The color brown in Old Norse-Icelandic literature

Kirsten Wolf

The article examines the use of the color brown in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, which is encoded by brúnn and jarpr. More specifically, it seeks to determine through linguistic categorization the objects about which brown is used and to determine on the basis of its frequency whether for Old Norse-Icelandic brown should be placed in the earlier stages of the evolution of color terms or if it should be assigned to the later stages. The data show that brúnn is the more frequently used term, though the earliest texts suggest that both brúnn and jarpr were contextually restricted. Gradually, brúnn came to be applied to a wider range of objects, whereas jarpr remained a secondary color term. As a basic color term, brúnn should be assigned a fairly late stage in the temporal-evolutionary order of basic color terms.

Introduction

In the more than four decades since the publication of Brent Berlin and Paul Kay’s Basic Color Terms (1969), there has been considerable elaboration and criticism of the two linguist-anthropologists’ claims that there is a restricted universal inventory of basic color terms,¹ and that a language adds basic color terms in a particular order, which is interpreted as an evolutionary sequence: stage I: black, white; stage

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¹ According to Berlin and Kay (1963), a basic color term should (1) be monolexemic, (2) not be included in any other color terms, (3) be applicable to a wide range of objects, and (4) be salient, easily elicited, and appear at the beginning of elicitation lists. Crawford (1982) refined Berlin and Kay’s criteria of basic color terms, using semantic criteria: “A basic color term occurs in the idiolects of all informants. It has stability of reference across informants and across occasions of use. Its significance is not included in that of any other color term. Its application is not restricted to a narrow class of objects” (p. 342). Biggam (1998:28) adapted Crawford’s criteria to the study of languages for which there are no living informants and defines a basic color term as a term that is not a hyponym, is not contextually restricted, has stability of reference across types of vocabulary, and appears not to be restricted to a single vocabulary type.
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II: black, white, red; stage IIIa: black, white, red, green; stage IIIb: black, white, red, yellow; stage IV: black, white, red, yellow, green; stage V: black, white, red, yellow, green, blue; stage VI: black, white, red, green, yellow, blue, brown; and stage VII: black, white, red, green, yellow, blue, brown, purple, pink, orange, grey. In response to these studies, Berlin and Kay have modified their hypotheses about the growth or emergence of color terms. Berlin and Berlin (1975: 83 and 84–6) introduced a light-warm versus dark-cool stage instead of the earlier categorization based on brightness contrast. Also, they suggested that the dark-cool category would at stage IIIa divide, leading to the emergence of grue (blue or green), while the warm-light category would divide at stage IIIb, leading to the emergence of yellow. At stage IV, stage IIIa systems would then encode focal yellow, while stage IIIb would encode focal grue, which would find a focus in either blue or green. At stage V, undifferentiated grue would divide, and the new category would encode either blue or green. At stage VI, focal brown would emerge from the light-warm category, and at stage VII, focal purple, pink, orange, and grey would become encoded. With regard to stage VII, it is argued that the terms are encoded in no particular order, though it is noted that grey may appear early in color vocabulary growth, and, indeed, two years later, Witkowski and Brown (1977) declared grey “a ‘wild card’ color… which can be encoded at any point after the early stages” (54). Finally, Kay, Berlin, and Merrifield (1991) reported that either brown or purple or both not infrequently appear before the green/blue composite is dissolved, and “that there appears to be no fixed ordering to the temporal appearance of brown and purple” (639).

Old Norse-Icelandic has eight basic color terms: svartr, hvítr, rauðr, grœnn, gulr, blár, brúnn, and grár (Wolf 2006a, Brückmann 2012), making it an early stage VII language. For lack of data, it is difficult to assess precisely the evolutionary sequence of these terms, but so far recent studies of individual color terms have supported the revised evolutionary sequence in that grár should probably be assigned to a fairly early stage, either stage III or stage IV (Wolf 2009), and that blár should be assigned to a somewhat later stage (Wolf 2006b). It has further been argued that grœnn should be assigned to a stage earlier than gulr (Wolf 2010).

It is the aim of this article to examine the use of the color brown in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, which is encoded by brúnn (a basic color term) and jarpr (a

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2. Wolf (2006a: 184). The Arnamagnaean Commission’s Dictionary gives a primary sense of ‘brown, dark brown, ?brownish violet’. Secondary senses are defined as of flowers ‘brown violet’, of a sword’s edge ‘burnished’, and of a horse ‘brown-black, black’. Pokorny (1948–1969: 1, 136) reconstructs the Proto-Indo-European root of brúnn as *bher- ‘glänzend, hellbraun’; and notes that the root is often found in the names of brown animals, for example, bears and beavers. Its line of descent was from the suffixed variant form *bhru-no- to Germanic *brunaz. See also Wintermeier (1973: 70).
secondary color term). More specifically, the article seeks to determine through linguistic categorization the objects about which brown is used and to determine on the basis of its frequency whether for Old Norse-Icelandic brown should be placed in the earlier stages or in the later stages.

Data for the usage of brown in Old Norse-Icelandic literature

The data for the usages of brown are drawn from the following texts, which I have excerpted: the *Poetic Edda* (ed. Neckel 1983), the corpus of skaldic poetry (ed. Finnur Jónsson 1912–15), Snorri Sturluson’s *Edda* (ed. Finnur Jónsson 1931), *Heimskringla* (ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51), *Sturlunga saga* (ed. Jón Þórhallsson, Magnús Finnbogason, and Kristján Eldjárn 1946), the bishops’ sagas (see Appendix I), the Sagas of Icelanders (see Appendix II), the Íslendinga þættir (see Appendix III), the mythical-heroic sagas (see Appendix IV), and the romances (see Appendix V). In addition to these works, the *Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany* presented in Royal Irish Academy 23 D 43 (ed. Larsen 1931), the translations and compilations of scholarly texts included in *Hauksbók* (ed. Eirikur Jónsson and Finnur Jónsson 1892–96), and the writings on geography, history, computistics, and medicine in *Alfreði Íslenzk* (ed. Kålund 1908, Beckmann and Kålund 1914–16, Kålund 1917–18) have been examined in order to determine if brúnn and jarpr show stability of reference across types of vocabulary, which is Biggam’s (1997: 88) adaptation of Berlin and Kay’s fourth criterion, i.e. that the term must be psychologically salient for informants, in light of the fact that informants for a medieval language comprise only those texts that have survived to the present day.

Brown in the *Eddas*

As noted by Laurenson (1882), brown “occurs seldomer still [than blue] in the *Poetic Edda*” (15). There is only one example of brúnn: the referent is a she-bear (*bera*; *Völundarkviða*, st. 9). There are two examples of jarpr: both describe the color of locks of human hair (*skør*; *Guðrúnarkviða II*, st. 19 and *Hamðismál*, st.

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4. Most of the texts have their provenance in Iceland. No regional differences have been detected between texts that have their provenance in Iceland and Norway.
20). In addition, the adjective jarpskamr occurs in Hamðismál (st. 12), where it is used to describe Erpr (see n. 3), who is mentioned also in Atlakviða (st. 37) and Guðrúnarnarmót (prose introduction). The prose sections of Snorri Sturlusson’s Edda contain no examples of brúnn or jarpr. However, elsewhere, in his Heimskringla, Snorri makes use of the color terms. In Haraldsaga Sigurdarsonar, mention is made of a cloak (skikkja) made of brúnn purpuri (3: 101.20), and in Magnúss saga Erlingssonar a kirtle (kyrtill) is said to be brúnaðr (3: 388.21). Jarpr occurs three times, and the referent is human hair (hár): Óláfs saga helga (ljósjarpr, 2: 4.4), Magnússonar saga (3: 256.14), and Haraldsøna saga (3: 330.24).

Brown in skaldic poetry

The early skaldic poems yield only examples of brúnn. One describes the color of blood (blóð) in Hallfreðr Óttarsson vandræðaskáld’s Óláfsdrápa (6.7; Skjaldeidnitting 1: 149). The other occurrence is the compound brúnleggr in the kenning brúnleggs mýll (‘the brown arm’s stone’, that is, a gold ring) in a lausavís by Kormákr Ógmundarson (55.2; Skjaldeidnitting 1: 82). The almost eight hundred stanzas or stanza fragments assigned to the eleventh century reveal an equally infrequent use of brúnn: to describe the color of blood (blóð) in Sighvatr Þórdarson’s Vikingavísur (9.4; Skjaldeidnitting 1: 215) and the color of ravens’ prey (bráðir), that is, the bloodied corpses on the battle field, in Óttarr svartari’s Þórungrdrápa (8.4; Skjaldeidnitting 1: 274).

The over twelve hundred stanzas and stanza fragments from the twelfth century contain three occurrences of brúnn. One is in Óláfs drápa Tryggvasonar, where the adjective describes the color of blood (blóð) (19.3; Skjaldeidnitting 1: 572). Another is in Krákumál, where it describes the color of dew (dögg), that is, the blood that runs from the swords (12.3; Skjaldeidnitting 1: 652). The third is in Einarr Skúlason’s Haraldsdrápa II, where brúnn describes the color of the thole (hár), that is, a ship (4.3; Skjaldeidnitting 1: 425).

The skaldic stanzas from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries show a similarly uncommon use of the color adjective. In addition to the two occurrences in Snorri Sturlusson’s Háttatal, where the referents are the outer side of something (barð), that is, a ship (3.4; Skjaldeidnitting 2: 61), and glowing fire (glóð

5. See also Mead (1899), who in his analysis of the color-scheme in Old Norse-Icelandic poems observes that “[b]rown is found only three times, and twice is used as an epithet describing hair” (p. 205).

6. The personal name Erpr occurs on several occasions in Skáldskaparmál.

7. Finnur Jónsson (1966), s.v. brúnleggr, comments that “her synes brún egl. at høre til mýll og betegne guldets mörkere lød end sølvets”.
hlakkar), that is, a sword (50.4; Skjaldedigtning 2:75), brúnn appears only in Sturla Þórðarson’s Hrafnsmál to describe the edge (egg) of a sword (20.2; Skjaldedigtning 2:131) and in Ragnars saga loðbrókar to describe the color of serpents (taumar) (3.3; Skjaldedigtning 2:254). Finally, brúnn and brúni are listed in the Þulur as names for Óðinn (6.4 and 7.2; Skjaldedigtning 1:163); the former is listed in the Þulur as a name for horses (4.6; Skjaldedigtning 1:676).

There are four occurrences of jarpr in the entire corpus of skaldic poetry. Three of these are in poems assigned to the twelfth century. One is in Einarr Skúlason’s Geisli, where jarplitsaðr describes the color of an eagle (orn) (29.1; Skjaldedigtning 1:434). The other two are inlausavisur by Magnús berfœtttr, where hvítjarpr and jarpr describe the (hair) color of a woman (armhlín and svanni) (3.8 and 5.1; Skjaldedigtning 1:402, 403). The fourth occurrence is inHeiðreks gátur, where enar jarpari (13.4; Skjaldedigtning 2:242) refer to pieces in a board game. Finally, jarpi is listed in the Þulur a a bird name (5.7; Skjaldedigtning 1:677).

Brown in Sturlunga saga

The various texts included in the Sturlunga saga compilation contain four occurrences of brúnn:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Referent</th>
<th>Number of examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Animal</td>
<td>hestri</td>
<td>3 (Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar 1:224.2, Þorgils saga skard 2:122.33, 176.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cloth</td>
<td>klaedi</td>
<td>1 ([ræðbrúnn] Prestsaga Guðmundar góða 1:139.9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jarpr appears only in compounds. There are three examples of ljósjarpr to describe human hair (hár): Íslandinga saga 1:351.27, 352.2, 516.15. Jarpskjóttir occurs once to describe the color of a horse (hestri): Íslandinga saga 1:391.10.

Brown in the bishops’ sagas

The sagas and þættir of the bishops and other narratives associated with them yield two examples of brúnn: to describe the color of a horse (hestri) in Þorláks saga biskups C (283.3) and the color of clothing (klaedi) in Lærentíus saga biskups (240.17).

There are four occurrences of jarpr, and all describe human hair: ljósjarpr (Hungrvaka 23.13), svartjarpr (Þorláks saga biskups yngri 205.10), and jarpr (Þorláks saga biskups C 260.17 and Þorláks saga biskups E 290.6).

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8. Lena Rohrbach 2009:178 fn. 81) lists instances of Icelandic horses described as brown (brúnn, jarpr) in the Sagas of Icelanders and the contemporary sagas.
Brown in the Sagas and þættir of Icelanders

The prose sections of the Sagas and þættir of Icelanders reveal a slightly more varied use of brúnn:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Referent</th>
<th>Number of examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>kyrtil</td>
<td>3 ([móbrúnn] Eyrbyggja saga 34.26, [rauðbrúnn] Laxdœla saga 194.16, Valla-Ljóts saga 240.21–22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair</td>
<td>hár</td>
<td>1 (Gísls þáttr Illugasonar 336.14).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse</td>
<td>hestr</td>
<td>3 (Grettis saga 999.32, Njáls saga 148.5, 276.22, Viglundar saga 77.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>hross</td>
<td>1 (Grettis saga 1024.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>merhryssi</td>
<td>1 (Grettis saga 1024.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapons</td>
<td>egg (of a sword)</td>
<td>1 (Fljótsdeila saga 681.2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, the compound brúngrass (Finnboga saga ramma 626.20) appears. The color term is also found as a personal name (Brúni) in Heiðarvíga saga (1377.26), Ljósvetninga saga (16.15, etc.), and Njáls saga (470.20), and in a place name (Brúnahaugr) in Flóamanna saga (265.14). Finally, skolbrúnn, which in Cleasby-Vigfusson (1957) is translated as ‘sculp-brown, swarthy’ and in Fritzner (1886–1896) as ‘brunladen om ansigtsfarve’ (brownish about facial complexion) appears on seven occasions:10 Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar 438.33; Eyrbyggja saga 21.6; Hallfreðar saga 17.4, 73.4; Laxdœla saga 188.17; Svarfdœla saga 162.15; Víglundar saga 15.19.

With regard to jarpr, the Sagas and þættir of Icelanders show a more frequent, but at the same time more restricted, use of the color term:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Referent</th>
<th>Number of examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hair</td>
<td>hár</td>
<td>12 (Eyrbyggja saga (139.10), Fljótsdeila saga (677.3; [ljósjarpr] 687.15–16), Grænlendinga saga ([ljósjarpr] 95.18–19), Gunnlaugs saga ormsstungu ([ljósjarpr] 1169.37), Hallfreðar saga (18.1), Hrafnkels saga Freysgøða (1403.42), Laxdœla saga (188.4, [dókkjarpr] 188.25, [svartjarpr] 189.20), and Njáls saga (70.15, 301.29).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. The horse is named Brúnninn after its color (Víglundar saga 79.6, etc.)
10. Often, however, brúnn is regarded as referring to eyebrows, and accordingly the word is sometimes translated as ‘shaggy’ or ‘bushy eyebrows’. See also Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon (1989), s.v. skol-
Brown in the mythical-heroic sagas and the romances

The prose sections of the mythical-heroic sagas (fornaldarsögur) and the romances (riddarasögur) differ from the Sagas and þættir of Icelanders in that they show a somewhat more frequent use of brúnn and a wider application of the term:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Referent</th>
<th>Number of examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>ess</td>
<td>1 (Ála flekks saga 5:158.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>hestr</td>
<td>1 (Rémundar saga keisarasonar 5:181.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>hundr</td>
<td>1 (myrkrbrünn, Saga af Trístram ok Ísónd 1:161.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing and cloth</td>
<td>bliaz</td>
<td>1 (raudbrúnaðr, Elis saga ok Rósamundu 4:51.10–11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>kyrtil</td>
<td>3 (myrkrbrünn; Klári saga 5:18.8, 19.22, 53.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>purpuri</td>
<td>1 (Parcevals saga 4:223.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>silkiblaka</td>
<td>1 (Gongu-Hróls saga 3:256.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facial hair</td>
<td>hár</td>
<td>1 (dírkeks saga af Bern 1:255.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>skegg</td>
<td>1 (dírkeks saga af Bern 1:253.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reptiles</td>
<td>dreki</td>
<td>2 (dírkeks saga af Bern 1:250.4; døkkbrúnn, dírkeks saga af Bern 1:256.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ormr</td>
<td>1 (Konráðs saga keisarasonar 3:326.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stones</td>
<td>marmarasteinn</td>
<td>1 (Elis saga ok Rósamundu 4:4.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapons and armor</td>
<td>herneskja</td>
<td>1 (dírkeks saga af Bern 1:248.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>skjóldr</td>
<td>2 (dírkeks saga af Bern 1:248.17; døkkbrúnaðr, Völsunga saga 1:164.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vápn</td>
<td>3 (dírkeks saga af Bern 1:248.24; døkkbrúnaðr, dírkeks saga af Bern 1:257.4; Völsunga saga 1:164.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are four occurrences of skolbrúnn: Gongu-Hróls saga 177.12; Mágus saga jarls 287.4; Sigúrðar saga þögla 110.11; and Piðreks saga af Bern 31.12. Finally, mention should be made of the personal name Brúni in Ketils saga hængs (2:158.21, etc.) and Brúnsteinn in Piðreks saga af Bern (1:9.4, etc.).

As evident from the above, the works that have traditionally been labelled mythical-heroic sagas contain only four examples of brúnn (to describe weapons, hair, and clothing), whereas all the other occurrences appear in the romances. The distribution of brúnn between the translated and the indigenous romances is about equal.12

11. In these two examples the dragon is painted on a shield.

12. The translations tend to be paraphrastic, but in the case of Parcevals saga the phrase “Vals d’une porpre par deseure” has been identified as the source of “Hon var klædd brúnum purpura” (The Arnamagnaeæan Commission’s Dictionary, s. v. brúnn).
Jarpr occurs only twice, in Piðreks saga af Bern; the referents are hair (hár; 1:251.7) and hair color (hárslitr; 1:253.10).

Brown in scientific compositions

The encyclopedic and scientific texts examined show an infrequent use of brúnn, but at the same time a usage of the term indicating a color range. While the brúnt salt (salt) recommended in AM 194 8vo for toothaches (ed. Kålund 1908: 64.26) and the brúnt fargi (color) mentioned in AM 685d 4to (ed. Kålund 1917–18: 3: 74.6) both suggest a dark or brown color, the use of brúnn about flowers in the Book of Simples in Royal Irish Academy 23 D 43 (ed. Larsen 1931) shows that the term covered also violet or purple. About the flowers of the violet (viola) it is said that “sumar eru brúnar, sumar hvítar, en sumar svartar” (93.6–7), and it is noted that the one that has brown flowers is good to drink for epilepsy (93.11–12; “hennar lögri sem brúnt blómstr er góðr at drekka við brottfallí”). And about the poppy (valmuga) it is specified that there are three kinds, one with white flowers, a second with red flowers, and a third which is smaller and grows in the fields and has brown flowers (84.19–20; “hit þríðja er minnst ok vex í õkrum ok hefir brúnt blómstr”). The oil made from the seed of the one with brown flowers (84.25; “brúnt blómstr”) is said to give sleep, while the juice of the poppy with brown flowers (84.27; “brúnt blómstr”) drunk with wine is said to relieve diarrhoea and stop a woman’s flux.

The texts examined provide only one occurrence of jarpr, in the section on physiognomy in AM 435 12mo (ed. Kålund 1917–18), where it is stated that “døkkjarpir lokkar, ef þeir eru mátuliga þunnir, sýna góðsiðuga menn ok hægt skaplyndi” (98.28–30; dark brown locks, if they are suitably thin, are indicative of upright men and an even temper).

13. “Við tanna verk: tak brúnt salt ok ríð utan tannholdit opt”.
14. “Pund af gullfargi fyrir 12 aura… spænkst grænt fyrir 5 aura… brúnt ok indiblátt, hvít fyrir 5 aura”.
15. ‘some are brown, some white, some black.’ The Arnanagamaean Commission’s Dictionary, s. v. brúnn, notes that for “brúnar” Henrik Harpestreng has “brunæ”.
16. The Arnanagamaean Commission’s Dictionary, s. v. brúnn, notes that for “brúnt” Henrik Harpestreng has “bleklic brunt”.
Assessment of the data and conclusion

There is no evidence of any symbolism associated with the color brown in Old Norse-Icelandic literature.\(^{17}\) The rare and restricted use of brúnn in the earliest Old Norse-Icelandic texts, that is, eddic and skaldic poetry, suggests that it was not a basic color term at the time of their composition, but was limited to specific sets of objects, though it must be borne in mind, of course, that the corpus of texts assigned to the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries is considerably smaller than that of the later centuries. Moreover, it cannot be argued that a composer did not know of the color term simply because it does not appear in the text.

In the earliest compositions, the chief collocation is blood, which indicates a reddish-brown color and shows that the term had an established hue sense. The other referents are pigments, that is, the bear in Völundarkviða, the ships (that is, wood) in Haraldsdrápa II and Háttatal, and possibly the serpents in Ragnar saga löðbrókar, though in these poems it seems that the color choice was dictated by alliterative and metrical purposes.\(^{18}\) The use of brúnn about swords (that is, metal) indicates that as in Old English the color term had two components, i.e. hue and surface reflectivity Casson (1997: 230), which is in line with Pokorny’s definition of the Proto-Indo-European root.\(^{19}\) Accordingly, in the statement in Þiðriks saga af Bern that “brúnn litr hans vápna merkir hans tiginleik ok kurteisi” (1:248.24; the brúnn color of his weapons signify his nobility and chivalry), the adjective applies not to the color of the weapons but to the fact that they were shiny.

It is not until the composition of Heimskringla, Sturlunga saga, the Sagas and þættir of Icelanders, the mythical-heroic sagas, and, especially, the somewhat more “foreign-influenced” romances that brúnn begins to be applied to a greater variety of objects. The referents indicate that during this time, the color term came

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\(^{17}\) Luckiesh (1918) discusses only red, yellow, green, blue, white, black, and grey. Blanch (1967) claims that “brown is the emblem of mourning, evil and vigor” (76), and, citing Allen (1930: 89), he comments that “[t]he color of the earth, brown is frequently linked with the poverty of the humble peasants or the laboring classes”.


\(^{19}\) See also Mead (1899), who comments that “[w]hen applied to helmets or to the edge of the sword the term brun possibly means bright, glittering, or flashing, with a suggestion of redness” (193–194), and the Dictionary of Old English, where it is noted that in poetry brún is used of forged metal “traditionally interpreted as ‘shining, gleaming, burnished’; perhaps take as sense 1 [of a brown hue, dark-coloured], referring to the appearance of oxidized iron”.

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to designate a more general brown or a dark color rather than the reddish-brown hue suggested by its use to describe blood and metal (weapons). Moreover, the fact that brúnn is used only five times about metallic objects in these compositions (Fljótsdœla saga, Diðreks saga af Bern, and Völtsunga saga) indicates that the secondary meaning of glistening or burnished was in the process of becoming obsolete.

The use of brúnn to designate purple is limited to the Book of Simples and the field of horticulture. Presumably, the reason for the use of brúnn to designate also purple is that Old Norse-Icelandic did not have a term for this particular color. Admittedly, a secondary color term, purpuralitr, is attested, but it appears not to have been widely used, and the modern Icelandic term for purple is fjólublár or lilla (the latter has only very recently entered the language). In this respect, the use of brúnn is similar to the use of the color term in Old English, which likewise did not have a basic term for purple, and while the Old English Dictionary gives a primary sense “of a brown hue, dark-coloured”, the Latin lemmata indicate a color range that includes also black, purple, red, and dun, and, interestingly, brun is also used of purple flowers in Old English. It is noteworthy that Old High German, too, associated purple with

20. Purpuralitr is not monolexemic and not applicable to a wide range of objects (see n. 1). The term came into Old Norse-Icelandic as a loanword from Church Latin. Latin purpura, which was the name of a shellfish, a dye obtained from the shellfish, and cloth colored by the dye, became Old Norse-Icelandic purpuri. The Arnamagnaean Commission’s Dictionary has only five occurrences of purpuralitr. In three of these, the term is used about precious stones: Stjorn (ed. Unger 1862: 210. 117–119), Hauksbók (ed. Eiríkr Jónsson and Finnur Jónsson 1892–96: 227.1), and AM 194 8vo (ed. Kålund 1908: 81.1). The two other occurrences are in Mariu saga (ed. Unger 1871), where it is said that “a klaðafallinu er purpuralitr” (113.2); and in the exemplum “Af Karlamagnúsi” (Íslenzk Æventyri, ed. Gering 1882–1883), where it is said about the middle-piece (medalkafli) of a sword that it was so beautiful, as if it “bari purpuralit” (1: 37.3).

21. “þonne ysexual wyrt twægea cynna… se wer hafæ hweat blostman & þæt wif hafæ reade ofpe brune” (then is this herb of two kinds…the male has a white flower and the female has a red or brown), “[seo wyrt] spica… is brunes heowes & godes stences” (the herb… is of brown color and has a pleasant smell), “dolhsealf… já wyrt bradleafan sio weaxeþ on wuda” (figwort… a broadleafed plant which grows in the forest), and “genome wealwyrt &… brune bicseopwyrt & attorlaþan & reade netlan & reade hofan” (take dwarf-elder and brown bishop’s wort and attrolothe and red nettles and red alehoof) (http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/dict/indices/headwordsindexe.html). In her discussion of the color terms used of hangings and coverings in Old English, Biggam (2006) draws attention to the fact that in his De virginitate Aldhelm writes of these products that they are dyed purpureus, which is glossed brun in Old English, and that two scholars, Arthur S. Napier and Louis Goossens, have suggested that brun is here an abbreviation for brunbasu. Biggam comments: “This high-quality context may have persuaded earlier editors that brun, traditionally defined as ‘brown’ or ‘dark’, indicates too ordinary a colour, while brunbasu is more impressive, meaning ‘dark purple, purple, red-purple, scarlet’. The DOE, however, while also defining brun as ‘of a brown hue, dark-coloured; continues its definition to include this word’s extended range into ‘purple’ and ‘red’ (among other colours) when glossing Latin words
brown; the *Althochdeutsches Wörterbuch* lists *wurmbrūn* (the brown produced by worms) as a gloss for Latin *purpureus*, though this is not the only gloss for the Latin word, which is also glossed by, for example, *purpurfaro* and *purpurīn*.22

With regard to glistening or burned and purple, it is telling, that the thirty-six occurrences of *brúnn* listed by the *Orðabók Háskóla Íslands* dating from the early eighteenth century to the twentieth century contain no examples of *brúnn* suggestive of purple or used to describe metal.23 At the same time, the occurrences confirm the gradually wider application of the color term with collocations including beans (*baunir*), clothing (*kläði*), darkness (*myrkur*), horses (*gangvari, hestur*), iodine (*joð*), mead (*mjöður*), rice (*hrísgrjón*), sauce (*sósa*), soup (*súpa*), and sugar (*sykur*). From one of the occurrences, it is clear that when used about horses, the color term denotes black: “Brúnn er liturinn [á hestum] kallaður, þegar hörundid er svart, svo og hárið og hófarnir” (the color of horses is called *brúnn*, when the skin and also the hair and hooves are black).24 Håkon Hamre’s examination of Icelandic horse-names confirms this, though, according to Hamre, *brúnn* covers also dark brown: “[b]runt er på Island féllesbetegnelse for mørkebrune og sorte hester” (brown is in Iceland a common designation for dark brown and black horses).25 His view is shared by Stefán Ædalsteinsson, who argues that “[h]estar sem eru svartir að lit eru ýmist kallaðir svartir eða brúnir og fer það eftir ýmsu hvort verður oftan á” (horses which are black in color are sometimes called *svartir* or *brúnir*, and it varies which is prevalent).26
In the texts examined, *jarpr* is used exclusively about human hair with the exception only of *Geisli*, in which it describes the color of an eagle, but where clearly it is used for alliterative purposes (“Lét [japr líðs út / [arnar jöðs enn göði / [munn rauð málþings kennir] / Magnús hugin fanga”); *Heiðreks gátur*, in which it is used about the pieces in a board game (contrasting “enar fegri”); and *Íslendinga saga*, in which it describes the color of a horse.27

It is difficult to assess the precise hue(s) to which *jarpr* refers, but “dark, dusky, swarthy” would seem reasonable candidates in the earliest compositions.28 However, as *brún* began to shed some of its semantic portfolio, including red-brown, and came to designate a more general brown hue (or black or dark brown when used about horses), it appears that *jarpr* attached itself more firmly to brown and assumed a specific sense of reddish brown to fill the gap left by *brún*,29 as evident from one of the occurrences listed by the *Orðabók Háskóla*

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28. This is the sense given of *earp*, *eorp* in the Dictionary of Old English.

Íslands: “[ý]mist er hesturinn einlitur, t. d. grár með ýmsum tilbrigðum, rauður, jarpur (rauíðbrúnn)” (the horse is alternately of one color, for example grey with various characteristics, red, jarpr [reddish brown]). The occurrences listed by the Orðabók Háskóla Íslands show that jarpr remains a restricted term used primarily about the color of horses, human hair, and human skin tone.

The data show that of the two Old Norse-Icelandic color terms brúnn is the more frequently used term, though the earliest compositions suggest that both brúnn and jarpr were contextually restricted. Gradually, brúnn came to be applied to a wider range of objects and assumed the status of a basic color term, whereas jarpr remained a secondary color term. The data therefore do not challenge Berlin and Kay’s original claim that brown should be assigned to a late stage in the temporal-evolutionary order of basic color terms, and the conclusion of this analysis must be that brúnn should be assigned to a fairly late stage, probably as late as blár and certainly a stage after hvítr, svartr, rauðr, grár, grœnn, and gulr.

Bibliography


31. In this respect, Old Norse-Icelandic is similar to Old English. Casson (1997) maintains that “[b]rown probably was not a basic color term in Old English, but was added to the basic color lexicon in the Middle English period” (230).

32. The use of brúnn and jarpr is therefore not comparable to French, which has one basic category brown, enclosed by two basic terms brun and marron, though there are two contexts, hair and physical type, in which marron is not used (Forbes 2006: 101).
The color brown in Old Norse-Icelandic literature


Íslenzk fornrit. 1933. Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka forntafléag.


Appendix I

The texts excerpted comprise: Árna saga biskups (ÍF 17),33 Biskupa ættir (ÍF 17), Gísls þátr Il-lugasonar (ÍF 15.2), Hungrvaka (ÍF 16), Ísleifs þátr biskups (ÍF 16), Jarteinabók þorláks biskups in forna (ÍF 16), Jarteinabók þorláks biskups önnur (ÍF 16), Jóns saga helga (ÍF 15.2), Kristni saga (ÍF 15.2), Kristni þættir (ÍF 15.2), Lárentíus saga biskups (ÍF 17), Páls saga biskups (ÍF 16), Sæmundar þátr (ÍF 15.2), Soguþátr Jóns Halldórssonar biskups (ÍF 17), þorláks saga biskups C (ÍF 16), þorláks saga biskups E (ÍF 16), þorláks saga biskups in elzta (ÍF 16), and þorláks saga biskups yngri (ÍF 16).

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33. ÍF = Íslenzk fornrit.
Appendix II

The texts excerpted comprise: Bandamanna saga (ed. Magerøy 1981), Barðar saga Snaefellsáss [ÍS 1],34 Bjarnar saga Hitdełakappa [ÍF 3], Droplaugarsona saga [ÍF 11], Egils saga Skálra-Grimssonar [ÍS 1], Eiríks saga rauða [ÍF 4], Eyrrbyggja saga [ÍF 4], Finnboga saga ramma [ÍS 1], Fljótstælra saga [ÍS 1], Flóamanna saga [ÍF 13], Fóstbræðra saga [ÍS 1], Gisla saga Súrssonar [ÍS 1], Grettis saga [ÍS 1], Grænlendinga saga [ed. Ölafur Halldórsson 1978], Gull-Þóris saga [ÍS 2], Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfífls [ÍS 2], Gunnlaugs saga orrnstungu [ÍS 2], Hallfreðar saga [ed. Bjarni Einarsson 1977], Harðar saga ok Hólmverja [ÍS 2], Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings [ÍS 2], Heiðarvíga saga [ÍS 2], Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða [ÍS 2], Hænsa-Þóris saga [ÍF 3], Kjalnesinga saga [ÍS 2], Kormáks saga [ÍF 8], Króka-Refs saga [ÍS 2], Laxdæla saga [ÍF 5], Ljósvetninga saga [ÍF 10], Njáls saga [ÍF 12], Reykdæla saga ok Víga-Skúta [ÍS 2], Svarfdæla saga [ÍF 9], bórðar saga hreðu [ÍS 2], Þorsteins saga hjóta [ÍS 2], Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar [ÍS 2], Válfa-Ljóts saga [ÍF 9, Váp努fiðinga saga [ÍS 2], Vatnsdæla saga [ÍF 8], Víglundar saga [ÍF 14])

Appendix III

The texts excerpted comprise: Arnórs þáttar jarlaskálds,35 Auðunar þáttar vestfirska, Bergbúa þáttar, Bolla þáttar, Brandkrossa þáttar, Brands þáttar ðorea, Draumar Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar, Egils þáttar Síðu-Hallssonar, Einars þáttar Skúlasögunar, Gisla þáttar Illugasonar [ÍF 3], Grænlendinga þáttar, Gull-Ású-börðar þáttar, Gunnars þáttar Þiðrandabana, Halldórs þáttar Snorrasonar I and II, Hrafnþáttar Guðrúnarsonar, Hreiðars þáttar, Hrómundar þáttar halta, Íslendingas þáttar sóggufrða, Ivars þáttar Ingimundarsonar, Jökuls þáttar Buasonar, Kumlbið þáttar, Mæna þáttar skálds, Oddós þáttar Ófeigssonar, Ófeigs þáttar [ÍF 10], Orms þáttar Stórólfssonar, Ótars þáttar svarta, Sneglu-Halla þáttar, Stjórnu-Oddas draumar, Stúfs þáttar, Sváða þáttar ok Arnórs kerlingarnefs, Þáttr Þorsteins skelks, Þiðranda þáttar ok þórðalls, Þórarins þáttar Neðjólfssonar, þórarins þáttar ofsa, Þórarins þáttar stuttfeldar, Þorgíms þáttar Hallssonar, Þorleifs þáttar jarlaskálds, þormóðar þáttar, Þorsteins þáttar Austfirdings, Þorsteins þáttar forvitna, Þorsteins þáttar Síðu-Hallssonar, Þorsteins þáttar stangarhógs, Þorsteins þáttar tjaldfástings, Þorsteins þáttar uxafóts, þorvalds þáttar tasalda [ÍF 9], þorvalds þáttar viðþyrla, þorvarðar þáttar krákunefs, Véðu-Brands þáttar [ÍF 10], Qgmundar þáttar dyttts [ÍF 9], og Qíkofra þáttar [ÍF 11])


35. References to this þáttar as well as the other þættir (unless otherwise stated) are all based on the ÍS edition.
Appendix IV


Appendix V

The texts excerpted comprise: Ála flekks saga,38 Bevers saga, Klári saga, Drauma-Jóns saga, Elís saga ok Rósamundu, Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans, Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr, Ívents saga, Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns, Konráðs saga, Mágus saga jarls, Mírmanns saga, Móttuls saga, Parcevals saga, Partalópa saga, Rémundar saga keisarasonar, Saga af Tristram ok Ísúnd, Samsons saga fagra, Sápidons saga stefka, Sigurðar saga fóts, Sigurðar saga þóglu, Tristrams saga ok Ísoddar, Valvers þáttur, and Vilmundar saga viðutan.

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37. References to this work as well as the following texts are based on Fornaldar sögur norður-landa (ed. Guðni Jónsson 1959).
38. References to this work as well as the other texts are based on Riddarasögur, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, 6 vols., Reykjavík, 1949–1954.