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A Letter from the Editor

Amy Jefford Franks[1]

In 1991, Judith Jesch opened her book *Women in the Viking Age* with the statement 'Vikings are irredeemably male in the popular imagination'.[2] Almost thirty years later it is hard to argue that this perception has changed at all. Indeed, even within academia, the study of gender in Viking Age and medieval Scandinavia and Iceland is still often viewed as a special interest subject. However, at its most basic level, gender history uncovers the experiences of around half the population of any given society.

Over the years, a number of excellent works concerning medieval Scandinavian gender have been produced. Among these notable pieces there are, aside from Jesch's aforementioned groundbreaking work, Carol Clover's 'Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe';[3] Jenny Jochen's *Women in Old Norse Society*;[4] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir's *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words, and Power*;[5] Brit Solli's articles on Óðinn's queerness;[6] and Nancy Coleman and Nanna Løkka's *Kvinner i vikingtid*.[7] As the titles above suggest, however, there is a heavy focus on gender within the fields

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2 Jesch, Judith, *Women in the Viking Age* (The Boydell Press: Woodbridge, 1991).

3 Clover, Carol J., 'Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe,' Speculum, 68 (1993) 363-387.

4 Jochens, Jenny, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

5 Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words, and Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

6 Solli, Brit, 'Odin the Queer? On Ergi and Shamanism in Norse Mythology,' in Glyfer och arkeologiska rum - En vänbok till Jarl Nordbladh (eds.) Gustafsson, Anders; & Karlsson, Håkon (Göteborg: Göteborg University, 1999) 341-349; Solli, Brit, '"Queer Theory" og gamle guder: Skeive perspektiv på norrøn mytologi,' in *Kritisk kunnskapspraksis: Bidrag til feministisk vitenskapsteori*, Ann Therese Lotherington & Turid Markussen (eds.), (Oslo: Spartacus Forlag As, 1999) 241-264; Solli, Brit, 'Queering the Cosmology of the Vikings: A Queer Analysis of the Cult of Odin and "Holy White Stones,"' Journal of Homosexuality, 54 (2008) 192-208.

7 Coleman, Nancy & Løkka, Nanna (eds.) *Kvinner i vikingtid* (Oslo: Scandinavian Academic Press, 2014).

of history and literature. This is, of course, no bad thing, and there is always room for more work within history and literature. However, this also reflects the comparative dearth of work in other disciplines, including history of religion, archaeology, reception studies, and art history.

Although there remains a heavy emphasis on literature and history, there is nonetheless an ever-growing amount of scholarship on gender in Viking Age and medieval Scandinavia and Iceland. This work covers a huge variety of angles and approaches: queer theory, shieldmaidens and maiden-kings, the lives of powerful women, the textile work of every day women, and so much more beyond that.

Despite this growth in scholarship, there is no dedicated space for this to be shared. Furthermore, it is my opinion that a huge amount of this scholarship is particularly coming from dedicated, fascinated, and inquisitive students. I know from my own experience how much we can learn from each other—my scholarship would not be what it is today without growing and learning from my peers. Enter: *Kyngervi*. This is a space for students to share their work with the wider community, learn from each other, and open up new areas of discussion.

Kyngervi is focused on, but not solely dedicated to, gender. In the words of our editor Basil Arnould Price, 'we aim to bring the marginalised to the forefront'. Therefore, *Kyngervi* accepts work from a variety of places that centre the Other, including critical race studies, disability studies, human/animal studies, and other related topics.

We received a wide range of articles for our inaugural volume, some of which are included below. We are excited to be working with the other articles for publication in our second volume in 2020, and look forward to receiving more submissions for this.

These articles have all been kept within rigorous academic standards. Double-blind peer-reviewing has been carried out. For students who are not familiar with the process, this is where fellow researchers, in this case all students, who work on related topics, are asked to read the article and give their feedback and recommendations. The author and the peer-reviewer do not know

who each other are. All journals work to this standard, as it is a process that allows us to improve one another's work. However, our editors also review the feedback before sending it to the author. Many academics throughout the years in a variety of fields have noted that their feedback has been harsh, with 'Reviewer 2' becoming a meme in its own right. Here at *Kyngervi* we want the best for our authors, many of whom may have never submitted work for peer review before. We hope that other journals will also follow suit.

The journal could not have existed without the hard work of the team of editors. We came together after I sought out colleagues who were willing to support me in this endeavour. I found a group of people who, like me, could see how much the field needed a journal like this, and I am so grateful to them for their dedicated and hard work in balancing this with their other academic work.

Lynn Schönbeck has been our excellent website editor and designer. She designed our beautiful logo and created our fantastic website. She has been ensuring our design is perfect every step of the way.

Lee Colwill is our book reviews editor. They have been suggesting and finding books that should be reviewed for this and future volumes, and then matching those books with the perfect reviewers. If you have future suggestions for books you'd like to review, get in touch with Lee!

Our articles have then been edited by myself and our three editors: Tonicha Upham, Holly McArthur, and Basil Arnould Price. They have all diligently found peer reviewers, looked after them and their authors, and have made every step of this journey smooth and easy.

I am so proud that we have come together as such a fantastic team, and so grateful that they have helped me bring this idea to life.

Kyngervi grew out of the informal Norse Queer and Gender Studies Student Network. I founded the network after completing my MA, upon realising how many students were working on these topics, often without support and advice. The network primarily exists on Facebook as a closed group—it is searchable, and I invite you, reader, to join us. We have a shared Google document reading list, where anyone is welcome to add the bibliographical information of texts that they think could be useful for people

working in the area. We also provide a space for members to ask questions about ideas, share their work, engage in discussions about texts, and to pass on Calls for Papers for conferences and journal submissions.

We have exciting hopes and plans for the future of *Kyngervi*, but let's start here. In this first volume we have an introduction from Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, a number of peer reviewed articles, two book reviews, and a variety of conference reports and exhibition reports. These articles include the discussions of Óðinn's gender as a point of comparison to a Scottish hagiography; the now infamous BJ 581; and women in *Ljósvetninga saga*, among others. There is huge international interest in Viking Age and medieval Scandinavian gender, and we have an excellent showcase of it here.

I want to extend my gratitude to everyone who has got involved, supported, and shared information about *Kyngervi*. I hope you enjoy what we have to offer.

Amy Jefford Franks

Foreword

Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir[1]

Kyngervi, the Modern Icelandic word for gender, first appeared in its contemporary usage in the late 1990s. As a compound noun, it was coined following the ancient Germanic custom of synthesising two or more words into one to articulate something new. The first part, *kyn*, has a plethora of meanings in Old Norse and Modern Icelandic, including kin, ancestry, kind, (biological) sex or even wonder, while the second component can refer to an outfit, apparel, kit, gear, or costume—something one puts on in order to adopt a certain persona or identity. Together, these components form an abstract concept—a modern kenning, even—which imagines gender as a metaphorical cloak each person dons as a part of their existence. In the last decades, *kyngervi* has been used to refer to the socially constructed, non-biological aspects of identity that make a person 'male' or 'female', a usage that highlights the performative nature of gender roles and entails a rejection of biological essentialism. Scores of books and articles have been published about different facets of gender and sexuality in Viking and Medieval Scandinavia, which is hardly surprising considering the wealth of pertinent evidence that survives. The study of gender theory as an academic subject is carried out in many different fields within which specialists in Norse culture work, and it has been modulated in several phases, e.g., from the first to the fourth waves of feminism, and lesbian, gay and queer studies developing as disciplines in their own right. We are now in the midst of a period where transgender and intersex perspectives are rapidly adding to, refining and changing our knowledge about sex and gender as they appear in ancient texts, becoming more fine-grained as the theories themselves develop. The new roads down which they will take us will revolutionise the sprawling field of Viking and Medieval Scandinavia in ways we probably can't quite foresee yet.

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It's a fun exercise to speculate whether a medieval person would have understood the word *kyngervi*, had they been able to time-travel to 2019: they certainly would have known the individual components, though it is open to debate if they would primarily have associated them with gender. As mentioned previously, the word *kyn* has a wide range of connotations, but it is used in the sense of 'the sexes' in an *exempla* (a short, Christian, didactic story) copied in a manuscript from around 1350.[2] Moreover, it appeared in various different compound words, including *karlkyn ok kvenkyn* (male and female), in the mid-fourteenth-century biblical text *Stjórn*, referring to God's command to Noah before the Flood to bring a male and female animal of every species on the Ark. The word *gervi* appears in compound words that appear fairly frequently in sagas, such as *atgervi* (physical or mental abilities, esp. positive ones) and *gervileikr* (prowess)—most famously in the proverb *sitt er hvárt, gæfa ok gervileikr* (they are are two different things, luck and ability)—seemingly going back to the idea that each individual possesses figurative 'equipment'.[3] *Gervi* has a different shade of meaning in words like *stafkarlsgervi* (a vagrant disguise), *konungsgervi* (an outfit appropriate for a king) and, notably, *karlmannsgervi* (a man's *gervi*), which appears in chapter 4 of *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*. This is the point at which Hervör sheds her femininity and adopts the name Hervarðr, spending the next phase of her life as a Viking, sailing the seas and harrying with a band of followers. The question is how a medieval audience would have understood the *-gervi* here: was it a 'disguise', implying a degree of deception—that you could masquerade as someone other than yourself? Or is it conceived of more neutrally as an 'outfit', which would mean that Hervör was viewed as having an inherent cisgender female identity, but that she cross-dresses and goes by a male name so she can be a Viking warrior? Or does *karlmannsgervi* mean that it was possible to inhabit a male gender identity regardless of one's biology? In other words, is Hervör's character a medieval expression of something similar to what is now called a transgender identity?

[2] For the lexical evidence discussed in this paragraph, see the entries for *kyn*, *gervi* and related words on onp.ku.dk.
[3] *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, ch. 34.

This is a complex issue and I'm not going to try to resolve it any further here, except to note that the scholarship on this text and similar sagas would probably be a good case study of the dramatic impact that each new wave of gender theory has had on the Old Norse field, and to remind us that yet new and probably more sophisticated interpretations will appear in time. Scholarship is always dependent on and in dialogue with what came before, and fortunately, none of us will ever have the last say on a subject. The possibilities of non-binary and queer readings is one of the running themes in this first issue of *Kyngervi*, and though the primary sources are sometimes frustratingly challenging to work with (for all sorts of reasons), each new study allows us to take a step further in mapping the many manifestations of gender identities and roles in Viking and medieval Scandinavia and Iceland. The concept of gender itself does not have one meaning for everyone today, nor did it in the past. Thinking about the variety of connotations evoked by the components of the word *kyngervi* in different configuations, one could speculate that individual Icelanders or Scandinavians might also have assigned the word different meanings, had they possessed it in their vocabulary. Although people who lived in the Viking and medieval periods would perhaps not have understood the contemporary terms we use to describe aspects of gender and sexuality, criticism is constantly deepening our knowledge of the innovative ways in which they explored gender in the literature or visual art they created, or how they memorialised their dead as gendered beings in burials.

Also at stake in this issue is the growing inter- and multidisciplinary nature of our work. When I began my graduate studies in medieval Norse and English literature mere moments (okay, 14 years!) ago, the boundaries between disciplines were firmer, at least in my memory. Literary critics and historians worked mostly in isolation from archaeologists or manuscript scholars and vice versa, with relatively little dialogue over the fences compared to now. With the establishment and growth of new multidisciplinary MA courses and summer programmes in the last 15 years or so, it has become more common for younger scholars to be at least passingly familiar with a whole range of disciplines. I never cease to be impressed and inspired by the dexterity with which many people

coming through their MAs and doctorates these days move from material philology to burial archaeology and textual analysis or runology and everything between, also using challenging theoretical frameworks and all the while maintaining the greatest academic rigour. This development towards multidisciplinary methods will strengthen the field, enabling us to draw productive connections between different types of sources that, when analysed together, might tell us more about Norse culture than they can individually.

In the first volume of *Prolonged Echoes*, published in 1994, Margaret Clunies Ross traced themes related to gender in Norse mythology, such as patterns of negative reciprocity in marriage, and male appropriation of procreation in myths about the creation of the world and the first humans.[4] The compelling evidence Clunies Ross provided for her arguments caused the book to become generally considered as one of the most authoritative secondary sources available on Norse mythology, which is, as she shows, mercilessly stratified by gender. However, one does not have to go very far back in Old Norse scholarship to find dismissals of her analysis, typical for the resistance earlier critics using feminist and/or queer methodologies often faced: for example, in as recently as 2005, the book was labelled as 'myth-making' and ideologically driven.[5] The rejection of feminist analysis on such grounds expresses a line of thought which suggests that there is such a thing as an unbiased reading position, one that is—often as not—male, heteronormative and white. Few younger scholars today would consider the analysis in *Prolonged Echoes* particularly radical, and I for one am grateful to Clunies Ross and other scholars who blazed trails when the field was much more skeptical than it is now to approaches informed by feminism, let alone queer and transgender theory. Whatever particular theoretical gender framework we adopt as critics, we are thankfully in a phase where incorporating gender perspectives is becoming ever

[4] Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*, vol. 1, *The Myths*, The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilization 7 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1994).
[5] 'Clunies Ross's ... feminist-influenced ideology again suggests that the mythologist cannot avoid becoming a myth-maker', in John McKinnell, *Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005), 23.

more 'mainstream' and accepted as a legitimate lens through which to study primary sources, and one that many believe should ideally be used alongside and integrated with other methodologies. That is not to say that we have arrived in a perfect place yet, and as the articles in this issue show, there are many 'untapped resources' for budding scholars to choose from, both in terms of investigating neglected sources and producing more nuanced interpretations of better-studied ones. Looking at the issue and its editorial team, the future looks bright!

In these times, most of us in academia understand and acknowledge that there is no way to separate our subjectivity as humans from our scholarship, i.e., that the idea of critical objectivity is an illusion. All scholarship is political and inevitably underpinned by ideology, whether a conservative or socially progressive one. Many young scholars today are activists to some degree, refusing to stay silent in the face of bigotry or oppression, whether within or outside the academy. They are firm in their view that structural conditions, life experiences and multi-faceted identities determine to a large extent how we approach the primary sources: what we study, with what methods, what conclusions we draw from the evidence, and how competing ideologies in the political sphere impact the ongoing dialogue in scholarship. For example, at the beginning of his recent book *Men and Masculinities in the Sagas of Icelanders*, Gareth Lloyd Evans explicitly lists 'the markers of [his] racial, sexual, gendered, social, and educational status' in what might become a standard way of prefacing our work.[6] Social media has brought out such themes as well, and it has also enabled us to discuss our work and views in very different ways from only ten years ago: faster, less formal and more egalitarian. The founding of an online journal, run by students, for students, where they take responsibility for the editorial policies, is yet another exciting sign of how scholarship might develop in the next dedades.

[6] Gareth Lloyd Evans, *Men and Masculinities in the Sagas of Icelanders* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

By creating this medium, the editorial team of *Kyngervi* has opened up a forum for promising, up-and-coming scholars to take their first steps in publishing their work, experience the peer-review process (with its pros and cons) and hone their arguments. Perhaps more importantly, it encourages this generation—who are the future of our field—unapologetically to take up space and set the agenda. The cohort which presents their first published work here in this inaugural issue of *Kyngervi* won't create any myths about the past, any more than their predecessors did. They'll create new knowledge—whether to identify new contours on the map of Norse gender or draw in more detail what we previously knew only in broad strokes—and that is knowledge for which we will all be the richer.[7]

Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir

[7] Many thanks to Chihiro Tsukamoto, Dale Kedwards and Merrill Kaplan for constructive feedback about various points in this piece.

Essays

Men's Business? Two Female Skalds of the Uppsala Edda and the Origins of Poetry

Anna Solovyeva[1]

Abstract:
Skaldic poetry is associated almost exclusively with men: especially in a court setting, both the professional poet delivering the verses and the patron receiving and rewarding the poet's performance were almost always male. However, *Skáldatal*, the early-fourteenth century list of professional court poets and their patrons found in the *Codex Uppsaliensis* of *Snorra-Edda*, includes not only several dozens of male names, but also two female ones. According to this list, one of the earliest skalds was Áslaug, the legendary wife of King Ragnarr *loðbrók*. The other woman, coming at the end of *Skáldatal*, is Steinvǫr Sighvatsdóttir, the niece of Snorri Sturluson. The presence of these two names allows us to question the gendering of skaldic tradition as it is portrayed in *Skáldatal* and in the Uppsala manuscript of *Snorra-Edda* in general. In order to account for the significance of Áslaug and Steinvǫr in this context, I discuss the structure and ideological agenda of the *Codex Uppsaliensis* on the one hand, and, on the other, the connection between these two women and poetry known to us from other extant sources. I propose that the image of Áslaug, on the one side shadowed by Steinvǫr and on the other echoing the role played by Gunnlǫð in the myth of poetry, represents the model of behaviour for professional skalds and acknowledges otherworldly feminine origins of the skaldic art widely practised by male poets.

Keywords: skaldic poetry, skalds, Uppsala Edda, fornaldarsögur, skáldkonur

Skaldic poetry appeared as an artistic form and a phenomenon of Scandinavian court culture in the ninth century and quietly went out of fashion by the end of the fourteenth century. During this period, skaldic poetry was both a way to shape, preserve and disseminate memories about the exploits of great kings and warriors, and the means of gaining wealth and prestige for the poets. With few exceptions, most skalds were Icelanders. With even fewer exceptions, they were

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male. According to the Icelandic sagas and medieval treatises, skaldic poetry and all interaction with it seems to have been almost exclusively the domain of powerful males. Even in regard to commissioning verses, hearing the skalds' performances and rewarding their craft, the women of Scandinavian royal families were usually passive witnesses sitting next to their royal husbands or fathers, who were the addressees of the poetry. When a woman did take the role of a skald's patron, both her character and the situation had to be exceptional, like when Gunnhildr *konungamóðir* commissioned the commemorative poem *Eiríksmál* about her husband Eiríkr *blóðøx*.[2] While being the subject of a praise poem contributed to the fame and prestige of a man, for a woman that was deeply problematic: even if the content of the poem was purely laudatory, questions could arise as to how the skald gathered the material for his praise. The implied close acquaintance with the male poet could bring dishonour to both the woman and her legal guardian.[3] Thus, Ottar *svarti* almost lost his head for composing a poem about King Óláfr's wife, and most other skalds did not even attempt to include their patrons' wives, sisters or daughters into their verses.

Composing her own poetry appears less problematic for a woman. A number of female characters across different types of sagas speak in verse, and, as Sandra Straubhaar notes, this 'indicates a readiness on the part of saga authors to accept women and young girls as composers of poetry.'[4] However, women's poetry mostly includes impromptu versified dialogues or visionary verses. It is not common for a woman to act as a court poet: to stand up in front of a powerful ruler, praise him in verse and be rewarded for her effort. In the business of court poetry, a man is wont to stand at both the giving and the receiving end of the interaction. In this context, it is all the more striking and intriguing that some women are exceptions to the rule. I would like now to draw attention to two women who are not only counted among professional skalds,

[2] *Fagrskinna* 8.
[3] Margaret Clunies Ross, *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics* (D.S.Brewer, 2005), 41.
[4] Sandra B. Straubhaar, 'The Forgotten *Skáldkonur* and Their Place in Early Scandinavian Culture,' in *Creativity, Influence, Imagination: The Worlds of Medieval Women,* ed. Judith Rice Rothschild (Morgantown, West Virginia: University of West Virginia Press, 1987), 18.

but occupy prominent positions in a late-thirteenth – early-fourteenth century portrayal of the skaldic tradition.

Skáldatal: A Portrait of a Tradition

My point of departure is *Skáldatal*, the list of skalds and their patrons from the legendary origins of court poetry until the mid-thirteenth century. Every single patron listed in this long document is a man (one of them might not even be human, but a dog named Saurr, who is still male). However, two poets in *Skáldatal* are women. Both extant versions of the list give pride of place at the beginning of the tradition outlined here to Áslaug, the wife of King Ragnarr *loðbrók*. The slightly later and longer version of *Skáldatal* includes another woman: close to the end of the list, Steinvǫr Sighvatsdóttir is mentioned as the skald of Gautr af Meli. The irregular character of the final section of *Skáldatal* in this version suggests that the presence of Steinvǫr is deliberate—and significant for our understanding of the list as a whole and of the way it portrays the skaldic tradition. To contextualize and understand the significance of the two women whose names frame the long list of male skalds and patrons, I will introduce *Skáldatal* in more detail, before turning to the female skalds themselves.

As its name suggests, *Skáldatal* is a list of skalds, or poets who composed *dróttkvæði* (court, or 'skaldic,' poetry). This medieval document includes professional skalds, who composed for and about the powerful rulers of Scandinavia in the period from the ninth to the middle of thirteenth century. The list follows several bloodlines, and the names of skalds are listed together with the names of their patrons (mostly Scandinavian kings and earls). *Skáldatal* also includes several short narrative passages, focusing on prominent figures who stood at the origins of the skaldic tradition and on certain types of skaldic composition or relationships between patrons and poets. The list is extant in two versions, both closely connected to the works attributed to Snorri Sturluson: one was found in the *Kringla* manuscript of *Heimskringla* from the second half of the thirteenth century, and the other in the manuscript DG 11 4to, or the *Codex Uppsaliensis* of *Snorra-Edda,* from the early fourteenth century. The *Kringla*

manuscript, with the K version of *Skáldatal*, perished in the Great Fire of Copenhagen in 1728, but we know its content through seventeenth-century copies. The *Codex Uppsaliensis*, containing the later and longer U version of *Skáldatal*, is preserved in Uppsala and has recently received ample scholarly attention. The U version is the primary source for my present investigation, and although *Skáldatal* itself has not been the primary focus of attention for scholars studying this manuscript,[5] I am indebted to the recent edition and translation of the full contents of DG 11 4to by Hermann Pálsson and Anthony Faulkes, and the monograph on the 'Uppsala Edda' by Hermann Pálsson. The most up-to-date source on the *Kringla* manuscript, its content, provenance, and the related scholarship is the monograph by Jon Gunnar Jørgensen.

Skáldatal is most often seen as a reference list that medieval writers could use to keep track of their poetic sources and that the scholars today can still use as a 'who is who' guide to medieval court poetry. Additional value of the list as a historical source can be appreciated by the scholars of *Kringla*, as the references to several thirteenth-century figures found in *Skáldatal* have proved to be useful clues to the dating of the manuscript. Due to the relative age and length of the two versions of the list, the U version has been seen as likely dependent on the K version, repeating its testimony and bringing the list up to date.[6] Without necessarily questioning the validity of this approach, I will point out some independent special features of the *Codex Uppsaliensis* and of the U version of *Skáldatal,* in order to put the references to the two female skalds into a proper context.

The text preserved in DG 11 4to is the earliest extant version of *Snorra-Edda*. Its structure and content have sparked comments about its possible closeness to a lost draft by Snorri Sturluson himself.[7] At least, the *Codex*

[5] One of the few notable exceptions is in Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy: The Role of Skaldic Verse in Icelndic Textual Culture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).
[6] Heimir Pálsson, 'Introduction,' in Snorri Sturluson, *The Uppsala Edda: DG 11 4to*, ed. Heimir Pálsson, transl. Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2012), lxxvi–lxxvii.
[7] Anthony Faulkes, 'Introduction,' in Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál 1. Introduction, Text and Notes*, ed. Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998), xliii.

Uppsaliensis is certainly more closely associated with Snorri Sturluson than any other medieval manuscript of *Snorra-Edda*. It is the only medieval version of this work which attributes the composition of the Edda—or at least, the compilation of its particular form—to Snorri.[8] The codex opens with the following lines:

> Bók þessi heitir Edda. Hana hefir saman setta Snorri Sturluson eptir þeim hætti sem hér er skipat. Er fyrst frá ásum ok Ymi, þar næst skáldskapar mál ok heiti margra hluta. Síðast Háttatal er Snorri hefir ort um Hákon konung ok Skúla hertuga.
>
> (This book is called Edda. Snorri Sturluson has compiled it in the manner in which it is arranged here. First it is about Æsir and Ymir, next Skáldskaparmál ('poetic diction') and (poetical) names of many things. Finally Háttatal ('enumeration of verse forms') which Snorri has composed about King Hákon and Duke Skúli.) [9]

Thus, the text postulates Snorri's authority in matters of mythology and poetics, his ability to compose poetry, and his connection to the powerful rulers of Norway. This message is reinforced by the three lists included into the compilation: *Skáldatal*; *Ættartala Sturlunga* (genealogy of the Sturlungs), tracing the bloodline from Adam, through heroes of the Trojan War and of Scandinavian antiquity, to Snorri and his contemporaries; and *Lögsögumannatal* (list of lawspeakers), following the history of lawspeakership in Iceland from the legendary Úlfljótr—again, to Snorri. The physical layout of the codex suggests that the lists were not a later interpolation, but integral to the initial design. They come after *Gylfaginning* and the first section of *Skáldaskaparmál* (including the myth about the mead of poetry), where mythological matters are addressed and the poetry quoted is almost exclusively the anonymous Eddic poetry. After the lists, the focus shifts to technical aspects of composing and understanding poetry, and verses by named skalds are quoted extensively. As Stephen Tranter suggests, the lists at this point in the compilation allow the compiler to set 'out his authorities in advance: first the corpus of known skalds, then the credentials of his author according to the criteria of descent and public office.'[10] In the laconic form of lists of recognizable names, the prestigious image is created for

[8] See Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy,* 53.
[9] Snorri Sturluson, *The Uppsala Edda: DG 11 4to*, ed. Heimir Pálsson, transl. Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2012), 6–7.
[10] Stephen Tranter, 'Medieval Icelandic *artes poeticae*,' in *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 152.

the skaldic tradition and personally for Snorri Sturluson. Together, *Skáldatal*, *Ættartala Sturlunga,* and *Lögsögumannatal* represent the network uniting the knowledge of various kinds of lore (poetic, legal, genealogical), political power, and illustrious bloodlines.[11]

The version of *Skáldatal* found here further supports this agenda by prioritizing certain skalds and including some non-royal patrons. The most notable difference from the K version of *Skáldatal* is in the last section, unique to the U version. Unlike the previous parts, that list the names of kings and earls according to their dynasty, the final section of *Skáldatal* here lists 19 Norwegian chieftains, not united by a single bloodline.[12] Many of the skalds associated with these chieftains are prominent figures in the tradition; they appear elsewhere in *Skáldatal*, and their poetry is known from other sources. It is likely that, while the rulers listed before this section were included into *Skáldatal* on the basis of their royal blood and power, the chieftains judiciously grouped in this final part of the list owe their inclusion to the association with the skalds who were particularly interesting to the writer. The final entry in this version of *Skáldatal* lists the skalds associated with Gautr af Meli: Steinvǫr Sighvatsdóttir, Óláfr Herdísarson, and Dagfinnr Guðlaugsson. While none of the three are prominent figures in the extant sources, Steinvǫr is the most intriguing addition. Notably, the end of *Skáldatal* in this redaction mirrors its beginning. The opening lines of both versions also feature two named male skalds and one woman:

> Starkaðr inn gamli var skald. Hans kvæði eru fornust þeira sem menn kunnu. Hann orti um Danakonunga. Ragnarr konungr loðbrók var skald, Áslaug kona hans ok synir þeira.[13]
> (Starkaðr the Old was a poet. His poetry is the oldest remembered by men. He composed about the Danish kings. King Ragnarr *loðbrók* was a poet, [and so were] his wife Áslaug and their sons.)

[11] On the interconnections between the various kinds of knowledge and their relation to social status, see, for example, Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, 'Legal Culture and Historical Memory in Medieval and Early Modern Iceland,' in *Minni and Muninn: Memory in Medieval Nordic Culture,* eds. Pernille Hermann, Stephen A. Mitchell and Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 211–230; Hannah Burrows, 'Rhyme and Reason: Lawspeaker-Poets in Medieval Iceland,' *Scandinavian Studies,* 81, 2 (2009) 215–238.
[12] Snorri Sturluson, *The Uppsala Edda*, 114–116.
[13] Snorri Sturluson, *The Uppsala Edda*, 100 (the following translation is mine).

I do not propose to put too much significance in numbers but having a female skald both as the third from the beginning of the list and the third from its end creates a pleasant symmetry—and may suggest more or less conscious design. But who were these women, and what was their association with poetry, power, and with the men who more habitually wielded both power and poetry?

Áslaug – The Queen, the Mother, and the Poet

Between the two women of *Skáldatal*, Áslaug is by far the better-known and the more popular—both in the Middle Ages and today. She appears episodically in *Vǫlsunga saga*—as the daughter of Sigurðr and Brynhildr—and takes central stage in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Ragnarssona þáttr* as the second wife of King Ragnarr *loðbrók*, mother of several outstanding sons, a lady of many talents, as well as an able ruler and warrior-leader. In addition to the narratives focused directly on Áslaug and her family, we also find her name across the extant Old Norse-Icelandic literary corpus, in numerous genealogies tracing the descent of powerful kings and chieftains to Ragnarr, Áslaug, and their sons.[14] Thus, *Skáldatal* falls into a well-attested pattern when it traces the (professional) descent of poets to this family.

Many readers—including twentieth-century scholars—have admired the character of Áslaug and noted the many merits attributed to her. Characteristically, at the time when *fornaldarsögur* were held in low esteem, Bjarni Guðnason writes of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*: 'Í fornaldarsögu, þar sem söguhetjur eru blóðlausar manngerðir, frægðaþrá tengir atburði, stíll er blæbrigðasnauður og lýsingar trénaðar, verða menn þakklátir fyrir allt, sem er öðruvísi'[15] ('In a *fornaldarsaga*, where characters are bloodless human images, action is driven by desire for fame, style lacks nuance and descriptions are wooden, one is thankful for anything that is different'). For Bjarni, rising above this text is the image of

[14] The numerous references to Ragnarr, Áslaug, and their descendants in medieval sources are discussed at length in Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, *Vikings in the West: The Legend of Ragnarr Loðbrók and His Sons* (Studia Medievalia Septentrionalia 18; Wien: Fassbaender, 2012).
[15] Bjarni Guðnason, 'Gerðir og ritþróun Ragnars sögu loðbrókar,' in *Einarsbók: Afmæliskveðja til Einars Ól. Sveinssonar,* eds. Bjarni Guðnason, Halldór Halldórsson and Jónas Kristjánsson (Útgefendur Nokkrir Vinir, 1969), 34–35. The translations from secondary sources are my own.

Áslaug: lifelike, feminine, relatable—and at the same time dreamlike and heroic. The group of sagas among which *Ragnars saga* is traditionally counted has been rehabilitated in the recent decades, but in the more favourable studies of this saga, the character of Áslaug is still often singled out. For instance, Ólafía Einarsdóttir suggests that Áslaug, '[d]en mest islandske skikkelse i familien'[16] ('the most Icelandic character in the family') was the character that a medieval Icelandic audience would most likely relate to and admire. Indeed, Ragnarr's second wife can be compared to the greatest women of the *Íslendingasögur*, as she possesses all the most admirable qualities: 'foruden skønhed og klogskab var hun i besiddelse af handlekraft og storsindethed, og hun var en selv-skreven leder af familien'[17] ('in addition to beauty and wisdom, she possessed energy and generosity, and was an obvious leader of the family').

Arguably, the story of Áslaug is central to *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*. The Y redaction of this saga, preserved in NKS 1824b 4to from ca. 1400, contains the most detailed extant account of Áslaug's life.[18] Other references in the extant corpus suggest that at least the key points of this account were part of widely-spread traditional knowledge. NKS 1824b 4to also preserves the only medieval redaction of *Vǫlsunga saga*, which precedes *Ragnars saga* (with no strict boundary between the two). While the story of the Vǫlsungs in other forms was part of a productive popular tradition, this fact of transmission has allowed scholars to speculate that the prose version had been written down specifically as a prequel to *Ragnars saga* and that the two narratives could even be approached as a single saga.[19] The most obvious bond between the two narratives is the story of Áslaug,

[16] Ólafía Einarsdóttir, 'Dronning Aslaug i Island: Fra Historie til Sagn – en Mentalitethistorisk Analyse,' *Gripla VIII* (1993)*,* 98.
[17] Ólafía Einarsdóttir, 'Dronning Aslaug i Island,' 99.
[18] For a detailed discussion of the two redactions, see: Bjarni Guðnason, 'Gerðir og ritþróun Ragnars sögu loðbrókar;' Rory McTurk, 'The Extant Icelandic Manifestations of Ragnars saga loðbrókar,' *Gripla I* (1975)*,* 43–75; Rory McTurk, *Studies in* Ragnars saga loðbrókar *and Its Major Scandinavian Analogues* (Medium Ævum monographs, new series, 15; Oxford: The Society for the Study of Mediæval Languages and Literature, 1991), 54–56; Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, *Vikings in the West,* 207.
[19] This feature of transmission has been reflected in some of the twentieth-century editions and translations – for example, those of Magnus Olsen (1906–08) and Margaret Schlauch (1930). For a consistent reading of the two sagas as one, see Klaus von See, 'Snorri Sturluson and the Creation of a Norse Cultural Ideology,' *Saga-Book Vol. XXV* (1998–2001), 367–393; for a more nuanced approach, see Carolyne Larrington, '*Völsunga saga, Ragnars saga* and

who mediates the blood and the character of the Vǫlsungs to the later generations through her fertile marriage to Ragnarr *loðbrók*.

The plot of the saga hardly needs an extensive introduction; instead, I will focus on the role of Áslaug and on the way poetry accompanies significant moments of her life.[20] The saga starts with a story of Áslaug's childhood—following the brief reference to her birth and fosterage in *Vǫlsunga saga* 27. After the death of her parents Sigurðr and Brynhildr, the three-year-old girl travels with her foster-father Heimir; soon, a greedy peasant couple kills Heimir, and the girl grows up with them, in poverty and hard labour, with her beauty concealed by dirt and rags and her name changed to Kráka. Only after this prelude does the saga turn to the story of its titular hero. By chapter 5, Ragnarr is a disconsolate widower who neglects the duty of ruling his land, engaging in Viking raids instead. During one of his expeditions, Ragnarr's men find a beautiful young woman—an equal of Ragnarr's first wife Þóra. Over the next two chapters, Ragnarr woos and marries Kráka. From their first meeting up to their wedding night, poetry accompanies the narrative.

First, Ragnarr challenges the unknown beauty to come to his ship neither clad nor unclad, neither fed nor unfed, and neither with a person nor unaccompanied. Kráka fulfils the requirements and explains her solution in a stanza, showing that she is wise as well as beautiful. Moreover, she is capable of communicating in poetry—an ability she must have acquired at a very early age or inherited from her parents. The first dialogue between Ragnarr and Kráka is also presented in verse. Here and throughout the saga the poetry is in a loose *dróttkvætt* form, imperfect, but still recognizable as a metre suitable for court poetry.[21] However, so far, the use of poetry is typical of a *fornaldasaga,* where dialogue can often be versified.

Romance in Old Norse: Revisiting Relationships,' in *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development,* eds. Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney and Ármann Jakobsson (Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2012), 251–270.

[20] The saga portrays this character under three subsequent names: Kráka, Áslaug, and Randalín. I will follow the original in using the appropriate name at each stage of her life story, since the names are thematized as an important part of the character's identity.

[21] See Rory McTurk '*Ragnars saga loðbrókar*,' in *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages, Vol. VIII, Poetry in* Fornaldarsögur*, Part 2,* ed. Margaret Clunies Ross (Brepols, 2017), 623. In

The next exchange between the couple is more intriguing in the context of skaldic tradition. As Ragnarr leaves and Kráka agrees to wait for his return, the king offers her a present: a lavish shirt that belonged to his first wife. Kráka graciously refuses the gift as one too rich for a peasant girl, but the stanzas accompanying the exchange belie Kráka's claim to low birth: in her reply she skillfully mirrors Ragnarr's words, transforming his offer into her refusal.[22] This episode, while still not seeming too unusual in a saga about ancient times with heroes spouting poetry, is at the same time reminiscent of a gift exchange between a king and his poet, where the latter would be expected to compose a verse in return for the former's generosity. The reminiscence is ironic, as King Ragnarr praises his own gift, while Kráka, acting as a poet honoured with the gift, declines it. Furthermore, this exchange has an affinity to another popular type of episode: a poetic competition where a poet responds to his patron's challenge and shows his skill (among the rulers who engaged in such competitions were jarl Rögnvaldr *kalf*[23] and King Haraldr *harðráði*[24]).

After Kráka becomes Ragnarr's second wife, at the end of chapter 6 she utters another verse, entreating her husband not to consummate the marriage in the first three nights and warning him that otherwise their first son would be born deformed. Kráka's prophecy is fulfilled with the birth of Ívarr *beinlausi* ('the

Háttatal 54, Ragnarr is mentioned as one of the ancient skalds who composed in loose forms of *dróttkvætt* – although the irregularities in the example associated with Ragnarr in *Háttatal* do not match exactly the irregularities of poetry in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*.

[22] Here and on the following pages, I quote the poetry from *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Ragnarssona þáttr*, along with the English translations, according to the most recent scholarly edition in *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*. Ragnarr: 'Viltu þenna þiggja, / er Þóra hjörtr átti, / serk við silfr um merktan? / Sama alvel þér klæði. / Fóru hendr hvítar / hennar um þessar görvar; / sú var buðlungi bragna / blíðum þekk til dauða.' ('Are you willing to accept this shift, decked out with silver, which Þóra hjǫrtr ("Hart") possessed? [Such] garments suit you very well. Her white hands stroked these trappings; she was dear to the joyful prince of men [KING = Ragnarr] right up to her death.') (McTurk, '*Ragnars saga loðbrókar*,' 632). Kráka: 'Þorik eigi þann þiggja, / er Þóra hjörtr ætti, / serk við silfr um merktan; / sama ælig mik klæði. / Því em ek Kráka kölluð, / í kólsvörtum váðum, /at ek hefi grjót um gengit / ok geitr með sjá reknar.' ('I dare not accept that shift, decked out with silver, which Þóra hjǫrtr ("Hart") possessed; wretched garments are suitable for me. I am called Kráka ("Crow") because I have walked on stones in coal-black clothes and driven goats by the sea.') (McTurk '*Ragnars saga loðbrókar*,' 633).

[23] Most notably, in the alleged composition of *Háttalykill* with Hallr Þórarinsson (*Orkneyinga saga* 81).

[24] For example, in *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* 32.

Boneless').[25] This episode once again bridges the floating gap between the old and new ways to use poetry. On the one hand, the heroine utters a versified prophecy, as women in myths and legends are wont to do. On the other hand, the prophecy is in skaldic metre, and the queen acts as an advisor to the king, trying to talk him out of a rash course of action—not unlike the wise court poets of later times (such as Þjóðólfr *inn hvínverski* for Haraldr *hárfagri*[26] or Sighvatr Þórðarson for Magnús *góði*[27]). In chapter 9, Kráka again predicts a physical peculiarity in her unborn son (the youngest, Sigurðr *ormr-í-auga,* 'Snake in the Eye')—a demonstration of wisdom that proves her own illustrious descent, saves her marriage, and allows her to revert to the name Áslaug. The occasion also moves Ragnarr to act as a court poet, praising the newborn prince; however, as no verse is attributed to Áslaug here, this intriguing episode falls beyond the scope of the present article.

Chapter 10 of *Ragnars saga* contains the largest amount of verse, accompanying one of the most dramatic parts of the narrative. Eiríkr and Agnarr, Ragnarr's sons from the first marriage, are killed in Sweden; before his fall, Eiríkr sends home a messenger with a verse and a gold ring. While Ragnarr is away, Áslaug receives the messenger and incites her sons to avenge her stepsons' killing. Incitement is one of the functions typical of women in the sagas—especially in *Íslendingasögur*. Less typical for saga-women (although not unheard-of) is taking an active part in the revenge—as Áslaug does in chapter 11 of the saga, taking the Valkyrie-type name Randalín. However, no less striking than the image of the queen going to war is the image of her sitting on the throne, combing her hair and receiving the news of her stepsons' fall. She is both feminine and powerful; while Ragnarr is away, she is the ruler of the land and the head of the family—despite the presence of her grown-up sons. The messenger introduces his errand with his own stanza and recites Eiríkr's dying

[25] This interpretation of Ívarr's nickname is consistent within the saga narrative; for other interpretations and their implications, see Rory McTurk, 'Recent and Projected Work on *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*,' in *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi: handligar från ett symposium i Uppsala 31.8–2.9.2001,* eds. Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney and Ármann Jakobsson (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2003), 124 and references.
[26] *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* 26.
[27] *Magnúss saga góða* 16.

verse; thus, Áslaug assumes the role of a patron listening to poetry in 'his' hall—the role not usually played by women. The queen demonstrates her ability to act both as a poet and a patron—the duality also characteristic of Ragnarr.

Áslaug/Randalín is, in fact, more successful than Ragnarr. When the king comes home to find his glory overshadowed by the successful Swedish expedition of his wife and sons, he decides to go to England with only two ships and prove his own worth there. Despite Randalín's council, he embarks on this suicidal mission (explaining his decision in two boisterous stanzas) and perishes in chapter 15 of the saga. As the couple says farewell, Randalín gives Ragnarr a shirt, explicitly mirroring the exchange that took place at the beginning of their courtship. She accompanies her gift with a verse, explaining the magical properties of the shirt, and once again demonstrating her wisdom and her connection to the supernatural. In contrast to the first shirt-episode, Randalín's gift-giving is successful: Ragnarr accepts the gift and is protected from harm until the shirt is taken away from him. Although his life cannot be saved, his rashness and failure are contrasted by his wife's prudence and success.

After this episode, the saga focuses on Ragnarr, his sons and their adversary, the English king Ella. Randalín's last appearance, in chapter 18, is a culmination of her portrayal as a mother and a poet. The aged queen learns of the glorious death of her son Hvítserkr and utters two stanzas in his memory.[28] Commemoration was among the major functions of skaldic poetry: professional skalds composed such verses both at their own initiative and at the behest of a dead ruler's relatives, ensuring the continuity of memory about great warriors and kings, dealing with grief and turmoil, and confirming the legitimacy of

[28] These two stanzas are preserved only in the Y redaction of the saga, in which the character of Áslaug is more prominent (starting from her connection to the Vǫlsungs and her early life as Kráka). The second stanza can serve as an example: 'Höfðum lét of hrundit / hundrmörgum gramt undir, at feigum bör fólka / fingi eldr yfir syngja. / Hvat skyli beð enn betra / böðheggr und sig leggja? / Olli dýrr við orðstír / allvaldr jöfurs falli.' ('The leader allowed a great many heads to be thrust under him, so that fire would have a chance to sing over the doomed tree of battles [WARRIOR]. How could a battle-tree [WARRIOR] place beneath himself an even better bed? The mighty ruler caused a prince's death with renown.') (McTurk '*Ragnars saga loðbrókar*,' 683–85).

succession.[29] In *Ragnars saga*, Eiríkr and Ragnarr compose their own death verses, like other legendary heroes.[30] The commemoration of Hvítserkr, however, places him and his mother at the edge of a new era, where kings have professional poets to remember them. Randalín is fit for the role of such a professional, since she is not only his closest relative, but also a distinguished ruler and warrior herself—and a skilled poet.

A similar, but not identical episode is also present in *Ragnarssona þáttr*, a narrative extant in the early-fourteenth century *Hauksbók* and telling a similar story of Ragnarr and his family, with differences in detail.[31] The brief *þáttr* contains fewer verses than the saga; here two stanzas are attributed to Áslaug[32]—in contrast to nine stanzas and one half-stanza in the saga. Most of the poetry in the *þáttr* is either the same or close to the poetry in the saga, but the last verse by Áslaug is a notable exception. The verse is completely different, and the commemorated son is Sigurðr *ormr-í-auga*.[33] The focus on Sigurðr is easily explained: the text is interested in the descendants of Ragnarr, especially the royal lines going back to Sigurðr. Conversely, the extant sources do not mention any descendants of Hvítserkr. The use of Áslaug's verse at this point in the narrative suggests that her poetic role was well-known to the writer, and that her words were suitable sources for verifying an account of an important event. The

[29] See Erin Michel Goeres, *The Poetics of Commemoration: Skaldic Verse and Social Memory, c. 890–1070* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
[30] On death-poems and Ragnarr's connection to this tradition, see Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Introduction,' in *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages, Vol. VIII, Poetry in* Fornaldarsögur*, Part 1* (Brepols, 2017), lxxxvi.
[31] For a discussion of differences between the saga and the *þáttr*, see Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, '*Ragnars saga loðbrókar, Ragnarssona þáttr,* and the Political World of Haukr Erlendsson,' in *Fornaldarsagaerne: Myter og Virkelighed*, eds. Agneta Ney, Ármann Jakobsson & Annette Lassen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Forlag, 2009), 347–360.
[32] The first of the two stanzas, similar to the corresponding stanza in chapter 10 of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, is found in chapter 2 of the *þáttr*, where Áslaug incites her sons to avenge the death of Eiríkr and Agnarr.
[33] Not only the commemorated subject, but also the language is different from the stanzas preserved in the saga. The style is more elaborate: 'Sitja veiðivitjar / vals á borgar hálsum; / böl er, þat er hefr um hafnat / hrafn Sigurðar nafni. / Blási nýtinjótar / nás í spán at hánum; / ofsnemma lét Óðinn / álf valmeyjar deyja.' ('Hunting-visitors of the slain [RAVENS] sit on the heights of the fortress; it is a misfortune that the raven has forsaken the name of Sigurðr. Let the devourers of the dead [RAVENS/EAGLES] whistle for him; Óðinn has caused the elf of the carnage-maiden [VALKYRIE > WARRIOR] to die too early.') (Rory McTurk '*Ragnars sona þáttr*,' in *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages, Vol. VIII, Poetry in* Fornaldarsögur*, Part 2* (Brepols, 2017), 780).

writer was certainly aware of this function of skaldic poetry: earlier in the *þáttr*, another verse verifies the account of King Ella's defeat. This half-stanza is attributed to Sighvatr Þórðarson's *Knútsdrápa*. Coming two chapters later, but with no verses cited in between, the commemorative stanza by the legendary queen is thus aligned with the oeuvre of one of the most famous eleventh-century professional skalds.

We can understand the reference to Áslaug as one of the earliest skalds in *Skáldatal* against the background of these narratives. Behind the brief wording of the list there was the traditional knowledge about at least some of the episodes outlined above—or about similar episodes, as the comparison between the saga and the *þáttr* suggests the possibility of variation, particularly in connection with Áslaug's poetry. The third skald mentioned in *Skáldatal* was a queen, a warrior, and a mother, as well as a wise woman and a poet. With her life story, her blood, and her skillful use of poetry, she links the legendary times of the Vǫlsungs and the times of historical kings and their professional skalds.

The Feminine Source of Poetry

Over thirty years ago, Sandra Straubhaar regretfully noted that, although female skalds (*skáldkonur*) likely played a significant role in ancient times, 'the significance of the *skáldkonur* to the greater skaldic tradition was forgotten, both by medieval anthologists and their modern counterparts.'[34] Of course, the number of male skalds in the extant sources is overwhelmingly larger than the number of *skáldkonur*. However, the position of women in *Skáldatal* may suggest that an important contribution of *skáldkonur* to the tradition was not forgotten—at least by the compiler of the *Uppsala Edda*. The presence of two women at the two ends of the list hints at the special significance of the women themselves and the powers they represent. We have already seen that Áslaug the poet cuts a striking figure. With her verses composed in a loose *dróttkvætt* form, she skillfully and subtly competed with King Ragnarr, gave advice and commemorated the dead in her poetry; moreover, her verses could be cited as

[34] Straubhaar, 'The Forgotten Skáldkonur,' 22.

historical sources verifying the narrative. Her success as a leader and a warrior adds to an image of a prototypical court poet, as many professional skalds were also distinguished for their diplomatic skills and battle prowess. At the same time, Áslaug is by no means a male character in a female body. Her femininity, her role as a wife and a mother, is central to her character. Moreover, her connection to the supernatural and her knowledge of the future are markedly feminine, tied to her motherhood. In the wider context of the Old Norse-Icelandic sources, Áslaug's motherhood is repeatedly emphasized in genealogies: it is through her that the precarious maternal link is forged between the Scandinavian royal dynasties and powerful Icelandic families, on the one hand, and the glorious Vǫlsungs, on the other.

The woman standing at the other end of *Skáldatal* also enjoyed the respect of saga-writers and belonged to a distinguished family. However, Steinvǫr Sighvatsdóttir was hardly as popular as Áslaug, and next to no poetry is associated with her in the extant sources. Steinvǫr's presence in the list echoes and reinforces the image of a feminine skald represented by Áslaug and strengthens the Sturlungs' claim for prestige in the *Uppsala Edda*. The curious deficiency of Áslaug's image is that, unlike many other powerful families, the Sturlungs did not claim descent from her. She is an excellent symbol of the power and prestige intertwined with skaldic poetry, but there is no direct connection between her and Snorri Sturluson. Steinvǫr, on the other hand, was Snorri's niece[35] and a welcome stand-in for a powerful female figure connected to the origins of the skaldic tradition. Unfortunately, we cannot explain the connection between Steinvǫr and Gautr af Meli on the basis of the extant sources—although, considering the gap between Steinvǫr's lifetime and the writing down of *Skáldatal* (less than 200 years), the medieval audience of the list would likely associate a specific episode with the reference, lest the truth of the document and its ideological implications be compromised. However, the only extant verse associated with Steinvǫr is the half-stanza in *Íslendinga saga* 134. One

[35] *Ættartölur* 2.

of the first omens preceding the Battle of Ǫrlygsstaðir is the dream of Steinvǫr Sighvatsdóttir: she sees a human head on the fence and a dead man who recites an ominous half-stanza. This verse is not composed by Steinvǫr herself but experienced by her as a revelation which she later repeats to other people. Poetry is not a product of a human creative act, but a dark gift from the Other World.[36] That the only verse surviving in connection with the woman listed as a skald should bear such character is at least in part a chance of transmission. However, it fits well with how the origins of poetic gift are portrayed in *Snorra-Edda*.

The myth about the mead of poetry, associated with the male god Óðinn is well-known; the exclusive masculine connotations of this myth can be debated in connection with the part played by the Vanir, or with the 'sexual ambiguity' of Óðinn.[37] However, to conclude this brief discussion of the feminine associations of poetry, I would like to emphasize the role of Gunnlǫð in the myth. In its making, the mead of poetry passes through several stages of transformation, and through the bodies of several owners; as Judy Quinn notes,

[36] The concept 'Other World' is most commonly used to designate the world of the supernatural, distinct and separated from This World where the everyday life of humans takes place. Conversely, in the Norse myths, we can see the Other World as the realm(s) of the *jǫtnar*, contrasted with This World of the gods, from whose perspective the stories are told. The contact between This World and the Other World is achieved through ritual, travel, dreams, and often through fantastic and bizarre encounters that blur the boundary between the two worlds (as when a revenant intrudes into the otherwise familiar and normal human world). Seen broadly, the Other World can acquire different qualities depending on the cultural, religious, and narrative paradigms, and '[a]s a universal category, The Other World can thus only be defined structurally as that which is completely different' (Jens Peter Schjødt*, Initiation between Two Worlds: Structure and Symbolism in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religion* (Odense: The University Press of Southern Denmark, 2008), 17). I follow Schjødt in noting that the fundamental otherness of the Other World can be defined in terms of time as well as in terms of space. In the context of the present article, we encounter two kinds of Other World: namely, the world of the *jǫtnar*, to which Gunnlǫð belongs, and the world of the legendary past, in which heroes like Sigurðr Fáfnisbani lived. I would argue that the second Other World lies just beyond the horizon of the past which the thirteenth-century audience can claim as 'its own' and identify with (see Jan Assmann, 'Communicative and Cultural Memory,' in *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, eds. Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning (Berlin, New York: DeGruyter, 2008), 113, for the idea that 'Cultural memory reaches back in the past only so far as the past can be reclaimed as "ours"'). The past of the legends is remembered as structurally different from the contemporary world, adhering to different values, different natural and supernatural laws, and often manifesting affinity with the mythical Other World. Áslaug, through her lineage as well as through the roles she assumes in the narratives, occupies the liminal place between This World of the present and the Other World of the legendary past.

[37] Straubhaar, 'The Forgotten Skáldkonur,' 21.

'[a]t each transfer, the value of the liquid swells with the attributes of the class of beings who lose it.'[38] Gunnlǫð is a representative of the *jǫtnar*, but also of women. The myth makes the place of her seclusion the last stage of transmission before the mead falls into the hands (or, rather, mouth) of Óðinn. This stage is the final point of origin for poetry: the precious drink is received by a woman from a powerful ancestral figure of supernatural origin (her father Suttungr) and kept safe, until the male god claims the poetic gift from her through sexual intercourse. Can the feminine frame of the skaldic tradition in *Skáldatal*, preserved next to the myth of the poetic mead in the *Uppsala Edda*, reflect a similar image, with the role of female intermediary more active and independent in the human past than in the myth? Áslaug, an imposing female figure born of an old and respected family, acquires the supernatural gift of poetry from mysterious powers – and passes it to her male descendants. Born several centuries later, Steinvǫr reminds us that the feminine origin and supernatural aspect of the seemingly all-male skaldic tradition is by no means forgotten, but essential for the legitimation of the male poets' status. The female figure may not receive credit as the creator of poetic skill, but she is remembered as the (more or less active) link between, on the one hand, the men who use the gift of poetry in their contemporary struggles for power and fame, and, on the other hand, the Other World of ancient times and supernatural creatures, where this gift was conceived.

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[38] Judy Quinn, 'Liquid Knowledge: Traditional Conceptualisations of Learning in Eddic Poetry,' in *Along the Oral-Written Continuum: Types of Texts, Relations and their Implications,* eds. Slavica Rankovic, Leidulf Melve and Else Mundal (Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy 20; Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 193.

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"Am I Not a Woman Like Thyself?" – The Transvestite Male Rapist Narratives of Óðinn and Rindr, and Ewen and Thaney

Andrew Bull[1]

Abstract

The tale of Óðinn and Rindr is a complex one, but in its version found in the early thirteenth-century *Gesta Danorum*, we can see how Óðinn's gender fluidity has become simplified into transvestism. From a being capable of changing gender, Óðinn now simply adopts the disguise of a woman. With this disguise, Óðinn rapes the woman Rindr in order fulfil a prophecy. Thomas Hill found that this version of events has a parallel in Scotland: the story of Prince Ewen and St Thaney. Ewen similarly uses transvestism to gain access to an otherwise unwilling woman in order to rape her.

This article will compare the two narratives to each other and to the broader figure of the male transvestite as found in the medieval period. What similarities are there? And what brought the writers of these tales to utilise this narrative trope? This article will firstly argue that Óðinn's gender identity is simplified in the Christianised version of the Óðinn and Rindr narrative found in the *Gesta Danroum*. Secondly, it will take into account issues surrounding Thaney's believed virginity, which caused the writer of the mid–twelfth century *Vita Kentegerni Imperfecta* to adopt the Óðinn and Rindr narrative, male transvestite rapist included. Finally, it will note that these stories show far more about their writer's perceptions of transvestism, rather than having any basis in reality.

Keywords: Transvestite, Óðinn, Thaney, Kentigern, Hagiography

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Introduction

The figure of the male transvestite was a complex one in medieval times. In chivalric romance, male transvestism was used as a joke, an amusing disguise that was ultimately shed to prove the underlying inherent masculinity of the perpetrator.[2] Yet to church officials, transvestism was subversive and to be avoided, lest its presence tear apart the binarised difference between male and female.[3] It could also distort the heterosexuality of other men, as a man in woman's dress could tempt other men, and transvestism and sodomy were often grouped together as sins against nature.[4]

This article will discuss two narrative containing male transvestism. Firstly, that of Óðinn and Rindr from Scandinavian mythology, both its early appearances in the sagas, and the later Christianised form found in Saxo Grammaticus' early-thirteenth-century *Gesta Danorum*. Secondly, that of Ewen and St. Thaney, found in the Scottish *Vita Kentegerni Imperfecta* (also known as the 'Herbertian Fragment') of the mid–twelfth century, written by an anonymous cleric of Glasgow. Both of these narratives share similarities in their portrayal of male transvestism and have previously been suggested to be related by Thomas Hill.[5] Hill, however, focused on the overall narrative structures, rather than focusing on their presentations of male transvestism in particular. This article will endeavour to open up further questions around the presentation of male transvestism in both narratives, especially around the fact that in both cases, transvestism is utilised in order to enact the rape of a woman.

Cross-dressing/transvestite female saints are common enough—usually with the theme of wishing to enter a religious community, but being unable to join a female one, so instead takes the guise of a monk (for example St.s Marina, Margaret, Pelagia, and Euphrosyne).[6] As the women was taking on the role of a

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[2] Ad Putter, 'Transvestite Knights in Medieval Life and Literature,' in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages,* ed. by Jeffery Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), 297.
[3] Putter, 'Transvestite Knights,' 297.
[4] Putter, 'Transvestite Knights,' 293.
[5] Thomas D. Hill, 'Odin, Rinda and Thaney, the Mother of St Kentigern,' *Medium Aevum* 55 (1986) 230-237.
[6] Dyan Elliott, 'Gender and The Christian Traditions,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, ed. Judith Bennett and Ruth Karras (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

man, this was seen as positive, and to be admired.[7] However, medieval conceptions of gender rarely looked upon men slipping between gender boundaries as positive, as men were perceived as superior to women.[8] Whilst pre-Christian Scandinavian tales of Óðinn appear to allow for a more fluid understanding of gender, later Christian versions, as shown in the *Gesta Danorum* and *Vita Kentegerni Imperfecta*, refuse to allow such fluidity. Óðinn's gender becomes steadfastly male as the centuries progress in our examples.

Óðinn and Rindr

This narrative is found in its fullest form in Book III of the early-thirteenth-century *Gesta Danorum* by Saxo Grammaticus.[9] Hǫðr killed Óðinn's son Baldr; seeking revenge, Óðinn consulted prophets and diviners, and found out that it would be the son of him and Rindr, daughter of the king of the Ruthenians, that would bring about this revenge.[10] Three times Óðinn appears before the king, in various male disguises, and attempts to woo Rindr. She, however, is not interested, and repeatedly rebukes him. It is the fourth disguise, that of a female physician, that allows Óðinn to get close to Rindr. After some time, Rindr falls sick, and Óðinn has her bound to the bed so that he can administer a particularly bitter tasting medicine. Instead of aiding her, however, he rapes her, whilst still dressed as a woman.[11]

This results in the hero Bo being born, who brings about the revenge that Óðinn sought. Óðinn, for his actions, was banished for ten years by the other gods. Even upon his return, there were those who were unhappy with him,

2013), 25; see also Michael Goodich, *Vita Perfecta: The Ideal of Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century*. (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersmann, 1982), 177-8, 193; John Anson, 'The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and Development of a Motif,' *Viator* 5 (1974) 1-32; and Stephen J. Davis, 'Crossed Texts, Crossed Sex: Intertextuality and Gender in Early Christian Legends of Holy Women Disguised as Men,' *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10, 1 (2002) 1-36.

[7] Vern L. Bullough, 'Transvestites in the Middle Ages,' *American Journal of Sociology* 79, 6 (1974) 1383.

[8] Elliott, 'Gender and The Christian Traditions,' 21, 25.

[9] Karsten Friis-Jensen (ed.) and Peter Fisher (trans.) *Saxo Grammaticus: Gesta Danorum. The History of the Danes*. Vol I. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2015), xxxiv, gives a likely date for completion 'not long after 1208.'

[10] Oliver Elton (trans.), *The First Nine Books of The Danish History of Saxo Grammaticus* (London: David Nutt, 1894), 94.

[11] Friis-Jensen and Fisher, *Saxo Grammaticus*, 167.

though this was due to him utilising a disguise and performing 'women's duties.'[12] Rape, it appears, was acceptable—but to adopt disguises and enact women's work was not, especially at length. Óðinn took some time in the disguise of 'Vekka' the female physician, as it was only 'at length' that he was enlisted into the queen's entourage.[13] Óðinn's apparent ease in the role of a woman, rather than his rape of a woman, appears to be the main issue.

Earlier versions of the narrative imply a lack of willingness on Rindr's part as well. They also, however, raise questions over Óðinn's gender identity. In the mid-tenth-century *Sigurðardrápa,* Kormákr Ögmundarson remarks '*seið Yggr til Rindar*' in the third stanza*,* which, accounting for Yggr being another name for Óðinn, roughly translates to 'Óðinn enchanted Rindr'.[14] The rest of the stanza discusses head binding in some form; the remark being suggestive of the binding of Rindr to the bed.[15] Óðinn here performs *seiðr,* a practice that is commonly regarded as magical or shamanistic, and possibly sexual, though also is found connected to weaponry.[16] Another mention of the same story, found in the sixth stanza of *Grógaldr*, does not mention *seiðr*. Magic is clearly involved though:

> Then first I will chant thee
> — the charm oft-tried,
> That Rani taught to Rind.
>
> Þann gel ek þér fyrstan,
> — þann kveða fjölnýtan,
> þann gól Rindi Rani.[17]

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[12] Friis-Jensen and Fisher, *Saxo Grammaticus*, 169.
[13] Friis-Jensen and Fisher, *Saxo Grammaticus*, 167.
[14] Finnur Jónsson, *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*. Vol B-I. (København: og Kristiania, Gyldendal, Nordisk forlag, 1912), 69. If Yggr is not Óðinn, then it is at least clear that Rindr is being enchanted by someone.
[15] Cecil Wood, 'Kormak's stanzas called the "Sigurðardrápa,' *Neophilologus*, 43, 4 (1959): 309-10.
[16] Amy May Franks, *Óðinn: A Queer* týr*? A Study of Óðinn's Function as a Queer Deity in Iron Age Scandinavia*, M.A. Dissertation, University of Iceland, 2018, 52. Henceforth, Franks will be referred to as Jefford Franks, reflecting their use of the name Amy Jefford Franks in other academic writing; John McKinnell, 'Encounters with Vǫlur,' in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society* ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross. The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern civilization, vol. 14. (Denmark: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2003) 113.
[17] Translation from Henry Adams Bellows, *The Poetic Edda* (New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1923), 236. Old Norse from Guð Jónsson, *Grógaldr* (Heimskringla, n.d.). This Edda is likely no older than the twelfth century, Einar Ól Sveinsson, 'Svipdag's Long

Rind clearly must be Rindr, again leaving us with the logic that Rani is Óðinn.[18] The overall text is about a son asking his deceased mother for magical charms that will aid him in his romantic quest. Again, it is magic that plays a role in the tale of Óðinn and Rindr, despite it not being specifically named as *seiðr*.

Seiðr as a concept, however, queers Óðinn's gender. The *Ynglinga saga* (written by Snorri Sturluson as the opening saga of the *Heimskringla* of ca. 1220-30) links *seiðr* to Óðinn's foresight.[19] However 'this magic, when it is practiced, comes with such great queerness that it was shameful for a man to practice it, and the skill was taught to the goddesses./ En þessi fjǫlkyngi, er framit er, fylgir svá mikil ergi, at eigi þótti karlmǫnnum skamlaust við at fara, ok var gyðjunum kend sú íþrótt.'[20] To this we can also add the god's displeasure with Óðinn in the *Gesta Danorum* over not his rape of Rindr, but his practicing 'women's duties.' Loki also accuses Óðinn of *seiðr* in *Lokasenna* 24:

> And you practiced *seiðr*
> in Samsey,
> and struck on a drum like a *vǫlva*;
> in a wizard's form you travelled over mankind,
> and I thought that was *ergi* in nature.
>
> *Ek þik síða kóðu*
> *Sámseyju í,*
> *ok draptu á vétt sem vǫlur;*
> *vitka líki*
> *fórtu verþjóð yfir,*
> *ok hugðu ek þat args aðal.*[21]

Journey: Some Observations on Grógaldr and Fjölsvinnsmál,' *Béaloideas*, Iml. 39-41 (1971-3), 307.

[18] Bellows, *The Poetic Edda*, 236 n. 6. See also 'Rind' for Rindr: Bellows, *The Poetic Edda*, 198. Again, the alternate possibility is that Rindr was a figure repeatedly enchanted and/or raped by multiple men.

[19] On the dating of the *Heimskringla* and its authorship by Sturluson, see Sturluson, Snorri. (2016). *Heimskringla*. Volume I: The Beginnings to Óláfr Tryggvason. Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (trans.). University College London: Viking Society for Northern Research, vii-ix.

[20] Sturluson, Snorri. (1962). *Heimskringla I*. Íslenzk Fornrit, Aðalbjarnarson, Bjarni (ed.). Reykjavík: Híð Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 19; translation by Jefford Franks, *Óðinn: A Queer* týr*?* 53. Finlay and Faulkes, *Heinskringla*, 11, however, translates this to mean this form of magic is 'accompanied by… great perversion'.

[21] Kristjánsson, Jónas and Ólason, Vésteinn (eds.) *Eddukvæði I: Goðakvæði*. Íslenzk Fornrit. (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 2014), 413; quoted in Jefford Franks, *Óðinn: A Queer* týr*?* 52.

The likening to a *vǫlva* also raises questions of Óðinn's gender. *Vǫlva or vǫlur* are prophetesses or seers, who occasionally appear in sagas.[22] *Ergi* is a charge of general unmanliness, and possibly male homosexuality. However, Jefford Franks notes that this could also mean *female* sexual excess, again suggesting that Óðinn's gender identity is more fluid than otherwise expected and that gender binaries were not firmly established at this point.[23] Overall, Óðinn's links to *seiðr* are suggestive of a certain gender fluidity, with Óðinn's magic being queer and linked far more to women than to men.

Ultimately, I would argue, Óðinn's more fluid gender identity in the earlier sagas becomes Christianised, and therefore simplified, in Saxo Grammaticus' work. An individual that can move between genders at will via the use of queer magic would hardly be acceptable in a Christian context. Grammaticus' Óðinn therefore becomes a transvestite, providing an easier explanation as to how he snuck his way into the court as a woman and impregnated Rindr.

General transvestite narratives

To an extent, the above story mimics one told often, that of a love-sick hero attempting to gain access to a woman who is inaccessible. Hill points to another story in the *Gesta Danorum*, that of Hagbarth and Signe in Book VII, along with the Old French romance *Floire et Blancheflor*.[24] To this, we can add the famed Tristan and Yseult: Tristan is able to bypass the security of Yseult's tower by cross-dressing.[25] Another parallel to this narrative trope can be found in Irish mythology, in the conception of Lugh.[26] In all of these, the hero of the tale utilises female disguise in order to gain access to the woman.

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[22] McKinnell, 'Encounters with Vǫlur.'
[23] Jefford Franks, *Óðinn: A Queer* týr*?* 51.
[24] Hill, 'Odin, Rinda and Thaney,' 233.
[25] Putter, 'Transvestite Knights,' 292.
[26] Alexander Haggerty Krappe. *Balor with the Evil Eye.* (New York: Institut des études françaises, Columbia University, 1927), 2-3. Various versions of the story exist. Krappe notes a few variants, 2 n. 9; see also the version given by Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, *Myth, legend & Romance: An Encyclopædia of the Irish Folk Tradition* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1991), 276; and John MacQueen, 'Yvain, Ewen and Owein ap Urien,' in *Transactions of Dumfriesshire and Galloway*

The primary difference between these and Óðinn/Rindr is that the woman is a willing participant. Indeed, it is sometimes the woman's idea for the man to cross-dress, as with Tristan and Yseult. Óðinn's utilisation of transvestism is far darker though, and more dangerous. Whereas before the noble hero was defeating an evil by gaining access to his love who loved him back, now transvestism is used to enable rape. Considering the original story always seems to have included magic in some way, the willingness of Rindr seems to have always been debatable, and Óðinn's gender identity questionable. Now, however, the figure of the transvestite has been invoked, not as a joke as it often was in chivalric romance, but as a method for Óðinn to gain access to Rindr. The queer gender magic of *seiðr* would not be acceptable in a Christian document, even one dealing with mythology. Instead, the role of transvestite hero sneaking his way into the woman's bedroom is used, only for more sinister purposes.

The Thaney and Ewen narrative

We now turn to another version of this narrative, found in a Scottish context. This is the mid-twelfth-century fragment of the *Vita Kentegerni Imperfecta*, written by an anonymous 'cleric of S. Kentigern' (presumed a cleric of Glasgow Cathedral) and now known as the 'Herbertian Fragment.' It contains a brief account of St. Kentigern's mother St. Thaney, before finishing at the moment of Kentigern's birth.[27]

In this account, Prince Ewen, son of Erwegende (Urien), attempts to woo Thaney, the daughter of King Leudonus of the Lothians. The young woman, however, has already converted to Christianity, and thereby wishes to remain pure. So far, so common for female virgin saints—the tropes of secretly becoming a Christian, wishing to preserve her chastity, and this coming into conflict with societal and familial requirements for her marriage are found in

Natural History & Antiquarian Society ed. R. C. Reid and A. E. Truckell, 3rd series, Vol. 33 (Dumfries: Council of the Society, 1954-5), 128-9.

[27] Alexander Penrose Forbes (ed.), *Lives of S. Ninian and S. Kentigern: Compiled in the Twelfth Century* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1874), 123-33.

many lives of female saints and martyrs.[28] Where the tale first differs for Thaney, however, is in precisely how she wishes to prove her new faith—instead of traditionally considering herself 'married to Christ,' she vows to imitate the Virgin Mary, including a hope to conceive immaculately.[29] Despite repeated advances from Ewen, Thaney remains uninterested. Ewen's response provides the other main difference from the common form of virgin saints' lives. Thaney is raped by Ewen, whereas the threat of rape usually dissipates or is removed due to God's intervention.[30]

Already, this flies in the face of convention, but what further makes the *Vita Kentegerni Imperfecta* differ is that both this and a later *Vita* were created in order to dispel a belief that Thaney *had* in fact conceived immaculately—thereby creating an awkward parallel to Jesus, which later medieval thought would have found uncomfortable and borderline heretical.[31] So whilst Thaney probably followed her female compatriots even more similarly by retaining her virginity, twelfth-century thought acknowledged that for her to have given birth to Kentigern, she had to have had sexual intercourse in some way. However, Thaney was revered as a virgin saint—she could hardly be portrayed as willingly having sex with a man. Therefore, the obvious solution was to rewrite her story so that she was raped—thereby retaining her moral purity, whilst still explaining her birth of Kentigern.[32]

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[28] Susan Marshall, 'Illegitimacy and Sanctity in the Twelfth-Century Lives of St. Kentigern,' in *Jocelin of Furness: Proceedings of the 2011 Conference* ed. Clare Downham (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2013), 74.

[29] Forbes, *Lives*, 125. The Glasgow cleric views this rather unkindly, and suggests this was the cause of her later troubles. Victim-blaming appears to not be a recent phenomenon.

[30] For a recent feminist reading of Thaney's rape, see Elspeth King, *The Hidden History of Glasgow's Women: The Thenew Factor* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1993), 15-23. The change to actual rape has more in common with the medieval *pastourelle*, though Thaney is of the same social class as Ewen.

[31] Marshall, 'Illegitimacy and Sanctity,' 68. This later *Vita* was written by Jocelin of Furness in the late twelfth century, by the request of Bishop Jocelin of Glasgow, and can be found in translation in Forbes, *Lives,* 28-119. It does not contain the Thaney/Ewen narrative, instead offering alternative suggestions as to how she became pregnant which still protect her moral purity before swiftly moving onto Thaney's punishment.

[32] Marshall, 'Illegitimacy and Sanctity,' 73; see also Suzanna M. Edwards, *The Afterlives of Rape in Medieval English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 24, which discusses Thomas of Aquinas's thoughts on rape in his *Summa Theologiae*. Incidentally, St Serf, Kentigern's teacher, was also supposedly born of miraculous conception, Marshall, 'Illegitimacy and Sanctity,' 73 n. 26.

Into this narrative requirement for rape, we have a further addition. Ewen realises he will never come close to Thaney dressed as a man, so he instead dresses as a woman in order to get close to her and force himself onto her. Once the rape is over, he utters the phrase 'Am I not a woman like thyself?' to the sobbing Thaney, who is left confused and unsure of what has transpired.[33] There are a number of similarities to the Óðinn/Rindr narrative that that led Thomas Hill to pose it the basis for the Ewen/Thaney narrative. Firstly, the stories both concern the conception of a divinely appointed hero. Secondly, the father progresses through attempted marriage, seduction, and finally rape of the mother. Thirdly, the child is conceived when the father has the appearance of a woman and takes advantage of the trust this entails in the mother.[34] With strong similarities between the two narratives, it seems likely that the Óðinn narrative was utilised to provide an explanation for Thaney's pregnancy, to compensate for the tradition that she was a virgin saint who had conceived Kentigern immaculately.[35]

Unusually for a transvestite tale, the point at which the maleness of the transvestite should become clear to all (here, the moment of rape) does not have the expected effect on Thaney.[36] She remains unsure of what has happened, with the potential for a lesbian interaction hanging in the air until her pregnancy becomes obvious. Whilst we, the reader, are clear as to what has happened, Thaney remains unsure—and we are left with an echo of anxiety over Ewen's identity. The transvestite has not been outed, not fully, not until Thaney becomes clearly pregnant. This contrasts the chivalric method of utilising transvestism, whereby the 'joke' does not fool anyone for long.[37] Until Kentigern's creation is confirmed by Thaney's pregnancy, Ewen's actions and

[33] The relevant section is Forbes, *Lives*, 126-8.
[34] Hill, 'Odin, Rinda and Thaney,' 233.
[35] As evidenced by the later *Vita Kentegerni* containing a diatribe against 'the stupid and foolish people' in Glasgow who believe Kentigern 'was conceived and born of a virgin.' Forbes, *Lives*, 35.
[36] In the *Gesta Danorum*, Grammaticus provides an additional comment explaining how the father of Rindr in fact knew what was occurring, but did not intervene - Friis-Jensen and Fisher, *Saxo Grammaticus*, 167-9.
[37] Putter, 298. Perhaps ecclesiastical commentators on such things were more concerned to show the longer-term effects of such activities.

comment 'Am I not a woman like thyself?' remain in a way subversive towards the gender binary. The homoerotic possibility of Thaney and Ewen's interaction is, too, only finally extinguished once Thaney's pregnancy becomes apparent (if it ever truly existed).[38]

The anonymous writer does not condemn the rape of Thaney. Female saints are often the victims of violence, and often suffer the threat of sexual violence—but as noted earlier, that threat is never realised, usually stopped through God's intervention.[39] Thaney's rape takes this voyeuristic tendency within hagiography a step further, leaving her 'Scotland's first recorded rape victim, battered woman and unmarried mother.'[40] Overall, this now fragmentary *Vita* deviates noticeably from standard accepted norms, with the issue of a virgin birth being the ultimate root of both Thaney's rape and Ewen's transvestism. On the other hand, Thaney's being held to blame for the rape is not uncommon in light of medieval rape trials.[41]

After several attempts from her father to execute Thaney, she is finally set out to sea in a tiny boat. Miraculously she lands on the beach near Culross, where Thaney gives birth to Kentigern on the shore. St. Serf, who lives at Culross, finds her and takes her and her new-born son in. Serf makes several comments at this point in an obvious authorial attempt to justify Thaney's ordeal. Firstly, Serf clarifies that Ewen's gender was never really in question, at least not to the writer—he was of 'the male sex.'[42]

Secondly, Serf claims that the rape was in fact predestined by God, in answer to her wishes to emulate the Virgin Mary. Therefore the conception was not sinful, and in fact a form of marriage.[43] With the twelfth century being a key point where the Church took greater control over marriage and its requirements

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[38] As always with medieval transvestite interactions. Putter, 'Transvestite Knights,' 295-6. Ewen's straight male desire is, of course, never distorted by his adoption of women's clothing, Putter, 'Transvestite Knights,' 293

[39] Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 197.

[40] King, Elspeth. *The Hidden History of Glasgow's Women: The Thenew Factor.* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1993), 13.

[41] Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, 205.

[42] Forbes, *Lives*, 133.

[43] Forbes, *Lives*, 133.

(notably requiring both members to be consenting), this passage seems an attempt to sanction Ewen's actions.[44] It is a convoluted explanation, claiming that 'lawful love abounded,' and is clearly concerned with legitimising Kentigern's parentage, rather than having any real concern towards Thaney beyond her virginity.

Ewen is never negatively portrayed. The tale is concerned with showing that Kentigern, 'though conceived through rape, is not fathered by a wicked, lustful monster but by a desperate, love-sick swain.'[45] Ewen's transvestism is presented as a means to an end, but never commented upon, nor portrayed in either a negative or positive light. It simply happens. In this way, it perhaps is not a trans narrative in that such figures are often 'bent towards the gothic, the fantastical, the comedic, and the pornographic.'[46]

However, if we accept that an underlying narrative thrust was that of pre-destination, per St. Serf's commentary, then perhaps the figure of the fantastical trans person can still be seen in both Ewen and Óðinn.[47] Certainly, they both exist in a boundary space between the normal world and the queer extraordinary world: Ewen is enacting God's will through predestination; Óðinn is following the path laid out by seers in order to enact divine vengeance. Both are certainly dangerous, their recourse to rape to get what they want being an obvious indicator of this.

Ultimately Thaney 'benefits,' having given birth to a prominent saint, and now revered as a saint herself. She now follows the path God has set out before her, having sacrificed her physical virginity, but importantly still retaining her moral purity.[48] A change found in eleventh– and twelfth–century writers is

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[44] Gaunt*, Gender and Genre*, 74, 120.
[45] Marshall, 'Illegitimacy and Sanctity,' 72.
[46] M. W. Bychowski, 'Trans Literature: Transgender as a Trope in Cisgender Stories,' accessed September 18, 2018, http://www.thingstransform.com/2018/09/trans-literature-transgender-as-trope.html.
[47] Following loosely the main themes of the 'Mystical Drag Queen' in Bychowski, 'Trans Literature.'
[48] St Serf additionally notes that Thaney 'suffered injury in the flesh, whilst she lost not her virginal devotion.' Forbes, *Lives,* 133. This is reminiscent of Augustine, who says much the same in *De civitate Dei contra paganos*, Book I Chapters 16 and 18 – see R. W. Dyson (ed.), *Augustine: The City of God against the Pagans*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 26-8. Thaney's suffering may have been part of an exercise in attempting to convert those local to that region,

their focus on the potentiality of rape as a suffering worse than death, and poses it as the 'ultimate sacrifice' of obedience to God.[49] However, whilst the *threat* of rape was usually enough to prove a female saint's holiness, the anonymous Glasgow cleric goes further. This is, in truth, likely in response to the impossible situation of the tradition already surrounding Thaney of her giving birth to Kentigern. The tropes surrounding female saints being threatened with rape appear to have been a useful solution to the problem of Thaney's pregnancy.[50]

All that was then required was a male actor to perpetrate this rape. Ewen's cross-dressing fits into a common narrative of male transvestism being utilised due to 'a desire to have easier access to women for sexual purposes.'[51] No male transvestite saint exists (or rather, no male transvestite has ever been canonised by the Roman Catholic Church—saintly activity may have occurred in such individuals, but been left unrecorded).[52] The activities of the male transvestite in medieval literature are usually sexual, often socially transgressive, and possibly linked to witchcraft.[53] They are either a dangerous figure, or one played as a joke in chivalric romance, but the underlying masculinity of the figure in drag is never truly in question. Both the *Gesta*'s Óðinn and the *Vita*'s Ewen are portrayed as men in women's clothing, only ever utilising a disguise to dupe a woman. The earlier versions of Óðinn, pre-Christianisation, often a glimpse into a more complex world of gender fluidity, one 'straightened out' by later writers.

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lacing her as a 'national heroine whose piety converted the tribe or people to Christianity.' Goodich, *Vita Perfecta,* 179.

[49] Edwards, *The Afterlives of Rape,* 22.

[50] Additionally, a parallel to the Rape of Lucretia could be made, with both suffering rape in order to aid their country: Lucretia's aiding the formation of Rome, Thaney's aiding the Christianisation of Scotland.

[51] Bullough, 'Transvestites in the Middle Ages,' 1382.

[52] Bullough, 'Transvestites in the Middle Ages,' 1383; 'Nov 1st: All (Gay) Saints,' Queer Saints and Martyrs: Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Trans in Church History, accessed September 27, 2018, https://queersaints.wordpress.com/2011/11/01/nov-ist-all-gay-saints/. Compare this to the not-uncommon trope of female transvestite saints, Goodich, *Vita Perfecta,* 177-8. Trans male saints have been identified, see Blake Gutt, 'Medieval Trans Lives in Anamorphosis: A Pregnant Male Saint and Backward Birth.' Accessed September 27, 2018. (Medieval, She Wrote, 2017) http://www.medievalshewrote.com/blog/2017/6/28/guest-post-by-blake-gutt-medieval-trans-lives-in-anamorphosis-a-pregnant-male-saint-and-backward-birth, providing a translation of elements from *Le Romanz de Saint Fanuel et de Sainte Anne et de Nostre Dame et de Nostre Segnor et de Ses Apostres.*

[53] Bullough, 'Transvestites in the Middle Ages,' 1383.

The links between Scotland and Scandinavia

Both tales sharing such noticeable similarities is suggestive of contact and borrowing from one to the other. As has been noted, this version of events found in the *Vita Kentegerni Imperfecta* gives the impression of an addition to solve the problem of Thaney's virginity. This leads us to the likelihood that the Óðinn and Rindr tale has been borrowed from to aid the *Vita Kentegerni Imperfecta.* We are left, then, with a question as to how this became known in Scotland. There were plenty of general links between Scotland and Scandinavia which may account for the possibility of the adoption of this tale into the *Vita Kentegerni*.[54] Viking raiders took control of the Shetland and Orkney Islands, along with the Hebrides, and then moved south, coming into conflict with the Picts in 839 and 866.[55] Settling took place as well, primarily in the north and west of Scotland, which remained under Scandinavian control up to the thirteenth century.[56] These areas were known well enough to appear in Norse sagas, which noted that Norse, or partly-Norse, individuals lived there.[57]

We can however suggest a more specific method for the Óðinn/Rindr narrative to have arrived at Glasgow Cathedral. Govan, as a site of early medieval Christian worship and a major ecclesiastical centre by the end of the tenth century, had a 'significant Scandinavian presence' in the area during the tenth and eleventh centuries.[58] Tenth-century carved stones, so-called 'hogback stones,' found within areas of Norse presence and settlement and first appearing in tenth-century York, have the highest Scottish concentration at Govan, and 'are an unambiguous indication of Norse patronage.'[59] These appear alongside

[54] For discussions over the presence of Scandinavian influence in Scotland, see James Graham-Campbell and Colleen E. Batey (eds.), *Vikings in Scotland: an archaeological survey* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998).
[55] Barbara Crawford, 'Scandinavia 1. To 1312,' in *The Oxford Companion to Scottish History*, ed. Michael Lynch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
[56] Crawford, 'Scandinavia 1,' 2001.
[57] Rosemary Power, 'Scotland in the Norse Sagas' in *Scotland and Scandinavia 800-1800,* ed. by Grant G. Simpson (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1990), 13-24.
[58] S. T. Driscoll, *Govan from Cradle to Grave* (Glasgow: The Society of Friends of Govan Old, 2004), 8, 12-14, 23.
[59] Chris Dalglish and Stephen T. Driscoll, with Irene Maver, Norman F. Shead, and Ingrid Shearer, *Historic Govan: Archaeology and Development.* (York: Council for British Archaeology and

cross-slabs, of a period 900-1100, indicating a possibly joint habitation of Viking and Christian in the area.[60] The nearby Doomster Hill's stepped form is comparable to other major Viking centres such as Tynwald and Dublin, and possibly had a ceremonial route between it and the early medieval church.[61]

This shared living area from an early point in Govan's history, along with the greater integration of Scandinavians into their surrounding countries during the end of the Viking Age, could have played a role in how such a noticeable parallel between Óðinn and Ewen could have occurred.[62] Scandinavian settlers and their offspring could well have known the tale of Óðinn and Rindr. From there, perhaps it seeped into a more general social consciousness over the intervening years. Certainly, Óðinn appears to have been one of the more successfully imported Scandinavian gods, and enjoyed popularity in the more northern areas of what is now Scotland.[63]

After the Viking Age, Govan's fortunes shifted, and it ceased to be the main ecclesiastical centre of the area. Govan was granted to Glasgow Cathedral by King David I, between 1128 and 1136, and made a prebend of the cathedral by Bishop Herbert, possibly an intentional snubbing of its previous importance.[64] Being an area of high Scandinavian cultural contact, which then became part of the Glasgow diocese, Govan then seems a likely route for which the Óðinn/Rindr narrative became known to a Glasgow cleric. Whilst this is still speculative, it seems a better fit than the 'pagan myths' explanation provided by Hill for the parallels between the two stories.[65] It may be yet another element of how Scandinavian culture and identity was imprinted onto the British Isles.[66]

Edinburgh: Historic Scotland, 2011), 31, 49; Olwyn A. Owen and Stephen T. Driscoll, 'Norse Influence at Govan on the Firth of Clyde, Scotland,' in *Viking Settlements and Viking Society: Papers from the Proceedings of the Sixteenth Viking Congress, Reykjavík and Reykholt, 16-23 August 2009*, ed. by Svavar Sigmundsson et al. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornleifafélag and University of Iceland, 2011), 336-7, 343.

60 Dalglish and Driscoll, *Historic Govan*, 32.

61 Dalglish and Driscoll, *Historic Govan*, 9; Owen and Driscoll, 'Norse Influence at Govan,' 341-3.

62 Barbara E. Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland.* Scotland in the Early Middle Ages. 2. (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1987), 219.

63 Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland,* 195-8.

64 Driscoll, *Govan*, 24; Dalglish and Driscoll, *Historic Govan*, 50.

65 Hill, 'Odin, Rinda and Thaney,' 235-6.

66 Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, 220.

Certainly, Scandinavian myths and Christian belief were not seen as mutually incompatible. Across the British Isles, depictions of Scandinavian myths can be found on crosses and grave monuments with Christian contexts—perhaps the adoption of Óðinn into the *Vita Kentegerni* can be seen as part of this.[67]

Conclusion

I am aware that the two tales above, containing as they do men that only cross-dress in order to sexually assault a woman, may give fuel to the cause of those that see transgender women as simply men invading women's spaces (such as Janice Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire*). It would be simple to read the above tales as just that. Simple, and simplistic. These are not tales told by the actors—these are literary and hagiographic creations. Following Simon Gaunt's line of enquiry as to why writers have chosen to represent the world in this way, and the symbolic value of this to contemporaries, we find ourselves with the conclusion that these tales show more about the writer's own concerns and fears than they do about actual transvestite individuals in the medieval period.[68] They show us a glimpse into how Christian writers viewed both transvestism and gender fluidity. Óðinn's queer gender is hammered out into a man in drag by Grammaticus; Kentigern's immaculate conception explained away by his mother's rape by a male transvestite, thereby keeping her moral purity.

Óðinn's gender crossing is suggested by the Old Norse sagas as having been achieved by magic; this is a gender queering that occurred pre-Christianisation. So Óðinn's transvestism in the *Gesta Danorum* is only partly Christian, a Christian response to magic that needed a more mundane explanation. Similarly, Ewen's character is portrayed in a remarkably neutral way. The writer is more concerned with showing how this was morally acceptable, in order to defend Kentigern's sanctity. A child born of rape is hard to defend as a sacred birth—one that was born of a love-sick swain, though, is more defensible. In light of Serf's comments that it is as God willed it, one could even argue that

[67] Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, 174.
[68] Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, 7-8.

transvestism, here, for this particular purpose, was seen as acceptable. Whilst the male transvestite is utilised as a sexual deviant, it paradoxically is also an agent of God's will—an unintentional empowerment, and a complex one. Ultimately, both Grammaticus and the anonymous Glasgow cleric were forced to write transvestites into their narratives, in order to fix greater problems. These were stopgap solutions, evidenced by the later *Vita Kentgerni* by Jocelin of Furness that removes this narrative entirely, but still one that someone found acceptable. The transvestite appears, then, as a dark figure in Christian writings around gods and saints. But we should always bear in mind that this shows more about others' views of transvestites, rather than anything they themselves did. An easily maligned figure such as the transvestite can be turned to any number of questionable activities by writers—but for the anonymous cleric and Grammaticus, it seems the transvestite was the lesser of two evils.

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The Women of *Ljósvetninga saga*

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Abstract

Studies on gender in *Ljósvetninga saga* have been largely focused on the somewhat larger-than-life figure of Guðmundr *inn ríki* Eyjólfsson. Guðmundr is an impressive, often controversial character, eliciting accusations of effeminacy and homosexuality from his contemporaries and much discussion as to the implications of his characterisation on the part of modern scholars. Such focus on Guðmundr has relegated the female characters of the saga to the scholarly margins—in a saga so concerned with feud and legal proceedings, the scarcity of female portraits can be seen to confirm the idea that the saga has little interest in women. The women of *Ljósvetninga saga*, however, deserve consideration, as they cut some of the most striking portraits of all the women of the family sagas, despite their relative lack of personal power, and their portrayal has much to contribute to the debate about women's roles in saga literature. This article examines the roles of women such as Guðmundr *inn ríki*'s wife Þórlaug Atladóttir, Guðmundr's niece Jórunn Einarsdóttir and the prophetess Þórhildr *Vaðlaekkja*, demonstrating the complex and varied nature of these characters and the limitations of attempting to classify female characters into tropes such as 'the whetter' or 'the guardian of family honour'.

Keywords: sagas, women, literature, law, social status

The women of *Ljósvetninga saga*, unlike those of the better-known family sagas such as *Laxdæla saga* and *Njáls saga*, have received very little scholarly attention.[2] Theodore M. Andersson and William Ian Miller's extensive introduction to the saga mentions women only briefly, as lesser players in a male-dominated political scene.[3] More recent scholarship, such as that by Gísli Sigurðsson and Yoav Tirosh, has similarly focused on the male characters of the saga, particularly on

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[2] I have based my analysis on the C-redaction of the saga, as edited by Andersson and Miller and the *Íslenzk Fornrit* series. The earliest fragments of the C-redaction date to the fifteenth century, while a fragmentary A-redaction parchment survives from the fourteenth century; the C-redaction, however, is longer, and can be reconstructed fully from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century manuscripts; Andersson and Miller, *Law and Literature*, 64-74.

[3] Andersson and Miller, *Law and Literature*, 3-118; in particular 19-22, 61 and 99.

the main rival of the Ljósvetningar, Guðmundr Eyjólfsson.[4] Guðmundr is an impressive, controversial character, who appears in many sagas and elicits varying treatment from different saga authors, and his depiction certainly merits discussion, as it contributes to the debate on Old Norse gender and sexuality.[5] It has, however, left the women of the saga largely forgotten. Women do not play as prominent a role in *Ljósvetninga saga* as they do in *Laxdæla saga* or *Njáls saga*, as the main focus is on the legal proceedings and political manoeuvrings through which the feud between the Ljósvetningar and their rivals takes place, and women are excluded from overt legal or political action. The women of *Ljósvetninga saga* are not often visible, but when they are, they do not always fit into the patterns we expect from other family sagas. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir's work on women in Old Norse literature has called attention to the variety of roles available to women in the sagas; building on her approach, I will analyse several female characters who do not fit the traditionally acknowledged roles available to women in the sagas.[6]

Despite the saga's heavy legal and political focus, women are not excluded to the same extent as in *Hrafnkels saga*; although they are secondary players in the game, they are all involved at some level, whether on their own account or on account of their connections with those male characters who are active participants in the disputes.[7] Guðmundr's wife Þórlaug, for example, cuts a striking figure in the scenes in which she features: at the Bægisá wedding, she makes a concerted effort to defend her husband's honour, providing him with an excuse to leave when the situation becomes very tense. Later, she shows considerable courage and determination when she protects the killer of Þorbjǫrn *rindill* by refusing to leave his house despite her husband's threats to burn her and their son Halldórr inside it. Þorkell *hákr*'s wife Þorgerðr also proves to be more perceptive than her husband in her suspicion of Rindill when he comes to

[4] Gísli Sigurðsson, '*The Immanent Saga of Guðmundr ríki'; Tirosh, '*The Fabulous Saga' and 'Argr Management'.
[5] Tirosh, '*The Fabulous saga', 3; Andersson and Miller, *Law and Literature*, 86-90.
[6] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature*, 8. For more discussion on female agency see, for example, McGillivray, 'Gender and Subversion'.
[7] The only women who feature in this saga are servants; Miller, *Hrafnkel or the Ambiguities*, 149.

their house to spy. There are a few women who are involved in legal disputes directly, and to varying degrees; Ǫlvir's daughter, who in the saga's first chapter is subject to unwanted visits from Sǫlmundr, has neither a name nor a voice, and her case is discussed solely through the men who take an active part in it, but not all of *Ljósvetninga saga*'s legal cases proceed in this way. Friðgerðr, who becomes pregnant, initially tries to appeal on her own behalf to her employer Þorkell, and only when he refuses to help her does she return home to her father, who takes over her case. There is even a case of a woman—Einarr of Þverá's daughter Jórunn—arbitrating a feud.[8] The behaviour of Þórhildr *Vaðlaekkja*, a sorceress whom Guðmundr consults, is also worth discussion; she is one of very few women in the sagas who are depicted wearing trousers, and the saga author has no qualms about describing the pagan ritual she performs to ascertain the future for Guðmundr.

I do not argue that women in *Ljósvetninga saga* are particularly unusual, or that they transgress social norms established by other sagas; given the degree to which these norms are subjective to individual authors and subject to change over time, such an assessment would be close to meaningless. Unlike Andersson and Miller, who believe that 'one of the fortunate side benefits of the sagas… is the abundance of social and cultural information preserved in them,' I do not seek to ground my argument with reference to social or cultural norms in medieval Iceland, or to generalise the evidence of the sagas in order to construct a model for wider Icelandic or even Germanic perceptions of women.[9] Instead, I treat the sagas as literary works, operating on the assumption that each saga author's construction of women and femininity differs, but that constructions of gender across the sagas, sharing a common culture and time period, are broadly comparable.[10] It is, therefore, productive to compare the depiction of women in *Ljósvetninga saga* with depictions of women in other Icelandic sagas, in

[8] *Ljósvetninga saga*, 139.
[9] Andersson and Miller, *Law and Literature*, 3. Some scholars, such as Jochens, in *Old Norse Images*, 10, argue that a common Germanic culture can be accessed through the sagas.
[10] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, 'Gender', 227.

order to place them in context and to broaden our understanding of how women in the sagas can function as characters within the narrative context.[11]

The argument is sometimes made that the only option for women in the sagas who wish to influence the course of a feud is to goad their male relatives into action.[12] Jenny Jochens estimates that 48% of the women in *Njáls saga* goad male relatives to action, and Ármann Jakobsson also argues that women in *Njáls saga* are quick to anger and urge their sons and husbands to avenge every insult.[13] Other family sagas such as *Laxdæla saga* and *Gísla saga Súrssonar* also feature several prominent female characters, such as Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir and Þórdís Þorbjǫrnsdóttir, who achieve their ends by goading men into action. A close examination of women in *Ljósvetninga saga*, however, suggests that women's involvement in feuds can vary in both nature and degree, and depends on multiple factors, such as the source of the dispute, the possible courses of action, the woman's relationship to the men who are involved, her social status, and her personality. The women of *Ljósvetninga saga* are very rarely depicted as goading their husbands and relatives. The only exception to this is Guðrún, the daughter of Þorkell *hákr*, who is killed by Guðmundr's men in retaliation for spreading rumours of Guðmundr's effeminacy.[14] Many years after her father's death, as the dispute over Friðgerðr's case escalates and both sides gather men to fight, her husband Ótryggr protests that he is not ready to join the battle as he is washing his hair; she retorts "'*satt var þat, at Þorkell hákr var mér skyldr, en eigi þér, enda skal ek ok fara*'" ("it is true that Þorkell hákr was related to me, and not to you, and so I will go").[15]

This method of goading, where a woman threatens to take her husband's place in seeking vengeance, is unusual in the sagas; even women like Þorgerðr Egilsdóttir in *Laxdæla saga*, who accompanies her sons when they avenge Kjartan on Bolli, worried that they would fail to carry out her instructions if left to their

[11] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature*, 3.
[12] Andersson and Miller in *Law and Literature*, 32; see also Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature*, 8-15.
[13] Ármann Jakobsson, 'Masculinity and Politics', 191.
[14] Þorkell hákr is killed when Guðrún is four years old; *Ljósvetninga saga*, 51.
[15] At this time, her husband Ótryggr is 'gamall' (old), and they have an adult son; *Ljósvetninga saga* 77. Translations are mine.

own devices, do not go as far as suggesting that they would replace their male relatives in taking revenge.[16] Guðrún's taunt is also unlike the infrequent cases in which women, such as Auðr in *Laxdæla saga*, actually attempt to take revenge themselves. Auðr has no close male relatives, and none of her more distant relatives are willing to attack her ex-husband Þórðr, while Guðrún has a husband and adult son, both of whom seem reasonably eager to join the fight. The issues at stake are also different: Auðr has recently been insulted and divorced by her husband, while the fight between the Ljósvetningar and the sons of Guðmundr has come about due to the escalation of a relatively inconsequential case. Ótryggr's main motivation to fight is his obligation to support his family, and it seems almost out of place for Guðrún to bring up an incident that happened decades ago, except to remind her husband of the depth and history of the feud between the two factions. Ótryggr is described by the saga narrator as '*inn vaskasti*' (the most valiant of men), and immediately answers Guðrún's taunt with a curt "'*mér sómir fǫrin, enda skal ek ok fara*'" ("it is honourable for me to go and I so will go"), offering no further protest against joining the fight.[17]

It seems as though Ótryggr, despite being past fighting-age, barely needs goading at all before agreeing to fight, so the strength of Guðrún's taunt is curious; why would she bring up an old, irrelevant issue to shame a husband who intends to fight anyway? If it is intended to persuade Ótryggr to take revenge, it would be somewhat out of place. If, instead, her main aim is to tease him for not being ready to go yet, it makes rather more sense; he protests that he is washing his hair—a mundane, household activity—so it would make sense for Guðrún to needle him about his lack of heroism, questioning his masculinity by suggesting that she is the man in their marriage and he the woman. Instead of painting a classic whetting scene, therefore, the saga plays with the idea of goading and the gender relations it implies, while exposing the limits of women's power over the actions of men. Guðrún is not depicted as trying to change her husband's intentions, although her words do have some effect: they are a

[16] Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age*, 194.
[17] *Ljósvetninga saga*, 77.

challenge, and they increase the urgency of Ótryggr's departure, as Guðrún has called his masculinity into question and further delay would only exacerbate the situation.

There has been much debate over whether the literary trope of the whetting woman had any basis in reality. Jochens argues for this trope as a literary device, given its near absence in the contemporary sagas on one hand and its frequency in several of the family sagas on the other, while Carol Clover maintains that the prominence of whetting in other bloodfeud cultures, such as those of ancient Greece and Albania, suggests a corresponding role for women in early Iceland.[18] Whether or not the whetting woman is a literary motif, however, the absence of this image in *Ljósvetninga saga* suggests that the depiction of women in the family sagas is more varied than a narrow focus on the whetting woman allows.

Several women are directly involved in legal cases in *Ljósvetninga saga*, but their involvement takes different forms each time. The case of Ǫlvir's daughter shows little concern for her character at all; in the opening scene of the saga, a man called Sǫlmundr pays some unsolicited visits to Ǫlvir's daughter against her father's wishes. Unable to do anything about the situation, Ǫlvir asks Ófeigr Jarngerðarson for help, which enables the saga author to demonstrate Ófeigr's good character in protecting an innocent girl and driving off her would-be kidnappers as they are about to abduct her. As demonstrated by his reliance on Ófeigr's help, it is clear that Ǫlvir is not an influential figure, and the saga author seems little interested in him or his daughter, choosing to focus instead on the righteousness of Ófeigr, who later in the saga ousts Guðmundr himself from a high seat at a feast after threatening to beat him up.[19] Andersson and Miller argue that the lack of interest in Ǫlvir is due to the author's preoccupation with the upper stratum of society; Ǫlvir is reasonably wealthy but unable to command respect, and is thus considered weak, while Ófeigr acts as 'a corrective to Olvir's

[18] Jochens, *Old Norse Images*, 194; Clover, 'Hildigunnr's lament', pp. 30-6.
[19] *Ljósvetninga saga*, 58-9.

fecklessness'.[20] Ǫlvir's daughter is not named, and does not speak. The focus on Ófeigr and the other men involved in the incident suggests that she, as an individual, is of little interest to the saga author, and is little more than a pawn in a political game in which she holds no sway.

Not all the women in *Ljósvetninga saga* share the fate of Ǫlvir's daughter, however. Friðgerðr Ísólfsdóttir is also of somewhat low status, and we hear of her father's wealth depleting as she returns home after falling pregnant.[21] Although she is eventually forgotten amid the larger feud between the Ljósvetningar and the sons of Guðmundr, she initially tries to settle her own case, taking up the matter with her landlord, Þorkell Hallgilsson. Friðgerðr is described in positive terms by the narrator; she '*þótti vera kona sæmilig ok allmikill gleðimaðr ok samði sik mjǫk í háttum með ungum mǫnnum ok var verkmaðr mikill ok umsýslumaðr*' (was thought to be an honourable and very cheerful woman and she fitted in well among the young people; she was active and a very hard worker).[22] Despite her promiscuity, she is described as an honourable woman; although her father does make an effort to move her to a farm where she would not be subject to advances from young men, when she comes home pregnant he simply notes that "'*Eigi hefir vel orðit, enda var eigi góðu ráði til at bregða*'" ("It has not turned out well, and yet there was no good way to solve this").[23] The absence of judgement for Friðgerðr's actions suggests that the author takes a reasonably lax attitude to extra-marital sex, and there is little association between chastity and moral character within the saga, at least in relation to unmarried women. Friðgerðr seeks support once it becomes difficult for her to work, but one gets the sense that it is financial support she needs to help her bring up her child rather than compensation for a damaged reputation. The description of her implies that honour, in her case, has less to do with sex than with her character and her actions: she is valued for her hard work and high spirits, though she ends up

[20] Andersson and Miller, *Law and Literature*, 99.
[21] *Ljósvetninga saga*, 64-7.
[22] *Ljósvetninga saga*, 65.
[23] When her father Ísólfr asks Þorkell to pay compensation, he retorts "'Er dóttir þín kona eigi fálynd ok eigi einn líkligri en annarr til þokka með henni'" ("Your daughter is not faithful and no-one is more likely than another to have been with her"); *Ljósvetninga saga*, 66.

paying for following her high spirits too far. Obedience is another character trait which is conspicuously absent in Friðgerðr; she has a mind of her own, disregarding the advice of Þorvarðr at Fornastaðir to return home because of bad weather after her father sends her away to remove her from the attentions of a young man from Grímsey. Her father intends for her to go to Eyjólfr Guðmundarson, but she is determined instead to go to Draflastaðir. Higher-status women in her position might be expected to be subject to their fathers' authority, but Friðgerðr shows a remarkable degree of autonomy and receives little censure for her actions—the saga rather implies that her fault lies in enjoying herself a little too much.

It is possible to interpret Friðgerðr's story as a moral tale, demonstrating the consequences of female independence, but if this is the case then it would make little sense for the narrator to hold her in such high esteem. The argument might be made that Friðgerðr is treated like a man by the saga author, as she attempts to settle her case by herself, confronting her host Þorkell when she falls pregnant in an attempt to gain compensation. There is, however, no indication within the text that she is masculine in any way, nor any indication that Friðgerðr is unusual in her behaviour. Miller and Andersson analyse her case thus:

> The woman is displaced by her father. This is hardly surprising. Women are disabled from prosecuting their own suits, and Thorkel's refusal to negotiate with Fridgerd informally means that she, as a woman, has no other alternative for direct public involvement in the dispute.[24]

Yet Ísólfr is just as unsuccessful at prosecuting Friðgerðr's case as she is, and her case is treated just like many others which involve lower-status farmers: it is passed up the social ladder in an attempt to get someone more powerful to settle her case (she goes first to her father, who passes the case to Eyjólfr Guðmundarson). In the first place, it is her status, rather than her gender, which prevents Friðgerðr from acting on her own behalf. Friðgerðr's case suggests that even relatively low-status women in the Icelandic sagas could have a great deal of control over the course of their own lives, and the fact that the author of a saga very much focused on legal and political manoeuvrings devotes several

[24] Andersson and Miller, *Law and Literature*, 32.

chapters to her case suggests a significant degree of interest in this strong female character, as well as interest in the affairs of people who do not belong to the upper stratum of society—an attitude which is relatively unusual in the family sagas.

Friðgerðr is not the only woman in *Ljósvetninga saga* who is actively involved in a legal case: Jórunn, the daughter of Einarr of Þverá and therefore Guðmundr Eyjólfsson's niece, is described thus by the narrator after she is married to Þorkell Geitisson:

> *Jórunn var inn mesti kvenskǫrungr, sem ætt hennar var til. Hon kom ok því til leiðar, sem engi hafði áðr komit, at þeir sættusk frændrnir, Þorkell Geitisson ok Bjarni Brodd-Helgason, ok heldu þá sætt vel ok drengliga síðan.*
> (Jórunn was an exceptional woman, as was appropriate to her lineage. She also found a way to reconcile the kinsmen Þorkell Geitisson and Bjarni Brodd-Helgason, which no-one had been able to do before, and afterwards they observed the terms faithfully and honourably).[25]

The passage is designed in part to humiliate Guðmundr, who has been forced to settle with Þorkell Geitisson after the betrothal; a little earlier Bjarni Brodd-Helgason had said to him that:

> "*Svá sýnisk mér, Guðmundr, sem þú hafir þurft báðar hendr við Þorkell frænda minn, ok hafi þó ekki af veitt um. Ok man ek enn þat, Guðmundr, er ek bað þik, at þú skyldir sætta okkr Þorkel, ok svaraði engi ódrengiligar en þú ok sagðir hann eigi vera mundu meira en annarrar handar mann gilds manns ok kvazt hann hafa hálfþynnu eina í hendi, en mik hǫggspjót gilt á hávu skapti. En ek em nú minni hǫfðingi en þú, ok sýnisk mér sem hann muni eigi þar lengi gengit hafa skaptamuninn.*"
> ("It seems to me, Guðmundr, that you have needed to use both hands against my kinsman Þorkell, and yet you were not successful. And I still remember that, Guðmundr, when I asked you to reconcile me with Þorkell, and nobody gave a more unmanly answer than you; you said he was not worth more than half a man and you said he had a small axe in his hand while I had a proper halberd on a long shaft. But I am a lesser chieftain than you, and it seems to me that he did not take long making up the difference").[26]

The incident could be passed over as yet another dig at Guðmundr's masculinity, since a woman is able to settle a case he refuses because it is too difficult. The saga, however, states that nobody has been able to reconcile Þorkell and Bjarni, not just that Guðmundr was unable to reconcile them, implying that the case

[25] *Ljósvetninga saga*, 139.
[26] *Ljósvetninga saga*, 138.

was genuinely difficult and suggesting that others had tried to take it up and failed. Jórunn's achievement is greater than mere humiliation of Guðmundr; she is instrumental in settling a case that no man has been able or willing to resolve. It is true that she acts on the legal margins—she only seems to get the opportunity to be involved in the case after several men have failed and is not otherwise said to be legally active. Her situation, like Friðgerðr's, elicits no comment from the narrator and there is nothing to indicate that it transgresses cultural norms.

There are other women in the family sagas who play a key part in settling feuds, such as Jórunn's namesake, the wife of Hǫskuldr in *Laxdæla saga* who persuades him to refrain from attacking his brother Hrútr and seek arbitration instead. The treatment of Jórunn Einarsdóttir suggests that women's involvement in legal cases, while perhaps unusual, does not constitute a transgression of gender norms—it is mentioned in conjunction with her wedding, an event which serves to reinforce gender roles and in which she had very little say, as it was arranged by her father and Ófeigr Jarngerðarson in order to prevent hostilities from breaking out between Þorkell Geitisson and Guðmundr.[27] The fact that Jórunn has no say in the arrangement of marriage but soon after is involved in the arbitration of a difficult legal case is ironic, but can be explained by the fact that Jórunn's marriage was arranged during a district *þing*, a space from which women are generally excluded, while the legal settlement she arbitrates was most likely concluded elsewhere. This suggests that while the assembly or law court was a strongly gendered space, the law itself was not necessarily so, and that there was perhaps more flexibility in attitudes towards women's involvement in legal disputes than recent scholarship has allowed.

The sorceress Þórhildr presents a clearer case of transgression of gender norms; she is '*gyrð í brækr ok hafði hjálm á hǫfði ok øx í hendi*' (dressed in breeches and had a helmet on her head and an axe in her hand), when Guðmundr comes

[27] *Ljósvetninga saga*, 137-9.

to visit her.[28] She elicits no comment from the narrator—positive or negative—and differs from sorceresses such as Þuríðr in *Grettis saga* in that she does not use her powers to harm people but only to see the future (Guðmundr wants to know whether he or his sons will suffer vengeance for the killing of Þorkell *háks*). Þórhildr is an unusual character: the narrator refrains from passing any comment upon either her character or actions, and she is simply described as '*forn í lund*' (heathen in mind).[29] The pagan ritual she carries out to determine the future is described in detail—she wades out into a lake and strikes her axe into it, and when the water turns bloody it means that vengeance for Þorkell *háks* will affect Guðmundr's sons. Her actions have no impact on the course of events; after she finishes, '*fór Guðmundr heim ok sat í virðingu sinni*' (Guðmundr returned home and continued to be held in high esteem), and the next we hear of Guðmundr are the events leading up to his death.[30] She is not simply intended as a device to reflect badly upon Guðmundr—if this were the case, one might expect that Þórhildr would be more harshly judged; Þorbjǫrn *rindill*, by contrast, is hardly spared from disdain. The saga author seems to be interested in her as a character in her own right, and accords her some respect. Jóhanna Katrín Fríðriksdóttir argues that magic in the sagas is not an unambiguously good or evil force and can be deployed for harmful or beneficial purposes; Þórhildr seems to be an example of neutral use, without discernible consequences.[31] This attitude to Þórhildr's use of magic is only one among many found in the sagas; Þuríðr in *Grettis saga*, for example, is responsible for orchestrating the death of Grettir, while Þorbjǫrg in *Eiríks saga rauða* brings an encouraging prophecy to the hungry Greenlanders.

Þórhildr's wearing of trousers might be compared to *Laxdæla saga*'s Auðr, who takes vengeance on her husband Þórðr for divorcing her. He bases his divorce suit on the claim that Auðr dressed in trousers like a man, but like Þórhildr, she also receives no direct censure. She deals Þórðr a serious wound

[28] *Ljósvetninga saga*, 59.
[29] *Ljósvetninga saga*, 59; an alternative translation might be 'having an ancient sensibility'.
[30] *Ljósvetninga saga*, 60.
[31] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature*, 48.

which makes it difficult for him to work, which I would argue counts as success on her part. Having failed to persuade her male relatives to take revenge on Þórðr for her, Auðr temporarily takes on a male role in seeking revenge for herself, and her trousers might be seen as an element of this role. In 'Before the Male Gaze', Jochens argues that women's trousers existed in saga society, but were cut differently from men's trousers, which had a triangular insert sewn in; it is not clear whether Auðr's trousers are of a male or female cut, but the author's remark that '*var hon þá at vísu í brókum*' (she was certainly wearing breeches then) reminds us of the accusation of masculinity which Þórðr used as an excuse to divorce her, and suggests that her current actions justify the accusation to some extent.[32] Wearing armour, however, is an even stronger indication of masculinity, and is exceedingly rare for women in the family sagas, since it implies a need for physical protection and the expectation of attack, something from which the women of the family sagas are generally immune. For both women, therefore, their clothing reflects the special roles they play; Auðr's breeches symbolise her taking on a masculine role, and in Þórhildr's case the armour appears to be of ritual significance, highlighting the preternatural nature of her actions. Perhaps it is because she is a sorceress that she invites no comment from the narrator; her access to magic excludes her from traditional expectations of gender expression, unlike Auðr, for whom the saga has considerable sympathy while offering mild disapproval.

The saga author demonstrates the perils of disregarding women's advice in Þorkell *háks*'s death scene: Þorkell's wife Þorgerðr is suspicious of Þorbjǫrn Rindill when he comes to their house to spy on them and re-latches a door Rindill has left open for Guðmundr's men to enter, but Þorkell refuses to listen to her and pays with his life. Her portrayal is not entirely positive: although she is more perceptive and intelligent than her husband, she comes across as somewhat heartless compared to him, as he takes the shivering man in from the bad weather and offers him hospitality. When he refuses to force Rindill to leave

[32] Jochens, 'Before the Male Gaze', 12; Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson eds., *Laxdaela Saga*, 97 and 127.

the house, '*var hon allæf í orðum við hann. En Rindill svaraði henni illa*' (she threw angry words at him, but Rindill answered her spitefully).[33] Although she makes a scene, she is ultimately powerless to stop Guðmundr's attack, very much like the wives of Gunnarr and Hǫgni in *Atlamál in Grœnlezku*, whose husbands refuse to take their advice and fall prey to Atli. Þorgerðr's function within the narrative thus differs again from the women discussed previously; Friðgerðr and Ǫlvir's daughter are at the centre of the action, while Jórunn is an active participant in it and Þórhildr is removed from it, serving only to prophesy future events. Þorgerðr, however, is a witness to the progress of a feud in which she has no direct part and which she is powerless to stop. Her characterisation is also different from that of the other women; her personality comes through in her dialogue with Þorkell, and in her actions of arguing with Rindill and checking to see if the door was latched. Friðgerðr is also a character whom we get to know primarily through her actions, though she comes across as rather less argumentative. Þórhildr has both dialogue and narrative description, but the saga author provides us with very little information that might enable us to form an opinion of her. Jórunn is characterised only by her actions, and never speaks, while Ǫlvir's daughter neither speaks nor acts. The female characters of *Ljósvetninga saga*, though few and somewhat far between, strike one as rich and varied figures, worthy of discussion in their own right, not only as characters of little significance who are occasionally involved in the men's legal and political games.

The most prominent woman of *Ljósvetninga saga*, however, is not introduced until well into the saga: Guðmundr's wife Þórlaug only appears on a few occasions, but when she does she comes across as an exceptionally strong, determined woman, loyal to her husband until his death despite a troubled relationship. We first see Þórlaug in action at the wedding of one of Guðmundr's *þingmenn* at Bægisá, when she has a terse exchange with Geirlaug, the wife of

[33] *Ljósvetninga saga*, 50-1.

Þórir Helgason, who along with Þorkell *hákr* had been spreading rumours of Guðmundr's effeminacy.[34] Geirlaug says,

> "*Hefir þú metnað til at vera mest metin; hefi ek engan hlut til jafns við þik nema gjaforð" Þórlaug svarar: "Víst hygg ek þik vel gefna. En nú er þar komit, at ek veit eigi aðra framar gipta en mik." Geirlaug svarar: 'Þá værir þú vel gefin, ef þar væri einmælt um, at bóndi þinn væri vel hugaðr eða snjallr.*"
> ("It is right for you to be the most honoured; I am in no way equal to you except in marriage." Þórlaug answered: "Indeed I think you are well married. But now it comes to it, I do not know of any marriage better than mine." Geirlaug answered: "You might be well married, if everyone thought that your husband was bold and courageous.").[35]

Tirosh argues that this scene is intended to contrast the 'worthy' marriage of Þorsteinn and Guðrún (at whose wedding the exchange takes place) with the problematic relationship between Guðmundr and Þórlaug, and that 'by finishing the conversation… Þórlaug is in a way acceding to Geirlaug's superior honour.'[36] Andersson and Miller interpret this as a cloaked but very deliberate insult by Geirlaug, which forms the catalyst for the ensuing feud that leads to Þorkell *hákr*'s death.[37] I interpret her response differently: Þórlaug may concede defeat in the short term, but she is not bested. She first ascertains from Geirlaug who was responsible for spreading the rumours, before abruptly cutting off the conversation in order to prevent the situation from escalating. As a guest at a wedding in enemy territory, this seems a prudent course of action, as does her subsequent feigning of illness and insistence that Guðmundr accompany her home. Tirosh argues that Guðmundr's reluctance to attend the wedding in the first place suggests that he already knows or suspects that rumours are being spread about him, and soon after setting out home from Bægisá Guðmundr makes it clear that he knows Þórlaug is not ill.[38] He grumbles that leaving the feast may confirm rumours of his unmanliness, but quickly turns his attention to how he can benefit from the situation, which suggests that he is not particularly upset about Þórlaug's actions. In my view, therefore, Þórlaug's

[34] Which, according to Meulengracht Sørensen, also implies his cowardice, making this a very serious insult; *The Unmanly Man*, 11.
[35] *Ljósvetninga saga*, 18.
[36] Tirosh, '*The Fabulous Saga', 17.
[37] Andersson and Miller, *Law and Literature*, 61.
[38] Tirosh, 'Argr Management', 249.

political skill shows through in this incident, as she successfully contrives an excuse to extract Guðmundr from a potentially dangerous situation into which he has gotten himself through poor judgement, as well as finding out the names of the main offenders to provide Guðmundr with targets for future revenge.[39]

Another situation in which Þórlaug demonstrates her strength of character is when Guðmundr threatens to set fire to Gnupufell, the farm at which Rindill's killer Eilífr is hiding. Tirosh argues that this is a very poor political move on Guðmundr's part, as Rindill is not much liked and has little social standing, while Bruni, the farmer at Gnupufell, is hosting several people in his house (including Þórlaug and Halldórr, her son with Guðmundr). The number of dead if the house were burned would far exceed the appropriate degree of revenge Rindill's death is worth, and Guðmundr's determination to carry it out, according to Tirosh, demonstrates Guðmundr's lack of moderation and poor relationship with his family.[40] Þórlaug, however, steps in again to defuse the situation, refusing to leave the house, and Halldórr follows suit, warning Guðmundr that "'*eigi þarftu þess mik at eggja, því at þér skal engi verri en ek, ef móðir mín brennr hér inni*.'" ("you do not need to incite me, because there will be no greater danger to you than me, if my mother is burnt inside here").[41] Þórlaug risks her own life in order to prevent Guðmundr from committing what the public opinion of the saga terms a '*mikla óhœf*' (terrible crime), causing Guðmundr short-term embarrassment but averting long-term damage to his reputation in the district.[42] She demonstrates her loyalty by standing up to her husband and forcing him to take the better political choice in the face of his enraged determination to seek revenge for Rindill. Þórlaug is able to influence the course of events in both cases, through both words and actions, without ever playing the role of whetter.

The female characters of *Ljósvetninga saga* are, therefore, a diverse cast; their roles are not particularly prominent in the main narrative, but neither are they mere caricatures or stereotypes. They are each unique; they shape the course of

[39] In '*The Fabulous Saga', 20, Tirosh argues that Þorsteinn persuades a reluctant Guðmundr to attend the wedding through flattery.
[40] Tirosh, 'Argr Management', 254; Gísli Sigurðsson, '*The Immanent Saga', 216.
[41] *Ljósvetninga saga*, 57.
[42] *Ljósvetninga saga*, 57.

the narrative in different ways, and ought not to be ignored simply because of the saga's concern with law and politics. Judith Jesch has observed that 'many of the female characters in the sagas are thoroughly unpleasant', but such an estimation does not apply to *Ljósvetninga saga*: even Þórhildr, who practises pagan magic, receives no negative judgement from the narrator or saga characters.[43] The marginal position of women in the saga does not prevent them from being accorded respect by the author, and their achievements are not insignificant. This is demonstrated by the brief description of Jórunn Einarsdóttir, indicating that she achieves a reconciliation that none of the saga's accomplished male lawyers were able to arrange, and by the account of Þórlaug's actions, which repeatedly protect her husband's political standing. The female characters of *Ljósvetninga saga* are in many ways similar to their counterparts in other family sagas, and yet there are notable differences, such as the absence of whetting, and this diversity of female characterisation ought to be acknowledged in wider discussions concerning the role of women in the sagas, which too often attempt to find patterns which are ultimately reductive or archetypes among female figures which oversimplify the complexity of social representations in the family sagas.

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[43] Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age*, 182.

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Beating a Dead Horse… Or Two: Bj. 581

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Abstract

Recent genomic testing of Bj. 581 revealed that the skeleton in the burial was genomically female. Instead of making rash assumptions about the gender of the burial, this article attempts to analyze other expressions of Bj. 581's identity in the form of their occupation. Frequently we impress modern gender onto people in the past who never asked for this classification, but by looking at the burial goods of Bj. 581, other warrior burials, and *seiðr* burials, we can see that the performative occupation is represented by the tools-of-the-trade of the buried individual. Performative occupation, whether accurate to the deceased or pageantry, exhibits how the people surrounding the dead chose to represent people in burials. Showing that occupation is just as important as the gender expression in the burial. This is seen in archaeology and supported by literature from later periods. This article will grapple with questions about whether or not modern people have the right to gender burials and suggest some solutions to these ethical problems.

Keywords: Bj. 581, gender, burials, warriors, archaeology

Introduction

Bj. 581 is an Iron Age warrior burial from Birka in Sweden likely from the early 10th C. Recently, genomic testing proved that the skeleton is female.[2] The findings were reassessed and contextualised by the same team again in 2019.[3] The research team still interprets Bj. 581's identity in relation to common literary and archaeological sources that are concerned with female identities. Perhaps it is time to move away from such a male-female binary analysis. The authors of

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[2] Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. "A Female Warrior Confirmed", *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 164, no. 4 (2017): 853.
[3] Neil Price et al. "Viking Warrior Woman? Reassessing Birka Chamber Grave Bj. 581" *Antiquity* 93 no. 367 (2019): 182.

these articles say that "Birka grave Bj.581 suggests to us that at least one Viking Age woman adopted a professional warrior lifestyle and may well have been present on the battlefield. We would be very surprised if she was alone in the Viking world; other women may have taken up arms in the same seasonal or opportunistic context as many male Viking raiders,"[4] which problematically resigns this person's identity to womanhood. This limitation on gender will restrict future studies unless we can move away from media influence and second wave feminist attempts to insert women in the historical record. Identifying Bj. 581 as queer, trans, or an identity unknown to us today will allow for further queer analysis on the different occupations and statuses of people in the Viking Age. For the purposes of this paper, these identities will be referred to as genderqueer or queer identities. This is not an attempt to remove women from the record and replace them with queer identities but allows for more mobility for gender outside of the binary.

Since its initial analysis, questions about Bj. 581 contain a multiplicity of assumptions about societal mobility, gender, and occupation. Rather than belabouring gender identity in this case, perhaps we should look at occupation identity and tools of trades in burials. They can exist simultaneously and depend on numerous societal factors. These identities can be created in a number of ways by internal and external sources. For example, the dead cannot fully consent to their final rites and how they are represented in death, but we can conclude that the objects in the burial must have either a performative or accurate representation of the deceased person. Whether true or performative, occupation identity in burials is evident in many contexts all over Scandinavia and the Viking worlds. This does not mean that the discovery of a genomically female warrior is not significant, but perhaps a genomically female person can transcend the gender hierarchy to manipulate the authority of ritual violence and identity by expressing occupation identity. This simultaneity happens on several occasions in the literary sources and in archaeology. Iron Age and medieval

[4] Price, "Viking Warrior Woman? Reassessing Birka Chamber Grave Bj. 581," 193.

Scandinavia had a different hierarchy of gender, but Bj. 581 shows how the individual's occupation identity was important to the person's identity.

As previously mentioned, Viking age burials are incredibly diverse and representative of many international identities.[5] Also notable are how these identities became exaggerated or skewed when the person died. The individual is left represented by the objects they owned, the objects assigned to them by their communities, and the landscapes they are buried in. To approach this critically, we must "bridge the gap"[6] between how the individual presented in life and how they are represented in death. This does not mean that a burial is not representative of an individual's identity, but some elements must be performative, and others must be accurate to how the person identified during their life. One major issue involves separating and differentiating the two elements, which can be near impossible. If we are bridging this metaphorical gap with gender, what gives us and the people who buried the person the right to do so? Between media and academic interpretations of Bj. 581 we are serving this person an injustice through our own wishful thinking and ignorance of queer identities in the archaeological record. This paper will address Bj. 581 with they/them/their pronouns in an attempt to allow them agency in our interpretations of this burial. This analysis will include an interpretation of the literary sources concerning female and queer identities in relation to taking up arms and look at the archaeological context of tools in burials.

Context

The first archaeological excavations at Birka were a product of their time, meaning that we need to revisit the excavations with new methods to draw new conclusions.[7] Along with the revisitation of material, we also have to consider Birka in its own time and place in the Viking Age landscape. The initial

[5] Neil Price "Passing into Poetry: Viking-Age Mortuary Drama and the Origins of Norse Mythology," *Medieval Archaeology* 54, no. 1 (2010): 123-124.
[6] Price "Passing into Poetry: Viking-Age Mortuary Drama and the Origins of Norse Mythology," 123.
[7] Anna Kjellstrom, "People in Transition: Life in the Mälaren Valley from an Osteological Perspective", *Shetland and the Viking World. Papers from the Proceedings of the 17th Viking Congress* (2017), 198.

excavation assumed that the skeleton of Bj. 581 was male due to the burial items. In the 1970s the skeleton was re-examined, producing an osteological report stating that the skeleton was genomically female, [8] though this was disregarded for many years.[9] Not only is the skeleton female, but the person in Bj. 581 comes from a diverse geographic background and does not seem to be from Birka or Sweden at all. Instead, the genetic analysis of the skeleton shows that the Birka warrior had genetic similarities to people in the British Isles and Norway.[10] This indicates that this person or their parents were mobile and participated in trade and interaction with other Viking Age settlements.

The landscape of the burial places it on "an elevated terrace between the town and a hillfort, the grave was in direct contact with Birka's garrison."[11] The placement of Bj. 581 was likely important in military culture. In the burial context, there is a sword, an axe, a spear, arrows, a battle knife, two shields, gaming pieces and two horses.[12] The burial items in Bj. 581 can be defined as tools-of-the-trade, offering a Marxist perspective on gender in an attempt to come to terms with the status of Bj. 581 and their high-status burial. By tools, I mean objects that could be used for work in any given profession. The osteological report indicated that the person was over 30 and had no instances of traumatic injuries.[13] Missing from this record is a study of bone deterioration. A study showing the usage of the body could be beneficial for knowing if this person was skilled in using weapons. However the lack of traumatic injuries does not necessarily indicate whether this person was in battle or not nor that the burial is purely performative. The grave goods signify a high-status warrior heavily involved in military strategy. The weapons and horses indicate that they were a warrior, and the game pieces and location of the burial indicate that they were skilled in strategy and warfare. Tools can tell us a lot about the occupation

[8] Kjellstrom, "People in Transition: Life in the Mälaren Valley from an Osteological Perspective", *Shetland and the Viking World. Papers from the Proceedings of the 17th Viking Congress* (2017), 198.
[9] Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson, *The Birka Warrior: The Material Culture of a Martial Society* (*Stockholm,* 2006), 197.
[10] Hedenstierna-Jonson et. al, "A Female Warrior Confirmed," 857.
[11] Hedenstierna-Jonson et. al, "A Female Warrior Confirmed," 853.
[12] Hedenstierna-Jonson et. al, "A Female Warrior Confirmed," 854.
[13] Hedenstierna-Jonson et. al, "A Female Warrior Confirmed," 855.

of an individual in a burial, along with the placement of the burial in the archaeological landscape.

Marianne Moen's dissertation on power and gender in mortuary practices discusses the dynamics of power and status in the Viking Age. Her study looks at the gendered landscape of burials and the division of men and women in cemeteries in Norway.[14] Moen's study may help to suggest that women in these burials benefit from their husbands' power or vice-versa. Bj. 581 is in the garrison, indicating that the warrior status was more important than the person's biological gender.

Carol Clover writes extensively on gender and binary breaking in the Viking Age. Specifically, her article "Maiden Warriors and Other Sons" is important for this paper. Clover focuses on textual rather than archaeological evidence to discuss the existence of shieldmaidens. In this paper, she looks at saga references to women bearing arms and compares this phenomenon with women taking on the legal status of 'son' in terms of property ownership and inheritance. Another piece of Clover's work "Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe" examines the power dynamics of gender through textual sources. Clover questions whether the gender binary is too simple but downplays the idea that their patriarchal surroundings suppressed many women in the Viking world.[15] Clover has some excellent insights on gender and society in both articles, but ultimately the literary sources exist differently than the archaeology. It is not enough to study Bj. 581 and only look at literary sources to conceptualize their life, but we can take away later societal perceptions and inheritances from older communities.

Most useful for my purposes is Clovers comment: "What finally excites fear and loathing in the Norse mind is not femaleness per se, but the condition of powerlessness, the lack or loss of volition, with which femaleness is typically, but neither inevitable nor exclusively, associated."[16] This suggests that women

[14] Marianne Moen, *The Gendered Landscape: A Discussion on Gender, Status and Power Expressed in the Viking Age Mortuary Landscapes* (Oslo, 2010), 5.
[15] Carol Clover, "Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe", *Speculum* 682, no. 2 (1993): 3-5.
[16] Clover, "Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe," 13.

taking on masculine traits did not repel the people in the Viking Age, and men were not so afraid of being unmanly, but that there was a power struggle within this society, and having a lack of power was detrimental to one's status. This is particularly relevant for Bj. 581. From the lavish goods found in the burial, we can tell that this person did not repel the society around them.

Ultimately, this burial is a standout for all the wrong reasons. Much exemplification of Bj. 581 is based on the dismissal of what we already know about women and queer people in the Viking Age. By stressing the identity of Bj. 581 as a woman, we are actively erasing the potential for transgender identity and prioritizing a romanticised history of warrior women because of our obsession with powerful women in media today. But powerful does not solely depend on one's ability to perform in battle. We have evidence of powerful women from runestones and literary evidence, among other places.[17] Our obsession with military powerfulness is wholly problematic, and erases identities lost to the burial and literary records. How do we move away from our obsession with warrior women and get closer to the development of theories and methods that allow more autonomy for people outside the binary?

Theories and Methods

One might speculate about gender expressions of Bj. 581 and the conscious decisions made in preparing the burial. Neil Price elaborates on Colin Renfrew's cognitive archaeological theories in *The Viking Way*, stating that archaeologists can find cognitive functions in the ground through archaeological contexts.[18] These contexts are meaningful, especially when looking at gender and queer theory. Queer theory is useful on the basis of the work Price has done *seiðr*[19]

[17] Anne Sofie Gräslund "Late Viking age runestones in Uppland: some gender aspects," in *The Viking Age: Ireland and the West: Papers from the Proceedings of the fifteenth Viking Congress*. John Sheehan and Donnchadh Ó Corráin (Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2010).
[18] Neil Price, *The Viking Way* (Uppsala 2002), 38.
[19] *Seiðr* magic is a contested type of Viking Age magic that exists in literature and the archaeological record mainly performed by women. Its historiography is contentious and has been studied and debated by scholars such as Neil Price, Leszek Gardela, and Clive Tolley. For the sake of this article, I will be looking at *seiðr* in its context as a profession to compare it to warrior professions. It is described by the above scholars as a violent magic and they generally compare it to shamanistic activities.

magic in female burials. *Seiðr* is known from sagas, Eddaic, and Skaldic poetry.[20] From these sources, we can determine that *seiðr* is violent magic associated with Oðin for women and non-manly people.[21] Queer and cognitive theories in archaeology allow for an identification of professions from their burial contexts and associates them with the items related to sorceresses in literary evidence of sorcery in the literature. Price discusses the significance of staffs in female *seiðr* burials with the help of cognitive archaeology. Therefore, if staffs were purposefully placed in *seiðr* burials, they are *seiðr* tools-of-the-trade evident in the archaeological record whether performative or truthful to the deceased person's occupation in life.

Leszek Gardeła's work on *seiðr* staffs also presents evidence for the ability to dissect identity in burials. His "A Biography of the *Seiðr*-staffs. Towards an Archaeology of Emotions" documents the history of interpretation and conflation of the contentious staff artefact. He notes that there was a massive conflation with mentions in literary sources of similar artefacts.[22] Much like sacrificed or defaced weapons in the Viking Age, he observed the occurrence of conflation with staffs as well.[23] By equating weapons and staffs, we can surmise that both are used similarly in burials to denote profession or protection. The degree of pageantry behind the placement of the artefacts will never be fully known, but they likely also signify how others chose to view the buried person in death. Of course, there is no reasonable way to categorize burials containing these items despite many noble efforts to do so. Gardeła's 2013 article "'Warrior-Women' in Viking Age Scandinavia? A Preliminary Archaeological study" precedes the increased attention surrounding Bj. 581. Gardeła called for better scrutiny when revisiting previously poorly excavated burial contexts.[24] This scrutiny includes holding sources and privileges accountable. He concluded

[20] Price, *The Viking Way,* 68-69.
[21] Price, *The Viking Way,* 94.
[22] Leszek Gardela, "Biography of the Seiðr-Staffs. Towards an archaeology of Emotions," in *Between Paganism and Christianity in the North* (Rzeszów University, 2009), 190-192.
[23] Gardela, "Biography of the Seiðr-Staffs. Towards an archaeology of Emotions," 192.
[24] Leszek Gardeła, "'Warrior Women' in Viking Age Scandinavia? A Preliminary Archaeological Study," in *Analecta Archaeologica Ressoviensia: Funerary Archaeology*, Slawomir Kadrow, Magdalena Rzucek, Sylwester Czopek, Katarzyna Trybała-Zawiślak (Rzeszów: Rzeszów University, 2013), 276.

that the archaeological and literary records are not always in agreement, because of the later nature of the literary sources. Furthermore, the weapons in the surveyed graves were generally dual-purpose weapons like axes and knives, with everyday practicality.

Seiðr sorceresses seem to have had a civic duty in war and provided ritual services to their communities in the archaeological record.[25] Price aims to blur the lines between religion and warfare in Viking culture. He states that religion and violence co-existed, and existed together in everyday life and ritual, outside of actual expression of warfare. He also argues that power in medieval Scandinavia could be gender specific, and that violence had an important role in this power structure and its manifestations.[26] In realizing that the Viking Age incorporated many patriarchal societies, we can look for norm-breaking and cultural outliers, much like any other society. We may also note that queer identities are normal and are generally suppressed by ruling populations depending on privilege and power. This is an important idea for the examining of Bj. 581; if Bj. 581 is a queer person, this will prove that their occupation took priority over gender. Price advocates for an interdisciplinary approach, using anthropology and history in his book.[27] He argues that the literary sources such as the *Edda* and sagas are useful, but with care to realise the religious filter they are transmitted through in modern scholarship. They are products of a converted Scandinavia remembering their heathen ancestors centuries later.[28] This does not mean that these sources are entirely unreliable, but they do need to be studied carefully in conjunction with the archaeological and anthropological evidence to more accurately decipher the cognitive intentions of what they have left behind. *The Viking Way* demonstrates the connection between the literary and archaeological sources to identify *seiðr* occupation identity in the burial record. To look further into occupation identity, we can look at the archaeology of labour.

[25] Price, *The Viking Way,* 27.
[26] Price, *The Viking Way*, 27.
[27] Price, *The Viking Way*, 32.
[28] Price, *The Viking Way*, 31.

Roberta Gilchrist's book, *Gender and Archaeology: Contesting the Past* discusses the importance of the archaeology of labour. She writes that:

> Apparently utilitarian artefacts in graves do not necessarily reflect the subsistence activities of its occupant, but rather may represent symbolic items of mementoes places by mourners; nor does the linking of biological male and female sex with specific tools further our understanding of the relationship between production and the social processes of gender. Conversely, where implements found in association with sexed skeletons may contradict received opinion on gendered patterns of labour, the context of the evidence is disregarded.[29]

This explains the approach taken in describing Bj. 581 clearly. In thinking that the burial goods in Bj. 581 do not belong to the skeleton or were placed there by the society they lived in, we are taking away the agency of the person buried there. It is unlikely that the items in Bj. 581 were heirlooms or effects not associated with the civic duty of the person. Gilchrist references Stalsberg's evaluation of Viking women participating in trade with the evaluation of Viking women in Norway and Russia buried with scales. Stalsberg explains the significance of scales in graves and notes that statistics show both men and women used scales; they were not merely heirlooms or mementoes in female burials.[30] This example is useful for Gilchrist, as before Stalsberg, no one had recognised that these women could be tradespeople or people who needed to use scales regularly.[31] If this was the case for the Rus' Viking tradeswomen, it can also be the case for Bj. 581.

Despite individuals matching grave good with occupation, we cannot sufficiently match sex and gender identity to occupation. If Bj. 581 had a queer gender identity, their occupation still takes precedence in the burial over however they chose to express themself. This does not mean that gender was not a concern for the medieval and Iron Age Scandinavians; there are always exceptions to the rule. Perhaps it will eventually emerge that Bj. 581 was not an exception and queer people could exist outside the realms they were assigned in the literary records. These realms include all spheres in society, whether they

[29] Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Archaeology: Contesting the past* (Routledge, 1999), 36.
[30] Anne Stalsberg "Scandinavian Relations with Northwestern Russian During the Viking Age: The Archaeological Evidence" *Journal of Baltic Studies* 13, no. 3(1982): 281.
[31] Gilchrist, *Gender and Archaeology: Contesting the past*, 37.

were originally assigned a binary or not. Future theoretical and methodological developments should allow more interdisciplinary work in literary and archaeological evidence. Perhaps a step in this direction will allow queer people more agency in the past. This requires new evaluations of older discoveries and the dissection of definitions of man/woman to include diverse spectra and webs of gender and sexual identities.

Literary evidence

The Scandinavian Iron Age and Middle Ages was a time of massive change, and many of the literary sources discuss people who have not converted to Christianity but were written by Christians. Genders and religious dynamics changed with conversion to Christianity. Saxo Grammaticus was a medieval Christian historian writing in the twelfth century who mentions warrior women, with an air of disgust, several times in the *Gesta Danorum*. In a passage describing Danish warrior women, he describes these women as "unsexed" expert fighters and he belittles many standard household activities as "dainty" duties lacking importance in comparison to warrior activities.[32] Due to the late nature of the documents we can only glean his perceptions of these women, and not actual factuality. Perhaps better questions might address the language Saxo uses to describe the people in this passage. He actively tried to erase their gender. By removing their gender, he dehumanises the people in the passage. Not only does he dehumanise these warriors, he does not have the appropriate vocabulary to describe these mythical women. Saxo was familiar with Greek and Roman literature, and likely took many of the metaphors and descriptions from southern and more ancient sources. Therefore, this account likely reflects some societal impressions, but it is difficult to conclude that this is hard evidence of women warriors.

[32] Saxo Grammaticus, Karsten Friis-Jensen, Peter Fisher, *Gesta Danorum* (Oxford, 2015), 7: 6.8. 477.

John Skylitzes's *Synopsis* is a Byzantine chronicle which mentions Viking or Rus' women laying with the dead after a battle at Kyiv.[33] This is a later source and therefore not entirely reliable. In addition to the late nature of the source, Skylitzes was from Byzantium, and may not have been capable of gendering the Rus' dead appropriately due to his social upbringing and learning in Byzantium. Again, we note that the gender of Bj. 581 may very well be completely unknown to us and indescribable in modern languages. Much like previous attempts of belittlement, Skylitzes attempts to degrade both the barbarians he mentions, and dehumanizes the women. Skylitzes may believe that the events he described were true,[34] but ultimately this is his interpretation of a much older story.

Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* presents numerous instances of gender-swapping. His writing shows evidence of queer identities in the later Norse medieval collective consciousness. One example is the story *Loki and Svadilfari*, in which Loki turns into a female horse and births a mare. Loki spends quite a bit of time as a pregnant female horse, but he exists on the fringes and outside of the gender constraints experienced by the other gods. Loki is described as unmanly and devious in the story and by the gods surrounding him. But for Þor in the *Þrymskviða*, merely cross-dressing is stressful for the god because of his fear of being considered a coward.

Þrymskviða is a mythological poem by an anonymous author outlining the events which occurred when Þrym, a giant, stole Þor's hammer. The giant took the hammer to trick Freya into marrying him without her consent. Heimdal formulated a plan to cross-dress Þor (as Freya) and Loki (as Freya's handmaid) to retrieve Þor's hammer back from Þrym in Jotenheim.[35] The poem describes Þor in standard women's clothing, [36] but Þor's masculinity cannot be confined by his costume and he eats and belches at Þrym's table more than the writer expects women to in his own context. Could this be an indication of queer identities in Norse literature? James Frankki addresses some of these issues in

[33] John Scylitzes, John Wortley, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811-1057* (Cambridge, 2010), 290.
[34] John Scylitzes, John Wortley, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811-1057*, 290.
[35] Carolyn Larrington, "Þrymskviða" *The Poetic Edda* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 93.
[36] Larrington, "Þrymskviða" *The Poetic Edda*, 95.

his article, "Cross-Dressing in the Poetic Edda". He writes: "Thor's initial reaction to the plan for his cross-dressing as Freyja is one of disdainful rejection, an indication that transgendered [sic] behaviour – by a highly respected male god nonetheless – was not favourably received or even tolerated in the thirteenth-century Icelandic society."[37] This highlights attitudes in the thirteenth-century, but the poem is likely more ancient than this, and we can tentatively and carefully consider the gender dynamics of the poem for earlier Norse societies. This poem not only presents the idea that Norse society rejected queer gender identities, but it also shows the mistreatment of women in the form of Freya.

Problematic third and other numbered genders continue to be forced on ancient and medieval people by modern scholars. The third gender is just as limiting as a binary. Diverse genders in history continue to be supressed by studies limited to a binary, when diverse genders have always existed. Sometimes, this suppression of gender identity resulted in inadequate naming for gender identities. Instead of creating other labels for genders we can never fully explain, we should allow past gender diversity to exist on its own terms. Kathleen Self's proposition of a third gender for Valkyries and shield-maidens is not convincing.[38] Perhaps there was a civic duty in war that exceeded the importance of gender, but this example is ripe with modern wishful thinking and obsessions with powerful women. This does not mean that powerful women did not exist. We can see this in sagas that exhibit examples of rituals before wars, and archaeology that shows ritual objects in magical female burials possibly suggesting women's importance in war.[39] Maybe it is more problematic to force modern gender on to the Vikings than it is to realise these expressions as expressions of duty rather than gender. Genomically female people were very clearly able to be warriors and to serve beyond the previous magical expectations with *seiðr* or other magic. Other archaeologists such as Enrique Moral are critical

[37] James Frankki, "Cross-Dressing in the Poetic Edda." *Scandinavian Studies* 84, no.4 (2012): 427-428.
[38] Kathleen Self "The Valkyries Gender: Old Norse Shield-Maidens and Valkyries as a Third Gender." *Feminist Formations* 24, no. 1 (2014): 144.
[39] Neil Price "The Way of The Warrior", *Vikings Life and Legend* (Cornell University Press, 2014), 116-117.

of this type of categorisation, calling third and fourth genders "stagnated categories"[40] and fabrications of the past, committing erasure on the actual multiplicity of queer gender identities in the past.

The sagas present numerous examples of women bearing arms, dressing in men's clothing, and having military prowess. The first example is in *Gisla saga*. In this saga, we see Þordis take up arms against her brother's murderer.[41] Another example of an armed woman is Freydis in the *Groenlandinga saga*. Freydis decides to use weapons and dress in men's clothing. For both Freydis and Þordis, there is a motivation to break the binary and weaponize their womanhood, unlike Hervor in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðrek*. This saga depicts a woman bearing arms and leading a troop of Vikings on a journey to her father's grave. However, the pronouns "they/them" might reflect Hervor/Hervarar better because her name is declined in both masculine and feminine to differentiate her gendered activities. They wear men's clothing and behave in a traditionally masculine manner.[42] There are less instantaneous motivations of vengeance for Hervor to bear arms, as their life was spent bearing arms, unlike Freydis and Þordis. Perhaps Bj. 581 correlates with the story of Hervor.

The person buried in Bj. 581 died long before the writing of these literary sources. Saxo Grammaticus wrote the *Gesta Danorum* in the late twelfth century, Snorri Sturluson in the twelfth century, and John Skylitzes in the eleventh century. Comparing this international perspective to one burial in Sweden can be challenging, but it raises interesting ideas. The international perspective of the literary evidence reflects the international background of the person buried in Bj. 581. The international perspective does not account for the problems of trusting myth and legend though. Literary myth and legend are indicative of the societies they were written for, rather than the earlier societies that created them, though we must account for some cultural similarities and studies in oral histories. *Þrymskviða* is a satire, and the Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* is a

[40] Enrique Moral, "Qu(e)erying Sex and Gender in Archaeology: a Critique of the 'Third' and Other Sexual Categories," *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 23, no. 3 (2016): 789.
[41] Judith Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age* (Boydell, 1991), 191.
[42] Carol Clover, "Maiden Warriors and Other Sons", *The English and Germaic Journal of Philology* 85, no. 1 (1986): 37.

Christianised myth. The *Þrymskviða* does not necessarily equate positive trans and queer visibility in Norse myth and literature. Nevertheless, we can take this poem as an indication of the perception of the anonymous author who wrote it and as accurately depicting general ideas about homophobia or transphobia in later Norse society. We can also parallel this with Snorri Sturluson's stories of Loki transforming into a mare, or Oðin transforming into a woman to practice *seiðr* magic.[43] Shapeshifting, cross-dressing, and gender-swapping occur in the literary sources, but these sources only discuss men changing into women. Women do not seem to transform into men fully, and if they do come close, they are allowed to become entirely female once again, as is evident with Hervor. If this is the case for gender in the Iron Age and medieval North, genetically female people might have had a greater ability to have fluidity in their genders than genetically male people. Perhaps this is why Bj. 581 is such a lavish warrior burial. They were capable of this manipulation of power because women could only ascend from their status as women.

We should step away from analysing these literary sources from a primarily women's studies perspective and open them up to include instances of queerness in the literary record. In allowing greater fluidity in identity, we can begin to reconcile the diversity of gender identities in the past.

Other Burials and Archaeology

Hjalmar Stolpe's initial excavation of Birka in the late nineteenth century[44] sexed the burials with grave goods by looking at the occupational goods and aligning those occupations with nineteenth century perceptions on gendered divisions of labour. This created the illusion of a binary of man and woman at the site. Today, we should interpret the occupations separate of and simultaneously with gender to understand the professional and societal functions of the buried people of Birka. One example of this juxtaposition of

[43] Price "The Way of The Warrior", *Vikings Life and Legend* (Cornell University Press, 2014), 65-66.
[44] Anna Kjellstrom, "People in Transition: Life in the Mälaren Valley from an Osteological Perspective", *Shetland and the Viking World. Papers from the Proceedings of the 17th Viking Congress* (2017), 198.

gender and societal function are the *seiðr* burials, which are burials of magical women associated with Oðin. These burials are (so far) generally sexed as female and exhibit evidence of a magical occupation. Other than *seiðr* burials, there are many lavish warrior burials. Bj. 581 is likely one of these. I mention *seiðr* here because these burials also express a civic duty to their societies, much like warrior burials, and to represent that the profession is likely more important than gender. *Seiðr* practitioners were sorcerers, but also magicians and practitioners of magic thought to be vital to society. *Seiðr* is a classification on its own, so did the people who practiced it primarily identify as women or sorcerers? This makes it safer to identify Bj. 581 and *seiðr* practitioners primarily as their occupation because the occupations seem to be exemplified in the burials. This leaves the ancient people in the burials and the communities that buried them some agency in their gender identifications, gender expressions, and general identities in society.

Staffs in burials have been interpreted as indicative of a *seiðr* or sorceress burial. Here we can recognize performers of sorcery in an occupational group, suggesting that the staffs indicate occupation in the burial record. Usually, these are rich burials with expensive goods, chairs, jewellery, chests and most importantly staffs. One such burial (Bj. 660) is likely an inhumation of a *seiðr* performer, so interpreted because of the staff.[45] The skeleton did not survive but grave goods included a staff placed across her[46] left lap, a pair of oval brooches, a silver chain, a necklace with 28 beads, rock crystals, a wooden box containing a glass beaker, a small ceramic vessel, a silver crucifix, and a pendant with a whirling design. These items indicate a rather rich burial including magical tools, such as the staff, the crucifix, the box and vessels. The crucifix does not mean that this burial is a Christian burial, but was rather a spiritual item based on the majority of Norse religious artefacts and theorised occupation of the occupant. The burial also has imported glass and eastern items showing the diversity of objects that could be acquired in the early Viking Age. On her belt, she had iron

[45] Price, *The Viking Way*, 128.
[46] Because of the lack of skeleton, this burial was sexed based on grave goods. This is problematic (as this paper suggests), but other burials exist with similar burial assemblages.

shears, an iron knife, an ear spoon, a whetstone and some other small objects.[47] This list of items is associated with regular items women or any person might carry on their person for personal hygiene. A similar burial burial to Bj. 660 is Bj. 845. Bj. 845 is also a Birka inhumation from the early tenth century.[48] Some of the similarities include items on the belt, oval brooches, and most importantly the staff. Both Bj. 845 and Bj. 660 are suggestive of the profession of the women buried there. The multiplicity of *seiðr* associated burials and the similarities of Bj. 845 and Bj. 660 are only a few examples of how *seiðr* association is possible in interpretation. The interpretations of *seiðr* burials indicate that these people played an important role in warfare and society. Therefore, we might expect similar occupational expression in Bj. 581. One of these expressions of identity might be found in horse burials.

There are many high status horse burials at Birka. There are 45 currently excavated at the site that include horses and/or horse riding equipment. [49] Bj. 834 is a double occupancy burial of a man and a woman and two horses.[50] For the purposes of this argument, perhaps we can also view horses as partially indicative of occupation. There are double occupancy and single occupancy burials that include sexed male and female people.[51] The horse burials, in addition to one other female burial and Bj. 581, are accompanied by weapons.[52] Horses at Birka seem to be an indication of warrior status. This includes Bj. 581. Horses appear in rich burials, but weapons are also a good indicator of a warrior burial. Weapons may be placed in burials to aid fallen warriors in the afterlife and seem to serve the same purpose as the horses in warrior burials.[53]

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47 Price, *The Viking Way*, 128-130.
48 Price, *The Viking Way*, 142.
49 Peter Shenk, *To Valhalla by Horseback?: horse burial in Scandinavia during the Viking Age*, (Oslo, 2002) 70.
50 Price, *The Viking Way*, 132.
51 Shenk, *To Valhalla by Horseback?: horse burial in Scandinavia during the Viking Age*, 70.
52 Shenk, *To Valhalla by Horseback?: horse burial in Scandinavia during the Viking Age*, 70-71.
53 D.M. Hadley and Letty Ten Harkel, "Whither the Warrior in Viking Age Towns", *Everyday Life in Viking-age Towns: Social Approaches to Towns in England and Ireland, C. 800-1100*, (Oxford, 2013) 9.

Conclusion

Despite the evidence presented in this paper, there are numerous problems with determining the gender of Bj. 581. The first problem is whether we have the right to answer this question. Scholars have been gendering burials since the birth of archaeology, but with the rise of queer and gender theory, we should not be taking these outliers so lightly. Is it our job to impose modern gender on ancient bodies, and is it useful to do so? Creating new genders can be a problem, especially if the past society does not fit into the terms used to describe the established gender. I am uncomfortable with assigning someone a designation they never asked for, and therefore I hope to illustrate that the gender of Bj. 581 was secondary or equally important as their warrior status. The second problem comes from the mismanagement of Birka during the first excavation. Hjalmar Stople's initial excavation in the late 1800s was sloppy, leaving much of the evidence from the site catalogued incorrectly.[54] Furthermore, the examinations of Bj. 581 until now were negligent and chose to gender the burial based on grave goods, rather than osteological evidence. The third problem is having to use evidence from a large range of time and space. Despite differences in Viking Age cultures, however, similarities existed in common languages, some material culture, and religious affiliations. The last problem is the lack of evidence. Despite the volume of evidence presented in this paper, Bj. 581 is ultimately an outlier. The biggest challenge is identifying Bj. 581 without other examples of burials containing genomically female people in warrior contexts.

Despite these problems, cognitive and gender archaeology show us that Bj. 581 existed as a high-status person decorated as a warrior. This warrior prioritised their status as a warrior before their biological sex. Through the archaeological evidence supporting occupation before gender in burials and the literary evidence depicting cultural ideas of female warriors, we can assume some form of Viking Age gender hierarchy. However, Bj. 581 suggests that the

[54] Anna Kjellstrom, "People in Transition: Life in the Mälaren Valley from an Osteological Perspective", *Shetland and the Viking World. Papers from the Proceedings of the 17th Viking Congress* (2017), 198.

occupation of the warrior was ultimately more or equally important as the gender of the person.

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Books Reviews

Review: *Bad Boys and Wicked Women: Antagonists and Troublemakers in Old Norse Literature*. Edited by Daniela Hahn and Andreas Schmidt. München: Herbert Utz Verlag. 2016.

Arngrímur Vídalín[1]

Bad Boys and Wicked Women is a collection of articles by mostly very young scholars. Excluding one author who already holds a permanent academic position, all the authors are either postdoctoral researchers or well on their way toward finishing their dissertations. As such the volume is not only promising due to its subject matter, but in that it provides a glimpse into the thought and methods of a brand new generation of Old Norse scholars.

The theme of the collection is as straightforward as its title suggests: antagonism, troublemaking and wickedness in Old Norse literature, with articles ranging from tricksters and evildoers to social monstrosity and succubi. So far, so good.

The collection starts with an especially poignant article by Marion Poilvez, in which she analyzes the othering of killers whose transgressive actions leads to their outlawry and dehumanization, all the while the reader/audience of the text is reminded of the tragic circumstances leading to them being cast out. Poilvez rightfully argues that in spite of their wrongdoings — or perhaps not least, at some level, because of them — the reader feels empathy towards these 'criminal-heroes' with nothing left to lose. In fact, they might be "able to satisfy our darkest and most primitive sense of justice," as Poilvez concludes (53). Their status as other is indeed what makes their stories so compelling.

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On a similar note, Rebecca Merkelbach has these last years, culminating in her unique doctoral thesis, written a number of articles and given several papers on the topic of social monstrosity. In the simplest terms, social monstrosity may be described as the sort of behavior one might engage in or acts one might commit in order to not only be alienated or outlawed by the community, but effectively be seen as monstrous. It is not least poor upbringing which might predispose one to such a moral development. Thus, Merkelbach aims to explore "the interactions of the future outlaw during his childhood and adolescence, the effect they have on him, and in what way they influence his gradual movement away from society even before he starts to be criminally active" (61). Even though the texts under analysis are all quite different (i.e. *Grettis saga*, *Harðar saga*, *Fóstbræðra saga* and different redactions of *Gísla saga*), common threads are to be seen in all of them. Not least is childhood abuse successfully argued to be one of several key factors contributing to the transgressive behavior of outlaws and their subsequent status as social monsters.

Anita Sauckel writes about the trickster in *Njáls saga* and of the saga itself as a trickster discourse. The analysis of the saga is clever and convincing and I agree with her assessment that the moral dichotomy of the saga is a false one, not least the dualistic view of the saga as a clash between good and evil, Christianity and paganism (indeed, many contributors to this volume make similar arguments about other texts and personae, all of which I heartily concur with). The concept of a 'trickster discourse,' I must admit, is new to me and one I did not quite grasp in this context. This may be due to my own, perhaps conservative, way of thinking about texts and how they function.

Following Sauckel's article is Jamie Cochrane's take on *Njáls saga*, or more specifically its notorious villain, Mǫrðr Valgarðsson. Or is he only a villain because the narrator takes every opportunity to insert hyperbolic statements into the narrative of Mǫrðr's explicitly evil nature (notwithstanding the fact that his name means 'weasel')? Every time Mǫrðr enters the stage he is plotting something sinister, though whether he proceeds to cackle maniacally into the night while thunder strikes is left to the imagination of the reader. It is quite

interesting how the narrator of *Njáls saga* vilifies Mǫrðr while Njáll is portrayed as a positive, almost saintly character, even though, as Cochrane notes, "many of Mǫrðr's actions (in particular his manipulation of others and formulations of plans) might be compared to those of Njáll, but we do not react to Njáll in the same way as Mǫrðr because of the narrator's systematic control of our perspective, perception and opinion" (139). Cochrane also notes the byname of Mǫrðr's father, Valgarðr *inn grái*, which "suggests a wolfishness, an otherness about him" (121). This could further be linked with the weasel-like quality of the son, as well as other wolfish and grey characters, such as the anti-Christian turned supernatural being Glámr in *Grettis saga*. All of this leads to the question whether the old idea that "saga narrators refrain from making apparently partial judgement statements" actually holds true in the case of *Njáls saga* (123). Personally, I doubt that it holds true at all. An all round very convincing article.

Daniela Hahn analyzes how female characters in *Njáls saga* and *Laxdæla saga* use theft as a means of inciting the desired reaction from male characters. Specifically, it is the act of revealing the theft at the right moment which they all employ to great effect, even if it means the loss of a daughter such as in the case of Þuríðr and Gróa (158–59). I have some reservations as to Hahn's interpretation of Guðrún Ósvífursdóttir's famous line at the end of her life, *þeim var ek verst er ek unna mest*, as whom she is referring to is in all certainty meant to be ambiguous — it is a non-answer to her son's question, and a narrative trick meant to intensify the audience's yearning for the real answer. My disagreement with this item aside, I find the article both clear and convincing.

Franziska Groß discusses how interpretations of dreams are often (wrongfully) disregarded by saga characters. Disregarding prophesy is of course both an ancient and a common motif which, had the article been allowed to be that much longer, would have been very rewarding to compare more closely. Groß makes a most impressive comparison between dream symbols and their intrepretation in the sagas with the *Somniale Danielis* and the *Oneirocritica*, showing that when saga characters interpret their dreams in accordance with established continental texts on the matter, their interpretations are proven to be wrong

(180–82)! I also favor Groß's interpretation of why men do not seem to follow female advice in the texts: "the fact that men do not follow well-meaning female advice or warnings might be because they choose to resign to destiny, for as they are male heroes in a fatalistic saga, they are obliged to do so" (186). Put differently: the rules of narration dictate that this must be so. My only criticism of this article is that no reference is made to the work of Christopher Crocker, who has written a number of articles and a doctoral dissertation on the paranormal in dreams in Old Norse literature.

Matthias Teichert writes with a very unique theoretical perspective, comparing the brief lover of Haraldr *hárfagri* in *Heimskringla*, Snæfríðr, with succubi. The beginning of the article is particularly exciting and provides a framework for the possible analysis of other episodes in light of this demonic figure. To the frequent reader of sagas, moreover, it figures of course that the malevolent, supernatural characters of Snæfríðr and her father Svási just happen to be *Finnar*. There are some things in Teichert's analysis I disagree with, e.g. when Snæfríðr's body dissolves into toads, snakes and other nasty creatures when the spell over Haraldr has been broken. Why does it *have to be* assumed that "all of these animals were living within Snæfríðr's body before her death and during her lying in state and that it was actually their presence sustaining her existence," rather than them being a symbolic representation of her true supernatural nature? The examples Teichert draws from the Bible with regard to said creatures would seem to me to support an argument that Snæfríðr is demonic rather than the one he makes, that they were physically present throughout her existence. There are other similar examples in the corpus illustrating such supernatural rather than corporeal connotations, such as in *Óláfs saga helga* (also in *Heimskringla*), in which a heathen idol is struck so it "brast allt í sundr, ok hljópu þar út mýss, svá stórar sem kettir væri, ok eðlur ok ormar."[2] The critters symbolize the evil within and that outward appearances may be deceiving. In the case of Haraldr, they may furthermore symbolize temptation.

[2] Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (ed.), "Ólafs saga helga," *Heimskringla* II, Íslenzk fornrit XXVII (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag 1941), 188-9.

For her entire existence seems, in fact, rather to be a *sjónhverfing* or a mirage, orchestrated by Svási through witchcraft in order to lead King Haraldr astray from his true mission. The fact that she never utters a word would support this reading. On the other hand, I do agree with Teichert that Svási's and Snæfríðr's ethnicity is neither coincidental nor meaningless, and that the diabolic nature of Svási's illusion is par for the course with regard to the abilities frequently associated with *Finnar* in the sources.

Florian Deichl writes about Sinfjǫtli, the avenger of the Vǫlsungar who was bred through incest for that one and only purpose: to kill King Siggeir. Deichl argues that Sinfjǫtli in many ways is "a border crosser between male and female virtues" (225), in that he endures pain passively when he is tortured with needle and thread, and that he assumes the role of whetting his father. At the same time his role is masculine and after his purpose has been fulfilled he "remains an outcast" (230). His whole existence is transgressive and borderline. Overall, I find his assessment interesting and thought-provoking.

Yoav Tirosh takes a literary approach to accusations made against Guðmundr *inn ríki*'s supposed *ergi*, while simultaneously responding step-by-step to previous assessments made by Theodore M. Andersson and William Ian Miller, among others. An example is the interpretation of *hugaðr eða snjallr* as 'manliness,' qualities that Guðmundr is thought to lack, which Tirosh in my opinion correctly refutes in favor of the more nuanced 'courage and lack of fortitude.' Not that Tirosh's interpretation makes Guðmundr any more manly; on the contrary, for Tirosh shows clearly that the "main components of *argr* […] are sodomy, witchcraft, and effeminacy/cowardice. All three of these are qualities that Guðmundr had been associated with to one degree or another in *Ljósvetninga saga*" (257). But Andersson's and Miller's interpretation of this phrasing was over the top nonetheless. Furthermore, the thorough argumentation made by Tirosh for the ejaculatory connotations of liquid dairy towards the end of the article (258–67) is not only surprisingly convincing, but appropriately provocative and amusing at the same time. Having reminded the

reader that sometimes a spear is just a spear, Tirosh proceeds to illustrate how sometimes the actual spearhead is indeed the dullest part of the weapon.

Andreas Schmidt's article on 'the bad guys' of *Færeyinga saga* is very much in line with previous argumentation in the volume: that the sagas are too complex to allow for the simple dichotomy of good and evil. Contrary to popular opinion, Schmidt argues that neither Þrándr nor his cabal of sinister cohorts, let alone the saga 'hero' Sigmundr, operate on the basis of good or evil. In Schmidt's reading, this is all a matter of politics rather than moral absolutes, and his argument in the simplest terms is that the saga may be read from both opposing sides depending on one's allegiance. Þrándr especially is a compelling character and I agree with Schmidt that a reading of him as a 'bad guy' is overly simplistic.

Joanne Shortt Butler argues on a similar note for a new reading of *Hrafnkels saga*, which "denies us the easy identification of any morally satisfactory binaries." The hero is an *ójafnaðarmaðr* and any and all attempts at peaceful reconciliation between him and his foes are "made unsustainable: obligations to higher powers, ambitious relatives and personal honour conspire against ostensibly good, moral intentions" (351). Some readers of *Hrafnkels saga* have had problems with the fact that an ostensibly deviant character is triumphant by its end. Shortt Butler provides a detailed analysis of this without attempting to provide with any easy answers, in an approach that is both compelling and nuanced.

Milena Liv Jacobsen's contribution further serves to add nuance to the discussion of the varying degree of King Óláfr Haraldsson's saintliness according to different sources. Jacobsen gives a good overview of these different portrayals of King Óláfr and rightly argues that all the different sources: historical, literary, and iconographic, are necessary to any analysis of King Ólafr.

And finally, Georg C. Brückmann illustrates how transgressions may be vital to facilitate necessary change. It may be said that chaos is not so much a binary opposite to order, but rather that they complement each other. This seems to be the case in both mythological and ostensibly Christian sources, and Brückmann also gives some examples from saga literature. His argumentation is somewhat different from the other articles in the volume, weaving in continental

philosophy such as that of Nietzsche and Waldenfels, which at times may seem a bit overwrought. His conclusion that transgressions serve a narrative function in Old Norse texts is of course absolutely correct, which serve as a good closing remark for a book that has from the beginning to its end proven just that.

As is evident from this overview, the volume thoroughly illustrates that the standard division of the sagas' *dramatis personae* into good or bad is at best a very simplified reading of the texts, at its very worst old-fashioned and outdated. The 'bad boys and wicked women' are in fact often the ones we are meant to root for or those who are right, and the sagas do not necessarily adhere to predictable moral compasses. Foul people may emerge victorious, heroes may be no better than their foes, good people may be vilified and others may have to reap the bitter consequences of their own childhood abuse, first rejected as children and later dehumanized as adults. The sagas are not fairytales — they are startlingly difficult, nuanced and socially realistic narratives that reveal an immense psychological depth to their characters. *Bad Boys and Wicked Women* is a timely addition to scholarship on this topic and I highly recommend it.

Review: Ármann Jakobsson. *The Troll Inside You: Paranormal Activity in the Medieval North*. punctum books: 2017.

Rebecca Merkelbach[1]

I believe it is fair to say that, for the past two decades, Ármann Jakobsson's many publications on all aspects paranormal, monstrous, and deviant — in short, trollish — have revolutionised the field of Old Norse-Icelandic studies. He was among the forefront of scholars who first turned to investigate these neglected features of saga literature, and especially of the *Íslendingasögur*, by approaching these texts as literary works that can be read through the lens of literary theory. Over the course of those 20 years, Ármann produced a number of articles on topics ranging from magic to the undead, from concepts like *ergi* to the way we categorise the paranormal, and from children to old people in the sagas, thus essentially covering all those topics and characters that are marginal(ised) and 'Other' in medieval Icelandic literature. All of these topics are also addressed in the present monograph, which thus brings together much of Ármann's previous work, and for this reason, many of its chapters contain information that will not be new or surprising to those of us who have been following his work in the past. However, by combining all this information in one volume, and with the addition of connections that have not previously been made as well as new material, *The Troll Inside You* becomes the foundational monograph for all trollologists, aspiring or professional.

The book is divided into 30 short chapters that seamlessly lead into one another, and whose titles reveal that the author is just as well-versed in the fields of contemporary popular culture and pun-making as in the worlds of the sagas;

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some personal favourites that highlight these tendencies are "The Truth Is Out There," "Goði as Exorcist," and "Troll and Control." This tendency to draw equally on critical theory and contemporary culture runs through the volume, serving as a "kind of defamiliarization" (172, n. 17) that is supposed to aid the audience in drawing out new connections and looking at things long thought familiar with new eyes.

Thus, in addition to *The Troll Inside You* being a very cleverly and entertainingly written book that is very much addressed to a contemporary audience, the author is also constantly concerned with defamiliarising those aspects of the sagas that have perhaps become overly familiar. One excellent and sadly rather hidden example of this is note 3 (166–7) in which he calls into question the long-held belief that the 'classical' *Íslendingasögur* are products of the thirteenth century, arguing instead that, since most of the manuscripts originate in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the *Íslendingasögur* themselves should be read more as a late-medieval genre than earlier readings, influenced by nationalism, allowed for. Similarly, this study of trolls is not just concerned with what they are, and with who encounters them, but also with the language used to describe them, and Ármann adds important nuance to the debate of what to call the paranormal 'Others' we encounter in Old Norse-Icelandic literature. Thus, challenging and ultimately breaking with previous taxonomic approaches to the paranormal emerges as one of the monograph's major themes. However, there are places in which clearer terminological definitions would have been useful. For example, the revenants at Fróðá are not demons (81), and if one wants to read them as such, an explanation for this choice of word should probably be given.

The volume's main strength and my main criticism of the author's approach go hand in hand. On the one hand, Ármann Jakobsson shifts the focus of trollological research from the paranormal beings themselves to the humans who encounter them — a shift in attention that runs not only through his previous work but also formed the basis of the research project *Paranormal*

Encounters in Iceland 1150–1400 that Ármann directed from 2012 to 2016.[2] This shift is a necessary one: as another prominent teratologist stated, "a monster is not really known through observation; how could it be? How could the viewer distinguish between 'normally' terrifying phenomena and abnormally terrifying monstrosity? Rather, I submit, the monster is known through its *effect*, its impact,"[3] and the same can, as Ármann argues persuasively, be said about trolls. Taking as a starting point the idea that "the paranormal is primarily located within the human psyche," (21), he investigates the idea of the troll as a double or mirror of the human, an exploration of human consciousness, concluding that "troll narratives are primarily concerned with the human condition" (51). In this investigation, Ármann utilises psychoanalytic readings, among others, and I will leave it to the individual reader to decide what to make of this. And while I very much support approaching trolls through the humans who encounter them, I am not fully convinced by reading them purely as metaphors, since this seems to rob the monsters that appear within the story-world of the sagas of some of their narrative reality. For regardless of how one interprets them, they are first and foremost part of the world the sagas depict and therefore ought to be approached as such. A more useful method seems to me the one suggested in the context of magic: "The good of society is the ultimate yardstick" (106), but this does of course not mean that only anti-social magic is in fact magic, as the author suggests in this context.

However, in shifting the centre of attention thus from the paranormal beings themselves to the humans who encounter them, Ármann establishes a binary of "the known, the human, life, safety, civilization, and the audience itself" versus "the occult, the inhuman, death, danger, wilderness, and the extraneous other" (17) that he occasionally questions but never fully challenges. He does of course draw attention to the fact that the term "troll" is an imprecise one, a concept that lacks definition and cohesion, but he does not use this

[2] An anthology of the same title based on research done as part of or in connection with the project is forthcoming in 2019.
[3] Asa Simon Mittman, "Introduction: The Impact of Monsters and Monster Studies." in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, edited by Asa Simon Mittman, with Peter J. Dendle, 1–14. Farnham: Ashgate, 2012; 6; emphasis original.

important caveat, nor the observation that trolls can be located very close to home and the humans who dwell in it, as a starting point for an interrogation of the supposed dichotomy between troll and human, paranormal and ordinary. Although the closeness, the dynamic, between the monstrous and the human is then perhaps contradictorily addressed at several points (e.g. 58, 63, 83, 119, 141), those trolls who would be the clearest example of the lack of a clear break or binary between human and non-human are only discussed superficially. Thus, an exploration of living human characters that are not magic-users (such as *berserkir*) is almost completely absent, and the caveat that the volume is not a list of all paranormal encounters, and that readers therefore should not miss their "favourite scenes or characters" (xiii) does not remedy this absence. Even Grettir, the saga protagonist who most clearly embodies the unstable continuum of monstrosity, is only dealt with rather briefly; instead, the misreading first put forward in an article in 2009 that Glámr was hired as more than a shepherd is repeated (136),[4] and Þuríðr — in keeping with the importance of magic-users throughout the volume — assumes a prominent place.

That this binary is therefore occasionally interrogated but not conclusively challenged may well be a result of the strong, and important, focus on the troll's pastness that runs through the volume as a whole: the past itself, in the author's view, is alien and 'Other,' and it is the space from which all paranormal alterity originates. In the figure of the troll, this alterity is giving haunting shape that reminds us of the fact that we are surrounded by uncontrollable forces.

Ultimately, *The Troll Inside You* is thus a volume that inspires rather than precludes debate, and despite its thorough overview of the paranormal beings encountered in the *Íslendingasögur* — covering all kinds of trolls from revenants to magic-users, from demons to divine beings — as well as the scholarly attitudes towards them that have dominated the field, I am certain that this volume will do one thing above all: it will stimulate new readings and responses to the ideas

[4] Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Fearless Vampire Killers: A Note about the Icelandic *Draugr* and Demonic Contamination in *Grettis Saga*', *Folklore*, 120 (2009), 307–316

presented in it, and I look forward to seeing in which direction these will go. I am certain of another thing: that everyone who is interested in the paranormal, be it a specialist of medieval Icelandic or other (medieval) literatures or a newcomer to the field, will find something in it that will speak to them. Because trolls, regardless of whether one reads them as mirrors of the individual human psyche or as reflections of a collective culture's anxieties, always profoundly impact those who encounter them.

Conference and Exhibition Reports

Meet Some Gender Stereotypes at the National Museum in Copenhagen: A Review of the Meet the Vikings Exhibition

Campbell Grade[1]

When entering the National Museum in Copenhagen, one finds it is organized mainly chronologically, where the prehistory of Denmark is located on the ground floor. "Mød Vikingerne" or "Meet the Vikings" opened in this wing on the 26th of November, occupying three galleries attached to the permanent prehistoric exhibition. The exhibition had potential to understand the modern reception of Vikings through popular culture as was shown by the grand opening. The event was in conjunction with HBO Nordic and welcomed the Danish cast of the "Vikings" series along with Jim Lyngvild – reality tv star, designer, and artist – who worked with the museum staff; Peter Vang Petersen (whose focus is the Stone Age) and Jeanette Varberg (a researcher of the Bronze Age) instead of experts with a focus on the Viking Age[2] to reimagine the exhibition and created the portraits and busts featured in the display. Now the hype is over and the only "modern reception" we are met with is Lyngvild's portraits. The exhibition has been met with much criticism, to which the museum responded that the exhibition's purpose was to create dialogue and communication that is not limited to the current knowledge and research as well as creating an aesthetic experience for the visitors.[3] As either a critic or supporter

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[2] Søren M. Sindbæk, "Arkæolog: Jim Lyngvilds vikingeudstilling er flot, men præget af historieløs udklædningsleg," Forskerzonen, last modified November 29, 2018, https://videnskab.dk/kultur-samfund/arkaeolog-jim-lyngvilds-vikingeudstilling-er-flot-men-praeget-af-historieloes.

[3] Jeanette Vanberg, Peter Pentz, Peter Vang Petersen, "Nationalmuseet: Vi udfordrer grænserne for formidling i ny vikingeudstilling," last modified November 29, 2018,

of the new exhibit, the fact remains that when entering the prehistoric wing, there is more than a little confusion.

It is the job of those designing the exhibition to gently guide the viewer through in the most informative and engaging, but also the least stressful way possible. If a guest feels overwhelmed, often from sensory overload, they will stop reading, reacting, and learning. Yet before the viewer even enters a gallery in the National Museum, they are presented with an impossible choice: Do they want to begin by meeting the Vikings or do they want to start from the beginning of time (the Stone Age in this case)? The "first" gallery on either end of the prehistoric wing presents the information relevant to what the viewer will see further into the display. This implies either of the galleries could be the beginning of the exhibition and there is no indication of a suggested route; Vikings or Stone Age?

The National Museum's website suggests that the first gallery of "Mød Vikingerne" is the one featuring portraits of berserkir and a völva and ends with a larger gallery which features extensive hoard finds.[4] However, following this route and continuing through to the rest of prehistory, you will find the gallery numbers begin to count down and you are going through time backwards. The information panels in the following galleries will also be presented to you backward, forcing you to retrace your steps through each gallery. And yet, I do not recommend starting in the Stone Age because when you reach "Mød Vikingerne," it is incredibly overwhelming. While the same introductory panel from the other side of the exhibition is also present here, you are still required to find your own way through the poorly labeled artefacts which are juxtaposed against Lyngvild's interpretive portraits. The artefacts in the museum's collection are given little consideration. The objects are grouped and labeled by hoard,

https://videnskab.dk/kultur-samfund/nationalmuseet-vi-udfordrer-graenserne-for-formidling-i-ny-vikingeudstilling.

[4] "Jim Lyngvild redesigner Nationalmuseets udstilling om vikinger," Nationalmuseet, last modified November 15, 2018, https://natmus.dk/nyhed/jim-lyngvild-redesigner-nationalmuseets-udstilling-om-vikinger/.

however the individual artefacts are lacking even the simple, tombstone labels. Most of these portraits feature extended labels which explain that the portraits are interpretations and modern perceptions of Vikings, but there are plenty which are not afforded the same care and viewers must infer what or who they represent.

Having described the structure of the exhibition, I wish to focus on the portraits by Jim Lyngvild as they encapsulate these "Vikings." Each character fills only one role in his or her society. Male images greatly outnumber what we see of women in these portraits; however, it seems Lyngvild has given more consideration to the niche roles a woman could fill, differentiating between an everyday housewife and a wealthy merchant's wife. The men, though, are given the option of being a warrior or a ruler. Only one of the male portraits does not fit this paradigm; the portrait of a father with his son. Representations such as these simplify people who were once living and thriving, and who formed the Scandinavia we know today.

Our modern views of gender identity and expression may hold no bearing over how gender was perceived historically, but these portraits are clearly labeled as men and women. Individually, the men portrayed greatly outnumber the women, and men and women never appear together in the portraits. In fact, none of the women appear with another character, existing only in isolation. Two female portraits are labeled as wives, though they are portrayed without their husbands and the focus is on their style of dress as defined by their status through their husbands. This is also true of Queen Tove, who is ornately dressed in red silk with gold brocade. Her title of Queen is due to her marriage to King Harald Blåtand or Bluetooth; he is the only husband we see, though still in a separate portrait.

The women presented in this exhibition are young or middle-aged and dressed modestly. Even the völva, despite the two human skulls, does not scream "outsider." It is interesting to note that the roles given to these women do not include Mother, which may be the first role we consider when we imagine women in this historical context. Instead, they are wives and while not sexually objectified, do no challenge what may be considered conventionally attractive.

Even the völva does not appear as a stereotypical, old crone. While giving the impression of someone older, her face is devoid of wrinkles and therefore conforms to this idea of conventional attractiveness.

One of these female roles is that of the popular character of the shieldmaiden, and compared to her male counterparts, she is an interesting figure. Her hair is cropped short and she carries a helmet, sword, and shield. Despite this, she remains dressed in a more feminine manner than the male warriors and is also the only character with scars. It appears as though these scars are intended to help the viewer see her transition into the masculine role of a warrior. Because she is a woman stepping into a conventionally male role, there is a need to prove her prowess as a warrior that the male characters do not share. Beside this portrait is a male fighter; an "imperial bodyguard" who wears chain mail and also has short hair, but does not show scars or other signs of battle-wear.

As for the male portraits, they are allowed to appear with other male characters in their portraits where the women are all depicted solo. One of these is a father with his son, though he is one of the portraits not significant enough to be afforded an object label explaining Lyngvild's interpretations. The rest are warriors and rulers; the two masculine occupations. Though not quite as savage and roguish as the Vikings Elizabeth Sklar discusses, these portraits perpetuate a similar gender stereotype as they are definitely "manly men doing manly things in a manly way."[5] Most of these are depicted with at least one weapon, aside from the beserkir where weapons are not clearly visible despite their inherent status as warriors. These are also the only characters which come across as sexually objectified. Lyngvild incorporates both definitions of beserkr: "bear shirt" because they wear animal heads atop their own, and "bare shirt" because the pelts are their only clothing. They crouch, not posed for battle, but fully aware of their muscularity and status as fighters of Óðinn. The rulers in the

[5] Elizabeth Sklar, "Call of the Wild: Culture Shock and Viking Masculinities in *The Thirteenth Warrior* (1999)," in The Vikings on Film; Essays on depictions of the Nordic Middle Ages, ed. Kevin J, Harty (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc, 2011), 128.

exhibition are a nameless chieftain and Harald Bluetooth. Based on their attributes, the status of each appears quite similar; each only carries a sword and both wear the expensive colors of red and blue. Harald Bluetooth seems to be able to assert his status solely on his regal pose, with a hand on the hilt of his sword; evocative of portraits of military leaders both past and present.

The exhibition also makes use of silicon busts. One of these is used to display a glass bead necklace from Lejre, which has been interpreted as a woman's necklace. This façade is the oldest character in the exhibition and not overtly feminine. In fact, it looks more impish than human; think Billy Crystal as Miracle Max in *The Princess Bride*. The rest are all notably masculine, manly men with head tattoos and braided beards. These are not used to display artefacts, though they appear in display cases beside such historical objects. Perhaps the intention was to emphasise the stereotypical masculinity of the Scandinavian men who went on raids and gave us the impression of barbaric "Vikings," who in one of the exhibition's information panels are described as being young men of royal descent. But we can only speculate as to the busts' purpose and message when there are no labels to provide an explanation.

In portrayals such as these, it is difficult to capture the multifaceted lives of historical people. But women are not just "wives of…" For example, Áslaug in *Ragnars saga loðbrók*, is a peasant child, a beautiful wife and mother, clever in her riddle, royalty as the child of Sigurðr, a prophetess shown when she proves her lineage by through the birth of Sigurðr Snake-in-the-Eye, and once her children are men, she changes roles again and becomes a shieldmaiden. No such diversity is granted in these portraits. The image of the father does challenge some assumptions about the role of parents and kin-structure, but the other male portraits rely heavily on the stereotype of overt masculinity as a necessary quality of Vikings to be rulers and successful fighters. Such problems could be easily remedied by increased extended object labels. Without an explicit explanation, the silicon busts and portraits are left up to interpretation by the viewer. This is an important facet of presenting artwork, but history museums have an obligation to educate their audience.

This exhibition could have easily focused solely on modern reception of the Viking Age and used this to educate the public on the multifaceted roles of both men and women in Scandinavia during this time period and shatter our preconceived notions of "Vikings." Instead, it is a showcase of portraits which challenge the material culture and present women only in roles attractive to modern society while men are pigeon-holed into being strong fighters. As a bid for increased commercial recognition, this exhibition is a great success. Yet, as an educational tool of the Viking Age, including modern perceptions of the era, it leaves a lot to be desired.

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Saga Conference, 12-17 August 2018, Reykjavík & Reykholt, Iceland

Amy Jefford Franks[1]

The 17th International Saga Conference was hosted by the University of Iceland and Árni Magnússon Institute between Reykjavík and Reykholt. Appropriately for its location in Iceland, the theme of the conference was the *Íslengingasögur*, or the sagas of Icelanders. Hundreds of scholars descended upon Reykjavík for a week of lively discussion about a wide range of topics related to the *Íslengingasögur*.

Each session of the conference consisted of seven parallel panels: as such, this report cannot cover all the papers, and will instead draw particular attention to the papers that pertain to the theme of *Kyngervi*.

The first day did not contain any papers; instead, registration opened alongside a wine reception. This was an excellent chance for delegates to reunite with friends and meet new people. There was also a specific reception hosted within this by NECRON, the Network of Early Career Researchers in Old Norse. This was a particularly friendly environment for younger scholars to start their conference experience, and I am grateful to NECRON for creating this space.

Monday, 13th of August was the first full day of the conference, and was opened by Icelandic President Guðni Th. Jóhannesson, previously a lecturer in the History department of the University of Iceland. Following this, Richard Cole introduced the keynote speaker, Carol Clover, who discussed the nature of facts in *Njáls saga*. It was a powerful opening to the conference.[2]

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[2] In this and other conference papers in *Kyngervi*, the decision has been made to not include the affiliations of scholars. Many people are independent scholars working outside the academy, and this decision has been made in order to normalise this practice without drawing attention to it.

A session that particularly stole my attention on this first day was part of the 'Ideas and Worldview' strand, exploring the topic of 'The Supernatural.' The first paper in this session was Kristen Mills discussing 'Death, Gender, and the Afterlife.' She questioned what women saw for themselves within the concept of the afterlife: *valhǫll* is notoriously told to be a sphere for men, so where did the women go? She explored a number of texts, but noted that everything we argue within this context reacts to Snorri Sturluson's work, first and foremost. This paper sparked lively discussion regarding source criticism and pre-Christian Scandinavian beliefs surrounding the afterlife. In the same session, Matthew Roby also presented his paper titled 'Till (Un)Death Do Us Part: Post-Menopausal Sexualities, Revenant Partners, and Romantic Foils in the *Melabók* Attestation of *Eyrbyggja saga*.' Roby led an interesting discussion about the way menopause and age is presented within the saga, noting the blood rain and blood moon as reflecting Þorgunna's menopausal status. It was very refreshing to attend a paper that discussed a key part of many women's life experience that is often ignored or silenced, and was in turn very thought-provoking.

The second day of the conference took place in Reykholt: coaches were provided to transport the delegates north into the remote area of Iceland where Snorri Sturluson spent his time. Reykholt is the home of Snorrastofa, an independent research institute dedicated to work on medieval Iceland.

The papers throughout the day continued to be dedicated to a large range of themes. Some papers that particularly caught my attention included Sophie Bønding's paper "'Kosti mun ek gera yðr… at þér skuluð reyna, hvár betri er trúan": 'Accumulation' and 'Eradication' as Strategies of Christianisation;' Tiffany Nicole White's paper 'Hǫrða-, Hǫrga-, Hǫlda-, or Hǫlgabrúðr? The Manuscript Evidence for Þorgerðr,' and Ingunn Ásdísardóttir's "'In arma" in *Þrymskviða*.' Overall, the day in Reykholt was a wonderful experience, allowing delegates not only the opportunity to continue to share their work, but to experience a different part of what Iceland has to offer. Following the day of papers, an optional excursion was available, in which attendees visited Þingvellir.

The following day took place back in Reykjavík. The first session consisted of a number of panels covering a range of topics. I attended the panel titled 'Freyr: His Role and Function in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religion.' Chaired by Jens Peter Schjødt, the panel also consisted of Stefan Brink, Terry Gunnell, Rudolf Simek, and Olof Sundqvist. With these scholars being some of the biggest names in History of Religion, the large room was packed out, with standing room only even after extra chairs were brought in. Prior to the panel it had been criticised online for being a 'manel:' a panel that only featured men. This was particularly striking throughout, but Margaret Clunies Ross was very vocal during the discussion at the end, providing at least one female voice. The panel itself was fascinating, with each scholar addressing the lack of sources and information about Freyr from a different perspective, using a variety of methodological approaches to bring a sharper view of Freyr into focus.

In the afternoon I attended a range of papers: of particular note is Anna Katharine Heiniger's paper on 'Experiencing Liminality in the *Íslendingasögur*.' Based on work from her PhD thesis, Heiniger criticised how freely the term 'liminality' is used, and instead returned to key theorists on the topic to define seven qualities that that are key to making something liminal. She highlighted that 'liminal' does not inherently mean anything marginal, hybrid, or supernatural, and instead draws on elements of rituality, permanence, and transformations. This excellent paper made me and many others in the room pause and consider our uses of liminality, and question whether it is always the appropriate term.

The evening reception took place at Listasafn Íslands, the National Gallery of Iceland, where food, wine, beer, and soft drinks were provided while we explored the art on display. Lively discussions continued as friendships and networks were formed, and the atmosphere was notably positive.

The fourth day of the conference was the day of excursions: an excellent opportunity for delegates to see the incredible Iceland landscape and see the settings of the Icelandic sagas. There were four options: the south, or *Njáls saga* territory, which included Skálholt, Hvolvöllur, Fjlótshlíð, Stóra-Dímon, Bergþórshvoll, and Oddi; the west, which included areas from *Laxdæla saga*,

Vinland saga, and *Eyrbyggja saga*, such as Eiríksstaðir, Búðadalur, and Stykkishólmur; Reykjanes peninsular, stopping at Kleifarvatn, Krýsuvík, and Grindavík; and a hiking trip from Hvalförður to Þingvellir known as the *leggjabrjótur*, or leg-breaker. Alongside this, NECRON also organised an unofficial excursion to Gleyma for those who could not afford the official tours. While I did not attend any of these myself, everyone who did attend these spoke highly of them all, and it was an excellent addition to the conference.

The final day of the conference continued to be at an excellent standard and variety. A morning paper of note was 'Assholes in the *Íslendingasögur*' from Asger Mathias Valentin Nordvig, in which he questioned the motives of bad behaviour and social standards. This paper was both informative and engaging, with Nordvig making the audience laugh throughout.

The final paper I will note here took place in the last session on Friday. Leszek Gardeła presented his paper 'Amazons of the North: The Search for Armed Females in the Viking World,' giving a succinct tour of his larger 'Amazons of the North' project. Within this paper, Gardeła focused his attention on axes and the regularity with which they are buried with women: he noted that axes are not just weapons, but tools of the household too, and we must be wary of interpreting various objects such as this through a modern lens.

The final evening of the conference featured the conference dinner, with a number of attendees socialising at the student bar as a cheaper alternative. After the conference meal was over, we joined together for a disco, which was a spectacular event, and demonstrated the wonderful bonds that had been formed throughout the week and the wonderful personalities in the field.

The conference was, overall, a resounding success. A huge range of topics were discussed surrounding the *Íslendingasögur*, such as gender, manuscripts studies, methodological approaches, international connections, reception, and much more.

The conference takes place every three years: the 18th International Saga Conference will be hosted between Helsinki, Finland and Tallinn, Estonia in 2021: the theme will be 'Developing Dialogues Between Sagas, Archaeology, Language and Folklore.'

The Aarhus Mythology Conference in Uppsala, 15-16 November 2018

Amy Jefford Franks[1]

The Aarhus Mythology conference is so called due to its beginnings at Aarhus University, Denmark, under Jens Peter Schjødt. It was held in Aarhus in 2006, 2007, and 2008, after which it has taken to travelling to various locations, including Aberdeen, Reykjavík, and Harvard. It is traditional within this conference for the speakers to be personally invited: there is never a publicly available Call for Papers. The conference is grounded within the field of the History of Religion, heavily drawing on Mythology and Folklore Studies, and has a different theme each year. This year the conference was held in Uppsala with co-operation between the Institute for Language and Folklore Arkivcentrum and the Mid-Sweden University's Study of Religion department. This year the theme of the conference was 'The Feminine in Old Norse Mythology and Folklore.'

It is of course incredibly important that a conference of this calibre acknowledges the role concepts of gender play within Old Norse mythology, but this conference also demonstrated the key work that is lacking from this field on a broader level. Papers covered a variety of topics, such as goddesses in early Germanic mythology, gender relations derived from evidence from *Snorra Edda*, the role of archaeology in understanding burial practices as ritual, and of course the now-infamous Birka grave Bj. 581 was a frequent topic of discussion.

A number of papers particularly piqued my interest. For example, Merrill Kaplan noted the way teaching of Old Norse mythology and religion is often grounded foremost in the *Snorra Edda* account, and then takes a variety of other sources as supporting evidence. Using the idea of Óðinn and the female mythical beings said to be Odinic in nature as a case study, Kaplan turned this notion on

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its head, and began with the (often unnamed) female mythical beings. By tracing how they express certain qualities also seen in Óðinn's portrayal in *Snorra Edda*, Kaplan argues that, rather than the feminine beings being Odinic, Óðinn may himself be expressing feminine characteristics. This interesting approach reminds us to interrogate the narratives we often take for granted, and how a new perspective can shed a new light on an old topic.

The variety of papers presented at this conference demonstrated the huge range of possible approaches to studying gender. Some papers took case studies exploring the lives of women, such as Karen Bek Pedersen's paper on 'Guðrún Ósvifrsdóttir and Cailleach Beare,' while other papers explored ideas of queerness and the feminine implications of 'badly performed' masculinity, such as Kendra Wilson's paper, 'Seiðr and Ergi noch einmal.' Other approaches included Judy Quinn's 'Time and the Feminine in Old Norse Mythology,' exploring the way the feminine experience of time within mythology is less bound to the physical body than the masculine experience of time. Also interesting was Rudolf Simek's discussion of 'The Late Roman Iron Age Germanic Cult of the Matronae,' which identified three goddesses recurring under many names in sources from the second to fifth centuries, who appear to be the earliest known Germanic deities.

In addition to papers using textual sources to discuss the History of Religion there were also papers addressing the more nebulous folkloric material. In particular, Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir analysed spinning deities in Icelandic variants of the folkloric motif ATU 500, and Eila Stepanova and Frog used folkloric traditions of lamentation to shed light on ritualised lament in pre-Christian Scandinavia. There was also a strong focus on archaeology, with Leszek Gardela exploring the implications of female burials containing miniature weapons. Charlotte Hedenstierna Jonson reflected on the now-famed Birka burial Bj. 581, her experience of the explosion of attention, and her interpretation of the burial. Instead of a traditionally academic presentation, Hedenstiena Jonson instead spoke personally about the reasons for her initial interpretation and why that has stayed the same: no matter the opinions of those present, it was an eye-opening insight into the way this particular project

progressed. Anne-Sofie Gräslund also carefully discussed 'The Problem of Sex Determination of Archaeological Grave Finds,' taking a variety of issues surrounding queer interpretations and the interpretations of burial goods into consideration. The connections made between these papers and approaches demonstrated the importance of greater discussion surrounding gender studies within this field.

However, I would like to take stock of the shortcomings that were evident at this conference. Unfortunately, it became clear that many speakers had no grounding in the research history of gender studies, and at no point in the conference was the concept of the 'feminine' identified, defined, or debated—a regrettable oversight at a conference that otherwise cared deeply about the use of terminology. Jens Peter Schjødt's abstract did propose to take a semantic approach to gender categories, but this was not present in the paper itself. Although it is understandable that papers change in the time between writing the abstract and presenting the paper, this was still a disappointing development within the broader context of the conference.

Despite this lack of grounding in a field so essential to the theme of the conference, I cannot fault the organisers' work. Tommy Kuusela and Maths Bartell had clearly worked tirelessly to ensure a fantastic two days filled with interesting discussions and a friendly social environment. The interdisciplinarity of the conference allowed for lively and varied discussions that opened new perspectives.

The Aarhus Mythology conference will take place again next autumn, hosted by the University of Bergen, on the theme of methodology. I look forward to seeing the papers that develop on this topic, and hope that papers from the 2018 conference are developed into publications to allow those unable to attend to read more work on gender within History of Religion.

TAG Deva, 17-19 December 2018, Chester, England

Kathryn Ania Haley-Halinski[1]

TAG Deva 2018, held from the 17th to the 19th of December at the University of Chester, marked the fortieth Theoretical Archaeology Group conference, and fittingly, it covered a vast spectrum of theoretical strands old and new. While some session organisers chose the traditional session structure of a twenty-minute academic paper followed by questions, other favoured more unconventional approaches, such as ten-minute mini-presentations, round table debates, or Twitter sessions. The latter was perhaps the most exciting, as it allowed people who were otherwise unable to attend the conference to take part in the discussions. Each session also had its own hashtag on social media, which again allowed those not attending to access the presentations and discussions.

While the diverse nature of the session organisational tactics mirrored the wide range of ideas and approaches being presented at the conference, it did have the unfortunate effect of making it logistically challenging to move between sessions. Papers did not begin and end at the same time, so delegates could find themselves having to arrive or leave halfway through a paper. Another logistical decision that hindered proceedings was the staggered coffee breaks. While this was introduced presumably to alleviate queues at coffee points, it meant that those in sessions that had later breaks would get caught in already-extensive queues, and that some coffee points would run out of tea, coffee, and other drinks before delegates arrived. These issues aside, however, the papers themselves made the conference an overall positive experience.

The first session I attended was 'Feminist Archaeologies.' It proved an ideal starting point for the conference, as although its format was based on the traditional twenty-minute academic paper, the discussions and overall

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atmosphere felt more like the AGM of a grassroots movement. Anne Teather and Rachel Pope's 'Ten Years of British Women Archaeologists' gave an overview of the reasons that so many women leave archaeology in their 30s, such as lack of support, gendered promotion patterns, and sexual harassment in the field. While Teather and Pope's paper gave a bleak picture of systemic sexism, it also felt like a call to action – one that was picked up by many subsequent presenters, such as Trowelblazers' focus on the history and present activism of female archaeologists as a group rather than a series of remarkable individuals, and the importance of female mentoring networks. Enrique Moral de Eusebio and Lucy Shipley, meanwhile, shifted the focus to a more intersectional perspective, looking at race and gender in conjunction. Moral de Eusebio used the theoretical framework of the 'matrix of oppression', coined by Patricia Hill Collins, to approach the study of women in eighteenth-century Spanish Guam in the context of the overall social organisation in which intersecting oppressions are developed and perpetuated. Shipley, meanwhile, discussed the ways that present-day misogyny and exoticism/Othering 'bleeds in' to depictions of past femininities. While challenging, this session was among the most powerful that I attended.

The next morning, I attended 'Haunt This Place,' a session which prompted archaeologists to link their work to ghosts, landscape, and fantasy. Many papers, such as those by Penelope Foreman, Martyn Barber, and Krystyna Truscoe, used fantasy literature and ghost stories as a lens through which to view the processes and discoveries of archaeology. These included the blending of occultism and science in early twentieth-century archaeology, as discussed by Barber. However, one of the most fascinating papers was delivered by Lucy Talbot, who discussed her interdisciplinary project on the Crossbones Cemetery in Southwark, London. Over the course of her presentation, Talbot not only addressed archaeology, but the ways it overlaps with folklore, anthropology, and art. Her discussion of these creative and emotional responses to the Crossbones cemetery was at once poignant and academically rigorous, and illustrated the potential of archaeology when used in an interdisciplinary context.

The afternoon session I attended was entitled 'Birds, Beasts, and Other Fauna'. While this session drew on zooarchaeological sources, several of the speakers were from historical and literary disciplines. Susan Stallibrass' paper on the hunt in pre- and post-Christianisation Roman Britain started the session well by discussing not only the ways in which humans created breeds of hunting dog, but also addressed the possible religious dimensions of the hunt as a ritual. Religion and ritual was also prominent in Luke John Murphy and Carly Ameen's discussion of the elusive notion of a 'British hare goddess,' and its connections to popular misconceptions of Ishtar and Eostre. Klaudia Karpińska's paper on birds in Viking Age Scandinavian burials likewise touched upon the possible symbolic aspects of birds in ritual contexts, as food for the afterlife and/or symbols of resurrection. One of the most interesting papers was Shirley Kinney's discussion of badgers in the early middle ages. Kinney drew upon medical texts, bestiaries, and archaeological sources to discuss the reasons why badgers appear to have held links with healing. While this session may not have been as deeply theoretical as some of the others on offer, it demonstrated that the 'animal turn' in disciplines such as medieval studies can still yield significant new perspectives and facilitate interdisciplinary research on familiar sources.

On the first session of the final day, I attended a session on the question of non-human agency and flat ontology. In some ways, it mirrored the preceding session on animals in archaeology, as the focus was on the importance of the non-human in the traditionally anthropocentric discipline of archaeology. Some papers, such as Kevin Chew and Joanna Lawrence's 'From the Bronze Age to Bambi,' took a more narrative approach to particular case studies. In this paper, Chew and Lawrence discussed how lived experiences of human-animal interaction changed artistic representations of animals from emblematic to more detailed renditions. They also addressed how human-animal relationships are mediated by media and material culture.

However, the majority of the papers in this session prioritised more abstract theoretical and ideological matters. The chairs' introduction took the form of a paper itself. They raised concerns that a theoretical focus on agency could be playing into a neoconservative view of society as a collection of

individual agents, and that placing things on an ontological level with humans could damage archaeology's potential to create social critiques of human actions. Robert Preucel's paper likewise raised concerns that flat ontologies could gloss over humans' moral and social responsibility, and Alicia Núñez-García discussed the ways in which flat ontologies are symptomatic of a Western consumerist attitude that considers objects as things that are simply manufactured, rather than looking at the craftsmanship and intention that go into processes of creation. A recurrent strand of argument found in papers by both Timothy Taylor and Oliver Harris was that 'agency' may be the wrong term, and that perhaps flat ontologies should be more concerned with 'affect,' as all relationships cause affect in the sense of one entity 'pressing into' another. Harris in particular argued that affect-based ontologies can retain social critique through 'relational politics,' politicised representations of the non-human and of relationships between entities. This session illustrated the importance of reflexive critique in theory: although these papers used flat ontologies as a theoretical starting point, their central concern was not to use it as a mere tool, but to highlight and build upon its shortcomings.

The final session I attended was 'Integrating Theory and Science in Archaeology.' This was one of the sessions that consisted of ten-minute presentations, usually of a case study or brief project outline. Both Rose Malik and Konstantinos Trimmis discussed the role of senses in archaeology. Malik was concerned with the archaeology of smell in practice, while Trimmis looked at the potential of thick description in recreating the 'palaeosensory environment,' but both presenters gave compelling arguments for the importance of sensory experience in understanding past cultures. Another thematic strand linking several papers was that of ethnicity and ancestry. Tom Booth's paper 'What Did the Cheddar Man Look Like and Why Does it Matter?' challenged archaeology as a discipline to stop relying upon the trope of 'our ancestors,' arguing that it acts as a dogwhistle to racist politics, and Jessica Bates compared research into prehistoric genetics with theoretical work into ethnic identities to argue that archaeologists need to distinguish between genetic ethnicity and an individual's own socially-situated sense of identity.

Overall, TAG Deva faced some logistical challenges, but the papers themselves displayed the potential for archaeology to engage with theory in ways that seek to engage in wider social and political issues including misogyny, racism, identity, and moral responsibility. The widespread use of social media fora and the scheduled use of rooms as 'quiet spaces' showed that efforts were being made toward accessibility, although my position as an able-bodied attendee means I am not fully qualified to evaluate the effectiveness of all measures taken. From an academic perspective, however, TAG Deva showed that more conferences should take the initiative to address theory head-on, as the results can prove engaging and above all constructive.

Gender and Medieval Studies: Gender and Aliens, 7 – 10 January 2019, Durham University

Andrea Freund[1] & Rebecca Merkelbach[2]

The 25th annual Gender and Medieval Studies conference was hosted by the Institute of Medieval and Early Modern Studies at Durham University from 7 - 10 January 2019. It was supported by the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship and the Centre for Academic, Researcher, and Organisation Development, Durham University. This year's theme was 'Gender and Aliens,' spanning topics from medieval Japanese women's salvation to late-medieval Icelandic sagas, from Arabic poetry to homoeroticism in Hildegard von Bingen's writing.

For postgraduate students and early career researchers, the conference started with a workshop chaired by Amy Burge. In preparation, two texts by Kathleen Davies and Geraldine Heng about race and the Middle Ages were read by participants. In a wide-ranging discussion, subsequently questions concerning intersectionality and opportunities for junior scholars in the field were considered.

The main conference then started with Halle O'Neal's plenary on 'Life and Death on the Margins: How Women Wrote Salvation in Medieval Japan.' She introduced the audience to the concept of blood pool hell, a rather gruesome place reserved for women dying without having had a child, and showed examples of women writing sutras to gain salvation from it. The day ended with a welcome reception and the launch of the 2017 conference proceedings.[3]

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[3] Victoria Blud, Diane Heath, Einat Klaffer (eds., 2019), *Gender in medieval places, spaces and thresholds*. London: Institute of Historical Research. [Open Access, available online: http://humanities-digital-library.org/index.php/hdl/catalog/book/gender].

On the first full day of sessions, the morning started with a panel on 'Alienation and Belonging in Norse Culture(s)' with the authors of this report. Markus Eldgrad Mindrebø considered 'The Alienation of Female Power in Early Medieval Norway' using the kings' sagas as sources, through the examples of Gunnhildr, Sigríðr and Álfífa, each shown as foreigner and opponent of one of the great Norwegian missionary kings. Next, Rebecca Merkelbach turned to 'Exploring the Gendered Experience of Belonging and Alienation in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*' and discussed how gender and religion intersect with the experience of belonging and alienation in the saga's trollish protagonists. Andrea Freund's paper 'An ethnic "gender gap" in the Norse North Atlantic?' explored the popular trope of the Irish slave girl taken to Iceland in light of interdisciplinary evidence. In a parallel session, Bart Lambert, Alex Marchbank and Cordelia Beattie discussed aspects of 'The Economic Experience of Aliens and Alienation' with a focus on late medieval England.

This was followed by the Early Career Plenary, a tradition introduced at last year's Oxford conference with great success. This year, Amy Burge discussed 'Displacement, Gender, and Precarity, from Medieval Romance to the Modern Academy,' making crucial points about the difficult situation many early career researchers are finding themselves in, drawing parallels to the literary hero Bevis of Hampton.

In the next panel, 'Marginalisation, Byzantium, and the Middle East,' delegates heard about three rather different areas with similar issues: Jesús Rodríguez Viejo discussed a portrait of the devil from twelfth-century Castile, Othering him by showing him as a hybrid African-Byzantine creature. Stephanie Novasio then discussed gender in Medieval Byzantine Romance while Ines Aščerić-Todd detailed the crisis of masculinity in *The Thousand and One Nights*. All three papers showed fascinating new insights into areas rarely discussed at 'conventional' Medieval Studies conferences.

Subsequently, delegates were treated to a storytelling performance of 'Broken Shells' by Daisy Black based on Chaucer's 'The Man of Law's Tale,' minus the misogyny, recounted from the female protagonist Custance's

perspective. It was a touching, sometimes hilarious, sometimes gruesome view of gender in medieval literature from a wholly new angle.

The second full day started with parallel panels. Beginning the day in one of two parallel panels, Jianing Li started off the panel on 'Gendered Bodies from Medieval to Modern Media' with a paper on 'Drag-Aliens: Performing Masculinity through the Body of Gawain and Superman,' in which she compared the way masculinity and heroism are constructed through masks, disguises and clothing in both the romance and the comic series. Next, Lucy Allen explored 'The Alienation of the Lesbian Body and Belle Sarrasin Romance,' discussing the depiction of Floripas as both a 'watery woman' and its stony opposite in two Middle English versions of the same romance, and illuminating that reading by drawing on modern culture: the movie *Codependent Lesbian Space Alien Seeks Same* (2011) on the one hand, and Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* (1993) on the other.

Simultaneously, and moving on to questions of 'Dynasty and Ethnicity,' the second panel focused on medieval England. Tom Chadwick explored the role of women in ethno-political discourse and showed that ethnicity played an important role in memorialisation, making the ethnicity of noble women more important for authors than previously recognised. David Mason discussed the role of family and visionary power in the experience of two very different migrants in thirteenth-century London, namely the Anglo-German Arnold Fitz-Thedmar and the Cornish cleric Peter of Cornwall, demonstrating how both use their writing to claim their place in society.

During the next session, in a panel on 'Mysticism, Mary, and Marginalisation,' Sam Drysdale offered new insights on female mystics, such as Julian of Norwich, suggesting they were existing in a space of gender partnership rather than gender conflict with men's monasteries, with women's prayers even regarded as superior. Hannah Johnson's paper on homoeroticism in the devotions of Hildegard von Bingen showed the subversion of misogynist tendencies in theological doctrine in Hildegard's writings with their unmistakable intensity of physical and spiritual attraction to Mary's virginal body. Hope Doherty reflected on emotions connected with Marian Botany, i.e.

the connection of Mary to the floral world, be it through the trees in Eden or an association with herbal medicine. When Mary is connected to the Tree of Life, she is both integrated within and separate from the Trinity.

At the same time, issues of monstrosity were discussed in the panel on 'Alienated Bodies.' First, Diane Heath discussed 'The Bestiary Hyena as Alien Nightstalker' in a paper focusing on, in the speaker's own words, the way 'sex, death and utter monstrosity' are embodied in an animal that was considered to transgress the boundaries of sex and gender. Afterwards, Natalie Goodison turned to 'Gender, Alienation, and Hybridity in *Melusine*,' drawing on learned perspectives from Augustine to Otto von Freising in an exploration of the possibility of salvation for monstrous hybrids. Goodison argued that Melusine gains this opportunity through her female body and the conformance to the social rules of marriage, but loses it again because of her useless husband.

After this, delegates visited the Oriental Museum and had a bespoke guided tour with curator Gillian Ramsay focusing on artefacts connected to women in the exhibition, ranging from a pair of shoes made for Chinese women with bound feet to the famous Egyptian servant girl's statue, showcasing the diverse lived experiences of women across the 'orient' from the Neolithic to the present. In the day's plenary on 'Rape and the Reader: Classic Arabic Poetry Comes to Light,' Adam Talib reflected on his own practice as an Arabist and how his views on eroticism and sexuality in Classic Arabic Poetry are shaped by his background, education and experiences. He challenged the audience to reflect on their practice, too, asking why we are still teaching Chaucer in the full knowledge how problematic he is as an author.

On the final day, in a session on romance literature, Robert Sturges discussed gender, sexuality and geographical aliens in *Tristan*, a medieval high German text from c. 1210 where its Irish hero Tristan, the dangerous Other, transgresses all categories of identity. The next two papers both focussed on Marie de France's *Lai de Lanval* but highlighted very different aspects: Amy Louise Morgan showed how the text can be read as a parable on alienation at court, constructing a queer female space as alternative to the masculine court of Henry II, while Jennifer Farrell demonstrated the failure of gendered and

chivalric identity through the interaction of Lanval, an ideal knight let down by his lord, with the fairy queen as his new patron.

Neither of us attended the parallel session on 'Women's Experiences of Marginalisation,' in which Simona Martorana talked about 'The Latin Romulus between Misogyny and Marginalisation,' and Hannah Piercy discussed 'Race, Intersectionality, and Agency' in Chaucer's Knight's Tale, but we have it on good authority that this session, just like all the others, was engaging and stimulating.

The conference was then concluded with a roundtable chaired by Daisy Black and Anum Dada.[4] Important and challenging questions were raised about decolonising the curriculum, intersectionality, and encouraging BAME students to take up Medieval Studies, thus connecting this conference and its focus further to ongoing debates in the field that have been reflected in other formats, for example, at the past several International Medieval Congresses in Leeds. Surely, this discussion will be ongoing in the field long after the conference, and it is up to us to keep engaging with it. This particular instance, and the practical suggestions given by several scholars, have certainly served as an inspiration to reconsider our own teaching practices.

Once again, the Gender and Medieval Studies conference was an amazing experience for junior scholars. The themes considered were wide-ranging and highly relevant to current public and academic discourse. Moreover, topics which court controversy elsewhere were discussed with respect. Medieval Studies in all its variety found a place in the programme, and many regions, periods, methodologies and disciplines relevant for studying medieval gender were treated with equal weight. Junior scholars were given a platform to present their ideas equally to their seniors, as evidenced by the Early Career Plenary. Most striking about the conference, though, was that it served as a showcase of academic kindness. Both papers and Q&As as well as the roundtable were full of mutual support and respect, even if there were disagreements, and in this,

[4] Daisy Black's contribution and considerations are available online in her blog: https://daisyblack.uk/decolonising-the-medieval-curriculum-critical-questions/.

GMS could serve as an example for many other conferences and discussions in Medieval Studies.

Eco-Norse: Land and Landscapes in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature, 23 February 2019, Oxford, England

Jonas Koesling[1]

This year's Student Conference by the Viking Society of Northern Research was held February 23rd, in Oxford, under the promising title *Eco-Norse: Land and Landscapes in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*. The event took place at the Faculty of English and was organised by a small committee of local staff with Prof. Carolyne Larrington and Prof. Heather O'Donoghue as their spokeswomen. Special thanks must be given to Caitlin Ellis and Timothy Bourns who skilfully organised and advertised the conference. The one-day event began with opening remarks by the organisers. What followed were six individual speakers with forty minutes each presenting on eco-theoretical issues and environmental concepts within Old Norse studies. Thus, the conference touched on a set of new ideas and questions elaborated for the first time in such an extent within the field. The papers were divided up into two sessions with three papers each, the first session called 'Genres of Eco-Norse,' the second 'Eco-Human Relations.' A keynote address by Eleanor Rosamund Barraclough (Durham) brought the conference towards its end.

The first session began with a paper by Carl Phelpstead (Cardiff): 'The Archipelagic Sagas.' Phelpstead introduced his perspective on Eco-Norse as critical landscape study by referencing important scholars and recent publications as framework to his approach, providing a helpful ground for further studies. After claiming that Old Norse studies are typically resistant to political and theoretical readings, Phelpstead specified his own interest to lie in the relation between place and time to genre. Combining Bakhtinian insights in

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place and genre with an ecocritical earth-centred approach, he went on to discuss *Orkneyinga saga* and *Færinga saga*. Following up earlier issues in classifying these sagas Phelpstead used the sagas' atypical interest in landscape to propose a new classification as archipelagic sagas. Even though the sagas rarely stress the archipelagic setting, it is always in moments crucial to the narrative, and thus the environmental features of the sagas may provide a better alternative in classifying the sagas. Finally, Phelpstead added that even the transmission in Flateyjarbók, divided up between other texts, would make them in another way archipelagic, although in a more controversial way.

As the conference's second speaker, Michael Bintley (Birkbeck), presented his paper 'Fluid Dynamics: Aquatic Agency in the Poetic Edda.' He introduced his own perspective of viewing the human as enmeshed in environment, followed by an explanation of his own theoretical framework based on recent developments in New Materialism or Object-Oriented Studies. Here, Bintley glanced especially into Material Engagement Theory, or Ian Hodder's concept of entanglement, only to look more closer into Merlin Donald's concept of the 'exogram' (an external memory record of an idea). Inscribed in the brain, these exograms would create mind in past, present, and future, comparable to the process of reading working like loops. From here, Bintley went on with his hunt for water in the Codex Regius of the Poetic Edda, analysing it for occurrences of various aquatic forms in different numbers. As Bintley considered more closely the role water has here, he concluded that primordial aspects are the dominant amongst mythological concepts about water's obscure origin, or reflections on water being part of us and not. Building a bridge back to the idea of entanglement, Bintley closed a thought-provoking paper.

The last paper of the first session was by Hannah Burrows (Aberdeen): 'Weatherscapes in Early Skaldic Poetry.' In her talk, Burrows went to look specifically into late tenth-century poetry from the circle around Hákon *jarl* Sigurðarson, led by her interest in exploring the artistic possibilities within the tradition of skaldic poetry and to what degree they allow for creating vivid weatherscapes. The literary milieu of Hákon, she stated, was deliberately chosen,

not only because Hákon himself is associated with weather magic several times in the literary transmission, but also since the poetry produced around him shows a prominence of weather. To exemplify her claims, Burrows chose to analyse poems by Eyvindr *skáldaspillir* Finnsson, Einarr *skálaglamm* Helgason, and Þorleifr *jarlsskáld* Rauðfeldarson for instance. In conclusion, poets were interested in exploring possibilities of their language, and Hákon seems to have provided extra inspiration in doing so.

After a lunch break, the conference proceeded with its second session and Tim Bourns (Oxford) presenting his paper 'Heart of Human, Flesh of Wood: the *trémaðr* of *Þorleifs páttr jarlaskálds*.' Bourns focused on the gendered *trémaður* of the *páttr*, which, he stressed, appears as more than an object. The strangeness of the *trémaður* served Bourns as a case to study thirteenth-century Icelanders' perspectives on pre-Christian belief. Mentioning more instances of actual *trémaður* occurrences, amongst them the naked *trémenn* in *Hávamál*, who receive clothing, or birch-bark wearing *trémenn* in *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*, these latter examples served Bourns to suggest a certain connection between bark and clothing in the minds of medieval Icelanders. In the second part of his paper, Bourns shifted focus to driftwood. Discussed were Askr and Embla in *Vǫluspá*, and a case for driftwood possessing its own agency in *Grettis saga*. Driftwood, in comparison to other Nordic areas, then, was concluded to be a distinctively Icelandic eco-phenomenon; a mysterious resource, inspiring the minds and beliefs of the local people in a variety of ways.

Harriet Evans Tang (York) began her paper 'Animal Farm: Animal-Human Spaces in the *Íslendingasögur*' with the assumption that animals were considered as destructive forces and at the same time vital partners. Inspired by the episode of Skarpheðinn in *Njáls saga* pretending to be an animal on the roof only to kill two other characters of the same saga, she limited her paper to animals on the roof. Raising questions whether for instance certain times or seasons, any laws, or significant parallels were associated with the studied phenomenon, Evans Tang could not confirm any of them. In the second part of her paper, Evans Tang departed from Heiðrún in *Gylfaginning*, said to be a

goat standing on *alfǫðr*'s hall gnawing from the branches of Læráðr. For this certain mythical motif she found parallels like an ewe in *Grettis saga*, or the dog Sámr in *Njáls saga* that led her to conclude that animals served as providers of integrity of society, not as invaders but rather comparable to Heiðrún's example.

The last speaker of the second session was Jane Harrison (Oxford) with her paper: 'Vikings and Their Landscapes: Land and Home in Northern Britain.' Viking-Age people, she claimed, thought their living imbued landscape with meaning, which allowed her to refer back to Mike Bintley. A first term she introduced was 'cultural landscapes' as places where humans engage through events and memory in landscape. She went on to discuss examples from Orkney, where Bay of Skaill for example provides a good example where new Viking-Age longhouses ignored or neglected the past by landscape use. Another strategy was shown for the East Mound where frequent re-building of houses every thirty years, interpreted as deliberate references to previous buildings, respects the past but also looks forward in time. In the end, Harrison concluded that the new Viking settlers clearly carrying on their own past into their new future on the Orkneys.

The final presentation of the conference was the keynote address by Eleanor Rosamund Barraclough (Durham): 'Got Wood? Living with the Forest and Imagining the Forest in Old Norse Culture.' Speaking about the world as both real and imagined, she focused on human understanding, recognition but also remembrance. Wood in this regard was introduced as a thing you can touch but also a mythological-cosmological object. Her particular interest here was on the intersection of physical and imagined wood. The settlement history of Iceland leads necessarily to practical discontinuations, Barraclough stated, with increasing lack of timber but its continued presence through cultural heritage into the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. First, she looked into the *Eddas*, where she could point out cases like Yggdrasill as an ash tree being non-native to Iceland. Mentioning kennings for men in *Snorra Edda*, she observed that they were using trees no matter which kind from all over the Scandinavian diaspora. This inspired her to speak of a diasporic cultural memory, which however was specific to the *Eddas* and different to other genres. Looking into the

Íslendingasögur, Barraclough reconsidered the common notion of Iceland being a treeless country. Even though archaeological studies pointed rather to non-native trees used in many cases, Barraclough stressed the evidence from different sagas, mentioning both driftwood and woodlands used by Icelanders painting a picture of their time being richer in trees than usually assumed. All in all, Barraclough provided fascinating stories and helpful references to medieval Icelandic accounts and their dealings with the given ecological conditions and issues.

Thus, the conference came to an end, providing the audience with a great day full of food for thought. Speaking of food and the kind provision of coffee and tea, however, as only drop of bitterness to an otherwise great eco-theoretical conference it could be mentioned that single-use plastic unfortunately was not absent from it. The overall topic of Eco-Norse, nonetheless, showed its great potentials, even in bringing the field a great step closer to current debates in academia and society.

The Richard Hall Symposium 2019: Women and Power in the Viking World, 24 February 2019, York, England

Cassidy Croci[1]

The Richard Hall Symposium 2019: Women and Power in the Viking World was held on 24th February at York St John University in York, England. Scholars from a variety of disciplines gathered to discuss aspects of female agency, power, and roles in Viking society, especially topical with the recent public interest in female Vikings. The event was organised by the Jorvik Group with support from the York Archeological Trust as part of the broader theme of the 2019 Jorvik Viking Festival 'The Untold Story of Women in the Viking Age.'

The Symposium began with introductory remarks by Chris Tuckley (The Jorvik Group) welcoming the speakers and approximately 70 attendees. Then Christine McDonnell (York Archeological Trust) shared a few words on the legacy of Richard Hall. The floor then went to the first plenary speaker, Dr Alexandra (Alex) Sandmark (University of the Highlands and the Islands) presenting on the topic 'The Norse *thing*: an assembly of women and men.' Sandmark challenged the tendency of scholars presenting Norse assembly sites or things (Old Norse *þing*) as exclusively male arenas, commonly describing participants as 'chieftains,' 'all men,' 'thingmen,' and other gendered variations. She reassessed primary sources such as the Norwegian laws of the Gulathing and Frostathing, the Icelandic *Grágás* (Grey goose laws), and the Icelandic sagas to demonstrate that groups of men and women could both take part in assemblies. However, these groups of individuals had varying degrees of access and participation based upon their social and marital status. For instance, widows and 'ring women,' unmarried women without close relatives to inherit

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property, were some of the groups of women who could participate in these assemblies. Although the number of women who could legally participate was a small percentage of the population, Sandmark showed that women could still influence socially within a judicial context. Overall, she demonstrated that 'thingmen' are not a homogenous group and we need to consider the varied experiences of individuals at things that are impacted by their social groups, changes in their lifetime, and even the assembly location.

The second plenary speaker, Professor Judith Jesch (University of Nottingham), spoke on 'Women, War and Words: a verbal archaeology of shield-maidens.' Jesch began to unearth the meaning and function of what Neil Price has termed the 'textual shield maiden,' not to be conflated with 'literal shield maidens' and 'mythical valkyries' by excavating the historical depths of the Old Norse corpus. Tracing the evolution of the Old Norse term *skjaldmær* (shield-maiden) in the *fornaldarsögur* (sagas of ancient time), Jesch discovered that it is an uncommon term that is linked to Amazons and often has Eastern associations. She suggests that this is likely due to the influence of Greek and Latin texts like Virgil's *Aeneid* on Scandinavian and Icelandic writers like Saxo in the eleventh and twelfth centuries; however, she notes *Atlakviða* might throw a wrench in this progression. Furthermore, she identifies that women described as shield-maidens often prove unsuccessful in battle and are treated negatively; potentially this is due to their perceived foreignness. These eastern elements merit more exploration and even could be analyzed in respect to the Birka Bj 581 grave. However, Jesch stresses that these 'textual shield-maidens' seem to have little connection to do with 'literal shield-maidens' whose description still needs to be determined. Indeed, what female warriors were called in Old Norse still needs to be pinned down. Additionally, there is no Old Norse cognate for the English word 'warrior' for men. Therefore, Jesch ended with a call for a more extensive vocabulary of warriors for both men and women going forward.

In the first half of the first special session, Dr Simon Trafford (Institute of Historical Research, University of London) presented on 'Hypermasculinity vs Viking warrior women: pop culture Vikings and gender.' Trafford discussed how the appetite for female warriors is fed in the internet age with a 'perfect

storm' of influences using Birka grave Bj 581 and Mcleod's 2011 article as examples. Articles featuring sexualized female warriors provide revenue for sites through 'clickbait,' academic articles are more available online through the impact initiative and open access, and 'kick-ass' female heroes in pop culture are all characteristic of a particular moment in time. Moreover, there has long been a hunger for female Vikings to counteract the extreme hypermasculinity of male Vikings who are often depicted as violent, barbarous, with restless energy and an insatiable appetite for women, food, and drink encased in a Fabio-like physique. These absurd extremes are tempting attitudes, but Trafford notes they are incompatible in modern society. Ironically, it is this hypermasculinity and feminist reaction that gets individuals interested in Vikings because of the rapid internet dissemination.

Trafford's paper was followed by another enlightening talk, given by Professor Howard Williams (University of Chester) entitled, 'Women, Death and Power in *Vikings* and the Viking Age.' He opened by challenging the 'biographical fallacy' in archeology where a furnished burial becomes equated with a personal identity. To move away from this tradition and start thinking about mortuary and commemorative practices in a broader sense, Williams unexpectedly turns to the television show *Vikings*. In this series, women are depicted in multiple death-related roles. They can be mourners, have dialogues with the dead, and even hold power from beyond the grave. Although many of these scenes are stylized, it does not mean that the general public and academics alike can start considering the ritualistic roles of women outside of the grave. Furthermore, Williams stressed the need to use anthropological and archeological methodologies of death and memory that account for a wider interpretation of reading graves as well as can consider women in roles of power, ritual, and cultural memory.

After the special session and before lunch, there was a special preview of the film, 'Viking Women: The Crying Bones' by Ash Thayer. The documentary's focus is on female reenactors and their views on the combat sport. I cannot reveal too much about the film but can say that it will be worth watching the entire feature.

After lunch, the third plenary speaker, Dr Pragya Vohra (University of York) presented 'Women Migrants in the Western Viking World,' exploring how gender intersects with migration. Often the default migrant in Viking studies is male: to counteract this norm, Vohra examined the role women played in a diasporic context and discussed whether they had any agency, autonomy, or authority during the migration process. Using case studies of female settlers in *Landnámabók* (The Book of Settlements), Vohra demonstrated that even in the terse text there is evidence for these three traits; however, they depended on the individual's situation. For instance, Þorgerðr *Ingjólfshöfði* gained authority on her trip to Iceland because her husband died on the journey and upon arrival settled on a large estate. She is compared alongside other women in the diasporic context notably Auðr *en djúpúðga* to begin giving visibility to women in diaspora and to consider gender in changes brought about in migration.

In the fourth and final plenary, Dr Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir (Yale University) spoke on '"Geirríðr, Get Your Gun": Trailblazing Women in Settlement Communities.' Friðriksdóttir closely read *Landnámabók* to uncover episodes of domestic and sexual violence against women. She noted that violence in *Landnámabók* is different from the sagas because it is not as regulated and stylized; women need to use all they have at their disposal to survive. Furthermore, she notes that women in *Landnámabók* may represent more 'typical,' lower-status women. She demonstrated how domestic and sexual violence can trigger mental illness or a shift in psychological state in unmarried women. For instance, a young woman named Álǫf is noted to go insane; the narrator does not delve into detail, but there is enough to convey she was assaulted in bed and developed a mental illness. Married women could face different forms of abuse. For instance, a woman was driven to hang herself when her husband swapped her for a neighbour's wife. Another was beheaded after an argument with her husband. There are few precedents for suicide and beheading in the Old Norse corpus, but these incidents illustrate that there was savage frontier culture. On a more positive note, women still had the opportunity to gain social power often through supernatural means. Þuríðr 'Sound-filler' could fill a fjord with fish through witchcraft and earned social

influence. Friðriksdóttir continues to explore these differing roles of women in her upcoming book, *Valkyrie: Viking Women in Life and Legend* due in 2019.

In the second special session and final presentation of the day, Dr Shannon Lewis-Simpson (Memorial University of Newfoundland) joined the conference via videolink and spoke on "'Orð gerik drós til dýrðar: I speak words to the lady's glory." Attitudes towards the "Female" "Viking" "Leader"". Lewis-Simpson questioned the meaning of these terms and asked if 'leadership' must be gendered. She observed that 'leadership' is constantly measured against the masculine warrior ideal. Yet, we do not know how the warrior as a social construct operated. She stressed that we need to start considering gender in the past and start accounting for individuals who may have presented as trans or gender non-conforming especially in the context of Birka Bj 581. Lewis-Simpson then discussed female forms of leadership considering the roles of advice givers and craftswomen to demonstrate that there can be different narratives of leadership beyond the masculine ideal.

The conference concluded with a ten-minute closing discussion featuring all speakers. This discussion provided an opportunity for audience participation and touched on topics ranging from identity to public perception of female Vikings. This open-ended dialogue was stimulating and demonstrated the amount of research still to be done on women and power.

Gendering Viking Age Rulership, 28 February – 1 March 2019, Katowice, Poland

Amy Jefford Franks[1]

On the 28th of February and 1st of March 2019 the University of Silesia in Katowice hosted the 'Gendering Viking Age Rulership' conference. As the title suggests, this two-day event focused its attention on Viking kings and queens, rulers, and maiden kings. The conference was a wonderful experience, engaging with gender studies from a variety of perspectives, deriving from a number of disciplines and therefore using a range of theoretical approaches.

Jón Viðar Sigurðsson opened the conference with a keynote lecture on 'Gendering Power: Scandinavia During the Viking Age.' He noted the importance of social roles over gender roles in Viking Age society, with women able to take on positions of power. He questioned modern perspectives on the high-status burial of the Oseberg ship in Norway: why do we argue that this was a queen instead of king? What implications do each of these words have? He went on to argue that this woman may have been a chieftain, not a queen, without disregarding that she may have still been a woman. He further noted that women had their own social networks, and despite our limited evidence for this we know this would have given them further access to forms of power. A particularly powerful point made by Jón Viðar was a comparison he made to Britain in the Second World War, when the country was largely run on a ground level by women while the men were overseas fighting. Viking Age Scandinavia is likely to have been very similar: he estimates that throughout the Viking Age 500,000 men lost their lives overseas, leading to a society where women had to essentially take charge. Recognising the importance of women's existence and role in all levels of society is something we must take stock of more, as Jón Viðar

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did throughout his paper, but by focusing primarily on the powerful roles of women, he set a strong tone for the conference.

Our next session featured Alexandra Sanmark discussing 'Male and Female Rulership in Viking Age Society,' focusing on scholarly biases that interpret male rulership within a secular and military context, while female rulership is placed within the sphere of cultic leadership. Similar criticisms were then noted in Unn Pedersen's paper, in which she highlights that male ship burials in the Vestfold region are perceived as political monuments, while the Oseberg woman is seen as apolitical and passive in her burial. Anne Irene Riisøy closed the session with a slightly different paper, exploring the role of women in medieval guild statutes from Norway, which she believes suggest pre-Christian roots.

Following the coffee break I presented my own paper titled 'A Queenly King and a Kingly Queen: Negotiating Gender and Royal Ideology in the Viking Age' in which I discussed Eiríkr *blóðøx* and Gunnhildr *konungamóðir* as a case study to explore the importance of correctly performing masculinity or femininity in relation to being a king or queen. Arngrímur Vídalín followed with a discussion on 'Women of Power – Influence, Affluence, Violence,' after which Karl Christian Alvestad presented his paper 'Just the King's Mother? A Woman's Role in the Unification of Norway.' The papers sat well together, exploring women within the concept of ideology and alliances.

In the next session Jakub Morawiec spoke to us about 'A Kinglike Queen. Sigríðr *in stórráða* in historical and literary contexts,' exploring how Sigríðr uses her position of power to achieve her personal goals. He then compared her to Gunnhildr *konungamóðir* and Álfífa Álfrimsdóttir, also known as Ælfgifu of Northampton. In particular, he highlighted their importance as royal mothers and royal widows, which reflects general research from surrounding medieval European queenship. Maciej Lubik then discussed 'A Smart Wife of a Wise Prince – Ingigerðr Óláfsdóttir's image in the Old Norse tradition,' in which he argued that she was very independent in her decisions and heavily politically involved, providing counsel and acting as a peace-maker.

The last papers of the day were provided by Aleksandra Jochymek who discussed 'The Faithful Queen: Christian Ideal of Female Chastity in the Old Norse Tale of Lady Olif,' which explored a translated romance, and Remigiusz Gogosz, who discussed 'The Concept of Co-Rulership in Viking Age Scandinavia.' This latter paper was not only focused on the male-female co-rulership, but also considered the successes of male-male co-rulership.

The second day of the conference opened with Martina Mandera, discussing 'Shieldmaiden Facts and Myths: The Story of Fighting Women,' drawing attention to the exclusive presence of these figures within legendary texts. Miriam Mayburd followed this with her paper 'The Subversive Maiden King Paradigm: Power Acts and Gender Dynamics in *Hrólfssaga Gautrekssonar*,' in which she provided, in my opinion, a well-argued criticism of Carol Clover's 'Regardless of Sex,'[2] argued for a 'destabilisation' of the category of 'woman,' and argued that gender should be seen as a spectrum within three-dimensional space. Annett Krakow followed this with her paper 'Authority Challenged: Examples from *Yngvars saga víðfǫrla*,' in which she used a wide variety of material for her analysis, including runestones, annals, and sagas.

The next session took us outside of Scandinavia proper into the diaspora areas. Marcin Böhm gave an exciting and engaging paper on 'Zoë Porphyrogenita and the Varangians,' after which Łukasz Neubauer presented his paper '*Sicut in caelo et in terra*: Capturing the Complimentary Model of Male-Female Political Responsibilities and Capabilities in the Dedication Page of the New Minster *Liber Vitae* (BL MS 944, fol 6r).' Neubauer highlighted the way in which the image of the cross on the dedication page creates a divide of spheres of complementary nature: heaven and earth, and male and female. Rafał Borysławski then closed this session with an engaging and humorous discussion of '"The Violence and the Sacred." Challenging the Non-Christian in Old English Juliana and Judith.'

[2] Carol J. Clover, 'Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe,' Speculum, 68, 2 (1993) 363-387.

Our closing papers summarised the variety of the conference excellently. Marta Rey-Radlińska spoke on 'The Image of King Haraldr *harðráði* in chosen *þættir* of Morkinskinna,' engaging us with rulership ideology in a specific *konungasaga*. Kendra Wilson then gave us a concise but thorough tour through the historiography of *seiðr* in her paper 'Óðinn, *seiðr*, and *ergi*,' — no mean feat! Finally, Alexander J. Wilson closed the conference with what was undeniably the best title we saw over the two days: 'No Woman, No Crime: The Transposition of Hyper-Masculine Gender Roles in Pálnatóki's Founding of the *Jómsvíkingar*,' in which he engaged with the famous *Jómsvíkinga saga*, addressing the strict rules that excluded women from Jómsborg, and used a variety of sources to argue that this was connected more to the romantic bonds men would form with the women than sexual.

In the closing discussion of the conference, Riisøy noted something we all knew to be true: you can turn to the index of any book on the Viking Age and find a section that lists the mentions of 'women,' but you cannot do the same for men. To even think of it is absurd: men are seen as the default, pervasive through all aspects of the Viking Age, while women are seen as a niche interest. This conference reminded us that the reality is far from that.

Overall, the conference was a resounding success. My thanks go to Jakub Morawiec and Anne Irene Riisøy for not only organising an engaging and exciting conference, but for also inviting me to speak. One of the biggest takeaways for me from this conference that was not strictly related to the papers was the kindness of academia. The delegates at the conference showed true openness, and it was a wonderful environment to be in.

The papers at 'Gendering Viking Age Rulership' were enriching, exciting, and well-researched. Alongside this, the delegates were all deeply kind people, creating a truly wonderful conference experience. I am very grateful to have been able to take part in this conference, and look forward to the futures of the papers involved!

Call for Submissions

Volume 2: Summer 2020

Kyngervi is a journal in Viking and Medieval Scandinavian Studies, with a focus primarily on gender and queer studies, but also taking a broader consideration of studies of 'the Other'—we aim to bring the marginalised to the forefront. We therefore also centre race, disability, human/animal studies, and related themes. *Kyngervi* is double-blind peer reviewed, run by students, for students to showcase their world.

We are looking for submissions for our second volume. We seek relevant articles of 4000-6000 words, book reviews of relevant books published in the last five years of 1500 words, and conference reports of conferences attended between Summer 2019 and Summer 2020. As an interdisciplinary journal, articles can be from any relevant field, including, but not limited to, History, Literature, Archaeology, History of Religion, Reception Studies, and Art History.

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