

Contents

List of Illustrations	xiii
List of Maps	xiv
Acknowledgements	xvi
Preface	xviii
Note on Names, Spelling and Pronunciation	xx
Introduction	I
1 An Immigrant Society	5
Language and the Term 'Viking'	11
Leadership	13
Mord the Fiddle: A Leader and the Law	14
The Sagas: An Ethnography of Medieval Iceland	21
2 Resources and Subsistence: Life on a Northern Island	25
Turf Housing	34
3 Curdled Milk and Calamities: An Inward-looking	
Farming Society	43
Provisions, Subsistence Strategies, and Population	46
Bad Year Economics: Difficulties of Life in the North Atlantic	55
4 A Devolving and Evolving Social Order	63
Ranking, Hierarchy and Wealth	66
Complex Culture and Simple Economy	69

CONTENTS

Privatization of Power in the Tenth Century	73
A Proto-democratic Community?	75
Icelandic Feud: Conflict Management	77
5 The Founding of a New Society and the Historical Sources	81
The Effect of Emigrating from Europe	82
Land-taking and Establishing Order	84
Dating the Settlement: Volcanic Ash Layers	89
Closing the Frontier and Establishing Governing Principles	92
Written Sources: <i>The Book of Settlements</i> and <i>The Book of the Icelanders</i>	95
6 Limitations on a Chieftain's Ambitions, and Strategies of Feud and Law: <i>Eyrbyggja saga</i>	99
Arnkel's Quest for Wealth and Power	103
Ulfar's Land Shifts to Arnkel	104
Thorolf's Land Shifts to Snorri Goði	108
Ulfar Claims Orlyg's Land	110
Ulfar's Demise	112
The End of Arnkel's Ambitions	115
7 Chieftain-Thingmen Relationships and Advocacy	118
The Nature of the <i>Goðorð</i>	119
Advocacy	120
Arbitration and Legalistic Feuding	123
The Flexibility of the <i>Goði</i> -Thingman Relationship	126
The Social Effects of Concubinage	132
Distinctions of Rank	134
<i>Hreppar</i> : Communal Units	137
The Orkneys: A Comparison	139
Freedmen	140

CONTENTS

8	The Family and Sturlunga Sagas: Medieval Narratives and Modern Nationalism	142
	The Family Sagas	143
	The Sturlunga Compilation	146
	The Sagas as Sources	149
	Modern Nationalism and the Medieval Sagas	151
	Conclusions	156
	The Locations of the Family Sagas	159
9	The Legislative and Judicial System	170
	<i>Thing</i> : Assemblies	171
	Options	183
10	Systems of Power: Advocates, Friendship, and Family Networks	185
	Advocacy	186
	The Role of Kinship	188
	A Balancing Act	190
	Friendship (<i>Vinfengi</i> and <i>Vinátta</i>)	192
	WOMEN AND CHOICES OF VIOLENCE AND COMPROMISE	196
	Vengeance and Feud: Goadng in <i>Laxdæla saga</i>	197
	A Goadng Woman from <i>Sturlunga saga</i>	204
	Restraint Within a Major Chieftain's Household in the Sturlung Age	205
11	Aspects of Blood Feud	207
	Territory	211
	Marriage and Confused Loyalties	214
	Some Conclusions	217
12	Feud and Vendetta in a 'Great Village' Community	219
	The Language of Feud	223
	Norms of Restraint	225
	Bluffng and Violence	230
	Outlawry	231

13	Friendship, Blood Feud, and Power: <i>The Saga of the People of Weapon's Fjord</i>	233
	Inheriting a Foreigner's Goods	236
	Brodd-Helgi's Revenge against Thorleif	237
	Struggle to Claim a Dowry	241
	Skirmishes over a Woodland	243
	Seeking a Thingman's Allegiance	244
	Brodd-Helgi Breaks <i>Vinfengi</i>	245
	Geitir Establishes <i>Vinfengi</i>	247
14	The Obvious Sources of Wealth	252
	SOURCES OF INCOME AVAILABLE ONLY TO CHIEFTAINS	253
	Early Taxes	253
	Price-setting	255
	Additional Privileged Sources of Wealth	260
	The Sheep Tax	261
	SOURCES OF INCOME AVAILABLE TO ALL FREEMEN	262
	Trade	263
	Slavery and the Rental of Land and Livestock	268
15	Lucrative Sources of Wealth for Chieftains	272
	THE ACQUISITION OF PROPERTY IN THE FAMILY SAGAS	275
	Disputed Property in the East Fjords: <i>The Saga of the People of Weapon's Fjord</i>	275
	Disputed Property in the Salmon River Valley: <i>Laxdæla saga</i>	278
	INHERITANCE CLAIMS IN THE STURLUNGA SAGAS	281
	The Struggle to Inherit Helgastaðir: <i>The Saga of Gudmund the Worthy</i>	283
	Inheritance Rights to Heinaberg: <i>The Saga of Hvamm-Sturla</i>	286
	Resurgence of the Dispute over Heinaberg: <i>The Saga of the Icelanders</i>	289

CONTENTS

16	A Peaceful Conversion: The Viking Age Church	292
	Pagan Observance	294
	A Viking Age Conversion	297
	Geography and the Church	302
	Early Bishops, Priests and Nuns	303
	The Beginnings of a Formal Church Structure	304
17	Grágás: The 'Grey Goose' Law	308
	Manuscripts and Legal Origins	309
	Women and the Law	316
	Marriage and the Church	320
18	Bishops and Secular Authority: The Later Church	324
	Bishops	324
	The Tithe and Church Farmsteads	326
	Bishops and Priests in the Later Free State	329
	The Church's Struggle for Power in the Later Free State	331
	Priests	336
	Monasteries	338
19	Big Chieftains, Big Farmers and their Sagas at the End of the Free State	341
	Big Farmers and the Family Sagas	343
	Advantages Enjoyed by the <i>Stórbændr</i>	344
	<i>The Saga of the Icelanders</i> in the Sturlunga Compilation	347
	The <i>Stórgoðar</i> , Not Quite Rulers	348
	Iceland's Jarl	350
	1262-4: The Covenant with Norway's King and the End of the Free State	351
	Appendix 1: The Law-speakers	355
	Appendix 2: Bishops During the Free State	357
	Appendix 3: Turf Construction	358

CONTENTS

Appendix 4: A Woman Who Travelled from Vinland to Rome	369
Notes	373
Bibliography	396
Index	431