted by Medea’s later bitterness. The word capta could imply
sex, but such an interpretation is not necessary. She does later say, “Virginitas facta est
peregrini praeda latronis” [My maidenhood was made the booty of a foreign robber]
(111). However, this is unconnected to their meeting in the woods and does not specify a
time at all. Met. VII seems to say that nothing sexual happened between them:

creditus accepit cantatas protinus herbas
edidicitque usum laetusque in tecta recessit. (98-99)

[Having been believed, he accepted the enchanted herbs at once and
learned their use by heart and went back happy into his house.]

Since “recessit” is singular, it can only apply to Jason. Once he gets what he wants from
Medea (apparently only her herbs) he leaves to sleep alone. There is none of the
affection here which is found in both Her. XII and TSβ. That Jason and Medea go to the
temple of the Fleece alone and at night also indicates that Met. VII is not the source in the
saga. (The temple itself is not mentioned in either of Ovid’s works.) The attempt for the
Fleece is a public spectacle in Met. VII.
Medea takes a much more active role in Jason’s labors in TSB than she does in Ovid. The image of Medea as she sets her sorcery to work against Argus and the dragon, the first monsters to be defeated, is striking:

hon tekr til oc syngr songva sina lengi nætr oc hefir frammi allar sínar íprottir. Hon leysti hár sitt oc bardi briost sitt. Lengi nætrinnar syngir hon adr Argus sofnadi er gætti hofsins ok þar eptir svæfir hon drækann (16, 4-7)

[She sets to work and sings her songs all night long and makes use of all her abilities. She loosed her hair and beat her breast. She sings for the length of the night before Argus, who guarded the temple, fell asleep, and thereafter she lulls the dragon to sleep.]

Medea in Her. XII and in Met. VII does not so openly help Jason, instead giving him herbs to use for the task of putting the dragon to sleep. However, the imagery of the Norse passage above closely resembles imagery Ovid uses to describe Medea’s sorcery in his two works, though each of Ovid’s passages comes from a place unrelated to the labors. First, in Her. VI, Hypsipyle writes to Jason, her former lover, about the evils of Medea. Second, later in Met. VII, Medea employs her most powerful sorcery to return Aeson to youth.

Nec facie meritisque placet, sed carmina novit
Diraque cantata pabula falce metit:
Illa reluctantem cursu deducere Lunam
Nititur et tenebris abdere Solis equos:
Illa refrenat aquas obliquaque flumina sistit;
Ilia loco silvas vivaque saxa movet;
Per tumulos errat passis distincta capillis
Certaque de tepidis colligit ossa rogis.
Devovet absentis simulacraque cerea fингit,
Et miserum tenuis in iecur urget acus  (Her. VI 83-92)

[It is neither her beauty nor merits that give pleasure, but the enchanted
songs she knows and the awful herbs she cuts with her pruning blade. She
strives to draw down the resisting Moon from its course and hide the
horses of the Sun in shadow; she curbs waters and stops crooked rivers;
she moves trees and living stones from their place; she wanders loose
clothed through barrows with her hair free and collects certain bones from
warm funeral pyres. She molds waxen likenesses for those elsewhere and
pushes thin needles into unfortunate livers.]

Tres aberant noctes, ut cornua tota coirent
efficerentque orbem. postquam plenissima fulsit
et solida terras spectavit imagine luna,
egreditur tectis vestes induta recinctas,
nuda pedem, nudos umeris infusa capillos,
fertque vagos mediae per muta silentia noctis
incomitata gradus . . .

.........................
sidera sola micant; ad quae sua bracchia tendens
ter se convertit, ter sumptis flumine crinem
inroravit aquis ternisque ululatibus ora
solvit et in dura submisso poplite terra (Met. VII 179-185, 188-191)

[Three nights were lacking for the horns to fill in whole and the circle to come about. After the fullest moon shown and the whole moon looked at the earth with its image, she goes out from the houses dressed in ungirded robes, bare foot, and with hair spread free over her shoulders, she goes unaccompanied with wandering steps through the mute silences of midnight . . . The lonely stars twinkle; stretching out her arms to them, she turns herself around three times, thrice she sprinkles her tresses with water obtained from a stream and loosed her voice three times with wails, and she lowered her knee to the hard earth.]

It is plain to see that Ovid drew from the same well of imagination when composing these two passages. As such, it is difficult to say which is more like the passage from TSβ. The saga copies neither in all its details. Both of Ovid’s passages contain the image of loose hair, but neither say she beat her breast. Likewise, in both she sings (“carmina novit” [songs she knows] (Her. VI 83), “ternisque ululatibus ora / solvit” [and loosed her voice three times with wails] (Met. VII 190-191)), but in both the singing is not the most important aspect of her magic. Met. VII more explicitly speaks of night, and thus matches the saga better, but it is hard to imagine Medea of Her. VI doing any of those magical spells in the daylight, and both refer to the moon. The details of Medea’s magic which the saga writer changes or leaves out are important for understanding his version of Medea and are discussed in greater detail below.
Thus far, we have seen that although the Medea/Jason episode in TSβ contains much information that can be found in *Met. VII*, in every case the same information can be found in one of the letters of *Heroides*, and furthermore, in almost every case the language of TSβ more closely matches that of *Heroides* than the corresponding passages in *Met. VII*. Also, there is a great deal of information in *Met. VII* which is not included anywhere in the saga (e.g., Aeson’s revival, Medea’s chariot drawn by flying dragons). There is, however, one glaring problem with ruling out *Metamorphoses* altogether as a source for this episode: the hundred-eyed monster, Argus, who accompanies the dragon as a temple guard. Argus, of course, was never connected with the legend of the Golden Fleece in classical mythology, but his presence in TSβ is explicable given the assumption that the author had only a vague knowledge of the myth of Argus, not necessarily the entire story as it is laid out in *Met. I*.

It has already been shown that the first reference to the dragon in *Her. XII* is vague (49-50). For the moment, we will pass over the second reference. The third reference is, "Insopor ecce vigil" [Behold, the unsleeping guard] (101), so here the nature of the guard is still indefinite. The fourth reference to the dragon is again obscure: "Flammea subduxi medicato lumina somno." [I carried off the fiery eyes in drugged sleep] (107). The last three references all call the dragon either *serpens* or *draco* (163, 171, 196). Thus, the first half of the poem has mostly vague, and the second half has exact references to a dragon.

The second reference to the dragon, however, says, "Ante meos oculos pervigil anguis erat" [Before my eyes was the ever-vigilant dragon] (60). Here *anguis* means "dragon," but if a reader did not know the word, he could guess its meaning by the
characteristics given thus far: *lumina* . . . *nescia somno* [eyes unknown to sleep] (49) and *pervigil* [ever-vigilant] (60). A dragon, a monster known for guarding treasure40 but also for *sleeping* in Germanic lore,41 would not be the obvious choice for the meaning of *anguis*, but if the reader were vaguely familiar with Argus, he might come to mind.

Indeed, either a copyist of the manuscript of *Heroides* which the saga writer was using or the saga writer himself could very well have misread the word “anguis” as “argus,” since an “n” may easily be taken as an “r” and an “i” might easily be overlooked next to a “u.” The β redactor must have been familiar with Argus in some form as he supplies the hundred count of his eyes (12, 15), so it is tempting to assign the mistake to him. Either way, the Fleece received a second watchman, and Argus was unnecessarily introduced into the saga. Even if the β redactor’s knowledge of Argus came from *Met. I*, and there is no need to assume that it did, this does not signify that he had *Met. VII* on hand for use, or even that he had read it.

It is against the two watchers, Argus and the dragon, that Jason shows his mettle. Although Ovid’s Jason does very little to win his fame besides administering Medea’s drugs, the β redactor has remade his Jason in the mold of a dragon slayer. Not only does he slay the sleeping Argus (16, 9-10), but after waking the dragon with his sword thrust, he defeats his serpentine foe after a perilous struggle (16, 10-14). It is very likely that the


41 For instance, the *Beowulf* dragon: “[þ]æ(n) [þ]æ(n) þræ[m] þæ(r) slæppende besyre(d wur)de” [though he, sleeping, was tricked] Klaeber’s *Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*, eds. R.D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles, 4th ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008) line 2218. See also the dragons of *Porskróðinga saga*: “En jafnskjótt sem eldingin kom yfir drekanna, þá sofna þeir allir” [And as soon as the lightning (dawn?) passed over the dragons, then they all fall asleep] *Porskróðinga saga*, eds. Þorhallur Vítmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, Islensk Forrit XIII (Reykjavik: Hið Íslenska Forritafélag, 1991) 188, ch. 4.
dragon slaying scenes of *Völsunga saga* and *Trójumanna saga* are related, and because I compare *Völsunga saga* multiple times to *Trójumanna saga* in the analysis later in the chapter, it is fitting to show the certain affinity between the sagas at this point.

The likely date of the original *Trójumanna saga* (Tms1) is a little before 1250.42 The later version known as Tms2 is the source from which TSβ and the *Hauksbók* version of the saga (TSH) derive. As explained in the introduction of this thesis, Tms2 was likely composed between 1250 and 1300; thus it is roughly contemporaneous with *Völsunga saga*, composed in the mid-thirteenth century.43 Since both of the following passages to be compared with *Völsunga saga* occur in both TSβ and TSH with slight differences, we may safely assume that they were in Tms2 and were not later additions. From here on I speak only of the β version of these passages for the sake of expediency.

There are two major similarities between Jason’s slaying of the Fleece’s dragon and the slaying of Fafnir in *Völsunga saga*. First, they both contain lines describing the everlasting fame of the dragon slayer:

Oc sa er þessu kemur aleid mun allðri tyna sinu lofí medan ueroldin stendr. (TSβ 13, 8-9)

[And he who comes through this devastation will never have his fame forgotten while the world lasts.]

hans nafn mun vppi meðan verollðin stendr (V. S. 118; ch. 12)

[His name will be remembered while the world lasts.]

hans nafn gengr í allvm tungum fyrir norðan gricklandz haf ok sva man vera medan verollðinn stendr. (V. S. 154; ch. 23)

---

[His name goes on in all the tongues north of the Greekland sea and so will it be while the world lasts.]

hans nafn man allöri fyrnæzt í þyverskri tungu ok a norðr laundum meþan heimrinn stenôr. (V. S. 198; ch.34)

[His name will never be forgotten in the German tongue and the northern lands while the world lasts.]

The author of Völsunga saga may show awareness of the source of his borrowing through the reference he makes to “norðan gricklandz haf” [north of the Greekland sea] and the “norðr laundum” [northern lands] in the last two passages above. Thus, he may be specifying that Sigurd’s fame may not reach Greece, whereas Jason’s fame has indeed reached Iceland, but this is hardly sure. That Sigmund speaks the passage from V. S. chapter twelve and not the narrator, and that the passage leaves out a reference to the German tongue or the North may be significant. The author may well have imagined Sigmund’s knowledge of geography to be less than his own and thus left out a part of the phrase which would sound as anachronistic as if Sigmund invoked Christ.

Yet, this phrase describing a hero’s fame lasting while the world lasts may well have been in common use. It is also used in Hrólfs saga kraka, written in the fourteenth century,44 with slightly different wording to describe the eponymous character: “Svá er hann mikill ágætismaðr, at hans nafn mun eigi fyrnast, á meðan veröldin er byggð.” [So great is this renowned man that his name will not be forgotten while the world is

inhabited.\textsuperscript{45} Of course, the phrase might have entered common usage through either \textit{Völsunga saga} or Tms2, as \textit{Hrölf's saga kraka} postdates them.

The second similarity between \textit{Völsunga saga} and TSβ, the descriptions of how the hero deals his first blow to the dragon, supports the theory of intertextual influence:

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Völsunga saga:} 
\textit{þa gengr hann moti þeim hinum grimma dreka oc legr til hans med sverdinu undir bægslit.} (TSβ 16, 10-11)
\textit{[Then he goes against the dragon and thrusts the sword under his shoulder.]} \textsuperscript{46}

\textbf{TS~:} 
\textit{þa leggr sigurdr sverdinu vndir bexlit vinstra sva at vid hiolltum nam.} (\textit{V. S.} 138; ch. 18)
\textit{[Then Sigurd thrusts the sword under his left shoulder so that it reached the hilts.]} \textsuperscript{50}
\end{quote}

Again, there is nothing to indicate which of the passages came first, and the similarity between the passages might possibly be coincidental. The description of the slaying of dragons in \textit{Porskfírðinga saga} is similar: \textit{“hlupu þeir yfir drekana, ok lögðu undir bægsl þeim, ok svá til hjartans”} [They run over to the dragons and thrust under their shoulders and so to their hearts.\textsuperscript{46} This, however, was almost certainly written after both Tms2 and \textit{Völsunga saga}.\textsuperscript{47} No works which might or definitely do predate Tms2 and \textit{Völsunga saga} describe the dragon slayer as stabbing the dragon under the shoulder, neither the dragon slayings in \textit{Beowulf}\textsuperscript{48} nor \textit{Fáfnismál}\textsuperscript{49} nor \textit{Skáldskaparmál}.\textsuperscript{50} Saxo Grammaticus

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Hrölf's saga kraka ok kappa hans}, eds. Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, \textit{Heimskringla}, www.heimskringla.no, ch. 22.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Porskfírðinga saga} 188; ch. 4.
\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Beowulf}, 874-897, 2694-2711. It is perhaps of note that Grendel’s mother tries to stab Beowulf in the shoulder, but his armor saves him: “Him on eaxle læg / bröstnet brōden; þæt gebearth feore / wið ord ond
\end{footnotesize}
does not describe Frotho, Frídleus, or Ragnar as stabbing their dragons under the shoulder in *Gesta Danorum*, and Ragnar explicitly stabs his dragon in the back in *Ragnars saga*. The technique of stabbing a dragon under the shoulder seems to be an innovation of Tms2 or *Völsunga saga*.

Once Jason has slain the dragon, his work in the quest is practically over. Medea’s great acts of magic accomplish the rest of the task. We turn now to the letter from Medea to Jason as presented in TSβ (19, 9-21, 4). Of the relationship between the letters of Her. XII and TSβ Louis-Jensen says, “The letter – or at least the use of the letter form – was probably inspired by *Her. XII* (Medea Iasoni) but the plot outlined in it is different from that of classical mythology, the only detail β and *Her. XII* have in common being Medea’s comment on the resemblance of her sons to their father.” The common detail she points out is:

> ṣa muntu ṣo kenna sonu ṣina er ṣier ero hinir likuztu (TSβ 20, 10)

[Then you will yet recognize your sons who are most like you.]

> Et nimium similes tibi sunt (Her. XII 189)

[And they are extremely similar to you.]

But the passages are more similar than Louis-Jensen acknowledges, as an examination of a longer excerpt reveals.

> Tam tibi sum supplex, quam tu mihi saepe fuisti,

---

wið ecge, ingang förstöð” [His braided breast-mail lay on his shoulder; that protected his life against point and against edge, hindered entrance] (1547b-1549).

52 *Ragnars saga loðbrókar ok sona hans*, eds. Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, Heimskringla, www.heimskringla.no, ch. 3.
Nec moror ante tuos procubuisse pedes;
Si tibi sum vilis, communis respice natos:
Saeviet in partus dira noverca meos.
Et nimium similes tibi sunt, et imagine tangor,
Et quotiens video, lumina nostra madent.
Per superos oro, per avitae lumina flammae,
Per meritum et natos, pignora nostra, duos,
Redde torum, pro quo tot res insana reliqui!
Adde fidem dictis auxiliumque refer!
Non ego te imploro contra taurosque virosque,
Utque tua serpens victa quiescat ope;
Te peto, quem merui, quem nobis ipse dedisti,
Cum quo sum pariter facta parente parens. (Her. XII 185-198)

[So am I kneeling before you as you were often kneeling before me, and I
do not delay to have sunk down before your feet. If I am worthless to you,
look back at our common children: the fearful stepmother will rage at my
offspring. And they are extremely similar to you, and are touched by your
likeness. And as often as I see them, my eyes are wet. I beg by the gods,
by lights of ancestral flames, by my due and the two children, our pledges,
give me back the bed for which I, insane, relinquished everything! Give
faith to your words and bring back help! I do not appeal to you to go
against bulls and men, nor to put a dragon to sleep with your power; I ask
for you, whom I have earned, whom you yourself gave to me, with whom
I was equally made a mother by a father.]

First compare the following passage from TSβ to Her. XII 187-189 above.

Hversu vesol kona ek em. þat spyr ek til þin at þu lætz ecki vita hver
Medea er. En ef þu veitz ecki hver hun er þa muntu þo kenna sonu þina er
þier ero hinir likuztu (TSβ 20, 8-10)

[What a wretched woman am I. I hear it of you that you pretend not to
know who Medea is. But if you don’t know who she is, then you will yet
recognize your sons who are most like you.]

To be sure, Ovid’s Medea nowhere accuses Jason of pretending not to know who she is,
and TSβ’s Medea never mentions Jason’s new wife (Creusa in Ovid, unnamed in TSβ),
but other than those differences the passages are identical in meaning. The words *vilis*
and *vesol* have enough overlap in their meaning that they could easily have been
considered synonyms by the β redactor. *Vilis* has the sense of something common and
thus of little value. When applied to a person, it takes on the meaning “poor” or “vile.”

*Vesall* is an adjective originally signifying “bereft of,” and thus “poor,” “destitute,” or
“wretched.”

There is at least one other close similarity between the letters. In both, Medea
appeals to Jason for aid in return for the aid she has given him:

---

hversu aumliga þu batt mik miskunnar first er þu vart med þeir minum.
Hygg at nu huersu mikla miskunn þu veitir mer þar er ek em komin i þitt land. (TSβ 19, 18-20, 2)

[How pitifully you begged for mercy at first when you were with my father. Take thought now how great a mercy you grant to me since I have come into your land.]

Compare to this Her. XII 185-186, 193-198 above where Medea’s rhetorical technique is to remind Jason with several examples of what they have done for each other, what they promised each other, and what children they made together in order to show how they are bound together by reciprocal obligations. In TSβ she mentions only the aid Jason received from her in Colchis when asking for his mercy in Greece. She leaves their tenderer moments and the promises they made out of the matter. The two passages from Her. XII taken together give the same impression as the passage from β 19, 18 – 20, 2, though the saga is much more succinct and Medea more guarded in her words there.

Indeed, this entire contiguous section (Her. XII 185-198) contains very few ideas which are not contained in the letter of TSβ. The changes the β redactor made to the fundamental makeup of his Medea explain the few omissions that there are. She is overall prouder and less desperate than Ovid’s Medea. For example, in Her. XII Medea imagines at length how Jason and Creusa must laugh at her faults:

Forsitan et, stultae dum te iactare maritae
Quaeris et iniustis auribus apta loqui,
In faciem moresque meos nova crimina fingas,
Rideat et vitiis laeta sit illa meis. (Her. XII 175-178)
[Perhaps, when you wish to boast to your stupid wife and say suitable things to her unjust ears, you could mold my face and habits into new faults, let her laugh and be gladdened by my faults.]

This pathetic imagining would be entirely out of character for Medea in TSβ. There she does not even mention Jason’s new wife, but does accuse Jason of pretending not to know her. She refuses to mention Creusa, the woman she was set aside for, because of her pride and dignity, qualities which are subordinated to Medea’s outrage and viciousness in Ovid. However, this refusal to mention Creusa leaves the β redactor with a hole in his letter, because Ovid’s Medea uses Creusa as a reason to mention her sons. The accusation of Jason’s pretended ignorance of Medea fills this hole nicely and adds back into the letter a bit of Jason’s perfidy that was lost because of Medea’s refusal to mention Creusa.

Three lines from Her. XII 185-198 find no place in the saga: 190-192, Medea’s crying over her sons and begging redress of Jason. Medea’s pride again explains this omission. She has no reason to expose her tenderer feelings to the man who betrayed her, nor to beg anything of him. The last, slight omission is that Medea does not recapitulate the ways in which she helped Jason as she does in Her. XII 193-198, but since the β redactor has already presented this adventure in direct narrative, it seems unlikely he felt it necessary to do so again.

Thus, the β redactor used at least Her. XII 185-198 (minus 190-192) in his letter from Medea to Jason. There are, however, other elements in Medea’s β letter which cannot easily be explained as adaptation from Her. XII. Some of these elements are
undoubtedly original to the Old Norse version of the story, but others have identifiable sources.

At first glance the prophecy with which Medea ends her letter in TSβ seems not to be founded on anything in Ovid:

Ok fyllaz mun su spasaga er firir var sogd at þeirrar veslu konu afkuæmi mundu verda storer hæfdingiar oc fædaz i annars konungs veldi oc munu hefna sinna frænda. (TSβ 21, 1-4)

[And that prophecy will be fulfilled which was before told; that this miserable woman’s offspring would become strong chiefs and grow up in another king’s empire and will avenge their kin.]

However, a source for this prophecy can be found. At the end of Her. XII, Medea’s intentions are left intentionally ambiguous:

Quos equidem actutum—sed quid praedicere poenam

Attinet? ingentis parturit ira minas. (Her. XII 207-208)

[Truely, without delay—but what harm in holding onto my foretelling?

Anger produces unnatural threats.]

The last readily understandable thing Medea says in Ovid is this mention of a prediction which she could make but does not. If the β redactor knew the classical ending of Medea’s story (the murder of her sons to which she here alludes) it is not likely that he would have shrunk from depicting it merely because it was distasteful. He had such literary models as the heroines, Signý and Gudrún, who commit the same crime or a worse in the Volsung legend, which must have been familiar to the β redactor, though not necessarily through the Völsunga saga. On the other hand, if the β redactor did know the
classical ending, he would not have hesitated to change it to his taste, just as he changed Deianira’s ending, as we shall see in chapter two. At any rate, the fact of Medea murdering her sons is not contained in *Heroides*. It is contained in *Met.* VII, but as we have seen it is quite possible that the β redactor did not know *Met.* VII.

If we assume his ignorance of Medea’s filicide, the β redactor was left with the problem of writing about a prophecy of which he had no knowledge, but which he could attempt to reconstruct based on the foreshadowing in *Her.* XII. There are two places in the poem when Medea mentions her future plans:

... ingentis parturit ira minas.
Quo feret ira, sequar! facti fotasse pigebit:
Et piget infido consuluisse viro.
Viderit ista deus, qui nunc mea pectora versat!
Nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit. (*Her.* XII 208-212)

[Anger produces unnatural threats. Where anger leads me, I will follow. Perhaps the deeds will disgust: and I am disgusted to have decided upon a faithless man. The god will have seen that, who now turns about in my heart. I know not certainly what greater thing my mind drives towards.]

Here “ingentis” [unnatural] and “pigebit” [will disgust] jump out at the knowledgeable reader as a sign that she is talking about the filicide, but without any foreknowledge the words lack any hint of that meaning, and the passage is completely obscure.

The other passage of foreshadowing, one that gives more concrete information, comes earlier in the poem:

Rideat et Tyrio iaceat sublimis in ostro:
Flebit et ardores vincet adusta meos!
Dum ferrum flammaeque aderunt sucusque veneni
Hostis Medae nullus inultus erit. (Her. XII 179-182)
[Let her laugh and lie exalted on Tyrian purple: she will weep, and when she burns she will exceed my flames. When iron and flames and the juice of poison appear none of the enemies of Medea will go unpunished.]

Here Medea speaks of the iron and burning to come against her enemies. Again, for the reader ignorant of the classical Medea legend this imagery raises the idea of war, not of murder. The only thing that suggests anything but war is "suscusque veneni" [juice of poison]. Even with the reference to poison, there is nothing in this passage to indicate that Medea plans to personally take vengeance against Jason’s new wife, whom she poisons in classical legend. The Norse audience would not expect Medea to take vengeance personally. There are only a few women who themselves take vengeance directly against their enemies in the sagas. The more common mode of revenge by far is for the woman to act through a male agent, and this seems to be what the β redactor either assumed or wanted Medea to be planning. In the Norse version, as we shall see, the saga writer elevates Medea above the use of poison. Even if he understood the "suscusque veneni" as Ovid’s Medea’s method for revenge, he would not have adopted it for his own Medea.

It seems obvious that it was necessary for the β redactor to fill in the gap of Medea’s alluded-to-prophecy. He was writing for an audience that likely did not have a greater knowledge of the Medea/Jason affair than he himself did. The β redactor had his

56 Aud of Laxdaela saga is one of them. Laxdaela saga, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Íslensk Fornrit V (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1934) 95-100; ch. 35.
Medea straightforwardly explain her prophecy rather than dance around the issue. Alluding to facts not held in common knowledge by the audience would not have worked, even if he could have made such an allusion fit the style of his saga. However, that the prophecy is made and yet unfulfilled in the saga is unsatisfying. Eldevik points out this problem: “Though one might view the emphasis on grim prophecies of future disaster as a distinctively Scandinavian contribution . . . the failure to follow through on the outcome of the prophecies is decidedly not typical of Scandinavian saga narrative.”

The β redactor did not have a source on hand for the story of the revenge of Medea’s sons (indeed, how could he when it has never been written?) and he may have left that part of the saga unwritten until he could find a source which described it.

However, the saga writer was not necessarily afraid of adapting an unrelated source to his narrative purposes. We see this in another element of the letter from Medea to Jason in TSβ which has to this point been unexplained: the invocation of the gods against Jason:


(TSβ 20, 2-5)

[Now the gods have changed everything between us and ordain fate for me. You have transgressed against both Frigg and Freyja, against the god of the sun and against the holy Pallas. And your body would not suffice to avenge this had each of the gods a little slice of you.]

Eldevik says of this particular passage,

The partial Germanicization of the names of the gods—Frigg and Freya rather than Juno and Venus—is typical of the saga’s handling of pagan religion. Curiously enough, however, the idea of the gods’ disapproval and punishment of Jason is not even mentioned by Ovid; it is purely an innovation of the Old Norse writer, as is the bloodthirsty statement about Jason’s threatened dismemberment. This is perhaps the most piquant Scandinavian contribution to Medea’s letter.58

She is completely correct about the partial Germanicization of the gods’ names.

Neither is the saga always consistent, at times identifying Sif instead of Frigg with Juno, or at times speaking of Thor and at other times of Jupiter (TSβ 87-88).

Eldevik is, however, incorrect in the rest of her statement. The passage does come from Ovid, but from Her. II (Phyllis Demophoonti), not Her. XII:

Per mare, quod totum ventis agitatur et undis,

Per quod saepe ieras, per quod iturus eras,

Perque tuum mihi iurasti, nisi fictus et illest,

Concita qui ventis aequora mulcet, avum,

Per Venerem nimiumque mihi facientia tela,

Altera tela arcus, altera tela faces,

Iunonemque, toris quae praesidet alma maritis,

Et per taediferae mystica sacra deae.

Si de tot laesis sua numina quisque deorum

Vindicet, in poenas non satis unus eris. (Her. II 35-44)

[By the sea which is all stirred by the winds and waves, through which you had often sailed, through which you were about to go, and by your grandfather, who soothes the sea stirred up by winds (unless he was pretended too) you swore to me. By Venus and the weapons she’s using excessively against me, one weapon the bow, the other torches. And by Juno the nourishing, who presides over marriage beds, and by the mysterious religious rights of the torch bearing goddess. If each of the gods should avenge their divinities for all these injuries, your one self will not suffice as a penalty.]

There are four gods in this passage. First, Phyllis invokes Neptune (Poseidon), father of Theseus and grandfather of Demophoon, though she does not name him. Obviously, Neptune is invoked because he would have an interest in the oaths of his grandson. Also, unnamed is Ceres (Demeter), to whom line 42 certainly refers. She is taedifera [torch-bearing] because she bore torches while searching for her daughter, Persephone. The mystica sacra are the Eleusinian Mysteries, centered around her and Persephone. ⁵⁹ Ceres is possibly invoked because Phyllis is looking for a lost loved one, as Ceres did, or perhaps for her connection with marriage and fertility. Venus and Juno are, of course, named because of their respective realms of love and marriage.

There are four gods mentioned in the invocation in TSβ as there are four in Her. II. They are Frigg and Freyja, identified with Juno and Venus respectively, the god of the sun, and holy Pallas. That the god of the sun and Pallas do not correspond to Neptune and Ceres is not terribly concerning. The solar god could have been chosen by the β redactor to replace the taedifera dea. As for Neptune, if the β redactor correctly

⁵⁹ March, “Demeter.”
identified the god of the sea alluded to by Ovid, Neptune is not the grandfather of Jason and the reason for having him in the invocation is gone. The β redactor may have simply decided to substitute Pallas for him.

Whether or not the β redactor had either of these specific reasons for using the different gods in mind is not important, for when the invocations of the four gods (whichever gods they are) in the first half of these passages is taken with the similar curses against Demophoon and Jason, which follow immediately after in both Her. II and TSβ, there can be no doubt that the former was the source for the latter. To be sure, the language is more explicit in TSβ, "bloodthirsty" as Eldevik says. While Ovid does not make Demophoon’s dismemberment explicit, TSβ has the word *segi*, which was often used to refer to slices or strips of bloody flesh. Yet, the underlying idea in the curses is the same.

Louis-Jensen mentions the invocation section of the letter when she argues against Gert Pinkernell’s assertion that similarities shared by an Italian text from *Testi Inediti di Storia Troiana* and the Trójumanna Saga came from the *Roman de Troie en prose*. During her comparison of sections of the Italian text which resemble TSβ but are not found in the Roman, she says,

> In [Medea’s] desperation she invokes a long string of gods and goddesses: Saturno, Giove, Marte, Apollo, Venus, Diana, Pultone (sic), Neturno (sic), Gienone (sic), Palladia/Minerva, cf. β, p. 20: [...] These parallels are perhaps not particularly close but they seem to suggest that, if the Italian

---

60 Cleasby, "Segi."
and Icelandic texts took this episode from a common source, it was not from the *Roman*. 63

*Her.* II is the source of the passage in TSβ, but it does not appear to be the source of the Italian passage. In the Italian Medea invokes many more than four gods and intermingles curses against Jason throughout, none of which bear much resemblance to the curse as found in *Her.* II and TSβ. 64

The rest of Medea’s letter is very likely, though not definitely, the original invention of the β redactor. The letter starts with Medea accusing Jason of boasting about his adventure (19, 9-12). Eldevik says of this, “One of the few [touches] that merit attention is the image of Jason boasting as he sits in his ‘great stone halls,’ an image redolent of the world of *Beowulf, The Battle of Maldon*, and of course the Norse sagas.” 65 Medea leaves unsaid for the moment the fact that Jason is taking credit for deeds which he could not have accomplished without her. In contrast, *Her.* XII 199-206 and *Her.* VI 99-100 have Medea demanding acknowledgement that she was the reason for Jason’s success. This difference can be explained by the fact that, again, this Medea is too proud to beg Jason for recognition of her deeds. Instead, she brings the letter to the matter at hand: “Enn ecki nauttz þu sealfs þins at þui en þu vant þar” [And yet you do not avail yourself of that which you won there] (TSβ 19, 12-13). This is a dignified and indirect way of reminding him of his obligations to her. Medea proceeds to lay out a prophecy (apparently unrelated to her later prophecy about her sons) of which she has already

---


64 If *Her.* II were the ultimate source of the Italian passage, it would seem necessary to hypothesize an intermediary text which predates TSβ and the Italian text and incorporates *Her.* II into the Medea/Jason story, as it does not seem likely that two separate authors would have adapted the same passage for this same purpose.

fulfilled her part by betraying her homeland and of which Jason has fulfilled his part by defeating his uncle Pelias (19, 13-17).

The only other notable passage in the letter not yet discussed is “Kost atta ek at drekia þier i hafí er ek sæ seglin” [I had a chance to drown you in the sea when I saw the sail] (TSβ 20, 7-8). It seems that the ß redactor invented the idea that Medea could drown ships from afar. There is precedent for sorceresses having this power in the sagas.66 Why she does not drown Jason and his men is not explained, but she gives a cry of dismay and leaves the task of vengeance to her two sons. The best explanation is that Medea, though she hates him, is still in love with Jason despite his desertion of her. Her Ovidian counterpart is much the same, fairly desperate to regain their love and yet despairing of it at the same time.

Though the women are similar in this respect, in Medea’s magical skills we see how the two authors conceived their heroines quite differently. In Ovid, Medea uses herbs, poison, and darker methods to achieve her magic than in the saga.67 Recall the lengthy excerpt from above (Her. VI 83-92) in which Medea cuts herbs, collects bones from funeral pyres, and practices what would today be called voodoo with needles and dolls. In the saga she uses only her voice, potent though it is. Besides her song of sleep mentioned above (TSβ 16, 4-7), Medea whistles (“blistrar” 16, 15) to the oxen to tame them to the yoke. She uses her “galdr list” to pull down the temple of the Fleece. Galdr (from the verb gala) most simply means “song,” though it has magical connotations and

---

66 For instance the drowning of Thórd Ingunnarson in Laxdæla saga (102; ch. 35).
67 It is notable that in Met. VII 137-138 Medea uses her voice: “Neve parum valeant a se data gramina, carmen / auxiliare canit secretasque advocat artes.” [And lest the herbs she had given should not be strong enough, she sings a song to aid and calls on secret arts.] However, Medea does not use her voice at this point in the saga; the warriors kill each other of their own accord (TSβ 17, 6-7). If Met. VII were being used as a source it is very likely that the saga writer would have used this opportunity to have Medea sing again, as in the saga she uses only her voice (or at least oral noises) for magic.
came to mean “witchcraft” or “sorcery” in general.\(^{68}\) Indeed, Medea is working magic, but a vocal kind of magic. *Galdrar list* is best translated “art of enchantment,” as long as one keeps the vocal idea contained in the word “enchantment” in mind.

The redactor very likely intentionally chose to focus on Medea’s voice and to leave out references to her poisons in order to make her a more heroic and sympathetic character. In the sagas the use of poisons and herbs is reserved to villainesses such as Grimhild and Borghild in *Völsunga saga* (112, 168; ch. 10, ch. 28). These are women who have little dramatic purpose in their saga beyond causing adversity for a hero. Medea, in contrast, is the center of drama for as long as she is in TSβ. Though she apparently acts as Jason’s aide, she actually takes more initiative and achieves more than Jason himself throughout the episode. First, she initiates their relationship by sending her sister to Jason (TSβ 14, 4-9). Then, during the quest for the Fleece, Jason’s contribution (except for his fight with the dragon) is to stab a sleeping Argus, wait for the teeth-grown warriors to kill each other, and help carry off the loot with Medea. Medea sings the watchers to sleep, tames and yokes the oxen, tells Jason not to fear the teeth-grown warriors, and pulls down the temple. She is the heroine who moves the story, and as such cannot be a poisoning villainess.

Still, Medea steals gold and gems from her father before she goes to Jason’s ship to leave Colchis. Yet, by this act she is made innocent of Jason’s subsequent attack on and slaying of her father (17, 9-18, 2, a scene unique to the saga). If she were complicit, there would have been no reason to steal the gold and gems beforehand. Compare this with her slaying and dismemberment of her own brother as she escaped Colchis, alluded to in *Her.* XII 113-118. Though Ovid does not make her fratricide explicit, it may be that

\(^{68}\) Cleasby, “Galdr.”
the β redactor understood that something grim happened before Medea and Jason’s departure from Colchis and invented Jason’s attack on King Medius to fill the gap in his knowledge. However, much like with Medea’s filicide, it is also possible that the β redactor understood her crime and chose to change it in order to keep his heroine sympathetic.

Now we must exchange Ovid’s Medea for Ovid’s Ariadne as the heroine of comparison in our analysis of the β redactor’s Medea. Louis-Jensen has pointed out that Jason’s abandonment of Medea is related to Her. X (Ariadne Theseo). She says, “[TSβ] proceeds to tell of Jason’s desertion of Medea, apparently confusing the lovers with Theseus and Ariadne. This part of the story seems to have been influenced by Ovid’s Her. X, if it is not indeed based on it.”69 She points out the parallel between β 18, 12-13, and Her. X 30 and Her. X 41 where the heroine sees the sails of her deserter in the distance and ties some piece of clothing to a tree to signal that she was left behind. In addition to this parallel, I would point out:

\[\text{þa sprettr hon upp vid mikla ugledi oc harm oc sva kom at huert bein var kalt i hennar likama. (TSβ 18, 10-12)}\]

[Then she springs up in great distress and grief, and so it happened that every bone was cold in her body.]

Compare this with Ovid:

\[\text{Excussere metus somnum; conterrita surgo,} \]
\[\text{Membraque sunt viduo praecipitata toro (Her. X 13-14)}\]

[Fears shook off my sleep; terrified, I rise and my limbs were thrown headlong from my widowed bed.]

Frigidor glacie semianimisque fui. *(Her. X 32)*

[I was colder than ice and half alive.]

The saga writer has combined these two passages from *Her. X* in his one sentence. Because the β redactor placed this section in the direct narrative of events before Medea’s letter, as he did with almost all the background exposition given in *Heroïdes*, the description of Medea awaking alone is changed from the first person to the third person perspective. As a result of that change and the general condensation of facts, some of the sense of panic of Ariadne is lost in Medea. The hyperbole “frigidior glacie” [colder than ice] is likewise toned down to “huert bein var kalt” [every bone was cold].

However, these small differences in tone are not entirely due to the change to an objective, third person voice, as a comparison of the next two examples of direct dialogue shows. Ariadne and Medea each give short speeches expressing their dumbfounded disbelief that their men have left them:

Weit ek at sa sami Jason er til Kolkos for oc þar vann mesta frægd mun ecki þessu radit hafa at skipa sva vid mik. Oc þat kann henda at vinit tapar margs mans skynsemi. *(TSβ 18, 14-16)*

[I know that same Jason who traveled to Colchis and there gained greatest fame must not have intended this, to change so towards me. And it can happen that wine draws out the reason of many a man.]

And Ovid:

‘Quo fugis?’ exclamo ‘scelerate revertere Theseu,

Flecte ratem! numerum non habet illa suum.’

Haec ego; quod voci deerat, plangore replebam:
Verbera cum verbis mixta fuere meis. (*Her.* X 35-38)

[“Where do you fly?” I cry out. “Turn back, wicked Theseus! Turn your ship around! It has not its full tally!” When I lost my voice, I finished this with a shriek: blows were mixed with my words. ]

Both women are incredulous. Ariadne’s reaction is to scream and beat her fists either on herself or the ground. She yells after Theseus as if he could hear her. Medea, however, speaks only to herself, offering some rationalization for what she cannot believe. If her emotional state were as hysterical as Ariadne’s, it seems likely that she would have drowned Jason and his men indeed (*TSp* 20, 7-8). Medea’s incredulity is as great as Ariadne’s, but her speech shows self-control and dignity while Ariadne’s shows wild despair. Though the β redactor used *Her.* X instead of *Her.* XII as his model for this scene, he was not careless with his heroine. He has kept Medea’s character consistent.

There was no confusion of the sets of lovers in the saga as Louis-Jensen thinks. If the β redactor had read some or all of *Heroïdes* sometime in his distant past, he might have accidently conflated the lovers who were in similar situations, but as has been shown above by examples of parallels between *Heroïdes* and TSβ, he must have been working with a copy of *Her.* XII, II and probably VI on hand. There is no reason to doubt his copy of *Heroïdes* included *Her.* X as well. The use of *Her.* X was intentional, and thus the β redactor’s intentions towards Medea’s character may be seen clearly here. By having Medea be abandoned on an island instead of having her slink away from the house of heartless Jason at his command, the β redactor has allowed her to maintain her pride, a pride which comes through in the letter she sends later to Jason.
Though *Trójumanna saga* is at its core a rewriting of Dares, the β redactor sought out material to supplement the spartan account. He added a new episode with Medea and Jason in which he adapted text from sources not only unrelated to the Trojan war, but even unrelated to Medea. His goal was not to write an accurate translation of Dares, but to write the saga of the men and women of the Trojan war, as complete, plausible, and interesting a telling of their lives as he could reconstruct from his sources.

Geraldine Barnes says of medieval translators in “The *Riddarasögur*: A Medieval Exercise in Translation”:

> Attitudes to translation in the Middle Ages differed considerably from modern demands for accuracy and objectivity. The medieval translator was not excluded from the creative process and might alter his source to conform to his own taste and purpose, even to the extent of adding material from other sources. ⁷⁰

Indeed, some sagas were constructed from many disparate sources. Take, for example, the *Völsunga saga*, constructed from a series of older lays. Nor does the author of *Völsunga saga* hesitate to change the facts of his sources, combining Sigrdrifa and Brynhild in the same woman. ⁷¹

The β redactor of *Trójumanna saga* does the same with different sources. He uses *Heroides* the way the author of *Völsunga saga* uses traditional Old Norse lays. However, the letters of Ovid’s *Heroides* differ from the lays in that they are entirely in the first person and (with three exceptions) have female speakers. His sources encouraged the β

---

⁷⁰ Barnes, “The *Riddarasögur*,” 407.
⁷¹ Compare *Völsunga saga* (146; ch. 21) and *Sigrdrifumál*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, *Heimskringla*, www.heimskringla.no.
redactor to focus on Medea (and Deianira) even to the point of reproducing her letter to Jason. Yet, the β redactor did reform his sources to his taste. All of the heroines of Heroides exhibit a common desperation (or, in a few cases, resignation). The Medea of TSβ, though she has been composed from the letters of such Ovidian heroines, is proud and capable, and instead of murdering her children to hurt their father, she is confident that her sons will in time take revenge for her against Jason.
CHAPTER II

A Bloody Shirt

Where the saga writer made Medea and Jason's story coherent and told it from beginning to end, the Deianira and Hercules episode cannot rightly be called a story. It is merely a list of Hercules's adventures before his wife's suicide. There are no great classical tales of Deianira's grand adventures at her husband's side, and in the saga Deianira's character is consequently less interesting than Medea's or Helen's. Although the lead up to Deianira's letter is insignificant in artistic terms, the letter itself is as original and carefully constructed as the other heroines'. As the β redactor changed one of Medea's defining characteristics, her famous filicide, so he has again changed what is perhaps the most significant fact about Deianira; she does not, either intentionally or unintentionally, kill Hercules in the saga.

After the letter from Medea to Jason the saga, without ever saying another word about that unhappy couple, moves abruptly to rejoin Dares' account at the point of Hercules's revenge against Laomedon for his disgraceful treatment of the Argonauts on their way to Colchis. The saga follows Dares closely through the first sacking of Troy (De Excidio 4-5; ch. 3). Hercules brings an army to Troy, kills Laomedon, father of Priam, and sacks the city. This is a small event when compared with the second, much more famous sacking of the city. After Hercules has achieved his victory, and Telamon has been rewarded for his effort in the battle with Hesione (whose abduction ultimately causes the abduction of Helen), Hercules is dropped completely by Dares, but the saga continues with the Deianira/Hercules episode (TSβ 28-35).
Just as the saga writer supplemented Dares’ account of Jason’s adventure with parts of *Heroides*, so does he add onto Hercules’s story a list of his famous labors and accounts of his battle with the centaurs at the wedding of Pirithous, his winning of and marriage to Deianira, and his saving Deianira from the centaur, Nessus, though this time *Heroides* cannot be the saga writer’s only source. To give a coherent structure to the massive accretion of Hercules’s adventures that had been passed down from the classical era is beyond the scope of the β redactor’s work. The β redactor chooses to include Hercules’s labors in summary form, and one has the impression that he dispenses with the list as quickly as possible in order to provide context for and sooner reach Deianira’s letter, on which he could again spend some artistic effort. That he does not elaborate on the Achelous and Nessus episodes in which Deianira is actually involved is regrettable, but as Deianira takes no action herself in either case, it is perhaps explicable.

In contrast to the account the saga writer gives of Medea and Jason, which probably came only from *Heroides* (setting aside the issue of that account’s relation to *Völsunga saga*), the tale of Hercules seems to be drawn ultimately from a multitude of sources, some of which I have not identified and indeed may not be identifiable because of the ubiquity of the lore of Hercules. *Her.* IX (Deianira Herculi) is an obvious source. Deianira’s letter in TSβ is very closely modeled after it, but some other letters of *Heroides* contributed slightly: *Her.* III (Briseis Achilli), *Her.* XV (Sappho Phaoni), and *Her.* XI (Canace Macareo). *Metamorphoses* is also a very likely source, as are the *Aeneid* and *Alexanders saga*.

Most of the classical counterparts of Hercules’s labors as given in the saga are easily identified, but a few seem to be original to the saga, created either by innovation on
or misunderstanding of classical sources. A few defy explanation. The labors are laid out in the following table in the order of their occurrence in TSβ. Possible sources for labors, but by no means *the* sources, are listed beside.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TSβ</th>
<th>Her. IX (ln.)</th>
<th>Metmorph.</th>
<th>Aeneid</th>
<th>Alex. Saga</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Labors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slays the Norma Lion</td>
<td>(61)</td>
<td>(IX 197)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slays Herkulesteus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slays the Hydra of Cerna</td>
<td>(95)</td>
<td>(IX 193)</td>
<td>(VI 801)</td>
<td>(p. 52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slays a lion with a sheep in its mouth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slays Gereon</td>
<td>(92)</td>
<td>(IX 184)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishes great pillars at world’s end</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(VI 801)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slays Karulus, son of Evander in Italy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goes to India</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(p. 162)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the way slays the centaur beast and tames some others</td>
<td>(100)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slays the Arpine birds in India</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes into a boar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walks to hell, chains Cerberus, and drags him to the surface</td>
<td>(94)</td>
<td>(IX 185)</td>
<td>(VI 392)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bears the heavens</td>
<td>(17)</td>
<td>(IX 198)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwells in the heavens between two wagons</td>
<td>(18)</td>
<td>(IX 272)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wedding</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attends the wedding of Peritheus, fights against Moniaus and Lampidas</td>
<td></td>
<td>(XII 210)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saves Deianira from Nessus</td>
<td>(141)</td>
<td>(IX 98)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formerly had taken Deianira from Achelous</td>
<td>(139)</td>
<td>(IX 1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deianira’s Letter</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slays a dragon in the yard of Atlanus</td>
<td></td>
<td>(IX 190)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There beats a giant and takes two golden apples</td>
<td></td>
<td>(IX 190)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrestles Eridem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goes with Orpheus into hell</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chains Cerberus and draws him up</td>
<td>(94)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slays the Gorgonium monster</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slays Gereon</td>
<td>(92)</td>
<td>(IX 184)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of Hercules’s more famous labors appear in both *Heroïdes* and *Metamorphoses* and they appear in TSβ more or less modified. The character of
Herkulesteus, the lion with the sheep in its mouth, and the Gorgonium monster are unknown outside the saga. The slaying of Karulus, son of Evander, in Italy may be a garbled reference to the slaying of Cacus in the *Aeneid*.

Hercules’s taming of some centaurs seems to be an innovation on his driving the centaurs out of Thessaly (*Her.* IX 99-100).

Also unique to the saga is the metamorphosis of Hercules. That Hercules changes himself into a boar may strain the modern reader’s credulity for the obvious lack of a classical source, and it likewise strained the credulity of the saga writer though for a different reason.

Then he goes abroad after this, and so said heathen men that he changed himself into the shape of a wild boar, and they dared not give him any blows. Thus he went around so that nothing stood against him wherever he went.]

The only other labor which the β redactor qualifies by attributing it to the sayings of “heidner menn” is that of Hercules holding up the sky.

[So say heathen men that he bore the sky on his shoulders, and for that work of strength the heathen men said he was taken into the heavens.]

---

The saga writer saves this attribution to heathen men for the labors which most obviously violate natural laws.

The explicit reciprocal nature, which does not exist in classical myth, between Hercules’s bearing of the sky and his being taken into the sky may have come from *Her. IX* 17: “Quod te laturumst, caelum prius ipse tulisti” [You yourself bore the sky, which is going to bear you]. However, there is not even a hint of Hercules turning into a boar in classical myth. The most likely source for this metamorphosis is a misinterpretation of *Met.* IX 191-192: “nee mihi Centauri potuere resistere nec mi / Arcadie vastator aper . . .” [neither could the centaurs withstand me, nor the boar, ravager of Arcadia . . .] I suggest that these lines could be misread (though admittedly this is a severe misreading), if *mi* were taken as accusative and the second line as in apposition to *mi*: “and the centaurs could not withstand me, not me, the boar, ravager of Arcadia.” Since there is no other mention of a boar anywhere in Hercules’s labors in *TSβ*, it seems very likely that Hercules’s transformation into a boar has here displaced the capture of the Erymanthian boar (the ravager of Arcadia). This misreading of *Met.* IX 191-192 is much less unlikely than the idea that the saga writer willfully changed his source for no narrative purpose and yet still attributed the story to heathen men.

Even if *Heroides*, *Metamorphoses*, the *Aeneid*, and even *Alexanders saga* are allowed as possible sources, not all of Hercules’s classical labors as listed in *TSβ* can be accounted for. The Arpine birds of the saga are known as the Stymphalian birds in classical myth. Although Stymphalus is mentioned in *Met.* IX 187, the birds themselves are not mentioned there. Indeed, the slaying of the Arpine birds is the only classically identifiable labor of Hercules in *TSβ* which cannot be found in any of the
abovementioned sources. This shows that the saga writer must have had access to more classical sources of information about Hercules.

These other sources may have been some sort of summary of classical myths and legends such as the Vatican Mythographers. These are three compilations of classical myth composed between the eighth and thirteenth centuries, which Eldevik has suggested as sources for Trójumanna saga. However, I do not think the Vatican Mythographers a very likely source for the Hercules section as there is a great deal in them about Hercules which is not in the saga. The search for direct sources for the well-known labors of Hercules may be futile as it seems that Hercules was subject of some interest in medieval Iceland. Louis-Jensen mentions that in one manuscript containing a version of Trójumanna saga α (ÍB 184 4to) there is a story titled “Um Herculem sterka,” [About Hercules the Strong]. Although this manuscript is from the eighteenth century and it contains the α version of the saga instead of the β, all of the sagas that it contains are from the fifteenth century or earlier. That does not mean that “Um Herculem sterka” is definitely from the Middle Ages, but it certainly supports the idea. It seems likely that there were stories of Hercules circulating in Iceland at the time of the β redaction, and if there were the β redactor would very likely have availed himself of the information they provided. Thus, the jumbled state of the labors and unrecognizable names of some of the participants in them may be the result of long strings of misinterpretation and invention, not necessarily perpetrated by the β redactor.

76 Introduction, Trójumanna saga: The Dares Phrygius Version, lxii.
After the β redactor has rather artlessly dispensed with the list of Hercules’s feats, he moves on to the section titled “Kvediu sending Dianira” [Deianira’s greeting] (31, 6). This section begins with the wedding of Peritheus (Pirithous in Ovid) which results in a great battle against the centaurs (31, 7 – 32, 1). This wedding is not mentioned explicitly in Heroides, and most likely comes from Ovid’s mock epic telling of it (Met. XII 210-535). Interestingly, Ovid’s mouthpiece, Nestor, intentionally leaves out any mention of his enemy, Hercules, while telling the story and only admits his presence at the battle when one of Hercules’s sons, Tlepolemus, complains. The saga’s version of the wedding has Hercules restored; after all, Hercules did not kill the β redactor’s family, so the reason for leaving him out of the story is gone. The saga’s account is summary, and the name of the centaur who starts the fight, Eurytus, has been changed to Moniaus. An unexplained character called Lampidas is said to give aid to the centaurs as if he were a counter to Hercules siding with Peritheus, though an insufficient counter it seems as “fell þar mesti hluti lids af Centauro firir Erkule” [There fell the greatest part of the centaur host before Hercules] (31, 12 – 32, 1).

Deianira is first mentioned indirectly as accompanying Hercules at the wedding: “þar med konu hans med þeim var Alcides” [With them Hercules was there with his wife] (31, 8). Of course, this fact is not mentioned by Nestor in Met. XII. Thus the β redactor has invented her presence and justifies putting Peritheus’s wedding in the “Kvediu sending Dianira” section, not with the rest of Hercules’s labors. The β redactor makes brief mention of the other two adventures of Hercules which involve Deianira: the fight with Achelous for Deianira’s hand and the slaying of Nessus to protect Deianira from rape (32, 1-6). Both of these antagonists’ names come into the saga without any

77 Alcides is another name for Hercules.
change in their spelling, suggesting that the β redactor may have pulled them straight from his copy of *Heroides*, but the details of their fights are not given as they are in *Her.* IX 138-142. Hercules is not said to have broken Achelous’s horns off, nor to have shot Nessus with his poison arrows. The former is an unimportant detail; the latter is essential to classical legend as it is Nessus’ blood which eventually kills Hercules. However, as mentioned above, Deianira does not cause Hercules’s death in the saga, and so to add the detail of the shirt poisoned in Nessus’ blood would be nonsensical, a dead end which the β redactor did not intend to use.

Immediately after these two fights, the β redactor says of Hercules, “Enn síðan let hann hana lausa oc tok eina bonda dottr ser til conu” [Yet afterwards he let her go and took a householder’s daughter for his wife] (32, 6-7). This act of betrayal prompts Deianira’s letter. In TSβ she closely follows her Ovidian counterpart in rhetoric. Her general technique in both works is to compare Hercules’s former rugged glory to his current soft indolence, e.g.:

And Ovid:

Vidit in Herculeo suspensa monilia collo
Illo, cui caelum sarcina parva fuit. (*Her.* IX 57-58)

[(Meander) saw necklaces hung on Herculean neck, on that neck for which the sky was little burden.]
This sort of reproach is usually accompanied by Deianira asking Hercules to imagine what his defeated opponents would think of him now, e.g.:

oc ecki mundi Atlanus nu kenna pik. (33, 4-5)

[and Atlas would not recognize you now.]

And Ovid:

Detrahat Antaeus duro redimicula collo,
Ne pigeat molli subcubuisse viro! (Her. IX 71-72)

[Antaeus would pull the feminine necklaces from your rough neck lest he be disgusted to have been laid out by a soft man!]

However closely the rhetoric of Ovid’s Deianira is mirrored by her counterpart in the saga, little overlap exists between the two letters in the specific labors of Hercules that she references. The letters both mention only the killing of Geryon and the chaining of Cerberus among all of Hercules’s labors. The wrestling of Eridem in the saga may be a reference to the wrestling of Antaeus, but it is hardly certain. Hercules’s adventure in Hades with Theseus and Orpheus’s unrelated quest to Hades somehow have been combined in the saga so that Hercules accompanies Orpheus to the underworld and Theseus is forgotten. The Gorgonium beast that “framan var sem leo enn i midiu sem geit enn flugdreki aptr” [was like a lion in front, yet like a goat in the middle, and yet like a flying-dragon in the back] (34, 9-10) is unidentifiable in the classical sources, as mentioned before. It has already been shown, however, that the β redactor likely had a myriad of direct or indirect sources for Hercules’s labors. Any manly labors would work for Deianira’s style of reproach. The specific labor is not important, but the contrast between Hercules’s former vigor and his current indolence and effeminacy is.
The letters of Deianira both begin with a reference to unrest in Hercules’s conquered territories:

Mart kemr vid um þitt rad þat er firir litlue mundi ecki likligt þickia. (32, 8-9)

[Much comes against your authority which a little earlier would not have seemed likely.]

And Ovid:

Gratulor Oechaliam titulis accedere nostris,
Victorem victae subcubuisse queror. (Her. IX 1-2)

[I congratulate you on adding Oechalia to your titles. I lament that the conqueror has surrendered to the conquered.]

The “victae” of Her. IX 2 is an oblique reference to Iole of Oechalia, the woman with whom Hercules has taken up at the time of the letter. There are many references to Hercules’s other lovers besides Iole in Her. IX, but most of all to Omphale, who is the one responsible for most of Hercules’s effeminate behavior such as dressing in women’s clothes and doing women’s work (Her. IX 54-84, 101-118). However, Her. IX never mentions Omphale by name, and never makes clear that she is a different person from Iole. Indeed, when Deianira switches at Her. IX 119 from complaining about Omphale to complaining about Iole, there is nothing to indicate that she has changed which woman she is talking about. It is only clear because of what is known about Omphale from other sources of Herculean legend that Omphale is a different person from Iole.

The saga writer does not draw a distinction between the two women, as Eldevik notes:
The Old Norse author has seized upon this past incident [Omphale’s domination of Hercules] and made it the main focus of Deianira’s present complaint, completely dropping all references to Hercules’ new mistress Iole—as though Ovid’s letter had been complaining of only one rival lover all along. The writer of Trójumanna saga has either conflated the characters of Iole and Omphale by mistake, or—more likely in my opinion—has deliberately chosen to concentrate on the Omphale incident and cut out the other material.\textsuperscript{78}

In a sense, Ovid’s letter does complain of only one rival lover, as the letter contains incomplete information on the situation and there is nothing to differentiate Iole from Omphale. The saga writer did not conflate the lovers by mistake as there is not enough information about which to be mistaken.

However, Eldevik’s larger point is correct: the saga writer focuses on the effeminacy of Hercules himself. There is no reference in TSβ to either Hercules’s mistress (Omphale) wearing his clothing (Her. IX 101-118) or to his mistress (Iole) processing triumphantly through town (Her. IX 119-130). Hercules’s wearing of jewelry and women’s clothes (Her. IX 54-72) and his spinning of wool (Her. IX 73-84) form the heart of Deianira’s reproaches in TSβ. Most of the details of Hercules’s humiliation in Her. IX are easily recognizable in the saga, yet the β redactor shows some originality on this subject. Eldevik says of this:

Ovid says that Hercules held the wool-basket and feared his mistress’s threats [Her. IX 73-74] but it is entirely the saga writer’s own idea to state that if Hercules does not comb well, his mistress strikes him with her

\textsuperscript{78} Eldevik, “Women’s Voices,” 59.
spindle-tail. The substitution of such concrete, homely details for Ovid’s vague and oblique allusions is characteristic of the Old Norse writer’s approach.\textsuperscript{79}

The two passages which Eldevik is comparing are:

\begin{quote}
En ef þu greidir ecki duganda þa lystr hon þik med snældu hala sinum.
\end{quote}

(33, 1-2)

[And if you do not comb helping (her) then she strikes you with her distaff tail.]

And:

\begin{quote}
Inter Ioniacas calathum tenuisse puellas
Diceris et dominae pertimuisses minas. (\textit{Her.} IX 73-74)
[You are said to have held the wicker basket among Ionian girls and to have become afraid of your mistress’s threats.]
\end{quote}

In fact, \textit{Her.} IX has lines of dubious authenticity which \textit{do} give the impression of Hercules’s mistress beating him:

\begin{quote}
Crederis infelix scuticae tremefactus habenis
Ante pedes dominæ . . . (\textit{Her.} IX 81-82)
[You are believed unlucky having been caused to tremble for the thongs of the strap before the feet of your mistress.]
\end{quote}

The β redactor may or may not have had these lines to work with. At any rate, it is not a great jump of imagination from Hercules being threatened by his mistress to his mistress beating him.

\footnote{79} Eldevik, “Women’s Voices,” 59.
The more remarkable addition to Hercules’s humiliations (which Eldevik also notes⁸⁰) is Deianira’s repeated reproaches for his eating of fine foods and drinking of wine.

Oc þat er mer sagt at þu drekr vin bædi um nætr oc daga oc etr pipradar krasir hæns oc pafugla. (33, 5-6)

[And it is said to me that you drink wine both nights and days and eat peppered dainty hens and peafowls.]

Ecki hafdir þu þa vin druckit . . . (33, 7-8)

[You had not then drunk wine . . .]

þo hafder þu þa ecki vin druckit ne kras etit oc ecki I karlatz klædum gengit oc eigi bundit gull á hálz þier sem þeir menn er inni sittia i dryckiú stofum. (34, 2-4)

[Yet you had not drunk wine then, nor dainties eaten, and not gone about in scarlet clothes, and not bound gold around your neck like those men who sit inside in drinking rooms.]

Recall from chapter one that Medea attributes Jason’s abandonment of her possibly to wine (18, 14-16). It seems the saga writer (or at least the women he writes) has a special distaste for drunkenness, specifically drunkenness from wine. Deianira clearly considers drinking wine and eating fine foods in excess as equally bad behavior for a man as wearing jewelry and carding wool.

The passage TSβ 34, 2-4, above, is a summary of all that Deianira finds lacking in her husband, for it is after this that she first says she will kill herself.

⁸⁰Eldevik, “Women’s Voices,” 60.
Ecki þarf ek um at tala. min forlog munu ganga sem minna frænda. fadír minn va sikk med sverdi. Enn brœdr miner vaguz sealfer. Systr minar drucknadu. *Impia quid dubitas Deianira mori* (34, 4-7)

[I do not need to talk around it. My fate will go as that of my kinsmen. My father slew himself with a sword. And my brothers killed themselves. My sisters drowned. *Faithless Deianira, why do you hesitate to die?*]

This declaration that Deianira will follow the example of her family is a rough adaptation of *Her.* IX 151-157 where she lays out a brief history of her family, hardly understandable for anyone unfamiliar with that history beforehand. Ovid’s style is so oblique in this section that it is not surprising the β redactor should invent a new and more fitting family history for her. In Ovid only her mother was an actual suicide: “Exegit ferrum sua per praecordia mater” [(Deianira’s) mother drove a sword through her vitals] (157). Yet, the saga has her father killing himself with a sword and no mention of her mother. I am at a loss to explain this difference except to suggest a misreading of *pater* for *mater.* The saga writer has no qualms about depicting female suicide, for Deianira is about to do just that.

Her declaration of suicidal intent comes in the middle of her letter in the saga, not at the end as in Ovid. Her suicide comes not because she has gotten news that the shirt she sent Hercules, having been poisoned in Nessus’s blood, is killing her husband, but purely because of the shame she feels for her husband. Still, the motif of the bloody shirt is not lost in the saga. The β redactor cleverly adapts the motif so that now Deianira intends to send Hercules her own shirt, which will be bloody after her suicide.

*Nu sendir ek þier einn kirtil rodin i blodi minu.* (34, 7-8)
[Now I send to you a shirt reddened in my blood.]

Compare:

Inlita Nesseo misi tibi texta veneno. (Her. IX 163)

[I sent you the clothing smeared with Nessus’s poison.]

In another touch unique to the saga, Deianira offers the shirt to Hercules in exchange for his sending their son to her: “Nu send hingat son ockran at pat fari at skipadu at hann byrgi augu min oc veiti mer abiargir” [Now send our son hither so it may proceed according to the arranged terms, so that he may close my eyes and do his duty to me] (35, 4-6). This leaves a powerful, emotional image in the reader’s mind of Deianira dying alone, her body waiting in a pool of blood for her son to bury her. Of course, logically there must be someone with her by whom she will send the letter and shirt to Hercules, but the image is nonetheless striking. It is not the last time we shall see an original, pathos-inducing stroke invented for Deianira’s letter by the β redactor.

As mentioned above, Deianira’s confession of her suicide comes in the middle of the letter in TSβ. As Deianira herself says, there is no reason to delay. She has formed the resolve even before taking up the pen. It is the sheer weight of the shame of her husband’s fall from manly vigor, not to mention the shame of his infidelity, that kills her. How different is Ovid’s Deianira who bears all of Hercules’s infidelities and humiliations. Indeed, Omphale’s humiliations of Hercules, which form a sizable part of the letter, are all in the classical Deianira’s past, and she has already borne whatever shame she felt on behalf of her husband without killing herself. Her suicide is caused by the simpler reason that she killed the husband whom she still loved even after all that he had put her through.
However, it would be a mistake to think that Deianira does not still love Hercules in TSβ, or at least still love the man he was. In the second half of the letter, the saga writer adds a new artistic detail to move the reader just as Deianira intends it to move Hercules. It is not original, but an adaptation of an effect that Ovid uses elsewhere in *Heroides*, though not in *Her.* IX.

Veit ek þat sagde hon. þo at nockur kleima se à þessu riti at þu munt þo radit geta oc velldr þui mikill gratr oc morg tår er ek fellir firir þinar sakir.

(34, 10-12)

[“I know,” she said, “even if some blots are on this writing that you will still be able to read it. And the great weeping and many tears which I let fall for your sake cause this.”]

Chapter one has established that the saga writer was very familiar with *Heroides*, so it is no surprise to find him adapting yet another touch of narrative from an unrelated letter to his purpose. Ovid uses this exact effect twice:

*Quascumque aspicies, lacrimae fecere lituras:*

*Sed tamen et lacrimae pondera vocis habent. (Her. III 3-4; Briseis Achilli)*

[Whatever blots you will observe will have been made by tears: but, nevertheless, tears also have the weight of utterance.]

And:

*Scribimus, et lacrimis oculi rorantur obortis:*

*Adspice, quam sit in hoc multa litura loco! (Her. XV 97-98; Sappho Phaoni)*
[I am writing and my eyes are dripping with rising tears: look how many
blots there are in this place!]

And Ovid uses the effect once with blood instead of tears:

Siqua tamen caecis errabunt scripta lituris,
Oblitus a dominae caede libellus erit (Her. XI 1-2; Canace Macareo)

[If any of my writing goes astray with dark blots, the letter will have been
bedaubed by the slaughter of your mistress.]

It is remarkable that all three of these passages hold elements expressed in TSβ 34, 10-12.
The β redactor did not so much copy any of these passages as learn Ovid’s method and
implement it in his own original passage. Note also that the saga writer briefly breaks the
first person narration of Deianira’s letter in the above passage. This is the only time he
does so in any of the letters. The cause must be the meta-literary effect he is
implementing. He is writing of words being blurred by tears, but obviously his own
words are not blurred, so he steps out of Deianira’s voice for a moment to remind the
reader that he is only copying down what she herself wrote.

By adding this detail to Deianira’s letter, along with the request for her son’s
return to her, the saga writer makes her a more pitiable and sympathetic heroine than
Medea, who never expresses her grief with such weight in her letter. Yet, Deianira is not
the woman of action that Medea is. Both the heroines have been abandoned by their
unfaithful husbands for a new woman, but the manner in which their men behave
afterwards is quite different. Jason is full of swagger and braggadocio (19, 9-12). He
perpetrates the abandonment itself in order to further his ambition for conquest (19, 4-5).
Hercules, on the other hand, has no ambition but to please his mistress and be
comfortable. Though Hercules is a much greater hero than Jason to start out, Jason remains the steadfast opportunist throughout his tale, while Hercules falls as far below Jason as he started above him on the heroic scale. This is why Deianira takes action to silence her shame while the more able Medea leaves her revenge to her sons. Both heroines have the shame and heartbreak of an unfaithful husband weighing down on them, only Deianira has the shame of an effeminate husband, a shame which she must feel both for herself and for the husband who has lost his own sense of honor.

Hercules’s effeminacy is more important in the saga than in Ovid not because Deianira spends more time on it in her letter (it is the focus of the majority of the classical letter as well) but because it is the cause of her suicide. Eldevik is correct in saying that the focus on Hercules’s effeminacy is “significant for what it shows about medieval Scandinavian attitudes toward gender differences.” That Icelanders had a particular abhorrence of effeminate men is evident in the Icelandic laws about cross-dressing, which are used as grounds for divorce for both a man or woman in Laxdæla saga.

Therein both Thorvald and Aud are divorced by their respective spouses (Gudrun and Thord) on the charge of cross-dressing, though Thorvald is tricked into it, and Aud only certainly cross-dresses as part of her revenge against her husband after being divorced.

---

82 Grágás: Konungsþók: Genoptrykt efter Vilhjalmur Finsens udgave 1852 (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1974) 47, 203-204; chs. 155, 254. Ch. 155: “Ef konor geraz sva af siða at þær gangu ikarlþóum eða hvergni carla sið er þær hafa fyrir bæltne sacir oc sva carlar þeir er kuena sið hafa huerne veg er þat er. þa varðar þat fiorbaugs garð. huarom sem þat gerâ.” [If women become so deviant that they go dressed in men’s clothing or whatever fashion of men they wear for the sake of change, and also men who wear the fashion of women, whatever sort that is, then that warrants lesser outlawry for whoever does it.]
83 Laxdæla saga, 93-100; ch. 34-35. Note that there is no extant Icelandic law which specifically gives cross-dressing as a justification for divorce (see footnote 3, page 94 of the above edition of this saga.) However, it would likely have been considered so as the penalty for it given in Grágás is lesser outlawry. As a spouse being outlawed would be a cause of contention for a couple, so cross-dressing would be a legitimate cause for divorce as described by the laws found in Grágás: Stadgarhólsþók: Genoptrykt efter Vilhjalmur Finsens udgave 1879 (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1974) 171, 204; chs. 137, 171. Ch.
Hercules goes much further than either of them and cross-dresses willingly after starting out as the essential man.

Preben Meulengracht Sørensen has examined the concept of effeminate men in the medieval north in his book, “The Unmanly Man.” There he says:

The charge of wearing women’s clothes, of performing women’s work or being a woman or a female animal evoked the whole complex of ideas on cowardice and effeminacy. The slander did not require that women or female activities were held in contempt as such, of course no more than was a woman’s sexual role or her maternal capacity. The female role was ignominious only when it was assigned to a man.⁸⁴

His study is primarily concerned with accusations of homosexuality and effeminacy made against men as attacks on their honor regardless of whether such accusations had any basis in reality. In the case of the saga, the accusation against Hercules of effeminacy, of cross-dressing and doing women’s work, is certainly true. Passive homosexuality and effeminacy in a man went hand in hand as homosexuality was disgraceful specifically when a man took on the aspect of a woman in the act.

Meulengracht Sørensen says, “In ancient Icelandic consciousness, the idea of passive homosexuality was so closely linked with notions of immorality in general that the sexual sense could serve to express the moral sense.”⁸⁵ Hercules is not accused of

---

¹³⁷: “Ef karl maðr velldr scíлинаnim. þa a hon heimting til mundar sins oc heiman fylgjo.” [If a husband gives cause for a separation, then she (his wife) has claim to her bride-price and dowry.] Ch. 171: “Þar er hliu verða eigi samhuga. þa er byscopi rëtt at lofa kononi fiar heimtinggar sinar allar undan boanda sinom. þott hann gér eigi lógscílað þeirra ef honom þickia for urtir til þes.” [Where a man and wife are not of one mind, then a bishop has the right to allow the woman all her claims of property from her husband if there seems to him a cause for forfeiture in that, even if he (the bishop) does not legally divorce them.]


⁸⁵ Meulengracht Sørensen, 20.
homosexuality in the literal sense, but of effeminacy which amounts to almost the same thing. Deianira sees him not only as sexually deviant but as morally bankrupt as well.

The β redactor, who knew that Deianira must die, decided that this was sufficient reason for her suicide.

However, the reason was not merely sufficient. It is clear that the saga writer preferred his rationale for Deianira’s suicide over the classical version. First, there is no way to misinterpret the ending of *Her. IX*. Deianira lays out the exact mechanism of Hercules’s death in lines 161-163:

\[ \text{Nessus, ut est avidum percussus harundine pectus,} \]
\[ \text{‘Hic’ dixit ‘vires sanguis amoris habet.’} \]
\[ \text{Inlita Nesseo misi tibi textra veneno.} \]
\[ \text{[Nessus, as he was struck in his greedy breast by the shaft, said, “This blood has the power of love.” I sent to you the clothing smeared with Nessus’s poison.]} \]

It is clear that this accidental murder is the reason for her suicide in the poem.

Second, we know that the β redactor read the above lines. The refrain of “Impia quid dubitas Deianira mori?” [Faithless Deianira, why do you hesitate to die?] is repeated four times in *Her. IX* (146, 152, 158, 164), just as it is repeated four times in the saga in Latin, never in Old Norse (34, 7; 34, 12; 35, 4; 35, 6-7). The β redactor clearly emulated Ovid and placed the refrain at four regular intervals after the point where Deianira announces her intent to commit suicide. This is the only use of a refrain in *Heroïdes*, and the only use of Latin in the Old Norse letters. Eldevik notes, “The use of Latin quotations is a technique that the Beta redactor eschews elsewhere in his letters—I think,
wisely. However, the β redactor did not quote the Latin words for their meaning, but for their power, as if they were a prayer. Why Ovid chose to use the refrain in *Her.* IX is not important for the current discussion. The saga writer noticed the unusual use of the refrain and inserted the exact same suicidal mantra into his letter. Because the last of the refrains in *Her.* IX comes on line 164, immediately after the explanation of how the bloody shirt was poisoned, we know the saga writer certainly read that explanation of the tragedy, rejected it, and consciously chose to focus on Deianira’s shame for her husband as the motive for suicide.

After the last recital of the refrain the tones of the two letters diverge sharply, each following the artistic plan of their respective authors. While Ovid’s letter ends with sad farewells made by a woman broken by guilt, in the saga Deianira’s letter ends practically as she thrusts herself upon the sword:

Se nu segir ek þier þo at þu villir ecki vita at nu bregd ek svedinu er eptir
lå efzta sinni er mit skilldumz ok nu snyr ek upp blodreflinum en nidr
hiltunum. (35, 7-9)

[See now, I say to you though you wish not to know, that now I draw the sword which remained behind the last time when you parted from me, and now I turn up the sword-point and down the hilts.]

Though many of Ovid’s heroines end their letters with warnings of their imminent suicides, some even with swords in hand, none of them is the model for Deianira here. As far as I can determine, this particular description of the positioning of the sword is original. However, the first clause in the sentence bears a remarkable resemblance to *Her.* IX 121-124:

86 Eldevik, “Women’s Voices,” 60.
Ante meos oculos adducitur advena paelex,
Nec mihi, quae patior, dissimulare licet!
Non sinis averti: mediam captiva per urbem
Invitis oculis aspicienda venit.

[The foreign mistress is brought before my eyes, and I may not conceal how I suffer! You do not permit me to turn away: through the midst of the city the captive comes, having to be seen by unwilling eyes.]

Here in Ovid, Hercules sends Iole, his new mistress, ahead of him, parading through the city, forcing Deianira to see something which she does not wish to see. The ß redactor does not relate this part of Deianira’s letter in his version. Yet, he has adapted this passage most interestingly and reversed the roles. Now, Deianira forces Hercules to see (in his mind’s eye) his wife impale herself on one of his swords.

To this point in the saga, Deianira has taken no active part in Hercules’s adventures. She is at the wedding of Pirithous, but not mentioned in the fighting; she is taken as a trophy from Achelous; and she is rescued from Nessus. Her two acts in the saga are to write her letter and kill herself. The passivity of Deianira during her husband’s former activities is a quality the saga writer preserved from Ovid. Unlike in Ovid, her last act is not one of penitence but one of aggression. By her final act, Deianira takes a dominant position in her relationship with her husband, one which her Ovidian counterpart does not approach and would not hope to achieve.

For instance, Deianira’s farewell in Ovid could not contrast more sharply with the end of the saga’s letter:

iamque vale, seniorque pater germanaque Gorge,
Et patria et patriae frater adempte tuae,
Et tu lux oculis hodierna novissima nostris,
Virque (sed o possis!) et puer Hylle, vale! (Her. IX 165-169)
[And now farewell, very old father and my sister, Gorge, and homeland, and brother taken from your homeland, and you, newest daylight of my eyes, and my husband (if only you were able to!) and my boy, Hyllus, farewell!]

Pitiful sadness for what she has done to her husband overwhelms this Deianira as she says her goodbyes. She has resigned herself to a just punishment for the murder of her husband. The Deianira of TSβ says no farewell, for she does not any longer wish her husband well.

Thus, we see again that the saga writer has fundamentally changed the heroine he found in Heroides. Whereas with Medea there is doubt as to whether or not the saga writer knew the classical ending of her sons' murder, this time there can be no doubt that he intentionally changed the reason for Deianira’s suicide. However, he did not simply change her into the same type of woman as his Medea. Deianira cannot be said to share many qualities with Medea. Where Medea performs great feats of magic in the quest for the Golden Fleece, Deianira accomplishes nothing but her own death. Deianira has no confidence in her own ability to get revenge on Hercules except through her suicide, where Medea was confident in the future victory of her sons over Jason. Deianira weeps openly and complains to her husband about his new mistress knowing how to do nothing but card wool (32, 9-10), where Medea never deigns to mention Jason’s new wife in her complaints. Yet, Deianira does have some pride, and she does share an innate fierceness
with Medea which she demonstrates at the end, achieving a sort of revenge by making her husband see her die in his imagination. Whereas her Ovidian counterpart must have worn a penitential frown, one imagines this Deianira dying with a snarl on her lips.

Why the saga writer has so changed Deianira is an interesting question. Perhaps, the redactor simply felt Ovid’s Deianira to be too pathetic to spend a large section of the saga on her letter, so he changed her, giving her enough of the qualities of a strong Northern heroine in the mold of Brynhild (Völsunga saga), Gudrun (Laxdæla saga), or Hervör (Saga Heiðreks Konungs ins Vitra) for her to elicit some sympathy in his audience. Deianira bears a special resemblance to Brynhild, the valkyrie whose doomed love of Sigurd, the dragon slayer, causes the collapse of the Burgundian court. In the end, Brynhild stabs herself and lays down on Sigurd’s funeral pyre as her husband, Gunnar, looks on, in the same way that Deianira wants Hercules to imagine her dying. Deianira is arguably the weakest of the heroines in Heroïdes, incapable of coping with her larger-than-life, over-masculine husband. Indeed, one of her first complaints in Her. IX is that her husband exceedingly outmatches her (27-32). The Deianira of TSβ does not make this complaint for in the end she does not believe that Hercules does outmatch her. Even though Hercules dominates his section of the saga (just as he dominates the content of this chapter), in the end, Deianira asserts her own will in the fashion of other Norse heroines, for good or ill.

---

87 Gudrun, who has been mentioned already above, has four successive husbands. How she gains and loses them forms the heart of her saga. Hervör is a shield maiden who retrieves the cursed sword Tyrning from her dead father’s revenant and later dies in battle.
CHAPTER III

The Boy and the Man, the Woman and the Wanton

Helen and Paris are more important by far to the story of the Trojan War than the other pairs of lovers considered in this thesis. As such, the episode of Helen's abduction from Greece examined in this chapter is fundamentally different than the previous two episodes. First, because the story of Paris's romancing and abduction of Helen is absolutely integral to the instigation of the Trojan war, as the Medea/Jason and Deianira/Hercules episodes are not, Dares treats the subject of Helen's abduction extensively, whereas he leaves out mention of the other heroines (De Excidio 11-13; chs. 9-11). Second, Helen and Alexander (the name by which Paris is known in the saga) are one of only three pairs of lovers in Heroïdes in which both lovers have a letter. The saga writer interpolated both of their letters in this section of TSβ (46, 5 – 56, 10), and thus, Alexander provides the only male epistolary voice in the saga. Although the letters are modeled on their counterparts in Heroïdes XVI and XVII (Paris Helenae, Helene Paridi), the surrounding text is largely a close translation of Dares, one that differs only slightly from the same section in TSα and as such dates back to the original Trójumanna saga in most of its parts. Third, the story of Helen and Alexander only begins in this section. In contrast to Deianira and Hercules, and Medea and Jason, whose stories begin and end in just a few pages, the story of Helen and Alexander runs through the ten years of the Trojan war and only ends after he has been killed and she returns to Greece with Menelaus. Unlike most of the men in Heroïdes, Paris remains true to Helen to the end, however false and faithless their beginning.
As mentioned in the second chapter of this thesis, Telamon is rewarded with Priam’s sister, Hesione, for his efforts in Hercules’s attack on Troy in both Dares and Trójumanna saga. Priam first sends Antenor to Greece in a diplomatic attempt to retrieve his sister, but this fails and the king of Troy convenes a war council. Priam’s five most important sons make speeches; Alexander, Deiphobus, and Troilus support a war with Greece, Helenus speaks against it, and Hector takes the middle ground. It is decided that Alexander is to lead an army to Greece to demand the return of Hesione, though it is clear from the start that his personal goal is to attain Helen (De Excidio 6-11; chs. 5-8).

The redactor inserts the letters of Helen and Alexander at the point of Alexander’s arrival at Cythera, before he has seen Helen in the temple, that is, between the events corresponding to chapters nine and ten of Dares. The redactor’s job of inserting these letters was not as easy as for Medea and Deianira. Since Dares has nothing to say about either Medea or Deianira, to insert a version of Ovid’s letters into the saga was a simple matter. Because Dares has a great deal to say about Helen and Alexander, much of which does not agree with Ovid’s version of events, interpolating these letters into Dares’s account was problematic. The redactor has rounded off the points of disagreement between Ovid and Dares so that they do not quite create contradictions within the saga.

The redactor made only one very slight change to the direct narrative surrounding the letters outside of his short introduction to the letters. However, the author of the original Trójumanna saga (Tms1) had previously added two important details from Heroïdes into Helen’s abduction scene, one detail taken from Her. XVI-
XVII (Paris Helenae, Helene Paridi) and the other from Her. XX-XXI (Acontius Cydippae, Cydippe Acontio). Like the β redactor but to a lesser extent, the original author had to struggle to avoid potential contradictions caused by the incorporation of Ovidian material.

There are three major inconsistencies between Dares’s and Ovid’s account. First, in Dares, Menelaus has already left his home, Sparta, when his ship crosses the path of Alexander’s fleet. They briefly meet before sailing on, Menelaus to Pylos and Alexander to the island of Cythera (De Excidio 11; ch. 9). Helen too makes her way to Cythera and meets Alexander for the first time in the temple of Diana and Apollo, and there Alexander abducts her (De Excidio 12; ch. 10). In Ovid, Paris comes to Menelaus’s home in Sparta and spends some time there as a guest before Menelaus leaves on a journey to Crete, giving Paris a chance to abduct Helen (Her. XVI 299-304).

The second inconsistency stems from the information found in the content of Paris’s letter in Ovid regarding Hermione, Helen’s daughter by Menelaus (Her. XVI 255-256). She is said to be at home with Helen and Menelaus while Paris is visiting. In Dares she is said to be away with her uncles, Castor and Pollux, visiting her aunt, Clytemnestra, in Argos (De Excidio 11-12; ch. 9). Thus, Alexander could not have met her as he does in Ovid.

The third inconsistency arises from the facts of the first inconsistency. Since Alexander meets Helen for the first time in the temple on Cythera and abducts her immediately afterwards in Dares, Alexander could not have written a letter to Helen praising her beauty. He had not seen her before; and she was at hand afterwards making a letter unnecessary. There is no room for the palace intrigue which bred the letter in
Ovid. Thus, besides the two authors’ disagreement merely on timing and place, Paris’s very letter could not have logically existed if Dares’s course of events were taken to be correct.

It may be that the original author of Tms1 spotted these inconsistencies between his sources and for that reason avoided using Ovid’s letters to any greater extent. The only use of *Her. XVI-XVII* common to all versions of the saga, and the first of the two times the original author used *Heroïdes* in this episode, comes when Menelaus meets Alexander at sea on his way to Pylos. (In all three versions of the saga Menelaus is going to Pylos as in Dares, not to Crete as in Ovid.) The three versions of the saga all have Menelaus courteously and naively inviting Alexander to spend time at his home where Helen will take care of him:

> Menelaus bauð honum til sin oc kuad drottningu vel mundu fagna honom.
> Kuad honom heimillt þar at hafa slikt sem hann vildi. Alexandr tok blidliga hans ordum. En brosti þó í hug ser er hann vissi hvat undir bio med honom. (TSβ 47, 17 – 48, 3)

[Menelaus invited him to his home and said that the queen would welcome him well. He said to him that he had a right there to such as he wanted. Alexander accepted his words graciously, but he smiled nevertheless in his heart since he knew what was hidden in him.]

As Louis-Jensen points out, this passage probably has as its ultimate source *Her. XVI* 299-304:

> Sed tibi et hoc suadet rebus, non voce maritus,
> Neve sui furtis hospitis obstet, abest.

---

Non habuit tempus, quo Cresia regna videret,

Aptius: (O mira calliditate virum!)

‘Res et ut Idaei mando tibi’ dixit iturus

‘Curam pro nobis hospitis, uxor, agas.’

[But even your husband urges this for you with deeds, if not with his voice, and he does not resist the thefts of his guest; he leaves. He did not have a better time to see the Cretan kingdom? (Oh, a husband with marvelous cunning!) “Also, I bid you to look after the affairs and the care of the Idaean guest for us, wife,” he said, about to go.]

Here Paris mocks the trust that Menelaus put in him before his departure for Crete, even as the saga’s Alexander smiles insincerely as he accepts Menelaus’s invitation.

Why the original author felt that this detail but no other details from this letter were important enough to include in the saga is an interesting question. Including Menelaus’s invitation certainly made his job harder for him. In Dares and in the saga, Alexander does not reach Helen’s home after landing in Greece. Both TSβ and TSH follow Dares by having Alexander land on the island of Cythera (Ceream in the saga) where there is a great temple by the sea in which he meets Helen. TSα changes the setting to the island of Bartram, which Eldevik has identified as Sparta. Though TSα agrees with Heroides, and TSβ and TSH agree with Dares, the saga versions do actually agree in all but the name of the island. Whether Cythera or Sparta, the island is called the kingdom of Menelaus (TSβ 48, 20; TSα 17, 34).

In the β redaction Helen comes to the great temple by the sea partially because “var henne oc sagt at Alexandr mundi hana heim sækia ef ei yrði adr þeira fundr” [it was

said to her that Alexander would visit her at home if their meeting should not take place earlier] (TSβ 52, 4-5). Eldevik notes the awkwardness of this phrase as it occurs in TSα, "A rather puzzling statement – but presumably Menelaus had sent Helen a message to that effect after his meeting with Alexander, and the message was faster in arriving than the Trojan visitors."90 This explanation of the mechanics of the situation is no doubt correct, but the reason for the addition of this phrase to the saga must be the insertion of Menelaus's earlier invitation. After the reader hears Menelaus invite Alexander to stay at his home the expectation is that Alexander will go to Menelaus's home. The author acknowledges the reader's expectation with the phrase from TSβ 52, 4-5, but makes Helen come to meet Alexander in the temple by the sea. In addition to bringing the saga back into agreement with Dares's account, this keeps the narrative moving steadily towards Helen's abduction. If Alexander had visited Helen at her home as he does in Ovid, the author would then have had to either contrive a reason for the action of the saga to move to the temple by the sea, or move the site of the abduction to Helen's home. The former option would have slowed the plot to a crawl even if it could be done gracefully, and the latter option would have forced the author to invent an abduction scene for which there is no description in Her. XVI-XVII.

Thus, it would certainly have been easier for the original author to leave out Menelaus's invitation to Alexander altogether. Yet the original author very much wanted the invitation in the saga because it shows Alexander's great perfidy. Alexander's character is by no means rehabilitated in the saga from its classical depiction; he remains faithless and without honor. Not only does he instigate the Trojan war to gratify his own vanity and lust, he leads the deception, ambush, assassination, and attempted defilement

90 Eldevik, "The Dares Phrygius Version of Trójumanna saga," 159.
of Achilles (TSβ 200, 8 – 201, 17).\textsuperscript{91} The saga writer tells these stories fully expecting Alexander’s villainy to be recognized. Adding Menelaus’s invitation is the first step in establishing Alexander’s bad character.

When the original author uses \textit{Heroides} a second time, he does so again to demonstrate Alexander’s dishonesty. Most interestingly, he uses an unrelated plot device from \textit{Her.} XX-XXI and replaces Acontius and Cydippe with Alexander and Helen. This is exactly the same technique that we have already seen the β redactor use multiple times with Medea/Jason and Deianira/Hercules; i.e., the author lifts an unrelated element from elsewhere in \textit{Heroides} and inserts it into the saga. One suspects that the β redactor may have learned this technique by his observation of this particular passage in the original \textit{Trójumanna saga}, or even that the β redactor is the same person as the original author, only working later on a second draft of his saga.

After the future lovers meet for the first time in the temple, Alexander employs the same ruse in an attempt to entrap Helen that Acontius uses to force Cydippe to marry him. In the saga, Alexander throws a golden apple into Helen’s lap on which is inscribed, “Ek suer þess vid godin at ek skal Alexandro gipt vera oc hans drottning skal ek vera hedan ifra” [I swear by the gods that I shall be married to Alexander and I shall be his queen from here on] (TSβ 53, 4-6). Helen unwittingly reads the inscription out loud in the temple, thus swearing to the gods that she will marry Alexander. She immediately denies the legitimacy of such an oath, but Alexander asserts its binding power:

\begin{quote}
Alexandr kuad þetta vordit hafa at vilia oc tilstilli gudanna sealfra er ecki hlyddi imoti at gera æda mæla. oc sagdi hana firir þeira reidi verda
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{91} A close translation of \textit{De Excidio}, 40-42; ch. 34.
Alexander said this had come to pass by the will and guidance of the gods themselves whom it was not allowed to act or speak against, and he said that she would come under their wrath if she should violate those laws and holy oaths. He said she would then have seen the last day of her prosperities.]

Helen remains adamant in her refusal of the oath, as we shall shortly see, and Alexander immediately turns to his last resort and orders his men to abduct her.

Wilhelm Greif was the first to note that Alexander borrows Acontius’s trick,92 and Louis-Jensen points it out.93 Eldevik analyzes the golden apple passage in detail, and says about the original author’s reason for using it:

This general similarity of circumstances [between the sets of lovers], coupled with the coincidence that both of the lovers’ meetings take place in a temple of Diana, evidently struck the saga-man so forcibly that he was moved to include additional details from the legend of Acontius and Cydippe in his account of Alexander’s courtship of Helen.94

And further on the effect of including this passage in TSα she says:

Alexander is revealed as a devious rogue, just the sort of person who later would willingly collaborate in Hecuba’s assassination scheme [against Achilles]. Helen, however, is effectively exonerated of blame for her

92 Wilhelm Greif, Die mittelalterlichen Bearbeitungen der Trojanersage (Marburg: N. G. Elwert, 1886), 152.
93 Introduction, Trójumanna saga: The Dares Phrygius Version, xxxvi.
adulterous conduct; she has been subjected to a double coercion, through trickery as well as through brute force, and her own desires play no part in the matter.\textsuperscript{95}

Eldevik points out a phrase which is contained in all three versions of the saga: “toku ḫaḫan i brott Helenam naudga” [(they) took Helen away from there against her will] (TSβ 54, 6-7). This is in direct contradiction to Dares who says, “Helenam non invitam eripiunt” [They take away a not unwilling Helen] (De Excidio 12; ch. 10). Since the abduction was against Helen’s will, she clearly did not accept Alexander’s arguments about the validity of the oath. Cydippe, in the same situation except that Acontius does not have an army at his command, likewise resists the oath for some time before she is forced to give in to it by the sickness it induces. Whether the original author intended Helen’s oath to have any real effect on her cannot be determined because Alexander gives it no time to work. Apparently, he himself had no faith in the oath’s binding power.

That Alexander uses a golden apple in the saga is an interesting point that bears further examination. Acontius’s apple is simply a natural apple picked from a tree and not a golden one as in the saga (Her. XX 9-10).\textsuperscript{96} As Eldevik shows, there is some small justification in Her. XX for the golden apple in the saga.\textsuperscript{97} Acontius says that once Cydippe marries him:

\begin{quote}
Aurea ponetur mali felicis imago,
Causaque versiculis scripta duobus erit:
‘Effigie pomi testatur Acontius huius,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{95} Eldevik, “The Dares Phrygius Version of Trójumanna saga,” 162.
\textsuperscript{96} Eldevik points out that the apple is said to be white as a bloodless face (Her. XXI 215-217). Eldevik, “The Dares Phrygius Version of Trójumanna saga,” 163.
\textsuperscript{97} Eldevik, “The Dares Phrygius Version of Trójumanna saga,” 163.
Quae fuerint in eo scripta, fuisse rata.' (237-240)

[The golden image of the happy apple will be set, and the cause will have been written in two verses: "Acontius bears witness by the image of this fruit that what things were written on it have been fulfilled."]

Acontius promises to make a golden image of the apple by which he has achieved his desire, but the original fruit is still only a natural apple.

As mentioned above, Alexander’s apple ruse is common to all versions of the saga and must have been in Tms1. We have seen in the previous chapters that the β redactor worked carefully with a copy of Heroides on hand, and that the very few mistakes he may have made in understanding the poems are explicable. It is possible that the original author of Tms1 may have misinterpreted or misremembered Her. XX 237-240 and turned Alexander’s apple to gold by mistake, but it does not seem likely as both men (if two men they are) seem to have worked with similar levels of care.

Eldevik believes that, “Given the mythological associations of golden apples in both Norse and classical tradition, it is hardly likely that the insertion of the word gullepli in [TSα] is just meaningless ornamentation.” A golden apple must make the modern reader recall the apple of classical myth which is thrown into the wedding of Peleus and Thetis (parents of Achilles) by the goddess, Discord (Eris) on which is inscribed “for the fairest.” The goddesses fighting over the apple causes the Judgment of Paris which causes the abduction of Helen, which, in turn, causes the Trojan war. The Apple of Discord is itself never mentioned in Heroides. Paris does not mention it in his description of his own Judgment (Her. XVI 53-88). Yet, to say that it is mere

---

99 March, “Judgement of Paris.”
coincidence that Alexander, who dispenses a golden apple to Venus for the promise of Helen in classical myth, uses a golden apple to attempt to win Helen in the saga stretches credulity to the breaking point.

Golden apples appear in several other places in classical myth. Eldevik points out all of the following examples.\(^{100}\) The garden of the Hesperides contains a tree of golden apples, some of which were given to Jupiter and Juno as a wedding gift.\(^{101}\) Also, golden apples from the garden of the Hesperides or from elsewhere were used as distractions by Hippomenes to win a footrace against Atalanta and gain her as his bride.\(^{102}\) There are Norse examples as well. The apples which Skírnir offers for the hand of Gerd are golden,\(^{103}\) and are usually identified with the apples of eternal life Skáldskaparmál describes Idun as possessing,\(^{104}\) though in Skáldskaparmál they are not described as golden. Also often identified with Idun’s apples is the apple of fertility given by the gods to King Rerir in Völsunga saga,\(^{105}\) though it is not described as golden either.

Clearly a golden apple would be an appropriate tool for Alexander to use in an attempt to woo a bride based on the abovementioned myths. But even if the original author of Tmsl was aware of this mythological theme, it still seems most probable that he was familiar with some version of the Judgment of Paris and chose to use the golden apple ruse in order to echo the classical myth. Eldevik suggests that the most likely source in medieval Iceland for an account of the Golden Apple of Discord is the Vatican

---

101 March, “Hesperides.”
102 March, “Atalanta.”
104 Skáldskaparmál, ch. 2.
105 Völsunga saga 78; ch. 1.
Mythographers, either I.208 or II.205.\textsuperscript{106} As discussed in chapter two (p. 62), these are three compilations of classical myth composed between the eighth and thirteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{107} Though they may have been a source for general public knowledge about the Apple of Discord, it does not seem likely that some version of the Vatican Mythographers was on hand for the various redactors for the same reason as discussed in chapter two; i.e., there is a great deal of information in them about Deianira, Medea, Jason and other characters that does not appear in the saga.

After the ruse of the golden apple fails, the plot of the saga follows Dares closely throughout the abduction scene; the only significant difference is that Helen is taken against her will. Alexander tells his men to be ready to steal Helen, Alexander orders the abduction, they take away Helen and some other women, and then they have to fight the local inhabitants who have become aware of the abduction. Clearly, the change in Helen’s will was intentional and the original author desired Helen to be a “high-minded lady” and not an “earthy trollop” as Eldevik says.\textsuperscript{108} If further redactors (assuming that later redactors were not the same person as the original author) noticed that the saga contradicted Dares here, they must have preferred the innocent version of Helen as well since every version of the saga says that she was unwilling.

Helen’s situation in this scene closely resembles Medea’s at the point of her departure from Colchis (17, 9 – 18, 2). In both cases the woman is about to sail from her home (though willingly in Medea’s case), and in each case there is a battle with the local inhabitants. The fact that Medea steals valuables from her father’s home before Jason’s

\textsuperscript{106} Eldevik, “The Dares Phrygius Version of Trójumanna saga,” 333. Note that I.208 “Nuptiae Pelei et Thetidis” and II.205 “Peleus et Thetis” are the chapter numbers and titles from Scriptores Rerum Mythicarum 65, 142.
\textsuperscript{107} Pepin, 5-11.
\textsuperscript{108} Eldevik, “The Dares Phrygius Version of Trójumanna saga,” 162.
attack proves her ignorance of Jason's intention and exonerates her from complicity therein, as discussed in chapter one (p. 51). Helen is completely exonerated from any wrong doing by her words and deeds. Indeed, as evident here and throughout the multiple redactions of the saga there is a general tendency to raise the moral fiber of female characters above that of their classical counterparts.

Having examined the abduction scene in Tms1, we may now turn to an examination of the use the β redactor makes of this foundation for his epistolary purposes. The β redactor was certainly aware of the three aforementioned inconsistencies between Dares' and Ovid's accounts of Helen's abduction. While the original author used only one detail from Her. XVI-XVII and thus avoided major difficulty, the β redactor presents full letters written by Alexander and Helen based very closely on their classical models. By changing a few details in each source he managed to avoid any outright contradictions, though the letters remain intrusive. Furthermore, one can still see the stitches the β redactor made to hold them in their place.

The β redactor resolves the inconsistencies primarily with a slight change to one line which invents at least one previous meeting between Helen and Alexander. Both the α and β redactions contain a mention of letters which passed between Helen and Alexander before they meet at the temple by the sea. Since there is no basis for this exchange of letters in Dares, the original author of the saga certainly put in this mention of it as a reference to the letters he had from Heroides. The passage in TSβ says:

farit hofdu oc ordsendingar i milli þeira. Oc sua hofdu þau seest. (TSβ 47, 9-10)

[And letters had gone between them, and also they had seen each other.]
Compare the equivalent passage from TSα:

hófdu farid nochrar ordsenjiangar j milli þeirra Alex(ándri) og hennar, so þar voru nochr kerleikar á milli ordner (TSα 16, 19-21)

[Certain letters had gone between them, Alexander and her, so there had come about certain intimacies between them.]

Notice the difference between the second halves of each sentence. In TSβ Helen and Alexander have previously seen each other.

The passage is missing in TSH, or it might be possible to say with certainty which sentence is closer to the original. As they stand, the sentence from TSα seems to flow much more naturally. The second half of the β sentence is rather awkward. If they had seen each other before, then why does the saga not tell the circumstances of this sighting, and why does the saga still describe their meeting in the temple as if they were meeting for the first time? “Óc er þau finnaz taka þau tal sin i milli oc litz huarutueggia vel à annat” [And when they meet they begin talking to each other, and each of the two looked positively on the other] (TSβ 52, 7-8). This passage appears in TSα as well with slight variation (17, 23-24), and it ultimately comes from Dares (12; ch. 10). There is little doubt that Helen and Alexander first met in the temple in Tms1.

Still, the β redactor does not create an actual contradiction in his saga by adding “Óc sua hofdu þau seest.” The abovementioned passage, TSβ 52, 7-8, does not explicitly say that the couple had never seen each other before they meet in the temple. If the β redactor’s interpolation of the letters is to make any sense, it is essential that Alexander had seen Helen previously as he spends much of his letter praising her beauty. However artless it is to simply state that, “and also they had seen each other,” like a child telling a
story and suddenly realizing he has left out an important fact until the very moment when it is essential to the plot, the β redactor nevertheless successfully resolves the inconsistencies between Dares and Ovid. Menelaus’s invitation (inserted by the original author) enables Alexander to mock Menelaus to Helen in his letter, and his earlier personal knowledge of Helen’s beauty allows him to praise it throughout the letter, as well as giving him a reason to write the letter in the first place.

The meeting of Helen and Alexander in the temple (TSβ 52, 7-8, above) certainly implies that the future lovers’ original sighting of each other did not result in an actual meeting. However, it is much more likely that they did meet in some fashion as becomes apparent in the examination of how the β redactor resolves the second inconsistency between Ovid and Dares: the disagreement about Hermione’s whereabouts during these events.

Dares states that at the time of Alexander’s visit, “Castor et Pollux ad Clytemestram ierant secum Hermionam neptem suam Helenae filiam adduxerant” [Castor and Pollux had gone to Clytemestra and had taken Hermione, their niece and daughter of Helen with them] (De Excidio 11-12; ch. 9). In Her. XVI, Paris, who is staying in Menelaus’s house, says to Helen, “Oscula si natae dederas, ego protinus illa Hermiones tenero laetus ab ore tuli” [If you had given a kiss to your daughter, I immediately took them from Hermione’s tender mouth] (255-256). The β redactor keeps both facts, at least in part. He says first, “Nu for Menelaus first á fund þeira brædra en þeir voro farner at finna systr sina Clitimestra oc þar med þeim systr dottir þeira Ermoen” [Now Menelaus went first to meet those brothers, but they were gone to visit their sister Clitimestra, and there with them their sister’s daughter, Hermione] (TSβ 48, 3-5). Later,
Alexander says in his letter, "Ok optliga sotta ek sæta kossa at meyunn er à golfinu rann. Eptir þat er hon hafdi þin briost druckit" [And often I would seek sweet kisses from the little girl who ran upon the floor after she had drunk from your breast] (TSβ 49, 14-15). For the moment we shall ignore this rather disturbing image of Alexander and only notice that Alexander does not name Hermione here or anywhere else in his letter as the girl he saw Helen nursing.

Thus, there is no contradiction here about Hermione, though it is hard to imagine Helen nursing any child but her daughter. It certainly seems that Alexander spent time in the same building with Helen and kissed a girl she had been nursing. While it is not essential that Alexander met Helen during these events, it is very likely. The audience must then understand their meeting in the temple (TSβ 52, 7-8) as not their first meeting in the story as told by the β redactor.

After Alexander's people arrive on Cythera and explain to the locals that they are seeking Castor and Pollux, there comes an awkward introduction to the letters of Alexander and Helen, which is of course unique to TSβ.

[Alexander, son of King Priam sent this inscription to the fair and courteous Helen, wife of Menelaus, since he (Menelaus) had gone to Turkland to seek settlements between King Priam and the Greeks over that
discord that was between them and is spoken of before. Alexander had now come into the kingdom of Menelaus and into those lodgings in which he himself was accustomed to sleep.]

There is a great deal of confusion in TSβ about the destination of Menelaus' errand. First, he is said to go to visit Nestor at Pylos (47, 14-15) following Dares (11; ch. 9). On the way he meets Alexander at sea, and sometime after that he goes to meet Castor and Pollux (48, 3-5). And then the above passage says that Menelaus has gone to Turkland (as the Trojan land is called) on essentially the same mission as Alexander, though presumably with purer motives. Since Menelaus could only be going to Troy to pay reparations for the abduction of Hesione, this adds new irony to Alexander’s abduction of Helen from Cythera. However, there is no other mention of this trip of Menelaus’s elsewhere, and it is seemingly soon forgotten. By the end of Helen’s letter, only a little further on (51, 13-14), she says that he is on a trip to collect tribute. Menelaus could, of course, be both collecting tribute and going to Turkland on the same trip, but the saga is very muddled on this point.

There is one other thing of note in the introduction to the letters. There are lodgings by the temple on Cythera in which Alexander is accustomed to sleep. The β redactor intended this statement to be taken with “Oc sua hofdu þau seest” (47, 9-10) as explanation of how Alexander and Helen had seen each other before. Alexander makes reference to the lodgings in his letter: “Um alla mina lidu rann þin fegurd er ek leit þik i þessu sama herbergi sem nu em ek” [Your beauty ran through all my limbs when I looked at you in these same lodgings that I am (in) now] (49, 7-8). Alexander has made this trip
to Cythera before for some reason, stayed in the same lodgings, and at some point seen Helen.

Now, with a picture of the characters of Helen and Alexander gained from the material surrounding the letters, we may more fully examine the letters and see how the redactor uses them to elaborate on these characters, which the original author of Ts1 first established. Helen’s character has shifted dramatically for the better in relation to her depiction in Dares or Ovid, while Alexander is at least as bad a villain in the saga as he is in classical sources.

In TSβ, Alexander’s letter follows its Ovidian model more closely in form and style than Medea’s, Deianira’s, or Helen’s. It is the longest of the four letters at about forty lines over three pages (48-50), just as Her. XVI is the longest of the letters in Heroides with 378 lines. The rhetoric of the letter is the most overwrought of any of the letters as well. For example, Alexander begins with a flourish: “Mikit skilr þina kurteisi æda annara kuenna. oc mikit skilr þik æda bonda þinn” [There is a great difference between your grace and that of other women, and a great difference between you and your husband] (48, 21-22). Though this precise turn of phrase does not appear in Her. XVI, it would fit well in Paris’s mouth. Likewise, Alexander finishes his letter with romantic hyperbole: “eigi ma ek ollu þui male koma à oll þau bokfell sem i heiminum ero er ek villda vid þik tala. oc ecki mundi heimurin þau hafa mega” [I cannot put all that speech I wanted to say to you on all that parchment that is in the world, and the world would not be able to hold it all] (50, 9-11). Again, this passage does not come from Heroides, but the hyperbolic imagery is hardly unique to the saga. The Gospel of John, though not a love letter, ends with a very similar sentiment and may be the source for this
passage: 109 "sunt autem et alia multa quae fecit Jesus quae si scribantur per singula nec ipsum arbitror mundum capere eos qui scribendi sunt libros" [However, there are also many other things which Jesus did which, if each one were written out, I do not think the world itself would hold those books that would be written] (John 21: 25). This is not the only time that Alexander uses biblical passages in his letter, as shall be seen.

The saga’s letter also resembles Ovid’s closely in many other ways. Alexander spends the first part of the letter pointing out how ill matched Helen is to Menelaus (48, 22 – 49, 2). He compares Menelaus to a præll in much the same way that Paris compares him to a rusticus:

Mer littz hann litt af brugdinn þræls yfírlitum. (48, 22-23)
[To me he seems little changed from the appearance of a thrall.]
Pænitet hospitii, cum me spectante lacertos
Imponit collo rusticus iste tuo. (Her. XVI 221-222)
[I am made to regret your hospitality when I see that peasant put his forearms around your neck.]

The word præll is certainly a more negative word that rusticus. Eldevik says of this particular criticism of Alexander’s, “Ovid’s Paris is mild in his disparagement of Menelaus, no doubt to avoid provoking a defensive reaction from Helen, but in the Old Norse text Helen must take great pains to uphold her husband’s overall character in refutation of [Alexander’s] forthright comparison of Menelaus to a thrall.” 110 This is true, but there is something more in the comparisons the two men make, and it is the first

110 Eldevik, “Women’s Voices,” 63-64.
indication of the real difference between the Alexander of the saga and the Paris of
*Heroides*.

Ovid makes Paris refined and cosmopolitan. Each of the letters of *Heroides* has themes drawn from the well-known elements of the classical myths surrounding their fictional author’s life. The core of each letter is an expression of the fictional author’s love or hate of the letter’s recipient, but the flesh of each is formed by these mythical themes as related by Ovid to this love or hate. One such theme which runs through *Her. XVI* is Paris’s pride in the rich opulence of Asia in comparison to the rustic backwardness of Greece. For instance, this pride comes through clearly in Paris’s description of Helen’s future reception at Troy:

\[
\text{Vix populum tellus sustinet illa suum;}\\
\text{Occurrent denso tibi Troades agmine matres,}\\
\text{Nec capient Phrygias atria nostra nurus.}
\]

\[
\text{O quotiens dices ‘quam pauper Achaia nostrast!’}\]

\[
\text{Una domus quaevis urbis habebit opes. (Her. XVI 184-188)}
\]

[That ground hardly supports its population. Trojan mothers will run to meet you in the dense crowds, and our atriums will not hold the Phrygian daughters-in-law. O how often you will say, “How poor our Achaia is!” Any one house will have the riches of a city.]

It is no stretch to say that Paris views Helen as a flower that grew out of a plot of dirt, a flower which he plans to move to a proper garden. He even goes so far as to call Helen herself *rustica* once (287). Paris does not make this comparison between Achaia and
Phrygia only to flatter Helen with descriptions of her reception in Troy, but also to shame her into despising her home in comparison with his home.

Alexander never shows such pride in the population or opulence of his city. He too speaks of Helen’s future at Troy but in terms of her safety from the inevitable Greek attack:

... ok þat somir vel at su spasaga fyllist sem godin hafa spad. at hin frægasta borg sem i verolldinni er mundi verða nidr brotin þirir þeirrar konu skylld sem vænst er oc kurteisust i ollum heiminum. En su eirt þu. Priamus konungr fadir minn hefir nu sva upp reista oc efla Trojam at ecki fa Girkier hana sott ... (49, 19 – 50, 2)

[And it beseems well that that prophecy be fulfilled as the gods have prophesied, that the most famous city in the world would be broken down for the sake of that woman who is the most beautiful and courteous in all the worlds. And she is you. King Priam, my father, has now so raised up and fortified Troy that the Greeks (will) not be able to overcome her.]

Alexander mentions Troy only in reference to the prophesy of its destruction for Helen’s sake, and he calls it the frægasta borg [most famous city] only to draw a parallel to Helen as vænst [most beautiful] and kurteisust [most courteous]. He then undercuts himself somewhat by assuring Helen that the prophecy, which he mentioned only to flatter her, will not come true because of his father’s preparations. Of course, assuring her of her new home’s certain destruction would not have worked either.

Alexander in no way attempts to shame Helen about her homeland, as Paris does. All of Alexander’s efforts of derision are directed towards Menelaus. As he does not talk
about the rusticity of Greece in general, neither does Alexander focus on the wealth of Troy. The β redactor could not have experienced anything like the metropolitan culture of Ovid’s Rome in the Scandinavian world, or even in Western Europe, so placing such civic pride in his Alexander’s breast would not have made sense to him or his audience.

There is a deeper reason that Paris speaks so much of the great city, Troy, and that he shames Helen as well as flatters her. He writes the majority of his letter not to secure Helen’s admiration, but to assure her of his lack of inferiority. Paris began his life as a peasant, a shepherd on Mount Ida, and it was not until after his Judgment that he was recognized as a son of Priam and brought to Troy (Her. XVI 89-92). Of himself, Helen, and Menelaus, Paris is the only one who actually comes from a rustic background. Throughout his letter Paris overcompensates for this with his tales of Troy’s wealth and his accusations of Helen’s and Menelaus’s rusticity.

Alexander shows no hint of this anguished sense of inferiority in his own letter, but Helen accuses him in her letter of finding in others the faults he himself has:

"En ek segir þier at hann er íafn vid hina rikustu konunga at allri ætt oc sealfr hofut konungr er hans brodir. þott godin villdi ecki at hann bæri tignar nafn. Kann þat oc opt henda at madr leitar þar annars sem hann felst sealfr. Menelaus trudi þier vel ok hugði sinom vardnadi vel komit à þitt vald" (51, 7-12)\textsuperscript{111}

[But I say to you that he (Menelaus) is equal to the greatest kings of all lineages and the head king himself is his brother, even if the gods willed not that he bear a high rank. \textit{Also, often it may happen that a man looks

\textsuperscript{111} My italics.
for something which he himself has (in himself). Menelaus trusted well in you and believed his goods well placed in your power.]

Eldevik interprets the italicized sentence as Helen accusing Alexander of “projecting his own secret faults onto the blameless Menelaus.”

By including this in Helen’s letter, the saga writer reveals his keen understanding of the dynamics of Paris’s character in *Her. XVI.* Yet, by moving this sentiment from Paris’s letter, where it is implied, to Helen’s, where he makes it explicit, the saga writer consciously alters both of the characters. Alexander becomes a man able to hide his insecurities, Helen a woman able to spy the hidden insecurities in a man.

There is a second meaning to the italicized sentence in the above passage, one which, in the immediate context of the sentence, may be more obvious than Eldevik’s interpretation. Even as Helen accuses Alexander, she praises Menelaus, for just as Menelaus trusted in Alexander so Menelaus is worthy of trust. Doubtless the saga writer (and Helen) intends both meanings to be understood by the audience (and by Alexander).

Paris’s and Alexander’s sense of inferiority in the face of Menelaus’s merits comes from more than just their pastoral youth. Near the end of *Her. XVI* Paris endeavors to convince Helen not only of his brother Hector’s martial vigor, but his own:

Nec plus Atrides animi Menelaus habebit
Quam Paris aut armis anteverendus erit:
Paene puer caesis abducta armenta recepi
Hostibus et causam nominis inde tuli;
Paene puer iuvenes vario certamine vici,
In quibus Ilioneus Deiphobusque fuit.

---

Neve putes, non me nisi comminus esse timendum,
Figitur in iusso nostra sagitta loco.
Non potes haec illi primae dare facta iuventae,
Intruere Atriden non potes arte mea!
Omnia si dederis, numquid dabis Hectora fratrem?
Unus is innumeris militis instar erit. (357-368)

[And Menelaus Atrides will have no more courage than Paris or be placed before him in arms. Nearly a boy, I got back stolen herds, the enemy having been cut down, and that is the reason I bore this name (Alexander) thereafter. Nearly a boy, I conquered the youths in various contests in which Ilionus was and Deiphobus. And do not think that I am not to be feared except in hand to hand fighting; my arrow pierces in the appointed place. You cannot grant these deeds of first youth to that man, you cannot fit Atrides out with my skill! If you will have granted (him) all this, surely you will not grant (Menelaus) Hector for a brother. He alone will be the equal of innumerable soldiers.]

Every sentence speaks to Paris's sense of inferiority. Twice the line begins with *paene puer* [nearly a boy] and the reader is left with the sense that Paris is still nearly a boy indeed. The two feats of his youth, saving a herd he was watching and winning some games, are singularly underwhelming when compared with the accomplishments of other classical heroes. He follows this boast up by proudly pointing out his ability as an archer, the least manly of martial professions. Fearing that Helen is still not impressed, he finishes by offering his superior brother, Hector, as a proxy for Paris in protecting Helen.
An analogous passage appears in Alexander’s letter, but gone is any reference to his own prowess, and in place of Hector, he offers all of his brothers: “oc miner brœdr erv sua miklir kappar at ecki ma þeim minna ætla enn 10 riddara huerium þeira oc ecki þarftu at ottast þin forlog” [And my brothers are such great heroes that any one of them cannot be considered less than ten knights, and you need not fear your destiny] (50, 2-4). The replacement of Hector with all of Alexander’s brothers is no doubt due to the fact that the other brothers play a much more prominent role in Dares than in Homer. Yet, why does Alexander leave out any mention of his own abilities alongside his brothers”? Alexander is no more accomplished in arms than Paris (just as he is no less rustic than Paris), but he is clever enough to recognize this and avoid the topic of his personal prowess altogether. The saga writer again shows that his Alexander is able to mask his insecurities.

Missing from Alexander’s letter is Paris’s lengthy and rather undignified description of agony over his supposedly hidden love for Helen while feasting in Menelaus’s house (215-262). This part of the letter is built around Paris’s sexual and romantic insecurities, this time proudly displayed in an attempt to gain Helen’s pity and convince her of his devotion to her. It makes sense that Alexander would not put such an undignified profession in his own letter. However, the β redactor still makes use of a few details from this section: the mention of Helen’s breasts and Paris’s stealing of Helen’s kisses from Hermione (which has already been mentioned). The β redactor adds these flavorful details to Alexander’s list of Helen’s beauties while leaving all of Paris’s sighs and sly glances out.
Augu þin voro sem dufna. En litrinn i kinnum sem samtemprat væri hin blodrávdi blomi rosa oc hitt sniohuita gras lilium. Varar þinar sem klædi þat sem er coccinium heitir. briostin er þu gaft meyninni at drecka voro slik sem gimsteinar þeir er cristalle heita . . . Ok optliga sotta ek sæta kossa at meyinni er à golfinu rann. Eptir þat er hon hafdi þin briost drückit. (49, 8-15)

[Your eyes were as of doves, and the color in your cheeks was like the commingling of the blood-red bloom of roses and the snow-white field-lilies. Your lips (were) like the cloth which is called coccinium (scarlet).

The breasts which you gave to the girl to drink were just like the gemstones which are called crystal . . . And often I would seek sweet kisses from the little girl who ran upon the floor after she had drunk from your breast.]

Compare the exposure of her breasts in Ovid:

Prodita sunt, memini, tunica tua pectora laxa
Atque oculis aditum nuda dedere meis,
Pectora vel puris nivibus vel lacte tuamque
Complexo matrem candidiora iove:
Dum stupeo visis (nam pocula forte tenebam),
Tortilis a digitis excidit ansa meis!
Osacula si natae dederas, ego protinus illa
Hermiones tenero laetus ab ore tuli. (Her. XVI 249-256)
[I recall, your loose breasts were brought forth from your shirt and gave
my eyes access, naked breasts whiter than either pure snow or milk, or
your mother when Jove embraced her. While I was stupefied by the
visions (as by chance I was holding a drink) the handle slipped from my
shaking fingers! If you had given a kiss to your daughter, I immediately
took them from Hermione’s tender mouth.]

The comparisons made to Helen’s beauties in the saga, as listed by Alexander, are rather
standard courtly fare. Eldevik says that the comparisons “are commonplace terms of
beauty-description in both romances and lyric poems of [the medieval French courtly
love tradition].”113 Most of them probably come either directly or indirectly from the
Song of Songs where eyes are compared to doves’ eyes, lips to scarlet, and thighs to
jewels, though not breasts.114

“ecce tu pulchra es amica mea ecce tu pulchra oculi tui columbarum.”
(Cant. 1: 14)

[Behold you are beautiful, my dear; behold you are beautiful, your eyes
are like those of doves].

“sicut vitta coccinea labia tua” (Cant. 4: 3)
[your lips are like a scarlet ribbon].

“iunctura feminum tuorum sicut monilia quae fabricata sunt manu
artificis” (Cant. 7: 1)
[the joining of your thighs is like the jewels (necklaces) which are made
by the hand of a craftsman].

113 Eldevik, “Women’s Voices,” 64.
114 Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem.
Notice that the same word, the adjective *coccineus*, is used for scarlet in both the Song of Songs and the saga. Though breasts are compared to fawns and to clusters of grapes multiple times in the song, they are not compared to crystal.\(^{115}\) Yet, the comparison of a woman’s thighs, or perhaps her groin, to jewels or necklaces is at least as strange.

Paris’s comparison of the whiteness of Helen’s breasts to milk may well have given the saga writer the idea of inventing the nursing scene. The unexplained exposure of Helen’s breasts in Ovid must have left the redactor wondering. It seems unlikely that a breast could accidentally (if it is an accident in Ovid) slip out of a medieval Icelandic woman’s dress, whereas it might do so in a loose, first century Mediterranean dress.\(^{116}\) Because of the unlikelihood of such an accident in medieval Iceland, the saga writer gives a practical reason for Helen’s breast being exposed in public and adds to it the altogether bizarre action of Alexander stealing breast milk from the little girl’s lips. As Eldevik says:

[The] saga writer, having previously set the scene of Helen’s breastfeeding the child, extends it by altering Ovid’s poetic conceit so that [Alexander], when he kisses the little girl’s mouth just after she has suckled, is vicariously gaining access not to Helen’s lips, but to a more intimate portion of her anatomy. Depending on one’s attitude toward lactation, this can be seen as either a grotesque or a powerfully erotic addition to the Ovidian love letter.\(^{117}\)

\(^{115}\) e.g., Cant. 7: 3; 7: 7.
\(^{117}\) Eldevik, “Women’s Voices,” 64.
The change from stealing kisses to stealing milk from the little girl’s lips further illustrates the difference between Paris and Alexander. Both are underhanded and violate an asexual interaction between mother and daughter (if she is her daughter in the saga), but Alexander’s violation is on an entirely different level than Paris’s. It would be extremely hard to understand Alexander’s actions as playful or innocently romantic. Just as Alexander is more forthright than Paris in his abuse of Menelaus, just as he hides his insecurities instead of flaunting them, so is he more sexually aggressive than Paris.

Helen too has changed dramatically in the saga from Ovid’s exemplar. As already mentioned above, when Helen is abducted by Alexander, “toku ḫaḥan i brott Helenam naudga” [(they) took Helen away from there against her will] (54, 6-7). This is a deliberate reversal of the classical tradition in which she is quite willing to be abducted. Although she eventually becomes Alexander’s willing wife some time after the abduction (as she must do for the Trojan war to unfold as it does), Helen is at first entirely loyal to Menelaus.

Consequently, Helen’s letter is a curt rejection of Alexander’s advances. It is definitely based on Her. XVII, though the moral position of the heroine is exactly reversed. Ovid’s Helen starts her letter almost as if she were really offended by Paris’s advances, but soon it becomes clear that she is only maneuvering to ensure her dignity and security after she has left Menelaus’s home. By line 35 it is obvious which way the letter is going: “Nec tamen irascor, (quis enim succenset amanti?)” [Nevertheless, I am not angry (who indeed gets angry at lovers?)] She is resolved, or very nearly resolved, to commit her adultery before she starts to write her letter.
In Ovid, most of Helen’s letter is taken up by coy flirtation disguised as feigned offense, and as such most of it is left out of the saga’s version. There, in the briefest of the four lover’s letters, Helen spends nearly all of her effort in refuting Alexander’s attacks on her husband’s worthiness. The only sentence not defending the honor of Menelaus, Menelaus’s lineage, or the men of her homeland in general is the opening where Helen neatly mirrors the opening of Alexander’s letter:

Mikil dyrfd var þer þat er þu ritadir til min sem til hinnar argskopudustu konu (50, 19-21)

[Great boldness was in you, that you wrote to me as if to the most wretched woman.]

Compare:

Mikit skilr þina kurteisi æda annara kuenna. (48, 21-22)

[There is a great difference between your grace and that of other women.]

Helen begins the sentence with the same word, and the sentence directly contradicts the assertion made in Alexander’s. Again the ß redactor’s subtle craft shines through. He has made her first sentence a mockery of Alexander’s flattery, and after only this one sentence a careful reader can be left with no doubt about Helen’s reply. She could not mock the form and content of his flattery and then accept his proposal. The saga writer does not use his subtlety to create suspense about the reply as Ovid does in Her. XVII. On the contrary, he uses a subtle expression to destroy suspense immediately.

The end of Helen’s letter is as remarkable as the beginning. It closely follows Her. XVII 156-161, but the details are reversed so that where Helen once sneered and laughed with Paris at her husband, she is now sincere.
Menelaus trusted well in you and believed his goods well placed in your power and thought you not so much a degenerate that you would betray that one who trusted in you. He has also not traveled away pointlessly, but to collect his debts which were not worth less than one hundred pounds of gold.]

Compare:

Magna fuit subitae iustaeque causa viae;

Aut mihi sic visumst: ego, cum dubitaret, an iret,

‘Quam primum’ dixi ‘fac rediturus eas!’

Omine laetatus dedit oscula, ‘res’que ‘domusque

Et tibi sit curae Troicus hospes’ ait.

Vix tenui risum . . . (Her. XVII 156-161)

[Great and just was the cause of the sudden trip, or it seemed so to me. When he was doubting whether to go, I said, “Go in order to make your return as soon as possible!” Gladdened by the sign, he gave me kisses. “Yours is the care of the house and affairs and the Trojan guest,” he said. I hardly held in my laughter . . .]

For Ovid’s Helen the trip is good because it leaves her alone with Paris, not because the business is actually important for Menelaus. She is just as faithless as Alexander is
accused of being by her counterpart in the saga. Whether or not the saga’s Helen is lying about the reason for this trip (as mentioned above, the reason for Menelaus’s trip is not clear in the saga) is not as important as the fact that she defends her husband wholeheartedly.

Thus, the letters work together to affirm Helen’s faithfulness to Menelaus, a virtue which the original author of the saga first invented. In slight but significant ways the β redactor likewise changed Paris’s character in his Alexander. He remains perfidious, greedy, and vain, but hidden are his boyish insecurities about his youth, lack of martial vigor, and rustic background.

The β redactor’s reason for adding these two letters (much like his reason for adding the two earlier letters) must have been a desire to flesh out his characters with lengthy first person narration for which he found precedent in his source, Heroides. Eldevik cogently observes of Helen and Paris, “The centrality of their love-affair to the entire course of the Trojan War makes an understanding of their inner feelings and motivations quite crucial to the overall saga; the interpolation of Ovid-inspired letters to achieve that understanding is indisputably worthwhile.” The β redactor used Helen’s letter to continue the original author’s project of morally improving Helen, and he used Alexander’s letter to push him into a deeper, more mature villainy. Indeed, Alexander’s letter adds a layer of flattery and persuasion to his trickery and coercion. Helen’s letter gives her her first opportunity to reject Alexander, forcing him to attempt the ploy of the golden apple. Once that fails, he finally resorts to abduction, which was his first and only necessary resort in Dares.

The classical wanton Helen was unacceptable to the tastes of any of the redactors of *Trójumanna saga*, and both the original author of Tms1 and the β redactor gave her new virtues. We have already seen that the β redactor made similar changes to Medea and Deianira. Yet, where Medea and Deianira share some qualities with their Ovidian sisters (Medea still seeks vengeance against Jason, Deianira still kills herself because of her husband), Helen is the antithesis of her classical counterpart, at least at the beginning. Eventually Helen is persuaded to love and marry Alexander (TSβ 56, 6-7). Helen cannot, after all, remain true to her first husband forever if the Trojan war is to take the ten year course that tradition dictates.

Assuming that the original author of Tms1, and the α and the β redactors were separate people, it is reasonable to conclude from the various redactors’ treatment of Helen that the tendency of moral improvement in female heroines was not unique to the β redactor, but was a general tendency among the Icelandic translators who worked on *Trójumanna saga*. Perhaps, in Helen’s case, the Norse authors thought a faithless wife to be an unworthy catalyst for the greatest war in literature. Ovid does not attempt to tell the entire story of the war and so may make Helen as coquettish as he likes without alienating his audience’s larger sympathies. Dares’s account, unsatisfying in so many ways, does not convince the reader that the recovery of Helen is really worth the effort of the war. In *Trójumanna saga* Helen is an admirable victim of abduction for whom the Greeks’ assault on Troy may be at least partially justified.
CONCLUSION

Through the chapters of this thesis I have analyzed and argued for the successful incorporation of four letters of Ovid’s *Heroides* into the β redaction of the *Trójumanna saga*. These letters flesh out the spartan framework of Dares Phrygius’s *De Excidio Troiae Historia* to a greater extent than the first translation of Dares into Old Norse, *TmsⅠ*, and add greater depth and complexity to the characters of Medea, Jason, Deianira, Hercules, Helen, and Alexander. The β redactor uses Ovid’s letters in two ways. Most obviously, he adapts them and puts them into the saga as letters, but he also draws background information from the letters for use in the direct narrative. Ovid puts a great deal of exposition of facts in his letters, facts which his letters’ fictional authors and fictional recipients already hold in common knowledge. This is a necessary facet of Ovid’s epistolary poetic form, but the β redactor removes almost all such exposition (as foreign to the saga form as it is frowned on in modern storytelling) from his letters and moves it into the narration of events before each letter.

The poems of *Heroides* are so fraught with allusion and packed with contextual exposition that the world of mythical Greece nearly bursts out between the lines, and the epistolary form is nearly forgotten. The β redactor provides context by using each of the four main Heroidian letters (Medea’s, Deianira’s, Alexander’s, and Helen’s) twice in the saga: once as a source for the larger story, and once to create a personal exchange of ideas and sentiments between characters. Because the β redactor keeps unnatural exposition out of his letters, and because the letters are far less ornate (being prose and not verse), the letters appear altogether more realistic, as if they could have been exchanged between real people.
However, though they appear realistic, the saga’s letters are as artificial as Ovid’s. Certainly, the β redactor (as well as the original author of Tms1) understood *Heroides* as a work of literature sprung from Ovid’s imagination and not as an historical collection of letters, or even a collection of letters that had once been reworked into poems. The β redactor freely borrows pieces of Ovid’s letters and inserts them into both the direct narrative and the letters of characters with whom they have nothing to do. Ariadne’s abandonment by Theseus (*Her. X*) is adapted to Medea and Jason, and the words of Phyllis to Demophoon from *Her. II* 35-44 are put into Medea’s letter to Jason. As the tears of Briseis (*Her. III*) and Sappho (*Her. XV*), and the blood of Canace (*Her. XI*) spatter the pages of their letters, so do the tears of Deianira obscure her words to Hercules. The author of Tms1 set the precedent for such use of sources by his borrowing of the carved apple ploy from Acontius and Cydippe (*Her. XX*) for Alexander’s use against Helen. This liberal use of the sources goes beyond just *Heroides*. It is possible that elements of Jason’s dragon adventure were taken from *Völsunga saga* and likely that much of the romantic comparisons and hyperbole in Alexander’s letter comes from the *Song of Songs* and the Gospel of John.

Such careless borrowing from the various poems of *Heroides* would be unconscionable if the β redactor thought *Heroides* to be historical, or if he thought himself to be writing a true history. His goal was clearly to write a full, entertaining, and plausible version of the story that had already been retold many, many times. By “plausible” here I mean that though the Ovidian Medea did not say the curse from *Her. II* 35-44, it comes from a heroine in a similar situation, time, and place, and it seems like something Medea *could* say. Jason does not abandon Medea on an island on his way
back to Greece, but it is completely plausible that he would. Although Deianira does not cry over her letter in Ovid, it seems that heroines of her sort often did, and though Paris does not use a carved apple to win Helen, such a ploy was available to the unscrupulous in the classical world.

However plausible they wanted their version of ancient Greece and Troy to appear in its details, the redactor and the original author still created heroes and heroines who are recognizably northern at heart. The authors borrowed phrases, plot points, and literary devices freely from Ovid, but they changed the defining actions and motivations of each of the heroines to better fit Norse types. In most cases it is clear that the changes they made were absolutely deliberate and improved each character from a moral standpoint.

Ovid's heroines have many distinct faults that are intentionally used by the author as defining characteristics. Most of the heroines in *Heroides* have been abandoned by their lovers (for one reason or another) and are in extreme emotional distress, as comes across clearly in their letters. Indeed, many of the heroines display such exaggerated and overwrought despair that they become something other than real women. They are classical heroines, akin to the rage-filled Achilles of the *Iliad* or clever Odysseus, who feel emotions differently and to different degrees than common people. Yet, Ovid's epistolary form offers only a single moment's look at each heroine's psyche, as if we only saw Achilles sulking in his tent, or as if we always saw Odysseus in full command of his cunning. If Homer had never written book twenty-four of the *Iliad*, Priam's visit, Achilles would forever have been inhuman, a caricature of rage, blood, and violence. If
Odysseus had never broken down, his will to test others finally failing before his father, Laertes, he would forever have been only the fox.

But this limited view of single letters is all we have of Ovid’s heroines, and as such most of them are overwrought caricatures of despair. They cannot be taken seriously as real people and reading their letters at length is extremely wearisome. Medea and Deianira certainly fall into this group, though Medea is crazed and murderous while Deianira is resigned and suicidal.

The β redactor changed Medea, Deianira, and Helen according to his scheme of moral improvement. On a basic level, he removes Medea’s frantic desperation, almost tangible in *Her.* XII, and replaces it with dignity and capability, which we see in her powerful magic used in the quest for the Fleece. The β redactor smoothes out the sharp lines of her psyche, her anger and anguish, until she is no longer on the edge of losing control. She is again the master of her own actions and able to hold herself with pride in the face of Jason’s injuries.

This switch from desperation to confidence leads perfectly into the change in the ending of Medea’s story, from the murder of her sons to the belief that her sons will avenge her against Jason. Although I have not determined whether or not the β redactor knew the classical story of Medea’s filicide, I have shown that it was not necessary that he did, as he could easily have constructed his new ending from the clues given in *Her.* XII. Whether or not he knew the classical ending, he could not have used it in his own story. After he had corrected, according to his scheme, the primary fault that Ovid gave Medea, her frantic desperation, an ending where she killed her own sons for revenge
would no longer make sense. An ending where Medea is able to wait patiently for her sons to avenge her makes perfect sense.

This difference in the manner of Medea’s use of her sons for revenge speaks to changes in her character no less fundamental than the changes the β redactor made to Deianira. However, though the changes to the two heroines are similar at heart, the results of the changes are drastically different. By subtly changing the motivation for Deianira’s suicide from grief for her husband’s accidental murder to grief for her husband’s effeminacy, the β redactor turns her from a penitential martyr to her husband’s memory into a violent suicide intended to haunt Hercules’s mind.

The fundamental change the β redactor made to Deianira, however, is not the motivation for her suicide or her abhorrence of Hercules’s effeminacy (which exists to a lesser degree in Ovid), but Deianira’s capability to take action in the face of her own and her husband’s disgraces. This change corrects the essential flaw in Ovid’s Deianira, who is wholly incapable of acting to preserve her honor or avenge herself on her husband. She sends the bloody shirt to Hercules in the hope of entrapping him with a love spell, hardly an admirable plan and one that seeks to bury past wrongs rather than confront them. Likewise, Ovid’s Deianira kills herself after accidentally killing Hercules, not trying to address the crime, but to hide from her grief and guilt. In TSβ, Deianira’s suicide and sending of the bloody shirt are done for precisely the opposite reason, to confront Hercules and his crimes. Thus, while the β redactor’s giving of dignity and capability to Medea mollifies her character, a similar change (that is her capability to act

---

119 One might argue that the letter, Her. IX, itself is evidence of Deianira taking action against her husband. However, it must be remembered that the letter was not finished before Hercules died. It was never sent, and perhaps would never have been sent. It is, in the end, a lengthy suicide note.
against Hercules's transgressions) applied to Deianira makes her a harder and more violent woman.

Helen's character is fundamentally different from that of the other two heroines. She is not one of the caricatures of despair in *Heroïdes*, but merely a coquette and unfaithful wife. These faults are corrected in the saga starting with the work of the original author and continuing with the additions of the β redactor. Her excessive lust is corrected according to the same scheme of moral improvement as Medea’s frantic desperation or Deianira’s pusillanimité (that is, her shrinking spirit).

In the saga Helen is loyal to Menelaus and rejects Alexander in a complete reversal of her character from Ovid and Dares. However, she is still attracted to him in some degree: “Oc er þau finnaz taka þau tal sin i milli oc litz huarutueggia vel à annat” [And when they meet they begin talking to each other, and each of the two looked positively on the other] (TSp 52, 7-8). The β redactor corrects her essential Ovidian fault by supplying her with a slightly different capability than Medea or Deianira receive: the self-control to avoid infatuation with Paris. She directs her energies towards rejecting Alexander as skillfully as she accepts him in *Heroïdes*.

Like Helen, the Paris of *Heroïdes* is not in the throes of despair, but of lust. However, his great fault is not his lust, but his boyish insecurities. The β redactor gives Alexander enough self-control and wit to be able to hide these insecurities, though the flaws which created them (his rusticity, youth, lack of martial accomplishment) are still present. Unlike with the three heroines, this masking of his insecurities does not greatly alter Alexander’s motivations or actions. He is still the same seducer, only now he is more competent even while Helen is less receptive.
All of the β redactor’s granting of self-control and capability to his characters is only half the story. The actions his characters take with their new found power are still determined by the author, and he might have chosen to do otherwise than he does with his heroines. Thus the β redactor wants his Medea to wait for her sons to take revenge for her, as he wants Deianira to kill herself for shame, as he wants Helen to reject Alexander’s advances. We see in Medea that the β redactor values emotional restraint in his heroines, in Helen that he values loyalty, and in Deianira that he values honor. He has taken three incredibly flawed Ovidian heroines and turned them into women with distinct virtues to counter the flaws they had.

Yet, while Medea’s and Deianira’s stories end abruptly with their letters, Helen’s goes on. She could not be and is not the loyal wife throughout the saga. As noted in chapter three (p. 113), eventually Helen is persuaded to love and marry Alexander: “tokuz þar bratt miklar astir med þeim oc blidar samvistir” [there soon grew great love between them and a joyful living together] (TSβ 56, 6-7). Yet, even if he had dared to deviate so greatly from the story of the Trojan war, the β redactor would not have tried to keep Helen forever at odds with Alexander. The redactors of Trójumanna saga have a penchant for happy endings. The above passage occurs in slightly different form in TSα 19, 7-8, and thus it probably comes from the original saga. The original author created a life of love for Telamon and Hesione as well (TSβ 28, 1; TSα 7, 13-14). Also, originally there was probably a happy ending for Jason and Medea, as it appears in TSα 4, 15-16, but the β redactor replaced this when he introduced Medea’s letter.

120 There is no mention of blossoming love between Helen and Alexander by Dares at this point (De Excidio 13; ch. 11). As Helen goes willingly in the first place there does not need to be.
The saga writers take as moderate an approach to marriage as they take to their heroines. Just as it is not probable that a person could maintain the levels of crazed hatred that Medea displays in Ovid, just as no person would likely be as pathetic as the classical Deianira, so it is not likely that Helen could maintain her fierce loyalty to Menelaus when trapped with Alexander in marriage for ten years. It would not be right or realistic for perpetual enmity to exist between them.

Gone from these heroines of Trójumanna saga are the wild extremes of Heroides. Ovid's heroines are nearly baroque in the extravagance of their characters and their faults. They may dazzle the mind, but in their extremes they come close to losing their humanity and our sympathy. Their Old Norse counterparts cannot compare with Ovid's women in elegance, but in the simplicity of their expression, the strength of their characters, and the temperance of their emotions they move the human heart.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Hrólfss saga kraka ok kappa hans. Eds. Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson.


www.heimskringla.no.


www.heimskringla.no.


