

COMMUNICATIONS

Icelandic Folklore, Landscape Theory, and Levity: The Seyðisfjörður Dwarf-Stone

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Abstract: This paper discusses the relationship between a folk tale about the Dvergasteinn ['Dwarf-Stone'] on the fjord of Seyðisfjörður in eastern Iceland and the details of the tale's landscape setting. It argues that storytelling for storytelling's sake might have been neglected in current theorising on the conceptualisation and narrative use of landscape. This, as well as the intensity with which landscape is used in Iceland for the construction of narratives, might also affect the use of place-lore for retrospective approaches.

In her introduction to the recent 'Art Seminar' volume on *Landscape Theory*, Rachel Ziady DeLue argues programmatically that "the intellectual and socio-political stakes of landscape theory are high", and that the importance of understanding our relationship to landscape can hardly be overestimated (DeLue 2008: 11). Seen against the background provided by such an ambitious claim, it comes as little surprise that the issues addressed in the scholarly discourse on landscape tend to be grave and important ones. Denis Cosgrove, for instance, is deeply concerned with matters of ideology: in the mid-1980s, he argued that 'landscape' is primarily a "way of seeing", through which parts of the European population commented on social relations, and emphasises the importance of 'myth', 'memory', and 'meaning' for the relationship between landscape and human beings (Cosgrove 2008: 20–21; Cosgrove in DeLue & Elkins 2008: 88–89; Cosgrove 1984). Myth and memory also play a core role for the approach that was taken by Simon Schama in his classic book on *Landscape and Memory*, and the seriousness of the topic is underlined by the location in which he begins his story of landscape and remembrance: at the mound at Giby in north-eastern Poland. He tells how this mound made him grasp what really is meant by 'landscape and memory' – and that his narrative opens at just this particular place sets a solemn tone indeed, as this mound tells the story of the mass-execution of several hundred men and women (Schama 1996: 23–26). Keith

H. Basso in his long-term ethnographic study of the use of places, place names, and place stories among the Western Apache takes a very different approach, but he deals with matters of social importance as well: a central concern of his book is how fundamental ethical and social questions can be addressed by taking recourse to place-lore (Basso 1996). Gillian R. Overing and Marijane Osborn adopt a more literary perspective, engaging with the landscapes of storytelling (1994). While the workings of society and the tragedies of 'real life' remain outside of the scope of their work, they still share a sense of acuteness with other landscape writers. Writing about the *Landscape of Desire*, they express already with their choice of title a deeply-felt urgency for their engagement with the relationship between landscape, story, and meaning in an approach where "place is a shared form of meaning", providing the space for an intense dialogue with the past (1994: xvi–xvii). More recent, but no less serious, is the approach taken by Robert Macfarlane (2015). In discussing the landscape writing of Barry Lopez and Peter Davidson, for instance, he emphasises the humanistic value of the approaches that these writers take to their respective chosen landscapes – northern ones in both cases – and concludes by emphasising their ethical aspects and their relationship to morality, seen as deeply connected to the power of certain landscapes to "bestow [...] a grace" upon the people inhabiting or travelling through them (Macfarlane 2015: 209–220). Even more intense is the engagement with

place and space frequently found in the study of religions. For Mircea Eliade, whose works have become classics of the discipline in spite of their notoriously crypto-theological tendencies, sacred space was a space in which ‘the sacred’ had revealed itself in an act of theophany, investing the place of this self-revelation with immense significance and turning it into a sacred centre from which everything around it took its meaning and orientation (Eliade 1998: 21–60). If one takes such an approach, virtually nothing can be more significant than place.¹ More recently, Jürgen Mohn (2007) abandons Eliade’s quasi-mystic emphasis on ‘the sacred’, but still approaches sacred space as a central source of orientation: place continues to be analysed under a perspective which primarily sees it as a medium of deep existential importance.

A Tale from the Shores of Seyðisfjörður Fjord

None of this is wrong: all of human life is set in places and ‘landscapes’, and the interaction between these settings of human life and human life itself is of obvious import. Yet if one leaves the library and, on a bright late summer’s day, takes a stroll along the north coast of the Seyðisfjörður fjord in eastern Iceland, life might easily seem too pleasant to ponder deep thoughts of desire, meaning, ethics, and orientation. There is just too much there to occupy the idle wanderer with much lighter thoughts. Picturesque cast-concrete ruins offer sheltered space to do some not-really-rough camping; the mountains could have been painted by W.G. Collingwood (and some of them, in fact, have been); and the sky and the sea compete with each other to be the most blue (unless a cloud passes and turns the competition into one of shades of grey). Even the saga-traveller and historian of religions will not be disappointed, as the north coast of the Seyðisfjörður fjord was the site of a church of literary fame. About a third of the way along the fjord’s northern shore lies the farmstead Dvergasteinn. Formerly, Dvergasteinn was the site of the local church and the seat of the priest serving it. In the mid-19th century, the great collector of Icelandic folktales, Jón Árnason, included a short story about this place among his ‘church tales’ (*kirkjusögur*). According to

this tale, the church had once stood to the west or south of the fjord; this had been so long ago, however, that nobody remembered what the place where it had stood had been called. At that time, there was a big boulder next to the church. People believed that this boulder was inhabited by dwarfs; hence it was called *Dvergasteinn* [‘Dwarf-Stone’]. But as time went by, people came to think that the location of the church was really rather inconvenient, and decided to move it to the northern side of the fjord to the place where it was still standing when Jón recorded his tale. Yet while the parishioners were engaged in erecting the church in its new location, suddenly they were astonished to see a house sailing across the fjord to the very place in which they were building the new church. This house continued on its way until it hit firm ground and lodged itself on the foreshore: this was the big boulder which had been standing next to the church in its old location and that had always been thought to be inhabited by dwarfs, but which of course had not been taken along when the church building was moved. So now people knew that the dwarfs had not liked being far from the church, and had therefore relocated their house-stone. Jón’s account concludes by stating that the vicarage was given the name ‘Dwarf-Stone’ to memorialise the dwarfs’ piety.²

Place and Story

Jón Árnason published this little tale in 1864. Since then, the church has been moved (again) and now stands close to the harbour in the town of Seyðisfjörður. Yet while the church is gone, the stone is still where it used to be (Figures 1–3). It is a grey boulder as tall as a man that faces the water of the fjord with a ‘facade’ which strikingly recalls the facade of a house: it has the exact triangular shape of a house’s gables, and is nearly plumb-vertical. Furthermore, it also catches the eye because of the unusual erosion patterns which the salty sea water has eaten into the rock: the Dwarf-Stone’s ‘facade’ has dissolved into an almost organic pattern of vertical bowls separated by narrow, cardboard-thin ridges; its whole structure is suggestive more of soap bubbles than of solid stone. What is more – and this may be very important – the Dwarf-Stone seems to be the only isolated



Figure 1. The Dwarf-Stone with its unusual erosion pattern and its distinctive triangular shape recalling the gables of a house.



Figure 2. The location of the Dwarf-Stone immediately above the shingle beach of a small 'harbour' protected by a rock-outcrop projecting into the fjord.

boulder on this stretch of shore; it is the only rock formation of such an unusual house-like shape; and it is the only stone which shows this kind of strange erosion pattern. The last point

in particular cannot be emphasised enough. While there is plenty of rock on this shore, none of it looks to be dissolving in a pattern



Figure 3. The Dwarf-Stone seen from the rock outcrop that projects into the fjord just to the east of the stone. Note the stump of rock that has been worked into a semi-natural bollard to which a mooring line is attached; this line leads to the buoy visible in Figure 2. Note also how differently this rock erodes in comparison to the Dwarf-Stone, showing no indication whatsoever of the remarkable quasi-organic way in which erosion affects the Dwarf-Stone's 'facade'.

that even remotely recalls the quasi-organic cell structure of the Dwarf-Stone (Figure 1).

Similarly suggestive is the location of this boulder (Figure 2). It lies immediately above a stretch of shingle beach; unlike much of the rocky coast of the fjord, this flat beach would make a good spot to pull an open boat ashore. (Seen from the slope above the shore, the shape of the Dwarf-Stone arguably even recalls a boat stored on the beach turned keel-upwards.) The impression of being by a natural 'harbour' of sorts is further strengthened by a rocky outcrop that juts out into the fjord just to the east of the Dwarf-Stone, acting as a natural breakwater protecting the shingle beach (which, in fact, is much broader behind this rock outcrop than further along the shore).

The evocative image of the natural harbour is also accentuated by the only visible piece of human interference in this little landscape of rock and water. About halfway along the rock outcrop-breakwater, a groove has been cut into a naturally protruding stump of rock, turning it into a semi-natural bollard (Figure 2). A mooring line is attached to this rock-bollard which leads off into the water towards a buoy

bobbing in the fjord a few metres further out (Figures 2 & 3).

This little ensemble shows a striking convergence between the physical topography of the place and the 19th-century folk tale. The conspicuous and flamboyantly unusual erosion pattern seen on the rock is mirrored by the otherworldly character that it attains in the story. Its striking house-shape is reflected by the story element that it serves as the dwarfs' rock-house. Its location immediately above a natural harbour corresponds to its arrival by floating across the fjord. And, the location of the stone next to the former parsonage correlates with the religious frame within which the action of the tale is set. Thus, there is a one-to-one match between the physical features of the place as it was at the time when the story was recorded (unusual, house-shaped stone; natural harbour; church) and the motifs employed in the tale (stone serving as a house of dwarfs; voyage; the dwarfs' piety). The story of the Dwarf-Stone is a place story in the strictest sense: it does not only play itself out in a real-world locality, but its whole plot appears to be directly crafted onto the features

of the local landscape. Or rather, it has not been crafted *onto* the landscape, but out of it. The extreme closeness of the correspondence between the tale of the Dwarf-Stone and its particular landscape setting on the coast of the fjord seems to suggest that, on one level, this tale in its transmitted form has been created specifically from the elements of its location: topographical element by topographical element, the land has been turned into a story.

Place, Story, and Storytelling Tradition

On another level, however, it goes without saying that the statement that the land has been turned into a story also needs to be qualified: it is by no means meant to imply that all the elements that are used in the tale to weave the different topographical features together to form a coherent narrative whole were invented from scratch. Rather, the tale seems to draw on a rich corpus of established narrative motifs to turn place into story. For instance, the use of stones as devices to cross bodies of water is attested both in Icelandic saga literature (Boberg 1966, motif-type F531.4.8, with attestations such as the giant rowing a stone in the A-text of *Qrvar-Odds saga*: Boer 1888: 120) and in later Scandinavian folklore (e.g. af Klintberg 2010, tale-type M110). Later Scandinavian folklore also presents numerous tales of how a prominent stone by a church was the result of – and is testimony to – a supernatural encounter (af Klintberg 2010, tale-type J1 “Giant throws stone at church”, J8 “Giant throws stone at churchgoers (wedding party)”). The multitude of attestations of such tales that is listed by Bengt af Klintberg for Sweden alone strongly suggests that there was a widespread feeling that prominent stones in the surroundings of church buildings were warranted as objects of a narrative.³

Another long-established motif in the tale of the Dwarf-Stone is the idea that dwarfs live in stones: this motif can be found already in the kennings of Egill Skallagrímsson’s poem *Sonatorrek*, where sea cliffs are called the boat-house doors of a dwarf (st. 3; Bjarni Einarsson 2003: 147). Classic examples of benevolent (if pagan) supernatural beings which inhabit a rock near a farm – at least until they are driven out by a missionary – can be found in *Porvalds þáttur víðforla I* (ch. 3) and

Kristni saga (ch. 2; both texts ed. Sigurgeir Steingrímsson et al. 2003). Even the idea that the supernatural inhabitants of local rock formations can be Christian was not an innovation by the inventor of the Dwarf-Stone tale, but was well established in 19th-century Icelandic folklore. In Jón Árnason’s collection, other examples are provided by the tales of “Borghildur álfkona” (Jón Árnason 1862: 8–9; 1889: 3–5), “Túngustapi” (1862: 31–34; 1889: 16–20), and “Barnsskírinn” (1862: 54–55; 1889: 27–28).

Nonetheless, the specific combination of motifs found in the aetiological tale of the Dwarf-Stone has been spun specifically out of the local topography, using the narrative vocabulary of its time and place of creation, but using it specifically to turn main features of the locality into a coherent plot. Such established motifs as are used in the resulting tale greatly contributed to making the tale narratively plausible to its audience; they ensured that it ‘made sense’ to them, as it related to a well-established tradition of storytelling. Yet while this tradition can account for the *motifs* used in the tale of the Dwarf-Stone, it cannot account for the particular way in which these motifs are woven together to form the tale’s *plot*. This plot as such was not developed out of traditional motifs, but out of a specific local landscape. In a manner of speaking, the traditional motifs employed in this narrative development merely were seeds falling on the fertile soil of the parsonage, and the folk tale grew out of the place in the same – if not in an even more intimate – sense as a plant grows out of the soil in which its seeds first take root.⁴ This makes it as pertinent to the relationship between landscape and story as any tale can possibly be.

Place, Story, and Landscape Theory

Looking back to the approaches to landscape mentioned at the beginning of this essay, it seems remarkable just how little they appear applicable to the Dwarf-Stone. Admittedly, the tale speaks of an old, now long-abandoned site where the parsonage was located once upon a time; thus, there is an element of ‘memory’ here as is so prominent in classical treatments of landscape such as Simon Schama’s (1996). Yet this memory is a memory of a place that

never was – and, what is more, consciously so. As the tale itself says, this former parsonage was located ‘either to the west or to the south of the fjord.’ This is virtually a non-statement: west and south are the two only possible directions in which the church could have been, given that it stood to the north of the fjord in the present when the story was told, and that to the east there is nothing but the North Atlantic. Thus, the maximum openness provided by this localisation ‘to the south or west’ seems like a tongue-in-cheek way of both denying and emphasising that, really, there was no such other location of the church within living memory. This lack of a memory of the church’s previous site even appears in a virtually explicit way when the tale states that nobody remembers what its former location might have been called. Memory is absent; a memory approach, therefore, has little explanatory power.

Even less explanatory power lies in approaching the tale as a narrative referring to questions of morality or as an illustration of social norms. The moral of the story – if there is one at all – seems to be that one should live right next to the parish church. Yet this does not help in understanding the tale, as in the widely dispersed settlement patterns of Iceland, this was not customarily the case and thus is not a plausible, realistic moral message. If anything, the lengths to which the dwarfs went to live next to the church might in such a social context have seemed a bit silly.⁵ Neither, furthermore, does the tale create meaning and orientation in the senses postulated by Mircea Eliade or Jürgen Mohn (see above), let alone contribute to the sacrality of the land. If there is any ‘message’, it does not seem to be more than the provision of an example of ‘stranger things have happened’, while offering some sort of explanation for the place name Dvergasteinn.

So, if we are trying to understand the relationship between landscape and storytelling, the case of the Dwarf-Stone might teach us some humility in our quest for deep, serious, and profound meanings: these do not seem to be what this tale is all about. Rather, it seems to be about the simple pleasure of storytelling for its own sake, for nothing more (but also nothing less!) than the fun of it.

Artfully and cleverly, it takes all the most eye-catching elements of a micro-landscape and turns them into a tale which combines them to form a working (if utterly fantastic) plot; whoever managed this little feat must have been immensely proud of themselves, and rightly so. Yet there is no indication that there is more to this little feat of landscape storytelling than the feat for its own sake.

Hypothetically speaking, there may have been other versions of this tale in circulation. Some people could also have believed that the Dwarf-Stone was indeed inhabited by supernatural beings rather than merely being the object of an entertaining story. Discourse about the meaning of landscape (and probably any discourse about any meaning) is best conceptualised as an ongoing phenomenon rather than a static one;⁶ it is, thus, not unlikely that the Dwarf-Stone was ascribed different meanings by different people at different times. Yet in the form in which it was recorded by Jón Árnason, this particular tale is not only tailored to its local setting in the closest way possible, but it also shows no indication of having been meant as more than a story for storytelling’s sake. Horace in his *Art of Poetry* states that *aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetae / aut simul et iucunda et idonea dicere vitae* (*Ars poetica* 333–334) [‘poets either want to be useful or to delight, / or say the pleasant and the useful things of life at once’]. The teller of tales who invented the story of the Dwarf-Stone seems to have been firmly in the second of these three categories: it is all about delighting in a good yarn. Admittedly, there is also an element here of enchanting the landscape (cf. Macfarlane 2015: 24–26), charging it with associations that transcend the mundane and the everyday. Yet given the overall structure of the tale, this enchantment does not appear to be the intention, but rather one of the tools of the storyteller. Drawing on traditional motifs such as the motif of dwarfs living in stones, the storyteller does to some extent inscribe supernatural connotations into the landscape. However, given the specific relationship between the tale and the landscape it is woven out of, these supernatural motifs were not more than a narrative device used to string together a series of landscape features into a working plot. The aim seems to be the

working plot, not the supernatural. Enchantment comes as a by-product, welcome perhaps, but secondary nonetheless – and is certainly not taken very seriously.

In this way, the Seyðisfjörður tale of the Dwarf-Stone serves as a reminder to put some levity back into landscape theory: in trying to understand the relationship between humans and the landscapes they are inhabiting, we should not forget that underlying the profound there is also the everyday, and that there is a lot that is done in everyday life which is simply done for the joy it gives.

Place, Story, and Retrospective Methodology

All this, however, may also have consequences for the use of Norse narrative material for retrospective reconstructions. In a level of detail that is achievable only very rarely, the folklore of the Dwarf-Stone illustrates the extreme interconnectedness between place-lore and the specific landscape of the place in which it is set. In the case of the Dwarf-Stone, if one wants to understand the degree of this interconnectedness, it is inevitable to consult, in the words of Schama (1996: 24), “the archive of the feet”: no textual analysis that is unaware of the text’s landscape referent would be able to make head or tail of this particular story. Only with recourse to this landscape referent can the tale be understood as a clever and delightful play on real-world topography; without this, it would have seemed quaint at best. This situation constitutes an emphatic warning about the interpretation of place stories whose place referents are lost – and such a warning is very pertinent indeed to the study of Old Norse sources, as so much of this material is (or purports to be) place-lore.

To illustrate this problem, another example linked to the topic of stones can be taken from *Landnámabók* [the ‘Book of Settlements’], where it is told that certain boulders by the name of *Gunnsteinar*, which were located somewhere in the valley Flateyjardalr in northern Iceland, had a double function as both boundary markers and as a cult site (ch. S241=H206). It is not known today where exactly these boulders might have been located (Jakob Benediktsson 1968: 273n.6). Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, in his influential *Under the Cloak* (1999: 29), takes this reference to be

a historical one. But in assessing the historicity of a report such as this, one should always wonder: assuming that in the medieval Flateyjardalr there really was a rock formation which was somehow striking enough to attract attention, what reason do we have to believe that it drew the religious attention of the valley’s Viking Age inhabitants, rather than that of a medieval storyteller simply in search of inspiration for a good tale? Not every narrative using religious or mythological motifs also has a deep religious or mythological significance.

Another aspect of the Dwarf-Stone tale that is also of relevance for retrospective approaches is the importance of sheer entertainment. Entertainment for entertainment’s sake was also a major factor for medieval saga writers; this is central to keep in mind when we consider sagas and stories that appear oriented towards entertainment as sources for vernacular religion and mythology. Looking beyond place-lore, one may think about tales such as *Bósa saga*, *Þorsteins þátrr bæjarmagns*, or Snorri’s myth of Thor’s visit to Útgarðaloki.⁷ The motifs that are used and manipulated in such texts may be conventional and link to widely held (or once-held) beliefs – as is the case with the Dwarf-Stone tale, which uses some very old themes indeed, such as dwarfs living in stones – but such motifs have often been removed from their former (‘original’) contexts and have been recombined in unique, unexpected, and entertaining ways. Thus, such texts may be of interest for studying individual motifs, but may hardly be able to tell us much about coherent plot lines and larger narrative structures of vernacular mythology: in constructing a new tale with an agenda focused on entertainment, the overarching plot lines are the first elements to undergo far-reaching transformations whose results may bear hardly any perceivable resemblance to the vernacular mythology of the Viking Age. The Seyðisfjörður folk tale of the Dwarf-Stone constitutes an emphatic reminder that stories (including place stories) can always just be stories for storytelling’s sake. The delight that this folk tale exhibits in the sheer joy of storytelling reminds us that, if we take narrative texts too seriously as reflections of the period they pretend to talk



Fig. 4. A topos of saga scholarship which provides an exact parallel to the Seyðisfjörður folk tale of the Dwarf-Stone is the blood-spattered 'Stone of Thor' of Eyrbyggja saga in the home-field of Þingvellir farm on Þórsnes. (Reproduced from Collingwood & Jón Stefánsson 1899: 96, Figure 82.)

about, we may be taking them more seriously than they ever took themselves – even if, in taking such an overly serious approach, we follow a path well-trodden in current landscape writing.⁸

To conclude by returning to the topic of landscape proper, the importance that the lessons drawn from the Dwarf-Stone tale have for saga scholarship is also illustrated by the *Þórssteinn* ['Stone of Thor'] and the scholarly discussion associated with it. *Eyrbyggja saga* (ch. 10) and *Landnámabók* (ch. S85=H73) locate this stone on the assembly site on the Þórsnes peninsula, claiming that human sacrifice was performed on it. *Eyrbyggja saga* (ch. 10) furthermore adds the detail that the stains left by the blood of the sacrificial victims can still be seen on the stone. Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, again, takes this to be a historically reliable tradition (2005: 500–501; 1999: 150–152, 194). Yet what we are dealing with here rather seems to be a case that is – at least within the frame of medieval saga literature – uniquely similar to the case of the Dwarf-Stone by the Seyðisfjörður. On the home-field of the farm Þingvellir ['Assembly Site'], to this day there lies a prominent boulder – a boulder that already W.G. Collingwood and Jón Stefánsson noted was coloured by inclusions of iron, giving it the look of a boulder spattered with blood (1899:

95–96 with Fig. 82 = Figure 4 above). Collingwood and Jón Stefánsson may have been the first modern writers to suggest that this stone and its colouring “may have been what the saga-man saw” (1899: 95); just as in the case of the Seyðisfjörður folk tale, this detail of *Eyrbyggja saga* also seems to have been directly developed out of (rather than being inscribed into) the landscape. Yet Collingwood and Jón Stefánsson were by no means the last scholars to note this correlation; rather, this correlation has long since become something of a topos of scholarship (cf. e.g. Bödl 2005: 213; Egeler 2015a: 83–84; Lethbridge, n.d.). What is crucial to note, however, and what is brought to the fore by the case of the Dwarf-Stone, is that this correlation is not a one-off occurrence, as it has been treated in scholarship to date. We are not dealing with an individual case here, but with a pattern: landscape and storytelling stand in a close dialogue with each other, sometimes so close that storytellers simply seem to have taken down their landscape's dictations in order to create an artistic interweaving between a literary plot and its real-world setting. We see this happening most clearly in the case of the Dwarf-Stone, but that it also appears in *Eyrbyggja saga* with almost the same clarity indicates that this is a pattern

which has to be fully taken into consideration in any attempt to assess the usefulness of medieval literary sources for retrospective reconstructions – even if, due to the nature of the material, close relationships between story and landscape tend to elude us when we are dealing with medieval texts, whose landscape settings are largely lost.

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Notes

1. For justified criticism of Eliade's approach, which ultimately is not scientific but mystic and theological, see Gill 1998: 301–304; Smith 1987: 1–23.
2. “Dvergasteinn. (Eptir frásögn kandid. Eiríks Magnússonar.) Prestsetrið á Seyðisfirði var í fyrndinni vestan eða sunnanfjarðar; en ekki greinir frá því, hvað það hafi þá heitið. Í grend við það var stór steinn, og trúðu menn því fult og fast, að í honum byggju dvergar, og því var hann kallaður Dvergasteinn. Þegar framliðu tímar, þókti staðurinn og kirkjan óhaganlega sett þeim megin fjarðarins, og var því hvorttveggja flutt þangað sem þau eru nú, hinu megin við fjörðinn. Steinninn stóri varð eptir, eins og nærri má geta. En þegar kirkjusmíðinni var lokið að mestu, varð mönnum starsýnt á að sjá hús koma siglandi handan yfir fjörðinn, og stefna beint þangað, sem kirkjan stóð. Heldur það á fram, uns það kennir grunns, og nemur þá staðar í fjörinni. Urðu menn þess þá vísari, að Dvergasteinn var þar kominn með íbúum sínum, dvergunum. Kunnu þeir ekki við sig, eptir að kirkjan var flutt, og drógu sig því á eptir henni. En til ævarandi minningar um guðrækni dverganna var prestsetrið kallað Dvergasteinn.” (Jón Árnason 1864: 67; for a translation cf. Jón Árnason 1891: 61.) See also the Sagnagrunnur database of Icelandic folklore.
3. More internationally, see also Christiansen 1958: 88 and motif-type A963.4 in Thompson 1955–1958.
4. A point which perhaps should at least be mentioned – even though it cannot be resolved – is the chicken-and-the-egg problem of the parsonage being called ‘Dvergasteinn’ and how this links to the story. The story's religious element seems to presuppose the existence of a church, and therefore it also presupposes that the parsonage predates the formation of the story as we have it. At the same time, if the story had only been invented after the parsonage had been established,

it would be surprising (though perhaps not impossible) that the parsonage should have been renamed with a toponym correlating with the new story. One, though not the only, possible scenario is that the unusual stone on the northern coast of the Seyðisfjörður at an early point attracted a dwarf story, was then used as a reference point for naming the parsonage after it was established at a later point, and was finally used as a core element of a story connecting both. If this sequence of events comes close to the truth, then the awkward relationship between the presuppositions made respectively by the naming of the parsonage (which presupposes the story of the dwarf stone) and by the story (which presupposes the parsonage) seems to be an indication of the growth of a Dvergasteinn story that took place in several steps and perhaps over a long period of time.

5. For an instance of a (Norwegian) supernatural aetiological place story that, at the time of its recording, was considered comical rather than being taken seriously, see Frog 2018.
6. For telling examples see also Tim Robinson on the toponym *Corrúch* on the island of Aran off the Irish west coast (Robinson 2009: 296–297), or his discussion of the different ways in which both scholars and local fishermen have attempted to make sense of the toponym *Oileán Dá Bhranóg*, borne by a little uninhabited island to the northwest of Aran (Robinson 2008: 151–153; in the present context it may be particularly interesting that the understanding current among the local fishermen – who are the only people to frequent the place – sounds like a joke, and from a scholarly perspective has been dismissed as one).
7. See also Power 1985; Egeler 2013: 33–43; 2015b: 73–92; Frog 2014: esp. 138–139.
8. To some extent, this parallels a problem in many approaches to the history of religions which Burkhard Gladigow (1988: 22) called “Rekonstruktion unter den Bedingungen von Perfektion”: “Ein [...] Darstellungsproblem in der Rekonstruktion eines Symbolsystems liegt in der Tendenz der Wissenschaftler, das System unter den Bedingungen von Perfektion zu rekonstruieren. So gibt es in den traditionellen Religionsgeschichten einer bestimmten Region oder Epoche kaum Routine und Trivialisierungen, Inkonsequenzen und notorische Mißverständnisse, Desinteresse oder Apathie. [...] Die Menschen begegnen ständig ‘heiliger Wirklichkeit’, befinden sich meist in ‘numinoser Hochstimmung’, handeln grundsätzlich in voller Kenntnis von Bedeutung und Geschichte der Rituale.” But cf. also the writings of Tim Robinson mentioned above in note 6.

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